



### **POUND FOR POUND**

by F.X. Toole

Harvill Secker £12, 384 pages

Boxing has arguably inspired the finest literature of any sport, though few of its practitioners have made the leap from ring to writing. F.X. Toole is an exception. A former trainer and "cut man" (the person who staunches the fighter's wounds), he made his literary debut aged 70 with *Rope Burns*, a collection of short stories that included "Million Dollar Baby", which became a Hollywood film.

Toole didn't live to see the film. Nor did he manage to finish his first novel. What remains is *Pound for Pound*, the story of Dan Cooley, an ex-fighter and boxing trainer whose life has been shattered by failure and bereavement. But a second chance presents itself in the person of Chicky Garza, a promising young Tex-Mex welterweight who coincidentally is the grandson of the fighter who ended Dan's career as a boxer. Training Chicky gives Dan a new lease of life. It also offers him a chance to reconcile himself to life's setbacks.

It is clear that this is an unfinished novel: at times the melodramatic plot reads like it has been patched up by the literary equivalent of a cut man. But Toole is capable of powerful writing. His hardboiled-yet-sentimental tone has the smack of authenticity. **LH-T**

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