

## fiction

Sátántango

by László Krasznahorkai, translated  
by George Szirtes*Atlantic Books, 274pp £12.99 \* £11.69*

The Hungarian village is forlorn and forgotten in the dying days of communism. Everything is decaying and people dream of getting away. Into this terminally depressing place erupts the compelling Irimias, who was thought to be dead. He has returned to cheat them all out of a fortune that might be their ticket to freedom, and he begins to tear apart the community. The prose is dense and slow and the reader is guaranteed not to smile once. Typical sentence: "It was hard to know whether the gently vibrating patches on the wall were merely shadows or symptoms of the despair underlying their faintly hopeful thoughts." First published in Hungary in 1985, the book carries an endorsement from Susan Sontag ("an inexorable, visionary book"). You have been warned.

Three Strong Women

by Marie N'Diaye, translated  
by John Fletcher*Maclehose, 277pp; £18.99 \* £17.09*

Norah is 38 and a lawyer in Paris, with a daughter, a stepdaughter and a vaguely unsatisfactory new husband. She has come unwillingly to Dakar, summoned by the horrible father who has blighted her life. He left his family in France when Norah was 8, taking with him her little

brother, five-year-old Sonny. Now he wants his unloved daughter because he needs a lawyer — Sonny is in prison. To Norah's horror, her sweet-natured brother has owned up to killing his young stepmother, and when she gets to the truth, she's forced into the decision of her life. This beautiful novel (winner of the 2009 Prix Goncourt) tells the linked stories of three women caught between Dakar and France; the other two being Fanta, unwillingly transplanted into the French countryside, and Khady the illegal immigrant. N'Diaye's writing is extraordinarily powerful, and she is very well served by John Fletcher's elegant, economical translation.

The Light of Amsterdam

by David Park

*Bloomsbury, 371pp; £16.99 \* £15.29*

"The whole city was a giant wake." The city is Belfast, on the day of George Best's funeral. Alan, a teacher in an art college, doesn't know why he has turned out to watch the cortège — unless it's nostalgia for his younger self. Alan is living in a cheerless one-bed flat, in the aftermath of his divorce. His former wife wants him to look after their troubled 16-year-old son Jack — but it's the weekend that Alan is going to a Bob Dylan concert in Amsterdam. The only solution is to take Jack with him. Also on her way from Belfast to Amsterdam is Karen, who holds down two gruelling jobs and worries about the ridiculous cost of her daughter's hen party. The last mismatched couple are Marion and Richard, on a break from their garden centre, and their stories are woven together with warmth, compassion and great skill.

Kate Saunders