

DANA HALL SCHOOL 2014 FACULTY & STAFF SUMMER READING BIBLIOGRAPHY

FICTION

Boxers and Saints, Gene Luen Yang (2013)

Yang's two-volume graphic novel follows the intertwined lives of two young people on opposite sides of the turn-of-the-20th-century Boxer Rebellion. Little Bao, whose story is told in *Boxers*, grows up fascinated by the opera's colorful traditional tales and filled with reverence for the local deities. Appalled by the arrogant behavior of foreign soldiers, Christian missionaries and their Chinese supporters, he eventually becomes a leader of the Society of the Righteous and Harmonious Fist, fighting under the slogan "Support the Ch'ing! Destroy the Foreigner!" The protagonist of *Saints*—an unlucky, unwanted, unnamed fourth daughter—is known only as Four-Girl until she's christened Vibiana upon her conversion to Catholicism. Beaten by her family for her beliefs, she finds refuge and friendship with foreign missionaries, making herself a target for the Boxers. Scrupulously researched, the narratives make a violent conflict rarely studied in U.S. schools feel immediate, as Yang balances historical detail with humor and magical realism. Ch'in Shih-huang, the first emperor of China, and Joan of Arc serve as Bao's and Vibiana's respective spiritual guides; the rich hues of the protagonists' visions, provided by colorist Lark Pien, contrast effectively with the muted earth tones of their everyday lives. This tour de force fearlessly asks big questions about culture, faith, and identity and refuses to offer simple answers. (*Kirkus Reviews*)

China Dolls, Lisa See (2014)

The lives of three young Chinese-American women—Grace, Helen, and Ruby—intersect in valuable and often violent ways in pre-WWII San Francisco as they shed their drab former lives to become glamorous entertainers at the city's rising hot spot, the Forbidden City nightclub. Despite their divergent backgrounds, a mutual desire to shatter the cultural stereotypes that doom them to lives of familial subservience feeds their ambition to prosper in a world in which the definition of success changes minute by minute. Though they've taken a one-for-all vow of eternal loyalty, each harbors secrets that cause a pervasive atmosphere of distrust to simmer just below the surface. When Ruby is revealed to actually be of Japanese heritage and deported to an internment camp, their friendships and fortunes suffer a mortal blow, one that only deepens as the war rages on. In her impeccably researched and distinctive historical saga of desire and ambition, betrayal and revenge set amid the glitz and debauchery of burlesque entertainment on the chop suey circuit, See lavishly explores the thorny intricacies of female friendships.

Ghostman, Roger Hobbs (2013)

Roger Hobbs's debut novel is a superbly written dark crime thriller. It's narrated by the smart, stoic Jack Delton, aka Ghostman, a fixer as meticulous and resourceful as Jason Bourne, who translates ancient texts in his down time. (His code comes from the *Aeneid*: "If you can't reach heaven, raise hell.") With a story told in short, James Patterson-like chapters of addictive prose, it's as good a first noir as Nic Pizzolatto's *Galveston*. An armored car heist at an Atlantic City casino goes wrong. Marcus, the brutal criminal mastermind who planned it, asks Ghostman—who owes Marcus after a botched heist in Kuala Lumpur five years earlier—to retrieve the money taken by one of the fleeing robbers. This has to happen fast: the money is tagged with an ink bomb that will go off in 48 hours, destroying the cash. As the clock ticks down, Hobbs inserts suspenseful flashbacks to that old job,

where Ghostman was mentored by Angela, who taught him to cut off his "last ties with the normal world and how to live like a ghost." After checking out the site, Ghostman concludes that there was a third person, a shooter, firing from a parking lot at the robbers below. Was this all a set-up, a double cross? Is he now in the cross-hairs? Is Marcus after him? Getting in Ghostman's way is Wolf, a sadistic killer, and a relentless FBI agent. Smart, gripping, shrewdly observed, and oh-so-well written, this is a sharp, standout piece of fiction. (*Shelf Awareness*)

The Goldfinch, Donna Tartt (2013)

A terrorist bombing in the Metropolitan Museum of Art turns 14-year-old Theo Decker's life upside-down: his young mother is killed, and the traumatized Theo unthinkingly snatches her favorite painting, *The Goldfinch*, from the wreckage. The theft, coupled with the derailment of his life, plunges Theo into a morass of drug addiction, alcoholism and art fraud. By the time Theo is in his 20s and engaged to a beautiful Manhattan socialite, his past has begun to catch up to him—poised to come to a final explosive denouement in Amsterdam. Colorful characters abound: Theo's father, a degenerate gambler and failed actor; antique dealer Hobie, who takes Theo under his wing; high school friend Boris, whose access to drugs and predilection for violence contribute to the downward spiral of Theo's adult life. And there is the Barbour family, a wealthy Park Avenue clan whose elegance serves to remind Theo of all that he doesn't have. At the center of Theo's life is his love for Pippa, a girl he glimpses in the Met just before the explosion. This obsession is ultimately the heart of the novel, because it is Theo's secret—the stolen painting, and his accumulating misdeeds—that must keep him forever alienated from the girl he loves. (*Shelf Awareness*)

I Always Loved You, Robin Oliveria (2014)

Paris in the mid-to-late 19th century was the place to be if you were an artist, especially an artist trying to shake up the stodgy traditional art institutions. It was the beginning of impressionism, a movement whose birth was quite painful for all involved. Oliveira's novel purports to be about the decade-long, convoluted, and complicated relationship between Mary Cassatt and Edgar Degas, yet it encompasses so much more—the relationships among other luminaries of the period, the difficulty of being a single woman and an artist in a harsh and often unforgiving male-dominated world, and the complexities of dealing with family. Oliveira has woven a rich tapestry of the artist's life in Belle Epoque Paris, in a close, intimate rendering rather than a grand, sweeping landscape. (*Library Journal*)

Lies You Wanted to Hear, James Thompson (2013)

It's not often an author in his mid-60s publishes a debut novel that proves worth the wait. But that's what James Whitfield Thomson has done with *Lies You Wanted to Hear*, a haunting piece of fiction that will bring a lump to your throat. Thomson's anguishing tale is told so thoughtfully that it leaves readers in the unusual place of trying to determine right from wrong. The romance begins innocently enough. Good guy cop Matt meets the intriguing and sexy Lucy and falls hard. Despite her being hung up on her cad of an ex-boyfriend, Griffin, the two marry and children follow. Although the newlyweds both adore their children (and Matt still adores Lucy), their domestic bliss is shattered when Griffin returns to steal a restless Lucy back into his arms. So far, this is hardly uncharted territory, but then Thomson loops a twist into the mix no one will see coming, leaving readers in disbelief. Matt, the loyal husband and loving father, begins to show a sinister side, while self-centered Lucy goes from a faithless wife to someone with whom every reader can identify. The author performs this sleight-of-hand so deftly, he might as well be a magician. Wrenching to read, but

nearly impossible to put down, *Lies You Wanted to Hear* is hopefully the first of many by an untapped author as he enters the prime of his life. (*Shelf Awareness*) [A selection of the 2014-15 Dana Hall Parent-Faculty Book Club, which will feature an appearance by the author, who lives in Natick!]

The Luminaries, Eleanor Catton (2013)

Step into the world of 1886 and New Zealand's gold fields in this Man Booker Prize-winning novel. The plot is complex and nonlinear, often folding back on itself, or, in the author's own words, "moving with the pattern of the heavens." No brief summary can do justice to this tale of more than 20 intertwined characters that begins with a young stranger arriving in town from Scotland and accidentally joining a clandestine meeting of 12 men gathered to analyze unsolved crimes in their frontier community. Within days, a wealthy man mysteriously vanishes, a prostitute attempts suicide, and a fortune in gold is uncovered in the rundown cabin of a reclusive alcoholic. Crime, deception, intrigue, and even love have a part, but this is a Victorian novel written in the 21st century, and the author takes her time weaving her tale, so much of the mystery is not revealed until the last 150 pages. (*Library Journal*)

Me Before You, Jojo Moyes (2012)

In Moyes's disarmingly moving love story, Louisa Clark leads a routine existence: at 26, she's dully content with her job at the cafe in her small English town and with Patrick, her boyfriend of six years. But when the cafe closes, a job caring for a recently paralyzed man offers Lou better pay and, despite her lack of experience, she's hired. Lou's charge, Will Traynor, suffered a spinal cord injury when hit by a motorcycle and his raw frustration with quadriplegia makes the job almost unbearable for Lou. Will is quick-witted and sardonic, a powerhouse of a man in his former life (motorcycles; sky diving; important career in global business). While the two engage in occasional banter, Lou at first stays on only for the sake of her family, who desperately need the money. But when she discovers that Will intends to end his own life, Lou makes it her mission to persuade him that life is still worth living. In the process of planning "adventures" like trips to the horse track, some of which illuminate Lou's own minor failings, Lou begins to understand the extent of Will's isolation; meanwhile, Will introduces Lou to ideas outside of her small existence. The end result is a lovely novel, both nontraditional and enthralling. (*Publishers Weekly*)

The Orphan Master's Son, Adam Johnson (2012)

Pak Jun Do lives with his father at a North Korean work camp for orphans. In a nation in which every citizen serves the state, orphans routinely get the most dangerous jobs. So it is for Jun Do, who becomes a tunnel soldier, trained to fight in complete darkness in the tunnels beneath the DMZ. But he is reassigned as a kidnapper, snatching Japanese citizens with special skills, such as a particular opera singer or sushi chef. Failure as a kidnapper could lead directly to the prison mines. But in Johnson's fantastical, careening tale, Jun Do manages to impersonate Commander Ga, the country's greatest military hero, rival of Dear Leader Kim Jong Il and husband of Sun Moon, North Korea's only movie star. Informed by extensive research and travel to perhaps the most secretive nation on earth, Johnson has created a remarkable novel that encourages the willing suspension of disbelief. As Jun Do, speaking as Ga, puts it, people have been trained to accept any reality presented to them. Johnson winningly employs different voices, with the propagandizing national radio station serving as a mad Greek chorus. Descriptions of everyday privations and barbarities are matter of fact,

and Jun Do's love for Sun Moon reads like a fairy tale. Part adventure, part coming-of-age tale, and part romance, *The Orphan Master's Son* is a triumph on every level. (*Booklist*)

Under the Wide and Starry Sky, Nancy Horan (2013)

Horan's spectacular second novel (following book-club favorite *Loving Frank*, 2007) has been worth the wait. Brimming with the same artistic verve that drives her complicated protagonists, it follows the loving, tumultuous partnership of Scottish author Robert Louis Stevenson and his Indiana-born wife, Fanny Osbourne. Fanny, an aspiring artist still tied to her unfaithful first husband when they meet in 1875, is fiery, courageous, and the mother of two living children. Louis, a younger man whose frailty belies a joyous, energetic spirit, dreams of writing full-time. While he perfects his craft, she becomes his protector and editor-collaborator, accompanying him across Europe and America and finally to Samoa in hopes of healing his weak lungs. This is more than just another novel designed to honor the unsung accomplishments of a famous man's spouse, though. Equally adventurous and colorful, Louis and Fanny could each command the story singlehandedly. Together, they are riveting and insightfully envisioned, including through moving depiction of how their relationship transforms over time. Horan also explores relevant social concerns, such as cultural imperialism and xenophobia, and how Stevenson's life influenced his literary themes. An exhilarating epic about a free-spirited couple who traveled the world yet found home only in one another. (*Booklist*)

NONFICTION

Brain on Fire, Susannah Cahalan (2012)

In this fascinating memoir by a young New York Post reporter previously known for going undercover as a stripper and writing a butt-implant story headlined *Rear and Present Danger*, Cahalan describes how she crossed the line between sanity and insanity after an unknown pathogen invaded her body and caused an autoimmune reaction that jump-started brain inflammation, paranoia, and seizures. Her divorced parents put aside their differences and rose to the occasion, sitting by her during the month she was confined to the hospital, about which she remembers nothing. Her boyfriend stayed with her, and one wonderful doctor, noticing that she walked and talked like a late-stage Alzheimer's patient, was determined to get to the bottom of her medical mystery. Luckily, she was insured, because her treatment cost \$1 million. Cahalan expertly weaves together her own story and relevant scientific and medical information about autoimmune diseases, which are about two-thirds environmental and one-third genetic in origin. So, she writes, an external trigger, such as a sneeze or a toxic apartment, probably combined with a genetic predisposition toward developing aggressive antibodies to create her problem. A compelling health story. (*Booklist*)

Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?, Roz Chast (2014)

Chast draws the *Moving Sidewalk of Life* with a sign: "Caution—drop-off ahead." The *New Yorker* cartoonist had vaguely thought that "the end" came in three stages: feeling unwell, growing weaker over a month or so in bed, and dying one night. But when her parents passed 90, she learned that "the middle [stage] was a lot more painful, humiliating, long-lasting, complicated, and hideously expensive" than she imagined. Chast's scratchy art turns out perfectly suited to capturing the surreal realities of the death process. In quirky color cartoons, handwritten text, photos, and her mother's poems, she documents the unpleasant yet sometimes hilarious cycle of human doom. She's especially dead-on with the unpredictable mental states of both the dying and their caregivers: placidity, denial,

terror, lunacy, resignation, vindictiveness, and rage. Chast so skillfully exposes herself and her family on the page as to give readers both insight and entertainment on a topic nearly everyone avoids. As with her *New Yorker* cartoons, Chast's memoir serves up existential dilemmas along with chuckles and can help serve as a tutorial for the inevitable. (*Library Journal*)

The Confidence Code, Katty Kay and Claire Shipman (2014)

In this follow-up to their 2009 best-seller, *Womenomics*, which argued for women's right to demand flexibility at the workplace, *BBC World News America* Washington correspondent Kay and *Good Morning America* contributor Shipman address how a lack of self-confidence hinders women's career advancement. In conversations among successful professional women, the authors have noticed a disturbing pattern: "Compared with men, we don't consider ourselves ready for promotions." Women lack the kind of self-assertiveness and self-confidence that propel their male counterparts forward, and the authors examine the reasons behind this phenomenon. Their investigation took them from the basketball court to the bastions of the International Monetary Fund and a conversation with Christine Lagarde, one of the most powerful women in the world. Through these interviews, Kay and Shipman confirmed their beliefs about the significant contrast between the typical male approach of pushing forward aggressively (e.g., shouting out questions or making unsubstantiated assertions in order to dominate meetings) and that of women, who instinctively hold back for fear of seeming pushy and aggressive. The authors attribute this to a lack of resilience and a drive for perfection, along with a tendency to dwell on past mistakes. After discussions with neuropsychologists and geneticists, they dismissed the importance of biological components (e.g., hormones or genes). Much more significant was the revelation by a recent graduate of the Naval Academy of the slang acronym that male cadets often apply to coeds: DUBs, or "dumb ugly bitches." An insightful look at how internalizing cultural stereotypes can hold women back from competing with men. (*Kirkus Reviews*)

Drama High, Michael Y. Sokolove (2013)

Journalist Sokolove pays tribute to drama teacher Lou Volpe, who in the last 40 years has revolutionized the theater program at Harry S. Truman High School in Levittown, Pennsylvania, a blue-collar town that has been on a slow economic downswing since the 1960s. Truman has become known for its drama program, thanks to Volpe, whose productions draw not only critical acclaim but also the attention of famous theater producers. A dedicated teacher who inspires loyalty in students past and present, Volpe often stages productions that are controversial but that he firmly believes his kids will relate to. During the season Sokolove spends at Truman, Volpe and his kids put on the play *Good Boys and True* and the musical *Spring Awakening*, both of which address teen sexuality, angst, and reckless behavior. Volpe pushes his student actors hard, but for most of them, being in one of his productions is transformative. Many alums go on to pursue careers in theater or the arts. A powerful look at the way a dynamic and dedicated teacher can change lives. (*Booklist*)

Five Days at Memorial, Sheri Fink (2013)

As the floodwaters rose after Hurricane Katrina, patients, staff, and families who sheltered in New Orleans' Memorial Hospital faced a crisis far worse than the storm itself. Without power, an evacuation plan, or strong leadership, caregiving became chaotic, and exhausted doctors and nurses found it difficult to make even the simplest decisions. And, when it came to making the hardest decisions, some of them seem to have failed. A number of the patients deemed least likely to survive

were injected with lethal combinations of drugs, even as the evacuation finally began in earnest. Fink, a Pulitzer Prize winner for her reporting on Memorial in the *New York Times Magazine*, offers a stunning re-creation of the storm, its aftermath, and the investigation that followed (one doctor and two nurses were charged with second-degree murder but acquitted by a grand jury). She evenhandedly compels readers to consider larger questions, not just of ethics but race, resources, history, and what constitutes the greater good, while humanizing the countless smaller tragedies that make up the whole. And, crucially, she provides context, relating how other hospitals fared in similar situations. Both a breathtaking read and an essential book for understanding how people behave in times of crisis. (*Booklist*)

Flash Boys, Michael Lewis (2014)

In his latest captivating expedition into the marketplace jungle, Lewis (author of *Moneyball*) explores how the rise of computerized stock exchanges and their attendant scams started a battle for the soul of Wall Street. He probes the subterfuges of high frequency traders who, assisted by banks and brokerages happy to sell out customers, use blindingly fast data links to gain inside information on investors' trades and then exploit them on today's entirely digital stock markets. At the center of his novelistic narrative is a New York mosaic: Brad Katsuyama, a Canadian-born trader with a conscience; Ronan, a hot-headed Irish telecom expert; and a Dostoevskian cast of Slavic programmers veering between existential angst and saintly resignation. This cast bands together to expose the market manipulations and then start their own honest stock exchange. Lewis does his usual superb job of explicating the inexplicable in his lucid, absorbing account of the crossroads of high-tech data transfer and byzantine market strategies, where milliseconds of signaling speed yield billions in profits. He also presents a rich sociology of Wall Street's assholes-vs.-geeks culture clash between greedy, blustering financial honchos and the flickers of rationalism and humanity in the tech people they need to run their markets. The result is an engrossing true-life morality play that unmask the devil in the details of high finance. (*Publishers Weekly*)

How About Never—Is Never Good for You?, Bob Mankoff (2014)

Mankoff was close to earning a PhD in psychology when he finally admitted that cartooning was his true calling. He developed his distinctive dot style as a vehicle for his heady sense of humor, had his first cartoon published in the *New Yorker* in 1977, and has been serving as the magazine's cartoon editor since 1997. In a witty mix of memoir and *New Yorker* cartoon history exuberantly illustrated with *New Yorker* cartoons past and present, Mankoff discusses his mother's complicated influence ("Humor thrives on conflict"), how his psychology background helps him understand what makes cartoons funny or thought-provoking, and why he created the Cartoon Bank, which transformed the profession. He also unveils the magazine's cartoon selection process under editors William Shawn, Tina Brown, and David Remnick and describes his own rigorous assessment of 1,000 cartoons a week. Other cartoonists describe their working methods, and Mankoff even offers inside information on the *New Yorker's* devilishly difficult Cartoon Caption Contest, which the late great movie critic Roger Ebert won in 2011 after 107 tries. A cartoon lover's feast. (*Booklist*)

It's Complicated, danah boyd (2014)

This groundbreaking survey of the online social habits and realities of American teens, based on extensive fieldwork, also serves as an important corrective to numerous persistent, widely held notions about young people, public life, and the Internet. Boyd offers provocative, cogent, and

compassionate assessments of teen participation in what she calls "networked publics." She illuminates the conflict between teens' desire to connect to peers and adult-created impediments to this socialization and roundly critiques both the idealism and the anxiety informing adult reactions to teen online behaviors. Among other topics in her packed but efficient and accessible book, Boyd discusses bullying, media literacy, and social inequality; debunks the pervasiveness of online predation; addresses problematic assumptions behind the term "digital native"; defends Wikipedia as a great educational tool that makes transparent the evolution of knowledge; and astutely points out that the technology may be new, but teens, as always, simply want to socialize, be known, spend time with friends, and participate in public life. Exciting, challenging, and liberating, this title is essential reading for adults with any interest in or control over teens. (*Library Journal*)

The Price of Silence, William D. Cohan (2014)

In 2006, when members of the Duke lacrosse team were accused of raping a stripper hired to entertain at a party, the case shone a harsh light on growing concerns about the blurred line between athletics and academics. The relationship between sports and the academic side of college life has long been troubled, with student athletes often exempted from attending classes and their bad behavior routinely overlooked. The Duke case was complicated by the fact that the alleged victim was a black woman and her alleged attackers were privileged young white men. The case had all the elements of controversy: race, sex, tensions between town and gown, and the larger issue of how universities balance the corrupting influences of the prominence and profitability of their sports programs. Cohan explores the social dynamics that clouded every aspect of the case. Drawing on interviews and official records, he details the events of the night and the growing turmoil on campus as news of the alleged crime spread, setting in motion the university's machinery to protect its reputation. Cohan explores the usual disconnects that occur in high-profile crime cases between what is reported by the press, chronicled in official records, and perceived as public opinion and what really happened. A gripping account of a sensational case. (*Booklist*)

Wild, Cheryl Strayed (2012)

Wild is a poignant, no-holds barred, kick-ass memoir that will grab you by the throat and shake you to your core. Cheryl Strayed is 22 when her mother dies, and for the next four years she's a mess: her marriage breaks up, she sleeps around, has an abortion and becomes addicted to heroin. Near rock bottom, she sees a book at a checkout counter about the Pacific Crest Trail, running from the Mexican border to Washington State. She buys the book, deciding that to save herself she must hike the trail, solo. In a motel room in Mojave, Calif., about to embark, she realizes she's never really hiked, never really carried a heavy pack before. Nevertheless, she takes a shaky step into the hot light. The very first day, she's stabbed by a Joshua tree, then loses her bandages in a gust of wind while trying to open her first aid kit with bloodied hands. That evening, she reads an Adrienne Rich poem entitled "Power" over and over. And so it goes, for 1,100 miles and three arduous months. This deeply felt, often humorous, and beautifully written memoir turns hiking into an act of redemption and salvation. (*Shelf Awareness*)

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