



HYDE

→ CONTINUED FROM P. 81

capas, and schemes—for Mary believes that she, and not her cousin Elizabeth Tudor, is England's true queen. **VERDICT** Though occasionally uneven, the narrative clips along at a suspenseful pace, and Erickson's depiction of Mary is more engaging than that of her previous female historical characters. The vividly realized relationship between Mary and her Scottish consort, Jamie, is the strongest aspect of the book. Recommended for historical fiction fans who enjoy Philippa Gregory and Jean Plaidy and can't read enough novels about this period.—**Jamie Kallio**, Thomas Ford Memorial Lib., Western Springs, IL

**Fellowes, Julian. Past Imperfect. St. Martin's. Sept. 2009. c.416p. ISBN 978-0-312-57068-2. \$24.99. F**

In his second novel (after *Snobs*), Oscar-winning screenwriter Fellowes (e.g., *Gosford Park*) examines the lives of the debutantes and young aristocrats of 1960s England 40 years on. Damian Baxter is a self-made millionaire dying of cancer who for nearly 20 years has had in his possession an anonymous letter indicating that he fathered a child in the early 1970s, right around the time that his group of friends and lovers were breaking up and moving on, often to more unsatisfying lives. Wishing to leave his entire fortune to this child, Baxter asks his one-time friend, the novel's narrator, to visit each of the women who might have written the letter. The narrator's visits and flashbacks to their glory days make up the bulk of the novel. **VERDICT** While the American woman is a sad caricature, the rest of Fellowes's players more than hold one's attention and sympathy. An interesting reflection on how to cope (or in some cases, how not to cope) with the end of one's era. Recommended. [See Prepub Alert, *LJ* 5/15/09].—**Julie Elliott**, Indiana Univ. Lib., South Bend

★ **Grenville, Kate. The Lieutenant. Atlantic Monthly. Sept. 2009. c.320p. ISBN 978-0-8021-1916-2. \$24. F**

Intellectually gifted but socially awkward, Portsmouth schoolboy Daniel Rooke routinely isolates himself from his peers to explore the mechanisms of logic, arithmetic, and Greek. When a mentor recognizes his potential and introduces him to the study of astronomy, Rooke believes that he has found his place and purpose in life. He volunteers for the marines and signs on as an astronomer with the First Fleet sailing to New South Wales in 1788. After his astronomical studies falter in Australia, Rooke becomes friendly with a group of Aborigines, attempting to learn and transcribe their language. The bond he forms with a girl named Tagaran—who reminds him of his

younger sister—takes Rooke by surprise and leads to an unexpected turning point in his life. **VERDICT** Rooke is a genuine, sensitive protagonist, and this new novel offers a more intimate and optimistic perspective of Australian history than Grenville's award-winning epic, *The Secret River*. Grenville displays a graceful touch with the characters and the history that so clearly move her, and her writing sparkles with life. Highly recommended for readers of literary fiction. [See Prepub Alert, *LJ* 5/15/09].—**Kelsey Peterson**, Johnson County Community Coll. Lib., Overland Park, KS

**Hicks, Robert. A Separate Country. Grand Central. Oct. 2009. c.419p. ISBN 978-0-446-58164-6. \$25.99. F**

After the Civil War, Confederate general John Bell Hood retired to New Orleans, where he became a businessman, married Creole belle Anna Marie Hennen, and fathered 11 children. This second novel from Hicks (*The Widow of the South*) opens in 1879 as Hood lies dying of yellow fever. His deathbed wish is to see his "private" memoir published in lieu of his earlier detailed accounting of the war. Hood enlists the aid of Eli Griffin, a young Tennessean who had come to New Orleans in 1875 to kill the man who led the South's defeat at the Battle of Franklin and later became enmeshed in the lives of the Hoods and the tragic events surrounding longtime friends of Anna Marie's and a former subordinate of the general's. **VERDICT** Suffused with racial tension, brutality, sweltering heat, and sickness, this is the tale of a warrior knowing "nothing about death, only killing" who finally seeks love and a reconciliation with God. Readers must see past the bugs and the stench of New Orleans to unravel the puzzle of these picaresque characters. Recommended for Civil War buffs and those who appreciate precise, evocative writing. [See Prepub Alert, *LJ* 5/15/09].—**Bette-Lee Fox**, *Library Journal*

**Hyde, Elisabeth. In the Heart of the Canyon. Knopf. Jul. 2009. c.336p. ISBN 978-0-307-26367-4. \$25.95. F**

Twelve travelers and three guides set off on a rafting trip down the Colorado River in this

## Summer Reads

www.libraryjournal.com



"Devour Books, Not People: A Librarian Picks the Best Zombie Lit."  
"Staycation Recreations: Escape with Sagas, Day Trips, and Genealogy."  
"35 Going on 13: Summer Reading." All great reading for the summer and all in the June 18 issue of *LJ*'s new e-newsletter, *BookSmack!* (<http://bit.ly/ui91b>). Just go to our web site and look under Newsletters.

adventure from the author of *The Abortinist's Daughter*. Each comes to the trip expecting a life-altering experience, but none is prepared for the events as they unfold, least of all JT Maroney, their veteran guide. It is JT's 125th trip down the river, and he thinks he's seen it all; but a dog, a couple in their seventies, two dysfunctional marriages, and an overweight teenager provide him with challenges that have nothing to do with white-water rafting. Each traveler leaves the trip with much more than he or she expected. **VERDICT** The reader is swept along with the characters through the strikingly beautiful canyon and the potentially deadly river. Great scenic description and fully believable characters make this adventure story well worth the ride. A good pick as a summer read. [See Prepub Alert, *LJ* 3/1/09].—**Susan Clifford Braun**, Aerospace Corp., El Segundo, CA

**Iles, Greg. The Devil's Punchbowl. Scribner. Jul. 2009. c.480p. ISBN 978-0-7432-9251-1. \$26.95. F**

Penn Cage (*Quiet Game*, *Turning Angel*), a former prosecuting attorney-turned-novelist, is now mayor of Natchez, MS, his hometown. But all is not well, for the promises he made as a candidate seem all but impossible to achieve as a working mayor. When one of his childhood friends is murdered a day after contacting him with information concerning dog fighting, prostitution, drugs, and money laundering presided over by the manager of a Natchez gambling casino, Cage takes on an investigation that makes him the target of organized crime, endangers the lives of his family and closest friends, and draws the wrath of the Justice Department and Homeland Security. **VERDICT** Iles's latest provides a thrill a minute, as Cage calls in long-owed favors to protect his family while employing every strategy in his command against a savvy, conscienceless killer. The author also manages to advance the love between Cage and Caitlin Masters, which, readers will remember, began in *Turning Angel*, and to present a striking panoramic view of his hometown. Highly recommended for thriller fans looking for a white-knuckled beach read.—**Thomas L. Kilpatrick**, formerly with Southern Illinois Univ. Lib., Carbondale

Hyde  
& Keegan

Dorothea is an engaging narrator, a more sympathetic character than her husband with his egotism, his wild enthusiasms, his creepy fascination with "child-women." Gaynor writes in an afterword that in this novel she tried to give voice to the "largely voiceless" Catherine Dickens, who asked that her letters from her husband be preserved so that "the world may know he loved me once." One aspect of Dorothea's voice is unconvincingly modern. Summoned to meet Queen Victoria, Dorothea asks her sovereign, "But does it not strike you as unfair, ma'am, that a simple question of one's sex should confine one for ever to a particular sphere?" Worse yet is a wince-inducing supernatural interlude in which her late husband appears to her and asks her to write the ending of his unfinished novel. As Catherine's story nears its end, she has all but transformed herself into a feminist, a New Woman. If you can manage to overlook Dorothea's anachronistic, out-of-character, self-empowerment, "Girl in a Blue Dress" is an entertaining attempt to imagine an aspect of Dickens's private life that remains something of a mystery.

Hyde was wise to include a list of characters at the start of "In the Heart of the Canyon" because it's easy to confuse her Colorado River rafters, especially early in the novel, before she has fleshed out their diverse personalities. There's Evelyn, a middle-aged Harvard biology professor nursing a broken heart. Mitchell, a know-it-all historian, appears to work at being obnoxious, especially to his meek wife, Lena. Amy, an obese 17-year old, is forever at odds with her fretting mother, Susan. Ruth and Lloyd, in their 70s, are making the last of many trips down the river, as Alzheimer's is robbing Lloyd of his memory. Jill is trying to make the trip a memorable adventure for her passive-aggressive husband, Mark, and their two adolescent sons, who didn't want to come. And Peter, a young unemployed cartographer, has been sent on the trip by his sister, who is tired of hearing him complain. Leading this 13-day passage is J.T. Maroney, a cool white-water guide who has made 125 trips through the Grand Canyon, and his assistants, Dixie and Abo. A stray dog joins the party and acquires a name, Blender, and his own life jacket.

Hyde vividly portrays both the wonders and horrors of white-water rafting. Anyone thinking of taking a similar trip would do well to read this. It's set in July, and the rafters face heatstroke, dehydration, and sunburn, as well as rattlesnakes, scorpions, and other potentially dangerous wildlife. And, of course, there are the rapids, a challenge in any season. However, the most daunting obstacles are the conflicts, emotional and otherwise, among the rafters.

Diane White writes every month about new light and popular fiction.

Boston Globe 7/12

Pop Lit  
By DIANE WHITE

7/12  
Boston Globe

## Souls adrift, seeking anchor

Nicola Keegan's novel about a young swimmer is enthralling. Gaynor Arnold's historical fiction was inspired by the plight of Charles Dickens's abandoned wife, Catherine. And Elisabeth Hyde sends readers on an excellent armchair adventure by raft, through the Grand Canyon.

In "Swimming," her first novel, Keegan's energy jumps off the page. Her lively, unorthodox style suits her unusual narrator, Philomena "Pip" Ash, a smart and smart-mouthed swimming prodigy, born in Kansas, in the mid-1960s. Her parents, desperate to find a way to tire their hyperactive infant, enroll her in an aqua babies class when she's 10 months old. Instead of sinking, Philomena kicks, and she's off, joyfully gliding through the water toward Olympic glory. It's not a smooth journey. Her older sister succumbs to cancer; her father dies in a plane crash; another sister becomes addicted to drugs; her agoraphobic mother can't cope with all the loss. At school Pip struggles to meet the expectations of demanding nuns. She grows into a gangling adolescent, more than 6 feet tall, with enormous feet. On land she's awkward, insecure, self-loathing. In the water she's a phenomenon. Under the tutelage of "super coach" Ernest Mankovitz she hones her skills, doggedly and painfully, turning her body into a powerful swimming machine.

### SWIMMING

By Nicola Keegan  
Knopf, 320 pp., \$25.95

### GIRL IN A BLUE DRESS

By Gaynor Arnold  
Crown, 432 pp., \$25.99

### IN THE HEART OF THE CANYON

By Elisabeth Hyde  
Knopf, 336 pp., \$25.95

"Swimming" is a wonderful coming-of-age story, a richly detailed account of a young woman channeling her rage, grief and insecurity into a passion to win. The voice Keegan has invented for Pip is sarcastic, thoughtful, elegant, irreverent. "Life is a series of complicated errors. Life is all about glid-

ing through angles with curves. And I have proof, once again, that my mind cannot prepare my body for anything outside a pool, so I close my eyes and swim into sex in a ghostlike glide, knowing that with time this will be funny." Eventually Pip learns that even Olympic medals can't assuage her pain, and she is forced to confront her losses.

The "Girl in a Blue Dress" is Dorothea Gibson, wife of Alfred Gibson, the greatest novelist of the Victorian age, a fictional figure closely modeled on Charles Dickens. As the story opens, the internationally celebrated writer is being buried in Westminster Abbey as thousands gather outside in an orgy of public mourning. His wife of more than 20 years, excluded from the funeral, sits in the small house to which she's been relegated and remembers her life with the self-styled "One and Only." First-time novelist Arnold has "Dodo," as Gibson nicknamed her, recall her courtship by the eager, high-spirited young writer, the happy early days of their marriage, their gradual estrangement as she grew stout and depressed after many pregnancies and births. Finally he banishes her from their home, cuts her off from her children, and secretly takes up with another girl in a blue dress, a willowy young actress.

Hyde



Comments 0 | Recommend 0

## Book review: 'In the Heart of the Canyon' by Elisabeth Hyde

12:00 AM CDT on Sunday, July 12, 2009

By BEATRIZ TERRAZAS / Special Contributor to The Dallas Morning News

It's July Fourth, and trip leader JT Maroney is about to log his 125th run through the Grand Canyon on the Colorado River. His assistant river guides are Abo and Dixie.

Together, they will take 12 rafters along 226 miles of some of nature's most dramatic landscapes. The trip's climax will be Lava Falls, a rapid that's rated a 10 on a scale of one to 10. JT has run it countless times, but this time will be different.

"This trip would change him a lot," writes novelist Elisabeth Hyde. "It would change everyone, in ways no one could have anticipated."

So begins a journey in which a river, a quirky set of travelers and unforeseen circumstances add up to a highly entertaining read. Hyde has concocted a near-perfect blend of humor and drama, heartbreak and redemption.

Among the rafters are Peter, a cartographer who can't swim; Mitchell, a control freak researching a book; Lloyd, an elderly doctor with Alzheimer's; and Amy, an obese teen with a secret that could derail everyone's vacation.

Maybe JT's getting soft by his 125th trip; by the end of Day One he takes in a stray dog on the river, violating company rules and setting in motion events that can't be undone.

On Day Two the dog causes the first of many mishaps. He knocks down Lloyd's wife, Ruth, and she gashes her leg badly enough to require medical attention.

With each mile logged, Hyde deftly ratchets up the tension and conflict by bringing out everyone's hidden flaws and pent-up emotions.

Amy writes about her self-loathing in a journal: "Maybe some night I will just float off down the river when everyone else is asleep and never be seen again, the lost whale."

Her mother, the petite Susan, attempts to draw Amy out, but struggles with a secret bias: "How could her daughter be so different? ... And how did she end up so ... large?"

Ruth's injury becomes infected, and her spouse is increasingly confused. The heat wears on everyone. So does Mitchell. His incessant complaints about the dog lead JT to issue an ultimatum: "One, you can stay with us, or two you can find another trip for the next seven days ... It's not about the dog, Mitchell. It's about learning to let go."