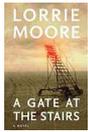


# Commonwealth Faculty and Staff

## Reading Recommendations for Winter Break

---



### *A Gate at the Stairs*

by Lorrie Moore

**Recommended by Ms. Bluestein and Ms. Lehmann**

In Lorrie Moore's new novel, *The Gate at the Stairs*, her protagonist navigates the first year of college with minimal engagement in her courses but at times hilarious and at times harrowing sentimental education (via boyfriends, the strange couple she baby-sits for, and her slacker brother) in the perverse ways of the human heart. The novel closes with a series of revelations that knock you flat.



### *Zeitoun*

by Dave Eggers

**Recommended by Ms. Bluestein and Ms. Stringfellow**

In *Zeitoun*, Dave Eggers throttles back his natural inclination to antic exaggeration in this spare, matter-of-fact real-life account of a Syrian-American survivor of Hurricane Katrina named Zeitoun, whose Good Samaritan efforts in his neighborhood of New Orleans in the days after the storm land him in the clink, courtesy of the ineptitude and racial assumptions of FEMA officials and local police. Zeitoun's resourcefulness and kindness, as he feeds pets trapped alone in attics, secures people's property, and ferries elderly survivors to dry land, are rewarded with weeks of incarceration on suspicion of looting and terrorism. Read it to find out what happens to him at the end.



### *Jane Eyre*

by Charlotte Brontë

**Recommended by Ms. Brewster**

It's not for the faint of heart; Jane, the narrator, likes to show off her vocabulary (on the other hand, it's a great book for beefing up your vocabulary...). When you've gotten used to that, you will find it a good winter-break read because:

1. There's a lot of bad weather in it.
2. It gradually becomes a gripping page-turner mystery.
3. Jane's tenacious independent streak grows on you and may be just the inspiration you need to get through the month of January.



### *The Chinese Shawl: A Miss Silver Mystery*

by Patricia Wentworth

**Recommended by Ms. Budding**

Miss Silver is my favorite fictional detective. She is a retired governess who knits complicated patterns while solving murders, and never drops either a stitch or a clue. Her strongest expression is "Dear me," and she frequently quotes Tennyson. The Miss Silver mysteries are set in England, mostly during or soon after the Second World War.



### *The Fiery Angel*

by Valery Bryusov

**Recommended by Mr. Conolly**

Satanism as a metaphor for poetic inspiration. An adventurer/scholar in 16th century Germany dabbles in the dark arts in order to win the heart of a woman possessed by demons. Bryusov was one of a group of modernist poets known as the Russian Symbolists, who flourished in the years just before the revolution, and whose work is characterized by experimentation with language and poetic forms, an embrace of mysticism and sensuality, and a flamboyant personal life. The love-triangle in the story is a thinly disguised allegory for the menage-a-trois involving Bryusov, the poet and novelist Andrei Bely, and their shared lover Nina Petrovskaya.



### *Petersburg*

by Andrei Bely

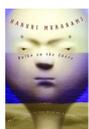
**Recommended by Mr. Conolly**

Though marred by a few short passages in which the author indulges in his enthusiasm for Rudolph Steiner's anthroposophy, this is otherwise one of the masterpieces of modern Russian literature. Often called the Russian *Ulysses* because it is not only contemporary with Joyce's novel, but depicts in painstaking detail the city of Peterburg on a particular day in 1905 (as Joyce does for Dublin on a particular day in 1904), the novel is the culmination of Bely's experimentation with language, narrative, and synaesthesia (certain sounds, for instance, are meant to evoke certain colors, etc.). The plot follows a ne'er-do-well aristocrat and would-be revolutionary terrorist who is ordered to assassinate with a bomb a certain government official--his own father, from whom he is estranged (with the usual Freudian implications). An explosive tragicomedy ensues!

# Commonwealth Faculty and Staff

## Reading Recommendations for Winter Break

---



*Kafka on the Shore*  
by Murakami

**Recommended by Ms. Cyrier**

I loved the characters in this book; a fifteen year old boy who is trying to find himself and a parallel story of an elderly mentally challenged man who is able to communicate with cats. Their two stories intertwine at the end in an oedipal twist.



*Five Tang Poets*  
by Wang Wei, Li Po, Tu Fu, Li Ho, and Li Shang-yin.  
Translated by David Young



*Selected Poems of Tu Fu*  
by Tu Fu. Translated by David Hinton

**Recommended by Mr. Davis**

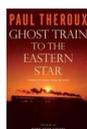
These poets from the turbulent 8th and 9th centuries in China wrote in a spare, compact, agile style that confronts all sorts of personal vicissitudes with a simplicity and restraint that you'll wish you could muster.



*Mctague*  
by Frank Norris

**Recommended by Ms. Siporin and Mr. Davis**

A novel about a very large, powerfully-built man with a very small brain becomes a dentist in the early days of California, marries a woman who likes to roll around on a bed full of gold coins, murders her, and runs away to Death Valley where he dies. Ironists will love this book. Contains one of the oddest love scenes in literature.



*Ghost Train to the Eastern Star*  
by Paul Theroux

**Recommended by Mr. Larry Geffin**

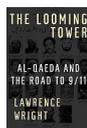
"Ever since childhood, when I lived within earshot of the Boston and Maine, I have seldom heard a train go by and not wished I was on it." Thirty years after writing *The Great Railway Bazaar*, his account of travel by train from London to Singapore and the Far East and back, Paul Theroux took the trip again, and wrote about it. In *Ghost Train to the Eastern Star*, Theroux, older, slower, but happier, focuses his sharp eye on everything he sees. Theroux isn't a travel writer. He's a traveler who writes.



*War With the Newts*  
by Karl Capek

**Recommended by Ms. Haber**

There are days you just need to read a satirical novel about what goes wrong when a corporation enslaves of a race of sentient newts by the Czech writer who coined the term "robot." *War With the Newts* is written in a variety of vivid, vigorous styles (straight narrative, newspaper articles, scientific reports, etc.); is often laugh-out-loud-look-around-sheepishly-at-everyone-staring-at-you funny; and, when read as a parable about how our narrow self-interest has a tendency to doom us all to death and destruction, profoundly disturbing. The novel was written in 1936 about the dangers of the modern world (fascism, technology), but I've never read a better description of the human idiosyncrasies driving global warming. (Did I mention it's very funny?)



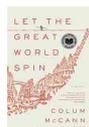
*The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*

by Lawrence Wright

**Recommended by Ms. Kane**

A riveting book that captivates the reader with its detail and analysis. Winner of the Pulitzer Prize, I think the the New York Times review best describes how powerful Wright's book is, "*The Looming Tower* is not just a detailed, heart-stopping account of the events leading up to 9/11, written with style and verve, and carried along by villains and heroes that only a crime novelist could dream up. It's an education, too... a thoughtful examination of the world that produced the men who brought us 9/11."

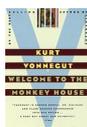
# Commonwealth Faculty and Staff Reading Recommendations for Winter Break



*Let the Great World Spin*  
by Colum McCann

**Recommended by Ms. Kane**

The narratives in *Let the Great World Spin* are all connected by a August day in 1974 in New York City when Philippe Petit, a French acrobat, walked across a tightrope strung between the World Trade Center towers. Petit's magnificent walk serves as a cornerstone for the stories of the other characters, who range from prostitutes to priests. Their tales create a vivid depiction of 1970's New York.



*Welcome to the Monkey House*  
by Kurt Vonnegut

**Recommended by Lihuan Lai**

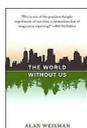
A collection of short stories exploring science fiction as social commentary. Best stories are "Euphoriaphone" and the title piece "Welcome to the Monkey House." Read them all, though, they are fantastic.



*Born to Run*  
by Christopher McDougall

**Recommended by Ms. Melvoin**

McDougall writes about ultra marathoners who, almost by definition, are crazy characters. In addition to writing about American runners, running, feet, shoes, and ultra marathons, McDougall focuses on the Tarahumara Indians of Mexico's Copper Canyons, people who run long distances in brutal terrain with speed, grace, and few injuries.



*The World Without Us*  
by Janet Maslin

**Recommended by Mr. Racioppi**

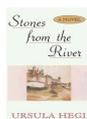
"Teasing out the consequences of a simple thought experiment—what would happen if the human species were suddenly extinguished—Weisman has written a sort of pop-science ghost story, in which the whole earth is the haunted house." - From *The New Yorker*



*Nation*  
by Terry Pratchett

**Recommended by Ms. Reyzin**

"Mau is the only one left after a giant wave sweeps his island village away. But when much is taken, something is returned, and somewhere in the jungle Daphne—a girl from the other side of the globe—is the sole survivor of a ship destroyed by the same wave." - From the publisher, HarperCollins



*Stones from the River*  
by Ursula Hegi

**Recommended by Jean Segaloff**

Trudi Montag is a dwarf who grows to womanhood in Nazi Germany.



*Out Stealing Horses*  
by Per Petterson

**Recommended by Mr. Sherry**

"*Out Stealing Horses* tells the story of Trond Sander, a sixty-seven-year-old man who has moved from the city to a remote, riverside cabin, only to have all the turbulence, grief, and overwhelming beauty of his youth come back to him one night while he's out on a walk." - From the publisher, Picador.



*Blue Covenant*  
by Maud Barlow

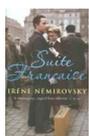
**Recommended by Ms. Frédérique Theibault-Adjout**

*Blue Covenant* is about the global water crisis, making water a human right, and the many struggles people are currently fighting all over the world to have or keep access to clean water.

# Commonwealth Faculty and Staff

## Reading Recommendations for Winter Break

---



*Suite Française*  
by Irène Némirovsky

**Recommended by Ms. Frédérique Thiebault-Adjout**

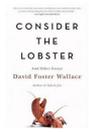
*Suite Française* is about how in the beginning of W.W. II in France people fled Paris to go south, taking all their precious belongings with them. Némirovsky describes the pettiness, social tension, and frustration that develops when people are forced to live together in difficult circumstances. What is also interesting and tragic about this book is that the author left Russia to take refuge in Paris after the Russian revolution. Némirovsky wrote in French and became very famous quickly, but was then deported to Auschwitz where she died in 1942.



*Jeff in Venice, Death in Varanasi*  
by Geoff Dyer

**Recommended by Mr. Vollrath**

A novel hard to categorize, written in two parts, the first of which takes place in Venice, the second in Varanasi, India. Dyer captures the whacky atmosphere during Venice's film Biennale and, utterly different, the haunting "riverscape" of one of India's chief places of death. Both echo the main character's attempt to find himself.



*Consider the Lobster and Other Essays*  
by David Foster Wallace

**Recommended by Mr. Vollrath**

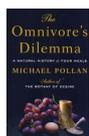
Essays of all sorts by a wild writer, a lover of life and the footnote, which allows him outlandish, whacky yet strangely accurate associations.



*Out of My Skin*  
by John Haskell

**Recommended by Mr. Vollrath**

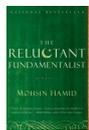
This is a strange, unsettling, and fun novel about a poor fellow who seeks to get away from his mixed-up, sad self. While trying to drain himself of his cares and neuroses, he becomes colonized by the personage of Steve Martin as he starts to impersonate him. An odd, humorous, surprising book.



*The Omnivore's Dilemma*  
by Michael Pollan

**Recommended by Ms. Wasilewski**

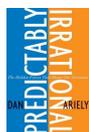
Pollan follows four meals from seed to mouth.



*Reluctant Fundamentalist*  
by Mohsin Hamid

**Recommended by Ms. Wasilewski**

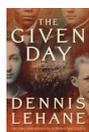
This novel takes place at a cafe table in Lahore where a Pakistani man tells an unknown American the story of his time living, working, and studying in the US before and after 9/11.



*Predictably Irrational*  
by Dan Ariely

**Recommended by Ms. Wasilewski**

Written by a behavioral economist at MIT, *Predictably Irrational* looks at the (irrational) ways in which humans behave and tries to explain why the irrational things we do make sense.



*The Given Day*  
by Dennis Lehane

**Recommended by Mr. Wharton**

An unevenly written, but engaging historical novel of events leading up to the 1919 Boston Police Strike by the author of *Mystic River* (and alumnus of B.C. High). The flu epidemic, Red Scare, Molasses Disaster, and Black Sox Scandal are woven into the story of two Boston families, one black, one white. The novel includes terrorist attacks, union organizing, class struggle, bare-knuckle politics, and riots, as well as cameos by numerous historical figures, including Babe Ruth, Calvin Coolidge (Governor of Massachusetts), U. S. Attorney General Mitchell Palmer, W.E.B. DuBois, and a young J. Edgar Hoover. Not great literature, but a good read.