What
(and Where and How)
We Read for Fun

Compiled by Meredith Heagney
Not even the most serious legal scholar reads scholarship all the time. Is there any greater joy than settling down with a great book, just for fun? The Law School is full of bookworms who would emphatically answer “no.” You can never have too many book recommendations, so we asked a handful of faculty and administrators to write about their literary favorites and reading habits. If you enjoy this, be sure to check out http://webcast-law.uchicago.edu/facultyreading/ to see the 2013 version of our annual holiday tradition, “What Are We Reading?” Older lists can be found on our Goodreads page (just search UChicago Law), and if you friend us, you’ll get this year’s list before we post it to our website.

Happy reading!

**Herschella Conyers, ’83**
**Clinical Professor of Law, Criminal and Juvenile Justice Project**

I just finished *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Díaz. It was my plane ride book for several trips. It’s fairly typical of one of my favorite kinds of fiction: sort of hard-hitting surrealism. During the summer, I try to read something old (a book I’ve read before to see what’s changed): *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison; something new (I’ve been meaning to explore this author): *Dear Life* by Alice Munro; something borrowed (a book recommended by a friend): *Why Zebras Don’t Get Ulcers* by Robert Sapolsky; and something blue (back to the surreal): I’m looking.

For me, reading is as much a physical as intellectual and emotional act. I’m trying desperately to convert to an e-reader but I like the weight of a book. I like the marking of a book, accidentally or not. I like seeing, as I go, where I am in the story.

There’s no best for me. What follows are books (not counting the classics and childhood readings, but I have to give a shout-out to *Advise and Consent* and *Gone with the Wind*) that I remember and remember reading. These are some of the books that have made me pause, made me grunt or speak out loud, and made me love words and meanings.

In no particular order:
- *Me Talk Pretty One Day* by David Sedaris
- *A Death in the Family* by James Agee
- *Play It as It Lays* by Joan Didion
- *Go Tell It on the Mountain* by James Baldwin

*Disgrace* by J. M. Coetzee
*Liff of Pi* by Yann Martel
*Middlesex* by Jeffrey Eugenides
*One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez

(Nothing beats a poetry anthology for a quick pick-me-up.)

**Susan Curry**
**Director of Public Interest Law and Policy**

Given my daily commute from Chicago’s far northwest side, I have upwards of 15 hours spent in my car in a typical week. So I look for books that tell long, sprawling stories. Better still if they feature a cast of hundreds and cover decades or generations. No matter how well told or artfully crafted, a short story leaves me wanting. Unsurprising then, that one major book-choosing factor for me is length: *The Goldfinch* by Donna Tartt or anything by Bryce Courtenay or Wally Lamb. I recommend *The Luminaries* by Eleanor Catton. At only 28 years old, she wrote this complex mystery set in the New Zealand goldfields of 1866. I can’t wait for her next book. Once I find an author I like, such as the hilarious Meg Wolitzer (whose *The Interestings* I am currently reading), I read everything in her oeuvre.

I am most grateful for the new audiobook craze, which has been my car commuter’s deliverance. I find that I have never been as well read. In my four years at the Law School, my audio library has grown to include 162 books. And how decadent it is to be read to! Especially by excellent actors-turned-narrators. Anyone who has listened to the cast-narrated audio version of *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett will know what I mean.

I used to think that I had a preferred genre of fiction, but since “going audio,” I find that I am willing to experiment with all types of books I would never have considered: in Westerns, I have loved *The Son* by Philipp Meyer and, of course, *Lonesome Dove* by Larry McMurtry; in young adult, I recommend *Eleanor & Park* by Rainbow Rowell and *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green; in fantasy/mythology, I’ve found no one better than Neil Gaiman, whose *The Graveyard Book* and *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* vie with *Neverwhere* for all-time favorites.

**Reading now:** *The Interestings* by Meg Wolitzer
**Best book in recent memory:** *The Luminaries* by Eleanor Catton
**Favorite book of all time:** *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez
M. Todd Henderson
Michael J. Marks Professor of Law and Aaron Director Teaching Scholar

One of my great fortunes is that I get paid to read. All day long every day, I read everything I can get my hands on. The bulk of my reading, however, is related to my teaching and research interests in corporate law and financial regulation. Books about economics, current events, and public policy more generally consume most of my time. Accordingly, my ratio of fun-to-work-related reading has fallen dramatically in recent years; when I was working as a lawyer, I read for pleasure as an escape, but unfortunately I read less fiction today. I read mostly on my Kindle, but largely because of the convenience of carrying books with me everywhere and the ability to read in the dark. My drawers are filled with book lights that never quite measured up, and I’m glad to be rid of them.

I like to read many books at once, and I don’t finish books that I don’t like. I usually read things recommended by book hounds that I trust—friends or colleagues with similar tastes or who I admire intellectually. I enjoy science fiction (but not fantasy), classic fiction, and history of all kinds, especially military and geopolitical history. A favorite in each: the *Foundation* series by Isaac Asimov, *Of Human Bondage* by W. Somerset Maugham, and the Liberation Trilogy (about World War II) by Rick Atkinson.

I also enjoy reading to my children, especially now that they are largely out of picture books. My daughter and I have recently read many of the Laura Ingalls Wilder books, and we’re now reading *Anne of Green Gables*. I’m looking forward to reading *The Constitution of Liberty* by F. A. Hayek to them in a few years!

**Reading now:** *Forgotten Ally* by Rana Mitter, about the war between China and Japan during the 1930s and 1940s; *Orkney* by Amy Sackville; and *Sons of Wichita* (about the Koch brothers) by Daniel Schulman; about halfway into each, I can recommend them all very highly

**Best book in recent memory:** *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea* by Barbara Demick, a perspective-inducing account of life in that country

**Favorite book of all time:** *The Brothers Karamazov* by Fyodor Dostoevsky
Alison LaCroix  
**Professor of Law and Ludwig and Hilde Wolf Teaching Scholar**

My “fun” books are nearly always works of fiction. I spend a lot of time reading nonfiction historical scholarship and primary sources for my research, which I love, but for leisure-time reading, nothing matches fiction. I nearly always read actual, paper books. The exceptions were when I used to have a longer commute and listened to audio versions of a few novels, some that I was reading for a Greenberg seminar and some others that I just wanted to read. Those were terrific, especially when the readers were especially talented (Frederick Davidson for *War and Peace*; Timothy West for Trollope’s Barsetshire novels; Kate Reading for *Middlemarch*). But for real, immersive reading, it has to be a genuine book.

As these titles suggest, I’m very fond of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels. But I also enjoy more modern works, often by British or Irish novelists, many of them female. And I tend to read in thematically or chronologically related groups—so in clumps over the past couple of summers, for instance, I’ve read a number of great books by twentieth-century British, Irish, and Commonwealth writers: Edna O’Brien, Elizabeth Bowen, Rebecca West, Shirley Hazzard, Anne Enright, Kate Atkinson, and Rachel Cusk. I’ve also had some spates of Tudor-era fiction, prompted by Hilary Mantel (who turns out to be basically incomparable), and World War I–era novels, sparked by the recent, excellent BBC/HBO miniseries version of Ford Madox Ford’s *Parade’s End*.

**Reading now:** *Troubles* by J. G. Farrell  
**Best book in recent memory:** *Barchester Towers* by Anthony Trollope  
**Favorite book of all time:** *Tom Jones* by Henry Fielding

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Jeff Leslie  
**Director of Clinical and Experiential Learning, Clinical Professor of Law, Paul J. Tierney Director of the Housing Initiative, and Faculty Director of Curriculum**

My pattern in reading for fun is to alternate between truly forgettable, trashy stuff—think airport bookstore bestsellers—and something meatier, often biographies or popular histories. The preferred format is almost always a real book and not an electronic format. Nothing beats the convenience of whipping out a battered paperback to squeeze in a few pages waiting for my son’s baseball game to start. The exception is the David McCullough–style histories that weigh you down in book form but fit so very nicely on the iPad. I love audio books but seldom am organized enough to download and listen. One recent favorite in the audio category was Andre Agassi’s excellent bio, *Open*. It was fun (for me, who knows about the students!) to draw analogies in class between the craft of the professional athlete and the lawyer’s craft.

**Reading now:** *The Border Trilogy* by Cormac McCarthy  
**Best book in recent memory:** *David McCullough’s biography of the young Teddy Roosevelt, Mornings on Horseback*  
**Favorite book of all time:** *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee

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Saul Levmore  
**William B. Graham Distinguished Service Professor of Law**

Virtually all my nonlaw reading is by way of audiobooks, listening while I exercise. I am in the midst of the last chapter of *Our Mathematical Universe* by Max Tegmark. It’s provocative and makes the reader think hard about the importance (or not) of testable hypotheses. I recently finished Evan Osnos’s *Age of Ambition*, a collection of observations from modern China. The reading (or listening, really) coincided with a trip there this last month. It’s a book for everyone.

I am always asking people for book recommendations but, as with films and television, I find it hard to develop a successful algorithm (of the Netflix kind). Someone recommends a book I love, but then the next suggestion from that source falls flat for me. This is true for fiction as well as nonfiction. I confess that I take my colleagues’ suggestions very seriously. By now I have read almost every book recommended in the Law School’s list. There I found *The Boys in the Boat*, which I thoroughly enjoyed but also some books that were hard to get through. Reading is experimenting, I guess.

**Reading now:** *Our Mathematical Universe* by Max Tegmark  
**Best book in recent memory:** *Probably Approximately Correct* by Leslie Valiant  
**Best book in longer-term memory:** *A Fine Balance* by Rohinton Mistry
Annette Moore, ’06
Associate Director of Admissions

Between work, enjoying all that the city of Chicago has to offer, and hanging out with friends, family, and especially my 19-month-old nephew, I find that I now have less time to read than when I practiced law. However, I do love those lazy weekends when I would rather stay at home than brave public transit on either a blisteringly hot summer day or a painfully cold winter evening. On those days, if I am not trying to catch up on TV shows saved on my DVR or binge watching some ridiculously addictive show on Netflix, I grab some comfort food, a piping hot cup of coffee, and a good book (either on my iPad or the actual print version) and settle on my living room couch.

I don’t discriminate when it comes to my literary tastes. I like historical nonfiction, science fiction (or just any type of fiction), fantasy, suspense thrillers (though not too suspenseful or venturing into horror), and classic American literature (think along the lines of The Great Gatsby). I am currently reading David & Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and The Art of Battling Giants by Malcolm Gladwell. I can’t recall what motivated me to pick up the book from the D’Angelo Law Library other than the fact that I have thoroughly enjoyed every other book of Gladwell’s that I have read (for those ever wondering why they never became an NHL star or a maestro on the violin, be sure to pick up his Outliers: The Story of Success).

Reading now: David & Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and The Art of Battling Giants by Malcolm Gladwell
Best book in recent memory: Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln by Doris Kearns Goodwin
Favorite book of all time: Anthem by Ayn Rand (I love the idea of championing the individual over the collective)

Jennifer Nou
Neubauer Family Assistant Professor of Law

Over the years, I’ve owned a Kindle alongside iPhones and iPads with Kindle apps on them. At first, I thought being able to get books immediately and not having to haul thick copies around would convert me. I was wrong; I still buy paper copies. I’m experimenting with audiobooks, but the Audible subscription I got a while ago has been good for road trips and not much else. There’s just something about dog-earring pages, scribbling notes in pencil.

My favorite genre is probably the memoir, followed closely by the biography. I love hearing people tell their own stories, in their own words: How do they perceive the events, both historic and mundane, that they’ve lived through? What are the details that only they could relate from firsthand experience? One of the best that I’ve read is Katharine Graham’s Personal History. I didn’t know that much about her before reading it, other than that she was the publisher of the Washington Post. But her story, spanning across almost eight decades, is about her complicated family relationships, her husband’s suicide, and her evolution from a housewife to the head of a major newspaper grappling with the Pentagon Papers and many other issues during her tenure. Throughout, she is admirably honest and candid.

More recently, I also really enjoyed Walter Isaacson’s Steve Jobs biography. Published so closely after Jobs’ death, it would have been understandable to whitewash much of his life. Instead, the biography also grapples with Jobs’ weaknesses and warts to present a fuller picture of someone it would be otherwise easy to mythologize. Finally, another one that stands out is David Sedaris’s Me Talk Pretty One Day. Sedaris is not only hilarious, but has such a unique voice and perspective on the most everyday things. Next on my list is probably Piper Kerman’s Orange Is the New Black—the show’s great, so the book must be too, right?

Reading now: Let the Great World Spin by Colum McCann
Best book in recent memory: Complications: A Surgeon’s Notes on an Imperfect Science by Atul Gawande
Favorite book of all time: The Brothers Karamazov by Fyodor Dostoevsky

Randy Picker, ’85
James Parker Hall Distinguished Service Professor of Law; Senior Fellow, Computation Institute of the University of Chicago and Argonne National Laboratory

I read a mixture of books on paper and as e-books. I am not quite sure what I think yet of e-books, but I love always having one or more e-books with me, and the highest virtue must be standing in line at Costco.
reading an e-book. Dollars saved, books read, a successful Saturday. I have been reading two different e-books: 

Probable Approximately Correct by Leslie Valiant (recommended on last year’s list by Saul Levmore) and The Why Axis: Hidden Motives and the Undiscovered Economics of Everyday Life by Uri Gneezy and Chicago economist John List.

On paper, I have a stack of books on the bedside end table. The obligatory copy of Capital in the Twenty-First Century by Thomas Piketty, half-read and holding. The real question is exactly how many other books I will read before circling back to Piketty. I think of that as a workish book: not directly relevant to what I do for a living but the kind of thing that I should know more about. Much closer to work is Brad Stone’s The Everything Store: Jeff Bezos and the Age of Amazon (bought, ironically, at the Seminary Co-Op), nice summer casual nonfiction.

But the book that I have been wrestling with is Cinematography: Theory and Practice by Blain Brown. This is a pretty hard-core filmmaking book: cinematic continuity, tungsten Fresnels, f/stops, and much, much more. Probably over my head and more than I need, but I am getting ready to do a video teaching project—I guess I just did—and I need to understand video storytelling much better than I do now. Reading now: Cinematography: Theory and Practice by Blain Brown

Best book in recent memory: On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft by Stephen King

Favorite books of all time: Foundations of Economic Analysis by Paul Samuelson and The Old Man and the Sea by Ernest Hemingway

Randolph Stone
Clinical Professor of Law, Criminal and Juvenile Justice Project

I would describe my reading habits, outside of the professional context, as feast and famine. Sometimes, I am reading several books concurrently from a variety of genres including collected essays, history, biography, fiction, and occasional poetry. On the mystery/crime noir level, two of my favorites are Walter Mosley and George Pelecanos. At other times, I’m only reading and savoring criminal and juvenile justice legal and policy materials. For the most part, I’m still reading hardcover books and paper, although e-books and audio are slowly easing into the mix. I often read late (sometimes too late) into the night, a habit I probably picked up from my mother.

I just finished Colson Whitehead’s wry and self-deprecating The Noble Hustle: Poker, Beef Jerky, and Death about his adventure at the World Series of Poker main event. His style is ironic, satirical, and somewhat negative although humorous at the same time. I’ve also read and enjoyed a couple of his novels, The Intuitionist (a metaphorical fantasy about the first black female elevator inspector) and John Henry Days (an improvisational riff on the legendary folk hero).

Just finished: The Noble Hustle: Poker, Beef Jerky, and Death by Colson Whitehead

Best book in recent memory: Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention by Manning Marable

Favorite books of all time: Sula by Toni Morrison, A Lesson Before Dying by Ernest Gaines, Bud, Not Buddy by Christopher Paul Curtis, and The Known World by Edward P. Jones

Paul Woo
Director of the Office of Career Services

I grew up near a library, so I have always had a tender spot for hardcover books. Virtually all of my books are hardcover (though I am picky about which authors I will buy and read); there is just such a connection to hold a page and turn it. I read mostly contemporary fiction but also enjoy a good nonfiction history book when the subject captures me—maritime and naval military history in particular. I do enjoy short-story collections immensely; my most admired author in this form is Raymond Carver.

I only use digital formats when I’m faced with a long complex work so I can use the search function to remind myself of characters, places, and events (for example, Infinite Jest and Game of Thrones), yet I will still buy the hardcover for my library.

Reading now: All the Light We Cannot See by Anthony Doerr

Best book in recent memory: The Golem and the Jinni by Helene Wecker

Favorite books of all time: It is a toss up between Charles Dickens’ Great Expectations and Márquez’s One Hundred Years of Solitude