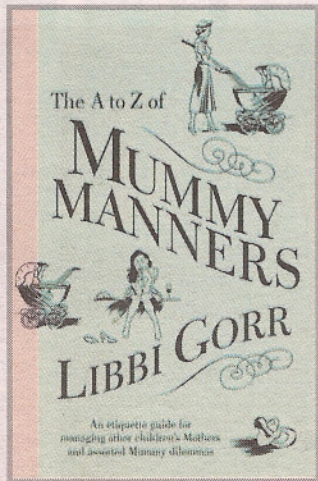


# non-fiction reviews

## The A to Z of Mummy Manners

Libbi Gorr  
HarperCollins, \$29.99

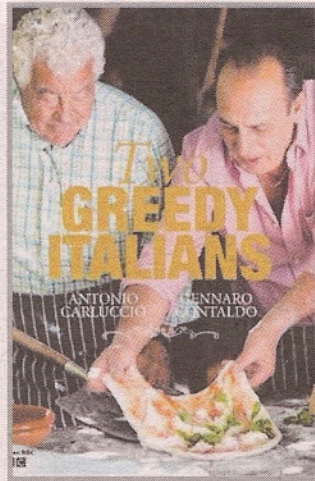


LIBBI Gorr is one of those Australian television, radio and theatre personalities who seem to have been around for years. She's always been a versatile performer and never at risk of taking herself too seriously. Frequently loud, brash and painfully honest, she's also been a breath of fresh air in an industry not known for its authenticity. Like the rest of us, having children meant a cataclysmic life shift and now she has added writing to her repertoire of skills. *Mummy Manners* is Gorr's first book and takes the form of an A to Z parenting directory for all things maternal. Gorr writes in a rather twee format, something akin to Mrs Beeton's manual for domestic science. Her advice is firmly tongue in cheek, clearly not intended for those who thrive on scientific evidence to form their decision-making. This makes a refreshing change. The advice ranges from one or two simple sentences e.g. "Domestic Goddess, Not - Face it sister you just weren't bred to bake...Get your PhD, move on", to long-winded explanations why guilt should not be included in the vast repertoire of maternity. Gorr includes some great advice for how to handle those sticky moments at playgroups; not what's been caused by the fruit juice but other mothers' comments. How to guard one's soul against the destructiveness of bitchiness? Here are all the answers. Ever polite, full of charm and to be delivered in the sincerest way possible. Gorr says she will be forever grateful to her children for helping her feel connected to the human race. Here she extends that connection to others similarly inclined.

Jane Barry

## Two Greedy Italians

Antonio Carluccio and Gennaro Contaldo  
Hardie Grant, \$39.95

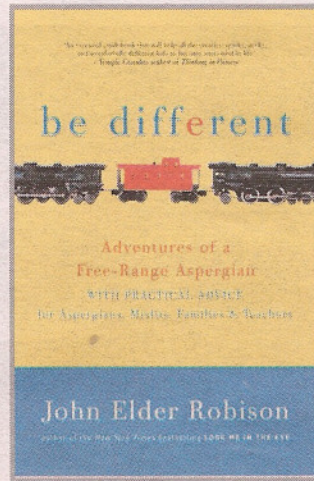


IS there a backlash against puritanism and restraint? A subtle snubbing of the less-is-more set who insist on telling us what's good for us? Certainly it's discernible in the UK, a country that has produced Nigella "I don't believe in low-fat cooking" Lawson; the jolly *Two Fat Ladies* and the stumbling but very lovable "have another glass" TV chef Keith Floyd. From the same stable comes the pleasantly rotund Antonio Carluccio who has teamed up with one slightly less plump Gennaro Contaldo to produce *Two Greedy Italians*. Despite being from north and south Italy respectively, the duo are London based, and met in the 1980s when Contaldo (who went on to be a mentor to Jamie Oliver) used to collect wild mushrooms for Carluccio's Covent Garden restaurant. For this cookbook, the chefs travelled Italy - each touring their own home territory to document the cuisine and how it has changed. Like an Italian menu, the book kicks off with antipasti; Contaldo tells us the word comes from the Latin 'antepastus' which means 'before the meal', with recipes such as baked sardines, carpaccio and stuffed quail eggs. From there it moves on to primi, a first course usually consisting of pasta, soup or perhaps gnocchi or polenta, then secondi considered the main dish and dessert, usually, Contaldo says, seasonal fruit, cakes or biscuits. What is great about this book is that there are many recipes that even lovers of all things Italian may not have come across. Still, none are terribly complicated and focus very much on the Italian ethos of simple and fresh.

Natascha Mirosh

## Be Different

John Elder Robison  
Bantam Australia, \$29.95

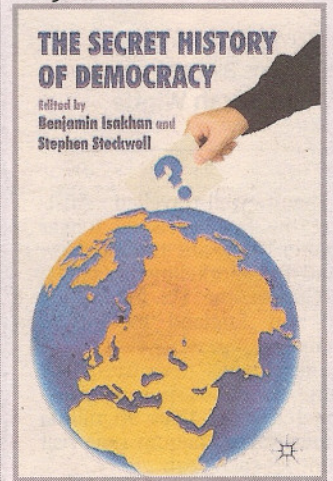


HERE'S an irony. One of the most identifiable symptoms of Asperger's syndrome is an apparent inability to empathise with others, and many Aspergians tend to process emotion in a very different manner to the rest of us. Yet while we "Nypicals" (a label applied to "normal, typical" folk) are often quick to dismiss Aspergians as emotionless and self-centred, this may actually point to our own lack of empathy and understanding. This paradox is the basis for John Elder Robison's wonderfully eccentric guide to dealing with Asperger's syndrome. *Be Different* is a survival manual for Aspergians, misfits, families and teachers. The author draws upon his own experiences in dealing with the condition, and his success was especially hard-won considering the fact that he spent the first 40 years of his life as an undiagnosed Aspergian. As a teenager, Robison was a perpetual outsider who was flummoxed by the niceties of personal relationships and social etiquette. After spending his first two decades as a wounded outcast, the author realised that making a concerted effort to study his Nypical acquaintances and adopt their bizarre codes of behaviour might have long-term benefits. He was right. Hilariously, Robison's desperate efforts to comprehend the subtleties of fashion, table manners, dinner party conversation and dating force the reader to recognise the ingrained inanity of many of our social institutions. Perhaps the mad men are indeed running the asylum. *Be Different* is an invaluable and hugely entertaining guidebook for Aspergians and Nypicals alike.

Terry Oberg

## The Secret History of Democracy

Ben Isakhan and Stephen Stockwell eds  
Palgrave Macmillan, \$138



READERS will want to know what's so secret about democracy's history. After all, don't we already know everything? Isn't democracy the dominant ideology, having seen off every oppressor from absolute monarchy to fascism and communism? Perhaps, but how much do we know about the road to the civil liberties and fundamental equalities we take for granted today? Citizens have a basic understanding of Abraham Lincoln's vision through *Hollywood* (think of *Mr Smith Goes to Washington*), but editors Ben Isakhan and Stephen Stockwell argue there's a far greater back story behind our way of life. We've seen a flurry of books on democracy since September 11, 2001, and the ensuing challenge of new fundamentalist ideologies. But this intellectually tight volume stands apart. For one, its novel coverage of less typical indeed, "secret" (if failed) democratic experiments is fascinating. Chapters by individual experts on ancient China, Aboriginal Australia and Islamic perspectives are cases in point. For another, variants of collective decision-making are explored. Democracy, like any organic creature, must evolve or die, and John Keane's argument that we're in the grips of a new phase, "monitory democracy" (an age of monitoring and scrutiny), is gripping. The book's mission seems to be that, with research like this adding to public knowledge, this generation should be the best-equipped to keep the democratic fires burning. Let's hope so. As we move from national to global arenas, our understanding of democracy will be challenged in ways we can hardly imagine.

Paul Williams