

## Wellcome Trust Book Prize 2010 shortlist

Judges **Clive Anderson**, **Meggie Gee**, **Michael Neve** and **Alice Roberts** discuss the six shortlisted books.

**AR:** I thought *Medic* was a fantastically good read; it is a description of medics and their role in battlefield medicine and the way that's evolved over the 20th century.

**CA:** It's like a book form of the first 20 minutes of *Saving Private Ryan*.

**MN:** Vivid, well-researched, good history.

**CA:** It makes a point about the horrors of war and the mistakes which are made and remade again and again, and while describing the worst of mankind it also shows people in an heroic light.

**AR:** I think it's a great book.

**MG:** I think it's a stunning book, it's very original. It is a wonderful story and a kind of fairytale in the end, about how one married couple deal with the coming of death.

**MN:** She uses the medical history to attack the complete lacuna that is the American healthcare system as we know.

**MG:** It's an attack on the way all of us tend to behave towards the very sick and the dying.

**MN:** It's extremely well-organised and vivid.

**MG:** It makes us feel for all the characters as people and I think we come away at the end feeling very satisfied, everybody's story arc is completed, it's a thrilling book.

**MG:** Well I'm a woman so you wouldn't think I would find a detailed description of one man's urinary problems would be very interesting, and I found it absolutely riveting.

**MN:** He's sceptical in the strongest sense about alternative medicine but he ends up thinking 'well I better see what the deal is here', and goes with it.

**AR:** The kind of mental processes that he goes through are absolutely fascinating and you do feel as though there's been some kind of revelation at the end of the book. I found it very interesting reading it as somebody that was medically trained; I felt that it did open my eyes a bit actually.

**MG:** Stylistically perfect, very intelligent, a very good book.

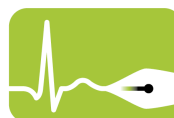
**CA:** *The Immortal life of Henrietta Lacks* is a fantastic book.

**MG:** It's about Henrietta Lacks, the young mixed race woman whose cervical cancer cells gave rise to a line of immortal cells which have been used in tissue research.

**CA:** It's a journalistic enquiry as to who was Henrietta Lacks, because she was anonymous for many years, what do her family think about this?

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**BOOK PRIZE**

**MN:** It's a tragedy in the proper sense, famously once defined as the struggle between right and right.

**MG:** It's also very interesting about racial history.

**CA:** It shines light on medical and scientific research, it tells you something about the modern-day America, and the modern-day world.

**MG:** I love *Grace Williams Says it Loud* because it's a really believable, vivid portrait of a girl, Grace Williams, who everybody sees just as somebody who can't really speak and can't really move like everybody else. But the novel makes you hear her inner voice, which is full of life and full of humour and full of hope for her life in the world, even though she's in this terrible 1950s mental institution, the Briar.

**MN:** I believed in her internal voice, which is kind of risky, and I thought the love affair for once wasn't mawkish or fantastical or just straightforwardly implausible.

**MG:** I think it's a terrific achievement and the style, this lovely lively jumping style, makes it into something rather marvellous.

**CA:** Smallpox is a fantastic subject for a book: it's a disease which has been responsible for millions of deaths, usually in hideous ways.

**MN:** A really triumphant story, without being sentimental.

**CA:** What makes it almost like have a happy ending is that as we know, smallpox has been eliminated. I think it's a most extraordinary thing that a hundred years ago you could scarcely avoid it and now it's been eliminated. It's got a lot of elements in it and it's breezily told by the author, a very readable account.

**MN:** Wonderful. Wonderfully researched, vivid again, vividly written and it's really, really an example of medical history at its absolute best.

[End of transcript]