



WHAT WE'RE READING

Summer 2017

This annual list presents suggestions for summer enjoyment from individual faculty of the West Chester University English Department. Read, view, listen!

You can also find this list and its predecessors at <http://www.wcupa.edu/arts-humanities/English/facultyPicks.aspx>.

Age of Anger: A History of the Present

Pankaj Mishra

Recommended by John Ward

A wide-ranging, probing, and slightly overheated examination of what the author regards as an unprecedented global rage whose origins lie in a body of –for most of the world’s population–unrealizable expectations generated by the European Enlightenment. Ideally, this book should probably be read against the backdrop of Mishra’s earlier *From the Ruins of Empire*, which–besides being interesting in its own right–implicitly clarifies some of the thinking that underlies *Age of Anger*.

Almighty: Courage, Resistance and Existential Peril in the Nuclear Age

Dan Zak

Recommended by Chuck Bauerlein

This non-fiction debut by *Washington Post* reporter Dan Zak made the *Kirkus* list of Best Non-Fiction books of the year. It focuses on a single powerful episode of an act of civil disobedience and religious conscience by three anti-nuclear activists: a Vietnam vet, an 80-year old nun, and a house painter. When they break into the "Fort Knox of uranium" with cans of spray paint, bottles of blood, and loaves of bread, their act is decried as catastrophic by embarrassed government officials and "miraculous" by their supporters, in part because the three protesters spent several hours in the facility before being apprehended. Central to Zak's thesis is the age-old question initially raised by President Truman's decision to use nuclear weapons on civilian populations in Hiroshima and Nagasaki: is this invention the "greatest thing in history," as Truman proposed, or mankind's gravest miscalculation? The question has never been more relevant than today.

Bear: The Life and Times of Augustus Owsley Stanley III

Robert Greenfield

Recommended by Timothy Ray

Augustus Owsley Stanley III is a mouthful, so he preferred to be called simply Owsley or "Bear," his "trickster/prankster" pseudonym. Owsley was the leading LSD chemist of the 1960s hippie counterculture era and

the patron (in the traditional sense) of the Grateful Dead. "Owsley's Acid" was the benchmark of LSD purity during the hippie era, rivaling even that of Sandoz Pharmaceuticals, the Swiss laboratory where chemist Albert Hofmann invented LSD in 1939. Owsley met the Grateful Dead and fell in love, and the chemical romance was perfect. His LSD, combined with their wildly psychedelic music, was a perfect combination. Owsley provided the Dead with LSD for their Ken Kesey-inspired "Acid Trips," and he also paid for sound equipment and instruments that enabled the Grateful Dead to become a countercultural phenomenon. Without Bear, the Dead would simply have been a San Francisco phenomenon. Without Bear, the hippie countercultural movement might not have ever been.

The Bees

Laline Paull

Recommended by Ashley Patriarca

Paull's debut novel is a charming meditation on love and community, wrapped up in a story about bees ... yes, bees.

Born to Run (Book on CD)

Bruce Springsteen

Recommended by Mary Clark

I'm a Jersey Girl—how can I *not* love BRUCE! But what is great about this book is that *Bruce is reading it to me!* Yes, it is like sitting on his front porch in Freehold, NJ, listening to him tell the story of his life. Bruce had spent the past seven years writing his story, with humor and honesty, about growing up Catholic in a small town in South Jersey. He explains, in detail, his journey from first watching Elvis Presley perform on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, through his days in a bar band in Asbury Park, to the phenomenon called the E Street Band. He also shares his personal struggles and his family challenges with candor and warmth. I have a newfound respect for the man who makes me proud to be from the Garden State. 16 CDs, and well worth the effort. Some libraries also have this book available as a digital online resource. I am old school, with an CD player in my car, and I listened to it on my commute back and forth to WCU for about two weeks.

Caesar and Cleopatra

Bernard Shaw

Recommended by Joseph Navitsky

Shaw's drama about one of the most famous power couples in history operates as a kind of prequel to two Shakespeare plays, one about Julius Caesar and one about Queen Cleopatra VII. In this version, Cleopatra is a teenager and Caesar her mentor and guardian—and the man who promises to send Antony to her in a few years ... if she behaves. Wonderfully self-referential and easy to read, *Caesar and Cleopatra* includes characters that are aware of their Shakespearean provenance yet also relentlessly forward looking. Deliberate anachronisms and ahistorical figures complete the fun—as do the Victorian-era allegories that challenge even the most careful of readers.

The Cazalet Chronicle tetology

Elizabeth Jane Howard

Recommended by B.G. Betz

Howard's four novels—*The Light Years*, *Marking Time*, *Confusion*, and *Casting Off*—follow a multi-generational British family from 1937 to 1947, capturing the family's war efforts, their removal from London during the Blitz, economies driven by rationing, and changing marital, business, and romantic relationships. The series immerses the reader in wartime England and stands as a brilliant commentary on mid-20th century British life.

Children of Time

Adrian Tchaikovsky

Recommended by Seth Kahn

Don't let the fact that this book is about spiders scare you away. *Children of Time* is a grand, far future sci-fi novel that chronicles the nano-technology-enhanced evolution of a spider colony on a terraformed planet, told alongside the devolution of likely the last human beings in the universe on a ship that's left Earth thousands of years before in search of a place to restart humanity. The plotlines converge in a climactic moment that's much less important than the tales that got us there. And that's a strength.

The Day of Atonement

David Liss

Recommended by Cheryl Wanko

A Jewish family destroyed by the Church in 18th-century Lisbon and a son out for revenge. Add mysterious, powerful, and threatening characters, plus natural disaster, and you have this thrilling and poignant novel.

The Devil in the Marshalsea

Antonia Hodgson

Recommended by B.G. Betz

Set in 1727 in the infamous London debtors' prison The Marshalsea, this novel is both a murder mystery and a fictionalized piece of investigative journalism that chronicles the gruesome treatment of debtors, especially those who were tenement dwellers to begin with.

Echo

Pam Muñoz Ryan

Recommended by Jordan Schugar

A 2016 Newbery Honor book, *Echo* challenges us to rethink about what we know about text structure. With music as a mainstay, the story follows a harmonica (and its musicians) through time and space through a fairy tale-esque narrative. A captivating page turner for sure.

Freaks of Nature

Directed by Robbie Pickering

Recommended by Sarah Paylor

In this movie, three teenagers band together to help their town survive when an alien invasion wrecks the peace between the human, vampire, and zombie populations.

The Golden Ass

Apuleius

Recommended by Stacy Esch

Do you want to read something classic *and* timely, something Roman *and* relevant? This Latin novel, the only one to have survived in its entirety, survived for a good reason. It's medicinal. In this age of braying golden asses, so to speak, this novel's charms just may cure you. It will at least give you a laugh, if, like me, you need one.

The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable

Amitav Ghosh

Recommended by John Ward

An informed, thoughtful, yet impassioned discussion of what the author, a highly regarded novelist and academic, regards as the greatest threat facing humanity. Ghosh is critical of most contemporary novelists (he includes himself among the guilty) for not having given this threat sufficient attention in their creative work. Don't be put off by the fact that this book about a distinctly non-fictional subject was written by a novelist; Ghosh has done his homework quite thoroughly.

Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and a Culture in Crisis

J.D. Vance

Recommended by Vicki Tischio

In the Land of Invented Languages: Adventures in Linguistic Creativity, Madness, and Genius

Arika Okrent

Recommended by Joshua Raclaw

There are nearly seven thousand languages spoken in the world today, but some of us want there to be just a few more. Known as *conlangers*, these individuals construct entire languages from scratch, ranging from the Dothraki and Valyrian heard in HBO's *Game of Thrones* to languages like Esperanto, originally intended as a universal communication

system that would usher in an era of world peace. In this fascinating and accessible book, author Arika Okrent tells the stories of the individuals and communities who invent these languages.

Leaving Orbit: Notes from the Last Days of American Spaceflight

Margaret Lazarus Dean

Recommended by Kristine Ervin

Part memoir, part history, this book is an elegy for the shuttle program, as well as a call for continuing funding for NASA and space exploration. For anyone who came of age during the days of the space shuttle and dreamed of being an astronaut or at least attending Space Camp, this work of nonfiction will enhance your appreciation of space flight and, through Dean's descriptions of launches and of her grief, will make you wish for the days when the shuttle was lifted gloriously into air by its booster rockets.

Lincoln in the Bardo: A Novel

George Saunders

Recommended by Robert Fletcher

A communal cacophony of voices—some documented witnesses, other grotesque fictions—all expressing human longing, mourning, and melancholy, circulate around the story of Lincoln's grief at the death of his young son Willie in 1862. Hilarious, shocking, and moving by turns.

MaddAddam trilogy + The Handmaid's Tale

Margaret Atwood

Recommended by Chuck Bauerlein

Coming soon to a living room TV in your own home are two highly anticipated television series based on four remarkably prescient dystopian novels by Canada's most celebrated author: *Oryx and Crake*, *The Year of the Flood*, and *MaddAddam*, plus *The Handmaid's Tale*. Critics tend to call them "science fiction," but Atwood herself prefers to think of them as "speculative fiction." Under our current political climate of a growing patriarchal, conservative autocracy, Atwood's speculations in these gripping page-turners have become too relevant for comfort. Read all four before you see them on HBO and Hulu.

Mama Day

Gloria Naylor

Recommended by Jeff Sommers

One of my favorite novels of the 1990s. Naylor died last September, and I plan to reread the book this summer. It's magical! On the island of Willow Springs, off the Georgia coast, the powers of healer Mama Day are tested by her great niece, Cocoa, a stubbornly emancipated woman endangered by the island's darker forces. A powerful generational saga at once tender and suspenseful, overflowing with magic and common sense.

The Man Who Quit Money

Mark Sundeen

Recommended by Cheryl Wanko

Trying to start your life but not sure you want to join the current soul-sucking system? Hitting your midlife crisis and too scared to make a big change? In either case, you might be helped, at least in your imagination, by reading about radical departures such as that of Daniel Suelo, who grew up fundamentalist, became disillusioned, and then began questioning everything, such as cultures' relationships with exchange and currency. Following the leaders and teachings of all of the world's great religions, he tries to detach himself from money—and inspires us in the process.

My Brother, My Brother and Me

Justin, Travis, & Griffin McElroy

Recommended by Cheryl Wanko

People turn to this "faculty picks" list for insightful, provocative, and profound intellectual experiences. This podcast is none of these. I listen to it when I can't take the gloom of media and politics anymore—when even "Wait Wait...Don't Tell Me!" is too serious. The McElroy Brothers give advice on Yahoo! Answers ("Can I take my parakeet in the shower with me?"), as well as brainstorm on important topics like what to name a drive-through shrimp scampi restaurant. Ear-to-ear silliness.

Neurotribes: The Legacy of Autism and the Future of Neurodiversity

Steve Silberman

Recommended by Rodney Mader

This trade book describes the history of the definition of "autism" in the 19th century, its "increase" in the 20th-21st centuries, and the centrality of neurodiverse people to contemporary culture in such fields as science fiction and computer science. Silberman is a sensitive, engaging writer who mixes case studies with historical information and highlights the voices of autistic people themselves.

Northern Borders

Howard Frank Mosher

Recommended by Jeff Sommers

One of my favorite novels of the 1990s. Mosher died this year, and I plan to reread the book this summer. It's magical! An elegiac novel of life in northern Vermont's Kingdom County, as told by a man remembering his boyhood. In 1948, six-year-old Austen Kittredge III leaves his widowed father to live with his paternal grandparents on their farm in the township of Lost Nation. Escapades at the county fair, doings at the annual family reunion and Shakespeare performance, and conflicts at the one-room schoolhouse are all recounted lovingly in this enchanting coming-of-age story filled with luminous memories and the deepest of childhood secrets, as a boy is molded into a man.

Ongoingness: The End of a Diary

Sarah Manguso

Recommended by Kristine Ervin

Written in short vignettes, this memoir explores the author's need for permanence and her fear of forgetting, as she details her compulsive daily diary writing over the course of 25 years. This book is like the companion guide to that diary, where the vignettes offer commentary on the act of writing in the diary, as opposed to offering the diary itself. A lovely little book that contributes to the debates around the essay and memoir forms.

Originals: How Non-Conformists Move the World

Adam Grant

Recommended by Timothy Ray

To no surprise, Adam Grant's book celebrates non-conformity and how non-conformity manifests itself in both originality and rebellion (which ultimately leads to originality). Grant explores some interesting ideas about non-conformity, including the usefulness of procrastination and the strong role that birth order plays in non-conformity (older kids are reinforcers of the status quo, while younger kids tend to be more rebellious and more prone to risk-taking). A fascinating book that is well researched (footnotes on almost every page) and well written. A great book for self-motivation.

A Place to Stand

Jimmy Santiago Baca

Recommended by Vicki Tischio

The Plague of Doves

Louise Erdrich

Recommended by Carla Verderame

The second in a loose trilogy, this Pulitzer finalist investigates a long unsolved murder of a farm family in North Dakota. This novel falls between *The Round House* and *La Rose* if you are interested in reading all three, but they do stand alone.

The Plot Against America

Philip Roth

Recommended by Rodney Mader

Roth's 2004 alternative history imagines that Charles Lindbergh won the 1940 election and enabled a creeping, populist, Nazi agenda to begin an American pogrom. Told from the perspective of 11-year-old Philip Roth from his Jewish neighborhood in Newark, it's alternately charming and chilling. This is not escapist reading, but surprisingly relevant.

Regeneration trilogy

Pat Barker

Recommended by Kristin Kondrlik

Barker's trilogy (*Regeneration*, *The Eye in the Door*, and *The Ghost Road*) details the experiences of a group of British soldiers and physicians touched by mental illness during World War I, beginning in a Scottish mental hospital that treated "shell-shocked" soldiers and ending on the battlefields of France in 1918. Barker's books present a striking meditation on war, medicine, masculinity, sexuality, and mental health that introduce the reader to key figures of the period, including physician W.H.R. Rivers (a pioneer of dream interpretation) and conscripted poets Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen. Next year is the 100th anniversary of the World War I armistice and the Spanish flu epidemic, historical events that shaped world history—particularly attitudes to mental and physical treatment of soldiers—but which often receive less attention than other international conflicts. Barker's series opens up key angles on this conflict, particularly questioning the role of medicine and physicians in war: should physicians heal soldiers, if they know that it will place these same soldiers back in battles that will claim their lives?

The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention

David F. Noble

Recommended by Timothy Ray

In a variety of instances ranging from early astronomy to space exploration, Noble documents how frequently scientists/astronomers/explorers resort to religious explanations and convictions of faith for things that might also be explained more in terms of scientism and skepticism. Noble particularly notes instances of how astronauts have been moved so much by the experience as to resort to religious explanations of the situation when that typically would not be a scientific conclusion from the experience. Noble seems to be teasing out that line of what constitutes religious/spiritual/skeptical/scientific viewpoints of technology. A good read in spite of its age.

The Rhetoric of Hindu India: Language and Urban Nationalism

Manisha Basu

Recommended by Ayan Gangopadhyay

This book makes an attempt to assess and map the rise of the hardcore right-wing nationalism in India in the form known as “Hindutva.” It argues that this ascension to its (political) power today (in the form of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi as the face of it) is essentially a linguistic effect of an urban metropolitan ethos. It dissects the writings of some of the chief ideologues of Hindutva to show how this language environment costumes and makes this range of aspirations not only visible but also articulable. A must read for anyone interested in engaging with the rise of identitarianism from a local to a more global level of dispensation.

Rise: The Complete Newsflesh Collection

Mira Grant

Recommended by Sarah Paylor

Rise contains all of Grant’s short fiction that is set in her Newsflesh world. Her novels *Feed*, *Blackout*, and *Deadline* take place in this world, where, in the aftermath of the zombie apocalypse, society has adapted to deal with the constant threat of zombies. If you have ever wondered what would happen if zombies attacked the San Diego Comic Con, or how Australians—who are used an environment full of deadly creatures—coped with the zombie apocalypse, you should pick up *Rise*. (First, you might want to read the trilogy, though. Otherwise, *Rise* will be full of spoilers, as well as zombie kangaroos.)

The Romance of a Shop

Amy Levy

Recommended by Robert Fletcher

For my annual non-canonical Victorian novel suggestion, I can recommend Amy Levy’s early New-Woman novel *The Romance of a Shop*, in which a set of sisters opens a photography studio after their father dies and they lose their income. Levy was an Anglo-Jewish novelist and poet who wrote marvelous dramatic monologues and keenly analytical novels about the divisions and hypocrisies of late-19th-century English society. Her work is sometimes characterized

by a sense of despair over the odds of succeeding in such a world, but this novella is buoyed by optimism about the new opportunities for women at the time.

The Rosie Project

Graeme Simpson

Recommended by Michelle Blake

I like the story behind this book as much as I like the book itself: *The Rosie Project* is the debut novel of fifty-year-old consultant who came up with the idea for it with his wife and daughter, and who worked on it in a novel-writing class at RMIT University. The book focuses on Don Tillman, a scientist on the autism spectrum, as he analyzes his own thoughts and feelings as he proceeds with The Rosie Project, his plan to find a wife. As you might guess, Rosie is *not* the kind of woman he was planning on falling for. A rom-com of a book, it is a bit predictable and oversimplified, but if you don’t mind that, it is also light, touching, funny, and fun—a good beach read!

Seinfeldia

Jennifer Keishin Armstrong

Recommended by Jordan Scholar

So many modern pop culture references came from *Seinfeld* that we often lose track of them all. However, *Seinfeldia* comments on the impact this show has had (and continues to have) on popular culture. If you ever watched the series, reading the book will definitely remind you of all the goodness (and, at times dis-ease) of the show. If you need some summer levity, *Seinfeldia* is definitely the festivity for the rest of us.

Silver on the Road

Laura Jane Gilman

Recommended by Ashley Patriarca

The Western genre seems to be experiencing a resurgence of sorts, albeit reimagined through the lens of science fiction and fantasy. In *Silver on the Road*, Gilman weaves magic, the Devil, folklore, and a coming-of-age story into a gorgeous, dust-blasted whole.

Snow White

Matt Phelan

Recommended by Jordan Schugar

If you've not had a chance to experience a graphic novel, then *Snow White* is an excellent place to start. In his graphic novel, Phelan revisits and revises the classic fairy tale by setting it in New York City in the '20s and '30s. Phelan's art is magnificent, and as we move towards more multi-modal interpretations of text, the juxtaposition of words and images will not only challenge what you know about reading, but what you know about Snow White, too.

Still Processing

Wesley Morris and Jenna Wortham

Recommended by Andrew Sargent

If you spend any time thinking about the racial politics of pop culture, this podcast is for you. Hosted by two *New York Times* culture writers—Wesley Morris and Jenna Wortham—*Still Processing* offers a stimulating weekly conversation on a wide range of cultural topics. Recent episodes have probed *Get Out*, Peak Black TV, the *S-Town* podcast, *Moonlight*'s Oscar victory, Kendrick Lamar's new album, and the fate of Obama's legacy in the Trump era. The funky music and charming banter—Morris and Wortham are pals in real life—lend each episode an entertaining kick.

This Is Where You Belong: The Art and Science of Loving the Place You Live

Melody Warnick

Recommended by Ashley Patriarca

Warnick and her family have moved a lot, thanks to her husband's academic career. (Full disclosure: One of those moves was to Virginia Tech, where her husband Quinn was a member of my dissertation committee.) With each move, Warnick found it increasingly difficult to connect to a new house in a new town. This sparked a desire to understand what exactly makes a place feel like home. *This Is Where You Belong* is Warnick's exploration of what it means to connect with a place that you might not have chosen, or that just doesn't resonate with you. It's perfect reading for anyone who moves a lot, or who is getting ready to move.

Track Changes: A Literary History of Word Processing

Matthew Kirshenbaum

Recommended by Eleanor Shevlin

Engaging, entertaining, and erudite, Kirshenbaum's literary history of word processing details the experiences that writers have had with word processors from those who were early adopters (pre-1981) to those who hesitated or resisted. Stephen King, Amy Tan, Margaret Atwood, Jacques Derrida, and William F. Buckley are just a few of the writers whose perceptions of creativity and computers Kirshenbaum's extensive archival work and interviews uncover. While offering individual perspectives, his work simultaneously considers the ways in which writing is always tied to tools and media, the changes to memory and the historical record that word processing has effected, and shifts in conceptions of writing and creativity engendered by computers.

The Underground Railroad

Colson Whitehead

Recommended by Hannah Ashley & John Ward

Ashley: What is amazing about this novel (or really anything by Whitehead) is that the magical realistic premise (a real train built underground to assist enslaved people in escaping) does not lessen the impact of the brutality of this story and history. Instead, for me, it heightened how near-impossible, how unlikely and heroic escape and rebellion and remaining human under the conditions of slavery were. A book for our times if there ever was one.

Ward: An imaginative, beautifully written, and thoroughly unsettling novelistic treatment of slavery and racism in America. It is, to me, interesting evidence of Whitehead's diligence and breadth of vision that in his Acknowledgments he thanks Franklyn Delano Roosevelt for initiating the Federal Writers' Project (which he says furnished him with much of the material that informs the novel) and David Bowie, who is apparently a looming inspirational presence behind most of Whitehead's work.

Uprooted

Naomi Novik

Recommended by Sarah Paylor

This was a very enjoyable fantasy novel—one of the best I've read this year. I liked the world and the magic system, found the plot intriguing, and enjoyed spending time with the main characters. I was most put out by the lack of a sequel.

Walden, a Game (waldengame.com)

Tracy Fullerton and USC Game Innovation Lab

Recommended by Robert Fletcher

I've downloaded this but haven't had a chance to play it yet; however, I've read and heard good things about it. As you might expect, you play as Thoreau in a simulation of his year in the woods. Also not surprisingly, the developers emphasize that "the game offers more opportunities for reflective play than strategic challenge." Tracy Fullerton has been a leader in experimental game design for a dozen years or so.

When Books Went To War: The Stories That Helped Us Win World War II

Molly Gupstill Manning

Recommended by Didi Johnson

Manning's non-fiction account of librarians' and publishers' efforts to provide reading material for soldiers during World War II looks not only at the creation and reception of Armed Services Editions but also at earlier projects to supply books for training camps. A highly readable addition to social and book history, as well as a survey of popular fiction of the era.

Why be Happy When You Could be Normal?

Jeanette Winterson

Recommended by Mary Buckelew

This memoir was highly recommended by a WCU graduate student, so I immersed myself in Winterson's memoir. Her life story and lyrical prose are immediately compelling. The memoir unfolds in the UK in the 1960s. While the reader comes away with a vivid sense of that time and place, it is Winterson's harrowing and remarkable roller coaster ride of a life and her words

that remain. Adopted by a fanatically religious family, as she grows up the young Jeanette is forbidden to read anything but the *Bible*. As soon as she is able, Winterson seeks solace in the local library. Throughout her memoir, she weaves in poetry and prose from the authors who became part of her salvation. Midway through, the teenaged Jeanette divulges to her mother that she has found someone who makes her happy. Winterson's mother yells after the fleeing Jeanette, "Why be happy when you could be normal?" The irony is not lost as the reader comes to know Jeanette's mother and silent father throughout the memoir. Winterson shares her journey without whining or blaming, but she does not exonerate anyone either. Read this memoir for the story, the language, and for your own edification.

The Year of the Runaways

Sunjeev Sahota

Recommended by Eleanor Shevlin

Timely in topic, Sahota's novel intertwines the stories of three young Indian men who come illegally to England in search of work and a better life and that of a young British Sikh woman whose family is well established in the U.K. While the male characters' backstories in India are recounted, the bulk of the story is set in Sheffield. Its pages, alternating structurally between short sections and longer novella portions, address the daily nitty-gritty of their lives, the hardships they face, the indignities they endure, and the human heartache and resilience they display. At the same time, Sahota's novel is not without hope.

Recommendations compiled by Cheryl Wanko

Page design by Ashley Patriarca

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