

Advance trade review, [Books+Publishing](#)

Broken Rules and Other Stories (Barry Lee Thompson, Transit Lounge)

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In this accomplished debut, Barry Lee Thompson makes delicate inquiries into the passage of time through a series of loosely linked, often coming-of-age stories. Several stories cast back to lucid memories of childhood and a frequently adversarial mother, with the narrator emerging more than once as a gangly youth coming to terms with both adolescence and homosexuality. Thompson crafts subtle vignettes about fleeting moments and missed connections, from the nocturnal temptations of webcams in ‘Twitch’ (‘I cavort through this nether world, and it swallows up my nights’) to the gigolo seeking post-coital coffee with an ageing client in ‘Gray’. The stories tend towards the shorter side, with a handful of them less than 10 pages long, but that encourages Thompson to experiment: ‘Fragrant’ reads more like atmospheric poetry, and ‘Careering’ is a witty display of youthful bravado. Resolution is never quite at hand and there’s often the lingering sense of something ending, whether it’s a family holiday or summer itself. And amidst the many descriptions of sexual encounters, Thompson cherishes the intimate, would-be mundane details all around. That exacting eye distinguishes these stories most, along with a sensitivity attuned to life’s inevitable waystations.

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