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Best books of 2018: Hilary Mantel, Yuval Noah Harari and more pick their favourites

I gave up Twitter this year, with two immediate consequences: I started dreaming again and recovered a ferocious appetite for reading. Evenings, it turns out, are long. Like everyone, I loved Sally Rooney’s beautifully observed *Normal People* (Faber). I also finally read Eve Babitz’s *Slow Days*, *Fast Company*, first published in the 1970s but recently reissued by New York Review Books. It is funny, sexy and then suddenly brutal, like a shark attack at the beach. As for poetry, I fell hard for Amy Key’s *Isn’t Forever* (Bloodaxe), a gorgeous, sad box of delights about intimacy, bad bodies, sorrow. Like Babitz, Key is adept at linguistic surprises, charting women’s lives with a savage delicacy. But my favourite book, and you’d better be quick, is *Blueprint*, a tiny edition of photographs by the New York artist Mary Manning (JMS). Manning is truly a genius at unregarded, everyday beauty. Everything on the planet has been Instagrammed by now, and yet her casual, seemingly unstudied photos have the capacity to make the familiar world look absolutely new.

— Olivia Laing