Books

Summer books guide

From Bretton Woods to Britten's century, FT writers and guests pick their books of the year so far

JUNE 29 2013

FICTION

Life After Life, by Kate Atkinson, *Doubleday, RRP£18.99, 480 pages*

One character; multiple lives. Atkinson's protagonist, Ursula Todd, sometimes senses she has travelled the same paths before. We see those other Ursulas, each born in 1910, as they live (and die). Shortlisted for the 2013 Women's Prize for Fiction.

The People of Forever Are Not Afraid, by Shani Boianjiu, *Hogarth, RRP£12.99, 320 pages*

The lead characters in Boianjiu's powerful debut novel are three teenagers – female conscripts in the Israeli army, the IDF. She delves into both the personal and political as the young women reach for normality in their extraordinary lives.

The Childhood of Jesus, by JM Coetzee, Harvill Secker, RRP£16.99, 288 pages

A lost boy and the kindly man who cares for him are the central figures in Coetzee's conjured world of Novilla, a bland place where new arrivals must erase their past. The title gives away the links to the Christian myth but the author mixes in many other traditions and languages.

Harvest, by Jim Crace, *Picador, RRP£16.99, 320 pages*

Crace's 11th book begins with harvest celebrations in a remote medieval village. This, however, is the beginning of a week that will herald the end of a feudal way of life. The reader is drawn into a web of old enmities – and new threats from rough interlopers and smooth-talking noblemen.

A Hologram for the King, by Dave Eggers, *Hamish Hamilton, RRP£18.99, 322 pages*

A formerly successful man, now enduring a depressing middle age, washes up in the desert north of Jeddah. He's part of a business team waiting to see the King of the title, and while he waits, we follow his life. Nothing dramatic happens – but it's a poignant and engrossing book.

How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia, by Mohsin Hamid, *Hamish Hamilton, RRP£14.99, 240 pages*

Hamid's new book plays around with genre – our unnamed narrator recounts his tale as the protagonist of his own self-help book – and we follow his life from poor village boy to successful businessman in an unidentified city, finding and losing true love along the way. Affecting, human and a window into the booming, cruel world of an Asian megalopolis.

How Should a Person Be?, by Sheila Heti, *Harvill Secker, RRP£16.99, 320 pages*

A semi-autobiographical work that's been a controversial hit on both sides of the Atlantic. Heti's narrator Sheila, like the author herself, is a Toronto-based artist, falling in and out of favour with her friends and lovers. It's ruthlessly honest, trite, rude, infuriating: unlike anything else you'll read this year.

A Delicate Truth, by John le Carré, *Viking, RRP£18.99, 336 pages*

The latest le Carré brings the usual pleasures: tight, beautifully woven plot lines and murky characters with troubled personal lives. There are some new ones too – the book is set in New Labour London, awash with Russian money. These are spooks updated for a post-cold war age. A treat from the master of spy fiction.

The Twelve Tribes of Hattie, by Ayana Mathis, *Hutchinson, RRP£12.99, 256 pages*

A first novel following the contrasting fortunes of the 11 children and one grandchild of Hattie Shepherd, the African-American matriarch we first meet as a teenager in the 1920s. It's an engrossing tale of family history set against the broad canvas of 20th-century US history and the civil rights movement.

TransAtlantic, by Colum McCann, *Bloomsbury, £18.99, 320 pages*

In this ambitious novel of journeys back and forth across the Atlantic, McCann links people, real and imagined, and their stories spanning 150 years. His real characters include Frederick Douglass, the black American abolitionist, and Senator George Mitchell, broker of the Northern Ireland peace process.

The Woman Upstairs, by Claire Messud, *Virago, RRP£14.99, 320 pages*

Seemingly small in scope, this novel tells the story of a quiet, unmarried woman's friendship with a glamorous, arty family who are newcomers in town. All is not as it seems, of course. An addictively good, well-written book.

The Crane Wife, by Patrick Ness, *Canongate, RRP£14.99, 320 pages*

Patrick Ness usually writes for young people but here turns out a polished adult novel. His starting point is a Japanese folk tale about a fisherman and his wife who are destroyed by greed; Ness crafts from it a suburban morality tale, set in all-too-real south London, but transformed into something delicate and full of wonder.

Americanah, by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Fourth Estate, RRP£20, 400 pages*

Adichie's first novel for seven years is well worth the wait. We follow Nigerian student Ifemelu as she struggles with both her new American life and the powerful need to return home. A warm, lively and truly cross-continental read.

Binocular Vision, by Edith Pearlman, *Pushkin Press, RRP£16.99, 384 pages*

The surprise literary hit of the year to date. The American writer Edith Pearlman is now 77 and this volume of collected stories is a great introduction to her work. She has a brilliant eye for the complexity and mess of human lives, beautifully rendered in (often funny) tales.

All That Is, by James Salter, *Picador, RRP£18.99, 304 pages*

The celebrated American writer James Salter is now 88, and his first new novel in more than 30 years is a big event. *All That Is* follows an alter-ego, Philip Bowman, from the battle fleet in Okinawa to the publishing worlds of postwar Manhattan and London, via plenty of encounters with women. No tight narrative here, just woven fragments and transporting prose.

Ghana Must Go, by Taiye Selasi, *Viking, RRP£14.99, 336 pages*

Selasi's debut novel starts with the death of a Ghanaian surgeon, recently returned home from the US. What follows is a novel about his family, and their lives at home and abroad. An exploration of what it means to be displaced – and what happens to the people left behind.

Big Brother, by Lionel Shriver, *HarperCollins, RRP£16.99, 384 pages*

How would you react if someone close to you became very, very fat? That's the starting point for Shriver's sharp novel, as Pandora's obese brother comes to stay and so wrecks her tidy life. As much a metaphor for bloated, consumerist America as it is a very good tale.

Secrecy, by Rupert Thomson, *Granta, RRP£12.99, 320 pages*

Thomson's book is based on the barest details we have about a real 17th-century Sicilian wax sculptor, reimagined here as Zummo, who is commissioned to sculpt a perfect woman in wax. To do this, he needs to find a perfect corpse. This is part thriller, part historical novel, and it's wholly satisfying.

Isabel Berwick

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FICTION IN TRANSLATION

The Enigma of the Return, by Dany Laferrière, translated by David Homel, *MacLehose Press, RRP£12.99, 240 pages*

This affecting novel investigates a man's relationship with the island he fled in his youth – Haiti – and the land in which he made a name for himself – Quebec. A meditation on loss and exile.

The Infatuations, by Javier Marías, translated by Margaret Jull Costa, *Hamish Hamilton, RRP£18.99, 352 pages*

The celebrated Spanish author's latest novel tells the story of María Dolz, whose interest in a seemingly perfect couple leads her deep into a murder mystery. Marías at his most haunting.

Altai, by Wu Ming, translated by Shaun Whiteside, *Verso, RRP£16.99, 272 pages*

Italy's mischievous literary collective returns with a 16th-century epic about a Venetian spycatcher whose quest takes him from Salonika to Constantinople as he seeks revenge and redemption. A riveting tale about betrayal, identity and the clash of civilisations.

Pow!, by Mo Yan, translated by Howard Goldblatt, *Seagull Books, RRP£19.50, 440 pages*

The winner of the 2012 Nobel Prize in Literature offers a Kafkaesque depiction of Chinese village life corrupted by greed and the challenges of modernisation. Broad in sweep yet personal in its concerns, the novel adds touches of the surreal to its social satire.

From the Fatherland, with Love, by Ryu Murakami, translated by Ginny Tapley Takemori, Charles De Wolf and Ralph McCarthy, *Pushkin Press, RRP£20, 672 pages*

Set in a dystopian near-present, this novel by Japan's "other" Murakami explores the disquieting prospect of a North Korean invasion of Japan, mixing the thrills of a spy novel with some national soul-searching.

Between Friends, by Amos Oz, translated by Sondra Silverston, *Chatto & Windus, RRP£12.99, 208 pages*

A collection of interlinked short stories from one of Israel's most revered writers. Set in the 1950s on a fictional kibbutz, Oz's tales portrays the joys and tensions inherent in a way of life that younger generations have abandoned.

If I Close My Eyes Now, by Edney Silvestre, translated by Nick Caistor, *Doubleday, RRP£14.99, 320 pages*

On the day that Russia launches its first cosmonaut, two children find a woman's body. What follows is a whodunit and a coming-of-age tale in small-town Brazil. A remarkable debut by a veteran journalist.

Ways of Going Home, by Alejandro Zambra, translated by Megan McDowell, *Granta, RRP£12.99, 160 pages*

A slim but thrilling novel from one of Chile's outstanding young writers. Set partly in the final years of Pinochet's regime, Zambra's tightly crafted work explores the themes of childhood, disappointment, and the impossibility of ever returning home.

Ángel Gurría-Quintana

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POETRY

Pink Mist, by Owen Sheers, *Faber RRP£12.99, 96 pages*

Pink Mist is revealed as the most visceral of titles for this beautifully crafted verse-drama of three young British soldiers before, during and after their Afghan tour. Traumas leave minds, bodies and families shattered; if, as one narrator says, "There's a signature to every war," Sheers has drawn it here in its most vivid, complex, devastating colours.

Go Giants, by Nick Laird, *Faber RRP£12.99, 80 pages*

From the Whitmanesque listing of the title poem to the rupturing candour of pieces such as "Tuesday", Laird's third collection comes with as many surprises as it does subjects and styles. The frivolous and serious, domestic and political are rendered in exemplary, measured verse.

Uncollected Poems, by RS Thomas, *Bloodaxe RRP£9.95, 176 pages*

The centenary of Thomas's birth affords an opportunity to rediscover one of Wales's greatest poets. Many of the 139 "lost" poems here address the clergyman's persistent themes: his country; his elusive God; landscape and the characters who seem to grow out of it. The most poignant lines are on love – often lost or stifled, but quietly celebrated.

Instant-Flex 718, by Heather Phillipson, *Bloodaxe, RRP£8.95, 64 pages*

A visual artist's debut book-length collection, in which a My Little Pony is mutilated for art's sake and a plate of mashed potato epitomises domestic drift. Levity and a likeable, direct voice make this innovative and entertaining summer reading.

Maria Crawford

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Lionel Barber

Editor of the Financial Times

Thant Myint-U's *Where China Meets India* (Faber) is a beautifully written account of the transformation of modern Burma, its history and geostrategic importance at the crossroads of Asia. The author, grandson of U Thant, the former UN secretary-general, is a diplomat-historian and the founder of the Yangon Heritage Trust. His book is a must-read for anyone visiting Burma, aka Myanmar.

Taiye Selasi

Author of Ghana Must Go (Viking)

In *The Cypress Tree* (Bloomsbury), Kamin Mohammadi recounts her childhood in Tehran and her family's flight to London. Her descriptions are so incredibly lush you feel as much as read them – I could smell the cardamom in the chai, the camellias in the garden. Here is a portrait of a country completely at odds with the media's portrayals: the sensuous, intellectual and social Iran that Mohammadi left behind. It was a particular joy to read this memoir in the wake of the recent presidential election, for in the author's nostalgic depiction, one finds both a world that has passed away and one being born again.

SCIENCE FICTION

Finches of Mars, by Brian Aldiss, *The Friday Project RRP£14.99, 224 pages*

If this is, as advertised, Aldiss's last work of SF then that's regrettable, as it shows the veteran genre grandmaster in excellent form. An edgy, curmudgeonly novel of ideas about Martian colonists overcoming infertility and inertia.

The Peacock Cloak, by Chris Beckett, *NewCon Press RRP£10.99, 240 pages*

A stunning short story collection from the winner of the 2013 Arthur C Clarke Award (for last year's *Dark Eden*). Beckett writes haunting tales about the future, steeping them in a very British sense of insularity and post-imperial impotence.

The Age Atomic, by Adam Christopher, *Angry Robot, RRP£8.99, 416 pages*

The sequel to last year's *Empire State* sees Christopher's "pocket universe" alt-Manhattan under threat from earth tremors, endless winter, and an army of killer robots. The nuclear terror of the Red Menace era is filtered through a fusion of SF and gumshoe novel to superb effect.

The Shambling Guide to New York City, by Mur Lafferty, *Orbit, RRP£7.99, 368 pages*

Zoë Norris is employed to write a reference work for a subculture of supernatural creatures that exists in parallel to human urban society, a kind of Lonely Planet guide for the otherworldly. At the same time she has to fathom their strange powers and arcane laws. A fun, sassy romp.

Seal Team 666, by Weston Ochse, *Titan Books, RRP£7.99, 320 pages*

A hugely entertaining thriller about a unit of US Navy Seals that specialises in dealing with supernatural threats. Ochse brings authenticity to the action, thanks to his own military background, and keeps the shocks coming. You never know who's going to be next to meet a gruesome demise.

James Lovegrove

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CRIME FICTION

Gun Machine, by Warren Ellis, *Mulholland Books, RRP£13.99, 320 pages*

Tallow, "a cop who's nine parts dead already", lands his cold case team with the worst workload in history after finding a New York apartment filled with hundreds of weapons, each of which has been used to commit an unsolved murder. A dazzling oasis in a desert of dull police procedurals.

Murder as a Fine Art, by David Morrell, *Mulholland Books, RRP£13.99, 336 pages*

Opium eater Thomas De Quincey should never have written that essay about murder; it has made him the chief suspect in a case reminiscent of the infamous Ratcliffe Highway killings. Ignore the unlikely premise and enjoy a gaslit gallop through Victorian London.

Plan D, by Simon Urban, *Harvill Secker, RRP£14.99, 528 pages*

A procedural with a twist, set in a Germany where the wall never fell. The GDR is facing bankruptcy while West Berlin prospers, and the case means digging up secrets that will affect everyone's future. A superb alt-timeline thriller that recalls Robert Harris's *Fatherland*.

The Anarchist Detective, by Jason Webster, *Chatto & Windus, RRP£12.99, 256 pages*

Spanish detective Max Cámara returns to his home town, where the unearthing of a mass grave revives memories of the civil war. It turns out to be a fresh killing and an investigation of the town's "saffron mafia" follows. The sun-drenched landscape never looked so sinister.

Christopher Fowler

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YOUNG ADULT FICTION

The Bone Dragon, by Alexia Casale, *Faber, RRP£9.99, 304 pages*

A teenage abuse victim carves a dragon from her own extracted rib; when it comes to "life" at night, it voices her buried pain. But will it also goad her to seek vengeance? Beautifully written, poetic and haunting, this is a superlative debut.

Oksa Pollock: The Last Hope, by Anne Plichota and Cendrine Wolf, translated by Sue Rose, *Pushkin Children's Books, RRP£12.99, 512 pages*

"The French Harry Potter" features an eccentric school, a Snape-type teacher, a Dobby-like servant, magic powers and a lead character with a physical mark. Oksa, 13, goes to a French school in London with best friend Gus, but discovers she's heir to a secret civilisation. Great fun.

The Wall, by William Sutcliffe, *Bloomsbury, RRP£12.99, 304 pages*

A 13-year-old boy discovers a tunnel that leads to the other side of his divided city. There he meets a girl and finds that everything he's been told about "the enemy" must be questioned. Sutcliffe's fable, inspired by a visit to the West Bank, can't fail to excite and move.

The Watcher in the Shadows, by Carlos Ruiz Zafón, translated by Lucía Graves, *Orion, RRP £12.99, 256 pages*

A pleasingly old-fashioned chiller, set in Normandy just before the second world war. Irene goes to stay in the Blue Bay when her mother becomes housekeeper to toymaker Lazarus Jann. A mystery filled with creepy automata and deadly secrets.

Suzi Feay

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CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Dragon Frontier, by Dan Abnett, *Puffin, RRP£6.99, 336 pages*

The latest novel from the prolific Abnett is a cracking fantasy-tinged Wild West yarn. Settlers on the Oregon Trail fall foul of a fire-breathing winged beast. Jake, apparently the only survivor of the attack, joins a Native American tribe who tame and ride dragons. Hot stuff.

Bodyguard: Hostage, by Chris Bradford, *Penguin, RRP£6.99, 432 pages*

Bone-crunching action adventure from the author of the *Young Samurai* series. Kickboxer Connor Reeves becomes an undercover "BuddyGuard", assigned to look after the US president's daughter. Hard-edged realism is leavened by tentative romance.

Fizzlebert Stump and the Bearded Boy, by AF Harrold, *Bloomsbury, RRP£5.99, 272 pages*

The circus inspectors are coming and their timing couldn't be worse, since the performers' acts are being sabotaged one by one. Harrold's second novel about lion tamer Fizzlebert has eccentric characters (Fish the greedy sea lion is a scene-stealer) and daffy authorial asides.

Captain Underpants and the Revolting Revenge of the Radioactive Robo-Boxers, by Dav Pilkey, *Scholastic, RRP£8.99, 192 pages*

This 10th outing for unlikely superhero Captain Underpants and naughty schoolboys George and Harold is as puerile, crude and daft as its predecessors, and we wouldn't want it any other way. Beneath the sniggersome silliness, though, lies a surprisingly sophisticated and mind-bending time-travel plot.

The Last Wild, by Piers Torday, *Quercus, RRP£9.99, 320 pages*

Torday's debut novel depicts a nightmarish near-future in which ecological catastrophe has killed off all animals except for the lower orders of vermin. Mute hero Kester Jaynes embarks on a quest to find the last remaining wildlife. It's a grim but in no way depressing read, preaching hope amid dystopia.

James Lovegrove

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CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS

Chu's Day, by Neil Gaiman and Adam Rex, *Bloomsbury, RRP£10.99, 32 pages*

Chu the little panda has a sneeze that's much like a comic-book superpower. When unleashed, it is as devastating as a hurricane. This charming tale from fantasy-fiction superstar Gaiman sees Chu attempting to stifle one of his sneezes until he can contain it no longer. Comedy chaos ensues.

No-Bot, the Robot with No Bottom, by Sue Hendra, *Simon & Schuster, RRP£6.99, 32 pages*

Bernard the Robot accidentally leaves his bottom behind on the swings at the park. The search for his detached derrière seems futile but has a happy "rear ending". The book celebrates the values of persistence and making sure you leave nothing behind.

The Hundred Decker Bus, by Mike Smith, *Macmillan, RRP£6.99, 32 pages*

A double-decker bus driver leaves his route and heads off on an adventure. More passengers come aboard and deck after deck is added. The story culminates in a fold-out revealing the entire bus in all its 100-storey glory. The detail in the drawings will repay countless re-readings.

The Dark, by Lemony Snicket and Jon Klassen, *Orchard Books, RRP£11.99, 40 pages*

Laszlo is afraid of the dark – and there is plenty of it in Klassen's lovely retro-styled illustrations, which are dense with black ink. The dark, however, is not afraid of Laszlo, and justifies its existence to him in this beguiling fable about confronting and conquering your fears.

James Lovegrove

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LITERARY NON-FICTION

Italo Calvino: Letters 1941-1985, selected by Michael Wood, translated by Martin McLaughlin, *Princeton, RRP£27.95, 632 pages*

The fabulist author of *Invisible Cities* (1972) was also an editor at the Italian leftist publishing house Einaudi, a Communist journalist, and a constant correspondent. His letters ranged from the routine – he thanked every person who reviewed his work, before critiquing them right back – to the whimsical and witty.

Say What You Mean: The n+1 Anthology, edited by Christian Lorentzen, *Notting Hill Editions, RRP£10, 268 pages*

Founded in Brooklyn in 2004 to give voice to a generation of sad young literary men (and women), the magazine n+1 has come of age. This anthology includes excellent essays by Elif Batuman, Emily Witt and Wesley Yang.

American Isis: The Life and Art of Sylvia Plath, by Carl Rollyson, *St Martin's Press, RRP$29.99, 336 pages*

Fifty years after Sylvia Plath's suicide, her myth lives on. Carl Rollyson's thorough biography, the first to use materials newly deposited in the Ted Hughes archive at the British Library, is the latest addition to the oeuvre, and sheds new light on Plath's pre-Hughes life and lovers.

Far From the Tree: A Dozen Kinds of Love, by Andrew Solomon, *Chatto & Windus, RRP£30, 976 pages*

Families coping with autism, deafness and dwarfism; with children conceived in rape; with prodigies; and with transgender children. Such scenarios are the subjects of Solomon's moving, provocative work of reportage, which covers every aspect of parenthood and ways of dealing with difference.

The Fun Stuff and Other Essays, by James Wood, *Jonathan Cape, RRP£18.99, 352 pages*

For those who missed Woods' reviews in The New Yorker, the LRB and The New Republic, this latest collection from the literary critic – which begins with a charming homage to The Who's Keith Moon, and includes essays on WG Sebald, Lydia Davis, Aleksandar Hemon, and Cormac McCarthy – is a reliable, indispensable pleasure.

For a Song and a Hundred Songs: A Poet's Journey Through a Chinese Prison, by Liao Yiwu, translated by Wenguang Huang, *New Harvest, RRP$26, 404 pages*

In June 1989, Chinese poet Liao Yiwu – an apolitical bohemian, ladies' man and quite a drinker – penned a poem, "Massacre", expressing his outrage at the Tiananmen Square crackdown. The four years of imprisonment, torture and humiliation that followed are described in the author's characteristically restrained and powerful prose in his latest memoir, which has been banned in China.

Emily Stokes

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TRAVEL

The Conquest of Everest: Original Photographs from the Legendary First Ascent, by George Lowe and Huw Lewis-Jones, *Thames and Hudson, RRP£24.95, 240 pages*

A blizzard of new books has accompanied this year's 60th anniversary of the first ascent of Everest, but this one stands out. Illustrated with intimate and, in many cases, previously unpublished photographs from George Lowe, a 1953 expedition member, it features essays by the many of the world's most respected mountaineers. Perfect relief from hot weather.

Blue Dahlia, Black Gold: A Journey into Angola, by Daniel Metcalfe, *Hutchinson, RRP£20, 368 pages*

At the end of his powerful new book, *The Last Train to Zona Verde*, Paul Theroux flees Angola in despair. "Let someone else …continue where I left off," Theroux writes, ground down by the poverty and corruption. Step forward Daniel Metcalfe, whose account of his three-month exploration of the country doesn't shirk from describing the appalling poverty but manages to reach a more optimistic conclusion.

Italian Ways: On and Off the Rails from Milan to Palermo, by Tim Parks, *Harvill Secker, RRP£16.99, 288 pages*

Not an account of one journey but a portrait of a country and its people, encountered in railway carriages and stations over several years. Parks, a British novelist and essayist, married an Italian and moved to Italy in 1981, since when he has become one of the foremost chroniclers of the country he calls a "charmingly irritating dystopian paradise".

Consolations of the Forest: Alone in a Cabin in the Middle Taiga, by Sylvain Tesson, translated by Linda Coverdale, *Allen Lane, RRP£16.99, 256 pages*

In 2010, French writer and adventurer Sylvain Tesson spent six months living alone in a cabin on the shores of Lake Baikal – reading, drinking vodka and writing about his experience of self-imposed exile, isolation and silence. It's hardly a new subject of course – *Robinson Crusoe* was published in 1719 – but in the context of the "always-on" digital world, it feels more relevant than ever.

Tom Robbins

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FOOD

Mange Tout, by Bruno Loubet, *Ebury Press, RRP£25, 256 pages*

The most exciting developments in French cooking right now are happening in the *bistronomie* movement – bistro food with a modern spin. Loubet, the most highly respected French chef working in the UK, gives us his own version in this accessible but never dumbed down collection of usable, grown-up recipes.

Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation: Finding Ourselves in the Kitchen, by Michael Pollan, *Allen Lane, RRP£20, 480 pages*

Perhaps because he wears considerable erudition lightly, Pollan is the darling of academically minded food geeks the world over. In this entertaining book, he examines the philosophy, science and technique behind four fundamental methods of food preparation: fire cooking, braising, breadmaking and fermentation.

A Greedy Man in a Hungry World: How (Almost) Everything You Thought You Knew About Food is Wrong, by Jay Rayner, *William Collins, RRP£12.99, 288 pages*

Rayner's latest displays a similar depth of research to Pollan but packages the information in an even more accessible way, challenging the organic movement, locavores, food miles and seemingly every other sacred cow of the modern food world. Easy to read, even when uncomfortable to accept.

Tim Hayward

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Lucy Kellaway

FT associate editor and columnist

Clever Girl by Tessa Hadley (Jonathan Cape) is that rare thing: a novel of ideas set in minute, everyday detail. Stella is the clever girl who rattles about in a life in which bad, big things happen and in which loose ends never get tied up. Being clever doesn't stop Stella from making a string of bad decisions about her life; yet the moral of the story is that it's not the choices we make, but how we live by their consequences, that defines us.

Lawrence Summers

Charles W Eliot professor at Harvard University and a former US Treasury secretary

Mark Blyth pulls no punches in *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea* (OUP). Like most good polemicists, the Brown University professor goes too far with his argument. But he provides a wealth of evidence that this has often proved a disastrous policy. His idiom is not that of modern macroeconomics – no theoretical equations, econometrics, stylised models, or even data tables. Rather, Blyth writes in the tradition of Keynes, slashing away at orthodoxy as he ranges widely over the history of economic and political thought.

Lynda Gratton

Professor of management practice at London Business School

Alison Wolf's account of the female working elite, The XX Factor (Profile) looks at women and work in a completely new way: one of Wolf's central assertions is that it is not the gap between men and women that is widening, it is the gap between highly educated women (about 70m globally) and less educated female peers. This is an exhaustive, provocative analysis of what it is to be an elite woman. And by laying out women's choices, Wolf ensures we don't have to walk blindfold into the future.

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BUSINESS

Give and Take: A Revolutionary Approach to Success, by Adam Grant, *Weidenfeld & Nicolson, RRP£20, 320 pages*

Grant's is the first book I've read that provides convincing evidence for "karma" in business. The young organisational psychologist points out that "takers" – "people who like to get more than they give" – do not always reach the top. He entertainingly explains how "givers" can avoid turning into doormats and why it eventually pays to be generous with our time, advice and money.

Strategic Transformation: Changing While Winning, by Manuel Hensmans, Gerry Johnson and George Yip, *Palgrave Macmillan, RRP£19.99, 256 pages*

What looks like an unpromising textbook contains fascinating insights into the history of UK corporate success, drawn from boardroom archives and interviews with former executives of Cadbury Schweppes, Tesco, Smith & Nephew and others. The authors point out that successful strategic change only happens at companies that combine continuity with self-criticism.

Firm Commitment: Why the Corporation is Failing Us and How to Restore Trust in It, by Colin Mayer, *OUP, RRP£16.99, 320 pages*

Mayer's proposed reform of the corporate sector in the wake of the financial crisis starts from the premise that while companies are at the root of many economic and social problems, they also contain the seeds of salvation. The former dean of Oxford's Saïd Business School suggests a switch to "trust firms" overseen by a board acting for all stakeholders. It looks overambitious, but Mayer makes his case clearly and passionately.

Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead, by Sheryl Sandberg, *WH Allen RRP£16.99, 240 pages*

Many people will have read about Sandberg's clarion call to women to realise their full potential, but fewer will have read the book itself. That is a pity. The hyperbole and the criticism of her stance distract from a forthright but heartfelt manifesto for change. Sandberg, who is Facebook's chief operating officer, backs up her case with strong, practical suggestions for ways in which women – and men – can clear away obstacles to happiness and achievement in life and at work.

Love in the Time of Algorithms: What Technology Does to Meeting and Mating, by Dan Slater, *Penguin, RRP$25.95, 272 pages*

The FT described Slater's book as a "well-reported romp through the digital love marketplace". It attempts to address the question of whether the romantic ideals of the dating industry's customers are at odds with the business models of matchmaking websites and their founders, giving a sharp insight into an area most people at least claim not to know much about.

Andrew Hill

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ECONOMICS

The Bankers' New Clothes: What's Wrong with Banking and What to Do About It, by Anat Admati and Martin Hellwig, *Princeton, RRP£19.95, 392 pages*

This is the most important book to have come out of the financial crisis. It argues, convincingly, that the problem with banks is that they operate with an order of magnitude too little equity capital, relative to their assets. Targeting return on equity, without consideration of risk, allows bankers to pay themselves egregiously, while making their institutions and the economy hugely unstable.

Why Growth Matters: How Economic Growth in India Reduced Poverty and the Lessons for Other Developing Countries, by Jagdish Bhagwati and Arvind Panagariya, *PublicAffairs, RRP£19.99, 304 pages*

Economic growth benefits the poor. That is the theme of this extremely important book. It is impossible to eliminate mass destitution in countries with low average incomes. So growth is a necessary condition for poverty alleviation. Is it also a sufficient condition? Again, yes, provided market-led liberalisation is sufficiently broad. Indian experience over the past two decades demonstrates this conclusively.

After the Music Stopped: The Financial Crisis, the Response, and the Work Ahead, by Alan Blinder, *Penguin Press, RRP$29.95, 496 pages*

This is the best account I have read of the US financial crisis. It offers a superbly written and rigorous analysis of what happened to the US financial system and of how policy makers responded. It makes for depressing reading, not least because the Federal Reserve and the federal government, which rescued the economy, have been turned into the villains of the story.

Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea, by Mark Blyth, *OUP, RRP£14.99, 224 pages*

Mark Blyth of Brown University has written a thought-provoking polemic against the policies of austerity, to which western governments have turned since 2010. He insists: "Austerity doesn't work. Period." The argument is overstated. But the central point is right: if closely intertwined countries all cut back on public spending, the outcome will be a deeper depression and more public debt.

When the Money Runs Out: The End of Western Affluence, by Stephen King, *Yale, RRP£20, 304 pages*

For many, the financial crisis is a temporary interruption in the rise of western prosperity that is due to easily remedied policy mistakes. The Keynesians believe this, as do anti-Keynesians on the free-market right. King argues, instead, that the future is not what it used to be. We have made promises to ourselves we cannot afford to keep. The argument is important, even if, like me, you are not persuaded.

The Great Convergence: Asia, the West and the Logic of One World, by Kishore Mahbubani, *PublicAffairs, RRP£17.99, 304 pages*

How could I not admire a book that quotes me, approvingly, on its first page? The Singaporean scholar-diplomat Kishore Mahbubani has written a sobering analysis of the political impact of the "great convergence" between the advanced western countries and the rest of the world. He argues that the rise of a global middle class requires matching political transformation. The outcome must be joint management of an increasingly interdependent world.

The End of Power: From Boardrooms to Battlefields and Churches to States, Why Being in Charge Isn't What It Used to Be, by Moisés Naím, *Basic Books, RRP£18.99, 320 pages*

Who is in charge? The answer given in this book is: nobody. The monopolies of coercion that characterised states, the potency of advanced militaries that created great powers, the barriers to entry that protected businesses, the media organisations that controlled information, the religious institutions that defined orthodoxy and the hierarchical parties that controlled democratic power are all losing control. Readers may disagree. They will be provoked.

Martin Wolf

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POLITICS

Foreign Policy Begins At Home: The Case for Putting America's House in Order, by Richard Haass, *Basic Books, RRP£17.99, 192 pages*

A new book from the president of the Council for Foreign Relations captures the intellectual mood that lies behind President Barack Obama's more cautious approach to US leadership. Haass argues that the foundations of American power need to be restored by concentrating on domestic priorities, such as infrastructure, education and the national debt.

Fragile Empire: How Russia Fell In and Out of Love with Vladimir Putin, by Ben Judah, *Yale, RRP£20, 400 pages*

A beautifully written and very lively study of Russia that argues that the political order created by Vladimir Putin is stagnating – undermined by corruption and a failure to modernise economically. Judah's reporting stretches from the Kremlin to Siberia and has a clear moral sense, without being preachy.

The Dispensable Nation: American Foreign Policy in Retreat, by Vali Nasr, *Doubleday, RRP$28.95, 320 pages*

Vali Nasr, a former official in the Obama administration, accuses the US president of undermining American leadership, particularly in the Middle East. He writes, "we have gone from leading everywhere to leading nowhere." You do not have to accept Nasr's argument (I don't) to find his insider's account compelling reading.

Presidential Leadership and the Creation of the American Era, by Joseph Nye, *Princeton, RRP£19.95, 200 pages*

A thoughtful analysis of different styles of presidential leadership in foreign affairs. Nye, a Harvard professor, is an enemy of the "vision thing", concluding that "there is little evidence ...that transformational foreign policy leaders are better in either ethics or effectiveness". His heroes are experienced pragmatists such as Eisenhower and the first Bush.

The Passage to Europe: How a Continent Became a Union, by Luuk van Middelaar, translated by Liz Waters, *Yale, RRP£25, 352 pages*

A study that is attracting a lot of attention among those trying to find a way out of the euro crisis. The author is a philosopher, historian and adviser to the president of the European Union. His book is slightly labyrinthine in structure, but full of interesting ideas. Van Middelaar rejects the idea that the EU must become a political union to survive.

Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography, Volume One: Not For Turning, by Charles Moore, Allen Lane, RRP£30, 896 pages

Published within weeks of Lady Thatcher's death, Charles Moore's biography is the product of many years of research. The author writes with elegance and wit, and his book has already been widely hailed as a classic work of political biography.

Gideon Rachman

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HISTORY

Revolutionary Iran: A History of the Islamic Republic, by Michael Axworthy, *Allen Lane, RRP£25, 528 pages*

Axworthy's book is a masterly history of Iran since the 1979 revolution that overthrew the shah and installed Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. A former head of the Iran desk at the UK's Foreign Office, Axworthy tells his tale with fairness, narrative skill and meticulous scholarship.

The Undivided Past: History Beyond Our Differences, by David Cannadine, *Allen Lane, RRP£20, 352 pages*

A distinguished British-born historian at Princeton, Cannadine warns of the political, social and cultural conflicts that arise from the use in historical writing of the rigid, divisive categories of religion, nation, class, gender, race and civilisation. A controversial but stimulating book.

Swans of the Kremlin: Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia, by Christina Ezrahi, *Dance Books, RRP£19.99, 338 pages*

Clement Crisp, the FT's dance critic, calls Ezrahi's book a "fascinating study of how the Imperial Russian Ballet lived on even after its sustaining social order had been swept away" in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution. As such, it is a book that deserves a readership beyond the world of ballet.

Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time, by Ira Katznelson, *WW Norton, RRP£22, 720 pages*

In a saturated academic field, Katznelson's book stands out as the most original work on the New Deal to appear in many years. The Columbia University professor explains how powerful politicians from the South saved US capitalism by helping to pass Franklin D Roosevelt's reforms – but reinforced their region's racial segregation.

Prague, Capital of the Twentieth Century: A Surrealist History, by Derek Sayer, *Princeton, RRP£24.95, 656 pages*

In this erudite, witty and well-illustrated book, Sayer restores Czech avant-garde art between the two world wars to its rightful position at the heart of European culture. A worthy successor to Sayer's much-praised *The Coasts of Bohemia* (1998), which traced the evolution of Czech identity down the centuries.

Leviathan: The Rise of Britain as a World Power, by David Scott, *HarperPress, RRP£26, 544 pages*

A sweeping and illuminating account of how English political tumult, economic progress and European overseas exploration drove Britain's emergence as an imperial power. Scott, a skilled narrator, takes his story from the start of the Tudor dynasty in 1485 to the definitive loss of the 13 American colonies in 1783.

Europe: The Struggle for Supremacy, 1453 to the Present, by Brendan Simms, *Allen Lane, RRP£30, 720 pages*

No book spanning more than five centuries of European history can cover all angles, so Simms concentrates on diplomacy, warfare and the domestic politics of the largest half a dozen states. The Cambridge university professor is especially strong on the British and German dimensions of his story.

The Battle of Bretton Woods: John Maynard Keynes, Harry Dexter White, and the Making of a New World Order, by Benn Steil, *Princeton, RRP£19.95, 472 pages*

An object lesson in how to make economic history at once entertaining and instructive. Director of international economics at the New York-based Council on Foreign Relations, Steil shows how espionage, political chicanery and bureaucratic skulduggery affected the US-led reconstruction of the world monetary order in the 1940s.

**The Undiscovered Country: ** Journeys Among the Dead, by Carl Watkins, *The Bodley Head, RRP£20, 336 pages*

A first-class, absorbing study of British attitudes to death and dying from the Middle Ages to the 20th century. Watkins, a Cambridge university-based expert on medieval religious culture, delivers a work of social history that is both scholarly and accessible to general readers.

Tony Barber

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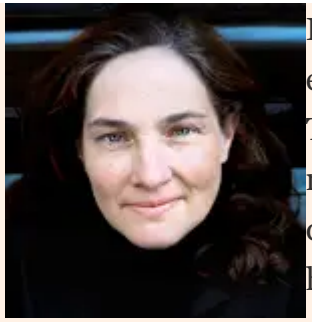
Lord Browne

Former chief executive of BP and author of 'Seven Elements that Have Changed the World' (Weidenfeld & Nicolson)

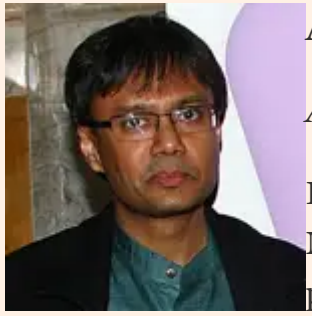
Donna Leon's *The Jewels of Paradise* (William Heinemann) demonstrates its author's deep understanding of Venice, and is an entertaining work that questions the changing values of life over the ages. Like life, it makes you wait to the end to understand the plot. A great departure for an author used to writing about Commissario Brunetti, who does not appear here.

AM Homes

Winner of the 2013 Women's Prize for 'Fiction for May We Be Forgiven' (Granta)



In *Bad Boy: My Life On and Off the Canvas* (Crown), Eric Fischl turns his eye squarely on himself and comes out with the best artist memoir in years. This is a candid exploration of a painter's evolution, the friendships and rivalries of his rise to fame in the 1980s art world, and his relationship with a dysfunctional family – the story of a man struggling to make peace with his history and himself.



Amit Chaudhuri

Author of 'Calcutta' (Union Books)

I was in Oxford when I spotted the Penguin reissue of *All Souls*, Javier Marías's novel about his time there as a lecturer in Spanish; perversely, I purchased a later novel, *Dark Back of Time*, which is about the reception of the earlier book. Marías makes great use of a familiar confusion: that, given the resemblances between the narrator of *All Souls* (a lecturer in Spanish at Oxford) and its author, many readers decided they were the same. Its principal provenance seems to me to be Barthes' remark on Proust's use of autobiographical material: "By a radical reversal, instead of putting his life into his novel ...he made of his very life a work for which his own book was the model."

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SCIENCE

Seven Elements That Have Changed the World, by John Browne, *Weidenfeld & Nicholson, RRP£20, 304 pages*

Where would we be without iron, carbon, gold, silver, uranium, titanium and silicon? Browne, chief executive of BP during the energy company's golden age from 1995 to 2007, blends science and engineering with history and personal reminiscence in this lucid guide to seven ubiquitous chemical elements.

Stuff Matters: The Strange Stories of the Marvellous Materials that Shape Our Man-Made World, by Mark Miodownik, *Viking, RRP£18, 272 pages*

Miodownik, a materials science professor, brings his subject vividly to life. The book grips from its opening sequence, when a razor-wielding madman slashes the back of a teenage Miodownik on the London Underground – an episode that excites his interest first in steel and then in other man-made materials.

Creation: The Origin of Life / The Future of Life, by Adam Rutherford, *Viking, RRP£20, 272 pages*

Rutherford presents the "prequel and sequel" to Darwinian evolution, through a "flip book" of two halves. The first tells of how life got started on Earth 4bn years ago, the second of how we are engineering new life forms. The format may be gimmicky but the exposition is excellent.

The Annotated and Illustrated Double Helix, by James Watson, *Simon & Schuster, RRP£19.99, 368 pages*

Watson's 1968 memoir of his discovery of the DNA double helix with Francis Crick has become a classic. This updated edition will fascinate historians of science.

The Physics of Finance: Predicting the Unpredictable: Can Science Beat the Market?, by James Owen Weatherall, *Short Books RRP£12.99, 288 pages*

An entertaining account of the contributions made by physicists and mathematicians to finance. It starts in fin de siècle Paris with Louis Bachelier's "random walk" model, runs through the blackjack tables of Las Vegas, and ends with today's Renaissance Technologies fund.

Clive Cookson

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SPORT

The Numbers Game: Why Everything You Know About Football Is Wrong, by Chris Anderson and David Sally, *Viking, £12.99, 384 pages*

Two US-based academics show how "Big Data" is changing soccer. They use stats to explain how football is a "weakest-link" game (oafs have more impact on results than do superstars); the enormous role of luck in football matches; and how stats will help keepers and defenders to equal strikers' earnings at last.

Eleven Rings: The Soul of Success, by Phil Jackson and Hugh Delehanty, *Penguin Press, $27.95, 368 pages*

Jackson isn't just a revered American basketball coach; this son of Pentecostal ministers is also a man of the spirit. In a pleasantly told memoir-cum-leadership manual, he explains how Zen Buddhism, Sioux philosophy and modern psychology helped him reach players such as Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant.

When Friday Comes: Football, War and Revolution in the Middle East, by James Montague, *De Coubertin Books, £16.99, 352 pages*

This lively and well-informed travel memoir first appeared in 2008, but since then the Arab spring, Qatar's winning bid to host the 2022 World Cup, and Gulf takeovers of western clubs have provided excellent new material. After rival Egyptian football fans helped unseat President Hosni Mubarak, the updated edition is just what football literature needs.

Calon: A Journey to the Heart of Welsh Rugby, by Owen Sheers, *Faber £14.99, 208 pages*

Sheers spent a year as writer-in-residence at the Welsh Rugby Union, just as little Wales won the Six Nations complete with Grand Slam. He had remarkable access to the players, in their modern world of cryotherapy and colostrum, but also followed the groundsmen who tend the pitch. A lovely story told with ease and grace.

Simon Kuper

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FILM

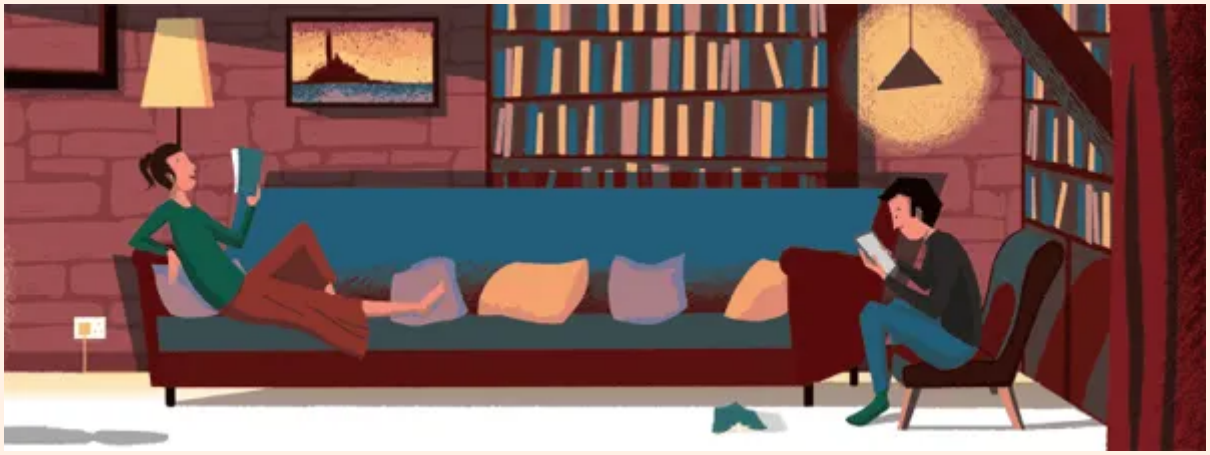
Sleepless in Hollywood: Tales from the New Abnormal in the Movie Business, by Lynda Obst, *Simon & Schuster, $26 304 pages*

Obst, a New York Times editor turned film producer, is by turns romantic and cynical about the movies, which sounds about right. She decries the trend towards cinematic gigantism, and explains how the superheroes usurped the stars of the romcom: it was down to the collapse of the DVD market, and the studios turning their attentions to blockbusters with plenty of "pre-awareness". The critique can feel a little watered down but this is still a welcome note of dissent from inside the megalomaniacal dream factory.

Into The Woods: A Five Act Journey Into Story, by John Yorke, *Particular Books, £16.99, 336 pages*

There is no end of books that instruct us on how to write the perfect screenplay, but few that delve more deeply into the art of storytelling than this erudite volume. Yorke is responsible in part for some of the most compelling UK television drama of the past decade, straddling populist serials such as *Casualty* and distinguished award-winners such as *Bodies*. He sees a pattern in our longing for narrative, and his deconstructions are fluently argued.

Peter Aspden



ART

Le Corbusier: An Atlas of Modern Landscapes, edited by Jean-Louis Cohen, *Thames & Hudson, £49.95, 406 pages*

The lavish catalogue to this summer's landmark MoMA exhibition. Its starting point is Le Corbusier's proposition that "the outside is always an inside"; the book explores how, across five continents, the pioneering architect responded to specific geographies and developed intense relationships with the sites his buildings transformed.

The Glory of Byzantium and Early Christendom, by Antony Eastmond, *Phaidon, £59.95, 304 pages*

In Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium", forms of "hammered gold and gold enamelling" are rich enough to "keep a drowsy Emperor awake". So is this sumptuous book: revealing major icons, mosaics, and paintings in locations from Aleppo and Bethlehem to Venice and Yerevan, it is a definitive account of how Byzantine culture gloriously expressed immaterial values through material wealth.

A Century of Israeli Art, by Yigal Zalmona, *Lund Humphries, £45, 512 pages*

This first ever survey of the first century of Israeli art is compelling, scholarly, well nuanced – some Palestinian artists are included – beautifully produced and, in Zalmona's far-reaching approach tracing how a nation's history is both echoed and challenged by its art, of broad political as well as aesthetic significance.

Jackie Wullschlager

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ARCHITECTURE

The Invention of Craft, by Glenn Adamson, *Bloomsbury Academic, £16.99, 272 pages*

Adamson, head of research at the Victoria and Albert Museum, argues that the notion of craft having been destroyed by the industrial revolution is quite wrong. Instead, he suggests in this engaging, provocative book, the 19th century was a high point for the crafts – both in their involvement in industry (the myriad models and tools needed for all those new products) and in the explosion in luxury goods for the new industrial bourgeoisie.

Modernism London Style, by Niels Lehmannn, edited by Christoph Rauhut, *Hirmer Verlag £39.95, 216 pages*

London is not known for its contribution to modernism. But this gorgeous photographic survey suggests there is a coherent, if occasionally stodgy, classical *moderne* that is as lasting as its better-known counterparts on the continent. From the brick cliff of Battersea Power Station to seductively streamlined social housing, Lehmann's black-and-white photos survey a city of barely noticed but fantastically inventive modernity.

Architecture on the Carpet: The Curious Tale of Construction Toys and the Genesis of Modern Buildings, by Robert and Brenda Vale, *Thames & Hudson, £19.95, 208 pages*

This quirky book attempts to trace the roots of the various approaches to modern architecture to the construction toys architects might have played with in their childhoods. Mostly ludicrously speculative, it is nevertheless nerdily entertaining and really gets into gear on the Meccano that exerted such an obvious aesthetic influence on the careers of Richard Rogers and Norman Foster.

Edwin Heathcote

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CLASSICAL

The Show Must Go On: On tour with the LSO in 1912 and 2012, by Gareth Davies, *Elliott & Thompson, £14.99, 256 pages*

In 1912 the London Symphony Orchestra became the first European orchestra to tour the US. Gareth Davies, principal flute for the past 13 years, combs archive material to tell the story of that visit, setting his account alongside impressions of the LSO's touring schedule today – a gentle dip into a musician's high-pressure lifestyle.

Benjamin Britten: A Life in the Twentieth Century, by Paul Kildea, *Allen Lane, £30, 688 pages*

Letters from a Life: The Selected Letters of Benjamin Britten, Volume Six, 1966-1976, edited by Philip Reed and Mervyn Cooke, *Boydell Press, £45, 880 pages*

The upcoming centenary of Britten's birth (November 22) has opened up a wealth of illuminating detail. Kildea's life-and-works volume is the most comprehensive study written about Britten's world. Authoritative but never narrowly academic, the book is hard to put down. The last volume of Britten's letters, a voluminously annotated traversal of the final decade of his life, is scarcely less revealing. Beneath a polite veneer, the ailing composer comes across as a man in a hurry to beat the Grim Reaper to the finishing line.

The Love and Wars of Lina Prokofiev, by Simon Morrison, *Vintage, £18.99, 384 pages*

This is the riveting story of Sergei Prokofiev's Spanish-born, US-educated wife, whom he married in 1923 in the west and deserted in 1941 in Moscow. Left to fend for herself in a hostile Soviet environment, she spent eight years in a gulag, eventually dying in London at the age of 91 in 1989.

Andrew Clark

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POP

Ziggyology, by Simon Goddard, *Ebury Press, £20, 352 pages*

After the comeback and the V&A retrospective comes Bowie fatigue. Do we need more adulation? Well, yes – when it's as imaginatively presented and obsessively researched as Goddard's cultural history of Ziggy Stardust, a self-styled act of "pop archaeology" excavating Ziggy's myriad influences, from Beethoven to *2001: A Space Odyssey* and beyond.

Energy Flash: A Journey Through Rave Music and Dance Culture, by Simon Reynolds, *Faber, £20, 560 pages*

Originally published in 1998, Reynolds' superb dance music survey ended with the Prodigy leading the "electronica revolution" in the US. A false dawn: the real revolution came in the 2010s with American youths going potty for "electronic dance music". An apt time to reboot *Energy Flash*: a new chapter covers the rise of EDM and dubstep.

Bedsit Disco Queen: How I Grew Up and Tried to be a Pop Star, by Tracey Thorn, *Virago, £16.99, 384 pages*

Thorn's observant and intelligent memoir is in the mould of her band Everything But The Girl. *Bedsit Disco Queen* charts the Hull University English Literature graduate's ascendancy to a sort-of pop stardom in the post-punk 1980s, proving (like Thorn's idol Morrissey) that the decade of glitz also specialised in clever music about feelings.

Ludovic Hunter-Tilney

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GARDENS

Ginkgo: The Tree that Time Forgot, by Peter Crane, *Yale, £25, 400 pages*

Ginkgo cranei, an extinct species of the family, is named after the author who lived beside the UK's oldest Ginkgo while he was director of Kew Gardens. This qualification is dwarfed by the depth of Crane's knowledge and the sparkle of his prose. He also reminds us why conservation matters: "Letting species go extinct when we have the power to intervene is like letting a library burn just when we are learning how to read …"

The Mystery of the Hanging Garden of Babylon: An Elusive World Wonder Traced, by Stephanie Dalley, *OUP, £25, 304 pages*

Did it exist? Yes, according to Dalley, but at Nineveh not Babylon. She leads a journey from Nebuchadnezzar back to Sennacherib, from sculpted grottoes and springs along channels and aqueducts to the great cast bronze screws that lifted the water to the gardens. An erudite adventure story.

The Drunken Botanist: The Plants That Create the World's Great Drinks, by Amy Stewart, *Timber Press, £14.99, 368 pages*

Well informed and completely mad, this guide to the botany of booze includes cocktail recipes as well as the recipe for a toxic-sounding drink that supposedly supports a flagging sex life. A trailer on Stewart's websitegives an indication of the madness.

Jane Owen

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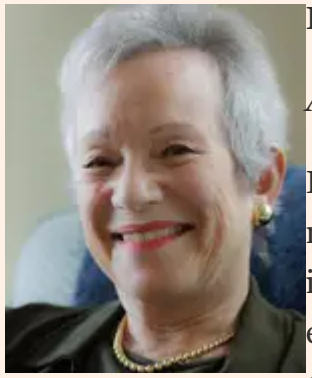

Edith Pearlman

Author of 'Binocular Vision' (Pushkin)

In *The Peabody Sisters*, Megan Marshall introduced me and countless other readers to three strong-minded American feminists of the 19th century. Now, in *Margaret Fuller: A New American Life* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt), she extends our acquaintance of this remarkable circle. Fuller, political and social critic, adventurer, tragic victim, becomes in this compelling biography our heroine ...and our intimate.

Caroline Daniel

Editor of FT Weekend

How I could have lived my life without having read George Saunders, I have no idea. I almost never read short stories, yet I devoured his collection *Tenth of December* (Bloomsbury) on a bus, between meetings, perhaps even during one. These are dark, caustically funny, contemporary and memorable tales, all set in a weird near-future, where a parent's desire to please a child with an overpriced gift means buying real people to use as lawn decorations. Despite the edgy sci-fi mood, humanity wins in the end.