



Reader's Guide



Other novels by Ruth Ozeki
All Over Creation (2003)
My Year of Meats (1998)

A Tale for the Time Being Ruth Ozeki

Canongate

www.themanbookerprize.com



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About the author

Ruth Ozeki was born and raised in New Haven, Connecticut, by an American father and a Japanese mother. She graduated from Smith College and then moved to Japan to study classical Japanese literature. Upon her return to New York, she worked as a television producer and director and made several independent films. In June 2010 she was ordained as a Zen Buddhist priest. She lives in British Columbia and New York.

She is the author of three novels: *My Year of Meats* (1998), which won the Kiriya Pacific Rim Award, the Imus/Barnes and Noble American Book Award, and a Special Jury Prize of the World Cookbook Awards in Versailles; *All Over Creation* (2002), the recipient of a 2004 American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation, as well as the Willa Literary Award for Contemporary Fiction; and *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013), longlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2013.

A Tale for the Time Being

Ruth, a novelist living on a remote island of Canada's Pacific northwest shore, discovers a Hello Kitty lunchbox washed up on the beach. Within it lies a diary that expresses the hopes and dreams of a young Japanese schoolgirl. Ruth suspects it might have arrived on a drift of debris from the 2011 tsunami. With every turn of the page, she is sucked deeper into an enchanting mystery.

In a small cafe in Tokyo, 16-year-old Nao Yasutani is navigating the challenges thrown up by modern life. In the face of cyberbullying, the mysteries of a 104-year-old Buddhist nun and great-grandmother, and the joy and heartbreak of family, Nao is trying to find her own place - and voice - through a diary she hopes will find a reader and friend who finally understands her.

Discussion points

A Tale for the Time Being starts with the first-person narrator expressing curiosity about the unknown person who might be reading her narrative. How did you respond to this opening and its unusual focus on the reader?

Is there a way in which Nao and Ruth form two halves of the same character?

In a recent interview Ruth Ozeki said "I would be happy if the book conveys the ways in which we and the world are intimately interconnected in time and space. I would be happy if readers came away feeling grateful for the precious and fleeting moments we have here on earth. And I would be overjoyed if readers felt an appreciation of the earth, itself, and resolved to treat it more kindly". Did *A Tale for the Time Being* leave you with any of these feelings?

A Tale for the Time Being expresses concern about the environment. How do Ruth Ozeki's observations about the environment affect the mood of her novel?

Do you agree with the reviewer (Beth Jones, *The Telegraph*) who wrote "What binds it all together is the voice of Nao, who manages to be both a convincingly self-obsessed Tokyo teenager and a sympathetic and engaging narrator".

Themed reading

John Gribbin *In Search of Schrödinger's Cat*

Useful links

[Author's website](#)

<http://www.ruthozeki.com>

[Publisher's website](#)

<http://www.canongate.tv>

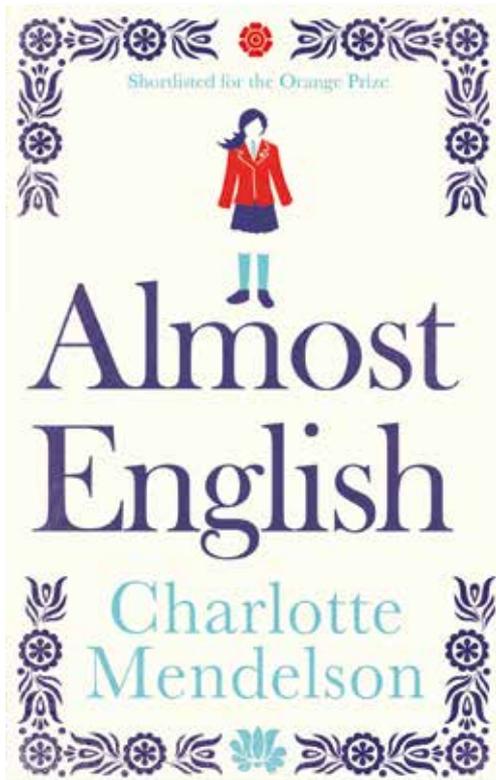
[Guardian interview](#)

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2013/mar/07/ruth-ozeki-interview-time-being>

The Man
Booker
Prize

2013

Reader's Guide



Other novels by Charlotte Mendelson

When We Were Bad (2007)

Daughters of Jerusalem (2003)

Love in Idleness (2001)

Almost English Charlotte Mendelson

Mantle

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M
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About the author

Charlotte Mendelson was born in London in 1972 and grew up in Oxford. She has written and reviewed for *the Guardian*, *the TLS*, *the Independent on Sunday*, *the Observer* and elsewhere. She currently lives in London.

She is the author of four novels: *Love in Idleness* (2001); *Daughters of Jerusalem* (2003), which won both the Somerset Maugham Award and the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize and was shortlisted for the Sunday Times Young Writer of the Year Award; *When We Were Bad* (2007), shortlisted for the Orange Prize for Fiction; and *Almost English* (2013), longlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2013.

Almost English

The air stinks of tuberose, caraway and garlic: the universal scent of central European hospitality. But Marina is not hospitable. After only an hour her skin is tender with cheek pinchings; she has been matchmade, prodded and instructed beyond endurance, and the night is young. Soon they will come to find her, to admire the shape of her fingernails, the thickness of her lashes, their eyes peeling back her clothes, weighing her like fruit. This is not new. She has been brought up to accept the questions and kisses as if nothing could please her more, however much lava is boiling inside. The problem is that Marina has changed. She can bear their scrutiny no longer because her life is a disaster, and it is her fault. She betrayed them and escaped them, and now she wants to come back.

In a tiny flat in West London, sixteen-year-old Marina lives with her emotionally-delicate mother, Laura, and three ancient Hungarian relatives. Imprisoned by her family's crushing expectations and their fierce unEnglish pride, by their strange traditions and stranger foods, she knows she must escape. But the place she runs to makes her feel even more of an outsider.

At Combe Abbey, a traditional English public school for which her family have sacrificed everything, Marina realises she has made a terrible mistake. She is the awkward half-foreign girl who doesn't know how to fit in, flirt or even be. And as a semi-Hungarian Londoner, who is she? In the meantime, her mother, Laura - an alien in this strange universe -, has her own painful secrets to deal with, especially the return of the last man she'd expect back in her life. She isn't noticing that, at Combe Abbey, things are starting to go terribly wrong.

Discussion points

The two central characters of *Almost English*, Marina and her mother Laura, seem locked in their inability to express their true feelings to one another; how does Charlotte Mendelson explore the mother-daughter dynamic in the novel?

If Marina can be seen as *Almost English*, is Laura perhaps Too English?

Marina is particularly afflicted by teenage awkwardness and the ability to be embarrassed by so many things; how does Mendelson make this intensely personal experience of her protagonist feel universal?

Many of the characters in *Almost English* are withholding secrets and misunderstandings pile up; what do you think Mendelson is exploring here about the human condition?

Close observation is a hallmark of Mendelson's work; how is telling detail used in *Almost English* to both richly comic and moving effect?

Useful links

Author's website

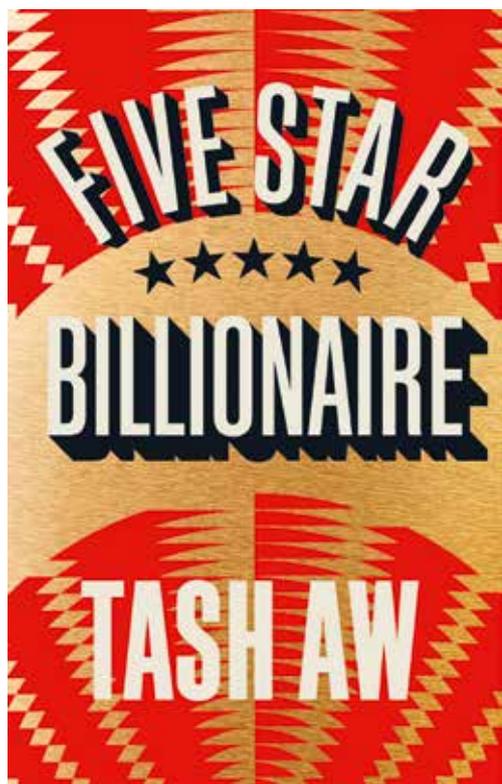
<http://charlottesmendelson.com>

Publisher's website

<http://www.panmacmillan.com/book/charlottesmendelson/almostenglish>



Reader's Guide



Other novels by Tash Aw

Map of the Invisible World (2009)

The Harmony Silk Factory (2005)

Five Star Billionaire Tash Aw

Fourth Estate

www.themanbookerprize.com



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About the author

Tash Aw was born in Taipei in 1971 to Malaysian parents. He grew up in Kuala Lumpur and moved to England at the age of 18 to attend University.

Tash Aw is the author of two other novels: *The Harmony Silk Factory*, winner of the Costa First Novel Award and a Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Novel and *Map of the Invisible World* which was longlisted for the 2005 Man Booker Prize.

Five Star Billionaire

Phoebe has come to China buoyed with hope, but her dreams are shattered as the job she was promised seems never to have existed. Gary is a successful pop star, but his fans disappear after a bar-room brawl. Yinghui was once a poetry-loving activist and is not sure how she became a wealthy businesswoman. Justin works hard for his powerful family, but begins to wonder if his efforts are appreciated. And then there is the *Five Star Billionaire* himself, pulling the strings of destiny, his lessons for success unsettling the dynamics of these disparate lives.

Discussion points

"Tash Aw's *Five Star Billionaire* opens with a bang, not a whimper", Aminatta Forna, *The Guardian*. What is your response to the start of the novel?

Walter Chao is the only character who is given a first person narrative. How does this affect the reader's impression of Walter?

Which of the cast characters do you find most convincing and memorable?

Do you think that the coincidences and chance encounters that bring the characters together are inventive or contrived?

"It's possible to reach the book's final stretch without being sure that this is a story of revenge. If it is, then revenge is being eaten very cold indeed, from the chiller cabinet if not the freezer". (Adam Mars-Jones, *The Observer*). Do you think that *Five Star Billionaire* is a story about revenge? How did you respond to the ending?

Themed reading

Yu Hua *China in Ten Words*
Timothy Mo *An Insular Possession*
Yiuan Li *Gold Boy, Emerald Girl*

Useful links

[Publisher's website](http://www.4thestate.co.uk/features/)

<http://www.4thestate.co.uk/features/>

[The Guardian interview with Tash Aw](http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2013/mar/15/tash-aw-life-in-writing)

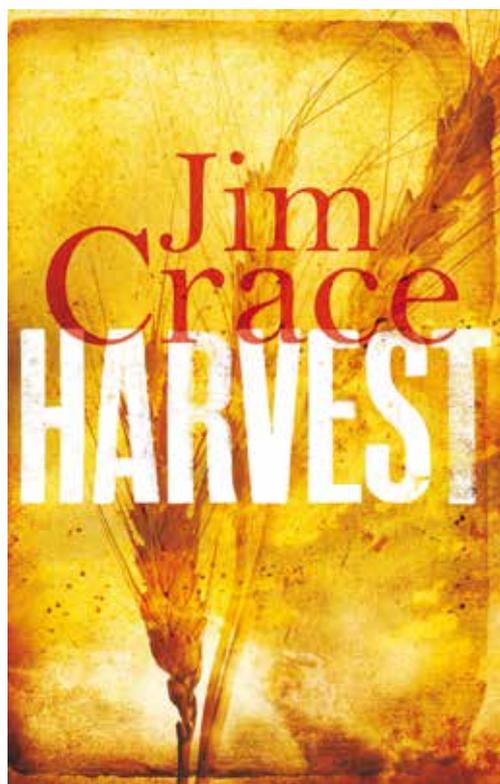
<http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2013/mar/15/tash-aw-life-in-writing>

[The British Council \(bibliography and critical perspective\)](http://literature.britishcouncil.org/tash-aw)

<http://literature.britishcouncil.org/tash-aw>



Reader's Guide



Other novels by Jim Crace

All That Follows (2010)
On Heat (2008)
The Pesthouse (2007)
Six (2003)
The Devil's Larder (2001)
Being Dead (1999)
Quarantine (1997)
The Slow Digestions of the Night (1995)
Signals of Distress (1994)
Arcadia (1992)
The Gift of Stones (1988)
Continent (1986)

Harvest Jim Crace

Picador

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About the author

Jim Crace was born in Hertfordshire in 1946. He read English Literature at London University and worked for VSO in Sudan as an assistant in Sudanese educational television.

He began writing fiction in 1974 and his first story, *Annie, California Plates*, was published by the *New Review*. He became Writer in Residence at the Midlands Arts Centre and in 1983 he directed the first Birmingham Festival of Readers and Writers.

His first book, *Continent* (1986), won the Whitbread First Novel Award, the *Guardian* Fiction Prize and the David Higham Prize for Fiction. His fourth novel, *Signals of Distress* (1994) won the Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize. *Quarantine* (1997) was shortlisted for the Booker Prize for Fiction, won the Whitbread Novel Award and was shortlisted for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. *Being Dead* (1999), won the National Book Critics' Circle Fiction Award (USA). He was awarded the E. M. Forster Award by the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1992 and became a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1999.

Harvest

As late summer steals in and the final pearls of barley are gleaned, a village comes under threat. A trio of outsiders – two men and a dangerously magnetic woman – arrives on the woodland borders and puts up a make-shift camp. That same night, the local manor house is set on fire.

Over the course of seven days, Walter Thirsk sees his hamlet unmade: the harvest blackened by smoke and fear, the new arrivals cruelly punished, and his neighbours held captive on suspicion of witchcraft. But something even darker is at the heart of his story, and he will be the only man left to tell it...

Discussion points

Walter Thirsk is absent from all the key scenes in *Harvest*. What does this say about him and his connection with the community?

Although *Harvest* is unmistakably set in England, sometime in the 16th century, why do you think that Jim Crace is careful to avoid giveaway place names and dates?

How and in what ways do the rhythms of the novel follow the rhythms of the agricultural seasons: planting in the spring and reaping at the end of summer, and keeping stores to survive the winter months?

How does the absence of the female stranger, who manages to escape from the village before being raped, become a powerful presence in the rest of the novel?

Walter Thirsk is a complex creation; he has been described as self-examining, self-admonishing, powerless, and unreliable. What was your impression of Walter, did your view of him change as the novel progresses?

Themed reading

JM Coetzee *Waiting for the Barbarians*
WG Hoskins *The Making of the English Landscape*

Useful links

[Interview with Jim Crace](#)

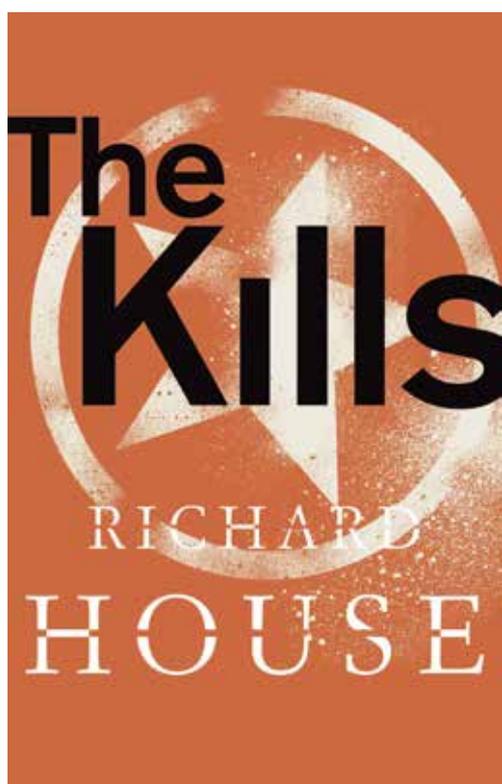
<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/02/14/entertainment-us-books-authors-crace-idUSBRE91DOLA20130214>

[The Paris Review interview](#)

<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/122/the-art-of-fiction-no-179-jim-crace>



Reader's Guide



Other novels by Richard House
Uninvited (2002)
Bruiser (1997)

The Kills Richard House

Picador

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About the author

Richard House is an author, film maker, artist and university teacher. He has written three novels; *Bruiser* (2002), *Uninvited* (2002) and *The Kills* (2013), longlisted for the 2013 Man Booker Prize.

The Kills

Camp Liberty is an unmanned staging-post in Amrah province, Iraq; the place where the detritus of the war is buried, incinerated, removed from memory. Until, suddenly, plans are announced to transform it into the largest military base in the country, codenamed the Massive, with a post-war strategy to convert the site for civilian use.

Contracted by HOSCO, the insidious company responsible for overseeing the Massive, Rem Gunnerson finds himself unwittingly commanding a disparate group of economic mercenaries at Camp Liberty when the mysterious Stephen Lawrence Sutler arrives. As the men are played against each other by HOSCO the situation grows increasingly tense. And then everything changes. An explosion. An attack on a regional government office. When the dust settles it emerges that Sutler has disappeared, and over fifty million dollars of reconstruction funds are missing.

Sutler finds himself accused and on the run. Gunnerson and his men want revenge for months of abuse and misinformation. Out of the chaos a man named Paul Geezler rises to restore order, a man more involved than he's willing to admit.

And then there's the vicious murder of an American student in Italy. A murder that replicates exactly the details of a well-known novel.

Discussion points

How would you categorise *The Kills*; do you see it as a thriller, crime novel, or something else?

How much of the story is about belonging?

Many of the characters don't seem to be in control of their lives, at what point is someone responsible for their actions, or are they victims of circumstance/their situation?

Stories are retold throughout these novels, in most fiction the idea of sharing stories and experiences is a positive thing - how is that different here?

Did the additional audio, visual and web content enhance the reading experience for you?

Themed reading

Roberto Bolano *2666*
Emile Zola *Les Rougon-Macquart*

Useful links

[The Kills' website](#)

<http://www.panmacmillan.com/thekills>

[Publisher's website](#)

<http://www.panmacmillan.com/book/richardhouse/thekills>

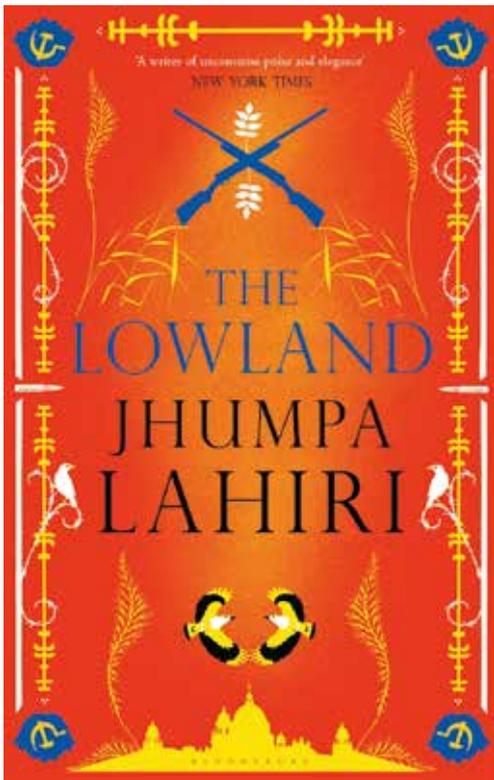
[Interview with Richard House](#)

<http://www.litro.co.uk/2013/05/richard-house-interview/>

The Man
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Reader's Guide



Other novels by Jhumpa Lahiri
Unaccustomed Earth (2008)
The Namesake (2003)
Interpreter of Maladies (1999)

The Lowland Jhumpa Lahiri

Bloomsbury

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About the author

Jhumpa Lahiri was born in 1967. She is a member of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, appointed by U.S. President Barack Obama.

She is the author of four works of fiction: *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), which won the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction; *The Namesake* (2003), adapted into the popular film of the same name; *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008); and *The Lowland* (2013), longlisted for the 2013 Man Booker Prize.

The Lowland

From Subhash's earliest memories, at every point, his brother was there. In the suburban streets of Calcutta where they wandered before dusk and in the hyacinth-strewn ponds where they played for hours on end, Udayan was always in his older brother's sight.

As the two brothers grow older their lives, once so united, begin to diverge. It is 1967. Charismatic and impulsive, Udayan becomes increasingly drawn to the Communist movement sweeping West Bengal, the Naxalite cause. As revolution seizes the city's student community and exams are boycotted in a shadow of Paris and Berkeley, their home is dominated by the absence of Udayan, out on the streets at demonstrations. Subhash wins a place on a PhD programme in the United States and moves to Rhode Island, never to live in India again – yet his life will be shaped from afar by his brother's acts of passionate political idealism.

Udayan will give everything for what he believes and in doing so will transform the futures of those dearest to him: his newly married, pregnant wife, his brother and their parents. The repercussions of his actions will link their fates irrevocably and tragically together, reverberating across continents and seeping through the generations that follow.

Discussion points

Udayan's involvement in radical politics has consequences far beyond those he could possibly foresee. To what extent is the collision between the personal and political inevitable in this novel?

In what way do the female characters in the book assert their own authority in a patriarchal society?

'He didn't belong, but perhaps it didn't matter. He wanted to tell her that he had been waiting all his life to find Rhode Island. That it was here, in this minute but majestic corner of the world, that he could breathe.' How does America provide a release for the characters? Are they able to break their ties with India or is India too inextricably a part of their identity and outlook?

'With children the clock is reset. We forget what came before.' Does this prove to be true? Does the birth of Bela allow the main characters to reset the clock?

How does a frequent change in perspective alter our views about Udayan and his actions?

Do any of the characters achieve their desired sense of freedom by the end of the novel?

Useful links

Author's website

<http://www.randomhouse.com/kvpa/jhumpalahiri/>

Guardian interview (2008)

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/jun/21/saturdayreviewsfeatres.guardianreview5>

Publisher's website

<http://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/>



Reader's Guide



Other novels by Eleanor Catton
The Rehearsal (2009)

The Luminaries Eleanor Catton

Granta

www.themanbookerprize.com



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About the author

Eleanor Catton was born in 1985 in Canada and raised in Christchurch, New Zealand.

She holds an MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop, where she also held an adjunct professorship, and an MA in fiction writing from the International Institute of Modern Letters. She currently lives in Auckland, New Zealand.

Her debut novel *The Rehearsal* (2009) was shortlisted for the *Guardian* First Book Award and the Dylan Thomas Prize, and longlisted for the Orange Prize. It has since been published in seventeen territories and twelve languages.

The Luminaries

It is 1866 and gold rush has gripped the town of Hokitika, New Zealand. When Walter Moody arrives, hoping to make his fortune, he finds himself drawn into a series of strange events. Why are twelve local men gathered together in a conspiratorial assembly? Is it just a coincidence that a wealthy man has vanished, a whore has tried to end her life, and an enormous fortune has been discovered in the home of a luckless drunk all on the same night? In this town of whispered secrets and precarious fortunes, who can Walter trust?

From the untouched natural beauty of the New Zealand coastline to the nebulous opium dens where avarice and vice rule, Catton has created an enthralling world full of mystery and intrigue; a network of fates and fortunes that is as complex and exquisitely patterned as the night sky.

Discussion points

At the start of the book Walter Moody stumbles across a tense meeting between twelve local men and is entrusted with their secrets. What do you make of these men? Do they tell Walter the whole truth, or are their stories distorted by external loyalties, self-interest and their individual character traits?

The Luminaries is set in New Zealand during the nineteenth century. How does Catton give you a sense of the story taking place in a different era? And how does the novel compare to other historical fiction you have read?

Astrology is a prominent theme in the book. At the start of each chapter, a chart depicting the twelve men's star signs and an epitaph forewarns the reader of ensuing events. To what extent are the characters determined by their star signs and the complementary planetary movements?

Following the court scene, do you feel that each character has received their just desserts? Were any characters let off lightly or unjustly punished, and if so why?

Was the novel's ending a shock or inevitable? And how does the outcome change your opinion of free will and determinism?

Themed reading

Hilary Mantel *Wolf Hall*
Patrick DeWitt *The Sisters Brothers*
David Mitchell *Cloud Atlas*

Useful links

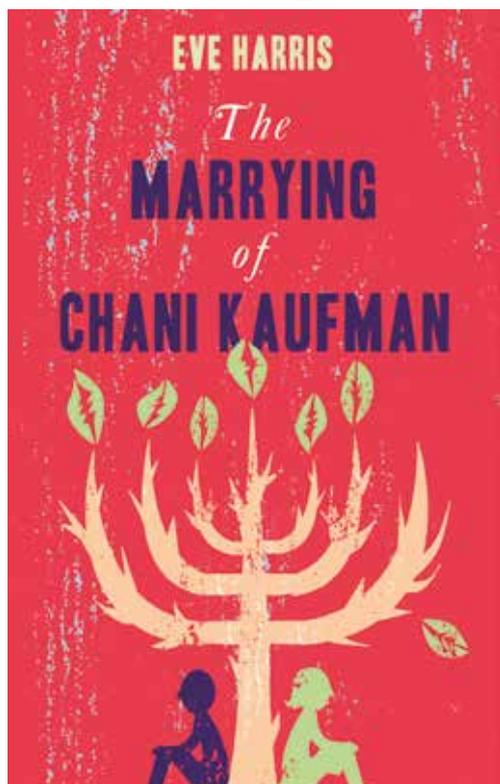
[Publisher's website](http://grantabooks.com/Eleanor-Catton)
<http://grantabooks.com/Eleanor-Catton>

[Publisher's Twitter](https://twitter.com/GrantaBooks)
<https://twitter.com/GrantaBooks>

[Profile of Eleanor Catton](http://www.bookcouncil.org.nz/Writers/Profiles/Catton,-Eleanor.htm)
<http://www.bookcouncil.org.nz/Writers/Profiles/Catton,-Eleanor.htm>



Reader's Guide



The Marring of Chani Kaufman
is Eve Harris' first novel

The Marring of Chani Kaufman Eve Harris

Sandstone Press

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About the author

Eve Harris was born in London in 1973. She lives there with her husband and their daughter.

Her novel, *The Marrying of Chani Kaufman* (2013) was inspired by teaching at an all girls' Orthodox Jewish school in North West London.

The Marrying of Chani Kaufman

19 year-old Chani lives in the ultra-orthodox Jewish community of North West London. She has never had physical contact with a man, but is bound to marry a stranger. The rabbi's wife teaches her what it means to be a Jewish wife, but Rivka has her own questions to answer. Soon buried secrets, fear and sexual desire bubble to the surface in a story of liberation and choice; not to mention what happens on the wedding night...

Discussion points

Chani comes from a family and a background very different from those of most teenage girls in Britain today. How do these differences affect the way she views love and marriage? What impact, good or bad, do you think Chani's ultra-orthodox background will have on her future as an adult and a married woman?

What differences are there between the families of the engaged couple and how do they impact on everyone involved in arranging the marriage?

The loss of their child drives Rebecca/Rivka and her husband apart. Might it have had the opposite effect of bringing them closer? What factors do you think have caused this increasing estrangement?

Avromi finally ends his secret relationship. Did you think that was inevitable, and if so why? What would have had to change for him to be able to be with a non-Jewish girl?

Are there any signs in Chani and Baruch's relationship that it could go the same way as that of Rivka and the Rabbi? What might make their relationship more likely to survive?

Themed reading

Chaim Potok *The Chosen*

Bernice Rubens *The Elected Member*

Amos Oz *In The Land Of Israel*

Hella Winston *The Unchosen: The Hidden Lives of Hasidic Rebels*

Shalom Auslander *The Foreskin's Lament*

Naomi Alderman *Disobedience*

Useful links

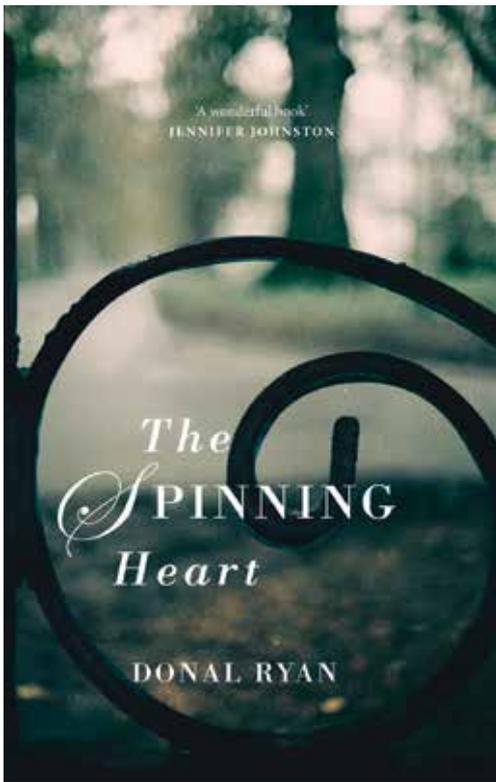
Publisher's website

<http://www.sandstonepress.com>

http://www.sandstonepress.com/title/The_Marrying_of_Chani_Kaufman/



Reader's Guide



The Spinning Heart
is Donal Ryan's first novel

The Spinning Heart Donal Ryan

Doubleday Ireland

www.themanbookerprize.com



About the author

Donal Ryan was born in a village in north Tipperary in 1977. He currently lives with his wife and two children just outside Limerick City.

The Spinning Heart

In the aftermath of Ireland's financial collapse, dangerous tensions surface in an Irish town. As violence flares, the characters face a battle between public persona and inner desires. Through a chorus of unique voices, each struggling to tell their own kind of truth, a single authentic tale unfolds.

Discussion points

One of the impressive aspects of *The Spinning Heart* is the 21 different narrative voices. Were you able to distinguish between each of the voices and were they all convincing?

With so many voices did you manage to keep track of the plot?

Do you agree with the reviewer (Gemma Kappala-Ramsamy, *The Observer*) who describes Donal Ryan's writing style as perceptive, intimate and darkly comic?

Donal Ryan has been praised for not following a traditional narrative structure - it has been described as both ambitious and unconventional; how did this structure affect the reading experience, do you think it's successful?

By the end of the novel do you come to understand the individual stories, not from one perspective, but from many?

Themed reading

Anne Enright *Taking Pictures*
Patrick McCabe *The Stray Sod County*
William Faulkner *As I Lay Dying*

Useful links

[Publisher's website](http://www.transworldireland.ie/)

<http://www.transworldireland.ie/>

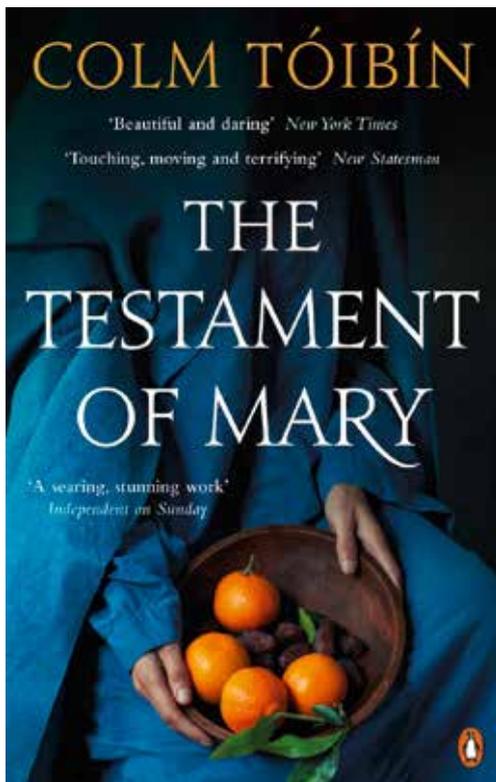
[Author interview](http://www.writing.ie/interviews/the-spinning-heart-by-donal-ryan/)

<http://www.writing.ie/interviews/the-spinning-heart-by-donal-ryan/>

The Man
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Reader's Guide



Other novels by Colm Tóibín

Brooklyn (2009)

The Master (2004)

The Blackwater Lightship (1996)

The Story of the Night (1996)

The Heather Blazing (1992)

The South (1990)

The Testament of Mary

Colm Tóibín

Viking

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About the author

Colm Tóibín was born in Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford in 1955 and educated at University College Dublin.

He is the author of seven novels: *The South* (1990), winner of *The Irish Times* Literature Prize in 1991; *The Heather Blazing*, winner of the Encore Award for the best second novel in 1992; *The Story of the Night* (1997); *The Blackwater Lightship* (1999), shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize; and *The Master* (2004), shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize and winner of the *Los Angeles Times* Novel of the Year and the Prix du Meilleur Livre Etranger in France; and *The Testament of Mary* (2012), longlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2013.

The Testament of Mary

In a voice that is both tender and filled with rage, *The Testament of Mary* tells the story of a cataclysmic event which led to an overpowering grief. For Mary, her son has been lost to the world, and now, living in exile and in fear, she tries to piece together the memories of the events that led to her son's brutal death. To her he was a vulnerable figure, surrounded by men who could not be trusted, living in a time of turmoil and change.

As her life and her suffering begin to acquire the resonance of myth, Mary struggles to break the silence surrounding what she knows to have happened. In her effort to tell the truth in all its gnarled complexity, she slowly emerges as a figure of immense moral stature as well as a woman from history rendered now as fully human.

Discussion points

Do you agree that throughout the novel Mary 'is more angry than accepting'?

In a recent interview Colm Toibin said he was very careful that the book didn't become just a debunking of the biblical stories about miracles. Was he successful?

Do you agree with the reviewer (Naomi Alderman, *The Observer*) who wrote "Since there are people who love to find reasons to take offence, *The Testament of Mary* might prove offensive for some".

Mary refers to Jesus as 'the one who was here', 'my son' or, 'the one you are interested in'. Why doesn't she use his name?

What was your reaction when Mary fled the crucifixion before her son was actually dead?

Themed reading

Michele Roberts *The Secret Gospel of Mary Magdalene*

Useful links

Author's website

<http://www.colmtoibin.com>

Guardian interview

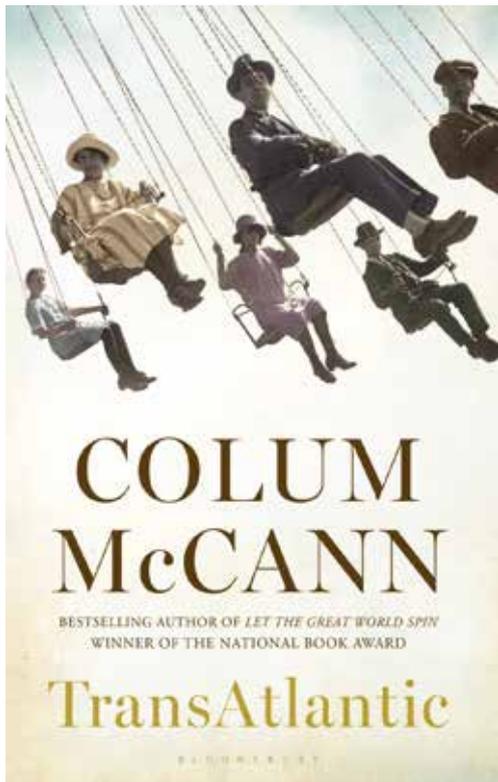
<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/feb/19/colm-toibin-novelist-portrait-artist>

Telegraph interview

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/booknews/9615673/Colm-Toibin-you-have-to-be-a-terrible-monster-to-write.html>



Reader's Guide



Other novels by Colum McCann
Let the Great World Spin (2009)
Zoli (2006)
Dancer (2003)
Everything in This Country Must (2000)
This Side of Brightness (1998)
Songdogs (1995)
Fishing the Sloe-black River (1995)

TransAtlantic Colum McCann

Bloomsbury

www.themanbookerprize.com



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About the author

Colum McCann was born in Ireland in 1965. He lives in New York with his wife and their three children. He teaches at the MFA program in Hunter College.

He is the author of six novels and two collections of stories. He has been the recipient of many international honours, including the National Book Award, the International Dublin Impac Prize, a Chevalier des Arts et Lettres from the French government, election to the Irish arts academy, several European awards, the 2010 Best Foreign Novel Award in China, and an Oscar nomination.

TransAtlantic

TransAtlantic tells the story of four generations of women. Spanning the onset of the Irish potato famine in 1845, the American Civil War and the more recent troubles in Northern Ireland, it is an epic and engrossing story of slavery, poverty, struggle and survival.

1919. Emily Ehrlich watches as two young air men emerge from the carnage of World War One to pilot the very first non-stop transatlantic flight from Newfoundland to the west of Ireland. Among the mail being carried on the aircraft is a letter which Emily's mother, Lily, wrote when she first left Ireland in 1845.

1845. Lily Duggans is just seventeen years old and living as a maid when Frederick Douglass, a black American slave, lands in Ireland to champion ideas of democracy and freedom, only to find a famine unfurling at his feet.

1998. Senator George Mitchell criss-crosses the ocean in search of an elusive Irish peace. How many more bereaved mothers must he meet before an agreement can be reached?

Discussion points

In *TransAtlantic*, Colum McCann uses the first nonstop flight across the Atlantic Ocean, as a catalyst. In what ways does this act of daring and skill become metaphors for more everyday acts of bravery?

The first half of *TransAtlantic* features non-fictional stories focusing entirely on famous historical men. The second half is pure fiction focusing on a family of women. How does McCann bring the two sides of the novel together in the second half?

In what way do the women in the novel carry both its sadness and hope?

Freya Johnston, in her Telegraph review of *TransAtlantic*, references Paul Muldoon's poem which summed up Ireland in the image of "men hurrying back / Across two fields and a river". She believes that the poem raises questions that are central to McCann's novel. What are people running from, and why? What have they been up to? What damage have they caused? Where are they going? To what extent does this novel answer these questions?

The majority of *TransAtlantic* is told by an omniscient narrator but uses a first person narrative for the final chapter. What affect does this have on the reader?

Themed reading

EL Doctrow *Ragtime*
Don DeLillo *Underworld*
David Mitchell *Cloud Atlas*

Useful links

[Author's website](http://colummccann.com/) <http://colummccann.com/>

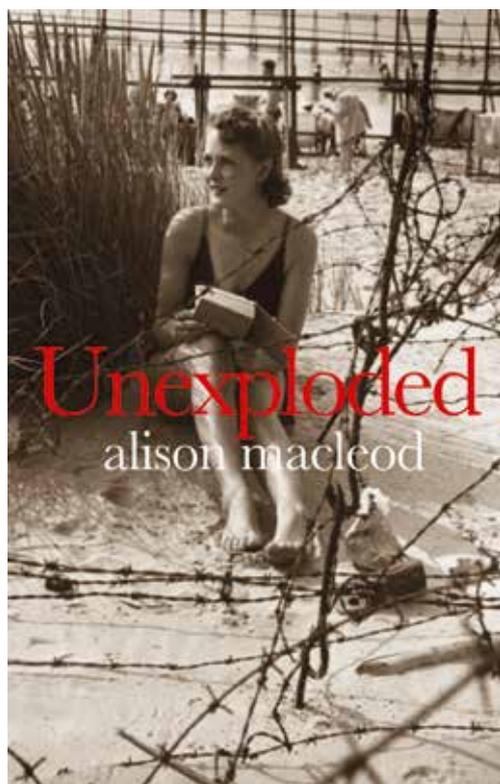
[Essay by Colum McCann](http://nyti.ms/18rAtTp) <http://nyti.ms/18rAtTp>

[Interview with Colum McCann](http://bit.ly/13niwY4) <http://bit.ly/13niwY4>

[Guardian with Colum McCann](http://bit.ly/14GYRAf) <http://bit.ly/14GYRAf>



Reader's Guide



Other novels by Alison MacLeod
The Wave Theory of Angels (2006)
The Changeling (1996)

Unexploded Alison MacLeod

Hamish Hamilton

www.themanbookerprize.com



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About the author

Alison MacLeod was raised in Canada and has lived in England since 1987. She is Professor of Contemporary Fiction at Chichester University and lives in Brighton.

She is the author of three novels: *The Changeling* (1996); *The Wave Theory of Angels* (2006); and *Unexploded* (2013), longlisted for the 2013 Man Booker Prize.

She has also written a collection of stories, *Fifteen Modern Tales of Attraction*.

Unexploded

May 1940, Brighton. On Park Crescent, Geoffrey and Evelyn Beaumont and their eight-year-old son, Philip, anxiously await news of the expected enemy landing on their beaches.

It is a year of tension and change. Geoffrey becomes Superintendent of the enemy alien camp at the far reaches of town, while Philip is gripped by the rumour that Hitler will make Brighton's Royal Pavilion his English HQ. As the rumours continue to fly and the days tick on, Evelyn struggles to fall in with the war effort and the constraints of her role in life, and her thoughts become tinged with a mounting, indefinable desperation.

Then she meets Otto Gottlieb, a 'degenerate' German-Jewish painter and prisoner in her husband's internment camp. As Europe crumbles, Evelyn's and Otto's mutual distrust slowly begins to change into something else, which will shatter the structures on which her life, her family and her community rest. Love collides with fear, the power of art with the forces of war, and the lives of Evelyn, Otto and Geoffrey are changed irrevocably.

Discussion points

Throughout the novel, Geoffrey and Evelyn seem to struggle to communicate anything meaningful to each other. Why do you think this is?

What impressions does the novel give you of how Jewish people in England were treated during WWII? Does anything about this surprise you?

When he is considering the old-testament subject matter for his fresco, Otto thinks to himself 'The war has never stopped. It is only our parts that change without reason or warning' (pg. 253.) What do you think this means? Do you agree?

Philip and the other children in the novel react to news of the war very differently to the adults. How did you respond to the contrast between the chapters about them and the chapters about the adults? Did you feel that the chapters about the children and their games offered some lightness in a serious novel? If so, did you still feel this by the end of the novel?

How have Geoffrey and Evelyn changed by the end of the novel? How do you envisage their lives continuing after all that has happened?

Themed reading

Ian McEwan *Atonement*
Sebastian Faulks *Charlotte Gray*

Useful links

[Publisher's website](#)

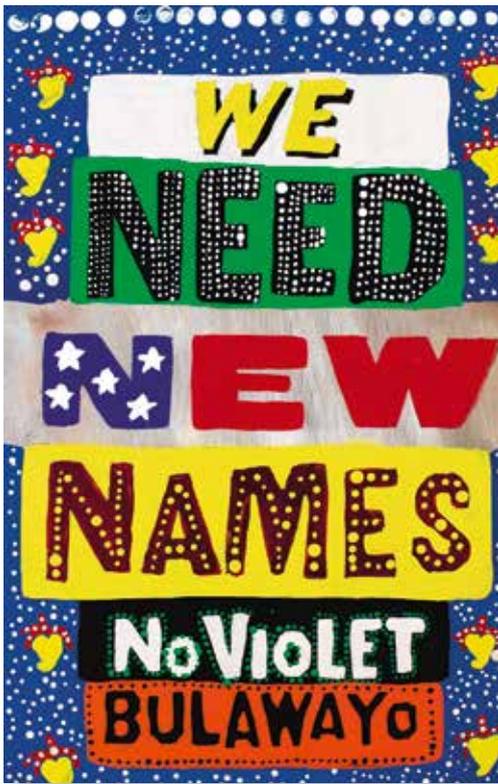
<http://www.penguin.co.uk/nf/Author/AuthorPage/O,,1000068242,00.html>

[Author interview](#)

http://makingwritingmatter.co.uk/?page_id=63



Reader's Guide



We Need New Names
is NoViolet Bulawayo's first novel

We Need New Names NoViolet Bulawayo

Chatto & Windus

www.themanbookerprize.com



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About the author

NoViolet Bulawayo was born in Tsholotsho. She earned her MFA at Cornell University, where she was also awarded a Truman Capote Fellowship, and she is currently a Stegner Fellow at Stanford University in California.

She is the author of the short story *Hitting Budapest* (2010), which won the 2011 Caine Prize for African Writing, and *Snapshots* (2009), shortlisted for the South Africa PEN Studzinski Award.

We Need New Names

Ten-year-old Darling has a choice: it's down, or out...

We Need New Names tells the story of Darling and her friends Stina, Chipo, Godknows, Sbhho and Bastard.

They all used to have proper houses, with real rooms and furniture, but now they all live in a shanty called Paradise. They spend their days stealing guavas, playing games and wondering how to get the baby out of young Chipo's stomach. They dream of escaping to other paradises – America, Dubai, Europe. But if they do escape, will these new lands bring everything they wish for?

Discussion points

We Need New Names is set in Zimbabwe and then America, did you find one setting more compelling than another?

The title *We Need New Names* highlights the link between names and identity. Discuss how NoViolet Bulawayo uses the characters' names to explore themes of identity and reveal ironies: 'What exactly is an African? Godknows asks'.

'Forgiveness is not a friend-friend because her family just recently arrived in Paradise'. Discuss how Bulawayo portrays the relationships and hierarchies between children and young people. Is *We Need New Names* as much about the complexities of growing up as it is about themes of nationality, displacement and identity?

Discuss the ways in which Bulawayo explores reactions to trauma and psychological breakdown through the characters of Chipo, Prince and Uncle Kojo.

Discuss Darling's sense of displacement in America. Why does she have such conflicting feelings about her own national identity? Do you agree with Sbhho's comment 'if it's your country, you have to love it to live in it and not leave it'?

Themed reading

Stephen Kellman *Pigeon English*
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie *Americanah*
Chinua Achebe *Things Fall Apart*
Binyawanga Wainana *Some Day I Will Write About This Place*
Christina Lamb *House of Stone*

Useful links

Author's website

<http://novioletbulawayo.com/>

Observer review

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2013/jun/16/debut-author-noviolet-bulawayo-names>

Telegraph review

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/hay-festival/10087546/Hay-Festival-2013-NoViolet-Bulawayo-returns-to-her-homeland.html>