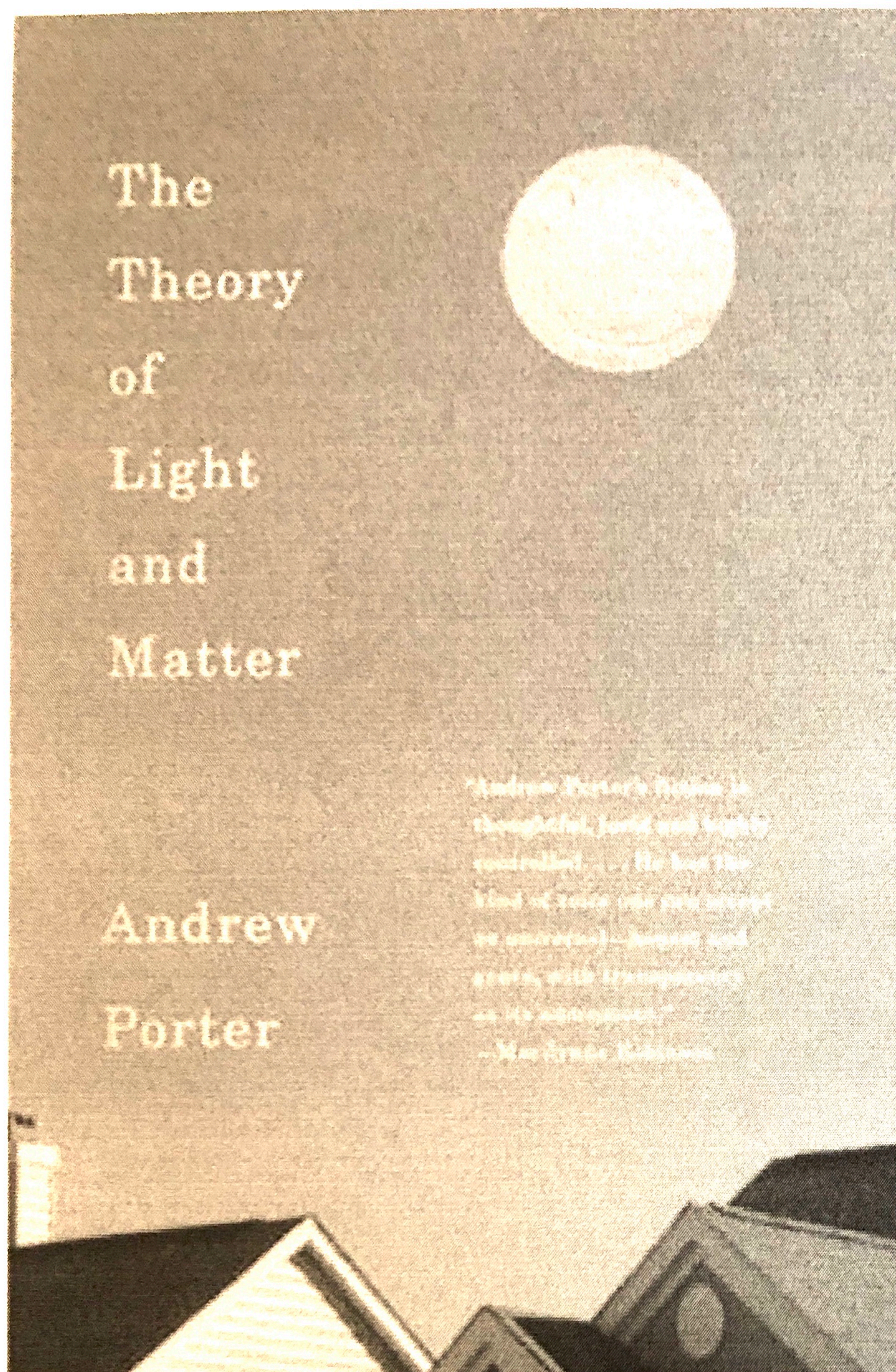


## Book of Secrets



By Christine Garza

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### The Theory of Light and Matter

By Andrew Porter

The University of Georgia Press

\$24.95, hardcover

232 pages

Many of us are familiar with the local authors who've gained international recognition over the last couple of decades: Sandra Cisneros, John Phillip Santos, Carmen Tafolla, Naomi Shihab Nye. But in my quest to seek out local writers whose work has made waves more recently, I entered The Twig Book Shop in search of recommendations. What I found there was a collection of ten short stories entitled *The Theory of Light and Matter* by Andrew Porter, an assistant professor of English and creative writing at Trinity University. He was awarded the Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction the year before his stories were assembled for print in 2008.

"Hole," the first and arguably most tragic of the stories, details the inner conflict of a young man grappling with the weight of the guilt he bears for his involvement in the death of a childhood friend. "It is said that when you are older you can remember events that occurred years before more vividly than you could even a day or two after you experienced

them," he says, laying the stylistic foundation for the stories that follow. Though the idea of suffering is overt in each story, each narrator is strikingly different from the other. In "The Theory of Light and Matter," we meet a young woman who, though in a relationship, begins to keep the company of a professor 30 years her senior, who fulfills the part of her that "believes the only truth lies in the secrets we keep from each other." "Skin," the shortest of the stories, offers a glimpse into the pained future of two lovers who believe, for the moment, that they are "capable of nothing cruel."

Porter's spare, unadorned use of language moves each page and story effortlessly, one after the other. Woven furtively throughout the collection are striking motifs of jacaranda trees, white colonials, alcoholism, and the idea that some people are just "not right." Without realizing it, you've finished the book and immediately feel as though you've read a collection of secrets: complex yet relatable stories fraught with themes of loss, guilt, human longing, memory, regret, absence, and the sometimes palpable sense of despondency associated with life in suburbia.

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