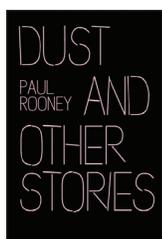


Author Q&A: Paul Rooney



DUST AND OTHER STORIES

(Akerman Daly/Aye-Aye Books, £10)

Liverpudlian Rooney is an award-winning artist, chiefly working with sound and video installations. This, his first book, brings together the texts of many of his recent pieces, and presents them as a formally daring collection of short

fiction. Often told in the first person, they're curious, distinctive tales featuring a tree that hates itself and an evangelist who uses toy military vehicles to spread the word of God.

How did the idea for doing the book come about?

I was asked to write one of the pieces, *Towards The Heavenly Void*, for an Akerman Daly collection in 2006. I really enjoyed the experience. It was the first time I had written a short story as such. I was really conscious of the short story form and of attempting to do something with it. So when they said it would be good to do something else together I was very keen. Everything I've done over the last four years has been partly written with this book in mind.

Are the influences on your writing mainly literary or mainly from the sphere of the art world?

Mainly literary, I would say. Even at art college I read more fiction than anything else: Beckett, Joyce, early Martin Amis. Since being particularly interested in short fiction I have gravitated towards people like Donald Barthelme, David Foster Wallace's shorter pieces, Miranda July, George Saunders. Having said all that, there are artists like James Coleman, Saskia Olde Wolbers and Matthew Buckingham whose writing – in different ways – is exemplary, and has definitely inspired what I do.

Many of the pieces have a strange, haunted feel. Where does that stem from?

I'm interested in the power the past has to unsettle the present, so the idea of haunting is fascinating to me but not in a conventional ghost story sense. In my stories



there are sprites haunting vinyl records, student memories haunting an art college building and Les Dawson haunting a dressing room mirror. They're all a means for the past to connect with the present, to spark ideas in one way or another, rather than just to spook the reader for the sake of it.

The word "texts" tends to crop up in relation to your prose. Would you even describe this as a short story collection, or is that a limiting term?

I tend to use the word "texts" because it's general enough to encompass differing forms of writing: monologues, letters, short stories, travel guides, lectures and so on. I see the short story as one amongst many possibilities. So I'm quite happy for it to be a book of short stories, but a book of short fiction is a better description, I think.

Would you ever consider writing a full straight-ahead novel?

I should give a novel a try. The trouble is you can spend a hell of a lot of time on a novel and realise when it doesn't work that you've wasted three years. At least with a short text you have only wasted a month or two. There are no limits to the ideas and forms you can play with in a piece of short fiction.

ANDY MURRAY

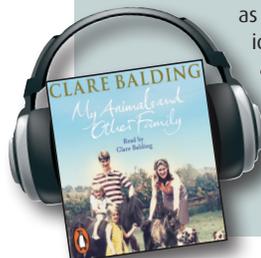
LISTEN TO THIS

MY ANIMALS AND OTHER FAMILY

Clare Balding

(www.audible.co.uk, £16.99)

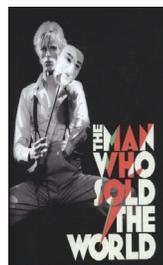
Officially a national treasure, Balding's memoirs are full of self-effacement, good humour and a passion for sport. With descriptions of her family that affectionately illustrate their charms as well as their idiosyncracies and flaws, this is a particularly engaging peek at her life.



THE MAN WHO SOLD THE WORLD: DAVID BOWIE AND THE 1970S

Peter Doggett

(Vintage, £8.99)



From writing *Space Oddity* in 1969, when he captured global enthusiasm for the Apollo mission to the moon; to the release of *Ashes To Ashes* in 1980 when he revisited the unlikely hero Major Tom, David Bowie defined the decade in between.

Doggett's last study, of The Beatles' break-up and its aftermath – *You*

Never Give Me Your Money – was met with critical acclaim. Here the music writer looks at how Bowie took on the pop mantle thanks to a large pool of money handed over by his record company and a new era in studio recording techniques. Fuelled by fear and moral panic as the country was gripped by the energy crisis and hurtled into recession, Bowie was the perfect hero for youth culture displaying all the fashionable pomp and glamour that The Beatles had lacked. Doggett walks the reader through Bowie's politics and personal life while referring to the bigger cultural picture, providing a valuable piece of commentary on music, culture and society in the 1970s.

ANTONIA CHARLESWORTH



OFF THE SHELF

PITY THE BILLIONAIRE

Thomas Frank

(Vintage, £9.99)

The former columnist for the *Wall Street Journal* provides a witty and forthright political commentary on the economic meltdown and the opportunism of the American Right. Ahead of the forthcoming election, Frank explains how the likes of the Tea Party and talk show host Glenn Beck have induced a conservative re-birth in America.

MOURINHO: FURTHER ANATOMY OF A WINNER

Patrick Barclay

(Orion, £4.99)

Sports journalist Barclay re-releases his biography of football manager Jose Mourinho to include his ventures in Spain and Italy. To his credit, Barclay has added testimonies from Patrick Viera and Mark Halsey but these fail to create any further insight. More tribute than biography, Barclay clearly believes Mourinho's own hype that he is "the special one".

SCOUSE

Tony Crowley

(Liverpool University Press, £16.99)

Crowley writes a contemporary academic account of language in Liverpool and presents an alternative to the widely accepted history of the language. By scouring a wide range of sources including newspapers, archives and letters the author collects evidence, including a poorhouse report with the first recorded use of the word and local literature, to provide a new understanding of "Scouse".

REVENGER

Tom Cain

(Bantam, £12.99)

Cain only really writes one kind of novel – testosterone-induced thrillers featuring ex-marine Samuel Carver. The battle ground here is the South London riots but the effort of mixing thrills and spills with modern-day social crises feels a little too hammy.

ANTONIA CHARLESWORTH