

November 29, 2013 6:16 pm

Books of the Year

From the Great War to the gardens of Venice, the best books of 2013 as chosen by FT writers and guests



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/\$29.95

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 vastly insufficient levels of 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/\$28.99

Economic growth benefits the poor: that is this book's theme. 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. India's 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*, RRP\$29.95

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 how policy makers responded. It makes for depressing reading, not least because the Federal Reserve and the government, which rescued the economy, have been turned into the story's villains.

Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea, by Mark Blyth, *OUP*, RRP£14.99/\$24.95

"Austerity doesn't work. Period", Blyth says. The argument is overstated. But the central point is right: if closely intertwined countries all cut 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/\$20

For many, the financial crisis is a temporary interruption in the rise of western prosperity, caused by easily remedied mistakes. 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/\$26.99

How could I not admire a book that quotes me on its first page? Mahbubani has written a sobering analysis of the "great convergence" between advanced western countries and the rest of the world. He argues that the rise of a global middle class requires matching political transformation.

Money: The Unauthorised Biography, by Felix Martin, *Bodley Head*, RRP£20

Economists have long been dangerously wrong about the nature of money, says Martin. He argues that money is not, in essence, currency, used as a “means of exchange”. It is, on the contrary, a unit of value, a system of accounts and transferable credit. Indeed, “whilst all money is credit, not all credit is money: it is the possibility of transfer that makes the difference”.



The Entrepreneurial State: Debunking Public vs Private Sector Myths, by Mariana Mazzucato, *Anthem Press*, RRP£13.99/\$18.95

Mazzucato’s fascinating book reads as if it were a response to the radical individualism of Edmund Phelps (see below). She argues that the state alone can support the long-term science-based innovation upon which economic progress increasingly depends. She provides compelling examples, particularly the US Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency and the National Institutes of Health.

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/\$27.99

Who is in charge? This book says nobody. The monopolies of coercion that characterised states, the potency of advanced militaries, the media organisations that controlled information, and the religious institutions that defined orthodoxy are all losing control. Readers may disagree; they will be provoked.

The Climate Casino: Risk, Uncertainty, and Economics for a Warming World, by William Nordhaus, *Yale*, RRP£20/\$30

Climate change is the biggest collective challenge in human history. Nordhaus argues persuasively that the right policy cannot be to do nothing. The question is whether humanity has the wisdom and the capacity to do what is needed.

Avoiding the Fall: China’s Economic Restructuring, by Michael Pettis, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, RRP£13.99/\$19.95

Pettis, professor of finance at Peking University, has long been the most thought-provoking of the “China bears”. He argues that the Asian giant’s investment-led development is unsustainable. The economy must be rebalanced towards consumption. If done successfully, growth will slow. If not, it will collapse.

Mass Flourishing: How Grassroots Innovation Created Jobs, Challenge, and Change, by Edmund Phelps, *Princeton*, RRP£19.95/\$29.95

Phelps, a Nobel laureate in economics, defies categorisation. In this extraordinary book – part history, part economics and part philosophy – he proclaims individual enterprise as the defining characteristic of modernity. But he fears this dynamism is lost. One does not have to agree to recognise that Phelps has addressed some of the big questions about our future.

The War of the Sexes: How Conflict and Cooperation Have Shaped Men and Women from Prehistory to the Present, by Paul Seabright, *Princeton*, RRP£12.50/\$17.95

With characteristic brilliance, Seabright uses biology, sociology, anthropology and economics to explain the war of the sexes. Men and women must co-operate to bring their offspring to maturity and conflict is inherent. Yet today opportunities for more successful and equal relations between the sexes are greater than ever before.

The Road to Recovery: How and Why Economic Policy Must Change, by Andrew Smithers, *Wiley*, RRP£18.99/\$29.95

Smithers is among the most penetrating economic and financial analysts. He argues that the economic malaise afflicting Japan, the UK and the US is structural, not cyclical. An essential element is the huge financial surplus of the corporate sector. In the US and UK, this is largely because of the bonus culture, which motivates management to focus on the short-term returns.

Selections by Martin Wolf

...

BUSINESS

The Org: The Underlying Logic of the Office, by Ray Fisman and Tim Sullivan, *Twelve*, RRP\$26.99

Fisman and Sullivan lead us through the organisational structure that governs the working lives of so many. In what reads like a tribute to the late Nobel Prize-winner Ronald Coase, who explained why companies exist, they outline why “the org” is important, even in a world of web-connected networks and home-workers.

Give and Take: A Revolutionary Approach to Success, by Adam Grant, *Weidenfeld & Nicolson*, RRP£20/*Viking*, RRP\$27.95

The assumption that winner takes all is brilliantly dismantled by Grant, who uses his and others’ research to show that “givers” can come out on top if they do not allow themselves to be trampled by “takers”. The virtuous circle of generosity has profound implications for behaviour.

Making It Happen: Fred Goodwin, RBS and the Men Who Blew Up the British Economy, by Iain Martin, *Simon & Schuster*, RRP£20/\$34.95

Martin fleshes out the story of the Royal Bank of Scotland with new detail on the arrogant Fred Goodwin’s obsessive leadership. He describes a man who fretted over minutiae – the colour of the company cars, the cleanliness of the bank’s branches – while the group careened towards disaster.

The Billionaire’s Apprentice: The Rise of the Indian-American Elite and the Fall of the Galleon Hedge Fund, by Anita Raghavan, *Business Plus*, RRP\$29

Raghavan digs into the insider trading scandal at Galleon. Perpetrators – notably Galleon founder Raj Rajaratnam and former McKinsey boss Rajat Gupta – and prosecutors are bound together in a tale of hubris and temptation.

Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead, by Sheryl Sandberg, *WH Allen*, RRP£16.99/*Knopf*, RRP\$24.95

This manifesto for the advancement of women in the workplace, by Facebook’s chief operating officer, continues to stir discussion about corporate gender balance. Not everyone agrees with her approach, which emphasises the role of individuals in effecting change, but she ensures nobody can ignore the debate.

Writing on the Wall: Social Media – The First 2,000 Years, by Tom Standage, *Bloomsbury*, RRP£14.99/\$26

Standage’s thesis is that social media date to at least the Roman era, when Cicero’s letters were copied for distribution. This witty account of social media’s evolution contains a hard truth for those in mainstream media: the authoritative one-way broadcast of news and opinion is a 150-year aberration that is soon to end.

The Everything Store: Jeff Bezos and the Age of Amazon, by Brad Stone, *Bantam Press*, RRP£18.99/*Little, Brown*, RRP\$28

Stone entertainingly maps Bezos’s life and personality on to the company he built, showing him to be a wily entrepreneur. The winner of the 2013 Financial Times & Goldman Sachs Business Book of the Year Award.

Selections by Andrew Hill

...



Lionel Barber, *Editor of the Financial Times*

There are many good books that mark next year’s centenary of the outbreak of the first world war, notably Christopher Clark’s *The Sleepwalkers* (Penguin, 2012) and Max Hastings’ *Catastrophe* (William Collins). Margaret MacMillan’s monumental *The War That Ended Peace* (Profile) must rank at the top of the pile. The great-granddaughter of wartime British prime minister David Lloyd George, MacMillan is particularly strong on the causes of the war and the miscalculations of the main players, who were often driven by a misplaced national pride. If you liked her earlier study of the flawed Treaty of Versailles and the making of the modern world, you will love this sharply observed, pacy book.



Bill Gates, *Chairman of Microsoft*

Marc Levinson’s *The Box: How the Shipping Container Made the World Smaller and the World Economy Bigger* (Princeton) was published in 2006 but I read it just this year, around the time I visited the Panama Canal. A book about metal boxes may not sound like a thrill ride, but Levinson keeps it moving with compelling characters and surprising details. He unravels the history of how the shipping container revolutionised the way the world does business, affecting everything from shipping times to the depth of ports. A helpful guide to one of the cornerstones of globalisation. I won’t look at a cargo ship in quite the same way again.

...

HISTORY

The Forgotten Presidents: Their Untold Constitutional Legacy, by Michael Gerhardt, *OUP*, RRP£22.99/\$34.95

An engaging and original study of US constitutional history, focusing on the eras of 13 lesser-known presidents such as Millard Fillmore and Chester Arthur. Gerhardt, professor of constitutional law at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, claims he has never had so much fun writing a book as he did with this one.

Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time, by Ira Katznelson, *WW Norton*, RRP£22/\$29.95

Katznelson's book offers the freshest perspective on the New Deal for many years. The Columbia University professor recounts how powerful Southern congressmen rescued US capitalism by passing Franklin D Roosevelt's reforms – at the price of reinforcing racial segregation.

The War That Ended Peace: How Europe Abandoned Peace for the First World War, by Margaret MacMillan, *Profile*, RRP£25/*Random House*, RRP\$35

As Europe approaches the 100th anniversary of the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, MacMillan's book is the most balanced and readable study of the first world war's causes. The Canadian historian's talent for selecting the most telling anecdotes and quotations is on fine display.

China's War with Japan, 1937-1945: The Struggle for Survival, by Rana Mitter, *Allen Lane*, RRP£25

This is an admirably incisive and humane account of a war that devastated China, contributed to the 1949 communist takeover and continues to weigh heavily on Chinese-Japanese relations today. Mitter, professor of Chinese history and politics at Oxford university, is especially strong on Chiang Kai-shek and his Nationalist regime.

The Plough That Broke the Steppes: Agriculture and Environment on Russia's Grasslands, 1700-1914, by David Moon, *OUP*, RRP£65/\$125

Rare is the book that casts Russian history in an almost wholly new light. The York university professor tells the environmental history of Russia's steppes up to the 20th century, drawing on his own field work in the region and an array of printed sources.

Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century, by Geoffrey Parker, *Yale*, RRP £29.99/\$40

A work of formidable erudition and scope from a renowned British authority on early modern history. Parker, based at Ohio State University, examines the extreme climatic conditions that accompanied and, to a hitherto underestimated extent, caused political and economic upheavals in the 17th century.

Prague, Capital of the Twentieth Century: A Surrealist History, by Derek Sayer, *Princeton*, RRP£24.95/\$35

In this thoughtful, witty and well-illustrated book, Sayer restores Czech avant-garde art between the two world wars to the central place it occupied in European culture before the Nazi and communist onslaughts. A worthy successor to the same author's *The Coasts of Bohemia* (1998), which traced the historical evolution of Czech culture.

Rebranding Rule: The Restoration and Revolution Monarchy, 1660-1714, by Kevin Sharpe, *Yale*, RRP£45/\$65

The third and final volume in Sharpe's superb series on how the British monarchy projected its public image in Tudor and Stuart times. Sadly, Sharpe, who ended his distinguished career at Queen Mary, University of London, died before this book was published.

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/\$29.95

Steil's book is an object lesson in how to make economic history entertaining and instructive. He shows how world war, bureaucratic skulduggery in Washington and early cold war espionage shaped the global monetary order in the 1940s.

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

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

Selections by Tony Barber

...



POLITICS

The Blood Telegram: Nixon, Kissinger, and a Forgotten Genocide, by Gary Bass, *Knopf*, RRP\$30

An account of the US role in the massacres in Bangladesh in 1971 might sound like an obscure episode of diplomatic history. In the hands of Gary Bass, a Princeton academic, it is a riveting read with direct relevance to many of the most acute foreign-policy debates of today – in particular how democracies should respond to mass atrocities, and the trade-off between idealism and realpolitik.

Angela Merkel: A Chancellorship Forged in Crisis, by Alan Crawford and Tony Czuczka, *Wiley*, RRP£19.99/*Bloomberg*, RRP\$29.95

After her electoral victory this year, Angela Merkel is undoubtedly Europe's dominant political figure. This study analyses the German chancellor through the prism of the euro-crisis. It argues that the secret of her success is a cautious, deliberative style – combined with sharp political instincts.

In It Together: The Inside Story of the Coalition Government, by Matthew d'Ancona, *Viking*, RRP£25

The British are not used to coalition governments and many gave the Tory-Lib Dem arrangement little chance of serving a full term, particularly given the weak economy they inherited. D'Ancona explains why the coalition has worked, and explores the personalities and policies behind this improbable success.

India Grows At Night: A Liberal Case for a Strong State, by Gurcharan Das, *Allen Lane*, RRP£19.99/*Penguin Global*, RRP\$25

Das, a former businessman, was one of the first public intellectuals to analyse the rise of modern India following the economic reforms of the 1990s. He returns to the fray, arguing that, to keep developing, India needs a state that is simultaneously smaller and stronger.

Strategy: A History, by Lawrence Freedman, *OUP USA*, RRP£25/\$34.95

The word "strategy" is much used and abused by businessmen, politicians and military men. Freedman offers a wide-ranging, scholarly and entertaining history of the concept. He ranges from David and Goliath to Peter Drucker, by way of Marx and Machiavelli – and emphasises the importance of responding flexibly to events.

Double Down: The Explosive Inside Account of the 2012 Presidential Election, by Mark Halperin and John Heilemann, *WH Allen*, RRP£20/*Penguin*, RRP\$29.95

Halperin and Heilemann wrote the classic account of the 2008 presidential election campaign that swept Barack Obama to the White House. They are back with a book on the 2012 poll – a less dramatic election, but still full of human drama. The authors' ability to get inside the campaigns and dramatise them makes the book essential reading for those addicted to US politics.

The Dispensable Nation: American Foreign Policy in Retreat, by Vali Nasr, *Scribe*, RRP£18.99/*Doubleday*, RRP\$28.95

Since it was published earlier this year, Nasr's argument that US foreign policy is "in retreat" has gained in strength, as Obama's reluctance to intervene in the Middle East has become increasingly evident. Nasr's account of policy debates within the administration is fascinating and his portrait of the direction of US foreign policy convincing – although his prescriptions did not convince this non-interventionist reviewer.

The Unwinding: An Inner History of the New America, by George Packer, *Faber*, RRP£20/*Farrar, Straus and Giroux*, RRP\$27

A downbeat take on the US that sees an economy and society increasingly divided into winners and losers. Packer is a gifted storyteller – this work won a National Book Award. Even readers who do not completely buy his thesis are likely to find his

reporting compelling

The China Choice: Why We Should Share Power, by Hugh White, *OUP*, RRP£16.99/\$24.95

A short, incisive and original book about the most important question in modern politics: how should the US respond to the rise of China? White, an Australian academic, argues that the US's current approach is dangerously confrontational and suggests an approach that would grant China equal footing in the Asia-Pacific region.

Selections by Gideon Rachman

...

SCIENCE

An Appetite for Wonder: The Making of a Scientist, by Richard Dawkins, *Bantam Press*, RRP£20/*Ecco*, RRP\$27.99

Dawkins, militant atheist and imaginative evolutionary biologist, is in uncharacteristically mellow mood in this memoir of the first part of his life – from childhood in colonial east Africa to the publication of *The Selfish Gene*, the book that made his name. He gets in a few digs at organised Christianity but, on the whole, humour and humanity shine through.

Population 10 Billion: The Coming Demographic Crisis and How to Survive it, by Danny Dorling, *Constable*, RRP£8.99

Dorling, an Oxford geography professor, takes a cheerful and positive view of global population rising towards 10bn. An enlightening riposte to “angry pessimists” who think we are doomed and “rational optimists” who think everything will turn out all right.

Stuff Matters: The Strange Stories of the Marvellous Materials that Shape Our Man-Made World, by Mark Miodownik, *Viking*, RRP£18.99

Miodownik, materials scientist and master communicator, uses his life to illustrate the stuff of modern life, from steel and glass to chocolate. Hard science is there – but coated in palatable personal anecdotes.

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

In a book of two contrasting halves, Rutherford tells us how life might have started on the young Earth and then – leaping past about 4bn years of Darwinian evolution – how humans are beginning to engineer new forms of life through synthetic biology. Ignore the gimmicky flip-book format and enjoy the excellent content.

Life at the Speed of Light: From the Double Helix to the Dawn of Digital Life, by J Craig Venter, *Little, Brown*, RRP£20/*Viking*, RRP\$26.95

Craig Venter, genomics pioneer and superstar of molecular biology, outlines his quest to create life from scratch. He explains the science with rigour and clarity – and also tackles more philosophical questions about the nature of life.

Selections by Clive Cookson

...

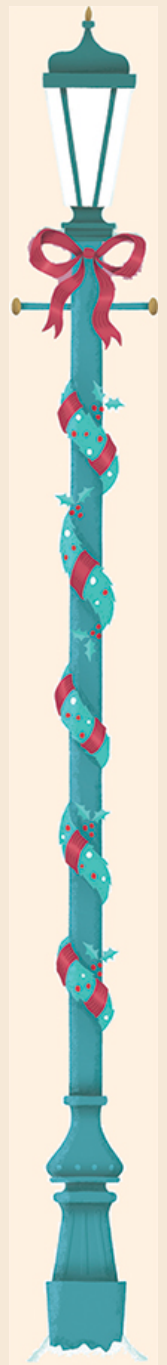
SPORT

Stillness and Speed: My Story, by Dennis Bergkamp, *Simon & Schuster*, RRP£20

This has been an excellent year for football autobiographies. The Dutch ex-footballer, who helped transform Arsenal and English football in the 1990s, has produced what he considers a “non-autobiography”. It's not an exploration of his life and psyche, but a highly thoughtful attempt to explain his unique way of playing and seeing the game.

The Sports Gene: What Makes the Perfect Athlete, by David Epstein, *Yellow Jersey Press*, RRP£16.99/*Current*, RRP\$26.95

This subtle, enthralling study by the *Sports Illustrated* writer avoids making excessive claims for genetics. There are no single genes that make you run fast or hit a ball well. However, genetics does help to explain sporting success. Almost all professional baseball players, for instance, have unusually good eyesight.



Alex Ferguson: My Autobiography, by Alex Ferguson, *Hodder & Stoughton*, RRP£25/\$29.95

Ferguson offers insights into the players he managed during his 27 years with Manchester United and into some opposing managers. The Scotsman rightly praises himself as an observer of people. However, this is not a management book. Ferguson's style was instinctive and is not easily copied.

Immortal: The Approved Biography of George Best, by Duncan Hamilton, *Century*, RRP£20

Hamilton is a guarantee of quality: two of his previous biographies won the William Hill award for sports book of the year. Here his research strips away the myth to reveal the human Best, the brilliant Manchester United winger destroyed by alcoholism. Hamilton doesn't quite get inside Best's head, but then perhaps nobody ever did.

I Am Zlatan Ibrahimovic, by Zlatan Ibrahimovic, *Penguin*, RRP£8.99

The brilliant Swedish striker has written a compelling immigrant's tale, starting with his childhood in a broken home in a ghetto in Malmö. The book sold millions of copies around Europe, and got a whole generation of Swedish boys reading, before finally appearing in English.

Selections by Simon Kuper

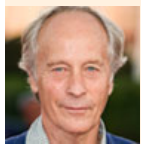
...



Lucy Kellaway

FT columnist and associate editor

In 1982 Nina Stibbe moved from Leicester to Camden Town to look after the children of Mary-Kay Wilmers, editor of the London Review of Books. *Love, Nina: Despatches from Family Life* (Viking) is a collection of letters she wrote to her sister describing the hilarious comings and goings of the north London literary set, including Alan Bennett (whom she thinks is an actor on *Coronation Street*) and Jonathan Miller (whom she thinks is an opera singer). Gentle and sharp, the book is full of terrible food and great insights on subjects ranging from hidden rubbish bins (good) to Geoffrey Chaucer (bad).



Richard Ford

Author of 'Canada' (Bloomsbury)

All That Is by James Salter (Picador) is, no question, the best novel I read this year – by a lot. Yes, yes, of course... the sentences. But then... the sentences. As well as the large historical vision from the 1950s to now; New York and Paris deliciously evoked; wonderful louts of both the male and female varieties; some extremely bad behaviour going nicely unpunished. And continuous authorial decisions about just what happens next that'll absolutely drop your jaw in admiration.

...

ART

Lowry and the Painting of Modern Life, by TJ Clark and Anne Wagner, *Tate Publishing*, RRP£19.99

This smart volume accompanying Tate's recent and radical re-evaluation of Lowry is delightfully atypical of exhibition catalogues: though extensively illustrated, it is compact, readable and intellectually fresh. Clark, a Marxist, writes with real feeling about painterly qualities and social context; Wagner brings an American outsider's angle. A perfect, clever stocking-filler.

Picasso and Truth: From Cubism to Guernica, by TJ Clark, *Princeton*, RRP£29.95/\$45

Marxism and cubism are a difficult mix, but Clark pulls off a brilliant art-historical analysis, arguing that to question the limitations of modernism is "not a judgment brought to the period's masterpieces from outside" but "the judgment of the masterpieces on themselves". The most original book on Picasso for years.

The Letters of Paul Cézanne, edited by Alex Danchev, *Thames & Hudson*, RRP£29.95/J Paul Getty Museum, RRP\$39.95

Newly translated, these vivid, engrossing complete letters – some published for the first time – reveal a more multifaceted Cézanne than the self-doubting recluse of myth: tormented but also lucid, wry, courteous, funny, and thrillingly frank about his creative life. The most moving correspondence by an artist that I have read.

The Glory of Byzantium and Early Christendom, by Antony Eastmond, *Phaidon*, RRP£59.95/\$95

The intriguing empire – dynamic, cosmopolitan, bizarre – comes to life in this lavish account of major icons, mosaics and paintings from Aleppo and Bethlehem to Venice and Yerevan. Underlying the magnificence is the paradox of how Byzantine culture sought to express immaterial values through material wealth.

The King's Pictures: The Formation and Dispersal of the Collections of Charles I and His Courtiers, by Francis Haskell, Yale, RRP£30/\$60

A connoisseur's volume: the story of the European dispersal of Charles I's incomparable Old Master collection – Titian, Raphael, Leonardo – in exchanges determined by volatile political fortunes. Haskell was a pioneer who expanded art history to include patronage and collecting. This study, in his usual lively, engaging style, appears posthumously.

Masterpieces of Chinese Painting: 700-1900, edited by Zhang Hongxing, V&A Publishing, RRP£40/\$60

The world's oldest painting tradition explored in the glorious catalogue to the V&A's current, once-in-a-lifetime survey. Luminous feathery landscapes predating impressionism by a millennium; images dovetailed with poems in "slender gold" calligraphy on 1,000-year-old scrolls: such works transform our view of Chinese art, emphasising individuality, personal expression and painterly conviction.

Breakfast at Sotheby's: An A-Z of the Art World, by Philip Hook, Particular Books, RRP£20

How to nail the mad, bad, crazy contemporary art world in print? Sotheby's senior director Hook draws on 35 years' experience in this informal memoir. He unravels, with humour, piquancy and erudition, what drives the economics of taste.

Japonisme and the Rise of the Modern Art Movement: The Arts of the Meiji Period, by Gregory Irvine, Thames & Hudson, RRP£45/\$75

A persuasive, sumptuous exploration of Japanese influence on western modernism. Whistler and Van Gogh ("all my work is founded on Japanese art") were famously indebted to oriental models; pairings of paintings by Monet, Manet and Degas with Japanese works, and discussions of gold-adorned Klimt and sexy Schiele, are revelatory.

Selections by Jackie Wullschlager

...

ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN

The Library: A World History, by James Campbell, photographs by Will Pryce, Thames & Hudson, RRP£48/University of Chicago, RRP\$75

Libraries are peculiarly photogenic and, while there's nothing particularly new about a big collection of pictures of rooms made of books, there always seems to be space for one more on my shelf.

Adhocism: The Case for Improvisation, by Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver, MIT Press, RRP£17.95/\$24.95

An expanded edition of a 1972 book, which now appears prescient, this is an exploration of an idea of design that blends Dada, high-tech and DIY. The result is close to contemporary ideas about hacking and mass customisation.

The View from the Train: Cities and Other Landscapes, by Patrick Keiller, Verso, RRP£14.99/\$26.95

Keiller is Britain's most observant and provocative film-maker around the subject of cities and the landscape. In these wonderful essays, he explores the political and cultural forces behind how the UK looks.

Soviet Modernism 1955-1991: Unknown History, by Katharina Ritter, Ekaterina Shapiro-Obermair and Alexandra Wachter, Park Books, RRP£45.50/\$65

Among the familiar images of dreary housing projects and bleak plazas designed more for military parades than everyday life, the achievements of Soviet architecture have been forgotten. This book is a wonderful trip around the edges of the empire, from the Baltic and the Caucasus to the Central Asian states, documenting some buildings of real invention and faith in the future.

Art & Place: Site-Specific Art of the Americas, Various authors, Phaidon, RRP£49.95/\$79.95

Another Phaidon coffee table-straining blockbuster, this curious, lovely book spans everything from pre-Columbian monuments to contemporary land art, from Diego Rivera to Walter de Maria. Just looking at the lush pictures will warm you up on a cold December day.

...



CLASSICAL

The Show Must Go On: On Tour with the LSO in 1912 and 2012, by Gareth Davies, *Elliott & Thompson*, RRP £14.99/\$24.95

Davies, principal flute of the London Symphony Orchestra, shows there is more to orchestral life than following the baton. He draws on archive material and personal observation to offer an entertaining comparison between the high-octane life of a professional musician today and what it was like for his LSO forebears.

Music in the Castle of Heaven: A Portrait of Johann Sebastian Bach, by John Eliot Gardiner, *Allen Lane*, RRP £30/*Knopf*, RRP \$35

Mixing scholarliness and practical experience, one of our leading conductors provides a detailed study of the choral masterpieces Bach produced as cantor, organist and teacher at Leipzig in the early 18th century. His elucidation of works such as the St Matthew Passion makes you want to listen to the music afresh.

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

Kildea has done everyone a service by refusing to allow moral judgments to cloud his biographical brief. His fluent narrative combines just the right amount of musical analysis alongside lightly worn documentary research, as fascinating to the casual music lover as to Britten insiders. Unquestionably the music book of the year.

Friedelind Wagner: Richard Wagner's Rebellious Granddaughter, by Eva Rieger, translated by Chris Walton, *Boydell Press*, RRP £30

While her brothers Wieland and Wolfgang served the Nazis and hoarded the “gold” of postwar Bayreuth, Friedelind went her own courageous way. The family dubbed her a black sheep, but she was the only Wagner to perceive Hitler's evil and put truth above personal profit – thereby disinheriting herself. An illuminating tale.

Inside Conducting, by Christopher Seaman, *University of Rochester Press*, RRP £19.99

This view from the rostrum has already established itself as the friendliest of guides to the mysterious art of conducting. Entertaining, insightful and free of jargon, Seaman's book shows that baton-waving is as much about psychology and physical communication as it is about music.

Selections by Andrew Clark

...

POP

Sounds Like London: 100 Years of Black Music in the Capital, by Lloyd Bradley, *Serpent's Tail*, RRP £12.99

Bradley's richly detailed account of black culture in London goes from a New York jazz band performing at Buckingham Palace in 1919 to the modern era of Dizzee Rascal and “grime”. Music links the margins and the mainstream – for example, Lord Kitchener on the gangplank of the Windrush greeting Britain with a calypso.

I Dreamed I Was a Very Clean Tramp: An Autobiography, by Richard Hell, *Ecco*, RRP \$25.99

New York punk pioneer Hell follows his peer Patti Smith's *Just Kids* with his memoir of 1970s East Village low-life, forming Television with ally-turned-foe Tom Verlaine and then leading The Voidoids. The little boy from Kentucky who dreamt of being a cowboy winds up a junkie. The tone is rueful. A punk survivor.

Yeah Yeah Yeah: The Story of Modern Pop, by Bob Stanley, *Faber*, RRP £20

“Serious” rock and “frivolous” pop are turned on their head by Saint Etienne's Stanley, who lauds polished Brill Building songcraft over the “fun-hating” likes of Eric Clapton. Stanley's connoisseurship is shot through with nostalgia: digital music is, in his view, even worse than Clapton.

Bedsit Disco Queen: How I Grew Up and Tried To Be a Pop Star, by Tracey Thorn, *Virago*, RRP £16.99 / \$27.95

A Smiths fanatic in her youth, Everything But the Girl's Thorn has written a better memoir than her old hero Morrissey's bloated autobiography. It's an account of semi-fame in the 1980s when Thorn and her partner Ben Watt were propelled into the charts with their restrained, smart songs almost despite themselves.

Selections by Ludovic Hunter-Tilney

...

FILM

The Best Film You've Never Seen: 35 Directors Champion the Forgotten or Critically Savaged Movies They Love, by Robert Elder, *Zephyr*, RRP\$16.95

An intelligently compiled "list" book with a noble purpose: the rehabilitation of movies that somehow got lost along the way, championed by such notable directors as Richard Linklater and Danny Boyle. The cases are well made, though not always convincing: are we really ready for a *Joe Versus the Volcano* revival?

My Lunches with Orson: Conversations Between Henry Jaglom and Orson Welles, by Henry Jaglom, edited by Peter Biskind, *Metropolitan Books*, RRP\$28

British-born actor and director Jaglom taped his lunches with Orson Welles during the final years of Welles's life. The results are witty, monstrous and always tinged with melancholy. Welles had turned into a caricature by the mid-1980s, but his dogged originality of thought shines through, and there are some brilliantly cursory dismissals of his contemporaries.

The World is Ever Changing, by Nicolas Roeg, *Faber*, RRP£17.99/iTunes, RRP£6.99

The iPad edition is the one to get, illustrating Roeg's reminiscences of a luminous career with extracts from his bravura film-making. "Film opened the door of doubt to the collapse of the difference between fiction and reality," reflects the director, and the resulting string of 1970s masterpieces is as good as British cinema ever got.

The Godfather Family Album, by Steve Schapiro and Paul Duncan, *Taschen*, RRP£27.99

Schapiro was the set photographer on Francis Ford Coppola's *Godfather* trilogy, and this is a beautifully produced memento of those landmarks of American cinema, packed with arresting images and vivid recollections from cast and crew. A weighty and mean-looking coffee table must, available at something of a bargain price.

Selections by Peter Aspden

...

STYLE

Peter Beard, by Nejma Beard, Owen Edwards and Steven Aronson, *Taschen*, RRP£44.99

From a young age, photographer Beard kept illustrated diaries. Originally published in 2006 in two separate volumes, they are here united in one book. Collect it while you can.

The Asylum: A Collage of Couture Reminiscences ... and Hysteria, by Simon Doonan, *Blue Rider Press*, RRP\$25.95

Doonan is one of the sharpest, least gullible fashion observers in the style universe, as this set of essays on subjects from Anna Wintour to Michelle Obama, reveals. He skewers the fashion world with glee.

Alexander McQueen: Working Process, Photographs by Nick Waplinton, by Susannah Frankel, *Damiani*, RRP£40

An unvarnished behind-the-scenes photographic memoir of McQueen's A/W 2009 collection, *The Horn of Plenty*, from inception to runway, is as close a record as you will find of how the late designer worked and thought.

The Anatomy of Fashion: Why We Dress the Way We Do, by Colin McDowell, *Phaidon*, RRP£59.95 / \$100

The human body is at the heart of this weighty thesis on fashion, covering the development of dress over 40,000 years with 450 images, from prehistoric body adornment to Yves Saint Laurent – via the work of Jan van Eyck and Michelangelo.

JAR Paris Vol II, by Pierre Genet and Joel Arthur Rosenthal, *JAR Vol II*, RRP\$800

In 2003, Rosenthal published the limited edition 10lb-plus *JAR Paris*. In November, he became the first living jeweller to have a

retrospective at the Metropolitan Museum in New York and republished that first volume with a second, covering 2002 to the present. Used copies of the first book are listed on Amazon for upwards of \$1,295.

Selections by Vanessa Friedman

...



Junot Díaz, Author of *This is How You Lose Her* (Faber)

The most extraordinary (and harrowing) book I read this year was Oscar Martínez's *The Beast: Riding the Rails and Dodging Narcos on the Migrant Trail* (Verso). This is a bravura act of frontline reporting that tracks the horror passage that many immigrants must survive (and some don't) to reach the US from the south. These immigrants are preyed on by everyone and yet they cling to hope like they cling to the trains that will bring some of them to what they pray will be better lives. Beautiful and searing and impossible to put down.



Caroline Daniel, Editor, FT Weekend

David Hockney: A Bigger Exhibition (Prestel) has wonderful images of the artist's new (2013) charcoal sketches of the arrival of spring in Yorkshire, and also several poignant essays citing Hockney's desire to encourage people to be "more active in your looking... you feel so much more free. Which is another way of saying, you feel more alive." The essays capture a difficult chapter in his life. Hockney had a mini-stroke and his much loved "totem" tree was vandalised. His subsequent intimate charcoal portraits, one of the essays notes, had "a strong sense of mortality in them". Fortunately, by the time of the book's publication, both Hockney's voice and his sense of vibrant colour had returned.

...

TRAVEL

The Broken Road: From the Iron Gates to Mount Athos, by Patrick Leigh Fermor, edited by Colin Thubron and Artemis Cooper, *John Murray*, RRP£25

This final part of Leigh Fermor's trilogy recounting his "great trudge" across Europe in the 1930s was published two years after his death in 2011. Pieced together from an unfinished manuscript and a contemporaneous diary, it offers a fascinating glimpse of a lost time and talent.

Under Another Sky: Journeys in Roman Britain, by Charlotte Higgins, *Jonathan Cape*, RRP£20

Higgins drives a blue camper van around Britain seeking out the ruins of Roman civilisation. Whether at Hadrian's Wall or in a car park in the City, she shows how Roman traces are woven through British life.

On the Road Bike: The Search for a Nation's Cycling Soul, by Ned Boulting, *Yellow Jersey Press*, RRP£14.99

Somewhere between travel, sport and sociology, this book looks for the roots of Britain's cycling boom from the windswept roads of north Wales to the Herne Hill velodrome in suburban south London. Boulting is a delightful narrator, amusingly preoccupied by his own middle-class roots.

Consolations of the Forest: Alone in a Cabin in the Middle Taiga, by Sylvain Tesson, translated by Linda Coverdale, *Allen Lane*, RRP£16.99/*Rizzoli*, RRP\$24.95

In 2010, Tesson spent six months alone in a cabin on the shores of Lake Baikal. In contrast to *Robinson Crusoe*, which was all about the value of imposing order on chaotic wilderness, this is an attempt to make sense of the world by stripping back modern conveniences and distractions.

The Last Man in Russia: And the Struggle to Save a Dying Nation, by Oliver Bullough, *Allen Lane*, RRP£20 / *Basic Books*, RRP\$26.99

On his journey tracing the life of a dissident Orthodox priest, former Reuters correspondent Bullough meets generous, hospitable people, but finds mass alcoholism and villages left abandoned and decaying.

Selections by Tom Robbins

...

FOOD

Treme: Stories and Recipes from the Heart of New Orleans, by Lolis Eric Elie, *Chronicle*, RRP£18.99 / \$29.95

This collection of recipes from US chefs, many working in the African-American traditions of the deep south, is bewilderingly different from your average TV tie-in cookbook. It's united by association with the HBO series but takes that as a launch point for possibly the most exciting and eclectic food publication of the year.

Brilliant Bread, by James Morton, *Ebury Press*, RRP£20

Morton was runner-up in TV cookery-fest *The Great British Bake Off* in 2012, a fact which does precisely nothing to detract from this excellent bread bible. Extraordinarily well-written and produced, engaging for beginners with something to offer even the seasoned pro, this is a potential long-term classic.

Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation: Finding Ourselves in the Kitchen, by Michael Pollan, *Allen Lane*, RRP£20 / *Penguin Press*, RRP\$27.95

Wearing his considerable erudition lightly, Pollan is the darling of academically minded food geeks the world over. *Cooked* is an entertaining examination of the philosophy, science and technique behind four fundamental methods of food preparation – grilling, braising, baking and fermentation – and digresses beautifully, effortlessly making political points.

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

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 and food miles, he serially slaughters the sacred cows of the liberal foodists. Easy to read – uncomfortable to accept.

Le Pigeon: Cooking at the Dirty Bird, by Gabriel Rucker, Meredith Erickson, Andrew Fortgang, *Ten Speed Press*, RRP£30 / \$40

I'd heard nothing about this Portland, Oregon institution until the book landed on my desk and utterly awed me. The young chefs draw influence from the Fergus Henderson nose-to-tail school but introduce a whole layer of iconoclastic hipster inspiration. When reading the contents makes you salivate, you know you have a winner.

Selections by Tim Hayward

...

GARDENING

Seeing Flowers: Discover the Hidden Life of Flowers, by Teri Dunn Chace and Robert Llewellyn, *Timber Press*, RRP£20/\$29.95

Flower porn. I defy anyone not to be seduced by these portraits – even hydrangeas look like works of art. Accompanied by neat text explaining familial characteristics from *Amaryllis* to *Viola*.

The Gardens of Venice and the Veneto, by Jenny Condie and Alex Ramsay, *Frances Lincoln*, RRP£35/\$60

Good to see old favourites, from *Giardino Eden*, created by Caroline Jekyll and Frederick Eden, to the Baroque *Valsanzibio*. Better still are the lesser-known gardens, from the beautiful modernist example at the *Fondazione Querini Stampalia* to the mysterious creations of *Alessandro Rossi*.

RHS Botany for Gardeners: The Art and Science of Gardening Explained and Explored, by Geoff Hodge, *Mitchell Beazley*, RRP£14.99

Anyone who loved A-level botany as much as I did will love this book, with its clear diagrams and straightforward illustrations. A godsend for anyone who wants to take gardening seriously.

The New English Garden, by Tim Richardson and Andrew Lawson, *Frances Lincoln*, RRP£40 / \$60

I agree with writer/historian Richardson's argument that English gardens are at a juncture. This timely survey records old favourites as well as some new gardens. The next book will, I hope, have more startling entries in both categories.

Virginia Woolf's Garden: The Story of the Garden at Monk's House, by Caroline Zoob and Caroline Arber, *Jacqui Small*,



RRP£30/\$50

Although not a great gardener, Woolf loved her garden at Monk's House in Sussex, and consulted Vita Sackville-West about it. Her husband Leonard created their plot, which was recreated and recorded by Zoob while a National Trust tenant there.

Selections by Jane Owen



LITERARY

NON-FICTION

White Girls , by Hilton Als, McSweeney's, RRP\$24

The New Yorker critic's first major work since 1996's *The Women*, this collection of essays parses cultural figures including Truman Capote, Flannery O'Connor, Michael Jackson, Richard Pryor and Louise Brooks – each representing a facet of the complex social construct Als calls the “white girl”.

The Kraus Project , by Jonathan Franzen, *Fourth Estate*, RRP£18.99 / *Farrar, Straus & Giroux*, RRP\$27

The author of *Freedom* translates the essays of Austrian “anti-journalist” Karl Kraus with help from Daniel Kehlmann and Paul Reitter. But the real story is in the footnotes, in which Franzen laments the state of modern media and confesses his sins as a Fulbright scholar in Berlin.

Bough Down , by Karen Green, *Siglio*, RRP£28/\$36

“It's hard to remember tender things tenderly,” writes Green in her debut, a reckoning with the death of her husband, novelist David Foster Wallace, who committed suicide in 2008. Written in short bursts of poetic prose, and illustrated with Green's collages, it is lyrical, bitterly funny and devastating.

No Regrets, n+1 Foundation, *Nplusonemag.com*, RRP\$9

Which books influenced you the most? What did you read too early? Too late? Published by Brooklyn-based literary journal n+1, this book features conversations between 12 young female authors and artists, and evolves into an animated reading list that includes discussions of Judith Butler, Joan Didion, Chris Kraus and Grace Paley.

A Prayer Journal , by Flannery O'Connor, edited by WA Sessions, *Farrar, Straus and Giroux*, RRP\$18

Discovered among her papers in Georgia, the prayer journal of O'Connor, written between 1946 and 1947 while she was a student at the University of Iowa, offers a very human portrait of the ambitious young short-story writer. “Please help me, dear God, to be a good writer and to get something else accepted.”

Darling: A Spiritual Autobiography, by Richard Rodriguez, *Viking*, RRP\$26.95

An author whose charming, associative prose is reminiscent of James Baldwin, Rodriguez has written autobiographical essays about his Mexican heritage, homosexuality and Catholic faith. As an exploration of the “desert religions” and of Rodriguez's own relationship with the women who raised him, *Darling* is a revelation.

The Mistress Contract , by She & He, *Serpent's Tail*, RRP£7.99

Having cosigned a contract in 1981 stating that “He” will provide a home and income for his mistress, while “She” will be his sexual property, a couple records intimate conversations covering sexual pleasure and ageing, feminism and fidelity. A delightful document

written by two wonderfully candid (anonymous) souls.

Love, Nina: Despatches from Family Life , by Nina Stibbe, *Viking*, RRP£12.99

In 1982, 20-year-old Nina Stibbe became the nanny of Sam, 10, and Will, 9, sons of Mary-Kay Wilmers, editor of the London Review of Books. This collection of letters to Stibbe's sister is a hilarious portrait of the London literati by a naive yet comically gifted correspondent.

Selections by Emily Stokes

...

FICTION

Life After Life , by Kate Atkinson, *Doubleday*, RRP£18.99/*Reagan Arthur Books*, RRP\$27.99

Ursula Todd is born in 1910 – over and over again. In Atkinson's most complex and satisfying novel to date, we see Ursula's many lives and deaths. While there may be magic afoot in the narrative structure, Atkinson's descriptions of London during the second world war are vivid and unflinching. Shortlisted for the 2013 Women's Prize for Fiction.

The Luminaries , by Eleanor Catton, *Granta*, RRP£18.99/*Little, Brown*, RRP\$27

More than 800 pages of mystery, history and astrology await readers of the 2013 Man Booker Prize winner. Set in 19th-century New Zealand during its gold rush, Catton's intricately constructed novel was described by the prize judges as "luminous" – and also as an accomplished work of traditional storytelling.

The Childhood of Jesus , by JM Coetzee, *Harvill Secker*, RRP£16.99/*Viking*, RRP\$26.95

Coetzee's bland world of Novilla, where refugees start over with blank slates and blank lives, is the backdrop to the story of a lost boy and the kind man who cares for him. There are lots of traditions and tales mixed in – along with mathematics and a wonderfully poetic use of language.

Harvest , by Jim Crace, *Picador*, RRP£16.99/*Vintage*, RRP\$15

A spare, haunting book that offers a peasant's-eye view of a catastrophic week in an unnamed and remote feudal village. Interlopers arrive and the irruption marks the end of an age-old way of life. Shortlisted for the 2013 Man Booker Prize, it is one to savour – Crace has said that this is his last novel.

How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia , by Mohsin Hamid, *Hamish Hamilton*, RRP£14.99/*Riverhead*, RRP\$26.95

Short, clever, genre-busting: Hamid's unnamed narrator stars in his own self-help book and we follow him from rural poverty to life as a self-made Everyman in a booming, callous megalopolis. A humane, lyrical tale.

Enon , by Paul Harding, *Heinemann*, RRP£14.99/*Random House*, RRP\$26

Harding won the 2010 Pulitzer Prize with his debut novel, *Tinkers* , but is not as well-known as he should be. Enon sounds depressing – a man spirals into drink and despair after the death of his daughter. Unflinching it may be, but this is an uplifting tale of our attempts to find meaning in our darkest days.

The Flamethrowers , by Rachel Kushner, *Harvill Secker*, RRP£8.99/*Scribner*, RRP\$26.99

Shortlisted for this year's National Book Award in the US, Kushner's take on 1970s radicalism, art and politics is a big, absorbing read. Her narrator is Reno, a twenty-something aspiring artist living with the son of an Italian industrialist – and the story unfolds through her outsider eyes.

The Lowland , by Jhumpa Lahiri, *Bloomsbury*, RRP£16.99/*Knopf*, RRP\$27.95

This family saga moves deftly from Calcutta to the US and back again, exploring love, loyalty, obligation and freedom. Lahiri's fastidious prose style is not to everyone's taste but this is a compelling novel that lingers long in the mind. Shortlisted for the Man Booker prize and the National Book Award.

The Good Lord Bird , by James McBride, *Riverhead*, RRP£16.99/\$27.95

A zippy, irreverent novel set in the turbulent years just before the American Civil War, which mixes real and imagined characters and events, and is narrated by an escaped slave boy who often dresses as a girl. The story brings



back to life the extraordinary figure of John Brown, a famous anti-slavery crusader, and gives his history a twist. The surprise winner of the 2013 National Book Award in fiction.

The Son , by Philipp Meyer, *Simon & Schuster*, RRP£14.99/*Ecco*, RRP\$27.99

As epic as the sweep of the American west, Meyer's second novel thunders through the years as Native Americans and white settlers fight for Texan lands. Its central figure is Eli McCullough, who, as a child, sees his family murdered and is kidnapped by the Comanche. He lives to be 100. Meyer was named in 2010 as one of the New Yorker's "20 under 40" names to watch.

Americanah , by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Fourth Estate*, RRP£20/*Knopf*, RRP\$26.95

"Americanah" is a nickname for a Nigerian woman who lives in the US, and that's where we meet Ifemelu, the protagonist of Adichie's long, satisfying novel of cross-continental relationships, exile and the pull of home. This is the Orange Prize-winning Adichie's first novel for seven years and well worth the wait.

Binocular Vision , by Edith Pearlman, *Pushkin*, RRP£8.99/*Lookout Books*, RRP\$18.99

An American short-story writer, Pearlman has been enjoying late-career success with this collection of delicate, funny, perceptive tales of suburban dysfunction, exile and family life. A book to dip into or devour; either way, it's a charmer with bite.

Bleeding Edge , by Thomas Pynchon, *Jonathan Cape*, RRP£20/*Penguin*, RRP\$28.95

Set in Manhattan in early 2001, Pynchon's latest novel is a thrilling ride through the first tech bubble, filled with "bleeding edge" technology. Pynchon's heroine Maxine Tarnow, a freelance fraud investigator, has some dark digging to do in a tale that's accomplished, funny and digressive. Shortlisted for the National Book Award.

All That Is , by James Salter, *Picador*, RRP£18.99/*Knopf*, RRP\$26.95

The first Salter novel for more than 30 years is a rare treat for fans of his distinctive prose. *All That Is* follows Philip Bowman from a second world war battle fleet into the publishing worlds of New York and London and the beds of many women. The main attraction is not the narrative, though – it's the beauty of Salter's words.

Tenth of December , by George Saunders, *Bloomsbury*, RRP£14.99/*Random House*, RRP\$26

Saunders sets this collection of short stories in a dystopian near-future, where human connection and empathy is undermined by giant, uncaring corporations and shocking consumerism. The author's focus on moments of kindness and resilience in difficult (often darkly amusing) circumstances makes this an uplifting read. Shortlisted for the National Book Award.

The Goldfinch , by Donna Tartt, *Little, Brown*, RRP£20/\$30

Tartt's last book was published in 2002, so a new novel is an event. *The Goldfinch* introduces us to Theo Decker, a modern-day Dickensian hero, and his suitably picaresque adventures in New York, Las Vegas and Amsterdam. Readers will either love or hate Tartt's intense, hypnotic prose style and this book has divided the critics.

Selections by Isabel Berwick

...

FICTION IN TRANSLATION

The Parrots , by Filippo Bologna, translated by Howard Curtis, *Pushkin Press*, RRP£14.99/\$25

The winner of one of Italy's most prestigious literary awards has written a scathing satire about the murky world of Italy's prestigious literary awards. Pitting an old and embittered novelist against an envious rival, and both against a talented novice, Bologna paints a comically grim picture of a culture of back-stabbing and deceit.

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

This novel by "the other Murakami" explores the unsettling prospect of a North Korean invasion of Japan, mixing elements of a spy thriller with some national soul-searching.

Butterflies in November , by Auður Ava Ólafsdóttir, translated by Brian FitzGibbon, *Pushkin Press*, RRP£12.99

The unnamed narrator of Ólafsdóttir's novel is a recently divorced linguist who has just won the lottery, and sets out on a road-trip around Iceland with a deaf-mute five-year-old boy in tow. A funny, moving and occasionally bizarre exploration of life's upheavals and reversals.

In Times of Fading Light , by Eugen Ruge, translated by Anthea Bell, *Faber*, RRP£14.99/*Graywolf Press*, RRP\$26

Ruge's award-winning debut novel charts half a century of East German history through the story of apparatchik Wilhelm Powileit. This family saga captures in rich detail the realities of daily life in the German Democratic Republic, and evokes a melancholy sense of houses, countries, political systems and people falling apart.

The Last Days , by Laurent Seksik, translated by André Naffis-Sahely, *Pushkin Press*, RRP£8.99/\$14.95

Having fled Austria as Europe hurtled towards the second world war, novelist Stefan Zweig and his wife, Lotte, settled in the Brazilian town of Petrópolis. When news reached them about the Third Reich's atrocities, the couple committed suicide. Seksik's bestselling novel is a tender and tragic dramatisation of Zweig's final months.

The Eternal Son , by Cristovão Tezza, translated by Alison Entrekin, *Scribe*, RRP£8.99/*Tagus*, RRP\$19.95

In this thinly disguised memoir, which won all of Brazil's major literary awards, a successful intellectual resents and then comes to terms with his son being born with Down's syndrome. A work of unflinching honesty and searing humanity.

Quesadillas , by Juan Pablo Villalobos translated by Rosalind Harvey, *And Other Stories*, RRP£10/*FSG Originals*, RRP\$13

In a bold follow-up to *Down the Rabbit Hole* , Mexico's Villalobos tells the riotous tale of Orestes, a teenager on a quest to find his siblings, wading through small-town bigotry, poverty, violence and political corruption. Guaranteed to entertain, from its attention-grabbing opening line to its gloriously bizarre climax.

Pow! , by Mo Yan, translated by Howard Goldblatt, *Seagull Books*, RRP£18

The winner of the 2012 Nobel Prize for Literature serves up a Kafkaesque depiction of Chinese village life corrupted by greed and modernisation. Broad in sweep yet personal in its concerns, the latest novel by the author of *Red Sorghum* brings hints of the surreal to its satire.

Selections by Ángel Gurría-Quintana

...

POETRY

Red Doc> , by Anne Carson, *Jonathan Cape*, RRP£12/*Knopf*, RRP\$24.95

In her follow-up to *Autobiography of Red* , Carson renames her winged hero Geryon as "G" and takes him on a picaresque journey with shell-shocked soldier Sad and artist Ida. The narrative poem plays delightfully with form, at times approaching stream of consciousness in the vivid interplay of memory and dialogue.

Ramayana: A Retelling , by Daljit Nagra, *Faber*, RRP£18.99

In Nagra's adaptation of the ancient religious text, which has its origins in Indian oral storytelling, he aimed to capture the same passion as the version he heard as a child. He borrowed from several countries' Ramayanas and the freedom and energy of his approach leaps from the page in chapters such as "Kill That Mother!" and "You Shot-Hot Monkey!".

Sleeping Keys , by Jean Sprackland, *Jonathan Cape*, RRP£10/*Random House*, RRP\$17.95

In Sprackland's fourth collection, the Costa prize-winner explores the fragility of the places we call home. In transitional experiences from the end of a marriage to the clearing of a drain, she raises unsettling questions about what might fill the spaces left by the broken, dismantled or departed and, finally, looks at the possibility of rebuilding and recovery.

The Forward Book of Poetry 2014 , *Faber*, RRP£8.99

The annual anthology features work from the Forward prize shortlists and highly commended poems. Highlights include Emily Berry and Marianne Burton, as well as the long established yet still innovative Simon Armitage and Hugo Williams. The foreword by Jeanette Winterson, chair of this year's Forward Prize judges, asserts the power of verse in an age of mass culture.

...



Simon Schama, *FT* contributing editor

The most improbable narrator – an academic obsessed with doing justice to the talents of Richard Nixon – is at the centre of the year’s most mind-blowing work of fiction: AM Homes’s *May We Be Forgiven* (Granta) begins by slamming you against a wall, robbing you of all resistance, tickling you helpless with dark laughter – and then really gets going. I have no clue why this is not being acclaimed as *the* great American novel of our times.

For those who have never *quite* managed the reverence for Dante required of the well-read, there is at last a translation that makes *The Divine Comedy* everything it’s billed: Clive James’s version in quatrain (Picador). Suddenly the voice – from teasingly conversational to clangorously epic to tenderly lyric – is right beside you even when it’s a talking beast: “The Pope pops Satan, Satan pips the Pope,”/ Plutus barked raucous nonsense, while my Guide/ Who knew all things, to give me back my hope/ Said “don’t let fear of him turn you aside.”

Read it out loud in bed (softly).

...

CRIME

Rubbernecker, by Belinda Bauer, *Bantam Press*, *RRP£14.99*

Obsessive Patrick, struggling with his messy life, attempts to solve a possible murder. Although not quite as memorable as *Blacklands*, Bauer’s 2010 debut, *Rubbernecker* continues her idiosyncratic trajectory. One can see why Val McDermid said that she wished she’d written it.

Ghostman, by Roger Hobbs, *Doubleday*, *RRP£9.99/Vintage*, *RRP\$14.95*

The protagonists of Hobbs’ breakout *Ghostman* are criminals bereft of any moral code, but the author invites us to identify with them. The enigmatic Jack, who specialises in tidying up awkward situations, tracks down an audacious thief. Cinematic and packed with pithy dialogue.

Strange Shores, by Arnaldur Indridason, translated by Victoria Cribb, *Harvill Secker*, *RRP£14.99*

The king of Icelandic crime fiction is not resting on his laurels, as the valedictory *Strange Shores* proves. This last outing for bloody-minded detective Erlendur starts with a woman walking into frozen fiords, never to be seen again. An elegiac but compelling last bow.

Burial Rites, by Hannah Kent, *Picador*, *RRP£12.99/Little, Brown*, *RRP\$26*

In 19th-century Iceland, convicted killer Agnes Magnúsdóttir is sentenced to death for stabbing her lover, but still has the power to change lives. Kent brilliantly recreates a community surviving in an inhospitable climate, and conveys the ineluctable force of one woman’s personality on those around her.

Alex, by Pierre Lemaitre, translated by Frank Wynne, *MacLehose Press*, *RRP£12.99/\$24.95*

The brutal kidnapping of a young woman is now a crime fiction cliché. But, although the details here are familiar – such as the desperate police search to find the missing victim – Lemaitre has something surprising up his sleeve.

The Necessary Death of Lewis Winter, by Malcolm Mackay, *Mantle*, *RRP£7.99*

A debut novel that is a truly innovative entry in the overcrowded crime field. Mackay has arrived fully formed. This first book in his planned Glasgow trilogy is principally concerned with how difficult it is to kill well; the narrative has understated panache.

Norwegian by Night, by Derek B Miller, *Faber*, *RRP£12.99*

Bostonian writer Derek B Miller’s discursive but richly written *Norwegian by Night*’s Jewish-American anti-hero is the 82-year-old Sheldon, fearing senility and chafing at his new country, Norway – until murderous Balkan villains and a cross-country chase change his life. Scandicrime by an American.

...

SCIENCE FICTION

Terminus , by Adam Baker, *Hodder & Stoughton*, RRP£7.99

The third in Baker's series of viscerally claustrophobic end-of-the-world novels has Manhattan destroyed by a nuclear warhead while, beneath the streets, ragtag survivors struggle to find a cure for an outer-space virus that turns people into raving zombies. The message is uncompromisingly bleak: humans are the greatest monsters.

Dream London , by Tony Ballantyne, *Solaris*, RRP£7.99/\$7.99

Urban fantasy set in a perpetually mutating, entropic London which has been sold to other-dimensional beings by City financiers. The novel's charismatic anti-hero becomes an unwilling revolutionary leader in a rambunctious Occupy-era satire that is as easy to enjoy as it is hard to define.

The Ocean At the End of The Lane , by Neil Gaiman, *Headline*, RRP£16.99/*William Morrow*, RRP\$25.99

Beautiful autobiography-tinged fantasy about growing up, magic, imagination and loss. A man returns to his childhood home and reminisces about a friend who might have been a witch, and about a demonic being who sneaked into this world from another realm and nearly destroyed his family.

Doctor Sleep , by Stephen King, *Hodder & Stoughton*, RRP£19.99/*Scribner*, RRP\$30

King's excellent sequel to *The Shining* revisits Danny Torrance, the ghost-haunted boy in his 1977 classic. The adult Dan is a recovering alcoholic struggling to atone for past errors. Salvation beckons in the form of a "shining" girl targeted by vampires with a thirst for psychic powers.

Anno Dracula – Johnny Alucard , by Kim Newman, *Titan Books*, RRP£12.99/\$24.99

Newman's fourth Anno Dracula book is a bracing, witty, allusive vampire tale revelling in the predatory decadence of 1970s New York and 1980s Hollywood. Blood and fame are the drugs of choice here.

Selections by James Lovegrove



YOUNG ADULT

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

Casale's dazzling debut begins with a sick girl who, when presented with a fragment of her own rib, carves it into the shape of a dragon. And then it just gets stranger. A haunting portrayal of damage, resilience and revenge, and one of the finest novels of the year – in any category.

The Boy with Two Heads , by Andy Mulligan, *David Fickling*, RRP£10.99

When friendly, well-adjusted 11-year-old Richard goes back to school having suddenly sprouted another head, he is unprepared for the mayhem the outspoken, cynical, malevolent Rikki will cause. As a metaphor for mental illness, it's blisteringly funny and sad.

The Bone Season , by Samantha Shannon, *Bloomsbury*, RRP£12.99/\$24

The first in a seven-book sequence by "the new JK Rowling" is well worth a look. It's set in a dystopian London and Oxford, where mysterious alien beings enslave psychic humans for use in combat. Over-elaborate, but intriguing so far.

Lockwood & Co: The Screaming Staircase, by Jonathan Stroud, *Doubleday*, RRP£12.99/*Disney-Hyperion*, RRP\$16.99

Fans of the Bartimaeus books will be delighted by Stroud's new series about a paranormal detective agency staffed by three argumentative young teens. Rapier-wielding Lucy Carlyle joins the shambolic outfit and is thrust into a series of chilling adventures. A delicious mixture of bone-dry wit and spooky shocks.

Selections by Suzi Feay

...

PICTUREBOOKS

Nuddy Ned , by Kes Gray and Garry Parsons, *Bloomsbury*, RRP£6.99

Some small children love to run around naked, and this book celebrates the rights of junior streakers to expose themselves willy-nilly. In spite of flaps which, if lifted, threaten to reveal Ned in all his disrobed glory, decorum is (mostly) maintained. Cheeky, in every sense.

Eleanor's Eyebrows , by Timothy Knapman and David Tazzyman, *Simon & Schuster*, RRP£6.99

Tazzyman's scribbly pencil work brings life to the adventures of the wonderfully abysmal Mr Gum. Here he lends his talents to a surreal and very amusing tale about a pair of eyebrows who, feeling unappreciated by their owner, head out into the world to seek their fortune.

Do You Speak English, Moon? , by Francesca Simon and Ben Cort, *Orion Books*, RRP£9.99

From the author of *Horrid Henry* and the illustrator of *Aliens Love Underpants* comes a surprisingly wistful and melancholy tale about a lonely, sleepless boy who wants someone to talk to at night. No playground pranks or extraterrestrial knicker-nickers here, just an engaging bedtime read to nod off to.

The Dark , by Lemony Snicket and Jon Klassen, *Orchard Books*, RRP£11.99/*Little, Brown*, RRP\$16.99

It's hard to convince kids that there's no reason to be afraid of the dark – that nothing's there which isn't there when the lights are on. In this sleek, stylish fable, little Laszlo's night light gives out, and he must learn that darkness is both unavoidable and necessary.

Selections by James Lovegrove

...



Lionel Shriver, Author of 'Big Brother' (HarperCollins)

The most memorable novel of 2013 for me was Philipp Meyer's *The Son* (Simon & Schuster), which had a panoramic sweep of several generations, but also managed to plant particular characters permanently in my imagination. I was astonished that Meyer could breathe fresh life into the *Little Big Man*-style plot of a white boy raised by Indians.

...

CHILDREN

Ethan's Voice , by Rachel Carter, *Scholastic*, RRP£5.99

Narrowboat-dwelling Ethan has been left mute by a traumatic incident he witnessed. It takes the gentle coaxing of a new arrival on the river, the garrulous Polly, to draw him back into the world of verbal communication in an affecting story of everyday heroics.

Asterix and the Picts , by Jean-Yves Ferri and Didier Conrad, translated by Anthea Bell, *Orion*, RRP£10.99/\$14.95

With the blessing of Albert Uderzo, surviving co-creator of the indomitable Gaul, Ferri and Conrad have produced a brand new Asterix adventure that's all but indistinguishable from the originals. Fun is poked at the Scottish so good-naturedly that not even the most ardent Celt could object.

The Last Wild , by Piers Torday, *Quercus*, RRP£6.99

Quirky post-apocalyptic fantasy set in a ruined world where only humans and the lower species of animal remain. Mute Kester Jaynes escapes from a nightmarish juvenile correctional facility, going on the run to discover the last holdout of wildlife left. This eco-fable gets its message across without didacticism.

Selections by James Lovegrove

...

GIFT BOOKS

Outraged of Tunbridge Wells: Original Complaints from Middle England, by Nigel Cawthorne, *Gibson Square*, RRP£9.99

Newspapers' letters pages can be a joy, recording both the intelligent opinions and more prosaic concerns of readers. And of all correspondents, it is those from Tunbridge Wells in Kent who have come to epitomise the form. Collected here are the funny grumbles of the citizens of that commuter-belt town.

Romps, Tots and Boffins: The Strange Language of News, by Robert Hutton, *Elliott and Thompson*, RRP£9.99

From bigwigs to bombshells, this lexicon of journalese is an enjoyable romp through the newspaper clichés we've come to know and love.

Letters of Note: Correspondence Deserving of a Wider Audience, by Shaun Usher, *Canongate/Unbound*, RRP£30

Letters of Note was originally a website showcasing amusing, poignant, or just downright bonkers correspondence. This handsome book, which was crowdfunded, collects more than 100 letters including the Queen's drop-scone recipe sent to president Eisenhower and Virginia Woolf's suicide note.

Selections by Carl Wilkinson

Most Popular on Social Networks

Unfair demands on your free time

Prince Alwaleed, singular Saudi scion

Printed from: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/f60b681e-529f-11e3-8586-00144feabdc0.html>

Print a single copy of this article for personal use. Contact us if you wish to print more to distribute to others.

© THE FINANCIAL TIMES LTD 2013 FT and 'Financial Times' are trademarks of The Financial Times Ltd.