ing inward, and, as Young put it, screaming from a "bottomless pit" of alienation and frustration. *Folk City* began life as a companion essay to a recent exhibition at the Museum of the City of New York. It comes close to being a complete social history of a vital, but ultimately tragic moment.

BRIAN MORTON

Catalan Fiction

Tony Sala
THE BOYS
256pp. Two Lines. Paperback, $14.95.
978 1 931883 49 8

The Boys begins with a beguiling description of a stretch of road between two brothels. The road leads to Vidreres, a village in the Girona province that Toni Sala has tried to make a breeding ground for iniquity and petty rivalry of the sort familiar from *True Detective* or the novels of Jim Thompson. Written in long stretches of indirect monologue, *The Boys* follows four lives brought together by a car crash that kills two young men. Ernest, a banker, mulls over the tree that the boys' car struck, has a fraught encounter with a prostitute, then more or less disappears; Miqui, a crude, shotgun-toting trucker, wiles away his hours arranging hook-ups in internet chatrooms; Iona, the girlfriend of one of the deceased, broods about mortality; and Nil, a failed art student, schemes with his father to buy the dead boys' patrimony and shoots videos of himself torturing animals.

The novel struggles between registers, bucking the strictures of its genre yet too prosaic to be thought literary. In the rare moments when the ubiquitous digressions about death transcend the commonplace, they frequently veer into incoherence: "Every death had told her: you are dead and that's why you must live. You have to live because you're dead. If you weren't dead, it wouldn't make sense for you to live". Sala is at his best when hewing to the local: there is charm and insight in his discussions of the bursting of the credit bubble and Spain's lingering economic crisis, the vagaries of Catalan nationalism, and the country's outsiders – from petty criminals to Russian gangsters to African labourers brought in to work the soil. He is a talented chronicler, as evinced in several of his earlier books; it is a shame to see his powers of observation marred here by so much exasperating lyrical excess.

ADRIAN NATHAN WEST

Cultural Studies

Geoffrey Hosking
TRUST
A history
224pp. Oxford University Press. £25 (US $45).
978 0 19 871238 1

"Trust me, I'm a doctor" still rings true, if recent polls are to be believed. The British medical profession has topped an annual Ipsos/MORI survey of public trust for over thirty years; in the United States, Gallup found that nurses inspire most confidence. Politicians in both countries lag far behind. Americans now trust them as much as telemarketers and car dealers. Only lobbyists are trusted less.

These figures confirm Geoffrey Hosking's diagnosis of a world-wide – or, at least, Western – "crisis of trust". Sociologists and anthropologists have long studied trust and its near-relatives, confidence, faith, credit and risk, but Hosking is one of the few historians to take trust seriously. As an eminent Russian historian, he is an acute analyst of distrust. He starts in that "land of maximum distrust", Stalin's Russia: "People have completely stopped trusting each other", complained a diarist in 1937. He later conjures up other states of distrust: Yugoslavia in 1991 ("we no longer trust anyone here any more", a Serbian soldier laments) and Japan after Fukushima (a pregnant woman blames the authorities: "I don't trust anything they say"). Hosking shows that trust is contagious, but also slow to grow and quick to evaporate. "Confidence grows at the rate a coconut tree grows", he quotes the Indian economist Montek Singh Ahluwalia's observation, "and it falls at the rate a coconut falls."

Trust: A history ranges widely and digs deeply into the historical record, social theory and even the human heart. Hosking argues that "strong thin trust", anchoring us to impersonal institutions, is modernity's characteristic form. With the 2008 financial crisis and its backwash in mind, he contends that "citizens rediscover their primary trust in the nation-state" whenever symbolic systems like money and credit melt into air. Yet that judgement seems premature: faith in the state proved fleeting and aroused no lasting trust in government. Scepticism about impersonal institutions is always wise, to hold the responsible to account and protect ourselves from harm. More Britons now trust their hairdressers (69 per cent) than their politicians (21 per cent).

Hosking's short, sharp book is no just-so story, explaining away our present discontents. Nor is it a tale of decline and fall: there was no "golden age of trust" we left behind. It ends with self-help and exhortation. "The central question . . . is how to restore trust in the trustworthy." Who are they? They are us. Hosking urges us all to be more professional, more loyal, more dependable. Trust him: he's a historian.

DAVID ARMITAGE

Literary Criticism

Barry Forshaw, editor
DETECTIVE
220pp. Intellect. Paperback, £25 (US $36).
978 1 78320 521 9

There is a strange parallel, in Western popular culture, between the rise of the fictional detective and the gradual diminuendo in widespread Christian belief. The sleuth – he who sees the truth of the world, who can make sense of the inexplicable, offer hope to the disconsolate and, in the writer Alison Joseph's words, provide "the epistemological lynch-pin" – echoes, surely, the role that might in earlier generations have been played by the priesthood. In the key tropes of the detective genre – in its cycles of punishment, confession and catharsis – there is something also of the mystery play and the pulpit. Despite the fictional crimesolver's frequent flaws, he is often someone to whom the reader and even the author can aspire. Chief Inspector Jules Maigret, for example, according to Jon Wilkins, "is the man his creator wished to be".

Much of this is touched on in Barry Forshaw's contribution to Intellect Books' *Crime Uncovered* series. After a brisk introduction, this volume, edited by Forshaw, offers insights into a variety of twentieth- and twenty-first-century iterations of the form. Crime fiction, he argues, is a genre that, while necessarily prescriptive, offers the possibility of "acute social critique". Although the surface pleasures of the detective story are considerable, the writers whom Forshaw has enlisted are at their most intriguing when discussing subtext. Barbara Pezzotti frames the highly popular character of Inspector Salvo Montalbano as an embodiment of "a contemporary Sicily where the Mafiosi are not feared and may be defeated, and where women are emancipated and assertive", while Forshaw himself argues that the dour Inspector Kurt Wallander's investigations dramatize "the fissures in the consensus regarding the Swedish welfare state" as well as discussing "the corrupt influence of Big Pharma and the ruthless prerogatives of multinationals, to people trafficking, to his country's barely disguised racism". The figure of the detective, a literary staple for more than a century-and-a-half, remains complex, shifting and fiercely modern. As Forshaw's book makes plain, it still has much to offer in its curious combination of the comforting and confrontational.

JONATHAN BARNES

Memoirs

Marion Coutts
THE ICEBERG
A memoir
304pp. Atlantic. Paperback, £8.99.
978 1 78239 352 8

"The news is given verbally. We learn something. We are mortal. You might say you know this but you don't." Marion Coutts is slowly plunged into a vertiginous chute after her husband, the art critic Tom Lubbock, is diagnosed with a brain tumour. Coutts charts every arc of this journey, the treatments, the hope, the new drugs ("How we adore this high false peak") and follows the new trajectory of their lives dictated by her husband's march towards death two-and-a-half years later: "If I were a tree you would find traces of that date in my wood". With astonishing clarity, she describes not only the gaping nature of illness and its insatiable demands on everyone around it ("The will to lie on the floor, to be carted off somewhere else and dealt with, has a strong attraction") but also the ever-changing emotions ("Fear is a peak, not a plateau"). Nothing is unbearable, Coutts shows us, by finding balance and ballast in the midst of acute mental distress. There is joy "And if I said to you now that we three are together and we are happy" – and consolation: the pleasure of work and food and the heart-stopping support of others, almost like a small tribe protecting its own in the middle of Central London. Her husband is never alone and when he dies it is with his family and friends around him.

Coutts's prose is precise and compelling, lyrical and poised, "We are like exhausted mammals, finned creatures, beached". Whether she talks about her toddler son – who is registering his father's deterioration as he blooms into language – or the practicalities of hospice care, she traces everything to its root with an unsentimental eye.

This is not another memoir of overcoming loss and grief, but rather an exploration of consciousness. Coutts, who is an artist, blends her writing on love, daily life and the visual arts in ways that transcend her own narrative. This is a chronicle of how we help each other die by travelling deeper into the texture of life. "You will lose everything that catches your eye", she reminds herself when witnessing great chunks of her husband's speech collapse, the obliteration of his intellect and his agency. Yet, his spirit was never destroyed and Coutts manages to echo that victory by writing an incandescent account of what it means to be alive.

FANI PAPAGEORGIOU

Japanese Literature

Natsume Sōseki
THE MINER
Translated by Jay Rubin
208pp. Aadvark Bureau. Paperback, £9.99.
978 1 910709 02 3

Reading Natsume Sōseki, it can be hard to believe that his works were not somehow ghostwritten by a crowd of dissimilar geniuses. His first novel, *I Am a Cat* (1905), never dips below the surface over more than 600 pages of verbal virtuosity, narrated by a very funny cat. His last, *Light and Dark* (1916) dives deep, putting the psyches of an ordinary married couple under the unsparing analytic scalpel of an invisible and omniscient narrator. To read these two novels in succession is to leap in a single bound from Laurence Sterne to late Henry James. It is also to understand why Haruki Murakami opens his long and reverential introduction to Sōseki's *The Miner* by calling him "Japan's greatest modern novelist".

The Miner, which Sōseki began serializing in 1908, manages to incorporate both extremes of surface and depth. It narrates a descent into the bowels of the earth and the narrator's own interiority, but it does so with an absurdist attention to detail. It begins without a subject in stream-of-consciousness fashion: "Been walking and walking through this band of pine trees". The narrator is a young Tokyoite fleeing a botched romance who ends up working in a coal mine somewhere in northeastern Japan. The mine would have reminded contemporary readers of the massive Ashio copper mine, the site of one of Japan's most devastating environmental disasters and a place infamous for its hellish working conditions. The novel's narrator, too, had a counterpart in real life: a young man who knocked on Sōseki's door and asked him to make his story into a novel. But in Sōseki's hands, the young man becomes a spouter of theories about the non-existence of character as "something fixed and final", and the hero of a novel that "never did become a novel". The mine flickers into allegory and *The Miner* becomes a hybrid of realism and existential parable, somewhere between Zola and Kafka.

For this new edition the translator Jay Rubin (who also translates Murakami) has given his original version from 1988 a thorough scrubbing and a new immediacy – sticking closer to Sōseki's striking use of present-tense narration. Rubin's superb afterword remains unchanged and ends on almost the identical phrase to the one with which Murakami's introduction begins, describing Sōseki as "Japan's great modern novelist".

J. KEITH VINCENT