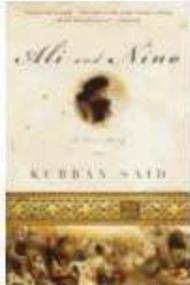


Here are some of the books that we have already discussed during our past sessions.

readasia+

19th July 2007 / 7.00pm - 9.00pm / library@orchard (Programme Zone)



The selected title for the month of July is ***Ali and Nino*** by Kurban Said, Call No.: SAI.

Book description:

It is the eve of World War I in Baku, Azerbaijan, a city on the edge of the Caspian Sea, poised precariously between east and west. Ali Khan Shirvanshir, a Muslim schoolboy from a proud, aristocratic family, has fallen in love with the beautiful and enigmatic Nino Kipiani, a Christian girl with distinctly European sensibilities. To be together they must overcome blood feud and scandal, attempt a daring horseback rescue, and travel from the bustling street of oil-boom Baku, through starkly beautiful deserts and remote mountain villages, to the opulent palace of Ali's uncle in neighboring Persia. Ultimately the lovers are drawn back to Baku, but when war threatens their future, Ali is forced to choose between his loyalty to the beliefs of his Asian ancestors and his profound devotion to Nino. Combining the exotic fascination of a tale told by Scheherazade with the range and magnificence of an epic, *Ali and Nino* is a timeless classic of love in the face of war.

Reading group guide:

<http://www.randomhouse.com/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=9780385720403&view=rq>

Ali and Nino is available at the libraries (Please check availability via the National Library Board's online catalogue at www.nlb.gov.sg) and also at bookstores like Books Kinokuniya.

Review quotes from Amazon.com:

"Poignant and beautiful...alive with a vividly unique vision of colliding cultures and enduring love." - *Newsweek*

"One feels as if one had dug up buried treasure -- An epic of cultural change that seems more immediate than this morning's headlines." - *The New York Times*

"The brilliant sunset light [*Ali and Nino*] sheds on a millennial civilization is like living history; the

alien yet immensely human characters draw one into their world with vivid conviction. The rescue of this novel is certainly an important literary event." - *Mary Renault*

"An emotional magic carpet...Rich, exciting, and brightly amusing as well as sorrowful along the way, page after iridescent page." - *The Plain Dealer*

"A beautiful novel." - *Paul Theroux*

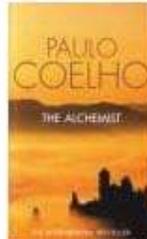
"A wonderful book. *Ali and Nino* is the best love story I have ever read, and one of the best adventures." - *Michael Feld, The Globe & Mail*

"Heartbreaking... [A] shimmering classic." - *Entertainment Weekly*

Please go to <<http://readsingapore.nlb.gov.sg/>> for other book discussions such as Read! Singapore held at library@orchard



The Shadow of the Wind
by Carlos Ruiz Zafon
8th July 2007, 3pm~5pm



The Alchemist
by Paulo Coelho.
15th July 2007, 3pm~5pm

Palestine Joe Sacco

19 April 2007

Welcome to the readasia+ book club where we read and discuss one selected book once every two months.

Reading is a solitary experience that is enhanced enormously by the opportunity to share with others about what you have read. We hope this discussion group will enhance your understanding of books and serve as a channel for an open exchange of opinions.

Readasia was set up by the Book Council in 2003 to promote the reading of Asian literature. Join us and take the excitement of reading to a whole new level.

About the author:



Joe Sacco is a Matese citizen currently residing in Portland, Oregon, USA where he makes his living as a cartoonist and journalist.

Sacco received his Bachelor of Arts degree in journalism at the University of Oregon in 1981.

In the years subsequent to the release of *Palestine*, Sacco has gained widespread praise for the depth of his research, the sensitivity of his handling of a delicate subject, as well as for the craft exhibited in his dynamic, sophisticated layouts and bold narrative.

Palestine set new standards for the use of the comic book as a documentary medium, and was the first non-fiction graphic novel to invite serious comparison with Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Maus*.

If you are interested to attend the discussions, please email christina@bookcouncil.sg or call 68488293. Log on to our website <http://www.bookcouncil.sg> for more details.

Organised by:  **library@orchard**
NBDCS
The Book Council

readasia+ Book Club

Join Us on:

19 April 2007
7 p.m.
library@orchard

For April, we've selected something quite different: a graphic novel.



Palestine
By Joe Sacco

If your idea of comics is all about genetically modified superheroes in skintight Lycra then Joe Sacco's *Palestine* might take you by surprise.

Swapping spandex for some hands-on journalism, Sacco spent two months on the West Bank and Gaza Strip during the early 90s, interviewing more than 100 people. The end result was nine issues, now in one volume, which follow the fortunes of Palestinians under the Israeli occupation. Soldiers, injured children, refugees and former prisoners all appear to tell their stories, featuring a cartoon Sacco interviewing them and creating his own portrait of the conflict.

Presented in detailed and sometimes gruesome monochrome, Sacco's graphics are dazzling and equally as affecting as his subjects' stories. While it's obviously biased towards the Palestinians, Sacco's portrait is a probing and searing one. Heavy going but highly entertaining, this is war reportage at its most creative. – BBC review.

This book is available at bookstores as well as at the libraries. Please check the online catalogue <<http://vistaweb.nlb.gov.sg>> for details on availability at the libraries.

The Noodle Maker

Ma Jian

15 February 2007

Booklist review:

Ma Jian, an immigrant Chinese dissident and author of the acclaimed travel book *Red Dust* (2001), now turns to mordantly satirical fiction to capture the grim paradoxes of late-twentieth-century China. Western products and attitudes have infiltrated the rigid Communist state, but people are still not free of the party's malignant power, and the only individuals able to get ahead are entrepreneurs pursuing risky, illegal ventures, such as a well-off "professional blood donor" who regularly visits his friend, a poor "professional writer." As the two men eat, drink, and needle each other, Ma Jian mixes in sections of the writer's fragmented yet utterly involving novel, which depicts a cruel and grotesque world. Women are abused and raped. A man runs an unauthorized crematorium where he berates the dead. An actress commits suicide onstage. Echoing Gogol and offering an urban variation on the themes of Nobel Prize winner Gao Xingjian, Ma Jian presents a bleak yet compelling vision of an aberrant society in which people are caught in the grip of a capricious and treacherous power and starved for kindness, beauty, and reason.

The author:

Ma Jian left Beijing for Hong Kong in the early eighties because he was unable to publish his work in China. After the hand-over of Hong Kong he moved to Germany and then London, where he has lived for four years, writing and publishing his acclaimed book *Red Dust*, winner of the 2002 Thomas Cook Travel Book Award.

From: <<http://www.randomhouse.com/author/results.pperl?authorid=14539>>

Snow Country

Yasunari Kawabata

21 December 2006

To this haunting novel of wasted love, Kawabata brings the brushstroke suggestiveness and astonishing grasp of motive that earned him the Nobel Prize for Literature. As he chronicles the affair between a wealthy dilettante and the mountain geisha who gives herself to him without illusions or regrets, one of Japan's greatest writers creates a work that is dense in implication and exalting in its sadness.

The author:

Yasunari Kawabata, son of a highly-cultivated physician, was born in 1899 in Osaka. Kawabata made his debut as a writer with the short story, *Izu dancer*, published in 1927. After several distinguished works, the novel *Snow Country* in 1937 secured Kawabata's position as one of the leading authors in Japan. In 1949, the publication of the serials *Thousand Cranes* and *The Sound of the Mountain* was commenced. He became a member of the Art Academy of Japan in 1953 and four years later he was appointed chairman of the P.E.N. Club of Japan. At several international congresses Kawabata was the Japanese delegate for this club. *The Lake* (1955), *The Sleeping Beauty* (1960) and *The Old Capital* (1962) belong to his later works, and of these novels, *The Old Capital* is the one that made the deepest impression in the author's native country and abroad. In 1959, Kawabata received the Goethe-medal in Frankfurt.

From:

http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1968/kawabata-bio.html

Behind the Moon

Hsu-Ming Teo

16 November 2006

Outsiders and misfits in their Australian school, three friends form a mutual bond: Justin Cheong, an only child and the idol of his Singaporean-Chinese parents; Tien Ho-daughter of a Vietnamese mother who stayed behind and an African American soldier she has never met- who lives with indifferent relatives; and Nigel "Gibbo" Gibson, an oddity: an Australian boy who, to his father's chagrin, dislikes sports.

When Tien Ho's mother arrives, the adjustment for mother and daughter is extreme. Gibbo is strongly attracted to beautiful, dainty Linh, to whom he is a kid, her daughter's pal. And Justin discovers that he likes Gibbo as something more than a friend. The three draw apart as they grow up, only to be reunited once more on Saturday, September 6, 1997, for the dinner Mrs. Cheong hosts for them and their parents, to

watch the funeral of Princess Diana on television. This Dead Diana Dinner turns out to be a more explosive event than any of them would have dreamed possible.

Hsu-Ming Teo was born in Malaysia in 1970 and immigrated with her family to Australia in 1977. She is the author of *Love and Vertigo*, which won The Australian/Vogel Literary Award and has been translated into German, Italian, Thai and Chinese. She lives in Sydney and is a lecturer in modern history at Macquarie University. More details (discussion points, notes etc) can be found at

<<http://www.allenandunwin.com/readinggroups/Files/behindthemoon.pdf>>.

Sightseeing

Rattawut Lapcharoensap

19 October 2006

The situation in Thailand is certainly the hot topic of the moment; share your thoughts about modern Thai society and culture via our next selected book: a collection of short stories set in contemporary Thailand. The writings of young Thai American writer, Rattawut resonates on many wavelengths as he considers the significance of seeing and being seen, of tourism and exile. Superbly well paced, nimble and vividly descriptive. From the pollution-enhanced sunsets of Bangkok to unheralded comings-of-age, and class and cultural conflicts, these tales of modern Thailand are fresh and captivating, funny and sad, and exceptionally astute.

A boy who looks to his moody older brother for love after their father was killed by a giant crate of wooden toys destined for America becomes ill when he eats his first hamburger. Two Thai boys befriend a courageous little Cambodian refugee named Priscilla. In each intriguing, ironic, and empathic story, Lapcharoensap tracks the unintended consequences of globalization and our strivings for self, survival, and love." The author of this collection was born in Chicago, raised in Bangkok, and now lives in Michigan. This is his debut publication. More details at

http://www.bookbrowse.com/reading_guides/detail/index.cfm?book_number=1520>.

Snow

Orhan Pamuk

20 September 2006

Dread, yearning, identity, intrigue, the lethal chemistry between secular doubt and Islamic fanaticism; these are the elements that Orhan Pamuk anneals in this masterful, disquieting novel. An exiled poet named Ka returns to Turkey and travels to the forlorn city of Kars. His ostensible purpose is to report on a wave of suicides among religious girls forbidden to wear their head-scarves. But Ka is also drawn by his memories of the radiant Ipek, now recently divorced. Amid blanketing snowfall and universal suspicion, Ka finds himself pursued by figures ranging from Ipek's ex-husband to a charismatic terrorist. A lost gift returns with ecstatic suddenness. A theatrical evening climaxes in a massacre. And finding god may be the prelude to losing everything else. Touching, slyly comic, and humming with cerebral suspense, *Snow* is of immense relevance to our present moment.

More details (discussion points, excerpts etc) can be found at

<<http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guides3/snow1.asp>>. This book is available at most bookstores as well as at the libraries. Please check the online catalogue <<http://vistaweb.nlb.gov.sg>> for details on availability at the libraries.

Corridor

Alfian Sa'at

17 August 2006

Alfian Sa'at is arguably one of Singapore's more interesting (and some would say subversive) young writers/poets. This early collection of short stories attests to this, although it reads more like an uneven collection of domestic anecdotes. In this book, one can sense the beginning of his preoccupation with the marginal. Experimental, exploratory, his intimate domestic scenes often veer into liminal spaces. Ghosts, dead bodies, racial alienation, illicit/taboo loves litter his domestic forays into ordinary Singaporeans' lives.

One is haunted by a recurring loneliness even between blood relations and lovers.

Told in a colloquial, almost earthy and matter-of-fact manner, Alfian demonstrates an ear for dialogue - oddly enough, it is through the silences and gaps in communication that one feels most sharply his characters' pain. For example, in "Video", a daughter leaves behind an expensive video camera from her late father because she cannot stand the thought that the ghosts of her father and unborn child are watching her.

This collection is not an explicitly political work, but his stories can be read as a short and critical social commentary on Singapore; we are thrust unapologetically beyond the façade of modern day Singapore's economic success to the microcosm of despair that exists in each unit of Singapore's ubiquitous HDB block. In doing so, Singapore's national myth of the harmonious society is atomized and fragmented by each character's struggle to connect with his/her immediate family and surroundings.

Memories of My Melancholy Whores

Gabriel Garcia Marquez

16 July 2006

García Márquez's slim, reflective contribution to the romance of the brothel, his first book-length fiction in a decade, is narrated by perhaps the greatest connoisseur ever of girls for hire. After a lifetime spent in the arms of prostitutes (514 when he loses count at age 50), the unnamed journalist protagonist decides that his gift to himself on his 90th birthday will be a night with an adolescent virgin. But age, followed by the unexpected blossoming of love, disrupts his plans, and he finds himself wooing the allotted 14-year-old in silence for a year, sitting beside her as she sleeps and contemplating a life idly spent. Flashes of García Márquez's brilliant imagery—the sleeping girl is "drenched in phosphorescent perspiration"—illuminate the novella, and there are striking insights into the euphoria that is the flip side of the fear of death. The narrator's wit and charm, however, are not enough to counterbalance the monotony of his aimlessness. Though enough grace notes are struck to produce echoes of eloquence, this flatness keeps the memories as melancholy as the women themselves. 250,000 first printing.

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Small Island

Andrea Levy

15 June 2006

Set largely in England during and soon after WWII, Andrea Levy's award-winning debut novel *Small Island* is about four different people at a time of profound social upheaval: Queenie, the spoiled blonde daughter of a British butcher; her husband Bernard, the repressed working-class soldier committed to his ideals; Gilbert, Queenie's Jamaican tenant and Royal Air Force veteran struggling to belong in the Mother Country he fought for; and Gilbert's lovely and demanding Jamaican wife Hortense, who married not for love but for a better life that she failed to find. As each of these character's lives intersect in surprising and disruptive ways, all are forced to confront, and ultimately adapt, to the changing world around them. Winner of the 2004 **Orange Prize** for Fiction

Never Let Me Go

Kazuo Ishiguro

18 May 2006

A thirty-one-year-old woman named Kathy narrates this haunting tale, drawing the reader gradually into her recollections of her life at Hailsham, the idyllic boarding school where she grew up. She and her best friends, Ruth and Tommy, were encouraged by their teachers to create works of art from an early age, to collect cherished objects, and to take good care of their health. There are no parents in their world, only a handful of teachers, some of whom seem to be deeply troubled by their position at the school. Kathy's friend Ruth is bossy and manipulative, while Kathy herself is gentle and self-contained. Both are drawn to Tommy, a boy given to explosive fits of temper. What is revealed, as Kathy's reminiscences accumulate, is a life of preparation for a special role in a world that has begun to exploit the medical possibilities of genetic technology. A tale of deceptive simplicity, *Never Let Me Go* slowly reveals an extraordinary emotional depth and resonance—and takes its place among Kazuo Ishiguro's finest work.

Sputnik Sweetheart
Haruki Murakami
20 April 2006

Murakami's seventh novel to be translated into English is a short, enigmatic chronicle of unrequited desire involving three acquaintances the narrator, a 24-year-old Tokyo schoolteacher; his friend Sumire, an erratic, dreamy writer who idolizes Jack Kerouac; and Miu, a beautiful married businesswoman with a secret in her past so harrowing it has turned her hair snowy white. When Sumire abandons her writing for life as an assistant to Miu and later disappears while the two are vacationing on a Greek island, the narrator/teacher travels across the world to help find her. Once on the island, he discovers Sumire has written two stories: one explaining the extent of her longing for Miu; the second revealing the secret from Miu's past that bleached her hair and prevents her from getting close to anyone. All of the characters suffer from bouts of existential despair, and in the end, back in Tokyo, having lost both of his potential saviors and deciding to end a loveless affair with a student's mother, the narrator laments his loneliness. Though the story is almost stark in its simplicity more like Murakami's romantic Norwegian Wood than his surreal Wind-Up Bird Chronicles the careful intimacy of the protagonists' conversation and their tightly controlled passion for each other make this slim book worthwhile. Like a Zen koan, Murakami's tale of the search for human connection asks only questions, offers no answers and must be meditated upon to provide meaning. (Apr. 30)Forecast: Long the secret delight of connoisseurs, Murakami has been steadily and quietly acquiring a wider readership. His latest offering breaks no new ground but is packaged in a striking manner and should attract a few newcomers.

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Mammon Inc
Hwee Hwee Tan
16 March 2006

How far would you go to pursue success? Would you sell your soul for the dream job?

This is the central question posed by Tan's modern satirical update on the tale of Faustus, albeit, with a transcultural twist. Meet Chiah Deng, the protagonist; born in Singapore and educated in Oxford. Newly graduated, pausing at the crossroads between pursuing something closer to one's heart (academia) or something fast and exciting in the corporate world. Enter the devil of a temptation, Mammon Inc., the behemoth Enron-like company that throws perks and privileges at you if you would only sell your body, mind and soul to it. Throw in the mix of "Asian values"; i.e, parental expectations of excellence and filial piety and the pressures to pursue worldly success are compounded. What would this young, educated, well-traveled, identity-crisis prone (Deng/Tan) do?

Tan's tale of cultural and spiritual dislocation resonates both within the nouveau riche young of Singapore and Asia as well as the wider Western world, where the conflict between capitalism and spiritual/emotional well being is becoming more pronounced in today's fast-paced relentless world. The question then becomes one of degree and balance: how far would one go to win worldly accolades? And at what cost to your cultural and spiritual identity?

The answer it seems is it does not take much to lose everything. Written with verve and cosmopolitan wit (in general), Tan captures the quintessential angst of a generation falling through the cracks of Globalisation. Unfortunately, this book is perhaps too ambitious in trying to deal with such complex themes coherently. Depending on your viewpoint, her take on culture can strike one as either overwrought or brilliant. Her sentences arrest and demand your attention (her opening line, "Steve got his dick caught in the window", is fantastic), but one senses Tan's quandary as she seeks to use words that can straddle two cultures. Case in point, should 'well-brought up' Asian girls even say 'dick'? You get the picture. Stylistically, she suffers from the perennial dilemma of good English Asian (is there even such a category?) writers. If language be the carrier of culture and values, what words should she inject to explain what?

A brilliant but flawed book, Tan's works are important for another reason, her books are perhaps Singapore's literature most successful attempt at reaching a wider world; she is (at least to the West) readable. Staff reporter for the Wall Street Journal, Gregg Zachary has hailed Tan as South East Asia's most important female English writer. Read Tan's Mammon Inc. to find out if such praise is hyperbole or well deserved.

Contributed by Andrea Wee, Librarian, Adult and Young People's Services
Mammon Inc is the winning work of Singapore Literature Prize 2004 for English Books

The Namesake
Jhumpa Lahiri
15 February 2006

The Namesake is a finely wrought, deeply moving family drama that illuminates this acclaimed author's signature themes: the immigrant experience, the clash of cultures, the tangled ties between generations.

The Namesake takes the Ganguli family from their tradition-bound life in Calcutta through their fraught transformation into Americans. On the heels of an arranged wedding, Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli settle in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where Ashoke does his best to adapt while his wife pines for home. When their son, Gogol, is born, the task of naming him betrays their hope of respecting old ways in a new world. And we watch as Gogol stumbles along the first-generation path, strewn with conflicting loyalties, comic detours, and wrenching love affairs.

With empathy and penetrating insight, Lahiri explores the expectations bestowed on us by our parents and the means by which we come to define who we are.

My Year of Meat
Ruth L. Ozeki
15 December 2005

Jane Takagi-Little, an unemployed documentary maker, leaps at the opportunity to co-ordinate a joint Japanese-American television series. Called "My American Wife!", the series focuses on American families and their favourite meat dishes. Jane's role is to find these "authentic" families and persuade them to take part in the programme. During the course of the year, Jane begins to find her conscience at war with her bank account as she learns about meat production in the USA. Running parallel to Jane's story of discovery is the story of unhappy Japanese wife, Akiko Ueno, whose violent, domineering husband is also involved in the creation of "My American Wife!".

Ozeki combines fact with social satire so that humour is always lurking below the surface, even when such "meaty" issues as domestic violence, eating disorders, drug-induced cancer and cross-cultural misunderstandings are being discussed.

Winner of the 1998 Kiriya Pacific Rim Book Prize.

The Kite Runner
Khaled Hosseini
17 November 2005

Amir lives a charmed life in a wealthy neighbourhood in 1970's Kabul, Afghanistan. He shares the joys of boyhood with his best friend, Hassan, the son of the family servant and a member of the despised Hazara minority. Their favourite sport is kite fighting, where boys use razor-sharp kite lines to sever each other's lines.

When Amir betrays Hassan to the neighbourhood bully, his guilt sets the rest of his life on a new course, as he constantly seeks redemption for his betrayal of Hassan. When the Russian army invades Afghanistan, Amir and his father flee for the United States where Amir marries and begins a writing career. When his father's business partner in Pakistan sends a deathbed summons for him, Amir returns to Kabul, now under the crushing rule of the Taliban, to discover long-buried secrets and a last chance to find absolution.

The Reader
By Bernhard Schlink
20 October 2005

Michael Berg, 15, is on his way home from school in post-World War II Germany when he becomes ill with hepatitis and is rescued by Hanna, a woman twice his age. When he recovers, he returns to thank her and they begin an affair. The relationship, at first purely physical, soon takes on a more meaningful routine in which after lovemaking, Michael reads aloud from the German classics. Hanna then leaves the city abruptly and Michael does not see her again until, as a law student, he sits in on her case when she is tried as a

Nazi criminal. Only then does it become clear that Hanna is illiterate and her inability to read and her false pride have contributed to her crime and will affect her sentencing.

This haunting story of love and guilt in which the legacy of Nazi crimes enters a young man's life in an irrevocable way will inspire questions and passionate discussion.

Lost Horizon
By James Hilton
15 September 2005

Few books succeed in adding a new word to the English language; *Lost Horizon* is one of them. Shangri-la, meaning a remote paradise of beauty and enlightenment, was invented by James Hilton as the name of the imaginary Tibetan monastery that is the setting for his fantasy adventure novel.

Conway, a British consul, his deputy, a missionary and an American financier find themselves in the mysterious snow-capped mountains somewhere in Tibet after their plane crashes. Instructed by the mortally wounded pilot to find the lamasery of Shangri-la, they are confused and delighted to be greeted with gracious hospitality there but find themselves virtually imprisoned in the mystical and beautiful place.

With its luxurious amenities, a vast library and many antique treasures, what is the dark secret at the heart of the apparent utopia of Shangri-la?

Reading Lolita in Tehran
Azar Nafisi
18 August 2005

In Iran in the late 90s, Azar Nafisi and seven of her former students gather at her house every Thursday to discuss forbidden works of Western literature. Shy and uncomfortable at first, they soon begin to open up, not only about the novels they are reading but also about their own dreams and disappointments. They discuss the daily indignities of living under the Ayatollah Khomeini's regime, the effects of the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, love, marriage, and life in general.

The room that they meet in becomes a place of transgression and their personal stories intertwine with those they are reading - *Pride and Prejudice*, *Washington Square*, *Daisy Miller* and *Lolita*. This tale gives a fascinating portrait of the Iran-Iraq war and gives us a rare glimpse, from the inside, of women's lives in revolutionary Iran.

Life of Pi
Yann Martel
21 July 2005

Pi Patel is a young Indian boy growing up in South India in the 1970's. His father owns a zoo but with increasing political unrest in India, decides to sell up and emigrate to Canada. They accompany the wild animals on board the ship on their journey to the new zoos in North America. The ship sinks and Pi finds himself the only human survivor onboard a life raft, his only companions a hyena, an orangutan, a wounded zebra, and a 450-pound Bengal tiger called Richard Parker. Soon the tiger has dispatched all but Pi, whose fear, knowledge, and cunning allow him to coexist with Richard Parker for 227 days lost at sea.

Life of Pi explores the redemptive power of storytelling and the transformative nature of fiction. It is a story, as one character puts it, "to make you believe in God".

Winner of the 2002 **Man Booker Prize** for Fiction.

Anil's Ghost
Michael Ondaatje
19 August 2004

In his first novel since the internationally acclaimed *The English Patient*, Booker Prize-winning author Michael Ondaatje gives us a work displaying all the richness of imagery and language and the piercing emotional truth that we have come to know as the hallmarks of his writing.

Anil's Ghost transports us to Sri Lanka, a country steeped in centuries of tradition, now forced into the late twentieth century by the ravages of civil war. Into this maelstrom steps Anil Tissera, a young woman born in Sri Lanka, educated in England and America, who returns to her homeland as a forensic anthropologist sent by an international human rights group to discover the source of the organised campaigns of murder engulfing the island. What follows is a story about love, about family, about identity, about the unknown enemy, about the quest to unlock the hidden past—a story propelled by a riveting mystery. Unfolding against the deeply evocative background of Sri Lanka's landscape and ancient civilisation, *Anil's Ghost* is a literary spellbinder – Michael Ondaatje's most powerful novel yet.

Michael Ondaatje is the author of the internationally acclaimed prose works *Coming Through Slaughter*, *Running in the Family*, *In the Skin of a Lion* and *The English Patient*, for which he won the Booker Prize in 1992. His books of poetry include *The Cinnamon Peeler* and *Handwriting*. Ondaatje was born in Sri Lanka and moved to Canada in 1962.

Republic of Wine
Mo Yan
15 July 2004

Set in the fictional province of the Republic of Wine, this tall tale begins with a rumor of cannibal feasts featuring children as the delectable main course. In response, Chinese officials send special investigator Ding Gou'er to look into the allegations. Almost at once, Ding's worst fears seem to be realised when he is invited to a special dinner, given enough alcohol to stun an ox, and then served what appears to be "a golden, incredibly fragrant little boy."

Horrified, he attempts to make an arrest and in the ensuing confusion, accidentally puts a bullet in the main course. Despite his hosts' explanation that the boy's arms are made of lotus root, his legs of ham sausage, and his head from a silver melon, Ding remains suspicious—until he is rendered so addled by wine that he ends up eating half an arm all on his own. As Ding continues his investigation, Mo Yan sends up the Chinese preoccupation with food, drink, and sex even as he daringly explores the nature of his country's political structure.

Peopled by extraordinary characters - a dwarf, a scaly demon, a troupe of small boys raised for eating and a cookery teacher who primes her students with monstrous recipes - Mo Yan's unforgettable novel confirms his reputation as one of China's greatest living writers.

Old Truths, New Revelations
Edited and introduced by KK Seet
17 June 2004

This book features a selection of 39 stories from prizewinning ASEAN writers who represent the best in southeast Asia. Whether it is a comical vignette, tragic tale, satire or folk fable, each story portrays the diversity of life in this part of the world. Read this and discover southeast Asia's literary talents!

A Gesture Life
Chang-rae Lee
20 May 2004

Franklin Hata, a Japanese man of Korean birth is a honest, hardworking man who is careful to never overstep his bounds. Beloved in the small, wealthy suburban New York community where he ran a surgical supply store, "Doc" Hata lives a stringently circumspect life designed to afford him privacy and respect. Never married, he adopts a young girl of mixed parentage from a Japanese orphanage. He raises Sunny

with strict adherence to impeccable standards, and is bewildered when she spurns his gifts and rejects his code of values. He is tormented, moreover, by his terrible forbidden love for a young Korean comfort woman when he was a paramedical officer serving in the Japanese army during World War II.

In *A Gesture Life*, Chang-rae Lee leads us through a taut, suspenseful story about love, family and community. He writes of the ways outsiders conform in order to survive and the price they pay for doing so. Chang-rae Lee was selected as one of the *New Yorker's* 20 best writers under 40. His work has appeared in *The Best American Essays*, *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, and numerous anthologies. He is the director of the MFA programme at Hunter College in New York City. His debut novel *Native Speaker* has won many awards, including the Hemmingway Foundation/PEN Award.

The New York Times Book Review, Andrew O'Hagan

A Gesture Life is a beautiful, solitary, remarkably tender book that reveals the shadows that fall constantly from the past, the ones that move darkly on the lawns of the here and now.

The New York Times, Michiko Kakutani

Chang-rae Lee has written a wise and humane novel.... a wonderfully resonant portrait of a man caught between two cultures and two lives.

A *New York Times* Notable Book

A *Los Angeles Times* Notable Book of the Year

A *Publishers Weekly* Notable Book of the Year

A *Finalist for the New Yorker Book Award*

An *Esquire* Distinguished Book of the Year

Talk Magazine's Best Book of 1999

An ALA Notable Book of the Year

A *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* Notable Book of the Year

Reef

Romesh Gunsekera

15 April 2004

After slowly and reverently savoring Gunsekera's debut novel, it's easy to see why this flawless book was short-listed for the Booker Prize (1994). In spare, poetic language, Gunsekera tells the story of a Sri Lankan servant and his esteemed employer, Ranjan Salgado, a compassionate man obsessed by the destruction of coral reefs and with Nili, the woman he loves. Only a youth when he enters Salgado's home, Triton acquires far more than cooking and cleaning skills. Over the course of many years together, Salgado and Triton witness the growing political turmoil and unrest of their island nation, and Triton observes, emulates, and finally parts company with the man who has nurtured his budding intellect and inherent potential. Worthy of acclaim, this exquisitely rendered work signals a writer to be closely watched.

Reef was shortlisted for the Guardian Fiction Prize and the Booker Prize in 1994, and won the Yorkshire Post Best First Work award and the Italian Premio Mondello Five Continents Prize.

Bibliography

Monkfish Moon, 1992

Reef, 1994

The Sandglass, 1998

Heaven's Edge, 2002

Romesh Gunsekera was born in 1954 and grew up in Sri Lanka and the Philippines before moving to England in 1972. He read English and Philosophy at Liverpool University. He now resides in London and travels widely for festivals, workshops and British Council tours. In recent years he has held writing residencies in Hong Kong, Singapore and Denmark.

Red Dust
Ma Jian
18 March 2004

In 1983, squirming under constant government scrutiny and mourning a failed marriage, writer and photographer Ma Jian abandons his home in Beijing to journey to China's western border with little more than a change of clothes, two bars of soap, a notebook, a camera and Whitman's Leaves of Grass. It is the beginning of an arduous three-year voyage that takes him not only through little-traveled regions of China, Myanmar and Tibet, but through a careful examination of what it means to be a Buddhist, to live in post-Mao China and to exist in his own skin. On the journey, he visited mountains, deserts, lakes, Buddhist monasteries, a leprosy camp, overpopulated cities and small villages, encountering unusual characters along the way. Although billed as a travelogue, this memoir is also a spiritual and geographical journey. Ma Jian was born in 1953 in Qingdao, China. He is a writer, painter and photographer. He left China for Hong Kong soon after finishing his journey but moved to Europe at the hand-over of Hong Kong in 1997. He currently lives in London.

The Glass Palace
Amitav Ghosh
19 February 2004

Starting with the threads of his own family memories, Indian author Ghosh has created a rich tapestry of a novel, set in the Indian subcontinent and spanning more than a century. As British troops take the Burmese royal family into exile in Mandalay in 1885, burly 11-year-old Rajkumar, who has lost his entire family to illness in India, spies lovely 10-year-old Dolly, an orphan who serves the queen, and he vows he will see her again. When they meet nearly 20 years later, Rajkumar has become wealthy from the teak business and Dolly is managing the royal household. Through friendship and marriage, their lives become intertwined with members of two other families, and all are seen in the context of the political conflicts and movements of the time in Burma, India, and Malaysia.

"An absorbing story of a world in transition, brought to life through characters who love and suffer with equal intensity." - **JM Coetzee**

New York Times Notable Book of 2001
Los Angeles Times Notable Book of 2001
Chicago Tribune Favourite Book of 2001
Grand Prize for Fiction, Frankfurt eBook Award, 2001

Amitav Ghosh was born in Calcutta in 1956 and is one of the most widely known Indians writing in English today. His books include *The Circle of Reason*, *The Shadow Lines*, *In An Antique Land*, *Dancing in Cambodia*, *The Calcutta Chromosome* and *The Glass Palace*. He lives with his wife and their children, in Brooklyn, USA.

Heartland
Daren Shiao
15 January 2004

Heartland explores the paradox of rootedness and rootlessness facing Singaporeans born after the Japanese Occupation. Wing, who has just been conscripted, is unable to reconcile his future but unwilling to dwell in the past. He finds his own meaning in an intense attachment to his surrounding landscape. Yet, as relationships and the years slip by him, Wing is irresistibly forced to question his own certainties and the wisdom of the people he values.

Shiao has been writing for the last ten years. He read Humanities at Raffles Junior College where he was selected to do a special paper on Metaphysical Poetry. He won the yearly writing prize at the college. In the NUS Literary Society Competition 1993 / 1994, he won top prizes in prose and verse for *Gyres* and *Mirrors Over Doors*. In 1995, he was shortlisted for the Singapore Literature Prize for his poetry collection *Heartland*. He spent the next three years on a novel, also titled *Heartland*, which won the Commendation Award in 1998. His works have been performed at various local recitals and are published in *Focus* and *Window of Singapore*.

A Quiet Life
Kenzaburo Oé
18 December 2003

Nobel laureate Kenzaburo Oe has produced a quirky, introspective novel that uses autobiographical elements to tell the story of a writer's family and his rediscovery of his place therein. Written in the form of a diary, the story is told from the point of view of Ma-Chan, the daughter of a famous writer (identified only as "K") who has decamped to California as a university writer-in-residence. Ma-Chan is left in charge of her equally famous brother, an idiot savant who composes brilliant classical music. The mentally retarded brother, nicknamed Eeyore, has violent fits, periods of incontinence, and a troubling new sexual awareness. Eeyore is the moral center of the book, a touchstone and a catalyst for the muted events that carry the novel to its unpredictable close. Full of digressions on the cinema and modernist music, Oe's latest novel is a stylized, idiosyncratic confessional that only he could fashion.

Kenzaburo Oé was born in 1935, and as a young boy, he was caught up in the fervor and propaganda of the second World War. Like most boys his age, he was ready to die for his country and his emperor. However, when the war ended, and young Oé heard the emperor on the radio, he realised that his great hero was a mere human. This disillusionment at such an early age influenced his life and his writing.

In 1963, Oé's son, Hikari, was born. Hikari was born with a brain hernia, and doctors said that even if he lived, he would be severely retarded. The birth of Hikari caused a change in Oé's writing: he started writing about his son and the relationship they shared. Since then, Oé has written several stories with similar themes, which he refers to as his "idiot son" stories. Oé is well known for these stories, and they contributed significantly to his winning the Nobel Prize in 1994.

Immediately after accepting the Nobel Prize, Oé announced that he would not be writing novels. His said that he wrote fiction to give a voice to his son, and now his son has his own voice. Hikari has become a composer, with two CDs currently in release and selling well in Japan and in the U.S. Hikari has become famous in Japan in his own right.

Interpreter of Maladies
Jhumpa Lahiri
20 November 2003

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 2000, Jhumpa Lahiri's debut is an elegant collection of stories about the lives of Indians in exile, of people navigating between the strict traditions they have inherited and the baffling new world they encounter everyday.

An interpreter guides an American family through the India of their ancestors and hears an astonishing revelation, a young Midwestern woman is drawn into a tantalising affair with a Bengali man, a young couple exchange confessions each night as they struggle to cope with the loss of their baby and Mr Pirzada, whose watch is always set to Dacca time, worries about his family back in Pakistan.

In stories that travel from India to America, Lahiri speaks with universal eloquence to anyone who has ever felt like a foreigner.

Jhumpa Lahiri was born in London of Bengali parents and grew up in Rhode Island, USA. She is the winner of numerous awards, including the 2000 Pulitzer Prize, Publishers Weekly Best Books of the Year, the PEN/Hemingway Award and The New Yorker's Debut of the Year Award. Her latest book is The Namesake.

Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress
Dai Sijie
16 October 2003

In this enchanting tale about the magic of reading and the wonder of romantic awakening, two hapless city boys are exiled to a remote mountain village for re-education during China's infamous Cultural Revolution. There they discover a hidden stash of Western classics in Chinese translation and steal "subversive" novels of Honore de Balzac, Flaubert, Dostoevsky, and Gogol and read them to the daughter of the local tailor. While reading, both boys fall in love with the girl, and, through Balzac, discover "awakening desire, passion, impulsive action, love, all the subjects that had, until then, been hidden". The unsophisticated girl is deeply

affected and inspired by the literature and seeks to escape from the limitations of her life. This is a book about the power of art to enlarge our imaginations and the power of literature to free the mind.

The novel was made into a film and was France's nominee for **Best Foreign Film** at this year's **Golden Globe Awards**.

Born in China in 1954, Dai Sijie is a filmmaker who was himself "re-educated" between 1971 and 1974. He left China in 1984 for France, where he has lived and worked ever since. This, his first novel, was an overnight sensation when it appeared in France in 2000, becoming an immediate best-seller and winning five prizes. Rights to the novel have been sold in nineteen countries.

"Poetic and affecting... The descriptions of life in this strangest of times and places are so riveting that the reader longs for more." - **The New York Times Book Review**

"Gives the rest of the world a glimpse into that dark place where the human spirit continued, against all odds, to shine its light." - **The Boston Globe**

A Bit of Earth
Suchen Christine Lim
18 September 2003

Malaya. A land of unparalleled richness. For centuries, the peninsula has attracted fortune hunters, money-grabbing pirates and migrants seeking a better life. Among those whose lives are rooted in the Malayan soil are three families - the Wongs, sons of the Chinese earth; the Wees, subjects of the English gods; the Mahmuds, scions of the Malayan soil - each with different dreams for the bit of earth they live on. Their destinies meet and this clash of hope inevitably leads to tragedy.

Suchen Christine Lim grew up on both sides of the causeway which separates the island of Singapore from Malaysia. When she was 15, her family left Malaysia and moved to Singapore where she was sent to the convent for her English education. She graduated from the University of Singapore and taught in a college for some years before writing fiction. Lim describes herself as a Southeast Asian writer and was International Writer-in-Residence at the University of Iowa in 2000.

A Bit of Earth is her fourth novel. Her other works include *Fistful of Colours* (1993), the first novel to be awarded the Singapore Literature Prize, *Gift from the Gods* (1990) and *Rice Bowl* (1984).

Memories of a Pure Spring
Duong Thu Hong
21 August 2003

Memories of a Pure Spring is a mesmerizing portrait of modern Vietnam and its people who struggle to survive under the complexities of a post-war regime. During the Vietnam war, Hung, a well-known composer, becomes enchanted by the voice and beauty of a young peasant girl named Suong. He invites her to join his troupe; she becomes his wife and his star performer. But after the war, Hung loses his job, setting off a series of events that drive him and Suong into a destructive spiral. Duong takes readers on a journey into the human psyche by looking at the frailty of the human condition and asks readers to confront issues like depression, attempted suicide, infidelity, and drug and alcohol abuse. The threads of love that bind her characters together are the same threads that break them.

One of Vietnam's most popular writers, Duong Thu Huong draws on her own experiences to describe life at the battlefield, the conditions of a re-education camp, and the texture and rhythm, scents and sounds, of a provincial Vietnamese city. Most of all, she tells a haunting, universal story of failed love.

Duong Thu Huong, an advocate of human rights and democratic political reform, was expelled from the Communist Party and imprisoned without trial in 1991. The Vietnamese government has effectively banned all of her novels.

The Death of Vishnu

Manil Suri

17 July 2003

Vishnu, the odd-job man in a Bombay apartment block, lies dying on the staircase landing. As this aging alcoholic takes leave of the earth, his neighbors surround him, arguing over who gave Vishnu a few dried chapatis, who called the doctor for him, and who will pay for the ambulance to cart him away.

Around him the lives of the apartment dwellers unfold – the warring housewives on the first floor, the lovesick teenagers on the second, and the widower, alone and quietly grieving at the top of the building. In a fevered state, Vishnu recalls his relatively rare snatches of love and joy - and especially his romance with Padmini, a self-involved prostitute and comedy becomes tragedy as his life draws to a close.

Blending wonderful family drama with Indian mythology and a dash of Bollywood sparkle, *The Death of Vishnu* is an intimate and compelling view of an unforgettable world.

Manil Suri, a native of Mumbai (Bombay) has lived in the United States since 1979. He is a professor of mathematics at the University of Maryland Baltimore County His fiction has appeared in *The New Yorker*. *The Death of Vishnu* is his first novel.

Norwegian Wood

Haruki Murakami

19 June 2003

Toru Watanabe, a successful, 37-year-old businessman, hears a version of the Beatles' *Norwegian Wood*, and the music transports him back 18 years to his college days. His best friend, Kizuki, inexplicably commits suicide, after which Toru becomes first enamored, then involved with Kizuki's girlfriend, Naoko. Naoko is a troubled young woman; and though sweet and desperate for happiness, she often becomes depressed and eventually enters a convalescent home for the disturbed.

Toru begins to adapt to the loneliness and isolation of campus life but Naoko finds the pressures and responsibilities of life unbearable. As she retreats further into her own world, Toru finds himself reaching out to others and drawn to a fiercely independent and outgoing young woman, Midori. As he falls in love with her, Toru realizes he cannot continue his relationship with Naoko, whose sanity is fast deteriorating.

A poignant story of one college student's romantic coming-of-age, *Norwegian Wood* takes us to that distant place of a young man's first, hopeless, and heroic love.

Haruki Murakami was born in Kyoto in 1949 and ran a jazz club in Tokyo before he was first inspired to write. In 1987, when *Norwegian Wood* was first published in Japan, it promptly sold more than 4 million copies and transformed Murakami into a pop-culture icon. The reluctant celebrity fled his native land for Europe and the United States, returning only in 1995. His relationship with his country has been complex but, after years in exile, he has returned to live in Japan.

Reader's Guide to Norwegian Wood

http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0375704027/ref=pm_dp_ln_b_15/103-7115259-7451044?v=glance&s=books&vi=discussion-guide

Links to information on Haruki Murakami

<http://www.complete-review.com/authors/murakamh.htm#links>

Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words by Jay Rubin

Soul Mountain
Gao Xingjian
29 May 2003

In 1982, Chinese playwright, critic, fiction writer, and painter Gao Xingjian was diagnosed with lung cancer and faced imminent death. But six weeks later, a second examination revealed there was no cancer -he had won "a second reprieve from death". Faced with a repressive cultural environment and the threat of a spell in a prison farm, Gao fled Beijing and began a journey of 15,000 kilometers into the remote mountains and ancient forests of Sichuan in southwest China. The result of this epic voyage of discovery is *Soul Mountain*.

Bold, lyrical, and prodigious, *Soul Mountain* probes the human soul with an uncommon directness and candor and delights in the freedom of the imagination to expand the notion of the individual self. Book description taken from Amazon.com

Gao Xingjian received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2000 and is the first Chinese recipient of the prestigious award. Born in 1940 in Jiangxi province in eastern China, he has lived in France since 1987. Gao Xingjian is an artistic innovator in both the visual arts and literature. He is that rare multitalented artist who excels as a novelist, playwright, essayist, director, and painter.

In addition to *Soul Mountain* and *One Man's Bible*, a book of his plays, *The Other Shore*, and a volume of his paintings, *Return to Painting*, have been published.

Reader's Guide to Soul Mountain

http://www.harpercollins.com/catalog/guide_xml.asp?isbn=0060936231

<http://www.bookbrowse.com/index.cfm?page=title&titleID=686&view=guide>

<http://www.imaginaryplanet.net/essays/literary/soulmountain.php>