placed. Rather, we tap into a moment of their lives — most often a subtle moment of crisis — in which nothing is made explicit. A man helps drive two people who have been involved in a car accident to a hospital; a father is given the responsibility of his young asthma suffering daughter for the day; a man’s house is invaded by a gang of thieves. The tendency to withhold background information on characters gives Disher’s stories an immediacy and clarity, which at the same time often leaves the reader with an uneasy feeling of not knowing enough.

Disher, who is a crime writer, is preoccupied with gaps in stories, the way in which the reader might be able to detect what is missing. Although these stories could not really be defined as crime writing, one is still forced to play an active role — that of the detective — in reading. The emotional motive of a character is as interesting a puzzle to solve as a criminal motive: the two are often intertwined. What leads two of the characters — both middle-class middle-aged men — to inflict damage upon their neighbour’s property? Why does a woman take her boyfriend on a strange trip to meet her ex-lover?

The language used in these stories — precise, well-crafted — helps to create the sense of clarity. It has a stylised, ‘hard-edged’ quality to it, which no doubt stems from Disher’s background as a writer of detective fiction.

There is something American in his tone, yet the stories — as a result of keen observation of characters, objects and settings — remain particularly Australian.

This is, finally, an entertaining book. It is also an engaging collection, whose complexity is perhaps initially hidden. Disher knows how to write a story that will grab and retain attention, whilst at the same time reflecting intelligently upon our society.

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