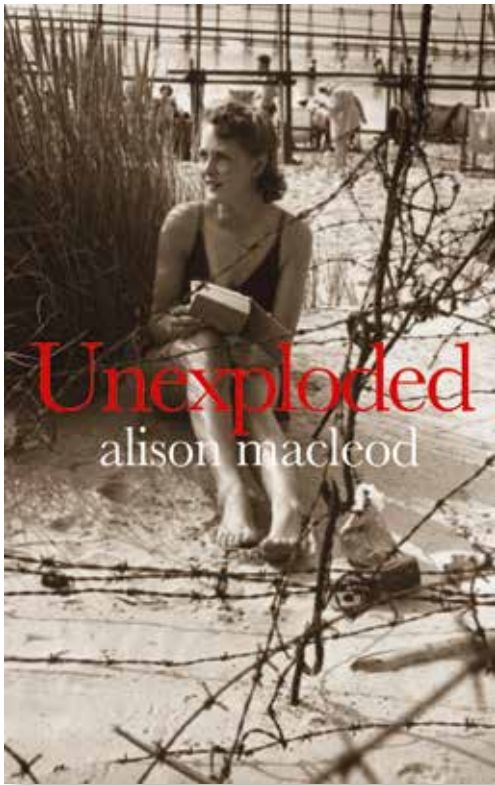




Reader's Guide



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

Unexploded Alison MacLeod

Hamish Hamilton

www.themanbookerprize.com



Innovating to perform



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