

Off the Shelf

Recent books with Harvard connections

Mothers and Others: The Evolutionary Origins of Mutual Understanding, by Sarah Blaffer Hrdy '68, Ph.D. '75 (Harvard, \$29.95). As she demonstrated in *Mother Nature*, the author (professor of anthropology emerita at the University of California, Davis) makes the enigmatic compellingly clear, beginning with the "Apes on a Plane" chapter that compares the "nods and resigned smiles" of human passengers on a cramped flight with the "bloody earlobes and other appendages" that would litter the aisles if chimpanzees were flying instead.

The Lost City of Z: A Tale of Deadly Obsession in the Amazon, by David Grann (Doubleday, \$27.50). A *New Yorker* writer traces Colonel Percy Fawcett's 1925 disappearance as he searched for a fabled civilization—and his rivalry with Alexander Hamilton Rice, A.B. 1898, M.D. 1904, explorer, Peabody Museum curator, and post-*Titanic* husband of Eleanor Widener, who used her fortune to fund competitive archaeological expeditions.

Annie's Ghosts: A Journey into a Family Secret, by Steve Luxenberg '74 (Hyperion, \$22.99). In a memoir-cum-investigation, a *Washington Post* editor discovers, after his mother's death, the suppressed story of her sister, who was confined to a mental institution from the age of 21.

The Innovator's Prescription: A Disruptive Solution for Health Care, by Clayton M. Christensen, Cizik professor of business administration, the late Jerome H. Grossman, G '77, M.D., and Jason Hwang, M.B.A. '06 (McGraw-Hill, \$24.95). The innovation theorist and consultant, with colleagues, argues for wholesale changes in medical practice and organization, with strong doses of new technology and new business mod-

els, rather than attempts to achieve incremental reform.

Can Poetry Save the Earth? A Field Guide to Nature Poems, by John Felstiner '58, Ph.D. '65

(Yale, \$35). From the Psalms to Gary Snyder, the author, professor of English at Stanford, interprets Anglo-American poetry attuned to nature, and assesses its ability to awaken readers to better stewardship of the planet.



Yucky Pollution, Shiny Pretty, 2001, Hilltop Children's Center, Seattle. From *Can Poetry Save the Earth?*

How Professors Think: Inside the Curious World of Academic Judgment, by Michèle Lamont, Goldman professor of European studies and professor of sociology and of African American studies (Harvard, \$27.95). How do scholars, dedicated to excellence, originality, and quality in academia, judge the work of peers from different disciplines in awarding fellowships or research grants? Lamont, who now advises the Faculty of Arts and Sciences dean on appointments and diversity, probes behind the veil in a unique way, from a sociological perspective.

Fighting Cancer with Knowledge and Hope, by Richard C. Frank '85 (Yale, \$28). A physician and cancer researcher offers a guide to the disease, to its diagnosis, and to therapies for patients, families, and—importantly—the healthcare providers who help them.

younger men into battle," he said. "Unfortunately that was true again in my own generation."

Faust spoke about Whitman's focus on the suffering of individuals, through which he was able to suggest the scale of the national tragedy. Adams enthusiastically concurred: "What I love about the poem is its absolutely shocking, clinical veracity."

Adams's music is always personal; that's why audiences take it personally. So he also spoke of some of the other cur-

rents that flowed into this work: the gradual disappearance of his father into the fog of Alzheimer's and his mother's selfless caregiving, and the loss of friends during the AIDS crisis. And because his music often explores or responds to issues that people care about, it therefore interests a public that is not necessarily drawn to contemporary music—while sometimes annoying the public that is, or

critics who pen jibes against his "CNN operas" or suggest that he is the fast-food king of classical music.

The relationship of text to music matters to Adams; much of his music is bound to words. "I considered setting some poems of Wallace Stevens to which I was introduced in Hum 5," he told his audience. (His section man was Neil Rudenstine.) "But his rhythms and textures were not right for me. I was attracted instead to the purely American utterance of Whitman, the flow of the language, the deep soul he was."

Adams said he spoke the words of the text into a recording microphone to imprint the rhythms and resonances in his mind, and only then embarked on composing the music; most of his models for text setting come not from composers of opera but from popular music.

I grew up singing Rodgers and Hammerstein with my mother, and I listened to Joni Mitchell, the Beatles, Bob Dylan, Otis Redding, Janis Joplin. But I am not a vernacular composer—I'm a classical com-