Dear Student,

We look forward to your arrival at Cowell College in the fall of 2015. As you know, you will participate in Cowell’s Core Course, also called Imagining Justice, Past and Present. The course begins with a summer reading assignment introducing many issues and areas related to justice. We write to you today to make sure that you can get a jump-start on this summer reading. You will be required to write a response to some questions about the summer reading, which you will turn in at the outset of the course in September. You’ll be given that writing assignment at orientation.

We have selected two novels that explore our central theme from different perspectives:

1. *Island of a Thousand Mirrors*, by Nayomi Munaweera, follows two families in Sri Lanka as their lives are changed forever by war. The author, in an NPR interview, said, "What I wanted to do in this book was really try to depict what happens to normal people in the course of warfare, and how your life can be completely derailed by this." A San Francisco Chronicle review writes of it: “Perhaps the only way left to attempt to understand war — and love — is through children. With their direct gaze, lack of nostalgia, and overwhelming instinct for surviving the impossible, they may be our last hope for making sense of the senseless or explaining the unexplainable. In her debut novel — already a prizewinner abroad — Oakland writer Nayomi Munaweera uses the child’s point of view to devastating effect in describing life during the seemingly endless civil war in her native Sri Lanka.” This narrative has challenging moments depicting the tremendous violence, including sexual violence, common to war, yet, the review notes, “the devastation in Island of a Thousand Mirrors gets delivered in a captivating story tempered with sensuality and moments of grace.” It calls on us to consider what justice, if any, is achieved through war.

2. *Daughter’s Keeper*, by Ayelet Waldman, tells the story of a young woman swept into the U.S. criminal justice system, raising questions about the consequences, intended and unintended, of the nation’s drug laws, while depicting complex family dynamics. The book brings us into the legal world that Waldman occupied when she worked as a federal public defender in Los Angeles and was inspired by a specific case she worked on there. It raises questions about the effectiveness of the formal judicial system, the limits of that system, and the role of mercy in systems of enforcement. Fellow novelist Dave Eggers writes that, “Waldman shapes outrage into a story that's always compelling, always compassionate—always so close to real that it feels like nonfiction.”

We are happy to announce that you’ll have the opportunity to hear from and talk to the authors of these books, as each has generously agreed to come speak with the Cowell Core Course at one of our evening sessions this fall.

Books are available at the UCSC Bookstore and can be purchased at a 20% discount during summer orientation. If you have any questions about your summer reading assignment which are not resolved during orientation, please email Cowell’s Core Course Coordinator, Catherine Carlstroem, at: mastodon@ucsc.edu
Best Wishes,

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