



Finding a Good Read

A column to help you find intriguing books

This month the column comes from Rachel Seiffert, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, who shares some favourite books with Inside Time readers



Credit: Charlie Hopkinson.

Rachel Seiffert

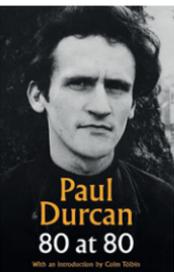
Rachel Seiffert has published five novels, *Once The Deed Is Done*, *A Boy in Winter*, *The Dark Room*, *Afterwards*, and *The Walk Home*, and one collection of short stories, *Field Study*. Her novels have been shortlisted for the Booker Prize and the Dublin/IMPAC Award, and longlisted three times for the Women's Prize for Fiction, most recently in 2018. She has also received awards from the American Society of Arts and Letters and the Association of Jewish Libraries, and was named one of Granta's Best of Young British Novelists. Rachel teaches writing in a wide variety of settings including universities and as a Royal Literary Fund Fellow.



The Bee Sting by Paul Murray

This is a proper page-turner, equally funny and tragic. PJ is thirteen and full of YouTube facts and existential angst; his sister Cas is in her last school year, desperate to be clever and pretty and far away in Dublin.

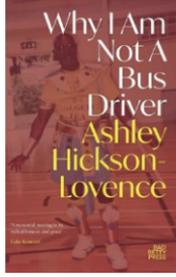
Their dad Dickie Barnes is kind, but he's run the family car business into the ground, and is trying - and failing - to keep this on the down-low. Their mum Imelda is a force of nature, exasperated by her husband, mystified by her children, she's keeping the household afloat by selling off her shoes and bags, hush-hush, on eBay. But in their small Irish town, everyone knows everyone, and secrets run deep through the generations. In the boom years, folk bought cars, built houses, but now the wheels are falling off the economy and off everyone's lives. And underlying everything is the mad story behind the bee sting in the title...



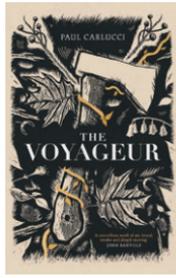
80 at 80 by Paul Durcan *Why I Am Not A Bus Driver* by Ashley Hickson-Lovence

Two books for lovers of poetry, or even for those who don't think they are.

Durcan is another Paul - and another Irishman - and has a beautiful straight way with words. 'He can break your heart in a



supermarket or a car park... sheer mad genius.' So says bestseller Alice Sebold, and I agree. Hickson-Lovence grew up in Hackney in the 80s and 90s, and his debut collection honours the community there, its music and resilience and humour. The poems are also a beautiful testament to family, especially his Jamaican grandfather. Both books are magic, but in case you're still worried poetry might be too fancy pants for you, some of Durcan's titles might convince: 'Cardinal Dies of A Heart Attack In A Dublin Brothel'; 'High Speed Car Wash'; 'The Death By Heroin Of Sid Vicious'.



The Voyageur by Paul Carlucci

The last Paul on my list is Canadian. His brilliant first novel is set on the western frontier of the 1830s; inspired by true events, it's a marvellously dark yarn. Alex is abandoned in boyhood: an innocent soul, thrown upon the rough mercies of the frontier folk. Again and again, he trusts in the untrustworthy, and again and again, he somehow finds himself saved too - from drowning, from knife blades, and even from a bullet that tears a hole in his side. The doctor who treats him seems like another saviour at first, and perhaps a real one this time? But Alex's wound heals strangely, leaving the bullet hole open. The doctor sees opportunity in this medical oddity...will Alex see through the doctor's motives?



Bad Blood by Lorna Sage

My last recommendation is a memoir, and a really honest and raw one. Sage grew up mostly with her vicar grandfather in a rural backwater in the Welsh Marches. But her grandfather was far from saintly, and she was far from being a conventional vicarage girl. This gripping book describes her half-feral post-war childhood, and the young love she finds with Vic in the 1960s, a fellow clever working class kid at her local grammar school. Lorna and Vic are soul mates and rebels, both determined to beat the odds and make it to university - but then Lorna falls pregnant at 17. How they deal with this is typically unconventional, and inspiring too: a story that shows how, sometimes, you just have to carve your own way in life.



Prison Reading Groups (PRG) was created in 1999 to set up, support and fund informal reading groups in prisons. We have set up more than 110 groups in over 80 prisons nationwide. PRG is part of Give a Book.