

# The Light Between Oceans

## Author Background

**M L Stedman**

***Born and raised in*** Perth, Western Australia

***Resides in*** London

M L (Margot) Stedman was raised and schooled in Perth, Western Australia. In an interview with the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 2012, Stedman said that she had 'always adored the artistry of words, had an affinity with them'.

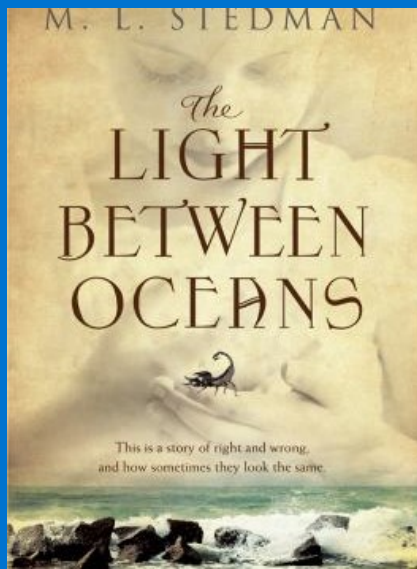
While working as a lawyer in London in 1997 Stedman decided to 'try creative writing' and after hiring a writing coach, going on a writing-holiday and publishing her first short-story *Flight*, she then studied creative writing part-time at the University of London. Stedman has also published three novellas in the out-of-print anthology, *Desperate Remedies*, in 2008.

M L Stedman prefers to keep her personal life separate from the story of her writing, she says "As the book's not autobiographical, details of my life won't really shed light on the story for the reader and I'd much rather let readers focus on the book and their own experience of it".

In writing her first novel *The light between oceans* M L Stedman endeavours to explore 'life's eternal questions about truth, redemption and the nature of happiness'. Her novel, and the light(house) of the title, illuminates the "tension between right and wrong, good and evil, and the shifting sands of moral certainty".

Stedman was taken by surprise at the great popularity of her first novel and says "It's just such a privilege to hear that so many readers have read and loved it". The book was also made in to a movie starring Michael Fassbender and Alicia Vikander.

Source: Quotes and information taken from an interview in *Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper  
<http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/interview-ml-stedman-20120321-1vkty.html>



# The Light Between Oceans

## Book Summary

The debut of a stunning new voice in fiction—a novel both heartbreaking and transcendent

After four harrowing years on the Western Front, Tom Sherbourne returns to Australia and takes a job as the lighthouse keeper on Janus Rock, nearly half a day's journey from the coast.

To this isolated island, where the supply boat comes once a season and shore leaves are granted every other year at best, Tom brings a young, bold, and loving wife, Isabel.

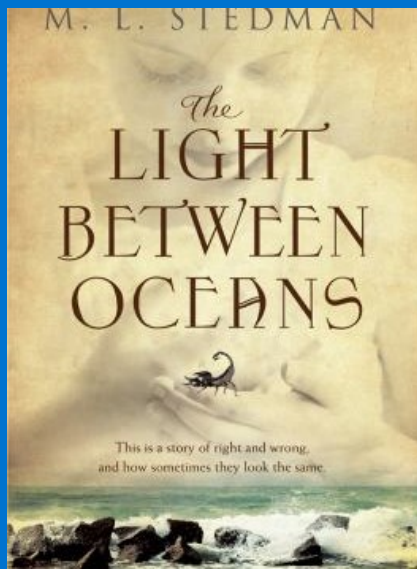
Years later, after two miscarriages and one stillbirth, the grieving Isabel hears a baby's cries on the wind. A boat has washed up onshore carrying a dead man and a living baby.

Tom, whose records as a lighthouse keeper are meticulous and whose moral principles have withstood a horrific war, wants to report the man and infant immediately. But Isabel has taken the tiny baby to her breast. Against Tom's judgment, they claim her as their own and name her Lucy. When she is two, Tom and Isabel return to the mainland and are reminded that there are other people in the world. Their choice has devastated one of them.

M. L. Stedman's mesmerizing, beautifully written novel seduces us into accommodating Isabel's decision to keep this "gift from God". And we are swept into a story about extraordinarily compelling characters seeking to find their North Star in a world where there is no right answer, where justice for one person is another's tragic loss.

*The Light Between Oceans* is exquisite and unforgettable, a deeply moving novel.

Source: LitLovers website



# The Light Between Oceans

## Discussion Questions

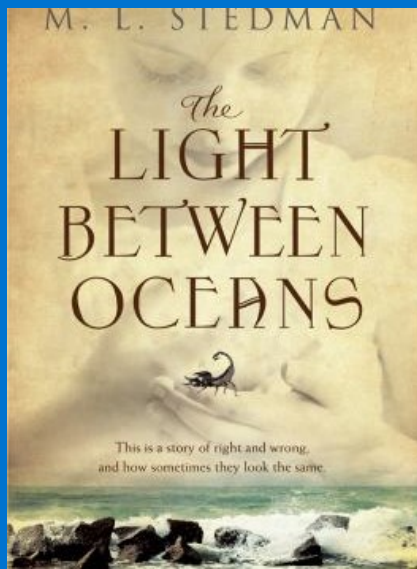
1. Light, literally and metaphorically, is core to the story. The incandescence of Janus Light, the oil lamps, electric lamps, the candles and the darkness they stave off, all serve to illuminate the characters and their changing era. Discuss the meaning of light in *The Light Between Oceans*.

2. The novel is rich with detailed descriptions of the ocean, the sky, and the wild landscape of Janus Rock. Is there a particular passage or scene that stood out to you? What role does the natural world play in Tom and Isabel's life?

3. *"The isolation spins its mysterious cocoon, focusing the mind on one place, one time, one rhythm—the turning of the light. The island knows no other human voices, no other footprints. On the Offshore Lights you can live any story you want to tell yourself, and no one will say you're wrong: not the seagulls, not the prisms, not the wind."* (page 110)

Discuss the impact of living in seclusion on both Tom and Isabel. Why do you think each of them is drawn to live on Janus Rock? Do you think, in the moments when we are unobserved, we are different people?

4. Which characters won your sympathy and why? Did this change over the course of the novel? Did your notion of what was best or right shift in the course of your reading?



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## Discussion Questions continued

5. How do you think Tom's experiences as a soldier impact his decisions throughout the novel? What other outside elements, like the war, influence the narrative?

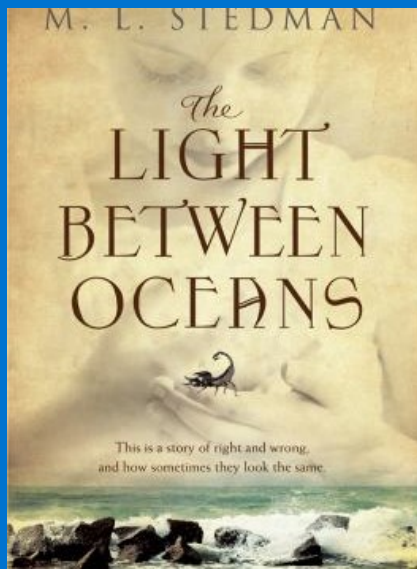
6. M.L. Stedman seems to undermine all notions of absolutes. For example, the author makes it clear that there is no one perfect answer to the question of who should raise Grace/Lucy. Hannah's husband seems ripe for prosecution and is utterly innocent. Further, Stedman will not dismiss all Germans as evil. Discuss the places in the novel where easy certainty turns out to be wrong.

7. Were you surprised by Isabel's final decision to admit to her role in the choice to keep Lucy—freeing Tom, but losing her child forever? Why or why not? What would you have done?

*Just for fun.*

8. Would you ever consider spending time as the lighthouse keeper on a remote island. It is still possible on some remote islands, such as Maatsuyker Island off the coast of Tasmania, to spend a six month stretch with only one trip to the mainland after three months. Why or why not? And with whom?

Source: Questions taken from or based on LitLovers website, Penguin Books website and interview with M L Stedman in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.



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## Reviews

As time passes the harder the decision becomes to undo and the more towering is its impact. This is the story of its terrible consequences. But it is also a description of the extraordinary, sustaining power of a marriage to bind two people together in love, through the most emotionally harrowing circumstances.

**Victoria Moore - *Daily Mail* (UK)**

Stedman grounds what could be a far-fetched premise, setting the stage beautifully to allow for a heart-wrenching moral dilemma to play out, making evident that *“Right and wrong can be like bloody snakes: so tangled up that you can’t tell which is which until you’ve shot ’em both, and then it’s too late”*. Most impressive is the subtle yet profound maturation of Isabel and Tom as characters.

***Publishers Weekly***

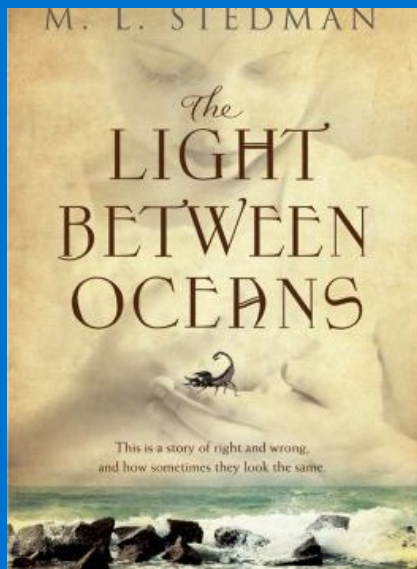
Haunting...Stedman draws the reader into her emotionally complex story right from the beginning, with lush descriptions of this savage and beautiful landscape, and vivid characters with whom we can readily empathize. Hers is a stunning and memorable debut.

***Booklist***

The miraculous arrival of a child in the life of a barren couple delivers profound love but also the seeds of destruction. Moral dilemmas don’t come more exquisite than the one around which Australian novelist Stedman constructs her debut.

***Kirkus Reviews***

Source: LitLovers website



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## Reviews

Stedman's descriptions of unqualified maternal devotion are powerful, but Tom's creeping sense of love for Lucy is also persuasively written. That this couple and, eventually, most of the protagonists develop such an intense concern for the child's welfare is what makes the novel's bizarre chain of events so believable.

The author's greatest achievement, however, is the validation given to their disparate views, despite the fact they are largely determined by personal interest. Moral ambiguity is rarely so compelling.

A remarkable, very readable, debut.

***Sydney Morning Herald***

M. L. Stedman knows how to render time and place, people and situations with great skill. This is a first novel and I would not hesitate to read the next by this author. We will be reading this for one of my reading groups. Part geography lesson, part historical novel, a bit of a mystery and above all a story of love, this book has been a joy to read. It is so well crafted, it will not disappoint.

***LibraryThing***

That disaster will ensue is obvious, but Stedman layers her story with three-dimensional characters and twists that are at once surprising and inevitable. When all is finally revealed, many good people's lives are destroyed. Tom ruminates on the nature of love, honour, and responsibility, "There are still more days to travel in this life", and everyone "who makes the journey has been shaped by every day and every person along the way. Scars are just another kind of memory".

**Sara Nelson, *Oprah.com***