



## Hotel du Lac

*Anita Brookner*

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## **Hotel du Lac** Anita Brookner

In the novel that won her the Booker Prize and established her international reputation, Anita Brookner finds a new vocabulary for framing the eternal question "Why love?" It tells the story of Edith Hope, who writes romance novels under a pseudonym. When her life begins to resemble the plots of her own novels, however, Edith flees to Switzerland, where the quiet luxury of the Hotel du Lac promises to restore her to her senses.

But instead of peace and rest, Edith finds herself sequestered at the hotel with an assortment of love's casualties and exiles. She also attracts the attention of a worldly man determined to release her unused capacity for mischief and pleasure. Beautifully observed, witheringly funny, *Hotel du Lac* is Brookner at her most stylish and potently subversive.

## **Hotel du Lac Details**

Date : Published October 3rd 1995 by Vintage Books (first published September 6th 1984)

ISBN : 9780679759324

Author : Anita Brookner

Format : Paperback 182 pages

Genre : Fiction, Literary Fiction

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## From Reader Review Hotel du Lac for online ebook

### Cynthia says

This book cut WAY too close to the bone for me. I can't decide if I want to read everything she's ever written or banish her forever.

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### Josie says

About how being coupled allows one to relax and behave badly, and the good behavior expected of single women. The main character is brittle and lonely, and the tenor of everything is like "overcooked veal" but still there is something about the way the character feels uncomfortable in the world, the way she is constantly constructing an edifice to protect herself from it, that is universal. There is also a remarkable perception about the ways women engage in frippery to exclude men, for example:

"It occurs to me...that some women close ranks because they hate men and fear them. Oh, I know that this is obvious. What I'm really trying to say is that I dread such women's attempts to recruit me, to make me their accomplice. I'm not talking about the feminists. I can understand their position, although I'm not all that sympathetic. I'm talking about the ultra-feminine. I'm talking about the complacent consumers of men with their complicated but unwritten rules of what is due to them. Treats. Indulgences. Privileges. The right to make illogical fusses. The cult of themselves. Such women strike me as dishonourable. And terrifying. I think perhaps that men are an easier target. I think perhaps the feminists should take a fresh look at the situation."

Such clarity is all over the place, and so even though it's a sort of brutal book to read, it's worth it.

It's also a hotel book, a venerable genre.

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### Eric says

A quite book, beautifully so. The simple prose is deceiving--the book is not simple, but elegant and superbly crafted. The words wrap you like the mist that weaves in and out of the landscape. A story of an older woman on a vacation alone. Loved it.

Anyone who has ever contemplated or experienced the noisy quiet that happens when you are by yourself but surrounded by others who are all there together.

Please read it.

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### CoffeeBook Chick says

Hotel du Lac, by Anita Brookner surprised me. The first forty or so pages, while beautifully written, were a tad tough to meander through at times. But then, oh then, all of a sudden, and at some point I can't recall, I

was quite happy -- it pulled me in and although it's a quiet and contemplative story, it was really quite interesting and I felt at home with it.

Edith Hope is a romance writer who writes under another name -- she's accomplished, but to be honest, she writes about feelings and events that she's never sure she'll ever have, or at least have forever. She's withdrawn, and doesn't fit with her "friends."

Edith is sent away from "civilized" society in London to a quaint and quiet hotel in Switzerland following a scandal that it has been deemed should not occur amongst polite and learned men and women. While there, she encounters a sad variety of characters that initially seem almost so uninteresting, that they are interesting. Eventually, you are drawn into each one, into their nuances, their sad or internally destructive personalities. While one character, Mrs. Pusey initially impresses upon Edith that she is kind and lovely, it soon becomes evident that she's really just lacking in the same things that most of the hotel guests are without as well -- after all, why are they all sequestered in this hotel, away from family and friends, during a quiet time of season? It seemed to be that they all were suffering in some way.

Do not expect a flurry of events in the winner of the Man Booker Prize of 1984. Expect instead a quiet discussion, a studied review of a writer's perspective of those she meets and interacts with, amidst the background of an incredible hotel. There is not a hurry from one thing to another. It is a slow exercise of evaluation and word usage to describe each scene, moment, person. Could it be considered tedious and boring to some? Perhaps. Could it also be viewed as deceptively pleasing, slowly building the undercurrent of anticipation for something, something brilliant and cunning to breach the water line and unfold its secret? Yes.

At times, it was a bit humorous, but I found it to be an overall sad book, about people who were sad and who either were forced to be in exile by others, or simply had nowhere else that they could go. It's an insightful and thoughtful novel on love, loss, and regret. Although I wouldn't recommend it for everyone, I would say that if you like a quiet novel that delivers an introspective view on one's own life, then this sad little beauty is a book for you.

Every word is quotable in this beautiful and very short book, but this one I found delightful:

He was a man of few words, but those few words were judiciously selected, weighed for quality, and delivered with expertise. Edith, used to the ruminative monologues that most people consider to be adequate for the purposes of rational discourse, used, moreover, to concocting the cunning and even learned periods which the characters in her books so spontaneously uttered, leaned back in her chair and smiled. The sensation of being entertained by words was one which she encountered all too rarely. People expect writers to entertain them, she reflected. They consider that writers should be gratified simply by performing their task to the audience's satisfaction. Like sycophants at court in the Middle Ages, dwarves, jongleurs. And what about us? Nobody thinks about entertaining us.

I look forward to reading more Anita Brookner novels. Particularly when I learned from Thomas at My Porch that Ms. Brookner is now in her eighties and has written a book a year since her first published fiction novel in her early fifties.

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## **K.D. Absolutely says**

I can't believe that this book won over J. G. Ballard's *Empire of the Sun* (4 stars) in 1984's Booker contest. Or I just expected too much from this book because I first read and tremendously enjoyed that Ballard? So the last time I was in Ohio in 2009, I decided to buy this brand new copy of *Hotel du Luc* because this made Ballard asked the question why the 5 judges, led by Professor Richard Cobb (1917-1996), denied him of that

year's Booker.

Maybe Cobb was a historian? Maybe he thought that there were too much inconsistencies in Ballard's depiction of Shanghai during World War II? Or maybe he found the sadness that **Edith Hope** is experiencing being ditched by a lover and finding solace in the silent and eerie Swiss hotel, *Hotel du Lac* melancholic enough and it brought back memories of lost love? Cobb was 67 years old when he gave his nod to *Hotel* to win over Ballard's *Empire* or even Julian Barnes' *Flaubert's Parrot*. What an upset, right?

Not really. The beauty of *Hotel* is inside Edith Hope's mind. The moment she enters the hotel she is bringing with her the pain of being ditched by a lover and the advice that her friends gave that she has to stay away for a while to find her self. I did not have a close female friend who got ditched so I wasn't able to readily understand what's the need to be alone to find one's self. I did have an experience of being crossed by a girlfriend who was a two-timer (me being the original) but I just went to a bar and drank myself till I vomited the alcohol out. But the day after, I was okay and just silently nursed myself back to reality. In other words, although that major part of the plot was something so alien to me that I had to sigh several times in disbelief in the first half of the book.

This lonely-woman-in-a-hotel plot is also not new to me. There is Sasha Jensen of Jean Rhys' *Good Morning, Midnight* (3 stars) whose loneliness and grief were far above that of Edith Hope because aside from unhappy marriage her child also died before she books herself in a hotel. There is also Madeleine who is abandoned in Paris by her lover and there is even a world war going on outside in Irene Nemirovsky's *Suite Francaise* (1 star). So this plot is nothing new really.

But what made this worth my while was how beautiful Brookner wrote in a melancholic way. I have no words to describe how she was able to capture the mood by using the hotel's surroundings to reflect the sadness and hopelessness that Edith has in the first half of the book. When the plot thickens towards the second half, the magic was lost however. The unbelievably caricaturist sort of portrayal of the other characters particularly the duplicitous **Mr. Neville** was just too artificial for me. It was like having a villain too obvious like you know right there in the first scene (if this is a movie) upon seeing Anthony Hopkins as Dr. Hannibal "The Cannibal" Lecter that he is the villain to Jody Foster's Clarisse Starling.

This writing of Brookner here for me is comparable to Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. Although of course, Woolf is Woolf and nothing compares to her writing. I have not read Julian Barnes' *Flaubert's Parrot* so I can't be the judge if it is better than this. But over *Empire*? I thought it was absurd.

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## **Maria says**

This is a well-written book for people who enjoy the low-key, thoughtful sort of lonely protagonist who appears quiet, almost withdrawn, out-of-step, who has depth and strength and yes, sadness, and for Anglophiles everywhere who mourn the passing of good manners. Among other things, Brookner focuses on character and the distinct nature of the woman alone and the way she is seen by society, in a sometimes delightfully dry, beautiful prose. A beautiful book.

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## **Kirstine says**

I promised myself I'd go into a bookstore and buy a book I'd never heard of before, by an author I didn't know, since I never ever go into a store and buy a book I wasn't always planning on reading. Which is a

shame. The result was the purchase of this slim Man Booker winning novel. And it wasn't a bad random pick, although I'm a little uncertain what it was REALLY trying to do.

See, I honestly don't know about this book. I found it very charming, and was easily swept into its languid prose, slow moving plot (if you can call it a plot) and the eccentric existences of Hotel du Lac. But on the other hand, I have no idea what it really gave me in the end.

Edith Hope is sent to Swiss Hotel du Lac, and told to think about her life and her choices, and only to come back when she's repented. As it's almost out of season only very few guests occupy the hotel, and they're all women. Edith soon becomes part of their daily life, with its small dramas and controversies.

She observes the other women, and tries to work them - and in turn herself - out. And this is where it gets a little uncertain. Because I can't decide if it's too stereotypical in its portrayal of women, or if it's confidently complex and subverts the tropes it gives us.

I'm leaning towards the latter, but I think a case can be made for the former too.

Because while it's a story with a sharp focus on women, it's also all women who are measured, in small ways, by their relationship with men. Either because their husbands died or they've been abandoned by them. Or they're the other woman. So they're left on the fringes of society, slightly outside what everyone else thinks is acceptable and they've come to Hotel du Lac.

Mr. Neville, a man who arrives at the hotel later on, vehemently tries to convince Edith that the life she's been living isn't worth it, and that he can give her a comfortable position inside the societal norm and all the freedom that come with it.

But it's also a novel that, I think, insists there is nothing wrong with Edith's life at all, with none of these women's lives. That Mr. Neville is a total d-bag who simply assumes he knows what Edith needs, without actually understanding her inner life and passions at all. And Edith may be prejudiced against her own sex, she may accuse them of some ridiculous things, but this is also because she's incapable of turning this judging eye towards herself, and that she has to learn too. I don't know if she does, but I think the experiences lends her a sympathy towards herself and her gender.

I just don't know. I'll have to read it again someday. But for now I found it had a nice melancholy charm, and I loved its focus on women and their inner and outer lives. Other books have definitely done it better, but this one I liked too.

For a random pick in the bookstore it was definitely not bad at all.

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## **Andrea says**

Edith Hope is a romance novelist who is banished by her friends to the Hotel du Lac on Lake Geneva in order to atone for a transgression, the details of which we don't learn until well into the second half of the book. At the hotel, it is approaching the end of the season and only a handful of long-term guests remain. Edith establishes a routine of writing and spending time with the other guests. Then along comes Mr Neville.

I am quite bemused that this won the Booker in 1984. It's such a simple, slow tale that really doesn't go anywhere. Some have described it as a romantic story - a love story even - but I felt it was almost the opposite. Yes, there was a love in Edith's life, but it was one that society and the other party would not allow

her to acknowledge. Maybe I missed the point, but I saw this as a story about relationships of convenience rather than passion.

A brief, well-written, sometimes humorous diversion, but not in the same class as other Booker Prize winners I have read.

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### **Brad says**

I ate dinner at an historical park once, and when I think of that meal I always remember being pleased with the place setting and the table linens. The table cloth was crisp and white, the silverware was highly polished, but I can't remember the feel of the fabric or the design of the forks and spoons and knife. What little I remember accumulates into nice. It was all nice.

Nice but mostly forgettable.

And that's all I'm left with when I think of Brookner's Booker Prize winning Hotel Du Lac. It was nice. I remember a likable woman moving amongst mostly likable folk in Geneva. I enjoyed the niceness of the experience, and then it was forgotten.

Hotel Du Lac was nice. I'll never read it again, though, because nice doesn't keep me coming back.

Something that has won a prestigious literary award should leave us with more than a feeling of niceness. But that's all Hotel Du Lac has to offer.

Nice. Just nice. Only nice.

But then maybe it wasn't nice at all. Maybe it was the antithesis of nice. But if it was, and if there was an element of the not nice that I missed...well, Brookner didn't do a very good job then did she? I shouldn't be remembering nice all these years later, should I? I think not. Now isn't that nice?

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### **Duane says**

This review contains spoilers.

1984 Booker Prize Winner.

Edith Hope, a successful romance writer, has made some mistakes, two of them actually; she is having an affair with a married man, and she walked out on her wedding to another man at the last minute. So her friends suggest that she take a change of scenery, another way of saying, get out of town for awhile. So she gets away to Switzerland, and the luxurious Hotel du Lac. But it's later in the story when the reader is told the reason for her trip.

For some, this novel is slow to start, there is just not a lot of action. But Brookner is slowly building the foundation for her characters and the story. Her detailed descriptions of everything; the characters, the hotel, her own history and feelings. It's very much in the style of Henry James, I think, just shorter sentences and paragraphs than the great man was famous for.

What Edith finds when she gets to the hotel is a group of very eccentric inmates. But this group helps her find the bearings for her own life's course, helps her decide between love and security, because at this point in her life she knows she can't have both. This story is her journey through the icebergs of her life and the Hotel du Lac. And the writing is excellent, as you would expect in a Booker Prize winner, and it has to be in a novel structured like this, it's simply the difference between success and failure.

4 solid stars.

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### **Irene says**

This novel is the perfect balance of quietly beautiful and quietly sad. Our narrator is a single woman on the edge of spinsterhood who is taking refuge in a Swiss luxury hotel during the off season to ride out an embarrassing breach of social expectations. In this quiet setting populated by eccentric cast-offs from love, she is surprised by what she comes to realize about herself. The atmosphere and characters are so vivid that I was easily drawn into the Hotel du Lac and became one of its residents where I developed a tender spot for each of these fragile individuals.

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### **Rebecca Foster says**

Edith Hope may be a moderately successful romance novelist, but her own love life is a shambles. After leaving a poor chap at the altar back in London, she goes on a sabbatical to a Swiss hotel to take stock of her life and spend some time working. Instead, she ends up absorbed in the lives of her fellow guests, especially elderly Mrs. Pusey and her daughter, and attracts an unwanted suitor. The choice before Edith is between safety and passion, and right up until the last few pages it's unclear which path she'll choose.

Brookner has some lovely turns of phrase ("her daily task of fantasy and obfuscation"; "Most of my life seems to go on at a subterranean level") but the quiet story is unlikely to stay with me. The style reminded me most of Penelope Fitzgerald and Barbara Pym, with touches of Continental writers like Thomas Mann and Stefan Zweig.

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### **Jeffrey Keeten says**

**"Her friend and neighbour, Penelope Milne, who, tight-lipped, was prepared to forgive her only on condition that she disappeared for a decent length of time and came back older, wiser, and properly apologetic. For I am not to be allowed my lapse, as if I were an artless girl, she thought; and why should I be? I am a serious woman who should know better and am judged by my friends to be past the age of indiscretion; several people have remarked upon my physical resemblance to Virginia Woolf; I am a householder, a ratepayer, a good plain cook, and a deliverer of typescripts well before the deadline; I sign anything that is put in front of me; I never telephone my publisher; and I make no claims for my particular sort of writing, although I understand that it is doing quite well."**

Edith Hope was supposed to get married, but at the 11th hour decided that it would be a grave mistake. Not the getting married part, but the getting married to the man who quite possibly might stupefy her to death.

As crushing as being lonely can be, doubling down by being married to a person who doesn't make your

heart beat faster when you hear their footsteps only adds another layer of unhappiness that can lead to rocks in pockets and an immersion in the closest river.

But now that she has proven herself unstable, she obviously needs some time for self reflection (as if she doesn't do that enough all the time), hopefully to return repentant for all the trouble she put her friends through with this rather unexpected lapse of judgment.

### **See what they don't know**

**is**

**that**

**she has a lover.**

He is unavailable except for short lustful encounters and too brief moments of domesticity that are so wonderful that she starts to envision what she wants. *"My idea of happiness is to sit in a hot garden all day, reading, or writing, utterly safe in the knowledge that the person I love will come home to me in the evening, every evening."*

Is that too much to ask? Is that really just too much to hope for?

She has been dispatched to the Hotel du Lac in Switzerland. I'd say she was fleeing, but that isn't quite right. It has been strongly suggested by her friends and acquaintances that she requires some time to come to different decisions.

Frankly, I'd say she needs different friends and acquaintances.

At least maybe in this plush hotel in the offseason, she can find some unusual characters who will add flesh to her characters in a novel.

Like this lovely, melancholy woman:

*"Naturally, she sulks. She eats cakes as others might go slumming. But she is very sad because she longs for a child and I don't think she will ever have one. She is so beautiful, so thin, so over-bred. Her pelvis is like a wishbone!"*

Or how about the infuriating Philip Neville, who challenges everything she believes seemingly for his own amusement:

*"He conducts himself altogether gracefully. He is well turned out, she thought, surveying the panama hat and the linen jacket. He is even good-looking: an eighteenth-century face, fine, reticent, full-lipped, with a faint bluish gleam of beard just visible beneath the healthy skin. A heartless man, I think. Furiously intelligent. Suitable."*

### **Suitable?**

Edith is still writing every chance she gets. After all, she has never missed a deadline. It is something she can control, and escaping into her writing is therapeutic, though a singular endeavor by design. Even so, she has not emerged from her "lapse in judgment" unscathed. *"She felt a weariness that seemed to preclude any enthusiasm, any initiative, any relaxation. Fiction, the time-honoured resource of the ill-at-ease, would have*

*to come to her aid, but the choice of a book presented some difficulties, since when she was writing she could only read something she had read before, and in her exhausted state, a febrile agitation, invisible to the naked eye, tended to distance even the very familiar."*

If I am too exhausted or too stressed to read, I am in worst shape than what most people could really understand. I could see Edith patting my hand with the proper amount of sympathy, serving me some hot tea, and some of her plain cooking while we chatted amiably under a lattice garden shade.

Anita Brookner won the Booker Prize for *Hotel du Lac* in 1984. She published her first novel at the age of 53, so there is hope for all us late blooming writers. She writes about loneliness and unattainable love with characters who have difficulty fitting into normal society. Interestingly enough, she never married, but stayed home and took care of her aging parents. I think she knew of what she wrote. I've seen the criticism leveled at her accusing her of writing the same book over and over again with very similar themes. I've only read one book by her, so I can't really comment on that criticism except to say that sometimes there is comfort in picking up a writer and knowing exactly what the basic themes of the plot will be. Since I identify with characters like Edith Hope, I can certainly see myself returning to the world of Anita Brookner, while steaming the glass of the mirror she holds up for me.

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>  
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

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### **Jenny (Reading Envy) says**

I knew I was going to like this book the minute I read Edith's description of her hotel room, decorated as it is in shades of overcooked veal. There are so many moments of humor in these pages, but it is quiet, blink-and-you-might-miss-it humor.

"People feel at home with low moral standards. It is scruples that put them off."

"The company of their own sex, Edith reflected was what drove many women into marriage."

The first 100 pages or so of the novel, Edith is more of a narrator of the characters in the hotel. There are hints of a mistake she has made, ending in her retreat (either a rejuvenation or a running away) in this fine but non-flashy hotel in Switzerland. The hotel itself is a character, as are the people working and staying there. She muses on them and as she gets to know them, has to change some of her opinions.

In the second half, more is known of her back story while her present day moves forward. Without spoiling anything that happens, I want to say that I find I am far more empathetic to a woman in literature who is alone but self-possessed over a woman who lets life be decided for her. I enjoyed the character of Edith very much!!

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### **Jake Goretzki says**

(I stayed at the Hotel du Lac in Vevey for work once and nicked as much stationery as I could, then set to reading this after ages looking for a second hand copy. Finally got to reading it after many months).

Small but super-concentrated.

For something so short, it asks big questions about ideals and compromises. It's a pretty profound meditation too on what it is to be a woman (like I'd know) and full of strong portraits of different ways of doing that. We've got a spectrum here, from the 'kept' Pusey senior and junior; the elderly Madame (a brilliantly drawn, very touching character) the jaded and cynical Monica and the ruthless buddy back home.

The plot also really delivers (though say no more for fear of spoiling).

Much has been said about the strong characterisation. Believe it all. Madame de Bonneuil has got amazing pathos and is so well observed. A couple of moments jumped out for me: Mme slowly raising a champagne glass for a toast (suggesting a lifetime of stolid ceremony); her reading 'small portions' of the newspaper with a magnifying glass (they do that! Looking at the world from a distance in selective disgust). And the inscrutable, slightly Mephistophelian Mr Neville. Superb.

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## Terri says

I am sorry I waited so long to read a book by the great British author, Anita Brookner. If you haven't read her works, you are in for a treat. Next up for me is reading her book "Making Things Better" (The Next Big Thing) which was longlisted for the Booker prize. "Hotel du Lac" won the Man Booker prize in 1984. It deserves it. The novel is about a woman who is exiled to a Swiss hotel to let things die down after a scandal. After bittersweet interactions with other hotel members, she begins to sort out who she really is. I understand there is a BBC film made from the book and I am curious to see it. I gave this book five stars and consider it a classic.

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## knig says

And another one bites the dust. Another moping, myopic, single, disconsolate, unfulfilled, disenchanted woman shuffling the mortal coils resignedly and patiently waiting for until her numbers up.

Ok, but I am racking my brains: is there ANY book out there about a male spinster? Not a bachelor: that image implies a certain Sherlock Holmsean contentedness with the regularity of life, a smug sense of quiet self satisfaction that all is alright with the world, at precisely the moment when a woman ISN'T present. An open book, a crackling fire and the languid smoke sonorating from a veal coloured pipe induces images not of pity for the sad old codger, but endorsement of quality and order.

Take a spinster, Edith Hope, and the same singleness of purpose is translated into failed possibility, the non crystallisation of purpose, gross irregularities in the order of the cosmos and staleness.

Do men ever consider it a life unlived without the redemptive qualities of femme feng shui? And what makes women wither without a man? Discuss.

Edith Hope is a spinster. She has professional success, but....no man. So, she is empty inside. Go on:, laugh, cry, deride, acquiesce about it. True or false?

And she is apologetically staunch: Prince charming or none at all will do. Well, lady, at your age, you should be thinking about who can serve, instead.

A perfectly handsome, successful, erudite, considerate man proposes to her: he promises a life of shared interests, social standing, security, and his support and friendship ad nauseum. But, he doesn't promise her love; he is too jaded for that. Have your dangerous liaisons, he says, and I will have mine. But you will never hear about them or be embarrassed by them. In return she can, however, expect respect, consideration, financial security and friendship.

But, nooo. Edith can't do that. Its all or nothing, right, ladies?

Men are from Mars. Women are from Venus. Edith Hope is from La-La.

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## Antonomasia says

Why this, controversially, won the 1984 Booker:

*"I have managed," writes the old devil [Richard Cobb, chairman of the judges, to his friend, fellow historian Hugh Trevor-Roper], "to keep Martin Amis and Angela Carter and something something de Terán off the shortlist and manoeuvred so that BALLARD did not get the prize to the FURY of the media, the critics and Ladbrokes. So I have done a little NEGATIVE good."*

<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2011...>

Hotel du Lac seems like a book from the 1920s-50s, not the eighties. ... I imagined the same setting as the first part of *Rebecca*. Edith is a romantic novelist, an old yet naïve 39, whose friends have insisted she go abroad for a while to escape some mysterious scandal. The Hotel prides itself on its discreet insulation from modern life - so character, environment and writing are all quite appropriate for and reflective of one another. The book isn't bad as I'd often been led to believe: it's simply a small story, carefully crafted. It has a muted camp quality - waspishness; the slightly tragic / I Will Survive temperament of its heroine; irony co-existing with emotional sincerity - so I can understand one way of liking *Hotel du Lac*.

Yet I didn't find it all that engaging. Its horizons are so narrow. Some of Edith's complaints reminded me of myself at school: her impatience with the company of women who are only interested in shopping and gossip... but she's a healthy well-off adult living in London and hasn't managed to find any friends who are more interesting. She prefers the company of men yet has none as platonic friends for interesting conversations and only feels able to confide in one ex-lover (married throughout their involvement) in a series of unsent letters. Edith *could* have been interesting if it was shown how and why she'd ended up as this lonely living fossil (whose works aren't selling too well in an age of 'briefcase wielding Cosmo readers who want stories about sex' - one of the few clues that the book actually is set in the 80s) or if she had any enthusiasms, but unfortunately, as she was, she was relatively dull company. This could even be a portrait of a sort of mild depression, but one more likely to induce same in some readers than to give any insight.

I've now read more from the 1984 Booker shortlist than from any other year except 2013, and have to agree not only that BALLARD WOZ ROBBED - and also LODGE. And BARNES would have been more worthy than this too. Not that that isn't extremely well-established by now.

Why I read this:

A friend who was visiting a few weeks ago saw the book here and mentioned that a relative he was staying with for part of the summer lived very near the place where *Hotel du Lac* is set. Had, in fact, chosen a house just there because she liked the book so much. I didn't expect to love it myself but this seemed a prompt of sorts to read the thing over the summer.

Why I even had this book in the house:

At the beginning of first year at (secondary) school we were given a reading list which was only occasionally referred to again by teachers, but by which I set great and geeky store. The list looked quite old, having apparently started out typed on a sheet of A5, and over years photostat was made of photostat until the lettering of our copies was fragmented grey. Budding historian already, I decided to try and work out how old the list was (teachers didn't know). *Hotel du Lac* turned out to be the most recent book. Somewhat disappointingly the list wasn't really as old as it appeared.

A book about a hotel *sounded* exciting (I imagined a cast of madcap characters rather like those I'd later find in Armistead Maupin) but the blurb of this one wasn't thrilling. So I kept putting it off and putting it off until I noticed it would be short enough to read in a day. (I was so unenthusiastic that I didn't finish it in one day after all.) The narrow horizons and fusty yet somewhat confused morals of *Hotel du Lac* did remind me quite a bit of school after all.

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## Paul Bryant says

A very slow, mournful novel set in an end-of-season hotel which may - just may - be a metaphor or sumpin. Everything happens in slowmo - walks, meals, coffee, tea, cakes, clothes (pages of those), more walks, mothers, daughters, gloomy memories, walks, talks, a small dog, gauntness, autumnal colours, pallor, crepuscularity, more damned walks, more wretched meals, the god damned dog again, more clothes, and on p 143 this:

"my patience with this little comedy is wearing a bit thin"

It's a ghastly vision of humanity presented here to be sure, bitter and defeated. In this world we swim slowly in a social fishtank constantly judging and appraising each other's sexual, sartorial, social and financial status. The women relentlessly and mercilessly judge all other women they encounter, the men likewise. Our heroine says "the company of their own sex was what drove many women into marriage". Some kind of bleak view of women, I say. But generalisations like this pop up all over - "women hide their sadness, thought Edith. Their joy they like to show off to one another." Or "men like the feeling they have had to fight other men for possession [of women:]". Wow, this is so pre-feminist. It was written in the 80s but reads more like the 40s. And it won the Booker! What?! What?!! I was expecting something acrid and memorable, but I got this wallow in antique stereotypes and fake psychological insight. Typical sentence:

*This banal and inappropriate excursion seemed to her almost perverse in its lack of attractions; she had supposed that they might be going on another walk.*

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## Paul E. Morph says

I'm almost sure the title of this book is a pun (*which gets it points from me; I can't resist a pun*) as every character in the book, especially the protagonist, is definitely lacking something or other.

If you're the sort of person who tends to complain that 'nothing happens' in a book, I would avoid this one. This is an introspective, reflective novel; it's all about the inner journey, not the physical one.

Our protagonist, Edith, is an author, specialising in romances (quite low-brow romances is the suggestion) who has been packed off to the Hotel Du Lac on the Lake Geneva shoreline (*yes, I had 'Smoke On The*

*Water' running through my head the entire time I was reading this book)* by her friends and family after her life goes a bit pear-shaped. We don't find out the precise occurrence that has prompted her exile until the third act, but the hints and clues are there right from the start.

While her stay at the hotel isn't exactly voluntary or planned, Edith nevertheless tries to see the silver lining and determines to use it as a chance to get on with writing her latest novel in solitude. It's the off-season, after all, so there shouldn't be too many other people around.

That's the plan, anyway. What actually happens is that she starts people watching... and gets sucked into the various trials and tribulations of the handful of other guests, most of whom are... let's say 'eccentric'.

This novel is about love, solitude and what it means to be a woman in this modern age. The themes are deep and almost universal but the book never makes the mistake of taking itself too seriously. Brookner actually has a bone dry wit that reminded me a bit of Oscar Wilde and the novel is often funny... Not laugh out loud oh-god-my-sides-are-actually-splitting funny, but gently funny, in a manner that reminded me of a 1970s-80s sit-com like 'The Good Life' or 'Ever Decreasing Circles'. *(That last comment wasn't intended as a negative... I quite like those shows.)*

I'm not quite sure how this book managed to win the Booker in 1984, but it's definitely not a bad book. I found it to be quite a good read and very touching in places.

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