WCU ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
SUMMER READING LIST
2013

This annual list presents suggestions for summer reading from individual faculty of the West Chester University English Department. You can also find this list & its predecessors at http://www.wcupa.edu/academics/sch_cas.eng/faculty/.

There’s something here for every reader!

**Book:**

All Roads Lead to Austen
Cheryl Wanko
Amy Elizabeth Smith
How do Jane Austen’s novels play in Central and South America? This easy-reading travel book from a writer who conducted reading groups in several countries asks us to consider what makes certain works of literature “translatable” and understandable (or not) in different cultures, questioning the familiar claim of “universality.” The narrator has her own spicy romance story to impart, as well.

The Art of Fielding
Chad Harbach
What would summer be without baseball? What would summer reading be without baseball fiction? You need not ponder such existential questions if you bring Chad Harbach's wonderfully human baseball novel to the beach with you. It tracks a transformational season of the Westish College Harpooners baseball team (it takes its name from the college’s dubious scholarly connection to Herman Melville) as it aspires to win its league for the first time ever and earn a chance to play for an NCAA championship. Shortstop Henry Skrimshander seems destined for big league stardom. But when a routine throw goes disastrously off course, the fates of five people are upended, and they are forced to confront their deepest hopes, anxieties, and secrets. Written with grace and great intelligence, this is an expansive novel about family, friendship and love.

Before the Revolution: America’s Ancient Pasts
Rodney Mader
Daniel K. Richter
Richter offers a brilliant synthesis of Native American, European, and African histories, weaving them together as they relate to what would become the U.S., but without teleologically anticipating that outcome. In other words, rather than writing these stories as if they were the prelude to Anglo-American dominance, Richter treats Natives, Europeans, and Africans as actors in their own histories, with goals, social structures, faith practices, politics, technologies, strengths, blind-spots, etc., all of which affected their ultimate interactions.
**Behind the Beautiful Forevers:**
  *Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity*
  John Ward

Katherine Boo

This non-fiction study of the cruelty, corruption, ingenuity, and occasional kindness that underlie the emergence of India as a twenty-first century economic power emphasizes both the daunting complexity of such an emergence and the extremely high price, in human terms, it exacts even though its long-term outcome may on balance be beneficial.

**Bring up the Bodies**
  John Ward

Hilary Mantel

This novel, the second volume in a projected trilogy dealing with the life and times of Thomas Cromwell, won its author a second Man Booker prize. Although I find it less compelling than its predecessor, *Wolf Hall*, and was surprised when it won the Booker, I do believe that it is worth the attention of readers who are interested in history, political maneuvering, and Mantel’s treatment of the novel’s fascinating central character.

**The Big Kiss-Off of 1944**
  Joseph Navitsky

Andrew Bergman

The first of Bergman’s three Jack LeVine mysteries, this crime novel features a private eye who is relentlessly self-critical about his place in the wartime culture of New York City. *The Big Kiss-Off of 1944* intriguingly extends some of the typical concerns of the genre to the highest reaches of American democracy, introducing presidential contenders and a military leadership desperate to win the war at any cost.

**Birds of the Air**
  Luke Stromberg

David Yezzi

*Birds of the Air* is Yezzi's third collection and, in my opinion, it confirms his place among our finest poets. This collection contains both exquisitely crafted lyrics and extended narrative pieces such as "Tomorrow & Tomorrow" about the dissolution of a love affair set against the backdrop of a disastrous touring production of *Macbeth*.

**Birds Without Wings**
  Linda Myrsiades

Louis de Bernieres

This book – on audio tape it's 23 hours – requires an abiding interest in the decline of the Ottoman Empire, including its wars and myriad cultural conflicts. A massive piece of fiction, it is probably as accurate as most historical novels, even if it gets the massacres and inter-ethnic hostilities of Anatolian as wrong as most authors of the period. Nevertheless, the cultural insights are on-spot (he wrote, as well, *Corelli's Mandolin* – about the Italian occupation and the precursors to the Greek civil war on a Greek island) – and the opportunity he provides to enter a mixed world of Muslim and Christian, Greek, Armenian, and Turkish villagers offers a certain welcome richness.

**Book Was There**
  Eleanor Shevlin

Andrew Piper

Offering a nexus of several fields, Piper addresses the past and present of reading and does so with a lyrical blending of personal, academic, and tactile experiences. Far from sounding the
death knell for the book and reading, Pipe instead situates the digital and its wondrous possibilities as part of a long continuum of the history of the written word.

*The Boy Kings of Texas*  
Domingo Martinez  
From the National Book Foundation website: "In *The Boy Kings of Texas*, Domingo Martinez traces his life from a rough Texas border town to the ‘wet wilderness of civility’ in Seattle. With sentences that often burst like small fireworks, this is a brave book, an angry dissection of the macho values that dominated his upbringing and a sorrowful account of his love, often betrayed, for his family – most poignantly, for his brother. Like the best of its genre, this memoir is absolutely specific and totally universal."

*The City in the City*  
China Mieville  
Sci-fi/Urban fantasy/Murder mystery. A murder victim from one city discovered in another. The trick is, both cities occupy the same physical space, and residents "live" in one or the other by virtue of ignoring the other. Anybody who fails to do so is likely to get punished by a shadowy overarching power called The Breach.

*The Classroom and the Cell: Conversations on Black Life in America*  
Ayan Gangopadhyay  
Mumia Abu-Jamal and Mark Lemont Hill  
A series of conversations between the authors, this book addresses, among other things, the “enclosed” spatial distribution of institutionally defined “places,” such as the classroom and the prison cells in America. Lemont Hill, who teaches at Columbia University, and Abu-Jamal – a journalist on death row – take on addressing the hard hitting questions that involve the essentially interconnected relationships between education, economics, and prison system in America: how it is the distribution of institutionally enclosed spaces that intertwine “black” life and categorically structural disenfranchisement. A remarkable achievement, indeed!

*Code Name Verity*  
Deidre Johnson  
Elizabeth Wein  
Young adult novel and Printz (YA award) Honor title. Captured as a spy, "Verity" begins writing out an account of her mission and her past, telling a tale of friendship, tragedy, and courage.

*The Complete Sherlock Holmes & The Complete Tales of Terror and Mystery*  
Arthur Conan Doyle  
Don’t tell anyone, but up until last summer, I had never read a Sherlock Holmes story. Not one. I decided to remedy this with a vengeance and read all of them over the past year. And now I know what all the fuss is about: quirkiness, crankiness, inventiveness, intelligence. If you are still as impoverished as I was, please read some ACD soon: you’ll be glad.
Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter
Meghan Muller
Two unlikely friends, Larry and Silas, in a suffocating Mississippi town, are estranged by many variables, and now find themselves on an intersecting and twisted path. One, an accused (but never convicted) murderer of a girl who disappeared 20 years ago, the other an ambitious cop who denies to everyone, including himself, his connection to his old friend, and when another girl goes missing, the past must be dug up. The desolate, eerie landscape is as much of a character as any other in this unsettling story, and though it's a solid mystery, the authentic characterization and struggle of the human spirit make it an unforgettable read.

Darkness Bids the Day Goodbye
Tim Ray
Gary McKinney
The second in a series of murder mystery novels involving Sheriff David Pruitt, a Deadhead who interweaves his Deadhead philosophy of life with his job as a law enforcement officer and his role as father and husband in the post-Grateful Dead world of the Pacific Northwest.

Devil in the Grove: Thurgood Marshall, the Groveland Boys, and the Dawn of a New America
Carla Verderame
Gilbert King
Awarded the Pulitzer Prize for nonfiction this year, King’s text provides a detailed analysis of Thurgood Marshall’s tireless efforts for civil rights in the United States.

The Dream of the Celt: A Novel
Eleanor Shevlin
Mario Vargas Llosa, trans. Edith Grossman
This historically-based novel by the Peruvian Nobel Laureate recreates the life of the Irish-born Roger Casement. Briefly covering his early years, the work charts Casement’s extraordinary efforts to expose human rights abuses and champion indigenous cultures in the Congo and Peru; his awakening to the cause of Irish nationalism; and his eventual imprisonment and execution for treason, a charge compounded by revelations of his homosexuality, by the British who had formerly knighted Casement for his service to the realm.

East of the Sun
Julia Gregson
BG Betz
A saga featuring three Englishwomen who journey to India between the two world wars, this engrossing novel depicts the end of the British empire.

The Emily Dickinson Reader:
An English-to-English Translation of Emily Dickinson’s Complete Poems
Rodney Mader
Paul Legault
In this loving, playful homage to Dickinson, poet Paul Legault "Englishes" all 1789 poems, translating them for those of us who struggle with their density. In doing so, he creates a distinct personality, which is not really Dickinson but is really funny, morose, antisocial, and crushing on Sue pretty badly. Buy this book and set it on top of Franklin's edition of Dickinson's poems near a favorite chair, and periodically treat yourself to a mix of belly laughs and insights into Dickinson.
**L’Empreinte à Crusoé**
Michael Brooks

Patrick Chamoiseau
Just published and easily accessible with college French. A rethinking of Defoe’s story that explores man’s shifting relations with the natural world.

**Everything Is Illuminated**
Hannah Ashley

Jonathan Safran Foer
This came out ten years ago, but I just got to it now. It made me literally laugh out loud, hard. And also have that ethereal, this-is-bigger-than-me feeling. Particularly enjoyable for Jews and our allies who know Jewish culture well, and the magical realists among us.

**The Feast of the Goat**
Kostas Myrsiades

Mario Vargas Llosa

**Flight Behavior: A Novel**
Jen Bacon

Barbara Kingsolver
I’ve never regretted reading anything by her.

**First Contact: Scientific Breakthroughs in the Hunt for Life Beyond Earth**
Allen Witkowski

Marc Kaufman
If you would like a good, understandable update on the latest breakthroughs in astrobiology and their implications for our past and future, this is where to start. The author, an accomplished science writer, asks expert mainline scientists to explain and speculate about the newest discoveries in space and their attendant questions, such as “how life evolved from non-life,” whether or not extraterrestrial life in the cosmos will be carbon based, how much of earth is extraterrestrial material, and the theological implications of finding—or even positing—life on other planets. The science behind the issues is always lucidly explained, and if science isn’t your strong suite, you’ll feel eminently smarter after reading this book.

**The Garlic Ballads**
Kostas Myrsiades

Mo Yan
Nobel Prize for literature, 2012. A novel based on the horrifying conditions of Chinese farmers struggling to sell the crops they are encouraged to plant under communist rule.

**A Grain of Wheat**
Graham MacPhee

Ngugi wa Thiongo
A powerful novel concerning the aftermath of Kenya’s war for independence. The novel traces the interconnected stories of various African and European characters, each of whom are drawn with remarkable insight. The novel concerns human aspiration, fear, and the nature of fidelity and betrayal. The narrative is beautifully told in a subtle and low key manner, and the overall affect is to leave you thinking deeply about these characters, their world, and perhaps your own life. A modern classic, and essential reading for contemporary global citizens.
Gulp: Adventures on the Alimentary Canal  Jen Bacon
Mary Roach
Roach’s new book. I’ve already had a "taste" for Gulp via the RadioLab podcast, which describes, in detail, Mary Roach’s trip to visit a fistulated cow, which she gets to stick her arm in up to the shoulder. What fun!

Heat: An Amateur’s Adventures as Kitchen Slave, Line Cook, Pasta-Maker, and Apprentice to a Dante-Quoting Butcher in Tuscany  Vicki Tischio
Bill Buford
An entertaining and close-up memoir about a journalist’s “internship” in a celebrity chef’s restaurant kitchen (Mario Batali’s acclaimed Babbo). You can almost feel the steam rising from the giant pasta pots. It’s an entertaining read, especially if you are a foodie, like me.

How Not To Say What You Mean:  A Dictionary of Euphemisms  Chris Teutsch
R.W. Holder
From the back cover blurb: "[The book] unmasks the language of hypocrisy, evasion, prudery, and deceit.” High recommendation indeed. Instructive and fun to read.

How to Live or a Life of Montaigne in One Question and Twenty Attempts at an Answer  Allen Witkowski
Sarah Bakewell
If you’ve read any of Montaigne’s Essays and wanted to put them into context and learn more about them and their author, this is the book for you. This highly readable, philosophical biography takes up the major contradictory themes of the Essays, shows how they were woven into Montaigne’s life, and engages the reader to meditate on their existence in one’s own life. It’s also a National Book Critics Circle Award Winner.

I May Not Get There With You:  The True Martin Luther King, Jr.  Andrew Sargent
Michael Eric Dyson
Dyson's study of MLK is a wonderfully overstuffed work of "bio-criticism" that seeks to recover "the Martin Luther King we've forgotten": a flawed but heroic leader whose radical critique of poverty, inequality, militarism, and materialism is, for Dyson, highly relevant to today's America but too often obscured by hazy memorializing and a disproportionate focus on a few isolated lines from MLK's "I Have a Dream" speech. Dyson, a professor and public intellectual who also happens to be a Baptist minister, offers nuanced discussions of various MLK controversies (e.g., plagiarism, adultery, etc.), and he's especially good at critiquing how MLK’s call for "color blindness" has been twisted by conservatives into a rationale for dismantling affirmative action.

In the Garden of Beasts: Love, Terror, and an American Family in Hitler’s Berlin  Carla Verderame
Erik Larson
Larson writes a gripping account of Ambassador William E. Dodd’s family’s experience in Berlin in 1933.
The Life and Legacy of Mary McLeod Bethune
Jim Trotman
Nancy Ann Zrinyl Long
This author moves beyond the headlines of the most famous educator to come out of the south after Booker T. Washington and examines the indefatigable efforts and successful life of this woman and her towering strength of character.

Lincoln’s Tragic Pragmatism
John Ward
John Burt
This painstakingly researched and profoundly reflective book undertakes to chart the dangerous territory where philosophy and politics converge, with its primary focus on the protracted contention between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas as to how best to deal with slavery, an institution that both men despised, but for very different reasons. Burt asserts, correctly, I think, that his skills as a literary critic enable him to offer a more nuanced analysis of political speeches and other documents of the time than previous scholars have been able to do. It seems unlikely that anyone who reads this volume will fail to emerge from the experience with a yet higher estimate both of Lincoln’s intellectual powers and his political skill, though Burt is quick to acknowledge that Lincoln inevitably took the occasional false step.

Lord Byron's Foot
Luke Stromberg
George Green
Lord Byron's Foot is a poetry collection that should appeal even to those who do not typically read contemporary poetry. Green's verse is witty, erudite, and inventive. "Jeffers' Medea Opens on Broadway with Judith Anderson," for instance, seamlessly moves from describing the premiere of Robinson Jeffers' translation of Euripides to a scene from the movie Hombre with Paul Newman and Richard Boone. Not many poetry books can honestly be called a page turner, but this is one of them.

Love Among the Chickens
Peter Kent
P. G. Wodehouse
Originally appeared in 1906; revised edition 1921. Hilarious, and very much an acquired taste; you either love it or you hate it; I tell you it’s an experience not to be missed!

Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention
Jim Trotman
Manning Marable
The most thorough biography on the late activist to date, and one that is very, very well written.

Master of the Mountain: Thomas Jefferson and his Slaves
Jim Trotman
Henry Wiencek
There is plenty to reflect upon in this study which centers upon Jefferson's life at Monticello.

Mother Courage and Her Children
Ayan Gangopadhyay
Bertolt Brecht, trans. Tony Kushner and Tom Kuhn
During the time when the US invaded Iraq, these US intellectuals decided to translate and adapt this Brechtian classic anti-war play yet again to ponder the then US (political) context for a performance event that took place in Central Park. Meryl Streep starred as the title character, which turned out to be yet another crown to her already illustrious career. Mother Courage uses
war to earn money for her own benefit. But in the end she loses her children who she was trying to feed and help; however much glorified war may be, it only brings loss. This bilingual edition will again teach me the classic Brechtian maxim: Never look at war wearing a sunglass!

*My Year with Eleanor: A Memoir*  
Vicki Tischio  
Noelle Hancock  
Written by a woman who had considerable phobias to overcome. She was inspired by Eleanor Roosevelt's transformation from a wallflower into first lady and a national role model for women, and decides to embark on a year of bravery inspired by Roosevelt's writings and philosophy. It's a very light read with some deep insights.

*The Old Ways*  
Lynette McGrath  
Robert Macfarlane  
Archeology, anthropology, history, poetry, art, psychology, all merge in a narrative of walking journeys and ancient public paths laid down over centuries, but also recapitulated in the author's experience. The BEST book I've read in a long time.

*The Painted Girls*  
BG Betz  
Cathy Marie Buchanan  
This novel focuses on sisters from the slums who dance for the Paris ballet and also model for Degas, sculptor and painter.

*The Parasol Protectorate Series: Soulless, Changeless, Blameless, Heartless, Timeless*  
Sarah Paylor  
Gail Carriger  
I am not quite sure how to describe these books, except that there are elements of a Victorian-era comedy of manners, well-researched Victorian culture, some mad science, dirigibles, vampires, and werewolves. Oh, and they are a delight to read.

*The Physick Book of Deliverance Dane*  
Jamie Feiler  
Katherine Howe  
Taken from Howe's website: when Harvard graduate student Connie Goodwin's mother "asks her to handle the sale of Connie's grandmother's abandoned home near Salem, she can't refuse. As she is drawn deeper into the mysteries of the family house, Connie discovers an ancient key [that] ... contains a yellowing fragment of parchment with a name written upon it: Deliverance Dane. This discovery launches Connie on a quest – to find out who this woman was and to unearth a rare artifact of singular power: a physick book, its pages a secret repository for lost knowledge. As the pieces of Deliverance’s harrowing story begin to fall into place, Connie is haunted by visions of the long-ago witch trials, and she begins to fear that she is more tied to Salem’s dark past then she could have ever imagined."

*The Postmortal*  
Tim Ray  
Drew Magary  
This novel is a dystopian futurist story of a cure for aging and all the issues involved when people actually can live forever. The lure of immortality is too strong to resist for most people, but the problems that ensue include rapid overpopulation and a dramatic breakdown of various
social structures such as marriage. The author is a first-time novelist but a frequent contributor to numerous blogs and magazines.

*Savage Inequalities*  
Jonathan Kozol  
Searing investigation of the state of education in the US, including eye-opening comparisons of schools in upper- and lower-income communities.

*The Secret Life of the Lonely Doll: The Search for Dare Wright*  
Deidre Johnson  
With their evocative black-and-white photographs, Dare Wright's Lonely Doll picture books were a favorite of many children in the 1950s and 1960s. One fan, Jean Nathan, became curious about the author and began to investigate her life. The result is – to quote *Library Journal* – a "compelling psychological biography . . . [that] illuminates Wright's tangled and tragic life [and] work" and an engaging, albeit sometimes painful, read even for those unfamiliar with Wright's picture books.

*Serena*  
Michelle Blake  
Ron Rash  
From its opening scene to its last, *Serena* is muscular and complex and challenging and violent, in an almost Shakespearean way. The story centers on George and Serena Pemberton and how they carve out their newly married life in the 1930s Appalachian timber industry, learning to live both with each other and with each other's passions. Not a light read, but one that is easy to get lost in. Apparently it is being made into a movie starring Bradley Cooper and Jennifer Lawrence – I can't see those actors in these roles, but maybe you'll have a different reaction! (I also highly recommend Rash's *The Cove*, which is more somber than violent, but equally well written.)

*A Song of Ice and Fire*  
BG Betz  
George R. R. Martin  
This is the series title for the brilliant medieval fantasy novels that begin with *A Game of Thrones* (Book 1). These books include deep characterization and breath-taking plot twists in which Martin is not afraid to execute major characters.

*Suite Française: A Novel*  
Peter Kent  
A novel about writer – a Frenchwoman and a Jew – and her life in occupied France. “*Suite Française* is a singularly piercing evocation . . . of life and death in occupied France, and a brilliant, profoundly moving work of art.” And I agree!

*The Swerve*  
Peter Kent  
Stephen Greenblatt  
An intellectually stimulating book which takes you across medieval Europe in search of a text, *De Rerum Natura*, which, again, will prod Europe into thoughts for a new direction – modernity.

*Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*  
Hyoejin Yoon  
Doris Kearns Goodwin  
A contextualized biography of Lincoln in relation to his contemporaries: William Henry Seward, Salmon P. Chase, Edward Bates – competitors, cabinet members, and eventual friends and
supporters. Impressive synthesis of primary sources – letters and diaries that, unexpectedly, shed light on the women in these men’s lives and their political, not just domestic, influence. You can’t help but love Lincoln by the end of it – it could be criticized for that bias – but I didn’t mind.

**Texaco**

Patrick Chamoiseau

A brilliantly translated modern classic. The classic is a rich history of Martinique. Imagine *Absalom, Absalom!* if Faulkner had concentrated on the slaves.

**This is How You Lose Her**

Junot Diaz

Appealing use of interlocking street and professorial argot, emotionally desirous, nostalgic, cynical, disabled, the usual mix of current contemporary writing.

**Transmission**

Hari Kunzru

One of my interests lately has been fiction about cyberculture and globalization. Kunzru satirizes Silicon Valley and transnational corporate culture in the story of an Indian programmer who winds up in an indentured IT servitude and, in an effort to better his fortunes, releases a virus with a Bollywood actress’s name that has unintended consequences that spread around the world.

**The Warmth of Other Suns:**

*The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration*

Isabel Wilkerson

Wilkerson (Pulitzer Prize winning journalist) writes a compelling story of America’s great migration by following three individuals who move from the south to northern and western US cities. This is a marvelous work; read it!

**Wild**

Cheryl Strayed

If you liked Jon Krakauer’s *Into the Wild*, you might find this piece an interesting comparison. In this now much praised book, Cheryl Strayed writes of her hike on the Pacific Crest Trail. She undertook her journey with very little knowledge of hiking and less knowledge of herself. While this topic could tend toward cliché, Strayed avoids it—instead giving a gripping account of her life and experiences.

**The Windup Girl**

Paolo Bacigalupi

Another novel that reflects my interest in stories about technology and globalization. This one is “biopunk” science fiction set in a 23rd-century Thailand depleted of petroleum and ravaged by biotechnological plagues. Anderson Lake – the representative of a Western “calorie company” interested in accessing the seed bank that has kept Thailand independent while other nations have fallen to famines brought about by GMOs – has his plans for gaining influence in the country disrupted by his encounter with Emiko, a “New Person” or engineered human, creche-grown,
programmed as a concubine for a Kyoto businessman, and now abandoned in the sex clubs of Bangkok.