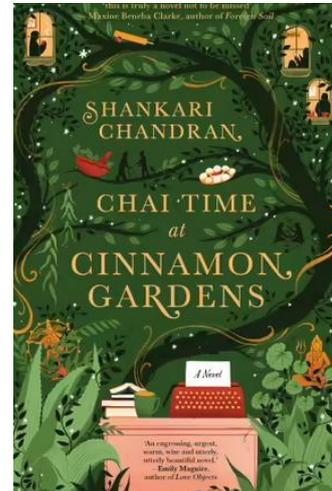


## Fiction

### ***Chai Time at Cinnamon Gardens***

Shankari Chandran

Despite its cosy name, this is anything but a cosy book. It's a thoroughly masterful look at many things: racism, history, social media and the political process, family, tragedy, learning, survival, endurance. Cinnamon Gardens is an old folks' home in western Sydney which is run by Sri Lankan Tamils. Matriarch Maya subsidises it by writing best selling novels under the pseudonym Sarah Byrnes. Nikki is one of the doctors there and best friend since childhood of Maya's daughter Anji, who's a psychiatrist and who now runs the place. Nikki's husband Gareth is a political operative, now acting local councillor since the departure of the mayor after a scandal. All is not well with their marriage. We learn early on that one of their children has died.



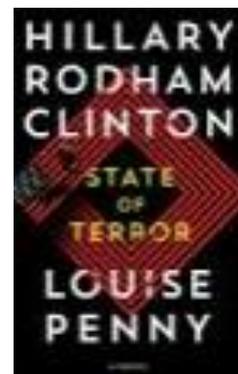
As things begin to go downhill for Gareth, he discovers that a statue of Captain Cook was removed from its pedestal by Maya's husband. For a variety of reasons, he puts in a complaint with the Human Rights Commission, classing this removal as a racist act that offends him as a white Australian. It leads to disaster. After an unintended altercation a right wing politician incites a white backlash against immigrants reminiscent of what happened after the Cronulla riots. This plays out against what we now know of horrendous events in Sri Lanka as the Sinhalese government sought to quell the Tamil Tigers. Maya and many others are carrying terrible burdens. Then follows a tragedy of quite Shakespearean proportions which could so easily have been avoided. To say that this is a compelling book that makes us think is an understatement. It's quite searingly visceral as well as thoughtful and well informed. Now this *does* deserve to be a best seller.

### ***State of Terror***

Hillary Rodham Clinton and Louise Penny

Review: *Anne Mason*

If you like political thrillers then you'll enjoy this book. The main character is the US Secretary of State, a position Hillary would know about. The plot involves bombings and a hunt for the terrorists behind them. There is an inept past President in the mix who is partly responsible for the situation - wonder where they got that idea!

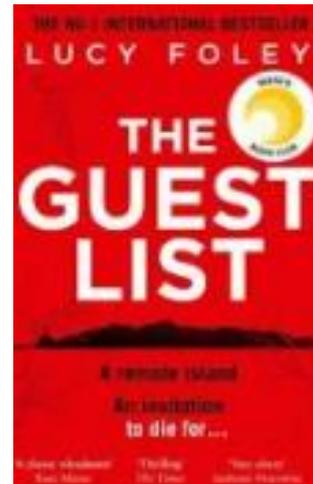


## Crime fiction

### ***The Guest List***

Lucy Foley

When this came out it rapidly notched up sales and soon reached best seller status. It's going to be a movie. It's about a glitzy wedding that's to take place on a wild Atlantic island off the west Irish coast. As the drunken reception takes place in an elaborate marquee setup, a wild storm causes electricity failures and one person ends up dead. Foley's pacing is excellent: various characters take centre stage to talk about the past and the present, giving us a picture of stressed, fallible people. This picture includes bullying, harassment, abortion, revenge porn, betrayal, naked greed, jealousy ... all the sins flesh is heir to. However there are no notes of appeal to higher purposes. Thousands of years of history have yielded little wisdom in ordinary lives, it seems. Just as well, I suppose, or we wouldn't have new novels. This is why I'd rather read the more philosophical Donna Leon or Louise Penny, though. However, there's no denying the fascination of Foley's roller coaster ride, and she'll no doubt make a mint.



### ***Reminders of Him***

Colleen Hoover

A paint by numbers plot has a young woman giving birth in prison and fiercely hoping to make contact with her daughter on her release. The child is being raised by the excellent parents of her partner, but as this young woman (who of course is beautiful and chestnut-haired) is partially to blame for his death they want nothing to do with her. However, she is meant to be a sympathetic character so Hoover pulls out all the stops to make her so. The dead partner's best buddy is close to the child and the grandparents but of course is (conflictedly) romantically attracted to our heroine. Cue sizzling sex scenes. You can probably tell how it ends. On course to be another best seller for Hoover, but frankly, these people are as interesting as snails. Why did the Spectrum section of the SMH review it?

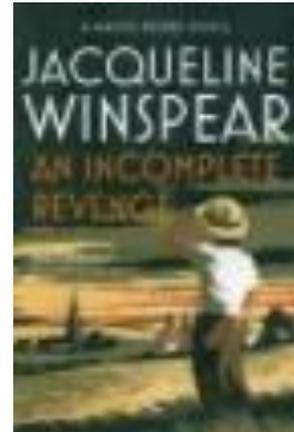


***An Incomplete Revenge (Maisie Dobbs #5)***

Jacqueline Winspear

Jacqueline Winspear has written a whole slew of books featuring psychologist and investigator Maisie Dobbs, which are set between the wars in England. World War I and the Depression cast a long shadow but life is still based on bucolic villages where poor Londoners enjoy a working country holiday picking hops. Gypsies also come to pick but of course there is antagonism against them. Maisie is asked to investigate some fires and minor criminality which the locals are curiously unwilling to report. She uncovers a trail of depressingly awful behaviour generated by the local lord of the manor who's a rotter, the villagers come clean about their complicity in an awful crime and the gypsy matriarch's time has come, as has that of Maisie's former fiancé, who's never been the same since they were both shelled on the fields of France.

These are warm hearted books which give a nuanced portrait of the times and the people.



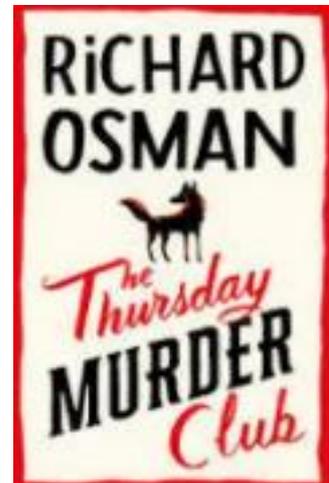
***The Thursday Murder Club***

***The Man Who Died Twice***

Richard Osman

Review: Anne Mason

Have just finished reading Richard Osman's book "The Thursday Murder Club", which the library has just got in for me. They had the second book "The Man who Died Twice" in earlier which I also read. I quite enjoyed both books. Found the second in the series more involved I think. The main characters in both are senior citizens in a retirement village who band together to solve murders. I found the characters interesting and the style of writing easy to digest. The chapters which are diary entries I really related to, as the writer gets side-tracked and often digresses (happens to me quite often). You are kept guessing as to who did it right to the end. I look forward to any more he writes using these characters.



***The Killing***

David Hewson

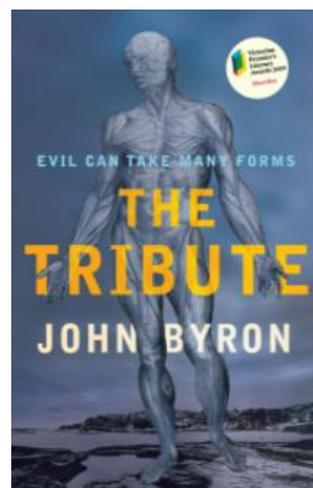
*The Killing* was first of all a Danish TV series that achieved cult status and it shows in this very good novelisation. A pretty young blonde student is nastily raped and killed and in every episode suspicion falls on a different character. There were 20 episodes and the book follows closely, ie: it's very long. The personality of lead detective Sarah Lund is often discussed. She's a quiet but strong person with a singular focus on the job which leaves little room for personal relationships. In fact, she comes off as slightly on the spectrum. Mixed in with the business of discovering the perpetrator is the political story of who will be the next mayor of Copenhagen, which is just as interesting.



### ***The Tribute***

John Byron

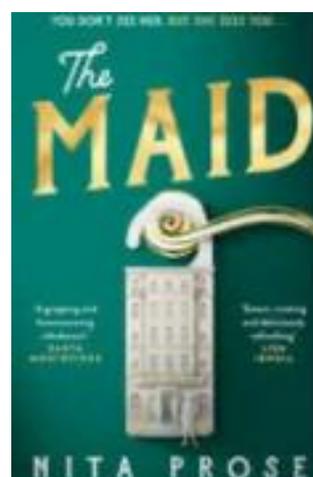
This debut novel is very assured and has two main strands: a psycho killer is inspired by the pioneering dissections of 16th century “Father of Anatomy” Andreas Vesalius to reproduce the uncovering of bones, muscles etc on various victims. Secondly, the lead detective, about whom we have some doubts initially, degenerates into full blown domestic violence, which is something Byron insists we should work to stamp out in his afterword. It’s set in Sydney so many of the settings will be familiar. Politics plays a part, because the NSW premier will soon be facing an election, so the police are facing considerable pressure to catch the killer. It’s a well told story with excellent characters. There are some wonderful reproductions of original woodcuts.



### ***The Maid***

Nita Prose

What a wonderful name for an author. This is also on the best seller list, and features a young woman who doesn’t read social cues and who was raised by her grandmother, who died recently. She enjoys her work as a maid at a boutique hotel, but finds her life turned upside down when she discovers one of their best clients dead in his suite. He’s “best” in terms of paying but worst in terms of being a decent human. As the maid is charged with murder, her team works to uncover nefarious goings on. The shtick in this book is the curiously old-fashioned politeness with which the maid speaks, which is a nice antidote to the way moderns usually speak. Not bad; not great either. Couple of surprises at the end.



## Non-fiction

### ***Turns Out I'm Fine***

Judith Lucy

Comedian Judith Lucy famously discovered she was adopted one Christmas when she was 25. Almost as well known: her “Mr Right” (for whom she’d waited a long time), finally admitted he’d been gaslighting her and taking money out of her bank account for years. It took a while to come back from this and in this book she talks about the things that helped. Yoga, counselling, new work projects, activism with poor African women and for the environment, swimming with whale sharks ... the list goes on. She’s an intelligent, amusing woman who’s been through a lot - some of it self-inflicted - and this is a sane look at the things that really matter and which nourish us, despite whether they fit a conventional narrative or not.

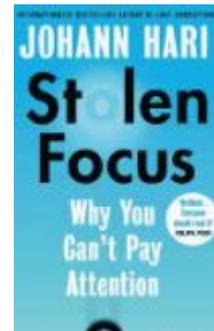


### ***Stolen Focus: Why You Can't Pay Attention***

Johann Hari

When I read Hari's *Chasing the Scream* I was really impressed. It was a really sane look at the issue of drugs worldwide and from every angle. This book is similarly impressive. He writes well. So it was a shock to read his Wikipedia page. It obviously wasn't written by him, because it contains the following sections:

3. Plagiarism
4. Fabrication
5. Misuse of Wikipedia
6. Use of libel law to suppress criticism



In short, his colleagues don't think well of him. However, even if he's presenting the knowledge and opinions of others as his own, he at least has the wisdom to choose wisely. For this book he unplugged from the internet and suffered withdrawals. However, our universal attention deficit disorder was already in progress before social media. A key point: when we think we're multi-tasking we're not. Studies show that people are rapidly switching between tasks. When we do this it takes considerable time to get back in the groove. And really in the groove is where we need to be for creative problem solving to take place. Moral: check email etc once a day, not constantly. An interesting book, despite my drop in admiration for its author.

## *A message from our leader, Anne M*

The Muswellbrook Library Book Club meets on the second Tuesday of the month at 2pm in the library. Books are provided by the library. Chosen books are not always to everyone's taste, but unlike school, if you don't like it, you don't have to read it. We also discuss any other books we have read that month. Newcomers are most welcome.

That's it for February. Please do send your reviews to [erylacarter@gmail.com](mailto:erylacarter@gmail.com)

*Happy reading!*