

## best-sellers

## THE NEW YORK TIMES

## NON-FICTION

- 1 IN AN INSTANT** by Lee and Bob Woodruff  
The aftermath of ABC co-anchor Bob Woodruff's traumatic brain injury in Iraq last year.
- 2 I FEEL BAD ABOUT MY NECK** by Nora Ephron  
A witty look at ageing from the novelist and screenwriter of *When Harry Met Sally*.
- 3 THE AUDACITY OF HOPE** by Barack Obama  
An Illinois junior senator proposes that Americans move beyond their political divisions.
- 4 A LONG WAY GONE** by Ishmael Beah  
A former child soldier from Sierra Leone describes his drug-crazed killing spree and his return to humanity.
- 5 INFIDEL** by Ayaan Hirsi Ali  
Memoir of an ex-parliamentarian who fled Somalia for the Netherlands to escape a forced marriage.
- 6 SOMEBODY'S GOTTA SAY IT** by Neal Boortz  
A radio talk-show host discusses government, poverty, prayer in schools, race relations, gun control and other topics.
- 7 THE HARDWARE DIARIES** by Mick Foley  
The former professional wrestling champion discusses his fame and life at World Wrestling Entertainment.
- 8 MARLEY & ME** by John Grogan  
A newspaper columnist and his wife learn some life lessons from their neurotic dog.
- 9 THE INNOCENT MAN** by John Grisham  
John Grisham's first non-fiction book examines the case of a man sentenced to death for a crime he didn't commit.
- 10 THE JESUS FAMILY TOMB** by Simcha Jacobovici and Charles Pellegrino  
The discovery of ossuaries that, the authors say, may contain the remains of Jesus, Mary Magdalene and their son.

## FICTION

- 1 NINETEEN MINUTES** by Jodi Picoult  
The aftermath of a high school shooting reveals the fault lines in a small New Hampshire town.
- 2 WHITETHORN WOODS** by Maeve Binchy  
A proposed highway threatens the existence of a religious shrine in a rural Irish village.
- 3 SISTERS** by Danielle Steele  
After a family tragedy, four sisters with very different lives decide to share a home in Manhattan.
- 4 SHOPAHOLIC & BABY** by Sophie Kinsella  
Becky is pregnant, and the obstetrician turns out to be her husband's ex-girlfriend.
- 5 STEP ON A CRACK** by James Patterson and Michael Ledwidge  
A detective raising 10 children alone must rescue 34 high-level hostages.
- 6 INNOCENT IN DEATH** by J.D. Robb  
Eve Dallas investigates the murder of an apparently inoffensive private-school history teacher; by Nora Roberts, writing pseudonymously.
- 7 THE DOUBLE BIND** by Chris Bohjalian  
A young woman who works at a homeless shelter struggles to understand mysterious photos taken by a recently deceased resident.
- 8 THE WATCHMAN** by Robert Crais  
A former Los Angeles police officer becomes the bodyguard of a troubled heiress marked for death.
- 9 FOR ONE MORE DAY** by Mitch Albom  
A troubled man gets a last chance to reconnect and mend relations with his dead mother.
- 10 PLUM LOVIN'** by Janet Evanovich  
A mysterious man in Stephanie Plum's life helps her track down a matchmaker who skipped bail.

US hardback best-sellers list, published March 18

## THE SUNDAY TIMES

## NON-FICTION

- 1 WELCOME TO MY WORLD** by Coleen McLoughlin  
Fashion and beauty tips from a celebrity industry insider.
- 2 THE MUMS' BOOK** by Alison Maloney  
A humorous handbook on the ups and downs of being a mother.
- 3 THE DANGEROUS BOOK FOR BOYS** by Conn Iggulden and Hal Iggulden  
A tongue-in-cheek manual for boys of all ages.
- 4 DAMAGED** by Cathy Glass  
When a foster carer takes in a young child it becomes apparent she has been abused by a paedophile ring.
- 5 THE GOD DELUSION** by Richard Dawkins  
The Oxford scientist asserts that belief in God is irrational and that religion has done great harm in the world.
- 6 COULD IT BE FOREVER?** by David Cassidy  
An autobiography by the 1970s pop singer recounts his years of stardom.
- 7 THE SOUND OF LAUGHTER** by Peter Kay  
The humorous autobiography of a popular British comedian.
- 8 OI: THE BOOK OF GENERAL IGNORANCE** by Stephen Fry  
Compendium of popular misconceptions, misunderstandings and common mistakes culled from the hit BBC show.
- 9 OUR LITTLE SECRET** by Duncan Fairhurst  
Memoir of the struggle to come to terms with having been abused as a child.
- 10 PURPLE RONNIE'S LITTLE BOOK FOR A LOVELY MUM** by Giles Andreae  
Thoughts dedicated to making mothers feel special.

## FICTION

- 1 THE GOOD HUSBAND OF ZEBRA DRIVE** by Alexander McCall Smith  
Mr J.L.B. Matekoni looks into the case of an errant husband. But can a man investigate such matters as competently as one of the ladies? A No 1 Ladies Detective Agency novel.
- 2 SHOPAHOLIC & BABY** by Sophie Kinsella  
Becky Bloomwood is pregnant and house-hunting with her husband, Luke. She couldn't be happier until his ex-girlfriend turns up.
- 3 THE LONER** by Josephine Cox  
After a tragic accident involving his mother, and the disappearance of his father, young Davie flees his home town of Blackburn, unsure of what the future holds.
- 4 SISTERS** by Danielle Steele  
After a family tragedy, four sisters with very different lives decide to share a home in Manhattan.
- 5 DARK WATCH** by Clive Cussler and Jack Du Brul  
Juan Cabrillo and his motley crew aboard the spy ship Oregon trail pirates targeting giant commercial freighters.
- 6 STEP ON A CRACK** by James Patterson and Michael Ledwidge  
Detective Michael Bennett faces his biggest challenge when guests at the New York funeral of a former first lady are taken hostage.
- 7 THE DEATH OF DALZIEL** by Reginald Hill  
When Superintendent Andy Dalziel is caught in an explosion that leaves him at death's door it falls on DCI Peter Pascoe to seek justice for him.
- 8 THE STEEP APPROACH TO GARBADALE** by Iain Banks  
Dark family secrets, a long-lost love affair and a lucrative gaming business lie at the heart of Iain Banks' latest novel.
- 9 THE SECRET LIFE OF A SLUMMY MUMMY** by Fiona Neil  
For Lucy Sweeney, motherhood isn't all ashtanga yoga and Cath Kidston prints in this novel about the dilemmas of modern marriage.
- 10 BURNING BRIGHT** by Tracy Chevalier  
Children Jem Kellaway and Maggie Butterfield become entangled with William Blake in Georgian London.

British hardback best-sellers list, published March 18

## MEMOIR



**Tuesday's Child**  
by Kathy Evans  
Bantam, A\$32.95  
★★★★☆  
Antonella Gambotto-Burke

Kathy Evans believes every life has its defining moment, and the birth of her daughter Caoimhe, a baby with Down's syndrome, is hers. "What do you say to a mother in a bipolar state of joy and grief?" she asks those confronted by women such as herself. "In cases of stillbirth, there is the solid indisputable evidence of a body; lifeless, but real ... But when the baby is born alive, albeit disabled, there is confusion."

*Tuesday's Child*, Evans' memoir of her experience, began as an affecting and award-winning newspaper story that evolved into a series. Although

her prose can be beautiful, it's her perspective that compels. Unlike those who elect to bear a child with Down's, Evans was sideswiped by biology.

"At 11 weeks, we were offered the routine screening tests for Down's syndrome," she writes. "We said no. I am not a religious person but over the years I've developed some sort of godless spirituality, a belief in the human condition and all its frailties ... She could have had two heads and we wouldn't have cared." But she did care, and *Tuesday's Child* is the evidence: a furore of love, bedazzlement and ambivalence.

When she first encountered her third daughter, she was startled. "Caoimhe [pronounced Keeva] ... was born within her amniotic sac, her face squashed up against the membrane like a doll wrapped in cellophane." In many ways, this memory is emblematic of their relationship, for no matter how vociferously Evans argues for the rights of those with Down's and records

her hot aesthetic appreciation of her daughter, Down's is, for her, the membrane against which Caoimhe's identity is forever squashed.

"When I look at her I see every row, every spitted heated word, every flaw in our relationship encompassed in her mal-assembled body; like a biblical scapegoat her mottled skin is the woven cloth of our failings ... [My husband] has not indulged in secret conversations with a child who turned out to be a mere illusion, just a fantasy of the mind, who vanished the moment this changeling came, as callously as a cold-hearted lover. Like Alice in Wonderland, I was conned; I believed I was carrying a baby but on closer inspection it was a pig that lay squawking in the Duchess' arms."

Clawing at a precipice, Evans fought to retain control – over her emotions, over her daughter's future, over life itself. Like the well-meaning doctor who, when Caoimhe was a baby, told Evans that she could grow up to work

in "a garden centre", Evans impaled herself on projections.

In the second half of the book, Evans steadies herself, and the result is powerful. "Down's syndrome strikes at the heart of society's two most valued attributes: looks and intelligence," she notes, raising exigent questions about our idea of what it is to be human. Added to this are questions about the relationship of disability to that which we understand to be normality, questions about the automatic association of termination with diagnoses of Down's, and – importantly – questions about the role of love in the decisions we make about our children. Never sufficiently detached to conclusively argue her case, Evans nonetheless succeeds in stirring indignation at the spiritual poverty of our bioethicists.

For Evans, "ending the life of a foetus with Down's syndrome is ethically different from abortion in general; I see it as eugenics disguised as

choice, where, in an impossibly short space of time, women find themselves in the role of society's unwitting gatekeepers, deciding who is of value and who isn't." She points out that those with Down's can paint, sculpt, act, dance, and sing, and that yes, they can also be profoundly intellectually disabled, but only in 10 to 15 per cent of cases. The vast majority have mild to moderate impairment; some even have a normal IQ. And, as medical professionals know, Down's diagnoses are not always correct; mistakes are made, and healthy babies killed.

*Tuesday's Child* may not be the most measured book on the subject – Martha Beck's *Expecting Adam* is far more comprehensive in its scope – but it's an important document, deep and lyrical and heartfelt, and makes essential reading for those interested in evaluating their spin on human worth.

*Tuesday's Child* is available from [dymocks.com.au](http://dymocks.com.au)



Photo: Oliver Tsang

## INDIAN FICTION



**The Peacock Throne**  
by Sujit Saraf  
Sceptre, HK\$208  
★★★★☆  
Manreet Sodhi Someshwar

Sujit Saraf has his head in the clouds. During the day he works on satellite missions, at night he writes fiction. *The Peacock Throne*, his sprawling fourth novel, opens in Delhi on a November day in 1984 when Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi is assassinated and riots break out. Gopal Pandey, a poor *chai-wallah*, is caught up in the ensuing violence and finds himself with an unexpected stash of cash. During the next decade and a half Pandey's life takes an incredible rags-to-royalty course as the writer deftly laces real events with fiction.

The story is set in Chandni Chowk in Old Delhi, once the seat of the Mughal empire. Formerly a tree-lined street that led to the Emperor's Red Fort with a canal flowing along its middle, today Chandni Chowk is a bustling place of commerce, the canal paved over. Trade

is dominated by Hindus amid the congested alleys and fading Mughal monuments, stores spilling onto the footpaths and hawkers yelling. Muslims decry the loss of Mughal splendour, Hindus are proud of covering the blemish with the plaster of commerce.

Into this setting is cast Suleiman Bhai, a Bangladeshi refugee masquerading as a descendant of Mughals, his eye on a Parliament seat via the votes of Bangla migrants in a slum colony in the area. Sohan Lal, a prosperous Hindu trader and a member of the fundamentalist Hindu party IPP is also angling for election. Pandey, the hapless tea seller, sits in a flimsy structure atop a drain opposite Sohan Lal's shop and serves his customers.

When protests against caste-based quotas break out, the IPP decides to seize the initiative by staging a self-immolation. Pandey's errand son, under the influence of opium, takes centre stage in a rally setting himself alight. As he flails, awaiting the promised blanket to be thrown over him, his dazed father shouts in favour of the quotas. Meanwhile, the God-fearing Sohan Lal has cleansed himself of guilt, having told Gopal rallies were no good for boys.

In the cartoon strips of R.K. Laxman, the character of the "common man", a bemused

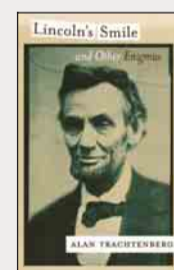
expression on his face, observes the shenanigans of Indian society from the sidelines. Saraf's Gopal Pandey is the common man brought to life. The simpleton is tossed as a pawn between the rival Hindu and Muslim factions of Chandni Chowk as each claws its way to the prestige, power and patronage of office. In a wonderfully farcical tale of democratic politics, Pandey is catapulted to within inches of power.

Each faction is supported by a coterie of memorable characters: yellow-toothed spinmeister Ibrahim, one-armed Gauhar, the leader of a gang of thieving street urchins, spare and slick Ramvilas Babu, who courts prostitutes and IPP politicians with equal élan, sari-clad Gita Didi, a prostitute who casts herself as a social worker and a quartet of doddering Hindu traders, each waiting for the other to die and vacate his municipal seat.

Saraf conjures a relentless portrayal of the corruption of modern India, with characters divided by religion, caste, class and gender yet united by self-aggrandisement. The tale would have been bleak but for its rollicking irony and laugh-out-loud humour. The narrative suffers from some repetition, but Saraf's tingling concoction will sober reporters who gush over the emerging economic power of India.

## reading into ...

## AMERICAN SHADOWS



**Lincoln's Smile and Other Enigmas**  
by Alan Trachtenberg  
Hill & Wang, HK\$234  
★★★★☆  
Glenn C. Altschuler

Standing on a street corner in Midtown Manhattan in 1946, Jean-Paul Sartre looked for New York. But he couldn't find it. To Sartre, a Parisian, a city was a social milieu, where "streets run into other streets", and people meet, drink, eat and talk. On New York's grid, with its numbered avenues, "you never lose your way, and you are always lost". In *Lincoln's Smile and Other Enigmas*, Alan Trachtenberg, professor emeritus of American studies at Yale University, examines the act and art of seeing. His essays, many of them previously published, range across American literature and material culture in the 19th and 20th centuries: from the daguerreotype to Stephen Crane's city sketches, Walker Evans' Depression-era photographs and film noir. Trachtenberg doesn't decipher the enigma of Lincoln's smile, captured – or conjured – in a photograph taken shortly before he died. But he does illuminate the complicated relationship between seeing and knowing.

Trachtenberg demonstrates that a photograph is much more than "a transparent copy of a thing in the world". Introduced in the US in 1839, daguerreotypes were hailed as mirrors in a world of deception, able to penetrate the mysteries of human character. But well before the century ended, observers understood that photographers – and their subjects – constructed identities, not true inner selves. Photographs were a means of representation, framed by words, captions, context, proximity to other photographs, and the assumptions of viewers.

Walker Evans wanted his shots of the Guder and Woods families, taken in Hale County, Alabama, for *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, to constitute "a pure record and no propaganda". But, Trachtenberg suggests, as he made poverty painfully visible, along with pride in a place – and in the past – Evans registered his dissent as an "old American" against modernity, metropolitanism and industrial capitalism.

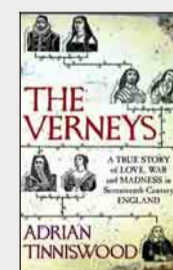
Photographs, Trachtenberg writes, elegantly and eloquently, are "not so much a guide to reality as a uniquely modern means of questioning reality". They're locked in an eternal present. Appearing at the intersection of image and speech, photographs present the paradox of "things appearing while disappearing, apprehended just in time, in time [to] expire into new life".

With or without the aid of photography, writers also re-viewed American cities. Led by William Dean Howells and Jacob Riis, the "realists" tried to make urban spaces transparent and comprehensible and arouse moral indignation against poverty and exploitation. But Trachtenberg argues that their work "did not cross into the inner world of the slums".

At the turn of the 20th century, with Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, Trachtenberg suggests, the city was "naturalised". Data was converted into lived experience, and characters accepted, with neither compassion nor social guilt, as they committed "self-sufficient acts of desire".

Modern ways of seeing, Trachtenberg concludes, grew out of – and reinforced – a "political economy of image commodities", with each individual reduced to a "market self", an object of surveillance. Like Uncle Venner in Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*, Trachtenberg prefers "a true exchange among familiars", where seeing is believing. But he knows that there's a disjunction between appearances and reality, that "shadows remain and seem only to have deepened". *The Philadelphia Inquirer*

## FAMILY AFFAIRS



**The Verneys: A True Story of Love, War and Madness in Seventeenth-century England**  
by Adrian Tinniswood  
Jonathan Cape, HK\$400  
★★★★☆  
Diane Purkiss

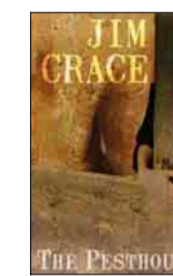
It's notoriously difficult to write the history of ordinary people, to find out what it was like to live in those days. Occasionally, a fabulous trove of personal writings survives, and makes it possible to know a man, a woman, their children, and to feel about them as we might about people who died last weekend.

The letters of the Verneys allow us to get to know a 17th-century family. There are more than 30,000, hoarded by the head of the family, Sir Ralph, and his son John. Discovered in a dusty attic in 1827, the Verney letters have become a staple of 17th-century social history. But to regard the Verneys as typical of their class slight their individuality. They were a normal family in their concern for property, eagerness to get on at court, and ambition for their children. But as Adrian Tinniswood shows in this vivid account of their mixed fortunes, they had a strain of extreme eccentricity they sought to conceal.

Tinniswood's first example of Verney oddity is unforgettable: Sir Francis Verney abandoned his wife in 1608 to run off to Morocco, where he became a convert to Islam and a Barbary pirate. His family was horrified. When he died they received his turban and slippers with a sigh of relief. Later, Restoration Verneys were shamed by Cousin Dick, who became a highwayman.

More than one Verney daughter eloped with an unsuitable man. Other Verneys were caught up in the gambling frenzy that shook Stuart England. They were subject to melancholy: Edmund refused to put on his armour before

## FICTION



**The Pesthouse**  
by Jim Crace  
Picador, HK\$176  
★★★★☆  
James Robertson

In Jim Crace's latest novel, the US has collapsed after some kind of catastrophe, the nature of which is never revealed and which, in the face of such a monumental reversal of national fortune, seems an irrelevant detail. Set sometime in the distant future, the remnants of American society are now living in a post-apocalyptic state of nature that's not too different from the country's 17th century colonial beginnings, clinging to foggy memories of civil society in an anarchic, plague-ridden, perilous wasteland.

Into this Hobbesian nightmare Crace brings his hero, Franklin, a conscientious farm boy making his journey to the east coast in search of a ship to Europe and a better life, and Margaret, a beautiful, red-haired victim of a mysterious disease known only as the "flux", who has been quarantined by her village in a hillside shack named the Pesthouse.

As a series of disasters estranges each character from their families, they become unlikely partners on an eastwards journey towards the Atlantic coast and the promise of leaving America behind. Along the way they observe the industrial ruins of the US and experience the dangers of a society without the rule of law.

Crace wisely resists the temptation to turn his novel into a predictive post-mortem of US decline – a staple of much cold war-era apocalyptic fiction. Although he leaves his readers clues about the nature of the disaster that put an end to the US as we know it, they're thinly spread and oblique.

Crace's commentary, like all the best satire, draws its power from subtle inversions that will chime with anyone with an appreciation for historical irony – American pilgrims board leaky boats heading east, not west, in search of civilisation; roaming bands of bandits force Americans into slavery. Organised commerce and religion, two of the most historically identifiable hallmarks of the modern American state, are almost unheard of.

But it's Crace's style that really distinguishes *The Pesthouse* as a novel. At a time when most of his British contemporaries are writing with a stylistic exuberance that occasionally borders on the absurd, Crace's prose rhythms look understated in *The Pesthouse*. Its characters aren't vividly drawn and its plotline, although strangely gripping, can hardly be described as epic. Yet Crace's story is exquisite in its bleakness.

Post-apocalyptic fiction's periodic resurgence in popularity has often been linked to the prospect of real world catastrophes – notably the threat of nuclear disaster represented by the cold war. As dangers such as climate change and global terrorism increase in their intensity, they can be expected to loom large in forthcoming books. We've already seen the end of the world explored in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and Will Self's comic romp *The Book of Dave*, to name but two. *The Pesthouse* stands out as a harrowing example of just how such a tale should be written.

the civil war battle of Edgehill, perhaps hoping for death, which duly found him. His son Ralph, this book's main character, increased his father's despair by declaring for parliament, and found himself in exile in France, where he too grew gloomy.

Part of his depression might have been caused by the impact his stand had on the family fortunes: his estates were sequestered because he was suspected of royalism, and his sisters made disastrous marriages.

Fascinating behind-the-scenes glimpses of great people and greater events are one of the book's chief attractions; huge canvases of war, politics and social history are reduced to enjoyable human terms. Events become important to us because they are important to the Verneys we've come to know and like.

Despite Tinniswood's care, the Verney habit of calling sons Edmund or Ralph and then marrying women called Mary can confuse, but that draws our attention to the way the family stressed continuity rather than disruption. The overlap of names also allows for some poignant contrasts.

The Mary who married Sir Ralph was amply possessed of that key Jane Austen virtue, good sense. She put all her wit and charm at the service of her unlucky husband. Ralph's estates were sequestered because it was impossible to forget his relatives' royalist allegiances. Through dogged perseverance, Mary managed to get the sequestration limited, preserving the Buckinghamshire manor from which the family drew its gentry identity. She did this despite the loss of beloved children and in her husband's absence. It's the story of a strong woman whose actions compel respect.

The rich and vivid Verney characters make history not only painless but positively pleasurable. This is a welcome return to exactly the kind of history that has always captivated the general reader. *The Independent*