

# THE Man BOOKER PRIZE 2006

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## The Man Booker Prize 2006 Reading Group Diary

### *Our Group*

#### Lerwick Book Group

The group has been going for a year and a half, and despite a few alarming lulls in attendance, has blossomed through 2006, with many new members who are enthusiastic and opinionated readers. The group was kicked off by the local Arts Trust and the Library, and is still coordinated through the library.

The idea has always been to keep it welcoming, open and informal, so meetings and news are advertised as much as possible to encourage new members to come along. Like many groups we are short on male members, though we are pleased that one brave man has stuck with us right from the start, and a couple of others have dipped their toes in.

The group has been involved in a couple of reading projects with publishers, and we were delighted to feature in Bookseller magazine in June 2006, when executives from Little Brown publishers made the long trip to Shetland to join a group meeting.

Sometimes we all read the same book, sometimes a mixture, such as the Orange Prize short list or a selection from a visiting author, though we've found we get a better discussion by all sticking to the same book. Sometimes we just read a book because we got free copies of it! Our monthly reads so far have included local history, poetry, chick-lit, classics, horror, crime... we've been fairly unorganised in the way we make our choices really.

We meet in a library events room and just bring along some food or drink if we like. We tried meeting in the pub but feared we were a bit too noisy for the other patrons. Discussions are pretty unstructured – everyone seems confident enough to speak up even though it's a big group, though maybe we'll experiment with splitting into smaller groups for part of the time if attendance stays so healthy.

Shetland is a great place for reading - we have a wonderful library, long dark winter nights, a vibrant local writing scene and a splendid book festival in September, but inevitably we can't get to the literary events round the country that we'd like to: that's why we're excited about this Man Booker project. There's already been local and national radio interviews and lots of interest in our involvement - we're really pleased to be part of it.

Here's a list of the books we've read so far:

*August 2006*

*Water Lily & The Earthquake Bird* Susanna Jones

*July 2006*

*Interview with the Vampire* Anne Rice

*June 2006*

*We Need to Talk About Kevin* Lionel Shriver

*May 2006*

\*Orange Prize Short List 2006

*April 2006*

*Cloth Girl* (Pre-publication) Marilyn Heward Mills

*February 2006*

*Raven Black* Ann Cleeves

*January 2006*

*Robinson Crusoe* Daniel Defoe

*December 2005*

*Fond Hopes Destroyed* (NF) Mary Prior

*November 2005*

*Housewife Down* Alison Penton Harper

*October 2005*

*Pride and Prejudice* Jane Austen

*September 2005*

\*Christopher Brookmyre

*August 2005*

\*Iain Banks

*July 2005*

*Rogue Male* Geoffrey Household

*June 2005*

*The Woman in Black* Susan Hill

*May 2005*

*The Point of Splitting* (Poetry) Sally Read

*April 2005*

*The Woman in White* Wilkie Collins

\*On these occasions the group didn't all read the same book, but various books by the same author, or from a shortlist.

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## *The members of our reading group*



*Just some of the members, about to pounce on the newly arrived shortlist books...*

**Liz:** “I enjoy reading a variety of fiction books. My favourites include *The Mists of Avalon* and I usually enjoy human interest stories and detective novels, but I shy away from romances. Books are my escape from everyday life.”

**Ken:** “I am a new member who used to read voraciously but have lost the habit. Lately I have enjoyed Alex McCall Smith and most travel books. I suppose I enjoy ‘well written’ books, definitely not *The Da Vinci Code* which I thought of as ‘tosh’, and thrillers and modern detective novels usually leave me cold.”

**Andy:** “I’m a very catholic reader, all styles, all genres. Fiction, non-fiction, biographies, autobiographies. The book group gives me a chance to try out new authors and get recommendations, the last two books, *Interview With the Vampire* and *We Need to Talk About Kevin* being points in case.”

**Aileen:** “I am a systems librarian and I like going to the book group as I enjoy reading but I’m not very involved with the books side of things at work. I will read anything from murder mysteries to classics to romantic fiction. The only thing I don’t like is horror books. The book group is good because it makes me read books I wouldn’t usually read, and sometimes I am surprised at the things I have enjoyed.”

**Charlene:** “I enjoy reading many kinds of books, most of which are horrors. I have only been reading for a few years because of Anne Rice’s *Interview With the Vampire* and *The Thin Blue Line* by Hammond Innes. Since I read these novels I’ve been rather unexcited so I joined the book group to try and enjoy different kinds of stories.”

**Karen:** “Reading a book with the book group makes me read into it more deeply as I know I’ll be discussing it. I read pretty widely but I’d have to be dragged kicking and screaming to fantasy or historical fiction (classics excepted). However, I like the fact that the book group may force me to temporarily overcome my prejudices and read something different.”

**Morag:** “I’m responsible for young people’s services at the Shetland Library and I joined the book group because I enjoy meeting new people and discussing books. Over the past couple of years I’ve read books which I wouldn’t normally choose myself and have really enjoyed most of them.”

**Zuzanna:** “I’m a new member and delighted to be able to talk about books again! I come from Poland, have lived in Shetland for three and a half years. As reading books is usually a solitary hobby, it’s great to make it a social experience too!”

**Laura:** I grew up on the Shetland Isles, but spent many years working away from ‘home’ and only returned to the islands to live last year. I’ve been an avid reader all my life, beginning with children’s classics, many of which still have special memories for me. Nowadays my reading tastes extend to literary fiction, drama and biographies. I especially enjoy searching out new authors and will read anything written with an unusual style. Until recently I would have said that I was not a fan of crime writing, but I’ve been reading books by Susannah Jones, Minette Walters, Kathy Riechs and Christopher Brookmyre and these books have altered my opinions somewhat.

**Anne:** I like to read books by women for women - basically light reading. My favourite authors are Anne Tyler (for her humour) and Daphne Du Maurier (long deceased but her books are still full of drama). I joined a book club for social reasons but I am pleased that I have participated in reading most of the chosen books recommended by this club. Most I would never have chosen to read left to my own choices only because I would have chosen books of a lighter calibre, i.e. flippant books. This book club is encouraging me to be more mature in my reading.

**Alexis:** I enjoy thrillers, whodunits, some autobiographies, factual investigations, some fantasy, anything well written. The book group has widened my reading genres.

## *Our Reading Group and the Man Booker Prize 2006 – Looking Forward*

### **Our current perception of the Man Booker Prize:**

- “I tended to think of it as horrible literary and elitist, but in recent years read some truly lovely (and very readable) books that had been shortlisted. So I see it now as a good barometer of the best new literature.”
- “I like the media hype and luvviness that goes with it.”

### **Most looking forward to:**

- “The intensive reading experience.”
- “I think it will be interesting meeting up with new people who share a common interest, from all around the country.”
- “The touch of glamour from being able to say we’re one of only six reading groups taking part, the close involvement in the process.”
- “The free books!”
- “Some of us are off to London for the shortlist party – hurrah!”

### **Least looking forward to:**

- “Very boring books on the shortlist.”
- “Hard to find time for all that reading, but really want to read all six.”
- “Hope this party’s not a let-down. Is there plenty of drink?”

### **Hope to be on/not be on shortlist:**

- “I heard Andrew O’Hagan talking about his book on the radio and it sounds good, so hoping that will be on.”
- “James Robertson is coming to Shetland for the book festival soon so it would be nice if he made the shortlist – never read any of his before though, dunno if I’ll like it or not.”
- “Not sure about that Sarah Waters book, friends have said it’s not all that great but maybe I would think different.”

## The shortlisted titles

### ***Title: Mother's Milk, Edward St Aubyn***

#### ***You will like this if....***

Karen: You like acerbic wit; you like a story viewed from different points of view; you are interested in family dynamics, bitterness, jealousy, compassion, love, and problems passed through the generations.

#### ***You won't like this if....***

Karen: You are irritated by clever-clever, over-intellectual sarcasm; you hate precocious brats; you are left cold by tales of the angst of the self-absorbed and affluent English; you want dialogue to be realistic.

Karen: I'd high hopes for this book as Hermione Lee described it at the shortlist party as 'brilliantly malevolent' and 'lethal'. Some witty lines made me laugh, for example Patrick, the father, putting down yet another of their vulgar acquaintances – mother of horrible bullying child says 'I hate to repress all that drive and energy' and Patrick says 'You're relying on the penal system to do that.' But often he's just unbearably smug, sarcastic, over-intellectual. Kids also seem very precocious in their use of language, but maybe with a parent like Patrick that's not so far fetched.

I liked the way it swung to different characters points of view, which fleshed out the different family members as you went along. Despite Patrick's louche selfishness I found I was sympathetic to his frustration, depression and alcohol and drug problems, whereas I couldn't take to the saintly Mary. I liked the kids better as the book went along, and there was some compassionate and touching stuff breaking through the familial bitterness. I often stopped to appreciate some nice use of language – e.g. Mary's horrible mother is described as 'bristling with indifference'. However in general the book was slightly depressing and it's not one that I'd rush out to recommend.

Laura: I could sum this book up in one word. Dire. The young Robert who we are meant to believe thinks like a grown man at the age of five and the totally implausible Thomas, aged two, but with the intellect of a thirty year old Ox-Bridge graduate. I'm sorry but it just did not work for me, even though I re-read passages and tried my hardest to suspend disbelief. Nope, sorry, not this one either.

***Title: The Inheritance of Loss, Kiran Desai***

***You will like this if.....***

You like fresh writing, love India, like rich poetic language, poignant characters, vivid descriptions.

***You won't like this if....***

You don't like India? You like books with a chronological narrative.

Cushla: I think from my experience of being a bookseller (OK, it was in New Zealand and it was a small independent business stocking books of interest to women....but it was 10 wonderful years of my life ) that the colour green was not a good one for covers....(you noted that *The Inheritance of Loss* was the last one left on the table) However in turning to it I am finding the writing fresh and enjoying the little sections within a chapter.

Karen: Once I finally knuckled down to *The Inheritance of loss* I didn't stop till I'd finished - it's a lovely book and I think the most striking thing is the quality of writing. There's a wonderful naturalness and artistry. She uses lots of odd little devices in her style - cuts the text into short sections, striking emphases and sounds, sometimes sends sentences off into patterns across the page, and none of it seems in any way contrived, it all has the feel of a really lively person telling a you a story, gesticulating wildly as they do so, using mimicry, and laughing and crying and digressing. She must have superb confidence to be able to take language and use it like that. Maturity and intelligence and compassion comes across but also liveliness and playful inventiveness. There's a lot of humour in the story although the main themes are pretty sad and miserable. (Couldn't she just have given the luckless Biju a little bit of a break?) Lovely lovely descriptions of people and places, I love the crumbling house with all the mice, mould, termites, damp (ironing the newspapers dry) oh and the couldnt-care-less staff in the Gymkhana restaurant, and lots more, but need to shut myself up as I'd like to hear other's views. If this glorious novel was to lose out to the comparatively thin, mean-spirited *Mother's Milk* I would have bad words to say.

Ken: The more I look back on it, the better it seems!

Aileen: I really loved this book although it was a bit harrowing at times and I really felt for the characters, especially for Biju. I think this is my favourite book so far, because its descriptions are so vivid and beautiful and you feel like you're really there, and it's a book that has really stayed with me even after I finished reading it. I read *Carry Me Down* before this and enjoyed it but then I immediately forgot all about it.

## ***Title: Night Watch, Sarah Waters***

### ***You will like this if.....***

You like period detail, meticulous research, a book that really evokes the times. Like books that don't romanticise wartime.

### ***You won't like this if....***

You like a straightforward chronological narrative, you are offended by lesbianism!

Janet: I read the blogs which seemed to be fixated on the pros and cons of the chronology. It didn't bother me as I read the book not expecting a plot but the development of relationships in a certain context ie the war and soon after.

The relationships were generally rather bleak. I think there's an observation towards the end of the book that we tend to love the wrong people which definitely seemed to be the case with this lot, especially Reggie and Viv. However, the love, although perhaps a bit misguided, was intense and, in the case of Kay's for Helen, exemplified what was, I thought, one of the strands of the book-the need to hold on to what was good, beautiful and had some meaning at a time of destruction, complete chaos and, after the war, great uncertainty and physical privation. The pyjamas were very symbolic: I fancied a pair myself!

I thought another thread was that all the characters were or became in some way outsiders and that, in their own ways, were lonely despite all that connected them through work and relationships. I thought the author conveyed this with some subtlety. It was a bleak aspect to the book but the reality for a lot of people in these circumstances.

The attention to detail was amazing. To begin with, I thought it might bog things down a bit but, as there was no racy plot to worry about, I think it was very effective and I felt I had learned a bit of social history.

In summary, a good contender for the prize, I think.

Cushla: Felt taken into the time of the 1940's, but not into the characters unfortunately.....the details were all evocative, but the feeling just wasn't there for me. Bits will stay with me... the abortion story in particular, but the rest will just disappear. I am still contemplating the time structure of the book, and wondering how it would have been if it had not been retrospective.

Morag: This could just win, due to the unusual format (the story goes backwards in three separate chunks) and it's amazing descriptive writing. I got totally hooked on the characters and the whole wartime London scenario. The characters are great – can't say too much about the book without giving essential plotlines away. Enough to say I had to reread parts of it when I finished to better understand why certain people did and said certain things, but that just made the whole experience that much better.

Laura: I think I may have to eat my hat as regards Sarah Waters! Started reading *The Night Watch* and it is superb. I was totally drawn in from page

one and I can see why Morag raved about it. It is so well written, so all credit to her I guess. I am really enjoying it.

Zuzanna: I thought I'd put down my thoughts on Sarah Waters' book as I have to say after initial doubts I did change my mind about it.

Did I say it was like a soap, a good TV material? Well, the reversed chronology gives it a real literary value, which I had thought it was somehow lacking. This chronological trick makes you think: how did the characters get to this point in their lives? What made them the way they are? Relationships are revealed in the light of previous relationships and events; we get to know the characters as we get to know people in real life: at a certain stage of their lives, with no previous knowledge of what had happened to them. And yet, once we do find out, it changes everything: little things matter, previous encounters and connections shape the reality. It makes you think how we all are fixed in time, with our own histories, which we cannot escape. It's not a groundbreaking thought when I say it but the strength of this book lies in its ability to evoke this realization in the reader.

**Title: *In the Country of Men*, Hisham Matar**

***You will like this if.....***

Alexis: you're stuck for a book to read! Karen: you like something about a country we don't hear much about; understated prose; a sense of menace; problems of children coming to terms with an adult world; family relationships.

***You won't like this if....***

Alexis: you're looking for a real sense of time and place.  
Karen: you're looking to be cheered up! It's very gloomy.

Laura: What is it with children this year? The third book of the six short listed and so far if the story has not been narrated by a child then children have featured prominently. This is the best so far but I still have three more to read. The story is told by nine year old Suleiman and this book is very sensitively written dealing with the emotive issues of politics in Libya at the end of the seventies. This book I did enjoy. It is a book that needs to be read slowly and thoughtfully. An excellent debut novel, carefully crafted with rich and luxuriant language. I would like to see this one win, but would be surprised if it did.

Alexis: I can't get a handle on this book. I think Hisham is too Westernised to relate to Libya, this could have been a mafia story or a European gangster story. I had no sense of place or time. A real disappointment.

Heather: Like some others who have got to this one I enjoyed it. It was a good look at another culture and I found the book cover etc fitted with this and enhanced the reading experience - I was interested to learn from Susanna Jones how little input the actual author has to this, but at least I think they got it right this time. I found it very moving I can't imagine living under such terror, the scene of the televised execution will stay with me for some time. Really my only criticism is that I wasn't totally convinced about his alcoholic mother she seemed a little too able to take or leave the drink and turn into an obedient Muslim woman at the drop of a hat. I really enjoyed the sense he had of how the child was powerless in the adult world whilst at the same time making decisions/taking actions that would adversely affect the adults because of this exclusion. I also liked the sense that he was aware that the rest of his life would be coloured by the decisions he had made. I thought the exile theme worked well.

Karen: I expected to like this more than I did – I think it was just so serious and depressing that I felt (as with J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*) that I'd read it for duty more than pleasure. It was well written of course, and the atmosphere of paranoia, heat, the deserted neighbourhood when everyone's having a siesta, the frustration and fear of the boy hearing things through doorways, not getting the full picture, is good. I just didn't quite believe in some of the instruments of repression: the henchmen were a little corny as was the man who intruded on the phone call like an uncool Big Brother. Emptiness of exile well evoked. I somehow didn't care about the people as much as I should have and I didn't like the little boy very much, but that's probably cos I'm a bad person more than it's a bad book.

## ***Title: Carry Me Down, M. J. Hyland***

### ***You will like this if.....***

Aileen: you enjoy well-written books and don't mind if they take a while to get to the point.

Karen: You want a book that's intriguing, makes you want to keep turning the pages; sense of menace; quite disturbing; not sure where the story will go.

### ***You won't like this if....***

Aileen: you like books where the action moves quickly with no unnecessary information.

Karen: You are disturbed by adolescent madness?

Aileen: I did enjoy this book as it gives an interesting perspective on life from an eleven year old boy with an unusual way of thinking as it charts the ups and downs of his family life. However, I did get frustrated at the slow pace of the book, and found it hard to work out what was going on from the boy's perspective. This illustrates well the trials of childhood but it does make it hard to read in places.

Laura: An interesting and delicately written book. The story is told from the viewpoint of eleven-year old John Egan who has the uncanny knack of being able to tell exactly when anybody is lying. At first he feels gifted, but as events unfold he starts to feel his 'gift' is a burden. Set in Ireland he tells the story of two years in his life as his family live firstly with his paternal Grandmother and then in a council flat in Dublin for a brief spell before moving back to live with the Grandmother. John Egan appears very bright for his eleven years despite the added bonus of his lie detection. I enjoyed the style of the story, even though I was aware of the Australian 'style' of storytelling and may have been able to detect the author's Australian connections even if I had not been told. A clever and original idea, but not the one I would choose as a Man Booker winner.

Karen: I found this really easy to read, ploughed through it very fast because I was always interested in what was coming – there was something disturbing and menacing looming all the way although there was humour there too. I found it hard to predict how it would end up, and though the ending was reasonably happy I tend to think the young man will go on to be a dangerous odd-bod. A delicate study of a psychopath in the making, I'd say, being tipped over the edge by family stress and the strains of adolescence.

Morag: Finished reading this last night. I enjoyed it, but I did feel at times that the storylines didn't develop as I would have expected them to and the characters did not live up to my initial expectations. Must admit that I enjoyed the story more at the start, before the move to Dublin, because after that I started to feel that some aspects of John's story were going nowhere ie I would have liked his relationship with "the gang" to have developed further, and also with the strange girl in the lift. The storyline with his dad and the women upstairs was a bit odd as well - maybe I missed something and

perhaps I need to reread this book later when I'm not under so much pressure to read several books in quick succession!

Zuzanna: I think Carry Me Down is excellent - very fresh, very simple. It cuts through to the bone. It is a very raw writing (I'm not sure if I can use this expression in English, but this is how I feel about it), very honest and pure. The moods, smells, sounds etc are all made real by means of just a few words. At the same time I don't think it's a particularly weird book. John impresses me as an ordinary boy - admittedly, more sensitive than most - but not essentially abnormal. He's tangled up in emotions, lonely and very vulnerable, caught between adolescence and childhood; his abnormal physical development makes this phase in his life even more difficult and confusing, the pain of change more acute. His gift for lie detection is his own invention - stemming from his oversensitivity and desire to be different, to be special, to be loved and admired - surely, not an unusual desire? It's a childish delusion - but he's only 12, why can't he be childish? In one entry (can't remember which one) a reader accused him of being sanctimonious and self-righteous. But that's the way kids are - trying to work out rules of the world, which they for the first time discover to be more complicated than they'd been told. It's only when you grow up you learn to tell the difference between 'lies' and 'white lies'.

I imagine this book would be a nice subject for critics keen on Freudian analysis - talk about Oedipus complex!

## ***Title: The Secret River, Kate Grenville***

### ***You will like this if.....***

Morag: you enjoy historical fiction; you enjoy fiction where the central characters struggle against the odds to succeed.

Alexis: you like a well-researched, well written historical piece.

### ***You won't like this if....***

Morag: if you're looking for a deep, thought-provoking novel; you only enjoy fiction with contemporary settings.

Alexis: You like dialogue!

Alexis: The characters are so well written that even if history isn't your pleasure you will enjoy this for the interplay of personalities and the accepted mores of the time.

Morag: I just loved this. Really liked the characters and the idea of them having to carve out a new life for themselves out of nothing in the Australian bush. Never really thought much about what life was like for those unlucky enough to be deported in those days, but then you realise they were actually the lucky ones if they succeeded because they could strive to make something of themselves free from the miserable existence they'd left behind them. I'd recommend this as a good read, but don't tip it as the winner.

Karen: Just zoomed through *The Secret River* - a good read. The broad historical sweep made the pace of the story a bit fast - one brother's drowning is dismissed in a line - and I thought both this and the lack of dialogue might prevent me getting a deep feel for the characters, but no, it was emotional and thought-provoking. She brought out the dilemmas and tragedies of colonization - you really wanted the settlers, who were escaping the most savage poverty, to succeed - but at what odds? There were glimpsed chances to learn from the natives and live together, but fear and misunderstanding inevitably brought disaster. The family's big incongruous house - material wealth yet spiritual unease - is a nice snapshot of the kind of society that formed on the back of this ethnic cleansing.

## The Man Booker Prize 2006

### Our winner

4<sup>th</sup> October:

Folk are still reading frantically, and arguing, and it's hard in a way to vote before everyone's read everything - but then I'm finding it hard to vote and I have read everything. Whatever, we decided to have an initial vote, with postal votes or changes of mind also being accepted up till Monday or Tuesday. The boot went into *Mother's Milk* again, indeed members opined that Patrick needed a kick up the backside - to be fair some folk rather liked it, but not enough to vote for it. Some predicted it might well win as they think the judges have a soft spot for it. Some liked the *Secret River* precisely as it was not the sort of book you expect to win literary prizes - just a strong straightforward story. But some didn't like it - a bit clichéd, 'the research done then a story built round it'. Folk did say, however, that they are glad they read them all - there's certainly no books that it's been a waste of time to read, and the experience of reading so intensely, comparing and judging and discussing, has been great. Oh yes, Ken had brought along various bookies' odds - interesting and at variance with our opinions so far...

So, this was the interim vote:

- *Mother's Milk*: nul point (sorry!);
- *In the Country of Men*: nul point (sorry again, it was liked, admired but not loved);
- *Carry Me Down*: one vote;
- *The Night Watch*: three votes;
- *The Secret River*: three votes... and our winner is...
- *The Inheritance of Loss* with five votes! Anyway, more votes to come - as Peter Snow might say, it's only a bit of fun...it could all change...

10<sup>th</sup> October – nothing has changed, we are going for:

**Title: *The Inheritance of Loss***  
**Author: Kiran Desai**

This is our winner because....

Great story, characters you really care about, even the horrible ones, humour among the tragedy, cleverly constructed to make it really easy to read. Most of all, just her wonderful lively vivid writing, she just dances through the story. Everyone who read it loved it, even those of us who didn't vote for it.

## *Our Reading Group and the Man Booker Prize 2006 – Looking Back*

Although not everyone liked every book, none of them were hard to read – they weren't excessively heavy and literary as you sometimes imagine the Man Booker books to be. We loved it all including the intense reading - you read the books more intently and critically than you might normally, you were always seeing the six as a group and contrasting and comparing. Not everyone had time to read them all but most folk found something they liked and authors they might go on and read more of.

Some of us think the shortlist could have been better – James Robertson's *Testament of Gideon Mack* was definitely better than several books on it. But having said that the selection was good as they were all very different books. Folk found themselves reading things they wouldn't normally have picked. It was hard to keep the copies moving round fast enough sometimes – before the Kate Grenville web chat I had to prize a copy of *The Secret River* out of the hands of Morag's husband who was halfway through it and read it overnight!

Keeping the blog was good - there was a feeling of camaraderie with the other book groups. Of course it was also good to meet most of the other groups down in London at the shortlist party – that was a great couple of days, bit expensive to get there but worth it. We enjoyed the web chat and it was so good of Kate Grenville to get up so early and do it.

Biggest disappointment is that there wasn't a proper oscar-style television programme for the final – it's quite feeble of the BBC, they could surely have at least fitted it on BBC4. But it was good that a lot of members came along to our finale anyway – upstairs in the Thule bar with a big projector telly – even though it was just to watch an announcement on the news it was good to watch it together with other people who knew the books so well. We were surprised and delighted when Kiran Desai won – everyone who read this loved it, even folk like me who didn't vote for it, in fact I was probably more pleased by this result than if my choice – *The Night Watch* – had won.

BBC Radio, if not TV, has been very interested in the Man Booker and it's been a whirlwind of interviews before, during and after the project on Radio Shetland and Radio Scotland – down in London me and Laura did a spot for Good Morning Scotland and weren't too chuffed about the early start but the BBC kindly sent a lovely silver Merc to our hotel in Paddington to whisk us to the studio and back. Thanks to Laura for doing this and other interviews, and boo hiss to Morag and Aileen who refused to get out of their beds and come with us! Thanks also to Alexis and Liz who spoke on a couple of local radio programmes.

I think everyone involved would like to do this again, problem is how to do it without the free books next time?! The library can't really afford to buy multiple copies of the shortlist, this being a small authority – demand doesn't justify it.

That said, maybe we could 'ring-fence' the copies we do get and lock up a crack squad of book group members for a week with them.

We will probably always pay more attention to the Man Booker after doing this, and probably be much more tempted by the longlist and shortlist – it's always going to be a good pointer to what's good new literature.