Graduate Liberal Studies Alumni Book Club

The GLS Alumni Book Club is the project of a group of dedicated alumni. Contact the Graduate Liberal Studies office at masters@wesleyan.edu or 860-685-2900 to request more information or to join the Club.

The Book Club is always looking for enthusiastic readers who love to read and discuss books. Both Alumni and Current GLS students are invited to join. The Book Club meets from 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm on the dates below. The only requirement for admission to the Club is to read the chosen book for each session, and be willing to discuss! Below you will find the title, author, and description of each book for the meetings this spring.

2013-2014

September 19 - The Red House, Mark Haddon
October 17 - The Light Between Oceans, M.L. Stedman
November 21 - Breathing Lessons, Anne Tyler
February 27 - Ancient Light, John Banville
March 20 - The Paris Wife: A Novel, By Paula McLain
April 24 - Flight Behavior, Barbara Kingsolver

September 19
Horgan House Library
The Red House, Mark Haddon
A Washington Post Best Book of the Year
From Mark Haddon, the bestselling author of The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time, comes a dazzlingly inventive novel about modern family life. Richard, a wealthy doctor, invites his estranged sister and her family to join his family for a week at a vacation home in the English countryside. Against the backdrop of a strange family gathering, Haddon skillfully weaves together the stories of eight very different people forced into close quarters. The Red House is a symphony of long-held grudges, fading dreams and rising hopes, tightly guarded secrets and illicit desires, painting a portrait of contemporary family life that is at once bittersweet, comic, and deeply felt.
Paperback: 272 pages

October 17
Usdan University Center, Room 104D
The Light Between Oceans, M.L. Stedman
After four harrowing years on the Western Front, Tom Sherbourne returns to Australia and takes a job as the lighthouse keeper on Janus Rock, nearly half a day’s journey from the coast. To this isolated island, where the supply boat comes once a season and shore leaves are granted every other year at best, Tom brings a young, bold, and loving wife, Isabel.
Years later, after two miscarriages and one stillbirth, the grieving Isabel hears a baby’s cries on the wind. A boat has washed up onshore carrying a dead man and a living baby. Tom, whose records as a lighthouse keeper are meticulous and whose moral principles have withstood a horrific war, wants to report the man and infant immediately. But Isabel has taken the tiny baby to her breast. Against Tom’s judgment, they claim her as their own and name her Lucy. When she is two, Tom and Isabel return to the mainland and are reminded that there are other people in the world. Their choice has devastated one of them. M. L. Stedman’s mesmerizing, beautifully written novel seduces us into accommodating Isabel’s decision to keep this “gift from God.” And we are swept into a story about extraordinarily compelling characters seeking to find their North Star in a world where there is no right answer, where justice for one person is another’s tragic loss. The Light Between Oceans is exquisite and unforgettable, a deeply moving novel.

Paperback: 352 pages

November 21
Horgan House Library

Breathing Lessons, Anne Tyler
In perhaps her most mainstream, accessible novel so far, Tyler spins a tale of marriage and middle-class lives, in an age when social standards and life expectations have gone askew. While she remains a brilliant observer of human nature, there is a subtle change here in Tyler’s focus. Where before her protagonists were eccentric, sometimes slightly fantastical characters who came at the end to a sense of peace, if not happiness, Maggie Moran and her husband Ira are average, unexceptional, even somewhat drab; and outside of some small epiphanies, little is changed between them at the story’s close. It’s this very realism that makes the story so effective and moving. Taking place on one summer day, when Maggie and Ira drive from Baltimore to Pennsylvania to a funeral, with an accidental detour involving an old black man they pass on the road and a side trip to see their former daughter-in-law and their seven-year-old grandchild, the novel reveals the basic incompatibility of their 28-year marriage and the love that binds them together nonetheless. This is another typical Tyler union of opposites: Maggie is impetuous, scatterbrained, klutzy, accident prone and garrulous; Ira is self-contained, precise, dignified, aloof with, however, an irritating (or endearing) habit of whistling tunes that betray his inner thoughts. Both feel that their children are strangers, that the generations are “sliding downhill,” and that somehow they have gone wrong in a society whose values they no longer recognize. With irresistibly funny passages you want to read out loud and poignant insights that illuminate the serious business of sharing lives in an unsettling world, this is Tyler’s best novel yet.

Paperback: 339 pages

February 27
Ancient Light, John Banville
Meeting Location: Allbritton 113
The Man Booker Prize-winning author of The Sea gives us a brilliant, profoundly moving new novel about an actor in the twilight of his life and his career: a meditation on love and loss, and on the inscrutable immediacy of the past in our present lives. Is there any difference between memory and invention? That is the question that fuels this stunning novel, written with the depth of character, the clarifying lyricism and the sly humor that
have marked all of John Banville’s extraordinary works. And it is the question that haunts
Alexander Cleave, an actor in the twilight of his career and of his life, as he plumbs the
memories of his first—and perhaps only—love (he, fifteen years old, the woman more than
twice his age, the mother of his best friend; the situation impossible, thrilling, devouring
and finally devastating) . . . and of his daughter, lost to a kind of madness of mind and
heart that Cleave can only fail to understand. When his dormant acting career is suddenly,
inexplicably revived with a movie role portraying a man who may not be who he says he is,
his young leading lady—famous and fragile—unwittingly gives him the opportunity to see
with aching clarity the “chasm that yawns between the doing of a thing and the
recollection of what was done.” Ancient Light is a profoundly moving meditation on love
and loss, on the inscrutable immediacy of the past in our present lives, on how invention
shapes memory and memory shapes the man. It is a book of spellbinding power and
pathos from one of the greatest masters of prose at work today.

Paperback: 304 pages

March 20
The Paris Wife: A Novel, By Paula McLain
Meeting Location: Allbritton 113
Chicago, 1920: Hadley Richardson is a quiet twenty-eight-year-old who has all but given
up on love and happiness—until she meets Ernest Hemingway. Following a whirlwind
courtship and wedding, the pair set sail for Paris, where they become the golden couple in
a lively and volatile group—the fabled “Lost Generation”—that includes Gertrude Stein,
Ezra Pound, and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Though deeply in love, the Hemingways are ill
prepared for the hard-drinking, fast-living, and free-loving life of Jazz Age Paris. As Ernest
struggles to find the voice that will earn him a place in history and pours himself into the
novel that will become The Sun Also Rises, Hadley strives to hold on to her sense of self as
her roles as wife, friend, and muse become more challenging. Eventually they find
themselves facing the ultimate crisis of their marriage—a deception that will lead to the
unraveling of everything they’ve fought so hard for. A heartbreaking portrayal of love and
torn loyalty, The Paris Wife is all the more poignant because we know that, in the end,
Hemingway wrote that he would rather have died than fallen in love with anyone but
Hadley. Paperback: 352 pages

April 24
Flight Behavior, Barbara Kingsolver
Meeting Location: Allbritton 113
The extraordinary New York Times bestselling author of The Lacuna (winner of the Orange
Prize), The Poisonwood Bible (nominated for the Pulitzer Prize), and Animal, Vegetable,
Miracle, Barbara Kingsolver returns with a truly stunning and unforgettable work. Flight
Behavior is a brilliant and suspenseful novel set in present day Appalachia; a breathtaking
parable of catastrophe and denial that explores how the complexities we inevitably
encounter in life lead us to believe in our particular chosen truths. Kingsolver’s riveting
story concerns a young wife and mother on a failing farm in rural Tennessee who
experiences something she cannot explain, and how her discovery energizes various
competing factions—religious leaders, climate scientists, environmentalists, politicians—
trapping her in the center of the conflict and ultimately opening up her world. Flight
Behavior is arguably Kingsolver’s must thrilling and accessible novel to date, and like so
many other of her acclaimed works, represents contemporary American fiction at its finest.
Hardcover: 448 pages. It is also available in paperback.