

BOOKSELLERS' CHOICE

TITLES DUE FOR PUBLICATION IN NOVEMBER 2010

Perfect reads

Unravelling lives, political unrest and Proust all feature in the panel's choices for November

SUE SCHOLES

Fiction buyer, WH Smith

Steve Martin is a real renaissance man—author, actor, musician, art collector to name but a few of his skills. In the novel *An Object of Beauty* he tells the story of Lacey Yeager's rise and fall through the world of art, money and more money. Martin holds a mirror to the glamorous and intrigue-filled world of the New York art scene and the images we see are sharp and clear. Like a mirror the novel illuminates a world and characters that are both glittering and liable to shatter—an irresistible book.

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Although many have come after, Oliver Sacks was one of the first chroniclers of the mind and its complexities for a popular readership. Most famous for *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* he tells of the human condition with curiosity, without ever becoming sensationalist. In *The Mind's Eye* he explores how we experience the visual world. This time, however, he is one of the case histories as he tells us about his experience of discovering that he had a malignant tumour in one eye. The personal aspect makes it all the more absorbing and enlightening.

I am not easily seduced by the lure of vampire fiction, however, I did really enjoy *Black Swan Rising*. New York jeweller Gareth James takes on a commission to open a sealed silver box. The opening of the box opens a new world to her. This is a cross between Stephenie Meyer and Kate Mosse and as the first part of a trilogy there is plenty more to come.

And finally, an early seasonal offering. In *Another Night Before Christmas* Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy has produced a typically engaging reimagining of a classic festive poem. This is a lovely gift, with beautiful illustrations and a real sweetness of tone. She has made the poem modern, without losing any of its charm or magic.

PATRICK NEALE

Jaffé and Neale Bookshop and Café Monarchist or Republican alike should take a good look at Prince Charles' latest offering describing man's relationship with our planet. Even Charles' critics have to accept that he

was an environmentalist long before it was fashionable. *Harmony* is a beautifully illustrated book developing the idea that our loss of contact with nature has damaged our lives and made them less fruitful. This book will spark debate and hopefully cement change.

I have read very little Proust but was delighted and fascinated by Lorenza Foschini's *Proust's Overcoat*. It's one of those stories that would fit so beautifully into the most imaginative novelist's fiction. But it's the true story of Jacques Guerin and his obsession with all things Proust. This is a joyful piece of literary detective work. You truly feel you are in the room as the author actually gets to hold this iconic garment. It once sat on the shoulders of the man as he toiled over one of the greatest works of literature and you are sucked in to join Guerin's ceaseless quest.

Oliver Sacks never fails to deliver. *The Mind's Eye*, like *The Man Who Mistook...* is packed with intriguing stories of people whose lives are changed and thwarted by minute alterations in their brain. This book concentrates on visual impediments and is all the more poignant as Sacks developed an abnormality himself and so became his own case history. What makes this book fabulous is the sensitivity with which Sacks describes his patients and their courage.

Polly Samson's stories pick you up by the scruff of the neck and shake you free from comfy unchallenging fiction. *Perfect Lives* is a bold collection digging beneath the surface of happy contemporary lives showing life and love for real. Mothers, daughters, lovers and friends all fall under Polly Samson's wise gaze with poignant and funny results.

RUTH HUNTER

BookTime editor, Bertrams

A new novel from the multi-talented Steve Martin, *An*

Object of Beauty casts a knowledgeable eye over the New York art world. Embellished with pictures of the works that feature in the plot, it tells the story of Lacey Yeager, an ambitious and ruthless art dealer. Using her sexuality and fraudulent practices to get ahead in the art business, the book traces her rise and fall. A well-written tale which exposes the inner workings of an exclusive world.

Set in Portugal in the late 1930s, when nationalism was taking hold, *Pereira Maintains* by Antonio Tarbucchi is a powerful story of a "little man" who takes a stand against oppression. Dr Pereira edits the culture pages of a Lisbon newspaper. Living in the past, translating 19th-century French literature, and talking to the portrait of his deceased wife, he is content to lie low, despite his disagreement with what's happening in his country. But when he meets a young political activist and his beautiful girlfriend his attitude slowly changes. Tarbucchi's narration is almost comic in its sparse, conversational tone, belying the serious nature of the novel.

Less a collection of short stories, more of a novel, *Perfect Lives* by Polly Samson examines the lives of various characters in a seaside village. From the piano tuner mourning the loss of his concert playing career, to a woman who finds she can't love her baby, these tales are poignant, surprising and often humorous. Samson reveals how people's view of themselves is often very different to how others perceive them.

Another book by Oliver Sacks offering an insight into the brain's workings, *The Mind's Eye* concentrates on vision, from reading and writing to blindness and internal imagery. He reveals the cases of those who've lost visual abilities through brain disease and injuries. Sacks always comes across as deeply engaged; he describes in great detail how a



"Set in Portugal in the late 1930s, Pereira Maintains is a powerful story of a 'little man' who takes a stand against oppression" **Ruth Hunter, BookTime editor, Bertrams**

tumour behind his eye slowly affected his vision.

EMMA GIACON

Book content manager, Amazon

In non-fiction this month Anna Pavord's *The Curious Gardener* presents a gorgeous gift opportunity for gardeners. It takes readers through the gardening year, describing what to do in each month to get the best from your garden, punctuating practical advice with Pavord's observations and commentary.

For fans of the arts comes *Apollo's Angels* by Jennifer Homans (a retired dancer and historian). This is a history of classical ballet which takes us from its origins in 18th-century France through the Italian influence in the 19th century, the dominance of Russia in the late 19th and early 20th century, up to the present and ballet's uncertain future.

Turning to music, November gives us two interesting titles to watch. Jay-Z's success is virtually unsurpassed, and his profile in the UK has never been higher. *Decoded*, featuring Jay-Z's own "decoding" of each lyric, uncovers the

wordplay and stories behind his songs and this personal chronicle should appeal to his massive fan base.

From hip hop to rock, and *The Girl in the Song*, which tells the stories of 50

women who have inspired classic rock songs—a great little stocking filler for music fans.

A couple to mention in fiction. Lloyd Jones scored a massive success with the Booker-shortlisted *Mister Pip* in 2007 and his new book should have similar book-club appeal. *Hand Me Down World* is a haunting story set around a nameless African girl, who sees her baby taken away from her and pursues him to Berlin.

Science fiction fans may want to take a look at *The Nemesis List* by R J Frith. This novel is a result of a

competition run by *SciFi Now* magazine, and will get lots of coverage from them in the run up to publication. Dyslexic (and female) author Frith has written a commercial space-opera, and it'll be fascinating to see what SF fans make of it.

SARAH CLARKE

Co-owner, The Torbay Bookshop

The interest in all matters relating to the First World War shows no sign of abating and in *Tommy's Ark*, *Last Fighting Tommy* author Richard van Ernden has turned his attention to the extraordinary variety of animals on the Western Front. Through the recollections of the men who were there, from unpublished diaries, letters and memoirs, they range from the commonplace such as the regimental mascot goat, to the exotic lion or monkey. The accounts illustrate just how important the contact and company of the animal world was to the lonely and desperate men on the front and the special relationships they forged.

Literary thriller writer Carol Goodman has appealed to the paranormal market in *Black Swan Rising*, the first in an exciting dark urban fantasy with real cross-over appeal. New York jeweller Gareth James finds she has opened far more than she bargained for when she unseals a mysterious box for a sinister stranger. She discovers she is descended from an immortal known as the "Watchtower", to stand guard between the human and supernatural worlds. With an array of exotic creatures to contend with she finds her life changed forever.

Andrew Klavan's *Identity Man* has a real sense of unease from the start, when petty criminal John Shannon is given a new face by a mystery man and starts to rebuild his life in a strange city devastated by a massive flood.

Corruption is rife but still Shannon cannot understand why he is a target when he has a new identity and should be unrecognisable. This could be his breakout novel in the UK with its fast-paced and gritty plotline containing plenty of twists.

Follow up to the hit BBC series *Victorian Farm* is Ruth Goodman's *Edwardian Farm*, tied into a 12-part series. This time the setting is Morwellham Quay in the West Country. The authors spent over a year living on the land, rediscovering forgotten skills and lost traditions with the aim of dramatically bringing the community to life.

RODNEY TROUBRIDGE

Fiction marketing planner, Waterstone's

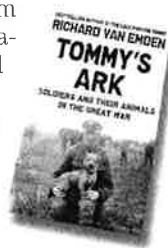
After the success of *Mister Pip*, Lloyd Jones' *Hand Me Down World* is the story of a woman in a third-world country whose child is taken from her and removed to Berlin. She decides to reclaim him, which involves a journey across the Mediterranean and through Europe. The journey is first told by various narrators; finally she is able to tell her own story. Another fine novel from Jones.

Orchid Blue is not a cheerful read for two reasons: one is that the story concerns the murder of a young girl and the treatment by the local police of the man who was convicted of killing her and hanged; secondly the setting is a town in early 1960s Northern Ireland; a depressing and bigoted location. Eoin McNamee has taken a real life crime and created a powerful fictionalisation of it. It won't lift the heart but one can only respect the way he has achieved it.

I found the short story collection *Perfect Lives* a particular pleasure; of course these are not all perfect lives and Sansom exposes them in entirely her own way and in a distinct tone. There are philandering husbands, a failed concert pianist and unhappy women searching for identities both in the past and

present. Their lives are cleverly interlinked in the eleven stories, and I particularly liked the way classical music and several pianos are weaved into the stories too.

Proust's Overcoat by Lorenza Foschini is short and can be read in a sitting. Yet it tells a strange story in a rather a charming way—an obsessive search for Proust's possessions and in particular the famous fur coat he wore and the bed in which he wrote. As so often there are family secrets and embarrassments to be overcome and also the niggling question of whether these objects really matter; but the story has a happy ending and the evidence sits in a Parisian Museum.



THE PANEL'S SELECTION

An Object of Beauty Steve Martin (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 25th, £16.99, 9780297863298)

Another Night Before Christmas Carol Ann Duffy (Macmillan, 5th, £4.99, 9780330523936)

Apollo's Angels: A History of Ballet Jennifer Homans (Granta, 4th, £30, 9781862079502)

Black Swan Rising Lee Carroll (Transworld, 25th, £12.99, 9780593065969)

Decoded Jay-Z (Virgin, 18th, £20, 9780753522691)

Edwardian Farm Ruth Goodman (Anova, 1st, £25, 9781862058859)

Hand Me Down World Lloyd Jones (John Murray, 11th, £14.99, 978184544789)

Harmony: A New Way of Looking at Our World HRH The Prince of Wales (Blue Door, 1st, £25.00 9780007348039)

Orchid Blue Eoin McNamee (Faber, 4th, £12.99, 9780571237548)

Pereira Maintains Antonio Tarbucchi (Canongate, 4th, £14.99, 9781847675712)

Perfect Lives Polly Sansom (Little, Brown, 4th, £14.99, 9781860499920)

Proust's Overcoat Lorenza Foschini (Portobello, 4th, £9.99, 9781846272714)

Tommy's Ark Richard Van Ernden (Bloomsbury, 1st, £16.99, 9781408806111)

The Curious Gardener Anna Pavord (Bloomsbury, 1st, £20, 9781408808887)

The Girl in the Song (Anova, 1st, £9.99, 9781907554032)

The Identity Man Andrew Klavan (Corvus, 1st, £14.99, 9781848875357)

The Mind's Eye Oliver Sacks (Picador, 5th, £20, 9780330508896)

The Nemesis List R J Frith (Tor, 5th, £16.99, 9780230748910)

John Murray, 11th, £14.99, hb, 9781848544789 Latest novel from the New Zealand-based author of *Mister Pip*—shortlisted for the 2007 Booker Prize and winner of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize best book award—is the absorbing story of a woman told through the eyes of those she meets on her journey from Africa to Europe to find the child that was taken from her. John Murray has high hopes that publishing literary fiction in a quiet month will pay dividends. BookScan ★★★

Anne Rice
Of Love and Evil
Chatto, 4th, £12.99, hb, 9780701178154 Second in The Songs of the Seraphim series follows *Angel Time*. Toby O'Dare, a former government assassin, is sent back to Rome in the 15th century by the angel Malchiah. At the heart of the high Italian Renaissance, O'Dare must solve a crime of poisoning as he grapples with treacherous plots and counter-plots. BookScan ★★★

German Sadulaev
I am a Chechen!
Harvill, 4th, £12.99, tpb, 9781846552632 Described as "a lyrical fusion of exotic legends, stories and memories of Chechnya" by an author who

left his ancestral home just before the first Chechen war to study in St Petersburg. BookScan N/R

Antonio Tabucchi
Pereira Maintains
Canongate, 4th, £14.99, hb, 9781847675712 Portugal, 1938. Dr Pereira is a long-widowed editor on a Lisbon newspaper, who prefers to ignore the political situation and immerse himself in 19th-century French literature. Then he meets a charismatic young man, with links to the anti-Franco International Brigade. Italian-born Tabucchi has been shortlisted for the International Man Booker Prize twice, and has won the Prix Medicis Etranger and the Premio Campiello. An impressive array of authors have provided quotes for the jacket including Philip Pullman, Diana Athill and John Carey. BookScan N/R

Armistead Maupin
Mary Ann in Autumn
Doubleday, 11th, £17.99, hb, 9780385619318 Latest instalment in the long-running Tales of the City series which Transworld describes as "the oldest literary soap opera in the world". It's been 20 years since Mary Ann Singleton left her husband and child in San Francisco

to pursue her dreams in New York but now she's back and seeking refuge at the house of her oldest friend. BookScan ★★★

José Luís Peixoto
The Piano Cemetery
Bloomsbury, 3rd, £16.99, hb, 9780747599654 Second novel by the author of *Blank Gaze* is set in the working-class district of Benfica, Lisbon and follows two generations of the Lázaro family, cabinet makers who would rather be piano makers, weaving in the true story of the marathon runner Francisco Lázaro who died after running 30km at the Stockholm Olympics in 1912. BookScan N/R

Jo-Ann Mapson
Solomon's Oak
Bloomsbury, 1st, £11.99, tpb, 9781408810682 A young widow, a traumatised teenager and a police officer injured in the line of fire are three damaged people whose new friendship may provide a way out of their misery. Jodi Picoult is a big fan and this is just her market. BookScan N/R

Russell Hoban
Angelica Lost and Found
Bloomsbury, 1st, £10, hb, 9781408806609 Volatore, the hippogriff from Ariosto's epic 16th-century poem *Orlando*

Furioso, has escaped from the confines of fiction, time and place and is roaming the 21st century looking for the beautiful Angelica (who he helped to rescue in the poem). And once he's found her he'll then have to find the perfect form in which to consummate their love... ● Author PR BookScan ★

Literary début

Salvatore Scibona
The End
Cape, 4th, £16.99, hb, 9780224091497 This was a finalist for the National Book Award in the US, and earned the author a place on the *New Yorker's* 2010 "20 Under 40" list of young writers to watch. Nothing to read but the setting is 15th August 1953, and we follow "an elderly abortionist, an enigmataic seamstress, a teenage boy and a jeweller deep into the heart of a crime that will twist all of their lives", says Cape. BookScan N/R

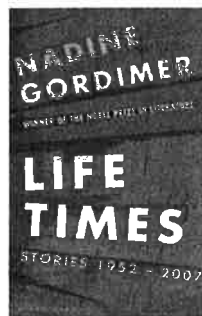
Poetry

Carol Ann Duffy
Another Night Before Christmas
Picador, 5th, £4.99, hb, 9780330523936 The classic Victorian Christmas tale retold by the Poet Laureate and in a lovely gift format. Illustrated by Rob Ryan. BookScan ★★★

Literary short stories

Polly Samson
Perfect Lives
Virago, 4th, £15.99, hb, 9781860499920 New collection by Samson whose first, *Lying in Bed* (2000), was very well-received. Here, characters tell their own stories—of love, loss and memory, and then reappear in the stories of others in this beautifully crafted collection. BookScan N/R

David Means
The Spot
Faber, 4th, £10, tpb, 9780571251339 New collection from an author whose work has appeared in *The New Yorker* and *Harper's*. A gang discusses a botched bank robbery, the body of a young girl floats at the bottom of Niagara Falls and a madman is plagued by a noisy neighbour on Manhattan's Upper East Side. BookScan N/R



Nadine Gordimer
Life Times: Stories 1952-2007
Bloomsbury, 15th, £25, hb, 9780747592631 Thirty-five stories by the Nobel

Prize-winning South African author over six decades, and drawn from her ten earlier published collections. ● Author PR

Historical adventure

Simon Scarrow
The Legion
Headline, 11th, £12.99, tpb, 9780755353743 Scarrow's latest to feature Roman army officers Macro and Cato. BookScan ★★

Saga

Val Wood
The Homecoming
Bantam Press, 11th, £18.99, hb, 9780593066997 Hull, 1874, and Jewel Newmarch's exotic beauty marks her out from everyone else in the town. Curious about her origins she sets sail for her birthplace in America, on what will be a life-changing voyage of discovery. Wood won the inaugural Catherine Cookson Prize for Fiction. BookScan N/S

Cynthia Harrod-Eagles
The Dancing Years
Sphere, 4th, £19.99, hb, 9780751537727 Thirty-third instalment of the Dynasty saga. It's 1919, and as the euphoria of the armistice fades, the Morland family must come to terms with the brave new world. BookScan N/S