

ASKING AT MEN  
MEN: ESSAYS ON  
THE MIND

AS-CORR

Best book is really American novelist, is married to Paul is best known for her , didn't have time to Perhaps she felt that articles about art, and philosophy ry thought she's had as when she finished says. Or maybe she othing less than 500 ges of notes would rly credentials.

reflects a heroic search. The book's des ponderings on ablo Picasso, Pina Koons, Robert dro Almodóvar and It also includes a ry darling Karl Ove reflections on the eriences teaching a psychiatric clinic psychoanalysis.

ird sections grapple ody conundrum, problems with the eory of mind and ology – especially most prominent nker. In one of her ed argues that by le of nature over ng that certain traits iology”, Pinker ideas that women t for technology and

illiance hangs over any of these essays t questions such as: me from? What is we have morality ple? Is the mind rain?

erspective of the r who looks in on believing this puts ition to breach the divide. But it's odd us on CP Snow's ure, in which he not being able to

DAN CALLISTER/REX



Circular motion: essayist Siri Hustvedt continually revisits the same ideas

# Asking questions she can't answer

explain the second law of thermodynamics, without mentioning how many have since taken up that challenge: Thomas Pynchon's *Entropy*, Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*, Ian McEwan's *Solar* and the rest have since made it into its own subgenre.

And instead of enlivening the subject herself, what we get is a lot of phenomenological jargon, lofty statements about what it is to be an artist, watery musings about the need for soulfulness in literature, gratuitous name-dropping of philosophers, physicists and neuroscientists, toe-curling anecdotes about dinner-party squabbles and platitudes of the sort she claims to abhor.

"Every human is capable of being wounded," she says, on the subject of male vulnerability.

For all her fawning over the "seques-

tered but intense worlds of the intellect", what Hustvedt seems to relish about the world of academia is its petty rivalries and po-faced nitpicking. I lost count of how many times she seethes at another intellectual's stupidity or preens at her own cleverness.

Later, she refers to the "genius" and "beauty" of ambiguity, an appreciation of the "lowering fogs". Despite the variety of subjects, she appears to be condemned to one room of thought where she is endlessly picking up the same ideas and putting them down again.

It doesn't surprise me that she's so keen on psychoanalysis. Reading her prose is not unlike becoming a therapist to someone locked in a series of circular arguments over a period of many years.

## PAPERBACKS OF THE YEAR

### NEUROTRIBES

by Steve Silberman

(Allen & Unwin, £9.99)

Is there an epidemic of autism? If there is, why might it be happening? This book, the result of 15 years' research, comes close to being a comprehensive guide to the subject.



### THE CLASP

by Sloane Crosley

(Windmill, £7.99)

When did I last first novel as go this? Sloane Crosley a bit like Anne her best. This is thirtysomething them at a wedd will life do to th

### THE BOYS IN THE TREES

by Carly Simon

(Constable, £9.99)

There are many cheesy books by celebrities about themselves. This is not one of them. It is a superb memoir by someone who happens to be famous – and who captures the essence of the Sixties and Seventies.



### ONE OF US

by Asne Seierstad

(Virago, £8.99)

July 22, 2011. In on the island of Anders Behring killed 77 people Seierstad descr the shooting. T why it happene

### POUR ME

by A.A. Gill

(W & N, £8.99)

A superb memoir – and one of the best books on addiction I have ever read. "The bliss of drink is that it's a small death," says Gill. He describes many things – people, works of art, parts of London – wonderfully well.



### THE UNFORTUNATE

by Sophie McM

(Windmill, £8.99)

A very sharp no about a rich fan George, his wife and his mother McManus show through the clo moneyed and g sense that some about to happer

### SOME RAIN MUST FALL

by Karl Ove Knausgaard

(Vintage, £8.99)

A Norwegian guy looks back at his youth in a fascinating way. This is the fifth volume in a series of six. It's best to read from the first book but you don't absolutely need to. Drinking, smoking, awkwardness. Brilliant.



### PURITY

by Jonathan Fr

(4th Estate, £8.99)

Franzen is grea hooking you so a person's life t want to stay the person in this C Californian wor in debt, full of s name is Purity. is superb.

### THE INVENTION OF SCIENCE

by David Wootton

(Penguin, £12.99)

This history of the scientific revolution is one of the best histories – of anything – I've ever read. It's about how, after about 1500, human beings discovered something truly amazing – the concept of discovery itself.



### HIGH DIVE

by Jonathan Le

(Windmill, £8.99)

It's 1978. Meet E Belfast boy who to join the IRA. meet Freya, a y woman who wo Hotel in Brighto does Margaret t what will happer