

DANA HALL SCHOOL 2007 FACULTY & STAFF SUMMER READING BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ancient History

Aeneid, Vergil, trans. Robert Fagles

Princeton scholar Fagles follows up his celebrated *Iliad* and *Odyssey* with a new, fast-moving, readable rendition of the national epic of ancient Rome. Virgil's long-renowned narrative follows the Trojan warrior Aeneas as he carries his family from his besieged, fallen home, stops in Carthage for a doomed love affair, visits the underworld and founds in Italy, through difficult combat, the settlements that will become, first the Roman republic, and then the empire Virgil knew. Fagles chooses to forgo meter entirely, which lets him stay literal when he wishes, and grow eloquent when he wants: "Aeneas flies ahead, spurring his dark ranks on and storming/ over the open fields like a cloudburst wiping out the sun." Scholars still debate whether Virgil supported or critiqued the empire's expansion; Aeneas' story might prompt new reflection now, when Americans are already thinking about international conflict and the unexpected costs of war. (Publisher's Weekly)

Augustus: The Life of Rome's First Emperor, Anthony Everitt

British author Everitt begins his biography of Augustus with a novelistic reconstruction of the Roman emperor's last days, offering a new spin on his murder at the hands of his wife, Livia. Everitt presents the death as an assisted suicide intended to speed and secure the transition of imperial power to his stepson Tiberius. Later, Everitt presents a careful historical argument for this theory—and, save for a few other shadowy incidents such as the banishment of the poet Ovid, he keeps guesswork to a minimum, building his narrative carefully on solid evidence. Everitt makes Augustus's rapid rise through Roman society comprehensible to contemporary readers, deftly shifting through the major phases of his life, from childhood through his adoption by his great-uncle Julius Caesar to the power struggle with Mark Antony that ended with Augustus's recognition as both *imperator* and *princeps*, or "first citizen." Everitt also neatly presents his subject's complex personality, revealing how Augustus secured a political infrastructure that would last for centuries while reportedly keeping up a highly active sex life, all the while fighting off longstanding rumors of cowardice in battle. This familiar story is fresh again in this lively retelling. (Publisher's Weekly)

Histories, Herodotus, trans. Robin Waterfield

Herodotus is not only known as the 'father of history', as Cicero called him, but also the father of ethnography; as well as charting the historical background to the Persian Wars, his curiosity also prompts frequent digression on the cultures of the peoples he introduces. While much of the information he gives has proved to be astonishingly accurate, he also entertains us with delightful tales of one-eyed men and gold-digging ants. This readable new translation is supplemented with expansive notes that provide readers the background that they need to appreciate the book in depth. (Amazon.com)

Boston History

The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation, M.T. Anderson

In this fascinating and eye-opening Revolution-era novel, Octavian, a black youth raised in a Boston household of radical philosophers, is given an excellent classical education. He and his mother, an African princess, are kept isolated on the estate, and only as he grows older does he realize that while he is well dressed and well fed, he is indeed a captive being used by his guardians as part of an experiment to determine the intellectual acuity of Africans. The novel is written in 18th-century language from Octavian's point of view and in letters written by a soldier who befriends him. Despite the challenging style, this powerful novel will resonate with contemporary readers. The issues of slavery and human rights, racism, free will, the causes of war, and one person's struggle to define himself are just as relevant today. Anderson's use of factual information to convey the time and place is powerfully done. (Sharon Rawlins, *School Library Journal*)

The Path: A One-Mile Walk Through the Universe, Chet Raymo

Raymo enchants us with the earth, in particular, a one-mile-long section of his hometown, North Easton, Massachusetts. He walks the route to his teaching job at Stonehill College, beginning in town and passing woods, a creek, and fields, scenery partly landscaped by Frederick Law Olmsted but now gone somewhat to seed. Olmsted and his employers, the Ames, who were heirs to a shovel-manufacturing fortune, had the foresight to buy local parcels a century ago, endowing the town with its undeveloped space. This provides the inspiration for Raymo's soliloquies on nature, in which he links the physical remnants of Olmsted's and the Ames' presence with the natural world. Raymo ruminates on water as erosive force and life source for the birds, plants, and insects seen on his walk, which in turn provokes tangents on entropy, the chemistry of DNA, and the area's geology. How wondering a commute can be--if one looks as thoughtfully as Raymo does in this beauty for nature readers. (Gilbert Taylor, *Booklist*)

The Peabody Sisters: Three Women Who Ignited American Romanticism, Megan Marshall

Although two of the three Peabody sisters were married to prominent men--Mary, the middle sister, to educator Horace Mann and artistic Sophia, the youngest, to Nathaniel Hawthorne--it is their lives as single women that interest Marshall. In carving out roles for themselves, they had the example of their mother, whose passion for learning survived a difficult, impoverished childhood and disappointing marriage. All three sisters were talented, but it was the force of oldest sister Elizabeth's intellect and drive that made them part of the New England circle that also included Bronson Alcott, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Margaret Fuller. A gifted teacher, Elizabeth collaborated with Alcott in his progressive Temple School. From her Boston bookstore, the center of the transcendentalist movement, she published the *Dial* as well as several of Hawthorne's early works. Later, with Mary and Horace Mann, she founded the American kindergarten movement. This book is the result of 20 years of research and it is an engrossing account, replete with both penetrating insights and interesting details. It brings these remarkable women to life and reminds us what struggles our foremothers faced when they tried to make full use of their powers. (Mary Ellen Quinn, *Booklist*)

Brain History

The Female Brain, Louann Brizendine

Every brain begins as a female brain. It only becomes male eight weeks after conception, when excess testosterone shrinks the communications center, reduces the hearing cortex, and makes the part of the brain that processes sex twice as large. Brizendine is a pioneering neuropsychiatrist who brings together the latest findings to show how the unique structure of the female brain determines how women think, what they value, how they communicate, and whom they'll love. Brizendine reveals the neurological explanations behind why a woman uses about 20,000 words per day while a man uses about 7,000; a woman remembers fights that a man insists never happened; a teen girl is so obsessed with her looks and talking on the phone; thoughts about sex enter a woman's brain once every couple of days but enter a man's brain about once every minute; a woman knows what people are feeling, while a man can't spot an emotion unless somebody cries or threatens bodily harm; and a woman over 50 is more likely to initiate divorce than a man. Women will come away from this book knowing that they have a lean, mean communicating machine. Men will develop a serious case of brain envy. (Amazon.com)

The Language Instinct, Stephen Pinker

A three-year-old toddler is "a grammatical genius"--master of most constructions, obeying adult rules of language. To Pinker, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology psycholinguist, the explanation for this miracle is that language is an instinct, an evolutionary adaptation that is partly "hard-wired" into the brain and partly learned. In this exciting synthesis--an entertaining, totally accessible study that will regale language lovers and challenge professionals in many disciplines--Pinker builds a bridge between "innatists" like MIT linguist Noam Chomsky, who hold that infants are biologically programmed for language, and "social interactionists" who contend that they acquire it largely from the environment. If Pinker is right, the origins of language go much further back than 30,000 years ago (the date most commonly given in textbooks. Peppered with mind-stretching language exercises, the narrative first unravels how babies learn to talk and how people make sense of speech. Pinker's book is a beautiful hymn to the infinite creative potential of language. (*Publisher's Weekly*)

The Primal Teen: What the New Discoveries about the Teenage Brain Tell Us about Our Kids, Barbara Strauch

New York Times medical science and health editor Strauch, the mother of two teenagers, sees the irony in a book about the teenage brain. Indeed, she grants that many may contend that the phrase *teenage brain* is a kind of oxymoron. But in recent years, she has seen reports of studies on teenage brain development whose claims seem preposterous. Although scientists had long believed that the brain was fully developed before puberty, they were now asserting that this was incorrect. The human brain, they said, is still very much in a critical growth period throughout adolescence. Indeed, key areas of the brain, such as those that help the teenager to do the right thing and decipher complex nuances of emotion, are among the last to reach a stable, grown-up state. Throw ubiquitous raging hormones into the mix, and it is little wonder that adolescence is so thorny. Strauch's well-researched book explains studies that were impossible without such advanced technology as the MRI, in clear, compassionate layperson's language. May become a parents' must-read. (Donna Chavez, *Booklist*)

Food History

From Hardtack to Home Fries: An Uncommon History of American Cooks and Meals, Barbara Haber

The tasty graham cracker, a beloved bedtime snack of many children, began its life as the linchpin of its originator Sylvester Graham's fanatical early-19th-century health campaign to curtail sexual excess, especially masturbation and more than once-monthly marital coitus. Facts such as these, interwoven with informed, witty discussions of social, political and economic history, make Haber's tour through the history of American food so entertaining. Since food has so often been consigned to the domestic realm of woman, Haber's study is in essence a history of American women: the "Harvey Girls," who worked in the chain of reasonably priced railroad depot restaurants that revolutionized public eating in the 1880s and '90s; how Eleanor Roosevelt and her general housekeeper Henrietta Nesbitt had to balance White House menus, which had to seem both fancy and economical during WWII; the role of a small tea shop, started by faculty wives in Cambridge, Mass., as a boon to women refugees in the 1940s. While Haber doesn't explore issues in depth, she does cover a wealth of material with a breezy style and a fine eye for historical detail. (*Publisher's Weekly*)

Garlic and Sapphires: The Secret Life of a Critic in Disguise, Ruth Reichl

This third volume of Reichl's autobiography covers her years as the *New York Times'* powerful restaurant critic, and readers of her previous books will relish the tales of her life at the summit of her power. Having been lured east from a successful stint in Los Angeles, Reichl faces a hideously competitive market, where even her predecessor seems out to get her. She adopts a number of disguises to keep restaurant owners from recognizing her. Repeated visits to Le Cirque, Sirio Maccioni's lionized temple of dining, yield wildly differing experiences, so she pens a so-so review only to find out it's the publisher's favorite restaurant. Reichl's insistence on reviewing non-mainstream restaurants upsets those who think Manhattan ends at Central Park North. Some of the book's most affecting episodes involve her young son's love of potatoes in all forms. And a touching encounter with a homeless man in the subway after a particularly chic and elegant lunch outlines the ironies of her profession. Reichl reproduces a number of her most significant reviews, and she also offers recipes for favorite dishes. (Mark Knoblauch, *Booklist*)

The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals, Michael Pollan

Humans were clearly designed to eat all manner of meats, vegetables, fruits, and grains. But, as Pollan points out, America's farmers have succeeded so wildly that today's fundamental agricultural issue has become how to deal sensibly with overproduction. The result of this surfeit of grain is behemoth corn processors, who have commoditized the Aztecs' sacred grain and developed ways to separate corn into products wholly removed from its original kernels. This excess food and Americans' wealth and rapid-paced lifestyles now yield supersized portions of less-than-nutritious eatables. Pollan contrasts the technologically driven life on an Iowa corn farm's feedlots with the thriving organic farm movement supplying retailers such as Whole Foods. Pollan also addresses issues of vegetarianism and flesh eating, hunting for game, and foraging for mushrooms. Throughout, he takes care to consider all sides of issues, and he avoids jingoistic answers. Although much of this subject has been treated elsewhere, Pollan's easy writing style and unique approach freshen this contemporary debate. (Mark Knoblauch, *Booklist*)

Spiritual History

Building Moral Communities; A Guide for Educators, Michael Schulman

Published by the Council for Spiritual and Ethical Education and written with independent school educators working with students in grades K-12 in mind, this book provides background on how morals develop, addresses the importance of community service and academic advising, and outlines numerous games and activities that facilitate moral growth. Topics covered include curriculum, rules and discipline, student participation, cooperative learning, athletics, teacher and staff training, parent involvement, and social problems.

Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman's Search for Everything Across Italy, India and Indonesia, Elizabeth Gilbert

Gilbert, a well-traveled I'll-try-anything-once journalist, chronicles her intrepid quest for spiritual healing. Driven to despair by a punishing divorce and an anguished love affair, Gilbert flees New York for sojourns in the three *Is*. She goes to Italy to learn the language and revel in the cuisine, India to meditate in an ashram, and Indonesia to reconnect with a healer in Bali. This itinerary may sound self-indulgent or fey, but there is never a whiny or pious or dull moment because Gilbert is irreverent, hilarious, zestful, courageous, intelligent, and in masterful command of her sparkling prose. A captivating storyteller with a gift for enlivening metaphors, Gilbert is Anne Lamott's hip, yoga-practicing, footloose younger sister, and readers will laugh and cry as she recounts her nervy and outlandish experiences and profiles the extraordinary people she meets. As Gilbert switches from gelato to kundalini Shakti to herbal cures Balinese-style, she ponders the many paths to divinity, the true nature of happiness, and the boon of good-hearted, sexy love. Gilbert's sensuous and audacious spiritual odyssey is as deeply pleasurable as it is enlightening. (Donna Seaman, *Booklist*)

Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know--And Doesn't, Stephen Prothero

Prothero, chair of the religion department at Boston University, begins this valuable primer by noting that religious illiteracy is rampant in the United States, where most Americans, even Christians, cannot name even one of the four Gospels. Such ignorance is perilous because religion "is the most volatile constituent of culture" and, unfortunately, often "one of the greatest forces for evil" in the world, he writes. Prothero does more than diagnose the problem; he traces its surprising historic and prescribes concrete solutions that address religious education while preserving First Amendment boundaries about religion in the public square. Prothero also offers a dictionary of religious literacy and a quiz for readers to test their knowledge. This book is a must-read not only for educators, clergy and government officials, but for all adults in a culture where, as Prothero puts it, "faith without understanding is the standard" and "religious ignorance is bliss." (*Publisher's Weekly*)

Compiled by Liz Gray

Library Director

Dana Hall School

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