

About the Booker Tea Reading Group

The Booker Tea Reading Group meets monthly to discuss award-winning and notable literature from across the globe, with an emphasis on works that illuminate socio-political figures, ideas and events.

The group was founded in Washington, D.C. in 1997 with an initial focus on titles that had been awarded or short-listed for the Booker Prize. Now known as the Man Booker Prize, this award is the premier literary award of the British Commonwealth and the Republic of Ireland, and arguably one of the most coveted literary awards of the planet today. Prize-winning authors include Salman Rushdie, Margaret Atwood, Kazuo Ishiguro, V.S. Naipaul and Iris Murdoch.

The group did not limit itself to the Booker Prize, instead embracing works that had won awards ranging from the PEN/Faulkner (U.S.) to the Kiriyaama (Pacific Rim and South Asia). Nevertheless, what distinguishes the Booker Tea Reading Group from many fine discussion groups is not its emphasis on award-winners but rather its commitment to reading literature that makes historical and contemporary political thought and events understandable for its readers.

The Booker Tea Reading Group now meets in both Washington, D.C. and in Berlin, Germany. The group's membership list of nearly 100 men and women has a smaller committee that crafts the annual reading list. As in the past, the list continues to reflect the initial commitments of this group to having demographic, geographic and thematic diversity in its lineup.

To limit costs and create an intimate atmosphere for dialogue, small group meetings of up to 12 gather on a Sunday afternoon each month in the homes of Booker Tea members. In between, group members coordinate outings to literary and other cultural events. There are no restrictions on or fees assigned to membership in the group.

The Reading List, 2007-2008

- Sep-07 [The Inheritance of Loss](#) by Kiran Desai
- Oct-07 [The Shadow of the Wind](#) by Carlos Ruiz Zafón
- Nov-07 [And She Was](#) by Cindy Dyson
- Dec-07 [A Woman in Jerusalem](#) by Abraham B. Yehoshua
- Jan-08 [The Secret River](#) by Kate Grenville
- Feb-08 [Beasts of No Nation](#) by Uzodinma Iweala
- Mar-08 [The Girl Who Played Go](#) by Shan Sa
- Apr-08 [Gabriela, Clove and Cinnamon](#) by Jorge Amado
- May-08 [Suite Française](#) by Irène Némirovsky
- Jun-08 [Death of a Red Heroine](#) by Qiu Xiaolong
- Jul/Aug 08 [Nervous Conditions](#) by Tsitsi Dangarembga

For more information on the group, selected works and discussion dates, please visit the group website at www.thebookertea.com or send an email to info@thebookertea.com.

September 2007

The Inheritance of Loss

by Kiran Desai

Published by Penguin Canada (2006)

ISBN 978-0802142818

Description:

In a crumbling, isolated house at the foot of Mount Kanchenjunga in the Himalayas lives an embittered judge who wants only to retire in peace, when his orphaned granddaughter, Sai, arrives on his doorstep. The judge's cook watches over her distractedly, for his thoughts are claimed by his son, Biju, who is hopscotching from one gritty New York restaurant to another. When an Indian–Nepali insurgency in the mountains interrupts Sai's exploration of the many incarnations and facets of a romance with her Nepali tutor, and causes their lives to descend into chaos, they are forced to consider their colliding interests.

In a generous vision, sometimes funny, sometimes sad, Desai presents the human quandaries facing a panoply of characters. This majestic novel of a busy, grasping time—every moment holding out the possibility of hope or betrayal—illuminates the consequences of colonialism and global conflicts of religion, race, and nationalism.

About the Author:

Kiran Desai was born in India in 1971, she lived in Delhi until she was 14, then spent a year in England, before her family moved to the USA. She completed her schooling in Massachusetts before attending Bennington College; Hollins University and Columbia University, where she studied creative writing, taking two years off to write *Hullabaloo* in the Guava Orchard. Her mother is Anita Desai, author of many books, three of which have been short listed for the Booker Prize.

October 2007

The Shadow of the Wind

by Carlos Ruiz Zafón; translated by Lucia Graves

Published by Penguin (2001)

ISBN 978-0143034902

Description:

Barcelona, 1945—just after the war, a great world city lies in shadow, nursing its wounds, and a boy named Daniel awakes on his eleventh birthday to find that he can no longer remember his mother's face. To console his only child, Daniel's widowed father, an antiquarian book dealer, initiates him into the secret of the Cemetery of Forgotten Books, a library tended by Barcelona's guild of rare-book dealers as a repository for books forgotten by the world, waiting for someone who will care about them again. Daniel's father coaxes him to choose a volume from the spiraling labyrinth of shelves, one that, it is said, will have a special meaning for him. And Daniel so loves the novel he selects, *The Shadow of the Wind* by one Julian Carax, that he sets out to find the rest of Carax's work. To his shock, he discovers that someone has been systematically destroying every copy of every book this author has written. In fact, he may have the last one in existence.

Before Daniel knows it his seemingly innocent quest has opened a door into one of Barcelona's darkest secrets, an epic story of murder, magic, madness and doomed love. And before long he realizes that if he doesn't find out the truth about Julian Carax, he and those closest to him will suffer horribly.

About the Author:

Carlos Ruiz Zafón is a Spanish novelist. Born in Barcelona in 1964, he has lived in Los Angeles, California since 1994.

November 2007

And She Was

by Cindy Dyson

Published by HarperCollins (2006)

ISBN 978-0060597719

Description:

Sweeping across centuries and into the Aleutian Islands of Alaska's Bering Sea, *And She Was* begins with a decision and a broken taboo when three starving Aleut mothers decide to take their fate into their own hands. Two hundred and fifty years later, by the time Brandy, a floundering, trashy, Latin-spewing cocktail waitress, steps ashore in the 1980s, Unalaska Island has absorbed their dark secret—a secret that is both salvation and shame.

In a tense interplay between past and present, *And She Was* explores Aleut history, mummies, conquest, survival, and the seamy side of the 1980s in a fishing boomtown at the edge of the world, where a lost woman struggles to understand the gray shades between heroism and evil, and between freedom and bondage.

About the Author:

The author of eight books for young adults, Cindy Dyson grew up in Alaska. Her work has appeared in *National Geographic*, *Backpacker*, *First for Women*, *Women's World*, and other publications. She now lives near Glacier Park, Montana.

December 2007

A Woman in Jerusalem

by Abraham B. Yehoshua; translated by Hillel Halkin

Published by Harcourt | Harvest Books

ISBN 978-0156031943

Description:

A woman in her forties is a victim of a suicide bombing at a Jerusalem market. Her body lies nameless in a hospital morgue. She had apparently worked as a cleaning woman at a bakery, but there is no record of her employment. When a Jerusalem daily accuses the bakery of "gross negligence and inhumanity toward an employee," the bakery's owner, overwhelmed by guilt, entrusts the task of identifying and burying the victim to a human resources man. This man is at first reluctant to take on the job, but as the facts of the woman's life take shape—she was an engineer from the former Soviet Union, a non-Jew on a religious pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and, judging by an early photograph, beautiful—he yields to feelings of regret, atonement and even love.

At once profoundly serious and highly entertaining, A. B. Yehoshua astonishes us with his masterly, often unexpected turns in the story and with his ability to get under the skin and into the soul of Israel today.

About the Author:

One of Israel's preeminent writers, A. B. Yehoshua has been awarded the Israel Prize, the Koret Jewish Book Award, and the National Jewish Book Award. Born in Jerusalem, he lives in Haifa.

January 2008

The Secret River

by Kate Grenville

Published by Canongate (2006)

ISBN 978-1841959146

Description:

London, 1807. William Thornhill, happily wedded to his childhood sweetheart Sal, is a waterman on the River Thames. Life is tough but bearable until William makes a mistake, a bad mistake for which he and his family are made to pay dearly. His sentence: to be transported to New South Wales for the term of his natural life.

The Thornhills arrive in this harsh and alien land that they cannot understand and which feels like a death sentence. But among the convicts there is a rumor that freedom can be bought, that 'unclaimed' land up the Hawkesbury offers an opportunity to start afresh, far away from the township of Sydney. When William takes a hundred acres for himself he is shocked to find Aboriginal people already living on the river. And other recent arrivals - Thomas Blackwood, Smasher Sullivan and Mrs. Herring - are finding their own ways to respond to them.

Soon Thornhill, a man neither better nor worse than most, has to make the most difficult decision of his life ...

About the Author:

Kate Grenville was born in Sydney. Her most recent novel, *The Idea of Perfection*, won the Orange Prize for Fiction and became a long-running bestseller. Her five other works of fiction have won numerous awards. Kate Grenville lives in Sydney with her family.

February 2008

Beasts of No Nation

by Uzodinma Iweala

Published by HarperCollins (2006)

ISBN 978-0060798680

Description:

In this stunning debut novel, Agu, a young boy in an unnamed West African nation, is recruited into a unit of guerrilla fighters as civil war engulfs his country. Haunted by his father's own death at the hands of militants, Agu is vulnerable to the dangerous yet paternal nature of his new commander. While the war rages on, Agu becomes increasingly divorced from the life he had known before the conflict started—a life of school friends, church services, and time with his family still intact.

In a powerful, strikingly original voice that vividly captures Agu's youth and confusion, Uzodinma Iweala has produced a harrowing, inventive, and deeply affecting novel.

About the Author:

Uzodinma Iweala was born in 1982 in Washington, D.C. He graduated from Harvard University, where he was a Mellon Mays Scholar and received a number of prizes for his writing, including the Eager Prize, the Horman Prize, the Le Baron Briggs Prize, and the Hoopes Prize, awarded for outstanding undergraduate thesis. He lives in New York City.

March 2008

The Girl Who Played Go

by Shan Sa; translated by Adriana Hunter

Published by Random House | Alfred A. Knopf (2004)

ISBN 978-1400032280

Description:

As the Japanese military invades 1930s Manchuria, a young girl approaches her own sexual coming of age. Drawn into a complex triangle with two boys, she distracts herself from the onslaught of adulthood by playing the game of go with strangers in a public square—and yet the force of desire, like the occupation, proves inevitable. Unbeknownst to the girl who plays go, her most worthy and frequent opponent is a Japanese soldier in disguise. Captivated by her beauty as much as by her bold, unpredictable approach to the strategy game, the soldier finds his loyalties challenged. Is there room on the path to war for that most revolutionary of acts: falling in love?

About the Author:

Shan Sa was born in 1972 in Beijing. In 1990 she left China for France, where she studied in Paris and worked for two years with the painter Balthus. Her two previous novels were awarded the Prix Goncourt du Premier Roman and the Prix Cazes. *The Girl Who Played Go* won the Kiriyama Pacific Rim Book Prize in 2004. This is her first book to be published in the United States.

April 2008

Gabriela, Clove and Cinnamon

by Jorge Amado

Translated by James L. Taylor and William Grossman

Published by Random House | Vintage (1974)

ISBN 978-0307276650

Description:

Ilhéus in 1925 is a booming town with a record cacao crop and aspirations for progress, but the traditional ways prevail. When Colonel Mendonça discovers his wife in bed with a lover, he shoots and kills them both. Political contests, too, can be settled by gunshot...

No one imagines that a bedraggled migrant worker who turns up in town—least of all Gabriela herself—will be the agent of change. Nacib Saad has just lost the cook at his popular café and in desperation hires Gabriela. To his surprise she turns out to be a great beauty as well as a wonderful cook and an enchanting boon to his business. But what would people say if Nacib were to marry her?

Lusty, satirical and full of intrigue, *Gabriela, Clove and Cinnamon* is a vastly entertaining panorama of small town Brazilian life.

About the Author:

Jorge Amado—novelist, journalist, lawyer—was born in 1912, the son of a cacao planter, in Ilheus. His first novel, *Cacao*, was published when he was nineteen and was an impassioned plea for social justice for the workers on Bahian plantations. His novels of the 30s and 40s would continue to dramatize class struggle. Not until the 1950s did he write his great literary comic novels which take aim at the full spectrum of society even as they pay tribute to the region of his birth. One of the most renowned writers of Latin America, Amado has been translated into more than 35 languages. A highly successful film version of *Dona Flor* was produced in Brazil in 1976. He died in 2001.

May 2008

Suite Française

by Irène Némirovsky; translated by Sandra Smith
Published by Random House | Vintage (2006)
ISBN 978-1400096275

Description:

Beginning in Paris on the eve of the Nazi occupation in 1940. *Suite Française* tells the remarkable story of men and women thrown together in circumstances beyond their control. As Parisians flee the city, human folly surfaces in every imaginable way: a wealthy mother searches for sweets in a town without food; a couple is terrified at the thought of losing their jobs, even as their world begins to fall apart. Moving on to a provincial village now occupied by German soldiers, the locals must learn to coexist with the enemy—in their town, their homes, even in their hearts.

When Irène Némirovsky began working on *Suite Française*, she was already a highly successful writer living in Paris. But she was also a Jew, and in 1942 she was arrested and deported to Auschwitz, where she died. For sixty-four years, this novel remained hidden and unknown.

About the Author:

Irène Némirovsky was born in Kiev in 1903 into a wealthy banking family and emigrated to France during the Russian Revolution. After attending the Sorbonne, she began to write and swiftly achieved success with her first novel, *David Golder*, which was followed by *The Ball*, *The Flies of Autumn*, *Dogs and Wolves* and *The Courilof Affair*. She died in 1942.

June 2008

Death of a Red Heroine

by Qiu Xiaolong
Published by Soho Crime (2001)
ISBN 978-1569472422

Description:

The discovery of the body of a beautiful young woman in a canal 20 miles from Shanghai interrupts the housewarming party of Chief Inspector Chen Cao, one of the lucky few to obtain an apartment in the congested city. Cao is a food lover and a poetry lover (he has published a translation of T. S. Eliot, and he is reminded of bits of Chinese poetry even when investigating homicides). Cao is also the head of the Shanghai Police Bureau's Special Cases Squad, Homicide Division. Cao discovers that the victim was a National Model Worker, a role model used for propaganda purposes and recruitment by the Communist Party. The case is politically sensitive, and Cao is urged to do the impossible: solve the case without probing too deeply into the victim's personal life, the details of which may be embarrassing to the Party. The double bind facing the detective is the perfect backdrop for an extended exploration of the conflicts rooted in contemporary China. [ALA Booklist]

About the Author:

Qiu Xiaolong was born in Shanghai. He was selected for membership in the Chinese Writers' Association and published poetry, translations and criticism in China. He has lived in the U.S. since 1989 and has an M.A. and a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from Washington University, where he now teaches Chinese Literature. He lives in St. Louis with his wife and daughter.

July/August 2008

Nervous Conditions

by Tsitsi Dangarembga; translated by K. Anthony Appiah

Published by Seal Press (1988)

ISBN 978-1580050630

Description:

This stunning first novel, set in colonial Rhodesia during the 1960s, centers on the coming of age of a teenage girl, Tambu, and her relationship with her British-educated cousin Nyasha. Tambu, who yearns to be free of the constraints of her rural village, especially the circumscribed lives of the women, thinks her dreams have come true when her wealthy uncle offers to sponsor her education. But she soon learns that the education she receives at his mission school comes with a price. At the school she meets the worldly and rebellious Nyasha, who is chafing under her father's authority. Raised in England, Nyasha is so much a stranger among her own people that she can no longer speak her native language. Tambu can only watch as her cousin, caught between two cultures, pays the full cost of alienation.

Nervous Conditions has become a modern African classic. It was awarded the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 1989.

About the Author:

Tsitsi Dangarembga was born in Zimbabwe. She has also studied filmmaking, graduating with honors from the German Film and Television Academy in Berlin. Her first feature, *Kare Kare Zvako: Mother's Day* premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in January 2005. Dangarembga lives in Harare, Zimbabwe, where she owns a film production company. She is also at work completing her second novel.