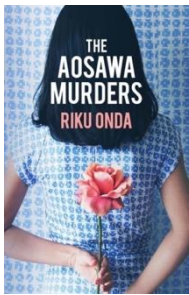


The New York Times

100 Notable Books

of 2020

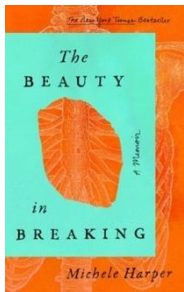
The year's notable fiction, poetry and nonfiction, selected by the editors of The New York Times Book Review



[The Aosawa Murders](#)

BY RIKU ONDA. Translated by Alison Watts. FICTION.

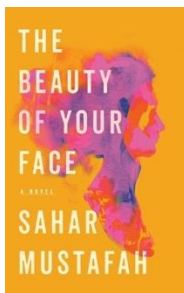
Onda's strange, engrossing novel — patched together from scraps of interviews, letters, newspaper articles and the like — explores the sweltering day that 17 members of the Aosawa family died after drinking poisoned sake and soda.



[The Beauty in Breaking: A Memoir](#)

BY MICHELE HARPER. NONFICTION. MEMOIR.

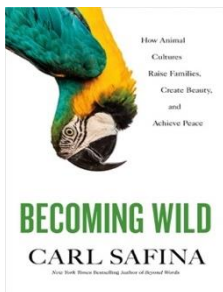
When Harper was a teenager, she drove her brother to the hospital to get treated for a bite her father had inflicted. There, she glimpsed a world she wanted to join. “The Beauty in Breaking” is her memoir of becoming an emergency room physician. It’s also a profound statement on the inequities in medical care today.



[The Beauty of Your Face](#)

BY SAHAR MUSTAFAH. FICTION.

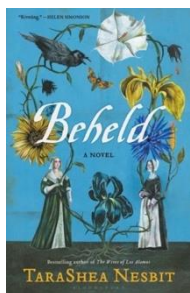
In the Chicago suburbs, a gunman opens fire at a school for Palestinian girls. Mustafah rewinds from the shooting to the principal’s childhood as a newly arrived immigrant. Hers is a story of outsiders coming together in surprising and uplifting ways.



Becoming Wild: How Animal Cultures Raise Families, Create Beauty, and Achieve Peace

BY CARL SAFINA. NONFICTION

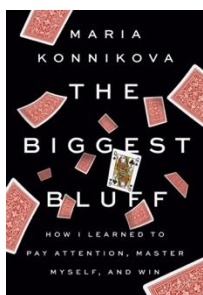
Safina, the ecologist and author of many books about animal behavior, here delves into the world of chimpanzees, sperm whales and macaws to make a convincing argument that animals learn from one another and pass down culture in a way that will feel very familiar to us.



Beheld

BY TARASHEA NESBIT. FICTION.

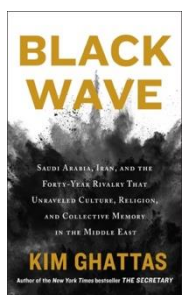
In this plain-spoken and lovingly detailed historical novel, the story of the Mayflower Pilgrims and Plymouth Colony is refracted through the prism of female characters. Despite the novel's quietness of telling, its currency is the human capacity for cruelty and subjugation, of pretty much everyone by pretty much everyone.



The Biggest Bluff: How I Learned to Pay Attention, Master Myself, and Win

BY MARIA KONNIKOVA. NONFICTION. MEMOIR.

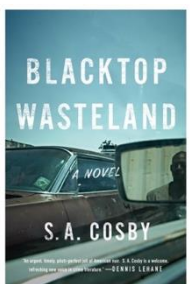
Konnikova, a writer for The New Yorker with a Ph.D. in psychology, decided to study poker for its interplay between luck and determination. This is an account of her journey, which took her much further into the world of high-stakes gambling than she ever imagined.



Black Wave: Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Forty-Year Rivalry That Unraveled Culture, Religion, and Collective Memory in the Middle East

BY KIM GHATTAS. NONFICTION.

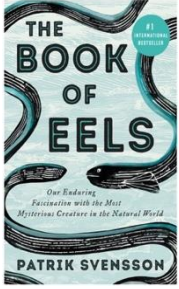
A Lebanese-born journalist and scholar takes a sweeping look at the unrest in the Middle East, arguing that much of it is the result of the competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran.



Blacktop Wasteland

BY S. A. COSBY. FICTION.

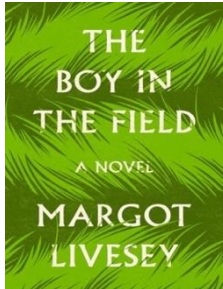
In this gritty thriller, set in rural Virginia, Beauregard “Bug” Montage — the owner of a struggling auto shop — is drifting back into his old life of crime. Cosby has a talent for well-tuned action, raising our heart rates and filling our nostrils with odors of gun smoke and burned rubber.



The Book of Eels: Our Enduring Fascination With the Most Mysterious Creature in the Natural World

BY PATRIK SVENSSON. NONFICTION. MEMOIR.

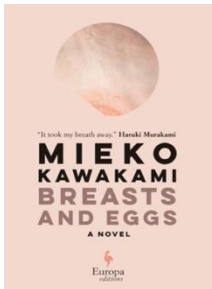
Svensson follows those slithery beings in every direction they take him, producing a book that moves from Aristotle to Freud to the fishing trips of his youth.



The Boy In The Field

BY MARGOT LIVESLEY. FICTION.

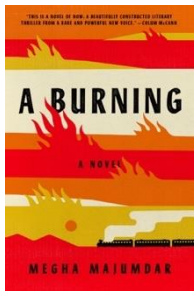
In Livesey's exquisite new novel, three siblings on their way home from school find a boy who has been attacked and left for dead in a field. This discovery leads to a mystery that will change the lives of all involved.



Breasts and Eggs

BY MIEKO KAWAKAMI. Translated by Sam Bett and David Boyd. FICTION.

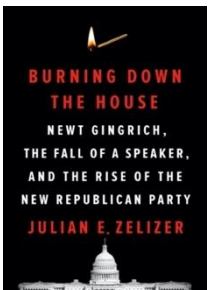
In supple and casual prose, this celebrated Japanese novelist follows sisters in Osaka who are considering breast augmentation and sperm donation, causing two generations of women to reckon with the realities of their physical bodies and the pressures put on them by society.



A Burning

BY MEGHA MAJUMDAR. FICTION.

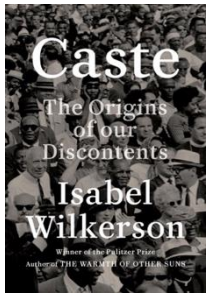
A brazen act of terrorism in an Indian metropolis sets the plot of this propulsive debut novel in motion, and lands an innocent young bystander in jail. With impressive assurance and insight, Majumdar unfolds a timely story about the ways power is wielded to manipulate and crush the powerless.



Burning Down the House: Newt Gingrich, the Fall of Speaker, and the Rise of the New Republican Party

BY JULIAN E. ZELIZER. NONFICTION.

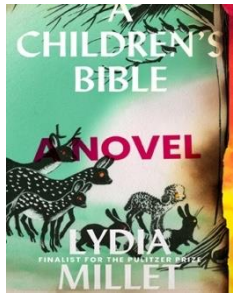
As Zelizer recounts, Gingrich brought a new slash-and-burn style to Congress in the late 1980s that disrupted old ways and led to repeated Republican successes.



Caste: The Origins of our Discontents

BY ISABEL WILKERSON. NONFICTION.

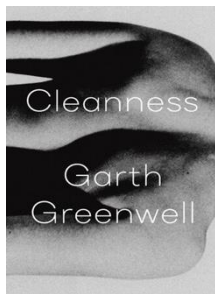
The Pulitzer-winning author advances a sweeping argument for regarding American racial bias through the lens of caste. Drawing analogies with the social orders of modern India and Nazi Germany, she frames barriers to equality in a provocative new light.



A Children's Bible

BY LYDIA MILLET. FICTION.

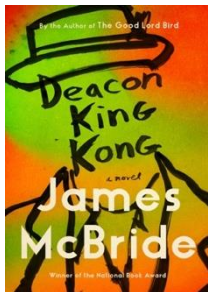
This superb novel begins as a generational comedy — a pack of kids and their middle-aged parents coexist in a summer share — and turns steadily darker, as climate collapse and societal breakdown encroach. But Millet's light touch never falters; in this time of great upheaval, she implies, our foundational myths take on new meaning and hope.



Cleanness

BY GARTH GREENWELL. FICTION.

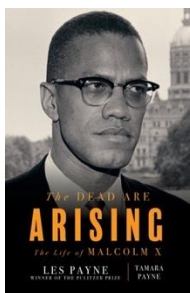
Greenwell's narrator is a gay American teacher in Sofia, Bulgaria, who has a series of encounters that are sexually frank and psychologically complicated; the book achieves an unusual depth of accuracy about both physical activity and emotional undercurrent.



Deacon King Kong

BY JAMES MCBRIDE. FICTION.

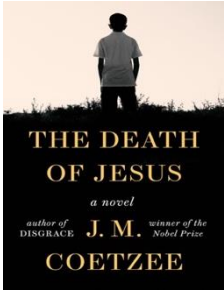
At the center of this raucous novel by the National Book Award-winning author of "The Good Lord Bird" are a hard-drinking church deacon and a sudden, inexplicable act of violence. But that's just one strand of McBride's tour de force, a book resounding with madcap characters and sly commentary on race, crime and inequality.



The Dead Are Arising: The Life of Malcolm X

BY LES PAYNE AND TAMARA PAYNE. NONFICTION.

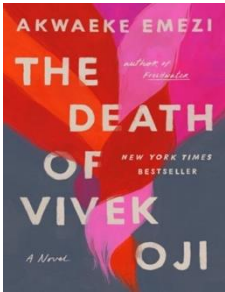
Thirty years in the making and encompassing hundreds of original interviews, this magisterial biography of Malcolm X was completed by Les Payne's daughter after his death in 2018. Its strengths lie in its finely shaded, penetrating portrait of the Black activist and thinker, whose legacy continues to find fresh resonance today.



The Death of Jesus

BY J. M. COETZEE. FICTION.

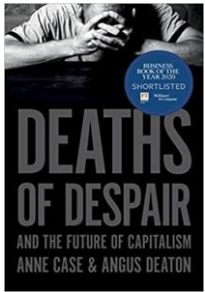
With the pared-down quality of a fable, the final novel in Coetzee's Jesus trilogy makes a case for the fantastical worldview of Don Quixote. Young David enters an orphanage, finds followers and imparts wisdom before falling terminally ill — a Christ figure, sure, but not one with easy or predictable parallels.



The Death of Vivek Oji

BY AKWAEKE EMEZI. FICTION.

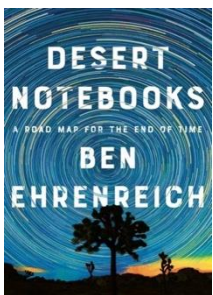
This steamroller of a story, about coming of age and coming out in Nigeria, centers on what a family doesn't see — or doesn't want to see — and whether that blindness contributes to a son's death.



Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism

BY ANNE CASE AND ANGUS DEATON. NONFICTION.

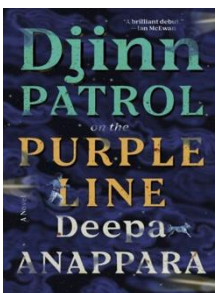
This highly important book examines the pain and despair among white blue-collar workers and suggests that the hopelessness they are experiencing may eventually extend to the entire American work force.



Desert Notebooks: A Road Map for the End of Time

BY BEN EHRENREICH. NONFICTION. MEMOIR.

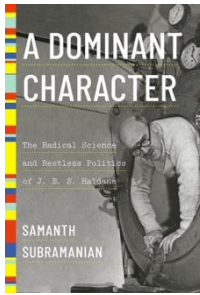
The author, a columnist for The Nation, divides his book into two strands: a journal-like description of his life in desert America, in a cabin near Joshua Tree National Park, and his move to Las Vegas, where his world shrinks. Months into lockdown, it feels creepily prescient: We are all in the desert now.



Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line

BY DEEPA ANAPPARA. FICTION.

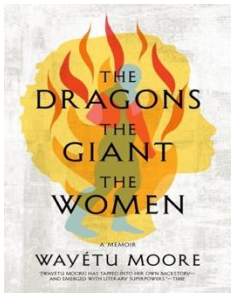
This first novel by an Indian journalist probes the secrets of a big-city shantytown as a 9-year-old boy tries to solve the mystery of a classmate's disappearance. Anappara impressively inhabits the inner worlds of children lost to their families, and of others who escape by a thread.



A Dominant Character: The Radical Science and Restless Politics of J. B. S. Haldane

BY SAMANTH SUBRAMANIAN. NONFICTION.

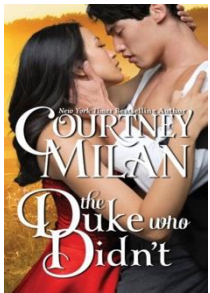
Haldane, the British biologist and ardent communist who helped synthesize Darwinian evolution with Mendelian genetics, was once as famous as Einstein. Subramanian's elegant biography doubles as a timely allegory of the fraught relationship between science and politics.



The Dragons, the Giant, the Women: A Memoir

BY WAYÉTU MOORE. NONFICTION. MEMOIR.

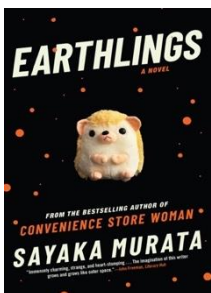
Following her magical realist debut novel, "She Would Be King," Moore's immersive, exhilarating memoir also has elements of the fantastical — framed by her family's harrowing escape from civil war in Liberia



The Duke Who Didn't

BY COURTNEY MILAN. \$15.99. FICTION.

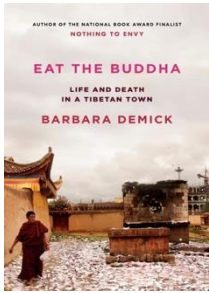
By turns consciously tender and fiercely witty, this is an unalloyed charmer about Chloe Fong, a stubborn Chinese-British sauce maker, and Jeremy Yu, the half-Chinese Duke of Lansing, who's head over heels for her, but can't seem to say so.



Earthlings

BY SAYAKA MURATA. Translated by Ginny Tapley Takemori. FICTION.

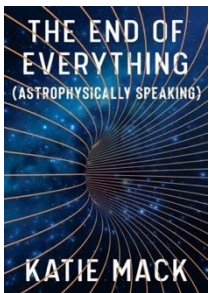
In the Japanese author's second novel, two cousins agree that they're aliens, abandoned at birth among humans. After the traumas of childhood, in adulthood they seek to abandon society -- a.k.a. "the Baby Factory" -- altogether, in favor of a moral vacuum.



Eat the Buddha: Life and Death in a Tibetan Town

BY BARBARA DEMICK. NONFICTION.

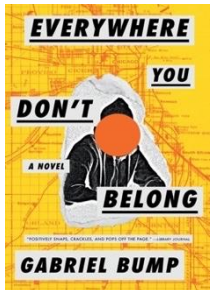
Demick tells a decades-long story about Ngaba, a small Sichuan town that has become the center of resistance to Chinese authority. Lately this activism has taken the form of self-immolation — an act of desperation, as Demick's panoramic reporting comprehensively shows.



The End of Everything: (Astrophysically Speaking)

BY KATIE MACK. NONFICTION.

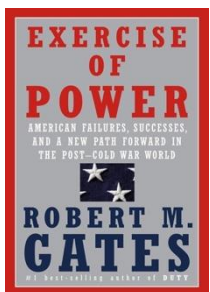
Many books have been written about the creation of the universe 13.8 billion years ago. But Mack, a theoretical cosmologist, is interested in how it all ends. She guides us along a cosmic timeline studded with scientific esoterica and mystery.



Everywhere You Don't Belong

BY GABRIEL BUMP. FICTION.

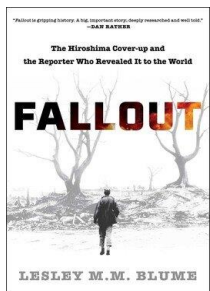
It's the rare book that can achieve an appropriate balance between heaviness and levity. This debut novel — a comically dark coming-of-age story about growing up on the South Side of Chicago — pulls the feat off not just generously, but seemingly without effort.



Exercise of Power: American Failures, Successes, and a New Path Forward in the Post-Cold War World

BY ROBERT M. GATES. NONFICTION.

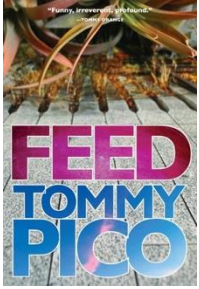
With decades of experience at the highest levels of government, Gates presents a critique of past mistakes in American foreign policy and provides a guide for policymakers in the future.



Fallout: The Hiroshima Cover-Up and the Reporter Who Revealed It to the World

BY LESLEY M. M. BLUME. NONFICTION.

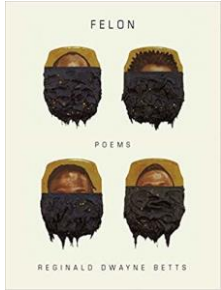
For months after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Americans were told little about the devastating effects on survivors. Blume's magisterial account of how John Hersey broke the story in The New Yorker is also a warning about the ever-present dangers of nuclear war.



[Feed](#)

BY TOMMY PICO. POETRY.

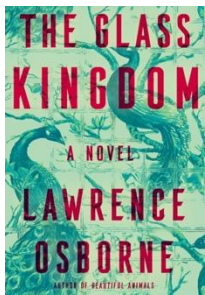
The title of Pico's restless, intimate and exhilarating new volume of poetry, his fourth, covers varieties of appetite: for sex, for nutrition, for fame, for news, for gossip, for simple companionship. "Feed" lets sympathetic readers pretend to live, for almost 80 pages, inside Pico's charismatic, uneasy mind.



[Felon: Poems](#)

BY REGINALD DWAYNE BETTS. POETRY.

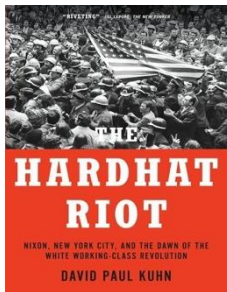
Betts's searing third collection surveys the underworlds of incarceration and its aftermath. "There is no name for this thing that you've become," he writes: "Convict, prisoner, inmate, lifer, yardbird, all fail." What does not fail is the language Betts sends prismatically through his experience to refract the prison-industrial complex.



[The Glass Kingdom](#)

BY LAWRENCE OSBORNE. FICTION.

An American woman is on the lam with a suitcase full of cash in Osborne's latest novel, which is set in a Bangkok rattled by monsoons and social unrest. As chaos grows, her refuge, a modern apartment complex, grows more prisonlike. Osborne's command of mood keeps the reader's pulse racing.



[The Hardhat Riot: Nixon, New York City, and the Dawn of the White Working-Class Revolution](#)

BY DAVID PAUL KUHN. NONFICTION.

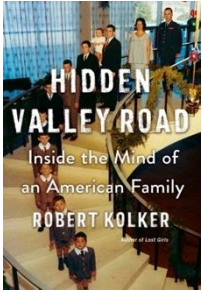
Kuhn highlights one day, May 8, 1970, when blue-collar workers went on a rampage against antiwar protesters, noting that the country's politics have never been the same.



[Hamnet](#)

BY MAGGIE O'FARRELL. FICTION.

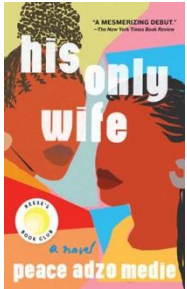
Shakespeare's son, Hamnet, died at 11, a few years before the playwright wrote "Hamlet." O'Farrell's wondrous new novel is at once an unsparingly eloquent record of love and grief and a vivid imagining of how a child's death was transfigured into art.



[Hidden Valley Road: Inside the Mind of an American Family](#)

BY ROBERT KOLKER. NONFICTION.

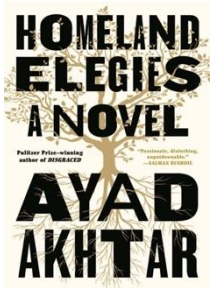
It reads like a Greek tragedy: Six of the Galvins' 12 children developed schizophrenia. This book is much more than a narrative of despair, though; its most compelling chapters involve the scientists who studied the family, looking for genetic clues about the origins of this unfathomable disease.



[His Only Wife](#)

BY PEACE ADZO MEDIE. FICTION.

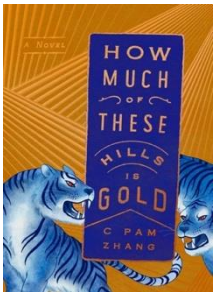
This rich, rewarding debut novel follows a Ghanaian seamstress — forced into an arranged marriage with a wealthy man she has never met — on her journey of self-discovery. “It wasn’t easy,” she declares, “being the key to other people’s happiness, their victory and their vindication.”



[Homeland Elegies](#)

BY AYAD AKHTAR. FICTION.

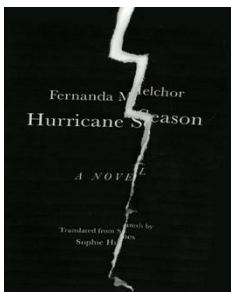
The latest novel from Akhtar is about the dream of national belonging that has receded for American Muslims in the years since 9/11. At once deeply personal and unreservedly political, the book often reads like a collection of essays illustrating the author’s prismatic identity.



[How Much of These Hills Is Gold](#)

BY C PAM ZHANG. FICTION.

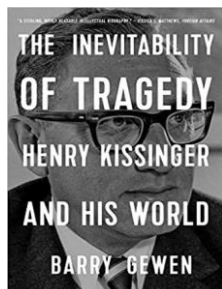
Zhang’s mesmerizing tale of two Chinese-American siblings crossing the West during the gold rush, with their father’s corpse in tow, unfolds in a landscape of desolation and struggle that recalls Steinbeck and Faulkner, and in a voice that is all her own.



[Hurricane Season](#)

BY FERNANDA MELCHOR. Translated by Sophie Hughes. FICTION.

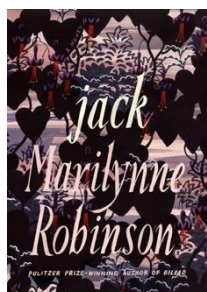
This searing novel, the first in English by the Mexican Melchor, dazzles with fury and beauty. Inspired by the wave of gruesome femicides in her home state of Veracruz, the author transposes the violence directed at women to the register of fable.



[The Inevitability of Tragedy: Henry Kissinger and His World](#)

BY BARRY GEWEN. NONFICTION.

In this magisterial account, Gewen, a longtime editor at the Book Review, traces the historical and philosophical roots of Kissinger's famous realism, situating him in the context of Hannah Arendt and a cohort of other Jewish intellectuals who escaped Nazi Germany.



[Jack](#)

BY MARILYNNE ROBINSON. FICTION.

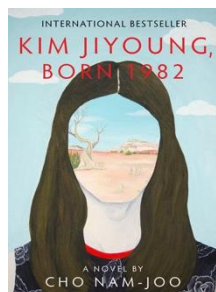
This uplifting addition to Robinson's numinous Gilead series centers on an interracial romance in postwar St. Louis that was hinted at but not amplified in the three books that preceded it. The lovers, Jack and Della, find hope and truth in each other, even as the world conspires to keep them apart.



[Just Us: An American Conversation](#)

BY CLAUDIA RANKINE. NONFICTION.

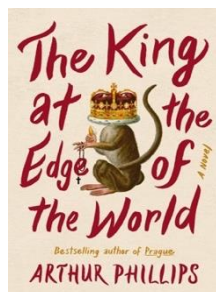
As she did in her acclaimed 2014 collection "Citizen," Rankine here combines essays, poetry and visual art to interrogate the ways race haunts her imagination, and America's. "Fantasies cost lives," she writes.



[Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982](#)

BY CHO NAM-JOO. Translated by Jamie Chang. FICTION.

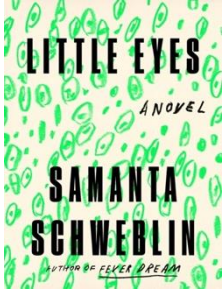
A sensation when it appeared in South Korea in 2016, this novel recounts, in the dispassionate language of a case history, the descent into madness of a young wife and mother — a Korean Everywoman whose plight illuminates the effects of a sexist society.



[The King at the Edge of the World](#)

BY ARTHUR PHILLIPS. FICTION.

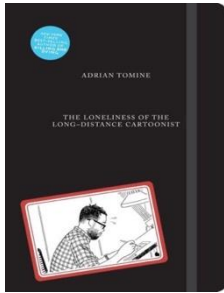
Intrigue and espionage fuel this delectable novel set during the twilight of the reign of Elizabeth I and featuring a Muslim Ottoman physician who is enlisted in the machinations surrounding the choice of the queen's successor.



Little Eyes

BY SAMANTA SCHWEBLIN. Translated by Megan McDowell. FICTION.

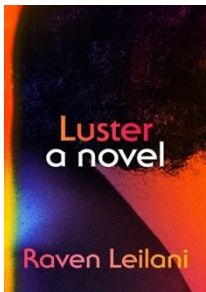
In this brilliantly creepy novel, surveillance takes the form of a toylike, camera-equipped pet that becomes a global sensation: Owning one is like inviting a mute stranger into your home.



The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Cartoonist

BY ADRIAN TOMINE. NONFICTION. MEMOIR.

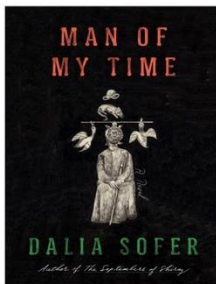
Tomine, now considered a master of the graphic novel form, returns in an autobiographical mode, in a book that lets vent the rage and fragility that are always just beneath the surface of his pristine drawings.



Luster

BY RAVEN LEILANI. FICTION.

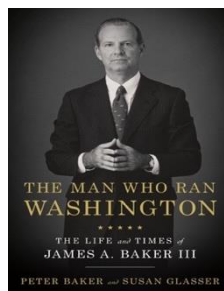
This first novel — about a 23-year-old New Yorker who becomes entangled with a white suburban couple and their Black daughter — feels like summer: sentences like ice that crackle or melt into a languorous drip; plot suddenly, wildly flying forward like a bike down a hill.



Man of My Time

BY DALIA SOFER. FICTION.

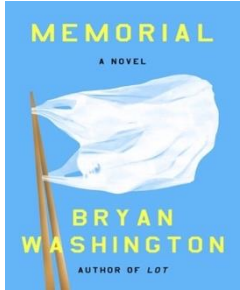
Sofer's second novel traces a man's path from "baffled revolutionary" in Iran to complicit actor in a ruthless regime sure he can undermine the system from inside. It is a master class in layering together a character who is essentially unforgivable but no less captivating.



The Man Who Ran Washington: The Life and Times of James A. Baker III

BY PETER BAKER AND SUSAN GLASSER. NONFICTION.

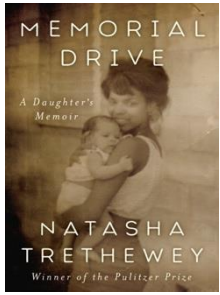
This fascinating biography of the former secretary of state and consummate insider, who was once called "the most important unelected official since World War II," reveals both Baker's accomplishments and the compromises he had to make.



Memorial

BY BRYAN WASHINGTON. FICTION.

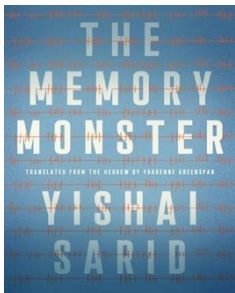
A sense of estrangement pervades this assured debut novel, which opens as a man flies to Osaka to care for his terminally ill father, leaving his visiting mother and his Black boyfriend to keep each other company. One of the great themes of “Memorial” is the immense power parents wield over their children, even well into adulthood.



Memorial Drive: A Memoir

BY NATASHA TRETHEWEY. NONFICTION. MEMOIR.

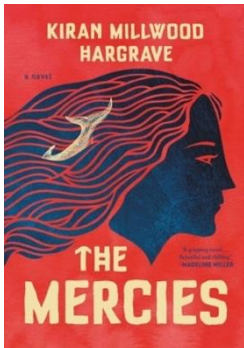
At the center of Trethewey’s memoir is the wrenching story of her mother’s murder, by her ex-husband, in 1985. But this haunting elegy by the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet is also a work of great beauty and tenderness, an atmospheric evocation of innocence and loss.



The Memory Monster

BY YISHAI SARID. Translated by Yardenne Greenspan. FICTION.

This brilliant short novel serves as a brave, sharp-toothed brief against letting the past devour the present. Sarid tells the story of a tour guide to the Nazi death camps and how his mind begins to slowly unravel as his knowledge of the mechanics of genocide becomes an obsession.



The Mercies

BY KIRAN MILLWOOD HARGRAVE. FICTION.

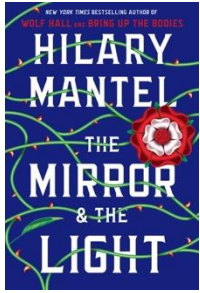
This unsparing, beautifully written novel takes as its subject the Vardo witch trials in 17th-century Norway, which even the infamous hysteria in Salem, Mass., several decades later could not match when it came to brutality. For such a book to center on a cast of powerful women characters seems as appropriate to its historical context as it is to our time.



Minor Detail

BY ADANIA SHIBLI. Translated by Elisabeth Jaquette. FICTION.

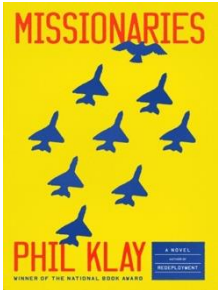
This slim, haunting novel begins with the rape and murder of a Palestinian girl in 1949, then shifts to present-day Ramallah, where a young woman tries to piece together what happened. Shibli turns her astonishing command of sensory detail into a rich study of memory and violence.



[The Mirror & the Light](#)

BY HILARY MANTEL. FICTION.

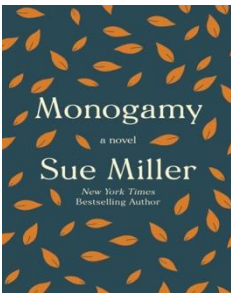
The final novel in Mantel's "Wolf Hall" trilogy returns to the terror of Henry VIII's court, where falls from grace are sudden and frequently fatal. For all its political and literary plotting, the book is most memorable for its portraiture, with Henry's secretary, Thomas Cromwell, as our master painter.



[Missionaries](#)

BY PHIL KLAY. FICTION.

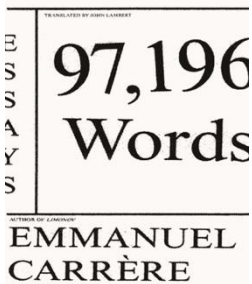
The four converging narratives of this astounding novel (Klay's first, after his National Book Award-winning story collection "Redeployment") capture the complexities of Colombia's five-decade war. Klay does not shy away from the thorny moral questions and psychological impacts of conflict, and the result is at once terrifying and thought-provoking.



[Monogamy](#)

BY SUE MILLER. FICTION.

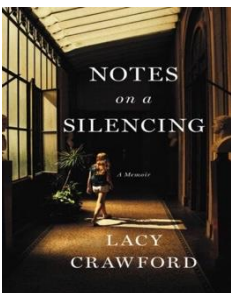
A gregarious bookstore owner dies suddenly, leaving his widow, children and ex-wife to make sense of the messy and colorful life they shared together. Sue Miller's engrossing novel is infused with generosity and the complicated kind of love readers will recognize from real life.



[97,196 Words: Essays](#)

BY EMMANUEL CARRÈRE. Translated by John Lambert. NONFICTION.

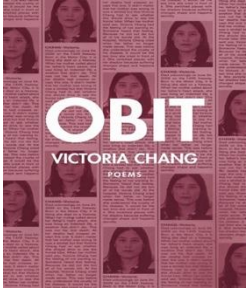
This collection of short pieces by an author widely considered to be France's leading nonfiction writer underscores Carrère's incisive style and moral stance; whether he's writing about a murderer or a movie star, he is also investigating himself, part of a deeply empathetic quest to understand our species.



[Notes on a Silencing: A Memoir](#)

BY LACY CRAWFORD. NONFICTION. MEMOIR.

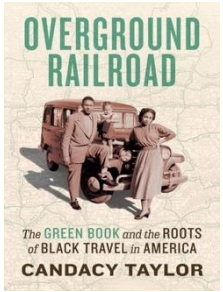
This devastating and erudite memoir chronicles the author's experience of sexual assault while she was a student at St. Paul's, an elite boarding school in Concord, N.H. — followed by a decades-long cover-up at the hands of an esteemed institution with money, power and connections, and her own complicated journey of recovery.



Obit: Poems

BY VICTORIA CHANG. POETRY.

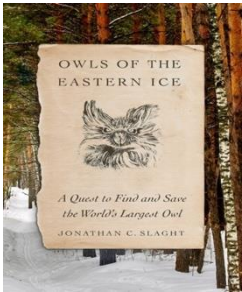
Chang's new collection explores her father's illness and her mother's death, treating mortality as a constantly shifting enigma. A serene acceptance of grief emerges from these poems.



Overground Railroad: The Green Book and the Roots of Black Travel in America

BY CANDACY TAYLOR. NONFICTION.

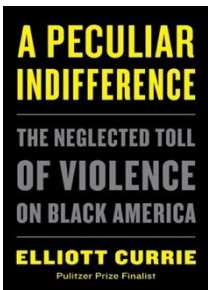
Taylor, a cultural documentarian, traveled to thousands of sites mentioned in the Green Book, the essential guidebook for Black travelers braving American roads during Jim Crow. Highlighting threats such travelers faced, her lively, illustrated history is mindful of the ongoing struggle for Black social mobility today.



Owls of the Eastern Ice: A Quest to Find and Save the World's Largest Owl

BY JONATHAN C. SLAGHT. NONFICTION.

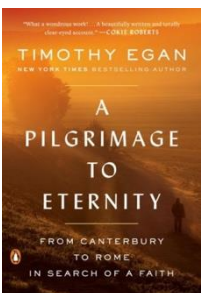
Slaght is a wildlife biologist with a singular mission, to conserve an elusive and enormous raptor in the eastern wilds of Russia. The book is an ode to the rigors and pleasures of fieldwork in hard conditions.



A Peculiar Indifference: The Neglected Toll of Violence on Black America

BY ELLIOTT CURRIE. NONFICTION.

This essential book by a veteran legal scholar argues that the extraordinary violence against Black lives is a result of the nation's refusal to address the structural roots of the problem.



A Pilgrimage to Eternity: From Canterbury to Rome in Search of a Faith

BY TIMOTHY EGAN. NONFICTION.

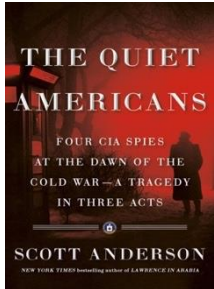
In his ninth book, this self-described "lapsed but listening" Irish Catholic travels 1,200 miles from Canterbury to Rome along the Via Francigena and tries to decide what he believes. If this book doesn't settle the question, it will at least fortify faith in scrupulous reporting and captivating storytelling.



[A Promised Land](#)

BY BARACK OBAMA. NONFICTION. MEMOIR.

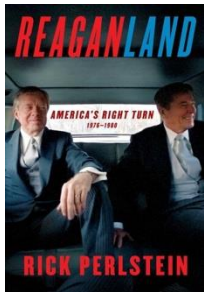
The former president's memoir — the first of two volumes — is a pleasure to read, the prose gorgeous, the detail granular and vivid. From Southeast Asia to a forgotten school in South Carolina, he evokes the sense of place with a light but sure hand. His focus is more political than personal, but when he does write about his family it is with a beauty close to nostalgia.



[The Quiet Americans: Four CIA Spies at the Dawn of the Cold War — a Tragedy in Three Acts](#)

BY SCOTT ANDERSON. NONFICTION.

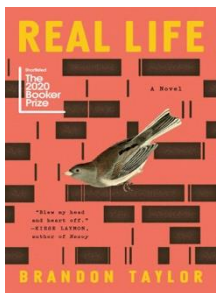
Covering the years 1944 to 1956, Anderson's enthralling history of the early years of the Cold War follows four C.I.A. operatives as their initial idealism eventually turns into betrayal and disillusionment, fueled by creeping right-wing hysteria at home and cynical maneuvering abroad.



[Reaganland: America's Right Turn, 1976-1980](#)

BY RICK PERLSTEIN. NONFICTION.

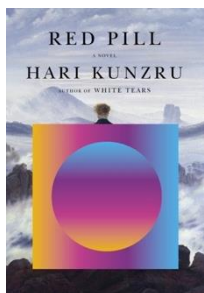
More than a book about Ronald Reagan, the conclusion of Perlstein's four-volume saga on the rise of conservatism in America is absorbing political and social history, with sharp insights into the human quirks and foibles that were so much a part of the late 1970s.



[Real Life](#)

BY BRANDON TAYLOR. FICTION.

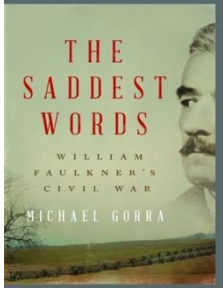
In this stunning debut novel, a gay Black graduate student from the South mines hope for some better or different life while he studies biochemistry in the haunted halls of a white academic space. As in the modernist novels of Woolf and Tolstoy cited throughout, the true action of Taylor's novel exists beneath the surface.



[Red Pill](#)

BY HARI KUNZRU. FICTION.

A fellowship at a study center in Germany turns sinister and sets a writer on a possibly paranoid quest to expose a political evil he believes is loose in the world. Kunzru's wonderfully weird novel traces a lineage from German Romanticism to National Socialism to the alt-right, and is rich with insights on surveillance and power.



The Saddest Words: William Faulkner's Civil War

BY MICHAEL GORRA. NONFICTION.

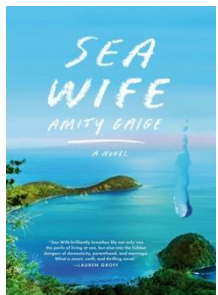
Gorra's complex and thought-provoking meditation on Faulkner is rich in insight, making the case for the novelist's literary achievement and his historical value — as an unparalleled chronicler of slavery's aftermath, and its damage to America's psyche.



Saint X

BY ALEXIS SCHAITKIN. FICTION.

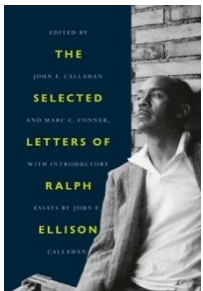
In 1995, on a nameless Caribbean island, the daughter of an American family goes missing. This debut novel is hypnotic, delivering acute social commentary on everything from class and race to familial bonds and community, and yet its weblike nature never confuses or fails to captivate.



Sea Wife

BY AMITY GAIGE. FICTION.

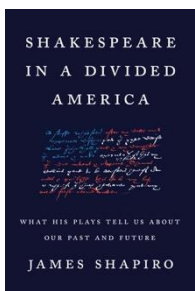
A husband and wife try to escape their problems by packing up their small children and taking to the open sea on a boat they barely know how to sail. Trouble follows, but not necessarily the kind you're expecting. Gaige's novel gives readers plenty to discuss, including ethical dilemmas, complicated family dynamics and the nature of forgiveness.



The Selected Letters of Ralph Ellison

EDITED BY JOHN F. CALLAHAN AND MARC C. CONNER. NONFICTION.

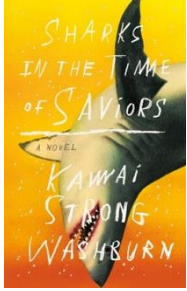
In his lifetime Ellison's only novel was the masterpiece "Invisible Man," but for six decades he corresponded with some of the greatest writers of his day. This magnificent collection captures his wit, style, ambition and personal travails, as well as his powerful insights into Black artistic expression.



Shakespeare in a Divided America: What His Plays Tell Us About Our Past and Future

BY JAMES SHAPIRO. NONFICTION.

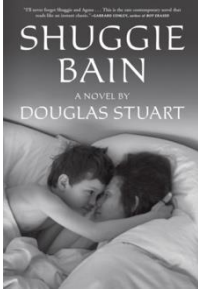
Shapiro has long created Shakespeare treats for the common reader, but this time he outdoes himself. From John Quincy Adams's racist attacks on "Othello" to the notorious Trump-as-Julius-Caesar Central Park production in 2017, he reminds us how divided we've been since our very beginnings, with the historical-tragical constantly muscling out the pastoral-comical.



Sharks in the Time of Saviors

BY KAWAI STRONG WASHBURN. FICTION.

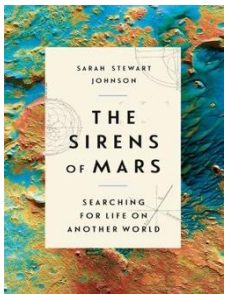
Washburn has no interest in the Hawaii of resorts and honeymoons; the characters in his singular debut novel live in a modern yet mystical version of the archipelago, one whose essence no conqueror can ever fully eradicate.



Shuggie Bain

BY DOUGLAS STUART. FICTION.

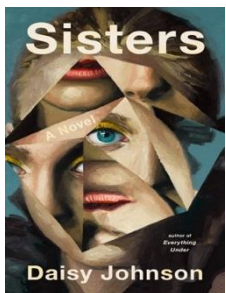
Young Shuggie grows up in 1980s Glasgow with a calamitous, alcoholic mother and punishing reminders that his effeminate manner sets him apart from his peers. Pain — physical and emotional — is everywhere in this potent, sure-footed debut, which makes as strong a case as any for love's redemptive power.



The Sirens of Mars: Searching for Life on Another World

BY SARAH STEWART JOHNSON. NONFICTION.

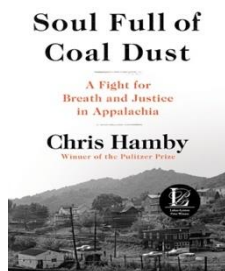
Johnson, a Georgetown planetary scientist, oscillates between a history of Mars science and an account of her own journey seeking sparks of life in the immensity. In prose that swirls with lyrical wonder, she recalls formative moments in her life and career.



Sisters

BY DAISY JOHNSON. FICTION.

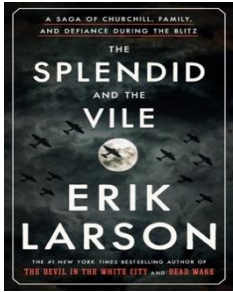
Secluded in a dilapidated country house, their depressed mother in a room upstairs, the teenage siblings at the center of this hypnotically macabre novel mull a sinister deed from their past. Johnson expertly layers the Gothic atmosphere with dread, grief and guilt.



Soul Full of Coal Dust: A Fight for Breath and Justice in Appalachia

BY CHRIS HAMBY. NONFICTION.

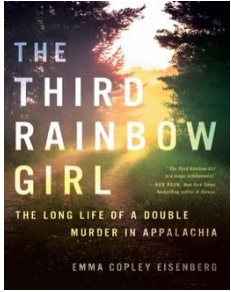
Hamby powerfully recounts two stories, both miserable: the effect that working in coal mines has had on the health of miners, and the decades-long battle for federal help to force companies to pay for their medical care.



[The Splendid and the Vile: A Saga of Churchill, Family, and Defiance During the Blitz](#)

BY ERIK LARSON. NONFICTION.

Larson's account of Winston Churchill's leadership during the 12 turbulent months from May 1940 to May 1941, when Britain stood alone and on the brink of defeat, is fresh, fast and deeply moving.



[The Third Rainbow Girl: The Long Life of a Double Murder in Appalachia](#)

BY EMMA COPLEY EISENBERG. NONFICTION.

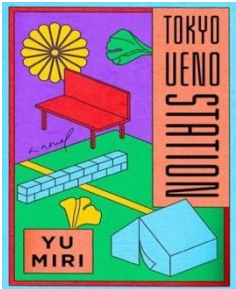
Decades after two young women were murdered there, a small town continues to grapple with the crime. This evocative and elegantly paced examination of the murders takes a prism-like view.



[This Is All I Got: A New Mother's Search for Home](#)

BY LAUREN SANDLER. NONFICTION.

In 2015, Sandler was volunteering at a homeless shelter when she met Camila, a pregnant resident who was determined to find a permanent, safe place to raise her child. This book charts her path through red tape, educational challenges, family crises and moments of joy amid unimaginable struggle.



[Tokyo Ueno Station](#)

BY YU MIRI. Translated by Morgan Giles. FICTION.

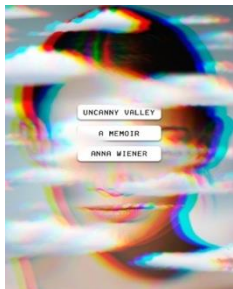
Yu's glorious modernist novel is narrated by a voice from the dead: a construction worker doomed to haunt various landmarks near Tokyo's Ueno Park.



[The Tunnel](#)

BY A. B. YEHOSHUA. Translated by Stuart Schoffman. FICTION.

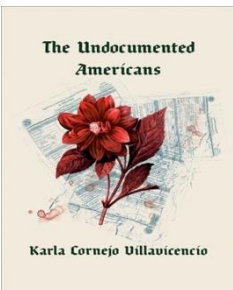
In this novel, Zvi Luria, a retired engineer in Tel Aviv, is in the early stages of dementia and takes a job in the desert to keep his mind sharp. The project involves building a road through an area where a Palestinian family lives, hiding out amid ancient ruins. Yehoshua masterfully entwines social commentary with a portrait of a mind in decline.



[Uncanny Valley: A Memoir](#)

BY ANNA WIENER. \$27.00. NONFICTION. MEMOIR.

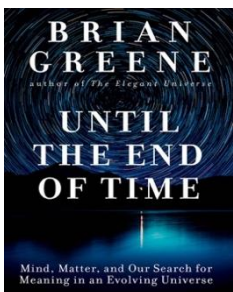
At 25, Wiener left a low-paying publishing job and wound up in San Francisco, in the hypercompetitive, male-dominated, morally obtuse world of tech start-ups. Her splendid memoir, stylish and unsparing, is a vital reckoning with an industry awash in self-delusion.



[The Undocumented Americans](#)

BY KARLA CORNEJO VILLAVICENCIO. NONFICTION. MEMOIR.

Cornejo Villavicencio was one of the first undocumented students to be accepted into Harvard University. In her captivating and evocative first book, she tells “the full story” of what that means — relying not just on her own experience but on interviews with immigrants across the country.



[Until the End of Time: Mind, Matter, and Our Search for Meaning in an Evolving Universe](#)

BY BRIAN GREENE. NONFICTION.

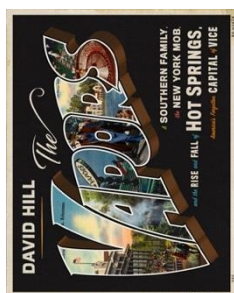
Few humans share Greene’s mastery of both the latest cosmological science and English prose. Here the best-selling physicist takes on our deepest mysteries: consciousness, creativity and the end of time.



[The Vanishing Half](#)

BY BRIT BENNETT. FICTION.

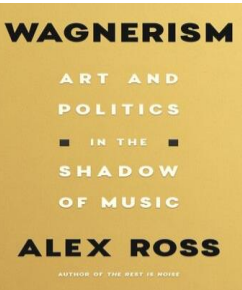
Bennett’s gorgeously written second novel, an ambitious meditation on race and identity, considers the divergent fates of twin sisters, born in the Jim Crow South, after one decides to pass for white. Bennett balances the literary demands of dynamic characterization with the historical and social realities of her subject matter.



[The Vapors: A Southern Family, the New York Mob, and the Rise and Fall of Hot Springs, America's Forgotten Capital of Vice](#)

BY DAVID HILL. NONFICTION.

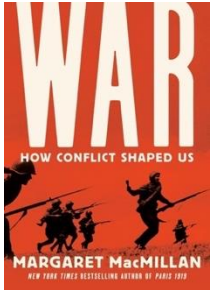
Hill grew up in Hot Springs, Ark., decades after its 20th-century heyday as the boozy, freewheeling hangout of choice for gamblers, mobsters and crooked politicians; his book recreates the giddy era with a delightfully light touch and a focus on the nightclub of the title.



Wagnerism: Art and Politics in the Shadow of Music

BY ALEX ROSS. NONFICTION.

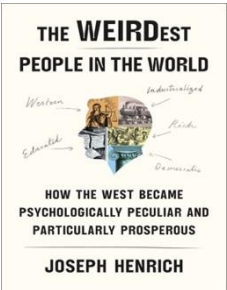
With enormous intellectual range and subtle artistic judgment, Ross’s history of ideas probes the nerve endings of Western society as they are mirrored in more than a century of reaction to Richard Wagner’s oeuvre, from George Eliot to “Apocalypse Now.”



War: How Conflict Shaped Us

BY MARGARET MACMILLAN. NONFICTION.

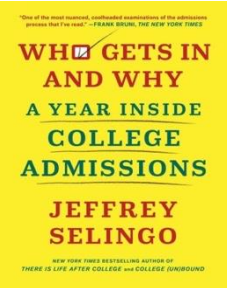
This is a short book but a rich one with a profound theme. MacMillan argues that war — fighting and killing — is so intimately bound up with what it means to be human that viewing it as an aberration misses the point. War has led to many of civilization’s great disasters but also to many of civilization’s greatest achievements.



The Weirdest People in the World: How the West Became Psychologically Peculiar and Particularly Prosperous

BY JOSEPH HENRICH. NONFICTION.

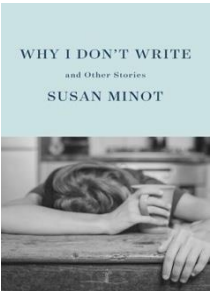
Henrich combines evidence from his own lab with the work of dozens of collaborators across multiple fields to make an ambitious case for the distinctiveness of Western psychology.



Who Gets in and Why: A Year Inside College Admissions

BY JEFFREY SELINGO. NONFICTION.

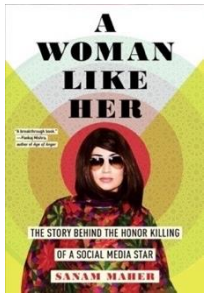
Selingo challenges the facade of meritocracy in his absorbing examination of America’s obsession with getting into college. Schools, he argues persuasively, are looking out for their own interests, not yours.



Why I Don't Write: And Other Stories

BY SUSAN MINOT. FICTION. STORIES.

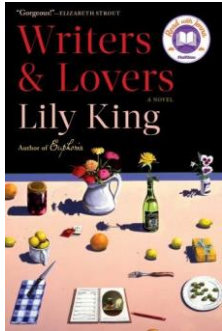
The stories in this collection, Minot’s first since 1989, are concerned with love, death, estrangement, loss and memory, which means that they are concerned with time itself.



[A Woman Like Her: The Story Behind the Honor Killing of a Social Media Star](#)

BY SANAM MAHER. NONFICTION.

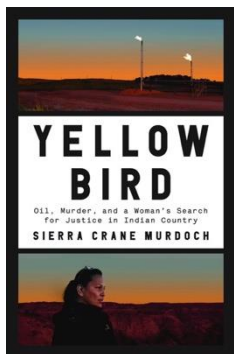
This fascinating portrait of Qandeel Baloch, Pakistan's first big female internet sensation, is also a skillfully reported account of a country in which conservative mores conflict with the pace of social change, and in which women all too often pay the price.



[Writers & Lovers](#)

BY LILY KING. FICTION.

A former golf prodigy turned waiter and writer is lonely, broke, directionless — and grieving for her mother, who has died suddenly. King's hopeful novel follows this young woman's hardscrabble quest for solvency, peace and passion.



[Yellow Bird: Oil, Murder, and a Woman's Search for Justice in Indian Country](#)

BY SIERRA CRANE MURDOCH. NONFICTION.

This painstakingly reported and beautifully written book, Murdoch's first, examines the effects of fracking on a North Dakota reservation through the eyes of a remarkable Native American woman who, determined to solve a murder related to the oil boom, exposes the greed and corruption that fueled it.