

Mary Baldwin College Alumnae/i Book Club

June 2008

What we are reading in
2008:

May 1: *Devil in the White
City* by Erik Larson

June 5: *Eat, Pray, Love* by
Elizabeth Gilbert

July 3: *Daughter of Destiny:
An Autobiography* by Benazir
Bhutto

Aug 7: *Pillars of the Earth*
by Ken Follet

Sept 4: *The Book Thief* by
Markus Zusak

Oct 2: *Midnight in the
Garden of Good and Evil* by
John Berendt

Nov 6: *The Shadow of the
Wind* by Carlos Ruiz Zafon

Dec 4: *The Next Thing on
My List* by Jill Smolinski

To Read or Not To Read

A few years ago, I found and mentioned the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) 2004 publication *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America*. The results of the studies were alarming. Fewer and fewer Americans were reading fiction, poetry, drama, books in general. Late last year the NEA published another study entitled *To Read or Not To Read* that, combined with more recent findings, "attest to the diminished role of voluntary reading in American life." Specifically, the new findings indicate three things:

1. Americans are spending less time reading.
2. Reading comprehension skills are eroding.
3. These declines have serious civic, social, cultural, and economic implications.

Following is an excerpt from the study:

A. Americans are Reading Less

Teens and young adults read less often and for shorter amounts of time when compared with other age groups and with Americans of the past.

1. Young adults are reading fewer books in general.
 - Nearly half of all Americans ages 18 to 24 read no books for pleasure.
 - The percentage of 18- to 44- year-olds who read a book fell 7 points from 1992 to 2002.
2. Reading is declining as an activity among teenagers.
 - Less than one-third of 13-year-olds are daily readers.
 - The percentage of 17-year-olds who read nothing at all for pleasure has doubled over a 20-year period. Yet the amount they read for school or homework (15 or fewer pages daily for 62% of students) has stayed the same.

The complete study including an executive summary can be found at <http://www.nea.gov/pub/pubLit.php>.

We are on the MBC website!!
www.mbc.edu/alumnae

Join us online!!
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/MBCAlumBookClub>

If you are in the Richmond, VA area we would love for you to join us! All meeting times are 7pm and last approximately 1 hour.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact Theresa Cash Lewis '99 at pinkferrets@gmail.com or the Alumnae/i office at 1-800-763-7359.



Your Guide to the Classics: *The Count of Monte Cristo*

At the age of nineteen, Edmond Dantès seems to have the perfect life. He is about to become the captain of a ship, he is engaged to a beautiful and kind young woman, Mercédès, and he is well liked by almost everyone who knows him. This perfect life, however, stirs up dangerous jealousy among some of Dantès' so-called friends. Danglars, the treasurer of Dantès ship, envies Dantès' early career success; Fernand Mondego is in love with Dantès' fiancée and so covets his amorous success; his neighbor Caderousse is simply envious that Dantès is so much luckier in life than he is.

Together, these three men draft a letter accusing Dantès of treason. Despite the entreaties of Monsieur Morrel, Dantès' kind and honest boss, Dantès is sent to the infamous Château d'If, where the most dangerous political prisoners are kept.

While in prison, Dantès meets Abbé Faria, an Italian priest and intellectual, who has been jailed for his political views. Faria teaches Dantès history, science, philosophy, and languages, turning him into a well-educated man. Faria also bequeaths to Dantès a large treasure hidden on the island of Monte Cristo, and he tells him how to find it should he ever escape. When Faria dies, Dantès hides himself in the abbé's shroud, thinking that he will be buried and then dig his way out. Instead, Dantès is thrown into the sea, and is able to cut himself loose and swim to freedom.

Dantès travels to Monte Cristo and finds Faria's enormous treasure. He considers his fortune a gift from God, given to him for the sole purpose of rewarding those who have tried to help him and, more important, punishing those who have hurt him. Disguising himself as an Italian priest who answers to the name of Abbé Busoni, he travels back to Marseilles and visits Caderousse, who is now struggling to make a living as an innkeeper. From Caderousse he learns the details of the plot to frame him. In addition, Dantès learns that his father has died of grief in his absence and that Mercédès has married Fernand Mondego. Most frustrating, he learns that both Danglars and Mondego have become rich and powerful and are living happily in Paris. As a reward for this information, and for Caderousse's apparent regret over the part he played in Dantès' downfall, Dantès gives Caderousse a valuable diamond. Before leaving Marseilles, Dantès anonymously saves Morrel from financial ruin.

Ten years later, Dantès emerges in Rome, calling himself the Count of Monte Cristo. He seems to be all knowing and unstoppable. None of his old cohorts recognize the mysterious count as Edmond Dantès, though Mercédès does. Dantès is thus able to insinuate himself effortlessly into the lives of Danglars, Mondego, and Villefort. Armed with damning knowledge about each of them that he has gathered over the past decade, Dantès sets an elaborate scheme of revenge into motion.

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