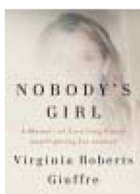


# A FALLEN PRINCE. A TRAGIC PRINCESS ...AND A KING WHO STOLE THE CROWN

**Top authors select their books of the year**



**NOBODY'S GIRL: A MEMOIR  
OF SURVIVING ABUSE AND  
FIGHTING FOR JUSTICE**

**by Virginia Roberts Giuffre**  
(Doubleday £25, 400pp)

THERE are few books that  
influence events, especially  
from beyond the grave and by

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**AUTHOR:**  
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ordinary citizens, but Giuffre's frank and brave memoir played a major part in the former prince, Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, being stripped of his titles.

We thought we knew her story but this brings home the full details and sheer horror of her upbringing, betrayed by friends and family whom she believed she could trust.

Giuffre's death shortly before publication adds to the poignancy of a book which shows her to have been a doughty fighter for justice and to hold the rich and powerful to account.

A worthy No 1 bestseller on both sides of the Atlantic and a book, skilfully ghost-written by Amy Wallace, whose impact will be felt long after 2025.

#### ANDREW LOWNIE

*Entitled by Andrew Lownie  
 (William Collins, £22) is out now.*

#### THE COVENANT OF WATER

by Abraham Verghese

(Grove Press UK £10.99, 736pp)

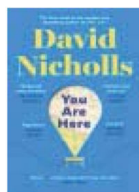
I HAVE just finished what has to be one of the most splendid and absorbing books I have ever read.

It is set in Kerala, South India – a fascinating country which I adore and have visited 26 times. It follows the story of three generations from the turn of the 20th century. I read Verghese's first novel, *Cutting The Stone*, some time ago and he is the most extraordinary writer.

I often read in bed before going to sleep but with this book I had to force myself to put it down and turn the lights off or I would have been up all night reading!

#### LADY GLENCONNER

*Manners And Mischief by Lady  
 Glenconner (Bedford Square, £18.99)  
 is out now.*



#### YOU ARE HERE

by David Nicholls

(Sceptre £9.99, 368pp)

THIS hits a sweet spot for me. Nicholls is an author I adore, the Coast to Coast long-distance path is a setting which taps into my love of

walking and the characters are so real I feel I've met them.

I love the delicate balance of humour and poignancy, the awkwardness of people finding love in adult life and the way Nicholls builds towards an ending that leaves you wanting more.

I also really enjoyed **The Seven Husbands Of Evelyn Hugo** (Simon & Schuster) by Taylor Jenkins Reid. It's beautifully constructed with a strong, complex woman at the heart whose story is shared with a young reporter.

I loved the layers of emotional vulnerability on show and the understanding that a woman can be many things all at the same time while trying to carve her way in an industry that wants her to be just one thing. It's funny, moving, surprising and hugely enjoyable.

#### CLARE BALDING

*Pastures New by Clare  
 Balding (HarperCollins, £10)  
 is out now.*

#### ON MYSTICISM

by Simon Critchley

(Profile £11.99, 336pp)

I HAVE been reading this with increasing pleasure.

Critchley is a philosophy professor in New York. The book is a history of mysticism but, more interestingly, an investigation into what it is or might be.

One big bonus is that it contains thoughtful chapters on some of my favourite writers, such as Anne Carson and Annie Dillard.

I was a little unsure about the book at first – was it some kind of self-help thing? – but have been utterly persuaded both by his wide reading and the sense that this is, for Critchley, a very personal project. What it's not is any kind of attempt to sell religion.

Another great read this year was Sarah Hall's new novel, **Helm** (Faber & Faber) – vivacious, bawdy and endlessly inventive.

And lastly, a very honourable mention for Jenny Erpenbeck's collection of short essays/articles, **Things That Disappear** (Granta).

Sane, witty and wise. A nice bite-sized introduction to this important European writer.

#### ANDREW MILLER

*The Land In Winter by  
 Andrew Miller  
 (Sceptre, £10.99) is out now.*

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**THE STOLEN CROWN**  
 by Tracy Borman  
 (Hodder & Stoughton  
 £26, 448pp)

THIS is a page-turner, which seems odd given that the story – how Elizabeth I was succeeded in 1603 by her Scottish godson, who became James I of England – is one of the best known in our history.

Balancing scholarship with skulduggery, the book exposes a very British coup, when the English and Scottish elites were plotting to see who came after Elizabeth I.

With secret letters, spies, murders, and doctored documents, *The Stolen Crown* reads like a political thriller.

**GARETH RUSSELL**

*Queen James* by  
 Gareth Russell (William  
 Collins, £25) is out now.

**DIANAWORLD**  
 by Edward White

(Allen Lane £25, 400pp)

JUST when we thought there was nothing left to say about the People's Princess, White comes up with *Dianaworld*.

This humdinger of a cultural history examines Diana through the lens of the obsessives who saw in her a version of themselves.

For some gay men, Diana was a gay man, for some drag queens, she was a drag queen, for some Black and Asian women, Diana knew what it was like to be a Black or Asian woman.

She also had an army of career

lookalikes, who said that they knew what it was like to be Diana.

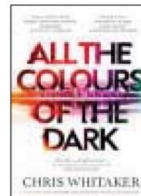
The most entertainingly bonkers memoir of the year must be Elizabeth Gilbert's *All The Way To The River* (Bloomsbury), which begins with the ghost of Gilbert's junky girlfriend telling her to write about their rollercoaster relationship.

For narrative skill and sheer headlong pleasure, I adored William Boyd's spy thriller,

*The Predicament* (Viking).

**FRANCES WILSON**

*Electric Spark* by Frances  
 Wilson (Bloomsbury Circus,  
 £25) is out now.



**ALL THE COLOURS OF THE DARK**  
 by Chris Whitaker

(Orion  
 £9.99, 592pp)

I WAS absorbed by this book and went to bed at 8pm for a week to finish it.

Based on two childhood friends who are ripped apart by tragedy, it's a sweeping epic with a serial killer mystery that isn't afraid to

shine a light on the lasting impact trauma has on everyone. The plotting and world-building made me truly believe in the small town, and everybody living there.

I still think about the characters every day, and the prose was gorgeous, too.

**HOLLY BOURNE**

*So Thrilled For You* by  
 Holly Bourne (Hodder, £9.99)  
 is out now.

**THE LAND IN WINTER**  
 by Andrew Miller

(Sceptre £10.99, 384pp)

HONEST disclosure: Miller was a student of mine at the University of East Anglia in the 1990s, so I read his work with affectionate attention. This latest novel is worthy of the praise it's been getting.

Miller always seems to chisel away at the strange emotional strata other writers have ignored. He calls this 'keeping it weird' and reading him is never a comfort read. But comfort isn't what we ask of the modern novel.

Here, Miller turns the grindingly ordinary lives of West Country folk caught out by cruel weather into a compelling struggle between man – fixated on his tiny survival rituals – and his awareness of his frailty in a pitiless universe.

Most memorable is the car



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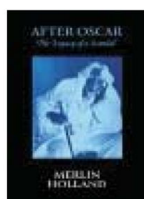
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journey of two drunken, deluded men trying to reach home, crashing and staggering about in a frozen world they utterly fail to understand. It's both funny and terrifying: Miller at his best.

#### ROSE TREMAIN

*The Housekeeper by Rose Tremain (Chatto & Windus, £20) is published in September 2026.*



**AFTER OSCAR**  
by Merlin Holland  
(Europa Editions  
£30, 687pp)

OSCAR Wilde, playwright, poet, wit, was imprisoned for gross indecency in 1895. He died in exile and in poverty in Paris 125 years ago, leaving behind two sons who, at the time of his imprisonment, had no idea what had happened to their father.

Holland, Wilde's only grandson, has told the extraordinary story of his legacy in *After Oscar*. Part family history, part social and literary history, it's beautifully written and deeply moving.

Richard Ayoade is one of the great wits of our time and in his delightful *Afterthoughts* (Faber & Faber) he's come up with a compendium of wise (and hilarious), nuggets: thoughts for our time like 'TV detectives need a gimmick. Mine would be not caring who did it,' and 'Where's the box to tick if you are a robot?'

#### GYLES BRANDRETH

*Somewhere, A Boy And A Bear by Gyles Brandreth (Michael Joseph, £25) is out now.*

#### THE MISSION

by Tim Weiner

(William Collins £25, 464pp)

TWO non-fiction books topped my list this year. Weiner's *The Mission* is a compelling, in-depth history of the CIA in the 21st century. Through exclusive interviews with six former directors and dozens of top officers, Weiner paints a portrait of the agency's transformation into a paramilitary force and highlights its struggle to reclaim its core mission of spying on other great powers.

In *The Philosopher In The Valley* (Simon & Schuster), Michael

Steinberger examines Palantir Technologies, a firm at the forefront of Big Data and surveillance technology founded in the early 2000s, in part to help the CIA fight the war on terror.

The story follows Alex Karp, philosopher-turned-CEO, as he navigates the ethical complexities of technical surveillance and its implications for privacy.

Together, these books provide a bracing view of the modern-day CIA and the technological revolution that is forcing intelligence agencies to adapt their tradecraft and business models.

#### DAVID McCLOSKEY

*The Persian by David McCloskey (Swift Press, £20) is published on January 29.*

#### V13: CHRONICLE OF A TRIAL

by Emmanuel Carrère

(Vintage £10.99, 320pp)

I'VE read many of Carrère's books, with their trademark intermingling of fiction, documentary and autobiography.

V13, his report on the 2021-2022 trial of the perpetrators of the terror attacks at the Bataclan and elsewhere in Paris in 2015, can only elicit unqualified admiration. To do justice to the

proceedings and also the victims and to try to understand the suspects, one of France's most celebrated writers subordinates himself to the task of diligently turning up at court every day to record and respond to what unfolds.

Compassionate, unexpectedly funny at times, profoundly moving and uplifting, it's a masterpiece.

#### GEOFF DYER

*Homework by Geoff Dyer (Canongate, £20) is out now.*

#### A TRUCE THAT IS NOT PEACE

by Miriam Toews

(Fourth Estate £16.99, 192pp)

TOEWS has garnered high praise for her fiction writing – *Fight Night* is a favourite of mine and *Women Talking* was adapted into a successful film.

In her first non-fiction for 20 years, she examines the bold yet simple question, why does she write? This book is a beautiful collage of letters home to a sister

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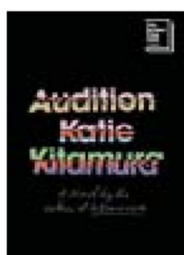
who refuses to talk, memories of a mother who defied her own religious upbringing and quotes that she has held on to.

It offers a complete kaleidoscope of emotions, at once melancholy and hopeful, grief-stricken and life affirming.

Toews answers her own question as she goes through her memories, ending with her thoughts on becoming the grandmother of the family. It's heartfelt, honest and funny. Her life lessons are hard-earned, but thankfully for us, she's written them all down.

### CARIAD LLOYD

*Lydia Marmalade And The Christmas Wish* by Cariad Lloyd (Hodder Children's Books, £7.99) is out now. She is also a judge for the 2026 Women's Prize for Fiction.



**AUDITION**  
 by Katie Kitamura  
 (Fern Press  
 £18.99, 208pp)

LET me make a nod to two different novels. The first is Kitamura's *Audition*, which covers the theatre and actors, and asks how much we are performing in intimate relationships in our lives.

It is a non-traditional narrative

in the sense that the novel's 'reality' is elusive and evolving.

A woman, a well-known actor, goes to lunch with a young man, who might be her colleague, her lover or her son in the different versions that unspool.

I loved Ron Currie's thriller, *The Savage Noble Death Of Babs Dionne* (Atlantic). The set-up, about drug-dealing gangsters, is familiar, but from there the novel departs.

How many books have you read about the French-descended residents of Maine, a mistreated minority? Or about a crime organisation whose members are female?

### SCOTT TUROW

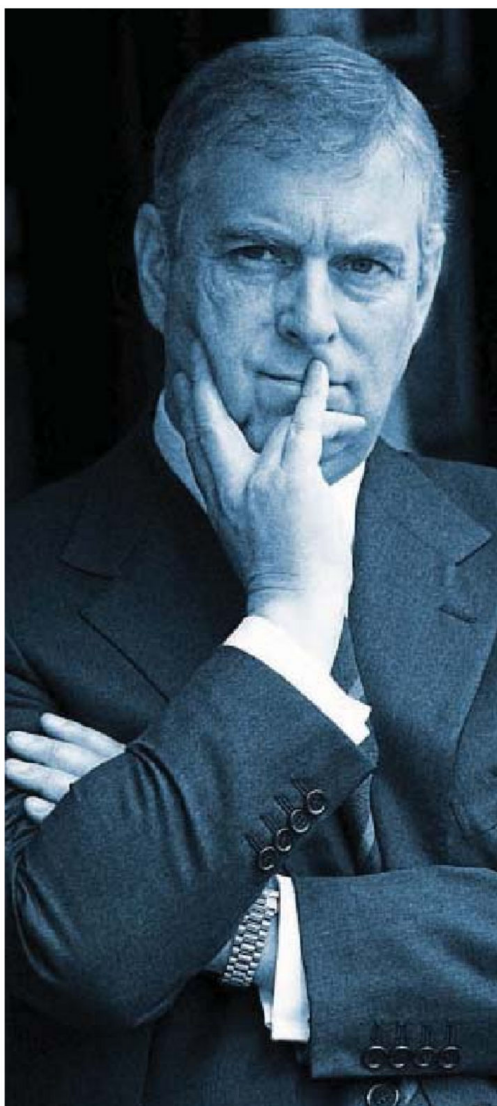
*Presumed Guilty* by Scott Turow (Swift, £9.99) is out in paperback on January 1.

Compiled by  
**JAMES CAREY-DOUGLAS**

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**Royal woes: Clockwise from far left, Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, Princess Diana and James I**

