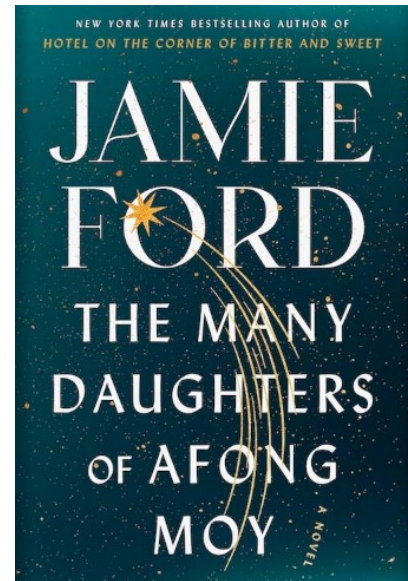


Renowned Author Jamie Ford Returns to present *The Many Daughters of Afong Moy*

A review by Lynn Ingham

Seeley Lake readers are in for a special treat this month as Jamie Ford returns to the Alpine Artisans Open Book Club to read from and talk about his latest novel *The Many Daughters of Afong Moy*. Jamie will be reading on Saturday, May 13 at 7 pm at the Seeley Lake Community Foundation building. Jamie's initial and epic visit to the AAI book series was soon after the publication of his first novel *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet* (currently being made into a feature film), and those who attended that evening will remember a wonderful night of witty humor that he is likely to repeat.

In this new book, Jamie blends history and fiction as he bridges the past, present and future by writing about Afong Moy, the first known female Chinese immigrant to the United States, and then imagining the future generations of women who were related to her as daughters, granddaughters and on down the line. Jamie masterfully and sensitively brings to life the trauma Afong endured as she was showcased as an oddity for her ethnicity, her language and clothing; she was also the subject of much public (and medical) curiosity because of the spectacle created around her traditionally tiny bound feet. Afong's traumatic beginnings in America, where she had no freedom or ability to make any decisions about her life or to move about on her own, sets the baseline for the novel's exploration into Epigenetics and a related area of scientific study that shows how a person's life experiences can imprint and impact their genetics. Under this lens, the idea of generational trauma and discussion of "nature vs nurture" take an entirely new turn.



Jamie's dedication at the beginning of this book is a wonderful distillation of the book's message. He writes: "This book is for anyone with a complicated origin story. I feel you." As someone with a complicated origin story myself, I can attest to the fact that he does, indeed, feel us.

It is hard to distill a book that covers six generations of women touching three centuries, Afong and her five female descendants, into a simple review without necessary spoilers to connect the dots. In the novel, Jamie writes about the lives of each woman, and he also writes about many of the sweeping historical and political changes to the landscape over those decades, as well as the many concurrent changes to the climate, no small feat. Each successive descendant leads as interesting, if as conflicted, a life as that of Afong, and each female character is deserving of a book on their own. Taken in entirety, the story is compelling and tightly knit in an almost impossible-to-pull-off way. Jamie himself, in the epilogue, admits to the complexity of this novel, which he refers to as his *big box of crayons*: "I wanted to use all of my colors to draw a story, with the old and the new, the familiar and the unfamiliar. To create a word-picture with as much wonder and possibility as history and remembrance."

All I can say is that Jamie has a rather impressive box of crayons.

Reviewers and fellow writers and admirers use phrases like "simply transcendent", "lyrical and profound", "haunting" when describing this book. Perhaps my favorite is on his book jacket as a quote from the New York Times bestselling author of *Beautiful Country* by Qian Julie Wang. She says, "A searing and vibrant epic of generational love, trauma, and healing. To read it is to be transformed – and to transcend." Here's to transforming and transcending!