



Books We Recommend ...

LESLIE MILLER (FACULTY) recommends Adam Kirsch's *The Modern Element: Essays on Contemporary American Poetry* (Norton, 2008). Whether or not you agree with Kirsch's assessments of these major and minor figures of contemporary poetry, the writing here is a masterful example of how readable literary criticism can be.

SHAWN PICTH (GRADUATE STUDENT) recommends Howard Zinn's *People's History of the United States: 1492-Present* (HarperCollins, 2003; reissue). Zinn presents the often overlooked historical perspective of the ordinary groups of people that made our country what it is today through their achievements in labor struggles, political action, organizing, and the collective will, as opposed to the individualized historical biography.

ANN TANDY-TREIBER (ADJUNCT FACULTY) recommends Mark Helprin's *Winter's Tale* (Harcourt, 2005; reissue). Helprin mixes the scope of Dickens or Tolstoy with magic realism and a deep love for New York. *The New York Times Book Review* said, and I echo here, that I only worry that I cannot say enough good things about this book. It is a beautiful novel, from sentence level to epic structure.

GORDON GRICE (ADJUNCT FACULTY) recommends Ambrose Bierce's *The Devil's Dictionary* (serialized between 1881-1886 and in 1904). A sample: "Impossible. *adj.* Unable to exist if something else exists. Two things are impossible when the world of being has scope enough for one of them, but not enough for both – as Walt Whitman's poetry and God's mercy to man."

ALEXIS EASLEY (FACULTY) recommends Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872). Le Fanu puts a twist on the vampire story genre by making his antagonist a beautiful young woman. The result is a terrifying and beautifully written tale!

JONAS ERICKSON (ADJUNCT FACULTY) recommends Kate Bernheimer's *The Complete Tales of Merry Gold* (F2c, 2006). Although it's called a sequel, this is the best place to start reading Bernheimer, an author who restores the fluid nature of the folk tale.

JIM ROGERS (ADJUNCT FACULTY) recommends Dan Berry's *Pull Me Up: A Memoir* (Norton, 2005). A moving, occasionally hilarious,



memoir about a suburban coming-of-age in the 1970s, his Irish immigrant mother, and surviving cancer. The author is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist for the *New York Times*.

ANDREW SCHEIBER (CHAIR, FACULTY) recommends George Levine's *Darwin Loves You: Natural Selection and the Re-Enchantment of the World* (Princeton UP, 2008).



Levine is a scholar of Victorian literature, now retired from teaching, whose most brilliant contribution to the field was a consideration of Darwin's influence on novelists like

George Eliot and Thomas Hardy. This new book is a personal appreciation of the work and life of Charles Darwin, and in it Levine dispels many of the negative myths about the great naturalist's work. As a literary scholar and an amateur naturalist himself, Levine finds that Darwin's fearless curiosity and restless intellect produce a view of the natural world as a sacred wonder on its own terms. Without shrinking from some of its difficulties and the pernicious misapplications to which it has been subjected, Darwin's work can be seen as engaged in what Levine calls a "secular re-enchantment" of the natural universe.

CAROLANN HOOK (GRADUATE STUDENT) recommends Murray Bail's *Eucalyptus* (Picador, 2007; reprint). Storytelling and fairy tales provide the unusual structure for an Australian story about fathers and daughters, caring for the land, and finding love. This is one of my favorite books to teach and read, especially in the summer.

LIZ WILKINSON (FACULTY) recommends Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (Penguin, 1986; reprint). A must read in the Native American literature canon, *Ceremony* investigates the PTSD experienced by lead character Tayo, a Laguna-Pueblo mixed-blood, when he returns to the reservation after WWII and describes his Native-based spiritual recovery. *The Delicacy and Strength of Lace* (Graywolf Press, 1986), a collection of letters written between Silko and the poet James Wright, is an excellent companion text.

JUAN LI (FACULTY) recommends Gerry T.M. Altmann's *The Ascent of Babel: An Exploration*

of Language, Mind, and Understanding (Oxford UP, 1999). An interesting and accessible introduction to the relationship between language, mind, and human experience for students of psycholinguistics and the general reader alike. Full of humorous examples.

SHANNON SCOTT (GRADUATE STUDENT) recommends Louise Erdrich's *The Plague of Doves* (HarperCollins, 2008). As always, Louise Erdrich creates a powerful sense of place – this on a fictional reservation in North Dakota – and although the story weaves back and forth in time and follows many different characters, it never loses the thread of the embedded murder mystery and was hard to put down.

LON OTTO (FACULTY) recommends Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (Knopf, 1989; reissue). Nabokov's funniest novel, *Pale Fire* consists of a 999-line poem with obsessively self-serving annotations by the poet's deranged next-door neighbor.

ANDY LEET (STAFF) recommends Allistair MacLeod's *Island: The Complete Stories* (Random House, 2002; reprint). Situated in Nova Scotia and elsewhere in Canada, these beautifully written short stories revolve around coal mining, the fishing industry, tradition, and family history.

MICHAEL MIKOLAJCZAK (FACULTY) recommends Brad Gooch's *Flannery: A Life of Flannery O'Connor* (Little, Brown, & Co., 2009). Gooch has an uncanny ability, born of careful attention to the fiction and the documents of O'Connor's life, to trace fictional incidents to real-life occurrences.

ABIGAIL DAVIS (ADJUNCT FACULTY) recommends *Two Years Before the Mast: A Personal Narrative* (1840) by Richard Henry Dana, Jr. (Signet Classic, 1964). In 1834, Dana left Harvard for health reasons (he was losing his eyesight) and signed on as a common seaman aboard the brig *Pilgrim* for the journey around Cape Horn to California. For the next two years, he kept this vivid journal of life at sea. Dana returned to Boston in one piece, graduated Harvard, and became a lawyer. His book enjoyed enormous success when it was first published in 1840 and is still a great read. To get you in the seafaring mood, listen to

Rogue's Gallery: Pirate Ballads, Sea Songs, & Chanteys (prod. Hal Willner, exec. prod. Johnny Depp & Gore Verbinski), 2-disc set. All songs are traditional, but not all are PG13.

MERIE KIRBY (ADJUNCT FACULTY) recommends Kate Braestrup's *Here If You Need Me* (Little Brown & Co., 2007). A memoir by a woman who became a Unitarian pastor after her State Trooper husband's death (he had planned to go into the ministry as well), how she and their four kids coped with his death, and her work as chaplain to the Maine game wardens, especially in cases when they are looking for those lost and missing in the wilderness. It is funny, sad, thoughtful, and thought-provoking.

TODD LAWRENCE (FACULTY) recommends *Man Gone Down* by Michael Thomas (Grove/Atlantic, 2006). This compelling novel explores the complexities of race and the American dream through the sprawling narrative of a struggling black writer who has only four days to raise \$12,000 to salvage his life and his family.

LIZ ROLFSMEIER (ADJUNCT FACULTY) recommends Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping* (Picador, 2004). With beautiful, spare writing and understated humor, Robinson constructs a dream-like story about an unconventional family living in an isolated Western town.

JOYCE POLEY (STAFF) recommends William P. Young's *The Shack* (Windblown Media, 2008). A creative approach to the heart and presence of God; very accessible theological concepts good for thought and discussion.

MARTIN WARREN (FACULTY) recommends John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (Little, Brown, & Co., 1998; reprint). What is most enjoyable about this book is the way in which Fowles chooses to play with his audience. As Fowles delicately dismantles the form of the traditional Victorian novel, he treats his readers as co-conspirators, who may, if they wish, join him in uncovering the tricks used by Victorian novelists to manipulate the reality of the worlds they create in their novels.

