

## Reviews

## Fiction

## ★ A Curable Romantic

Joseph Skibell. Algonquin, \$24.95 (400p)  
ISBN 978-1-56512-929-0

Skibell's fat, cheeky, and sweeping latest begins in early 1895 Austria when his endearing protagonist, young Dr. Jakob Sammelsohn, comes face-to-face with Sigmund Freud in a room full of mirrors that create an ironic "unending trail of Freuds." Eventually, the story follows Sammelsohn through the shadow of Freud, the arms of several lovers, and eventually to the Warsaw ghetto, providing a grand portrait of Eastern Europe, but it is the initial setup of Sammelsohn as a naïve crucible for Freud's vicarious obsessions that makes Skibell (*A Blessing on the Moon*) more of a social satirist than a straightforward portraitist. In the figure of Sammelsohn, we see the timid makings of the modern psychoanalytic man: the young doctor is, at heart, a lonely romantic led into a bungle of overanalysis in a world "glittering with the usual accoutrements of late-century masquerade," sporting the foolish instrumentation of "monocles, lorgnettes, pince-nez, stickpins, watchfobs" and an "assortment of impractical hats." Skibell's delicious juxtaposition of Sammelsohn against the cocaine-snorting Freud, and Sammelsohn's infatuation with the "cruel, vindictive, haughty, caustic, dismissive, even murderous" character of Emma Eckstein, one of Freud's patients, make for a magnetic collection of personalities. (Sept.)

## The Pleasure Seekers

Tishani Doshi. Bloomsbury, \$15 paper (320p)  
ISBN 978-1-60819-277-9

Not all that much pleasure is sought (or found) by the characters of Doshi's competently written if thinly conceived debut. The story starts off in 1968 as Babo Patel leaves his Madras home to study in London, and though our hero is quick to give up the strict rules of his Jain upbringing, he's soon summoned



© JEFF ALLEN

Joseph Skibell puts a novel spin on Freud in his lovely *A Curable Romantic* (reviewed at left).

home once his parents find out he's been seeing Siân, a Welsh girl. After Babo gives his folks the silent treatment for a few months, the Patels comes to an agreement: if Babo and Siân are still together after two years of living with his family in Madras, they can return to London. Siân arrives in India, learns to take on the role of a traditional homemaker, joins the Overseas Women's Club, and has babies. Years later, Babo's youngest daughter takes off for an English adventure of her own. Ominous dreams and a catalogue of cursory mentions of historical events and pop culture references try to give this story some direction, but the narrative doesn't do much more than mark the passage of time. Doshi can write a nice sentence, but the bigger picture is too slight. (Sept.)

## ★ Juliet

Anne Fortier. Ballantine, \$25 (448p) ISBN 978-0-345-51610-7

Fortier bobs and weaves between Shakespearean tragedy and popular romance for a high-flying debut in which American Julie Jacobs travels to Siena in search of her Italian heritage—and possibly an inheritance—only to discover she is descended from 14th-century Giulietta Tomei, whose love for Romeo defied their feuding families and inspired Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Julie's hunt leads her to the families' descendants, still living in Siena, still feuding, and still struggling under the curse of the friar who wished a plague on both their houses. Ju-

lie's unraveling of the past is assisted by a Felliniesque contessa and the contessa's handsome nephew, and complicated by mobsters, police, and a mysterious motorcyclist. To understand what happened centuries ago, in the previous generation, and all around her, Julie relies on relics: a painting, a journal, a dagger, a ring. Readers enjoy the additional benefit of antique texts alternating with contemporary narratives, written in the language of modern romance and enlivened by brisk storytelling. Fortier navigates around false clues and twists, resulting in a dense, heavily plotted love story that reads like a *Da Vinci Code* for the smart modern woman. (Aug.)

## Slicker

Lucy Jackson. St. Martin's, \$24.99 (256p)  
ISBN 978-0-312-56500-8

Pampered Manhattan girl Desirée runs away from her privileged life to Kansas, only to find it meaner and more mixed up than the urban jungle she abandoned in the pseudonymous Jackson's light romp through the land of corn, cows, and "small-minded, Bible-thumping, self-righteous, Jew-hating John Birchers." Or so Desirée sees it when confronted by a gun-toting thief, the hilarious highlight of this oddball tale of young and middle-aged love. "Mostly everyone here's good people," the outraged thief replies. "Or good enough, anyway." Jackson (*Posh*) puts a sunny spin on Desirée's foray into waves of grain, where she discovers love worth leaving New York City for, and forgiveness for a dad who clumsily burst out of the closet. The companion story of

