

January 27, 2008

Book Briefs

Sentinel Staff Report

Gambling on Obama

The news is not that Barack Obama's backers came out in droves in Iowa.

The news is that, after the caucuses, book collectors began snapping up copies of Obama's 1995 memoir, "Dreams of My Father," raising the price of the book.

In the past year, rare signed first editions of Obama's memoir have sold for over \$1,200, reports, Richard Davies at AbeBooks.com.

In effect, these book collectors are betting Obama will go all the way to the White House.

Capitola history has fans

Crowds were lined up at the Capitola Museum last month to get their copies of "The Grand Hotel Capitola" signed by co-authors Gordon van Zuiden and Carolyn Swift.

The book includes images of the resort from 1874-1929, when it burned, as well as some facts about the role of Frederick Hihn in the founding of Capitola.

To order a copy in either hardback, paper or with enlarged print, visit <http://www.capitolamuseum.org>.

History out loud from UCSC

Two new oral histories have been published by UC Santa Cruz Library's Regional History Project.

"The UCSC Arboretum: A Grand Experiment" includes interviews with Brett Hall, Phyllis Norris and Daniel Harder, three who shaped the Arboretum's history over the last four decades.

"I Respond: Alissa Goldring's Photographs of Mexico in the 1950s" concerns the painter and photographer now in her 80s who still lives in the Santa Cruz area. The oral history is a guide and supplement to her photos, slides and negatives archived at UCSC's Special Collections.

Both oral histories can be viewed in PDF form at <http://library/reg-hist/index.html> and copies can be ordered by calling 459-2847.

Books we like

Now that double and triple duty have become the industry standard for wage slaves at newspapers, book reviewers -- including yours truly -- have little choice but to curtail our bookish ways.

Since there's less time for extravagant reviews, I'll be using this column, on occasion, to tell you about books I've enjoyed.

To wit:

- "Then We Came to the End" by Joshua Ferris Little Brown, \$23.99, which speaks directly to the downsizing trend in the workplace.

Ferris' "story set in the pages of an Office Depot catalog" is spot-on hilarious about the dysfunctional goings-on in offices.

Impressive also is how Ferris has found a way to narrate his story as a plural narrator -- as an entire office organism.

Because our office-mates are our second family, this novel can't help but strike a tragic tone when that family is disbanded.

- "Night Train to Lisbon" by Pascal Mercier Grove Press, \$25 is all the rage in Europe, but American readers who like best-sellers may want to steer clear.

This cerebral novel will, nevertheless, appeal to readers who thrive on novels that ask big questions -- like "Given that we can live only a small part of what there is in us -- what happens with the rest?"

The author -- a German philosopher -- takes us from Switzerland to Portugal and shows how our lives are only a portion of what they could be while, at the same time, showing us that our lives are all they can be.

A delight for those who favor serious books.

- "The Adventures of Augie March" by Saul Bellow Penguin, \$17. It's a great time of year to read a classic piece of literature you've heretofore overlooked.

Not without flaws, this novel is considered Bellow's chef d'oeuvre. Full of terrific style, slang and poetry, it'll remind you of Kerouac, Fitzgerald, Lardner, Sandburg, Proust, Whitman and Dickens.

An American classic.

What's coming up this week

The literary documentary film, "Mysterious California: Four Authors," will be shown at the Central Branch Library today at 2 p.m. in the Community Meeting Room, 224 Church St., Santa Cruz. All four of the authors will be available to discuss their work, including Kirk &Russell, &Nadia Gordon,& Nina Revoyr and local best-selling author &Laurie King.

Please send questions and comments to Books Editor Chris Watson at cwatson@santacruzsentinel.com.