

## Rusland Reading Group - Books for 2006-2007 Season

The group meets on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of each month (apart from August and December) at 08:00 p.m.

| <i>Meeting Date</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <i>Where</i>               | <i>Book</i>                      | <i>Author</i> |
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| <b>October 19th</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Helen Pearce, Thwaite Head | <a href="#">The Secret River</a> | Kate Grenfell |
| <p>First novel for 5 years from Orange prize-winning Kate Grenville. Blanket review coverage backed by a major advertising campaign. A dramatic and evocative historical novel set between the slums of Nineteenth-century London and the convict colonies of Australia. Following a childhood marked by poverty and petty crime in the slums of London, William Thornhill is sentenced in 1806 to be transported to New South Wales for the term of his natural life. With his wife and children, he arrives in a harsh land to a life that feels like a death sentence. But, among the convicts there is a whisper - that freedom can be bought - an opportunity to start afresh on lush, 'unclaimed' land away from the infant township of Sydney, up the Hawkesbury River. As Thornhill and his family stake their claim on a patch of ground by the river, the battle lines between old and new settlers are drawn. Whilst some attempt to reconcile themselves with the place and its native people, others fear of this alien world turns into brutal depravity towards it. "The Secret River" joins a tradition of grand historical action. It sensuously etches the intense light and scribble of the Australian bush onto the page, making them the backdrop to a story about ownership, belonging and identity - themes which are timeless and universal. (<i>Amazon</i>)</p> |                            |                                  |               |

| <i>Meeting Date</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <i>Where</i>                               | <i>Book</i>                          | <i>Author</i>      |
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| <b>November 16th</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Jan Benefield, Jane Meadow, High Dale Park | <a href="#">The Poisonwood Bible</a> | Barbara Kingsolver |
| <p>As any reader of <a href="#">The Mosquito Coast</a> knows, men who drag their families to far-off climes in pursuit of an Idea seldom come to any good, while those familiar with <a href="#">At Play in the Fields of the Lord</a> or <a href="#">Kalimantan</a> understand that the minute a missionary sets foot on the fictional stage, all hell is about to break loose. So when Barbara Kingsolver sends missionary Nathan Price along with his wife and four daughters off to Africa in <i>The Poisonwood Bible</i>, you can be sure that salvation is the one thing they're not likely to find. The year is 1959 and the place is the Belgian Congo. Nathan, a Baptist preacher, has come to spread the Word in a remote village reachable only by airplane. To say that he and his family are woefully unprepared would be an understatement: "We came from Bethlehem, Georgia, bearing Betty Crocker cake mixes into the jungle," says Leah, one of Nathan's four daughters. But of course it isn't long before they discover that the tremendous humidity has rendered the mixes unusable, their clothes are unsuitable and they've arrived in the middle of political upheaval as the Congolese seek to wrest independence from Belgium. In addition to poisonous snakes, dangerous animals, and the hostility of the villagers to Nathan's fiery take-no-prisoners brand of Christianity, there are also rebels in the jungle and the threat of war in the air. Could things get any worse? .... (<i>from Amazon</i>)</p> |                                            |                                      |                    |

| <b>Meeting Date</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <b>Where</b>                         | <b>Book</b>                   | <b>Author</b> |
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| <b>January 18th</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Mandy Lane, Lilac Cottage, Oxen Park | <a href="#">Anna Karenina</a> | Tolstoy       |
| <p><i>Anna Karenina</i> is widely regarded to be an even greater achievement of tragedy and of the novel form than <i>War and Peace</i> had been the decade before. Tolstoy began it in 1873 and concluded it in 1877. It is the story of a fashionable married woman, Anna Karenina, who arrives in St Petersburg to meet Stepan Arkadyevitch but meets with him another man. This man, Count Vronsky, is strangely attracted to Anna from the outset and she begins to feel for him too. Anna recalls her cold-blooded and cynical husband who is twenty years her senior. He never shows her any affection and considers her to be a trophy. The Count contrives to meet Anna again through his friendship with Stepan, with whom Anna is residing. The novel then follows this liaison as it begins and then ends horribly as Anna's husband Karenin finds out about the affair. Anna is brought down by others' passions and power over her and she is driven, after many twists and turns in her fortunes and those of her lovers, to throw herself under the wheels of a train. It is one of the most famous suicides in literary history but to know of its inevitability only makes the tragedy of Anna's life more cathartic and sad. (<i>Bibliomania</i>)</p> |                                      |                               |               |

| <b>Meeting Date</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>Where</b>               | <b>Book</b>                                                                    | <b>Author</b>          |
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| <b>February 15th</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Jean Crabtree, Force Mills | <a href="#">The Wildest Dream: Mallory - His Life and Conflicting Passions</a> | Peter and Leni Gillman |
| <p>Since the discovery in 1999 of George Mallory's body on Everest, controversy has raged over whether Mallory and Andrew Irvine could have summited the mountain. Every detail of the climb has been dissected and Mallory's skill as a mountaineer has been hotly debated. Observing the debate, Peter and Leni Gillman felt that the essence of who Mallory was as an individual had been lost. In <i>The Wildest Dream</i> they offer the most comprehensive biography ever written about one of the 20th century's most intriguing personalities.</p> <p>Exploring Mallory's early years, the Gillmans take the reader to Cambridge and Bloomsbury where Mallory consorted with some of the most colorful literary and artistic figures of Edwardian England: Rupert Brooke, James and Lytton Strachey, Maynard and Geoffrey Keynes, and Duncan Grant, among others. <i>The Wildest Dream</i> moves on to examine exactly what Mallory accomplished as a climber, evaluating the quality of his routes and skills within the context of climbing in the early 1900s.</p> <p>At the heart of this biography, and of Mallory's life, is his wife, Ruth. The letters they exchanged during the many separations caused by World War I and three Everest expeditions reveal the depth of their commitment to each other and the unwavering support and strength Ruth offered George. The Everest expeditions are also insightfully rendered, offering perspective on criticisms levied at Mallory after the 1921 and 1922 attempts. The authors examine how Mallory, a dedicated husband and father, arrived at his fateful decision to participate in the doomed 1924 expedition and why he continued to press for a summit attempt when the odds seemed stacked against him. As Mallory once declared, a climber was what he was, and this is what climbers did; this was how they fulfilled their wildest dreams."</p> |                            |                                                                                |                        |

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| <b>March 15th</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Liz Cringle, Low Dale Park | <a href="#">Rough Music</a> | Patrick Gale  |
| <p>Julian as a small boy is taken on the perfect Cornish holiday. When glamorous American cousins unexpectedly swell the party, however, emotions run high and events spiral out of control. Though he has been brought up in the forbidding shadow of the prison his father runs, though his parents are neither as normal nor as happy as he supposes, Julian's world view is the sunnily selfish, accepting one of boyhood. It is only when he becomes a man - seemingly at ease with love, with his sexuality, with his ghosts - that the traumatic effects of that distant summer rise up to challenge his defiant assertion that he is happy and always has been.</p> |                            |                             |               |

| <i>Meeting Date</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <i>Where</i>                     | <i>Book</i>                   | <i>Author</i>   |
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| <b>April 19th</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Helen Adams, Light Hall, Rusland | <a href="#">Mother's Milk</a> | Edward St.Aubyn |
| <p>"Last year's Man Booker prize was widely perceived to have thrown up a surprise when the prize went to Kiran Desai's <i>The Inheritance of Loss</i> instead of <i>Mother's Milk</i> by Edward St Aubyn, a writer who has been on the scene for over a decade but was regarded as finally having his long-overdue moment. Writing after the event, one of the judges, Anthony Quinn, admitted that <i>Mother's Milk</i> was "the book I loved the best", praising it as a "fantastically funny, humane and serious novel". When it didn't win, Quinn "felt quite devastated and wondered if I should go off and sulk". Many others in the book world echoed the sentiment." <a href="#">Hadley Freeman The Guardian Saturday January 13, 2007 (read on...)</a></p> <p>The once illustrious, once wealthy Melroses are in peril. Caught in the wreckage of broken promises, child-rearing, adultery and assisted suicide, Patrick finds his wife consumed by motherhood, his mother consumed by a New Age foundation, and his five-year-old son Robert understanding far more than he ought. Showcasing Edward St Aubyn's ability to combine the most excruciating emotional pain with the driest comedy, "<i>Mother's Milk</i>" is a dazzling exploration of the troubled allegiances between parents and children, husbands and wives. Acerbically witty, disarmingly tender, it goes to the core of a family trapped in the remains of its ever-present past. 'So good - so fantastically well-written, profound and humane...it is heart-stopping' - "Observer". 'The bravura quality of St Aubyn's performance is irresistible' - "Sunday Telegraph". 'Wonderful caustic wit ...Polished yet profound, it's even better than his previous work, and that's saying something' - "Guardian". (from Amazon)</p> |                                  |                               |                 |

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| May 17th                   | Lin Macintosh,<br>Crosslands | <a href="#">Purple Hibiscus</a> | Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie |

A haunting tale of an Africa and an adolescence undergoing tremendous changes by a talented young Nigerian writer. Fifteen-year-old Kambili's world is circumscribed by the high walls of her family compound and the frangipani trees she can see from her bedroom window. Her wealthy Catholic father, although generous and well-respected in the community, is repressive and fanatically religious at home. Her life is lived under his shadow and regulated by schedules: prayer, sleep, study, and more prayer. She lives in fear of his violence and the words in her textbooks begin to turn to blood in front of her eyes. When Nigeria begins to fall apart under a military coup, Kambili's father, involved in mysterious ways with the unfolding political crisis, sends Kambili and her brother away to their aunt's. The house is noisy and full of laughter. Here she discovers love and a life -- dangerous and heathen -- beyond the confines of her father's authority. The visit will lift the silence from her world and, in time, reveal a terrible, bruising secret at the heart of her family life. This first novel is about the promise of freedom; about the blurred lines between the old gods and the new; between childhood and adulthood; between love and hatred. An extraordinary debut, *Purple Hibiscus* is a compelling novel which captures both a country and an adolescence at a time of tremendous change.

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| June 21 <sup>st</sup>      | John Walton,<br>Crosslands Barn | <a href="#">Restless</a> | William Boyd         |

It is 1939. Eva Delectorskaya is a beautiful 28-year-old Russian emigree living in Paris. As war breaks out she is recruited for the British Secret Service by Lucas Romer, a mysterious Englishman, and under his tutelage she learns to become the perfect spy, to mask her emotions and trust no one, including those she loves most. Since the war, Eva has carefully rebuilt her life as a typically English wife and mother. But once a spy, always a spy. Now she must complete one final assignment, and this time Eva can't do it alone: she needs her daughter's help.

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| WEDNESDAY!<br>July 18 <sup>th</sup> | Carol Driver, Windy<br>Hall | <a href="#">The Places In<br/>Between</a> | Rory Stewart         |

A brilliant account of a death defying walk through Afghanistan Rory Stewart's sparsely poetic, and highly acclaimed account of his walk across Afghanistan in January 2002 has been hailed as a modern classic of travel writing. Travelling entirely on foot and following the inaccessible, mountainous route, Stewart was nearly defeated by the hostile conditions. With the help of an unexpected companion and the generosity of the people he met on the way, however, he survived to report back on a region closed to the world by twenty-four years of war. (*Amazon synopsis*)

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| Sept 20 <sup>th</sup> | Mandy Lane, Lilac Cottage, Oxen Park | <a href="#">Testament of Youth</a> | Vera Brittain |

In 1914 Vera Brittain was 21 years old, and an undergraduate student at Somerville College, Oxford. When war broke out in August of that year, Brittain "temporarily" disrupted her studies to enrol as a volunteer nurse, nursing casualties both in England and on the Western Front. The next four years were to cause a deep rupture in Brittain's life, as she witnessed not only the horrors of war first hand, but also experienced the quadruple loss of her fiancé, her brother, and two close friends. *Testament of Youth* is a powerfully written, unsentimental memoir which has continued to move and enthral readers since its first publication in 1933. Brittain, a pacifist since her First World War experiences, prefaces the book with a fairy tale, in which Catherine, the heroine, encounters a fairy godmother and is given the choice of having either a happy youth or a happy old age. She selects the latter and so her fate is determined: "Now this woman," warns the tale, "was the destiny of poor Catherine." And we find as we delve deeper into the book that she was the destiny of poor Vera too.

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

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| <a href="#">The Places In Between</a>   | Rory Stewart |
| <a href="#">A Prayer for Owen Meany</a> | John Irving  |
| <a href="#">Galileo's Daughter</a>      | Dava Sobel   |
| <a href="#">Skating to Antarctica</a>   | Jenny Diski  |
| <a href="#">The Inheritance of Loss</a> | Kiran Desai  |