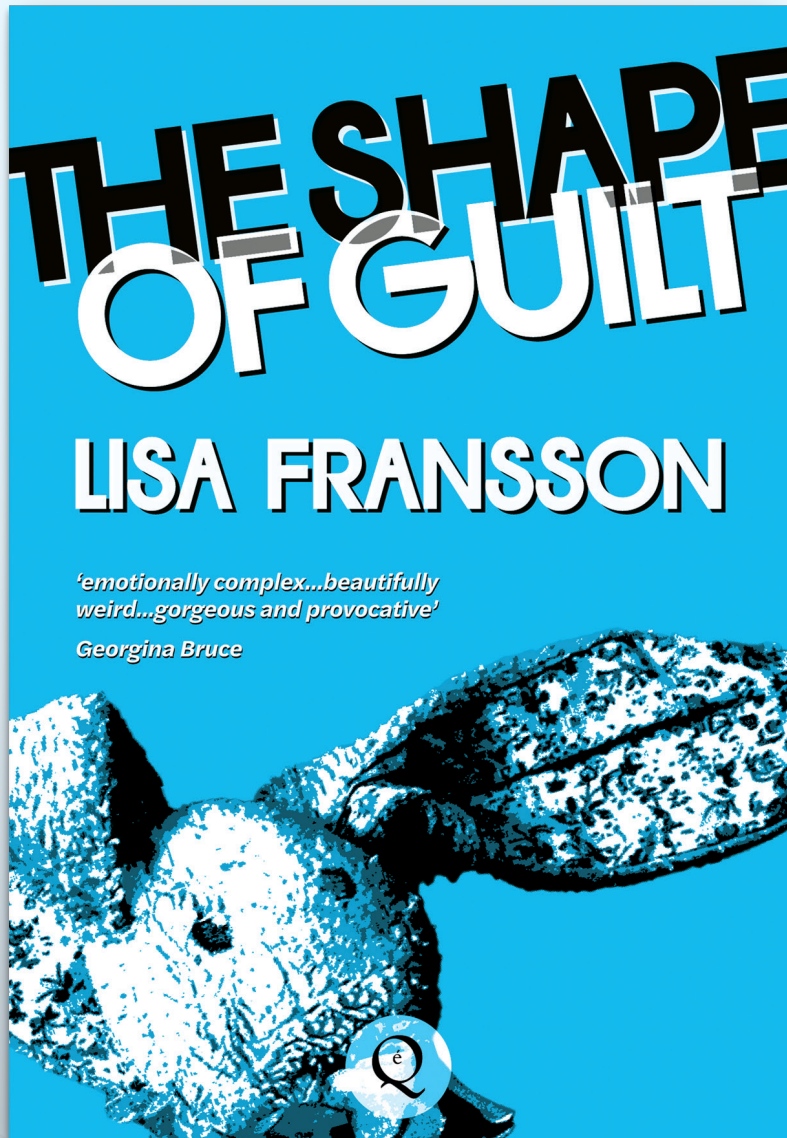


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BOOK CLUB AUTHOR Q&A
THE SHAPE OF GUILT BY LISA FRANSSON



Our authors would be delighted to participate in any book club discussions you have arranged, either in person or via a video link. Should you choose one of our titles for your book club we are also happy to provide copies directly at a 40% discount. Please contact us at info@epoquepress.com for all enquiries.

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Please see detailed below some questions and answers provided by the author in relation to their book.

1. How would you summarise the book and your motivations for writing it?

In *The Shape of Guilt*, Debs watches over her son, Alex, after he's tried to commit suicide, because he wanted to protect the world from the worst side of himself. Debs, who is suffering a relapse of psychotic depression, vows to save him by using the logic of her dark mind.

In my writing, I tend to hover on the edge of reality, always trying to explore the border between what is real and what is imagined, and how difficult it is to tell difference. In *The Shape of Guilt* each individual character is invested in their own personal realities, and they continue to act in ways they believe are right, even if those actions have catastrophic results for the people who are closest to them.

2. What is the significance of the title?

The Shape of Guilt describes the haunting effect that our actions can have on others and on ourselves. The guilt we carry may not even be truthfully ours. It can be inherited, passed down through generations even. The more we try to name this guilt, to shape it, the harder it can be to grasp. And then we pass it on, unwittingly to our children.

3. What are the main themes of the book? What do these themes mean to you as the author?

The Shape of Guilt deals with severe mental health issues, with suicide and one instance of sexual violence. With *The Shape of Guilt*, I wanted to test my limits and see how far straight into the darkness I could walk. We can never truly know what motivates others, where their actions spring from, but as a writer it is fascinating to explore what might lead a person to act in a certain way.

4. Did you decide on a specific style of writing for this book, and if so, why? What are you trying to convey through your style?

The writing style of *The Shape of Guilt* is very much a deliberate choice and an integral part of the narrative, which I wanted to be fragmented and

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claustrophobic, therefore the prose is sparse, with hopefully, not a word out of place.

5. Was the structure and layout of the book an important consideration? If so, why?

Yes, again the structure and the layout is vital to the narrative, which is not linear. I didn't want there to be any clearly defined rights or wrongs, any goodies or baddies, therefore the structure is quite jagged, and my aim was for the reader to piece together their own version of the story, but that the version they would read would not necessarily be the same as the one the reader next to them reads.

6. What would you highlight as some of the pivotal scenes of the book, what is their importance to the narrative and to you on a personal level?

Debs's miscarriage is the pivotal scene. It is what triggers her first episode of psychotic depression which ultimately leads to her to being sectioned at the hands of her husband and her big sister. It is the event that gives life to Robert Bunny (the narrator) and to Debs's terrifying hallucinations. It is what rends the family asunder.

7. How important was the time period or the setting to the story? What were you looking to evoke through this?

The story is largely set in a hospital room because I wanted the setting to emphasise the sense of claustrophobia that I hoped to evoke in the reader. The time period from Alex's attempted suicide to the end scene is brief, only a matter of weeks, but the story in between the lines is set over generations. This contrast of a short and intense action period against a generational, painful, lingering history was important to me, to give the characters' motivations and actions a sense of inevitability.

8. Which location in the book would you most like to visit and why?

Ah, no thank you. I already spent far too long in that world, longer than what was good for me, and I'm not going back, but you, the reader, might visit it as often as you like.

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9. What emotions are you hoping to evoke in the reader?

When I started writing the book, the story itself didn't have a shape, but I had a keen sense of the atmosphere I wanted to create. That darkness, that claustrophobia and inevitability I mentioned above. But with this story, I would also like to step away from black and white and into the grey zone, to question our own actions perhaps more than the actions of others.

10. As an author you are very close to your characters. Reflecting back on the book, which of your characters would you like to meet in real life and why?

That is a hard choice. There are some that I would not like to meet at all, and a handful that would be a delight. I would like a Dr Fairwell in my life, someone old and wise who do not judge. But my heart also bleeds for Robert Bunny. I would like to give him a home.

Additional questions your book club may wish to consider:

- What is Alex's mother called? Why do you think she has so many different names
- The Shape of Guilt mentions A Clockwork Orange, what is the significance of this?
- At the end of the chapter Memory of a Mirror, why do you think Debs draws a picture of her sister Sylvia in the mirror?
- Why do you think Debs married Ed, and does she love him?
- Why do you think Sylvia married Jo, and does she love him?
- Toby and Alex are two quite different people, why do you think they are friends?
- Who does Alex believe he loves?
- Debs makes up her mind to save Alex, what is her motivation for acting like she does at the end of the story?

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Lisa Fransson is a bilingual writer living on the south coast of England with her husband and three teenagers.

In her native Swedish, Lisa is an award-winning children's author, while in her adopted English she's a writer of novels and short fiction.

She's represented by Intersaga Literary Agency.