

# books

## DARK MATTER Juli Zeh

(Vintage, £7.99)

Winner of the German Book Award and the Rauris Literature Award amongst several others, Juli Zeh's latest novel, set by the Black Forest, tells the story of Sebastian and Oskar, friends since their days studying physics at university where both were



considered future Nobel Prize candidates. Since their studies, the two friends' lives and scientific views have taken different paths and tension between them is high when Oskar returns from his prestigious research post in Geneva to visit Sebastian, who has chosen marriage and fatherhood as an exit strategy.

The philosophical thriller takes a more serious turn when, following a heated argument, Sebastian's car, which has his son inside it, vanishes while Sebastian goes into a service

station. When a voice on the other end of the phone tells him that he must kill a man to get his son back, the only person he can safely turn to is Oskar.

Zeh's intelligent crime novel breaks convention by revealing many of the answers early on but masterfully the author manages to maintain suspense and surprise, none of which appears to be lost in the English translation by Christine Lo.

ANTONIA CHARLESWORTH



## Off the shelf

### PIRATES OF BARBARY

Adrian Tinniswood

(Vintage, £9.99)

Historian, educationalist and pirate obsessive Adrian Tinniswood sheds light on the most fantastical characters in history through tales of bravery, brutality and betrayal. The book draws shocking similarities with the modern-day stories of piracy, bringing new levels of importance to this comprehensive historic insight.

### IN THE BEGINNING

Karen Armstrong

(Vintage, £8.99)

Leading religious commentator Karen Armstrong provides a new interpretation of the book of Genesis. She brings the ancient tales into the 21st century by assessing cowardice, the struggle with evil and the importance of understanding our innermost selves.

### FOR THE LOVE OF A SON

Jean Sasson

(Bantam, £7.99)

Sasson's latest novel is as sharp-eyed and compassionate as her previous, which chronicled life behind the veil for Muslim women. *For the Love of a Son* tells the true story of Maryam, a feisty woman suppressed by Afghan society. The book details Maryam's quest for her son, stolen from her by her abusive husband.

### GET ME OUT OF HERE

Henry Sutton

(Vintage, £7.99)

In what's been dubbed as the first credit crunch novel, it is easy to identify with protagonist Matt Freeman as he becomes increasingly frustrated with the consumerist society he lives in. But when Matt's life spins murderously out of control, Sutton creates a chilling contemporary horror story.

ANTONIA CHARLESWORTH

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## Author Q&A: Barbara Trapido

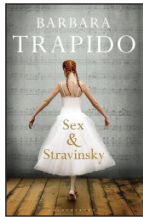
### SEX AND STRAVINSKY

(Bloomsbury, £18.99)

South Africa-born Barbara Trapido has written seven novels, including *Brother of the More Famous Jack* (which won the Whitbread prize) and *2010's Sex and Stravinsky*. Renowned for her humorous, choreographed tales of crossed paths and complex backstories, three of her novels have been shortlisted for the Whitbread Noel Award. Her latest novel is set in the mid-90s and weaves character's emotions and plot lines in a beguiling manner.

**Sex and Stravinsky's characters and plot span several continents. As someone who emigrated to Britain are you driven to tell global stories?**

There is a certain interest in cross-cultural alliances in my books – transatlantic, French-Italian – and since the 1994 regime change in South Africa I've been quite drawn to the African continent. I suppose there's a bit of a global preoccupation, partly, no doubt, because both my own and my husband's backgrounds are rather mixed. But also the global reach of people's lives now is exciting and enriching but concurrently alarming, cruel, unpredictable, insecure and hideously unequal. It makes for both opportunities and very complex dilemmas.



**You're known for your symmetrical, balletic structures. Are your plots fully formed before you start writing?**

Absolutely not. I never plan my books. I stare into the dark in a sort of trance state and wait for the murk in the back of my mind to yield up a bunch of characters, then stalk them and eavesdrop on them and write down what they say to each other. After a while I begin to notice certain patterns and preoccupations emerging, which I can start choreographing, so to speak. I am rather in love with patterns and symmetries, but I discover them as I go along.

**You seem to enjoy exploring people's multiple faces and roles, in their families, at work and socially...**

Yes, I'm very aware that none of us has a completely static identity. We appear different in different contexts and with different people, so it's interesting to explore those contexts. I'm also not in the business of being judgmental, so it pleases me to discover that we are all in a sense unreliable narrators: one of my characters might give the reader a negative impression of another but a third character may provide a different, more positive version of that person. I'm intrigued by that.

**You've written about growing up under apartheid. Has writing helped you deal with life experiences?**

My other books are determinedly made-up, but *Frankie and Stankie* did use

real-life stories and people and writing it was a terrific release. I think I was impelled to write it because, after the regime change, I felt able to confront the apartheid state I'd put behind me when I left for London aged 21 in the early sixties – for three decades I'd sort of blocked it out.

**How important is comedy to your writing?**

Very – comedy is a better form of tragedy. True comedy is just as open-eyed at taking on everything that's sad, cruel and terrible about human life, but the energy and dexterity of the creator can make something so brilliantly balanced that the reader or audience feels uplifted. It's like a troupe of acrobats balanced on a pyramid of chairs. You know that the moment of celebration is going to be shortlived but it's inspiring all the same. Doing it is like tightrope walking – I love it.

**You read from your work at literature festivals. Does your writing benefit from meeting your readers?**

I love meeting the people who read my books, it's really encouraging, because when I'm writing it's a lone, rather introverted existence. I'm not, then, thinking of my readers, but after the book is done the extrovert in me takes over. I like the performance aspect.

It's also a spur when you become aware that people really want you to get on and do another book. And I think such events definitely broaden people's reading; it's really nice for book-lovers to gather and trade enthusiasms.

