

Top 50 books

Alderman, Naomi. **Disobedience**. Penguin Books, 2007. p. 277.

The story, set among the Orthodox Jews of Hendon, north London, aims to lift a veil on the habits and words of a community known, but unfamiliar, to most of us. In this task of documentation it succeeds, but all too often that comes at the expense of more difficult, and genuinely novelistic, virtues.

Winner of the Orange Award for New Writers 2006.

Amis, Martin. **The Pregnant Widow**. Jonathan Cape, 2010. p. 470.

Summer 1970. Sex is very much on everyone's mind. The girls are acting like boys and the boys are acting like girls. Keith Nearing – a bookish twenty year old – is on holiday and struggling to twist feminism towards his own ends. Torn between three women, his scheming doesn't come off quite as he expects.

Atkinson, Kate. **Started Early, Took My Dog**. Black Swan, 2011. p. 493.

A day like any other for security chief Tracy Waterhouse, until she makes a shocking impulse purchase. That on moment of madness is all it takes for Tracy's humdrum world to be turned upside down, the tedium of everyday life replaced by fear and danger at every turn.

Barnes, Julian. **Arthur and George**. Vintage, 2006. p. 505.

Arthur and George (2005) is based on the true story of a solicitor in the early twentieth century, accused of maiming cattle, and saved by the intervention of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

Bauer, Belinda. **Blacklands**. Corgi Books, 2010. p. 347.

Set on Exmoor, it's the story of a cat-and-mouse game between 12-year-old Steven and Arnold Avery, the serial violator and killer of children who, 18 years before, murdered Steven's 11-year-old Uncle Billy and never revealed where he buried the body.

Birch, Carol. **Jamrach's Menagerie**. Canongate, 2011. p. 348.

1857. Jaffy Brown finds himself on board a ship bound for the Dutch East Indies, on an unusual commission for Mr. Jamrach, explorer, entrepreneur and collector of the world's strangest creatures. Jaffy's journey – if he survives it – will push faith, love and friendship to their utmost limits.

Boyd, William. **Any Human Heart**. Penguin Books, 2009. p. 503.

William Boyd lives in London. He was awarded a CBE in 2005. His eighth book is a history of the twentieth century told through the fictional journals of novelist Logan Mountstuart.

Boyne, John. **The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas**. Random House. p. 224.

It's a touching tale of an odd friendship between two boys in horrendous circumstances and a reminder of man's capacity for inhumanity.

Byatt, A.S. **The Children's Book**. Vintage Books, 2010. p. 617.

The Children's Book is a work of huge ambition that follows the lives of two generations of a constellation of families living in the Kent countryside at the turn of the 20th century. It is a portrait of childhood at the end of the Victorian era, when children were starting to be treated as adults, and when adults, though they talked more openly about sex, tended to retreat into childhood.

Shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize 2009.

Colfer, Eoin. **Artemis Fowl and the Eternity Code**. Puffin Books, 2006. p. 328.

Artemis Fowl has constructed a powerful new supercomputer using stolen fairy technology, and the last thing he needs is for it to all into the wrong hands. So, when it does fall into the wrong hands- those of ruthless tycoon Jon Spiro – Artemis knows he must recover the device or the consequences will be dire, for humans and fairies alike.

Craig, Amanda. **Hearts and Minds**. Abacus, 2010. p. 422.

This compelling novel is a sprawling, ambitious tale that is part-thriller, part-love story, part-detective yarn, but above all a book about the way we live now.

Cross, Helen. **The Secrets She Keeps**. Bloomsbury, 2006. p. 276.

It is an intriguing novel that deals innovatively with modern themes, particularly the obsession with celebrity lifestyles and famous people. A modern fairytale with elements of the gothic, the novel's rather protracted end ultimately affirms the traditional triumph of love over greed.

Cross, Helen. **My Summer of Love**. Bloomsbury, 2004. p. 248.

Set in Yorkshire in the summer of 1984, Cross's spirited début isn't afraid to confront the rawest of teenage emotions (and body odours). Fifteen-year-old Mona is getting over her mother's death from cancer when she meets Tamsin Fakenham – posh, busty and the chatelaine of a parent-free country house. Sent dizzy by bottles of Malibu and near-starvation, the two flirt with more than just each other. Immediate and inventive, Cross pinpoints the "midday midnight energy" of adolescent girls.

Cross, Helen. **Spilt Milk, Black Coffee**. Bloomsbury, 2010. p. 276.

In a northern town rife with racial tension and tabloid outrage, *Spilt Milk, Black Coffee* is a hilarious and unlikely love story. A romantic comedy of twenty-first-century multi-cultural Britain, this is an irresistible novel from the prize-winning author of *My Summer of Love*.

Donoghue, Emma. **Room**. Picador, 2011. p. 400.

Jack is five. He lives in a single, locked room with his Ma. This remarkable novel presents an utterly unique way to talk about love, all the while giving us a fresh expansive eye on the world in which we live.

Shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize 2010.

Dunmore, Helen. **The Betrayal**. Penguin Books. 2010. p. 328.

Leningrad, 1952. Andrei, a young hospital doctor, and Anna, a nursery school teacher, are forging a life together in the post-war, post-siege wreckage. But their happiness is precarious, like that of millions of Russians who must avoid the claws of Stalin's merciless ministry for State Security.

Dyer, Geoff. **Jeff in Venice, Death in Varanasi**. Canongate, 2010. p. 296.

This is a story of erotic love and spiritual yearning that begins in Venice and reaches its conclusion amidst the ghats of Varanasi.

Evaristo, Bernardine. **Blonde Roots**. Penguin Books, 2009. p. 261.

The book is about a young girl, living in a sleepy English cottage from where one day she is kidnapped and put aboard a slave ship for the New World.

Faulks, Sebastian. **A Week in December**. Vintage, 2010.

It is the author's latest book, which follows the lives of seven characters in London during the week before Christmas 2007.

Foulds, Adam. **The Quickening Maze**. Vintage Books, 2010. p. 258.

The book is part-historical part-fictional account of the relationship between John Clare, Matthew Allan - the head of Clare's mental asylum, and Alfred Lord Tennyson.

Shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize 2009.

Grant, Linda. **The Clothes on Their Backs**. Virago, 2009. p. 293.

The narrator, Vivien Kovaks discovers that she has a relative, uncle Sándor. The reason he has remained unknown and will continue to remain almost entirely unmentioned in the Kovaks household becomes a source of fascination that tips close to obsession for Vivien when she grows up.

Shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize.

Haddon, Mark. **The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time**. David Fickling Books, 2010. p. 271.

The behaviors and demands of adults are mysterious and confusing to most children. To 15-year old Christopher Boone it's completely beyond the realm of his understanding. Christopher is an autistic savant and while he's a whiz at math and science, human emotions are particularly complex for him. He finds a neighbor's dog, named Wellington, murdered and decides to write a book about his attempt to solve this mystery. It's a search for information that will ultimately upset his carefully constructed world.

Winner of the Whitbread Book of the Year.

Haggarty, Ben and Brockbank. **Mezolith** (graphic novel). David Fickling Books, 2010.

The book intertwines Stone Age horror with recognisable myths. Interconnected episodes explore the hard life of a Prehistoric hunter gatherer tribe through the eyes of young Poika. His coming of age story follows the Kansa Tribe through different seasons as he makes mistakes on his journey to becoming a man.

Hall, Sarah. **How to Paint a Dead Man**. Faber and Faber, 2010. p. 289.

In this gorgeous still life of a book, Sarah Hall gives us four lives -- two in 1960s Italy and two in contemporary Britain -- each narrated in a different voice. All are artists confronting mortal peril: Susan is a young British photographer mourning her twin brother, Giorgio is an Italian still-life painter facing terminal illness, Peter is a British landscape artist who becomes physically trapped under a boulder he is painting, and Annette is a blind Italian flower girl who once loved to draw and whose beauty makes her a target for assault.

Longlisted for the Man Booker Prize for Fiction 2009.

Harvey, Samantha. **The Wilderness**. Vintage Books, 2010. p.

Jake, on his 60th birthday, is treated to a plane flight above his home territory. From his aerial vantage, he scans the prison where his son Henry is serving a sentence. By profession an architect, Jake built that prison. His wife, Helen, has died. These facts he knows. The rest of his world shifts and blurs; words fail him and all Jake craves is stable footing on the earth. This he will never again enjoy.

Betty Trask Prize winner, Orange Prize shortlisted, Man Booker Prize longlisted, Guardian First Book Award shortlisted.

Hill, Susan. **The Small Hand**. A Ghost Story. Profile Books, 2010. p. 167.

Late one summer's evening, antiquarian bookseller Adam Snow is returning from a client visit when he takes a wrong turn. He stumbles across a derelict Edwardian house. Standing before the entrance, he feels the unmistakable sensation of a small cold hand creeping into his own, 'as if a child had taken hold of it.'

Jacobson, Howard. **The Finkler Question**. Bloomsbury, 2010. p. 307.

This charming novel follows many paths of enquiry, not least the present state of Jewish identity in Britain and how it integrates with the Gentile population. Equally important is its exploration of how men share friendship. All of which is played out with Jacobson's exceptionally funny riffs and happy-sad refrains.

Winner of the Man Booker Prize. 2010.

Hughes, Gregory. **Unhooking the Moon**. Quercus, 2010. p. 374.

Meet the Rat: A dancing, football-playing gangster-baiting ten-year-old. When she foresaw her father's death, she picked up her football and decided to head for New York. Meet her older brother Bob: Protector of the Rat, but more often her follower, he is determined to find their uncle in America and discover a new life for them both.

Winner of the Booktrust Teenage Prize 2010.

Keegan, Claire. **Foster**. Faber and Faber, 2010. p. 88.

Claire Keegan's new book *Foster* is a single story published on its own, which deals with a young girl in rural Wexford who is taken in by a foster family for the duration of yet another of her own mother's pregnancies.

Kureishi, Hanif. **Something to Tell You**. Faber and Faber, 2009.

The novel describes with elegant seriousness the fear of aging, the inanition of pleasure, the survival of love, the longing to understand and be understood.

Lelic, Simon. **Rupture**. Picador, 2010. p. 316.

The author's first novel examines one of the great horrors of our times – the schools shooting. Slowly and painfully the causes are revealed and they are even more shocking.

Lever, James. **Me Cheeta**. Fourth Estate, 2009. p. 320.

Funny and moving the book transports us back to the lost Hollywood of glamour and yachts, Bogie and Coop – but always, at the heart of it all, is Cheeta, the real star, in the celebrity non-memoir of recent times.

Levy, Andrea. **Small Island**. Picador, 2004. p. 441.

Small Island, set in 1948, explores the interaction between a black couple, Gilbert, a former RAF recruit, who has returned to Britain on the SS Windrush, and his Jamaican wife Hortense, and a white couple: Queenie, their landlady, and her recently demobbed husband, Bernard.

It won the 2004 Orange Prize for Fiction, the 2004 Whitbread Book of the Year, and the 2005 Commonwealth Writers Prize. *Small Island* was adapted for BBC television and broadcast in 2009.

Lively, Penelope. **Family Album**. Penguin Books, 2010. p. 261.

All "happy family" novels are alike. They present the shiny, noisy, splashy surface of family life, ruffled only by obligatory eccentricity. Then, before long, the shadows begin to slide along beneath, leaving the reader to guess which are the harmless tangles, and which the tooth-baring sharks. The murkier the layers of secrecy, the more satisfying the schadenfreude.

Shortlisted for the 2009 Costa Novel Award.

Lupton, Rosamund. **Sister**. Piatkus, 2010. p. 375.

Beatrice Hemming's flighty younger sister, Tess, first goes missing and is then found dead in an abandoned lavatory in London's Hyde Park. The police rule her death a suicide, but Beatrice is convinced that Tess has been murdered.

Madden, Deirdre. **Molly Fox's Birthday**. Faber and Faber, 2009. p. 221.

The author's third novel is about friendship; specifically about how much it is possible to know of the people we are closest to, or whether a mystery must always remain. That, at least, is what it seems to be about.

Shortlisted for the Orange Prize for Fiction 2009.

Mantel, Hilary. **The Wolf Hall**. Fourth Estate, 2010. p. 653.

In *Wolf Hall* the writer brings opulent, brutal world of the Tudors to bloody, glittering life. It is the backdrop to the rise and rise of Thomas Cromwell: lowborn boy, charmer, bully, master of deadly intrigue, and, finally, most powerful of Henry VIII's courtiers.

Winner of the 2009 Man Booker Prize.

Mawer, Simon. **The Glass Room**. Abacus, 2010. p. 405.

This is a book about a culture slipping from decadence into catastrophic decline. It's a study of a marriage. It concerns itself with art, music, architecture, indignity, loneliness, terror, betrayal, sex. And the Holocaust.

Shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize 2009.

McCarthy, Tom. **C**. Jonathan Cape, 2010. p. 310.

The novel follows the short, intense life of Serge Carrefax, a man who – as his name suggests – surges into the electric modernity of the early twentieth century, transfixed by the technologies that will obliterate him.

McGregor, Jon. **Even the Dogs**. Bloomsbury, 2011. p. 195.

Shockingly powerful and intensely moving, the book is an intimate portrayal of existence from beyond the comfort zone.

McEwan, Ian. **Solar**. Vintage Books, 2011. p. 285.

Ranging from the Arctic Circle to the deserts of New Mexico, this is a story of one man's greed and self-deception; a darkly satirical novel showing human frailty struggling with the most pressing and complex problem of our time – how to save the world from environmental disaster.

Winner of the 2010 Bollinger Everyman Wodehouse Prize for Comic Fiction.

Miéville, China. **Kraken**. Pan Books, 2010. p. 481.

When a perfectly preserved giant squid suddenly and impossibly disappears from the Natural History Museum for curator Billy Harrow it's the start of a headlong pitch into a London of warring cults, surreal magic, apostates and assassins.

Mitchell, David. **Cloud Atlas**. Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2004. p. 509.

A young Pacific islander witnesses the nightfall of science and civilisation, while questions of history are explored in a series of seemingly disconnected narratives. *Cloud Atlas* was shortlisted for the 2004 Man Booker Prize for Fiction.

It won the 2004 Orange Prize for Fiction, the 2004 Whitbread Book of the Year, and the 2005 Commonwealth Writers Prize. *Small Island* was adapted for BBC television and broadcast in 2009.

Mitchell, David. **The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet**. Sceptre, 2011. p. 560.

In your hands is a place like no other: a tiny, man-made island in the bay of Nagasaki, for two hundred years the sole gateway between Japan and the West. Here, in the dying days of the 18th century, a young Dutch clerk arrives to make his fortune. Instead he loses his heart.

Mulligan, Andy. **Trash**. David Fickling Books, 2011. p. 215.

Three friends. Raphael, Gardo and Rat. Living on a heap of trash, a lifetime of sifting rubbish. One day they find something extraordinary – a deadly secret. From that moment they are hunted without mercy.

Nicholls, David. **One day**. Vintage Contemporaries, 2010. p. 437.

One Day is about loneliness and the casual savagery of fate; the tragic gap between youthful aspiration and the compromises that we end up tolerating.

O'Farrell, Maggie. **The Hand that First Held Mine**. Mariner Books, 2011. p. 341.

A gorgeous, spellbinding story of love and motherhood, this is an extraordinary portrait of how even our most accidental legacies connect us.

Raine, Craig. **Heartbreak**. Atlantic Books, 2010. p. 223.

What becomes of the broken-hearted? Craig Raine's first novel is an exquisite investigation of love, one of the elusive yet deeply felt of human conditions. The result is a compassionate and textured novel about what happens to us when love and loss collide.

Rachman, Tom. **The Imperfectionists**. Dial Press Trade Paperback Edition, 2011. p. 281.

"The Imperfectionists" takes place in Rome. The characters are, for the most part, the staff of an unnamed English-language newspaper founded in the 1950s by an eccentric American businessman with the perfect name of Cyrus Ott. Each of the novel's chapters is about a particular staffer from the editor in chief on down to a lowly copy editor.

Robertson, Robin. **The Wrecking Light**. Picador, 2010. p. 96.

The ceaseless throb and thrum of the natural world – which is to say, the unhuman world – pulses throughout *The Wrecking Light*, Robin Robertson's fourth collection of poetry.

Shortlisted for the 2010. T.S. Eliot Prize and the Costa Poetry Award.

Roffey, Monique. **The White Woman on the Green Bicycle**. Pocket Books, 2010. p. 440.

It is a compelling love story set in the turbulent period of Trinidad. Since British George Harwood and his French wife, Sabine, have first stepped on the land of the beautiful Trinidad in 1956 as a newly-wedded couple, their relationship starts to change.

Shortlisted for the Orange Prize for Fiction 2010.

Rosoff, Meg. **The Bride's Farewell**. Penguin Books, 2010. p. 185.

Pell rises early, leaving her wedding dress spread out on a chair, saddles her horse Jack and slips away from the house. She's decided she can't possibly marry Birdie, the smith's son, so she's running away. But her plans are complicated by Bean, her mute little brother, who insists, silently, on accompanying her.

Sackville, Amy. **The Still Point**. Portobello Books, 2010. p. 307.

This is beautiful and unearthly novel, in which the secrets of a house and a marriage continually open out to a wild glare of Arctic light.

Self, Will. **The Butt**. Bloomsbury, 2009. p. 355.

Tom Brodzinski chucks his final fag-butt over his unspecified balcony in an unspecified hotel in an unspecified country where NO SMOKING is the only real moral imperative... only to have it land in the unpersuasive hairpiece of a scrag-end Anglo and his 20-year-old gorgeous matt-black native popsy. Who turns out to be his wife.

Sebold, Alice. **The Lovely Bones**. Picador, 2009. p. 323.

Our narrator Susie Salmon is already in heaven. Murdered by a neighbor when she was only fourteen years old. Watching from her place in heaven, Susie sees her family devastated by her death. Over the years, her friends and siblings grow up, fall in love, do all the things she had never had the chance to do herself. But life is not quite finished with Susie yet....

Summerscale, Kate. **The Suspicions of Mr Whicher**. Bloomsbury, 2009. p. 372.

It is a merging of research and storytelling about a notorious 1860 murder case. Mr. Whicher was one of eight policemen to join Scotland Yard's Detective Branch in 1842.

It won the 2008 Samuel Johnson Prize and two British Book Awards in 2009.

Toibin, Colm. **Brooklyn**. Penguin Books, 2010. p. 252.

The book tells the story of a young Irish girl, Eilis Lacey, who emigrates to New York in the 1950s and later becomes confronted by a terrible dilemma –a devastating choice between duty and one great love.

Trevor, William. **Love and Summer**. Penguin Book, 2010. p. 211.

The novel is a portrait of a brackish rural backwater, complete with family tragedy, sexual scandal, a repressed spinster and a half-crazed ancient retainer ... delicate, elegiac, written with all Trevor's trademark compassion and understanding.

Waters, Sarah. **The Little Stranger**. Virago, 2010. p. 501.

Gripping ghost story....As well as being a supernatural tale, it is a meditation on the nature of the British and class, and how things are rarely what they seem. Chilling.

Shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize 2009.

Williams, C. K. **Wait**. Bloodaxe Books, 2010. p. 125.

C.K. Williams is the most challenging American poet of intense and searching originality who makes lyric sense out of the often brutal realities of everyday life. His poems are startlingly intense anecdotes on love, death, secrets and wayward thought, examining the inner life in precise, daring language.

Letters of Ted Hughes. Selected and edited by Christopher Reid. Faber and Faber, 2009. p. 756.

No other English poet's letters, not even Keats's, unparalleled as they are, take us so intimately into the wellsprings of his own art.