

FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA by Ian Gibson (Faber & Faber, £6.99).

Gibson's portrait of Spain's most apocalyptically-gifted modern poet and playwright is clod-thick with the vivid passions of the Twenties and Thirties, Lorca's friendships with many of this century's great artists (with Dali in particular) and with the multiplicity of Lorca's talent itself – which also embraced acting, drawing, oratory and most especially music. The meticulous detail and the barrages of references are occasionally overwhelming, but Gibson powerfully illuminates the anguished contradiction of Lorca's effervescent, Dionysian public life and the tormented, craggy inscape of his private homosexuality. The poet was savagely murdered, aged only 38, by Fascist rebels at the start of the Spanish Civil War. Ian Gibson's dedicated, loving biography ensures that Lorca and his work remain indubitably alive.

SOME FREAKS by David Mamet (Faber & Faber, £4.99). Those

who found stimulus or strife in Mamet's elucidations on the modern male condition in February's *GQ* will enjoy that piece and others in this, his second collection of essays. Most of these pieces are short deliveries falling well below the scope of an essay; more accurately, they are notes, musings, reminiscences, soundings-off. Mamet is clearly at his best when he abandons his theatrical polemics or directorial jottings in favour of poker – 'The game is not about money. The game is about love and divine intervention' – or women – 'The first thing I realised about women is they are people too' – a piece written, he confesses, on a dare. Combative and humorous, Mamet dances just this side of hyperbole.

THE GREAT PROFUNDO AND OTHER STORIES by Bernard MacLaverty (Penguin, £3.99). Small,

ephemeral encounters made intimate and intense by the beautifully observed exactness of Irishman MacLaverty's prose. Most of these stories deal sympathetically and engagingly with the sufferings of society's detritus – the sad, the lonely, the unreachable.

BY PHILIP WATSON

A HISTORY OF THE WORLD IN 10½ CHAPTERS by Julian Barnes (Picador, £4.99). Julian Barnes's novel arrives in paperback accompanied by the kind of plaudits more usually reserved for the winner of the Booker Prize. And rightly so. Certainly this 'fabulation' of ten short stories and a parenthetical essay on love is dazzling in the scope of its reference and ambition. Barnes views history as a 'multi-media collage' of connecting themes, and his book steers a watery course across the continents and the centuries, from a reworking of the story of Noah's Ark to an Australian dinghy escaping nuclear war. While Barnes's thesis is that 'we are all lost at sea', this history asserts that out of our global shit creek comes the possibility of God, art and love. A hybrid of astonishing originality and imagination.

DICTIONARY OF THE KHAZARS by Milorad Pavić (Penguin, £4.99). Another 'fabulation' lying somewhere between fantasy and reality is this beguiling first novel by Yugoslav academic Pavić. Like a surrealistic version of Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, Pavić weaves a medieval

patchwork of theology, philosophy and murder around the lost East European nation of the Khazars. A seriously phantasmagoric people who wrote in salt, read colours and met in their dreams, the Khazars were massacred in the tenth century before they had settled 'the Khazar polemic' – whether to follow Christianity, Islam or Judaism. Published in two separate editions, male and female, with just one paragraph different (it's italicised on pp 293/4; I defy you not to read it first), this may be the closest we get to the tailor-made *GQ* novel.

THE CHYMICAL WEDDING by Lindsay Clarke (Picador, £5.99). Although politely subtitled 'A Romance', this is a big novel dealing with big subjects. Clarke is a Jungian fascinated by the power of the unconscious to inform all human behaviour. Thus, *The Chymical Wedding* is no simple witchcraft story – he infuses this tale of 27-year-old blocked poet Alex Darken, an 'escape artist of the moral universe', with all kinds of mysterious alchemies and Hermetic arts. At times, the endless and complex references to the paranormal and transcendental are

overbearing; the novel works best when Clarke's imaginative powers fly through the many dream sequences. And for his narrative skill alone – parallel contemporary and early Victorian stories are cleverly interwoven à la John Fowles – the novel was a worthy winner of the 1989 Whitbread Prize for Fiction.

FALLING FOR A DOLPHIN by Heathcote Williams (Cape, £9.95). Williams's sequel to his poem *Whale Nation* further expands his theory of the moral superiority of animals over humans. It is similarly illustrated with icy, translucent green photographs – this time of a hermit dolphin he swam with off the coast of Ireland. As rhetorical and sentimental as his language may sometimes be, Williams is too aware of his obvious anthropomorphism for his work to be simply mawkish. He was 'alchemically touched' by his experience and is at his best when describing the dolphin's compelling attractiveness. Like a cross between Ted Hughes and Jonathan Porritt, Williams captures the serene, fragile beauty of the natural world. ■

BY PHILIP WATSON



THE TRICK OF IT by Michael Frayn (Penguin, £4.99).

Frayn's return to the novel is alive with many of the elements that infuse his plays – farce, artful construction and a fiery pace. *The Trick Of It* is effortlessly, seriously, tragically funny. The story of bumbling English lecturer Richard Dunnett is told through his comic and candid correspondence with an academic friend in Australia. Inviting his favourite writer to speak to his students, he discovers a new taboo, 'intercourse with an author on your reading list'. In their subsequent marriage lies Frayn's characteristic juggling of themes – love, self-deception, the relationship between writer and critic – and Dunnett's search for 'the trick of it' – the creative process itself.



BILLY BATHGATE by E L Doctorow (Picador, £3.99).

Billy Bathgate, Arnold Garbage, Abbadabba Berman, Dutch Schultz – the names alone are colourful enough. Attach them to our fifteen-year-old story-telling hoodlum hero, a scavenger, a crippled financial wizard and a ruthless, murderous gangster, and Doctorow's picaresque novel of brutal, fedora-wearing mobsters in Depression-ravaged New York really jumps to life. Not that it hasn't already. From the very first page, in which Billy witnesses the cement-shoed execution of a rival mafioso, his fast-moving, acutely observed colloquial style tugs you along almost as surely as a Pip or a Huck Finn. Visual almost to the point of being cinematic, *Billy Bathgate* is an exhilarating read.



SEXING THE CHERRY by Jeanette Winterson (Vintage, £3.99).

If it wasn't for the fact that Winterson's short yet most ambitious novel is so jam-packed with imaginative fire and narrative audacity, this would be too much for even the most reconstructed New Man to bear. A gothic farce mixing fact and fairytale narrated alternately by the hideous Dog Woman and her time and space cadet foster son, Jordan, Winterson's jokes are definitely on us. Women are advised to 'drown men should they become too troublesome'. And the simpleton Dog Woman's response to male sexual advances is either to suffocate them between her gigantic breasts or to eat their cocks. A novel that hits hard, and hits where it hurts.

BY PHILIP WATSON

BOOKS

WHEN THE MUSIC'S OVER by Robin Denselow (Faber, £5.99). Subtitling it the story of political pop, veteran music journalist Denselow charts a rocky course from the McCarthyite persecution of rebel folk singers in



the Fifties to a new postscript on the milestone Wembley concert celebrating Nelson Mandela's release. Edited by Pete Townshend, who himself gets several mentions, Denselow's detailed analysis is predictably and worthily left of

centre, but so much so that he overlooks such obvious right-wing targets as the Fascist skinhead movement, Oi. In fact, the dichotomy between pop and politics is best illuminated, not through the well-travelled Denselow's comprehensive reporting, but through the amalgamated stories and anecdotes he has collected en route. 'Political singing is like a gorilla driving a car,' says Gil Scott-Heron. 'People come to see it, but they don't believe you have a licence.'

FALLING by Colin Thubron (Penguin, £4.99). A novel short on words and long on allegory. Just 150 pages strong, *Falling* tells of provincial journalist Mark Swabey's brief, yet fatal attraction for the angelic trapeze artist Clara, the story of love and loss narrated by Swabey himself from his prison cell, and by others in the story through first-hand accounts. An affair

gradually revealed through flashbacks, the novel's title comes to represent, among other things, falling in love, Clara's fall from the trapeze, our hero's fall from grace, and ultimately The Fall itself – mankind's innate and original sin. Thubron is best known for his award-winning travel writing; *Falling* establishes him as a novelist of authority and vision.

LONDON FIELDS by Martin Amis (Penguin, £4.99). You read it here first: sex, porn, love, millennial angst, nuclear annihilation, Notting Hill – all the favourite Amis obsessions – plus two new comic creations to log alongside John Self and Rachel Noyes. Meet grimy, yobbish, low-life petty crook Keith Talent and the sexual 'black hole' Nicola Six, a fantasy femme so fatale that she has foreseen the time and place of her death, and now needs only her murderer. Told Philip Roth-style by Samson Young, a

visiting Jewish American novelist who is blocked, sick and cynical, *London Fields* is a brilliant, teasing, cheating black thriller.

THE GIRL AT THE LION D'OR by Sebastian Faulks (Vintage, £4.99). A young, pretty, intelligent girl arrives at the dingy Hôtel du Lion d'Or in provincial France in the mid-Thirties to take up a job as a waitress. Soon she embarks on a love affair with a local married Jewish lawyer. As the plot develops, so does our understanding of the girl's dark past, the threat of impending war, and of the conflicts between the intensely private and the cataclysmically public. In a novel that consists of beautifully drawn characters, the girl is the most convincing - enigmatically combining the passion and emotion of Colette's *Chérie* with the strength and independence of Fowles' French Lieutenant's Woman. Vivid and moving. PHILIP WATSON ■