

Contemporary Women Novelists (Androski, 2005)

Authors on this list have published their first novels since 2000 and show promise of continued good work.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. *Purple Hibiscus*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2003. ISBN: 3071565123875.

The political and the personal merge in this coming of age novel set in contemporary Nigeria. The fifteen year old daughter tells of her life with a father who abuses his wife and children while fighting the autocratic regime put in power by a military coup. Although marred by a rushed ending, this book nevertheless paints a vivid portrait of the politics, climate, social customs, and, above all, food of Nigeria as well as universal dysfunctional family dynamics. [The Orange Prize for Fiction Shortlist 2004]

Monica Ali. *Brick Lane*. New York: Scribner, 2003. ISBN: 3690743243307; ISBN: 0743243315 (pbk.).

Set in the Bangladeshi community of contemporary London's East End, this novel charts the physical and emotional journey of a young Muslim woman brought from a traditional sheltered existence in Pakistan to a modern multicultural city for an arranged marriage with a man 20 years her senior. [American Library Association Notable Book 2004; Guardian First Book Award Shortlist 2003; Man Booker Prize Shortlist 2003; National Book Critics Circle Award Shortlist 2003; Granta Best Young British Novelist 2003]

Trezza Azzopardi. *The Hiding Place*. London: Picador, 2000. ISBN: 2820330390759.

Set in Tiger Bay, Cardiff, this is the story of Dolores, whose father gambled and lost everything to the head of the Maltese Mafia when Dolores was born a girl, not a boy. This novel moves between past and future, exploring Dolores' world through sometimes horrific incidents [Man Booker Prize Shortlist 2003]

—. *Remember Me*. New York: Grove Press, 2004. ISBN: 2610802117678.

Lillian, a 72 year old woman, homeless on the streets of Norwich, England, is robbed of everything she owns by a seemingly random act of violence by a young woman. This sets her off on an examination of her life that, though initially as disjointed as her mind, gradually pieces together a moving story of loss and betrayal where she is both victim and perpetrator.

Anna Burns. *No Bones*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2002. ISBN: 039332303X

A grim inside look, with black comic touches, at life in Belfast, Northern Ireland beginning in 1972, where the line between political and personal violence does not exist. [Orange Prize for Fiction Shortlist 2002]

Lan Samantha Chang. *Hunger: A Novella and Stories*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1998. ISBN: 1910393046648

These stories evoke the immigrant experience for present day Chinese Americans, especially the tension between parents wanting to preserve the traditions that give them identity and American-born children wanting to assimilate. [Banta Award 1999]

—. *Inheritance*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2004. ISBN: 3020393059197

A family history set in China during the Japanese invasion in World War II and the Maoist revolution. The impact of the larger events on interpersonal relationships is explored with vivid cultural detail and poignancy.

Susanna Clarke. *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2004. ISBN: 7821582344167

Set in England during the early 1800s, this novel – part historical fiction, part fantasy fiction – tells the story with gusto and ample period detail of how magical creatures helped avert a Napoleonic invasion. Great fun to read.

Anne Donovan. *Buddha Da*. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2004. ISBN: 3300786713364.

The impact on their lives as a Glasgow housepainter takes up meditation and becomes more and more involved in Buddhism is narrated by himself, his wife, and his daughter in a surprisingly accessible Glaswegian dialect. There is much humor and insight into family dynamics here. [The Orange Prize for Fiction Shortlist 2003; Whitbread First Novel Award Shortlist 2003].

Debra Magpie Earling. *Perma Red*. New York: BlueHen Books, 2002. ISBN: 296039914899.

A love story with overtones of *Wuthering Heights* set in the years following World War II on the Flathead Indian Reservation in Montana and involving a spirited Indian girl, her rebellious Indian lover, and a wealthy white man who also desires her.

Susan Elderkin. *Sunset Over Chocolate Mountains*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2000. ISBN: 0871138085

Three story lines – an eccentric Englishman emigrates on a whim to the US where he lives alone and lonely; a pair of lovers, she pregnant, leave Slovakia illegally to make their fortunes; a motherless girl is snatched from her odd but idyllic childhood all too brutally – converge in the Arizona desert where the landscape is also a character in this moving story of the human need for connection. [Betty Trask Award, Granta Best Young British Novelists 2003]

—. *The Voices*. New York: Grove Press, 2003. ISBN: 3230802117570.

Also set in the desert, this time the Australian bush, with a strong sense of place, this is the story of a boy, alienated from his parents, who becomes involved with an Aboriginal girl and her cultural magic.

Nomi Eve. *The Family Orchard: A Novel*. New York: Knopf, 2000. ISBN: 3160375410767; 0375724575 (pbk.)

A young woman reconstructs her family history in Jerusalem from 1837 to the present using interlocking narratives – her father's straightforward genealogical findings and her own imagining of the characters' interior lives – to create not merely a family tree but a family orchard. Information about horticulture – the family does indeed own an orchard – and the city of Jerusalem are deftly woven into the story.

Susan Fletcher. *Eve Green*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2004. ISBN: 287039305988X

The grown up Eve Green looks back on her childhood in rural Wales where she came to live with her grandparents at the sudden death of her mother and, piece by piece, comes to terms with the tragedies and hard lessons she endured as well as the beauty and the love she found. [Whitbread First Novel Award 2004]

Julia Glass. *Three Junes*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2002. ISBN: 3530375422412.

The fortunes of the McLeods are followed over three fateful summers in a ten-year time span with the scene shifting from their Scotland home to Greece to – particularly affecting – New York at the height of the AIDS crisis. The many meanings of family are thoughtfully explored. [National Book Award 2002]

Tessa Hadley. *Accidents in the Home*. New York: Henry Holt, 2002. ISBN: 2410805070648.

Interlocking stories create a portrait, rich in domestic detail, of an extended middle class English family (a helpful family tree is provided) and its discontents, particularly those of Clare, a young wife and mother embarking on an affair with her best friend's partner.

—. *Everything Will Be All Right*. New York: Henry Holt, 2003. ISBN: 3030805070656.

The lives of four generations of women from one family from the 1950s to the present are explored. The feel of each decade is captured exactly right.

Sarah Hall. *Haweswater*. London: Faber, 2002. ISBN: 2670571209254

A fictional account of the building of the Haweswater Dam in the 1930s in England's Lake District (where Hall

was raised) which flooded a valley and its village to supply water to Manchester. Hall is a poet and it shows in the vivid word pictures she creates of the natural and social worlds lost. [Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best First Book 2003]

— ***The Electric Michelangelo*. London: Faber, 2004. ISBN: 2880571219292**

A tattoo artist in 1930s Coney Island reproduces on the bodies what is written on the souls of his clients. [Man Booker Shortlist 2004]

Zoe Heller. *Everything You Know*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000. ISBN: 2030375407243.

A black comedy about a misanthropic writer.

— ***What Was She Thinking?* New York: Henry Holt, 2003. ISBN: 2580375407243**

The story of the disastrous affair between a schoolteacher and her 15 year old student as told by her supposed friend, aptly named Barbara Covett. A brilliant character study of loneliness and bitterness. [Man Booker Shortlist 2003]

Jhumpa Lahiri. *Interpreter of Maladies: Stories*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999. ISBN: 1980395927218

Tender, precise stories that tell of the immigrant experience for Indians in America, particularly the women caught between two cultures. [Pulitzer Prize Shortlist]

— ***The Namesake*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003. ISBN: 2910395927218.**

The bonds and tensions between Bengali-born immigrants in a Boston suburb and their American-born and thoroughly Americanized son are told with tenderness and generosity. [The Orange Prize for Fiction longlist 2004]

Mary Lawson. *Crow Lake*. New York: Dial Press, 2002. ISBN: 293038533611X.

A 26 year old biologist narrates her family's story in a series of flashbacks: four children being raised by the eldest in a rural northern Ontario community when their parents are killed in a car crash. Family dynamics, love, misunderstanding, and reconciliation are dealt with here with poignancy.

Julie Otsuka. *When the Emperor Was Divine*. New York: Knopf, 2002. ISBN: 1410375414290.

Otsuka tells the story, based on her own family's experience, of a Japanese-American family's internment during World War II. Her spare, dispassionate prose creates for the reader the sense of surrealism that must have been felt by those who were uprooted from all that was familiar.

Ann Packer. *The Dive From Clausen's Pier*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002. ISBN: 3690375412824.

When the man she was falling out of love with breaks his neck in a dive into shallow water and is paralyzed, a young woman is suddenly thrust into having to decide what her obligation to him is. The story of her moral choice is told without shrinking from its complexity and with such close attention to the details of everyday life that the reader can easily identify with her dilemma.

Suzan-Lori Parks. *Getting Mother's Body*. New York: Random House, 2003. ISBN: 2571400060222.

This tragi-comic first novel by a Pulitzer-winning African-American playwright paints a vivid portrait of life for Blacks in Civil Rights era Texas as the survivors of a woman reportedly buried with some very expensive jewelry vie to get their hands on the fortune, each hoping to finance a new start in life. [NY Times Notable 2003]

Gwendoline Riley. *Cold Water*. New York: Carroll & Graf, 2003. ISBN: 1650786711094

An oddly hopeful novel despite its setting among the denizens of low-life bars in Manchester, England where it never seems to stop raining. The characters, especially Carmel, the twenty-something bar girl protagonist with vague dreams of getting out, are depicted with affection and the prose is sharp and witty. [Betty Trask Award Shortlist 2002; Guardian First Novel Award]

—. ***Tuesday Nights and Wednesday Mornings*. New York: Carroll & Graf, 2004. ISBN: 2310786713267**

Short stories and a novella where the heroine, bookish Esther this time, can't quite leave grubby Manchester or get on with her life. The prose again crackles and the depiction of the friendship between Esther and her best mate Donna is brilliant.

Alice Sebold. *The Lovely Bones*. Boston: Little, Brown, 2002. ISBN: 3280316666343.

A 14 year old girl tells the story of her rape and murder and its aftermath from her vantage point in heaven. An unusual and effective method of portraying the hold the dead have upon those they leave behind.

Rachel Seiffert. *The Dark Room*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2001. ISBN: 2780375422595.

Told in clear, dispassionate prose that leaves lingering images, this book looks at Nazi Germany through the eyes of three Germans playing indirect roles and not completely understanding what they witness: a young man in Berlin during the build up to the war and the war itself whose physical deformity keeps him out of the army; an adolescent girl who must shepherd her younger siblings across a ravaged post war countryside to get to her grandmother's house because her parents, highly placed Nazis, have been arrested by the Americans; and a young man in 1997 who learns his beloved grandfather was Waffen SS. [Booker Prize short list 2001]

—. ***Field Study*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2004. ISBN: 0375422595.**

Short stories, mostly set in traumatized post World War II Europe.

Zadie Smith. *White Teeth: A Novel*. New York: Random House, 2000. ISBN: 4480-375-50186-X.

The story of two families – one a white man married to a much younger Jamaican woman and the other a Pakistani immigrant couple – in multicultural North London told with great humor, humanity, and rollercoaster plotting. [Whitbread First Novel Award, Guardian First Book Award, Commonwealth Writers First Book Award, Booker Prize Shortlist, National Book Critics Circle Award Shortlist, Orange Prize for Fiction Shortlist]

—. ***The Autograph Man: A Novel*. New York: Random House, 2002. ISBN: 347037550186X**

Again with humor and tenderness, Smith takes on the celebrity culture with this story of a Chinese Jewish autograph dealer who cannot seem to come to grips with the responsibilities of real life. [Booker Prize longlist]

Mary Helen Stefaniak. *Self Storage and Other Stories*. Minneapolis, MN: New Rivers Press, 1997. ISBN: 1550898231833

An exquisite collection of stories that explore with insight and with the experience of every day life. [Banta Award 1998]

—. ***The Turk and My Mother*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2004. ISBN: 3160393059243.**

This first novel, spanning from 1914 Austro-Hungary to present day Milwaukee, tells with great humor and poignancy the story of one immigrant family's experience.

Jennifer Vanderbes. *Easter Island*. New York: Dial Press, 2003. ISBN: 304038533673X.

Two women from different eras, one the wife of an anthropologist in 1914 and the other a biologist in 1973, have come to Easter Island to uncover its mysteries and instead learn some truths about themselves. Their alternating stories converge in a book rich not only in interpersonal dynamics but also in interesting information about Easter Island's natural and human history.

Salley Vickers. *Miss Garnet's Angel*. New York: Carroll & Graf, 2000. ISBN: 3420374177023.

A British spinster who has spent her life as an unbeliever vacations in Venice and succumbs to its magic. A sensuous, multi-layered book that treats the possibility of angels without sentimentality.

—. ***Instances of the Number 3*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002. ISBN: 3050374214891**

Peter Hansome, recently dead and now in Purgatory, watches over his wife and his mistress coming to terms with their respective bereavements.

— ***Mr. Golightly's Holiday*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004. ISBN: 3560374214891**

An elderly man rents a holiday cottage in a Devon village and reluctantly finds himself involved in his neighbors' lives. Gradually the reader becomes aware that Mr. Golightly is God, still reeling from the death of his son and rethinking his relationship to his creation. Vickers, as usual, treats her weighty theme with comic thoughtfulness.

Louise Welsh. *The Cutting Room*. Edinburgh: Canongate, 2002. ISBN: 294184195280X

A thriller that transcends the genre. A Glasgow auction house dealer is called upon to appraise and dispose of quickly the possessions of a newly deceased wealthy man. When he discovers these possessions include a snuff pornography collection, his quest to find out if the suggested murder actually happened leads him into the city's seamy underbelly where he must confront a host of vividly drawn characters as well as his own sexual nature. [NY Times Notable 2003]

— ***Tamburlaine Must Die*. Edinburgh: Canongate, 2004. ISBN: 1841955329**

An historical novel about Christopher Marlowe and skullduggery in Elizabethan London.

Jincy Willett. *Winner of the National Book Award: A Novel of Fame, Honor, and Really Bad Weather*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2003. ISBN: 3230312311818.

In this witty and literary black comedy, a middle-aged librarian, who prefers books to people, recounts her life with her bawdy twin sister, their mutual relationship with an abusive man, and her passion for reading in 1980s Rhode Island.

Key to Awards

- **American Library Association Notable Books:** selected by a division of the ALA for their significant contribution to the expansion of knowledge or for the pleasure they can provide to readers.
- **Banta Award:** given by the Wisconsin Library Association for the best book of the year by a Wisconsin author
- **Betty Trask Award:** for first novels published in English by UK writers over age 35
- **Commonwealth Writers Prize:** for any work of prose fiction written in English by a citizen of the Commonwealth
- **Guardian First Book Awards:** sponsored by the UK newspaper for first books
- **Lambda Literary Award:** awarded by the Lambda Literary Foundation which is devoted to the recognition and promotion of gay, lesbian, transgender, and bisexual writing
- **National Book Award:** given by the National Book Foundation to enhance the public's awareness of exceptional books written by Americans
- **National Book Critics Circle Award:** given by an organization of active book critics to honor quality writing
- **The Orange Prize for Fiction:** honors fiction written by women and published in the United Kingdom.
- **PEN/Faulkner Award:** recognizes the best published works of fiction by contemporary American writers.
- **The Whitbread Award:** aims to celebrate and promote the best of contemporary British writing

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Prepared for the University of Wisconsin Women's Studies Librarian's Office

May 2005