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ALISON SHURTLEFF, A READER FROM BENICIA, CA

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FOR EVERYONE WHO HASN'T READ EVERYTHING

BOOK BY BOOK



Walker Percy
Gabriel Garcia Marquez
Stephen Ambrose
Imre Kertész

IN REVIEW

Jeffrey Eugenides
Dave Eggers
Rohinton Mistry
Steven Pinker

INFLUENCES

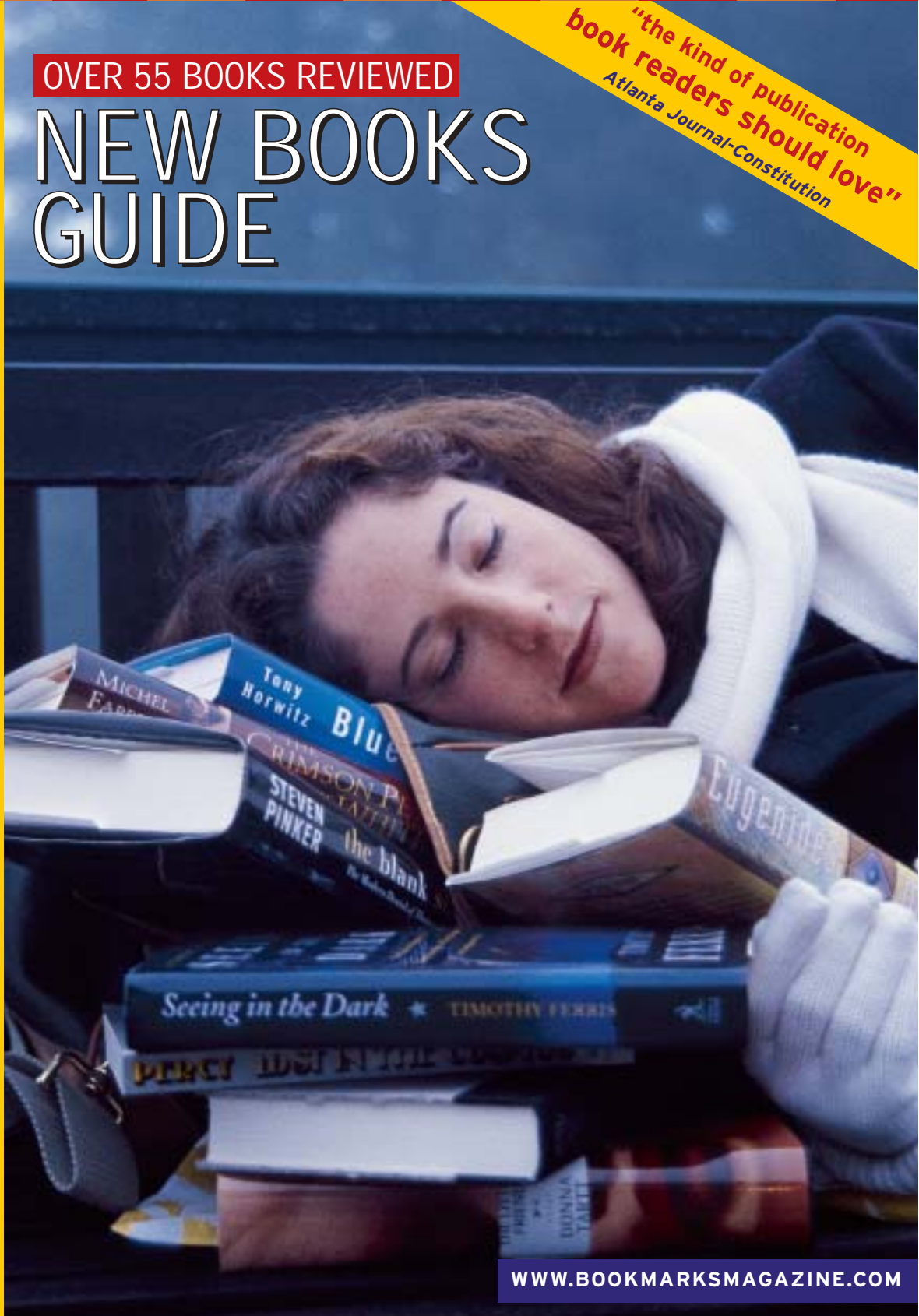
Jonathan Franzen
Tim O'Brien

Discuss a few of their favorite books.

OVER 55 BOOKS REVIEWED

NEW BOOKS GUIDE

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book readers should love"
Atlanta Journal-Constitution



JAN/FEB 2003
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Middlesex did not put Jessica to sleep—we promise. (Review, page 30.)

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One of the books we're excited to take a look at this month is *A Reader's Manifesto* by B.R. Myers. There are so few efforts by the press to publish works that take a broad, integrative, and accessible look at literature. (*The Washington Post's* Jonathan Yardley's "The State of the Art," published July 14, 2002 and available online, stands as a welcome exception.) We enjoyed *Manifesto's* provocative arguments; agreeing with much of it, differing on some of its finer points. One issue we had was a subtle but overarching assertion by Myers that the critics speak with one voice. While we know that wide critical acclaim and prize committees can steamroll readers into accepting a book, we study the broad range of voices behind reviews. The diversity of opinion we see is the reason we started *Bookmarks*. Whether the voices of reason amongst the crowd of reviewers are many or few, we hope to make sure they are heard.

The notion of many voices is vital, because it would be impossible to have a few "comprehensive" literary critics—sleepless, bleary-eyed reviewers who cover all the major releases. There are simply too many books and not enough time for insightful reflection.

Other fields don't face the same constraints as literature: Roger Ebert or Pauline Kael could establish themselves with cinema, Frank Rich with theater, Robert Parker or Jancis Robinson with wine. Each critic is able to sample enough and write enough that we get to know their tastes and compare them to our own. Not so with

books. The major newspaper's frontline critics—Yardley at *The Washington Post*, David Kipen at the *San Francisco Chronicle*, or *The New York Times's* suite of weekday writers—provide a track record of strong reviews. Even then, at an average of one book reviewed a week by these individual critics, they do not begin to cover the range of interesting books being published. This is but one reason why having a relationship with your local bookseller can be so rewarding—your agreements and disagreements about recommendations are interactive and there are no space constraints as to how many books you can discuss.

These thousands of reviews by thousands of critics are inherently subjective, and we believe no one review should be considered the final word on a book—no matter in what paper of record it might be printed. When the critics speak united in enthusiasm, we'll let you know—as we did with *Atonement* in our Summer 2002 issue. And still there was one dissenting voice, Heather Macleod from *Salon*, whose review we were glad to highlight because it contained an important counterpoint. As we bring together these reviews and individual opinions, we hope that their consensus and their conflicts will be helpful in finding the books most rewarding for you.

Thanks, Jon.

WRITE TO:

letters@bookmarksmagazine.com

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LETTERS

Our Pledge: No Slacking

I just have to tell you that I think your magazine, for the true book lover, is magical. You have hit the mark on what real readers crave in a literary magazine. The many reviews, the author bios, the interesting sidebars are all a delight, and my only complaint is that the pages in each issue can't be endless. The format is excellent and original (the "Have You Read: Readers Recommend" is the most refreshing concept to hit magazines, ever). Please, don't ever slack off on the quality or the content.

Alison Shurtleff
Benicia, CA

I Hope That I Shall Someday See/ Bookmarks Cover Poetry

How excited I was to find an issue of *Bookmarks* in the gift bag I received as a participating writer in San Francisco's LitQuake. And to see Marie Howe's fine and moving book of poetry, *What the Living Do*, recommended right along with novels as a worthy read in a sidebar. But how demoralizing to discover that poetry, as a category, is once again deemed too insignificant for serious readers. *The Los Angeles Times* stopped reviewing it years ago. A magazine which offers surveys of the latest biographies, crime novels, etc., but which finds poetry unworthy of coverage, is not a magazine I wish to support. Why not cull reviews from *Rain Taxi*, *The Hungry Mind Review*, *Boston Review of Books*, and other places that do still review books of poems, and add a poetry tab to your pages? Then I'll gladly subscribe.

Kim Addonizio
San Francisco, CA

Bookmarks will feature poetry—see our review of *Nine Horses* by Billy Collins on page 60. (Also a *Bookmarks Selection*)

More, More Often

I can't see anything yet that needs improvement--unless it would be to include even more titles and make it a monthly magazine. The quality is great! I've been looking for something just like this and I'm glad I found it!

Kim Thoren
Mahomet, IL

Dude, The Obscure

I briefly looked at *Bookmarks* at the library today--it looks very good, although I may not be your ideal reader. I read a lot of fiction like *Prague*, *Atonement*, *The Corrections*, *Big If*, *Empire Falls*, *John Henry Days*, *The Autograph Man*, etc., so I'm always interested in reviews of books like *Middlesex*, *The Three Junes*, *Child of My Heart*, *Baudolino*, *The Piano Tuner*, etc. and your reviews look excellent. I also like the multiple-review format. But the books I like that I never see reviewed are *He Sleeps*, *A Walk Through Darkness*, *Red Moon*, *In the Shadow of a Saint*, *Winter Zoo*, *Nowhere Man*, *October Suite*, *The Heart of Redness*,

etc. I might subscribe to a magazine which created some exposure for these voices.

All the best to you. The *USA Today* forum is defunct but not from lack of reader interest. I agreed with your take on it.

Anonymous Survey

We strive to balance our coverage between the widely reviewed books (see *Middlesex*, *Baudolino*, and *The Piano Tuner* in this issue) while "uncovering" those rarely critiqued. See our review of *Nowhere Man* on page 50.

Laughing Matters

What a lovely magazine! I love your approach to an author's body of work, e.g. Charles Dickens etc. And, you brought us humor! Most book-related magazines, journals, etc., seem to think we reading-types are too serious minded for jokes. It is good to laugh at ourselves; it is healthy for our souls. Thanks!

Nancy O'Donnell
Saukville, WI



"I'm not having much luck with your 'alphabetical by author' shelving system. Ever think of organizing them in order of how good they are?"

The New York Times Book Review ★ The New Yorker ★ The New Republic ★ Esquire ★
The Boston Globe ★ Los Angeles Times ★ The Economist ★ The Wall Street Journal ★
Atlanta Journal-Constitution ★ The Atlantic Monthly ★ Business Week ★ Salon.com ★
The Village Voice ★ Time ★ Newsweek ★ The Washington Post ★ San Francisco Chronicle ★ Entertainment Weekly ★

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BOOKMARKS RATINGS

★★★★★ **CLASSIC**

One of the best of its kind.

★★★★ **EXCELLENT**

A recommended book for
all readers.

★★ **FAIR**

Some problems, approach
with caution.

★★★ **GOOD**

Enjoyable, particularly for fans
of the genre.

★ **POOR**

Not worth your time.

RATINGS SYSTEM

We read hundreds of book reviews each month to provide:

A rating system to help you decide what to read next

We created the ratings to help sort through the hundreds of books that are available each month. We apply a rating to a book from each review we study—those ratings are assessed to provide a final rating.

The collective wisdom of professional critics and knowledgeable readers

Each critic and each reader offer a unique 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.

Organized, easy to understand information about each book

Our reviews are separated into genres and structured to find easily the information about a particular book most interesting and relevant to you.

Spoiler-free book descriptions

We hereby pledge not to reveal the ending or revelatory plot points when discussing a fictional work. You can read our reviews without feeling like you've read the book.

Reviews of classics as well as current releases

Great books are great no matter when they were written—we will cover classic authors and the best works in various genres as well as keep you up to date on new releases.

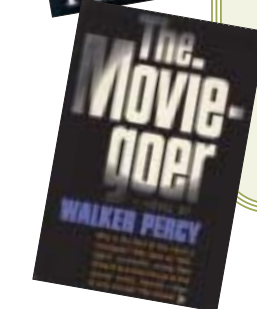
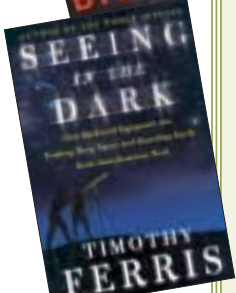
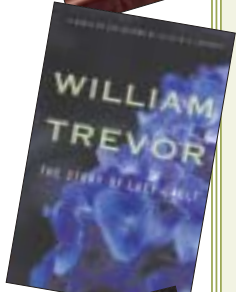
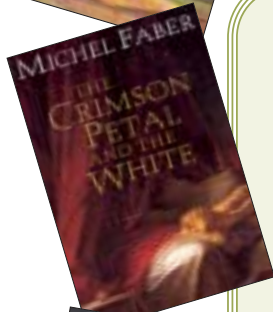
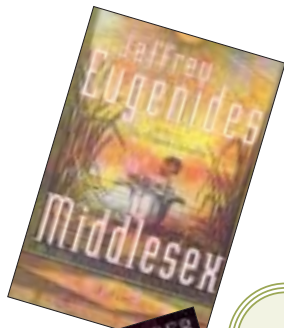
APPLYING RATINGS TO WORKS OF ART IS FRUSTRATINGLY REDUCTIONIST

It is also helpful in navigating through such a myriad of choices.

There are so many compelling books to read, we hope this rating system helps you discover them. 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.

BOOKMARKS SELECTIONS

In each issue we select our favorites from among the most highly-rated books:



Middlesex

By Jeffrey Eugenides

LITERARY FICTION

The fall's "Big Book"—a story of America, immigrants, love...oh, and a teenage girl who is also a boy.

Page 32

Nine Horses

By Billy Collins

POETRY

The latest collection of poems by the U.S. Poet Laureate.

Page 59

The Lunar Men

By Jenny Uglow

HISTORY

Profiles of a group of British Renaissance men in the 1700's.

Page 74

Fearless

By Imre Kertész
(Winner of the 2002 Nobel Prize for Literature)

CLASSIC

15-year old Gyorgy Köves is sent to a Nazi concentration camp.

Page 13

The Crimson Petal and the White

By Michael Faber

LITERARY FICTION

Though this social and sexual romp takes place in Victorian England, the characters possess modern sensibilities.

Page 41

The First Billion

By Christopher Reich

CRIME

A business thriller? High finance made exciting? Say it ain't so.

Page 62

Seeing in the Dark

By Timothy Ferris

SCIENCE

The top-rate science writer inspires a new wave of amateur astronomers.

Page 77

The Moviegoer

By Walker Percy

CLASSIC

Binx Bolling struggles to get through the "everydayness" of life.

Page 18

The Story of Lucy Gault

By William Trevor

LITERARY FICTION

Lucy, an eight-year-old girl goes missing; her family believes her dead. Lucy returns to her house to find her family has left the country.

Page 44

Benjamin Franklin

By Edmund S. Morgan

BIOGRAPHY

Yet another captivating biography of a Founding Father—and finally one under 350 pages.

Page 71

New Biographical Dictionary of Film

By David Thomson

ARTS

The third edition of one man's opinionated, exhausted view of an art-form.

Page 79

One Hundred Years of Solitude

By Gabriel García Márquez

CLASSIC

The epic, enchanted tale of the Buendía family.

Page 24

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NEWS AWARDS

NATIONAL BOOK AWARD

A DEBUT NOVEL, A MAMMOTH BIOGRAPHY. STRONG CHOICES. HOW THEY WERE CHOSEN IS ANOTHER MATTER.

THE WINNERS OF THE 2002 NATIONAL BOOK AWARDS were announced on November 20th. What's not typically discussed following frantic 'stickering' of the winners' books is the process by which the awards are selected. Each of the finalists, as well as the eventual recipient of the award, is chosen by a panel of judges. Michael Kinsley, editor of the online magazine *Slate* and judge on the non-fiction panel, provided some biting insight into the process. Kinsley tells of receiving 402 books to review, allowing his fellow panelists to whittle it down to 50 books before he started reading, and then merely skimming a portion of those last 50: "So, anyway, we gave the award to Caro. But did I actually read every page? I'll never tell."

The nonfiction panel chairman, Christopher Merrill, took Kinsley to task in a follow-up article in *Slate*, recounting the more rigorous process he and other fellow judges followed. Kinsley replied with some contrition, but summed up with "Like many others, I think Caro would be twice as good at half the length. But I also suspect that a more humble book would not have won the award."

Perhaps the National Book Foundation realized that last year's Jonathan Franzen/Oprah Winfrey dustup was good publicity and is committing to fomenting an annual controversy. In any event, here are this year's winners, as well as the names of the panelists who most likely read at least some of some of the books.

FICTION

WINNER:

♦ Julia Glass, **Three Junes**. An intimate family portrait told over three years. Kudos again to the *Good Morning America* book club for picking a solid debut novel.

OTHER FINALISTS:

- ♦ Mark Costello, **Big If** (★★★★, Nov/Dec 2002). A team of Secret Service agents who protect the Vice President and deal with their own personal problems.
- ♦ Adam Haslett, **You Are Not a Stranger Here** (★★★, Nov/Dec 2002). A Today Show book club selection - a debut collection of short stories by a Yale law student.
- ♦ Martha McPhee, **Gorgeous Lies**. A sequel of sorts to McPhee's *Bright Angel Time*. Here, a gestalt therapist is dying of cancer-his family gathers and looks back.
- ♦ Brad Watson, **The Heaven of Mercury**. This debut novel tells the story of small town Mercury, Mississippi and its inhabitants.



THE FICTION PANEL, chaired by Bob Shacochis (winner of the American Book Award for *Easy in the Islands*), included Adrienne Brodeur (editor of fiction magazine *Zoetrope*), David Wong Louie (author and UCLA professor), Jay McInerney (author of *Bright Lights, Big City*), and Jacquelyn Mitchard (author of *The Deep End of the Ocean*).

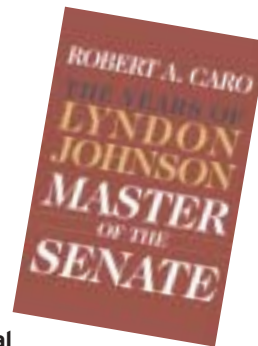
NONFICTION

WINNER:

♦ Robert A. Caro, **Master of the Senate: The Years of Lyndon Johnson**. The third volume of Caro's projected four-volume biography of the 36th President.

OTHER FINALISTS:

- ♦ Devra Davis, **When Smoke Ran Like Water: Tales of Environmental Deception and the Battle Against Pollution**. The devastating effects of environmental damage told through scientific theory and case studies.
- ♦ Atul Gawande, **Complications: A Surgeon's Notes on an Imperfect Science**. Concerning the human experience and imperfections of modern medicine.
- ♦ Elizabeth Gilbert, **The Last American Man**. A biography of Eustace Conway who entered the wilderness at 17 and still "lives off the land."
- ♦ Steve Olson, **Mapping Human History: Discovering the Past Through Our Genes**. An interweaving of archaeology and DNA studies to explore evolution and ethnicity.



THE NONFICTION PANEL, chaired by Christopher Merrill (author and Director of the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa), included Anthony Brandt (book columnist for *National Geographic Adventure*), Gail Buckley (author of *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm*), Mary Karr (author of *The Liars' Club*), and Michael Kinsley (founding editor of *Slate*).

NEWS AWARDS

POETRY

WINNER:

♦ Ruth Stone, *In the Next Galaxy*

OTHER FINALISTS:

- ♦ Harryette Mullen, *Sleeping with the Dictionary*
- ♦ Sharon Olds, *The Unswept Room*
- ♦ Alberto Ríos, *The Smallest Muscle in the Human Body*
- ♦ Ellen Bryant Voigt, *Shadow of Heaven*

THE POETRY PANEL, chaired by Dave Smith, included Elizabeth Alexander, Margaret Gibson, Bob Holman, and Dorianne Laux.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S LITERATURE

WINNER:

♦ Nancy Farmer, *The House of the Scorpion*

OTHER FINALISTS:

- ♦ M.T. Anderson, *Feed*
- ♦ Naomi Shihab Nye, *19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East*
- ♦ Elizabeth Partridge, *This Land Was Made for You and Me: The Life & Songs of Woody Guthrie (Nov/Dec 2002)*
- ♦ Jacqueline Woodson, *Hush*

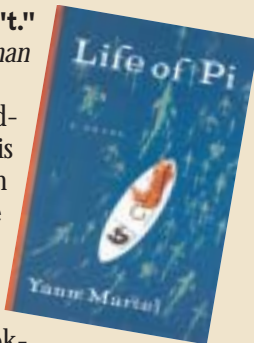
THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S LITERATURE PANEL, chaired by Han Nolan, included Christopher Paul Curtis, Rita Williams-Garcia, Sandra Jordan, and Gregory Maguire.

"In *Life of Pi* we have chosen an audacious book in which inventiveness explores belief. It is, as the author says, 'a novel which will make you believe in God' - or ask yourself why you don't."

Lisa Jardine, Panel Chairman

The 2002 Booker Prize was awarded on October 22nd. The prize is open to authors from British Commonwealth countries; the winner receives 50,000 pounds. There is considerable hype around the Booker Prize in Britain, and, as with many things British, book-makers offer odds and take bets on the winner. Trevor's *The Story of Lucy Gault* was the early favorite with 9/4 odds (vs. *Life of Pi* in third place at 7/2.) Then *Life of Pi* was mistakenly published as the winner on the Booker website several days before the scheduled announcement. The committee insisted it was an innocent mistake—that Martel was not necessarily the recipient of the Prize. No one believed it: *Life of Pi's* odds dropped to 2/1, betting was shut down, and lo and behold, *Life of Pi* was indeed the winner.

Controversy #2 for this year's Booker winner: accusations of plagiarism. Martel's *Life of Pi* tells the story of an Indian boy on a lifeboat with a hyena, an orangutan, a zebra, and a tiger. In 1981, Brazilian author Moacyr Scliar published *Max and the Cats*, about a Jewish boy on a lifeboat with a panther. Martel admitted that he had read a review of *Max and the Cats* and was inspired by the idea, but that he had never actually read the book. The themes of the two books are quite different, and, after initial concerns, Scliar decided not to pursue the matter.



2002 Booker Prize

WINNER:

Yann Martel, *Life of Pi* (★★★★, Nov/Dec 2002). An allegorical tale of a teenager, who simultaneously practices Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism, stranded on a lifeboat with a cast of animal characters.

OTHER FINALISTS:

Rohinton Mistry, *Family Matters*. (★★★★, Page 32).

The follow-up to *A Fine Balance*, a Parsi family in Bombay must make sacrifices to care for an elder member.

Carol Shields, *Unless*. (Nov/Dec 2002). A mother struggles to understand why her daughter has left college and is living on the streets, wearing a sign labeled "Goodness."

William Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* (★★★★, Page 45). Eight-year-old Lucy disappears; her family thinks she has died and leave the country in their grief. Lucy returns to find her family gone and must survive without them.

Sarah Walters, *Fingersmith* (★★★★, Summer 2002). A feminist twist on a classic Dickensian scenario involving an orphan girl pickpocket and an orphan heiress.

Tim Winton, *Dirt Music* (★★★★, Page 51) In the wilderness of Western Australia, lives collide in petty theft and adultery.

THE PANEL OF JUDGES was chaired by Professor Lisa Jardine - writer, critic and broadcaster and included: David Baddiel, writer and comedian; Russell Celyn Jones, novelist and short story writer; Salley Vickers, novelist and analytical psychologist; and Erica Wagner, Literary Editor of *The Times*.

have you read?

Readers Recommend

PLEASE SEND US YOUR LIST OF FAVORITE BOOKS, ALONG WITH A DESCRIPTION OF WHY EACH ONE IS MEANINGFUL TO YOU. WE ARE INTERESTED IN ANY AND ALL TOPICS. WE WILL PROVIDE A COMPLIMENTARY ONE-YEAR SUBSCRIPTION TO ONE OF THE LISTS WE PRINT EACH ISSUE (SELECTED AT RANDOM).

UNCONVENTIONAL BABY SHOWER GIFTS

(Or, books you might not expect when you're expecting)

Erin Foster is a librarian turned stay-at-home-mom in Scarsdale, NY.

Room Temperature

by Nicholson Baker

The book is entirely composed of the stream of consciousness musings of a father while feeding his baby daughter. The passages on early marriage make you remember why you fell in love with your spouse in the first place, something difficult to do in the presence of a screaming infant.



The Blank Slate

The Modern Denial of Human Nature

by Stephen Pinker

(reviewed on page 38)

Pinker gives a cogent review of the nature/nurture debate, coming down on the nature side. You may or may not buy his premise (for an alternative view see *Character Styles* by Stephen M. Johnson). But it sure makes good ammunition

when your child's terrible twos phase reminds you of exactly the way your mother-in-law behaved during your wedding reception.

Inside the Mouse

Work and Play at Disney World (Duke's Post-Contemporary Interventions series)

Edited by Stanley Fish, et.al.

C'mon, you know that once you have the kid you're going to end up at Disney eventually. This book is full of amusing tidbits that will keep you sane during that loooong wait for the Dumbo ride. Did you know that the costumed characters are not allowed to remove their heads while in the parks, EVER, even if they vomit in the costume due to heat exhaustion?

Protecting the Gift

Keeping Children and Teenagers Safe (And Parents Sane)

by Gavin de Becker

De Becker gives no-nonsense advice on how to keep your children safe from predators of all types. Be forewarned: the riveting stories of child abuse may panic new parents, but these are counter-balanced with practical tips on everything from how to choose a

nanny to when to let your kids walk to school alone.

The New Yorker Book of Kids Cartoons

And the People Who Live with Them

Edited by Robert Mankoff

Worth it for the Roz Chast introduction alone.

The Gatekeepers

Inside the Admissions Process of a Premier College

by Jacques Steinberg

(reviewed on page 68)

It's never too early to start planning for college. *The New York Times* education reporter Steinberg spent a year shadowing an admissions officer at prestigious Wesleyan College. His wry humor and engaging style make this book read more like a novel than the news report it started out as. The upshot is that no matter what your children's talents, they may not be recognized in the way you hoped they would come time for college (and this may be a good thing). Best to simply enjoy the ride.

Operating Instructions

A Journal of My Son's First Year

by Anne Lamott

Although on the surface I have little in common with Lamott (not single, not religious, not recovering from any addiction except caffeine), by the end of the book I thought of her as my best



friend. Hers was one of the first stories I read that validated my feelings that ferocious motherly love and thoughts of infanticide were not necessarily contradictory ideas.

The 20th Century Children's Book Treasury

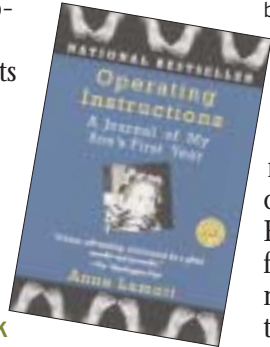
Picture Books and Stories to Read Aloud

edited by Janet Schulman and Simon Boughton

This is the only book our family takes with us when traveling.

The editors were a bit skimpy with the illustrations due to their space constraints, but it almost doesn't matter

because the stories are so familiar. *Goodnight Moon*, *Madeline*, *Curious George*, *Where the Wild Things Are*, *Winnie the Pooh*, *Swimmy*, and *The Story of Ferdinand*. Need I say more?



One Bite Won't Kill You

by Ann Hodgman

A cookbook designed to get the finicky child to eat his vegetables, and other nutritious bits. My kids never actually fell for any of these recipes (You want me to put cheese on my WHAT?). But Hodgman's irreverence (she was formerly the food editor at *Spy* magazine) is enough to make me think that if I keep trying long enough my daughter Louisa will actually eat something green.

FROM DISNEY TO GRIZZLY

By Alison Shurtleff, a reader in Benicia, California

Rebecca

by Daphne Du Maurier

There are certain seminal books in a young girl's life—*Gone with the Wind*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre*—that open the door to rich, romantic thoughts and ideas. Du Maurier brought the forbidding cliff house, crashing waves, and delirious suspense into my adolescent consciousness and it remains to this day. Having grown up in a society much like that in her novel (including her own childhood mansion, Menabilly), Du Maurier knew her subject well, and it spurred me on to the delightful *Frenchman's Creek*, *The House on the Strand*, and *Jamaica Inn*. Rebecca's opening line, "Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again," remains one of the most memorable in twentieth-century literature.

Alive

The Story of the Andes Survivors

by Piers Paul Read

My first realization that nonfiction could be entertaining—much more than just textbook dry. Read made

the heartbreaking experience of the Andes survivors seem as real as if we were along for the ride—an incredible ride—with no detail left out. I couldn't stop matching the names to the faces in the book's photos; it was just too horrible to think any of them could have gone through what they did. Snow was never so cold, hunger so piercing. A true testament to the will to survive.

Into Thin Air

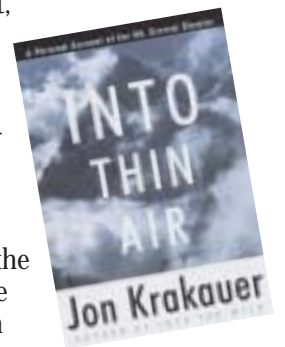
A Personal Account of the Mount Everest Disaster

by Jon Krakauer

From his grim descriptions of Lobuje, the climbing expedition's starting off point, to the crossing of great crevasses on unimaginably rickety equipment, Krakauer ropes you in with the big question,

"Why would anyone want to do this?"

In addition to chronicling a harrowing event, the book describes the naiveté of the rich being able to purchase anything, whether good for them or not. A master storyteller, Krakauer, who must have thought he had something big with his first book, *Into the Wild*, didn't know what lay ahead. A classic.



Inventing Kindergarten

Nineteenth Century Children

by Norman Brosterman

A discussion of the early education innovator Friedrich Froebel and his influence on the artistic work of such notables as Mondrian, Klee, and Frank Lloyd Wright. The lush photographic chronicle of Froebel's "gifts" (a sequence of playthings made of manipulatives such as wood and string) will propel you out the door to buy a complete set of Tinker Toys and Lincoln Logs. Whether the kid will get to play with them or you will is up for debate.

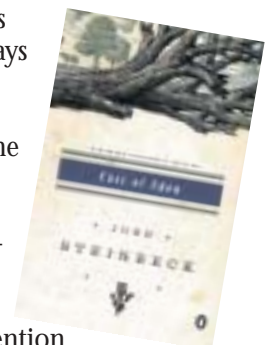


East of Eden

by John Steinbeck

Published in 1952, this novel, centered in California's Salinas Valley, portrays good and evil through the heartbreaking story of the Trasks and the Hamiltons, two families whose destinies are inextricably intertwined.

With abundant attention



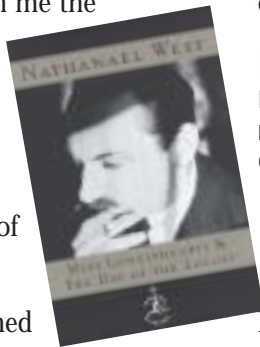
have you read?

to the land he knew so well—and the people who worked it—Steinbeck serves up heady stuff (based in part on his own family history), yet never won the praise he so deserved. The James Dean film is legendary, but tells only half the story.

Day of the Locust

by Nathanael West

As a young adult, my growing awareness of quality literature led me to Lowry, Bellow, Percy and Cheever—rewarding nuts to crack. For some reason, though, West’s book about the lower depths of Hollywood in the 1930s—more a sketch of ironies than a fleshed-out tale—remains with me the most. This 1939 novel, like Budd Schulberg’s “What Makes Sammy Run,” serves up a slice of motion-picture history that lives inside sun-bleached bungalows between Hollywood and Vine. West’s crystal clear prose, depicting unfulfilled dreams, is stunning.



Walt Disney

An American Original

by Bob Thomas

One of the best biographies ever written about one of the most fascinating men of our time. From building scaled-down trains in his back yard to attempting a live-action Alice in Wonderland using film techniques still in their infancy, Walt’s imagination was boundless and his optimism unflagging. What he accomplished in his relatively short lifetime puts the rest of humankind on notice. In short, he built American folklore into our

lives while entertaining generations with his ingenuity. Thomas wrote the bible on this amazing man.

Night of the Grizzlies

by Jack Olsen

The late Jack Olsen may be known for his true crime books (*Salt of the Earth, Doc*), but this 1967 account of an aggressive bear taking chomps out of teenage campers is where he touched on brilliance. His detailed description of the flora and fauna in Glacier National Park masterfully builds to a devastating series of events that show just how far we’ve come in our relationship with the mighty grizzly bear. Scarier than the scariest horror film—but true.

Halfway Heaven

Diary of a Harvard Murder

by Melanie Thernstrom

Grim but fascinating, this book delves into the cultural differences between an Ethiopian student, Sinedu Tadesse, and her Vietnamese roommate, Trang Phuon Ho—and how these differences led to murder. Along the way, it explores the reasons behind a small, prestigious community’s neglect of its mentally-ill members. Thernstrom’s visit to Ethiopia, and the culture differences she discovers between Ethiopian and American life, are fascinating. Sinedu’s loneliness will haunt you.

Small Sacrifices

A True Story of Passion and Murder

by Ann Rule

True crime isn’t always about want-ad killers or sex slaves in the basement. Rule breaks away from the pack of churned-out exploitation to show depravity in the most unexpected place: a mother’s heart. This book haunted me for months. Rule has long shown that she is the

doyenne of true crime—this is her very best. Diane Downs, the mother who would sacrifice her children for love, presaged Susan Smith by decades. But where Smith left questions unanswered, Downs reveals the twisted need that sent her on to prison.

White Noise

by Don DeLillo

People have said they hate this book, but don’t be fooled—it’s one of the funniest ever. Not only is it extremely biting in its take on contemporary culture, it does more to skewer air travel than “Airplane” ever did. Only satire like this could portray a lethal black chemical cloud as an “airborne toxic event.” Jack Gladney, a Hitler scholar, and his fourth wife, Babbette, raise four ultramodern offspring in a world DeLillo sneaks to you with tight, spare prose; you’re never quite prepared for the abstract punch-lines.

FOR ANY MOOD

By Shelly Nelson. Shelly is a recent college graduate who lives in New York City.

When you’re feeling like **THE ONLY SINGLE PERSON LEFT IN THE WORLD—Mr. Maybe** by Jane Green is a really fun book. It is a bit reminiscent of Bridget Jones, but better! It pokes fun at all aspects of life and I think everyone—both men and women, young and old—will find a character with whom they connect or feel they have come across in their own travels. From abysmal, six-second



sex to cheesy, out-of-the-loop parents, this story jumps from one comic tale to another.

When **SUDDENLY YOUR KIDS ARE GROWING UP** and getting lured by teachers and friends into the world of youth sports—soccer *and* basketball *and* hockey *and* cheerleading *and* tennis, **HOW INVOLVED SHOULD YOU, AS A PARENT, GET?** No one has better insight into this dilemma than Bob Bigelow, author of **Let the Kids Play**. In his book, he explores the innocence of youth sports and what happens when that innocence is taken away and replaced with competition, jealousy, and demanding parents who don't know what it means to watch from the sidelines.

When **THE WEEK IS FEELING LONG AND SLOW AND YOU NEED SOME FAST-PACED DRAMA**, pick up Harlan Coben's best selling suspense novel, **Tell No One**. It's quick, it's fun, and it will keep you

engaged until the very last page. You won't have to think too much, but you'll wonder a lot!

When you're feeling **INTENSE, INQUISITIVE, AND UP FOR A DEEP, CHALLENGING READ**, Friedrich Nietzsche's **Beyond Good and Evil** is a good place to start (some of his other works like **The Gay Science** and **Zarathustra** get even more intense!) Nietzsche will answer questions you never even thought about asking. What is will to power? Does it merely exist or is it something Nietzsche created? What is truth and who are the free spirits? Who will be the philosophers of the future and what will be their duties? My dirty secret: you can even read the Cliff's Notes right along with it.

When you're looking for a **HISTORY LESSON THAT READS LIKE A NOVEL**—J. Anthony Lukas's account of desegregation in the Boston public schools, **Common**

Ground. Lukas takes one of the most powerful and influential events in Boston's history and moves it into the hands and minds of people who reap its benefits every day without even realizing it. He floods our minds with true stories of courage, bravery, violence, and determination by exposing the lives of three Boston families—the Yankee Divers, the black Twymons, and the Irish McGoffs. This book will shock you, educate you, humble you, and remove from your eyes any blinders that may exist when it comes to the issue of desegregation in our country.



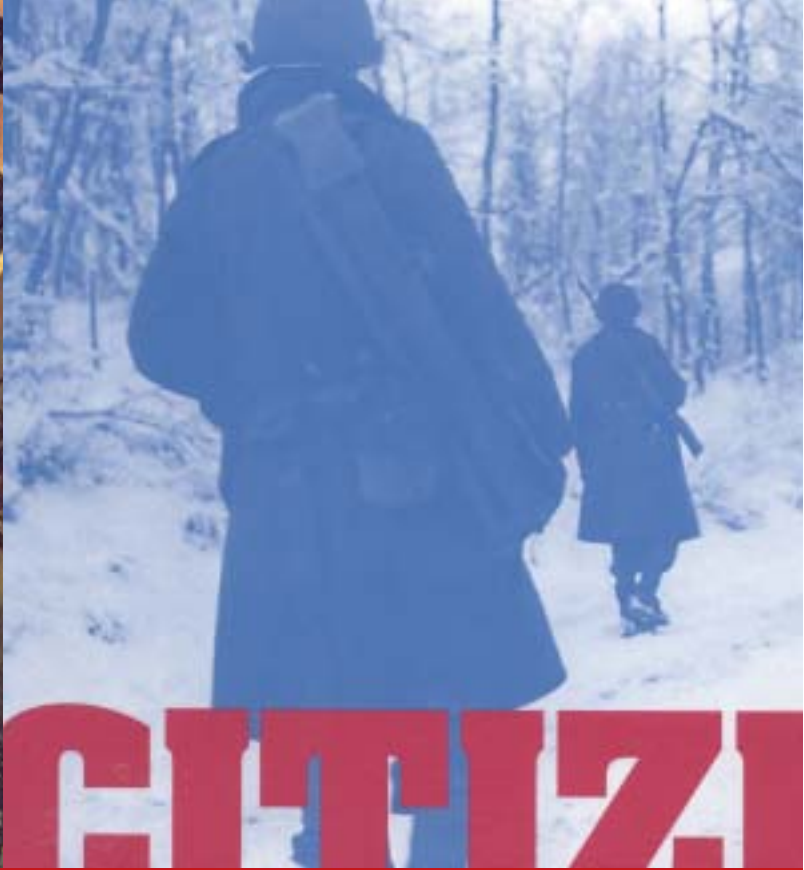
When you're feeling **SENSITIVE, PASSIONATE, AND ENTRHALLED WITH THE LIVES OF WOMEN**, pick up **The Diary of Anais Nin, Volume One 1931-1934**. This memoir will capture you from the first paragraph and lead you through the most personal intricacies of a woman's mind. Nin is perceptive, honest and bold. Her melodic writing revives the English language and serves as a reminder of the power and beauty of the written word.



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Imre Kertész, Nobel Laureate

BY JESSICA TEISCH

"I am here, and I know full well that I have to accept the prize of being allowed to live. . . . I have to continue my uncontinuable life. My mother is waiting for me."

-Imre Kertész, *Fateless*

KERTÉSZ is the first Hungarian and the first Holocaust survivor to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. Like his fellow "survivor" writers, including Primo Levi, Aharon Appelfeld, Paul Celan, and Elie Wiesel (winner of the 1986 Nobel Peace Prize), Kertész etched humankind's atrocities into a collective memory. He submitted neither to Auschwitz nor to the four decades he lived under Communist rule. Instead, through his writing, Kertész chose to explore how individuals deal with social and political conformity.

Kertész was born in Budapest on November 9, 1929. He was deported to Auschwitz during the Nazi roundup of Hungary's Jews, and then sent to Buchenwald in Germany. After liberation in May 1945, he worked for a Budapest newspaper, but was dismissed in 1951 when the Communists came to power. He began writing and translating German authors, including Nietzsche, Freud, and Wittgenstein. He completed his first novel, *Fateless*, in 1965. Its publication ten years later went largely unnoticed, in part because Kertész refused to accept censorship in exchange for membership in the official Writers' Association. "I refuse to adapt or integrate myself," he told *The New York Times*—a recurring theme in his life. Although he has loyal followings in Germany, Sweden, and France, Kertész hopes that his works will reach his fellow Hungarians, whose collaboration with the Nazis sent 600,000 Hungarian Jews to their death: "I hope that in light of this

recognition," he told *The New York Times*, "they will face up to [the Holocaust] more than until now" (10/11/02).

THE CLASSIC

Fateless (1975)

THE STORY: Gyorgy Köves, the 15-year old Jewish narrator, is arrested and sent to a concentration camp, where he naively accepts his new life. "I will continue to live my unlivable life," he writes, because "there is no absurdity that one cannot live through quite naturally."

"[Fateless] conveys a chillingly convincing sense of how a young person by rapid stages comes to adapt himself to the terms of a radically altered reality. . . . the tale itself persuades us, whatever we may know or not know about the teller." Robert Alter, *The New Republic*, 4/30/01.

Kertész's trilogy—*Fateless*, *Fiasco*, and *Kaddish for a Child Not Born*—achieved wide acclaim in Europe in the 1990's. His work did not reach the United States until Katharina M. Wilson, a professor of comparative literature at the University of Georgia, persuaded Northwestern University Press to publish *Fateless* and *Kaddish* in English. Publishers Weekly subsequently named *Fateless* one of the fifty best books of 1992. Even then, Kertész did not become a household name, though the Nobel Prize will surely bring him worldwide recognition.

Kertész takes a different approach to his past than other Holocaust writers. He views Auschwitz through the eyes of an adolescent and possesses "an honesty and a lack of anger" rarely

SELECTED WORKS

NOVELS

FATELESS, 1975*

The Pathfinder, 1977

FIASCO, 1988

Fiasco follows Köves's life as an older man who waits for his memoirs of Auschwitz to be published. Yet when it is finally published, Köves is dismayed to find his secrets publicly exposed.

KADDISH FOR A CHILD NOT BORN, 1989

Translated by Christopher C. Wilson & Katharina M. Wilson, 1997.

In the last of Kertész's trilogy, Köves refuses to bring a child into a world that permitted the Holocaust. The Kaddish, the Jewish prayer for the dead, is said for this unborn child.

The English Flag, 1991

Galley Diary, 1992

The Holocaust as Culture, 1993

A Story, Two Stories (with Péter Esterházy), 1994

I-Another: Chronicle of a Metamorphosis, 1997

Moments of Silence While the Execution Squad Reloads, 1998

The Exiled Language, 2001

* DISCUSSED IN ARTICLE

found in similar literature (*The Washington Post*, 10/11/02). But, like his contemporaries, Kertész asserts the universality of his experience in vivid, heartrending detail. "For him Auschwitz is not an exceptional occurrence," the Swedish Academy wrote. "It is the ultimate truth about human degradation in modern existence."

"Mr. Kertész's books are reflections on the nature of survival and the impact of the Holocaust on those who must reconcile themselves to living in a world of madness and mass death. . . . Given [his] experiences in the camps, [he] had the moral authority to speak to all manner of human failing." Thane Rosenbaum, *The New York Times*, 10/12/02. ■

Stephen E. Ambrose (1936-2002)

BY JESSICA TEISCH

Stephen Ambrose's best-selling books created heroes out of Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Meriwether Lewis, Dwight Eisenhower, and World War II veterans like George McGovern. His highly accessible work, which inspired Americans to take pride and interest in their history, made him "the great populist historian of America" (*Associated Press*, 10/14/02).

Ambrose, a history professor at the University of New Orleans, died October 13, 2002. Throughout much of his career, he was a liberal who spoke out against many of America's military exploits, including the Vietnam War. World War II veterans, however, were among his biggest heroes and subjects. "I thought the returning veterans were giants who had saved the world from barbarism," he said, and he founded the National D-Day Museum in New Orleans in their honor (*AP*, 10/13/02). But it was Ambrose's first work of history, *Halleck, Lincoln's Chief of Staff* (1962), that fashioned his reputation. The book impressed then President Eisenhower so much that he chose Ambrose as his biographer.

Many of Ambrose's colleagues considered his presidential biographies and military histories to be conservative and outdated. Others, like Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Arthur Schlesinger, praised Ambrose for successfully combining "high standards of scholarship with the capacity to make history come alive for a lay audience" (*AP*, 10/13/02). Even accusations of plagiarism (a very few instances were cited) did not diminish Ambrose's popularity-or book sales. In 1998, President Clinton presented him with the National Arts and Humanities Medal. Ambrose also collaborated with Steven Spielberg on the World War II blockbuster, *Saving Private Ryan*, the documentary, *Price for Peace*, and the HBO miniseries *Band of Brothers*.

MAJOR WORKS

Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West is one of Ambrose's best known and most widely read works. Here are some others to explore:

Crazy Horse and Custer

The Parallel Lives of Two American Warriors (1975)

THE STORY: Ambrose follows the parallel lives and careers of two great warriors, General George Custer and Crazy Horse, leader of the Ogala Sioux. The story culminates in the battle of the Little Big Horn in June 1876.

"Movingly told and well written, [the book] is more

than the story of Crazy Horse and Custer, who are but the symbols of the larger drama played out on the northern Great Plains. . . . The author remains compassionate, understanding, and judicious; he takes no sides." P. J. Coleman, *Library Journal*, 12/14/76.

"An epic and accurate retelling of one of our country's most tragic periods." *Baltimore Sun*

THE BOTTOM LINE: Not Ambrose's best known work, but a fascinating and often overlooked portrait of two men's psychology.

Eisenhower

The President (1984)

THE STORY: This volume about Eisenhower covers his two terms as president, including his difficult relationships with Joe McCarthy, civil rights activists, and Soviet leaders.

"[This book is] bound to cause controversy. . . . A scholarly determination to be fair permeates the book, and so, even as Mr. Ambrose argues incisively for Eisenhower's greatness, he passes judgments on the President's performance that undermine those claims." Robert J. Donovan, *The New York Times Book Review*, 9/9/84.

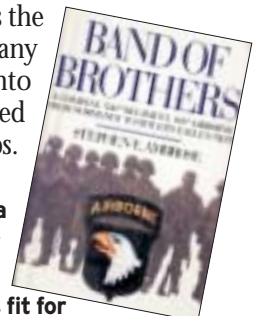
"[This book] is a superb piece of biography, a detailed and objective assessment of his management of government, spiced with fascinating revelations." John Keegan, *The New Republic*, 10/22/84.

THE BOTTOM LINE: An engaging example of Ambrose's presidential biographies; not only for Eisenhower enthusiasts.

Band of Brothers

E Company, 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne from Normandy to Hitler's Eagle's Nest (1992)

THE STORY: Ambrose chronicles the journey of the elite riflery company from Georgia that parachuted into France on D-Day and later captured Hitler's retreat in the Austrian Alps.



"*Band of Brothers* follows a parachute infantry unit (Company E, known as Easy) on a real-life journey of such scope that it seems fit for *Forrest Gump*." Caryn James, *The New York Times*, 9/7/01.

"[*Band of Brothers*] is an American success story, forcefully and modestly told. . . . His book is full of insights into the nature of comradeship, as well as brutally frank description: noise, stench, discomfort, hunger and fear are all there, tied together in a mastery narrative flow."

M. R. D. Foot, Times Literary Supplement, 8/21/92.

THE BOTTOM LINE: An in-depth, often gory account of American soldiers during WWII. Considered an Ambrose classic.

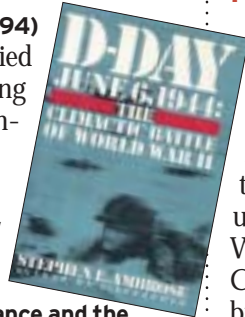
D-Day, June 6, 1944

The Climactic Battle of World War II (1994)

THE STORY: Ambrose recounts the Allied invasion of Normandy in 1994, arguing that it represented a major organizational triumph of the U.S. Army.

"The early chapters about strategy, planning and preparation include some new and illuminating details about undercover liaisons with the French Resistance and the Allies' deceptive ruses. . . . But the descriptions of individual ordeals on the bloody beach of Omaha make this book outstanding." Raleigh Trevelyan, The New York Times Book Review, 5/29/94.

"[Ambrose] brings to his new work the narrative drive, thorough research and muscular prose he is justly famous for. . . . It is unlikely, though, that any [historians] will produce a book like *D-Day, June 6, 1944*, with its



wealth of detail, absorbing vignettes and rich anecdotal material. William L. O'Neill, New Leader, 6/94.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Ambrose's classic and best known WWII study.

Nothing Like It in the World

The Men Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad 1863-1869 (2000)

THE STORY: California's "Big Four" financed the building of Abraham Lincoln's transcontinental railroad, a measure of national unity in a country divided by Civil War. Yet immigrants, including Chinese and Irish, undertook the back-breaking work.

"Stephen Ambrose's new book makes the how of [building a transcontinental railroad] understandable, but no less mind-boggling. With the publication of this book, a lot of minds will be boggled, because when Ambrose writes, a lot of people read." Steve Weinberg, Chicago Tribune Books, 9/3/00.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Not only a story in railroad construction, but also a study in constructing national unity.



COMPLETE WORKS

BUILDING THE NATION

- Crazy Horse and Custer: The Parallel Lives of Two American Warriors (1975)
- Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West (1996)
- Lewis & Clark: Voyage of Discovery (1998)
- Nothing Like It in the World: The Men Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad 1863-1869 (2000)

PRESIDENTIAL STUDIES

- Halleck: Lincoln's Chief of Staff (1962)
- The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower, Vols. 1-5 (1967)
- Nixon (3 vols., 1987-1991)
- Eisenhower: The President (1985)
- Eisenhower: Soldier, General of the Army, President-elect, 1980-1952 (1983)
- Milton Eisenhower: Educational Statesman (with Richard Immerman, 1983)
- Eisenhower: Soldier and President (1990)

WORLD WAR II

- Eisenhower and Berlin, 1945: The Decision to Halt at the Elbe (1967)
- General Ike: Abilene to Berlin (1973)
- The Supreme Commander: The War Years of General Dwight D. Eisenhower (1970)
- Ike's Spies: Eisenhower and the Espionage Establishment (1981)
- Pegasus Bridge: June 6, 1944 (1985)
- Band of Brothers: E Company, 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne, from Normandy to Hitler's Eagle's Nest (1992)
- D-Day, June 6, 1944: The Climactic Battle of World War II (1994)
- Citizen Soldiers: The U.S. Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Bulge to the Surrender of Germany, June 7, 1944-May 7, 1945 (1997)
- The Victors: Eisenhower and His Boys, the Men of World War II (1998)
- The Wild Blue: The Men and Boys Who flew the B-24s over Germany (2001)

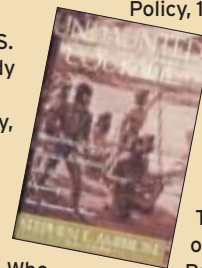
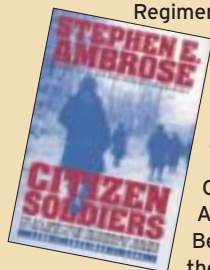
THE U.S. MILITARY

- A Wisconsin Boy in Dixie: Civil War

- Letters of James K. Newton (1961)
- Upton and the Army (1964)
- The Military and American Society: Essays & Readings (with James Barber, 1972)
- Duty, Honor, Country: A History of West Point (1999)
- Comrades: Brothers, Fathers, Heroes, Sons, Pals (1999)
- What If?: The World's Foremost Military Historians Imagine What Might Have Been (1999)

GENERAL U.S. HISTORY

- Institutions in Modern America (1967)
- Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy, 1938-1980 (1980)
- Americans at War (1997)
- Witness to America: An Illustrated Documentary History of the United States from the Revolution to Today (1999)
- The Mississippi and the Making of a Nation: From the Louisiana Purchase to Today (with Sam Abell and Douglas Brinkley, 2002)
- To America: Personal Reflections of a Historian (2002)



THE DIXIE KIERKEGAARD

WALKER PERCY

TRAINED AS A PSYCHIATRIST, WALKER PERCY CONCLUDED THAT SCIENCE WAS FAILING HIM AND FAILING SOCIETY. IT DISTANCED A PERSON FROM HIS OR HER SOUL AND COULDN'T EXPLAIN THE DESPAIR WE ALL EXPERIENCE. PERCY PUT ASIDE HIS MEDICAL DEGREE, CONVERTED TO CATHOLICISM, AND BEGAN WRITING.

HIS DEBUT NOVEL, *THE MOVIEGOER*, WON THE NATIONAL BOOK AWARD.

BY JOHN FREDERICK MOORE

"THE HUMAN CONDITION." When attempting to define the meaning of their work, many writers simply claim that they are exploring the human condition. Ergo their novels must be brimming with insight! It's a phrase so sufficiently generic that readers can imbue the book with their own ideas and needs and imagine that the author will address them directly.

Walker Percy, on the other hand, had definite ideas about the human condition—that it is defined by despair. He was consumed by this phenomenon: why are men and women so unhappy at a time in human culture when, for many, it seems that life has never been easier? What is the cause of our collective malaise?

He first approached this question as a man of science. Percy earned a medical degree from Columbia University and was a trained psychiatrist. However, in 1942, he contracted pulmonary tuberculosis and convalesced for three years. During this time he turned to philosophy, studying Søren Kierkegaard, Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Thomas Mann. Suddenly science felt empty—it didn't address the true difficulties of being human. Science exacerbated these difficulties. Percy then made

some dramatic changes in his life. He turned away from medicine, converted to Catholicism, and began his career as a novelist. His debut novel, *The Moviegoer*, won the National Book Award in 1962.

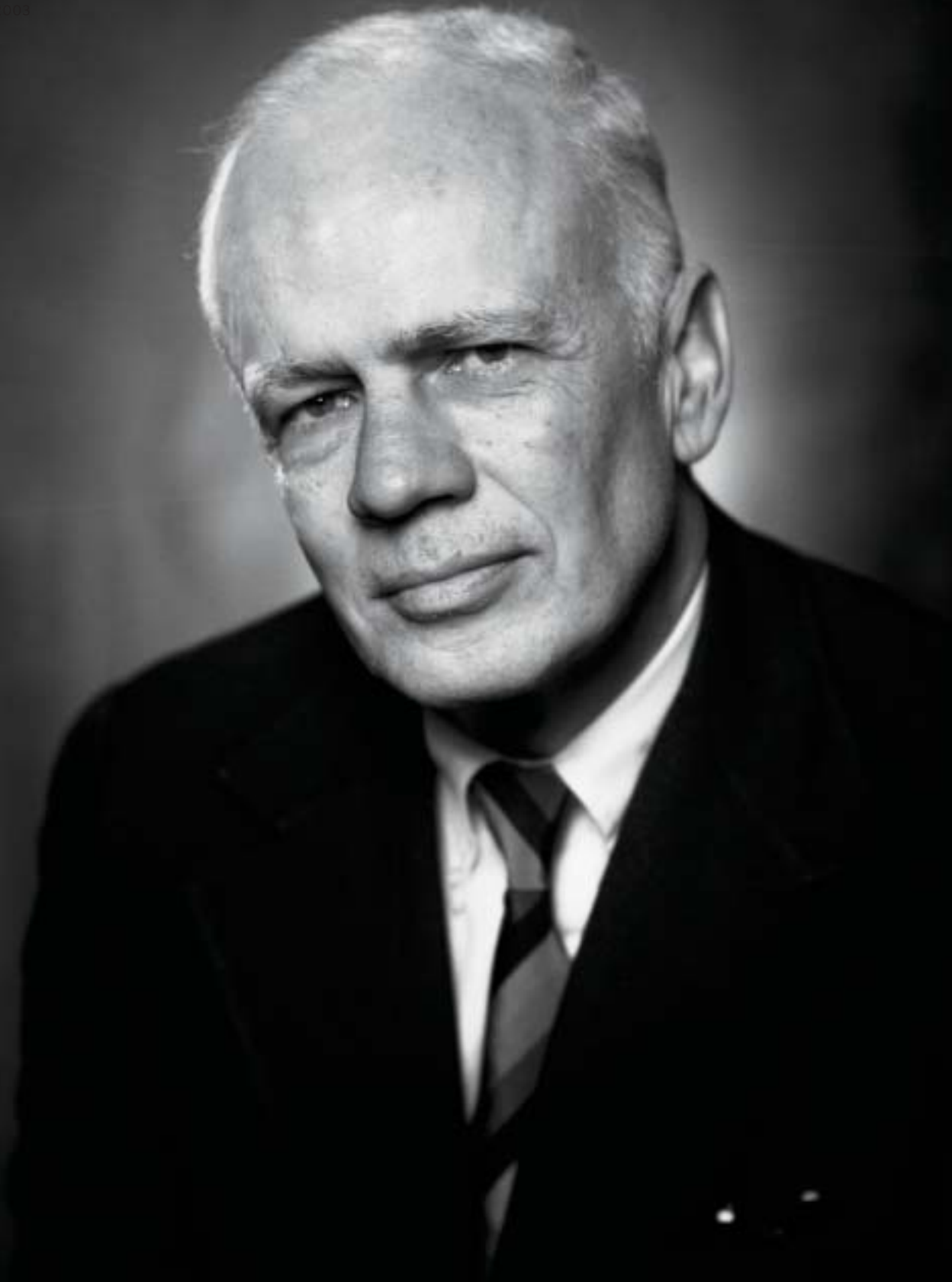
Percy wrote both fiction and non-fiction in order to explore the existential philosophies that captivated him. He sought to write novels based on ideas—if our despair was generated in our own mind, then his characters and situations illustrated this internal struggle. As Gail Godwin wrote in *The New York Times Book Review*, "Walker Percy has the rare gift of being able to dramatize meta-

physics." Percy returned to the same themes again and again. His characters were cast adrift in a modern world, having grown complacent from an unchallenging, inauthentic culture. They find themselves on a quest for meaning in an increasingly godless existence, where intellect and science have replaced spirituality. They find hope by reexamining their past or connecting with new people in a real, authentic way.

Percy's sense of urgency about our culture's problems increased over the course of his six novels. In *The Moviegoer*, the simple notion of getting up and getting through a mundane, purposeless day crippled most of

WHERE TO START

Percy's fiction can be divided into two basic themes: man's quest to heal himself, and man's quest to heal mankind. His debut novel, **THE MOVIEGOER**, is the perfect introduction to the first theme. **LOVE IN THE RUINS**, perhaps Percy's most laugh-out-loud funny book, looks into the future of America, torn apart by, as he told Shelby Foote, "the rural knotholed right and the godless and alienated left."



his characters—dealing with the "everydayness" of life, as protagonist Binx Bolling puts it. As his career progressed, Percy's scope widened and his concerns grew. Binx was intent on saving himself, whereas in later works Percy's characters are bent on saving the world. There is an apocalyptic undertone to much of the author's later works (*Love in the Ruins*, for example, is subtitled *The Adventures of a Bad Catholic at a Time Near the End of the World*). Man's predicament can be summed up by one character's rumination in *The Thanatos Syndrome*: "Here we are on the very brink of World War Three, on the brink of destruction, and nobody gives it a second thought." And so thought Percy—our culture is destroying itself and no one seems to care.

SOUTHERN ROOTS

Percy was born in Birmingham, AL, in 1916. When Percy was a teen, his father committed suicide. This was followed three years later by the death of his mother in an automobile accident. He and his two brothers moved to Greenville, MS, to live with the writer William Alexander Percy, an older cousin who later adopted the children. A sense of physical and spiritual displacement, perhaps born from this time, runs through Percy's fiction.

Percy spent his adult life in Covington, LA. With the exception of *The Last Gentleman*, Percy's work is set exclusively in the South, particularly in the semi-fictional land of Feliciana Parish, LA. Percy is, if anything, more than a little cynical about the South in his work. As he wrote in *Lancelot*: "Do you want a portrait of the New Southerner? He is Billy Graham on Sunday and Richard Nixon during the rest of the week." Percy's affection for his Southern roots becomes evident, however, in the way he delights in describing landscape, in placing land and buildings in historical context, and in dissecting the uneasy relationship between Southern blacks and whites. Percy was captivated by the shortcomings of language and often explored how characters can say one thing and understand each other on a whole other level. This is particularly acute in the conversations he portrays between blacks and whites.

Though he is often lumped together with other "Southern" writers, Percy's approach to storytelling owes more to the work of his favorite European writers. As Percy once quipped to *The New York Times Book Review*, "I lived a hundred miles from William Faulkner but he meant less to me than Albert Camus." He claimed to have read little fiction and had no interest in socializing with literary luminaries, even after his first novel won the National Book Award. He led an increasingly secluded life, though one outlet for him was the Maple Street Bookshop in New Orleans, LA (see *In Gratitude* sidebar).

Percy never gave up trying to right the wrongs he saw in society. When one reporter, Robyn Perry, called him for an interview, he replied, "If you knew anything about my work, you'd know I hate the twentieth century, the whole culture, and that I've had enough of interviews." When he eventually acquiesced and she visited him, she found him working on *Lost in the Cosmos*, a non-fiction work he hoped would provide further insight to the culture he loathed—to offer up a possible antidote to the terminal illness that is the human condition.

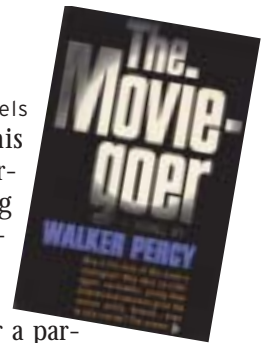
MAJOR WORKS

The Moviegoer (1961)

- ◆ National Book Award
- ◆ #60, Modern Library's 100 Best Novels

Percy's first novel remains his widely acknowledged masterpiece. The book details a young man's search for the cure to the tedium of the "everydayness" of existence. Percy would never again achieve such unanimous acclaim for a particular book—*The Moviegoer* singlehandedly established his reputation as one of the most respected American authors of the late 20th century.

THE STORY: Binx Bolling, an educated, well-to-do manager of a brokerage firm with strong family ties, seems to have everything going for him—except happiness. Binx frequents the movies to escape the emptiness of his life, often modeling his behavior on the heroes he sees on-screen. A family tragedy and the problems



THE MOVIEGOER'S PATHOLOGY

AN EXCERPT FROM WALKER PERCY'S ACCEPTANCE SPEECH FOR THE NATIONAL BOOK AWARD.

"... since it seems appropriate to say a word about *The Moviegoer*, it is perhaps not too farfetched to compare it in one respect with the science of pathology. Its posture is the posture of the pathologist with his suspicion that something is wrong. There is time for me to say only this: that the pathology in this case has to do with the loss of individuality and the loss of identity at the very time when words like the "dignity of the individual" and "self-realization" are being heard more frequently than ever. Yet the patient is not mortally ill. On the contrary, it speaks well for national health that pathologists of one sort or another are tolerated and even encouraged.

In short, the book attempts a modest restatement of the Judeo-Christian notion that man is more than an organism in an environment, more than an integrated personality, more even than a mature and creative individual, as the phrase goes. He is a wayfarer and a pilgrim." ■

facing his cousin Kate force Binx to reassess his life, to open himself to the world and accept reality. Although Binx Bolling's odyssey from alienation to self-awareness established Percy as a novelist of ideas, critics also admired his lucid, entertaining prose.

"[Percy's] interest in psychiatry is evident in the way he probes at the mainsprings of his characters. Nothing is stated; everything is implied. The reader gets fragments of meaning and occasional glimpses of deep-rooted causes. Yet so expertly are these fragments fitted together and these glimpses sustained that Binx and Kate grow steadily in character throughout the book." *The New York Times*, May 28, 1961.

"A finely etched, sensitive commentary on the rootlessness and fragmentation of contemporary life." *Booklist*, July 1, 1961.

"Walker Percy... is able to satirize without cruelty and to mock without harshness. His story is often so shrewdly witty, even outright funny, that one forgets it is a novel about despair." *New York Herald-Tribune Books*, July 30, 1961.

THE BOTTOM LINE: A funny, insightful meditation on the journey of finding one's true self. *The Moviegoer* establishes the themes that Percy would explore in his subsequent novels.

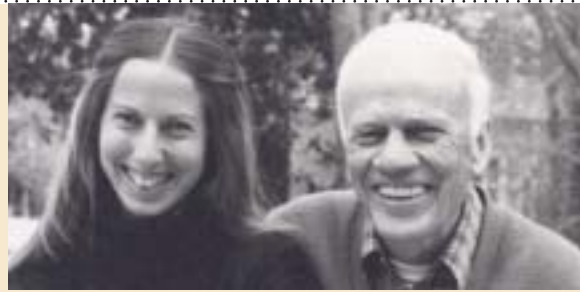
The Last Gentleman (1966)

♦ National Book Award Nomination

A transitional novel as Percy takes the themes from *The Moviegoer* and paints them on a broader canvas.

THE STORY: Will Barrett, a 25-year-old engineer from Mississippi, drifts through life in New York while struggling through occasional fugue-like episodes of déjà vu and amnesia. After spotting Kitty Vaughn, a pretty 21-year-old with problems of her own, through his telescope lens in Central Park, Barrett quickly becomes entangled in the affairs of the entire Vaughn family. During a journey that takes him to Santa Fe by way of Mississippi, Barrett—like Binx Bolling before him—snaps out of his fog in the face of real human tragedy.

"... a beautifully textured novel, immediately enjoyable on a narrative level and richly rewarding on a level of implication that runs through it like some powerful subterranean stream... This novel succeeds brilliantly in dramatizing the contradictory nature of reality through characters who are at once typical of our condition yet saltily individual." *The New York Times Book Review*, June 26, 1966.



Rhoda Faust and Walker Percy

IN GRATITUDE

Walker Percy was especially kind to the Maple Street Book Shop. Years ago, when he was teaching a course at Loyola, he started dropping by to sign books for us. He also let us give several autograph parties for him, even though, as we discovered later, they were a source of intense discomfort to him, as he hated forgetting people's names and perhaps hurting their feelings.

When he couldn't handle signing parties anymore, he was agreeable to our sending out flyers announcing the publication of a new book. We would drive over to Covington with a car full of boxes of his new book for him to sign and inscribe.

Customer response invariably yielded great piles of sometimes weird and intricate requests for special inscriptions. He would always try to accommodate and would only sometimes pass judgment in the form of a sad smile when confronted with instructions on a form to inscribe something like, "To a budding fellow writer who treads the same path and makes the same search . . ." or "To a bourbon-lover extraordinaire - You love not wisely but too well . . . don't blow your cool." Once in a while, he'd look up with a slight grimace and say, "Do I know this guy?"

He also helped Maple Street Book Shop's publishing arm, Faust Publishing Company, to come into existence by offering a speech of his, "Diagnosing the Modern Malaise," to be its first publication, and later, two other pieces of his work.

After Walker Percy's death, many of our customers expressed their sympathy for our loss. We really appreciated that, and we want to thank them. Many also voiced their own great sorrow. Some of the people who were most saddened did not even know him personally, but they had read his books and felt, and we understand why, that he knew them.

As a writer, his greatest gift was getting right to the heart of the matter, putting his finger right on the crucial spot. The dry humor with which he did this made his books startlingly funny, while at the same time, breathtakingly important. With regard to his faith in God and Catholicism, it was his intelligent soft-handedness that won him respect from non-believers as well as believers.

We have lost a great friend, and we remember him gratefully. ■

by Rhoda Faust, owner of the Maple Street Book Shop in New Orleans, LA.

"Page-for-page and line-for-line this is certainly one of the best-written books in recent memory." *Critic*, Oct., 1966.

THE BOTTOM LINE: No sophomore slump here, though the novel is overshadowed by *The Moviegoer*.

Love in the Ruins (1971)

◆ National Catholic Book Award

A significant moment in Percy's development—he begins to shift from strictly personal matters to more worldly concerns.

THE STORY: Dr. Tom More, psychiatrist, failed Catholic, and alcoholic, sets out to save America from itself. Set in the South in 1983, the country is being torn apart by political, racial, and religious divides. The quest of Percy's hero moves from the personal to the universal, as More invents a device intended to cure mankind's psyche. Meanwhile, a sinister character named Art Immelman is bent on thwarting More's plan to save the country from total breakdown.



"A great deal happens [in this novel] and, though it's no laughing matter, Walker Percy makes it seem extraordinarily funny.... Mr. Percy, the least malicious of satirists, devises a lively, complex, and strangely heartening end to his story." *Saturday Review*, May 15, 1971.

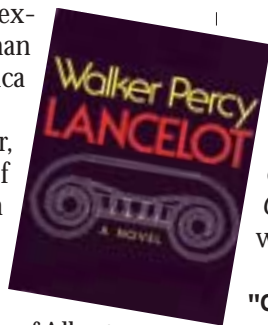
"At first Percy's style seems as beautifully controlled as ever, musical and poetic and delicately nuanced; but the whimsical content ultimately overwhelms the writing, which inevitably falls apart." *Library Journal*, May 15, 1971.

THE BOTTOM LINE: A satire of America's soul. The expanded scope of this work allows Percy's sardonic humor to shine.

Lancelot (1977)

A drastic shift in narrative tone from Percy's earlier work—a dark exploration into the soul of a man fighting against the emptiness of America in the 1970's.

THE STORY: Lancelot Andrewes Lamar, a disenchanting liberal lawyer, tells of how he came to be institutionalized in a prison mental hospital. His audience is Percival, an old college friend and now a psychiatrist/priest. Constructed as a confessional narrative in the manner of Albert Camus's *The Fall*, the book details Lancelot's quest for the "unholy Grail." Amid what he sees as America's decadence all around him, Lancelot discloses his plans for a Third Revolution that will establish a new cul-



ture based on old values. Think of Lancelot as a Travis Bickle of the New South.

"[Percy] knowingly fingers what he perceives as the rotting fabric of Southern aristocratic life, and describes it with vividness and a kind of affection, even as he starts to shred it.... Philosophical digressions and painstaking analyses are the author's price for doled-out flashbacks, which provide the book's only action. But such is Mr. Percy's talent - and his evident moral concern - that the daring method mainly works." *Christian Sci. Monitor*, March 2, 1977.

"In Lancelot, Percy is again confronting the forces which make it so difficult for us to make moral choices and live by them.... This novel is Percy's strongest counterattack against those forces, which I suspect are still shrieking at his door." *Harper's*, May 1977.

"Percy has acquired the reputation of being a 'philosophical thinker,' but I have never really found in his fiction much evidence to support this view.... [This] is one of the most disappointing novels I have read in recent years."

The New Republic, Feb. 5, 1977.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Though it features Percy's typically acerbic lament against modern society's breakdown, not all the critics were enamored by the author's bleakest, most unforgiving novel.

The Second Coming (1980)

◆ Los Angeles Times Book Prize

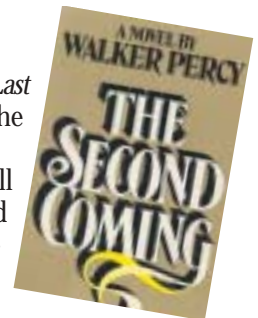
◆ PEN/Faulkner Award Nomination

◆ American Book Award Nomination

Will Barrett returns from *The Last Gentleman*, a little worse for the wear.

THE STORY: Much has changed for Will Barrett: he's now 49, a wealthy retired lawyer, and a widow. But Barrett's despair persists. Still haunted by his father's suicide when Barrett was 12,

Barrett decides to spend the rest of his days in a cave until he receives a sign from God. While making an emergency retreat from his hole, Barrett literally falls into the life of Allie Huger, a young escapee of a mental institution who speaks in her own coded language. As in *The Moviegoer* and *The Last Gentleman*, Percy's damaged men and women find ways to shore each other up.



"Out of the chance meeting of two implausible characters, Percy manages to create a superb novel.... The Second Coming treats two characters who are suffering because of their age's impoverished view of the possibilities of human life, and it sees them through to a full recovery." *Christian Science Monitor*, Aug. 20, 1980.

"... his best book since *The Moviegoer* and among the most admirable American novels of the past few years."

The New Republic, July 5, 1980.

"A book as bad as this, from a writer as intelligent and sympathetic as Walker Percy, makes one heartsick.... He is a beguiling, uniquely gifted novelist who deserves to be read in order and in full. His worst novel, this one, is still more interesting than most writers' best shot." Newsweek,

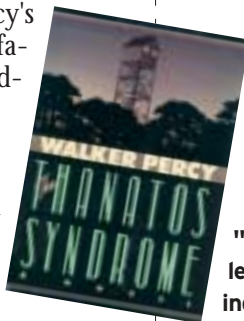
July 7, 1980.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Though Percy's usual obsessions—language, signs and symbolism, and religion—are pushed out farther in the foreground, this book represents his most unabashed love story. Percy's fairy tale-like romance garnered mostly favorable reviews, though some critics considered this book a misstep.

The Thanatos Syndrome (1987)

With a title of which Robert Ludlum would have been proud, this is Percy's most thriller-like novel. Percy's message once again: humanity is severely flawed, but science isn't necessarily the answer.

THE STORY: As he did in *Love in the Ruins*, Dr. Tom



More investigates the strange behavior he sees around him. Recently released from a two-year stint in federal prison, More investigates the strange behavior he's noticed among citizens of his hometown. Along the way, he uncovers a social-engineering plot to make people docile by contaminating the water supply, as well as a child molestation ring in a prestigious private school.

"Though *The Thanatos Syndrome* reads like a good thriller, it plays for bigger stakes.... Nobody presently writing has so keen an eye for the surreal quality of our cultural topography." The New Republic, April 13, 1987.

"There is ample evidence of Percy's brilliance in *The Thanatos Syndrome*...But the book is seriously marred by the byzantine melodrama of its plot, which begins to seem like a movie made for the prime-time television Percy so frequently refers to." The Atlantic Monthly, April 1987.

"Even by the high standards that Percy has already led us to expect of him, this is still a very good book indeed." National Review, May 22, 1987.

THE BOTTOM LINE: One of Percy's darkest novels, and certainly his most heavily plotted. The layers of unfolding mysteries keep readers turning the pages. ■

PERCY'S NON-FICTION

Along with his novels, Walker Percy also gained notoriety for a body of provocative non-fiction work. In these books, Percy delves into the same obsessions that fuel his novels—existential crises, language, and the possibility of the end of the world.

Well before he garnered acclaim as a novelist, Percy had been writing essays on language and existence for several small literary and psychiatric journals. **THE MESSAGE IN THE BOTTLE** (1975) is a collection of this work from 1954 through 1975. With titles such as "Toward a Triadic Theory of Meaning" and "Symbol as Hermeneutic in Existentialism," Percy is working here as a serious theoretician; general readers will find his essays on language, in particular, tend towards the esoteric. Fans of Percy's fiction, however, will be interested in his explorations of existential angst. "The Man on the Train," a study of alienation as seen through the prism of literature and film, anticipates the themes he would later explore in *The Moviegoer* and *The Last Gentleman*, while "Notes for a Novel About the End of the World" suggests he was thinking ahead to *The Thanatos Syndrome*.

If Tony Robbins were an existentialist with a wry sense of humor, he might come up with something like



LOST IN THE COSMOS: THE LAST SELF-HELP BOOK (1983). Written at a time when the self-help craze had taken off—everything from books to televangelists—Percy skewers the genre while providing thought-provoking commentary. Here Percy tackles the nature of selfhood by examining 20 aspects of self (The Fearful Self, The Depressed Self); each section includes a multiple-choice questionnaire and a "thought experiment," through which the reader is encouraged to actively engage the issue at hand. (Sample question: "What does the saleslady mean when she fits a customer with an article of clothing and says: 'It's you!'") As Jack Beatty wrote in *The New Republic*, "Read it to find out why you can't look anyone in the eye, why Johnny Carson can't think of anything to say at a party, and why John Cheever was right when he said that 'the main emotion of the adult North Eastern American who has had all the advantages of wealth, education, and culture is disappointment.' "

There is also **SIGNPOSTS IN A STRANGE LAND**, a posthumous collection of magazine pieces dating back to 1935. Though there are some of philosophical ruminations here about language, existence, and Catholicism, the collection shows Percy's lighter side with essays on drinking (with a family recipe for mint juleps) and life in the South. ■

G a b r i e l

G a r c í a

M á r q u e z

LATER THIS YEAR, THE NOBEL PRIZE WINNER WILL PUBLISH THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE FIRST VOLUME OF HIS MEMOIRS. IN ANTICIPATION, WE TAKE A LOOK BACK AT A LIFE'S WORK.

BY JESSICA TEISCH

García Márquez is Latin America's preeminent man of letters. His international bestseller, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), an unforgettable family saga that mines Colombia's violent history, brought him universal acclaim, including the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982. Yet "Gabo" is also something of a revolutionary: he is friends with Fidel Castro, criticizes American culture and its influence, and was involved in negotiations to end the civil wars in El Salvador and Nicaragua. Above all, García Márquez's work reflects Latin America's dark past. Yet his recurring themes of violence, solitude, and love transcend national borders.

A POLITICAL KIND OF "MAGICAL REALISM"

García Márquez's political venom and trademark "magical realist" style, which weaves dreamlike elements into critiques of Latin American life, came from his upbringing. The eldest of twelve children, he was born in 1928 in the small, banana-growing town of Aracataca, Colombia. He was weaned on family myth and history. His grandmother told fairytales, and his grandfather recounted his days as a colonel in the War of a Thousand Days. García Márquez was particularly influenced by his grandfather's memories of Aracataca's violent

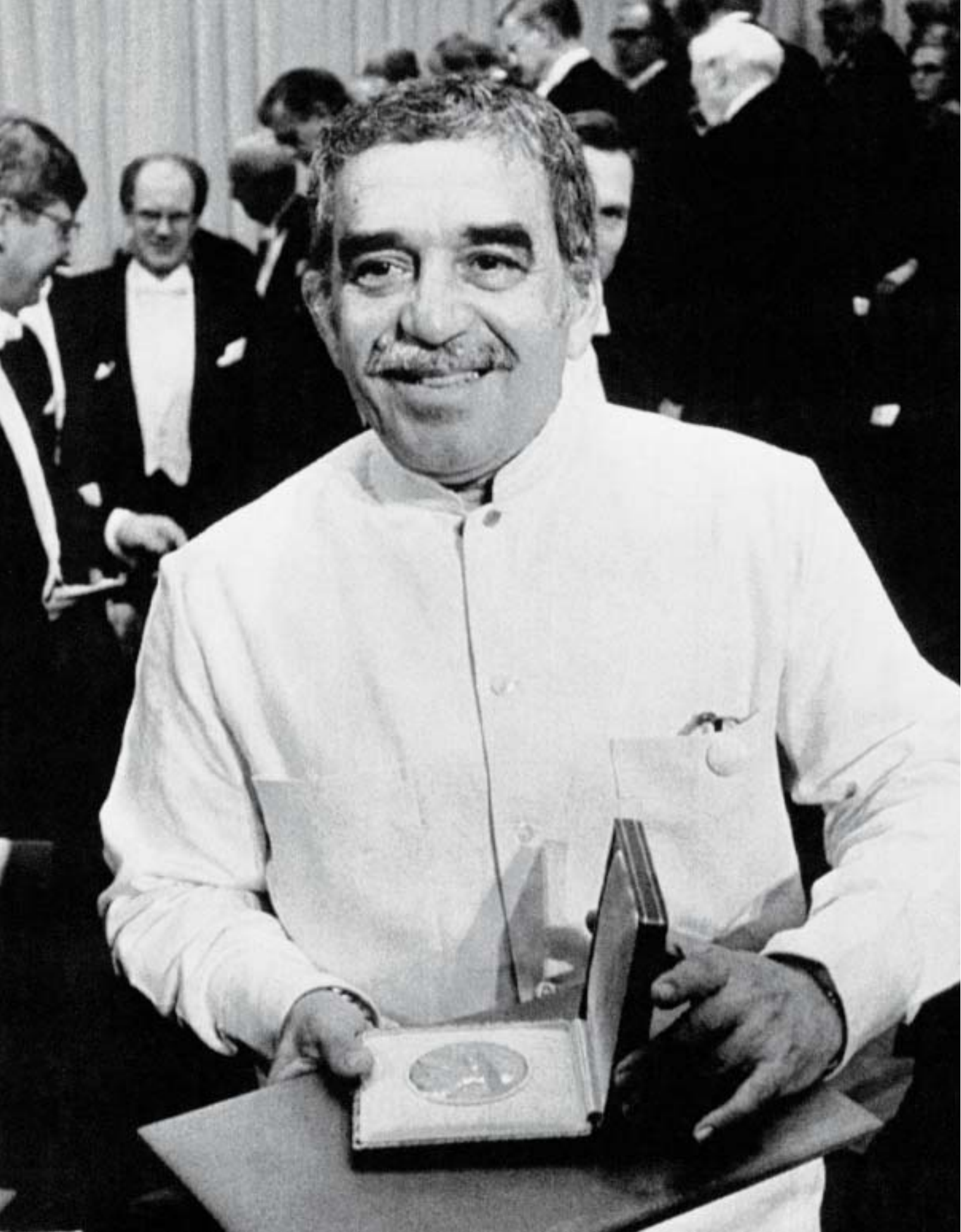
banana strike of '28, in which Colombian soldiers massacred hundreds of workers who demanded better conditions from the American-owned United Fruit Company. This incident inspired García Márquez's lasting hatred of Latin America's relationship with the U.S. "One of these days," Colonel Aureliano Buendía shouts in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, "I'm going to arm my boys so we can get rid of these shitty gringos!" Aracataca also became the model for the magical town of Macondo in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *Leaf Storm*, and other stories.

García Márquez's politics, too, were homegrown. He studied law at the National University in Bogotá, where he became steeped in Marxist literature. After political unrest closed the university in 1947, he turned to journalism and established his name at *El Espectador*. A year later civil war (La Violencia) broke out between Liberal and Conservative supporters. García Márquez joined the Communist Party of Colombia in 1950 and used its underground leaders as sources for stories. He also started writing fiction and spent several years abroad. His first novels, including *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Autumn of the Patriarch*, reflect Latin America's difficult, lonely path to modernity.

But García Márquez decorated this

WHERE TO START

ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE is considered the reason Márquez won the Nobel Prize. The story of three generations of the Buendía family embodies Márquez's magical realist style. Also consider **LOVE IN THE TIME OF CHOLERA** or, for a taste of his non-fiction, **NEWS OF A KIDNAPPING**.



path with soothsayers, flying carpets, and beached Spanish galleons. The "magical realism" genre that Miguel Angel Asturias, the 1967 Nobel Laureate, popularized in Latin America in the 1960's soon marked his literary style. García Márquez says he based the tone in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* on his grandmother's poker face. "She told things," he writes, "that sounded supernatural and fantastic, but she told them with complete naturalness." Yet when García Márquez first sat down to write, he discovered that he first had to convince himself of his own veracity before he could write stories "with the same expression with which my grandmother told them: with a brick face."

García Márquez's harrowing tales of isolation, peasant violence, farcical politics, and unrequited love continue to spellbind readers. His recent life mirrors some of these themes. In 1981, a few years after founding a leftist newspaper and working with political prisoners, the Colombian military accused García Márquez of conspiring with the M19 guerrillas (now legal). He sought asylum in Mexico City, where he resides with his wife, Mercedes. He has just published *Living to Tell It*, the first of a projected three volume set of his memoirs. It is currently available only in Spanish and will be published in the United States by Random House in late 2003. In its first ten days, it sold over 300,000 copies in Spain.

MAJOR WORKS

One Hundred Years of Solitude/ Cien Años de Soledad (1967)

- ◆ Chianchiano Prize (Italy, 1969)
- ◆ Best Foreign Book (France, 1969)
- ◆ Honoris Causa (Colombia, 1971)
- ◆ Rómulo Gallegos Prize (1972)

García Márquez wrote this novel in eighteen months of solitude. It has been translated into more than 30 languages and is considered the book that earned him the Nobel Prize.

THE STORY: García Márquez brings epic proportions of fantasy, love, adventure, and sorrow to the Buendía family, a clan living in the enchanted South American town of Macondo. The novel opens with an eccentric patriarch and matriarch, and follows their unique progeny through generations of love and loss, war and peace, and life and death.

"[The book] is generally credited with inaugurating the genre of "magic realism" novels which combine the matter-of-fact narrative style of conventional realistic fiction with fantastic nonsense such as levitation and alchemy."

Sunday Telegraph, 1999.

"Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* struck with incalculable force. . . . More important, *Solitude* focused broader interest on Latin American fic-

NOVELS

Leaf Storm/La Hojarasca, 1955

García Márquez's first novella, influenced by William Faulkner, introduces Macondo, the mythical village that reappears throughout his work. The story: an honorable Colonel promises to bury the Doctor, a hated foreigner. A frighteningly humorous look at the town's past, present, and future ensues.

No One Writes to the Colonel/El Coronel No Tiene Quien Le Escriba, 1961

García Márquez started this novel when he was in Paris, but published it years later. In a town near Macondo, the Colonel, a character loosely based on García Márquez's grandfather, unflinchingly waits for pension checks that never arrive. Although poverty stricken, he does have one thing: a prize-winning fighting cock. But

to keep this rooster in shape for the next match, he must feed it and starve himself.

Big Mama's Funeral/Los Funerales de la Mamá Grande, 1962

García Márquez derived the themes for this collection of eight stories when he sold encyclopedias in 1853.

In Evil Hour/La Mala Hora, 1962

A short novel originally titled "This Town of Shit." Influenced by Ernest Hemingway, this story revisits the town and characters in *No One Writes to the Colonel*. Yet this time, the townspeople are gossipy and malicious, and the country is falling apart. Scenes from this dark novel inspired *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

* One Hundred Years of Solitude/Cien Años de Soledad, 1967

The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor/ Relato de un Naufrago, 1970

In 1955 a Colombian ship full of contraband sank at sea. One of the survivors told his story to García Márquez, who then serialized it in *El Espectador* (and later published it as a novel). The survivor's version was contrary to the government's, causing his own, and the newspaper's, spectacular downfall.

* The Autumn of the Patriarch/El Otoño del Patriarca, 1975

Innocent Eréndira and Other Stories/ La Increíble y Triste Historia de la Cándida Eréndira, 1978

A young girl, Eréndira, accidentally sets fire to her grandmother's house, and her grandmother sells her into prostitution. The other eleven short stories, including

*Books are discussed in Major Works

tion and led the way to the author's Nobel Prize." *Time*, 3/7/83.

"The narrative is a magician's trick in which memory and prophecy, illusion and reality are mixed and often made to look the same. It is, in short, very much like García Márquez's astonishing novel."

The New York Times, 3/8/70.

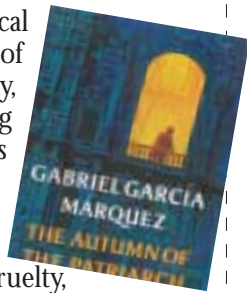
THE BOTTOM LINE: García Márquez's undisputed masterpiece.

The Autumn of the Patriarch/El Otoño del Patriarca (1975)

García Márquez called this satirical novel "a poem on the solitude of power." This portrait of tyranny, which the author wrote after spending a year studying in Francisco Franco's Spain, reverberates to this day.

THE STORY: A Caribbean dictator on his deathbed represents the worst traits of South America's autocrats: cruelty, brutality, oppression. Yet the dying tyrant is caught in the prison of his own dictatorship—he's a paranoid monster who scours his palace for assassins each night, can't hold onto women, and fears God.

"[García Márquez 's] wheezing tyrant, with his flat feet and his hernia, sloping through a decrepit presidential



palace littered with cows and lepers and concubines, losing an obsessively loved woman during an eclipse, instituting a campaign for the canonization of his mother the birdwoman, listening indefatigably to radio soap operas whose scripts have been rigged to please him, is a myth come alive." *New York Review of Books*, 12/9/76.

"As is to be expected from García Márquez, this novel about a Latin American dictator is mystical and surrealistic in its excesses, its distortions and its exotic language. It is a supreme polemic against any society that encourages or even permits the growth of such a dictator." *The New York Times*, Editors' Choice 1976.

BOTTOM LINE: García Márquez's most stylistically labyrinthine work, but rewarding in its stunning portrait of total-and flawed-power.

Chronicle of a Death Foretold/ Crónica de una Muerte Anunciada (1983)

Fidel Castro helped proofread this novel, a Bogotá weekly was sued for 20 million pesos over it, and Rupert Everett starred in the movie.

THE STORY: García Márquez opens this novel with a marriage in a seaside Colombian town. On their wedding night, the husband inexplicably mistreats his new wife, who turns out to have certain skeletons in the closet. What ensues is a fatal-and inevitable-act of vengeance.

"Eyes of a Blue Dog" and "Eva Is Inside Her Cat," touch on themes of solitude and isolation.

* **Chronicle of a Death Foretold/Crónica de una Muerte Anunciada, 1981**

* **Love in the Time of Cholera/El Amor en los Tiempos del Cólera, 1985**

Clandestine in Chile: The Adventures of Miguel Littín/ La aventura de Miguel Littín Clandestino en Chile, 1986

A journalistic account of Chilean film director Littín's filming of Chile's military dictatorship. García Márquez interviewed the filmmaker and then wrote a shocking account of military oppression.

* **The General in His Labyrinth/El General en Su Labertino, 1989**

Collected Stories Stories, 1990
A collection of 26 of García Márquez's stories found in three Spanish vol-

umes: *Eyes of a Blue Dog*, *Big Mama's Funeral*, and *The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Eréndira and Her Heartless Grandmother*. The collection includes "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" and "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World," which show the author's unsurpassed storytelling skill.

Strange Pilgrims/Doce Cuentos Peregrinos, 1992

A collection of twelve stories about Latin American ex-pats in Europe. Heralded as surreal and terrifying, these Twilight Zone-like stories-in which a wife unknowingly enters an insane asylum and a dog is trained to grieve for her owner-are among García Márquez's best.

Of Love and Other Demons/ Del Amor y Otros Demonios, 1994

The story of a doomed love affair between a 12-year old girl, Sierva María, and Father Cayetano, a 36-year old priest hired to exorcise the demons

she acquires from a rabid dog. This haunting novel, set in a colonial seaport in mythic South America, mirrors scenes in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

The Smell of the Guava Tree/Olor de la Guayaba, 1995

A collection of articles from García Márquez's days as a journalist.

* **News of a Kidnapping/Noticia de un Secuestro, 1996**

For the Sake of a Country Within Reach of the Children, 1998

García Márquez originally wrote this essay as a prologue to a "state of the nation" analysis published by a group of Colombian reformers. He paints an optimistic future of Colombia based on its human potential and national spirit.

Collected Novellas, 1999

Contains three novellas: *Leaf Storm*, *No One Writes to the Colonel*, and *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*.

GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ ON MODERNITY, AMERICAN-STYLE

García Márquez is not only extremely nationalistic, but anti-American as well. Officially, the feeling runs both ways. Despite his friendship with the Clintons, the U.S. is one of the few places that restricts the author's visa privileges. He worked in Cuba as a news reporter in 1959 and is chummy with Fidel Castro, whom he cites as "one of the greatest idealists of our time" (*The New Republic*, 8/25/97). García Márquez has this to say about the U.S.:

ON DEMOCRACY

"Democracy in the developed countries is a product of their own development and not vice versa. To try to introduce it in a crude form into countries with other cultures-like those of Latin America-is as mechanical and unreal as to try to introduce the Soviet system." *The New Republic*, 8/25/97.

IN DEFENSE OF PRESIDENTIAL SCANDALS

"It is one thing to lie in order to deceive; but it is quite another to conceal truths in order to protect that mythical dimension of human existence that is private life . . . Disastrously, with the same insistence with which he had denied blame, [Bill Clinton] later admitted [his affair with Monica Lewinsky] and went on admitting it over all the media, written, visual and spoken, to the point of humiliation-a fatal error in an uncertain lover, whose secret life will go into the history books not for having made love badly but for having made it a lot less glorious than it should be." *salon.com*, 8/19/02.

ON CUBAN REFUGEES

"Nobody in Miami seems to care about the harm being done to [Elián González'] mental health by the cultural uprooting to which he is being subjected. At his 6th birthday party . . . his hosts took a picture of him wearing a combat helmet, surrounded by weapons and wrapped in the flag of the United States, just a short while before a boy of his age in Michigan shot a classmate to death with a handgun. In other words, the real shipwreck of Elián did not take place on the high seas, but when he set foot on American soil." *The New York Times*, 3/29/00.

"The book, as is to be expected from García Márquez, is mystical, surrealistic, Rabelaisian in its excesses, its distortions and its exotic language. But García Márquez's sense of life is that surreality is as much the norm as banality." *The New York Times*, 10/31/76.

"[The novel] is a short, strange and ingeniously conceived metaphysical detective story in which the detective, García Márquez, reconstructs the events associated

with a murder that occurred in a Caribbean town 27 years before . . . This murder will stand among the many in modern literature as one of the most powerfully rendered." *The New York Times Book Review*, Editors' Choice 1983.

"*Chronicle of a Death Foretold* is a small book, hardly more than a novella (as Henry James would call it), but in no sense is it a minor work." *New York Review of Books*, 4/14/83.

BOTTOM LINE: A powerful novel that shows the power of fate over human will.

MOVIE: 1988, starring Rupert Everett, Gian Maria Volonte, and Ornella Muti and directed by Francesco Rosi.



Love in the Time of Cholera/ El Amor en los Tiempos del Cólera (1985)

García Márquez based this tragicomic story of unrequited love on his parents' strange, but not as extraordinarily lengthy, courtship.

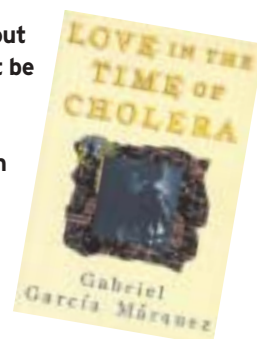
STORY: A vow of love takes 51 years, nine months, and four days to fulfill. The pathetic Florentino Ariza courts the youthful Fermina Daza, only to lose her to the wealthy Juneval Urbino. At the latter's funeral 51 years later, Ariza again declares his love to Fermina, precipitating a chain of events that reunites the couple near the end of their lives.

"Love's power to grow in such dark interstices, to transcend life's profanities yet remain elusively unscathed, to remain even sacred, is one of the most skillfully rendered themes of the novel." *Arete Magazine*, 12/88.

"This may be the only way to write about love; without the darkness there might be romance, erotica, social comedy, soap opera—all also present in this book—but not the Big L. . . . this novel can return our worn souls to us." *The New York Times*, Editors' Choice 1988.

"What distinguishes this novel from the sentimental work it continuously alludes to is not irony or distance but a certain persistent lucidity. This is not a tearful text; just scrupulously loyal to tearful stories." *New York Review of Books*, 4/28/88.

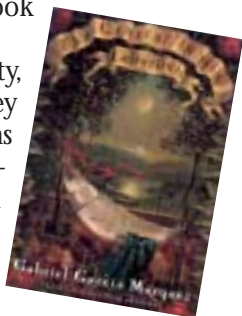
THE BOTTOM LINE: *The New York Times* says it best: "This shining and heartbreaking novel may be one of the greatest love stories ever told."



The General in his Labyrinth/ El General en Su Labertino. (1990)

There is history in fiction, and fiction in history. Nowhere does García Márquez meld the two more tightly than in this look at Simón Bolívar's last years.

THE STORY: As Bolívar, age fifty, takes a seven month river journey from Bogotá to the sea, he remains caught in a past of his own making: the dream of South American liberation and his wars, loves, and transgressions. The once-fierce Liberator dies as the world he created dissolves around him.



"Between them, Simon Bolivar and Gabriel García Márquez invented Latin America. That one of these continental dreamers should novelize the other isn't a surprise." The Nation, 12/3/90.

"One hardly expects a carefully realistic historical novel from an author as noted for imaginative ingenuity as is Mr. Márquez's, but such a novel is what he has chosen to write, and he has done it extremely well." The Atlantic, Oct. 1990.

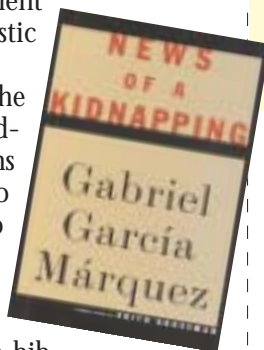
"Gabriel García Márquez, with more than a few touches of his novelist's art, has improved on history." New York Review of Books, 10/11/90.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Tough, compassionate, hallucinatory. For those primarily interested in Bolívar's life.

News of a Kidnapping (1997)

García Márquez claims that he is "really a journalist who just happens to write some fiction on the side" (*The New Yorker*, 9/27/99). This harrowing, insider account of Colombia's violent drug wars confirms that journalistic talent.

THE STORY: Set in Colombia in the early '90s, this story recalls the kidnappings of prominent Colombians by the agents of drug trafficker Pablo Escobar, who feared extradition to the U.S. Ten prominent Colombians were kidnapped and held hostage. Two died, the rest were released, and Escobar surrendered. But "the biblical holocaust that has been consuming Colombia for more than twenty years" has yet to end.



"While the language in *News of a Kidnapping* is reportorial, even flat, a far cry indeed from the luxuriant prose of the author's novels, the narrative possesses all the drama and

THE NOBEL PRIZE

THE LECTURE

"... Europeans of good will-and sometimes those of bad, as well-have been struck, with ever greater force, by the unearthly tidings of Latin America, that boundless realm of haunted men and historic women, whose unending obstinacy blurs into legend. We have not had a moment's rest... In spite of this, to oppression, plundering and abandonment, we respond with life. Neither floods nor plagues, famines nor cataclysms, nor even the eternal wars of century upon century, have been able to subdue the persistent advantage of life over death... [W]e, the inventors of tales, who will believe anything, feel entitled to believe that it is not yet too late to engage in the creation of the opposite utopia. A new and sweeping utopia of life, where no one will be able to decide for others how they die, where love will prove true and happiness be possible, and where the races condemned to one hundred years of solitude will have, at last and forever, a second opportunity on earth." Gabriel García Márquez, 12/8/82

... AND THE NOBLE DISSENTERS

Not everyone agreed that García Márquez deserved the Nobel Prize.

JOHN UPDIKE, author of 26 novels: "A fine choice, but... I'd rather have seen Borges get it; he's at the end of his career. Márquez is a writer of true significance, yet offhand, I can't think of anyone who has received the Nobel who has published less."

Professor, novelist, and poet **ROBERTO RUIZ**: "I do not grudge García Márquez the award... [But] there are at least a half-dozen Latin American writers more deserving of the Nobel Prize... If you consider the novel depends on fantasies, fine; but the philosophical depth of those older writers is absent, I'm sorry to say, in García Márquez"

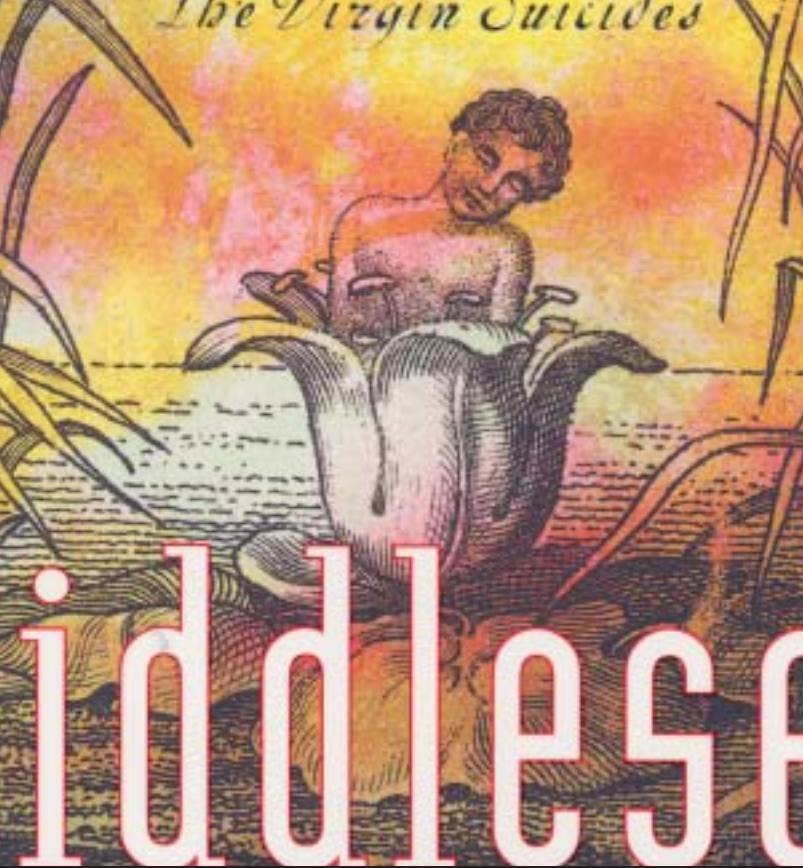
Novelist **KURT VONNEGUT**: "No writer is going to object to the naming of García Márquez. Of course, you hear random rumors. I knew my name had come up. Usually, there aren't leaks like that. But what the hell."

emotional resonance of García Márquez's most powerful fiction." The New York Times, 6/19/97.

"This surreal drama would seem like perfect raw material for García Márquez's fantastical talent, yet *News of a Kidnapping* is surprisingly flat and unsuspenseful." salon.com, 7/2/97.

"To give an intelligible account of the kidnappings and the negotiations, García Márquez has made use of all his storyteller's ingenuity." New York Review of Books, 10/9/97.

THE BOTTOM LINE: One of García Márquez's finest pieces of journalism. ■



bookmarks
magazine

NEW BOOKS GUIDE



Who Doesn't Write Good?

BY JESSICA TEISCH



A Reader's Manifesto

An Attack on the Growing Pretentiousness of American Literary Prose

by B.R. Myers

THE BOOK

Let's face it—writers, their critics, and the media have an incestuous, often antagonistic relationship. A well-placed phrase in a prominent publication can make or break another writer's reputation. In 1998 John Updike dealt a blow to Tom Wolfe's *A Man in Full* by publicly denouncing its literary value. John Irving and Norman Mailer piled on, and a literary brawl ensued. Just last year when Jonathan Franzen, citing a conflict between Great Literature and Popular Culture, refused to appear



on Oprah's TV Show, the media went berserk. Such are the battles among literary giants.

Rarely does an unknown voice step into the fray. Enter B. R. Myers with *Manifesto*, a scathing attack on contemporary literary writing. "Give me a time-tested masterpiece or what critics patronizingly call a fun read, *Sister Carrie* or just plain *Carrie*," he writes. "Give me anything, in fact, as long as it isn't the latest must-read novel, complete with a prize jury's seal of approval on the front and a clutch of precious raves on the back."

What's wrong with the prize jury's seal? Lots, says Myers, who originally published an abridged version of *Manifesto* in the July/August 2001 issue of *The Atlantic*. What passes for art, he claims, is "the sort of gibberish that stops all thought dead in its tracks." He accuses some of our nation's most celebrated nov-

elists (and their critics) of advancing dolled up, convoluted prose in the interest of self-promotion. Prize-winning authors E. Annie Proulx, Cormac McCarthy, Don DeLillo, Paul Auster and David Guterson might aim for one thing, but they achieve another: "a prose so repetitive, so elementary in its syntax, and so numbing in its over-use of wordplay that it often demands less concentration than the average 'genre' novel." But to Myers it is no mystery why these kinds of books sell—readers trust handed-down opinions more than their own personal taste.

CRITICAL THEMES

THE STORY VERSUS THE STYLE. Are today's elite readers (the "Sentence Cult") so caught up with trying to grasp the intellectual sounding sentence that they forget about the text? According to Myers, yes. "Serious Writers fail even on their own postmodern terms" by focusing more on style than content. Jonathan Yardley of *The Washington Post* agrees: Besides Saul Bellow, Anne Tyler, Larry McMurtry, and Michael Chabon, few American novelists have intellectual bulk and popular appeal.

THE GOOD OLD DAYS. Myers yearns for the days when writers like Vladimir Nabokov and Saul Bellow, both traditional realists, actually *said* something. Myers's recommendations? Budd Schulberg's *What Makes Sammy Run?* (1941), John O'Hara's *Appointment in Samarra* (1934), and British classics like Patrick Hamilton's *Hangover Square* (1941) and Roy Fuller's *The Second Curtain* (1953). And, if our geisha fetish persists, there's Enchi Fumiko's *The Waiting Years* (1957) and Mori Ogai's *Wild Geese* (1913).

TODAY'S CRITICS. Myers pities American readers. He feels even worse for smart critics who laud bad books and for the combina-

THE AUTHOR

The 39-year old **B. R. MYERS** (Brian Reynolds) conceived of *Manifesto* in 1999, when he read the first sentence of Annie Proulx's acclaimed short story, "The Half-Skinned Steer" (see *Literary Pretenders*). Appalled by its gibberish language, he decided to do something about it.

Until *Manifesto*, Myers had not delved into American literature. Yet contrary to Shulevitz's claim that he is "foreign" to the literary establishment "in every way," Myers is well trained in literary criticism. He was born in New Jersey, raised in his mother's native Bermuda, and moved to South Africa as an adolescent. He was then educated as a philologist in Germany, where he majored in Russian socialist realism and later earned a Ph.D. in North Korean literature. His dissertation, a study of the failure of socialist realism under Kim Il Sung, was published in 1994.

In 1999 Myers wrote a lighthearted polemic against modern literary writing, *Gorgons in the Pool*. Myers ended up purchasing a majority of the copies himself, but one was picked up by Bill Whitworth, editor emeritus of *The Atlantic Monthly*. Whitworth passed the book on to Michael Kelly, and from there, *Gorgons* (renamed *Manifesto*) took off. Myers, who currently teaches North Korean Studies in South Korea, said that *Manifesto* was his last critique of modern American literature: "I've made my point" (*Wall Street Journal* 8/30/02).

SPOTLIGHTS
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ARTS

tion of cultural elitism and media power that shapes popular thought. The press has a choice: It can either continue to plug “unreadable” new books, or “start promoting the kind of novels that will get more Americans reading again” (*Manifesto*).

(London) Observer ★★★★★
“In years to come, literary historians may look back on this manifesto and realise this was the moment at which, like the boy in the fairy tale, someone dared to say out loud that the emperor had no clothes.” ROBERT MCCRUM

Washington Post ★★★★★
“Though I would take mild issue with Myers in regard to Auster—I did like ‘Timbuktu,’ but then I confess to a soft spot for dog stories. . . he’s got the big stuff right.” JONATHAN YARDLEY

Atlantic Unbound ★★★
“A certain kind of pretentious, heavy, pseudo-literary writing has been rewarded for a very long time. So my feeling is that there’s some truth to [Myers’s] argument. . .” JONATHAN FRANZEN

National Review Online ★★★
“If what you’re reading feels more like a crossword puzzle than a narrative, then rest assured, regardless of what the critics are saying, you’re not reading Serious Fiction.” MARK GOLDBLATT

New York Observer ★★★
“Mr. Myers is glib, mean-spirited, occasionally amusing and consistently irritating. . . His essay would be annoying even if he were more often wrong, and his tin ear easier to dismiss.” ADAM BEGLEY

LA Times ★
“[Myers is the] loudest proponent of phony populism who has appeared in some time.” LEE SIEGEL

NY Times ★
“. . . Myers doesn’t have a sure grasp of the world he’s attacking. . . [He] says American critics lack discernment, but hating indiscriminately is a greater sin than loving too much.”

JUDITH SHULEVITZ

WashingtonPost.com ★
“No one will remember this article in a year.” MICHAEL DIRDA

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Nothing recently has raised literary hackles like *Manifesto*. Critics, pro and con, weighed in when the essay first appeared in *The Atlantic*. But not until Judith Shulevitz of *The New York Times* accused Myers of being an “outsider” to the literary world did the viciousness begin. Critics attacked Shulevitz’s needless quip—but few came to Myers’s rescue. “If Shulevitz’s attack is a cheap shot, so too, in a sense, is Myers’s original essay,” wrote Mark Goldblatt of the *National Review*. Even fewer agreed with Yardley of *The Washington Post* that narcissistic writing, is, truly, “the order of the day.”

Reviewers criticized Myers’s methodology, poorly constructed critiques, and backward glances at the good old days of literary writing. But of overwhelming concern was the artificial divide Myers erects between “literary” and “genre” fiction. Such a boundary might exist, but the literary side is larger and more diverse than Myers portrays. Similarly, genre novelists like Stephen King and Michael Crichton receive more review coverage in prominent publications than literary writers like DeLillo. The public buys more genre than literary fiction, and the American bestseller lists rarely include the books Myers criticizes. What is not in question, however, is the solid—if fickle—relationship between the literary establishment and the media. ■

LITERARY PRETENDERS?

Myers focuses much of his criticism on five authors in his *Manifesto*. Here we have selected a passage from each book of which Myers is critical and gathered separate critical reviews of each book. While this imparts a sense of Myers’s argument, it is important to keep in mind that these reviews were not written to directly address Myers’s complaints.

Annie Proulx

Close Range: Wyoming Stories

“The Half-Skinned Steer”

EXCERPT: “In the long unfurling of his life, from tight-wound kid hustler in a wool suit riding the train out of Cheyenne to geriatric limper in this spooled-out year, Mero had kicked down thoughts of the place where he began, a so-called ranch on strange ground at the south hinge of the Big Horns.”

John Updike, included the story in his *The Best American Short Stories of the Century* (1999).

“[‘The Half-Skinned Steer’] begins with a sentence that loops across the page and seems to snare a life in its tightening noose. . . . The first impression is one of simplicity, but on closer inspection hers is an intricate craft, of shaping, paring, and fitting together, nothing accidental, no effect without its exact calibration, no word without a job to do.” HILARY MANTEL, THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS, 5/11/00

“This is a remarkable sentence. There’s not a flabby or unnecessary phrase, and no evidence of virtuoso preening, of an author too appreciatively tasting her own words. . . . As always, when signs are this clear that an author knows her trade, the reader signs on for the journey.” JOHN SKOW, TIME, 5/17/99

MYERS’S VERDICT: “Like so much writing today [this sentence] de-

mands to be read quickly. . . . Slow down, and things fall apart.”

Don DeLillo

White Noise

EXCERPT: “Everything is concealed in symbolism. . . . The large doors slide open, they close unbidden. Energy waves, incident radiation . . . code words and ceremonial phrases. It is just a question of deciphering. . . . Another reason why I think of Tibet. Dying is an art in Tibet . . . Chants, numerology, horoscopes, recitations. Here we don’t die, we shop. But the difference is less marked than you think.”

“There are suspense and an urgent intelligence to Mr. DeLillo’s writing, a sense of the widening gyre and the tight-drawn net. . . . Nowhere is Mr. DeLillo’s take on the endlessly distorted, religious underside of American consumerism better illustrated than in the passage on supermarkets.” JAYNE ANNE PHILLIPS, NY TIMES

“Each of his eleven previous novels has been a far-flung language system, where the gravity is variable. . . . Since [DeLillo] is smarter than we are, better informed, and a lot more sensitive to beauty and dread, trust him.” JOHN LEONARD, THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS

“[F]iction. . . is a kind of religious meditation in which language is the final enlightenment, and it is language, in its beauty, its ambiguity and its shifting textures, that drives my work.” DON DELILLO, 10/21/95

MYERS’S VERDICT: “You couldn’t make that any less coherent if you mixed the sentences up in a hat and pulled them out again at random.”

Cormac McCarthy

The Crossing

EXCERPT: “He ate the last of the eggs and wiped the plate with the tortilla and ate the tortilla and drank the last of the coffee and

wiped his mouth and looked up and thanked her.”

It is a matter of straight-on writing, a veering accumulation of compound sentences, stinginess with commas, and a witching repetition of words. . . . Once this style is established, firm, faintly hypnotic, the crispness and sinuousness of the sentences gather to magic.” ROBERT HASS, EX-POET LAUREATE, THE NEW YORK TIMES

MYERS’S VERDICT: “All the original [sentence] does is say, ‘I express myself differently from the man in the street, therefore I am a writer.’”

Paul Auster

Timbuktu

EXCERPT: “If Willy happened to tug on the leash before Mr. Bones was ready to move on, before he had ingested the full savor of the turd or urine puddle under his scrutiny, he would plant his legs to resist the yank, and so unbudgeable did he become, so firmly did he anchor himself to the spot, that Willy often wondered if there wasn’t a sac hidden somewhere in his paws that could secrete glue on command.”

“In writing this slender fairy tale, Mr. Auster seems to have realized that putting his philosophical theses across does not require deliberately elliptical narratives or fancy, post-modern pyrotechnics, that he can tell an old-fashioned story, replete with sentiment and even flourishes of sentimentality, without losing his voice.” MICHIKO KAKUTANI, NY TIMES

“Auster’s prose is always economical—clipped, precise, the last word in gnomic control.” DENNIS DRABELLE, WASHINGTON POST

MYERS’S VERDICT: “[Most] remarkable is the way that almost every phrase or attribute is followed by one that either says the same thing or adds too little meaning to

warrant the inclusion of both. . . . Swing the hammer often enough, and you’re bound to hit the nail on the head sometime—or so Auster seems to think.”

David Guterson

East of the Mountains

EXCERPT: “They spoke of his wife—now dead—and of his daughter, of silent canyons where he had hunted birds, of august peaks he had once ascended, of apples newly plucked from trees, and of vineyards in the foothills of the Apennines. They spoke of rows of campanino apples near Monte Della Torracchia; they spoke of cherry trees on river slopes and of pear blossoms in May sunlight.”

“In structure and concept *Mountains* is a sort of dry, prose version of Ingmar Bergman’s *Wild Strawberries* minus the haunting, surreal imagery and minus the masterly cinematic manipulation of time and mood. . . . [Many] scenes are visceral, uncompromising and harrowing, and they remind us what this talented writer can do when he isn’t coasting along on automatic pilot.” MICHIKO KAKUTANI, NY TIMES

“As always, Guterson’s most inspired moments come when he describes his beloved Northwest—the fragrant valley of the Winesap apples, the vast rain obscuring the Cascades, the larvae of the viceroy butterfly feeding on poplar leaves, the languid sweep of the red-tailed hawk in July heat, the coyotes’ haunting call at dusk in the pear orchards. . . . it is a compassionate and masterful achievement.”

CHITRA DIVAKARUNI, SF CHRONICLE

MYERS’S VERDICT: “[T]he sheer accumulation of phrases is supposed to fool the reader into thinking that a lyrical effect has been created. . . . What would otherwise be sprightly sentences are turned into mournful shuffles through the use of tautology.” ■

She Said, No... He Said

BY LEANNE MILWAY



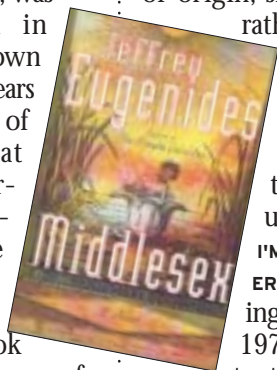
Middlesex

by Jeffrey Eugenides

Hermaphrodite narrator Cal traces the near-mythological tale of one mutant gene through three generations of his eccentric Greek-American family.

THE STORY

CAL STEPHANIDES, 41 and working at the American consulate in Berlin, was born and raised in Detroit—as a girl. Cal (known as Calliope for the first 14 years of his/her life) is the victim of a rare genetic defect that causes his maleness to surface, surprisingly, during puberty. Cal's unfortunate gender confusion is but one ingredient in this thick novel, a novel that took Eugenides nine years to compose after his widely acclaimed debut, *The Virgin Suicides*. It's 1922, and Smyrna, Greece is burning. Cal's grandparents, Lefty and Desdemona, flee their homeland, heading toward the rich promise of America while covering up their forbidden love affair. Cal traces his family (and the mutant gene they carry) through



Prohibition, the Depression, World War II, the Detroit race riots, the Haight-Ashbury counterculture, Watergate, and the energy crisis. Incest, Islam, death, and sexual freedom: it's all here in Cal's spanning epic of a sexual middle ground.

Farrar, Straus, & Giroux. 529 pages. \$27.

CRITICAL THEMES

TAKE ME TO DETROIT ROCK CITY. *Middlesex* is the author's love letter to Detroit. Eugenides tenderly paints his city of origin, showcasing the defects rather than the virtues of a deeply American city. As one critic notes, any novel that can convince a reader to visit Detroit has genuine power.

I'M A FREAK AND A TEENAGER. It's tough enough being a teenager, especially in 1970's suburbia. Adding to the general malaise of adolescence is Calliope's dawning suspicion of her sexual monstrosity. *Middlesex* sensitively portrays Calliope's coming-of-age, replete with a very specific horror and shame. Thankfully, Cal's all-knowing voice can play the confusion for a laugh.

IMMIGRATION, RACISM, AND THE AMERICAN

DREAM. Lefty and Desdemona arrive in America to cash in on their dream - they open a restaurant. The 1967 race riots convince the family to leave the city, and head to the upper-class suburbs. But even here, a Greek-American family will suffer the cruel sting of bigotry. *Middlesex* observes a slice of U.S. history through the kaleidoscope of one family's unique story.

THERE ARE TWO SIDES TO EVERYTHING. *Middlesex* operates on dichotomies: male/female, Greek/WASP, black/white, old world/new, destiny/free will, nature/nurture. Can we make any choices here? Is it determined by the gods or by our grandparents? These questions are the most haunting in the text (who are we?), underscoring every plot twist and character development.

Los Angeles Times ★★★★★
"Eugenides has taken the greatest mystery of all--What are we, exactly, and where do we come from?-- and crafted a story that manages to be both illuminating and transcendent. ... a towering achievement ..." JEFF TURRENTINE

NY Times ★★★★★
...it's [Eugenides's] emotional wisdom, his nuanced insight into his characters' inner lives, that lends this book its cumulative power. ...he has also delivered a deeply affecting portrait of one family's tumultuous engagement with the American 20th century." MICHIKO KAKUTANI

SF Chronicle ★★★★★
"Here's a novel that emphatically declines to state whether it's a guy book or a chick book. Instead, it's the most reliably American story there is: A son of immigrants [searches for love] after growing up feeling like a freak." DAVID KIPEN

Boston Globe ★★★★★
"Middlesex is a big, cheeky, splendid novel, and its confidence is part of its

THE AUTHOR T.S. Eliot summons Eugenides in *The Wasteland*: "Under the brown fog of a winter noon/ Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant/Unshaven, with a pocket full of currants ..." What better excuse is there for becoming a writer? **JEFFREY EUGENIDES** credits his Latin teacher for first pointing out his subtle link to Eliot. It's the critics and readers who lavished praise on his *The Virgin Suicides* debut that solidified his reputation as a real writer.

Eugenides admits to spending two years struggling with his story's voice—he chose a first-person all-knowing narrator to avoid the pronoun complexity of a hermaphrodite - is it a she or a he? Eugenides was inspired by a 19th century memoir of a French schoolgirl and closet hermaphrodite. The author wanted to fill out the experiences of a girl/boy creature in love, and include some intimate details missing from the schoolgirl's chaste account.



SPOTLIGHTS
LIT FIC
POETRY
CRIME
SF
GEN NONFIC
BIO
HISTORY
SCIENCE
SPORTS
ARTS

success, because it goes places few narrators would dare to tread. ... [It's] an old-fashioned story camouflaged in hipster threads, brandishing leather and body piercings but reliant upon ancient conventions as well as a tender heart." GAIL CALDWELL

New Republic ★★★★★
JAMES WOODS

New York Observer ★★★★★
"Middlesex sweeps the reader along with easy grace and charm, tactfully concealing intelligence, sophistication and the ache of earned wisdom beneath bushels of inventive storytelling." ADAM BEGLEY

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★
"Eugenides pitches a big tent, but one of the delights of Middlesex is how soundly it's constructed, with motifs and characters weaving through the novel's various episodes, pulling it tight.." LAURA MILLER

Salon ★★★★★
"It's a big, affectionate and often hilarious book, whose point seems to be that every human being, not just Cal/Calliope, is the culmination of an infinitely unlikely journey through genetic and social history, the product of coincidence and passion, fate and free will, 'what love bequeaths to us before we're born' and what we do with it." ANDREW O'HEHIR

Washington Post ★★★★★
LISA ZEIDNER

NY Review of Books ★★★
"Eugenides's novel seems itself to be composed of two distinct and occasionally warring halves. ... A major problem with Middlesex is that there's nothing all that interesting or distinctive about either half of the main character ... [An] ambitious but malformed novel ..." DANIEL MENDELSON

Esquire ★★
"There aren't enough honest-to-God

CLASSICAL BORROWING

Middlesex puts a modern twist on the classics of Greek mythology, incorporating odysseys, transformations, passionate lust, and a trans-generational curse. Eugenides borrows liberally from - and pays careful homage to - a long list of timeless greats; some well known, some not-here's a primer:

TEIRESIAS: In her school performance of *Antigone*, it is Callie who lands the role of the blind prophet Teiresias. The seer in Sophocles's classic was born a man, turned into a female for seven years, and eventually reversed back to his original form. Now he is all knowing, a psychic with the power to know both sexes. In a separate story, the gods Zeus and Hera are arguing about whether men or women find sex more pleasurable. Teiresias is summoned to answer the debate. His final answer to the riddle of the gods? Women, he says, have a better time in bed.

THE METAMORPHOSES: Ovid's collection of ancient mythological stories draws from Virgil, Lucretius, and Homer, and each story contains a transformation. *Middlesex* is in part Eugenides's tribute to this 18 B.C. classic. When Callie admits to enjoying Homer's *Iliad*, she wonders if it's due to the male hormones "manifesting themselves silently inside me."

HERMAPHRODITUS: A minor deity famous for his dual-sexual nature. Hermaphroditus left home at age 15. During his travels he came upon a pool of water, and dived in. The naiad Salmacis who lived in the water fell for Hermaphroditus, overwhelming him with kisses and embraces. She prayed to the gods to not let them ever separate; the two bodies were joined as one.

"THE OBSCURE OBJECT": Callie's name for the recipient of her intense schoolgirl crush and a primary source of her discovery that she's not all female. The name is drawn from Luis Buñuel's film about sexual politics, *That Obscure Object of Desire*. The film concerns a man's helpless misunderstanding of his relationship with a beautiful young woman -- played by two different actresses (to symbolize the different roles one woman can assume).

WALT WHITMAN: The poet knew how to "sing the body electric," pouring out lush verse on the allure of the flesh. Whitman is not shy about praising both sexes: "That of the male is perfect, and that of the female is perfect," he says, speaking of the body. Callie knows exactly what he's talking about.

real-time scenes in this book, not enough story. Eugenides may be hugely talented, and *Middlesex* may be big of heart, but there's just not enough to sink your teeth into here."

ADRIENNE MILLER

Time ★★
"The *Virgin Suicides* was a triumph of strange suburban melancholy. It marked Eugenides as a novelist of voluptuous gifts. *Middlesex* is a sign he's not sure what to do with them."

RICHARD LACAVO

CRITICAL SUMMARY

It's Cal's narration that unites the critics: smart, insightful, wry, and very human. His voice is at once comforting and illuminating--part

male, part female, and part of every one of us. The story moves along at an old-fashioned pace, bursting with bright and specific descriptions that drip with visual effects and pointed observations.

Critics do note a few subpar points. The two lengthy sections focusing on racial issues are studied and didactic. Cal's sexual experiences and identity crisis are brushed over in comparison to the treatment he gives to his parents' and grandparents' affairs. Using a character's hermaphroditism as an allegorical device is a risky maneuver. But despite a few faltering moves, Eugenides hits his mark with aplomb. Cal's story will resonate for everyone, sexual deviant or otherwise. ■

SPOTLIGHTS
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Domestic Dilemmas

BY CARLYN MADDOX



Family Matters

by Rohinton Mistry

The author of *A Fine Balance* receives his third Booker Prize nomination for *Family Matters*.

THE STORY

NARIMAN VAKEEL, a 79 year old Parsi widower, lives with his selfish stepchildren in contemporary Bombay. When Parkinson's disease and an accident render him unable to care for himself, he is carted off to recuperate with his daughter, Roxana, and her family in a tiny apartment. Nariman's presence strains the family emotionally and financially, forcing everyone to reevaluate what they believe about love, compassion, and familial duty.

As Nariman's health deteriorates, secrets from his past unfold. In his youth, he was forced to marry a Parsi widow instead of the Catholic woman he truly loved—a situation that blights the family for decades. A keen observer and dramatist, Mistry explores religious hypocrisy, political strife between Hindus and Muslims, and how one family endures while caring for a dying relative. Knopf. 448 pages. \$26.

CRITICAL THEMES

THE NEW TOLSTOY OR DICKENS? Mistry tackles the big themes of family, illness, religious beliefs and death similar to 19th century masters with his eye for sensual detail and use of grand metaphor. As his characters struggle between domestic obligations and private longings, Mistry creates an expansive family drama in the midst of societal strife in Bombay during the 1990's.

EVERYDAY MATTERS. Unlike many novelists today who create hurried, cinematic plots, Mistry patiently weaves this family's struggle into an intimate setting and illuminates their pain with moments of tender beauty. Caring for Nariman isn't glamorous, and living in poverty-stricken conditions isn't easy for Roxana's family. Still, there is a refreshing reality in how each family member struggles with changing bedpans, listening to Nariman's nostalgic ramblings, and budgeting for food, medicine and doctor bills. Ordinary details yield a powerful



story, and Mistry misses little in creating this complex family portrait. **A FINE LINE BETWEEN DRAMA AND MELODRAMA.** Many critics find Mistry prone to a sense of contrivance and melodrama; some of the novel's subtlety and grace veer into inconceivable coincidence and sentimentality.

The New Yorker ★★★★★

"...Mistry has kept the patience to tease narrative and moral interest out of domestic life, in a subcontinent of more than a billion striving, often desperate souls...The reader is moved, even to tears, by these rites of passage among characters we have lived with long enough to feel as family." JOHN UPDIKE

NY Review of Books ★★★★★

"Mistry's great gift, in nearly all his writing, is to eliminate every trace of self-consciousness, and to disappear so naturally into his people that nothing seems to come between us and their anguished hopes. His freedom from postmodernist games, and from mythmaking is, in fact, part of what makes him so refreshing and able to draw blood." PICO IYER

Washington Post ★★★★★

"A bald summary of the novel's plot cannot do justice to the richness of its portrait of middle-class life among the tiny Parsi community of Bombay.... In his loving recreation of the trivial and yet life-affirming transactions of domesticity, Mistry draws the reader so deeply into his characters' lives that the smallest of emotional moments carries a powerful poignancy." SHASHI THAROOR

Time International ★★★★★

"This is extraordinary writing—tender and wise, stripped of the inessential. Its power rivals those apocalyptic scenes in *A Fine Balance* and is all the more impressive, given the intimate scale." CHARLES FORAN

THE AUTHOR



ROHINTON MISTRY emigrated from Bombay to Canada in 1975. He worked as a banker and began writing short stories in 1983, publishing *Tales from Firozsha Baag* in 1987. His next publications—*Swimming Lessons* (1989), *Such a Long Journey* (1991), and *A Fine Balance* (1995)—steadily gained acclaim and secured him as a leading novelist.

Central to his stories and novels is the dwindling Parsi community in Bombay, the struggles between Muslims and Hindus, decades of political strife in India, and how families navigate through tragedy and triumph in their lives. All three of his novels, *Such a Long Journey*, *A Fine Balance*, and *Family Matters*, were shortlisted for the Booker Prize; *A Fine Balance* won the Giller Prize in 1995 and was featured as Oprah's forty-fourth pick in 2001.

Atlantic Monthly ★★★★★
"One of the strongest features of Mistry's novels--and the reason he is so reminiscent of the great nineteenth-century writers--is his use, sometimes audacious, of big metaphors...He also manages, with gentle insistence, to focus on what we have and what we are constantly in the process of losing." BROOKE ALLEN

Chicago Tribune ★★★
"...Mistry accrues detail by detail, scene by scene, character by character, with Jamesian precision, gathering weight in such discrete measures that what begins as a light domestic drama, almost a farce, creeps upon the reader with the power of a juggernaut..." BOMAN DESAI

NY Times Book Review ★★★
"...fine but disturbing novel..." JOHN SUTHERLAND

Salon.com ★★★
"[Mistry] writes simply, but by accumulating the small details of his characters' existence, he creates a visceral feel for their loves, humiliations and little victories" MICHELLE GOLDBERG

NY Times ★★
"At its worst, *Family Matters* reads like a book written by someone determined to graft Dickensian stagecraft--uncanny coincidences, operatic misfortune, sociopolitical rumblings--onto a small-scale family drama without really knowing how." MICHIKO KAKUTANI

The Los Angeles Times ★★
"...The symbolism of opposites--big apartment, small childless group; minuscule flat, growing rumbustious family--is duly hammered home: Mistry never shrinks from whacking his readers over the head with the obvious..." PETER GREEN

BACKGROUND ON THE PARSI COMMUNITY

"For readers as uninstructed as myself, it would help to bone up on the Parsi religion before getting too far into the novel." JOHN SUTHERLAND, NY TIMES BOOK REVIEW

Mistry's *Family Matters* embraces the little-known Parsi experience in Bombay and exemplifies their unique and often conflicted community. Nariman's divided heart can be traced to his parents' strict beliefs in only marrying a Parsi; Roxana's husband forbids their sons to change Nariman's bedpans in adherence to Parsi purity; Murad, the eldest son, rebels against Parsi practice and begins to date a non-Parsi classmate. Here tradition clashes with modernity, and Mistry's family is caught in the fray.

The Parsis are a small but successful community living mostly in Bombay. As followers of the prophet Zarathustra, they fled into India during the eighth century after Islamic persecution in Persia. They became arbiters of British rule in the 19th century and accumulated great wealth.

However, the Parsi culture carried the seeds of its own decline: diaspora, prohibition of religious conversion, and the forbidding of inter-faith marriages led to their now endangered status. A recent demographic study predicts that by 2020, the Parsi population will have dropped to around 23,000 and they will be considered a "tribe."

Certain rituals play a role in *Family Matters*. Essential to Parsi practice is prayer at the fire temple, where Parsis gather and fuel the continual fire with sandalwood. The Navjote is a ceremony held for all Parsi adolescents and is similar in meaning to the Jewish Bar Mitzvah. In India, the Parsis erected the "Towers of Silence" for their death ceremonies, in which they leave their dead in the open to be devoured by vultures. This validates their belief that there is equality of all people in death.

What Mistry does for the Parsi community in his work is shed light on their struggles to live within religious tradition and also seek opportunities in other cultures or countries. As Parsis today continue to face the challenges of a dwindling community and modern ideas, they remain steadfast in preserving their identity and this is central to the stories that Mistry creates.

Village Voice ★★
"*Family Matters* is vexingly mediocre...the narrator bluntly assigns emotions to characters, at once telling them how to feel and telling the reader how to feel about them." PAUL ELIE

CRITICAL SUMMARY

If you are willing to overlook Mistry's melodramatic flourishes and his penchant for coincidences, *Family Matters* is a compelling and tender domestic drama. Most critics raved about Mistry's acute sense of family relationships and how small details of despair, selfishness, and compassion transformed Nariman's family's struggle into an intimate connection with the reader. Pico Iyer from *The New York Review of Books* applauded Mistry's

ability to get readers to pray for his characters—a feat not easily achieved—and Brooke Allen from *The Atlantic Monthly* contends that the suffering witnessed is "strangely joyful." What soured several reviewers and caused many to have reservations, were the heavy-handed plot twists and a first-person epilogue that threw the book into maudlin territory; Paul Elie from *The Village Voice* quipped that Mistry is "openly writing melodrama" and bluntly assigns emotions to readers. General consensus, however, hails *Family Matters* as an affecting story about characters coping with what Mistry calls the story of "youth, loss, and yearning for redemption." This redemption—as seen through this family's frailties and humanity—is found in matters large and small. ■

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Is Y.S.K.O.V. a H.B.W.O.S.G.?

BY LEANNE MILWAY



You Shall Know Our Velocity

by Dave Eggers

Two mid-twenties semi-slackers trek through exotic international settings while attempting to hand out money. They have one week, one dead friend, and countless existential anxieties.

THE STORY

WILL AND HAND, 27-year-old childhood buddies, embark on a transcontinental journey with a noble goal: to get rid of the \$32,000 Will earned for his appearance in a light bulb ad. They have one week to finish the job. Another reason for their undertaking is the recent death of their friend Jack. They hope to get rid of the money as randomly as they received it and as randomly as Jack died. Will and Hand zip through Senegal, Morocco, and Estonia, looking for people in need. The two soon realize how complicated their task is and in one of many harebrained schemes, consider taping money to donkeys. Will narrates the travel-

logue, including arguments, pick-up basketball games, and inner rants against God. This existential on-the-road adventure is the fiction debut of literary superstar Dave Eggers, author of the acclaimed memoir *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*.

McSweeney's. 376 pages. \$21.

CRITICAL THEMES

TWO BUDDIES, ONE ROAD. Will and Hand join a great tradition of male partnerships; with their creation Eggers borrows from a variety of literary sources. Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty travel the byways of America (Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*). Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon survey the countryside (Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*). Gogo and Didi expect someone who might never show (Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*). Huck Finn and Jim travel down the Mississippi. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern bicker. Beavis and Butthead snicker. And now, Will and Hand?

MONEY, GUILT, AND UGLY AMERICANS. The novel's two bumbling heroes are

racing to unload excess cash, but their race and nationality (as well as the thousands of dollars they care nothing about) afford them numerous advantages. For this, Will is ashamed. Part of his trip is to rid himself of this shame, and the panic and discomfort his privileges cause. (For much of the novel, Will seems on the verge of a nervous breakdown, which certainly doesn't help his guilt.)

GO, GO, GO. Though their goal is constant motion, Will and Hand endure frequent delays. They must deal with rental car flat tires, uncaring ticket clerks, loud American tourists, jaded prostitutes, visa regulations, and brutal weather eruptions. Sometimes it's simpler to stay in the hotel room and watch TV.

HEALING THE PAIN OF LOSS. The two friends are still rattled by Jack's absence, and much of *Velocity* is about Will (and, to a lesser extent, Hand) exorcising the troubling demons of grief. Will's panacea for life's random setbacks? Live well! Swing from tree to tree, observe the setting sun over a new city, and recall the anxiety and excitement of a junior high dance.



DAVE'S WORLD

The cult of DAVE EGGERS has been steadily growing for years. His memoir *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* disclosed his experience following the death of both of his parents within weeks of each other. Suddenly he was foster parent to his brother Toph in San Francisco, where he also started *Might* magazine and auditioned for MTV's *The Real World*. The irreverent and heartfelt work earned rave reviews and propped him on a pedestal marked "The Voice of His Generation."

Then there's the literary quarterly he publishes, *McSweeney's Quarterly Concern*. McSweeney's has morphed into an independent book publisher, promising to hand authors a large cut of profits, since it operates without the publicity machine and the hordes of editors in high-rise office buildings. Nick (High Fidelity) Hornby recently published a collection of essays on his favorite songs and songwriters with them. *Songbook* includes a CD of the songs Hornby discusses in the collection. Other notable McSweeney's authors include Jonathan Lethem, Stephen Dixon, David Byrne, and Lydia Davis.

Salon ★★★★★
"A certain crabbed critic for a paper of record has complained about Eggers' "shaggy-dog plot" and "self-indulgent yapping," but I think she's showing her age. A writer is among us, however imperfect, and he'll only get better if we leave him alone."

PETER KURTH

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★
"Will must rethink all the things Dave Eggers thought about in *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, like fear, violence, loss, death, unfairness, responsibility, community, redemption, self-aggrandizement and shareware; plus new things like

balance, speed, randomness, chaos, teleportation, quantum physics, retribution, clarity, valor and barbecued beef. He will do this thinking in ruthless self-interrogations, followed by the usual patented Eggers Frisbee sentences that sail, spin, hover, circle and come back to the reader like gifts of gravity and grace." JOHN LEONARD

SF Chronicle ★★★
 "Eggers has managed to craft an entertaining and profoundly original tale. ... And though he coats this meditation on generosity in his helium-inflected humor, there is a self-reflexive sadness, too." JOHN FREEMAN

Entertainment Weekly ★★★
 "...though *Y.S.K.O.V.* coasts only on a charm for scores of pages at a stretch, at its best, it simply moves and is moving. ... Eggers is so attuned to the logic of bereavement and the plain glory of life that his novel deserves something larger than a coquette audience." TROY PATTERSON

New York Magazine ★★★
 "The novel's grinding, at times monotonous rock and roll of plane trips and hotel rooms and (often hilarious) bickering about how to give the money away ... is punctuated by surprising, elegant lyrics: similes, epiphanies, gorgeous writing. ... *You Shall Know Our Velocity* is a messy, funny book. As always with Eggers, not least interesting is figuring out just who the joke is on." JOHN HOMANS

Chicago Tribune ★★★
 "His forte is the messy, funny tirade, stuffed with convincing pain and wry observation. Too bad you have to wade through the adolescent humor to get there." PETER TERZIAN

NY Times ★★
 "A pastiche novel that borrows from myriad sources without ever quite knowing how to meld those borrowings into something new, [the book] feels like a crafts-fair project - bits

AN UNABASHED PLUG FOR 826 VALENCIA

INSIDE 826 VALENCIA, a pirate supply store and drop-in writing lab, you can open up a drawer in the wall and stick your hand in *guts*. Guts! Yes, Dave Eggers's nonprofit organization/store (the only place in San Francisco to purchase quality lard) is *that* kind of place. There's a unique schedule of events, which includes a "heartbroken boy sitting outside lamenting," Tuesday from 3 to 4 p.m., as well as semi-traditional spelling bees, local art shows, and daily puffer fish feedings in a three-seat auditorium.

The heart of 826 is farther inside, past the tented reading library, the trapdoors, and the piles of McSweeney's publications (all proceeds from the store benefit the writing center). Here you'll see computers buzzing with activity. You might step into the middle of a workshop or overhear a tutoring session with neighborhood kids. With over 200 volunteers - many of them Bay Area literati - 826 Valencia is poised to help kids (ages 8 -18) polish their creative writing, brush up on computer skills, publish a zine, or ace a college application essay. Visit www.826Valencia.com for more information.

and pieces of found and homemade objects stuck together, sometimes artfully, sometimes not, into a messy, unconvincing assemblage.... clearly the work of a talented writer cruising along on automatic pilot." MICHIKO KAKUTANI

Philadelphia Inquirer ★★
 "The gist of *Velocity* ... is so patently lame and loaded down with self-pity that it's a wonder somebody didn't inform Eggers...that he was working with an absolute dog of an idea. Such are the perils of self-publishing." DAN DELUCA

Washington Post ★★
 "Eggers writes some wonderful moments, but the reader needs a road to travel on, a sense of direction and some reliable horsepower. And before Will runs out of money, Eggers's literary vehicle has run out of gas." JENNIFER SCHUESSLER

Village Voice ★★
 "Eggers hits on something quintessentially American in this tangle of good intentions and condescension. But the novel churns through the subject too schematically, spelling out the power gap between these American boys and everyone else. ... reading Eggers's listless prose feels more like sitting through some unhinged friend's blurry vacation photos." JOY PRESS

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Dave Eggers can lay claim to some "glorious gifts as a writer" (Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times*), but for the most part, *Velocity* is a mediocre follow-up to his comic and grief-stricken *Heartbreaking Work*. The female characters here are particularly weak, his heroes uneven, and their actions cartoonish--it's a reality TV show posing as fiction. As the men's adventures progress, their escapades become increasingly sophomoric. If a mainstream publisher and not Eggers's own McSweeney's Books had released this novel, it would have undergone a more rigorous editing process (and as more than one critic suggests, maybe Eggers would have reconsidered the project). But perhaps these harsher criticisms can be traced to the pompous prejudices of older reviewers. Despite some flaws, *Velocity* is original, entertaining, and packed with a deep-felt understanding of grief, of the confusing experience of money, and of life's disappointments. All critics singled out several notable set pieces in which Eggers's flair for words buoys the novel's thin plot. His target audience (confused 27-year-olds?) will surely discover treasures to store in, as Eggers puts it, that "small Velcro pocket in the parachute pants of your soul." ■

SPOTLIGHTS
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Boys Will Be Boys

BY JESSICA TEISCH



The Blank Slate

The Modern Denial of Human Nature

by Steven Pinker

Pinker's new book about human nature argues for genetically programmed behavior and a reexamination of science's political implications. But what does it add to the existing debate?

THE ARGUMENT

WE HAVE LONG EXPLAINED human nature in two radically different ways. The first theory attributes human behavior to environment and culture (the "tabula rasa," or blank slate theory), and the second, to nature and genetic inheritance. Pinker attempts to debunk contemporary versions of the former by arguing that human nature is a science. "We are our brains," he writes, a collection of innate, hereditary genetic traits. Although environment and culture can help shape them, we can't fundamentally change them. Pinker relies on new sciences of the mind to analyze the political implications of science—from abortion and

animal rights to serial killers and genetically modified food. He concludes that as individuals we fit into an overall "psychological unity of our species."

Viking, 509 pages. \$27.95.

CRITICAL THEMES

CONTROVERSIAL EVIDENCE.

Pinker lodges his complaint against "blank slaters" by touting three relatively new strands of scientific thought: cognitive psychology, behavior genetics, and evolutionary psychology. Yet according to some critics, Pinker misinterprets results of heritability studies, confounds the idea of instinct, and exaggerates the "rules" of human behavior. "Saloon-bar assertions," animal behaviorist Patrick Bateson writes in *Science*, "... do a disservice to the really powerful biological arguments that can be deployed." *The New Scientist* agrees that if "we read carefully, the contributions of evolutionary theory, psychology or neuroscience appear to be either little or controversial" to Pinker's claims and the larger nature-nurture debate.

BACK TO NATURE. Pinker's evolutionary psychology approach might get



our gears turning, but most critics agree that it adds questionable value to the nature-nurture debate. This raises the larger question: Is this age-old controversy even meaningful anymore? Few people, after all, deny the link between genes and specific traits. Some critics question whether Pinker's work only fuels another round of what has become a "tedious and increasingly irrelevant nature-nurture debate," rather than shedding new light on the issue (*Science*). But whether it's nature or nurture, there's some consensus that *Blank Slate* brings us "no closer than we ever were to figuring ourselves out" (*San Francisco Chronicle*).

A POLITICIZED SCIENCE. It's not Pinker's new science of human nature that's so intriguing to critics, but rather the political implications of that science. "Human nature and morality are not the same thing, but they tend to be connected in people's minds," Pinker claims (*Pittsburgh Tribune Review*). Critics agree with Pinker's claim that our innate wiring should not dictate our values, but they see problems with his methodology. *The Washington Post* notes that when discussing values, Pinker confounds the "blank slate" position with the "noble savage" (we are born virtuous) and "ghost in the machine" (the mind is free) dogmas, which discredit his high-minded claims. Similarly, Pinker's philosophizing over our value system overstates "what science does and does not know about human beings" (*Wall Street Journal*).

Human Nature Review ★★★★★
"Pinker's thinking and writing are first-rate... maybe even better than that... It is unlikely to change the minds of those who are rigidly committed to the blank slate perspective,

THE AUTHOR



With his wild mane, twinkling blue eyes, bright smile, and snazzy dress, STEVEN PINKER looks like a rock star. But though he once fantasized about being on stage, music was never his thing; psychology was. The 49-year old Pinker, who describes himself as an "erstwhile '60s radical," was raised in Montreal's Anglophone Jewish community (*Maclean's*, 5/1/00). He studied psychology at McGill

University and received his Ph.D. in experimental psychology from Harvard in 1979. Noam Chomsky, who argued that all languages have some universal qualities, inspired much of Pinker's work on visual cognition and the psychology of language. "It was the first time that I had heard of language being an innate ability," Pinker said (*Scientific American*, 7/99). Pinker has taught in the Departments of Psychology and Brain and Cognitive Sciences at M.I.T. since 1982. *The Language Instinct* (1994) made him one of our nation's most popular (and media friendly) science writers.

but for anyone whose 'nature' includes even a modicum of open-mindedness, it should prove a revelation."

DAVID P. BARASH (PROF. OF PSYCHOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON, SEATTLE)

Economist

★★★★

"Though he seems to have a point to score or a joke to crack about almost every topic on earth, he makes his main argument persuasively and with great verve. . . . *The Blank Slate* ought to be read by anybody who feels they have had enough of nature-nurture rows or who thinks they already know where they stand on the science wars."

Los Angeles Times

★★★★

"Pinker presents an unanswerable case for accepting that man can be, as he is, both wired and free. . . . As a brightly lighted path between what we would like to believe and what we need to know, it is required reading."

FREDERIC RAPHAEL (PHILOSOPHER)

SF Chronicle

★★★★

"The essential elements of this story have been aired before, but it all seems surprisingly new when assembled here in one hefty but manageable text. Reading it will warm you and leave you cold, sometimes in the same sentence, as Pinker rubs our fuzzy noses in the uncomfortable facts of biology."

CARL T. HALL (SCIENCE WRITER)

Wall Street Journal

★★★★

". . . Mr. Pinker draws on an impressively broad range of reading to make his case, from genetics to economics to art history and literature. He points us in the direction of a more productive debate, a debate in which the political implications of science are confronted forthrightly and not simply wished away by politicized scientists."

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA (PROF. OF PUBLIC POLICY, GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY)

Washingtonpost.com

★★★★

"Steven Pinker has written an ex-

tremely good book-clear, well argued, fair, learned, tough, witty, humane, stimulating. I only hope that people study it carefully before rising up ideologically against him."

COLIN MCGINN (PROF. OF PHILOSOPHY, RUTGERS UNIVERSITY)

NY Times Book Review

★★★★

"With the triumph of evolutionary theory, Pinker sees a new scientific, cultural and political alignment near, one that accepts a more constrained conception of human nature and adopts corresponding social and economic policies, but does not neglect the genetically less endowed-in short, a compassionate conservatism."

ROBERT J. RICHARDS (PROF. OF HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO)

Time

★★★★

"Anyone who has read Pinker's earlier books. . . will rightly guess that his latest effort is similarly sweeping, erudite, sharply argued, richly footnoted and fun to read. . . . But readers would be wise to apply some skepticism, whether it's native or nurtured."

MICHAEL D. LEMONICK (SCIENCE WRITER)

New Scientist

★★

"*The Blank Slate* is brilliant in several dimensions. . . . Its political motto might be the remark E. O. Wilson made about Karl Marx: 'Wonderful theory. Wrong species.'"

SIMON BLACKBURN (PROF. OF PHILOSOPHY, UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE)

Guardian

★★

"However gravely we need a notion of human nature, this isn't the way in which we are going to find it."

MARY MIDGLEY (PROF. OF PHILOSOPHY, UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE)

Science

★

"I fear that *The Blank Slate* will become a happy hunting ground for the social scientists already predisposed to be skeptical about evolutionary thinking and that the wretched un-

necessary debate over human nature is due for yet another silly round."

PATRICK BATESON (PROF. OF ANIMAL BEHAVIOR, CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY)

CRITICAL SUMMARY

A split among the critics, primarily based on the perceived audience of their review. Most reviews in general newspapers and magazines found *The Blank Slate* to be a vitriolic, combative, eloquent, defensive, humorous, but still not a definitive response to those blank slaters (namely, Richard Lewontin and the late Stephen Jay Gould) who claim that our experiences determine human nature. It's truly an "all-out assault on those who insist that nurture explains everything" (*Time*), that, for most critics, was a well-reasoned, up-to-date view of an age-old quandary.

The more hardcore *Science* cites *Blank Slate* as long on grand theories but short on scientific evidence. Take the human smile, for example, which Pinker cites as a universal human trait. But according to *Science*, expressions that appear to have been shaped by Darwinian evolution actually change according to individual experience.

Bateson in *Science* offers a collective sigh - haven't we been through all this before? Readers of *Science* may have, but the general population could have much to benefit from Pinker's latest effort; few science writers are better at integrating various scientific theories and evidence into a coherent summary. The only problem here is that Pinker has such a strong point of view that his bias undermines the book's value as a balanced analysis of new approaches to the field. Despite these pitfalls, critics believe that *The Blank Slate* is so controversial and ideologically charged that, if you hold no strong beliefs either way, you just might change your mind about human nature. ■

BOOKMARKS
RATINGS

★★★★★ **CLASSIC**
One of the best of its kind.

★★★★ **EXCELLENT**
A recommended book for all readers.

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

★★ **FAIR**
Some problems, approach with caution.

★ **POOR**
Not worth your time.

FICTION
literary

★★★★★

Caramelo

By Sandra Cisneros

Three generations span the bridge between Mexico and the United States.

Caramelo is Sandra Cisneros's second novel. It follows twenty years after her first, *The House on Mango Street*, and eleven years after her acclaimed short fiction collection *Woman Hollering Creek*. In this new work, the author again explores Chicana identity through poetic storytelling. *Caramelo* covers three generations' worth of coming-of-age stories, progressing chronologically from oldest to youngest, and crossing cultural borders between Mexico and the U.S. The novel's many characters take



road trips and establish new lives in Chicago, Mexico City, Acapulco and San Antonio.

Rich in cultural history, English and Spanish language, *Caramelo* derives its title from the 'caramelo rebozo,' or burnt-caramel shawl, a nostalgic object in the story and a literary device linking three generations of the Reyes family together.

Knopf. 448 pages. \$24.

Austin Statesman ★★★★★
"...An immigrant family's challenges... [serve] as a universal memoir for scores of Mexican Americans. [Cisneros's] lessons may be sweetened by prose that approaches poetry, but they are no less instructive for their ease." SHARYN WIZDA VANE

Chicago Tribune ★★★★★
"Cisneros has brought us masterfully into the middle of regular folks living their lives and has made us feel like part of the family." BREENA CLARKE

LA Times ★★★★★
"With *Caramelo*, [an] exuberant, overstuffed new novel, [Cisneros] undertakes storytelling on a grand scale, detailing the struggles and joys of three generations of a family that bridges the Mexican, Mexican American and American experiences during the momentous migrations of the last century..." JANE CIABATTARI

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★
"If any section of this long and vivid novel is less dazzling than the others, it is the one depicting Lala's high school woes - but we have all suffered through high school and this novel must do its hard time there as well." VALERIE SAYERS

Philadelphia Inquirer ★★★★★
"Unforgettable characters drive the multigenerational plot, and the reader can hear in their voices the echoes of marimbas and bamboo flutes, the

eternal sadness of jealousy and love and fear." LAURIE KAPLAN

SF Chronicle ★★★
"Cisneros is superb at assembling... components of memories, and at evoking the sensations of the past in their full complexity. She is less successful when it comes to constructing an overarching narrative that would reveal the long-term development of her characters." DAVID MAZELLA

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Six critics concur that *Caramelo* holds as much literary power as it does popular or cultural value. They use phrases like "expansive," "grand," "ambitious" and "complex" to characterize a shift in Cisneros' storytelling. Her previous novel by contrast was a slender volume of vignettes.

Harsh assertions about *Caramelo* come from contributing *San Francisco Chronicle* critic, David Mazella. A professor of British Literature at the University of Houston, he writes "[the author] seems unable to leave behind the wry and pathetic miniatures that constituted the structure of a work like *Mango Street*."

The Philadelphia Inquirer's Laurie Kaplan, a professor of English at Goucher College, deems *Caramelo* "a glorious book" yet also admits some slowing down in the last few chapters. She excuses this, however, noting that "the frailties of the very young are less shocking than those of a grandmother, an aunt, a papá."

Generally, the words of *The Chicago Tribune's* critic and novelist, Breena Clark, represent the critical community's final verdict. She calls *Caramelo* "an honest novel about national identity and color...breathless, precise and emotionally involving."

- Lora Kolodny, Bookmarks

★★★★

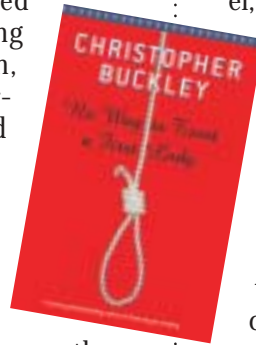
No Way to Treat a First Lady

By Christopher Buckley

A laugh-out-loud satirical look at the Clinton years.

First Lady Elizabeth Tyler MacMann says, "I've hit him much harder before. The time I threw the lamp at him? Four stitches." But this time Lady Beth

Mac (so dubbed by the media) has murdered him—him being Kenneth MacMann, decorated Navy veteran, philanderer, and United States President. His Viagra-induced rendezvous with a Hollywood starlet goads Beth into clocking her adulterous husband over the head with an antique silver Paul



Revere spittoon. In his ninth novel, Buckley, author of best-selling *Thank You for Smoking* and more than 50 *New Yorker* humor pieces, spoofs Clinton-era presidential politics. Beth, for example, loathed by the public for her ambition, is "a far cry from Hillary Clinton, who contented herself with... giving the occasional tea for Congressional wives." When Beth is arrested and charged with assassination, she

★★★★

The Crimson Petal and the White

By Michael Faber

William Rackham is an aspiring writer who joins his family's perfume and cosmetics dynasty. Agnes, his wife, is a proper, if somewhat sexually repressed, woman. Sugar, a spicy nineteen-year old prostitute, is writing a man-hating novel about the realities of prostitution ("If there is one thing I have learned in my time on this Earth," she writes, "it is this. All men are the same.") The year is 1875, and the setting is Notting Hill. Faber infuses the Victorian novel with a twenty-first century sensibility. Faber's plot sounds comfortingly familiar: William formalizes an exclusive "arrangement" with Sugar, Sugar enters the world of bourgeois society as his mistress, and class distinctions blur as love and relationships are betrayed. But Faber's characters possess modern speech, thoughts, and feminist tendencies. What results is a "terrifying and explicit book" about "sexual politics," modern-style.

Harcourt. 838 pages. \$26.

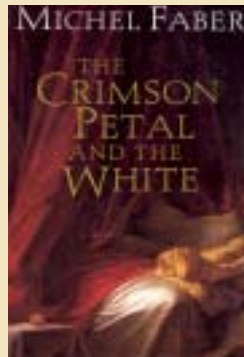
Guardian ★★★★★

"Here is the London that [Dickens] did not live quite long enough to write about, a city of department stores and omnibuses, advertising hoardings, canned foods and shop-bought Christmas cards. . . . In less able hands this updating might have resulted in a novel that felt tricky without being especially innovative." KATHRYN HUGHES

NY Times ★★★★★

"In a big, sexy, bravura novel that is destined to be surpassingly popular, Mr. Faber has set forth monumental ambitions. . . . There is as much *Bonfire of the Vanities* as

SELECTION



Faber updates Dickens for the 21st century.

Dickens here, not to mention a graphic sexual realism that is Mr. Faber's own." JANET MASLIN

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★

"The astonishing thing is that we not only sympathize with Sugar's ironic journey and watch as she goes, but are led on a parallel path. . . . Gradually, the novel's direct address disappears and we are allowed to make our own way, to find feelings and states of being we didn't know we possessed." JAMES R. KINCAID

SF Chronicle ★★★★★

"Faber's *tour de force* is an enormously readable saga of a rigidly striated society. . . ." HELLER MCALPIN

Washington Post ★★★

"When he's not rubbing the reader's nose in Victorian sewage and soiled underwear, Faber has the Victorian virtue of telling a good story grippingly and colorfully. . . . an old-fashioned page-turner with pleasingly newfangled twists." JOHN SUTHERLAND

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Unanimous acclaim for *The Crimson Petal and the White*, a bawdy story of sexual politics and mores. Critics praise Faber for updating the Victorian novel, making its themes and plots relevant to the twenty-first century while setting in the nineteenth. Faber constructs his well-researched story with stunning historical detail, and delves into the human mind in ways reminiscent of George Eliot. The novel contains graphic sex and is twice the length of most Victorian novels. These caveats for some, however, should not deter readers who love sex, scandal, and good, old-fashioned books brought up to date.

- Jessica Teisch, Bookmarks

hires Boyce “Shameless” Baylor, a \$1,000-an-hour defense attorney and her ex-fiancé. What ensues is a hilarious lampoon of Clintonian propriety, full of plots, subplots, and even cameos. (Stay tuned: Will Catherine Zeta-Jones be cast as Beth in the movie “Spittoon”?) But when the FBI arrests Shameless, the Trial of the Millennium elevates presidential antics to a new level.

Random House. 320 pages. \$24.95.

Denver Post ★★★★★

“Christopher Buckley must have had a great time creating this satire that is part legal thriller, part love story and entirely over-the-top funny.” ROBIN VIDIMOS

LA Times ★★★★★

“Perhaps Buckley, in his bemusement at both right and left with the media and lawyers in between, has written the most discerning social history of the Clinton era that will ever appear. It is a feat that will be difficult to replicate.” JACOB HEILBRUNN

NY Times ★★★★★

“[T]his clever, gleeful satire... sets a high comic standard to be met whenever Mr. Buckley gets around to his, what, 10th [book]?” JANET MASLIN

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★

“There’s an effortless quality to Buckley’s prose that’s both enviable and annoying; he sets a crisp pace and tosses off great one-liners, but you can’t help believing that he’s capable of something a little deeper and more enduring... the only thing in *No Way to Treat a First Lady* that couldn’t possibly happen in real life is that, in the end, we all learn what in fact happened.” ROB WALKER

SF Chronicle ★★★★★

“...here’s hoping he’s already hard at work on one or more follow-up volumes, say, something skewering the cartoonish style of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.” STEVE KETTMANN

CRITICAL SUMMARY

In *No Way to Treat a First Lady*, Beth doesn’t dispute hitting her husband. She only denies any intention to kill him. Christopher Buckley’s cut of the same cloth—he hasn’t exactly written a biography of the Clinton administration, but has instead parodied it to no end. The critics cite Buckley’s work as clever but not mean-spirited, smart but still light. The novel takes the form of a legal thriller that reaches far beyond the courtroom and into the realm of presidential politics, personalities, and scandals. In some parts, the narrative spirals out of control—Shameless, for example, impregnates the First Lady and throws in his lot with shady Central Americans. Yet Buckley ties together all loose ends and takes perfect aim all around. After reading this novel, most readers will never think about that little stained dress or President Hillary in quite the same way.

— Jessica Teisch, Bookmarks

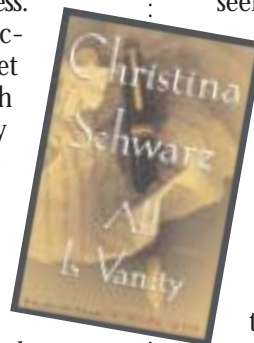
★★★★★

All is Vanity

By Christina Schwarz

The author of *Drowning Ruth* returns a writer manipulating her friend to get material for a novel.

Margaret and Letty are best friends from childhood who are now in their 30’s and struggling with a nagging sense of emptiness. Dissatisfied with her accomplishments, Margaret quits her job as an English teacher in New York City in order to write the ‘Great American Novel.’ She chooses a Vietnam veteran as her main character, but finds that she’s more skilled at procrastinating than ac-



tually writing. Meanwhile, in Los Angeles, Letty attempts to become the best wife and mother ever, as her husband’s prestigious new job offers many opportunities to move their lifestyle up a notch. Margaret soon turns to Letty’s email accounts of expensive dinners and posh new friends for inspiration, and ends up writing about her friend’s life as thinly veiled fiction.

Doubleday. 368 pages. \$24.95.

SF Chronicle ★★★★★

“The book can be read as a cautionary tale about hubris, a morality play about women’s friendship or a terrific inside joke from a writer with her head screwed on straight. In all cases, the book is a blast.” MONICA WOOD

LA Times ★★★★★

“An enthralling, satirical novel... Schwarz’s keen work portrays a tormenting reality: We may come to understand that all is vanity, yet usually we’re helpless to shift course.”

BERNADETTE MURPHY

NY Times ★★★

“The story is like one of those amusement park rides that feature a straight drop from great heights. I wish I could report that this is a weakness, but one hardly cares. The novel is both a page-turner and a cautionary tale of consumerism run amok.” KAREN KARBO

CRITICAL SUMMARY

A novel about novel-writing would seem to be the last resort for an uninspired author. But, in her second novel, Schwarz delivers something that the critics called funny, touching, and true. Unencumbered by trifling subplots, the book is a focused examination of two women’s downward trajectories, prompting one reviewer to call it “a tragedy in

the classic sense.” But that is not to suggest that the novel is too serious: Schwarz has a lot of fun with Margaret’s struggle with writer’s block, with Letty’s descriptive emails, and the result is highly entertaining. Underneath the hilarity, however, is a deft satire of consumer culture in America. Schwarz manages to take an incisive look at the human condition, as she illustrates the darker side of ambition and the disastrous effects of envy.

- Catherine Hopkinson, Bookmarks



Blessings

By Anna Quindlen

The columnist’s fourth novel.

Blessings, a rich widow’s 1,200-acre estate in New England, is an Edenic idyll with its large white house, trout-filled pond, flowering gardens, and fruit orchards. It is perfect. At least that’s how it appears to the teenager and his girlfriend who deposit their newborn in a cardboard box on the widow Lydia Blessings’s doorstep. The ex-delinquent Skip Cuddy, Blessings’s young caretaker, discovers the baby girl. He decides to keep her, names her Faith, and conceals her in his ramshackle apartment above Lydia’s garage. Quindlen explores what happens when the 80-year old Lydia, who has lived an autocratic and isolated existence for decades, is forced to confront change. Slowly, as she learns of the baby, she lets both Skip and Faith into her ossified life, shielding them from the law and breaking down class barriers. As Lydia starts to weave Skip’s and Faith’s lives into her own, she begins to come to terms with her past—one filled with illicit love, homosexuality, suicide, hidden mon-



ey, religious infidelity, and final exile to Blessings, where nothing is as perfect as it seems.

Random House. 230 pages. \$24.95.

LA Times ★★★★★

“Quindlen. . . is earnest, detailed and comforting. She considers a question that haunts Skip and Lydia—are we trapped forever in the cages of our upbringing and class?—before she delivers, with the aid of a dead man’s bloodstained suit and an attic full of treasure, on the promise of her title, however mixed those blessings may be.” MICHAEL HARRIS

NY Times ★★★★★

“[Quindlen] has what Joyce called the common touch, the ability to speak to many people about what’s on their minds before they have the vaguest idea what’s on their minds.” PATRICIA VOLK

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★

“When matters are finally determined, Anna Quindlen’s immense sympathy for her characters remains intact, but her fidelity to certain truths is paramount: social class informs destiny; happiness is often recognized belatedly; and while some people are capable of heroic change, others must repeat their mistakes, with fatal results, because they’re unable to learn from them.” HILMA WOLITZER

Washington Post ★★★★★

“Although the first few pages of the novel are awkwardly overwritten, [Quindlen] quickly settles into a well-told story of love and redemption, one that is not based on the passion of a man for a woman but on the affection and understanding that develops between people of very different backgrounds who are brought together by a baby named Faith and a house called Blessings.” SUSAN DOOLEY

Oregonian ★★★

“[P]lot isn’t Quindlen’s strongest suit, as even her staunchest fans might admit. And if there’s one true thing about ‘Blessings,’ it’s in the close attention paid to the relationship between children and the people who love them most, particularly the connection that grows between the baby girl and the hired hand, Skip Cuddy.” B. T. SHAW

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Anna Quindlen, best known for the honest, affectionate, and often painful portraits of daily life she painted in *Black and Blue*, *One True Thing*, and *Object Lessons*, has once again written a novel that explores the ephemeral but life-changing moments of a group of people bound by unlikely circumstance. Critics praise Quindlen’s unpredictable characters, her emotional and suspenseful scenes, and good surprises (the “blessings”). Above all, Quindlen puts readers in the moment by creating an Edenic landscape that critics hail as a wonderful character in its own right. Readers will digest *Blessings* as they do a slow, charming movie, in part because of the power of the Blessings landscape to set scenes that “spool out like film” (*The New York Times*). On the negative side: this movie-like quality can slow down the action. Also, Lydia’s family secrets are melodramatic and sometimes at odds with the gentle present of Blessings.

- Jessica Teisch, Bookmarks



The Book of Illusions

By Paul Auster

Everyone thought he was dead. Thus opens Auster’s tenth novel, an artfully deceptive tale about a dead man who returns to life, and a living man who wishes he



The Story of Lucy Gault

By William Trevor

◆ 2002 Booker shortlist

The *Story of Lucy Gault*, Trevor's thirteenth (and saddest) novel, spans the history of Irish Independence while exploring the psychological underpinnings of redemption. The drama begins when Captain Everard

Gault, the Anglo-Irish owner of an estate on the southeast coast of Ireland, fires shots at three figures that approach his home one night in 1921. He expresses his regret after mistakenly wounding one of the boys, but, fearing revenge, decides that he and his family must leave Ireland. His eight-year old daughter Lucy, however, runs away on the eve of the Gaults' departure and breaks her ankle in the woods. Her parents, believing she has drowned, leave without her for France and Italy. Lucy is discovered two weeks later, half-starved but alive. But her family has left no word of their whereabouts. What ensues is a near lifetime of isolation, denied love, repentance, and a descent into the minds of others' madness.

Viking. 228 pages. \$24.95.

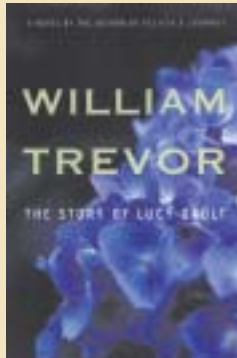
Atlantic Monthly ★★★★★

"It is perhaps the saddest story he has ever told, although even here redemption is possible. . . . For in his stately depiction of a tragic tale that might, in other hands, seem overwrought, perhaps even overdetermined, Trevor has once again captured the terrible beauty of Ireland's fate, and the fate of us all—at the mercy of history, circumstance, and the vicissitudes of time." ALICE MCDERMOTT

Boston Globe ★★★★★

"Throughout this supple choreography of years is the sense of time not ill spent, but spent in neighboring universes—ones of misperception and contrition, where destiny has more sway than mere emotion. . . . one of Trevor's finest works: a morally resonant novel with a heart-rending purity at its core." GAIL CALDWELL

SELECTION



"one of Trevor's finest works"

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★

"If Trevor fails to astonish us with the plausible way he makes 80 years pass in little more than 200 pages, that is only because he has spoiled us by doing this kind of thing so convincingly and often. . . . Trevor [previously] worked as a sculptor, and one still does well to circle some of his paragraphs, like three-dimensional objects, rather than simply read from top to bottom." THOMAS MALLON

Observer (London) ★★★★★

"In different hands, the trajectory of this story itself would have made for clunking melodrama. Trevor's writing is so simple and poised, however, his sense of pace so exact, his understanding of essential human emotion so sure, that he draws from it something with the force and certainty of myth." TIM ADAMS

Economist ★★★★★

Washington Post ★★★

"So here we have the drama of [Lucy's] 'wasted' life, and a lot of 'beautiful' writing. . . I do complain, though, because in this case the author put his imagination on automatic, pulled out the standard cursed and rustic 'Ireland' and created a heroine about as engaging and human as Charlie McCarthy." CAROLYN SEE

CRITICAL SUMMARY

With the exception of *The Washington Post*, which accuses Trevor of writing a cookie-cutter novel, there is exceptional acclaim for *The Story of Lucy Gault*. The action takes place in the first quarter of the book, when the estate is threatened and all, including Lucy, seems lost, but the remaining three-quarters of the novel are no less engaging. Critics praise Trevor's precise, graceful writing; every object has meaning, including the blue hydrangeas and the drawing-room portrait of the forgotten ancestor. His descriptions of Ireland's forlorn beauty similarly come alive. Trevor, however, considered *Lucy Gault* a failure of economy: "I'm a short story writer," he reported to *The New York Times Book Review*, "who writes novels when he can't get them into short stories."

- Jessica Teisch, Bookmarks

were dead. David Zimmer (who made a brief appearance in Auster's *Moon Palace*), a literature professor, is dead—at least that's how he feels after his wife and sons die in a car crash. He begins to drink himself to death, only to be saved by a silent slapstick comedy starring Hector

Mann, a Charlie-Chaplinesque actor-director. Mann, who disappeared from Hollywood in 1929, soon becomes Zimmer's obsession, his sole reason for living. Why did Mann (nee Chaim Mandelbaum) vanish? What was his true identity? Zimmer travels the globe to try to answer

these questions. One day, he receives a strange invitation from Mann's wife, Frieda, who invites him to their ranch in New Mexico, where the 90-year old Mann is on his deathbed. Thinking it a farce—for hasn't Mann been long dead?—Zimmer refuses, until Mann's god-

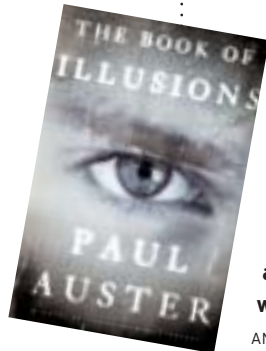
daughter and biographer, Alma, bearing a nickel-plated pistol, comes to fetch him. What ensues is a magically realistic story that raises questions about art, illusion, life, death, and, above all, identity.

Henry Holt. 321 pages. \$24.

SF Chronicle

★★★★★
“[Auster] brings something we might call the Paul Auster novel as close to perfection as anyone ever will. It is a nearly flawless work, and is the best argument among many that Auster will be remembered as one of the great writers of our time.” PETER S.

TEMES



NY Times Book Review ★★★★★

“It is a book with many pleasures, augmented by the muted grace of Auster’s narrative voice – a man telling us a sad story through a concrete wall. . . . But *The Book of Illusions* doesn’t quite reach the tautness of the New York Trilogy, in which every sentence feels ordained, or the warmth of his film work.” D. T. MAX

Guardian ★★★★★

“While its sleights of hand are admirable, it is not quite so absorbing as to be difficult to put down. Like most leg-erdemain, it is diverting and clever and something to wonder at, but you take your leave of it with no feelings of regret.”

ANTHONY QUINN

Washington Post ★★★★★

“*The Book of Illusions* seemed to me to be, despite the high color of its many urgent incidents, strangely without warmth. . . . The whole of this novel feels as though it were underlaid with a longing, impossible to fulfill, for that simplicity, at once evanescent and immortal.” JOHN

CROWLEY

Atlanta Journal-Const. ★★★★★

“The verdict: Auster examines reality, illusion, movies, death and resurrection in a novel as precise and lifeless as a strip of celluloid. . . . [his] chilly, remote approach makes the story seem to unreel at a distance – like a movie at an old drive-in, glimpsed from a car passing on the highway.”

STEVE MURRAY

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Critics praise *Book of Illusions* for its brilliant, almost surreal examination into life, death, and their ephemeral states. Auster’s characters are equally, and compellingly, fleeting, occupying halfway spaces between two worlds. Yet of all Auster’s characters it is Mann (and his films) who comes

alive, seeming more real than even real actors. Despite their general praise, critics find a few faults with Auster. He tries to evoke the feeling of memory with long sentences that lack quotation marks, but stiff dialogue and unbelievable character traits estrange the reader and narrator. A minority of critics found the book cold—an intellectual exercise that didn’t resonate. Auster also employs some obvious, and perhaps misplaced, literary techniques, including melodramatic action. Why, for example, does Alma have to fetch the unwilling Mann with a gun? Despite these quibbles, those who enjoyed *The Book of Illusions* felt it would be remembered as one of Auster’s masterpieces.

– Jessica Teisch, Bookmarks

★★★★★

Cloud of Sparrows

By Takashi Matsuoka

Shogun without the sap.

The world is changing in 1861. America is embroiled in the Civil War, Europe is carving out new countries across the globe, and Asia is being opened up to Westerners. On New Year’s Day, 1861, an American ship in the harbor at Edo (now Tokyo) points guns at the Shogun, who doesn’t know how to fight back Western-style. On board are three Christian missionaries looking for heathens—or rather, two missionaries and one sharpshooter posing as a missionary. The three, Emily, Matthew, and Zephaniah, are in Edo at the request of Lord Genji, the charismatic and clairvoyant leader of the



Boston Globe ★★★★★

“It’s a magical world, this place Auster has created in his fiction, one organized around the principle of chance and shot through with wormholes to the impossible. Yet nothing Auster has written to date quite matches his latest feat of derring-do, *The Book of Illusions*, which conjures a fictional film director, depicts his entire oeuvre, and then makes it vanish into thin air.” JOHN FREEMAN

LA Times ★★★★★

“The novel packs the weight of a human heart between its dramatic covers. . . . It is a story of unspeakable grief told with virtuosic brilliance, which Auster finally brings safely to Earth with a very human simplicity.”

JONATHAN LEVI

NY Times ★★★★★

“Mr. Auster’s elegant, finely calibrated *Book of Illusions* is a haunting feat of intellectual gamesmanship. . . . Of all the illusions to be found here – and they are many and conspicuous – the most deceptive is that the past can be found.” JANET MASLIN

Okumichi clan. Genji has predicted the destruction of his own line, as well as the breakdown of Japan's ancient feudal system of shoguns and samurai warriors. Genji's prophecies incite the wrath of the Shogun, who declares war. Soon Genji, his beautiful but questionably loyal geisha Heiko, and the missionaries must flee to Cloud of Sparrows Castle, where they prepare for final battles with outside forces and with each other.

Delacorte. 416 pages. \$25.95.

Washington Post ★★★★★

"The book seizes you from start to finish. . . . it is the new spirit of optimism, not the old habit of melancholy, that prevails." ELIZABETH WARD

Milwaukee Journal ★★★★★

"Just because a situation is inherently dramatic doesn't mean that a novelist will be able to capture the drama. . . . But Takashi Matsuoka has pulled it off." CURT SCHLEIER

SF Chronicle ★★★★★

"... it's exotic, entertaining and thankfully free of soap-opera undercurrents. . . . One part historical thriller, one part adventure yarn and one part study of cross-cultural divides, this exceptional first novel manages simultaneously to be familiar yet consistently fresh." DAVID LAZARUS

Detroit Free Press ★★★★★

"Cloud...reads a lot like the movie Universal intends to make it. But it has an unexpected bittersweetness."

SUSAN HALL-BALDUF

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Cloud of Sparrows begs comparison to other stories of Western expansion in Japan, notably James Clavell's *Shogun* and, more recently, Mineko Iwasaki's *Geisha: A Life* and Lian Hearn's *Across the Nightingale Floor*. In his first novel, Japanese-born

American Matsuoka exhibits "all the markings of a great storyteller" (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*). He combines the color and adventure, but not the sap, of Clavell's book, the adventure and expense of Hearn's, and Iwasaki's deep look into Japan's traditional culture and threatened ideologies. Above all, critics laud *Cloud of Sparrows's* movie quality. Its quick cuts, action sequences full of ambushes and swordfights, and rich characters—from his cross-bearing missionaries to a double agent ninja Geisha—will entertain any reader.

- Jessica Teisch

★★★★★

Hello to the Cannibals

By Richard Bausch

A friendship of sorts, through letters written a century apart.

Enter the lives of Lily Austin and Mary Kingsley, two women born a century apart but connected by their hopes, dreams, and fears. Austin, a gifted playwright and mother living in the twentieth century, has left her husband for a new life in New Orleans. She takes as her new subject the nineteenth-century life of Kingsley, the first woman to explore West Africa and "say hello" to a West African tribe "known to eat human flesh, not merely on special occasions but rather often." Austin's play, aptly named "Hello to the Cannibals," derives from a series of letters she writes to Kingsley, who has left a slew of her own letters to an unnamed "friend, faraway" in the future. Bausch's ninth novel, which weaves Kingsley's conventional (and true) life in Victorian England into Austin's (fictional) own, explores the emotional territory shared by

these two women, including their questioning of familial duty, love, marriage, and social mores. Through Kingsley, Austin finds strength to address her tumultuous past and personal responsibilities. "I would like to have some of that bravery now," she writes as her Kingsley sets foot in Africa. "I'm not going to wild places, but I have a child with me, and the intricacy of another person, the responsibility of another person. . . ." Bausch ultimately asks what poses more danger to the human soul: the domestic sphere or the African adventure.

HarperCollins. 661 pages. \$27.95.

Atlanta Journal-Const. ★★★★★

"The verdict: A wonderful blend of fiction, fact, gender and geography. . . . Rarely does a novel about friendship cross cultures and periods so artfully and movingly." CARLO WOLFF

Washington Post ★★★★★

"...the courage both Mary and Lily find to face the horrors of human fallibility in both our last century and the one before, on the African coast and in American suburbia, cannot fail to leave us with an expanded sense of our own tolerance." AOIBHEANN SWEENEY



NY Times Book Review ★★★★★

"The novel is ambitious not only in its historical and geographical sweep but also in its author's choice to confine himself, with admirable conviction and credibility, to the consciousness of two women. . . . Bausch's ability to imbue Victorian home life with such emotional immediacy is one of the triumphs of the novel." JANET BURROWAY

Denver Post ★★★★★

"There is an unfortunate emotional distance between the reader and the characters. The lives Bausch writes about are rich and interesting; it



The Little Friend

By Donna Tartt

Twelve-year old Harriet Cleve Dufresnes dreams of adventure and...murder. That's no surprise given Tartt's best-selling debut mystery, *The Secret History* (1992). Her long-awaited second novel, *The Little Friend*, introduces Harriet, a precociously bookish but rather disagreeable child. No wonder: as a baby, she and her older sister witnessed the murder of their older brother, Robin. The rest of the family was devastated. Harriet's mother leaves bed only for spoonfuls of ice cream; her older sister, who witnessed but promptly forgot the details of the murder, sleeps all day; and her father has deserted home. Only Harriet is convinced that she knows who murdered Robin. With her 11-year old companion, Hely, she plots to avenge his death. They rather arbitrarily target a red-neck named Danny Ratliff, a crystal meth dealer. Tartt skillfully moves back and forth between the Ratliffs, the town's lowlife, and the Cleves, a respectable middle-class family, to tell a haunting coming of age story in which every act—even seemingly innocent ones—have the potential to inflict harm.

Knopf. 556 pages. \$26.

NY Times ★★★★★

"The Little Friend seems destined to become a special kind of classic—a book that precocious young readers pluck from their parents' shelves and devour with surreptitious eagerness, thrilled to discover a writer who seems at once to read their minds and to offer up the sweet-and-sour fruits of exotic, forbidden knowledge. . . . Like its predecessor, *The Little Friend* will attract a mass of readers, all of them convinced that it was written especially for them." A. O. SCOTT

New Yorker ★★★★★

"[If] you're startled when you finally learn the secret of the title, it isn't because this information comes as a surprise but because, by the time you get to page 543, you're so engrossed in just about everything but the murder that you no longer care who dunnit. . . . this novel demonstrates the way in which guilt resides in the very fabric of a certain kind of small-town culture." DANIEL MENDELSON

New York Observer ★★★★★

"Though *The Little Friend* ratifies and even amplifies the range of Ms. Tartt's abilities...and though it has emotional and sociopolitical dimensions that were completely absent from the earlier book, it's finally less satisfying. . . .



The long-awaited follow-up to Tartt's *The Secret History*.

[Though] it's an uneven performance, the novel displays such a big talent—for dialogue, for description, for quiet personal moments and broad, ambitious tableaux—that I find myself even more convinced than before that Donna Tartt is the real thing." JENNIFER EGAN

Washington Post ★★★★★

"If you demand of new fiction that it show you how to see the world afresh, you are excused from reading [Tartt]. But if you are hungry for the 'simple' pleasures of well-crafted, stylish and highly intelligent entertainment, you'll be glad to make the acquaintance of *The Little Friend*." DENNIS DRABELLE

Boston Globe ★★★

"Wonderfully ambitious and garrulously unruly . . . [But having] reached for the summit and gotten only halfway there, *The Little Friend* suffers a similar mix of triumph and defeat." GAIL CALDWELL

SF Chronicle ★★★

"Right up till the end. . . [Tartt is] everything a reader could want in a novelist. Funny, empathic, a demon plotter with a crack-shot sense of time and place, Tartt conjures up a jerkwater town in 1970s Alexandria with an unholy vividness that should have local Jaycees reaching for the tar brush." DAVID KIPEN

CRITICAL SUMMARY

The Little Friend reconfirms Tartt's rare talents as "a born storyteller" (*Boston Globe*). Critics who anxiously read her second novel after her first blockbuster were not disappointed. Tartt creates full, "gorgeously mean" characters and plots (*San Francisco Chronicle*). Her portraits of the white-trash "plain people" (Ratliffs) and the more respectable, middle-class "town folk" (Cleves)—in particular the Ratliff grandmother who won't die—earn the highest praise from critics. So, too, do Tartt's mesmerizing scenes of Southern decay in the 1970's. Critics, however, voice two general complaints. First, Tartt often presents her rich details and elaborate scenes indiscriminately. This clutter detracts from what should be, in many critics' view, an elevation of the novel to a higher ground. (Where, for example, is Harriet's higher consciousness?) Second, the novel starts in one place but then wanders away from the original question: Who killed Robin? These complaints, however, barely detract from what is, overall, a "Faulkner meets Nancy Drew" page-turner (*Washington Post*).

- Jessica Teisch, Bookmarks

would be... more satisfying to feel closer to the events and decisions that shape their lives." ROBIN VIDIMOS

CRITICAL SUMMARY

"Another human soul," Austin concludes, "is also a wilderness, and the exploration of that requires courage, too." In *Hello to the Cannibals*, Bausch successfully explores how Austin draws courage from her imaginary emotional relationship with Kingsley. Critics conclude that few other novels link time and space so gracefully and convincingly. They stand divided, however, on a few issues. The first relates to Bausch's literary device: does it link, or further separate, Austin and Kingsley's lives from readers? The *Denver Post* notes an "unfortunate emotional distance" between the two women and ourselves, while *The New York Times Book Review* praises the "emotional immediacy" that Bausch creates. The second issue relates to the emotional depth of the novel: Do Bausch's characters evolve as expected (*Washington Post*), or succumb to long, generic, and meaningless monologues that might or might not reveal truths about ourselves (*New York Times Book Review*)? Despite these lingering questions, *Hello to the Cannibals* provides a valuable window into two periods of history and two women's souls.

- Jessica Teisch, Bookmarks



Ignorance

By Milan Kundera
Translated by Linda Asher

"His most successful since *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*"

Irena is a Czech exile living in Paris. In the 20 years since her departure from Prague, she experiences dramatic change. Her husband dies, and her ties to her

overbearing mother weaken enough to afford her independence and discovery. Her current lover, a Swedish businessman named Gustaf, opens an office in Prague, drawing her back to her homeland. On the return plane ride, Irena encounters Josef, a man with whom she briefly flirted in her college days. He remembers nothing of her, but she aggressively pursues the imagined bond. The novel follows the nearly opposite experiences of these two exiles reconciling the past and the present.

HarperCollins. 195 pages. \$23.95.



Denver Post ★★★★★

"*Ignorance* succeeds, with language simpler and more direct than in Kundera's past works, in revealing remarkable insight through the experiences of unremarkable people." ROBIN VIDIMOS

LA Times ★★★★★

"...The tricks played by memory on people and nations in transition, are the subject of *Ignorance*, the new novel by Czech writer Milan Kundera—by far his most successful since *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*... [The author's] irony and wit are back on target, his characters vivid and convincing." JAROSLAW ANDERS

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★

"Kundera's fiction is always ingeniously patterned. Here his control is near perfect, granting [principal characters] Irena and Josef the troubling thoughts of their human dimension, juxtaposing the comic and cruel..."

MAUREEN HOWARD

NY Times ★★★★★

"As in his previous books, Mr. Kundera works musical variations around these themes... of exile and return,

nostalgia and regret... using the intertwining stories of his characters as an armature on which to hang philosophical asides: in this case about mathematical symmetries in history, the limits and subjectivity of memory and the difficulties of homecoming in that 'founding epic of nostalgia,' *The Odyssey*..." MICHIKO KAKUTANI

Rocky Mountain News ★★★★★

"[Kundera] does a masterful job of reminding that the political is the personal...As usual, he poses more questions than answers, but the characters grappling with them in this story are vague. Ultimately, the variations on the theme grow tiresome, less like variation than repetition." JANE HOBACK

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Reviewers universally admire Milan Kundera for his body of existential and fictional works. Yet they are divided with respect to his latest novel, *Ignorance*. Critics for *The Denver Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *The New York Times Book Review* endorse this latest short novel as a success, connecting it to historical moments in literature from *The Odyssey* to the 18th Century Novel to Henry James's *The Jolly Corner*, also calling it "urgent," "a cautionary tale," and politically current.

Jane Hoback for the *Rocky Mountain News* complains that *Ignorance* merely repeats Kundera's worn themes, this time with "vague" characters in place of heroes and "tacked on" sex scenes in place of "powerful eroticism." *The New York Times* critic Michiko Kakutani strikes a critical balance. "*Ignorance* is marred by one very implausible scene," she writes, but quickly lauds Kundera for constructing the rest of his story with "authority and panache" and "a few graceful detours."

- Lora Kolodny, Bookmarks



The Last Girls

By Lee Smith

A Book Sense Selection—the reunion of four women.

Four college roommates reunite on a luxurious cruise. In spirit, the trip resembles their journey down the Mississippi on a homemade raft 35 years before. But as Smith, author of nine previous novels, writes, “[t]ime has picked up somehow, roaring along like the furious current.” Life has changed since their carefree days on the river, when the girls “expected to be taken care of” and saved by a collect call to somebody’s parents if they ran into trouble. Harriet, a timid, unmarried teacher, has drifted around in those “in between” years after college. Courtney, a Raleigh socialite, lives with a philanthropic husband. Catherine, a sculptor, has married three times. Anna writes romance novels. The only person missing on the cruise is the one (and last) girl that tied them together: the wildly free Baby Ballou. Baby, whose death poses a mystery to those who loved her best, conceived of their original raft trip when they read *Huck Finn* in college. Her widower has asked her old friends to scatter her ashes at the mouth of the Mississippi in New Orleans. In chapters that move between the four friends’ points of view, Smith explores what it means to examine the past and try to match memory with an increasingly complex present.

Algonquin Books. 384 pages. \$24.95.



Boston Globe



“Lee Smith’s genius is in her seamless weaving of the two stories, past and present, so that we realize what the stakes are for these women, and how they have arrived at the reunion as footsore pilgrims. . . . Smith has that talent that all storytellers envy: the ability to dive deeply into the lives of her characters, to bring them to life in their rich fullness, warts and all.”

ROBERT INMAN

USA Today



“Though the story moves quickly and flows easily, it wouldn’t be nearly as engaging without Smith’s genuine Southern flavor. . . . An honest portrait of intelligent, well-rounded Southerners is always refreshing, and *The Last Girls* delivers.”

WHITNEY MATHESON

NY Times



“It’s a pleasure to see [Smith] directing her talents to a different class of women with a different set of concerns—if only they, instead of the hazy Baby and the pining Harriet, had more time on-stage. One can’t help wishing that Harriet would just pack up all her press clippings and memories of Baby and get on with her life a little sooner.”

SARAH TOWERS

CRITICAL SUMMARY

In 1966, Lee Smith and fifteen other classmates from Hollins College boarded a makeshift raft in Paducah and “headed [950 miles] down the [Mississippi] with absolute confidence.” Smith’s Huck Finn-like adventure inspired *Last Girls*, which explores the “what-happened-after-the-adventure” question. This question consumes the four college girls, now fifty-somethings, who reflect upon their carefree past. Overall, reviewers give the novel relatively high marks, but criticize its uneven character development. Smith draws Harriet as a ghostlike

reflection of Baby, for example, and Baby’s shadowy, undeveloped ghost hovers over the entire narrative. Nonetheless, each of these five women “could energize an entire book” (*Boston Globe*). Above all, Smith pays homage to Huck Finn. The characters, scenery, and plot differ, but *The Last Girls* truly embodies Ernest Hemingway’s famous words: “All modern American literature comes from . . . *Huckleberry Finn*.”

- Jessica Teisch, Bookmarks

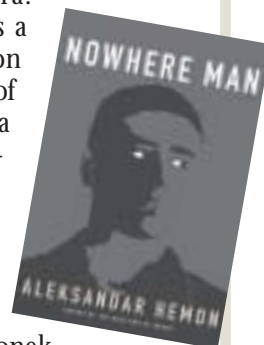


Nowhere Man

By Aleksandar Hemon

Hemon is rumored to have learned English by studying *Lolita*.

Aleksandar Hemon’s debut offering to the literary world, the short story collection *The Question of Bruno* (2000), afforded the Bosnian-born author comparisons to Nabokov, Conrad and Kundera. *Nowhere Man* is a zigzag navigation through the life of Jozef Pronek, a character established in that earlier collection. Each story here (the subtitle of the volume is “The Pronek Fantasies”) features Jozef at a different stage of life – as a baby, a punk teenager, a young man in wrecked Sarajevo and Kiev, and a newcomer to Chicago with various odd jobs. Throughout, Jozef (as revealed by various narrators of ambiguous identity) struggles to make sense of his place in history.



Nan A. Talese/Doubleday. 242 pages. \$23.95.

Esquire



“Now here’s reason to get excited: a



Dirt Music

By Tim Winton

◆ 2002 Booker shortlist

Winton, an Australian writer who has published 15 volumes of fiction, nonfiction, and short stories, is best known for *The Riders*. Shortlisted for the Booker Prize, *Dirt Music* will put him on the international map once again. Winton's "Australia-meets-Robinson Crusoe" tale involves three main characters, Georgie, Luther, and Jim, whose adventures take them from White Point, a fictional town north of Perth in Western Australia, to the wild islands of the north. Georgie, a wild forty-year old from an elite Perth family, finds herself—despite better intentions—in White Point with Jim, the town's best fisherman but a man she doesn't love. Then she meets Luther, a poacher who comes from a family of outcast musicians. Everyone in White Point is strange in some way, and everyone is hiding something. Unfortunately, some love affairs do not remain hidden.

Scribner. 416 pages. \$26.

Economist ★★★★★

"As well as offering nuanced portraits of three very different characters, it is a cracking page-turner which deftly splices together separate narrative threads without ever losing its headlong momentum. . . . What really hooks you is the novel's mixture of brashness and lyricism."

Independent (London) ★★★★★

"*Dirt Music* is easily [Winton's] best, a big, rolling road-train of a novel that transports its reader shudderingly across the vast and enigmatic landscape of Winton's Western Australia." JOHN TAGUE

SF Chronicle ★★★★★

"What redeems *Dirt Music* throughout are Winton's humor, his romantic faith in the power of love to come along and screw up even the most rut-bound lives, his tactile regard for rude, nouny particulars of physical labor and, not least, the majesty of his regard for nature." DAVID KIPEN

true work of art that's as vast and mysterious as life itself. This is as great a compliment as I can think of.... This tender, devastating book is evidence indeed that Hemon is a writer of rare artistry and depth." ADRIENNE MILLER

Washington Post ★★★★★
"The author plays around a lot with chronology and point of view, but for all this, *Nowhere Man* is still devastatingly simple. ... The merit of *Nowhere Man* rests on far more than gimmicky, literary stunts. It's a study of the hu-

man condition, sad as it is, today."

CAROLYN SEE

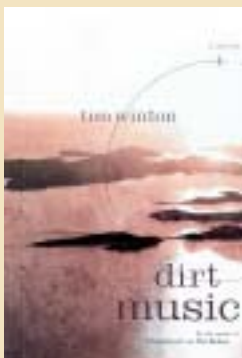
Chicago Tribune ★★★★★
SVEN BIRKERTS

Times (London) ★★★★★

"Long-standing family feuds, mysterious curses, and local superstitions haunt *Dirt Music* as convincingly as they do [Thomas Hardy's] *The Return of the Native*. That they do this in a contemporary setting, in the presence of the Internet and the global economy, is further testimony to Winton's powers of imagination." RUTH SCURR

Washington Post ★★★★★

"[Tim Winton] writes startling stories with a poet's economy - he's a Raymond Carver for down-and-under Down Under, documenting the defiant, troubled souls who live thousands of miles across the Outback from the pomp and glitz of Sydney 2000. . . . *Dirt Music's* intensity only tightens as the story evolves from a domestic drama into an epic quest." TODD PRUZAN



"He's a Raymond Carver for down-and-under Down Under"

Guardian ★★★★★

"Perhaps Winton's most considerable achievement is his description of this fishing community, with its violence, its resentment of urban big shots ('lawyers and surgeons and kick-arse CEOs') and its love of 'dirt music,' an Australian composite of everything that was ever moaned along to a guitar in the United States." PETER PORTER

CRITICAL SUMMARY

High acclaim for *Dirt Music*, Winton's nuanced portrait of three Australians, their relationships, and the magnificent landscape that molds them. Critics praise Winton's clear, crisp writing, and "salty, frequently very funny" dialogue (*San Francisco Chronicle*). They also acknowledge his deep debt to Thomas Hardy's fatalistic characters who are subdued only by the power of the land. Indeed, the magical description of Australia's wilds is perhaps this novel's greatest strength. Winton paints the country's often hostile deserts and majestic coastlines in vivid colors, transforming the landscape into a powerful character—and character-shaper—in its own right. On the downside, Winton's rambling, punctuated narrative can sometimes slow the reader down.

- Jessica Teisch, Bookmarks

SF Chronicle ★★★
 "We again bear witness to the life of Jozef Pronek, but this time, Hemon delivers a searing, mordantly funny novel about the dislocation of this irrepressible subject, from his 1967 birth in a Sarajevo hospital to his rebirth of sorts 25 years later as a man out of time." KERA BOLONIK

NY Times Book Review ★★★
 "The refugee experience is presented as a comic voyage of the damned ...Hemon's observations are rarely off target, and language remains his dearest friend. ...The bottom line is that Hemon can't write a boring sentence, and the English language (which he adopted at a late age) is the richer for it." GARY SHTEYNGART

Village Voice ★★★
 "He's as handy with the pop culture references as Dave Eggers and as nimble with the self-consciously post-modern footnotes as David Foster Wallace. ...Hemon finds a graceful equilibrium in *Nowhere Man*, using novelistic tricks and perfectly elastic language to create a sidelong portrait of Josef Pronek, double agent and new American, riding the currents of history." JOY PRESS

Newsday ★★
 "Hemon is so taken with this literary tomfoolery that robust storytelling collapses, and Pronek is rendered too much a cypher to capture our attention. ... Jozef Pronek remains a dull man without qualities. This may indeed make him a 'nowhere man,' but it doesn't make us care." DAN CRYER

CRITICAL SUMMARY

The boisterous praise for Hemon's innovative control of theme and language, does leave room for a few shared irritations. The Kiev segment, told by Ukrainian American Victor Plavchuk, falters, mostly from the use of an unreliable (and not fully realized) narrator. Only the

Chicago portion of this volume comes closest to (even if it doesn't fully capitalize on) the stunning promise of Hemon's original novel. While Hemon's patchwork approach was clever enough for Dan Cryer from *Newsday*, he was left longing for a plot and compelling characters. Still, most critics remain convinced that Hemon is a true artist of the written word, one to watch, one to admire.

- Leanne Milway, Bookmarks



One Man's Bible

By Gao Xingjian
 Translated by Mabel Lee

Xingjian's first novel after winning the Nobel Prize.

You're a counterrevolutionary, a stinking counterrevolutionary! the narrator's girlfriend screams. Gao, the first Chinese writer to win the Nobel Prize for literature, has written a novel that mirrors his own life. Denounced by his own wife, Gao left China in 1987 and settled in France. His narrator, a similarly exiled Chinese writer, painter, and playwright, lives in Hong Kong, just before the island is scheduled to be returned to China. The fictional Gao spends his time with Margarethe, a Chinese speaking German Jew who convinces him to recount his experiences in China. Gao switches back and forth between scenes with Margarethe in Hong Kong and his life in China during the Red Terror, the reign of Mao Tse-tung, and Communist rule. He unforgivingly recounts his years in Beijing, where artists and intellectuals became street sweepers, children informed on their parents, and neighbors sent neighbors to reeducation camps. The fictional Gao experi-

ences many hardships, and fearfully burns his manuscripts and diaries in order to survive. At the end of the Cultural Revolution, he becomes an expat writer. Though the real Gao no longer has a homeland, he claims that writing *One Man's Bible* expurgated all his feelings toward China: "Your heart is at peace, and you are no longer a rebel."

HarperCollins. 450 pages. \$26.95.

NY Times Book Review ★★★
 "[*One Man's Bible*] has come to claim its place as a powerful narrative, barely fictional, of the Cultural Revolution's insidious, corrosive terror." BARBARA CROSSETTE

Washington Post ★★★
 "*One Man's Bible* is driven by the sweeping panorama of history and the suffering and reconciliation that underlie it. ... The novel is a courageous attempt to face down those memories like a ghost enemy, something Gao does admirably." TERENCE CHENG

Denver Post ★★★
 "The only way to make it through this book is to drop expectations, live in the narrator's moment and prepare for a ride that is as confusing as it is instructive. ... But if the hallmark of a good novel is its ability to transport the reader, willing or not, into unfamiliar or uncomfortable territory, then this novel is a success." ROBIN

VIDIMOS



LA Times ★★★
 "Gao's portraits of dread are among the book's most compelling scenes. By them he measures the cost of a terrorist regime in terms of human souls." MARY ROURKE

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Critical acclaim for *One Man's Bible*, a story of repression and freedom

that bears striking resemblance to the author's own life. *The New York Times Book Review* asks, "If so much of this book is autobiography, why the cloak of fiction?" *The Washington Post* similarly questions, "Is this a memoir in disguise, or is this a 'real' novel?" Yet critics agree that lingering questions about the work's true identity do not obscure its rare and discomfiting look into China's history, society, politics, and individual expression. "Freedom is not a human right conferred by Heaven," Gao writes, "It is a capacity and an awareness that needs to be defended." Despite its important themes, the book falls short on a few counts. The scenes, jumping between the "he" in flashbacks and "you" in Hong Kong, cause confusion. The novel suffers from a rough translation. Lastly, there is very little, if no, plot, and too much obsession with lust and opportunistic sex. Yet this novel-cum-autobiography will surely enlighten readers who take freedom and democracy for granted.

- Jessica Teisch, Bookmarks



The Piano Tuner

By Daniel Mason

A debut novel echoes *Heart of Darkness*.

In 1886 London, renowned piano tuner Edgar Drake receives a summons from the British War Office: Surgeon-Major Anthony Carroll has a badly out-of-tune grand piano. This particular grand piano sits deep in the jungles of Burma, where Dr. Carroll tickles the ivories to appease the natives. Drake, who hasn't once left England in his 41 years, agrees to take the three-month expedition by train, river, and pony to Carroll's compound. Once in the jungle, the eccentric (and possibly insane) Dr. Carroll entices Drake with his med-

ical work and the area's exotic flora and fauna. But there's still so much the doctor keeps hidden. Drake, in turn, begins to doubt the doctor, the war, and himself.

Knopf. 336 pages. \$24.

SF Chronicle ★★★★★

"Many questions remain at the end—what was real and what did Drake let himself believe, what is the importance of truth? The questions are not holes in the story left by an inattentive author. Rather, they are profound existential questions, delicious to ponder long after the last page is turned." REGAN MCMAHON

LA Times ★★★★★

"Mason's writing achieves that kind of reverie in which every vision, tone, flavor and sensation is magnified. ...The scenes are rendered with resolute command, alive with lush metaphor, even if at times Mason's plotting is a bit heavy-handed."

BERNADETTE MURPHY

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★

"Dr. Carroll and his piano provide the excuse for the trip, but it is Edgar—alert, responsive, confused and generous—who is the prime actor. In him, the reader finds an excellent guide to the wonders and sorrows of another place and time." ANDREA BARRETT

New Yorker ★★★★★

"Mason proves himself equally adept at scenes of wry humor and moments of rapture; most remarkable, he has written a profound adventure story with an unexpected climax, as the mild piano tuner finally becomes the hero of his own life."

Denver Post ★★★★★

"It's as if the exotica that is Burma in the mid-19th century is a character in its own right. [Mason] plays upon the seeping tropical heat and humidity. ...even if it is at times overwrought and melodramatic, it is an exotic and atmospheric debut." TOM WALKER

Washington Post ★★★

"... the formality of that prose and of the novel itself serves as a barrier to the reader's emotional engagement with Drake and Carroll. ... Mason makes us interested in them, but he doesn't make us care about them. He does, on the other hand, make us care about himself, a gifted, original and courageous writer whose next book surely will be something to anticipate with curiosity and pleasure." JONATHAN

YARDLEY

CRITICAL SUMMARY

First-time novelist Daniel Mason, 26, spent a year in Thailand and Myanmar researching malaria for his senior thesis. He gets the details right in this text and is willing to take risks. He conjures the location and its exotic culture with cinematic rapture. Sure, he throws about more names and places than any reader can remember. Yes, many of the secondary stories are awkwardly integrated into the primary plot. And while *The Piano Tuner* is an extended ode to *Heart of Darkness*, it still earns a critical "apocalypse wow." Most reviewers found much to praise in this rich adventure story, with its fiery themes of empire and individualism.



- Leanne Milway, Bookmarks

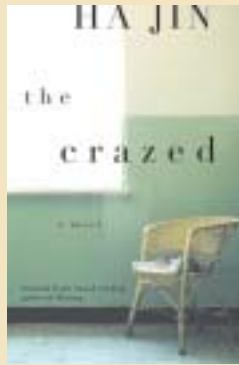


The Crazyed

By Ha Jin

Jian Wan's literature professor, Mr. Yang, sometimes "blabbers like an imbecile and sometimes he speaks like a sage." Jian, a 26-year-old Ph.D. student at Shanning University in the spring of 1989, cares for Mr. Yang, a stroke victim, every afternoon. The professor's mind has become "a broken safe—all the valuables stored in it. . . scattered around helter-skelter." He quotes Dante one moment and reinterprets Genesis the next. In *The Crazyed*, acclaimed writer and professor Ha Jin, whose 1999 novel *Waiting* won the PEN/Faulkner and National Book awards, explores what happens when new ideologies collide into the steadfast dogma of the Cultural Revolution. Jian plans to marry a Party line-spouting medical student and settle down into the academic life. Yet as he listens to Mr. Yang renounce his own intellectual beliefs, Jian reconsiders his own set of values; he sets off for Beijing, where Tiananmen Square is about to erupt in violence. Ultimately, Jian must figure out who, exactly, is the crazed one.

Pantheon. 336 pages. \$24.



The follow-up novel to the 1999 National Book Award winner.

Washington Post ★★★★★

"Now, in *The Crazyed*, Ha Jin does it again, whatever 'it' is, taking the lead of ordinary life and turning it into gold....so haunting, so wrenching, so great." CAROLYN SEE

LA Times ★★★★★

"...Are Yang's railings only figments of a damaged mind, delusions not to be trusted, or is Yang finally speaking the truth in a country where honesty and defiance are harshly punished? . . . In this slow-moving but beautifully layered tale, Jian must decide the nature of truth for himself."

BERNADETTE MURPHY

NY Times ★★★★★

"The author's gift for conveying an earthy, immediate sense of Chinese life. . . far outstrips the didacticism on display here. . . [It is Jian's] journey to personal and political sanity that emerges most movingly from this schematic story." JANET MASLIN

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★

"Ha Jin may be the most disorienting writer working in English today. . . Though Jin studied creative writing at Boston University, where he now teaches, he breaks every rule of the M.F.A. workshop—and in doing so produces work of extraordinary moral and aesthetic lucidity." RUTH FRANKLIN

SF Chronicle ★★★★★

"The only shortcoming of *The Crazyed* is that it is so eager to make points about the importance of the individual—about poetry versus politics, about the body versus the soul, about love at odds with practicality—that occasionally Jin, using Professor Yang as a mouthpiece, writes in pages of monologue that read like a philosophy text with commentary. . . Piercing, critical, but leavened by Jin's understated prose, *The Crazyed* is a substantial addition to the corpus of a great author." FRANCIE LIN

Chicago Tribune ★★★★★

"Without resorting to the simplistic techniques of allegory, Ha Jin constructs a portrait of modern China in which the ugliness and torpor of provincial life and the wearing struggles of individual conscience are clearly linked to the country's authoritarian leadership and dictatorial politics." ALAN CHEUSE

Boston Globe ★★★

"To laud Jin for the depth and humanity of his imprint of modern China—a place he knew and eventually fled—is justified. To canonize him for writing in a language he has yet to master is not only wrongheaded, it's an insult." GAIL CALDWELL

Denver Post ★★★

"[T]hough funny, whimsical, sometimes moving and often interesting, [*The Crazyed*] is one of those novels that possess the right stuff and yet somehow leave you not completely satisfied." JEAN CHARBONNEAU

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Ha Jin, the author of three books of poetry, three collections of short stories, and two novels, emigrated from China in 1985 and currently teaches English and Creative Writing at Emory University. *The Crazyed*—which touches on themes of repression, desperation, redemption, and self-questioning—receives more mixed reviews than *Waiting*. *The Boston Globe* and *Denver Post* stand together in their critique of the novel's uneven writing, trivial details, naïve sentiments, and discrepancies between characters and their actions. At its worst, "it's *Let One Thousand Flowers Bloom* bumping into *Tuesdays With Morrie*" (*Globe*). The other reviewers couldn't disagree more about Jin's writing, a "spare yet radiant prose" (*LA Times*) that conveys characters and scenes in vivid, cerebral detail. *The New York Times Book Review* notes that an occasionally faltering first-person voice undermines Jian's actions, but this complaint does not detract from the overall praise for *The Crazyed*.

- Jessica Teisch, Bookmarks

★★★

Blue Shoe

A Novel

By Anne Lamott

A fictional look at motherhood by the author of *Operating Instructions*.



Readers of Anne Lamott's fiction (*Hard Laughter, All New People*) and non-fiction (*Bird by Bird*) will find the setting and themes familiar in her most recent novel. Mattie, *Blue Shoe's* protagonist, leaves her philandering husband, takes her kids, and moves into her parents' vacated house, behind whose walls lie rot both literal and metaphorical. In taking care of her ailing mother, her family and the run-down home, Mattie learns how to take care of herself, her soul, and even her love life.

Riverhead Books. 292 pages. \$24.95.

Atlanta Journal-Const. ★★★

"After reading *Blue Shoe*, you feel as if you had sat on the kitchen floor and talked with the author late into the night about your mothers, your bodies, your lovers and God." CYNTHIA SMITH

Contra Costa Times ★★★

"Mattie has money troubles, mom troubles and man troubles. She's a 'perfect size 12,' a down-to-earth, likable woman whose efforts to steady her wobbly life make for compelling reading." CATHY FRISINGER

NY Times Book Review ★★★

"Mattie is a heroine with nothing to offer but her imperfections. Our curiosity about earnest, sad, funny Mattie makes it easy to accept her author's imperfections." CLAIRE DEDERER

Plain Dealer

★★★

"Bumbling and sharp, hyperbolic yet true, Lamott on the page can make even the smartest readers wish that

Lamott in the flesh would turn up on their doorsteps to nibble chocolate and discuss the difficulties of making it safely from today to tomorrow. ... *Blue Shoe* is a bit messy and imperfect itself. It is also resonant, because Lamott's voice is one in which certain imperfect readers can count on hearing some small but worthwhile truths." KAREN SANDSTROM

Christian Science Mon. ★★★

"Far and away the book's greatest strength is its witty insight into the plight of so many women suspended between responsibilities to their children and parents with no time for their own lives. ... If there's a problem here, it stems from a lack of emotional distance between narrator and protagonist." RON CHARLES

LA Times

★★★

"... the novel in many places is a lot like life—as messy, aimless and at-times ordinary as reality tends to be—and not the bigger-than-life experience we look to fiction to provide. ... Still, the portrait of our wounded humanity and the difficult-yet-enduring aspects of family relations is stirring and authentic." BERNADETTE MURPHY

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Critics take Anne Lamott as she is—a witty, thoughtful, intensely spiritual, middle-aged Marin County woman—and review her books accordingly. Lamott would appreciate that: both she and her protagonist, Mattie, find contentment in the acceptance of one's imperfections. Her latest effort is regarded as more compelling than her other novels, though her writing and use of metaphor are still stronger in her more personal non-fiction works—accounts of the writing life (*Bird By Bird*) and her son's first year of life (*Operating Instructions*). Still, *Blue*

Shoe works best when she turns everyday actions and feelings into little altars for spiritual thoughts, a device that could be cloying but that Lamott manages to keep palatable and even humorous. Mattie is no Bridget Jones or Kate Reddy—her mature struggles have the simple resonance of a middle-aged woman responsible for both her children and her mother, still trying to find a way to let a glimmer of romance into her midst.

- Julie Landry, Bookmarks

★★★

I Don't Know How She Does It

The Life of Kate Reddy, Working Mother

By Allison Pearson

Better than Bridget Jones.

Must Remember: Absolutely Bloody Everything So goes one of the diary entries in this story of Kate Reddy, British working mother and uber-multitasker who's obsessed with having it all. Though she relishes her hard-charging job at a chauvinistic hedge fund, she's equally smitten with her children. The resultant demands on her time and energy take their toll on her body (as they do on us all) and on her marriage.

Alfred A. Knopf. 337 pages. \$23.

Boston Globe

★★★★

"*I Don't Know How She Does It* is written in diary form, but it's not another [Bridget] Jones clone. It's wittier and darker and more ironic, fueled by anger and guilt and desperation. ... Pearson's eye for detail, her ruthless insight, her brilliant writing, make this book a hilarious, and provocative, read." DIANE WHITE

Newsweek

★★★★

"What makes her tale such a hoot are

the spot-on details that crowd her life and her brain—and will be familiar to any woman reader who's ever tried to dress a squirming toddler while calling the office to explain why she's late. ... Pearson has an effortlessly smart style—she's not trying to buy our sympathy for her heroine or prompt a cheap laugh." CATHLEEN

MCGUIGAN

New York Observer ★★★

"Kate is clever and Allison Pearson is more than clever—she's smart, her intelligence at once wide-ranging and penetrating. But smart occupies an uncomfortable middle ground between clever and wise." ADAM BEGLEY

NY Times Book Review ★★★

"Ironically, the kind of women who will really relate to the heroine of Allison Pearson's fast and funny first novel ... probably won't have enough time to read it. And that's a shame because anyone who has pumped breast milk in the back of a taxi, or wept quietly into the laundry hamper after arriving home too late for a good-night kiss, will recognize herself in this sharply observed, sometimes painfully sad story about the sordid disparity between the ideal and the reality of 'having it all.'" KATE BETTS

NY Times ★★★

"I Don't Know How She Does It sparkles so brightly in its dialogue and observations that ... storytelling developments suffer by comparison. ... Famously adorable and sometimes brittle with self-regard, [Kate] has been given a set of friends and situations, then eased into a routine, unsurprising narrative." JANET MASLIN

Washington Post ★★★

"Kate's mind is literally a compilation of buzz. She is a journalist's projection of Who We Are rather than someone who really is. As a result, as a reader, you can't really lose yourself in Kate Reddy's spliced-together personality." JUDITH WARNER

CRITICAL SUMMARY

As a young, contemporary woman writing in diary form, comparisons with Carrie Bradshaw (TV's *Sex and the City*) and Bridget Jones abound. But Kate Reddy is older and deeper, a sort of "Bridget with brains, a woman—not a girl—who's been disappointed, who knows better, who's marked by what she knows and yet still wants to make us laugh." (Adam Begley, *New York Observer*). Critics appreciate the character's piercing honesty about her job and domestic chores—delivered with a heavy dose of wit—and her obvious adoration of her children that dissolves any perception of cruelty. The plot is thin and almost extraneous alongside such a strong character, but probably made the Hollywood adaptation (which is, in fact, in the works already) a whole lot easier.

- Julie Landry, Bookmarks

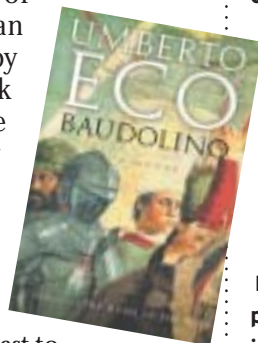


Baudolino

By Umberto Eco

Not for casual *The Name of the Rose* fans.

The Italian professor of semiotics returns with another vast, fanciful novel set in medieval times. Here Eco imagines the life story of Baudolino, an Italian adopted by Frederick Barbarossa, the 12th-century Holy Roman emperor. Baudolino goes to study in Paris; upon his return he heads east to find Prester John, the mythical Christian king from the Far East, so that the emperor might gain



greater glory and recover the holy land for Christianity. Along the way, he discovers the bodies of the three Magi, falls in love (three times, once with a creature not quite human), and fabricates the Holy Grail. Baudolino is also a gifted liar—but his lies often come true. *Baudolino* is a mystery, travelogue, and philosophical meditation all rolled into one.

Harcourt. 522 pages. \$27.00.

LA Times ★★★

"The author is engaged in a continuous subversion not only of the forms of the historical novel...but also of our engagement with any sort of narrative at all.... It is quite a disorienting experience and very effectively done."

IAIN PEARSON

Atlantic Monthly ★★★

"One is always a little too conscious of Eco's intellectual agenda, and Baudolino is an archetype rather than a character, so the reader has nowhere to invest emotion. But the historical flavor is rich, and so are the ideas; for many, this will be enough."

BROOKE ALLEN

Denver Post ★★★

"*Baudolino's* tales are fun; the blend between fact and fiction, and the narrator's truth and lies, is seamless. But for all that the opening is funny, that subtle humor pops up in unexpected places and that the journey is enlightening, the sheer level of detail bogs the book down." ROBIN VIDIMOS

NY Times ★★★

"It's a mystery that begins well, and ends well, too, drenched in the scholastic logic and the intricate, entertaining literary gamesmanship that is Mr. Eco's territory. The problem is that while *Baudolino* contains plenty of learning and imagination, it is so strenuously fanciful that it becomes tedious, like a Thanksgiving Day parade that lasts all day." RICHARD

BERNSTEIN

SPOTLIGHTS
LIT FIC
POETRY
CRIME
SF
GEN NONFIC
BIO
HISTORY
SCIENCE
SPORTS
ARTS



The Autograph Man

By Zadie Smith

Autograph trader Alex-Li Tandem, 27, is half-Chinese, half-Jewish, and completely obsessed with getting his hands on the rare autograph of 1950s movie-musical star Kitty Alexander. Alex travels to New York City for the big Autographicana convention and through a series of misadventures obtains Kitty's autograph—but is it real? Or is it a fake? Alex wrestles with Jewish mysticism, Zen enlightenment, the false gods of Hollywood, his beautiful girlfriend, and his feelings for his father.

Random House. 400 pages. \$24.95.

Salon ★★★★★

"A new novel from [Smith] feels like an occasion to open up another chamber in your heart and another lobe in your brain to take it all in; some books are expansive, hers are *expanding*, but never in a dreary, good-for-you way." LAURA MILLER

LA Times ★★★★★

"*The Autograph Man* mingles such quintessentially contemporary themes as our obsession with fame and the substitution of entertainment for experience with time-honored subjects like the tangled bonds between fathers and sons and the inevitability of death. All are considered with the same bracing intelligence and salty humor that distinguished her debut." WENDY SMITH

Washington Post ★★★

"The fact remains, though, that Smith is young and smart, and when at her best she proves to be an amazingly gifted writer. *The Autograph Man* is not as accomplished or funny or unputdownable as *White Teeth*. Even so, there is a lot in it to like." JABARI ASIM

Atlantic Monthly ★★★

"Her new novel is too little too soon, and although she has

Philadelphia Inquirer ★★★

"*Baudolino* is not so much a page-turner as a page-lingerer. To enjoy it you have to be willing to savor the detailed descriptions of fantastic creatures, rivers of rocks, a forest of utter darkness, and the like." FRANK WILSON

SF Chronicle ★★

"Now comes Eco's turn at the Grail

story, and the result is relentlessly challenging, colossally erudite and thunderously, excruciatingly boring..." DAVID KIPEN

Washington Post ★★

"The book becomes a vast plum pudding: occasionally tasty morsels embedded in masses of stodge.... In the end, for all its occasional beauty and

sharp flashes of wit, I, like Niketas, longed to wake up." GERALDINE BROOKS

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Though they were careful to express respect for his past work, many critics had a field day blasting Eco's newest novel. They complained of lengthy, overly complex digressions

more talent than just about anyone else in the room, no one, she needs to be reminded, has talent to burn." THOMAS MALLON

NY Times Book Review ★★★

"It's troubling to see a writer whose first novel taxonomized a dazzling array of humankind portray her characters as homogenized drones.... If *The Autograph Man* ultimately sinks, it is nearly saved by Smith's buoyant prose." DANIEL ZALEWSKI

New Republic ★★

"Gone almost completely are the imagination and the humanity of *White Teeth*; they have been replaced by gimmickry.... Smith's latest is a supersize sitcom, a made-for-TV novel." RUTH FRANKLIN

NY Times ★★

"Alex not only tries our patience with his selfishness and self-pity, but the people around him are too sketchily or too briefly drawn to provide emotional ballast.... Unfortunately this new novel is a...poor testament to its author's copious talents." MICHIKO KAKUTANI

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Not a single critic can resist comparing Smith's sophomore effort to her astonishing debut, *White Teeth*. When your first novel is that good, it's an Olympian battle to reap the praises a second time. And according to most of the critics, Smith falters here. *The Autograph Man* operates on an effective premise—a spiritual quest through the eccentric world of autograph collectors—but her reach here is shallow, wide, and uneven. She can't effectively transform Alex's autograph obsession into both a Jewish *and* Buddhist search for enlightenment. Smith still delivers imaginative writing with a healthy dose of humor, and she convincingly writes from a male point-of-view. If Smith needs to take more time in imagining her third novel, we'll temper our eagerness with patience.

- Leanne Milway, Bookmarks



A sophomore slump for the author of *White Teeth*?

on tedious subjects, flat supporting characters, wooden dialogue, and an overabundance of detail. Some reviewers did allow that the theme of the nature of truth, as represented by the fact that Baudolino is a consummate liar and thus an unreliable narrator, was interesting and well developed. But they could not forgive the slow, convoluted narrative and lack of characterization. Even the fantastical creatures on parade during Baudolino's journey—giants and pygmies, headless heretics, one-legged beasts, a half-woman-half-goat—did not seem that different from each other. Though some critics appreciated the wit and ideas buried within, most were unhappy slogging through a book with characters for whom they cared little. One even suggested, in a backhanded compliment, that Eco (a semiotician, philosopher, cultural critic, and essayist) is too smart to be writing novels.

- Catherine Hopkinson, Bookmarks

★★★

Lullaby

By Chuck Palahniuk

The author of *Fight Club* is back with another punk novel.

While researching an article on crib death, reporter Carl Streater unearths a peculiar culprit: an ancient African chant. The powerful chant is included in an anthology that Carl himself owns, and once read to his (now dead) wife and daughter. By merely thinking the poem, people around him drop dead. Carl and three like-minded (and suitably bizarre) souls set off on a cross-country odyssey to



destroy all copies of the poem and the original spell book from which it was derived. Along the way, the crusaders become obsessed with the idea that the mystical book might grant other awe-inspiring powers.

Doubleday, 256 pages, \$24.95

Philadelphia Inquirer ★★★

"Palahniuk once again tells a disturbing story with rapid-fire prose and quick, pointed dialogue, but he raises questions that are even more disturbing. The questions are hardly new, but Palahniuk, as always, does ask them in an original and entertaining way."

PHAEDRA TRETAN

SF Chronicle ★★★

"Grotesque, dark and often bitterly funny, *Lullaby* is alternately compelling and frustrating, insightful and sophomoric, pointed and jejune ... Palahniuk's weakness for indulging in the prose equivalent of mischievous pranks is doubly irritating: He wastes the reader's time – and his own considerable talent." CHARLES SOLOMON

NY Times ★★

"*Lullaby* functions on one level as an extended, literate dead-baby joke.... [Palahniuk's] murders are too many to be moving and too few to give the story the heft and scope of an apocalyptic vision. *Lullaby* feels like a reckless first draft...." VIRGINIA HEFFERNAN

CRITICAL SUMMARY

In his previous four novels, and in this latest offering, Palahniuk tackles taboo subjects with clever pop sensibility and cutting wit. *Lullaby* is a punk novel, awash in corpses, bloody bits of corpses, and the decapitated heads of corpses. Some critics call this the cheap trick of a novelist trying to shock, a poor attempt at grandiose social commentary. But somewhere in between the pointless digressions on necrophilia, told by throwaway characters, the author manages to

pose unsettling questions about life in a media-obsessed culture.

- Leanne Milway, Bookmarks

★★

In the Hand of Dante

By Nick Tosches

A compelling biographer throws everything but the kitchen sink into his novel.

This ambitious undertaking by biographer and culture sponge Nick Tosches – who has chronicled the madcap lives of Dean Martin, Jerry Lee Lewis, Sonny Liston and others – gathers three story lines under one crazy-quilt roof: 1) the life of 14th century poet Dante Alighieri, 2) the story of an Italian priest who stumbles upon that poet's famous text, *The Divine Comedy*, and 3) the author's own (fictional) role in the Mafia-led abduction of that text. As Tosches the character wrestles with issues of authenticity, Tosches the writer imagines the truth of Dante's motivations and circumstances *vis-à-vis* the modern world.

Little, Brown. 376 pages. \$24.95.

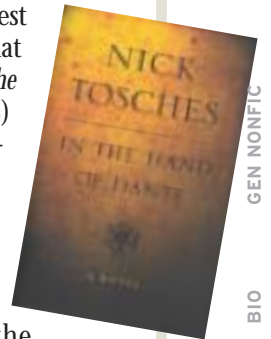
NY Times Book Review ★★★

"... a splendid, passionate mess, with a moral fervor far exceeding most novels of better grooming. ... The novel seesaws back and forth between the 14th and 21st centuries, becoming a kind of scale that weighs Tosches' misfortunes against Dante's—a novelistic embodiment of the adage that history plays out the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce."

WILL BLYTHE

Boston Globe ★★

"*In the Hand of Dante* aims to be a shocker, a mystery, and entertain-



TIM O'BRIEN

A Few Favorites

Recently *Bookmarks* spoke with author Tim O'Brien about his favorite books and authors. After praising the influence of TOLSTOY, CRANE and HEMINGWAY, O'Brien offered up writers that explored what he called the "magic and miraculous" in our lives.

LARRY OF THE LITTLE LEAGUE

(author unknown) "I was about nine when I read this story. This kid Larry could do everything I couldn't do; he could field, hit, run and throw. I mean, this kid was amazing. So I wrote my own version called "*Timmy of The Little League*" and that got me dreaming about being a writer."

THE ALEPH AND OTHER STORIES

by Jorge Luis Borges

"I read these stories when I was twenty-five, but the title story in particular was fantastic to me. The main character goes down into his cellar and sees this spot called the Aleph. In that spot, he sees everything in the entire world. It's this "everythingness" in Borges'

writing that I really like. This is a magical story that opened me to seeing miracles in our lives."

ALICE IN WONDERLAND

by Lewis Carroll

"This story blew my brains. It wasn't just Alice going down the rabbit hole that was interesting--this whole world was upside down. Right was suddenly wrong. Wrong was suddenly right. This book made me see that the miraculous can happen in stories. This book was one of those amazing wonder stories."

ANTON CHEKOV'S SHORT STORIES--"In particular, 'The Lady with the Dog' is a great short story."

DISPATCHES

by Michael Herr

"This is a masterpiece of writing about war. Amazing."

"I always read JOHN UPDIKE, PHILIP ROTH and ROBERT STONE," O'Brien concluded. "Updike writes beautifully jeweled prose, and I don't think Roth can write a bad sentence. Stone has always been one of my favorites."

-Carlynn B. Maddox, *Bookmarks*

ment using history and creativity as its platform. ... Reading this book feels like navigating choppy seas as Tosches scrambles periods, personae, and styles in an overly complex, insufficiently compelling story whose theme likely will appeal most to the literary intellectuals he so assiduously courts." CARLO WOLFF

SF Chronicle

★★

"The book Nick Tosches is billing as his masterpiece is a great, glorious mess of a novel that happily breaks every rule it can, interrupts its various plot strains with discourses on the sorry state of publishing and other subjects gnawing at the author's mind, and is often more fun than it probably deserves to be." DAVID WIEGAND

Wall Street Journal

★★

"... an audacious, overgrown bramble of a novel, part hardboiled crime story, part medieval tale of transcendence. It is also something of a disappointment, since Mr. Tosches's talents are often obscured by lengthy diatribes against modern culture and by torrents of tangential detail." ELIZABETH

BUKOWSKI

LA Times

★★

"... there is scant beauty to be found in passages that alternate between cartoonishly gruesome violence, excruciatingly long and impenetrable discourses on cabalistic numerology and the purple musings of Dante Alighieri as imagined by his impassioned scholar. ... Tosches is [not] a bad writer; he's actually a good one, even a very good one, when he exercises some self-control." JEFF TURRENTINE

Village Voice

★

"A writhing mass of purplulent prose, *In the Hand of Dante* is Tosches's most overripe book yet. It is literally swollen with ambition, mounting a confused and confusing attempt to answer the big questions of human existence--love, faith, the nature of truth, and evil." JOY PRESS

CRITICAL SUMMARY

From the far corners of his mind, Nick Tosches seems to have gathered all his good ideas and piles of intellectual miscellany, and pureed them into this novel. The plot is just flimsy scaffolding for all this mania,

though, and the end result is a mess. Critics agree on that term—but is it a glorious mess well worth the effort, or a maddening one not worth the time? Apparently a little of both, as both the good and the evil of this novel are in the sheer volume of details both great and mundane, the same values that distinguish his nonfiction work. But it seems that when Tosches turns his keen biographer's eye on himself through the lens of fiction, his presumed brilliance starts to look suspiciously like a gimmick.

- Julie Landry, *Bookmarks*

★★

July, July

By Tim O'Brien

Not a return to greatness.

It was July 7, 2000, a humid evening. The war was over, passions were moot. ... For everyone, there was a sense of nostalgia made fluid by present possibility.

Tim O'Brien's eighth novel explores these present possibilities in



Nine Horses

Poems

By Billy Collins

As Billy Collins, our nation's current poet laureate, drives past the graveyard where his parents are buried, he taps his horn. He does not stop for a few moments of solemn remembrance. He honks. Few poets could immortalize this irreverent act—or even conceive of it—as humorously as Collins. His cursory nod to his deceased parents fills him with guilt, and he imagines his father's response in the poem "No Time": "Then, all day long, I think of him rising up/to give me that look/of knowing disapproval/while my mother calmly tells him to lie back down." In *Nine Horses*, Collins plays with the mundane—a kitchen counter, a light, a table, the possibility that a wayward mouse might set his house afire with a stolen match—and transforms it into an unearthly delight. This collection brings together some of Collins's finest poems. "By a Swimming Pool Outside Siracusa" depicts the drunk poet, after a long Italian day, losing fluency in English. And "Litany"—perhaps his most quoted poem—pays homage to Belgian poet Jacques Crickillon's famous wine, bread, and knife scene. Collins assures us not to worry about our lot in life: "I am not the bread and the knife./You are still the bread and the knife."

Random House. 120 pages. \$21.95.

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★

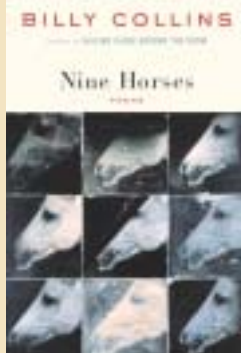
"[Collins's] originality derives, it seems, from the marriage of a loopy, occasionally surreal imagination (the moon looks like 'the top of Shakespeare's/famous forehead'); a dead

groundhog in the road, like "a small Roman citizen. . . still hailing Caesar") to an ordinary life observed in just a few ordinary words. . . . [You] also know you've had your mind freshened, robbed of a few complacencies." MARY JO SALTER

USA Today ★★★★★

"Using simple, understandable language, Collins captures ordinary life—its pleasures, its discontents, its moments of sadness and of joy. . . . Able to celebrate young love and married love, Collins possesses a quality rare among serious poets: He's funny." DEIRDRE DONAHUE

SELECTION



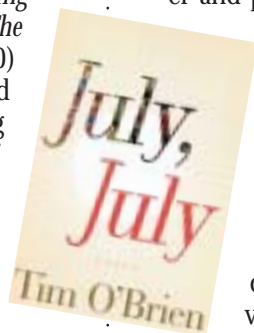
A collection from the U.S. Poet Laureate.

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Collins is not a poet in the traditional sense. He ignores trade standards like metrics, rhymes, alliteration, and mnemonics. "It's fair to say," the *New York Times Book Review* claims, "that you wouldn't want most poets to disregard so many tools of versification." But Collins is not just any poet; he's our nation's poet laureate who, last April, was reappointed by the Library of Congress for a second term. According to the critics, it's a well-deserved honor. Collins takes standard props, makes them even more generic (if a flower is a "wild phlox perhaps," his own dog is merely "the dog"), and turns them into "delightful poems" of "idiosyncratic flight" (*New York Times Book Review*). Among his other talents, Collins also reaches both scholars and "real" people. In sum: you might not be able to quote Collins's poems verbatim since they don't rhyme, but you will certainly remember that you are, as you so rightly claimed, the bread and the knife. But get over yourself; ". . . you are certainly not the pine-scented air./There is just no way that you are the pine-scented air."

- Jessica Teisch, Bookmarks

the context of possibilities lost. The best-selling author of *Going After Cacciato* (1978) and *The Things They Carried* (1990) leaves his well-marked Vietnam War-era hunting ground and brings a cast of misfits to a 30-year college reunion at Darton Hall College in Minnesota. The class of '69 is a verifiable mess. Among the fifty-something year olds is a college dropout who subsequently lost a leg to a Viet Cong sniper; the class



fat boy, now a wealthy manufacturer and pathological liar; a minister with several indiscretions in his past; and a woman with two full-time husbands. Then there's the missing: a small-town dentist who drowned during an illicit rendezvous and a woman who was murdered. These children of the 1960's, who came of age listening to "crappy songs about barricades and para-

noia" and staging daily revolutions at Darton Hall, face a new reality: middle age. Their youth is gone, and their present speaks only to marriage (and divorce), loss, illness, grief, betrayal, death, and final regret for possibilities lost.

Houghton Mifflin. 322 pages. \$26.

Los Angeles Times ★★★

"Although O'Brien has widened his range to an ensemble in *July, July*, his choice of a moral vision based on high school-era stereotypes and post-traumatic defenses dilutes the power

FICTION [crime]

of his work. One would hope that next time around, he will move beyond these limits to use his enormous gifts to grapple more thoroughly with the considerable mysteries of adulthood."

JANE CIABATTARI

Boston Globe ★★
"Imagine 'The Big Chill' with PTSD, dental work, cancer, and multiple divorces. . . . *July, July* is more disenchanting footnote than elegiac truth."

GAIL CALDWELL

NY Times ★★
"Though there are a few glimpses of the brilliance Mr. O'Brien displayed in his class Vietnam fictions, *Going After Cacciato* and *The Things They Carried*, *July, July* is, for the most part, an uninspired, flat-footed performance—a clichéd compendium of midlife crises and complaints. . . . Most of the novel's characters are broad stereotypes, and most of their stories feel like contrived compilations of melodramatic incidents garnished with large heapings of self-pity." MICHIKO KAKUTANI

San Francisco Chronicle ★★
"It's a charm bracelet of a book, a collection of loosely linked short stories about 11 of the classmates soldered together with scenes from the reunion. As in most charm bracelets, some trinkets are more distinctive than others, and all are more eye-catching than the chain to which they're attached." HELLER MCALPIN

Washington Post ★★
"For the most part. . . *July, July* simply wanders aimlessly along. . . . O'Brien, it seems, can't do domestic melodrama—or, perhaps more accurately, can't raise it above the level of soap opera." JONATHAN YARDLEY

NY Times Book Review ★
"Serious fiction. . . ought to have more respect for both its audience and itself." DAVID GATES

CRITICAL SUMMARY

O'Brien in a sense owns the literary rights to the 1960's and the Vietnam War. His National Book Award-winning novel, *Going After Cacciato*, explored a soldier's hallucinatory Vietnam experience. In *July, July*—much to his critics' chagrin—O'Brien moves away from the devastating psychology of war. Instead, in what many reviewers refer to as a "Big Chill" rerun, he creates a series of Vietnam War-era veterans (and wives and deserters) thirty years later. These portraits barely succeed at the level needed to make *July, July* a riveting novel. Critics decry most of the characters, with the exception of the amputee, as cardboard cutouts lacking the power to glean insight from their past experiences. Similarly, O'Brien does not capture the regrets of middle age with force and understanding. Finally, his prose rambles and his cookie-cutter characters speak exactly, well, like you'd expect them to speak. Only *The Washington Post* ends on a kinder note: "Give [O'Brien] full credit for having the guts to try something new, and hope that next time around he finds himself in more comfortable territory."

- Jessica Teisch, Bookmarks

crime FICTION

★★★★

Blood of Victory

By Alan Furst

Another compelling historical thriller from Furst.

A Russian writer and war hero living in 1940s Paris, is recruited by a beautiful French woman into a gang of amateur spies. His mission is to incapacitate the German-led assault on Romania's oil

fields (oil is the "blood of victory" in this war). *Blood of Victory* does what all his books do: showcase detailed historical research, as larger-than-life characters (the best kind for gritty spy thrillers) navigate war-torn European cities.

Random House, 237 pp., \$24.95

LA Times ★★★★★
"Understated sentiment, deprecatory charm, digressions aplenty, more nuances than action, more subtlety than slaughter, hints, nudges, whispers and incredible stories one would like to believe are the ingredients of his style. The recipe has worked before, and here it works again." EUGEN WEBER

NY Times ★★★★★
"He glides gracefully into an urbane pre-World War II Europe and describes that milieu with superb precision. The wry, sexy melancholy of his observations would be seductive enough in its own right — he is the Leonard Cohen of the spy genre — even without the sharp political acuity that accompanies it." JANET MASLIN

SF Chronicle ★★★★★
ALAN CHEUSE

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★
"It's familiar fictional territory, but it has never received treatment like this. . . . The frequent passages of historical analysis in *Blood of Victory* — as in all of Furst's books — are inspired, exemplifying the power of fiction to capture what formal histories often can't." NEIL GORDON

Wall Street Journal ★★★★★
"Mr. Furst, widely regarded as the master of the atmospheric spy novel, writes with a vivid sense of the murky world of espionage, of conflicted loyalties, shady characters and cryptic motives. The reader will sometimes find himself in a daze after meeting Serebin's literary colleagues and fellow spies and possible suspects along the way." VICTORINO MATUS

SPOTLIGHTS LIT FIC POETRY CRIME SF GEN NONFIC BIO HISTORY SCIENCE SPORTS ARTS

Boston Globe ★★★
"No other writer today captures so well the terror and absurdity of the spy, the shabby tension and ennui of emigre communities at the time. His characters are hopeless, lethal, charming. ... The history of the oil fields and Germany's discovery of synthetic oil alone make absorbing reading." SAM ALLIS

Washington Post ★★
"The world-weariness practically leaks off the page. ... Furst, like Serebin, seems to have undertaken this enterprise not because something big was at stake but because 'it was – something to do.'" JENNIFER HOWARD

CRITICAL SUMMARY

It's already on Furst's critical record that his impeccable research and stylistic prose acts as a surrogate for page-turning action and plot. This novel is one of his shortest, and several critics blame the lack of pulse-raising maneuvers on a shortage of space. Also, many of the set pieces in *Blood of Victory* are "borrowed" from classic spy novelist Eric Ambler, so perhaps you've heard it all before. For Furst fans it's a small price to pay for another intelligent, insightful, genre novel.

- Leanne Milway, Bookmarks



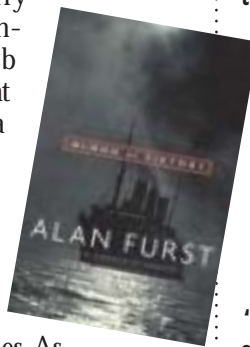
December 6

By Martin Cruz Smith

Tokyo, one day prior to infamy.

Best-selling author Martin Cruz Smith locates his latest story in Tokyo on the eve of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. Populating *December 6* is a constellation of characters: diplomats, warriors, women, geishas, jazz musicians and Smith's

main character, Harry Niles. A well-connected nightclub owner in the vibrant but seedy Asakusa district, Niles is bilingual, American-born but Japanese-raised, a white man with Japanese sensibilities. As such, he associates with players on both sides of the war, though neither party trusts him completely. Ultimately, Niles must choose between nations, lovers, and poles of morality while fending off his arch nemesis the samurai Colonel Ishigami. Simon & Schuster. 339 pages. \$26.



than Moscow, his usual setting. Its protagonist, Harry Niles, is a complex man whom one must regard with complex emotions, as are all of its secondary characters both male and female; Smith deals not in good guys and bad guys, but in human beings." JONATHAN YARDLEY

NY Times Book of Reviews ★★★
"[the novel's setting] means a double excitement: it provides a skillfully imagined and convincingly detailed glimpse of one side of a historic fulcrum known to us almost exclusively – through books, films and television retrospectives – from the other. And it furnishes a dazzling setting for (it could be the story's subtitle) Harry's run." RICHARD EDER

CRITICAL SUMMARY

With *December 6* Martin Cruz Smith gains critical kudos for having created another thrilling, fast-paced plot, a beautifully stylized historical setting, and a quirky, Bogart-cool antihero. The only debate amongst critics hinges on the question of labeling. Is this novel a piece to categorize as entertainment thriller, or genre-transcendent literature? *Denver Post* critic Dorman T. Shindler suggests the latter, describing Cruz-Smith's books as "unusual novels of suspense" and *December 6* as "a hybrid: a suspenseful, dark comedy of manners." *The New York Times Book Review* critic Richard Eder however, has no problem categorizing this and Smith's previous novels as "international thrillers," books that easily fit within a genre, the kind of book though exquisitely written that might fade away with the passing of time.

- Lora Kolodny, Bookmarks

Denver Post ★★★★★
"Call it a hybrid: a suspenseful, dark comedy of manners. Whatever you label it, *December 6* is a solid piece of entertainment and an undeniably brilliant display of the author's literary genius...filled with beautiful prose, meaty, complex characters and [a] well-constructed plot." DORMAN T. SHINDLER

SF Chronicle ★★★★★
"Martin Cruz Smith makes the most of his flamboyant protagonist and tense circumstances in *December 6*, a novel that draws inspiration from both *Casablanca* and *The Third Man* while staking out its own territory." DAVID LAZARUS

Time Magazine ★★★★★
"...Smith's 1940s Tokyo is so gloriously and tenderly realized, ringing with modan jazu (modern jazz) and the tinkling of geisha headdresses, that the reader understands the hold it has on [main character] Harry [Niles] and the reason his loyalties are so tragically divided." LEV GROSSMAN

Washington Post ★★★★★
"*December 6* is quintessential Smith, though it takes place in Tokyo rather

SPOTLIGHTS
LIT FIC
POETRY
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The First Billion

By Christopher Reich

In *The First Billion*, Reich, author of the bestseller *Numbered Account* (1998), has returned to his old haunt: international finance. Jett Gavallan is an ex-Gulf War fighter pilot turned founding CEO of Black Jet Securities, a small investment banking firm in San Francisco. Konstantin Kirov is the duplicitous owner of Mercury Broadband, a high-speed Internet service provider in Russia. Kirov hopes that taking his company public on the American market will help Russia regain its economic status as well as make him rich. Gavallan offers to orchestrate a \$2 billion initial public offering of stock by Mercury Broadband. But when he hears rumors of Mercury's fraudulent business practices from an online financial analyst, Private Eye-PO, Gavallan decides to investigate. He sends his best friend and partner Grafton Byrnes to Moscow to snoop around. When Byrnes disappears, Gavallan finds himself embroiled in Russian mobster politics and at the front of an FBI investigation. An intercontinental plane and car chase with Jett's old flame ensues. . . to thrilling ends.

Delacorte. 438 pages. \$26.95.

SF Chronicle ★★★★★

"A number of writers have tackled the elusive genre of financial thrillers, and most have gotten lost in a thicket of money-speak. Christopher Reich has finally gotten it right."

DAVID LAZARUS

SELECTION



The impossible—a winning business thriller.

USA Today ★★★★★

"Add in organized crime, terrorism, fighter pilots and a troubled IPO and you have the equation for a fast-paced financial thriller. . . Reich deftly blends Wall Street and bullet-dodging in this thriller, thanks to his experience in the financial community." KELLY DINARDO

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Reich, who formerly worked in finance in Switzerland following a brief stint on Wall Street, developed his characters after traveling to Moscow to research post-

Cold War business practices. He noted that the Russian oligarchs, as embodied by Kirov, are "helping their country emerge from the dark ages" while succumbing to unhelpful binges of "self-enrichment" (*USA Today*).

The First Billion, which received high praise from critics, mixes financial realism with a thrilling account of fraud, subterfuge, and—sex. At times, Reich's prose can dull a reader's senses ("Kind of you, Mr. Gavallan. It's not often a disloyal, disgraceful slut gets any TLC"). At other times, his sense of credibility can challenge even those readers willing to suspend every ounce of disbelief. Yet overall, "Reich does for finance what John Grisham does for law"—that is, make financial markets a backdrop for a character-rich and plot-driven

thriller (*San Francisco Chronicle*). Tune in for his next book about how the Treasury Department destroys terrorist funds around the world.

- Jessica Teisch, Bookmarks



Reversible Errors

By Scott Turow

Turow takes on capital punishment.

The sixth thriller about the legal profession from the perennial bestseller Scott Turow, *Reversible Errors* centers on a seemingly hopeless appeal by a death row inmate. Arthur Raven is a chubby workaholic lawyer who is assigned to defend a young black man named Rommy Gandolph. Gandolph is a confessed mass killer and is a month



away from his scheduled execution. That all changes when Gandolph disavows his confession and Raven's assistant discovers that

Gandolph was being held by police when three of the killings occurred. What follows is Raven's race to find a "reversible error" that will save his client's life. Turow strives to cover new ground while keeping things close to home—as in past novels, Turow set this book in fictional Midwestern Kindle County and several characters from his previous legal yarns

turn up again here.

Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 433 pages. \$28.

Denver Post ★★★★★

"Reversible Errors doesn't break new ground for legal thrillers, but it might be a pleasant distraction from obsessing about your plummeting 401K...Turow's characters are as full and complex as Ted Bundy's case file." RON FRANSCCELL

SF Chronicle ★★★★★

"Turow brings to the mix his usual deft hand with characters, fleshing out the entire cast and making their actions plausible. He also provides enough surprises to keep the story

moving and the reader guessing.”

DAVID LAZARUS

Chicago Tribune ★★★

“Turow’s dialogue, while perfectly serviceable, lacks the ear for the underworld’s clipped poetry that so enlivened the books of George V. Higgins.” BRAD LEITHAUSER

Washington Post ★★★

“To call [Turow’s books] formulaic would be a disservice to a writer of Turow’s intelligence, ambition and skill, but there can be no getting around it: They occupy what is by now familiar territory, and they explore it in familiar ways.” JONATHAN YARDLEY

NY Times ★★

“Much as the reader comes to care about Mr. Turow’s characters, one ends up wishing that these people had been involved in a more compelling legal case—and a more compelling novel.” MICHIKO KAKUTANI

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Critics note that Turow has not strayed far from the thematic formula of his five previous books—and for this, reviewers alternately praise and scold him. With this book, some critics argue, Turow has again confirmed his status as the best of the contemporary legal thriller writers. That’s the case in part because Turow, a lawyer who has argued capital cases, is perhaps peerless in his description of courtroom wrangling; he “unmistakably shines...in his evocation and explanation of the legal process,” writes Leithauser in the *Chicago Tribune*. But some critics fault the structure of the story at the heart of this novel. Kakutani of *The New York Times* argues that “plot is not exactly Mr. Turow’s forte.” All of which suggests that Turow fans – and fans of the legal thriller genre—will like this book, and those who’ve been indifferent to Turow’s distinguished writing ca-

reer will remain so.

- Kevin Canfield, Bookmarks

★★★

From a Buick 8

By Stephen King

King’s last novel?

King’s latest (and perhaps last) novel has echoes of his earlier story about a possessed automobile, *Christine*, but this one is more mysterious than horrific. A sleek yet oddly creepy 1979 Buick Roadmaster is abandoned at a service station and begins to wreak a ghostly kind of havoc on the police troopers that take it into custody. Over the years, the car births strange creatures, houses bizarre electrical storms, and casts a deadly curse over its keepers. The car’s origin and power are unfathomable, and its effects are told through the troopers’ narrative to the 18-year-old son of one of the Buick’s victims.

Scribner. 356 pages. \$28.

Newsday ★★★★★

“[The] best American novel I’ve read this year - and it’s also the most ambitious, the furthest reaching and most morally eloquent. ... [The] terror doesn’t dissipate once you’ve finished it, and not just because King offers no explanation for it, but because the repercussions extend far beyond the spook story he’s telling.” CHARLES

TAYLOR

NY Times ★★★

“In a book that finds Mr. King paying more than usual attention to character development, dread will eventually supplant the more quantifiable forms of horror ... this book effectively delivers its warning that each of us must face some ultimate Buick of the soul. And it is welcome evidence that Mr. King and his overheated imagination are still around.” JANET MASLIN

NY Times Book Review ★★★

“[A] phenomenon almost as exotic as the Buick itself: a King novel to read for voice and atmosphere, not plot. ... It’s still a horror novel, but it’s one that gnaws away at the very premises of the horror novel. It knows what you want and expect from it, but it deftly gives you something else instead, something equally worth having and all the more pleasing for being a surprise.” LAURA MILLER

Boston Globe ★★★

“*From a Buick 8* has plenty of entertainment value, likable characters, a creepy rural setting, and a perfectly respectable horror hook. But this is far from King’s best work ...” ERICA

NOONAN

Salon.com ★★★

“Although *From a Buick 8* will surely keep you turning the pages (I read it in one sitting), it isn’t the most propulsive of King’s novels; its profound skepticism about the nature of storytelling itself runs through the entire book like a flawed thread through a family quilt. ... Deft and complicated as *From a Buick 8* is on the philosophical and existential fronts, it isn’t quite as successful as a horror story.” ANDREW O’HEHIR

Plain Dealer ★★

“Meaning, schmeaning, says Stephen King. ... Well, King isn’t kidding. *From a Buick 8* bears the author’s attitude of dark amiability, but it’s an odd disappointment. Writing a tale whose point is that there is no point is risky. For my money, King missed his jump.”

KAREN SANDSTROM

Denver Post ★★

“In between the overabundance of terrifically spooky scenes there is too little plot. And like some awful, literary black hole, the absence of plot in *From a Buick 8* sucks all the light and life from King’s characters and prose.” DORMAN T. SCHINDLER

SPOTLIGHTS LIT FIC POETRY CRIME SF GEN NONFIC BIO HISTORY SCIENCE SPORTS ARTS

CRITICAL SUMMARY

One of the only things King's critics agree on is that *From a Buick 8* forms a nice parallel between the story's main character, a havoc-wreaking Buick, and the automobile that severely injured King in 1999. (The first draft of the book was written before that accident.) From there, it's clear only that this work isn't King's best, but is sufficiently compelling to drive best-selling sales. The themes of grief, terror, and cops' heroism seem particularly relevant post-9/11 and in light of King's auto accident. Some believe King's choice of favoring chaotic mood over compelling plot could lose some readers. Others argue that King's storytelling – a blend of descriptiveness and plain-speak – has become more psychologically haunting by dealing with real-life horrors. As one critic put it, "it's possible Stephen King has finally outgrown his ghost stories" (Karen Sandstrom, *The Plain Dealer*).

- Julie Landry, Bookmarks

sf FICTION

★★★★☆

Across the Nightingale Floor

By Lian Hearn

Fantasy in historical Japan.

In an imaginary place in 13th-century feudal Japan, the warlords make war, the heroes surmount insurmountable obstacles, and the innocent are betrayed. In *Across the Nightingale Floor*, the first of a planned three-part series, Hearn (a pseudonym for Australian children's fantasy writer Gillian Rubinstein), introduces Takeo, an orphaned boy. He comes from a persecuted minority sect known as

the Hidden, a hill sect of Christians living in a culture of Buddhism and Shinto. Takeo is sixteen when a warlord massacres his entire village. Lord Shigeru of the Otori clan, an enemy of the murderer, saves him. Takeo decides to avenge the Hiddens. In order to do so, he must cross the "nightingale floor" of the murderous warlord's castle, a floor constructed so that any sound—even a cat's footsteps—elicits song-like warnings. This challenge proves tough enough, but Takeo faces even greater questions: Where does his loyalty lie? To Shigeru, who saved his life and has named him as heir? To the Tribe (he's part Ninja, with special preternatural powers)? Or to his fifteen-year old love, who is to be traded in marriage to Lord Shigeru? And will he rely on his pacifist upbringing to seek revenge, or return to his warrior impulses? To be continued. . .

Riverhead. 287 pages. \$24.95.

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★

"Hearn creates an engaging alternate Japan, filled with knowing details about the people and the land, mixed with a few fantastic touches of the 'Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon' type. . . . [She] has created a world I anticipate returning to with pleasure."

GERALD JONAS

Washington Post ★★★★★

"Nothing is certain in this world but beauty and loss, so the saga ends, as it must, in grief. But give the foreigner her due: That is the authentic note of medieval Japan, and she strikes it truly." ELIZABETH WARD

Guardian ★★★★★

"On one level this is a thrilling tale of love, violence, loyalty and betrayal, fast-moving, set in a far-away country long ago, where people and places have exotic names. . . . Much is left to conjecture and the fun is in picking up the clues." JAN MARK

Independent (London) ★★★★★

"As it is, [Hearn] has written a novel that, by cleverly mixing modern sensibilities with exotic impossibilities, goes a long way to rescuing fictional images of ancient Japan from a series of boring fights. Readable, gripping and at times moving, this is a good but not a great book, never quite coming up to the expectations held out by its first chapters." NICHOLAS TUCKER

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Critics praise the first novel of Hearn's planned three-part series, *Tales of the Otori*. Believing it to be a winner even before it hit bookstores, its publisher advertised the story as both adult and children's fiction. Much like *Harry Potter*, *Across the Nightingale Floor* will appeal to both groups. The novel, which is set in a historically rich period, provides a wealth of imaginative detail about feudalism, religion, and personal relationships in 13th-century Japan. At the same time, the novel does not fall into fantastical never-never land and presents epic themes of loyalty, love, violence, self-realization, and betrayal with clear, almost spare language and believable settings. The novel might promise more than it delivers, but, in short, *Across the Nightingale Floor* will enchant readers of all ages.

- Jessica Teisch, Bookmarks

★★★★☆

Ruled Britannia

By Harry Turtledove

Alternative history-can Will Shakespeare defeat the Spanish?

In late sixteenth-century England, Queen Isabella and Prince Albert sit on the English throne. The deposed Elizabeth, imprisoned in the Tower of London, awaits her fate at the hands of. . . Stop! Wait a second! Didn't you study European

history? Wasn't Elizabeth supposed to be *on* the throne? Well, yes, in fact. But not in *Ruled Britannia*, where Turtledove, considered to be the dean of alternate history, recreates a wacky new world order. The Spanish Armada defeated England in 1588 and now occupies the island, ruling its citizens through torture and fear. Living amid this repressive atmosphere is the young Will Shakespeare, whose main goal is to keep his theater company alive. But conspirators against the Spanish rulers want Will to write a patriotic play that will incite the masses to rebel against the Spanish. The occupation government simultaneously invites him to pen a eulogy to the dying Phillip II of Spain. The playwright and his actors find themselves caught in a dilemma as thick as the smoke pouring out of the Spanish ships eagerly guarding the. . . Never mind, scratch that. Steamships weren't invented until the next century.

New American Library. 464 pages. \$24.95.

SF Chronicle ★★★★★
"Sprinkled with literary jokes, peopled with a lively supporting cast and filled with engaging plot reversals, *Ruled Britannia* is a smart, enjoyable exercise in 'what if'" MICHAEL BERRY

Denver Post ★★★★★
"The sometimes slow story is spiced up with a number of comic minor characters, including a sheriff who constantly mangles his words and a landlady preoccupied with securing her monthly rent payments." FRED CLEAVER

LOCUS ★★★★★
"... a fine stand-alone alternate history novel, a worthy expression of [Turtledove's] gifts." NICK GEVERS

CRITICAL SUMMARY

What if the Spanish Inquisition had actually changed England's political

and cultural landscape? Would we all be eating paella instead of hamburgers and fries? Critics ("A friendly eye could never see such faults"—*Julius Caesar*) applaud Turtledove's creative blend of realism and suspend-your-disbelief shuffle of history. Then again, not everything's pure fantasy. Turtledove lifts ideas and phrases from Shakespeare's works, creating "artful combinations of real lines" from the playwright and his contemporaries (*Denver Post*). Despite some slow spots in the narrative (remember, Elizabeth is waiting patiently in the Tower of London for the Spanish to depart while you selfishly read on), the story speeds up with the story's minor characters, cameos, and hilarious Shakespearean lines. In the end, Turtledove makes a strong case for why you shouldn't feel too guilty about forgetting the dates, events, and beheadings you memorized in history class. Shame on him. "O, what men dare do! What men may do!" (*Much Ado About Nothing*).

- Jessica Teisch, Bookmarks

NON-FICTION
general

★★★★★
How To Be Alone

By Jonathan Franzen
A collection of essays as a follow-up to *The Corrections*.

How has the increasingly obsolete American culture of printed mail, rotary phones, and, sadly enough, even books affected the human condition? In this collection of thirteen previously published essays about solitude, Franzen, author of the 2001 National Book Award winner *The Corrections*, celebrates the act of reading and writing—even when it occurs alone. "Readers and writers," he

says, "are united in their need for solitude, in their pursuit of substance in a time of ever-increasing evanescence: in their reach inward, via print, for a way out of loneliness." Simply put, our culture alienates us not only from each other but from our inner selves as well. Franzen's essays explore two main ideas: the movement away from isolation towards an acceptance of it, and the problem of maintaining individuality in a culture where "picking up a novel after dinner represents a kind of cultural 'Je refuse!'" His topics include, among others, the vagaries of the Chicago post office, his father's debilitating Alzheimer's, the safety of Manhattan, and his participation in a socialist demonstration at President Bush's inauguration. The centerpiece, "Why Bother?" (originally published as "Perchance to Dream" in *Harper's*) explores Franzen's lonely but ultimately rewarding attempt to dig himself out of a deep depression through writing. "For me, today," he concludes, "there is nothing sexier than a reader."

Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 278 pages. \$24.

NY Times ★★★★★
"[T]he welcome paradox in *How to Be Alone* is that the reader need not feel isolated at all. . . . This collection emphasizes [Franzen's] elegance, acumen and daring as an essayist, with an intellectually engaging self-awareness as formidable as Joan Didion's."

JANET MASLIN

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★
"... Franzen is a writer of remarkable temperamental consistency, and the impression one takes away from *How to Be Alone* is that being a semi-obscure serious novelist and being a best-selling serious novelist are not all that different. . . . Franzen's calm, passionate critical authority derives not from any special expertise in criminology, neurology or postal science, but rather from the fact that, as a novelist, he is principally concerned

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JONATHAN FRANZEN

A Few Favorites

Jonathan Franzen asks a lot of readers. Each of his three novels, including last year's National Book Award-winning *The Corrections*, is more than 500 pages long. But even he admits to being, at times, "an impatient reader."

"Unless it's really working or unless I really trust the writer I reserve the right not to read it," he says.

Franzen, whose new essay collection, *How To Be Alone*, covers subjects as diverse as the U.S. Postal Service and Oprah Winfrey's Book Club, took time recently to talk about a few books that are important to him.



THE TRIAL

by Franz Kafka

"I read *The Trial* when I was a German student in college, and it was the first book where I really understood that literature might be about understanding your own life. I chose to read *The Trial*, rightly or wrongly, as something close to *A Christmas Carol*, where somebody is suddenly visited by mysterious visitors, and it corresponds to some sort in interior trial or process."

THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV

by Fyodor Dostoyevsky

"I think I was reading *The Brothers Karamazov* at a time when I was ready to experience a confusion between literature and religion, art and religion. I think it's the best. The character of Mitka in particular, he's

so filled with desire, and that's my idea of what a great fictional character is - somebody who really wants things. When he goes and throws that money away at the roadhouse until Grushenka makes him stop -- before he's about to be arrested for murder -- that's just sublime and it's terrible. But it's also, I think, really funny because he's not a murderer and yet he's out of control. I find him just a model of a comic character."

DESPERATE CHARACTERS

by Paula Fox

"I've written about it many, many times. You can go look up in *How To Be Alone* all of the things I've said. In *Desperate Characters* itself there's an introduction by me, so I'll mention that and move on."

THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA

by C.S. Lewis

"I think the Narnia books were the first books I really loved, and felt enchanted by when I was a kid, just wanted to live in. I found the fictional world preferable to my own world. I was the son of an engineer, and it was weird to find my way into a such a deep fantasy involvement."

"Also," Franzen added, "I will always read LORRIE MOORE, I will always read DENIS JOHNSON, I will always read DAVID FOSTER WALLACE, LYDIA DAVIS. TOM DRURY is another writer people don't talk about and I wish they did. DONALD ANTRIM, ALICE MUNRO I will always absolutely read, and [DON] DELILLO I will always absolutely read."

-Kevin Canfield, Bookmarks

with the messy architecture of the self." A. O. SCOTT

SF Chronicle

★★★★

"By giving readers such an intimate glimpse of his personal demons, Franzen forces a kind of guilty collusion. . . . There's some boldness, then, in how Franzen reclaims his pain on the page, owning up to it and, as any good journalist will, making it our own, too." JOHN FREEMAN

Atlanta Journal-Const.

★★★★

"[A]ngry to the point of immobility about the marginalization of the writing and reading life in a world of electronic media, [Franzen] works out his own writerly angst in the hope that his novels will somehow provide readers with an imagined world they can

enter, thus connecting reader and writer. . . . Franzen probes the value of reading and writing in a digital age with grace and wit." HENRY L. CARRIGAN, JR.

Entertainment Weekly

★★★★

"Why be alone? For the pleasure of reading books such as this." TROY PATTERSON

CRITICAL SUMMARY

After Franzen's run-in with Oprah over the popular literary appeal of *The Corrections*, critics have been keeping a watchful eye on him: What would he have to say next about the relationship among Writing, Great Literature, and the Self? Would he bare his true feelings about his 'writerly' worth once

again? *How To Be Alone* restores much of Franzen's personal reputation, despite the uneven nature of the collection. The more recent essays, including the ones on the loss of his father and the fate of the novel, flow more smoothly than the older ones, which tend to ramble. But Franzen has again shown that he can successfully delve into the human psyche (his own, no less) while retaining a firm grasp on popular culture—even if this reality is an isolating mass of television waves and computer chips. In the end, Franzen once again proves that despite the isolating nature of reading and writing, he is his own—and perhaps among our own—best company.

- Jessica Teisch, Bookmarks



Blue Latitudes

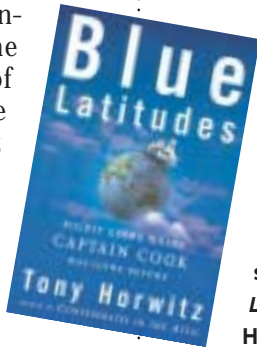
Boldly Going Where Captain Cook Has Gone Before

By Tony Horwitz

Following in an explorer's footsteps...with a beer or two.

Was Captain James Cook a savior who carried Western civilization to the far corners of the earth, or a tyrant who devastated native cultures? According to Horwitz, a journalist and author of the bestselling *Confederates in the Attic*, he was a bit of both. On August 26, 1768, Cook set sail from England to the Pacific. Upon his return to London three years later, he redrew the map of the world to include Australia, New Zealand, and countless Pacific islands. He had follow-up expeditions to the Arctic, Antarctic, and South Seas, during which time he and his wealthy botanist partner, Joseph Banks, survived coral reefs, icebergs, storms, and native attacks. In *Blue Latitudes* Horwitz retraces Cook's steps (he skips Antarctica, citing a preference for people over penguins) and explores the long-lasting effects of Cook's expeditions. As he visits each place, Horwitz concludes that Cook's travels created "wretched colonial outposts" for European expansion, disease, and exploitation. But Horwitz, accompanied by an unruly Australian sidekick, Roger Williamson, uncovers small treasures along the way: a red banana that natives smeared on their teeth to scare Cook into thinking they were cannibals, and an island near Tonga whose economy is dominated by telephone and Internet sex lines. Profound effects, indeed.

Henry Holt. 480 pages. \$26.



NY Times Book Review ★★★★★
"... Horwitz's account of life before the mast, while not original, is full of humor. . . . what he also does, and what makes this book so absorbing, is intersperse among all the details of life today in these far-flung places an elegant running account of Cook's exploits." ROBERT R. HARRIS

LA Times ★★★★★
"[*Blue Latitudes*] is a vivid narrative - part history, part travelogue - and mostly just great fun. . . he weaves a meticulously researched historical tale with his own amusing misadventures." BOB DROGIN

Newsweek ★★★★★
"[In] this book, not getting there is half the fun." DAVID GATES

Wall Street Journal ★★★★★
"[M]uch of the value of Mr. Horwitz's volume is in his own reflections on what he sees." DAVID M. SHRIBMAN

Washington Post ★★
"... Horwitz has produced that most maddening of books, almost equal parts enchantment and irritant, a

tour de force of evocative history, serious scholarship and compelling writing, wearily larded with political correctness, sophomoric posturing and mystifying omissions and errors. . . . Yet the real shortcomings of *Blue Latitudes* lie not in what Horwitz says about Cook's travels but in how he portrays

his own." KEN RINGLE

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Had Horwitz and his most unappealing Australian companion not gotten seasick, drunk, and stoned quite so often, *Blue Latitudes* might have been a better read for most of its critics. But as it is, some felt Horwitz and Williamson's search for

the unknown Cook and his legacy "resembles *Animal House* at sea," complete with wet T-shirt contests and conversations with barflies (*Los Angeles Times*). Yet despite these amusing if frivolous anecdotes, Horwitz undercuts his narrative with a serious stab at history and a Marxist analysis of class prejudice—Banks, for example, was a "supercargo of wealth and vanity," and Cook a poor farm boy (*Washington Post*). Most critics appreciated this mix of humor and history, but a few wanted a more complete analysis of Cook. That latter group concludes that Horwitz has failed to discover the real Cook: despite extensive research, he lacks cultural understanding of Cook's historical context, including his relationship to the Royal Navy during the age of the sail. But if *Blue Latitudes* falls short as a convincing cause-and-effect narrative of Cook's lasting impacts, it will attract readers who desire a refreshing, humorous, and often irreverent look into history.

- Jessica Teisch, Bookmarks



The Demon in the Freezer

A True Story

By Richard Preston

Smallpox explained, by the master of biological paranoia.

Smallpox is among humankind's deadliest diseases. Before it was eradicated in the 1970s, it had killed more than two million people. Preston, a journalist with *The New Yorker* and author of the best-selling *Hot Zone*, started *Demon in the Freezer* before September 11, 2001. Given threats of biological warfare, his book is even more timely now. Preston argues that smallpox, much like the anthrax that was sent by mail to members of Congress and prominent media personalities, could be used as a weapon of mass

destruction. Since its eradication, the use of the few remaining samples of the smallpox virus has been highly contested. Preston takes us to the laboratory at Ft. Detrick, Maryland, the center for developing defenses against bioterrorism, and back into history. Under pressure from the British Ministry of Dense and the Pentagon, the United States decided to keep some samples of smallpox for experimental purposes. So did the then-Soviet Union, whose samples have since been lost—or misplaced, perhaps in Iraq. Given the unknown whereabouts of these samples, Preston fears that reckless scientists will create a strain with no defense. He leaves readers with chilling last words: “We could eradicate smallpox from nature, but we could not uproot the virus from the human heart.”

Random House. 240 pages. \$24.95.

Chicago Tribune ★★★★★

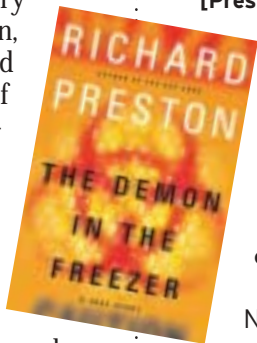
“[H]ere’s the bottom line on Preston’s new book: If you have the slightest hint of hypochondria, anxiety, paranoia, or insomnia, don’t read it. . . . If none of those things applies to you, by all means read it, but do so with caution.” REBECCA SKLOOT

LA Times ★★★★★

“[Preston] is consummately a writer in the *New Yorker* style—understated, rarely personal. Without comment, he tells his stories, letting them speak for themselves through the people involved.” ANTHONY DAY

Washington Post ★★★★★

“As anyone who has read *The Hot Zone* will instantly realize, we have suddenly reentered air-lock-door/decon-shower territory, that tract of experimental reality where monkeys crash and bleed out, and space-suited lab techs come millimeters away from



stabbing themselves in the thumb with an incurable virus, while the fate of civilization hangs in the balance. . . . For all its similarities to *The Hot Zone*, the new book is even more unsettling.” ED REGIS

NY Times Book Review ★★★

“[Preston] has probably done more than any other writer to establish a nationwide imperative to think about infectious agents as global threats. . . . [but] the book lacks the integrity and dramatic intensity of its predecessors.” HAROLD VARMUS

NY Times ★★★

“[B]y jump-cutting among narrative strands, [Preston] turns a story about science and medicine into a theme-park ride of a thriller. . . . Given such horrors, it seems gratuitous and highly manipulative of Mr. Preston to hype the drama of his story.” MICHIKO KAKUTANI

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Smallpox speaks for itself, or so it did before it was eradicated three decades ago. Now it’s found another voice: Richard Preston, who speculates about a possible biological holocaust that could be far deadlier than anything we’ve encountered before. *Demon in the Freezer* is the third in a trilogy that Preston calls “Dark Biology”: *The Hot Zone* chronicled an Ebola outbreak in monkeys in Virginia, and *The Cobra Event* fictionalized a bio-terrorist on the loose in New York City. Preston’s new work follows along these lines. Critics, however, stand divided on this book. Despite his evenhanded journalistic style, Preston occasionally succumbs to “theatrical stagecraft” (*The New York Times*). He titles a Lysol flood in a decontamination room, for example, “Chaos in Level 4.” These heightened scenes, however, lend

little humor to *Demon in the Freezer*. Simply put, it is not for the faint of heart. Preston’s fact-based research—even his speculation alone—will, as the *Chicago Tribune* notes, “probably make you fear for the future.”

- Jessica Teisch, Bookmarks

★★★★★

The Gatekeepers

Inside the Admissions Process of a Premier College

By Jacques Steinberg

It’s NOT a how-to-get-in manual!

Will your child’s 4.0 GPA and 1600 score on the SAT secure her a place at the college of her choice? Maybe, but maybe not. Steinberg (Dartmouth ’88), a national education correspondent for *The New York Times*, spent an academic year observing the college admissions process at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut (annual tuition and fees, \$36,000). After shadowing an admissions officer and six anxious applicants (among the 7,000 competing for 700 spots), Steinberg concludes that while the process is a meritocracy, it is far from fair. The committee likes “to see a familiar reflection staring back” from the personal essays. Furthermore, office politics, moods, and even the time of day can clinch (or deny) your child’s future. Steinberg shares many small, if obvious, nuggets: Legacies and minorities are twice as likely to be admitted, and the entire process is driven to influence the annual rankings published by *U.S. News & World Report*. Steinberg also profiles some of Wesleyan’s candidates: a talented, multiracial dancer (1500 SAT score) courted by Stanford and the Ivys; an Asian-American female from Palo Alto, California (English as a second language, 1470 SAT score); and a native American from New Mexico (C grades, mediocre SAT score). The first chose Yale. Of the

second two, only one was admitted to Wesleyan.
Viking. 292 pages. \$25.95.

Business Week ★★★★★

"The *Gatekeepers* won't aid those seeking a prescription for entry into an elite private colleges. . . . But if you're still determined to seek the prize of a prestigious college, *The Gatekeepers* will at least help prepare you for the ordeal." WILLIAM C. SYMONDS

Commentary ★★★★★

"[Steinberg's] portraits of selected students—selected apparently because they were of special interest to [admissions officer] Ralph Figueroa—repeatedly demonstrate that the SAT is an extremely good predictor of college success, especially as compared to the wishful sociological forecasting of admissions officers." DAN SELIGMAN

Chicago Tribune ★★★★★

"By following several admissions officers and applicants through the process, Steinberg paints a picture that is at once impressive in its detail but discouraging, especially if you're a potential applicant or parent of an applicant. . . . Just hope that the application is being read by an admissions officer flush with energy and not, as in an example given in Steinberg's book, at the end of a very long day." DAN

SANTOW

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★

"[Steinberg suggests] that today's cutthroat competition in college admissions has less to do with real educational value than with a market-driven scramble for perceived value in an academic world where the difference between reality and perception is breaking down." ANDREW DELBANCO

SF Chronicle ★★★★★

"*The Gatekeepers* will be studied in certain quarters—Marin and Westchester counties, the suburbs ringing Chicago—as holy writ this fall, for all the wrong purposes. . . it will

doubtless get snatched up by parents eager to hoard even the tiniest advantage for their 17-year-olds." JESSE

BERRETT

CRITICAL SUMMARY

The *San Francisco Chronicle* asks the obvious question: "Does a book like this, with its focus on getting in, put the insanity in proportion, or simply feed the hysteria?" Ummmm...possibly both. *The Gatekeepers*, which emerged from the series of articles Steinberg wrote for *The New York Times*, is both a terrifyingly candid look into the Ivory Tower's not-so-egalitarian admissions process and a tacit defense of affirmative action. It is doubtful that Steinberg would have been allowed to glean much of his information had he *not* agreed with the popular affirmative action sentiment of the day. Nonetheless, Steinberg suspends judgment as he shuffles through thousands of labeled manila folders with the rest of the admissions officers. *The Gatekeepers* also empathetically examines the admissions process from the students' perspectives—and concludes that it is every bit as nerve wracking as it appears. What results is a "thoroughly engrossing drama" of the college admission process for the Class of 2004 (*Business Week*). Just hope your child receives the thick, not the thin, envelope in May.

-Jessica Teisch, Bookmarks

★★★★★

Genius

A Mosaic of One Hundred Exemplary Creative Minds

By Harold Bloom

Well, the title sounds like the result of a marketing study...

If Jane Austen was "Shakespeare's daughter," then John Keats was the "genius of tragic acceptance." And if Ernest Hemingway was

"a minor novelist with a major style," Oscar Wilde was "a precursor of Truman Capote [and] Andy Warhol." Perhaps no other American literary critic besides Harold Bloom could define, maddeningly but oh so correctly, the essence of our 'Great Writers'. In *Genius*, Bloom assesses the characters and contributions of 100 literary geniuses (101, Bloom included), or inventive writers who derive inspiration from each other and their predecessors. Shakespeare, for example, built on the Bible. Every subsequent English writer defined himself or herself against him. In America, our Bard was Ralph Waldo Emerson, who inspired the next century of writing. (But only the next century—for according to Bloom, there has been a grievous poverty in Western literature since 1965). Bloom intends *Genius* "to be a kind of mosaic-in-perpetual-movement." His complex classification system based on the Jewish mystical tradition, the Kabbalah, divides geniuses into Masters (Shakespeare, Cervantes, Milton, Montaigne, and Tolstoy), Lesser Masters (Lucretius, Virgil, St. Augustine, Dante, Chaucer), and myriad other, fluid categories. In more than 800 pages Bloom answers almost every question except for one: into which category would Bloom place himself?

Warner. 814 pages. \$35.95.

Washington Post ★★★★★

"[W]hile there are the natural gripes—that Bloom argues by proclamation and rumbles forward in what can feel like willy-nilly fashion—these are more than offset by the force of his irresistible adoration of literature. . . . Bloom's outsize ambition and reach make the idea of greatness attractive once again." SVEN BIRKERTS

Boston Globe ★★★

"On nearly every criterion by which I customarily judge books and authors, Harold Bloom's *Genius* is irritating,

even infuriating. . . . [Yet] I have no hesitation in recommending this book to anyone who loves literature."

HOWARD GARDNER

NY Times Book Review ★★★

"[Bloom's] style may be disheveled and his book shockingly attuned to the demands of the marketplace, but both have a virtue that trumps those flaws: authenticity. . . . Bloom's own genius is not for scholarship but for rekindling an ancient sense of awe, for restoring to us an awareness of literature's uncanny, unspannable distance from ordinary life." JUDITH SHULEVITZ

Chicago Tribune ★★

"Is Bloomfog the price we pay for what's worthwhile in this book? . . . Despite my cavils, I think many readers, including this one, can learn from, enjoy and even be thrilled by some of these pages." RICHARD STERN

Financial Times ★

"...his book is also a manifesto for the pleasures of reading and a call to divorce literary art from the anachronistic criteria of political correctness. So far so good, but unfortunately the tone is so relentlessly egomaniacal, the structure so sloppy, and the editing so non-existent that nuggets of brilliant observation are overwhelmed by an avalanche of muddy thinking."

ROY FOSTER

CRITICAL SUMMARY

"I am energized by the endless idiosyncrasy of my bad reviewers," Bloom says. He'll find much to invigorate him here. The Sterling Professor of Humanities at Yale University has published more than twenty books, including *Shakespeare*, *The Western Canon*, and *How To Read and Why*. Since then, he admits that he has "aged into an infinitely digressive teacher." Age (he's 71) hasn't treated his scholarship kindly, either. Bloom's prose is elitist, politically incorrect, and unedited. *The*

Financial Times notes that Bloom "writes like the protagonist of a Philip Roth novel in free fall: defensive, didactic, paradoxically rabbinical, wildly repetitive." (Here's an example: "The genius of influence transcends its constituent anxieties, provided we become aware of them and then surmise where we stand in relation to their continuing prevalence.") Bloom's Kabbalistic classification system doesn't help much, either. What, then, explains some of his more positive reviews? Simply put, Bloom has a rare and genuine intellectual passion that shines through even his murkiest prose. *Genius*, in short, is "not a totally unreadable book" (*Chicago Tribune*).

- Jessica Teisch, Bookmarks

NON-FICTION
biography

★★★★

Charles Darwin

The Power of Place

By Janet Browne

Vol. 2 of the definitive biography.

Charles Darwin opens with a little known but significant fact: In 1858, Darwin returned from his adventures aboard the *Beagle* and received a package from the naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace. Contained therein was an essay with theories on natural selection similar to his own. In the second of her two-volume work on Darwin, Browne, a historian of science, chronicles Darwin's mature years. She argues that Wallace's research prompted Darwin to hurriedly write *The Origin of Species* (1859), which argued that plants and animals constantly struggle to modify themselves to survive their environments. Darwin did not discuss human origins, but his work nonetheless challenged Anglican theology and influenced the course of social and

scientific thought. Despite major controversy over his ideas, Darwin won admiration from his colleagues (including Wallace) and became England's greatest scientist and celebrity. But, as Browne shows, Darwin also had a private life. He was fiercely anti-slavery, politically liberal, and advocated humanity toward all animals. He spent his last years in his garden at home studying worms, the subject of his last book. When he died in 1882, he was so esteemed that he was buried near Newton in Westminster Abbey. Knopf. 591 pages, illustrated. \$37.50.

Atlanta Journal-Const. ★★★★★

"No other Darwin biographies can match the elegance or the completeness of Browne's. Her magisterial two volumes, with their beautifully crafted prose and their eloquently told story, will stand as Darwin's definitive biography." HENRY L. CARRIGAN JR.

Boston Globe ★★★★★

"[*Charles Darwin*] elegantly completes a complex, significant, and deeply interesting story. . . . [Browne] is sensitively aware that even the most celebrated and distinguished intellectual is also a person; one of the triumphs of this biography is its consistent integration of the various facets of Darwin's life." HARRIET RITVO

COLUMN

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★

"This biography is matchless in detail and compass, and one feels an abiding gratitude that Browne was willing to sacrifice so many years of her life to reconstruct Darwin's. A democracy of days, her book is weighted more by private moments and daily occupations than by rare dramatic turning points—a biography nearer in structure to how we experience our lives than to how we tell them." JOHN TOOBY

Washington Post ★★★★★

"In *Charles Darwin: The Power of Place*, we have a wonderful account of



Benjamin Franklin

By Edmund S. Morgan

This “purposely short” biography of Benjamin Franklin might mince words, but it creates plenty of space for insight into our most elusive Founding Father. Morgan, professor emeritus of history at Yale and author of several distinguished volumes on early America (including *American Slavery and American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*), relies almost entirely on Franklin’s letters and printed works to reconstruct Franklin, the Political Philosopher. Franklin was a bit of a chameleon, Morgan argues. He rejected family, authority, and religious orthodoxy. He devised his own rules of social conduct, entered business, devoted time to civic improvement, tinkered with countless technologies, and chartered the University of Pennsylvania. He eventually became the diplomat who signed all of America’s birth certificates. But it was Franklin’s changing views of citizenship, colonialism, and authority, rather than his personal life, that interest Morgan most. Once a loyal subject of the King, Franklin turned to rebel against his rule. In the end, Franklin worked towards creating an America that would become “the future seat of the greatest political structure human beings would ever erect.”

Yale University Press. 339 pages. \$24.95.

NY Review of Books ★★★★★

“It is hard to imagine a more fitting introduction to the tricentennial commemoration of Franklin’s birth that is almost upon us than this concise and beautifully written portrait of an American hero.” GORDON S. WOOD

LA Times ★★★★★

“[I]t is not so much a biography, in the cradle-to-grave sense of relating a life, as an appreciative inquiry into the mind of America’s foremost polymath . . . for an introduction to the mind of Franklin—one of the most inquisitive, productive and engaging minds of his or any other day—readers can’t do better than this incisive volume.” H.W. BRANDS

SELECTION



The latest Founding Father biography.

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★

“In this engaging and readable book, Edmund S. Morgan . . . skillfully dissects the man’s personality and mind, his social self and political beliefs, deftly exploring in *Benjamin Franklin* how the two halves of his being lived together, not always in harmony.” SUSAN DUNN

Washington Post ★★★★★

“The notion that it is possible to deal with a large life in a relatively small space – to focus on its important events and themes rather than to bog down in meaningly quotidian detail....[now comes] Edmund S. Morgan to distill the singularly eventful life of Benjamin Franklin down to barely 300 pages of text, yet to give the great man, in every important sense, his due.” JONATHAN YARDLEY

Wall Street Journal ★★★★★

“... Mr. Morgan’s [book is an] agreeable, if at times too reverential character study.” ALAN PELL CRAWFORD

New York Observer ★★★★★

“...for all his command of the facts, Mr. Morgan falters in his depiction of the man himself.” TED WIDMER

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Is there room for yet another founding father biography? Critics say ‘yes’, though Morgan’s work is not a biography in the truest sense, but rather a one-sided approach to Franklin’s life. It omits key facets of Franklin’s life: his womanizing tendencies, his pursuit of land grants in the West, his bastard son, and his relationships with his wife and son whom he disowned during the American Revolution. Morgan devotes only a few lines to Franklin’s role at the Constitutional Convention. Furthermore, readers unfamiliar with eighteenth-century history and political philosophy might do better elsewhere. Yet Morgan’s short tome, which “is meant only to say enough about the man to show that he is worth the trouble” to read about him, is a brilliant work in its own right and, in the end, a celebration of a great, if elusive, man.

- Jessica Teisch, Bookmarks

the life and work of one of the truly great scientists of all time—an account that is detailed and sympathetic, and candid without at the same time being cynically debunking.”

MICHAEL RUSE

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Unanimously seen by critics as the definitive biography on Charles Darwin. Browne, as she did in her first volume, *Charles Darwin: Voyaging* (1995), relies on Darwin’s family journals, research notebooks, ac-

count books, and extensive collection of letters (he wrote more than 1,500 a year) in order to reconstruct Darwin’s mature years, when the publication of *The Origin of Species* brought him fame but caused intellectual havoc in ordered Victoriana. Critics laud Browne for

providing excellent character studies of Darwin and his colleagues (yes, he remained friends with his early competitor, Wallace) and delving into their personal lives with ease and compassion. Browne also recreates nineteenth-century Britain with convincing detail: its publishing houses, libraries, postal system, and, most importantly, the scientific and social context that allowed Darwin to be simultaneously revered and contested.

- Jessica Teisch, Bookmarks



My Losing Season

By Pat Conroy

Conroy looks back at his high school basketball team.

Loss hurts and bleeds and aches, best selling author Pat Conroy writes. It “follows you home and taunts you at the breakfast table, follows you to work in the morning.” And in Conroy’s case, it’s followed him—and his career—for more than 30 years. Conroy’s latest novel explores, through the metaphor of the basketball court, his childhood, the legacy of his abusive father, the “frustration of being mediocre” at a sport he loves, and his early career as a writer. Most of all, *My Losing Season* examines the idea and legacy of loss. Basketball provided for Conroy the “single outlet for a repressed and preternaturally shy boy to express himself in public.” But during The Citadel’s 1966-67 season, when the 5-foot-10-inch senior played point guard, the Bulldogs lost 17 of 25 games. The season hit its players “in all the soft places of our young manhoods,” Conroy recalls. Though his recollections, he grapples with his lifelong mantras: his simultaneous hatred for his father and desire for paternal approval, and his love-hate relationship with The Citadel. Conroy’s newest coming-of-age story has no happy

ending, but arrives at some of life’s universal truths. The losing season, Conroy writes, was the year “I learned to accept loss as part of natural law.”

Doubleday. 416 pages. \$27.95.

Los Angeles Times ★★★★★

“Say what you will about him, Pat Conroy doesn’t coast or slack off, and his success is well earned. *My Losing Season* is as heartfelt and poignant a coming-of-age memoir as they come and a splendid contribution to the literature of sport.” JEFF TURRENTINE

Washington Post ★★★★★

“[Conroy] imposes art on memory, and he produces a harsh, abrasive, sad, funny, cheerful, revelatory and very readable book. . . . *My Losing Season* is a superb accomplishment, maybe the finest book he has written.” ROBERT W. CREAMER

Denver Post ★★★★★

“Conroy is a gifted storyteller and lyrical writer. . . but [he] tends to repeat himself.” WILLIAM PORTER

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★

“It’s common knowledge that ex-jocks can get mawkish when recalling their youthful victories; Conroy shows that certain others of them can also get mawkish when recalling their youthful defeats. . . . But either way, it seems, you grow old and sappy.”

JONATHAN MILES

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Conroy has built a career on writing memory-driven novels. “Fact and fiction,” he writes, “have been engaged in an abnormal and fanciful dance since I first began my writing career.” *My Losing Season* revisits the themes, characters, and places of his semi-autobiographical novels, *The Great Santini* and *Lords of Discipline*, but is a self-conscious attempt to rebuild his life on fact. Critics question, however, whether

My Losing Season contributes anything new to the Conroy genre. The *Denver Post* accuses Conroy of overplaying old themes and contributing to a “frustrating sameness,” and *The New York Times Book Review* of “[m]aking literature out of middle-aged nostalgia.” To make matters worse, *The Oregonian* describes parts of the novel as “melodrama run amok.” Yet, strangely enough, these complaints do not seem to detract from reviewers’ overall praise. In the end, maybe we should be grateful that the so-called Prince of Southern Writers chose to write about playing basketball “instead of killing his father.”

- Jessica Teisch, Bookmarks



Leadership

By Rudolph W. Giuliani with Ken Kurson

Too little, too soon.

This is the first of two books Giuliani is under contract to write for Talk Miramax. *Leadership* covers his career as a mob-busting prosecutor, his aborted run for the Senate seat eventually won by Hillary Clinton and, of course, his experiences as the two-term mayor of New York City. It’s easy to overlook this now, but Giuliani was a deeply divisive figure until Sept. 11, 2001, and the broader public’s perception of the man who was later dubbed “America’s Mayor.” Accordingly, Giuliani and Kurson, a financial writer, devote a fair amount of the book to City Hall’s efforts to rebuild Lower Manhattan, rejuvenate the city’s economy and bolster the spirits of New Yorkers – and the nation – after the terrorist attacks. The book also serves as a sort of how-to for would-be managers of all stripes, as Giuliani writes about the broader strokes as well as the minutiae of leadership. There is also the suggestion, at least as one critic reads

it, that Giuliani might some day run for president.

Talk Miramax. 407 pages. \$25.95.

Business Week ★★★

"Considering the praise heaped on Giuliani these days, perhaps it's no surprise that the book's tone veers toward self-congratulation...Still, there is enough candor here to make *Leadership* an entertaining read."

DIANE BRADY

NY Times Book Review ★★★

"While no blockbuster revelations leap off the pages, Giuliani can tell a compelling story." CLYDE HABERMAN

Boston Globe ★★

"Maybe in his next book he'll tell a less varnished story." FRED KAPLAN

Newsweek ★★

"Throughout the book, Giuliani tries to pass off common sense as insight...The book is really a failure of form over function." ADAM BRYANT

CRITICAL SUMMARY

The critical reception to Giuliani's treatise on managing and leading is lukewarm. Some reviewers feel the former NYC mayor is, at times, frank enough about his missteps and shortcomings to make this a worthwhile book. Haberman, who writes a column about New York City for *The Times*, says Giuliani's narrative is occasionally "touching" and says the author "is candid, at times graphic, about his painful fight with prostate cancer..." But most agree that Giuliani's assessment of his tenure in office is a bit skewed. Kaplan, in *The Boston Globe*, calls "simply astonishing" Giuliani's claim that he would "meet with any constituency, visit any neighborhood, help any community." Adds Kaplan, "[one] might expect a book about leadership to deal with a leader's handlings of crises, but Giuliani does not mention, even once, his gravest pre-9/11 crises..."

Bryant, writing in *Newsweek*, is even harsher, terming much of Giuliani's leadership advice warmed-over platitudes. This emerges as a prevailing criticism of the book, as critics express the hope that former mayor reveals more personal details and foibles in his next book.

- Kevin Canfield, Bookmarks

NON-FICTION
history

★★★★★

The Lives of the Muses

Nine Women & the Artists They Inspired

By Francine Prose

Love and beauty inspire genius.

The Muses—divine women who inspire the art of men—first appeared in Hesiod's *Theogony* as daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne. Each of the nine muses governed a different area of the arts. Prose, author of *Blue Angel*, updates these centuries-old muses in her account of some of history's most inspirational women, from the art-wife to the spin-doc-tor, serial, and child muse. Her subjects include the wives, lovers, or friends of, for example, Salvador Dali, John Lennon, Edward Weston, and Lewis Carroll. In nuanced portraits of nine women, Prose explores the relationships between men and women, challenging gender stereotypes and notions about the roots of creativity. These women, of course, barely resemble their ancestors. And no two muses are alike, for each historical period "endows the muse with the qualities, virtues and flaws that the epoch and its artists need."



The Victorian muses, including the young Alice Liddell, who inspired Lewis Carroll's *Alice*, were naïve and repressed. Later muses, including Yoko Ono (the muse-witch), managed their men's careers and profits. But only Suzanne Farrell and George Balanchine, Prose claims, were true collaborators—the other relationships ended tragically. So much for sexual liberation.

HarperCollins. 416 pages, illustrated. \$25.95.

Atlanta Journal-Const. ★★★★★

"With elegance, eloquence and majesty, Prose has given us a glimpse of the tangled webs of art and Eros, creativity and inspiration in the lives and work of these nine women." HENRY

L. CARRIGAN JR.

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★

"[Prose] has braided these lives together closely and nimbly, so that the whole is even more resonant than the sum of its vibrant parts. Given that she is working with a chorus of silent partners, the result is all the more remarkable." STACY

SCHIFF

New Yorker ★★★★★

"Prose's broader conclusions about culture can seem hasty, but the book's achievement is its quiet reevaluation of the received notion that genius is solitary in nature."

San Diego Union-Trib ★★★★★

"These stories, which read like a newscast of degeneracy, lunacy, pain, sorrow, betrayal, suffering and early death or miserable old age, may convince the reader that the relationship between muse and artist is perhaps the most hopeless and deadly of all human alliances." MARIE JORDAN

NY Times ★★★★★

"[Prose's portraits] are smart, sympathetic and keenly observed, pithy

SPOTLIGHTS
LIT FIC
POETRY
CRIME
SF
GEN NONFIC
BIO
HISTORY
SCIENCE
SPORTS
ARTS



The Lunar Men

Five Friends Whose Curiosity Changed the World

By Jenny Uglow

Uglow writes, "In the time of the Lunar men, science and art were not separated: you could be an inventor and designer, an experimenter and a poet, a dreamer and an entrepreneur all at once." The time was the late 1700's, and the self-named Lunaticks were members of the Lunar Society of Birmingham, a group of naturalists, artists, physicians, and entrepreneurs that met the first Sunday nearest the full moon for "a little philosophical laughing." Erasmus Darwin (Charles's grandfather) was the darling of the group, a natural philosopher, physician, and poet who anticipated the Big Bang theory by more than a century. Other members included ceramics entrepreneur Josiah Wedgwood, chemist Joseph Priestley, Scottish instrument maker James Watt, and ironmaster Matthew Boulton, whose manufactory produced "toys" like buttons and shoe buckles and then moved on to Watt's steam engines. Together, Uglow concludes, the Lunaticks nudged "their whole society and culture over the threshold of the modern, tilting it irrevocably away from old patterns of life towards the world we know today."

Farrar Straus & Giroux. 512 pages. \$30.

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★

"What distinguishes *The Lunar Men*, Jenny Uglow's study, besides her evident skill as a writer, is her biographical approach, her focus on individuals and their quirks, social origins, intellectual worlds and politics. . . . Uglow has given us a remarkable story of remarkable men, richly detailed and brilliantly told." PAUL S. SEAVER

Washington Post ★★★★★

"[this] magnificent group-history chronicles a last great upsurge of the all-embracing Renaissance spirit, when a few amateurs and tinkerers of genius ushered in, ironically enough, the gloomy Age of Machinery and Specialization. . . . *The Lunar Men* is a book you can live in for a month or longer, especially in these dark times[.]" MICHAEL DIRDA

biographical portraits that are gems of concision and insight." MICHIKO KAKUTANI

LA Times ★★★

"It is a thoroughly researched, highly opinionated series of fascinating double biographies that charts some of the multivariate forms partnerships -

and love - can take. . . . Though Prose identifies various commonalities among her carefully selected group, she leaves us convinced that inspiration - like passion - is quirky, highly individualistic and often ineffable."

HELLER MCALPIN

Chicago Tribune ★★★★★

"*The Lunar Men* is a big book in every sense. . . it teems with colorful characters and the private and public dramas that surrounded them and that they often provoked. To her credit, Uglow devotes as much attention to the personalities, friendships and family lives of the Lunar men as she does to their scientific and industrial ventures." KATRIN SCHULTHEISS

NY Times ★★★★★

"Ms. Uglow has written a playful, exuberant book about figures to whom the new science was itself part play: play that could lead to a vision of society, a steam engine, a fortune or, as with the irrepressible Darwin, plans for a head-shaped talking machine with wooden jaws and leather lips. Sometimes her zeal to get us to pay attention inflames her style." RICHARD EDER

Philadelphia Inquirer ★★★★★

ED VOVES

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Erasmus Darwin once described the shrub *Kalmia* as having the "colours of a seraph's wing." No matter that he never laid eyes on the plant. The point is, at one time the poet-philosopher was virtually indistinguishable from the physician-businessman. Sadly, those days are over. Happily, *The Lunar Men* captures the spirit of that lost age. Reviewers unanimously praise Uglow's portrayal of the unique historical moment when tinkerers and dabblers furthered scientific knowledge. They also commend Uglow's ability to put a human face on progress. A more minor Lunatick Thomas Day, for example, implemented a Rousseauvian theory of education by borrowing two orphan girls and raising them until one proved to be his ideal mate (neither did). The Lunaticks might not have changed the world, as the title claims, and *The Lunar Men* might aggrandize the roles of certain individuals. These flaws, however, are "pardonable exaggeration[s]" in an otherwise brilliantly researched account about of how "a little philosophical laughing" can lead to major intellectual pursuits (*The New York Times Book Review*).

- Jessica Teisch, Bookmarks

CRITICAL SUMMARY

High acclaim for *Lives of the Muses*, part biography and part omniscient inquiry into the women who inspired their male counterparts' artistic endeavors throughout recent history. Critics commend Prose for her

exploration into the roots of creativity and her reevaluation of gender roles and cultural mores. Prose's conclusion that artistic genius does not flourish in isolation will provide new thought for art lovers and critics alike. Although critics received this work favorably, they nonetheless find fault with a few things: Prose's arbitrary selection of muses (where's Alma Mahler, Zelda Fitzgerald, or Picasso's many mistresses?) and her sometimes jargon-filled language. Overall, however, *Lives of the Muses* will inspire. . . well, something.

- Jessica Teisch, Bookmarks



Crossroads of Freedom

Antietam, The Battle That Changed the Course of the Civil War

By James M. McPherson

The author of *Battle Cry of Freedom* takes a closer look at Antietam.

On September 17, 1862—the bloodiest day in American history—General George McClellan moved his Union army to Antietam. Although he held back 20,000 troops, he mobilized his men in time to fell thousands of General Robert E. Lee's Confederate soldiers. Had McClellan struck with more force, the Civil War might have ended. Instead, more than 6,500 Union and Confederate soldiers were killed, and the battle was considered a limited Union victory. According to Princeton historian McPherson, whose *Battle Cry of Freedom* (1988) earned him a Pulitzer Prize, the battle also changed the direction and nature of America's Civil War. Most importantly, it gave it moral fortitude with respect to human freedom. Only five days after the battle, Abraham Lincoln issued the proclamation that abolished slavery.

Although his proclamation did not free all slaves, Lincoln's portrayal of the Civil War as a battle between humanity and slavery elicited French and British support for the North. It also kept both border slaves and Northern Democrats in his war coalition. Thus, the Battle of Antietam not only set the Union on a victorious trajectory, but also turned the war into one that would create a new Union "purged of human bondage."

Oxford University. 203 pages. \$26.

Wall Street Journal ★★★★★

"[McPherson's] latest work is further evidence that he continues to be the most reliable, insightful and readable Civil War historian of our time." JEFF

SHAARA

Austin Statesman ★★★★★

"McPherson tells [this story] with straightforward grace. . . . He also conveys fully the unimaginable horror of the battle." KIP KELLER

Boston Globe ★★★★★

"McPherson makes the comparison [of Antietam's deaths] not to denigrate any other event, Sept. 11 included, but rather to elevate Antietam from its frequent status in history as a mere bloody stalemate of a day. In so doing, he helps us understand how important the passage of time is to understanding cataclysmic events."

THOMAS OLIPHANT

Economist ★★★★★

"In this book, as in his magnificent history of the civil war as a whole, *Battle Cry of Freedom*. . . Mr. McPherson cannot conceal that his heart lies on the northern side. . . . Mr. McPherson's judgments of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the rival generals is as interesting as his account of the battle itself."

USA Today ★★★★★

"... Crossroads is a short but eloquent history lesson that doesn't try

to compete with the two great narratives on Antietam: Stephen Sears's *Landscape Turned Red* and James Martin's *The Gleam of Bayonets*." BOB

MINZESHEIMER

CRITICAL SUMMARY

McPherson transforms a bloody battle, where dead Confederate soldiers literally covered the ground, into a significant chapter of our nation's history. McPherson might be biased toward the North, but he leaves the reader with no question about the admirable skill of the Confederacy's cavalry. McPherson bases his argument on contemporaneous diaries, newspapers, military telegrams, memoirs, and letters. These sources allow him to draw excellent character studies of rival generals. Lee, for example, was the "greatest risk taker of all," and McClellan was "cautious and weak under grave responsibility." Finally, *Crossroads of Freedom* contains many historical unknowns: McClellan's reserves, for example, outnumbered Lee's Confederate troops. For Civil War aficionados and history buffs alike.

- Jessica Teisch, Bookmarks



In the Devil's Snare

The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692

By Mary Beth Norton

A new theory behind the Salem trials.

Abigail Hobbs saw the devil in 1692. Although it was dark, he looked suspiciously like George Burroughs, the former minister of Salem Village, Massachusetts. According to Norton, a professor at Cornell University and Pulitzer Prize finalist for *Founding Mothers & Fathers* (1996), Hobbs's accusation "set off a chain of events that within 36 hours explicitly linked the

SPOTLIGHTS LIT FIC POETRY CRIME SF GEN NONFIC BIO HISTORY SCIENCE SPORTS ARTS

witches' and the Wabanakis' assaults against New England." What, exactly, did witchcraft and Indian and French aggression on the northeastern frontier have in common? To Norton, everything. Salem's witch trials, she claims, can only be fully understood by placing them in the context of the Second Indian War, which created the conditions for witchcraft hysteria. As a siege mentality rapidly overtook Salem, judicial authorities began to explain the presence of witches as God's punishment for their sins. The evidence? More than 30 of the accusers and accused had personal ties to the war. Most of these men, women, and children were hanged or pressed to death. Norton concludes that had "the Second Indian War on the northeastern frontier somehow been avoided, the Essex County witchcraft crisis of 1692 would not have occurred."

Knopf. 436 pages, illustrated. \$30.

Boston Globe ★★★★★
"Concern over native unrest, and God's possible unhappiness with the settlers because of it, pointed the way to the witch hysteria. . . . Norton builds her case with the precision of a criminal prosecutor." MICHAEL KENNEY

LA Times ★★★★★
"If you know [Salem] history already, you see [Norton's] story unfolding early and have the delicious thrill of anticipating the grand conclusion she will draw. If you do not, her final chapter, 'New Witch-Land,' can read like the end of an Agatha Christie novel."

MARC ARONSON

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★
"In the Devil's Snare is a rabble-rouser of a book. It defies both conventional 'Crucible'-inspired wisdom



and prevailing scholarship about Salem. . ." JILL LEPORE

Chicago Tribune ★★★★★
"The case Norton makes for the interconnectedness of the Wabanaki threat and the presence of the devil in northeastern Massachusetts is compelling, if not airtight, and is based on a wealth of research. . . . [This book] also provides a poignant reminder of how the perceived failure of leaders to defend their people against an external threat, then, as now, can lead to terrible efforts to purge the demons within." KATHLEEN M. BROWN

Atlantic Monthly ★★
"[Historians'] attempts to make sense of [Salem's witchcraft trials] are often anachronistic and usually overly speculative: they've attributed the crisis to the psychosexual imagination of teenage girls, to status anxiety, to collective hysteria, to misogyny, to religious fervor, even to organic hallucinogens. . . . Norton's own case would be thrown out of court." BENJAMIN SCHWARZ

CRITICAL SUMMARY

On Halloween Day, 2001, the Massachusetts Legislature passed a bill that retroactively absolved five of Salem's hanged witches of wrongdoing. The bill came more than three centuries too late for its victims. Yet *In the Devil's Snare* comes at a timely moment in American history, where the threat of violence is closer to home than it has been in generations. With the exception of *The Atlantic*, which accuses Norton of conflating "fanciful motive with evidence," critics praise Norton's persuasive account of the events leading up to the Salem witch trials. Her fresh political and economic approach to understanding the motives behind the witch-hunt draws a new causal relationship between the conditions of war and

witchcraft. Admittedly, Norton overdraws these connections, but she backs up speculative inquiry with the evidence that does exist. A good book for those who enjoy colonial history, like witchcraft, or want a historic precedent for some of our modern troubles.

- Jessica Teisch, Bookmarks

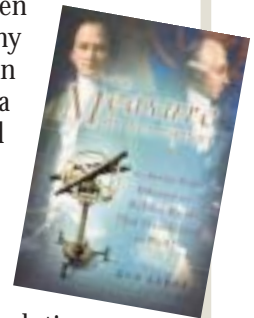
★★★★★
The Measure of All Things

The Seven-Year Odyssey and Hidden Error That Transformed the World

By Ken Alder

The story of the meter.

Today we define the meter as the distance light travels through a vacuum in 1/299,792,458 of a second, or about 39.37 inches. But the meter was not always so precise. When the French National Assembly decided to institute a new standard of measurement in 1790, the meter did not even exist. Nor did many other standards—in parts of France, a pound of bread weighed less than a pound of lead. The standardization of measurements was just one of many Revolution era reforms that included the less successful 10-hour clock and 400-degree circle. In this volume, Alder, a historian, retraces the journey of the two French astronomers who measured the meter: Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Delambre and Pierre-François-André Méchain. For seven years, the two men triangulated their way from Dunkirk to Barcelona. They braved the natural elements, scaled extinct volcanoes and cathedral towers, and encountered hostile revolutionaries, mak-





Seeing in the Dark

How Backyard Stargazers Are Probing Deep Space and Guarding Earth from Interplanetary Peril

By Timothy Ferris

What happens “in the moment when ancient starlight strikes the eye and incites the mind?” A celestial kind of magic, says Ferris, and perhaps even a breathtaking new discovery. A professional journalist, amateur astronomer, and retired professor of journalism, Ferris has written another book for the layman astronomer. This time, he argues that technological breakthroughs since the 1980s, including the Internet, robotic telescopes, and light-sensitive computer chips, have allowed backyard astronomers to make important contributions to the field. Take Barbara Wilson, for example, head of the Association of Invisible Nebula and Things Nobody Observes, or Vera Rubin, who discovered mysterious “dark matter” in the 1980s. Then there’s William Herschel, a musician who discovered the planet Uranus. (Of course, professionals like Alan Hale *do* exist.) Ferris takes us on a trip to the Sun, the Oort cloud, quasars, and the Milky Way, among other celestial bodies, focusing on our ordinary encounters with them. He also provides an excellent introduction to basic astronomy and 30 pages of astronomical tables and viewing tips. “I guess my fondest dream,” Ferris writes, “would be that [*Seeing in the Dark*] would result in doubling the number of stargazers in this country.” And so it might.

Simon & Schuster. 379 pages. \$26.

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★

“[Ferris’s] adolescent enthusiasm, well tended since Sputnik, reinforces his formidable literary gifts - for metaphor, for narrative and everything between. This is a beautiful book.” WILLIAM R. EVERDELL

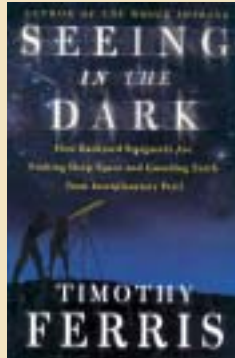
ing their “progress worthy of Don Quixote.” Yet in the end, human error got the best of them. Méchain, unable to reconcile a series of observations he had made, nearly committed suicide. Later Delambre discovered that Méchain had falsified his measurements and recalculated them. . . . to our lasting benefit.

The Free Press. 466 pages. \$27.

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★
“Highly original. . . an unusually capable and well-written book that adeptly sets its yarn of exploration amid the wider context of a world awakening to the pleasures and perils of scientific exactitude.” TIMOTHY FERRIS

Observer (London) ★★★★★
“It is beautifully written, endlessly informative and meticulously documented. . . thrills at every level.”

SELECTION



“Will be treasured by generations of stargazers to come”

SF Chronicle ★★★★★

“After spending time with Ferris’ book, with its star charts and observatory logs, it’s impossible to see the night sky in the same way.” HEIDI BENSON

Scientific American ★★★★★

“My advice to Simon & Schuster would have been to keep the ‘Further Reading’ section and let Ferris substitute the rest [of the astronomical tables and viewing tips] with another profile or two. Then this great book would be near perfect.” SHAWN CARLSON

Washington Post ★★★★★

“Ferris’ descriptions are pitch-perfect in capturing the inner rhapsodic thrill of standing under a canopy of stars in the dark. . . . Entrancing and beautifully written, this latest work by Ferris, the writer laureate of astronomy, will be treasured by generations of stargazers to come.”

MARCIA BARTUSIAK

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Ferris has received a Pulitzer nomination, won countless science awards, and written and narrated the PBS documentaries, “Life Beyond Earth” and “The Creation of the Universe.” He resides at the top of the best science writers of his generation, a group that includes Steven Pinker, Stephen Jay Gould, and science journalists James Gleick and Laurie Garrett. *Seeing in the Dark* shows why. Ferris makes the night sky come alive for experts and novices alike by putting a human face, past and present, on astronomical exploration and discovery. He also writes in vivid, evocative language that will create backyard stargazers out of even the most unscientifically-minded among us. The Orion nebula, for example, is “a glowing hive at the middle of the scabbard dangling from the hunter’s belt.” Who knows, maybe you’ll be the one to discover the next universe. Stranger things have happened.

- Jessica Teisch, Bookmarks

Washington Post ★★★★★
“. . . Delambre and Mechain’s epic mission succeeded—not because it had produced accurate results, but because it was epic. Epic in its own way, *The Measure of All Things* is no less a success.” GREGORY MOTT

Discover ★★★★★
“[A]s Alder reminds us, this standard of precision owes its existence to a time of political upheaval and its ac-

tual length to the imperfections of a troubled man." MARGARET FOLEY

New Yorker ★★★
 "Although there were moments of real drama—the astronomers' equipment made them look like spies at a time when authorities tended to behead first and ask questions later—the measuring is the least interesting part of the story. . . . The most thought-provoking parts of Alder's book are the (too brief) ones in which he explains why the metric system represented not just standardization but a 'revolutionary rupture' in the fabric of French society and 'a crucial stage in the education of modern *Homo economicus*.'" DAVID OWEN

New Statesman ★★★
 "While the narrative micro-history genre relies on dazzling the reader with previously unnoticed historical oddities, this potentially fascinating story is deadened by long-winded exposition. Alder's knowledge of the sources is undeniable, but he suffers from a fetish for facts." TRISTAN QUINN

CRITICAL SUMMARY

In 1790, President George Washington, who had already introduced decimal-based coinage, tried to convert the United States to the metric system. For whatever reason, the metric system never took hold, and the idea fell out of favor for 200 years. In France, however, the metric system flourished. Alder's engaging account of the two Frenchmen who helped make it happen shows why. Although some critics cite the actual triangulation scenes as some of the less interesting parts of the book, most welcome Alder's detailed adventure scenes, broad historical context, and even-handed personality studies. Yet certain issues divide the critics. While the *New Statesman* thought the narrative too sugarcoated, *The New York Times Book Review* claimed that the

book "bathes the past in the light, life and humanity of the eternal present." Nonetheless Alder writes with humor, adventure (he followed the Frenchmen's route on bicycle), and clarity. But why only the U.S., Myanmar, and Liberia still cling to antiquated measurements remains a mystery.

- Jessica Teisch, Bookmarks

NON-FICTION
sports

★★★★★

The Founding Fish

By John McPhee
 It's all about the shad.

This is a book about Pulitzer prize-winner John McPhee and his love of fishing for shad, cooking shad, reading about shad and talking about shad. A frequent *New Yorker* contributor and author of more than two dozen books, McPhee's latest is part American history text, part fishing lore compendium and part cookbook. Here, too, are digressions on fish anatomy and biology, odes to the author's favorite rivers and at least one epic battle of man vs. shad. The shad, McPhee explains, is a storied fish; George Washington worked for a time as a commercial shad fisherman, Thomas Jefferson had a weakness for the taste of cooked shad, and Ben Franklin's Colonial-era newspaper published news items about shad. All of which explains why McPhee has dubbed it the nation's "Founding Fish."

Farrar Straus and Giroux. 320 pages. \$25.

Washington Post ★★★★★
 "There is a lot more going on in John McPhee's *The Founding Fish* than obsession. Perhaps that may have been the initial impulse for writing, but the

result is a masterpiece of fishing literature." CRAIG NOVA

Christian Science Mon. ★★★★★
 "Even if you've never cast a shad dart in a coastal river on an early spring morning or eaten planked shad for supper, this is a book that will make you think, laugh, and wonder." WILLIAM MOODY

Denver Post ★★★★★
 "McPhee's special genius is that he knows how to out (put?) all this potentially numbing detail into a book and make it absolutely interesting." BILL PRIDE

Plain Dealer ★★★★★
 "[McPhee's] reporting and research are always thorough, his writing always clear and fluid...." JEAN DUBAIL

Chicago Sun-Times ★★★
 "[I]f you are a fisherman, or particularly fond of fish, or have a special interest in shad, this book is for you. If you are one of the legion of McPhee fans who reflexively read everything he writes in the hopes of recapturing the glory of *The Search for Marvin Gardens*, then *The Founding Fish* might be a disappointment." NEIL STEINBERG

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Reviewers are almost universally enthusiastic about the new effort from the septuagenarian author. McPhee's ability to merge his own obsessions with ruminations on the history of fishing is roundly praised. *The Washington Post*, is the most enthusiastic, terming the book "good fun and exceedingly informative...compelling and important." Likewise, Moody, in the *Christian Science Monitor*, describes himself as thoroughly captivated by the writer's prose. "Under McPhee's close eye," he writes, "everything about this fish is fascinating." Only *The Chicago Sun-Times*, suggests that the book's



The New Biographical Dictionary of Film

By David Thomson

This, the third—and perhaps not the last—revision of Thomson's much-heralded 1975 catalogue of film is, like its predecessors, idiosyncratic and exhaustive. The book's 1,300 entries cover obscure figures (Jean-Pierre Melville, Yasujiro Ozu) and contemporary stars (Reese Witherspoon, Brad Pitt) alike. The British-born Thomson has, it seems, watched every film ever made, and his writing is entertaining and opinionated. He calls Tom Hanks an actor who carries "the automatic sentiment of a dog in a film about people," and describes Charlie Chaplin as "the looming mad politician of the century, the demon tramp." In this way, it is not a "dictionary" in the classic sense, but a wide-ranging romp through a century of film.

Knopf. 964 pages. \$35.

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★

"In the passion department, he sometimes gives the impression that he's had it up to here with the movies and all their twisted head games, and that if cinema were a woman he'd gladly seek a divorce. Yet in the latest edition of his deservedly treasured reference work, the book's third and biggest revision since it first appeared in 1975, Thomson proves anew that he is irreplaceable." SARAH KERR

Washington Post ★★★★★

"The book that [Thomson's] Dictionary should be paired with on any film buff's shelf is Pauline Kael's 5001 Nights at the Movies, and that is lavish praise indeed." DENNIS

DRABELLE

LA Times ★★★★★

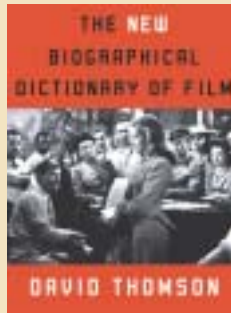
"To some degree, the sheer vastness of Thomson's enterprise renders it inarguable...More to the point, how can we dispute the apparent thoroughness of his viewing?" RICHARD

SCHICKEL

New York Observer ★★★★★

"David Thomson is here to sing the multiplex blues—sitting there, at the back of the cinema, amid the torn velour and spilled Pepsi—but this book is the most beautiful of torch songs, and more than bright enough to light up the gloom." TOM SHONE

SELECTION



One man's opinionated, exhaustive look at film.

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Critics rave about Thomson's "Dictionary," quarrelling only with the book's minor factual errors and, occasionally, its extravagantly idiosyncratic entries (for example, as Sarah Kerr points out in the *The New York Times Book Review*, Thomson, after seeing thousands of more acclaimed actresses, has chosen Angie Dickinson as his favorite). Yet the sheer mass—there are 300 more entries than the last edition—and boldness of Thomson's work impresses reviewers. Schickel, himself a

film critic for 35 years, concedes that the breadth of Thomson's knowledge is superior to his own. And Drabelle, in *The Washington Post*, expresses something close to awe. Thomson can be alternately dismissive and harsh, hyperbolic and brilliant. At times, he is even inscrutable; it's hard to know what he means when he calls Anne Heche "altogether lemony" or when he writes that, "There is a talent in American films that makes for adolescent attitudes, veiled fascism." But there is enough knowledge backing Thomson's opinions, and enough passion in his writing, to make this book a winner. Thomson's is not a typical reference text, but it is something close to a must-have for serious film fans.

- Kevin Canfield, Bookmarks

audience might be limited to hardcore fishing fans. Other critics, though, think McPhee's command of history, his lively prose and his enthusiasm make this a book for a wide audience.

- Kevin Canfield, Bookmarks



Sandy Koufax

A Lefty's Legacy

By Jane Leavy

Sandy Koufax, may be the greatest left-handed pitcher in baseball history and has long been an intensely private man. Little about Leavy's book will change that. "A Lefty's Legacy" focuses almost exclusively on Koufax's playing career, putting into social context his identity as a Jewish sports hero who refused to pitch in a World Series game because it fell on Yom Kippur. Leavy, a former writer for *The Washington Post*, also does well to point out that Koufax, who pitched

for the Brooklyn and, later, Los Angeles Dodgers from 1955 to 1966, was aided in his transition to the big leagues by his African-American teammates. Black players were only allowed to suit up for Major League Baseball clubs beginning in 1947, and they knew all too well how bigotry could impede performance. After six uneven seasons, Koufax broke through with a stellar 1961 campaign. Then, from 1962 to 1966, he had what was arguably the greatest five-year stretch

of any pitcher in Major League Baseball history. Leavy is a longtime Koufax fan, and her book reads like it. It is not a probing analysis of the pitcher's private life, but a Valentine to a champion athlete.

HarperCollins. 282 pages. \$23.95.

Philadelphia Inquirer ★★★★★

"Jane Leavy has captured that awe we felt at who he was and what he did. She's also filled in some of the blanks in a way that respects his desire to be the information gatekeeper of his own life." LARRY EICHEL

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★

"We scarcely know Koufax at all, but after Jane Leavy's delightful [book], we probably know him as well as anyone needs to." ALLEN BARRA

LA Times ★★★★★

"[Leavy] agreed not to interview [Koufax] and 'chose not to call his ex-wives, ex-girlfriends or the woman with whom he currently shares his life.' ...[I]f you want to know the man whose biography you are writing, it's nice to know a bit more than this."

WALTER BERNSTEIN

Washington Post ★★★★★

"Koufax is not presented in Leavy's book as he is often portrayed: as an ornery recluse. Leavy admires Koufax's private nature." SEAN CALLAHAN

CRITICAL SUMMARY

The acclaim for Leavy's paean to Koufax is qualified. Critics laud Leavy's ability to capture what Koufax meant to baseball and, in particular, Jewish fans in the 1960s. As Barra puts it, Koufax was "[t]he most popular Jewish sports star since David." But Leavy's decision to steer clear of most details of the pitcher's personal life is a point of disagreement among reviewers. Eichel applauds her choice not to interview the pitcher's ex-wives and ex-girlfriends. Bernstein, though, thinks

the author's self-imposed boundaries were detrimental. "It is not necessarily prurience," he writes, "that would like a little more from those wives and girlfriends." Overall, critics agree: it's a knowledgeable baseball book, but not an exhaustive biography.

- Kevin Canfield, Bookmarks

★★★

Live From New York

An Uncensored History Of Saturday Night Live

By Tom Shales & James Andrew Miller

From *The Washington Post* writers Shales and Miller comes what the authors hope is the definitive insider account of the long-running NBC comedy show. The program, in its 28th season, has become a cultural touchstone, and Shales and Miller treat it as such in their long oral history. The authors interviewed all but two of the show's key on-air and behind-the-scenes staff, all of whom are given generous amounts of space in which to tell their stories. Lorne Michaels, the show's producer for 22 of its first 27 seasons, emerges as an Oz-like figure, choreographing skits and making-or-breaking-careers. Chevy Chase, who left the show early on to pursue a movie career, emerges as a widely disliked figure, and, at least on one occasion, a pugilistic opponent of cast member Bill Murray. Shales and Miller also make the case that the show, after a creative low point, has enjoyed something of a renaissance as of late.

Little, Brown. 572 pages. \$25.95.

Chicago Tribune ★★★★★

"Readers who are inclined to scorn what Saturday Night Live has become...will come away with much more sympathy to the challenge of mounting 90 live minutes 22 times a year." STEVE JOHNSON

Washington Post ★★★★★

"[T]here's such a surplus of bite-sized gossip and backstage chatter that you barely notice what or who is being overlooked." GENE SEYMOUR

NY Times Book Review ★★

"Few will deny that this remarkable show merits a serious book-length treatment. Unfortunately, that is not what Tom Shales and James Andrew Miller have given us." MARTHA BAYLES

New York Observer ★

"The book, with its breathless claim of being 'uncensored' should have been censored a little more: not its scandalous material, but its hundreds of pages of insider-baseball and unpleasant personal complaints and self-justifications." VINCE PASSARO

CRITICAL SUMMARY

Reviews the most ambitious book on *SNL* to date, are all over the map. Some critics love the book's dishy tone-backstage drug use, physical confrontations, creative struggles are all covered at length here. Others appreciate the extensive reporting done by the authors, who interviewed almost everyone even remotely linked to the show (Eddie Murphy and Dennis Miller refused to participate). Johnson, in *The Chicago Tribune*, calls it a "superbly executed oral history." Yet other reviewers think this book is largely a waste of time. The book, as Bayles sees it in *The New York Times*, lacks focus. And several critics seem to agree that there is just too much here—too many silly anecdotes, too much revisionist history, too much self-praise. Passaro, in the *New York Observer*, says the book is three times longer than need be, suggesting that even diehard *SNL* watchers would be satisfied with a long magazine article. Like many of the skits on the show itself, this book is, it seems, a love it or hate it proposition.

- Kevin Canfield, Bookmarks

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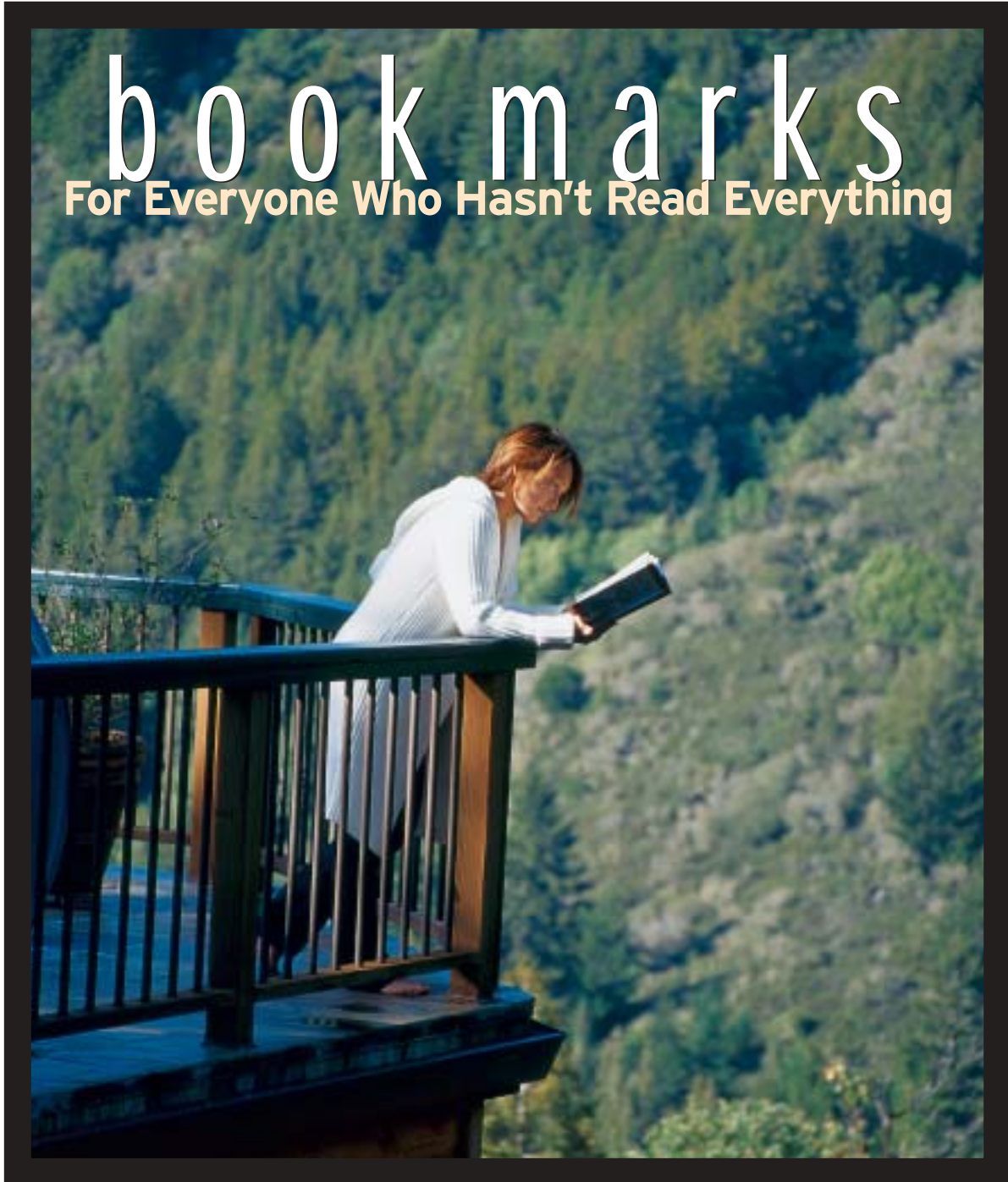
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