

# Mary Baldwin College Alumnae/i Book Club

December 2006

What we are reading in  
2006/2007:

Dec 7: *The Memory Keeper's  
Daughter* by Kim Edwards

Jan 4: *The Body in the  
Library* by Agatha Christie

Feb 1: *Never Let Me Go* by  
Kazuo Ishiguro

Mar 1: *The Empress Orchid*  
by Anchee Min

Apr 5: *Handmaiden's Tale* by  
Margaret Atwood

May 3: *The Glass Castle* by  
Jeanette Walls

June 7: To Be Announced

July 5: To Be Announced

Aug 2: To Be Announced

Sept 6: To Be Announced

Oct 4: To Be Announced

Nov 1: To Be Announced

Dec 6: To Be Announced

If you have any book  
suggestions please feel free  
to pass them on to me at any  
time.

## New York Times 5 Best Fiction Books of 2006

***ABSURDISTAN*** - By Gary Shteyngart. Random House, \$24.95.

"Absurdistan" introduces Misha Vainberg, the rap-music-obsessed, grossly overweight son of the 1,238th richest man in Russia. After attending college in the United States, he is now stuck in St. Petersburg, scrambling for an American visa that may never arrive. Caught between worlds, and mired in his own prejudices and thwarted desires, Vainberg just may be an antihero for our times.

***THE COLLECTED STORIES OF AMY HEMPEL*** - Scribner, \$27.50.

A quietly powerful presence in American fiction during the past two decades, Hempel has demonstrated unusual discipline in assembling her urbane, pointillistic and wickedly funny short stories. These collected stories show the true scale of Hempel's achievement. Her compact fictions, populated by smart, neurotic, somewhat damaged narrators, speak grandly to the longings and insecurities in all of us, and in a voice that is bracingly direct and sneakily profound.

***THE EMPEROR'S CHILDREN*** - By Claire Messud. Alfred A. Knopf, \$25.

Messud gracefully intertwines the stories of three friends, attractive, entitled 30-ish Brown graduates "torn between Big Ideas and a party" but falling behind in the contest for public rewards and losing the struggle for personal contentment. The vibrant supporting cast includes a deliciously drawn literary seducer ("without question, a great man") and two ambitious interlopers, teeming with malign energy, whose arrival on the scene propels the action forward.

***THE LAY OF THE LAND*** - By Richard Ford. Alfred A. Knopf, \$26.95.

The third installment, following "The Sportswriter" (1986) and "Independence Day" (1995), in the serial epic of Frank Bascombe - flawed husband, fuddled dad, writer turned real estate agent and voluble first-person narrator. Once again the action revolves around a holiday. This time it's Thanksgiving 2000: the Florida recount grinds toward its predictable outcome, and Bascombe, now 55, battles prostate cancer and copes with a strange turn in his second marriage.

***SPECIAL TOPICS IN CALAMITY PHYSICS*** - By Marisha Pessl. Viking, \$25.95.

The antic ghost of Nabokov hovers over this buoyantly literate first novel, a murder mystery narrated by a teenager enamored of her own precocity but also in thrall to her father, an enigmatic itinerant professor, and to the charismatic female teacher whose death is announced on the first page.

We are on the MBC website!!  
[www.mbc.edu/alumnae](http://www.mbc.edu/alumnae)

<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 [tlewis41203@yahoo.com](mailto:tlewis41203@yahoo.com) or the Alumnae/i office at 1-800-763-7359.



## Your Guide to the Classics: *Madame Bovary*

About the book:

*Madame Bovary* takes place in provincial northern France, near the town of Rouen in Normandy. A doctor, Charles Bovary, marries a beautiful farm girl, Emma Rouault. She is filled with a desire for luxury and romance, which she gets from reading popular novels. Charles means well, but is boring and clumsy. Emma believes that the birth of a baby boy will "cure" their marriage. After Emma gets pregnant and eventually gives birth to a daughter, she believes her life is virtually over.

Charles decides that Emma needs a change of scenery, and moves from the village of Tostes (now Tôtes) into an equally stultifying village, Yonville (traditionally based on the town of Ry). Emma flirts with one of the first people she meets, a young law student, Léon Dupuis, who seems to share her appreciation for "the finer things in life." When he leaves to study in Paris, Emma begins an affair with a rich landowner, Rodolphe Boulanger. Swept away by romantic fantasy, she makes a plan to run away with him. Rodolphe, however, does not love her, and breaks off the plan the evening before it was to take place, with a letter at the bottom of a basket of apricots. The shock is so great that she falls deathly ill, and for a time turns to religion.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madame\\_Bovary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madame_Bovary)

About the author:

**Gustave Flaubert** (December 12, 1821 - May 8, 1880) [gystav flobɛʁ] was a French novelist who is counted among the greatest Western novelists. He is known especially for his first published novel *Madame Bovary* and for his scrupulous devotion to his art and style, best exemplified by his endless search for *le mot juste* ("the precise word").

Flaubert was born in December 1821, in Rouen, Seine-Maritime, in the Haute-Normandie Region of France. He was the second child of Achille-Cléophas Flaubert (1784-1846), a surgeon in practice at Rouen, and his wife, Anne Justine, born Fleuriot. He began writing at an early age, as early as 8 according to some sources. He was educated in his native city and did not leave it until 1840, when he went to Paris to study law.

In Paris, he is said to have been idle at school. Though he found the city distasteful, he made a few acquaintances, including Victor Hugo. Towards the close of 1840, he travelled in the Pyrenees and Corsica. In 1846, he left Paris and abandoned the study of the law. Epilepsy may have contributed to his departure. In his youth, Flaubert was vigorous, had a certain shy grace, was intensely individual, and apparently lacked ambition.

The personal character of Flaubert offered various peculiarities. He was shy, and yet extremely sensitive and arrogant; he passed from silence to an indignant and noisy flow of language. The same inconsistencies marked his physical nature; he had the build of a guardsman with a Viking head, but his health was uncertain from childhood, and he was neurotic to the last degree. This ruddy giant was secretly gnawed by misanthropy and disgust of life. His hatred of the bourgeois and their *bêtise* (wilful idiocy) began in his childhood and developed into a kind of monomania. He despised his fellow-men, their habits, their lack of intelligence, their contempt for beauty, with a passionate scorn which has been compared to that of an ascetic monk.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustave\\_Flaubert](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustave_Flaubert)