

# Mary Baldwin College Alumnae/i Book Club

October 2006

What we are reading in  
2006:

Jan 3: *No. 1 Ladies  
Detective Agency* by  
Alexander McCall Smith

Feb 2: *Hard Times* by  
Charles Dickens\*

Mar 2: *The Poisonwood Bible*  
by Barbara Kingsolver\*

Apr 6: *Angry Housewives  
Eating Bon Bons* by Lorna  
Landvik

May 4: *Life of Pi* by Yann  
Martel

June 1: *Secret Life of Bees*  
by Sue Monk Kidd

July 6: *The Red Tent* by  
Anita Diamant

Aug 3: *My Sister's Keeper*  
by Jodi Picoult

Sept 7: *Girl With a Pearl  
Earring* by Tracy Chevalier

Oct 5: *The Time Traveler's  
Wife* by Audrey Niffenegger

Nov 2: *Reading Lolita in  
Tehran* by Azar Nafisi

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

\*These are selections from  
the MBC Reading Group for  
faculty and staff on campus.



Tell us a little bit about your favorite  
childhood book.

We want to know what your favorite childhood book and/or author was. Send me a quick email and let me know! For the November newsletter I will include everyone's responses.



National Endowment for the Arts:  
The Big Read

The Big Read is an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts designed to revitalize the role of literature in American popular culture and bring the transformative power of literature into the lives of its citizens. Mrs. Laura Bush is the honorary chair of the Big Read. The Big Read is presented in partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Services and in cooperation with Arts Midwest.

The Big Read provides citizens with the opportunity to read and discuss a single book within their communities. This initiative comprises innovative reading programs in selected communities; expansive outreach and publicity campaigns, including television, radio, and print publicity; compelling resources for discussing outstanding literature; and an extensive Web site offering comprehensive information on the authors and their works.

More than 100 communities nationwide will participate in the Big Read for 2007. Each community's program will last approximately one month and include a kick-off event to launch the program locally; major events devoted specifically to the book (panel discussions, lectures, public readings, and the like); events using the book as a point of departure (film screenings, theatrical readings, and so forth); and book discussions in diverse locations and aimed at a wide range of audiences.

Communities participating in the first grant cycle will read one of eight classic American novels: Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*; Willa Cather's *My Antonia*; F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*; Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*; Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*; Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*; John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*; or Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*. Four new books will be added for the second grant cycle.

The program was created in response to the National Endowment for the Arts report *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America*, which identified a critical decline in literary reading among American adults.

When the Arts Endowment released *Reading at Risk* last year, we pointedly said, "No one factor caused this decline in reading, and no one solution could reverse the trend." We said that "Journalists, writers, teachers, education administrators, publishers all need to address the problem in their spheres."

[www.neabigread.org](http://www.neabigread.org)

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: *Frankenstein*

By the time she was nineteen, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley had written one of the most famous novels ever published. Embodying one of the central myths of Western culture, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, first published in 1818, tells the story of an overreacher who brings to life the monster who inhabits one's dreams, a tale which still stands as a powerful and enduring example of the creative imagination. Nearly two hundred years later, the story of his creation still inspires stage, film, video, and television productions.

To those who have not read the book, the name Frankenstein is often associated with the monster rather than its creator. The mistake is perhaps not altogether erroneous, for as many critics point out the creature and his maker are doubles of one another, or doppelgängers. Their relationship is similar to that between the head and the heart, or the intellect and the emotion. The conception of the divided self--the idea that the civilized man or woman contains within a monstrous, destructive force--emerges as the creature echoes both Frankenstein's and narrator Robert Walton's loneliness: all three wish for a friend or companion. Frankenstein and his monster alternately pursue and flee from one another. Like fragments of a mind in conflict with itself, they represent polar opposites which are not reconciled, and which destroy each other at the end. For example, the creature enacts the repressed desires of its maker, alleviating Victor Frankenstein's fear of sexuality by murdering his bride, Elizabeth Lavenza, on their wedding night. Identities merge, as Frankenstein frequently takes responsibility for the creature's action: for instance, after the deaths of the children William and Justine, both of which were caused by the creature, Frankenstein admits they were "the first hapless victims to [his] unhallowed arts." <http://people.brandeis.edu/~teuber/shelleybio.html>

### **About the author: Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley**

The childhood of Mary Shelley (1797 - 1851), sounds rather like a dark fairy-tale. Her mother died giving birth to her and she was brought up by a remote father and a step-mother who hated her. Her step-sister was a depressive and later committed suicide and Mary had little in common with her step-brother or her half-brother. As a young girl, she escaped into books and would often read by the side of her mother's tomb.

In 1813 Mary met Percy Bysshe Shelley. He was only twenty-one but was already unhappily married. He was destined to be one of the geniuses of English poetry. The two fell in love and eloped, despite Mary's age. Her father, William Godwin, disowned her, but still she and Shelley were married in 1816. They settled in Italy but tragedy seemed to follow them. Only one of their four children lived very long and then, in 1822, when he was just thirty, Shelley was drowned. Mary lived for another thirty years but she lost the promise that she had shown in the company of her brilliant husband and his friends, such as the poet Lord Byron. The single book that we remember her for belonged to her happy time in Italy.

It was Byron who suggested in 1817, that they each write a horror story. The result in Mary's case, was *Frankenstein*. [www.penguin.com](http://www.penguin.com)