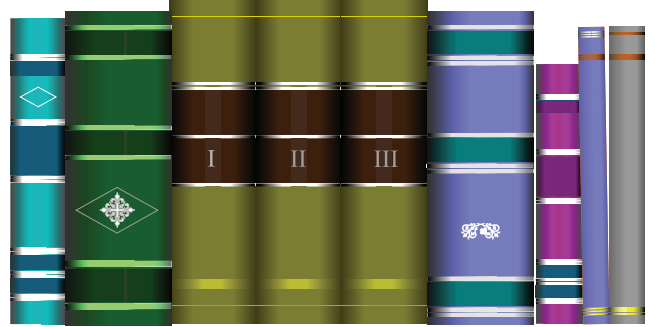


BOOKS

WHAT ARE THEY READING?



The Daily Astorian invites people to submit titles of books they are reading and share a few thoughts about the work. This week, Robert Michael Pyle, an author who lives in Grays River, Wash., passes along some of the books he is enjoying. Pyle has written 17 books, including “Chasing Monarchs” and “Wintergreen: Rambles in a Ravaged Land.” To submit, send to news@dailyastorian.com

The book I’m having the most fun with right now, and not wanting it to end, is “The Book of William: How Shakespeare’s First Folio Conquered the World,” by Paul Collins. It’s a marvelous investigation into the first definitive publication of the Bard’s works, and the crazy paths it has followed since. It fits right in with a Shakespearean mystery I’ve recently read called “The Bookman’s Tale: A Novel of Obsession,” by Charlie Lovett. Both of these are real book lovers’ books.

Speaking of mysteries, I am preparing for an upcoming trip to Iceland by reading a number of dark mysteries by Arnaldur Indridason, including “Hypothermia” and “Silence of the Grave;” also “The Windows of Brimnes,” brilliant Icelandic essays by Bill Holm; and “The Postwar Poetry of Iceland,” edited by Sigurdur A. Magnússon.

For the Scottish part of the trip, I am reading the weighty “How the Scots Invented the Modern World: The True Story of How Western Europe’s Poorest Nation Created Our World and Everything In It,” by Arthur Herman.

Books of poetry, fiction

At any given time I am reading several books of poetry. Four very strong books



The author Robert Michael Pyle in his home in Grays River, Wash.

Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

of poems I’ve returned to again and again lately are “Nevertheless: Poems from the Gray Area,” by Florence Sage of Astoria, Nancy Cherry’s “El Verano Burning,” “Splitting an Order,” by Ted Kooser, and “Songs for a Summons,” by David Guterson. Each of these poets takes me deep into heart, image, and language.

As for fiction, I finally took The Brothers K by David James Duncan off my shelf, and can’t imagine why I waited so long — it is a magnificent delight of a novel, even if you don’t care

that much about baseball. The most affecting book I’ve read for some time is Ann Pancake’s “Strange as This Weather Has Been,” about the utter devastation of mountaintop-removal coal mining in Appalachia.

I enjoy English fiction a lot, most recently David Lodge’s “Paradise News” and Penelope Lively’s “The Photograph.” It’s hard to keep up with Brian Doyle, but his new one, “Martin Marten,” drew me right in like “The Plover” and “Mink River” before it. Other compelling Northwest novels

for me this year have been Ivan Doig’s “Work Song” and “The Brightwood Stillness,” by Mark Pomeroy. In between, I gobbled three books of addictive short stories by Ohio writer Tom Noyes.

‘Astoria’

Like many of us around here I read Peter Stark’s “Astoria” with pleasure, but I still love Washington Irving’s livelier book by the same name, which is more fun if maybe less reliable.

And of course natural history is a big chunk of my

reading. Charles Darwin is my main man, but I’d never actually read “The Voyage of the Beagle,” so I just have — who knew that as well as very long (the voyage lasted five years!) it is also funny in many places, and very beautiful in many others. I’ve since been reading Thor Hanson, a fine young nature writer of San Juan Island. Both his award-winning “Feathers” and his new book, “The Triumph of Seeds,” are wonderful reads for anyone who cares about how the humble parts of our world

actually work. Lastly, I’ve just begun “Life’s Greatest Secret: The Race to Crack the Genetic Code,” by Matthew Cobb. It should make the perfect bookend for the Darwin, and take me just about as long to read.

I read mostly for the pleasure of better understanding the world, and for the sheer enjoyment of story and words used well. None of these books has let me down in these qualities. I am very grateful for the good libraries and independent bookstores in the Lower Columbia.

THE SHIP REPORT

The science of hot water

By JOANNE RIDEOUT
Special to The Daily Astorian

In this year of scary drought in our part of the nation, I’ve been reading a lot about how bad warm temperatures are for Pacific Northwest fish, specifically salmon.

Warm water temperatures and low water levels are wreaking havoc with fish populations in two critical waterways in the West: The Sacramento River in California and the Columbia River here in our neck of the woods. The result will likely be a greatly diminished salmon run this year.

The assumption in most of the news pieces I’ve seen or heard is that “warm” is bad for marine life in these parts. I’ve never seen much of an explanation as to exactly why, and I got to wondering about that. As a scientist, the water doesn’t seem too warm to me. Seems kind of nice, actually. I could go swimming quite comfortably in some spots on

the Columbia right now. Usually it’s too darn cold. What’s the big deal for salmon?

Hot water and salmon don’t mix

So I did some research (one of my favorite things to do) and found a tsunami of information as to why hot water and salmon don’t mix, with all the bad connotations the word tsunami brings.

To start with, let’s draw a quick parallel between us and salmon. As living beings, we all have a range of temperature at which we feel and live at our best. At the extremes of those ranges we have trouble, and if we’re outside that range for very long without protection, we risk dying or being seriously injured. The same is true of salmon, but they like things colder than we do. Salmon love cold water. They are happy in water that’s about 60 degrees but can cheerfully handle water much colder than that. When the water starts to get up in the high 60s and 70s as it is on inland rivers, that begins to

cause stress. For reference, by the way, the Columbia River water temperature off Astoria this week was a little over 70 degrees. Getting uncomfortable for salmon.

What happens to salmon in warm water? A number of things that make life harder for them. First of all, because they’re feeling warm, their respiration rate goes up. They’re breathing more, trying to get more oxygen. The catch is that warm water holds less oxygen than colder water does, and so the cumulative effect of many fish trying to do this can be oxygen depletion, weakness, illness, and death.

Toxic soup

Then there’s the effect of warm water on chemicals dissolved in the river, like toxins from runoff. Many substances that are relatively inert in cold water become more extreme in their effects when they are in a warm solution. And things like algae and fungi grow more quickly and spread more rapidly. Those can bring

episodes of blights like domoic acid, which makes shellfish toxic to humans.

Add that to low water conditions on key rivers, what you have is a lot of salmon swimming in a hot, toxic soup of things that are bad for them. Kind of like how it would feel to be in an uncomfortably warm, smoke-filled room, with a heavy coat on that you couldn’t take off.

This is not a good situation for our fish, and some experts estimate that on the Columbia we could lose up to 80 percent of this year’s salmon run.

What would it take to put things back to normal? We need rain, lots of it, to fill tributaries and cool water masses down. In the winter we’ll need snow to replace our lost snow pack.

But with scientists predicting a continued and intensifying El Nino season, with continued dry conditions through next spring, our salmon troubles could be far from over.

Life loves water

Years ago, when I lived



Joshua Bessex/The The Daily Astorian
KMUN General Manager Joanne Rideout is the voice of The Ship Report.

in the desert Southwest, I was always amazed at how the desert could change in a heartbeat from a barren wasteland to a lush spread of wildflowers, grasses, and blooming cactus with just a short period of rain. Life loves water and responds to it quickly.

But on the flip side of these occasional wet times in the desert were the long stretches in between, normal there, where cherished water did not come and things quickly withered. Creatures that endured hunkered down to wait for the next flood or downpour.

Native cultures there value rain and hold ceremonies

to request it. They understand the vital connection between life and water, for fish and people. It’s clear we need some water here pronto to preserve things as we know them. If you’re the praying kind, this might be a good time.

Joanne Rideout is general manager of Coast Community Radio (KMUN-FM) in Astoria. She’s also the creator and producer of The Ship Report, a radio show and podcast about All Things Maritime. You can hear The Ship Report on Coast Community Radio at 8:48 a.m. weekdays at 91.9FM, streaming at www.coastradio.org. Podcast available on The Ship Report website at www.shipreport.net.



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