Lifestyle
5 new books to read this week
Prudence Wade
1,419 words
6 October 2021
05:05
Independent Online
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This week’s bookcase includes reviews of The Magician by Colm Tóibín and Kay’s Marvellous Medicine by Adam Kay.

A legendary Irish writer is back, and comedy writer Adam Kay delights with his latest children’s book…

Fiction

Happy Publication day to Colm Tóibín!

In his new novel #TheMagician, Colm Tóibín turns his attention to Thomas Mann in a tale of unrequited love and exile set against the turbulence of 20th century Europe.
https://t.co/40mR7b8tCXpic.twitter.com/B7PlEXXiOh

— Viking Books UK (@VikingBooksUK) September 23, 2021

The Magician is prolific Irish author Colm Toibin’s 10th novel, and is an expansive yet deeply personal exploration of the life of exiled German writer Thomas Mann. Ranging from Mann’s childhood in conservative Lubeck, Northern Germany, to his life in liberal Munich, Bavaria, and his family’s flight to America to escape the Nazis, the novel is almost biographically thorough. It paints a detailed portrait of Mann, encompassing everything from his sedate daily routine and fatherly misgivings, to his hidden longings and desires. The book’s opening is slow, but following the advent of the First and Second World Wars and its devastating impact on the Mann family, it becomes gripping, imbued with a sense of dread. Containing beautiful observations on life and literature, and a sweeping sense of historical scale, The Magician remains tightly written and wryly funny. 9/10 (Review by Jessica Frank-Keyes)


Happy publication day to Karl Ove Knausgaard for The Morning Star, out today ⭐️

Last night a new star appeared in the sky. The Morning Star.
Order your copy now: https://t.co/0sg1bCeBnCpic.twitter.com/YglUSY2TPE

— HarvillSecker (@HarvillSecker) September 30, 2021

Karl Ove Knausgaard established his controversial reputation with his My Struggle series, and The Morning Star builds on that fine foundation. As a bright star shines in the sky, this is a tale of interwoven lives seeping together as the players battle their own wills and those of the people around them, to forge their own definitive path. A true Scandinavian epic, as the morning star shines, the darkness inside the myriad characters becomes exposed – from priest Kathrine, to a journalist out drinking while his wife works a night shift in a psychiatric care unit. And strange things begin to occur too – crabs appear on the road, brutal murders are reported… Ultimately, Knausgaard’s brilliant storytelling is as bright as the celestial body from which the book takes its title. 7/10 (Review by Roddy Brooks)


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It has been quite a wait since Anthony Doerr’s last novel in 2014, the Pulitzer Prize winner, All The Light We Cannot See – a tear-duct buckling World War II saga. And so, Cloud Cuckoo Land has some pressure on it, not helped by how huge it is. Ignore the 600+ page count though and let the tides of five characters take you to present-day Idaho, Constantinople in 1453 and to a spaceship in the future, whose inhabitants are searching for a new planet to call home. Doerr manages to knit together three very different trajectories, using the legend of a man turned into a donkey, a fish and a bird, as a (slightly irritating) anchor. Yes, it sounds fantastical, and at times it is, which can jar against some of the more distressing themes (climate change, war, abuse, poverty, terrorism) – but Doerr’s expansive look at freedom, the value of the natural world, and the importance of storytelling, is captivating. There are moments that are a tad worthy, but they don’t detract from the imagination at play, and the endearing, brilliantly wrought protagonists – particularly Omeir and his oxen, and Konstance and her AI.7/10

(Review by Ella Walker)

Non-fiction


Nice to see Rationality out and about @waterstonesPicc -signed copies still available.

— Steven Pinker (@sapinker)
October 1, 2021

In a time when fake news, conspiracy theories and urban myths thrive, Harvard psychology professor Steven Pinker has taken it upon himself to encourage us to think more rationally. In each chapter he provides tools to help readers become more able to think clearly and challenge their own biases and assumptions. Pinker defines what he means by rationality, as well as how to develop it and how it may differ from logic. Up to date with examples, including the death of George Floyd, the US elections and TV game shows, Pinker offers insights into ways of questioning your own and other people’s thinking. From how to take apart a news report to understanding that correlation doesn’t equate to causation or really being able to understand probabilities. The book can arm you to think for yourself. It came out of a course he taught at Harvard and it sometimes feels more textbook than popular science, so for the ordinary reader it’s – in parts – hard work. For Pinker, that is the point – the book is an impassioned plea for putting the effort in, to create a more rational world.7/10

(Review by Bridie Pritchard)

Children’s book of the week


If you thought doctors would never be crazy enough to blow smoke up your bottom if your heart stopped, or pluck a chicken’s bum and stick it in your armpit to cure the plague, then think again. As Adam Kay’s hilarious new children’s book shows, humans have taken a long time to get their heads around how bodies work and how to fix them when they go wrong. Kay’s Marvellous Medicine – a follow-up to his 2020 children’s debut, Kay’s Anatomy – takes a look at all the weird and wonderful treatments through the ages, with a lot of facts about the body and modern medicine thrown in along the way. It is a ridiculously funny read that will delight, gross out and educate all at the same time. While Kay’s adult books (This Is Going To Hurt and Twas The Nightshift Before Christmas) have gone down a storm, his chatty tone and perfectly silly humour make him a natural children’s writer who can keep young readers engaged and giggling throughout.9/10

(Review by Holly Williams)

BOOK CHARTS FOR THE WEEK ENDING OCTOBER 2


(Compiled by Audible)

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