

# Books

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He's been labelled a self-hating Jew for his crusade against Israel, but Norman Finkelstein is unrepentant. Ben Naparstek finds out why

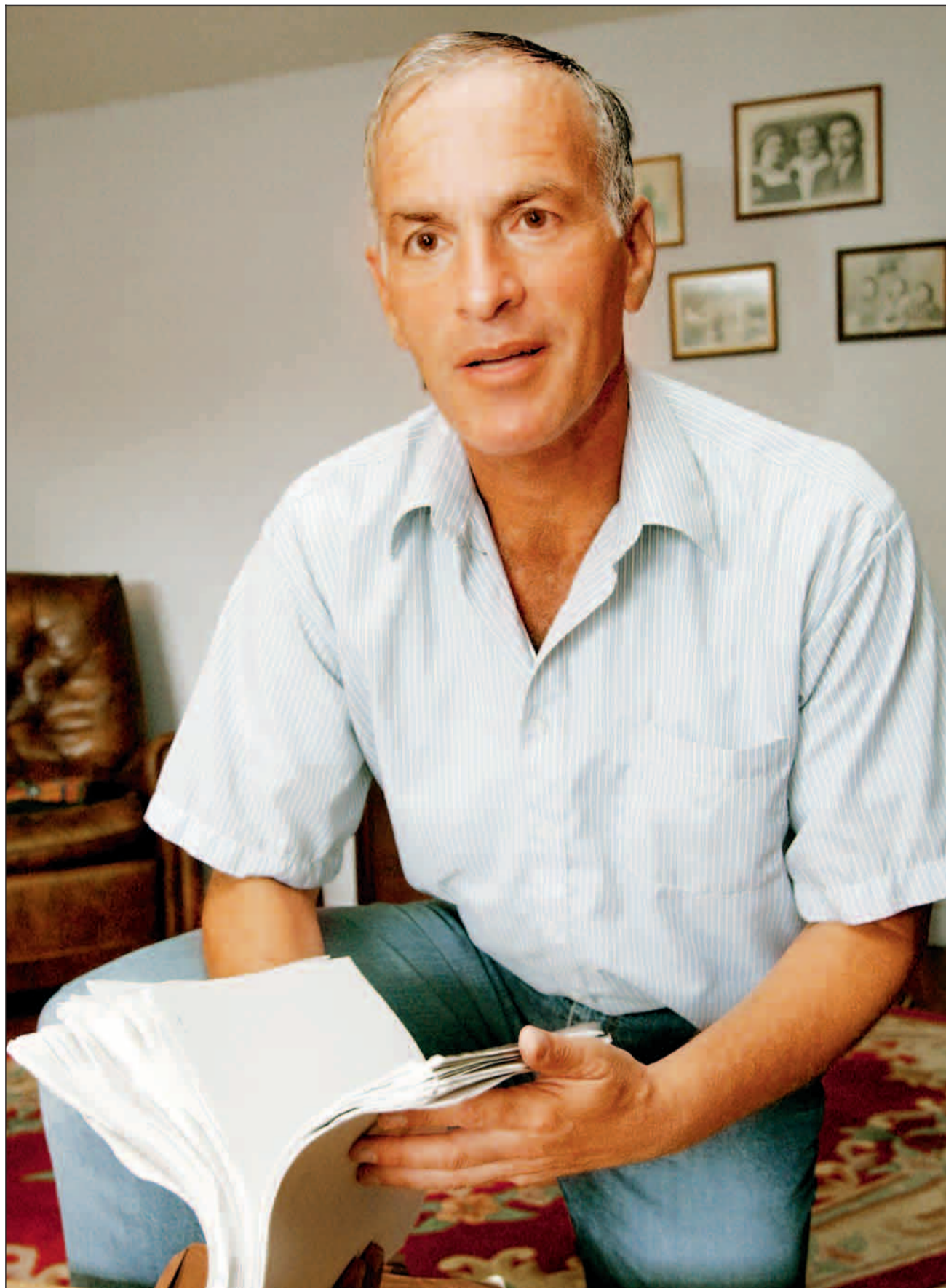


Photo: AP

**NORMAN FINKELSTEIN** is the academic equivalent of a street fighter. An anti-Zionist crusader and the son of Holocaust survivors, he regularly likens Jewish officials to anti-Semitic stereotypes and has called the Holocaust-survivor writer Elie Wiesel the "resident clown" of the Holocaust "circus". Finkelstein is a far-left academic, with a strong support base among the Holocaust-denying right, who one Jewish intellectual has described as "poison ... a disgusting self-hating Jew ... something you find under a rock."

He rose to notoriety in 2000 with *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering*, which argued that organised Jewry exploits the memory of the Holocaust to deflect criticism of Israel and blackmail European governments for compensation payments. Finkelstein's tract was initially ignored in the US, but was translated into 17 languages and spent nine months on German best-seller lists. Only after the book created a storm in Europe did mainstream US publications pay heed.

Finkelstein boasts that *The New York Times* reviewed *The Holocaust Industry* more savagely than Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. Writing in its pages, historian Omer Bar-tov described it as "an ideological fanatic's view of other people's opportunism ... filled with precisely the kind of shrill hyperbole that Finkelstein rightly deplores in much of the current media hype over the Holocaust".

His new book, *Beyond Chutzpah*, reprises these themes. Finkelstein says American-Jewish leaders wield the club of anti-Semitism to silence critics of Israel. "By turning a blind eye to Israeli crimes in the name of sensitivity to past Jewish suffering, [Jewish leaders] enable Israel to continue on a murderous path that foments anti-Semitism," he writes.

The latter half of the book is given over to a debunking of Harvard scholar and celebrity lawyer Alan Dershowitz's 2004 best-seller *The Case For Israel*. Finkelstein alleges that Dershowitz's book is a hoax stitched from spurious sources, with vast swathes plagiarised from Joan Peters' *From Time Immemorial*.

In an academic dogfight that made headlines in the US, Dershowitz launched a fierce campaign to stop *Beyond Chutzpah* going to press. When his efforts to deter University of California Press from publishing the book failed, he asked Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to intervene. Schwarzenegger refused, saying it was an issue of "academic freedom".

Finkelstein says he's less interested in exposing the alleged fraud than the corruption of intellectual debate on Israel-Palestine. "Alan Dershowitz is a pathological liar, but I don't think he's the problem," he says. "The problem is the institutions which give you a free ride when you toe the party line. The problem is *The New York Times*, which praised his hoax, and the deans at Harvard who don't call him to account."

Finkelstein makes no pretence about his academic credentials, bragging that he's never been published in an academic journal and teaches at a "third-rate university" in Chicago because he was "kicked out of every job" in New York. But reasoned objectivity isn't his aim, because Finkelstein is an angry man and

writing is his therapy. "The only reason I ever write anything is because I get so angry I start screaming at the pages," he says. "It's just all lies! Rather than having it locked up inside of me, I write it out."

To his supporters – most prominently, his friend and mentor Noam Chomsky – Finkelstein is a bold iconoclast, prepared to speak the unspeakable about questions long sidelined by political correctness. In his just-published book *The Case For Peace*, Dershowitz says Chomsky uses Finkelstein as a "hit man" to voice his hard-left perspective on Jewish issues, which Chomsky has avoided ever since his name became tarnished by his association with Holocaust deniers.

Finkelstein is untroubled about his work being embraced by neo-Nazis. "In the second world war, Thomas Mann went on radio constantly denouncing the Nazi regime and they all said, 'That's giving comfort to anti-Teutonic feeling'. I'm sure there are people who are gleeful that a Jew is sticking it to the Jews. But you have to say, 'Who are the main victims now? Is it Jews or Palestinians?' If my writing can mitigate, even in a small way, the suffering Palestinians have to endure, and

## Razing Zion

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if it gives comfort to a handful of loonies, then I think that price is acceptable."

If Finkelstein were concerned about being a neo-Nazi pin-up, he wouldn't use Nazi Germany as his most persistent analogy for Israel and the American Jewish lobby. Asked about Dershowitz's claim that Finkelstein's mother was a Nazi collaborator, Finkelstein doesn't hesitate to quote from *Mein Kampf*. "He had a good insight, Hitler. He said in *Mein Kampf*: 'If you say a small lie, people think, 'Well, maybe that's true, maybe that's false'. But if you say a colossal lie, people think, 'Nobody could possibly be so brazen as to make something like that up.' Say Finkelstein's mother is a Nazi collaborator and people will believe it. It's Hitler's Big Lie."

For Finkelstein, the outrage that greets his work proves his argument that Jewish officials deploy the stereotype of the eternal Jewish victim to immunise themselves from criticism. "If you were to say American actions in Iraq caused a lot of anti-American feeling, would anyone think twice about it? But if you say that the Jews and the Jewish state cause anti-Jewish feeling, everybody calls, 'Horror! That's blaming the victim!'"

## Killer looks and murder in mind

Model-turned-writer Tara Moss is finally getting the respect she deserves for her thrillers. Sue Green finds out how she did it

It's a scene straight from the cover of *Vogue*: the model, blonde hair gleaming, makeup flawless, sips a coffee at a pavement cafe. Tall, slim, a tiny white dog at her feet, she's the epitome of style. But this model has murder on her mind.

Tara Moss, a model since the age of 15 who has graced the catwalks of Europe and the covers of more than 40 magazines, is now one of Australia's biggest-selling crime writers.

Rights to her gruesome psychological thrillers have been sold worldwide. In November, they were launched in the lucrative US and Canadian markets and she's had a glowing advance review from *Publishers Weekly*. "The bold new voice for American creative fiction fans," says Moss, quoting it by heart.

Having written since childhood, concocting stories chapter by chapter for her classmates, Moss turned to novels seven years ago.

Three best-sellers later, all featuring her character Makedde "Mak" Vanderwall, a model studying to be a forensic psychologist, Moss is still a model and not ashamed of it. "It's who I am and if I want to do it, I will do it," she says.

But when she published her first book, *Fetish*, in 1999, she discovered that being a woman who turns heads has its downside if you want to be treated seriously.

"I was advised, literally, to cut my hair off and wear spectacles I didn't need," she says.

At first she was hurt that people doubted she'd written the books. But now, having received a royalties cheque large enough to live on for a year and with her fourth book, *Hit*, due at the publishers, she thinks she's got rid of the "models can't write" label.

Moss was just 15 when she left her Canadian home on Vancouver Island, Victoria, for London and a career in modelling.

The impetus was the death of her mother at 43 from cancer. The

legacy was a compelling urge to live her life to the fullest, and do everything on her "to do before I die" list. "It gave me a kind of ticking clock," she says. "It sounds morbid. It makes me more excited about doing things. I don't wait. I just do things and don't put them off. I just thought, I have to do everything right now, otherwise it will all be over."

"I was extremely motivated, but didn't know what to do, so I did what I'd had suggested to me so many times because I was 6ft tall and 14 years old. No one comes up to you and says, 'You should be a writer.'"

At first, modelling was fun – travel, clothes, attention. But by the age of 23, Moss was fed up. "As you develop as a person and become more mature you're a little less lenient about who you spend your time with and how they treat you."

By then she was living in Sydney. Her career a bore and money tight, Moss sat in her tiny apartment wondering what to do with the rest of her life. She grabbed the local newspaper and "did the finger thing", closing her eyes to point at the job advertisements. It took a few attempts. "I promised myself I'd do whatever the first one my finger landed on was, but I broke the rule."

Working in a bank or a shop was ruled out, but then her finger hit an advertisement for the Australian College of Journalism. "It said, make money and write."

Moss posted her enrolment fee that day and, through the course, developed a structure for the writing she had done all her life. "Most importantly, it gave me the psychological reinforcement that this was what I was going to do now," she says.

During her course she began *Fetish* and, when she won the Scarlet Stiletto young writers award for her story *Psycho Magnet*, attracted a literary agent. "That spurred me on to finish *Fetish*."

She also has no shortage of ideas, and is planning the fifth book in her Makedde series, while finishing the fourth and publishing the third, *Covet*, which is partly set in Hong Kong.

Despite her success, Moss still wants to keep challenging herself. Her interests include hang gliding, she rides a motorcycle, plans to go on a wildlife safari and has joined a speakers' bureau, having taken lessons to overcome her nerves.

Moss can also tick the "own a pet python" box. Gomez, a 2.3-metre diamond python came to live in the home she shares with her film-producer husband, Mark Pennell. "I just love them, they're so cool," she says.

Feeding Gomez involves defrosting a rat for him. Moss' pet Shih Tzu-Maltese cross is banished when Gomez comes out to play. "There are food-chain issues," she says.

But although she makes time for family, friends, unusual pets and new challenges during the two years it takes her to write each book, Moss says that, in the final six months of devising a plot, her mind never really switches off.

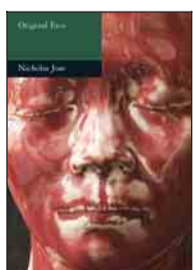
"Everybody asks, 'Are you OK?' and I'm like, 'Oh, yes, just thinking'. I'm thinking about hit men or strange ways of killing people."



Covet (HarperCollins, \$110)

## review of the week

### FICTION



**Original Face** by Nicholas Jose  
\$185  
★★★★☆  
Tim Cribb

Hong Kong property investors will know that the geographic centre of Sydney is now about 14km as the crow flies from the city's famed harbour, and drifting in a south-westerly direction.

For many of its 4.7 million inhabitants, though, Sydney's heartland is an alien place. It's in a state of constant cultural flux as

new arrivals displace the old – Italians and Greeks in the 1950s and 1960s, Lebanese and Vietnamese in the 1970s and 1980s, mainland Chinese after Tiananmen Square in 1989.

It's among these Chinese that Nicholas Jose finds the plot of what is, on the surface, a clever and satisfying crime thriller. A man is skinned alive, his corpse found amid the flies at an outlying refuse tip on a hot summer's morning.

The trail leads deep into the Chinese community that sprang up after Bob Hawke, prime minister at the time of Tiananmen, gave passports to 40,000 mainland Chinese then in the country, with thousands more following. It was an emotional response.

Australia's Chinese are predominantly Cantonese who have little regard for their Putonghua-speaking cousins.

Language barriers and immigrant invisibility were soon exploited by those who found human trafficking more lucrative than drugs. Also exploited was the emotionalism about the restraint on pro-democracy activism, leading to manipulation and corruption of immigration officials.

Jose moves comfortably among Sydney's Chinese, with two well-regarded China-themed novels to his credit: *The Rose Crossing* (1994) and *The Red Thread* (2000). He worked in Shanghai and Beijing from 1986 to 1990, meeting many artists, writers and dissidents, and was the cultural attaché at the



Australian Embassy during the events of 1989. He has translated essays and poems.

It's this considerable experience that allows Jose to take *Original Face* to a higher level than merely well-plotted thriller.

The central character is taxi driver Lewis Lin, who takes the Buddhist approach of living in the present and facing problems as they come, rather than dreaming of the future or brooding about the past. Buddhism is one of Jose's threads, most obviously manifested in the character of Zhou Huang, whom police identify as the faceless corpse.

In Jose's telling, there's a well-conceived homoeroticism about Zhou, an area he's explored in his previous works.

Jasmine Guo Lihua, a practitioner of Chinese medicine on an expired visa, and dissipated Oscar-winning cinematographer Bernie Mittel, provide the heterosexual relief and the prospect of mutual redemption. Jose's acupuncture scene skewers the psyche of the Australian male with nerve-point precision.

Less convincing is Ah Mo, charismatic former violin great whose insidious Chinese Democracy League has connections with mainland money and some rather nasty former PLA in Hangzhou.

He is, from the outset, identified as the bad guy, grown fat and rich on illegal immigrants. His character lacks the depth of motivation to be convincing,

although Jose's grimly low-key account of the skinned-alive murder is masterful.

For the white Australians, Jose introduces Sergeant "Ginger" Rogers and Constable Shelley Swert, representative of the old and new, and embodying an ideal of easy-going mutual respect that seems so much under threat these days from rapacious greed and ignorant bigotry. Not all Australians are stupid racists, Jose seems to be saying, just some.

*Original Face* takes its title from a Zen koan – what was your original face, before your mother and father? At a time where one's real face is often deeply hidden, this smartly packaged story peels back Sydney's face to reveal one of struggling optimism.