

# *Read All About It*

My year of falling in love with literature again

PAUL CUDDIHY

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TO MY MUM AND DAD

*For giving me a lifelong love of reading and writing.*

TO KAREN

*For spending the past twenty-three years with me and my books.*

TO LOUISE, REBECCA & ANDREW

*I treasure you all more than any Booker Prize ...  
but it would still be nice to win it.*

# *Contents*

Introduction	1
1. You Say You Want A Resolution	7
2. From Starks Park To Seventh Avenue	18
3. Seeing Is Believing	31
4. A Kick Up The Eighties	41
5. Three Is A Magic Number	55
6. Do Do Do Do DoDo, Do Do Do Do DoDo	66
7. Lazing On A Sunny Afternoon	77
8. #Curmudgeon	88
9. Don't Judge A Booker By Its Cover	99
10. There's More To Life Than Books, But Not Much More	110
11. Based On A True Story	118
12. It's The Most Wonderful Time Of The Year	128
Conclusion	139
Appendix I	142
Appendix II	146
Appendix III	151

*'No matter how busy you may think you are, you must find time for reading, or surrender yourself to self-chosen ignorance.'*

Confucius

*'Every night I have to read a book so that my mind will stop thinking about things that I stress about.'*

Britney Spears

Rushdie experience, and the fact that *The Satanic Verses* and *Midnight's Children*, both considered to be great works of literary fiction, will probably sit on my book-shelves forever without being read.

April also sees the annual Glasgow literary festival, Aye Write. I don't like the festival for personal reasons. I never get invited to take part despite being a Glasgow author with three novels published, two of which are set mainly in the city, as well as working for the biggest and most successful football club in Scotland. It's not that I haven't tried to get an invitation. I've contacted the organisers on a number of occasions, including emailing one of them after an email introduction through a writer friend which actually prompted the organiser to contact me with the words 'sounds intriguing.' Within half an hour of receiving her email, I'd replied, giving details of my books, my writing career to date and some information about myself. It was the last I heard from her. Aye Write? Aye, That'll Be Right, more like it.

So, in classic 'cutting off my nose to spite my face' style, I generally don't go to any of the Aye Write events. I know I should act my age, and as a writer who aspires to improve both personally and commercially, I should be listening to others who have already done so, but I'm very childish and immature about it all. However, I do make an exception for an event involving Tracey Thorn, the singer/songwriter most famous for being part of Everything But The Girl. She has written a memoir, *Bedsit Disco Queen: How I Grew Up And Tried To Be A Pop Star*, and, as a fan of her music, as well as having enjoyed her recent reading of the book when it was Radio 4's Book of the Week, I decide to go to the event. I even manage to 'persuade' Karen to join me, though it's only on the understanding that we go for dinner afterwards.

The event, in the main hall at the Mitchell Library in Glasgow, is packed, with over two hundred people in attendance. Most of them, I suspect, are music fans rather than literary lovers, but it's a very entertaining hour, which Karen enjoys too, though not as much as the dinner later on.

I even ask Tracey a question, something about whether part of the motivation for writing the memoir was to put it down as an historical record for her children so they can discover a side to their mother they weren't previously aware of. I don't remember the answer. I'm just relieved to have managed to get my question out without stumbling over any of the words, and making it sound sensible (I hope).

The book itself doesn't take long to read, but that's because it's well-written, entertaining and very insightful on the life of a pop star. Now emboldened after my email correspondence with Kate Harrison, I decide to 'tweet' Tracey Thorn.

*@tracey\_thorn Enjoyed your performance in Glasgow last Friday and enjoyed reading the book even more. Really well-written and interesting.*

*@PauTheHunted Thankyou!*

She replies. I have an actual genuine reply from a famous person. I am thrilled, delighted and slightly embarrassed at the same time. I'm forty-six, after all. I really do enjoy the book, and my 'tweet' to Tracey Thorn is genuine, though I'm not brave enough to dispute one passage of the book that I disagree with. Writing about her memories of the early 1980s, and how it doesn't correspond to the way the decade is remembered now in packaged nostalgia form, she says:

*It may have been Thatcher's decade, with vacuous social climbers such as Duran Duran sometimes held up to represent the whole period, but it didn't feel like that at the time. While the lovely Durannies revelled in their own dim-wittedness – 'There are plenty of bands catering for people who want to hear about how bad life is... We're not interested in that... One of the perks of this job is getting rich,' said Simon Le Bon – those of us who still remembered punk still held firm to the belief that the purchasing of yachts had NOT been our sole reason for deciding to form a band.*

*I often feel that I barely recognise 'The 1980s' as a decade, in the form that is now remembered and repackaged for glib TV programmes. I would later see the decade reviled, and then revived, but in a manner that bore almost no relation to the years I had lived through..... Scenes which I never witnessed in my life – yuppies chugging champagne in City wine bars, toffs dancing in puffball skirts to Duran Duran – have now become the universal TV shorthand used to locate and define the era.'*

I have never chugged champagne in a wine bar, anywhere. I have never bought a yacht, nor have I ever aspired to buy one, and I definitely never wore puffball skirts while dancing to Duran Duran, but I like them. I really do. I like their music. Whenever I hear the song, *Rio*, for example, it reminds me of being sixteen again, still at school, relentlessly unsuccessful with girls, but believing that life, with all of its wonderful possibilities, is going to last forever.

I have catholic tastes in music, and believe it's possible to like Everything But The Girl, Duran Duran, The Smiths, David Bowie, Girls Aloud, The Beatles, The Velvet Underground, Johnny Cash and Reo Speedwagon. This could be a playlist on my iPod. I should tell Tracey Thorn this, but I don't. I fear that we won't have a lively Twitter debate, but that she'll merely think I'm some sort of '80s yuppie throwback who's actually just a complete tosser. I'm not like that at all, and if Tracey Thorn is reading this, I hope she believes me. If she was to ever hear my version of *Rio* on the acoustic guitar, she might even change her opinion of the song ... well, maybe that's going too far.



*Do Do Do Do DoDo,  
Do Do Do Do DoDo*

*I still love the book-ness of books, the smell of books;  
I am a book fetishist. Books, to me, are the coolest  
and sexiest and most wonderful things there are.'*

*Neil Gaiman*

If you're familiar with the classic Duran Duran song *Rio* then you may well recognise the chapter title above as the last few lines Simon Le Bon sings as the song fades and the band, in that classic 1980s video, sail off into the Caribbean sunset aboard their luxury yacht. Can you hear it now? Are you singing along to the chapter title? Good. It's worked then. If you don't like Duran Duran, are not familiar with the song or if you are Tracey Thorn (*see Chapter Two*), then my efforts have been in vain.

Having finished, not quite successfully, trilogy month, I opt for something as far removed from Cormac McCarthy, Roddy Doyle and Richard Ford as it's possible to be and start reading another memoir, this time by John Taylor, bass guitar player in Duran Duran. His book, *In The Pleasure Groove: Love, Death and Duran Duran* tells his story from a shy, spectacled only-child living in Birmingham to pop star pin-up, drink and drug addict and, ultimately, to a 'clean', happily married musician currently enjoying a resurgence in popularity along with his fellow Duran Duran band mates.

My motivation in having bought the book is obviously my love of the band and their music, and therein lies the problem. As a writer, John Taylor is a great bass player. I can tell almost immediately that a ghost writer has been involved because it reads like a series of interviews/conversations that have been transcribed, tidied up and presented as a

first-person narrative. A quick check of the acknowledgement page at the back of the book confirms my suspicions. The 'ghost' in question is Tom Sykes. Should I be surprised? Probably not, although I am slightly disappointed. There is a chronology to the story, with a few interesting anecdotes sprinkled throughout the book to keep readers – Duran Duran fans – happy, but the narrative lacks depth, and as I'm reading it, I have this sense of Tracey Thorn sitting behind me, legs crossed, arms folded, shaking her head and wearing a look that says 'I told you so.' I glance over my shoulder just to make sure I really am only imagining this. My opinion on the book is confirmed by a fellow Duranie (and no, that's not Cockney rhyming slang this time) in work, who had the same feelings when reading it. Yes, I also know what you're thinking. It's hard to believe there are two Duran Duran fans working at Celtic.

I have always liked Duran Duran for their music and I always will, and John Taylor has helped to write some of my favourite songs. I admire his honesty in revealing some of the excesses in his past, but I want to know more and that level of detail and revelation can only come directly through him rather than relating it to someone else. There is automatically a filter through which he relays the stories and they are then laid out on the page for him. Having previously read two books by celebrities – Molly Ringwald's novel and Tracey Thorn's memoir – both of which did not require the assistance of a ghost writer, I have to conclude that they're much better as a result. It doesn't take long to read *In The Pleasure Groove*, and while I still enjoy it, I think I'll just stick to Duran Duran's music from now on.