



Books of the Year

Page-turners

The best books of 2009 covered the financial crisis, climate change and the war in Afghanistan, as well as justice, corruption, cooking and the power of literature

Politics and current affairs

The Crisis of Islamic Civilisation. By Ali A. Allawi. Yale University Press; 320 pages; \$27.50 and £18.99

A thoughtful and original anatomy of the decay of contemporary Islam that takes issue with both Islamism and secular modernity. An eloquent *cri de coeur*—and a call for spiritual renewal.

The Idea of Justice. By Amartya Sen. Belknap Press; 496 pages; \$29.95. Allen Lane; £25

A commanding summation of the work of Amartya Sen, an Indian-born Nobel laureate, that focuses on economic reasoning and the elements and measurement of human well-being.

The Silence and the Scorpion: The Coup Against Chávez and the Making of Modern Venezuela. By Brian A. Nelson. Nation Books; 384 pages; \$26.95. Da Capo Press; £17.99

A scrupulous account of one of the most important, yet most misunderstood, events in recent South American history. It should be read by all those who believe that Hugo Chávez is a worthy champion of democracy and the oppressed.

It's Our Turn to Eat: The Story of a Kenyan Whistleblower. By Michela Wrang. Harper; 368 pages; \$25.99. Fourth Estate; £12.99

A down-to-earth yet sophisticated exposé of how an entire country can be munched in the clammy claws of corruption and

tribalism to ensure that those in power win the fattest share of the cake.

The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One. By David Kilcullen. OUP; 384 pages; \$27.95. C. Hurst; £20

General David Petraeus's adviser on counter-insurgency advocates mixing military theory with a deep knowledge of culture and tradition among tribal peoples to try and win the "war on terror".

Desperate Glory: At War in Helmand with Britain's 16 Air Assault Brigade. By Sam Kiley. Bloomsbury; 288 pages; £18.99

The most vivid account yet of British soldiering in Afghanistan.

Biography and memoirs

Louis D. Brandeis: A Life. By Melvin Urofsky. Pantheon; 976 pages; \$40

A remarkable man who increasingly found himself defending what he saw as the public interest against what were then known as "the interests".

Marx's General: The Revolutionary Life of Friedrich Engels. By Tristram Hunt. Metropolitan Books; 448 pages; \$32. Allen Lane; £25

An illuminating biography of the self-effacing friend who enabled Karl Marx's most famous work, "Das Kapital", to be written.

Also in this section

95 Books by Economist writers in 2009

The Life and Times of Raúl Prebisch, 1901-1986. By Edgar J. Dosman. McGill-Queen's University Press; 599 pages; \$49.95 and £33

Best known for his ideas about trade, Raul Prebisch, an Argentine economist who was often talked about as "Latin America's Keynes", may be due for rehabilitation. An invaluable biography.

Pops: A Life of Louis Armstrong. By Terry Teachout. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt; 496 pages; \$30. J.R. Books; £20

More than a trumpeter, the great Satchmo was both pioneer and innovator, with a voice and style that set their stamp on the development of jazz.

The Secret Lives of Somerset Maugham. By Selina Hastings. John Murray; 624 pages; £25. To be published in America by Random House in May 2010

William Somerset Maugham was an unhappy man and is today a derided figure—unfashionable, unpopular and widely regarded as unpleasant. But he is still one of the finest short-story stylists Britain has ever produced.

Constable in Love: Love, Landscape, Money and the Making of a Great Painter. By Martin Gayford. Fig Tree; 384 pages; £20

How John Constable, disapproved of by his wife's relatives, his own family and his painting peers, was buoyed by the support of his wife, Maria Bicknell, and triumphed in the end.

William Golding: The Man Who Wrote Lord of the Flies. By John Carey. Faber and Faber; 592 pages; £25. To be published in America by Free Press in June 2010