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durrants

in exquisite, subtle
and intricately
moving

**ANNE
MCELVOY**

Noted prize
winner Della

Müller's *The Land of Green Plums* (Granta, £7.99) is set in Ceausescu's Romania. The dark heart of dystopian communism – and films on the outside of a student and the impact on her cowed classmates. Nothing I have read brings home more the horror of a society which conditioned agencies backwardness with the monstrosities of the one-party state. It drove the ethnic German author to emigrate; this is her response to those she left behind.

DOMINIC SANDBROOK

John Gwyn's *William Gaddis: The Man Who Wrote Lord of the Flies* (Faber, £25) was characteristically brilliant, written with a level of imagination, depth and sheer common sense that other biographers would do well to emulate. My discovery of the year (albeit shamefully late) was Anne Tyler, and after finishing the wonderfully wry *North's Compass* (Chatto, £17.99), I immediately rushed out to get her earlier books. And I could not believe it when Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* (Fourth Estate, £18.99) won the Booker; could the judges really have given the prize to such a rich, densely textured book, and a historical novel to boot? It almost made up for all the years of cheap journalism.

NICK LEZARD

An autobiography that did not receive the attention it deserved was Byron Rogers' *Whilom*, and finally published, *Met: the Authorized Biography* (Aurum, £16.99). Few writers have a style like his, an delight-expanding, stark and the regrets of lost love. I also loved Gilbert Adair's genre-reading descriptive story, *And Then There Was No One Else* (Faber, £14.99), in which Adair is confronted at a Stetson by his own creation, Martin

Mont. And *The Letters of TS Eliot: Volume 2* (Faber, £35) is something I have been waiting for for more than a decade.

SAM KILEY

The Worst Date Ever: War Crimes, Hollywood Heart Throbs and Other Abominations by Jane Rossmann (Arcadia, £11.99). Rossmann has come up with a new and brilliant way to write about Africa's agencies, make it funny, angry and hilarious. This is a little classic, *Goats at the Wedge* by James Delluggole (Simon & Schuster, £12.99). Anyone who is still child-ish enough to like *Chippopotamus* and enjoys *Flashman* will love this, perfect for long afternoons in the Junior Common Room. *Down into Glass* by Ahmed Rashid (Penguin, £10.99). The world's leading authority on the Taliban explains how we've got ourselves stuck into the mother of all messes. Required reading, weighty.

JANE SHILLING

The books I liked best this year share a certain quality of hard-won wisdom. William Somerset Maugham's childhood memoir *The Music Room* (Picador, £10.99) is a tender, finely observed account of growing up in a great house with a brother, Richard, whose complex (and neurological) problems left him trapped in a state of indefinite childhood. Elizabeth McCracken's *An Exact Copy* *Bew of a Fragment of my Imagination* (Corgi, £10.99) is a bit of a mix of two babies, one born alive, the other not, written with brilliant, tragic comic precision.

SIMON SERAG MONTEFIORE

The trilogy of *Christian Jerusalem*, *Muslim Jerusalem* and now *Ayyubid Jerusalem* by Sylvia Auld & Robert Sutherland (Knaul Publications) is magisterial, brilliantly fascinating, obligatory reading. David Cesarani's *Major Warren's Hat* (Hodder, £20) is a historical whodunit as a study in gripping about a murder during the British Mandate of Palestine. Norman Ross's *A Senseless Squallid War* (Head, £20) is the best account yet of the end of the British mandate. Short