

LP² STUDY GROUP PROPOSAL FOR FALL 2022

THE LIVES OF OTHERS: READING MEMOIR 4

Coordinators: Peggy Blumenthal, Mary-Joan Gerson, Mireya Perez-Bustillo, Michael Serrill, Miriam Lawrence (organizer)

We read and discuss the lives of four Americans, born within ten years of each other, of different backgrounds and lived experiences. We start with Sonia Sotomayor's *My Beloved World*, a "searching and emotionally intimate memoir" (*New York Times*) told with a candor never before undertaken by a sitting Justice.

Next is James McBride's classic, *The Color of Water*, which, in alternating chapters, tells both his own coming-of-age story, and that of his white, Jewish mother, born in Poland, raised in the American South, who landed in Harlem, married in succession two Black men, and raised 12 children.

We then turn to the memoir of MIT psychologist, best-selling author and deep thinker, Sherry Turkle. According to Vivian Gornick, "The strong suit of *The Empathy Diaries* is the wonderful clarity with which Turkle guides us through her intellectual development."

We conclude with Mary Karr's seminal work, *The Liar's Club*, about her hardscrabble Texas childhood. Her honest exploration of sex, guns, and alcohol, of tragedy and trauma, makes it what the Washington Post called "the essential American memoir."

Peggy Blumenthal spent her career promoting US-China relations and managing educational exchanges, despite her original plan to teach English literature. Retirement brought her time to read books again just for pleasure. **Mary-Joan Gerson**, like Sherry Turkle, is a Ph.D. clinical psychologist and has always deeply admired Turkle's fascination with how electronic engagement has impacted our sense of identity, relationship and perceived reality. **Mireya Perez-Bustillo**, born in Colombia and raised in New York, holds a PhD in Spanish Literature and Culture, and has coordinated study groups in Spanish, Latino, Caribbean, Border, Hispanic literatures. Her novel, *Back to El Dorado* (Floricanto), was published in 2020. **Michael Serrill** spent 40-plus years as a reporter and editor for publications including *Time* magazine, *Business Week* and *Bloomberg Markets Magazine*. He is a former president of the Overseas Press Club. **Miriam Lawrence** has been organizing The Lives of Others: Reading

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Memoir series from its inception. This is the fourth round.

Type of Study Group: Mostly discussion

Readings and other Materials/Online Services:

My Beloved World by Sonia Sotomayor (preferred edition: ISBN 978-0345804839);

The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother by James McBride (any edition);

The Empathy Diaries by Sherry Turkle (any edition);

The Liar's Club by Mary Karr (any edition).

***** **SYLLABUS - A WORK IN PROGRESS** *****

WEEK 1

TOPIC: *My Beloved World*

READING:

Preface, Prologue, Chapters 1-7; poem "A Puerto Rico" pp. 395-397;
Glossary

QUESTIONS:

What does the choice of photos in the beginning of the book and on p. 247 tell us? What are the differences between PR and NY? Which TV and literary models are important for her and why?

WEEK 2

TOPIC: *My Beloved World*

READING: Chapters 8-15

QUESTIONS:

How do gender issues relate to her becoming a lawyer? In what way does Affirmative Action affect her? How does she maintain a connection to PR?

WEEK 3

TOPIC: *My Beloved World*

READING: Chapters 16-28; epilogue

QUESTIONS:

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What has diabetes taught her? How do you see the importance of learning for her? Who are her mentors? What is her goal on the Court?

WEEK 4 TO WEEK 6: *The Color of Water*

WEEK 7 TO WEEK 9: *The Empathy Diaries*

WEEK 10 TO WEEK 12: *The Liar's Club*