

Looking for a good book to read? LLC faculty, staff and TAs have come together to provide some recommended readings and favorite books just for you! Selections focus in some way on languages and cultures and we've tried include a little something for everyone. Hope you enjoy!

The Diving Bell and the Butterfly (1997, Jean-Dominique Bauby): A translation of the French *Le scaphandre et le papillon* by a journalist who describes his life after suffering a massive stroke resulting in locked-in syndrome—he retained only limited movement of his head and one eye and dictated the book with eye blinks. I recommend this book because of the way in which it was written; it transcends what we see as traditional language all the while telling a true story of courage. A best seller in Europe.

Three Cups of Tea (2006, Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin): A NY Times bestseller about a young man who doesn't know who he is or what he wants to do in life, goes to climb the Himalayas, gets lost, almost dies and ultimately finds fulfillment in building schools in the hardest to reach areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan, in the process getting to know and love the people, their languages, their history, their culture, 3 cups of tea at a time. It's a great study in cultural sensitivity and patience (with lots of adventures), Mortenson learning not as an invasive foreigner expecting to get something, but as an interested student seeking to work alongside the local people. It's a compelling story with an interesting window into a very different world.

Roma, the Novel of Ancient Rome (2007, Steven Saylor): Traces 2 semi-historical Roman families for a millennium, in tales interwoven with history and legend. The "...fiction is used not to alter fact but to illuminate it, humanize it and bring it to life." (Houston Chronicle) Definitely not just for classicists!

The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain (2002, Maria Rosa Menocal): Shows in a fascinating way the cultural exchanges between Arab Spain and Europe from the 9th-16th centuries. From the book flap: "A portrait of the vibrant civilization of medieval Spain...an altogether different vision of medieval Europe, where tolerance was often the rule and literature, science and art flourished in a climate of cultural openness. ... The story begins as a young prince in exile ... flees the massacre of his family and founds a new kingdom.... Combining the best of what Muslims, Jews and Christians had to offer [it] and its successors influence the rest of Europe in dramatic ways...." "Menocal travels through time and space to reveal the often paradoxical events that shaped the Andalusian world and continue to affect our own."

Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes (1978, LS Vygostky): Explores language, the most powerful tool humans possess for development.

Children of the Revolution: the French 1799-1914 (2008, Robert Gildea): Per the Harvard University Press "...Gildea has written a richly engaging and provocative book. His is a strikingly unfamiliar France, a country with an often overwhelming gap between Paris and the provinces.... Gildea reveals how the collective recognition of the great costs of the Revolution galvanized the French to achieve consensus in a new republic and to integrate the tumultuous past into their sense of national identity." Here is a triumph of the Parisian commune, a French cultural history after 1789.

Mémoires de porc-épic (Memories of a porcupine, French, 2006, Alain Mabanckou): Inspired by African legend that all humans possess an alter animal ego, this tale is told by a porcupine whose alter ego is a mad sorcerer causing trouble for anyone in his path, that is, until the porcupine intervenes. Winner of the Prix Renaudot, France's equivalent of the National Book Award.

Tintin en Amérique (1932, Herge): A classic cartoon showcasing cultural treasures and political commentary in comic strip form. Adventures in Great Depression, gangster-filled Chicago, include meeting Al Capone, American Indians and being exposed to the oil and meat packing industries. While depictions may not be politically correct today, they offer a portal into a 1930s mindset.

Anissa Corto (2000, Yann Moix): A dark tale of a 30-something man whose obsessed passion for a woman who he cannot bring himself to meet leads to an exploration of his tormented psyche and a twisted ending. Loved it!

Persepolis (2001, Marjane Satrapi Kare): An Iranian illustrator's autobiography of a child's life following the Iranian revolution in graphic novel form. The resulting animated film was nominated in 2008 for an Academy Award.

The Wife of Martin Guerre (French, 1941, Janet Lewis): According to Google, "This compelling story of Bertrande de Rols is a rich novella with the timeless power of a fable. It was based on a famous story of a court case in mid-16th century France. Janet Lewis depicts a distant time and a traditional, rural culture...." or **The Trial of Soren Quist** (Scandinavian, 1959, Janet Lewis): Lewis was a fine poet - her prose is impeccable. The books are based on original European trial records.

The Oysters of Locmariaquer (1959, Eleanor Clark): About a tiny village in southern Brittany and the perfect oyster. Very different, little known but very interesting. From HarperCollins: "A vivid account of the cultivation of Belon oysters and an excursion into the myths, legends, and rich, vibrant history of Brittany and its extraordinary people, [it] is also an unforgettable journey to the heart of a fascinating culture and the enthralling, accumulating drama of a unique devotion."

Old New York (1924, Edith Wharton): A quartet of novellas, the first, "False Dawn," set in the 1840's is a wonderful comment on the first stages of America's love affair with European art. Appropriate to the time of year, one is set on, and called "New Year's Day." I just love them. According to Google Wharton shows, "...wealthy high society... powerfully depicted in these three elegantly ironic novels. Revolving around the marriage question, they explore the dilemma of women and men held within the rigid bounds of social convention."

Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War (1996, Robert B. Strassler): A terrific translation of ancient history I cannot recommend enough - replete with maps, cross-referenced notes and every kind of aid a reader could ask for!

The Island at the Center of the World: The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan and the Forgotten Colony that Shaped America (2005, Russell Shorto): A NY Time Bestseller described as follows on the Random House website, "...a landmark work of history that is also thrilling storytelling... Shorto "deconstructs" Manhattan, transforming it from the concrete-and-glass center of global power to a wooded wilderness island, home to wolves and bear, hunting ground for Indians. On this strategically located island, a largely forgotten collection of smugglers, traders, prostitutes, pirates, and entrepreneurs formed America's original melting pot, and created a society that helped shape the nation that was to come. [It] gives a startling new perspective on American beginnings."