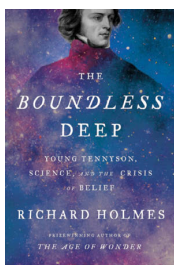


BOOKS OF THE YEAR

The best reads of 2025 (and three cheers for Richard Holmes)

ALAMY/WALKER ART GALLERY



LUCY BECKETT

Richard Holmes' *The Boundless Deep* (William Collins, £25; *Tablet* price £22.50) explores the terror of the young Tennyson, awkward son of a dysfunctional clerical family, at the infinities of space and time being

revealed by astronomy and geology. In the meaninglessness of inevitable extinction, where was God? Through undecided poetry, with miraculous passages, Tennyson suffered the question. Holmes' acutely perceptive learning takes the reader deep into both his work and his world. A wonderful book.

ERIK VARDEN

What happens when a classical philologist turns his mind to the study of one of modern literature's most audacious, best-loved enterprises? Read Giuseppe Pezzini's *Tolkien and the Mystery of Literary Creation* (Cambridge University Press, £30; *Tablet* price £27) to find out. The book is at once an overview of Tolkien's work and an essay in literary theory. It is elegantly composed – and it's fun. It will tell you at last what Queen Berúthiel's cats are all about.

LUCY LETHBRIDGE

I've been in a reading rut recently, so Robert Douglas-Fairhurst's *Look Closer: How to Get More Out of Reading* (Fern Press, £20; *Tablet* price £18) was the perfect book for me. It's about how good writing works and how fiction and poetry form relationships with their readers that are endlessly fascinating and complicated. It's so packed full of discursive delights about authors from Wordsworth to George Eliot to Anita Loos that I covered my copy with notes and arrows for future reading.

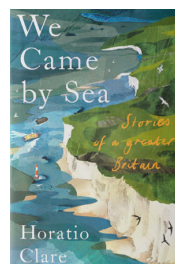
GUY STAGG

"Was Tennyson ever young?" Richard Holmes asks in his brilliant new biography, *The Boundless Deep* (William Collins, £25; *Tablet* price £22.50) conjuring the poet before he became a bearded emblem of Victorian respectability. We learn about his troubled family, his failed proposals, his fascination with geology and astronomy, his black moods, his dirty clothes, his ceaseless smoking, his forays into business and hydrotherapy, and his profound poetry about grief, doubt and the search for the divine.

A.N. WILSON

From Oscar Wilde to Muriel Spark, from David Jones to G.K. Chesterton, the twentieth

century was a glory age of Catholic converts. In *Converts* (Yale University Press, £25; *Tablet* price £22.50), Melanie McDonagh brings them all to life with tremendous brio. She has profound theological understanding, is herself a wonderful writer and has the journalist's eye for the truly telling biographical detail about some of these glorious eccentrics. A marvellous book which I recommend heartily.



LUCY POPESCU

The rhetoric surrounding migration and asylum seekers has reached an all-time low, and alternative narratives are rare. Horatio Clare's *We Came By Sea: Stories of a Greater Britain* (Little Toller Books, £20; *Tablet* price £18) is therefore especially welcome.

Clare speaks with volunteers aiding refugees in Calais and lifeboat crews involved in rescue operations, uncovering a version of Britain largely ignored by the media – one defined by compassion and solidarity with those risking everything to reach its shores.

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