



## A Word from...YOUR Library

Thanks to all of the faculty and staff who contributed to this issue of Bookwatch! Be sure to check in at the library for some great fall reading.

Congratulations to Jeff Namiotka this month's winner of the Learned Owl gift certificate.

### NON-FICTION REVIEWS:

#### **The Perfect Summer: England 1911, Just Before the Storm**

by Juliet Nicolson

A breezy social history of the summer of 1911 when the British Empire was in full bloom, George V was being crowned, and the clouds of war seemed distant. Much is included about London's aristocratic circles, with sidebar stories into the lives of more ordinary people. Nicolson is the daughter of Nigel Nicolson, whose own parents have cameo roles in this delightful book. (Review by Tom Vince)

#### **Hidden Kitchens: Stories, Recipes, and More from NPR's The Kitchen Sisters**

by Davia Nelson and Nikki Silva

I had never heard of The Kitchen Sisters! (Admittedly, I am also a recent listener of NPR...) A little research has proven them to be an award-winning duo. In 2002 they received the Peabody Award (the Pulitzer of radio broadcasting) for The Sonic Memorial Project, an intimate and historic documentary radio series commemorating the life and history of the World Trade Center and its neighborhood through rare recordings, voicemail messages, personal stories, and oral histories. Don't miss this wonderful new narrative of local food, families, neighborhoods and stories from around the country! (Review by Jane Spencer)

#### **Men of Salt: Crossing the Sahara on the Caravan of White Gold**

by Michael Benanav

While doing research, writer and world traveler Benanav stumbled across a reference to the Caravan of White Gold, a 500-mile journey that has been made by camel caravans for a thousand years passing through the oldest and driest part of the Sahara desert in modern-day Mali to obtain desert rock salt, a valuable commodity used as currency even today in parts of West Africa. Reading that the caravan would soon be replaced by trucks, Benanav became obsessed with joining one and experiencing this age-old tradition before its demise. His tale is enthralling—a fascinating, insightful, and well written travelogue of his adventure. (Review by Jacque Miller)

#### **Land of Lincoln** by Andrew Ferguson

Ferguson travels the country looking for traces of Lincoln in myth, museums, memory, and in roadside attractions. It's a tour that becomes a commentary on the American scene, with lively conversations with Lincoln fans and experts. (Review by Tom Vince)

The page is framed by a decorative border. At the top, there are dark brown tree silhouettes against a light blue sky. A black bird is flying in the upper right. Various colored leaves (red, orange, yellow, green) are scattered throughout. At the bottom, there's a brown ground area with a large orange pumpkin with green leaves, a basket of red apples, and a brown squirrel sitting and eating a nut. The number '2' is printed on the pumpkin.

# FICTION REVIEWS

## **The Road** by Cormac McCarthy

A frightening tale of an unnamed father and son on the road pushing all of their possessions in a shopping cart after an apocalyptic event has left the land barren and covered in ash. They risk their lives each day searching for food and safe shelter and encounter others who have resorted to cannibalism and extreme violence. In a story that is grim beyond belief the young son leaves readers with some hope for a future. Winner of the 2006 Pulitzer Prize for Literature and selected for Oprah's Book Club. (Review by Paula Campanelli)

## **The Year of Fog** by Michelle Richmond

Abby Mason, a photographer, gets distracted by a prime photo opportunity and takes her eyes off of her fiancé's 6-year old daughter, Emma. A miniscule 35 seconds later, Emma has disappeared into the swirling fog surrounding the coastline of San Francisco. Take the harrowing, despairing and gut-wrenching journey with Abby as she is thrust into the unwilling spotlight of missing children. See how her strength and determination affect the lives around her. This book, after starting it, kept me coming back for more. I read it in one sitting – and didn't regret the time I spent with it. (Review by Tracy Schooner)

## **Secondhand Smoke** by Karen E. Olson

Annie Seymour, New Haven-born reporter, lives in her childhood neighborhood. One morning she watches as her favorite Italian restaurant is destroyed by fire. Arson is suspected as a charred corpse is found among the ashes. The body is thought to be the owner Sal Amato, but it turns out to be the restaurant hostess instead and Sal is missing. Annie finds herself in the thick of the investigation, coupled with local PI Danny De Lucia. The Feds are investigating none other than Annie's own father, long time Vegas casino boss and friend to Sal. Olson develops solid characters and tells a humorous tale filled with small town familiarity. (Review by Jane Spencer)

## **Mary: A Novel** by Janis Cooke Newman

One of the best fictional biographies I've read. Well written, it clearly shows the darker side of a first lady with an obsessive nature. Mary reveals much about her husband and their marriage. It's an excellent read!! (Review by Sue Donnelly)



## Fiction Reviews continued:

### **Woman in Red** by Eileen Goudge

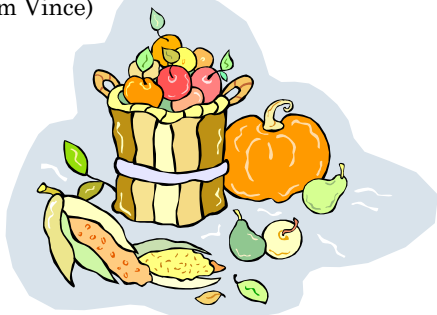
This story, told in the past and present, follows the return to society of Alice who went to jail for 9 years after running over and injuring the man who killed her young son in a hit-and-run accident. Alice goes back to the town where it all happened and tries to get to know her other son whom she has not seen in 9 years. In another twist to the story Alice makes friends with Colin, who is also returning to this small town after many years to live in his grandfather's house. Both Alice and Colin have many struggles to overcome and, while they are helping each other adjust to these new lives, they discover they have an important connection to each other through their grandparents. (Review by Melissa Slager)

### **March** by Geraldine Brooks

In this novel Brooks imagines the life of March, the father in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*. March, an abolitionist preacher and idealist, is away at war to support and inspire the Union soldiers throughout most of *Little Women*. The character of March was modeled after Louisa May Alcott's own father, Bronson Alcott, who was an abolitionist and contemporary of John Brown, Emerson and Thoreau. Brooks explores the physical and psychological trauma that March experiences when his ideals confront the harsh realities of war. Paralleling current world affairs, Brooks weaves a fascinating tale that invokes reflection and discussion. (Review by Paula Campanelli)

### **Be Near Me** by Andrew O'Hagan

An absorbing novel about an English priest serving in a small Scottish parish who unwittingly becomes involved in a scandal that unravels into public hysteria. Over the course of a few months, Father David becomes friends with two troubled teens, and by the end of the year finds his life and career in ruins. This novel has already won critical and reader acclaim. (Review by Tom Vince)



### **Pope Joan** by Donna Woolfolk Cross

This is a fascinating historical novel based on the life of Pope Joan, a woman who supposedly was Pope for two years in the mid-ninth century! Surprised? So was I! According to the author's note, her papacy was universally accepted until the mid-seventeenth century. Allegedly at that point, however, the Catholic Church made a concerted effort to destroy the historical records of her papacy, and only today can her papacy be argued as fact by historical documents outside of the Church and by other circumstantial evidence. Fact or fiction, the author's arguments are compelling, and the novel is a fascinating look at the Dark Ages and a woman's role at that time. (Review by Jacque Miller)

### **An Accidental American** by Alex Carr

Nicole Blake is an "accidental American" who is trying to free herself from a not-so perfect past. She has finally built a decent life for herself, living in a farmhouse in France and working as a freelancer for a British documents firm. However, Nicole is suddenly thrown back into her old life when she gets a visit from John Valsamis who convinces her to help the United States government track down her former boyfriend, Rahim Ali. The more Nicole tries to get away from her past, the more entangled she becomes in it. Carr takes the reader on a journey into the dark side of international affairs from Lisbon, Portugal, to the Middle East and everywhere in between. This book is a very quick read with new twists and turns on every page. (Review by Kim Barsella)

### **Alibi** by Joseph Kanon

Kanon takes us to Venice, Italy, at the end of World War II in another fabulous novel that captures the aftermath of the Allied victory and its impact on those societies and countries on the losing side and the moral quandaries that result. A discharged U.S. Army officer goes to stay with his socialite mother who has fled to Venice, only to find himself caught up in a web of intrigue and eventually murder as he falls in love with a Jewish woman who was "sent away" by members of a Venetian society who no longer admit to their German collaboration. (Review by Jacque Miller)

## FACULTY AND STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS



**Jeanne Kidera** recommends:

**The Future Dictionary of America** edited by Jonathan Safran Foer, Dave Eggers, Nicole Krauss, and the Staff of McSweeney's

This book was conceived...as a way to bring over a hundred authors together to promote progressive causes in the November 2004 election." (*Amazon*)

### **The Polysyllabic Spree**

by Nick Hornby

"A collection of essays in which Hornby chronicles and discusses the books he buys and the books he reads each month for a year."

### **Dancing in Odessa** by Ilya Kaminsky

"A gorgeous collection of poems by a brilliant young man and wonderful teacher."

### **Stephanie White** recommends:

### **A Thousand Splendid Suns**

by Khalid Hosseini

"It was great!"

"Hosseini's follow-up to his best-selling debut, *The Kite Runner* (2003) views the plight of Afghanistan during the last half-century through the eyes of two women." (*Booklist*)

### **Midge Karam** recommends:

### **Nineteen Minutes** by Jodi Picoult

"I was absolutely devastated by this portrayal of a high school shooting and what led up to the events Picoult described."

### **This is Your Brain on Music**

by Daniel J. Levitin

"Levitin's fascination with the mystery of music and the study of why it affects us so deeply is at the heart of this book." (*School Library Journal*)



**Patti Campbell** recommends:

### **The Road** by Cormac McCarthy

(See annotation on page 2)

### **Thirteen Moons**

by Charles Frazier

"Frazier, author of the widely applauded *Cold Mountain*, remains true to the historical fiction vein...[and] finds grounding in a timeless theme: a grand old man remembering his glory days." (*Booklist*)

### **The History Boys: A Play**

by Alan Bennett

Education is the focus as senior British schoolboys discover its meaning and importance in this funny play.

**Sherry Chlysta** recommends:

### **Thirteen Senses**

by Victor Villasenor

"The saga Villasenor began in *Rain of Gold* (1991) continues here, celebrating family, love, and immigrant culture." (*Booklist*)

**Susan McKenzie** recommends:

### **Those Who Save Us** by Jenna Blum

"Blum's novel tracks the wartime experience and later life of Anna Brandt, a young woman from Weimer, Germany, coming of age in during World War II. Blum deals honestly and hauntingly with the issues of guilt, sacrifice and forgiveness. A must read!"



**Faculty recommendations continued:**



**Diccon Ong recommends:**

**The Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else** by Hernando de Soto

“The author, president of an influential Peruvian think tank and a prominent Third World economist, sets out to solve the mystery of why some people in the world can create capital and others cannot.” (*Booklist*)

**The Economic Naturalist: In Search of Explanations for Everyday Enigmas** by Robert Franks

“In his wonderfully succinct and down-to-earth book, Frank explored the difference between absolute and relative goods, and how confusing the two got people into senseless economic ‘arms races.’” (*Washington Post*)

**The Undercover Economist: Exposing Why the Rich are Rich and the Poor are Poor—And Why You Can Never Buy a Decent Used Car** by Tim Harford

“In this acclaimed and riveting book—part exposé, part user’s manual—the astute and entertaining columnist from the Financial Times demystifies the ways in which money works in the world.” (*Amazon*)

**Christine Borrman recommends:**



**The Book Thief** by Marcus Zusak

“The narrator is death, and the book follows the life of a young girl who helps harbor a Jewish man in her house. It provides a fresh perspective on the Hitler era from inside Germany and it can make all of us have a greater appreciation for all of the freedoms we have (not to mention all of the books!!).”

**Gatsby’s Girl** by Caroline Preston

“Preston reimagines the life of Ginevra King, F. Scott Fitzgerald's first love, changing her name to Ginevra Perry and positing that Ginevra followed Fitzgerald's career and work with interest.” (*Booklist*)

**Jeff Namiotka recommends:**

**The Schopenhauer Cure** by Irvin Yalom

“A beautifully wrought tale of a therapy group's final year and a moving debate about the end of life.” (*Kirkus Review*)



**Everything Is Illuminated** by Jonathan Safran Foer

“This highly imaginative debut novel features a protagonist with the same name [and occupation] as the author... [who] travels to Eastern Europe after his junior year in college. His mission, as he ventures through the farmlands, is to find Augustine, who may have saved the grandfather he never knew from the Nazis.” (*Library Journal*)

**The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay** by Michael Chabon

“[Chabon] revels in the crass yet inventive and comforting world of comic-book superheroes, those masked men with mysterious powers who were born in the wake of the Great Depression and who carried their fans through the horrors of war with the guarantee that good always triumphs over evil...[as he] chronicles the fantastic adventures of two Jewish cousins, one American, one Czech [in 1939].” (*Booklist*)

## Faculty recommendations cont.:

### Jeff Namiotka cont.

#### **The Lake of Dead Languages: A Novel**

by Carol Goodman

“It is set in a private girls' school in upstate New York. Jane Hudson has come there to teach Latin, many years after having attended the school herself.” (*Booklist*)

### Dana Cunningham recommends:

#### **The Secret Servant**

by Daniel Silva

“Gabriel Allon is an art restorer who moonlights as a top agent for the Mossad, Israel’s version of the CIA. In this seventh installment of the series, Allon is sent to investigate the murder in Amsterdam of one of his colleagues, where he discovers a plot to kidnap the daughter of an influential American diplomat. Unable to thwart the kidnapping, Gabriel dedicates himself to freeing the kidnap victim. Daniel Silva is among the best writers of international thrillers currently working, and if you like this genre of literature, *The Secret Servant* will be an instant hit.”



### John Haile recommends:

#### **Exploring Stone Walls: A Field Guide to New England’s Stone Walls**

by Robert M. Thorson

“ ‘Every stone wall is unique and every stone tells a story,’ says Robert M. Thorson, the author of the first field guide to historic New England stone walls...” (Book description on back cover)

#### **For Whom the Bell Tolls** by Ernest Hemingway

Considered one of the best war novels of all time, this classic work captures the war experience of demolitions expert, Robert Jordan, in the Spanish Civil War.

### Dan Dyer recommends:

#### **An Arsonist's Guide to Writers' Homes in New England** by Brock Clarke

“I loved it (as have other reviewers around the country in all our major newspapers). His other [novels] are also good, especially *The Ordinary White Boy*.” (Look for Mr. Clarke’s visit to WRA next spring!)

#### **The Blackest Bird**

by Joel Rose

“A murder/mystery novel featuring Edgar Allan Poe as an important character.”

#### **The Pale Blue Eye**

by Louis Bayard

“Another mystery involving Poe, this time set at West Point, where, improbably, Poe actually studied (until his dismissal)...”

#### **Hospital Sketches** by Louisa May Alcott.

“LMA spent some time during the Civil War as a nurse in Washington, DC. This brief memoir is a dazzler.”

#### **On Chesil Beach** by Ian McEwan

“A novella about a marriage that does not survive its first day!”

#### **The Lost Constitution** by William Martin

“A thriller featuring an antiquarian book dealer (it’s part of a series); this one deals with a copy of the Constitution annotated by the Founders, shedding light on issues like gun control, religion, etc. Hot property with many interested parties in pursuit.”

