

WHAT LAWRENCE FACULTY ARE READING

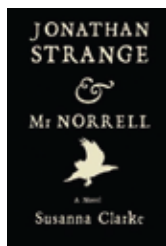
Academic Charles W. Eliot once said, "Books are the quietest and most constant of friends; they are the most accessible and wisest of counselors, and the most patient of teachers." *Lawrence Today* invites its readers to expand their circle of friends with these recommendations.



Brent Peterson, professor of German
Three Bags Full, Leonie Swann

Three Bags Full is a strange and delightful mystery that begins when a herd of sheep awake one morning to discover that their shepherd is lying dead in the meadow with a shovel through his chest. The sheep, led by Miss Maple, perhaps the most intel-

ligent ewe in the world, decide to find out who did it. With characters like Mopple the Whale, Cloud, and Sir Ritchfield, all of them sheep, this novel might sound excessively cute, but viewing the world through the eyes of these sheep makes for a unique reading experience.



Marcia Bjørnerud, professor of geology and Walter Schober Professor of Environmental Studies
Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell, Susanna Clarke

As an antidote to the unremitting rationality of the scientific literature that constitutes most of my reading, I sometimes seek out

unabashedly irrational works of fiction. A book that provided that balance for me this year was *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*, which at nearly 800 pages, is stuffed with delightful character sketches and evocative descriptions of interiors and landscapes. I read the book this summer while doing geologic field work in Svalbard (Norwegian arctic) and came across the following passage one evening after a day when we had had a kind of epiphany about what the rocks were telling us. The excerpt summed up the feeling I'd had — that we had finally asked the right question and the rocks had answered. In the book, fairies, not geologists, have this ability. Here, a human, a butler named Stephen, describes how a fairy communicates with the land: "When the fairy sang, the whole world listened to him. Stephen felt clouds pause in their passing; he felt sleeping hills shift and murmur... He understood for the first

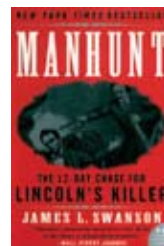
time that the world is not dumb at all, but merely waiting for someone to speak to it in a language it understands. Important messages — and destinies — were hidden inside pebbles and crumpled leaves. In the fairy's song, the earth recognized the names by which it called itself".

The context is obviously fanciful, but the phenomenon is real: The Earth is always ready to speak to us, if only we rediscover the art of conversing with it.



Keith Dom Powell, instructor in music and teacher of French Horn
Musicophilia, Oliver Sacks

I chose to read *Musicophilia* after reading excerpts in *The New Yorker* magazine a few months ago. The book is extremely well written, funny, insightful, and thought provoking. It deals with aspects of music and the mind. Oliver Sacks (author of *Awakenings*, *The Man who Mistook his Wife for a Hat* and other books) has collected case histories that explore the different ways music is affected by or ameliorates brain injury or diseases of the brain. The author is a noted neurologist who is also an amateur musician. His writing avoids the usual clinical detachment one often finds in medical writing. It is filled with interesting personal asides and opinions. My one caveat is that occasionally music terms are imprecisely used. That's the music theory teacher in me! Musicians and those with an interest in music but no special knowledge of the field will enjoy *Musicophilia*.



Jerry Podair, associate professor of history and Robert S. French Professor of American Studies
Manhunt: The 12-Day Chase for Lincoln's Killer, James L. Swanson

Among the multitude of reasons I love history is that, as the saying goes, you can't make this stuff up. Exhibit A has to be the assassination of Abraham Lincoln by John Wilkes Booth, the Brad Pitt of his day, and his desperate flight through the backwaters of Maryland and Virginia from pursuing federal troops. *Manhunt* tells this tale as a grand epic, complete with chase scenes, narrow

escapes, and a violent ending that permits Booth's life as a Shakespearean tragedian to imitate his art. Somewhere along the line, I may have ripped through a book more quickly and compulsively, but I doubt it.

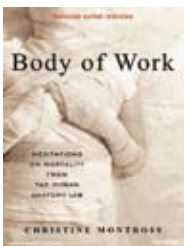


Brigid O'Donnell,
Postdoctoral Fellow in Biology
Proust Was a Neuroscientist, Jonah Lehrer

Art presupposes science, or so says Jonah Lehrer in his first book *Proust Was a Neuroscientist*, an intriguing exploration of the creative intersection of art and science. Lehrer presents the notion that several of

the great artistic minds of the modern age foreshadowed (and indeed may have instigated) a suite of scientific studies on the workings of the human mind. "Science needs art to frame the mystery, but art needs science so that not everything is a mystery." So begins an examination of the intellectual seeds set by Whitman, Eliot, Escoffier, Cézanne, Stravinsky, Stein, Woolf and of course, Proust. I was initially drawn to this book after hearing an engaging conversation with Lehrer on "On Point" on NPR and in following my emerging curiosity in connections between art and science.

Lehrer's background as a scientist, his skillful writing style and choice of artists steeped in the science of their times work together to create a thought-provoking read. Lehrer ultimately suggests that, "The reductionist methods of science must be allied with an artistic investigation of our experience." In light of Lehrer's idea, one can't help but ponder: if scientists and artists were to create and think together as a matter of course, what sort of new perspectives, new knowledge about the human experience could be illuminated?

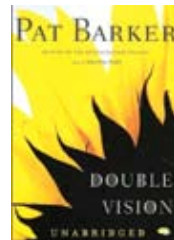


Beth De Stasio, associate professor of biology and Raymond H. Herzog Professor of Science
Body of Work: Meditations on Mortality from the Human Anatomy Lab, Christine Montross

I discovered *Body of Work* in the process of creating a lending library for pre-

medical students at Lawrence, a library that, coupled with our preceptorship program, helps students explore their passion and commitment for medicine.

Christine Montross entered the Brown University Medical School as an older student, after having been a poet and a high school teacher for a few years. She writes eloquently and with a poet's sensitivity about her experience dissecting a human cadaver, both the physical experience itself and how it serves to transform students into physicians. This might not sound like 'a good read,' but I found it both fascinating and thought-provoking. As the subtitle suggests, Dr. Montross uses her experiences to think and to write about the fine line between life and death and, more importantly, about how we treat our fellow human beings, be they alive, barely alive, or deceased, be they felons, working poor, or someone who reminds her of her grandmother. She writes cogently about how the anatomy lab experience, coupled with introductions to patient care, serves to allow medical students to explore the balance between human compassion and the dispassion necessary to think clearly and objectively about medical care. Interwoven with the basic narrative are interesting descriptions of historical and cross-cultural views of human dissection. While this book should be required reading for folks thinking of entering the medical profession at any level, it is also worth reading as an 'outsider.'



Bertrand A. Goldgar,
professor of English
Double Vision, Pat Barker

I am currently reading *Double Vision*, a taut, intense work published four years ago by the distinguished British novelist Pat Barker. I like it, but since I haven't finished it yet, I will just use it as the occasion to

recommend her brilliant trilogy about life in Britain and in the trenches during the first World War: the titles are *Regeneration*, *The Eye in the Door*, and *The Ghost Road*. I happen to think the second, which won the *Guardian* fiction prize, is the best, but they are all excellent, and the final one was awarded the Booker Prize, Britain's most prestigious literary prize. Her style is elegantly plain, her plots engrossing and disturbing, and her characters are rendered with (we are forced to assume) unerring accuracy. ■