

Manlius Pebble Hill Faculty and Staff

The Bookie

Winter 2011

Susan Gullo (Administration)

The Imperfectionists, Tom Rachman.

A talented young author's incredible first novel. It recounts the lives of people working for an English-language newspaper headquartered in Rome. Rachman has a masterful grasp of language and stunning insight into what drives people to do what they do. His setting is a now lost era of journalism, but the characters he writes about have compellingly timeless motivations. His use of words -- whether to make you laugh or move you to tears -- is incomparable. If the reader is paying attention, he or she begins to sense that Rachman is weaving the seemingly separate stories of his various characters into an extraordinary tableau. He is one *fantastic* writer!

Sue Foster (Science)

South Light, Michael Parfit

One of the few walking the planet who can claim to have 'wintered over' in Antarctica, Michael Parfit, while on assignment for Smithsonian magazine under the auspices of the National Science Foundation, reminded me how rooted in and comforting we

find the rhythms of our daily lives. From the couch one can safely experience an Antarctic white out and simultaneously be moved to reflect upon the constitution of those scientists and support staff working and living in Antarctica.

Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature – Deficit Disorder, Richard Louv

The writer's contention that we need unstructured time in the unstructured outdoors is reminiscent of Theodore Roosevelt's call for citizens to experience nature. On another level, one must rethink the role of data in developing a causative relationship between two phenomena as much of Louv's defense is anecdotal rather than resulting from engineered studies. His thesis remains compelling. You will want to put the book down and take your kids outside!

At Manlius Pebble Hill we value a life of the mind and reading is part of this value. Book talk is frequent among faculty and staff and we hope this informal list for adults will be a peek into our conversations. Thanks to Jill Flack for technical help on this first edition. We welcome comments! lmorrison@mph.net, ed

Bill Preston (*English*)*Case Histories*, Kate Atkinson

Part of a series of novels featuring a private detective for a protagonist, this novel reads nothing like a standard “detective” story, though it is. Atkinson constructs a mystery embedded in intertwined tales of murder, and you only understand the book’s structure and purposes once you finish it. The writing astonished me as it alternated between humorous, humane, exciting and tragic. The book contains one of the saddest passages I’ve ever read. I intend to read more of this brilliant writer.

Invisible Man, Ralph Ellison

How had I not read this book before this summer? I think, largely, it was because I expected something completely different. The book defies all expectations, switching tone and focus with every misadventure by the unnamed, black protagonist, a man struggling to locate his identity in a country of people and institutions incapable of seeing his true self (if he even has a true self). A wild ride.

The Best of It, Kay Ryan

Ryan won a MacArthur “genius” grant this year for her poetry, and this career-long collection won a Pulitzer. Her (physically) slender poems reward you every time you read them; she’s clever and funny, and each poem strikes sparks from the flinty parts of your brain. Get this for the poets in your life.

The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes, Janet Malcolm

Plath has become a dreadful icon: the poet-suicide, the victim of a husband (also a poet) who misused her, a genius who died at the peak of her

powers. Malcolm, a deeply insightful writer, not only examines the facts and myths surrounding Plath’s final days but also the other books that have probed her story. Who gets to tell Plath’s tale, and what agendas are held by each teller? You’ll learn much about Plath, but you’ll also learn about the nature of nonfiction and the sad reality of biography as a genre in this oft-cited work.

Moneyball, Michael Lewis

Yeah, they made a movie out of it. Despite that, the book is an excellent evocation of a particular time and place in baseball history, when Billy Beane, running the Oakland A’s, threw out the common wisdom about baseball recruiting and sought statistics that would allow him to reverse his team’s fortunes. Beane’s successes changed baseball forever, even though not all of his conclusions were correct.

Inside Scientology, Janet Reitman

A student of religious literature and history, I’m a fan of anything having to do with homegrown religions and cults. As a consequence, I already knew a fair amount of what appears in Reitman’s book, but her journalistic detailings of the current internal machinations of the Church of Scientology was new to me, providing a vivid sense of how the organization functions. The book is not simply an attack; in addition to “apostates,” Reitman interviews people who love Scientology, even though they were driven out. She has written a measured, fair-minded account of a half-hidden history, a mercurial founder, and a present-day citadel of secrecy and rabbit-holes.

Nothing to Be Frightened Of, Julian Barnes

I haven't finished this yet, but I wanted to praise it anyway. Barnes is known for his novels; this is, instead, a work of nonfiction about death, starting with Barnes's reflections on the lives of those who preceded him in his family. It's a much funnier (and sunnier) book than I expected. Perhaps most striking is the very English voice; an American could never have written this book. Every sentence conveys a distinctly British view of the world. So far, marvelous.

Liza Morrison (Library)

Inside Out Coaching Joe Ehrmann

Recommended to me by our lacrosse coach Derek Wolfanger, I began this book having already enjoyed a book **about** the author who was on the cover of Parade magazine (that book is *A Season of Life* By Jeffrey Marx.) Ehrmann was an SU All American (Football), played for the NFL Baltimore Colts and has ties to MPH (he spent a post grad year at the Manlius Military academy in the 1970s). What most intrigued me was his relationship with his life-long mentor, the former SU varsity lacrosse legend Roy Simmons. Ehrmann's senior year at SU, after 4 successful seasons with football coach Schwartzwalder, he decided to go out for lacrosse! The book is a deeply critical look at contemporary sports culture and of the narrow and often damaging ways we define masculinity. Although he focuses on the role coaches play in the lives of boys and girls, his larger message about the work role models and mentors must do personally in order to truly mentor, is for anyone who considers themselves a teacher.

The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society, Mary Ann Shaffer and Annie Barrows

Told in letter format, this novel pieces together a community of folks from the Channel Islands during World War II. It is told in an inimitable British voice which at times is laugh out loud funny and at turns chillingly realistic, as it details war time England. As you follow the characters, including a London journalist who discovers the eccentric characters who endured the occupation in Guernsey, you can't believe the story is made up. The characters stay with you long after this short read ends, and the style of the novel may cause you to take up the sadly near extinct form of communication, letter writing

Saving Miss Oliver's Stephen Davenport

Jim Eagen recommended this and what a timely novel it is! The book isn't perhaps the best writing – it doesn't "flow" really but the subject is compelling if you are involved in independent school education. The author is a very careful observer of independent school culture and readers will enjoy that. The novel explores the chaos that ensues for one full school year after a beloved long time Headmistress leaves and a new, younger Headmaster is put in place by the Board. Issues ranging from "grad ads" and capital campaigns and enrollment decisions will resonate with MPH readers. You may find yourself asking if all independent schools are alike? This book at least argues that an iconoclastic head, extreme loyalty to a school's ethos, and the politics of running a school in the 21st century are common themes in independent school education.

Robopocalypse Daniel H. Wilson

This new novel by a young author describes a future world when our technology has become so intelligent it appears to have developed “a mind of its own” The story is told in flashback and from the point of view of diverse characters including a hacker, a Japanese inventor, a child who has been modified to be part robot, a congresswoman, a soldier, and a Native American. If you’ve ever wondered about the artificial intelligence that plays certain songs on your iPod’s random shuffle, or worried about a US military drone’s computer being hacked, this book is for you. War has been declared between technology and humans and you will never look at your GPS the same again.

Manlius Pebble Hill School is an independent, nonsectarian, coeducational, college preparatory school in Syracuse, New York enrolling more than 500 students in Prekindergarten through Twelfth Grade. Visit online at www.mph.net