

This page shows the article as it originally appeared in the newspaper. The article itself can be read on the following page.

BookReviews

Swindling the children

How do you swindle the children of the future? The answer is simple: you don't.

Carl Colby



Children are not pawns. They are not the property of their parents. They are not the property of the state. They are not the property of the church. They are not the property of the world. They are the property of the future.

Shot on a continuous loop

David Lauder



The Book of David is a collection of stories about the lives of the children of David. It is a book that is shot on a continuous loop.

This is the article's web address for reference.

<http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/archive/2007/0317/Pg117.html#Ar11702>

The User may not copy, reproduce, distribute, or create derivative works from the Content without expressly being authorised to do so by the relevant copyright owner. © Copyright 2013 The Irish Times. All Rights Reserved.

Vera, the shadowy heroine of Andrei Makine's ninth novel, was only 16 when her lover went to fight in the second World War. He never returned. Although solitary and loyal, she has made herself useful by tending the old, forgotten widows in her village. Meanwhile, the locals watch her. She has become a mythic figure – there is no pity, only admiration. The young male narrator has arrived from Leningrad to study local customs. His romantic imagination becomes fired by Vera's tragedy. Makine, the gifted Siberian whose literary career is itself a romance (he settled in exile in France to write in French), possesses an elegiac voice ideally suited to his prevailing theme of displacement. This is not his most compelling book, yet it still beguiles with its characteristically atmospheric limpid beauty, and its balance of history, romance and reality.

Eileen Battersby

All Aunt Hagar's Children

Edward P Jones

Harper Perennial, £7.99

The legacy of slavery plays a powerful but subtle role in this collection of short stories from Impac and Pulitzer prize-winner Edward P Jones. Set in Washington DC, the stories are about ordinary folk: labourers, children, convicts, sailors and nuns. A newly-wed woman finds a baby in a bundle hanging from a tree. A young man is jailed for killing a man he can't quite remember. A mother ventures to buy the sweets from her childhood, but discovers they don't taste quite the same. A carefully crafted, rhythmic pace is sustained throughout these moving stories of hardship and struggle. But it is the details that will stay with you: the woman watching over her ill daughter in a chair built by a slave "to last 142 years"; the young man wondering if his mother and aunts will be "the last generation of Negro women" to wear gloves on hot afternoons.

Sorcha Hamilton

House of Stone

Christina Lamb

Harper Perennial, £8.99

Lamb, the *Sunday Times*'s correspondent for Zimbabwe since 1994, writes beautifully and bravely, telling this true story with an impassioned sincerity that is both moving and contagious. The political and cultural backdrop since pre-Rhodesian times is vividly depicted, coming powerfully alive through two singular characters: a privileged white farmer, and the black woman who becomes his family's nanny; both strong-minded, brave individuals; neither morally irreproachable; neither one simply a victim or hero. Lamb follows each of them from childhood through the erratic, explosive events of Zimbabwe's recent past, to a final dramatic convergence of the two lives which shows the pressure of conflicting lifestyles and mentalities. Highlighting the fundamental, perhaps insoluble, conflicts which persist in Zimbabwe, this is an outstanding and important book from a committed and critical mind.

Contact Wounds: A War Surgeon's Education

Jonathan Kaplan
Picador, £8.99

From his native apartheid-torn South Africa to the horrors of 21st-century Iraq, Jonathan Kaplan seeks out conflict situations and finds inner peace and clarity in extremis. Recognised as a specialist in the emerging field of conflict and catastrophe medicine and equipped with a strong sense of justice, he moves from cause to cause, exposing corruption in Madagascar and South Africa but reserving his strongest criticisms for the government of Margaret Thatcher and coalition ineptitude in Iraq. Kaplan writes in a clear style imparting pared-down histories of complex situations and lyrical descriptions of exotic locations. When describing front-line medical procedures he is graphic but never gratuitous, giving the reader a unique insight into modern warfare, and showing the difference one brave man can make.

Eleanor Fitzsimons

Oracle Bones: A Journey Between China and the West

Peter Hessler
John Murray, £9.99

Peter Hessler's is one of the more sophisticated of the recent books about modern China. The Beijing-based correspondent for the *New Yorker* and author of *River Town*, having become disillusioned with the glib phrases and soundbites that suffice for much of modern commentary about China, travels across this vast country meeting some of the hundreds of millions of migrants, including some of his former students, who are leaving the countryside for the soulless factory cities – the greatest migration of humans in peacetime. Interweaving their stories with that of Chen Mengjia, a scholar of oracle bone inscriptions – the earliest form of Chinese writing – who committed suicide during the Cultural Revolution, Hessler has produced a highly personal and fascinating blend of history and journalism, an intriguing glimpse of China.

Tim Fanning

Left-Hand Turn Around the World

David Wolman
Da Capo Press, £8.99

Reading this I was reminded of a southpaw friend who wondered if it were coincidence that the word right has two very distinctive meanings? Right-left (political),

right-wrong (moral). Her mother once complained to the Irish Hockey Union that her daughter had been discriminated against because she couldn't find a left-handed hockey stick. This book is especially for the 10 per cent of the world's population that are ciotógs – except Japan, where officially it's only 2 per cent, due to pressure on the other 8 per cent to conform. Self-confessed obsessive southpaw David Wolman engages even this rightie, as he sets out to explain the world of left-handers and left-handedness, alternating between serious scientific research, past and present, and some of the more wacky notions of what makes the world of the ciotóg so different.

Martin Noonan

