

FICTION

cooperative monks, and a distractingly attractive female servant bogs down the investigation. With a Ph.D. in history and a background in law, Sansom clearly harbors a deep affection for and knowledge of this historical period. However, his novel is unrelentingly grim in tone, as the reader is forced to plod along with Shardlake and the other mostly unlikable characters. Although the novel can be superficially compared with the historical mysteries of Iain Pears and Umberto Eco, their caliber of writing is much higher than Sansom's. Appropriate for large public libraries only. [Previewed in Prepub Alert, *LJ* 12/02.]—*Laurel Bliss, Yale Arts Lib.*

Skibell, Joseph.
English Disease.

Algonquin. Jun. 2003. c.256p. ISBN 1-56512-257-7. \$23.95. F

Melancholia was once known as the English disease, and touring the ruins of antiquity was seen as a cure, since, as the author notes, "contemplation of actual ruins would make one's own ruined life seem less hateful." This new novel by Skibell (*A Blessing on the Moon*) begins with Charles Belski and his wife, Isabelle, pitching a tent in the American Southwest and arguing about Mahler. If Alma couldn't be faithful to the genius Mahler, how can any marriage stand a chance? And if she could clandestinely have affairs, why couldn't she clandestinely compose? Belski spends the whole of this novel trying to save (or end) his marriage and coming to terms with what it means to be a Jew in contemporary times. Later, on a trip to Poland with a musicologist colleague, he muses about the insanity of paying to see the sites where his ancestors were slaughtered; visiting ruins doesn't seem to cure this patient. Despite the subject matter, this is a widely entertaining story—particularly because of the absurdist juxtapositions. The exposition on the Marx Brothers as a model of "the Ascent of the Assimilating Jewish Man" is priceless. Highly recommended for literary fiction collections.—*Debbie Bogenschutz, Cincinnati State Technical & Community Coll. Lib.*

★Sullivan, Mark J.
Jonah Sees Ghosts.

Akashic. Jul. 2003. c.206p. ISBN 1-888451-04-1. pap. \$13.95. F

This debut novel follows the conflict in the adolescent world of 15-year-old Jonah Hart, who sees ghosts after the death of his alcoholic father. Jonah's awkward initiation into adulthood is constantly—and sometimes humorously—interrupted by his visions of these ghosts, who sit beside him and his girlfriend at the movies or block his entrance to school, making him tardy to class. Peers ridicule Jonah's increasingly peculiar behavior, and he withdraws deeper into his dream world, despite the growing

concern of his only friend, Ross mother. It is especially ironic that in one such episode, the ghost of his father pulls him out of his dream and encourages him to "decide what [his] back on and what to face." With insight and compassion, this is a stunning look at the addictive personality of an adolescent boy in an alcoholic family. Recommended for all secondary school and public libraries.—*David A. Beronä, Univ. of New Hampshire, Durham*

Suzuki, Koji. **Ring.**

Vertical. Apr. 2003. c.352p. tr. from Japanese by Robert B. Rohmer & Glynne Walley. ISBN 1-932254-00-4. \$24.95. F

From its eerie opening to its chilling conclusion, this novel by the "Stephen King of Asia" will keep readers glued to its pages. On a humid September night, four Japanese teenagers die suddenly; the cause is determined to be heart failure, but the look of horror on their faces indicates that something more unnatural was to blame. When he realizes his niece was one of the victims, journalist Kazayuki Asakawa decides to investigate. His search leads him to a cabin in an isolated resort, where he finds an unmarked videotape that the four teenagers may have viewed. Curious, Asakawa watches it: a series of disturbing and enigmatic images is followed by a creepy warning that the viewer will die in a week unless he follows certain instructions. Unfortunately, this part of the tape has been erased, and now Asakawa is in a race against time to solve the mystery. Despite the melodramatic and sometimes unbelievable plot twists, this is an engrossing read. First published in Japan in 1991, the novel was the basis for *Ring*, one of Asia's highest-grossing films ever, and its American remake, *The Ring*. Fans of intelligent horror fiction and readers interested in Japanese pop culture will enjoy.—*Wilda Williams, "Library Journal"*

★Valdes-Rodriguez, Alisa.
The Dirty Girls Social Club.

St. Martin's. May 2003. c.320p. ISBN 0-312-31381-0. \$24.95. F

Lauren, Rebecca, Elizabeth, Sara, Amber, and Usnavys ("oohs-nah'vees"), or the *sucias* (dirty girls), as they call themselves, have been friends for the past decade, since their days at Boston University. They're all Latina, but they're as varied as the culture itself, representing different shapes, sizes, religions, ethnicities, and skin tones. Their approach to being Latina is diverse, too, ranging from denial to cultural confusion to ultra-militancy. As close as sisters, these young women meet every six months in Boston and discuss their problems and their triumphs, but it is their unspoken secrets that add the edge to their relationships. Former *Boston Globe* journalist Valdes-Rodriguez has written an incredible first novel, told in six distinct voices and points

Library Journal, 4/2003
tural lines as the characters advise, comfort, and support each other. Highly recommended for popular fiction collections of all sizes, it is also available in Spanish (ISBN 0-312-31812-X, \$13.95), so both editions should be considered for purchase. [Previewed in Prepub Alert, *LJ* 1/03.]—*Shelley Mosley, Glendale P.L., AZ*

Weisberger, Lauren.
The Devil Wears Prada.

Doubleday. Apr. 2003. c.320p. ISBN 0-385-50926-X. \$21.95. F

This chic read is sure to take the fashion world by storm, although the literary world may find it lacking. Weisberger, former assistant to *Vogue* editor Anna Wintour, has created a fictionalized tell-all à la Emma McLaughlin and Nicola Kraus's *The Nanny Diaries*. Andrea is a nice Jewish girl from suburban Connecticut who, as Weisberger repeatedly tells us, lands "a job a million girls would die for" as assistant to Miranda Priestly, the imperious editor of *Runway* magazine. But the job is more like indentured servitude with a one-year contract; 14-hour days are de rigueur and encompass such delights as sorting Miranda's laundry, fetching her lunch, and responding instantly to such commands as "Ahn-dre-ah, hand me a scarf." The carrot at the end of the stick is the promise of a dream job with *The New Yorker*, which somehow makes palatable Miranda's invectives and the ensuing downhill slide of Andrea's personal life. This fast-paced black comedy has enough dirt to please any fashionista but should serve as fair warning for every girl who dreams of working at a fashion magazine. Despite the pedestrian writing, the prepublication buzz on this novel is big, so buy for demand. [Previewed in Prepub Alert, *LJ* 2/1/03.]—*Stacy Alesi, Southwest Cty. Regional Lib., Boca Raton, FL*

Short Stories

Iagnemma, Karl. **On the Nature of Human Interaction.**

Dial. May 2003. c.224p. ISBN 0-385-33593-8. \$22.95. F

Iagnemma would seem to be a paradox: he's a notable author of short stories whose works have won a Pushcart Prize and a *Paris Review* Discovery Prize as well as a research scientist in the mechanical engineering department at MIT. In fact, these disparate aspects of his personality work together; he seamlessly blends the lyrical and the precise to create gemlike little portraits of individuals who seem suddenly to have caught their "reflection[s] in a cloudy mirror." A confused academic whose ef-