

## Out in paperback



{ Memoir }

### **First Time Ever**

by Peggy Seeger,  
Faber, £9.99

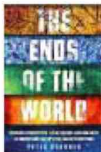
Though the American singer-songwriter kept a diary for much of her life, her most vivid memories owe less to notetaking than to her eye for exuberant details. Her music teacher at school played the piano with theatrical flourishes: “Slow has got to be soupy; fast has got to be like little mice gone mad.”

Seeger doesn't go easy on herself. She tells of how she was a “lolloping, spontaneous loner” as a teenager. Her times with husband and collaborator Ewan MacColl were rarely smooth. Life on the road was both arduous and addictive.

As digital hustlers burble about accelerated obsolescence, it's all the more wonderful to read Seeger on tenderness

and tenacity, value and vitality, culture and continuity.

**Sukhdev Sandhu**



{ Science }

### **The Ends of the World: Volcanic Apocalypses, Lethal Oceans and Our Quest to Understand Earth's Past Mass Extinctions**

by Peter Brannen,  
Oneworld, £10.99

As science journalist Peter Brannen points out, life is extremely fragile, a “thin glaze of interesting chemistry on an otherwise unremarkable, cooling ball of stone”. So fragile, in fact, that in the planet's history there have been five mass extinctions, when nearly all life has been wiped out. The question hanging over this book is whether the current most dominant species on the planet is about to cause a sixth mass extinction.

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**Source:** The Guardian (Review)  
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{ Fiction }

**Milkman**

by Anna Burns,  
Faber, £8.99

This strange and intriguing novel tackling the Northern Ireland conflict from the perspective of an 18-year-old girl is shortlisted for the Man Booker prize.

Burns, whose 2002 novel *No Bones* also depicted the Troubles, is excellent at evoking the strange ecosystem that emerges during protracted conflict. Paramilitary or state violence is not shown. Her targets are more insidious forces: the oppressiveness of tribalism, of conformism, of religion, of patriarchy, of living with permanent fear.

*Milkman* calls to mind several seminal works of Irish literature. In its digressive, batty narrative voice, it resembles *Tristram Shandy*, while it is Beckettian in its ability to trace the logical within the absurd.

But for all the parallels, *Milkman* has its own voice. It prompts thoughts of other regimes: Stalinist Russia, the Taliban. Despite its surreality, everything rings true. The narrator disrupts the status quo not through being

political, heroic or violently opposed, but because she is original, funny, disarmingly oblique and unique. The same can be said of this book.

**Claire Kilroy**