

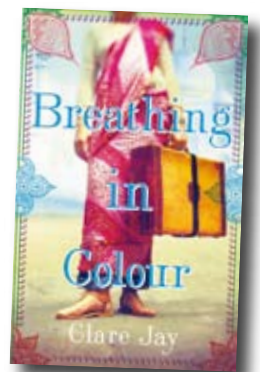


Photograph Clare Jay © Dave Meehan.

Breathing in Colour

Clare Jay

Clare Jay writes intelligent women's fiction, and her debut novel, *Breathing in Colour* will be published by Piatkus in March 2009. Set in India, it's about a fractured mother and daughter relationship, which starts with the phone call that every mother dreads: "your child is missing, presumed dead." Alida sets off to India to find her daughter, and there begins the emotional journey of her past. At the same time we learn more about the daughter's struggle to come to terms with a past family tragedy and her rare condition, synaesthesia. Synaesthesia is an extraordinary sensory condition that makes people see the world in a kaleidoscope of shapes, colours and smells. This element of the novel creates wonderful moments vivid with description that send the imagination soaring. Jay's short stories and poetry have won prizes and appeared in several anthologies. She has a PhD in Creative Writing and currently works as a lecturer. She has lead "Dreaming into Writing" workshops at international conferences, has lived in five European countries and travelled extensively in South-East Asia. She currently lives between Portugal and Devon, UK.



The following extract is from *Breathing In Colour* by Clare Jay, published by Piatkus.

The night she learned of her daughter's disappearance, Alida's head was full of the past. Sleep had eluded her for hours, and although she was still in her bedroom, she was sitting on the swivel chair at her desk in front of the bay window, her hair falling forwards in loose, dark spirals as she looked at the object she held in

her hands. Her slender knees were drawn up to her chest and she had pulled on her oldest cardigan, which was made of raw silk fibres knotted together in shades of red. Years ago, she had slipped it on to keep her warm while she breastfed. Wearing it reminded her of simpler times. The bedroom was filled with amber shadows from the bedside lamp, and through a crack in the curtains the sky was

beginning to lighten. Three floors down, the occasional car rumbled past as London began to stir.

In her hands, Alida was holding a four-inch long treasure chest originally made of cardboard, but unidentifiable as such due to the profusion of sequins glued to every surface, gold, silver, green, so that even after more than a dozen years, the little box shimmered.

Mia had presented her with it one Mother's Day before she turned six, before their world changed beyond recognition.

Alida recalled Mia's stripy scarf trailing to the ground, her smile almost too wide for her small face as she ran towards her across the playground and thrust the treasure chest — still sticky in places — into her hands.

'These are the stars we catch before I go to sleep,' Mia had announced, her eyes ablaze with pride as she pointed at the sequins. 'When the pink ones sparkle, they fizz in my mouth like sherbet.'

Her talented, multi-sensory daughter. Whenever a sequin dropped off, Alida would stick it back on with Superglue so that now the chest had a smooth, tight carapace, broken by the protrusion of sequin edges when she ran her finger over it. The chest, more Superglue now than cardboard, had become a permanent feature on Alida's desk. More

"Alida's hands were shaking too badly for her to slot the cordless telephone back onto its stand. Instead she slid it onto the bedside table and stared frozen-eyed into the orange glow of her nightlight."

than any other object, it evoked the happiest moments of her life; the time when she, Ian and Mia had formed a tight circle of love and anything had seemed possible.

As usual, Alida tried to shift her thoughts away from the event that had destroyed their happy balance. Closing her eyes, she tipped her head back to ease her neck muscles. In her mind's eye, she saw an image of a man with a silver disc in place of a head standing in a yellow desert. The sun flashed off the disc. It was something she had dreamed earlier that night; one of the many disconnected but highly real dreams she'd had before emerging from sleep altogether. The disc-headed man had been holding Mia's treasure chest in one of his hands, she remembered now. And in the open palm of his other hand had lain a baby with curled fists and carved, still features. He had stretched both arms out to Alida in invitation, as if asking her to make a choice.

The telephone shripped; a shocking sound in the silence which caused Alida to swivel quickly around in her chair to stare at it. Instantly, she thought of Mia. She had only telephoned once in all the many weeks that she'd been travelling in India, but Alida was ever hopeful. Perhaps Mia had mixed up the time difference and that's why she was calling so very early.

Or perhaps she was in some kind of trouble.

Putting the treasure chest hastily back on her desk, Alida jumped to her feet and scrambled across the bed. She picked up the phone on her bedside table on the second ring.

'Hello?'

At first, the only word she even half

understood was 'madam'. Her first confused thought was that if the disheeled man had a mouth to open, he too would speak in this exotic jumble of sounds and call her madam in a voice as rich as treacle. But as the plastic casing of her phone pressed coolly against her cheek, the caller's words separated from the accent which wound around them and hung in the air like a threat.

Alida jerked her body upright.

'Who are you?' she demanded. 'What's happened?'

Now the man's voice scraped through her ears like gravel. As Alida listened, the hand holding the telephone tightened until the knuckles strained at the skin.

'India, you say?'

Her voice was high and anxious. 'Yes, Mia Salter is my daughter, but what . . .? Her passport? Gone missing? I'm sorry, you'll have to speak more clearly, there's such a bad

echo. Which is missing, the passport or my daughter? Oh my God. Eight days? No, no, she hasn't contacted me . . . The morgue? What are you suggesting? Are you trying to tell me you think my daughter is dead? . . . Dead, I said . . . My God, do you really think she . . . A pen, yes. Wait, let me just . . . OK, ready. Case file number . . . got it. Madurai, southern India . . . Guru? That's the name of the hotel? Hotel Guru. Room seven. I'll take the next possible plane . . . Yes, I realise that, but she could be hurt, she might need help, she might be lying senseless in a ditch somewhere . . . I am calm, but how would you feel if it were your daughter? . . . I said how would you . . . I understand.

'I'll be there as soon as I can. I'll find her.'

Alida's hands were shaking too badly for her to slot the cordless telephone back onto its stand. Instead she slid it onto the bedside table and stared frozen-eyed into the orange glow of her nightlight. Her mind flashed with accident scenes: concertinaed train carriages, turned-over buses. Bloodied tarmac. In the warm light, the worry grooves on Alida's narrow face were softened and her eyes, deep and dark, were Mia's.

'Daughter is lost,' the Indian policeman had said with a shrug in his voice as if advising her not to waste her airfare. 'Find her cannot guarantee.'

Alida could taste bile at the back of her throat. The bedroom around her seemed vast; she felt shrunken. 'Not again,' she whispered.

'Many foreigners go missing,' the policeman had said.

'Often we find them well and alive. But accidents also are possible. Then unhappily

New Releases

Cradle to Cradle **Re-making the way** **we make things**

Michael Braungart &
William McDonough
Jonathan Cape



Michael Braungart and William McDonough's significant updated book denotes our attitudes towards manufacturing and consumerism. They chart the history of the "cradle-to-grave", wasteful and damaging manufacturing model that has been in place since the industrial revolution. Michael Braungart is a chemist and leading environmental activist, and William McDonough is an architect, who focuses on sustainable development. They have set out a charter for change to avoid environmental disaster.

The book analyses current recycling practices of "reduce, resize and recycle" and notes the damaging effects of industry, that no amount of recycling can prevent. Braungart and McDonough challenge the entire "cradle-to-grave" manufacturing model and the notion that human industry must destroy the natural world.

Shona Fairweather

The Flying Troutmans

Miriam Toews
Faber and Faber



The *Flying Troutmans*, a novel about our endless faith in the people we love, begins when Hattie Troutman is summoned in the middle of the night to return home and help care for her suicidal sister, Min. When it becomes clear that Min does not want to recover, Hattie piles Min's children, Thebes and Logan, into the family's Ford Aerostar and takes them on a cross-continental road trip to find their father.

From Manitoba, Canada to the western United States, they entertain themselves with art projects, poetry classes, and story telling, all which take place in the van's three rows of seats. Through Hattie's retelling of selected events from Min's childhood, Logan and Thebes finally begin to understand their mother. And for the first time Hattie, at the wheel of the van, assumes a purpose and direction for her life.

Miriam Toews's realistic depiction of the laughter and despair in family dysfunction reveals a story both keenly observant and inherently hopeful. *The Flying Troutmans* remind us all that we are never as bad off as we think.

Jordan Von Cannon

we find them in the morgue.' In the aching space behind her eyelids, Alida could feel the memories escalating into grief and rage as they had done before.

Her bedroom was steeped in expectant silence. 'I'm not going to cry,' she muttered. 'It can't be too late.'

The curtains were momentarily parted as a waft of air tumbled in from the night and rolled across the wooden floor. Its coolness enveloped Alida like a shroud as she sat on the bed, so that she curled her toes up and shivered.

I'm going to India, she thought, and in one smooth motion she gathered her limbs and leaped from the bed.

Still trembling, blinking away the stars floating in her vision, Alida stood barefoot on the floor and tried to think rationally. She switched on the main light and flung open her wardrobe. A life-sized baby doll slid onto the polished wooden floorboards. She picked

“Still trembling, blinking away the stars floating in her vision, Alida stood barefoot on the floor and tried to think rationally. She switched on the main light and flung open her wardrobe.”

it up by its soft belly and crammed it back into her workbag, leaving ten plastic toes and a bald head visible above the leather rim. Pushed against the back of the wardrobe was the old-fashioned brown suitcase which had once belonged to her father.

When the case was lying open on the bed, Alida realised she didn't know where to begin. What would she need in India? On the duvet, she made a comforting pile of makeup and shampoo. She picked out a pair of low-heeled sandals. Then she saw the framed head-and-shoulders photograph of Mia which she kept on her bedside table. As she picked up the delicate silver frame, she had a disconcerting image of herself traipsing through the streets of India, showing people the picture and explaining that this was her lost daughter.

In the photograph, Mia was standing under a tree in Hyde Park on a blue January morning. The wind had loosened her corkscrew curls of dark hair so that individual strands snaked around her face, which was rosy with cold. Mia had a theory that on windy days she and her mother both ended up looking like Medusas, their hair whipped into a halo of snakes. Her eyes, caught in the wintry sunshine, were dark gold beneath strong, curved eyebrows and her wide mouth rocked with laughter as she breathed out a big white cloud of cold air. That day, the tensions which spiked the two of them apart had momentarily subsided, and they had fallen into step like experienced dance partners. 'Take a picture of my cloudy white breath flying away from me on the wind,' Mia had said. Alida had taken several, with Mia laughing as she tried to make different

shaped clouds. The picture had been taken eighteen months ago, when she had just turned seventeen. Alida tipped it gently into her handbag.

She had to tell Mia's father. His most recent address wouldn't be written inside Mia's passport, which was where the police must have found her own contact details.

Would it be acceptable, she wondered, if she just emailed him from India with the news? Sighing, she retrieved the telephone from the edge of her bedside table.

'What?' complained a husky female voice after three rings.

'Maggie, it's Alida. I need to speak to Ian.' She could hear the wobble in her voice, and frowned.

'At half five in the morning?' But she was already handing the telephone over. Alida pictured Ian's crumpled, unshaved face, his dirty-blond hair flopping over his eyebrows and the bright blue of his eyes blinking

awake.

'Lida. Something wrong?'

'It's Mia.' Alida bit her lip, her feet freezing on the floor. 'I got a call. She's in India.' To her dismay, her voice tripped up on the word India and tears started to slide from her eyes.

'I know she is,' said Ian impatiently. 'It's been three months now, hasn't it?' His voice was ragged around the edges, as if he'd had too much to drink the previous night.

'What did she say?'

'Nothing, I didn't speak to her.' Alida coughed to get the lump out of her throat. 'It was a policeman.' Teardrops were rolling off her cheeks and landing in hot splashes on her vest top.

'What?' Now Ian's voice was sharp with concern. 'What the hell did he say?'

'He... Mia's lost.'

End of book extract

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Reader offer

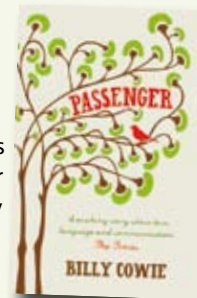
To order your copy of *Breathing In Colour* at the special price of £5.99 plus free P&P please call the order line on 01832 737525 and quote reference PIA 052.

New Releases

Passenger

Billy Cowie

Old Street Publishing



Billy Cowie has added another string to his already accomplished bow.

Milan's unexceptional life is changed beyond recognition when he hears a musical tapping, Beethoven's fifth to be precise, seemingly originating from within his own body. Fearing for his mental health, Milan undergoes varied medical tests which reveal his condition as "foetus in fetu." Whilst in the womb, Milan subsumed his foetal twin sister who has astoundingly survived undetected for 42 years.

Belying the sci-fi plot, *Passenger* is a simple, touching exploration of the human condition. Cowie's understated style cleverly allows the nuances of relationship dynamics to take centre-stage over the bizarre back-drop. Christening his "little sister" Roma, Milan's symbiotic twin becomes a rounded, humorous character whose fate becomes a real concern.

Disbelief is soon suspended, as the reader is swept away in the complexities of this tale, which gently challenges grand notions of identity, perception, love and enlightenment.

Samantha Cracknell

Up a Tree in the Park at Night with a Hedgehog

P. Robert Smith

Vintage Originals



Combining a tragic death and an exploitative affair with a categorically unsympathetic anti-hero

might not sound like the recipe to become the pretender to Mark Haddon's crown, but somehow with *Up a Tree*, Smith manages to pull it off. The protagonist, Benton Kirby disastrously lurches from one farce of his own creation to another, leaving a dead fiancée, a suicidal pet and heartbroken students in his wake to ultimately end where the novel's title begins, up a tree in the park at night with a hedgehog. Smith's saving grace in enabling the reader to continue their alliance to the pathetic Benton is his adept transformation from the realistic to the phantasmagoric to a point where the reader becomes truly involved in a grotesque parody of mundane existence.

Up a Tree does nothing to elicit any heart-wrenching emotion, but does provide a comical interlude into the bizarre and the macabre. A truly entertaining read for a light-hearted slant on usually heavy fare.

Pauline Bache

Q&A

with Clare Jay

What inspired you to write *Breathing in Colour*?

I knew I wanted to write a novel set in India because I was in love with the country, and felt it would be good to keep a lasting connection with it once I'd returned from my travels. While I was backpacking, I noticed many "missing" posters of travellers like myself who had disappeared off the face of the earth while in India. I wondered what had happened to them, and I imagined a mother whose child had vanished this way. What would she do? How can you look for one tiny person in such a vast, teeming country?

What was it like writing this novel?

The research process was extremely thorough, as the book was initially written as part of my doctoral research into the role of lucid dreaming in the creative writing process. This meant I engaged in practice-based research, examining the way my own lucid dreams informed the novel as it developed. Doing the PhD was an eye-opener for me. I also researched synaesthesia, retrograde amnesia, and the protocol for searching for missing British nationals in India.

Tell me about writing *Alida* and *Mia*?

Alida is a courageous woman who has suffered an unspeakable tragedy. Writing her character meant that I had to explore the terrible holes that loss can leave in a life. It was fascinating to get to grips with her psyche and chart the development of her understanding of her past behaviour. Writing in *Mia*'s voice was also intense. I researched synaesthesia, had lucid dreams in which I experienced my dreaming mind's interpretation of the condition, and I also engaged with it imaginatively while awake and writing.

How do you structure your writing day?

I'm very unstructured in my writing life. I'll fiddle around doing non-writing-related tasks, wander off to the beach, then suddenly be gripped by an idea, an image, a snatch of dialogue, and I'll sit down on the spot and write an entire chapter. Or I'll wake up and race to my desk at 7am and write for five straight days, barely pausing for food, sleep, or sunshine. Or I'll write nothing for a week. Really, it's that erratic.

Which writers do you love to read and why?

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, because of the richness of her language, her use of colour and scent, her skill at evoking emotion. Maggie O'Farrell for her precision, depth and fearlessness, and Audrey Niffenegger because her novel *The Time Traveler's Wife* just blew me away on every level.

What did you find to be the most inspiring event or person over the past year?

Signing a two-book deal with Piatkus of Little, Brown. In the past 12 months, I've met many talented people — my literary agent, my editor, and all the people who work at Piatkus. Emma Beswetherick's sensitive editorial comments on my "PhD novel" enabled me to shape it into the book it is today.

If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would you go and why?

I'd like to go to Bhutan, Guatemala, Peru, and many other places; all the places I haven't been to yet. Travelling compliments writing: it blows away the cobwebs and fills the mind with images.

If you could take only three things to a desert island, what would they be and why?

I'd take my husband, to see me through the dark nights, and a magical object like an Aladdin's lamp or a flying carpet, so we can escape if we want to. And a writing-boat, which is a small craft with writing materials built into a waterproof trunk on the side, so I can daydream and write with the waves rocking me.

What are your future plans?

I'm writing my second novel, which is set in Portugal and is about the effects of a violent sleep disorder on a family. I can also imagine myself tutoring weeklong novel-writing courses at some stage, and participating in writers' retreats. Writing has been a major part of my life for 10 years now, and I plan to keep it that way!

New Art Releases

Young Chinese Artists

The Next Generation

Edited by Christoph

Noe, Xenia Piëch &

Cordelia Steiner

Prestel



Contemporary Chinese Art is on the rise.

Young Chinese artists are the rock-stars of their time with works selling for millions, and a new era of modern art emerging. Beijing and Shanghai are taking residence as the most exciting artistic hubs on the planet.

Young Chinese Artists is an important and groundbreaking collection. It really gets to grips with the rise of contemporary Chinese art, and also offers a chronology of Chinese history since the end of the Cultural Revolution and Mao Zedong's death in 1976. It examines Chinese art in the context in which it was created — a generation of undergoing a paramount moment of change through globalisation and urbanisation.

This volume provides tremendous insight into current Chinese art, and the society from which it was created. There is an explosion of ideas, and for this reason, this collection is a must-have for anyone practicing or working in contemporary art.

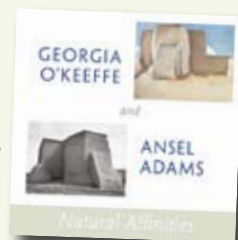
Cherie Federico

Natural Affinities

Ed. Buhler Lynes &

Phillips, Woodward

Little Brown



Georgia O'Keeffe and Ansel Adams were two of America's

most influential artists of the 20th century. *Natural Affinities* is a collection of essays by Barbara Buhler Lynes, Richard B Woodward and Sandra S. Phillips, and an overview of the artists' works and their connection with the American southwest. The natural world was an area of profound inspiration.

This book draws comparisons between the two artists' works and looks at the lasting influence each artist has left on contemporary art. The accompanying essays provide a new interpretation of O'Keeffe's and Adams' works, as well as a backdrop to their lives, 56 year friendship and affection for the desolation of the American southwest.

This is an essential book to understand the early workings of two of America's finest artists. Their works came to prominence when America was developing its own identity, and from that came a new sense of modern art, something different than Matisse, Picasso or Duchamp, but something undeniably American.

Shirley Stevenson