

DANA HALL SCHOOL 2011 FACULTY & STAFF SUMMER READING BIBLIOGRAPHY

FICTION

Great House, Nicole Krauss (2010)

This stunning work showcases Krauss's consistent talent. The novel consists of four stories divided among eight chapters, all touching on themes of loss and recovery, and anchored to a massive writing desk that resurfaces among numerous households, much to the bewilderment and existential tension of those in its orbit, among them a lonely American novelist clinging to the memory of a poet who has mysteriously vanished in Chile, an old man in Israel facing the imminent death of his wife of 51 years, and an esteemed antiques dealer tracking down the things stolen from his father by the Nazis. The sharply etched characters seem at first arbitrarily linked across time and space, but Krauss pulls together the disparate elements, settings, characters, and fragile connective tissue to form a formidable and haunting mosaic of loss and profound sorrow. (*Publishers Weekly*)

Jellicoe Road, Melina Marchetta (2008)

Taylor Markham isn't just one of the new student leaders of her boarding school, she's also the heir to the Underground Community, one of three battling school factions in her small Australian community (the others being the Cadets and the Townies). For a generation, these three camps have fought "the territory wars," a deadly serious negotiation of land and property rife with surprise attacks, diplomatic immunities, and physical violence. Only this year, it's complicated: Taylor might just have a thing for Cadet leader Jonah, and Jonah might just be the key to unlocking the secret identity of Taylor's mother, who abandoned her when she was 11. In fact, nearly every relationship in Taylor's life has unexpected ties to her past, and Marchetta has a knack for nuanced characterizations and punchy dialogue. Those who stick out the complexity of the back story will find rewards in the heartbreaking twists of this saga. (Daniel Kraus, *Booklist*)

Room, Emma Donoghue (2010)

In many ways, Jack is a typical 5-year-old. He likes to read books, watch TV, and play games with his Ma. But Jack is different in a big way—he has lived his entire life in a single room, sharing the tiny space with only his mother and an unnerving nighttime visitor known as Old Nick. For Jack, *Room* is the only world he knows, but for Ma, it is a prison in which she has tried to craft a normal life for her son. When their insular world suddenly expands beyond the confines of their four walls, the consequences are piercing and extraordinary. Despite its profoundly disturbing premise, *Room* is rife with moments of hope and beauty, and the dogged determination to live, even in the most desolate circumstances. Readers who enter *Room* will leave staggered, as though, like Jack, they are seeing the world for the very first time. (Lynette Mong, Amazon.com)

Please Look After Mom, Kyung-Sook Shin (2011)

This novel from widely acclaimed Korean author Shin focuses on motherhood and family guilt. Park So-nyo, mother of four now-adult children, has gone missing in a Seoul train station on the way to visit them. The novel is told in four parts, from the perspectives of her daughter, her firstborn son, her husband, and finally, So-nyo herself. Composed almost entirely in second-person narration, the writing is sharp, biting, and intensely moving. So-nyo's children continually battle with their own guilt for not taking better care of her while reminiscing about the times when they were young, growing up in incredible poverty in the countryside. The children come to terms with their mother's absence in their

own ways, and their father repents for a lifetime of neglect. This Korean million-plus-copy best-seller is an impressive exploration of family love, poverty, and triumphing over hardship. (Julie Hunt, *Booklist*)

The Privileges, Jonathan Dee (2010)

In his previous four novels, Dee has dramatized peculiarly American forms of absurdity and moral bankruptcy with search-and-destroy precision and calculated understatement. That approach serves him well in this ensnaring tale of alienating wealth, in which Dee breaks fresh artistic ground with the sheer beauty and quiet poignancy of his prose. Picture-perfect and ferociously confident and ambitious Adam and Cynthia marry right out of college and quickly have children, April and Jonas. Adam excels at a private equity firm in Manhattan, but, impatient for the big money, he also launches a high-stakes insider-trading venture. The gleaming Moreys become so impossibly rich they don't seem quite human to others, and, of course, money doesn't preclude suffering. Dee deftly avoids cliché as Adam and Cynthia go against type by being fiercely loyal to each other, April takes desperate risks, and Jonas, the brightest and most creative of the clan, embarks on an inquiry into outsider art that lands him in a strange and terrifying predicament. A suspenseful, melancholy, and acidly funny tale about self, family, entitlement, and life's mysteries and inevitabilities. (Donna Seaman, *Booklist*)

State of Wonder, Ann Patchett (2011)

Dr. Marina Singh, a research scientist with a pharmaceutical company, is sent to Brazil to track down her former mentor, Dr. Annick Swenson, who seems to have all but disappeared in the Amazon while working on what is destined to be an extremely valuable new drug. Nothing about Marina's assignment is easy: not only does no one know where Dr. Swenson is, but the last person who was sent to find her, Marina's research partner Anders Eckman, died before he could complete his mission. Plagued by trepidation, Marina embarks on an odyssey into the insect-infested jungle in hopes of finding her former mentor as well as answers to several troubling questions about her friend's death, the state of her company's future, and her own past. Once found, Dr. Swenson, now in her seventies, is as ruthless and uncompromising as she ever was. But while she is as threatening as anything the jungle has to offer, the greatest sacrifices to be made are the ones Dr. Swenson asks of herself, and will ultimately ask of Marina, who finds she may still be unable to live up to her teacher's expectations. In a narrative replete with poison arrows, devouring snakes, and a neighboring tribe of cannibals, *State of Wonder* is a world unto itself, where unlikely beauty stands beside unimaginable loss. It is a tale that leads the reader into the very heart of darkness, and then shows us what lies on the other side. (Amazon.com)

The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet, David Green (2010)

David Mitchell reinvents himself with each book, and it's thrilling to watch. His novels like *Ghostwritten* and *Cloud Atlas* spill over with narrators and language, collecting storylines connected more in spirit than in fact. In *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*, he harnesses that plenitude into a more traditional form, a historical novel set in Japan at the turn into the 19th century, when the island nation was almost entirely cut off from the West except for a tiny, quarantined Dutch outpost. Jacob is a pious but not unappealing prig from Zeeland, whose self-driven duty to blurt the truth in a corrupt and deceitful trading culture, along with his headlong love for a local midwife, provides the early engine for the story, which is confined at first to the Dutch enclave but crosses before long to the mainland. Every page is overfull with language, events, and characters, exuberantly saturated in the details of the time and the place but told from a knowing and undeniably modern perspective. It's a story that seems to contain a thousand worlds in one. (Tom Nissley, Amazon.com)

A Visit from the Goon Squad, Jennifer Egan (2010)

Egan's star-crossed marriage of lucid prose and expertly deployed postmodern switcheroos is alive in well in this graceful yet wild novel. We begin in contemporaryish New York with kleptomaniac Sasha and her boss, rising music producer Bennie Salazar, before flashing back, with Bennie, to the glory days of Bay Area punk rock, and eventually forward, with Sasha, to a settled life. By then, Egan has accrued tertiary characters, like Scotty Hausmann, Bennie's one-time bandmate who all but dropped out of society, and Alex, who goes on a date with Sasha and later witnesses the future of the music industry. Egan's overarching concerns are about how rebellion ages, influence corrupts, habits turn to addictions, and lifelong friendships fluctuate and turn. Egan's powerful novel chronicles how and why we change, even as the song stays the same. (*Publishers Weekly*) Winner of the 2011 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction.

The Widow of the South, Robert Hicks (2005)

Hicks's historical novel, based on true events in his hometown, follows the saga of Carrie McGavock, a lonely Confederate wife who finds purpose transforming her Tennessee plantation into a hospital and cemetery during the Civil War. Carrie is mourning the death of several of her children, and, in the absence of her husband, has left the care of her house to her capable Creole slave Mariah. Before the 1864 battle of Franklin, Confederate Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest commandeers her house as a field hospital. In alternating points of view, the battle is recounted by different witnesses, including Union Lt. Nathan Stiles, who watches waves of rebels shot dead, and Confederate Sgt. Zachariah Cashwell, who loses a leg. By the end of the battle, 9,000 soldiers have perished, and thousands of Confederates are buried in a field near the McGavock plantation. Zachariah ends up in Carrie's care at the makeshift hospital, and their rather chaste love forms the emotional pulse of the novel, while Carrie fights to relocate the buried soldiers when her wealthy neighbor threatens to plow up the field after the war. Valiantly, Hicks returns to small, human stories in the midst of an epic catastrophe. (*Publishers Weekly*)

Wolf Hall, Hilary Mantel (2009)

No character in the canon has been writ larger than Henry VIII, but that didn't stop Hilary Mantel. She strides through centuries, past acres of novels, histories, biographies, and plays--even past Henry himself--confident in the knowledge that to recast history's most mercurial sovereign, it's not the King she needs to see, but one of the King's most mysterious agents. Enter Thomas Cromwell, a self-made man and remarkable polymath who ascends to the King's right hand. Rigorously pragmatic and forward-thinking, Cromwell has little interest in what motivates his Majesty, and although he makes way for Henry's marriage to the infamous Anne Boleyn, it's the future of a free England that he honors above all else and hopes to secure. Mantel plots with a sleight of hand, making full use of her masterful grasp on the facts without weighing down her prose. The opening cast of characters and family trees may give initial pause to some readers, but persevere: the witty, whip-smart lines volleying the action forward may convince you a short stay in the Tower of London might not be so bad... provided you could bring a copy of *Wolf Hall* along. (Anne Bartholomew, Amazon.com)

NONFICTION

At Home: A Short History of Private Life, Bill Bryson (2010)

Bryson takes readers on a tour of his house, a rural English parsonage, and finds it crammed with 10,000 years of fascinating historical bric-a-brac. Each room becomes a starting point for a free-ranging discussion of rarely noticed but foundational aspects of social life. A visit to the kitchen prompts disquisitions on food adulteration and gluttony; a peek into the bedroom reveals nutty sex nostrums and the horrors of premodern surgery; in the study we find rats and locusts; a stop in the scullery illuminates

the put-upon lives of servants. Bryson follows his inquisitiveness wherever it goes, from Darwinian evolution to the invention of the lawnmower, while savoring eccentric characters and untoward events (like Queen Elizabeth I's pilfering of a subject's silverware). There are many guilty pleasures, from Bryson's droll prose—"What really turned the Victorians to bathing, however, was the realization that it could be gloriously punishing"—to the many tantalizing glimpses behind closed doors at aristocratic English country houses. In demonstrating how everything we take for granted, from comfortable furniture to smoke-free air, went from unimaginable luxury to humdrum routine, Bryson shows us how odd and improbable our own lives really are. (*Publishers Weekly*)

Cinderella Ate My Daughter, Peggy Orenstein (2011)

Orenstein, who has written about girls for nearly two decades, finds today's pink and princess-obsessed girl culture grating when it threatens to lure her own young daughter. In her quest to determine whether princess mania is merely a passing phase or a more sinister marketing plot with long-term negative impact, Orenstein travels to Disneyland, American Girl Place, and the American International Toy Fair; visits a children's beauty pageant; attends a Miley Cyrus concert; tools around the Internet; and interviews parents, historians, psychologists, marketers, and others. While she uncovers some disturbing news (such as the American Psychological Association's assertion that the "girlie-girl" culture's emphasis on beauty and play-sexiness can increase girls' susceptibility to depression, eating disorders, distorted body image, and risky sexual behavior), she also finds that locking one's daughter away in a tower like a modern-day Rapunzel may not be necessary. Orenstein concludes that parents who think through their values early on and set reasonable limits, encourage dialogue and skepticism, and are canny about the consumer culture can, to a certain extent, combat the 24/7 "media machine" aimed at girls and hold off the focus on beauty, materialism, and the color pink. With insight and biting humor, the author explores her own conflicting feelings as a mother as she protects her offspring and probes the roots and tendrils of the girlie-girl movement. (*Publishers Weekly*)

Cleopatra: A Life, Stacy Schiff (2010)

For those who think they know enough about Cleopatra or have the enigmatic Egyptian queen all figured out, think again. Schiff provides a new interpretation of the life of one of history's most enduringly intriguing women. Rather than a devastatingly beautiful femme fatale, Cleopatra, according to Schiff, was a shrewd power broker who knew how to use her manifold gifts—wealth, power, and intelligence—to negotiate advantageous political deals and military alliances. Though long on facts and short on myth, this stellar biography is still a page-turner; in fact, because this portrait is grounded so thoroughly in historical context, it is even more extraordinary than the more fanciful legend. Cleopatra emerges as a groundbreaking female leader, relying on her wits, determination, and political acumen rather than sex appeal to astutely wield her power in order to get the job done. Ancient Egypt never goes out of style, and Cleopatra continues to captivate successive generations. (Margaret Flanagan, *Booklist*)

The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer, Siddhartha Mukherjee (2010)

"In 2010, about six hundred thousand Americans, and more than 7 million humans around the world, will die of cancer." With this sobering statistic, physician and researcher Mukherjee begins his comprehensive and eloquent "biography" of one of the most virulent diseases of our time. An exhaustive account of cancer's origins, *The Emperor of All Maladies* illustrates how modern treatments—multi-pronged chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery, as well as preventative care—came into existence thanks to a century's worth of research, trials, and small, essential breakthroughs around the globe. While *The Emperor of All Maladies* is rich with the science and history behind the fight against cancer, it is also a

meditation on illness, medical ethics, and the complex, intertwining lives of doctors and patients. Mukherjee's profound compassion--for cancer patients, their families, as well as the oncologists who, all too often, can offer little hope--makes this book a very human history of an elusive and complicated disease. (Lynette Mong, Amazon.com) Winner of the 2011 Pulitzer Prize for Nonfiction.

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks, Rebecca Skloot (2010)

The "first immortal human cells," code-named HeLa, have flourished by the trillions in labs all around the world for more than five decades, making possible the polio vaccine, chemotherapy, and many more crucial discoveries. But where did the HeLa cells come from? Science journalist Skloot spent 10 years arduously researching the complex, tragic, and profoundly revealing story of Henrietta Lacks, a 31-year-old African American mother of five who came to Johns Hopkins with cervical cancer in 1951, and from whom tumor samples were taken without her knowledge or that of her family. Henrietta died a cruel death and was all but forgotten, while her miraculous cells live on, "growing with mythological intensity." Skloot travels to tiny Clover, Virginia; learns that Henrietta's family tree embraces black and white branches; becomes close to Henrietta's daughter, Deborah; and discovers that although the HeLa cells have improved countless lives, they have also engendered a legacy of pain, a litany of injustices, and a constellation of mysteries. Writing with a novelist's artistry, a biologist's expertise, and the zeal of an investigative reporter, Skloot tells a truly astonishing story of racism and poverty, science and conscience, spirituality and family driven by a galvanizing inquiry into the sanctity of the body and the very nature of the life force. (Donna Seaman, *Booklist*)

In the Garden of Beasts: Love, Terror, and an American Family in Hitler's Berlin, Erik Larson (2011)

This vivid portrait of Berlin during the first years of Hitler's reign is brought to life through the stories of two people: William E. Dodd, who in 1933 became America's first ambassador to Hitler's regime, and his scandalously carefree daughter, Martha. Ambassador Dodd, an unassuming and scholarly man, is an odd fit among the extravagance of the Nazi elite. His frugality annoys his fellow Americans in the State Department and Dodd's growing misgivings about Hitler's ambitions fall on deaf ears among his peers, who are content to "give Hitler everything he wants." Martha, on the other hand, is mesmerized by the glamorous parties and the high-minded conversation of Berlin's salon society -- and flings herself headlong into numerous affairs with the city's elite, most notably the head of the Gestapo and a Soviet spy. Both become players in the exhilarating (and terrifying) story of Hitler's obsession for absolute power, which culminates in the events of one murderous night, later known as "the Night of Long Knives." The rise of Nazi Germany is a well-chronicled time in history, which makes *In the Garden of Beasts* all the more remarkable. Erik Larson has crafted a gripping, deeply intimate narrative with a climax that reads like the best political thriller, where we are stunned with each turn of the page, even though we already know the outcome. (Shane Hansanuwat, Amazon.com)

Lives Like Loaded Guns: Emily Dickinson and her Family's Feuds, Lyndall Gordon (2010)

Forever vanquished is the pallid icon of Emily Dickinson as the reclusive virgin saint of Amherst. Gordon explodes all previous theories in an electrifying family portrait. It wasn't heartbreak that kept the poet sequestered, Gordon argues with high-beam cogency, it was epilepsy, a then-uncontrollable and shameful malady. With one stroke, Gordon recasts Dickinson's entire oeuvre. She then reveals the outrageous treachery of the poet's esteemed brother, Austin, who held his unmarried sisters, wife Susan, and their children hostage to his passion for his ambitious mistress, Mabel Loomis Todd, whose scheming husband encouraged the affair. So much for New England decorum and restraint. With trysts in Lavinia and Emily's cherished home and sanctuary, Mabel's escalating demands, and Austin's utter

callousness toward his family, a great feud was born. And on it raged long after Emily's death as the irrepressible, multitalented Mabel deciphered, typed, and published Dickinson's poems. Literary bloodhound and superbly eloquent chronicler Gordon follows every twist and kink of the ensuing legal skirmishes, especially the poignant battle between Mabel's daughter and Emily's niece, in a Shakespearean tale of a house divided. (Donna Seaman, *Booklist*)

The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains, Nicholas Carr (2011)

Carr—author of *The Big Switch* (2007) and the much-discussed *Atlantic Monthly* story “Is Google Making Us Stupid?”—is an astute critic of the information technology revolution. Here he looks to neurological science to gauge the organic impact of computers, citing fascinating experiments that contrast the neural pathways built by reading books versus those forged by surfing the hypnotic Internet, where portals lead us on from one text, image, or video to another while we're being bombarded by messages, alerts, and feeds. This glimmering realm of interruption and distraction impedes the sort of comprehension and retention “deep reading” engenders, Carr explains. And not only are we reconfiguring our brains, we are also forging a “new intellectual ethic,” an arresting observation Carr expands on while discussing Google's gargantuan book digitization project. What are the consequences of new habits of mind that abandon sustained immersion and concentration for darting about, snagging bits of information? What is gained and what is lost? Carr's fresh, lucid, and engaging assessment of our infatuation with the Web is provocative and revelatory. (Donna Seaman, *Booklist*)

The Triple Bind: Saving Our Teenage Girls from Today's Pressures, Stephen Hinshaw (2009)

Hinshaw, chair of UC Berkeley's psychology department and an authority on childhood ADHD, enters a cultural minefield: why do today's teenage girls, despite enormous opportunities, seem crippled by increased rates of depression, anxiety, eating disorders, violence and suicide? Hinshaw's sweeping diagnosis is the triple bind, or society's expectation that young women possess traditionally feminine attributes such as empathy and selflessness, but also succeed in typically masculine arenas such as competitive sports and cutthroat career paths, and finally, generally conform to a narrow, unrealistic set of standards that allows for no alternative. Hinshaw identifies academic pressures, sexed-up pop culture, Internet voyeurism and girl-on-girl bullying as sources of overwhelming stress and conflicting ideals for girls. (*Publisher's Weekly*)

Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience and Redemption, Laura Hillenbrand (2010)

From Laura Hillenbrand, the bestselling author of *Seabiscuit*, comes this inspiring true story of a man who lived through a series of catastrophes almost too incredible to be believed. In evocative, immediate descriptions, Hillenbrand unfurls the story of Louie Zamperini—a juvenile delinquent-turned-Olympic runner-turned-Army hero. During a routine search mission over the Pacific, Louie's plane crashed into the ocean, and what happened to him over the next three years of his life is a story that will keep you glued to the pages, eagerly awaiting the next turn in the story and fearing it at the same time. You'll cheer for the man who somehow maintained his selfhood and humanity despite the monumental degradations he suffered, and you'll want to share this book with everyone you know. (Juliet Disparte, Amazon.com)

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May 2011