Twitter Thread by Sam Freedman

Sam Freedman
@Samfr

Time for my annual Books of the Year - Xmas gift suggestion thread.

These are my favourite 15 books I've read this year. Starting with non-fiction, which I've read more of this year than last, and then fiction.

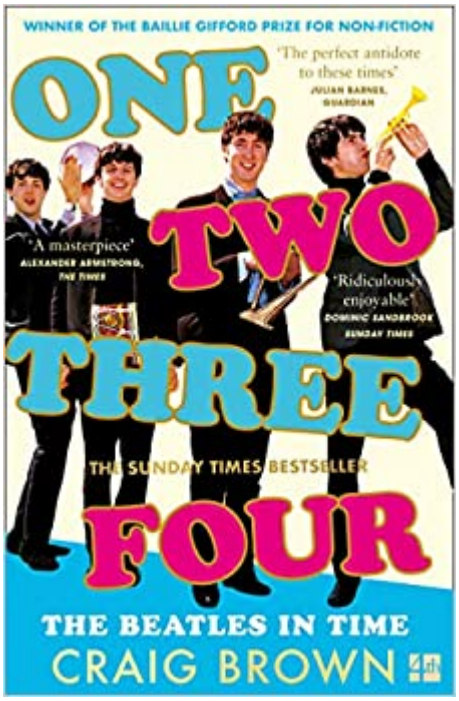
1. I've got into classical music properly for the first time this year, in large part due to this wonderful history of 20th century music. Ross manages to make a technical and potentially dry topic absolutely gripping. Masterful.



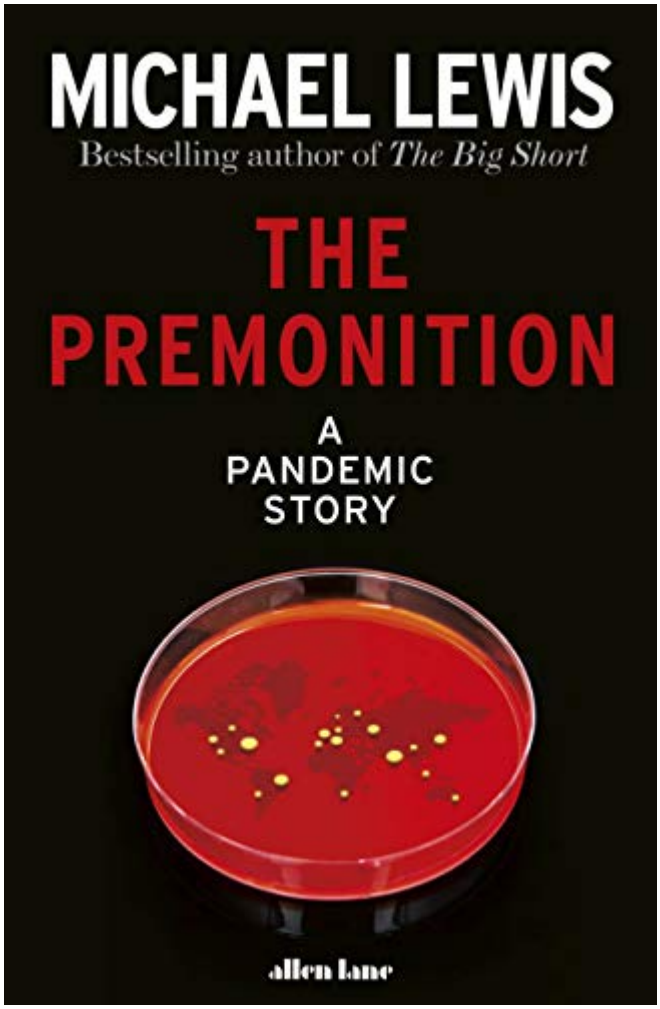
2. The best biography I read this year - Sontag was a fascinating figure, brilliant but also pretty obnoxious. Also she slept with an astonishing array of people from Jasper Johns to Lucinda Childs and, somewhat incongruously, Lord Donaghue.



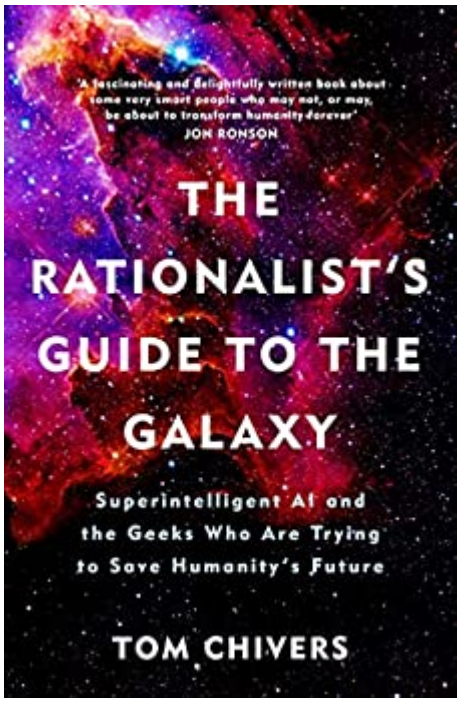
3. When I was recovering from a long hospital stay I needed something purely fun and enjoyable and this was it. Hard to say much new about The Beatles but Brown's book finds some new angles.



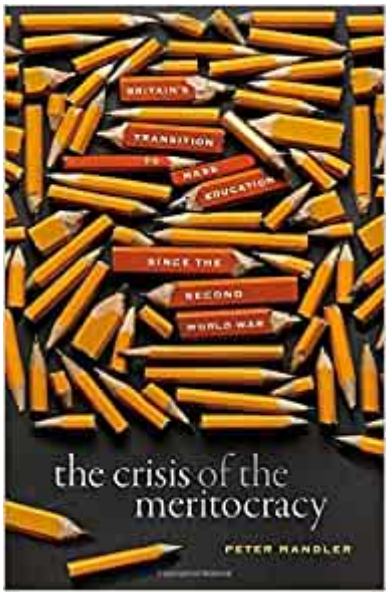
4. I've avoided most of the pandemic books - too soon - but this was one great. To be honest I'd read Michael Lewis's shopping lists if he published them. He is *the* best story teller. This book looks at a group of people who had anticipated the disaster of covid.



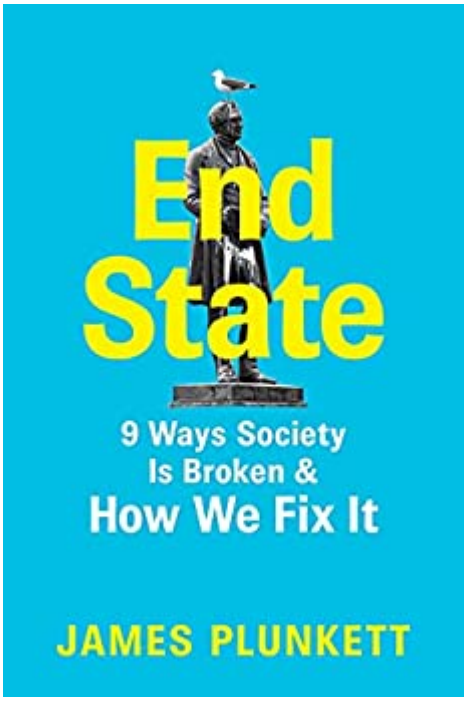
5. I've been reading a lot about rationalism this year. These two by @TomChivers + @juliagalef were great introductory guides. Also read "Rationality: from AI to Zombies" by @ESYudkowsky which is also great but 1600 pages so start with these two!



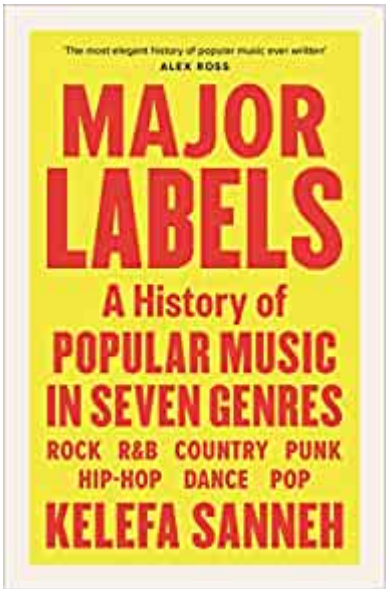
6. This, by @PeterMandler1, is probably the best book I've read about education in the UK. Explains how demand for education has driven policy as much, if not more so, than any politician's plans.



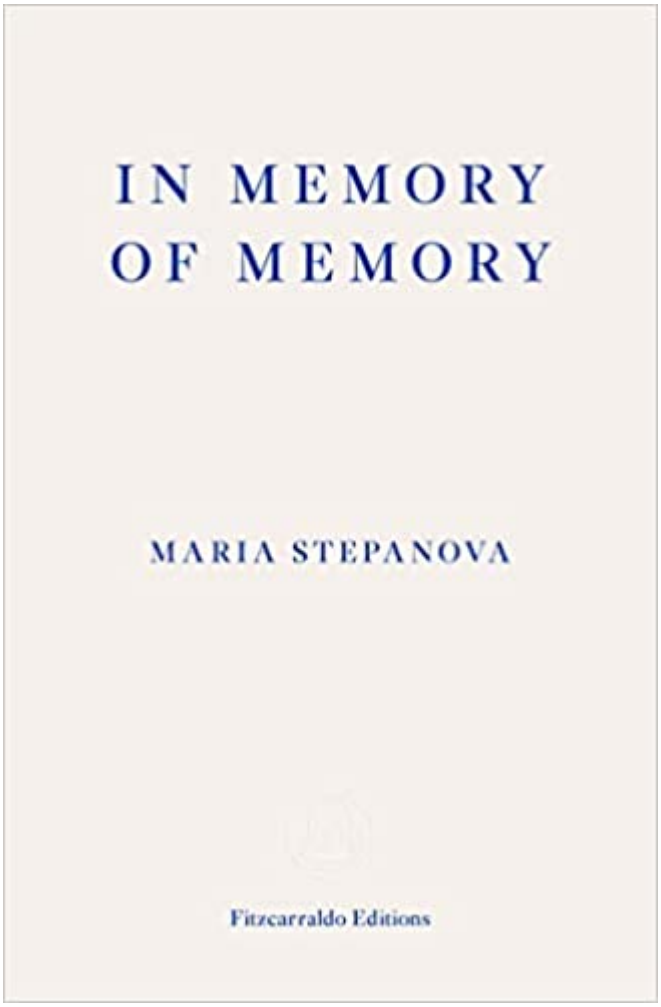
7. This, by @jamestplunkett, was one of the more hopeful things I've read about policy this year. Lots of thoughtful ideas that go beyond the tired debates that we keep having and beyond traditional political dichotomies.



8. A really interesting history of pop music through which I learned a lot about genres I rarely listen to like country and punk. Sanneh's very ecumenical tastes are a nice counterweight to the constant online desire to define oneself by disliking something.



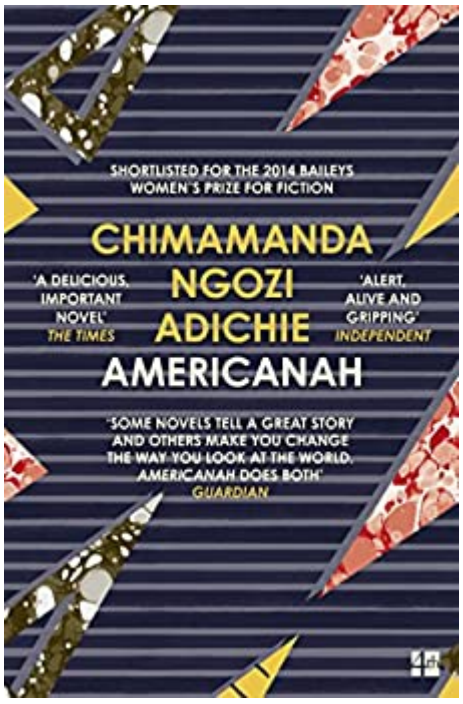
9. A hard book to categorise. It's partly history, partly memoir, partly life writing, partly fiction. But incredibly beautiful. A lengthy meditation of what memory means sounds dull and worthy but it's anything but. And I discovered a load of other writers/artists through it.



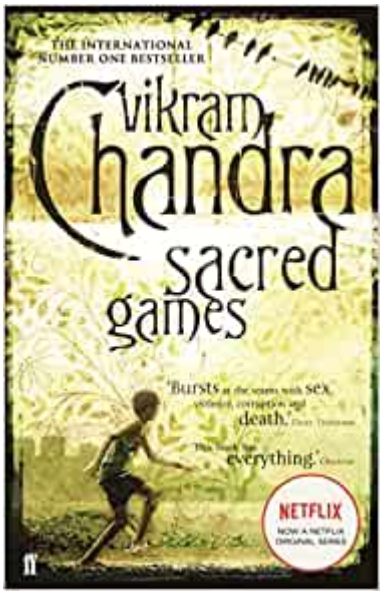
10. Not sure why it took me until now to realise James Baldwin was a genius but this is one of the best things I've ever read. A call to end racial injustice but so much more than that - and incredibly empathetic/nuanced. This is one I think everyone should read (+ it's short).



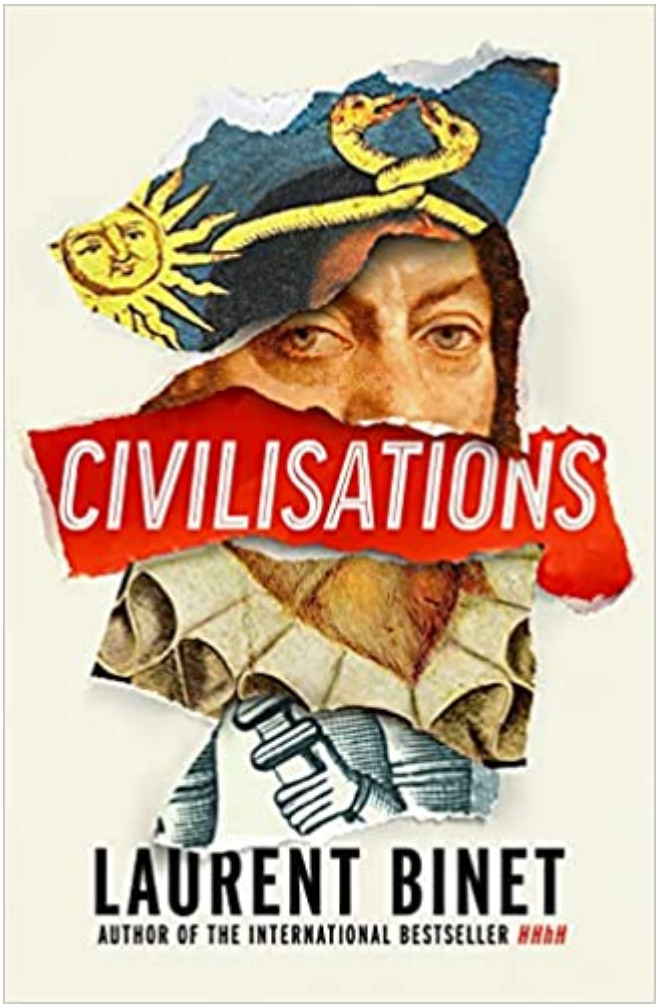
11. On to fiction. This was a v enjoyable romance, lifted well above genre standard by the quality of the writing and the sharply insightful, often acerbic, takes on American and Nigerian culture.



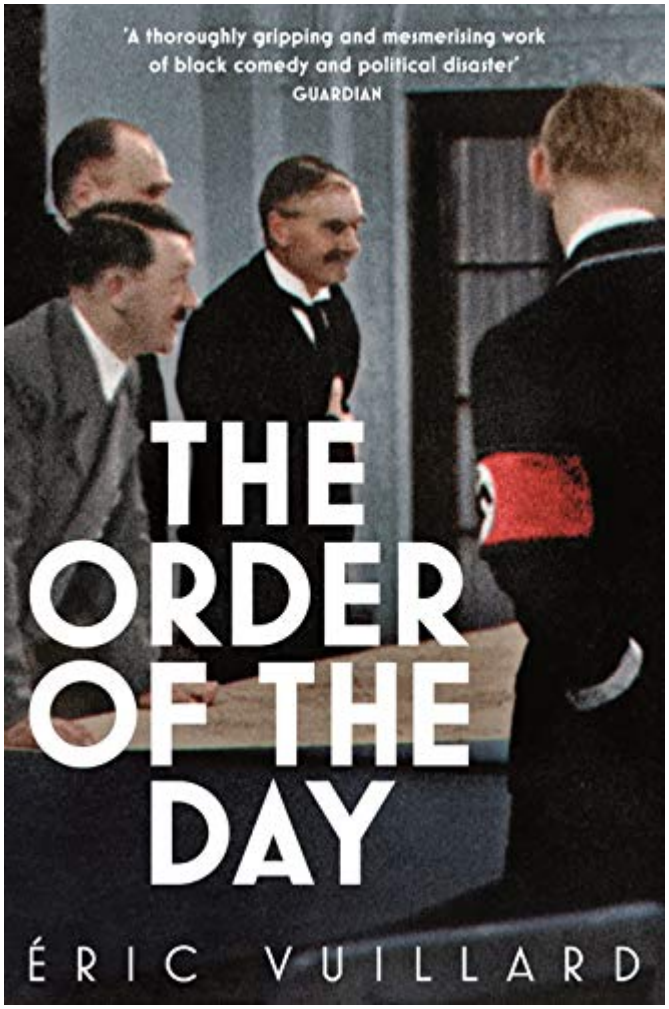
12. Probably the most enjoyable novel I read this year. A huge blockbuster crime thriller that also tells you a lot about Indian history and culture. Utterly compelling protaganists.



13. I am a huge fan of Binet. I've recommended his brilliant first novel HHhH to dozens of people. This is his third - and is a counterfactual history imagining the Aztecs conquered Europe. It's a bit more uneven but still ingenious and fun.



14. These two are more like long short stories than novels and use snapshots of moments in history to explore broader themes. You can read them both in a couple of hours and they'll get you reading all sorts of follow ups to find out more.



15. And finally... the book I'm reading at the moment. It follows Jacob Frank, a real person who claimed to be the Jewish messiah. A massive, intricate, portrayal of an 18th century world caught between enlightenment and mysticism. It's an almost overwhelming masterpiece.

