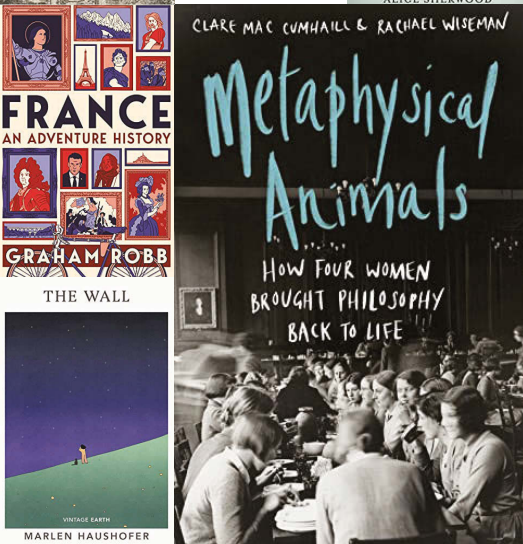


TABLET



BOOKS OF THE YEAR

Frank Cottrell-Boyce • Chris Patten
 Antonia Fraser • A.N. Wilson
 Erik Varden • Ysenda Maxtone Graham
 Maggie Fergusson • Melanie McDonagh
 Christopher Jamison



Joanna Moorhead
The women who lead Cafod

Abigail Frymann Rouch
Sunak's multi-faith Cabinet

Brian Morton
Mica Paris sings gospel

Rose Prince
No turkey this Christmas

BOOKS OF THE YEAR

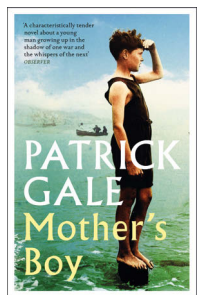
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21



CARINA MURPHY
The Queen of Dirt Island by Donal Ryan (Doubleday, £14.99; *Tablet* price £13.49) is a masterclass in strong female characters. In 1980s rural Ireland, three generations of the Aylwards, living without their menfolk, love, grieve, struggle and thrive over endless cups of tea and cigarettes in this humorous, melancholic and stirring yarn. Youngest member Saoirse comes of age against a backdrop of brutality and tragedy, counteracted by the fierce, unceasing love of her family.

FRED KELLY

There are far too many books about cricket, and far too many people who write them. Thank goodness for Jon Hotten, one of the world's pre-eminent cricket writers, who cuts, pulls and drives through the crowd. In *Bat, Ball, Field* (William Collins, £20; *Tablet* price £18), he illuminates the wonders, frustrations and history of people hurling leather balls at others with wooden bats. It's an essential addition to any sport lover's bookshelf.



LINDSAY DUGUID
Patrick Gale's retelling of the life of the poet Charles Causley, *Mother's Boy* (Tinder Press, £20; *Tablet* price £18), based on diaries, letters and poems, goes from the meeting of Causley's parents in 1914, to 1948 when he returns from gruelling wartime service to live with his widowed mother in Launceston and teach in a local school. Gale's poetic observations of daily life and his sympathy with Causley's feelings make a powerful and moving novel.

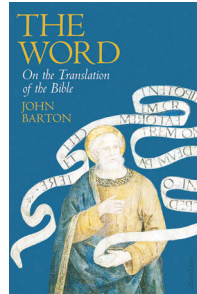
LUKE BELL

In this time of rocketing energy costs, Susanna Søberg's *Winter Swimming: The Nordic Way Towards a Healthier and Happier Life* (Quercus, £22; *Tablet* price £19.80) offers a way for you to build up your natural cold resistance. It's enjoyable and fun, too, with science to back it up, though much research remains to be done. There are beautiful illustrations: my favourite is a Siberian matron leading children through the snow to the river for their swim.

YSEDA MAXTONE GRAHAM

I feel I've actually lived in Wigton in Cumbria, so vividly does Melvyn Bragg describe every back street of his childhood town in his beautifully written memoir *Back in the Day* (Sceptre, £25;

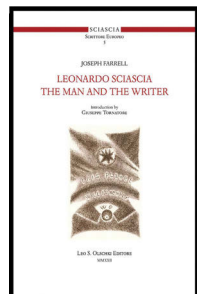
Tablet price £22.50). He combines an affectionate portrait of his parents, Stan and Ethel, who ran a pub, with a moving account of his teens, which included a terrifying nervous breakdown, followed by the discovery that hard work was addictive. I never thought I could be enraptured by an account of a sixth-form English lesson, but I was.



NICHOLAS KING
If you are interested in the question of translation, particularly the translation of the Bible (and all readers of *The Tablet* should have such an interest), then you must go out and buy the latest work from John Barton, *The Word: On the Translation of the Bible* (Allen Lane, £25; *Tablet* price £22.50). As always, the watchword is profound scholarship, lightly worn. This book makes excellent reading, and will open you up to the difficulty, not to say impossibility, of translation.

LUCY POPESCU

I loved the economy of Claire Keegan's Booker-shortlisted *Small Things Like These* (Faber, £8.99; *Tablet* price £8.09). Set in a small Irish town in 1985, it follows an unlikely hero – Bill Furlong, a coal merchant, married with five daughters – and his growing realisation that something is wrong at the local convent. This is a compassionate and compelling exploration of the Magdalene laundries, and the appalling silence regarding their existence, rendered in exquisite prose.



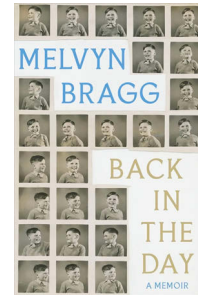
IAN THOMSON
Joseph Farrell's *Leonardo Sciascia: The Man and the Writer* (Leo S. Olschki Editore, £30.48) considers the life and work of one of the great crime writers of our time. Sciascia (pronounced "sha-sha") was born in 1921 in the Mafia-infiltrated west of Sicily, and much of his work – thrillers, essays, pamphlets, plays – is set in that beautiful but bedevilled part of the island. Caroline Moorehead is currently researching a book about him; Farrell's is an excellent place to start.

RICHARD HOLLOWAY

Ronald Blythe, author of *Akenfield*, turned 100 this year, and to mark his centenary John Murray has published *Next to Nature: A Lifetime in the English Countryside* (£25; *Tablet* price £22.50). This is a collection of articles Blythe has written for the *Church Times*, and each month's selection is introduced by a well-known writer. It's a sumptuous book.

PATRICK HUDSON

We are enjoined but rarely able to look beyond the statistics of history's (or today's) horrors. *Memories of Starobielsk* by Józef Czapski (NYRB, £16.99; *Tablet* price £15.29) is a rare glimpse of the author's fellow Polish officers in a Soviet prison camp who were among 22,000 massacred by the NKVD in 1940. Czapski, an old-style cosmopolitan humanist, survived; in his writings survive his comrades' characters, delights and imaginations.



PETER STANFORD

Memoirs work best when they tell a story that resonates with readers' own stories. Few have pulled it off as brilliantly and beguilingly as Melvyn Bragg in *Back in the Day* (Sceptre, £25; *Tablet* price £22.50).

Completely immersed in post-war Wigton, the Cumbrian town where he grew up and to which he remains profoundly connected, it recalls voices and places and people in technicoloured detail and manages to make anyone who has left home and family behind, but never quite behind, wonder if they did the right thing.

MARY BLANCHE RIDGE

I recently read and loved Dorothy Whipple's childhood memoir *The Other Day*, first published in 1936, and now reprinted by Persephone Books (£14), which also publishes her lovely, long-forgotten novels. It rings with *joie de vivre* and authenticity; it's unsentimental and funny too.



MAGGIE FERGUSON

Former Children's Laureate Malorie Blackman's memoir, *Just Sayin'* (Merky Books, £16.99; *Tablet* price £15.29), gave me a clearer sense than anything else I've ever read of the routine, casual racism suffered by Black people in this country – on the Underground, in hospital, at school. If that makes it sound like a moan a minute, it's really not. Blackman is a beautiful writer, with a cracking sense of humour. A treasure.

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