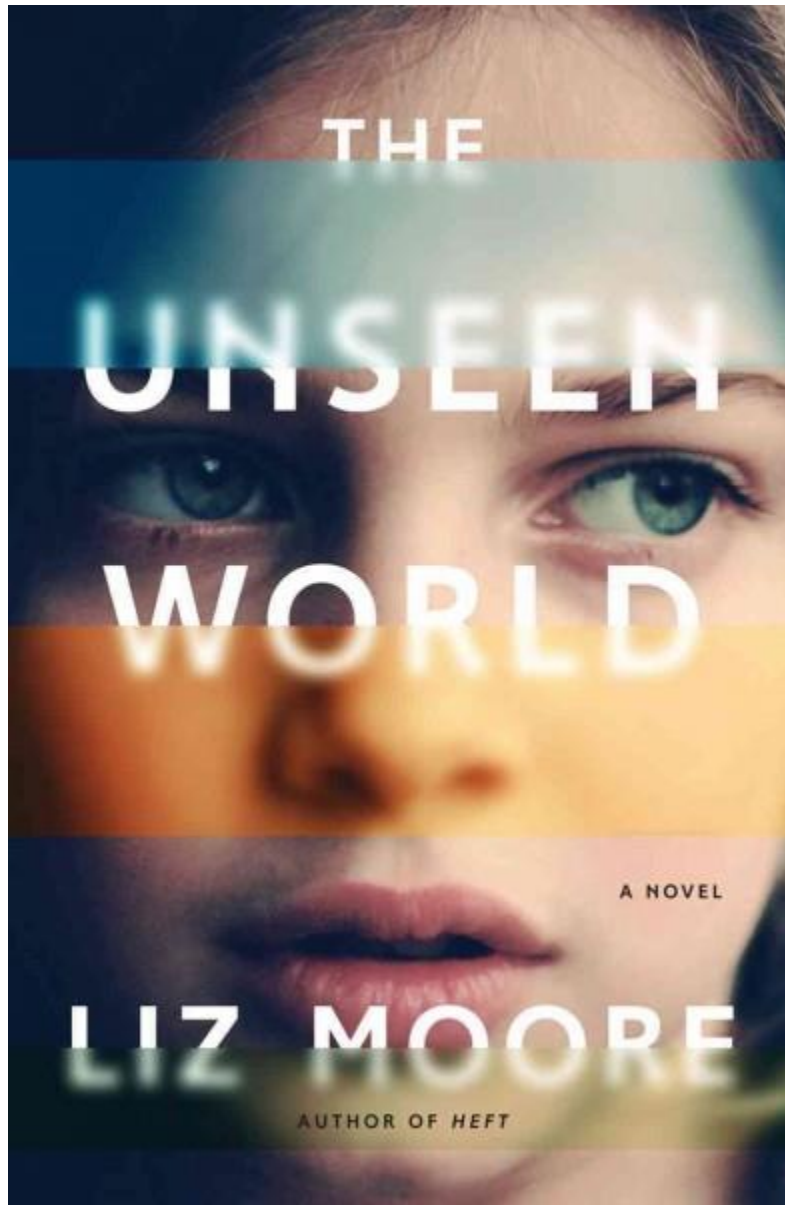


Tompkins County Public Library Book Kit

The Unseen World

by Liz Moore



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### The Unseen World

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#### SUMMARY

"The moving story of a daughter's quest to discover the truth about her beloved father's hidden past. Ada Sibelius is raised by David, her brilliant, eccentric, socially inept single father, who directs a computer science lab in 1980s-era Boston. Home-schooled, Ada accompanies David to work every day; by twelve, she is a painfully shy prodigy. The lab begins to gain acclaim at the same time that David's mysterious history comes into question. When his mind begins to falter, leaving Ada virtually an orphan, she is taken in by one of David's colleagues. Soon after she embarks on a mission to uncover her father's secrets: a process that carries her from childhood to adulthood."--Provided by publisher.

What Ada discovers on her journey into a virtual universe will keep the reader riveted until *The Unseen World's* heart-stopping, fascinating conclusion. - (WW Norton)

See also the author's website for more recommended links pertaining to this novel

[www.lizmoore.net/](http://www.lizmoore.net/)

## Author Biography

(From author's website)



Liz Moore

<http://www.lizmoore.net/about/>

Liz Moore's first novel, *The Words of Every Song* (Broadway Books, 2007), centers on a fictional record company in New York City just after the turn of the millennium. It draws partly on Liz's own experiences as a musician. It was selected for Borders' Original Voices program and was given a starred review by *Kirkus*. Roddy Doyle wrote of it, "This is a remarkable novel, elegant, wise, and beautifully constructed. I loved the book."

After the publication of her debut novel, Liz obtained her MFA in Fiction from Hunter College. In 2009, she was awarded the University of Pennsylvania's ArtsEdge residency

and moved to Philadelphia, where she still lives. She is now an Assistant Professor of Writing at Holy Family University.

Her second novel, *Heft*, was published by W.W. Norton in January 2012 to popular and critical acclaim. Of *Heft*, *The New Yorker* wrote, "Moore's characters are lovingly drawn...a truly original voice"; *The San Francisco Chronicle* wrote, "Few novelists of recent memory have put our bleak isolation into words as clearly as Liz Moore does in her new novel"; and editor Sara Nelson wrote in *O, The Oprah Magazine*, "Beautiful...Stunningly sad and heroically hopeful." The novel was published in five countries, was long-listed for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, and was included on several "Best of 2012" lists, including those of NPR and the Apple iBookstore.

Moore's short fiction and creative nonfiction have appeared in venues such as *Tin House*, *The New York Times*, and *Narrative Magazine*. She is the winner of the Medici Book Club Prize and Philadelphia's Athenaeum Literary Award. After winning a 2014 Rome Prize in Literature, she spent 2014-15 at the American Academy in Rome, completing her third novel.

That novel, *The Unseen World*, was published by W.W. Norton in July of 2016. Louisa Hall called it "fiercely intelligent" in her review in *The New York Times*; Susan call called it "enthraling . . . ethereal and elegant . . . a rich and convincing period piece in her review in the *Washington Post*. *The Unseen World* was included in "Best of 2016" lists by *The New Yorker*, the BBC, *Publishers Weekly*, *Vox*, Google Play, and Audible.com, among others.

***Author Unplugged: 10 Questions With Liz Moore*** (Writer's Bone)

[www.writersbone.com/interviewsarchive/2016/9/14/author-unplugged-10-questions-with-liz-moore](http://www.writersbone.com/interviewsarchive/2016/9/14/author-unplugged-10-questions-with-liz-moore) (9/14/16)

## Book Reviews

### Booklist Reviews

“\*Starred Review\* The mystery that's at the heart of this intelligent and brilliantly absorbing novel is one that dogs Ada Sibelius for decades: Who is her father, David Sibelius, really? A brilliant, quirky computer scientist, pioneering cutting-edge research at one of Boston's leading technical institutions, or a fraud masquerading under a borrowed identity? For a while, the answer to this question threatens to make or break the very foundation that Ada's life is built on, as an only child, rigorously homeschooled, as someone for whom "no life existed outside of David." As David slips away to Alzheimer's and Ada's custody falls to one of his close lab colleagues, the question of David's identity surfaces and looms large, casting a shadow over everything that Ada holds to be true about her father and making her teen years—and their associated milestones of early crushes and school dramas—even more challenging. Filled with achingly memorable scenes (the first time David disappears, leaving Ada alone for more than a day is a heartbreaker) and beautifully nuanced writing, Moore's (Heft, 2012) latest is a stunner in its precise take on identity and the compromises even the most righteous among us must make to survive life's challenges with grace. Copyright 2014 Booklist Reviews.”

### Library Journal Reviews

“Moore's third and perhaps most ambitious novel (after Heft and *The Words of Every Song*) is large in scope, as it explores the philosophical issues surrounding human vs. computer consciousness, but it is also a small-scale, powerfully local story about a young girl. The details of Ada Sibelius's day-to-day life in Boston's Dorchester neighborhood, homeschooled by her genius father, carry this narrative. She is forced to grow up fast, helping her father and his team at a computer science lab, and caring for him as he suffers from early-onset Alzheimer's. As his health and memory rapidly decline, she discovers her parent was not who he said he was, and with the help of a private investigator and a local librarian, learns more about him and his sacrifices than he would ever share with her. The story also flashes forward to the present and near future, when Ada is working for a tech company to produce a virtual reality world. VERDICT Moore's vivid characters will stay with readers long after the story has ended. Highly recommended for literary fiction enthusiasts, with crossover appeal to sf fans. [See Prepub Alert, 12/7/15.]—Kate Gray, Boston P.L., MA”

## Discussion Questions

[books.wwnorton.com/books/readingguidesdetail.aspx?id=4294993258&CID=4294993570&tid=3288&tcid=](https://books.wwnorton.com/books/readingguidesdetail.aspx?id=4294993258&CID=4294993570&tid=3288&tcid=)

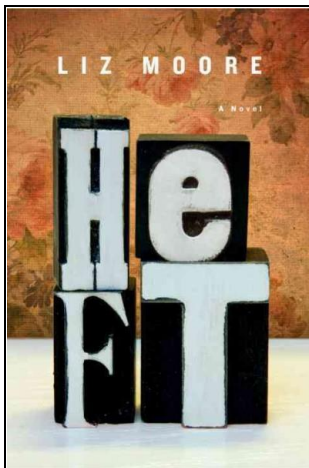
1. After finishing the novel, reread the conversation that occurs in the Prologue. What does this conversation imply about the narrator of the story?
2. On page 90 when David returns from his surprising absence, “Ada knew for the first time she could no longer hope to protect David from...anyone’s judgment.” How does this sort of “protection by omission” occur throughout the story?
3. Do you think David should have told Ada the truth? Why do you think he kept his past to himself?
4. Ashamed for locking David in their house while she was out, Ada thinks “she had made the best decision she could make” (page 134) given the situation. How is this true for other characters at different moments throughout the novel?
5. Consider David’s past and how he donned a new persona—allowing himself, in essence, to lead a new life. Do you think rejecting the past can free us to live more honest lives? How does this play out in David’s life? How does it differ for Ada?
6. Why is Ada unable to bear visiting her father in the facility, but habitually returns to her childhood home to be among his things?
7. On page 193, after Ada learns that David has lied about his past, she feels “a deep and abiding rage was growing inside of her, alarming in its intensity, directed mainly at Liston.” Why is she angry at Liston? Do you understand her rage?
8. As adults, Gregory visits Ada and admits that Liston was in love with David. Ada can’t believe it, and he remarks on page 335: “ ‘You were both like that,’ he said. ‘You Sibeliuses.’ His voice had taken on an edge, and Ada could not identify its source.” What does Gregory mean by this?
9. When Ada finally decodes her father’s note, it bears a startling resemblance to the note he affixed to the disk on page 31: “*A puzzle for you. With my love, your father, David Sibelius.*” Why does the author make the two notes so similar?
10. We learn “The Unseen World” refers to an invention David was attempting to create. What is it exactly? What is behind his desire to make it?
11. Much of the novel is told in the third person, but the last chapter switches to the first person. What does this switch say about David’s ability to create a virtual reality?

From W.W. Norton & Company, Publisher

## Further Readings

If you enjoyed reading this work by Liz Moore, try the works of these authors or any of the titles linked below.

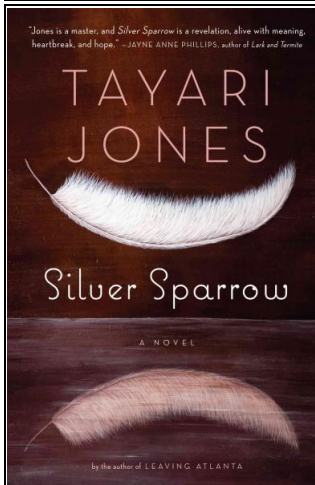
Julia Glass  
Stewart O’Nan  
Mary Gaitskill



### **Heft**

By Liz Moore

An obese former academic shut-in and a poor kid dreaming of a successful baseball career are linked together by a former student who transforms their lives in this novel from the author of *The Words of Every Song*. 20,000 first printing. - (Baker & Taylor)

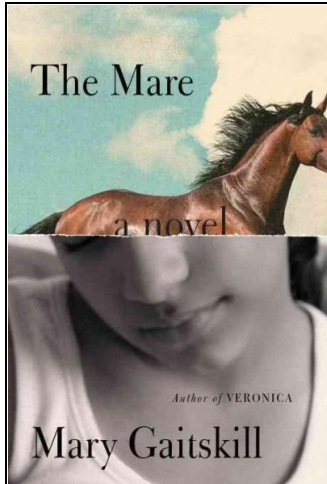


### **Silver Sparrow**

By Tayari Jones

In 1980s Atlanta, two teenage girls become friends, with only one knowing that they are in fact both daughters of the same bigamist father, and as their friendship develops their father's secret begins to unravel. - (Baker & Taylor)

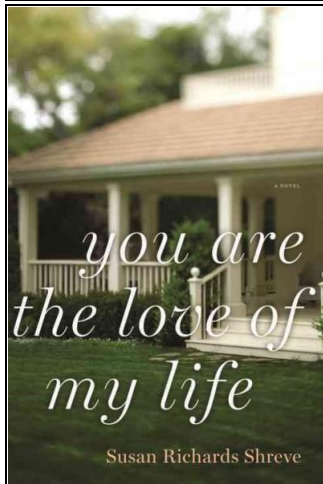




### **The Mare**

By Mary Gaitskill

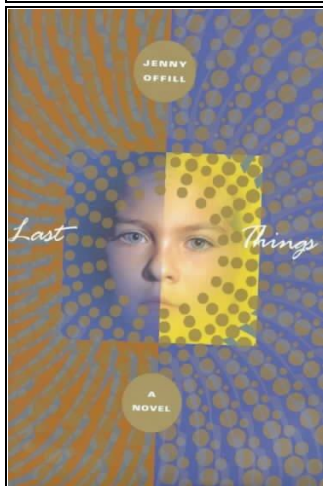
Taken in by a near-alcoholic artist and a jaded academic, a young Dominican girl in Brooklyn's Fresh Air Fund program explores the contrasts between her inner-city life and her hosts' privileged world and finds her realities powerfully shaped by her relationship with a horse. - (Baker & Taylor)



### **You Are the Love of My Life**

By Susan Richards Shreve

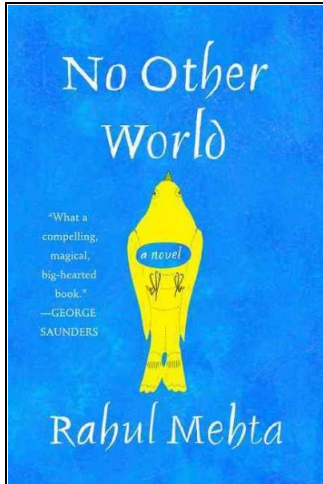
Hoping for a fresh start, Lucy Painter moves back to a small Washington neighborhood as the Watergate scandal hits and wrestles with her own secrets, including the identity of the father of her children. - (Baker & Taylor)



### **Last Things**

By Jenny Offill

Grace Davitt, a young girl living with her family in a small lakeside Vermont town, is drawn ever deeper into her mother's bizarre world of obsession and myth, despite the efforts of her father, a dedicated rationalist - (Baker & Taylor)



## **No Other World**

By Rahul Mehta

Sweeping and emotionally complex, *No Other World* is a haunting meditation on love, belonging, and forgiveness that explores the line between our responsibilities to our families and to ourselves, the difficult choices we make, and the painful cost of claiming our true selves. (HARPERCOLL)

See complete related books list with links directly to the Library's catalog at [library.booksite.com/6631/nl/?list=CNL17&group=EB605](http://library.booksite.com/6631/nl/?list=CNL17&group=EB605).