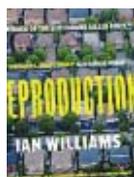


LITERARY FICTION by ANTHONY CUMMINS



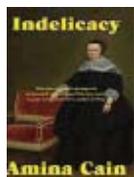
REPRODUCTION
by Ian Williams
(Dialogue Books)
£16.99, 464pp)

MULTI-GENERATIONAL sagas occasionally have the air of a somewhat dutiful enterprise – not so with this vastly enjoyable debut from Canadian author Ian Williams.

Opening in Seventies Toronto, it turns on the aftermath of a grief-stricken hook-up between teenaged Felicia, a black student from the Caribbean, and 30-something Edgar, a white entrepreneur of German descent, who run into one another in hospital as their mothers lie dying.

When there's a vital mishearing (or misleading) about whether or not Edgar has had the snip, he refuses to acknowledge the consequence until the resulting child is in his teens – by which time Edgar, probed for sex offences at work, is suddenly rather keen to give away his fortune.

Top-notch comic dialogue makes this light-footed navigation of race and gender politics fizz on the page, as the steady dopamine hit of Williams's deliciously juicy phrasemaking works in tandem with typographical high-jinks that look gimmicky but earn their keep.



INDELICACY
by Amina Cain
(Daunt Books £9.99, 168pp)

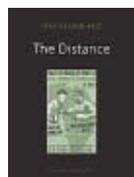
THERE'S a clutter-free coolness to the form and focus of this U.S. novel that recalls the attitude of Outline-era Rachel Cusk.

It's told by Vitória, a woman who, since childhood, has found her itch to write relentlessly stymied. Once forced to care for her siblings, she now lacks the time or money, earning a living by mopping the floor at a museum displaying the very art she'd like to write about.

While marriage to a rich husband buys a measure of freedom, she's doubtful about how it's at the expense of her beautiful young maid, Solange,

who unwittingly holds the key to Vitória's ambition. Amid her acerbic reflections on work, sex and the life of the mind, there's a crackle of tension in the implicit question of how Vitória at last managed to cut loose.

Narrated with gnomic mystery as well as lethally disarming candour, it's a slim novel with the heft of a much larger one.



THE DISTANCE
by Ivan Vladislavic
(Archipelago Books)
£14.99, 210pp)

THIS bittersweet story of hero worship and political awakening has a pole-axing sting in the tail. It follows two brothers, Joe and Branko, growing up white in Seventies South Africa.

Joe collects a scrapbook on Muhammad Ali, whose success and stardom carry an explosive charge in the apartheid era. Forty years later, Joe is a writer, Branko a musician, and Joe revisits his boyhood cuttings to see if they can inspire a new project, unsure what, if anything, it amounts to.

We cut between the two men in name-tagged segments that mingle recollections of adolescent longing with sharply observed scenes of their hesitant relationship as adults.

Vladislavic, a prize-winning South African writer who isn't well known here, doesn't let slip until late in the novel the devastating reason why the book takes the form it does.

In this instantly engaging novel, told in thoughtful but direct style, all the cleverness is under the bonnet.

