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Musselman Library
Gettysburg College

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Abstract

In this new *Next Page* column, Julie Hendon shares how listening to audiobooks has made her more aware of writing quality, her top picks for archaeology-related fiction (hint: two series to add to your must-read list!), and which authors she returns to again and again.

Keywords

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*In this new **Next Page** column, Julie Hendon shares how listening to audiobooks has made her more aware of writing quality, her top picks for archaeology-related fiction (hint: two series to add to your must-read list!), and which authors she returns to again and again.*

What are you currently reading that you would recommend?

I'm currently reading two books. One is [William Morris: A Life for Our Time](#) by Fiona MacCarthy, a comprehensive biography of this pivotal figure in the development of modern ideas of art, craftsmanship, and historical preservation. The other is [Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa](#) by Ousmane Oumar Kane which is introducing me to traditions of scholarship and education in West Africa that I know almost nothing about. I'm listening to a third, [Farewell, My Lovely](#) by Raymond Chandler.

Recent reads that I'd recommend include Francis Hardinge's [The Lie Tree](#), one of the best fictional accounts of the traumatic effects of Darwin's Origin of Species on Victorian society as seen through the eyes of an adolescent girl. Also, [The Girls from Corona del Mar](#) by Ruffalo Thorpe which transcends its title as it examines the life long friendship between two young women and the consequences of both lying and truth telling.

Are there particular genres you appreciate more than others?

I alternate between more serious writing, usually biography, social history, and anthropology, and more relaxing works of fiction. I read very widely in such genres as fantasy and science fiction, mystery, historical fiction, and graphic novels. Perhaps because I am an anthropologist, I am drawn to authors who excel at world building, giving me a sense of a real or imagined place and time. I steer clear of stories that feature serial killers and excessive violence, or books that lack believable female characters. I have never enjoyed short stories. I admire poetry but find it difficult to engage with.

Do you have a favorite author? Is there a writer that you really enjoy and look forward to his/her next book?

There is no single author I would identify as my favorite but many that I enjoy reading. I look forward to new books by [Tana French](#) who writes the Dublin murder squad series and [Laurie King](#) whose series of mysteries featuring Mary Russell and Sherlock Holmes has given me much pleasure. [Lois McMaster Bujold](#) is one of the best fantasy writers I know of and I will read anything by her.

Your professional and scholarly work is in archaeology. Is there a good work of fiction with an archaeology plot line that you would recommend to better understand your discipline?

Among the many series featuring archaeologists, I would recommend two. The [Amelia Peabody series](#) by Elizabeth Peters is a funny and sharply observed recreation of the heyday of colonial Egyptology as seen through the eyes of a determined upper class Englishwoman. Peters is the pseudonym of the late Barbara Mertz who held a Ph.D. in Egyptology from the University of Chicago. The second series I have enjoyed features [forensic archaeologist Ruth Galloway](#) and is set in contemporary Great Britain. This series is by Elly Griffiths.

What are your reading habits? Do you read electronic or print? Write in the margins or keep your books clean? Keep them or give them away?

I find that I listen as much as I read these days. Audiobooks have become an important companion during my daily commute, while I knit, weave, garden, or exercise. Listening really makes me aware of the quality of the writing. I think having a book that can stand up to being read is a real test of a writer's abilities. When reading, I don't care about format unless the book has illustrations that are important to the subject matter. Then I want print. I try not to buy books anymore and have been giving away the ones I do own. I am a dedicated patron of Musselman and Adams County libraries.

Are there any books you find yourself returning to again and again?

I regularly reread [Raymond Chandler](#), Georgette Heyer, [Terry Pratchett](#), [Ursula LeGuin](#), Susan Cooper, Patricia Wentworth, and Margery Allingham. Periodically I get the urge to revisit one of the Victorians, usually [Dickens](#), [Wilkie Collins](#), or [Anthony Trollope](#), all of which work wonderfully as audiobooks provided one gets the right narrator.

What was the last book that made you laugh?

The last book to make me laugh out loud was *The Wee Free Men* by Terry Pratchett as read by Simon Vance. Vance does a wonderful job with the tongue twisting conversation of the wee free men, an extremely tiny but pugnacious kind of fairy that speak in broadest Scots.

Do you have a favorite book or literary character from your childhood? What did you like to read as a child?

Important characters from my childhood reading that I still enjoy revisiting include Miss Bianca, an intrepid mouse who becomes the leading light of the Prisoners' Aid Society ([Margery Sharp](#)) and Jenny Linsky, a small black cat who has many adventures with the other members of the Cat Club in 1950s Brooklyn (Esther Averill). [Beatrix Potter's](#) books continue to be favorites. All of these are characterized by a perfect blend of text and illustration. Both Potter and Averill created their own pictures whereas the inimitable Garth Williams illustrated *The Rescuers* and later Miss Bianca adventures.

What are you planning to read next?

Friends whose insight I trust have recommended three books to me that I look forward to reading or listening to soon: *White Dog Fell from the Sky* by Eleanor Morse, *The Last Painting of Sara de Vos* by Dominic Smith, and *Sea of Poppies* by Amitar Ghosh.

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