

# ***SOUTH PORTLAND PUBLIC LIBRARY***

## ***EVENING BOOK GROUP***

Meeting date and time: 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday at 6:30 PM

Location: Main Library

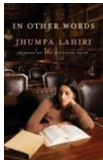
**November 10**



### ***Queen of the Night* by Alexander Chee**

In 1882 Paris, the soprano known as Lilliet Berne is a celebrated opera star with an unforgettable but vulnerable voice. When a stranger offers her the chance to originate a new opera's leading role, she discovers that the work retells her scandalous hidden history. As she attempts to discover which of four individuals from her past revealed her secrets, she recalls the circus troupe in which she first performed, her days as a servant to France's Empress Eugénie, and her time as a prostitute. Chee memorably depicts the shifting fortunes of France and historical figures including Napoleon III and George Sand. But opera as much as history shapes the novel, with nods to *The Magic Flute* among other works. Lilliet's reinventions provide a moving meditation on the transformative power of fate, art, time, and sheer survival.

**December 8**



### ***In Other Words* by Jhumpa Lahiri**

Short story writer and novelist Lahiri presents her first book of nonfiction and first book not written in English. The why and how of this radical change in her literary life is the primary theme in this arresting bilingual chronicle of a daring experiment. Lahiri experienced her first linguistic complication as a girl when her family left Calcutta for America, where she spoke Bengali at home and English everywhere else. She fell in love with Italian as a graduate student and studied for years without achieving fluency. So she decided to move to Rome with her husband and children so that she could live and breathe Italian. Lahiri writes perceptively about being a linguistic pilgrim and her first attempt to write in Italian. It is acutely disorienting for a writer to lose her facility with language, which was the jolt and challenge Lahiri felt she needed to take a new artistic approach. A richly meditative, revealing, and involving linguistic autobiography about language and the self, creativity, risk, and metamorphosis.

January 12



***Underground Airlines* by Ben H. Winters**

Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man* meets *Blade Runner* in this outstanding alternate history thriller from Edgar-winner Winters (*The Last Policeman*). Victor, an African-American bounty hunter for the U.S. Marshals Service, possesses a supreme talent for tracking down runaway slaves in a world in which there was no Civil War and slavery still exists in four Southern states. He's a master of disguise and dissembling. Victor tracks a runaway slave code-named Jackdaw to Indianapolis, Ind., where he ingratiates himself with Father Barton, a purported leader of an abolitionist organization called Underground Airlines, and succeeds in penetrating the group. But soon thereafter Victor impulsively befriends Martha Flowers, a down-on-her-luck white woman traveling with her young biracial son, Lionel, a kindness that soon jeopardizes Victor's carefully constructed cover identity. The novel's closing section contains several breathtaking reversals and an exhilarating final course of action for Victor.

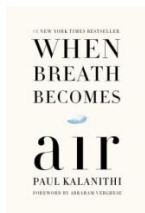
February 9



***Better than Before* by Gretchen Rubin**

Author Rubin (*The Happiness Project*) believes that through altering habits people change their lives and that there is no one-size-fits-all method to making desired alterations. Habit change is more successful, says Rubin, if individuals choose strategies that coincide with their tendencies to respond negatively or positively to outer and inner expectations. This is a fascinating study of the human mind and the process of change, interspersed with psychological facts and real-life examples. One of the best books available on the subject.

March 9



***When Breath Becomes Air* by Paul Kalanithi**

Can life remain rewarding even while one is living under a death sentence? This is the question now-deceased neurosurgeon Kalanithi asked himself after receiving a late-stage lung cancer diagnosis. Kalanithi describes his life-changing decision to set aside the pursuit of a doctorate in literature in favor of attending medical school and then recounts the discovery and progress of his illness, along with the upheaval in his personal life. A highlight here is the heartrending epilogue penned by his wife, Lucy, following Kalanithi's passing shortly after she became pregnant. This eloquent, heartfelt meditation on the choices that make life worth living, even as death looms, will prompt readers to contemplate their own values and mortality.