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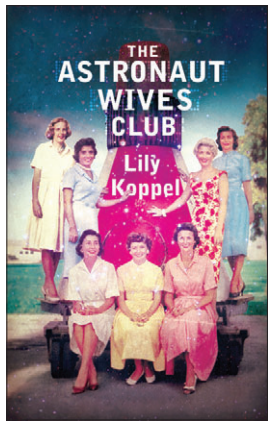
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SUMMER READING

The holiday season looms, and with it the chance to get lost in a book. Here some of our regular reviewers choose the reads they'll be packing



Catherine Nixey
Their husbands aimed for the moon. The wives of Nasa's astronauts meanwhile had to aim for the (hardly easier) goal of providing their men with "perfect wives, perfect children, perfect homes". And to be perfectly silent when it all went

wrong. If you want a fascinating book to read this summer, try *The Astronaut Wives Club* by Lily Koppel (Headline, £16.99; *Tablet* price £15.30).

Peter Stanford

Michael Arditt is the heir to Graham Greene as the author of powerful novels about faith and doubt. His latest, *The Breath of Night* (Arcadia, £11.99; *Tablet* price £10.80) is his best yet. Set in the Philippines, it tells of a well-born English missionary priest who is radicalised by the poverty and piety he encounters. Both the quality of the theological debate flecked through the narrative and the build-up of tension towards an extraordinary denouement had me absolutely hooked.

Lucy Popescu

Saira Shah's debut novel *The Mouseproof Kitchen* (Harvill Secker, £14.99; *Tablet* price £13.50), set in Languedoc, follows an English couple coming to terms with raising a disabled child. Although semi-autobiographical, this is no misery memoir. Shah finds unexpected humour in her characters'

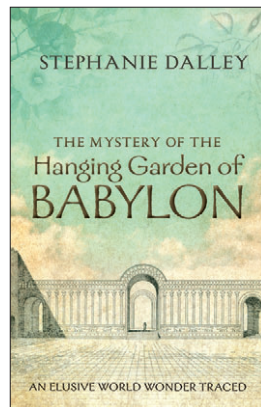
confrontations with the region's inhospitable terrain, extreme weather conditions and difficult neighbours.

Emma Klein

The 1870s upper-class New York of Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* is skilfully transported to today's Jewish north-west London by Francesca Segal in her novel *The Innocents* (Chatto & Windus, £14.99; *Tablet* price £13.50). The tension between security and rebellion that consumes the protagonist, embodied in his fiancée and her exotic cousin, makes this novel a gripping read.

Emma Hughes

David Kynaston's hefty *Modernity Britain* (Bloomsbury, £25; *Tablet* price £22.50) is well worth making room in your suitcase for. The late 1950s are brought sparkingly to life by our most warm-hearted and egalitarian historian. Tower blocks, cantilevered bosoms, tinned pies and twin-tub washing machines abound.



Teresa Morgan

The hanging garden of Babylon was a wonder of the ancient world, but when modern archaeologists excavated the city, they found no trace of it. The Assyriologist Stephanie Dalley set out to find it. How she did so and what she discovered are the

subject of *The Mystery of the Hanging Garden of Babylon* (Oxford University Press, £25; *Tablet* price £22.50): a gripping detective story, wonderfully written and illustrated, with an astonishing conclusion. Unmissable.

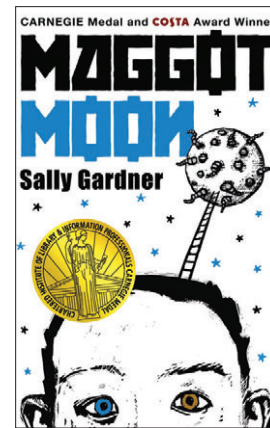
Clarissa Burden

Whether you go to Blackpool or the Black Sea, you'll need a good book to read on the beach, and *The Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller (Bloomsbury, £7.99; *Tablet* price £7.20) would be a sparkling choice. Based on Homer's *Iliad*, this stunning novel tells the story of the Trojan War from the viewpoint of Patroclus, the companion and lover of Achilles.

Brian Morton

The late, cold spring has left the hedgerows quieter than usual. Precious few swallows, and only small-voiced warblers. At such times, bird books come into their own, and there aren't any better than the latest one from the poster-boy of twitchers, listers and bird-racers Mark Cocker. His *Birds and People* (Jonathan

Cape, £40; *Tablet* price £36) may be too weighty – in avoirdupois, rather than tone – to put in luggage for your Mediterranean charter, but you won't need any other printed entertainment.



Julian Margaret Gibbs

Sally Gardner's *Maggot Moon* (Hot Key Books, £6.99; *Tablet* price £6.30) is written for anyone over 10 and set in an alternative 1956. *Standish Treadwell* is a deeply likeable hero: dyslexic, loving, self-sacrificing. His

brave attempt to unmask the nightmare regime under which he lives is sparsely and brilliantly described. Even reluctant teenage readers will find this novel compelling.

Eamon Duffy

For those who like a challenge on the beach, Denys Turner's wonderful new study, *Thomas Aquinas: a portrait* (Yale University Press, £18.99; *Tablet* price £17.10), is a marvellous introduction to the thought of the most daring and most important thinker of the Christian Middle Ages: lucid, gripping and beautifully written, it ousts even G.K. Chesterton's famous study as the best single-volume introduction to St Thomas: ideal *Summa* reading!

Lynn Roberts

Suppose you could live your life again and again, and save those you love by changing your actions? This is the moral spine of Kate Atkinson's extraordinarily engaging *Life after Life* (Doubleday, £18.99; *Tablet* price £17.10). For pure fun, take Jess Walter's *Beautiful Ruins* (Penguin, £8.99; *Tablet* price £8.10) – it tracks the intertwined lives of 1960s film stars and twenty-first-century wastrels; everyone looking for the right script for their lives and loves, with Richard Burton in a walk-on, drive-through part.

Theo Hobson

The thing I most enjoyed reading this year was D.H. Lawrence's short story "The Woman Who Rode Away" (together with "St Mawr" and "The Princess", Penguin Classics, £11.99; *Tablet* price £10.80). Set in Mexico, it portrays the allure of primitive religion. A discontented wife and mother decides to visit a nearby tribe reputed still to practise human sacrifice. It's an adventure story, like Rider Haggard for grown-ups.

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Nicholas King SJ

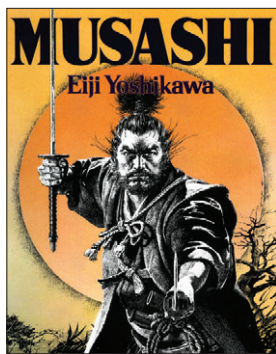
Here is a book that you should definitely throw into your bag as you rush off on holiday: *Unapologetic: why, despite everything, Christianity can still make surprising emotional sense* by Francis Spufford (Faber & Faber, £8.99; *Tablet* price £8.10). It is wonderfully well written; it faces the difficulties freely; it will occasionally make you laugh out loud – and it thinks Christianity is all right!

Lucy Lethbridge

Lighting up my greedy Kindle this summer are two novelists whose writing careers can be measured in centuries. I generally have an Anthony Trollope novel on the go and at the moment it's *Can You Forgive Her?* (Oxford World Classics, £9.99; *Tablet* price £9); the 88-year-old American author James Salter's *All That Is* (Picador, £18.99; *Tablet* price £17.10), published recently after a long wait, will be another treat.

Michael Alexander

Penelope Fitzgerald's novels are tragicomic, economical. She has my favourite literary quality, optional depth. Try *Human Voices* or *The Beginning of Spring*. Her last, *The Blue Flower* (Flamingo, £8.99; *Tablet* price £8.10), was her most astonishing, a fiction based on the life of the late-eighteenth-century German poet Novalis. It gets my vote.



Raymond Edwards

A new discovery this year: Japanese historical novels. I am greatly enjoying Eiji Yoshikawa's *M u s a s h i* (K o d a n s h a USA, £24; *Tablet* price £21.60), a long (984 pages in

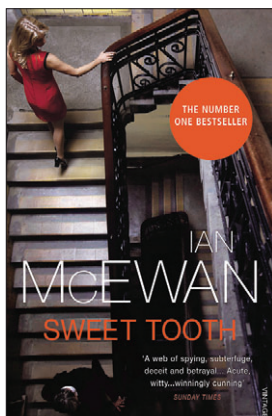
translation) picaresque tale giving in fine recursive and ironical style the early life of Japan's most famous swordsman. Written in the 1930s, translated into English 30 years ago, it is a cracking read.

Jimmy Burns

The Life and Death of the Spanish Republic by Henry Buckley (I.B. Tauris, £20; *Tablet* price £18) is a seminal eyewitness account of Spain's civil war by one of the great war correspondents. Buckley provides incisive portraits of many of the key personalities, from his good friend Hemingway to La Pasionaria, while also reporting with a deep sense of humanity on those who struggled to have a voice.

Piers Paul Read

It is important on holiday to keep one's mind on standby by reading at least one stimulating book. I recommend *The Diversity Illusion* by Ed West (Gibson Square, £14.99; *Tablet* price £13.50) which asks us to re-think our attitude towards multiculturalism and immigration. Cogent, informative and challenging, particularly for Christians who, in the hope of holding on to the moral high ground, fail to discern flaws in some secular thinking.



Richard Owen

Ian McEwan's *Sweet Tooth* (Vintage, £7.99; *Tablet* price £7.20) is a cracking read about a female MI5 agent, with a clever twist which took me at least by surprise. Otherwise, I have been re-reading D.H.

Lawrence's *Sea and Sardinia* (Penguin, £10.99; *Tablet* price £9.90) and anyone heading for the Med will still find it absorbing; the book not only has some of Lawrence's most lyrical descriptions, it is often very funny.

Michael Glover

Two major poets of the post-war era – one a celebrated American anti-war poet and pioneer of the men's movement called Robert Bly, and the other Tomas Tranströmer, a Nobel-Prize-winning Swede – spar, joust and play through *Airmail* (Bloodaxe, £15; *Tablet* price £13.50), a correspondence that begins in the early 1960s and runs for almost two and a half decades. A wonderful insight into how poets pick apart each other's linguistic worlds.

Jane O'Grady

If you'd like to travel to a strange world where the hero slaughters thousands, goes to Mass every day and is upheld as valiant and glorious, you should try *The High History of the Holy Grail*, translated from the Old French by Sebastian Evans (James Clarke, £11; *Tablet* price £9.90) – a world of slaying and praying, of Perceval, Logrin the Giant, the Deep Forest and the Chapel Perilous.

Piers Plowright

The Good Soldier Svejk by Jaroslav Hasek, translated from the Czech by Cecil Parrott (Penguin, £10.99; *Tablet* price £9.90) is the funniest book I've ever read. Follow the "knowing idiot" Svejk through the First World War, and watch him and Hasek make mincemeat

of tyranny, stupidity, and all fundamentalisms. Dear readers, a masterpiece. Long live Svejk!

Sue Gaisford

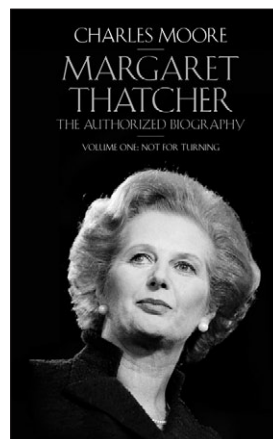
Servants: a downstairs view of twentieth-century Britain (Bloomsbury, £20; *Tablet* price £18), Lucy Lethbridge's enthralling and lively history of domestic service, is packed full of stories; funny, tragic and bizarre. *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry* by Rachel Joyce (Black Swan, £7.99; *Tablet* price £7.20), a picaresque first novel of gentleness and redemption, proves that it's never too late to grow up.

Christopher Howse

The person next to me on the plane asked why I had torn pages from *Margaret Thatcher: the authorized biography, volume one: Not For Turning* by Charles Moore (Allen Lane, £30; *Tablet* price £27). It was because I had somehow bought one copy too many and it was worth travelling without the weight of 100 pages of references. As compelling as a novel.

Mary Kenny

Distant Intimacy: a friendship in the age of the internet by Frederick Raphael and Joseph Epstein (Yale University Press, £20; *Tablet* price £18) is wicked, but also wickedly enjoyable: the literary bitchiness is a hoot, yet it's brilliantly written and the obsession with Jewishness is insightful. *Dotter of Her Father's Eyes* by Mary M. Talbot and Bryan Talbot (Jonathan Cape, £14.99; *Tablet* price £13.50) is a stimulating Catholic-ish autobiography written in cartoon form.



David Goodall

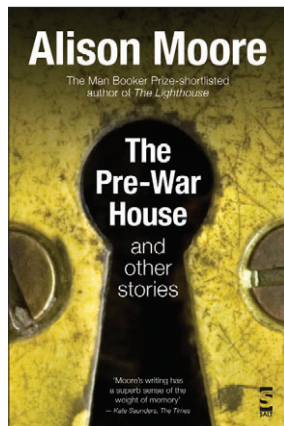
I'd like first to finish the first volume of Charles Moore's authorised biography of Margaret Thatcher – comprehensive, objective, illuminating and charitable. If that proves too heavy for a holiday suitcase, I will turn to

Trollope: perhaps to *The Duke's Children* (Oxford World Classics, £9.99; *Tablet* price £9) where Plantagenet Palliser's political troubles and dealings with his adult children provide a Victorian counterpoint to Margaret Thatcher's.

Timothy Brittain-Catlin

I have been riveted by *The Mussolini Canal*

(Dedalus, £12.99; *Tablet* price £11.70), the novel by Antonio Pennacchi published this year in a fine translation by Judith Landry. It tells the story of a northern Italian peasant family, intertwined with the early career of Mussolini, that has been transplanted to the new fascist landscape of the drained Pontine Marshes outside Rome.



James Moran
I've been tremendously impressed by Alison Moore's short-story collection, *The Pre-War House* (Salt, £12.99; *Tablet* price £11.70), a dark but compelling set of stories about domestic life. These short tales are the

perfect length for beach or airport reading, although the sinister opening story is scarcely designed to encourage foreign travel.

Hilmar Pabel

As we awaken to revelations of widespread government-directed electronic espionage, Graham Greene's *Our Man in Havana* (Vintage, £8.99; *Tablet* price £8.10), first published 55 years ago, serves as a marvellous tonic. James Wormold, unsuccessful vacuum cleaner salesman and accidental spy extraordinaire, plies his new trade with wit, not technology. The novel is English understatement at its finest.

Marina Vaizey

Telling tales about relationships, misunderstandings, loneliness, love, ageing, families, what people think of themselves and others, how they manage the world – or don't: graceful, elegant, haunting, at times surreal, *The Collected Stories of Lydia Davis* (Penguin £10.99; *Tablet* price £9.90) range from a couple of sentences to 40 pages or so; any size but all humanity is here. And they are funny, ironic, hilarious and affecting too: and alarmingly recognisable as the human predicament in all its guises.

Robert Carver

Joseph Kony, the anti-hero of *The Wizard of the Nile* by Matthew Green (Portobello Books, £7.99; *Tablet* price £7.20) instructs his Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army of abducted child soldiers to say their Rosaries and pray to the Virgin Mary. Wanted for torture, slavery and war crimes by the Hague Tribunal, Kony trusts only a Spanish Catholic missionary priest, while born-again Evangelicals claim Kony is possessed by Satan. Stranger than Conrad or Graham Greene – but all true.

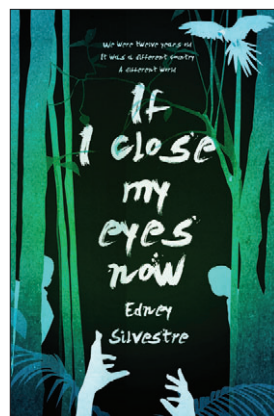
Terry Philpot

In *The End* (Allen Lane, £30; *Tablet* price £27), Hitler's biographer, Ian Kershaw, com-

bines scholarship with engrossing storytelling to explain why Germany continued to fight when all was self-evidently lost. Sobering but rewarding holiday reading.

Susan Dowell

Francis Spufford's memoir *The Child that Books Built* (Faber and Faber, £8.99; *Tablet* price £8.10) bears eloquent witness to fiction's power to make the reader say, "This is what I needed without knowing it ... this is where part of me is going to be living for a while." A summer treat not only for the bookish.



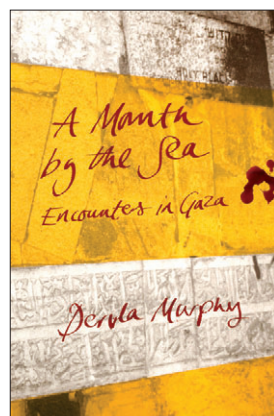
Amanda Hopkinson

If I Close My Eyes Now by Brazilian author Edney Silvestre, translated by Nick Caistor (Doubleday, £14.99; *Tablet* price £13.50) affirms that crime fiction is to the twenty-first century what the grand

social novel was to the nineteenth. Sadistic sexual politics, investigated by an unlikely trio of sleuths (two schoolboys and an elderly man); misogynistic murder; syncretic Christianity; municipal shenanigans; all fester beneath the raging Rio sun.

Kathy Watson

Donna Leon's elegant detective novels set in Venice are perfect holiday reading. The main character, Commissario Guido Brunetti is warm-hearted and loveable, his wife, Paola, cooks lavishly described meals, and a pleasing air of sophistication pervades every scene. My personal favourite is *A Question of Belief* (Arrow, £7.99; *Tablet* price £7.20), a fascinating tale about an old lady, a judge and a conman. It all takes place during a pulverising Venetian heatwave which is so well evoked you'll probably end up fanning yourself.



Jonathan Wright

Dervla Murphy's *A Month by the Sea: encounters in Gaza* (Eland, £16.99; *Tablet* price £15.30) is a triumph. It demolishes stereotypes, makes you weep and roar with laughter, and should be placed

in the hands of every would-be travel writer who thinks that all the job requires is a plane ticket to an exotic locale and a thesaurus on the shelf when you return home.

Laura Keynes

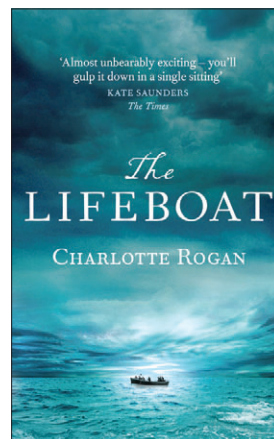
I'm enjoying *Not That Kind of Girl* by Carlene Bauer (Harper Perennial, £9.20; *Tablet* price £8.30), a memoir about growing up in New Jersey with an Evangelical mother and Catholic father – and being a sensitive literary girl with ambitions to get to New York and be a writer. A brave, poignant, evocative coming-of-age tale about a young woman negotiating books, sex and God, finding her way and establishing her own voice.

Melanie McDonagh

My battered copy of L.P. Hartley's trilogy *Eustace and Hilda* (Faber and Faber, available second-hand), is the surest route to literary pleasure I know. Literary pleasure, mind you, for it is impossible not to feel vicarious anguish at this story of a boy dominated by his older, puritanical sister: perhaps feminism might have given her other outlets. But, as Lord David Cecil wrote, it is "in any age and by any standards, a masterpiece".

Brendan Walsh

You'll be lucky to find a copy, but I've been delighting in the third volume of autobiography by the brilliant, irreverent and convivially subversive journalist Claud Cockburn, *View from the West* (MacGibbon and Kee, long out of print I'm afraid, but available second-hand), written after his move to County Cork. Cockburn, perhaps because he is a writer easier to love than to trust, "got" the Irish in a way few Englishmen do.



Sibhan Garrigan

Rarely has the battle of the sexes been so fraught as on *The Lifeboat*, by Charlotte Rogan (Virago, £7.99; *Tablet* price £7.20). Somewhere between the claustrophobia of surviving three weeks stranded at sea

and the tension of the New York court where she is tried for her behaviour on the eponymous boat, we realise we perhaps ought to despise our heroine.

Alexander Lucie-Smith

There's not been much published this year that has stayed in my memory, and a good summer read needs to be substantial. That's why I recommend George Gissing, a novelist most have heard of but few have read. His *New Grub Street*, first published in 1891 (Oxford World Classics, £9.99; *Tablet* price £9), is a wonderful exploration of why authors write, and what they put up with in their struggle for fame. It's grim stuff, but fascinating, and a great way in to a great writer.