



BY THE LETTER ... Manfred Jurgensen's protagonist thinks he's a book and ends up writing one. PHOTOGRAPH • Richard Waugh

## Write turn

The lines between fiction and fact are blurred in a novel starring the author himself

If you're going mad, you might as well go mad in comfort like the protagonist in Brisbane author Manfred Jurgensen's latest novel. He is incarcerated at Humanitas, a luxurious Swiss sanatorium for the "mentally disturbed", which makes one wonder about the author's sanity since *Five Weeks at Humanitas* (Hybrid Publishers, \$45) is touted as "an intense and powerfully personal memoir".

"But I should point out that I have never been incarcerated," Manfred Jurgensen says.

But wait a minute; this is a story about a bloke called Manfred Jurgensen, right? But the author is playing an interesting game with fact and fiction here. Any number of authors has done this – John Updike, Philip Roth and more recently Australian-based winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature J.M. Coetzee, whose 2009 book *Summertime* is a novel about a character who happens to have the same name as the author.

In Manfred Jurgensen's case, the protagonist is locked up because he thinks – in a deliciously Kafkaesque turn – that he has turned into a book. A board of psychiatrists studies his case and sets him the task of writing his life's story in an attempt to cure him of his delusion. So, in the end, he becomes a book after all.

"We create fiction to try to control life," he says. "But life is the real author, the narrator is the mediator."

This is a foil for Manfred to explore the facts as well as the fiction of his own life. Now 70, Manfred, who lives at Kangaroo Point with his teacher wife Ulrike, has chosen to explore some unpalatable aspects of his early life. Born between Denmark and Germany in the coastal border town of Flensburg, his younger years were overshadowed by the pall of Nazism.

He explores the legacy of being part of the generation of Hitler's children. It's an era and a subject that has fascinated readers and critics alike. Broadcaster Phillip Adams has had Manfred on his *Late Night Live* program on Radio National twice to talk about the book.

"Writing *Five Weeks at Humanitas* was a painful process but in the end it's a book about redemption and love," Manfred says.

He has lived in Brisbane since 1968 and the city features in a number of his novels, including *A Difficult Love*, *The American Brother*, *Under the Skin* and *The Misunderstanding*, which is due out later this year.

Manfred, a professor who taught literature at the University of Queensland until 2000, is also a prolific poet who is published in Germany as well as Australia.

must read

### YEARN

AUTHOR • Tobsha Learner  
PUBLISHER • HarperCollins, \$32.99

Tobsha Learner has a talent for the exotic and erotic, and this new collection of short stories signals her return to the form. Previous collections – *Quiver* and *Tremble* – brought new fans to her work. Here she again explores the universal experiences of obsession, romantic encounters and secret regrets. In one story, a movie star longs for anonymity, in another a Sydney sculptor wonders whether a lover can be summoned by the act of artistic creation. The stories reflect Learner's globetrotting ways and her interest in the life of the flesh.



### KAHLIL GIBRAN: AN ILLUSTRATED ANTHOLOGY

AUTHOR • Dr Ayman El-Desouky  
PUBLISHER • Spruce, \$39.99

This gorgeous volume helps resurrect the reputation of Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931), the Middle Eastern poet and artist who was so popular in the 1960s. Back then, everyone who had hippie or mystical leanings had a copy of *The Prophet*, which featured his beautiful poetry and illustrations. His quest for enlightenment and inner peace through words and images still resonates. Certainly, Gibran has a message for a materialistic age and it's high time he was rediscovered by a new generation, if they can stop Tweeting long enough to read this book.



**MARY RYAN'S BRISBANE NEWS** AND **BUILDING BRISBANE'S HISTORY**  
ARE PROUD TO PRESENT AN AUTHOR EVENT WITH  
**HELEN GREGORY AND DIANNE MCCLAY**  
**BUILDING BRISBANE'S HISTORY**  
6.15PM THURSDAY MARCH 24  
Mary Ryan's, 40 Park Road, Milton  
Ticket \$15 includes refreshments  
Bookings essential on 3510 5000

brisbanenews

musica viva

Andreas Scholl

Witness one of the greatest countertenors in the world.  
Wednesday 23 March 7pm\*

Eggner Trio

See three Austrian brothers work their magic on piano, violin and cello.  
Wednesday 6 April 7pm

Brentano String Quartet

Performing two of the finest string quartets ever written – the last works ever composed by Beethoven  
Thursday 19 May 7pm

WHERE Conservatorium Theatre  
(\*QPAC for Andreas Scholl)  
BOOK [qtix.com.au](http://qtix.com.au) or 136 246 (\*[qpac.com.au](http://qpac.com.au))

1800 688 482 [musicaviva.com.au/2011](http://musicaviva.com.au/2011)