

Book Reviews

The Lizard and Other Stories

Michael Bryson

Chaudiere Books, Paperback - \$18

Michael Bryson's most recent short story collection, *The Lizard and Other Stories*, is a quick read, but definitely not light. It is a haunting work of hardship, adultery, neuroses, and passion.

The collection is told from a variety of perspectives. Each tale offers insight into the tortured minds of the protagonists as they struggle with their demons, be it an aging parent, a troubling revelation about a loved one, or even an imagined lizard taking up residence in someone's stomach. Though these issues can be irritating, the reader is drawn in by the universality of the characters' heartbreak.

One piece in particular resonates with the reader: "The Book of Job," the story of a man's love affair with Crow, the teacher and trickster of Aboriginal folklore. Told in the traditional folklore style with a modern setting, the story is both beautiful and unsettling.

reviewed by Jacquelyn Bester

Bloodletting & Miraculous Cures

Vincent Lam

Random House, Paperback - \$17.95

Vincent Lam, Toronto emergency doctor turned novelist turned Giller Prize winner for best Canadian fiction, takes readers behind the scenes of Canadian physicians in SARS era Toronto with his breakthrough novel *Bloodletting & Miraculous Cures*.

The reader is led through a series of interconnected stories about different characters in their medical careers. Lam's stories touch on sensitive issues such as child molestation, mental illness, substance abuse, and interracial marriage.

While writing a novel in an innovative, intelligent, and highly creative style, Lam sacrifices much of the story. In many cases, the reader does not know if a character is even alive come the end of the novel, not to mention whether any conclusions have been drawn concerning the characters' careers or personal relationships. Though you get the feeling things are missing, you have to admire Lam for an experimental first novel.

reviewed by Mike Lipsius

Kanata

Don Gillmor

Viking, Hardcover - \$34

Don Gillmor's latest novel, *Kanata*, the story of Canada's development from 1759 to 1967, is his first attempt at both adult and historical fiction, and is decidedly ambitious in its scope. Half of the novel concerns Michael Mountain Horse's life from childhood to near-retirement, and the other half focuses on major players in Canada's history, including Wolfe and Montcalm, John A. MacDonald, Louis Riel, Mackenzie King, and Diefenbaker. Gillmor presents a fascinating take on the actions of these men, revealing the selfish motivations and darker sides of their characters that are easily forgotten in times of patriotism.

Michael's time in the First World War, brief stint as a Hollywood actor, enlistment in the Spanish Civil War, and choice to go to McGill University in his fifties make for a compelling story on their own. The grander narrative of Canadian anti-heroes seems to divert from the main narrative and is perhaps too heavy-handed in its message. Still, *Kanata* is a good read and a great first novel from veteran writer Gillmor.

reviewed by Brendan Flattery

The Bishop's Man

Linden MacIntyre

Random House, Hardcover - \$32

Linden MacIntyre's *The Bishop's Man* adopts a new perspective in the examination of the Catholic priest scandals. Told from the point of view of a priest whose career has been devoted to covering up the scandals, MacIntyre manages to show the damaging effect that exposure to this kind of atrocity can have on everyone involved.

In order to remove himself from the press scrutiny, Father MacAskill returns home to a quiet east coast parish. but soon discovers that you can't hide from your problems as MacIntyre weaves both Father MacAskill's past and present into the body of the narrative. MacIntyre manages to make the pace of the novel quick and fairly easy to read without losing any of the gravitas that the novel calls for. Well deserving of the Giller prize, *The Bishop's Man* is a must-read for anyone who appreciates a well-told story with an ending that may not be happy but is somehow fitting given the overall tone of the novel.

reviewed by Dan Sharpe