

## Notes Simon Critchley Fitzcarraldo Editions

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This book is not a suicide note. Ten days after Edouard Leve handed in the manuscript of *Suicide* to his publisher in 2007, he hanged himself in his apartment. He was 42. Two years after Jean Amery's *On Suicide* was published in 1976, the author took an overdose of sleeping pills. He was 65. In 1960, some eighteen years after Albert Camus had raised and - so he thought - resolved the question of suicide in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he was killed in a car accident. He is alleged to have said that dying in a car crash is the most absurd of all deaths. The absurdity of his death is compounded by the fact he had an unused train ticket in his pocket. He was 46. Let me say at the outset, at the risk of disappointing the reader, that I have no plans to kill myself ... just yet. Nor do I wish to join the chorus of those who proclaim loudly against suicide and claim that the act of taking one's own life is irresponsible and selfish, even shameful and cowardly, that people must stay alive whatever the cost. *Suicide*, in my view, is neither a legal nor moral offence, and should not be seen as such. My intention here is to simply try to understand the phenomenon, the act itself, what precedes it and what follows. I'd like to consider suicide from the point of view of those who have made the leap, or have come close to it—we might even find that the capacity to take that leap is what picks us out as humans. I want to look at suicide closely, carefully, and perhaps a little coldly, without immediately leaping to judgements or asserting moral principles like the right to life or death. We have to look suicide in the face, long and hard, and see what features, what profile, what inherited character traits and wrinkles emerge. Perhaps what we see when we look closely is our own distorted reflection staring back at us.

From this renowned philosopher comes a debut work of fiction, at once a brilliant précis of the history of philosophy, a semi-autobiographical meditation on the absurd relationship between knowledge and memory, and a very funny story. A French philosopher dies during a savage summer heat wave. Boxes carrying his unpublished papers mysteriously appear in Simon Critchley's office. Rooting through them, Critchley discovers a brilliant text on the ancient art of memory and a cache of astrological charts predicting the deaths of various philosophers. Among them is a chart for Critchley himself, laying out in great detail the course of his life and eventual demise. While waiting for his friend's prediction to come through, Critchley receives the missing, final box, which contains a maquette of Giulio Camillo's sixteenth-century Venetian memory theater, a space supposed to contain the sum of all knowledge. With nothing left to hope for, Critchley devotes himself to one final project before his death—the building of a structure to house his collective memories and document the remnants of his entire life.

"A sharp, funny, and eccentric debut ... Pond makes the case for Bennett as an innovative writer of real talent. ... [It]reminds us that small things have great depths."—*New York Times Book Review* "Dazzling...exquisitely written and daring ." —0, the Oprah Magazine Immediately upon its publication in Ireland, Claire-Louise Bennett's debut began to attract attention well beyond the expectations of the tiny Irish press that published it. A deceptively slender volume, it captures with utterly mesmerizing virtuosity the interior reality of its unnamed protagonist, a young woman living a singular and mostly solitary existence on the outskirts of a small coastal village. Sidestepping the usual conventions of narrative, it focuses on the details of her daily experience—from the best way to eat porridge or bananas to an encounter with cows—rendered sometimes in story-length, story-like stretches of narrative, sometimes in fragments no longer than a page, but always suffused with the hypersaturated, almost synesthetic intensity of the physical world that we remember from childhood. The effect is of character refracted and ventriloquized by environment, catching as it bounces her longings, frustrations, and disappointments—the ending of an affair, or the ambivalent beginning with a new lover. As the narrator's persona emerges in all its eccentricity, sometimes painfully and often hilariously, we cannot help but see mirrored there our own fraught desires and limitations, and our own fugitive desire, despite everything, to be known. Shimmering and unusual, Pond demands to be devoured in a single sitting that will linger long after the last page.

By turns philosophical and darkly comic, an ex-smoker's meditation on the nature and consequences of his nearly lifelong addiction. Written with the passion of an obsessive, *Nicotine* addresses a lifelong addiction, from the thrill of the first drag to the perennial last last cigarette. Reflecting on his experiences as a smoker from a young age, Gregor Hens investigates the irreversible effects of nicotine on thought and patterns of behavior. He extends the conversation with other smokers to meditations on Mark Twain and Italo Svevo, the nature of habit, and the validity of hypnosis. With comic insight and meticulous precision, Hens deconstructs every facet of dependency, offering a brilliant analysis of the psychopathology of addiction. This is a book about the physical, emotional, and psychological power of nicotine as not only an addictive drug, but also a gateway to memory, a long trail of streetlights in the rearview mirror of a smoker's life. Cigarettes are sometimes a solace, sometimes a weakness, but always a witness and companion. This is a meditation, an ode, and a eulogy, one that will be passed hand-to-hand between close friends.

The figure of Hamlet haunts our culture like the Ghost haunts him. Arguably, no literary work, not even the Bible, is more familiar to us than Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Everyone knows at least six words from the play; often people know many more. Yet the play—Shakespeare's longest—is more than "passing strange" and becomes deeply unfamiliar when considered closely. Reading *Hamlet* alongside other writers, philosophers, and psychoanalysts—Carl Schmitt, Walter Benjamin, Freud, Lacan, Nietzsche, Melville, and Joyce—Simon Critchley and Jamieson Webster consider the political context and stakes of Shakespeare's play, its relation to religion, the movement of desire, and the incapacity to love.

Pretentiousness is the engine oil of culture; the essential lubricant in the development of all arts, high, low, or middle.

Widely acknowledged as one of the most important English writers of the last century, Angela Carter's work stands out for its bawdiness and linguistic zest, its hospitality to the fantastical and the absurd, and its extraordinary inventiveness and range. Her life was as vigorously modern and unconventional as anything in her fiction. This is the story of how Angela Carter invented herself - as a new kind of woman and a new kind of writer - and how she came to write such seductive and distinctive masterworks as *The Bloody Chamber*, *Nights at the Circus*, and *Wise Children*. Because its subject so powerfully embodied the spirit of the times, the book also provides a fresh perspective on Britain's social and cultural history in the second half of the twentieth century. It examines such topics as the 1960s counterculture, the social and imaginative conditions of the nuclear age, and the advent of second wave feminism. Author Edmund Gordon has followed in Angela Carter's footsteps - travelling to the places she lived in Britain, Japan, and the USA - to uncover a life rich in adventure and incident. With unrestricted access to her manuscripts, letters, and journals, and informed by interviews with Carter's friends and family, Gordon offers an unrivalled portrait of one of the twentieth century's most dazzlingly original writers. This sharply written narrative will be the definitive biography for years to come.

At a time when opinion trumps facts and truth is treated as nothing more than another perspective, free speech has become a battleground. While authoritarians and algorithms threaten democracy, we argue over who has the right to speak. To protect ourselves from encroaching tyranny, we must look beyond this one-dimensional notion of what it means to be free and, by reconnecting liberty to equality and accountability, restore the individual agency engendered by the three dimensions of freedom.

Diogenes died by holding his breath. Plato allegedly died of a lice infestation. Diderot choked to death on an apricot. Nietzsche made a long, soft-brained and dribbling descent into oblivion after kissing a horse in Turin. From the self-mocking haikus of Zen masters on their deathbeds to the last words (gasps) of modern-day sages, *The Book of Dead Philosophers* chronicles the deaths of almost 200 philosophers—tales of weirdness, madness, suicide, murder, pathos and bad luck. In this elegant and amusing book, Simon Critchley argues that the question of what constitutes a 'good death' has been the central preoccupation of philosophy since ancient times. As he brilliantly demonstrates, looking at what the great thinkers have said about death inspires a life-affirming enquiry into the meaning and possibility of human happiness. In learning how to die, we learn how to live.

*Suicide Century* investigates suicide as an increasingly 'normalised' but still deeply traumatic and profoundly baffling act in twentieth-century writing.

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