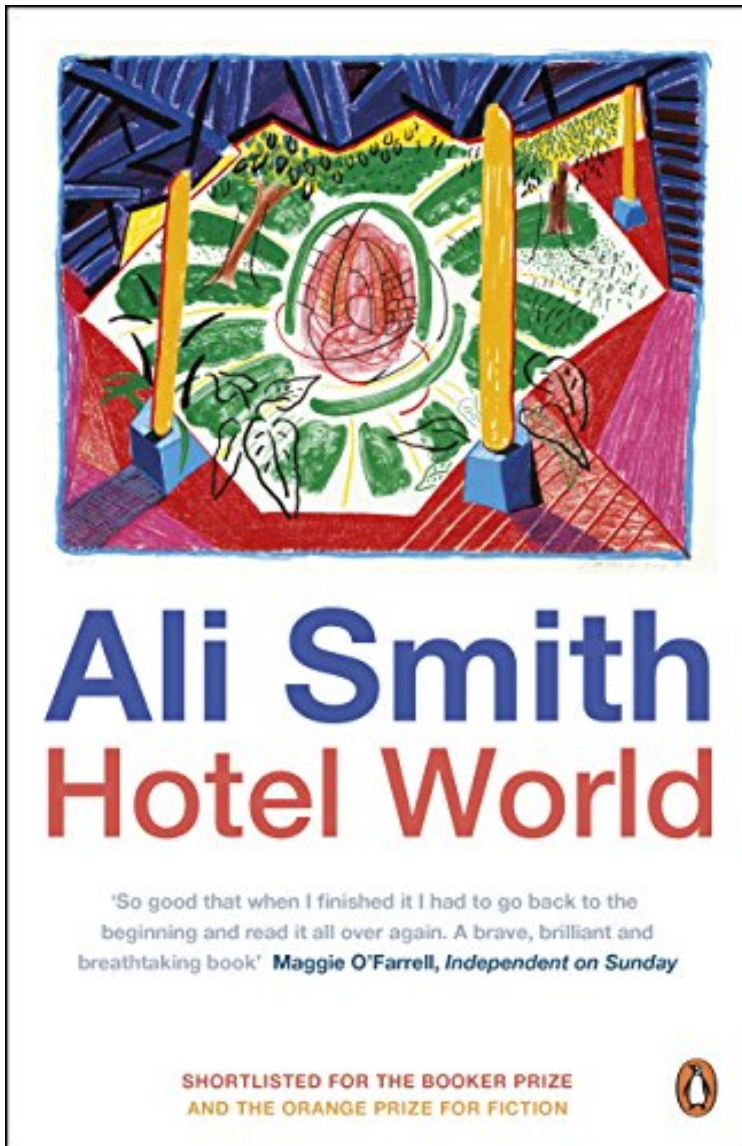


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Hotel World



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurAli Smith's masterful, ambitious Hotel World was shortlisted for the Booker Prize and the Orange Prize.Five people: four are living, three are strangers, two are sisters, one is dead. In her highly acclaimed and most ambitious book to date, the brilliant young Scottish writer Ali Smith brings alive five unforgettable characters and traces their intersecting lives. This is a short novel with big themes (time, chance, money, death) but an eye for tiny detail: the taste of dust, the weight of a few coins in the hand, the pleasurable pain of a stone in one's shoe . . .'Ali Smith has got style, ideas and punch. Read her' Jeanette Winterson 'An extremely readable, easy-flowing writer and one of the subtlest and most intelligent around. Hotel World is essential reading from a writer confirming herself as a major talent. . . a wonderful piece of

sustained imagination' Independent'As infectious as a pop song, the story bursts open from the very first page and demands to be read in one sitting' The TimesExtraitPastWoooooo-hoooooo what a fall what a soar what a plummet what a dash into dark into light what a plunge what a glide thud crash what a drop what a rush what a swoop what a fright what a mad hushed skirl what a smash mush mash-up broke and gashed what a heart in my mouth what an end.What a life.What a time.What I felt. Then. Gone.Here's the story; it starts at the end. It was the height of the summer when I fell; the leaves were on the trees. Now it's the deep of the winter (the leaves fell off long ago) and this is it, my last night, and tonight what I want more than anything in the world is to have a stone in my shoe. To be walking along the pavement here outside the hotel and to feel a stone rattling about in my shoe as I walk, a small sharp stone, so that it jags into different parts of the sole and hurts just enough to be pleasure, like scratching an itch. Imagine an itch. Imagine a foot, and a pavement beneath it, and a stone, and pressing the stone with my whole weight hard into the skin of the sole, or against the bones of the bigger toes, or the smaller toes, or the inside curve of the foot, or the heel, or the small ball of muscle that keeps a body upright and balanced and moving across the breathtaking still-hard surface of the world.Because now that my breath, you might say, has been taken I miss such itching detail all the time. I don't want anything but it. I worry endlessly at detail that wouldnever have concerned me, not even for a moment of when I was still alive. For example, just for peace of mind, my fall. I would like very much to know how long it took, how long exactly, and I'd do it again in a minute given thechance, the gift of a chance, the chance of a living minute, sixty whole seconds, so many. I'd do it given only a fraction of that with my full weight behind me again if I could (and this time I'd throw myself willingly down it wooo-hooooo and this time I'd count as I went, one elephant two eleph-ahh) if I could feel it again, how I hit it, the basement, from four floors up, from toe to head, dead. Dead leg. Dead arm. Dead hand. Dead eye. Dead 1, four floors between me and the world, that's all it took to take me, that's the measure of it, the length and death of it, the short goodb--.Quite tall roomy floors, quite quality floors. Nobody could say I didn't have a classy passage out; the rooms very newly and tastefully furnished with good hard expensive beds and corniced high ceilings on the first and second, and a wide grand stairwell I fell parallel to down the back of. Twenty-one steps between each floor and sixteen down to the basement; I fell them all. Quite substantial space from each thick carpet above to each thick carpet below though the basement is stone (I remember it, hard) and the drop was short, less than one complete glorious second per floor I estimate now so long after the event, descent, end. It was something fine. The fall. The feeling. The one-off rough-up; the flight to the bitter end, all the way down to the biting of dust.A mouthful of dust would be something. You could gather it any time, couldn't you, any time you like, from the corners of rooms, the underneaths of beds, the tops of doors. The rolled-up hairs and dried stuff and specks of what-once-was-skin, all the glamorous leavings of breathing creatures ground down to essence and glued together with the used-up leftover webs and the flakes of a moth, the see-through flakes of a bluebottle's dismantled wing. You could easily (for you can do such a thing whenever you choose, if you want to) smear your hand with dust, roll dust's precious little between a finger and a thumb and watch it stencil into your fingerprint, yours, unique, nobody else's. And then you could lick it off; I could lick it off with my tongue, if I had a tongue again, if my tongue was wet, and I could taste it for what it is. Beautiful dirt, grey and vintage, the grime left by life, sticking to the bony roof of a mouth and tasting of next to nothing, which is always better than nothing.I would give anything to taste. To taste just dust.Because now that I'm nearly gone, I'm more here than I ever was. Now that I'm nothing but air, all I want is to breathe it. Now that I'm silent forever, haha, it's all words words words with me. Now that I can't just reach out and touch, it's all I want, is to.This is how it ended. I climbed into the, the. The lift for dishes, very small room waiting suspended above a shaft of nothing, I forget the word, it has its own name. Its walls, ceiling and floor were all silver-coloured metal. We were on the top floor, the third; it used to be the servants' quarters two hundred years ago when the house had servants in it, and after that the house was a brothel and up there was where the cheap girls, the more diseased or aging girls, were put to sell their wares, and now that it's a hotel and each room costs money every night the smaller rooms still cost a little less because the ceilings are closer to touching their floors up at the top of the house. I took the dishes out and put them on the carpet. I was careful not to spill anything. It was only my second night. I was being good. I climbed in, to prove I could; I curled like a snail in a shell with my neck and the back of my head crammed in, pressed hard right up against the metal roof, my face between my arms, my chest between my thighs. I made a perfect circle and the room swayed, the cord snapped, the room fell wooo-hooooo and broke on the ground, I broke too. The ceiling came down, the floor came up to meet me. My back broke, my neck broke, my face broke, my head broke. The cage round my heart broke open

and my heart came out. I think it was my heart. It broke out of my chest and it jammed into my mouth. This is how it began. For the first time (too late) I knew how my heart tasted. I have been missing the having a heart. I miss the noise it used to make, the way it could shift warmth round, the way it could keep me awake.

I go from room to room here and see beds wrecked after love and sleep, then beds cleaned and ready, waiting again for bodies to slide into them; crisp sheets folded down, beds with their mouths open saying welcome, hurry up, get in, sleep is coming. The beds are so inviting. They open their mouths all over the hotel every night for the bodies which slip into them with each other or alone; all the people with their beating hearts, sliding into spaces left empty for them by other people gone now to God knows where, who warmed the same spaces up only hours before. I have been trying to remember what it was like, to sleep knowing you would wake up. I have been monitoring them closely, the bodies, and seeing what their hearts let them do. I have been watching them sleep afterwards; I have sat at the ends of satisfied beds, dissatisfied beds, snoring, oblivious, insomniac beds, the beds of people who sensed no one there, no one else in the room but them. Hurry up. Sleep is coming. The colours are going. I saw that the traffic was colourless today, the whole winter street was faded, left out in the wind and the sun for too long. Today even the sun was colourless, and the sky. I know what this means. I saw the places where green used to be. I saw almost no reds, and no blues at all. I will miss red. I will miss blue and green. I will miss the shapes of women and men. I will miss the smell of my own feet in summer. I will miss smell. My feet. Summer. Buildings and the way they have windows. The bright packaging round foods. Small coins that are not worth much, the weight of them in a pocket or a hand. I will miss hearing a song or a voice come out of a radio. Seeing fires. Seeing grass. Seeing birds. Their wings. Their beady . The things they see with. The things we see with, two of them, stuck in a face above a nose. The word's gone. I had it a moment ago. In birds they're black and like beads. In people they're small holes surrounded in colour: blue, green or brown. Sometimes they can be grey, grey is also a colour. I will miss seeing. I will miss my fall that ruined me, that made me wooo-hooooo I am today. What a fuck, for always, for ever and ever world-without-end with an end after all, amen. I'd do it again and again. I go every night since I fell last summer (my last) up to the top floor, and though the lift is gone now, to God knows where, removed out of something akin to good taste (notorious, a tragedy, not-spoken-about, a shadow-story, my dying got into the papers one day and blew away the next, a hotel has to make a living), the shaft is still there suspended behind the stairwell with its grave promise from up all the way to down, and I throw myself over and it's all I can do, hover in the hollow, settle to the ground like boring snow. Or if I launch myself in, make the special effort to fly down fast to hit the stone, I go straight through it as if the stone is water, or I'm a hot blade and the stone is butter. I can make no dent in anything. I have nothing left to break. Imagine diving into water, water breaking round your shoulders to make room for you in it. Imagine hot or cold. Imagine cold butter disappearing into heated-up bread, gold on its surface, going. There is a word for heated-up bread. I know it. I knew it. No, it's gone. Here's the story. When I hit the basement whoo I was broke apart, flaked away off the top of me like the points of flame flake off the top of a fire. I went to the funeral to see who I'd been. It was a bit gloomy. It was a cold day in June; the people had coats on. Actually it is very nice, where they buried her. Birds sing in its trees, and the sound of far-away traffic; I could hear the full range of sounds then. Now the birds are far away, and there is almost no traffic noise. I visit quite often. It's winter now. They've put up a stone with her name and her dates and an oval photograph on it. It hasn't faded yet. It will, in time; it gets the late afternoon sun. Other stones have this too, the same kind of photograph, and the rain gets in and as the seasons move round the stones, heating them up and cooling them down, condensation comes and goes inside the glass over the pictures. That small boy with the school cap on, way across the moundy grass; that elderly lady, beloved wife; that young man in his best suit twenty-five years out of fashion- all still breathing behind their glass. I hope ours will do that breathing thing too. Hers. Under the ground, in the cold, in the rich small smells of soil and wood and dampening varnish, so many exciting things are happening to her now. Maybe the earnest ticklish mouths of worms; anything. We were a girl, we died young; the opposite of old, we died it. We had a name and nineteen summers; it says as much on the stone. Hers/mine. She/I. Knock knock. Wooo-hoooo's there? Me. You wooo-hoooo? You-hoo yourself. Someone has cut the photograph of her so it will fit in. I can see the tremor of careful scissors round the edge of her head. A girl's head, dark hair to the shoulders. Closed and smiling mouth. Bright and shy, the things she saw with. They once were greenish blue. The head in the glass oval is the same one in the frames in the different rooms of the house, one in the front room, one in the parents' room, one in the hall. I chose the saddest people and I followed them to see where we'd lived. They seemed vaguely -familiar. They sat at the front in the church. I couldn't be sure. I had to guess. I thought they were

ours, the people, and I was right. After the funeral we went home. The house is small; it has no upstairs, no place for a good fall. A chair in that house can take up almost one whole wall. A couch and two chairs fill a room so there is hardly any place for the legs of the people sitting. A dog was barking at me two houses away. A cat shivered through me where her ankles had been, rubbing up against air. More funeral people came and the house got even smaller. I watched them take tea in the lack of space she'd lived in. I went to her room. It was full of two beds. I hovered above a bed. I came back through. I hovered above the sad. I hovered above the television. I hovered above the Hoover. They ate the salmon, the salad and the little sandwiches and they left, shaking hands with the man at the door, the father. They were relieved to be leaving. The blackness dispersed above the heads of most of them when they reached the garden gate and clicked it behind them. I went back inside the house to examine the left people. There were three. The woman was the saddest. She sat in a chair and the unspoken words which hung round her head said: although this is my home where I have lived for twenty-two years, and in it I am surrounded by family and familiar things, I do not rightly know any more where it is that I am in the world. The man made tea and cleared dishes. All afternoon while tea was being drunk or was skinning over he collected u cups on a tray and went through to the kitchen, filled a kettle and made more tea, brought cups back again full of it. In the kitchen he stood, opened a cupboard door, took nothing out of the cupboard, shut the door again. The still-alive child was a girl, another one. She had a fracture of anger starting under her yellow hairline, crossing her forehead and running right down the middle of her face, dividing her chin, her neck, her chest, all the way to her abdomen where it snarled itself into a black knot. This knot only just held the two halves of her together. She sat hugging her knees below the framed photograph of the gone girl. In it we were wearing a tie, shy, and holding a trophy in the shape of a swimming body. There was some salmon left on the plate. I was wondering how it would taste. The man came through, took it away, scraped it into a plastic bag in the back yard. It was a waste. He could have kept it. They could have eaten it later or tomorrow and it would have tasted as good, better; I wanted him to know. I looked at him sadly, then shyly, then he saw me. He dropped the plastic bag. It rustled down on to the broken flagstones. His mouth opened. No sound came out (I could still hear perfectly then). I waved my swimming trophy at him. He paled. He smiled. He shook his head and looked through me, and then I was gone again and he threw the salmon away. A whole half a side of a fish, and the bones would have been easy to pick out, it was perfectly cooked. It had beautiful pinkness.

This was last summer, my (suddenly) last. I could still see the full range of reds then. So I practised the school photograph which was on top of the television. The face was innocence and tiredness, the age thirteen, a slight squint in the, the. The things she saw with. I honed to perfection the redness in them in another picture, one with other girls, and all the girls in the blur had red lights and mock boldness coming out of their faces and drinks in their hands. I checked to see I was performing the right girl. There she was, hiding at the back. I worked hard at the warmth of her look in the picture on the mantelpiece, the one with her arm round the shoulders of the woman now sitting so lostly in the chair. Her mother. I could do the self in the oval on the headstone without even trying; it was easy, slight smile but serious; passport photograph for entry to other worlds. But my favourite to perform was the one with the left-behind sister in it too, a picture the sister kept hidden in her purse and only looked at after her parents were asleep or when she was in a room with a lock. Both of them sat on a couch, but the gone girl was caught in the middle of saying something, looking away from the camera. That one was my masterpiece, the angle of movement, the laughing look, the still more about to be said. That one took effort, to look so effortless. *Revue de presse* Ali Smith has got style, ideas, and punch. Read her. Jeanette Winterson *Hotel World* is everything a novel should be: disturbing, comforting, funny, challenging, sad, rude, beautiful. *The Independent* (London) In this voice from beyond the grave Ali Smith has created the perfect literary ghost imbued with a powerful sense of wonder at the minutiae of everyday sensuality and her beautiful, vivid descriptions are reinforced by a sharp, unsentimental tongue. *The Times* (London) "Ali Smith's remarkable novel *HOTEL WORLD*... is a greatly appealing read. Smith is a gifted and meticulous architect of character and voice." *The Washington Post* "The heart of Scottish writer Ali Smith may belong to good old-fashioned metaphysics -- to truth and beauty and love beyond the grave -- but her stylistic sensibility owes its punch to the Modernists. She's street-savvy and poignant at once, with a brutal sense of irony and a wonderful feel for literary economy. There's a kind of stainless-steel clarity at the center of her fiction. . . ." *The Boston Globe* "*HOTEL WORLD* is that rare experiment, a novel with style to spare . . . despite all the tricks, all the tweaks of language and literature, what you remember about *HOTEL WORLD* is Smith's evocation of the anguish that results when a life ends, her rendering of the sadness at separating from the living world and the loneliness of staying behind.

What a death. What a life. What a book."--San Antonio Express-News ". . . in Smith's hands, this slender plot serves as an excuse for a delightfully inventive, exuberant, fierce novel of which the real star is not the dead Sara, or any of the living characters, but the author's vivid, fluent, highly readable prose. HOTEL WORLD was a well-deserved finalist last year for two prestigious British prizes: the Orange Prize and the Booker Prize. . . . I can't begin to paraphrase all that this dazzling book conveys about humanity and mortality . . ." Margot Livesey, Newsday "Ali who? Hotel what? Even for people who follow contemporary British literature, neither the name nor the title meant a lot. They do now. HOTEL WORLD makes a striking impression. It's a challenging, often bleak but affecting journey through the lives of four young women united by the death of another . . . What an introduction to Ali Smith. Minneapolis Star Tribune "HOTEL WORLD is that rare experiment, a novel with style to spare . . . despite all the tricks, all the tweaks of language and literature, what you remember about HOTEL WORLD is Smith's evocation of the anguish that results when a life ends, her rendering of the sadness at separating from the living world and the loneliness of staying behind. What a death. What a life. What a book." Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel "HOTEL WORLD is compelling . . . precisely because it suggests shifting yet coherent perspectives rather than simplifying lives into rigid, inert realities. Most impressively, Smith has mastered sophisticated literary techniques, which never intrude or bog down a delectable narrative of human perception and rumination. Apart from establishing Ali Smith as a novelist with the skills of a Martin Amis and Samuel Beckett combined, HOTEL WORLD is a damn good read." The San Francisco Chronicle "Wonderfully inventive and boldly lyrical, HOTEL WORLD is an exhilarating read. A chambermaid careens to her death in a broken dumbwaiter, and her dissipating spirit sings a paean to earthly existence. . . . Newly published in the U.S., Ali Smith's thrilling meditation on life, transience, class, and the material world was an Orange Prize finalist and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize." INSIDE BORDERS Courageous and startling. I doubt that I shall read a tougher or more affecting novel this year. Jim Crace