

RTC LIBRARY E-NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2020

Welcome to the April 2020 issue of *RTC LIBRARY E-NEWSLETTER*

In this issue: Recommended Reads: *On Earth, We're Briefly Gorgeous*; *In the Shadows of Naga Insurgency*; *The Goldfinch*; *What I Wish I Knew When I Was 20*; *On the Other Hand: Left Hand, Right Brain, Mental Disorder, and History*.

Recommended Reads from the RTC community

[On Earth, We're Briefly Gorgeous](#) by Ocean Vuong

This debut novel by poet Ocean Vuong could only have been written by a poet, as his prose can often be so lyrical as to suggest many one-sentence poems hidden within a book-length prose form. *On Earth* is written as letter by a Vietnamese-American boy to his mother. In revisiting moments from their shared past and opening up about more secretive parts of his own life, the protagonist explores the Vietnam War, immigration and low-paid immigrant labor, domestic violence, generational and cultural divides, sexual exploration and orientation, drug use and abuse, death, contemporary American and global politics, and more. The topics are emotionally charged and thus challenging, but they are written in such an accessible epistolary form. I left the novel wishing to explore my own identity more deeply (and also curious about the extent to which the book is a thinly veiled autobiography!).

Thank You

Dana M. Polanichka, Ph.D.

Social Sciences

Professor (Part-time)

In the Shadows of Naga Insurgency by Jelle JP Wouters

The social anthropologist, Jelle J.P.Wouters went to NEHU 1 in 2007 as an exchange student when he heard of Nagaland, which gradually fuelled his interest there. Fortunately, he enrolled in a PhD programme in 2011, thus beginning his research in Nagaland and its politics. The ethnography 'In the Shadows of Naga Insurgency' (Wouters, 2018) is a result of his intensive fieldwork over roughly two years in Nagaland, particularly in the villages of Phugwumi and Noksen. 'In the Shadows of Naga Insurgency' is mainly concerned with the complex political conflict the Naga endured since the British colonized India.

The book effectively demonstrates how the Naga suffer from not being able to establish a common political institution with the emergence of internal ethnic conflict and the presence of antagonism and disputes within their political movements, which in turn is associated with their everyday life. 'In the Shadows of Naga Insurgency' is a valuable contribution to the understanding of the complex issues of ethnic conflict and everyday life in Nagaland because the book reflects on a historical background along with the continuous process of change occurring in Nagaland (Wouters, 2018). The book is of great interest to scholars engaged in the study of ethnicity, state, and nation in South Asia.

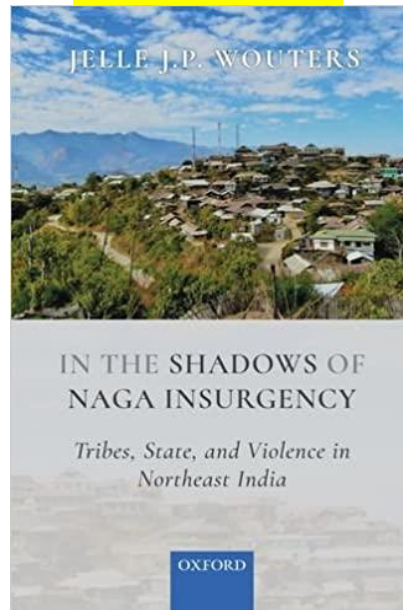
Wouters' ethnography is fascinating because of the difficulty he encountered before and during fieldwork. Wouters had difficulties obtaining a fieldwork permit, which is a challenge most researchers encounter (Abrams, 1988). Due to the Indo-Naga conflict, entering Nagaland was difficult and before 2011, the author's permit application forms were not granted. This depicts how researchers as foreign nationals struggle to access native places. However, Nagaland's restriction was partially lifted in 2011 to promote international tourism, when Wouters began his fieldwork, thus allowing his research (Wouters, 2018, p. 22). During his fieldwork, tribal wars and assassinations occurred, which risked his life. Therefore, the struggle Wouters endured to produce this political ethnography makes the book worthy.

The book provides an excellent political ethnographic account of a conflict ridden zone. The intensive voices of the native people being projected give a deep emic perspective along with the enriching theoretical approach discussed by Wouters. By highlighting the complex entanglement between the internal insurgencies, state functionaries, politicians, and the people, it demonstrates the everyday violence people face in Nagaland.

'In the Shadows of the Naga Insurgency' is a great example of an ethnographic exploration of a politically disputed area. Hence, I would like to recommend others to read the book as it well discusses the political instability in Nagaland and its repercussion on everyday life of innocent Nagas. The book gives an insight of how the political instability and dispute can result in the overall dysfunction of the state at large and everyday violence at an individual level.

Thank you
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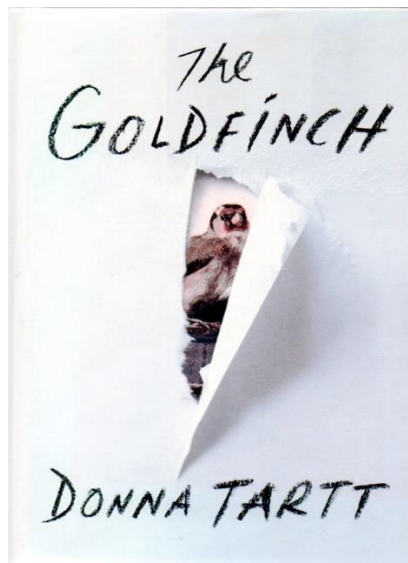


The Goldfinch by Donna Tartt

Reading this book is quite the long haul (nearly 1,000 pages), but it is worth the time investment! The prose is easy, and the fully developed characters and suspenseful story make one not want to put the book down. Tartt's main character, Theo, is beautifully crafted, and it is hard not to feel so deeply and personally the young boy's emotions as he deals with great loss and change, again and again. Even the secondary characters—especially Boris and Hobie—are magnetic. All in all, Tartt pulls her reader into a world that feels simultaneously familiar and foreign. I recommend the book (and not the film) highly!

Thank You
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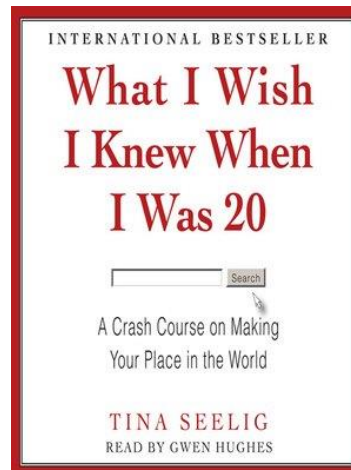
What I Wish I Knew When I Was 20 by Tina Seelig

What I Wish I Knew When I Was 20 by Tina Seelig is really a 'Crash Course on Making Your Place in the World. I read this book on recommendation from none other than His Majesty the King during one of his audiences to RTC students. The book really shares practical life lessons. Even if you can't relate, it gives you a beautiful perspective and something to ponder on. This book guided me in many situations, to the extent of helping me in making hard decisions. I hope it will also do the same to you.

Happy reading.

Thank you
Bhuvan Kafley
Assistant International Relations Officer

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On the Other Hand: Left Hand, Right Brain, Mental Disorder, and History by Howard I. Kushner

During the last few years, I have come across articles in popular publications like The Atlantic suggesting that many of the 'facts' I learned about left handedness while growing up are actually incorrect. Supposedly, lefties were more likely to die earlier than righties, due to accidents caused while navigating their way through a world filled with tools designed for use by the right hand. Moving to the positive side, one often hears that lefties are more creative and even smarter on average. Yet, studies trying to support these claims have multiple problems. At any rate, if much of what we thought we knew is wrong, what remains, and what can we even say about the state of being left-handed or right-handed? It seemed like time to find an accessible account of our current state of knowledge.

Professor Howard Kushner of Emory University in the USA is well qualified to write such a work. As a left-handed son of a left-handed mother, he surely has the requisite sympathy. More importantly, he clearly has a strong knowledge of neuroscience. However, he is primarily a historian of science, and is particularly interested in how ideas have developed over time. This means that we should not merely jump to the most recent research, but try to understand how previous beliefs and ideas shape our very questions about what left-handedness 'means' and how it arises.

Along the way, we learn of many contradictions and oddities. For instance, Kushner claims that a belief that right = masculine and left = feminine is nearly universal among the world's cultures. One of the many problems with this is that males are more likely than females to be left-handed. Perhaps it should not surprise when such beliefs arise in traditional societies that are not focused on counting people and keeping statistics, though it is much harder to explain why early 20th century Western evolutionary scientists persisted in this belief, even though they *did* know the statistics.

The book examines a wide range of evidence and disciplines. To name just a few, fields of inquiry include genetics, social environment, complications during pregnancy, internet forums for lefties, comparisons between humans and other mammals, and evolutionary psychology (as is so often the case, evolutionary psychology's 'explanation' for lefties seems unintentionally humorous. Read the book to learn more^^).

My biggest concern about the book regards its title: it is frankly a somewhat confusing string of words, and gives little idea of the content. For instance, Kushner finds little or no evidence of correlation between handedness and mental 'disorder', though people have often believed that it exists (the English word *sinister* comes from the Latin word for left, with many similar examples around the world). On the other hand, the book provides ample evidence that forcing left-handed children to become right-handed can cause enduring difficulties. It also explores probably the most famous example: King George VI of the United Kingdom and the British Commonwealth, whose speech difficulties very likely resulted from such efforts.

Brent Bianchi

Librarian

Language note: the terms 'lefty' and 'righty' are quite informal, and not used in Kushner's book, but using these terms in the review seemed less cumbersome. As an aside, I find it interesting that in the USA (and perhaps other countries), 'lefty' is used by people with conservative political beliefs as an insulting term for people to their left on the political spectrum. However, I have not encountered 'righty' being used in a pejorative way.

Wanted! Book reviews from Faculty, Staff, and Students

If you have read a good book and would like to contribute a review to the Library Newsletter, we would love to receive one from you. Tell us a little about the book and why you liked it in 250-500 words. If interested, send your review to gyanupradhan@rtc.bt or come by the library and see the library staff.

Thanks!!

YOU MUST TELL YOURSELF, "NO MATTER HOW HARD IT IS, OR HOW HARD IT GETS, I AM GOING TO MAKE IT..."-Les Brown.