“My lab is a place where I can be the child that I still am. It is the place where I play with my best friend. I can laugh in my lab and be ridiculous...Because the outside world cannot come into the lab, the lab has become the place where I can be the real me.” (LAB GIRL, p. 19)

Hope Jahren’s 2016 memoir of a practicing laboratory scientist is a deeply personal account of the pursuit of science in the laboratory. To guide our discussion of this award-winning title, we were favored with the expert participation of Dr. Mary Ann Vinton, Associate Prof. and Director of Environmental Science at Creighton University. The literary and narrative qualities of LAB GIRL were highly enjoyed by all. Jahren’s effective use of narrative story, dialog, metaphor, plant analogues, and literary illusions were on display.

Vinton offered a personal reservation regarding Jahren’s abundant anthropomorphic portrayals of plant life. This is not common scientific language and manner. It seems integral, however, to Jahren’s quest for emotive story and readability. One of her writing goals was avoidance of scientific and technical nomenclature. Vinton suggested THE BOTANY OF DESIRE by Michael Collins embodies a less personalized, approach to the success of plant progeny in evolutionary terms.

A very engaged discussion ensued regarding Jahren’s personal experiences and her critique regarding male dominance in the culture of science. Vinton pointed to several New York Times essays in which Jahren decried the exploitation of women in scientific pursuits in academe. It was a surprising back story reflecting many of the same current concerns regarding the lifestyle of Harvey Weinstein and $METOO.

Our devoted and reliable website master, Melanie Kiper, joined in the discussion at this meeting. She has a law degree and beaucoup technology smarts to support her leadership role and many activities in UNO’s College of Public Affairs & Community Service.

The book selected for our next meeting is NEVER CAUGHT, by the historian Dr. Erica Armstrong Dunbar. Recommended by Rev. Mary Newbern-Williams, this book explores the determined pursuit by George and Martha Washington to recapture a runaway slave from their Virginia Plantation. I placed an order request for eight paperback copies of this book to be available at the Bookworm. Ask for our book club discount.

I look forward to seeing you at Spezia on Wednesday, March 7th at 11:30 a.m.

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BobR
1/11/18