



## Binge & Book List

# The Pandemic Edition, Summer 2020

Or, Stay Home and Read  
(watching and listening also permitted)

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

### *A Gentleman in Moscow*

**Amor Towles**

*Recommended by Richard Scholl*

This is a uniquely brilliant novel about a Russian count who is under house arrest in a hotel by the Nazis during WW II. It is a story that effectively demonstrates how hope and kindness ultimately defeat pettiness and evil.

### *Art of Solitude, the*

**Stephen Batchelor**

*Recommended by Stacy Esch*

I was inspired to read this by Krista Tippet's conversation with Stephen Batchelor in her ON BEING podcast, which I also recommend!

### *Babylon Berlin*

**Netflix**

*Recommended by Eleanor Shevlin*

A neo-noir piece set in 1929 Weimer Germany. I have only watched two episodes, but it is on my summer list – quite good. In German with subtitles.

### *Beekeeper's Apprentice, the*

**Laurie R. King**

*Recommended by Cheryl Wanko*

1st in the Mary Russell murder mystery series (15+ books). Two weeks ago I finished the last in this series and was sad ... but just learned that one more is coming out this summer – yay! They have been my go-to comfort-read over the past year. Set in the early 20th century, this series follows the intelligent, talented, and rump-kicking Mary Russell who teams up with an aging Sherlock Holmes for professional and personal adventures around the globe. And it's darn well-written.

### *Bordertown*

**Netflix**

*Recommended by Eleanor Shevlin*

A Finnish detective series, dubbed in English, featuring a brilliant detective who moves his family to a border town with Russia after his wife recovers from cancer. The goal is a quieter life with more family time, but the border area is a hotbed for criminal activity.

### *Broken Earth trilogy*

**N.K. Jemisin**

*Recommended by Hannah Ashley*

Jemisin is the only author to have won the Hugo Award for best science fiction novel three years in a row. They are about racism, capitalism, climate change, technology, humanity and you can't put them down.

### *Chief Inspector Gamache book series*

**Penny, Louise**

*Recommended by BG Betz*

This murder mystery series starts with the novel Still Life and features a recurring cast of characters including Chief Inspector Armand Gamache and Inspector Jean-Guy Beauvoir. On the surface, these books are about solving murders taking place in and around Quebec, but the series is really a wonderful exploration of evolving and soulful characters, an antidote to our jaded times. Be on the lookout for Henri, the German Shepherd puppy with the big ears and bigger heart.

### *Consider This*

**Chuck Palahniuk**

*Recommended by Ilks Sancak-Marusa*

I've been a lifelong fan of Palahniuk's works and this recent memoir focuses on his own life events that have led him to being a prolific writer. He documents his own journey through writing and discovery. It's an authentic, honest text that promises to be engaging for any reader, especially if you are a fan of his works.

### *Cross and the Lynching Tree, the*

**James Cone**

*Recommended by Tim Dougherty*

For those of us interested in the history of Christianity and the history of white supremacy in the United States, this is required reading. Cone shows readers the obvious connections between lynching and Jesus's crucifixion, and explores the inability of white theologians throughout the 20th century to make those connections in their work. He then turns to Black artists and poets who've long made the connection and explored it deeply in their work. For the faithful among us, it will challenge us to walk our faith journey more deeply. For the

agnostic and atheist among us, it will reveal deep lessons about the raced complexity of U.S. Christianity and the reasons that Sunday morning continues to be the “most segregated hour of the week.” Once you’ve finished, you can pick up Ursula Ore’s 2019 *Lynching: Violence, Rhetoric, and American Identity* to understand the ways that lynching has been and continues to be woven into the fabric of U.S. Society.

### *Derry Girls*

**Netflix**

*Recommended by Maureen McVeigh-Trainor*

Set in 90s Northern Ireland, so obviously a comedy, since the Irish love humor amidst turmoil.

### *Educated*

**Tara Westover**

*Recommended by Moira Kuo*

*Educated* by Tara Westover is a fun and quick read. This memoir reflects on the author's childhood with little to no schooling as part of an LDS/survivalist/minimalist subculture and her gradual climb up the ivory tower at first BYU and then Oxford.

### *Girl, Woman, Other*

**Bernardine Evaristo**

*Recommended by Eleanor Shevlin*

Co-winner of the 2019 Booker Prize, this vibrant, multi-vocal novel features twelve characters whose intersecting lives and histories create a diverse tapestry of Black British life.

### *Great Alone, the*

**Kristin Hannah**

*Recommended by Richard Scholl and Michelle Blake*

**Richard says:** A family moves to Alaska to escape the perceived treachery of normal society, only to discover that the most potent threats lie in nature and within the family itself. It is also a story that combines naivete, love, hope, mental illness, adversity, violence, the stark yet magical beauty of nature and the indomitable strength of women.

**Michelle says:** The title made me not eager to read it, considering "alone" is the last thing I was looking for

in the pandemic, but themes of connection rang out for me more than those of alone-ness. The characterization was fantastic--highly recommend!

### *Here Come the Warm Jets*

*Taking Tiger Mountain (by Strategy)*

*Another Green World*

*Before and after Science*

### **Brian Eno**

*Recommended by Justin Nevin*

In the seventies Brian Eno began experimenting with mixing and simultaneously redistributing the music of his band Roxy Music during live performances. Over the course of the decade, his work with synthesizers moved the background of a traditional rock song to the foreground, making it float in what he called ambient music. He worked with and heavily influenced David Bowie and David Byrne, among others.

I recommend the following rock-based albums.

### *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention*

*Economy*

**Jenny Odell**

*Recommended by Stacy Esch*

An intriguing book review (don't remember where) led my husband and I to this book and he read it first. He liked it so much I was impatient for him to finish it so I could read it, too! Now it's my turn tell you – read this one!

### *Howl's Moving Castle*

**Diana Wynne Jones**

*Recommended by Sarah Paylor*

This is a delightful YA fantasy novel. There's also a movie, which is different but still good.

### *In the Dream House*

**Carmen Maria Machado**

*Recommended by Maureen McVeigh-Trainor and Erin Hurt*

**Maureen says:** The content, the form: which is better? They're both great. If you don't have time to read the book, definitely read her short story "The Husband Stitch."

**Erin says:** This memoir by Machado is about the arc of her psychologically abusive queer relationship. Machado examines her experiences through scholarship about psychological abuse, especially research about queer abusive relationships, but she also uses her writing to examine the genre of the memoir itself. Her memoir interrogates and dissects what happened, why it happened, but using a dream-like tone and second-person narrator that does make the reader feel as if they are peering through the looking glass.

***Inevitable: Understanding the 12 Technological Forces That Will Shape Our Future, the***

**Kevin Kelly**

*Recommended by Stacy Esch*

It seems like everything we read and feel about technology is so soaked in a dystopian wash these days. Yet we know we can't put Pandora back in her box, and even if we could, most of us like our gadgets too much to chuck them away. One remedy: Kevin Kelly's enthusiasm! If you need a burst of it.

***Inheritance Trilogy***

**N.K. Jemisin**

*Recommended by Tim Dougherty*

On the 10th anniversary of its first book, *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms*, this trilogy is a great place to start in encountering the brilliance of N.K. Jemisin, who won three straight Hugo Awards for Best novel from 2016-2018 for her *Broken Earth* series. If you like fantasy or speculative fiction that probes complicated questions about divinity, identity, and power, you will be enthralled by *The Inheritance Trilogy* (which you can purchase altogether now as one book with a bonus novella) and Yeine Darr, the protagonist. And after you're done, you may just want to jump right into her new one, *The City We Became*. That's my plan, at least.

***Inside the Hotel Rwanda: the Surprising True Story***  
**Edouard Kayihura, 2014**

*Recommended by Jordan Schugar*

This book describes the Rwandan Genocide Against the Tutsis from a civil servant who survived those horrendous 100 summer days in 1994 holed up in the Hotel des Mille Collines. While many people know the story of Rwanda from the movie *Hotel Rwanda*,

Kayihura gives us the real, non-Hollywood, true story of Paul Rusesabagina (played by Don Cheadle). It's also one of the few narratives about the Genocide written by a Rwandan author and survivor.

***Jane the Virgin***

**TV series**

*Recommended by Tim Dougherty*

If you like tight writing, you'll love this series, especially if you like the romance and the ridiculous put together in soap opera or telenovela. The character development is tremendous, the writing crisp, funny, and often profound. It is refreshingly "light" without ever being "saccharine." For those raised Catholic who also aspire to be writers, you'll find a special bond with Jane.

***Journal of the Plague Year (1722)***

**Daniel Defoe**

*Recommended by Eleanor Sheolin*

Written almost 300 years ago about a public health crisis that occurred over 350 years ago, its events and protective measures echo many aspects of today's COVID-19 reality: quarantine and social distancing ✓ quack cures ✓ door-stoop food deliveries ✓ heads of state, MIA / local officials on the ground, taking charge ✓ countless deaths and overflowing burial sites ✓

***Kanopy***

*Recommended by Rodney Mader*

This is a little worky, but FHG Library has a great film service called Kanopy, which has films of all types: documentaries, world cinema, some Criterion Collection, and The Great Courses. My pandemic lunchtime viewing has been a Great Courses "Intro to Botany" class. The 30-minute videos are basic, but quite informative, and it's easy to eat watching a video because you don't have to touch the keyboard.

***Kim's Convenience***

**Netflix**

*Recommended by Ilks Sancak-Marusa*

Centered on the Kim's, a Korean family who owns a convenience store in Canada, this series is humorous and just an easy viewing pleasure. The show

navigates family tensions, cultural differences, and life in general. Each episode is about 30 minutes.

### **Leaves of Grass**

**Walt Whitman**

*Recommended by Graham MacPhee*

Don't write off as a "classic". The poems are bursting with humanity, generosity, intellect, and understanding. Whitman's poetry is more urgent and timely than ever -- the "lost America of love" which we seem bent on erasing.

### **Leverage**

**Chris Downey & John Rogers**

*Recommended by Sarah Paylor*

This show features a team of modern-day Robin Hood-style thieves, who steal back from the rich & powerful. It's wonderfully episodic: while there is continuing character development through the seasons, it's very easy to just sit down with an episode or two. It's got humor and heart and the good guys always win. Well, the good thieves. There are five seasons, and a reboot is in the works.

### **Magnus Archives**

*Podcast at <http://rustyquill.com/the-magnus-archives/>*

*Recommended by Amy Anderson*

English major Kelsey Holm recommended this podcast to me in Fall 2019, and now I'm hooked. The podcast is constructed as a series of delightfully creepy short stories, but if you stick with it for a while, the stories start to come together into a larger -- and creepier -- tale.

### **Mandalorian**

**Disney Plus**

*Recommended by Sarah Paylor and Jordan Schugar*

**Sarah says:** A very good Star Wars story. I am eagerly awaiting the next season.

**Jordan says:** This is the way to keep the Star Wars Universe alive with The Mando and Baby Yoda and a whole host of other characters with great ethos. Follow the saga of 2019's greatest bounty hunter in his quest to balance the light and the dark.

### **My Brilliant Friend**

**HBO**

*Recommended by Eleanor Sheolin*

A television adaption of thus far the first two of Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan four novels. Set mainly in Naples it traces the friendship between two exceedingly bright and aware young women from their elementary years on against the backdrop of improvised neighborhood on the outskirts of Naples. In Italian with English subtitles.

### **Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics**

**Yochai Benkler, Robert Faris and Hal Roberts**

*Recommended by Andy Famiglietti*

It's a pretty remarkable book that uses network analysis and other quantitative techniques to document the rise of an alternative right-wing media sphere. Scary and topical stuff.

### **Nickel Boys, the**

**Colson Whitehead**

*Recommended by Michael Burns*

I recommend *The Nickel Boys* by Colson Whitehead, a wonderfully-researched and beautifully-crafted work of historical fiction (and the 2020 Pulitzer winner for fiction). Whitehead once again exposes the depths and brutality of white supremacy, while also showing that it can be, must be resisted and destroyed.

### **Nightingale, the**

**Kristin Hannah**

*Recommended by Richard Scholl*

This is a captivating, page-turning, heart-rending story about love, heroism, fear and death in Nazi-occupied France during WW II. I couldn't stop reading this remarkable novel.

### **On Beauty**

**Zadie Smith**

*Recommended by Bob Fletcher*

I love anything Smith writes but this was the first book of hers I read, and it's still my favorite. She

writes postcolonial novels with the richness of Victorian triple deckers.

### ***On Earth We Are Briefly Gorgeous***

**Ocean Vuong**

*Recommended by Eleanor Shevlin*

An achingly beautiful work whose innovative play with form coupled with its depth of experience, trauma, and heartache conveys with unsparing feeling what it means to be an immigrant in 21st-century America. It confronts head on poverty, racial and sexual identity, addiction, family, love and fear.

### ***Ordinary Girls***

**Jaquira Diaz**

*Recommended by Maureen McVeigh-Trainor*

CRW scheduled Jaquira Diaz to read this semester, and she will hopefully join us next semester. Diaz just won a Whiting Award for Nonfiction. Stolen from her website: "Reminiscent of Tara Westover's *Educated*, Kiese Laymon's *Heavy*, Mary Karr's *The Liars' Club*, and Terese Marie Mailhot's *Heart Berries*, Jaquira Díaz's memoir provides a vivid portrait of a life lived in (and beyond) the borders of Puerto Rico and its complicated history – and reads as electrically as a novel."

### ***Overstory, the***

**Richard Powers**

*Recommended by Cheryl Wanko, Rodney Mader, and Mary Buckelew.*

**Cheryl says:** Sweeping and beautiful. Lots of characters that you'll care about. Lots of hard lessons about how we're trashing the earth and each other. But always above, supporting and surrounding all, the abiding huge spirit of the trees.

**Rodney says:** At first I found the opening chapters a little annoying. I knew that there would be an attempt to unite the character-based vignettes, but I was doubtful Powers could pull it off. But pull it off he did, in a magnificent, sprawling story connecting people with the earth through their relationships to trees. It's not preachy at all, but it's hard not to be converted.

**Mary Buckelew says:** Chestnut, Mulberry, and Linden are just a sampling of the trees you will meet and come to know intimately in the novel, *The*

*Overstory*, by Richard Long. Almost as interesting as the trees are the people Long introduces along the way – people whose lives are intertwined with a tree or a multitude of trees. People who study trees, love trees, fight for trees. Each chapter is a short story of sorts. One can choose to read this book slowly without losing track. Sip like a fine wine (mulberry perhaps). While some dendrologists may take issue with Long's observations regarding trees and their lives, *The Overstory* is still a fascinating and informative read for anyone who has noticed that trees speak to them (or wishes they would). After reading this book, you may be inspired to rescue city trees (realizing just how lonely they can be) the way Harold and Maude did in the classic (1971) movie of the same name, *Harold and Maude*.

Also, appropriately, the copyright page, states that "The *Overstory* is printed on 100% recycled paper. The first paperback printing has saved 637 trees, 614, 962 gallons of water, 206,700 pounds of greenhouse emissions, 62, 925 pounds of solid waste." Totals quantified using the Eco-Calculator at <http://rollandinc.com/>

### ***Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life***

**Eric Klinenberg**

*Recommended by Joe Navitsky*

Adapting the well-known term "infrastructure" to the decayed social life of modern America, Klinenberg offers a path forward built on investment in and engagement with institutions both traditional (libraries) and radical (safe injection sites). In its attention to physical space and public design, the book advocates for the cooperative rebuilding of civic life through thoughtful design.

### ***Patternist Series***

**Octavia Butler**

*Recommended by Bob Fletcher*

I've enjoyed Butler's science fiction for a while, with my favorites being the *Xenogenesis* (Lilith's Brood) series; however, I had never read this series and I'm now in Book 3, *Clay's Ark*. As always, Butler blends past and present in an imagined future, immersing you in the world and characters she creates

## *Plot against America*

**HBO**

*Recommended by Eleanor Sheolin*

A six-part series brings Phillip Roth's novel by the same name to the screen. Imagining that Charles Lindbergh beat FDR for the presidency, it charts the subsequent rise of fascism through the eyes of an extended Jewish family in New Jersey. The first episode was somewhat slow, but it rapidly picks up.

## *Poetry Unbound (podcast)*

*Recommended by Amy Anderson*

In each short episode of this podcast, poet Padraig O Tuama reads and reflects on a thought-provoking poem. This podcast is insightful, hopeful, and filled with the joy of language.

## **READINESS**

**Mark Cox**

*Recommended by Jesse Waters*

I would like to recommend Mark Cox's Wonderful book of pros poems, READINESS. Not only is Mark and incredibly accessible poet, but the short, ethereal prose poems truly capture the idea of the lyric narrative, and have such wonderful humor and tenderness. Please do give it a read!

## *Russian Doll*

**TV series**

*Recommended by Margaret Ervin*

Starring Natasha Lyonne, this unique and dark comedy is written and produced by an all-woman team, Lyonne, Lesley Headland, and Amy Poehler. Lyonne plays a hard-drinking, drugging, smoking, genius who doesn't believe in anything or anyone and expects to die young. There is a by-the-way moment in episode two revealing that she is a video-game programmer with more intelligence in her pinky finger than the rest of her work team. This satisfying yet small detail is slipped into a corner of the episode, as if to say "If you don't get how smart she is..." yet the notion of the character's lightning quick intellect is more than fully earned throughout the series. Russian Doll passes the Bechdel test [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bechdel\\_test](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bechdel_test) ten times over, making me want to shout, "Take that, sexism." The complexity, depth, and nuance of Russian Doll makes completing the sentence "The

show is about..." into a Rorschach test. For me, the show is about addiction and mental illness. I got a sense, though, that the second season will morph into science fiction. The first season is a perfect whole. I don't think there is any way to maintain the delight of the characters' emergence over four hours. The Lyonne character is bound to dissolve into schtick. Lyonne, who sort of plays herself, a genius in real life, so maybe not. Still, I (almost) don't want to watch the next season when it comes out.

Disappointment in a great show getting ruined by running too long is my new wanting the movie to be more like the novel.

## *Saga*

**Brian K. Vaughan and Fiona Staples**

*Recommended by Lara Rutherford-Morrison*

This summer, I will be catching up on the latest volumes of Saga, an addictive sci-fi/fantasy comics series from Brian K. Vaughan and Fiona Staples. This ongoing story of two planets at war is complex, political, epic, and – most importantly – FUN. The art is gorgeous, and there is a character whose head is literally a television.

## *Schitt's Creek*

**(Netflix/PopTV)**

*Recommended by Ilks Sancak-Marusa*

Smart, multi-season series that combines life's unexpected challenges with larger-than-life characters. The once millionaire family falls destitute after a financial debacle and must now live in a roadside motel in the middle of nowhere. Lots of funny with wonderful character development. Each episode is about 30 minutes, and provides levity in abundance.

## *Seven Seconds*

**Netflix**

*Recommended by Eleanor Sheolin*

A 2018 crime drama focused on the aftermath of an African American 15-year-old's death who is riding his bike when hit by vehicle driven by a white police officer and the ensuing cover-up.

***She-Ra and the Princesses of Power*  
Netflix**

*Recommended by Sarah Paylor*

Created by Noelle Stevenson (*Lumberjanes*; *Nimona*)  
This is a wonderful YA animated series. It's funny and serious and has great characters, with some serious character development happening in the later seasons.

***Short Takes: Brief Encounters with Contemporary Nonfiction***

**Judith Kitchen (Editor)**

*Recommended by Stacy Esch*

Earlier this year I found this old-ish collection (2005) of creative nonfiction in a thrift store and just love how some of its super-short pieces have so much emotional punch! There's a great mix of recognizably great writers and others I've never heard of – which is like going to a party where you can hang with old friends and meet some new ones!

***Soccernomics***

**Kuper and Szymanski, 2018**

*Recommended by Jordan Schugar*

Are you curious about the economic impact hosting Olympics and World Cups has on local economies? How about knowing the best place to kick a penalty kick? Or the odds of winning a shootout if you go first (60%, by the way)? While dense with statistics, this book, written in a similar style to *Freakonomics*, is a great read about the culture of soccer and what makes winners winners and losers losers in the world's greatest sport.

***Stolen: Five Free Boys Kidnapped into Slavery and Their Astonishing Odyssey Home***

**Richard Bell**

*Recommended by Eleanor Shevlin*

Meticulously researched, this account of the Reverse Underground Railroad opens in Philadelphia with the luring away of five young African American boys and trafficking into slavery in the Deep South. This monograph traces their travails and fight to regain their freedom. (might read with Ta-Nehisi Coates's excellent novel, *The Water Dancer*).

***Sun is a Compass, the*  
Caroline Van Hemert**

*Recommended by Erin Hurt*

This travel memoir details the author's 9 month trip from the PNW up through Alaska and into the Arctic, while also deciding whether or not to pursue her profession as a biologist in academia. If you're longing to travel in the backcountry while stuck inside or in the city, this book contains beautiful passages of Alaska and Arctic wildlife and landscape, as well as the ups and downs of backcountry travels.

***Swordheart***

**T. Kingfisher**

*Recommended by Sarah Paylor*

A fantasy novel with humor and a lot of heart. Halla is a middle-aged widow who is plagued by troublesome relatives; Sarkis is an immortal warrior trapped in a sword. Hijinks and romance ensues.

***Syllabus: Notes from an Accidental Professor***

**Barry, Lynda**

*Recommended by Vicki Tischio*

It's kind of notebook, sketchbook, annotated narrated syllabus. Barry reflects on her assignments, illustrates her ideas in the margins and the middles of the pages. It is an entertaining and insightful peek into the process and practice of one teacher.

***This is Football***

**Amazon Prime (6 Episodes), 2019.**

*Recommended by Jordan Schugar*

This six-part series examines football/soccer from around the world through the documentary format. The episodes describe players' and fans' passion for the game and the sense of community and belonging associated with the world's greatest sport. Episodes cover the soccer in Iceland and Africa, woman's soccer, players with disabilities, and also the Argentinian phenom: Lionel Messi.

***Unruly Women: Gender and the Genres of Laughter*  
Rowe, Kathleen**

*Recommended by Vicki Tischio*

This book looks at women's comedic work on television and film, examining the how comedy plays

a role in providing more empowered images of women in the culture.

*Where the Crawdads Sing*

**Delia Owens**

*Recommended by Richard Scholl*

This is the story of a girl who grows up, mainly alone after being abandoned by most of her family and ultimately her father, in rural North Carolina. It is a story of loneliness, love and triumph over withering odds.

*Witcher, the*

**Netflix**

*Recommended by Sarah Paylor*

An enjoyable, slightly dark (but not as grim as *Game of Thrones*) fantasy show with a complicated storyline (there are three timelines, which are not clearly identified)

Recommendations compiled by Sarah Paylor

Page design by Sarah Paylor

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