

The Best of the Booker

Readers' Guides

Disgrace by J.M. Coetzee

Publisher by Vintage
Paperback RRP £7.99

Winning year 1999

Other shortlisted titles in 1999

Anita Desai – *Fasting, Feasting*
Michael Frayn – *Headlong*
Andrew O'Hagan – *Our Fathers*
Ahdaf Soueif – *The Map of Love*
Colm Toibin – *The Blackwater Lightship*

1999 Judges

Gerald Kaufman (Chair),
Sheena McKay, John Sutherland,
Boyd Tonkin, Natasha Walter



About the author

JM Coetzee was born in South Africa in 1940. He won the 1983 Booker Prize with *Life & Times of Michael K* and then again with *Disgrace* in 1999. His novels include *Waiting for the Barbarians* (awarded the James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 1980) and *The Master of Petersburg* (awarded the Irish Times International Fiction Prize in 1995). In 2003 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. JM Coetzee lives in Australia.

Disgrace

Refusing to apologise after an impulsive affair with a student, David Lurie, a 52 year old professor in Cape Town, seeks refuge on his daughter's farm where a savage and disturbing attack brings into relief the faults in their relationship. Pitching the moral code of political correctness against the values of Romantic poetry, *Disgrace* examines dichotomies both in personal relationships and in the unaccountability of one culture towards another.

Discussion points

- The novel is written in the third person but we see things from David Lurie's viewpoint. Do you think he is the hero of the story?
- Does David become a better human being as a result of his experiences?
- David Lurie is disgraced in the story because he has preyed on a vulnerable student. Do you think the story is about other forms of disgrace?
- How would you describe David's relationship with his daughter Lucy? Does it get stronger or more fraught in the course of the novel?
- We are more aware of David's feelings about Lucy than we are of hers about him. How do you think Lucy would describe David?
- If this novel is telling us about the current reality of South Africa, what is it saying? Is it a very bleak vision?

Other books by JM Coetzee

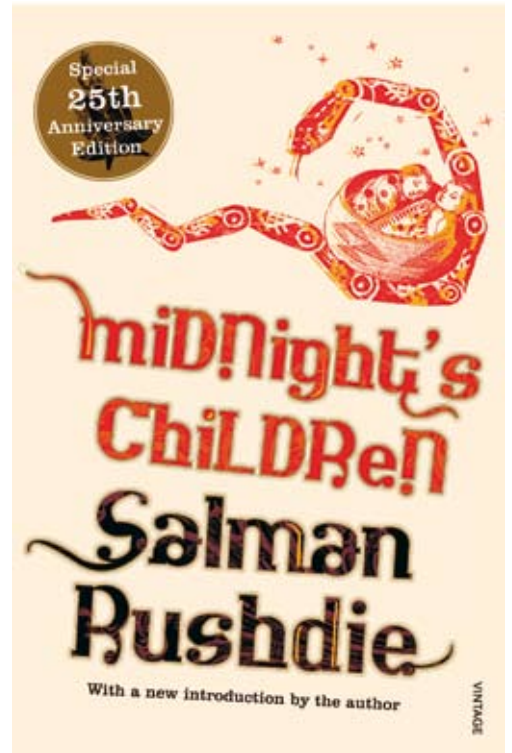
Life & Times of Michael K; *Dusklands*;
In the Heart of the Country;
Waiting for the Barbarians; *Foe*;
Age of Iron; *The Master of Petersburg*;
Boyhood; *Slow Man*; *Diary of a Bad Year*

Further Reading

Sabbath's Theatre – Philip Roth
The House of Mr Biswas – VS Naipaul
The Trial – Franz Kafka
The House Gun – Nadine Gordimer
Dog Heart – Breyten Breytenbach

Useful links

<http://www.encompassculture.com/readinggroups/readersnotes/disgracebyjm.coetzee/>
<http://www.randomhouse.co.uk/offthepage>
<http://www.themanbookerprize.com/prize/books/39>



The Best of the Booker

Readers' Guides

Midnight's Children by Salman Rushdie

Publisher by Vintage
Paperback RRP £7.99

Winning year 1981

Other shortlisted titles in 1981

Molly Keane – *Good Behaviour*
Doris Lessing – *The Sirian Experiments*
Ian McEwan – *The Comfort of Strangers*
Anne Schlee – *Rhine Journey*
Muriel Spark – *Loitering with Intent*
DM Thomas – *The White Hotel*

1981 Judges

Professor Malcolm Bradbury (Chair),
Brain Aldiss, Joan Bakewell,
Samuel Hynes, Hermione Lee



About the author

Salman Rushdie was born in Bombay in June 1947. His second novel, the acclaimed *Midnight's Children*, was published in 1981. It won the Booker Prize for Fiction, the James Tait Black Memorial Prize (for fiction), an Arts Council Writers' Award and the English-Speaking Union Award, and in 1993 was judged to have been the 'Booker of Bookers', the best novel to have won the Booker Prize for Fiction in the award's 25-year history. His fourth novel, *The Satanic Verses* (1988), led to the Iranian leadership issuing a fatwa against him. Despite the fatwa the novel was shortlisted for the Booker Prize and won the Whitbread Novel Award in 1988. Salman Rushdie continued to write and publish books, including a children's book, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990) and was nominated for the Man Booker International Prize in 2007. Salman Rushdie became a KBE in 2007

Midnight's Children

Born at the stroke of midnight on August 15, 1947, at the precise moment of India's independence, the infant Saleem Sinai is celebrated in the press and welcomed by Prime Minister Nehru himself. But this coincidence of birth has consequences Saleem is not prepared for: telepathic powers that connect him with 1,000 other "midnight's children" – all born in the initial hour of India's independence – and an uncanny sense of smell that allows him to sniff out dangers others can't perceive. Inextricably linked to his nation, Saleem's biography is a whirlwind of disasters and triumphs that mirror the course of modern India at its most impossible and glorious.

Discussion points

- Saleem describes himself as 'handcuffed to history'. What do you think that this means, and do you think that this is true of him?
- The prose of *Midnight's Children* has a distinctly filmic quality. Why do you think this is, and what would be the implications of making a film of the novel?
- Saleem makes many errors in his narrative – both accidental and purposeful. Why do you think that he does this, and why does he not bother to correct his mistakes?
- In *Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie uses a technique known as 'magical realism', which involves using magical elements in a realistic setting. An example of this would be the Midnight's Children Conference, who have magical powers but live in an otherwise normal world. Why do you think that Rushdie uses this technique?
- What is Padma's role in the novel?
- Which character do you consider more sympathetic, Shiva or Saleem?

Other books by Salman Rushdie

Grimus; Shame; The Jaguar Smile; The Satanic Verses; Haroun and the Sea of Stories; Imaginary Homelands; The Wizard of Oz; The Moor's Last Sigh; The Ground Beneath Her Feet; Fury; Midnight's Children Screenplay; Shalimar The Clown; The Enchantress of Florence

Further Reading

Ulysses – James Joyce
The God of Small Things – Arundhati Roy
A Suitable Boy – Vikram Seth
White Teeth – Zadie Smith

Useful links

<http://www.contemporarywriters.com/authors/?p=auth87>
<http://www.randomhouse.co.uk/offthepage/guide.htm?command=Search&db=/catalog/main.txt&eqsbndata=0099578514>
<http://www.themanbookerprize.com/prize/books/20>



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PETER
CAREY

Twice winner of The Booker Prize

OSCAR & LUCINDA



The Best of the Booker

Readers' Guides

Oscar and Lucinda by Peter Carey

Publisher Faber and Faber
Paperback RRP £8.99

Winning year 1988

Other shortlisted titles in 1988

Bruce Chatwin – *Utz*

Penelope Fitzgerald –

The Beginning of Spring

David Lodge – *Nice Work*

Salman Rushdie – *The Satanic Verses*

Mariner Warner – *The Lost Father*

1988 Judges

The Rt Hon Michael Foot (chair),

Sebastian Faulks; Philip French

Blake Morrison; Dr Rose Tremain



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About the author

Peter Carey was born in Australia in May 1943. He won the Booker Prize in 1988 for *Oscar and Lucinda* (which has since been made into a film starring Ralph Fiennes) and was shortlisted in 1985 with *Illywhacker*. He won The Man Booker Prize for the second time in 2001 with *True History of the Kelly Gang* and was nominated for the Man Booker International Prize in 2007. His other honours include the Commonwealth Writers' Prize and the Miles Franklin Literary Award. He now lives in New York City where he is the director of the Hunter College programme in creative writing.

Oscar and Lucinda

Oscar is a young English clergyman who has broken with his past and developed a disturbing talent for gambling. A country girl of singular ambition, Lucinda moves to Sydney, driven by dreams of self-reliance and the building of an industrial Utopia. Together this unlikely pair create and are created by the spectacle of mid-nineteenth century Australia.

Discussion points

- What are the similarities between Oscar and Lucinda's circumstances and characters?
- Would Lucinda be appreciated and understood better today than in her own lifetime?
- *Oscar and Lucinda* is filled with innuendo and insinuations and there is rarely a direct sentence. What effect does this indirect style have on the plot and your insight into the characters of Oscar and Lucinda?
- Consider the turning points throughout the novel where Oscar and Lucinda had the chance to make different choices that could have led to a happy ending
- Mrs Williams has a compulsive need to brush her hair, what does this say about her character and why did Peter Carey chose this particular trait to demonstrate his point?

Other books by Peter Carey

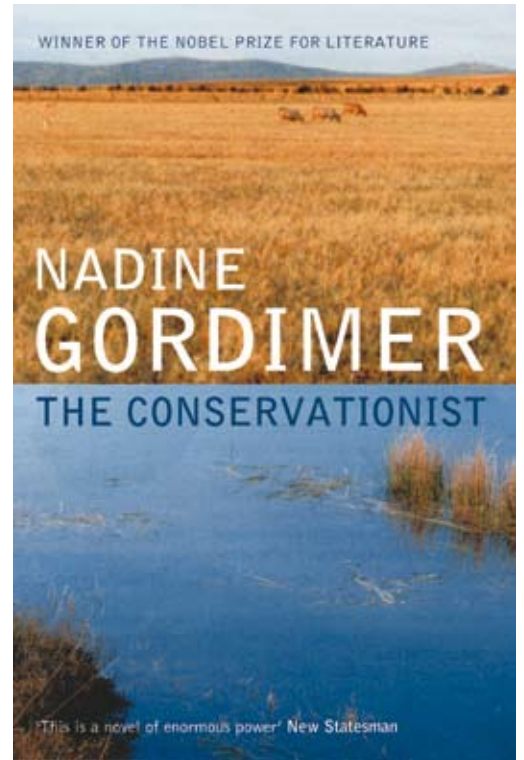
Bliss; *Illywhacker*; *Oscar and Lucinda*; *The Tax Inspector*; *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith*; *Collected Stories*; *The Big Bazoohley*; *Jack Maggs*; *30 Days in Sydney: A Wildly Distorted Account*; *True History of the Kelly Gang*; *My Life as a Fake*; *Wrong about Japan*; *Theft: A Love Story*; *His Illegal Self*

Further Reading

Be Near Me – Andrew O'Hagan
Illywhacker – Peter Carey
The Tin Drum – Gunter Grass
The Riders – Tim Winton

Useful links

<http://www.petercareybooks.com/>
<http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/generalfiction/story/0,6000,418708,00.html>
<http://www.faber.co.uk>
<http://www.themanbookerprize.com/prize/books/27>



The Best of the Booker

Readers' Guides

The Conservationist by Nadine Gordimer

Publisher Bloomsbury
Paperback RRP £7.99

Winning year 1974

Other shortlisted titles in 1974

Stanley Middleton – *Holiday* (joint winner)
Kingsley Amis – *Ending Up*
Beryl Bainbridge – *The Bottle Factory Outing*
CP Snow – *In Their Wisdom*

1974 Judges

Ion Trewin (Chair), AS Byatt, Elizabeth Jane Howard



About the author

Nadine Gordimer was born in Springs, in South Africa in 1923. She was educated at a convent school and spent a year at Witwaterstrand University. Since then, her life has been devoted to her writing. Her first novel, *The Lying Days* (1953), was based largely on her own life and set in her home town. In 1974, her novel *The Conservationist* was joint winner of the Booker Prize for Fiction. Nadine Gordimer has been awarded fifteen honorary degrees from universities in USA, Belgium, South Africa, and from York, Oxford and Cambridge Universities. She was made a Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, and was judge of the Man Booker International Prize in 2007. She was also a founder of the Congress of South African Writers. In 1991 she was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, and in 2007, the Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur.

The Conservationist

Mehring is rich. He has all the privileges and possessions that South Africa has to offer, but his possessions refuse to remain objects. His wife, son, and mistress leave him; his foreman and workers become increasingly indifferent to his stewardship; even the land rises up, as drought, then flood, destroy his farm.

Discussion points

- Mehring has a complex and contradictory relationship with his son, Terry. How does this manifest itself in the novel and why does Mehring feel so much guilt?
- 'Rebirth and mortality' is one of the key themes of *The Conservationist*, how is this symbolised throughout the novel?
- Jacobus is Mehring's right hand man and proves himself to be a capable farmer. Is Jacobus loyal to Mehring and is the relationship more like employer and employee or master and slave?
- Has *The Conservationist*, because it is so closely linked with apartheid, lost its political urgency?
- Does the burial of the dead man found on the farm bring about closure for Mehring?

Other books by Nadine Gordimer

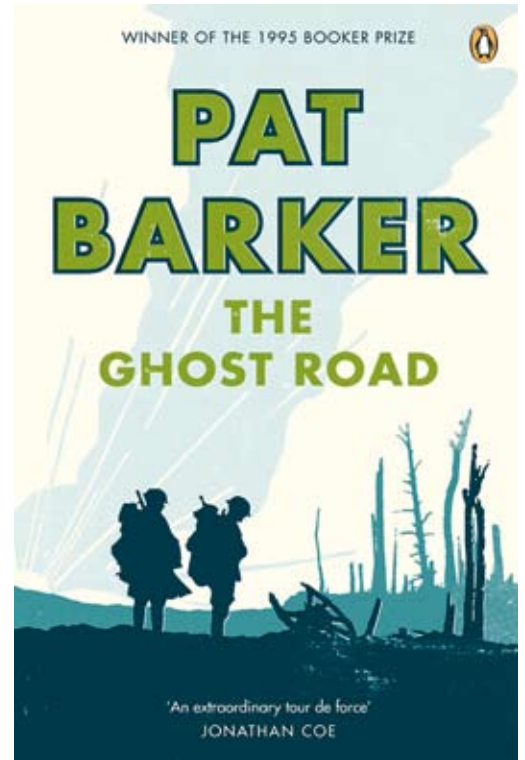
The Lying Days; *The Soft Voice of the Serpent and Other Stories*; *Six Feet of the Country*; *Short Stories*; *A World of Strangers*; *Friday's Footprint*; *Occasion for Loving*; *Not for Publication*, *The Late Bourgeois World*; *A Guest of Honour*; *Livingstone's Companions: Stories*; *Selected Stories*; *Some Monday for Sure*; *Burger's Daughter*; *A Soldier's Embrace*; *July's People*; *Something Out There*; *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*; *Lifetimes: Under Apartheid*; *Reflections of South Africa: Short Stories*; *The Essential Gesture: Writing, Politics and Places*; *My Son's Story*; *Crimes of Conscience: Selected Short Stories*; *Jump and Other Stories*; *Why Haven't You Written?*; *None to Accompany Me*; *Writing and Being Harold*; *Claudia and Their Son Duncan*; *The House Gun*; *Living in Hope and History*; *Notes From Our Century*; *The Pickup*; *Loot and Other Stories*; *Get A Life*; *Beethoven Was One-Sixteenth Black*

Further Reading

In the Heart of the Country – JM Coetzee
In a Free State – VS Naipaul

Useful links

www.bloomsbury.com/nadinegordimer
<http://www.contemporarywriters.com/authors/?p=auth03D251553012635618>
<http://www.themanbookerprize.com/prize/archive/8>



The Best of the Booker

Readers' Guides

The Ghost Road by Pat Barker

Publisher Penguin

Paperback RRP £7.99

Winning year 1995

Other shortlisted titles in 1995

Justin Cartwright – *In Every Face I Meet*

Salman Rushdie – *The Moor's Last Sigh*

Barry Unsworth – *The Morality Play*

Tim Winton – *The Riders*

1995 Judges

George Walden MP (Chair), Kate Kellaway,
Peter Kemp, Adam Mars-Jones, Ruth Rendell



About the author

Pat Barker was born in Yorkshire in May 1943. Her first book, *Union Street* (1982) won the Fawcett Society Book Prize, while her second, *Blow Your House Down* (1984), was adapted for the stage by Sarah Daniels in 1994. Her trilogy of novels about the First World War, which began with *Regeneration* in 1991, was partly inspired by her grandfather's experiences fighting in the trenches in France. *Regeneration* was made into a film in 1997 starring Jonathan Pryce and James Wilby. *The Eye in the Door* (1993), the second novel in the trilogy, won the Guardian Fiction Prize, and *The Ghost Road* (1995), the final novel in the series, won the Booker Prize for Fiction. Pat Barker was awarded a CBE in 2000. Pat Barker lives in Durham.

The Ghost Road

1918, and Billy Prior is in France once again. A real test case for the 'shell-shock' therapies practised at Craiglockhart War Hospital where, with Wilfred Owen, he was a patient. Prior experiences a late-summer idyll, some days of perfect beauty, before the final battles in a war that has destroyed most of his generation. In London, Prior's psychologist, William Rivers, tends to his new patients, more young men whose lives and minds have been shattered. And remembers the primitive society on Eddystone Island where he studied as an anthropologist before the war.

Discussion points

- Other than the fact that he does not know what else to do with his life, why does Billy Prior return to the Front for the fourth time?
- 'Struggle' is one of the key themes of *The Ghost Road*, consider how the novel portrays the internal and external struggles of Billy Prior, Dr Rivers, Njiru and the villagers and the patients in Dr Rivers' care.
- World War I France and Melanesia are compared throughout the novel, what parallels can be drawn between the war in France and the 'war' on Eddystone?
- Dr Rivers is an enigma; more time is spent exploring his character through flashbacks of his work on Eddystone than his present life. Does Dr Rivers know what he wants from life, did he prefer his life on Eddystone or at home in Britain?
- What is the impact on the reader of flipping the narration back and forth between the first and the third person?

Other books by Pat Barker

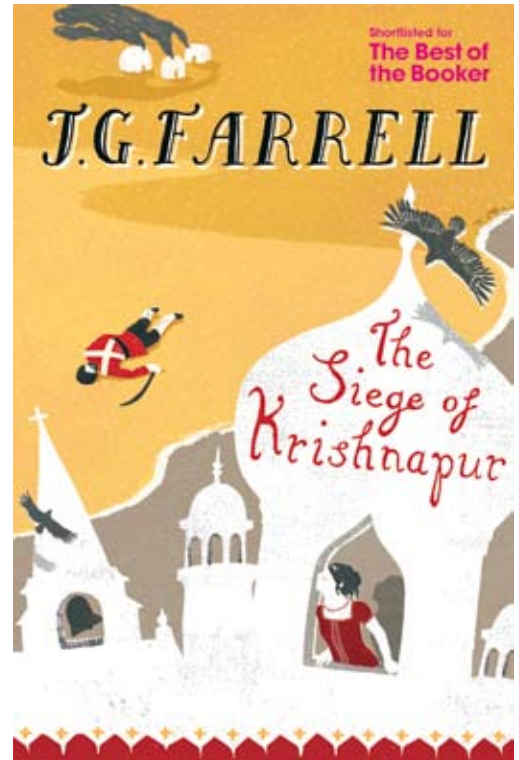
Union Street; *Blow Your House*; *The Century's Daughter*; *The Man Who Wasn't There*; *Regeneration*; *The Eye in the Door*; *The Ghost Road*; *Another World*; *Border Crossing*; *Double Vision*; *Life Class*

Further Reading

Penguin Book of First World War Prose – John Glover and Jon Silkin
Birdsong – Sebastian Faulks
Three Day Road – Joseph Boyden
All Quiet on the Western Front – Erich Maria Remarque

Useful links

http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/generalfiction/story/0,,459394,00.html#article_continue
<http://www.contemporarywriters.com/authors/?p=auth15>
<http://readers.penguin.co.uk/nf/Search/QuickSearchProc/1,,the%20ghost%20road,00.html?id=the%20ghost%20road>
<http://www.themanbookerprize.com/prize/books/35>



The Best of the Booker

Readers' Guides

The Siege of Krishnapur by J. G. Farrell

Publisher Orion

Paperback RRP £7.99

Winning year 1973

Other shortlisted titles in 1973

Beryl Bainbridge – *The Dressmaker*

Elizabeth Mavor – *The Green Equinox*

Iris Murdoch – *The Black Prince*

1973 Judges

Karl Miller (Chair), Mary McCarthy, Edna O'Brien



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About the author

JG Farrell was born in Liverpool in January 1935. In 1956 he went to study at Brasenose College, Oxford; it was while there he contracted polio. He drew heavily on his experience for his second novel, *The Lung* (1965). His novel, *Troubles* (1970), the first in the Empire trilogy, won the Faber Memorial Prize in 1971. A film version of *Troubles* was made for British television in 1988. The second in the Empire trilogy, *The Siege of Krishnapur* (1973) won the Booker Prize. JG Farrell died in 1979.

The Siege of Krishnapur

India, 1857 – the year of the Great Mutiny, when Muslim soldiers turned into bloody rebellion on their British overlords. The Siege of Krishnapur is set in an isolated Victorian outpost on the subcontinent. Rumours of strife filter in from afar and yet the members of the colonial community remains confident of their military and above all, moral superiority. But when they find themselves under actual siege, the true character of their dominion – at once brutal, blundering, and wistful – is soon revealed.

Discussion points

- Do you agree with a recent review of *The Siege of Krishnapur* that said “A novel set in India in 1857, the year of the Mutiny, in which the points of view of the Indians are almost nonexistent, would be unlikely to win the Man Booker prize these days.”
- To what extent do you think that Fleury’s character is a symbol of the changing times in which he lives?
- What parallels can be drawn, as the siege progresses, between the behaviour of the domesticated dogs and the British Community members?
- *The Siege of Krishnapur* has a more formal style of writing compared to that of many contemporary novels, with long sentences and descriptive passages. Did this have an impact on your approach to reading the novel?
- What does the JG Farrell feel about bureaucracy? How does he demonstrate his feelings?

Other books by JG Farrell

A Man From Elsewhere
The Lung
A Girl in the Head
Troubles
The Singapore Grip
The Hill Station

Further Reading

Staying On – Paul Scott
Ladysmith – Giles Foden
White Moghuls – William Dalrymple

Useful links

<http://www.themanbookerprize.com/prize/books/11>