

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



Gingerbread

By Helen Oyeyemi



British author Helen Oyeyemi's previous novels include *Mr. Fox* (★★★★ Jan/Feb 2012) and *Boy, Snow, Bird* (★★★★ SELECTION May/June 2014). She is also

the author of two plays and a short story collection, *What Is Not Yours Is Not Yours* (2016). In 2013, she was named one of *Granta's* Best of Young British Novelists. Born in Nigeria, she now lives in Prague. This is her sixth novel.

THE STORY: Harriet Lee is famous for her gingerbread, which she bakes to try to impress fellow parents at her daughter Perdita's London school. But when Perdita tries recreating the recipe for herself, she adds ingredients that nearly kill her. Was it an attempted suicide? As Perdita lies in a coma, Harriet decides it's finally time to tell the story of her upbringing in Druhástrana, along with how she journeyed from there to England with her mother, Margot, and fell for two lovers, one of whom was Perdita's father. These three generations of strong women have a strange history behind them, all involving rich patrons and living dolls and making for an unpredictable tale.

Riverhead. 272 pages. \$27. ISBN: 9781594634659

Kirkus

★★★★

"As in her last novel, *Boy, Snow, Bird* (2014)—based loosely on 'Snow White'—Oyeyemi takes the familiar contours of a children's tale and twists it into something completely new, unsettling, and uncanny. ... The effect is heady, surreal, and disarming—you have to be willing to surrender to Oyeyemi's vision and the delicious twists and turns of her prose."

Los Angeles Review of Books

★★★★

"*Gingerbread* is a Rubik's Cube of a book, with all the frustration and delight that that toy entails. You have to stay in a very strange headspace, but like Oyeyemi's other novels, it's a tale that bears multiple rereadings and is more marvelous the deeper you're willing to dive into its rearranging of reality, its derangement."

ANITA FELICELLI

NPR

★★★★

"Trying to summarize the plot of *Gingerbread* is like trying to describe a strange dream you had—it's nearly impossible to put something so odd and compelling into words that will actually convey the experience. ... Oyeyemi is a master at pacing; it's hard to put down *Gingerbread* for even a second. That's not only because of her gift at building suspense, but also because she makes the reader fall in love with her characters."

MICHAEL SCHAUB

NY Times Book Review

★★★★

"[L]ike Lewis Carroll and L. Frank Baum before her, Oyeyemi's work is more than just fairy-tale whimsy and clever humor. ... *Gingerbread* is jarring, funny, surprising, unsettling, disorienting and rewarding. It requires the reader to be quick-footed and alert." EOWYN IVEY

Publishers Weekly

★★★★

"Oyeyemi excels at making the truly astounding believable and turning even the most familiar tales into something strange and new. This fantastic and fantastical romp is a wonderful addition to her formidable canon."

Slate

★★★★

"Rudimentary symbolism is not a trademark of this tricky novelist, but if the titular baked goods stand for anything, it's a peasant sturdiness and determination to make something decent, even alluring, out of sparse or second-rate materials. ... Oyeyemi's point can sometimes seem as elusive as that house, but the charm evident on every page of this novel is enough to lure any reader through its twistier passages, and gradually the novel's ideas emerge from the thicket of droll jokes, fantastical occurrences, and the

BOOKMARKS SELECTION



The Last Romantics

By Tara Conklin



Tara Conklin is a former lawyer turned novelist. Born in the U.S. Virgin Islands, she was raised in Massachusetts. *The House Girl* (2013), an intertwined story about an escaped house slave in pre-Civil War Virginia, a contemporary lawyer, and the art world, was her first novel.

THE STORY: In the near future, renowned, but reclusive, poet Fiona Skinner, 102, is

asked about the inspiration for the characters in her most famous poem. She answers with a story that spans characters, countries, and decades. After the sudden death of their father, the Skinner family exists in a moment the four siblings refer to as “The Pause”—a wild, parentless summer in a small Connecticut town before the beginning of their new, uncertain life. Twenty years later, Fiona and her three siblings, older and changed, are once again faced with tragedy and crisis and must look at their lives and at the life that stretches out behind them and at the pain of a betrayal that will reverberate deep into their futures.

William Morrow. 368 pages. \$26.99. ISBN: 9780062358202.

Seattle Times



“[*The Last Romantics*] is one of those books that agreeably floats between characters and time periods, following its own elegant trail. ... And it’s a book that beautifully understands its characters.”

MOIRA MCDONALD

Shelf Awareness



“*The Last Romantics* contains all the essential elements of a compelling Greek tragedy, one that also provides a mercifully cathartic release for its emotionally spent main characters and, ultimately, for the reader. ... The skillful three-dimensional

rendering of Joe and his sisters welcomes the reader into the inner sanctum of their preoccupations and rivalries.” SHAHINA PIYARALI

USA Today



“Through episodes of sexual assault and alcoholism, professional success and stirring first inklings of love, Conklin examines her characters’ lives with generosity and an unflinching eye for the complexities of love and family. ... Conklin manages to rove between viewpoints and decades without ever veering into cleverness or self-consciousness.” ELIOT SCHREFER

Washington Independent Review of Books



“As this tightly woven and immersive saga unfurls, spanning the lives of the siblings, we witness them grow into their adult selves and find their separate ways, coming together and moving apart—sometimes for years—like chords in a symphony. ... Told beautifully and with wisdom and heart by Tara Conklin, *The Last Romantics* pulls the reader into these lives, treating each character with honesty and, yes, love.” SARAH SHOEMAKER

Washington Post



“An elegantly penned family saga that stretches for nearly a century. ... It is the strength and fragility of the siblings’ bond, the evolving nature of love that is at the core of Conklin’s novel.” KARIN

TANABE

CRITICAL SUMMARY

The Last Romantics is “a thoughtful family drama with exceptional characters at its heart” (*Shelf Awareness*) and an insightful, unflinching, and unpredictable glimpse into love, imperfect as it is. Conklin tells the century-spanning emotional epic of the Skinner family with great nuance, as she follows the four siblings who, though they take different paths, remain bound by an invisible, unbreakable bond. Though tragedy strikes more than once, Conklin proves herself as “an accomplished storyteller” and manages to tell a story stretched over decades that still “leaves its characters—and its dazzled readers—surrounded by a halo of love” (*Seattle Times*). A must-read for fans of family sagas, from Ann Patchett’s *The Immortalist* to Jonathan Franzen’s *The Corrections*.

occasional reference to Lady Gaga.” LAURA MILLER

Entertainment Weekly



“What a strange, ponderous book this is—without the searing focus of *Boy, Snow, Bird* or the emotional sweep of *Mr. Fox*, but still a beautifully, wildly inventive beast. Nobody else writes like this: puncturing the timelessly poetic with harshly contemporary asides, animating plants and dolls with a cool nonchalance. And how is it that this dark, nutty novel exudes cozy warmth above all else?” DAVID CANFIELD

CRITICAL SUMMARY

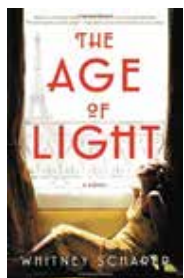
Oyeyemi’s fiction draws on mythology and folk tales; her latest novel is reminiscent of European fairy tales—but not just “Hansel and Gretel.” By setting the Lee women’s past in a nonexistent country, she allows Druhástrana to take on whatever metaphorical connotations it needs to. And “while fairy tales have a sequestered inward-looking quality, Oyeyemi’s novels are wide-ranging” (*Slate*). *Gingerbread* is particularly sinuous, morphing into many different types of stories as it proceeds. Novelist Eowyn Ivey, review-

ing it for the *New York Times Book Review*, warns that the “wildly imagined, head-spinning, deeply intelligent novel ... requires some effort and attention from its reader.” Challenging, then, but also entrancing and rewarding.



The Age of Light

By Whitney Scharer



Whitney Scharer has a BA in English Literature from Wesleyan University and an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Washington. She lives in Arlington, Massachusetts, and is a cofounder of the Arlington Author Salon. Her short fiction has been featured in literary journals, including *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Cimarron Review*, and *New Flash Fiction Review*. She also teaches fiction-writing workshops in the Boston area. *The Age of Light* is her first book.

THE STORY: In a novel about *Vogue* model and photographer Lee Miller's relationship with the artist Man Ray, Scharer re-creates the bohemian atmosphere of early 1930s Paris. Miller had always been the muse and never the artist; she was determined this role would change. After meeting Man Ray at an opium den, she became his assistant and model—and soon his lover, too. But their relationship was volatile, complicated by traumatic memories and jealousy about past and current affairs. Glimpses into Miller's future show her as a photographer capturing the aftermath of World War II in Germany and as an older woman in England trying to pick up the pieces. An elegant, true-to-life portrait.

Little, Brown. 384 pages. \$28. ISBN: 9780316524087

Boston Globe



"Part of the heady pleasure of Scharer's novel is the writing, which is as seductive and beautiful as her descriptions of the shimmery satin kimonos in the opium den. ... An absolutely gorgeous and feminist novel about art, love, and ownership, *The Age of Light* is truly a work of art in itself, both deeply moving and thrilling."

LEAVITT

Entertainment Weekly



"Whatever reams of research Scharer put into excavating Miller's story she distills here into clean, consistently evocative prose. The glittering bohemia of 1930s Paris, the pastoral boredom of mid-'60s Sussex, the hollowed-out carnage of postwar Europe; all come equally alive on the page, as do iconic figures like Ray and Cocteau and Kiki de Montparnasse."

LEAH GREENBLATT

Kirkus



"Scharer sets her viewfinder selectively, focusing on her heroine's insecurities as much as her accomplishments as an artist; her hunger to be more than 'a neck to hold pearls, a slim waist to show off a belt' is contrasted with her habit of solving problems by simply leaving. The price for Lee is steep, but it makes for irresistible reading. Sexy and moving."

Publishers Weekly



"The years during and after the fall of Hitler led to her most important work, but also to a drinking problem. ... Scharer's brilliant portrayal of the complicated couple features a page-turning story and thrillingly depicts the artistic process."

Washington Post



"Readers wanting more than these snapshots might turn to Carolyn Burke's 2005 biography, *Lee Miller: A Life*. ... She joins such novelists as Paula McLain (*The Paris Wife*) and Rupert Thomson (*Never Anyone but You*) in a most worthy enterprise: repopulating male-dominated accounts of the past with the many noteworthy women who deserve the same limelight."

NY Times Book Review



"[T]he pedestrian, realist form the novel takes is baffling: Why write a conventional novel about a pair of visionary experimental artists who transformed photography from something meant to document reality into an expressive form of art? ... The novel's tone often devolves to the level of the bodice ripper ('It pleases her, how irresistible she is to him') or the mall ('Lee wants to roll her eyes but restrains herself'; reader, I did not restrain myself)."

LAUREN ELKIN

CRITICAL SUMMARY

This "slightly fictionalized, readily digestible account" (*Washington Post*) is set apart by its sophisticated prose and its vivid rendering of Paris and Miller's artistic endeavors with Man Ray. Its "rich historical fiction" (*Entertainment Weekly*) convinced all but one of the critics, who felt things were "just a little *too* period-accurate" (*New York Times Book Review*). The sexually explicit nature of a number of scenes didn't bother the critics, though readers may feel differently. Flash-forwards to Miller's time as a war photographer, interspersed with the 1930s action to show the sweep of her life, are a highlight. All in all, *The Age of Light* is a "stellar debut" (*Publishers Weekly*) that promises great things to come.



Little Boy

By Lawrence Ferlinghetti



Lawrence Ferlinghetti is the author of numerous works of poetry, prose, and drama. His *A Coney Island of the Mind* (1958) is one of the best-selling poetry books of all time.

He is the recipient of the ACLU's Earl Warren Civil Liberties Award and is a Commander of the French Order of Arts and Letters.

THE STORY: Having just turned 100, Ferlinghetti—poet, painter, scholar, free speech champion, bookstore owner, publisher, and much more—has written the memoir he'd said he'd never write. Only it's billed as a novel. But it's not that, either. In the initial 15 pages, Ferlinghetti hurls through the first years of his life: given up by his mother to an aunt who took him to France then back to New York, taken away from that aunt and placed in an orphanage, finding a home with a wealthy couple in Bronxville, earning a degree in journalism, commanding a submarine chaser on D-Day, and witnessing Nagasaki seven weeks after

the second bomb was dropped, which made him an “instant pacifist.” By this point, the author is in exuberant stream-of-consciousness mode, declaring, “Grown Boy came into his own voice and let loose his word-hoard pent up within him.” Ahead is an arrest on obscenity charges for publishing Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl and Other Poems*, the publication of his own hugely influential poetry collection *A Coney Island of the Mind*—and more

Knopf. 192 pages. \$24. ISBN: 9780385544788

Los Angeles Times ★★★★★
“Ferlinghetti’s book is a torrent of textual splendor.” TYLER MALONE

New York Journal of Books ★★★★★
“Little Boy is a novel that sweeps through a lifetime that now encompasses a century. Within it, Ferlinghetti seems determined to include the whole of his experiences and everything within range of his experience, whether first or second hand. It is a breathtaking summary of his century on the planet.” RICHARD CREPEAU

New York Times ★★★★★
“No one’s biography has more completely or ardently embodied the visions and contradictions, the achievements and calamities, the social mobility and social animosities, of that life span.” ROBERT PINSKY

San Francisco Chronicle ★★★★★
“On the verge of his 100th birthday, Lawrence Ferlinghetti has given us a slice of his cake in the form of a dense, daffy, and often delightful prose-poem. It’s a surging century’s worth of language that combines elements of memoir, journaling and comic wordplay, with hints of an alternative State of the Union address.”
 JAMES SULLIVAN

Washington Post ★★★★★
“Little Boy is full-on stream-of-consciousness: A Portrait of the Artist as an Old Man. As he swoops back and forth through the impressions and highlights of his long life, Ferlinghetti spits on conventional grammar and mocks the very idea of linear coherence.” RON CHARLES

NPR ★★★★★
“Ferlinghetti’s wits are afire, his wisdom

is wide and deep, and this little book is packed with incredible sentences, even if it’s short on story.” CRAIG MORGAN TEICHER

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Part autobiography, yes, but, as the *Los Angeles Times* observes, *Little Boy* is, as well, “a poem, a monologue, a psalm, a rant, a scientific treatise, a political address, a last will and testament.” It’s a rich and apt chronicle of an immense life, comparable, the reviewer continues, only to James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* and Conrad Aiken’s *Ushant*. So many literary luminaries—Beckett, Burroughs, Ginsberg, Dylan Thomas—appear in these pages, the *Washington Post* notes, “that when he mentions Don Quixote, it took me a moment to realize that he didn’t know the knight personally.” That reviewer acknowledges a Beat sensibility to the book, but adds that there’s also a dose of Robin Williams: “the hairpin turns, the interior voices bantering with each other, the constant spinning of an idea till it ricochets off to another.” If you’ve enjoyed Ferlinghetti’s poetry, *Little Boy* will delight you. And if you haven’t, the book is likely to send you off in search of more of his work.



The Silk Road

By Kathryn Davis



Kathryn Davis is the author of seven previous novels, including *Labrador* (1988), *The Thin Place* (2007), and *Duplex* (2014). Among her accolades are a Janet

Heidinger Kafka Prize, the 1999 Morton Dauwen Zabel Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a 2000 Guggenheim Fellowship, and a 2006 Lannan Literary Award for Fiction. A senior fiction writer in Washington University’s writing program, she lives in Montpelier, Vermont.

THE STORY: A philosophical mystery based loosely on Boccaccio’s *Decam-*

eron, this short novel opens with a group of “siblings”—The Astronomer, the Archivist, the Botanist, the Keeper, the Topologist, the Geographer, the Iceman, and the Cook—in corpse pose during a yoga class held in a labyrinth in an Arctic settlement. They’re here to escape a plague that’s currently wiping out the rest of humanity, and their class is led by the mysterious Jee Moon. These eight characters hear each others’ thoughts telepathically and share childhood memories; are they literally siblings, or just archetypes? We learn how they came to be here and ponder what might happen next. A one-of-a-kind reading experience.

Graywolf Press. 144 pages. \$24. ISBN:

9781555978297

Kirkus ★★★★★
“In keeping with Davis’ earlier novels—which explore interstices, numinous metamorphosis, and the stretching, twisting, crumpling, bending space between being and nonbeing—her latest effort takes place in a realm of almost pure language. ... A book that stuns, almost literally, with its force and its humility.”

Boston Globe ★★★★★
“Davis hooks us with a murder mystery only to abandon it. That’s because she’s after bigger game: the mystery of time and mortality ... and of the pure contingency of all that exists. ... Radiant and endlessly shifting, sensitive to outer form and inner reality, wildly and beautifully impenetrable: that’s as good a paraphrase of this splendid, poetic novel of ideas as you’ll get.” ANTHONY DOMESTICO

The Millions ★★★★★
“Davis’s new novel, *The Silk Road*, continues her exploration of the strange, but if anything, it’s even bolder than her earlier books. ... Though such mind-melding might quickly become ridiculous in the hands of another writer, Davis harnesses it to powerful effect, using it as an excuse to blend the characters’ voices with voices borrowed from literature, scripture, and song.” ALEX ANDRIESSE

Slate ★★★★★
“I read it in a state I can only describe as baffled wonder, and no small part of the

BOOKMARKS SELECTION



Black Leopard, Red Wolf

By Marlon James



Marlon James is a Jamaican-born writer who won the 2015 Man Booker Prize for *A Brief History of Seven Killings* (★★★★ Jan/Feb 2015), a novel that explores the attempted assassination of Bob Marley in 1976. *Black Leopard, Red Wolf* is the first part of the planned epic fantasy series titled Dark Star Trilogy.

THE STORY: Set in a mythological Africa, Tracker—the novel’s protagonist, narrator, and titular Red Wolf—is endowed with superhuman powers of scent and a magic eye. A boy who may or may not be the heir to the throne of an ancient African empire goes missing. Although Tracker asserts that he’s dead, a mysterious financier hires Tracker and a motley band of characters, including a giant, a water buffalo, a witch, and a shape-shifting man-animal known as the Black Leopard (who is also Tracker’s lover), to find the boy. Their search leads them to cities and kingdoms populated by otherworldly creatures bent on destroying them. As the questers fight to survive, brandishing their own malevolence in return, Tracker confronts conflicting stories about the quest’s veracity and his companions’ motivations. Riverhead. 640 pages. \$30. ISBN: 9780735220171

Minneapolis Star Tribune ★★★★★
“James’ world-building rises out of African myths and cultural traditions rooted in that continent’s diverse history. The novel’s settings are stunning in their detail and expansive in their geography, but it’s James’ creative flexing of the oral tradition of storytelling as the novel’s backbone and his gender-fluid, omniseual main character, Tracker, that may well make this novel a standard-bearer for future fantasies.” CAROLE E. BARROWMAN

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★
“What propels the novel forward is the same thing that fuels the best superhero movies and comic books: the origin stories of its central characters. ... In their beginnings are their ends: the keys to their strengths and vulnerabilities, the source of their drive and ambitions and fears, and clues to the larger goals that endow their quests for self-knowledge with some larger sense of mission.” MICHIKO KAKUTANI

Slate ★★★★★
“If there is a ruling imperative in this world, it’s the bloody cycle of retribution, culminating in one of the book’s final scenes, where a sorcerer warns, ‘You would best think about what you want in these last days, Tracker. Love or revenge. You cannot have both.’ Yet the two aren’t really separate: Every quest for vengeance in the novel is spurred by the pain of a love betrayed or destroyed.” LAURA MILLER

Washington Independent Review of Books ★★★★★
“Black Leopard, Red Wolf is as dark and pulsing as blood from a fresh wound, nearly bursting with tragically flawed characters and some of the most truly musical dialogue in any book, fantasy or otherwise. ... The most fascinating part of Black Leopard, Red Wolf is the transformation of Tracker and how he goes from searching for a missing boy to wanting that boy dead.” JOSH DENLOW

Washington Post ★★★★★
“James has spun an African fantasy as vibrant, complex and haunting as any Western mythology, and nobody who survives reading this book will ever forget it. That thunder you hear is the jealous rage of Olympian gods.” RON CHARLES

NPR ★★★★★
“[The] experience of reading this book ... is more like if Toni Morrison had written Ovid’s Metamorphoses: Painful and strange, full of bodies shifting from personhood into meat, and somehow, always, still, upsettingly beautiful. This isn’t Tolkien’s grief-stricken melancholy, or Martin’s calculating, character-forward plot mechanics; it’s horror and tragedy by way of fantasy, nothing discrete, everything penetrating everything else.” AMAL EL-MOHTAR

Vox ★★★★★
“It’s difficult to push through page after page of beautiful sentences—and James’s sentences really are stunning—that are organized specifically to avoid telling you who is doing select theft what or why and why you should care. ... [What’s] most compelling to me about [the novel] is the moments in which James delves into what’s really motivating Tracker, which is his family trauma.” CONSTANCE GRADY

Guardian (UK) ★★
“The next 600 pages amount to one big killing field, in which characters are slashed, garroted, mutilated and raped with abandon. It’s Heart of Darkness for video gamers, a colonial-era catalogue of clichés about Africa—a continent where life is cheap, the women sexual commodities, the inhabitants duplicitous, all values negotiable.” SUKHDEV SANDHU

CRITICAL SUMMARY

In *Black Leopard, Red Wolf*, James demonstrates unequivocal inventiveness and a gift for language. His fantastical Africa is a mesmerizing landscape and a world of extreme violence, “a place mapped by Gabriel García Márquez and Hieronymus Bosch with an assist from Salvador Dalí” (*New York Times Book Review*). James’s adventure draws comparisons to George R. R. Martin’s *Game of Thrones*, yet the parallel also falters. James’s prose structure, which blends ancient and modern tones and a sprawling narrative rendered by the fervent Tracker, upends expectations readers may bring to his epic fantasy. Metamorphosis and truth are central themes, and James’s shape-shifting characters symbolize certainty’s elusiveness. One of the book’s greatest achievements is the ever-changing relationship between Tracker and the Leopard. Yet dialogue can be jolty, action occasionally slips into predictability, and early scenes are repetitive. Still, a masterful work.

wonder came from how much I enjoyed the novel considering the fact that much of the time I had no idea what was going on. ... Davis has an oddly humble approach for someone whose work is so ambitious. She only wants you to understand how stupendous creation is, as well as all the works of human ingenuity and passion."

LAURA MILLER

Publishers Weekly ★★★★★
 "Davis's provocative and offbeat eighth novel ... is a haunting take on the fluidity and circuitousness of human life. ... Davis is a singular writer, capable of piercing observations and gorgeous language."

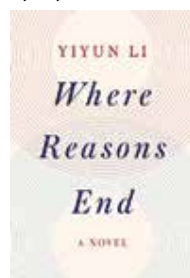
CRITICAL SUMMARY

Kathryn Davis is a writer's writer and a well-kept secret—until now. A summary makes *The Silk Road* sound like a bizarre allegory in which the settlement might symbolize the Tibetan bardo (purgatory). It's a book to read for its ideas rather than for its plot. The Millions reviewer offers this advice: "think of *The Silk Road* as a piece of music, in which meaning is produced through rhythm and repetition rather than rational exposition." Both "gorgeous and confounding" (*Boston Globe*), it's a novel that might require more patience and attention than usual, but "the rewards are infinite. ... [Davis] has a devout but tiny band of admirers. Join us" (*Slate*). As *Kirkus* concludes: "A tender book. A savage book. A once-in-a-lifetime story."



Where Reasons End

By Yiyun Li



Yiyun Li grew up in Beijing and moved to the United States in 1996. Her books include the novels *The Vagrants* (★★★★★ SELECTION May/June 2009) and *Kinder Than*

Solitude (★★★★★ SELECTION May/June 2015), story collections *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* (★★★★★ Jan/Feb 2006) and *Gold Boy, Emerald Girl*

(2010), and a memoir, *Dear Friend, from My Life I Write to You in Your Life* (★★★★★ May/June 2017). Named one of "20 Under 40" fiction writers to watch by the *New Yorker*, she now teaches at Princeton University.

THE STORY: In her memoir, Li reflected on her severe depression and the two suicide attempts she made in 2012. In a horrible irony, it was her 16-year-old son, Vincent, who succeeded in killing himself in 2017, just seven months after his mother's previous book was published. This short novel clearly draws from Li's own experience of losing a child. The narrator has imagined dialogues with her departed son, Nikolai. Their conversations range from highbrow to playful. "I was almost you once," she says to him, "and that's why I have allowed myself to make up this world to talk with you." There is no bringing him back, but communication brings consolation.

Random House. 192 pages. \$25. ISBN: 9781984817372

NPR ★★★★★
 "It's a book born of unimaginable pain; Li began writing it after her own child took his life. It's also one of the most original and most accomplished American novels of the decade." MICHAEL SCHAUB

Guardian (UK) ★★★★★
 "On any given page, the back and forth draws you in, yet you almost wince to recall the context, which intrudes in detail both tragic and bittersweet. ... Li's narrative experiment proves admirably fit for purpose." ANTHONY CUMMINS

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★
 "The humor in this book is subtle yet potent, always followed by a lifelike echo of absurdity. ... *Where Reasons End* is an interrogation of form—an exploration of what fiction can do and what it can't—as well as an attempt to understand how both to live through suffering and to write about it." LAUREN OYLER

Los Angeles Review of Books ★★★★★
 "Aesthetically, *Where Reasons End* is an austere novel, but there are passages with

heavy weight. There are parts that begin to feel redundant and repetitive. ... Her empathy and courage are what make the book work." RACHEL VEROFF

New York Times ★★★★★
 "Typically mother and son banter and philosophize, as clever (and occasionally grating) as characters out of Tom Stoppard. Their glittering debates about time, and the politics of grammar, feel like levees against overwhelming emotion." PARUL SEHGAL

CRITICAL SUMMARY

There's not much plot, as such, in *Where Reasons End*. It's a work that succeeds on the strength of its voice and its prose. "The tone is both astringent and faintly mischievous, recalling the dialogue in a J. M. Coetzee novel or the wordplay of Ali Smith" (*Guardian*). Ultimately, Li is brought up against the limitations of language itself—"wrestling with it, trying her best to forge it into a monument for her son" (NPR). The philosophical conversations between the mother and her deceased son can start to feel a little repetitive and tedious, but it's a short enough book that the format works. Ultimately, the critics found this semiautobiographical novel "devastating" and "brilliant" (NPR).



Adèle

By Leila Slimani, translated from the French by Sam Taylor



Leila Slimani's *The Perfect Nanny* (★★★★★ SELECTION March/April 2018) was selected as one of the *New York Times Book Review's* 10 Best Books of 2018. The novel also earned her France's Prix Goncourt, awarded to the best and most imaginative prose work of the year. *Vanity Fair France* ranked Slimani as second on its Fifty Most Influential French People in the World list. *Adèle* was originally published in France in 2014.

THE STORY: Adèle is a beautiful, 35-year-old Parisienne, a journalist, the wife of a successful doctor, and the mother of a young son. Her obsession is seducing strangers and casual acquaintances, as well as her husband's colleagues, her best friend's partner, and her boss—pretty much anyone except her husband. Adèle isn't ashamed of her desire; rather, she seems intent on self-destruction. The sex means nothing to her; any gesture of intimacy is repelled. Her reward comes immediately after, when she finds herself "suspended between two worlds, the mistress of the present tense." She's heedless of danger—and dangerously out of control.

Penguin. 240 pages. \$16. ISBN: 9780143132189

Entertainment Weekly ★★★★★
"Slimani observes [Adèle's desire and indifference] all with a coolness that's almost clinical, even as the feverish spark of obsession licks at the corner of nearly every page. Because Adèle's appetites, of course, can't really be sated — they're as vast and shattering as this fierce, uncanny thunderbolt of a book." LEAH GREENBLATT

Independent (UK) ★★★★★
"Adèle is a brilliant and bothersome book. The story itself is not new, but Slimani has birthed an everywoman anti-heroine who is both timeless and shockingly contemporary." DAISY BUCHANAN

Guardian (UK) ★★★★★
"Adèle is a tough read, but a bracing one; little concerned with reader-pleasing narrative treats, but provocatively enigmatic. Appearing to adopt the conventions of realism ... it eventually becomes increasingly dream-like, the compulsions of its characters (and not merely Adèle) revealed as the manifestation of suppressed desires and dysfunction." ALEX CLARK

San Francisco Chronicle ★★★★★
"[N]othing is simple in Adèle, Leila Slimani's sensitive and bleak debut novel. ... Any moral certainties we may have found at the outset are frustrated, like Adèle herself, at every turn." CHELSEA LEU

New York Times ★★★
"If the central idea of the book is a fascinating one, the prose is not always impeccable. Dialogue can be flat. Clichés are abundant." MOLLY YOUNG

Washington Post ★
"Reading Adèle ... was like being in the middle of a blocking exercise in a play rehearsal. Move her here, move him there, see what happens, if anything happens at all." SARAH WEINMAN

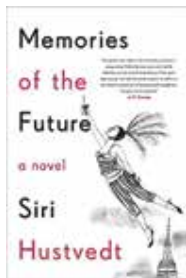
CRITICAL SUMMARY

Adèle evoked strong emotions from reviewers—not surprising, given the provocative subject matter, ranging from sex to expectations of motherhood. The *Independent* wrote of reaching midbook and feeling both dazzled and extremely depressed. Adèle is hardly likable. Yet, the critic continued, she's "strangely and irresistibly appealing, to her conquests and to readers." Slimani refrains from judging her protagonist, encouraging neither empathy nor scorn. But the *Washington Post* found Adèle to be too sketchily drawn to be engaging, and the supporting characters "mere paper-thin constructs." Acknowledging that *Adèle* as a polarizing novel, the *Independent* critic asserts that it nonetheless holds "important truths about the way women live and think. It deserves a broad and broad-minded readership."



Memories of the Future

By Siri Hustvedt



Siri Hustvedt has written six novels, including *What I Loved* (2002) and *The Blazing World* (★★★★★ SELECTION July/Aug 2014), which won the Los Angeles

Book Prize for Fiction; four collections of essays, the most recent of which is *A Woman Looking at Men Looking at Women* (2017); a book of poems; and a memoir, *The Shaking Woman, or A History of My Nerves* (2009). In 2012,

she was awarded the International Gabarron Prize for Thought and Humanities. Since 2015, she has been a lecturer in psychiatry at Weill Cornell Medical College. She lives in Brooklyn. Her husband is the writer, Paul Auster, and their daughter is the singer, Sophie Auster.

THE STORY: In 1978, S. H. left Minnesota for Manhattan, arriving full of enthusiasm for the comic detective novel she would write, while living in a spartan apartment, making friends, and sampling the city's literary life. She also amused herself by dreaming up a backstory for her next-door neighbor, Lucy Brite, whose strange utterings, audible through the wall, suggested a fraught personal life. In 2017, S. H. finds her journal from 1978 through 1979 while she's moving her mother into a nursing home. Now in her 60s, she marvels that she's the same person as this idealistic young woman. Through excerpts from the journal and her novel-in-progress, she reflects on storytelling, memory, and women's struggle for self-determination.

Simon & Schuster. 336 pages. \$27. ISBN: 9781982102838

Guardian (UK) ★★★★★
"As layered as a millefeuille, as dense and knotted as tapestry, it feels, by the time you reach the final pages, less like a novel and more like an intellectual reckoning; an act of investigation into how, as a woman, it is possible to live well in the world, and enter effectively into the conversation about it. It's a mark of Hustvedt's thoroughgoing intelligence that the idea of investigation is another of the novel's explicit themes, as well as an aspect of its undertaking." SARAH CROWN

Kirkus ★★★★★
"The book includes whimsical illustrations by the author, among them a caricature of Donald Trump with S. H.'s 94-year-old mother's comment as caption—'Can that man be president?' Like all the best postmodern novels, this metafictional investigation of time, memory, and the mutating self is as playful as it is serious."

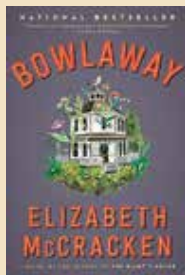
Publishers Weekly ★★★★★
"This provocative, experimental novel

BOOKMARKS SELECTION



Bowlaway

By Elizabeth McCracken



Elizabeth McCracken's previous books include the novels *The Giant's House* (1996), a National Book Award finalist, and *Niagara Falls All Over Again* (2001); the short story collections *Here's Your Hat What's Your Hurry* (1993) and *Thunderstruck & Other Stories* (2015); and a memoir about her stillborn child, *An Exact Replica of a Figment of My Imagination* (★★★★ Nov/Dec 2008). She is the James

Michener Chair for Fiction at the University of Texas at Austin.

THE STORY: McCracken's first novel in 18 years is a quirky family saga featuring a Salford, Massachusetts, candlepin bowling alley. Bertha Truitt, a woman found (alive) in the local cemetery early in the 20th century, claims to have invented this New England specialty. She soon opens the six-lane Truitt's Alleys, later renamed Bowlaway. Big-bosomed Bertha's behavior is odd but downright ladylike: she builds an octagonal house up on a hill, marries an African American doctor, and bicycles in a split skirt. She even—gasp!—lets women bowl. In the near-century that follows, even long after Bertha is gone, the bowling alley continues to attract a curious cast of brokenhearted, larger-than-life people.

Ecco. 384 pages. \$27.99. ISBN: 9780062862853

Entertainment Weekly ★★★★★

"Elizabeth McCracken holds a funhouse mirror up to the Great American Novel. ... This is McCracken's masterpiece, a story of reinvention: that most American of themes, the promise that's guided a country through depressions, wars, tragedies, betrayals."

DAVID CANFIELD

New York Times ★★★★★

"Bowlaway is a large and caterwauling sort of opera buffa, packed with outsize characters—some with recherché talents—and wild, often dreamlike events. ... That this ambitious novel nearly works is a testament to [McCracken's] considerable gifts as a novelist, her instinctive access to the most intricate threads of human thought and feeling." DWIGHT GARNER

Paste Magazine ★★★★★

"The fundamental loneliness that defines these characters, who all keep something of themselves deeply private, creates a sense of magic around marriages, divorces, births and deaths. Their

from Hustvedt ... joins several narratives to illustrate the roles of memory and perspective in making sense of a life. ... The many moods and flavors of this brash 'portrait of the artist as a young woman' constantly reframe and complicate the

story, making for a fascinating shape-shifter of a novel."

Independent (UK) ★★★

"The novel—and it is very much a novel, despite the occasional sheen of memoir; indeed, there are little digs throughout at

interwoven stories are by turns heartbreaking and beautiful, defined by, as McCracken writes in the first chapter, love." BRIDEY

HEING

San Francisco Chronicle ★★★★★

"Wars, the Depression, women's rights, the advent of automatic pinsetters—are deftly reflected; changes noted with sharp, physical precision. ... This is the risk of Bowlaway: its bighearted, cockamamie tone—playful, bittersweet, fond—takes a number of bewilderingly violent dives." JOAN FRANK

Washington Post ★★★★★

"There's a wickedness to McCracken's technique, the way she lures us in with her witty voice and oddball characters but then kicks the wind out of us. She never misses the infamous 7-10 split, managing to hit Annie Proulx and Anne Tyler with the same ball!"

RON CHARLES

Boston Globe ★★★★★

"But if Bowlaway is never thoroughly engrossing or wrenchingly emotional, it is a tour de force of magnificent sentences, arrestingly strange images, and penetrative observations. Swerving madly in all directions, with a sparkly surface trying to light up its darkness, Bowlaway is like a train off the tracks: breathtaking as a flash-bulb, breaking new ground, but not reaching any destination." PRISCILLA GILMAN

Wall Street Journal ★★★★★

"Bowlaway is ersatz history, dressing up contemporary values and concerns in period costume. In its singsong quirkiness it reminded me of Erin Morgenstern's *The Night Circus* and Karen Russell's *Swamplandia!* If you like those books and you're a fan of the lanes, you may be the target audience." SAM SACKS

CRITICAL SUMMARY

"Our subject is love because our subject is bowling," McCracken writes. That might not be the most obvious link, but it's a testament to the novelist's skill that she fully convinces readers through her plotting and characterization. There's also a lot of drama, much of it violent—including deaths by spontaneous combustion and a molasses flood. The *New York Times* warns that McCracken comes close to caricature, and the *Wall Street Journal* noted that her style might appeal to a narrower audience. Most reviewers, however, quickly warmed to McCracken's quirky characters and style. *Bowlaway* is a sweeping and delicious "epic of the wins and losses that make up the average life" (*Paste Magazine*), all "frosted with macabre comedy" (*Washington Post*).

the kind of pretension to accuracy peddled by auto-fiction practitioners like Karl Ove Knausgaard—is a springboard for all kinds of ruminations on life, time, writing and feminism. ... Mostly, though, *Memories of the Future* is a catalogue wearily familiar from the #metoo movement, in which men

place their hands patronisingly on their wives' shoulders; boorishly explain things that women already know; they plead, steal, rape, and get away with it because they are men." PHILIP WOMACK

LA Review of Books ★★★
 "[P]resent-day S. H. lacks a compelling story arc of her own that's separate from that of her journal. ... In the Trump era, there appears to be a wider trend among writers and artists of all kinds in creating works that drill their themes into the minds of their audiences, to the point where these works sometimes feel more like propaganda than art." ELENA GOUKASSIAN

CRITICAL SUMMARY

It's clear that S. H. is Siri Hustvedt; the book also contains jokey references to Sherlock Holmes: In this work of autofiction, the author becomes a detective investigating her past self. The themes are strong: "the incomprehensibility of time and the fragility of memory ... misogyny, authority, entitlement and selfhood" (*Guardian*). The novel also brings New York City of that time to life. However, critics mentioned that the contemporary story line seems weaker, and the points made about male privilege and female vulnerability are too obvious. Still, *Memories of the Future* is another inventive outing from an author who isn't afraid to take risks with style and subject matter and who is sure to delight her fans.



The Weight of a Piano

By Chris Cander



Chris Cander's debut novel, *11 Stories* (2013), won the Independent Publisher Gold Medal for Popular Fiction, and her most recent, *Whisper Hollow*

(2015), was long-listed for the Great Santini Fiction Prize by the Southern Independent Booksellers Alliance. She is also the author of *The Word Burglar*

(2013), which won a Moonbeam Children's Book Award.

THE STORY: Alternating chapters tell the stories of two women who come into possession of a prized 1905 Blüthner piano. Katya Zeldin, eight, lives in 1960s Soviet Russia, when she receives the piano after the death of a neighbor and proves to be a gifted player. A decade or so later, Katya leaves Russia for the United States with her husband and infant son; the piano, regrettably, must be left behind. Life doesn't unfold in California as the young couple had hoped, and though the Blüthner returns to their lives, it once again exits—this time into the home of a UCLA professor, a piano student of Katya's, who shortly thereafter dies in a house fire. The novel follows the lives of the people who play and acquire the piano thereafter, from a car mechanic to a photographer and more.

Knopf. 336 pages. \$26.95. ISBN: 9780525654674

Deep South ★★★★★
 "The Weight of a Piano is a beautiful exploration of passion and art and music—and of place and identity. ... Through the focus on the 1905 Blüthner, Cander explores how much power the past exerts over us and whether the past is something we can ever truly let go of." VIKI MUJUMDAR

Historical Novel Society ★★★★★
 "The Weight of a Piano is deeply moving. It will resonate with anyone who has been shattered by loss, anyone who is frozen in time or place, unwilling to open themselves to others or unable to overcome the anger that accompanies the absence of love." K. M. SANDRICK

Minneapolis Star Tribune ★★★★★
 "The reader is left to contemplate loss and legacy, the novel's notions of 'poetry and color and imagination' lingering like the notes of a distant song." KATHLEEN ROONEY

New York Times ★★★★★
 "The Weight of a Piano throws a lot into the Cuisinart—it's immense, intense and imaginative." JAMES BARRON

Washington Times ★★★★★
 "Readers stay gripped by the questions this novel raises: Questions about art,

about the power of fetishized possessions, about the effects of family members on each other, about the difficulties of finding love and of recognizing it. ... It's well worth reading and pondering." CLAIRE HOPLEY

Washington Post ★★★★★
 "[A] worthy novel despite the story's occasional sluggishness." CAROL MEMMOTT

CRITICAL SUMMARY

The Weight of a Piano, *Deep South's* reviewer writes, "explores identity, place and the memories and objects that keep us tethered to both." Cander urges us to contemplate the power of the past and our steadfast reluctance to part with it. The *Historical Novel Society* critic attests to the Blüthner's role in the novel as a "conduit for fantasy, bereavement, jealousy, remembrance, sorrow, emptiness, and understanding." Cander tackles a lot here, and the pacing is uneven, slowing considerably, as Clara and a friend negotiate the logistics inherent in lugging a piano across a desert landscape. But the *New York Times* lauds the author as a "smart, deft storyteller" who holds it all together, eloquently conveying the piano—the novel's central character—as both exquisite gift and oppressive burden.



Golden State

By Ben H. Winters



Ben H. Winters's nine previous novels include *Underground Airlines* (2016) and the *Last Policeman Trilogy* (2012–2014). *The Last Policeman* won

a 2012 Edgar Award, while *Countdown City*, the second novel in the series, won a Philip K. Dick award. Winters, who also writes for the theater, lives in Los Angeles.

THE STORY: In Winters's imagined future, California—now the Golden State—is its own nation devoted to the truth, where lies land people in

jail. Fifty-something policeman Laszlo Ratesic, a veteran of the Speculative Service, is an asset to the force because of his uncanny ability to tell when someone is lying to him. This skill has allowed him to make breakthroughs in plenty of unsolved crimes. When a construction worker falls off a roof, Ratesic and his young female mentee are called in to investigate. The idea that it was no accident but a wide-ranging conspiracy soon takes hold. Mulholland Books. 336 pages. \$28. ISBN: 9780316505413

Financial Times (UK) ★★★★★
"The plot follows the formula common to this kind of SF police procedural—suspicious death opens up conspiracy can of worms—and there isn't much to distinguish Ratesic from countless world-weary cop characters before him. The novel is an entertaining, unpredictable read nonetheless, and given that nowadays news is fake and opinion is fact, it's very much a dystopia for our times."

JAMES LOVEGROVE

Kirkus ★★★★★
"In some details, Winters' story might have fallen out of a forgotten file drawer at Philip K. Dick's pad, though Winters takes a less bleak view of humankind than the master of bad-vibes future California; though somewhat less surprisingly inventive than the author's *Underground Airlines*, it's still a skillful and swift-moving concoction. For those who like their dystopias with a dash of humor."

Paste Magazine ★★★★★
"A bit too much like *Minority Report* meets *Fahrenheit 451*, Winters' world rests upon one [tenet] and is protected by a special class of law enforcement beholden to it: lying is a capital offense. ... *Golden State* reveals the classic take on the dystopian: that speaking in absolutes leads to absolute corruption." B. DAVID ZARLEY

Washington Post ★★★★★
"[T]he last third of *Golden State* fails to deliver on the promise of its first two hundred pages. Winters paints himself into an imaginative corner." JON MICHAUD

Publishers Weekly ★★
"Some of the societal elements seem contrived, such as how every citizen must archive every single life event in a journal, and the reveal at the end is too nebulous to be completely effective. Winters's exploration into the nature of truth will grip many readers, but this ambitious novel misses the mark."

CRITICAL SUMMARY

The setup of *Golden State*—though it feels somewhat familiar—is an inviting one, and it couldn't really be more timely. It serves as "a wry commentary on our current era of fake news," as the *Guardian* puts it, while also calling to mind dystopian classics such as George Orwell's *1984*. However, some of the reviewers were disappointed with a rather ordinary protagonist, a clichéd theme, and especially with an ending that fizzles out. "Instead of a cathartic redemption, Laszlo achieves only a meek escape" (*Washington Post*). Winters has written better books, and readers new to him may want to start elsewhere.



Good Riddance

By Elinor Lipman



American writer Elinor Lipman received the New England Book Award, the Paterson Fiction Prize, and a lifetime achievement award from the New England Library and Information Network, and she has taught at Simmons, Smith, and Hampshire colleges. *Good Riddance* is her 14th novel, after *On Turpentine Lane* (2017). She has also written two books of nonfiction and a short story collection.

THE STORY: When New Yorker Daphne Maritch throws away a cryptically marked-up 1968 Pickering High School yearbook, which belonged to her late mother, June, to whom it was dedicated, it ends up in the worst hands possible. Her quirky, annoy-

ing neighbor, Geneva Wisenkorn, a would-be filmmaker, plucks the yearbook from the trash with plans to turn it into a documentary. Her interest in the yearbook forces Daphne to confront her mother's past, including an affair with a former student and other secrets. Meanwhile, Tom, Daphne's widowed father, moves to the city, just as she is trying to navigate a new relationship with Jeremy, an actor, while being roped back into the life of her ex-husband, Holden.

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 304 pages. \$25. ISBN: 9780544808256

Publishers Weekly ★★★★★
"Lipman's satisfying latest is a worthy addition to her long lineup of smart, witty novels. ... In a lesser writer's hands, the plot could have devolved into a soapy mess, but Lipman ably turns it into a charming romantic comedy."

San Diego Union-Tribune ★★★★★
"Even with the sprinkling of snark and the bits of PG-rated naughtiness, *Good Riddance* is classic Elinor Lipman. It is a charming companion suitable for poolside escapism, airport diversions, rainy-day cocooning and sickbed comfort." KARLA PETERSON

All About Romance ★★★★★
"Take the sharp barbs of the Marx Brothers, combine it with the most pathetically eager, fast-talking flim-flaming characters this side of Mel Brooks, throw in some trenchant Woody Allen-esque observations about life in modern New York City and a skosh of Norah Ephron's heart and you have the book's final formula. But the end result is pretty original and interesting—sometimes a black comedy that leans heavily on squirmy discomfort, sometimes a touching comedic pastiche, sometimes simply a story of a New York transplant learning how to live like an adult." LISA FERNANDES

New York Times ★★★★★
"*Good Riddance* is a caper novel, light as a feather and effortlessly charming. It will not save lives or enrich them in an enduring way. ... But the book inspires a very specific kind of modern joy." MARY POLS

Washington Post ★★★
"The characters in *Good Riddance* don't necessarily develop; some of them seem to exist only as chess pieces. Daphne functions as the queen, moving any way she likes, but few of her moves make sense as part of a larger theme." BETHANNE PATRICK

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Even Lipman's biggest fans will concede that *Good Riddance* is an extremely light, albeit fun, romantic comedy. Still, it touches on serious subjects, including parentage and the burden of past relationships, which feels "old-fashioned, sometimes to a point requiring some generosity from the reader" (*New York Times*). The novel is certainly not as tightly constructed or as sharply written as some of her previous books, but fans of Lipman's female narrators will likely still find it delightful, funny, and charming because of its silly capers and personalities, some of whom possess "the wholesome glee of a sitcom character" (*New York Times*). While the plot twists and turns, the last 50 pages resolve the major conflicts. Verdict: light, entertaining, and a little bit forgettable.



Landfall

By Thomas Mallon



Thomas Mallon's novels include *Henry and Clara* (1994), *Dewey Defeats Truman* (1997), *Fellow Travelers* (★★★★ July/Aug 2007), and *Watergate* (★★★★

May/June 2012). He has served as the literary editor of *GQ* and the deputy chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities. In 2011, Mallon received the Harold D. Vursell Memorial Award for prose style from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

THE STORY: A fictionalized account of the second term of George W. Bush's presidency, *Landfall* centers on the experiences of two fictional charac-

ters, Allie O'Connor and Ross Weatherall, who meet as teenagers in 1978, at a "Bush Bash" in Texas. Twenty-seven years later, they're reunited. O'Connor now works for the National Security Council as a specialist on Iraq, and Weatherall is on assignment for the National Endowment of the Arts and Humanities in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, where he witnesses the tragically bungled relief efforts. Mallon focuses on the Bush administration's failures in Iraq and New Orleans, and the cast of characters includes the principals—Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Rice—and a colorful array of extras—Kissinger, Nancy Reagan, Larry King, Anne Richards, and John Edwards among them.

Pantheon. 496 pages. \$29.95. ISBN: 9781101871058

New York Journal of Books ★★★★★
"He is the Bob Woodward of fiction. ... There are plenty of unexpected twists and turns." JONATHAN POWER

Seattle Times ★★★★★
"Landfall is a big, minutiae-crammed novel, driven by the ambivalence and agonies of its main characters and leavened with the catty wit of its supporting cast. ... Mallon's Bush has an irascible charm and an unexpectedly keen awareness that his administration has fallen short, while Mallon's Rice sometimes wishes herself out of the game altogether." MICHAEL UPCHURCH

New York Times ★★★★★
"Landfall is a romance—a romance in which the president repeatedly intercedes, rom-com fashion—set against the machinations concerning the administration's defining failure in Iraq. There's also quite a bit about its other defining failure, Hurricane Katrina, and a good, MacGuffinish Bush family subplot that Ross uncovers." KURT ANDERSEN

Wall Street Journal ★★★★★
"[T]he writing is crisp and witty, the central characters complex and sympathetic in surprising ways, the narrative structure tight." BARTON SWAIM

Washington Post ★★★★★
"Mallon has done his homework and his novel delves, at times a tad too exhaustively, into the kaleidoscope of events and characters of the Bush era." MANUEL ROIG-FRANZIA

Washington Times ★★★★★
"[Landfall] will surely fascinate anyone with an interest in politics or current affairs. It does not, however, provide an entirely enjoyable reading experience." CLAIRE HOPLEY

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Though *Landfall* contains moments of supreme cattiness, Mallon is generally sympathetic to his characters. George Bush comes off as an essentially decent man who made some terrible, costly decisions. His efforts to bring together O'Connor and Weatherall, though "writ small in the ink of a double catastrophe," are steps that might "lead him toward a solution for the catastrophes themselves." There's a large cast of characters to keep up with here, and the the flow of Mallon's generally excellent prose is "sometimes tripped up by clumsy but necessary forays into who's who and what's what" (*Seattle Times*). The *New York Times* felt the author should have more thoroughly examined "the awful particulars" of the administration's consequential errors, arguing that everyone gets off too easily. But, despite Mallon's artistic license, "*Landfall* offers a lot to think about and quite a bit of fun, too" (*Washington Times*).



Leading Men

By Christopher Castellani



Christopher Castellani is the author of the novel trilogy *A Kiss from Maddalena* (2004), *The Saint of Lost Things* (2005), and *All This Talk of Love* (2013), as well as a

collection of essays on the craft of fiction, *The Art of Perspective: Who Tells*

the Story (2016). He is the artistic director of GrubStreet, a creative writing center in Boston.

THE STORY: The novel opens at a party thrown by Truman Capote in 1953, in the Italian seaside resort of Portofino. Tennessee Williams is in country with his lover, Frank Merlo, to write English dialogue for a film by the director Luchino Visconti. Merlo—a former Marine, truck driver, and actor—is largely resigned to his subordinate role. At Capote’s party, Williams and Merlo encounter the novelist John Horne Burns and his Italian boyfriend and are introduced to a Swedish mother and her aspiring actress daughter. The following day, these six travel to a cliffside garden, where they’re attacked by a pack of boys. Merlo recalls this event a decade later, as he lies dying of lung cancer. The rest of the novel transpires decades after that, with the Swedish actress having come into possession of an unknown Williams play called “Call It Joy.”

Viking. 368 pages. \$27. ISBN: 9780525559054

Boston Globe ★★★★★
“Castellani’s prose has a beguiling lilt and color, whether he’s evoking his characters’ evasive or erratic emotions, or conjuring the far-flung locales where these globe-hoppers touch down.” MICHAEL UPCHURCH

Kirkus ★★★★★
“To the spate of novels investigating the lives of famous artists and their relationships with the people who loved them most, add this intriguing take on Tennessee Williams and his lover of 15 years, Frank Merlo. ... Humane, witty, and bold, this novel imagines the life of a loving but tortured couple.”

Entertainment Weekly ★★★★★
“Castellani has a lot on his mind, and generously employs the craft necessary to convey it. *Leading Men* is unafraid to expand beyond its glitzy hook into something deeper, sharper.” DAVID CANFIELD

Washington Post ★★★★★
“Narrative tension may flag at times, but some zesty real-life figure is always rushing forth to distract us: Paul Bowles to get high, Anna Magnani to make lunch,

Truman Capote to toss another bon mot on the fire.” LOUIS BAYARD

NY Times Book Review ★★★
“Engineering may be the aspect of novel writing that deserves the most praise and gets the least, and Castellani is a first-rate engineer. At its best, his novel not only exults in the historical synchronicities and proximities he has discovered but catches the reader up in its rapture.” DAVID LEAVITT

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Castellani vividly captures the milieu of 1950s Italy and the voice and manner of the characters with whom he inhabits it. He writes, *Entertainment Weekly* attests, “with an evocative precision that historical fiction often merely aspires to.” Merlo is the novel’s focal point, and the author’s portrait of him “has a deep, aching appeal” (*Boston Globe*). The *New York Times* critic found the construction of the novel to be “as intricately designed as a Lego kit,” the pieces snapping together into a sturdy whole. Castellani has uncovered some wonderful historical minutiae, and the critic laments that the author didn’t go further still with his extrapolations, rather than withdrawing into excessive explanation, “as if abashed by the shadow Williams casts over him.” How a legacy is defined is a primary theme of the novel, and as the *Boston Globe* observes, while *Leading Men* provides no answers, “it’s seductive in the way it raises its questions.”



The Wall

By John Lanchester



British author John Lanchester’s novels include *The Debt to Pleasure* (1996), which won the Whitbread First Novel Prize, *Fragrant Harbor* (2002), and *Capital* (★★★★ Sept/Oct 2012). He has also published several works of nonfiction, including the memoir *Family Romance* (2007) and *How to Speak Money: What*

the Money People Say—And What It Really Means (2014). He lives in London and is a regular contributor to the *New Yorker* and a contributing editor of the *London Review of Books*. *The Wall* is his fifth novel.

THE STORY: This timely speculative novel imagines a near-future situation in which climate-change-induced sea level rise has destroyed the world’s beaches. Britain is surrounded by a wall, technically called the “National Coastal Defense Structure.” Each citizen must spend two years guarding the Wall, preventing “Others” from getting through. If one of these refugees slips through, a Defender is exiled in his or her place, and the Other essentially becomes a state-owned slave. Twenty-something Joseph Kavanagh arrives for his two-year service under the Captain and alongside Hifa, who proposes that she and Kavanagh have a child so they can qualify for the parental exception. But nothing goes as planned in this world gone awry.

Norton. 288 pages. \$25.95. ISBN: 9781324001638

Kirkus ★★★★★
“Lanchester’s view is unblinking, his prose assured, a matter of ‘if’ and ‘then’: This is what happens when the sea rises, this is what happens when an outsider lands in a place where life has little meaning and the only certain things are the Wall, the cold, the water, and death. Dystopian fiction done just right, with a scenario that’s all too real.”

Publishers Weekly ★★★★★
“Lanchester ... imagines coming of age amid the xenophobia and despair of a world ravaged by climate change in his dynamite dystopian novel. ... This terrifyingly resonant depiction of desperation will spark lively discussions about the responsibilities climate change is restructuring, and is electrifying storytelling to boot.”

Spectator (UK) ★★★★★
“The [second] half, in which the protagonists take to the sea and encounter ragtag post-apocalypse settlements, wicked pirate rapists and the like, is likely to play several more old tunes to

those acquainted with previous fictional catastrophes, leaving the whole affair as a serviceable but slightly baffling experiment, never much more than the sum of vaguely familiar parts. Even so, it'll probably do fabulously on Netflix one of these days." TIM MARTIN

Guardian (UK) ★★★
"Despite being very different to Lanchester's last novel, *Capital*, *The Wall* suffers from some of the same flaws: underdeveloped characters, particularly the women, a lack of convincing detail and an overly schematic plot. ... But it's resolutely British at least—and you can't help wondering if it's the dystopia our lonely, windswept islands deserve." JOHANNA THOMAS-CORR

Independent (UK) ★★★
"What probably seemed alarmingly prescient at the time of writing has become almost unbearable to read. ... In line with the most common observation about millennials, Kavanagh and his friends are just a little too bland. In making his experience as universal as possible, detail is lost, and there just isn't enough spark to create a needed sense of urgency." DAISY BUCHANAN

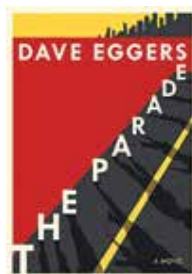
CRITICAL SUMMARY

Lanchester has created a believable future world that he describes in accessible prose. His topic could hardly be more relevant, given the climate crisis, Brexit, and refugee situations worldwide; the title also resonates with American politics. The plot combines allegory and adventure in an entertaining way, while dealing sternly with the economic and environmental catastrophes we've brought upon ourselves. However, the characters feel two-dimensional, and, overall, the events are "not nearly strange enough—the ambient unease rarely trickles down to a human level" (*Guardian*). Lanchester's fans may be interested to see him try a new direction. In a market so saturated with dystopian narratives, though, *The Wall* will likely not stand out.



The Parade

By Dave Eggers



Dave Eggers's *A Hologram for the King* (★★★★ Sept/Oct 2012) was a finalist for the National Book Award; *Your Fathers, Where Are They? And the*

Prophets? Do They Live Forever? (★★★ Sept/Oct 2014) was short-listed for the Dublin International Literary Award; and *What Is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng* (★★★★ Jan/Feb 2007) was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and the winner of France's Prix Médicis Étranger. In 2018, Eggers cofounded the International Congress of Youth Voices, a global gathering of writers and activists under 20.

THE STORY: Two men, code-named Four and Nine, are contractors who have signed on to build a 150-mile road in an unnamed country that is emerging from a brutal civil war. The road is intended to unite the country, linking the capital with the rural south, and to help usher in prosperity. Four is a veteran of such projects, a practical-minded, no-nonsense kind of a guy. His job is to pilot the paver. Nine is a younger, more adventurous man, ravenous to know the people (most especially the women) and their culture. Inevitably, Nine finds trouble and becomes ill, risking the possibility that the road won't be completed in time for the president's celebratory parade. To the rescue come Medallion ("a leader, an entertainer, a man with great charm") and Cousin, natives of the country. With great trepidation, Four relies on their assistance.

Knopf. 192 pages. \$25.95. ISBN: 9780525655305

Guardian (UK) ★★★
"[Eggers'] allegory is designed to make us realise the dangers of 'improvements,' when their use is exploited by those who control the levers of power. His novel may be sternly reduced in terms of its cast

and language, but this leanness doesn't diminish the strength of its argument."

ANDREW MOTION

New York Journal of Books ★★★
"*The Parade* is a deeply felt book that defies easy labels. This is a book you can finish in a single sitting. And you will." TONY ROMANO

Kirkus ★★★
"The closing paragraphs of this short novel take an abrupt turn into Dour Lecturer territory, but the shift is earned; Eggers is determined to counter the notion that social and economic improvement work hand in hand, and Four and Nine ultimately resonate as characters as much as archetypes. An unassuming but deceptively complex morality play, as Eggers distills his ongoing concerns into ever tighter prose."

Millions ★★★
"The novella's plot moves in a straight line, event after event rolling along day by day. But *The Parade* can't be reduced to its plot any more than life (individual or collective) can be reduced to bare events." JEAN HUETS

Entertainment Weekly ★★
"Eggers' writing in *The Parade* is fine—often lovely in its attention to physical detail, utterly lacking in soul. The allegorical nature of the prose hints at weighty complexity, but what materializes ranges from a college term paper steeped in pessimism to a narrative assembled from crocodile tears." DAVID CANFIELD

Washington Post ★★
"Eggers has pared his clever style down to a series of flat, declarative sentences. The characters have been crunched into types. The details of this place have been sandblasted away. At best, we're left with the stark elements of a parable, which raises the book's pretentiousness quotient to dangerously high levels." RON CHARLES

CRITICAL SUMMARY

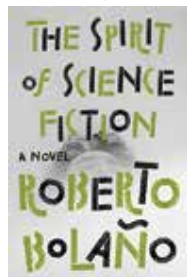
The *Washington Post* is among those not at all impressed by Eggers's latest, writing that the author has reduced his protagonists to Buddy-genre stereotypes—"the grumpy old crank who does everything by the book and

the carefree heartthrob who drives him crazy, *gosh darnit!*—while scripting a plot that leads to the inevitable crisis that allows both men to appreciate just who the other truly is deep within. Harsher still was the assessment of the *Entertainment Weekly* critic, who argues that Eggers “all but rejects the principles of good storytelling,” rendering a novel that reads “more like an extended short story, reserving its knife-turn for the final page and plodding until then.” Slim and concise while maintaining complexity, *The Parade* is best for fans of morality plays.



The Spirit of Science Fiction

By Roberto Bolaño, translated from the Spanish by Natasha Wimmer



Roberto Bolaño Ávalos (1953–2003) was a Chilean author of novels, short stories, poems, and essays. He won the Rómulo Gallegos Prize for *The Savage Detectives* (1998), and, in 2008, he was

posthumously awarded a National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction for *2666* (2004). He published 16 books and is considered one of the most important figures of 20th-century Latin American literature. Natasha Wimmer has translated multiple works by Bolaño and Mario Vargas Llosa and received the PEN Translation Prize in 2009.

THE STORY: Composed circa 1984, this short novel features a pair of writers, Jan Schrella and Remo Morán, who leave dictator-led Chile for Mexico City in the 1970s. Shy Jan translates poetry and writes fan letters to his science fiction heroes, including Robert Silverberg and Ursula K. Le Guin. Meanwhile, Remo undertakes a writing workshop and decides to look into the sudden explosion of literary magazines in their city. He often gets sidetracked from his literary pursuits, however, by romantic entanglements.

In between the vignettes that describe these two young men's adventures are excerpts from a later interview with a famous author, full of digressive musings on science fiction—and potato farming.

Penguin. 208 pages. \$24. ISBN: 9780735222854

Telegraph (UK)



“The Spirit of Science Fiction has the same episodic quality [as *The Savage Detectives*], although it is so short that a lungful of Bolaño’s prose on page one should be enough to see you safely to the end without mishap. It may be prentice work, but the mixture of passionate hymning of the beauties of women and literature, fabular digressions and offbeat similes (one character is described as being ‘like the coat of paint on a crossbeam’) is immediately recognisable as Bolaño.” JAKE KERRIDGE

Guardian (UK)



“Bolaño’s novels are often fuelled by a playful dialectics, structured loosely around rival friends, siblings or schools of poetry, which are set against one another as each pursues its own desires. ... Every now and then, little islands of visibility appear within the fog, clear-eyed glimpses into the books to come.” CHLOE ARIDJIS

NPR



“[O]nce you’ve read those books [2666, *The Savage Detectives*, and others], come back to this one. It’s a joy to watch such a brilliant stylist practice his moves, and to see such a brilliant mind expand on the page. Knowing the work that came next only makes the joy deeper.” LILY MEYER

Irish Times



“To say it’s the perfect introduction to Bolaño’s tactics, tricks, and motifs is too generous and wrongly uses his style as a delicate prop. Ultimately, we’re encountering problematic framing.” LUCIE SHELLY

Kirkus



“Whether they resolve the mysteries of either literary production or women is beside the point, though; the novel is designed more as a series of set pieces from the pair’s lives than a clear narrative, which leaves room for plenty of riffs about writers hungry to make names for

themselves. ... An abstracted and loose minor work that only glancingly addresses the author’s favorite themes.”

Observer (UK)



“It’s a rambling, dispiriting mess, symptomatic of the way publishers have dredged up substandard work from this great writer’s past in the hope that it might catch some of the reflected glory of his two great novels. Let us hope *The Spirit of Science Fiction* is the last of these tawdry outtakes that can only serve to diminish the legacy of one of the most remarkable literary voices of the past 50 years.” ALEX PRESTON

PRESTON

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Not published during Bolaño’s lifetime, in theme and style, this novel, “among Bolaño’s fragments” (NPR), resembles an early draft of what eventually became the well-regarded (and much longer) *The Savage Detectives*. While the critics identify flashes of the brilliance of the author’s later work here, they caution that this is unfinished work he possibly never intended for publication, so it reads somewhat like a pastiche rather than a substantial work. It is his third posthumous work to be published, and there may be more to come. “Bolaño does his signature pirouettes around the pages of *The Spirit of Science Fiction*, but they are his small-stage practice. The true performance was yet to come” (*Irish Times*).

crime

FICTION



Tombland

By C. J. Sansom



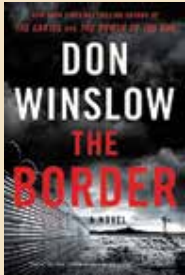
C. J. Sansom, a Scottish-born author, writes historical crime novels. He is best known for his Shardlake Series, set in 16th-century Tudor England and

BOOKMARKS SELECTION



The Border

By Don Winslow



Don Winslow is the *New York Times* best-selling author of more than 21 books and the recipient of the Raymond Chandler Award, the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize, the Ian Fleming Silver Dagger, and many other prestigious awards. *The Border* concludes his epic and expansive trilogy about America's war on drugs—*The Power of the Dog* (2005) and *The Cartel* (★★★★ Nov/Dec 2015)—spanning from the poppy fields of Mexico in the 1970s to Wall Street and the White House in 2017.

THE STORY: Art Keller has been on the front lines of the war on drugs for more than 40 years. After an obsessive quest to defeat the kingpin of the Sinaloa Cartel, he's worn, scarred, and left with a loss. Now the head of the DEA, Keller faces a war on two fronts: the drug traffickers and Mexican drug cartels he's trying to take down and the incoming administration in bed with them. Moving from Mexico to Washington, D.C., and from Guatemala to Wall Street, Winslow follows Keller and a new generation of dealers, traffickers, cops, addicts, politicians, migrants, and moguls, many of them enemies, most of them manipulators, and some of them violent—and it's not hard to see the places in his novel where he's pulling from today's headlines.

William Morrow. 736 pages. \$28.99. ISBN: 9780062664488

Arizona Republic ★★★★★

"Think *The Godfather* of the recreational-drug generation. ... *The Cartel* is fiction in the same way Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* is fiction; this is reporting and expose built around an intricate plot, finely etched characters and whip-crack dialogue." ROBERT ANGLÉN

New York Times ★★★★★

"The book makes Winslow's clear case for why everything we're told about Mexican drug imports is wrong: why New York is so vital to the country's illegal-drug distribution, and even production; how Wall Street money and drug money are intertwined; and how money laundering intersects with businesses like real estate. ... You don't read these books; you live in them." JANET MASLIN

Providence Journal ★★★★★

"No fiction writer has ever owned a subject, a kind of first and final word, the way Winslow, who grew up in South Kingstown, owns the war on drugs. ... This is a modern masterpiece of rare depth and pathos, an epic destined to be the defining tome of an age

that has given us the opioid crisis and a never-ending battle over a border wall." JON LAND

Los Angeles Times ★★★★★

"*The Border* is intricate, mean and swift, a sprawling canvass of characters including narco kingpins, a Guatemalan stowaway, a Staten Island heroin addict, a kinky hit woman, a barely veiled Donald Trump and DEA agent Art Keller, who over the arc of the trilogy has been noble and merciless, a conflicted wanderer who makes America face the transgressions committed in its name."

JEFFREY FLEISHMAN

NPR ★★★★★

"The book is trope-heavy, stereotype-heavy, occasionally (okay, often) one-dimensional. ... 300 years from now, when our children's children's children want to understand the defining conflict of the late 20th and early 21st century—when they want it presented with full lights and fireworks, costumed in gold chains and polo shirts, writ hugely in the way that only fiction can be—there's a fair chance that this is what they will read." JASON SHEEHAN

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette ★★★★★

"This is so timely it's ahead of the curve. ... Mr. Winslow also captures the vernacular of all social levels, from underage migrant dope slingers in Jackson Heights in Queens to the New York City cops who help Keller unearth a tainted real estate deal involving investments of Mexican drug money in Park Tower, a failing property (666 Fifth Ave., anyone?) linked to Dennison's boy Lerner." CARLO WOLFF

Washington Post ★★★★★

"Some of the angriest (and probably most controversial) moments come through Winslow's scathing account of the 2016 presidential election. ... The result is a powerful—and painful—journey through a contemporary version of hell." BILL SHEEHAN

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Comparing Winslow's trilogy to *The Godfather* is almost inevitable; both are sprawling sagas on multiple generations of organized crime. After making that comparison, most reviewers seem to revel in how deep and timely Winslow's work is—and how lasting it will be. "Like Shakespeare, it makes a three-act drama of our modern moment," wrote NPR. The administration Keller must undermine has faces—and even names—pulled from the headlines, perhaps most notably Donald Trump and Jared Kushner. Certain threads and plot points are so timely, in fact, that multiple critics questioned how and when Winslow was even able to tie them into the more than 700-page novel. When pulling in current events, though, Winslow is not making a grab for relevance: everything culminates in his brutal theses on the futility of America's war on drugs, both moral and political.

featuring hunchbacked lawyer Matthew Shardlake. His recent novels include *Lamentation* (2014), *Dominion*

(2012) and *Heartstone* (2010). *Tombland* is the seventh novel in the series. **THE STORY:** In 1549, in the wake of King Henry VIII's death, England

is nearly bankrupt and on the edge of rebellion, with the true heir to the throne, Edward VI, only 11 years old and his uncle, Edward Seymour, in

a nominal place of power. Matthew Shardlake is working as a lawyer for King Henry VIII's daughter, Elizabeth. When a distant cousin of hers is murdered, Shardlake and his assistant Nicholas Overtone are tasked with discovering if the murder somehow connects to Elizabeth. The duo travel to Norwich, which quickly falls to Kett's Rebellion. The lawyer must step through the political minefield, while searching for what a potential empire-toppling insurrection has to do with Elizabeth's dead cousin; he must also discover where his own allegiances lie. Mulholland Books. 880 pages. \$28. ISBN: 9780316412421

Christian Science Monitor ★★★★★
"Longtime readers of this superb series will know what to expect on every level: sharply drawn characters, particularly Shardlake himself, who has grown into one of the most well-textured leading characters in the entire genre. ... But if Tombland has a flaw, it's that by abandoning so conspicuously the brevity that is the hallmark of a tense tale of murder, it makes its own whodunit elements feel irrelevant." STEVE DONOGHUE

Crime Review ★★★★★
"The book has a huge cast, adroitly managed, and effortlessly weaves together the realities of life in Tudor England, and absorbing murder mystery, vivid characters and seductive history to provide compelling reading for both history lovers and crime aficionados. Sansom, brings the past to life in three dimensions, but it is the character of his main protagonist that shines throughout this remarkable series." JOHN CLEAL

Guardian (UK) ★★★★★
"[A] thumping 847 pages of glorious pageantry. ... Although the main storyline is sometimes lost in all the hurly-burly, Sansom handles his huge cast with aplomb." LAURA WILSON

Guardian (UK) ★★★★★
"Shardlake is a superb creation, who gains more substance with each new book; he questions and challenges the political shifts of his age while remaining entirely plausibly shaped by them. ...

The novel's murder plot rather slips into the background, as Sansom creates a vivid picture of life in Kett's camp outside Norwich, as the rebels prepare to take the city; the echoes of a popular leader promising to lead desperate people against self-serving elites are there for readers to interpret as they wish." STEPHANIE MERRITT

Lazy Historian ★★★★★
"If you're in the market for that type of realistic historical fiction, I can totally recommend the Shardlake series. ... [Sansom's] novels will satisfy both the history buff and the murder mystery enthusiast—the books are that well-crafted they could stand alone under either genre." CLAIRE MILES

Times (UK) ★★★★★
"Sansom leads us around the local countryside with the same scrupulous authority that he describes Fleet Street or the City of Westminster. ... As well as the longest of the books, this is Sansom's most depressing, with torture, child abuse, and rape all rife in 1540s Norfolk." NEIL FISHER

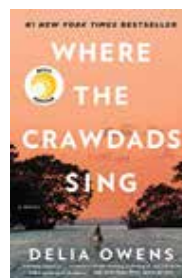
CRITICAL SUMMARY

The seventh in the Shardlake series is "compelling reading for history lovers and crime aficionados alike" (*Guardian*). At center are Samson's sharply delineated characters, including the increasingly compelling protagonist, a man dedicated to finding the truth, even amid rank corruption and danger. *Tombland*, a dense 880 pages, often leans so fully into historical detail and nuance it can abandon the mystery aspects fans of the series may have enjoyed in the past. "Samson seems to bore himself with the murder" at the heart of the novel, focusing instead on the exceedingly bleak machinations of the peasant revolution (*Times*). And though *Tombland* is "intensely satisfying" and another step in the right direction for "one of the best ongoing mystery series currently being published" it "might have benefitted from some editorial pruning" (*Christian Science Monitor*). Overall, a highly worthy addition.



Where the Crowdads Sing

By Delia Owens



Idaho-based Delia Owens has coauthored three nature books (with her former husband, Mark Owens) on the basis of her wildlife research in Africa: *Cry of the Kalahari* (1984), which won the John Burroughs Medal for natural history writing; *The Eye of the Elephant* (1992); and *Secrets of the Savanna* (2006). *Where the Crowdads Sing*, her best-selling debut novel, was chosen for Reese Witherspoon's Hello Sunshine Book Club and is being developed into a movie.

THE STORY: Kya Clark has always lived alone in a shack in North Carolina's marshland. When she was six, her mother left; soon her father's drunken violence also drove out her siblings, including her brother, Jodie. The residents of Barkley Cove dismiss Kya, who lives alone in her natural surroundings, as "marsh trash." As a girl, she avoided truancy officers and subsisted on grits. The owners of the general store took her under their wing, and Jodie's friend, Tate, taught her to read. As a young woman, she starts writing field guides to the region's flora and fauna, and falls in love—twice. But when Chase Andrews is found dead in the swamp in 1969, she becomes the police's prime suspect. G. P. Putnam's Sons. 384 pages. \$27. ISBN: 9780735219090

Historical Novel Society ★★★★★
"Both Kya and the marsh are the main characters of this immersive and moving story of love and belonging mixed with mystery and suspense. This is a deeply affecting novel, lyrical and unforgettable." JANICE OTTERSBERG

Southern Literary Review ★★★★★
"Part romance, part mystery, part love song to the natural world, *Where the*

***Crawdads Sing* is, in the end, a story about two of the most basic instincts, the instinct to survive, and the equally strong yearning humans have to form relationships with others. ... Pitch-perfect, it excels in every way: originality of characters, faithful rendering of a unique setting, and language that is somehow both lush and straightforward.**" DONNA MEREDITH

Guardian (UK) ★★★★★
"Though set in the 1950s and 60s, *Where the Crawdads Sing* is, in its treatment of racial and social division and the fragile complexities of nature, obviously relevant to contemporary politics and ecology. But these themes will reach a huge audience though the writer's old-fashioned talents for compelling character, plotting and landscape description." MARK LAWSON

New York Journal of Books ★★★★★
"Owens' writing is tight, yet sumptuous. It is abundant with descriptive prose and brings the reader straight to the edges of the briny marsh waters, and directly into the mind of the Marsh Girl. ... The conclusion is haunting and unexpected, yet leaves a sense of fulfillment as all well-told stories do." DONNA EVERHART

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★
"Owens has found her voice in ... a painfully beautiful first novel that is at once a murder mystery, a coming-of-age narrative and a celebration of nature. ... In the end, Owens goes a bit too far as she attempts to make amends for Kya's lonely childhood and solitary life. But it must be said that Kya has earned it." MARILYN STASIO

CRITICAL SUMMARY

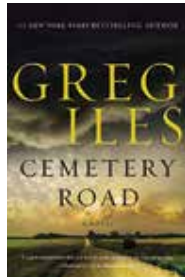
It's no surprise that so many readers have taken this novel to their hearts: it's a gripping mystery but also a tender coming-of-age story about one woman's desperately lonely upbringing and rocky route to finding love and a vocation. "Owens adeptly alternates plotlines" (*Historical Novel Society*) that start in 1952 and 1969. Not only that, but Owens describes the North Carolina setting in lyrical language that evinces her background in nature writing, tempered with folksy Southern dialect. The title refers to the place where wild creatures do what comes

naturally, and the book invites readers to ponder how instinct and altruism interact. In Kya, Owens has created a truly "vivid and original character" (*Guardian*).



Cemetery Road

By Greg Iles



Mississippi-based Greg Iles is the author of 13 *New York Times* best sellers, including *The Devil's Punchbowl* (2009), which reached number one on its list. *Mississippi Blood* (2017), the third novel in his Natchez Burning Trilogy, hit number one on *USA Today's* list. His novels have been made into films and published in more than 35 countries.

THE STORY: Marshall McEwan, a Washington D.C.-based Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, returns home to the river-bluff town of Bienville, Mississippi, to rescue his family's 150-year-old newspaper. Bienville may appear to be a sleepy Southern outpost, but much is afoot. The beloved Buck Ferris—local archeologist, Scoutmaster, and mentor to McEwan—discovers a 4,000-year-old American Indian pot buried on a site alongside the Mississippi River, where Chinese investors intend to build a billion-dollar paper mill. Ferris's body is subsequently found in the river. McEwan's investigation into the murder leads him to a secret society of local rich white men and a former high school sweetheart. A backdrop to the drama is McEwan's strained relationship, and possible reconciliation, with his ill father, dating back decades to the drowning of his older brother.

William Morrow. 608 pages. \$28.99. ISBN: 9780062824615

Bookreporter ★★★★★
"There is so much action and character development here that it is impossible to turn away. It's like binge-watching your favorite TV drama, and you don't dare take

your eyes off the screen for fear of missing out on another revelation." RAY PALEN

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette ★★★★★
"What elevates this sexy potboiler is Mr. Iles' psychological acuity, his huge variety of literary and pop culture references, and a narrative pull as strong as a Mississippi River current. ... Those who love an overflowing page-turner will appreciate Mr. Iles' distinct voices, unexpected and effective metaphors, intense scenes and super dramatic emotions, despite a little raunchy romance." MARGIE ROMERO

Real Book Spy ★★★★★
"Greg Iles does it again, offering up a compelling, double-dose of southern crime. ... *Cemetery Road* is a must-read for anyone calling themselves a fan of the genre." RYAN STECK

Washington Post ★★★★★
"Though strictly speaking a suspense novel, *Cemetery Road* is, in fact, a great deal more. In the precision and power of its language and its sheer amplitude of detail, Iles's latest calls to mind the late, great Southern novelist Pat Conroy." BILL SHEEHAN

Kirkus ★★★★★
"The bad guys are really bad, the molls inviting ... the politicians spectacularly corrupt. ... Formulaic but fun."

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Cemetery Road is a "sprawling account of people trying—and usually failing—to manage their messy lives in a town struggling for economic survival" (*Washington Post*), with ample political malfeasance and sexual misconduct to usher the narrative along. Iles writes with drama and psychological insight, and the critics uniformly praised the author's vivid depiction of life in this Southern town and admired his stellar ensemble of colorful, fully realized characters. Greg Iles and Mississippi go together like meat and potatoes, the Real Book Spy avows. Readers concerned that the author may have exhausted this setting with his Natchez Burning Trilogy can rest assured, the reviewer concludes, that Iles is "keeping things fresh and exciting."



The Suspect

By Fiona Barton



Fiona Barton, author of the *New York Times* best-selling *The Widow* (★★★★ May/June 2016) and *The Child* (★★★★ Sept/Oct 2017), was a senior writer at the *Daily Mail*, news editor at the *Daily Telegraph*, and chief reporter at the *Mail on Sunday*, where, in 2002, she earned the British Press Award for reporter of the year.

THE STORY: Thirty-five years as a journalist inform Barton's portrayal of Kate Waters, a reporter for a London newspaper ever on the alert for the next earth-shattering exposé. In the summer of 2014, Waters learns about the disappearance of two local young women. Alexandra O'Connor, 18, took a gap-year excursion to Thailand with Rosie Shaw, whom she hardly knows. The two take up residence at Mama's Paradise Bar and Guesthouse and slip into Bangkok nightlife. Weeks go by, with no word from the women to their parents. After a fire breaks out in the boarding house, the women's bodies are found; an autopsy suggests foul play. Now in Thailand, Waters finds herself intimately involved in the investigation: her rarely-heard-from globe-trekking son had been living in Thailand, became friendly with the murdered women, and has now vanished.

Berkley. 416 pages. \$26. ISBN: 9781101990513

Bookreporter



"Twists and turns abound, and while several are easy to anticipate, the story unfolds in a highly satisfying manner. ... Fans of well-written and suspenseful tales will thoroughly enjoy this clever book."

CINDY BURNETT

USA Today



"Barton's classic use of short chapters and multiple narratives keep the reader on edge, helping to move the story along

at a brisk pace. Her ability to sustain the tension while not overwhelming the reader is to be applauded." MARY CADDEN

Mystery Tribune



"The razor-sharp thriller, *The Suspect*, reaffirms the reputation of Fiona Barton as an author who combines propulsive narrative with subtle, insightful commentary on the universal stories of family, identity and loss. ... While the [plot's] ending [is] not entirely novel or surprising, the tight writing style and believable characters make up for it and turn the book into a solid thriller read."

Washington Post



"[A]n expertly written look at a painful subject: the way parents often suffer when their children go forth to confront the dangers of this world." PATRICK ANDERSON

The Real Book Spy



"[W]hile the setup is solid, the plot ultimately concludes with a predictable ending that might fool casual readers, but not big fans of the genre." RYAN STECK

NPR



"[T]he setup and setting are original, but the action is hampered by too much stage business. If you've never read Barton's work, start with her first two novels. If you loved those books, join me in waiting for her fourth." BETHANNE PATRICK

CRITICAL SUMMARY

This "well-crafted commercial thriller" (*Mystery Tribune*) takes a bit of time to get moving, but once it does, it moves along at a steady clip, propelled by short chapters and a brisk writing style. Some critics were put off by poorly developed, unrelatable characters and occasionally stilted dialogue. NPR wrote that, despite an elaborate murder plot, *The Suspect* fails to live up to Barton's previous novels, because the author tries to do too much with too many characters. But the *Bookreporter* critic was drawn to several thought-provoking themes the author tackles—including the public's hunger for sensationalized news and the media's rush to provide it, and "the ramifications of the use of social media to frame an experience ... the way that

an individual wishes it was happening while ignoring the reality."



Judgment

By Joseph Finder



Joseph Finder's novels include *Guilty Minds* (2016) and *Company Man* (2005), both winners of the Barry Award for Best Thriller, *Buried Secrets*, winner the

2011 Strand Critics Award for Best Novel, and *Killer Instinct*, recipient of the 2007 International Thriller Writers' Award for Best Novel. His novels *Paranoia* (2004) and *High Crimes* (1998) were adapted for film.

THE STORY: Erstwhile straight-laced Massachusetts Superior Court Judge Juliana Brody, a prospective candidate for the U.S. Supreme Court, attends a legal conference in Chicago and makes a rash decision that upends her life. The married mother of two sleeps with a man she meets in the hotel bar. She awakens horrified by her behavior, pledging to return to normalcy. Back in her courtroom, she's hearing a sexual harassment case against the CEO of a ride-share company, when the defense team announces an additional attorney—the man with whom Judge Brody transgressed. She soon learns that there's a videotape of their dalliance, that it's in the hands of the man's handlers, and that she best comply with their demands. It appears she's in way over her head.

Dutton. 400 pages. \$28. ISBN: 9781101985816

Criminal Element



"Judgment is an absolute blast. It is, in the best sense, a textbook thriller—exactly the sort of book you want when you're looking for a cracking plot and a memorable protagonist." LARRY CLOW

New Jersey Herald



"Finder proves that what appears to be a simple idea can be elevated with great writing and powerful characters." JEFF AYERS

Real Book Spy ★★★
"Judgment does require readers to suspend their disbelief a tad more than normal. ... Touching on a Russian conspiracy and the #MeToo movement, Judgment is as relevant as it is thrilling, and Joseph Finder shows once again that he knows how to keep readers off balance and guessing until the very end." RYAN STECK

Wall Street Journal ★★★
"Finder writes a tense and well-balanced novel that unfolds in the context of a suburban life full of other, more mundane challenges. The more we learn about Judge Brody and her family, the more we root for a merciful resolution to their travails." TOM NOLAN

Washington Post ★★★
"In bringing this thriller to a conclusion, Finder hews closely to what readers might expect from the genre. ... Suffice it to say that the denouement feels less than believable." RICHARD LIPEZ

Kirkus ★★
"Coming from an author known for his intense plots, Finder's latest is a rather mild work of suspense—readable but not all that suspenseful or compelling."

CRITICAL SUMMARY

The *Washington Post* suggests that Finder's plot "isn't so much ripped from the headlines as exactly extracted from them": a divisive president, sexual misconduct in corporate America, Russian interference. The author also takes a deep dive into dysfunctional, understaffed government. "We read of this grim phenomenon in the media," the *Washington Post* writes; "Finder makes it palpable in his lurid tale." Reviewers disagreed on Brody's appeal as a protagonist. *The Criminal Element* delighted in witnessing the judge's stumble through "absolute hell." And some took issue with the pacing of the narrative. But, with the arrival of the Russians, things pick up considerably, with Finder delivering, the *Real Book Spy* asserts, "a nail-biting final act that's everything his fans expect and more."



★★★★
All Systems Red

The Murderbot Diaries
 By Martha Wells



Martha Wells's fantasy novels include *The Death of the Necromancer*, a 1998 Nebula Award finalist; *Wheel of the Infinite* (2000); *The Wizard Hunters* (2003); and *The*

Harbors of the Sun (2017). She has also written fantasy for young adults. The Murderbot Diaries is a series of four science fiction novellas originally published in 2017–2018. Wells lives in Texas. *All Systems Red* is the winner of the 2018 Hugo Award for Best Novella, the 2017 Nebula Award for Best Novella, and the Locus Award.

THE STORY: SecUnit, otherwise known as "Murderbot," is a genderless robot that has been contracted out as a bodyguard. Instead of the expected slavish devotion, it treats its human employers with disdain. It's addicted to watching a show called *Sanctuary Moon*, a great way of filling the time between assignments. But when a whole new threat hits the humans it's charged with protecting, Murderbot has to step up and decide where its true allegiances lie. Narrated by Murderbot itself, this is a funny and unusual novella that will draw readers in for the three books to follow.

Tor. 176 pages. \$16.99. ISBN: 9781250214713

Book Smugglers ★★★★★
"Beyond characterization, All Systems Red also scores top marks in terms of overall worldbuilding and execution. The pacing of the novella is superb, and I loved the gradual reveals regarding the survey team, the planet they are currently occupying, and the cheap-o Company that supplies their excavation." ANA & THEA

New York Journal of Books ★★★★★
"It's snappy, wry, charmingly awkward,

and brings up a lot of details that build a world while mattering specifically to the events at hand—the trick of good worldbuilding. ... At under 200 pages, like all the Tor mini novels, it's a quick read, and there's something of old sci[-]fi to the feel of it: robots, alien planets, intrigue, adventures on the edge of known space—all in half of the length of a more recent-style novel." SAMANTHA HOLLOWAY

SFF Book Reviews (blog) ★★★★★
"While Murderbot is the heart and soul of this novella, the human cast was pretty interesting as well. ... As lighthearted as it feels, this is a complex read that asks many questions and lets the readers reach their own answers." DINA

Tor.com ★★★★★
"Wells has a really tight grasp of tension and pacing, and a truly polished skill with turning a phrase. The language in All Systems Red draws no attention to itself, but Wells has a knack for making even unobtrusive prose slid into a vivid line that brings a whole paragraph to life." LIZ BOURKE

Fantasy Literature ★★★★★
"All Systems Red is a breezy, fast-paced science fiction adventure wrapped in a light mystery. ... Murderbot is a unique, well-developed character but, other than the leader of the survey group, Dr. Mensah, and one other person who is somewhat antagonistic to Murderbot, the members of PreservationAux aren't particularly distinguishable personalities." TADIANA JONES

The Verge ★★★★★
"This format is ideal. It allows Wells to tell Murderbot's story through discrete installments, and opens up the opportunity for endless variations, missions, or backstory in each adventure."

ANDREW LIPTAK

CRITICAL SUMMARY

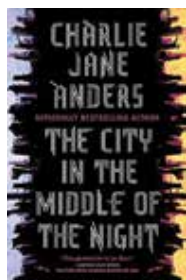
Reviewers fell in love with the character of Murderbot in *All Systems Red*—"the unreliable narrative of a curmudgeonly Artificial Intelligence organic-machine cyborg who largely wants to be left alone" (*Book Smugglers*). While the plot is a fairly familiar one in science fiction from the 1960s onwards, Wells has crafted a sardonic

voice that is simply irresistible, and her world building is top-notch. The critics could also see this novel working well as a television series. It's "a really fun piece of science fiction adventure with compelling characters and great pacing" (*Tor*).



The City in the Middle of the Night

By Charlie Jane Anders



Charlie Jane Anders's novel *All the Birds in the Sky* (★★★★ Mar/Apr 2016) received the 2017 Nebula Award for Best Novel and was a finalist for the Hugo Award for

Best Novel, and her short story "Six Months, Three Days" won the 2012 Hugo Award for Best Novelette. Anders served as editor in chief for the science fiction and fantasy website io9.com.

THE STORY: A thousand-some-odd years in the future, humans have colonized the planet January. January is tidally locked: one side faces the sun and is unrelentingly hot; the other is dark and permanently frozen. Humans dwell in a "sliver of dusk" between the two. Sophie, a shy, lower-class student, serves as one narrator. Sophie meets Bianca, a rich kid who fashions herself a revolutionary. When Bianca gets herself into a spot of trouble, Sophie elects to take the fall. She's hauled away by men in faceplates and dumped over a cliff, left for dead. But she's saved by a "crocodile," a fur-covered lobsterlike creature. The crocodiles are the planet's original species; they're intelligent and are desperate to warn the humans of impending climate change. The second narrator is Mouth, the lone surviving member of a tribe of nomads. Mouth trails Sophie, while Mouth is desperate to discover a greater purpose to her own life.

Tor Books. 368 pages. \$26.99. ISBN: 9780765379962

Chicago Tribune ★★★★★
"It's at once a troubled romance, a political and environmental fable, a story of first contact with aliens, a rousing adventure complete with sea monsters and pirates, and, toward the end, an almost visionary evocation of an alien way of thinking as we learn more about those crocodiles and their world. That she succeeds at balancing all this is a testament to her growing sophistication as a novelist." GARY K. WOLFE

New York Journal of Books ★★★★★
"The City in the Middle of the Night by Charlie Jane Anders is superbly written social science fiction as well as an intimate portrayal of individuals who are damaged by their societies." DAVID WALTON

NPR ★★★★★
"It is a story about how grand social ideas break, and who gets hurt worst in the breaking. ... It is an intimate portrait of people as much as it is a piece of culturally aware social sci-fi—a look at our moment in history through a distorting lens of aliens and spaceships." JASON SHEEHAN

Tor.com ★★★★★
"[The City in the Middle of the Night] is ultimately the kind of didactic, intelligent, critical fiction that interrogates the boundaries of our current moment through broad-scope questions of what if, why, how—illustrating our failures, our pitfalls, and our potential for change via alien perspectives." BRIT MANDELO

A.V. Club ★★★★★
"[The City in the Middle of the Night] is disorienting at first, fascinating when the world comes into focus, frustrating when nothing happens for long stretches of time, and satisfying when all the puzzle pieces fall into place." ADAM MORGAN

Paste ★★★★★
"There's a very human story at the center of Charlie Jane Anders' latest novel, *The City in the Middle of the Night*. ... [T]he tale is as much about toxic relationships, blinding love and otherness as it is the danger facing all the planet's inhabitants." JOSH JACKSON

St. Louis Post-Dispatch ★★★★★
"At more than 300 pages, [The City in the

***Middle of the Night*] is dense to the point of being slow going, with alternating points of view that are sometimes as disorienting as night and day. Persist and the last chapters come together in a satisfying conclusion with lessons that are more than relevant to this Earth today."** GAIL PENNINGTON

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Critics found this novel to be a generally satisfying blend of social commentary, romance, alien species, pirates, bratty kids, and spaceships—as the *A.V. Club* critic puts it, a mash-up of the "social and environmental themes of Le Guin with a Guillermo del Toro creature feature." Anders addresses climate change, gender equality, and political activism, without losing her focus on "the alliances, loves and perceived betrayals of her main characters" (*Chicago Tribune*). The NPR critic summed it up as, "Grand social ideas ... break if you put too much weight on them." Some reviewers, though, took issue with the novel's abrupt ending, at which little is resolved. Nonetheless, the *New York Journal of Books* writes that *The City* is "likely to garner major awards attention for its many-layered and nuanced characterization and themes."



The Consuming Fire

By John Scalzi



For his novel *Old Man's War*, John Scalzi received the 2006 John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer. In 2013, his *Redshirts* received the Hugo Award for Best

Novel. Scalzi is a critic at large for the *Los Angeles Times*. This space opera novel is the second in the best-selling Interdependency Series.

THE STORY: This follow-up to *The Collapsing Empire* (2017) takes place in a future in which humanity has fled Earth. An interstellar realm of planets, called the Interdependency, is linked by the Flow, a force enabling ships to

BOOKMARKS SELECTION



The Ruin of Kings

By Jenn Lyons



Jenn Lyons, who lives in Atlanta, Georgia, was a graphic artist for 20 years. This is her first book and the opening volume in the five-book series, *A Chorus of Dragons*. She also works on video games, including *The Saboteur* and *Lord of the Rings: Conquest* for EA Games.

THE STORY: Kihrin is a thief who grew up in a slum, raised by a blind musician. His life changed forever when he witnessed a murder during a robbery. Now he's being held in a jail cell and guarded by Talon, an attractive female assassin. In alternating chapters, these two characters swap memories. Kihrin has reason to believe that he is the son of a corrupt prince, and he wonders if the necklace he wears might have some deeper significance. He recently had to flee from a set of sorcerers, which seems like further proof that he is a more important figure than he initially realized. Talon has conspiracy stories of her own.

Tor Books. 560 pages. \$24.99. ISBN: 9781250175489

Fantasy Book Review



"When it works it creates an escalating tension as the chapters flip, each one ending on a cliffhanger, so that it's impossible to put the book down. ... From beginning to end, the worldbuilding is excellent, layered and intricate, developed by an author who knows everything about the place she's created." EMMA DAVIS

Kirkus



"Although a cast of well-developed characters and an impressively intricate storyline power this novel, it's Lyons' audacious worldbuilding that makes for such an unforgettable read. ... Epic

travel at accelerated speeds through "shoals," facilitating colonization and trade. But scientists are now warning that these shoals are vanishing. Skeptics say no, it's a hoax, a crisis manufactured for political gain; there is nothing to worry about. Marce Claremont is among the scientists sounding the alarm, but he learns that there may be a solution: alternate pathways through space. Then, with the opening of these routes, Marce makes another startling discovery: life still exists on a colony that was assumed to be lost, offering further hope for the future.

Tor Books. 320 pages. \$26.99. ISBN: 9780765388971

Los Angeles Times



"Scalzi avoids the trap that many science fiction writers fall into—that of technobabble—and makes accessible this far future on a distant planet. A large part of that is due to the way he writes—a fierce intelligence combining a sharp, at times acerbic, wit." ANTONY JONES

New York Journal of Books



"The Consuming Fire is the very best type of space opera that blends the inner workings of social groups with the broader mechanisms of power—along with a strong dash of social commentary. ... The book is quintessential Scalzi, with enough political commentary, social justice, pew-pew shoot-'em-up, space renegades, and

fantasy fans looking for a virtually un-put-down-able read should look no further."

SFF World



"The Ruin of Kings is an impressive debut, a fine start to a multi-volume fantasy epic and a book that will likely be a standout for me in 2019. The book should really appeal to readers who enjoy their fantasies big and weighty with a strong narrative pull." ROB H. BEDFORD

Tor.com



"The Ruin of Kings demanded my time, my determination, and my most interrogative reading skills. ... [T]he novel is definitely worth the frustration and extra work its narrative structure creates." SYLAS K. BARRETT

NY Times Book Review



"I was much more invested in Kihrin's human problems than I was in the sweeping, celestial aspects of the world-building, and embedding those problems within decades' worth of divine lineage obscures their impact. ... That said, it's impossible not to be impressed with the ambition of it all, the sheer, effervescent joy Lyons takes in the scope of her project." AMAL EL-MOHTAR

CRITICAL SUMMARY

The twin story lines are a unique feature of this series opener. That "dueling narrative" (*SFF World*) will keep readers gripped, eager to get back to unfinished business from the alternating thread. It seems unlikely, though, that Lyons will be able to repeat this structure in future books, so it will be interesting to see what form her storytelling takes next. Some aspects of *The Ruin of Kings* feel like hard work—the footnotes, myriad characters and a complicated genealogy to keep track of, and multiple mysteries. Overall, however, the book is "immersive, deliberate, and suitably epic" (*SFF World*), and an enticing introduction to a fully realized fantasy world.

underhanded maneuvering, that no reader will leave empty handed." J. S. FIELDS

Locus



"There is a welcome sharpness to this book and its lack of patience for those who can't see beyond increasing their own profit, no matter how much suffering they cause. It's a fun book, mind, but it's also an angry one." ADRIENNE MARTINI

Tor.com



"If you need a story where the people in government care about the people under their charge and also about deep corruption, this book will be tons of fun and will definitely cheer you up. ... Scalzi, as always, gives great romp." RENAY WILLIAMS

Space and Sorcery ★★★

"The Consuming Fire is indeed a swift and entertaining read, which is what I have come to expect from a Scalzi novel, but I'm sorry to say that it also proved to be something of a disappointment." MADDALENA

CRITICAL SUMMARY

The Consuming Fire is a quintessential space opera. Swap out vanishing interstellar pathways with global warming, and the narrative feels contemporary—urgent, even—an effect enhanced by the author's use of current slang and syntax. The overriding theme, the *Los Angeles Times* suggests, is a commentary on "belief, and its correlate, denial": despite compelling evidence of peril, there are those who find it expedient to insist that all is well. But the *Space and Sorcery* reviewer was, overall, underwhelmed by the novel. While allowing that this disappointment was, in part, due to lofty expectations, the reviewer expresses dissatisfaction with Scalzi's pacing: "moments of adrenalin-infused narrative" interrupted by others in which characters "indulge in long, drawn-out conversations" that come off "pedantic and artificial." But, for fans, it's a worthy follow-up.



The Raven Tower

By Ann Leckie



Ann Leckie's novel *Ancillary Justice* (★★★★★ **SELECTION** Jan/Feb 2014) received the Hugo, Nebula, Arthur C. Clarke, and British Science Fiction awards, and its

sequel, *Ancillary Sword* (★★★★★ **SELECTION** Jan/Feb 2015), was the recipient of BSFA and Locus awards. Her short story "Hesperia and Glory" was included in the 2007 edition of *Science Fiction: The Best of the Year*.

THE STORY: The novel's narrative echoes the themes of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Mawat, heir to the throne in the country of Iraden, returns home from the frontlines of war to find

that his father has disappeared, his uncle has assumed power, and the city of Vastai is in turmoil. Mawat is outraged; he distrusts his uncle and vows to overthrow him. Mawat's loyal servant, Eolo, tempers the young man's anger. He calmly sets about to investigate what's transpired in their absence and to smooth relations between Mawat and the royal family. The novel's narrator is an ancient god made of stone, called the Strength and Patience of the Hill. He narrates in the second person, speaking to Eolo, who, for the most part, is unable to hear him. Orbit. 432 pages. \$26. ISBN: 9780316388696

New York Times ★★★★★

"[The Raven Tower] reminded me of nothing so much as Hamlet—if Hamlet were told from the point of view of Elsinore Castle addressing itself to a Horatio who mostly couldn't hear it. ... The god's voice is mesmerizing, tender and careful, full of admiration for Eolo." AMAL EL-MOHTAR

Tor.com ★★★★★

"The Raven Tower is an enormously compelling novel. ... Leckie's worldbuilding is deep and thorough, showing us the edges of a broad, rich, complicated world, and her characters are fascinating." LIZ BOURKE

ARS Technica ★★★

"[A] challenging first installment that will capture the interest of fantasy nerds if they can grasp all of this world's moving parts—including some that the gods themselves don't fully understand." VALENTINA PALLADINO

NPR ★★★

"Leckie has a knack for constructing conflicts where bureaucracy is the primary field of battle, and here she gives governance the epic-fantasy treatment. ... [A]t its best, The Raven Tower examines details of power, politics, and the nature of a divinity that can shape our ends, rough-hew them how we will." GENEVIEVE VALENTINE

Book Smugglers ★★★★★

"I enjoyed The Raven Tower, and there are many things to love about the book. But there are also many, many flaws. The Raven Tower certainly executes its

revenge story—but it's a cheap kind of trick." THEA JAMES

CRITICAL SUMMARY

While admiring much about *The Raven Tower*, most particularly the author's "dedication and technical expertise," the *Book Smugglers* reviewer ultimately found the narrative to be exhausting. Some readers may get lost in extended stretches of second person exposition, and there no chapter breaks. The *New York Times* writes that the book has "the affect of an elegant short story overlying the complications and concerns of a novel." With the focus on bureaucracy governance, there's little character development. But, like other reviewers, the *New York Times* critic was lifted by the stone-god's voice: "mesmerizing, tender and careful," full of admiration for the young and earnest Eolo. Ultimately, the critic concludes, Leckie demonstrates that "a story can be entirely told instead of shown and still be utterly brilliant." The novel ends on a cliffhanger, suggesting a sequel.

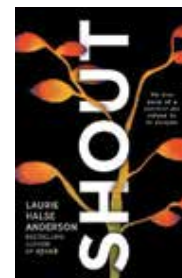
young adult

FICTION



Shout

By Laurie Halse Anderson



Laurie Halse Anderson's novels *Speak* (1999) and *Chains* (2008) were National Book Award finalists, and *Chains* was short-listed for the Carnegie Medal. She received the 2009 Margaret A. Edwards Award by the American Library Association. *Shout* is a free verse memoir.

THE STORY: In the first section, Anderson recounts her rape at the age of 13, her veteran father's struggle with PTSD, her parents' alcoholism, her family's frequent relocations—in sum, an altogether chaotic childhood.

The second section takes us into her adulthood and the publication of her novel *Speak*, which was informed by her rape. Anderson's poems herein draw on the many stories told to her as she traveled, speaking about the book, by young people who have experienced sexual assault and abuse, and on the censorship she encountered, told, on multiple occasions, that her subject matter was too inflammatory to be shared in schools. In the final section, Anderson returns to her own family, speaking to her late parents and affirming the power of sharing one's truths. Viking Books for Young Readers. 304 pages. \$17.99. ISBN: 9780670012107

Horn Book ★★★★★
"By turns angry, commanding, raw, and wistful, this collection is a praise song to survivors, a blistering rebuke to predators, and a testament to the healing power of shared stories." JENNIFER HUBERT SWAN

Kirkus ★★★★★
"The verse flows like powerful music, and Anderson's narrative voice is steady and direct ... Readers new to Anderson will find this accessible. It's a strong example of how lived experience shapes art and an important book for the #MeToo movement."

LA Review of Books ★★★★★
"[Anderson's] book is a powerful testament that bears witness not just to her own pain, and the pain of others similarly abused, but also to the power of speaking persistently, time and time again, about topics that most people don't want to hear." JONATHAN ALEXANDER

New York Times ★★★★★
"Shout is Anderson's reckoning; it follows a hurting cry to the universe that turns into a hard-won path to healing and ultimately unfolds into a powerful call to action. ... Shout serves as both a testament to the life-altering, lifesaving impact of these types of stories—and as an urgent and brutal reminder of their ongoing necessity." COURTNEY SUMMERS

School Library Journal ★★★★★
"Anderson uses the language of poetry perfectly to capture and talk about what

it's like to be a woman in this world, what it's like to have abusive situations in your life, and what it's like to navigate and live with the aftermath of sexual violence."

KAREN JENSEN

CRITICAL SUMMARY

"Necessary for every home, school, and public library" (*Kirkus*), *Shout* is equally important for its examination of Anderson's own life and as a chronicle of her advocacy on behalf of young people who have suffered sexual violence. "If *Shout* only shouted," the *Los Angeles Review of Books* reviewer writes, "it would be sufficient as a memoir, one that is regrettably still needed today." But it offers much more. Anderson's decision to write in verse acknowledges poetry as a medium well suited to discuss the tragedies we would prefer to look away from. The *New York Times* critic found *Shout* meandering at times, most particularly in the first and third sections, suggesting that the author is at her best when she's "aiming her lens directly at the reader to speak about rape culture." In such passages, Anderson confirms the "life-altering, lifesaving impact of these types of stories."



We Set the Dark on Fire

By Tehlor Kay Mejia



Tehlor Kay Mejia, who lives in Oregon, has had short fiction published in the *All Out* and *Toil & Trouble* anthologies from Inkyard Press. This is her debut

young adult fantasy novel, with a sequel due next year. Her middle grade fantasy debut, *Paola Santiago and the Drowned Palace*, is also forthcoming.

THE STORY: This speculative young adult novel takes place in Mexico-like Medio, an island divided by a wall. Unlucky citizens on the "wrong" side of the wall struggle to rise above poverty. Such was the case for 17-year-old Daniela Vargas, who lacks official

papers but who still managed to obtain entry into an elite private academy, the Medio School for Girls. Now graduating after five years, Dani is destined to be the Primera for the prominent Garcia family's son. In this patriarchal society, men have two wives; only the Segunda bears children. But life becomes complicated when one of Dani's female friendships turns into romance and she's drafted into spying for a resistance movement.

Katherine Tegen Books. 384 pages. \$17.99. ISBN: 9780062691316

Buffalo News ★★★★★
"Mejia makes an impressive debut in this thrilling tale of political intrigue, the first of two books set in a fantasy world whose stark divide between rich and poor offers echoes of contemporary realities. ... The author offers terrific suspense, compelling Latina heroines, a sizzling, forbidden romance and an interesting political backdrop of a nation with an entire mythology and founding narrative that conveniently supports the status quo."

JEAN WESTMOORE

Kirkus ★★★★★
"An action-packed third-person narrative, smart dialogue, and lush descriptions offer readers a fresh and steely heroine in a contemporary coming-of-age story. This well-crafted fantasy offers a mirror that reflects themes in our own difficult world, namely privilege, immigration, and individualism versus the common good."

NPR ★★★★★
"It's a gripping book, easy to race through despite the difficult and timely issues at its core. ... While there are some slight debut novel imperfections in the flow of the plot and climactic build, *We Set the Dark on Fire* burns bright, and I hope it will light the way for a new generation of rebels and lovers." CAITLYN PAXSON

School Library Journal ★★★★★
"A tense cliffhanger that reveals secrets and sets up book two will leave readers ... desperate to see what happens. This well-written book has great world building, strong characters, and so much intrigue. A smart and engrossing read full of twists and turns." AMANDA MACGREGOR

BOOKMARKS SELECTION



The Waning Age

By S. E. Grove



S. E. Grove, who writes young adult fiction, also works as an academic historian. Her novels exist somewhere in the realm of fantasy and science fiction, with an emphasis on history, real and imagined. Her latest books include *The Mapmakers Trilogy: The Crimson Skew* (2016), *The Golden Specific* (2015), and *The Glass Sentence* (2014).

THE STORY: In an alternate, future version of a major city in California, humans—in early adolescence—lose the ability to feel or process any emotion for good. Hotel maid Natalia Peña and her younger brother Calvino catch the attention of pharmaceutical megacorporation RealCorp—fabricators of drugs that produce fake emotions for the wealthy—when Calvino seems to maintain his ability to feel. When he is snatched by agents of RealCorp, Natalia must go head-to-head with the world's largest company, using her martial arts skills and a bevy of new friends (and enemies) to take down those who seek to hunt and kill her along the way.

Viking Books for Young Readers. 352 pages. \$18.99. ISBN: 9780451479853

Booklist



"Grove ventures into science fiction with this psychological story, which explores concepts of childhood wonder and innocence, the harsher world of adults, and the love that lies at the center. ... A dazzling, emotional journey about a sister's love and the fight against an emotionless society." ELIZABETH KONKEL

Center for Children's Books



"Though it suffers from an occasionally inconsistent schema (people seem to feel emotions and connections that the premise should preclude), Grove's world shines through as a complex statement on empathy. ... [Natalia's] quest to retrieve her brother raises issues of morality, class inequality, and justice that are bound to evoke [reflections] on our own political environment from philosophical teenagers." NATALIE BERGLIND

Tor.com



"Countless novels have been written about dystopian worlds where the patriarchy melds with fascism, sparking violent rebellions in response. Winks and nudges toward *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* abound in this story, but Mejia fills her dystopia with queer romance, female friendship, and Latinx influences and cultural nods, setting it apart." ALEX

BROWN

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Something like *The Handmaid's Tale* for 14- to 18-year-olds, this novel is an inventive dystopian work set in a recognizable alternative future. Women in Medio are separated into two camps, effectively "the virgin and the whore" (*Tor.com*), but the protagonist, Dani, doesn't fit into either one. Female friendship is a subversive force in her world. Her relationship with Carmen, in particular, places her beyond the

Hypable



"I was initially intrigued by the idea of a story about a society filled with emotionless adults, but the further I got into *The Waning Age*, the more excited and immersed I got. ... The idea of emotions and empathy becoming vestigial was fascinating, and I tore through *The Waning Age*, hungry to learn more about how it worked."

School Library Journal



"Unexpected twists create a fast-paced plot. Topics of suicide, rape, extreme violence, and murder arise but are discussed with reserved detail and sensitivity." MONICA CABARCAS

Youth Services Book Review



"The futuristic L.A. in which Grove sets the novel bears a strong resemblance to a noir film, and it's no coincidence that Natalia refers often to the short stories of Raymond Chandler. It's a twisty, absorbing story with plenty of atmosphere and red herrings." SUSAN HARARI

Teenreads



"With her careful attention to detail and tidbits of daily life, this strange society comes alive. ... The themes of the novel regarding love, family and hope and how Grove explores these ideas in-depth are noteworthy." TIMOTHY R.

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Grove's "thoughtful" new entry into the young adult speculative fiction genre features a "spunky, competent ... and likable" (*Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*) protagonist in the emotionless Natalia. By paying careful attention to the details of the daily life she creates, Grove allows her strange world to be both believable and riveting. The obstacles Natalia faces in trying to get her brother Calvino back are "dangerous and suspenseful" (*Booklist*), and watching Natalia "battle her way back to her little brother is a treat" (*Hypable*). Throughout, Grove limns her characters and their relationships with great depth. Despite some awkward sections of writing, *The Waning Age* provides an insightful look at the effects of a world stripped of emotion through a tough, likable teenage character.

pale in this patriarchy-driven society. Talk of a wall makes this a timely book, and excerpts from the school rulebook emphasize how difficult it is to rebel. "This is a powerful, personal novel, and Mejia is a fierce writer with a sharp eye for subtlety" (*Tor.com*).



The Afterward

By E. K. Johnston



E. K. Johnston, a Canadian author and a forensic archaeologist, wrote her first manuscript in 2009. She won the Amy Mathers Teen Book Award for her fifth book,

Exit, Pursued by a Bear (2016), and was short-listed for the William C. Morris Award for her first book, *The Story of Owen: Dragon Slayer of Trondheim* (2014). *The Afterward* is her seventh novel, after *That Inevitable Victorian Thing* (2017). She has also written three *Star Wars* novels.

THE STORY: The seven woman questers comprising the godsgem successfully defeated the Old God a year ago, but their stories aren't over. The two youngest questers, apprentice knight Kalanthe Ironheart and thief Olsa Rhetsdaughter, became lovers on their quest, but the transition back to their "normal" lives proves to be more difficult than they had anticipated. Olsa tries to return to thieving, but keeps getting arrested, and there's only so many times Kalanthe can intercede on her behalf. To pay off her debts, Kalanthe is put on a tight timeline to find and marry a rich husband before she's knighted. Switching between the quest and life afterwards, Johnston combines the thrill of adventure and the trope-subverting query into what happens next.

Dutton Books for Young Readers. 352 pages. \$17.99. ISBN: 9780735231894

Sci-Fi Fan Letter



"Seeing five female knights on a quest was great, especially when one was asexual and another was transgender. The romance between Olsa and Kalanthe developed organically in the flashback scenes and you can see them trying to come to terms with their choices—imposed and desired—in the present and how their circumstances and pride cause problems." JESSICA STRIDER

Teen Reads



"[The Afterward] is a love story between a knight and a thief, and a queer, feminist celebration for all the readers who love the fantasy genre, but always felt left out of it. ... I loved that this is a solidly standalone YA fantasy novel, which are typically a bit less common—although I must say, I would love to revisit Olsa and Kalanthe in more books!" MAYA GITTELMAN

Tor



"Johnston divides her narrative into alternating sections of Before and After, using a first-person voice for her two narrators in the Before sections, and a close third person perspective for each of those narrators in the After ones. ... This division of voices might seem jarring, but in Johnston's hands it works seamlessly, compellingly—and gives us the hint that their participation in the quest changed both of the main characters in ways that aren't necessarily initially obvious." LIZ BOURKE

Kirkus



"Johnston weaves a compelling fantasy world in which meticulously crafted female characters slip easily between chain mail and dresses, enjoying many freedoms and yet facing economic and biological pressures to marry men. ... Impatient readers will note that there's an awful lot of armor and weaponry with very little questing."

New York Times



"The structure of *The Afterward* is trickier than it needs to be. ... But the gender flip is effortless and enlivening." JEFF GILES

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Johnston has created a fantasy world that is generally optimistic and far more inclusive than that of many of her peer writers. In addition to starring five female knights, Johnston's characters are queer, asexual, and transgender, and she makes a point of explicitly describing characters with dark skin and natural hair. While commending Johnston for her inclusivity and diversity, though, some critics expressed difficulties with the novel's structure, which alternates between tenses and characters. Some critics thought the

tense change assisted in clarifying the time period the characters occupied, while others found it distracting and difficult to follow. Despite the structure, the novel has an interesting and compelling premise that will appeal to many young adult readers.

general

NONFICTION



Parkland

Birth of a Movement

By Dave Cullen



Among the first reporters on the scene of the 1999 massacre at Columbine High School, Dave Cullen spent a decade writing *Columbine*, the definitive account of

the shooting, which launched him as an authority on America's mass murders. *Columbine* was a *New York Times* best seller, won the Edgar Award, and was a finalist for the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize and the American Library Association Alex Award.

THE TOPIC: Ten years after the definitive account *Columbine*, Cullen returns at the one-year anniversary of the Parkland shooting with a "year-in-the-life" look at the teens and families at the center of the community. The mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, was hardly the first of its kind, but it was the first that truly galvanized a nationwide effort to fight back with a campaign movement—with courageous and angry teens at the helm. While following media stars, including Emma Gonzalez and David Hogg, backstage organizer Jackie Corin, and "Tio Manny," the father of victim Joaquin Oliver, Cullen creates an immersive account that touches on even the mundanities of high schoolers' lives as they grapple with unspeakable tragedy.

BOOKMARKS SELECTION



The Source of Self-Regard

Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations

By Toni Morrison



Toni Morrison is a Pulitzer Prize– and Nobel Prize–winning novelist, essayist, playwright, and editor. Her books focus on themes of race and the repercussions of racism on American history. Her novel *Beloved* was turned into a film in 1998. Her recent books include *The Origin of Others* (2017), *God Help the Child* (2015), and the children’s book *Please, Louise* (2014).

THE TOPIC: This collection of nonfiction essays, speeches, and meditations draws on four decades of writings. The work is divided into three sections—“The Foreigner’s Home,” “Black Matter(s),” and “God’s Language”—each focusing on a different aspect of the dominant theme: that the world’s current problems stem from both greed and the subjugation and “demonization” of the Other. Morrison delves into her own work as well, picking apart the ending of *Beloved* and the opening page of *Sula* and analyzing the larger context of race. Each section of the book starts with an elegy—to the survivors of 9/11, to Martin Luther King Jr., and to James Baldwin. Throughout, Morrison discusses the power of words, both good and bad, and how using them to the right effect marks a feat of bravery.

Knopf. 368 pages. \$28.95. ISBN: 9780525521037

New York Times



“This book demonstrates once again that Morrison is more than the standard-bearer of American literature. ... The bursts of rumination examine world history, skirt religion, scour philosophy, racism, anti-Semitism, femininity, war and folk tales, and are dotted with references to writers like Isak Dinesen and the deeply gifted African novelist Camara Laye.” JAMES MCBRIDE

Booklist



“This collection of essays and speeches covers a wide variety of topics that resonate with current issues...Morrison turns a critical eye on race, social politics, money, feminism, culture, and the press, with the essential mandate that each of us bears the responsibility for reaching beyond our superficial identifies and circumstances for a closer look at what it means to be human.”

VANESSA BUSH

Guardian (UK)



“Morrison believes in the power of language to move us towards this more desirable end, and one of the keenest pleasures of this book, especially for the many admirers of her fiction, will be the detailed explications of her own writing. ... [A] bracing reminder of what words do, how carefully they should and can be used.” RO KWON

NPR



“[Y]ou can expect virtually every entry in the collection, whether

it was written in the 1970s or in this century, to feel strikingly relevant today. ... Some of the strongest entries in the collection challenge the seemingly eternal human compulsion to move towards separation rather than unity, to elevate superficial difference over shared humanity.” ERICKA TAYLOR

Boston Globe



“Where the book explodes into pure brilliance, though, is in Morrison’s comprehensive account of her own writing, from its origins in slave narratives, to its philosophical underpinnings, to its artistic influences (in tributes to Chinua Achebe, Romare Bearden, Peter Sellars, William Faulkner, and, of course, Baldwin), to the workings of individual narratives, sentences, and even words. ... Perhaps the very act of its publication speaks for itself, positioning *The Source of Self-Regard* as the definitive statement that Morrison, who has thought as much as anyone about the ways countries, cultures, and people fail and hurt each other and themselves, still believes that we can be better.” REBECCA STEINITZ

Financial Times



“There are delightful glimpses into the craft and the care with which she writes. ... This is a collection that is startling in its relevance to the conflicts and challenges of the present moment.”

NILANJANA ROY

New York Journal of Books



“Toni Morrison’s selected essays, speeches and meditations should come with a cover warning: In order to prevent being overwhelmed, take it slowly and easily. ... A slow, careful reading of this book will reveal the deep thinking and philosophical regard for the world that made it possible for Toni Morrison to create such towering literary works as *Beloved* and *Jazz*.” CARRIE JANE KNOWLES

CRITICAL SUMMARY

This four-decade-spanning collection of Toni Morrison’s speeches, essays, and thoughts demonstrates that “the pure power and beauty of words delivered in thought, reason and discourse, still carry the unstoppable force of a thousand hammer blows, spreading the salve of righteousness that can heal our nation and restore the future our children deserve” (*New York Times*). Morrison’s insightful meditations on racism and sexism, some heralding back to 1976, remain “eerily timely” (NPR) and “resonate with current issues” (*Booklist*), even decades later. But since the most recent writing comes from 2013, Morrison doesn’t reflect on the last few years. This is a dense collection, as well (with spotty editing), to be consumed and savored at a thoughtful pace. “In other words, it’s a large, rich, heterogenous book, and hallelujah” (*Guardian*), a worthy tome to Morrison’s life work.

Harper. 385 pages. \$27.99. ISBN: 9781787477070

Washington Post ★★★★★
"Here is a sentence you would not expect in a review of a book on one of the country's most notorious school shootings: *Parkland* by Dave Cullen is one of the most uplifting books you will read all year. ... It's practically a how-to guide for grassroots activism." JILL FILIPOVIC

Chicago Tribune ★★★★★
"*Parkland* asks us to pause. To sit with the stories — the stories of survivors who launched a movement and may very well create a cultural sea change around guns, yes." HEIDI STEVENS

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette ★★★★★
"The book never turns into a diatribe about how best to curb gun violence and prevent more school shootings but clearly favors what is depicted as a reasonable set of five demands developed by March for Our Lives. ... Part character study, part media analysis, part political critique, *Parkland* ends up being many things." JOHN YOUNG

San Francisco Chronicle ★★★★★
"Cullen shows them also dealing with the stuff that high schoolers deal with: grades, college applications, school plays, the jealousies of other students. Cullen even takes readers to the Parkland prom, at which there is both a determination to acknowledge those whose lives were cut short and a determination not to stop living one's own life." MICHAEL S. ROTH.

New York Times ★★★★★
"Maybe it's unfair to place even more burden on this group of teenagers to become our perfect heroes. ... But I did find myself wishing for some more depth, detail or psychological complexity, something to cement these extraordinary kids in the public imagination so that we'd never forget what they somehow managed to pull off." HANNA ROSIN

CRITICAL SUMMARY

While *Columbine* provided a microscopic look at what happened before and during the mass shooting, *Parkland* is something very different: it's

not only a look at what happened afterwards to the kids—and they are kids—who became household names with their highly publicized activism but also a look at those folks who were murdered, those who worked more behind the scenes, and those who weren't involved at all. Cullen's decision to devote only a few pages to the shooter, however, deprives the book of a driving force of tension. Instead, despite the odds, he provides an uplifting note to the engagement and action that occupied the nation posttragedy. One reviewer noted that Cullen didn't delve deep enough into the kids' psyches, but that's a minor complaint in an important, timely book.



Say Nothing

A True Story of Murder and Memory in Northern Ireland

By Patrick Radden Keefe



Patrick Radden Keefe is a staff writer for the *New Yorker*, to which he has been contributing since 2006. His previous books are *Chatter: Dispatches from the Secret World of Global Eavesdropping* (★★★★★ July/Aug 2005) and *The Snakehead: An Epic Tale of the Chinatown Underworld and the American Dream* (★★★★★ Nov/Dec 2009). From Dorchester, Massachusetts, he now lives in New York City.

THE TOPIC: In 1972, Jean McConville, a 38-year-old widow and a mother of 10, was abducted from her apartment in a Belfast housing project and murdered. It appears that the IRA had mistaken McConville for an informer, because, one day, she had assisted an injured British soldier. The case serves as an example of the worst cases that occurred during the Troubles in Northern Ireland, during which 16 people were "disappeared." A major player was Gerry Adams, who was suspected as a member of the IRA but who would never admit it. He helped negotiate the 1998 Good Friday

Agreement that ended the Protestant-Catholic conflict and later led Sinn Féin, the IRA's political branch. McConville's remains were found on a beach in 2003.

Doubleday. 464 pages. \$28.95. ISBN: 9780385521314

BookPage ★★★★★
"To tell the story, Keefe delves into a long and devastating history of open and hidden conflict, parts of which remain entombed within the IRA's code of silence. With visceral detail, he describes life in the embattled neighborhoods, where suspicion and betrayal festered on all sides." ALDEN MUDGE

Kirkus ★★★★★
"Keefe's reconstruction of events and the players involved is careful and assured. ... A harrowing story of politically motivated crime that could not have been better told."

Minneapolis Star Tribune ★★★★★
"*Say Nothing* unravels the McConville murder by profiling Dolours Price and Brendan Hughes. Price was a member of an elite cell within the IRA called the Unknowns, which she said reported directly to Adams. Hughes was a commanding officer in West Belfast and had an especially tight bond with Adams." DENNIS J. MCGRATH

NPR ★★★★★
"Keefe is a storyteller who captures the complexities of a historical moment by digging deep into the lives of people on all sides of the conflict. ... All the while, Keefe is attuned to the fascination with repression and martyrdom that runs through Irish culture." MAUREEN CORRIGAN

Los Angeles Times ★★★★★
"Toggling between marveling at his 'sociopathy' and acumen[,] though, I wonder if *Say Nothing* doesn't unduly mythologize Adams. Mentioned only in passing is the vital tradition of non-physical force Irish nationalism." STEPHEN PHILLIPS

CRITICAL SUMMARY

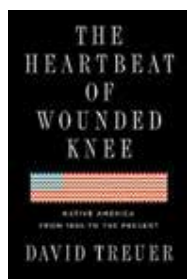
Say Nothing explores a little-known fragment of the history of the Troubles.

Most people imagine or portray graffiti and masked gunmen on the streets, but they don't give a thought to the civilians who were drawn into events by accident. Keefe makes McConville's story relatable, rather than just a vehicle for a true-crime narrative. At the same time, he provides a thorough rundown of the major players involved in the Troubles, giving special consideration to Gerry Adams, a tricky figure to understand. Northern Ireland's situation is still up in the air because of Brexit, but it seems possible there may, one day, be a united Ireland. All in all, *Say Nothing* is a "riveting account" (*Minneapolis Star Tribune*) sure to interest amateur historians.



The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee

Native America from 1890 to the Present
By David Treuer



David Treuer grew up on an Ojibwe reservation in northern Minnesota and has written four novels, including *Prudence* (★★★★★ May/June 2015); an essay collection; and

a memoir, *Rez Life* (2012). He has received a Pushcart Prize and the 2014 Native Arts and Cultures Foundation Literature Fellowship. With his brother, he is at work on a grammar of the Ojibwe language.

THE TOPIC: Treuer frames his history of America's native peoples as a response to *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, the 1970 nonfiction survey by Dee Brown. Whereas Brown focused on the Indian wars of the later 19th century, Treuer picks up with their aftermath. Most American Indians were not granted U.S. citizenship until 1924, and survival has required great flexibility. The federal government has attempted to seize reservation land, with such laws as the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. The urban-led American Indian Movement of the

1970s was not unambiguously successful, but today's American Indian population is 10 times higher than it was in 1900. Rather than an aging population, as in the rest of the country, it's a youthful, and resilient, one. "The American Indian Dream is as much about looking back and bringing the culture along with it as it is about looking ahead," Treuer writes. Riverhead Books. 528 pages. \$28. ISBN: 9781594633157

BookPage ★★★★★
"In his sweeping, consistently illuminating and personal [book], David Treuer ... offers a compelling counternarrative to popular U.S. history with a combination of reportage, interviews and memoir about American Indian life in the recent past. ... This engrossing volume should interest anyone who wants to better understand how Native Americans have struggled to preserve their tribes and cultures, using resourcefulness and reinvention in the face of overwhelming opposition." ROGER BISHOP

NPR ★★★★★
"This retelling [of early European encounters with American Indians] is the weakest part of the book, although there are some nice historical tidbits. ... The author shines, instead, when he heads out on the road to meet with his relatives at Leech Lake or members of other tribes across the United States." TOM BOWMAN

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★
"Rarely has a single volume in Native American history attempted such comprehensiveness. ... Ultimately, Treuer's powerful book suggests the need for soul-searching about the meanings of American history and the stories we tell ourselves about this nation's past. There is an urgency to fashion new national narratives." NED BLACKHAWK

Washington Post ★★★★★
"As in his previous book, *Rez Life: An Indian's Journey Through Reservation Life*, Treuer relies on extended interviews and personal memoir to tell his tale.... Treuer is an easy companion: thoughtful, provocative and challenging." PAUL ANDREW HUTTON

Economist (UK) ★★★★★
"Treuer's elegant handling of this complex narrative occasionally falters. For example, he omits to set out clearly how tribal sovereignty works. ... But his writing sings when he celebrates recent gains."

The National ★★★★★
"Despite hundreds of pages documenting these kinds of travesties, Treuer's book has a bright, upward arc. Slowly at first but gaining force in the book's final quarter, the story begins to fill with hope." STEVE DONOGHUE

San Francisco Chronicle ★★
"The prose is bloated, undisciplined and repetitive. ... His talking points drown in a sea of verbiage. He quotes speeches, legal briefs and treaties at extraordinary length, when summaries would better serve his purpose." DAN CRYER

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Based on research and interviews with fellow American Indians, this book is a valuable follow-up to classic works of history. Treuer travels from the 1890 U.S. cavalry massacre of Lakota Sioux at Wounded Knee Creek, South Dakota, to the present day, via the Standing Rock Reservation protest against the Dakota Access pipeline. "There is much to learn here, including the government's misguided attempts to solve the 'Indian problem'" and "the positive and negative aspects of the American Indian movement" (*BookPage*). American Indians are "more than ghosts and more than the relics of a once happy people," Treuer writes. Here, in this rather nonlinear narrative that draws on both history and his own life, he accomplishes his goal: "to catch us not in the act of dying but, rather, in the radical act of living."



The Collected Schizophrenias

Essays

By Esmé Weijun Wang



Esmé Weijun Wang was named one of *Granta's* Best of Young American Novelists of 2017 and received the Whiting Award in 2018. Her novel *The Border of*

Paradise (2016) is a multigenerational saga about how mental illness affects an Asian American family. Born in the Midwest to Taiwanese parents, she now lives in San Francisco. This is her second book.

THE TOPIC: Wang states that she suffers from schizoaffective disorder and late-stage Lyme disease; she also has posttraumatic stress disorder stemming from a rape. These 13 essays trace the developments in her own mental health, but they also look at the rights and circumstances of the mentally ill in America, historically and today. The author was diagnosed with bipolar disorder in her late teen years; at Yale, she had several manic episodes and became suicidal. She was hospitalized twice, and eventually the university requested that she leave. However, she later graduated from Stanford. She and her husband decided not to have children so she won't pass on her illness. Wang discusses involuntary committal, types of delusions, uncompassionate insurance policies, and more.

Graywolf Press. 224 pages. \$16. ISBN: 9781555978273

Minneapolis Star Tribune ★★★★★

"Threaded through Wang's fractured yet cohesive and empathy-sparking narrative is the awareness that as frightening as the hallucinated voices are to those like her, they terrify others and threaten social ostracization. ... [B]y the end of this harrowing and heartfelt collection, she also leaves open the hope that there are other nonclinical ways forward that might

allow her to 'wrangle sense out of the senseless.'" CHRIS BARSANTI

Publishers Weekly ★★★★★
"Wang invariably describes her symptoms and experiences with remarkable candor and clarity. ... Throughout these essays, Wang trains a dispassionate eye onto her personal narrative, creating a clinical remove that allows for the neurotypical reader's greater comprehension of a thorny and oft-misunderstood topic."

Washington Post ★★★★★
"Her elegant essays are strongest at their most personal—when she writes, with clinical precision, about what it feels like to believe that she's dead, or to slip the boundary between our world and a sci-fi movie on TV—but they also confront major questions about psychiatric care with meticulous even-handedness. ... Wang's forays beyond the personal occasionally left me unsatisfied." NORA CAPLAN-BRICKER

NY Times Book Review ★★★
"The images and insights Wang summons from these shards [of memoir] are sometimes frustrating, but often dazzling, and worth the reconstructive work, especially in the places where Wang is able to illuminate the lived experience of psychosis. ... One alternately wishes Wang had been subjected to more disciplined editing and to more questioning of her vantage point." RACHAEL COMBE

Kirkus ★★★
"Unfortunately, Wang's prose is often clinical when it needs to be harrowing or affective when it needs to be precise, and the transition from the macro view to the micro is occasionally inelegant. What makes these essays worthwhile is their attention to both the broad historical and cultural implications of their subject matter and the personal, first-person perspective that is so often lost in historical accounts."

CRITICAL SUMMARY

To re-create a confused mental state on the page, Wang cuts between various narratives and doesn't tell her story in chronological order. Instead, the reader has to put some work into piecing it all together. Some readers may find "the

pervasive disorientation ... distracting" (*New York Times Book Review*) and the fractured essay format a little repetitive. However, there's no denying the intensity of Wang's writing on mental health and trauma when she draws on her own experience. It makes for a "penetrating and revelatory exploration" (*Publishers Weekly*). Critics were less convinced when the author tries to combine memoir with historical or cultural criticism. Still, this is a powerful book for anyone with an interest in mental illness.

biography

NONFICTION



All the Lives We Ever Lived

Seeking Solace in Virginia Woolf
 By Katharine Smyth



Katharine Smyth, who lives in Brooklyn, is a graduate of Brown University and Columbia University. She has been an editorial assistant and a researcher at

The Paris Review and *Radar Magazine*. *The Best American Essays 2014* designated her essay "Prey" as a Notable Essay. This is her first book.

THE TOPIC: "Perhaps there is one book for every life," Smyth writes, and, for her, that book has been Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse*, which she first read as a 20-year-old studying abroad at Oxford University. It was a book she would read many more times, as she tried to come to terms with the changes in her family. Her British father's alcoholism had contributed to her architect parents' turbulent marriage, and, after his death, she returned to the book for comfort. The coastal setting of the novel also reminded her of the Rhode Island beach house where she, an only child, went with her parents for weekends. This unusual, touching memoir also

includes literary criticism and biographical information on Woolf.
Crown. 320 pages. \$26. ISBN: 9781524760625

Washington Post ★★★★★
"Smyth's fascination with Woolf enriches her own writing, providing her with the wisdom she needs to make sense of her loss. ... This is a transcendent book, not a simple meditation on one woman's loss, but a reflection on all of our losses, on loss itself, on how to remember and commemorate our dead." CHARLOTTE GORDON

BookPage ★★★★★
"Readers with a passion for Woolf will find the reading experience enriching, but even those with a cursory knowledge of her work will be able to glean the major themes that resonate in Smyth's interpretation of it. ... Smyth's prose pulsates with intensity, and its lyrical qualities make it a moving one." INES BELLINA

Minneapolis Star Tribune ★★★★★
"Like many ardent acolytes, Smyth's worship of her literary idol can at times lead to cringeworthy stylistic homage. ... But there are many lovely moments when Smyth's prose soars into poetry." DIANA POSTLETHWAITE

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★
"[I]t's hard to relegate a writer as formidable as Woolf to connective tissue, nor would it be fair to ask a debut author to measure up to her mature style. ... Her prose is so fluid and clear throughout that it's not surprising to observe her view of her family, its cracks and fissures, sharpen into unsparing focus." RADHIKA JONES

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Smyth delicately weaves together the various strands of her well-written debut: an account of her growing-up years and her relationship with her parents, observations on *To the Lighthouse* and Virginia Woolf's life, and musings on how rereading a favorite book can give comfort after a bereavement. The reviewers responded enthusiastically, though two noted that the book is best when it sticks closest to the author's own story and doesn't try to mimic Woolf's style. The *New York Times Book Review* critic writes, "I didn't re-

tain much of Smyth's commentary on Woolf. It is ... not revelatory, at least not to someone who has studied her work." Perhaps not ideal for diehard Woolf fans, then, but great for general memoir readers.



Deep Creek

Finding Hope in the High Country
By Pam Houston



Pam Houston's previous books include the short story collection *Cowboys Are My Weakness* (1992), the essay collection *A Little More About Me* (1999), and the

novels *Sight Hound* (★★★★ May/June 2005) and *Contents May Have Shifted* (2012). She is a professor of English at the University of California, Davis and teaches in the Low Residency MFA program at the Institute of American Indian Art. The cofounder and creative director of the literary nonprofit Writing by Writers, she lives on a ranch in Colorado. *Deep Creek* is her sixth book.

THE TOPIC: This wonderful memoir in essays reflects on a deep connection to a place, built up over decades. Houston used the advance from her book *Cowboys Are My Weakness* to make a small deposit on a 120-acre ranch in Colorado after her mother's death. It was an act of faith on her part—and for the ranch's seller—but, in the years that followed, it paid off. Houston has found herself as a writer at the same time as she has grown accustomed to rural life and the threat of wildfires. The author also remembers her traumatic upbringing with an abusive father and alcoholic mother, and ponders what the human duty should be towards a world that's rapidly moving towards environmental breakdown.

Norton. 288 pages. \$25.95. ISBN: 9780393241020

BookPage ★★★★★
"Although she examines the forces that uniquely shaped her ... the collection is as

universal as it is personal. ... *Deep Creek* is one woman's reckoning of her past and the land where she's found herself, but it is also a reflection on what it means to be a soft-hearted human in an ever-changing and sometimes frightening world." CARLA

JEAN WHITLEY

Minneapolis Star Tribune ★★★★★
"Houston here lets truth tell the stories she wants to tell, and they are quietly stunning, but also provocative in the contradictions she poses. ... [T]he goal's complexity [reconciling wonder and grief] may be Houston's intent, pushing us to pause and think and ponder and wrestle and, ideally, to do something." KIM ODE

Publishers Weekly ★★★★★
"Houston ... brings compassion, a deep sense of observation, and a profound sense of place to [these] essays. ... Houston's vision finds a solid place among the chronicles of quiet appreciation of the American wilderness, without the misanthropy that often accompanies the genre; her passion for the land and its inhabitants is irresistibly contagious."

Seattle Times ★★★★★
"[T]here is little bitterness in *Deep Creek*, which describes a place of hope. ... Houston says learning to care for her land showed that all this time, it had cared for her." IRENE WANNER

CRITICAL SUMMARY

The main theme of *Deep Creek* is "reconciling grief and hope" (*Minneapolis Star Tribune*), both in an individual life and on a global level. As a child, Houston developed PTSD because she never knew when her father might try to kill her. Now, approaching her 60s, she's aware of the threat human action poses to the survival of the Earth. "I am celebrating because this magnificent rock we live on demands celebration," she writes. She enumerates the pleasures of ranching life through a month-by-month almanac, which she intersperses with essays. Whether she's glimpsing narwhals in the Canadian Arctic or rescuing her favorite books from the 2013 West Fork Fire, Houston locates the beauty in what's temporary in this exquisite memoir.



Survival Math

Notes on an All-American Family
By Mitchell S. Jackson



Mitchell S. Jackson is the author of the novel *The Residue Years* (2013), which won a Whiting Award and the Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence. He is a clinical associate professor of writing at New York University.

THE TOPIC: Mitchell Jackson shares the story of his upbringing in North-east Portland, Oregon, a black community in one of the nation's most predominantly white, presumably liberal cities in the only state to have explicitly excluded, until 1926, black people. He tells his story through essays, poems, and letters, interspersed with historical passages for contextualization. He writes of prostitutes, pimps, drug dealers, and his mother's struggles with addiction. He tells of the death of his aunt Essie Carie Jackson, a prostitute who was murdered: a "beloved aunt, cousin, sister, daughter, mother." He presents "survivor files," interviews with the men in his life, of whom he asked, "What's the toughest thing you've survived?" With his own father absent, Jackson proactively sought out mentorship: "[I]f a boy isn't blessed with a dad or gifted with a dynamic stand-in, he must find ways to forge one. He must identify the fatherish men in his life. ... I composed a father from the men at hand."

Scribner. 336 pages. \$26. ISBN: 9781501131707

Boston Globe ★★★★★
"[Jackson's] various storytelling methods imbue the book with an unpredictable dexterity. It is sharp and unshrinking in depictions of his life, his relatives (blood kin and otherwise), and his Pacific Northwest hometown, which serves as both inescapable character and villain."

RENÉE GRAHAM

New York Journal of Books ★★★★★
"Jackson's phrasing is a brilliant new language, inciting renewed interest for all readers to tackle big subjects. The timbre of his metaphors provides comfort and release from some of the raw traumatic detail in his memoir." ROBERTA E. WINTER

New York Times ★★★★★
"Jackson's work is a model of autobiographical writing that demonstrates how reportage and critical attention to the complexities of black life—its intersectional textures—can be the source material for an inimitable memoir." DARNELL L. MOORE

NPR ★★★★★
"[S]uch a spellbinding narrative that I read the end notes just to extend my time with it. And wouldn't you know it? Even the end notes are beautiful." ERICKA TAYLOR

San Francisco Chronicle ★★★★★
"Jackson dissects the darker realities of his hometown—his mother's addiction, his own foray into drug dealing, and growing up around gang life and uncles who were pimps. His explorations feel strikingly unguarded." BRANDON YU

USA Today ★★★
"Each essay is a cornucopia of semi-related ideas, yet *Survival Math* is remarkably direct and poignant when the author focuses on the intimacies of his own deepest betrayals and hopes." HEATHER SCOTT PARTINGTON

CRITICAL SUMMARY

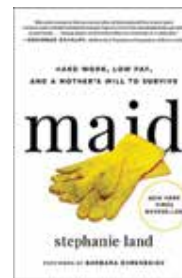
In this "virtuosic wail of a book" (*Boston Globe*), Jackson pulls no punches, subjecting himself to the same scrutiny he levels at his rich cast of complicated characters. "While never shirking from the various harms his family members inflict on themselves and each other," NPR notes, the author consistently writes about them "from a place of grace." Jackson's "searing intelligence" is evident throughout, the reviewer continues, but is particularly notable when addressing "gentrification, white supremacy and corporations that gain their wealth off the bodies of the poor." As for his own transgressions, Jackson offers "victim statements" from former

romantic partners. The result, the *New York Times* writes, is a departure from anything readers have likely encountered in a memoir: "a stunning move from blame to an honest calculation of how one black man's actions and inactions hurt the black women he claimed to love."



Maid

Hard Work, Low Pay, and a Mother's Will to Survive
By Stephanie Land



Stephanie Land's debut memoir originated from the essay "Confessions of the Housekeeper," portions of which were published online at *Vox* in 2015. Land is a

writing fellow at Community Change and the Economic Hardship Reporting Project, where she focuses on social and economic justice issues.

THE TOPIC: "My daughter learned to walk in a homeless shelter," Stephanie Land writes in the first sentence. In this insightful and personal recollection, Land chronicles her first few years as a minimum-wage housecleaner and her reliance on public assistance programs in Washington State. When she was 28, an unplanned pregnancy curtailed her college and career plans; she found work as a housekeeper to make ends meet. She chronicles the toll that such work exacted on her mind and body, her feelings of inadequacy as a single mother, and her determination to rise above her status among the working poor, to earn a college degree, and to write. While struggling in a system stacked against the working poor, Land also writes of her empathy towards some of the people whose homes she cleans.

Hachette Books. 289 pages. \$27. ISBN: 9780316505116

Medium ★★★★★
"She wants us to understand the struggles she faced, and the struggles of those in

similar positions. Much of the book *Maid* is gritty and real, evidence that making one's living by cleaning houses ... is hard work—but her book is never without hope." WENDY L. COHAN

Nation ★★★★★
 "It's easy to see how *Maid* will become a qualitative source for understanding the white working poor going forward. ... In *Maid*, Land reflects on what it means that a white woman like her doesn't look like the type of poor person that white, middle-class America loves to demonize."

ANN-DERRICK GAILLOT

Seattle Times ★★★★★
 "Land's book is rich with poignant detail, about cleaning houses filthy with neglect ... about the scorn and derision she receives from both strangers and friends when she temporarily relies on food stamps ... of the struggle to provide for her daughter and of the solace that Mia gave her." MOIRA MACDONALD

Washington Post ★★★★★
 "Land's story is not defensive, but it is a defense of sorts an unapologetic account of how a smart, talented woman ended up a homeless mother, in and out of bad relationships, and reliant on public benefits and meager pay earned by cleaning houses. ... *Maid* isn't about how hard work can save you but about how false that idea is." JENNY ROGERS

Minneapolis Star Tribune ★★★★★
 "She describes homes she refers to as the Cigarette Lady's House, the Sad House, the Cat Lady's House, the Porn House and so on, recounting the pretty parts, the gross parts (trigger warning if you're squeamish) and the quirks of each." KATY READ

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★
 "For a while, as Land recounts in *Maid*, her memoir of her time as a cleaner, she was on seven kinds of government assistance, and still hardly surviving. ... The narration advances with some circularity; the language is often stale." EMILY COOKE

Newsday ★★
 "Land's complaints about the work go on for nearly the length of the book—her dissatisfaction with clients, co-workers

and family; with mothers who have more resources than she has, friends she feels have betrayed her, and strangers she perceives as saying negative things about her because she gets assistance from, at one point, seven social agencies. ... Only when Land focuses on several clients whose home she cleans—their loneliness and how she's able to bring some solace to their lives, and they to hers—do we get a sense of her humanity and grace." NANCY ROMMELMANN

CRITICAL SUMMARY

When Land took a low-paying house-cleaning job and depended on government assistance to provide food, housing, and health insurance for her daughter, she joined America's white working poor. Land provides an unwavering, occasionally uneven, account of how it feels to be devalued by society for being poor and how that stigma engenders unrelenting inadequacy and internalized shame. Written, for the most part, in clear, poignant prose, Land offers an intimate portrait of hardship, perseverance, and triumph and a wider, informed view of the economic divide between America's upper-middle-class and low-income wage earners. *Maid* joins Matthew Desmond's *Evicted* and Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed* as a valuable contribution to the understanding of poverty in America. It is "a landmark book ... [and] it should be read" (*Medium*).

history
 NONFICTION



Spies of No Country

Secret Lives at the Birth of Israel
 By Matti Friedman



Journalist Matti Friedman was an Associated Press correspondent and is a contributor to the *New York Times*' op-ed section. His previous books

include *The Aleppo Codex* (2014), about an ancient Bible manuscript, and *Pumpkinflowers: A Soldier's Story of a Forgotten War* (2016), a memoir of his service in the Israeli Army. From Toronto, he now lives in Jerusalem.

THE TOPIC: Friedman tells the stories of four, young, Middle Eastern spies—Gamliel Cohen, Isaac Shoshan, Havakuk Cohen, and Yakuba Cohen—who worked for an Israeli intelligence unit called the Arab Section, a paramilitary organization in Palestine that was later absorbed into the Israel Defense Forces, for a year and a half between 1948 and 1949. The men spoke Arabic and had connections with British Palestine and other Middle Eastern locations, so they were ideal recruits for underground missions. They derailed various assassination and bombing attempts in the Haifa and Beirut areas, and prevented Hitler's yacht from being turned into a warship. Shoshan, who is still alive, was interviewed for the book; material was also drawn from Gamliel Cohen's *Undercover: The Untold Story of the Palmach's Clandestine Arab Unit* (2001). Algonquin Books. 272 pages. \$26.95. ISBN: 9781616207229

BookPage ★★★★★
 "Based on both interviews and archives, Friedman drops readers into the complex, shifting and dangerous landscape of the 1948 conflict. *Spies of No Country* is a fascinating journey into the past that reads like a spy novel—except in this case, it's all true." DEBORAH HOPKINSON

Kirkus ★★★★★
 "As Friedman readily admits at the beginning of the book, this is not a comprehensive history of the birth of Israel—and it can't be, since records are few, confusion was the norm, mistakes were made, and many died. An exciting historical journey and highly informative look at the Middle East with Israel as the starting point."

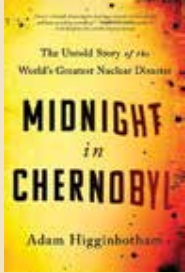
NY Times Book Review ★★★★★
 "[H]istories often fall short in tapping the depths of [spies'] lives—or, more aptly, their humanity. Matti Friedman's *Spies of No Country* stands out as a wondrous

BOOKMARKS SELECTION



Midnight in Chernobyl

The Untold Story of the World's Greatest Nuclear Disaster
By Adam Higginbotham



Journalist Adam Higginbotham's work has appeared in various publications, including the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times Magazine*, *Wired*, *GQ*, *Businessweek*, *Smithsonian*, *Men's Journal*, and the *Atavist*. He served as editor in chief of the *Face* and as a contributing editor for the *Sunday Telegraph*. He lives in New York City.

THE TOPIC: At 11:55 p.m. on April 25, 1986, in Ukraine, Chernobyl's Reactor Number Four was powered down as a test to see what would happen in the event of an electrical blackout. After a few seconds, the plant started to rumble and the reactor's fuel caps bobbed up and down. A full-scale meltdown ensued, the nuclear core was destroyed, and the plant burned for days. Higginbotham chronicles one of the 20th century's major disasters, along with the Soviet Politburo's attempts to downplay the crisis and the secrecy that ensued. Two days passed before the area was evacuated. Several dozen lives were lost in the immediate aftermath, and countless more in subsequent years, as a result of the effects of radiation exposure. The author recounts acts of extraordinary bravery, including those of helicopter pilots who extinguished the fire.

Simon & Schuster. 560 pages. \$29.95. ISBN: 9781501134616

Christian Science Monitor ★★★★★

"[T]he most comprehensive, most thoroughly detailed history [of the Chernobyl disaster] yet to appear in English. ... The author, along with his research partner Taras Shumeyko, has conducted extensive interviews and compiled background material over ten years, creating a compelling, panoramic account of the disaster set in its broader context but still working with those three fundamental questions, starting with 'what happened?'" STEVE DONOGHUE

Guardian (UK) ★★★★★

"Higginbotham tells the story of the disaster and its gruesome aftermath with thriller-like flair. ... It is a tale of hubris and doomed ambition, featuring Communist party bosses and hapless

exception. In unadorned yet piercing prose, Friedman ... captures what it was like to be part of the Arab Section." NEAL BASCOMB

NPR ★★★★★

"For half a decade, Friedman has been working hard, and publicly, to dispel easy narratives about Israel. ... His perspective is unusual: Israeli by choice, he clarifies his

own bias in every piece but he writes to complicate, not to defend." LILY MEYER

Washington Post ★★★

"The book is most engaging when Friedman sticks with one character, in one timeline and in one scene. But often, *Spies of No Country* veers from one timeline to the next and from one spy to the next, and it's hard to keep track of who's doing what

engineers, victims and villains, confusion and cover-up." LUKE HARDING

Herald (Scotland) ★★★★★

"It's a topsy-turvy story and Adam Higginbotham has told it with a calm regard for the balance between history and journalism, momentousness and human simplicity. If it's the most frightening book you'll read this year, it is also one of the most uplifting." BRIAN MORTON

New York Times ★★★★★

"Joining a body of Chernobyl literature that includes work by the Nobel laureate Svetlana Alexievich and the historian Serhii Plokhy, Higginbotham's extraordinary book is another advance in the long struggle to fill in some of the gaps, bringing much of what was hidden into the light." JENNIFER SZALAI

Washington Times ★★★★★

"Higginbotham's book reflects extensive on-the-scene research, including access to previously secret Soviet documents and interviews not only with plant engineers but also with countless persons driven from their homes. Although intensely technical at times, his account is highly readable." JOSEPH C. GOULDEN

Wall Street Journal ★★★

"Much has been written about this accident, and now in *Midnight in Chernobyl* the journalist Adam Higginbotham presents an account that reads almost like the script for a movie." JEREMY BERNSTEIN

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Higginbotham meticulously documents the details of this disaster and its aftermath in a narrative that the *New York Times* critic at-tests is "superb, enthralling and necessarily terrifying" and unfurls with a "horrible inevitability." The author expertly intertwines big-picture politics and policies with the deeply personal—firsthand accounts from those who were there and those who lived with the horrific consequences, such as the woman who returned from a weekend away to a ghost town. Every moment is tense; every moment is informative. The *Guardian* reviewer praises the author for his vivid recreations and for avoiding "the fallacy of a redemptive ending." But not everyone was fully on board, with the *Wall Street Journal* citing some "stagey" dialogue and suggesting that Higginbotham "doesn't seem to understand fully the physics of the situation." For everyone else: a riveting read.

and when, especially because each of the four spies has aliases that Friedman also uses." IAN SHAPIRA

CRITICAL SUMMARY

"I was looking less for the sweep of history than for its human heart," Friedman writes. His firsthand knowledge of Israel gives the book an emotional grounding that counterbal-

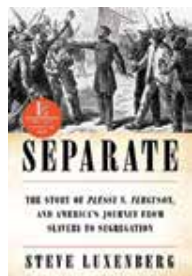
ances a potentially dry stream of facts. The focus on just four young men and their experiences keeps the subject from becoming overwhelmingly large. It all adds up to a “tension-filled tale of espionage” (*BookPage*). Reviewers mentioned a few niggles, such as a tendency for the author to insert himself into a scene, which breaks the flow of the third person narrative. Readers are also, of course, likely to respond differently on the basis of their views on Israel and Palestine in general, but Friedman asks readers to think of Israel as a country that is “more than one thing.” Fortunately, since “[m]eaningful opinions require nuanced understanding, ... *Spies of No Country* offers that” (NPR).



Separate

The Story of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, and America's Journey from Slavery to Segregation

By Steve Luxenberg



Steve Luxenberg is a senior editor at the *Washington Post* and the author of *Annie's Ghosts: A Journey into a Family Secret* (2009), which was selected as the

2013–2014 Great Michigan Read.

THE TOPIC: The U.S. Supreme Court's 1896 decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* provided the legal underpinning to state-mandated racial segregation and the “separate but equal” mandate. It was a near-unanimous decision—John Marshall Harlan, a Kentucky slave owner, cast the lone dissenting vote—a vote that surprised almost no one. The defendant in the case was Homer Plessy, enlisted, in 1892, by a citizens group in New Orleans, to board a train and seat himself in a whites-only coach. Plessy was removed and arrested. Luxenberg relates the buildup, the legal proceedings, and the aftermath, through his portraits of three principals: Harlan; Massachusetts-born Justice Henry Bill-

ings Brown, who wrote the majority opinion; and Albion Tourgée, a judge, a novelist, and a newspaper columnist, who argued Plessy's case. Jim Crow segregation would stand, until successfully challenged in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.

Norton. 624 pages. \$35. ISBN: 9780393239379

New York Times ★★★★★

“Along with the court cases and the three lovingly researched lives, Luxenberg devotes many lively and illuminating pages to race and politics in New Orleans. ... The subtitle is also misleading because separate and unequal extended far beyond transportation and accommodations to education, employment, health care, credit, housing and criminal justice.” JAMES GOODMAN

GOODMAN

NPR ★★★★★

“Separate is an eye-opening journey through some the darkest passages and haunting corridors of American history.”

TERENCE SAMUEL

Wall Street Journal ★★★★★

“Mr. Luxenberg writes at the outset of his book that the story of *Plessy* is a reminder that ‘history is made, not ordained.’ In his moving portrait of the many figures who played a role in the case, he confirms that idea as well as another: that even the most hopeless fool's errand can emerge, in time, as an unassailable triumph.” CHARLES S. DAMERON

DAMERON

WA Independent Review of Books

★★★★★

“What does the average white person do in America's racist landscape? Nothing, and they gain the benefit of it. And what emotion should this statement elicit from the average white American participating in their past, present, and future racist society? These are the questions asked in Steve Luxenberg's prodigious new work.”

Y. S. FING

New York Review of Books ★★★★★

“In documenting this country's fateful journey from slavery through thwarted Reconstruction to segregation, Luxenberg paints on a broad canvas, elegantly narrating several captivating and scrupulously researched stories that

converge in *Plessy v. Ferguson*.” STEVE

NATHANS-KELLY

Washington Post ★★

“To be sure, his apparent desire for novelistic effects sometimes gives the prose a purplish hue. ... The long biographical excursions are not only unnecessary (excellent biographies of Harlan and Tourgée already exist, and Brown does not seem to deserve one) but often of questionable relevance (it is not clear what bearing Brown's trips to Europe had on his approach to *Plessy*).” ERIC FONER

CRITICAL SUMMARY

NPR calls *Separate* “a dazzlingly well-reported chronicle of an important period in our history,” asserting that Luxenberg's “careful narrative choices” create “a lucidity that saves the book from ever feeling unwieldy, even at more than 600 pages.” Certainly, the author illuminates issues of race and politics in multiracial New Orleans; some details stand out, including his portrayal of the transformation of John Marshall Harlan, from proud slaveowner to the Supreme Court's most outspoken advocate for racial equality. The *Washington Post*, however, had issues with the book's structure, writing that the alternating biographical chapters create “chronological confusion.” That said, Luxenberg reminds us that our history “is not simply a narrative of greater and greater freedom,” that Constitutional guarantees “can sometimes, with the acquiescence of the Supreme Court, be violated with impunity,” as evidenced by the court's decision in 2013 to invalidate key provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.