

Women's Prize for Fiction 2019

Reading Group Guide

Milkman by Anna Burns Faber & Faber

Also by Anna Burns:
No Bones (2001)
Little Constructions (2007)
Mostly Hero (2014)

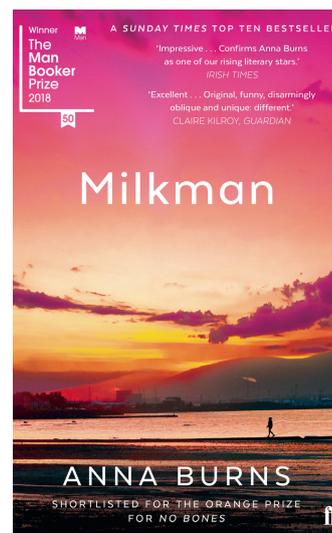
About the book

In this unnamed city, to be interesting is dangerous. Middle sister, our protagonist, is busy attempting to keep her mother from discovering her maybe-boyfriend and to keep everyone in the dark about her encounter with Milkman. But when first brother-in-law sniffs out her struggle, and rumours start to swell, middle sister becomes 'interesting'. The last thing she ever wanted to be. To be interesting is to be noticed and to be noticed is dangerous.

Milkman is a tale of gossip and hearsay, silence and deliberate deafness. It is the story of inaction with enormous consequences.

About the author

Anna Burns was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland. She is the author of two novels, *No Bones* and *Little Constructions*, and of the novella, *Mostly Hero*. *No Bones* won the Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize and was short-listed for the Orange Prize for Fiction. She lives in East Sussex, England.



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Questions and discussion points

1. The characters are known only by their relationships with others, such as ‘middle sister’ and ‘first brother-in-law’. What effect does this have?
2. What do you think of Anna Burns’ writing style, which has been described as a ‘stream-of-consciousness’?
3. What role does the character Milkman serve in prompting the narrator to reflect on her own life?
4. Although violence isn’t the focus of the novel, it has a continuous presence. How do the characters react to their violent surroundings?
5. A running theme in the novel is the feeling of being watched and gossip. This is particularly relevant to the context of the Troubles, but do you notice any parallels with contemporary society?

Suggested reading

Troubles by JG Farrell

Country by Michael Hughes

Sweet Home by Wendy Erskine

For the Good Times by David Keenan

Music Love Drugs War by Geraldine Quigley

Useful links

[Nowhere to Run: The claustrophobic world of Anna Burns’s *Milkman*](#)

[‘It’s nice to feel I’m solvent. That’s a huge gift’: Anna Burns on her life-changing Booker win](#)

[Anna Burns’ Booker-winning *Milkman* isn’t a difficult read; it’s a triumph](#)

[Anna Burns’s Booker-longlisted *Milkman*: a work of time universality](#)

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