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Book Marks

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BOOK MARKS

Each issue of *Furman* magazine includes brief reviews of books written by Furman faculty and alumni, as well as reviews of books recommended by faculty and staff as “good reads.”

RECOMMENDED

John Henry Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua* (Penguin Classics edition, 1995). Newman began his career as an Anglican churchman and scholar and ended it as a Roman Catholic cardinal. He converted from the Anglican to the Catholic faith in 1845, to the perplexity of his friends in the Oxford Movement — and much of the English nation. About 20 years later he wrote this account of his conversion, in which he describes the painful and humbling process of reconsidering his passionately held beliefs. For him the process involved both reasoning through evidence gleaned from reading and study and a deeper, mysterious internal process that moved him to “a different place.” In a culture in which the experience of religious conversion figures prominently, Newman’s thoughtful, well-written story is of interest.

— Carolyn Watson, *Art*

J.M. Adovasio with Jake Page, *The First Americans: In Pursuit of Archaeology’s Greatest Mystery* (Random House, 2002). Not so long ago, everyone knew that the first Americans were the Clovis (point) mammoth-hunters of 11,000 years ago. So when, in 1974, James Adovasio found 15,000-year-old artifacts in a Pennsylvania rockshelter, professional skeptics began spinning ever more elaborate “explanations” of why his dates must be wrong. These days, following the discovery of other pre-Clovis sites in Virginia, South Carolina and Chile, the whole story of these first Americans (evidently not big game-hunters) is under reconstruction. This book, without pulling any punches, offers a clear and lively account of past and current views of Ice Age America and its people.

— Brian Siegel, *Sociology/Anthropology*

Isadora Tattlin, *Cuba Diaries: An American Housewife in Havana* (Algonquin, 2002). Isadora Tattlin (a pseudonym) is an American married to a diplomat who recently completed an assignment in Cuba. In this book Tattlin recounts her family’s four years there. She writes both entertainingly and informatively about experiences ranging from throwing a dinner party for Castro to wanting to throw a tantrum when friends from the United States forget to bring her the Ziploc bags she had requested. Anyone interested in our neighbor 90 miles to the south will find this book valuable for its insights into the political, economic, social, religious and artistic climate there.

— Willard Pate, *English*

Brian Greene, *The Elegant Universe: Superstrings, Hidden Dimensions, and the Quest for the Ultimate Theory* (Random House, 1999). Describing the physical laws of the universe is no easy task. To make such a narrative entertaining is even more difficult. That, however, is exactly what the author has done. Greene, a Rhodes Scholar who teaches at Columbia University, assumes that the reader knows little about basic physics. Using simple, concrete examples, he explains complex topics such as Newtonian mechanics, the general theory of relativity and quantum mechanics in a clear, concise manner. His specialty is “superstring” theory, the idea that all the matter and forces in the universe are the result of extraordinarily small, vibrating strings. This theory, in turn, supports the seemingly fantastic notion that the universe is made up of 11 dimensions. Anyone interested in gaining a better understanding of time, space and the laws that regulate those two phenomena should read this book.

— Scott Henderson, *Education*

Lady Antonia Fraser, *Marie Antoinette: The Journey* (Nan Talese/Doubleday, 2001). Fraser, author of acclaimed works on the wives of Henry VIII, Mary Queen of Scots and Oliver Cromwell, has ventured from her traditional English subjects to publish a magisterial biography of Marie Antoinette. As portrayed by Fraser, the Austrian-born queen is a sympathetic character who proved to be a pawn throughout her life. She served political purposes in her marriage to the future Louis XVI of France, and in her death she became a despised scapegoat of the Old Regime in France. Her life in between was filled with great privilege, high drama and tragedy. “Out of her league” as France’s troubles mounted, Marie Antoinette was unable to cope with the intrigues of the French Court and never fully understood the cataclysmic nature of the French Revolution. Courageous to the end, she is seen by Fraser as possessing both humility and courage.

— Marian Strobel, *History*

FROM ALUMNI

Lucinda Secret McDowell ’74 (compiler), *A Southern-Style Christmas* (Harold Shaw Publishers, 2000). This elegantly designed book features holiday reflections, recipes, poems and stories from such well-known Southern authors and personalities as Jan Karon, Ruth Bell Graham, Anne Rivers Siddons and Celestine Sibley, as well as McDowell herself. A native of Georgia who now lives in Connecticut, McDowell is the author of four books. She is a graduate of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and runs an inspirational ministry, Encouraging Words. Visit her Web site at www.encouragingwords.net.

Janet Walker McDaniel ’74, *By Train at Night* (Henri Butler Press, 2002). According to the publisher, this book of 16 short stories set in the Southeast features characters that “grapple with some of life’s most urgent problems . . . the loss of a child, difficult relationships, psychological stress, pure terror.” One reviewer describes the stories as both “edgy” and “poignant.” The author, who lives in Georgia, is a reviewer for *Midwest Book Review*, webmaster for a family of writing-related Web sites, and the publicist for *WriterAdvice*, a California-based newsletter.

FROM FACULTY

Amy Hackney Blackwell and Christopher W. Blackwell, *Mythology for Dummies* (John Wiley & Sons, 2002). Blackwell, a Furman classics professor, has joined with his wife to write a book that makes the study of mythology more accessible to the average reader. As part of the best-selling “Dummies” series, this book is written with a light and humorous touch — but with a serious intent. It appeals, according to the publisher, to an audience ranging from “novices who want to dabble in the subject all the way to academicians who study mythology for a living.” Christopher Blackwell, who joined the faculty in 1996, is the author of *The Absence of Alexander: Harpalus and the Failure of Macedonian Authority*. He is also the developer of an educational software program that allows students of Greek to practice vocabulary and grammatical forms. Amy Blackwell, who works as a freelance writer, has degrees in Medieval and Renaissance history from Duke and Vanderbilt universities, and a law degree from the University of Virginia.

C. Danielle Vinson, David Paletz (editor), *Local Media Coverage of Congress and Its Members: Through Local Eyes* (Hampton Press, 2002). What do local media report about Congress and its members? The answer: it depends. Vinson, a Furman political science professor and 1989 alumna, analyzes coverage of Congress in various markets and discusses the extent to which congressional reporting meets the needs of congressional members and their constituents. She discovers that local coverage varies widely across media markets and types of media, but in predictable ways. The amount of coverage, the substantive content, and how favorable or unfavorable it is can be explained to varying degrees by market/district congruence (the fit between media markets and congressional districts), characteristics of different types of media (weekly and daily newspapers and television), and the relationships between members of Congress and reporters. The book also examines how the media act as watchdogs over government and as links between members of Congress and their constituents.