The many pleasures of reading

For those who cannot survive on bodice-rippers alone and would like to widen their reading horizons in English, I thought you might be interested in a project the BBC is currently running.

An unexpected pleasure in this job is taking colleagues who’ve asked for advice on reading to a bookshop. This usually happens with colleagues who don’t live in anglophone countries and who need some tips. I’ve brought one or two to near bankruptcy.

Now, I wouldn’t want you all to think I spend my entire life reading high literature and exchanging witty aphorisms with Luigi Luccarelli – tempting as it is. No, I’m as happy as the next man to curl up with the latest bonkbuster bought at the airport.

For those who cannot survive on bodice-rippers alone and would like to widen their reading horizons in English, I thought you might be interested in a project the BBC is currently running. Called The Big Read, they have asked people around Britain to nominate their favourite books. They have whittled it down to a list of 100 books, and will be announcing the winners in the autumn.

So far the classics (Dickens, Brontës, Jane Austen) have done well – but then they are classics for a good reason. A number of children’s authors figure high on the list – J.K Rowling, Roald Dahl and Philip Pullman. Being a British list it is perhaps rather parochial by international standards, as only eight books by authors who didn’t write in English are on the reading public’s radar screen, with ones by Tolstoy, Süsskind, Dumas and García Márquez among them. However non-British authors who write in English (USA, Canada, India, Australia, Ireland) do well.

The idea of hit parades is admittedly populist, but if it gets people reading, so what? You can find out all about it at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/bigread/top100.shtml

Phil Smith is a UK-based freelance. He is currently reading: The Paradigm: Did it shift or was it pushed? By Harry Stinkfuss. The book is a judicious blend of semiotics, semolina and semi-quavers.

Recommended citation format: