

# Reader Group Book Sets 2007

Titles are available in sets of 10 unless otherwise stated  
Audio copies are available on some titles on enquiry

## Classics

### **Pride & Prejudice** by Jane Austen

When Elizabeth Bennet first meets eligible bachelor Fitzwilliam Darcy, she thinks him arrogant and conceited; he is indifferent to her good looks and lively mind. When she later discovers that Darcy has involved himself in the troubled relationship between his friend Bingley and her beloved sister Jane, she is determined to dislike him more than ever. In the sparkling comedy of manners that follows, Jane Austen shows the folly of judging by first impressions and superbly evokes the friendships, gossip and snobberies of provincial middle-class life.

### **The Woodlanders** by Thomas Hardy

Set in the beautiful Blackmoor Vale, *The Woodlanders* concerns the fortunes of Giles Winterborne, whose love for the well-to-do Grace Melbury is challenged by the arrival of the dashing and dissolute doctor, Edred Fitzpiers. When the mysterious Felice Charmond further complicates the romantic entanglements, marital choice and class mobility become inextricably linked. Hardy's powerful novel depicts individuals in thrall to desire and the natural law that motivates them.

### **Tess of the d'Urbervilles** by Thomas Hardy

When Tess Durbeyfield is driven by family poverty to claim kinship with the wealthy D'Urbervilles and seek a portion of their family fortune, meeting her 'cousin' Alec proves to be her downfall. A very different man, Angel Clare, seems to offer her love and salvation, but Tess must choose whether to reveal her past or remain silent in the hope of a peaceful future. With its sensitive depiction of the wronged Tess and powerful criticism of social convention, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is one of the most moving and poetic of Hardy's novels.

### **Maurice** by E. M. Forster

Completed in 1914, this novel is a condemnation of the repressive attitudes of British society and a plea for emotional and sexual honesty. Aware that its publication would cause a furore on account of its homosexual content, Forster ensured that it did not appear until after his death in 1970.

## Contemporary Fiction

### **House of Sand and Fog** by Andre Dubus III

When Kathy, a young recovering alcoholic recently separated from her husband, fails to open a series of tax letters that have been sent to her in error, the State of California seizes the house she and her brother have inherited from her father. The State sells the house at auction to Behrani, a former Iranian Air Force officer. Unable to parley his skills into a job in aerospace in the US, the house represents an entry into real estate and a passport to the future of his family and his own version of the American Dream. For Kathy, its loss is the last of a series of insults life has dealt her. When she becomes involved with a married policeman who takes up her cause, the stage is set for a gut-wrenching tragedy.

8 copies

### **Mr Golightly's Holiday** by Salley Vickers

Mr Golightly is much in need of a holiday. As successful as Golightly Enterprises has been, it has also taken up all his time and energy, and anyway the fortunes of the company are now somewhat in decline. Mr Golightly needs to re-think the whole operation. Choosing the perfect English village of Great Calne as his holiday destination, Mr Golightly has time to reconsider the dwindling appeal of the international bestseller which made Golightly Enterprises what it once was. The great work needs to be modernised and Mr Golightly has the idea of re-conceiving the whole thing as a soap opera. Strangely, the story of the book seems to be being played out around him amongst the villagers of Great Calne. All very mysterious. Indeed there is mystery surrounding Mr Golightly too. Who is he? And what of the tragic story of his son's death? In this bravura performance, Sally Vickers has written a novel that is at once, audacious, complex and very funny.

**The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time** by Mark Haddon

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time is a murder mystery novel like no other. The detective, and narrator, is Christopher Boone. Christopher is fifteen and has Asperger's, a form of autism. He knows a very great deal about maths and very little about human beings. He loves lists, patterns and the truth. He hates the colours yellow and brown and being touched. He has never gone further than the end of the road on his own, but when he finds a neighbour's dog murdered he sets out on a terrifying journey which will turn his whole world upside down.

**If nobody speaks of remarkable things** by Jon McGregor

On a street in a town in the North of England, ordinary people are going through the motions of their everyday existence - street cricket, barbecues, painting windows...A young man is in love with a neighbour who does not even know his name. An old couple make their way up to the nearby bus stop. But then a terrible event shatters the quiet of the early summer evening. That this remarkable and horrific event is only poignant to those who saw it, not even meriting a mention on the local news, means that those who witness it will be altered for ever.

**The Kite Runner** by Khaled Hosseini

Twelve-year-old Amir is desperate to win the approval of his father and resolves to win the local kite-fighting tournament, to prove that he has the makings of a man. His loyal friend Hassan promises to help him, for he always helps Amir. But this is 1970s Afghanistan and Hassan is merely a low-caste servant who is jeered at in the street, although Amir still feels jealous of his natural courage and the place he holds in his father's heart. But neither of the boys could foresee what would happen to Hassan on the afternoon of the tournament, which was to shatter their lives.

**The Sea** by John Banville

When art historian Max Morden returns to the seaside village where he once spent a childhood holiday, he is both escaping from a recent loss and confronting a distant trauma. The Grace family had appeared there, in that long-ago summer, as if from another world. Mr. and Mrs. Grace, with their worldly ease and candour, were unlike any adults he had met before. But it was his contemporaries, the Grace twins, Myles and Chloe, who most fascinated Max. He grew to know them intricately, even intimately, and what ensued would haunt him for the rest of his years and shape everything that was to follow.

**Affinity** by Sarah Waters

Set in and around the women's prison at Millbank in the 1870's, *Affinity* is an eerie and compelling ghost story, a complex and intriguing literary mystery and a poignant love story with an unexpected twist in the tale. Following the death of her father, Margaret Prior has decided to pursue some 'good work' with the lady criminals of one of London's most notorious gaols. Surrounded by prisoners, murderers and common thieves, Margaret feels herself drawn to one of the prisons more unlikely inmates - the imprisoned spiritualist - Selina Dawes.

**Purple Hibiscus** by Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche

A haunting tale of an Africa and an adolescence undergoing tremendous changes by a talented young Nigerian writer. The limits of fifteen-year-old Kambili's world are defined by the high walls of her family estate and the dictates of her repressive and fanatically religious father. When Nigeria begins to fall apart during a military coup, Kambili's father, involved mysteriously in the political crisis, sends Kambili and her brother away to live with their aunt. In this house, full of energy and laughter, she discovers life and love - and a terrible, bruising secret deep within her family.

**When we were orphans** by Kazuo Ishiguro

England, 1930s. Christopher Banks has become the country's most celebrated detective, his cases the talk of London society. Yet one unsolved crime has always haunted him: the mysterious disappearance of his parents, in old Shanghai, when he was a small boy. Moving between London and Shanghai of the inter-war years, this is a remarkable story of memory, intrigue and the need to return from the highly acclaimed author of *The Remains of the Day*.

**Behind the Scenes at the Museum** by Kate Atkinson

Ruby Lennox was conceived grudgingly by Bunty and born while her father, George, was in the Dog and Hare in Doncaster telling a woman in an emerald dress and a D-cup that he wasn't married. Bunty had never wanted to marry George, but here she was, stuck in a flat above the pet shop in an ancient street beneath York Minster, with sensible and sardonic Patrica aged five, greedy cross-patch Gillian who refused to be ignored, and Ruby...Ruby tells the story of The Family, from the day at the end of the nineteenth century when a travelling French photographer catches frail beautiful Alice and her children, like flowers in amber, to the startling, witty, and memorable events of Ruby's own life.

**Small Island** by Andrea Levy

Award-winning novelist Andrea Levy's *Small Island* was published in 2004 and has become a critically acclaimed international bestseller. The author has drawn upon personal family experience and extensive research to create a compelling novel that convincingly mixes high drama, comedy, pathos, outrage and compassion. The reader is immersed in the period when the first black Caribbean immigrants arrived in post-war Britain and made contact with the white resident population, a meeting that would change the lives of all. The story shifts between 1948, the year when the SS Empire Windrush docked at Tilbury in Kent carrying 492 Jamaican migrant workers – including among them Andrea Levy's father – and 'Before', the years leading up to this significant moment in British history. The events are seen through the eyes of four narrators, two black and two white.

**The Pillars of the Earth** by Ken Follett

"The Pillars of the Earth" tells the story of Philip, prior of Kingsbridge, a devout and resourceful monk driven to build the greatest Gothic cathedral the world has known; of Tom, the mason who becomes his architect - a man divided in his soul; of the beautiful, elusive Lady Aliena, haunted by a secret shame; and of a struggle between good and evil that will turn church against state, and brother against brother. A spellbinding epic tale of ambition, anarchy, and absolute power set against the sprawling medieval canvas of twelfth-century England, this is Ken Follett's historical masterpiece.

**High Society** by Ben Elton

The war on drugs has been lost. The simple fact is that the whole world is rapidly becoming one vast criminal network. From pop stars and princes to crack whores and street kids, from the Groucho Club toilets to the poppy fields of Afghanistan, we are all partners in crime. High Society is a story about our world today, a collection of criminal nations in which everyone is either breaking the law or knows people who do. It takes the reader on a hilarious, heart breaking and terrifying journey through the kaleidoscope world that the law has created and from which the law offers no protection.

**The Service of Clouds** by Susan Hill

At the far end of the long white gallery is a painting of a woman, in pale flowing clothes and lying on a sofa beside an open window. The muslin curtains billow out towards her like clouds. There is a touch of brilliant red, the ribbon on her hat. The rest is the white, cream, palest grey. It is a painting which leads Flora on, beckoning her away from her childhood, her complaining, clinging mother, pert younger sister, and the confines of a small community, to a proud and self-reliant future. But later, its image is to prove the catalyst for the most significant event in her life. Isolation, separation, solitude, betrayal. The shocks of life. The consolations and the beauty of death. A few piercing moments of absolute joy and perfect understanding. The Service Of Clouds is about these things, and also about love, loyalty, friendship, growing up and growing old.

**Goodnight Mister Tom** by Michelle Magorian

The gruff and surly Mr Thomas Oakley is less than pleased when he is landed with a scrawny little city boy as a guest, but because it is compulsory that each villager takes in an evacuee he reluctantly agrees. It soon becomes obvious to Mister Tom that young Willie Beech is hiding something, and as the pair begin to form an unlikely bond and Willie grows in stature and in confidence he begins to forget the past. But when he has to return to war-torn London to face his mother again he retreats into his shy and awkward ways once more.

**The Restraint of Beasts** by Magnus Mills

Good fences may make good neighbours, but in Magnus Mills's first novel, bad fences make for high tension indeed. An eerie noir fable told in a grim, deadpan voice, *The Restraint of Beasts* begins as an unnamed English fence builder finds himself promoted to foreman over Tam and Richie, two undermotivated Scots labourers. They've just been sent out to fix a high-tension fence when events go horribly awry--and that's just the beginning. For the rest of the novel, as his charges drink, smoke, loaf, and pound the occasional post, things go wrong over and over again. In a sense, that's all you can truly rely on in Mills's fictional world. It is not giving away too much to say that with these particular fencers on the job, you'd best watch your back. And your front, for that matter. And maybe keep a firm eye on the skies, just in case.

**Revenge of the Middle Aged Woman** by Elizabeth Buchan

Living wisely is the best revenge for a London book review editor who loses both husband and job to her conniving assistant in this sophisticated and satisfying novel. Rose Lloyd is in her late 40s and has been happily married for 25 years when Minty, her "glossy free-ranging" young assistant, brusquely shoulders her aside. Husband Nathan, who is a deputy editor at the same newspaper, is decent and remorseful, but determined to start a new life, and Rose must pick up the pieces--which she does with commendable energy and resolve. Sidestepping the conventional wife-gets-even plot, Buchan opts for a more believable examination of one intelligent woman's midlife coming-of-age.

**Man and Boy** by Tony Parsons

On the eve of his 30th birthday, Harry Silver blows everything by indulging in a one-night stand with a young assistant on the TV talk show he produces. When Harry's wife, Gina, discovers his adultery, she jets off immediately to pursue job opportunities in Japan, leaving Harry in temporary custody of their adorable four-year-old son, Pat. Parsons captures the free-floating angst of a man who senses his horizons constricting and the panic of a suddenly single father confronting the issues of childcare. Harry's misery is compounded by the subsequent loss of his job; his conviction that he's failed his own loving father, a WWII war hero; and the reluctance of the new woman in his life, an American waitress, to commit emotionally to him.

**8 copies****Austerlitz** by W G Sebald

An unnamed narrator, resting in a waiting room of the Antwerp rail station in the late 1960s, strikes up a conversation with a student of architecture named Austerlitz, about whom he knows almost nothing. Over the next several years, the narrator often runs into his odd, engaging acquaintance by chance on his travels, until finally, after a gap of two decades, Austerlitz decides to tell the narrator the story of his life and of his search for his origins in wartime Europe. Slow and meditative, relying on the cumulative effect of its sedate, musical prose and its dark subject matter (illuminated here and there with hope), Sebald's novel doesn't overturn the conventions of fiction, but transcends them. It is a love story to history and vanished beauty.

**Atonement** by Ian McEwan

In the summer of 1935, 13-year-old Briony Tallis attempts to stage a production of her new drama "The Trials of Arabella" to welcome home her older, idolized brother Leon. But she soon discovers that her cousins, the glamorous Lola and the twin boys Jackson and Pierrot, aren't up to the task, and directorial ambitions are abandoned as more interesting prospects of preoccupation come onto the scene. The charlady's son, Robbie Turner, appears to be forcing Briony's sister Cecilia to strip in the fountain and sends her obscene letters; Leon has brought home a dim chocolate magnate keen for a war to promote his new "Army Ammo" chocolate bar; and upstairs, Briony's migraine-stricken mother Emily keeps tabs on the house from her bed. Soon, secrets emerge that change the lives of everyone present.

**The No.1 Ladies Detective Agency** by Alexander McCall Smith

It's the detective as folk hero, solving crimes through an innate, self-possessed wisdom that, combined with an understanding of human nature, invariably penetrates into the heart of a puzzle. If Miss Marple were fat and jolly and lived in Botswana--and decided to go against any conventional notion of what an unmarried woman should do, spending the money she got from selling her late father's cattle to set up a Ladies' Detective Agency--then you have an idea of how Precious sets herself up as her country's first female detective.

**The Flight of the Maidens** by Jane Gardam

Prolific English novelist Gardam, Whitbread Award winner for both *The Hollow Land* and *Queen of the Tambourine*, has crafted a story through which readers can step into 1946 England. The war is over and the world is profoundly changed, though some of the old trappings remain, reminders of a faded past. Three Yorkshire girls of considerable intelligence but modest means have earned scholarships to universities in Cambridge and London; the novel is set during the summer before their departure for university. The portrait of postwar England as conventions crumble and the country is rebuilt is drawn by a writer whose attention to detail recreates, lovingly and with bright flashes of wit, another time and place.

**The Innocent** by Ian McEwan

Leonard Marnham is assigned to a British-American surveillance team in Cold War Berlin. His intelligence work-- tunneling under a Russian communications center to tap the phone lines to Moscow--offers him a welcome opportunity to begin shedding his own unwanted innocence, even if he is only a bit player in a grim international comedy of errors. Leonard's relationship with Maria Eckdorf, an enigmatic and beautiful West Berliner, likewise promises to loosen the bonds of his ordinary life. But the promise turns to horror in the course of one terrible evening--a night when Leonard Marnham learns just how much of his innocence he's willing to shed.

**The Siege** by Helen Dunmore

*The Siege* is Helen Dunmore's masterpiece. Her canvas is monumental -- the Nazis' 1941 winter siege on Leningrad that killed six hundred thousand -- but her focus is heartrendingly intimate. One family, the Levins, fights to stay alive in their small apartment, held together by the unlikely courage and resourcefulness of twenty-two-year-old Anna. Though she dreams of an artist's life, she must instead forage for food in the ever more desperate city and watch her little brother grow cruelly thin. Their father, a blacklisted writer who once advocated a robust life of the mind, withers in spirit and body. At such brutal times everything is tested. And yet Dunmore's inspiring story shows that even then, the triumph of the human heart is that love need not fall away.

**This is not a novel** by Jennifer Johnston

Johnny, an outstanding young swimmer, went missing nearly thirty years ago: drowned, or so everyone except his sister Imogen believes. How could this have happened? Encouraged, pushed even, from a child by his father, Johnny could have made the Olympic team, couldn't he? As Imogen gradually pieces together bits of her family history, we hear the tragic echoes that connect her with the Great War and Ireland in the nineteen-twenties.

**A Metropolitan Murder** by Lee Jackson

The brutal 'Railway Murder' brings Inspector Decimus Webb to the newly-formed Metropolitan Line on a bleak winter's night. His investigation leads him through the slums of Victorian London. Lee Jackson's second novel brilliantly recreates the sights, sounds and smells of Victorian London, taking readers on a suspense-filled journey through its criminal underworld.

**Star of the Sea** by Joseph O'Connor

In the bitter winter of 1847, from an Ireland torn by injustice and natural disaster, the *Star of the Sea* sets sail for New York. On board are hundreds of fleeing refugees. Among them is a maidservant with a devastating secret, bankrupt Lord Merridith and his family, an aspiring novelist, a maker of revolutionary ballads, all braving the Atlantic in search of a new home. Each is connected more deeply than they can possibly know. But a camouflaged killer is stalking the decks, hungry for the vengeance that will bring absolution. The twenty-six day journey will see many lives end, others begin afresh. In a spellbinding story of tragedy and mercy, love and healing, the further the ship sails towards the Promised Land, the more her passengers seem moored to a past which will never let them go.

### **The Nature of the Beast** by Frances Fyfield

Different people react to disasters in different ways. But why would Amy Petty want the world to presume her dead? Fate is not alone in deciding who lives and who dies after the crash of a train travelling from Kent to London. One passenger uses the opportunity to commit a murder. Another — the blonde and beautiful Amy Petty — uses the accident as an opportunity to leave her life behind. Is it because Amy's husband is currently embroiled in a libel action against a national newspaper? Douglas Petty, a former barrister, is rich, charismatic and evil tempered: he runs a dog sanctuary in a brutally eccentric manner. Amy is his star witness: without her, his reputation faces ruin. Or maybe it isn't the present that Amy is running from. Maybe it is the past.

8 copies

## **Non-fiction - General**

### **Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil** by John Berendt

Part travelogue, part murder mystery, *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* has been on the New York Times best seller list for over two years. Though the book is a work of nonfiction, it reads like a fast-paced, immensely entertaining and often hilarious novel. Shots rang out in Savannah's grandest mansion in the misty, early morning hours of May 2, 1981. Murder or self defence? The question captivated the city's Society, high and low, for over a decade. John Berendt, a veteran writer and editor, travelled to Savannah where he became involved in bizarre adventures as he followed the unpredictable twists and turns of a landmark murder case.

### **The Bookseller of Kabul** by Asne Seierstad

Two weeks after September 11th, award-winning 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. 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 which also offers a unique perspective on a troubled country.

### **The Art of Travel** by Alain de Botton

Few things are as exciting as the idea of travelling far from home. Somewhere with better weather, interesting customs and inspiring landscapes. So why are we so often dissatisfied with the reality of travel? Alain De Botton takes us on a journey with some of the world's greatest artists, writers and philosophers to the most inspiring destinations. Our guides include Picasso, Wordsworth and Flaubert, as De Botton examines the the art of travel with thought provoking humour.

## **Non-fiction - History**

### **Rubicon** by Tom Holland

After a palace coup demolished the reign of King Tarquin of Rome in 509 B.C., a republican government flourished, providing every person an opportunity to participate in political life in the name of liberty. As Holland, a novelist and adapter of Herodotus' *Histories* for British radio, points out in this lively re-creation of the republic's rise and fall, the seeds of destruction were planted in the very soil in which the early republic flourished. With the skill of a good novelist, Holland weaves a rip-roaring tale of political and historical intrigue as he chronicles the lively personalities and problems that led to the end of the Roman republic.

### **A Foreign Field** by Ben MacIntyre

Survival saga and murder mystery set in rural France during the First World War. Using the testimonies of the daughter, the villagers, detailed town hall records and the soldiers' last letters, MacIntyre reconstructs an extraordinary story of love, duplicity and shame -- ultimately seeking to discover through decades of village rumour the answer to the question, 'Who betrayed Private Digby and his men?'

### **The Six Wives of Henry VIII** by Antonia Fraser

"Divorced, beheaded, died; divorced, beheaded, survived." So the six wives of Henry VIII - Catherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour, Anna of Cleves, Katherine Howard and Catherine Parr - have become defined in a popular sense not so much by their lives as by the way these lives ended. In the same way their characters are popularly portrayed as female stereotypes: the Betrayed Wife, the Temptress, the Good Woman, the Ugly Sister, the Bad Girl and, finally, the Mother Figure. But, as Antonia Fraser brilliantly and conclusively proves, they were rich and feisty characters. They may have been victims of Henry's obsession with a male heir, but they were not willing victims. On the contrary, they exhibited remarkable degrees of spirit and defiance of which women living now might still be proud.

### **The Gunpowder Plot** by Antonia Fraser

With a narrative that grips the reader like a detective story, Antonia Fraser brings the characters and events of the Gunpowder Plot to life. Dramatically recreating the conditions and motives that surrounded the fateful night of 5 November 1605, she unravels the tangled web of religion and politics that spawned the plot.

### **The Dreadful Judgement** by Neil Hanson

Neil Hanson's *The Dreadful Judgement: The True Story of the Fire of London* is an absorbing history of the fire that destroyed London in four terrible days in September 1666. Hanson argues that the "Great Fire of London is one of those cataclysmic events that has burned its way into the consciousness of mankind", but that as an event it "remains misunderstood and many of the most intriguing questions remain unanswered".

### **The Surgeon of Crowthorne** by Simon Winchester

The Murder, Mystery, and Madness of the OED. The compiling of the Oxford English Dictionary was a monumental task. It took 50 years, even with the help of numerous contributors. Among the most prolific was William Chester Minor, who sent editor James Murray, thousands of extracts. On many occasions, Murray invited this mysterious correspondent to Oxford, but the invitation was always declined. Finally stirred by curiosity, Murray himself went to visit Minor. What he found was shocking; Minor lived in Broadmoor asylum. He was a millionaire, an expert on the English language, and a qualified surgeon, but he was imprisoned as a lunatic for murder.

## **Non-fiction – Biography & Memoir**

### **Don't let's go to the dogs tonight** by Alexandra Fuller

Alexandra Fuller was two in 1971, the year her parents abandoned their life in England and returned to what was then Rhodesia, and to the beginning of a bloody civil war. This is the story of one family's quixotic battle against the ravages of nature and the pain of bereavement, and of their unbreakable bond with the continent that defined, shaped, scarred and healed them.

### **Jane Austen: a life** by Claire Tomalin

Austen's family, friends, and admirers provide a clear insight into this observant, remarkable woman. As a child, Jane refused to be parted from her beloved sister, the start of an affection which was to increase with maturity, forming a likely model for the sisterly love of Jane and Elizabeth Bennett. Austen is renowned for never repeating a character. Jane wasn't rich, but her brother was adopted by a wealthy, childless couple. Through him came chance to observe, with wickedly accurate detail, the people who were to become the basis for her novels.

### **Samuel Pepys: the unequalled self** by Claire Tomalin

Samuel Pepys achieved fame as a naval administrator, a friend and colleague of the powerful and learned, a figure of substance. But for nearly ten years he kept a private diary in which he recorded, with unparalleled openness and sensitivity to the turbulent world around him, exactly what it was like to be a young man in Restoration London. This diary lies at the heart of Claire Tomalin's biography. Yet the use she makes of it - and of other hitherto unexamined material - is startlingly fresh and original. Within and beyond the narrative of Pepys's extraordinary career, she explores his inner life - his relations with women, his fears and ambitions, his political shifts, his agonies and his delights.

### **Truth & Beauty** by Ann Patchett

What happens when the person who is your family is someone you aren't bound to by blood? What happens when the person you promise to love and to honour for the rest of your life is not your lover, but your best friend? In her frank and startlingly intimate first work of nonfiction, *Truth & Beauty*, Ann Patchett shines light on the little explored world of women's friendships and shows us what it means to stand together. Ann Patchett and Lucy Grealy met in college in 1981, and, after enrolling in the Iowa Writer's Workshop, began a friendship that would be as defining to both of their lives as their work.

### **Bad Blood** by Lorna Sage

From a childhood of gothic proportions in a vicarage on the Welsh borders, through her adolescence, leaving herself teetering on the brink of the 1960s, Lorna Sage's memoir brings to life a vanished time and place, and illuminates the lives of three generations of women. The period as well as the place is evoked with crystal clarity: from the 1940s, dominated for Lorna by her dissolute but charismatic vicar grandfather, through the 1950s, where the invention of fish fingers revolutionised the lives of housewives like Lorna's mother, to the brink of the 1960s, where the community was shocked by Lorna's pregnancy at 16.

### **Scribbling the Cat** by Alexandra Fuller

When Alexandra Fuller was in Zambia visiting her parents, she asked her father about a local banana farmer who was known for being tough. Her father warned her to steer clear of him: "Curiosity scribbled the cat," he said. Nonetheless, Fuller began a friendship with the man - a white African and veteran of the Rhodesian War. With the same fiercely beautiful prose that won her such acclaim for *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*, Fuller recounts her friendship this contradictory character. Tattooed, battle-scarred and weathered by farm work, he is a lion of a man. Yet he is also a born-again Christian, given to weeping when he recollects his failed romantic life and welling up inside with memories of battle...

## Poetry

### **Poems on the Underground** edited by Gerard Benson, Judith Chernaik, Cicely Herbert

Those famous poem Tube cards first appeared on the London Underground in 1986, a brave and instantly successful experiment in introducing poetry to an unexpected audience in a public place. The changing display of poems, five or so every four months, were soon a part of the London scene and did much to spark a new interest in poetry. They appeared in book form in 1991; *Poems on the Underground* is now in its Tenth Edition. This is an eclectic mix of old and new, familiar and unknown. There are poems of every hue and tone imaginable, from around the world, in English and other languages, all jostling in comfortable juxtaposition for the readers' attention.

## Short Stories

### **Heavenly Date** by Alexander McCall Smith

From the author of the massive New York Times best-selling series *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* comes a collection of short stories that have us visiting in on romantic encounters in exotic locales around the globe. In these hilarious stories of perverse meetings, casual dates, and romantic encounters, we are enthralled, saddened, inspired, and surprised by the encounters we're made privy to. Alexander McCall Smith, a master of the unexpected and a seamless storyteller, revels in offering us the quirky complications inherent in entanglements that human beings engineer for themselves-entanglements that can be shocking, edifying, compulsive, complicated, and, sometimes, completely disastrous.