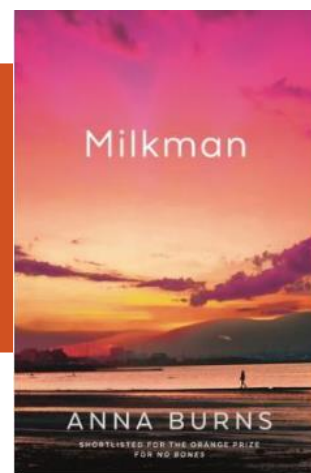




Milkman

Anna Burns



Author Background

Anna Burns was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland and raised in the working-class Catholic district of Ardoyne.

Milkman (2018) is her third novel after *No Bones* (2001), which was shortlisted for the Orange Prize, and *Little Constructions* (2007).

In 2018, Burns won the Man Booker Prize for *Milkman*, making her the first Northern Irish writer to win the award.

Four years before *Milkman*, a surgical injury left Burns with excruciating back pain, and she found herself unable to write and unsure if she would be able to finish the book.

When Burns finally completed the novel, it was turned down by several publishers before being taken up by Graywolf Press.

Burns currently lives in East Sussex, England.

Book Summary

Set during The Troubles military conflict in the 1970s, in an unnamed city, middle sister stands out for the wrong reasons. She reads while walking, for one. And she has been taking French night classes downtown.

So, when a local paramilitary known as Milkman begins pursuing her, she suddenly becomes “interesting,” the last thing she ever wanted to be.

Despite middle sister’s attempts to avoid him, and to keep her mother from finding out about her maybe-boyfriend, rumours spread, and the threat of violence lingers.

Milkman is a story of the way inaction can have enormous repercussions, in a time when the wrong flag, wrong religion, or even a sunset can be subversive.

“Eccentric and oddly beguiling.... What makes it (*Milkman*) memorable is the funny, alienated, common-sensical voice of middle sister, who refuses to join in the madness.”
Sunday Times (UK)

Discussion Questions

- ❖ Describe middle sister. She's 18 years old and bookish. What else?
- ❖ What is it about middle sister that draws milkman to her? Reviewers call him creepy. Do you agree? How else would you describe him?
- ❖ How would you describe the society in which the book is set? Consider the city's atmosphere, the sense of totalitarian oppression.
- ❖ The book is concerned with power. How does power operate in *Milkman*? Who has power and for what purpose? How is power used and over whom?
- ❖ *Milkman* is also about tribalism. Talk about how group identity functions in this novel. Consider the us versus them allegiances, even down to the brand of butter or tea.
- ❖ Did you find the author's stream-of-consciousness style difficult?
- ❖ What about the lack of character names? The author says that in her initial writing that she used names, but that the book never worked until she removed them. Why might the writing have gone more smoothly without names? Does the lack of names lend a dystopian quality to the work?
- ❖ The author wrote *Milkman* years before the onset of the #MeToo movement, yet its subject of sexual predation is timely. How did you experience the book considering today's more aware society? How might you have read it several years ago...or even (if you're old enough) 50 years ago when the events of the book supposedly take place?

References

- ❖ Wikipedia: Anna Burns - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna_Burns
- ❖ LitLovers: Milkman (Burns) - <https://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/fiction/11412-milkman-burns>