

This week's column is by Vicki Wilson, a patron of the Kirkland Town Library.

When current times feel troubling or you just want to escape for a little while to a different era, historical fiction can be exactly what you need. Historical novels that imagine the lives of famous figures in history or that place fictional characters in true past events have become a popular trend in books in the last few years — and many of these books feature the lives of women.

*The Only Woman in the Room* and other books by Marie Benedict focus on important women in history who may not have had the spotlight shone on them in quite the same way before. In *The Only Woman in the Room*, Benedict explores a time period in the life of Hedy Lamarr, the famous actress. However, the book looks at Hedy's escape from a marriage to an Austrian arms dealer with ties to the Nazi party and her intelligence — she was a scientist and inventor — rather than her Hollywood days. Benedict also wrote *Carnegie's Maid*, *The Other Einstein*, and her current release, *Lady Clementine*, which is the story of Clementine Churchill, Winston's wife. All four books are available as e-books through the library's digital collection.

*Finding Dorothy* by Elizabeth Letts looks behind the scenes of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* — the book and the film — through the perspective of author L. Frank Baum's wife, Maud. It sorts through the sometimes challenging but always unusual life of Maud and her husband, and the reader gets a sneak peek into how the beloved children's novel came to be. Like the other books mentioned here, *Finding Dorothy* is fictionalized, but based on researched facts. It's available as an e-book and audiobook via the library.

*Between Shades of Gray* and *The Fountains of Silence* by Ruta Sepetys are both books that imagine fictional young women in times of true-life turmoil. Geared more toward young adult readers but so chock full of detail, history, and rich emotion that adult readers will adore the younger main characters, both novels carry the reader to a completely different and tumultuous time. In *Between Shades of Gray*, 15-year-old Lina is a Lithuanian girl torn from her home by Soviet officers in the 1940s. *The Fountains of Silence* is set Madrid in 1957, during the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco. Both books are available as e-books and audiobooks through the library's online apps.

*The Gown: A Novel of the Royal Wedding* by Jennifer Robson follows the women who crafted one of the most famous wedding dresses in history: Queen Elizabeth's wedding gown. Focusing on the period of time after WWII and set in London, and with a wealth of information about hand-crafting an exquisite and elaborate dress, the book also depicts a delightful friendship between two women who play an important role in finishing the dress. The book is offered as an e-book and audiobook via the library.

If you're looking for something both historically and romantically focused, *The Winter Sea* by Susanna Kearsley (book one of a series) fits the bill. In the book, Carrie McClelland, an American writer, travels to Scotland to research and write a novel about the Jacobite Rebellion of 1708 and discovers that she has a unique connection to the time period. The book flips between McClelland's modern life and the life of Sophia Paterson,

who lived in the time of the rebellion. You can find *The Winter Sea* as an e-book through the library.

A popular genre, historical fiction especially featuring women is expanding and covers a number of time periods and locations. Additional authors of “imagined” historical novels include Kate Quinn (*The Huntress* and *The Alice Network*), Lisa Wingate (*Before We Were Yours*), Renee Rosen (*Park Avenue Summer* and *Dollface*), and Elizabeth Gilbert (*City of Girls*). If you’re itching to get away — in location and era — one of these novels is sure to be a fit.