

Book Case

Prof Peter Maxwell, 6 favourites from my bookcase.

BLINDNESS

Jose Saramago
(Vintage, 2005)

A contagion of blindness spreads through an unnamed city. The authorities attempt to contain the epidemic but very rapidly normal social conventions start to break down. Human spirit prevails in this surreal allegory which illustrates the fragility of civil society. A wise and ingenious novel by Portuguese Nobel laureate Jose Saramago.



THE YEAR OF THE HARE

Arto Paasilinna (Peter Owen, 2006)

A journalist, Vatanen, rescues an injured hare that his car hits in the outback of Finland. This seemingly random act of kindness triggers a life-changing experience and Vatanen sets out on an increasingly farcical adventure leaving behind his job, his wife and worldly possessions. A liberating and popular European novella confirming Finns have a well-developed sense of humour.



NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR

George Orwell
(Penguin Classics, 2004)

Written in 1949, this satirical novel portrays a dystopian nightmare vision of the future. The world is divided into three great powers permanently at war. "Oceania" is controlled by "The Party" a repressive and totalitarian regime. Constant surveillance of citizens is "justified" by the remote threat of "terrorism" but the Big Brother state itself is truly terrible. This is the story of Winston Smith and his revolt against the Party's rule. George Orwell's novel reflects his own experiences of the Spanish Civil War and Second World War and the extremes of fascism and communism.



THE MEMORY CHALET

Tony Judt (Vintage, 2011)

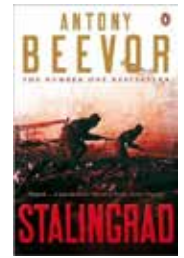
This book is a beautiful and remarkable series of dictated essays. They form historian Tony Judt's humane, amusing and moving memoir of times past as his body lies trapped and immobilised by progressive motor neurone disease. The first two chapters alone are eloquent insights into living with an incurable disorder. This posthumously published book is a testament to the human spirit.



STALINGRAD

Anthony Beevor
(Penguin, 1999)

The German siege of Russian forces at Stalingrad lasted almost 2 years and is seen as a major turning point in the Second World War. Anthony Beevor's book depicts the almost unbelievable savagery of this war of attrition between ill-prepared German forces and a Red army which is also harassed in turn by Soviet intelligence. Meticulous research of the evolution of the siege is coupled with first-hand accounts from soldiers. This is military history at its finest.



THE HUMANS

Matt Haig (Canongate Books, 2013)

A thought provoking, hilarious and touching satire of what it means to be human. One night a naked man is found walking through the streets of Cambridge. Mathematical genius Professor Andrew Martin is not quite himself. Clothes confuse him, food sickens him, and even his wife and son are abhorrent to him. Love, marriage, logic, mercy, immortality, teenagers, mathematics and much more are all in the mix that makes this novel unique.

