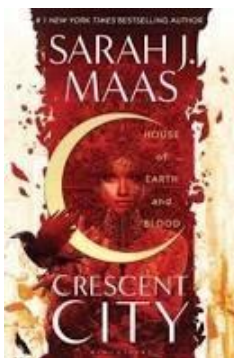


House of blood and earth by Sarah J Maas (Bk 1 Crescent Moon series)

Reviewed by Alex



Bryce Quinlan used to light up Crescent City, partying all night in clubs where the strict classes of angel, shifter, human and Fae merge into a sea of beautiful bodies.

And then a demon murdered her closest friends.

Two years later, when the supposed killer is behind bars, the crimes start up again, the city's leaders command Bryce to help investigate. They assign an enslaved fallen angel, Hunt Athalar, to make sure she does. But as Bryce fights to uncover the truth – and resist her attraction to the brooding angel who shadows her every step – she finds herself following a trail that leads deep into

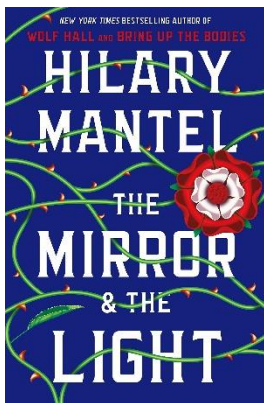
her own dark past.

Sarah J. Maas has created a strong female character in Bryce. A little a bit of everything, humour, romance, action, fantasy. Could not put it down! Waiting for next book in series.

Interested in this title? Check out the library [catalogue](#)

The Mirror and the Light by Hilary Mantel (Bk 3 Thomas Cromwell trilogy)

Reviewed by Skye



I was really looking forward to this book, having loved the first two, *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies* (both were Man Booker Prize winners). The intrigue of court life, the politics of religion and the rapid rise of Thomas Cromwell made for a brilliant reading. It's been eight years since *Bring up the Bodies*, so I did a quick wiki search to refresh my memory before starting.

The book opens with the beheading of Anne Boylen in May 1536. Cromwell, having made the marriage possible, is witness to the grim reality of what happens to those that fall from favour. His star, however, continues to rise as he works to strengthen the acceptance of the new English Church and raid the monasteries to fill the royal coffers. Henry VII has another bride, Jane Seymour, and is desperate for a male heir. Cromwell has spies everywhere, a network that he exploits to ensure his continued success and royal favour.

Unlike the previous two books, the Cromwell of the *Mirror and the Light* is introspective. Reflecting on his actions, considering their meaning and waiting to discover their consequences. Conversely, he is also at his most careless, speaking of the King in ways that he will come to regret deeply. Some of his enemies have fallen, although many remain. Additionally, he is feared by the populace who have come to see him as a menacing character who will stop at nothing in his pursuit of wealth and power. Following the death of Jane Seymour, Cromwell is tasked with finding Henry a suitable Queen, and his good fortune begins to unravel.

I'm not sure if it was because I knew how this would end, or if it was the change in style, but I didn't enjoy this as much as the previous books. Still a good read, by an extremely talented author and a lovely big book coming in at around 900 pages.

The *Mirror and the Light* is available on Borrowbox. There are also a couple of podcasts that might interest you:

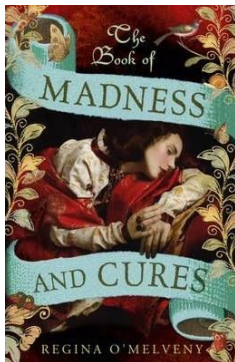
[Talking Politics – Episode 236 In Praise of Hilary Mantel](#) (contains spoilers, best to listen after you finish the book)

[Thomas Cromwell: Getting Past the Myths](#) – a one-off lecture packaged as a podcast that I found really interesting.

Interested in this title? Check out the library [catalogue](#)

The book of madness and cures by Regina O'Melveny

Reviewed by Jo



Gabriella Mondini lives in 16th Century Venice, a Dottoressa by trade, thanks to the support and tutelage of her father. Together they are writing The Book of Diseases, an encyclopaedia of all known diseases, cures, and uses for medicinals. Dr Mondini leaves Venice to research further diseases and cures, leaving only a trail of letters that become erratic, enigmatic, and troubling, before they dry up completely.

His letters lead Gabriella to suspect her father may suffer some illness, or some form of madness. She sets out to find him, against her mother's wishes, taking her old nursemaid Olmina, and Olmina's husband Lorenzo, as her companions.

It is an arduous journey, with prejudices against women, witches, and Catholics evident along the way. Gabriella has her hope, her stubborn determination, the good nature of Lorenzo, the unfailing support of Olmina (even if she does complain), and her continued work on The Book of Diseases to sustain her.

This book is Regina O'Melveny's first novel, beautiful and lyrical, as you would expect from an award-winning poet.

Interested in this title? Check out the library [catalogue](#)

Everyone brave is forgiven by Chris Cleave

Reviewed by Pat



The novel follows four protagonists from the outbreak of war to the summer of 1942. Mary North is the privileged daughter of an MP who signs up for the war effort within 45 minutes of its declaration: “She left finishing school unfinished.” She is assigned a school-teaching job, initially an unappealing prospect but one for which she soon discovers a natural aptitude.

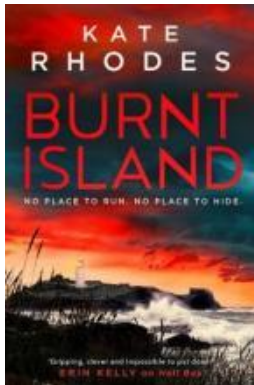
Through the job she meets Tom Shaw, head of the local education authority and, despite the class difference – or perhaps because of it, given Mary’s maverick, rebellious nature – the two embark on a love affair. Meanwhile, Tom’s friend and flatmate, Alistair Heath, a picture restorer at the Tate, signs up for active duty, eventually deploying to Malta to defend the island amid harrowing and demoralising conditions. Completing the quartet is Mary’s best friend, Hilda who at first appears shallow but who’s hidden strength shines though in the toughest of times.

Cleave’s engagement with themes of racism, class, female empowerment and the emotional dislocations induced by war lend the novel social and historical depth in scenes that are both intricately researched and evocatively conveyed. All tied up in a narrative that is truly unputdownable.

Interested in this title? Check out the library [catalogue](#)

Burnt Island by Kate Rhodes

Reviewed by Pat



As the sun sets on St Agnes on bonfire night, a man's charred body is found on Burnt Island, surrounded by threats in the old Cornish language.

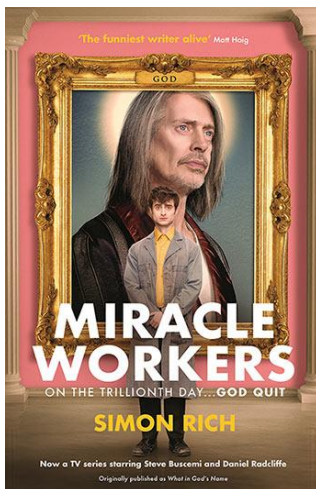
Deputy Chief of Police Ben Kitto has no choice but to ban all travel between the islands, forcing the community of just eighty islanders to remain within reach, while he hunts for the killer. Ben quickly suspects the motive is to rid the island of newcomers who threaten tradition, and when a second fire results in the disappearance of another islander, he only has forty-eight hours before another life is lost . . .

Gripping, clever and impossible to put down. I am a big Kate Rhodes and in Ben Kitto she has created a detective who is complex and compelling. Rhodes' elegant plotting and stunning prose always make for a good read. The claustrophobia and paranoia of the closed island community are so brilliant evoked, I could almost feel the tide encroaching as time ran out to find the killer.

Interested in this title? Check out the library [catalogue](#).

Miracle workers by Simon Rich

Reviewed by Kirk



In my eternal quest to answer the question “is the book actually better than the movie?” this little gem caught my eye. Originally published in 2012 under the title ‘What In God’s Name?’ it was adapted for television in 2019 starring Daniel Radcliffe and Steve Buscemi. I was happy to discover that the adaptation closely followed the book – which proved superior.

God, becoming complacent with his side project ‘mankind’, decides to end all of humanity to open a new Asian-fusion restaurant in Heaven. Craig and Eliza, angels from the Department of Miracles on floor 17, challenge God to a bet with the fate of humanity (and their jobs) on the line.

Rich’s satirical writing is reminiscent of Douglas Adams. The narrative feels like a paragraph from *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* has been extrapolated into a novel. The text is direct and simple. The cast of characters is small but relevant. In short, it’s easy to follow and at only 168 pages it is a quick read.

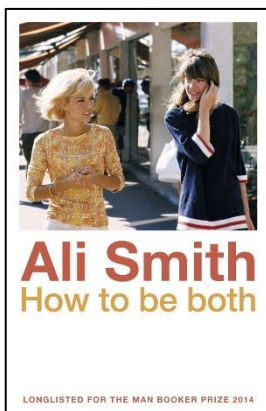
The humor of *Miracle Workers* lies in the absurdity of the situation and overly specific descriptive phrasing that critique the essence of humanity. Behind the satire though is a love letter to the nature of relationships that ultimately has a big heart.

The book is available as a hardcopy only. Season 1 and 2 are currently streaming via Stan.
Similar authors: Douglas Adams, Terry Pratchett, Ben Elton.

Interested in this title? Check out the library [catalogue](#).

How to be both by Ali Smith

Reviewed by Jaime



Difficult to put my finger on this one. How to Be Both by Ali Smith is a dual narrative; two tales of love and injustice intertwined.

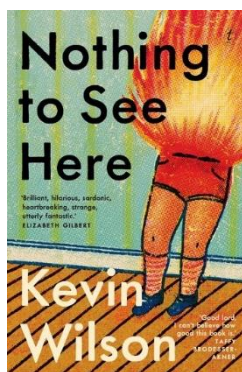
Half-way through I discovered the publishers has printed two versions of the book, swapping each of the stories to the beginning. Depending which copy of the book you pick up you may be meeting Francescho in 15th-century Ferrara, northern Italy first or teenage girl George in present day Cambridge, England. The two parts of 'How to Be Both' have overlapping themes: the subversive power of art; what Martineau refers to as “sexual and gender ambiguities”; the hold of the dead on the living; and, of course, the figure of Francescho him/herself.

George has a boy's name but is a girl whose sexuality is only just being explored; Francesco is born a girl but binds her chest and lives as a man. When Francesco is taken to a brothel by a male friend, the artist declines to sleep with the prostitute but draws her instead. When, centuries later, George and her mother study del Cossa's frescoes they cannot tell who is male and who is female. In the end, they decide it doesn't matter. Then when Francesco sees George for the first time, she assumes George is a boy, only to discover later that she had been mistaken. I read George's story first, and loved it... although I do wonder what my perception of the book may have been if I started the other story first. Great read for book clubs who love a debate!

Interested in this title? Check out the library [catalogue](#).

Nothing to see here by Kevin Wilson

Reviewed by Skye



I loved this book. It's one of the most original things I've ever read. Lillian and Madison are an unlikely pair. Arriving at an elite boarding school via very different paths, they are roommates and quickly become firm friends. Until Lillian leaves the school unexpectedly in the wake of a scandal.

15 years on and Lillian is living in her mother's attic, living week to week, with little hope of change and a high degree of self-loathing. That is until Madison writes a letter asking for her help. Soon, Lillian is living in luxury with Madison and her husband Jasper. Jasper's children, twins Bessie and Roland, from a previous marriage are coming to live with the couple and there's a problem.

The twins have a tendency to burst into flames. "How are they still alive?" I asked. "It doesn't hurt them at all," she said, shrugging to highlight how dumbfounded she was. "They just get really red, like a bad sunburn, but they're not hurt." "What about their clothes?" I asked. "I'm still figuring this out, Lillian," she said. "I guess their clothes burn off." "So they're just these naked kids on fire?" "I think so. So you can understand why we're worried."

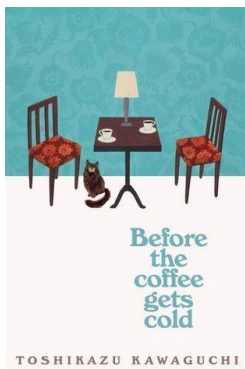
The story of Lillian, the twins, Madison and Jasper's political ambitions is told with great heart and ripples with good humour. Everyone should read this book!

Available as an e-book in Borrowbox

Interested in this title? Check out the library [catalogue](#).

Before the coffee gets cold by Toshikazu Kawaguchi

Reviewed by Maree



What if you could go back in time but had to return before your coffee gets cold.

The story is set in a tiny basement cafe in Tokyo, where people go for coffee and a spot of supernatural therapy. There are strict rules for this time travel, which to many people makes the trip not worth the effort. For example, there is a certain chair you must sit in and not move from and, more significantly, the present will always remain the same no matter what anyone does in the revisited past, nothing will change.

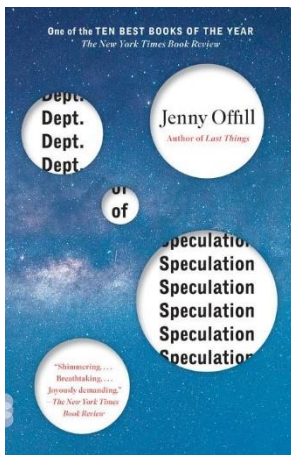
Before the Coffee Gets Cold looks at human nature and the little things that remain unsaid. Events may not change from the trip through time but the frame of mind almost certainly will. The time travel is like therapy or a drug, the only thing that changes is perception. There are about half a dozen characters in the featured coffee shop. The telling of each of their stories is like a fable, and all of the stories are intertwined.

Coffee, time travel and human connections, the perfect recipe that makes this book a little treasure

Interested in this title? Check out the library [catalogue](#).

Dept. of Speculation by Jenny Offill

Reviewed by Jaime



The size of this slender book lures you in... what possible impact could such a story have that can be read cover to cover on one Sunday afternoon?

It's been months since I finished it and I still can't stop thinking about it.

Extremely funny, often sad - Dept. of Speculation by Jenny Offill invites you in for a cup of tea and kicks you in the guts. From the point of view of a young writer referred to simply as 'the wife', we are shown short bursts of observation and memory—comic, startling, searing. Daily life, narrative of marriage, parenthood, ageing, introspective questions - how to be the artist. A book I couldn't put down and then forced into the hands of all my friends.

Interested in this title? Check out the library [catalogue](#).