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Julie Hendon, Interim Associate Provost for Academic Technology Initiatives & Faculty Development and Dean of Social Sciences & Interdisciplinary Programs, Director of the Johnson Center for Creative Teaching and Learning, and Professor of Anthropology

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**

Musselman Library, Gettysburg College, reading, books, interview

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November 4, 2016

*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.*

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*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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