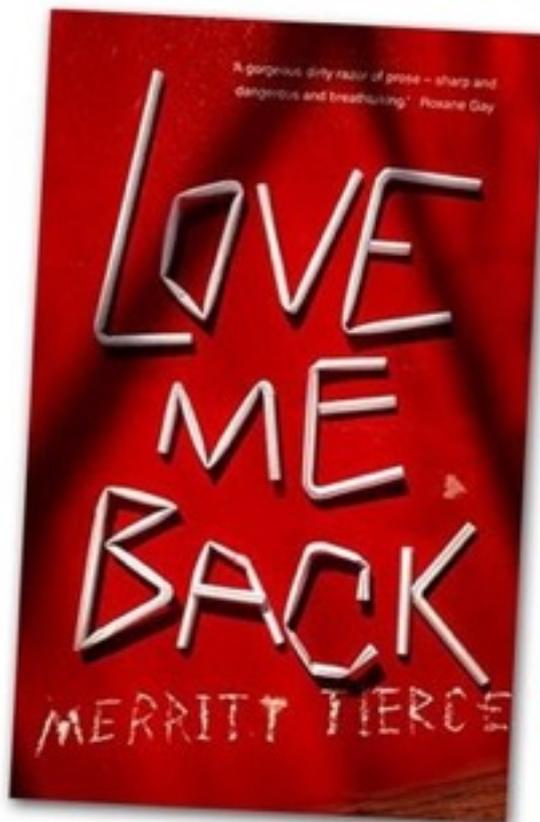


# At a glance: fiction

Francesca Angelini Published: 17 January 2016  
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## **Love Me Back by Merritt Tierce**

*Corsair* £14.99 pp224

Casual sex, cocaine and self-harm are twentysomething Marie Young's main pastimes, pursued not for hedonistic abandon but for a break from self-loathing. After an unexpected pregnancy leaves her intensely depressed, she gives custody of her daughter to the child's father and moves through jobs in various restaurants, including a fine-dining Dallas steakhouse. American debut novelist Tierce never flinches in detailing the debasing sex that Marie seeks out and her novel sustains a remarkably visceral anguish. Just as impressive is the author's rendering of the secret world of restaurants: her depiction of the chaos, flagrant rule-breaking and exhausting performances undertaken by the staff, night after night, is as deafeningly vibrant as *The Ivy* running at full tilt.

*Buy for £12.99, including p&p, from the Sunday Times Bookshop*  
*Ebook also available*

## **The Life and Death of Sophie Stark by Anna North**

*Weidenfeld £8.99 pp320*

How far should one go in the pursuit of art? This is the philosophical cliché at the centre of the American novelist Anna North's second outing. For the esoteric film-maker Sophie Stark, achieving perfection is paramount: her films have "that quality, as if an alien had come down and filmed humans and shown us what we were like so much more honestly than any other human could", but the making of them alienates her from those she loves. As an earnest narrative outlines her career from bullied teenager and down-and-out Brooklynite to indie star, the chapters oscillate between the perspectives of those who knew her best. It is a technique that neatly hones the mismatch between their infatuation with Sophie and her inscrutability. The downside of Sophie's otherness, though, is that she remains so out of reach that it is hard to engage emotionally.

*Buy for £8.54, including p&p, from the Sunday Times Bookshop  
Ebook also available*

### **Memoirs of a Stalker by Thomas W Hodgkinson**

*Silvertail £10.99 pp260*

The most alarming part of being inside the intense mind of Jack Raphael is witnessing how easy it is for him to turn from normal to stalker. After Jack, a failing author, splits up with his posh girlfriend, Mills, he exhibits all the symptoms of heartbreak: constantly checking the phone, inability to sleep. Finding himself at Mills's house, he sneaks into the basement and takes up residence. Hodgkinson's blackly comic debut then becomes increasingly dark as, undetected, Jack begins to interfere in Mills' life, thwarting her dinner parties, watching her sleep. The grandiose literary references could grow wearisome, but here they contribute to the hyperbole of Jack's obsessive sense of self. This is a psychological thriller that, although offering few surprises, captivates as it slides inexorably towards its finale.

*Buy for £10.99, including p&p, from the Sunday Times Bookshop*