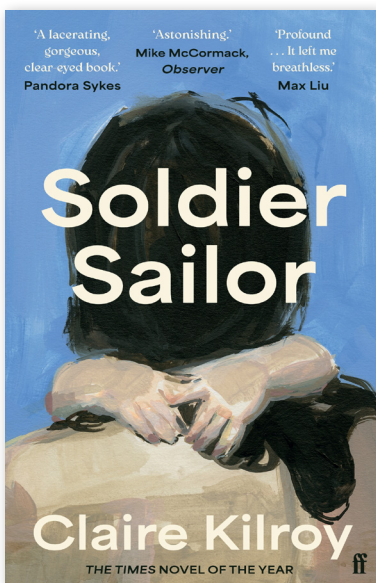


Soldier Sailor

by Claire Kilroy



PLOT SUMMARY

In Claire Kilroy's first book in over a decade, she takes us deep into the mind of her unforgettable heroine.

Exploring the clash of fierce love for a new life with a seismic change in identity, she vividly realises the tumultuous emotions of a new mother. As her marriage strains and she struggles with questions of love, autonomy, creativity and the passing of time, an old friend makes a welcome return – but can he really offer a lifeline to the woman she used to be?

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

In *Soldier Sailor*, Kilroy explores the emotional terrain of being the mother in all its bone-tiredness, panic, bitterness and terrifyingly deep love. Her ability to capture the emotional intensity of this experience is remarkable:

'You've no idea what your screams did to me, Sailor. I've no idea what they did either. They shook my brain, flung it in whirling fragments like the contents of a snow globe.'

As well as the visceral panic of motherhood, Kilroy accurately captures the all-too-common frustration of the exhausted new mother who is expected to 'just get on with it' by her husband, the powerlessness of being the primary carer, having to de-prioritise her career, and the resentment that her husband still gets to live a relatively unchanged life while being a parent:

'The luxury, the sheer luxury of sending a last-minute message saying you wouldn't be home that evening. It would be a decade – more – before I could do the same.'

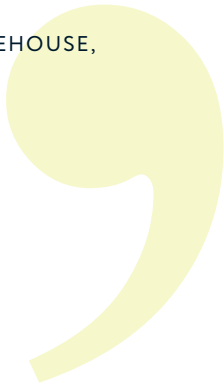
>



Shortlist
2024

“A full-bodied, remorseless, visceral deep dive into the maternal mind. It is ultimately a love story between Soldier, the mother, and Sailor, the son.”

ANNA WHITEHOUSE,
2024 JUDGE



It is rare to find a narrative which so accurately represents the pain and difficulty of early motherhood in such an uncompromising and honest way, even to the point of abandoning a baby because of postnatal depression, or just sheer hopelessness and overwhelming fatigue.

However, Kilroy manages to make the reader sympathise with her protagonist leaving and rescuing the baby in the forest, leading us away from the common judgemental assessment society tends to make of women. Rather, Kilroy’s writing engenders empathy for anyone who has been driven to this point; victim to the extreme experience of looking after a small child.

DISCUSSION POINTS

One of the themes that Kilroy addresses so well in *Soldier Sailor* is the division of labour and parental responsibility between men and women in many heterosexual relationships. In the novel, the narrator’s husband is forever making ‘helpful’, simplistic and ideal-world suggestions about what she should do, whilst also being generally unavailable to help or do any of those suggested actions himself:

‘We’re not a team. The lot of you in there discussing your wives’ post-natal depression over the water cooler so you can feel like concerned husbands. All you need to do is help. But, instead, you work late. You stay in the office until you’re sure all the babies have gone to bed. Then you congratulate yourselves on how hard you’re working. Your bosses promote you for shirking family responsibilities when your wives’ careers dwindle to a halt because somebody is left holding the baby.’

Kilroy grasps the unfairness of how some workplaces reward fathers for being absent from their families, and don’t offer family-friendly working practices. Many, of course, have improved hugely in this regard over the years, with some governments around the world ushering through new legislation for shared parental leave, flexible working and childcare provisions.

Discuss your thoughts about how workplaces could better support families, and how society could better support new parents in terms of education, community support and even medical treatment. What could we do to make sure that fewer parents feel less alone and unsupported at this crucial and difficult time of life?



Shortlist
2024

QUESTIONS

What did you think about the narrator's husband? How does he compare to her old friend from the playground – as a father and as a man?

How did *Soldier Sailor* make you feel about motherhood?

How did you feel that the relationship between the narrator and her husband was resolved? Was there a sense of having overcome difficulties, or just accepted them as part of a difficult time?

What is your understanding of postnatal depression, and has it been influenced or changed in any way by reading this book?

NEXT STEPS

Write a letter to your mother. What is it you would like to say? Is it a thank you, a loving letter, is it angry, resentful, or are there things you have been meaning to tell her for a long time and didn't know how? You don't have to send it; you may not be able to give it to her. You can burn it after you've written it, keep it in a drawer after writing it, or leave it on her grave, but the act of writing might be cathartic.

Alternatively, make a baby album for yourself or for one of your children if you don't have one already. Select pictures, keepsakes and cards from their birthdays or when they were born and add in notes and memories from all the family. If you're making it for the baby you once were, how does this make you feel? Sad? Sentimental? Happy?

If you enjoyed this book try some of our recommended reads on the next page.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Claire Kilroy is the author of four previous novels, including *Tenderwire* and *The Devil I Know*.

She was awarded the Rooney Prize in 2004 and has been shortlisted for many other prizes, including the Irish Novel of the Year Award and the Kerry Group Award for fiction.




Shortlist
2024

If you enjoyed this book...

RECOMMENDED READS

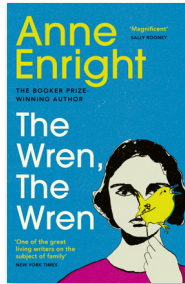
In *The Devil I Know*, Claire Kilroy presents a mysterious testimony recounting Tristan's story of his involvement in an property development deal amid the Irish financial meltdown at the beginning of the 21st century.

Matresence by Lucy Jones is an urgent and radical examination of the modern institution of motherhood, which seeks to unshackle all parents from oppressive social norms. It raises vital questions about motherhood and femininity; interdependence and individual identity, as well as about our relationships with each other and the living world. *Matresence* was longlisted for the 2024 Women's Prize for Non-Fiction.

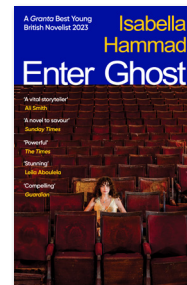
Want more? Our website is packed full of book recommendations, reading lists, author interviews and more. And our Women's Prize library is brimming with books, both fiction and non-fiction, that will satisfy every reader from gripping mysteries and inspiring memoirs to magical romances and thrilling historical accounts.

womensprize.com

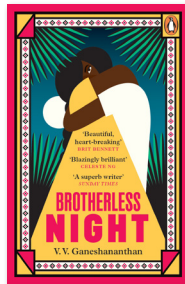
EXPLORE THE 2024 SHORTLIST



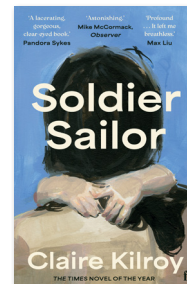
The Wren, The Wren
by Anne Enright



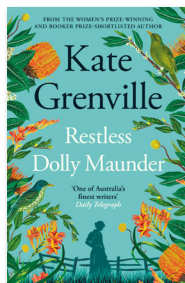
Enter Ghost
by Isabella Hammad



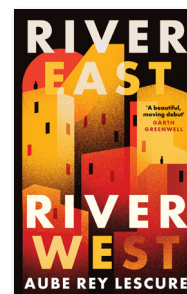
Brotherless Night
by V. V. Ganeshanathan



Soldier Sailor
by Claire Kilroy



Restless Dolly Maunder
by Kate Grenville



River East, River West
by Aube Rey Lescure

DISCOVER MORE!

There are many ways to get involved with the Women's Prize. We have a 16-million strong book loving community that subscribe to our newsletter, chat on social media and join us at our events, both in-person and online.

We run free writing workshops, online book clubs and an annual book festival to bring our community together. And listen out for our podcast *Bookshelfie*, where each week a guest picks her five favourite books written by women and

discusses the impact they have had on her life and career.

The Women's Prize Trust is a registered charity, and we appreciate donations of any size to support our outreach work with writers and readers from disadvantaged backgrounds. So, however you wish to, **join us and help put more books written by women into the hands of more readers.**

womensprize.com
[@womensprize](https://www.instagram.com/womensprize)



SUPPORTED BY

