

Thursday Morning Book Club - Old Filth by Jane Gardam

Thursday, June 9th at 10:30 AM

"British novelist Gardam has twice won the Whitbread and was shortlisted for the Man Booker. This, her 15th novel, was shortlisted in Britain for the Orange Prize; it outlines 20th-century British history through the life of Sir Edward Feathers, a barrister whose acronymic nickname provides the title: "Failed in London, Try Hong Kong." At nearly 80, Feathers, retired in Dorset after many years as a respected Hong Kong judge, is a hollow man with few real friends and a cold, sexless marriage that has just ended with the death of his wife, Betty. For the first time, "Filth" (as even Betty called him) delves into the past that produced him: a "Raj orphan" raised by a series of surrogates while his father worked in Singapore, Filth served briefly in WWII (guarding the Queen) and had a lackluster stint as a London barrister before emigrating. The flashbacks contrast British privilege and the chaos that ensues when the empire (especially Filth's childhood Malaya), starts to crumble. As Filth undertakes chaotic visits to his Welsh foster home and other sites, Gardam's sharp, acerbic style counterpoints Feathers's dryness. Well-rounded secondary figures further highlight his emptiness and that of empire." - From Publishers Weekly