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Book Marks

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Each issue of *Furman* magazine includes brief reviews of books recommended as good reads by Furman faculty.

Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, *Mother Nature: A History of Mothers, Infants, and Natural Selection* (Pantheon, 1999). Incorporating intriguing details from biology, anthropology, politics, psychology and literature, Hrdy, a renowned student of primate behavior, offers a thoroughly researched and engaging story, from an evolutionary perspective, that both explains and celebrates human mothers. What do potential mothers value in their mates? Why are human babies so fat compared with other primate babies? Why do female humans — as opposed to females of other species — become sterile (at menopause) decades before they die? Why might a stepfather be worse for a mother's offspring than no mate at all? These are but a few of the questions Hrdy addresses.

Although 541 pages long, this book is so accessible that reading any two or three pages at random is richly rewarding, partly because Hrdy includes scientific data and personal experiences with her own children.

— John Batson, *Psychology*

Frank McCourt, *Tis: A Memoir* (Scribner, 1999). If you thought the language, “the excitement” and other aspects of Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* were a little too risqué, you ought to encounter his new book, *Tis*. McCourt himself says that “good

taste pops up when the imagination dies.” When you read *Tis*, the air will not be so thick with good taste that you will in any way feel suffocated.

His writing about the world of academe is so apt that it hurts as we “corner a half-acre of human knowledge . . . build a fence around it. Decorate the fence with footnotes and bibliographies.”

McCourt's books are masterpieces because of his artistry as a raconteur and because of his insight into human nature. We understand his understanding and, as he says, when that light fades, “we smile at each other like travelers returned.”

— Tom Cloer, *Education*

Dava Sobel, *Galileo's Daughter; A Historical Memoir of Science, Faith, and Love* (Walker & Company, 1999). Sobel, the author of the acclaimed *Longitude*, has produced a fascinating dual biography of astronomer Galileo Galilei and his beloved illegitimate daughter. Realizing that his daughter would have limited marriage opportunities, Galileo early placed her in a convent where she became known as Suor Maria Celeste. The bulk of the book is based on a series of letters that she sent her father. Through them, the reader comes to understand the scientific discoveries of Galileo, the political

and religious intrigues of seventeenth-century Italy, and the amazing competence of the sequestered Suor Maria Celeste.

Contrasting the sheltered world of the convent with the larger Roman Catholic world which tried Galileo for heresy, Sobel has humanized an exciting chapter in the history of science.

— Marian Strobel, *History*

Ha Jin, *Waiting* (Pantheon, 1999). Ha Jin is a native of China who moved to the United States in 1985. His novel, which won the National Book Award, tells the story of Lin Kong, a physician torn between two women and the conflicting values they represent. Shuyu, the uneducated but devoted wife chosen for him by his family, lives in a remote rural province. Every summer Lin journeys home from the city to ask her for the divorce that will enable him to marry Mannu Wu, the sophisticated woman with whom he works, but with whom he cannot live because the Communist government punishes adultery.

The story of the interaction between these characters is both touching and funny, as it offers insights into both the struggles of the human heart and the struggles of a changing nation.

— Willard Pate, *English*

RECENT BOOKS BY ALUMNI

Mart G. Baldwin, Jr. '53, *Drifting the River* (Wolfhound Press, 1999). According to the Hendersonville (N.C.) *Times-News*, Baldwin's latest book is a collection of true outdoor stories that covers over 50 years and spans the South, “from the Outer Banks in North Carolina to the Coosa River in Alabama.” The newspaper adds, “This is not a book solely for outdoorsmen, but for anyone who enjoys a good read.”

Baldwin is also the author of a mystery, *Kill the Benefactor*, and *A Busy Day in Loafer's Glory*, a travel book.

Robert Whitlow '76, *The List* (Word Publishing, 2000). The debut novel from the author, an attorney in Charlotte, N.C., is the story of Renny Jacobson, a young lawyer who receives a mysterious inheritance upon the sudden death of his father. The novel revolves around how Jacobson deals with the value — and the power — of his inheritance, and how he is delivered from its clutches. According to the publisher, Whitlow writes “with a genuine passion that entertains while integrating the truth of God.”