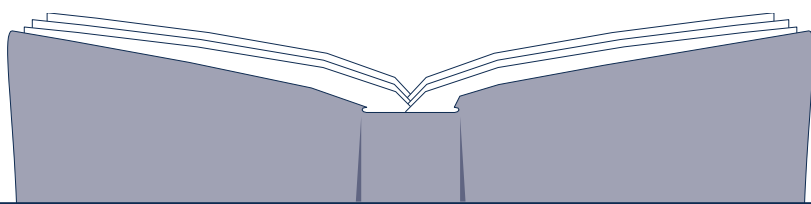


2018 Book Recommendation List



Rudolph Almsy, Faculty, recommends:
A Severed Head
by Iris Murdoch

A 1961 comic novel of what looks like love among spouses, lovers, and siblings, but it's really a matter of deception and self-deception where relationships never seem quite right, never quite in touch with reality, always full of surprises. As one character says, an enterprise of joyless and joyful madness.



Bryan Alukonis, PhD Student, recommends:
Necessary Trouble
by Sarah Jaffe

This is a book that feels, for lack of a better word, necessary. Beginning with the financial collapse of 2008, Jaffe chronicles the grassroots social and political movements that have taken form since, from a look at the Wisconsin Capitol occupation and its connection to Moral Mondays, to an honest assessment of the commonalities and conflicts that the Tea Party had with the Occupy Movement and, later, Ferguson. The beauty of this text is the optimism that Jaffe maintains, believing so earnestly in the power of grassroots change in a time of pessimism and general malaise.



Amy Alvarez, Lecturer, recommends:
Olio
by Tyehimba Jess

Visually stunning, Jess' poems explore African American lives during the Reconstruction. The poems and the book itself encourage play in the reading process; some pieces can be read both backward and forward and pages unfurl to reveal images embedded in the writing itself.



Brian Ballentine, Interim Chair, recommends:
Heat & Light
by Jennifer Haigh

Set in the fictional coal town of Bakerton, PA, Haigh's novel presents a cast of characters who represent the many competing viewpoints on hydraulic fracturing or "fracking" for oil and natural gas. Bakerton and its residents have already endured boom and bust cycles that have come with successful and then failed mines. For some of the locals, fracking is the town's salvation, and for others, it should be stopped at all costs.



Gwen Bergner, Faculty, recommends:
Frog Music
by Emma Donoghue

Set in the seedy underworld of San Francisco in the mid-19th century, Emma Donoghue's "Frog Music" (2014) solves the true crime story of the murder of a cross-dressing woman who helps her friend, a "girl on the town," rescue her son from the cruel conditions of an infant care "farm."



Jacob Block, MFA Student, recommends:
No Object
by Natalie Shapero

In this book, Shapero's first collection (her wonderful second collection, *Hard Child*, came out earlier this year), humor, profundity, and melancholy mingle like old friends at a baby shower. Shapero's unique, deadpan voice delivers wisdom like a punchline: "The god I answer to is different/from the god I started with—still, I wouldn't say I get/around." The perfect mix of strange, sad, funny, and beautiful that all good poetry is or strives to be.



Laura Brady, Faculty, recommends:
When Breath Becomes Air
by Paul Kalanithi

A neurosurgical resident at Stanford confronts terminal cancer. Grim? Surprisingly not. This memoir is quietly, eloquently hopeful. In clear and graceful prose, Kalanithi reflects on literature and medicine, family and friendship, life and death. A student recommended this book to me. I'm passing along her wise choice.



Mark Brazaitis, Faculty, recommends:
This Angel on My Chest
by Leslie Pietrzyk

Winner of the Drue Heinz Literature Prize from the University of Pittsburgh Press, *This Angel on My Chest's* sixteen stories are linked by a luminous rhapsody on a theme: the premature death of a husband. Moving, humane, and exquisitely written.

Nancy Caronia, Faculty, recommends:
The Hunger Saints
by Olivia Kate Cerrone

The moving tale of 12-year-old Ntoni, who has been forced to work in the Sicilian sulfur mines. This moving and well-crafted novella excavates the little-known history of child slavery practices in Sicily.

Siberian Exile: Blood, War, and a Granddaughter's Reckoning
by Julija Šukys

A stunning work, which weaves together past and present and asks its readers to examine, along with the author, notions of complicity, responsibility, and the ties that bind. Part memoir and elegiac essay, *Siberian Exile* confronts the past of her grandfather Anthony, who Šukys discovers is a war criminal in her research for another, earlier book, on his wife and her grandmother, Ona, who spent seventeen years in a Siberian labor camp.



Jordan Carter, MFA Student, recommends:
No Landscape Lasts Forever
by Amber Colleen Hart

Amber Colleen Hart's debut collection, *No Landscape Lasts Forever*, is made up of short stories all terse, most elegiac, all humming with want. The best stories in this collection are those about the mundane: a therapy session between a gay man and his alcoholic-in-recovery brother, the empty life of Cody Dolan, a kid trying to cope after his dad split, or the even emptier lives of two sisters picked up by CPS.



Ryan Claycomb, Faculty, recommends:
Station Eleven
by Emily St. John Mandel

While most post-apocalyptic stories focus on a bleak brutality inherent in humans, this 2014 National Book Award Finalist speaks of the power of art, culture, and community in expressing hope for the future of humanity.

Citizen: An American Lyric
by Claudia Rankine

A potent series of meditations—equal parts poetry, essay, and image—on what it means to be black in America today, under the constant threat of violence and disregard from the institutions purported to guarantee safety and dignity.



Patrick Conner, Professor Emeritus, recommends:
The Way it Was
by Matthew Wolfe

Matthew Wolfe took his PhD in WVU's Department of English with a dissertation concerning an important manuscript of Geoffrey Chaucer's work. A sometime teacher at Ohio University and Marshall University, he was the recipient of the 2005 West Virginia Artist Fellowship in memoir writing for an early draft of this book. "Somewhere between the Hollywood stereotypes of inbred, cannibal rapists and the television image of stupid, lazy hillbillies," he writes, "there are Appalachian people who are hardworking, intelligent, and beautiful. *The Way it Was* is the true story of a few of those folks." Through a series of seven, day-in-the-life stories spread out over five decades, this book illustrates the culture of southern West Virginia and chronicles how their unique way of life has all but died.



Lowell Duckert, Faculty, recommends:
A Tale for the Time Being
by Ruth Ozeki

Two women communicate across time and space through the "gyre memory" of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, offering a meditation on writing (storying) within catastrophe.



Anna Elfenbein, Faculty, recommends:
Taking Down the Moon
by Lisa Muir

By turns amusing, thought-provoking, touching, and inspiring, the stories in this collection by one of WVU English Department's PhD graduates repay reading and re-reading. From the odd-couple car poolers of "Vanilla Tuna," who find themselves too distant for comfort, to the widow of "What Remains," who discovers a truth her husband had concealed, the characters in *Taking Down the Moon* come to life on the page and live on in the imagination of the reader. These two stories and many others in this volume will leave the reader longing for more Muir.

Lara Farina, Faculty, recommends:
The Buried Giant
by Kazuo Ishiguro

Recent Nobel Prize winner Ishiguro turns toward the legendary past of King Arthur's reign for this timely meditation on memory, loss, and ethnic violence. The novel revisits medieval classics like Beowulf and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight but speaks to present-day crises of loyalty and justice.



Marilyn Francus, Faculty, recommends:
The Secret History of Wonder Woman
by Jill Lepore

An unexpected origin story of the most famous female superhero, involving the development of the lie detector, the fight to have access birth control, and a ménage à trois.



Ryan Kalis, MFA Student, recommends:
A Prayer for Owen Meany
by John Irving's

Although set in 1987, this story returns to two New Hampshire boys growing up in the 50s and 60s. Owen Meany believes he is "God's Instrument" despite his minuscule stature and high-pitched voice. The narrative is fanciful, delving into topics that range from religion to fate. It is a beautiful story, I think.



Aaron Rovan, PhD Student, recommends:
Panic in a Suitcase
by Yelena Akhriorskaya

It's a fun story, filled with entertaining characters, about a family of Russian immigrants who are forced by their young daughter to confront what it means to be American by confronting what it means to be Russian.



Hannah Rubenstein, MA Student, recommends:
The People of Paper
by Salvador Plascencia

A fun and thought-provoking read. It's a visually stunning piece of meta-fiction about a group of characters that become aware of the presence of the author, and begin to wage a war for their freedom. It's a wonderful discussion piece as well: there are ink splatters, writing in all directions, and some illustrations.



Katy Ryan, Faculty, recommends:
Brothers and Keepers
by John Wideman

A memoir of two brothers--one, an Ivy League graduate and accomplished writer; the other, sentenced to life for murder. How do you write this story? John and Robby Wideman composed a stunning meditation on time, in

and out of prison. Be sure to read the 2005 edition for updated information.



Mary Ann Samyn, Faculty, recommends:
The Sounds of Poetry
by Robert Pinsky

Written for poets and readers of poetry alike, former poet laureate Pinsky's *The Sounds of Poetry* will increase your knowledge and appreciation of all things prosodic. The book is technical and delightful. Plus, it's pocket-sized. You think you won't want to carry it around, but you will.



Timothy Sweet, Faculty, recommends:
A Constellation of Vital Phenomena
by Anthony Marra

In this remarkable novel, set during the Chechen wars (1994-2004), the matter is grim but the meditation on history is important, and a kind of hope is built into the structure of the sentences.



Glenn Taylor, Faculty, recommends:
Black Glass
by Karen Joy Fowler

This is a strong collection of short fictions first published in 1998 and recently re-issued with a preface by the author, in which she writes: "I am always aware that, beautiful as the world sometimes is, deeply as I sometimes feel that beauty, there is no denying or forgetting that I once lived somewhere so much better."



Natalie Updike, MFA Student, recommends:
Cloud Atlas
by David Mitchell

This 2004 novel is one of the best examples of voice and inter-textual form in all western literary history. Its six stories span from the nineteenth century South Pacific to a futuristic, Korean dystopia, recounting the possibilities of reincarnation and love.



Johanna Winant, Faculty, recommends:
A Pillow Book
by Suzanne Buffam

This is a slim book of...Poetry? Prose? Hilarious lists? All of the above—and more. The plot, in as much as there is one, is the nightly attempt by an insomniac to fall asleep after fighting with her husband, experiencing anxiety about her own derailed career, and explaining death to her young daughter. But it's also very funny, as the narrator puts together late-night lists, for example, of "Iffy Similes" and "Dubious Doctors" (Who, No, Zhivago, Moreau, Strangelove, Feelgood, to name a few of hers). Oh, and it's also a version of a similarly uncategorizable book written over a thousand years ago by a woman in the Imperial court of Heian Japan, Sei Shonagon.

PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN

Name _____ Email _____

Address _____

Occupation (optional) _____

Title and Author of Book Recommendation _____

Reasons for Recommending _____

University/College _____

Year of Graduation _____ Degree _____