

The International Balzan Foundation
is pleased to announce the winners of the



Balzan Prizes 2001

for **History of Architecture**
(including town planning and landscape design)

Prof. James Sloss Ackerman, USA

for **Literary History and Criticism (post 1500)**

Prof. Marc Fumaroli, France

for **Cognitive Neurosciences**

Prof. Jean-Pierre Changeux, France

for **Climatology**

Prof. Claude Lorius, France

Balzan commitment to emerging talent

Each Balzan Prize is worth 1,000,000 Swiss francs (£405,000 US\$567,000). In awarding the prizes, the Foundation asks prize-winners to set aside half the amount to support research projects and similar work preferably involving young scientists or scholars.

The Award-giving Ceremony of the Balzan Prizes 2001 will take place in Bern, Friday November 9th, in the Parliament of the Swiss Confederation.

Next Balzan Awards

Balzan Prizes 2002

each worth 1,000,000 Swiss francs, of which half to be earmarked to research projects, will be awarded in the fields of:

- *Sociology*
- *History of the Humanities*
- *Developmental Biology*
- *Geology*

International Balzan Meetings - Advance Notice

Meeting the Challenges of the Future

A Discussion between "The Two Cultures"

A Symposium organised by the International Balzan Foundation and held at The Royal Society, London

May 13th - 14th 2002

The International Balzan Foundation is dedicated to recognising and rewarding outstanding individual achievement - regardless of nationality, race or creed - in science, humanities, culture and humanitarian causes through a programme of prestigious annual prizes totalling 4 million Swiss Francs (£1.6 million, US\$2.2 million). Nominations are submitted by universities and learned societies. With offices in Milan and Zürich, the Foundation is advised on its awards by a committee of 18-20 distinguished European scientists and academics.

Over the last forty years, the Balzan Foundation has awarded over 33 million Swiss francs (£13 million, US\$19 million) to 82 international scientists for their contributions in such varied fields as anthropology, art history, music, geophysics, social science, epidemiology, philosophy and history. Uniquely among major international foundations, the Balzan Foundation chooses different subjects each year within the sciences and the humanities. This enables it to encourage emerging new research areas and to support important fields of study possibly overlooked by other major international Prizes.

For further information:
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Elegy for lost youth

ANNA SWAN

Emma Richler

SISTER CRAZY

258 pp. Flamingo. £12.99.

0 00 711822 8

Sister Crazy is an open invitation to play with the boisterous, self-reflexive Weiss family. Emma Richler asks the reader to sit beside her fragile narrator, Jemima, and hold her hand as she circles within the maze that has led her to a very unhappy cul-de-sac. Somewhere along the route to adulthood, Jem misread the signs: "Crazy is not a person, it is a place you go."

Richler's themes are purity and control, and her chilling message is intelligently, if brutally, extracted. It is easy to assume that *Sister Crazy* is another autobiographical first novel. Emma Richler is Mordecai's daughter, and the novel depicts a family similar to her own with a literary icon for a father. Between an impossibly angelic mother and a loving but preoccupied sportswriter father, Jem balances precariously as the middle child of five. Buttressed - or bound - on both sides, she lays herself bare. There is no familial dysfunction here, but never having faced adversity, Jem lacks resilience.

As unstructured as the meanderings of her disturbed mind, the novel's seven episodes succeed in exposing an alarming parental dilemma: that a household built on love and security cannot guarantee a well-adjusted adult. Nobody dies or is abused, but, trapped in a past more vivid than the present, the grown-up Jem cannot grasp that, as childhood slips away, we must distinguish between necessary loss and unnecessary pain. There is an enticingly breathless quality to Richler's prose, and in a childlike dash, she guides us through her elegy for lost youth.

Her incisive observations on the intricacies

of family dynamics are by turns whimsical, intense and darkly funny; they prevent her heroine from becoming mired in self-pity. Jobless, friendless and celibate, Jem is in a solitary state which derives from the idealization of her parents, the hero worship of one intellectual brother and an almost incestuous attachment to another; no one outside the family "measures up". Her self-sabotage mirrors that of her compulsive younger sister, Harriet, who has a horror of food touching other food on her plate: "She can organize it, make it all neat and pretty before the chaos of chewing and digesting."

Sister Crazy refers not only to Jem and Harriet but also to the Sisters at their convent school: "Nuns, you would think, leave the world partly because it is all a bit complicated, then they go and make things even more complicated. They have a lot to learn." Jem herself covers three religious bases, with her Protestant mother, Jewish father and Roman Catholic education; but it is Crucifixion and stigmata which play most on her mind, with good reason. Despite several blood-related hints, the casual account of private violence catches the reader off-guard. Point 8 of Jem's self-help list, reads: "WHEN YOU ARE GOING THROUGH DARK TIMES, PACK UP YOUR KNIVES AND GIVE THEM TO A FRIEND."

Jem is a watcher not a doer, and the only action she takes is self-mutilation; after cutting comes healing. It is an eloquent expression of what cannot be articulated in words, hence no explanations or conclusions are drawn in the novel, but for the uninitiated the lacunae gape like the wounds she leaves as she plays the violin on her forearms with a knife. The essence of her distress is a need for distillation, which leads us back to blood as purifier. We may have overdosed on solipsism in the modern novel, but Emma Richler sees the comic in the tragic, and her acute insights save *Sister Crazy* from self-indulgence.

Matt Thorne

PICTURES OF YOU

304pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £12.99.

0 297 64667 2

Pictures of You is twenty-seven-year-old Matt Thorne's fourth novel. It details thirteen eventful days in the lives of Martin, the editor of *Force* magazine, and his assistant, Alison. The slick narrative moves rapidly between their two very different existences, deftly capturing the atmosphere of media London. Alison lives with her constantly stoned boyfriend Adrian and her promiscuous sister Suzanne. She is secretly in love with Martin, who scarcely notices her, since he is far too involved with his clique of hedonistic friends and their cocaine-fuelled quest for gratification. When Martin's life falls apart, he suspects that he has fallen under the spell of a "dark force". He gets sacked, his wife leaves him, his house is vandalized and he is kidnapped. Yet we learn "this wasn't his story"; he has merely been a bit-player in somebody else's sordid nightmare.

Thorne is a founder member of the New Puritans, a group of youngish writers who reject literary elaboration in favour of stark

verity. Adherence to their rules on textual simplicity, temporal linearity and grammatical purity gives *Pictures of You* a brisk immediacy, somewhat at the expense of depth and meaning. We get a grimly amusing romp through a world of social paranoia, sadomasochism, infidelity, secret sex societies and pornography. Such sordid subject matter needs careful handling, if it is not to leave the reader feeling as empty and discontented as the characters. Although Thorne asserts that the New Puritans are "moralists", there does not ultimately seem to be any redemptive or satirical purpose to this resolutely untranscendent novel. Martin realizes that his world is hollow and that he needs to find "someone with a moral centre", but no such figure appears. Alison is relatively less debauched than Martin's other friends, but she deceives her partner and has sex with someone she picks up in a hotel. *Pictures of You* is not sexy, since sexiness is all to do with context, sternly disallowed by the New Puritans. The events seem to occur in a vacuum. It leaves us with a narrative that makes nothing happen, since its alluringly slick surface is as shallow as the existence it describes.

SALLY CONNOLLY

Connolly, Sally. "Pictures of You." The Times Literary Supplement, no. 5138, 21 Sept. 2001, p. 24. The Times Literary Supplement Historical Archive, link.gale.com/apps/doc/EX1200505809/TLSH?u=txshracd2588&sid=bookmark-TLSH&xid=04d525cd. Accessed 23 Aug. 2021.