



Summer reading season is approaching! If you're looking for titles to add to your TBR pile, the WVU English Department has some recommendations for 2024.

Fiction

Kacie Allen, MA student, recommends:

***Books of Blood vol. 1* by Clive Barker**

A classic horror anthology ranging in tone: witty, black humor (“The Yattering and Jack”); intense body horror (“Pig Blood Blues”); awesome neo-Lovecraftian (“The Midnight Meat Train” and “In the Hills, the Cities”). Outside of recognition due to *Hellraiser*, Barker remains an underappreciated horror icon. You can't go wrong with any of his short stories.

Katie Bonevento, PhD student, recommends:

***Poor Things* by Alasdair Gray**

Most people are probably aware of the movie *Poor Things* due to its success at the Oscars recently. If you liked it (or even if you didn't like it!) I highly recommend checking out the book it's based on! It's very different from the movie, and tells Bella Baxter's Frankenstein-esque story in a much more layered, nuanced way.

Laura Brady, Faculty, recommends:

***The Hero of This Book* by Elizabeth McCracken**

This is a book for anyone who has loved and celebrated and mourned a memorable parent, for anyone who is interested in the blurry line between fiction and memoir, for anyone who appreciates well-crafted and frequently funny writing.

Mark Brazaitis, Faculty and Director of the Creative Writing Program, recommends:

***The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon**

A murdered dog. An autistic teenage detective who's part Sherlock Holmes, part Stephen Hawking. Who killed Wellington? Christopher is on the case (when he isn't rhapsodizing about prime numbers and the expanding universe).

Cari Carpenter, Faculty, recommends:

***A Council of Dolls* by Mona Susan Power**

A superb, heart-wrenching novel by an American Indian tells a multi-generational story about three Dakotah girls through their dolls.

Brent Cronin, MFA student, recommends:

***The Shards* by Bret Easton Ellis**

Bret gets personal in this fictionalized memoir, which follows a closeted teen through his senior year at a prep school in 1981 Los Angeles. An alluring new student with a troubled past drives the plot, but I flew through this novel because of the clear and matter-of-fact prose about boredom, money, sex, violence, and music (ranging from Springsteen to DEVO). A T.V. series adaptation is in the works, so do your homework.

Lara Farina, Faculty, recommends:

***Temporary* by Hilary Leichter**

The first novel by the acclaimed author of *Terrace Story*, *Temporary* follows its protagonist through a bizarre series of impermanent jobs, including Shoe Arranger and Human Barnacle. A withering satire of the gig economy, corporate culture, and disposable labor, it's perfect reading for this year, sadly. But it's also really funny and weird and enjoyable.

David Foreman, Alumnus, recommends:

***Why I Killed My Best Friend* by Amanda Michalopoulou (translated by Karen Emmerich)**

Why I Killed My Best Friend is about protagonist Maria's relationship with her best friend Anna from early childhood to adulthood. The book follows Maria as a student, artist, and activist through the turmoil of post-dictatorship Greece, beginning in the 1970s when Maria relocates to her family's home in Athens after growing up in Africa.

Marilyn Francus, Faculty, recommends:

***The Netanyahus* by Joshua Cohen**

Cohen's novel is a rollicking academic satire -- very much "an account of a minor and ultimately even negligible episode in the history of a very famous family" -- as the subtitle suggests.

Jeremy C. Justus, PhD Alumnus, recommends:

***Sing, Unburied, Sing* by Jesmyn Ward**

A spiritual successor to Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, this novel presents a poignant look at institutionalized racism in America's industrialized prison system through the lens of a series of interconnected narrative perspectives. Ward's prose is fiery and provocative, enough to rip a hole in your skull and punch one in your heart.

Mary Linscheid, Alumnus, recommends:

***Lonesome Dove* by Larry McMurtry**

This novel is more than a Western, it's an American epic; rough, poignant, and sometimes ridiculous. I recommend this book because it is fuel for your creative writing, from the language and images to the retroactively-dynamic, complicatedly-simple characters.

Laura Leigh Morris, MFA Alumnus, recommends:
***Nothing to See Here* by Kevin Wilson**

This book had me riveted because it's so weird -- a woman agrees to nanny for a friend's step-children who spontaneously combust. It's as much fun as it is heartwarming.

Sarah Munroe, MFA Alumnus, recommends:
***God of River Mud* by Vic Sizemore**

A generational family saga told through alternating perspectives, and ultimately a queer love story, *God of River Mud* wades into the roiling waters of conservative evangelical faith, identity, sexuality, love, and belonging (plus rural West Virginia) with such tenderness and nuance that my brain, my heart, and how I understand others is genuinely different now. Heart-breaking and healing, the main protagonists, Berna and Jay, must fight through the muck of personal and cultural expectations, loss and sorrow, guilt and shame to come into who they truly are. As someone who grew up in a small, conservative Christian town, this is a book I wish I'd had much sooner, but you need not have a Christian or any religious background to appreciate the depth and growth of the characters, their struggles, and their relationships.

Renée Nicholson, Alumnus and WVU Humanities Center Director, recommends:
***Heading North* by Holly M. Wendt**

One of Holly's blurbs describes their book as “a tender hockey story,” which is exactly the right description. *Heading North* exposes ugly truths and history of a still too closed-minded sports culture, while also revealing how this culture could embrace new possibilities and a different future.

Heather O'Brien, Alumnus, recommends:
***The Dictionary of Lost Words* by Pip Williams**

A young Esme goes with her dad as he works on publishing the very first edition of the Oxford English Dictionary. She quickly realizes that words used by women and people of lower classes are missing. This book explores feminism in the late 1800s and early 1900s, along with loss, and most of all, whose words truly matter.

Jordan Pugh, Alumnus, recommends:
***The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath**

A novel paralleling the events of Sylvia's young life, through the lens of Esther Greenwood. Follows Esther's writing aspirations that are both thwarted and empowered by her mental illness.

Mary Ann Samyn, Faculty, recommends:
***Tom Lake* by Ann Patchett**

I'm guessing others will also recommend this book, which has justifiably received a lot of praise and which, especially in its final 75 pages or so, provides a master class in how to write a novel. Patchett is just so good at creating that magical mixture of inevitability and surprise. The novel's Northern Michigan setting doesn't always match up with what I know to be true about that beloved landscape, but nonetheless, I enjoyed reading about our little towns and rolling hills and lakes and orchards.

Sam Stebbins, MFA student, recommends:
***The Seas* by Samantha Hunt**

Our narrator is unreliable and may or may not be an actual mermaid. This novel is vivid, atmospheric, meandering, disorienting, grim, and magical.

Tim Sweet, Faculty, recommends:
***Erasure* by Percival Everett**

A funny, self-reflective novel featuring a narrator who, like Everett, writes postmodern fiction and doesn't sell many books. Read it and you'll see the irony of Everett getting a movie deal (the recently released *American Fiction*) for this particular novel.

Michael Vozniak, PhD Alumnus, recommends:
***Demon Copperhead* by Barbara Kingsolver**

One of the best depictions of life in Appalachia that I've encountered in a long time. *Demon Copperhead* is an entire semester's worth of an Appalachian Studies course disguised as an entertaining novel. A retelling of Charles Dickens's novel *David*

Copperfield reset in modern Appalachia, filled to the brim with humor, joy, tragedy, and triumph.

Jeff Yeager, Alumnus, recommends:
***To a God Unknown* by John Steinbeck**

As one of Steinbeck's earliest works, it is often passed over for more well-read titles like *Of Mice and Men*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and *East of Eden*. This novel follows Joseph Wayne, a man who seeks to dominate nature. The novel has a lot of themes ripe for good theoretical study, especially ecocriticism. It is a must read!

Nonfiction

Whit Arnold, MFA Alumnus, recommends:
***When We Cease to Understand the World* by Benjamin Labatut**

This powerful little book tells the stories of how several famous scientists from the 20th century came to their profound discoveries that changed our world. It's funny, dark, weird, and human; it fills in so much that is missing from our science and history textbooks.

Erin Brock Carlson, Faculty, recommends:
***Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle* by Emily Nagoski and Amelia Nagoski**

This book sounds a bit like a self-help text, but it's a little of that and a little of a synthesis of physiological and psychological studies about burnout. Sprinkled with anecdotes from the authors (who are sisters), I found some insight into why burnout seems so prevalent these days and some steps to preventing it and dealing with it once it's come on.

Sarah Beth Childers, Alumnus, recommends:
***Bestiary* by Lily Hoang**

It's a work of lyric nonfiction published by a press that focuses on poetry, and it has the focus on language and the fragmentation you might expect from such a book, and yet the narrative drive is powerful. It's a read-it-straight-through sort of book, exploring the

ways that grief remaps a person's life, exploring inheritances. There are fairy tales, terrible marriages, and Asian American women on TV.

Anna Elfenbein, Faculty, recommends:

***Path to Grace: Reimagining the Civil Rights Movement* by Ethel Morgan Smith**

Path to Grace: Reimagining the Civil Rights Movement, this year's recipient of the Eudora Welty Award, is a page-tuner that establishes an enduring and inspiring fact about America—that those fighting for social justice began even before the founding of the country by resisting enslavement. Like the eleven unsung “brave warriors” of the Movement whom she interviews, physicians, teachers, parents, volunteers, and writers like Gloria Naylor and Nicki Giovanni--*Path to Grace's* author Ethel Morgan Smith has committed herself to the struggle for human rights that continues to this day. The only African American to earn tenure in WVU's Department of English, Ethel emerges in the interchapters of *Path to Grace* where glimpses of her story as a first-generation college student, single parent, and new WVU faculty member remind us of the paths we ourselves have taken and of the roles we play in pursuing our research and writing and in teaching and mentoring students. Although Ethel has retired from WVU, she continues to be tireless in her attempts to make a difference. In *Path to Grace*, she has done so. It is a must-read!

Ola ElWassify, MFA Alumnus, recommends:

***Camera Lucida* by Roland Barthes**

In this book, Barthes not only explores photography as an emotional catharsis, but also sheds two different lights on what he called 'Stadium' and 'Punctum' ... details that captivate and expand beyond the frame, taking the viewer into the blind field. He starts by drawing lines between painting, cinema, and photography, and ends on grieving his mother and wounds as a point of departure in the arts.

Marilyn Francus, Faculty, recommends:

***People Love Dead Jews* by Dara Horn**

***Shy* by Mary Rodgers**

Horn's essays -- particularly on Anne Frank and discussing *The Merchant of Venice* with her son -- reveal the challenges of being a Jew in the contemporary world and facing anti-Semitism.

Shy is a delightful memoir by Mary Rodgers, the author of *Freaky Friday*, the composer of *Once Upon a Mattress*, and the daughter of Richard. If you are interested in 20th-century American musical theatre, this memoir has everyone in it -- Oscar Hammerstein, Lorenz Hart, Stephen Sondheim, Hal Prince, Leonard Bernstein, Arthur Laurents -- and Mary tells all.

Maggie Glover, MFA Alumnus, recommends:

***An Immense World: How Animal Senses Reveal the Hidden Realms Around Us* by Ed Yong**

A captivating exploration of the diverse sensory perceptions of animals, revealing that the human experience of the world through senses is just a fraction of a much larger reality. Yong delves into the intricacies of animal senses, from the peculiarities of vision and touch to the complexities of pain, offering a sensory smorgasbord enriched with insightful writing and discussions on scientific research and interviews.

Catherine Gouge, Faculty, recommends:

***Citizen 13660* by Mine Okubo**

Citizen 13660 is a graphic memoir by Mine Okubo detailing her experiences in multiple internment camps where people of Japanese descent were imprisoned in the United States during World War II. Originally published in 1946 by Columbia University Press when, as Okubo has said, "anything Japanese was still rat poison," her compelling illustrations and narrative document both the details of daily life in the camps as well as the remarkable injustices faced by those forced into them.

Rosemary Hathaway, Faculty, recommends:

***Making Our Future: Visionary Folklore and Everyday Culture in Appalachia* by Emily Hilliard**

In this entertaining, brilliant, and highly accessible book, Emily Hilliard--the inaugural West Virginia state folklorist--documents a wide range of folk traditions old and emergent that she encountered during her work for the West Virginia Humanities Council from 2015-2021. From Helvetia's Fastnacht celebrations to West Virginia slaw dogs to the expressive culture of the 2018 teachers' strike, Hilliard shows readers the

deep cultural meaning and impact of the everyday objects, traditions, and communities we so often take for granted.

Kelly Moffett, MA/MFA Alumnus, recommends:

***A Twenty Minute Silence Followed by Applause* by Shawn Wen**

Because who doesn't want a mime to speak and share mime secrets? Perhaps it could be described as a lyric, experimental biography of Marcel Marceau, but I've found it so special and unique that it has become the book that houses all of the four leaf clovers I found last summer. (I have 29 pressed in the pages, though some of them are five-leaf.)

Mary Ann Samyn, Faculty, recommends:

***The Sound of a Wild Snail Eating* by Elisabeth Tovaohs Bailey**

***Diary of a Tuscan Bookshop* by Alba Donati (trans. by Elena Pala)**

***Little Pieces of Hope* by Todd Doughty**

If you, like me, enjoy books that are a quick read and books that you can dip in and out of, then you will enjoy the charming and wise *The Sound of a Wild Snail Eating*; the many reading recommendations woven throughout the very entertaining *Diary of a Tuscan Bookshop*; and the pick-me-ups big and small that provide "happy-making" moments in *Little Pieces of Hope*. That last book, in particular, can be opened at any page for a discovery or a sweet reminder or the little nudge you just might need.