



JULY 2014

SUMMER READING LIST

Aaaaah, at long last! The long winter has faded and it's time for summer. Time for long hikes, time for digging in the dirt, time for dozing off while the baseball game plays on the radio... and time for reading! Preferably in a hammock, or a tent, or curled up in a window seat while the rain drums on the roof.

Here are some highlights from the Honeybee summer reading pile – some old favorites, some new ones, and some that are both old and new at the same time.

TOP QUOTES:

*What nature delivers to us is never stale.
Because what nature creates has eternity in it.*
- Isaac Bashevis

The world is almost entirely solar powered already.
- Elon Musk

Our entire biological system, the brain and the earth itself, work on the same frequencies.
- Tesla

So what do we do with this big bee bummer? Plant flowers.
- Marla Spivak, on the drastic decline of bee populations

Reality provides us with facts so romantic that imagination itself could add nothing to them.
- Jules Verne

She acts like summer and walks like rain.
- Train

It's a sunshine day.
- The Brady Bunch

Summer days, drifting away, tooo-ah! Oh those summer nights.
- Jacobs & Casey (or Newton-John and Travolta)

*Here comes the sun
And I say, it's all right.*
- The Beatles

SHORT STACKS:

No matter how focused we might hope to be, summer has a way of pulling our attention outward, away from our own thoughts. I have come to think this is a positive weather-induced trait, that we are practically forced to pay attention to other things for at least a few months of the year. Still, even with the attention of a flea, there's no need to read Us magazine ALL the time. Here are some thought-provoking selections that are perfectly sized for an hour in a deck chair – and many are available in audio versions, too, ideal for a walk along the shore, car ride to the mountains, or tromp through the woods... though silence or campground sing-along songs would be perfectly great options for those times, too.

- **[LETTERS OF NOTE](#)**: this mesmerizing blog has finally published the US version of its well-curated archives. I love that you can see the original images of these letters along with the transcriptions and context notes – poor handwriting, quirky illustrations, telegram typefaces and all. Did you know that apparently the Queen of England is not required to have excellent penmanship?
- **[THINK](#)**: WALTER RUSSELL IBM LECTURE SERIES: I have not yet explored this well-regarded series, but given my longtime fascination with IBM and especially the heart of the “THINK” era, it is high on my list.
- **[NOBEL LECTURES](#)**: there are many paid published versions of these lectures, but most are also available on the [Nobel site](#), and some also include audio versions or interviews with prize winners. They are surprisingly short and, by definition, remarkable.
- **[REITH LECTURES](#)**: I've highlighted this terrific BBC series for a few years now – it never fails to impress, and I am slowly working my way through the archives as well. The 2014 series features Dr. Atul Gawande (he of the famous [TED talk](#), amongst many other things) on The Future of Medicine. His discussion of pit crews versus cowboys in health care raises some interesting questions for investing and other endeavors as well.

FICTION BUNDLE:

- **[THE SIGNATURE OF ALL THINGS](#)**, by Elizabeth Gilbert
 - **[EUPHORIA](#)**, by Lily King
- If there is an explorer in your life (or your inner life), these two novels will be of interest. *The Signature of All Things* spans a great arc from Captain Cook to Charles Darwin, and shows how it can be the slower, careful pathways that ultimately lead to the most dramatic breakthroughs – in science and in life. *Euphoria* is imagined from the life of Margaret Mead, which might make it sound a lot less exciting than it is. I devoured this book within a small segment of a long transpacific flight, just a few hours. These books are both fascinating reads, especially if you've ever dreamt of being an adventurous academic (not an oxymoron, I promise).
- **[DELICIOUS! A Novel](#)**, by Ruth Reichl
- Many of you will know Reichl's terrific writing on food and autobiography; this is her first novel. Any story that combines crazy recipes, a giant library with hidden passages, a cult-like food market, and a puzzling code linking secret documents is my kind of story... so of course I loved it.
- **[THE CIRCLE](#)**, by Dave Eggers
- This might not be the most finely wrought of Eggers' work (it reads like it was written in a bit of a hurry, which, perhaps, it was) – but the story shows how little extension of our current hyper-linked world is needed to create a seriously dystopian society. I especially appreciated how slippery the road can be from “sharing is caring” to “not sharing is selfish”. The scenes from

headquarters of a modern social media behemoth are strikingly close to reality (at least as far as I've witnessed it), which makes it easy to sink right into this book.

- **[LIFE AFTER LIFE](#), by Kate Atkinson**
- **[MISS PEREGRINE'S HOME FOR PECULIAR CHILDREN](#), by Ransom Riggs**
You won't likely find these books sitting near each other in your local bookstore, but they are linked in my mind, as they both have a magical realism approach to wartime stories. Take my advice, just suspend disbelief from the very first page, and you will love these books. *Life After Life* is a dizzying loop-the-loop, a single fictional biography that vividly illustrates the many "if only's" that all of our lives contain. And *Miss Peregrine's* is a sort of circus side-show version of Harry Potter, the first of a trilogy (the second in the series is *Hollow City*). This would be a great book to read with your kids, so long as they are not easily spooked. Do invest in the hardcover of *Miss Peregrine's*, so you can fully appreciate the photographs and other quirky visual elements.

NON-FICTION BUNDLE:

- **[THE SYSTEMS VIEW OF LIFE: A UNIFYING VISION](#), by Fritjof Capra and Pier Luigi Luisi**
If you worry that the world really works in entirely different ways from the silo-ed factory model that's familiar to many of us, you are right. If you then further worry about how best to re-frame your own thinking, this book could be a big help. Capra and Luisi examine the far-ranging implications of systems thinking across multiple disciplines and applications. This is the book where I am most eager to dive in deep this summer; a more thorough review from the legendary Hazel Henderson can be found [here](#), on SeekingAlpha.
- **[BREAKING TRAIL: A CLIMBING LIFE](#), by Arlene Blum**
I had the great treat of meeting Arlene at TEDxWellesleyCollege earlier this year. As she described dispatching her first scientific paper from a mountaintop, leading the ban on carcinogenic flame-retardants *and* the first team of women climbers to summit Mt. McKinley, along with everyone else in the audience I thought, woah. I need to spend more time with this person! Reading her story is one way to do so – lucky for all of us.
- **[THE RIVER](#), by Alessandro Sanna**
This suggestion comes via the terrific [Brainpickings](#) site, and it is an absolutely gorgeous book, almost 100% watercolor illustrations. There is a story here, and beauty – best of all, you can make up great chunks of your own narrative, with as much nuance and depth as you like... which maybe means it should be in the fiction section. Great to read with a small child (or a large one), while you make up stories together.

NATURAL BUNDLE:

- **[THE GREAT ANIMAL ORCHESTRA](#), by Bernie Krause**
Shhh. Listen. Looks can be deceiving. Listen to nature, don't just look. I first encountered Bernie Krause when he gave an extraordinary [TED talk](#) that showed just how much information about a habitat and its health can come from listening. I never thought much of the sounds of my own environment until I came across a set of bird recordings, and played them as I sorted through infinite emails. As the track for eastern woodlands came on I found myself suddenly and reflexively looking up, completely alert. Without my conscious mind even engaging, I knew it was the sound of home.
- **[HORSESHOE CRABS AND VELVET WORMS](#), by Richard Fortey**
This is the "Built to Last" of the natural world. Instead of studying innovation and adaptation, Fortey has collected the animals and plants that have stayed the course, persisting long past

the time when most species have become part of the fossil record. I can't wait to learn from these creatures.

- **[LIFE EVERLASTING](#): The Animal Way of Death, by Bernd Heinrich**

I've been working my way through the full set of Heinrich's writings, which combine meta-questions and micro observations in a wonderful way. For example, the explorations in this book were prompted by a friend who requested a "green burial" on Heinrich's property, inspiring important questions about why and how humans handle death so differently from the rest of nature. This quickly led Heinrich to days and days of observations of scavenger beetles, ravens, and other undertakers of the natural world. As I finish this book I am looking forward to gaining insights on the investment questions of how to consider decline instead of endless growth.

- **[SNOW CRYSTALS](#), by Wilson Bentley**

You have probably heard of Snowflake Bentley – at least if you live somewhere cold. And if you're interested in research, maybe you know of the great (and sadly unusual) story of a university professor (George Henry Perkins) who took the time to help a teenager (Bentley) publish his scientific findings, without scooping the credit. But it's only when you start paging through this book that the sheer magnitude of Bentley's work can begin to be appreciated. There they are, page after page after page of incredible icy images... and these successful images are a small fraction of Bentley's total attempts (yes, I am sorely tempted to say they are the tip of the iceberg). Like Heinrich's work, and like Gilbert's and King's stories, it's a great reminder that profound observations usually come only after incredibly long and tedious endeavor.

TALES OF SUMMERS PAST:

For the past few years I've been going back to read the books they assigned us in junior high and high school – turns out, they are on those reading lists for good reason. And these books are different – better – a few decades on. This year I'm focusing on books that were assigned in my youth, but are now top features on [banned books lists](#). Overall, it seems to me that if you picked any given banned book list at random, you would have a pretty terrific library, a syllabus for life.

- **[LEAVES OF GRASS](#), by Walt Whitman**

Is there any better match for the fervor of summer than Walt Whitman? I keep this book out and just flip to random verses – last night in *Song of Myself* I found, "Missing me one place, search another. I stop somewhere waiting for you." You are lucky indeed if you are able to read this while watching fireflies blink around you. This volume is a longtime favorite, and this summer brings an extraordinarily lovely edition from [Arion Press](#), marrying historic letterpress equipment with contemporary illustration and commentary from Helen Vendler. If you love books – I mean, really LOVE books – there is no better art to be found than in Arion's publications. They only publish two or three books per year, and it is easy to see the care and craft that go into each and every volume.

- **[ANIMAL FARM](#), by George Orwell**

This book is just as disturbing to read as a grown-up as it was in sixth grade: maybe more so, because the patterns in it are so easy to see all around us. But now it's a banned book... hmm. Curiously, Arion Press has also issued a tremendous version of this story. Perhaps we have happened upon their secret selection process!

- **[SONG OF SOLOMON](#), by Toni Morrison**

Milkman Dead, what a name. Every single time I finish a book by Morrison I want to turn right around and read it again. What greater compliment can there be? A simple reference to the plot can never do justice to Morrison's writing, which is more poetry than prose.

PERIODICALS:

These two publications match beautiful graphics with compelling content. Both are science-y, provocative, and a little quirky – my highest praise.

- **NAUTILUS**
The tagline for Nautilus is “science connected”. What more do you need to know? This brief, thoughtful [interview with Sir Partha Dasgupta](#) is a great example of the content: why the value of a forest is not just the sum of it’s lumber board feet, in less than 15 minutes. Each issue has a terrific theme, like “Turbulence” or “Mutation”. Their print journal is magnificent, as is the online content. <http://nautilus>.
- **ZYGOTE QUARTERLY**
Zygote focuses on “the nexus of science and design” (are you sensing a theme here?), and especially on biologically inspired design. Their publication (seen online via issue) is always chock full of jaw-dropping photographs and mesmerizing content. For example, the April issue featured a terrific piece on how some things “multiply up” through hierarchical structures. Hair, claws, the cable that holds the Golden Gate Bridge together... they all share some amazing design elements. You can see current issues plus archives at <http://zqjournal.org>.

OTHER MEDIA:

- **HERE IS TODAY:**
Having a rough day? In need of some perspective? Click away, and your troubles will amazingly be put in proportion. They won’t vanish, but hopefully they’ll shrink. <http://hereistoday.com>
- **JIM CARREY'S COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS:**
I am a fan of commencement speeches and farewell speeches. Both offer the speaker a chance to reflect seriously and independently, as such remarks are inherently open-ended in nature. This year, one of the best is from Jim Carrey – it’s funny, of course, but more, too. <http://bit.ly/CarreyComm>

FINALE: A GREEN CRAB'S SHELL, by Mark Doty (via poets.org)

Not, exactly, green:
closer to bronze
preserved in kind brine,

something retrieved
from a Greco-Roman wreck,
patinated and oddly

muscular. We cannot
know what his fantastic
legs were like—

though evidence
suggests eight
complexly folded

scuttling works
of armament, crowned
by the foreclaws'

gesture of menace
and power. A gull's
gobbled the center,

leaving this chamber
—size of a demitasse—
open to reveal

a shocking, Giotto blue.
Though it smells
of seaweed and ruin,

this little traveling case
comes with such lavish lining!
Imagine breathing

surrounded by
the brilliant rinse
of summer's firmament.

What color is
the underside of skin?
Not so bad, to die,

if we could be opened
into *this*—
if the smallest chambers

of ourselves,
similarly,
revealed some sky.