



Kydd gloves are off for invasion

Conquest

by Julian Stockwin
Hodder & Stoughton, \$32.99

JULIAN Stockwin's latest maritime adventure is set during the British invasion of South Africa. *Conquest* follows on from *Victory*, which centred on the Battle of Trafalgar and is a fascinating account of the naval battle that broke the back of Napoleon's French empire.

In *Conquest*, the British are looking to capitalise on their victory over the French and Captain Thomas Kydd is in command of the 32-gun frigate *L'Aurore*, part of the British squadron that

invades Cape Town.

They are up against the Dutch settlers, backed by the French and thousands of African natives.

Taking Cape Town was not difficult, but keeping it in British hands was the problem.

The French were poised to throw the British out when Kydd and his crew encountered a French frigate and uncovered details of the plot.

Stockwin is an old salt who retired from the Royal Navy with the rank of Lieutenant Commander, and his series on Captain Kydd follows in the footsteps of other great maritime writers.

Among the best are C.S. Forester with his series on Captain Horatio

Hornblower; Dudley Pope's swashbuckling hero was Captain Nicholas Ramage; and Captain Adam Bolitho was the creation of Douglas Reeman, who wrote his series under the name of Alexander Kent.

They are a fine crew of historical maritime novelists.

Stockwin has the knack of weaving a great story around an event in history to create an entertaining and informative adventure.

He is up there with the best of the maritime novelists and his Captain Kydd is sure to give pleasure to readers who like to go down to the sea in ships in an era when Britain ruled the waves and the world.

ROSS GATES

Top 10 books

1. **A Dance with Dragons** George R. R. Martin
2. **1835** James Boyce
3. **Blood Line** Lynda La Plante
4. **Winter on the Farm** Matthew Evans
5. **Win & Clyde** Janet Fenton
6. **Go the F**k to Sleep** Adam Mansbach
7. **Jamie's 30-Minute Meals** Jamie Oliver
8. **The Abels, volume 2** Bill Wilkinson
9. **Viv and Hilda** Kathy Gatenby
10. **Before I Go to Sleep** S. J. Watson

● Compiled from lists supplied last Monday by Fullers, the Hobart Bookshop, Dymocks Hobart, Book City Hobart, Kingston and Eastlands and Ellison Hawker.

Austen Tayshus: Merchant of Menace

by Ross Fitzgerald and Rick Murphy
Hale & Iremonger, \$29.95

MOST people don't "get" Austen Tayshus – and he probably doesn't care because his audacity is what seems to drive him.

If a group of "holier-than-thou psychiatrists" can't get a handle on the country's most dangerous and subversive comedian, who is also an observant son of Judaism, then those who cast the first stone don't stand a chance – particularly if they are in his audience.

Austen Tayshus (aka Isaac Cox) is Sandy Gutman's stage name and *Merchant of Menace*, by Ross Fitzgerald and journalist Rick Murphy, reveals Gutman's chaotic life and Austen Tayshus's remarkable ability to be vulgar, crude, loud, angry, confident, outrageous and pointed.

Recognised in mainstream media as the man who delivered the smash hit *Australiana* (penned with fellow comedian Billy Birmingham), Austen Tayshus berates and delivers on many political, sociological and cultural levels.

Naturally, *Merchant of Menace* focuses on *Australiana*, which incorporates puns featuring dozens of Australian place names.

Birmingham acknowledges "it's not the deepest material I've ever done", but the track was played relentlessly on radio, racing to No. 1 – before disappearing from the charts within five days largely due to a raid by the vice squad on stores selling it.

Police charged the retailers with possessing, distributing and selling an obscene item. The obscenity charges centred on five words – "tryin' to Platypus" and "pack Billabong".

The judge threw the case out and the single went back to No. 1.

Merchant of Menace details Gutman's reaction when the single took top spot.

"I was in the shower and they announced it had reached number



WITTY: Sandy Gutman has left an indelible mark on Australia with his alter-ego Austen Tayshus.

Sandy's satire o-puns many doors

one," he says. "I remember I cried."

Such emotion would seem to run against Gutman's taciturn nature, but he rates it as an important event in his life.

"I had failed and quit so many things. I had become such a loser that comedy felt like my last chance to actually do something," he says.

"In the Jewish culture it is encouraged, and sometimes expected, that you will attempt to do great things in your life.

"The number one hit was a relief more than anything."

Gutman cites Barry Humphries, John Clarke, Graham Bond, Rory O'Donahue and Garry McDonald as influences. In particular he rates McDonald's character Norman Gunston "a genius".

Merchant of Menace reveals how

Austen Tayshus pushes the boundaries of taste and political satire and astonishes all types of audiences, from airline executives to stockmen in outback Australia.

He can dominate a wild and unruly mob such as the Hells Angels, and charm the hipster urban elite of Melbourne's artistic and intellectual underground.

Austen Tayshus's interaction with hapless Telstra employees, service station attendants, radio disc jockeys, government bureaucrats, literate youth, white supremacists and brain-dead rock stars is the stuff of legend.

For some, his public excesses are intolerable, while others find them wondrous and enlightening.

And it is a relief that *Merchant of Menace* declares Gutman is not

interested in the glittering reward of mainstream success because he does not belong in the gaping conservative arena known as popular entertainment.

Gutman realised that he was never going to be a popular showbiz figure, but as an outsider he would be free to speak his mind.

Perhaps Austen Tayshus should have the last say – as all good comedians do.

"The biography explains in fairly simple terms what I have been trying to achieve," he says.

"I have tried to be funny with a little bit of a message while shaking things up."

For now, Gutman is happy, which almost seems enough because he's got *chutzpah*.

JOHN ANDREWARTHA

Weighty issues for a Mal-content

Bed

by David Whitehouse
Text, \$29.95

WE are cautioned not to judge a book by its cover, but the eye-catching design of striped pyjamas is calculated to inspire curiosity.

It is also an astute ploy because it gives a hint of what can be expected, while avoiding any graphic and off-putting images of the contents.

Somewhere in Britain there lives a devoted wife and mother of two boys. The eldest has psychological problems that manifest in odd behaviour – one of which is the compulsion to remove all of his clothes in public. Many professional gurus are consulted over the years, but seemingly they are unable to effectively diagnose or treat Mal's waywardness.

Somehow he completes an education and enters a period of normality to the point of leaving home and acquiring both a girlfriend and a job.

However, at the age of 25 Mal decides he no longer wants to be on the treadmill of work, family, bills, mortgages and vegetating in front of the television. He returns home to the bedroom that he shared with his younger brother and never leaves it. Mother readily accepts the situation because she was stereotypically brought up to care for others and be needed and knows no other role. Mining engineer father retreats not to his shed but the attic as the eldest son becomes the sun around which the family planets revolve.

In time, Mal's obesity reaches colossal proportions and rumours cause him to attain a celebrity status. Seemingly he is indifferent to the way he has blighted the life of his younger brother and squashed his identity.

This clever novel is not merely highly entertaining, but a mirror of Western society where obsessive slimness exists in parallel with unprecedented levels of obesity. It reflects too on a sensation-seeking media that pries into people's lives and presents shallow exposes as news, while issues of great consequence to an imperilled globe are trivialised or ignored.

There is a cast of quirky characters and imaginative, even preposterous, situations, as well as unpredictable events in this well-rounded and ultimately resolved dark comedy.

Bed is a kind of suburban equivalent of *Wuthering Heights* where the household is kept in thrall by a secret shame that must be concealed from the vulgar gaze.

Undoubtedly the gothic nightmare that will provide frissons of fear is the beast within: the fat cells in everyone that are waiting to escape, run amok, smother us under an avalanche of adipose.

CLYDE SELBY



All About Love

Anatomy of an Unruly Emotion

Lisa Appignanesi



Analysis of love is lacking in passion

All About Love: The Anatomy of an Unruly Emotion

by Lisa Appignanesi
Virago, \$55

THIS is an academic treatise on love in its many guises throughout time. This book charts changing rituals and norms, covering everything from the secret missives of courtly love to the more guarded expressions of love in our own age.

Lisa Appignanesi strikes readers with her encyclopedic knowledge (the index alone stretches for what seems like chapters) and her concise style.

However, as love is, by its very nature, individualistic and elusive, Appignanesi's classification system left me a little unsatisfied.

Perhaps it was because she occasionally had to sacrifice depth and specificity for clarity, or

perhaps it was because her reference to cultural artefacts could only stretch to film.

Whatever the reason, I was impressed by the scholarly rigour, but was left wanting more passion and insight.

I found the strongest part of Appignanesi's writing to be her deconstruction of dysfunctional relationships – possibly because this is her area of greatest personal interest and territory closest to that she covered in her award-winning *Mad, Bad and Sad*.

As a respected expert in the fields of both English literature and Freudian psychology, she puts an interesting spin on some of the more angst-ridden areas she explores.

Her dryly humorous comments about the cynicism of our age are particularly adroit.

Appignanesi has attempted a Herculean task and is to be commended on catering for a huge gap in the market.

Students of English, Media and Sociology will doubtless find this book very useful and it

will also probably appeal to casual readers still searching for a book that answers those eternal questions about this enigmatic emotion.

Annabel

by Kathleen Winter
Random House, \$28.50

WHAT would you do if your child was born neither male nor female, but a combination of both? What if, when trusting medical experts to assign a gender to this child, you feared they would make a grave mistake? What if everything you subsequently told this child about their identity was premised on uncertainty or half-truth?

In *Annabel*, Kathleen Winter bravely approaches the difficult terrain of these questions, producing a first novel that is provocative, caring and beautifully written.

Winter's *Annabel* moved me with every page. It is not only the story of Wayne/Annabel, a "true hermaphrodite" born to simple and honest parents in the remote wilderness of Labrador; it is also the story of each of these parents, plus their most courageous friends.

Annabel records the first twenty-something years of its namesake's existence, bringing to life the extreme isolation each of these characters feels, and makes the reader care deeply for all those involved.

While other reviewers have suggested that the book lacks plausibility, I found its tone utterly authentic and haunting, and while it certainly contains some disturbing moments, one of its greatest strengths is getting the reader to accept what it would be like to be in this extraordinary situation.

With its superb descriptions of landscape and its surprising, nuanced plot, *Annabel* is a stunning achievement.

ANNA FORWARD

