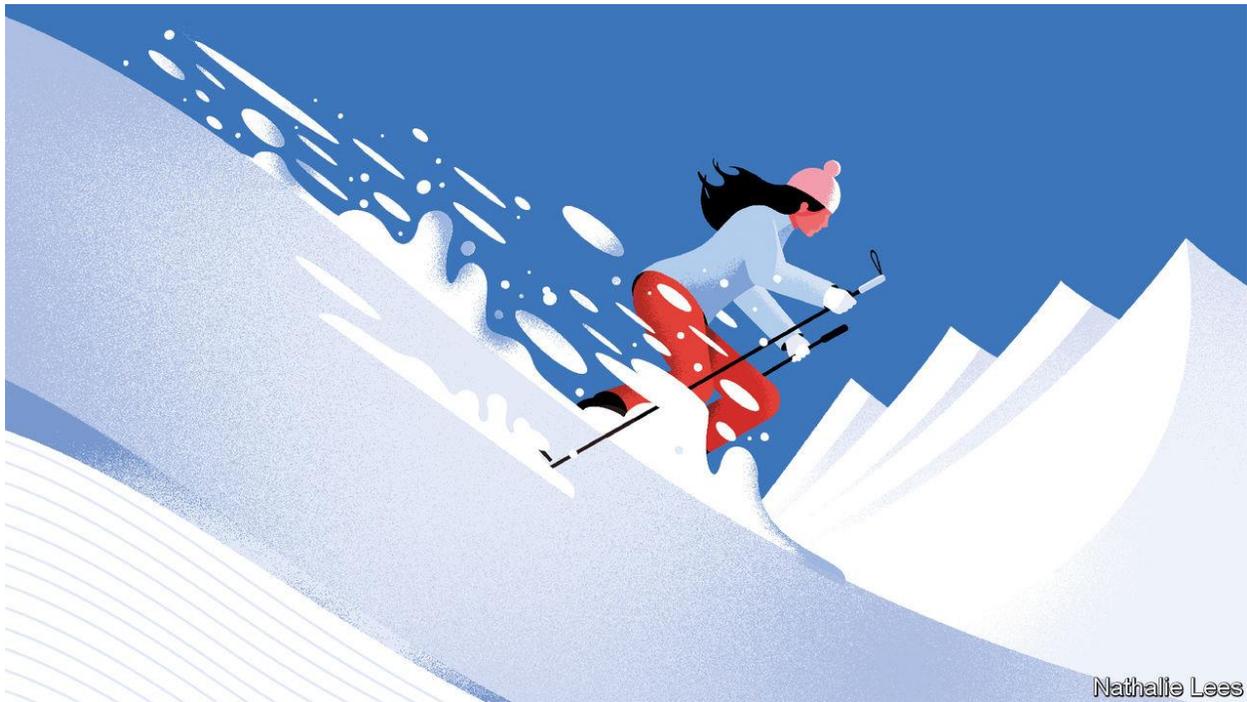


THE ECONOMIST

Word up

Our books of the year

They were about the IRA, Harper Lee's lost work, rational economics and an Ohio housewife



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Dec 7th 2019

History

Say Nothing. By Patrick Radden Keefe. Doubleday; 464 pages; \$28.95. William Collins; £20

Framed as an inquiry into the death of Jean McConville, a mother of ten who was abducted and murdered by the IRA in 1972, this is a masterful exploration of the motives of terrorists, the stories they tell themselves and how they make the transition to peace—or, in some cases, fail to.

Remembering Emmett Till. By Dave Tell. University of Chicago Press; 312 pages; \$25 and £19

A fine history of racism, poverty and memory in the Mississippi Delta told through the lynching of Emmett Till, a black 14-year-old from Chicago whose murder in 1955—and his mother’s determination to display his mutilated features in an open coffin—made him an early martyr of the civil-rights movement.

Amritsar 1919: An Empire of Fear and the Making of a Massacre. By Kim Wagner. Yale University Press; 360 pages; \$32.50 and £20

At least 379 people were killed by British soldiers in the Amritsar massacre on April 13th 1919, making that one of the darkest days in the history of the empire. On the event’s centenary, this book persuasively argues that it was less of an aberration than apologists for empire, including Winston Churchill, have chosen to believe.

Maoism: A Global History. By Julia Lovell. Knopf; 610 pages; \$37.50. Bodley Head; £30

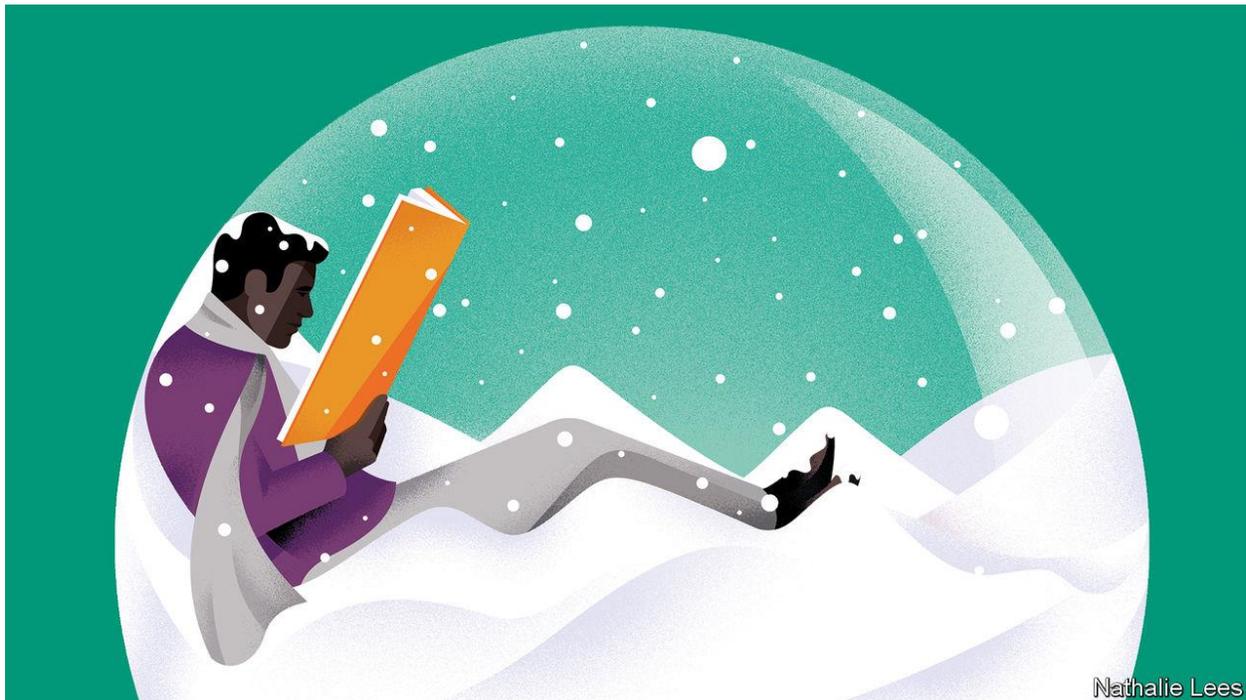
Mao Zedong was a despot who caused tens of millions of deaths; yet his name does not attract the same opprobrium as Hitler’s or Stalin’s. Indeed, his legend and ideas have inspired revolutionaries around the world. As the author of this book shows, his manipulated image retains a powerful allure in China and beyond. “Like a dormant virus”, she writes, “Maoism has demonstrated a tenacious, global talent for latency.”

The Regency Years. By Robert Morrison. W.W. Norton; 416 pages; \$29.95. Published in Britain as “The Regency Revolution”; Atlantic Books; £20

“I awoke one morning and found myself famous,” Lord Byron, a Regency poet, once said. The period itself has suffered from the opposite problem—eclipsed by the more solemn and substantial Georgian and Victorian ones that preceded and followed it. Arguing that Britain truly started to become modern in the Regency era, this delightful book explains why it deserves to be better known.

How to be a Dictator. By Frank Dikötter. Bloomsbury; 304 pages; \$28 and £25

What do Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Kim Il Sung, Nicolae Ceausescu, Papa Doc Duvalier and Mengistu Haile Mariam have in common? This insightful handbook for gangsters is written by a distinguished historian of 20th-century China.



Nathalie Lees

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