

Among 96,000 extreme fans, I was one of the lucky ones who managed to see Taylor Swift at the MCG last month. I live nearby, and the whole day of that first of her three shows I saw Swift fans walking past my apartment, dressed to the nines in sparkly dresses, cowboy boots and faces adorned with jewels. By lunchtime, I could hear her sound checking from my balcony.

When night fell, a friend and I zigzagged through the glittering crowds, took our seats, not fully comprehending how deafening the sound of thousands upon thousands of fans screaming in unison would be. Swift took the stage, bejewelled too. I was enamoured by the spectacle, heartened by the number of girls and women who had completely taken over this sports stadium, which is often not so glamorous or dazzling.

Swift, clearly gobsmacked by the number of fans gathered (it was her biggest concert to date), commanded the stadium, leading us through her backlog, laden with so many hits dipped in so many genres, it was hard to keep up. It was an incredible feat – three-and-a-half hours long. Her energy never faltered. There were surprise acoustic songs, a taste of her upcoming record *The Tortured Poets Department*, ballads and total pop euphoria. It ended the only way it could: with fireworks. **IT**

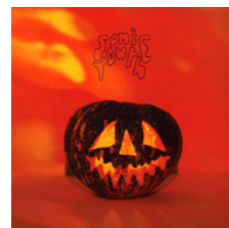


THE BOSS

HOOPER CRESCENT **ESSENTIAL TREMORS**

★★★★

Hooper Crescent's artfully askew version of post-punk continues to mutate on the Melbourne band's second album. Opener 'Dog Day Afternoon' revisits the call-and-response musical trade-offs from their 2020 record *Object Permanence* but adds more pronounced dub elements to sound like squiggly new wave slowed right down. Lead single 'Late Night TV' is more upbeat and propulsive, with an arch quality to the group vocals, while the weedy, chiming guitar tones on 'Karaoke Love' recall mid-career Sonic Youth. But flux is the running theme here, and nothing stays in one place (or at one pace) for long. Hooper Crescent are at their best when contrasting between exacting control and unchecked outbursts, as heard amid the deconstructed power pop of 'Master Disruptor' and the weirder 'Carnival'. Lead vocalist Sam Cummins' lyrics are happily abstract, which fits the music to a tee. The biggest surprise here is how mellow and unruffled the last couple of songs are, hinting at another potential permutation. Like their local peers Pinch Points and Eggy, Hooper Crescent are rejuvenating underground guitar music in real-time. **DOUG WALLEN**



SONIC YOUTH **WALLS HAVE EARS**

★★★★

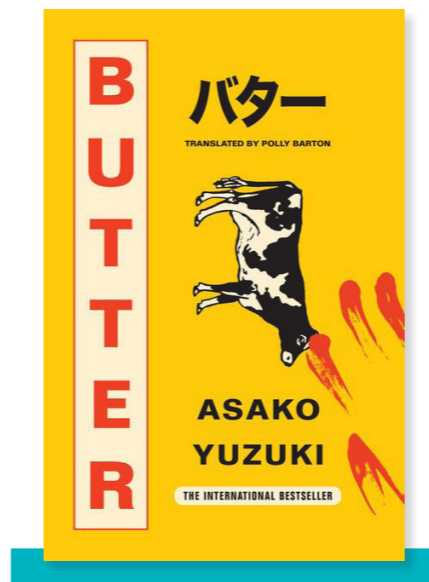
I should be clear – this is not a new record from the noise rock titans who broke up definitively in 2011, after the separation of Kim Gordon and Thurston Moore. Instead, it's a beloved bootleg, recorded in 1985 during a UK tour, finally being officially released by the band decades later. The sound is fuzzy and low-grade – but in its scrappiness, it makes you feel like you're in some musty English venue alongside them. The walls really do have ears – you can practically hear the room vibrating and shaking. The record distils the early part of their legacy – characterised by caustic noise and confusion – before they ventured into somewhat more commercial territory and became the alt-rock giants we know them as today. They play songs off their first record, warping them, making them more confronting and disordered. It's wonderful to hear a live rendition of 'Death Valley 69' – all those guitars in combat, relentless feedback, the drums stomping and Moore brattily drawing out each lyric. **ISABELLA TRIMBOLI**



KANYE WEST & TY DOLLA \$IGN

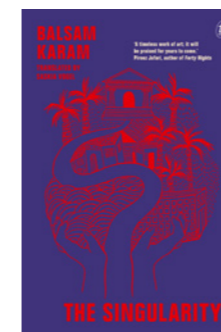
★★★★

Kanye West's *Vultures 1* is as provocative as anticipated. The lyrics reflect West's headline-making life, showcasing more of a triumph in style than substance. The production – with Ty Dolla \$ign – innovatively melds drum beats that echo Ye's *808s & Heartbreak* (2008) with the choruses of *Jesus Is King* (2019) and *Graduation* (2007). Tracks like 'STARS', 'TALKING' and 'KEYS TO MY LIFE' demonstrate West's pursuit of fresh sounds, while the focus on the opulent and out-of-touch lifestyles of the elite – particularly in songs like 'FUK SUMN' 'BACK TO ME' and 'CARNIVAL' – blends well with this new sonic direction. The album is a testament to West's signature mix of laid-back style and serious artistry. Independently released, the album has reached No.1 in the US and Australia, even while being removed from Apple Music, iTunes and Spotify. The album's message, highlighted in the Chris Brown-featured 'BEG FORGIVENESS', leaves room for a deeper, more meaningful narrative in West's future work. **OLIVIA BENNETT**



I learned from my late father that women should show generosity towards everyone," says Manako Kajii, convicted gourmet serial killer, in the first chapter of Asako Yuzuki's tasty gastronomic thriller *Butter*. "But there are two things I simply cannot tolerate: feminists and margarine." Translated by Polly Barton and inspired by the real-life story of Japan's Konkatsu Killer (*konkatsu* translates roughly to "marriage hunting"), *Butter* is the tale of an imprisoned food blogger charged with seducing, defrauding and murdering several lonely old men; and an investigation by journalist Rika Machida, who meets and becomes infatuated with Kajii and her delectable transgressions.

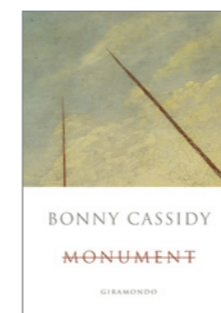
While I found this one slightly over-seasoned – there's a lot of exposition here, a lot of filler – I do love a tale of a woman dizzy with pleasure, defiantly sticking it to the good girl's diet of paltry subservience, and I found this book moreish in the truest sense: it made me so snacky! The food writing is supreme, and I dare you to read the description of rice with butter and soy sauce and not hightail it to the kitchen and whip some up for yourself – stat. It even whet the appetite of my favourite food lord Nigel Slater: "Delicious food, my favourite city AND a serial killer," he says on his socials. "Honestly, I couldn't ask for more." I don't often give a serving suggestion with a book recco, but this one needs a full pantry to hand – or at least a shining golden slab of the finest salted butter you can afford. **MF**



THE SINGULARITY **BALSAM KARAM**

★★★★★

Swedish Kurdish author Balsam Karam's second novel, her English-language debut, is the story of two women whose lives intersect at a corniche in an unnamed coastal town: one in search of her missing daughter, the other a witness to this despair. The title – a reference to the central point of a black hole where laws of space-time cease to exist – is a powerful metaphor for the characters' distorted sense of time, place and self after war and displacement. In the playbook of grief, the past is ever-present, and a departure from reality to reclaim what's lost feels like a bargain away. Most sections open at the same juncture, albeit with subtle shifts in perception and points of view, which deepens our sense of these women's compounding losses. This return to a fixed moment also anchors the narrative and lends a cadence to Karam's stunning prose poetry. The novel closes with heart-rending vignettes that illuminate the many ways in which the spirits of the nameless, the stateless and the voiceless are broken. **MEK YIMAM**



MONUMENT **BONNY CASSIDY**

★★★★

Equal parts archive, autofiction, historical treatise and poetry anthology, this literary memoir grapples with genocide, resistance and forgetting. Dr Bonny Cassidy has meticulously researched her white ancestors to reconstruct their possible relationships with the First Nations people whose stolen lands they inhabited. We meet English, Irish and Prussian settlers across the class spectrum, from an "esquire" to a "waif", and throughout the country from the Derwent River to Myall Creek. All benefit from colonial atrocities. Cassidy's family's secrets and lies become case studies in denial, and microcosms of Australia's founding myths. Like the records it deconstructs, *Monument* is riddled with absences: white space, X marks and censored photographs remind us how much is missing from these stories. This fragmentary, sometimes elliptical work won't be for everyone, but luscious language and harrowing revelations mark *Monument* as a unique venture in truth-telling from a serious and singular voice. **BENJAMIN HICKEY**

THE BOOK OF LOVE **KELLY LINK**

★★★★

After decades of infusing her short stories with idiosyncratic wit and wonder, celebrated American author Kelly Link has finally turned her hand to a novel – and an epic, 600-page one at that. It opens with three teenagers very much out of sorts, having literally just come back from the dead and re-entered the small New England town of Lovesend via their music classroom. They don't remember how they died, but they're tasked with learning magic so that they might remain alive rather than be sent back to a murky forest purgatory. From there the plot is classic Kelly Link, stuffed with sudden transformations, messy romantic complications and knowing updates of fairytale tropes. At its heart this is an intimate coming-of-age tale about how we navigate relationships with friends, lovers and family in the limited time we have alive. While Link can get lost in the weeds with so much repetition and digression, this is undeniably a triumph of literary fantasy – and outright imagination. **DOUG WALLEN**

