

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



Evvie Drake Starts Over

By Linda Holmes



Linda Holmes is a pop-culture correspondent for National Public Radio and the host of the podcast *Pop Culture Happy Hour*. She previously wrote for *New York* magazine online, *TV Guide*, and the website *Television Without Pity*.

Evvie Drake Starts Over is her debut novel.

THE STORY: Eveleth “Evvie” Drake, 33, lives in the coastal town of Calcasset, Maine, married to her high school sweetheart. To the neighbors, Evvie appears to have a tranquil life. But, within the walls of her home, she suffers abuse. On the day she’s finally found the resolve to leave her husband, he dies in a car accident. Evvie plays the role expected of her, that of the grieving widow. But she longs to redefine her life, herself—to buck expectations. A friend suggests that Evvie rent part of her rambling home to a childhood friend of his, Dean Tenney, a former New York Yankee pitcher, whose career has abruptly ended and who longs to escape the New York City media. Evvie and Dean haven’t a clue about what’s to become of their lives. Friendship ensues; then something more.

Ballantine Books. 304 pages. \$26. ISBN: 9780525619246

Hypable ★★★★★

“Evvie Drake Starts Over was one of the most satisfying reads I’ve picked up in several years. These characters and this story are going to stick with me for a long while.” BRITTANY LOVELY

Kirkus ★★★★★

“Holmes writes with an easy warmth about kind people who are trying their best but messing things up anyway. Characters speak to each other with

natural but hilarious dialogue, making their conversations a joy to read.”

Shelf Awareness ★★★★★

“Evvie Drake Starts Over, ripe with amusing wit and charm, skillfully explores regret and longing, friendship, love and forgiveness, and the challenges posed by reinvention. Strong characterizations and short, well-plotted scenes are filled with clever banter.” KATHLEEN GERARD

USA Today ★★★★★

“[A] nuanced, extraordinarily ordinary adult love story that is as romantic as it is real. ... With the effortlessly enjoyable Evvie Drake Starts Over Holmes proves herself a natural novelist.” MARY CADDEN

Entertainment Weekly ★★★★★

“[Holmes] fills her debut with wry humor, romance, and just enough edge to make you buy into her gentle fantasy.” LEAH GREENBLATT

Washington Post ★★★

“[T]his is escapism at its finest, focused on two people who have had an abrupt change in plans and must forge a path forward. And, inevitably, it’s a love story. The kind you can slip in and out of reading, as you would a pool, and still find yourself totally immersed.” JULIE DEPENBROCK

CRITICAL SUMMARY

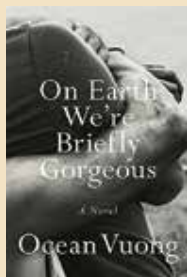
At least a few critics approached *Evvie Drake Starts Over* with trepidation, on high-cliché alert. But Holmes won over the majority. The *Hypable* reviewer writes that the author plunges her protagonists into the “icy waters of reality,” delivering a “shocking and refreshing” reminder that there’s “a darkness inside every place and inside every person.” Being a love story, *USA Today* notes, the novel dutifully delivers “flirtatious moments that will bring a blushing smile to the faces of the sappiest romantics”—but the novel also mixes in these moments with the mundane ones of life. Above all, Holmes writes with an understanding of “what makes people hurt and pine, and the forces that ultimately conspire to encourage them to pick up, dust off and start again” (*Shelf Awareness*).

BOOKMARKS SELECTION



On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous

By Ocean Vuong



Ocean Vuong, who was born in Vietnam, is an assistant professor in the MFA program at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. His debut poetry collection, *Night Sky with Exit Wounds*, garnered numerous awards and was named a *New York Times* Top Ten Book of 2016. Vuong has received fellowships from the Poetry Foundation, the Lannan Foundation, the Civitella Ranieri Foundation, the

Elizabeth George Foundation, the Academy of American Poets, as well as the Pushcart Prize. *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* is his debut novel.

THE STORY: Little Dog, a young man born in Vietnam and raised in Connecticut, writes a letter to his illiterate mother. Knowing that she cannot read it frees Little Dog to delve deeply into his past to understand his traumatic history. In a stream of memories, Little Dog revisits the violence inflicted on his grandmother and his biracial mother in the Vietnam War; the abuse his mother inflicted on him as a result of PTSD; the pain she endured working in low-paying nail salons in America to support her impoverished family; his grandmother's stories, schizophrenia, and eventual bone cancer; the bullies Little Dog faced before realizing his homosexuality; and the all-American but drug-fueled and conflicted teen with whom Little Dog discovered his sexuality one summer and whose loss Little Dog suffers.

Penguin. 256 pages. \$26. ISBN: 9780525562023

Washington Post



"[W]ith his radical approach to form and his daring mix of personal reflection, historical recollection and sexual exploration, Vuong is surely a literary descendant of the author of *Leaves of Grass*. ... At times, the tension between Little Dog's passion and his concern seems to explode the very structure of the traditional narrative, and the pages break apart into the lines of an evocative prose poem—not so much briefly gorgeous as permanently stunning."

RON CHARLES

Boston Globe



"With *Briefly Gorgeous*, Vuong delivers an overall striking portrait of a boy growing up in a world in ruins, before making an escape from it that leaves him profoundly uneasy." MICHAEL UPCHURCH

Los Angeles Times



"The novel is expansive and introspective, fragmented and dreamlike, a coming of age tale conveyed in images and anecdotes and explorations. ... *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* is a book of sustained beauty and lyricism, earnest and relentless, a series of high notes that trembles exquisitely almost without break." STEPH

CHA

Minneapolis Star Tribune



"Ocean Vuong's debut novel, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, illuminates lives that at first glance might seem anything but gorgeous: those of people on the edges of society, struggling with mental illness, PTSD, various forms of trauma and addiction. But in Vuong's lyrical prose, beauty and pain are intertwined in the memories of the narrator, a young Vietnamese refugee in America called Little Dog." MAY-LEE CHAI

NY Times Book Review



"Vuong beautifully evokes this boy's seductive power over Little Dog: This is some of the most moving writing I've read about two boys experimenting together (and reader, I've read a lot). The sex here is good because it feels honest, messy, joyous, awkward, painful." JUSTIN TORRES

San Francisco Chronicle



"An epistolary novel has a tricky framework, but for Vuong, an award-winning poet, it's a platform of extraordinary imagery, carefully parsed relationships and intense prose. He's a writer with the patience and skill to develop a cast of complex characters, one who knows how to take on timely themes—the opioid crisis, anti-immigrant bigotry—in a way that never feels forced." KEVIN CANFIELD

USA Today



"There is no diagrammable plot here, no villains, no clear conflict. Vuong is pushing the boundaries of the novel form, reshaping the definition to fit the contours of his restless poetic exploration, using language to capture consciousness and being." BARBARA

VANDENBURGH

Guardian (UK)



It's more problematic when the flow of the story is freighted with too much of a different kind of writing: an explicit commentary on the meaning of what's happening, or a sort of choric lyrical lamenting between scenes. Part of the problem may come with the framing device: because the novel is addressed to Rose, who can't read it, it's aimed too much rhetorically at the unresponsive air."

TESSA HADLEY

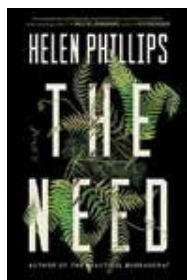
CRITICAL SUMMARY

Favorably compared to James Baldwin and Walt Whitman, Vuong receives high praise for his experimental, semiautobiographical, and poetic novel. Here, he drives the plot not through action but through "the rhythms of its prose and the associative logic of its narrator's memories" (*Boston Globe*). While the subject matter of the novel is, for the most part, dark, the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* concludes that the novel is "ultimately a celebration of the love, however flawed and fleeting, that threads all the characters' lives together." Some critics briefly note that Vuong's writing is, on occasion, "clumsy or cloying" (*Los Angeles Times*) and "disappointingly bland" (*San Francisco Chronicle*). Ultimately, however, Vuong successfully pushes the boundaries of the novel, creating "a riot of feeling and sensation" (*USA Today*).



The Need

By Helen Phillips



Author of five books, Helen Phillips has received numerous accolades, including the John Gardner Fiction Book Award (for 2016's *Some Possible Solutions*), a

Rona Jaffe Foundation Writers' Award, the Italo Calvino Prize in Fabulist Fiction, and more. Her novel *The Beautiful Bureaucrat* (★★★★ Nov/Dec 2015) was a *New York Times* Notable Book. A graduate of Yale and the Brooklyn College MFA program, Phillips is an associate professor at Brooklyn College.

THE STORY: One night, while her husband is away, Molly, an overwhelmed paleobotanist and mother of two young children, discovers a masked intruder in her home. The intruder's surreal familiarity and, eventually, his identity unsettles Molly. In her exhausted and possibly mentally unbalanced state, Molly becomes increasingly driven by fear to keep her children safe, while she carries out the everyday tasks of motherhood: breastfeeding, planning birthday parties, caring for the bodies of small people. At the same time, the pit that Molly excavates reveals bizarre artifacts—such as a Coca Cola bottle in the wrong font—which might be pranks or evidence of something far stranger. And they begin to attract disturbing attention.

Simon & Schuster. 272 pages. \$26. ISBN: 9781982113162

Boston Globe ★★★★★

"Between chills, readers will notice the pleasures of Phillip's prose. Her style combines the sensibility of a poet with the forward drive of a thriller." ANN HARLEMAN

Entertainment Weekly ★★★★★

"[W]hat presents at first as a straightforward thriller is quickly revealed—in a series of short, sharp chapters—to be a sort of narrative

nesting doll, a story infused with both essential home truths and a wild, almost unhinged sense of unreality. ... Even as the book takes an unsettling turn toward the supernatural, a glassy *Black Mirror* shimmer on the plot, *The Need* never abandons its domesticity." LEAH GREENBLATT

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★

"Phillips favors a succession of rapid-fire chapters, some only a few sentences long, and at several points the timeline breaks up so that each new section requires a significant recalibration. ... Molly may be wrestling with the big existential questions (the irreconcilable tidal pull of her rival identities) but she's doing this while finding peas in the freezer, organizing an ocean-themed birthday party, wrangling kids in the grocery store." HARRIET LANE

Publishers Weekly ★★★★★

"Structured in brief, sharply focused segments that shift back and forth in time, the novel interrogates the nature of the self, the powers and terrors of parenting, and the illusions of chronology. Yet it's also chock-full of small moments—some scary, some tender, some darkly witty—that ground its cerebral themes in a sharply observed evocation of motherhood."

San Francisco Chronicle ★★★★★

"Following that initial sound Molly encounters, the rest of the book, paced out in short, rapid-fire chapters, plays out as a taut thriller. A threat to her children does ultimately manifest, but from an unsettling and unexpected place, as the story eventually takes genre-bending turns." BRANDON YU

Washington Post ★★★★★

"Molly's struggle to remain her full self while giving so much of herself away is electrifying." BETHANNE PATRICK

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Touted as a "sparse, eerie marvel of a novel, both beautifully familiar and profoundly strange" (*Entertainment Weekly*), *The Need* is much more than a conventional thriller. Phillips has a poet's eye for language, and she deftly captures the physicality of child rearing and the strange dichotomy of the joy and the servitude of motherhood.

Nonparents or those who have forgotten the early years of child rearing may be mystified, for a bit, but the *Washington Post* notes that "Phillips has found a way to make these experiences universal." The novel, darkly funny, also maintains suspense, as it veers into speculative and philosophical ground. "With its crossover appeal to lovers of thriller, science fiction, and literary fiction, this story showcases an extraordinary writer at her electrifying best" (*Publishers Weekly*).



The Unpassing

By Chia-Chia Lin



Chia-Chia Lin, who graduated from Harvard College and the Iowa Writers' Workshop, lives in the San Francisco Bay area. Her stories have appeared in *The*

Paris Review and other literary journals. *The Unpassing* is her debut novel.

THE STORY: In 1986, meningitis strikes a Taiwanese American family living in rural Alaska. Youngest sister Ruby dies; when 10-year-old Gavin wakes up from his temporary coma, he is wracked with guilt at passing the illness onto her. His mother wants to take the three surviving children back to Taiwan, but his father, who drills wells for a living, resists the move. The family's situation goes from bad to worse, when the father is sued after a child is poisoned by a well he installed. Though he swears he did nothing wrong, the family goes on the run, living in their truck or squatting in their empty house, as winter sets in.

Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 288 pages. \$26. ISBN: 9780374279363

AV Club ★★★★★

"What *The Unpassing* does is so brutal yet intensely immersive that questioning Lin's choices feels like asking for a novel far less authentic. ... It's brutal, but marvelous. The prose is so sparse that it feels designed to

BOOKMARKS SELECTION



Fleishman Is in Trouble

By Taffy Brodesser-Akner



Taffy Brodesser-Akner, an American journalist, has written celebrity profiles for *GQ* and currently writes for the *New York Times*. Her profiles have earned her three New York Press Club awards and a Mirror Award, and the *Columbia Journalism Review* deemed her “one of the nation’s most successful freelance writers.” *Fleishman Is in Trouble* is her debut novel.

THE STORY: Toby Fleishman, a 41-year-old doctor, has recently divorced his wife, Rachel. Narrated by his college friend, Libby, the novel explores Toby’s life and plight. Toby would have everyone believe that he tended their two children, while Rachel cultivated her career as a top Manhattan talent agent and climbed the Upper East Side’s social ladder. Now single, Toby dabbles in dating apps, only to be delightfully surprised to find his phone afire with the texts, cleavage and crotch pictures, and emojis of the modern dating world. Then Rachel drops off the children for his weekend custody and simply disappears in what Toby sees as another example of her selfishness. As the novel progresses, however, Libby’s perspective begins to shift. Is everything as it appears to Toby? Or are there pitfalls to being a talented, ambitious woman today?

Random House. 374 pages. \$27. ISBN 9780525510871

NPR



“The great trick of *Fleishman Is in Trouble* is it cons the reader into siding with Toby. Brodesser-Akner demonstrates how women get suckered into acquiescing to misogyny by suckering both narrator and reader—then showing us what she’s done.” LILY MEYER

Washington Post



“Taffy Brodesser-Akner brings to her first novel the currency of a hot dating app and the wisdom of a Greek tragedy. The result is a feminist jeremiad nested inside a brilliant comic novel—a book that makes you laugh so hard you don’t notice till later that your eyebrows have been singed off.” RON CHARLES

Entertainment Weekly



“Brodesser-Akner ... aims a perfect gimlet eye at the city’s relentless self-regard—the women with their aggressively botulized foreheads and tank-top spirituality, the status symbols that signal nothing and everything in their Darwinian social world. But her best trick may be the novel’s narrator.” LEAH GREENBLATT

describe Alaska, and Alaska alone.” KAMIL

AHSAN

Los Angeles Times



“Lin excels when she gets small, with finely observed renderings of the family’s surroundings. ... The way this chilling,

Huffington Post



“Without flattening her subjects, she locates the stakes of their quotidian dramas and the hidden tensions of their seemingly controlled lives, transforming something unremarkable into something textured, absorbing, and darkly funny. When [Brodesser-Akner] writes a book about modern heterosexual marriage, you don’t roll your eyes; you clear your schedule.” CLAIRE

FALLON

Minneapolis Star Tribune



“*Fleishman Is in Trouble* is funny, yes, but also savage, landing blows with efficient and deadly precision, fearless in its ravaging of gender double standards, the inequities of modern marriage and the bewildering intersection of sex and technology.” CONNIE OGLE

New York Times



“In her witty and well-observed debut ... Taffy Brodesser-Akner updates the miserable-matrimony novel, dropping it squarely in our times, where a husband complains that his wife sees him as ‘a blinking cursor awaiting her instructions,’ and extramarital affairs involve emojis. The most significant adjustment, however, is to focus on the left-behind spouse and to make it the husband.” TOM

RACHMAN

New Yorker



“The book channels Tom Wolfe’s fiction—the gonzo, swooshy sentences, the satirical edge—and Roth is everywhere, too. ... And yet there is, in the end, a redemption at work, achieved not by novelty—the surprise of perspective—but by old-fashioned insight.” KATY WALDMAN

Rolling Stone



“*Fleishman Is in Trouble* will occasionally make you angry at the things the people in it do, but mostly it will make you hungry for whatever Brodessa-Akner is going to write next.” ALAN SEPINWALL

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Brodesser-Akner has written a brilliant novel about how we don’t see women for who they really are. “[I]n one gut-punching paragraph after another,” writes the *Washington Post*, “is the articulate fury of someone who once dared to imagine that her ambition could be expressed and appreciated.” Brodessa-Akner is an accomplished stylist, who writes with wit and who knows when to withhold information to keep the reader turning the pages. The narrator, too, is something else—she “turns out to be both the book’s Trojan horse and—in a brilliant third-act pivot—its greatest gift, transforming a fizzy comedy of manners into something genuinely, unexpectedly profound” (*Entertainment Weekly*). The result is an astute sociological study in our relationships and gender roles, and, opines NPR, “a maddening, unsettling masterpiece.”

captivating book concludes will delight as much as it challenges, offering as it does a blend of escape, tragedy, triumph, loss and what we’ve expected all along.” NATHAN DEUEL

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★
"If the novel seems unrelentingly cheerless at times, its tone reflects Gavin's struggle to come to terms with his family's particular history of displacement and loss. ... For all of its pathos, its themes of cross-cultural intermingling, its stories of immigrant arrival, marginalization and eventual accommodation, *The Unpassing* is a singularly vast and captivating novel, beautifully written in free-flowing prose that quietly disarms with its intermittent moments of poetic idiosyncrasy." BRIAN HAMAN

Washington Post ★★★★★
"Lin's attention to detail is startling, and though she keeps close to Gavin's childhood experience, she also allows us to read between the lines and intuit the depth of the family's grief, financial straits and fear of belittlement from their white neighbors and colleagues. Anyone who has ever grieved—be it the loss of a person, home, country or security—will feel a sense of recognition." ILANA MASAD

Kirkus ★★★
"The book's main mood is one of intense suffocation: Gavin's family is completely unable to communicate, and events pile up, disjointed and without explanation. The family doesn't belong, the novel makes achingly, physically explicit: not to the community, where they stick out because of their race and lack of money, and not to the land, which is unwelcoming to any form of life."

CRITICAL SUMMARY

This beautiful and "remarkable, unflinching" (*Washington Post*) novel is told mainly from Gavin's perspective, as he looks back from adulthood at the disasters that struck his family when he was a child. Pei-Pei, his older sister, supplies nuances he might have missed out on because of his youth at the time. The multiple points of view create a well-rounded picture of people in desperate straits, and Alaska works perfectly as a barren setting for a fateful story: "Lin takes full advantage of the sheer scale of Alaska and the immigrant family's isolation" (*AV Club*). It's a striking tale of the American dream gone wrong. Don't expect a

happy ending; do expect "an arresting approach" (*AV Club*) and, the *Kirkus* reviewer notes, an "[u]nremittingly bleak" story.



Very Nice

By Marcy Dermansky



Marcy Dermansky's previous novels are *Twins* (2005), *Bad Marie* (2010), and *The Red Car* (2016).

The recipient of a Smallmouth Press Andre Dubus Novella Award and

a *Story* magazine Carson McCullers short story prize, she lives in Montclair, New Jersey.

THE STORY: Rachel Klein is an MFA student at a liberal arts college on the Hudson River. She's fallen for her creative writing professor, Zahid Azzam, and offers to dogsit for him, while he returns to Pakistan to visit his dying grandmother. Rachel brings the poodle with her to the glamorous family home in Connecticut, to stay with her mother, Becca, for the summer. Rachel's father, Jonathan, recently left. When Zahid returns for the dog, he falls in love with Becca, which makes for an awkward love triangle. These three characters, plus Jonathan and Khloe, the lesbian financial analyst who's subletting Zahid's Brooklyn apartment, take turns narrating the scandalous, humorous antics involving them all.

Knopf. 304 pages. \$25.95. ISBN: 9780525655633

NPR ★★★★★
"The inspirational model for *Very Nice* is less literary than Murakami [the model for Dermansky's previous novel] but no less popular: soap opera. ... But beneath the fun, *Very Nice* is a scathing portrait of a culture in which self-interest overrides duty and loyalty." HELLER MCALPIN

Publishers Weekly ★★★★★
"Bouncing between points of view, Dermansky confines herself to snappy, brisk paragraphs and short sentences, with

much of the psychic action between the lines. Her sharp satire spares none of the characters and teeters brilliantly on the edge of comedy and tragedy."

Washington Post ★★★★★
"I think the author means to delight us with a love triangle, then redirect our attention to the various subplots and digressions that allow her to ruminate on identity, art, violence and our current politics. ... While not profound, necessarily, this is a more serious book than it might seem at first glance." RUMAAN ALAM

Kirkus ★★★★★
"All the characters sound the same—like Dermansky, except with more or less profanity—and that seems to be intentional. ... This may not be the best thing she's ever written—it doesn't have the sneaky profundity of *The Red Car*—but it's a hell of a lot of stylish fun."

Minneapolis Star Tribune ★★★★★
"With an impressively light touch, Dermansky pokes considerable fun at the literary world, from authors who are asked their opinion on the best bath products for writers to the unspoken suggestion that the wealthy are freer to pursue a career in the arts than those of lesser means. The novel builds to a conclusion that may be too broad for some readers." MICHAEL MAGRAS

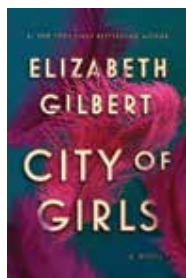
CRITICAL SUMMARY

A sexy read set mostly in and around a swimming pool, *Very Nice* appears to be the perfect book to pack for a beach vacation. But the critics took it more seriously than the soap opera basics of the plot might seem to warrant. Dermansky is a writer's writer, and there are lots of creative-writing in-jokes here. Short sentences make the story zip along, and all of the characters speak in the same straightforward, slightly flippant manner. Finding a moral underneath the hedonistic behavior may take a little digging, and the critics were divided about the ending, but the novel still makes for "a tart lemonade of a summer read" (NPR). Or, as the case may be, a fall read.



City of Girls

By Elizabeth Gilbert



Elizabeth Gilbert was a journalist and a short story writer before she tried her hand at longer fiction and nonfiction, including her 2006 memoir *Eat, Pray, Love: One*

Woman's Search for Everything Across Italy, India, and Indonesia (★★★★ May/June 2006), which sold over 10 million copies; *Committed: A Skeptic Makes Peace with Marriage* (★★★★ Mar/Apr 2010); and her novel *The Signature of All Things* (★★★★ Jan/Feb 2014).

THE STORY: After flunking out of Vassar, 19-year-old Vivian Morris is sent by her affluent parents to live in Manhattan with her Aunt Peg. It's 1940, and Vivian is thrust into a new cast of characters at her aunt's theater, the Lily Playhouse. She befriends showgirls, actors, and writers and when the Playhouse finally has a successful show (the titular *City of Girls*), she becomes the costume seamstress. Her existence remains effervescent and glittering—until a threesome turns into a professional scandal and Vivian must carve out a new kind of life and freedom. Now, Vivian is 89 and sharing her story with the daughter of a former lover. Finally, she is able to confront and to understand just how those years changed the rest of her life, and what that means for who she became.

Riverhead Books. 480 pages. \$28. ISBN: 9781594634734

Independent (UK) ★★★★★

"Gilbert revels in bringing to life the world of New York City theatre in the Forties, with Vivian's love of fashion making for vivid descriptions of everyone's outfits and costumes. ... There's something slightly reminiscent of Forrest Gump in Vivian's tale, in that you truly get to know a character when you see them through several decades." CLÉMENCE MICHALLON

Minneapolis Star Tribune ★★★★★

"Hung over and carefree, she stumbles through the city's salacious nightlife offerings with little consequence—an absence of conflict that grows increasingly problematic for the novel, as the pastiche of drinks and clubs begins to merge and become indistinct. When there are truly terrible moments, Vivian is always protected, whether by Celia, Peg or her continuous flow of good luck." JACKIE THOMAS-KENNEDY

USA Today ★★★★★

"Gilbert is sharply wonderful in these scenes where women take pleasure without shame, reveling in 'the delicious blinding yearnings of the young' ... After spending nearly 300 pages on one year, the novel now picks up speed, covering years to come in Vivian's life where there are fewer sequins, more regrets." EMILY GRAY

TEDROWE

NPR ★★★★★

"Gilbert pulls off a breezy, entertaining read—and really, something better: a lively, effervescent, and sexy portrait of a woman living in a golden time. We just have to get past the somewhat ponderous, overly familiar framing device—an ancient but still loquacious crone who looks back on her life and tells the tale to an eager listener." JEAN ZIMMERMAN

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★

"Vivian's rambling recollections eventually reveal a hidden coherence: The novel turns out to be the self-portrait of a woman whose truest intimacy is with her own being. ... It's not a simple-minded polemic about sexual freedom and not an operatic downer; rather, it's the story of a conflicted, solitary woman who's made an independent life as best she can." DAVID GATES

San Francisco Chronicle ★★★★★

"For those new to Gilbert's work, some of the most dramatic moments in the novel may feel overly mechanistic. ... Still, the lush prose and firm belief in love that suffuses *City of Girls* will be a cool place to hide out as we enter a heated summer season of contentious presidential politics." MARIE MUTSUKI MOCKETT

Washington Post ★★★

"The best and worst thing that can be said about *City of Girls* is that it's perfectly pleasant, the kind of book one wouldn't mind finding in a vacation condo during a rainy week. In exchange for a series of diverting adventures, it demands only stamina from its readers." RON CHARLES

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Gilbert's prose is gorgeous, her setting is meticulously researched, and the dialogue—in its best moments—bubbles over with wit and charm. Still, *City of Girls* has some weaknesses: the length, the pacing, and the plotting. Even though critics noted that the novel improved as it progressed and had a surprisingly touching ending, they balked at its heft; one reviewer suggested lopping off nearly 200 pages to tighten it up. Vivian, while complex, is often flitting about without conflict or consequence (unless something truly terrible happens), and her most important decisions are often unconvincing. Yet as the *Independent* wrote, "Coming-of-age stories which centre on female protagonists are still a relatively rare thing, and a celebrated treat. With *City of Girls*, Gilbert adds a valuable contribution to the genre—and shows that she's as gifted a novelist, as she is a memoirist."



The Gone Dead

By Chanelle Benz



Chanelle Benz, who lives in Memphis, teaches at Rhodes College and has received an O. Henry Prize. Her previous book was the short story collection *The Man*

Who Shot Out My Eye Is Dead (2017), which won the 2018 Sergio Troncoso Award for Best First Fiction and was longlisted for the 2018 PEN/Robert Bingham Prize for Debut Fiction. This is her first novel.

THE STORY: Billie James, 34, has inherited a shack in Greendale, Missis-

issippi, that belonged to her father, Cliff; he was a celebrated African American poet who died in 1972, when Billie was just four. She was raised mostly by her white mother, Pia. It's 2003 when Billie returns—with a dog and a gun—to the Mississippi Delta to move into the shack and visit her father's old acquaintances to try to learn the truth about his death. Her parents faced prejudice for their interracial relationship, and Billie finds that, even decades after the Civil Rights movement, the barriers between rich and poor and white and black communities seem as rigid as ever.

Ecco. 304 pages. \$26.99. ISBN: 9780062490698

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★
"The author excels at capturing authentic turns of phrase, but the book really shines in its exploration of other characters. Sections carried by Lola, Carlotta, Jim McGee and even Avalon, an old juke joint Billie's father used to frequent, showcase Benz's ability to assume a vast array of distinct, heartfelt voices, her knack for understanding and revealing complex human behavior." MARGARET WILKERSON SEXTON

Publishers Weekly ★★★★★
"Just as discovering the truth of Billie's father's death is not enough to satisfy the novel's characters, there are no easy answers for readers, who will be haunted by the lingering effects of injustice. A beautiful and devastating portrait of the modern South, this book will linger in the minds of readers."

Washington Post ★★★★★
"Reading Benz is exciting and unnerving. She excels at capturing the moods and subtle gradations of her characters who can be upstanding but also shady at times, playing fast and loose with morality."
 MICHELE LANGEVINE LEIBY

Entertainment Weekly ★★★★★
"Perhaps its most unique element as a Southern novel is its potent underlying melancholy. ... The climax feels far too rushed, but it does lead into a note-perfect denouement, in which *The Gone Dead* takes one final deep breath." DAVID CANFIELD

Kirkus ★★
"The music of the spoken word shows that Benz ... has a strong ear and appreciation for Southern culture that rings true. Unfortunately, though, the reader is only occasionally steeped in the world of the novel."

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Benz beautifully evokes a Delta town haunted by the legacy of racism. While she presents a mystery—what exactly happened to Billie's father?—the novel is slower and subtler than the average thriller. The author takes care crafting atmosphere and backstory, and "tackles big topics intimately" (*Entertainment Weekly*) through her protagonist's family history. The structure is effective, and the prose reminded one critic of James Baldwin's. Only one reviewer felt Benz keeps the reader at arm's length, with the strong dialogue only partially making up for that sense of distance. There were also a few quibbles over the ending. However, Benz remains "an adept critic and storyteller" (*New York Times Book Review*)—and one to watch.



The Most Fun We Ever Had

By Claire Lombardo



Claire Lombardo graduated from the Iowa Writers' Workshop in 2017. She currently works as an adjunct professor of creative writing at the University of

Iowa. *The Most Fun We Ever Had*, already a *New York Times* best seller, is Lombardo's debut novel.

THE STORY: Spanning several decades, the novel explores the loving, passionate, 40-year marriage of David and Marilyn Sorenson of the Chicago suburbs, as well as the lives of their daughters: Wendy, Violet, Liza, and Grace. David is a physician, while Marilyn stays home with their chil-

dren, with some resentment. Wendy, an acerbic widow, grieves both her husband and a premature child with the help of wine. Violet, who gave up her law career for motherhood, tries to create the perfect home. Liza is a tenured academic with a depressive boyfriend and an unplanned pregnancy, while Grace is living a terrible lie. Into this mix comes the adolescent boy that Violet gave up for adoption and who came back to the family.

Doubleday. 532 pages. \$28.95. ISBN 9780385544252

Guardian (UK) ★★★★★
"If ever there were to be a literary love child of Jonathan Franzen and Anne Tyler, then Claire Lombardo's outstanding debut, which ranges from ebullience to despair by way of caustic but intense familial bonds, would be a worthy offspring." HANNAH BECKERMAN

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★
"Of course it's not the responsibility of every novel to wrestle with cultural shifts, with politics and war, but the near total absence of even a whiff of non-Sorenson-related events over 40 years and 500-plus pages must be a conscious choice. It reads, eventually, as a deliberate and fascinating commentary on how a particular kind of moneyed white family can choose the degree to which they engage with such ... unpleasanties. And that sometimes they choose zero degrees." JADE CHANG

Publishers Weekly ★★★★★
"Lombardo captures the complexity of a large family with characters who light up the page with their competitions, secrets, and worries. Despite its length and number of plotlines, the momentum never flags, making for a rich and rewarding family saga."

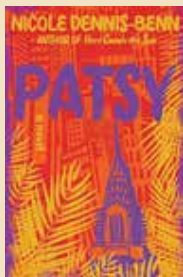
NPR ★★★★★
"Lombardo's sweeping family drama, fueled by power plays between spouses and between sisters, is operatic in both good ways and bad. It hits plenty of high notes, but like opera, it runs long and tends toward histrionics and repetition."
 HELLER MCALPIN

BOOKMARKS SELECTION



Patsy

By Nicole Dennis-Benn



Nicole Dennis-Benn immigrated from Jamaica to the United States as a teenager. Her debut novel, *Here Comes the Sun* (★★★★ SELECTION Nov/Dec 2016), was a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year, won the Lambda Literary Award for Fiction, and was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award. She currently lives with her wife in Brooklyn and teaches writing at Baruch College. *Patsy* is her second novel.

THE STORY: After years in her picturesque, but impoverished, Jamaican town, in 1998, Patsy, 28, reunites with her childhood best friend and former lover, Cicely, in New York City—and she doesn't plan on returning to either her devout evangelical mother or to her five-year-old daughter, Tru. In Brooklyn, though, Cicely is not the girl she once was, and Patsy, an undocumented immigrant, must work as a bathroom attendant at a restaurant and as a nanny for white children to make ends meet. Back in Jamaica, Tru tries to understand her mother's decision to leave, while building a relationship with her previously absent father, all the while coming to grips with her own conceptions of gender, sexuality, and identity. Liveright. 432 pages. \$26.95. ISBN: 9781631495632

Atlantic



"Yet for all the bleak determinism and brutality in Dennis-Benn's fictional worlds, what stands out in *Patsy* is yearning—for opportunity, for pleasure, for connection, almost exclusively among women. That yearning, coexisting as it does within the cold-eyed realism of its setting, helps Dennis-Benn's second novel strike a solemn balance between entrapment and escape." ADRIENNE GREEN

NPR



"Dennis-Benn packs a great deal of emotional power into *Patsy*, and does so successfully because she's not afraid to confront truths that many other authors might shy away from. There are plenty of novels that celebrate the mother-daughter bond, but not as many that delve into its absence." MICHAEL SCHAUB

Time



"There have been few narrative epics that effectively tally the emotional, logistical, physical, psychological and financial trials of the black female immigrant and mother or, likewise, the impact on

the family of a black woman who dares transform herself. ... *Patsy* fills a literary void with compassion, complexity and tenderness."

JOSHUNDA SANDERS

Minneapolis Star Tribune ★★★★★

"*Patsy* is a probing novel about freedom, examining one woman's shifting conception of it, and how people weigh what they are willing to trade for liberty. ... Dennis-Benn's vivid, sensory writing plunges the reader into the experience of an undocumented immigrant in the wilds of New York, teeming with unreliable buses, rude citizens and mattresses of unknown provenance." JENNY SHANK

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★

"One of the novel's finest achievements is how vividly and insistently the body shapes not just character but plot. ... This is a story of self-made queer survival, with ample pleasure alongside the pain and sacrifice, and of severing familial ties in order to save one's own life, no matter the cost." CHELSEY JOHNSON

Washington Post



"Dennis-Benn explores themes of gender, sexuality, motherhood and freedom, as well as colorism and classism and the ways the two intertwine both in Jamaica and the United States. But none of this feels didactic or moralistic so much as integral to the characters' lived experiences and seamlessly woven through their emotional arcs." ILANA MASAD

Newsday



"In her new novel, Nicole Dennis-Benn contrasts the deep chasm between the American dream and immigrant reality, and the result is magnetic and wrenching. ... A mother who abandons her child is a monster in most cultures, but Dennis-Benn's deep compassion for Patsy—for all women facing unthinkable choices—forces you to reconsider your own preconceptions." CONNIE OGLE

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Fans of *Here Comes the Sun* will find the same rich and vivid prose, as well as many overlapping themes: the pain that stems from societal disdain for black women, mothers literally or figuratively abandoning their children, and a social context that discourages pushing against norms regulating sexuality and gender. Fundamentally, *Patsy* is about black, queer women who are determined to find a sense of self, even if it challenges conventions and expectations of them. Dennis-Benn also writes about the immigrant experience with empathy and honesty. But the theme of female desire lies at the core of this novel, and the yearning that Patsy and Tru experience feel stark against the bleakness of their respective settings. Yet somehow they depend on each other, their yearning born of desperation.

USA Today



"[W]hile it's all enjoyable, *The Most Fun We Ever Had* seems longer than necessary, some of its story lines expanding the book's surface area without adding much

depth. Still, it's a pleasure spending time with the Sorensens[.]" STEPH CHA

Washington Post



"[T]he downside of one crisis after another is that the reader might recoil from the

onslaught—there never seems to be a time, over 40 years or so, when life just moves along in a relaxing and ordinary way. ... *The Most Fun We Ever Had* is an ambitious and brilliantly written first novel, sometimes amusing and sometimes

shocking, but its unrelenting nature and lack of context is ultimately off-putting."

JANE SMILEY

CRITICAL SUMMARY

In her impressive debut, Lombardo exhibits "a keen eye and ear for dysfunctional family dynamics" (*Guardian*). Compared to novels by Jonathan Franzen and Anne Tyler—family dysfunction, anyone?—*The Most Fun We Ever Had* explores the love, problems, and tumult most families experience. The characters are all ones we recognize, and the action never flags. However, the novel "seems longer than necessary" (*USA Today*), and "a few themes are replayed so often ... that the book would have benefited from judicious trims, particularly in the flashbacks" (NPR). A few critics also wondered why Lombardo chose to examine the family in isolation from larger social and political events over the four decades. Ultimately, however, "it's a pleasure spending time with the Sorensons" (*USA Today*), and readers won't be disappointed.



Mostly Dead Things

By Kristen Arnett



Kristen Arnett received the 2017 Coil Book Award for her debut short fiction collection, *Felt in the Jaw*, for which her neighborhood 7-Eleven held the launch. She is also a columnist for Literary Hub.

THE STORY: Jessa-Lynn Morton, a 30-something third-generation central Floridian taxidermist, arrives at work one morning to discover her father's suicide. Her dad wasn't the lovable type; Jessa nonetheless grieves—as does her mother, in a rather odd way: in the storefront window, she designs sexually explicit dioramas by using animals brought into the shop, explaining that the displays highlight "similarities between sex acts in the animal kingdom and those in modern suburbia,"

including "correlations to myself and my late husband." Jessa, meanwhile, continues to long for her one and only true love, Brynn, her brother Milo's wife, who bolted town years ago with someone she met at the dry cleaner. The novel's sections are named for steps in the taxidermy process.

Tin House Books. 354 pages. \$24.95. ISBN: 9781947793309

New York Times ★★★★★

"[Arnett] writes comic set pieces to make you laugh, sex scenes to turn you on. The action flips from the past to the present, swimming through first love and first grief on a slick of red Kool-Aid and vodka, suntan oil and fruity lip gloss, easy and unforced. This book is my song of the summer!" PARUL SEHGAL

Entertainment Weekly ★★★★★

"The book is very Florida, very gay—hot to the touch, in other words—and Arnett leads with sharp character development. ... *Dead Things* may be animated by graphic explainers on animal stuffing and cutting analyses of family dynamics, but plot isn't Arnett's strong suit." DAVID CANFIELD

Minneapolis Star Tribune ★★★★★

"Arnett writes about how we have to overcome our first understanding of the world in order to process it as an adult. She uses the language of taxidermy to explore the memories that ripple beneath our longest held beliefs." HEATHER SCOTT PARTINGTON

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★

"The outward conflicts presented at the outset of the novel find their resolutions, though the real story here is an inside job, and Arnett pulls it off with aplomb. Jessa is the disastrous heroine of our dreams; her job has never been to clean herself up, but to open herself." MELISSA FEBOS

NPR ★★★★★

"[I]ts narrator is so real that every time I stopped reading the book, I felt a tiny pull at the back of my mind, as if I'd left a good friend in the middle of a conversation."

ILANA MASAD

Tampa Bay Times ★★★★★

"[W]eird, funny and, in its own macabre way, warm-hearted." COLETTE BANCROFT

Washington Post ★★★★★

"The central characters in this sad and funny book are recognizable not as easily boxed, felonious stereotypes but as complex, flesh-and-blood human beings. ... Most of all, Arnett skillfully and humanely captures the agony and confusion of surviving a loved one's suicide." JAKE CLINE

San Francisco Chronicle ★★★★★

"Jessa is a ruminator, a loner, a hard drinker, and she prefers to nurse some wounds over others, the way a drunk repeats the same stories night after night. ... A first-person novel implicitly drives toward an internal change in the heart of its protagonist." SALLY FRANSON

CRITICAL SUMMARY

NPR calls *Mostly Dead Things* "darkly funny, both macabre and irreverent," while the *Washington Post* asserts that while the family business "involves copious amounts of flesh and blood," the novel "is only as weird as a reader wants it to be." Arnett's Florida, however, is no Disney paradise. "This is gas station food and body odor and dirty flip-flops, Publix bags and crammed trailers and stifling humidity" (*San Francisco Chronicle*). Amid this landscape, we find a family in grief, and we witness, after years of isolation, the slow coming together of its members. The novel suffers a bit from the "first-novel blues" (*New York Times*)—uneven pacing and a rushed climax. Nonetheless, concludes that critic, the novel's pulse "emanates not only from its sun-drunk, word-drunk wit, but from what it knows about life. Arnett's characters suffer because they remember."



Raised in Captivity

Fictional Nonfiction

By Chuck Klosterman



Chuck Klosterman's 11 books include *Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs* (2003), *But What If We're Wrong?* (2016), and the novels *Downtown Owl* (2008) and *The*

Visible Man (2011). Known for his music journalism, he was also the ethicist for the *New York Times* magazine for three years and is an original founder of the pop-culture blog *Grantland*. This is his third work of fiction.

THE STORY: Klosterman refers to these 34 metafictional short stories as “microdoses of the straight dope.” A number of them imagine surreal situations. For instance, in the title piece, a man is confused to find a puma in an airplane bathroom. “Every Day Just Comes and Goes” turns into a debate between a time traveler and a person stuck in regular chronology. Characters regularly cross lines of acceptability: “Cat Person” is about someone who rubs people with cats; the band in “Blizzard of Summer” writes a hit song that’s incredibly racist; a woman interviews a would-be husband killer. Full of bizarre setups and dialogue, *Raised in Captivity* is an out-of-the-ordinary read.

Penguin. 320 pages. \$26. ISBN: 9780735217928

Los Angeles Times ★★★★★

“[T]his is the kind of strange, sharply detailed and often slyly funny examination of cultural behavior and norms he does unlike anyone else. ... That said, Klosterman’s interrogative nature sometimes means these stories yield little more than premises for wry jokes while others unfortunately feel as if they’re cut off too soon.” CHRIS BARTON

NPR ★★★★★

“Absurdity and intelligence, applied in unequal measure. A sliding scale between

reality and pure banana-pants craziness.

Most of them work. Some don’t.” JASON

SHEEHAN

Publishers Weekly ★★★★★

“Klosterman, in this irreverent collection of what he calls ‘fictional non-fiction’ stories, creates a multitude of clever scenarios. ... No matter the topic, Klosterman’s gimlet eye and trenchant prose bedazzle.”

Time ★★★★★

“[W]hat they may lack in development or structure, [the stories] make up for in originality and humor. ... The effect of these almost scrollable-length stories is at once familiar and uncanny.” NICHOLAS MANCUSI

AV Club ★★

“While its tone may be alluring to fans, the collection is less clever, incisive short stories than it is akin to a series of premises pitched in a precocious TV writers’ room. ... [F]or every good story in this collection of 34, there are far too many middling ones, and more than a couple bad ones.”

KAMIL AHSAN

CRITICAL SUMMARY

This flash-fiction collection reminded reviewers of the sorts of “divergent conversations that can come up between old friends as the hours grow late” (*Los Angeles Times*). That is to say, the stories are strange and random, and they don’t follow any particular logic. They often have sudden endings that don’t deliver a clear meaning, and some “come off like complicated jokes that don’t really land” (NPR). Still, the pieces are generally funny and timely, even if they are occasionally “undercooked” (*AV Club*). Just as the subtitle suggests, the book involves a deliberate mashup of reality and fantasy. Klosterman’s fans will be amused, while those new to him might be perplexed.

crime

FICTION



Joe Country

(Slough House)

By Mick Herron



British author Mick Herron is best known for the Slough House espionage series, but he has also written four books in the Oxford Series, as well as several

stand-alone mysteries. His awards include the CWA Gold Dagger for Best Crime Novel and the *Ellery Queen* Readers Award. From Newcastle, he currently lives in Oxford. *Joe Country* is the sixth novel in the series, after *London Rules* (2018).

THE STORY: Jackson Lamb is the head of Slough House, a London outpost where disgraced spies are sent after mission failures or embarrassments of a more personal nature. He encourages his MI5 operatives to keep their heads down and to obey orders if they want to keep their jobs. But things never stay quiet around here for too long; soon, one of Lamb’s employees is asked to solve the case of a missing teenager—complicated by the fact that it’s her former lover’s son. The stage is set for a thrilling showdown in the Welsh countryside, involving blackmail and betrayals.

Soho Crime. 360 pages. \$26.95. ISBN: 9781641290555

Criminal Element ★★★★★

“There are plenty of rewards for long-time readers, from unexpected character developments to some great jokes nestled in exciting action sequences. ... Herron is a fantastic writer, able to balance these reflective moments with pitch-black comedy and precise plotting.” LARRY CLOW

For Winter Nights (blog) ★★★★★

“This series is remarkable. It’s very clever and witty, full of abominable people, and yet Mick Herron makes us care intensely

for a fair few of them. It seems as if every human failing can be found in Slough House, the place where disgraced spies are sent to be forgotten, not to mention a fair few tragedies and ghosts, but there's a warmth to be found in the least likely of places."

Guardian (UK) ★★★★★
"Mick Herron's Jackson Lamb novels are among the best spy novels being written today. ... If you've not read Herron before, start at the beginning, with *Slow Horses*, but do start: this series is bitingly intelligent, light of touch and frequently hilarious." ALISON FLOOD

Publishers Weekly ★★★★★
"Droll dialogue, characters who wear their foibles proudly, and observations on the politics of potential vested interest in national security keep the pages turning. Herron solidifies his place as one of Britain's top spy novelists."

Thriller Books Journal ★★★★★
"Beneath Herron's corrosive humour and wily irony, all may not be well in the world of British secret intelligence—in fact in the whole of the not very United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Yet, so long as we can believe there are slow horses out there harnessed to Jackson Lamb's rickety carriage, we can be sure that someone will try their damndest to do the right thing—if not in the real world, then certainly in Mick Herron's subtle, entertaining and fascinating fictional one."

NICOLA MIRA

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Herron has earned a loyal following for his "seamy, low-fi and delightfully quirky espionage capers" (*Thriller Books Journal*). This latest installment includes timely references to Brexit and is as gripping and funny as the previous novels. Since Herron builds up his plots and characters gradually, the series should be read in order. The main joy of the books, undoubtedly, is "the malevolent, corpulent genius that is Lamb himself" (*Guardian*). He's not your average spy; nor are these your average spy novels. They're action packed and enhanced by "cliffhangers and one-liners"; they're both "biting" and

"enduring" (*Criminal Element*). If you haven't already, pick up the first book, 2010's *Slow Horses*, right away.



Big Sky

(Jackson Brodie)
 By Kate Atkinson



English author Kate Atkinson's 11 novels include *Life After Life* (2013) and *A God in Ruins* (★★★★ July/Aug 2015), each of which won a Costa Novel Award, and *Transcription* (★★★★ SELECTION Nov/Dec 2018). The four previous Jackson Brodie mysteries are *Case Histories* (★★★★ Jan/Feb 2005), *One Good Turn* (★★★★ Jan/Feb 2007), *When Will There Be Good News?* (★★★★ Nov/Dec 2008), and *Started Early, Took My Dog* (★★★★ May/June 2011). The first three were adapted into the BBC television series *Case Histories* in 2011–2013. Atkinson lives in Edinburgh.

THE STORY: The fifth Jackson Brodie mystery sees the eponymous PI living in a cottage on the English coast. He shares custody of his 13-year-old son, Nathan, with his ex-partner, Julia, who acts in a television police drama. The news that an infamous sex offender is about to be released plunges Brodie into a sordid history of pedophilia. As he goes about an investigator's everyday work—such as keeping an eye on a cheating husband—he also happens to rescue a suicidal golfer, look into a murder, and get drawn into solving a human trafficking case. Meanwhile, he's haunted by his sister's untimely death. Atkinson's trademark wit lightens the distressing contents.

Little, Brown. 400 pages. \$28. ISBN: 9780316523097

New York Times ★★★★★
"Atkinson tells a great story, toys with expectations, deceives by omission, blows smoke and also writes like she's your

favorite friend. Thank goodness the long Jackson Brodie hiatus is over." JANET MASLIN

Wall Street Journal ★★★★★
"Such grimness is leavened by a text brimming with wit, unpredictable events and vivid characters. From the shocking to the comic to the poignant, Ms. Atkinson does it all with breathtaking panache." TOM NOLAN

Washington Post ★★★★★
"Atkinson is so skilled at getting inside people's heads that when she introduces a new character, it's almost impossible to not feel at least a little sympathy for the person. As terrible as I feel typing this, it even holds true for one of the human traffickers." CAROLYN KELLOGG

Guardian (UK) ★★★★★
"The novel enjoys the absurdities of its genre—winks at them, even—yet manages at the same time to do a lot of work with the melancholy and absurdity of ordinary life. ... It's a credit to Atkinson's dexterity that despite these clashes of tone and register the novel manages to hang together, even though the subject matter—child sexual abuse, human trafficking—and the essentially comic mechanisms of the plot, its coincidences and confrontations, seem to be at odds." SAM LEITH

Herald (UK) ★★★★★
"With only a few exceptions, most of the cast make up in a plethora of detail what they lack in personal depth. ... Atkinson's instinct to lighten the mood at every opportunity makes for an uneven atmosphere in terms of crime drama, yet she manages, just about, to control the mood sufficiently to allow sardonicism, poignancy and appalling acts against humanity to share the same page." ROSEMARY GORING

Independent (UK) ★★★★★
"Atkinson's work is always playful, and there's a brisk, jaunty tone to *Big Sky* and much dry observational comedy. ... [The] focus on character means *Big Sky* can lack the relentless propulsion associated with crime writing[;] getting to know a plethora of her tenacious, memorable characters seems like a fair trade, especially as they

BOOKMARKS SELECTION



Lady in the Lake

By Laura Lippmann



Laura Lippmann bases her 23rd novel (after 2018's *Sunburn*) on two unrelated murders. First was the unsolved case of Shirley Lee Wigeon Parker, a black, 35-year-old woman, whose body was found in a Baltimore park fountain in 1969. Three months later, Esther Lebowitz, 11, was beaten to death inside a fish store. A second-generation (former) reporter for the *Baltimore Sun*, Lippmann is

best known for her award-winning crime novels set in Baltimore, particularly the books featuring Tess Monaghan.

THE STORY: In mid-1960s Baltimore, Maddie Schwartz, 37, a wealthy Jewish housewife, separates from her conventional husband. Striking out on her own, she rents a downtown apartment, starts a secret affair with a black policeman, and dreams of becoming a newspaper reporter. When she discovers the corpse of Tessie Fine, 11, she corresponds with the killer and leverages the story for a very entry-level position at the *Baltimore Star*. Then she becomes obsessed with the murder of Cleo Sherwood, a black cocktail waitress, whose body is found in a fountain in a city park months after she disappeared. Maddie's unfettered ambition and attitude towards men, however, proves to be costly to her—both personally and professionally. The story unfolds from Maddie's perspective, as well as that of Cleo's unappreciative ghost and a collage of other Baltimore characters, from an Orioles pitcher to a nightclub owner.

William Morrow. 352 pages. \$26.99. ISBN: 9780062390011

Independent (UK)



"This vivid historical novel inspired by two real deaths (one solved, one unsolved) confirms Lippmann's status as one of the most skilled and prolific authors of American crime fiction—and makes for a fascinating, unforgiving dive into Sixties Baltimore. ... While Maddie's metamorphosis from a skilled—but-bored housewife to a rookie reporter is the beating heart of *Lady in the Lake*, Lippmann invites us, time and time again, to see Maddie's journey as one element of a larger picture—one moving part in Baltimore's complex dynamics." CLÉMENTINE MICHALLON

New York Times Review



"Lippmann's point—which takes this book far beyond the works of Agatha Christie and Rex Stout, although Lippmann does not fail to honor her genre roots—is that Maddie also pays, and in blood. ... Lippmann walks a fine line, balancing a cracking good mystery with

the story of a not always admirable woman working to stand on her own." STEPHEN KING

Newsday



"Lippmann, a former reporter whose father was also a newspaper writer, deftly evokes the personalities and power dynamics of a midcentury newsroom. ... In a bold move, there are almost two dozen voices in the book, often addressing the reader in short, confessional chapters—think reality TV contestants speaking directly to the camera." CAROLYN KELLOGG

Publishers Weekly



"Lippmann relates the bulk of the tale from Maddie's perspective, but enriches the narrative with derisive commentary from Cleo and stunning vignettes of ancillary characters. Lippmann's fans will devour this sophisticated crime novel, which captures the era's zeitgeist while painting a striking portrait of unapologetic female ambition."

Washington Post



"Lippmann's ambitious novel weaves some 20 points of view into a seamless, vivid whole. ... And although some characters don't seem to add much to the mystery of Cleo's death, Lippmann uses them to show the many layers a reporter must sift through while pursuing a lead." JEN MICHALSKI

Time



"While the voice of Cleo's ghost is compelling, other narrators are less sharply articulated. ... It's Cleo whose words make the reader feel the intense grip prejudice has over 1960s Baltimore, and Cleo who makes it impossible to ignore how that ugly legacy lives on."

ANNABEL GUTTERMAN

CRITICAL SUMMARY

"The Lady of the Lake is more than a 'weird love letter to Baltimore newspapers'—it is an earnest and beautiful homage to a city and its people," opines the *Washington Post*. Set in the 1960s, racism and gendered norms are rampant. "The arc of Maddie's character ... reflects the gulf which then existed between what women were expected to be and what they aspired to be," writes Stephen King in the *New York Times Book Review*. Lippmann chronicles Maddie's obstacle-ridden journey through her voice, as well as through a large cast of characters, an approach that mainly succeeds in capturing the tapestried milieu of 1960s Baltimore and its newspaper culture. "The clarity of Cleo's voice," notes *Time*, "... showcases her own complexities and interrogates the biases that threatened her very survival." As to the murders? "Lippmann answers all outstanding questions with a totally cool double twist that your reviewer—a veteran reader of mysteries—never saw coming" (*New York Times Book Review*).

gently offer hope that, in the end, good will out." HOLLY WILLIAMS

Publishers Weekly



"Atkinson has been better at balancing

personal and professional story lines, and the presence of a figure from Jackson's past, now a cop involved in an inquiry looking at establishment figures, won't

resonate for first-timers. Series fans will best appreciate this outing."

CRITICAL SUMMARY

The Jackson Brodie novels aren't your average crime thrillers. For one thing, they emphasize character more than plot. One reviewer even suggested Atkinson might be happy to "do away with the connecting thread and simply focus on people, and what makes them tick" (*Herald*). That love for delving into backstories and motivations can mean that the pace lags in *Big Sky*. In addition, her use of humor occasionally seems at odds with the subject matter, making for a "fine line between cheerfully unrealistic and macabre" (*Herald*). Most of the critics felt that Atkinson pulls off this mixed tone, praising her "vastly enjoyable nonchalance" (*New York Times*). *Big Sky* is one for existing fans.



The Chain

By Adrian McKinty



Crime novelist Adrian McKinty is best known for his six-book Detective Sean Duffy Series, which includes *The Cold Cold Ground* (2012) and *Rain Dogs* (2016). He has also written the Dead Trilogy, a young adult fantasy series, and stand-alone fiction. Among his honors are an Edgar Award and a Ned Kelly Award. From Belfast, he has also lived in the United States and Australia. *The Chain* is his 19th novel.

THE STORY: A shadowy kidnapping ring has set up a chain: each affected parent must pay a ransom and abduct another family's child, or his or her own child will be killed. And don't dare involve the police or the media. The novel focuses on the case of 13-year-old Kylie Klein, kidnapped while waiting for the school bus on Plum Island, Massachusetts. Her mother, Rachel, is on her way to an oncology appointment in Boston, when she gets a phone call from a woman who says that she's kidnapped

Kylie—and now Rachel must continue "The Chain." Despite the warnings, she's determined to get to the bottom of this diabolical scheme.

Mulholland Books. 368 pages. \$28. ISBN: 9780316531269

New York Times



"McKinty hangs on to his wit and literacy even under duress. ... To McKinty's great credit, he can make readers wonder at any point whether the ground may fall beneath their feet and how much evil they might be pushed toward." JANET MASLIN

USA Today



"The Chain is that rare thriller that ends up being highly personal. Yes, there's a shadowy force dictating the action, but when it all comes down to its (necessarily) explosive conclusion, the actions of characters are boiled down to familial ethics, understandable motivations, and good old-fashioned revenge, which makes for a satisfying and deeply rewarding read." TOD GOLDBERG

NPR



"The Chain is a straight-up, stone-faced thriller, a present-tense race to find out how Rachel will react to the unthinkable and then find a way to do the unthinkable herself. ... Flashbacks inevitably slow a narrative down, and The Chain is all about momentum. Sometimes, though, it feels as though it moves a little too fast." PADDY HIRSCH

Times (UK)



"The Chain may have some resonance with the gloomy state of world affairs and the breakdown of civilised norms, but it is essentially light entertainment, and as such it succeeds splendidly. No surprise, then, to hear the film rights have just been sold to Paramount." KATHLEEN MACMAHON

Entertainment Weekly



"The author at times seems to be at war with the demands of his genre: A sort of cruelly, engrossingly simple story of parental desperation bumps up against corny crime staples—larger conspiracies, literal shadowy figures, the occasional red herring. The novel is at its best when its focus narrows, with punishing clarity,

on the emotional intensity of its central predicament." DAVID CANFIELD

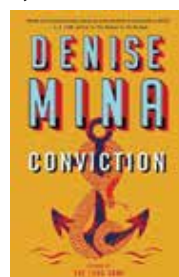
CRITICAL SUMMARY

McKinty took his inspiration from Mexico's "exchange kidnappings" and old-fashioned threatening chain letters. Critics were immediately captivated by the premise of the novel, even if it might seem far-fetched at first. "The concept is brilliant" (*Times*), and the author ratchets up the tension, as Rachel chooses a random kidnapping victim via Instagram. Critics were impatient with the second half of the book, which slows down somewhat, as flashbacks reveal the history of "The Chain." Still, the "vividly chilly New England locale" and "fatalistic sense of mystery and confusion" (*Entertainment Weekly*) make this a worthy thriller. Readers will nervously ask themselves, "If it was your child, what would you do?" (NPR).



Conviction

By Denise Mina



The Scottish author of crime-fiction novels, Denise Mina received the Crime Writers' Association John Creasy Dagger for Best First Crime Novel for her first novel, *Garnethill*

(1989), while her true-crime novel, *The Long Drop* (★★★★ Sept/Oct 2017), was named a *Washington Post* Best Book of the Year and won the McIlvanney Prize for Scottish Crime Novel of the Year. Mina, who was inducted into the Crime Writers' Association Hall of Fame in 2014, resides in Glasgow.

THE STORY: Glasgow housewife Anna McClean is addicted to a true-crime podcast called *Death and the Dana*, which addresses the mysterious fate of a wealthy family, whose possibly haunted yacht mysteriously sank in the Mediterranean. Just as Anna begins listening to another installment, her husband announces that he is leav-

ing Anna for her best friend. Reeling, Anna focuses on the podcast, only to realize that she knew one of the victims, Leon Parker, before she moved from London to Glasgow and changed her identity because of a terrible crime. Distracted, Anna travels across Europe with her best friend's husband, anorexic ex-rock star Fin, to discover what really happened to Leon. At the same time, they must escape dangers from Anna's past, after her picture goes live on social media.

Mulholland Books. 384 pages. \$27. ISBN 9780316528504

Publishers Weekly ★★★★★
"Mina delivers a metafictional marvel that both endorses and exemplifies the power of storytelling."

Scotsman (UK) ★★★★★
"[Mina's] newest novel might be described as a fictional non-fiction. It's a thriller that often evokes an almost Hitchcock-like air of paranoia, doubt, double identities, sexual frisson, gadding around over several countries from Fort William to Venice, with sinister train journeys and mordant wit." STUART KELLY

Washington Post ★★★★★
"Conviction is spectacular; if you, dear reader, can sanely spread your enjoyment of it out over, say, a week, you're a more disciplined consumer of suspense fiction that I am. I inhaled this novel in two extended sittings in one day." MAUREEN CORRIGAN

Crime Fiction Lover ★★★★★
"Throughout the novel, Mina effectively conveys Anna's state of mind, and while she doesn't always make the best decisions, you can believe in her. She's both prickly and charming, and you want her to come out of the experience with body and spirit intact." VICKI WEISFELD

Guardian (UK) ★★★★★
"The initial impetus for the investigation may be a stretch, but the narrative is plausible and compelling, as the mysteries of Parker's fate and Anna's past unfold in parallel and collide, dangerously, in the present." LAURA WILSON

National Scot (UK) ★★★★★
"There are points when it looks as though Mina is struggling to locate a satisfying conclusion in all this, but she pulls it off with her customary flair and a final flourish." ALASTAIR MABBOTT

CRITICAL SUMMARY

A leading practitioner of "Tartan Noir," which combines American detective fiction with Scottish atmosphere and slang, Mina and her work have garnered increasing attention. *Conviction* is another "spellbinding thriller," in which Anna and Fin "alternatively bolster and antagonize one another, balancing introspections on modern life and human nature with laugh-out-loud humor" (*Publishers Weekly*). As the *Washington Post* notes, Mina writes with Daphne du Maurier's supernatural eeriness, fellow Scot Helen MacInnes's intrigue, and Lisa Scottoline's wry humor. While the *Guardian* finds the initial reason for Anna's investigation a bit implausible and the *Scot* suggests that Mina seems to struggle with the denouement, both conclude the novel succeeds. Ultimately, "*Conviction* is a giddy celebration of the art of storytelling itself, from Anna's 'guilty pleasure' podcasts to books and folk tales and alibis and brazen lies" (*Washington Post*).



Knife

A New Harry Hole Novel

By Jo Nesbø, translated from the Norwegian by Ned Smith



Jo Nesbø is the internationally best-selling Norwegian author best known for the Harry Hole Series of crime novels, of which *Knife* is the latest. A former soccer player and economist, Jo Nesbø's work has been translated into 40 languages and has sold 33 million copies worldwide.

THE STORY: Rogue police officer Harry Hole is back, but things are not

good. His wife, Rakel, the love of his life, has left him for good, and he has been demoted to cold cases with the Oslo Police Department. At the same time, Svein Fenne, a serial rapist and murderer whom Hole helped incarcerate, is now free, seeking revenge, and not exactly reformed. Then Rakel is found brutally murdered in the Holes' apartment. After waking from a drunken blackout with bloody hands and no memory of what happened, Hole becomes a suspect in Rakel's murder and is suspended from the force.

Knopf. 451 pages. \$27.95. ISBN 9780525655398

Evening Standard (UK) ★★★★★
"Nesbø, sharp-witted as ever, keeps the complex, burnished narrative on, um, a knife-edge as Harry, suicidal and sober, tries to find out the horrible truth. Nesbø remains the king of Scandinavian noir." MARK SANDERSON

AP News ★★★★★
"Each reveal—did he do it? did she?—is meticulously laid out as [Nesbø] takes readers along for the ride. ... The final whodunit is powerful and leaves Harry—and readers—wondering what's next." MERRILL

Los Angeles Times ★★★★★
"This is a long novel, heavy with characters, back story and Scandinavian angst, but never feels ponderous. It manages to keep twisting until the last few pages." SCOTT TIMBERG

New York Times ★★★★★
"Does anyone write creepier villains than Jo Nesbø? ... No, I can't think of anyone who makes my skin crawl like Nesbø." MARILYN STASIO

New York Journal of Books ★★★
"The story begins with action and terror. Then the plot becomes most impenetrable." ROBERT ZUPKUS

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Knife is another compelling installment in Nesbø's bleak Nordic noir series: "The pages turn, the violence is brutal, and the characters are well-drawn and mysterious" (*AP News*).

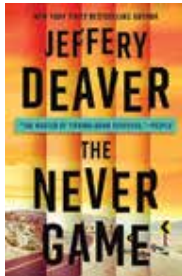
Newcomers to the series would be better off starting with book one, *The Bat*, since this work is long and complex. *AP News* found it “dense but brisk,” while the *Los Angeles Times* remarked that the novel starts slowly, but “it never loses its force” after the first 50 pages. Only the *New York Journal of Books* found it “impenetrable,” thanks to long paragraphs and characters and subplots that twist around each other. Ultimately, however, “*Knife* is a reminder of why people read [Nesbø’s] books” (*Los Angeles Times*).



The Never Game

A Colter Shaw Novel

By Jeffery Deaver



Jeffery Deaver has written more than 40 crime novels. He is best known for his 14-book series starring NYPD Homicide Detective Lincoln Rhyme, which started with

The Bone Collector in 1997. Deaver has also been a journalist, a lawyer, and a folk singer and served as president of the Mystery Writers of America organization in 2017 and 2018. *The Never Game* is the first book in a new series.

THE STORY: Colter Shaw travels around the United States in an RV, finding fugitives and missing persons and collecting the reward money. His latest case takes him to the San Francisco Bay area, where he grew up with a survivalist father, to search for college student Sophie Mulliner in Silicon Valley. Sophie’s father, Frank, is offering \$10,000 to whoever finds her. While Shaw thinks there’s a 60 percent chance Sophie is already dead, he’s willing to follow whatever leads he can find. Two other cases swiftly arise: an abducted gay rights activist and a kidnapped pregnant woman. Rational but prickly, Shaw is a compelling character whose adventures, particularly involving a strange video game, captivate.

G. P. Putnam’s Sons. 416 pages. \$28. ISBN: 9780525535942

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★
“Jeffery Deaver creates insanely devious plots calculated to make your head explode. ... Deaver’s cunning plot dazzles with its crafty twists and turns, but when the fun gets really nasty, it’s comforting to repeat this mantra: It’s only a game.” MARILYN

STASIO

Publishers Weekly ★★★★★
“Fans of twisty suspense that pushes the envelope of plausibility without inviting disbelief will be enthralled.”

The Real Book Spy (blog) ★★★★★
“Deaver knows just how much background to provide, offering enough about Colter’s past to flesh him out and explain how he became such an experienced tracker—while leaving enough on the table to keep you wanting more. ... Well-plotted and built on an intriguing premise and an exciting new character, *The Never Game* delivers in a big way and is one of Jeffery Deaver’s best thrillers in years.” RYAN STECK

Guardian (UK) ★★★
“So far, so nail-biting, although tech-heavy descriptions soon start to clog up the narrative flow, and clumsy use of withholding devices towards the end may leave fans of Deaver’s other series hero Lincoln Rhyme feeling shortchanged.” LAURA

WILSON

Kirkus ★★
“For once Deaver takes more effort to establish his hero’s bona fides than to give him a compelling and logical plot. The results are subpar for this initial installment but more encouraging for the promised series.”

CRITICAL SUMMARY

The critics were pleased to see Deaver taking risks in his latest novel. For one thing, he’s set aside Lincoln Rhyme for Colter Shaw, who is, in some ways, unlikeable. “Readers, who become attached to series characters, don’t always embrace the newcomer” (*Real Book Spy*). But glimpses into Shaw’s backstory make his behavior believable. Another risky choice is having Shaw solve the initial case quickly and moving into other territory. Partway through, a subplot about the online video gaming

industry gathers momentum; the line between games and reality becomes unclear. While reviewers differed in their appraisal of the plot, all sensed promise in Deaver’s “intriguing and entertaining” (*Real Book Spy*) protagonist.



This Storm

By James Ellroy



The novels in James Ellroy’s L.A. Quartet have won numerous awards and are international best sellers. He has written more than 20

books, including novels, autobiographies, and short story and essay compilations. *This Storm*, a historical thriller, is the second volume of Ellroy’s Second L.A. Quartet and starts just after the events chronicled in the first volume, *Perfidia* (★★★★ Nov/Dec 2014).

THE STORY: *This Storm* unfurls over several months, between December 30, 1941 and April 26, 1942. Shifting perspectives, Ellroy tracks a large swath of characters, fictitious and historic, through a soul-crushing Los Angeles, as the war-weary are confronted with “Russian Reds,” Nazis, and the city’s ever-toxic race relations. It’s almost a break, then, when torrential rainstorms unearth a corpse and LAPD Sergeant Dudley Smith sets out to solve the murder. As the case progresses over several months, forensic chemist Hideo Ashida, his assistant Joan Conville, socialite Kay Lake, and real-life Father Charles Coughlin and Orson Welles all become entangled, until the novel’s main plots finally converge.

Knopf. 608 pages. \$29.95. ISBN: 9780307957009

Guardian (UK) ★★★★★
“Clearly Ellroy is having a blast using wartime LA as his playground, with Nazi sympathisers knocking about with other diabolical and cynical grotesques. ... Like all good jazzmen, Ellroy works very hard

indeed to make his music flow so easily.”

ADRIAN MCKINTY

New York Times ★★★★★
“The Los Angeles of James Ellroy’s latest historical thriller, *This Storm*, is the kind of place where rats as big as cats fearlessly scoot across the front porch, where lovers rendezvous in welcoming Tijuana, anonymous among the ‘child-beggars swarms’ and ‘cat-meat taco vendors,’ and where sentiments of pure, undiluted venom (‘Hate, hate, hate. Kill, kill, kill’) express the prevailing state of race relations.” MARILYN STASIO

Wall Street Journal ★★★★★
“The author has created an ongoing Balzacian jigsaw puzzle that will surely attract, repel, outrage and seduce readers for years to come.” TOM NOLAN

Washington Post ★★★★★
“It’s a style that utilizes fragments, truncated sentences, profane interjections and period slang to deliver large amounts of information in tightly compressed form. It’s not always an easy, reader-friendly style, but it effectively reflects the jangled, chaotic nature of life in L.A. in the early days of the war.” BILL SHEEHAN

Spectator (UK) ★★★★★
“Without a doubt, Ellroy aficionados will love *This Storm*. Others may balk at its length and complexity, or at its headlong momentum.” JOHN BURNSIDE

New York Journal of Books ★★★★★
“While Ellroy’s in the middle of a very ambitious story arc, and he’s employing a time-honored narrative technique sure enough, the question is not whether he’s the Demon Dog of American Literature, as he loves to call himself, or whether he’s producing crime fiction worthy of the ages. The question is whether or not *This Storm* is readable.” MICHAEL J. MCCANN

CRITICAL SUMMARY

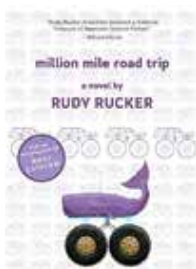
This Storm is very long and quite complex, with a prose style that teems with slang and borders on frantic. Ellroy provides everything his fans love about his work, but critics noted that the novel can be divisive. A potential point of contention is the morally

lacking cast. The characters, while complex, nuanced, and compelling, are not likable or relatable—and they’re not meant to be. Every character is jarringly flawed, “cops are all still bent and broken, and the victims are all still pathetic and desperate” (*New York Review of Books*). Yet, even with its substantial heft, *This Storm* proceeds at a breakneck pace, and the telegrammatic style Ellroy is famous for only hastens the pace. Despite one critic’s utter disdain for the novel, *This Storm* is difficult to put down, and most agree that “Ellroy remains one of the most exciting literary stylists in the English language” (*Guardian*).



Million Mile Road Trip

By Rudy Rucker



A former Silicon Valley computer-science professor and one of the founders of the cyberpunk literary movement, Rudy Rucker is a two-time recipient of the Philip K. Dick Award. In addition to his novels, including the Ware Tetralogy (1982–2000) and *Mathematicians in Love* (★★★★ May/June 2007), Rucker has written books on the fourth dimension, infinity, and the meaning of computation.

THE STORY: Zoe Snapp and Villy Antwerpen will soon graduate from a California high school with no notion of what their futures may hold. Road trip! But not a terrestrial one. In blowing a particular riff on her trumpet, Zoe inadvertently opens the gateway to a transdimensional tunnel through which they prepare to pass in Villy’s surfer wagon, the Purple Whale, with Villy’s annoying kid brother, Scud, on board. From within the tunnel, two friendly aliens emerge to help Villy soup up his ride for the journey.

The road ahead leads through Map-pyworld, a flattened representation of the universe. The objective is to engage in a “cosmic beatdown”—to save the Earth from flying saucers intent on consuming earthling “smeel,” the source of consciousness. It’s gonna be a long, strange trip, indeed.

Night Shade. 504 pages. \$24.99. ISBN: 9781597809924

Locus ★★★★★
“Rucker has outdone himself in creating the most bizarre and surreal and overstuffed cosmic ecology of his career. Familiar tropes such as fourth-dimensional travel and ‘teeping’ by slug prosthetic reappear, but the vast majority of the concepts are brand new.” PAUL DI FILIPPO

Publishers Weekly ★★★★★
“Tipping his hat to Thomas Pynchon, Jack Kerouac, and Douglas Adams, Rucker (*Return to the Hollow Earth*) immerses readers in a fantastical roadtrip adventure that’s a wild ride of unmitigated joy. ... Before it all falls apart, he ties everything together with internal consistency, playful use of language that keeps his ideas alien yet accessible, and a solid grounding in fourth-dimensional math.”

Reviews & Robots ★★★★★
“*Million Mile Road Trip* is unlike any journey you’ve ever been on. Rucker takes the wheel and slams through barriers into a world that bursts with originality and inventiveness. ... With a wild cast of characters, an alien world that boggles the mind, and extremely spot-on writing, Ruckus has created a masterpiece that must be experienced.” JACOB A. OLSON

NPR ★★★★★
“This kind of thing, you just jump in and hang on, warmed by the goofball joy of it all. ... And by the end of it, your mind will be inevitably expanded—open to the possibility of almost anything.” JASON SHEEHAN

Speculiction ★★★★★
“A sci-fi salad of constantly changing ingredients, the book reaches a point at about the three-quarters mark where the barrage of originality begins to become a wash. ... [The *Million Mile Road Trip*]

will wash away the sins of the mediocre, derivative material flooding the market today and cleanse your science fiction soul." JESSE HUDSON

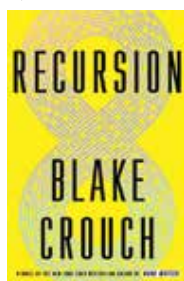
CRITICAL SUMMARY

"*Strange*," writes NPR, is Rucker's "favorite paintbrush, his sharpest tool," and he wields it here with enthusiastic abandon. "Not haunting-strange or dire-strange," the critic continues; rather, "joyous-strange," a "jubilant looseness" from a writer "who wants to tell a story about three teenagers going on a road trip through alien worlds without leeching any of the inherent strangeness from it." The universe Rucker creates contains surreal, often funny, personalities and scenes, which suck in and transport the reader quickly. And as is the case with almost any notable road trip novel, it's really all about the destination—or maybe not. Rucker's not saying. Though the protagonists are teenagers, the *Speculiction* reviewer asserts that characterizing *The Million Mile Road Trip* as a young adult novel would be to do it a disservice, given that "people of all ages could just as readily enjoy the trio's zany adventures in a parallel world."



Recursion

By Blake Crouch



Blake Crouch's 14 novels include *Dark Matter* (★★★★ Nov/Dec 2016) and the Wayward Pines Trilogy. He also writes short stories. A screenwriter, as well as an author, he lives in Colorado.

THE STORY: False Memory Syndrome causes its victims to be haunted by memories from other possible lives. NYPD Detective Barry Sutton first encounters the ailment when he tries to talk a woman down from the ledge of a building. Grief from a life never lived led her to the brink of suicide, and she's not the only one driven to such extremes. Sutton has his own sad-

ness: his teenage daughter was killed in a hit-and-run 11 years ago. That same year neuroscientist Helena Smith, inspired by her mother's Alzheimer's, developed a machine to allow people to relive memories. Now, before the machine can be turned to sinister use, it must be destroyed.

Crown. 336 pages. \$27. ISBN: 9781524759780

Kirkus ★★★★★

"A poignant love story is woven in with much food for thought on grief and the nature of memories and how they shape us, rounding out this twisty and terrifying thrill ride. An exciting, thought-provoking mind-bender!"

Locus Magazine ★★★★★

"It might be somewhat slick, it might be eminently filmable, but it has heft and gravitas beyond the unambitious technothriller category. ... Crouch's skills in laying down tense and vivid action scenes [are] essential here." PAUL DI FILIPPO

NPR ★★★★★

"But there's a catch [to reliving alternate lives]. A big one and a clever one with some weird modern resonance. And it is the unforeseen consequence of this catch that provides the hook for *Recursion*." JASON SHEEHAN

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★

"Barry's and Helena's stories do eventually collide, but the journey is a gloriously twisting line that regularly confounded my expectations. ... The fear that we are losing our collective memory, of a stable nation for instance, doesn't read to me like fantasy." VICTOR LAVALLE

Publishers Weekly ★★★★★

"Crouch effortlessly integrates sophisticated philosophical concepts—such as the relationship of human perceptions of what is real to actual reality—into a complex and engrossing plot. Michael Crichton's fans won't want to miss this one."

Entertainment Weekly ★★★★★

"[H]aving tackled the subject of alternative dimensions in 2017's *Dark Matter*, the author tackles another familiar science fiction trope here. And, as was the case

with that previous book, he breathes fresh life into the matters with a mix of heart, intelligence, and philosophical musings, as the reader is invited to ponder the importance of memory to, well, everything." CLARK COLLIS

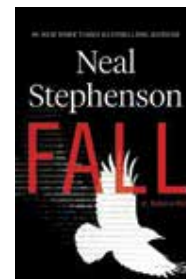
CRITICAL SUMMARY

In this "sci-fi-driven thriller" (*Kirkus*), Crouch explores the workings of grief and memory. He has a knack for taking what may seem like tired themes and reinvigorating them with the help of his strong characters and spellbinding action scenes. It takes some time for the main characters' stories to connect in *Recursion*, but once the two team up, the pace accelerates even more. It all makes for an "intelligent, mind-bending" read (*Publishers Weekly*), with a fully fleshed-out theory that "has a thrumming pulse that moves beyond big ideas and into their effects on a larger, more complex world" (NPR). *Recursion* should win the author new fans—even attracting readers who don't normally gravitate towards science fiction.



Fall; or Dodge in Hell

By Neal Stephenson



New York Times best-selling author Neal Stephenson is renowned for his works of speculative fiction concerning elaborate subjects of mathematics, cryptography,

linguistics, philosophy, currency, and the history and future of science. To date, he has published 16 novels, including the acclaimed *Snow Crash* (1992), Locus Award winner *Cryptonomicon* (1999), and the Baroque Cycle (2003–2004). Recently reviewed: *Seveneves* (★★★★ July/Aug 2015).

THE STORY: Spanning more than a century, *Fall* starts with Dodge, a character from Stephenson's earlier novel, *Reamde* (2011), who dies during a routine surgical procedure. Per his will,

BOOKMARKS SELECTION



The Grand Dark

By Richard Kadrey



Richard Kadrey's fantasy novels include *Butcher Bird* (2005), *Dead Set* (2013), *The Everything Box* (2016), and the 10-book Sandman Slim "supernatural noir" series. He has also written for comics and films, and works as a photographer.

THE STORY: In this speculative future-set story, Largo Moorden is a bike messenger and drug addict in the fictional European

settlement of Lower Proszawa. The region has been at war with its northern neighbors for a long time, and it is now threatened by mysterious plagues. Largo's main work is delivering suspect packages for Herr Branca, which doesn't leave much time for romancing the girl for whom he's fallen. Other major characters include Baron Hellswarth, one of Largo's customers; a theater's cast; and a traumatized soldier. Diaries, travel brochures, and other invented documents bring Kadrey's fantasy world to vibrant life.

Harper Voyager. 432 pages. \$26.99. ISBN: 9780062672490

Kirkus



"Throw in radicals using eugenics to create creatures that should never have existed, and the automata—sentient robots whose purposes are probably worse than you imagine—and the odd mix of debauchery and desperation starts to gel into a stark and compelling vision. Wildly ambitious and inventive fantasy from an author who's punching above his weight in terms of worldbuilding—and winning."

Los Angeles Times



"The Grand Dark is a miracle of the old and the new: a tale of Weimar decadence that is also a parable for our New Gilded

Age, where war is inequality's handmaiden. ... It's a fun and terrifying ride, gritty and relentless, burning with true love and revolutionary fervor." CORY DOCTOROW

Locus Magazine



"[T]he cosmopolitan, decadent manners and mores of the city, tinged with the eldritch circumstances, are enrapturing. The naturalistic elements support the fantastical parts and vice versa. The proportions of the storyline are nicely balanced." PAUL DI FILIPPO

NPR



"Rather than lean, mean, and hardboiled, Kadrey's new standalone novel is a sprawl of ornately arranged speculative fiction that ups the ante for urban-set fantasy. ... It's the work of a major science fiction/fantasy creator going way out [on] a limb in the effort to wholly redefine himself, all while crystallizing what's made him great." JASON HELLER

Publishers Weekly



"A constant underlying tension makes the city's powder-keg agitation visceral, and the individual neighborhoods and their residents are well wrought. Any fan of convoluted science fiction will appreciate the sharp twists Largo has to navigate if he and those he loves are going to survive."

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Kadrey is known for his violent and gripping plots, but in this stand-alone novel he focuses more on characters and atmosphere, creating a "sumptuous setting" (NPR) that's ironically perfect for introducing "whatever the opposite of a Belle Epoque might be" (*Locus*). Largo is one in a long line of Kadrey's "gentleman loser antiheroes" (*Los Angeles Times*), whose misadventures power a fast-paced storyline. Reviewers noted that Lower Proszawa bears similarities to worlds created by the likes of China Miéville and Michael Moorcock. Most concluded that this is not just some of Kadrey's best work, but "some of the best fantasy fiction," period (*Kirkus*).

Dodge's brain is preserved for future resurrection. Some time later, a brain-scanning technology saves Dodge's neural connections. At this point, two worlds start to coexist: Bitworld and Meatspace (what we'd call the real world). In Bitworld, Dodge, who becomes a vaguely mad, megalomaniac deity called Egdod, creates a digital afterlife, where millions of downloaded minds join him, while battling his nemesis, Elmo Shepard. Although Bitworld needs Meatspace for computing power, those who remain in Meatspace lack communication with Bitworld. At the same time, those in Bitworld are unaware of their origins in Meatspace

and must create their society from scratch.

William Morrow. 880 pages. \$35. ISBN 9780062458711

NY Times Book Review



"[Fall is] a staggering feat of imagination, intelligence and stamina. For long stretches, at least. ... The result is a story that touches on society, technology, spirituality and even eschatology, a far-reaching attempt at a grand myth that is breathtaking in scope and ambition."

CHARLES YU

NPR



"Fall starts bad, recovers slowly, builds to a level of awesome not seen since

Stephenson's early days of sound and fury when he wrote things like *The Diamond Age* and *Snow Crash*, then settles for an achingly long time, into a kind of back-and-forth narrative discursion on immortality, the singularity, chaos, life and death. ... Stephenson's greatest strength as a writer has always been that he sees just a little bit further and a little bit clearer than the rest of us do." JASON SHEEHAN

Slate



"Fall tricks you into thinking it plans to be this or that sort of fiction (a bitingly plausible near-future dystopia or tale of corporate intriguing, for example), only to heel around and head off in a new direction entirely. ... The audacity of

Stephenson's intentions is itself part of the entertainment value." LAURA MILLER

Washington Post ★★★★★
"The passages set in the real world display all of Stephenson's usual witty brilliance when it comes to technology and culture. ... As for the Miltonic saga of Dodge's godhood, which gradually comes to dominate the narrative, Stephenson more or less gives us a cyber-Silmarillion." PAUL DI FILIPPO

Wired ★★★★★
"What's unique to this go-round is that Stephenson's pet ideas about our digital lives and afterlives overshadow his book's urgency. ... What's most disappointing about Fall's fall into its parallel prehistory is that it leaves a different, more urgent book unwritten—one in which Stephenson wrestles with the chaotic fallout of today's social internet." PETER RUBIN

Publishers Weekly ★★★
"This laboriously detailed follow-up to Reamde explores where human imagination ends and artificial intelligence begins, providing some speculative concepts without any real payoff. ... Fans of Stephenson's passion for the minutiae of technological innovations will revel in the intricacies of his construction, but unwieldy dialogue, uneven pacing, and a narrow-minded view of the future betray the story's promise."

CRITICAL SUMMARY

If readers can get through the first hundred or so pages, "the rest is a feat of mind-blowing adventure powered by deep existential questions" (*Slate*). *Fall; or Dodge in Hell* rewards, eventually—but perhaps only for those who know what they're getting into. The myriad details and digressions can get tiresome, though some critics thought that such "mind-melting density of detail ... is very much in service of the book's subject: reality, and how it might one day be simulated" (*New York Times*). But at its core, the novel is, critics describe, a "savage, Swiftian satire" (*Slate*), "a kind of backward retelling of Milton's *Paradise Lost*" (NPR), and "a kind of information-age Genesis story" (*New York Times*)—un-

til it morphs into "a ripingly Tolkienesque epic fantasy quest" (*Slate*). Ambitious, audacious, and breathtaking in scope—and perhaps not for Stephenson newbies.



Lent

By Jo Walton



Jo Walton is a Welsh Canadian science fiction and fantasy author. Her novel *Among Others* (★★★★★ SELECTION May/June 2011) won the Nebula Award and the

Hugo Award for Best Novel. She has also published three poetry collections, two essay collections, and a short story collection. *Lent*, as in her Thessaly Series, returns to the Renaissance and its relationship to antiquity.

THE STORY: Opening in April 1492, *Lent* is the alternate history of Brother Girolamo Savonarola, the real-life monk behind the bonfire of the vanities book burning in Florence. Here, however, young Girolamo has the ability to see and banish demons and the capability of giving, what he believes, is true prophecy. After Girolamo spends his life attempting to do good as a political force, shaping Florence into a democracy, he falls out of favor and is excommunicated and executed. After his death, Girolamo receives a fantastic shock that leaves him reliving his life between 1492 and 1498 over and over again, in a sort of Renaissance *Groundhog Day*, while attempting to change history and himself.

Tor. 384 pages. \$26.99. ISBN 9780765379061

Los Angeles Times ★★★★★
"In a Walton novel, it's frequently unclear whether the characters' situations are real, whether their actions are just or unjust, and yet, each tale resolves in way that is utterly satisfying and lingeringly curious. ... Again and again, between hell and earth, Savonarola tries different approaches to redeem his beloved Florence and his church, and to find a way

to break the cycle, harrow hell and regain his grace." COREY DOCTOROW

Chicago Review of Books ★★★★★
"Winningly anxious, humane, and cerebral, Lent uses its time-loop structure to elevate historical narrative into a thoughtful exploration of character and faith. ... In a vein that Walton explored at length in *My Real Children*, there's a real poignancy to Girolamo's memories of his previous lives."

JAKE CASELLA

Locus ★★★★★
"What began as a riveting historical about a fascinating figure whose self-destructive pride insured both his demise and his lasting influence ends up as a rather dizzying timeline adventure leading to a conclusion that ingeniously satisfies both the terms of its 15th-century Florentine worldview and the SF-like machinery that makes it work." GARY K. WOLFE

NPR ★★★★★
"I love Walton's work for several reasons, not least of which is her ability to make a book feel like a conversation—between compassionately wrought characters, certainly, but also between reader and text. ... It was odd, having been so dazzled by the ways in which the novel painstakingly sets up its conclusion, to find the book itself impatient to end." AMAL EL-MOHTAR

EL-MOHTAR

Tor.com ★★★★★
"I'm not convinced that Walton pulls off the conclusion, but it's a deeply compelling novel, ambitious and kind, and deeply rooted in the intellectual life of the Renaissance. I enjoyed it immensely." LIZ BOURKE

New York Journal of Books ★★★
"The cover copy of Jo Walton's *Lent* promises that it is a 'historical fantasy thriller set in Renaissance Florence and in Hell!... Unfortunately, it takes a commitment of 168 pages reading to realize this fact—and many readers may find themselves giving up in bewilderment before then." ERICA OBEY

CRITICAL SUMMARY

In *Lent*, "Walton's love of Florence and fascination with the source material

shine off the page” (NPR), and this imaginative, alternative history is “undeniably a love letter to Renaissance Florence” and Girolamo (*Tor*). The first part of the novel sticks, primarily, to the historical facts; the story does not become a fantasy thriller until almost halfway through. The supernatural elements are Christian in nature, with some Neoplatonic themes strewn throughout. But because the fantastical part is late in coming, the *New York Journal of Books* expressed concern that readers expecting Walton’s usual fare might quit reading before that point. That, and the conclusion, feels rushed and, according to a couple of critics, unconvincing. Still *Locus* found that the conclusion “ingeniously satisfies,” and Walton fans won’t be disappointed.



FKA USA

By Reed King



Reed King is the pseudonym of a *New York Times* best-selling author and television writer. That’s all we know.

THE STORY: In 2084, the country formerly known as the USA is now riven by nuclear war and civil war. Truckee Wallace, a 16-year-old orphan, works for a processing plant in Crunchtown 407 (formerly Little Rock, Arkansas) that produces synthetic foodstuffs. His boss sends him to interfere with an inventor’s plot to invent a chip that interfaces between brains and electronic devices. Accompanying him is a talking goat called Barnaby. Ultimately, these orders come from the president, who wants Barnaby delivered to a San Francisco lab. Another character is a female android. The bulk of the novel is Truckee’s journal, while appendices fill in the political backstory and the other quests that involve the search for immortality.

Flatiron Books. 480 pages. \$27.99. ISBN: 9781250108890

NPR ★★★★★

“It ain’t gonna be everyone’s brand of vodka, for sure, but if it isn’t yours, you’ll realize it quickly. ... This is a weird, loud, violent, funny, profane journey across the blasted ruin of our future from the first word to the last, that never pretends to be anything else.” JASON SHEEHAN

Kirkus ★★★★★

“This book is quite strange but eminently readable and kinetic in a manner that mashes up pop culture, video game tropes, apocalyptic visions, and a meaningful nod to the peculiar humor of Douglas Adams. ... Like all quests, there are also a few villains, a prize, and a sacrifice that turns out to be rather touching in the end.”

USA Today ★★★★★

“If taken less as a novel than as an encyclopedia of an imagined future, FKA USA has a lot to offer. ... Richly textured but curiously shapeless, FKA USA is a wander through a strange and fascinating future, nudged along by weak currents of story.” ELIOT SCHREFFER

Publishers Weekly ★★

“Uneven worldbuilding makes this dull, sprawling postapocalyptic picaresque a bit of a mess; the blend of mayhem and farce never gels. ... This dreary slog isn’t worth the effort.”

AV Club ★

“Instead of telling a story, the author packs every page with as many convoluted world-building references and one-liners as possible. It feels less like a novel and more like a movie treatment crowdsourced by studio executives, who then passed the writing off to one of their teenage nephews.” ADAM MORGAN

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Truckee’s journey is full of outlandish happenings and footnotes from *The Grifter’s Guide to the Territories FKA USA*. Reviewers conceded that fans of comic fantasy will probably enjoy the novel in spite of it being “a glorious mess; a jangly, spit-and-duct-tape creation that you can feel shaking itself to pieces even as you read” (NPR). Others were less willing to forgive faults like absurd plot twists, a juvenile

sense of humor, and a misogynistic presentation of women. Is *FKA USA* “a visionary head-trip of apocalyptic political satire” (NPR) or a shapeless mistake? That’s up to readers to decide. In the meantime, speculation over the author’s real identity will only intensify.

young adult

FICTION



On the Come Up

By Angie Thomas



Angie Thomas, a former teen rapper from Jackson, Mississippi, holds a BFA in Creative Writing for Belhaven University. Her debut novel, *The Hate U Give*

(★★★★★ **SELECTION** May/June 2017), won numerous awards and became both a # 1 *New York Times* best seller and the basis of a major motion picture from Fox 2000.

THE STORY: Bri Jackson, 16, is an aspiring rapper. The daughter of an acclaimed underground rapper who was killed by a gang before he could achieve mainstream fame, she dreams of helping her family. Her mother, a former addict always at risk of relapse, loses her job as a church secretary. Her brother, a star student and recent college graduate, is forced to take a job at a local pizza shop to help make ends meet. As the family faces eviction, Bri writes a song spawned by racial profiling she had experienced at school, and it goes viral. White listeners misunderstand her song, however, and begin to see her as a threat. Although the song is her ticket to fame, is it worth changing who she really is?

Balzer + Bray. 464 pages. \$18.99. ISBN: 9780062498564

Guardian (UK) ★★★★★

“[T]he novel’s strength lies in the way it explores the loves, fears and friendships

of an African American community that is doing its best to survive under an increasingly hostile administration.” PATRICIA LAWRENCE

Minneapolis Star Tribune ★★★★★
 “Thomas is a rich chronicler of the love that binds and the poverty that frays black communities. She slows down the story to detail the skills it takes to be a battle rapper, the judgmental nature of black congregations and even a stretch of trash-talking over a game of Uno when the power goes out at Bri’s home.” TRISHA COLLOPY

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★
 “The fact that someone like Bri is granted nearly 500 pages to find and use her voice feels like an event of political urgency. She matters and must be heard, says an author in complete command of her own voice.” KAREN VALBY

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette ★★★★★
 “Angie Thomas expertly dissects black culture and life in a way that is both critical and understanding, affirming her assertion that this book is meant to be a love letter. ... *On the Come Up* is a touching celebration of black culture and black girls combined in a powerful story of what it means to know who you are.” TAYLOR THOMAS

School Library Journal ★★★★★
 “Though the book never sands over the rough realities of Garden Heights, such as gang warfare, it imbues its many characters with warmth and depth. While acknowledging that society is quick to slap labels onto black teens, the author allows her heroine to stumble and fall before finding her footing and her voice. ... Thomas once again fearlessly speaks truth to power; a compelling coming-of-age story for all teens.” MAHNAZ DAR

Vox ★★★★★
 “[*On the Come Up*] is well on its way to becoming just such a runaway success. It’s wise and witty, and it boasts Thomas’s characteristic ability to handle serious questions of systemic racism with a light and even joyous touch.” CONSTANCE GRADY

Washington Post ★★★★★
 “The text challenges its readers to think deeply about white privilege, police

brutality and the circumstances designed to break the spirits of young people of color. ... This book beckons young readers and music lovers alike with an homage to the forefathers of hip-hop that also assures the feminine voice is never dismissed from the cypher.” MAHOGANY L. BROWNE

CRITICAL SUMMARY

As she did in *The Hate U Give*, Thomas dissects black culture, exposes the realities of black working-class life, and examines racism, drug use, and gang violence. Indeed, “Thomas’s superpower is the ability to write tough subjects joyfully” (*Vox*). She achieves this, at least in part, by creating an endearing, honest, and funny protagonist—her life and relationships may not be as relatable as Starr’s from *The Hate U Give*, but they are nonetheless compelling. Despite the difficulties she chronicles, Thomas also celebrates African American culture, “in music, TV and film, bursting with references that feel like a gift to readers who don’t usually see their lives represented this way” (*Guardian*). *On the Come Up*, critics conclude, will likely “assure Thomas’s continued and well-deserved dominance on the best-seller lists” (*Vox*).



Queen of the Sea

By Dylan Meconis



Dylan Meconis is a cartoonist, a writer, and an illustrator from Portland, Oregon. Her illustrations have appeared in the *Portland Mercury*, the *Nib*, and *Feminist Frequency*. *Queen of the Sea*, which reimagines the exile of Queen Elizabeth I by her sister, Queen Mary, is her fifth graphic novel.

THE STORY: Margaret has grown up in a convent, and while she’s not sure how or why she ended up on a remote island of the Albion kingdom, she’s content with her life. The nuns are kind, and Margaret plans to join their vocation. But when Lady Cameron

and her son, William, arrive on the island, Margaret learns that the nuns are exiles and that the island is a political prison. Suddenly, the question of how and why Margaret landed there seems much more urgent. Years later, after William returns to Albion, Margaret learns the difficult truths about her heritage, her island home, and the sisters who inhabit it. When Eleanor, the deposed Queen of Albion, arrives, Margaret is cast into an unexpected political storm.

Candlewick/Walker Books. 400 pages. \$24.99. ISBN: 9781536204988

Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books ★★★★★
 “Meconis revels in the offstage court machinations, but within the lone setting of the convent island she also creates respectful portraits of strong women who know how to weather a political storm, and of faith and religious ritual that bring the sisters genuine contentment.” ELIZABETH BUSH

Kirkus ★★★★★
 “With its compelling, complex characters and intrigue-laden plot, this will have readers hoping it’s only the first of many adventures for Meconis’s savvy heroine.”

Publishers Weekly ★★★★★
 “Meconis constructs the plot with carefully paced revelations and story elements that echo, build, and amplify each other. Art in soft, earthy colors brings this singular story to life in styles ranging from simple line drawings to elaborately styled text illuminations.”

YA Books Central ★★★★★
 “The illustrations lend to the time and emotions of the story line. I did wish that more was revealed on what happened to her young friend William and the fate of Queen Eleanor at the end.” KIM BACCELLIA

School Library Journal ★★★★★
 “In this tale loosely based on the early years of Elizabeth I, Meconis skillfully balances imaginative twists with factual evidence. At several points, Margaret interrupts the narrative to offer historical context about Albion or information on the nuns’ rituals, immersing readers in the drama in spite of the occasionally heavy

BOOKMARKS SELECTION



Patron Saints of Nothing

By Randy Ribay



Randy Ribay is an author and a high school English teacher. Born in the Philippines, he grew up in Michigan and Colorado. *Patron Saints of Nothing* is his third book, after *An Infinite Number of Parallel Universes* (2015) and *After the Shot Drops* (2018)

THE STORY: High school senior Jay Reguero was born in the Philippines, but growing up in Michigan has created some distance:

he doesn't speak Tagalog, and while he used to be close with his cousin and pen pal Jun, who was born and raised in Manila, it's been a while since Jay responded to one of his letters. Then, he hears that Jun has been killed, supposedly in President Rodrigo Duterte's war on drugs, which has permitted the extrajudicial murder of thousands of people. No one in Jay's family will talk about it, even though Jun's father is a police chief. Jay decides to go to a Manila he barely remembers to figure out the truth about his cousin's murder, even if it means confronting the horrible realities about his homeland, his family, and himself.

Kokila. 346 pages. \$17.99. ISBN: 9780525554912

Buffalo News



"He expertly navigates the tricky issues of the cultural identity and complicated family relationships this heritage poses. ... Jun, a tragic figure, comes to life through his letters, and this novel is as much Jun's story as it is Jay's, putting a human face on the statistics behind this deadly vigilante war on drugs." JEAN WESTMORE

School Library Journal



"Part mystery, part elegy, part coming of age, this novel is a perfect convergence of authentic voice and an emphasis on inner dialogue around equity, purpose, and reclaiming one's lost cultural identity." SARA LISSA PAULSON

USA Today



"As mysterious as the plot is, the book is no thriller and has a

purposefully slow pace. ... It's a perfect balance of an immigrant story, an American story and a story of grief, woven together by the perspective of a teenage boy trying to understand his family and himself." DELFINA V. BARBIERO

Utopia State of Mind



"Patron Saints of Nothing is stunning from page one. ... It is a book brimming with emotions, hard truths, and experiences that will wring your heart."

YA Books Central



"Reading Patron Saints of Nothing invokes a lot of emotions, especially for someone who's socially aware of the current political situation in the Philippines." BETH EDWARDS

Center for Children's Books



"Ribay does a great job of engaging those complications instead of resolving them for readers, as Jason's general American teen ignorance makes him an effective surrogate throughout his investigations, which necessitates a nuanced look at the country, its culture, its languages, its beauty, and its strife." WESLEY JACQUES

National Public Radio



"[The war on drugs is] a conversation that extends past shores of the Southeast Asian archipelago and extends to Filipinos, their families and descendants living abroad—including in the United States." NOEL KING

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Patron Saints of Nothing is a slow burn, alternating between Jay and Jun's letters and a more traditional narrative. While critics universally lauded the realism of the characters, Jay's character, in particular, is strikingly nuanced: as an American-raised Filipino, his ignorance of his native country serves as an entry point for readers who might be unfamiliar with the political climate of the Philippines. To his credit, Ribay doesn't neatly solve any of the problems Jay confronts—not just with extreme poverty and the war on drugs but also within his own family and their history. There are no pat solutions in real life, the author suggests, as he effectively portrays complicated, painful, and, above all, real circumstances that cannot be so easily reconciled.

backstory. ... The book is dense with dialogue, often feeling more like a work of prose than a graphic novel." MATISSE MOZER

believable, female protagonists in young Margaret, Lady Cameron, and the nuns."

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Meconis tells *Queen of the Sea* through conventional graphic novel panels, with atmospheric watercolor illustrations—in a style noted by *School Library Journal* to resemble Raina Telgemeier's—but much of Margaret's narration, because it is long and often veers into backstories or folktales, ap-

Shelf-Employed



"Queen of the Sea is a rousing adventure, but it's also an education in sixteenth century politics and the lifestyle of a religious order in the early days of modern Western history. Though the destiny of women was often determined by men, Queen of the Sea offers strong, but

pears alongside the frames. While the book has crossover appeal for lovers of both historical fiction and political fantasy, some critics debated whether the book is best for teens or middle-grade readers. While the plot and the politics might be a little complex for some younger readers, the island world is elaborately developed, and the characterization of Margaret rings true. The strong females go beyond Margaret, however: they're strong, but believable

and nuanced, as they work through issues of politics, faith, and destiny.



With the Fire on High

By Elizabeth Acevedo



National Poetry Slam champion Elizabeth Acevedo's debut novel in verse, *The Poet X* (2018), won the National Book Award for Young People's Literature,

as well as the Michael L. Printz, Pura Belpré, and *Boston Globe*–Horn Book awards.

THE STORY: Emoni Santiago, an Afro-Latina high school senior in north Philly, is the mother of two-year-old Emma. Living with her grandmother, Buela, who's raised her, Emoni is juggling motherhood, a part-time job, and her ambitions. She's a gifted, magical cook, with dishes that reflect her multicultural ancestry. Emoni dreams of becoming a chef, and when an elective cooking class—culminating with a week in Spain—is offered, she can't possibly pass up the opportunity, despite the cost, the time commitment, and a nagging sense of being foolish for entertaining such impractical dreams. Emoni pursues her passion, and, in so doing, also finds romance with a charming classmate, who is grieving the shooting death of his younger brother.

HarperTeen. 400 pages. \$17.99. ISBN: 9780062662835

Book Smugglers ★★★★★

"[A] beautiful, poetic, remarkably drama-free portrayal of a teen mother growing into her own." ANA GRILO

Horn Book ★★★★★

"Acevedo continues to create beautifully realized characters with complex lives ... and her portrait of a young mother is a story too infrequently taken up in YA. But readers of all sorts will find something to connect with in this honest and ultimately hopeful story—and aspiring chefs like

Emoni can follow a few actual recipes (such as 'When Life Gives You Lemons, Make Lemon Verbena Tembleque')." CHRISTINA DOBBS

New York Times ★★★★★

"The narrative of *With the Fire on High* is a common, shared one—the story of a multifaceted, brilliant brown woman who will not be victimized by other people's projections of shame on black and brown young mothers—but Acevedo elevates it in a way that feels new. ... With its judicious depth and brilliant blazes of writing that simmer, then nourish, *With the Fire on High* is literary soul food." JOSHUNDA SANDERS

NPR ★★★★★

"This book is boldly and gloriously subversive. In a world of after-school specials designed to scare teenagers into abstinence, *With the Fire on High* dares to make the assertion that it's possible to be both a teen mother and a good mother."

CAITLYN PAXSON

Washington Independent Review of Books ★★★★★

"*With the Fire on High* is a delectable confection filled with optimism, humor, and an obvious affection for each and every character." EMMA CARBONE

Washington Post ★★★★★

"*With the Fire on High* transcends old tropes, letting us into the mind and heart of a teenager as she struggles with how to follow her dreams—and whether she should." JULIE DEPENBROCK

Entertainment Weekly ★★★★★

"Acevedo's clever imagery and explorations of language and culture make the journey not only beautiful, but thought-provoking. However, I was left craving the fleshy, savory story lines we know she's capable of delivering." LURIA FREEMAN

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Critics are high on what Acevedo delivered with *The Poet X*, and now its follow up. A former eighth-grade English teacher, the author clearly empathizes with her young-adult readers. *With the Fire on High* is a rebuttal to the tired narrative of young mothers of color, and others in their communi-

ties, as tragic lost souls. Repeatedly, characters defy stereotypes. *Entertainment Weekly* asserts that Acevedo truly sees her characters "and wants them to see themselves." Moreover, this book will make you hungry: Each section is introduced with a recipe for one of Emoni's dishes, the description of which conveys the quality of her cooking. Acevedo, the *New York Times* writes, has "pulled off a kind of alchemy of emotions and magic reminiscent of Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate*."



Enchantée

By Gita Trelease



Born to Indian and Swedish parents in Sweden, Gita Trelease has lived around the world. Educated at Yale College and New York University, Trelease received her

PhD in British literature. Before becoming a novelist, Trelease taught classes on writing and fairy tales.

THE STORY: On the eve of the French Revolution, Camille Durbonne, 17, must find a way to support herself and her younger sister after they've been orphaned. Using *la magie ordinaire*, or "magic drawn from sorrow," Camille turns bits of metal into coins to pay for bread, but *la magie* leaves Camille weak. When their drunken brother steals the girls' savings, Camille tries a darker magic. Using an enchanted makeup brush and a dress left by her mother to disguise herself, Camille slips into Marie Antoinette's court to gamble with aristocrats. While filling her pockets with coins, Camille finds herself drawn to the decadent life of the very aristocrats she grew up hating, while also becoming addicted to *la magie*. As revolution unfolds, she discovers the great cost of magic.

Flatiron Books. 464 pages. \$18.99. ISBN 9781250295521

NPR ★★★★★
"Enchantée is a soaring success. I can think of no more satisfying way to fly across the years and enjoy a gilded view of Paris as it never was but could have been, with a little magic." CAITLYN PAXSON

School Library Journal ★★★★★
"Romance and fantasy readers will enjoy the magic realism, ruse and tension of Camille's double identity, authentic historical references, and Camille's daring, passionate spirit. A must-have." GERRY LARSON

YA Books Central ★★★★★
"I loved the intrigue of 1789 Paris in the glittering courts of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. Also the idea that not only the aristocrats, but Versailles used magic adds to the story." KIM BACCELLIA

Literary Review (UK) ★★★
"Gita Trelease's *Enchantée* is a fine teen novel that deals with concealment and identity: the young characters experiment, hiding and revealing secrets, as France tries to forge a new path. This is a thrilling account of love, passion, and adventure."
 PHILLIP WOMACK

Publishers Weekly ★★★
"While debut author Trelease's twist on the Cinderella story offers some diversity with gay and biracial characters—Camille's love interest is an aeronaut of French and Indian descent—too much attention is given to the minutiae and intrigue of court life, leaving themes of diversity underexplored. Nevertheless, Camille's desire to be a voice of change for the oppressed will resonate."

Kirkus ★★★
"Camille has a slow-burn romance with a biracial French/Indian balloonist, and race and racism are lightly touched upon. ... Somewhat like its protagonist, Trelease's debut at times falls a little flat despite its ideal trappings and never rises to extraordinary."

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Trelease's reworking of the Cinderella story garnered mixed reviews. NPR notes that "*Enchantée* paints its sorceries with a delicate hand," while still knowing "how to have fun" with its

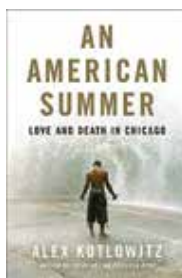
lavish descriptions of French food and clothing. The novel addresses serious issues: greed and addiction. However, other themes, including those of racism and homophobia, remain underdeveloped. Despite such unevenness—both in thematic development and in pacing—1789 Paris comes alive. Trelease successfully builds an alternate, richly limned, and glittering world to the one we know in history books. For fans of history, fantasy, and magic, *Enchantée* is "an ambitious, rich and absorbing debut" (*Literary Review*).

general NONFICTION



An American Summer

Love and Death in Chicago
 By Alex Kotlowitz



Alex Kotlowitz, a former staff writer for the *Wall Street Journal*, has received the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award and the George Polk Award. His three previous books are *There Are No Children Here: The Story of Two Boys Growing Up in the Other America* (1991), *The Other Side of the River: A Story of Two Towns, a Death, and America's Dilemma* (1998), and *Never a City So Real: A Walk in Chicago* (2004). He also cocreated an award-winning documentary, *The Interrupters* (2011). From New York City, Kotlowitz now lives in the Chicago suburbs.

THE TOPIC: Two of Alex Kotlowitz's previous books, as well as his documentary, explore Chicago's violence. Here, he zeroes in on the summer of 2013 and rough Chicago neighborhoods like Englewood and North Lawndale, which lose more than 50 residents to gun violence annually. During this summer, 172 people were killed in Chicago, and another 793 were wounded by gunfire. Kotlowitz

introduces readers to the range of people caught up in the violence—victims, perpetrators, and bystanders. There's a teenaged gang member who jeopardizes his future by killing a rival. A mother decides to testify on behalf of her son's murderer; a different mother forgives her son's killer. A social worker sees a favorite student gunned down, and a witness sees police planting evidence. "I could tell story after story like this," Kotlowitz writes. It's an eye-opening and an empathetic book.
 Nan A. Talese. 304 pages. \$27.95. ISBN: 9780385538800

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel ★★★★★
"Among the many gut-wrenching and heartbreaking stories that Alex Kotlowitz shares in *An American Summer: Love and Death in Chicago* is ... one from Doris Hernandez, a member of a support group for mothers who've lost a child through violence. ... Kotlowitz listens with compassion to dozens of affected people, bringing them alive in fluid prose." JIM HIGGINS

Minneapolis Star Tribune ★★★★★
"If his new book is disconcerting to read, it's also hard to look away from. Kotlowitz's accounts of love, friendship, parenting, rivalry, humiliation and the pressure to maintain respect are fascinatingly real."
 MARK KRAMER

NPR ★★★★★
"Kotlowitz presents the human side of tragedy, the stories of those left behind. ... This makes *An American Summer* an uncomfortable read that cuts to the marrow of one of country's most violent cities and exposes the inequities, economic factors, and psycho-geographic elements that make it what it is." GABINO IGLESIAS

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★
"*An American Summer* is a powerful indictment of a city and a nation that have failed to protect their most vulnerable residents, or to register the depth of their pain. ... Kotlowitz aims to tell unforgettable stories about the afterlife of homicide, how it penetrates the minds, bodies and communities of those it touches. He succeeds." ERIC KLINENBERG

Irish Times ★★★★★
“Survivors form mutual support groups—‘they live richly in mourning’—and those who have inflicted violence turn their lives around. But their stories resist narratives of closure and redemption.” STEPHEN PHILLIPS

Washington Post ★★★★★
“One thing [Kotlowitz] does achieve is to make clear that these horrors are not happening on TV or to creatures who somehow don’t feel pain. They are happening here, in the most prosperous nation in the world, to people like me and you.” CLIFFORD THOMPSON

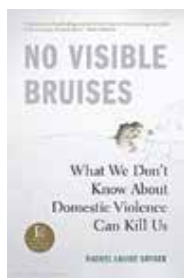
CRITICAL SUMMARY

Kotlowitz’s first book, *There Are No Children Here*, about two boys growing up in a Chicago public-housing complex, was on the New York Public Library’s list of the 150 most important books of the 20th century. His latest work is just as revealing about the situation on the ground in Chicago, where poverty and violence go hand in hand. He spends time with those who have been traumatized by homicide, including grieving family members. The book can veer towards the depressing; Kotlowitz, to the frustration of some critics, also proposes no solutions. “He’s too shrewd and has seen too much to tender any prescriptions” (*Irish Times*). Nonetheless, the stories he shares will instill conviction and compassion.



No Visible Bruises

What We Don’t Know About Domestic Violence Can Kill Us
 By Rachel Louise Snyder



Journalist Rachel Louise Snyder reports widely on domestic violence. Her previous books include *Fugitive Denim: A Moving Story of People and Pants in the Borderless World of Global Trade* (2008) and a novel, *What We’ve Lost Is Nothing* (2014). Snyder is an associate professor

of creative writing and journalism at American University in Washington, D.C. *No Visible Bruises* received the 2018 Lukas Work-in-Progress Award from the Columbia School of Journalism and Harvard’s Nieman Foundation.

THE TOPIC: As of 2017, four women are killed by their partners each day in America. That statistic accounts for the passion and the urgency in Snyder’s investigation of domestic violence. The costs to society are staggering: 8 million days lost from work each year and \$8 billion in health care costs. But Snyder puts a human face on such losses. In particular, she follows the case of one Montana family. Rocky and Michelle Mosure had two children by the time Michelle graduated from high school. Rocky was violent and addicted to drugs. Although Michelle got a restraining order, he murdered her and their children before killing himself. Snyder interviews both victims and abusers, as well as discussing shelters and rehabilitation programs in this sobering, but essential, book.
 Bloomsbury Publishing. 320 pages. \$28. ISBN: 9781635570977

Guardian (UK) ★★★★★
“Snyder is here to tell us, in her clear, smooth and accessible style (never folksy but never academic, and so matter-of-fact you can feel the writer holding herself in check so as not to overwhelm us with painful details), that we have misunderstood. ... There is a river of shame and grief in this book, and even the most well meaning wade in it.” AMY BLOOM

Kirkus ★★★★★
“As these stories and perspectives evolve and deepen, the author contributes her own profound introspection on the nature of empathy and relatability, weaving in themes of enduring emotional trauma, the resilience of ‘deep stereotypes,’ and the many manifestations of physical and emotional violence. Bracing and gut-wrenching, with slivers of hope throughout, this is exemplary, moving reportage on an important subject that often remains in the dark due to shame and/or fear.”

Los Angeles Times ★★★★★
“One senses Snyder’s impatience in the short, fragmentary sentences that pepper the book. Her empathy for the victims is powerful, and infectious.” KATE TUTTLE

Minneapolis Star Tribune ★★★★★
“The book is far from a collection of grim statistics, even though it’s packed with upsetting information. Snyder is a talented storyteller, and *No Visible Bruises* is largely a series of moving and fascinating in-depth profiles.” ERICA PEARSON

Washington Post ★★★★★
“In a writing style that’s as gripping as good fiction, as intimate as memoir and deeply informed, she takes us into the lives of the abused, the abusers and the survivors. The stories are devastating, but Snyder keeps us reading by pointing us toward possible solutions. She delves into how researchers and front-line interveners are creating practical, cost-effective, evidence-based ways to save lives.” E.J. GRAFF

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★
“Less convincing is her call for perpetrators to get more jail time, to give the victims more time to get their own lives in order. ... To her credit, Snyder takes seriously the underlying causes of violence, interviewing perpetrators and noting that many have often been victims themselves.”
 ALISA ROTH

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Snyder refers to domestic violence as “intimate terrorism,” often kept secret because of shame and misunderstandings. But keeping quiet about it only leads to larger problems that feed on misogyny, she argues, including mass shootings. This book “is both reportage and manifesto” (*Los Angeles Times*), with the author calling for transparency and for support from lawmakers and drawing attention to the advocacy groups that exist to help victims. She also ponders the reasons why men are drawn into violent behavior, “combining her own careful analysis with deeply upsetting and thoughtfully told accounts of victims” (*New York Times Book Review*). It doesn’t make for comfortable reading, but, for its potential to save lives *No Visible Bruises* may

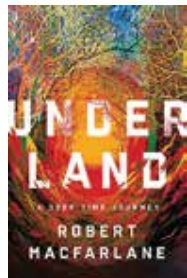
be among the most important books published this year.



Underland

A Deep Time Journey

By Robert Macfarlane



British nature writer and Cambridge literature professor Robert Macfarlane's books include the award-winning *Mountains of the Mind: A History of a Fascination* (2003),

The Wild Places (2007), *The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot* (2012), *Holloway* (2013), *Landmarks* (2015), and more. In 2017, he received the American Academy of Arts and Letters' E. M. Forster Prize for Literature.

THE TOPIC: Look up at a cloudless night sky, Macfarlane writes, "and you might see the light from a star thousands of trillions of miles away, or pick out the craters left by asteroid strikes on the moon's face." But, he continues, rarely has he felt as far from the human realm as when he was but 10 yards beneath it. It's into this world so near and so far that we journey in *Underland*. We creep and crawl through the catacombs beneath the streets of Paris, into which, he tells us, millions of corpses from the city's overcrowded cemeteries were, in the 18th century, dumped, and where he encounters a band of urban adventurers enjoying brie and beer and listening to David Bowie. We enter Slovenian caves and a Finnish nuclear-waste repository. And, in Greenland, Macfarlane shares the experience of "the most beautiful and frightening space into which I have ever looked": a vertical chute within a melting glacier.

Norton. 496 pages. \$27.95. ISBN: 9780393242140

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★

"Macfarlane's writing is muscular, meticulously researched and lyrical, placing him in the lineage of Peter Matthiessen, Gretel Ehrlich and Barry

Lopez. What distinguishes his work is his beginner's mind, his lack of self-consciousness, his physical pursuit of unlearning what he has been taught by received information." TERRY TEMPEST WILLIAMS

Guardian (UK)

★★★★★

"There is a rare gift at work here: chiselled prose of such beauty that it can, on occasion, illuminate the darkness below ground as startlingly as a Verrey light sent up into the vaults of one of Macfarlane's subterranean stalactite cathedrals." WILLIAM DALRYMPLE

New York Times

★★★★★

"[T]his is an excellent book—fearless and subtle, empathic and strange. It is the product of real attention and tongue-and-groove workmanship." DWIGHT GARNER

NPR

★★★★★

"[T]he pages of *Underland* fly fast. At times though, the bigger reward is to allow Macfarlane's words slow passage across the mind. ... The beauty is immense—of the writing and of the natural world it describes." BARBARA J. KING

San Francisco Chronicle

★★★★★

"*Underland* is] a tangled journey—part science fiction, part ancient myth—and Macfarlane narrates it elegantly. He's a precise, tart, luminous writer, whose descriptions throw off sparks." PETER FISH

Wall Street Journal

★★★★★

"[Macfarlane] is both Dante and Virgil, wide-eyed visitor as well as seasoned guide, accompanying us to the underworld, underland, Wonderland, the rabbit hole, there and back again." MARCIA BJORNERUD

Los Angeles Times

★★★★

"*Underland* starts strong, and any reader familiar with Macfarlane's prose will find that precise and underloved stash of fabulous words. ... But a brittle format begins to emerge: A paragraph-long, scene-setting passage, all detail, few verbs." NATHAN DEUEL

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Macfarlane is foremost a poet, "evoking place and mood with astounding economy" (*Wall Street Journal*). When

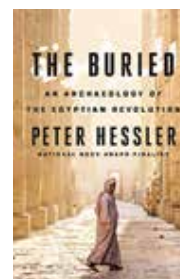
it seems that the book's framework might be in danger of crumbling, "the power of the writing holds it together like a force field." The *New York Times*, while acknowledging that the author sometimes resorts to "BBC/PBS gently-eat-your-peas earth-show narration," is also enthusiastic—but the *Los Angeles Times* less so. Dialogue exchanges are too often too long, rendering a claustrophobic feel. But Macfarlane earns high marks for his sense of purpose; he "ensures that our images of the underland are lashed to a recognition of terrible human harms to the environment" (NPR). Indeed, the adventures serve as launching points for discussions of deeper concern: "the relationship between man and landscape, the instability of time and place, and perhaps above all, the fragility of all we are and all we create" (*Guardian*).



The Buried

An Archaeology of the Egyptian Revolution

By Peter Hessler



A *New Yorker* staff writer, Peter Hessler served as the magazine's Cairo correspondent between 2011 and 2016. His books include *River Town: Two Years on the*

Yangtze (2001), winner of the Kiri-yama Book Prize; *Oracle Bones: A Journey Through Time in China* (★★★★ July/Aug 2006), a finalist for the National Book Award; and others. Hessler won the 2008 National Magazine Award for excellence in reporting.

THE TOPIC: Hessler arrived in Cairo with his wife and two infant children in October 2011, shortly after protests had led to the fall of President Hosni Mubarak. The interim military government had promised to hold elections, and democratic rule seemed imminent. But it was not to be. Hessler recounts those uncertain days through the lives

of ordinary people, including Sayyid, a garbage collector, whose wife is attempting to divorce him, and Manu, a gay man subjected to harassment, beatings, and arrest. As the protests turn violent, Hessler reports from the streets, hunkering down in a mosque that now serves as a command center for protesters. He also visits archaeological sites, finding parallels between ancient Egypt and the tumultuous events unfolding around him.

Penguin. 480 pages. \$28. ISBN: 9780525559566

Minneapolis Star Tribune ★★★★★

"Although Egypt and America may never fully understand each other, reporters such as Hessler help narrow the gap. In *The Buried*, he's crafted an edifying portrait of a nation that experienced a dramatic uprising—and hasn't changed as much as many of its citizens had hoped." KEVIN

CANFIELD

Wall Street Journal ★★★★★

"[A] closely observed, touching and at times amusing chronicle of this tumultuous time. ... Drawing both from daily life and from interviews with highly placed political figures, the book is an extraordinary work of reportage, on a par with Anthony Shadid's *Night Draws Near* (2005), which was itself built from tales of everyday Iraqis during the early days of the American occupation." JOHN FREEMAN

Washington Post ★★★★★

"[A]n eclectic, beautifully written narrative that weaves a portrait of contemporary life in Egypt together with the complex strands of its pharaonic past, finding parallels between seemingly disparate ancient and modern worlds. ... Although at first it may seem unclear why Hessler tacks between the instability of contemporary Egypt and its ancient glories, he makes thoughtful connections between the authoritarian grandeur of the past and the chaos of today." RACHEL NEWCOMB

Literary Review ★★★★★

"The greatest contribution of *The Buried* to the shelf of English-language books on the Arab Spring is the intimately detailed depictions it provides of a handful of ordinary, politically disengaged Cairenes

trying to steer their way through the chaos." DAVID D. KIRKPATRICK

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★

"The book's three-part outline ('The President,' 'The Coup,' 'The President') is deceptively simple. ... What Hessler offers is something that no Egyptian could ever really write, and in that way, he adds alternate dimensions to a story, or the stories, of this place we call home, with all the good intentions of simply his own singular viewpoint and experience." YASMINE

EL RASHIDI

Sydney Morning Herald ★★★★★

"*The Buried* is a book that promises a uniquely deep insight into modern Egypt, and what went so terribly wrong after the tumultuous, joyous eruptions of the Arab Spring. But the implied but never stated conclusion that Hessler invites the reader to make is rather more cliched than he probably ever intended: that the more things change, the more they stay the same." PETER GRESTE

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Hessler has a unique talent for conveying the humanity of his subjects. In *The Buried*, he writes poignantly of "the untapped human potential and the cleverness with which Egyptians navigate everyday life in the face of an often brutal authoritarian regime" (*Washington Post*). The *Wall Street Journal* calls the author "a superb literary archaeologist," who conveys a sense of wonder that he's allowed "to watch the history of this grand city unfold, one day at a time." Moreover, he successfully brings together disparate themes of political instability, the lives of everyday Egyptians, and his own education and understanding of Egypt's language and history. Despite the richness of the text, readers hoping for a surprise ending will be disappointed, as we all know how, upon Hessler and his family's departure from Egypt, the country turns out.



Three Women

By Lisa Taddeo



Journalist Lisa Taddeo is a magazine and short story writer whose pieces have appeared in *New York* magazine, *Esquire*, *Elle*, *Glamour*, and the *Best American Sports*

Writing and *Best American Political*

Writing anthologies. For this debut book, Taddeo spent eight years and crisscrossed the country six times to find the subjects of her book and to immerse herself in their lives, even moving to their towns to better understand their daily lives.

THE TOPIC: Taddeo chronicles the erotic lives of three women. Lina, a suburban housewife with an emotionally and physically cold husband, rekindles a high school romance with a now-married man. Lina finds great passion, but he is, in fact, unconcerned and noncommittal. A high school teacher pursues an inappropriate relationship with teenage Maggie, until his wife finds a text, and the teacher instantly drops Maggie, devastating her. Now in her early 20s, Maggie falls under media scrutiny when she presses charges against the teacher, but a jury acquits him, believing the teacher's version of events over Maggie's. Finally, Sloane has an open marriage with Richard, who sets up sexual encounters for Sloane so he can watch them. When the wife of a married partner discovers their activity, she wrongly blames only Sloane.

Avid Reader Press/Simon & Schuster. 320 pages. \$27. ISBN 9781451642292

LA Review of Books ★★★★★

"Taddeo rarely interjects to give her two cents on any particular scene; her prologue and epilogue are brief, too, allowing the three stories to stand alone as dispatches from the world of female longing and loss. She does not offer solutions to these women's problems or hope for their outcomes." HELENA DUNCAN

NPR ★★★★★
"Its prose is gorgeous, nearly lyrical as it describes the longings and frustrations that propel these ordinary women. Blending the skills of an ethnographer and a poet, Taddeo renders them extraordinary." KATE TUTTLE

Slate ★★★★★
"What makes *Three Women* so remarkable and indelible, and also so refreshingly out-of-step with the tenor of the present moment, is Taddeo's refusal to judge these 'characters.' ... What most fascinates her is how sexual desire transfigures the entire tissue of a personality and chances the course of lives." LAURA MILLER

Washington Post ★★★★★
"Although this is a book about women's desire, readers will not find in its pages an answer to the question of 'what women really want.' Rather, it is a heartbreaking litany of the disappointments and betrayals that shape female longing." BRYN GREENWOOD

Guardian (UK) ★★★
"This book does not reveal a secret history, or even describe a contemporary sexual dynamic ... *Three Women* simply confirms, once again, the hypocrisies of the heterosexual marriage, the psychological scars that sexual coercion and violence can leave on a person, and the persistence of gender inequality." EMILY WITT

New York Times ★★★
"What we have instead is something much more modest—an immersive look at a particular story of female sexuality, albeit refracted three ways. It's florid and sometimes inexcusably clumsy but also bracing, bleak and full of nagging questions about why it remains so difficult for some women to access their secret lives, to name—let alone pursue—their desires." PARUL SEHGAL

New Yorker ★★★
"Taddeo's view of women as both impossibly complicated and fundamentally constrained leads her to ascribe nonsense and clichés to them. ... Although she asserts in her epilogue that 'women have agency,' she tends to patronize her subjects, emphasizing the

fact that people may not understand their conflicting emotions." LAUREN OYLER

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Taddeo originally set out to examine desire in modern-day America. After eight years of exhaustive research, however, she takes "a deep, deep dive into the sexual psyches of her three characters" (*Slate*). Not surprisingly, reviews of *Three Women* frequently remark on the unrepresentative nature of this book: her three subjects are white, (mostly) heterosexual, and cisgender and were selected for honesty and relatability. Taddeo is, however, "stellar at embodying the women, taking on the voice of each in turn" (*Washington Post*). Her use of language raised some eyebrows: despite some lyrical passages, an "assembly line of truly terrible metaphors" (*New York Times*) and the haphazard switching of tenses. Ultimately, a common theme emerges about the rather grim truths about female desire and power. As the *Washington Post* notes, "Taddeo doesn't shy away from uncovering the deeply misogynistic messages that pervade our society."



Upheaval

Turning Points for Nations in Crisis
 By Jared Diamond



Jared Diamond, a professor of geography at the University of California-Los Angeles, is the author of *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*, which won the 1998 Pulitzer Prize for General Nonfiction; *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (2005); *Why Is Sex Fun?* (1997); *The World Until Yesterday* (2012); and *The Third Chimpanzee* (1991). He has been awarded the U.S. National Medal of Science and a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship and was elected to the U.S. National Academy of Sciences.

THE TOPIC: Nations in crisis, Diamond argues, can learn from the resolution of personal crises. He lists 12 factors developed by therapists to predict how well a person will handle a crisis, and he asserts that there are "recognizable analogues" for nation-states. Among those factors are an acknowledgment of a crisis, accepting the responsibility to act, seeking help from others, and recognizing "core values." Diamond examines several national crises dating back to the mid-19th century and spanning Finland, Japan, Chile, Indonesia, Germany, Australia, and the United States. As for the present, in addition to potential crises that all nations confront—including nuclear warfare and climate change—Diamond writes that the United States must find solutions for political polarization, low voter turnout, obstacles to voter registration, economic inequality, limited socioeconomic mobility, and decreasing government investment in public goods—threats greater, he argues, than any posed by other nations. "Only we Americans can destroy ourselves," he concludes.

Little, Brown. 512 pages. \$35. ISBN: 9780316409131

Boston Globe ★★★★★
"The great pleasure of this volume is the random intriguing insights peppered throughout these cases. ... He's actually an optimist, though of a curmudgeonly sort."

DAVID M. SHRIBMAN

NPR ★★★★★
"Anyone with an interest in history, psychology, or the future of the country will find much to admire in *Upheaval*, and Diamond's take on how our nation might navigate its path forward is fascinating reading for anyone anxious about the state of the republic today." MICHAEL SCHAUB

USA Today ★★★★★
"By detailing how seven countries faced past upheavals with self-appraisal and bold adaptation, Diamond makes an erudite case for learning from history and applying its lessons to our global future. ... But Diamond's decision not to include any discussion of the UK's Brexit upheaval or the polarization of America in the Trump

era leaves a gap in his political science."

MATT DAMSKER

Guardian (UK) ★★★
"Diamond has grounds for extreme pessimism, but he also sees some hopeful signs. ... Diamond's methods—drawing direct parallels between personal and national trauma, and between the psychology of individuals and character of nations—are not those practiced by historians, who tend to emphasize the particularity of circumstance and the intricate unrepeatability of events." COLIN KIDD

Wall Street Journal ★★★
"Mr. Diamond tries to be systematic throughout, interrogating his case studies according to a list of criteria that, he believes, support a comparison across cultures and centuries. But his approach is also idiosyncratic and eclectic, with fascinating details and stories offered up along the way." BRENDAN SIMMS

Washington Post ★★★
"In the same way that his previous and far more rigorous work, *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, suffered from an excessive reliance on geography to explain complex, multidimensional events, *Upheaval* suffers from an overreliance on psychology." MOISÉS NAÍM

New York Times ★
"I dug into Diamond's latest, intrigued by his thesis that the way individual humans cope with crisis might teach something to countries. Then, before long, the first mistake caught my eye; soon, the 10th. ... Errors, along with generalizations, blind spots and oversights, that called into question the choice to publish." ANAND GIRIDHARADAS

CRITICAL SUMMARY

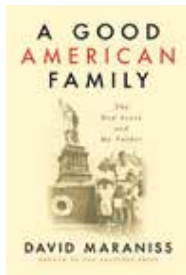
NPR finds *Upheaval* "similar to taking a college course from a professor who's as charming as he is polymathic." Still, some, like the *Washington Post*, question whether nations and individuals in the throes of crisis are really comparable, concluding that Diamond's analysis fails to persuade. That said, the critic continues: "Ignore his attempts to force the therapeutic 12-step onto

history" and enjoy this journey with an "experienced observer with an uncanny eye for the small details that reveal larger truths." But the *New York Times* could not overlook the author's missteps: the book's framework is "driving the inquiry here, and everything stands at its service." The people we encounter are too often sketchily drawn, because only the framework matters. Moreover, the critic concludes, "facts recede in importance. The book is riddled with errors." Interesting premise, less-successful execution.



A Good American Family

The Red Scare and My Father
 By David Maraniss



David Maraniss is an associate editor at the *Washington Post*, where he has worked for 40 years. During his time with the newspaper, he has won the Pulitzer Prize twice. His 12 books include biographies of Bill Clinton, Vince Lombardi, and Barack Obama, and *They Marched into Sunlight: War and Peace, Vietnam and America, October 1967* (2003), winner of the J. Anthony Lucas Prize. He is also a distinguished visiting professor at Vanderbilt University.

THE TOPIC: The author's father, Elliott "Ace" Maraniss, was a journalist who worked everywhere—from New York City to Madison, Wisconsin. In 1952, he was called before the House Un-American Activities Committee after accusations of Communism. Indeed, Elliott and his wife had joined the Communist Party because, as their son writes, they "believed the nation had not lived up to its founding ideals in terms of race and equality." However, at his trial Elliott, defended his patriotism, reminding the HUAC that

he had served as an Army captain for all all-black company in World War II. Nonetheless, after an FBI investigation, he was fired and had to move his family to different cities five times. Maraniss tells the stories of his father and of others who got caught up in the Red Scare.

Simon & Schuster. 432 pages. \$28. ISBN: 9781501178375

Minneapolis Star Tribune ★★★
"In recounting his family saga, David Maraniss has wisely followed the precept his father delivered to the House Un-American Activities Committee: 'To properly measure a man's Americanism you must know the whole pattern of a life.' Maraniss presents the whole pattern of a generation of young, idealistic Americans—and, ultimately, of one brave and stubborn man who refused to give up his belief in what America stands for." JOHN REINAN

New York Journal of Books ★★★
"Maraniss digs deep into his father's 1952 blacklisting, and emerges with a riveting account of what disloyalty charges did to families in the McCarthy era, a profound meditation on what it means to be 'un-American,' and a sobering example of the corrosive effects of tagging journalists as 'enemies of the people.' ... In addition to parsing Ace Maraniss' testimony before the committee ... *A Good American Family* also takes into account much of the scholarship on the eras it covers." STEVE NATHANS-KELLY

NPR ★★★
"*A Good American Family: The Red Scare and My Father* has an unexpectedly lyrical sweep as it moves from Room 740 to biography and history and back again. The 'wheel' [a metaphor for the book's story] of Maraniss' Author's Note is ultimately a deeply patriotic portrait of the first half of the 20th century, a prose poem to America's ideals." MARK KATKOV

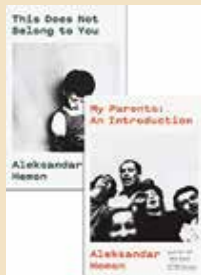
Publishers Weekly ★★★
"Communism was as American as apple pie, according to this searching account of a family's Cold War ideological journey. ... Clear-eyed and empathetic, Maraniss's engrossing portrait of a patriotic, baseball-loving red reveals the complex human

BOOKMARKS SELECTION



My Parents

An Introduction/This Does Not Belong to You
By Aleksandar Hemon



Aleksandar Hemon, a Bosnian American fiction writer, essayist, and critic, was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship and a MacArthur Genius Grant. Reviewed: *The Lazarus Project* (★★★★ July/Aug 2008), *The Book of My Lives* (★★★★ July/Aug 2013).

THE TOPIC: Aleksandar Hemon's latest memoir is two books in one: *My Parents: An*

Introduction, which recounts Hemon's parents' emigration from Sarajevo to Canada, and *This Does Not Belong to You*, a fragmented collection of memories of Hemon's childhood in Sarajevo. Before they became refugees, Hemon's family had the sort of social stability for which Hemon can't help being nostalgic. Then, the Bosnian War uprooted and turned his family into refugees. Hemon had already been living in Chicago, but his parents fled to Canada, stripped of their belongings and their identities. His mother, in particular, struggled with her new life, while his father devoted himself to beekeeping. From his childhood in Sarajevo to watching his parents adjust years after leaving their home, Hemon illustrates the beautiful melancholy his parents passed down to him. "This is how history works: arbitrarily and irreversibly," Hemon writes. MCD. 368 pages. \$28. ISBN: 9780374217433

Los Angeles Times ★★★★★
"This is Hemon at his most contemplative, whimsical, and personal. ... He's written autobiographical fiction and a collection of personal essays, but *This Does Not Belong to You*, being his most fragmented work, reflects his truest self." RANDY ROSENTHAL

Newsday ★★★★★
"The writing contains both immediacy and a thrillingly historical long view. ... This is some of the best writing about what it really feels like to be a child that I can recall reading." KATE TUTTLE

Chicago Tribune ★★★★★
"[Hemon's] latest two-books-in-one memoir makes clear that a penchant for narrative—not to mention beekeeping, folk singing and righteous grievance—runs in his immigrant family. ... [M]ostly he wants to validate memory as an antidote to both exile and mortality — even if memory itself is necessarily faulty." JULIA M. KLEIN

motivations underneath the era's clashing dogmas."

Kirkus ★★★★★
"Maraniss creates a sensitive portrait of a man who was 'young and brilliant and searching for meaning'; whose leftist

political perspective was never at odds with his patriotism; and whose optimism never failed him as he confronted considerable professional obstacles. ... A cleareyed, highly personal view of a dark chapter in American history!"

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Drawing on family letters, archival materials, and his father's own writings, Maraniss crafts a loving portrait of his father, whom he describes as "inspirational, level-headed, and instinctive about a good story." He sets

Minneapolis Star Tribune ★★★★★
"In *My Parents: An Introduction*, Hemon explores his parents' history and melancholy relationships to food, music, marriage and other cultural touchstones. In *This Does Not Belong to You*, Hemon contemplates his inheritance." MARK ATHITAKIS

New Republic ★★★★★
"Together, they constitute the poles of Hemon's world: history and memoir, reality and myth, realism and the avant-garde. ... There is an ocean of pain underneath his prose, and his brainy stoicism is the raft that prevents him from drowning in it." RYU SPAETH

New York Times ★★★★★
"There's a fatalism that suffuses *This Does Not Belong to You*, an overwhelming sense of mortality and the suspicion that storytelling might never be enough. This despair is leavened by what Hemon so beautifully and concretely conveys in *My Parents*, with Hemon as a middle-aged son who is carefully and movingly trying to make sense of it all." JENNIFER SZALAI

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★
"Depending on how you read this two-part book by Aleksandar Hemon, you'll either be going from a concrete account to disarray, or watching the threads of memory come together into a single story. ... In a world that demands of every migrant a story that justifies his or her arrival, Hemon's book keeps these memories within his own private language, for his purposes alone." MADELEINE SCHWARTZ

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Most critics read *My Parents: An Introduction* before *This Does Not Belong to You*, and while some qualify that the two can be read in either order, it seems more natural to read *My Parents* first. That story, which comes earlier and explores Hemon's adjustment to Canada and his parents' marriage, is also more accessible, since it is told in a more straightforward manner. The memories in *This Does Not Belong to You*, which focus on Hemon's own boyhood in Sarajevo and coming-of-age, comprise "a series of short, spikier pieces, untitled, none longer than a single paragraph" (*Newsday*). Certainly, most reviews were far more focused on *My Parents*, and one critic even wrote that *This Does Not Belong to You* was essentially compiled "outtakes" from the other (*Chicago Tribune*). While *This Does Not Belong to You* showcases Hemon at his most "whimsical" (*Los Angeles Times*), the episodic nature also makes it clear he "didn't always strike gold," even if that part is enjoyable, overall (*Los Angeles Times*).

his father's experience with Communism in context by exploring the lives of several of Elliott's contemporaries, including Coleman Young, the future mayor of Detroit, and Arthur Miller, a fellow University of Michigan alum. In this way, the author "places his father at the center of an absorbing history of American political and cultural life in the 1940s and '50s" (*Kirkus*). The result is a unique blending of family memoir and wider history, which should engross anyone with an interest in the time period.



The Queen

The Forgotten Life Behind an American Myth

By Josh Levin



Josh Levin is the national editor at *Slate* and the cohost of *Hang Up and Listen*, a weekly sports podcast. A Brown University graduate with degrees in computer science and history, Levin has also written for the *Atlantic*, *Sports Illustrated*, *GQ*, *Men's Health*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *Play: The New York Times Sports Magazine*.

THE TOPIC: In the 1970s, then-presidential candidate Ronald Reagan, seeking to galvanize conservatives by calling for welfare reform, frequently mentioned "the woman in Chicago"—or Linda Taylor, who had committed vast welfare fraud by using different identities. With her expensive cars and furs, this "welfare queen," as she became known, embodied the corrupt welfare system. In *The Queen*, Levin reveals the complex truth underlying the stereotype that was wielded for political purposes. Taylor, the mixed-race woman behind the myth, was a grifter extraordinaire. But she was also very likely a murderer, a kidnapper, and a baby trafficker, facts dismissed or downplayed by journalists, prosecutors, and politicians, because they didn't fit the desired image. By fol-

lowing Taylor and the Chicago police detective on her trail, Levin does not ultimately exculpate Taylor, but permits her to embody only herself.

Little, Brown. 432 pages. \$14.99. ISBN: 9780316513302

Los Angeles Times ★★★★★

"In its early chapters, *The Queen* is as much about Taylor's duplicity as it is the detective's need to break out of his own workaday tedium and make his mark in a deeply segregated and racially charged Chicago. ... *The Queen* is a story of grand scale manipulation, both of Taylor's trail of brazen deceptions but also the role media and politics played in shaping a narrative—making us all the victims of games of shadows and smoke." LYNELL GEORGE

Minneapolis Star Tribune ★★★★★

"If it had been possible to pin Taylor down in her lifetime, she would have been a statistic: of poverty, of crime, of disease. But Levin makes sure that her story is heard and that we know its tragedy, which is that Linda Taylor was doomed from the moment she was born." CHRIS HEWITT

New York Times ★★★★★

"Levin makes no excuses for Taylor and instead rushes in, magnifying glass in hand, to the tornado that was her life. ... He presents Linda Taylor not as a parable for anything grand, but as a singular American scoundrel who represented nothing but herself." SAM DOLNICK

Pittsburgh Post Gazette ★★★★★

"Levin's work succeeds at untangling a complex life, both the actual facts of it—no easy task for a woman with dozens of aliases—and what she ultimately came to represent. ... There are so many swindles, attempted swindles, aliases and unrelenting fabrications that they are at times hard to keep straight." KATE GIAMMARISE

Washington Post ★★★★★

"*The Queen: The Forgotten Life Behind an American Myth* reads like a detective story. Yet it serves up serious and timely questions about the way stereotypes can overpower evidence in shaping policy."

LISABETH B. SCHORR

NPR



"The stereotype Reagan created was of a woman on welfare in Chicago; the city and the implied poverty alongside the implied theft making it clear that he was speaking about a black woman. Taylor was a lifelong criminal, yes, and she was also the product of racism that shamed her from birth." ILANA MASAD

MASAD

CRITICAL SUMMARY

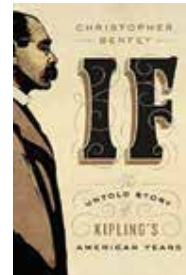
The Queen is the culmination of six years of exhaustive research by Levin through police reports, old court files, FBI investigations, and newspaper coverage. Indeed, the *New York Times* found "[p]art of the fun of Levin's book is burrowing inside his obsessive quest." At the same time, therein may lie its one weakness: as NPR noted, "[T]here is so much material in the book that it sometimes seems to lose the plot," and the backstories can feel overwhelming. Still, "Levin succeeds in always drawing readers back to his main subjects: systematic oppression, the rhetoric that feeds it, and how Taylor fits into both" (NPR). He also explores issues of race (Taylor passed as white, black, Jewish, Hispanic, and American Indian), mental illness, and self-invention. In both discovering the full extent of Taylor's crimes and the distorted impressions encouraged by the media and others, "Levin has managed to bring the human being out from the stereotype" (NPR).



If

The Untold Story of Kipling's American Years

By Christopher Benfey



Christopher Benfey, the Mellon Professor of English at Mount Holyoke College, specializes in 19th- and 20th-century American literature. His previous books

include *Degas in New Orleans* (1999), *The Great Wave: Gilded Age Misfits, Japanese Eccentrics, and the Opening of*

Old Japan (2003), and *A Summer of Hummingbirds: Love, Art, and Scandal in the Intersecting Worlds of Emily Dickinson, Mark Twain, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Martin Johnson Heade* (2008).

THE TOPIC: It's not widely known that English writer Rudyard Kipling, born in colonial India in 1865, spent four years living outside of Brattleboro, Vermont, starting in 1892. Yet he dreamt up and composed poetry (such as the famous title poem, "If," which was written in homage to George Washington) and some of his most celebrated adventure novels there, including *Kim*, *Captain's Courageous*, and *The Jungle Book*. His wife, Carrie, was American, and their two daughters were born during these Vermont years. Kipling befriended Theodore Roosevelt (before he was president) and Mark Twain. Although Kipling disliked American warmongering, he had problematic ideas about colonialism—today he is considered racist and imperialist. However, Benfey feels that Kipling's life and work are worth reexamining.

Penguin. 256 pages. \$28. ISBN: 9780735221437

Christian Science Monitor ★★★★★
"Benfey is shrewd to begin his story with 'If—,' the Kipling poem a lot of readers can warm their hands around. ... [A]s Benfey makes clear, he's not writing in defense of Kipling's cultural attitudes, but to explore his place in history." DANNY HEITMAN

Minneapolis Star Tribune ★★★★★
"The larger 'patterns of suggestion and implication' identified by Benfey are provocative, if not always persuasive. ... Fortunately, Benfey helps us navigate these claims. 'Blindness and insight,' he concludes, 'are often oddly combined in our major writers.'" GLENN C. ALTSCHULER

New Yorker ★★★★★
"Kipling's American sojourn is hardly an 'untold story'—it figures in all the biographies—but Benfey tells it well, catching nuances that some biographers have missed. He argues that Kipling was profoundly altered by his experience of America, and that America, in turn, was

altered by its experience of Kipling." CHARLES MCGRATH

Publishers Weekly ★★★★★
"Benfey is concerned more with the personal than the political. ... This is an admirably concise account of a complex and pivotal period in a famed writer's career."

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★
"It is not Benfey's fault that Kipling flies about in reckless disregard of his subtitle, but it does at times make for something of a disjointed narrative. ... We get little sense of Kipling's actual presence; why did he strike Henry James as 'the most complete man of genius' James had known? Not for my life could I speak to the Kipling marriage." STACY SCHIFF

CRITICAL SUMMARY

In his time, Kipling was the most successful writer since Dickens, and though he has fallen out of fashion, certain of his works remain popular. Benfey is aware of the stereotype of Kipling as a "jingoist Bard of Empire"; a friend warned him that writing about Kipling might be career suicide. He doesn't deny the racism in poems like 1899's "The White Man's Burden," which sets up white people as benevolent saviors who know what's right for the natives. (Kipling's arguments with Twain over imperialist policies are an intriguing historical note.) Benfey convincingly asserts "not only that Kipling's engagement with the United States made him the writer he became, but that he lavishly returned the favor" (*New York Times Book Review*).

history

NONFICTION



The British Are Coming

The War for America, Lexington to Princeton, 1775-1777

By Rick Atkinson



Rick Atkinson is a former staff writer and a senior editor for the *Washington Post*. He is the author of the World War II-themed Liberation Trilogy, the first volume of

which, *An Army at Dawn* (2002), won the Pulitzer Prize for history; *In the Company of Soldiers: A Chronicle of Combat in Iraq* (2004); and several other books. A recipient of the George Polk Award and the Pritzker Military Library Literature Award, he lives in Washington, D.C.

THE TOPIC: In this first volume in a proposed trilogy on the Revolutionary War, Atkinson delves into the issues that led to the conflict, including the taxes levied against the colonies—which, though low compared to what the English paid back home, were viewed as unfair, considering that the colonists' interests were not fully represented in Parliament. Atkinson describes the early battles of Bunker Hill and Lexington in vivid detail. He also takes a close look at the leadership of the American and the British armies. The British army was understaffed and so beset by sickness and deserters that the Americans were able to take the upper hand in spite of meager formal training. Generals, spies, and soldiers are the main players.

Henry Holt. 800 pages. \$40. ISBN: 9781627790437

Field & Stream ★★★★★
"Atkinson's particular genius, and I do not use that word casually, is to make you see and smell and hear. He describes not only what took place, but what it was like to be there. The amount of research that has gone into doing so must be absolutely staggering." DAVID E. PETZAL

Kirkus ★★★★★
"There's plenty of motion and carnage to keep the reader's attention. Yet Atkinson also has a good command of the big-picture issues that sparked the revolt and fed its fire, from King George's disdain of disorder to the hated effects of the Coercive Acts."

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★
"At times, Atkinson's you-are-there style is so visually compelling, so realistic, that skeptical souls in the historical profession might wonder if he has crossed the line that separates nonfiction from fiction. ... A powerful new voice has been added to the dialogue about our origins as a people and a nation." JOSEPH J. ELLIS

Publishers Weekly ★★★★★
"By providing vivid portraits of even minor characters, Atkinson enables readers to feel the loss of individual lives on both sides of the conflict, and by providing memorable details—such as starving soldiers relishing a stew made out of a squirrel's head and some candlewicks—he brings new life even to chapters of oft-told American history. Atkinson doesn't shy away from noting the hypocrisy of the slave-owning founding fathers."

Wall Street Journal ★★★★★
"Pithy character sketches—reminiscent of 18th-century historians David Hume and Edward Gibbon, both of whom Mr. Atkinson cites—bring the dead to life. ... [T]he narrative is the stuff of novels."

Washington Times ★★★★★
"Those of us fortunate enough to have teaching mentors who cared were lucky. For the unlucky rest, there is Rick Atkinson. He makes learning about the past fun and enjoyable." GARY ANDERSON

Washington Post ★★★★★
"Atkinson is also keenly alive to the British side of the story, and he adeptly shifts the reader from an American to a British perspective. ... What *The British Are Coming* lacks is an argument and a revolution." WAYNE E. LEE

CRITICAL SUMMARY

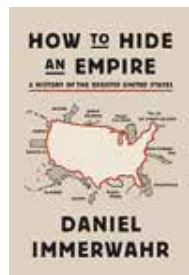
Atkinson's writing is so intense and so evocative that it matches the best

in war fiction—from Leo Tolstoy to Jeff Shaara. The author is "a longtime master of the set piece" (*Kirkus*), and his depictions of the figures involved in the war bring them to life. Instead of a dry rundown of events, the book is a gripping trove of stories. Although the endnotes reflect the huge amount of research—primarily manuscript and printed sources—that went into the writing, the focus on storytelling makes Atkinson "a strikingly imaginative historian" (*New York Times Book Review*). He goes deeper than received opinions on the American Revolution to reveal it for the bloody saga that it was, in an "eminently readable" style (*Washington Times*).



How to Hide an Empire

A History of the Greater United States
 By Daniel Immerwahr



Daniel Immerwahr is an associate professor of history at Northwestern University. His first book, *Thinking Small: The United States and the Lure of Community Development* (2018), won the Organization of American Historians' Merle Curti Award. He has also taught at the University of California, Berkeley; Columbia; and San Quentin State Prison. His research specialties are global history and U.S. foreign relations.

THE TOPIC: America's overseas territories—places like the U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, and Puerto Rico—exist in a peculiar limbo. Though not called colonies, that is effectively what they are. Many came under American rule after the Spanish-American War, the culmination of a period of conscious expansionism at the turn of the 19th century. Four million people now live in the territories, but since they lack U.S. citizenship, they can't vote for the president and don't have full Congressional representation—but they pay income

taxes. There are also 800 U.S. military bases around the world, including the strategic military site on Guam. Immerwahr makes a strong case for the United States as "a partitioned country, divided into two sections, with different laws applying in each."

Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 528 pages. \$30. ISBN: 9780374172145

Harper's ★★★★★
"Immerwahr vividly retells the early formation of the country, the consolidation of its overseas territory, and the postwar perfection of its 'pointillist' global empire, which extends influence through a vast constellation of tiny footprints—its approximately eight hundred military bases across scores of nations. ... Much of this book's power is in the details." LIDIJA HAAS

New Republic ★★★★★
"The book is written in 22 brisk chapters, full of lively characters, dollops of humor, and surprising facts. ... It entertains and means to do so. But its purpose is quite serious: to shift the way that people think about American history. Americans tend to see their country as a nation-state, not as an imperial power." PATRICK IBER

New York Times ★★★★★
"To call this standout book a corrective would make it sound earnest and dutiful, when in fact it is wry, readable and often astonishing. Immerwahr knows that the material he presents is serious, laden with exploitation and violence, but he also knows how to tell a story, highlighting the often absurd space that opened up between expansionist ambitions and ingenuous self-regard." JENNIFER SZALAI

Publishers Weekly ★★★★★
"Historian Immerwahr argues in this substantial work that the U.S. is more than the 50 states its name references. This insightful, excellent book, with its new perspective on an element of American history that is almost totally excluded from mainstream education and knowledge, should be required reading for those on the mainland."

Washington Post ★★★
"This book, however, is somewhat one-

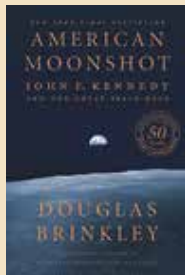
BOOKMARKS SELECTION



American Moonshot

John F. Kennedy and the Great Space Race

By Douglas Brinkley



Douglas Brinkley (*Rightful Heritage: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Land of America*, 2016) is the Katherine Tsanoff Brown Chair in Humanities and Professor of History at Rice University. A CNN presidential historian and a contributing editor at *Vanity Fair*, Brinkley has received seven honorary doctorates in American Studies. Six of his previous books were named *New York Times* "Notable Books of the Year," while seven became *New York Times* best sellers.

THE TOPIC: Fifty years after the moon landing in July 1969, Brinkley reveals the significant political, cultural, and scientific developments that led to NASA's expansion and the Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo missions. Relying on new primary source material and interviews with key surviving figures, Brinkley details the geopolitical tensions of the Cold War that pushed John F. Kennedy to seek his legacy in space and the people and technology that made a successful trip to the moon possible. Brinkley gives particular attention to Kennedy's role, specifically seeking to understand the presidential motives and the leadership that propelled America to win the race to the moon. As he writes, "[H]aving been raised in a family obsessed with winning at every level, [Kennedy] reduced the complexities of Cold War statesmanship to a simple contest."

Harper. 548 pages. \$35 ISBN 9780062655066

Boston Globe



"[I]t takes a rare combination of leadership, luck, timing, and public will to pull off something as sensational as Kennedy's Apollo moonshot. Brinkley's book returns us to a place when we had all three, and only makes us want them even more, especially now." DAVID M. SHRIBMAN

Christian Science Monitor



"Kennedy is the focus of Brinkley's *American Moonshot*, which is not only the best of the Apollo 11 books to appear so far this year but also, surprisingly and pleasingly, the best biography of Kennedy published in years." STEVE DONOGHUE

dimensional. The full story of any empire must include what it does to the home country." ADAM HOCHSCHILD

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Immerwahr tells long-forgotten stories that are surprising and enlightening. But "beyond its collection of anecdotes and arcana, this humane book offers something bigger and more profound" (*New York Times*): a corrective to the

way the country presents itself. Many Americans are unaware of the country's overseas holdings or of its colonial past. This is not a question of history but of ongoing policy; Guantánamo is just one example of a military base the United States retains for its convenience. The book is thus "a provocative and absorbing history" (*New York Times*). Only one critic felt the picture is incomplete, lacking a description of

how colonialism changed the United States. But, for the most part, this is history at its most "fascinating" (*Harper's*).

Kirkus



"A highly engaging history not just for space-race enthusiasts, but also students of Cold War politics."

New York Journal of Books



"The entire book leads up to this moment early in his administration—the process by which Kennedy decided on a manned moon landing program to best the Soviets in space and establish American technological, economic, and diplomatic dominance for space achievement in the Cold War. ... Brinkley's admiration for JFK is boundless, and the steady hand and enthusiasm of the president is evident during those crucial early years of NASA." JERRY D. LENABURG

NY Times Book Review



"[T]he best new study of the American mission to space, rich in research and revelation. ... Brinkley concludes that, as a purely economic matter, the mission was worth it, given the gains that extended to matters of public health." JILL LEPORE

Washington Post



"With a mixture of granular detail from a gigantic body of works on the subject and analyses of Kennedy's decision-making and political savvy, *American Moonshot* transcends mere narrative to help the rest of us understand how America geared up for the astonishing feat of landing a man on the moon. With the approach of the 50th anniversary of Neil Armstrong's 'small step for man,' Brinkley's focus on the all-important early days provides a valuable perspective." THOMAS OLIPHANT

CRITICAL SUMMARY

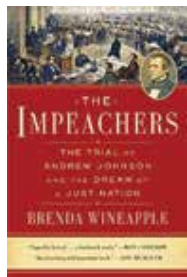
American Moonshot couldn't be more timely, and Brinkley has certainly done his fair share of research. "It's clear he's mastered a great deal of the facts and lore surrounding" the missions, noted *Kirkus*, while providing a unique angle in seeking to understand the president who propelled America to do the seemingly impossible. *The Christian Science Monitor* praises Brinkley's "refreshingly complex" answer to the question of Kennedy's motives for pursuing the space race, and he does so in highly accessible, engaging prose. He also explores the obstacles that Kennedy faced. In sum, *American Moonshot* is an excellent read for those interested in the Cold War or the space race.



The Impeachers

The Trial of Andrew Johnson and the Dream of a Just Nation

By Brenda Wineapple



Brenda Wineapple's books include *Ecstatic Nation: Confidence, Crisis, and Compromise, 1848–1887* (2013), a best book selection by the *New York Times*; *White Heat: The Friendship of Emily Dickinson and Thomas Wentworth Higginson* (★★★★ Nov/Dec 2008), a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award; and *Hawthorne: A Life* (2003), winner of the Ambassador Award for Best Biography of the Year. Wineapple has also received, among other honors, a Pushcart Prize, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and a National Endowment Public Scholars Award.

THE TOPIC: Andrew Johnson, the 17th U.S. president, was impeached by the House of Representatives by a vote of 126 to 47, but he survived his trial in the Senate by a single vote. While the offense of record was that he had fired the Secretary of War without consulting Congress, Johnson had accumulated an army of enemies in his short time in office. Lincoln had selected Johnson as his running mate largely because he was the only senator from a state that had seceded but who didn't resign his seat; he was a Unionist. Then Lincoln was assassinated, and Johnson, to the despair of many, became president. Those who sought to remove him from office believed that he wanted to roll back emancipation; he pardoned prominent Confederates at a rate of almost 100 a day. As Wineapple writes, impeachment demonstrated "that the American president was not a king, that all actions have consequences and that the national government, conceived in hope, with its checks and balances, could maintain itself without waging war, even right after one."

Random House. 576 pages. \$32. ISBN: 9780812998368

Medium



"Wineapple is superb in her storytelling and, more importantly, she is able to glean the big-picture takeaways from Johnson's impeachment from a historical perspective. ... You'll have a greater understanding of how this episode fits into the larger narrative and lessons of the Civil War and Reconstruction." JASON PARK

New York Review of Books ★★★★★

"*The Impeachers: The Trial of Andrew Johnson and the Dream of a Just Nation* is not only an important book that reminds us of a historical moment we might have been in danger of forgetting, it also serves as a reminder that what was is never all that far from what is." LANCE WELLER

New York Times



"Wineapple's depiction of Johnson is so vivid and perceptive that his standoff with Congress arrives with a doomed inevitability. ... Wineapple dips into the intrigue and the whiffs of corruption that surrounded the vote, including a cloak-and-dagger narrative that features incriminating telegrams." JENNIFER SZALAI

Pittsburg Post-Gazette



"[Wineapple] provides a terrific—and timely—account of the first attempt in American history to impeach and remove a sitting president. She also analyzes debates about whether impeachment requires a criminal offense, an abuse of power or ... deplorable, bigoted, reckless acts, especially if they undermined other branches of government." GLENN C. ALTSCHULER

Wall Street Journal



"Wineapple does not once mention current political debates about impeaching the president. But the timing of the book's publication seems to offer a lesson: Before taking sides on whether Congress should impeach Donald Trump, consider what that process meant at another significant moment in our history." MICHAEL O'DONNELL

Washington Post



"Wineapple's timely story suggests, almost despite itself, that impeaching presidents and dreaming of justice are no substitutes for the work of doing justice and winning elections." JOHN FABIAN WITT

CRITICAL SUMMARY

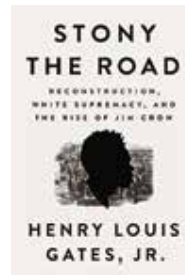
The *Washington Post* calls *The Impeachers* "a stunningly well-timed book on a question ripped from the headlines": should we think of the impeachment of a "lawless and toxic president" as a "vital matter of national principle," or as "an affair of pragmatic politics?" Though Wineapple briefly addresses the impeachment proceedings of Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton, she never mentions Donald Trump. But none is necessary, the *New York Times* writes, as the "relevance of this riveting and absorbing book is clear enough, even if Wineapple's approach is too literary and incisive to offer anything so obvious as a lesson." The author persuasively and eloquently argues that the impeachment of Johnson "had not succeeded but it had worked," in that it underscored that a president must be held accountable for his actions. The *Medium* reviewer adds: "It is surprising how fun a book about impeachment can be."



Stony the Road

Reconstruction, White Supremacy, and the Rise of Jim Crow

By Henry Louis Gates, Jr.



Henry Louis Gates, Jr., is the Alphonse Fletcher University Professor and director of the Hutchins Center for African & African American Research at

Harvard University. He has written or cowritten 22 books and created 18 documentary films, including *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross*, which received an Emmy and an NAACP Image Award. *Stony the Road* offers a wealth of material related to *Reconstruction*, a documentary series that Gates produced for PBS.

THE TOPIC: *Stony the Road* takes its name from James Weldon Johnson's song "Lift Every Voice and Sing," sometimes called the "the Negro

national anthem.” Through text and visuals, Gates chronicles the systematic, post-Reconstruction dismantling of African Americans’ rights and explores the legacy of that era. Reconstruction, which began just after the end of the Civil War, involved, Gates writes, “nothing less than the monumental effort to create a biracial democracy out of the wreckage of the rebellion.” Amendments were added to the Constitution outlawing slavery, granting birthright citizenship, and expanding voting rights to all races; more than 2,000 black men were elected to public office. Reconstruction lasted until 1876, when Federal troops were withdrawn from the South. What followed was a period known as Redemption, in which Jim Crow laws were violently institutionalized. It became clear that antislavery was not at all the same thing as supporting equal rights for all people.

Penguin. 320 pages. \$30. ISBN: 9780525559535

Boston Globe ★★★★★
 “[A] luminous history of Reconstruction, and the savage white backlash that derailed it.” RENÉE GRAHAM

NPR ★★★★★
 “[A]n absorbing and necessary look at an era in which the hard-fought gains of African-Americans were rolled back by embittered Southern whites—an era that, in some ways, has never really ended.”
 MICHAEL SCHAUB

Washington Post ★★★★★
 “For those wishing to know more about this dismal story of racial hysteria in places as high as Woodrow Wilson’s White House and as low as the blackface minstrel show, *Stony the Road* is excellent one-stop shopping.” HOWELL RAINES

Christian Science Monitor ★★★★★
 “[*Stony the Road*] argues that the premise of Jim Crow has inspired a resurgence of white supremacist ideology among the alt-right. That legacy, says Gates, ‘drifts like a toxic oil slick as the supertanker lists into the sea.’” DANNY HEITMAN

LA Review of Books ★★★★★
 “Gates offers an innovative

reinterpretation of a ‘long Reconstruction’ and a ‘war of imagery’ that produced the nation’s most odious and enduring antiblack images but also created a well of resistance.” ROBERT D. BLAND

Newsday ★★★★★
 “Gates rousing, persuasively contends that black resistance to racism embodied by the New Negro ideal remains as much a part of the cycle of race relations as white reaction to black progress. Still, one is left at the end wondering why this cycle exists at all—and what needs to be done to break it down and sweep away its wreckage for good.” GENE SEYMOUR

New York Times ★★★★★
 “*Stony the Road* presents a bracing alternative to Trump-era white nationalism. ... [The book] offers a history lesson on connivance, or, in today’s idiom, collusion, by cataloging in words and pictures the white supremacy at the highest levels of American politics.” NELL IRVIN PAINTER

CRITICAL SUMMARY

NPR writes that Gates’s analysis is “predictably brilliant, but he’s also just a joy to read,” with a gift for “elegant prose” that complements his persuasive arguments. Few authors write of difficult periods of history with his unblinking clarity, the *Boston Globe* says, and that’s certainly substantiated in these pages. “Only with its horrors unvarnished can we reckon with the past,” the reviewer continues, “and hear its dissonant echoes in the present.” Gates dedicates the book to the congregants of Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, who were murdered by an avowed white supremacist. Their assassin, Gates writes, need not have read the history recounted in his book; “it had, unfortunately, long become part of our country’s cultural DNA and, it seems, imprinted on his own.” The *New York Times* notes that *Stony the Road* exemplifies a kind of “cultural work” now emerging in the United States that the Germans call *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*: a coming to terms with the past so as not to repeat it. ■

continued from page 7

LANNY

By Max Porter

In a small English village outside London, the precocious, elfin Lanny, just five, is free to roam as he pleases. Readers come to understand the boy, his plight, and the town’s prejudices through his devoted mother, his hardworking father, neighbors, and Dead Papa Toothwort, a shape-changing ancient spirit.

QUICHOTTE

By Salman Rushdie

As the title suggests, Rushdie’s 14th novel takes inspiration from Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*. But instead of exploring 17th-century Spain, it’s a metafictional novel within a novel that, featuring a traveling salesman, explores a modern America on the verge of collapse.

10 MINUTES 38 SECONDS IN THIS STRANGE WORLD

By Elif Shafak

“Tequila Leila,” a 40-something prostitute, is murdered and dumped in a garbage can on the outskirts of Istanbul. As her brain starts to shut down—

over 10 minutes, 38 seconds—Leila narrates her life, from her well-to-do upbringing in a household of subjugated women and abuse to her friendship with five social outcasts and her ultimate fate.



FRANKISSTEIN

By Jeanette Winterson

In this meditation on creation, artificial intelligence, and transsexuality and humanness, Ry Shelley, a transgender doctor or “hybrid,” meets Victor Stein, an AI professor who identifies transhuman possibilities in Ry’s body as he works to liberate humans from the limits of biology. ■