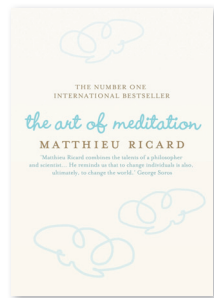


February 2010

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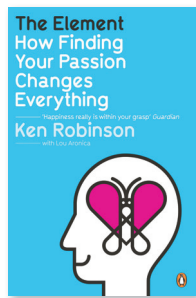


The Art Of Meditation

Matthieu Ricard
Penguin Books
\$29.95 Hardback

Wherever he goes, Buddhist monk Matthieu Ricard is asked to explain what meditation is, how it is done and what it can achieve. In this elegant, authoritative and entirely accessible book, he sets out to answer these questions.

Although meditation is a life-long process even for the wisest, *The Art of Meditation* demonstrates that by practicing it on a daily basis we can change our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. In this brilliantly inspiring book, Matthieu Ricard talks us through the theory, spirituality and practical aspects of meditation.

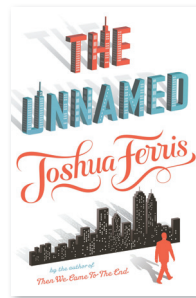


The Element

Ken Robinson
Penguin Books
\$26.95 Paperback

In this ground-breaking book, world-renowned creativity expert Ken Robinson considers the child bored in class, the disillusioned employee and those of us who feel frustrated but can't quite explain why – and shows how we all need to reach our *Element*.

Through the stories of people like Vidal Sassoon, Arianna Huffington and Matt Groening, who have recognized their unique talents and made a successful living doing what they love, Robinson explains how every one of us can find ourselves in our *Element*, and achieve everything we're capable of.



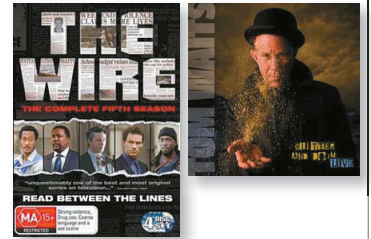
The Unnamed

Joshua Ferris
Penguin Books
\$32.95 Paperback

Tim Farnsworth is a handsome, healthy man, ageing with the grace of a matinee idol. He loves his work. He loves his family. He loves his kitchen. And then one day he stands up and walks out on all of it. He cannot stop walking. And, as his body propels him relentlessly forward, deep into the unfamiliar outer reaches of the city, he begins to realise he is moving further and further from his old self, seemingly unable to turn back and retrieve what he has lost.

The Unnamed is no less than a shimmering reflection of our times, of the lives we aspire to and the terrifying realisation of what is beyond our control.

DVDs and CDs



The Wire Complete Fifth Season

DVD \$59.95

At last! We can be sleepless again, staying up night after night watching episode after episode of this HBO series which has kept Avid Reader staff from their favourite past-time of reading. We think it is pretty well unanimous, "The Wire" is Avid's favourite TV series of all time. It is not just a series but a lifestyle choice as we have all chosen to abandon the idea of a social life in order to watch this addictive, smart and beautifully written series.

Glitter and Doom Live

Tom Waits— Vinyl Album with MP3 Download Coupon \$34.95

We were so disappointed that the Tom Waits *Glitter and Doom* tour did not come to Australia. Some local Avid Readers went overseas to see the great man in the flesh. Now we have brought a bit of the Waits glitter into Avid with this high quality 180 gram vinyl record and a coupon for a free MP3 download of this entire album.

Our Favourite Penguin Books



1. **The Tall Man** by Chloe Hooper
2. **The Boat** by Nam Le
3. **Monkey Grip** by Helen Garner
4. **Love In The Time Of Cholera** by Gabrielle Garcia Marquez
5. **The Consolations of Philosophy** by Alain De Botton
6. **Fantastic Mr Fox** by Roald Dahl
7. **Of Mice and Men** by John Steinbeck
8. **Lolita** by Vladimir Nabakov
9. **Middlesex** by Jeffrey Eugenides
10. **The Cook's Companion** by Stephanie Alexander
11. **A Confederacy of Dunces** by John Kennedy Toole
12. **In Cold Blood** by Truman Capote
13. **Cold Comfort Farm** by Stella Gibbons
14. **Ham On Rye** by Charles Bukowski
15. **Delta of Venus** by Anaïs Nin



Fiona Stager

Trespass

Rose Tremain,
Paperback \$32.95

Set among the hills and gorges of the Cevennes, the dark and beautiful heartland of southern France, *Trespass* is a thrilling novel about disputed territory, sibling love and devastating revenge.

In a silent valley stands an isolated stone farmhouse, the Mas Lunel. Its owner is Aramon Lunel, an alcoholic so haunted by his violent past that he's become incapable of all meaningful action, letting his hunting dogs starve and his land go to ruin. Meanwhile, his sister, Audrun, alone in her modern bungalow within sight of the Mas Lunel, dreams of exacting retribution for the unspoken betrayals that have blighted her life.

Into this closed Cevenol world comes Anthony Verey, a wealthy but disillusioned antiques dealer from London and his sister Veronica, a gardener and her partner Kitty. From the moment Anthony arrives at the Mas Lunel, a frightening and unstoppable series of consequences is set in motion.

Two worlds and two cultures collide. Ancient boundaries are crossed, taboos are broken, a violent crime is committed.

Rose Tremain is a fine writer. I have really enjoyed every book of hers—each is so very different and I think *Trespass* is her most unsettling yet.



Verdi Guy

Manhattan Dreaming

Anita Heiss,
Paperback \$32.95

Lauren Lucas is a sassy young Aboriginal woman who lives in Canberra. She has a pretty good life; she works as a curator at the National Aboriginal Gallery, she has a best friend that always gives useful advice and has a supportive family that lives close by. But she also can't stop thinking about Adam, a star football player, who isn't at all loyal or devoted to Lauren.

Lauren is forced to make a tough decision when she is offered a year long fellowship at the Smithsonian in New York City. She is anxious about moving to a city which has "sixteen times more people than Canberra", starting over and leaving her friends, family and Adam.

Lauren's friends manage to convince her she has to go because "the place is crawling with men and bars and good fun." When she arrives in New York men constantly flirt with her and she is surprised by their chivalry. Lauren enjoys her new job at the National Museum of the American Indian and gets along well with her colleague Wyatt, who plays tour guide

She begins to like the New York lifestyle and finally starts to get over Adam. That is until he turns up. Her life is turned upside down once again and she is forced to make some big decisions. Namely, whether she should stay in Manhattan or risk losing Adam.

Anita Heiss' writing captured me from the very beginning. It is a light and easy read but also touches on issues of Aboriginal rights, black/white politics and the art world. Chick-lit with a twist.



Anna Hood

Mr Rosenblum's List

Natasha Solomons,
Hardback \$30.00

Jack and Sadie Rosenblum immigrated from Germany to London just before World War 2 broke out. They were lucky to escape as many people, including their own family and friends, did not. So Jack resolves to make the most of his new life and endeavours to transform himself and his long suffering wife into the perfect English couple.

Unfortunately, nobody told the rest of the nation and they are the enemy to many of their new countrymen. However Jack's tenacity and determination knows no bounds as he begins a list of all he has observed of the English and uses it as his guide to the ways and means of his new life. Yet while Jack looks to the future, Sadie is always looking to the past, constantly feeling the loss of her loved ones. Their different ways of dealing with grief is tearing them apart. Together they must not only find their place in this baffling and fascinating country they now call home, but also rekindle the love they once had for each other.

This book is all charm and heart. I found Jack's limitless enthusiasm and Sadie's quiet mourning to be an insightful look at the lives of German immigrants living in England during and after WW2. Read it if you loved *The Guernsey Literary Potato Peel Pie Society*.



Christopher Currie

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks

Rebecca Skloot,
Paperback \$35.00

Her name was Henrietta Lacks, but scientists know her as HeLa. She was a poor black tobacco farmer who worked the same land as her slave ancestors, yet her cells – taken without her knowledge – become one of the most important tools in modern medicine. Taken in 1951, these cells became the first immortal human cell line ever grown in culture. They were vital for developing the polio vaccine; uncovered the secrets of cancer, viruses and the effects of the atom bomb; helped lead to important advances like in vitro fertilisation, cloning, and gene mapping, and have been bought and sold by the billions. Put together, her cells would now weigh more than 22 million tons and placed end-to-end would wrap around the earth five times. Skloot takes us on an extraordinary journey from the 'coloured' wards of Johns Hopkins in the 1950s to poverty stricken tenements of East Baltimore today, where Henrietta's children are unable to afford health insurance. Their story is inextricably linked to the birth of bioethics, the rise of multi-billion dollar biotech industry, and the legal battles that determine if we own our bodies. Intimate in feeling, astonishing in scope, and impossible to put down, this extraordinary book captures the beauty and drama of scientific discovery, as well as its human consequences.

Rebecca Skloot will appear at Avid Reader on Thursday 27th May 6pm for a 6.30 start. Tickets \$5 RSVP essential.



Kasia Janczewski

Chronic City

Jonathan Lethem,
Paperback \$33.00

Welcome to New York City. Or, at least the Upper East Side where a cast of odd, bored but wealthy and lonely characters reside and obsess over film, music, burgers, dope, sex, wild animals and money. Lethem invites us into the strangest corners of thought and relationships navigated by his fascinating characters as a mysterious tiger is loose on the streets terrorizing neighbourhoods and the smell of chocolate pervades the city's atmosphere.

The story revolves around the new-found, turbulent friendship between Chase Insteadman—a former child star who is now a middle-aged barely working actor and routine socialite, and Perkus Tooth—an aging, unkempt and reclusive cult pop critic who survives on a diet of marijuana and cheeseburgers. The two men convene at Tooth's 84th St apartment tucked behind a dingy piano bar or venture to *Jackson's Hole* for their fill of ground beef and coca-cola while they discuss their passions and troubles. Chase is distraught by his lack of attachment to his astronaut wife who is famously stranded in orbit and writes him emphatic letters that are published in *The New York Times*. This is compounded by his guilt-ridden affair with aloof ghost writer, Oona Laszlo. Perkus is plagued by debilitating 'cluster' headaches, inspired by episodes of 'ellipsis' and implores Chase to contact Marlon Brando who he declares to be the necessary saviour of New York City.

This is a crazy ride written in sublime prose that exposes the vulnerable underbelly of New York's elite and the shambolic universe of its culture vultures.



Paul Landymore

Horn

Peter M. Ball,
Paperback \$10.00

Unicorns. Peaceful, beautiful creatures who glow with the purest hearts in the universe. Not in the hands of Peter Ball they're not. Miriam Aster, ex-cop, private eye, once dead and former lover of a Faerie Queen is a surly and sarcastic wench. Called in to consult on the brutal murder and a rape of a teenage girl, she is reluctantly drawn back into the world of the Fey when an autopsy reveals the perpetrator to be a Unicorn.

Blending a classic noir detective story with a much loved fantasy trope, Peter then lets rip with his dark side and has written a short, brutish, confronting and delicious alternative fantasy. If you've ever seen the movie about snuff movies *8mm* then you'll have some idea of how raw and dark this book is. If your bedroom walls are filled with posters of Unicorns jumping over rainbows do not buy this book.

This story has the lot—from Miriam's former police colleague who gives her grudging respect, her friend and insider at the morgue, a dangerous and sleazy club owner, a Fey petty criminal who uses his powers to charm drunk women in nightclubs and a full-bore, stand-up-sit-down denouement. Sick and twisted as I am, I had so much fun reading this and I'm desperate for Peter's next book. Whatever it may be, it's sure to be different.



Helen Bernhagen

Mother of Rock: The Lillian Roxon Story

Robert Milliken,
Paperback \$27.95

Iggy Pop, Helen Reddy and Derryn Hinch all in the course of one evening? Naturally I needed to read further into the life of Australian journalist Lillian Roxon. I confess I had previously not heard of Roxon, or her *Rock Encyclopedia*.

Arriving in New Farm as a refugee in 1940 independent Roxon soon became part of the Brisbane Pink Elephant crowd and later, the Sydney Push. She mixed with the likes of Barbara Blackman, David Malouf, Barry Humphries and Donald Horne. By 18 she was cutting her writing teeth in the colourful world of Sydney's tabloid journalism. In her early 20s Roxon moved to the United States during the 1960s cultural revolution where, according to Rolling Stone, she soon became "the unchallenged queen of the New York rock scene ... the Dorothy Parker of Max's Kansas City". Tragically she died at 41 of asthma. Still not intrigued? Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* is dedicated to her!

Robert Milliken has written not just a biography of Lillian Roxon but also gives us a brief cultural history of a time not often documented. I particularly enjoyed reading of early times at *Meanjin* magazine. The book also contains a selection of some of Roxon's writing.



Trent Jamieson

Booklife

Jeff Vandermeer,
Paperback \$26.95

Jeff Vandermeer is one of the most exciting fantasists writing at the moment. He has made a career of producing varied and challenging fiction. But he has also produced a large body of fascinating non-fiction. In *Booklife*, Jeff explores just what it is to be a professional writer in the age of blogs and social media.

A practical and deeply personal book – how he manages both, I don't know – it is not so much a 'how to', but a series of suggestions, a kind of 'have you thought of this'.

Jeff shares what has worked for him in his career, as well as some devastating failures. It's this honesty that is the strength of the book. Every suggestion is backed up with real life examples. And, at the very least, at the end of the book you will have a better knowledge of the notion of 'Platform' and finding inspiration.

But it's more than that. Jeff's ideas of integrating your life and your work, and of finding balance are clearly articulated and compelling. With sections on dealing with envy, and giving yourself permission to fail, it is a sensible and thoughtful exploration of what you, as a writer, will face as you follow the peaks and troughs of your career.

Every writer should consider this for their bookshelf.

Children's books



Fiona Stager

Mission Telemark

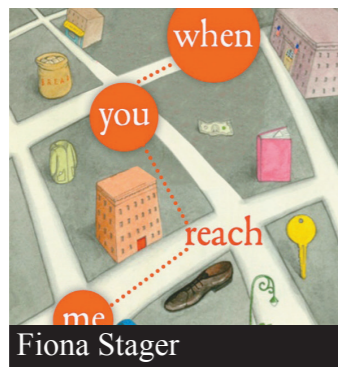
Amanda Mitchison,
Paperback \$19.95
Ages 10+

It's 1942, in the midst of WW2 and four young teenagers, Ase, Freddie, Jacob and Lars find themselves recruited by the British Army Special Operations Executive for a secret mission. But before they depart they undergo extreme training in the Scottish Highlands. Think mountain climbing in a blizzard, learning morse code, signals, rabbit catching & hand to hand combat.

Once the mission is revealed these three boys and one girl are sent to Norway to stop Hitler from making the atomic bomb. They must penetrate the fortress-like Vermorck Power Plant and then escape over the freezing mountains into Sweden with the Germans on their heels.

Mission Telemark is a story about a true mission—one of the most astonishing feats of bravery and endurance in the Second World War. It's also a survival manual—inside are some fold-outs for secret agents. Find out everything you would need to know about frostbite and hand guns and surviving a Gestapo interrogation. The range of inserts and beautiful drawings make this book a fascinating combination of both riveting drama and historical information.

For readers who have loved the *Henderson Boys* series by Robert Muchamore or the *Young Bond* series by Charlie Higson.



Fiona Stager

When You Reach Me

Rebecca Stead,
Paperback \$16.95
Ages 12+

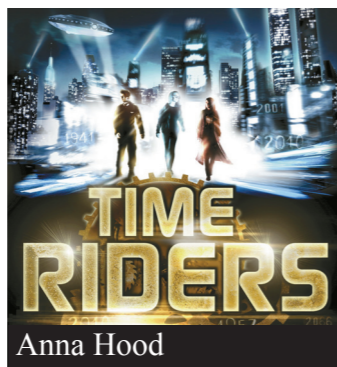
US author Rebecca Stead won the highly coveted Newbery Medal for her charming novel *When You Reach Me*. The Newbery Medal was established in 1922; it's the longest running children's book prize in the world and America's highest honour for children's books. It is selected by children's librarians and is awarded for the 'most outstanding contribution to children's literature'.

When You Reach Me is set in Manhattan in the late 1970s, and sixth grader, Miranda and her best friend, Sal, know how to navigate their New York City neighborhood. They know where it's safe to go, like the local grocery store, and they know whom to avoid, like the crazy guy on the corner.

Miranda and Sal are best friends, but when Sal gets punched by a new kid for no apparent reason, he shuts Miranda out of his life. Then she finds a mysterious note scrawled on a tiny slip of paper.

Miranda finds other notes left for her in strange places and she realises that whoever is leaving them knows all about her, including things that haven't even happened yet...

When You Reach Me is a story about friendship and time. It's an intriguing puzzle with pieces that fit together in the most intricate and unexpected ways.



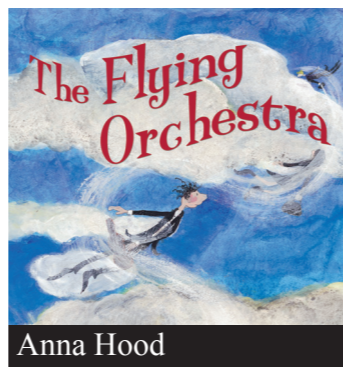
Anna Hood

Time Riders

Alex Scarrow,
Paperback \$16.95
Ages 10-14

Time Riders is the story of three teenagers who, had their lives taken a normal path, would never have met. Yet together they keep the world from being destroyed every single day. Liam should have died in 1912, Maddy in 2010 and Sal in 2026. Yet something far from normal happened to them: just before they are supposed to die they get recruited by a secret agency. The ethos of the *Time Riders* team is to use time travel, a reality in the rear future, to go back and fix broken time caused by others misusing this technology. The three teens, two girls and one boy, rescued moments before certain death are each chosen for their own special skills and together they become an unstoppable team.

Pacey, riveting & exciting, *Time Riders* takes you on an adventure you won't soon forget. Also the book is packed with historical facts so readers will definitely learn as they are entertained! This is Alex Scarrow's first young adult novel and it will be continued as a series. Perfect for readers aged 10-14 who loved the *Cherub* series, the *Alex Rider* books and Gabrielle Lord's new teen reader series *Conspiracy 365*.



Anna Hood

The Flying Orchestra

Clare McFadden,
Hardback \$24.95
Children's picture book.
Ages 6+

'Some days are so windy that even the angels lose their balance from the top of City Hall'. It's always a day like this when the Flying Orchestra blows into town.' And so begins one of the most beautiful children's picture books that reveals the music that surrounds us every single day in everything we do. Written and illustrated by first time local Brisbane author Clare McFadden, this whimsical tale travels the streets of a city (no specific city is named but it is overtly reminiscent of Brisbane's streets and cityscape) exploring the idea that music can be found in the world around us at any time of the day.

I love the idea this book poses that life has an orchestral score, and not just in the happy times but at sad and seemingly unremarkable moments too. This book is a perfect gift for adults and children alike because of its beautiful message and engaging illustrations.

→ From the Editor

Sometimes when I crank up the air-con and open the front doors of Avid Reader I find myself exhausted before I have begun. There are books inside our shop that will change people's hearts and minds. I honestly believe this to be true, but it is quite an effort to put that one beautiful book into the hands of its perfect reader.

Books find us in mysterious ways.

I discovered William Trevor recently and realised that I had been missing out on almost 40 books by Trevor, each one potentially as beautiful as his December 2009 release *Love and Summer*. It was sheer luck that the Trevor fell into my hands. If I had missed Trevor for his entire long and lorded writing career, then I have missed so many others that would have a similar impact on my own heart and mind. It is



An Interview with Andrew Porter

Our featured author this month is Andrew Porter, author of the amazing collection of short stories The Theory of Light and Matter. A short story from this collection has been published in its entirety in this magazine. We caught up with Andrew and asked him a few questions about his work and his process.

The short story form is many things for many people. I am interested to know why you have chosen to write a collection of short stories as your first book. Is this the form you prefer to work in? Do you see short stories as a training ground for the longer form or are you intending to work exclusively in the short form?

Looking back, I think that my interest in writing grew largely out of my love for the short story form. Up until my sophomore year in college, I hadn't really read a lot of contemporary short fiction—I had mostly read novels—but that year I took a fiction writing course and in that course we read writers like Raymond Carver, Joyce Carol Oates, and Richard Ford, writers who were doing extraordinary things with the short story form. I had never read anything like the stories I encountered in that class before, and it was really through falling in love with those stories that I first began to feel a desire to write stories myself. As to whether or not this is my preferred

terrifying to imagine the sheer amount of work that has slipped through my fingers over the years but there is no way to avoid this.

Reviews and recommendations go some way to point us in the direction of the books that we need to read. But there will always be those gems that just get overlooked. Sometimes this is because of bad timing – they are eclipsed by several big name authors releasing books at the same time as theirs – marketing - they have been given unfortunate jackets, or have had no advertising budget at all. The ones that get away are distressing. Sometimes, like with Trevor, you can stumble upon them later down the track. But at other times they are lost.

The Avid Reader Magazine is our way of making up for this in some small way. It is first of all a place where we can hook readers up with books that we have discovered, hoping that you will not regret the things that will be missed.

form, I would have to say yes, at least right now, though I'm currently working on a novel and having a lot of fun with it.

Your stories in *The Theory of Light and Matter* are often about familial relationships. Do you tend to draw from your own life?

I think all writers draw from their own lives to a certain extent, but I would not say that any of my stories are truly autobiographical. For example, the mother and father characters in my stories are nothing like my own mother and father, and yet they've all been informed by various people who I have encountered in my life.

The idea of sexuality - heterosexuality/homosexuality plays out in a number of your stories, is this a particular theme you are interested in exploring? Do you find yourself coming back to common themes? Do you think there are themes that you will continue to repeat in all your work, questions that you will always struggle with in your writing?

It's interesting. Every time I finish a new story I feel that this story is unlike anything I've ever written before, and yet when I examine the story closely I begin to notice certain themes that I have written about before. In some ways, I think this is unavoidable for all writers. There are simply certain themes that occupy your imagination for whatever reason, and yes, for me, one of those themes is sexuality.

How does a story form for you? Can you give us a picture of your working process? Do you start from a specific idea or do you work from a character outwards?

My stories tend to evolve in what I've come to realize is a fairly unusual way. Rather than starting with a first sentence, or a scene, and then moving forward, I tend to just generate a large amount of raw content about the characters and their lives before I start thinking about the story itself. In fact, it's only later, after I've generated, say, 50 or 60 pages of raw content, that I begin to go back and look for the story in what I've written. I realize this might not be the fastest way to write, but that's my process.

The fiction insert of the magazine is something new. The authors on staff at Avid would really love to edit a serious literary journal, and the fiction insert is our way of sneaking closer to this. Here we bring you the best new and established fiction that we can find. Whole stories, poems, and vignettes, interviews with authors and information about the world of publishing. Yes, we understand that this is not bookselling as such. But we hope you indulge us as we have our fun hunting out the best short fiction and slipping it to you with a quiet nudge and a wink.

I hope you enjoy this, our first of the fiction inserts as we indulge in the wonderful world of Andrew Porter, celebrated American short story writer whose book *The Theory of Light and Matter* is one of those gems that we hope you will pick up and enjoy. And don't miss the beautiful micro story by Josephine Rowe at the very end of the magazine.

Krissy Kneen

It seems difficult in Australia for a writer to forge a career as a short story writer. We often have publishers (and readers) pushing for novels instead of short stories. Is this the same in the US?

Yes, I'm afraid the short story form has suffered the same fate here in the U.S., at least in the last decade or so. That said, I also think the form itself is still very much alive and thriving, and I would even go so far as to say that short stories are probably being written in record number right now. What's happened is that most short story collections are now being published by independent presses or university presses, as opposed to large publishing companies, but I think there's still a very large audience for the form.

Were your stories written at disparate times, or did you write this suite of work all at once, almost as one would a novel?

Two of the stories in the collection were written about ten years ago, but the majority of them written in the past five or six.

How easy / difficult was it to attract a publisher to *The Theory of Light and Matter*? Are prizes you have won and publication in particular journals or magazines an important step in attracting a publishing contract?

The hardcover edition of the collection was published by a university press, after it had won the Flannery O'Connor Award—an award that actually included publication. Later, after the hardcover had done well in terms of sales and reviews, the paperback rights were bought by Random House, a much larger national publishing company. So, in this way, I suppose my path has been fairly unconventional.

When collecting a whole book of short stories is it important that all the stories have a similar tone? Do you have to be mindful of repetitions lengths etc? Was there something important about your own work you discovered by creating something that had to hang together as a complete collection?

Initially, I had about twenty stories that I felt were strong enough to include in the collection, but

I ended up winnowing the manuscript down to ten, basing my decisions largely on tone and whether or not I felt a particular story fit with the others thematically. Still, it wasn't until the book was actually published that I began to notice all of the ways in which the various stories were connected.

Are there particular short story writers who have influenced your work? Or writers of different forms?

The writer who has probably influenced my work the most is Raymond Carver. In fact, looking back, I probably learned everything that I needed to know about the fundamentals of short story writing from reading his stories. And yet, what's interesting is that I rarely read Carver's work anymore, and I probably haven't read his work in depth for five or six years, but I can still see his stamp on almost everything I've written, and even the work I'm doing now. I think those lessons and techniques I learned all of those years ago will always be a part of my aesthetic.

You have studied writing at university. Is this an important thing for a writer to do? Or can you come to this job without a university degree. What did you particularly learn from university?

I don't think there's really a "right" path to becoming a writer. Many writers have had amazing success doing it on their own, and others have benefited greatly from the guidance they received in a graduate program. Personally, I think that I needed to go to graduate school at the age I went (23), if for no other reason than the fact that I didn't yet have the confidence to do it on my own. I needed additional feedback, support, validation, etcetera. I needed a few years in the "minor leagues," as we say here in the States, before I was ready to make a go of it on my own.

You now teach creative writing. Are there any things you particularly discourage your students from doing in their writing or in their career development? Are there common mistakes you can tell us about?

Well, I have always loved teaching, but on some level I also understand that you can't ever really teach another person how to become a writer. You can teach them a lot about the fundamentals, of course, and you can give them encouragement, but you can't supply them with the type of confidence and discipline they'll ultimately need to make a career of it. So, in this way, I think that most of the lessons my students will learn will be lessons they learn after they leave my classroom: how to deal with rejection, how to write in the face of great adversity, how to keep going when every sign you're receiving is telling you to stop. Those aren't things that you can really teach someone. Still, it's always very encouraging to hear from one of my old students years later, some student who I may have even forgotten, writing to tell me that she has just published her first story. Those emails always make my day.



Merkin

BY ANDREW PORTER

LAST WEEK LYNN CALLED ME AT WORK to remind me of our dinner date. I was sitting in the rec room at the Center preparing my lesson on creative memories for the class I teach and a few of the kids beside me were shifting in their seats, going over their new editions of Moby Dick. I looked at them and smiled and then explained that I'd be back in a minute. This is an important call, I signed.

The children nodded solemnly and went back to their books.

Lynn seemed nervous on the phone, explaining that this time would be a little different because her father would be bringing a date—a *date*, she said softly, like it was a secret—and then she went over the usual: what I should wear, what I should say, what types of new developments there had been in our relationship.

For the past three years I have been pretending to be Lynn's boyfriend whenever her father comes to town. I do this for Lynn because she asks me to and because I know it means a lot to her. Her father is nearing eighty and already mostly gone on the medications that he takes, and it doesn't make a difference that I'm fifteen years younger than her. All that matters is that I'm a man.

This year, as I said, Lynn's father was bringing a date and Lynn explained to me that this woman he was bringing must be serious if he was willing to introduce her, though she also added that her father didn't want us to acknowledge that she was his girlfriend. "He's referring to her as his 'friend,'" she said, "so that's what we have to call her too."

"Okay," I said.

Then she launched into a long list of things I needed to remember: the new car she just bought, her income tax fine, the settlement on her house.

In the distance I could see the children huddled over their books, silently mouthing the words to themselves.

Most of the children I teach have a progressive bilateral hearing loss, meaning they were born with perfect hearing or maybe only a unilateral hearing loss, but have gradually gone deaf over the years.

In some ways this makes them harder to teach than the kids who were born deaf,

those who never had that fleeting hope that their hearing loss might one day recover. But when I see them like this, working so hard to mouth out each word that they read, I wonder what it is that keeps them going.

"There are other things too," Lynn said when she finished, "that I'm forgetting."

"You can tell me when I get home," I said.

Lynn lives across the street from me, though she often forgets this.

"Were you even listening to me?" she said.

"Of course I was."

She sighed, and I could hear someone screaming in the background.

"Look," I said. "It's going to be fine, honey, okay? It's going to be just great."

The neighbourhood where Lynn and I live is located in a part of Houston called the Heights. Quiet residential streets in a mostly middle class area. None of the people in our neighborhood are rich, but most have white-collar jobs and kids and enough time and money to take care of their property. For a while the Heights was a kind of sketchy part of town, filled with your occasional crack house or abandoned building, but in the past few years it's been on the rise and lately I've noticed the cars on our street getting nicer and some of our neighbors adding on wings or, in a few cases, swimming pools.

Lynn's house is by far the nicest on the street, though modestly sized. She has a row of jacaranda trees that blossom in the spring and an oval-shaped perennial garden that lines her porch. Last year, she and her daughter Georgia tore out all of the grass in their yard and planted this new Bermuda grass, I guess it's the nicest you can get, and you can really tell the difference. Some of her neighbors have even followed suit, walking by her lawn late at night and asking her how she got her grass to look so green.

It's strange, but before I even knew Lynn and Georgia, I used to watch them, watch them as they walked around their yard, weeding on the weekends or planting flowers in the spring, washing their cars in the evening hours after Georgia came home from school. And sometimes on Friday nights I'd see Lynn out on her front porch with a stranger—sometimes a man, sometimes a woman—drinking beer and laughing. I often wonder if she ever knew

that I was out there, watching her, if she even realized how much comfort it gave me just to know that she was there.

Tonight when I get home from the Center there's a message from Lynn on my machine telling me I should come over as soon as I can to go over a few of the things she forgot to tell me on the phone. Her voice sounds nervous and strained, and I hear a lot of commotion in the background.

I know that this invitation is just an excuse. In the past few months things have been bad between her and her girlfriend Delphine and I know that she likes to have me over there because it cuts the tension in the room, makes it harder for them to fight.

Delphine is closer in age to me than Lynn, but when I'm over at the house I always get the sense she's older: a parent who has been assigned to keep the house in order. To keep us from drinking too much, or forgetting to mow the lawn. Delphine is fastidious to a fault, and I know that this is something that sometimes annoys Lynn, the way that Delphine will set up the table for dinner, putting out extra knives and forks that aren't even necessary, the way she irons her clothes with starch and makes sure that the air conditioning unit is never without a filter.

Delphine is not a bad person, just hard to like. Hard to get behind from my perspective. I'm not rooting against her, just not rooting for her. Whenever I'm over at the house, she throws a fit and complains about needing more space or about how I sometimes don't even knock when I arrive. Lynn thinks that she feels threatened by me, by our closeness, and so when I'm there, I try to be nice to her. I ask her about her photographs or her prints, and sometimes even ask to see them.

For the past month Delphine has been working on a show in Austin and twice a week she drives over there and spends the night with a woman she used to date. If Lynn was a person who was prone to jealousy she'd be suspicious, and have every right to be, but she's not that type of person. She simply smiles and waves her off and when I ask her later on, as we're sitting over dinner or drinks, if it bothers her that Delphine is staying with her ex-lover, Lynn will wink and say, "Honey, I'm too old to get jealous.

As long as she comes home to me, I don't really care."

And the way she says it, rolling her eyes and patting my hand, I believe her.

That night, when I arrive at Lynn's house, I find the front door open and the downstairs dark. I make my way down the hallway and call out her name. "Hey, honey," I say, when she doesn't respond. "I'm home."

In the days before her father arrives we sometimes play a game in which we practice terms of endearment on each other, but tonight I can tell she's not in the mood.

She's in there, she mouths to me, when I arrive in the kitchen, then motions toward Delphine's darkroom.

Oh, I mouth back. *Sorry*.

In the other room, the room that used to be Lynn's study but now belongs to Delphine and Delphine's photography equipment, I can hear Delphine putting on a tape of some type of European punk band.

"I have a headache!" Lynn yells to Delphine through the door and a moment later the music goes off.

"What's with you tonight?" I say.

"I don't know," she says. "Nothing. Everything." She looks at me and shrugs. "Georgia's mad at me."

"Oh yeah?" I say. "And why is that?"

She looks over at the hallway where Georgia's bedroom is, then whispers, "I caught her surfing on the internet again."

"Oh."

Lynn has become paranoid about the internet, all the horror stories you hear about cyberstalkers and weirdos. She only allows Georgia to use it for school or to e-mail her father.

"She said she hated me," she says.

"Really?"

"When I unplugged her computer."

"Well," I say, taking her hand. "She's just a kid, you know."

"I know," she says. "But she's never said that before."

I look at her. "Maybe I should go," I say.

"No," she says. "I want you to stay." And then she reaches down and grabs a bottle of wine she's hidden beneath her chair. "I'm in the mood to get drunk."

Lynn is a talented cook, and in the five minutes it takes me to uncork the wine and pour us each a glass, she has heated up a dish of pasta primavera and doled out two generous servings onto plates. Georgia is in the other room pretending to study, but more likely talking with her friends, and Delphine is still in her darkroom mixing up some chemicals. Lynn is wearing an apron and has her hair pulled back and looks at once exhausted and sublime. "I have an idea," she says to me later that night after we've worked our way through most of the wine and Georgia has gone to bed.

"Okay," I say. "Let's hear it."

"I was thinking that maybe we could tell him we're going to Europe this year."

"Europe," I say. "Why Europe?"

"I don't know," she says. "I've just always wanted to go."

I look at her and smile. "And how are we going to pay for this trip?"

"With the money from your new promotion. Remember?"

"Oh right," I smile. "I almost forgot."

I sometimes think that Lynn enjoys creating our fictional lives more than she lets on. She always acts like these dinners with her father are some type of onerous duty she has to perform, but I never see her so excited as she is during those last few days before he arrives.

In truth, I don't think her father really notices. He's far more interested in talking about his own life or in telling Lynn what she has to do to improve hers. He's a Texas Democrat, a Texacrat, as they say, a man who's convinced that Lyndon B. Johnson was the greatest president this country ever had.

Over dinner, Lynn gives me a rundown of all the things she's told her father we've one in the past year: gone to Louisiana on vacation, sold a car and bought another, adopted a cat from our neighbor, and refinanced our house. These are all things that Lynn has actually done and so they're not that hard to remember, but before I leave she insists that I go through them one more time just so she's sure we're on the same page.

When she finishes, she takes my hand and leads me out to the porch. I can tell that she's nervous, and as we sit down on the steps beside her house, she pulls me aside in a conspiratorial

typos. I had written it in a heightened state of conviction, but now, as I reread it, it seemed simply juvenile, defensive. I thought of writing her another e-mail, apologizing and explaining that I had been stoned when I wrote the first one, but I figured that would only confirm her convictions about me.

Instead, I just deleted it and waited for her reply. But her reply never came. Sometimes I think it would be better if I was more like Lynn.

When Lynn's husband cheated on her, she made no attempt to seek revenge or demand retribution from him. She simply went on with her everyday life and then, after a lot of counseling and conversations, asked him for a divorce. It was broke, she told me later, too broke to fix. But when I asked her why she wasn't angry, she simply smiled and said, "It takes two people to break a marriage, honey. And I was one of those two people."

When I arrive at the hotel desk, the concierge informs me that the guest staying in room 412 has departed for the evening, but that a note has been left for me. I take the note and open it. In big bold letters Lynn has written: "dinner has been cancelled," then in smaller letters beneath: "Come meet me at the bar."

I ask the concierge where the bar is and he points me toward a hallway near the elevators.

At the back of the dim lit bar, which is decorated like an exotic tiki lounge, I find Lynn sitting at a small glass table all alone, drinking a daiquiri out of a tall glass.

"What happened?" I say.

"Dinner has been cancelled." She shrugs.

"Did you see your father?"

"Nope." She shakes her head.

"Did he leave you a note?"

"Yep."

"What did it say?"

"It said, 'Dinner has been cancelled.'"

"That's all."

"No. It also said that he was meeting some of his clients at some rib shack outside of town. Very important. He said that he hoped I'd understand and could we maybe have breakfast tomorrow morning before he leaves." "You're kidding."

Lynn shakes her head.

"Typical," she says. "Story of my life."

"So all this preparation for nothing."

She smiles. "Have a seat," she says.

"I'm getting drunk."

I sit down and wave the waitress over and order the same thing Lynn is drinking, whatever it is. The waitress, dressed like a Polynesian dancer, smiles politely and nods.

"Why don't you ask her out?" Lynn says, after the waitress has left.

"She's like twenty-two years old," I say.

"Never stopped my father," she says, and laughs.

I take her hand and smile and then we both look over at the stage at the back of the room, where a jazz trio is setting up and testing their instruments.

When the waitress returns with my drink, Lynn says, "I have something to tell you."

"Okay," I say. "Shoot."

"I think I might have just broken up with Delphine."

"When?"

"This afternoon—right before I came here."

"What happened to waiting till her show was over?"

"Delphine," she says. "Delphine is what happened."

"Do you want to talk about it?"

"No," she says. "Not really." She looks over at the waterfall, and for a moment seems transfixed. "She was reading my journal, I guess. I don't know how long, but she was reading it."

"So she knew."

"Yeah."

"What a little sneak," I say and Lynn laughs.

Then she picks up her drink and takes a long sip. "What did she say anyway?"

Lynn shrugs. "Oh, I don't know. The usual. I'm a liar, I'm secretly in love with you, I was never a lesbian, etcetera."

I laugh. "Well, do you feel better at least?"

"No," she says. "I feel worse."

A moment later she slides the note her father left her across the table. She has drawn a big black x through the entire thing and crossed out his name at the bottom. The note says basically what she said it said, though in slightly kinder words.

"You know," I say. "We can still go to Europe."

She smiles. "And who's paying?"

"I am," I say, reaching across the table and grabbing her hand.

She looks at me and laughs and then I fold up the note and slide it back to her.

"So what do we do now?" I say.

"Whatever you want," she says. "But I think we need to get out of here." Then she lays down some bills on the table and says that the drinks are on her tonight.

On the way out, Lynn stops by the front desk and drops off the note her father left her. She tells the concierge to please make sure he gets it. Then she looks at me and winks. "Retribution," she explains. "Ain't it sweet?"

After we leave the restaurant, I ask Lynn if she would mind stopping by the Java House and listening to the tail end of the reading. She just looks at me and nods.

"Of course," she says. "Why not?"

"It's the last one," I say. "Otherwise I wouldn't care."

She smiles and looks out the window. I can tell she's thinking about something. Around us the streets of Houston are shimmering and bright: neon daiquiri bars, tattoo parlors, taquerias.

"I wish you were ten years older or I was ten years younger. Then we could get married," she says.

I smile. "You wouldn't really want that."

"How do you know?"

"Because if you did, it wouldn't really matter

that I was ten years younger."

She looks at me and smiles, then turns away.

"Do you ever think about it though?" she says after a moment, looking out the window.

"It?"

"About us, you know. About you and me, about what it would be like if we ever dated."

"I'm too tame for you," I say.

"I'm being serious," she says.

"Yes," I say. "I think about it."

"Me too," she says, and nods. "I guess that's all I wanted to know."

Then she looks at me and smiles and I feel a tension fill the car.

I realize at this moment that I could reach over and touch her, grab her hand, and she would squeeze it back. We could pull over on the side of the road and she would kiss me. I realize all of this, but it somehow seems wrong, and I know it's just the booze and Lynn's sudden loneliness, her fear of going back to an empty house all alone.

When we arrive at the Java House I can hear the sound of laughter and applause flooding out onto the street, mixing with the warm, humid air. Lynn asks me for a cigarette before we go inside.

"I need to call the babysitter," she says as I light her cigarette. "I told her I'd be back by nine."

"Okay," I say and light a cigarette for myself.

Lynn walks across the street to call her house and I stand beneath the palm trees on the curb and look through the window at the students as they read their poems. I can't make out what they're saying, but I can hear the occasional laughter from the crowd and the soft and steady applause. The inside of the Java House is warmly lit, welcoming, and it fills my heart with warmth.

I look over at Lynn and can see her gesticulating dramatically as she talks into the phone. I point at my watch, letting her know that it's almost over, and she waves back. A moment later she hangs up and walks over, putting her arm through mine as we stand there at the window looking in.

Inside, I can see José standing up and walking toward the podium, pushing his way awkwardly through the crowd. The other students begin to cheer and José just waves them off.

"There's José," I say to Lynn, and she nods.

"Let's go inside," she says.

"No," I say. "It won't matter."

And then I hold her, put my arm around her as we look inside.

José grabs the mike and says something into it, then stands behind the podium and pulls out his poem. I can tell by the expression on the patrons' faces that they can't really tell what he's saying, but it doesn't matter.

At that moment all I care about is standing there with Lynn, holding her close while she'll let me. And the two of us look on, watching José's lips, the sudden shifting of his brow, a boy unable to communicate with the world around him, speaking in a language no one knows.

The best in non-fiction



REQUIEM FOR A SPECIES

Christopher Currie

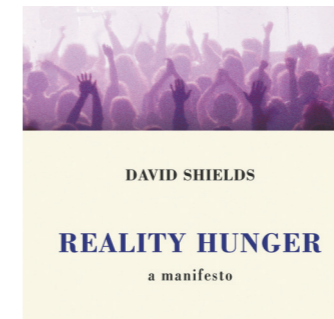
Requiem for a Species

Clive Hamilton,
Paperback \$25.00

Sometimes facing up to the truth is just too hard. There have been any number of urgent scientific reports in recent years emphasising just how dire the future looks and how little time we have left to act. But around the world only a few have truly faced up to the facts about global warming.

This book is about why we have ignored those warnings, so that now it is too late. It is a book about the frailties of the human species: our strange obsessions, our hubris, and our penchant for avoiding the facts. It is the story of a battle within us between the forces that should have caused us to protect the earth — our capacity to reason and our connection to nature — and those that, in the end, have won out — our greed, materialism and alienation from nature.

Clive Hamilton, one of Australia's great thinkers, shows us how we have failed ourselves and the earth that supports us, but also what to do now. A fascinating book.



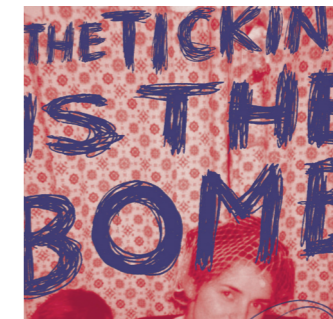
Christopher Currie

Reality Hunger

David Shields,
Paperback \$29.95

Reality Hunger is a manifesto for a burgeoning group of interrelated but unconnected artists who, living in an unbearably artificial world, are breaking ever larger chunks of 'reality' into their work. The questions Shields explores — the bending of form and genre, the lure and blur of the real — play out constantly around us, and *Reality Hunger* is a radical reframing of how we might think about this 'truthiness': about literary licence, quotation, and appropriation in television, film, performance art, rap, and graffiti, in lyric essays, prose poems, and collage novels.

A must-read for anyone who makes creative work, or cares about those who do. Certain to provoke controversy and debate, this book is destined for cult status. Shield's anecdotal style is easy to read and process, but the arguments he is making are deceptively clever and important



Krissy Kneen

The Ticking is the Bomb

by Nick Flynn,
Paperback \$25.00

If you haven't read *Another Bulls**t Night in Suck City* by Nick Flynn then you are in for a double treat because Flynn is back with a second memoir. In *Bulls**t* he looked at the problem of homelessness in America whilst discussing his reunion with his father when he was working for a homeless shelter in New York. His father was homeless and Flynn found it difficult to offer help and shelter to the man, despite his commitment to his work.

He is still living with these paternal issues as he returns with *The Ticking is the Bomb*, but he is also distressed by the US involvement in the Iraq war and in particular, the use of torture. Flynn explores the idea of torture whilst also confessing to his own crimes, in particular those committed within in relationships. At the start of this memoir, Flynn is almost panicked about the idea of his own soon to be born daughter. Will he feel love for the child? Will he be a good dad? Will he repeat the crimes of his own father. Compounding this is the fact that he was not always faithful to the mother of his child and it seems he has never been faithful to his various partners. Flynn manages to pen a very personal treatise on life love, fatherhood and betrayal, whilst touching on global issues, philosophy, and all with the lyrical voice of a poet.



Christopher Currie

Real Food Companion

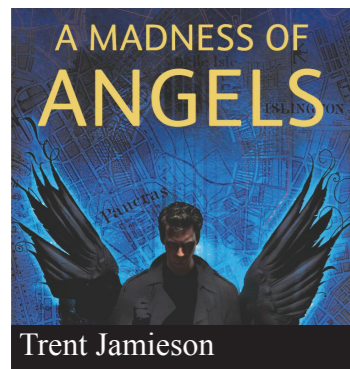
Matthew Evans,
Hardback \$89.95

In *The Real Food Companion*, renowned food writer Matthew Evans shows us how to ethically source, cook and eat real food. Written with gusto and filled to bursting with information to inspire and a huge range of recipes to nurture the soul and family, *The Real Food Companion* outlines everything you need to know to navigate today's complex food world. It's the farmer, butcher, fishmonger and baker by your side.

It will appeal to dedicated foodies as well as novice cooks looking for a reliable and up-to-date kitchen companion. As well as this, the book's stunning design makes it as much a coffee table book to browse through as a cookbook. Matthew Evans was most recently seen on wonderful SBS programme *The Gourmet Farmer*.

Avid Reader is proud to host an event with Matthew Evans on Tuesday 27th April at 6pm for a 6.30pm start. Tickets \$5 RSVP essential

Best in science fiction



Trent Jamieson

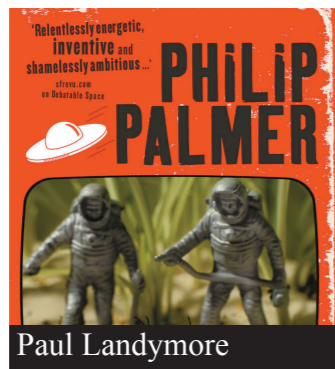
A Madness of Angels

Kate Griffins,
Paperback \$23.00

A Madness of Angels presents a London as magical as any seen in modern fantasy. It's definitely one for fans of Neal Gaiman's novel *Neverwhere*, though Griffins draws on her own and highly unique vision of a city bound in magic and ruled by secret societies.

Matthew Smith is a man back from the dead. A sorcerer murdered for reasons he cannot fathom. And the murderer is keen to finish the job. Powerful forces battle over and under a London drawn in a marvelously impressionistic style. Kate's characters are vivid, the pacing and action brutal but possessed by a weird beauty.

If you like *Urban Fantasy* then her magic of rubbish bins and side streets can't help but appeal. Give Matthew's deliberately fragmented voice a chance and you will find yourself immersed in a world of adventure and peril grounded in a London as familiar as *The Bill*, yet alluringly fantastical. And, while all loose ends are tied, the sequel *The Midnight Mayor* is due out in March. This is a series with definite legs, might be time to get in with the first one.



Paul Landymore

Red Claw

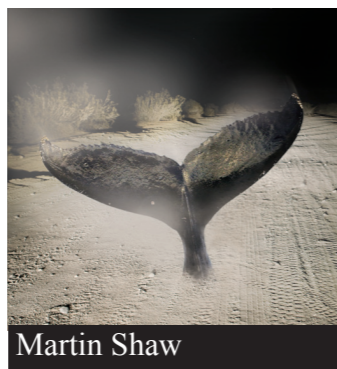
Philip Palmer,
Paperback \$23.00

Monsters, Aliens & Killer Robots. That's all you need to know, but apparently I'm meant to give you more than that, so here goes. New Amazon, a lush and dangerous jungle planet is due to be terraformed for human habitation. Before this happens a group of dedicated and idiosyncratic scientists, along with their soldier protectors/guards, brave the toxic atmosphere and deadly fauna to catalogue life on this doomed planet before it is all destroyed.

Attacked without warning, their home destroyed, the survivors plunge into the jungle pursued by their unseen assailant and his deadly robot slaves and it does not take long before personal and professional rivalries fracture the group. The most impressive character is New Amazon itself, with its wonderfully realised ecosystem of planet spanning Aldiss trees, Flesh Webs, Wiggly Worms, Godzillas and oodles more.

Palmer has created a wonderfully realised alien world and placed within it an exciting and thought provoking story. And it's fun, really fun. Take a little *Star Trek*, mix liberally with a healthy dose of 50s B-movie (*Forbidden Planet* would work well if you have some to hand) and heat through with C21st sensibilities. Or, save yourself time and buy pre-made.

Best of the independent presses



Martin Shaw

The Norseman's Song

Joel Deane,
Paperback \$32.95

As I never tire of pointing out to prospective fiction writers, it's highly recommended to try to grab your reader's attention right from the beginning, or at least spark some sort of curiosity — there's a plenitude of other books out there vying for readers' attention after all! Well in some ways the estimable young Melbourne publisher John Hunter has given his equally young author a bit of a leg up already with his blurb for this debut novel: "An ancient man with no past hails a taxi driven by a petty crim with no future". Weird certainly, but also strangely enticing! A lot does indeed ride in this novel on a suspension of disbelief, but I must say I was utterly beguiled. In somewhat of an anti-picaresque, "The Norseman" of the title is a whaler in the 19th Century, stranded in a sea of winter pack-ice off the Alaskan coast, passing his time seeing off marauding eskimos and surveying his (rather bloodcurdling) life to date. That his story then cleaves in alternating chapters to a keenly observed, ultra-noir contemporary one (the taxi driver on the mean streets of present-day Melbourne, and his mysterious passenger cum yarn-spinner, all but destitute, who nevertheless carries around an old skull in a hat box) is a piece of pure writerly seduction by Deane. Indeed, in its bold invention and exquisite command of narrative registers, I feel *The Norseman's Song* is a debut bound to be up there with the most intriguing novels published in the 2010 fiction year.

Martin Shaw,
Readings Melbourne



Krissy Kneen

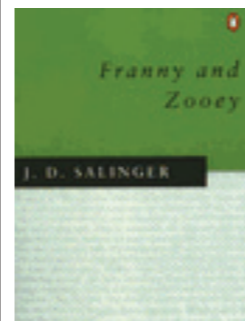
Nineteen Seventysomething

Barry Divola,
Paperback \$24.95

Affirm Press a little publishing house from Melbourne committed to publishing six collections of short stories in 2010. They called out for submissions and were inundated by manuscripts from all around the country. *Affirm* decided to publish short stories because this is a genre that does not always hold its own in the world of publishing. As a bookseller it is often harder to sell the most amazing collection of short stories than it is to sell a fairly average novel.

Nineteen Seventysomething by Barry Divola is the second book from the *Long Story Shorts* series by *Affirm Press*, and we think that it would be worthwhile to collect them all. *Affirm* has put a lot of effort into making these collections as beautiful as they can be. *Nineteen Seventysomething* captures a time and a place as it describes the world of Charlie, a young boy in the fictional town of Braithwaite. This interlinked collection of stories details a rich coming of age story in a time that will be familiar to many. It is a time of Dragstar bikes, Top 40 radio and cicadas chirping through a hot suburban afternoon. Divola is a senior writer at *Rolling Stone* and writes for *Who* magazine and the *Sydney Morning Herald*. He is the author of several non-fiction books and children's books including an *Avid* favourite *M is for Metal*.

Classics revisited



Krissy Kneen

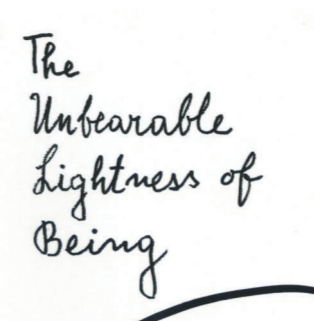
Franny & Zooey

JD Salinger, Paperback \$19.95

The tragic death of J D Salinger earlier this year reminded many people, myself included, that the handful of books the man produced are amongst the most wonderful and influential in modern literature. *Catcher in the Rye* is his most famous work but the books that were always closest to my heart were the Glass family stories.

This family of hyper-intelligent children who all appeared on the radio show *It's a Wise Child* grew into complicated adults with very little in common with their fellow humans. The family is marked by the tragic suicide of the oldest of the Glass children, Seymour, and the stories that introduce us to the other children are all written in the shadow of this act. *For Esme With Love and Squalor* is a wonderful collection of stories, but my favourite by far is *Franny and Zooey*. Within this slim volume containing two sizeable stories about the youngest Glass children, comes a lot of wisdom.

These stories are a treatise about loneliness, the desire for perfection, spiritual questioning, and an ode to the power and love of familial relationships. I am always drawn to books that explore the complexity of families but Salinger's *Franny and Zooey* is one of the best books on this theme ever penned. If it is not already, it will soon become a favourite.



Kasia Janczewski

The Unbearable Lightness of Being

by Milan Kundera,
Paperback \$23.95

'If eternal return is the heaviest of burdens, then our lives can stand out against it in all their splendid lightness. But is heaviness truly deplorable and lightness splendid?'

This is the question posed at the beginning of this mesmerising novel that contemplates the weight and consequences of human existence through the love story of Tereza and Tomas, his affair with the fiercely independent Sabina, and her relationship with married professor Franz.

Kundera explores notions of fidelity, coincidence, kitsch and the significance of motifs during one's life through lush and contemplative prose. The internal struggle of his characters is set against the political unrest of Soviet occupied Czechoslovakia during the aftermath of the 1968 Prague Spring. His characters join many other frightened Czechs in seeking liberty by settling in other European cities like Geneva, Zurich and Paris. But their troubles and desires born at home are not left behind as they travel and attempt to establish new lives.

Absorbing, beautiful and powerful — this timeless novel shaped by its philosophical enquiry and given life by the exposed vulnerability of its characters will linger in your conscience.

One of the most important books of my life — it gave me so much, including an irreversible love of literature.



Krissy Kneen

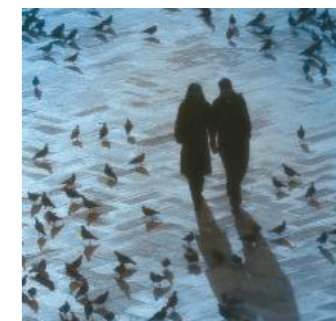
Revolutionary Road

Richard Yates,
Paperback \$24.95

At last a book that has had a decent adaptation made of it in living memory. Richard Yates' exploration of suburban pressure on individuals and marriages made the leap from the page to the screen in a film starring the wonderful Kate Winslet in 2009. The good thing about this is that the film adaptation has brought a whole new group of readers to a classic novel that has as much to say about America and indeed Australia today as it did when it was first published in 1961. I am certain that Alain de Botton must have glanced at *Revolutionary Road* when penning his philosophical work *Status Anxiety*.

This novel, set in 1955 shines a brutally honest light on the idea of status and social pressures and looks at the issues most of us face at one time or other in our lives when we must choose between our dreams and our realities. The film version just touches on the heartbreaking tragedy of bending to social pressures, the book plunges you in the deep end. It is not a light or cheery ride but it is an important one. Yates demands that the reader stops to assess their own lives as they peer behind the white picket fence belonging to protagonists Frank and April Wheeler. The cracks that appear on the very first page of the book turn out to be decidedly deep and earth-shattering.

Reading *Revolutionary Road* is like listening to a loud and insightful wake-up call. I dare you not to take this book to heart and do some serious soul-searching along the way.



Krissy Kneen

Cheating at Canasta

William Trevor,
Paperback \$24.95

If you are one of the many people who discovered or re-discovered William Trevor because of his latest novel *Love and Summer* then join us in looking back through his amazing back catalogue of work.

Trevor is a perennial. Although he was born in 1928 and his first novel was published in 1958, his writing still feels as fresh and contemporary as any young and incredibly skilled novelist. *Cheating at Canasta* is a short story collection that was first published in 2007. There are well over 30 Trevor novels and story collections to choose from and if the rest of them are as complex and multi-layered as *Cheating at Canasta* then I have a world of literary joy stretching ahead of me.

Whether he is writing about a young man's guilt over a hit-and-run or an old priest's guilt over an accusation of paedophilia which never occurred, or a husband playing cards with his wife who has almost completely relinquished her memory of him to Alzheimer's, Trevor manages to take a small domestic moment and ring it so that it resonates against the whole of humanity. These stories have weight. They leap up and demand your undivided attention, proving that William Trevor is a master of his craft.



Interview with Richard Bell *not forgiven or forgotten*

Wrapped up in a woolen coat and scarf, I was rescued from the cold streets of SoHo in NYC by Brisbane artist, Richard Bell who welcomed me into his studio at Location One, where he is fulfilling a ten month International Fellowship that started in October 2009.

Bell is an infamous and celebrated Indigenous voice in the visual arts landscape of Australia who is not afraid to confront this predominantly white industry and audience with the persisting issues of racism and cultural imperialism that affect Aboriginal people. He vehemently protests the commodification of Indigenous culture by the Western art world which he outlined in the 2002 essay, *Bell's Theorem: Aboriginal Art – It's a White Thing!* He has been making and exhibiting locally and overseas for over twenty years stimulating debate with his theorems, videos and text-based paintings that often combine sardonic wit and the appropriation of iconic styles by famous artists like Jackson Pollack, Jasper Johns, Roy Lichtenstein and Emily Kngwarreye.

His residency commenced with his first solo exhibition in America, "I Am Not Sorry" (Oct 8 – Dec 23 2009 at Location One) which included past work and his most recent video works

like *Broken English* (2009) and *Scratch an Aussie* (2008) in which he psychoanalyses racist white Australians. Bell shared the American reaction to his work and his experience of being in the art capital of the world in an interview for *Avid Reader*.

Despite his active criticism of the Western art system which is operating at full force in New York, Bell expressed his excitement and admiration for the public enthusiasm and activity that thrives on art in the city. He revealed that he initially "had the impression they [Americans] were sort of culture-less, but that's us [Australians]. That's the stereotype that is created of America, that they are uncultured. They have an appreciation for art and artists that we don't have back home". Bell was impressed by the crowds queuing (myself included for 40 minutes in the rain) in the freezing cold to pay \$20 for the privilege of seeing iconic modern art in the mammoth art gallery, MoMa. He expressed that there was "no way" this would ever happen in Australia.

Bell recognized "the colonial nature" of an institution like MoMa which reinforces the western model of curatorial practice which has determined that its pristine and revered spaces are

predominantly occupied by the art of white men. However, he still appreciated "seeing art that you only ever see in books back home" and that the public who may only be visiting such a museum as a tourist attraction will still be subliminally influenced because "imagery has residual value". He maintained that the impact of an artwork may strike later when something else we encounter resurrects its meaning.

The exhibition of his body of work in "I Am Not Sorry" also revealed that his confrontation of issues relating to Indigenous Australians found resonance with Americans. Bell reflected that "they [Americans] recognise that they are human issues" and that "if people go into an art gallery they should be able to recognise something of themselves in the art there, and they certainly do". Although his work provoked a discussion of racism and colonialism, it did not seem to prompt a reflection upon the destruction of Native American culture. Bell described this issue as being "buried" in the U.S. in comparison to Australia, where "Australians are so guilt-ridden [that] Indigenous issues are just a heartbeat from a headline".

Interestingly, his experience of Americans had revealed

their familiarity with the current political context and social reality of Indigenous Australians. This awareness was especially connected to the world coverage of the "Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples" delivered by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in 2008, which was flagged by the title of his show. Bell openly denounced the 'Apology' as an "empty and vacuous" gesture during our interview, exclaiming, "Sorry, but..." in relation to his absolute opposition to government initiatives like the Northern Territory Intervention which he described as racist and unfounded.

The extremely frank and direct communication of his opinions relating to Australian politics, culture and its Indigenous community that I experienced during our interview revealed the passion and urgency that fuels the art of Richard Bell. Although his "humour is meant to soften the blow", the power and certainty of his message demanding the equality and justice owed to Aboriginal people is always loud and clear in his work.

Richard Bell is currently showing in 'The Edge of Elsewhere' a group exhibition that is part of the Sydney Festival. He will be exhibiting new work as part of his International Fellowship at Location One, New York City mid-2010.

Film news



Jason Reed

Neighbourhood Trash

Fifteen years ago, Andrew Leavold took his ever-expanding video collection and a childhood dream and turned them into a reality. He now co-owns and runs local independent video store *Trash Video*.

Trash was born on Ann Street in Fortitude Valley, "in a filthy hole in the wall under the Zoo in Ann St," where it stayed for five years. For a store like *Trash*, The Valley seemed to be the perfect location to attract the kind of customers who desire something a little different, however, "The Valley changed dramatically in the five years we were there. At first there was a community of like-minded culture vultures...but we were squeezed out by shoe shops and upmarket homeware stores selling \$80 can-openers. Add no parking and a shiny new *Blockbuster* around the corner, and we couldn't make rent anymore. West End was the only logical place to move to, as they encourage their local eccentrics."

West End embraced the new and improved *Trash*, being "fertile enough to [allow us] to do something offbeat and interesting, and small enough for people to not be too jaded or blasé about what's going on in their own backyard. I've seen similar shops to ours open and close in larger cities in Australia, and they end up being swallowed by the cities' hugeness."

Those who know Andrew may have seen him in any number of guises. When he's not at *Trash*, he is also a writer, filmmaker and musician, which all help to prevent him 'getting bored standing behind the same counter 9 to 12 hours a day, and keep the mind from turning to cheese. Have you ever watched movies continually from sunup to sundown? Agghh!! Better

for your mental health to write about them at the same time.'

The store has always been a labour of love for Andrew, putting in long hours and learning how to run a business as he went along. Right from the start he 'pretty much dove into the deep end, having to learn to swim as I went. Which means you tend to pull wild and woolly ideas out of the ether and hope they work – and sometimes they do.' The unforeseen bumps along the way and perils of owning a small business would be enough to dissuade most, but for Andrew, 'the main reason is that we love movies, celebrate diversity, and are constantly hunting down the weirdest and most obscure titles for the shelves. That's the adventure.'

On many occasions, after calling most local video stores for a film only to be told that it is not yet available on DVD, or they don't have a copy, or the junior there doesn't even know what you're talking about, it is comforting to know that there will always be one place that will have what you need. Andrew's unique taste in cinema is showcased upon the walls of *Trash* and is part of the reason people keep going back. However, *Trash* is not just for locals or film buffs and welcomes anyone who steps through the door. They especially want to invite anyone 'who is passionate about cinema and has an adventurous spirit. One who doesn't follow the herd, and actively engages with film rather than passively consumes. And one who has both DVD and VHS players!'

If you'd like to know more about *Trash*, sign up for their monthly email newsletter (just email trash@trashvideo.com.au).

Jason Reed is a film reviewer, writer and bookseller at *Riverbend Books, Bulimba*

Theatre



Kate Lee

I created a show last year for Brisbane Festivals' *Under the Radar*. After performing in other peoples shows I was desperate to create work of my own. A deep fear I knew I had to tackle.

I did it the hard way. I chose a literary, not dramatic, text and although I'm not a dancer, I wanted to create a physical score that underpinned the dialogue. As with many creative processes there were times I felt debilitated. I didn't know what the text was saying and it was difficult transferring prose to live action. At times I felt we were grappling with thin air, desperate to turn nothing into something.

Decisions were made with the pending deadline and the show came together.

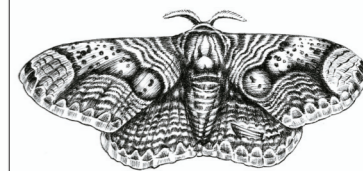
The work got selected for a three week season at Metro Arts. A chance to re-mount, re-think and re-examine. It's easy to ignore the consequences of your work and not examine your choices when you're not obligated to. I welcomed, with a combination of strength and trepidation, the challenge.

We re-worked our choices and I asked for feedback to move the piece forward and to understand my own processes. As frightening as it was to expose our decisions to outside eyes, it was essential and a relief. I needed to let go of the work and to know it was bigger than the idea of what I conceived it to be.

All who were involved were deeply sensitive to the re-creation process and I have faith the work has expanded. Although our perspective has changed, it is (in its third incarnation) a great exploration of what our ideas of performance are.

Flicking the Flint is on at *Adelaide Fringe* Feb 25, 26, 27 and at *Metro Arts* from March 10-27.

Original fiction



You and Sleep and Old Ritual in New Classical or The Pianist is Still and Time Has Stopped

by Josephine Rowe

I knew you by the way I fell into sleep at your shoulder. I fell a long way into sleep after not sleeping for a long time and I knew you by this and by the precise tilt of my face when it was turned up to meet yours. Really I think I knew you even before this by your voice and by the way you said everyday words like 'house' and 'laugh' and 'flight' and by your hands when they were still and your hands when they were not.

And there are other things I know in the way an audience knows when the piece is over but cannot applaud because the pianist has not yet moved. The audience is waiting for the shoulders to drop, for the fingers to flex but the pianist is still and time has stopped. The audience has politely folded its breath and in a low lit reflection the grand piano looks like an old hotel silhouetted against a red sky and I am sometimes the audience with its neatly folded breath and I am sometimes only your breath on my skin but it is still too early to say what I already know. Only that yes when you got here I could finally sleep.

Josephine Rowe's mini book of poems and stories *How A Moth Becomes a Boat* is available at *Avid Reader*.

Events March/April



Akmal Saleh *The Life of Akmal*

Friday 5th March
6pm for a 6.30pm start
Tickets \$5
RSVP books@avidreader.com.au

Join comedian Akmal Saleh as he talks about his rise to fame as an Australian Egyptian comic.

Mitch Albom *Have a Little Faith*

Monday 8th March
@ Brisbane Synagogue
6pm for a 6.30 start
Tickets \$15/\$12/ \$10 (6+)

This is a *Brisbane's Better Bookshops* Event.

Andrea Levy and Sarah Dunant in conversation with Richard Fidler

Thursday 11th March
@ Irish Club
6pm for a 6.30pm start
Tickets \$20/ \$18 / \$15 (10+)
This is a *Brisbane's Better Bookshops* Event

Beast Quest Party

Sunday 21st March
10 am – 11am
Tickets \$5 per child
Limited places
Come celebrate the meteoric success of this best selling kids series.

Donna Mulhearn *Ordinary Courage*

Tuesday 23rd March
6pm for a 6.30pm start
co-hosted with *Just Peace Qld*
Donna Mulhearn talks about her life-changing decision to become a human shield in Afghanistan.



Joanne Watson *Palm Island: Through a Long Lens*

Thursday 25th March
6pm for a 6.30pm start
Free Event RSVP essential

Palm Island has a rich and troubled history. Historian Joanne Watson looks at the cultural and social pressures that have led to the situation on Palm Island today.

Loani Prior *Really Wild Tea Cosies*

Friday 26th March
6pm for a 6.30pm start
Free Event RSVP essential

Everyone loves a crazy tea cosy. Join Avid Favourite Loani Prior as she shows us hers.

Phillipa Fioretti *The Book of Love*

Wednesday 21st April
6pm for a 6.30 start
Free event
RSVP essential.
Join us for the launch of this romantic novel and celebrate with a local favourite

Matthew Evans *Real Food Companion*

Tuesday 27th April
6pm for a 6.30 start
Tickets \$5
RSVP essential
We just love this television celebrity who knows that food production and cooking must look towards sustainability.



Don't forget our popular bookclubs

Fiona's Open Bookclub

First Wednesday night of each month at 7pm, then the first Thursday morning of each month at 9.30am

March book is *The Disappeared* by Kim Echlan

April book is *The Long Song* by Andrea Levy

Fiona's Crime Bookclub

First Saturday of each month at 2pm

March book *The Good Thief's Guide to Paris* by Chris Ewan

The Young and the Restless Bookclub

For 18-35yr olds
Last Wednesday of each month at 7pm

March book *Let the Great World Spin* by Colin McCann

April book *Solar* by Ian McEwan

Adaptation Bookclub

About books that have been made into films

Last Monday of each month at 7pm

March book *Wake in Fright* by Kenneth Cook

April book *The English Patient* Michael Ondaatje

For more information about any of our events or bookclubs go to www.avidreader.com.au



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8:30 am – 8:30 pm

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8:30 am – 8:30 pm

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8:30 am – 8:30 pm

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8:30 am – 8:30 pm

Friday
8:30 am – 8:30 pm

Saturday
8:30 am – 6:00 pm

Sunday
8:30 am – 5:00 pm

Open most public holidays

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