

Class of 2013

BY STACEY BARTLETT

One of things our readers told us they'd like to see in *The Bookseller* this year was a round-up of the media's books of the year. So, 660 reviews and one massive Excel spreadsheet later, here we are.

National press and, more specifically, broadsheet reviews have always been a rule unto their own. They rarely reflect what sells in bookshops: the books they

review usually sell in their hundreds rather than tens of thousands. But it's important for publishers to have their books in the press regardless of their sales figures, and 2013's books of the year coverage was impressively wide-ranging.

Supermarket sweethearts including cookbooks and sporting biographies sat alongside word-of-mouth wonders like John Williams' reinvigorated *Stoner*, and groundbreaking débuts such as Donal Ryan's *The Spinning Heart*.

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Some newspapers did their coverage differently; the *Observer* had the most contributors (45) who each offered their individual favourites, while other papers divided their books of the year into sections, offering a more comprehensive landscape of what was published in each genre.

However you consume the books of the year, there were 35 titles that were cited most often (see chart opposite), with posthumous biographies seeming generally to be the critics' favourites: Charles Moore's biography of Margaret Thatcher, Hermione Lee's biography of Penelope Fitzgerald, and Lucy Hughes-Hallett's biography of Gabriele d'Annunzio, *The Pike*, all

impressed readers including Mary Beard, William Dalrymple, Ali Smith, Hilary Mantel, John Lanchester, Penelope Lively and Philip Hensher.

Stand-out fiction this year from big names like Donna Tartt, Dave Eggers and Kate Atkinson sat alongside prize shortlistees and winners such as Jim Crace and Eleanor Catton. The breakthrough authors we should look out for next year are Philipp Meyer and Rachel Kushner, whose second books emerged from more than 160 fiction reviews to steal the limelight, thanks to championing from admirers including Colm Tóibín and Lionel Shriver. Overleaf, we break down what the critics loved most in 2013 by genre.

Do Book of the Year lists affect sales?

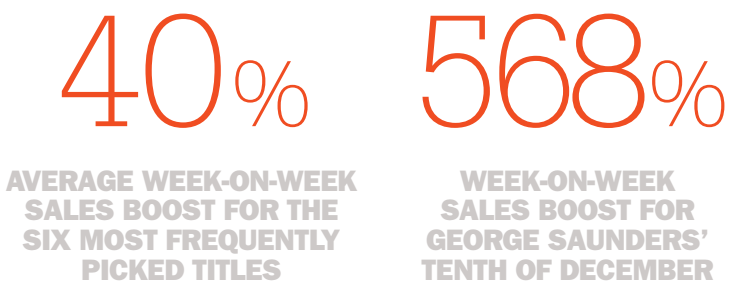
BY PHILIP STONE

In addition to awards boosts, numerous titles receiving “Book of the Year” nominations in the national press also enjoyed uplifts at the end of November. Sales of the six most commonly picked books of the year—Jim Crace's *Harvest* (Picador), Nina Stibbe's *Love, Nina* (Viking), Charles Moore's biography of Margaret Thatcher (Allen Lane), Hermione Lee's *Penelope Fitzgerald: A Life* (Chatto), Lucy Hughes-Hallett's *The Pike* (Fourth Estate) and George Saunders' *Tenth of December* (Bloomsbury)—jumped 40% week

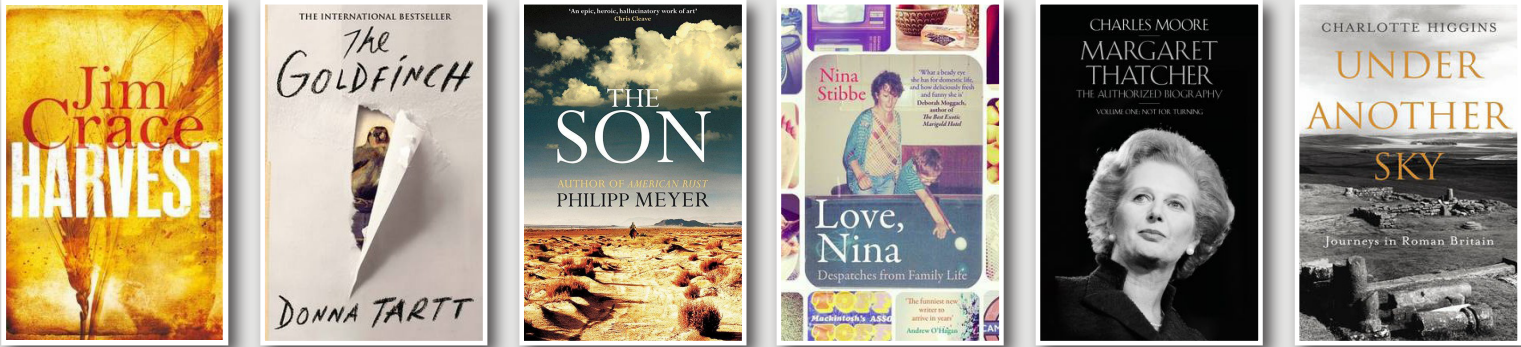
on week, ranging from a boost of 19% for *Love, Nina* to a huge 568% for *Tenth of December*.

There were big uplifts for other titles receiving multiple nominations in the newspapers, including Max Hastings'

*Catastrophe* (HarperPress, +104%), Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (Hamish Hamilton, +179%), Philipp Meyer's acclaimed *The Son* (Simon & Schuster, +124%) and James Salter's *All That Is* (Picador, +588%).



TOP PICKS: THE SIX BOOKS SELECTED BY FOUR DIFFERENT PUBLICATIONS



**HARVEST**  
**JIM CRACE**  
Picador, 9780330445665, £16.99

Crace announced earlier this year that *Harvest* would be his last novel. One of three novels to be picked as a book of the year by four papers—the *Observer*, *FT*, *Sunday Times* and *Telegraph*—novelist Justin Cartwright said in the *Observer* that *Harvest* was the book he “most admired” this year, and in the same paper Colin Thubron called him a “fine and unsparing writer”. Tim Martin said in the *Telegraph* it “aspires to the unsettling self-assurance of a William Golding novel without ever quite cashing the cheque that its attitude promises”. Isabel Berwick called it a “spare, haunting book” and “one to savour” in the *FT*. Crace has bowed out with a starry 2013.

**THE GOLDFINCH**  
**DONNA TARTT**  
Little, Brown, 9781408704943, £20

Tartt's 760-page tour de force, her first novel in more than a decade, was always going to be one of the outstanding fiction titles of 2013.

Isabel Berwick called the publication “an event” in the *FT*. Louise Doughty called it “a good one to snuggle down with when the inevitable New Year virus hits” in the *Times*, and Tim Martin described it as a “huge, shambling, Dickensian beast of a novel . . . a Gothic kids' story in the vein of J K Rowling or *Hugo Cabret*, tricked out with enough Xanax, anomie, violence and betrayal to draw in the most scornful adult.” Jan Moir called it a “thrillingly good doorstep of a novel” in the *Daily Mail*.

**THE SON**  
**PHILIPP MEYER**  
Simon & Schuster, 9780857209429, £14.99

Lionel Shriver, Colm Tóibín, Isabel Berwick and Tim Martin all chose Philipp Meyer's epic, two-century-sprawling tale of the Texan McCullogh family. *The Son* follows them from humble beginnings on the frontier, as patriarch Eli McCullogh is kidnapped by Indians, to his great-granddaughter's single-handed domination of the oil industry in the present day.

Tóibín noted its “ambition and sense of character” in the *Observer*, and Shriver praised its use of the “white-man-raised-by-Indians routine, and yet incredibly it doesn't feel tired.” Tim Martin wrote in the *Telegraph* that it evokes the “Spartan vistas of Cormac McCarthy and Peter Matthiessen.”

**LOVE, NINA**  
**NINA STIBBE**  
Viking, 9780670922765, £12.99

Little did Stibbe know at 20 years old—when she was writing home to her sister detailing her days looking after the sons of *London Review of Books* editor Mary-Kay Wilmers—that 20 years later she herself would be the toast of the book world.

Many have fallen in love with Nina: Andrew Holgate, Catherine O'Flynn, Emily Stokes, John Lanchester and, of course, Wilmers' ex-husband Stephen Frears chose *Love, Nina* among their books of the year.

The *Sunday Times* review, which called the book “full of wry humour, charming, warm-hearted and gently but irresistibly funny,” seemed to sum up the thoughts of the those who highlighted it.

**MARGARET THATCHER**  
**CHARLES MOORE**  
Allen Lane, 9780713992823, £30

Dame Thatcher's death this year saw the posthumous publication of the first volume of Charles Moore's biography of the Iron Lady. John Kampfner called it “by far the most authoritative account of the woman who changed Britain” in the *Observer*, and Philip Hensher praised it in the *Guardian*, describing it as “written with a clear eye and full of incidental pleasures”.

Dan Hodges said it stood out “a neatly coiffured head and shoulders above the rest” in the *Telegraph*, adding: “While some other books published in the wake of Mrs Thatcher's death were produced with a degree of expediency, Moore's work has been years in the planning, and it shows.”

**UNDER ANOTHER SKY**  
**CHARLOTTE HIGGINS**  
Jonathan Cape, 9780224090896, £20

Higgins' book about Roman Britain was shortlisted for this year's Samuel Johnson Prize, and four out of seven newspapers flagged it. William Dalrymple called it “thoughtful, learned, witty and superbly written” in the *Observer*, and Samuel Johnson judge Shami Chakrabarti selected it for the *Guardian*.

Dan Jones described it as “filled with passion and personal interest” in the *Telegraph*, adding that Higgins “ably captures the spirit of Britain now, Britain then and Britain inbetween”. Tom Robbins also chose it as one of his books of 2013 in the *FT*, citing Higgins' talent for showing “how Roman traces are woven through British life”.

TOP PICKS: THE TOP 35 BOOKS OF THE YEAR CHOICES

TITLE	AUTHOR	PUBLISHER	GENRE	ISBN	DM	FT	GU	OB	ST	TEL	TOTAL
Penelope Fitzgerald	Hermione Lee	Chatto	Biography	9780701184957			●●●●	●●●	●		8
Love, Nina	Nina Stibbe	Viking	Letters	9780670922765	●	●	●●	●	●		6
The Pike	Lucy Hughes-Hallett	Fourth Estate	Biography	9780007213962			●●	●●●	●		6
Harvest	Jim Crace	Picador	Fiction	9780330445665		●		●●	●	●	5
Margaret Thatcher	Charles Moore	Allen Lane	Biography	9780713992823			●●	●	●	●	5
Tenth of December	George Saunders	Bloomsbury	Short stories	9781408837344			●●	●●			5
The Goldfinch	Donna Tartt	Little Brown	Fiction	9781408704943	●	●		●		●	4
The Son	Philipp Meyer	S&S	Fiction	9780857209429		●	●	●		●	4
Under Another Sky	Charlotte Higgins	Jonathan Cape	Travel	9780224090896		●	●	●		●	4
Life After Life	Kate Atkinson	Doubleday	Fiction	9780385618670		●	●	●●			4
Power Trip	Damian McBride	Biteback	Politics	9781849545969			●		●●	●	4
All That Is	James Salter	Picador	Fiction	9781447238249		●	●	●			3
Benjamin Britten	Paul Kildea/Neil Powell	Allen Lane/Hutchinson	Biography	1846142321/0091931230*		●			●	●	3
Breakfast at Sotheby's	Philip Hook	Particular	Art	9781846146251		●	●		●		3
Catastrophe	Max Hastings	HarperCollins	History	9780007398577				●	●	●	3
Far from the Tree	Andrew Solomon	Chatto	Essays	9780701176112				●●	●		3
How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia	Mohsin Hamid	Hamish Hamilton	Fiction	9780241144664		●		●	●		3
I Am Zlatan Ibrahimovic	Zlatan Ibrahimovic	Penguin	Biography	9780241966839		●			●	●	3
In It Together	Matthew D'Ancona	Viking	Politics	9780670919932		●		●	●	●	3
Levels of Life	Julian Barnes	Jonathan Cape	Biography	9780224098151			●	●	●		3
Music in the Castle of Heaven	John Eliot Gardiner	Allen Lane	Music	9780713996623		●			●	●	3
Stoner	John Williams	Vintage	Fiction	9780099561545	●		●		●		3
The Broken Road	Patrick Leigh Fermor	John Murray	Travel	9781848547520		●	●	●			3
The Circle	Dave Eggers	Hamish Hamilton	Fiction	9780241146484			●	●	●	●	3
The First Bohemians	Vic Gatrell	Allen Lane	History	9781846146770				●	●	●	3
The Flamethrowers	Rachel Kushner	Harvill Secker	Fiction	9781846557910		●		●			3
The Luminaries	Eleanor Catton	Granta	Fiction	9781847084316			●	●		●	3
The New English Garden	Tim Richardson	Frances Lincoln	Gardening	9780711232709	●	●			●		3
The War That Ended Peace	Margaret Macmillan	Profile	History	9781846682728	●	●			●		3
Virginia Woolf's Garden	Caroline Zoob	Jacul Small	Gardening	9781909342132	●	●			●		3
Yeah Yeah Yeah	Bob Stanley	Faber	Music	9780571281978		●		●	●		3
Maggie & Me	Damian Barr	Bloomsbury	Biography	9781408838068				●●	●		3
The Bombing War	Richard Overy	Allen Lane	History	9780713995619				●●		●	3
The Infatuations	Javier Marias	Hamish Hamilton	Fiction	9780241145364				●●		●	3
The Letters of Paul Cezanne	Alex Danchev	T&H	Letters	9780500239087		●		●●			3

This chart was compiled using six newspapers' Books of the Year pieces: Daily Mail (DM), Financial Times (FT), Guardian (GU), Observer (OB), Sunday Times (ST) and the Telegraph (TEL). It is sorted by the number of critics who picked the title (TOTAL); and then by the number of newspapers to have selected the title; and finally alphabetically (by book title). \* Indicates that both ISBNs are prefixed by 978



↓ GENRE FICTION

Pushkin impresses with unlikely tales

BY STACEY BARTLETT

Genre fiction might not have filled as many column inches as some of the more literary books of the year, but reviewers indulged in some weird and wonderful fiction from all corners of publishing, including short stories, crime, fantasy and science-fiction.

The latest adult novel from international superstar Neil Gaiman (pictured), *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* (Headline) was the unsurprising hero of genre fiction. But independent publisher Pushkin Press was lauded for two of its titles. Edith Pearlman’s short-story collection *Binocular Vision*, her UK début at the age of 76, was chosen as the *Sunday Times*’ fiction book of the year—with Peter Kemp calling it a “dazzling revelation”. Isabel Berwick also selected it for the *FT*.



Rya Murakami’s satirical dystopian novel *From the Fatherland, with Love*, another Pushkin title, was also highly regarded; Tim Martin wrote in the titles. Edith Pearlman’s short-story collection *Binocular Vision*, her UK début at the age of 76, was chosen as the *Sunday Times*’ fiction book of the year—with Peter Kemp calling it a “dazzling revelation”. Isabel Berwick also selected it for the *FT*.

year’s best in the genre” according to John Dugdale in the *Sunday Times*. Barry Forshaw called it “cinematic and packed with pithy dialogue” in the *FT*.

More genre fiction picks included: Elizabeth Knox’s *Mortal Fire* (Farrar Straus Giroux), chosen by Man Booker winner Eleanor Catton in the *Guardian*; in the same paper Barbara Kingsolver heralded Helene Wecker’s *The Golem and the Djinni* (Blue Door); Hilary Mantel praised Maria McCann’s *Ace, King, Knave* (Faber) in the *Observer*; Robert Harris’ *An Officer and a Spy* (Hutchinson) was chosen by the *Guardian* and the *Sunday Times*; and Justin Cartwright’s *Lion Heart* (Bloomsbury) was selected in the *Telegraph* and the *Sunday Times*—Tim Martin “enjoyed it immensely for being so much itself”.

4 OTHER GENRE PICKS

**USA NOIR**  
**JOHNNY TEMPLE**  
Akashic Books, £7.99, 9781617751844

**ALEX**  
**PIERRE LEMAITRE**  
MacLehose Press, £7.99, 9781782060796

**TERMINUS**  
**ADAM BAKER**  
Hodder, £7.99, 9781444755879

**DREAM LONDON**  
**TONY BALLANTYNE**  
Solaris, £7.99, 9781781081730

↓ THE OUTDOOR LIFE

A natural selection

Outdoor life had some honourable mentions, with Sylvain Tesson’s dark travel memoir *Consolations of the Forest* (Allen Lane)—about his six months spent alone in a cabin on Lake Baikal—picked up by the *Sunday Times* and the *FT*.

*Virginia Woolf’s Garden* (Jacqui Small) by Caroline Zoob was chosen three times—Jane Shilling called it an “affectionate” book in the *Daily Mail*—and another highly reviewed gardening book was Tim Richards’ *The New English Garden* (Frances Lincoln): “This timely survey records old favourites as well as some new gardens,” Jane Owen wrote in the *FT*.

In nature, stinging animals seemed to be a theme: Dave Goulson’s Samuel Johnson-shortlisted book about bees, *A Sting in the Tail* (Jonathan Cape),

was one of Mary Beard’s picks—she called it a “worthy book of the year” in the *Observer*—and Colm Tóibín chose *Stung! On Jellyfish Blooms and the Future of the Ocean* by Lisa-Ann Gershwin (University of Chicago Press) for the *Observer*: “I have been sure for some time that I will come back as a jellyfish in the next life and thus have been much cheered up,” Tóibín wrote.

In the *Guardian* Roddy Doyle chose Paul Morley’s travelogue-cum-memoir *The North* (Bloomsbury) as his favourite book of the year: “[It] pushed me to go to the Lowry exhibition at the Tate and made me listen again to George Formby and the Buzzcocks . . . the book filled my head.”

Oliver Bullough’s travel book

*The Last Man in Russia* (Allen Lane) was chosen in the *Sunday Times* and the *FT*. In the former, Martin Hemming called Bullough’s quest to answer the question “why do Russians drink so much?” an “obscure but fascinating conceit”.

*Man Belong Mrs Queen* (Old Street), Matthew Baylis’ account of meeting a cult on the Pacific Island of Tanna that worships our very own Prince Philip, was also one of Hemming’s travel books of the year; he found it “self-mocking and occasionally hilarious”.

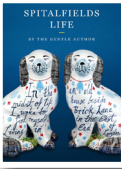
And Bel Mooney chose Miriam Darlington’s *Otter Country* (Granta) as one of her favourites in the *Daily Mail*: “I love books about the natural world and warmed to [this book] . . . it was a reminder to slow down . . . and watch.”

↓ CAPITAL READS

London’s book fare sparkles

“The book I’d most like for Christmas is *Spitalfields Life* [Saltyard Books] by the anonymous Gentle Author. I’ve been an avid fan of the blog, but ink and paper is where it belongs” said *Observer* critic Tim Adams about this collection of colourful stories of life in London’s East End.

Continuing the London theme, in the *Guardian* Bill Bryson called Philip Davies’ *London: Hidden Interiors* (English Heritage/Atlantic Publishing) his “absolute book of the year . . . hefty, gorgeous, [it] explores 180 fabulous London interior spaces that most people know nothing about.”



↓ BOOKS TO MAKE YOU THINK

Thinking, fast and slow

The history, sports, politics, philosophy, science and business sections of the books of the year compilations made for interesting reading. Four “books to make you think” stood out: David Epstein’s *The Sports Gene: What Makes the Perfect Athlete* (Yellow Jersey Press); Stephen Grosz’s *The Examined Life* (Chatto & Windus); William Dalrymple’s *Return of a King* (Bloomsbury); and Sheryl Sandberg’s *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (WH Allen)

Of *Lean In*—which was picked by the *Sunday Times* as a “game changer”—Andrew Hill in the *FT* said: “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.”

Also in the *FT*, Simon Kuper called *The Sports Gene* a “subtle, enthralling study”; in the *Guardian*, Malcolm Gladwell said it was one of the books that he loved this year. In the *Guardian* Shami Chakrabarti described *The Return of a King* as one of her “favorites

ALSO PICKED

**THE WAR OF THE SEXES**  
**PAUL SEABRIGHT**  
Princeton, £12.50, 9780691159720

**THE SWEETNESS OF LIFE**  
**FRANÇOISE HÉRITIER**  
Penguin, £9.99, 9781846146992

**COMMAND AND CONTROL**  
**ERIC SCHLOSSER**  
Allen Lane, £25, 9781846141485

**POPULATION 10 BILLION**  
**DANNY DORLING**  
Constable & Robinson, £8.99, 9781780334912

**DREAM IT, DO IT, LIVE IT**  
**R NEWTON & C A RUSEN**  
Capstone, £9.99, 9780857084569

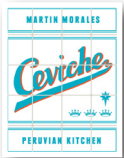
**ANATOMIES...**  
**HUGH ALDERSEY-WILLIAMS**  
Viking, £18.99, 9780670920747



↓ FOOD & DRINK

Jamie and Nigel serve up a treat

Jamie Oliver and Nigel Slater were the toast of the food and drink sections; the *Daily Mail* called Slater’s *Eat* (Fourth Estate) “an acquired taste, but definitely one worth acquiring,” while Niki Segnit hailed *Save with Jamie* (Michael Joseph) as “brilliant: fresh, modern and ingenious” in the *Sunday Times*. But Segnit chose *Ceviche: Peruvian Kitchen* (Weidenfeld) as her pick of the year, calling it “a delight”. Annie Rigg’s *Sweet Things* (Kyle), Tristan Stephenson’s *The Curious Bartender* (Ryland Peters & Small) and Christopher Trotter’s *The Whole Cow* (Pavilion) were devoured by Jane Shilling, who flagged them in the *Mail*.



↓ THE OUTDOOR LIFE



↓ CAPITAL READS

↓ PEOPLE

A touch of Frost among warming memoirs

Four very different books about four very different people were the most frequently selected Book of the Year picks among the newspapers: *Breakfast with Lucian* by Geordie Greig (Jonathan Cape); Sir Alex Ferguson’s *My Autobiography* (Hodder & Stoughton); Nicholas Shakespeare’s *Priscilla* (Harvill Secker); and David Jason’s *My Life* (Century).

In the *Telegraph*, Duncan White said of Ferguson’s tome: “Has one document generated more headlines? Never mind WikiLeaks or Edward Snowden, this is the real secret stash: Ferguson, the great propagandist, opening up the archive of the last decade.

“Ferguson has few peers when it comes to qualifying compliments or damning with faint praise. When he really goes for someone, you



wince. It feels less like reading, more like rubbernecking.”

The *FT*’s Simon Kuper agreed: “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.”

Authors themselves were fascinated by the lives of other people this year, too. In the *Observer*, Sebastian Faulks called *Priscilla*—an account of Shakespeare’s aunt’s life in France under the Nazis—“grim but fascinating”; in the *Guardian* William Boyd described *Breakfast with Lucian* as “fascinating” and “intimate”. Both titles were picked up by the *Sunday Times* too.

Both the *Sunday Times* and the *Telegraph* highlighted Jason’s *My Life*, but in the latter Mark Sanderson described it as something that, “only hardcore fans will appreciate,” as it was a, “long march through luvviedom: there are two ‘wonderfuls’ and a ‘lovely’ on the first page.”

4 OTHER PEOPLE PICKS

**I AM MALALA**  
**MALALA YOUSAFZAI**  
W&N, £18.99, 9780297870913  
*Sunday Times*

**SYLVIA PLATH: DRAWINGS**  
**FRIEDA HUGHES**  
Faber, £16.99, 9780571295210  
*Guardian*

**A STORY LATELY TOLD**  
**ANJELICA HUSTON**  
S&S, £16.99, 9780857207425  
*Sunday Times*

**BONKERS**  
**JENNIFER SAUNDERS**  
Viking, £20, 9780241001561  
*Telegraph*

