THE BEST COZY MYSTERIES • MEG WOITZER
SOUTH KOREAN NOVELS • ADVENTURE SPORTS
NEW BOOKS GUIDE • BOOK GROUP • READER PICKS
Contemporary South Korean Books in Translation
In recent years, novels by native South Koreans have reached a global audience. We highlight novels published in the last few decades to reflect South Korean culture from the 1980s onward—decades of immense change that saw the violent emergence of democracy, as well as further industrialization and Westernization.

Beyond Miss Marple: The Best Cozies
With Miss Jane Marple, the shrewd, elderly spinster of the fictional English village of St. Mary Mead, Agatha Christie may very well have perfected the traditional “cozy.” Today’s cozies center on varied themes, from felines to books, holidays, food and coffee, archaeology, antiquing, and even fashion.

Adventure Sports
French high-wire artist Philippe Petit, who performed death-defying acrobatic feats 1,350 feet above ground between the World Trade Center’s Twin Towers, explained that “If I see two towers, I have to walk.” Other adventure junkies jump off cliffs, climb ice mountains, and surf the world’s largest waves. We’ve chosen some compelling nonfiction adventure sports books written in the past few decades.

Meg Wolitzer
Wolitzer writes with keen observation, compassion, wit, lack of judgement, and a breezy lightness that bely her novels’ hefty social weight. In tackling domestic and social issues in her stories, families, marriage, sex, gender politics, careers, parents, children—and especially women’s lives—come into play.

www.bookmarks magazine.com
OUR LONGTIME READERS are familiar with associate editor Patrick Smith’s articles—informative and engaging, sometimes over-the-top, but always capturing the heart of the matter. So personally interested was he in what made people tick, I always think he would have made a good gonzo journalist. He had ideas—big ones, ambitious ones—and was never afraid to explore them.

Patrick, who held a day job as Professor of English at Bainbridge State College, was also a fine scholar and wrote a number of books: *Tim O’Brien: A Critical Companion; The True Bones of My Life: Essays on the Fiction of Jim Harrison; Conversations with Tim O’Brien; Conversations with William Gibson;* and *Thematic Guide to Popular Short Fiction*; among others.

But over the past three years—in the midst of writing a true-crime book about a murder!—Patrick also battled cancer. We are sad to let you know that he passed away in April.

Because he was, to put it mildly, obsessed with the craft of writing, Patrick might have liked some words about him to start off with books. All kinds of novels and memoirs talk about friendship, relationships, love, loss, and death—universal themes that seemingly cover the gamut of human experience. Take Joan Didion’s blockbuster *The Year of Magical Thinking*, about the emotional trauma of loss and its devastating aftermath. “I know why we try to keep the dead alive,” Didion writes. “We try to keep them alive in order to keep them with us. I also know that if we are to live ourselves there comes a point at which we must relinquish the dead.”

Those are important words. But I find that books, no matter how relatable they are in theory, don’t offer pat recipes for navigating loss.

So, for once, let’s forget about books.

Since we lived some distance from each other, Patrick and I conducted our business—and friendship—more over phone, email, and text than in person. Over the decade we worked together, we found ourselves in the same city just a handful of times, but I identified in Patrick an instant, kindred spirit. And it was because of our love of books (which we rarely discussed outside of work). We found our stride over food: dim sum in San Francisco, strange looking fruit in Chinatown, and $28 sandwiches at the famed Chez Panisse in Berkeley. We wondered endlessly about why we should have felt guilty over the latter but for some reason did not. He also loved children—his two sons, of course, but also my own two, who loved him right back. He felt like family.

Over the years, Patrick made me laugh and throw up my arms in exasperation in equal parts. Though as a writer, he was not a man of few words, to say the least, he was one of the best writers and stylists out there, period. As a human being, he was kind, thoughtful, curious, charming, and, most of all, generous in spirit. And for that he will be remembered and never relinquished.

Best,
Jessica Teisch
Managing Editor

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The Female Persuasion
By Meg Wolitzer
In 2006, a college freshman is groped at a party. After graduation, she goes to work for a women’s foundation in Brooklyn.
Los Angeles Times “Wolitzer’s prescience about the coming rift between gender activists in the age of #MeToo feels particularly wise.”

Varina
By Charles Frazier
The author of Cold Mountain (1997) returns to the post–Civil War landscape.
Christian Science Monitor “… a reminder that a national reckoning over the legacy of slavery has yet to take place.”

The Overstory
By Richard Powers
Over 50 years and nine main characters, Powers celebrates the amazing properties of trees.
Washington Post “… soars up through the canopy of American literature and remakes the landscape of environmental fiction.”

You Think It, I’ll Say It
Stories
By Curtis Sittenfeld
Independent (UK) “… every page of this book as engaging as the next.”

The Mars Room
By Rachel Kushner
A stripper is serving two life sentences for killing her stalker.
NPR “Kushner does a masterful job evoking the isolation and hopelessness intrinsic to a life behind bars.”

How It Happened
By Michael Koryta
A teen mother admits to a coerced role in a brutal murder.
Washington Post “… the secrets he discloses, one by one, at the novel’s end are both surprising and plausible.”

Emergency Contact
By Mary H. K. Choi
Can you build a relationship through electronic communication?
NPR “While the story does traffic in the heart flutter of romance that is tantalizingly out of reach, its emotional core goes deep.”

Beneath a Ruthless Sun
A True Story of Violence, Race, and Justice Lost and Found
By Gilbert King
A man is wrongly committed to the Florida State Hospital for the Insane.
New York Times “His mastery of the material is complete.”

Robin
By Dave Itzkoff
This book is currently the definitive biography of Robin Williams.
Washington Post “It’s a revealing, warts-and-all portrait of a man of great talent.”

Barracoon
The Story of the Last “Black Cargo”
By Zora Neale Hurston
The author of Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937) interviews one of the last survivors of the Atlantic slave trade.
NPR “Short enough to be read in a single sitting, this book is one of those gorgeous, much too fleeting things.”
**Literary**

*Clock Dance* | ANNE TYLER: Tyler, the bard of domestic life in Baltimore, returns to her usual themes of family life and second chances after *Vinegar Girl*, her retelling of Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*. Set between the 1960s and the 2000s, *Clock Dance* follows the mild-mannered Willa Drake as she comes of age, reluctantly marries, remarries, and takes care of her eccentric brood—related and not. **JULY**

*So Much Life Left Over* | LOUIS DE BERNIÈRES: Through a group of childhood friends who scatter throughout Asia and Europe and back to Britain during the interwar years, Bernières (*Corelli’s Mandolin*) asks, “If you have been embroiled in a war… what were you supposed to do with so much life unexpectedly left over?” All the characters—including the philandering Daniel, who flew with the RAF, and his wartime nurse wife, Rosie—must reorient their lives as the Second World War approaches. **JULY**

*Summer* | KARL OVE KNAUSGAARD: *Summer* marks the end of Knausgaard’s autobiographical Seasons Quartet (after *Spring*). Again addressed to his newborn daughter, these essays and diary entries present his childhood memories and his thoughts on his difficult relationship with his father. In true Knausgaard fashion, he reflects on everything else, as well, including life in rural Sweden and mosquitoes, ice cream, lawn sprinklers, and the meaning of each moment. Simultaneously trite and profound. **AUGUST**

**Crime**

*The Other Woman* (Gabriel Allon) | DANIEL SILVA: Art restorer, assassin, and Israeli spy Gabriel Allon needs little introduction. In the 18th in the series (after *House of Spies*), the Kremlin has inserted a mole into the West, and a dangerous conspiracy threatens the postwar global order. Allon must find the traitor after a series of mishaps that endanger his life and must battle the darker elements of the New Russia. **JULY**

*Give Me Your Hand* | MEGAN ABBOTT: In her newest psychological thriller, Abbott (*Dare Me, You Will Know Me*) explores an unlikely friendship that develops between two ambitious girls in a high school chemistry class. Years later, both are brilliant scientists. Then they find themselves vying for the same coveted research position—and the two former friends become haunted by a past secret and, perhaps worse, become endangered by the other. **JULY**

*A Measure of Darkness* (Clay Edison) | JONATHAN KELLERMAN AND JESSE KELLERMAN: In the second Clay Edison book (after *Crime Scene*) by the father-son writing team, former star athlete turned Alameda County Coro-
ner's Deputy Clay Edison is swamped with personal issues. Then he receives a call about a party in West Oakland, California, that erupts in violence. Among the victims is an unidentified young woman, strangled instead of shot, a Jane Doe among known victims. Clay embarks on a dangerous, morally ambiguous journey to find the truth. JULY

Pieces of Her | KARIN SLAUGHTER: Slaughter (The Good Daughter) returns with a story that questions how well we know our closest family members. When a crazed shooter opens fire in a mall, Andrea starts to realize that her mother Laura—a speech therapist and a pillar of their seaside community—has another identity she has kept secret for three decades, hoping no one will ever find her. Of course, the past always does have a way of catching up, doesn’t it? AUGUST

The Death of Truth | Notes on Falsehood in the Age of Trump | MICHiko KAKUTANi: The former chief book critic for the New York Times, Kakutani offers a scathing critique of America’s gradual embrace of subjectivity, conspiracy theory, and propaganda over science, fact, and common values, epitomized by today’s White House. This little book is sure to be polarizing: journalist David Grann describes it as “destined to become the defining treatise of our age,” while the New Criterion calls it “a petulant little squeal of political correctness against Donald Trump” by a “low-wattage” critic. Clearly, room for debate. JULY

The Fall of Gondolin | J. R. R. TOlkien, ED. BY CHristopher TOlkien: Following the release of Beren and Lúthien in 2017, The Fall of Gondolin is another “new” Tolkien work, a story originally written by Tolkien when he was convalescing after the Battle of the Somme. This quest story, presented as the first real story of Middle-earth, sets up the evil Morgoth, who is trying to discover and destroy the hidden Elfin city of Gondolin, against the sea god Ulmo, who supports the Noldor. Part of this tale appears in The Silmarillion. AUGUST
How did your club get started?
Our book club was the brainchild of one of our members, who is still the foundation of our literary enthusiasts. Malu Fernandez was indefatigable in her pursuit to start a book club and remains the backbone of ours.

For almost 18 years, Malu has consistently encouraged all of us, keeping us on track and maintaining the necessary housekeeping chores, including lists of book titles we have read and discussed and an annual calendar of monthly assignments. We began with 12 members. Some moved, left, or were overwhelmed with personal responsibilities, but we have maintained 11 faithful readers, who look forward to a year’s reading and discussions. The Coronado Boo-K Club members include Laurie Bella, Doris Beiskof, Heidi Erdmann, Gwen Howland, Marcia Hughes, Joy Kleber, Diann Kueny, Jackie Mullin, Chris Sloan, Margaret Wright, and, of course, Malu. Kathleen Glaser is an original member, who still communicates her reading successes with us.

Our first meeting occurred in December 2001, at Malu’s home. Since that evening, we have read 185 books and have engaged in thought-provoking, intelligent discussions about them. We originally wanted our name to be “Wild Women Who Never Wanted to Be in a Book Club.” But it was too long and complicated, so we ended up by copying the example of a friend who owned a dog named “Dog.” If it was good for her dog, why not a simple name for the book club? But it sounded bland, so we became “Boo-K Club,” phonetically sounding out “boo” “k” club. We have never been just a book club. We have explored great literature, have involved ourselves in tremendous discussions, have enjoyed a camaraderie that is outstanding, and look forward to the future.

Who are your members?
Our group, consisting of both retired and actively employed women, includes four businesswomen, two lawyers, four teachers, and one nurse. Each member schedules a month for leading a discussion of a book of her choice, moderates the evening’s discussion, and hosts the meeting at her home or an agreed-upon location. We have enhanced the understanding of the literary selection by involving invited guests, attending a movie on the subject or the book, and designing our refreshments or light dinner to reflect the content or the ethnicity of the book.

How do you structure your meetings?
Our club has limited rules. Perhaps the most important one is that, to engage in the discussion, the participant must have read the selection. We meet 11 months of the year on the last Tuesday of the month. “A shared love of reading first got us together in 2001; the same love of reading now also keeps us going,” admits Malu. We all look forward to gathering around the words and tastes of the evening. Our rules have changed slightly over the years; for example, our initial plans included discussing a nonfiction book and a book of poems. However, we dropped poetry because the evening was not long enough for both.

Each literature choice is determined not by a group or a committee, but by the leader of the month. The members then read the book and actively participate in our lively discussions, where divergent points of view and diversity are respected, appreciated, and encouraged. For 11 months, we read, discuss, and recognize the relationship of the prose to our own lives. We are introduced to selections that we
may otherwise not have experienced; we discuss and share ideas that are not always aligned with our own thoughts or philosophy. In December, our approach changes. Each member purchases books appropriate for children or youth. We present a brief summary of each book, then donate the collection of books to a hospital or a youth group, providing them with books that hopefully will give the recipients as much joy in receiving the books as we experience in donating them. We have expanded our reading gift “chain” this year to include giving books, clothing, and personal necessities to an organization that provides assistance to homeless youth. The December meeting is hosted by two members, and it begins the holiday season for us, as we enjoy casseroles, desserts, the realization of the wonderful fellowship we experienced the previous year, and the knowledge of a continuation of our Boo-K Club for the next year.

What are your special activities? Our club is a dynamic one. In addition to reading books in a myriad of genres, we attend movies that are based on books we have read. We also encourage visits by authors and guests of the members, who are also invited to read the book and to participate in the evening’s discussion. We also traveled as a group through Germany. The trip, hosted by Heidi, led the us through areas with which she is familiar, making the trip one that will be difficult to replicate.

What have been your favorite and least favorite books? After completing 185 books in a wide variety of genres, it is next to impossible to not consider the many books that generated good-to-great discussions. One of the most memorable and unusual books was the memoir, *Conquest of Copper Mountain: A Vivid, Personal Account of the Discovery and Development of a Spectacular Outcrop of Ore in the Remote Peaks of Irian Jaya, Indonesia* by Forbes Wilson. A variety of comments led to new understanding and appreciation of a book that many of us may not have read had we not had the opportunity to openly discuss this genre. *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* by J. D. Vance was also a favorite among several of our members. A great discussion followed the reading of *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right* by Jane Mayer. *Prey* by Michael Crichton was identified as an exciting book by a reader who had admitted that science fiction was not a favorite. We enjoyed *The Devil and the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair That Changed America* by Erik Larson for re-creating the world fair in Chicago, while simultaneously presenting the true story of the first serial murders in the United States. *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot resulted in our best discussion.

We thought two books were particularly light and enjoyable: *One Summer: America 1927* by Bill Bryson and *The Rosie Project* by Graeme C. Simsion. *Shantaram* by Gregory David Roberts was also a favorite for its color and its intensity of feeling. We could identify more favorites, but we will speak to just two more: *The Last Report of the Miracles of Little No Horse* by Louise Erdich, a vivid, intense, and humorous depiction of American Indian culture, and *A Million Little Pieces* by James Frey, which ultimately resulted in Oprah Winfrey dropping Frey from her Book Club.

We identified two “least favorite” books. The first was *The Corrections* by Jonathan Franzen. The major criticisms centered on the author’s use of foul language and an inability to connect with a relatable character in the novel. The other least favorite was *Divisadero* by Michael Ondaatje.

**Tom and Lovey: Under the Moon into the Wood**

G. R. Jerry

$13.99 • 220 pages • 978-1-64069-710-2

Stargut, the local sheriff himself, who is on a mission to create the perfect man-beast, brutally sacrificed Lovey’s beloved man. After 10 years, Lovey is still on a mission to avenge her murdered husband, Bill. Abandoned by her spellbound friend Patty, Lovey is joined by a stranger.

Tom is a preacher... of sorts. He has followed the scent of evil for a hundred years. Now, he mysteriously appears in the Village of Wrong, the rural Midwestern town, where its mutant inhabitants are mere creations of the devil lawmaker.

Together the three converge under the moon into the wood down by the river at the door-steps of hell. Whatever awaits them at the other side of the door is bone-chilling and heart-stopping. Read on to find out.
Ken Scallon is from Nassau, New York.

Some books, once read, refuse to let us go. While my undergraduate degree in history makes me picky about facts, I have always appreciated writing that pays attention to facts—at least to some degree. The core element of my selections below is American storytelling—whether fiction or nonfiction. They add a richness to my own view of American life, which hopefully I have used for the better. I will pass down these books to my daughters and grandchildren for their consideration.

**The Diversity of American Life**

*Ken Scallon is from Nassau, New York.*

**All God’s Dangers**

*The Life of Nate Shaw*  
By Theodore Rosengarten

This book is one of the most powerful memoirs ever written—a memoir of a black sharecropper in Alabama in the early 1900s, which I read after working in the state as a VISTA Volunteer in the early 1970s. I could smell the cotton fields, feel the heat, and sense, again, just how dark the nights were.

**The Lost Universe**

*Pawnee Life and Culture*  
By Gene Weltfish

This in-depth study of a year in the lives of the Pawnees was like opening a door and stepping back into a totally different world. It gave me a sense of loss for what time and circumstances do. Weltfish was urged in 1928, while at the Department of Anthropology at Columbia University, to undertake a formal study of the Pawnee language, which led to the publication of his anthropological study.

**Honey in the Horn**

*By Harold L. Davis*

A “forgotten” Pulitzer Prize Fiction winner in 1935, this novel, with characters who come of age in southern Oregon in the early 20th century, evokes a time and a geography that, for most of us, is unknown. Davis masters telling a story about homesteaders, while immersing us in the details of what one had to know to live and work there.

**WLT**

*A Radio Romance*  
By Garrison Keillor

Keillor’s first actual novel, *WLT*, is nostalgic, laugh-out-loud funny as the author creates this radio station in 1930s Minneapolis. Much more earthy than we would find on his radio show, Keillor is one of our master story tellers who translates well to the printed page.

**Raintree County**

*By Ross Lockridge, Jr.*

Told in flashbacks from July 4, 1892, this is a panoramic novel about John Shawnessy, as he makes his way through the Civil War and onward to grow with the republic (the United States). The novel can be read at different levels, and, at times, it is dense and filled with detail. The novel is also somewhat experimental in that Lockridge links his chapters with split sentences. It did become a star-studded movie that can be intriguing to watch, but, of course, no movie could capture what the book evoked. Sadly, the author later took his life, purportedly as he struggled with the expectation of what he would write next.

**The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford**

*By Ron Hansen*

Of all the stacks of books on James, both fiction and nonfiction, this novel captures him as the larger-than-life character in American culture that he has become. Don’t miss the stunning first three pages, which weave a word picture of him that pulls you into the story.

**Dandelion Wine**

*By Ray Bradbury*

This novel evokes the strange, nostalgic, eerie world of Green Town, Illinois, as seen through a 12-year-old’s eyes, with echoes of Bradbury’s childhood. A master writer who always takes us one step beyond, Bradbury often wrote across genres which defied classification.

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Rabbit, Run
By John Updike

The Rabbit Angstrom novels, which take place over the last half of the twentieth century, reset the bar for American fiction. Someone once said that in order to understand that time period in America, Updike said that in order to understand that time period in America, he would likely be a primary source for years to come.

The Orchard Keeper
By Cormac McCarthy

A Faulkner Foundation Award winner from 1965, this novel takes place in Tennessee in the 1930s. Robert Penn Warren called McCarthy a “born narrator,” which has certainly been proven by his subsequent writings. After this novel, I began to watch for his later books, though one has to pace reading him because there is a narrator,” which has certainly been proven by his subsequent writings. After this novel, I began to watch for his later books, though one has to pace reading him because there is a narrator,” which has certainly been proven by his subsequent writings. After this novel, I began to watch for his later books, though one has to pace reading him because there is a narrator,” which has certainly been proven by his subsequent writings. After this novel, I began to watch for his later books, though one has to pace reading him because there is a narrator,” which has certainly been proven by his subsequent writings. 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Hold Back the Night
By Pat Frank

This is a little-known novel of the First Marine Division’s breakout from the Changjin (Frozen Chosin) Reservoir in Korea in 1950. That epic running fight in below-zero weather refuted the concern that American youth were getting soft. The characters, while somewhat stereotyped, are well-constructed. I read this as a teen without interruption and long after midnight, and the novel partly contributed to my enlisting in the Marine Corps at age 18.

MANIFEST DESTINY IN MY CORNER OF THE WEST

Kay Emel-Powell is from Minneapolis, Minnesota.

A few months ago, I pulled out to reread some oral histories written by settlers who first came to my corner of northwestern Kansas in 1888. As I read about people surviving a horrific blizzard, watching herds of Texas cattle being moved to open ranges further north, collecting plentiful buffalo bones to sell for ready money, and fearing the occasional news of American Indians passing through the region, it made me want to read more deeply and share earlier reading about these people, this time, and this place.

The Republic for Which It Stands
The United States During Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, 1865–1896
By Richard White

White’s book covers all the bases—the economy, the politics, the social movements, industrialization, and changes in labor, personalities, and population not only of those who could now vote but also of those who continued to be disenfranchised. My own farm family’s history as migrants and immigrants to Middle Border Kansas during this time provided motivation for me to read this history. Hefty book, lots to ponder, and not too scholarly.

The Legacy of Conquest
The Unbroken Past of the American West
By Patricia Nelson Limerick

Limerick, an academic and a Colorado state historian, takes a fresh look at Manifest Destiny and the many players who contributed to it and who were sometimes pushed to the edges of the mainstream stories.

Cattle Kingdom
The Hidden History of the Cowboy West
By Christopher Knowlton

Knowlton writes about the young men and the financing that underpinned the huge herds of Texas longhorns moved to open ranges in Wyoming and Montana. He also explores the cowboys, many young jobless veterans of Confederate cavalry units, and the cattle trails and trailheads that made towns like Dodge City and Abilene in Kansas famous. The history will interest readers with connections in the West or baby boomers who grew up watching Gunsmoke!

The Worst Hard Time
The Untold Story of Those Who Survived the Great American Dust Bowl
By Timothy Egan

Egan writes an account of the 1930s Dust Bowl on the Great Plains, zeroing in on a group of families. The settlers of the 1880s arrived in years of high rainfall, sometimes believing promoters’ assertions that “rain follows the plow.” So, while not an account of 1880s, it’s a cautionary tale in the Manifest Destiny story.

Killers of the Flower Moon
The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI
By David Grann

The Burkhart sisters were among the Osage families with headrights to fabulous wealth in oil-rich Osage County, Oklahoma, in the 1920s. They were also targets of unscrupulous behavior by their non-Indian neighbors and by local, state, and federal government entities. The deaths were a dark, dark conspiracy. A 2017 Top Ten read for me.

And Still the Waters Run
The Betrayal of the Five Civilized Tribes
By Angie Debo

A book cited as a classic in understanding Indian policies affecting tribes in Indian Territory, particularly after the territory was absorbed into the state of Oklahoma. It’s hard to believe the greed. This is tough, but important, reading.

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FOR MANY READERS, understanding of Korea has come from writers like American novelist Adam Johnson, who portrayed North Korea’s Orwellian world in his Pulitzer Prize–winning novel, *The Orphan Master’s Son* (**** SELECT Mar/Apr 2012), or from English author David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas* (**** Nov/Dec 2004), which presents a dystopian Korea. Other depictions come from writers born in Korea but now living in the United States. Suki Kim, for example, went undercover in North Korea to research *Without You, There Is No Us: Undercover Among the Sons of North Korea’s Elite* (**** Mar/Apr 2015), and her novel *The Interpreter* (2003) involves a mystery about a young Korean American in New York.

There is, of course, an elephant in the room: with few exceptions, the literature coming out of Korea is from South Korea. North Korean literature is highly censored, and—save for defector memoirs by authors who have escaped their homeland, like Kang Chol-hwan’s *The Aquariums of Pyongyang* (2000) or Hyeonseo Lee’s *The Girl with Seven Names* (2015)—the books that emerge from the autocratic regime tend to be hagiographic or didactic.

Hence we turn almost exclusively to South Korea. Thanks to the Library of Korean Literature, published by Dalkey Archive Press in collaboration with the Literature Translation Institute of Korea, international marketing efforts, and the work of acclaimed translators, in recent years, novels by native South Koreans have reached a much wider audience. Han Kang’s novel *The Vegetarian* (**** SELECT May/June 2016), for example, won the Man Booker International Prize and was named one of the best books of the year by the *New York Times*.

We highlight novels published in the last few decades to reflect South Korean culture from the 1980s onward—decades of immense change that saw the violent emergence of democracy, as well as further industrialization and Westernization, both in custom and in popular culture.

As South Korea becomes a major player in the global literary scene, it’s clear that there’s no single entry point to its fiction. The literature is, by turns, social realist, experi-
mental, avant garde, and subversive, and filled with family dysfunction, parables, drifters, dispossessed, the beautiful (and not), and the transgressive. Cheonmanaeyo ("You're welcome.")

The Lone North Korean Novel

The Accusation

Forbidden Stories from Inside North Korea
By Bandi, translated by Deborah Smith (2017)
This collection of seven stories is the first work of dissident fiction by a living North Korean writer ever smuggled out of that country. Bandi (1950–; a pseudonym) is, by most accounts, a prominent writer in North Korea and a member of the official, state-controlled writers’ association; he smuggled this fierce indictment of totalitarian life to a North Korean refugee activist in China, and the book was published in South Korea in 2014. Through ordinary citizens, the stories collectively offer a devastating testament to the paranoia, rigid social hierarchy, bureaucratic incompetence, and fruitless careerism during Kim II-sung’s and Kim Jong-il’s reigns. “Bandi’s stories,” wrote the New Yorker, “are not about outright rebellion but about the slow onset of despair; their protagonists are, for the most part, hopeful strivers struggling to keep their spirits from shattering in the face of mounting evidence that their government has betrayed them.”

South Korean Fiction

Please Look After Mom
In 2011, Shin (1963–) became the first woman to win the Man Asian Literary Prize, beating out the likes of Haruki Murakami, Amitav Ghosh, Banana Yoshimoto, and other worthy rivals. The novel subsequently became a best seller in Korea and sparked renewed interest in Korean fiction abroad. When the suffering, illiterate Park So-nyo is separated from her husband and disappears in a bustling Seoul subway station while visiting her grown children, her family goes in search of her. Narrated in the second person through the selfish, browbeating characters—Mom’s adult, careerist daughter; her wealthy, favorite son; her faithless husband; and Mom herself, who wanders through her memories—the novel asks how well we know family and the sacrifices they make. Shin addresses the Korean concept of han, or profound sorrow and suffering, as family fractures and secrets start to surface. “The lost mother clearly,” wrote NPR, “stands for values that are fading from Korean culture as industrialization and urbanization triumph.”

At Least We Can Apologize
By Lee Ki-ho, translated by Christopher J. Dykas (2009, 2013)
The simpleminded Jin-man, who lives in an abusive mental ward, narrates this short, dark, and comically tragic novel. With his buddy, Si-bong, he rationalizes the institution’s violence and invents wrongs to confess to their caretakers, which the friends then commit after their beatings. When the ward is shut down, Jin-man and Si-bong find themselves ill adapted to the real world. With such experiences under their belt, they decide to hire themselves to deliver apologies on behalf of people who have offended others—for a hefty fee. Unfortunately, their concept of wrongs is shaped by their pasts, and their apologies deliver unexpected results. The Times Literary Supplement
described the novel as a “wickedly funny story, a kind of *Waiting for Godot* recast by Stephen King,” filled with uncomfortable philosophical questions and various forms of normalized madness.

**Our Happy Time**

By Gong Ji-young, translated by Sora Kim-Russell (2012)

Gong (1963–), a feminist author, writes about women’s struggles, laborers, the underprivileged, and social activism. This best-selling novel addresses peace, forgiveness, and capital punishment. Yujeong, an privileged former pop star, awakes in a hospital after her third suicide attempt. Her aunt, a nun, offers to take her home only if Yujeong will accompany her to visit inmates on death row. When she meets convicted murderer Jeong Yunsu, Yujeong feels nothing but disgust. But as the weekly visits pass, the two misfits begin an unlikely friendship as they reveal to each other their darkest secrets and begin to heal. Told through alternating chapters, *Our Happy Time* “plays out in overwrought, clichéd fashion, but with moments of beauty. Many readers will find the tone overly preachy, but Gong’s sincerity at times breaks through the heavy-handed moralizing” (*Publishers Weekly*).

**No One Writes Back**


“I left home with an MP3 player and a novel in an old backpack,” says Jihun, who, for three years, has traveled through a series of nameless Korean cities with his late grandfather’s blind guide dog. Spending each night in a different motel, he starts one-sided correspondences with members of his family or with people he meets along the way. “I write letters because I want to convey to someone the stories of these people,” he explains, “but also because I want to let someone know that a day had existed for me as well.” At center is a women selling a novel to subway commuters and a letter to Jihun’s sister, whose addiction to cosmetic surgery reflects a society obsessed with images. A universal story of alienation and displacement, *No One Writes Back* “has the trappings of the avant garde—the carefully affectless style, the way it is told in numbered paragraphs—but in terms of the emotional impact it delivers, it is, in its way, as sentimental as [Dickens’s] *The Old Curiosity Shop*,” wrote the *Guardian* (UK). “All I can say … is read it—you’ll love it.”

**The Hen Who Dreamed She Could Fly**

By Sun-mi Hwang, translated by Chi-Young Kim and illustrated by Nomoco (2000, 2013)

Well, this novel by an acclaimed children’s author is unusual. Hwang’s (1963–) “sublime story is … a fable of farm animals that belongs on a bookshelf somewhere between the innocent frivolity of Charlotte’s Web and subliminal politics of *Animal Farm*” (*Toronto Star*). The novella, which sold more than two million copies, features the endearing Sprout, a hen who, one day, decides to never lay another egg. Thrown from the coop, she experiences both freedom and danger. When her wildest dreams come true and she finds an abandoned egg in a briar patch, she nurtures it until Baby—a duckling—arrives. As an improbable connection develops between mother and baby, Sprout faces both friendship and hostility from other animals, and as Baby grows up, their own bond is tested. Charming, heartbreaking, uplifting, and tragic all at once, this sparsely simple, philosophically rich novel explores fate, happiness, family, and courage.

**When Adam Opens His Eyes**

By Jang Jung-il, translated by Hwang Sun-Ae and Horace Jeffery Hodges (2013)

“I was nineteen years old, and the things that I most wanted to have were a typewriter, prints of Munch’s paintings and a turntable for playing records,” opens the alienated teenage narrator (called Adam by a lover). Set in the year leading up to the Seoul Olympics, with a weak form of democracy just emerging, this short novel was considered shocking at that time for its depictions of freedom and explicit sex; Jung-il (1962–) was even arrested for his “pornographic” work. Adam, who has failed entry to the top university, decides to spend the next year cramming for the test again. As he experiences further cynicism and isolation, what ensues is a coming-of-age story about sex, death, contemporaneous Korean mores, and a critique of South Korea’s competitive society. “The conspicuous problem which emerges through this narrative concerns character formation: what happens when the phoniness Adam detects in others’ tastes extends to the tastes of people he values?” asked the *Literateur* critic.
Pavane for a Dead Princess

The handsome narrator, 20, a valet at a ritzy shopping mall in Seoul, revolted against aesthetics when his dashing father abandoned his common mother for the silver screen. Perhaps for this reason, he’s drawn to “the world’s ugliest women”—an intelligent, sweet, but never-promoted woman confined to an underclass in a culture with beauty fetishes, “where pretty trumped justice and pretty has the last word.” Set in the mid-1980s, this poetically written, flawed love story veers into metafiction with its footnotes and multiple endings, while critiquing South Korea’s rapidly industrializing, consumer-oriented, superficial society. But before the novel ends, tragedy and farce intervene. “It’s a pleasant read in the vein of Norwegian Wood, Haruki Murakami’s classic love story set during a period of great change,” wrote the Three Percent critic. “And like his Japanese counterpart, Park shows that regardless of the dark that surrounds us, true love can shine a light.”

Meeting with My Brother

In this slim, controversial novel, the prominent South Korean novelist (1948–) questions long-held assumptions about the two Koreas. During the division of Korea, Yi’s father abandoned his family to defect to the north in 1950; he subsequently spent 30 years in prison camps and took another family. Yi imagines a fictional meeting between two half brothers; one, his own middle-aged alter ego, travels from Seoul to the Chinese-North Korean border to meet his North Korean half brother after his father’s death. They soon discover that their highly regimented lives are not as different as one would think despite their personal rivalry and ambivalence, the great chasm between their upbringing, and the South-North divide. But reunification—political and personal—comes at great cost. “Meeting with My Brother,” commented the New Yorker, “is one of the best descriptions of the contemporary political and social dynamics between North and South Korea.”

The Hole

Pyun (1972–) gained acclaim for her short story “Caring for Plants,” which originally appeared in the New Yorker.

That story’s main character, Oghi, occupies this tense, slow-burning, best-selling thriller. When Oghi, a South Korean professor, awakes from a coma after causing a car accident that killed his wife and left himself paralyzed and disfigured, he finds himself isolated and neglected by his grief-stricken mother-in-law. Imprisoned inside his room, he recalls his troubled relationship with his wife, who had realized none of her life goals except cultivating their garden. Then his mother-in-law starts to dig it up. A creepy tale in the vein of Misery, the novel considers the tiny surrenders in daily life, as it explores power struggles that reflect a socially divided Korean society. “By the time Hye-young Pyun’s taut psychological thriller The Hole has tightened its grip on the unsuspecting mind, it’s too late to escape,” wrote Shelf Awareness. “It takes a maestro to create a short novel of such atmosphere and depth.”

The Private Lives of Plants

As the story opens, the shallow Ki-hyeon, taking over the duty from his mother, is procuring a “lady of the night” for his military career, a punishment for having taken photos of police throwing tear gas bombs and clubbing protestors during the demonstrations of the mid-1980s. In this dysfunctional family saga and bizarre love story, the father interacts more with his plants than with his family; Ki-hyeon seeks out his brother’s former girlfriend; Woo-hyeon borrows a page from the Greek myth of Apollo and Daphne, “pray[ing] to be transformed into a tree.” Filled with heightened passions and small traumas that represent the larger tragedies of Korean history, the novel—whose plot really can’t be discussed—ends, tragedy and farce intervene. “It’s a pleasant read in the vein of Norwegian Wood, Haruki Murakami’s classic love story set during a period of great change,” wrote the Three Percent critic. “And like his Japanese counterpart, Park shows that regardless of the dark that surrounds us, true love can shine a light.”

Further Reading
BLACK FLOWER | YOUNG-HA KIM, TRANSLATED BY CHARLES LA SHURE (2003, 2012; ➔ ASIAN LITERARY PRIZE LONG LIST)
A GREATER MUSIC | BAE SUAH, TRANSLATED BY DEBORAH SMITH (2003, 2016)
RECITATION | BAE SUAH, TRANSLATED BY DEBORAH SMITH (2011, 2017)
THE BOY WHO ESCAPED PARADISE | J. M. LEE, TRANSLATED BY CHI-YOUNG KIM (2016)
THE COLOR OF EARTH | KIM DONG HWA, TRANSLATED BY LAUREN NA (2003, 2009)
ONE HUNDRED SHADOWS | HWANG JUNG-EUN, TRANSLATED BY JUNG YEWON (2010, 2016)
RINA | KANG YOUNG-SOOK, TRANSLATED BY KIM BORAM (2015)
VASELINE BUDDHA | JUNG YOUNG MOON, TRANSLATED BY JUNG YEWON (2010, 2016)
In *The Murder at the Vicarage* (1930), Agatha Christie immortalized Miss Jane Marple, the shrewd, elderly spinster of the fictional English village of St. Mary Mead. A woman of independent means, she sweetly meddled in her neighbors’ business while solving local crimes and never dropping a knitting stitch.

With Miss Marple, who appeared in a dozen novels and more short stories, Christie, who wrote during the Golden Age of Detective Fiction, may very well have perfected the traditional “cozy.” Though this subgenre of crime fiction takes many forms, it has some defining features. The crime and detection usually occur in a small, intimate, and enclosed community, in which the murderer knows the victim and ultimately turns out to have a personal motive. The protagonist is routinely an amateur sleuth and frequently a woman—nosy, well educated, and intuitive about human nature and the community’s social dynamics. Cozies are often character driven, lighthearted, and rich in humor; murders are frequently bloodless (death by poison!); relationships are regularly chaste; and the amateurs often enlist the help of local police (conveniently sometimes a husband or friend) to solve the crimes. The genre, however, can also take the form of a small-town police procedural. As Marilyn Stasio, the crime columnist for the *New York Times Book Review*, acknowledges, “The abiding appeal of the cozy mystery owes a lot to our collective memory, true or false, of simpler, sweeter times.”

In the past couple of decades, the cozy genre has exploded in popularity (and, in some series, has become more graphically violent). Today’s cozies center on different themes, from felines to books, holidays, food and coffee, archaeology, antiquing, and even fashion. We’ve chosen a few series on some loosely structured topics to highlight the variety of the genre.
If You Like Miss Marple

Miss Silver
By Patricia Wentworth
Like Christie, Wentworth was another master of English mystery writing. In the 1920s, she introduced Miss Maud Silver, who, along with Miss Marple, is the quintessential English cozy heroine. The dowdy spinster, a retired government turned private investigator whose fondness for knitting, Tennyson, thefts, and art forgeries masks her profound intelligence, appears in 32 novels published between 1928 and 1961. Much to the chagrin of Scotland Yard, Miss Silver successfully infiltrates the dysfunctional households and crimes of the upper class. Unlike Miss Marple, however, who plays a lone hand, Miss Silver relies on inductive reasoning and shares her thought processes and actions as she solves crimes. One of the standouts is The Chinese Shawl (1943), in which Miss Silver must intervene in an age-old family feud that results in murder.

Lord Peter Wimsey
By Dorothy L. Sayers
Sayers, a British author and playwright, is best known for her farcical capers starring amateur sleuth Lord Peter Wimsey—a dapper English dilettante and gentleman amused by his chosen hobby and often assisted by his valet, his Chief Inspector brother-in-law, and his wife. Set between the two World Wars, the 20-plus novels and short story collections, published between 1923 and 1972, address contemporary issues—from advertising to women’s education and veterans’ health. In The Nine Tailors (1934), the ninth in the series, Wimsey must solve a two-decades-old case of missing jewels—and the mysterious corpses dotting the countryside. Sayers, who received much less recognition for her whodunits than Christie did, at least in America, is well worth exploring.

Further Reading
MRS. POLLIFAX | DOROTHY GILMAN (14 TITLES, STARTING WITH THE UNEXPECTED MRS. POLLIFAX [1966])
PETER SHANDY | CHARLOTTE MACLEOD (10 TITLES, STARTING WITH REST YOU MERRY [1979])
HOMER KELLY | JANE LANGTON (18 TITLES, STARTING WITH THE TRANSCENDENTAL MURDER [1964])
DAISY DALRYMPLE | CAROLA DUNN (22 TITLES, STARTING WITH DEATH AT WENTWATER COURT [1994])

Sarah Keate | Mignon G. Eberhart (7 Titles, Starting with The Patient in Room 18 [1929])
The Circular Staircase | Mary Roberts Rinehart (1908)
The Yellow Room | Mary Roberts Rinehart (1945)

For History Buffs

Maisie Dobbs
By Jacqueline Winspear
The best-selling Maisie Dobbs series was inspired by Winspear’s grandfather’s experience in World War I. Maisie, who first appeared in Maisie Dobbs (*AGATHA AWARD, 2003), which takes place in England between 1910 and 1929, is a quirky, educated psychologist and private investigator who worked as a nurse during the war and deals in wartime secrets and traumas—her own included. In the 14th and most recent in the series, To Die But Once (2018), Maisie investigates the disappearance of a young apprentice craftsman on the home front during World War II. “Most entries in the series begin with a conventional mystery: A suspicious death, a missing person, a family’s desire for closure—but once Maisie gets involved, she plunges into a secondary, connected storyline,” wrote NPR. “Sometimes it’s her need to reconcile something from her own past, but often it’s a parallel mystery with a broader canvas and a modern resonance: Economic disparity, racial tensions, health care. . . .”

Flavia de Luce
By Alan Bradley
Considered an old-fashioned cozy, Bradley’s Flavia de Luce series is sophisticated and widely appealing. The award-winning The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie (2009) introduces Flavia de Luce, an incorrigible, precocious 11-year-old and aspiring chemist specializing in poison and deduction. Living in an idyllic English countryside in 1950, she stays ahead of the local police as she tries to clear her father of murder. Hailed as “a combination of Eloise and Sherlock Holmes” by the Boston Globe, Flavia evolves throughout the eight-book series as she slowly loses her innocence. In Thrice the Brinded Cat Hath Mew’d (2016), the most recent entry, Flavia, now 12, leaves a boarding school in Canada, and, upon returning to England, she finds her father gravely ill—and discovers an interesting dead body. Throughout the series, “Bradley never loses touch with the
darker realities of this rustic English paradise: a town still haunted by the atrocities of World War II and trying to regain its footing in daily life” (Entertainment Weekly).

**William Monk**

By Anne Perry

Perry brought Victorian England’s social issues to life in *The Face of a Stranger* (1990), in which William Monk—a banker-turned-policeman with scant regard for Victorian social conventions—wakes up after a horrific carriage accident with no memory of his previous life in Northumberland. Slowly rebuilding his identity, he comes to know himself as William Monk, his home as 1856 London, and his primary case the murder of Major Gray, a minor British noble. Hester Latterly, a Crimean war nurse who helps Monk through his amnesia (and assists in his later cases), is a recurring character. By the 23rd novel, *An Echo of Murder* (2017), Monk is dealing with rampant prejudice in the Hungarian immigrant community. Perry’s Thomas Pitt series (starting with 1979’s *The Cater Street Hangman*) also takes place in Victorian London, where Pitt, a police inspector, is aided by his wife’s bored, upper-class family.

**Further Reading**

**THE CADFAEL CHRONICLES** | ELLIS PETERS (12TH-CENTURY ENGLAND; 21 TITLES, STARTING WITH A MORBID TASTE FOR BONES [1977])

**MRS. JEFFRIES** | EMILY BRIGHTWELL (VICTORIAN ENGLAND; 36 TITLES, STARTING WITH THE INSPECTOR AND MRS. JEFFRIES [1993])

**CHARLES LENOX** | CHARLES FINCH (VICTORIAN ENGLAND; 10 TITLES, STARTING WITH A BEAUTIFUL BLUE DEATH [2007])

**GASLIGHT MYSTERY** | VICTORIA THOMPSON (EARLY 20TH-CENTURY NEW YORK; 21 TITLES, STARTING WITH MURDER ON ASTOR PLACE [1999])

**MOLLY MORPHY** | RHYS BOWEN (EARLY 20TH-CENTURY NEW YORK; 17 TITLES, STARTING WITH MURPHY’S LAW [2001])

**AMELIA PEABODY** | ELIZABETH PETERS (19TH/20TH CENTURY EGYPT; 20 TITLES, STARTING WITH CROCODILE ON THE SANDBANK [1975])

**BESS CRAWFORD** | CHARLES TODD (POST-WORLD WAR I ENGLAND; 8 TITLES, STARTING WITH A DUTY TO THE DEAD [2009])

**DARLING DAHLIAS** | SUSAN WITTIG ALBERT (1930S ALABAMA; 6 TITLES, STARTING WITH THE DARLING DAHLIAS AND THE CUCUMBER TREE [2010])

**MAGGIE HOPE** | SUSAN ELIA MACNEAL (WORLD WAR II-ERA EUROPE; 7 TITLES, STARTING WITH MR. CHURCHILL’S SECRETARY [2012])

**If You Have Pets**

**The Cat Who ...**

By Lilian Jackson Braun

This whimsical series features James Qwilleran, a former crime reporter, and his two Siamese cats, Koko and Yum Yum, who live in the small, isolated town of Pickax (likely in Michigan). In *The Cat Who Could Read Backwards* (1966), Qwill rents a room from the paper’s art critic, starts to care for the literate Koko (Yum Yum, by contrast, is no intellectual giant), and tries to solve an art crime. Then there is the cat who, in future titles, sees red, plays Brahms, knows Shakespeare, talks to ghosts, tails a thief, sings for the birds, and more. In the final and 29th installment, *The Cat Who Had 60 Whiskers* (2007), a gardener’s “accidental” death flummoxes Qwill just as his special lady friend leaves him for Paris. The novels, which sold millions of copies and regularly appeared on the *New York Times* best seller list, are warmhearted if somewhat formulaic—but “for cat lovers, those set pieces offered dependable pleasures” (*New York Times*).

**Meg Langslow**

By Donna Andrews

Andrews’s first book, *Murder with Peacocks* (1999), which introduced Meg Langslow, a blacksmith by trade in the small town of Yorktown, Virginia, won multiple awards, including the Agatha. Meg earns her living by crafting metal sculptures, but everyone in her family and social circle are oddballs. When the random murder occurs, Meg steps in—and madcap hilarity and adventures ensue. Each of the 22 novels to date marginally feature different birds (who don’t solve mysteries but are usually central to the antics in some way): puffsins, flamingos, hawks, ducks, emus, wickets. See also Andrews’s award-winning Turing Hopper series, featuring an Artificial Intelligence protagonist. “Langslow’s tendency to mania into her deadpan prose, whose unflappable cadences … and cutaways from farcical tableaux suggest half Jane Austen, half battery acid” (*Kirkus*).

**Further Reading**

**MRS. MURPHY** | RITA MAE BROWN (26 TITLES, STARTING WITH WISH YOU WERE HERE [1990])

**PAWS & CLAWS** | KRISTA DAVIS (5 TITLES, STARTING WITH MURDER, SHE BARKED [2013])

**CATTARINA** | MONICA SHAGNESSY (3 TITLES, STARTING WITH THE TELL-TAIL
Chief Inspector Gamache  
By Louise Penny  
Penny earned critical acclaim and multiple awards with Still Life (2006); each subsequent novel (13 to date) has won or has been nominated for major awards. Though a police procedural, the series contains scant sex and violence and is generally gentle in nature; the action takes place, mostly, in Three Pines, an enchanting, fictional town in Quebec, where the kindly Chief Inspector Armand Gamache works for the provincial police force. Besides compelling whodunits, Penny excels in delving into the human condition and digging up old Canadian history to set up her lively personalities and their backgrounds. “Penny’s novels are rich and full, intelligent and entertaining, and worthy of all the many awards they’ve garnered,” wrote the Huffington Post. “Penny doesn’t write feel-good, frothy novels with everything falling neatly into place by the finish, but instead she creates real scenarios that expose the tolls exacted by real living, where good is not always rewarded and evil not always punished.”

Hamish Macbeth  
By M. C. Beaton  
In the small, sleepy town of Lochdubh in the Scottish Highlands, Hamish Macbeth makes up the entire police force. Although he appears somewhat lazy, bumbling, and unambitious, Macbeth—the son of crofters who lives in the police station and keeps some farm animals—has a talent for solving the small town’s crimes and murders. In the first novel, Death of a Gossip (1985), a tabloid reporter who joins a fishing club is found dead in the water. Thirty-three novels later, in Death of a Ghost (2017), a dead body in a castle cellar disappears, and Macbeth must solve the mystery before the “ghost” appears again. “Macbeth is the sort of character who slyly grows on you,” wrote the Chicago Sun-Times. Beaton also writes the popular Agatha Raisin series, featuring an English middle-aged, former public relations agent who solves murders in the Cotswolds and eventually sets up her own detective agency. Start with Agatha Raisin and the Quiche of Death (1992).

Further Reading  
J. P. Beaumont | J. A. JANCE (23 TITLES, STARTING WITH UNTIL PROVEN GUILTY [1985])  
RODERICK ALLEYN | NGAIO MARSH (32 TITLES, STARTING WITH A MANDALAY DEAD [1934])  
CONSTABLE EVANS | RHYS BOWEN (10 TITLES, STARTING WITH EVANS ABOVE [1997])  
MR. AND MRS. NORTH | FRANCES AND RICHARD LOCKRIDGE (26 TITLES, STARTING WITH THE NORTH’S MEET MURDER [1940])

For Bibliophiles  
Booktown Mysteries  
By Lorna Barrett  
Barrett writes some of the best cozy mysteries set in contemporary times, many of them New York Times best sellers. The 11-novel series to date takes place in Stoneham, New Hampshire, a vacation town lined with bookstores—and rife with crimes. Tricia Mills, a city refugee-turned-mystery bookstore owner dealing in rare books (who becomes, coincidentally, an amateur sleuth), often finds herself mixed up in thorny whodunit murders. Start with Murder Is Binding (2008), in which Tricia comes under suspicion for the death of the owner of a rare cookbook. In the most recent entry, A Just Clause (2017), Tricia’s absent father comes to town—and becomes the prime suspect for a murder. Of the first book, Publishers Weekly wrote: “The mix of books, cooking and an engaging whodunit will leave cozy fans eager for the next installment.”
Aunt Dimity
By Nancy Atherton
When Lori Shepherd learns that her late mother’s fabled best friend, Aunt Dimity, was actually a real person who left her an inheritance, Lori, newly divorced, leaves America for the England’s idyllic Cotswolds. Besides a quaint cottage, her bequest also includes a mysterious, blank journal possessed by none other than Aunt Dimity’s friendly ghost. In the first in the series, Aunt Dimity’s Death (1992), Lori must find a secret hidden among letters written between her mother and Dimity. In later volumes, none other than Dimity helps Lori solve local crimes. In the 22nd and most recent installment, Aunt Dimity’s Curse (2017), Lori—now married, with twin boys and a baby daughter—listens as her neighbor cheerfully admits to killing her first husband, and perhaps others. Dimity must, of course, be consulted. The plots in the series rarely involve grave danger; instead, they are romantic, satisfying, warmhearted, and simple: “charmingly low-key puzzles to blood-soaked chills and thrills” (Kirkus).

Further Reading
WITCHCRAFT MYSTERIES | JULIET BLACKWELL (6 TITLES, STARTING WITH SECONDHAND SPIRITS (2009))
SILVER HOLLOW PARANORMAL COZY MYSTERIES | LEIGHANN DOBBS (4 TITLES, STARTING WITH A SPELL OF TROUBLE (2016))
WITCH CAT MYSTERIES | VICKI VASS (1 TITLE TO DATE: Bloodline [2017])
SPELLBOUND MYSTERIES | ANNABEL CHASE (8 TITLES, STARTING WITH CURSE THE DAY (2017))
LIZZY AND DIESEL | JANET EVANOVICH (3 TITLES, STARTING WITH WICKED APPETITE [2010])

A Final Recommendation: One of a Kind

The No. 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency
By Alexander McCall Smith
The regally stout, clever, and kind Mma Precious Ramotswe is Botswana’s first (and only) female investigator, and her work at the No. 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency both solves mysteries and highlights people’s foibles. As Mma Ramotswe’s assistant explains, “Most of the time we are just helping people to find out things they already know.” The 17 novels (1998–2016), starting with The No. 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency, feature a lush African setting, a folksy style, and ample interpersonal relationships. In the novels, husbands go missing, kidnappers must be identified, a man must atone for past sins, and Mma Ramotswe is romantically pursued. The plots lack suspense, murders, and sometimes even mysteries; the novels are playful and deceptively simple. “The No. 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency series is a literary confection of such gossamer deliciousness that one feels it can only be good for one,” wrote the New York Times. “Fortunately … there is no end to the pleasure that may be extracted from these … books.” McCall Smith is also the author of the 44 Scotland Street series and the Isabel Dalhousie Mysteries.

Further Reading
SOUTHERN SISTERS | ANNE GEORGE (8 TITLES, STARTING WITH MURDER ON A GIRLS’ NIGHT OUT [1996])
In August 1974, French high-wire artist Philippe Petit rigged a 400-pound, 1-inch-thick cable, crafted a 55-pound balancing pole, and performed death-defying acrobatic feats 1,350 feet above ground—without a safety net—between the World Trade Center’s Twin Towers.

“If I see three oranges, I have to juggle. And if I see two towers, I have to walk,” Petit later explained to the New York Times. Today we might call Petit’s caper an adventure sport—or an extreme sport. Yet while he enjoyed risking his life walking between the spires of some of the world’s tallest buildings, other people see cliffs and must jump off, view ice mountains and have to climb, and glimpse hundreds of miles of unforgiving terrain and feel compelled to hike. All require some measure of risk, including possible death; all involve adrenaline-rush thrills. As surfer Laird Hamilton describes riding giant waves in his native Hawaii: “When you’re in that moment, there’s no beginning and no end. … It’s just pure. You are and it is and that’s why we continually seek it out, and always search for it, and need it. We need to feel alive and to feel complete.”

We’ve chosen some nonfiction adventure sports books written in the last two or three decades that may—or may not—whet your appetite for such thrills. They are not survival stories per se, but rather depict the drives, challenges, and “flows” of such extreme activities. If you find one that interests you, don’t forget to tell us about it.

### ADVENTURES ON LAND

**Born to Run**

A Hidden Tribe, Superathletes, and the Greatest Race the World Has Never Seen

By Christopher McDougall (2009)

Have American running shoe companies been duping us? This isn’t the main question that McDougall—a journalist
and former contributing editor to <i>Men’s Health</i>—asks in this riveting best seller, but it’s an interesting one. His main subject is the Tarahumara Indians, a tribe living in the isolated Copper Canyons in Mexico. Superathletes, they are legendary for their ability to run extreme distances through inhospitable canyons, almost barefoot, without rest or injury. As the always-injured McDougall set out to uncover their secrets (and run alongside them), he investigates the development of the (cushioned) modern running shoe and the evolutionary claim that humans are “born to run.” There’s also the title’s show-stopping race between a few American elite ultrarunners and the Tarahumara. “McDougall found a large cast of characters, an exotic setting for drama and discovery, and a tailor-made showdown with which to cap the book,” reported the <i>Washington Post</i>. “By and large it’s a thrilling read, even for someone who couldn’t care less about proper stride and split times and energy gels.”

**Eiger Dreams**

<i>Ventures Among Men and Mountains</i>

By Jon Krakauer (1990)

Krakauer is best known for <i>Into the Wild</i> (1996) and his record of his ill-fated expedition to climb to the summit of Mount Everest in 1996, detailed in <i>Into Thin Air</i>: <i>Death on Everest</i> (1997). In his first book, a collection of a dozen articles and essays, many written for <i>Outside</i> and <i>Smithsonian</i> magazines, he asks a fundamental question: why would you risk your life to climb a mountain? Traveling from Mount McKinley to Pakistan to Switzerland (home of the Eiger), Krakauer introduces the eccentric mountaineering community as they climb frozen waterfalls (in Valdez, Alaska), attempt life-threatening hang gliding and bungee jumping (Chamonix, France), or canyoneering in Arizona’s Mogollon Rim. As for Krakauer himself? He nearly died on his solo climb of the Devil’s Thumb in Alaska. Casual readers may wish to start with one of Krakauer’s heavy hitters. But here, “Mr. Krakauer has taken the literature of mountains onto a higher ledge,” wrote the <i>New York Times</i>. “… His snow-capped peaks set against limitless blue skies present problems that inspire irrefutable human experiences: fear and triumph, damnation and salvation.”

**Wild**

<i>From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail</i>

By Cheryl Strayed (2012)

In 1995, 26-year-old Strayed’s life was falling apart. Then she stumbled upon a guidebook to the Pacific Coast Trail, which spans 2,600 miles between Mexico and Canada. Despite her lack of backpacking experience, Strayed decided to solo hike the trail from the Mojave Desert to the Cascades in Oregon, more than 1,000 miles, as a way to alter her trajectory. Wild recounts her three months of solitude, physical hardship, emotional privation, and self-reliance. “I was amazed that what I needed to survive could be carried on my back,” Strayed writes of her mental and physical journey. “And, most surprising of all, that I could carry it. That I could bear the unbearable.” As the <i>New York Times Book Review</i> commented, “[S]etting out on a 1,100-mile trek from the Mojave Desert to the Cascades outfitted in brand-new hiking boots—a size too small, it turned out—and with 24.5 pounds of water in a dromedary bag is a recipe for disaster. Fortunately for the reader, it’s also a recipe for a spectacular book.” (★★★★★ SELECTION July/Aug 2012)

**Between a Rock and a Hard Place**

[ietitle 127 Hours: Between a Rock and a Hard Place]

By Aron Ralston (2004)

In 2003, Ralston, then 27, planned a 30-mile part bike, part hiking, and part canyoneering excursion in Utah’s remote Blue John Canyon. Bike part over, he descended into the canyon, only to have his right hand pinned by an 800-pound boulder. He could either sever his arm and risk death—or face certain death. Spending six days in the desert without food and water, Ralston, after long periods of despair and acceptance, amputated his arm with a multitool. “This is gonna make one hell of a story to tell my friends,” he writes, and it does. The book alternates between Ralston’s childhood, his past experiences, and his entrapment in the canyon, with his family’s rescue efforts. “It seems that there is little the former engineer, graduating with a B.S. in mechanical engineering and a double major in French and a minor in piano performance can’t do—including writing a thought-provoking book that will make the reader contemplate life and the human ability to cope beyond what we believe to be possible,” wrote the <i>Curled Up</i> critic. The memoir inspired the 2010 Academy Award-nominated film <i>127 Hours</i>, directed by Danny Boyle and starring James Franco.

**The Man in the White Suit**

<i>The Stig, Le Mans, the Fast Lane and Me</i>

By Ben Collins (2010)

For years, millions of British viewers wondered about the identity of The Man in the White Suit, or the Stig—the silent, iconic, and anonymous race car driver/presenter made famous on the blockbuster BBC show <i>Top Gear</i>.
In each episode, the Stig was a test driver and trainer for celebrity guests like Tom Cruise. In this guilty pleasure, Collins (the second Stig, 2003–2010) tells his story. Born with an attitude, Collins—who competed with the best at Daytona and Le Mans—describes his upbringing, his stint as an army reservist, and his racing and movie stunt career. He also shares highlights of his time in the white suit—how he got there and what it’s like to guide a blind former RAF officer around the track and more. He also gives insight into the making of the show. “For all his skill behind the wheel of expensive metal, Collins is no less of an entertaining writer,” Autoblog wrote. “Throughout The Man in the White Suit, Collins paints a pretty clear picture of what it was like to be the Stig, and it’s one of loneliness and uncertainty.”

Further Reading

**TRACKS: A WOMAN’S SOLO TREK ACROSS 1700 MILES OF AUSTRALIAN OUTBACK | ROBYN DAVIDSON (1980)**

**BECOMING ODYSSEA: ADVENTURES ON THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL | JENNIFER PHARR DAVIS (2010)**

**THRU-HIKING WILL BREAK YOUR HEART: AN ADVENTURE ON THE PACIFIC CREST TRAIL | CARROT QUINN (2015)**

**WHAT I TALK ABOUT WHEN I TALK ABOUT RUNNING: A MEMOIR | HARUKI MURAKAMI | Nov/Dec 2008**

**NOWHERE NEAR FIRST: ULTRAMARATHON ADVENTURES FROM THE BACK OF THE PACK | CORY REESE (2016)**

**KILIMANJARO DIARIES: OR, HOW I SPENT A WEEK DREAMING OF TOILETS, DRINKING CRAPPY WATER, AND MAKING BAD JOKES WHILE HAVING THE TIME OF MY LIFE | EVA MELUSINE THIEME (2014)**

**BREAKING TRAIL: A CLIMBING LIFE | ARLENE BLUM (2005)**


**AWOL ON THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL | DAVID MILLER (2006)**

**ADVENTURES IN WATER**

**In Search of Captain Zero**

A Surfer’s Road Trip Beyond the End of the Road

By Allan Weisbecker (2001)

“If you are looking for Hunter S. T.’s and Kerouac’s long lost cousin, look no further,” wrote Paste magazine. In 1996, Weisbecker—a novelist, screenwriter, photojournalist, and surfer enduring a midlife crisis—left his Long Island home, packed his dog and belongings in a camper, and went in search of his longtime fellow surfer friend Christopher. A Vietnam vet who had signed a lone postcard as Capitán Cero, Christopher had disappeared somewhere in Central America some years back. As he travels down the coast of Mexico and Central America in search of both friend and wave, Weisbecker nostalgically recalls his global surfing adventures and the drug-running mishaps that fed his and Christopher’s surf habits. When he does find his comrade, he also finds himself—and more colorful adventures ensure. “The author’s flair for describing natural beauty, and his strong sense of narrative rhythm and uncompromising candor, make for a lovely personal reflection that mixes the right amount of dreamy meditation with page-turning allure” (Publishers Weekly).

**Swimming to Antarctica**

Tales of a Long-Distance Swimmer

By Lynne Cox (2004)

American open-water swimmer Cox is physiologically suited for cold-water swimming. As a teenager, she broke all records for crossing the English Channel. She then conquered the Strait of Magellan, the waters around the Cape of Good Hope, and, in an attempt to “create a thaw in the Cold War,” the Bering Strait. In 2002, at age 45 and dressed in only a bathing suit, cap, and goggles, she became the first person to swim a mile in the icy Antarctic Ocean—symbolizing all of her life’s joys, dangers, and achievements. Her memoir offers intimate glimpses into her mind, as she conquers icy (Antarctic) or rat-strewn (Nile) waters—her doubts, happiness, and observations of unfamiliar surroundings. “As far as I knew,” she writes, “I would only be here once, and I wanted to live as much as I could.” “The singularity of her swims alone makes her book an instant classic of adventure writing,” wrote the Minneapolis Star Tribune, “but it’s Cox’s ability to get inside her own head that makes it such a valuable work.” (Nov/Dec 2008)

**The Wave**

In Pursuit of the Rogues, Freaks, and Giants of the Ocean

By Susan Casey (2010)

Massive rogue waves took the scientific establishment by storm in 2000, when they battered a British research vessel in the North Sea. In her wide-ranging investigation, Casey reviews current research and bizarre new discoveries in “wave science.” She also travels the globe with legendary surfer Laird Hamilton and friends, as they seek out new challenges. Extreme surfers...
in search of the ultimate wave have pioneered tow-in surfing, in which Jet Skis provide the force and speed necessary to ride the biggest waves miles offshore. As the world’s climate continues to shift, storms will become more volatile, waves will grow larger, and the struggle to understand and predict these giants will be crucial to the survival of millions of people around the world. Part science lesson and part adrenaline rush, “Casey’s white-knuckle chronicle—which follows the surfers pursuing the waves and the scientists struggling to understand them—delivers a thrill so intense you may never get in a boat again” (Entertainment Weekly). (★★★★ Nov/Dec 2010)

Barbarian Days
A Surfing Life
By William Finnegan (2015)

Finnegan fell in love with surfing as an adolescent in California and Hawaii more than half a century ago, and that love affair has defined nearly every aspect of his life ever since. Infected by an insatiable desire to see the world, Finnegan and his surfing buddies, Bryan Di Salvatore and Mark “Doc” Renneker, pursue legendary waves in Australia, South Africa, Europe, and Asia. The author’s quest leads him, finally, back to Oahu, where he has a life-altering epiphany after a close brush with death. “They were the object of your deepest desire and adoration,” Finnegan writes of the waves he’s spent a lifetime chasing, “At the same time, they were your adversary, your nemesis, even your mortal enemy.” “Elegantly written and structured,” wrote the Washington Post, “it’s a riveting adventure story, an intellectual autobiography, and a restless, searching meditation on love, friendship and family. … Finnegan explores every aspect of the sport—its mechanics and intoxicating thrills, its culture and arcane tribal codes—in a way that should resonate with surfers and non-surfers alike.” (★★★★ Nov/Dec 2015)

Saltwater Buddha
A Surfer’s Quest to Find Zen on the Sea
By Jaimal Yogis (2009)

Back in high school, Yogis—now an award-winning journalist and photographer—decided that he’d had enough. With only a copy of Herman Hesse’s Siddhartha and a pocketful of cash, he ran away from his Sacramento, California, suburb and bought a one-way ticket to Maui. Thus began his spiritual growth—Yogis, of course, visits major surfing
spots—but he also starts to embrace Zen Buddhism. This heartfelt, lyrical bildungsroman captures the culture of indigenous Hawaiians (their gods surfed), the science of surfing, and his own search for meaning, both in and out of the water. “Even land lovers will find Yogis’s lessons resonant and entertaining, but surfers will find this a quick, surprisingly deep tribute to the quest for surf and serenity,” wrote Publishers Weekly in its starred review. The book was turned into a feature documentary film directed by Lara Popyack in 2015. All Our Waves Are Water (2017), the sequel, follows Yogis in his early 20s from the Himalayas to Indonesia, New York City, Jerusalem, and San Francisco’s Ocean Beach as he “stumbles toward enlightenment.”

Deep
Freediving, Renegade Science, and What the Ocean Tells Us About Ourselves
By James Nestor (2014)

Nestor’s fascination with the links between people and the disappearing marine environments that spawned us began when he wrote about the 2011 Individual Depth World Championships, a freediving competition off the coast of Kalamata, Greece, and the superhuman exploits of New Zealander William Trubridge. Intrigued by the resilience of the human body—on one breath, divers reach depths of 300 feet or more and return to the surface (though often with devastating consequences)—he searches for scientists on the cutting edge of marine exploration. Filled with intriguing details and eccentric, dedicated characters, Deep is worth the effort as Nestor provides vicarious glimpses of a world known only from the surface. “Over the course of Deep, Mr. Nestor comes to see competitive freediving as ‘egocentric, numbers-driven’ and often foolishly dangerous,” reported the Wall Street Journal. “But he leaves the reader with the idea of freediving as a tool to better understand the life of the sea and our place in the water’s eternal rhythms.” (★★★★ Selection Sept/Oct 2014)

Further Reading
KOOK: WHAT SURFING TAUGHT ME ABOUT LOVE, LIFE, AND CATCHING THE PERFECT WAVE | PETER HELLER (2010)
FORCE OF NATURE: MIND, BODY, SOUL (AND, OF COURSE, SURFING) | LAIRD HAMILTON (2008)
WELCOME TO PARADISE, NOW GO TO HELL: A TRUE STORY OF VIOLENCE, CORRUPTION, AND THE SOUL OF SURFING | CHAS SMITH (2013)
CAUGHT INSIDE: A SURFER’S YEAR ON THE CALIFORNIA COAST | DANIEL DUANE (1996)
ALL FOR A FEW PERFECT WAVES: THE AUDACIOUS LIFE AND LEGEND OF REBEL SURFER MIKI DORA | DAVID RESIN (2007)
ROWING TO LATITUDE: JOURNEYS ALONG THE ARCTIC’S EDGE | JILL FREDSTON (2001)
INSIDE: ONE WOMAN’S JOURNEY THROUGH THE INSIDE PASSAGE | SUSAN MARIE CONRAD (2016)

ADVENTURES IN AIR

Bird Dream
Adventures at the Extremes of Human Flight
By Matt Higgins (2014)

Higgins, a journalist, captures the electrifying plunges of the air’s most death-defying (but not always defying) stunts. Starting with simple parachuting, Higgins expands to BASE jumping (building, antennae, span, and earth) from bridges and radio towers to thrill-seeking jumpers wearing wingsuits and “flying” between cliffs (think flying squirrel). He focuses on the exploits of two wingsuit BASE pilots: the troubled Jeb Corliss Jr. (who jumped off China’s Mount Jiangan) and Gary Connery, an English stuntman. Through firsthand reporting and traveling the world alongside these daredevil men and women, who glide from cliffs at speeds more than 100 mph, Higgins chronicles the techniques, history, and bloody tragedies of the sport, culminating with the 2012 race between Corliss and Connery. “Higgins has inherently thrilling material on his hands, but he does much more than merely describe the adrenaline-charged feats of jumpers,” wrote the Chicago Tribune. “The book is a subtle study of the psychology of athletes engaged in a sport where death is a constant possibility.”

Further Reading
SUGAR ALPHA: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF SEÑOR HUEVOS GRANDES | ROGER AND MELISSA NELSON (2013)
ABOVE ALL ELSE: A WORLD CHAMPION SKYDIVER’S STORY OF SURVIVAL AND WHAT IT TAUGHT HIM ABOUT FEAR, ADVERSITY, AND SUCCESS | DAN BRODSKY-CHENFELD (2011)
FLYING OFF EVEREST: A JOURNEY FROM THE SUMMIT TO THE SEA | DAVE COSTELLO (2014)
LEARNING TO FLY: AN UNCOMMON MEMOIR OF HUMAN FLIGHT, UNEXPECTED LOVE, AND ONE AMAZING DOG | STEPH DAVIS (2013)
FLY LOW, FLY FAST: INSIDE THE Reno Air Races | ROBERT GRANDT (1999)
When female college student Greer Kadetsky reveals to a legendary second-wave feminist, “I don’t really know how to be,” Greer sets off on a journey through female mentorship, the feminist movements, her own coming-of-age, an understanding of power, and the often challenging relationships between a younger and an older generation. *The Female Persuasion*, Meg Wolitzer’s newest novel (reviewed on page 27), reprises many of the author’s concerns about women, their relationships, and the difficult, often compromising, sets of ideals they face as they navigate society.

“Wolitzer is one of those rare writers who creates droll and entertaining novels of ideas,” wrote NPR; she is rarely experimental but rarely so straightforward, either. In many of her novels—anchored in miniaturist detail but universal enough to transcend specificity—she assumes that her characters may fail to live up to their own expectations, and, in these shortcomings, they are forced to ask questions about the compromises they have made along the way. “Wolitzer’s novels function as an empathy-building exercise,” said the *Washington Post*. “If you emerge from them certain of your own superiority, you’ve missed the point. Far more often, when I finish one of Wolitzer’s books, I feel grateful that I’ve been spared the sort of choices her characters must navigate, or freshly uncertain about how I’ll handle the decisions that still lie ahead of me.”

Wolitzer writes with keen observation, compassion, wit, lack of judgement, and a breezy lightness that bely her novels’ hefty social weight. In tackling domestic and social issues in her stories, families, marriage, sex, gender politics, careers, parents, children—and especially women’s lives—come into play. “I’ve been absorbed for a long time in questions about men and women and fiction,” Wolitzer told *Slate*. “I tried to address them—or impale them—in *The Wife* [2003]. … Since that time, these ideas have sometimes found their way sort of obliquely into my fiction, and other times they’ve simply made for a passionate conversation.” Her novels show that while our lives may, over different decades, assume new forms, we return time and again to age-old questions.

Born in 1959 and raised on Long Island, Wolitzer studied creative writing at Smith College under John Irving and Mary Gordon and graduated from Brown University. She wrote her first novel, *Sleepwalking* (1982), while still an undergraduate; more novels followed. Since then, three films have been based on her work: *This Is My Life*, scripted and directed by Nora Ephron in 1992; the 2006 made-for-television movie, *Surrender, Dorothy*; and the 2017 drama *The Wife*, starring Glenn Close. A member of the MFA faculty at Stony Brook Southampton, Wolitzer, who has also taught writing at the University of Iowa’s Writers’ Workshop and Skidmore College, lives in New York City with her husband.

**The Early Works**

*Sleepwalking* (1982)

Published when she was just 23, Wolitzer’s debut novel, which received critical acclaim but didn’t sell well, tells the story of three “death girls” on the Swarthmore campus; each dresses in black and is obsessed with the work and the suicide of a different poet. But when one of the girls grapples with feelings for an upperclassman, she must confront her true self. About artifice and truth in identity, the novel asks how much we are affected by outside influences and how we can snap out of that sleepwalking state.

*This Is Your Life* (1988)

Erica and Opal are the daughters of obese comedienne Donnie, a warm and loving, but absent, mother. However, the pressures of growing up in Manhattan in the 1970s and coming to terms with their outrageous parent produce two very different girls. “Wolitzer has a fine grasp of adolescent sensibilities and lingo, and her acute takes on the foibles of upper-class New Yorkers are strikingly apt,” noted *Publishers Weekly*. “But the core of the novel is her understanding of mother-daughter and sibling relationships, her feel for
the sad limbo of fractured families, and her knowledge that ‘every family has their own secret.’”

**The “Male Game”**

**The Wife (2003)**
In this “slim jewel of a novel” (Time), Wolitzer lays bare the details of a four-decades-long marriage. “The Wife was the first time I had written in a first-person voice,” she told The Nervous Breakdown, “and it was important to me that the voice be used to embody the pent-up feelings of the narrator, which she is only able to reveal entirely as the story unfurls.” Wolitzer also told NPR that this novel represented a new, bolder period of writing in her graphic portrayal of “an array of sexual lives.”

On their way to Helsinki, where her famous novelist husband is to receive a major literary award, Joan Castleman, an attractive 64, decides that she’s going to leave her husband. Joan, who narrates a series of flashbacks, reveals the couple’s history: she became smitten with her dashing creative writing professor during her freshman year at Smith in the 1950s; they had an affair; he left his wife and baby; and they moved in together in Greenwich Village, married, and had three children. Joan, realizing that writing in the 1960s was a male game, stifled her own writing career to support her philandering husband’s. “I wanted things— and it was important to me that the voice be used to embody the pent-up feelings of the narrator, which she is only able to reveal entirely as the story unfurls.” Wolitzer also told NPR that this novel represented a new, bolder period of writing in her graphic portrayal of “an array of sexual lives.”

Wolitzer’s comic timing never wavers,” noted The New Yorker, “and she has an astute grasp of the way one generation’s liberation inspires the next generation’s pity.”

**The Privileged Urban Woman**

**The Ten-Year Nap (2008)**
Wolitzer’s interest in the ongoing dialogue between mothers who work and those who are able, financially, to drop out began when she met other mothers through her (now adult) children. “I’ve been both home with my kids and working, and there are very few jobs that allow you that,” she told BookPage. “… I wanted to show the tensions between motherhood and ambition and work and vulnerability in as broad a way as I could.”

Wolitzer’s eighth novel “presents a taxonomy of the subspecies known as the urban female” (New York Times Book Review) as a new generation of stay-at-home mothers—intelligent women who renounced careers for motherhood—search for meaning in post-9/11 New York City. Every morning, Amy Lamb, a Manhattan housewife who left a promising legal career when her son was born, drops the 10-year-old boy off at his upscale private school and heads for the Golden Horn Diner to meet three fellow stay-at-home moms. As they sip coffee and poke at scrambled eggs, these women, heirs to a hard-won, postfeminist world of choice, struggle to conceal the boredom and the emptiness that threaten to overtake their lives as their children grow up and their husbands grow cold. Soon enough, Amy’s blossoming friendship with a seemingly perfect woman forces her to reexamine her choices.

**The Generational Gap**

**The Position (2005)**
Wolitzer’s darkly comic seventh novel “is really about sex and the family,” she told Publishing Perspectives, “which is innately funny because they don’t go together. Writing things that are dissonant often can lead in some part to a witty way of doing things.” The dysfunction—and the different ways in which children from the same family all turn out—is all here.

Roz and Paul Mellow, a sexually open couple in mid-1970s Long Island, capture their liberation in the graphic sex manual Pleasuring: One Couple’s Journey to Fulfillment. To their four young children’s mortification, the book becomes a best seller. The novel tracks the fallout from this book over the next three decades, as old, sensitive scars reopen with the now former Mrs. Mellow’s determination to publish an anniversary edition. She sends her oldest son, who struggles with impotency himself, to convince his father to help her update Pleasuring for the 2000s. He and his other maladjusted siblings must come to terms with the impact of this book on their very different lives. “Wolitzer’s comic timing never waivers,” noted The New Yorker, “and she has an astute grasp of the way one generation’s liberation inspires the next generation’s pity.”
“The Ten-Year Nap takes a leisurely, immensely enjoyable look at the ‘opt-out’ generation as the latest litmus test of how far we have come,” reported the Miami Herald. “… It’s when wittily recording the fraying preoccupations of the female psyche (romance, adequacy, connection) that Wolitzer really plays to her strengths.” (★★★ July/Aug 2008)

SEX AND THE SUBURBS
The Uncoupling (2011)
Here, Wolitzer skillfully explores modern-day relationships and explores what happens when passion becomes too much work. “I didn’t want to write a novel that centered on women talking bitterly or sadly about the changes in their sex drives and their feelings toward the men they sleep with,” she told The Nervous Breakdown. “And my interests lay not at all in the special super-powers of women, but in finding a way to look at the vicissitudes of female desire: the disappointments, the joys, the ways in which we’re all just carried along by our lives.”

When a new drama teacher chooses to perform Aristophanes’ comedy Lysistrata, a mysterious spell falls over a suburban New Jersey high school. The play, originally performed in 411 B.C., tells of a group of women who withhold sexual favors as a way of ending the Peloponnesian War. It’s a puzzling choice for a school production. And it gets even stranger when the faculty and students of Eleanor Roosevelt High—from the guidance counselor to the school psychologist—suddenly lose all interest in sex and stage boycotts for reasons all their own. “All of this leads to a wonderfully funny final act at the play’s premiere, in which this midwinter night’s dream comes to an end and the dreamers wake,” wrote the Seattle Times. “… The Uncoupling is a smooth and often enchanting read that reveals a wry understanding of modern relationships and generations.” (★★★★ Jul-Aug 2011)

THE “BREAKOUT” BOOK
The Interestings (2013)
In 2012, while she was writing this novel, Wolitzer published an essay in the New York Times Book Review about the consignment of “Women’s Fiction” to “The Second Shelf,” or “that close-quartered lower shelf where books emphasizing relationships and the interior lives of women are often relegated.” Female novelists don’t garner the same attention as male writers, Wolitzer argued, even when the latter (like Jonathan Franzen) write domestic fiction. But The Interestings (with a big, bold jacket design instead of the softer, more figurative ones commonly seen on women’s fiction) attracted attention as a “big book.” Large in scope and heft, it remains one of Wolitzer’s most ambitious novels to date.

When six teenagers meet at a Berkshires summer camp for the artistically gifted in 1974, they dub themselves the Interestings. “Just by being here in this teepee at the designated hour, they all seduced one another with greatness, or with the assumption of eventual greatness,” Wolitzer writes. Spanning the 1970s to the present, the novel traces the paths of this Manhattan-based group from the perspective of Jules, an aspiring actress. Her view offers a skewed picture of what turns out to be her very ordinary adult life and her continued bond with the Interestings—whose varied talents, fortunes, disappointments, and varying levels of self-acceptance shape them into people very different from the adolescents they once were. With abundant moral subplots, the novel covers the range of human—that is, privileged human—experience as its characters reconcile their dreams with their lives.

“Like Mary McCarthy’s The Group, it follows a circle of friends over the unpredictable arc of their lives, and like Wallace Stegner’s Crossing to Safety … it captures the vagaries of chance and health and the sense of responsibility to close friends even as it addresses the jealousies that can arise between them,” wrote the Christian Science Monitor. “… In probing the unpredictable relationship between early promise and success and the more dependable one between self-acceptance and happiness, Wolitzer’s novel is not just a big book but a shrewd one.” (★★★★★ SELECTION July/Aug 2013)

FOR YOUNGER READERS
The Fingertips of Duncan Dorfman (2011)
Wolitzer is a tournament Scrabble player, and one of her sons participated in National School Scrabble Championship, so she knows the world she describes here. Three 12-year-olds’ lives come together at the annual Youth Scrabble Tournament. Duncan, an outcast with a single mom, struggles with whether or not to use an odd magical power to win the game; skateboarder Nate’s obsessed father forces him to play; and April’s sports-oriented family can’t understand her passion. Together, they deal with indifference, ambition, struggling families, and identity. “It’s hard to quibble with a story that brings together a tween in a mustard shirt and one with magenta hair to play a board game that promotes

continued on page 63
The Female Persuasion
By Meg Wolitzer

THE STORY: In 2006, Greer Kadetsky, a bookish 18-year-old college freshman who would have been at Yale but for her irresponsible parents, is groped at a party. This male student, who commits multiple sexual assaults, gets barely a slap on the wrist. When Greer’s idol, legendary feminist Faith Frank, the 63-year-old author of The Female Persuasion (and “a couple of steps down from Gloria Steinem”), comes to speak on campus, Greer asks what can be done about this outrage. Faith encourages Greer to continue speaking out for women’s rights. After graduation, Greer moves to Brooklyn to work for the seductive Faith’s new venture, the Loci women’s foundation. Meanwhile, her relationship with her childhood sweetheart, Cory Pinto—the son of Portuguese immigrants who had attended Princeton—goes by the wayside after he suffers a heart attack, Cory Pinto—the son of Portuguese immigrants who had attended Princeton—goes by the wayside after he suffers a family tragedy.

Riverhead. 464 pages. $28. ISBN: 9781594488405

Boston Globe ★★★★
“Some of the best scenes in this book are from Cory’s or Zee’s perspectives, as Wolitzer follows them through college and into their 20s, where their stories gain a thrilling—if also heartbreaking—momentum. … In every scene she is laying the groundwork for what’s to come, so that plot developments that might feel jokey in less capable hands register as natural and inevitable.” ANNA SOLOMON

Los Angeles Times ★★★★
“The divides between older and younger generations of radicals have always been wide, but Wolitzer’s prescience about the coming rift between gender activists in the age of #MeToo feels particularly wise. … [Cory’s and Zee’s] stories could feel like interesting but nonessential tangents if they weren’t so pointedly in opposition to Greer’s idealistic-white-girl-made-good narrative.” MARIS KREIZMAN

NPR ★★★★
“The Female Persuasion is a wonderfully solid book, luxuriously long and varied in an almost 19th-century kind of way. … [Wolitzer] speaks to very particular intergenerational resentments: that younger women are whiny, entitled and don’t know that they have it easier because of what older women suffered; that older women are clueless, racist, passé, embarrassing to the cause of the young,” ANNALISA QUINN

NY Times Book Review ★★★★
“The novel’s timeliness cannot be overstated. … Wolitzer is an infinitely capable creator of human identities that are as real as the type on this page, and her love of her characters shines more brightly than any agenda.” LENA DUNHAM

Slate ★★★★
“The novel seems pitch-perfect on the type of careerism that has been foisted upon college graduates after 2008—a combination of class privilege that assumes all work should be rewarding and a genuine anxiety about how to navigate professional life after the collapse of the global financial market. … The novel is gentle rather than biting, but its satirizing of summit-based feminism is a politics; its sympathy for young people told to make meaning in their lives with, in many cases, no guidance whatsoever is a politics.” LYDIA NUESLING

Washington Post ★★★★
“It’s a daunting task for any novelist to express her characters’ political views without growing pedantic, and Wolitzer doesn’t entirely avoid that trap. … But more often the book is full of Wolitzer’s trademark wit and insight.” KATHERINE HEINY

Entertainment Weekly ★★★★
“The Female Persuasion contains multitudes [of kinds of love], but it hinges on another kind of love most books don’t touch: the passion, as intense as any crush, for the first grown-up who shows you a window into the life you want to lead, the sort of person you want to be. … Persuasion has three other often more compelling narratives inside it: Cory, Zee, and Faith, supporting players who become, in their own ways, the book’s thrumming heart.” LEAH GREENBLATT

AV Club ★★★
“[B]y focussing on various characters and their trajectories, no one achieves the sort of transcendence they might otherwise be worth. … Wolitzer paints with a broad brush that doesn’t capture any of the nuance in actual twentysomethings’ lives.” NANDINI BALIAL

CRITICAL SUMMARY
Wolitzer’s astute account of casual misogyny resonates with the #MeToo movement and almost daily public revelations about male misconduct. Her long, absorbing novel has four main characters to warm to—the fourth is Zee Eisenstat, Greer’s lesbian friend from college. Even Lena Dunham, a voice of a younger feminist generation, was impressed by how Wolitzer captures the angst and ambition of 20-something girls with sympathy and gentle satire. The AV Club reviewer, though, was disappointed that the novel doesn’t go further in terms of race and trans rights and found it a very white, middle-class picture. Wolitzer effectively contrasts Greer and friends with Faith’s generation, yet suggests that the essence of feminism—fighting for an authentic, equal life—remains the same. A wry, insightful novel about youth and feminism, “what [Wolitzer] has written is not a speech but a novel, one that’s big, necessary, and utterly persuasive” (Boston Globe).
NEW BOOKS GUIDE

We read hundreds of book reviews each month to select the works to include in each issue. We seek a balance among three categories: highly-rated books that received many reviews, highly-rated books that received less comprehensive coverage, and lower-rated books that were widely reviewed and well publicized.

The collective wisdom of critics
Each critic offers an individual perspective. We quote and summarize the reviews studied to provide an informed, balanced critique and to make sure that unique insights do not get missed. We apply a rating to a book from each review we study—those ratings are assessed to provide a final rating.

Spoiler-free book descriptions
We hereby pledge not to reveal the ending or revelatory plot points when discussing a fictional work.

APPLYING RATINGS TO WORKS OF ART IS FRUSTRATINGLY REDUCTIONIST
It is also helpful in navigating through myriad choices. As with any rating system, it is solely a guide—a summing up of several informed perspectives. There is no substitute for reading the book yourself and forming your own opinion.

RATINGS

★★★★★ CLASSIC
A timeless book to be read by all

★★★★ EXCELLENT
One of the best of its genre

★★★ GOOD
Enjoyable, particularly for fans of the genre

★★ FAIR
Some problems, approach with caution

★ POOR
Not worth your time

literary

FICTION

Last Stories
By William Trevor

Irish author William Trevor Cox (1928–2016) wrote 14 novels as well as plays and short stories. He won three Whitbread Prizes and was nominated for the Booker Prize five times. In 2008 he was honored with the Bob Hughes Lifetime Achievement Award in Irish Literature. He lived in England for much of his life. Reviewed: The Story of Lucy Gault (★★★★★ Jan/Feb 2003), A Bit on the Side: Stories (★★★★★ Jan/Feb 2005), Cheating at Canasta (★★★★★ Jan/Feb 2008), and Love and Summer (★★★★★ Nov/Dec 2009). This is his 14th and last collection of original stories, published on what would have been his 90th birthday.

THE STORY: The characters in these 10 melancholy, beautiful stories are lonely, ordinary people who feel left behind by life. Multiple stories begin with a death or the sudden end of a relationship, and six come from the perspective of a woman. Frequently there are two central characters whose lives Trevor cuts between before bringing them together in a surprising way. In “Mrs. Crasthorpe,” a widow vows to make a new life for herself. “An Idyll in Winter” pairs a cartographer and an heiress. In “The Piano Teacher’s Pupil,” the teacher looks back at the momentous events that have taken place in her lesson room. Affairs and abandonments always take a toll.


Guardian (UK) ★★★★★
“We submit to the deep, essential truth to life that Trevor has presented. … None but those with a complete mastery of fiction can walk this line. William Trevor was not ‘an Irish Chekhov’ or even ‘the Irish

Chekhov’. He was and will remain the Irish William Trevor.” JULIAN BARNES

LA Review of Books ★★★★★
“Desperation permeates each of the 10 impeccable stories in Irish writer William Trevor’s posthumous new collection … yet these fictions of seemingly lost lives are neither bleak nor distressing. … But his humanistic storytelling redeems each of these lives without judgment.” ROBERT ALLEN PAPINCHAK

New York Journal of Books ★★★★★
“Last Tales is a sort of gift from beyond from one of the finest storytellers. … A master of understatement and elegant, pithy prose, William Trevor creates an air of ambiguity and leaves it to readers to put the pieces together of his characters’ situations.” ARIEL BALTER

Minneapolis Star-Tribune ★★★★★
“[T]his is a typically gratifying effort, a volume of faultless prose and contemplative characters, and a fitting testament to his storytelling prowess. … His stories are suffused with longing and pain, beauty and humanity, and, as promised, they’re full of answers to timeless questions.” KEVIN CANFIELD

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★
“And so they suffer and breathe, this procession of living women and men, alive by virtue of their longings and their defeats and their schemes and their truncated hopes. … This truthfulness of fragility is William Trevor’s credo. It is why we honor him as the supreme master of his honest art.” CYNTHIA OZICK

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Trevor was a writer’s writer and critical darling. That he remains somewhat obscure for the average reader is a shame, but he may find posthumous fame with Last Stories and his many other acclaimed books. His “masterful short fiction,” in particular, is “in the same class as Chekhov, Joyce, and du Maupassant” (Los Angeles Review of Books). These stories seem simple, with unpromising opening lines and unshowy prose. The characters are prone to “emotional marginality, glancing non-relationships and the dubious cer-
Varina's history in the picaresque style of Cold Mountain.” BRENDA WINEAPPLE

Newday ★★★★
“Coincidentally or not, the book seems an apt text for up-to-the-minute discussions of gender and racial inequality. … Frazier’s lyrical, rhythmic prose is equally adept at evoking a Georgia devastated by Sherman’s March, a torrential rainstorm or Varina’s shifting moods.” DAN CRYER

Washington Post ★★★★
“Frazier’s historical research generally sits lightly on the story, almost always embedded gracefully in dialogue, a small telling incident or a sharp memory of kindness or brutality. … Elegiac without being exculpatory, it is an indictment of complicity without ignoring the historic complexity of the great evil at the core of American history.” MARY DORIA RUSSELL

Denver Post ★★★☆
“Blake, who is a teacher, becomes the book’s driving force as he tracks Davis down and pushes her to help him understand his past. The book’s chapters alternate between the two adults and Davis’ life in New York and flashbacks that reveal her childhood, her marriage and particularly the harrowing journey she and her children took as they fled Richmond after the Confederacy collapsed.” SARA B. HANSEN

USA Today ★★★☆
“His writing can be breathtaking, but Varina’s fragmented narrative hopscotches all over the place. Which is a shame, because this picaresque novel’s most memorable scenes rival Gone With the Wind (and Cold Mountain) for sheer jaw-dropping Dixie drama.” JOCELYN McCLURG

Critical Summary
Frazier elegantly revives an intriguing figure from Civil War-era history, though Varina Davis hasn’t completely disappeared; Joan E. Cashin published a good scholarly biography in 2006. But Frazier, in his first acclaimed novel since Cold Mountain, adds the details, depth, and research to make her a household name. V is a captivating, contradictory, and nuanced character, one wracked by memories and moral inconsistencies. Frazier based Blake, though his real fate remains unknown, on a young mixed-race boy whom the Davis family raised with their own children, “a cogent critic who keeps her memories anchored in others’ reality” (Washington Post). The only point of disagreement was the writing, mostly lyrical and flowing but occasionally overwrought. Varina is a challenging novel, the Christian Science Monitor concludes, “and, while not as readily appealing and as fluidly written as Cold Mountain, it provokes thought and encourages reflection on one of the most difficult issues of our time.”

Varina
By Charles Frazier
Charles Frazier’s first novel, Cold Mountain, which won the 1997 National Book Award and which was adapted into an Academy Award–winning film, was a best seller and critical success. He has published two less-acclaimed novels since then. His fourth book, Varina, returns to the post–Civil War landscape with a fictionalized biography.

THE STORY: In 1906, as Varina Howell Davis, the wife and widow of Confederate president Jefferson Davis, languishes in an upstate New York sanitarium, she receives visitor James Blake. Blake, a middle-aged black man, has misgivings about his own past that he hopes V will clarify for him. As they engage in conversation over six Sundays, the well-educated V, now elderly and addicted to opium, recalls her Mississippi childhood, her marriage to a widower twice her age, and her husband’s political career, which put her in the war’s epicenter. After she and her children fled the collapse of the South with a bounty on their heads, V started a new life. Her chapters alternate with those of Blake, who was orphaned and raised with V’s children but was separated in 1865. As V reconstructs her life for Blake, she questions the past and the moral failures of slavery. “Being on the wrong side of history carries consequences,” Varina acknowledges.

Ecco. 368 pages. $27.99. ISBN: 9780062405982

Christian Science Monitor ★★★★
“Varina may have regrets and misgivings about the war, but she still carries more than a whiff of white privilege that makes her ignorant of how African-Americans experienced slavery. … Varina can be seen as a reminder that a national reckoning over the legacy of slavery has yet to take place.” APRIL AUSTIN

Columbus Dispatch ★★★★
“The book itself has something of the flavor of a drug-induced dream, with chronology abandoned in favor of the heightened reality of scenes seared into the memory. … Too sharp to befooled by Confederate platitudes, and too enmeshed in her society to break free until after it collapses, Varina is a believably contradictory character, a modern soul both seduced and repelled by the tiny taste of power she is fed.” MARGARET QUAMME

NY Times Book Review ★★★★
“As the novel’s moral center, James Blake presumably allows the reader to admire this complex woman or at least hope that her empathetic imagination may not be as deficient as, say, that of her husband. … But when he disappears from the narration, which he mostly does, a seemingly more relaxed Frazier lyrically unspools titudes of memory” (Guardian). There are no major epiphanies. And yet his short fiction, “elegiac and profoundly resonant” (New York Journal of Books), cuts to the heart. Try his work today.
Girls Burn Brighter
By Shobha Rao

Shobha Rao, born in India, moved to the United States at age seven and lives in San Francisco. She won the Katherine Anne Porter Prize in Fiction, was anthologized in the *The Best American Short Stories 2015*, and is the author of the short story collection, *An Unre- stored Woman* (2017), loosely about the formation of India and Pakistan in 1947 and its aftermath.

**THE STORY:** In 2001, in the Indian village of Indravalli, Poornima, an unattractive, rebellious girl from a poor family, and Savitha, from an even more desperately impoverished family, are both considered poor marriage prospects. When Poornima’s father hires Savitha to help him weave textiles, the two girls find in each other kindred spirits. Then, on the eve of Poornima’s ill-fated marriage, a horrific tragedy tears them apart. Savitha runs away, leaving Poornima at the mercy of her ruthless father. But Savitha—she becomes enslaved to human traffickers—fares no better. Told through their alternating perspectives, *Girls Burn Brighter* follows their travails in a world—both in India and the United States—that devalues and brutalizes women, but also one in which their courage prevails and they dream of a reunion.

Bustle

“In the face of such darkness Rao, and her characters, always find a way to move towards the light. … Without giving anything away, I will say the end of this novel will clobber you—it will haunt you, and leave you wanting to begin *Girls Burn Brighter* all over again, if only to discover if you’ll arrive at another ending the second time around. And the third.” E.CE MILLER

Los Angeles Times

“These are humans with quirks and strengths and flaws: from determined industriousness to resigned submission or a taste for bananas and insecurity about skin tone. … *Girls Burn Brighter* contains many scenes that will make readers see the at the injustice against women in this world, but what they may remember long after reading is the book’s sustained and elegant prose.” BETHANNE PATRICK

Publishers Weekly

“Although lengthy metaphysical musings threaten at times to derail the momentum, the narrative’s thematic consistency and emotional urgency will pull readers along. Vivid depictions of contemporary Indian culture and harrowing accounts of human trafficking—along with the novel’s ambiguous ending—will leave readers, and book clubs, with much to ponder and discuss.”

San Francisco Chronicle

“Many of the novel’s plot points are so grim and tragic it could be unbearable—a Thomas Hardy novel on steroids—if not leavened with subtle moments of humanity and joy, smaller emotions conveyed with tremendous lyricism. … This is a painful and riveting novel that takes on rape culture with so much fire and grace it should speak to readers all over the world.” ANITA FELICELLI

USA Today

“The story is told in an operatic key that sacrifices plausibility. … Once Rao learns to dial down the melodrama, she’ll be a formidable writer.” ANN LEVIN

**CRITICAL SUMMARY**

In addition to human trafficking, Rao’s debut delves into other urgent issues facing women around the world today, from domestic abuse to sexual violence, desperate poverty, inequality, and lack of access to education and opportunity. Despite these dire themes, “in the face of such darkness Rao, and her characters, always find a way to move towards the light” (Bustle). In this dual quest narrative, the girls’ journeys differ, as each finds her tentative way in a hostile world. Rao writes “with electric intensity” (Los Angeles Times), and her feminist voices—“rarely found so full-throated in mainstream novels” (San Francisco Chronicle)—shine through, despite the graphic violence. Only the USA Today critic voiced complaints about the melodrama and stereotyped characters: “The bad characters are monstrous. The girls are angelic.” Most readers, however, will find an emotionally resonant novel about friendship’s lasting bonds.

Circe
By Madeline Miller


**THE STORY:** Like *The Song of Achilles*, *Circe* is inspired by Homer. The Odyssey tells of the witch Circe, who turns Odysseus and his crew into pigs. The daughter of the sun god, Helios, Circe was banished to the island of Aeaea. Although she starts off painfully lonely there, Miller’s Circe is a feminist heroine who makes her own life. “I will not be like a bird bred in a cage,” she declares. She learns to make potions and outsplits the creature Scylla to allow Daedalus to cross safely. She takes lovers, divine and mortal, and is the midwife at the birth of the Minotaur. *Circe* is a thrilling retelling of Greek myth.

Entertainment Weekly

“Circe’s tale lacks the sweeping arc and central romance of *Achilles*. … But Miller, with her academic bona fides and born instinct for storytelling, seamlessly grafts modern concepts of selfhood and independence to her mystical reveries of...”
Richard Powers is the author of 12 novels, including the National Book Award–winning *The Echo Maker* (Jan/Feb 2007), *Generosity: An Enhancement* (Jan/Feb 2010), and *Orfeo* (2014). His novels often consider how science and technology affect ordinary lives. A former computer programmer, he grew up in Illinois.

**THE STORY:** With nine main characters and a 50-year time span, *The Overstory* represents epic storytelling at its best. The overarching theme is humans’ relationship with nature: what it has been and how we might restore what we’ve destroyed. Powers celebrates the amazing properties of trees. An Air Force pilot is saved by a banyan tree during the Vietnam War. A disabled researcher studies tree communication. An artist continues his grandfather’s project of photographing the same chestnut tree once a month for decades. Some of these stories are brought together during the Timber Wars in the late 1990s, when activists protested the logging of ancient sequoias in the Pacific Northwest.

NY Times Book Review

**“Using the tools of story, he pulls readers heart-first into a perspective so much longer-lived and more subtly developed than the human purview that we gain glimpses of a vast, primordial sensibility, while watching our own kind get whittled down to size. … This is a gigantic fable of genuine truths held together by a connective tissue of tender exchange between fictional friends, lovers, parents and children.”** BARBARA KINGSOLVER

Washington Post

**“Long celebrated for his compelling, cerebral books, Powers demonstrates a remarkable ability to tell dramatic, emotionally involving stories while delving into subjects many readers would otherwise find arcane. … This ambitious novel soars up through the canopy of American literature and remakes the landscape of environmental fiction.”** RON CHARLES

Guardian (UK)

**“This is a mighty, at times even monolithic, work that combines the multi-narrative approach of David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas* with a paean to the grandeur and wonder of trees that elegantly sidesteps pretension and overambition. … The book is long and could have done with an edit, and Powers’ ecological message, heartfelt though it is, might strike some readers as on the nose in places.”** ALEXANDER LARMAN

Scotsman (UK)

**“For a novel about ecology and economy, it is remarkably verbose. There are back-stories and plot-twists that would embarrass a 19th century hack.”**

**CRITICAL SUMMARY**

Richard Powers is known for writing long, absorbing novels of ideas. An environmentally minded masterpiece, *The Overstory* is no exception. As usual, he incorporates science and philosophy in a wide-ranging story. Crucially, though, he invests his characters “with touching humanity” (New York Times Book Review), so they’re not just symbols. Powers joins a long tradition of nature-infused American writing: “there is a richness and allusiveness to the prose that reaches back as far as Thoreau’s *Walden*, and Emerson” (Guardian). With the exception of the Scotsman, who objected to the book’s length and wordiness, the critics lauded Powers for his expansive vision and his profound message of human reliance on the natural world that we continue to damage.
everyday events in a “dazzling” way, giving these somewhat familiar tales a “distinctive feminist tang” (Kirkus).

Although her prose style echoes Homeric poetry, it is accessible to today’s readers and “sparked with mortal sass” (Washington Post). Circe has a daring and authoritative voice and undertakes some surprising adventures despite her isolation. She is an independent female who won’t let men get the better of her. In this way, “Miller makes Homer pertinent to women facing 21st-century monsters” (Kirkus).

![The Only Story](image)

The Only Story
By Julian Barnes

English author Julian Barnes’s 24 books include novels, short stories, essays, a memoir, Nothing to Be Frightened Of (★★★★ Jan/Feb 2009), and a translation from the French. He is perhaps best known for The Sense of an Ending (★★★★ Jan/Feb 2012), for which he won the Man Booker Prize. Also reviewed: Arthur and George (★★★★ Mar/Apr 2006) and The Noise of Time (★★★★ July/Aug 2016). The Only Story is his 13th novel.

**THE STORY:** Paul, an aging Englishman, recalls a critical love story of his youth. At age 19, living at home in 1960s suburban England one summer between years at university, he meets Susan Macleod, 48, at the local tennis club. They start off as tennis partners but soon engage in an affair. Susan’s marriage to the abusive Gordon, whom she calls “Elephant Pants,” had become sexless and loveless, and she had two grown daughters older than Paul. They nonetheless set up house in London, where Paul, for the first time, tastes independence. Paul describes their relationship over the years as the defining incident of his life—“there’s only one [story] that matters, only one finally worth telling,” he says—but, in some ways, that relationship also destroys him.

Knopf. 272 pages. $25.95. ISBN: 9780525521211

**Guardian (UK)** ★★★★

“[T]he exquisite moments—and there are many—in The Only Story come from its psychological acuity, especially about how we remember. In Paul’s narrative, experiences deconstruct themselves and personalities decay in a devastatingly convincing way.” KATE CLANCY

**Independent (UK)** ★★★★

“At points I wondered whether this is really what the world needs right now—another novel about a disillusioned older, straight, white man ruing the mistakes he’s made (a different type of ‘the only story’), but Barnes writes with such shattering emotional acuity. The moments of pure devastation pile up, the story crushing with increasing weight as it unfurls.” LUCY SCHOLES

**NPR** ★★★★

“Beautifully done, but heartrending. It isn’t about belligerent politicians, refugees fleeing for their lives, or schoolchildren being gunned down, but it’s a tragedy nonetheless—albeit on a much smaller scale.” HELLER MCALPIN

**Spectator (UK)** ★★★★

“The prose, though often playful and always elegant, propels us forward, first into joy, and then into despair, and there is no escape from the central story as it becomes bleaker. This intense, taut, sad and often beautiful tale may well be Barnes’s best novel for some years.” LARA FEIGEL

**NY Times Book Review** ★★★★

“There is much food for self-contemplation on the part of the generation that came to maturity in the 1960s, and it’s a popular theme among British novelists born in the 1940s. But it has proved difficult to pull off. … Here and there, all the same, Barnes’s rapier wit flashes and glitters.” LAWRENCE OSBORNE

**Washington Post** ★★★★

“While the early parts of the novel contain striking vignettes about Paul’s naivete—his passion, his earnestness—the plot’s forward motion soon stalls in ruminations on the nature of love, the loss of innocence and the unreliability of memory. There’s a staleness to these themes that’s only partially camouflageed by Barnes’s elegant style.” RON CHARLES

**C R I T I C A L S U M M A R Y**

The critics couldn’t help noting similarities between The Only Story and The Sense of an Ending, both of which come from the perspective of an older man looking back on his life and asking if what he remembers is accurate. It’s a novel about truth, memory, and youthful ignorance, one might say. Once again, Barnes writes in “rhythmic, elegant, understated prose” (Guardian). As the story gets sadder—Paul and Susan stick together, but she battles depression and alcoholism—it can feel “claustrophobic” (Washington Post). Shifts into second person and third person narration only ease this feeling somewhat. For the most part, though, the critics admired Barnes’s “melancholy, intimate tone” (Guardian) and his questioning of whether love is ever simple—or, for that matter, really the only story.

Wade in the Water
Poems
By Tracy K. Smith

Tracy K. Smith, the poet laureate of the United States, has written three previous books of poetry: The Body’s Question (2003), winner of the Cave Canem Poetry Prize; Duende (2007), winner of the James Laughlin Award of the Academy of American Poets; and Life on Mars (2011), winner of the Pulitzer Prize. Her memoir, Ordinary Light (2015), was a finalist for the National Book Award. She is Director and Professor of Creative Writing at Princeton University.

**THE POEMS:** The poems in this new collection hail from various events: a
immigrants and refugees, will probably attract most of the attention—and they ought to. … [Wade in the Water] asks how an artist might navigate the political and the personal, and the collection’s real strength lies in its many marvelous poems that are more private.” CHARLES SIMIC

Publishers Weekly ★★★★
“Some poems inhabit a more boldly theological space than does previous work, yet Smith’s sense of the numerous stays appealingly grounded, as when she describes the ‘everlasting self’ as ‘Gathered, shed, spread, then/ Forgotten, reabsorbed. Like love/ From a lifetime/ Over the floor.’ Whether presenting a sardonic erasure of the Declaration of Independence or dramatizing the correspondence between black Civil War soldiers and their wives, Smith nimbly balances lyricism and direct speech.”

New York Times ★★★★★
"Wade in the Water" is pinned together by a suite of found poems that employ near-verbatim the letters and statements of African-American Civil War veterans and their families. … If this new book lacks some of the range and depth and allusiveness of [Life on Mars], well, she has battened down certain hatches.” DWIGHT GARNER

Christian Science Monitor ★★★
"Wade in the Water" includes notes at the back to help explain what many of the poems are about. One feels a small sense of defeat at needing such a tutorial to grasp a poem, which perhaps ideally should be a self-contained thing." DANNY HEITMAN

CRITICAL SUMMARY
It’s rare for a sitting poet laureate to release a collection of new poems. Here, with clear images and powerful metaphors, “Smith is forcefully addressing some of the nation’s enduring wounds” (New York Times). Divided into four sections, this innovative collection merges the political and the personal to make statements on America’s past and present. The centerpiece, perhaps, is Smith’s own rewriting of Civil War letters, poems that “have a homely, unvarnished sort of grace” (New York Times). Smith also draws on her own childhood and her own children with some playfulness (as when, "Flying home, I snuck a wedge of brie, and wept/ Through a movie starring Angelina Jolie."). Critics noted that some poems feel polemical rather than personal and that the collection lacks the same breadth as Life of Mars. But Wade in the Water “is a treasure, a chest of historical gems, which offers spectacles for everyone to adore” (New York Journal of Books).

America Is Not the Heart
By Elaine Castillo

Elaine Castillo was born in the San Francisco Bay area and graduated from the University of California, Berkeley. America Is Not the Heart is her first novel.

THE STORY: Geronima de Vera, a young woman born into a wealthy family in the Philippines, became a doctor and went to the mountains to serve with the National People’s Army, a guerrilla revolutionary force. She was captured and tortured, released, then came to the United States. Now, in 1990s Milpitas, California, Geronima is taken in by her Uncle Pol, also once a doctor, and his wife, Paz, and given the name “Hero” by their young daughter, Roni. Hero works the cash register at a strip mall turo-turo—a steam table restaurant—and steps into the rhythms of American life: shepherding Roni back and forth to school, attending parties, engaging in one-night stands. She meets Rosalyn, a Filipina American makeup artist, and falls, furtively, in love. Throughout, Hero works to reconcile her traumatic past with her present.

Viking. 416 pages. $27. ISBN: 9780735222410

Chicago Tribune ★★★★★
"[In this startlingly lovely first novel, home is not a place at all, but the people willing
to wait most patiently for your love.” AMY
GENTRY

Guardian (UK) ★★★

“Although [America Is in the Heart] is
thick, it is a small vessel to contain all that
Castillo slips in. She has brought a whole
community to the page.” ROWAN HISAYO
BUCHANAN

Seattle Times ★★★

“Her prose style is uniquely her own,
given to sentences that are economical,
yet vividly descriptive, albeit occasionally
choppy. . . . Even as a first-time novelist,
Castillo is not afraid to experiment
with techniques, such as using multiple
narrators and making liberal use of foreign
languages, such as Tagalog and Ilocano.”
BHARTI KIRCHNER

Sunday Herald (Scotland) ★★★

“Castillo has thrown in the kitchen sink,
dutifully filled with Filipino dishes for this
is a novel that does not blink in the face
of listing the foods and the ingredients
of the homeland of the main characters.
. . . America Is Not the Heart unleashes a
force that is sometimes barely rational, oft
times just, and only just, governable and
regularly breath-taking.” HUGH MACDONALD

New York Times ★★★

“(America Is Not the Heart is) hungrily
ambitious in sweep and documentary
in detail, and reads like a seismograph
of the aftershocks from trading one life
for another. . . . (Castillo’s) true target is
the persistence of social iniquity both in
the Philippines and among Filipinos in
America.” LIGAYA MISHAN

CRITICAL SUMMARY

America Is Not the Heart is an im-
pressive debut. “The reader in me
wonders at its ambition,” the Sunday
Herald writes. The novel’s epigraph
is a quotation from Carlos Bulosan’s
1946 semiautobiographical novel,
America Is in the Heart, in which he
asserts that “America is in the hearts
of men that died for freedom; it is also
in the eyes of men that are building a
new world.” Castillo writes stirringly
of both the brutal consequences of the
colonization of the Philippines and the
suffering of immigrants in America.

The story of Paz is particularly moving:
from impoverished origins, she marries
a man above her station, unaware that
“marrying someone who’s always slept
with a full belly will be like being mar-
ried to someone from another planet.”
If occasionally the sheer number of
characters and details overwhelm, the
novel’s message is clear: America is no
utopia, particularly for immigrants.

Guardian (UK) ★★★

“Happiness asks us to think about the
interconnectedness of lives both human
and animal, about what we choose to see
and ignore as we move through the city,
about the power of small acts of decency.”
ALEX PRESTON

Minneapolis Star Tribune ★★★

“Happiness starts out as a novel about
coincidence—chance encounters,
twists of fate—and turns into one about
coexistence: how to overcome intolerance,
accept differences and live in harmony.
What could have been a strident,
speechifying polemic is instead a subtle,
considered yet deeply resonant tale,
one which sensitively and intelligently
highlights connection over division and
kindness over cruelty.” MALCOLM FORBES

Washington Post ★★★

“Happiness is a meditation on grand
themes: Love and death, man and nature,
cruelty and mercy. But Forna folds this
weighty matter into her buoyant creation
with a sublimely delicate touch.” ANNA
MUNDOW

NY Times Book Review ★★★

“At its weakest, Happiness devolves
into a stern lecture. . . . Yet Forna’s finely
structured novel powerfully succeeds
on a more intimate scale as its humane
characters try to navigate scorching
everyday cruelties.” MELANIE FINN

Seattle Times ★★★

“[Happiness] starts slowly and deliberately,
but burns brightly when it matters most.”
DAVID TAKAMI

San Francisco Chronicle ★★★

“While more ecologically minded readers
may feel otherwise, the fox material
seems a touch strained to me, and Jean’s
storylines a little static. Adding to this,
Forna’s prose stays fairly measured, and
the pile-up of coincidences puts hairline
cracks in the fictional illusion.” WILL BOAST

CRITICAL SUMMARY

In her latest novel, Forna “explores
instinct, resilience, and the complexity
of human coexistence, reaffirming her
reputation for exceptional ability and
perspective” (Washington Post), with

Happiness

By Aminatta Forna

Aminatta Forna, a
Scottish and Sierra
Leonean writer, is
the author of a
memoir, The Devil
That Danced on the
Water (★★★★
May/June 2003), and
three previous
novels: Ancestor Stones (2006), The
Memory of Love (2010)—which
received the Commonwealth Writers’
Prize for “Best Book” and which was
short-listed for the Orange Prize for
Fiction—and The Hired Man (2013).
She is the Lannan Visiting Chair of
Poetics at Georgetown University.

THE STORY: Happiness follows two
people whose lives collide, literally,
on London’s Waterloo Bridge and
then intertwine over a 10-day period.
We learn much about them through
flashback. Attila Asare, a Ghanaian
psychiatrist, chronicles the trauma
experienced by survivors of war and
other conflict. His wife has recently
died, and he’s come to London to
attend a conference, to visit a former
lover with Alzheimer’s, and to investi-
gate the disappearance of a niece. Jean
Turane is an American wildlife biolo-
gist in London to study the behaviors
of urban foxes. After their encounter
on the bridge (she’s chasing a fox),
Asare feels “the imprint of her body on
his.” Their time together will be brief,
but unforgettable.

9780802127556
prose that’s “precise and often stunning in its clarity” (Seattle Times). While the San Francisco Chronicle found Turane’s story lines a bit on the dull side and wanted more emotion from Attila, other reviewers easily embraced the characters’ struggles and solidarity. But the real joy of the novel may be Forna’s atmospheric portrait of London and its people; among those she brings to life are street performers, hotel doormen, and security guards. Though Attila and Jean are certainly memorable characters, the author’s portrayal of London is something remarkable, a vision so multilayered and intense that it emerges as the novel’s central character.

The Italian Teacher
By Tom Rachman

Before turning to fiction writing, Tom Rachman worked for the Associated Press in New York and Rome and for the International Herald Tribune in Paris. He is the author of The Rise & Fall of Great Powers and The Imperfectionists (★★★★ July/Aug 2010), which has been translated into 25 languages.

THE STORY: In the mid-1950s, Bear Bavinsky, a roguish celebrity American artist, travels from New York to Rome, where his wife, Natalie, an aspiring ceramist, and their five-year-old son, Charles (Pinch), are living. Bavinsky is an ebullient, unpredictable presence—a man of considerable appetites, the father, eventually, of 17 children, who moves on as his spirit dictates. Pinch is a shy, self-conscious boy who worships his father. The novel follows Pinch through his adolescence onward. He paints, living to, one day, impress his father; but it’s not to be. Upon seeing his son’s work, the old man replies: “I got to tell you, kiddo. You’re not an artist. And you never will be.” Pinch finds himself lost, teaching Italian in a London language school. But a twist is yet in store.

USA Today ★★★★
“Rachman’s narrative is rich with wordplay, clever dialogue and subtle insights. His plot twists blindside you. And, his ensemble of lovable, misfit characters … are unforgettable.” DON OLDENBURG

Entertainment Weekly ★★★★
“[After several hundred pages that seem like sad checkpoints (albeit wonderfully written ones) on a trail of beta-male woe, Teacher finds a lovely and unexpected grace note, a left-field redemption made even sweeter by its long and winding path.” LEAH GREENBLATT

Kirkus ★★★
“A sensitive look at complicated relationships that’s especially notable for the fascinatingly conflicted protagonist.”

Washington Post ★★★★
“This is a novel about art and the mercurial currents of fate that determine how it’s celebrated, valued and commodified. But more than anything else, The Italian Teacher is about fathers and sons, the anxiety of influence, and the sly ways we go about carving a little space for ourselves in the shadow of great masters.”

RON CHARLES

Chicago Review of Books ★★★
“Rachman writes with rich and abundant detail. It’s the feelings underpinning these details that get lost.” JESSICA GROSS

Critical Summary
USA Today’s critic writes that reading Rachman is de rigueur for those who appreciate literary fiction’s brightest, newest voices. Though Bear Bavinsky is a fictional character, the author has cleverly placed him amid “the canon of contemporary art,” the Washington Post’s reviewer asserts, so that you’ll be convinced you’ve seen one of his still lifes at the National Gallery. This novel, the critic continues, confirms Rachman as a “shepherd of lost souls.” He draws his characters “with a specificity so sharp it borders on cruel” (Entertainment Weekly) and displays a true talent for depicting those characters’ sometimes atrocious behavior with compassion. But the Chicago Review of Books critic found a certain hollowness in the novel: “I read, I understood, I pondered, but I didn’t feel,” describing a perceived reluctance in Rachman to lean into tense moments.

Noir
By Christopher Moore


THE STORY: In 1947 San Francisco, bartender Sammy “Two Toes” Tiffin’s life goes topsy-turvy when the lovely war widow Stilton sinks into his bar and steals his heart. Meanwhile, an Air Force general from New Mexico is trying to gain membership to the exclusive Bohemian Club, a group of wealthy eccentrics, by offering them some adult entertainment. Sammy gets volunteered by his boss to scare up some ladys for the general and vamooses to gain assistance from his pal Eddie Moo Shoes in Chinatown. Stilton then disappears, and Sammy tries to retrieve her. Add to the mix two “men in black” in pursuit and a talking black mamba named Petey who takes a bite out of Sally—and the unpredictable Moore is at it again.

William Morrow. 352 pages. $27.99. ISBN: 9780062433978

Chicago Tribune ★★★★
“Noir is sad and daffy and wacky, and surprisingly heartfelt, novel.” PATRICK T. REARDON

Florida Times-Union ★★★★
“Christopher Moore is the heir apparent to Kurt Vonnegut, an author who is an
new books guide

BOOKMARKS SELECTION

You Think It, I’ll Say It
Stories
By Curtis Sittenfeld

Curtis Sittenfeld’s previous novels include Prep (★★★★★ Mar/Apr 2005), The Man of My Dreams (★★★★ Sept/Oct 2006), American Wife (★★★★ Nov/Dec 2008), Sisterland (★★★★ Sept/Oct 2013), and Eligible (★★★★ July/Aug 2016), a retelling of Pride and Prejudice. This is her first short fiction collection.

THE STORIES: In these 10 stories (some previously published), the adolescents of Sittenfeld’s previous novels have grown up and gone different directions, though the lusts, jealousies, and disappointments of their youth still cast long shadows over their lives. In “The World Has Many Butterflies,” a suburban housewife engages in a manipulative gossip game with a married friend. “Do-Over,” which takes place following Trump’s election, a divorced businessman tries to rectify a long-ago sexist moment. And a recently dumped, 30-something professor has an awkward sexual encounter with an airport shuttle driver in “The World Has Many Butterflies.”

“Sittenfeld has written an entertaining book about basically decent (albeit flawed), mostly middle-aged people doing the best they can in a confusing, disappointing and touching world; it’s a funny and moving comfort (albeit a comfort with an edge) to encounter the sometimes salacious and always most salient parts of their lives.” KATHLEEN ROONEY

“Sittenfeld has written an entertaining book about basically decent (albeit flawed), mostly middle-aged people doing the best they can in a confusing, disappointing and touching world; it’s a funny and moving comfort (albeit a comfort with an edge) to encounter the sometimes salacious and always most salient parts of their lives.” LUCY SCHOLES

“Her characters are predominantly white, middle class and well educated, a uniformity that eventually begins to feel a little limiting. Sittenfeld is a consummate professional, every page of this book as engaging as the next, but I’d still love to see her try something a little unexpected next time.” LUCY SCHOLES

“Sittenfeld occasionally swerves from the female point of view to the male who, elsewhere in her fiction, is usually the object of so much obsessive rumination. … Their trials, in the grand scheme of things, are manageable enough that they allow easily for comedy, which Sittenfeld is a pro at delivering in the details.” SUSAN DOMINUS

“We’re happy to report that there isn’t a single dud in this collection. Though not groundbreaking, each story is carefully plotted, psychologically astute, highly empathetic, and pleasurably dishy (“Good fiction needs to be at least as interesting as good gossip, which itself is interesting because it unerringly serves up the crucial or conflict-ridden morsels of a story,” notes the Chicago Tribune). As in previous novels, notably Prep, Sittenfeld has a talent for reprising the insecurities and bruised feelings of youth; as adults, her characters know better but simply can’t help themselves behave badly. Yet while she “skewers hierarchies based on class, education, gender, financial success and, yes, physical attractiveness” (San Francisco), her privileged, mostly middle-aged, white characters don’t extend past her comfort zone. No matter—this is a standout collection.

New York Times ★★★★★

“Sittenfeld occasionally swerves from the female point of view to the male who, elsewhere in her fiction, is usually the object of so much obsessive rumination. … Their trials, in the grand scheme of things, are manageable enough that they allow easily for comedy, which Sittenfeld is a pro at delivering in the details.” SUSAN DOMINUS

“Long-festering resentments erupt like post-adolescent acne, leading her characters to expose their petty, vindictive, snooty sides—even though they end up feeling bad about that, too. … You Think It, I’ll Say It is filled with tales that take us in surprising directions, causing characters—and readers—to re-examine their assumptions, pieties, elitism and bad behavior.” HELLER McALPIN

“Sittenfeld is a Midwesterner, and many of these tales take place in the ‘heartland’. Her characters, though, would fit right in at a Brooklyn dinner party.” JOCELYN McCLURG

“Not only has Moore taken a loving look at a familiar genre, he’s done so with style and wit. If you like your hard boiled detective stories with their tongues stuck firmly in their cheeks, you’ll love this book.” RICHARD MARCUS

American Treasure. I hope everyone enjoys this novel as much as I did.” RICHARD KLINZMAN

Seattle Post-Intelligencer ★★★★★

“American Treasure. I hope everyone enjoys this novel as much as I did.” RICHARD KLINZMAN

“Not only has Moore taken a loving look at a familiar genre, he’s done so with style and wit. If you like your hard boiled detective stories with their tongues stuck firmly in their cheeks, you’ll love this book.” RICHARD MARCUS
Washington Independent Review of Books
“The master of metaphor and a sultan of simile.” DREW GALLAGHER

Wall Street Journal
“Noir is worth reading just for its similes and metaphors. … Not serious, but fun.”
TOM SHIPLEY

San Antonio Express-News “We get plenty of Moore’s trademark linguistic high jinks, oddball characters and a cartwheeling plot in danger of spinning out of control before miraculously sticking the landing.” MICHAEL KNOOP

Kirkus
“The book employs no end of snappy dialogue straight out of a Jimmy Cagney movie, but the device can’t save it from its meandering, distracted plot. … A frantically comic tale of guys and dolls that shoots and just misses.”

CRITICAL SUMMARY
Moore is a genre-defying writer whose work is probably best distinguished by its satirical strain. He writes in an afterword that he started out to write a more traditional, Dashiell Hammett-type crime narrative, but he ended up with “essentially ‘Perky Noir,’ a lot closer to Damon Runyon meets Bugs Bunny than Raymond Chandler meets Jim Thompson.” That said, the Chicago Tribune found the novel to be moodier than Moore’s usually “snappy fare,” with characters living on the margins of postwar America, with its job shortages, broken veterans, racial prejudice, and sexual exploitation. The Seattle Post Intelligencer writes that Moore not only does an excellent job of conjuring the ambience but also “brings to life the attitudes and prejudices of the times.” While his characters regularly stagger along the precipice of over-the-top, “we soon realize there is more to them than initially meets the eye.”

Warlight
By Michael Ondaatje

Michael Ondaatje was born in Sri Lanka and grew up there and in England before moving to Canada in 1962. He has published poetry and a memoir, Running in the Family (1983), but he is best known for his novels, which include The English Patient (1992), winner of the Booker Prize, Divisadero (Sept/Oct 2006), and The Cat’s Table (Jan/Feb 2012).

THE STORY: “In 1945 our parents went away and left us in the care of two men who may have been criminals,” Ondaatje’s eighth novel, which takes place in the years following World War II, begins. Nathaniel Williams was 14 when he and his older sister, Rachel—whose parents left for Singapore—were taken under the wing of the family’s upstairs lodger, known as the Moth, and his friend, a former boxer called the Pimlico Darter. They involved Nathaniel in some dubious activities, and as time went by, he started questioning simple categories of “good” and “bad”—after all, his father was a cipher, and his mother was a wartime hero, but her decisions still broke the family apart. Years later, an adult Nathaniel tries to understand these chains of events and his “lost inheritance.”


Kirkus
“If anything, his latest novel moves even more slowly [than The English Patient], but to deliberate effect. Ondaatje’s shrewd character study plays out in a smart, sophisticated drama, one worth the long wait for fans of wartime intrigue.”

Los Angeles Times “Do we need to obtain answers, this novel asks, or might we learn to relish ambiguity? In a book made lush through layers of experience instead of description, the latter feels possible.” BETHANNE PATRICK

Washington Post “For the first hundred pages, all is atmosphere and allusion. … As the pattern emerges, Ondaatje imperceptibly tightens the narrative. Gradually, we see that no detail or character, however incidental, has been extraneous.” ANNA MUNDOW

NPR “The murkiness, camouflage, and subterfuge add intrigue and atmosphere to Warlight, but many of the characters remain hazy, sometimes frustratingly so. … With Warlight, Ondaatje gives us another reminder of the long dark shadow cast by war.” HELLER MCALPIN

San Francisco Chronicle “In this latest book, Ondaatje largely eschews robust characters and gripping plotlines to instead spend his creative energies on atmosphere, observation and theme. This is something of a departure, as the author’s sparse novels have typically given a feeling of energetic movement and lifelike realism despite their reticence.” VERONICA SCOTT ESPOSITO

New York Times “[Ondaatje’s] burnished, lukewarm sentences don’t snap to life like the people he enjoys. Reading him on these scruffy men and women is like listening to someone try to play ‘Long Tall Sally’ on solo cello. It’s not awful, but it’s weird.” DWIGHT GARNER

CRITICAL SUMMARY
The word “warlight” refers to the dim lights that were used for emergency vehicles’ navigation during blackouts in London during World War II. The critics welcomed Ondaatje’s first novel in seven years and found it a “lyrical mystery” (Kirkus) and “a dark fairy tale” (Washington Post). Like the author’s previous novels, the book explores the workings of memory and how we come to understand our lives differently with the passing of time. Only one reviewer objected to the characterization and tone of “sober observation. Humor is scarce. The disreputable characters invariably
have hearts of gold” (New York Times). But the rest thought that Warlight is a worthy heir to The English Patient, with its melancholy and incomplete war reminiscences.

★★★★
Alternate Side
By Anna Quindlen

Anna Quindlen started her career as a journalist; her New York Times column won a Pulitzer Prize for Commentary, and she wrote a biweekly column for Newsweek until 2009. Her semiautobiographical novel One True Thing (1994) made her famous as a novelist. Known for her portrayals of domestic dramas and modern America’s materialistic lifestyle, she has written nearly two dozen works of fiction, nonfiction, and children’s books.

THE STORY: Nora and Charlie Nolan, who live on a posh cul-de-sac in Manhattan’s Upper East Side, have been married—much of the time neither happily nor unhappily—for 25 years. She is a museum director; he is an investment banker, who wants to trade in their home for one in the Sunbelt. Then one of his dreams comes true when he secures a parking space on his street. When a rich, arrogant, and hot-tempered white neighbor finds his own precious parking spot blocked by Nora’s Latino handyman’s van, he shatters the handyman’s leg with a sledgehammer, but his own precious parking spot blocked.

NY Times Book Review ★★★★
“If a novel about ‘first-world problems,’ as Nora’s daughter calls them, already has you rolling your eyes, remember that Quindlen … is one of our most astute chroniclers of modern life. This novel may be too quiet for some, too populated with rich whiners for others, but it has an almost documentary feel, a verisimilitude that’s awfully hard to achieve.” SUE CORBETT

Charleston Gazette-Mail ★★★
“Quindlen is universal fiction for any, all or no genders, and so is Alternate Side. … I would encourage you to try to look past the environment (of Manhattan) because this story is playing out everywhere, every day.” ERIN BREWSTER

Minneapolis Star Tribune ★★★
“Anna Quindlen has written a book that only a New Yorker—or at least someone who has lived there for a stint—could love. The rest of the world may have a hard time relating to the characters.” ROB MERRILL

USA Today ★★★
“Well-meaning people of the world who enlist others to clean their homes and nanny their children, prepare to be made uncomfortable by Quindlen’s astute observations about interactions between the haves and have-nots, and the realities of life among the long-married.” PATTY RHULE

New York Journal of Books ★★
“In lead character Nora Nolan’s world, men are children, boobs, boors, and Neanderthals incapable of containing their misplaced rage. … Quindlen is a good storyteller and Alternate Side zips along but it all feels so small, somewhat intentionally.” PAUL LAROSA

CRITICAL SUMMARY
In her ninth novel, Quindlen has traded “her trademark warmth in depicting family life” for “sharp social commentary and characters with ‘first-world’ problems” (USA Today). Alternate Side is certainly a Manhattan book, filled with affluent, careless characters (save, perhaps, for Nora, who, like the author, is sensitive, introspective, and socially astute) and an almost documentary-like feel for the city’s social and economic milieu. A few critics felt that “in the end, the story seems all too unfamiliar to anyone who didn’t go to private school or attend catered community barbecues” (Minneapolis Star Tribune), and many readers will fail to relate to the characters and their petty issues. Still, the larger themes are topical—marriage and relationships, racial and class tensions, immigration, violence, homelessness—and the novel is well paced. But in the end, it’s not among the critics’ favorites.

★★★★
Macbeth
(Hogarth Shakespeare)
By Jo Nesbo, translated from the Norwegian by Don Bartlett

Norwegian crime novelist Jo Nesbo is one of the pioneers of the “Nordic/Scandi noir” subgenre. He is best known for the Harry Hole Series, including The Devil’s Star (★★★★ May/June 2010) and The Snowman (★★★★ July/Aug 2011). His books have sold more than 30 million copies in 40 different languages. He is also the singer/songwriter for the Norwegian rock band Di Derre. This is the seventh volume in the Hogarth Shakespeare series.

THE STORY: Nesbo’s Macbeth is a corrupt policeman in a Scottish town in the 1970s. He heads up a SWAT team; his wife, Lady, runs the swanky Inverness Casino. Duncan, the new chief of police in town, hopes to make a name for himself by bringing down Hecate’s drug empire. Malcolm is his deputy, and Inspector Huff is in charge of the narcotics unit. Macbeth is Huff’s best friend, but he’s also a former drug addict and craves power. He beats Huff to a promotion to head of Organized Crime, but Lady goads him to keep moving up the chain, no matter whom he has to take out. This can’t end well. Hogarth. 464 pages. $27. ISBN: 9780553419054

Guardian (UK) ★★★★★
“The book’s style … is workmanlike, but from the combination of simple materials a thought can arise that seems authentically, blackly bardic. … This is in the end a deliciously oppressive page-turner that, like The Tragedy of Macbeth itself, seems to
The Mars Room
By Rachel Kushner

Rachel Kushner is the author of the novels Telex from Cuba (★★★★ Sept/Oct 2008) and The Flamethrowers (★★★★ SELECTION July/Aug 2013), both of which were National Book Award finalists, as well as a collection of stories, The Strange Case of Rachel K (2015). She is from Eugene, Oregon, and now lives in Los Angeles. The Mars Room is her third novel.

THE STORY: In 2003, Romy Leslie Hall, 29, is serving two life sentences at California’s San Quentin Women’s Correctional Facility for killing her stalker. She tells readers about her former life as a stripper at the “seediest and most circuslike place there is”—San Francisco’s Mars Room. Not that her present circumstances are much better. But, at least back then, she could be with her son. Here, instead, she has to jostle for position along with many other hopeless, powerless female prisoners: a baby murderer, a model who hired a hit man to take out her husband, and a white supremacist. Although an English teacher recommends books to Romy, she soon plans a more literal escape.

Scribner. 352 pages. $27. ISBN: 9781476756554

NPR
“‘There’s very little sunlight, literally and metaphorically, in Kushner’s brilliant and devastating The Mars Room… Kushner does a masterful job evoking the isolation and hopelessness intrinsic to a life behind bars; she never resorts to cliché or pathos, but still manages to convey the emotional torture to which prisoners are subjected on an hourly basis.” MICHAEL SCHAUB

Entertainment Weekly ★★★★★
“Like Raymond Carver or Edward Hopper or Nan Goldin… Kushner is a sort of genius of loneliness; her stories slink in the margins, but they have the feel of something iconic. Mars brims with characters and digressions… and returns to favored themes: the tricky wobble of young womanhood, the open-road freedom of motors and speed.” LEAH GREENBLATT

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★
“Part of Kushner’s achievement here is that she makes this character, for all her shortcomings, so appealing… It’s one of those books that enrage you even as they break your heart, and in its passion for social justice you can finally discern a connection between all three of Kushner’s novels.” CHARLES McGRATH

Slate ★★★
“Kushner doesn’t soft-pedal her characters’ crimes, some of which are as cruel as the treatment handed out to them. … But while the prison guards berate their charges that they have ended up in this hellhole as a result of their own choices, she summons the indelible image of lives from which all meaningful choices have been erased, one by one.” LAURA MILLER

New York Times ★★★
“Like Alfred Hitchcock in many of his best films, Kushner works here in close quarters… If these prison scenes have a flaw, it’s that Kushner has clearly done so much research that it weighs her down a bit.” DWIGHT GARNER

Washington Post ★★★
“The Mars Room shuffles along shackled with so much importance that it barely has room to move. Swollen with certainty, the story tolerates little ambiguity and offers few surprises.” RON CHARLES

CRITICAL SUMMARY
In 2012, Kushner went undercover at California state prisons, accompanying criminal justice students for glimpses behind the scenes. Her intensive research into prison life infuses the novel with authenticity, but it’s Romy’s “tough, cynical” voice (New York Times Book Review) that is the true accomplishment. “Romy might not be going anywhere fast, but she’s alive on every page, raw and beautiful” (Entertainment Weekly). More than one critic compared Kushner’s writing to Don DeLillo’s: it’s smart, concise, and hard-hitting. The subject matter is tough, no doubt about it, but all but one reviewer—who couldn’t find redemptive value in this “bleak tale” (Washington Post)—found the book “original and compassionate” (NPR).

harbour something ineradically evil at its core.” STEVEN POOLE

NPR ★★★
“While Nesbø’s adaptation sings when he departs from the original script, it also takes him farther from the original’s core. Which isn’t to say there isn’t a lot to like. Nesbø fans won’t care one bit about the un-Shakespearean aspects of his Macbeth.” BETHANNE PATRICK

Washington Post ★★★★
“On the whole… though, Nesbø manages the balancing act of being true to the original play without slighting his own interests as a writer: bleak settings, loyalty (or the lack thereof) among crooks, clever escapes from tight spots, the affinities between policemen and the criminals they chase.” DENNIS DRABLEE

Spectator (UK) ★★★
“Whatever the novel may lack in psychological subtlety, it makes up in shoot-outs… Nesbø has produced a sprawling, often confusing thriller which may not have a great deal to do with Shakespeare’s play but at least bursts with a rude imaginative vigour of its own.” ANDREW TAYLOR

Independent (UK) ★★★
“Of all the pairings in the Hogarth Shakespeare retold series, matching the king of Scandi noir with this most violent and dark of the Bard’s works seemed in theory one of the most promising. In the
**Critical Summary**

There has been a mixed reception of the Hogarth Shakespeare series, with some applauding the effort and others questioning the point. Nesbø's Macbeth falls somewhere in the middle of the seven retellings. The gritty 1970s Scotland setting works well, and the characterization is strong. If you think of it simply as one of Nesbø's usual thrillers, it offers plenty of excitement: “drug busts gone wrong, car chases, and shoot-outs—to keep the narrative moving” (Independent). But those who are looking for the book to shed new light on Shakespeare may be disappointed. At best, the Guardian reviewer suggests, Nesbø's attempt should “remind you how weirdly nightmarish the original play is.”

**Motherhood**

By Sheila Heti

Sheila Heti, a Canadian writer and former Interviews Editor of The Believer, first attracted widespread attention in the United States with her semiautobiographical and experimental *How Should a Person Be?* (Sept/Oct 2012).

**The Story:** In her late 30s, Sheila Heti’s self-absorbed narrator—also a divorcée, also the author of several books who lives in Toronto, and also the daughter of Hungarian-Jewish immigrants with mother issues—ponders the question of whether or not to have children. She never imagined having them, and she relentlessly circles around the question. “Whether I want kids is a secret I keep from myself—it is the greatest secret I keep from myself,” she confesses. Her boyfriend Miles already has a daughter from a previous relationship and doesn’t want another child, though he would want one if she really wants to have one. She considers the joys of children versus the loss of freedom: she will either have a baby or her art. And if she forsakes motherhood, what if her art is mediocremore? Throughout, she has conversations with friends (childless and not), consults a psychic, and poses “yes-no” questions I Ching-style. And her answer becomes increasingly clear.

Henry Holt. 364 pages. $27. ISBN: 9781627790772

New York Times ★★★

“Heti’s semi-fiction, like that of writers like Ben Lerner, Rachel Cusk and Teju Cole, among others, is dismantling our notions of what a novel should be. … She deals out her ideas in no-nonsense form, as if she were pulling espresso shots.” Dwight Garner

The Cut ★★★☆☆

“I am only one reader, and yet I’ve found myself in both camps: I read it the first time and felt profoundly, irresistibly annoyed; I wanted to keep thinking about it enough that I wanted to read it again. … Motherhood joins *How Should a Person Be? and Women in Clothes to form what might be read as a field guide to womanhood in a particular literary-bohemian milieu.” Molly Fischer

New Yorker ★★★

“Motherhood is a novel, or so its publisher claims, though even that loose and accommodating category doesn’t convey the weird originality of this sometimes exasperating, sometimes illuminating work. … In spite of its treatise-like title, the novel can feel so inwardly directed that Heti appears to be writing only for herself.” Alexandra Schwartz

New York Times ★★★

“Heti is at her best—her sharpest and funniest—when she writes about why having a child doesn’t appeal to her, cutting against saccharine commonplaces about the importance of child-rearing. … Though our narrator moves in the artistic and academic circles of Toronto, she writes as though she seems unaware of any cultural debates, current or historical, about the ethics of procreation and child-rearing.” Elane Blair

Quill & Quire ★★★

“The book is much more enjoyable without trying to extrapolate the realities of Heti’s own biography and simply abandoning oneself to the music of her prose. A recommendation: read *Motherhood* the first time with pure feeling. And then a second time to notice the details of Heti’s craft.” Tatum Dooley

Elle ★★★

“For a subject that produces as wide a range of experiences and opinions as motherhood does, the protagonist seems to have little interest in what anyone outside her bohemian Toronto artist circle thinks about the topic. Part of this is a function of the highly personal and self-referential nature of Heti’s work, but it’s surprising how little her narrator seems to care about the reasons why this choice is so difficult for women to make, or why motherhood is so daunting for smart, ambitious women—even though these reasons are well-documented and prime fodder for literary anger.” E. J. Dickson

Slate ★★☆☆☆

“The book, in other words, is self-consciously a way of killing time, and after the first 60 pages, it reads like one. … *Motherhood* is an exhibition of Heti’s freedom, of all the time and space she has made for herself, but as she perseverates, providing us with tarot readings, backslidings, and repetitions, the book drifts, languorous and limp.” Willa Paskin

**Critical Summary**

Heti’s work fits into a category of books described as “domestic ambivalence,” including Jenny Offill’s *Dept. of Speculation* and Rachel Cusk’s *A Life’s Work*. Though written in a stream of consciousness and praised for its strong voice, “it’s not a particularly unique or original conversation: the decision whether or not to have kids has been the basis of thinkpieces and manifestos for decades” (Elle). But perhaps the bigger problem is that the work feels self-centered, with little context provided about raising children. Indeed, Heti’s “lack of engagement with
other minds on this much-discussed subject,” wrote the *New York Times*, “makes her deliberations feel airless and mulishly self-involved.” Other points—including Miles’s comment that “one can either be a great artist and a mediocre parent, or the reverse, but not great at both”—remain undeveloped. But if *Motherhood* grows a bit tiresome, it also raises important and timeless questions about women and motherhood.

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**In Dust and Ashes**

*Fiction*

**A Hanne Wilhelmsen Novel**

By Anne Holt, translated from the Norwegian by Anne Bruce

Besides writing 20 books since 1993, Scandinavian noir crime novelist Anne Holt worked for the Oslo Police Department, founded her own law firm, and served as Norway’s minister for justice. *In Dust and Ashes* is the 10th, and reputedly last, Hanne Wilhelmsen novel in the series, after *Odd Numbers* (2017). Reviewed: 1222 (★★★★ Jan/Feb 2012), the eighth in the series but the first Hanne Wilhelmsen mystery to be translated into English and published in the United States.

**THE STORY:** Oslo chief inspector Hanne Wilhelmsen, wheelchair-bound since a line-of-duty shooting, and her eccentric, timid disciple, Henrik Holme, must face two cases in counterpoint. In 2004, Jonas Abrahamsen, whose young child was killed in a car accident, was convicted of his ex-wife’s murder. Veteran police detective Kjell Bonsaksen, on the eve of retirement, now believes that Jonas, who has served a decade in prison, is innocent. Hanne, meanwhile, suspects that the death of far-right, anti-immigrant, and extremist blogger Iselin Havorn was a murder rather than a suicide. As Hanne digs into Havorn’s past and Henrik becomes a humanitarian, they investigate the deaths further. It appears that the two cases, though they superficially have no connection whatsoever, just may be related.

**Scribner. 320 pages. $26. ISBN: 9781501174780**

**Publishers Weekly ★★★★★**

“For Hanne and Henrik, both convincing complex characters, all suffering comes down to the ‘good old sins’: money, sex, and revenge. Readers will be sorry to see the last of them.”

**Seattle Times ★★★★★**

“The Nordic countries continue to shower us with superior crime fiction. ... The book is a strong, if bleak, conclusion to an already powerful series.”

**Wall Street Journal ★★★★★**

“There is also fascination in seeing Ms. Holt enter the minds of characters troubled and admirable alike—and of seeing the admittedly conceded Hanne grow less self-centered and more generous in her treatment of Henrik, who himself comes more into his own and even discovers the fulcrum on which the two deaths turn. If *In Dust and Ashes* is indeed the last we’ll read of Hanne Wilhelmsen, maybe it will also mark the beginning of our deeper acquaintance with a more accomplished, self-confident Henrik Holme.”

**Otago Daily Times (New Zealand) ★★★★★**

“Holt is clever at sliding over the coincidences that might disrupt our reading of her plot, and she continually reveals new information to keep us in suspense. ... In fact, I might have to go back and read some of the earlier books in the series.”

**Sydney Morning Herald ★★★★**

“Like much successful crime fiction Holt’s is strongly character-driven and she may be planning to do more with Wilhelmsen’s clever and sweet-natured, if physically unprepossessing, sidekick Henrik. ... [N]othing is what it seems.”

**Pittsburgh Post-Gazette ★★★**

“[It] is the complex, troubled Henrik who proves to be this novel’s most interesting character. Curiously, once her part in the mystery is resolved, Hanne—protagonist of the entire series—just fades away, while the outwardly wimpy Henrik emerges as a hero of sorts, bravely risking his own safety to protect an endangered child.”

ROBERT CROAN

**Euro Crime ★★★★★**

“(It) seems as if most of this book’s characters are expressing psychological misery and alienation (with due cause you could say) and this leaves me with the uneasy feeling that Holt has become the queen of bleak. ... I don’t mind my Nordic Noir being dark but I’m not too sure of almost (and I do say almost) relentlessly bleak.”

LYNN HARVEY

**Critical Summary**

*In Dust and Ashes* is Holt’s latest, and perhaps final, novel featuring Hanne, an unusual detective, indeed—a paraplegic lesbian living with her second wife and their daughter. Readers have come to love both Hanne and Henrik as real, complex characters who have an “often stormy relationship ... as neither one is capable of expressing their feelings, despite their deep love and mutual respect” (*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*). The ingenious police procedural elements are just as compelling as the novel “eventually develops suspense and pace and hurtles towards its ending” (*Euro Crime*). But the novel is dark, almost relentlessly so. Still, if one can get past the bleakness, *In Dust and Ashes*—as well as the earlier novels—live up to the author’s reputation as one of the masters of Scandinavian noir.

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**Tangerine**

By Christine Mangan

Christine Mangan earned her PhD in English from University College Dublin, with a focus on 18th-century gothic literature. She sold *Tangerine*, her
### BOOKMARKS SELECTION

#### How It Happened

By Michael Koryta

Michael Koryta was a private investigator and newspaper reporter before he turned to writing crime and supernatural fiction. He is the author of the Lincoln Perry Series (2004–2009), the Markus Novak Series (Rise the Dark Nov/Dec 2016), and other stand-alone novels. How It Happened, loosely based on a real case that Koryta covered as a young reporter in his hometown of Blooming- ton, Indiana, is his 13th book.

**THE STORY:** Teen mother and drug addict Kimberly Crepeaux, 22, admits to a coerced role in the brutal murders of Jackie Pel- letier, the daughter of a well-known local Maine family, and her boyfriend. She pins as her coconspirator the upstanding Mathias Burke. But then the bodies turn up far from where Kimberly said they would be. Even more, they are covered in another person’s DNA. FBI agent and interrogation specialist Rob Barrett, who knew Burke growing up, gets sent to Port Hope, Maine—where he spent his own childhood summers—to investigate the murders. As new evidence comes to light, Barrett slowly admits that Kimberly might be lying. As he tries to uncover the truth, the case dredges up painful memories of his mother’s mysterious death when he was just a child.

Little, Brown. 368 pages. $27. ISBN: 9780316293938

**Booklist**

“Barrett’s rediscovered lost love, Liz Street, is a keeper. Koryta excels at action set in remote places, and fans of William Kent Krueger and C. J. Box will enjoy this one.”

**Chicago Tribune**

“The book casts its spell in revealing the whys and wherefores of the killings. Koryta, who has introduced supernatural elements into several novels, plays it straight here. But that doesn’t mean he fails to deliver his usual blend of dark psychology and pulse-pounding action.”

**Publishers Weekly**

“With this searing look at an investigator’s obsessive efforts to close a case that has reawakened childhood demons, bestseller Koryta … has produced his most powerful novel in years. … Koryta, when he’s at the top of his game, has few peers in combining murder mysteries with psychological puzzles.”

**Tampa Bay Times**

“In some crime fiction, the confession comes at the end. In How It Happened, Kimmy’s story is just the beginning.”

**Washington Post**

“Koryta’s plotting is sure-footed, and the secrets he discloses, one by one, at the novel’s end are both surprising and plausible. … Koryta has seized upon such an unusual and engrossing premise that the excess punishment heaped on his hero can be overlooked.”

**NY Times Book Review**

“It’s as if Mangan couldn’t decide whether to write a homage to Donna Tartt’s The Secret History or a sun-drenched novel of dissolve Westerners abroad in the tradition of Patricia Highsmith and Paul Theroux.”

**Critical Summary**

Koryta, who has won various awards for his fiction, pens another top-notch tale of suspense that starts with a confession “that is long, fluent, rich in vivid detail—and prompted by a clever move on the interrogator’s part” (Washington Post). From there, the reader must question all presented “facts,” as Barrett, who initially believes Kimberley’s confessions, tries to dig up evidence to support her claims. Most of the action takes place in a small, coastal Maine town (except for when Barrett gets sent to Montana on temporary assignment), with its share of misfits and opportunists. Koryta presents the central mystery as a puzzle, and occasionally the reader may lose a thread or two. But the slow-burn plot and chilling, unpredictable, and explosive denouement more than make up for any minor shortcomings.

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New books guide
The Elizas
By Sara Shepard

In 2006, American author Sara Shepard published the best-selling novel Pretty Little Liars, the first in a highly successful young adult suspense series; it was turned into a seven-season television series. She is also the author of The Lying Game Series (2010–2013) and other series and stand-alone novels.

THE STORY: In this psychological thriller, 20-something Eliza Fontaine awakens in a Southern California hospital. Her family informs her that she attempted to drown herself in a posh Palm Springs resort—another suicide attempt—but Eliza believes she was pushed. Who, though, would want her dead? Eliza feels as if she is finally recovering after many hospitalizations to remove a brain tumor, despite the loss of some of her memories and her family’s insistence that she obtain psychiatric treatment. With Desmond, the man who rescued her, Eliza starts to chase down some unnamed villains. Meanwhile, her life starts to resemble that which she describes in her soon-to-be-published novel The Dots, about a young girl with a brain tumor and an aunt. But what is memory? What is reality? And what, finally, is history?

Chie Nomura

The Secret History

tells more about Eliza than it tells about Eliza. The novel is a little weak, and the characters are more or less convincing. It’s clear from the reviews that the planned film version might be more satisfying than the novel. It’s not the most compelling story, but it’s well-crafted. The characters are well-developed, the plot is well-paced, and the setting is well-described. The film version might be more satisfying than the novel. It’s not the most compelling story, but it’s well-crafted. The characters are well-developed, the plot is well-paced, and the setting is well-described.

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**Blackfish City**

By Sam Miller

Sam Miller’s debut was *The Art of Starving* (2017), which won the Andre Norton Award for Best Young Adult Novel. His science fiction short stories have been nominated for Nebula, World Fantasy, Locus, and Hugo Awards. *Blackfish City* is his first novel for adults. Miller grew up in upstate New York and now lives in New York City.

**THE STORY:** In this dystopian story, Qaanaaq is a floating slum city that arose to replace the many cities that have gone up in flames or have sunk beneath the waves. When a woman arrives in the company of an orca and a polar bear, the four main characters have to decide what it means for them. Those affected by their arrival include Soq, a nonbinary delivery person; Ankit, a civil servant who wants to help her birth mother escape from an institution; Kaev, a brain-damaged street fighter; and Fill, rich grandson of one of the city’s founders. This motley band discovers political intrigue and surprising bonds between themselves.


**Chicago Tribune**

“These days, we tend to label almost any future city as dystopian, but the term hardly does justice to Miller’s complex society. … As each of his main characters strives toward some goal—freeing a mother from a prisonlike mental hospital, tracking down the author of a mysterious guidebook, simply trying to retire with dignity—they gain insights not only into the true nature of their city, but into their own families as well.” *GARY K. WOLFE*

**Guardian (UK)**

“Qaanaaq is vividly brought to life in all its squalid glory, and Miller excels at depicting a metropolis bursting at the seams and populated by both refugees and the elite. *Blackfish City* is a compelling dystopian thriller.” *ERIC BROWN*

**Locus Mag**

“It takes a while for Miller to reveal how these characters and their worlds are intertwined, since at first each seems to have a different agenda. … Miller’s conclusion may seem a bit rushed and CGI-ready, after a novel so dense with ideas and fully-realized characters, but at the same time it makes clear that, beyond the technology and pyrotechnics, *Blackfish City* is, rather surprisingly, also a novel about family, responsibility, and the possibility of community.” *GARY K. WOLFE*

**Tor.com**

“Though it has a fast-paced and intriguing political plot, *Blackfish City* is a novel driven in large part by its conceptual and thematic frameworks. The bits I found most engaging were often the intimate sketches Miller gives of his characters’ interactions with their world.” *BRIT MANDELO*

**CRITICAL SUMMARY**

*Blackfish City*, though a take on the recognizable genres of science fiction and dystopian fiction, tips the hat to a wide range of different influences, including superhero comics and noir crime movies. The critics were impressed with the author’s “well-drawn and disparate characters” *(Guardian)* and his willingness to tackle issues of politics and gender. The city of Qaanaaq is well realized, and the connections between the central characters are unexpected but convincing. Short chapters propel the book to a thrilling finale. “It’s a thought-provoking and ambitious book, one that I found delightful and handsome at turns” *(Tor.com)*. This gripping fantasy thriller feels like a true original.

**Gods, Monsters, and the Lucky Peach**

By Kelly Robson

Kelly Robson’s novella *Waters of Versailles* received the 2016 Aurora Award. In 2017, she was a finalist for the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer and has been a
finalist for the Nebula Award, the World Fantasy Award, the Theodore Sturgeon Award, and the Sunburst Award. Her work appears in a number of anthologies.

THE STORY: The first of the two stories here takes place in the 23rd century, as humanity emerges from underground, where it had sought refuge from pandemics and climate change. Minh, a middle-aged environmental scientist with prosthetic tentacles, has dedicated her life to restoring river ecosystems, but there’s little funding left for such work, with time travel now in vogue. Minh finds an angle: she arranges an expedition back in time, aboard the Lucky Peach. Along with her is the young, idealistic Kiki. The team’s destination is Mesopotamia, the location of the second story. It’s 2024 BC, and the Tigris and Euphrates river valley is relatively unspoiled, offering an excellent opportunity for study. But King Shulgi fears for the survival of his people against the threat of demons, and he’s less than welcoming to his guests. Tensions mount. The Verge

“Rich, nuanced characters, deeply compelling story, and a powerfully conceived world make Gods, Monsters and the Lucky Peach one of the best novellas of recent times, one of the highlight books of 2018, and something to look for on awards ballots come 2019.” JONATHAN STRAHAN

Light Speed

“Readers unfamiliar with a host of genre terms and concepts may struggle. Even some genre readers may stumble at the blending of tropes. But unapologetic immersion lends wonderful confidence and believability to the telling.” ARLEY SORG

Locus

“(Gods, Monsters, and the Lucky Peach) concludes with an open-ended moment, one that raises more questions than it answers, but Robson’s sly, deft storytelling has already left us all the hints we need to see the questions she’s really offering for us to answer: what do we owe to past generations, to future ones, and to each other? And what do we owe the world?” LIZ BOURKE

The Verge

“Gods, Monsters, and the Lucky Peach is a splendid read, one that had me wanting far more by the time I turned the last page.” ANDREW LIPTAK

Kirkus

“The strong worldbuilding will appeal to sci-fi fans, but a slow-burn plot that spends too much time on the logistics of time travel weakens an otherwise appealing story.”

Low Tea

“Robson gives us a unique world, with engaging characters, compelling writing and inventive twists on common themes in science fiction … but don’t expect to be thrilled with the story.” JACOB P. TORRES

Critical Summary

A blend of science fiction and historical fiction, this novella is a quick, mostly satisfying read. The story line occasions some opportunities to ruminate on how the past can and should inform the future. Conflicts and relationship dynamics weave together nicely, the Light Speed critic writes, “layering central characters in beautiful complexity.” The dialogue is generally compelling, rendering those characters from distant times relatable. The Kirkus reviewer concludes that when the plot finally warms up (though much of the suspense takes place in the second half), “dazzling technology and an endearingly cranky main character” make for an engaging ride. Coode Street offers higher praise, affirming Robson as “one of the best, most exciting and most complete new storytellers working today.”

Science fiction author John Kessel’s three previous novels are Good News from Outer Space (1989), Corrupting Dr. Nice (1997), and The Moon and the Other (★★★★★ July/Aug 2017). His short story collection The Baum Plan for Financial Independence and Other Stories (★★★★★ Nov/Dec 2008) includes the Nebula Award–winning novelette from which Pride and Prometheus, a mash-up of two beloved literary classics, was expanded. Kessel teaches literature and writing at North Carolina State University, where he was the first director of the MFA Creative Writing program.

THE STORY: Twelve years after Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice takes place, Mary Bennet, the stuffy, bookish sister, has taken up fossil hunting. She’s pretty much resigned to spinsterhood—until she meets Victor Frankenstein at a London party. He and his friend, Henry Clerval, fled to England after Adam, the creature he made, started demanding a bride; because of her amateur interest in science, Mary gets drawn into the project. Frankenstein eventually finds a pregnant corpse to use for parts, though it requires grave robbing. Pride and Prometheus is a perfect book for science fiction and fantasy readers (or open-minded readers of the classics) to pick up during the 200th anniversary of Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein.

Saga Press. 384 pages. $27.99. ISBN: 9781481481472

Speculative Herald

“I adored everything about Pride and Prometheus, from the utterly engrossing struggles of its characters to the emotional themes about obsession and attachment. The book is also artfully written, and I think Pride and
**Prejudice** and **Frankenstein** fans will be impressed with how well Kessel has captured the original novels’ forms and styles, even if it might make it more challenging for some readers to get into the writing.” STEPHENIE SHEUNG

Utopia State of Mind (blog) ★★★★☆

“Kessel brings a more explicitly feminist lens to this book by including discussions of agency, responsibility, and interacts with the Creature in a more substantial way.” LILI

Chicago Tribune ★★★★☆

“That might sound like the formula for a lightweight mash-up, but Kessel, though not lacking in wit, is more interested in how the themes of these very different novels resonate with each other. … The shifting viewpoints between Mary, Victor and the tragically conflicted creature help make this a nuanced novel of character.” GARY K. WOLFE

Vox ★★★★☆

“Mary and the Creature eventually meet, and that’s where Pride and Prometheus really begins to sing: It’s surprisingly touching to witness two of the loneliest and most solipsistic people in literature meet and see their own dark reflections in one another.” LIZ BOURKE

**Critical Summary**

It’s always risky to meddle with the classics, but Kessel pulls it off nicely by adding new dimensions to Mary Bennet’s, Victor Frankenstein’s, and his Creature’s personalities. The novel moves between each of their perspectives to build sympathy for them. So Mary is not just a sermonizing ghostwriter, and for her Creature strike up something of a friendship, though he remains a threat. Kessel’s prose cleverly updates Shelley’s style, and the novel is a fairly satisfying “meditation on human nature and human nurture” (Tor.com)

**The Sky Is Yours**

By Chandler Klang Smith

Chandler Klang Smith teaches in New York City. She has worked in book publishing, as a ghostwriter, and for the KGB Bar literary venue, and she has served twice as a juror for the Shirley Jackson Awards. *The Sky Is Yours* is her debut novel.

**THE STORY:** The dystopian Empire Island (an alternate New York City) is crumbling, as two indestructible dragons circle relentlessly overhead. Occasionally, they pour fire on the frightened residents below. While the rich are protected, the poor scavenge. For better or worse, technology is intact: people communicate via LookyChats on their LookyGlass devices, and the Toob offers reality-show fare. Duncan Ripple, a dim reality-show star and heir to a fortune, has an impending arranged marriage to Baroness Swan (Swanny) Lenore Dahlberg. But while flying over Empire Island, his personal aircraft malfunctions, and he lands on a garbage island in the bay, where he meets and falls for Abby—beautiful but nearly feral. As Duncan decides to run away with Abby, chaos ensues, and the two bring Swanny with them, venturing into the darker recesses of Empire Island.

Hogarth. 464 pages. $27. ISBN: 9780451496263

**Tor** ★★★★☆

“There have been a lot of books heralded as heirs to *Infinite Jest*, but I can happily say: this is it. … Chandler Klang Smith has unleashed her own slipstream, genrefluid monster of a book—that also happens to be fun, visceral, heartbreaking, and genuinely funny.” LEAH SCHNIELBACH

**Fantasy Literature** ★★★☆☆

“Smith’s prose is an amazing performance. It’s high-intensity, original, funny. A few times I felt like I was downing my second signature cocktail at a high-end lounge; not quite drunk on the words, but definitely tipsy.” MARION DEEDS

**Locus** ★★★★★

“In so many ways, *The Sky Is Yours* should be a glorious mess, given all that this writer is doing. But while it is glorious, it isn’t a mess. It is warm and violent and strange and comforting in equal measure, without ever falling apart.” ADRIENNE MARTINI

**NPR** ★★★★★

“Smith’s gifts of imagination are staggering. Her world-building is a tangled sprawl of past, present, and future, a wickedly satirical synthesis that underlines just how fractured our own realities can be during periods of fear, unrest, inequality, and instability.” JASON HELLER

**Wall Street Journal** ★★★★★

“Smith’s imagination is inexhaustible. *The Sky Is Yours* is a great and disturbing debut.” TOM SHIPLEY

**Publishers Weekly** ★★★★★

“Smith’s novel calls to mind the works of Nick Harkaway and *Game of Thrones*. Although the story is long, it gathers momentum in its last third, bringing this novel home with a hopeful conclusion.”

**SFFWorld** ★

“*The Sky Is Yours* is a novel that points at the genres of Science Fiction and Fantasy with disdain and holds its characters in contempt rather than embracing the fun elements of SFF and the potential of SFF. Unfortunately, this isn’t a book I can recommend on any level.” ROB B.

**Critical Summary**

*The Sky Is Yours* is, for the most part, an impressive debut. It is creative and strange and contains alternative formats, including poetry, cultural references, and flow charts. At center, it tells a story of privilege and social and economic inequality and the nature
of cities—the wealthy can escape the dragon attacks while the poor cannot. The protagonists, none too likable, can be hard to take, but they “shine amid a constant barrage of wonders and grotesqueries, eking out depth and redemption” as the world around them closes in (NPR). Only the SFFWorld reviewer was fully put off by the characters and the perceived “sneer of disdain” for the science fiction and fantasy genre, as evidenced by too-familiar genre elements. Nonetheless, The Sky Is Yours is “an auspicious debut with enough inventiveness for two novels” (Publishers Weekly).

★★★★

The Tangled Lands
By Paolo Bacigalupi and Tobias S. Buckell

American science fiction and fantasy writer Paolo Bacigalupi won the Hugo and Nebula awards for his biopunk debut novel, The Windup Girl (★★★★ July/Aug 2010), and the Printz Award for best young adult novel for Ship Breaker (2010). Tobias Buckell (Arctic Rising ★★★★ May/June 2012) has been nominated for the Hugo, the Nebula, the Prometheus, and the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Science Fiction Author. Both are New York Times best-selling authors. The Tangled Lands is a collaborative fantasy, with each author contributing two novella-length narratives.

THE STORY: These stories take place in the ancient city of Khaim, the final stronghold of a crumbling empire. The city is under attack by an unrelenting poisonous bramble that’s choking the empire of food. Touch it, and you fall into a deep sleep. The use of magic only fuels it. In the first story, “The Alchemist,” an old man nonetheless attempts to use magic to save his dying daughter, while working on a device to destroy the weed. “The Executioner” tells the story of an executioner’s daughter desperately searching for her children, after marauders destroy her home. In “The Children of Khaim,” a young boy tries to save his sister, who’s been infected by the bramble. And “The Blacksmith’s Daughter” relates the tale of a girl’s attempt to save her parents from the sadistic Duke Malabaz.

Guardian (UK) ★★★★★
“Exploring themes of power, corruption, greed and thwarted hope, the authors deliver an absorbing and sensitive fantasy.” ERIC BROWN

Washington Post ★★★★★
 “[A] rich and haunting novel!” EVEREEN MASON

Locus ★★★★
“While each story works on its own individual terms, the collective effect is that of a series of intriguing trailers for a tantalizing epic film which we may or may not ever see in its entirety.” GARY K. WOLFE

SciFiNow ★★★★★
“The Tangled Lands explores different perspectives throughout Khaim, each one depicting the effects of the social and moral decay as well as offering hopeful glimpses of the people who could bring their land back from the brink. … Given the relatively short amount of time in which we get to know them, the characters featured throughout the four stories are well-drawn.” BECKY LEA

Tor.com ★★★
“The Tangled Lands feels like a well-imagined beginning, like there’s more to see and more to be said.” ERIK HENRIKSEN

Publishers Weekly ★★★
“Buckell and Bacigalupi’s shared setting has some solid worldbuilding, but the four novellas that comprise this collection … vary in quality. … Without an emotional payoff or overarching plot resolution, these gloomy works serve the book poorly.”

CRITICAL SUMMARY
These four stories unite through a common theme: the challenges of living in poverty and under oppression. Each of the book’s stories is devastating in its own way, “because the authors don’t let anyone get away clean” (Washington Post). The protagonists are well rounded and compelling, though SciFiNow suggests that the villains tend toward “the more moustache-twirling end of the spectrum.” But more than one critic had a greater concern: that the stories don’t hold entirely together. Is this, in fact, a novel, as advertised? While a shared passion comes through, the Tor critic allows, the book “occupies an awkward middle ground.” It’s “not quite significant or unified enough to feel like a novel, yet its parts aren’t independent or far-ranging enough to have the appeal of a story collection.” And little is offered in the way of resolution.

★★★★

The Long Sunset
An Academy Novel
By Jack McDevitt

Jack McDevitt won the 2006 Nebula Award for his novel Seeker. He also has been nominated for the Hugo Award, the Arthur C. Clarke Award, the John W. Campbell Memorial Award, and the Philip K. Dick Award. In 2015, he received a Robert A. Heinlein Award for lifetime achievement. The Long Sunset is the eighth entry in the Academy Series.

THE STORY: In the year 2256, interstellar pilot Priscilla “Hutch” Hutchinson is adjusting to life on Earth in an era in which travel to the far reaches of the galaxy in search of intelligent life is no longer in vogue. Fear now prevails that such alien contact could lead to disaster, and the president is campaigning for relection on a platform of ending the space program. But a signal is picked up from 7,000 light-years in the distance, from the star Calliope. It’s a television broadcast of a waterfall, with a musical score, and Hutch sets out in pursuit. En route, she and her crew encounter a black hole aimed at
McDevitt earns kudos here for his “optimism and enthusiasm for the profound mysteries of the universe” (Barnes and Noble) and for his realistic, vividly drawn characters. He also embraces the idea that aliens may well be much like us. His protagonist, Hutch, is a strong advocate for continued galactic exploration, believing there’s much good to be learned out there. Advancing this position involves, as the Kirkus critic points out, “some obvious editorializing, with epigraphs aptly illustrating a discussion that McDevitt infuses with real warmth and understanding.” But John the Librarian takes issue with the notion that alien cultures are likely to be much like ours, pointing out that the culture the author describes is “almost exclusively American, almost exclusively aspirational middle class,” completely ignoring the “vast cultural diversity of our own planet and species.” Not the best entry; not the worst.

**CRITICAL SUMMARY**

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**CRITICAL SUMMARY**

In the vein of Seth Grahame-Smith’s *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*, this novel fuses Civil War history and supernatural warfare in a well-paced plot. The focus on young women of color gives it a unique flavor and is an encouraging development in a genre that often lacks diverse authors and characters. Critics and readers alike were impressed with Jane—“one of...
Mary H. K. Choi, who was born in Seoul and immigrated to Hong Kong and then later to Texas, is a Korean American author, editor, and journalist. She is the culture correspondent on Vice News Tonight on HBO and was previously a columnist at Wired and Allure magazines. She also hosts a monthly podcast called Hey, Cool Job. Emergency Contact is her debut novel.

**THE STORY:** When the socially inept Penny Lee heads to college in Austin, Texas, hoping to become a writer, she leaves behind her dull high school years and her embarrassingly flirtatious mother. Her new college roommate introduces her to her tattooed, sexy and flirtatious mother.

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**New Books Guide**

**Tess of the Road**

By Rachel Hartman

Rachel Hartman follows up the young-adult fantasy series she began in the award-winning *Seraphina* (2012) and *Shadow Scale* (2015) with this companion novel, the first in a new duology featuring Seraphina's younger half sister, Tess.

**THE STORY:** The three Dombegh sisters—the disgraced Tess, her perfect twin Jeanne, and their talented older half sister Seraphina—live in the repressive kingdom of Goredd. Now 17, Tess is helping her twin find a suitable marriage, and, after that, her parents will send her to a convent to amend her past ways. After a disastrous wedding send-off, Tess, in order to escape her strict family and her impending fate, dresses as a boy and travels across Goredd and Ninys in search of her twin Jeanne, and their talented older half sisters—the disgraced Tess, her perfect Seraphina, and their talented older half sisters—the disgraced Tess, her perfect Seraphina, and their talented older half sisters—the disgraced Tess, her perfect Seraphina, and their talented older half sisters—the disgraced Tess, her perfect Seraphina, and their talented older half sisters—the disgraced Tess, her perfect Seraphina. Finding herself amongst mugglers and the shadow it casts, never creating a thing without pondering what it obscures,” writes NPR. Though a draggy middle section slowed down one reader, “Tess’s hard-earned character arc is worth sticking around for, and will make the inevitable sequel even more satisfying” (Hypable).

**Center for Children's Books ★★★★★**

“The novel deals frankly with sexuality and sexual violence, both in the slow unfolding of the events that disgraced Tess in her family’s eyes … and in the healing relationship she has toward the end of her travels. Neither Tess nor the novel is defined by her trauma, though; her story is also a rousing adventure set in a richly drawn world, and the novel’s conclusion sets up a sequel that promises to have every bit as much excitement, and a healthy dose of political intrigue as well.” *Sarah Saah*

**Hypable ★★★★★**

“While *Tess of the Road* is a fantasy novel, its grounded exploration of human pain and trauma and the healing that comes from travel and being present within one’s self make it relatable in ways not all fantastical works can be.” *Caitlin Kelly*

**Locus ★★★★★**

“Serious, traumatic moments mix with irreverent humor, amusing characters, wry observations on life, and fascinating details of this world, particularly some surprisingly intimate details of the lives of the reptilian quigutl. Tess’s personal journey makes a delightful adventure, as she grows from angry, traumatized teen to a young woman determined to do some good in the world, find the good in herself she’d denied so long—and enjoy a good adventure or two.” *Carolyn Cushman*

**Deseret News ★★★★★**

“A Tolkien-esque quest novel, *Tess of the Road* plods along at a slow pace for much of its length. … Overall, if you can get through the dragging middle section, readers will be rewarded with a beautiful message of resilience and healing.” *Michelle Garrett Buliewicz*

**Critical Summary**

Readers need not be familiar with *Seraphina* to appreciate this companion fantasy quest novel, which takes place in the same near-Renaissance world of half dragons and other mythical beings. The fantastical trappings, however, take somewhat of a back seat to the remarkable, deeply wounded Tess and her ordinary, albeit terrible problems (which are hinted at and revealed slowly throughout the book, so we won’t say more) as she embarks on her rousing adventures. Hartman weaves throughout the novel themes of sexuality, gender, faith, language, self-acceptance, and political intrigue, among others. “Hartman never establishes a monument without examining the shadow it casts, never creates a thing without pondering what it obscures,” writes NPR. Though a draggy middle section slowed down one reader, “Tess’s hard-earned character arc is worth sticking around for, and will make the inevitable sequel even more satisfying” (Hypable).

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**The Place Between Breaths**

By An Na

An Na was born in South Korea and grew up in San Diego, California. Her first novel, *A Step From Heaven* (2001), won the annual Michael L. Printz Award. She currently lives in Vermont and teaches at Vermont College of Fine Arts in the Writing for Children and Young Adult’s MFA program. *The Place Between Breaths* is her fifth book.

**THE STORY:** Grace King, a talented high school senior, grew up motherless when her schizophrenic parent abandoned the family when she was five. Grace’s workaholic father, a doctor and a researcher who met Grace’s Korean mother while serving as a U.S. Army doctor, conducts genetic research at a prestigious lab and believes that a cure for schizophrenia is possible. But Grace, who interns at the same lab, has problems of her own. A realist who doesn’t...
believe in a magical cure for the illness, Grace starts to identify many of the symptoms of schizophrenia herself. As her own sense of reality starts to deteriorate and she spirals downward, Grace becomes more and more disoriented, and time, memory, dreams, and reality begin to blur.


Publishers Weekly ★★★★★
“The disjointed structure of the novel—jumping from one reality to another, and moving among first-, second-, and third-person perspectives—effectively reflects the state of Grace’s mind, in which time is not linear but rather an incomplete mosaic of events past, present, and imagined. Readers will feel Grace’s tension viscerally, as she weighs hope against despair.”

School Library Journal ★★★★★
“Steeped in lyricism and metaphor, Na’s devastating story explores the workings of the human mind, the melancholy sweetness of memory, and the power of dreams. … A slim but demanding and haunting novel for readers of Beth Kephart’s One Stolen Thing or John Green’s Turtles All the Way Down.” LUANN TOTH

Waking Brain Cells ★★★★★
“The book is multilayered and complex, each chapter taking place in a season, but the seasons are not necessarily in the same years at all. … It is the writing here that shines, moments on the page become incredibly meaningful and it’s a book that will have readers turning back to previous chapters to read them in the light of what was just discovered.” YAsha

Teen Reads ★★★★★
“While the characters themselves are not a major focus in The Place Between Breaths because the focus of the novel is on Grace King and her struggle with schizophrenia, the characters that exist are certainly well-written. I was able to learn so much about the characters based simply on little quirks or habits the author described, even though I did not see much of the characters other than Grace.” ANSLEY K.

Cultures ★★★
“While it’s understandable that a character with mental illness might have a less positive outlook on the situation, I’m also wary of having a main character tout the message that mental illness is inescapable and worse, not worth living with. It’s believable that Grace would feel this way, but the story needed to do more to challenge her beliefs.” AMANDA MULLEN

CRITICAL SUMMARY
A complex, multilayered novel, The Place Between Breaths is “a puzzle of a book, a deep look at the chaos of mental illness and a profound experience to read” (Waking Brain Cells). Some of the twists and turns can initially feel confusing—different seasons, flashbacks, surreal chapters, and crystal clear experiences mix together. However, in using this nonlinear structure to write about schizophrenia, Na aptly depicts the illness’s debilitating effects in lyrical, sometimes metaphorical language. Grace, of course, takes central stage, though other characters are convincingly limned. Only the Cultures critic felt that Na depicted mental illness as too inevitable. Most reviewers agreed, however, that The Place Between Breaths is a powerful, visceral, and psychologically intense novel. “Masterfully written,” concluded Waking Brain Cells, “this is a harrowing depiction of mental illness in a family.”

God Save Texas
A Journey into the Soul of the Lone Star State
By Lawrence Wright


THE TOPIC: Few other states match Texas’s tremendous impact on the rest of the nation: the state gave us Lyndon Johnson, Buddy Holly, Ann Richards, George W. Bush, and a booming oil economy. Yet it is a state full of contradictions, “a culture that is still raw, not fully formed, standing on the margins but also growing in influence, dangerous and magnificent in its potential.” In 14 essays, Wright explores Texas’s cities, culture, and politics, while delving into the state as a movie myth, a borderland, and a harbinger of the future. Whether we like it or not, he argues, America’s future is Texas, which is growing at twice the rate of California and winning more congressional seats and electoral votes with a young, diverse, and—relative to its legislators—progressive population. And “[d]espite the legendary qualities of boorishness, braggadocio, greed, and overall tackiness that are associated with my state,” Wright concludes, “there is a lot to love about the traditional elements of our culture.”

Knopf. 368 pages. $27.95. ISBN: 9780525520108

Dallas Morning News ★★★★★
“The push-pull between homegrown admiration and deep disappointment fuels God Save Texas with literary tension. … As a native of Dallas his insights on the city are particularly valuable and often provocative.” CHRIS VOGNAR

New York Times ★★★★★
“A bride and groom emerging from a chapel leads to a disquisition on the Spanish conquistadors and the explorer Cabeza de Vaca; a chapter on Texas radio turns into a discussion of Texas gun laws and a consideration of Texas snakes. … He has a deep knowledge of the terrain; he has been hoarding details over a lifetime, consulting history books, his reporter’s notes, his own memories and what one imagines is a massive clippings file of truly strange stuff.” JENNIFER SZALAI

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★
“God Save Texas is his most personal work yet, an elegant mixture of autobiography
and long-form journalism, remarkably free of elitist bias on the one hand, and pithy guidebook pronouncements on the other. Like many Texas liberals, Wright has a soft spot for the three Texans who reached the White House—a feeling no doubt heightened by his loathing of the present occupant.”

David Oshinsky

NPR ★★★★

“Wright is one of the most talented journalists Texas has ever produced, and God Save Texas is him at his best. It’s a thoughtful, beautifully written book about a state that’s hard to understand, and one that’s become synonymous with, to put it delicately, a unique set of eccentricities.”

Michael Schaub

Tampa Bay Times ★★★★

“Wright’s eclectic approach to the state combines his personal experiences with Texas history, politics, culture and current events, and the result is a portrait that is always complicated and often surprising. For every Texas stereotype Wright explores, there’s something that blows it up.”

Colette Bancroft

Washington Post ★★★★

“The essays in God Save Texas, written with Wright’s trademark wit and wry humor, celebrate what makes Texas unique and wonderful: free-flowing rivers, the canyons of Big Bend National Park, Lubbock musicians (plus Abbott-born Willie Nelson). … At the same time, Wright doesn’t shy away from the fact that, for many Texans, it is hard to square up the state we grew up in with the intolerance that has defined our national reputation.”

Cecile Richards

Christian Science Monitor ★★★★

“Before reading this book, if you had told me I would enjoy a chapter on the history of oil drilling in Texas I would never have believed it…. [Wright’s] history of his personal life seems lifeless compared to his account of a Black Lives matter protest in Dallas.”

Kevin O’Kelly

Critical Summary

By turns affectionate and critical, humorous and apologetic, this memoir-criticism-apologia “capture[s] the full range of Texas in all its shame and glory” (New York Times). It’s a particularly timely portrait of what America might look like with divisive, retrograde politicians heading the state and the nation. Wright’s inquiries into his homeland run deep and wide—from subpar public schools and social services and an embarrassing legislature (don’t ask) to remote artists’ communities, the history of the Astrodome, Austin’s start-ups, and debate over the ways to kill feral hogs (don’t ask, again). Yet, for readers hoping to understand why such a populist state “became the test bed for the most racist, homophobic and anti-women’s-rights laws and policies in the country, we will have to wait for Volume 2,” wrote the Washington Post. Still, God Save Texas is essential reading—not only for Texans but for anyone who wants to understand the path of our country.

God Save Texas ★★★★

One Woman’s Obsessive Search for the Golden State Killer

By Michelle McNamara

Los Angeles-based Michelle McNamara (1970–2016) was the author of the website True Crime Diary. She died suddenly, at age 46, without completing this manuscript about the Golden State Killer, whom she had profiled in a 2013 Los Angeles magazine article. Her husband, comedian Patton Oswalt, was determined to see the manuscript through; McNamara’s lead researcher, Paul Haynes, and crime journalist Billy Jensen completed the last third of the book. A docuseries based on the book is also in the works at HBO.

The Topic: On April 24, 2018, Sacramento police announced the arrest of Joseph James DeAngelo, 72, an ex-cop known as the Golden State Killer (and East Area Rapist or Original Night Stalker). McNamara—who passed away before DeAngelo was apprehended—worked, indefatigably, to uncover the identity of the killer who had terrorized California during the 1970s and 1980s. A serial rapist and killer who assaulted around 50 women and murdered at least a dozen people over two distinct periods, this psychopath—a masked white male with meticulous, systematic plans—attacked women and girls in suburbs stretching from Sacramento to 450 miles south. He vanished without a trace in 1986, and the case went cold. McNamara details the horrors of each crime—in many, he forced the woman to tie up the man before raping her, or ended up slaying them both—while chronicling the dissolution of the investigation, the effects on the communities he struck, and her own obsessive investigation.

Entertainment Weekly ★★★★

“There’s a spooky, suspenseful magic to the way the author constructs bite-sized short stories —tales of jealous siblings, happy young couples, impulsive children and ‘stony’ parents—and infuses them with that lurking inevitability of terrible, potentially deadly crimes…. She’s also able to perfectly execute the procedural aspect of true crime: She seems most at home when detailing prolonged police work, showing off her alacritous prose while still managing to subvert the genre’s conventions.”

David Canfield

Globe and Mail (Canada) ★★★★

“Perhaps most importantly, she kept her work free of salaciousness and sensationalism. … While I’ll Be Gone in the Dark is an incredible look into the hunt for a serial rapist and murderer, it’s also a front row seat to better understanding human nature. It’s a look into the way we interact with our neighbours, the way we try and protect ourselves and what we’re willing to do to learn the truth.”

Anne T. Donahue

Guardian (UK) ★★★★

“Some of [McNamara’s] material went into the blockbuster story she wrote about the case for Los Angeles magazine in 2013, but this book is the real testament to how all-consuming and dogged McNamara’s search was. … As a record of obsession, I’ll Be Gone in the Dark delivers a nearly fluorescent portrait of the fanatic’s life:
Beneath a Ruthless Sun
A True Story of Violence, Race, and Justice Lost and Found
By Gilbert King

Journalist Gilbert King's The Devil in the Grove: Thurgood Marshall, the Groveland Boys, and the Dawn of a New America was awarded the 2013 Pulitzer Prize in Nonfiction and was a finalist for the Dayton Literary Peace Prize.

**THE TOPIC:** In December 1957, Blanche Knowles, a member of a prominent white Florida family, was raped by a black man as her baby slept nearby. Lake County Sheriff Willis McCall, long noted for his racism and corruption, ordered all black men in the area be rounded up. The case took an unexpected turn when McCall arrested Jesse Daniels, a developmentally disabled 19-year-old white man. Daniels was regularly seen pedaling the dusty streets and slept with a teddy bear; few believed he could have committed this crime. Daniels received a five-minute hearing and was committed to Florida's infamous Florida State Hospital for the Insane. His mother and a local newspaper reporter fought unrelentingly for the young man's release and exoneration. It took almost 14 years before Daniels was declared both innocent and sane.


**Christian Science Monitor ★★★★★**
“Beneath a Ruthless Sun is multiple books in one—a gripping true-crime narrative, a deeply wrenching story of American bigotry and corruption, and an inspiring tale of heroes fired by love and righteous fury. … Thanks to transcripts, the most gripping scenes in the book take place in a courtroom and in the room where a suspect is interviewed.” RANDY DOTINGA

**Dallas News ★★★★★**
“If Beneath a Ruthless Sun has an imposing villain in McCall, it also has its share of heroes. The two most prominent are Pearl Daniels, Jesse’s mother, who got J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI interested in the case; and the journalist Mabel Norris Reese.” CHRIS VOGLAR

**New York Times ★★★★★**
“King tells this complex story with grace and sensitivity, and his narrative never flags. His mastery of the material is complete.” JEFFREY TOOBIN

**NPR ★★★★★**
“Beneath a Ruthless Sun plunges the reader deeply into the legal practices, civil rights battles, and stubborn sexual inequalities of the mid-20th century, but this fast-moving and impeccably sourced book is anything but a slog.” JEAN ZIMMERMAN

**Tampa Bay Times ★★★★★**
“Beneath a Ruthless Sun reveals a story that is horrifying to read but must be remembered. … This extraordinary book's story might have begun more than half a century ago, but it isn't history.” COLETTE BANCFORTH

**Washington Post ★★★★★**
“King recounts this perplexing story with compassion and a vibrant sense of time and place.” GARY KRST

**CRITICAL SUMMARY**
The “true” in “true crime” is often “a promise that betrays as much as it entices,” NPR writes, but such is not the case in King’s “scorching, compelling, and—unfortunately—still entirely relevant” book. The author delves expertly into a number of fascinating story lines. For example: the rape victim’s husband reportedly convinced the authorities that it would be too shameful for the family for a black man to have raped his wife. And this: a black man named Sam Odom was arrested for a rape in a nearby town, and evidence implicated him as Blanche Knowles’s assailant. McCall used his influence to have Odom executed for that rape before he could be implicated in the first. The Christian Science Monitor asserts that Beneath a Ruthless Sun isn’t about just this one case: “King's canvas is large and vivid; examining, among other things, “the bizarre contradictions of Southern attitudes toward miscegenation, infidelity, and rape.”

the sleepless nights and shut-in days, the rabbit holes of online message boards, the underground economies of samizdat information.” JEREMY LYBARGER

**New York Times ★★★★★**
“[The book] is both a vivid and meticulous investigation of a twisted predator who terrorized quiet, upper middle-class communities in California for nearly a decade, and a wrenching personal account from a writer who became consumed by her subject. … Rather than attempting to mimic her voice and flesh out fragmentary chapters, or condense her sprawling research into a taut true crime narrative, Mr. Haynes and Mr. Jensen let the jagged edges of the unfinished project show.” ALEXANDRA ALTER

**Slate ★★★★★**
“I’ll Be Gone in the Dark blossoms into a masterful accounting of what might at first seem like a minor issue: where we’re used to thinking of crime as the product of psychological, historical, and social factors, but in I’ll Be Gone in the Dark McNamara skillfully demonstrates the role geography and architecture played in shaping the Golden State Killer’s reign of terror.” LAURA MILLER

**Minneapolis Star Tribune ★★★★★**
“Her dogged reporting makes I’ll Be Gone in the Dark both hard to read and hard to put down. The accounts from survivors are nightmarish and the crime scenes of the homicide victims are disturbing.” STEPHEN J. LYONS

**USA Today ★★★★★**
“If there is a criticism about McNamara’s otherwise scintillating work, it’s the book’s disjointed structure. … The
antidote, however, is McNamara’s poignant prose.” MARCO DELLA CAVA

**Critical Summary**
McNamara wanted almost nothing more than for the Golden State Killer to be caught, and her book testifies to her relentless dedication and tireless, meticulous research. The book isn’t so much about finding a killer (which she never did) as it is about wanting to find him. McNamara, who spares no details about the killer’s attacks and methodology, writes with an unusual warmth and humor. As she interweaves her own experiences with that of the police procedural, she offers penetrating insight into communities. “What we discover, beautifully,” Entertainment Weekly writes, “is McNamara’s interest in human beings.” The book, because it was completed by others, can feel somewhat disjointed as McNamara “rocket[s] back to the past for the first-rate book.

How to Change Your Mind
What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches Us About Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression, and Transcendence
By Michael Pollan

Award-winning writer Michael Pollan, the Knight Professor of Science and Environmental Journalism at the University of California, Berkeley, is the author of five New York Times best sellers, including Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation (2013), Food Rules: An Eater’s Manual (2010); In Defense of Food: An Eater’s Manifesto (Mar/Apr 2008); The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals (Selection, July/Aug 2006); and The Botany of Desire: A Plant’s-Eye View of the World (2001).

**The Topic**: Shifting his focus from food and cooking to other uses of food, Pollan explores the impact of psychedelic drugs on human consciousness. He delves into the history of these substances, their medical applications, and their potential to transform our understanding of the world and ourselves.

Patriot Number One
American Dreams in Chinatown
By Lauren Hilgers

Journalist Lauren Hilgers lived in Shanghai for six years. Her work has appeared in Businessweek, Harper’s, the New York Times Magazine, the New Yorker, and Wired.

She now lives in New York City. **Patriot Number One** is her first book.

**The Topic**: Shortly after relocating to Brooklyn, Hilgers received a call from Zhuang Liehong, a democracy activist who had fled persecution in China. She had met Zhuang the year before while reporting on the Wukan village rebellion, in which he participated under the alias “Patriot Number One.” Now he was in the United States with his wife, Little Yan. Overstaying their tourist visas, they planned to live in New York’s Chinatown. He had reached out to Hilgers because she was the only person he knew in the city.

Zhuang was a dreamer, but the American Dream wasn’t as simple to achieve as he’d expected. The couple eventually earned asylum but struggled to find adequate shelter and employment. Hilgers tells Zhuang’s story compassionately, illuminating the recent immigrant experience.

**Crown. 336 pages. $27. ISBN: 9780451496133**

Christian Science Monitor ★★★★
“Hilgers is a thoughtful chronicler with an eye for telling details about the [Wukan] uprising, the revealing upbringing of Zhuang and Little Yan, and their complicated, sometimes-tense marriage. She also vividly tells readers about the challenges facing immigrants, from bus stops that must be memorized to disagreements over gender roles.” RANDY DOTINGA

Kirkus
“(An affecting portrait of a Chinese dissident who found a home among like-minded democrats in faraway New York. This excellent book makes a powerful argument for why the U.S. should always remain a place of sanctuary, benefiting immensely from those who arrive from other shores.”

**New York Times** ★★★★
“Such a comprehensive project could have easily sprawled across a book twice as long, but **Patriot Number One** stays close to the people it follows, in a narrative as evocative and engrossing as a novel. … Hilgers observes all of this with a sharp eye and an open heart.” JENNIFER SZALAI

Publishers Weekly ★★★★
“A battle for freedom segues into a struggle for survival in this clear-eyed, humane look at modern immigration. … [A] quintessentially American story of exile and renewal.”

San Francisco Chronicle ★★★★
“Hilgers captures the small poignant moments of the immigrant experience. … **Patriot Number One** tells a powerful human story about America and the world in 2018.” STEPHEN PHILLIPS

**Criminal”**
Hilgers uses Zhuang and Little Yan’s story to explore what it’s like for immigrants to arrive in the United States without any knowledge of English and with dreams that seem too big to be realistic. The couple settled in Flushing, an area where many Chinese people congregate, and Zhuang eventually became an Uber driver. However, he hasn’t lost his passion for activism (including a protest outside Trump Tower in New York City), and he comes across in the book as an “irrepressible, quixotic” character (San Francisco Chronicle). The critics were impressed at how adeptly the author switches between scenes in China and America and brings both to life. Overall, “**Patriot Number One** is an eye-opener … startling but heartening” (Christian Science Monitor).
plants, Pollan explores the use of psychedelics (such as LSD) throughout history, their effect on the human brain, recent research on their potential to heal mental illnesses (from depression and addiction to PTSD), and, finally, his own mind-expanding use of the drugs. “After several decades of suppression and neglect”—years after Timothy Leary’s call to “turn on, tune in, drop out” and the moral panic that followed—“psychedelics are having a renaissance” in both home and lab, he writes. Pollan argues that the therapeutic benefits of psychedelics, especially for the terminally ill, can’t be separated from the mystical experiences they produce since they create heightened awareness that extends beyond the self. Case in point: though Pollan is healthy, he drops acid, eats psilocybin, and ingests the venom of the Sonoran Desert toad, all of which lead to his own transformative mystical experiences.

Evening Standard (UK) ★★★★★
“[Pollan] is sober-minded, methodical and more used to experimenting with sauerkraut than his own consciousness. … Pollan journeys through the rich and surprising history of psychedelics, from the accidental discovery of LSD by Swiss chemist Albert Hoffman in the darkest days of the Second World War all the way to the present renaissance (Silicon Valley is particular keen).” RICHARD GODWIN

Guardian (UK) ★★★★★
“[T]his is a serious work of history and science, but also one in which the author, under the influence of a certain Central American toad venom, becomes convinced he’s giving birth to himself. … The big risk for a writer here, as Pollan is aware, is that first-person reports from the frontiers of consciousness have a way of seeming utterly banal on the page.” OLIVER BURKEMAN

Massive Sci ★★★★★
“Pollan starts out as green to the topic as his readers, and he walks us through some very high-minded publications. … His descriptions of each researcher, patient, or advocate bring their visage and demeanor right into the mind’s eye, and he explains their findings (or revelations) interestingly, regardless of our previous understanding of neuroscience or spirituality.” BENJAMIN BELL

Slate ★★★★★
“The meat of the book is its chapters on the neuroscience of the drugs and their evident ability to suppress activity in a brain system known as the ‘default mode network’ … If How to Change Your Mind furthers the popular acceptance of psychedelics as much as I suspect it will, it will be by capsizing the long association, dating from Leary’s time, between the drugs and young people.” LAURA MILLER

New York Times ★★★★★
“Pollan’s initial skepticism and general lack of hipness work wonders for the material. … Pollan keeps you turning the pages even through his wonkiest stretches.” JOHN WILLIAMS

USA Today ★★★
“In trying to describe hallucinations, the author poses a question: ‘How do you put into words an experience said to be ineffable?’ Unfortunately, you can’t. Michael Pollan made a valiant effort to dissuade this skeptic, but he wasn’t able to change my mind.” MATT MCCARTHY

**CRITICAL SUMMARY**

In his most personal book to date, Pollan addresses his subject with his usual panache, wonder, and well-earned knowledge. But there’s one big problem: “reading about an acid trip is like listening to someone recount a dream. It’s far more interesting to the person who experienced it” (USA Today). The transformative power of LSD is a well-shopped topic, and, even in Pollan’s hands, sometimes his experiences, and those of whom he interviews, are not that much fun to read about. Where Pollan shines, however, is his research into the neuroscience of the drugs and his colorful exploration of past and current research, though still in its infancy. “He does do a remarkable job convincing us these devotees may be on to something,” wrote the Massive Sci critic, a neuroscientist. Pollan may, in the end, fail at putting “the ineffable into words” (Guardian), but How to Change Your Mind may just change your mind about psychedelics.

**Natural Causes**

An Epidemic of Wellness, the Certainty of Dying, and Killing Ourselves to Live Longer

By Barbara Ehrenreich

Barbara Ehrenreich is a social scientist, a political activist, and a journalist who recently won the Erasmus Prize. She has written or cowritten 23 books, including Nickel and Dimed (2001), Bait and Switch (★★★★ Nov/Dec 2005), Bright-Sided (★★★★ Jan/Feb 2010), and Living with a Wild God (★★★★ July/Aug 2014). She earned her PhD in cellular immunology, and she often writes about science, health, and feminism. Ehrenreich lives in Virginia.

THE TOPIC: Once she passed 70, Ehrenreich decided she was old enough to die of “natural causes” and wasn’t going to undergo unnecessary medical screening. After all, she’d recently learned that the immune system can actually help spread cancer. With our bodies working against us, why keep up a futile fight? In her usual no-nonsense style, she argues against routine medical testing, which she believes is generally done for profit (in the United States, at least) and is likely to lead to overdiagnosis, as well as medication, which has no proven health benefits. Although she rails against the nation’s fitness craze, she admits she’s still a faithful gym-goer. This wide-ranging, incisive book explores the extent to which we can control our bodies—and the extent to which we can’t.
**San Francisco Chronicle**

“Ehrenreich proves a fascinating guide to the science suggesting that our cells, like the macrophages that sometimes destroy and sometimes defend, can act unpredictably and yet not randomly. ... I think Ehrenreich is really talking about herself—about her own fight for control, and her own desire to be able to give up and accept the end when the time comes.”

*VICTORIA SWEET*

**Chicago Tribune**

“Ehrenreich compares doctors’ examinations to rituals that serve as much to cement the social order and the authority of physicians as they do to advance healing. ... For Ehrenreich, the answer seems to be that we should relax and enjoy being part of this complex world, rather than stressing about how to stay in it as long as possible.”

*RACHEL NEWCOMB*

**Cut**

“The rest of the book serves as sometimes persuasive, sometimes antagonistic explanation for this declaration [that she wouldn’t let doctors go looking for medical problems]. ... Ehrenreich’s analysis of our approach to death will resonate with anyone who’s ever had a serious illness, and she’s particularly incisive about the world’s collective need to know how others died so one can avoid making that same mistake, whatever it is.”

*DEANNA PAI*

**Guardian (UK)**

“Ehrenreich has fun at the expense of health sages and fitness gurus, with their mantras about the ‘wisdom of the body’. ... Like most polemists, Ehrenreich is more persuasive when on the attack than when it comes to offering solutions.”

*MORRISON*

**Newsday**

“It’s short ... more a collection of linked essays than a complete work of reportage. It’s a form that creates some problems, though it doesn’t obscure the final and most pertinent message. Ehrenreich has an unusual combination of tools at her disposal—she’s a polemicist who is also a scholar and scientist.”

*MARY ANN GWINN*

**New York Times**

“Natural Causes is peevish, tender and deeply, distinctively odd—and often redeemed by its oddness. ... Ehrenreich’s focus on relatively rarefied issues and pet preoccupations make it clear that this is a book born out of private not public concerns—despite masquerading as such.”

*PARUL SEHGAL*

**Critical Summary**

Ehrenreich has a solid reputation as a social critic. Here she forcefully debates our devotion to wellness and life extension. “She delights in confronting entrenched assumptions, popular delusions, grandiose ambitions—and in teasing out their unexpected consequences” (Atlantic). She generally makes her points with “animated language” (New York Times), and she can be convincing, as well as philosophical—as in the late chapters, where she considers what survives of us after death (“a continuous chain of human experience and endeavor”). However, some critics took issue with her particular prejudices, such as those against mindfulness, and even her overall approach: is it not worth protecting our health where we can? Nevertheless, Ehrenreich “is one of our great iconoclasts, lucid, thought-provoking and instructive” (Guardian).
NPR
“Dean’s literary bash is as stimulating and insightful as its roster of guests. … The book’s topicality, combined with Dean’s astute analyses of her subjects’ lives and vinegar-sharp wit, should appeal to more than literary works.” MELLER MCALPIN

NY Times Book Review
“Dean traverses the intellectual landscape of the 20th century at an easy gallop—the boozy cocktail parties; the plotting of editors in their offices; the literary and political trench wars; aggressive essays thrown across the breach like grenades. … Dean’s own writing, direct and lively, can get too loosely conversational—too wordy and imprecise.” LAURA JACOBS

LA Review of Books
“The downside to Dean’s focus on the lives of her subjects is that their writing sometimes takes a backseat to their lives. … When Dean does get down in the weeds and engage with what these writers actually wrote, she often does it quite well, and the book’s strength is in its accounts of debates among public intellectuals.” JACQUELYN ARDAM

Washington Post
“This book should be better. It should be racy and effervescent and captivating. … Instead, a book that explores the professional lives of some of history’s most provocative essayists and theorists is slow and a bit plodding and even boring in patches, even though the women who are its subject are none of those things.” ROBIN GIVAN

CRITICAL SUMMARY
Dean’s subjects had one major trait in common: they “were willing to be unpopular. That made them not only sharp, but brave” (Los Angeles Times). However, they had other things in common, too, and it is this homogeneity that gave a couple of critics pause. Most of these figures are white, Jewish, middle-class, and based in New York City. When Dean tries to branch out with a brief section on Zora Neale Hurston, she fails to tie this writer in with the rest of the book. The feeling is that of a somewhat exclusive club. On the plus side, this approach does make for plenty of fun encounters, and, in the end, these minibios exhibit “remarkable concision” and give due honor to “truly gutsy, brilliant women” (NPR).

War on Peace
The End of Diplomacy and the Decline of American Influence
By Ronan Farrow
Investigative journalist Ronan Farrow, who trained as an attorney, worked for the United Nations in Sudan and then as a State Department adviser during the Obama administration. He won a Pulitzer Prize for his New Yorker coverage of the sexual assault allegations against Harvey Weinstein. He is the son of Woody Allen and Mia Farrow. War on Peace is his first book.

THE TOPIC: Farrow, who began working for the State Department early in the Obama administration, recounts how that agency has been gutted in recent years and how militarization has replaced diplomacy as an overall strategy. This was the case even before Trump’s administration. More power was given to the Pentagon and the CIA than to diplomatic missions. Farrow focuses on his time as an aide to diplomat Richard Holbrooke, who was a special representative in Afghanistan and in Pakistan. Holbrooke died in 2010; his last words were, reputedly, “You’ve got to stop this war in Afghanistan.” Farrow traces the history of American diplomacy and sees force supplanting peaceful approaches to conflict resolution.

Norton. 432 pages. $27.95. ISBN: 9780393652109

Globe & Mail (Canada)
“This volume is part meditation and part memoir, and as a result Mr. Farrow is a prominent figure in his jeremiad. But the theme that courses through this book is the triumph of the military perspective over the diplomatic perspective, coming to a crescendo in the Trump years.” DAVID SHIRBMAN

The Atlantic
“Farrow spoke to every living former secretary of state and a host of other civil servants, policy experts, and at least one prominent U.S.-backed warlord. The resulting picture of American foreign policy is both grimmer and in some ways more hopeful than any other recent portrait of the State Department: grimmer because the decline in American diplomacy long predates the Trump administration, and hopeful because it reveals how past presidents have acted to arrest that decline.” MATT PETERSON

Publishers Weekly
“Farrow blends analysis with vivid reportage; his firsthand recollections of State Department icons, such as the brilliant, blustering Richard Holbrooke, make diplomacy feel colorful and dramatic rather than gray and polite. [He] doesn’t quite demonstrate how diplomacy would succeed in quagmires like Afghanistan, but his indictment of the militarization of American foreign policy is persuasive.”

NY Times Book Review
“In a sense, Farrow is telling a story with a well-known ending but a surprise beginning. … Yet real as these dynamics [of sidelining diplomats] are, Farrow’s account of them comes with some omissions that skew the broader picture.” DANIEL KURTZ-PHELAN

Telegraph (UK)
“Farrow is not lacking in self-esteem. … He might well write a book worth reading if he ever gets round to undertaking a more mature analysis of America’s recent reassertion of its power.” CON COUGLIN

CRITICAL SUMMARY
Farrow believes “the Trump era [has] squandered diplomatic leadership by dint of chaos and blunder.” Diplomats’ overseas assignments are being shortened, such that the pool of experienced Foreign Service professionals grows ever shallower. Serious mistakes have been made in U.S. dealings with Pakistan and with Afghanistan, he argues,
as a result of "massive inefficiency and a lack of accountability." Some critics thought his "a sad and sober book of dogged research and persuasive argument" (Globe & Mail). However, others found it to be one-sided and slight. "Ultimately, I suspect this book is not aimed at foreign affairs veterans such as myself, but at a younger generation who might appreciate some of its more obscure pearls of wisdom," the Telegraph reviewer concluded.

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**I Am, I Am, I Am**
*Seventeen Brushes with Death*
By Maggie O’Farrell

Maggie O’Farrell was born in Northern Ireland, grew up in Wales and Scotland, and now lives in London. She worked as a journalist in Hong Kong and London and was a literary editor at the Independent on Sunday. Her novel *After You’d Gone* (2000) won a Betty Trask Award, *The Distance Between Us* (2004) received a Somerset Maugham Award, and *The Hand That First Held Mine* (2010) was selected for a Costa Novel Award.

**THE TOPIC:** Maggie O’Farrell turns to autobiography in this collection of 17 of her own near-death (or "near-ish") experiences. The title comes from Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar*: “the old brag of my heart. I am, I am, I am.” Each chapter’s name derives from the part of the body to be imperiled therein. “Cerebellum 1980” tells of her encounter, at eight, with severe encephalitis (“the hinge on which my childhood swung”). Her early brushes with death nourished a recklessness, “a cavalier or even crazed attitude to risk.” Among her experiences are a flight to Hong Kong that nearly crashes, her just barely escaping decapitation by a passing truck, and her talking her way out of strangulation with a binocular strap by a man who later murders a woman exactly so. In the final chapter, she races her daughter to a hospital as the child struggles to survive an anaaphylic attack.

Knopf Doubleday. 304 pages. $25.95. ISBN: 9780525520221

**Guardian (UK)**

“I Am, I Am, I Am isn’t purely about peril, it’s about the life lived either side of it. These snapshots, shared in extreme closeup, reveal a thoughtful and determined writer who, despite frequent trauma, remains resilient and uncowed.” FIONA STURGES

**Independent (UK)**

“It’s a structure many, no doubt, wouldn’t be able to pull off, but O’Farrell’s existence has seemingly been as crammed full with illness, accident and spine-tingling close calls as a character in a death-and-disaster-packed soap opera. … [A] rich celebration of every breath O’Farrell’s taken.” LUCY SCHOLES

**NY Times Book Review**

“At times she shifts skillfully from first- to second-person narration as if to implore the reader to understand that there is no protection, nor order, nor safety. … [T]his memoir is a mystical howl, a thrumming, piercing reminder of how very closely we all exist alongside what could have happened, but didn’t.” DANI SHAPIRO

**NPR**

“[I Am, I Am, I Am] is an extraordinary book, a reminder that while life has its limits and can be unpredictable, we should push against limitations and not give in to fear.” HELLER MCALPIN

**San Francisco Chronicle**

“Reading [I Am, I Am, I Am] was a bit like peering through a lighted window into someone else’s living room. It’s rare to get a look so closely at a person’s brushes with mortality, and rarer still for that portrait to be so elegant.” SOPHIE Haigney

**Critical Summary**

With a pounding, life-affirming pulse, this memoir offers moments of beauty that “ambush the reader as unexpectedly as malevolent predators” (NPR). O’Farrell doesn’t present the stories chronologically, which some critics found to be a bit disorienting. And she also occasionally lessens the emotional force of her narrative with unnecessary details. O’Farrell is at her finest, however, when she’s describing the intensity of her love for her three children and her fear of placing them in danger. And she earns praise from the Guardian critic for her expertise in finding significance in the ordinary and for “making connections and finding clarity where most might find fog.” Woven through these essays is a reminder that it’s impossible to keep death at bay. “I know all too well how fine a membrane separates us from that place,” O’Farrell writes, “and how easily it can be perforated.”
the first Jewish justice. But in order to placate Southerner congressmen, who feared his threats to states’ rights—particularly their Jim Crow laws—Wilson allowed the segregation of the Civil Service. And while Wilson advocated for national self-determination, he sent troops into Haiti and the Dominican Republic. As O’Toole notes, blacks in America “noticed a wide streak of racism in Wilson’s foreign policy.” O’Toole explores Wilson’s deep contradictions.

**Time**

“Itzkoff allows readers a rare intimate look at Robin Williams in this honest and emotional biography of the late entertainer. Itzkoff explores critical moments from Williams’ start in comedy to his Academy Award-winning performance in Good Will Hunting, while shining a light on his personal struggles with addiction and depression.” KATE SAMUELSON

**USA Today**

“Itzkoff has done his research, including interviews with friends, family, and glitterati—as well as with the subject himself, whom the author first interviewed in 2009 for a newspaper story. … There are moments when the reader will laugh out loud.” JOCELYN MCCLURG

**Washington Post**

“It’s a revealing, warts-and-all portrait of a man of great talent trying to design a career and a life while being buffeted around by a cacophony of contradictory voices and impulses. At almost 500 pages, the book is the result of exhaustive research and fan-like devotion.” MERRILL MARKOE

**Minneapolis Star Tribune**

“The New York Times veteran approaches his daunting task with a reporter’s objective eye, relying heavily on more than 100 interviews with close friends and noted celebrities, including David Letterman and former Mork & Mindy co-star Pam Dawber. … Still, Itzkoff can’t quite crack the surface, a shortcoming he admits in the book’s epilogue.” KIM ODE

**Critical Summary**

Perhaps as a fitting tribute to the madcap, humane comic genius, the majority of critics focused more on Robin Williams’s life and career than on the book itself. That being said, Itzkoff’s generous, grateful book is, at this time, the definitive biography of Williams, impeccably researched, well written, and aided by more than 100 interviews with friends, family, and celebrities. Yet though he was loved by many, he was only truly understood by few—“Robin Williams developed into one of the world’s most beloved comedians by drowning out his true voice with chatter from a deep bench of characters,” commented the Minneapolis Star Tribune. So perhaps it’s not surprising that Itzkoff reveals his limitations in capturing what, exactly, made the inimitable Williams tick. “Everyone got a piece of him and a fortunate few got quite a lot of him, but no one got all of him,” he writes. Few, however, will be disappointed in this magisterial biography.
National Review ★★★★★

“Her book stands as a welcome corrective to a pair of sympathetic Wilson biographies from 2011 and 2013—by John Milton Cooper Jr. and A. Scott Berg, respectively—that helped rehabilitate the 28th president’s reputation by putting flesh and emotion on what had long been a cold icon of the man. … She has exposed, in meticulous detail, the vanity and vacuity of Wilson the moralist.” JOhn DANIEL DAVIDSO

USA Today ★★★★★

“She presents him as more secular than religious in his ideals—despite his ministerial background—and tragically divided in his political action. … Grim and often gripping, The Moralist goes a long way in explaining the America we’re awakening to.” MATT DAMSKER

Wall Street Journal ★★★★☆

“[An] elegantly crafted portrait of a president as polarizing as he is consequential.” RICHARD NORTON SMITH

New York Times ★★★☆☆

“ILike her subject, O’Toole occasionally gets trapped by her own noble intentions: A biography called The Moralist, which takes Wilson’s ‘great sense of moral responsibility’ as its starting point, surely sets up expectations for a deeper exploration of just where he drew that line.” JENNIFER SZALAI

CRITICAL SUMMARY

O’Toole is a “lucid and elegant writer,” and, throughout The Moralist’s over 600 pages, “there isn’t a passage that drags or feels superfluous” (New York Times). For the most part, the author captures Wilson’s contradictions, hypocrisies, rigidity, and high ideals. She is excellent on Wilson’s complicated entry into World War I, as she traces the president’s “journey from stubborn neutrality to zealous wartime president” (New York Times), as well as on his contradictory (and racist) policies at home. She is less sure-footed, however, in addressing the racism inherent in his dealings in the Caribbean. Perhaps unlike previous works, O’Toole also successfully explores the self-doubt that had long plagued the president and thoroughly addresses the consequences of the series of strokes Wilson suffered. A worthy biography of an idealistic man.

Paul Simon

The Life

By Robert Hilburn

Robert Hilburn, a music critic for the Los Angeles Times from 1970 through 2005, is the author of the biography Johnny Cash: The Life (★★★★★ Jan/ Feb 2014), which the New York Times selected as one of the top 10 books of 2013.

THE TOPIC: Paul Simon, born to Hungarian-Jewish parents in 1941, grew up in Queens. His musician father often criticized young Paul’s efforts. In 1957, Simon and his childhood friend Art Garfunkel, inspired by the Everly Brothers, formed a harmonizing duo. They caught the attention of producers in Manhattan and, in 1957, had a small hit with a Simon-penned song called “Hey, Schoolgirl,” thus earning an appearance on American Bandstand. Simon, then barely 16, was a perfectionist, while Garfunkel was a dreamer; the two were regularly at odds. In the mid-1960s, they skyrocketed to fame with a succession of megahits—“The Sound of Silence,” “Mrs. Robinson,” and “Bridge Over Troubled Water”—before splitting for good. Hilburn chronicles Simon’s solo success and the recording of his album Graceland, in which he declined to honor a U.N. boycott against performing in South Africa.


USA Today ★★★★★

“Paul Simon: The Life is a straight-shooting tour de force. … Ultimately, he’s a man at peace with his complicated past, his honored present, and Hilburn does thorough justice to this American prophet and pop star.” MATT DAMSKER

Seattle Times ★★★★★

“(Hilburn) really makes you want to know what makes this coolly calculating, controlling and ambitious 76-year-old singer-songwriter tick. … Not since Caetano Veloso’s and Dylan’s autobiographies has there been such a detailed discussion of the layered poetic process that lies behind a great song.” PAUL DE BARRIOS

Boston Globe ★★★★★

“Hilburn does best when he moves beyond the role of chronicler and helps readers plumb the depths of Simon’s creative process.” STEVE ALMOND

Times (UK) ★★★★★

“(W)ith Hilburn’s deep understanding and feeling for Simon’s music shining through the pages, this is an illuminating biography that does its subject (a little too) proud. Now, when do we get to read Art Garfunkel: The Life?” WILL HODGKINSON

Washington Post ★★★★★

“[Hilburn’s] thorough, balanced and insistently chronological biography, Paul Simon: The Life, reminds us how titanic this musician is.” SIBBE O’CONNOR

Wall Street Journal ★★★★★

“I am no fan of gossipy books about celebrities, but I wish our author had pushed harder to get behind the facade and tell us not just what Mr. Simon says, but what fuels his many fires.” TED GIOLIA

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Paul Simon, a very private man, long declined to collaborate on a biography. But after he read Hilburn’s Johnny Cash biography, he consented. Hilburn offers extensive analysis of Simon’s lyrics; he’s extremely attentive to the dynamics at play behind the work. The Boston Globe critic found the most striking aspect of the biography to be the extent to which, since Simon’s youth, “self-doubt has both plagued and propelled” him, even after achieving enormous success. That said, some critics question to what extent Simon...
truly opened up in his interviews with Hilburn. The *Times* reviewer suggests that while the book is “not exactly sycophantic,” it is “at the very least extremely generous.” Art Garfunkel was not interviewed for the book and is only quoted from press interviews. Still, a juicy and revealing biography.

**The Recovering**

**Intoxication and Its Aftermath**

By Leslie Jamison


**THE TOPIC:** In her self-described “drunkalog,” Leslie Jamison takes us on a ride through the dark, often exhilarating, days of addiction into an awareness of the vice grip in which alcohol held her. Jamison was very much a high-functioning alcoholic. She graduated from Harvard and attended the Iowa Writers’ Workshop, where she passed her days “reading dead poets and my nights trying to sleep with live ones.” Her role models were the “iconic drunk writers”—John Cheever, John Berryman, Raymond Carver, Denis Johnson—who had also spent time at the workshop and whose drinking she romanticized as “proof of extreme interior weather: volatile and authentic.” She drank, in part, to overcome sometimes debilitating self-doubt, and she found in the bottle the courage to explore, often to disastrous effect. In fits and starts, she emerges from the fog. Jamison intersperses her own story with those of other writers.

*Little, Brown. 544 pages. $30. ISBN: 9780316259613*

**A.V. Club**

“[Jamison has] written a singular, extraordinarily insightful memoir of addiction, one which she might insist is altogether ordinary. That a reader might recognize herself in these pages, familiar as they are, is, of course, part of their power.” LAURA ADAMCZYK

**Entertainment Weekly**

“While Jamison dissects her lifelong battle with alcoholism, she doesn’t merely unpack her history. She summons the legends of literary gods—the iconic writers, like Carver or Denis Johnson, in whose work genius and addiction remain seductively entwined—and elucidates why they so deeply feed her pain, insecurities, and creative spirit.” DAVID CANFIELD

**Minneapolis Star Tribune**

“By turning her attention outward to the stories of others, Jamison understands her own experience in a context larger than the prism of self. *The Recovering* demonstrates what memoir has always assumed: that in the stories of others we find ourselves. It is a magnificent achievement.” SCOTT F. PARKER

**NPR**

“When Jamison writes about drinking and drugs, and later about sobriety, it is the kind of gorgeous and exact writing that only comes from extreme attention, that greater part of love. … The result is long, diligent sections summarizing the trials of people she met in AA or of dead strangers, which are cleanly done but have none of the ‘strange little animals’ of her own story.” ANNA LISA QUINN

**NY Times Book Review**

“Jamison’s prose is strikingly uneven. The writing itself seems tipsy: It can be energetic, colorful, fun, buzzy, affecting and spot on, but also loose, sloppy, digressive and excessively poetized at moments, veering into nebulous grandiosity.” MELANIE THERNSTROM

**Wall Street Journal**

“No matter how bright and self-aware and analytical and ambitious Ms. Jamison is—and she is manifestly and impressively all of those things—she tries far too hard to anticipate and deflect potential criticisms.

**Critical Summary**

Jamison’s prose can be transfixing—“I mashed the lime in my vodka tonic and glimpsed … my life as something illuminated from the inside.” It’s certainly deeply personal, revelatory. “In this astounding triumph” (*Entertainment Weekly*), the author “reveals how myths make us who we are.” Jamison worries that a story of recovery can’t possibly be as compelling as one of crumbling, then illustrates that it can. Her own story, however, is much more riveting than her accounts of others’ experiences or her broader observations. The NPR critic writes that when she reread just the autobiographical segments, she “found a shorter and truer book waiting inside.” Jamison might have probed deeper into her story, including what made the author want to drink in the first place. Jamison’s book, agrees the *New York Times* critic, “falls into that vast category of good books that tantalize the reader with all the ways in which they could have been better.”

**The Perfectionists**

How Precision Engineers Created the Modern World

By Simon Winchester

Simon Winchester is a British journalist and the author of multiple bestselling works of nonfiction, including *Krakatoa* (**July/Aug 2003**), *A Crack in the Edge of the World* (**Jan/Feb 2006**), *The Man Who Loved China* (**Sept/Oct 2008**), and *Atlantic: Great Sea Battles, Heroic Discoveries, Titanic Storms, and a Vast Ocean of a Million Stories* (**Jan/Feb 2011**). In 2006 he was made an Officer of the Order of the
**BOOKMARKS SELECTION**

**Barracoon**
The Story of the Last “Black Cargo”  
By Zora Neale Hurston  

Zora Neale Hurston (1891–1960) was an anthropologist, as well as a novelist. She is best known for *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), but she also published three other novels, two collections of folklore, an autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942), and short stories, plays, and essays. She grew up in Alabama and Florida and graduated from Barnard College in 1927. Completed in 1931, *Barracoon* remained unpublished until now. Literary critic Deborah Plant provides the introduction, and Alice Walker the foreword.  

**The TOPIC:** Between 1927 and 1931, Hurston made several trips to Plateau, Alabama, on an anthropological assignment: interviewing Oluaie Kossola, aka Cudjo Lewis, believed to be the last survivor of the Atlantic slave trade. When she first met him, he was 86, but his memories of being captured from his village in West Africa at age 19, transported on the *Clotilda* via the Middle Passage, and enslaved in the United States were still strong. Freed at the end of the Civil War, he founded the “Africatown” community of *Clotilda* survivors outside Mobile. Hurston conveys Kossola’s story—his childhood memories, his enslavement, and his life afterward—using his own vernacular.  


**NPR**  
“Framing the material, Hurston’s deepening relationship with Kossola helps lend the story additional power. … Short enough to be read in a single sitting, this book is one of those gorgeous, much too fleeting things.” *Jean Zimmerman*  

**Tampa Bay Times**  
“Lewis’ dialect does require some patience from the reader, but it soon becomes familiar. And the story he tells Hurston rewards that patience, although it’s often horrifying and heartbreaking.” *Colette Bancroft*  

**Vox**  
“*Barracoon* is both a historical document and an astonishing literary accomplishment, an unapologetic rendering of a voice that shows us the wound and does not hide from it. … Kossola’s story is recognizably his own, but Hurston has a novelist’s eye for the telling detail that builds character and the rhythms that create story.” *Constance Grady*  

**Washington Post**  
“Hurston, renowned for her joie de vivre, is restrained as she coaxes this story from the loneliest man in the world. … While technically *Barracoon* can be categorized as a slave narrative, Kossola tells the story of his life as a free man.” *Tayari Jones*  

**Smithsonian**  
“A man who lived across one century and two continents, Kossola’s life was marked, repeatedly and relentlessly, by loss: of his homeland, of his humanity, of his given name, of his family. For decades, his full story, from his perspective and in his voice, was also lost, but with the publication of *Barracoon*, it is rightfully restored.” *Anna Diamond*  

**Critical SUMMARY**  
“*Barracoon*, from the Spanish for “barracks,” refers to the pens in which enslaved Africans were held before their journey across the Atlantic. To capture the horrors of that experience, Hurston submerged herself in Kossola’s everyday life, and her efforts paid off. “Brimming with observational detail from a man whose life spanned continents and eras” (NPR), the book is a striking account of slavery and its aftermath. Hurston’s publisher was worried that the dialect in her book (sample: “My people in Affick you unnerstand me, dey not rich”) would put off some readers, but she refused to change it, and, during the Great Depression the manuscript fell into obscurity. The story it tells is “devastating, but Hurston’s success in bringing it to light is a marvel” (NPR).  

British Empire. Winchester now lives in New York and on a small farm in the Berkshires.  

**THE TOPIC:** Precision engineering designs machines and structures that are highly reliable and create reproducible results. Winchester dates the discipline back to the 19th-century discovery of steam power, courtesy of James Watt (1736–1819) and John Wilkinson (1728–1808). Their work helped fuel the Industrial Revolution and, ultimately, all the technology we rely on today, including GPS, microchips, airplanes, and automobiles. Winchester mixes the history of science with fragments of his own story. His father was a precision engineer, and he encountered the products of precision engineering when he was a young geologist on a North Sea oil rig. Some of the inventors he profiles include the Intel founder and the men behind Rolls Royce. Throughout, Winchester asks questions about the importance of precision and the ways it has changed our lives.  


**BookPage**  
“The book’s complicated scientific explanations have the potential to be tedious (at least to nonengineers like me), but Winchester’s prose is engaging. … [W]hat remains with me are the stories from Winchester’s life, as well as those of the men (yes, almost all men) who measured, tinkered and persevered to build, for better or worse, our ultraprecision-driven world.” *Sarah McCraw Crow*  

**Kirkus**  
“Winchester tells the story of a series
of increasingly impressive inventions, usually introduced by a journalistic ‘hook’ to engage readers—e.g., an account of an explosion aboard the world’s largest commercial airliner in 2010 precedes his history of the jet engine. … Less a work of scholarship than an enthusiastic popular-science tour of technological marvels, and readers will love the ride.”

Publishers Weekly ★★★★
“Winchester … smoothly mixes history, science, and biographical sketches to pay homage to the work of precision engineers, whom he credits with the creation of everything from unpickable locks to gravity wave detectors and the Hubble Telescope. … Winchester’s latest is a rollicking work of pop science that entertains and informs.”

Christian Science Monitor ★★★★
“Winchester is a champion humanizer; it’s the foremost of his many writing skills. He sifts through the historical record, builds impressive bibliographies, and then crafts it all into three-dimensional characters. … The story Winchester tells is one of steady, almost inexorably increasing complexity, and this can make the book’s later sections heavier going for the lay reader.” STEVE DONOGHUE

NY Times Book Review ★★★★
“It might be difficult to accept the notion that there was such a ‘precise’ turning point in our history, but Winchester makes a convincing case. … Interestingly, Winchester also discusses the social implications of precision on assembly lines.” ROMA AGRAWAL

**Critical Summary**
Winchester’s latest is a typically “entertaining narrative” based on an “ingenious argument” (Kirkus)—that steam power enabled precision engineering and led to the Industrial Revolution, thus paving the way for modern technology. Although the author does regret that the work of individual craftsmen has become less prominent in the automation age, he believes there is a certain beauty to precision engineering. For instance, when he considers Japan’s Seiko Watch Company in one of the later chapters, he sees how “craft and precision [can] work side by side” (BookPage). The critics applauded the “narrative skill” that makes “even the most arcane of technical specifics smoothly comprehensible in context” (Christian Science Monitor). Winchester writes accessible and diverting nonfiction that draws laypeople in. ■

Belzhar (2014)

When Jamaica (Jam) Gallahue’s boyfriend dies, she is sent to a rustic Vermont boarding school for “emotionally fragile, highly intelligent students.” Handpicked to attend a legendary class called “Special Topics in English,” she meets the handsome Griffin; Sierra, an African American dancer; Marc, a natural-born leader; and Casey, new to a wheelchair—each with his or her own tragic story. Soon, the class is reading Sylvia Plath’s The Bell Jar and writing in journals. But as their journal writing takes them to surprising alternate realities (dubbed “Belzhar”), Jam and her friends must grow emotionally by learning to leave the past behind. “Wolitzer melds the power of confessional writing, Plath’s legacy, and the internal worlds of teenagers in this unusual gem of a novel” (Entertainment Weekly). (★★★★) Nov/Dec 2012 ■

**continued from page 26**

mental dexterity and linguistic ballet” (New York Times Book Review).

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Pioneer Girl
The Annotated Autobiography
By Laura Ingalls Wilder and Pamela Smith-Hill, Editor

Wilder’s memoir forms the basis for her Little House books. The stories are familiar, but the annotation is remarkable and certainly adds to Laura’s story.

The Children’s Blizzard
By David Laskin

Laskin tells the story of a monstrous blizzard on January 12, 1888, which caught the settlers of the Great Plains utterly by surprise, with warm temperatures in the morning and the raging chaos of horizontal snow and hurricane-force winds in the afternoon.

The Long Winter
By Laura Ingalls Wilder

Although this Little House book takes place in Dakota Territory, not Kansas, the blizzards and survival strategies were the same. A childhood favorite.

Prairie Fires
The American Dreams of Laura Ingalls Wilder
By Caroline Fraser

What Kansas-born girl doesn’t read all there is to know about the writer of the iconic Little House books? Fraser adds 19th-century historical context to the stories, making this a good inclusion in my list. It won the 2018 Pulitzer Prize. ■
NOTABLE FICTION

A Thousand Acres
By Jane Smiley
* PULITZER PRIZE

Buried family secrets and sibling rivalries emerge when the elderly patriarch, Larry Cook, decides to turn over his large Iowa farm to two of his three daughters.

All the Pretty Horses
By Cormac McCarthy
* NATIONAL BOOK AWARD

In the first novel in the Border Trilogy, teenage John Grady Cole and Lacey Rawlins leave their Texas home on horseback in 1948, cross the Rio Grande, pick up Jimmy Blevins, and arrive at a hacienda in Mexico.

The English Patient
By Michael Ondaatje
* BOOKER PRIZE

The young nurse Hana, a nameless and supposedly English burn victim, the thief Caravaggio, and the Sikh sapper Kip come together at an Italian villa during the final days of World War II and cope with their losses.

Sacred Hunger
By Barry Unsworth
* BOOKER PRIZE

In the 18th century, a cotton speculator’s nephew leads a shipboard revolt that strands both crew and slaves in Florida. They then attempt to establish a society based on utopian principles and racial equality.

EDGAR AWARD
A DANCE AT THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE: A MATTHEW SCUDDER CRIME NOVEL | LAWRENCE BLOCK
HUGO AWARD BARRAYAR | LOIS MCMASTER BUJOLD
NEBULA AWARD DOOMSDAY BOOK | CONNIE WILLIS
NEWBERY MEDAL SHILOH | PHYLLIS REYNOLDS NAYLOR

NOTABLE NONFICTION

PULITZER PRIZE
THE PRIZE: THE EPIC QUEST FOR OIL, MONEY, AND POWER | DANIEL YERGIN
NATIONAL BOOK AWARD FOR NONFICTION
BECOMING A MAN: HALFWAY LIFE STORY | PAUL MONETTE

New York Times Best Sellers
July 19, 1992
DIANA: HER TRUE STORY | ANDREW MORTON (3 WEEKS ON LIST)
THE SILENT PASSAGE | GAIL SHEEHY (8)
TRUMAN | DAVID MCCULLOUGH (5)
SAM WATSON: MADE IN AMERICA | SAM WATSON AND JOHN HUEY (4)
DIANA IN PRIVATE: THE PRINCESS NOBODY KNOWS | LADY COLIN CAMPBELL (8)
A BRILLIANT MADNESS: LIVING WITH MANIC DEPRESSIVE ILLNESS | PATTY DUKE AND GLORIA HOCHMAN (3)
HEAD TO HEAD: THE COMING ECONOMIC BATTLE AMONG JAPAN, EUROPE, AND AMERICA | LESTER THUROW (11)
PEROT: AN UNAUTHORIZED BIOGRAPHY | TODD MASON (7)
ACQUIRED TASTES | PETER MAYLE (5)
LINCOLN AT GETTYSBURG: THE WORDS THAT REMADE AMERICA | GARRY WILLS (1)

Other Notables
THE SECRET HISTORY | DONNA TARTT
SHE’S COME UNDONE | WALLY LAMB
SNOW CRASH | NEAL STEPHENSON
DOLORES CLAIBORNE | STEPHEN KING
THE BRIDGES OF MADISON COUNTY | ROBERT JAMES WALLER
DOOMSDAY BOOK | CONNIE WILLIS
BASTARD OUT OF CAROLINA | DOROTHY ALISON
WHEN NIETZSCHE WEPT | IRVIN D. YALOM
SMILLA’S SENSE OF SNOW | PETER HØEG
THE PATRON SAINT OF LIARS | ANN PATCHETT
THE BROTHERS K | DAVID JAMES DUNCAN
A GOOD SCENT FROM A STRANGE MOUNTAIN | ROBERT OLEN BUTLER

Lit Year in Review

Derek Walcott (Saint Lucia, 1930–) wins the Nobel Prize for Literature “for a poetical oeuvre of great luminosity, sustained by a historical vision, the outcome of a multicultural commitment.” … The English satirical magazine Punch ends after 151 years of publication. … The Color Purple is challenged in North Carolina schools for its depictions of rape. … Libraries and schools across the United States celebrate 500 years of Christopher Columbus’s “discovery” of America with readings about cultural diversity. … R. L. Stine’s Goosebumps horror series for children is first published in the United States. … The Los Angeles riots spur dozens of novels, nonfiction accounts, and children’s books.
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