

TOP FIVE BIOGRAPHIES

- 1 **HANNS AND RUDOLF**
Thomas Harding
- 2 **THE KABUL BEAUTY SCHOOL**
Deborah Rodriguez
- 3 **DAD'S WAR**
Chris Tarrant
- 4 **THE GREAT ESCAPER**
Simon Pearson
- 5 **A SPY AMONG FRIENDS**
Ben Macintyre

THIS WEEK'S BESTSELLERS SUPPLIED BY WATERSTONES

Hundreds of years of hurt

MEDICINE THE STORY OF PAIN
By Joanna Bourke
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
£20
REVIEWED BY LEYLA SANAI

Professor Joanna Bourke's ninth book tackles the history of pain, and is meticulously researched, interesting, and well written. Dr Peter Mere Latham wrote in the mid-19th century that "every man smarts with his own pain".

The acceptance that if a patient says they feel pain then they are suffering is one that is still a basic tenet of pain control.

Bourke examines some of the reasons why it is not easy to communicate pain. Sometimes language is inadequate to express it. Talking about pain may remind the individual of their suffering. Patients may be reluctant to distress care-givers, a sentiment recognised by the economist Adam Smith. Those in pain often spurn communication. The Scottish philosopher Dugald Stewart believed, in 1828, that expressing pain was rude. Bourke looks at the stigma associated with some kinds of pain, especially venereal disease, and, to a lesser extent, chronic illness, where the source of pain may not be visible.

Bourke discusses how in the past, pain was seen as God's will, with sufferers being told that their pain was due to improper behaviour. In a chapter on diagnosis, Bourke mentions how sometimes any diagnosis is better than none, and cites the example of Henry James's sister, Alice, who had suffered pain for 20 years and was relieved when she was finally diagnosed with heart problems and incurable breast cancer.

There is a fascinating section on doctors judging patients. In the past, doctors assumed patients from other cultures could not experience pain as acutely as the British could. One doctor even suggested that British women experienced more pain menstruating than African or Asian women did in childbirth. There are anecdotes that will raise eyebrows or snorts, such as one doctor's pronouncement that pregnant British women should abstain from physical activity - except for housework.

There is a chapter dedicated to the subject of the insensitivity of some doctors. This is partly due to the maintenance of professional detachment. Bourke is frequently entertaining, as when discussing the 17th-century belief in an Organ of Destructiveness, purported to be particularly large in surgeons and butchers.

My only quibble is that in the introduction, Bourke occasionally lapses into the language of academia, and risks losing readers. But on the whole, this is a compelling history of a great source of human misery.

A rebel's life, from urban Waltons to drag queens

MEMOIR A PARALLEL LIFE
By Bonnie Greer
ARCADIA BOOKS
£14.99
REVIEWED BY JOY LO DICO



In this, Bonnie Greer's memoir, she recalls hearing DJ Herb Kent "the Cool Gent" on the radio as a young woman in Chicago in the 1960s, and he did something she had not heard before: he talked over the records to analyse the black community's predicament with Sam Cooke playing in the background. It was the first beats of rap.

Greer's account of her early life - this book only takes us up to her arrival in New York in the 1980s where she goes on to study playwriting at the Actors Studio with Elia Kazan - is pegged to the culture that shaped her into adulthood. This memoir is her rap, and behind her is the soundtrack that seeped into her as she was growing up in Chicago, from the hopeful days of the civil rights movement before the assassinations of JFK and Martin Luther King, through to the radicalisation of the late 1960s, in which she rebelled.

The early teenage years belong to the chanteuse Laura Nyro and Burt Bacharach's muse Dionne Warwick. By the time Greer is in the full bloom of her politics, it is Grace Slick singing the line "Feed your head" in "White Rabbit" as her friends smoke pot and replace their hope with anger.

The playwright and critic, who eventually settled in London and became deputy chair of the British Museum, sets the scene with her own parents' romance. Her father is a Second World War black vet who danced her mother, a young woman fascinated by the British Royal Family, into marriage. In almost comic detail Greer recounts the parallels in timing between their courtship and that of Prince Philip and Princess Elizabeth, and the birth of Bonnie, their first child, on almost the same day as



Bonnie Greer's graduation photograph, 1967

the first royal baby. She is named Bonnie after Prince Charlie.

So begins the hard grind towards respectability. Her father takes up a second job as a TV repair man. Her mother, the great beauty of the family, performs the endless rotation of chores required to

'Greer struggles her way out of a regime of hair-straightening'

keep a family of seven children in food and clean clothing. And, up until her teens, Bonnie is a picture of a good Catholic girl in starched uniform and white socks. It is an urban Waltons, and though by no means easy for a black family in Chicago, it was at least preferable to the South where violence against blacks was still common. The greatest scandal in her early life is when a female neighbour, who Greer's mother disapproves of for being a little loose, has a regular gentleman caller pull up in a pink truck in the afternoons and practise

his blues. "And what kind of name is that - Muddy Waters?" she sneers.

It's near enough apple pie, but underneath it is a teenage angst that not only grips Bonnie as she approaches that age, but also the post-war civil rights movement that has grown impatient with Martin Luther King's passivity. Greer struggles her way out of a regime of hair-straightening and propriety. Her younger sister Leila is heading towards marriage and a happy family life, while Bonnie's hair has gone wild. By the time she gets to university, she is leading an increasingly erratic life working in a topless bar and sleeping in strangers' houses. Her old school friends have melted away, and she dons short, military-style jackets and finds herself a role in the black power movement.

By this point she's sleeping with white men - her black male colleagues have become brothers in the political struggle and so de-sexualised. But there is also a creeping contempt for the benevolent white community who espouse the black cause. Greer casually recounts stealing money from a white girl working within the movement, a history of racial repression being repaid to her in small change. Her friends become drag queens, her own life is always pushing back one frontier or another.

Interspersed are awkward visits to a home from which she has become distant, for which she has little nostalgia. Years later, her mother admits to Bonnie that she was trying to keep her quiet and tamed "or the forces that crushed all free, wild black women would crush her eldest child". Her mother did not succeed.

Greer opens the book having traced her genetic roots, an incomplete lineage with threads lost somewhere over the Atlantic as her ancestors were moved here and there as slaves. This memoir vibrantly tells of another breach, this time from the 1960s and not a genetic breach but a cultural one. It is messy, drug-fuelled - though she doesn't take more than one puff of a joint - and inconsistent, but it turns out to be liberation from the deadlock of her parents' generation.

It is the story of a journey deliberately and bravely taken against all expectations.



PHOTOGRAPHY

THEM
By Rosalind Fox Solomon
MACK £25

Rosalind Fox Solomon spent five months in Israel and the West Bank during 2010-2011, working in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Nahariya, Bethlehem and Jenin. Travelling by local bus with commuters, she photographed Jewish teenagers at Purim, Christians at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and Ghanaian pilgrims at the Mount of Olives. The photographs contain numerous interwoven narratives, some with particular political charge.

Her photographs are informed by an acute sensitivity to lives conditioned by race and religion, ethnicity and location. Through

a cacophonous image sequence, Solomon articulates the turmoil of her experience of the region. She says: "I felt the tension. The stress... I wanted to express the chaos and pressure that was around me."

Punctuating the images are fragments of text - amusing and frightening background conversations, recorded in Solomon's journal; the texts reveal the humanity of each person photographed, a window on to lives conditioned by violence and uncertainty.

Solomon, an American artist based in New York, has had work shown in nearly 30 solo exhibitions, and in the collections of more than 50 museums globally.



JD Salinger 'described what it was to be young and at war with the world'
HULTON ARCHIVE

boss seemed forbidding, but Rakoff's memoir is not the literary version of *The Devil Wears Prada*. The aloof culture of the office was offset by getting acquainted with the agency's famous client. Salinger was friendly over the phone and, later, in person, though chronically deaf.

His fan mail landed in staggering volumes, much of it from teenagers and frequently resembling letters to agony aunts. Even had he wished to, he could never have dealt with this industrial quantity of angst. Rakoff was mesmerised by the letters and when she got round to reading Salinger's works herself, she became an ardent fan.

Joanna Rakoff, meanwhile, arrived in New York in the mid-1990s, fresh from university, as a fledgling poet. Like so many before and since, she became side-tracked. In her case, the detour was a spell at a literary agency as an assistant. Still, at least the agency was prestigious and long-established, though there were attendant disadvantages. The premises were dimly lit, not to say sepulchral; more crucially, there were no computers to lighten the administrative load.

Worse still, and perhaps predictably, her

MEMOIR MY SALINGER YEAR
By Joanna Rakoff
BLOOMSBURY CIRCUS
£16.99
REVIEWED BY PETER CARTY



JD Salinger was one of the most intriguing of modern writers. He was a publisher's dream, an author whose readership extended to enormous numbers of people who do not normally buy books. And despite this massive popularity, the quality of his writing remains mostly undisputed. The Salinger legend was fuelled further by his reclusiveness; as he shunned visitors and ignored mail, the enigma surrounding him grew steadily larger.

In the shadow of a legend

Slow-burn tension in a split narrative of revenge

FICTION HER
By Harriet Lane
WEIDENFELD & NICHOLSON £12.99
REVIEWED BY RACHEL HORE



Harriet Lane, author of *Alys Always*, specialises in scheming women. Her new novel of psychological suspense asks how you can tell when your friend is really your enemy. Emma Nash, pregnant, struggling with a toddler, believes Nina Bremner to be a kind stranger when she turns up on Emma's doorstep in genteel north London to return a lost wallet. She has no idea that Nina spotted her in the street earlier, recognised her from an undisclosed incident many years before, and stole the wallet from her bag as an excuse to make contact.

The structure of this novel is both its strength and its weakness, for what happens next is told from Emma and Nina's alternating points of view. On the plus side this conveys valuable insight, but it also means that some of the same events are described twice. The author is so skilled at edge-of-the-seat suspense, however, that even repeated accounts of mundane chores acquire tension.

Emma is touched and grateful, if a little overawed, by the way that Nina proceeds to take her under her wing, rescuing Emma's little boy one day after he wanders off, inviting her to lunch, babysitting for her. Only the reader sees how Nina is manipulating Emma, inflicting little cruelties on the young family, worming her way into a position of trust.

She's a clever creation, this villainess, like a deadly spider waiting to pounce. A moderately successful landscape artist, Nina is married to her second husband, the urbane, older Charles. On the surface she is poised, elegant, her life under perfect control, her only apparent source of anxiety being Sophie, her narcissistic 17-year-old daughter. Underneath the cool exterior,



Can you tell if a friend is really an enemy?

however, she's a seething mass of resentment and fixates on Emma as the cause.

Emma, her unwitting victim, is not Nina's type at all. Through her we are given a vivid portrait of modern middle-class motherhood. She's the same age as Nina, fortyish, but her life is so different. She and her husband, Ben, live on a shoestring and she looks back wistfully to her days working in television as she copes with dirty nappies, toddler tears and stressful visits to the park.

Emma has a pleasing eye for social satire. A weekend visit to her house-proud in-laws is a marvellously funny setpiece, as is a dinner party with an unfortunate mix of guests. Although their voices are usually sufficiently distinct, occasionally Emma's takes on a note of cynicism too similar to Nina's.

While Nina paints intense abstract scenes of Kent and broods enigmatically on her traumatic past there, her parents' divorce, her subsequent unhappy early adulthood, she plots revenge.

Her invitation to the Nashes to stay in Nina's father's holiday home in France is gratefully received by Emma, but Ben is right to be suspicious. One unanswered question keeps the reader gripping that seat-edge: what on earth did Emma do to upset Nina all those years ago?

The answer and the novel's outcome do not disappoint.

Like Holden Caulfield, Rakoff has an entertaining eye for potential phones. Outside work, she went out with Don, a writer; his penny-pinching lifestyle and emotional disengagement seemed to reflect a chilling self-centredness. Whether his lengthy and challenging novel could take flight was unclear; in contrast, Rakoff's first steps to get her poetry published were successful.

Here she writes with springy energy, but is always revealing. A bonus is a portrait of Brooklyn in its proto-hipster era, when young women set off to work in vintage

dresses to meet by evening in the borough's meagre stock of happening venues. It was a boho milieu that featured deflating impoverishment: Rakoff heated her apartment by leaving her oven on and the door open.

She delivers an elegant account of her coming of age in the shadow of Salinger, a writer whose achievement was to describe what it is like to be young and at war with the world with such unerring veracity that so many of his readers thought he had captured their inner lives with omniscient fidelity. Her memoir is a small jewel.