



# YULETIDINGS

## Over The Moon

The Booker prize is the literary world's symbol of prestige and wealth. Christmas shopping is geared around the short-listed titles and bookshop displays reflect the publisher's obsession with the prize. Nicci Gerrard reviews the short-listed books below and, with Colin Hughes, guides you through the new novels to buy at Christmas.

'I'm writing a history of the world' is the arresting opening sentence of Penelope Lively's **Moon Tiger**, winner of this year's Booker prize. Claudia is egocentric, admirable and irritating; a successful author and journalist, she has always wanted to write: 'The history of the world as selected by Claudia; fact and fiction, myth and evidence, images and documents.' Her opening remark is spoken as she lies dying in hospital, and its ballooning audacity is immediately deflated by her nurse's jolly and patronising: 'That's quite a thing to be doing, isn't it?' But it nevertheless points out the ambitious nature of **Moon Tiger**.

And perhaps this is the one common feature of the otherwise very different six books that were on the 1987 Booker shortlist: they all have large themes. Penelope Lively's novel is a good example of their conscious seriousness. Although two of her previous novels (**The Road To Lichfield** and **According To Mark**) were Booker shortlisted, they were always outside runners. While obsessed with history, they seemed tame when placed alongside the massive sweep of, say, JG Ballard's **Empire Of The Sun** – although that year neither Ballard nor Lively won; the spoils went to a book that dealt with the poignant ordinariness of one woman's life – **Hotel Du Lac**.

And the other five Booker books, (with the exception perhaps of Nina Bawden's compelling and beautifully crafted but more domesticated **Circles Of Deceit**), place themselves firmly in the camp of 'serious literature'. Iris Murdoch has always dealt in huge preoccupations, bringing classic absolutes – the nature of moral-

ity and of good and evil – to bear upon the snarls of the modern world; in **The Book And The Brotherhood**, Murdoch adds to her familiar concerns her fear for the future of our decaying democracy and declining civilisation. It has been 20 years since the distinguished African author of **Things Fall Apart**, Chinua Achebe, has published a novel. **Anthills Of The Savannah** is a brave and anxious account of a West African country state where power has corrupted ideals and only fools and flatterers survive; Achebe, in telling the history of a country, draws a world of savage disenchantment.

Brian Moore's political thriller, **The Colour Of Blood**, eloquently questions the bonds between religion and power; Ackroyd's **Chatterton** powerfully recreates and remakes history through its evocation of an 18th century poet, and a famous friendship.

The six shortlisted books were all certainly worthy candidates for the prize and their differences fuelled the Booker fever. We had the favourites and the long odds; the fans of one camp or another. What the Booker prize lacked this year, however, was the excitement of a rank outsider.

Penelope Lively's triumph may be a surprise – many people favoured the massive and complex intelligence of **Chatterton**, the political vigour of **Anthills Of The Savannah**, Nina Bawden's wayward charm, or Brian Moore's and Iris Murdoch's troubled contemporaneity, but the surprise is not shocking.

Her voice, newly assertive and commanding though it is, does not disturb the mannered calm of the literary dinner party. ●



## Christmas Reading

The Booker shortlist always arouses a storm of complaints about what was left out – this year the list is longer than ever. Here is an unashamedly subjective selection of Booker-worthy novels and other fiction published this year.

**The Child In Time** by Ian McEwan (Cape, £10.95) deserves the criticism of being 'writerly' contrived. But, however 'set' the set pieces are, it is a plane above his previous work, and deals well with new father temperament, while exploring the spiritualism of temporal physics and the logical social consequences of Thatcherism post-1990.

Why Maureen Duffy remains a minority discovery is hard to understand. This year came **Change** (Methuen, £10.95), in which a mosaic of voices narrates the courage, sacrifice and bloody waste of World War Two, showing how the century was recast by its violent transformations in the real and perceived lives of individual people.

**The Passion** by Jeanette Winterson (£10.95) is the Bloomsbury that *should* have been on the Booker shortlist: a passionate, grave and fine novel. **Trust** by Mary Flanagan (Bloomsbury, £10.95) is the book that deservedly launched the house.

Bloomsbury's other best offering is among their most recent. **Presumed Innocent** by Scott Turow (£10.95) was hyped in the US, and expensively bought, but it stands the test: court room drama, inner-city cop subculture, and a good whodunnit twist – all in the tough-sensitive prose of the new American man.

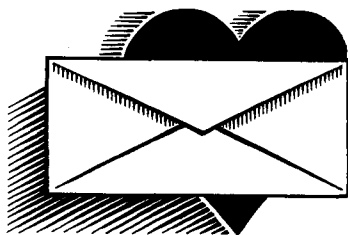
At least Nadine Gordimer has enjoyed the Booker acclaim once before – **Sport Of Nature** (Cape, £10.95) is the brutal, complex history of South Africa and the desperation and

courage of those who fight apartheid told with rare lucidity and eventual optimism. Emma Tennant is among the most flagrantly versatile of modern writers: **The House Of Hospitality** (Viking, £10.95) is a gleeful and witty scrutiny of the lives of the upper classes, and their exclusiveness and tenacity in the face of change.

Among several impressive short story collections, **Bluebeard's Egg** by Margaret Atwood (Cape, £10.95) stands out: a compilation that evokes delicious pleasures and sickening mishaps. **A Book Of Spells** by Sara Maitland (Methuen, £9.95) proves warm, unexpected and humorous. The eminently buyable **Virago Book Of Ghost Stories**, edited by Richard Dalby (£10.95) includes pieces by Angela Carter, Elizabeth Bowen, Mary Shelley, Fay Weldon, Mrs Oliphant... and is strategically published just before Christmas.

Finally, since few of us can afford to flatter their friends with costly hardbacks, even in the giving spirit of Christmas, here are some of the impressive novels that have been released in paperback for the first time this year. **Perfume** by Patrick Suskind (King Penguin); **Innocence** by Penelope Fitzgerald; **Staring At The Sun** by Julian Barnes; **La Douleur** by Marguerite Duras; **The Sportswriter** by Richard Ford (all Flamingo); **The Handmaid's Tale** by Margaret Atwood (Virago); **The House Of The Spirits** by Isabel Allende (Black Swan); **Postcards From The Edge** by Carrie Fisher (Picador); **Death Comes Staccato** by Gillian Slovo (The Women's Press); **A Taste For Death** by PD James (Sphere); **Gabriel's Lament** by Paul Bailey (Penguin), and **A Perfect Spy** by John le Carré (Coronet). Any one of those will give a memorable meaning to the dead days between Boxing Day and New Year's Eve. ●

Illustration: Clifford Harper



## M·T·H·E·A·R·T·S

For love, lust or laid-back companionship. To those according to their need. 50p per word. All entries run for two issues.

● **Divorced man**, attractive 39, graduate social sciences, own home. Interested in books, politics. Seeks intelligent, sincere woman (25-40), for possible permanent relationship. Children welcome. S. West. Box 104.

● **Stimulus** (Intellectual and Physical) wanted by Gay Man (40, Vegetarian, Non-smoker) in Midlands. My interests are 'The Scene', Arts and Outdoors. Box 105.

● **Socialist male**, 29, sincere, easy-going, placid, non-sexist, tired of meeting the wrong people, seeks like-minded female. Box 106.

● **Woman**: physically robust, active; emotionally open, generous; intellectually intense, able; personally autonomous, independent. Seeks man: ditto. She; egalitarian; employed; ex-parent; ex-wife; 49; graduate; home/food/classical music/poetry lover; libertarian; mountain-walker; optimist; political (very); writer. And he? Box 107.

● **W/S Yorkshire man**, 31, writer, left-wing but not dogmatic, paralysed but still sane, still okay, own house/car, eater out, theatre-goer, seeks woman, 20-40. Photo please - will be returned. Box 108.

● **2 independent women**, 28, single-parents, seek independent, socialist males 28-35 for friendship. Hertfordshire. Photo Box 109.

● **Attractive man 37**. Divorced, no ties. Graduate. Seeks intelligent female 25-35, for possible relationship. Children O.K. London/Bath. M4 corridor. Box 110.

● **Gay male (28)**, left-wing bit of fluff. Has safety-pin, will travel (mainly London). Seeks others for safe fun. Photo apprec. Will return. Box 111.

● **Female**: 31, quiet yet humorous wide-ranging interests. Seeks company of intelligent, caring male. Birmingham/W. Midlands. Box 112.

● **Male, 39**, no ties, quiet but with an adventurous streak seeks lovely unconventional female. Interested arts, walking, travel. West Yorkshire. Box 113.

● **Male, 24**, non-macho, discerning yet inexperienced, dreams unfulfilled, politics Green, offers friendship/relationship to woman 19/29 in south-eastern Midlands. Box 114.

● **Happily married bisexual female** looking to re-discover her woman loving instincts after years of neglect, seeks similar for easy-going friendship/relationship/dalliance. No male involvement, just we two and the odd weekend away from it all. I am 39, fit and into books, walks, counselling, dining, dancing. Photo appreciated. Box 115.

● **Like to write?** Write to me, a West-German socialist female (24), wide-ranging interests and no prejudice. Box 116.

● **Male 46**, seeks attractive, intelligent, black-stockinged female for intellectual and physical satisfaction. Lichfield (Staffs). Box 117.

# C·L·A·S·S·I·F·I·E·D

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● **Interesting**, caring, politically active, male graduate, 41, non-smoker - interests include food, cinema, cycling - seeks warm, attractive, independent woman. Photo appreciated. West Midlands/Anywhere within two hours. Box 118.

● **Loose-limbed male** (30) seeks articulate female for joint enjoyment. Manchester area. Box 119.

● **Socialist woman**, 38, divorced, two children, mature student, offers friendship to unconventional, smoking, drinking, non-vegetarian male, who likes books, films, politics, women. Photo please, West Midlands. Box 120.

● **Active bi-sexual woman**, 22 seeks fast-burning heterosexual woman for immediate conversion. Letter, photo, and phone number. Box 121.

● **Male**, 42, Kent and London area seeks female socialist; likes Dylan, Irish music and history for friendship. Box 122.

● **S. Wales Female** fifty, warm, caring environmentalist. 5'5" robust build. Seeks sincere like minded partner. Box 123.

● **Male** (28), radical, anti-capitalist green, unconventional life/outlook, wide interests, political/philosophical, but hedonistic, open, friendly, not unattractive. Box 124.

● **Gay male**, 29, inexperienced, seeks similar young guy. Photo appreciated. Croydon area. Box 125.

● **Woman 34**, seeks travelling companion, China/India/U.S.S.R? Leave Autumn 1988 for 6 months? Possibly cycling. Box 126.

● **Woman**, 43, values her friends and independence but would appreciate sharing, loving comradeship with emotionally and politically mature man, 40-50 (approx). London area preferred. Box 127.

● **Lively woman** in stagnant social scene (W. Midlands) seeks man with sense of fun and adventure. Why not? Box 128.



## M·T·H·O·M·E·S

● **Interested in non-violence**, meditation, simple living, feminism? Mixed community seeks new members. Write to: Enquirers Secretary, Some Friends Community, Bethnal Green Road, London E2 6DG.

● **Clays Lane** is a large, multi-racial, single person housing co-op looking for new members. Welcome gays, heteros, lesbians and all creeds. Write: Membership Secretary c/o 11, Taylor Court, Clays Lane Housing Co-op, Clays Lane, Stratford, London E15 2EL, including S.A.E.

● **1/2 people needed** to share large Victorian house in Birmingham. We are a long established feminist based mixed group committed to creating a supportive base from which to pursue different work and interests. 021 449 4713.

● **Room** in luxury city flat for commuter (Mon-Fri). Reasonable rent. Phone 01-222 8877 (Day). Ask for Pat.

● **G.C. Services**: Paint, Decorate, Renovate and Maintain Properties. For Free Estimate phone 01-692 0270.



## H·O·L·I·D·A·Y·S

● **Journey Latin America** Low cost flights, holiday journeys, 3-6 weeks. JLA, 16 Devonshire Road, London W4 2HD. 01-747 3108.

● **Women's Group Treks in Nepal**. Departures Xmas. SAE for details and 1988 Programme: Adventure Trekking, 40 Queens Park Court, Edinburgh, EH8 7DX.

● **Winter breaks**, cheap rates, BB&E. Vegetarians, hamsters, children, smokers, all welcome. Near the sea. Paignton SW Devon. Call Maureen on 521793.

● **Woman**, 34, seeks travelling companion. China/India/USSR? Leave Autumn 1988 for 6 months. Possibly cycling?

● **Woman**, 23, seeks travelling companion, S.E. Asia, leave Feb 1988. Box 1.

## M·T·R·E·M·O·V·A·L·S

● **Women's moves**. Reliable, friendly, professional moves. Free quotes: 01-733 3519 or 400 8446.

● **Transport of Delight**. Local and long distance (01-708 4718).

● **South London Vans and drivers**. Lutons. Friendly service. Insured. Concessions. 01-767 1755/01-670 0154.

## E·V·E·N·T·S

● **New Year in Sofia and Music Festival**, 28 December 1987 to 4 January 1988. Price £289.50 including two concerts, New Year Gala including wine, sightseeing, bed and breakfast, first class hotel. From Heathrow. Famous opera singers and musicians. No visa required. Immediate booking essential as numbers limited. Closing date 25 November 1987. Further details from The British-Bulgarian Friendship Society, c/o Finsbury Library, 245 St John Street, London EC1V 4NB. Tel: 837 2304.

● **Don't miss 7 DAYS GRAND XMAS BAZAAR** at the CAMDEN CENTRE (old St. Pancras Town Hall) Bidborough Street, Saturday 12th Dec. 10.30am-4pm. Books new and second hand. Home made jams, Batik and Patchwork. Prints and Plants and lots more. Home made meals served in the refreshments rooms.

● **London Communist Students** We meet every Wednesday at 6pm, 16 St John Street, London EC1 to plot revolutionary activities. Interested? Contact Mary (01-251 4406) or come along.

● **"Marxism Tomorrow."** An educational event for communist (or other) students interested in getting to grips with Marxist theory and its relevance to the late 1980s. To be held January 7-10 in Birmingham. To reserve your place, contact Mary Browning or Monty Johnstone, 16 St John Street, London EC1M 4AY (01-251 4406).

● **Teeside MT readers group** meeting, Thursday 26th Nov in the Queen's, Jylkes St., Middlesbrough, 8pm to discuss the articles on the Soviet Union in the November issue. All welcome.

● **Islington: "Images and the Left"**. With speaker Stuart Hall. Tuesday December 8, 7.30pm at Red Rose Club, Seven Sisters Rd., London N7. Organised by Marxism Today in association with N. Islington CP.

● **Wandsworth Marxism Today Discussion Group**: meeting Monday 25 January, 8pm, 24 Bryne Rd, Balham, London SW12. Discussion on lead articles. Phone 01-675 0808.

● **"A Vision for Wales"**, a day of discussions and workshops, Sat 5 December 1987, 10am-4.30pm., Community Centre, Blaenau Ffestiniog. Speakers: Dafydd Elis Thomas MP; Merfyn Jones, Labour Party, lecturer and author, Meri Huws, lecturer-socialist-feminist; Emyr Williams Plaid Cymru; Mary Winter CP; Gill Evans, Plaid spokesperson on international affairs; Selwyn Williams, lecturer; Bob Cole, Sec. CND, Cymru CP; Brig Oubridge. Organised by the Blaenau Ffestiniog branches of the CPGB and Cyndeithas yr Iaith, in association with Marxism Today. For more information phone (0766) 831356/830000.

● **Living with Aids**. A national conference is being organised in 1988 by a group of Lesbian and Gay Communists, in association with Marxism Today. If you would like to help, contact Linda Arch: Tel 01-708 1204.

● **Haringey: "Glasnost and After"**. Discussion with Mary Browning, member of the recent CP delegation to USSR. Wednesday December 9, 7.30pm. Stroud Green Community Centre, Stapleton Hall Road, London N4. Details phone Arthur, 348-8915. Organised by Haringey Marxism Today Discussion Group.

● **Birmingham: "Opening up the Welfare State"**. Speakers include Robin Cook MP and Anne Lee. Tuesday January 26, 7.30pm. Key Books, 136 Digbeth, Birmingham B5. Details 021-643-8081. Organised by Birmingham Marxism Today Group.