Books of Summer 2014
Recommended Reads from Phillips Library Fans

Still Alice by Lisa Genova. Alice is fifty and a professor of psychology at Harvard when she is diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer’s. The story of the disease’s effect on her career, marriage and family is fairly predictable, but what makes this stand out is that Alice herself is the narrator. She tells us how she grapples with this diagnosis and what it’s like to sense herself unraveling. This story, as gut wrenching as it is, is beautifully told. I’ve not known anyone with the early onset form of this disease but I’ve watched older loved ones slip away into dementia. I know the impact that dementia has on those of us connected to the sufferer but I now better understand who and where my loved ones are after reading this book. • 813.6 Gen-s

Kathy Ball, ITS

Furious Love: Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton, and the Marriage of the Century by Sam Kashner. Entertaining novel on two individuals, who on paper, should never have been together. Before the Internet and reality TV, they were the subject of constant media attention. How they began, endured, and ended is covered. • 791.43028 Kas

Andi Seifrid, Phillips Library

The Book Thief by Markus Zusak. This is probably the most well-written, devastating, yet beautifully haunting book I have ever read. From beginning to end, Zusak has the reader in the palm of his hand with his unique writing style, especially his personification of Death as the narrator, whose narration is chilling, yet sympathetic. Death follows the life of Liesel Meminger, a young, German orphan, adopted by new parents. Death not only witnesses her growing affinity for reading, but also the blossoming relationship with Max Vandenburg, the young, Jewish man her foster parents are hiding in the basement. Throughout, Death denounces stereotypes of him and comments on what it is like to “do his job.” With these interesting annotations and Liesel’s story, the reader will close this book refusing to accept that it is over. Uncontrollable tears are guaranteed. Although the story is tragic, it is ironically fulfilling. It is a must-read for those who enjoy unique and creative writing styles, for anyone interested in WWII stories, or those who want a great, touching story. • 823.92 Zus

Sherry Becker, Senior, English and Secondary Education Major

Old Man’s War by John Scalzi. Humanity has begun to colonize the galaxy. The Colonial Defense Force is the quasi-governmental organization dedicated to training new colonists for life beyond Earth. Many unknowns await humanity; and the Colonial Defense Force must recruit soldiers to protect its colonies. After years of patience, John Perry is finally old enough to enlist, and he joins on his seventy-fifth birthday. How does the Colonial Defense Force rejuvenate and prepare its recruits for military life? No one on earth really knows. Follow John Perry in an adventure on a galactic scale as he finds life, love, and conquest among the stars. • 813.6 Sca-o

Joseph Moran, AU Online Criminal Justice Faculty

Extreme Medicine: How Exploration Transformed Medicine in the Twentieth Century by Kevin Fong. From Scott’s disastrous expedition to the South Pole to outer space, learn how healthcare has improved thanks to humanity’s wanderlust. • 616.0725 Fon

Amy Schlumpf Manion, Phillips Library
Girls of Atomic City by Denise Kiernan. Imagine a young woman, just out of high school in 1943, from a rural farm in Anywhere, USA, boarding a train to an unknown destination to live and work, to do an unknown job, to earn more money than she ever dreamed... and all she knows is that she will help bring the war to an end! Thousands of women (and men) arrived in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, recruited out of high schools, colleges, and work places across the country, knowing only that they would help end the war doing highly paid jobs. This nonfiction account focuses mainly on the women who came to this secret city to work on a secret government project; a secret that was remarkably kept by over 75,000 workers until its existence was made known to the world over Hiroshima. Kiernan masterfully weaves together the voices and experiences of these ordinary women to recreate the daily struggles to survive and thrive in this environment—to make friends and create a home in a place where every word is overheard and every movement is seen by someone; where each worker only knows what her job is, but not what it leads to... a place where, as the townspeople observe, “everything goes in but nothing comes out.” Share their relief, shock, joy, and horror when the secret is finally revealed and the uncertainty of “what comes next” sets in. A fascinating angle on this historic event.

Through a Glass, Darkly by Donna Leon. No tourist would want to find a dead body in front of a Murano glassblowing furnace. However, this is just what happened to Venetian murder mystery solver, Commissario Brunetti. Along with the hero of Leon’s series and his family, you can enjoy the food, drink, and ambience of la Serenissima. See http://www.diogenes.ch/media/public/venedig/index.html for a map of Brunetti’s Venice.

Fall of Giants and Winter of the World by Ken Follett. Fall of Giants is the first book of the trilogy. It follows five families as they experience life just before, during, and after World War I. Set in America, England, Germany, and Russia, this fictionalized history makes it real as you see events through characters you know and have feelings for. Winter of the World is book two. It follows the same but adds the next generation. This book covers the time before, during, and after World War II. I absolutely loved both books. Reading history can feel like learning about events that already happened. These books give a sense of what it was like to be there when no one knew how things would turn out.

David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants by Malcolm Gladwell. The Old Testament story of David and Goliath has for centuries inspired the underdog. Gladwell suggests that we’ve been wrong in our interpretation of that story. Did you know that ancient armies had three types of warriors? They were the cavalry, the infantry, and the projectile warriors. One type of projectile warrior was the slinger who was skilled at hurling rocks with great precision from a long strand of rope. The slinger’s specific and deadly job was to take out the infantry. So perhaps the shepherd David, with the skill set of a slinger, actually had the advantage in fighting Goliath, an infantryman. Gladwell goes on to suggest that being an underdog can change people in ways we often fail to appreciate. For example, individuals with dyslexia make up approximately one-third of all successful entrepreneurs, the best students from mediocre schools are almost always a better bet that good students from the very best schools, and help often does not come from the privileged or fortunate but from those marginalized by society. Overall, Gladwell verifies that there is enormous strength, purpose, and beauty from those we have often underestimated. I encourage you to read this book, because if nothing else, it will challenge the way you think.

Kris Johnson, Wackerlin Center
Spillover: Animal Infections and the Next Human Pandemic by David Quammen. This is an exciting and scary book that reads like a detective novel. How do some diseases pass from animals to humans? What is the history behind microbes that can kill us? Where did HIV/AIDS come from? This book takes the reader on a scientific, historical, and ecological journey to discover the link between many animal and human diseases. Diseases like AIDS, SAARS, Ebola, and many others have their history in the world of animals. A fascinating book, this work will show you how animals, humans, and microbes inhabit our planet together and how vulnerable we may be to diseases that formerly appeared only in animals. This is a medical and scientific fast-paced romp around the globe by an award-winning author. • 614.43 Qua

Lauren Jackson-Beck, Phillips Library

The Shallows by Nicholas Carr. This is an interesting historical chronicle of how innovations throughout history have fundamentally altered the thought processes of humans. The map, the clock, the book have all changed how we think and operate. The Shallows questions how the ubiquity of the internet might affect forever the way people think and challenges us to be thoughtful about how this innovation changes our society and ourselves. • 612.80285 Car

Lisa Fredenburgh, Music

Paradise by Toni Morrison. Toni Morrison, arguably the most renowned living American writer, is noted for crafting novels that seamlessly blend history, folklore, and myth. The concerns of women and African Americans limn her fiction yet her works illuminate the universality of human experience. Although Morrison’s Pulitzer Prize-winning novel Beloved is without question her magnum opus, regarded by most critics as the single best American novel ever written, Paradise, her seventh novel, is often overlooked, yet it deserves as much attention as its kin. The novel’s disquieting premise invites close, sustained reading: the men of Ruby, an all-black town located in Oklahoma, set out to slaughter five women who have taken up residence in an abandoned convent not far from town. These women, fugitives from abusive husbands, neglectful parents, and a nest of other troubles, have been labeled both sirens and sorceresses by the men of Ruby, healers and kindred spirits by the women of Ruby. What transpires between the book’s chilling opening pages and its pulse-pounding climax is a rich, nuanced look at the lives of the Convent women, Ruby’s history, and the sequence of events that caused these multiple narratives to converge. It is a novel as searing as summer itself. • 813.54 Mor-J

Jarrett Neal, Center for Teaching and Learning

Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China by Chang Jung. This is a fascinating, semi-autobiographical account of a family in China from the days of warlords through the Communist Revolution, the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution. It shows how these tumultuous events affected ordinary families, with an emphasis on women. • 951.05 Cha

Mary Buettner, History and Center for Teaching and Learning

Me Before You by Jojo Moyes. A bet in the movie Shakespeare in Love centers on whether a play can show the truth and nature of love. Shakespeare answers the challenge with Romeo and Juliet; Moyes does it in Me Before You. To call this a romance would do a disservice to thoughtful, complex depiction of love, living, and death that Moyes creates. This heart-rending book will leave you thinking long after you have put it down. • 823.92 Moy-m

Anna-Marie Spinos, Psychology

Democracy in America by Alexis de Tocqueville. In these days of increasing political rancor and ideological division, it is more important than ever to understand the American character. Tocqueville’s insights are as relevant today as they were when he wrote them nearly two hundred years ago. • 342.7303 Toc-k

Andrew Manion, Executive Vice President
The Cuckoo’s Calling by Robert Galbraith. The Cuckoo’s Calling is the first crime novel by J.K. Rowling, written under the pseudonym Robert Galbraith and I’m happy that it won’t be her last. In it we meet Cormoran Strike, a down-on-his-luck private detective recently back from a tour in Afghanistan. His prosthesis is bugging him and his girlfriend has thrown him out, so he’s camping out in his London office and he’s run out of clients. Enter recently-engaged, 25-year old Robin Ellacott, who mistakenly shows up at Strike’s office for a temporary secretarial assignment at the same time as a potential new client. Strike can’t pay her, but he’s desperate to make a good impression on the new client, John Bristow, adoptive brother of legendary supermodel Lula Landry. Landry, known to her friends as Cuckoo, fell to her death from the balcony of her tony London apartment a few months before. It was ruled a suicide, but Bristow doesn’t believe it and he wants Strike to investigate. This novel is an exploration of fame, beauty, and wealth and has enough twists and turns to keep the reader interested. I enjoyed the working relationship which develops between Strike and Ellacott. The sequel is scheduled to be released in June and I’m looking forward to it.

The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History by Elizabeth Kolbert. The past half billion years have seen five mass extinctions, the last wiping out those unfortunate dinos who danced with an asteroid 65 million years ago. According to Kolbert (and many respected scientists, some of whom she introduces in this book), we’re now in the midst of the sixth mass extinction—and we are the cause. In this accessible book, Kolbert explains why that is the case and ponders what comes next, all while introducing a wonderful cast of characters—human and nonhuman—and telling the remarkable story of the rise of natural history as a scientific field of study. It is certainly not a comforting read, but the story it tells is crucial.

Daring Greatly: How the Courage To Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead by Brené Brown. Based on research about shame and the fear of vulnerability, this is a qualitative study of interviews with men and women who struggle with shame and their fear of being vulnerable to other people. It includes insights, stories, and why it is important to be vulnerable. She also talks about her own personal struggle with shame.

Shotgun Lovesongs by Nickolas Butler. Midwesterners are a special people. Fertile farm soil, fresh water lakes, rolling pastures and long winters connect us to the earth and fortify us in a unique way. Nicholas Butler understands this. He was born and raised in Eau Claire, Wisconsin and his first novel is set in the fictional small town of Little Wing. It’s a beautifully written tale about love and friendship. It follows the lives of high school buddies for two decades as they become husbands and fathers. Life has taken them in different directions but a wedding, back in their hometown, reunites them. It has a little bit of the The Big Chill vibe to it. The story examines the evolving relationships of friends over time. It is about hope, heartbreak, forgiveness, and healing. Butler is a graduate of the Iowa Writers Workshop, one of the best training programs for writers in the world. He has an engaging way of describing the lives and inner landscapes of each character. If you grew up in the Midwest, you know this town and these people. You care about them, root for them and wish they were in your real circle of friends. In a recent interview, Butler said that he had just sold his story to a Hollywood producer. I am already thinking about who should play each role.

A special thank you to reviewers who provided a complimentary copy of the book they reviewed to the Phillips Library collection.