

7 books you should own

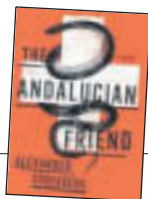
MICHAEL CONAGHAN

NOT FOR TURNING



Robin Harris (Transworld £13.99)
 Harris has previous when it comes to prime ministers. The duplicitous leader Adam Lang in *The Ghost* was thought to be based on Tony Blair, but can an 'authorised' biography really be anything other than hagiography? Harris is too clever to fall into that trap. Though clearly an admirer of Thatcher, he paints a more rounded picture than we had a right to expect.

THE ANDALUCIAN FRIEND



Alexander Soderberg (Harville Secker £12.99)
 The first in what promises to be an eventful trilogy where all the major characters have a moral hinterland which often contradicts their allotted roles. Thus the cop is also a stalker, and the ruthless gang leader is also a tender lover, producing a minefield for heroine Sophie Brinkmann to negotiate.

IS IT ABOUT A BICYCLE



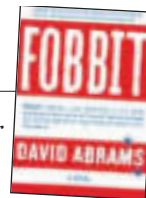
Jennika Baines (Four Courts £40)
 Like all unheralded visionaries, the unique world that Flann O'Brien imagined, with its absurdities, insane paradoxes, and impossible theories, is increasingly the one we inhabit. This series of essays, edited by Jennika Baines, attempts to place him in an academic context, but all we can do is shrug and conclude that the man was a bit of a genius. Like the Brother.

THE DIVINE COMEDY



Dante Alighieri, trans: J G Nichols (Alma £20)
 With the imminent arrival of the new Dan Brown blockbuster, *Inferno*, set to put Dante's name on the supermarket shelves, why not try this recent translation, which has the imprimatur of Dante in Love author A N Wilson, and will more than do until Clive James' effort is published later this summer.

FOBBIT



David Abrams (Harvil Secker £12.99)
 Trying to do for Iraq what Catch 22 did for WWII, and M*A*S*H did for asterisks, *Fobbit* attempts to walk a clever line between y'know, war is heck, and our servicemen and women are basically decent folk doing a darned good job in difficult circumstances. Which may be true but kind of circumscribes your satirical intentions.

PRAGUE, CAPITAL OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



Derek Sayer (Princeton £24.95)
 Can a city define a century? Sayer seems to think so and he forgoes a conventional retelling to concentrate on themes, mixing literary and political, the harshly realistic and the absurd. This is the city of Kafka, Havel and communism with a human face.

PLAYING WITH FIRE



Mary A Larkin (Little, Brown £7.99)
 If Belfast has its Catherine Cookson, surely that person is Mary Larkin whose novels covering post-war Belfast from the point of view of its women are more than just nostalgia but a sort of social history. In *Playing With Fire*, set in the '50s, she tackles the topic of love across the sectarian divide. A Belfast girl is 'nothing but trouble' runs the tagline. Don't we just know it.

