

## DANA HALL SCHOOL 2008 FACULTY & STAFF SUMMER READING BIBLIOGRAPHY

### CHANGE & INSPIRATION

*The Good, Good Pig: The Extraordinary Life of Christopher Hogwood*, Sy Montgomery

No less an authority than the great biologist E. O. Wilson has affirmed the significance of our intrinsic affinity for other living organisms, our biophilia, and it's obvious from naturalist Montgomery's unforgettable books about tigers, pink dolphins, and the golden moon bear that she is an animal lover of the first order. Now she chronicles the life of the animal her life revolved around for 14 years, a pig named Christopher Hogwood: 750 pounds of bliss, affection, and good cheer. Even as a runt he had a special aura, and once Montgomery and her husband, the writer Howard Mansfield, nursed him into robust health on their New Hampshire homestead, he proved to be an exceptionally intelligent, sociable, and loving companion, if rather demanding. It took a village to keep Christopher fed and entertained, and Montgomery's descriptions of Christopher's amazing adventures and celebrity status are hilarious, enchanting, and deeply affecting. Joyful and serene, smart and friendly, Christopher soothed many a troubled heart, and Montgomery writes with extraordinary lucidity, candor, and grace about what this good, good pig taught her and others about life, love, happiness, and all that we share with our fellow species on this precious planet. (Donna Seaman, *Booklist*)

*Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain*, Oliver Sacks

*Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain* examines the extreme effects of music on the human brain and how lives can be utterly transformed by the simplest of harmonies. Sacks' subtitle aptly frames the book as a series of medical case studies—some in-depth, some abruptly short. The tales themselves range from the relatively mundane (a song that gets stuck on a continuing loop in one's mind) through the uncommon (Tourette's or Parkinson's patients whose symptoms are calmed by particular kinds of music) to the outright startling (a man struck by lightning subsequently developed a newfound passion and talent for the concert piano). In this latest collection, Sacks introduces new and fascinating characters, while also touching on the role of music in some of his classic cases (the man who mistook his wife for a hat makes a brief appearance). This book leaves one a little more attuned to the remarkable complexity of human beings, and a bit more conscious of the role of music in our lives. (*Publishers Weekly*)

*Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace, One School at a Time*, Greg Mortenson & David Oliver Relin

On a 1993 expedition to climb K2 in honor of his sister Christa, who had died of epilepsy at 23, Mortenson stumbled upon a remote mountain village in Pakistan. Out of gratitude for the villagers' assistance when he was lost and near death, he vowed to build a school for the children who were scratching lessons in the dirt. Raised by his missionary parents in Tanzania, Mortenson was used to dealing with exotic cultures and developing nations. Still, he faced daunting challenges of raising funds, death threats from enraged mullahs, separation from his family, and a kidnapping to eventually build 55 schools in Taliban territory. Award-winning journalist Relin recounts the slow and arduous task Mortenson set for himself, a one-man mission aimed particularly at bringing education to young girls in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Readers interested in a fresh perspective on the

cultures and development efforts of Central Asia will love this incredible story of a humanitarian endeavor. (Vanessa Bush, *Booklist*)

*A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future*, Daniel H. Pink

"Abundance, Asia, and automation." Try saying that phrase five times quickly, because if you don't take these words into serious consideration, there is a good chance that sooner or later your career will suffer because of one of those forces. Pink, best-selling author of *Free Agent Nation* (2001) and also former chief speechwriter for former vice-president Al Gore, has crafted a profound read packed with an abundance of references to books, seminars, Web sites, and such to guide your adjustment to expanding your right brain if you plan to survive and prosper in the Western world. According to Pink, the keys to success are in developing and cultivating six senses: design, story, symphony, empathy, play, and meaning. Pink compares this upcoming "Conceptual Age" to past periods of intense change, such as the Industrial Revolution and the Renaissance, as a way of emphasizing its importance. (Ed Dwyer, *Booklist*)

## EXILE

*Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*, Alexandra Fuller

Pining for Africa, Fuller's parents departed England in the early '70s while she was still a toddler. Living a crude, rural life, the author and her older sister contended with "itchy bums and worms and bites up their arms from fleas" and losing three siblings. Mum and Dad were freewheeling, free-drinking, and often careless. Yet they were made of tough stuff and there is little doubt of the affection among family members. On top of attempting to make a living, they faced natives who were trying to free themselves of British rule, and who were understandably not thrilled to see more white bwanas settling in. Fuller portrays bigotry (her own included), segregation, and deprivation. But judging by her vivid and effortless imagery, it is clear that the rich, pungent flora and fauna of Africa have settled deeply in her bones. Snapshots scattered throughout the book enhance the feeling of intimacy and adventure. This was no ordinary childhood, and it makes a riveting story thanks to an extraordinary telling. (Sheila Shoup, *School Library Journal*).

*Polite Lies: On Being a Woman Caught Between Cultures*, Kyoko Mori

Creative writing professor Mori (author of *Dream of Water*) offers a poignant portrait of her dichotomous life: a childhood in Japan and an adulthood in the American Midwest. These 12 personal essays show the insight evident in Mori's previous works. "Polite lies" refers to the imbalance present in the two cultures and the resulting balance Mori establishes for herself and her readers with wit and warmth. Topics include family, secrets, the body, and tears. The distinction between the public and the private colors the double world that Mori speaks of so eloquently. Sacrificial deaths, tragic suicides—all these may be exalted in Japanese art and literature, yet the personal tragedy of Mori's mother's suicide was "shameful instead of glorious." This strong collection binds one woman's old country with her new one, repeating her impassioned desire not to be swept up in a lifetime of polite acquiescence as were the women of her youth. (Kay Meredith Dusheck, *Library Journal*)

### *An Unaccustomed Earth*, Jhumpa Lahiri

The gulf that separates expatriate Bengali parents from their American-raised children—and that separates the children from India—remains Lahiri's subject for this follow-up to *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Namesake*. In this set of eight stories, the results are again stunning. An inchoate grief for mothers lost at different stages of life enters many tales and, as the book progresses, takes on enormous resonance. Lahiri's stories of exile, identity, disappointment and maturation evince a spare and subtle mastery that has few contemporary equals. (*Publishers Weekly*)

### *What is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng: A Novel*, Dave Eggers

In Atlanta, too-trusting Valentino Achak Deng opens his door to strangers and is beaten and robbed at gunpoint. Lying on the floor, tied up with telephone cord, he begins silently to tell his life story to one of his captors. Through the rest of his miserable ordeal, he continues these internal monologues. Deng is a Sudanese "Lost Boy," and his story is one of unimaginable suffering. Forced to flee his village by the  *Murahaleen* (Muslim militias armed by the government in Khartoum), he survives marathon walks, starvation, disease, soldiers, bandits, land mines, lions, and refugee camps before winning the right to immigrate to the U.S.—a move he sees as nothing short of salvation. Deng is a real person, and this story, told in his voice, is mostly true. Readers may weigh Eggers' right to tell the story or wonder what parts have been changed, but here a novel is the best solution to the problems of memoir. Reworking this powerful tale with both deep feeling and subtlety, Eggers finds humanity and even humor, creating something much greater than a litany of woes or a script for political outrage. (Keir Graff, *Booklist*)

## GETTING GRAPHIC

### *American Born Chinese*, Gene Luen Yang

With vibrant colors and visual panache, indie writer-illustrator Yang focuses on three characters in tales that touch on facets of Chinese American life. Jin is a boy faced with the casual racism of fellow students and the pressure of his crush on a Caucasian girl; the Monkey King, a character from Chinese folklore, has attained great power but feels he is being held back because of what the gods perceive as his lowly status; and Danny, a popular high-school student, suffers through an annual visit from his cousin Chin-Kee, a walking, talking compendium of exaggerated Chinese stereotypes. Each of the characters is flawed but familiar, and, in a clever postmodern twist, all share a deep, unforeseen connection. Yang helps the humor shine by using his art to exaggerate or contradict the words, creating a synthesis that marks an accomplished graphic storyteller. The stories have a simple, engaging sweep to them, but their weighty subjects—shame, racism, and friendship—receive thoughtful, powerful examination. (Jesse Karp, *Booklist*)

### *Blankets*, Craig Thompson

Thompson's *Good-bye, Chunkie Rice* offered readers well-realized but fantastic characters in a tale that nicely combined sentiment with adventure. This second, much longer work shares the acuity for character development and dynamic sensitivity that makes the author so compulsively readable. In *Blankets*, however, realism reigns supreme in both the story arc and in the humanity of its characters. Thompson himself is the protagonist, and this is his tale of growing up, falling in love, discovering the texture and limits of his faith, and arriving at a point from which he can look back at

those experiences. The snowy Midwest, peopled by overweight parents, hairy youths, and lovingly depicted younger siblings—including a respectfully and realistically treated minor character with Down syndrome—is energetically realized in Thompson's expressive lines and inking. (Francisca Goldsmith, *School Library Journal*)

*Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*, Alison Bechdel

This autobiography by the author of the long-running strip, *Dykes to Watch Out For*, deals with her childhood with a closeted gay father, who was an English teacher and proprietor of the local funeral parlor. *Fun Home* refers both to the funeral parlor, where he put makeup on the corpses and arranged the flowers, and the family's meticulously restored gothic revival house, filled with gilt and lace, where he liked to imagine himself a 19th-century aristocrat. Bechdel's talent for intimacy and banter gains gravitas when used to describe a family in which a man's secrets make his wife a tired husk and overshadow his daughter's burgeoning womanhood and homosexuality. His court trial over his dealings with a young boy pushes aside the importance of her early teen years. Her coming out is pushed aside by his death, probably a suicide. The recursively told story, which revisits the sites of tragic desperation again and again, hits notes that resemble Jeanette Winterson at her best. Bechdel presents her childhood as a "still life with children" that her father created, and meditates on how prolonged untruth can become its own reality. (*Publishers Weekly*)

*Persepolis I and II*, Marjane Satrapi

*Persepolis* is the story of Satrapi's unforgettable childhood and coming of age within a large and loving family in Tehran during the Islamic Revolution; of the contradictions between private life and public life in a country plagued by political upheaval; of her high school years in Vienna facing the trails of adolescence far from her family; of her homecoming--both sweet and terrible; and, finally, of her self-imposed exile from her beloved homeland. It is the chronicle of a girlhood and adolescence at once outrageous and familiar, a young life entwined with the history of her country yet filled with the universal trials and joys of growing up. Edgy, searingly observant, and candid, often heartbreaking but threaded throughout with raw humor and hard-earned wisdom--*Persepolis* is a stunning work from one of the most highly regarded graphic artists at work today. (*Amazon.com*)

## **MEDIA & MESSAGE**

*Blog!: How the Newest Media Revolution is Changing Politics, Business, and Culture*, David Kline and Dan Burstein

Just in case you've been living in the woods, *blog* is short for *Web log*, which is the online, collaborative, interactive, interconnected writing tool that is allegedly changing the nature of public discourse. Kline and Burstein are unabashed proselytizers, finding precedents for blogs in cave paintings and the "commonplace books" of later Europeans. Now, they say, blogging "may be nothing short of a new paradigm for modern human communication." After a persuasive introductory essay by Burstein, the book is divided into three sections: politics, business, and culture. Each begins with a thought-provoking essay by Kline and then includes interviews with and articles by a well-selected array of qualified commentators. Books on technology trends often have a short shelf life, but *Blog!* focuses on the larger issues that make this such an exciting cultural moment while steering clear of details that will date quickly. (Keir Graff, *Booklist*)

*Packaging Girlhood: Rescuing our Daughters from Marketers' Schemes*, Sharon Lamb & Lyn Mikel Brown

That girls are overwhelmed by images of princesses, demure femininity and pink, pink, pink is no surprise. What is shocking, as Lamb and Brown so astutely demonstrate, is the downright bombardment girls receive, coming from all forms of media. Lamb and Brown, both psychologists, came to harsh conclusions after they surveyed girls; sat through hours of *Rugrats* and *Kim Possible* television programming; scoured stores such as Hot Topic and Claire's; watched Hilary Duff movies; listened to Eminem and Beyoncé; visited MySpace.com; and read Caldecott books. Girls are offered two choices by the marketers: they are "either for the boys or one of the boys." Even rebellion is being packaged, "the resistance, that edginess and irreverence that once gave girls a pathway out of the magic kingdom." The book is incredibly readable and rises above others in the genre by giving parents concrete tools to help battle stereotypes. The authors aren't trying to deny anyone princesses or pink; they just want girls to be knowledgeable enough to choose what will truly interest them. (*Publishers Weekly*)

*The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation*, Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff

Before the civil rights movement, coverage of race was almost exclusively the purview of the black press, which reported on the plight of southern blacks facing brutality and Jim Crow laws and northern blacks facing a watered-down version of the same racism. Drawing on interviews, private correspondence and notes, and unpublished articles, Roberts, a journalism professor, and Klibanoff, managing editor of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, describe the personal and professional difficulties faced by southern-born white reporters as they took up the coverage, mostly for northern publications. They chronicle the coverage of the Emmett Till case, Selma march, Montgomery bus boycott, and bombings and sit-ins that constituted the civil rights movement. Roberts and Klibanoff also recall the hatred and threats of violence against white reporters as they dared to report on the turbulence in the South. By retelling the civil rights story from the perspective of the white reporters who covered it, Roberts and Klibanoff demonstrate the profound changes the movement wrought not only on U.S. social justice but also on American journalism. (Vanessa Bush, *Booklist*)

*Send: The Essential Guide to Email for Office and Home*, David Shipley & Will Schwalbe

From this essential guidebook's opening sentence—"Bad things can happen on email"—Shipley and Schwalbe make all too clear what can go wrong. E-mail's ubiquity, with casual and formal correspondence jumbled in the same inbox, makes misunderstandings common; e-mail's inexpressive, text-only format doesn't help. Given its brief history, there's no established etiquette for usage, which is why this primer is so valuable. It promises the reader hope of becoming more efficient and less annoying. Brisk, practical and witty, the book aims to improve the reader's skills as sender and recipient: devising effective subject lines and exploring "the politics of the cc"; how to steer clear of legal issues; and how to recognize different types of attachments. Using real-life examples from flame wars and awkward exchanges (including their own), Shipley and Schwalbe explain why people so often say "incredibly stupid things" in their outgoing messages. They also offer "seven big reasons to love email," along with quick guides to instant messaging and e-mail technology, all the while urging us to "think before [we] send." (*Publishers Weekly*)

## A YEAR OF...

*Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life*, Barbara Kingsolver, Camille Kingsolver, & Steven L. Hopp

Living the American consumerist's good life in Arizona's desert makes abundantly obvious how everyday existence depends on nearly limitless consumption of fossil fuel. Despite their genuine love of life in the Southwest, the Kingsolver family moved back to reconnect with ancestral roots in Appalachia, to a farm that has been in the author's family for years. There they have at least some chance of re-creating a profounder and more intimate relationship with the foods they put on the table. Kingsolver's passionate new tome records in detail a year lived in sync with the season's ebb and flow. Starting with spring's first asparagus, summer's chickens, and the fall's surfeit of vegetables, Kingsolver's family consumes what they and their farming neighbors produce. Writing with her usual sharp eye for irony, she urges readers to follow her example and reconnect with their food's source. To that end, she provides a bibliography, Web sites, and a listing of organizations supporting sustainable agriculture. (Mark Knoblauch, *Booklist*)

*The Kings of New York: A Year Among the Geeks, Oddballs and Geniuses Who Make Up America's Top High School Chess Team*, Michael Weinreb

Weinreb, whose work has appeared three times in *The Best American Sports Writing*, offers the story of a year spent with Brooklyn's Edward R. Murrow High School chess team as it strives for a national championship. Weinreb makes several choices that work well for a year-in-the-life account. For one, he eschews unnecessary speculation about the teen chess prodigies' psychology, a strategy that taken with his deft reporting of how they view themselves and one another renders them more accessible, more natural and consequently more interesting. Weinreb also expands his arena by investigating the cultural milieu of the modern chess world. He describes what it takes to be a successful high-level chess player, the difficulties women have in this world, the very nature of the game and the phenomenon of the chess prodigy, using the experience of Josh Waitzkin, who has now retired from competitive chess and was the subject of the movie *Searching for Bobby Fischer*. All this is supported by well-chosen detail, intelligence and terrific writing. (*Publishers Weekly*)

*The Year of Living Biblically: One Man's Humble Quest to Follow the Bible as Literally as Possible*, A.J. Jacobs

What would it require for a person to live *all* the commandments of the Bible for an entire year? That is the question that animates this hilarious, quixotic, thought-provoking memoir from Jacobs. He didn't just keep the Bible's better-known moral laws (being honest, tithing to charity and trying to curb his lust), but also the obscure and unfathomable ones: not mixing wool with linen in his clothing; calling the days of the week by their ordinal numbers to avoid voicing the names of pagan gods; trying his hand at a 10-string harp; growing a ZZ Top beard; eating crickets; and paying the babysitter in cash at the end of each work day. (He considered some rules, such as killing magicians, too legally questionable to uphold.) In his attempts at living the Bible to the letter, Jacobs hits the road in highly entertaining fashion to meet other literalists, including Samaritans in Israel, snake handlers in Appalachia, Amish in Lancaster County, Pa., and biblical creationists in Kentucky. Throughout his journey, Jacobs comes across as a generous and thoughtful (and, yes, slightly neurotic) participant observer, lacing his story with absurdly funny cultural commentary as well as nuanced insights into the impossible task of biblical literalism. (*Publishers Weekly*)



*The Year of Magical Thinking*, Joan Didion

Didion--a master essayist, great American novelist, and astute political observer--uses autobiography as a vehicle for tonic inquiries into both the self and society. Here, in her most personal and generous book to date, she chronicles a year of grief with her signature blend of intellectual rigor and deep feeling. The ordeal began on Christmas 2003 when Didion and her husband, the writer John Gregory Dunne, learn that their daughter, Quintana Roo, is in intensive care with severe pneumonia and septic shock. Five grim days later, Dunne and Didion come home from the hospital, sit down to dinner, and Dunne suffers "a sudden massive coronary event" and dies. Married for 40 years and sharing a passion for literature, they were inordinately close. But Didion could not give herself over to grief. Instead she researches it, schools herself in her daughter's medical conditions, and monitors the flux of flashbacks and fears that strobe through her mind. Didion describes with compelling precision exactly how grief feels, and how it impairs rational thought and triggers "magical thinking." The result is a remarkably lucid and ennobling anatomy of grief, matched by a penetrating tribute to marriage, motherhood, and love. (Donna Seaman, *Booklist*)

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