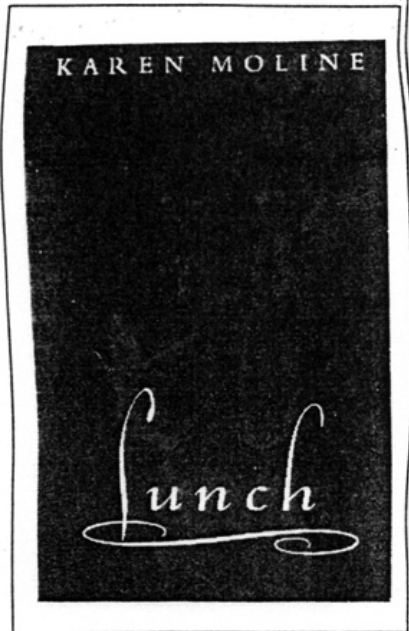


other assorted overpaid idiots', that *Lunch* was born.

The novel is centred around three characters: the unbelievably conceited and sexually perverted Nick, the intelligent, confident and very likeable portrait artist Olivia, and the menacing, anonymous, M - Nick's bodyguard and assistant in all of his bizarre and usually cruel sexual exploits. Unlike most erotic novels, where the narrator is one of the participants in the affair, this story of sexual obsession is told by M, who watches Nick's every move and whose constant observation is instrumental to Nick's pleasure. The reader is encouraged to judge all three main characters very early in the novel, but as the story progresses, it becomes clear that none of them are what they seem to be. Nick's complex relationship with his one close friend is slowly revealed, and we see that a loveless past is the basis for their shared coldness and perversity. Olivia, who seems a very normal woman in love with her pianist fiance, finds herself becoming involved in a sado-masochistic affair from which she seemingly cannot escape.

Nick Muncie is a movie star created, Moline says, from a compendium of celebrities she has interviewed and known. The complexity of his character is one of several features which set *Lunch* apart from innumerable trashy pornographic novels. Nick is an example, to use Moline's phrase, 'of what happens to your psyche when no one ever says no to you'. When Olivia becomes the first woman to say no to his powerful sexual charisma, the results are ultimately very destructive, not only for the two of them, but for M as well. Nick's fame and fortune free him from the behaviour restrictions to which ordinary people are confined. Anger, created by his violent and loveless youth, is his only means of self-expression, and even true love cannot save him from his own cruel desires.

Moline says that nothing in the book is 'made up', as such. Even the nature



of the sex in the novel comes from stories she has heard from various celebrity friends and acquaintances about their own sexual behaviour and the behaviour of the people they know. The credibility of the novel's characters, despite their somewhat unusual sexual exploits, is one of its greatest achievements. This is particularly true of Olivia, who strikes the reader as quite normal. When she starts partaking in sexual activity she had previously seen as unthinkable - and finds herself enjoying it - the reader does not stop relating to her character, but is forced to question how far they themselves are enjoying the novel's bizarre sex scenes.

*Lunch* is a Jackie Collins-style Hollywood-sex-obsession novel for people who don't want to read total crap. Its characters are all complex and three-dimensional and the story is thought provoking as well as highly entertaining. What struck me most, though, was the question of why a woman who is clearly a talented writer, chose such a narrow- and let's face it, tacky - genre in which to write. This mystery didn't hamper my enjoyment of the book, however, and I spent two days of break reading it and hardly putting it down. Perhaps Moline's next novel will do greater justice to her talent. In the meantime, I recommend *Lunch* as a great holiday read.

Sarah Gilbert

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## LUNCH

by Karen Moline Picador books \$14.95

*Lunch* is the very impressive first novel from celebrity journalist Karen Moline. Moline was born in Chicago in 1955, has lived in various U.S. cities, as well as in London, and is now settled in New York. It is from her experiences interviewing and socialising with actors, rock musicians, directors, models 'and