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Pick of the paperbacks

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Christopher Hands, Alex Peake-Tomkinson, Matt Warman, Jake Kerridge and Toby Clements review the latest paperbacks

Madhouse by Andrew Scull

During the early part of the 20th century, the psychiatrist Henry Cotton gained international renown for the innovative treatments he introduced at Trenton State Hospital, New Jersey.

Cotton claimed to have revolutionised psychiatry, with the "discovery" that all mental illness was caused by toxins released from infections. He began an increasingly obsessive "war on sepsis", which involved him and his assistants pulling teeth and removing tonsils, cervixes and even whole colons.

Madhouse minutely describes Cotton's monomania, and the way other doctors accepted his claims, or even dissembled to protect him. Alongside Cotton's story are those of his patients, many of whom suffered endless rounds of operations, often against their will.

Exhaustively researched from contemporary records, and told like a thriller, Madhouse shows the dangers of single-mindedness, and the importance of evidence-based medicine. **Christopher Hands**

The Uninvited by Geling Yan

Dan, an unemployed factory worker, and his wife Little Plum survive on a diet of noodles and expired canned goods in suburban Beijing.

Then he starts posing as a fake journalist and attending state-sponsored banquets. But life is more than "minced pigeon breasts with mashed tofu moulded into tiny snowballs", and the strain of his false identity begins to tell.

Writing for the first time in English, Geling Yan has produced a subtle examination of China's uninvited. In this sharp novel, Dan realises, "One becomes an even dirtier whore by selling something more precious than one's body." **Alex Peake-Tomkinson**

Dreams from My Father by Barack Obama

Senator Obama has taken time out from knocking at the White House door to republish this 1995 memoir.

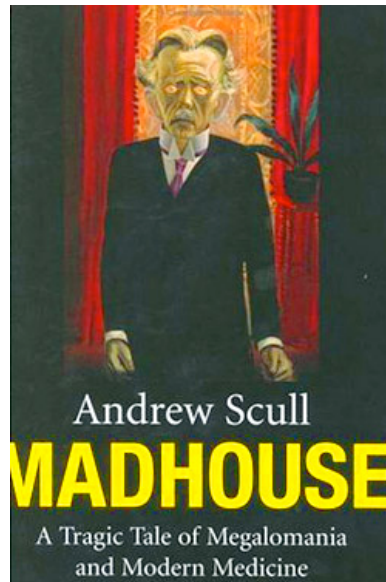
As he explains in the introduction, it evolved from a disquisition on race and politics into a personal account of his early life and his father's influence on him. He left when Obama was two and assumed mythic status in his son's mind.

He describes how he went from being a pot-smoking near-drop-out to working among the poor in Chicago with an honesty and self-awareness not always found in autobiographers, and more rarely in potential leaders of the free world. **Jake Kerridge**

Pound for Pound by F X Toole

This novel is the last work by F X Toole, the boxer-turned-writer who did not live to see the success of the film, Million Dollar Baby, based on his short story (the movie won four Oscars including best picture).

The grizzled trainer Dan Cooley is driven to contemplating murder and suicide after the



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death of his grandson, but then rediscovers meaning in his life when a young Mexican boxer turns to him for help.

The tale is sentimental enough to be a made-for-TV American movie, but there can be few directors who could stage the fight scenes with the authenticity and raw power that Toole gives them. **JK**

iWoz by Steve Wozniak

Steve Wozniak - the "other Steve" who, along with Steve Jobs, founded Apple computers in the 1970s - thanks his father for inspiring him to become an electrical engineer, but he is such a geek he would always have done something similar. He really loves what he does, and his enthusiasm is almost infectious.

His ghost writer, Gina Smith, who should be congratulated for her light touch, has preserved the spirit of "the Woz": the book is so poorly written that you find yourself yearning for the coming of the iPod, knowing that that must signal the end of the story - for now at least. **Toby Clements**

Hitler's British Slaves by Sean Longden

Between 1939 and 1945 more than 200,000 British and Commonwealth soldiers were captured by the Germans. While life in PoW camps has been given an almost attractive varnish in books and films, Hitler's British Slaves comes as a shocking corrective.

Many of the men were marched to camps in the East to work in mines, factories or fields - even helping to construct the factories at Auschwitz - and they were treated almost as badly as the other victims of Nazi rule.

Fluent, broadly researched and full of the prisoners' own thoughts, this book does its subject proud. **TC**

Travels in the Scriptorium by Paul Auster

It is possible that Paul Auster's "report" on a day in the life of the prisoner Mr Blank is trying to address the impossibility of real freedom. But since all the characters who visit him come from Auster's other books, and the novella's conclusion disappears up a post-modern blind alley, the effect is self-indulgent.

Fans will enjoy the parlour game of catching Auster's references to his own work, but even knowing the answers adds little depth. Elements of Groundhog Day and an interwoven, unfinished story are intriguing, but these Travels stop some way short of an interesting destination. **Matt Warman**

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