

March to May REVIEWS

BOOKSELLER+PUBLISHER's star rating system gives readers an indication of the quality of the publication being reviewed in its context. Our reviewers have been asked to use the following guidelines to rate the book:

- ★★★★★ an exceptional book of the very highest quality, regardless of genre
- ★★★★ an excellent book
- ★★★ a good book, within its genre
- ★★ a passable example of the genre
- ★ caution advised

Each issue, BOOKSELLER+PUBLISHER asks booksellers and writers to review books due to be published in the following month or thereafter. All books reviewed originate in Australia or New Zealand.

Top Picks our reviewers' top picks this issue are:



The Sparrows of Edward Street

★★★★★
Page 30



Black Glass

★★★★★
Page 31



Gone

★★★★★
Page 33



Ashes in the Air

★★★★★
Page 35

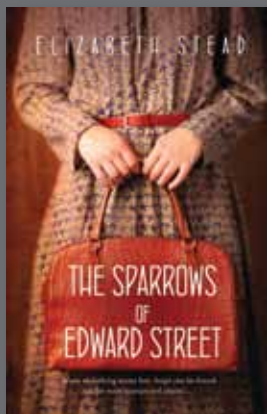


Mezza Italiana

★★★★★
Page 37

‘The language is beautiful and cruel and vivid’—Sue Bond on *Gone*

An eclectic list of top picks this issue spans literary fiction, spec-fiction, poetry and travel memoir.



The Sparrows of Edward Street (Elizabeth Stead, UQP, \$32.95 tpb, ISBN 9780702238758, March) ★★★★★

Elizabeth Stead takes readers into the grinding world of a NSW housing commission camp for the homeless in the mid-20th century. The Sparrow family—the widow Hanora, whose husband died after being run over by a council van full of stray cats, and her two teenage daughters, Aria and Margaret Rose—have been evicted from their lodgings after Hanora’s brief career as a kept woman ends with her lover’s appearance in the divorce courts. So the family takes up residence in a disused military camp on Edward Street in one of 800 huts made of fibro, corrugated iron and rough timber—boiling hot in summer and freezing in winter.

Hanora is overcome by the terrible turn of events and exists in a haze induced by various pharmaceutical products. The youngest daughter Margaret Rose—the ‘Colonial Royal’—is humiliated. According to her sister she has ‘never coped well with life overturned’. So it is up to the eldest daughter Aria, the narrator of the novel, to take on responsibility for the family. Aria is a fixer and sparrow-like in her manner. She loves her namesakes as ‘brave, scavenging little creatures’ but ‘sly as crows and with the hearts of savages’.

Before long Aria has begun to organise the lives of the camp’s more helpless residents, helping them to regain their confidence and self-respect. She has a habit of saying exactly what she thinks, which often gets her into trouble, but she won’t apologise: ‘I’m not sorry’ is her catchcry. A trickle of income comes in from Margaret Rose, who works as an apprentice to a milliner, while Aria gets by as a ‘bottom-of-the-ladder’ photographic model, employing her physical to ‘love’ a variety of commercial

products. Aria does not believe in lost causes so when things get desperate for the Sparrows, she puts her pride and reputation to one side to fight for a better future for her family.

The Sparrows of Edward Street is a wonderful novel about family relationships, about overcoming hardship and the strengths that people can gain by pulling together to beat the odds. It also provides insight into the lives of those left damaged and poor in the years after World War Two. This is a story told with great humour; you will never look at a sparrow in the same way again.

Chris Harrington is the co-owner of Books in Print in Melbourne

August (Bernard Beckett, Text, \$23.95 pb, ISBN 9781921758041, March) ★★

August begins with a slow-motion car crash, after which its two main characters find themselves trapped, injured and upside down in the wreckage. As Tristan (a student from a religious school) and Grace (a young prostitute) tell each other their stories, we slowly learn how they got there. Beckett's latest book (after his Esther Glen Award-winning YA novel *Genesis*) is another novel of ideas—in this case an exploration of St Augustine's philosophy of will and free choice, determinism and the existence of the soul. I have no problem with using fiction to explore philosophy, but *August* has barely any plot (certainly nothing more complicated than a fable), and almost no characterisation. Its setting is a world neither truly modern nor medieval, and its characters (of whom only

Tristan, Grace and the Rector resemble 'real' people) are little more than ciphers for ideas, or pawns to move the story along. And that was the biggest problem—at no point did I forget that I was reading a contrived work of speculative fiction. (Admittedly, this may have been the point.) If you are familiar with St Augustine, or interested in how his thought might be explored through fiction, you might enjoy it. If you read for pleasure, relaxation or simply to switch off, you'll probably find it tedious (or at the least disappointing).

Lachlan Jobbins is a freelance reviewer, editor and ex-bookseller



Black Glass (Meg Mundell, Scribe, \$32.95 tpb, ISBN 9781921640933, March) ★★★★★

Black Glass presents a dark urban dystopian future of mass surveillance and government control, filled with corruption and morality gone wrong. It is the story of two sisters, Tally and Grace, who are separated at the start of the book. Grace doesn't know if Tally is even alive, but Tally is always looking for Grace. They have no ID, so to stay out of jail they must hide in the shadows among derelict buildings, away from the working class, scrounging for whatever food they can and taking whatever jobs come their way. There's also Damon, a journalist for a current affairs television show, who looks for the juiciest stories while maintaining the government's status quo. Another character is Milk, who has the ability to control the

emotions of a crowd with engineered scents and special lighting. *Black Glass* contains a mix of writing styles, adding to the big brother style of the book, which flow nicely and are easy to pick up because of the headings. The book is based in a specific city that becomes obvious when reading, and this localisation makes the situation more believable, illustrating that we may onto be a few steps away from a similar world in a decade or two. The tension builds right until the end. This is recommended for Gen-Y readers who like a bit of spec-fiction now and then.

Andrew Wrathall is publishing assistant at BOOKSELLER+PUBLISHER

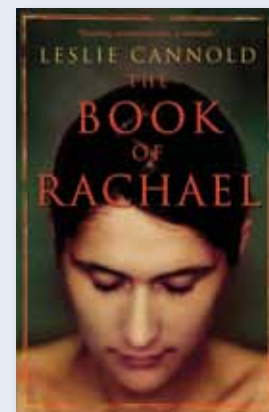


The Book of Rachael (Leslie Cannold, Text, \$32.95 tpb, ISBN 9781921758089, April) ★★★★★

Public commentator and nonfiction author Leslie Cannold had chosen an ambitious topic for her first foray into the world of fiction. *The Book of Rachael* is a thoughtful novel that traces the life of Jesus' younger sister Rachael in a society where the lives of women revolved around producing and nurturing men. Rachael is a strong character. Ambitious, passionate and unconstrained by her upbringing, she pursues reading and writing, learns the craft of midwifery, and falls in love with Judah of Iscariot, Joseph's best friend and the man who will change their lives forever. On one level *The Book of Rachael* is a new take on the well-known tale of Jesus Christ. Cannold extends this story in an expert manner, showing the reader the reality of the women in Jesus' life through engaging

and fast-paced prose. But on another level, it is a story about a girl who dares to dream of a better life, and who has the courage to chase these dreams. *The Book of Rachael* is a compelling read, not just for those interested in religious history but for readers who enjoy quality fiction about family, kinship and love. (See interview, page 38.)

Eloise Keating is a journalist with the Weekly Book Newsletter and BOOKSELLER+PUBLISHER

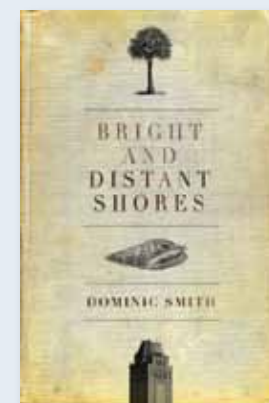


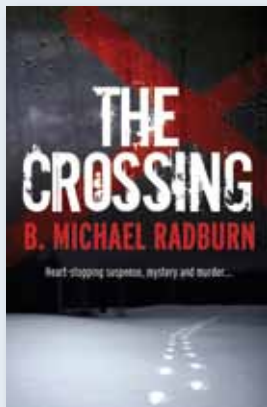
Bright and Distant Shores (Dominic Smith, A&U, \$29.99 tpb, ISBN 9781742374161, March) ★★★★★

Bright and Distant Shores follows two men on a journey across the Pacific in 1897—one of them an American from Chicago, the other a native of the area who was a servant to a missionary. Both the men are orphans, but Owen Graves has a fiancée waiting for him in Chicago, and Argus Niu wants to return to his native Poumeta to find his sister. Graves is under the employ of Hale Gray, the owner of insurance company, Chicago First Equitable, which has just opened the tallest building in the world. Gray wants to open a native show on the roof of his building to sell more insurance policies, and he wants Graves to furnish the exhibits—including the natives. Gray also sends his only son on the voyage an attempt to 'make a man of him'. This book really draws

the reader in, making you interested in each character. Although it depicts many aspects of unattractive racism, it also contains beautiful descriptions of the people and the islands, as well as the artefacts collected for museums. *Bright and Distant Shores* will appeal to history buffs, and the element of romance adds a nice lightness.

Jessica Broadbent is a former bookseller who is now studying to become a librarian. She also volunteers at the Melbourne Museum





The Crossing (B Michael Radburn, Pantera Press, \$32.99 tpb, ISBN 9780980741872, May) ★★☆☆

I can't quite pin down how enthusiastic I am about this book. It sits firmly in the mystery area of the crime spectrum, and while it suffers from a fairly generic thriller tone of voice, it does have some nice gothic flourishes that lift it above the ordinary. Taylor Bridges is a man living an empty life. One year on from the disappearance of his eight-year-old daughter and estranged from his wife, he lives a guilt-ridden, sleepwalk-plagued existence in Tasmania. His work as a park ranger has brought him to Glorys Crossing, a former logging town that is being slowly swallowed by a rising lake, where locals are suspicious of outsiders and coffins pop up from the softening ground. The area has its share of strange folk, including Dan Scully, The Raggedy Man, who was a

suspect in the disappearance of a young girl ten years ago; and Thomas Leon, The Librarian, a former news reporter caring for his reclusive Vietnam Vet son. So when another young girl goes missing, the suspects are thick on the ground. I swung between rolling my eyes at awkward dialogue and enjoying the colourful characters and some nice descriptive passages. It's a shame this book isn't being published until May as it would make a superior summer read.

Paul Landymore is business and development manager at Queensland Writers' Centre and a former bookseller



Ember and Ash (Pamela Freeman, Orbit, \$19.99 pb, ISBN 9780733624226, March) ★★☆☆

In this standalone book, Pamela Freeman returns to the Eleven Domains a generation after the end of her 'Castings Trilogy'. Her characters, Ember and Ash, have grown up in a land that appears to be at peace for the first time in centuries, due in part to the actions of their parents. Ember's wedding should be a time of joy, but when her husband is killed before her eyes by a giant magical flame, a chain of events is set in motion that will take her deep into the magic of her heritage. Ember and Ash (not the 'Ash' of the 'Castings Trilogy', though fans will be relieved that he is in the book too) must make an epic journey to finish the task their parents began, not by fighting epic battles, but by the small acts of reconciliation that are the real face of lasting peace. This book can be read

as an epilogue to the 'Castings Trilogy', but is still self-contained enough for any fantasy reader to enjoy. Well paced with great characters, it has loads of magic and all the usual fantasy tropes but adds a few twists to the mix that are refreshingly self-reflective. Fans of the 'Castings Trilogy' will love this finale, and new readers will no doubt return for more.

Stefen Brazulaitis is a Perth-based bookseller, freelance reviewer and columnist



The End of Longing (Ian Reid, UWA Publishing, \$32.95 tpb, ISBN 9781742582740, March) ★★☆☆

The End of Longing is a cleverly written piece of historical fiction inspired by two people in the author's own family. Frances Phillips and William Hammond travelled extensively at the end of the 19th century, from New Zealand to Australia, Japan to Jamaica and several other countries. Reid has based his novel on their actual recorded destinations, and around these he has woven a complex story of mystery and intrigue. Having married suddenly and left Dunedin to follow evangelist Dr Hammond abroad, it is not until after her departure that Frances' brothers begin to hear rumours and reports of Hammond's fraudulent activities, numerous previous wives, and reputation as a con-man. They become increasingly concerned for their sister's welfare and

eventually learn of her death, months after its occurrence. The narrative jumps back and forth through time and alternates between the characters' perspectives to gradually reveal details of the couple's lives before and after their relationship. As the motivations behind Hammond's actions become clear, it is difficult to determine whether the rumours about this charming and charismatic, scheming and deceitful man are accurate or not. I was completely absorbed from the first page until the final scene, when Hammond's true nature is finally revealed.

Lyndal More is a Melbourne-based bookseller and publishing student



Flock (Lyn Hughes, Fourth Estate, \$32.99 tpb, ISBN 9780732291853, March) ★★☆☆

Ten years since her last release, Lyn Hughes's latest novel is proof that time is indeed an author's best friend. *Flock* is a carefully crafted, in-depth hybrid of historical fiction and biography. In the Blue Mountains in 1951, romance is blossoming between newlyweds Francis and Lilian. Unprepared for their quick progression into parenthood, however, the pair ache to satisfy their individual aspirations. When Francis discovers his flair for designing beautiful wallpapers and his exclusive, native Australian prints grant him overnight success, his newfound love leaves Lilian struggling to keep up. Unable to settle on a creative passion, nor come to terms with her unforgettable childhood, she drifts emotionally from her family. Thirty years later their daughter Addie is working on a major

restoration project of an historical property, also in the Blue Mountain bush. But as her conservation team help Addie uncover truths about the previous inhabitants of the house, their own ghostly pasts are questioned. In a terrifically detailed, interweaving inner monologue, Hughes paints a picturesque narrative that breathes new life into the walls of Queen Marie Antoinette's estate, and attempts to interpret the tragic murder of Australian designer Florence Broadhurst. Readers of Kate Morton or Kirsten Tranter will be mesmerised.

Tiffany Bridger is a Brisbane-based bookseller and freelance reviewer

Friends Like These (Wendy Harmer, A&U, \$32.99 tpb, ISBN 9781741751666, April) ★★ ★

One of Australia's best-known personalities, Wendy Harmer is also a prolific writer with over 15 children's titles, three one-woman shows, two plays, a musical and a libretto under her belt. *Friends Like These* is her fourth novel for adults. Similar in tone to her other titles, Harmer examines the meaning and nature of friendship and sacrifice when things go seriously wrong. Set amongst the chattering classes of Sydney's privileged North Shore, it can also be read as a not-so-subtle dig at the pressures and hypocrisy of 'keeping up appearances'. When Jo's career as deputy head of Sydney's most exclusive girls school ends spectacularly, it also represents the end to her 20-year marriage. Forced to re-examine her relationships and drive, she discovers all is not what it seems. Ultimately Jo

is forced to take a stance and to fight for what is rightfully hers—not just hope that people will just do the decent thing. Essentially *Friends Like These* is a coming-of-middle-age story set in recognisable surrounds. Harmer creates believable and sympathetic characters and I'm sure the book will do very well in the Mother's Day market.

Rachel Wilson is a Melbourne-based media academic and former bookseller



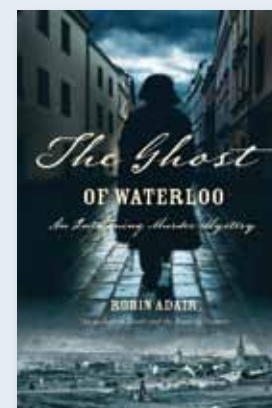
Author: Wendy Harmer

The Ghost of Waterloo (Robin Adair, Michael Joseph, \$29.95 tpb, ISBN 9781921518485, March) ★★ ★★

In contrast with the glitzy image that current denizens of Sydney like to think their city embodies, early 19th-century Sydney wasn't a nice place. Murders, muggings, robbery, executions, floggings, not to mention the dictatorial powers of the appointed governor, filthy and poorly drained streets, a plethora of dank drinking holes, rampant prostitution, corruption and hosts of criminal types transported from merry England all lent the city a certain unsavoury air. Luckily, in Robin Adair's second crime novel, these aspects of the city are faithfully explored in a book that revels in the juicy underbelly of early Australian life. The novel's protagonist is Nicodemus Dunne, a news hawker (think early journalist) and expoliceman, who is not only well-versed in the business

of the bustling settlement but is favoured by the chief of police, Captain Rossi, when it comes to crime-solving. And there are certainly crimes to solve, namely some mysterious murders, conspiracies formed on distant shores and the robbery of a safe box from the newly formed squatters bank, The Australian Bank. While *The Ghost of Waterloo* is a brisk read, lovingly filled with historical detail, it has too many characters in the early parts, which makes this interesting novel a little disjointed. However, fans of both early Australian history and solid crime novels will find enough to keep them happy.

Shane Strange is a Canberra-based lecturer and ex-bookseller

**Gone** (Jennifer Mills, UQP, \$34.95 tpb, ISBN 9780702238710, March) ★★ ★★ ★

Jennifer Mills' second novel, after the accomplished debut *The Diamond Anchor*, is about a hitchhiker's journey. A man of 30-ish years is heading west, back home from Sydney after a 15-year absence, including time in jail. He takes the name Frank and a photograph of 'home' from a charity backpack. That's all he has, apart from memories that come interspersed with the stories of the people who pick him up and give him food, money or conversation. Mills' talent was evident in her first book, but here it is clear she is a brilliant writer, with poetic prose that takes the reader right into the place that Frank inhabits. The novel begins with the line, 'He goes barefoot into the meaty darkness', and this is a perfect metaphor for the entire novel. The language is beautiful and cruel and vivid.

The socks in Frank's bag are 'a fatty deposit', someone's teeth are like 'bunched pencils', galahs are 'cackling fruit'. Frank's journey is into the starkness of the outback, but it is also into his own psychological darkness. The mystery and harsh beauty of this story will appeal to a wide range of readers who enjoy a challenging novel.

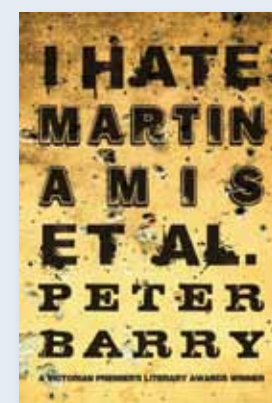
Sue Bond is a writer and former bookseller in Brisbane

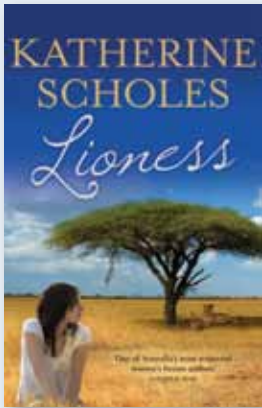
**I Hate Martin Amis et al** (Peter Barry, Transit Lounge, \$29.95 tpb, ISBN 9780980846201, May) ★★ ★

This is a strange and ambitious debut novel from Peter Barry. An earlier draft won the 2005 Victorian Premier's Award for an unpublished manuscript. The book is set in the mid-1990s and is narrated by Milan Zorec, the English-born son of Serbian immigrants. Milan is a much-rejected aspiring novelist in a dead-end menial job; his girlfriend has left him; and his latest manuscript has been summarily rejected by yet another literary agent. So Milan decides he will get inspiration for a truly original new book by volunteering to fight for the Serb army in the Yugoslavian war, and he ends up as a sniper at the siege of Sarajevo in 1995. In between gunning down Bosnian civilians from a safe distance, Milan keeps notebooks of his thoughts: he writes about the atrocities

of war, interspersed with his own increasingly delusional ravings about his literary hero Martin Amis, the London literary scene, his rejection by publishers and literary agents, etc. This is a book that is likely to polarise readers. With a deeply unlikable protagonist, and a deliberately flat, cold, distant tone, there is little about it that is conventionally likable—but it is compelling in a bleak, black way. In some ways it is reminiscent of books such as Jonathan Littell's *The Kindly Ones* or Christos Tsiolkas' *Dead Europe*.

Tim Coronel is publisher of BOOKSELLER+PUBLISHER



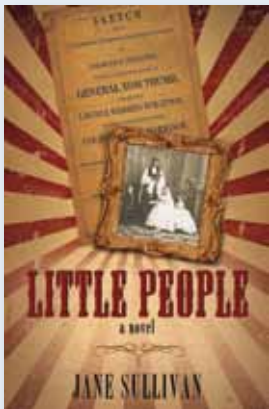


Lioness (Katherine Scholes, Viking, \$32.95 tpb, ISBN 9780670072699, April) ★★☆☆

Lioness is a great summer read. It is fun and exotic, you really grow to care about the characters, and it is not too challenging or dense. It also made me want to jump on the next plane to Tanzania to see some of the incredible sights for myself. In the very first chapter the reader is confronted with a young child who is being forced to deal with the sudden and shocking death of her mother in the middle of a barren landscape. Angel is then rescued from a pack of hyenas by a gentle lioness and her three cubs—which somehow doesn't seem unrealistic in the context of the book. In the second chapter the focus shifts to Emma, an Australian medical researcher who has travelled to Tanzania to trace the journey of her own mother, who died there many years before. Emma, of course, gets

caught up in the search for Angel, and along the way she meets some fascinating people—and lions—and learns an awful lot about the world and about herself. The lions themselves are described with great affection and made me curious to learn more about George Adamson, 'the original lion man', who inspired some aspects of this very lovely book.

Freelance editor Hannah Cartmel has worked as a publishing assistant and bookseller



Little People (Jane Sullivan, Scribe, \$32.95 tpb, ISBN 9781921640964, April) ★★☆☆

Inspired by the real-life tour of a troupe of 'little people' to Australia in 1870, this quirky novel is the second from literary journalist Jane Sullivan. It is ostensibly the story of Mary Ann, recently released from employment by the amorous father of her ward and bearing his child. Standing on the banks of the Yarra contemplating suicide, she sees a child fall from a bridge and rushes to its rescue. The child is in fact Charles Stratton, know as General Tom Thumb, the charismatic entertainer who, along with his wife, the beautiful and perfectly formed Lavinia; her restless and willful sister Minnie; and rival for lead Commodore George Washington Nutt inhabit a world of barely restrained, savage curiosity in the employ of P T Barnum. Taken in as dresser to the two diminutive ladies,

Mary Ann is exposed to the strange and transient life they lead. As time passes she becomes aware that her position there may have more to do with the child she carries than her act of heroism. Mary Ann is not the only character to narrate the story as others take turns in various 'sideshows' to relate their own tales; this shift in narrative works well and these sideshows provide great amusement and colour. The language and voices of the characters do a fine job of placing the story in its historical context, and the story itself is interestingly textured and set in a fascinating milieu. This is a most enjoyable read.

Paul Landymore is business and development manager at Queensland Writers' Centre and a former bookseller

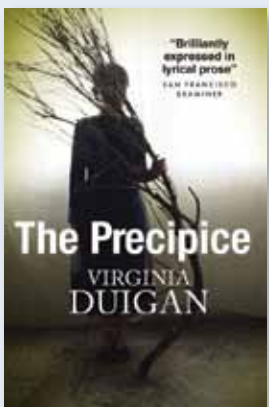


Me and Mr Booker (Cory Taylor, Text, \$32.95 tpb, ISBN 9781921758119, March) ★★☆☆

Martha is dangerously bored with her small-town existence when she meets Mr Booker at one of her mother's parties. What follows is a tale reminiscent of the excellent 2009 film *An Education*, as the charming Mr Booker introduces Martha to style, sex, whiskey and cigarettes. Mr Booker's initially suave persona seems at odds with his environment, but soon the quiet desperation of a man trapped in a mediocre academic career and childless marriage emerges. Amongst the passion and the adoration between the pair there is a kind of sadness to their trysts in the seediness of the motel rooms and the inevitable unacknowledged decline. Martha's parents are fascinating characters and their strange and troubled relationship offers insight into Martha's actions. Her father is a deeply

troubled man, and Martha, weary of his depressive episodes and manipulative bullying, sees only the shadow that he has cast on her family life. Some of the warmest and darkly comic passages in the novel concern Martha and her mother discussing her father's latest attempts to extort money and attention from his wife. *Me and Mr Booker* is sharply observed and blackly comic, but it is also a tender depiction of love, sex, power and one girl's heartbreaking step into adulthood.

Portia Lindsay works at the UNSW Bookshop in Sydney



The Precipice (Virginia Duigan, Vintage, \$32.95 tpb, ISBN 9781741667165, April) ★★☆☆

For two decades, 77-year-old Thea Farmer has been living in the dense isolation of the Blue Mountains with her dog and favourite companion, Teddy. After retiring from her position as principal at a prestigious school following a scandalous incident with a younger teacher and a student, Thea has her dream home built. However, when her investments with a particular financial fund go bust, she is forced to sell her retirement property and remain in the tiny, decrepit cottage next door. Filled with bitter resentment at the sight of her young neighbours Frank, Ellice, and Frank's niece Kim living in her intended home, Thea takes the advice of her creative writing teacher and unloads her petulant thoughts into a journal. Kim, a bookish 12-year-old who has lived in various foster homes,

takes Thea's stationary residence and staunch personality as a blessing, and the two build a loyal friendship. Yet as we bear witness to Thea's growing concerns over Frank's behaviour towards Kim, frightening connections are made between Thea's past and present, with devastating repercussions. Virginia Duigan's third novel delves deeply into the complex emotional recesses of her protagonist, offering a haunting take on pushing boundaries too far. This book is suited to readers of literary fiction.

Tiffany Bridger is a Brisbane-based bookseller and freelance reviewer

The Secret Fate of Mary Watson (Judy Johnson, Fourth Estate, \$32.99 tpb, ISBN 9780732292508, April) ★★☆☆

From scraps of historical documents reproduced at this novel's opening, Judy Johnson vividly imagines a story far removed from the grisly demise these documents imply for Mary Watson. The young heroine she conjures is fiercely intelligent and courageous, and clearly deserves better. On the way to her 'secret fate', Mary navigates the hazardous frontier world of Far North Queensland, 1879, which is like a tropical Deadwood. She dives into the deep end, working as a criminal-underworld spy. Though ripe with danger and intrigue, *The Secret Fate of Mary Watson* is very much at the literary end of historical fiction. Eloquent, observant and with unselfconscious historic authenticity, it's among the genre's best Australian-set works, such as Kate Grenville's soon-to-be-completed 'Secret River'

trilogy. A multi-award-winning poet, Johnson edged toward prose with the verse novel *Jack*, a 2007 Victorian Premier's Literary Award winner. Here her poetic powers are still very much on show, particularly in its rich, descriptive language and fearlessly florid metaphors. The sheer number of metaphors for sea and storm borders on excess, but the book's only real flaw is unsubtle hints that a character close to Mary can't be trusted. Overall, however, this is a compelling, impressive read.

Patricia Maunder is a freelance writer and broadcaster



The Shattered City: Creature Court Book 2 (Tansy Rayner Roberts, HarperVoyager, \$22.99 pb, ISBN 9780732289447, April) ★★☆☆

In the second book of the 'Creature Court' series which began with *Power and Majesty*, Tansy Rayner Roberts once again delivers an utterly compelling dark fantasy. Velody is now the leader of the Creature Court—shapechangers who nightly defend the city of Aufleur from magical attack. But ruling the Court proves difficult, as the web of affections and enmities between the members is revealed to be far more complex than she expected. The forces that seek to destroy Aufleur have also noticed the effect that Velody is having on the Creature Court and set their own plans in motion. As the separation between the nocturnal world of the Creature Court and the daytime world of the city begins to unravel, Velody has to struggle to protect her friends from her strange subjects, and the even

stranger forces that bring destruction from the night sky. This book has everything you could want from the sequel to a great dark fantasy. It's sexier, nastier and answers questions while asking harder ones. There's a lot more detail on the exotic members of the Creature Court and it's just as deliciously decadent as the first. With hints of 'Gormenghast', goth and anime, this is a book that oozes with contemporary cool.

Stefen Brazulaitis is a Perth-based bookseller, freelance reviewer and columnist



The Undivided: Riftrunners Book 1 (Jennifer Fallon, Voyager, \$32.99 tpb, ISBN 9780732290849, April) ★★☆☆

Dublin, 2001—Ren Kavanagh is a teenage orphan with no notion of his origins, plagued by mysterious injuries and strange dreams. When he meets the odd and enticing Trasa, his life begins to spin out of control. This is the set-up for Jennifer Fallon's latest offering, *The Undivided*. Readers familiar with Fallon will know roughly what to expect—fairly standard high-fantasy tropes that are delivered in fast-paced and dialogue-heavy prose. The opening chapters are a little difficult to follow, with psychic visions, Gaelic names and a narrative that jumps back and forth between our world and an alternate reality peopled by Druids and Faeries, but Fallon soon wrangles these elements into a coherent narrative. While not explicitly aimed at the young adult market, there is

nothing here to worry parents of precocious teen readers, and the youthful protagonists should appeal. Fans of this type of romantic fantasy are going to gobble this up and will keenly await the next installment (due 2012), but crossover, mainstream appeal is limited.

Beau Taylor is a bookseller at Pulp Fiction Booksellers in Brisbane



Author: Jennifer Fallon

Credit: infocus pty ltd

Ashes in the Air (Ali Alizadeh, UQP, \$24.95 pb, ISBN 9780702238727, March) ★★☆☆

What do we want from a book of poetry? We want each poem to paint a picture, to shake us up a little, and to ultimately reach down inside us and peel something back. Ali Alizadeh's poems do all of these things. They are stories and they are personal, many of them seethe with rage at the injustices (and also the blandness) found in all corners of the globe. Alizadeh explores his own internal conflict of straddling two worlds and never completely feeling he belongs—in Iran or Australia, or in the places he has visited. He explores the generally paradoxical nature of peace, freedom and choice. The poems are personal (deeply so) but political, social, philosophical and definitely meaningful. Subjects range from the self, to freedom of speech, the inadequacy of

language, environmental destruction, war, childhood, friendship, love—but these distinctions cannot capture the complexity of the poet's emotion (which is sometimes even a destructive and self-destructive drive). Yet, the poems are simply written: evocative and vivid, with subtext in layers. The collection makes a perfect companion to Alizadeh's wonderful biography/history *Iran: My Grandfather* (Transit Lounge). Alizadeh's work is important and I'd hope the average reader might pick him up and be enlightened.

Angela Meyer is a writer, reviewer, doctoral candidate and the literary blogger for Crikey. She is a former acting editor of BOOKSELLER+PUBLISHER



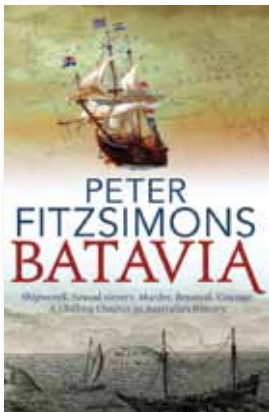


1001 Australian Nights (Dave Graney, Affirm Press, \$29.95 tpb, ISBN 9780980790436, April) ★★★★★

As a teenager from small-town Australia fired up on punk music, young outsider Dave Graney hit the road to find a way into the world. Anyone familiar with Graney's style will know not to expect a 'straight up' memoir. Abstractions often take the place of facts, figures, names and dates: 'I can't get interested in that sort of thing', writes Graney. Graney's 1001 nights avoid morphing into one another, gig after gig, city after city, country after country, as they are separated by vivid observations, memories and various admirable sartorial ensembles. Lyrics weave—stories unto themselves—in and out of the text. While Graney's shtick is sometimes criticised as style over substance, and might, at times, keep people at a distance, he mostly avoids alienating his reader by giving

just enough of himself away. On stage and on paper he is a consummate entertainer: witty, literary, anarchic and displaying more self-love than Narcissus. His love of crime fiction—'I wanted to be hard boiled', he writes—is evident in his noir stylings and is rendered deftly and wryly in his description of his musical collaborator and wife Clare Moore: 'She sneered with her posture and kept her cool icy. She was on a Birds Eye kick. She was straight from the fridge.' This is essential reading for Graney fans and music lovers. (See interview, page 39.)

Deborah Crabtree is a Melbourne-based writer and bookseller



Batavia (Peter FitzSimons, Random House, \$49.95 hb, ISBN 9781864710403, March) ★★★★★

Most Australians only know the vaguest details of the Dutch East India Company's Batavia, shipwrecked off the coast of WA in 1629. The astounding tale of slavery and wanton murder which ensued is a sorry chapter in our history, and one that is brought to life in a pacy, entertaining, informative and chilly narrative by Peter FitzSimons—in his own inimitable style. Moving between the various groups of survivors, the narrative is gripping—almost like a good thriller movie. The actions of Jeronimus Cornelisz, the self-proclaimed leader (i.e. dictator) of the survivor colony are truly shocking. Cornelisz oversaw the murder by his fellow mutineers of at least 110 men, women and children in his care. Drawing on the extensive journals of the 'Commandeur' of the fleet as well as other surviving

letters and documents, FitzSimons has reconstructed dialogue, personalities and scenes which complement the facts and give the narrative a life and pace which would otherwise be lacking. As with previous historical episodes getting 'the Fitzzy treatment', history purists will likely frown upon his methods—no matter how well-researched and deliberate they may be. Due to this chatty and accessible style, however, many more readers will be educated about the incredible story of the Batavia and booksellers will enjoy a bestseller sure to outsell any academic treatment limited to provable history.

Scott Whitmont is the owner of Lindfield Bookshop & Children's Bookshop in Sydney



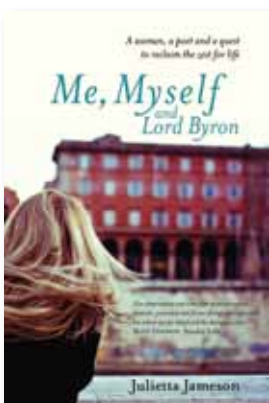
Author: Betty Churcher

Betty Churcher's Notebooks (Betty Churcher, MUP, \$44.95 pb, ISBN 9780522858426, April) ★★★★★

As director of the National Gallery of Australia in the 1990s, Betty Churcher was well known for her blockbuster exhibitions, attracting famous international artworks to Australian shores. Her passion for great art and her ability to communicate its qualities without pretention is one of the biggest strengths of this book. *Betty Churcher's Notebooks* is a tour of Churcher's favourite artworks, divided into a number of galleries in London, Paris, Madrid and Rome. When Churcher discovered her eyesight was failing, these were the paintings she sought out one last time. The analysis is wide-ranging and also deeply personal—Churcher talks about how she felt when she first saw these painting, and the book includes some of her sketches, reproduced alongside the originals. It's a fascinating but

often too brief insight into some very famous paintings, as Churcher covers too many artists to do each justice. The exceptions are Rembrandt and Velazquez—clearly two particular favourites—and her analysis of these painters' talent is much more detailed and satisfying. This is a beautiful coffee table book that will appeal to lovers of art, history and travel, and likely the many people who flocked to recent blockbuster exhibitions at the National Gallery.

Andrea Hanke is editor of BOOKSELLER+PUBLISHER



Me, Myself and Lord Byron (Julietta Jameson, Pier 9, \$34.99 tpb, ISBN 9781741966459, March) ★★

Julietta Jameson loved Lord Byron's poetry as a young girl and was inspired to follow his trail around Italy and Greece at a time when her personal life was floundering, though not quite as severely as Byron's. Unfortunately, this 'quest to reclaim the zest for life' does not quite hit the mark. It will appeal to some (of the many) readers of *Eat, Pray, Love*, but for anyone intrigued by the literary aspect of her travels, a biography of Lord Byron may be more insightful. Some of Jameson's own travel anecdotes are delightful and are interspersed with snippets of Byron's biography, which makes for pleasant reading. However, the constant reflection on her life choices and single status becomes repetitive to the point of self-indulgence. While the stories of her youth and her fascinatingly flawed

parents are unflinchingly honest, the bravery of such candid revelations is nullified by the consistent woe-is-me, how-have-I-gotten-here narrative. Jameson should be applauded for the fact that her journey does not necessarily culminate in finding a man but rather finding herself; however, it was just not a particularly engrossing journey on which to accompany her.

Portia Lindsay works at the UNSW Bookshop in Sydney

Mezza Italiana (Zoe Boccabella, ABC Books, \$29.99 pb, ISBN 9780733329548, April) ★★★★★

Zoe Boccabella grew up in Brisbane in an Anglo-Italian family. Her father's Italian family had strong links to 'home' and Zoe was constantly being reminded of her Italian heritage. However, this was 'Joh's' Queensland in the 1970s and 1980s and Boccabella was taunted at school as a 'wog' and Italian food and culture were openly derided. Consequently Boccabella tried to adapt, 'not to stand out or be different'. It is not until she is in her 20s, travelling around Europe with her boyfriend, that she can bring herself to visit her family's home village of Fossa in the mountainous Abruzzo region. After years of denial Boccabella immediately realises her emotional link to the house in which her family has lived for several centuries, and her Italian ancestors. What follows are

wonderful descriptions of relatives and other villagers, the countryside and the food—the Abruzzo produces more superb cooks than any other part of Italy. When an earthquake strikes, Boccabella describes the strength of the villagers to endure yet more hardship. This is a beautifully written memoir full of characters and places, which will appeal to the literary traveller, to people who already love Italy and to all those intending to visit.

Chris Harrington is the co-owner of Books in Print in Melbourne



Mia Culpa (Mia Freedman, Viking, \$29.95 pb, ISBN 9780670075515, March) ★★★

My first impression of Mia Freedman's latest collection of blogs and musings, *Mia Culpa*, was that it was like reading a women's magazine—only longer, and without any pictures. And that was just fine. After some hesitation at the opening sentence, 'Pubic hair is sooo last year', I am delighted that I kept reading. Freedman, who has spent her professional life swaddled in magazine pop culture, and briefly in television, humorously documents life's cringeworthy moments on a range of topics, including fashion, sexuality, motherhood, generation gaps and dressing rooms without mirrors. *Mia Culpa* is like that pleasingly worded magazine article that you wish would never end, and fans of Freedman's blog, Mamamia, will recognise the language and ideas. This book will appeal

to women from 25 upwards, especially those with young families. Fans of Freedman's earlier collections *The New Black* and *Mamamia: A Memoir of Mistakes, Magazines & Motherhood* will happily get on board. This is great for lightweight, holiday reading or a gentle toe dipped into the waters of more serious lifestyle conversations.

Rebecca Butterworth is a freelance writer, an ex-bookseller and book reviewer living in Melbourne



Shannon Bennett's New York (Shannon Bennett, MUP, \$44.99 hb, ISBN 9780522858051, March) ★★★

Once again, Bennett and co have delivered a delicious collection of travel tips, restaurant reviews, hotel recommendations and foodie fun, this time in the incredible city of New York. As a travel guide, this isn't as helpful as some. As with Bennett's book on Paris, the restaurants and hotels in particular are generally beyond the reach of the average traveller. Unless you happen to have a heck of a budget, only one night in one of these hotels or one meal in one of the restaurants is probably achievable. As a book, however, the package is gorgeous and fascinating, and it is just so nice to dream of all the things you would do if you could. In his introduction, Bennett is almost defensive about his decision to follow Paris with New York, but it is clear as you read on that

NYC truly is the up-and-coming young star to Paris' master chef. It is also great to hear from people who really know what they're talking about disagree with an authoritative voice such as the Michelin guide. These are foodie tips direct from the horse's mouth, which simply cannot be ignored.

Freelance editor Hannah Cartmel has worked as a publishing assistant and bookseller



Thirty Something and the Clock is Ticking (Kasey Edwards, Ebury, \$34.95 pb, ISBN 9781864711806, March) ★★★

When a newly married friend and I started discussing the baby question, I had just completed *Thirty Something and the Clock is Ticking* by Kasey Edwards. I hesitated, then said: 'You should read this book. But. Be warned. It will freak you out to the maximum.' In *Clock is Ticking*, newly de-facto Edwards finds that the baby question quickly becomes more of an exclamation mark. As she takes us through her journey from baby skeptic to baby hopeful, Edwards does her research (mostly anecdotal), and doesn't leave much out. The best thing this book has to offer a reader is honesty. It uncovers the layer of misinformation, myth, generational pressure and even motherly competition that weighs heavily on pregnancy and motherhood. It rang true. Edwards's prose style is

entertaining, and although her personal opinions were at times jarring, they were often cut down to size. Edwards' courage gets her reader onside, and her storytelling does the rest. This will appeal to most women of the aforementioned age and fans of Edwards' previous book *Thirty Something and Over It*.

Rebecca Butterworth is a freelance writer, an ex-bookseller and book reviewer living in Melbourne

