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Suggested Reads for Reading Groups

The following novels are all available in multiple copies through your local library. We update the list annually, so please let us know if you read a book you think should be included. You may post your review/notes of reading group discussion on the Libraries West website, or ask for a reader review card at your library.

The books are listed in alphabetical order by author and cover a range of genres and styles. Many groups are enjoying working their way through it. This is just a small selection of what's available, most of the authors have written more books. The majority are also available in audio and Large Print format. The book details have been extracted from publisher and online bookseller information. For further ideas it's also worth trying www.whichbook.net and also publications such as The Book Club Bible.

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi Half of a Yellow Sun (433 pages)

Set in Nigeria during the 1960s, at the time of a vicious civil war in which a million people died and thousands were massacred in cold blood. The three main characters in the novel are swept up in the violence during these turbulent years. This extraordinary novel is about Africa in a wider sense: about moral responsibility, about the end of colonialism, about ethnic allegiances, about class and race; and about the ways in which love can complicate all of these things.

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi Purple Hibiscus (307 pages)

When Nigeria begins to fall apart under a military coup, Kambili's father, involved in mysterious ways with the unfolding political crisis, sends Kambili and her brother away to their aunt's. Here she discovers love and a life – dangerous and heathen – beyond the confines of her father's authority.

Adiga, Aravind The White tiger (336 pages)

Balam Halwai is the White Tiger - the smartest boy in his village. His family is too poor for him to afford for him to finish school and he has to work in a teashop, breaking coals and wiping tables. But Balam gets his break when a rich man hires him as a chauffeur, and takes him to live in Delhi.

Allende, Isabel Daughter of Fortune (399 pages)

A magnificent sweeping tale from the international bestselling author of 'The House of the Spirits'. Set in Anglophile Chile and Goldrush California during the middle years of the nineteenth century, this magnificent romance tells the story of English founding Eliza Sommers who grows up in the bustling entrepot of Valparaiso. Eliza is a spirited, sparky and ambitious romantic who becomes embroiled in a forbidden love affair with the charismatic but capricious Joaquin Andieta. When he disappears suddenly for California, and the promise of riches that rumours of gold strikes have brought him, she can but follow after him!

Ali, Monica

Brick Lane (512 pages)

A tale of two Muslim sisters living out their own personal tragedies, one in a tower block in London's East End and the other in a Bangladeshi village.

Anam, Tahmima

A Golden Age (288 pages)

In the spring of 1971, Rehana Haque is throwing a party for her two children. What she does not know is that, after today, their lives will change forever. For this is East Pakistan, a country erupting into war. As she struggles to keep her children safe, Rehana will find herself faced with a heartbreaking dilemma. Set against the backdrop of the Bangladesh War of Independence, A Golden Age is an unforgettable story of revolution, hope and unexpected heroism, and of the great lengths that can be traversed in the name of love.

Atkinson, Kate

Behind the scenes at the museum (382 pages)

Ruby was born while her father was in the pub. Her mother, Bunty, had never wanted to marry him, and dreamt of being swept off to America by a romantic hero, but instead, was stuck in a flat with her three children. This is the family's story.

Atkinson, Kate

Case Histories (304 pages)

The perfectly judged prose that distinguished Human Croquet is fully in evidence in Case Histories, and a new frisson here comes from the genre-stretching that Atkinson is indulging in. Those deluded into thinking they've picked up something resembling a standard private eye novel will find something much more rich and strange; Atkinson goes from strength to strength.

Atwood, Margaret

The Blind Assassin (641 pages)

Even at the age of 82, Iris lives in the shadow cast by her younger sister Laura. Now poor and trying to cope with a failing body, Iris reflects on her far from exemplary life, in particular the events surrounding her sister's tragic death.

Atwood, Margaret

The Handmaid's Tale (320 pages)

The Republic of Gilead offers Offred only one function: to breed. If she deviates she will, like all dissenters, be hanged or sent out to die slowly of radiation sickness. But even a repressive state cannot obliterate desire – neither Offred's nor that of the two men on which her future hangs. A thought-provoking look at the future of women in a society of corruption and pain.

Atwood, Margaret

Moral Disorder (272 pages)

A series of interconnected stories that trace the course of a life and also the lives intertwined with it — those of parents, of siblings, of children, of friends, of enemies, of teachers, and even of animals. As in a photograph album, time is measured in sharp, clearly observed moments. The '30s, the '40s, the '50s, the '60s, the '70s, the '80s, the '90s, and the present — all are here. By turns funny, lyrical, incisive, tragic, earthy, shocking, and deeply personal, Moral Disorder displays Atwood's celebrated storytelling gifts and unmistakable style to their best advantage.

Atwood, Margaret

Oryx and Crake (374 pages)

Snowman may be the last man on earth, the only survivor of an unnamed apocalypse. Once he was Jimmy, a member of the scientific elite; now he lives in bitter isolation and loneliness, his only pleasure the watching of old films on DVD. His mind moves backwards and forwards through time, from an agonising trawl through memory to relive the events that led up to sudden catastrophe. Gradually the reasons behind the disaster begin to unfold as Snowman undertakes a perilous journey to the remains of the bubble-dome complex where the sinister Paradise Project collapsed and near-global devastation began.

Austen, Jane

Pride and Prejudice (350 pages on average)

Elizabeth Bennet is at first determined to dislike Mr. Darcy, who is handsome and eligible, if not arrogant and conceited. His involvement in her sister's relationship with his friend Bingley does not further his cause. In the sparkling comedy of manners that follows, Jane Austen shows the folly of judging by first impressions, and evokes the friendships, gossip and snobberies of provincial middle-class life.

Aw, Tash

The Harmony Silk Factory (362 pages)

The love story of four people, set against the turbulent backdrop and political rumblings of 1930s Malaysia.

Bainbridge, Beryl

According to Queeney (244 pages)

In the 1770's and 1780's Dr Johnson, having completed his life's work, is running an increasingly chaotic life. Torn between his strict morality and his undeclared passion for the widow of an old friend, he is revealed here in all his wit and glory.

Baldacci, David

Last man standing (556 pages)

An FBI agent in the Hostage and Rescue Team becomes the only survivor of a particularly brutal ambush of his squad. An investigation takes place to discover why he – and no one else – was spared.

Banks, Lynne Reid

The L-shaped room (320 pages)

Jane Graham has left the theatre after a scandal and returned to the home of her narrow-minded father. Always disapproving, he throws her out when he learns that she is pregnant.

Banks, Iain

The Algebraist (544 pages)

In *The Algebraist*, Iain Banks returns to spectacular space opera but not to his familiar Culture universe. His new setting is a complex, war-torn galaxy with an entirely different history going back almost to the Big Bang...

Banks, Iain

The Steep Approach to Garbadale (400 pages)

Alban McGill, a member of the Wopuld family, has sold most of his shares in the family firm, and resigned from his job in the company to become a forester, but has had to retire on medical grounds because of white finger. He is distracted from affairs of business by his relations with his family and with his teenage love, his first cousin Sophie.

Banks, Iain

The Wasp Factory (184 pages)

Frank, no ordinary 16 yr old, lives with his father outside a remote Scottish village. His elder brother Eric is confined to a psychiatric hospital. When news comes of Eric's escape Frank has to prepare the ground for his brother's inevitable return.

Banville, John

The Sea (263 pages)

When Max Morden returns to the coastal town where he spent a holiday in his youth he is both escaping from a recent loss and confronting a distant trauma. The Grace family appeared that long ago summer as if from another world. Drawn to the Grace twins, Chloe and Myles, Max soon finds himself entangled in their lives, which are as seductive as they are unsettling. What ensues will haunt him for the rest of his years and shape everything that is to follow...

Barclay, Linwood

No time for goodbye (448 pages)

You wake up. Your house is empty. Your family has disappeared...

Barnes, Julian

Arthur and George (352 pages)

With a mixture of detailed research and vivid imagination, Julian Barnes brings to life not just this long-forgotten case, but also the inner lives of these two very different men.

Barnes, Julian

Love, etc (249 pages)

Revisits Stuart, Gillian and Oliver (from his previous novel Talking it over), using the same intimate technique of allowing the characters to speak directly to the reader, to whisper their secrets and to argue for their version of the truth.

Barry, Sebastian

A Long Long Way (292 pages)

The story of Willie and his regiment, the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, it tells of the divided loyalties felt by many Irish soldiers fighting in the Great War in the wake of the Easter Rising.

Barry, Sebastian

The Secret Scripture (320 pages)

Nearing her one-hundredth birthday, Roseanne McNulty faces an uncertain future, as the Roscommon Regional Mental hospital where she's spent the best part of her adult life prepares for closure. Over the weeks leading up to this upheaval, she talks often with her psychiatrist Dr Grene, and their relationship intensifies and complicates.

Bennett, Ronan

Havoc, in its Third Year (244 pages)

England in the 1630s: a difficult country in turbulent times. John Brigge is a governor, a man who has kept away from intrigues to work on his farm and be with his wife, now expecting their first child. He is also - secretly - a Catholic. When he is called to settle the murder of a newborn child, Brigge finds himself drawn into matters he wants to avoid. Katherine Shay is accused of killing her baby. Brigge wants to wait for more evidence. The ascendant puritan faction, however, demand her immediate hanging. Brigge suspects their haste has little to do with their talk of justice. What are they hiding? And does he really want to know? In the background, a rebellion is brewing.

Benson, Richard

The Farm (229 pages)

A warm, funny, moving and unsentimental tale of one family and the English countryside.

Billington, Rachel (local author) Lies and loyalties (352 pages)

An emotional, gritty family drama exploring the power of frustrated love and intense sibling rivalry - from the acclaimed author of One Summer and A Woman's Life.

Bingham, Charlotte (local author) The Enchanted (464 pages)

When Kathleen finds a mare in foal, despite the fact that she and her father can barely afford to feed her, they take her in. Tragically the mare dies, leaving an orphan that they name The Enchanted. Rory James and his father take a chance on the little horse in the hope of improving the fortune of their run-down racing yard.

Boycott, Rosie (local author) Our Farm (320 pages)

Presents an account of life in the country. This book deals with Rosie who finds recovery in the rhythms of the seasons and the complex patterns of the natural world. It talks about Rosie who reflects deeply on the intimate relationship with nature and, ultimately, its power to heal.

Boyd, William

Restless (325 pages)

It is 1939. Eva Delectorskaya is a beautiful 28-year-old Russian émigré living in Paris. As war breaks out she is recruited for the British Secret Service by Lucas Romer, a mysterious Englishman, and under his tutelage she learns to become the perfect spy, to mask her emotions and trust no one, including those she loves most. Since the war, Eva has carefully rebuilt her life as a typically English wife and mother. But once a spy, always a spy. Now she must complete one final assignment, and this time Eva can't do it alone: she needs her daughter's help

Bradley, James

The Resurrectionist (352 pages)

It is London, 1826. Leaving behind his father's tragic failures, Gabriel Swift arrives to study with Edwin Poll, the greatest of the city's anatomists. It is his chance to find advancement by making a name for himself. But, instead, he finds himself drawn to his master's nemesis, Lucan, the most powerful of the city's resurrectionists.

Bragg, Melvyn

Crossing the lines (490 pages)

Continuing the story of Joe from "A Son of War", this is the story of the rapid changes in his life from working-class Wigton to the rarefied atmosphere of Oxford as he begins his studies there.

Bronte, Charlotte

Jane Eyre (570 pages on average)

Although many were shocked by its depiction of a woman's bold and passionate search for independence and love on her own terms, Jane Eyre was an immediate success when it appeared in 1847 and has remained very popular. The orphaned Jane survives a harsh and lonely childhood unbroken in spirit. As governess at Thornfield Hall she finds love with her employer, Mr. Rochester, but the discovery of his terrible secret forces her to follow her moral convictions, even if it means giving up her chance of happiness.

Brooks, Geraldine

March (280 pages)

March explores the passions between a man and a woman, the tenderness of parent and child and the life-changing power of an ardently held belief

Buchan, Elizabeth

That certain age (400 pages)

Barbara's life revolves around her home and keeping her husband, airline pilot Ryder, happy. Then she meets the young and charming Alexander who reawakens a desire within her that she thought had long been buried.

Burke, Richard

Frozen (264 pages)

When his childhood friend, Verity, is found at the foot of Beachy Head, barely alive, Harry's life is thrown into turmoil. He can't accept that she would try to kill herself. With the help of his friend, Adam, and Verity's business partner, Sam, he begins piecing together the last few weeks of Verity's life.

Burke, Richard

Redemption (240 pages)

When Matthew's wife Charlotte is kidnapped, his world is thrown into chaos. There are no demands made for her release, just a threat that if he calls the police, Charlotte will lose the baby she is carrying. As a prison governor, Matthew is convinced that Charlotte's abduction may be related to his job. He resorts to the only help he can find - Monk, an ex-prisoner, who has underworld contacts - a devil's pact, but time is running out...

Byatt, A.S.

Biographer's tale (265 pages)

Fed up with stultifying criticism, Phineas G. decides to study the messiness of real life. He sets out to write a biography of a great biographer, but everywhere he looks he finds fragments and gaps.

Byatt, A.S.

Possession (511 pages)

"Literary critics make natural detectives", says Maud Bailey, heroine of a mystery where the clues lurk in university libraries, old letters and dusty journals. Together with Roland Michell, a fellow academic and accidental sleuth, Maud discovers a love affair between the two Victorian writers the pair has dedicated their lives to studying.

Carey, Peter

Theft: a love story (320 pages)

Narrated by the twin voices of the artist Butcher Bones, and his 'damaged two-hundred-and-twenty-pound brother' Hugh, this novel once again displays Peter Carey's extraordinary flair for language. Ranging from the rural wilds of Australia to Manhattan via Tokyo, it is a brilliant and moving exploration of art, fraud, responsibility and redemption.

Carey, Peter

True history of the Kelly Gang (424 pages)

True History of the Kelly Gang is the song of Australia, and it sings its protest in a voice at once crude and delicate, menacing and heart wrenching. Carey gives us Ned Kelly as orphan, as Oedipus, as horse thief, farmer, bushranger, reformer, bank-robber, police-killer and, finally, as his country's beloved Robin Hood.

Cezair-Thompson, Margaret

The Pirate's daughter (528 pages)

The ultimate 'thinking-person's beach read', a novel based on a fascinating kernel of fact that is as thought provoking as it is utterly unputdownable.

Chevalier, Tracy

The girl with a pearl earring (256 pages)

An historical novel on the corruption of innocence, using the famous painting by Vermeer as an inspiration.

Chevalier, Tracy

Burning Bright (400 pages)

London 1792. The Kellaways move from familiar rural Dorset to the tumult of a cramped, unforgiving city. They are leaving behind a terrible loss, a blow that only a completely new life may soften. Against the backdrop of a city jittery over the increasingly bloody French Revolution, a surprising bond forms between Jem, the youngest Kellaway boy, and streetwise Londoner Maggie Butterfield. Their friendship takes a dramatic turn when they become entangled in the life of their neighbour, the printer, poet and radical, William Blake.

Chevalier, Tracy

The Lady and the Unicorn (278 pages)

A subtle study in social power and the conflicts between love and duty. Nicolas des Innocents has been commissioned to design a series of large tapestries. While Nicolas is measuring the walls, he meets a beautiful girl who turns out to be Jean Le Viste's daughter. Their passion is impossible for their world--so forbidden, given their class differences, that its only avenue of expression turns out to be those magnificent tapestries.

Clark, Clare

The Great Stink (358 pages)

It is 1855 and William May has returned to London from the Crimea, devastated by the horrors he has suffered. He believes his job transforming the city's sewer system will prove his salvation, but the subterranean world hides its own terrible secrets

Clarke, Susanna

Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell (1006 pages)

Long ago when magic still existed in England, the greatest magician of all was the Raven King. Now at the start of the 19th. Century, the Raven King is only a myth and England no longer believes in magicians. But then Mr. Norrell makes his incredible talents known.

Coben, Harlan

Tell no one (346)

Each year David Beck and his wife Elizabeth went back to the deserted lake to inscribe one more year into their tree. But that year was the last. Elizabeth was kidnapped and Beck knocked unconscious. By the time he woke, his wife was dead.

Coetzee, J.M

Disgrace (219 pages)

After years teaching Romantic poetry at the Technical University of Cape Town, David Lurie, middle-aged and twice divorced has an impulsive affair with a student. The affair sours, he is denounced and summoned before a committee of inquiry.

Connelly, Michael

The Lincoln Lawyer (449 pages)

They're called Lincoln Lawyers: the bottom of the legal food chain, the criminal defence attorneys who operate out of the back of a Lincoln car, travelling between the courthouses of Los Angeles county to take whatever cases the system throws in their path.

Connor, John

Phoenix (446 pages)

Introducing Detective Constable Karen Sharpe. The two people she arranges to meet are killed, and the police operation to find who is responsible is one of the biggest in the history of West Yorkshire police.

Cornwell, Bernard

Stonehenge: a novel of 2000 BC (433 pages)

The tale of three brothers and of their rivalry that creates the great temple.

Cunningham, Michael

The Hours (229 pages)

Takes Virginia Woolf's life and work as the inspiration for a meditation on artistic endeavour, failure, love and madness. Moving effortlessly across decades and between England and America, Cunningham explores the pain and trauma of creativity and the immutable relationship between writer and reader.

Davies, Martin

The conjuror's bird (309 pages)

A mixture of detection, romance and history, The Conjuror's Bird is a dazzling debut novel, spanning three centuries of secrets and surprises.

Dawson, Jill

Watch Me Disappear (336 pages)

Marine biologist Tina Humber returns to the Fenland village where she grew up. A moment of panic triggers a vision of her friend Mandy who went missing 30 years ago and Tina finds she knows who was responsible for Mandy's disappearance.

De Bernieres, Louis

Captain Corelli's Mandolin (544 pages)

When the Axis powers reach the Greek island of Cephallonia, a young Italian captain is billeted in the doctor's house. Captain Corelli turns out to be an accomplished musician, and for a while the war seems to suit them well. But then the brutality of the conflict catches up with them.

Dean, Louise

Becoming Strangers (291 pages)

Jan and Annemieke are going on their last holiday together, their love dissolving in middle age. Thirty years their senior, Dorothy and George are on one of their first. When these four people meet on an island in the Caribbean, they find more than an escape from their daily existence. They discover that it's not too late to save the rest of their lives.

Denby, Joolz

Billie Morgan (320 pages)

Billie is in her forties, running a little jewellery shop in Bradford, watching over her godson Natty, trying to live a quiet life, trying to forget the past. Because Billie has a lot of past to forget. She was a biker chick, lived a life that hurtled out of control – and ended in murder.

Desai, Anita

The Zigzag Way (192 pages)

Would-be writer Eric follows his girlfriend to Mexico, where he is seduced by the colour of an older world. He finds himself on a quest for his own family in a mining town where 100 years ago Cornish miners worked the earth.

Desai, Kiran

The Inheritance of Loss (336 pages)

Man Booker Prize for Fiction 2006 Winner. A magnificent novel of humane breadth and wisdom, comic tenderness and powerful political acuteness. In the northeastern Himalayas, at the foot of Mount Kanchenjunga, in an isolated and crumbling house, there lives an embittered old judge, who wants nothing more than to retire in peace. But with the arrival of his orphaned granddaughter, Sai, and the son of his chatty cook trying to stay a step ahead of US immigration services, this is far from easy.

Diamant, Anita

The Red Tent (386 pages)

Using the story from Genesis as its basis, this novel combines rich story telling with a new way of looking at the place occupied by women in ancient Jewish society. The central character is Dinah, daughter of Jacob.

Drabble, Margaret

The Red Queen (358 pages)

200 years after being plucked from obscurity to marry the Crown Prince of Korea, the Red Queen's ghost decides to set the record straight about her extraordinary existence - and Dr Babs Halliwell, with her own complicated past, is the perfect envoy. But why does the Red Queen pick Babs to keep her story alive? Originally published: London: Viking.

Drabble, Margaret

The Witch of Exmoor (276 pages)

A portrait of a troubled middle-class family: from the eccentric grandmother who gives up everything to go and live in a ruin on Exmoor, to her successful but anxious children and the drug-taking grandchildren.

Dudman, Clare

Wegener's jigsaw (404 pages)

A fictional account of the life of Alfred Wegener – a remarkable man who reached record-breaking heights in hot air balloons, was almost fatally injured in World War one, and was driven by a passion for ice and a better understanding of the natural history of the world.

Du Maurier, Daphne

My cousin Rachel (335 pages)

I threw the piece of paper on the fire. She saw it burn ...Orphaned at an early age, Philip Ashley is raised by his benevolent older cousin, Ambrose. Resolutely single, Ambrose delights in Philip as his heir, a man who will love his grand home as much as he does himself. But the cosy world the two construct is shattered when Ambrose sets off on a trip to Florence. There he falls in love and marries - and there he dies suddenly. In almost no time at all, the new widow - Philip's cousin Rachel - turns up in England. Despite himself, Philip is drawn to this beautiful, sophisticated, mysterious woman like a moth to the flame. And yet ...might she have had a hand in Ambrose's death?

Du Maurier, Daphne

Rebecca (428 pages)

A tale of an innocent young bride who finds her life blighted by the mystery surrounding the death of her husband's previous wife.

Dunmore, Helen

House Of Orphans (330 pages)

In Finland in 1901, the life of Eeva, the orphaned daughter of a revolutionary, is set against the backdrop of a country in political ferment, as the Russian Empire grows more oppressive, but resistance to its rule grows, too.

Dunmore, Helen

Mourning Ruby (309 pages)

A hugely moving and strongly plotted novel, about memory, history, imagination, and ultimately about the most important relationship of all in any novel – that of the reader to the writer.

Dunmore, Helen

The Siege (294 pages)

Leningrad, September 1941. German tanks surround the city, imprisoning those who live there. The besieged people of Leningrad face shells, starvation, and the Russian winter. Interweaving two love affairs in two generations the reader is drawn into the Levin's family struggle to stay alive during this terrible winter. It is a story about war and the wounds it inflicts on people's lives, but is also a lyrical and deeply moving celebration of love, life and survival.

Dunnett, Dorothy

The Game of Kings (543 pages)

The first of the six 'Lymond Chronicles' which explore the intricacies of sixteenth-century history through the exploits of Francis Crawford, Scottish mercenary, soldier, spy wit, lover...

Eliot, George

Middlemarch (852 pages)

Subtitled 'A study of provincial life', George Eliot fashions a concept of life and society free of the dogma of the past yet able to confront the scepticism of the age.

Elton, Ben

The First Casualty (448 pages)

Flanders, June 1917: a British officer and celebrated poet, is shot dead, killed not by German fire, but while recuperating from shell shock well behind the lines. A young English soldier is arrested and charged with his murder. Douglas Kingsley is sent to France in order to secure a conviction. Forced to conduct his investigations amidst the hell of The Third Battle of Ypres, Kingsley soon discovers that both the evidence and the witnesses he needs are quite literally disappearing into the mud that surrounds him.

Enright, Anne

The Gathering (272)

The nine surviving children of the Hegarty clan gather in Dublin for the wake of their wayward brother Liam. It wasn't the drink that killed him - although that certainly helped - it was what happened to him as a boy in his grandmother's house, in the winter of 1968.

Evans, Nicholas

Loop (511 pages)

Helen Ross is a 29-year-old biologist, sent into a hostile place to protect the wolves from those who seek to destroy them. She struggles for survival and for self-esteem, embarking on a love affair with the 18-year-old son of her most powerful opponent, brutal and charismatic rancher, Buck Calder.

Faber, Michel

Under the Skin (296 Pages)

This novel centres on a female character, Isserley, who is obsessed with picking up lone, male hitchhikers who are muscular and fit. As the story unfolds, the reader comes to realise that Isserley's motives are rather unusual.

Faulks, Sebastian

Birdsong (407 pages)

Set in France before and during World War I, this is the story of a young Englishman who is impelled through a series of extreme experiences, including a traumatic love affair, which tears apart the bourgeois French family with whom he lives.

Faulks, Sebastian

Human Traces (615 pages)

As young boys both Jacques Rebière and Thomas Midwinter become fascinated with trying to understand the human mind. As psychiatrists, their quest takes them from the squalor of the Victorian lunatic asylum to the crowded lecture halls of the renowned Professor Charcot in Paris; from the heights of the Sierra Madre in California to the plains of unexplored Africa. As the concerns of the old century fade and the First World War divides Europe, the two men's volatile relationship develops and changes, but is always tempered by one exceptional woman; Thomas's sister Sonia.

Fielding, Helen

Bridget Jones's diary (310 pages)

This tale concerns the trials and tribulations of a single, girl-about-town on an optimistic but doomed quest for self-improvement. If she could just get down to 8st 7lbs, stop smoking and develop inner poise, all would be resolved.

Forster, Margaret

Keeping the world away (352 pages)

Lost, found, stolen, strayed, sold, and fought over...This engrossing, beautifully crafted novel follows the fictional adventures, over a hundred years, of an early 20th-century painting and the women whose lives it touches. It opens with bold, passionate Gwen, struggling to be an artist, leaving for Paris where she becomes Rodin's lover and paints a small, intimate picture of a quiet corner of her attic room...Then, there's Charlotte, a dreamy intellectual Edwardian girl, and Stella, Lucasta, Ailsa and finally young Gillian, who share an unspoken desire to have for themselves a tranquil golden place like that in the painting. Quintessential Forster, this is a novel about women's lives, about what it means and what it costs to be both a woman and an artist, and an unusual, compelling look at a beautiful painting and its imagined afterlife.

Fowler, Karen Joy

The Jane Austen book club (288 pages)

In California's Sacramento Valley, six people meet once a month to discuss Jane Austen's novels. Over the six months they meet marriages are tested, affairs begin, unsuitable arrangements become suitable, and under the guiding eye of Jane Austen, some of them even fall in love.

Franzen, Jonathan

Corrections (653 pages)

The Lamberts - Enid and Alfred and their three grown-up children - are a troubled family living in a troubled age. Alfred is ill and as his condition worsens the whole family must face the failures, secrets and long-buried hurts that haunt them if they are to make the corrections that each desperately needs. Stretching from the Midwest in the mid-century to Wall Street and Eastern Europe in the age of globalised greed, Corrections brings an old-time America of freight trains and civic duty into wild collision with the era of home surveillance, hands-off parenting, do-it-yourself mental healthcare, and New Economy millionaires.

Frazier, Charles

Cold Mountain (436 pages)

Set against the backdrop of the American Civil War, this is the story of a wounded soldier, Inman, who escapes the army and tries to make his way home to Cold Mountain and to Ada, the woman he left behind when the war began.

Freud, Esther

The Sea House (276 pages)

A young woman, Lily, researches the life of an architect, Klaus Lehmann. Alone in her rented cottage by the sea, Lily reads Klaus's letters to his beloved life, Elsa, and begins to sense an absence in her own life that may not be filled by simply going home.

Gardam, Jane

Old Filth (260 pages)

Old Filth was a 'child of the raj'. His earliest memories are of his amah, a teenage Malay girl. But soon he is torn away from the only person who loves him, and sent to be educated at 'home', where he is boarded out with strangers. What is the terrible secret the children shared? What happened at the farmhouse in the Lake District?

Golden, Arthur

Memoirs of a Geisha (496 pages)

Summoning up more than 20 years of Japan's most dramatic history, the geisha's story uncovers a hidden world of eroticism and enchantment, exploitation and degradation. It moves from a small fishing village in 1929 to the glamorous and decadent Kyoto of the 30s and on to post-war New York.

Gregory, Phillipa

The Constant Princess (490 pages)

Katherine of Aragon, the Spanish Infanta, is betrothed from childhood to Arthur, son of Henry VII. Arriving in England, she adapts to the Tudor court, and falls in love with Arthur, but when he dies she is left to make her own future: by marrying his younger brother, Henry.

Gregory, Phillipa

The Constant Princess (490 pages)

For years, Isobel Latimer has composed serious novels for serious people, but to dwindling acclaim and ever more dwindling financial gain. Now her husband is ill and she must carry the burden of their house and his hopes alone, and in secret. But if the public don't want careful moral fables any longer, why not provide them with an outrageous tale of sex and Satanism, and an author to match? Isobel, together with her agent, Troy, resolves to change her writing and her appearance, for one book only: the blockbuster that will make her fortune and save her marriage.

Gregson, Julia

East of the Sun (480 pages)

An utterly captivating story of three young British women in search of freedom and love in 1920s India.

Grenville, Kate

Idea of perfection (401 pages)

Harley Savage is a large, raw-boned, plain person with a ragged haircut and a white t-shirt coming unstitched along the shoulder. Douglas Cheeseman is a big-eared man who avoids his own reflection, and has bored his wife into leaving him. They are not the usual suspects for a burgeoning romance.

Grenville, Kate

The Secret River (352 pages)

First novel for 5 years from Orange prize-winning Kate Grenville. A dramatic and evocative historical novel set between the slums of Nineteenth-century London and the convict colonies of Australia. It sensuously etches the intense light and scribble of the Australian bush onto the page, making them the backdrop to a story about ownership, belonging and identity - themes that are timeless and universal.

Haddon, Mark

The curious incident of the dog in the night-time (271 pages)

A murder mystery like no other, this novel features Christopher Boone, a 15 year-old who suffers from Asperger's syndrome. When he finds a neighbour's dog murdered, he sets out on a journey that will turn his whole world upside down.

Haddon, Mark

A spot of bother (512 pages)

George Hall doesn't understand the modern obsession with talking about everything. The secret of contentment, George felt, lay in ignoring many things completely. Some things in life, however, cannot be ignored. At 57, George is a dignified man trying to go insane politely...

Hardy, Jules

Altered Land (324 pages)

Joan is a single mother - beautiful, talented and desired. John is her adored son, her 'Merboy'. Growing up in the West Country, his life is hunting for shells and collecting bits of old boats. On his thirteenth birthday, Joan treats him to a trip to London to buy his first pair of jeans. Unused to city driving, she takes a wrong turn. The repercussions of that moment's hesitation are devastating...

Hardy, Thomas

Tess of the D'Urbervilles (496 pages)

When Tess Durbeyfield is driven by family poverty to claim kinship with the wealthy D'Urbervilles and seek a portion of the family fortune, meeting her 'cousin' Alec proves to be her downfall. A very different man, Angel Clare, offers her love and salvation, but she has to decide whether to reveal her past or remain silent in the hope of a peaceful future. A powerful criticism of the social convention of the day.

Harris, Joanne

Five Quarters of the orange (364 pages)

Beyond the main street of Les Laveuses runs the Loire, smooth and brown as a sunning snake - but hiding a deadly undertow beneath its moving surface. This is where Framboise, a secretive widow named after a raspberry liqueur, plies her culinary trade at the creperie - and lets memory play strange games. Into this world comes the threat of revelation as Framboise's nephew - a profiteering Parisian - attempts to exploit the growing success of the country recipes she has inherited from her mother, a woman remembered with contempt by the villagers of Les Laveuses. As the spilt blood of a tragic wartime childhood flows again, exposure beckons for Framboise, the widow with an invented past.

Harris, Joanne

Gentlemen and Players (508 pages)

The place is St Oswald's, an old and long-established boys' grammar school in the north of England. A new year has just begun, and for the staff and boys of the school, a wind of unwelcome change is blowing. Suits, paperwork and Information Technology rule the world and Roy Straitley, Latin master, eccentric, and veteran of St Oswald's, is finally - reluctantly - contemplating retirement. But beneath the little rivalries, petty disputes and everyday crises of the school, a darker undercurrent stirs. And a bitter grudge, hidden and carefully nurtured for thirteen years, is about to erupt. Who is Mole, the mysterious insider, whose cruel practical jokes are gradually escalating towards violence - and perhaps, murder?

Harris, Robert

Pompeii (352 pages)

A detailed re-creation of one of the most famous natural disasters of all time. By focusing on the characters of an engineer and a scientist, Harris gives an entirely original perspective on the Roman world.

Hart, John

Down River (384 pages)

Banished for a murder he didn't commit -- now he's coming home.

Hazzard, Shirley

The Great Fire (314 pages)

The Great Fire is the Second World War. In war-torn Asia and stricken Europe, men and women, still young but veterans of harsh experience, must reinvent their lives and expectations, and learn, from their past, to dream again. At the centre of the story, a brave and brilliant soldier finds that survival and worldly achievement are not enough. His counterpart, a young girl living in Occupied Japan and tending her dying brother, falls in love, and in the process discovers herself. In the looming shadow of world enmities resumed, and of Asia's coming centrality in world affairs, a man and a woman seek to recover self-reliance, balance, and tenderness.

Hearn, Miranda

Nelson's Daughter (266 pages)

In 1814, in a French farmhouse, an English girl struggles to live with ghosts of the past. She is Horatia, Nelson's only child, and as she relives her memories of the man she learned was her father only after his death, an intimate portrait emerges.

Heller, Zoe

Notes on a scandal (243 pages)

When Sheba arrives Barbara senses that she will be different from the rest of her staff-room colleagues. Sure enough, Sheba starts an affair with a pupil and is caught. When all the dust settles and Sheba's life falls apart, Barbara is there for her even if she can't condone her sexual behaviour.

Hiaasen, Carl

Basket case (419 pages)

Journalist Jack Tagger wages a war to discover the truth behind the death of musician James Stomarti, formerly with the band Jimmy and the Slut Puppies. Was he murdered? Is someone trying to kill off the Slut Puppies one by one?

Hislop, Victoria

The Island (480 pages)

On the brink of a life-changing decision, Alexis Fielding longs to find out about her mother's past. But Sofia has never spoken of it. All she admits to is growing up in a small Cretan village before moving to London. When Alexis decides to visit Crete, however, Sofia gives her daughter a letter to take to an old friend, and promises that through her she will learn more. What she learns is about the former leper colony on Spinalonga, and how the life of her family was affected by it.

Hollinghurst, Alan

The Line of Beauty (501 pages)

It is the summer of 1983, and young Nick Guest, an innocent in the matters of politics and money, has moved into an attic room in the Notting Hill home of the Feddens: Gerald, an ambitious new Tory MP, his wealthy wife Rachel, and their children Toby and Catherine. As the boom years of the mid-80s unfold, Nick becomes caught up in the Feddens' world. In an era of endless possibility, Nick finds himself able to pursue his own private obsession, with beauty - a prize as compelling to him as power and riches are to his friends.

Holt, Hazel (local author)

No Cure for Death (288 pages)

When Dr Morrison is found dead, apparently murdered, evidence points towards Rhys Hampden, the drug addicted son of a couple from the village, and the last person to have seen Dr Morrison alive. However, Sheila Malory is not convinced that Dr Morrison's death was simply the result of a random act of violence. Originally published: 2005

Holt, Tom (local author)

Barking (432 pages)

Tom Holt's latest comic novel is a rollercoaster ride of supernatural silliness and biting satire.

Hornby, Nick

How to be good (243 pages)

According to her own moral calculations, Katie Carr has earned her affair. She's a doctor, and doctors are decent people, and her husband David is the "Angriest Man" in Holloway. When David suddenly becomes good, Katie's sums no longer add up, and she is forced to ask herself some questions.

Hornby, Nick

A Long Way Down (256 pages)

'Can I explain why I wanted to jump off the top of a tower block?' For disgraced TV presenter Martin Sharp the answer's pretty simple: he has, in his own words, pissed his life away'. And on New Year's Eve, he's going to end it all. But not, as it happens, alone. Because first single-mum Maureen, then eighteen-year-old Jess and lastly American rock-god JJ turn up and crash Martin's private party. They've stolen his idea, but brought their own reasons. Yet it's hard to jump when you've got an audience queuing impatiently behind you.

Hosseini, Khaled

The kite runner (352 pages)

Winter 1975: Afghanistan, a country on the verge of an international coup. 12 year old Amir is desperate to win the approval of his father, one of the richest merchants in Kabul. He's failed to do so through academia or brawn, but the one area they connect is the annual kite-fighting tournament.

Hosseini, Khaled

A thousand splendid suns (384 pages)

Mariam is only fifteen when she is sent to Kabul to marry the troubled and bitter Rasheed, who is thirty years her senior. Nearly two decades later, in a climate of growing unrest, tragedy strikes fifteen-year-old Laila, who must leave her home and join Mariam's unhappy household. Laila and Mariam are to find consolation in each other, their friendship to grow as deep as the bond between sisters, as strong as the ties between mother and daughter. With the passing of time comes Taliban rule over Afghanistan, the streets of Kabul loud with the sound of gunfire and bombs, life a desperate struggle against starvation, brutality and fear, the women's endurance tested beyond their worst imaginings. "A Thousand Splendid Suns" is an unforgettable portrait of a wounded country and a deeply moving story of family and friendship.

Ishiguro, Kazuo

Never let me go (282 pages)

Kathy, Ruth & Tommy were pupils at Hailsham – an idyllic establishment situated deep in the English countryside. The children there were tenderly sheltered from the outside world, brought up to believe they were special, and that their personal welfare was crucial. But for what reason were they really there?

Jacobson, Howard

Kalooki Nights (480 pages)

Life should have been sunny for Max Glickman, growing up in Crumpsall Park in peacetime, with his mother's glamorous card evenings to look forward to, and photographs of his father's favourite boxers on the walls. But other voices whisper seductively to him of Buchenwald, extermination, and the impossibility of forgetting. Max moves away, marries out, and draws cartoon histories of Jewish suffering in which no one, least of all the Jews, is much interested. But it's a life, until Max's long-disregarded childhood friend, Manny Washinsky, is released from prison. Little by little, as he picks up his old connection with Manny, trying to understand the circumstances in which he made a Buchenwald of his own home, Max is drawn into Manny's family history - above all his brother's tragic love affair with a girl who is half German. But more than that, he is drawn back into the Holocaust obsessions from which he realises there can be, and should be, no release.

James, P. D

The Lighthouse (496 pages)

Combe Island off the Cornish coast has a bloodstained history of piracy and cruelty but now, privately owned, it offers respite to over-stressed men and women in positions of high authority who require privacy and guaranteed security. But the peace of Combe is violated when one of the distinguished visitors is bizarrely murdered. Adam Dalgliesh is called in to solve the mystery quickly and discreetly. Hardly have the team began to unravel the mystery when there is a second brutal killing and the investigation is jeopardized when Dalgliesh is faced with a potentially fatal danger...This powerful novel combines all the elements P D James fans have come to expect: a vivid evocation of place, sensitive characterisation and a superbly structured plot.

Jones, Sadie

The outcast (448 pages)

1957, and Lewis Aldridge is travelling back to his family home, straight out of jail and just nineteen years old. His return will trigger the implosion not just of his family, but also of a whole community.

Jong, Erica

Fear of flying (339 pages)

Isadora Wing is a compulsive daydreamer, seeker of saviours and fully-fledged phobic – as she travels to Vienna with her husband, jaunts around Europe with a Laingian analyst, and is forced to face her demons in this novel of liberation.

Jordan, Tony

Addition (256 pages)

A rom-com with added OCD, Addition is a unique and witty debut novel.

Kingsolver, Barbara

Poisonwood Bible (616 pages)

Narrated by the wife and four daughters of Nathan Price, a fierce evangelical Baptist who takes his family and mission to the Belgian Congo in 1959. They carry with them all they believe they will need from home, but soon find that all of it – from garden seeds to scripture – is calamitously transformed.

Kingsolver, Barbara

Prodigal Summer (444 pages)

Weaves together stories of human love within a larger tapestry of lives inhabiting the mountains and farms of southern Appalachia. It portrays these people who find their links to one another and to the plants with whom they share a place.

Koomson, Dorothy

My Best Friend's Girl (448 pages)

Best friends Kamryn Matika and Adele Brannon thought nothing could come between them - until Adele slept with Kamryn's fiancé, Nate. Worse still, she got pregnant and had his child. When Kamryn discovered the truth about their betrayal she vowed never to see any of them again. Two years later, Kamryn receives a letter from Adele. Adele is dying and begs Kamryn to adopt her daughter, Tegan. The last thing Kamryn needs is a five year old to disrupt things. Especially not one who reminds her of Nate. But with no one else to take care of Tegan and Adele fading fast, does she have any other choice? So begins a difficult journey that leads Kamryn towards forgiveness, love, responsibility and, ultimately, a better understanding of herself.

Kostova, Elizabeth

The Historian (704 pages)

A young girl discovers her father's darkest secret, and embarks on a harrowing journey across Europe to complete the quest he never could -- to find history's most legendary fiend: Dracula ...

Krauss, Elizabeth

The history of love (252 pages)

Leo Gursky is trying to survive a little bit longer, tapping his radiator each evening to let his upstairs neighbour know he's still alive, drawing attention to himself at the milk counter of Starbucks. But life wasn't always like this: sixty years ago, in the Polish village where he was born, Leo fell in love and wrote a book. And although he doesn't know it, that book also survived: it crossed oceans and generations, and changed lives. "A wonderful novel erupting with life... building to a perfect, heartbreaking end" Short listed for Orange Broadband prize for Fiction 2006.

Lawson, Mary

The Other side of the bridge (288 pages)

Two brothers, Arthur and Jake, are the sons of a local farmer in the mid-1930s, when life is tough and another world war is looming... A young woman, Laura, comes into the community and tips the fragile balance of sibling rivalry over the edge... And then there is Ian, son of the local doctor, much younger, thoughtful, idealistic, and far too sure that he knows the difference between right and wrong. By now it is the Fifties, and the world has changed - a little, but not enough. The stories of these two generations in the small town of Struan and its harsh rural hinterland are tragically interlocked, linked by fate and community but separated by a war which devours its young men and whose unimaginable horror reaches right into the heart of this remote corner of an empire.

Le Carré, John

The Constant Gardener (506 pages)

Tessa Quayle has been horribly murdered on the shores of Lake Turkana in Northern Kenya, the birthplace of mankind. Her putative African lover, a doctor with one of the aid agencies, has disappeared. Her husband, Justin, a career diplomat and amateur gardener at the British High Commission in Nairobi, sets out on a personal odyssey in pursuit of the killers and their motive. His quest takes him to the Foreign Office in London, across Europe and Canada and back to Africa, to the depths of South Sudan, and finally to the very spot where Tessa died. On his way Justin meets terror, violence, laughter, conspiracy and knowledge. But his greatest discovery is the woman he barely had time to love.

Lee, Harper

To kill a mockingbird (307 pages)

'Shoot all the blue jays you want, if you can hit 'em, but remember it's a sin to kill a mockingbird'. This is a lawyer's advice to his children as he defends the real mockingbird of the story – a black man charged with raping a white girl in the 1930s.

Lessing, Doris

The Golden Notebook (576 pages)

A portrait of the intellectual and moral climate of the 1950's – a society on the brink of feminism. Anna Wulf is a young novelist with writer's block who fears her life is falling apart after several unsatisfactory relationships, a divorce and a child. She records her experiences in notebooks, and it is the fifth – The Golden notebook – that is the key to her recovery and renaissance.

Levy, Andrea

Small island (544 pages)

Returning to England after the war, Gilbert Joseph is treated very differently now that he is no longer in RAF uniform. Joined by his wife Hortense, he rekindles a friendship with Queenie who takes in Jamaican lodgers. Can their dreams of a better life in England overcome the prejudice they face?

Lewycka, Marina

A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian (326 pages)

When their recently widowed father in Peterborough announces his plan to remarry, sisters Vera and Nadezhda realize they must put aside a lifetime of feuding in order to save him. His new love is a voluptuous gold-digger from the Ukraine, half his age, with a taste for green satin underwear and boil-in-the-bag cuisine, who stops at nothing in her single-minded pursuit of the luxurious western lifestyle she dreams of. But the old man is also pursuing his eccentric dreams – and writing a history of tractors in Ukrainian. Orange Broadband Prize shortlist 2005.

McGregor, Jon

So Many Ways to Begin (384 pages)

David Carter cannot help but wish for more: that his wife Eleanor would be the sparkling girl he once found so irresistible; that his job as a museum curator could live up to the promise it once held; that his daughter's arrival could have brought him closer to Eleanor. But a few careless words spoken by his mother's friend have left David restless with the knowledge that his whole life has been constructed around a lie.

McCall Smith, Alexander

No 1 Ladies' Detective Agency (250 pages)

Wayward daughters. Missing Husbands. Philandering partners. Curious conmen. If you've got a problem, and no one else can help you, then pay a visit to Precious Ramotswe, Botswana's only - and finest - female private detective. Her methods may not be conventional, and her manner not exactly Miss Marple, but she's got warmth, wit and canny intuition on her side.

McCourt, Frank

Angela's Ashes (452 pages)

A sad, funny, bittersweet memoir of growing up in New York in the 30s and in Ireland in the 40s. It is a story of extreme hardship and suffering, in Brooklyn tenements and Limerick slums -- too many children, too little money, his mother Angela barely coping as his father Malachy's drinking bouts constantly brought the family to the brink of disaster. It is a story of courage and survival against apparently overwhelming odds.

McEwan, Ian

Atonement (384 pages)

On the hottest day of the summer of 1934, thirteen-year-old Briony Tallis sees her sister Cecilia strip off her clothes and plunge into the fountain in the garden of their country house. Watching her is Robbie Turner, her childhood friend who, like Cecilia, has recently come down from Cambridge. By the end of that day, the lives of all three will have been changed forever. Robbie and Cecilia will have crossed a boundary they had not even imagined at its start, and will have become victims of the younger girl's imagination. Briony will have witnessed mysteries, and committed a crime for which she will spend the rest of her life trying to atone.

McEwan, Ian

Saturday (279 pages)

A remarkably accomplished piece of work, as richly drawn and characterised as anything he has written. McEwan's protagonist is neurosurgeon Henry Perowne, a man comfortably ensconced in an enviable upper middle class existence. As he wakes one Saturday morning and witnesses a plane accident through his window, he is not yet aware that this is a harbinger of a sustained assault on all that he holds dear. As Saturday progresses, Henry is forced to examine every aspect of his life and beliefs, not least his attitude to the war. McEwan's invigorating and trenchant novel is an unmissable experience.

Mackay, Sheena

Heligoland (224 pages)

Set in The Nautilus, a strange shell-shaped building put up in the 1930s in South London, this is the story of Rowena Snow. Rowena is of Indian and Scottish parentage, orphaned, without family or friends, and in search of her own Utopia.

Mantel, Hilary

Beyond Black (480 pages)

Set in Middle England's bleak no-man's-land, this is the story of Home Counties psychic Alison, and Colette, her pragmatic assistant. While Alison talks to the dead, Colette concerns herself with more earthly matters.

Martel, Yann

Life of Pi: a novel (319 pages)

Life of Pi is a tale of disaster at sea. Both a boys' own adventure (for grown-ups) and a meditation on faith and the value of religious metaphor, it was one of the most extraordinary and original novels of 2002. The only survivor from the wreck of a cargo ship on the Pacific, 16 year old Pi spends 221 days on a lifeboat with a hyena, a zebra (with a broken leg), a female orang-utan and a 450-pound Royal Bengal Tiger called Richard Parker.

Meek, James

The People's Act of Love (400 pages)

Set in Siberia in 1919, this is the story of a small Christian sect and a stranded regiment of Czech soldiers. Into this isolated community trudges Samarin, a gulag escapee, whose arrival throws them into turmoil.

Meloy, Maile

Liars and Saints (260 pages)

Yvette Santerre met the photographer on the beach as her children played, and he offered to take their picture for her husband, away at war. When he arrived at her house with his camera, the last thing she expected was that he would try to kiss her. But that kiss will haunt her family for generations. Orange Broadband prize shortlist 2005.

Michaels, Anne

Fugitive Pieces (294 pages)

The stories of two men from different generations whose lives have been transformed by war. A young boy, Jakob Beer, is rescued from the mud of a buried Polish city during World War II and taken to an island in Greece by an unlikely saviour, the scientist/humanist Athos Roussos.

Miller, Andrew (local author) Oxygen (323 pages)

OXYGEN is a contemporary tale of courage, love and liberation. It is a novel from the winner of the James Tait Black Memorial, International Impac and Grinzane Cavour Prizes and one of the most celebrated debutants of the '90s, Andrew Miller.

Miller, Sue

Lost In The Forest (247 pages)

When John is killed in a car accident, his wife and family struggle to come to terms with their loss. But his absence is most traumatic for his daughter Daisy, just at the onset of adolescence. In steps a man only too willing to take advantage...

Miller, Rebecca

The private lives of Pippa Lee (240 pages)

At fifty, Pippa Lee seems just fine. The wife of a publisher thirty years her senior, she seems to glow with feminine serenity. But when her husband decides they should cast off Gramercy Park for Marigold Village retirement home, as a "pre-emptive strike against his decrepitude," Pippa finds her beatific persona unravelling in alarming ways.

Min, Anchee

Empress Orchid (336 pages)

To rescue her family from poverty and avoid marrying her slope-shouldered cousin, seventeen-year-old Orchid competes to be one of the Emperor's wives

Mitchell, David

Black Swan Green (384 pages)

Jason is 13, doomed to be growing up in the most boring family in the deadest village (Black Swan Green) in the dullest county (Worcestershire) in the most tedious nation (England). And he stammers. This novel follows 13 months in his life, covering the pitfalls of school and home, bullies, girls and family politics.

Mitchell, David

Cloud Atlas (544 pages)

A reluctant voyager crossing the Pacific in 1850; a disinherited composer blagging a precarious livelihood in between-the-wars Belgium; a high-minded journalist in Governor Reagan's California; a vanity publisher fleeing his gangland creditors; a genetically modified 'dinery server' on death-row; and Zachry, a young Pacific Islander witnessing the nightfall of science and civilisation - the narrators of "Cloud Atlas" hear each other's echoes down the corridor of history, and their destinies are changed in ways great and small. In his extraordinary third novel, David Mitchell erases the boundaries of language, genre and time to offer a meditation on humanity's dangerous will to power, and where it may lead us.

Mitchell, Margaret

Gone with the wind (1011 pages)

Set against the dramatic backdrop of the American Civil War this is an unforgettable tale of love and loss, of a nation mortally divided and a people forever changed. Above all, it is the story of beautiful, ruthless Scarlett O'Hara and the dashing soldier of fortune, Rhett Butler.

Moggach, Deborah

Tulip Fever (259 pages)

The story of sexual betrayal and human failings in 17th-century Amsterdam, as the characters move inexorably towards a grand deception and a tragic climax.

Morrall, Clare

Astonishing Splashes of colour (320 pages)

Caught in an over-vivid world, Kitty feels haunted by her "child that never was". As children all around become emblems of hope, longing and grief, she begins to understand the reasons for her shaky sense of self.

Morrison, Toni

Beloved (275 pages)

Set in the mid-19th. Century, when moves to abolish slavery are at their height and one man's world of love turns to violence when his daughter, Beloved, dies at the hands of her mother.

Morton, Kate

The House at Riverton (352 pages)

Summer 1924: On the eve of a glittering Society party, by the lake of a grand English country house, a young poet takes his life. The only witnesses, sisters Hannah and Emmeline Hartford, will never speak to each other again. Winter 1999: Grace Bradley, 98, one-time housemaid of Riverton Manor, is visited by a young director making a film about the poet's suicide. Ghosts awaken and memories, long consigned to the dark reaches of Grace's mind, begin to sneak back through the cracks. A shocking secret threatens to emerge; something history has forgotten but Grace never could. A thrilling mystery and a compelling love story, "The House at Riverton" will appeal to readers of Ian McEwan's "Atonement", L.P. Hartley's "The Go-Between", and lovers of the film "Gosford Park".

Moss, Kate

Labyrinth (702 pages)

Skilfully blending the lives of two women - separated by 800 years, yet united by a common destiny - Labyrinth is a time-slip adventure story steeped in the legends, secrets, atmosphere and history of the Cathars, Carcassonne and the Pyrenees. Winner of Richard and Judy Best Read of the Year!

Niffenegger, Audrey

The time traveler's wife (518 pages)

This is the story of Henry and Clare, who have known each other since Clare was 6 and Henry was 36, and were married when Clare was 20 and Henry was 28. This is possible because Henry is one of the first people to be diagnosed with chrono-displacement-disorder.

Noble, Elizabeth

The Reading Group (466 pages)

A glass of wine, a gossip, and a good book - 'The Reading Group' is born. Its members are as different as the books they read. But each woman has secret hopes and fears - and each woman finds laughter and support in the group's monthly meetings.

Noble, Elizabeth

The Tenko Club (437 pages)

Four young women at university swear they will always be there for each other. Twenty years later, that promise is put to the test.

O'Connor, Joseph

Star of the Sea (410 pages)

Winter 1847, the Star of the Sea sets sail from Ireland for New York. Among the refugees are a maidservant, bankrupt Lord Merridith, an aspiring novelist and a maker of revolutionary ballads. Each is connected more deeply than they know. But a killer is stalking the decks, hungry for vengeance.

O'Farrell, Maggie

After you'd Gone (384 pages)

A distraught young woman boards a train at King's Cross to return to her family in Scotland. Six hours later, she catches sight of something so terrible in a mirror at Waverley Station that she gets on the next train back to London. After You'd Gone follows Alice's mental journey through her own past, after a traffic accident has left her in a coma. A love story that is also a story of absence, and of how our choices can reverberate through the generations, it slowly draws us closer to a dark secret at the family's heart.

Ondaatje, Michael

Anil's ghost (311 pages)

Anil Tissera, a forensic anthropologist, has returned to Sri Lanka, a land steeped in culture and tradition, to investigate organized campaigns of murder engulfing the island. This is a story of love, family, and identity, set in a country torn apart and ravaged by civil war.

Parsons, Tony

Man and Boy (343 pages)

A fabulously engaging and exciting novel about a man who has to learn about life and love the hard way. Harry Silver has it all. A successful job in TV, a gorgeous wife, a lovely child. And in one moment of madness, he chucks it all away. Man and Boy is the story of how he comes to terms with his life and achieves a degree of self-respect, bringing up his son alone and, gradually, learning what words like love and family really mean. It is very well written, has a good pace, is funny and heart-breakingly moving.

Patchett, Ann

Bel Canto (352 pages)

Latin terrorists storm an international gathering hosted by an underprivileged country to promote foreign interest and trade, only to find that their intended target, the President, has stayed home to watch his favourite soap opera on TV. Among the hostages are a world-class opera singer and her biggest fan, a Japanese tycoon who has been persuaded to attend the party on the understanding that she will perform half a dozen arias after dinner. The tycoon's engaging and sympathetic translator plays a vital role in the subsequent relationships between so many different nationalities closeted together, interpreting not only the terrorists' negotiations but also the language of love between lovers who cannot understand what the other is saying.

Penney, Stef

The Tenderness of Wolves (450 pages)

As winter tightens its grip on the isolated settlement of Dove River, a man is brutally murdered and a seventeen-year-old boy disappears. Tracks leaving the dead man's cabin head north towards the forest and the tundra beyond.

In the wake of such violence, people are drawn to the township – journalists, Hudson's Bay Company men, trappers, and traders – but do they want to solve the crime or exploit it? One by one, the assembled searchers set out from Dove River, pursuing the tracks across a desolate landscape home only to wild animals, madmen and fugitives, variously seeking a murderer, a son, two sisters missing for seventeen years and a forgotten Native American culture, before the snows settle and cover the tracks of the past for good.

Picoult, Jodi

Perfect Match (402 pages)

After years of dealing with abused children and their families and working her damndest to bring the perpetrators to justice, assistant district attorney Nina Frost takes a while to recognise the signs of abuse in her only child. When five-year-old Nathaniel stops speaking and finally, through sign language, identifies his abuser, Nina takes the law into her own hands. And so begins a fast and furious tale of twists and turns--just when you think you've got it covered, you move at right angles and a new reality emerges.

Picoult, Jodi

Nineteen Minutes (608 pages)

Sterling is a small, ordinary New Hampshire town where nothing ever happens -- until a student enters the local high school with an arsenal of guns and starts shooting, changing the lives of everyone inside and out. The daughter of the judge sitting on the case is the state's best witness -- but she can't remember what happened in front of her own eyes. Or can she?

Pierre, D.B.C.

Vernon God Little (277 pages)

Fifteen-year-old Vernon Gregory Little is in trouble, and it has something to do with the recent massacre of 16 students at his high school. Soon, the quirky backwater of Martirio, barbecue capital of Texas, is flooded with wannabe CNN hacks, eager for a scapegoat.

Plath, Sylvia

The Bell Jar (258 pages)

This largely autobiographical novel tells the story of a gifted young woman's mental breakdown beginning during a summer internship as a junior editor at a magazine in New York City in the early 1950s. The real Plath committed suicide in 1963, leaving behind this scathingly sad and honest book that remains one of the best-told tales of a woman's descent into insanity.

Pullman, Phillip

Northern Lights (448 pages)

In this first part of the "Dark Materials" trilogy, Lyra's friend Roger disappears. She and her daemon, Pantalaimon, determine to find him. Their quest leads them to the bleak splendour of the North where a team of scientists are conducting unspeakably horrible experiments.

Pym, Barbara

Quartet in Autumn (186 pages)

'Quartet In Autumn' is the story of four people in late middle age who work in the same office and who all suffer from loneliness. Poignantly and with humour, Pym takes us through their small lives and the facades they erect to defend themselves against the outside world.

Rice, Eva

The lost art of keeping secrets(433 pages)

Set in the 1950s, in an England still recovering from the Second World War, The Lost Art of Keeping Secrets is the enchanting story of Penelope Wallace and her eccentric family at the start of the rock 'n' roll era.

Robertson, James

The Testament of Gideon Mack (386 pages)

If the devil didn't exist, would man have to invent him? For Gideon Mack, faithless minister, unfaithful husband and troubled soul, the existence of God, let alone the Devil, is no more credible than that of ghosts or fairies. Until the day he falls into a gorge and is rescued by someone who might just be Satan himself. Mack's testament - a compelling blend of memoir, legend, history and, quite probably, madness - recounts one man's emotional crisis, disappearance, resurrection and death. It also transports you into an utterly mesmerising exploration of the very nature of belief.

Robinson, Marilynne

Gilead (288 pages)

In 1956, towards the end of his life, Reverend John Ames begins a letter to his son about the tension between his pacifist father and his grandfather, who came west to fight for abolition, and his own relationship with his best friend's wayward son.

Roy, Arundhati

The God of Small Things (340 pages)

Set against a background of political turbulence in Kerala, this novel tells the story of twins Esthappen and Rahel. Amongst the vats of banana jam and heaps of peppercorns in their grandmother's factory they try to craft a childhood for themselves amidst what constitutes their family.

Zafon, Carlos Ruiz

The shadow of the wind (510 pages)

Hidden in the heart of the old city of Barcelona is a labyrinthine library of obscure and forgotten titles that have long gone out of print. A man brings his 10 year old son to the library & allows him to choose one book to keep. But as he grows up, several people seem inordinately interested in his find.

Rushdie, Salman

Shalimar The Clown (416 pages)

Los Angeles, 1991. Maximilian Ophuls is murdered by his Kashmiri driver, who calls himself Shalimar the Clown. The murder looks at first like a political assassination but turns out to be deeply personal. This is the story of Max, his killer, his daughter - and the woman who links them, whose story explains them all.

Russell, Willy

The Wrong Boy (506 pages)

Such is Willy Russell's understanding of the human condition, even the flintiest heart cannot fail but to be moved by the story of Morrissey-mad Raymond Marks, the "Wrong Boy" of the title, and his misadventures in a world of cynical, and often treacherous, grown-ups. But this is not a miserable book, far from it: it is full of life, of richly drawn characters, exuberant, hilariously funny and utterly memorable.

Sebold, Alice

The Lovely Bones (328 pages)

Susie Salmon, murdered at the age of 14, watches from heaven as her friends and siblings grow up and do all the things she never had the chance to do herself. But then she finds that life is not quite finished with her yet.

See, Lisa

Snow Flower and the secret fan (272 pages)

Lily is the daughter of a humble farmer, and to her family she is just another expensive mouth to feed. Then the local matchmaker delivers startling news: if Lily's feet are bound properly, they will be flawless. In nineteenth-century China, where a woman's eligibility is judged by the shape and size of her feet, this is extraordinary good luck. Lily now has the power to make a good marriage and change the fortunes of her family. To prepare for her new life, she must undergo the agonies of foot binding; learn nu shu, the famed secret women's writing, and make a very special friend, Snow Flower. But a bitter reversal of fortune is about to change everything.

Seierstad, Asne

The Bookseller of Kabul (276 pages)

Two weeks after September 11th, journalist Asne Seierstad went to Afghanistan to report on the conflict. In the following spring she returned to live with a bookseller and his family for several months. The Bookseller of Kabul is the fascinating account of her time spent living with the family of thirteen in their four-roomed home. Bookseller Sultan Khan defied the authorities for twenty years to supply books to the people of Kabul. He was arrested, interrogated and imprisoned by the communists and watched illiterate Taliban soldiers burn piles of his books in the street. He even resorted to hiding most of his stock in attics all over Kabul. But while Khan is passionate in his love of books and hatred of censorship, he is also a committed Muslim with strict views on family life. As an outsider, Seierstad is able to move between the private world of the women - including Khan's two wives - and the more public lives of the men. The result is an intimate and fascinating portrait of a family that also offers a unique perspective on a troubled country.

Seth, Vikram

An Equal Music (483 pages)

A chance sighting on a bus; a letter which should never have been read; a pianist with a secret that touches the heart of her music ... An Equal Music is a book about love, about the love of a woman lost and found and lost again; it is a book about music and how the love of music can run like a passionate fugue through a life. It is the story of Michael, of Julia and of the love that binds them.

Shakespeare, Nicholas

Snowleg (386 pages)

A young Englishman goes to Cold War Leipzig for a weekend with a group of student actors and, during his brief visit beyond the Iron Curtain, falls for an East German girl who is just beginning to be aware of the horrendous way her country is governed. Her misery touches him, her love excites him, but he is too frightened to help. He spends 19 years suppressing the strength of his feelings for the girl he knew only by her nickname 'Snowleg' - until one day, with Germany by now united, he decides to go back and look for her. But who is she now, how will his having once abandoned her have affected her life, and how will he find her? "Snowleg" is the story of more than one sundered love, of both broken dreams and damaged families.

Shields, Carol

Unless (320 pages)

Reta Winters has a loving family, good friends, and growing success as a writer of light fiction. Then her eldest daughter suddenly withdraws from the world, abandoning university to sit on a street corner, wearing a sign that reads only 'goodness'. As Reta seeks the causes of her daughter's retreat, her enquiry turns into an unflinching, often very funny meditation on society and where we find meaning and hope.

Shreve, Anita

The Last time they met (360 pages)

Traces the life-long relationship between Linda Fallon and poet Thomas Janes. Beginning at a writers' festival in 2000, the novel accelerates backwards and ends on a June night in 1962, taking in Toronto, Nairobi and Massachusetts, and exploring the ravages of life and the need for forgiveness.

Shreve, Anita

Light on snow (288 pages)

'I watched my father run forward in his snowshoes the way one sometimes does in dreams, unable to make the legs move fast enough. I ran to the place where he knelt. I looked down into the sleeping bag. A tiny face gazed up at me, the eyes wide despite their many folds. The baby was wrapped in a bloody towel, and its lips were blue.' The events of a December afternoon on which a father and his daughter find an abandoned infant in the snow will forever alter eleven-year-old Nicky Dillon's understanding of the world which she is about to enter and the adults who inhabit it: a father who has taken great pains to remove himself from society in order to put behind him an unthinkable tragedy; a young woman who must live with the consequences of the terrible choices she has made; and a detective whose cleverness is superseded only by his sense of justice.

Shreve, Anita

A Wedding in December (328 pages)

This is the story of seven former schoolmates who gather at an inn in the Berkshires to celebrate a wedding. Their reunion becomes the occasion of astonishing revelations, recrimination, and forgiveness as the friends collectively recall a long-ago night that forever marked each of their lives...

Shriver, Lionel

We Need To Talk About Kevin (400 pages)

Kevin Katchadourian killed seven high-school students, a cafeteria worker and a teacher before his 16th birthday. His mother fears her own shortcomings may have shaped him - but how much is she to blame? And if it isn't her fault, why did he do it?

Sinha, Indra

Animal's People (400 pages)

An Indian Cyrano de Bergerac, about the relationship between an extraordinary street boy and the enemy who came to help.

Slaughter, Karin

Kisscut (470 pages)

In a small, southern U.S. town a teenage quarrel explodes into a deadly gun battle. When the smoke clears the police chief and the medical examiner are blocked at every turn of their investigation by the families and children who close ranks.

Smith, Ali

The Accidental (320 pages)

14-year-old Astrid is spending the summer in a Norfolk holiday home with her family. She knows nothing's going to happen all summer, so she's started filming the dawn breaking each morning on her Sony digital camera. Magnus, Astrid's older brother, has had to be pulled out of the upper sixth early. He used be sickeningly excited about things like calculus, how plants grow, computers and binaries. Now he lies face down on the floor in his room. What happened? Orange Broadband Prize shortlist 2006.

Smith, Andrew

Moondust (320 pages)

'A fascinating book... Smith is certainly no techno-geek and he does not shy away from the more personal questions... The humour is underpinned by a sense of extreme danger'

Smith, Dodie

I capture the castle (432 pages)

This is the journal of Cassandra Mortmain. First, there is her eccentric father. Then there is her sister, Rose, and her stepmother, Topaz. Finally, there is Stephen, who is in love with Cassandra. Cassandra records her feelings on all of them.

Smith, Zadie

On Beauty (432 pages)

When Howard Belsey's oldest son Jerome falls for Victoria, the stunning daughter of the right-wing Monty Kipps, both families find themselves thrown together, enacting a cultural and personal war against each other. Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction Winner 2006.

Smith, Zadie

White Teeth (541 pages)

In the author's words, this novel is "an attempt at a comic family epic of little England into which an explosion of ethnic colour is injected". It tells the story of three families, one Indian, one white, one mixed, in North London and Oxford from World War II to the present day.

Suskind, Patrick

Perfume (263 pages)

Survivor, genius, perfumer, and killer: this is Jean-Baptiste Grenouille. He is abandoned on the filthy streets of Paris as a child, but grows up to discover he has an extraordinary gift: a sense of smell more powerful than any other human's. Soon, he is creating the most sublime fragrances in the entire city. Yet, there is one odour he cannot capture. It is exquisite, magical: the scent of a young virgin. And, to get it, he must kill. And kill. And kill...

Tan, Amy

The Bonesetter's Daughter (339 pages)

By the author of "The Joy Luck Club", this story turns the harrowing accounts of pre-Communist Chinese women into a romantic and intriguing tale. Ruth moves in with her ailing mother, and discovers the story LuLing wrote in Chinese, of her tumultuous life growing up in a remote village.

Tartt, Donna

The Little Friend (576 pages)

Harriet grows up haunted by the murder of her brother. His killer was never identified. Harriet lives largely in the world of her imagination, alone even in company. Then one day she decides to find his murderer and exact her revenge.

Taylor, Andrew

The American boy (400 pages)

Edgar Allan Poe is the American boy, a child standing on the edge of mysteries. In 1819 two Americans arrive in London, and soon afterwards a bank collapses, a man is found dead and mutilated, an heiress flirts with her inferiors, and a schoolmaster struggles to understand what is happening.

Tessaro, Kathleen

Elegance (390 pages)

Deep in the hushed dimness of a second-hand bookshop, Louise Canova discovers a faded hardback. It is an A-Z of how to be elegant, written many years before. As she starts reading, the book's pages whisper something elusive – a way to face up to her unhappy marriage and recapture her self-esteem.

Thomas, Rosie

If my father loved me (410 pages)

Sadie can't cope with the fact that her father is dying and she begins to look back over the painful childhood that she's tried to forget. Then the arrival of one of the women from her father's past starts a train of events that she cannot control.

Tiffany, Carrie

Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living (254 pages)

Among the swaying carriages full of cows, pigs and wheat, an unlikely love affair develops between Robert Pettergree, a man with an unusual taste for soil, and Jean Finnegan, a talented young seamstress with a hunger for knowledge. In an atmosphere of heady scientific idealism, they marry and settle in the impoverished Mallee with the ambition of proving that a scientific approach to cultivation can transform the land.

Toibin, Colm

The Blackwater Lightship (273 pages)

Helen's brother is dying, and with two of his friends she waits for the end in her grandmother's crumbling old house. Her mother and grandmother, after years of strife have come to an uneasy peace. The six of them, from different generations and beliefs, are forced to come to terms with each other.

Toibin, Colm

The Master (200 pages)

It is January 1895 and Henry James's play, Guy Domville, from which he hoped to make his fortune, has failed on the London stage. Opening with this disaster, The Master spans the next five years of James's life, during which time he moves to Rye in Sussex, having found his dream retreat. There he writes his short masterpiece The Turn Of The Screw, a tale in which he incorporates many details from his own life, including his experiences as a member of one of the great eccentric American families and, later, an exile in England. Impelled by the need to work and haunted by his past - including his failure to fight in the American Civil War, and the golden summer of 1865, and the death of his sister Alice - James is watchful and witty, relishing the England in which he has come to live and regretting the New England he has left.

Tolstoi, Leo

Anna Karenina (838 pages)

Anna Karenina provides a vast panorama of contemporary life in Russia and of humanity in general. Anna is a sophisticated woman who abandons her empty existence as a wife and turns to her lover, Count Vronsky, to fulfil her passionate nature.

Tracy, P.J.

Want to play? (481 pages)

The slaying of an old couple in small town America looks like an isolated act of brutal retribution. At the same time in Minneapolis, teams of detectives scramble to catch a serial killer. The two separate investigations converge on a Catholic boarding school and it seems an old killer has resurfaced.

Tremain, Rose

The Colour (384 pages)

Joseph and Harriet Blackstone emigrate from Norfolk to New Zealand in search of new beginnings and prosperity. But the harsh land near Christchurch where they settle threatens to destroy them almost before they begin. When Joseph finds gold in the creek he is seized by a rapturous obsession with the voluptuous riches awaiting him deep in the earth. Abandoning his farm and family, he sets off alone for the new gold-fields over the Southern Alps, a moral wilderness where many others, under the seductive dreams of 'the colour', are violently rushing to their destinies. By turns both moving and terrifying, it is a story of the quest for the impossible, an attempt to mine the complexities of love and in the process discover the sacrifices to be made in the pursuit of happiness.

Tremain, Rose

Music and Silence (464 pages)

It is 1629, and a young English lute-player arrives at the court of Danish King Christian IV to play in the Royal Orchestra. From the moment he learns that the musicians must perform in a freezing cellar, he understands that he's come to a place where Good and Evil are waging a war to the death.

Tremain, Rose

The Road Home (384 pages)

'On the coach, Lev chose a seat near the back and he sat huddled against the window, staring out at the land he was leaving...' Lev is on his way to Britain to seek work, so that he can send money back to Eastern Europe to support his mother and little daughter. Readers will become totally involved with his story, as he struggles with the mysterious rituals of 'Englishness', and the fashions and fads of the London scene. We see the road Lev travels through Lev's eyes, and we share his dilemmas: the intimacy of his friendships, old and new; his joys and sufferings; his aspirations and his hopes of finding his way home, wherever home may be.

Trigiani, Adriana

Big Stone Gap (320 pages)

It's 1978 and Ave Maria Mulligan is a 35-year old spinster living in Big Stone gap, Virginia. As the local pharmacist, she's been keeping the townsfolk's secrets for years, but she's about to discover a scandal in her own family's past.

Tyler, Anne

Back when we were grownups (288 pages)

After losing her husband in a car accident, Beck asks herself whether she is an impostor in her own life. Is she really the joyous and outgoing celebrator that her family think she is?

Unsworth, Barry

The Ruby in her Navel (336 pages)

Thurstan, a young Norman and would-be Knight at the Court of King Roger in Palermo, has been in love since boyhood with Lady Alicia, now returned a widow from the Holy Land. At the same time, he is enthralled by the earthy sensuality of the dancer, Nesrin, whose troupe he brings to Court to dance for the King. In a compelling tale of love, passion, intrigue and treachery, Thurstan finds himself caught in a tangle of plots; counter-plots and deceptions that threaten to destroy him. Set in twelfth-century Sicily against the backdrop of the Crusades, Barry Unsworth's brilliant new novel tells the story of how the war between Islam and Christendom impinges on both Thurstan's mind and his heart. His journey towards freedom and love, driven along by the forces of history in the making, is both moving and unforgettable

Vickers, Salley

Miss Garnet's Angel (342 pages)

Julia Garnet is a teacher. Just retired, she is left a legacy that she uses by leaving her orderly life and going to live -- in winter -- in an apartment in Venice. Its beauty, its secret corners and treasures, and its people overwhelm a lifetime of reserve and caution. Above all, she's touched by the all-prevalent spirit of the Angel, Raphael.

Vickers, Salley

The Other Side Of You (320 pages)

'There is no cure for being alive.' Thus speaks Dr. David McBride, a psychiatrist for whom death exerts an unusual draw. As a young child, he witnessed the death of his six-year-old brother and it is this traumatic event that has shaped his own personality and choice of profession. One day, a failed suicide, Elizabeth Cruikshank, is admitted to his hospital. She is unusually reticent and it is not until he recalls a painting by Caravaggio that she finally yields up her story. We learn of Elizabeth Cruikshank's dereliction of trust, and the man she has lost, through David's narration. As her story unfolds, David finds his own life being touched by her account and a haunting sense that the 'other side' of his elusive patient has a strange resonance for him, too. Set partly in Rome, "The Other Side of You" explores the theme of redemption through love and art, which has become a hallmark of Salley Vickers's acclaimed work.

Vine, Barbara

Grasshopper (535 pages)

In a semi-fictionalized North London, a group of twenty-something slackers spend their nights walking the roofs of Maida Vale. On one of these walks they see a couple through an open window, a sighting with profound consequences that reverberate through all their lives.

Walker, Alice

The color purple (258 pages)

This is the story of Celie, raped by the man she calls father, her two children taken from her and forced into an ugly marriage. She has no one to talk to but God, until she meets a woman who offers love and support.

Wastvedt, Tricia

The River (345 pages)

In 1958 two children drown while playing in a Devon river; 30 years later a pregnant woman comes to the area to escape city life and her own disappointments. She goes to live with the children's mother and the arrival of her baby opens old wounds and uncovers past secrets

Waters, Sarah

Fingersmith (548 pages)

Sue Trinder, orphaned at birth, is born among petty thieves - fingersmiths - in London's Borough. From the moment she draws breath, her fate is linked to another orphan, growing up in a gloomy mansion not too many miles away.

Waters, Sarah

The Night Watch (506 pages)

Moving back through the 1940s, through air raids, blacked out streets, illicit liaisons, sexual adventure, to end with its beginning in 1941, The Night Watch is the work of a truly brilliant and compelling storyteller. This is the story of four Londoners - three women and a young man with a past, drawn with absolute truth and intimacy. Orange Broadband Prize shortlist 2006.

Webb, Mary

Precious Bane (288 pages)

Prue Sarn is a free spirit cursed with a harelip – her 'precious bane'. Rejected by the superstitious townspeople she takes comfort in her love for the Shropshire countryside of her birth, and in her seemingly hopeless love for Kester Woodseaves, the weaver. How Woodseaves finally discerns the true beauty of gentle Prudence is set against the tragic drama of her ambitious brother Gideon, a driven man who spurns that harmony with the natural world that his sister has always nurtured.

Weldon, Fay (local author)

The Spa Decameron (368 pages)

Ten high achieving ladies are gathered together in the week between Christmas and the New Year, at the Castle Spa, seeking, through Botox, aromatherapy and general all round pampering, a new beginning to their lives. The Ladies lounge around in the Jacuzzi, drinking champagne and eating chocolate telling each other the stories of their lives.

Winterson, Jeanette

Oranges are not the only fruit (171 pages)

A semi-autobiographical first novel, the author's namesake struggles against a domineering mother and the strictures of religion. When she starts going to school she confides in her mother about her feelings for another girl and is swept up in a feverish frenzy for her tainted soul that forces her to strike out on her own path.

Woolf, Virginia

To the Lighthouse (272 pages)

'To the Lighthouse' was Virginia Woolf's fifth novel, and was the first book to win her a large public. The story of an English middle class family in the years leading up to the First World War, it has remained the most popular of all her works.

Zafon, Carlos Ruiz

The Shadow of the Wind (510 pages)

Hidden in the heart of the old city of Barcelona is the 'cemetery of lost books', a labyrinthine library of obscure and forgotten titles that have long gone out of print. To this library, a man brings his 10-year-old son Daniel one cold morning in 1945. Daniel is allowed to choose one book from the shelves and pulls out 'La Sombra Del Viento' by Julian Carax. But as he grows up, several people seem inordinately interested in his find. Then, one night, as he is wandering the old streets once more, Daniel is approached by a figure who reminds him of a character from La Sombra del Viento, a character who turns out to be the devil. This man is tracking down every last copy of Carax's works in order to burn them. What begins as a case of literary curiosity turns into a race to find out the truth behind the life and death of Julian Carax and to save those he left behind. A page-turning exploration of obsession in literature and love, and the places that obsession can lead.