

Softcover: UK

# Southern comfort, universal appeal

*Tim Gautreaux's stories celebrate blood, kinship and community ties*

BY ANNIE PROULX  
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON

This outstanding collection marks Tim Gautreaux as one of the best short story writers anywhere. He is probably the only writer in the world who restores old locomotives for relaxation. He can tune pianos, understands sawmills, river-barge engines, vehicles, dancing, fights, washing dishes, feeding hens, tractors, welding and human hearts. His interest in machinery and physical work, his skill in describing the darker mysteries of mechanics and messy lives, greatly enrich these stories.

Reviewers tag Gautreaux as a regional southern writer, but his stories cannot be contained in this box; they connect with people everywhere because they are built on Gautreaux's deep knowledge of human nature and relationships, and mankind's old comrades, beauty and grief. The stories celebrate blood, the love of family and the tight-knit community feelings that characterize South African kraals, rural counties, small Ohio towns, coastal Greenland settlements, Albuquerque vecinos, urban blocks and residents of Appalachian hollows. The family of man is Gautreaux's natural reader.

Generations interlock, as when Merlin LeBlanc, a 52-year-old widower, is left to care for Susie, his dead daughter's baby. Merlin's 75-year-old father visits and tells him to look for a young wife. Etienne, Merlin's 92-year-old grandfather — sarcastic and wise — comes from the nursing home for the day. The four generations sit on the porch, the baby in fierce old Etienne's lap. "You gonna keep her here and raise her even if you don't find no wife," he says, and we know it will be that way.

In another story, an elderly man, suffering intermittent memory loss, is enslaved by a bully, himself terrified of his abusive wife. The old man's memory suddenly returns, he smacks the abusive wife with a shovel, steals her truck and makes it back to the shopping center from which he was abducted. There, parked next to his ancient Oldsmobile, he sees his sleeping grandson, his familiar features the embodiment of family, happiness and safety. And in *Floyd's Girl*, loving father Floyd, whose daughter has been stolen by her mother's Texan boyfriend, gets her back after a bizarre chase.

Gautreaux's dialogue seems so comfortable and familiar that the reader feels he or she has lived in Louisiana in some dream-time. He turns small events into large examinations of the nature of human behavior, whether kindness done, tragic loss or repairing wretched meanness, and often takes the reader to a place where a character can say "we couldn't do nothing for him but we did it anyway."

Many of the stories have a scalding streak of off-kilter humor. *The Pine Oil Writers' Conference* skewers writing workshops; *Good for the Soul* manipulates kindly Father Ledet into hearing a deathbed confession that leads him down a crooked path of drinking and car-stealing which had this reader laughing for 10 minutes. *Navigators of Thought* features failed academics as the crew of a greasy tugboat. *Easy Pickings* highlights a knife-wielding, heavily tattooed hold-up man, self-named "Big

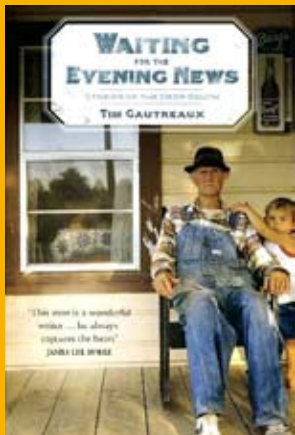
Blade," who tries to rob and then kidnap 85-year-old Mrs Landreneaux. Seeing his tattoos she cries, "Baby, who wrote all over you?" She is rescued by four elderly bourre fiends next door who are waging a hot battle while wondering about the strange car ("a Freon") in Mrs Landreneaux's drive. As the police haul Big Blade off to jail, the winner of the bourre game invites him to bring plenty of money and play cards with them when he gets out.

Several of Gautreaux's best stories are included in this collection. *Welding With Children* is the story of Bruton, who has four unmarried daughters, each with a child. The daughters dump their children at Bruton's house and go off. The children are foul-mouthed, disobedient, demanding and awful, and when Bruton tries to do a little welding they switch on his big grinder and fool with the electric welding rod holder until he decides he can't weld with children around. He gives in to their whining and drives them downtown for "icees." As he pulls up he hears a mean comment from Fordlyson, one of the old men sitting in front of the store — "here comes Bruton and his bastardmobile." But later Fordlyson becomes his not unkind guide to a kind of redemption.

*The Piano Tuner*, about a talented but lonely woman pianist, seems as though it is also a story about mending a broken life, but sometimes long solitude so damages a recluse that healing is not possible. *Rodeo Parole* is the uncharacteristically bitter story of four inmates who take part in a prison rodeo for a chance of a shorter sentence. Their event is the curious "card game" in which a team of four sits in folding chairs in the arena, hands flat on a card table. The team that keeps its hands on the table the longest wins. A maddened bull is turned loose. He attacks the men. In the end a guard tells one of the convicts the self-evident truth: "We can only have one winner."

In *Waiting for the Evening News* the reader is the winner — it is magnificently enjoyable reading.

## PUBLICATION NOTES



WAITING FOR THE EVENING NEWS:  
STORIES OF THE DEEP SOUTH

TIM GAUTREAU

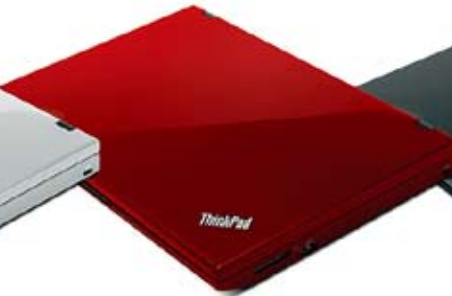
400 PAGES

SCEPTRE



Lenovo's IdeaPad S10-3t is a netbook that converts into a touchscreen tablet.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF APEX COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTANTS



Not a netbook but priced like one: The ThinkPad x100e is the most affordable model from Lenovo's venerated business laptop line.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF APEX COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTANTS

BY DAVID CHEN  
STAFF REPORTER

Two of Lenovo's latest products nod to the popularity of netbooks, with a new version of a classic computer and a tablet laptop with a multitouch screen.

Lenovo, a Chinese company and one of the world's largest PC manufacturers, has closely maintained the rugged design and solid performance of the ThinkPad series since purchasing IBM's personal computer division in 2005.

But with the **ThinkPad x100e**, the company is taking its venerated line of business laptops in a new direction.

The company doesn't call this new model a netbook, but it appears to be aiming at the same market. The x100e, which has retail price of NT\$24,900 (street price roughly NT\$19,000), is the smallest ThinkPad to date. It has an 11.6-inch matte screen and measures 282mm by 189mm by 30mm — roughly the same dimensions of four issues of *National Geographic* magazine stacked on top of each other. It weighs 1.5kg.

The ThinkPad is showing a bolder fashion sense with the x100e, which is available for the first time in "heatwave red" (which has a cool retro look) and "Arctic white" (hello, MacBook), in addition to the standard black.

But the x100e's best features are the hallmarks of the ThinkPad series: ergonomics and design. The x100e has one of the best keyboards I've ever used on a laptop of this size. The chiclet-style keys are slightly curved for the fingertips and feel solid when you press down. It took a very short time to get used to the keyboard layout; I was touch-typing almost right away. Like all ThinkPads, the x100e keyboard is "spill-resistant," although I didn't test this feature out.

Loyal ThinkPad users will appreciate that Lenovo kept the TrackPoint, a small red knob in the middle of the keyboard used to navigate the pointer. This joystick control may seem awkward to casual users, and the company was wise to also include the more conventional trackpad, which is a little small but well-designed. The left and right click buttons are quiet and have a soft, cushion-like feel when pressing down.

Unlike its ThinkPad predecessors, though, the x100e is not the fastest computer around. Powered by AMD's 1.6 Ghz Neo MV-40 processor, it performs just slightly faster than the average netbook. This

model comes with Windows Home Premium installed on a 320GB hard drive and 2GB of RAM (it should be noted that Lenovo's demo model on loan to the *Taipei Times* had 4GB of RAM).

But the x100e gets the job done. It performed reasonably well with programs like Microsoft Word, Mozilla Firefox and Picasa, all of which worked with very few lags. This model also handled video well: both 720p and 1,080p resolution trailers for Tim Burton's version of *Alice in Wonderland* played without a hitch. For startup times, the x100e takes around one minute on a cold boot and around 10 seconds to wake up from sleep mode.

Those who spend a lot of time away from power outlets may have to think twice about the x100e. With Wi-Fi on and the screen at maximum brightness, I managed only three-and-a-half hours using this model unplugged, with my time split evenly between using Microsoft Word and Web surfing. Lenovo does include an easy-to-use power management software program that lets you adjust how much power the x100e's processor consumes with one switch. But bear in mind that longer battery power means slower performance.

All in all, a solid design and low price makes the x100e an attractive choice for a small laptop if battery life isn't a top priority.

While the ThinkPad x100e appeals to practical needs, Lenovo's **IdeaPad S10-3t** is a netbook full of bells and whistles. Designed as a touchscreen tablet PC, the S10-3t has a swiveling 10.1-inch screen that rotates 180 degrees and can be flipped over to cover the keyboard.

It comes with Lenovo's Natural Touch software, a program suite with a slick carousel-style interface that allows quick access to movies, music and videos. The program is well-designed and responsive to the touch, and also includes a nifty all-in-one note-taking application that lets you write, draw and record audio and video, as well as an ebook reader.

But unfortunately the S10-3t doesn't have enough power to take full advantage of the software with its current-standard netbook specs: 1.66 Ghz Intel Atom N450 and 1GB of RAM. It was nice and easy to flick through pages on the ebook reader, which can display PDF and text formats, but the computer seemed to choke on large files.

The S10-3t's design is a mixed bag. It has a nice

## Technology: Taiwan

rounded edges but the shiny black case around the screen will inevitably attract fingerprints and smudges. The full-sized keyboard works decently for typing despite the flimsy plastic keys, but the trackpad is way too small — its dimensions are a third of the size of a business card.

The touchscreen capabilities make up for this shortcoming somewhat — it was surprisingly easy to navigate in Windows 7 Home Premium using the touchscreen on the demo model that Lenovo loaned to the *Taipei Times* (Potential buyers should note that the S10-3t comes bundled with the more basic Windows 7 Starter edition). But Windows 7's interface still felt awkward when clicking on the menu items, which are too small for the fingertips.

The touch gestures work well when surfing the Internet on the S10-3t. You can scroll down or glide across a Web page with the flick of finger. The experience is similar to using the iPhone's Web browser.

The S10-3t scores points for a long battery life. With the 8-cell battery, I used this model unplugged for six-and-a-half hours, mainly surfing the Internet, watching YouTube videos and listening to music on iTunes.

The flipside, though, is that the battery adds bulk and detracts from the computer's clamshell design. With the battery, the S10-3t weighs 1.5kg — light enough to carry in a bag, but too heavy to hold with one hand if you're using it in tablet mode.

It's hard not to think of Apple's highly anticipated iPad when considering what the S10-3t is capable of doing. This netbook has the potential to be an easy-to-use device for multimedia, but is constrained by its underpowered specs and Windows 7, which is a good operating system for a computer but not ideal for a tablet device.

This model will appeal most to enthusiasts willing to spend some time tinkering with the software and upgrading the RAM to get the best possible performance.

The IdeaPad S10-3t comes with a 250GB hard drive and sells at a retail price of NT\$21,900 (Street price of around NT\$19,000). A version with the smaller 6-cell battery has a retail price of NT\$16,900.

Both the S10-3T and Thinkpad x100e are available at major electronics retailers across the country.

Softcover: UK

# What's right, what's wrong and how to know the difference

*Political philosopher Michael Sandel's new book, based on a popular class he teaches at Harvard, surveys the best thinking in ethics from Aristotle to John Rawls*

BY BRADLEY WINTERTON  
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

Once, in 1884, three English sailors and an ailing cabin boy were adrift in an open boat without food or water. The adults killed and ate the cabin boy and were later rescued. Were they guilty of murder and, if so, were there extenuating circumstances? Again, after a 2004 Florida hurricane, prices charged for roof repairs increased hugely. Was this exploitation of the already afflicted or the legitimate operation of the free market? Such difficult questions characterize this excellent and finely discriminating book.

Towards its end, Michael K. Sandel points to three traditions that have characterized moral philosophy, or the search for what is the right course of action, over the millennia. The first is the desire to increase human happiness ("maximizing utility or

welfare"), the second the wish to see freedom remain untrammelled (which these days often means respecting market forces), and the third "cultivating virtue."

"As you've probably guessed by now," writes the author, "I favor a version of the third approach."

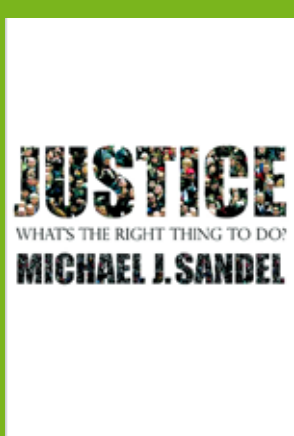
In this, Harvard's Professor of Government is very much out on a limb. For centuries thinkers have opted for one or both of the first two principles. It's a long time since a major Western philosopher has expressed the wish to see governments trying to influence how people live their lives. Respecting their private convictions has been far more popular, as has trying to ensure, at least in theory, the greatest happiness of the greatest number. (Protecting the powerful may seem to many what governments actually do, but philosophers can be relied on not to openly endorse such behavior). And trying to

make its citizens more virtuous smacks, as Sandel readily admits, of the religious right, and even oriental despotism.

This fine book surveys the best thinking in this area from the ancient Greeks to the present. Interspersed with these historical chapters, as well as within them, are sections dealing with contentious issues in contemporary US society — positive discrimination in access to higher education, same-sex marriage, abortion, immigration, and more.

The alert reader will detect Sandel's preferred approach early on. One clue is the order in which he treats his historical philosophers. First comes Jeremy Bentham, then Immanuel Kant, then the American philosopher John Rawls, and finally Aristotle. Isn't this sequence rather strange, you wonder? Why is the oldest thinker, the ancient Greek Aristotle, left till last? The answer is that

## PUBLICATION NOTES



JUSTICE: WHAT'S THE RIGHT  
THING TO DO?

BY MICHAEL J. SANDEL

308 PAGES

PENGUIN

Aristotle is the only one of the set who believed in the state trying to improve the moral character of its citizens, to encourage them to behave better. Sandel thus sees him as his precursor, and places him, as it were, at the top of the bill.

The most striking chapters of this fascinating book are those in which Sandel examines contemporary American issues. His chapter on positive discrimination — essentially allowing candidates from racial minorities entry to colleges ahead of their white peers with identical grades — is magnificent. He examines facets of the question you might never have thought of. Do universities really only exist to promote academic excellence? Would it be right in some circumstances to give preference on grounds of race to whites? Should colleges give places to the children of rich fathers whose donations might

benefit thousands of students in the future, and so on.

Sandel very rarely comes to a hard and fast conclusion on these issues. Instead, he probes the questions from just about every angle, throwing illumination on everything he touches.

Elsewhere he dismisses points of view with barely concealed disdain. Utilitarianism — the belief that the well-being of the majority should always prevail — he sees as hopelessly inadequate. It's the reduction of everything to statistics, he argues. You might as well say that throwing Christians to the lions was a good idea because there were more spectators getting pleasure from the spectacle than there were victims suffering pain. Yet such statistical approaches are routine today, he observes, notably in the form of cost-benefit analyses, common in both business and government.

Sandel is a great supporter of US President Barack Obama, and sees him, along with the late Robert F. Kennedy, as a major endorser of ethical values in government. Torture might in theory save some lives, but it is not what Americans ought to do. This viewpoint is very much to Sandel's taste.

Sandel's detailed analyses of major modern issues in the field of public ethics are far more interesting than his views on the civic virtues governments might seek to promote. Perhaps he takes what these might be for granted. Nevertheless, there are problems there, of which he is very well aware. Even so, this is a mightily readable and engrossing book, and is highly recommended.

The lectures on which *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* is largely based are available complete on Harvard University's YouTube channel.