

## Strike Anywhere: Essays, Reviews & Other Arsons

**Michael Lista**

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*Provocative and profound but eminently readable, Strike Anywhere demonstrates a critic of high order, unrestrained. It's great fun watching Lista play with matches.*

Michael Lista casts his discerning eye toward poetry, television, music, and the relationship of the arts to the wider world in the illuminating essay collection *Strike Anywhere: Essays, Reviews & Other Arsons*.

Lista is a respected poet, with two published collections and five years of poetry columns for Canada's *National Post* to his credit. The bulk of *Strike Anywhere* is culled from those columns, in which Lista praises, criticizes, and occasionally excoriates poems (and poets), including Canadian luminaries like Leonard Cohen. He defends traditional figures like Robert Frost while suggesting that Margaret Atwood and Michael Ondaatje might be coasting just a bit. After discussing poetry and writing, Lista focuses on television and music: *Dancing with the Stars*, *The Walking Dead*, and "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down," among other topics.

All of this is cogent and entertaining criticism, but it serves as warm-up to the pièce de résistance, the longest essay in the book, "The Shock Absorber." This entry examines the responsibility of artists outside of their art by analyzing Canada's prestigious (and remunerative) Griffin Poetry Prize and the means by which its founder makes his money, in parallel with a profile of a writer and Saudi Arabian political prisoner. Lista points out the ethical conflicts, but it's handled in a way that evokes mature thought; these are not the adolescent screamings of a student who has found his or her first example of hypocrisy in the world.

The book's title is apropos, as is its cover, with a burning flame on a black background; Lista's writing is incendiary, and there's no doubt he's burned some bridges along his path. Although sometimes harsh, Lista is often amusing and never falls into mean-spiritedness or mere attempts to shock—every opinion is justified with examples.

One of Lista's targets is the common practice in Canada (and elsewhere) of publications only providing favorable reviews; by challenging this system, he simultaneously points out its flaws and magnifies the weight of his own praise as it's bestowed on those he finds deserving.

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PETER DABBENE (October 19, 2016)

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