

1. TOM WOLFE *Back to Blood*
Civic mavericks, gang leaders and art mavens people Wolfe's latest opus, energetically set against the deco licentiousness of Florida's steamiest party capital, Miami (Jonathan Cape, £20).

2. JOANNE HARRIS *A Cat, a Hat and a Piece of String*
A mother communicates with her dead son on Twitter; Norse gods navigate life in Manhattan... Harris's 16 interconnected short stories are witty and magical (Doubleday, £15).

3. COLM TOIBIN *The Testament of Mary*
In powerful, spare prose, the Irish writer reimagines the Virgin Mary as she moves through savage grief to moral rectitude in this short study of exquisite humanity (Viking, £13).

4. CATHI UNSWORTH *Weirdo*
When new evidence turns up, a retired private investigator revisits the 20-year-old murder of a Norfolk schoolgirl. Unsworth explores the grisly side of parochialism with cool compassion (Serpent's Tail, £12).

5. NICOLA BARKER *The Yips*
Luton, 2006. Tiger Woods is still morally upstanding and Twitter has yet to grip the chattering classes. The award-winning author scores high with this bold, comic fiction (Fourth Estate, £19).

6. JK ROWLING *The Casual Vacancy*
The literary sorceress conjures her first grown-up drama in Pagford, a town riven with quotidian drama over a battle for a seat on the parish council. Wizards are not welcome here (Little, Brown, £20).

7. WILL SELF *Umbrella*
The redoubtable writer uses the plight of Audrey Death and her anomalous medical case history to underpin this ambitious novel spanning a century of change in modern Britain (Bloomsbury, £19).

8. JOSEPH O'CONNOR *Where Have You Been?*
In his first collection of short stories for more than 20 years, O'Connor's deftly poignant prose unites tales of old New York, the ghosts of the Celtic Tiger and yuppy London (Harvill Secker, £17).

9. MOLLY RINGWALD *When It Happens to You*
The Brat Pack's ultimate prom queen makes her fiction debut with a tender portrait of American lives (Simon & Schuster, £10).

10. LAWRENCE SCOTT *Light Falling on Bamboo*
Scott's historical novel transports us to post-emancipation Trinidad, a country shaking off its violent legacy and simmering with local passions (Tindal Street Press, £13).

11. THOMAS KENEALLY *The Daughters of Mars*
Moving from Australia to the battlefields of Gallipoli, Keneally's epic novel takes inspiration from journals kept by Australian nurses for a heart-wrenching perspective on the Great War (Sceptre, £19).

12. PETER HOEG *The Elephant Keepers' Children*
Peter and Tilte pursue a pastor and an organist in this Danish adventure novel. That the criminals happen to be their parents only adds to the dilemma (Harvill Secker, £18).

13. HOWARD JACOBSON *Zoo Time*
The self-described "Jewish Jane Austen" turns his acerbic eye to Guy Ableman, a novelist trying to survive the death of fiction, his wife's own literary ambitions and his mother-in-law (Bloomsbury, £19).

14. AM HOMES *May We Be Forgiven*
When Harry's brother George is the author of a horrific accident – and further evil deeds – Harry is left to pick up the pieces. The bloodletting is brief, but the aftershocks reverberate right through this humane, comic study of a good man trying to do the right thing (Granta, £17).

15. ROSE TREMAIN *Merivel*
Seven years after *Restoration*, Tremain revisits the court physician Robert Merivel, and thrusts him into the world of pre-revolutionary Versailles. In middle age, our everyman tries to reconcile love and loyalty in the Enlightenment (Chatto & Windus, £19).

16. GILLIAN FLYNN *Gone Girl*
The set-up is simple: girl goes missing, husband looks increasingly suspect. But there's much more going on beneath the surface of this fiendishly clever thriller (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £13).

17. JODI PICOULT AND SAMANTHA VAN LEER *Between the Lines*
A tween-age fantasy about a fairy tale that comes to life in its reader's hands, this is the first book co-authored by Picoult and her daughter (Hodder & Stoughton, £13).

18. ALICE MUNRO *Dear Life*
Munro's deftly simple prose belies her brilliance. Here, she returns to the shores of her beloved Lake Huron to deliver more beautifully succinct stories, each containing a whole life (Chatto & Windus, £19).

19. APRIL BLOOMFIELD *A Girl and Her Pig*
The force behind Manhattan's Spotted Pig serves up delicious recipes, each accompanied by anecdotes infused with her exacting, passionate approach to food (Canongate, £25).

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