

# The Khandallah Literary Review

Welcome to the May edition of our monthly newsletter.

We'll review books, and some music, which appeal to us. Contributions also come from select library members and staff (basically, anyone who tells us about a Book, Movie or CD they like)

"I read for pleasure and that is the moment I learn the most"

Author Margaret Atwood

Rendang by Will Harris (Poetry)



Will Harris is a London based author and poet with Chinese Indonesian heritage, hence the name 'Rendang,' a traditional beef curry and one of the national dishes of Indonesia. As a Chinese Indonesian myself, I was delighted to find this poetry book in our collection, and it proved both whimsical and piercing, compelling but also vague. Harris writes in such a way that leaves you with impressions of feelings, people and places almost as if he is relaying memory, but all the while charming you with his word play and almost nonsensical association. The first poem/dedication was by far my favourite, a combination of these different factors distilled into one, while also addressing his unique ethnic lens. This is my favourite passage from it:

*Rose and rosé have French and Frisian roots*

*Context makes the difference clear*

*Here lies one whose name was writ in bahasa*

*Here are words I've said*

*In memory of her who I could never speak to*

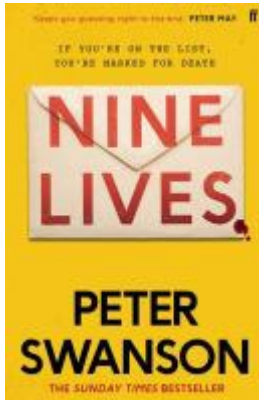
*Tjandra Sari*

*I call you wrongly*

*Rend me rightly*

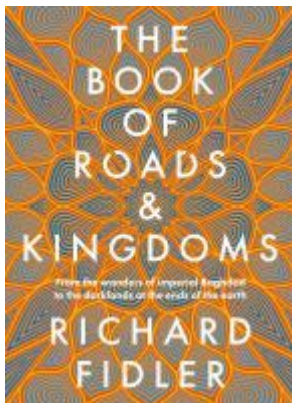
*Rootless and unclear (Yani)*

## Nine Lives by Peter Swanson (Fiction)



Nine names on a list, nine people with apparently nothing in common. An eclectic bunch that includes an English Professor, a male oncology nurse, an FBI agent, a mistress and a retired businessman, they apparently have nothing in common. While the list is not an overt threat, as expected, people on the list start being killed. Characters in the book refer to Agatha Christie's "And Then There Were None/ Ten Little Indians". That idea is a starting point, although not quite in that league. Swanson has an economical easy style, switching between listees and the detectives trying to solve the murders. Intriguing situations, unexpected plot developments and enough twists and character development to get involved with the story. (Greg)

## The Book of Roads and Kingdoms by Richard Fidler (Non-Fiction)



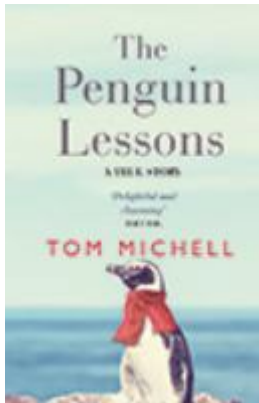
When the author came across the story of a tenth-century Arab diplomat who travelled from the sophisticated pleasures of the Caliphate of Baghdad to Russia he was struck by how modern the traveller's voice seemed, almost as if a 21<sup>st</sup> Century time traveller was dropped into medieval lands. This led Author/Broadcaster Fidler to discover that this was just one of many chronicles of wonder, delight and horror from Persian and Arab travellers and their adventures in Africa, China, India, and Byzantium. Through these stories, both realistic and fantastical, the author traces the expansion of this empire (which at its peak was larger than the more familiar Roman one), not only through its geographical frontiers but also intellectually, utilising Muslim theology, Greek science, and Indian numbers. This is a beautifully told, very entertaining story of a dazzling lost world which broadens and challenges our view of the medieval world and the "dark ages" (David)

## A Lady's Guide to Fortune-Hunting by Sophie Irwin



This book is an easy read and lots of fun, perfect to help you unwind after a busy day. This Regency romance novel has shades of *Pride and Prejudice* and Georgette Heyer's novels. It features a savvy heroine Kitty who driven by the need to keep the debt collectors away from her family home, decides the only option to a woman of her times is to find a rich husband. So she goes to London to find her fortune in the shape of a single man, dragging her bookworm sister with her. Here she launches herself on the London season and has to navigate the unwritten social norms of the upper classes in order to ingratiate herself and win over the gatekeepers of these rich young men – their mothers. Kitty and her nemesis Radcliffe are engaging characters and Kitty, in particular, is likeable despite her seemingly mercenary nature. The rest of the characters are pretty superficial though. The book rattles along at a good pace that keeps you turning the page. It was light but it made me smile. (Fiona R)

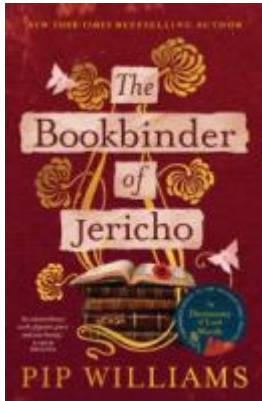
## The Penguin Lessons: A True Story Tom Mitchell



On the cover there is a quote from the Daily Mail “*Delightful and Charming*” and it is! In the 70s, the author seeking adventure, is accepted as Assistant Master at a boarding school in Argentina. In one of his many excursions to explore the country he rescues a Magellan penguin, lone survivor of an oil slick. After it has been cleaned of all the oil and tar, The penguin refuses to return to the sea. With no other options, Tom smuggles it onto a bus and then into his flat at the school. Reading the novella Jonathon Livingston Seagull, which translates to Juan Salvador Gaviota, he names him Juan Salvador Pingino. He must learn to feed and care for the bird, and to help it recover it's waterproofing. In heart-warming detail, he relates how the school students and staff embrace Juan Salvador and the love and affection that is lavished on him. They visit him to talk to and tell their troubles and seek advice. There are episodes where Juan Salvador inspires the boy's rugby team and a poor swimmer to victory. In a straightforward style the author incorporates life in Argentina at the time, the economy, and trips to the pampas into a lovely story about an amazing creature. (Greg)

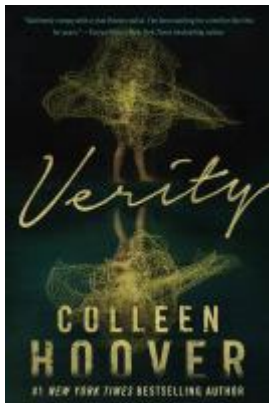
## The Bookbinder of Jericho by Pip Williams (Fiction)

*“Your job is to bind the books, not read them”*



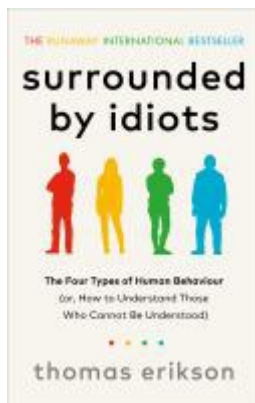
Set in Jericho, Oxford’s Clarendon Press during World War One, Peg, and her identical (though very different) twin sister Maude are bookbinders, and very firmly “town” not “gown”. The Bookbinder of Jericho celebrates sisterhood – of siblings, friends, nurses, suffragettes – aspirations and the simple things that get you through an unbearable time. In a deceptively light and enjoyable way, Williams explores issues of class, duty, the horrors and repercussions of war, and most of all, the power of knowledge – who holds it and who should have access to it. Overwhelmingly, it was the expressions of support, acceptance and resilience that made me love this book and want to linger over every page. The literary references throughout add to the joy this book brings. Simply superb. (Fiona M)

## Verity by Colleen Hoover (Fiction)



Colleen Hoover has been something of a recent sensation, particularly on the social media platform TikTok, so I decided to read this book to see if it lived up to the hype. I will disclaim that I don't usually read thrillers, but from my perspective this book did not deliver as 'the best thriller ever.' Verity is told through the eyes of struggling novelist Lowen, who miraculously receives an offer to complete an award-winning thriller series which will undoubtedly save her from financial ruin, and change the trajectory of her career for good. Lowen is then invited to research and write for the series at the original author's residence, when he is unable to write due to a serious car accident. Lowen's experience at this locale is the focus for the rest of the book. One thing I didn't anticipate was how much of a steamy romance this book would be, and this seems to be where much of the thrill in the book comes from, which feels a little cheap. As the main character, Lowen seemed somewhat vapid, if not irritating as the self-proclaimed moody introvert of NYC. Plot-wise, most of the action happens at the end of the book and I think this where a lot of the character development happens too. Overall, this is a good book if you want something easy to burn through over a weekend, but not the stuff of excellence. (Yani)

Surrounded by Idiots: The Four Types of Human Behaviour (or, How to Understand Those Who Cannot Be Understood) by Thomas Erikson (Non-Fiction)



I picked up this book because I liked the title, it explained so much! The author talks about using the D.I.S.C. system, each category given a colour in the charts he uses. The four categories are: Dominance – Red: Quick and more than happy to take command, become control freaks happy to tread on people’s toes. Inducement – Yellow: Amusing, creative and will elevate the mood, can consume all the oxygen in the room. Submissive – Green: Pleasant and genuinely care for others, Wishy washy and unclear, never take a stand. Compliance – Blue: Calm, Level-headed and think before they speak, critical thinking can easily turn to suspicion. Most people are not all just in one category of course but are mainly in one group. Erikson calls it perhaps the world’s most widely used method, so I googled for more information. The book had a major impact in Sweden, Hundreds of thousands of Swede have spent an estimated ten million euros on the book and changed the way they discuss behaviour. Many companies and organisations use the personality test system which has no proven research behind it, written by someone with no credentials in this field. VoF (*Vetenskap och Folkbildning — the Swedish Skeptics Society*) voted Erikson Fraudster of the year in 2018. Read at your own risk (Greg)

Growing up in Ganges Road by Pauline Steele (Biography)

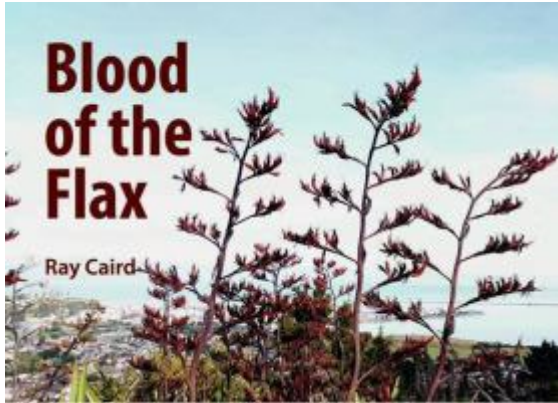
(No Cover Picture Available)

A retired English school teacher in her eighties, Pauline describes an interesting slice of life, of a childhood in Khandallah through the Great depression and war years The only family to live in the Khandallah village at the time, at 8 Ganges Road, now the site of the library. Their neighbour was a coal merchant “*a dark-faced ogre, waving his arms and shouting if he saw us playing in his yard*”. Next door was Mrs Griffiths’ cakeshop; across the road was the Zerfus’ shop where they bought exercise books This was next to the Town Hall where “*every Saturday evening the local citizens gathered for a showing of the latest film. Those at the top of the social scale sat upstairs in the more expensive seats and the hoi polloi below*”. The author vividly brings to life such memories of waiting for the horse drawn milkman’s cart and getting two-pint scoops of milk into their billy, making a straw stuffed guy for Guy Fawkes night and putting it in a cart to take to Nairnville Park for a huge bonfire, and visits from the Rawleigh’s Man, their main health care provider. Pauline writes in an understated manner that



reflects the time: *“The Anglican church to which the family of my future husband belonged, had a small architectural gem of a church up Boxhill”*. A small book well worth reading. (Greg)

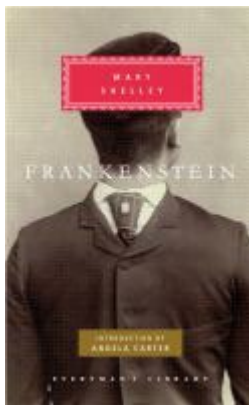
Blood of the Flax by Ray Caird (NZ Non-Fiction)



This beautiful, illustrated book is a playful and stunning celebration of the Harakeke. *Toto o te Harakeke* explores the most important plant-human relationship in the history of Aotearoa

“I loved it, a fabulous book” (Neroli)

Mary Shelley's “FRANKENSTEIN, or The Modern Prometheus” (YA Fiction)



What a satisfying read. Nothing like I expected. This hybrid of Gothic-Romanticism became the pioneer of the Sci-Fi genre. So much to reflect on in this impacting book. It's like the biblical story of Job, only in reverse. Victor Frankenstein (the scientist who manufactures this creature) whose repulsive disdain of the 'monster' is a reflection of his own bitter subconscious self. Some striking parallels to contemporary culture, e.g. the creature longs to join the community, but the Christian family he reaches out to freaks out, calls him a monster, a devil, an abomination, and the work of Satan, before driving him

away into banishment. The unnamed creature is a pictorial metaphor of the dehumanization of those around us we deem 'wretched'.

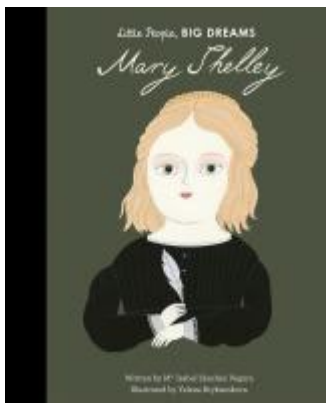
## FRANKENSTEIN (Audio Book)



The narration by Dan Stevens for Mary Shelley's "FRANKENSTEIN, or, The Modern Prometheus" is amazing. What an artistic actor. This audio series spread over 8 hours was a wonderful experience.

"But I am a blasted tree, the bolt has entered my soul..."

## MARY SHELLEY (Little People, Big Dreams) by Ma Isabel Sanchez Vegara (Children Biography)



"Frankenstein .. the greatest horror story ever written." "The mother of modern science fiction." Era appropriate illustrations and colours. 4 Stars. (Andy)