

DANA HALL SCHOOL 2013 FACULTY & STAFF SUMMER READING BIBLIOGRAPHY

FICTION

The Burgess Boys, Elizabeth Strout (2013)

Pulitzer Prize-winning Strout (*Olive Kitteridge*, 2008) delivers a tightly woven yet seemingly languorous portrayal of a family in longtime disarray. Brothers Jim and Bob Burgess, and sister Susan, are mired in a childhood trauma: when he was four, Bob unwittingly released the parking brake on the family car, which ran over their father and killed him. Originally from small Shirley Falls, Maine, the Burgess brothers have long since fled to vastly disparate lives as New York City attorneys. Egoistic Jim is a famous big shot with a corporate firm. Self-effacing Bob leads a more low-profile career with Legal Aid. High-strung Susan calls them home to fix a family crisis: her son stands accused of a possible hate crime against the small town's improbable Somali population. The siblings' varying responses to the crisis illuminate their sheer differences while also recalling their shared upbringing, forcing them finally to deal with their generally unmentioned, murky family history. (*Booklist*)

Fall of Giants, Ken Follett (2010)

This first in a century-spanning trilogy from bestseller Follett makes effective and economical use of its lead characters. From a huge cast, eight figures emerge to play multiple roles that illustrate and often illuminate the major events, trends, and issues of the years leading up to and immediately beyond WWI: American diplomat Gus Dewar; Earl Fitzherbert, a wealthy Englishman; Fitz's sister, Lady Maud; German military attaché Walter von Ulrich; Russian brothers Grigori and Lev Peshkov; Welsh collier Billy Williams and his sister, Ethel, whom Fitz hires as a housemaid. Ingenious plotting allows Follett to explore such salient developments of the era as coal mine safety in Wales, women's suffrage, the diplomatic blundering that led to war, the horrors of trench warfare, and the triumph of the Bolsheviks. (*Publishers Weekly*) Though this is historical fiction lite, it is a remarkable and wonderfully readable synthesis of fact and fiction, and it will leave you eager to read *Winter of the World* (v. 2) and the as-yet-unpublished third volume.

Ghana Must Go, Taiye Selasi (2013)

A father's death leads to a new beginning for his fractured family in this powerful first novel. Kweku Sai is felled by a sudden heart attack at his home in Ghana. At the moment of his death, Kweku is filled with regret for his abandonment of his first wife, Fola, and their four children in Baltimore, many years ago, after losing his job as a surgeon. His four children are now scattered across the East Coast: Olu, a gifted surgeon who followed in his father's footsteps; twins Taiwo and Kehinde, who share a terrible secret from childhood; and youngest daughter Sadie, who is struggling with her body image and sexuality. In the wake of their father's death, the four siblings, along with Olu's wife, Ling, reunite to journey to their mother's home in Ghana, where secrets, resentments, and grief bubble to the surface. A finely crafted story that seamlessly weaves the past and present, Selasi's moving debut expertly limns the way the bonds of family endure even when they are tested and strained. (*Booklist*)

Gone Girl, Gillian Flynn (2012)

When Nick Dunne's beautiful and clever wife, Amy, goes missing on their fifth wedding anniversary, the media descend on the Dunnes' Missouri McMansion with all the fury of a *Dateline* episode. And

Nick stumbles badly, for, as it turns out, he has plenty to hide, and under the pressure of police questioning and media scrutiny, he tells one lie after another. Juxtaposed with Nick's first-person narration of events are excerpts from Amy's diary, which completely contradict Nick's story and depict a woman who is afraid of her husband, has recently found out she's pregnant, and had been looking to buy a gun for protection. In addition, Amy is famous as the model for her parents' long-running and beloved children's series, *Amazing Amy*. But what looks like a straightforward case of a husband killing his wife to free himself from a bad marriage morphs into something entirely different in Flynn's hands. It contains so many twists and turns that the outcome is impossible to predict. (*Booklist*) If you missed this last summer, read it now!

Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet, Jamie Ford (2009)

Fifth-grade scholarship students and best friends Henry and Keiko are the only Asians in their Seattle elementary school in 1942. Henry is Chinese, Keiko is Japanese, and Pearl Harbor has made all Asians—even those who are American born—targets for abuse. Because Henry's nationalistic father has a deep-seated hatred for Japan, Henry keeps his friendship with and eventual love for Keiko a secret. When Keiko's family is sent to an internment camp in Idaho, Henry vows to wait for her. Forty years later, Henry comes upon an old hotel where the belongings of dozens of displaced Japanese families have turned up in the basement, and his love for Keiko is reborn. In his first novel, award-winning short-story writer Ford expertly nails the sweet innocence of first love, the cruelty of racism, the blindness of patriotism, the astonishing unknowns between parents and their children, and the sadness and satisfaction at the end of a life well lived. The result is a vivid picture of a confusing and critical time in American history. (*Library Journal*)

Life After Life, Kate Atkinson (2013)

Atkinson delivers a wildly inventive novel about Ursula Todd, born in 1910 and doomed to die and be reborn over and over again. She drowns, falls off a roof, and is beaten to death by an abusive husband but is always reborn back into the same loving family, sometimes with the knowledge that allows her to escape past poor decisions, sometimes not. As Atkinson subtly delineates all the pathways a life or a country might take, she also delivers a harrowing set piece on the Blitz as Ursula, working as a warden on a rescue team, encounters horrifying tableaux encompassing mangled bodies and whole families covered in ash, preserved just like the victims of Pompeii. Alternately mournful and celebratory, deeply empathic and scathingly funny, Atkinson shows what it is like to face the horrors of war and yet still find the determination to go on, with her wholly British characters often reducing the Third Reich to a fuss. From her deeply human characters to her comical dialogue to her meticulous plotting, Atkinson has written an audacious, thought-provoking novel. (*Booklist*)

The Middlesteins, Jami Attenberg (2012)

The Middlesteins, a Jewish family of strong temperaments and large dysfunctions, living in the middle of the country in Chicago and its suburbs, revolve around Edie, a woman of gargantuan appetites. Attenberg marshals her gift for mordant yet compassionate comedy to chart Edie's rise and fall in sync with her ever-ballooning weight. Smart, generous, and voracious in every way, Edie is a lawyer who loves food and work more than her pharmacist husband. Her daughter, Robin, a private-school history teacher, is anxious and reclusive. Edie's even-keeled, pot-smoking son, Benny, is married to Edie's opposite, petite and disciplined Rachele, an ambitious stay-at-home mother of twins. After Edie loses her job and rolls past the 300-pound mark, she becomes a medical crisis

waiting to happen. Finally galvanized into action, her in-denial family is both helpful and destructive, each effort and failure revealing yet another dimension of inherited suffering. A flawless omniscient narrator, Attenberg even illuminates the life of the man who owns foodaholic Edie's favorite Chinese restaurant while executing perfect flashbacks and flash-forwards and subtly salting this irresistible family portrait with piquant social commentary. Kinetic with hilarity and anguish, romance and fury, Attenberg's rapidly consumed yet nourishing novel anatomizes our insatiable hunger for love, meaning, and hope. (*Booklist*)

Where'd You Go, Bernadette, Maria Semple (2012)

Bernadette Fox, practically a shut-in, who's hired a virtual assistant in India to remotely arrange every task, from hiring a gardener to planning the trip to Antarctica she's promised her star-student daughter, Bee seems pretty crazy. But don't be fooled. Suspicions that madcap Bernadette is as clever as her last name implies will be confirmed heartily. When she's party to some unfortunate events, her erratic behavior leads her husband, Microsoft guru Elgin Branch, to commit her to a local mental-health facility. But Bernadette intercepts his plan at the pass, escapes the staged intervention, and disappears without a trace. Though much of the story is told through documents—e-mails, letters, magazine articles—precocious young teen Bee as narrator is great company, entertaining and convincing in her compartment. Under the guise of a hilarious romp, Semple explores the universal questions of why we do what we do and love what we love to some sweet and unexpected ends. (*Booklist*)

NONFICTION

Cooked, Michael Pollan (2013)

Pollan's newest treatise on how food reaches the world's tables delves into the history of how humankind turns raw ingredients into palatable and nutritious food. To bring some sense of order to this vast subject, he resurrects classical categories of fire, water, air, and earth. Pollan, one of America's most compelling expositors of food and human sustainability, visits pit masters to learn what constitutes authentic barbecue. An Italian-trained Iranian American teaches him the subtleties of proper cooking in pots, how to coax maximum flavor from humble vegetables, herbs, meats, and water. Baking trains Pollan to watch, listen, and feel the action of living yeasts in doughs. The harnessing of fungi and molds to ferment sauerkraut and beer and produce cheeses illuminates the fine and ever-shifting boundaries between tastiness and rot and how the human palate can be trained. Four recipes accompany the text, and an extensive bibliography offers much deeper exploration. (*Booklist*)

Jerusalem: A Family Portrait, Boaz Yakin and Nick Bertozzi (2013)

Chronicling the birth of a country so long torn by strife, this graphic novel is, fittingly, a war story. Taking place in the mid-to-late 1940s, as Israel struggled to establish itself as a Jewish nation, it is about both the war against British occupiers and Palestinian residents and the story of a family at war with itself. The Halaby family—angry, stubborn, fractious, but ultimately fiercely committed—proves effective both as metaphor for the strife and as a way to put a human face on a much larger piece of history, with individual characters able to illicit both livid frustration and deep sympathy. In a visually dazzling move, Bertozzi embraces artistic styles with conceptual connections to the material. His work shares gray tones and idiosyncratically humanistic character lines with Will Eisner's—a

pioneer of Jewish realism in comics—and the battle scenes, of which there are many, are deftly suspenseful but also highlight the tragic cost of warfare. Though it does include a two-page primer on the political history of the region, this is most powerful for investing a massive and complex issue with real human emotion. (*Booklist*)

Lean In, Sheryl Sandberg (2013)

If Facebook COO (and first-time author) Sandberg succeeds, it will be because she's made us mad and more than willing to act. With no small amount of self-deprecating humor, a massive quantity of facts and research, plus a liberal dose of very personal anecdotes, Sandberg forces each one of us to reexamine ourselves at work and in life, using a unique filter. Are we more concerned about being liked than succeeding? Do we think of our career as a series of upward ladders rather than a jungle gym? Do our authentic selves and honesty show up in business? In short, every single undoing of a woman's career is examined thoughtfully and with twenty-first-century gentleness and exposed with recommended remedies. Her colleagues act as advocates for her theme: lean in, or take a risk and drive change for us all. And though there are no solutions offered, except in the formation of communities around the country and (we hope!) around the world, there's tremendous reenergy in feeling that, thanks to Sandberg, the world just might be a different place. (*Booklist*)

Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea, Barbara Demick (2009)

In spite of the strict restrictions on foreign press, award-winning journalist Demick caught telling glimpses of just how surreal and mournful life is in North Korea. Her chilling impressions of a dreary, muffled, and depleted land are juxtaposed with a uniquely to-the-point history of how North Korea became an industrialized Communist nation supported by the Soviet Union and China and ruled by Kim Il Sung, then collapsed catastrophically into poverty, darkness, and starvation under the dictator's son, Kim Jong Il. Demick's bracing chronicle of the horrific consequences of decades of brutality provide the context for the wrenching life stories of North Korean defectors who confided in her. Strongly written and gracefully structured, Demick's potent blend of personal narratives and piercing journalism vividly and evocatively portrays courageous individuals and a tyrannized state within a saga of unfathomable suffering punctuated by faint glimmers of hope. (*Booklist*)

A Paradise Built in Hell, Rebecca Solnit (2009)

Solnit delivers an insightful glimpse into the compelling human interest stories behind five major disasters: the San Francisco earthquake of 1906, the Halifax explosion of 1917, Mexico City's 1985 earthquake, 9/11, and Hurricane Katrina. But more than just the stories, she turns her attention to the larger subject of the sociology of disasters and the incredible community spirit that can arise amid disaster. In contrast to media portrayals of negative human behavior in times of distress, Solnit believes that humans have an intrinsic need to help each other and work together in communities forged by disaster. These surreal situations demonstrate how deeply most of us desire connection, participation, altruism, and purposefulness. Thus the startling joy in disasters. Solnit wonders if some of these ephemeral moments could be recaptured in our normal day-to-day routines, thus enhancing our sense of community. (*Library Journal*)

Sticks and Stones, Emily Bazelon (2013)

Bullying has become a buzzword recently with high-profile examples of its tragic ramifications appearing frequently on the national media. Bazelon first became involved in reporting on bullying

for a series in *Slate* magazine, which ultimately led to this book-length analysis of the phenomenon. The book is framed by the author's examination of three different bullying situations. These cases lead to a deeper discussion of the factors that foment bullying and how bullying affects its victims. Bazelon also examines the motivation for bullying and how adults, parents, teachers, guidance counselors, and school administrators can address the problem, whether it's traditional face-to-face bullying or cyberbullying. She also deconstructs the language of bullying, which teens often refer to as drama, and looks at how a teen's social capital can affect his or her likeliness to be bullied. This perceptive and accessible work on a topic of increasing relevance is a must-read for anyone who works with teens and tweens. (*Booklist*)

Stuck in the Middle with You, Jennifer Finney Boylan (2013)

Boylan, a best-selling novelist for youth and adult readers and a nonfiction writer, picks up the thread of her *She's Not There: A Life in Two Genders* (2003) in this combination of memoir and interviews. Born male, Boylan became a woman after marrying and fathering two children. Here she recounts six years of life as a cross-dressing father and ten years as a mother and chronicles the demanding transition between those two roles. She writes of her yearning for normalcy and shares her mother's loving and affecting response to the announced change, "I would never desert my child. . . There will be a scandal, for a while. . . But I will adjust." As striking as Boylan's transgender experiences are, she also offers reverberating counterpoint in universally relevant observations about parenting and time's passing. By including candid and revealing conversations on gender and families with such writers as Richard Russo, Edward Albee, Susan Minot, and Anna Quindlen, Boylan illuminates diverse family relationships and the many ways families operate fluidly on a seemingly never-ending spectrum. This unique and giving book has tremendous resonance. (*Booklist*)

Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?, Jeannette Winterson (2012)

Winterson's volatile and eccentrically devout adoptive mother was apocalyptic by nature. In self-defense, as we learn in this galvanizing memoir and testimony to the healing properties of creativity, Winterson took shelter in the library, discovering in poetry and fiction language powerful enough to say how it is. After she acquired some books of her own, only to have her ogre of a mother burn them, Winterson summoned her resolve: "Fuck it, I thought, I can write my own." She was similarly stoic when her mother caught her in bed with another girl and arranged for an exorcism that turned sexually abusive. Winterson fled her bleak Lancashire home at 16, got herself to Oxford, and wrote her first novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), which became a beacon in gay culture. Drawing on her cartwheel imagination and piercing worldview, Winterson wrote a dozen more books to resounding acclaim. But her long-submerged anguish finally boiled up, leading to a breakdown, an unnerving search for her birth mother, and an all-out struggle to understand what it is to love and be loved. Clarion, courageous, and vividly expressive, Winterson conducts a dramatic and revelatory inquiry into the forging of the self and the liberating power of literature. (*Booklist*)

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