

The Khandallah Literary Review

Welcome to the July edition of our monthly newsletter.

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

The only important thing in a book is the meaning that it has for you.

W Somerset Maugham (Writer)

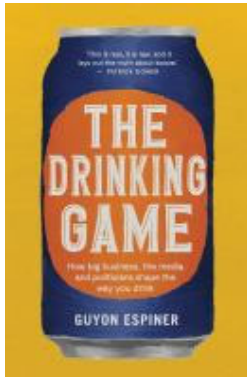
Khandallah Library's Platinum Anniversary

This August marks 70 years since the Khandallah Library opened in 1953. To mark the occasion, Wellington City Libraries Historian Gábor Tóth will present a talk about the history of this local institution and how it was established. The talk will take a particular look at the vital role played by the Khandallah-based historian Fanny Irvine-Smith in the 1940s to have a purpose-built library constructed in the suburb and the importance she placed on libraries in society.

Come along to this free talk at the Khandallah Library, 8 Ganges Road, at 6pm Thursday 24th August.



The Drinking Game: How Big Business, the Media and Politicians shape the way you drink by Guyon Espiner (Non-Fiction)



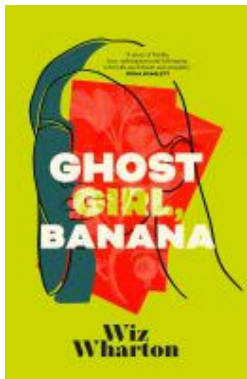
A timely exploration of New Zealand's drinking culture, Espiner's book is validated by the recent release of Otago University's Alcohol research which found Alcohol the most harmful of 23 psychoactive drugs. It is also a very personal account of his own drinking days and experiences, and those of friends, politicians, and journalists he met. The use of some form of mind-altering substance is found throughout recorded history. *"Nearly every other human society you can think of has got blitzed, blasted, flushed or fried in some way or another, often according it top priority."* Espiner examines our own

history with booze, successive governments watering down recommendations for alcohol legislation, and the role of sponsorship and lobbyists. *"But New Zealand has barely any rules about lobbying, and absolutely no rules to stop the revolving door of Beehive staffers shifting into lucrative corporate jobs to leverage their political connections and information."* He looks at the dangers the industry doesn't want you to know about; the amount of calories in alcohol and the cancer-causing properties, but it is a balanced look. Espiner is not advocating banning alcohol: *"There is an innate need in humans to alter consciousness – to unlock creativity, to bond and to have fun. That has to tell you that prohibition does not work and will not work. It didn't work for alcohol and it hasn't worked for the other drugs."* Rather he argues it should be treated as a drug and regulated by government, rather than dispensed by a self-regulating industry. Excellent. Informative, and dare I say, a sobering account. Greg

The New Zealand Drug Harms Study Ranking Study

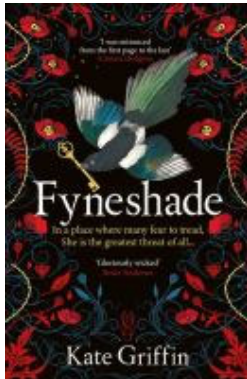
<https://www.otago.ac.nz/news/news/otago0245955.html>

Ghost Girl, Banana by Wiz Wharton (Fiction)



An absorbing story of two generations of Chinese women and the ties between them over a 30-year period. Sook-Yin leaves Kowloon for London in 1966. Sent to regain honour to her family, she struggles to find her place in a different society. In 1997, her daughter Lily sets off on a quest to discover her heritage and identity. Really very good story, 5 stars. Susan W

Fyneshade by Kate Griffin (Fiction-Suspense/Historical/Gothic)



On the day of her beloved Grandmother's funeral, Marta, abandoned by her family, discovers that she is to become a governess. She has no choice but to travel to the old, crumbling manor, Fyneshade, in the wilds of Derbyshire but all is not well at Fyneshade where servants will not meet her eye, the master of the house is mysteriously absent, the son and heir is forbidden to enter the house and Marta is warned by the housekeeper to have nothing to do with him!

This has many of the tropes of classic gothic novels such as "Turn of the Screw" and "Jane Eyre"; a 19th Century setting, a lonely, foreboding house surrounded by desolate moors, a family with secrets and a young governess isolated from her family. This book has all of these and more, (even secret passages and witchcraft!) but some of these themes have been cleverly subverted by the author. For example, Marta, the main character is not the usual shy, self-effacing, virginal victim. She's much more interesting-scheming, manipulative, duplicitous, ambitious. None of the characters are what you first imagine them to be. All have their secrets and shadows which is what makes this novel intriguing and unpredictable, suspenseful and compelling.

The author is happy to acknowledge the influence of Henry James' gothic novel "Turn of the Screw" and highly recommends the 1961 movie of the book which was renamed "The Innocents" and stars Deborah Kerr. You can either borrow this on DVD from the library or, even better, see it on the big screen during the upcoming NZ International Film Festival. David

The Second Stranger by Martin Griffin (Thriller)



In a remote hotel in the Scottish Highlands, the sole staff member is on her final shift when Storm Ezra hits. After an accident on the mountain road, injured PC Don Gaines arrives at the hotel, saying the only other survivor was the prisoner they were transporting so lock the doors. Shortly after a second stranger arrives, claiming that *he* is PC Don Gaines. It is not a coincidence that they arrive there.

"First mystery thriller for this author. A good read on a wet night before you go to bed. The editing could be a bit tighter, but very good all the same". Jennifer D.

Our Wives under the Sea by Julia Armfield (Fiction)



This is the story of Miri and Leah, a couple whose marriage is collapsing after Leah's return from a deep-sea research mission. Exactly what happened on the voyage unfolds slowly over the course of the novel, but in the meantime Miri is confronted with the unsettling after-effects. Leah barely talks or eats, spends hours in the bath, and starts to experience bizarre physical changes. I enjoyed the subtle, slow burn horror, the sense that something is very wrong but no clear notion of what it might be. The small number of settings and characters gives it a claustrophobic feel, both above and below the waves. That said, I'm not a fan of first-person narration in general, and here it's used for both main characters. It makes them feel less distinct from each other than they could've been, particularly as their narrative voices are not markedly different. I still liked the novel though, and if you're in the mood for something sinister and sad it's worth checking out. Charlotte

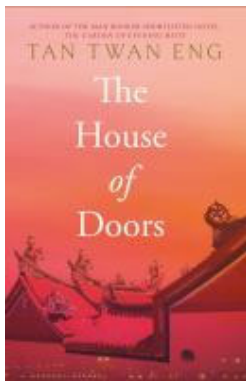
Game, Set, Match: Billy Jean King and the Revolution of Sports by Susan Ware (Non-Fiction)



A combination of biography, history and an analysis of male/female relationships the book opens at a moment in time, 20 September 1973, when Billie Jean King played Bobbie Riggs in "The Battle of the Sexes". A tennis match with a televised audience of 48 million Americans and 90 million worldwide, it was a pivotal moment when King won, and it catapulted her to the forefront of the Woman's Liberation movement. Ware, described as a scholar, looks at that event and King's career and life to document the whole history of women's struggle to attain equality and the feminine movement. King's struggles in setting up a breakaway tour using cigarette sponsorship, Title IX Legislation, the attempt to start a professional team tennis franchise system, publishing her own magazine, and her sexuality and subsequent outing are used as a microcosm of the times. King was the first woman to win \$100,000 prize money in a year and the author is clearly a fan (she watched the 1973 match live) and is lavish in her praise but balanced about the mistakes and pitfalls. Incredibly detailed but never dull account of a remarkable women. Greg

Fun Fact: Elton John's song Philadelphia Freedom was written for his friend Billie Jean King. That was the name of the team King played for in an attempt to start a franchised professional competition for tennis.

The House of Doors by Tan Twan Eng (Fiction)



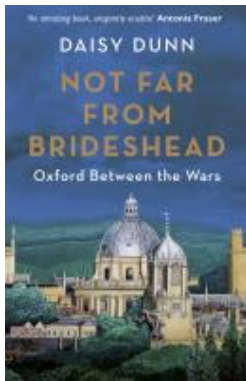
"I see myself as an anonymous gentleman in the parlour, a traveller sitting in the half-shadows ready and willing to listen to anyone with a story to tell" says novelist Somerset Maugham to Lesley Hamlyn, who indeed has a story to tell him. The story of her friend, Ethel Proudlock, who a decade earlier, was arrested for the murder of her lover. (Maugham based his story "The Letter" on the real-life events of the case which was made into a movie of the same name starring Bette Davis) Tan's story moves seamlessly from Lesley's first-person narration to the third person narration that tells Maugham's story. I particularly

liked Lesley's character as she was not the stereotypical European woman of *A Passage to India* or Jewel in the Crown struggling in a strange land but someone who, born in what was then Malaya, speaks fluent Malay and has a deep attachment to Penang.

Mostly set in Penang's English community ("Cheltenham-by-the -Equator") in 1921, tensions between public and private life lie at the heart of this story. Lesley, for example, at first wary of Maugham, talks to him in a way she can't to her husband, Robert. While Maugham, escaping from his fractured sham marriage to Syrie, is travelling with his "secretary" the reckless Gerald.

Other themes emerge in this compelling story of illicit love affairs and concealed sexuality notably political turmoil as Lesley meets the future Chinese Leader Sun Yat Sen, at the time planning his revolution, and becomes fascinated by his fiery speeches. As well as the man himself. This is a superbly written, subtly complex story of love, duty and betrayal which uses words and imagery evocatively and touchingly. David

Not Far From Brideshead: Oxford Between the Wars by Daisy Dunn (Non-Fiction)



This book is about life at Oxford University in the 20s and 30s, a time of colourful people and a society undergoing significant change. It's well-written and everything it covers is interesting - the problem is, it tries to cover too much. It's supposedly centred on three influential classicists, but frequently detours to talk about other, more famous people, as well as subjects like contemporary politics, women in academia, occultism after WWI, modern literature, the appropriation of classical myth by the Nazis, Jewish professors fleeing persecution, and so on. Any of these subjects could've

taken up a whole book on their own, and the effect of having all of them in one, rather short volume is to feel like you're not getting enough material about any of them. I really wanted to learn more about the classicists, since I hadn't heard of them before, and their rivalry over the prestigious Regius Professor of Greek appointment was entertaining. Overall, a lively introduction to the era but without enough depth to do it justice. Charlotte

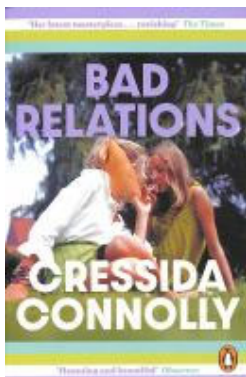
Seventeen: Last Man Standing by John Brownlow (Thriller)



A debut novel about an assassin might seem to be an odd choice for someone who wrote the screenplay for the Gwyneth Paltrow film *Sylvia* (Plath) and the TV series *The Miniaturist*, but Brownlow also wrote the TV series *Fleming* about Ian Fleming's work as a spy. Author Jeff Abbott enthuses that 'Seventeen reinvents the hitman novel' and he certainly turns it around and gives it a spin. It's definitely violent as our hero explains his origins and dedication to perfecting his craft. His mother played a big part in his metamorphosis as a contract killer. *"My mother's name was June. People called her Junebug. She*

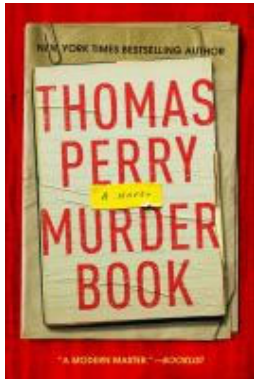
was ash-blond and willowy and she never had a chance. Her father was a religious nut who beat her and, I imagine, did other stuff to her she never cared to mention to me. I've come to realise that her death was just the final act in a tragedy which had been playing out long before I was born". Written in the first person throughout, Brownlow really gets into the 'head' of Seventeen and how he has to find and kill Sixteen, his mysterious predecessor. The plot slides into unexpected directions as revelations are disclosed and information uncovered with characters that include Tommy, ex Chief of Station in Beirut and non-recovering alcoholic who's now rescuing young girls from polygamists, and Kat, enigmatic illustrator and motel owner who'd rather not have guests. Intensely satisfying. Greg

Bad Relations by Cressida Connolly



A rich, immersive novel about war, memory and loss, spanning three generations of one family, *Bad Relations* tells the story of a family fractured by history, geography and desire. Very good well drawn characters that you can get into and know quickly. A compelling story" Anne C.

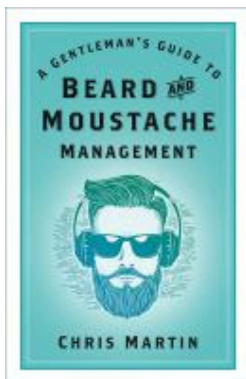
Murder Book by Thomas Perry (Mystery)



Ex police detective Harry Duncan is persuaded against his better judgement to conduct an investigation by his ex-wife who is now a US Attorney. She is worried about reports of an increase of crimes in rural areas by professionals, crimes like burglaries robbery and a few murders. Is it the start of a new crime organisation? She needs more information, enough to get the authorities involved. The story is told mainly from Duncan's point of view and it's interesting for his thought processes as he works his way through the events which include a kidnapping and more murders and a stylish female

assassin. Harry is very unflappable and laid back and so is the style with which Perry relates the machinations of the villains, and Duncan's devising of very inventive strategies to combat them. Perry's plots are always very thoughtful like his main character, complex and very well laid out, in which every action leads inexorably to the next. Perry doesn't feel the need to have the usual romantic subplot and Harry sometimes appears maybe too laid back, but a genuinely exciting and involving story. Greg

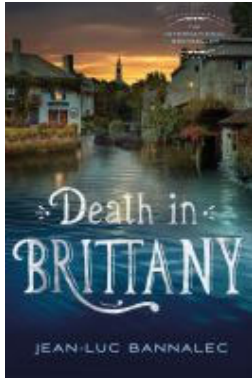
A Gentleman's Guide to Beard and Moustache Management by Chris Martin (Non-Fiction)



A quasi-humorous run down on the world of facial hair. The book details everything you are ever likely to want to know. There is a brief history of Facial hair – Loved by the Greeks, despised by the Romans; a guide to different beard and moustache styles and how to choose the best for a particular face, and grooming tips. No illustrations unfortunately. The Hall of Fame features famous bearded or moustached individuals such as Jesus, Burt Reynolds, Lord Kitchener and Chuck Norris; When Facial Hair goes wrong is very silly, and The World of Beards and Moustaches has quotes and records. Best Quote: Being

kissed by a man who didn't wax his moustache was like eating an egg without salt – Rudyard Kipling. Of limited interest perhaps. Greg

Death in Brittany by Jean-Luc Bannalec (Mystery)



First in the series of books featuring Commissaire Gorges Dupin, a Parisian born detective, transferred to the wilds of Brittany because of his attitude. The author clearly loves the area, because while this is an entertaining murder mystery, it is also a homage/love poem to the province. The Breton Coast, countryside and people, along with the food smells and atmosphere of the place are authentically detailed. The plot is a gentle mystery, reminiscent of Louise Penny in that it is well written with memorable characters, and an intriguing storyline that features artist Paul Gauguin, a missing masterpiece and a host of possible suspects. I will be visiting Brittany again. Greg

The Winter Dress by Lauren Chater (Fiction)



Two women separated by centuries but connected by one beautiful silk dress. This captivating novel is based on the real life finding of a surprisingly well-preserved silk dress recovered from a three-hundred-year-old shipwreck several years ago.

“A great story! So well researched. I really enjoyed it”
(Shirley)

Fun Fact: The story is set on the island of Texel. Originally, the locals spoke their own dialect, known as "Tessels". Nowadays it's dying out and is replaced by a more Standard-Dutch tongue, although still with specific words and accents. The inhabitants have their own name for the mainland: de Overkant, literally "the Other Side".

In my Hut by Anita Mullick



I like reading about different huts. My favourite is the Pod Hut. It was very good. It looked like the Death Star. Five Stars is my vote. Jax (aged 7)