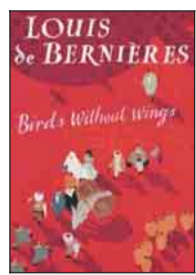


## Books

Edited by Alister McMillan alister.mcmillan@scmp.com

## FICTION



**Birds Without Wings**  
by Louis de Bernieres  
Secker and Warburg \$220  
★★★★☆  
Claire Scobie

*Birds Without Wings* touches all the epic themes: love and war, the danger of moral certainty and the paradoxes of the human condition. It also bears de Bernieres' literary signatures: vast emotional breadth, dazzling characterisation, rich historical detail, gruesome battle scenes, and a swerve between languid sensuality and horror, humour and creeping melancholy.

It follows some of the inhabitants of Eskibahce, literally the Garden of Eden, a town in southwest Turkey

at the turn of the 20th century. Christians, Muslims, Armenians and Greeks co-exist, bound by history, inter-marriage and friendship, until all is disrupted by the first world war.

de Bernieres says he wanted to write "a book with no goodies or baddies", so the flaws of the good citizens of Eskibahce are exposed alongside their virtues. They can stone an alleged adulterer, Tamara, wife of Rustem Bey, their modern-thinking rural landlord, "with gleeful cruelty", and yet band together when they are threatened.

Rustem Bey, afflicted by an aching loneliness, takes a Circassian mistress, the indulgent Leyla, who "plays the oud delightfully" and seduces Bey with garlic orgies. Their poignant relationship is just one of those explored by de Bernieres, who paints characters that haunt long after the book is put down.

There's the beautiful Philothei, a Christian with an "angel's eyes" who

has to wear an "exiguous veil" as she reduces the men to salivating wrecks. She is devotedly pursued by her childhood Muslim sweetheart, Ibrahim the goatherd, who tragically becomes Ibrahim the mad. There's the garrulous Iskander the Potter and Abdulhamid Hodja, the imam, in love with Nilufer, a beautiful horse with green ribbons in her mane.

Religion unites rather than divides. Muslim and Christian women are like sisters, their lives inextricably linked and interwoven. They make promises "by the Beard of the Prophet and the Hem of the Virgin's Gown".

Parallel to the unravelling of their lives, de Bernieres charts the spectacular rise to power of Mustafa Kemal (later known as Ataturk, father of modern Turkey), as war looms. Father Kristoforos, the Christian priest, portends the grim days ahead with nightmares of God dying. As the war gathers momentum and the men are sent away, Eskibahce withers.

Yet even amid the battlefields of Gallipoli, there is redemption. The soldiers may be "covered in corpse-slime" but when the Franks (Allies) and the Turks meet as men rather than as enemies in no-man's land, "everything changed between us and [we] no longer hated each other". But "after this, the war became less holy", and what follows is tantamount to ethnic cleansing, with Turkish Christians expelled to Greece and Greek Turks sent to Turkey.

As the Christians were the doctors and merchants, the thriving town of Eskibahce falls apart. The Muslims are left "helpless, no banker, no blacksmith, no shoemaker ... no merchant, no Spicer. The community had lost its Christians and their drunken holy days and the joy". Those left live "amid so much absence", and villages are transformed to ghostly husks.

Despite the rawness of the content, de Bernieres excels in his inventive

vocabulary, made-up proverbs – "he who seeks shade under red pines gets shat upon" – and kaleidoscopic prose. You sense his enjoyment through the writing (well, he did have a decade to perfect it) and his own idiosyncrasies shine through.

A friendly Italian captain Lampedusa is stationed at Eskibahce (de Bernieres obviously has a soft spot for charming Italian officers), but roundly lambastes Britain's then-prime minister Lloyd George, who is called, among other names, a "f\*\*\*wit".

Ultimately a novel about the constrictions of being human, hemmed in by the trammels of nationalism and religion, *Birds Without Wings* is a literary feast. "For birds with wings ... fly where they will and they know nothing ... But we are always confined to earth ... Because we have no wings we are pushed into struggles and abominations that we did not seek," de Bernieres writes.

## SPORT



**Gazza: My Story**  
by Paul Gascoigne with Hunter Davis  
Headline \$250  
★★★★☆  
David Watkins

Recently asked what he considered the England football team's strength, France striker Thierry Henry replied: "Their desire."

And their weakness? "Their desire."

Paul Gascoigne embodies this English phenomenon. Perhaps the most talented footballer the country has produced, he is better remembered for his spectacular self-destruction. This biography represents the first time the 36-year-old has spoken about it in detail – having now been sober for three months. He begins with "Beer, Wine, Vodka, Cocaine, Morphine, Paranoid, Anxiety" before a football has even been mentioned. Yet by the end of *My Story* you wonder whether his career was not so much a tragic waste as the salvation of Gascoigne. Suffering nervous ticks at the age of 12, football became therapy for him. That he happened to be brilliant was a bonus.

His tears at the 1990 World Cup unleashed Gazza-mania. His account suggests a man-child who never got to grips with his fame, living in the shadow of an alter-ego. In an injury-ravaged career, he shone at international level as well as at Newcastle, Tottenham, Lazio and Rangers. Yet alcohol – and its ability to help him escape – informs everything. Whether on World Cup duty in Italy or in the changing room at half

time in Glasgow, Gazza is searching for a sneaky drink. He starts smoking at 28; cocaine binges soon follow.

Gazza was a magnet for attention, either by performing magic on the pitch or by parading himself in plastic breasts off it. He burped into a microphone and, after being asked on live Norwegian television whether he had a message for viewers, said, "Yes, f\*\*\* off".

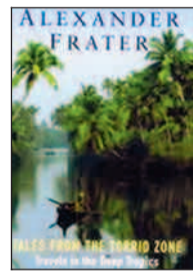
When he explains his side of the infamous dentist's chair incident in Hong Kong's now defunct China Jump club in 1996, it's like a school kid wrangling his way out of detention. "It was all a laugh, no more than us letting our hair down before the Euro finals," he pleads. He became one of the players of the tournament.

The perception that Gazza's off-field games showed he was coping with fame was far wide of the goal. Gascoigne was, and is, crippled with neurosis. He still sleeps with the light on, and is obsessed with death, blaming himself for the demise of three friends during his teenage years.

As his spent fortune of £20 million (HK\$284 million) and broken marriage testify, "Gazza" consumed Gascoigne. Only now, in quitting football, he believes he can save himself. The turning point was his short stint at Gansu Tianma in China. While little is made of his experience there, he says he realised the need to "escape from myself" and flee to a clinic in Arizona. The spectre of Sars is his excuse for failing to return to China.

One of the most telling sections of the book is a list of quotes from coaches, players, doctors and celebrities. "If a snooker player or golfer cried during a game, I think people in that sport may realise there was a problem," said Dr Raj Persaud in the *Daily Mail*. "Gascoigne could have been helped a long time ago."

## TRAVEL



**Tales from the Torrid Zone: Travels in the Deep Tropics**  
by Alexander Frater  
Picador \$235  
★★★★☆  
Ed Peters

The grandson of a hell-fire Pacific Island missionary and the son of one of the British Empire's last colonial

doctors, Alexander Frater's genetic passport spurs him to wander the tropics as a privileged insider and passionate observer. Raised in what is now Vanuatu, he ranges around many of the 88 tropical countries that cover one third of the globe, eye cocked for unusual details, ears pricked for salty conversation. The result – *Tales from the Torrid Zone* – is one of the happiest memoirs cum travelogues of recent years.

A taste for adventure runs in the family. Maurice – Frater's grandfather – and his bride landed on the tiny island of Paama in 1900, to be met with a volley of missiles and threats. They stayed 39 years, built a score of churches and – in the terminology of the day – converted the heathen. That neither had been abroad before must have made for quite some honeymoon.

Frater grew up on a nearby island called Iririki – his father labouring in the local hospital, his mother running a school. He returned as an adult to find it transformed into a luxury holiday resort. Less than a century had passed since his forebears had ventured forth to fight the good fight with their bibles.

Frater by no means confines himself to the Pacific, although it evokes his finest passages

of description. "The tropical air was silky and oven-roasted, the stars bright as headlights and arranged in such novel configurations you needed time to adjust your mental compass," he writes of landing in Fiji.

In Africa, he gets involved in a television documentary, voyaging aboard a Catalina Flying Boat from Alexandria to the Ilha de Mozambique, dodging wild weather and wars. A second documentary takes him to India to film the monsoon, but – he notes with characteristic humour – the weather refuses to cooperate with the production schedule and a local fire engine has to be pressed into service. After which farce, he deserts the artifice of television for the relative sanctity of print.

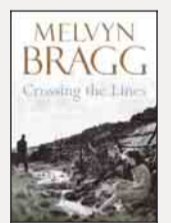
Part of the fun of *Torrid Zone* is Frater's huge bank of knowledge, which is frequently tossed into the text. He knows that leopards left their prints in the wet cement of the Kandalama Hotel in Sri Lanka while it was under construction, that the first airline hijack took place in 1948 aboard a Cathay Pacific Catalina on the way from Hong Kong to Macau, and that coconuts from Jamaica somehow managed to drift as far as Norway.

A rollicking sense of the ridiculous means he can lampoon a cruise ship bore or a self-regarding backpacker with a couple of pithy sentences. But his genuine affection for ordinary folk and their tropical habitat shines through.

Central to the book is Frater's quest for a new church bell for his grandfather's former parish. Cast in the same east London foundry as Big Ben, its journey east is a chapter of accidents, but one which ends with a rousing rendition of *Onward Christian Soldiers*, the pastor invoking God to "bless them in long name along Jesus Kraes" and a triumphant peal that travels up to the heavens.

## paperbacks

Compiled by Diana McPartlin



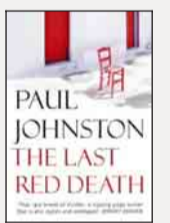
**Crossing the Lines**  
by Melvyn Bragg  
Sceptre \$100  
★★★★☆

Part three in the trilogy – after *The Soldier's Return* (1999) and *A Son of War* (2001) – traces the fortunes of a working-class English family during and after the second world war. *Crossing the Lines* covers the years 1955 to 1959 and is loosely based on Bragg's life. Like his central character, Joe Richardson, Bragg was born in Wigton in the 1930s and went on to read history at Oxford. The crossing of lines occurs when Joe finds himself in a world of privilege, completely different to the one he grew up in. Bragg has taken great care with the nuances of character, dialogue and setting. But in spite of the excellent writing, the narrative drive is weak and seldom picks up enough pace. It's described on the back as "an enormously important piece of literature about post-war Britain". Maybe, but Bragg doesn't reveal much of interest for those who aren't of his generation.



**The Princess Diaries: Give Me Five**  
by Meg Cabot  
Macmillan \$85  
★★★★☆

Like, hello. Is it too much to ask that Mia gets the one thing for her birthday that she's always wanted: one perfect night at the prom? I mean, Lana Weinberger is getting that, and she's not even striving to become self-actualised. She probably doesn't even know what self-actualisation means. I'm telling you there's no justice in the world. America's favourite princess is about to turn 15 and is still using the words "like" and "totally" so much she sounds as if she has Tourette's Syndrome. The disaster facing her is that her boyfriend, Michael – the person she loves most in the whole world, with the exception of her cat – has decided he'd rather go bowling than go to the prom. This book is slightly more risqué than previous instalments in Mia's diaries. Her mother tries to have a "sex talk" with her, and Michael gets to second base.



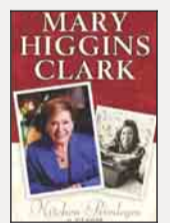
**The Last Red Death**  
by Paul Johnston  
NEL \$100  
★★★★☆

This slick and well-crafted thriller is the second in Johnston's series featuring half-Greek, half-Scottish private investigator Alex Mavros. The story begins in 1976, when five-year-old Grace Helmer, the daughter of an American diplomat, witnesses her father being murdered outside their apartment in Athens. We then skip to 2001. Grace's mother has committed suicide and left the daughter a note telling her that she had an affair when Grace was young, and that her lover murdered her husband. Grace returns to Greece to find out the truth about her father's death. She hires Mavros to help her, and the pair become tangled in a complex conspiracy involving dangerous politicians and terrorists. If you're not familiar with recent Greek history and politics the plot can be hard to follow. That aside, it still works well enough as a thriller.



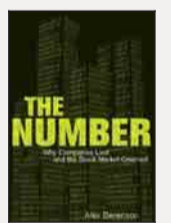
**The Angel Tree**  
by Alex Dingwall-Main  
Ebury \$115  
★★★★☆

Scottish landscape gardener Alex Dingwall-Main is hired by Frenchman Regis Lautour, who wants to find "something spectacular" for the courtyard of his house in Provence. As money is no object, Dingwall-Main suggests he find the oldest olive tree in the world, and Lautour agrees. We then follow Dingwall-Main on a tour of the olive groves of France, Spain, Italy and Greece. It's an unusual book in that it manages to be irritating and delightful at the same time. One problem is that there's no urgent need for the tree to be found, which makes the quest seem rather pointless. Another is that Dingwall-Main always appears so smug and pleased with himself that he verges on being nauseating. On the other hand, he has a knack for beautiful imagery, and such a devilish sense of humour (although the French don't think his jokes are funny) that you end up liking him anyway.



**Kitchen Privileges**  
by Mary Higgins Clark  
Pocket Books \$100  
★★★★☆

"*Kitchen Privileges* is a book that I feel as though I have been writing ever since I was 12 years old," writes Mary Higgins Clark in a letter to her readers in the front of her memoir. Ever since she was a child she wanted to be an author, but she wasn't published until she was in her 40s and widowed with five young children. She recounts her years growing up in an Irish neighbourhood in the Bronx, where family was everything. When her father died during the Depression, her mother took in boarders and put a sign outside their home that read "Furnished Rooms. Kitchen Privileges". Higgins Clark supported her family by writing radio shows and spent a brief spell as a Pan Am flight attendant. She began her writing career by typing stories at the kitchen table. After six years and some 40 rejections she sold her first story for US\$100.



**The Number**  
by Alex Berenson  
Pocket Books \$115  
★★★★☆

There can be few people who still believe stock markets are open and fair, but even cynics will be shocked at the revelations in this book. Alex Berenson, a *New York Times* business reporter, looks at the rise and fall of the markets and tells a sorry tale: of financial statements designed to deceive investors to the tune of billions of dollars; companies inventing customers; and CEOs of unprofitable companies paying themselves hundreds of millions of dollars in bonuses, then encouraging their employees to buy shares, while they sell theirs. Berenson recounts how the buying frenzy of the 1990s had its roots in the 60s, and how stock options were the nail in the coffin of executive ethics. He doesn't show readers how to beat the market, but he does explain how to understand accounting and its limits, and recognise patterns that can lead to fraud.

## BEHIND THE BEST-SELLERS

All is not quiet on the Western Front, as Richard Holmes takes aim at misconceptions of the soldiers' lot during the first world war. Let the battle commence, says Tim Bryan

Richard Holmes says the key to history is that hindsight does little for accuracy.

Today's books and films often portray British soldiers in the first world war as loathing the senseless slaughter, and doing anything to avoid an attack that served only to move the drinks cabinets of wealthy generals a few inches closer to Berlin or Paris.

Holmes says the popular attitudes of today have clouded the views of the time. In his book *Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front*, the TV historian argues that what was deemed a worthy war by those fighting it soon became viewed as futile. The Depression and literature written

afterwards, often by those who were not present, reshaped attitudes.

Better, says Holmes, to look at the diaries and letters of those who fought and, more importantly, when they were fighting.

After years of trawling through the archives at London's Imperial War Museum and the Liddle Collection at Leeds University in northern England, studying personal correspondence and diaries of men who lined the 640km of trenches, Holmes has largely triumphed in his quest to set the record straight, taking as his focus the attitudes of the ordinary soldier.

The supposedly ignorant generals didn't stay in the mess swilling sherry when Tommy went over the top. Many went with them and died, far more than in the second world war. Even going "over the top" was not as common as we think. Usually, infantry spent two years in the

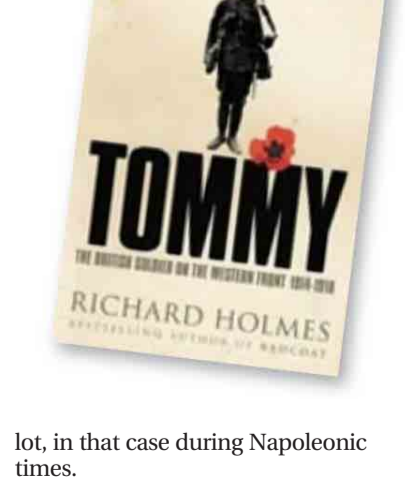
trenches (and only a third of that time in the frontline) without attacking.

Their main enemy was the cold, boredom, German snipers and the odd artillery shell or grenade.

Holmes also finds a camaraderie and spirit among the troops at odds with the picture of horror, destruction, squalor, disease and unrest. Although all these issues existed, to varying degrees, mutiny was not rife, nor kept in check by draconian punishment. Only 346 of 3,000-odd death sentences were carried out, Holmes points out.

*Tommy* is written in a populist style, dispensing with battlefield movements and tactics in favour of focusing on the ordinary soldier.

Holmes, himself, is a soldier, having quickly risen through the ranks of the Territorials to become a general. This is his second time in the best-seller charts for HarperCollins. His first was *Redcoat*, a similar portrait of a soldier's



lot, in that case during Napoleonic times.

One of his other roles, as a TV historian – conducting enthusiastic walks across battlefields, among other things – adds to his selling power, a factor not lost on HarperCollins, although publicity director Helen

Ellis is keen to point out "this book is not a TV tie-in". Holmes, she says, "has a considerable reputation, he is a very well-known and liked historian. But more importantly he is the first to put the ordinary soldiers' experience centre stage."

"Generally, there is a massive market for war and history. But the chief sales factor here is that it is a remarkable book by a renowned historian. For anyone interested in history, and especially war – an interest that spans many so-called markets – this book is unmissable."

Surely the fact that he's writing about war must help, especially now, with the 60th commemoration of D Day? "We didn't release the book to coincide with D Day or any other anniversary," Ellis says. "Although there's one important one coming up: the 90th anniversary of the first world war."

Let's we forget.

## best-sellers

## THE TIMES (OF LONDON)

## FICTION

- 1 SHOPAHLIC AND SISTER**  
by Sophie Kinsella  
Latest in the series introduces a black sheep in the family.
- 2 THE DARK TOWER: SONG OF SUSANNAH**  
by Stephen King  
Sixth instalment of the epic.
- 3 THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY**  
by Marian Keyes  
The tale of three women involved in the publishing industry.
- 4 MONDAY MOURNING** by Kathy Reichs  
Tempe Brennan investigates the deaths of three young women.
- 5 THE INCREMENT** by Chris Ryan  
An assassin squad targets former soldiers.
- 6 THE NARROWS** by Michael Connelly  
Harry Bosch chases a mass murderer.
- 7 SHARPE'S ESCAPE** by Bernard Cornwell  
A Briton battles the French in the Peninsular war.
- 8 THE TORMENT OF OTHERS**  
by Val McDermid  
Echoes of the past resound after two prostitutes die.
- 9 THE LONELY DEAD**  
by Michael Marshall Smith  
A former CIA agent investigates murders.
- 10 JUST ONE LOOK** by Harlan Coben  
A murder of 20 years ago comes back to haunt those involved.

## NON-FICTION

- 1 GAZZA**  
by Paul Gascoigne with Hunter Davies  
The ups and downs in the life of the former England football star.
- 2 PURPLE RONNIE'S LITTLE THOUGHTS ABOUT DADS**  
by Purple Ronnie  
Poems and observations on patriarchs everywhere.
- 3 BEING JORDAN** by Katie Price  
The tabloids' favourite glamour model.
- 4 EATS, SHOOTS AND LEAVES**  
by Lynne Truss  
In defence of proper grammar and punctuation.
- 5 FRIENDS 'TIL THE END** by David Wild  
Companion to the recently departed American sitcom.
- 6 THE WORLD ACCORDING TO CLARKSON**  
by Jeremy Clarkson  
The BBC presenter's favourite machines.
- 7 GRUMPY OLD MEN** by David Quantick  
A manual for malcontents.
- 8 THE PLAYER** by Boris Becker  
Autobiography of the German tennis ace.
- 9 PURPLE RONNIE'S LITTLE BOOK OF FOOTBALL** by Purple Ronnie  
The popular poet takes on the nation's favourite sport.
- 10 MOTSON'S NATIONAL OBSESSION**  
by John Motson and Adam Ward  
Facts and figures from the beautiful game.

British hardback sales for week ending June 19.

## THE NEW YORK TIMES

## FICTION

- 1 THE DA VINCI CODE** by Dan Brown  
The murder of a Louvre curator involves the work of Leonardo da Vinci and a secret society.
- 2 SONG OF SUSANNAH**  
by Stephen King  
Sixth volume of the epic Dark Tower series.
- 3 THE RULE OF FOUR**  
by Ian Caldwell and Dustin Thomason  
Two students are ensnared in murderous intrigue.
- 4 THE FIVE PEOPLE YOU MEET IN HEAVEN**  
by Mitch Albom  
A man who died while trying to rescue a girl finds that all will be explained in the afterlife.
- 5 ANGELS & DEMONS** by Dan Brown  
A scholar tries to save the Vatican.
- 6 BLOWOUT** by Catherine Coulter  
Married FBI agents investigate the murders of a Supreme Court justice and two of his clerks.
- 7 GLORIOUS APPEARING**  
by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins  
In the 12th volume of the *Left Behind* series, the Second Coming occurs.
- 8 THE COLOUR OF DEATH** by Elizabeth Lowell  
Mistaken for a criminal, a jewel cutter is pursued by federal agents – and an assassin.
- 9 THE JANE AUSTEN BOOK CLUB**  
by Karen Joy Fowler  
The tale of six people in a reading group.
- 10 MONDAY MOURNING** by Kathy Reichs  
Tempe Brennan investigates the deaths of three young women.

## NON-FICTION

- 1 BIG RUSS AND ME** by Tim Russert  
The host of *Meet the Press* remembers his mentors.
- 2 DRESS YOUR FAMILY IN CORDUROY AND DENIM** by David Sedaris  
The humorist's latest collection of essays.
- 3 EATS, SHOOTS AND LEAVES**  
by Lynne Truss  
The use and misuse of punctuation.
- 4 FATHER JOE** by Tony Hendra  
A satirist recalls his decades-long friendship with an English Benedictine monk.
- 5 PLAN OF ATTACK** by Bob Woodward  
A behind-the-scenes account of the Bush administration as it drew up plans to invade Iraq.
- 6 ALEXANDER HAMILTON**  
by Ron Chernow  
A biography of the first Treasury secretary and chief author of the Federalist Papers.
- 7 BATTLE READY** by Tom Clancy, with Tony Zinni and Tony Koltz  
The evolution of the US Marine Corps, from the Vietnam era to the post-9/11 years.
- 8 CADDY FOR LIFE** by John Feinstein  
The story of Bruce Edwards, Tom Watson's long-time caddy, who died in April.
- 9 MORE THAN MONEY** by Neil Cavuto  
A financial journalist who has multiple sclerosis presents portraits of people in business who have overcome obstacles.
- 10 ON THE DOWN LOW**  
by J.L. King with Karen Hunter  
The straight black men who have sex with men, and the health consequences for the black community.

US hardback sales for week ending June 19