

**W**hat is a library? Once, the answer was straightforward: a library was a collection of books, and a lending library was an institution that lent books. But these definitions belong to the Victorian era, according to a submission by the Society of Chief Librarians to a House of Commons select committee. A library is rather a place that provides "access for everyone to information and knowledge" – through whatever medium.

That change of focus is clear from the figures: just 9 per cent of libraries' budgets is spent on books. There has been a 14 per cent decline in book stocks in ten years, and a 36 per cent decline in book borrowing. The *Bookseller* recently conducted a search for ten popular titles in seven London libraries, and found no more than four of them in any one collection.

Facts such as these have supported a good many damning portraits of the library service. Tim Coates, a consultant in the sector, has been a prominent critic of the way libraries are run; he says that the fall in book stocks and lending is a symptom, along with ungenerous opening hours and unrefurbished premises, of wasteful administration. Even some champions of libraries agree with many of Coates's observations, although they may not approve of his combative way of publicising them, or his implication that there is little good to be said about libraries at present. There is, as they point out, another story. While libraries stand in need of better management and better stock, they are at the centre of some of the most enterprising work in the book world.

More than half a million children will take part over the holidays in the Summer Reading Challenge, working their way through books on the shelves of more than 3,000 libraries.

## the book business



**NICHOLAS CLEE** on why libraries today are about more than just books

The library sector and BBC Learning are joining forces for three years of literacy campaigns. BBC Radio is to make available its author interviews and book readings to library users. An organisation called the Reading Agency co-ordinates a host of initiatives throughout the service: book clubs, campaigns with prize sponsors such as Orange, partnerships with commercial organisations, research projects, programmes designed to attract adults with poor reading skills.

Ten years ago, publishers showed little interest in libraries. Now, the Reading Agency boasts the involvement of senior executives including the managing director of HarperCollins and the heads of PR at Penguin and Random House. Certainly, there is self-interest here. The core market of regular book buyers is not expanding. The only hope for growth in the industry is to reach out to the broader population that libraries can still attract. There is a buzz phrase in the sector: "reader development". Like any buzz phrase, it quickly becomes annoying, but it does encapsulate something that libraries can do that publishers and bookshops, with their increasing focus on the latest marketing hypes, cannot.

By the time this piece appears, David Lammy, the culture minister, may have given his response to the report by the select committee on libraries. He needs to sort out the muddled funding and leadership of the service; and he needs, above all, to answer the question with which I began. Some libraries appear to have settled for becoming community information points with coffee shops attached. Lammy does not have to mention books, those Victorian relics, but a statement that literacy is at the heart of what libraries are for would be welcome.

## ALICE O'KEEFFE Into the abyss

**Being Luis: a Chilean life**

Luis Muñoz  
Impress Books, 272pp, £11.99 (pbk)

**R**eading this autobiography of a revolutionary in Pinochet's Chile is a reminder that my contemporaries and I inhabit a world dramatically different from that of our parents. Despite the odd stage-managed protest, the heady times that gave birth to Luis Muñoz and his ilk are gone, times when young people really believed that they could save the world. And nowhere is the generational

shift starker than in Latin America.

I worked in Colombia for a couple of years after leaving university and became friends with a group of bright, well-informed students. To engage with politics was, for them, to participate in the long, bloody conflict that has scarred their lives and families. Many of them had parents who had participated in the early, idealistic stages of the Colombian civil war, and suffered or died for it. They felt strongly about the poverty in their country, and the corrupt politicians who were doing little to prevent it. Understandably, however, they saw little benefit in getting involved. They could see that the stakes were too high, and the chances of ever making a difference too slight.

Things were different for Luis Muñoz. He grew up in an impoverished family in Chile, and became active in left-wing politics as a teenager just before Salvador Allende was elected president in 1970. It was a harsh era – Muñoz describes his father's descent into bedridden depression as his family went hungry – but at least it was an optimistic one. Muñoz and his comrades believed passionately that "everything was possible" and were prepared to risk their lives for a better future. When Allende came to power and introduced sweeping reforms, their dreams seemed on the brink of coming true.

We know what happened next. General Pinochet's CIA-backed coup in 1973, and the 80,000 people whom it is estimated

were murdered or tortured during the 17 years he remained in power, have been well documented. This eloquent, brutally personal book takes us right inside the torture chamber and, even more disturbingly, inside the mind of a torture victim.

Muñoz and his pregnant girlfriend, Diana Aron, were detained in 1974. Aron never reappeared, having apparently been shot on arrest. Muñoz was taken to Villa Grimaldi, the infamous torture centre in Santiago, where he was subjected to months of "interrogation". He was then transferred to a concentration camp, one in a network dotted across the country. After a long and terrifying incarceration, he was exiled to England, where he began slowly and painfully to rebuild his life.

These days, Chile is hailed as one of Latin America's success stories. Pinochet is credited in some quarters with having implemented the strict economic policies that eventually stabilised its economy. But this book highlights the true legacy of those years: a society that has looked into the abyss and seen how low human nature can sink. Muñoz describes how his youthful optimism, "the openness, the honesty, the nobility of everyone's intentions", were shattered. Face to face with his torturer, he sees "the face of the new Chile that had just been born: out of horrendous atrocities and terror, the past had been erased and a new kind of person had emerged in power, devoid of feelings towards fellow humans".

The most heartbreaking chapter of *Being Luis* is the first, in which Muñoz returns to Chile to testify against his torturers after 12 years in exile. He is confronted with a sight that will be only too familiar to anybody who has visited Latin America – streets full of homeless children, who sleep in doorways and beg for leftovers from restaurants. "We had left our blood and flesh in the torture chambers . . . lost our dearest and most loved ones. All because we did not want to see . . . children of such a tender age begging for food in the streets. And here they were, in their hundreds." It seems to Muñoz that the sacrifices made by his generation did not count for much. Who can blame young Latin Americans of today if they are not prepared to do the same?



The "Gucci socialist"

**JOE MORAN**

## Towers of terror

**Ernö Goldfinger: the life of an architect**

Nigel Warburton  
Routledge, 197pp, £14.99

**T**he architect Ernő Goldfinger will forever be associated with a dramatic silhouette rising above north Kensington drive along the Westway, London motorway. Trellick Tower, a distinctive lift shaft joined by a bridge to the main building, has become an unlikely symbol of urban cool. The name-checked in Blur's song "Trellick Tower's been calling, she'll leave me in the morning" also made Goldfinger a hated figure to traditionalists such as Brian Sibley, who once described him as "no more than a pimple on the rump of Wren".

Avant-garde architects are often of being unconcerned about the lives of their buildings after the moment of their completion. Goldfinger's tower, like their Hampstead town house, was built for the poor residents on the 20th floor, but he never worried about leaking roofs, or