



for his fragile friend. Roth is up against poverty, a demanding addiction to alcohol and corrosive bitterness towards Zweig, who has a secure cash flow, a dependable wife-stroke-typist and an easy bonhomie. Ultimately, however, each is drawn to his own destruction.

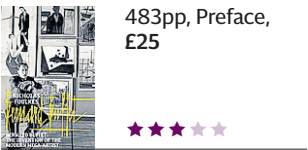
Roth's last novella, *The Legend of the Holy Drinker* (1939), reveals the attempts made by an alcoholic vagrant to regain his dignity and honour a debt. His final collapse in the same year was precipitated by hearing the news that the playwright Ernst Toller, another Ostend exile, had hanged himself in New York.

In February 1942, hearing

that Singapore had fallen to the Japanese, Zweig took an overdose of sedative, prompting André Maurois to write of "the shame of a civilisation that can create a world in which a Stefan Zweig cannot live".

Zweig and Roth were zealous spokesmen for the war-hating world conscience. The tragedy of both their lives, for so long jackbooted into historical oblivion, is highlighted by Weidemann's gift for subtle pathos and the comic cameo. His translator, Carol Brown Janeway, retains this graceful dexterity. For such a slim book to convey with such poignancy the extinction of a generation of "Great Europeans" is a triumph.

**BERNARD BUFFET**  
by Nicholas Foulkes



483pp, Preface, £25

★★★★★

In 1955, barely 21, Bernard Buffet established himself as the leading French painter of the day, his style compared to Picasso. So addicted was he to painting that he flooded the market with his own works, leading to a crash in value. Foulkes's biography is best on these art market vagaries, leaving much about Buffet's personality and motives obscure. *Tom Payne*

**THE HIGH MOUNTAINS OF PORTUGAL**  
by Yann Martel



329pp, Canongate, £16.99, ebook £8.54

★★★★★

To write one novel with an animal in a starring role may be regarded as a curiosity; to write three starts to look like monomania. After the success of *Life of Pi* (2001) and the relative failure of *Beatrice and Virgil* (2010), about a donkey, Yann Martel has stuck to his guns: the three sections of his new novel are linked by the motif of a chimpanzee. Oddly, it works. *Sarah Crown*

**Inside a perverted mind**  
Cassie Davies hails a bold novel that traces the thoughts of a sex offender

**MARTIN JOHN**  
by Anakana Schofield



256pp, And Other Stories, £10

★★★★★

The protagonist of *Martin John*, Anakana Schofield's second novel, already shortlisted for the Giller Prize in her native Canada, lives in an ordinary mid-terraced house in south London and works night shifts as, presumably, a security guard, making "circuits" around a car park and mopping floors.

During the day (he barely sleeps), Martin John prowls around Euston station, the Tube, shops – any manner of public space – molesting young girls and women. He is unhinged, shameless in his repeated acts: Schofield writes without judgment, making her new novel an exceptional, albeit uncomfortable, reading into the mind of a paranoid, compulsive sex offender.

The deconstruction of Martin John's mental health is the book's central event. Using free indirect style, Schofield gradually unwinds the obsessions, incessant repetitions and depraved thoughts of her protagonist. Formally unconventional, the novel moves between vignettes and paragraphs of varying lengths, an unpredictable scattering which mimics Martin John's mind. He rails against

"Meddlers" and severely dislikes reading words that begin with the letter "P", but lists them incessantly: "POSSIBLE, PAISLEY, POLITICAL, POLITICIAN..." He is obsessed with circuits and refrains, following a strict tea "dunking routine" in which "he anoints every corner of the table" with his moistened tea bag.

Compulsive behaviour is also visible in his neurotic mother, who is in denial, and turns a blind eye to her son's indecent sexual behaviour at home. Her presence is felt throughout the novel and is disturbingly entwined with Martin John's molestations. "It's her voice. But it's his head. Always her voice in his head"; "IF MAM TOLD HIM TO DO IT/ IT WAS RIGHT/ RIGHT?" Her character,

**Forceful:**  
Anakana Schofield



distorted through the mind of Martin John, remains inscrutable for the reader: has her son's behaviour driven her towards her neurosis? Or has Martin John acquired some of his mother's traits? Towards the

**Martin John's mother turns a blind eye**

end, we discover that she has 11 teapots, filled with paper slips upon which she has scrawled her sins.

The narrative skilfully loops back on itself, filling in earlier gaps. In the process, the extent of Martin John's mental instability is revealed. Schofield shows her skill through precise, singular and forceful prose. Her words vividly capture the feelings and

urges of Martin John: of a woman on the Underground, he is desperate "to smear along her. A light buttering. A smudge"; he watches a 12-year-old girl in the food aisle "squish-/ squeeze-/ squelch-" the packets of food, mesmerised.

Although Schofield does not hold back on suggestive language, she does withhold explanation: some obscenities and patterns of behaviour neither Martin John, nor his mother, can bring themselves to address. "There are simply going to be things we won't know," Schofield writes in the opening pages. "It's how it is. As it is in life must it be unto page."



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