

## Rusland Reading Group - Books suggested for 2004-2005 Season

<i>Month</i>	<i>Where</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>
<b>October 21<sup>st</sup></b>	Helen Pierce	<a href="#">Big Chief Elizabeth</a>	Giles Milton
<p>The follow up to his best-selling <a href="#">Nathaniel's Nutmeg</a>, Giles Milton's <i>Big Chief Elizabeth</i> is a sprawling, ambitious tale of how the aristocrats and privateers of Elizabethan England reached and colonized the "wild and barbarous shores" of the New World. Milton's story ranges from John Cabot's voyage to America in 1497 to the painful but ultimately successful foundation of the English colony at Jamestown by 1611. However, the main focus of the book is Sir Walter Raleigh's elaborate and tortuous attempts to establish an English settlement on Roanoke Island, in present-day North Carolina, following the first English voyage there in 1584. Scouring contemporary travel accounts of the period, Milton creates a colorful and entertaining account of the greed, confusion, and misunderstanding that characterized English relations with the Native Americans, and the violent and tragic conflict that often ensued.</p> <p>Milton has a good eye for a surreal or comical story, such as the colony's first encounter with Big Chief--or <i>Weroanza</i> Wingina, whose exotic title "quickly captured the imagination of the English colonists, and they began referring to their own queen as <i>Weroanza</i> Elizabeth." The Elizabethan cast is also dazzling: the flamboyant and ambitious Walter Raleigh, who provided the money behind the Roanoke ventures; the "sober" ascetic scholar Thomas Hariot, who provided the brains; and hardened adventurers, like Arthur Barlowe and Ralph Lane, who provided the muscle. The myths and stories also come thick and fast, from John Smith and Pocahontas, to the importation of the fashion of "drinking tobacco," but the problem with <i>Big Chief Elizabeth</i> is that it lacks a central driving story. In the end, it reads like an entertaining, but rather labored jog through early Anglo-American history, something that has been done with greater skill and originality by, for one, Charles Nicholl in his fascinating book <a href="#">The Creature in the Map</a>. Those who enjoyed <i>Nathaniel's Nutmeg</i> will probably like <i>Big Chief Elizabeth</i>, but with some reservations. --Jerry Brotton, <a href="#">Amazon.co.uk</a>.</p>			

<i>Month</i>	<i>Where</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>
<b>November 25<sup>th</sup></b>	Helen Adams	<a href="#">Don't Let's go to the Dogs Tonight</a>	Alexandra Fuller
<p><b>From Publishers Weekly</b></p> <p>A classic is born in this tender, intensely moving and even delightful journey through a white African girl's childhood. Born in England and now living in Wyoming, Fuller was conceived and bred on African soil during the Rhodesian civil war (1971-1979), a world where children over five "learn[ed] how to load an FN rifle magazine, strip and clean all the guns in the house, and ultimately, shoot-to-kill." With a unique and subtle sensitivity to racial issues, Fuller describes her parents' racism and the wartime relationships between blacks and whites through a child's watchful eyes. Curfews and war, mosquitoes, land mines, ambushes and "an abundance of leopards" are the stuff of this childhood. "Dad has to go out into the bush... and find terrorists and fight them"; Mum saves the family from an Egyptian spitting cobra; they both fight "to keep one country in Africa white-run." The "A" schools ("with the best teachers and facilities") are for white children; "B" schools serve "children who are neither black nor white"; and "C" schools are for black children. Fuller's world is marked by sudden, drastic changes: the farm is taken away for "land redistribution"; one term at school, five white students are "left in the boarding house... among two hundred African students"; three of her four siblings die in infancy; the family constantly sets up house in hostile, desolate environments as they move from Rhodesia to Zambia to Malawi and back to Zambia. But Fuller's remarkable affection for her parents (who are racists) and her homeland (brutal under white and black rule) shines through. This affection, in spite of its subjects' prominent flaws, reveals their humanity and allows the reader direct entry into her world. Fuller's book has the promise of being widely read and remaining of interest for years to come. Photos not seen by PW. (On-sale Dec. 18) Forecast: Like Anne Frank's diary, this work captures the tone of a very young person caught up in her own small world as she witnesses a far larger historical event. It will appeal to those looking for a good story as well as anyone seeking firsthand reportage of white southern Africa. The quirky title and jacket will propel curious shoppers to pick it up.</p>			

<i>Month</i>	<i>Where</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>
December 16th	Jan Benefield	<a href="#">The Woman in White</a>	Wilkie Collins
<b>From the Publisher</b>			
<p>"There in the middle of the broad, bright high-road-there, as if it had that moment sprung out of the earth or dropped from the heaven-stood the figure of a solitary woman, dressed from head to foot in white garments." Thus young Walter Hartright first meets the mysterious woman in white in what soon became one of the most popular novels of the nineteenth century. Secrets, mistaken identities, surprise revelations, amnesia, locked rooms and locked asylums, and an unorthodox villain made this mystery thriller an instant success when it first appeared in 1860, and it has continued to enthrall readers ever since. From the hero's foreboding before his arrival at Limmeridge House to the nefarious plot concerning the beautiful Laura, the breathtaking tension of Collin's narrative created a new literary genre of suspense fiction, which profoundly shaped the course of English popular writing. Collins other great mystery, <i>The Moonstone</i>, has been called the finest detective story ever written, but it was this work that so gripped the imagination of the world that Wilkie Collins had his own tombstone inscribed: "Author of <i>The Woman In White</i>. . ."</p>			

<i>Month</i>	<i>Where</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>
February 24 <sup>th</sup>	Lin Mackintosh	<a href="#">White Teeth</a>	Zadie Smith
<b>From Publishers Weekly</b>			
<p>The scrambled, heterogeneous sprawl of mixed-race and immigrant family life in gritty London nearly overflows the bounds of this stunning, polymathic debut novel by 23-year-old British writer Smith. Traversing a broad swath of cultural territory with a perfect ear for the nuances of identity and social class, Smith harnesses provocative themes of science, technology, history and religion to her narrative. Hapless Archibald Jones fights alongside Bengali Muslim Samad Iqbal in the English army during WWII, and the two develop an unlikely bond that intensifies when Samad relocates to Archie's native London. Smith traces the trajectory of their friendship through marriage, parenthood and the shared disappointments of poverty and deflated dreams, widening the scope of her novel to include a cast of vibrant characters: Archie's beautiful Jamaican bride, Clara; Archie and Clara's introspective daughter, Irie; Samad's embittered wife, Alsana; and Alsana and Samad's twin sons, Millat and Magid. Torn between the pressures of his new country and the old religious traditions of his homeland, Samad sends Magid back to Bangladesh while keeping Millat in England. But Millat falls into delinquency and then religious extremism, as earnest Magid becomes an Anglophile with an interest in genetic engineering, a science that Samad and Millat repudiate. Smith contrasts Samad's faith in providence with Magid's desire to seize control of the future, involving all of her characters in a debate concerning past and present, determinism and accident. The tooth--half root, half protrusion--makes a perfect trope for the two families at the center of the narrative. A remarkable examination of the immigrant's experience in a postcolonial world, Smith's novel recalls the hyper-contemporary yet history-infused work of Rushdie, sharp-edged, fluorescent and many-faceted. Agent, Georgia Garrett. (May)</p>			

<i>Month</i>	<i>Where</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>
March 17th	Jean Crabtree	<a href="#">The Kite Runner</a>	Khaled Hosseini
<b>From Publishers Weekly</b>			
<p>Hosseini's stunning debut novel starts as an eloquent Afghan version of the American immigrant experience in the late 20th century, but betrayal and redemption come to the forefront when the narrator, a writer, returns to his ravaged homeland to rescue the son of his childhood friend after the boy's parents are shot during the Taliban takeover in the mid '90s. Amir, the son of a well-to-do Kabul merchant, is the first-person narrator, who marries, moves to California and becomes a successful novelist. But he remains haunted by a childhood incident in which he betrayed the trust of his best friend, a Hazara boy named Hassan, who receives a brutal beating from some local bullies. After establishing himself in America, Amir learns that the Taliban have murdered Hassan and his wife, raising questions about the fate of his son, Sohrab. Spurred on by childhood guilt, Amir makes the difficult journey to Kabul, only to learn the boy has been enslaved by a former childhood bully who has become a prominent Taliban official. The price Amir must pay to</p>			

recover the boy is just one of several brilliant, startling plot twists that make this book memorable both as a political chronicle and a deeply personal tale about how childhood choices affect our adult lives. The character studies alone would make this a noteworthy debut, from the portrait of the sensitive, insecure Amir to the multilayered development of his father, Baba, whose sacrifices and scandalous behavior are fully revealed only when Amir returns to Afghanistan and learns the true nature of his relationship to Hassan. Add an incisive, perceptive examination of recent Afghan history and its ramifications in both America and the Middle East, and the result is a complete work of literature that succeeds in exploring the culture of a previously obscure nation that has become a pivot point in the global politics of the new millennium.

<i>Month</i>	<i>Where</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>
April 21st	Helen Pierce	<a href="#">Therese Raquin</a>	Emile Zola

**[The Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of Literature](#)**

Novel by Emile Zola, first published serially as *Un Mariage d'Amour* in 1867 and published in book form with the present title in the same year. Believing that an author must simply establish his characters in their particular environment and then observe and record their actions as if conducting an experiment, Zola nonetheless adopted a highly moral, unscientific tone in this grisly novel, the first to put his "analytical method" into practice. The sensual Therese and her lover Laurent murder her weak husband Camille. After marrying, they are haunted by Camille's ghost, and their passion for each other turns to hatred. They eventually kill themselves. Conservative readers accused Zola of prurience; the novel, however, illustrates the author's belief that sexual pleasure leads only to brutality and destruction.

**Product Description:**

One of Zola's most famous realistic novels, *Therese Raquin* is a clinically observed, sinister tale of adultery and murder among the lower classes in nineteenth-century Parisian society. Zola's shocking tale dispassionately dissects the motivations of his characters--mere "human beasts", who kill in order to satisfy their lust--and stands as a key manifesto of the French Naturalist movement, of which the author was the founding father.--*This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.*

<i>Month</i>	<i>Where</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>
May 19th	Fiona Baxter (Dane's Howe)	<a href="#">The Kindness of Strangers</a>	Kate Adie

<i>Month</i>	<i>Where</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>
June 16th	Liz Cringle (Low Dale Park)	<a href="#">Small Island</a>	Andrea Levy

**From Publishers Weekly**

Starred Review. After winning the Orange Prize and the Whitbread Book of the Year Award, Levy's captivating fourth novel sweeps into a U.S. edition with much-deserved literary fanfare. Set mainly in the British Empire of 1948, this story of emigration, loss and love follows four characters—two Jamaicans and two Britons—as they struggle to find peace in postwar England. After serving in the RAF, Jamaican Gilbert Joseph finds life in his native country has become too small for him. But in order to return to England, he must marry Hortense Roberts—she's got enough money for his passage—and then set up house for them in London. The pair move in with Queenie Bligh, whose husband, Bernard, hasn't returned from his wartime post in India. But when does Bernard turn up, he is not pleased to find black immigrants living in his house. This deceptively simple plot poises the characters over a yawning abyss of colonialism, racism, war and the everyday pain that people inflict on one another. Levy allows readers to see events from each of the four character's' point of view, lightly demonstrating both the subjectivity of truth and the rationalizing lies that people tell themselves when they are doing wrong. None of the characters is perfectly sympathetic, but all are achingly human. When Gilbert realizes that his pride in the British Empire is not reciprocated, he wonders, "How come England did not know me?" His question haunts the story as it moves back and forth in time and space to show how the people of two small islands become inextricably bound together.

<i>Month</i>	<i>Where</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>
July 21st	Mandy Lane (Lilac Cott, Oxen Park)	<a href="#">English Passengers</a>	Matthew Kneale
<p><b>From Publishers Weekly</b></p> <p>The brutal hand of British imperialism provides the foundation for this broad historical swashbuckler about the English colonization of Tasmania in the early and mid-19th century. U.K. author Kneale debuts stateside with this lengthy novel of hapless smugglers, desperate convicts, simpering bureaucrats, mad vicars and displaced aborigines. The English passengers are the Reverend Wilson, a vicar determined to prove that Tasmania was the site of the original Garden of Eden, and Doctor Potter, a ruthless scientist equally determined to prove Wilson wrong and gain fame in the victory. They're on their way to Tasmania aboard the good ship Sincerity, commanded by Captain Illiam Quillian Kewley, a high-seas smuggler and rascal of renown. This is an unpleasant voyage for everyone, especially Kewley, for he has been forced to charter his ship in order to escape punishment for dodging customs duties on his illicit cargoes. Storms, pirates and foul tempers, however, are just the prelude to the hardships that await everyone when they land in Tasmania. British self-righteousness in forcing civilization and Christianity on the aborigines causes wholesale slaughter and subjugation of the islanders, and the natives are more than just restless. Wilson and Potter's overland expedition is guided by Peevay, a wily aborigine not about to knuckle under to the white man. Of course, the expedition is a bloody disaster. Murder, madness, betrayal, mutiny and shipwreck spice up the action and provide intricate plot twists with surprising and satisfying resolutions, particularly for Captain Kewley. This rich tale is told by 20 different voices skipping back and forth across the years, but somehow Kneale manages to keep the reader from becoming confused. Kneale's careful research and colorful storytelling result in an impressive epic. BOMC featured selection.</p>			

<i>Month</i>	<i>Where</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>
September 22 <sup>nd</sup>	Sarah Demick	Middlemarch	George Elliot
<p>No reviews on Amazon (perhaps not unexpected!)</p> <p>Found this link:  <a href="http://www.complete-review.com/reviews/eliotg/mmarch.htm">http://www.complete-review.com/reviews/eliotg/mmarch.htm</a></p> <p>But will be others around on the web I expect.</p>			

**Rusland Valley Reading Group: Other suggested books:**

<a href="#">Biography of George Mallery - The Last Climb: The Legendary Everest Expeditions of George Mallery ??</a>	by <a href="#">David Breashears</a> , <a href="#">Audrey Salkend</a>
<a href="#">Mrs Dalloway</a>	Virginia Woolf
<a href="#">An Idea of Perfection</a>	Kate Grenfell
<a href="#">Give Me Ten Seconds</a>	John Seargent (Autobiography)
<a href="#">On the Road</a>	Jack Kerouac
<a href="#">Oranges are not the Only Fruit</a>	Jeanette Winterson
<a href="#">The Poisonwood Bible</a>	Barbara Kingsolver
<a href="#">May you be the Mother of 100 Sons</a>	Elizabeth Bumiller
<a href="#">A Prayer for Owen Meany</a>	John Irving
<a href="#">Galileo's Daughter</a>	Dava Sobel
<a href="#">The Shadow of the Wind</a>	Carlos Ruiz Zafon
<a href="#">The Clearing</a>	Tim Gautreaux
The Reader	Bernhard Schlink
The American Boy	