

What We're Reading - 29 January 2021

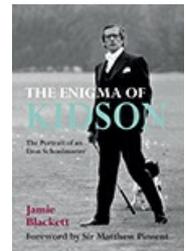
Lucy Nathan

Opinion - Books Friday, 29th January 2021

The BookBrunch team reveals what's on their bedside tables

Neill Denny

We wrote a story last week that a playwright had been found to adapt *The Enigma of Kidson* for the stage, a turn of events that happens to surprisingly few books. Intrigued by the splendid title and striking jacket, and also by sheer banality of the subject - the biography of a dead history teacher - I got hold of a copy. Of course, Kidson was not just any teacher, he was a senior 'beak' at Eton, with a list of distinguished former pupils including David Cameron, Nat Rothschild and Johnnie Boden, plus the author of course, Jamie Blackett. Published by Quiller, it is a work of genuine love, with contributions from dozens of people who adored Kidson, a man of mystery, humour and enormous commitment to his surprisingly delinquent charges. At times the waves of Eton-related bants threaten to induce a gagging reflex, and it is best to lock your inner Dave Spart safely in the cellar for the duration, but what shines through is the sheer vitality and bizarreness of the man.



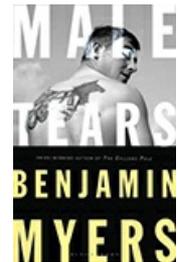
Nicholas Clee



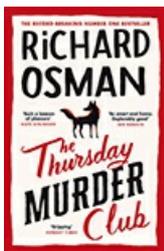
Hugh, a widower, is in love with Emma. Randall, his son, is in love with Emma's companion Lindsay. Ann, Randall's wife, is in love with Felix, whose sister Mildred is in love with Hugh. Miranda, Ann's daughter, is also in love with Felix; Penn is in love with Miranda. Yes, I've been reading Iris Murdoch again. *An Unofficial Rose* (1962) is, like all her novels, preposterous; but fiction, in her hands at any rate, can be preposterous as well as profound and true.

David Roche

Following the success of Ben Myers' *The Offing* comes his second book for Bloomsbury, a collection of short stories out at the end of April called *Male Tears*. The book incorporates stories written over the last decade and it's no surprise to Myers fans that these are tales often set in the North and with rugged, windswept characters who are part of the environment that they inhabit. Gritty, acerbically amusing, occasionally raw, and always engaging, this is about real men and their oddities, their stubbornness, their foibles and their strength of spirit.



Jo Henry



Owing to the number of (mostly excellent) entries for the Selfies book awards this year, I haven't been able to dip into my highly anticipated pile of Christmas books yet, but I have found time to listen to Richard Osman's *The Thursday Murder Club* (Viking), read (excellently) by Lesley Manville, as I was keen to see what all the fuss was about. I'm still slightly baffled. Viking has done a terrific job in promoting it, and it's one of those useful books which you could give to almost anyone and know that they will find it entertaining. But I felt that the mystery element was rather over-complicated and the plotting and characters just a little too cosy and conventional to be totally engaging. Still, I will

doubtless read the next one when it comes along...



Lucy Nathan

I love a thriller with an interesting setting and a hint of the supernatural, which meant that I was the ideal audience for *The Nesting* by CJ Cooke (HarperCollins). Set in a Norwegian forest, it's about Lexi, who has lied about her qualifications to secure a new job nannying for recently widowed architect Tom and his two young daughters. It's about nature and grief and motherhood and folklore with a cast of flawed, mysterious characters, and it was a fast, immersive read that I got through in a day or so. I would have liked to be more terrified by it, but it's a really compelling read for fans of both domestic thrillers and horror.



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