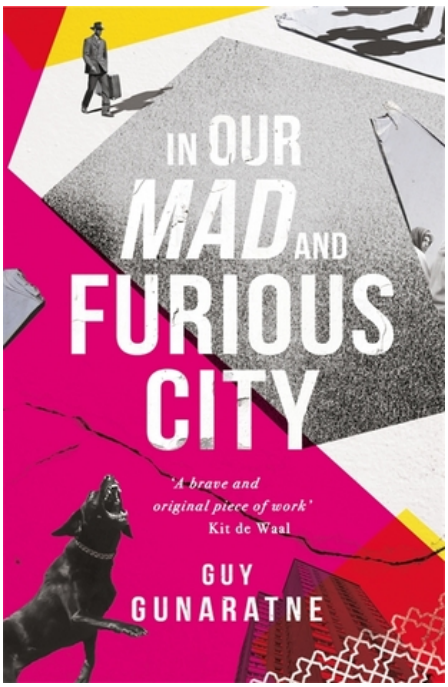

In Our Mad and Furious City

Guy Gunaratne

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In Our Mad and Furious City Guy Gunaratne
For Selvon, Ardan, and Yusuf, growing up under the towers of Stones Estate, summer means what it does anywhere: football, music, and freedom, but now, after the killing of a British soldier, riots are spreading across the city, and nowhere is safe. While the fury swirls around them, Selvon and Ardan remain focused on their own obsessions, girls, and grime. Their friend Yusuf is caught up in a different tide, a wave of radicalism surging through his local mosque, threatening to carry his troubled brother, Irfan, with it. Provocative, raw, poetic yet tender, *In Our Mad and Furious City* marks the arrival of a major new talent in fiction.

In Our Mad and Furious City Details

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ISBN	:	9781472250193
Author	:	Guy Gunaratne
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From Reader Review In Our Mad and Furious City for online ebook

Hugh says

Shortlisted for the Goldsmiths Prize 2018
Longlisted for the Man Booker Prize 2018

This year's Booker longlist undoubtedly contained some big surprises. I can't defend all of them but, like Milkman, The Long Take and Everything Under, this extraordinary and vibrant picture of modern London was not on my radar before the list was announced, and I would love to see all four of them shortlisted.

The bleak setting is the Stones estate, a group of tower blocks in north London with a richly multicultural population. There are five main narrators, three of them London-born teenagers from different ethnic backgrounds, who bond over music and football. Selvon (named after the writer Sam Selvon) has parents from the Caribbean island of Montserrat, and is obsessed with running and fitness. Ardan comes from an Ulster Catholic background and aspires to be a grime performer. Yusuf is the son of the recently deceased local imam, and has more in common with Selvon and Ardan than with the radical Muslims who are gaining influence in his community.

The two older narrators are Selvon's disabled father Nelson and Ardan's mother Caroline. They live largely in the past and their thoughts are dominated by the conflicts of their own youth. There is also one pivotal chapter narrated by Yusuf's disgraced elder brother Irfan.

All of these narrators have distinctive voices and use plenty of street slang (and in Nelson's case Caribbean patois), but this is always readable. The action, which takes place over just two days, builds towards a violent confrontation.

For a first novel, this book is tremendously impressive, and although it covers some dark subjects there is always an element of hope. My only slight misgiving was that there are no young female voices.

Whispering Stories says

Book Reviewed by Clive on www.whisperingstories.com

My initial reactions to this book were “what do these words mean” and “what is going on”? The first question was because the narrative is written from the perspective of half a dozen very different characters of which four are teenagers from inner London, whose everyday language is very much of the street. During the early chapters I found www.urbandictionary.com very handy but as the book progressed I became more comfortable with the terms.

My second question was because I could not easily fit together the characters although I felt confident that the author would bring them together in time. This he did but I was then left with concerns over the timelines as I could not reconcile the generational gaps.

However, even if you share my concerns please persist with reading the book. It will be worth it.

All the characters are either first or second generation immigrants living on an inner-London estate and Guy Gunaratne explores in depth many of the challenges they face as they cope as best as they can with living in a densely populated area with a mixture of races and backgrounds. In the Acknowledgements section he uses the apt term “survival”.

In Our Mad and Furious City is written in a gritty, uncompromising style. It is sombre most of the time, bordering on depressing, eased by a little humour and some guarded companionship between the boys.

As I said above Gunaratne concentrates on the lives of immigrant families and what might be referred to as “native British” people are restricted to the police and some racist mobsters. Whilst he is right to highlight the challenges of immigrant families, I believe that most of the issues covered are shared by all relatively poor people in our inner cities. In particular I am thinking of the struggle to make a living on basic wages, coping with inadequate, cramped accommodation, prejudice and bigotry.

You will probably find In Our Mad and Furious City hard to read, hard to follow and short of pleasure. You will also find it impossible to ignore, hence my award of four stars.

Meike says

Nominated for the Goldsmiths Prize 2018
Longlisted for the Man Booker Prize 2018
This book is going to win the Booker (update: No it didn't, which of course only means that the judges were wrong! :-)). Set in London, the story discusses identity, a topic that is central for so many current political issues, from Brexit to the divided States of America, to globalization, religous conflicts, you name it. On top of that, the language is vivid and fresh, and Gunaratne finds many compelling images that he evokes in street slang and patois - the poetics of grime and hip-hop have clearly infused this text which is full of rhythm and musical references.

Our protagonists are three teenage friends who live in and near some decrepit housing blocks in North London: Selvon is the son of immigrants from the Carribean, and he dreams to climb the social ladder by getting an athletic scholarship, which is why he is obsessed with his physical fitness. Ardan has Irish roots and aspires to become a musician. Yusuf is the son of the local imam who has recently passed away. Apart from these three young men, we are hearing the perspective of two grown-up immigrants - what unites all five of them (apart from some aspects I will not spoil) is their experience of violence.

The interlocking stories of these characters quickly become an exploration into the question how fear and hate emerge and how these two feeling are interrelated. Why do groups of people - immigrants and non-immigrants, Muslims and Christians, Catholics and Protestants - start to hate each other, and how is hate perpetuated? How do these feelings become so overwhelming that they turn into madness and fury, so that the common living area - in this case the city of London - is suddenly a battleground?

These question touch the core of human nature, and Gunaratne discusses them to a dirty grime beat. I really felt with these characters, and it is miraculous what a joy it is to read this book, although it makes the reader stare into an abyss.

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sue says

I was asked if I would like to read this at some point for my thoughts.
I've finally got to it. The covers been putting me off, the writing is urban street dialogue and I've needed to Google some of the words and contents which slowed me down, irritated me and frustrated me even more, but, it needs to stay this way for impact. So I was determined to press on.

The overall of this is a shocking insight.
It's not an enjoyable read it's a factual one, us the reader just needs to accept the "happenings" in this book and why a change is needed.

Too many characters in this book for my head to wrap around at times.

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

> "This country lack the joy of island life. And it make we who come here drab and forgetful of natural feeling. We come to the cold country and shed them smiles and grit them teeth. Feeling as if the bad air of the place, the hostile nerve give us cause to arch we backs, haunted in later life as memories come."

This may be one of the surprises for me as a reader from the Man Booker Prize longlist (did not make the shortlist) in the sense that I hadn't heard of the book or author prior to the list being announced, and I found it very readable, a pleasure to read despite its dark subject matter. This is the entire reason I read from these award lists.

The novel is told in rotating point of view chapters from various people living in The Stones Estates, a very poor area of London. Most people are from somewhere else, from the woman sent from Ireland during The Troubles (linking this book to Milkman, a shortlisted title that I read right before this one) to island-born immigrants to Muslim youth. Each pov has its own rhythm and words that help you really hear their voice. Words like "ennet" and "sunnat" and "myman."

I did feel the author overused some of his character descriptions. One in particular sucks his teeth so often that I wish he had spelled it out as a sound. It's kind of like in those YA novels where people frequently chew their lips or lick their lips and you are wondering why the heck it needs to be mentioned so often. This and the way music is talked about, where on multiple occasions a popular song is referred to and someone responds, "Oh you mean the one with the X sample?" I just don't think people talk about music this way. I certainly don't. I've never heard anyone else do so. So sometimes the writing creates a powerful voice while other times the writing gets in the way of that voice.

There is a lot of recency in this novel, from the way fundamentalism is grabbing hold in western nations, the effects of Brexit, the increasing racism, but also the longreaching effects of earlier violence and trauma. Some of the characters' stories feel present-day and are actually from a few decades ago (I was confused by Caroline's age for some time.)

I admire the vibrance, I admire the pacing, I admire the realism. I would definitely read his next work. By

itself I'd probably give it 3.5 stars but since I found it more palatable than most of the Man Booker list, I'm going to give it 4.

Ace says

This. This is what the Booker is about. Review soon.

Trudie says

Was an ugliness in this Britain, I feel it then. But I had not learn it yet. I had learn to drink a bitter, smoke a weed, learn to work and play lairy, but not that. To see it there writ across the brick, it have me numb and leave me feeling a sorta deep-down shame. Sorta shame the Lord give you when you love a wretched thing. Was how it feel like when I realise that this Britain did not love me back, no matter how much I feel for it.

This then is not the London of ease and merriment, of summer days spent at the tennis or going to the theatre. So much of anything I might know of North West London, where this novel is set, has almost always come from crime dramas. It is notable that this book is not that and that it is written by someone who grew up in that same area providing the reader with such a blistering insight into life on the estate or "the ends" and much more besides.

In our Mad and Furious City is such an interesting meditation on how you find belonging in a country that is often inhospitable to your presence. It explores the often pernicious tug of radicalisation and violence and it does this from multiple perspectives, looking at the IRA, the Notting Hill race riots of 1958, and acts of domestic extremism such as the killing of Lee Rigby and the related fallout.

Beyond the obvious political aspects of the book it also a rare look (in literary fiction anyway) of life in a working class housing Estate, familiar to us all now after the Grenfell Tower Fire. I thought Gunaratne really worked hard to give a sense of community in this novel and to provide warmth and hope while also steeping you in the sense of hopelessness - a tough balancing act.

This book has such strong male voices (similar in that regard to both Wintons *A Shepherds Hut* and also Ryans *A low and quiet sea*) it formed a kind of tapestry of disaffected youth in my mind. The London slang here is a tough obstacle at least in the beginning but eventually the writing created its own rhythm and became easier to parse.

Much like *White Tears* and *Vernon Subutex* this book can be read with it's own soundtrack. In this case the style is Grime and I enjoyed listening to the tracks that Ardan has on his phone when preparing for the soccer game. More books need soundtracks I say !.

In terms of it's Booker long list inclusion, *Mad and Furious* perhaps didn't dazzle me as much as the seemingly effortless prose of Kushner or Ryan. Personally, I thought the book was marginally stronger in the earlier sections and it suffered a little from some "speed wobbles" towards the end there. Did Carolines' character entirely work ? I am not sure.

However, as an insight into a grittier side of London life and particularly as a debut novel it is amazingly

impressive.

Gumble's Yard says

> *Each of us were caught in the same swirl, all held together with our own small furies in this single mad, monstrous and lunatic city*

I re-read this book following its shortlisting for the 2018 Goldsmith Prize - something which caught me a little by surprise. I have augmented my review and upgraded my ranking - on reflection I think this is the book that should have won the Booker (and definitely should have been shortlisted) but the Goldsmith seems a stretch too far as it lacks the formal innovation I would expect from a Goldsmith winner.

This debut novel was longlisted for the Man Booker prize having been shortlisted for the Gordon Burn Prize one week earlier, and after having come to my attention as having been featured in a number of literary previews of 2018 at the start of the year.

The book is set in a North London (Neasden) housing estate (The Stones) some-time in the late 2000s and takes place over 48 hours, in the tinderbox atmosphere immediately after the murder of an off-duty/back-from-service soldier by a black man which has further inflamed the racial and religious tensions in the area which include a radicalised Muslim group based around the local mosque and a group of White racists/nationalists planning a provocative march through the area.

The book is written in a third party point-of-view style with short chapters progressing largely chronologically between three young men *"London's scowling youth"* and close friends – Selvon (named after the writer Sam Selvon), Ardan and Yusuf.

All are second generation immigrants – form the Caribbean, Ireland and Pakistan respectively, but all think of themselves as part of *"a young nation of mongrels"* , as Londoners (and even more narrowly members of their Estate based community) bonding over *"high-school sieges, road banter, Premier league football .."*

> *Ardan and I could not be more different on the surface. But that didn't matter when our common thread was footie, Estate, and the ill fit we felt against the rest of the world.*

Although conscious of the richness of their backgrounds

> *those of us who had an elsewhere in our blood, some foreign origin, we had richer colours and ancient callings to hear. ….. for me that meant Pakistan and its local masks, which in Neasden meant going Mosque and dodging Muhajiroun. For my breddas on Estate, they were from all over*

And their common London link is stronger than their own racial backgrounds - as one character realises when a relative newcomer to London tries to bond over their Pakistani heritage:

> *Anyway, how could I explain this to Freshie Dave? He knew nothing of our high-school sieges, road banter, Premier League football or anything else that made Estate living what it was. A world away for him. I watched Dave salt my chips. I had more in common with the goons that broke his window in truth*

While the form of the book is a common one one thing that makes it distinctive - and must have influenced its Goldsmith selection - is the idiomatic voice in which the youngsters chapters are written (particularly Selvon and Ardan), peppered with “allow it”, “ennet”, “nuttan”, “yuno”.

> *Ours was a language, a dubbing of noise while [that of the private-school boys] was a one note, void of new feeling and any sense of place*

The latter part of that sentence providing a fascinating challenge to the Somewhere versus Anywhere tension that David Goodhart advances in his The Road to Somewhere: The Populist Revolt and the Future of Politics

I found the language easy to follow – although I did find that the Urban Dictionary helped me with some of the more specific language (“stush” for example). I think I was also aided by my watching of Arsenal Fan TV and individuals like Troopz, and that is a relevant comparison, as it brings me to two other points.

Firstly football is crucial to the lives of the characters and dominates much of the limited action in the book, and the book is set in a firmly Arsenal area *“There were no Tottenham fans for miles”* (which as an aside proves that this is by no means a dystopian novel as I have lazily heard it described – for those who live there, the Estate is their life and home).

Secondly the book is set in an time before Social Media (coverage of the murder and related issues comes by TV and Metro not Facebook) – although rather than any specific time it seems a mix of the years in which the author grew up in North London rather than any fixed period (as references to specific footballers, politics and to songs are simply mutually incompatible).

Selvon and Ardan are both trying to escape from their life

For Selvon the escape is physical and external and into the world of sport: pushing himself in running and boxing with an eye on an University place at Brunel and with the ultimate dream of a sporting/Olympian career.

For the fatherless Ardan the escape is mental, internal and into the world of music: Ardan like all the “breddas” is a Grime fan (“*Filled with the noises of cursed foil, kicked-down doors and borough folklore. Same sounds found in all Ends, ours included”*) but more than the others Ardan lives his life to the beat of that music while when he is alone, composing his own lyrics.

Selvon recognising Ardan’s lack of ambition and self-assertion (after an incident with some Muslim radicals)

– forces him into a bus top battle where he merks his opponent (and later sets him up with the chance of a recording contract but more importantly with *"a path where he could walk without stooping"*)

But there ain't no prize on the line, like zero
I've a heart like a pikey, Irish hero
In fact, in fact –cut the beat!
On this bus, in the ring or on road
Come cuss me about them Muslim mandem, I'm willing
Cuh' I don't do this for your applause or your jaws
My bars prove I'm top billing

Ardan's sections (and particularly one where he arrives at a football match which dominates much of the story) are best read to the background of the Grime Music which he listens to, overhears and reflects on – to give the appropriate experience of his internal monologue.

A suggested playlist of songs mentioned in that chapter would be:

https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=6FM93un... Wiley "Bow E3"
https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=yyX_7UM... Kano "How We Livin"
https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=iupu6yn... Skepta "Gingerbread Man"
https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=HK1SpAy... Roll Deep "When I'm Here"

The author himself has said he drew on the storytelling of Grime (as well as I am sure his own expertise in storytelling from the tech firm he jointly founded with his wife https://storygami.com/about) and as just one example the muti-rapper, collective style of When I'm Here reminded me of the point of view technique used.

For Yusuf – far from escaping he finds himself increasingly under capture. His father was the local Imam but increasingly *"Disturbed by a brand of worship that became less about history and art, the Islam he loved, and more about the hate curdled up in the present"* – and after he dies in an accident the radicals/fundamentalists take over the Mosque and after Yusuf's brother brings disgrace to his family and community, he and Yusuf's freedom to defy the new leaders is curtailed.

Selvon too is in one respect fatherless and I think this is an important theme for the author – together with the differences of and difficulty of communications between first and second generations as seen in the rather wonderful story in the following articles:

https://www.theguardian.com/books/201...

https://www.independent.ie/world-news...

Interspersed with these accounts are those of two first-generation immigrants: Caroline from Ireland and Nelson from Montserrat.

Caroline's sections I found the least convincing as we hear her back story, a member of an IRA family, and her exposure to and rejection of tit-for-tat rape atrocities – unconvincing as I do not think that the author captures her voice or accent at all and unfortunately for him another Booker longlisted book Milkman is

entirely based around The Troubles in Ireland and has a wonderful voice. I was not that convinced by her impression of London either - for example would someone bought up in Belfast struggle with the cold January winds in London.

Nelson's story is moving and compelling – caught up in the Teddy Boy racist attacks on the black West Indian immigrants in the early 1950s and the resulting backlash and riots – he is distanced from his fellow activists first when he calls a police officer "Sir" after a racially-motivated search and then distances himself when he takes a conscious decision to reject the tit-for-tat violence. Now incapacitated and inarticulate due to a stroke, he is still able to reflect on the lessons he learnt (*"All I have now .. are these surging, fearsome memories what come and go, sending me back like an echo"*) for himself at that time:

> *I not never understand the mind of furious men. The hard at heart, all them hasty scrawled placard. For what? How we go from talking about we rights and decent living to being march out like foot-soldiers bent and unthinking and hollow? We dusty group of angered blacks, my brothers and sisters them. How quickly honest talk is exchange for speeching, screaming about we numbers and we bodies and not we needs or means to live? How we plunge and grapple and seize all them loose ideas of unbelonging and offence. Leave all them, I thought. Leave all them behind me. I will abandon them, for me, my Lord, for I. Call me a coward. Call me a soft heart then. For the cruel world is too close in this city. Them madmen like Mosley, the violent stories, them images of torn faces in the tabloid paper. It suffocate we own sense and have it replace with some lower code. For see all them who I called my blood, see them lost to it, lost to a city what hate them.*

And its implications for today's world:

> *And now I know. I know that on the night of the riot, when the fury blind the way, I ran not for cowardice but for love. And doing anything for love in a city that deny it, is a rebellion.*

The book then reaches a violent and shocking conclusion which also sheds an additional level of poignancy on the unattributed Prologue and Epilogue which book-end the story.

However I feel that in what could be a depressing and difficult novel (and has been described as such elsewhere) Nelson's voice points a way forward – of the bravery, and rebellion of rejecting the call of violence.

Overall this is an outstanding and memorable debut novel.

I am however delighted that the judges of the Booker (the UK's most prestigious book prize) chose to pick a book which was based in the UK and examined the issues, tensions and fissures in our own society rather than (as so often in the last 2-3 years books which examine the issues in the US).

And rather wonderfully Ardan uses the analogy of Grime to (I am going to chose to believe) make exactly the same case:

> *Most man-tho, even Selvon and Yoos, they still on their Yankee-made hip-hop. Allow that. Why be on that gas when London's got our own good moves? Even if. Even if it sounds ugly, cold and sparse. Even if the beats are angry, under scuddy verses, it's the same noise as on road. Eskibeat, ennet. Why would any man keep listening to Americans with their foreign chemistries after that? Nobody from Ends been to Queensbridge, get me?*

Paul Bryant says

This London working class panorama tries so hard but is eventually brought down by its mad and furious ambition. It's like a box of fireworks that someone has accidentally set alight, everything going off at once, too much for the eye to take in.

As well as being stuffed full of CONTEMPORARY ISSUES ripped out of tomorrow's headlines it's all very neat, like our author had a scheme and he stuck to it.

So it's a neat exploding box of fireworks. Looks like I'll never figure out this metaphor thing.

It's told in five voices –

The three young friends Yusuf (Muslim), Ardan (Irish) and Selvon (black British)

And two of their parents – Caroline (Ardan's mother) and Nelson (Selvon's father).

THE LANGUAGE

First person present tense mostly and for these five people the present is really tense. Told in a medley of demotic speech – yes, at the beginning it might remind you of the ferocious Scottish slang of *Trainspotting* but soon it becomes clear that all you need is these ten words and you'll be fine

Fam
Blood
Ennet
Nuttan
Suttan
Bredda
Myman
Bare
Stush
Bunn

IMPOSSIBLE VOICES

The slangy part of the language is not a difficulty. What was a problem for me (but not any other reviewers I found) was that these five people speak impossibly. On the most fundamental level we have some disbelief

to suspend for all first person narratives, from Moll Flanders, Robinson Crusoe, and Huckleberry Finn onwards. John Mullan in *How Novels Work* makes this very basic point which is so basic it never gets made

Your memory is probably not as good as that of most narrators of novels told in the first person. Those who professionally deal with testimonies – detectives, say, or criminal lawyers – must find extraordinary the exactitude of recollection in such works of fiction. … Jane Eyre, supposedly writing years afterwards, recalls pages of precise and passionate dialogue with Mr Rochester….. (such novels rely) on a convention that contradicts experience. We might remember a phrase or emphasis from a recent conversation, but we are unlikely to recall the exact words said to us, or by us, even minutes ago. Yet novels with first-person narrators invariably behave as if the narrator could replay a tape of dialogue made in his or her head.

So let's take that convention as read and overlook it. Next, we have the PRESENT TENSE

I open my eyes and I see Selvon reach a hand down to me. I pull myself up. Fuck. They all looking at me to see if I'm crying or suttan, as if I pissed myself or suttan. Fuck em. I watch their feet, them henchmen jackboots, walk out the gate taking Yoos with them. Why they taking Yoos for?

The three young voices are all narrating their stories as the events are happening. Who are they talking to? Not a reporter or a detective or a friend, no, they are talking impossibly to you, the dear and ever forgiving reader.
So that's the second convention. I don't think anyone minds that either, and neither do I. I'm not in love with it, but I wouldn't throw it out of the house. But the third level of impossibility really bugged me.

I had been running along the streaming vein of the North Circular Road. A thousand cars shot past on the carriageway, the long orange bend of twin lamplights stretched along the middle barricade between the rush of cars, lorries and motorcycles, and I was alone.

Streaming vein? Yusuf sounds so literary at times, so elegant, that his first person words might almost have been made up by an author whose first novel has been longlisted for the Booker prize. Yusuf again:

The way back to my bedroom I glanced into Amma's room. I saw the shape of my mother's oval shoulders, her tousled hair spread out on the pillow I wanted to wake her.

In the middle of a crisis (there's a riot going on and his brother has disappeared) he chooses this detail to record and selects the beautiful adjective "oval" for his mother's shoulders. No teenage kid will be this elegant & poetical. Unless they are characters in a novel about tough but tender kids in 21st century London.

Okay, this only applies to Yusuf, the other lot never get too poetical. Yusuf's literary gracefulness grated on me. Way too pretty.

GET ON WITH IT

The plot kicks off with an off-stage crime just like the murder of British soldier Lee Rigby by Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale in 2013 but that turns out to be just scene setting, atmosphere. The real story (taking place over two days) is the outward clash between Muslims living on the Stones Estate and the "Britain First" fascists who are organising a provocative march through the estate. Well, but that's not it either, that's just the outer shell. The REAL real story, the inner one, is between Yusuf and his conflicted

probably-being-radicalised older brother.

That was what I got really interested in. But hell, there were so many things which got in the way. The two other friends Arden and Selvon and their fairly minor life problems; their parents and their painful memories of ancient conflicts (IRA/Prot violence; original skinheads in the 50s). But what mostly got in the way of the story I wanted to read about was that Guy Gunaratne didn't want to tell it :

The worst think I could have done – or the less interesting thing – would have been to write a little story about how a young man gets radicalised.

(Interview with The New Review, 26 August 2018)

I guess that is why this core story is beset with interruption after interruption as the fast-paced narrative CRAWLS along.

This was a jangly, clangourous read. GG has put four stars worth of great writing into his novel but he end up with only three. There ain't no justice, which is one of the morals of this book.

POSTSCRIPT

A great photo showing GG's father looking at a copy of In Our Mad and Furious City in a London bookshop.

Nat K says

"The blood was not what shocked us. For us it was his face like a mirror, reflecting our own confused and frightened hearts."

5**** plus.

Stark. Gritty. Raw.

I read this book late into the night. The power of the writing, the characters, the themes, totally captured my attention. It is emotive and unforgiving.

Set in a housing estate in inner city London, each chapter is told from the pov** of one of the five main characters. We live inside their heads, and view the world from their eyes. We hear their thoughts. We feel their anxieties.

The urban landscape of the estate is a melting pot of cultures and creeds. There is friendship and kinship. Likewise there is also the ugly side of bigotry, fear & suspicion. Radicalism. Fundamentalism. Sectarianism. Any unpleasant "ism" you can think of is here, like a tinderbox, waiting to catch alight.

Selvon, Ardan & Yusuf are mates. They listen to music, keep fit, play soccer and dream of leaving. But events spiral out of control, which impact them all.

Nelson and Caroline are from the generation above. From Montserrat and Belfast respectively, they've know their own share of troubles. It seems that while years have passed, people continue to face the same struggles. As the saying goes "the more things change, the more they stay the same".

What really stood out of for me from this story, is that as much as human beings have evolved, we still carry petty grievances in our hearts, which often spill over to the next generation.

The grammar is spoken in the patois/street language of the characters (it shouldn't be any other way). This gives the book its authenticity, its voice.

A truly sensational debut novel from Guy Gunaratne. His writing shows a depth of maturity and understanding of the crazy world we live in, and (the ugly side of) human nature.

I felt like this book was a hit to the solar plexus, it's so powerful.

There are so many amazing reviews out there for this book which describe it much more eloquently than I have. Read them! More importantly, read this book.

A book for our times.

"It was like we lived upon jagged teeth in the dark, in this bone-cold London city. A young nation of mongrels. Constantly measuring ourselves against what we were supposed to be, which is what? I couldn't tell you."

Long listed for The Man Booker Prize 2018

** pov (point of view)

Paula Kalin says

Nominated for both the 2018 Booker and Goldsmiths prizes, In our Mad and Furious City is a gritty debut about two days in the lives of London's diverse population living in a poor neighborhood called Estates. The book is narrated by a handful of immigrants from two generations. From Belfast to the Caribbean islands, different inner street contemporary voices emerge using the vernacular of their culture.

Gunaratne writes about the underbelly of the prosperous in London. With clear insight the narrators voice what it takes to survive in this neighborhood and the challenges they face. The youth share their football and music, however, there is always that underlining fear, cruelty, and hate.

I could not put down this book. Very intense. The author made you feel like you were right there.

Highly recommend to those that don't mind reading in the form of inner city language.

5 out of 5 stars

Marchpane says

Exceptional. I hope this book blows up and becomes huge because really, it deserves to be.

Alternating the perspectives of three London teenagers and two of their parents, it dials the pressure and momentum up, up, up with ever shorter chapters as the events of the book escalate and yes, it's furious.

Set over two days in a London housing estate under a gathering storm cloud of racial tensions, the violent struggle is both timely and timeless. Brexit and its associated wave of anti-immigrant sentiment might be happening now but this stuff has been going on since always. *In Our Mad and Furious City* shows the older generation looking back on earlier instances of strife, the violent patterns that just keep on repeating:

> *Is how I learn what they meant when they call it a bad tide. It was the people bad mind here, the flow of the water, smell of the air. During a high tide things come fairly. The people them welcome a newcomer like novelty. Other times the tide is low and them smiles turn to bitterness and hate. Sour time like that, the British native think that the tide bring a flood and they do everything they can to push away we, the difference. This was the London I come to. Them old ships what bring common cause was long gone.* ***London was at the beginning of a low tide.***

All in first-person, with natural speech patterns intact, the vernacular uses street slang and patois to render the voices of first and second generation immigrants so lifelike as to be almost audible.

Sections from the POV of the teenagers (or "youngers") are heavily influenced by grime music, capturing not just the language of the streets, but its rhythms and cadences too. It's gritty, this verbal patter it pulses and gets inside your head. In the final lines you can practically hear the beats:

> *So here it all is, this London. A place that you can love, make rhymes out of pyres and a romance of the colours, talk gladly of the changes and the flux and the rise and the fall without feeling its storm rain on your skin and its bone-scarring winds*

There are many Londons. This brilliant book is one of them.

Neil says

UPDATE:

Now re-read after its (surprise, to me) inclusion on the Goldsmith's shortlist. I'm glad it was put on this shortlist, though, as I may not have re-read it otherwise and it benefits from a second reading. I found myself thinking a lot more as I read it this time about the reasons people leave and the reasons people stay. We have an older generation in the book (Nelson and Caroline) who left their home countries and settled in London. And we have a younger generation (Selvon, Ardan and Yusuf) who are feeling trapped in London. Selvon

escapes through his exercise regime and his dreams of athletic stardom. Ardan escapes through his music and his dreams of a recording contract. Yusuf struggles because he is under the shadow of his brother Irfan and may be forced to leave London.

The parallels between the generations show us that the battles are ongoing, fought by each generation in turn.

A re-read really makes me question how this book could have been dropped from the Man Booker long list and not carried over to shortlist. I am less convinced, though, of its suitability for the Goldsmith's: I don't see anything particularly new or innovative.

This is a wonderful book and I am very glad that I have re-read it. I wish it had gone further in the Booker prize.

"See London. This city taints its young."

In Our Mad And Furious City opens with the murder of a young soldier on the streets of London. It both is and isn't the murder of Lee Rigby in May 2013. And this both is and isn't the real London. Gunaratne has re-imagined London with only a few minor changes from the real thing. *"Families hauling bare ASDA shopping bags past Chinese shops and Polish newsagents."* - sounds like London to me! Gunaratne's novel floats around the edges of actual events, the real city, and gives us a fiction that is uncomfortably close to the truth. If you are British and you read this, it's not just the story itself that is frightening, but the things it makes you think about that you see in the country where you live.

The story focuses on three young men, Selvon, Ardan and Yusuf who Iive on a North London estate of four tower blocks. It is set in the period of unrest that follows the opening murder. It is a frightening book to read. About halfway through, I wrote in the notes I was taking as I read "Everything I don't want Britain to be but am afraid it is becoming". I don't live in London. I don't live in a city. I live in rural England surrounded by fields and countryside. But I read the newspapers. And I don't think I am the only person in the country who was disturbed not just by the result of the Brexit referendum but more so by the undercurrent of racism and intolerance that was brought to the surface and put on display in all its ugliness. This isn't a Brexit novel (its date is never made explicit, but the indicators are the main events are about 10 years prior to the Brexit referendum), but it is a novel that exposes some of the tensions, that explores how misunderstandings, sometimes deliberate, spark into violence and hatred.

Honestly? It made me cry to think about it.

We meet Selvon who is dedicated to his physical fitness. He sees it as a way to escape from "the Estate" (clarification after Gumble's Yard correctly picked me up on this - Selvon lives off-estate but his life centres there because of his friendships and he is looking for a way to escape to a better life). We meet Ardan, a gifted lyricist who seeks escape through his music (it is worth, by the way, looking up some of the music referenced in the book - there are lyrics there that give more context for the book even if the music is, as for me, not to your taste). We meet Yusuf, whose life is dominated by the Mosque and those who run the Mosque and, by extension, his life. He sees no escape. The three of them support one another as tensions rise around them to an explosive conclusion. (It's hard to read this and not think of another multi-narrator story of racial tensions that culminates in an episode of violence and which should also have been on the Man Booker longlist - Tommy Orange's There There).

There are two other narrators (Nelson and Caroline - I won’t say how they fit in, but they do), and we cycle through each of those five with chapters that either progress the story or that drop back to show events from a different perspective. Nelson arrived from Montserrat and we read his story and the reaction against black immigrants a generation ago. Caroline is Irish and left Ireland during the troubles. Their stories are a counterpoint to the three young men who tell us today’s story. Nelson's and Caroline's stories, told in flashback, show us that this is not new and, for me, point forward to the post-Brexit Britain that scares many of us.

Gunaratne’s writing is poetic, especially with his three younger protagonists. I love the way he can capture a person in just a sentence (*”Slowly I rise to my feet, my hands in my pockets like that’s where I keep my courage like.”*). His writing often reads like the grime music that forms a backdrop to the story. He keeps us always in the slang and vernacular of the characters. I would love to hear this book read by a North Londoner from the estates and tower blocks.

I hadn’t heard of this until it was put on the Man Booker list. This is what I like most about the Booker - when it points me towards an urgent, important book that I haven’t heard of and, once started, cannot put down.

Adina says

Longlisted for Booker Prize 2018, Shortlisted for Goldsmith prize 2018

For those of us who had an elsewhere in our blood, some foreign origin, we had richer colours and ancient callings to hear. For those of us who had an elsewhere in our blood, some foreign origin, we had richer colours and ancient callings to hear.

I finished this more than two weeks ago but I struggled to write a review. Unfortunately, this was one of those books that I know it's well written and with literary and sociologic merit but which meant nothing to me. I mean, I liked it but I wasn’t moved too much and I struggled a bit too finish, not because of the language as other friends mentioned. I had no problem with that, in the end there are no more than 20 slang words repeated over and over again, ennet?

The format was interesting, The story is told from the interlocking points of view of three young men with different ethnic backgrounds (Irish, Caribbean black and Muslim), living one of the poorer neighborhoods of London, the so called Estates, and from the point of view of some of their parents. The timeline is not certain, which gives the narrative a sense of continuity, the felling that nothing changes, tha Fury, hate and fear do not disappear, they only transform.

Abba would have told me that there was wisdom to be found in seeing cruelty so close and finding violence in the daylight. History, he said, is not a circle but a spiral of violent rhymes. We were meant to bear the foul mess, live on with our voices tied to verse and those that could survive it would be worthy. This is the truth that our olders knew. Familiar with the echoes on road, they sensed the fury come but stepped back to let us learn our own frailty. That’s the deep strength that survives in this place, and now it’s our wisdom too.

Tim says

Guy Gunaratne's debut novel unfolds over the course of 48 hours on a north London housing estate describing moments of peace and chaos in a city boiling with social tensions. There we follow three young men – Selvon, Ardan, and Yusuf – navigate the fragile, deprived communities of suburban London. The backdrop to the novel seems very close indeed to real London events – the murder of an off-duty soldier by a black man, riots, progessing radicalisation of Muslim youths.
Alongside the three youngsters, the narrative follows Caroline, and Irish single mother haunted by memories of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, and Nelson, born in the island nation of Montserrat, who talks of his own experience coming to London as a young man confronted with the Keep Britain White movement and the clashes with racist police and Teddy Boys.

The prose is alive and strong, it is written in the languages of “those with elsewhere in their blood”. It reminded me somewhat of Junot Diaz's style of prose. The language explodes from the page and stylistically makes Marlon James' A Brief History of Seven Killings' – a Man Booker Prize winner no less – prose look one dimensional. The layers Gunaratne manages to create in order to give singular strong voices to the narrators is remarkable. Especially the passages following Ardan, a youth inspired and formed by the fast rhyming bars of Grime, are in my opinion immaculate.

This novel is a joy to read and I doubt I will read much this year to top this extraordinary book.
