

Mary Baldwin College Alumnae/i Book Club

January 2008

What we are reading in
2007/2008:

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

May 3: *The Glass Castle* by
Jeanette Walls

June 7: *The Bean Trees* by
Barbara Kingsolver

July 5: *The Last
Witchfinder* by James
Morrow

Aug 2: *Snow Flower and the
Secret Fan* by Lisa See

Sept 6: *Tortilla Curtain* by
T.C. Boyle

Oct 4: *The Girls Who Went
Away* by Ann Fessler

Nov 1: *The Same Sweet
Girls* by Cassandra King

Dec 6: *The Secret Agent* by
Joseph Conrad

Jan 3: *I Got Somebody in
Staunton* by William Henry
Lewis

Feb. 7: *Love* by Toni
Morrison

Mar 6: *The Kite Runner* by
Khaled Hosseini

Apr 3: *The Lovely Bones* by
Alice Sebold

Happy New Year!!!

The celebration of the new year is the oldest of all holidays. It was first observed in ancient Babylon about 4000 years ago. In the years around 2000 BC, the Babylonian New Year began with the first New Moon (actually the first visible crescent) after the Vernal Equinox (first day of spring).

The beginning of spring is a logical time to start a new year. After all, it is the season of rebirth, of planting new crops, and of blossoming. January 1, on the other hand, has no astronomical nor agricultural significance. It is purely arbitrary.

The Babylonian new year celebration lasted for eleven days. Each day had its own particular mode of celebration, but it is safe to say that modern New Year's Eve festivities pale in comparison.

The Romans continued to observe the new year in late March, but their calendar was continually tampered with by various emperors so that the calendar soon became out of synchronization with the sun.

In order to set the calendar right, the Roman senate, in 153 BC, declared January 1 to be the beginning of the new year. But tampering continued until Julius Caesar, in 46 BC, established what has come to be known as the Julian Calendar. It again established January 1 as the new year. But in order to synchronize the calendar with the sun, Caesar had to let the previous year drag on for 445 days.

Traditions of the season include the making of New Year's resolutions. That tradition also dates back to the early Babylonians. Popular modern resolutions might include the promise to lose weight or quit smoking. The early Babylonian's most popular resolution was to return borrowed farm equipment.

<http://wilstar.com/holidays/newyear.htm>

Calling All Readers!!!!

It's that time again! If you will notice our current book list ends with April. We will need to start gathering book suggestions for the rest of the year. If you have any suggestions please forward them to me. I will gather all of them together along with a brief synopsis and submit all of them to the club for review and choosing.

Thanks!

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 tlewis41203@yahoo.com or the Alumnae/i office at 1-800-763-7359.



Your Guide to the Classics: *The Catcher in the Rye*

Jerome David Salinger was born in New York City in 1919. The son of a wealthy cheese importer, Salinger grew up in a fashionable neighborhood in Manhattan and spent his youth being shuttled between various prep schools before his parents finally settled on the Valley Forge Military Academy in 1934. He graduated from Valley Forge in 1936 and attended a number of colleges, including Columbia University, but did not graduate from any of them. While at Columbia, Salinger took a creative writing class in which he excelled, cementing the interest in writing that he had maintained since his teenage years. Salinger had his first short story published in 1940; he continued to write as he joined the army and fought in Europe during World War II. Upon his return to the United States and civilian life in 1946, Salinger wrote more stories, publishing them in many respected magazines. In 1951, Salinger published his only full-length novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*, which propelled him onto the national stage.

Many events from Salinger's early life appear in *The Catcher in the Rye*. For instance, Holden Caulfield moves from prep school to prep school, is threatened with military school, and knows an older Columbia student. In the novel, such autobiographical details are transplanted into a post-World War II setting. *The Catcher in the Rye* was published at a time when the burgeoning American industrial economy made the nation prosperous and entrenched social rules served as a code of conformity for the younger generation. Because Salinger used slang and profanity in his text and because he discussed adolescent sexuality in a complex and open way, many readers were offended, and *The Catcher in the Rye* provoked great controversy upon its release. Some critics argued that the book was not serious literature, citing its casual and informal tone as evidence. The book was—and continues to be—banned in some communities, and it consequently has been thrown into the center of debates about First Amendment rights, censorship, and obscenity in literature.

Though controversial, the novel appealed to a great number of people. It was a hugely popular bestseller and general critical success. Salinger's writing seemed to tap into the emotions of readers in an unprecedented way. As countercultural revolt began to grow during the 1950s and 1960s, *The Catcher in the Rye* was frequently read as a tale of an individual's alienation within a heartless world. Holden seemed to stand for young people everywhere, who felt themselves beset on all sides by pressures to grow up and live their lives according to the rules, to disengage from meaningful human connection, and to restrict their own personalities and conform to a bland cultural norm. Many readers saw Holden Caulfield as a symbol of pure, unfettered individuality in the face of cultural oppression.

The few brief public statements that Salinger has made suggest that he continues to write stories to this day, implying that the majority of his works may not appear until after his death. Meanwhile, there are signs that readers are becoming more favorably disposed toward Salinger's later writings, meaning that *The Catcher in the Rye* may one day be seen as part of a much larger literary whole.

<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/catcher/>