September 12, 11:30-1, room 453: Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Lowland* (352 pages) National Book Award Finalist, *comes out in paperback in mid-June*

But for its lyrical, evocative scenes of life in the Calcutta neighborhood in which her heroes grow up, Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Lowland* could be set anywhere, in almost any time. At the center of this heartbreaking story are two very different brothers. Udayan, the younger by 15 months, is passionate, idealistic and ripe for involvement in the political rebellion in 1960s India (not all that different from his American counterparts of the same era.) Subhash is the “good brother,” the parent-pleaser, who goes off to study and teach in America. But when Udayan, inevitably, ends up a victim of his self-made political violence, Subhash steps in and marries his dead brother’s pregnant wife. His is the proverbial good deed that will never go unpunished; Subhash soon becomes a victim of his own goodness. As always, Lahiri’s prose is lyrical and rich and her story is steeped in history, but in this book (more perhaps than *The Namesake*, her other novel) the issues raised are more universal and the plot more linear. Competitive siblings, parental love, commitment to belief and family, these are the topics one of our most brilliant writers addresses in what is at once her most accessible, and most profound, book yet.

October 14, 12:30-2, room 453: Dan Chaon, *Await Your Reply* (348 pages)

The lives of three strangers interconnect in unforeseen ways--and with unexpected consequences--in acclaimed author Dan Chaon’s gripping, brilliantly written new novel. Longing to get on with his life, Miles Cheshire nevertheless can’t stop searching for his troubled twin brother, Hayden, who has been missing for ten years. Hayden has covered his tracks skillfully, moving stealthily from place to place, managing along the way to hold down various jobs and seem, to the people he meets, entirely normal. But some version of the truth is always concealed. A few days after graduating from high school, Lucy Lattimore sneaks away from the small town of Pompey, Ohio, with her charismatic former history teacher. They arrive in Nebraska, in the middle of nowhere, at a long-deserted motel next to a dried-up reservoir, to figure out the next move on their path to a new life. But soon Lucy begins to feel quietly uneasy. My whole life is a lie, thinks Ryan Schuyler, who has recently learned some shocking news. In response, he walks off the Northwestern University campus, hops on a bus, and breaks loose from his existence, which suddenly seems abstract and tenuous. Presumed dead, Ryan decides to remake himself--through unconventional and precarious means. *Await Your Reply* is a literary masterwork with the momentum of a thriller, an unforgettable novel in which pasts are invented and reinvented and the future is both seductively uncharted and perilously unmoored.

November 14, 11:30-1, room 453: Carson McCullers, *Clock Without Hands* – Carson McCullers (259 pages)

Set in Georgia on the eve of court-ordered integration, *Clock Without Hands* contains McCullers’s most poignant statement on race, class, and justice. A small-town druggist dying of leukemia calls himself and his community to account in this tale of change and changelessness, of death and the death-in-life that is hate. It is a tale, as McCullers herself wrote, of “response and responsibility--of man toward his own livingness.”

December 4, 12:30-2, room 453: Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (448 pages)

The story follows 100 years in the life of Macondo, a village founded by José Arcadio Buendía and occupied by descendants all sporting variations on their progenitor’s name: his sons, José Arcadio and Aureliano, and grandsons, Aureliano José, Aureliano Segundo, and José Arcadio Segundo. Then there are the women—the two Úrsulas, a handful of Remedios, Fernanda, and Pilar—who struggle to remain grounded even as their menfolk build castles in the air. If it is possible for a novel to be highly comic and deeply tragic at the same time, then *One Hundred Years of Solitude* does the trick. Civil war rages throughout, hearts break, dreams shatter, and lives are lost, yet the effect is literary pentimento, with sorrow’s outlines bleeding through the vibrant colors of García Márquez’s magical realism. Consider, for example, the ghost of Prudencio Aguilar, whom José Arcadio Buendía has killed in a fight. So lonely is the man’s shade that it haunts Buendía’s house, searching anxiously for water with which to clean its wound. Buendía’s wife, Úrsula, is so moved that “the next time she saw the dead man uncovering the pots on the stove she understood what he was looking for, and from then on she placed water jugs all about the house.” With *One Hundred Years of Solitude* Gabriel García Márquez introduced Latin American literature to a world-wide readership. Translated into more than two dozen languages, his brilliant novel of love and loss in Macondo stands at the apex of 20th-century literature.
February TBA – we are hoping to do another faculty/Honors student joint book discussion

March 17, 12:30-2, room 453: James McBride, *Good Lord Bird* (422 pages) 2013 National Book Award for Fiction, **comes out in paperback in early August**

Abolitionist John Brown calls her “Little Onion,” but her real name is Henry. A slave in Kansas mistaken for a girl due to the sackcloth smock he was wearing when Brown shot his master, the light-skinned, curly-haired 12-year-old ends up living as a young woman, most often encamped with Brown’s renegade band of freedom warriors as they traverse the country, raising arms and ammunition for their battle against slavery. Though they travel to Rochester, New York, to meet with Frederick Douglass and Canada to enlist the help of Harriet Tubman, Brown and his ragtag army fail to muster sufficient support for their mission to liberate African Americans, heading inexorably to the infamously bloody and pathetic raid on Harpers Ferry. Dramatizing Brown’s pursuit of racial freedom and insane belief in his own divine infallibility through the eyes of a child fearful of becoming a man, best-selling McBride (*Song Yet Sung*, 2008) presents a sizzling historical novel that is an evocative escapade and a provocative pastiche of Larry McMurtry’s salty western satires and William Styron’s seminal insurrection masterpiece, *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1967). McBride works *Little Onion’s* low-down patois to great effect, using the savvy but scared innocent to bring a fresh immediacy to this sobering chapter in American history.


In his first novel in seven years, Woodrell (*Winter’s Bone*, 2006) returns to the Ozarks to tell the story of a catastrophe based on a real-life occurrence. Alek Dunahew is sent to live with his grandmother, the former housemaid Alma DeGeer Dunahew. Haunted by the death of her sister, Ruby, in the explosion of the Arbor Dance Hall in 1928, Alma’s views of the cause of the disaster created a schism between her and one of her sons. But Alek is curious and listens carefully, tucking away Alma’s stories of her drunken husband, her wild sister, and her affair with Alma’s employer and the mysterious whisperings about mobsters and shootings. Told in meandering flashbacks with a lyrical cadence, the story is gripping and heartrending at the same time. Interspersed with Alma’s memories are vignettes of some of the victims of the explosion and how they happened to be at the dance hall on that particular night. With this book, Woodrell confirms his place among the literary masters.

May 7, 12:30-2, room 453: Thomas Pynchon *Bleeding Edge* (496 pages) National Book Award finalist, **comes out in paperback in late August**

Bleeding Edge is a lovably scruffy comedy of remarriage, half-hidden behind the lopsided Groucho mask of Pynchon’s second straight private-eye story. Like Omette Coleman’s riff on *The Rite of Spring*, it starts out strong, misplaces the melody amid some delightfully surreal noodling, and finally swans away in sweet, lingering diminuendo. Almost all Pynchon’s books are historical novels, with this one no exception. Where Vineland slyly set a story of Orwellian government surveillance in 1984, Bleeding Edge situates a fable of increasingly sentient computers in, naturally, 2001. Of course, the year 2001 means something besides HAL and Dave now, and Pynchon spirits us through “that terrible morning” in September—and its “infantilizing” aftermath—with unhysterical grace. Our heroine throughout is Maxine Tarnow, a defrocked fraud investigator and daftly doting Manhattan mom, still stuck in that early, “my husband...ex-husband” stage of an unwanted divorce. Maxi soon becomes embroiled in the mysterious case of one Lester Traipse, a superannuated Silicon Alley veteran who, along with the dotcom bubble, has just gotten popped. The plot’s dizzying profusion of murder suspects plays like something out of early Raymond Chandler, under whose bright star Bleeding Edge unmistakably unreels. Shoals of red herrings keep swimming by, many of them never seen again. Still, reading Pynchon for plot is like reading Austen for sex. Each page has a little more of it than the one before, but you never quite get to the clincher. Luckily, Pynchon and Austen have ample recourse to the oldest, hardest-to-invoke rule in the book --when in doubt, be a genius. It’s cheating, but it works. No one, but no one, rivals Pynchon’s range of language, his elasticity of syntax, his signature mix of dirty jokes, dread and shining decency. It’s a peculiarity of musical notation that major works are, more often than not, set in a minor key, and vice versa. Bleeding Edge is mellow, plummy, minor-key Pynchon, his second such in a row since *Against the Day* (2006)—that still-smoking asteroid, whose otherworldly inner music readers are just beginning to tap back at. But in its world-historical savvy, its supple feel for the joys and stings of love—both married and parental—this new book is anything but minor. On the contrary, Bleeding Edge is a chamber symphony in P major, so generous of invention it sometimes sprawls, yet so sharp it ultimately pierces. All this, plus a stripjoint called Joie de Beavre and a West Indian proctologist named Pokemon. Who else does that?

For more information contact Michelle Stewart at 951-639-5645 or mstewart@msjc.edu