More Gems from the Spring Lists
by Albert R. Vogeler

The literary friend who provided me with titles from the Spring book lists in 2008 has found some new ones, also from obscure publishers. Many offer refreshing new perspectives in scholarship, or daring departures from dogma, and some poignantly encapsulate the human drama. After each title I append a brief excerpt from the advertising blurb, or a reviewer’s comments, or my own.

Moby Duck, by Cal M. Ishmael. Pequod Press, 2013. This parody of an over-praised classic purports to tell the tale of a huge malevolent white duck, and how the legendary creature was pursued to the ends of the earth by a crazed hunter named Rehab. Crude though it is, it avoids the pompous mystifications and tedious digressions of the original story.

Adventures in the Wild, by Ben Thayer and Don Zatt. Munchhausen Books, 2013. Purposely denying themselves all civilized amenities like deodorant, cufflinks, the New Yorker, and dry martinis, the two survivalists parachuted into the Amazon rain forest in 1990 and have not yet emerged. They left this gripping pre-written account of their exploits.

My Life Sentence, by I. Shelby Freed. Bighouse Imprints, 2013. Sentenced to life imprisonment without parole, Mr. Freed was dismayed by the intolerable irony of his name. Unable to change his sentence, he decided to change his last name—to Stang. Now, no longer living a contradiction, he enjoys his freedom from the anxieties of the job market.

The Story of Our Flag, by Rhett Weidenbluh. Vol. I. Banner Books, 2012. Our flag dates back to turbulent revolutionary times when, according to Weidenbluh, it was not clear whether there were actually eleven or fifteen states. Thirteen seemed a good compromise estimate for the stripes. Vol. II will explain the stars, and we may be in for another surprise.

describes his ingenious efforts to keep his igloo frozen by installing solar-powered deep freeze units, and he recommends this solution to everyone with the same problem.

*Appeals to a Higher Power*, by Evan Elpuss. Aspiration Associates, 2013. This is the absorbing account of one man’s lonely lifelong struggle to get on the good side of the Powers That Be, to find a way through life’s thickets, and to transcend the surly bonds of mortality. The jury is still out, but he is optimistic that things are going his way.

*A History of Corporal Punishment*, by O. Howard Hertz. Inflictus Imprints, 2013. The author is painfully aware that his subject is not everyone’s cup of tea. In accordance with the publisher’s conditions, several chapters describing involuntary anatomical interventions have been omitted from the book, but are available on his website with a secret password.

*Books You Can’t Put Down*, by A. Page Turner. Handbook Press, 2013. The author has patented a harmless vegetable adhesive which, lightly applied to the covers of a book, keeps it firmly in your hands when you might be tempted to put it down before finishing it. Students with short attention spans report that it helps them complete their reading assignments.

*Lore of the Pirate Age*, by Joaquin de Planque. Bookaneer Books, 2013. The author explores the pirate legends of the Caribbean, showing that buried treasure hoards, skull-and-crossbones pennants, battered tricorn hats, broadswords, peglegs, eyepatches, rum, ribaldry, and jollity, were in fact the daily realities of this colorful, fast-fading way of life.

*UFOs*, by D. E. Bunker. Roswell Enterprises, 2013. Everyone has an opinion about UFOs, but secrecy seems to be part of the equation. The government can resolve the issue once and for all by openly admitting that for years it has been conducting undercover surveillance missions using an elite corps of Unofficial Freelance Operatives.

*The S.S.*, by S. Esse. Essential Editions, 2013. The deeply sinister associations of the letters “S.S.” are fully justified, according to this important new study, which reveals the reprehensible record of criminal conspiracy, brutal belligerence, ruthless repression, and pathological persecution by the society for Simplified Spelling.

*Legal Norms and Career Success*, by Laura Biden. Harmony House Press, 2013. The Vice President’s niece says she owes her success to never having been arrested or convicted of anything whatsoever. She makes a strong case for keeping out of trouble and helping others to do the same. “The blameless life is the safest life,” she pronounces, and who will dispute her?

*Dyslexia in Modern Music*, by Roland Rock. Cacophone Imprints, 2013. Ironically a victim of the condition he describes, Rock surveys Western music from the Raboq to the Seltaeb and finds that medoly and harnomy have been in decline, while the atanos, the phonysymph, and the arepo may vanish completely, drowned out by knuf, par, and pohphih.

*The Public Policy Review Institute*, by Paula C. Wonk. Public Policy Review Institute Press, 2013. Dr. Wonk has made her urgent priority the task of jazzing up the title of her organization, a government think tank. She has boldly proposed a committee to study the matter. It will ultimately vote on tentative recommendations for an official Nomenclature Modification Announcement.

*Being and Non-Being*, Vol. I, by Wanda Y. Datso. Urdank Imprints, 2013. Professor Datso, of Tokyo University, boldly asks the fundamental ontological questions: Why do we exist? How can non-being exist? Are being and non-being in equilibrium? Volume II, she promises, will provide all the answers, as well as explaining how she makes a living doing this sort of thing.

*The Mythology of Inebriation*, by Philip deGlasse and Anne Gover. High Time Books, 2013. The authors, respectively a wine-taster and a barista, conclude from years of research that alcohol is not the culprit. Instead, an elusive substance “X” is to blame, and the team is diligently tasting for it daily. Their next book is optimistically titled “Drink Your Way to Sobriety.”

*California Conurbations*, ed. by Kelly Fournier. Golden-Tate Publishers, 2013. The editor of this eccentric volume, featuring chapters by the women writers Frances Coe, Sandy Yeager, and Lois Angell, never explains why she studiously ignores all but three California cities, whose names are curious echoes of her contributors.
Activities Report
Howard Seller

The Patrons are sponsoring three lectures and one field trip during the 2013-14 academic year.

The first lecture was given by Dr. Gregory Benford on Saturday, October 12. A professor emeritus of physics and astronomy at the University of California, Irvine, Dr. Benford is also an award-winning author of many science fiction novels. He spoke about the fascination he has had with science and science fiction since he was a boy and also about the connection between his scientific research and his novels.

The second lecture will be given on Saturday, March 8, 2014. Our speaker will be Dr. Brian Michael Norton, assistant professor of English, comparative literature, and linguistics at Cal State Fullerton. He will discuss his recent book: *Fiction and the Philosophy of Happiness: Ethical Inquiries in the Age of Enlightenment.*
The speaker at our annual meeting next spring will be Lis Leyson, who will talk about *The Boy on the Wooden Box*, the recently published book about her late husband, Leon Leyson. The date for this meeting will be announced early in 2014.

Both Professor Norton's lecture and the annual meeting will be at 2 p.m. in room 130 of the Pollak Library. Admission to these events and parking on campus are free.

There will also be a field trip scheduled during the spring, and information about this event will be provided in early 2014.

We invite everyone to attend these events and look forward to seeing you.

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**BOOK SALE CENTER**

*Herb Rutemiller*

The Patrons and Emeriti Book Sale Center is open throughout the academic year, except during the semester finals period and the intersession between the fall and spring semesters. We sell used books, both from donations and excess volumes from the CSUF Library. Our very low prices of $1, $2, or $3 per book are set to help the CSUF students and others purchase books.
which are usually extremely expensive. All proceeds from sales are designated to purchase books for the Library, vitally important in this era of drastically reduced state funding.

Our hours are 11 to 5 on Tuesdays and 1 to 3 on Thursdays. Please visit us regularly—new stock is added each week.

As always, we need your donations to keep the shelves stocked in L199. Please call 657-278-4055 and ask for Joy Lambert in order to make arrangements. If you are interested in joining the Patrons and Emeriti volunteers working in the Book Sale Center, please call Herb Rutemiller at 714-528-4475.

ALICE MUNRO
Nobel Prize Winner
Gordon J. Van De Water

Alice Munro has had a high profile in recent literary news. She won the Man Booker prize in 2009 and now, in 2013, has won the Nobel Prize for Literature. It isn’t often a Canadian-born writer wins such a prestigious award (Saul Bellow in 1976), and it is an even rarer thing for a short story writer to do so. She is the first! Once she’d won I went through my library shelves and found a copy of her 2009 book Too Much Happiness, which contains ten stories “that shed light on the unpredictable ways in which men and women accommodate and often transcend what happens in their lives.” A bit of research tells me that she often deals with people in crisis, exploring human despair, exploitation and alienation. Most of her stories explore man/woman betrayals in Ontario, Canada. Canadian writer Margaret Atwood describes Munro’s fictions as having “the combination of obsessive scrutiny, archaeological unearthing, precise and detailed recollection, the wallowing in the seamier and meaner and more vengeful undersides of human nature, the telling of erotic secrets, the nostalgia for vanished miseries, and the rejoicing in the fullness and variety of life, stirred all together.”

Not having previously read Munro, I was at a loss as to what might personally be discovered. I did recall a conversation with our own Joyce Mason in which she praised the author’s ability to
create a short story which might have led another kind of writer to compose a full length novel. And so I started reading ...

The first Munro story I picked up, *Face*, was masterfully written, but spoke of disturbing, unsettling things in a casual conversational way that invited intimacy with the reader. A male narrator tells the strange tale of a baby boy born with a birthmark that covers half his face and how that birthmark affects his life and the lives of others. His hate-filled father sees his son as “a hunk of chopped liver,” and his mother, though caring, is at times frightening. As he matures, the boy enters into a friendship with Nancy, who, in a horrific act, mutilates her face with a razor blade she so can draw closer to him. She is then forced to move from the neighborhood and he never sees her again, but realizes that if he did bump into her in the future, there would be nothing between them.

*Some Women* takes account of many characters, including a man dying of leukemia, but the focus is on a strange old woman and a young and uninhibited masseuse who pounds her skin, which is vividly described as being “yellow-white, like wood freshly stripped of its bark.” What follows is a peculiar, enigmatic, love story of two women chasing after this stricken man who dies “sometime before the leaves were off.”

I then read a few more Munro stories that show her full power as a writer. Memorable is Fiona, once a happy small town girl, who slowly slips into the depths of Alzheimer’s disease in the 1999 story, *The Bear Came Over the Mountain*. We see how Fiona coped with declining mental powers by posting yellow sticky notes on kitchen drawers to identify the contents, and eventually comes into a world of her own as she drifts deeper and deeper into mental confusion and flickering memories. The story is, however, primarily about her marriage, with full emphasis on the casual infidelities of her husband Grant, a retired college professor.

I was able to download the 1968 story *Boys and Girls* and so give attention to a story from early in Munro’s career. This is a slice of life story of living on a hard-scrabble fox farm somewhere in Ontario where a young unnamed girl, something of an inquisitive and at times rebellious tomboy, describes the daily events, and interaction with people, and animals, that are central to her being, all mingled with the life and death that are always a part of farm life. Eventually she comes to the painful realization that she is “only a girl” in a male dominated society.
The essential strength of Munro’s stories, to my mind, comes from the vivid descriptions of character and place. She manages to pack an entire novel into about 25 - 30 pages. And she does this without giving a sense that her material is forced or anything important left out. Her characters come to life on the page. Growing up in Ontario I can easily relate to many of the locales and scenes she presents - the sandy but sometimes stony beaches surrounding the multitude of lakes that grace the province, the snow forts (and snowmen) built and then destroyed in childish mock wars, and the many little towns I recall from family driving excursions on Sundays.

Alice Munro is a penetrating explorer of the lives of ordinary people, often women. As a writer of “modern” short stories, however, she is quite different from the writer of more traditional stories that captivated me in my youth – W. Somerset Maugham; but I fancy that I’m not too old to stretch my mind and appreciate the work of this latest winner of the Nobel Prize. If you enjoy short stories, I would certainly urge you to pick up a volume of Alice Munro’s stories. Her insight and artistry are well worth experiencing.

Patrons Book Discussion Group
Herb Rutemiller

The Patrons Book Group has now been in existence for 15 years. We meet for 2 hours each month during October- May. in the second floor conference room, PLS-299. We meet the third Thursday 3-5 P.M. Parking passes are provided if you don’t have one from another source.

A book is assigned a month ahead by one of the members for attendees to read. Then that member leads the 2-hour discussion. Some come only to listen. No problem. We welcome newcomers.

If you like the group and are not a member of Patrons of the Library, we ask that you join or rejoin after three visits.
Occasionally we have a ‘wild card’ day instead of a group read. Each attendee can, if he/she wishes, give a 10-15-minute book report, either one proposed as a group read, or a book of special interest to only a few.

Attendance varies from 12 to 20 month to month. We do both fiction and nonfiction, all the way from classics to current best sellers. Once per year we try to group read a classic.

![Image](image_url)

**Henry and Friends**
**The Crowd at Walden Pond**

In the sixth of *Walden’s* eighteen chapters, “Visitors,” Thoreau forcefully refutes the enduring myth that he lived as a hermit in the house that he built at Walden Pond. He wastes no time in distancing himself from the h-word, in the last of two sentences that make up the first paragraph: “I am naturally no hermit, but might possibly sit out the sturdiest frequenter of the bar-room, if my business called me thither.”
With characteristic dry humor, Thoreau goes on to describe not just having visitors, but in fact entertaining a crowd in his 150 square foot cabin.

“When visitors came in larger and unexpected numbers there was but the third chair for them all, but they generally economized by standing up. It is surprising how many great men and women a small house will contain. I have had twenty-five or thirty souls, with their bodies, at once under my roof. And yet we often parted without being aware that we had come very near to one another.”

A careful writer, Thoreau would not have used the word “often” in the last sentence if he had hosted a large group only once, say for his hut-warming party. The final pages of “Visitors” offer details about Thoreau’s abundant company at Walden, introduced by this blunt statement: “I had more visitors while I lived in the woods than at any other period of my life; I mean that I had some.” At least one of those visitors knew that there were many others, since he “proposed a book in which visitors should write their names, as at the White Mountains; but alas! I have too good a memory to make that necessary.”

The title page of the first edition of Walden includes an epigraph that was dropped in the next edition and subsequently restored. It is a statement of purpose and a ringing refutation of the hermit myth: “I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up.” In the first sentence of the first chapter, Thoreau says “…I lived alone, in the woods, a mile from any neighbor,” and yet he proclaims his purpose in writing the book to be to disturb those same neighbors. The 1995 annotated edition of Walden, edited by Walter Harding, notes that “Actually there was a whole hamlet of huts and shanties occupied by Irish railroad laborers less than half a mile from T’s cabin, but T chose to ignore them.” In rural America in the mid-19th century a walk of half a mile was trivial, and presumably Thoreau crossed that distance as often as he walked the mile and a half in to Concord, almost daily, even though he mentions his nearest neighbors only once.

The guest list at Walden includes “Many a traveler [who] came out of his way to see me and the inside of my house, and, as an excuse for calling, asked for a glass of water.” An “inoffensive, simple-minded pauper, whom with others I had often seen used as fencing stuff, standing or sitting on a bushel in the fields to keep cattle and himself from straying, visited me, and expressed his wish to live as I did.”
Thoreau the activist mentions “One real runaway salve,...whom I helped forward toward the north star.” He comments on the “peculiarities of my visitors” in some of the book’s most pointed social criticism.

“Men of business, even farmers, thought only of solitude and employment, and of the great distance at which I dwelt from something or other; and though they said they loved a ramble in the woods occasionally, it was obvious they did not. Restless committed men, whose time was all taken up in getting a living or keeping it; ministers of God who spoke as if they enjoyed a monopoly on the subject, who could not bear all kinds of opinions; doctors, lawyers, uneasy housekeepers who pried into my cupboard...”

But Thoreau’s greatest scorn is reserved for a surprising target:

Finally, there were the self-styled reformers, the greatest bores of all, who thought I was forever singing,

This is the house that I built;
This is the man that lives in the house that I built;
but they did not know that the third line was,
These are the folks that worry the man
That lives in the house that I built.

The chapter ends on a happier note, referring to Thoreau’s “more cheering visitors...,” including “Children come a-berrying, railroad men taking a Sunday morning walk in clean shirts [those nearby shanty town dwellers, perhaps?], fishermen and hunters, poets and philosophers...”

It is surely no accident that “Solitude,” the chapter that precedes “Visitors,” is about a third shorter. Thoreau is at his most quotable in this chapter, but those passages celebrating the solitary life are only a part of a larger argument.

“We meet at the post-office, and at the sociable, and about the fireside every night; we live thick and are in each other’s way, and stumble over one another, and I think that we thus lose some respect for one another. Certainly less frequency would suffice for all important and hearty conversation.”

Living where he did, and as he did, Thoreau found as much society as suited him, neither more nor less. He was not misanthropic, and in fact was sought out for his company by both townspeople and passing travelers.