

Rusland Reading Group - Books for 2008-2009 Season

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

Meeting Date	Where	Book	Author
September 18th	Carol Driver, Rusland	-East of Eden -The Dream Lover	John Steinbeck William Boyd

Meeting Date	Where	Book	Author
October 16th	Sarah Demick, Dane's Howe	The Thirteenth Tale	Diana Setterfield
<p>Synopsis</p> <p>Angelfield House stands abandoned and forgotten. It was once home to the March family - fascinating, manipulative Isabelle, brutal, dangerous Charlie, and the wild, untamed twins, Emmeline and Adeline. But Angelfield House hides a chilling secret which strikes at the very heart of each of them, tearing their lives apart...Now Margaret Lea is investigating Angelfield's past - and the mystery of the March family starts to unravel. What has Angelfield been hiding? What is its connection with the enigmatic writer Vida Winter? And what is the secret that strikes at the heart of Margaret's own, troubled life? As Margaret digs deeper, two parallel stories unfold, and the tale she uncovers sheds a disturbing light on her own life...</p>			

Meeting Date	Where	Book	Author
November 16th	Jan Benefield, Dale Park	The Boy in Striped Pyjamas	John Boyne
<p>From the Jacket:</p> <p>Berlin 1942</p> <p>When Bruno returns home from school one day, he discovers that his belongings are being packed in crates. His father has received a promotion and the family must move from their home to a new house far far away, where there is no one to play with and nothing to do. A tall fence running alongside stretches as far as the eye can see and cuts him off from the strange people he can see in the distance.</p> <p>But Bruno longs to be an explorer and decides that there must be more to this desolate new place than meets the eye. While exploring his new environment, he meets another boy whose life and circumstances are very different to his own, and their meeting results in a friendship that has devastating consequences.</p>			

Meeting Date	Where	Book	Author
January 15th	Jean Crabtree, Force Mills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Armadale • If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wilkie Collins • Jon McGregor

Armadale: *From Wilkie Collins website:* Collins's longest novel, published in 1866 and dedicated to John Forster. The story spans two generations of the Armadale families and the complex plot combines several of Collins's favourite themes, including the supernatural, identity, murder and detection. A stage version of *Armadale* was published in 1866 to protect dramatic copyright. Collins noted in an Appendix that he had carefully researched certain aspects of the novel: 'Wherever the story touches on questions connected with Law, Medicine, or Chemistry, it has been submitted, before publication, to the experience of professional men.' The Ladies' Toilette Repository of Mrs Oldershaw was based on the Bond Street beauty parlour of the infamous Madame Rachel Levenson, and Lydia Gwilt's criminal past is partly drawn from the famous trial for murder of Madeleine Smith. Collins wrote in the preface 'Viewed by the Clap-trap morality of the day, this may be a very daring book. Judged by the Christian morality which is of all time, it is simply a book daring enough to speak the truth.'

If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things:

"This novel owes as much to poetry as it does to prose. Its opening, an invocation of the life of the city, is strongly reminiscent of Auden's "Night Mail" in its hypnotic portrait of industrialised society An assured debut" - Erica Wagner, "The Times".

From www.reading.co.uk: The book tells the story of one day on a residential street in a city. From the start we know that something significant happened on that day but we are unable quite to place our finger on what it is. As the story unfolds, revealing the activities of the street's residents throughout the day, we become less concerned with the details of a specific event and ever more captivated by the broad canvas of everyday existence. Set alongside this is the story of a girl whose recent experiences have caused her to look back, somewhat wistfully, on that particular day on the street. The stories are masterfully told, with an assurance which belies the fact that this is McGregor's literary debut. His idiosyncratic style – he uses punctuation freely and doesn't distinguish speech from narration – gives a loose, poetic feel to the prose, and a descriptive quality reminiscent of writers like Annie Dillard. Throughout the entire novel, but primarily through 'the boy from number 18', McGregor invites us to share in his attempt to capture and sometimes catalogue the genuinely remarkable things that mostly go unnoticed in a seemingly drab environment.

Meeting Date	Where	Book	Author
February 19th	Mandy Lane's - Lilac Cott, Oxen Park	All Quiet on the Western Front	Erich Maria Remarque

From www.rbooks.co.uk: One by one the boys begin to fall...In 1914 a room full of German schoolboys, fresh-faced and idealistic, are goaded by their schoolmaster to troop off to the 'glorious war'. With the fire and patriotism of youth they sign up. What follows is the moving story of a young 'unknown soldier' experiencing the horror and disillusionment of life in the trenches.

All Quiet on the Western Front was an international bestseller after its publication in 1929 but when the Nazis came to power they stripped the author of his German citizenship and banned the Oscar-winning film of the book.

Erich Maria Remarque was born in 1899. He fought and was injured in the trenches in the First World War when he was eighteen years old. He was exiled and his works were burnt by the Nazis. He lived in America and Switzerland and married and divorced his first wife twice before marrying the celebrated Hollywood actress Paulette Goddard. He published several novels after *All Quiet on the Western Front*, the most famous of which is *The Road Back*. He died in 1970.

Meeting Date	Where	Book	Author
March 19th	Lin McIntosh, Rusvale, Crosslands	Dreams From My Father	Barack Obama

Misc. reviews from Amazon:

One of the many refreshing things about Barack Obama is his self-deprecating sense of humour. Responding to the unrealistic expectations for his presidency, Obama said 'I've been sent by my father from the planet Krypton to save the Earth.' Unfortunately, the irony of this self-comparison to Superman was probably lost on many of his dedicated followers, who clearly believe that – once in office – he can exercise a few super powers and rid the world of all its thronging ills, economic and otherwise. But as *Dreams from My Father* proves, Obama is no fool, and knows the cold realities that face him, even though this intelligently written book is filled with optimism and hope. Which is understandable enough; after all, what else could Obama offer?

The politicians who can actually write may be counted on one hand, but on the evidence here, Barack is among their number (he reminds us that William Faulkner said the past is never dead and buried – it isn't even past; can you imagine Barack's predecessor in the Oval Office quoting Faulkner – unless the allusion was written for him by one of his speechwriters?). In fact the book -- Obama's remarkable life story – was, of course, written before his destiny was irrevocably changed by his success in the US presidential election, and it is a striking account of a young man coming to terms with the problem of his identity and issues of belonging in a racially divided country (a racial division that Obama – by the very example of his success – may do a considerable amount towards healing). The son of a black African father and a white American mother, Obama details the dramatic journey that constituted his parents' life before his own trip to Kenya to confront the sobering realities of his father's life. It is a book about coming to terms with the past – and comparisons with writers such as Proust in such areas are not as ridiculous as they would be if almost any other politician were involved. *Dreams from My Father* gives real hope that 'dumbing down' – in order to appeal to the lowest common denominator – will not be the hallmark of the Obama presidency

Meeting Date	Where	Book	Author
April 16th	Fiona Baxter, Dane's Howe	The Road Home	Rose Tremain

In *The Road Home*, Tremain tells the story of Lev, an Eastern European migrant worker who has left his village and travelled to England so that he can finance a better life for his mother and daughter. He takes with him his grief for his dead wife. There is an almost fairytale-like quality to Lev's chance encounters and where they lead him, although, that said, they also feel natural and possible; Tremain has always been good on the essential randomness of experience.

Lev's London is awash with money, celebrity and complacency - an ugly picture of the way we live now - but there is nothing polemical about the book. The world Tremain creates feels real, and she allows her characters to negotiate it, and make their compromises with it, in a way that is both convincing and very poignant. There is also a rich vein of humour that runs through the book, much of which comes from the stories about and conversations with Lev's friend Rudi, who has stayed back in the village.

Meeting Date	Where	Book	Author
May 21st	Helen Adams, Light Hall, Rusland	The Catastrophist	Ronan Bennett

Ronan Bennett writes screenplays for television and film as well as novels. His third book, *The Catastrophist*, set in the Belgian Congo during the decolonisation struggles of 1959 to 1960, imprints a cinematic vision on the reader's eye, rendering images of indolent colonials blinded by the African sun to the realities of African decolonisation and the momentum of the Congolese independence movement led by the resolute Patrice Lumumba. James Gillespie, Irish by origin, arrives in Léopoldville in the hope of saving his relationship with Inès Sabiani, an Italian journalist increasingly involved in central African nationalist politics. James, "the trained observer", watches dispassionately from the wings, mystified by the politics of commitment to a political cause, but desperate for personal love and commitment from Inès. She, however, is lost to him, but found to the cause of the overthrow of the colonial occupation of the Belgian Congo. The impasse at the heart of their love affair hinges upon the dilemma between the politics of belief and the role of art in society. This is summed up by the fact that while Inès uses her journalistic skills as an instrument of political struggle, James believes writing is the art of disbelief. As Inès remarks: "Politics of that sort demands conviction, fiction demands doubt."

The Catastrophist, justly shortlisted for the 1998 Whitbread Novel Award, is an insightful and patient study of masculine self-delusion that--even better--shows the good sense to keep it's distance from overplaying it's narrative claims to insight into Inès's psychology. In fact, this novel derives much of its psychological realism precisely from its depiction of the pain and confusion of a man who cannot understand why a woman can say "I am still loving you", but not be able to give up her life for him. --*Rachel Holmes*

Review

'A mighty achievement... vision, imagination and gravitas' -- Times 'A writer to watch, a genuine and gifted novelist' -- Cole Moreton, Independent 'As lush and sensual as ripe mangoes' -- Financial Times 'I have not read such a good thriller in years' -- Ian Thomson, Evening Standard 'Compelling... the power of this fine novel lies in its detached subtlety... a memorable book with a ring of deeply felt authenticity' -- Hugo Hamilton, Sunday Tribune

Meeting Date	Where	Book	Author
June 18th	John Walton, Crosslands Barn	Glister	John Burnside

Step into Innertown. Open the first page of this astonishing work, and take a step straight into the echoing grey streets, the poisoned woods, of one of the most grim but enduring landscapes committed to print in recent years. A forgotten town, built on a bleak, salty headland to service a vast chemical factory, long decommissioned. Toxins have blackened the trees, coloured the grasses, given the town cancers and death. Few leave, although daily lives are rank with disappointment. The word dystopian could be used. Except that Burnside has just taken harsh post-industrial reality and blessed it with a bizarre sense of beauty.

Boys disappear every year or so. There is a thief in the night and they are 'taken'. Are they leaving, the official line; or being killed; or moving to some mysterious Other, through a portal deep inside the abandoned plant? (*Euan Ferguson, The Observer*) [more.....](#)

Meeting Date	Where	Book	Author
July 16th	Helen Pierce, Canal Foot, Ulverston ? (tbc)	Things Fall Apart	Chinua Achebe

One of the most widely read novels from Nigeria's most famous novelist, *Things Fall Apart* is a gripping study of the problem of European colonialism in Africa. The story relates the cultural collision that occurs when Christian English missionaries arrive among the Ibos of Nigeria, bringing along their European ways of life and religion. In the novel, the Nigerian Okonkwo recognizes the cultural imperialism of the white men and tries to show his own people how their own society will fall apart if they exchange their own cultural core for that of the English.

Meeting Date	Where	Book	Author
Sept 17th	Carol Driver, Windy Hall, Rusland	Barnaby Rudge	Charles Dickens

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Rusland Valley Reading Group: Suggested books:

Book	Author	Who suggested
Brave New World	Aldous Huxley	
Brokeback Mountain et al	Annie Proulx	Mandy Lane
The Carhullan Army	Sarah Hall	
The Stone Diaries	Carol Shields	
Engleby	Sebastian Faulks	
Girl in the Blue Dress	Gaynor Arnold	
Two Lives	Vikram Seth	
	Pat Barker???	
Glister (when out in paperback)	John Burnside	Fiona Baxter
The Lonely Sea and the Sky	Francis Chichester	
The Interpretation of Murder	Jed Rubinfeld	Jean Crabtree
Darwin book???		Liz Cringle
The White Tiger	Aravind Adiga	
Seven Years in Tibet	Heinrich Harrer	