Book of the Month: Winter Semester 2020/21

October 2020: **Alina Rahn** recommends *Notes on a Nervous Planet* by **Matt Haig (2018)**:

"In these times of global anxiety, Matt Haig's question rings as true as ever: 'How can we live in a mad world without ourselves going mad?' Far from being a cure-all guidebook, *Notes* is a heartwarming, funny, inquisitive and personal account, which does not have all the answers but certainly poses the right questions to make you stop and think about your own life and how you choose to spend your time and energy. Haig openly addresses his own struggles with depression and anxiety to destigmatize mental health issues and normalize the idea that there is no 'normal' to begin with in a world as fast-paced and ever-evolving as our own. With its compassionate and light-hearted tone, *Notes* is a book I read time and time again to slow down and disconnect from the world to connect with myself again."

November 2020: **Leandra Plank** recommends *Dominicana* by Angie Cruz (2019):

"If you are interested in American Ethnic Literature, I recommend Angie Cruz' *Dominicana* (2019).

In her novel, Cruz narrates the life of Ana Canción. Born in the Dominican Republic, Ana gives in to her family's wishes and marries Juan Ruiz at the age of only fifteen – a much older man that she barely knows, but who can offer her and her family a life in the United States.

The remainder of the book gives the reader a glimpse at what Ana's new life looks like: small episodic narrations help to make us understand what it means to be an immigrant in the U.S., to barely speak a country's language, to suffer from isolation, from an arranged and abusive marriage and from having to choose between others' and one's own wishes.

While the individual episodes are often heartbreaking, Cruz narrates Ana's life in a light tone and with a good sense of humour, thereby turning the novel into an enjoyable page-turner about the life of immigrants in the U.S."

December 2020: **Claudia E. Laube** recommends *Howl's Moving Castle* by **Diana Wynne Jones (1986)**:

"Whilst I am sure many of you know the famous Ghibli movie, I want to point towards Diana Wynne Jones original *Howl's Moving Castle*. It naturally shares many similarities with the movie, but where Miyazaki's piece focuses more on the gravity of war, Jones' book delves into a more light-hearted, comedic and especially heart-warming mood. Having been inspired by a schoolboy who simply requested a story about a "moving castle," Jones manages to captivate the reader with something as arbitrary as a woman talking to hats. No, it is not about the Mad Hatter, but it is just as magical and definitely one of those books I like to recommend to anyone who needs a good laugh combined with a generous sprinkle of fantasy and wit."

January 2021: **Sarah Berndsen** recommends *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* by **Caroline Criado Perez (2019)**:

"An eye-opening book about how politics, medicine, design of public places and items for everyday usage, are based on a gender data bias which sets men as the default and unconsciously, yet systematically, ignores women. The consequences of being thus invisible include not only discomfort, but also health risks and the perpetuation of unequal power structures. It is at times overwhelming and frustrating, but always interesting and surprising how small and seemingly unimportant aspects of everyday life are designed in a way that makes life harder and more dangerous to women. I recommend reading *Invisible Women* because it illustrates why it is necessary that women are included in research and decision-making concerning all areas of life."

February 2021: **Svenja Schürmann** recommends *The Penguin Book of First World War Stories*:

"If you are interested in reading about the First World War, *The Penguin Book of First World War Stories* and its companion piece *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry* are a good place to start. The short story collection edited by Barbara Korte is divided into four sections – Front, Spies and Intelligence, At Home and In Retrospect – with each story focusing on a different aspect of the war or its aftermath. The collection features stories by a diverse set of authors, among them Arthur Conan Doyle, Katherine Mansfield, Winifred Holtby and Muriel Spark. My favourite story from the collection is probably "Evermore" by Julian Barnes, the moving tale of Miss Moss whose whole life is defined by her brother's death in 1917. Even fifty years after the war she visits her brother's grave and the war memorials and cemeteries in France every year. While the story focuses on the grief of one person, the reader is left with larger questions: Is there a responsibility to remember the war and the people who died in it and if so, how do we remember them? I think these questions are still relevant today."