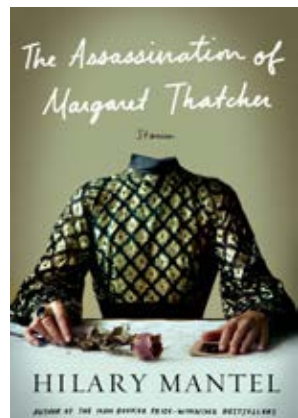


## short stories

### The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher

by Hilary Mantel. Picador, \$16.



Hilary Mantel is the sort of writer who makes other writers want to quit writing. Her prose is magnificent, resplendent, inimitable; it flutters off the page like a kind of breezy but acute argot, effortlessly meshing conversational shorthand with British pomp and registering the subtlest tones of class and gender and domestic conflict. But she is, first and foremost, a fantastic storyteller, given to details and observations that cause her fiction to burst alive in the reader's mind.

Her short story collection, *The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher*, is packed with moments that catch the breath: a pair of unlikely attic windows are described as "surprised,"

a man in contemplation is seen "as if he were the warden of his own identity," cherry trees "toss extravagant flounces of blossom" to the pavement. Such intimacies extend to every nook and cranny of the writing, bringing to life a breathing, throbbing, three-dimensional world in which everyday people doing everyday things become, somehow, grander than the picayune facts of their existence. As with the "catharses" of James Joyce, each story hinges on some peculiar twist or surprise of fate, honestly earned, and yet each sentence Mantel lays on the page is, in some sense, cathartic: perfectly rendered, emotionally resonant and exquisitely lapidary, as permanent and incontrovertible as a final verdict. — Rick Levin

### A Manual for Cleaning Women: Selected Stories

by Lucia Berlin. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, \$26.

Restless yet assured, frenetic yet searching, the short stories of Lucia Berlin tap out like spooling subtitles deciphering the mad gibberish of unreconstructed reality. Berlin, who died in 2004 at the age of 68, lived a crazy life — itinerant childhood, boho youth, odd jobs, marriages, divorces, addiction, recovery, restless relocations across the U.S. and into Mexico — and her stories grab bits and pieces of this woolly existence, patching them together

## J. Michaels Staff Picks

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Of local interest is Megan Kruse's *Call Me Home*. Oregon writer, an uncommonly powerful debut novel.

Also in fiction, *A Little Life* by Hanya Yanagihara. Astonishing, challenging, upsetting and profoundly moving.

And it's a big year for rediscovering the short story. Three collections, two American women and one South American woman: *A Manual For Cleaning Women* by Lucia Berlin (see review this issue), *The Visiting Privilege* by Joy Williams, *The Complete Stories of Clarice Lispector*.

In non-fiction: Andy Goldsworthy *Ephemeral Works 2004-2014*, *Hold Still* by Sally Mann, Maira Kalman's *Beloved Dog*, *Thing Explainer: Complicated Stuff In Simple Words* by Randall Munroe and Mario Vargas Llosa's *Notes on the Death of Culture: Essays on Spectacle and Society*.

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