THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
HONORS COLLEGE
INFORMAL READING GROUPS
SPRING 2017 SEMESTER
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To sign up for a group, visit [https://goo.gl/yxfq0E](https://goo.gl/yxfq0E) or scan the QR code.

**All books will be distributed at the first meeting during the week of Jan 30-Feb 3.**

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Frequently Asked Questions

So you’ve looked through the Informal Reading Group Spring 2017 catalog and decided which group(s) you want to join, but you still have some questions:

How do I sign up for a group?
Please visit https://goo.gl/yxfq0E or scan the QR code on page 2 to access the online sign-up form. Everybody from OU (students, faculty, staff) is welcome to sign up. Participants will be limited to three groups each.

When/how do I pick up my book?
Books will be distributed at the first meeting. **Groups start the third week of classes (Jan 30-Feb 3).** Meeting days/times can be found in this catalog. If you are unable to attend the first meeting, but would still like to participate in future meetings, please notify the group’s moderator.

I signed up for a reading group, but my scheduled changed, and I can no longer attend the group. What do I do?
That’s fine! We understand that academics come first. To cancel your order, email honorsreading@ou.edu and let us know that you will not be able to attend your group meetings. Please give us your name, student ID number, and the names of the group(s) you will no longer be able to attend.

So this really is free, huh?
Sure is! The only thing we ask from you is that you make a good-faith effort to attend as many meetings as possible, with the understanding that you may have to miss one or two. If you have to miss a meeting, please notify your moderator.

About the Program

Each semester, the Honors College sponsors the Reading Groups program. The groups, composed of ten to fifteen participants and a moderator from Honors College faculty, staff, or student body, meet one hour per week to discuss about fifty pages of reading from specific books. The books cover a wide range of topics, and most have been recommended by Honors College students. This is a great chance to meet other people at the University of Oklahoma with similar interests.

As one of the most popular, rewarding, and innovative programs offered by the Honors College, the Informal Reading Groups program has its origins in the political science department, where over a decade ago, students and faculty began to meet to discuss a single book over the course of a semester. Beginning in 2009, the groups were organized and expanded by the Honors College and were open to all Honors College students. Generous donations from supporters of the Honors College have allowed the program to grow to forty groups during the fall 2015 semester. Starting in 2016, for the first time, the program includes the entire OU family, not just Honors College students.

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Aidan Young

Informal Reading Groups Spring 2017
I remember anticipating the reading group featuring Other Colors and commenting to a friend that I did not expect to enjoy myself. This was because of nothing more than the fact that I had “no interest in Turkey and no interest in literature.” I soon found that I was completely in the wrong. As I engaged in the book as well as dialogue with a professor and with other students, especially the ones who had visited Turkey, I found myself thrilled and excited to learn more about Orhan Pamuk, Istanbul, the Ottoman Empire, and Turkey.

And then I understood what might be the most important lesson I’ve ever received: I am interested in both Turkey and literature. This is something that I would have never anticipated for I have no personal connection or natural interest in either.

The implications of this discovery were astounding, for my lack of interest in Turkey was actually a presumed lack of interest, and it only took one book to prove otherwise.

But if this was true of Turkey and literature, what wouldn’t I find fascinating if I took the time to study? Suddenly, everything in the world was interesting. I was overwhelmed, but in a very positive way.

When I started the Informal Reading Groups this semester, I had to be very disciplined to finish the fifty pages required for both books each week.

Since my epiphany, if it can so be called, I have required myself to read fifty pages of any book every day. At first, this seemed like a chore, for my days were full already with school and clubs. But I pushed myself, and every day it seems less and less like a chore. I’m feeling now the daily desire to read, the feeling that I want to read, something I have never felt before.

You’ll be amazed to hear that I wake up about ninety minutes earlier now just so I can start the day right - with a book. By the time you read this I will have finished three books in as many weeks - all fiction classics.

I want to emphasize that the books we read and the discussions we had among the students were great... and I left feeling energized about reading. My definition of education has drastically morphed, and I now challenge myself to pursue lifelong learning.

“I’m feeling now the daily desire to read, the feeling that I want to read, something I have never felt before.”

— Jordan Rogers

Jordan Rogers

engineering major and Honors College alumnus
Free for All OU Students

No fees or tuition, just free books provided by the University of Oklahoma Honors College

No Grades

The only commitment you make is a good-faith effort to complete the reading and attend group meetings as often as possible

Community

The Informal Reading Groups are a great opportunity to get to know your fellow classmates and discuss topics of mutual interest
**Why Architecture Matters**

by Paul Goldberger

The French writer Alain de Botton has called this small book “succinct, lyrical and heartfelt – a book that celebrates the best works of architecture and points the way to being able to build more of it in the world today. There are so many guides to the world of art, so few to the world of architecture. This is among the very best.” It is not a work of architectural history, or a guide to architectural styles, or an architectural dictionary, though it contains elements of all three. Architecture critic for *The New Yorker* magazine, the author raises our awareness of fundamental things like proportion, scale, space, texture, materials, shapes, light, and memory.

**Meeting Time**

T 3:00-3:50

**Location**

DLBH 182

for 6 weeks

**Moderator(s):**

Prof. David Ray

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**The United States of Paranoia**

by Jesse Walker

In an influential 1964 essay titled “The Paranoid Style in American Politics,” historian Richard Hofstadter echoed the conventional wisdom of the time, claiming that the conspiratorial thinking which lurked on the fringes of American politics was “the preferred style only of minority movements.” In his book *The United States of Paranoia*, Reason magazine books editor Jesse Walker insists, contra Hofstadter, that “the Paranoid Style is American politics.”

People like to look for conspiracies everywhere; they make explaining complex, frightening reality simpler, and obsessing about them can even be comforting. Walker recounts the “greatest hits” of conspiracy theories in American history from the colonial era to the post-9/11 War on Terror to show how they reflect the anxieties and experiences of the people who believe in them. With tales of Mormon conspiracies, the Salem witch trials, the Illuminati, political assassinations, race riots, Satanists, the 1980s rash of bogus claims of child molestation and many more, Walker proves that Hofstadter and others have seriously underestimated how afraid Americans have always been – and how those in power have been able to exploit those fears for their own benefit. Now in an age of Truthers, Vaxxers, and a man who rode the Birther movement all the way to the White House, Walker’s book has never been more relevant.

**Meeting Time**

M 12:30-1:20

**Location**

CCD1 317

for 5 weeks

**Moderator(s):**

Will O’Donnell
Capital in the Twenty-First Century by Thomas Piketty

How will Europe and the United States manage the changing wealth and income inequality that has emerged as an integral part of capitalism.

*Capital in the Twenty-First Century* offers a unique view of the complexities of modern day capital investment and rate of return on capital. The London School of Economic’s Centennial professor, Thomas Piketty, argues that the rate of capital return in developing countries is significantly higher than the economic growth rate, resulting in an increase in income inequality worldwide. In the past, capital investment has served the needs of the people, but today’s return on investment are frequently hoarded by individuals in the top 1%.

Hailed as “the most important economics book of the decade,” Piketty’s *Capital* showcases how capitalism is failing in developed countries while widening the gap between the rich and poor, threatening the future of the American Dream. Our economy requires investment to grow, but when the gains no longer return to the public, is there truly any gain? Living in a world of uncertainties, Piketty “is a man for the times.”

Through comprehensive analysis of data spanning 250 years, Piketty paints a clear picture of the problems of modern day capitalism. Even better, he develops a potential solution that could provide the answer in transitioning into a resource-plentiful world...

The Circle by Dave Eggers

This novel takes its name most immediately from a fictional West Coast social media corporation that has subsumed all earlier iterations such as Google, Facebook, Instagram, Amazon, and Twitter. It traces the rise and rise within this company of its female protagonist, who has increasingly mixed feelings about her job. The time is somewhere in the not-too-distant future — the Three Wise Men who own and rule the Circle are recognizable as individuals living today. The company demands transparency in all things; two of its many slogans are SECRETS ARE LIES and PRIVACY IS THEFT. Anonymity is banished; everyone’s past is revealed; everyone’s present may be broadcast live in video and sound. Nothing recorded will ever be erased. The Circle’s goal is to have all aspects of human existence — from voting to love affairs — flow through its portal, the sole such portal in the world. This is the tenth and newest novel by Dave Eggers, author of the much-acclaimed *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius.*
The Bone Clocks
by David Mitchell

It is difficult to put David Mitchell's *New York Times* bestselling novel *The Bone Clocks* into a single genre, because it has a little bit of everything. This novel weaves together 6 different storylines, all taking place in different decades, with different narrators. In each storyline the narrator encounters mysterious forces that hint at another world hidden within our own. Each individual story takes place in a different genre: the first tells the story of a teenage misadventure, the third delves into the life of a war correspondent, and the final chapter (set in 2043) asks serious questions about humanity's resource use and the future of climate change. You will be drawn in by his supernatural visions, but you will stay because you grow to love the characters he creates through his words.

The *New York Times* said of Mitchell’s writing, “He writes with a furious intensity and slapped-awake vitality, with a delight in language and all the rabbit holes of experience, that no new media could begin to rival.” *The Bone Clocks* won the 2015 World Fantasy Award.

This group will attempt to look at *The Bone Clocks* both as a character study and as a social critique. We will also discuss Mitchell’s unique format and how it affects the overarching plot he creates.

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It Can’t Happen Here
by Sinclair Lewis

*It Can’t Happen Here* is the only one of Sinclair Lewis’s later novels to match the power of *Main Street*, *Babbitt*, and *Arrowsmith*. A cautionary tale about the fragility of democracy, it is an alarming, eerily timeless look at how fascism could take hold in America.

Written during the Great Depression, when the country was largely oblivious to Hitler’s aggression, it juxtaposes sharp political satire with the chillingly realistic rise of a president who becomes a dictator to save the nation from welfare cheats, sex, crime, and a liberal press.

Called “a message to thinking Americans” by the Springfield Republican when it was published in 1935, *It Can’t Happen Here* is a shockingly prescient novel that remains as fresh and contemporary as today’s news.

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All the King’s Men
by Robert Penn Warren

More than just a classic political novel, Robert Penn Warren’s tale of power and corruption in the Depression-era South is a meditation on the unforeseen consequences of every human act, the vexing connectedness of all people, and the possibility of goodness in a bad world.

Willie Stark, a lightly disguised version of Huey Long, the onetime Louisiana governor, begins as a genuine tribune of the people but gradually transforms into a murderous populist demagogue as his idealism is overwhelmed by his lust for power. The story is narrated by Stark’s press agent, Jack Burden, who carries out the boss’s orders, first without objection, then in the face of his own increasingly troubled conscience.

Widely considered the finest novel ever written on American politics and adapted into an Oscar-winning film in 1949, All the King’s Men offers a profound insight into both America’s contemporary challenges and the greater struggles of the human condition.

Meeting Time
M 3:00-3:50
for 10 weeks
Location
CCD1 217
Moderator(s):
Robert Bellafiore
and Ian White

Hillbilly Elegy
by J.D. Vance

From Amazon.com: Hillbilly Elegy is a passionate and personal analysis of a culture in crisis—that of white working-class Americans. The decline of this group, a demographic of our country that has been slowly disintegrating over forty years, has been reported on with growing frequency and alarm, but has never before been written about as searingly from the inside. J. D. Vance tells the true story of what a social, regional, and class decline feels like when you were born with it hung around your neck.

A deeply moving memoir with its share of humor and vividly colorful figures, Hillbilly Elegy is the story of how upward mobility really feels. And it is an urgent and troubling meditation on the loss of the American dream for a large segment of this country.

Note: We are offering two Hillbilly Elegy group. For the Wednesday group featuring this book, go to page 20.

Meeting Time
M 5:30-6:20
for 6 weeks
Location
CCD1 217
Moderator(s):
Lisa Tucker
The World’s Religions
by Huston Smith

With more than two million copies sold, Huston Smith’s *The World’s Religions* is a foundational book on comparative religions, assigned by many different religious studies professors as an introduction to religion. Smith analyzes the five major world religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) and other major religious traditions (Confucianism, Daoism, and animistic traditions). The book devotes one chapter to each religion and provides a cursory introduction to them, examining their core beliefs, differing sects, and relationships to other religions.

However, the first edition of his book was published over 50 years ago, and while it serves as a good introduction to the field of religious studies, the discipline has since evolved substantially. Smith’s descriptions and analysis of the religions provide a unique opportunity to discuss what fundamentally defines a belief system and how author bias can influence our opinion on religious traditions different than our own. This reading group will aim to foster thoughtful and respectful discussion about the differing religious traditions. Both those with a background in religious studies and those simply desiring to learn the basics of differing religious traditions are encouraged to join!

Party in the Street by Fabio Rojas and Michael T. Heaney

In 2008, presidential candidate Barack Obama promised to end the War in Iraq. This August, White House reports indicated there were still over 4,000 troops in Iraq as part of their anti-ISIL campaign, as well as over 9,000 in Afghanistan, and in September it was announced that 600 more were being sent. It’s been estimated that there have been ten times as many drone strikes under Obama as under his predecessor.

This is of course antithetical to the antiwar candidate of 2008, but the antiwar movement that played such a big role in the election seems to have all but disappeared from the public eye. In *Party in the Street*, Fabio Rojas and Michael T. Heaney employ massive amounts of empirical data from tens of thousands of anti-war protesters and organizers against the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq to investigate the relationships between social movements and political parties, and the problems that face activists when they attempt to work within partisan politics. This book is essential reading for anyone with an interest in activism or social movements.
Alexander von Humboldt was one of the most influential individuals of the nineteenth century, and hardly anyone remembers him. He is considered the founding father of environmentalism, and his works and adventures inspired several well-known individuals, including Charles Darwin, John Muir and Henry David Thoreau. One would imagine that he’d be better known, right? Unfortunately, most people have no idea who Alexander von Humboldt was, a fact sadly unremedied until Andrea Wulf wrote *The Invention of Nature: Alexander von Humboldt’s New World*, a critically acclaimed title named one of the 10 Best Books of 2015 by the New York Times, the winner LA Times Book Prize in 2016 in the category of Science & Technology, and the winner of the Royal Society Insight Investment Science Book Prize for 2016.

The book is oft-presented as a biography of the aforementioned forgotten man, but the scope of Wulf’s work encompasses much more than the life and adventures of Alexander von Humboldt. Humboldt’s influence was pervasive during the nineteenth century, and Wulf brilliantly and concisely articulates the range of his influence, bouncing from topic to topic, eventually providing an artful survey of the biological and geological sciences during the nineteenth century.

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**Kindred** by Octavia Butler and *The Underground Railroad* by Colson Whitehead

While the issue of racism is more relevant than ever right now, we’re starting to run out of ways to discuss race relations and feasible solutions. *Kindred* and *The Underground Railroad* both take a creative approach to writing about slavery.

*Kindred* tells the story of modern black woman’s inexplicable and seemingly uncontrollable time travel between her life in California and life on a plantation in the antebellum South.

*The Underground Railroad* follows a young slave woman’s journey to freedom on the Underground Railroad. In Whitehead’s conception, the Underground Railroad is a secret network of tracks and tunnels beneath the Southern soil, rather than a mere metaphor. Both novels present slavery through the perspective of women on odysseys through time and space. Neither interpretation cheapens the horrific realities of slavery, but the creativity in these stories helps Butler and Whitehead provide unique narratives that speak to the complete history of slavery in the U.S. and the repercussions that we must continue to address today.
The Middle East has long been a region of rival religions, ideologies, nationalisms, and ambitions. All of these conflicts—including the hostilities between Arabs and Israelis, and the violent challenges posed by Iraq's competing sects—are rooted in the region's political inheritance: the arrangements, unities, and divisions imposed by the Allies after the First World War.

In *A Peace to End All Peace*, David Fromkin reveals how and why the Allies drew lines on an empty map that remade the geography and politics of the Middle East. Focusing on the formative years of 1914 to 1922, when all seemed possible, he delivers in this sweeping and magisterial book the definitive account of this defining time, showing how the choices narrowed and the Middle East began along a road that led to the conflicts and confusion that continue to this day.

**Meeting Time**  M 2:30-3:20  for 12 weeks  
*Moderator(s):*  Jaci Gandenberger

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From the soaring symphonies of Beethoven to the intimate sonatas of Chopin, the Western canon of instrumental music speaks profoundly to our collective psyche. Its language, however, is an opaque, sometimes even purposefully abstruse one, and no one is better suited to interpret this language than Leonard Bernstein, famed American composer and longtime conductor of the New York Philharmonic.

In *The Joy of Music* and *The Infinite Variety of Music*, Bernstein treads through the orchestra with a poet's tongue, by turns amusing and insightful. Perhaps you’ve pondered George Washington's thoughts on reading music, or the average New Mexican poet's take on the components of composition? Bernstein has, too, and with style so avant-garde you might mistake him for Burroughs, he reanimates in literary form his musings on these, and other, subjects. Working in formats ranging from the short essay to the transcribed lecture to the imagined interview, he examines an enormous patchwork of musical ideas. He includes some inspired ramblings on the works of particular composers, to be sure – his exposition on Beethoven’s Third, Brahms’ Fourth, and Tchaikovsky’s Sixth are of particular note – but he also delves into such varied topics as jazz, rhythm, romanticism, conducting, opera, and even musical comedy.

With Bernstein, there is something for everyone. We hope that musical veterans and novices alike will join us this semester as we experience and explore music to live to, cry to, laugh to, and even die to.

**Meeting Time**  M 11:30-12:20  for 12 weeks  
*Moderator(s):*  Zach Simpson and Will Thompson
The Monkey Wrench Gang and Desert Solitaire by Edward Abbey

In the 1950s, Edward Abbey spent three seasons among the hoodoos and sand flats of Arches National Park. There, in the decade preceding the damming of Glen Canyon to quench the thirst of the ever growing southwestern population, Abbey turned his eyes on the desert and saw there the failings of federal public land policy. Though the solutions he provides would likely be viewed as archaic or cold in the modern environmentalist climate, Desert Solitaire has gone on to inspire countless individuals to take up his banner.

These same ideas are expanded upon in our second book from Abbey: The Monkey Wrench Gang. Here, Abbey takes up the pen to weave the fictional tale of a rag tag group of environmental activists dissatisfied with peaceful resistance. The chaotic story that follows – which critics have compared to the plot of a comic book – is one of sabotage against the forces threatening America’s wild places. In essence, it’s a field guide to applying the ideas from Desert Solitaire in the real world. Hailed by many as a watershed work in the eco-terrorist movement, the ideas presented in The Monkey Wrench Gang are at times extreme, but they are certainly trying to make a change, and will absolutely provide a foundation for lively discussion.

Americanah by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a gifted Nigerian novelist who has received numerous awards and distinctions for her works Purple Hibiscus (2003), Half of a Yellow Sun (2006), The Thing Around Your Neck (2009), and her latest and more compelling novel – Americanah (2013). In her work, Americanah, she illuminates the complexities of racial issues in the United States, through the eyes of the protagonist, Ifemelu. Americanah also highlights some insights in to the problems of immigrants and racial issues in the United Kingdom. It also deals with the economic problems in Nigeria due to corruption and the lack of will of the government and the elite to enhance change in the country. Ifemelu is a Nigerian girl who gets tired of the constant strikes in her university and goes abroad to complete her education. Her experiences both in Nigeria and the United States form the basis of the novel.
**Tuesdays**

**Gigi** by Colette  
and  
**The Volcano Lover** by Susan Sontag

Both the novella *Gigi* and the novel *The Volcano Lover* discuss experiences of love, pleasure, femininity, and manipulation.

The 1944 work *Gigi*, by French writer Colette, describes the birth of femininity and love through the tale of a young Parisian girl and her ensuing romance with a wealthy and cultured man named Gaston. Almost certainly, this early 20th century story of the romance between a fifteen-year-old young courtesan and her 33 year old suitor raises as many questions as it attempts to answer.

*The Volcano Lover*, the 1992 work by writer, filmmaker, and activist Susan Sontag, has been praised by Lettie Ransley of The Guardian as a “powerful, intricate novel of ideas: frequently inflected with Sontag’s feminism, it applies a modern lens to the Enlightenment’s moral, social and aesthetic concerns. Yet it is also a tender inventory of desire: intricately mapping the modulation from the cold mania of the collector to the lover’s passion.”

Both works discuss romance and betrayal in a lens specific to their time. We plan to read these works in chronological order, beginning with *Gigi* and ending with *The Volcano Lover*.

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**Bad Feminist**  
by Roxane Gay

“These essays are political and they are personal,” Roxane Gay announces in the introduction of *Bad Feminist*. “They are, like feminism, flawed, but they come from a genuine place.” This place, as displayed throughout the course of her excellent essay collection, is also one of daring intelligence, imagination, and empathy. *Bad Feminist* is a sharp, funny, and spot-on look at the ways in which the culture we consume becomes who we are, and an inspiring call-to-arms of all the ways we still need to do better.

In these humorous and insightful essays, Roxane Gay takes us through the journey of her evolution as a woman of color while also taking readers on a ride through culture of the last few years and commenting on the state of feminism today. Roxane Gay takes a different perspective on writing about feminism. *Bad Feminist* isn’t a series of epithets, but rather a narrative from someone who speaks from the heart. She admits she doesn’t know all the answers. We join Roxane Gay in her development of herself and her feminist identity, and the mistakes and flaws she experiences that we as humans experience too. Gay stands out most in her acceptance of imperfection.

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**Meeting Time**  
T 4:30-5:20  
**Location**  
CCD1 317  
for 9 weeks  
**Moderator(s):**  
Amanda Ahadizadeh and Alice Barrett

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**Meeting Time**  
T 10:30-11:20  
**Location**  
CCD1 317  
for 8 weeks  
**Moderator(s):**  
Bailey Ashbaker and Zainab Sandhu

Informal Reading Groups Spring 2017
**And Then There Were None**

*by Agatha Christie*

*And Then There Were None* is one of my favorite murder mysteries. It has engaging characters and a great twist ending. It is the story of ten people brought together by a mysterious host for various reasons who become trapped on an island in a storm. When the characters begin to die off one by one, we learn they have more in common than we thought and that their deaths are being orchestrated. It is written by Agatha Christie, one of the best who-done-it writers of all time, and is very worth the read. This mystery was, according to Christie, one of her hardest to write and is largely considered one of her best works.

**Les Misérables**

*by Victor Hugo*

Sparking a great deal of controversy at the time of its publication, Victor Hugo's 1862 novel *Les Misérables*, also translated as *The Wretched or The Dispossessed*, is now a widely recognized masterpiece. You may know it by its popular musical adaptation by the same name.

Following the lives of several iconic characters (including the infamous Jean Valjean) through five volumes, Hugo explores many facets of society through both narration and interposed essays concerning morality, history, and the state of humanity. Set in revolutionary France, these characters navigate one of the most tumultuous times in European history.

No experience with the story or the musical is required. Join us as we read this timeless classic.
**The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo**
by Stieg Larsson

Do you want to brush up on your Swedish culture? Do you enjoy a deep mystery? Do you support the freedom of the press? Does your heart melt for circumstantial romances? Do you believe that the corporate oligarchy is actively scheming against you? If you answered yes to any of these, we have the reading group for you! Dive into this scintillating novel and buckle up for a fast-paced plot guaranteed to keep you up late into the night!

Follow a misunderstood hacker, a deflated journalist, and some shady businessmen through the pits of a Swedish winter. See the contrast between a saucy romance and the perversion of dark pleasure in its rawest form. The unrelenting opposition, both passively and actively imposed upon the protagonist in her plight sparks a newfound believe in the power of the human spirit. This book is sure to intrigue—leading the reader through deep secrets, an intense trial, and surprising relatable psyches. While the plot is intoxicating, the book is also filled with meaningful nuances which serve to expose the reader to the stark realities of modern society. *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* is sure to please—with rich action and impactful insight to boot.

**Location**

Meeting Time: T 8:00p-8:50p
for 12 weeks

Moderator(s):
John Unterschuetz and McKenzie Cowlbeck

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**Midnight in Peking**
by Paul French

Peking in 1937 is a heady mix of privilege and scandal, opulence and opium dens, rumors and superstition. The Japanese are encircling the city, and the discovery of Pamela Werner’s body sends a shiver through already nervous Peking. In this true-crime thriller that doubles as a social history of 1930s Peking, you’ll race against the clock to uncover the truth behind this notorious murder, and get a rare glimpse of the last days of colonial Peking.

Paul French’s *Midnight In Peking* is a masterfully woven non-fiction murder mystery peopled with smug British diplomats, harried Scotland Yard detectives, Chinese police officers with mysterious agendas, an American dentist with degraded, lustful designs, and a beautiful young woman who isn’t all that she seems.

**Location**

Meeting Time: T 4:30-5:20
for 7 weeks

Moderator(s):
Jeremy Allen and Will Goree
For Whom the Bell Tolls
by Ernest Hemingway

Considered by many the magnum opus of Hemingway’s career, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* exemplifies both the cogent prose for which Hemingway was renowned and the cultural and historical significance of Europe during World War I.

The New York Times Book review describes *For Whom the Bell Tolls* as “packed with the matter of picaresque romance: blood, lust, adventure, vulgarity, comedy, tragedy.” This novel follows the story of professor Robert Jordan, a professor on sabbatical in Spain. His exploits prove memorable and consequential, and we’d be delighted to explore them with you this semester.

**Meeting Time**
T 4:00-4:50 for 8 weeks

**Location**
CCD1 217

**Moderator(s):**
Matthew Carman and Patrick Lockwood

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Songmaster
by Orson Scott Card

*Songmaster* is a lesser-known science fiction novel from the author of *Ender’s Game* and *Speaker for the Dead*. The story examines the power of song to impact life and vice versa by following the life of a boy named Ansset. Beginning with his arrival at the ancient and mysterious Songhouse and through all his training there as a Songbird, Ansset has no idea of the plans that have been set in motion for his future and the influence he will soon come to wield in the Imperial Court on Earth.

As a close confidante of the galactic conqueror Emperor Mikal the Terrible, Ansset is in a position of great power and great vulnerability. All that he has to defend himself with is his extraordinary musical ability and the immense loyalty that he inspires in his closest friends.

One of Card’s earlier works, *Songmaster* shows hints of the characters that would appear in his later works, but it also uses an entirely unique and thought provoking fictional universe, which has not ever again been successfully imitated by other writers. The struggles against institutional misogyny and lack of self-worth take place as a backdrop for the conflicts in the story. Amidst themes of love, truth, and power the novel examines the reasons we are so reluctant to show our emotions and what the consequences would be if someone had the ability to draw them out of us.

**Meeting Time**
T 4:00-4:50 for 8 weeks

**Location**
CCD1 217

**Moderator(s):**
Matthew Carman and Patrick Lockwood
Meeting Time Location
T 12:00-12:50 CCD1 217
for 4 weeks
Moderator(s):
Dr. Amanda Minks

Meeting Time Location
W 5:30-6:20 CCD1 317
for 7 weeks
Moderator(s):
Tanya Miller-Eager

The Country Under My Skin
by Gioconda Belli

Gioconda Belli is a Nicaraguan poet who powerfully tells the story of moving from a comfortable upper-class existence to her participation in a revolution that toppled a brutal dictator in 1979.

This memoir is focused on her personal relationships—as a daughter, wife, mother, lover—intersecting with political activities. She reminds us how the personal is political, and how difficult it can be to change deeply engrained cultural patterns (like gender inequalities) even in the midst of radical political transformations.

The book is beautifully written and quite a page turner. When I used it as a course reading a few years ago, several of the students read the 369 pages in one sitting because they could not put it down.

The Good Body by Eve Ensler
and
Fat Pig: A Play by Neil LaBute

Finding peace with our bodies can be difficult to achieve. We will read material that discusses feelings and attitudes over body image as well as looking at how it affects sexuality. This group will start by reading Eve Ensler’s The Good Body, a couple of articles from various sources including Yes Means Yes, and finish up with Neil LaBute’s play, Fat Pig.

The Good Body written by Eve Ensler, author of The Vagina Monologues, challenges our view of what it means to have a “good body.” She begins with her own tortured relationship with her aging body and her attempts at fad diets along with exercise gadgets. While trying to find her own self-acceptance she is joined by the voices of women across the globe who are struggling with their own body issues. Along the way, Ensler also introduces us to women who have found a hard-won peace with their bodies. Ensler weaves inspiring stories from obsession to enlightenment. Ultimately, these monologues become a personal wake-up call from Ensler to love the “good bodies” we inhabit.

Neil LaBute’s play, Fat Pig, follows a romantic relationship between a plus-size woman and a young professional man. How many insults can you hear before you have to stand up and defend the woman you love? Tom faces just that question when he falls for Helen, a bright, funny, sexy young woman who happens to be plus sized-and then some. Forced to explain his new relationship to his shallow friends, finally he comes to terms with his own preconceptions of the importance of conventional good looks. LaBute’s sharply drawn play not only critiques our slavish adherence to Hollywood ideals of beauty but boldly questions our own ability to change what we dislike about ourselves.

The Country Under My Skin
by Gioconda Belli

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This memoir is focused on her personal relationships—as a daughter, wife, mother, lover—intersecting with political activities. She reminds us how the personal is political, and how difficult it can be to change deeply engrained cultural patterns (like gender inequalities) even in the midst of radical political transformations.

The book is beautifully written and quite a page turner. When I used it as a course reading a few years ago, several of the students read the 369 pages in one sitting because they could not put it down.
House of Leaves
by Mark Z. Danielewski

What can you say about *House of Leaves*? It’s a horror novel. It’s a love story. It’s a multimedia mish-mash of several different writing styles, told from several different perspectives by several different narrators. Above all else, it’s a brilliant work of metafiction that examines the very nature of storytelling and the inexorable human drive to narrativize experience. The novel begins by flatly stating that “This is not for you,” and immediately delves into our protagonist’s (Johnny Truant- yes, that really his name) search for a new apartment, wherein he uncovers a mysterious book written by a dead man.

If you have a taste for weird and experimental fiction, please consider joining us as we work our way through Mark Danielewski’s truly unique debut novel, originally published in 2000.

The Wright Brothers
by David McCullough

Master historian, David McCullough, takes readers through the ever fascinating and unique story of how man first took to the skies. Too many remember the story of Kitty Hawk and the Wright Flyer, but too few have learned how the Wrights developed the first modern wind tunnel, air foil, and aeronautical physics. Wilbur and Orville Wright went from humble bicycle shop owners to the fathers of aviation through meticulous study and tireless effort rather than formal training. Perhaps what is most remarkable of the Wright story is how two men with no college education were capable of outsmarting the greatest scientific minds of the time, such as Ph.D. Samuel Langley.

Further, the bravery of the brothers is unmatched in science to this day. Any test flight could have killed the operator and nearly did so on several occasions. There is always a risk to testing new technology, but there is no risk like travelling through the air at high speeds in an unproven vessel. McCullough also does a fantastic job of developing the Wright sister, Katharine. Although publicly forgotten, Katharine was the only college educated member of the family and was an integral figure in the brothers’ lives. Her contributions saved both brothers on different occasions.

With only birds as their guide, Orville and Wilbur Wright sought and built an entirely new era, The Age of Flight. The story of their accomplishments and many failures is sure to inspire hopeful scientists, engineers, inventors, and entrepreneurs for endless generations.
Hillbilly Elegy by J.D. Vance and White Trash by Nancy Isenberg

J.D. Vance’s bestselling memoir Hillbilly Elegy was published to wide critical and popular acclaim last year, and its author immediately became a media spokesman for the plight of “hillbillies”—poor whites in the Appalachian Rust Belt—who feel that they have been betrayed by the American Dream.

While Vance earned a law degree from Yale after college, he still identifies as a “hillbilly”, and writes the book from the perspective of a moderate conservative who explains the social and economic problems of poor whites from his own experience. I’m particularly interested in discussing this book because while I enjoyed it and plan to teach it in the future, I’m not so sure that Vance’s opinions should be taken without several grains of salt; I am particularly concerned that the book is lauded primarily by conservative intellectuals who celebrate Vance’s castigations of his class. So, in addition to reading the book, I’m planning that the group will read short reviews of the memoir that I have been compiling to help us wrap our heads around Hillbilly Elegy. I am also hoping that participants will want to engage in a larger conversation about class dynamics in America and here at OU since the Presidential election has moved the issue from the back burner to the forefront of national discussions about American identity that often feature Vance’s input.

If the group wishes to read another book, we will follow with Isenberg’s WHITE TRASH, a New York Times Notable Book of 2016.

Note: For the Monday group featuring this book, see page 9.

Freakonomics by Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner

Throughout our time in school, many of our teachers have probably told us that no question is a dumb question. And we all know that one person in every class who asks the most random questions every day. The authors of Freakonomics are “those people”. In a blend of economics, psychology, and sociology, Levitt and Dubner explore random questions like “What do schoolteachers and sumo wrestlers have in common?”, “Why do drug dealers still live with their moms?”, and “How much do parents really matter?”. Even though they seem unrelated, these questions and the others explored throughout the book boil down to one basic principle: people respond to incentives. Our personalities and background dictate how our responses differ, which makes it interesting when a lot of people want the same thing.

Levitt, a prize-winning economist, and Dubner, an award-winning journalist, ask the questions nobody thought of asking, but once the questions are asked, the answers are surprising. The world is admittedly confusing at times, and on some days, nothing makes sense. Levitt and Dubner draw connections through mounds of data where no one has drawn connections before, which brings a surprising amount of clarity to the chaos of modern life. While reading Freakonomics, get ready to explore the hidden side of everything.
Blood in the Water
by Heather Ann Thompson

A finalist for the 2016 National Book Award, Heather Ann Thompson’s *Blood in the Water* is the first comprehensive history of America’s most famous prison riot, the uprising that took place in the Attica Correctional Facility in upstate New York in September 1971.

Though events grew from a series of accidental confrontations rather than from a formal plan, prisoners came to control the facility for four days until authorities decided to retake it by force, resulting in the deaths of thirty-nine people. The first half of *Blood in the Water* concerns the riot itself. The second half concerns its aftermath, as a series of court cases and investigations show state officials responding to events with cover ups and incompetence.

Though it centers on an event that took place almost half a century ago, the key issues in *Blood in the Water* are ones that are of extraordinary relevance today: mass incarceration, racial conflict, police brutality, and official and public responses to all of these things. It is also a masterful work of historical detective work, as Thompson spent a decade piecing together events that have been obscured rather than illuminated by public, official accounts since they took place.

Die Verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum by Heinrich Böll

*Note: The entire book and as much discussion as possible will be in German; however, fluency is not at all required. This book does include violence, language, and sexual references that may be uncomfortable for some readers.*

Nobel Prize winner Heinrich Böll explores the effects of sensationalism in a climate of fear in his 1974 novel *Die Verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum*. Set in 1970s Germany, during the Cold War and a period of intense terrorism, a housekeeper turns to violence after suddenly finding herself at the center of the press’s attention. After spending the night with an alleged terrorist, reporters see her as the perfect subject for a sensational story. The press paints her in the worst possible light and she becomes hated by anonymous note-writers and neighbors alike. As her harassment intensifies, she struggles to find a way out of her unasked-for infamy.
**Inkheart** by Cornelia Funke

On the surface, Inkheart is a brilliant fantasy novel, a bestselling translation of the original German text, taking you on a magical adventure while toying with an oft considered question. What if our favorite characters came to life? However, more than just a piece of fiction for entertainment, Inkheart delves into a subtle reflection on reading and literature with which bookworms will identify immediately. Ms. Funke celebrates the tales trapped between covers and the addictive joy of reading, preceding each chapter with a quote from a popular story, but she also whispers a warning. What terrors do we ignore, thinking they are safely imprisoned by paper and ink?

Set in a European countryside vividly painted with eloquent imagery, the tantalizing mix of fantasy and reality reflect the influence literature has on our lives and the way our lives affect our perception of literature. We will discuss the development of the story, how it compares it to similar stories written in English, and whether the author’s commentary on reading matches your own experience. This is a tale written for anyone who has ever gotten lost between pages, ever missed a meal or stayed up too late because they could not put their book down.

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**Justice** by Michael Sandel and
**The Trolley Problem** by Thomas Cathcart

Is it sometimes morally wrong to tell the truth? Would you push a man off a bridge to save five others? Should you be able to sell your kidneys? What is justice? Throughout history, many different moral philosophies have attempted to answer these questions. *Justice*, based on the famous Harvard course taught by Michael Sandel, explores the various attempts to answer these questions. He does so in a unique light, illuminating the various philosophical arguments underpinning the surface debates surrounding the issues of physician-assisted suicide, national service, and tax laws.

Each argument has its own strength and weakness, but stripping these issues down to their core philosophical roots challenges readers to maintain a consistent moral philosophy for their decision-making.

*The Trolley Problem, or Would You Throw that Fat Guy Off the Bridge*, humorously demonstrates the clash of these philosophies in a hypothetical courtroom full of nonsense and drama. Using the famous though experiment proposed by Philippa Foot, it too challenges how you determine what is ethical. Why do we sometimes justify ending one life to save five more, while at other times refusing to do so? Does tweaking the context significantly change the morality of the scenario?
A Little Life
by Hanya Yanagihara

Hanya Yanagihara’s *A Little Life* follows four men: Willem, Malcolm, Jean-Baptiste (JB) and Jude throughout their lives. Willem hails from Wyoming and wants to be an actor. Malcolm is an architect from a wealthy family. JB is an aspiring artist, the child of Haitian immigrants. Jude is a lawyer with a mysterious background, but a solemn intensity, he stands as the group’s foundation and its shakiest member. *A Little Life* tells each man’s story, showing the reader each of them as boys while still moving deftly through their adult lives.

The 700+ page tome contains many different narrative arcs as each man’s life unfolds. Abuse and self-injury come up during a narrative that meanders between trauma and healing. However, there’s never a point when the heavy issues weigh down the story. *A Little Life* tells the story of male friendship; along with the nuances of maintaining college friendships long after you have graduated. The male friendships evolve over time, as each member of the group comes into his adult life.

The book has received many accolades for such a new publication. It was short-listed for the Man Booker Award in 2015, short-listed for the National Book award and was a *New York Times* best-seller.

The book is rich with descriptive prose, coving a topic that is not explored in such depth in many other works. As Yanagihara has said, men are given “such a small emotional palette to work with.” This novel takes that limited palette and paints a masterpiece with it.

The Israel Lobby
by John J. Mearsheimer

*The Israel Lobby*, by John J. Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago and Stephen M. Walt of Harvard’s John F. Kennedy School of Government, was one of the most controversial articles in recent memory. Originally published in the London Review of Books in March 2006, it provoked both howls of outrage and cheers of gratitude for challenging what had been a taboo issue in America: the impact of the Israel lobby on U.S. foreign policy.

Now in a work of major importance, Mearsheimer and Walt deepen and expand their argument and confront recent developments in Lebanon and Iran. They describe the remarkable level of material and diplomatic support that the United States provides to Israel and argues that this support cannot be fully explained on either strategic or moral grounds. This exceptional relationship is due largely to the political influence of a loose coalition of individuals and organizations that actively work to shape U.S. foreign policy in a pro-Israel direction. Mearsheimer and Walt provocatively contend that the lobby has a far-reaching impact on America’s posture throughout the Middle East—in Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, and toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—and the policies it has encouraged are not in America’s national interest. The lobby’s influence also affects America’s relationship with important allies and increases dangers that all states face from global terror. While written in 2008, this book is still incredibly relevant to U.S. foreign policy in not only Israel, but the Middle East as a whole.
The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy by Douglas Adams

*The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, a so-called “trilogy in five parts” (of which we plan to read all five) recounts the zany, exciting, and often hilarious adventures of a man named Arthur Dent. Following the destruction of the Earth by a mysterious race called the Vogons (in order to make way for an intergalactic bypass, of course), Dent hitchhikes around the universe, meeting a smorgasbord of interesting characters and uncovering the true nature of Earth. From Marvin the Paranoid Android to the President of the Galaxy Zaphod Beeblebrox and an alien named Slartibartfast, Douglas Adams’ perfectly outrageous cast of characters, set in his even more outrageous world, makes this series as entertaining as it is easy to read.

Adam’s humorous approach to science fiction is unrivaled, and these five novels are his tour de force. Always surprising and wonderfully witty, they have become enshrined in pop culture – references to 42, towels, “mostly harmless,” and “so long and thanks for all the fish” seem to show up everywhere you look. So if you ever wanted to know the answer to the Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe, and Everything, or to prepare for intergalactic travel (make sure you bring a towel!), or to figure out how an improbability drive allows you to travel faster than light, or even to puzzle out when exactly time travel was invented, come join us on our journey through Adams’ magical world.

**Meeting Time**
R 3:00-3:50

**Location**
DLBH 182

**for 15 weeks**

**Moderator(s):**
Jaci Gandenberger and Jordan Crawford

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**Habibi** by Naomi Shihab Nye

and

**The Breadwinner** by Deborah Ellis

Although often overlooked, children’s and young adult literature can often provide fresh insights into important issues. Since the Taliban took over Afghanistan, 11-year-old Parvana has rarely been outdoors. Barred from attending school, shopping at the market, or even playing in the streets of Kabul, she is trapped inside her family’s one-room home - until the Taliban hauls away her father and Parvana realizes that she must become the “breadwinner” and disguise herself as a boy to support her family. A political activist, Ellis based The Breadwinner on the true-life stories of women in Afghan refugee camps.

In Habibi, Naomi Shihab Nye tells the story of 14-year-old Liyana Abboud, a Palestinian-American girl whose family moves to Jerusalem from St. Louis, where she must adjust to cultures and conflicts that she had previously only known through stories. The sights, sounds, and smells of Jerusalem drift through the pages as readers glean a sense of current Palestinian-Israeli relations and the region’s troubled history.

This reading group is geared towards anyone who is interested in a new or more accessible window into understanding and discussing current events in the Middle East.

**Meeting Time**
R 4:30-5:20

**Location**
CCD1 214

**for 8 weeks**

**Moderator(s):**
Jaci Gandenberger and Margaret Bourlon
CLASSIFIED: As the War in Afghanistan has entered its 15th year, many Americans still don’t fully understand the origins of the conflict. Indeed, the roots of American involvement in the country extend long before **Ghost Wars** captures the little-known time between America’s first involvement in Afghanistan during the anti-Soviet jihad of the 1980’s until the September 11th attacks. It is one of the few authoritative histories on one of the largest covert operations undertaken by the CIA and consistently is found on the agency’s recommended readings for those interested in a career in intelligence.

This fascinating history tracks the failed Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the **Taliban**, and the emergence of Al-Qaeda in an interwoven narrative. As well, **Ghost Wars** tells the story of the varied intelligence agencies involved in the over twenty-year long saga, including the CIA, the Pakistani **Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)**, Saudi intelligence and **XXX**. It brilliantly shows the nuanced relationships that both agents and agencies held between allies with sometimes convergent, sometimes divergent, interests. While detailed, it is an approachable history for those without prior knowledge of the region or subject matter. Great for anyone interested in foreign policy, covert action, or just an interesting (albeit somewhat depressing) tale.

Attendance of reading group will guarantee a seat at a watch party of **Charlie Wilson’s War** at the end of the group. Please burn this document after reading.

[Ed. Note: Do not burn this document.]

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**Mistborn: The Final Empire**

by Brandon Sanderson

Brandon Sanderson’s **Mistborn: The Final Empire** is set in a roughly Victorian Era world, plagued by incessant volcanic ashfall and covered nightly in blanketing mists. Ruled by the tyrannical Lord Ruler for 1000 years, society has been divided into the ruling nobles, descendants of the original supporters of the Lord Ruler, and a class of feudal serfs, known as skaas. The story revolves around a rag-tag group of thieves attempting to overthrow the Lord Ruler. **Mistborn: The Final Empire** includes many hallmarks of Brandon Sanderson’s works including sophisticated world building, complex character dynamics, and well-defined rule-based magic. Fans of J.R.R. Tolkien or George R.R. Martin’s works will enjoy this book.

There are many interesting facets of **Mistborn: The Final Empire** that we will discuss in our reading group. For example, how far would you be willing to go to overthrow an empire? Would you kill without mercy or be willing to manipulate religion in order to incite revolt?

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**Meeting Time** | **Location**
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R 4:00-4:50 | CCD1 217
for 11 weeks

**Moderator(s):** Libby Trowbridge and James Lincoln Ratcliff

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**Meeting Time** | **Location**
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R 3:00-3:50 | CCD1 217
for 10 weeks

**Moderator(s):** Avi Revah and Maaz Khan

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The Complete Fiction of H.P. Lovecraft

In the 1920s and ‘30s, H.P. Lovecraft pioneered a new type of weird fiction that fused elements of supernatural horror with the concepts of visionary science fiction. Lovecraft’s tales of cosmic horror revolutionized modern horror fiction and earned him the reputation of the most influential American writer of weird tales since Edgar Allan Poe. *The Complete Fiction of H.P. Lovecraft* collects the author’s novel, four novellas, and fifty-three short stories. Written between the years 1917 and 1935, this collection features Lovecraft’s trademark fantastical creatures and supernatural thrills, as well as many horrific and cautionary science-fiction themes, that have influenced some of today’s writers and filmmakers, including Stephen King and Neil Gaiman. Included in this volume are “The Case of Charles Dexter Ward,” “The Call of Cthulhu,” “The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath,” “At the Mountains of Madness,” “The Shadow Over Innsmouth,” “The Color Out of Space,” “The Dunwich Horror,” and many more hair-raising tales.

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In the wake of a presidential campaign that exposed an America even more divided than once thought, people from across the political spectrum are trying to explain how America went from the election of Barack Obama in 2008 to the election of Donald Trump in 2016. Join us as we seek to make sense of the election, political polarization, the rise of far-right politics, and resistance to racial diversity and integration as seen through Rich Benjamin’s journeys through Whitopias. In *Searching for Whitopia*, Benjamin explores exurbs that arise in response to White America’s anxiety with rising populations of immigrants and individuals of color. In his book, Benjamin, an African-American living in these predominantly -White communities, seeks to explain not only the factors that make Whitopias possible, but also what makes them tic and why they’re flourishing.

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**Meetings:**
- **Meeting Time:** F 4:00-4:50
- **Location:** CCD1 217
- **for 9 weeks

**Moderator(s):**
- Hannah Harrell

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**Meetings:**
- **Meeting Time:** F 2:30-3:20
- **Location:** CCD1 317
- **for 9 weeks

**Moderator(s):**
- Tyler Nunley
- Garrett Eakers
Published in Japan in 1994, Haruki Murakami’s *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is not only highly acclaimed but also heralded as the novel which established him as a giant of the international literary community. Simultaneously a mystery and a lyrical examination of purpose, the novel follows Toru Okada, a man who has quit his job and spends his days with host of characters: psychics, veterans of World War II, a mediagenic politician, and a strangely morbid sixteen-year-old girl. To attempt to describe the plot would be to fail to give it justice, as discovering each of the incidences and anecdotes is half the wonder in Murakami’s symphonic novel. Suffice it to say that while the book begins with Okada’s search for his missing cat, what he finds along the way is an intricate pattern of haunting war stories and present day mysteries. Heartbreaking and comedic, the novel is infinitely readable, laugh out loud funny, and perfect for anyone interested in a genre bending work of history, magical realism, and modern fiction.

Discussions may cover anything from flawed characters, prophecy, musical motifs, the titles of the chapters (each has two), potential problems (or literary strengths?) in its written characters, and an examination of literature in translation.

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**The Dark Lord of Derkholm**

by Dianna Wynne Jones

Diana Wynne Jones published more than 50 works during her career, winning among other awards the World Fantasy Award for Life Achievement in 2007 for her incredible contributions to the genre of fantasy literature. Jones’s works are well-known for their humor and their social insight, and her style is an unforgettable pastiche of the fantasy genre, delighting in flipping well-established tropes on their heads in order to surprise and delight her readers.

*The Dark Lord of Derkholm* is Jones at her best, deftly satirizing the sometimes-rigid genre of fantasy while weaving a complex tale full of intrigue and humor. Mr. Chesney operates Pilgrim Parties, a tour group that takes paying participants into an outer realm where the inhabitants play frightening and foreboding roles. The time has come to end the staged madness . . . but with the bumbling magizoologist Wizard Derk cast as the new Dark Lord, can he really be stopped? As the Pilgrim Parties explore Chesney’s staged world, we come to realize that this world is not as simple as we thought. As secret political factions rise and a rogue demon wreaks havoc, it is up to Derk and his family to put an end to Mr. Chesney’s tyranny.