Featuring 327 Industry-First Reviews of Fiction, Nonfiction, Children's and YA books

Bernardine Evaristo
The author of *Girl, Woman, Other* reflects on her historic Booker Prize win and black women's lives in literature
p. 14

Also in the issue:
David Zucchino, Tiffany Jewell, and Geraldine McCaughrean
It’s JANUARY—what are your reading resolutions?

As the New Year rolls around once more, it’s a good time to take stock of your reading habits and set goals for the months to come. At the top of everyone’s list is to read more, of course—we all want to do that. (A few years ago, Connie Ogle at the Miami Herald offered “8 Ways to Read More Books,” and the advice—including the admonition to “step away from your phone”—is still solid: Google it.)

I have a few resolutions for 2020. This year, I’d like to read more international work in translation. American readers are notoriously bad at this; according to Chad W. Post, publisher of Open Letter Books, only about 3% of all books published in the United States are translations (hence the name of the database he started, Three Percent). In recent years I’ve read and enjoyed books by Juan Gabriel Vásquez and Patrick Chamoiseau (not to mention Elena Ferrante!), but I’m redoubling my efforts in 2020.

I’m a die-hard reader of memoir, but I’m resolving to read more general nonfiction this year. One of my favorite books of 2019 was Patrick Radden Keefer’s masterful Say Nothing: A True Story of Murder and Memory in Northern Ireland, which reminded me that a well-reported work of narrative nonfiction is a uniquely satisfying reading experience.

And in the wake of a year that contained excellent essays collections by Jia Tolentino, Lydia Davis, and Emily Nussbaum, I resolve to read more essays.

And now, a handful of books I resolve to tackle this year:

**How Yiddish Changed America and How America Changed Yiddish**, ed. by Ilan Stavans and Josh Lambert (Restless Books, Jan. 21): I saw Joel Grey’s Yiddish-language production of *Fiddler on the Roof* last fall and left enchanted by the musical cadences of this tongue originally spoken by the Ashkenazi Jews of Eastern and Central Europe. This eclectic anthology brings together fiction and nonfiction by Isaac Bashevis Singer, Emma Goldman, Irving Howe, Grace Paley, and more, showing how Yiddish is an inextricable part of American writing and culture. Our reviewer awarded it a star, calling it a “revelation” and a “treasure.”

**The Big Goodbye: Chinatown and the Last Years of Hollywood** by Sam Wasson (Flatiron, Feb. 4): I love a good Hollywood history, and this account of the making of Roman Polanski’s *Chinatown*, which is also a portrait of Tinseltown on the cusp of enormous social and cultural changes, promises to deliver the goods. (Wasson is the author of the knockout biography of Bob Fosse that was the basis for the recent FX series *Fosse/Verdon.* Our reviewer calls it “good reading for any American cinema buff.”)

**Shuggie Bain** by Douglas Stuart (Grove Press, Feb. 11): I’m cheating here: I’ve already read this astonishing debut novel about a dreamy Glasgow boy and his charismatic alcoholic mother. The vivid, heartbreaking characters; the bleak working-class Scottish milieu; the cleareyed but sympathetic portrayal of one life in freefall as another blooms—*Shuggie Bain* is, as our reviewer says, a "masterpiece." I resolve to recommend it widely.

**Amnesty** by Aravind Adiga (Scribner, Feb. 18): I’ve loved this Indian novelist—sharp-eyed, funny, and merciless—ever since *The White Tiger*, which won the Man Booker Prize in 2008. Kirks gave his latest, about an undocumented Sri Lankan immigrant evading the authorities in Australia, a starred review, calling it “taut” and “well-crafted.”

**Warbol** by Blake Gopnik (Ecco, April 21): Andy Warhol is endlessly fascinating—a recent retrospective drew crowds at the Whitney Museum of American Art—and he’s one of the few artists whose life and work could justify more than 900 pages. In a starred review, Kirkus calls Gopnik’s new biography “a fascinating, major work that will spark endless debates.” I’m ready.

Happy New Year! Time to start reading.
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The Kirkus Star is awarded to books of remarkable merit, as determined by the impartial editors of Kirkus.

**WARHOL**

Former *Washington Post* chief art critic **Blake Gopnik** delivers an epic cradle-to-grave biography of the king of pop art. Read the review on p.65.

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When the largest and most audacious housing project in history crashes to the ground, a new culture is born, for good or bad.

Adams’ debut novel is a dystopian nightmare that is metaphorical in nature but has a compelling story, a recognizable villain, and a few key characters whose personality traits make them interesting. The setting is Los Verticales, a nearly 500-story architectural marvel of its time; or, to be more accurate, what’s left of it after the unprecedented housing complex crashed to the ground under its own weight. What the salvage crew unaffectionately calls “the Heap” is nothing but an enormous pile of rubble punctuated by the occasional dead guy. Weirdly, there’s a single survivor: DJ Bernard Anders, who mysteriously still has electricity and broadcasts regularly to a wide audience from somewhere in the rubble. Meanwhile, interstitial excerpts from a history of “the Vert” titled The Later Years give context to the monolith’s rise and fall. The novel’s story centers on the “Dig Hands,” the poor souls recruited to shovel their way through the biggest recycling project in the world. The link to Bernard is his brother, Orville, digging relentlessly and carrying on nightly conversations with his brother over the radio. Orville’s companions include Hans, the photographer who emotionally captures his subject, and Lydia, who is trying to work her way up the community’s political structure. There are a couple of bad guys here—Hal Cornish, from the company that runs the radio station, wants Orville to converse with his trapped brother for the highest ratings, at any cost, while Peter Thisbee, the mogul who built the Vert in the first place, plays at redemption while working his own machinations to profit off his fallen monolith. It’s distressing that we have so many bleak visions of the future these days but at least here people are given a chance to dig themselves out of the hole that the upper class made.

A vision of the future that gives the working class a chance to get even.
The lives of three women are irreparably changed after a sexual assault accusation rocks their college campus.

Adkins’ (When You Read This, 2019) sophomore novel follows Annie, Bea, and Stayja as they navigate the complexities of Carter University. When Annie, a self-conscious white scholarship student, accuses Tyler—a fourth-year student and the son of Carter mega-donors—of sexual assault, all their lives begin to collide. Bea, a biracial student enrolled in the Justice Scholars Program, is assigned as Tyler’s student advocate—a job she finds complicated and unsettling as a feminist. Stayja, who’s white, works at an on-campus coffee shop to help support her family and save money for nursing school. Over a series of deep conversations, Stayja and Tyler fall into a romantic relationship of sorts. After the accusation goes public, Stayja chooses to believe Tyler even when her friends and family express their concerns. Adkins’ writing provides a multifaceted portrayal of campus life and politics in the #MeToo era. One moment in particular shows how deftly and honestly this novel treats trauma. Annie cycles through confusion, rage, and every emotion in between. When she thinks back to confronting Tyler about the assault (which he vehemently denies), she tries to diagnose her reaction: “I recall hope so vicious that it sliced through me, disguising itself as belief. Because while I don’t think I did believe him, I wanted to believe more than I’d ever wanted anything.”

The diverse cast of characters helps portray the way race, class, and gender affect power dynamics and inform our worldviews. Following a traumatic climax, the novel races too quickly to its ending, though it’s both satisfying and realistic. In the wake of their suffering, Annie, Bea, and Stayja find ways to heal with hope and disillusionment in equal measure.

A timely and resonant novel.

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Victim 2117 has been stabbed to death, not drowned, and Joan’s laughably incomplete reportage gets him put under strict orders to dig up the rest of the story within two weeks. For Hafez el-Assad, of Department Q, Victim 2117 means much more. He recognizes her from Joan’s picture as Lely Kababi, the woman who sheltered his family years ago and became a second mother to them. Deeply shaken by her murder, Assad is finally moved to share with DI Carl Mørck, the head of Department Q, some crucial details about his past, from his links to Iraq’s notorious Abu Ghraib prison to his real name, Zaid al-Asadi, so that they can take steps against the plot Assad is certain is unfolding. For Abdul Azim, the terrorist now known as Ghaalib, Victim 2117 marks the first step in an epic plot of revenge against the West in general and Assad in particular. And for Alexander, an obsessive video game player, Victim 2117 is the trigger that informs him that once he’s claimed his 2117th victory in “Kill Sublime,” it’ll be time to murder his parents and then go out into the streets of Copenhagen and continue the carnage. Only a wizard could sustain all these plotlines and manage the shifting connections among them, and Adler-Olsen (The Scarred Woman, 2017, etc.) delivers inconsistently on their extravagant promise. But readers hooked by Assad’s fatal tango with Ghaalib or the news that Mørck, now 53, is about to become a father again will keep reading compulsively and do their best to shift gears with the grimly multifoliate story.

Adler-Olsen supplies everything you could possibly want from a thriller and much, much more.

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Three strangers in a rural Canadian town intersect in complex ways through the nexus of a mysterious piece of art.

Kent is a disaffected teenager growing up in the small Canadian town of Durham. His father is gone, his mother is emotionally absent, his brother died a few years ago under circumstances Kent will not talk about. When Kent is asked by a teacher to submit his documentary project to a contest—the prize for which could mean his ticket out of Durham—he’s torn between his desire to create something like his favorite cult movie, Evie of the Deephorn, and his desire to protect himself with slacker anonymity. Sarah—from whose perspective the second section is narrated—is a painfully awkward teen afflicted with virulent acne and an unpredictable temper. She only feels like herself when she’s working on her magnum opus, Evie of the Deephorn, a fantasy novel she’s been writing since childhood. After her father’s death, Sarah burns the manuscript only to return to Durham 10 years later to the same secluded clearing where she buried the ashes. There she meets a young man she dimly recognizes from high school, who turns out to be Kent Adler, author of a book of poems she admires. In the...
If I could read only one book in 2020, I know what it would be: *The Mirror & the Light*, the long-awaited conclusion to Hilary Mantel’s Thomas Cromwell trilogy. Ten years ago, I wrote this on Facebook: “I finished Wolf Hall and wished it would never end. Which is strange, for a 532-page book about Thomas Cromwell.” One of my friends, a book publicist, responded, “What is Wolf Hall? Do I need to read it?” What a difference a decade—as well as one sequel, two Man Booker Prizes, a Broadway play, and a TV show—can make. Holt will be publishing the book on March 20, and I’m counting the days.

Fortunately, no one is actually stopping me from reading other books, and there’s a lot to be excited about. N.K. Jemisin’s *Broken Earth* trilogy is the SF version of Mantel’s Cromwell books prizewise; she won three Hugo Awards in a row for the three volumes. Now she’s turned to fantasy with *The City We Became*, about the great metropolis of New York battling to come to life. Our starred review calls it “fierce, poetic, uncompromising” (Orbit, March 24).

I’ve been hearing great things about Jeanine Cummins’ *American Dirt*, the story of a mother and son who travel more than 1,000 miles to escape a Mexican drug cartel. Our starred review says, “In-tensely suspenseful and deeply humane, this novel makes migrants seeking to cross the southern U.S. border indelibly individual” (Flatiron, Jan. 21). I’ve long been a fan of Stephen Wright’s hallucinatory novels; *Processed Cheese* is his first in more than a decade, and our starred review says “this dark, harrowing, and wildly funny novel somehow both challenges and affirms that tried-and-true adage: Money isn’t everything” (Little, Brown, Jan. 21).

Colum McCann’s *Apeirogon* is an audacious novel about an Israeli man and a Palestinian man who both lose their daughters to violence and who become advocates for peace; our starred review calls it “a soaring, ambitious triumph” (Random House, Feb. 23). Gish Jen is another author whose books I always look forward to; *The Resisters* is her first since 2010, and it’s a new direction: a dystopian novel in which baseball offers a way out for a girl who’s born into an oppressed class. “The juxtaposition of America’s pastime and the AI-enabled surveillance state Jen presents here is brilliant,” according to our starred review (Knopf, Feb. 4). Baseball is also central to *The Cactus League*, a debut novel by Emily Nemens, the editor of the *Paris Review* (FSG, Feb. 4); I’m eager to find out how these two women approach the sport that’s been so closely associated with literary men.

There are some other exciting debut novels coming up, including *Transre)lating House One* by Poupeh Missaghi, which is “set in Tehran [and] aims to unknot the city’s tangled secrets—its art, its violent histories—and illuminate inhabitants living and dead” (Coffee House, Feb. 4). *Night Theater* by Vikram Paralkar is about a surgeon who tries to revive a dead family in a remote village in India. Our starred review calls it “a beguiling and unforgettable fable” (Catapult, Jan. 14).

In the department of everything old is new again, I’m looking forward to reading *The Women in Black* by Madeleine St. John, originally published in 1993 and now reintroduced by Scribner (Feb. 11). Our review makes it sound like exactly my cup of tea: “In this witty little gem of a tale, reminiscent of Barbara Pym and Muriel Spark, three women working at a posh department store see their lives turn important corners while a fourth lends a helping hand.”

James McBride’s *Deacon King Kong* is “an exuberant comic opera set to the music of life” (Riverhead, March 3). *In We Ride Upon Sticks*, Quan Barry imagines a Massachusetts field hockey team as a coven of witches tempted by the devilish Emilio Estevez (Pantheon, March 3). Ali Smith will publish *Summer*, the last book in her Seasonal Quartet (Pantheon, Aug. 4). Louise Erdrich returns with *The Night Watchman* (Harper, March 3). Walter Mosley will bring back private eye Leonid McGill for the first time in five years in *Trouble Is What I Do* (Mulholland, Feb. 25). Lily King, winner of the inaugural Kirkus Prize in Fiction, returns with *Writers & Lovers*, in which “a Boston-area waitress manages debt, grief, medical troubles, and romantic complications as she finishes her novel” (Grove, March 3). There should be enough fiction coming out to take our minds off the election when we need a break! —L.M.

Laurie Muchnick is the fiction editor.
midst of her own existential crisis, she forms an immediate bond with Adler that is as powerful as it is brief and sets her life on a new course. Some years later, Reza—the narrator of the third section—comes to Durham to visit the grave of acclaimed poet Kent Adler, who committed suicide in the neighborhood woods in 1976. In the aftermath of a bad breakup Reza is seeking the sort of elegiac clarity he finds in his favorite Adler poem, “Evie of the Deepthorn.” With the help of Sarah, now a clerk at a local real estate agent’s office, Reza finds Adler’s grave but discovers nothing of the spiritual balm he had expected there. Babyn’s debut novel has moments of deeply affecting writing and captures the emotional void of depression and the fear that trembles alongside desire with a deft touch. However, the convolutions of the story—which shuffles the details of the characters’ lives from section to section with deliberate contradictory intent—distract from the human truth at the heart of the novel. The unfortunate result is a book more akin to a failed parlor trick than a lingering expression of grief or faith in renewal. A book intent on rendering isolation which suffers from an excess of experimental overlay.

**WE RIDE UPON STICKS**

*Barry, Quan*
Pantheon (384 pp.)
$26.95 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-5247-4809-8

Almost 300 years after the town of Danvers, Massachusetts, hosted the infamous 1692 witch trials, a new coven rises to power. The 1989 Danvers High School girls’ field hockey team (go Falcons!) is sick and tired of losing. Frustrated after yet another loss at a summer training camp, goalie Mel Boucher takes matters into her own hands by signing a “dark pledge” in a spiral notebook with a picture of Emilio Estevez printed on the cover: “Years later [Mel] would try and explain why she did it by saying that sometimes the Lord is busy and He needs us to be self starters, show a little moxie.” Emilio, whom right halfback Heather Houston calls an “alternative god,” shows his gratitude by improving the team’s performance in their next game, and one by one the rest of the players sign their names in the book, each of them given a cut-off slice of an old sock (in Falcon blue) to tie on their arm as a symbol of their pledge. When the official season starts and the Falcons start winning games, the girls feel Emilio pushing them toward their more devilish impulses. As they cause increasing mayhem around Danvers, the team can feel Emilio demanding more from them, and they worry they won’t be able to keep the magic going long enough to win the state championship. Barry (*She Weeps Each Time You’re Born*, 2014, etc.) is deeply witty, writing the narrator as a sort of omniscient group-think, the team speaking as one wry voice. Barry spends time with each of the team members and examines their struggles with the gender norms of the late 1980s as well as with race, identity, family, and friendship. Three of the characters are women of color who have complex relationships to being surrounded mostly by white people; a few of the girls discover budding nuance in their sexuality; and they all start to wonder if witchcraft is really about taking up space in a world that wants to keep you small. As Emilio pushes them further down the path of darkness, readers will cheer them on because what they’re really doing is learning to be fully and authentically themselves.

*Touching, hilarious, and deeply satisfying.*

**NASU RABI (OLD BEAR)**

*by D.L. Roley*

A debut historical fantasy sees a peasant boy, orphaned by raiders, taken in and trained by a solitary old man whose very name is legend.

“The resulting storyline has epic scope yet an intimate feel, pulling readers along familiar paths but in a manner that doesn’t seem forced.”

“This skillful story bodes well for future adventures.”

“...well-rendered take on quest fantasy’s master-apprentice trope.”

—Kirkus Reviews

ISBN #: 978-1233912507

For information on publishing and film rights, email info@jdpubshers.com • www.jdpubshers.com
THE WARSAW PROTOCOL

Berry, Steve
Minotaur (384 pp.)
$28.99  |  Feb. 25, 2020
978-1-250-14030-2

Holy relics, a salt mine, and treachery feature in this 15th entry in the author's Cotton Malone series (The Malta Exchange, 2019, etc.).

Former lawyer and American intelligence officer Cotton Malone is now a bookseller who goes to Bruges, Belgium, for an antiquarian book fair. He's hired by a former boss to steal the Holy Lance, one of the seven “weapons of Christ,” or Arma Christi. That is the price of admission to a secret auction, in which various countries will bid on compromising information about Poland's president, Janusz Czajkowski. The point? Czajkowski is an honorable man who will not allow the U.S. to build a missile system on Polish soil, and the EU– and NATO–hating U.S. President Fox is one of several people who want the Polish leader out of the way at all costs. “If I wanted a conscience, I'd buy one,” Fox says. Readers will have to pay close attention to suss out the meaning of Czajkowski's Warsaw Protocol because the author hardly hammers it home. But the story is fun regardless, especially with characters like the smart and resourceful Malone and the Polish foreign intelligence officer Sonia Draga, “a fortress, often scaled and assaulted, but never conquered.” The complex plot leads to a magnificent Polish salt mine (a real place) that's hundreds of meters deep with nine layers, has hundreds of miles of tunnels, brine lakes people can't sink in, and lots of tourists. Berry builds suspense nicely, allowing readers to anticipate the violence that eventually comes. To a great extent, the novel is a richly detailed homage to Poland, its culture, and its ability to survive so many invasions over the centuries. The connection between Arma Christi and an unwanted American missile system feels a wee bit iffy, but at least the latter won't be called the Holy Lance.

An enjoyable read. Berry's fans won't be disappointed.

Fugitive Planet

By Shane Greenburg

In Greenburg’s SF debut, Earth in 2030 may be in danger of colliding with a rogue planet moving through the solar system.

“Greenburg’s novel, which launches a prospective series, sets an impressive pace from the start.”

“A cliffhanger ending leaves plenty of room for a sequel or two.”

“An entertaining futuristic tale with a thoroughly established, cool alien species.”

—Kirkus Reviews

ISBN 978-1095085554 • 978-1087815695

For information on publishing and film rights, email shanegreenburg@gmail.com • www.fugitiveplanet.com
A nightmarish and unsettling story.

THE BODY DOUBLE

Beyda, Emily
Doubleday (304 pp.)
$26.95 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-0-385-54527-3

In Beyda’s claustrophobic first novel, the body double for a reclusive star is trapped in a Los Angeles home, awaiting her public debut.

Rosanna Feld, tired of the spotlight, has sent headhunter Max to hire a look-alike to be photographed and interviewed in her place until she recovers. The body double will be paid well for her services. The catch is that she’ll have to sign a nondisclosure agreement about her work, cut herself off from the people who know her true identity, and leave the country at the end of a three-year contract. Max finds the unnamed heroine working a dead-end job at a movie theater. With weak family ties and few friends, she readily accepts the offer. But from the minute she moves into Rosanna’s empty Los Angeles apartment, she realizes that Max is more than just a talent scout. Max controls her diet and clothing, makes her study videos of Rosanna to learn to mimic her personality, and locks her in the house when he’s away. He slowly chips away at her identity, even coercing her into getting plastic surgery to look more like Rosanna, until she realizes with regret that she’ll no longer see her dead mother’s features in her own face. The more she invests in Rosanna’s identity, the more she longs for her approval—and for Max to deem her ready for the outside world. Once she’s there, she’s seduced by lavish shopping sprees, exclusive parties, and outings with Rosanna’s old friend Marie. If she can fool the press, and even Rosanna’s friends, into thinking she’s the real thing, she’ll have a better life than the one she left. But Max’s increasingly controlling behavior makes her wonder who Rosanna is and what she’s really hiding from. The big reveal is less surprising than it is well executed, its climax lush and operatic. As she meets her fate with slow-burning horror, the unnamed woman fades like a ghost in a haunted house, its rooms as hollow as the empty promise of stardom.

A nightmarish and unsettling story.

HILLBILLY HUSTLE

Browne, Wesley
West Virginia Univ. Press (264 pp.)
$19.99 paper | Mar. 1, 2020
978-1-949199-28-4

Business at his pizza place is slow and his aging parents need money, leading Knox Thompson to deal drugs—a vocation that quickly turns perilous.

The permanently disheveled, 40-year-old Thompson, who lives in his hometown of Richmond, Kentucky, stumbles into dealing. After winning big at a backroom poker game in a shady nearby town, he is forced into forking over his winnings by one of the players, a nasty drug supplier named Burl, in exchange for a pound of marijuana. If Knox refuses to comply, he won’t make it to his car in one piece. Not knowing what else to do with the weed, in which he has invested all his money, Knox starts selling it. It’s only a matter of time before he’s buying another pound from Burl, making dumb decisions, and getting in way over his head. Burl’s sadistic enforcer, Greek, starts paying him unpleasant visits. And Knox’s hard-edged new girlfriend, Darla, a tattoo artist with whom he watches old videotapes of My So-Called Life, leaves town. Though the book suffers from an overreliance on sadistic violence and a too-tidy ending, this is a top-notch debut with a winning narrative voice and unexpectedly multidimensional characters. Even as he’s making Knox’s life miserable, Burl develops an affection for him. “I never seen anything like you,” he says to the pizza man. “You’re smart, you just ain’t no good at thinking.”

A promising debut by an author with an amusing approach to life.
EVERYWHERE YOU DON'T BELONG
Bump, Gabriel
Algonquin (272 pp.)
$25.95 | Feb. 4, 2020
978-1-61620-879-0

A sharply funny debut novel that introduces an irreverent comic voice.
Bump tells the story of Claude McKay Love, a young boy who has been abandoned by his selfish parents in the South Shore neighborhood of Chicago. Raised by his spirited grandmother and her close friend Paul, a lovelorn queer man who suffers tragedy after romantic tragedy, Claude chases affection in a community where yearning is everywhere but real intimacy can be hard to come by. Potential friends, like the gifted basketball player Jonah, come and go, promising affection but always frustrating Claude’s hopes. “My life went on like that,” Claude remembers, “people coming and going, valuable things left in a hurry.” Grandma is determined that, despite all this, Claude make something of his life. “I’m not going to lose you. You got something special deep in there,” she tells him. But when a street gang-cum-political party called the Redbelters, led by the incorrigible demagogue Big Columbus, instigates a riot after a police killing of a young boy, Claude’s entire life is turned upside down. In the riot’s aftermath, Claude latches onto journalism as his passion, something that might lift him out of the South Side. It takes him from Chicago to Missouri, but when an old crush and family friend turns up in his college dorm one day, Claude learns that escaping the past is easier said than done. Bump brings a manic yet reflective energy to Claude’s story. By telling it in short vignettes rather than a traditional narrative, he creates striking images and memorable dialogue that vibrate with the life of Chicago’s South Side. Exchanges like one between Jonah’s parents and Paul—over whether New York or Chicago is the mecca of basketball—are genuinely hilarious. The novel is almost devoid of a real plot or anything resembling well-rounded characters and threatens to become repetitive at times. In the end, though, Bump’s voice is so distinct and funny that a reader might overlook those shortcomings.

A comic novel that is short on story but abundant in laughs.

THESE GHOSTS ARE FAMILY
Card, Maisy
Simon & Schuster (288 pp.)
$24.00 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-9821-1743-6

Generations of a Jamaican family grapple with the legacy of slavery and secrets. “Perhaps, a life does not belong exclusively to one person,” thinks a character in Card’s debut novel, a rich and layered story about several generations of a Jamaican family. Secrets, Card shows, are part of what bind us together. One of this family’s biggest secrets involves Abel Paisley, who leaves Jamaica for England in the 1970s. When another Caribbean dock worker is killed in an accident and the white workers mistakenly think it’s Abel, Abel assumes the dead man’s identity. Abandoning his wife, Vera, and two young children, he marvels over “the one time racism worked” in his favor. Abel marries again and builds a new life in New York as the proprietor of a West Indian market, which turns out to be difficult in all new ways. But Card’s story doesn’t end there. She’s only just beginning. A public librarian who was born in Jamaica and raised in Queens, she brings to life Abel’s ancestors and descendants and those whose lives intersect with theirs, among them Abel’s abandoned wife; the servant who loved her; a precocious out-of-wedlock granddaughter; and the white descendant of the plantation owner who once enslaved and terrorized the family. This is a wonderfully ambitious novel: It sprawls in time from the uncertain present to the horror of slavery on a Jamaican plantation, examining racism, colorism, and infidelity and how they obscure and fracture a lineage. A gifted storyteller with an
A coming-of-age tale for the 21st century.

*DAYS OF DISTRACTION*

Chang, Alexandra
Ecco/HarperCollins (336 pp.)
$26.99 | Mar. 31, 2020
978-0-06-295180-9

An intriguing debut with an inventive spin on the generational family saga.

Haunted by the trauma of abuse at the hands of a priest, a man discovers at last a path to healing.

“A beautiful portrayal of an unspeakable betrayal and the fraught path … to recovery.”
— Kirkus Reviews

“Martin’s arresting first novel … will make a lasting impact on readers.”
— Booklist

“Martin’s literary style and poignant, gripping narration keep readers spellbound throughout.”
— BookTrib

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eye for detail and compassion for all her flawed characters, Card ends the book with an unsettling ghost story about insatiable hunger. We all hunger for something, she tells us: love, acceptance, freedom, an understanding of the past to know who we are, because our lives are never just our own.

An intriguing debut with an inventive spin on the generational family saga.

A coming-of-age tale for the 21st century.

“People think I’m smaller than I am.”
This is the opening sentence of Chang’s debut and—as the reader soon learns—a sly summation of the novel as a whole. A first-generation American and the daughter of Chinese parents, the unnamed narrator finds that people frequently see in her what they expect rather than what she is. But, more often than not, she shrinks herself to fit these misperceptions. She stays silent when her boyfriend, J, calls her his “little sweetheart.” She gives up trying to teach J how to pronounce the family nickname that he insists on using. At work—a tech publication—she chooses not to press the point when her superiors refuse
to seriously discuss giving her a raise when she discovers that she’s earning less than all of her colleagues. Even in a world in which social media lets ordinary people become extraordinary, the protagonist asserts that she is quite simply ordinary—a consumer of other peoples’ lives, not the creator of one. J’s decision to enter a graduate program in upstate New York gives her the chance to leave the high-pressure microcosm of San Francisco and start again. Chang has won acclaim for her short stories, and, stylistically, her debut novel can be seen as a collection of linked microfictions. The text is composed of brief vignettes and the narrative is discursive, but this does not mean that the story feels choppy or disjointed. Instead, the novel’s form encourages the reader to slow down, think about what they’ve just read, and figure out for themselves how the pieces fit together. The narrator’s meditations on themes like racism, capitalism, the role of technology in our lives, and complicated family relationships are simultaneously uniquely insightful and accessible to anyone who has grappled with these issues themselves.

**Beautifully crafted and deeply thoughtful.**

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**INCLUDE ME OUT**

Cristoff, María Sonia

Trans. by Silver, Katherine

Transit Books (316 pp.)

$16.95 paper | Feb. 4, 2020

978-1-945492-30-3

A former simultaneous interpreter devotes herself to a year of silence.

Argentine author Cristoff (False Calm: A Journey Through the Ghost Towns of Patagonia, 2018, etc.) writes of Mara, who takes a job as a guard in a small Argentinian town’s museum following a professional debacle, envisioning a year of silence as atonement, reflection, and resistance: “She sits in her museum guard chair and watches—silent, ecstatic, with no interruptions of any kind.” Mara, whose story is interspersed with excerpted passages from literary and historical sources she’s copied into her notebook, develops a strict code for the year. “One of the key protocols of the experiment she came to this town to carry out is to not ask...
questions. To speak the absolute minimum, and, above all, to never ask questions. One year, that’s all. One year of practicing the art of keeping quiet.” Mara manages by nodding, grumbling, and letting others fill the space. Her silence is anything but passive. “Muteness is also the art of a still body...remaining silent is important as a paradoxical speech act.” There is “eloquence implicit in this business of remaining silent, and she enjoys it doubly, out of revenge, rage, and vengeance.” Cristoff plays with ideas of speech, pause, and power. Mara was a skilled interpreter, and she becomes skilled in more laconic arts. Eventually, she is recruited from her post to help in the embalming of two valuable horses at the museum. Her own silence, “a discipline of the body,” and the stillness of the beasts stand in contrast to the chatty, idiosyncratic taxidermist. It was an act of sabotage that ended Mara’s career as an interpreter, and it is another act of sabotage that occupies her mind during the project. Silence as reflexive communication is, in many ways, similar to the way Mara sees taxidermy: “Here there is art, here there is science, and here there is great respect for the original.”

**SO WE CAN GLOW**

Cross-Smith, Leesa

Grand Central Publishing (256 pp.)

$26.00 | Mar. 10, 2020

978-1-5387-1533-8

A collection of 42 stories about the complexities of girlhood, womanhood, love, longing, and grief. Cross-Smith (Whiskey & Ribbons, 2018, etc.) uses many forms—from more traditional first- and third-person narratives to email and text exchanges, plays, and recipes—to explore these themes. Most of the stories are quite short and feature vivid sensory detail; the author has a gift for describing smells in particular and using them to conjure emotion. But the stories tend to lack layers; they are beginnings without middles and endings, as if they were drafted from writing prompts and then polished, by a skilled author, without further development. The story “Girlheart Cake With Glitter Frosting” mimics a recipe. It begins, “POSSIBLE INGREDIENTS: Too much black eyeliner. Roses. Champagne from a can, champagne in a bottle. ‘Music to Watch Boys To’ by Lana Del Rey,” and then lists more singers, authors, celebrities, songs, movies, and objects for another two pages. “You Should Love the Right Things” reads, in its entirety, “Not how it hurts when you press down on a yellowish-blue, purple-black bruise, but the feeling you get when you lift up. Let go.” The language is rich and rhythmic, the sentiment fresh, but devoid of context, it resonates only so deeply. Even the more traditional stories read like vignettes, constellations of pretty images and ideas that make for scenes, not stories. Sometimes characters recur or side characters from one story emerge as main characters in another. But too often characters who are supposed to be close family, friends, or partners explain things to each other for the benefit of the reader.

**THE LAST TAXI DRIVER**

Durkee, Lee

Tin House (240 pp.)

$25.95 | Mar. 3, 2020

978-1-947793-39-2

Durkee’s long-awaited second novel (Rides of the Midway, 2001) is a black-comic delight.

Lou Bishoff is beset from all sides. After a promising debut novel that he’s long ago ceased to imagine he’ll ever...
In October, Bernardine Evaristo took the stage at London’s Renaissance-era Guildhall to accept one of the literary world’s most prestigious honors. Dressed in a bright pink tuxedo and a slack necktie, her curls pulled back in an African printed scarf, the British author clutched her Booker Prize–winning novel, Girl, Woman, Other (Black Cat/Grove Atlantic, Nov. 5). “I am the first black woman to win this prize,” she said as cheers and applause rose through the hall. “I hope that honor doesn’t last too long.”

When we speak a month later by phone, I ask if she’s exhausted by these belated firsts, welcome recognition that is too long in coming. At best, she says, it’s “bittersweet.”

“It’s great to win the prize, but on the other hand, it shouldn’t have taken this long,” Evaristo says. In the Booker’s 51-year history, 300 novels have been shortlisted—only five written by black women authors.

“I knew that a black woman hadn’t won it,” she says. “But most people hadn’t even noticed it.”

They did, however, take note that the historic moment was made all the rarer by a rule-breaking panel of judges who declared the prize would be jointly shared by two winners this year, Evaristo and Margaret Atwood, the (very famous) author of The Testaments.

For some, the fact that the first black woman ever to win the literary award would have to share it—and the 50,000-pound (about $64,000) prize money—was an “epic fail,” as a former Booker Prize judge wrote on the online British news site UnHerd. One English publisher chided the Booker judges in the Guardian, saying their split decision had ignored the cultural significance of Evaristo’s win, “when the sole focus should be on this historic and long overdue first.”

The 60-year-old Anglo Nigerian author, better known in the U.K. than she is the U.S., has spent a lifetime exploring black British history in theater, poetry, and fiction. Over the course of 25 years she has introduced readers to characters rarely seen in literature: a Nubian teenager coming-of-age in Roman Britain in The Emperor’s Babe (2002), a 74-year-old gay Caribbean man on the verge of coming out to his wife in Mr. Loverman (2014), and now the interconnected lives of a dozen black women in contemporary England.

“I was raised in England in a very, very white British environment,” Evaristo says about her upbringing in Woolwich, less than an hour east of London’s Square Mile. As one of eight children born to a white English mother and Nigerian father, she struggled to understand her identity. Her father had come to Britain in a wave of immigration from the former colonies following WWII, when the country’s workforce was depleted. He was a welder and a member of the local Labour Party; her mother was a homemaker and schoolteacher. They grew up poor. To help them assimilate, her father chose not to pass on his Yoruba language and culture.

“Perhaps one of the reasons I write the books that I do is because of this awakening I had in my late teens and early 20s that my background had been completely whitewashed, that my sense of self was not rooted in anything black or African,” Evaristo says. “I wanted to develop an identity that...
was so much more than being one of the few black people in a white society.”

Readers will feel the force of that exploration in *Girl, Woman, Other*. There is a singular quality about the novel—a feeling that one has crossed into uncharted territory. In it, we experience the lives of 12 black British women spanning over a century. These women carry a lineage borne from the shores of the Caribbean and the cradle of the African continent, subsumed in a legacy of British colonialism.

What is the life of a black woman in British society? It’s a question few mainstream novels have posed and an ideal starting point for this accomplished writer.

“In a sense, what the book is doing is it’s answering the invisibility of our presence in British literature,” Evaristo says. *Girl, Woman, Other* explores race, class, gender, and sexuality through her characters’ varied experiences, among them a stable of revolving lovers, unexamined class privilege, pansexuality, boredom, and regret. “Each storyline brings the reader round to a position of empathy,” Micha Frazer-Carroll writes in the *Guardian*. “When each section ends, we leave with a new perspective.”

There’s Amma, a lesbian playwright who has recently garnered recognition despite being an outsider for most of her professional career. At the top of her game, she doesn’t know what to make of her newfound success. Bummi, a Nigerian housecleaner, has fought to provide her daughter, Carole, with opportunities she never had and now struggles with the unintended consequences of her achievements. Hattie is a 93-year-old woman who’s lived on a farm in Northern England and tended the land her whole life. She looks at the family she’s built around her and finds them lacking.

“Not only did I want to have that full range of black British womanhood, but I also wanted to challenge the idea that as you age you deteriorate,” says Evaristo. “These women on the whole don’t fit into that idea at all.”

As the Kirkus reviewer notes, “Instead of forcing her creations to code-switch to make their lives comfortable for general consumption, Evaristo compels the reader to accommodate and adjust.”

To bring their stories together, Evaristo used a literary device she calls “fusion fiction.” Throughout the book, characters appear and reappear in each other’s lives—“fused” together. But the technique emphasizes more than connection. She describes it as a “waterfall of words.” Evaristo dispenses with standard capitalization and punctuation for a construction more akin to poetry. The pattern of the text offers readers breathing space rather than full stops.

Though it may first appear odd, the book’s form allowed her to fuse the characters’ past and present lives, to be inside and outside of them, and “to engage in a sort of stream of consciousness with them. The fusion gave me a freedom and allowed me to be liberated as a writer, in terms of the way in which I could tell this particular story.”

The technique offers a depth that lends itself well to character development. In the *New York Times*, Dwight Garner writes that “Evaristo has a gift for appraising the lives of her characters with sympathy and grace while gently skewering some of their pretensions.”

She deploys sexuality in a way that feels natural, no matter how shocking. Pushing beyond heteronormative boundaries, her characters explore the full realm of their sexualities and gender expressions. She presents female characters who are often restricted by how society views them—their age, race, culture, or sexuality—doing and experiencing things we aren’t accustomed to in mainstream fiction.

“From my point of view this is something that is urgent and topical because we don’t talk about it,” Evaristo says. “Our invisibility, the ways in which we are marginalized, the ways in which our stories haven’t been told.…This goes to the heart, in a sense, of what we want from the society that we’re a part of. And that’s to be fully participating citizens and for our work to be fully accepted and expressed in the arts and beyond.”

*Safiya Charles is a writer living in Montgomery, Alabama, and has written for the Nation and the New Republic. Girl, Woman, Other received a starred review in the Nov. 15, 2019, issue.*
follow up, he spent almost two decades in frigid Vermont (failed marriage, child-rearing, attendant despair). Now he’s returned to his native Mississippi, where, after working through a succession of jobs, he’s found a niche as a kind of knight-errant cab driver—Charon to meth heads, rehab escapees, elderly ICU refugees, and frat-boy monsters looking to score—in a college town (Gentry, a dead ringer for Oxford). But even this poor haven, a spavined, reeking, gas-guzzling Lincoln with a balky suspension and a “Shakespeare-mint” air freshener, is under imminent threat; Uber is set to arrive in weeks, the cab company owner’s fugitive son has returned to town, and both Lou’s back and his romantic life are in perpetual spasm. All this provides the setup for a remarkable one-day picaresque as we follow Lou on a marathon shift through a blasted landscape that’s part Denis Johnson–ish carnival of the wrecked, part Nietzschean Twilight of the Gods (or Twilight of the Taxicabs). Lou is damaged, bitter, self-righteous, with a hint of Sam Spade masochism that one fare recognizes—yet the book’s relentless grimness never seems either relentless or grim. Instead there’s a comic sweetness and energy underneath that reminds one of Charles Portis. Lou has every reason for cynicism, but a dogged hope and playfulness, remnants of his studies in Buddhism and the influence of comedian Bill Hicks, keep pressing through; even when the car breaks down—and his body and every last structure of the world around him—he has the refuge of his considerable wit.

A dark pleasure.

**VANISHING**

*Five Stories*

Emmons, Cai

Leapfrog (144 pp.)

$15.00 paper | Mar. 1, 2020

978-1-948585-08-8

Five women must reckon with quietly unsettling shifts in their lives as they navigate unexpected changes.

Set in the Northeast United States—Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York—novelist Emmons’ (*Weather Woman*, 2018, etc.) first short-story collection centers on women who are surprised by something in their lives. In “The Deed,” an attorney and mother of young twins comes home to find a man in her house insisting he owns it, treating her like a confused person who should be pitied. In “Fat,” a young art student has strong negative feelings about the model in her drawing class as well as her own body, and the corporeal drama escalates to an alarming pitch. In the title story, a middle-aged woman visits her childhood best friend, who is suffering from Alzheimer’s, on her birthday. In “Redhead,” a woman whose college ex-boyfriend’s wife has died in her early 20s befriends the dead woman’s mother by lying to her. In “Her Boys,” a middle-aged woman who runs a magazine feels a maternal ownership over her young male employees, but it becomes clear that she does not see anyone around her as they are. Throughout the stories, each woman is preoccupied with appearance, both physical and social. The language in the collection is poetic in its imagery: “sunlight popping off so many surfaces, appearing unexpectedly through the branches like flashing blades.” But that flowery language can also come off as judgmental and contrived: “Her hair was an unfortunate light rust-red, a shade that…faded in summer to a grandmotherly gray-ish orange, and always suggested the possibility of a histrionic character or white trash origins.” The characters’ obsessions with their own and others’ bodily appearances are often disturbing, especially in “Fat,” in which the fat character is a strange cross between cautionary tale, inspiration, and object of fixation. “Her private parts were concealed, but to Tasha Jane’s entire body was one massive private part.” None of the characters are very likable, and many are unreliable, but Emmons is a skilled storyteller when it comes to psychological drama in seemingly ordinary lives.

With an ominous air and well-crafted prose, Emmons’ stories are both immersive and challenging.
Another triumph for Enright: a confluence of lyrical prose, immediacy, warmth, and emotional insight.

**ACTRESS**

*Enright, Anne*

Norton (272 pp.)

$26.95 | Mar. 3, 2020

978-1-324-00562-9

A daughter reveals the intertwined tales of her mother—a theatrical legend—and herself, a mature retrospective of sharing life with a towering but troubled figure.

Katherine O’Dell, star of stage and screen, blessed with beauty, red hair, and a gorgeous voice, “the most Irish actress in the world,” was not Irish at all. She was born in London, and the apostrophe in her name crept in by error via a review following one of her appearances on Broadway. However, the fact that Katherine is “a great fake” doesn’t cloud the love her daughter, Norah, has for her; a bond which exists alongside the unanswered question of Norah’s father’s identity, “the ghost in my blood.” The complexities of this mother/daughter relationship and its context in Ireland, the men it includes, and the turns both women’s lives take through the decades are the meat of this tender, possessive, searching new novel from Man Booker Prize–winning Irish novelist Enright (*The Green Road*, 2015, etc.). Saga-esque, it traces Katherine back to her parents, strolling players from another era who invited her on stage at age 10, scarcely imagining the luminous, internationally recognized figure this “useful girl” would become. But the novel is no fairy tale. Katherine’s life was marked with loneliness; disappointing, sometimes exploitative, and abusive men; the pressure of trying to remain successful; a desperate act of violence; and a breakdown. Norah narrates both her mother’s life and her own—she’s the author of five novels, a mother, a sexual being, and also the sole offspring of a parent she both adored and observed at a distance. Fame, sexuality, and the Irish influence suffuse the story, which ranges from glamour to tragedy, a portrait of “anguish, madness, and sorrow” haunted by a late, explanatory glimpse of horror which nevertheless concludes in a place of profound love and peace.

Another triumph for Enright: a confluence of lyrical prose, immediacy, warmth, and emotional insight.

**ROXY**

*Gerritsen, Esther*

Trans. by Hutchison, Michele

World Editions (192 pp.)

$15.99 paper | Mar. 4, 2020

978-1-64286-040-5

Sudden catastrophe brings bewilderment and wild swerves of direction to a troubled and troubling young widow.

Roxy Rombouts, 30 years younger than her film-producer husband, Arthur, immediately assumes the worst when she finds two policemen on her doorstep in the middle of the night, and she’s right to do so. Not only has Arthur been killed in a car accident, but so has his young female intern, and both were naked, parked on the hard shoulder. “Would the bodies be carefully separated at the site of an accident like that, or might parts of one still be in the other?” wonders Roxy, in the deadpan comic style characteristic of Dutch novelist Gerritsen (*Gravity*, 2018, etc.). Mother to 3-year-old Louise, Roxy found early fame as the author of an autobiographical novel, *The Trucker’s Daughter*, but moving in with Arthur when she was only 17, she “has always known that she skipped something, took a short cut to adulthood.” Now this introverted woman finds her life busily populated by babysitter Liza; Jane, Arthur’s personal assistant; and her previously estranged parents, who move in for a while. The widow also finds herself sleeping with her married undertaker, Marcel, and, later—when the women and Louise head away for a holiday—with strangers met in hotel bars. On this trip, Roxy’s care of Louise swings through indulgence, neglect, anger, and endangerment as she confronts her fears of the past and the future. Questionable parenting and bizarre behavior are hallmarks of Gerritsen’s previous novel, too, but Roxy’s story is starker and
more manic, as her road trip of self-discovery spirals down into ever darker, more violent behavior before emerging into a degree of realization.

A diverting absurdist parable more shocking than memorable.

**ONE MINUTE OUT**

Greaney, Mark
Berkley (412 pp.)
$28.00 | Feb. 18, 2020
978-0-593-09891-2

Ninth in the author's Gray Man series (Mission Critical, 2019, etc.) in which “the most elite assassin in the world” has his hands full.

Ex-CIA Agent Courtland Gentry (the Gray Man) has Serbian war criminal Ratko Babic in his gun sight, but when he decides instead to kill the old beast face to face, he uncovers a massive sex-slavery ring. “I don’t get off on this,” the Gray Man lies to the reader as he stabs a sentry. “I only kill bad people.” Of course he does. If there weren’t an endless supply of them to slay, he’d have little reason to live. Now, countless young Eastern European women are being lured into sexual slavery and fed into an international pipeline, sold worldwide through “the Consortium.” Bad guys refer to their captives as products, not people. They are “merchandise,” but their plight crosses the Gray Man, so of course he is going to rescue as many women as he can. The road to their salvation will be paved with the dead as he enlists a team of fighters to strike the enemy, which includes a South African dude who is giddy for the chance to meet and kill the Gray Man.

Meanwhile, Europol analyst Talyssa Corbu meets the hero while on a personal mission to rescue her sister. “You don’t seem like a psychopath,” she tells him. Indeed, though he could play one on TV. Corbu and her sister are tough and likable characters while the director of the Consortium leads a double life as family man and flesh merchant. Human trafficking is an enormous real-life problem, so it’s satisfying to witness our larger-than-life protagonist put his combat skills to good use. There will be a sequel, of course. As a friend tells the wounded Gentry at the end, he’ll be off killing bozos again before he knows it.

Great storytelling about the pursuit of extrajudicial justice.

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**THE ANIMALS AT LOCKWOOD MANOR**

Healey, Jane
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (352 pp.)
$26.00 | Mar. 10, 2020
978-0-358-10640-1

Healey looks back fondly at the tradition of spooky English country-house fiction while adding a few twists of her own.

With more than a few nods to Jane Eyre and Rebecca, this debut novel throws an awkward but stalwart heroine into a decaying house with history and mystery to spare. Friendless Hetty Cartwright has found a home working among the stuffed specimens at a major natural history museum in London. When, in 1939, the museum decides to farm out its collection to houses in the countryside in order to avoid their destruction in the anticipated bombing of the city, Hetty is assigned to guard the stuffed mammals in their temporary home at Lockwood Manor. The decaying manor, ruled by the imperious and lascivious Lord Lockwood, has “four floors, six flights of stairs, and ninety-two rooms,” some with resident ghosts, and Hetty soon has her hands full attempting to protect the animals, some of which disappear and many of which she finds in disconcerting new spots. Scorned by the household staff, Hetty finds an ally in Lord Lockwood’s sensitive, unstable daughter, Lucy, who narrates the portions of the novel that Hetty doesn’t. As the two become closer and face their individual fears and insecurities, the peril of the house amps up, culminating in a disastrous party. While Healey sometimes lays on the atmospheric menace with a heavy hand, especially considering how light on action the novel actually is, and though she ties up her plot threads in a few hasty pages, her depictions of the historical period and of the dread of anticipating full-scale war are vivid. The animals, frozen in place and unable to defend themselves either against the encroaching Germans or the more immediate dangers of the live animals and insects that want to devour them, mirror the plight of the women caught in Lockwood Manor.

A moody exploration of bleak wartime Britain.

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**DECEIT AND OTHER POSSIBILITIES**

Hua, Vanessa
Counterpoint (304 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Mar. 10, 2020
978-1-64009-348-5

Secrets and lies drive the protagonists to acts of desperation in Hua’s dazzling story collection, first published in 2016 and now reissued with an additional three tales.

Most of the 13 stories are set in the San Francisco Bay area and revolve around characters from the Asian and Mexican
immigrant communities who are caught between the expectations of their ancestral homelands and the promise of America. “My parents adhered to strict Chinese traditions that we learned to circumvent,” says Calvin, a closeted engineer who is spending a romantic weekend at a B&B with his lover, Peter, in “The Responsibility of Deceit.” For years, he and his sister “shared the responsibility of deceit, the big and little secrets that oiled the machinery of family expectations.” But when friends of his parents walk into the dining room at breakfast, does Calvin have the courage to risk his parents’ alienation by revealing his true self? In “Accepted,” a darkly funny twist on the well-worn myth of the model minority, the pressure of filial piety propels the increasingly bizarre actions of Elaine Park, who pretends to be a Stanford University student to avoid disappointing her self-sacrificing family. Parents also deceive their children; in the moving “What We Have Is What We Need,” the young son of undocumented Mexican immigrants discovers that his unfaithful mother has been leading “an alternate existence, happier than what she was born to.” Hua writes with tenderness, humor, and empathy, imbuing her stories with lovely turns of phrase (“she had an eye for the fleeting”). Only “Line, Please,” about a Hong Kong movie star fleeing a sex-photo scandal, strikes a slightly dated and false note given the city’s current political turmoil.

Fans of Hua’s acclaimed first novel, River of Stars (2018), will savor these unforgettable stories.

ON THE CORNER OF HOPE AND MAIN
Jenkins, Beverly
Morrow/HarperCollins (336 pp.)
$15.99 paper | Mar. 3, 2020
978-0-06-269928-2

The residents of Henry Adams, Kansas, prepare to elect a new mayor. Town matriarch Bernadine Brown is dealing with problems both personal and professional. Bernadine is struggling
Annie has misgivings, but her doctor strongly endorses the plan, Rebel Adams. The 10th installment of Jenkins’ (Rebel, 2019, etc.) Blessings series is filled to the brim with characters and subplots, and if it starts off with perhaps too much exposition about events from past books, the people are still compelling. Women prioritizing their own feelings and needs in order to forgive and move forward is the thematic and emotional core of the book. Of particular note is the focus on longtime married couple Sheila and Barrett Payne. Sheila is still reeling from the devastating discovery of her husband’s infidelity despite her years of unwavering support for his military career. Barrett announces his plans to run for mayor and expects Sheila’s support, but Sheila has her own plans to run for mayor. Like most of the candidates, Sheila lacks political experience, but she presents a well-researched platform that will benefit all the town’s citizens. When Barrett tells her that she “[doesn’t] know the first thing about running a town,” Sheila stands up for herself and her dreams. As the election continues, Bernadine’s ex-husband, Leo, appears in town, hoping to gain revenge for perceived slights in the past. Although the multiple long-running plotlines and extensive backstories might prove to be an impediment to new readers, this is still a charming installment full of warm, interesting characters. The small-town drama is intense, but Jenkins merri ly moves the plot forward, always rewarding good people and punishing wrongdoers.

For longtime fans who are looking forward to catching up with beloved characters.

THE DEEP
Katsu, Alma
Putnam (432 pp.)
$27.00 | Mar. 10, 2020
978-0-525-53790-8

Demons both literal and figurative torment a Titanic stewardess in this supernatural-tinged suspense novel. After scandal causes 18-year-old Annie Hebbley to flee her family’s home in Northern Ireland, she decamps to Southampton, England, and takes a job aboard the Titanic. The ship contains every imaginable luxury, but when an 0therworldly voice nearly lures the Astors’ young servant over the railing, Annie and several others become convinced that the vessel also harbors evil spirits. Four years later, in 1916, Annie is at Morninggate Asylum, convalescing from a head injury sustained in the Titanic’s sinking, when she receives a letter from fellow former White Star Line employee Violet Jessop. Now a nurse, Violet is about to set sail on the Britannic—a hospital ship that is the Titanic’s twin—and she wants Annie to join her. Annie has misgivings, but her doctor strongly endorses the plan, so despite having no medical training, she signs on. The hope is that the experience will help Annie heal; instead, it unearth’s painful memories that provide shocking clarity regarding what actually transpired during the Titanic’s fateful crossing. Atmospheric prose and exquisite attention to detail distinguish Kat su’s follow-up to The Hunger (2018). Regrettably, though, while crosscuts between the voyages add tension and a kaleidoscopic narrative adds color and depth, the book ultimately founders beneath the weight of glacial pacing, paltry plotting, and sketchily conceived paranormal elements. Carefully researched and meticulously crafted historical fiction fused with ho-hum horror.

GROWN-UP POSE
Lalli, Sonya
Berkley (320 pp.)
$16.00 paper | Mar. 24, 2020
978-0-451-49096-4

A 30-something woman attempts to figure out who she really is, with occasionally hilarious and disastrous results. Anu Desai was always the good girl. She listened to her traditional Indian parents, became a nurse because it was practical, got married young, had a daughter, and then reduced her work hours so she could focus on parenting. But now that Anu’s older and taking stock of her life, she realizes that she’s more open to change (and more complicated) than she originally thought. Anu’s struggle to find herself is wrought with obstacles and sometimes frustrating, but the resolution of her story is both satisfying and realistic. A moving look at one woman’s journey between her family and her desire for independence.
“Todd grippingly conjures a what-if time-travel scenario that’s unusually believable.” — Kirkus Reviews

“★★★★★ Time Tunnel: The Empire was a crazy good adventure that I would have never expected from this sci-fi style book. It is a must-read that I could hardly put down.” — Manhattan Book Review

“As the main characters carry out their exciting mission and remake history, readers will find it intensely satisfying, and the cliffhanger ending promises new thrills to come.” — Kirkus Reviews

“★★★★★ Just like the first novel in the series The Twin Towers, The Empire is full of action, intrigue, and suspense. Richard Todd does a fantastic job of retelling historical events, which are brilliantly researched.” — Seattle Book Review

“★★★★★ The integration of the time travel storyline with the real events that happened on that day are seamless. If I didn’t know better, I would think this could have really happened.” — Manhattan Book Review

“★★★★★ Relationships are tested in this story; the only way to know how you truly feel about someone is to throw them in a situation together for which they are totally unprepared. The reader is able to delve deeper into the feelings of the characters and grasp a better understanding for the motivation of their actions. As in Twin Towers, there is action galore, and The Empire includes another story from history that originally ended badly, but now occurs in a way we would have liked for it to have played out. The ending was a complete shock, with another phase in the Time Tunnel series coming at a later date.” — Tulsa Book Review

The Towers will rise again

Time Tunnel: The Twin Towers and Time Tunnel: The Empire by Richard Todd available on Amazon
View book trailers at timetunnel.one
For publication or film rights, contact laura.hinson@timetunnelmedia.com
An LGBTQ nonprofit takes its services to rural Middle America in this ambitious debut about the slow wheels of social change.

Big Burr, Kansas, is the most homophobic town in America, which is why Acceptance Across America sends a task force to take up residence there for two long years. Laskey's debut novel chronicles the ups and downs of the social experiment, alternating between the queer volunteers who uprooted their lives in big cities and the residents who have, for the most part, minds as small as their Main Street. There's Avery, the straight daughter of AAA's proud lesbian director, caught between wanting to fit in at the local high school and protecting her out-and-proud family; Linda, the grieving mother who finds solace in volunteering for AAA; Gabe, the closeted father and husband who hides his sexuality behind Carhartts and mounted deer heads; and Harley, the nonbinary social media copywriter for AAA whose neighbors retaliate against them with unflinching cruelty. Laskey inhabits each of these characters with skill and grace in a tour de force of first-person narration that illustrates how dangerous isolated, rural places can be for queer people. However, the conceit of Laskey's novel is troubled, and it requires a certain dependence on stereotypes, queer and straight, urban and rural, open-minded and closed, that hampers its success. Laskey is most convincing when she turns stereotypes on their heads, like the blustering rage and sadness rippling beneath teenage Avery's encounters with the homophobic group of teens who egg her mother's house—forcing her to choose sides. Other characters, like the bigoted Christine Peterson, flounder under the weight of bad marriages and righteous mommy blogs and are driven to unexamined acts of hatred and violence. There are unarticulated class and geographical tensions here, too, between the "liberated" coasts and the "backwards" red states. Laskey seems to suggest that Middle America can only change, reluctantly, with a push from AAA's proud family; Linda, the grieving mother who finds solace in volunteering for AAA; Gabe, the closeted father and husband who hides his sexuality behind Carhartts and mounted deer heads; and Harley, the nonbinary social media copywriter for AAA whose neighbors retaliate against them with unflinching cruelty. Laskey inhabits each of these characters with skill and grace in a tour de force of first-person narration that illustrates how dangerous isolated, rural places can be for queer people. However, the conceit of Laskey's novel is troubled, and it requires a certain dependence on stereotypes, queer and straight, urban and rural, open-minded and closed, that hampers its success. Laskey is most convincing when she turns stereotypes on their heads, like the blustering rage and sadness rippling beneath teenage Avery's encounters with the homophobic group of teens who egg her mother's house—forcing her to choose sides. Other characters, like the bigoted Christine Peterson, flounder under the weight of bad marriages and righteous mommy blogs and are driven to unexamined acts of hatred and violence. There are unarticulated class and geographical tensions here, too, between the "liberated" coasts and the "backwards" red states. Laskey seems to suggest that Middle America can only change, reluctantly, with a push from AAA's pragmatic director tells one beleaguered task force member, "[Liking] these people isn't a necessary part of it. You have to understand them, but that's different."

Energetic and compelling, a promising first book from a writer to watch.

A young temp searches for permanence in Leichter's whimsically surreal fable of late-stage capitalism.

The nameless protagonist of Leichter's debut leads a temporary existence. "The calls come on Mondays and Fridays, flanking each week with ephemeral placements," she explains. It's her job to fill in for others, and she takes it seriously; after all, as she read once on a granola bar wrapper, "there is nothing more personal than doing your job." All people are replaceable, but the jobs must continue. Filling in for the chairman of the board at Major Corp ("the very, very major corporation"), it is her job to sign documents and stamp dates and run meetings and wear fashionable scarves. "Everyone has a parcel of work they don't want to do themselves, and what can I say? I'm a purveyor of finished parcels," she says simply. Soon, she leaves the city and her cadre of casual boyfriends—her culinary boyfriend and her tallest boyfriend and her earnest boyfriend, a designated boyfriend for each possible purpose—for a series of increasingly absurd assignments. On a pirate ship, she fills in for someone named Darla, swabbing the decks and cleaning the company buckets, adjusting her temperament to best channel real Darla. But then Darla returns—she was only visiting her grandparents in Florida—and our unnamed protagonist is on to her next transient post, filling in at a small murder business, with logistics. She comes from a long line of temporaries, but still, she hopes it is temporary, being a temporary. The lucky temps ascend to a state of permanence—"the steadiness," they call it. "My dream job," she tells her earnest boyfriend, "is a job that stays." The novel, playful bordering on twee, is not especially subtle in its commentary—a cohesive identity? in this economy?—but it's clever and strange and, in the end, unexpectedly hopeful, less a biting gig-economy satire than a wistful 21st-century myth.

A dreamy meditation on how we construct who we are.
PILLARS OF SALT by J.A. Adams

PILLARS OF SALT
OIL, GREED, AND AN AMERICAN FAMILY

J.A. ADAMS

In Adams’ 1980-set thriller, a U.S. Air Force major is determined to prove that his estranged father was murdered.

After the deadly puncture and collapse of a salt mine by an oil rig, Major Harvey (“H”) Doucet is certain his father, owner of Doucet Drilling Company and a Catholic, would never have committed suicide, as his death was ruled. H and Placide finally uncover a sinister conspiracy involving Big Oil, crooked state and federal regulators, insider traders, and sundry thugs, leading all the way to the White House.

“Hearty backstories and a beguiling Louisiana setting enhance this compelling thriller.”
—Kirkus Reviews

For information on publishing and film rights, email Jwither22@gmail.com
Sometimes, complex writing work is fueled, at least in part, by reality TV. Debut novelist Crissy Van Meter confides, “I can’t read while I’m working...so I end up watching a lot of TV. Housewives, Kardasbians, any reality TV.” Read Van Meter’s emotionally dense debut novel, Creatures (Algonquin, Jan. 7), and you’ll be richly rewarded, but you’ll also understand the desire to occasionally retreat from the deeply felt world Van Meter creates as you dive headlong into the life of Evangeline, a young woman raised in the fictional tourist town of Winter Island, California.

We meet Evangeline—called Evie—on the eve of her marriage as she deals with a trio of bridal nightmares: a dead, putrid, beached whale that has washed ashore at her wedding venue; a groom who may be lost at sea; and a mother of the bride who has shown up uninvited. We then travel backward in time to revisit the chaos of Evie’s early life, spent with a father too consumed by substance abuse to keep a steady roof over their heads. We also jump forward a decade into her marriage and see her struggle to strike a balance between her feelings of betrayal and unflinching love for her spouse, as well as for her best friend, Rook, and for her parents living and dead.

“I told myself I didn’t want to write a novel about grief,” says Van Meter. “I lost my dad, and I thought it would be really cheesy.” However, the result was not only cathartic for Van Meter, but a novel that provides fresh perspective on the ebb and flow of grieving. She says, “I was really thinking about grief and was annoyed that the way I kept reading about grief was so linear. Sure, we have the five stages, but sometimes they happen all at once, sometimes it happens in waves. I grew up on the beach and reading tide charts, and I was thinking about this really basic idea of tides...that’s so similar to my own experience of grief.”

The resulting narrative isn’t chronological, but it is cohesive. Part of that cohesion comes from the isolated island setting, an element of the novel that is very personal to Van Meter, who spent much of her childhood in Newport Beach—a peninsula—with her waterman father. Of the city, she notes, “There’s one way in and one way out. There’s no parking, there’s a thousand tourists, you’re stuck there...The metaphor of being trapped by their lives and relationships came so naturally to me.”
Van Meter has been a journalist, editor, and teacher for a decade, but as she readies for the publication of her debut novel, she is somewhat reluctant to call herself a novelist. When asked if there’s one piece of advice she gives her students and embraces herself, she first laughs and then notes, “All artists are so different...One thing I [do], and that I encourage all my students to do, is I read everything aloud....One, to hear the dialogue, but two, you slow down and have to go word by word and sound by sound. I’m lucky my novel is pretty short.”

True, Creatures is relatively short, but there’s power in its brevity. For Van Meter, it is art underpinned by—but not explicitly reflective of—her own experiences, which has her feeling both excited and a bit trepidatious. Van Meter is keenly aware that readers want to know which elements or characters in any novel are “real” or “true,” saying, “I feel really vulnerable because it’s emotionally true and because people who know my life will recognize that. But I have to resolve that the book is no longer mine—I made it and it’s in the world now. However people want to read it...that’s up to them.”

When asked what she hopes readers will take away from the novel, she notes two things. “I hope people really think about the structure as a feeling and really think about life not being linear, [and] I wonder if other people who grew up with alcoholic parents will be able to relate to loving someone who wasn’t always a good person.” Those hopes are well realized in Van Meter’s arresting debut.

Tayla Burney is a writer in Washington, D.C., and curates a weekly newsletter of literary events in the region. Creatures received a starred review in the Oct. 15, 2019, issue.
An exuberant comic opera set to the music of life.

DEACON KING KONG

McBride, James
Riverhead (984 pp.)
$28.00 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-0-7352-1672-3

The versatile and accomplished McBride (Five Carat Soul, 2017, etc.) returns with a dark urban farce crowded with misjudged signals, crippling sorrows, and unexpected epiphanies.

It’s September 1969, just after Apollo 11 and Woodstock. In a season of such events, it’s just as improbable that in front of 16 witnesses occupying the crowded plaza of a Brooklyn housing project one afternoon, a hobbling, dyspeptic, and boozed old church deacon named Caify Jasper “Sportcoat” Lambkin should pull out a .45-caliber Luger pistol and shoot off an ear belonging to the neighborhood’s most dangerous drug dealer. The 19-year-old victim’s name is Deems Clemens, and Sportcoat had coached him to be “the best baseball player the projects had ever seen” before he became “a poison-selling murderous meathead.” Everybody in the project has their eyes away as this runaway train inevitably derails.

A stranger from his crime-boss father’s past. There are also an assortment of salsa musicians, a gentle Nation of Islam convert named Soup, and even a tribe of voracious red ants that somehow immigrated to the neighborhood from Colombia and hung around for generations, all of which seems like too much stuff for any one book to handle. But as he’s already shown in The Good Lord Bird (2013), McBride has a flair for fashioning comedy whose buoyant outrageousness barely conceals both a steely command of big and small narrative elements and a river-deep supply of humane intelligence.

An exuberant comic opera set to the music of life.

PRECIOUS YOU

Monks Takkah, Helen
Random House (336 pp.)
$26.00 | Mar. 10, 2020
978-1-984855-96-1

A Gen X magazine editor-in-chief and her new millennial intern play an escalating game of cat and mouse in former journalist Monks Takkah’s debut psychological thriller.

At 41, London magazine editor Katherine Ross already feels like a walking cliché. She and her longtime partner Iain, a failed screenwriter, used to be the cool kids, complete with an open relationship and a cavalier attitude to drugs and drink. Now Katherine feels old and out of touch, reaching for a life that seems to have gotten away from her. After 20 years with her magazine, Leadership, and a bout of depression that caused a blip in her upward trajectory (and seems to be trying to take her over again), she’s trying to get back into the swing of things. Enter Lily Lunt, a beautiful, vibrant, and privileged 24-year-old upstart who seems to have weaseled her way into an internship via her aunt Gemma—who recently bought Leadership. Lily is everything Katherine used to be: “I couldn’t take my eyes off you. You were like looking into a mirror, or more like a window into a different time in my life, not long past, but just out of reach.” The lonely Katherine’s desire for mutual understanding, maybe even friendship, with Lily is clouded by instinctive mistrust. Katherine soon recognizes that Lily’s wide-eyed innocence is a mask, but what is she hiding? Lily wastes no time sideling and embarrassing Katherine at Leadership, and before Katherine knows it, Lily has also wormed her way into Katherine’s personal life, including, to her horror, her relationship with Iain. Katherine and Lily’s tense and twisted push and pull unfolds through sinuous, overlapping first-person narratives—addressed to each other—that the author carefully shapes to highlight the characters’ often divergent takes on shared events. Monks Takkah tackles workplace dynamics, aging, feminism, mental illness, and the hotly debated generation gap, all within the framework of a tightly plotted revenge thriller that reads a bit like a less soapy 21st-century Single White Female. Readers won’t be able to tear their eyes away as this runaway train inevitably derailed.

A wickedly sharp first novel from an author to watch.
ROOSTER by Edward Pontacoloni

ROOSTER IS AMERICA’S BEST LOVED CANINE FABLE!

“...a roller coaster ride of excitement...hilarious, engaging, and absolutely entertaining.”

“...draws the reader gently into the story and holds them there until it is finished.”

“...delightful and adventurous... fast paced and full of action... readers will find themselves eagerly flipping through the pages, completely engrossed in this tale. AWESOME!”
—Reader’s Favorite

“Thumbs up! I encourage everyone who has a dog to read this delightful work.”
—Mazie Davis, Davis Kennels

“What makes this novel such an engaging read is Pontacoloni’s ability to transport readers into the story with lucid details, a mix of realistic and fanciful narration, and a pervading tone of reminiscence, as if the author is telling a captivating tale around the campfire.”

“Delightful, inviting storytelling that will effectively immerse readers in the world of field trials.”
—Kirkus Reviews

“...delight, breezily written as a fable should be. The author has talent and has created characters lovable and dastardly...” —Tom Word, author of The Curmudgeons

ISBN # 978-1-48356-774-7

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THE LAND BEYOND THE SEA
Penman, Sharon Kay
Putnam (688 pp.)
$12.00 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-0-399-16528-3

This mammoth historical novel dives deep into the undersung saga of the leper king of Jerusalem and his archfoe, Saracen sultan Saladin.

It’s the 1170s, and a small enclave of Frankish colonists known as Poulains are trying to hold on to their feudal fiefdoms in and around the city of Jerusalem, footholds gained during the Crusades in the land they call Outremer—beyond the sea. The main focuses of this multivariegated work, encompassing enough material for a trilogy; are the ruling families of the European Christian interlopers and their Muslim Saracen counterparts. Most attention is paid to Baldwin IV, who becomes king at 13 when his father, Amalric, unexpectedly dies. From an early age, Baldwin exhibits attributes of greatness, including charisma, wit, courage, and excellent horsemanship. His imperviousness to pain is the first symptom of what will soon be diagnosed as leprosy. Baldwin’s strong support system, including his ambitious, embittered mother, Agnes (whom Amalric divorced upon becoming king); his spiritual adviser, William, archdeacon of Tyre; and his staunchest friend, Balian of Ibelin, enables him to overcome or at least manage the depredations of the disease and spearhead the Franks’ ongoing struggles—diplomatic and otherwise—with Saladin. Penman (A King’s Ransom, 2014, etc.) excels at depicting medieval warfare and the unintended, often disastrous consequences of the best-laid strategies. She is equally adept at depicting the rivalries and internecine strife that roil Baldwin’s court—peopled by characters who are mostly related to each other by some degree of kinship—finding credible motives for everyone’s grudges. Occasional cutaways to Saladin and his entourage are less detailed but also humanize him, his extended family, and allies. Dramatic set pieces—a wedding in a castle under attack, a future Knight Templar dragged out of a brothel—abound. The religious and tribal conflicts, among both the Christians and Muslims—Kurds, Shiites, and a murderous sect aptly dubbed the Assassins—certainly have echoes for today. This book amply illustrates the extent to which fortune and personality dictated victory, détente, and defeat on both sides.

A teeming 12th-century tapestry which Penman renders coherent, even eloquent.

THE BODY POLITIC
Platzer, Brian
Atria (320 pp.)
$27.00 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-5011-8077-4

A New York couple faces medical and personal difficulties during the national malaise of the Trump years.

When we meet Tess, a Broadway understudy and mother of two, she is celebrating her 37th birthday alone in a bar. Eight months ago, shortly after she confessed to cheating on him with a fellow actor, her husband, David, fell off a long ladder at an upstate New York apple-picking orchard, and his head injuries resulted in a debilitating, long-term vestibular disorder (also suffered by the author). Once filled with so much “buoyancy and good cheer” that he would dance upon getting up in the morning, now David feels leaden and can barely function. As he writes in a journal Tess reads without permission, “Some days I think I’m lucky to be with someone who’s suffered. Seen what she’s seen and survived true depression. Other days I think I need someone less damaged, someone who can devote herself more fully to helping me.”

The journal also documents David’s desperate visits to alternative practitioners that ultimately do nothing but ruin the family financially. There are many more complications—too many—some having to do with Tess’ past, other with David’s best friend, Tazio (whom David nursed back to health after liver failure and whom Tess is in love with), and Tazio’s fiancee, Angelica. Tazio is an art student–turned-politico, and his story arc contains, among other things, a deep dive into the John Edwards campaign and a position in the Trump administration. As he makes the rounds of the male and female characters, Platzer (Bed-Stuy Is Burning, 2017) often seems to be searching for answers himself. For example, after Tess and Angelica attempt to resolve their past traumas by pairing up for #MeToo type confrontations, the author tries to evoke Tess’ state of mind with a series of questions: “Maybe…seeing your father kill your mother is something you can’t ever get over. Maybe it is worse than rape, especially if you loved your rapist.” Elsewhere: “What if Tazio is planning on killing Trump?” Fewer storylines and less topical content might have helped.

Platzer writes confidently about marriage and illness, but there’s too much else going on.

COMES A TIME
Ramey, Frederick
Fomite (248 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Feb. 19, 2020
978-1-944388-72-0

An aging man revisits his most meaningful relationships as he grapples with dementia.

Ramey’s novel begins with a few lines of almost-illegible handwriting followed
by a pair of sentences that set out the images that will recur throughout the book: “The handwriting didn’t look like his. Neither did the hand.” Protagonist Raymond sits in solitude, looking back over his life, from going off to fight in World War II to his relationships with the people closest to him. Complicating matters is Raymond’s mind, which is slipping into dementia. Ramey’s evocation of Raymond’s loss of language and fragmented mental state makes for some of the book’s most unsettling segments: “Though he couldn’t always call the numbers for the hour anymore or even the name for the—the moon—that is, the mano—the...first part of the day.” Later, Ramey illustrates his protagonist’s distress more straightforwardly: “the sudden wonder that all his memories were just half-seen things and that words had become accidents he suffered.” Raymond’s life is a life beset with heartache; in passing, Ramey reveals that his mother died in childbirth. His father, Vic, and son, David, both loom large in the proceedings, but most of his thoughts are occupied with his relationships with two women, Clara and Ellen—and his regrets over how he treated them both. “Raymond had fooled himself. Or lied, really. Told himself it was a thing a good man could do—hold two women separate like stones without hurting anybody.” The blend of fractured memories and long-held regrets doesn’t always come together neatly, but the book’s cyclical structure makes for an affecting conclusion.

Frequently moving even as it charts the limitations of memory.

Stories centered on a particular apartment building in a small Ukrainian town.

In the last story of this debut collection, oligarchs, tycoons, and celebrities in post-Soviet Ukraine pay good money for transformative experiences. One popular option re-creates One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich: “Clients are carted out to the fringe of the Arctic Circle,” Reva writes, where “they must mop the guardhouse, lay brick walls with quick-dry mortar, fight over stone-hard bread,” all while “a guard flogs them.” Reva’s world tips that over for him. The effect is somewhat claustrophobic. Still, Reva is clearly a talent to watch: Her prose has a neat efficiency, and her wonderful sense of humor and an equally wonderful sense of the absurd. But the book is slim enough that the reappearances of certain characters and images feel overdone. Smena’s X-ray music comes back several times. So does Mikhail Ivanovich, a low-level apparatchik who, in “Letter of Apology,” is assigned to track a famous poet; later, in “Lucky Toss,” he winds up working for him. The effect is somewhat claustrophobic. Still, Reva has a neat efficiency, and her stories are as memorable as they are unique.

The world Reva creates slips fluidly from the surreal to the absurd to the grittily realistic.

**THE BAUDELAIRE FRACTAL**

Robertson, Lisa

Coach House Books (160 pp.) 978-1-55245-390-2

An itinerant poet makes an autofiction of her wayward wandering youth in this debut novel.

One morning in the spring of 2016, the poet Hazel Brown awakens in a Vancouver hotel to discover that she’s written the complete works of Charles Baudelaire. Although “perhaps it is more precise to say that all at once, unbidden, I received the Baudelairean authorship, or that I found it within myself.” Already middle-aged at the time of this curious inheritance, the poet attempts to trace the contours of this bequest through a kind of fragmented, allusive double biography: both of Baudelaire brooding amid the onset of industrial modernity and of her young self, coasting through Paris, the city Baudelaire left behind, more than a hundred years in his wake. Throughout the book—part Künstlerroman, part biography, part artist’s statement, part political tract—we track Baudelaire’s bourgeois dispossession, his revolutionary and then reactionary politics, his love, his losses, his furniture, his friendships. All this interpenetrates with the loose and jumbled story of Hazel’s artistic awakening as she spins a set of concepts (the hotel room, the stain, the garment) into a tapestry of memory and desire. Through Hazel, poet Robertson (I Summers, 2016, etc.) meditates on the impossibility of any coherent “I”—especially that of a woman writing poetry. But as Hazel reads philosophy and cleans apartments and seduces men and writes in her diary, she grows into herself, in glimmering, beautiful sentences that illuminate as much as they obscure: “First, I knew nothing, then I believed anything, now I doubt everything.”

An intense if abstract portrait of the poet as a young woman in search of a kind of language that might lead to liberation.
A heartwarming portrait of a broken heart finding a little healing magic.

**IN FIVE YEARS**

*Serle, Rebecca*
*Atria (240 pp.)*  
$27.00 | Mar. 3, 2020  
978-1-68137-367-6

After acing a job interview and accepting a marriage proposal, Dannie Kohan has had the perfect day. That is, until she awakens to find herself five years in the future with a completely different man.

Just one hour in that alternate reality shakes Dannie to her core. After all, highly ambitious Dannie and her boyfriend, David, have plotted out their lives in minute detail, and the sexy man in her dream—was it a dream?—is most certainly not in the script. Serle (*The Dinner List, 2018*) deftly spins these magical threads into Dannie’s perfectly structured life, leaving not only Dannie, but also the reader wondering whether Dannie time traveled or hallucinated. Her best friend, Bella, would delight in the story given that she thinks Dannie is much too straight-laced, and some spicy dreaming might push Dannie to find someone more passionate than David. Unfortunately, glamorous Bella is in Europe with her latest lover. Ever pragmatic, Dannie consults her therapist, who almost concurs that it was likely a dream, and throws herself into her work. Pleased to have landed the job at a prestigious law firm, Dannie easily loses her worries in litigation. Soon four and a half years have passed with no wedding date set, and Bella is back in the U.S. with a new man in her life. A man who turns out to be literally the man of Dannie’s dream. The sheer fact of Aaron Gregory’s existence forces Dannie to reevaluate her trust in the laws of physics as well as her decision to marry David, a decision that seems less believable with each passing day. And as the architecture of Dannie’s overplanned life disintegrates, Serle twists and twines the remnants of her dream into a surprising future.

A heartwarming portrait of a broken heart finding a little healing magic.

**SKETCHES OF THE CRIMINAL WORLD**  
*Shalamov, Varlam*  
*Trans. by Kayfield, Donald*  
*New York Review Books (576 pp.)*  
$22.95 paper | Jan. 14, 2020  
978-1-68137-367-6

Building on his *Kolyma Stories* (2018), one-time prisoner Shalamov limns the hell that was the Soviet gulag.

The stories gathered here, apparently reportage with a light veneer of fiction to disguise names, open with their author chiding himself for being “thrilled by the ‘heroic’ figures of the criminal world,” adulation befitting an impressionable teenager. For, as Shalamov (1907-1982) writes, there really were criminals in the gulag, not just blameless victims of Stalin. At the head of the hierarchy were the “hereditary thieves,” those who knew no other way than robbery—and who were not to be confused with the amateurs who swelled the ranks of the criminal class following the “dekulakization” of the 1930s. The professionals wield tremendous power: In one of Shalamov’s tales, they threaten the head medical officer at a mine where one of their “godfathers” had been sent with unspecified violence while promising him two suits of clothing if he arranges for a transfer to “a thieves’ place, the Northern Administration.” Indeed, apart from the criminals, many of the figures whom Shalamov profiles are the doctors, nurses, and paramedics who serve the camps, often as inmates themselves; the prisoners tend to make little distinction over titles, so long as they can get a little medicine and perhaps a little time off in the clinic, and even the captors who administer the prison system prefer those doctors to the ones on the outside. There are fascinating sociological side notes, such as the odd fact that the “murderers or thieves” among the gulag’s denizens were fond of the poetry of Sergei Yesenin, “the only poet who was accepted and consecrated by the criminals, who generally altogether disliked poetry.” As in his earlier volume, Shalamov writes matter-of-factly, unblinkingly, about the endless horrors of the gulag, which are scarcely comprehensible.

Essential chronicles of the worst face of the totalitarian state.

**THE TWO LIVES OF LYDIA BIRD**

*Silver, Josie*
*Ballantine (384 pp.)*  
$26.00 | Mar. 3, 2020  
978-0-593-13523-5

A woman loses her partner in a horrific car accident and must piece together her life while dreaming about an alternate reality of what life would have been like had he not died.

On Lydia Bird’s 28th birthday, she has an innocuous conversation with her long-term partner, Freddie Hunter. He’s going to make a detour to pick up his best friend, Jonah Jones, for her birthday dinner. The delay will make him late, much to Lydia’s chagrin. And with that, the last conversation she ever has with her beloved passes her by while she tries to disentangle a Velcro roller from her hair. Author Silver (*One Day in December, 2018*) has created a story about grief that follows Lydia in two worlds—real life, where she must grapple with life without Freddie for the first time since they met at school in their little Shropshire town in England, and in her sleeping pill–aided dreams, where there was no accident and their wedding plans are continuing apace. Jonah—the third in their group, Lydia’s one-time best friend before Freddie moved to town, and a constant, friendly presence in her life from childhood—is also struggling with the accident, which he walked away from. This is very much Lydia’s story; however, as she learns to exist as one person instead of as part of a couple. She receives ample support from those
around her—her sister, her mother, her co-workers, Jonah—even though she is so caught up in herself and what might have been that she does not reciprocate. At its core, this is a story of love lost and individual growth. But it is also about love found and future happiness. While this is in many ways the complete opposite of Linda Holmes’ *Evvie Drake Starts Over*, fans of that book will enjoy it.

A story that thoughtfully takes readers to the Hollywood ending they can see coming.

THE EVERLASTING
Smith, Katy Simpson
Harper/HarperCollins (352 pp.)
$28.99 | Mar. 24, 2020
978-0-06-287364-4

Rome, past and present, serves as the setting for a sparkling historical novel. Smith (Free Men, 2016, etc.) bounds through 2,000 years of history, following four indelible characters as they grapple with questions of faith, freedom, and transgressive love. Tom, a biologist working in contemporary Rome, is studying ostracods, tiny crustaceans that thrive in polluted, agitated environments. “Are they adapting in the face of disadvantage or are they opportunists of collapse?” Tom asks, aware that his question about ostracods could just as well apply to his own emotional agitation. The married father of a 9-year-old daughter, he has met a young woman who enchants him, compelling him to confront his desperate desire for “an unleashing” and for a love deeper than what he feels for his wife. A child playing in the water where he is investigating suddenly shrieks in pain, pierced by a piece of bent metal, “scaly with corrosion, its silver marred with patches of orange rust.” It is a fishhook—maybe a castoff with no value or perhaps an ancient relic: uncanny, miraculous. The fishhook reappears as Smith leaps back to the Renaissance, where it falls into the hands of Giulia, a mixed-race princess newly married to a Medici, pregnant with another man’s child. For Giulia, her fortunes embroiled in political and religious rivalries, the fishhook evokes a holier time, its silver bearing the uncanny, miraculous. The novel’s leading voices.

A compelling, beautifully rendered tale of passion and pain.

BLACKWOOD
Smith, Michael Farris
Little, Brown (504 pp.)
$27.00 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-0-316-52981-5

Still bearing psychological scars from his childhood, Colburn, a junkyard sculptor, confronts the traumatic past when he returns to his hometown of Red Bluff, Mississippi.

In 1956, when he was a boy, Colburn’s unloving father hung himself—an act the son not only witnessed, but also abetted. Years later, when Colburn was a teenager, he learned from his mother that before his father’s death, he had a baby brother who met a horrible fate due to his father’s negligence—something that helped explain the suicide and made Colburn feel even more unwanted. In 1975, when Colburn returns to Red Bluff after years away, he is not the only lost soul drawing attention in the now-faded town. A disheveled man, woman, and boy living out of a dead Cadillac are committing strange and desperate acts that the veteran sheriff, Myer, can’t begin to figure out. A married man who has obsessed over Celia, owner of the town bar, since grade school is pushed to the edge when she begins a complicated relationship with the taciturn Colburn—whose father, Colburn learns, consorted with Celia’s fortunetelling mother. Unsettling, heartbreaking, and frequently astonishing, this Southern gothic never runs out of revelations. No mere metaphor in Smith’s hands, the novel’s ever present kudzu vines are a malevolent force, “strands of bondage” with the power to disappear people, cars, and entire houses, concealing ghostly caves and tunnels once dug by slaves. Such is the power of Smith’s pitch-black poetic vision that the deeper you get into the book, the more entwined you are by its creeping effects. “It’s like when something moves in the dark,” says Myer. “You can’t see it but you know it’s there. I wonder if that’s where we are.”

A gleaming, dark masterpiece by one of Southern fiction’s leading voices.

YOU WILL NEVER BE FORGOTTEN
South, Mary
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (256 pp.)
$15.00 paper | Mar. 10, 2020
978-0-374-53836-1

Futuristic and of-the-moment stories that take aim at innovations that threaten to take us backward.

In this debut collection, South crafts science-fictional scenarios that are just believable enough to be unsettling: In “Keith Prime,” babies, born from artificial wombs, are drugged into “perpetual sleep,” tended by nurses, and then harvested for valuable organs; and in “Not Setsuko,” a mother who has lost her daughter
A young woman wanders the nighttime streets of post–9/11 New York in search of answers.

THE EXHIBITION OF PERSEPHONE Q

Stevens, Jessi Jezewska
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (224 pp.)
$26.00 | Feb. 4, 2020
978-0-374-15092-1

A young woman wanders the nighttime streets of post–9/11 New York in search of answers to the mysterious disappearance of herself.

One night, Persephone Q, or Percy for short, wakes up to find she no longer recognizes her husband. The man beside her is definitely Misha—her new husband, whom she’d married in the heady rush just after the Sept. 11 attacks, despite having known him for only four months—but it seems to Percy as if he has aged a whole decade overnight, leaving her behind. What’s worse, her response to Misha’s sudden unfamiliarity is “a small and violent impulse” to pinch his airways shut. Bewildered by her own behavior and pregnant with a baby she cannot seem to tell her husband about, Percy launches herself into the equally bewildered streets of a city in which posters for those still missing from the World Trade Center attacks “cropped up in bursts, like desperate plants, clambering over telephone poles, the entrances to trains, fences....”

In the midst of Percy’s increasingly insomniac wanderings comes a mysterious package advertising the gallery opening for an exhibition of Percy’s ex-fiance’s photographs. The exhibition, entitled The Exhibition of Persephone Q, opened the day after the attacks and features image after image of a nude woman asleep in a red room in which, as the photographs progress, familiar domestic objects are replaced by creeping moss or tangled tree limbs and the skyline of the city outside is altered or erased. It is clear to Percy that the unnamed woman in the photographs is herself and the red bedroom is the one she used to live in when she and her ex-fiance were still engaged, yet no one—perhaps not even she—can see the resemblance. What follows in Stevens’ dreamlike first novel is a delicate and drifting exploration of Percy’s relationships with friends, lovers, neighbors, and the many not-quite strangers who form the fabric of city life. As Percy wanders, New York itself is reflected through the prism of her many identities—“The woman [she] was with Misha, a wife who loved her husband and yet tried to kill him all the same....”

Some interesting ways, from shifting perspectives from Marion to other townspeople (with a particular emphasis on Native women), a smirking humor that cuts the mordant atmosphere (“What do Indians call a lack of faith?” “Being white”), and a graceful handling of Ojibwe culture. In its later stages, the story seems to keep sprouting tentacles as new characters and revelations emerge, which saps some of its narrative drive, but it returns affectingly to the messy fates of Marion and Shannon.

A knotty portrait of Ojibwe life with some winnily uncanny touches.

This Town Sleeps

Staples, Dennis E.
Counterpoint (224 pp.)
$26.00 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-64009-284-6

A young gay man reckons with love, tribal lore, and a decades-old murder in this rangy debut novel.

Marion, the main narrator of Staples’ first book, isn’t where he wants to be, and that’s back in his hometown on Minnesota’s Ojibwe reservation. A brief stint in the Twin Cities ended with busted relationships, but his best romantic prospect in the area is deeply closeted former high school classmate Shannon, who has the unglorious job of attending to animal carcasses on a resort island. Still, Staples, an Ojibwe writer, wants to suggest that the best way to move forward is by facing one’s past head-on. The notion arrives first via symbolism: As children, Marion and his friends spooked each other by saying a dog died under the merry-go-round at the playground, and now that dog reappears (or seems to) in Marion’s presence. That incident sparks Marion’s investigation into his high school days, in particular the murder of Kayden, a basketball star who became a father shortly before he was killed. Plotwise, the story is a stock hero’s-journey tale, as Marion lets go of his skepticism of Ojibwe spiritualism, discovers the truth about Kayden’s death, and finds a community along with a degree of emotional fulfillment. But credit Staples for complicating the story in some interesting ways, from shifting perspectives from Marion to other townspeople (with a particular emphasis on Native women), a smirking humor that cuts the mordant atmosphere (“What do Indians call a lack of faith?” “Being white”), and a graceful handling of Ojibwe culture. In its later stages, the story seems to keep sprouting tentacles as new characters and revelations emerge, which saps some of its narrative drive, but it returns affectingly to the messy fates of Marion and Shannon.

A knotty portrait of Ojibwe life with some winnily uncanny touches.
sleep”—in luminous prose that captures the essence of a place in the middle of its most defining transformation.

A stellar debut.

REAL LIFE
Taylor, Brandon
Riverhead (336 pp.)
$26.00 | Feb. 18, 2020
978-0-525-53888-2

A young gay black man comes of age at a moment when American culture feels bitter and closefisted. Wallace is a graduate student in the Midwest, desperate for his genetic experiments on nematodes to be successful. He’d also like some semblance of a relationship with Miller to work out, never having had a boyfriend before; meanwhile, Miller isn’t certain he’s gay. Having just arrived from Alabama, Wallace has a lot of whiteness to adjust to. His friends are white; so are his colleagues. He notes the “tasteless, strained, diluted flavor of white people food.” “Microaggression” is a term anyone paying attention to race and gender issues in America has heard, but in this flinty debut novel, there’s nothing micro about them, as when a Machiavellian female colleague who may be sabotaging Wallace’s experiments tells him that “I have to prove myself because you and men like you are always counting me out” and then goes on a dizzying bender of benighted cultural appropriation. (The fact that it feels unresolved whether she is his saboteur is a fault in the novel.) Or when a French grad student alludes to Wallace’s “deficiencies,” i.e., the facts that he grew up black and poor. Taylor deserves admiration for making it so clear how racism and homophobia feel: “When you tell white people that something is racist, they hold it up to the light and try to discern if you are telling the truth,” for example. The novel, by a staff writer at Lit Hub, has generated a lot of buzz, and its unflinching forays into our culture wars are cleareyed. Beyond its status as a testament of political injustice, though, it deserves accolades for its insights into the ways trauma hollows out a person’s soul. The novel ends on a note of hope as Wallace and his new friends are toasting one another by the lake at the end of summer, but, as one in a tradition of searing novels about gay men, it’s better read for its chill: “Is this all his life is meant to be, the accumulation of other people’s pain?” Wallace wonders.

Telling the truth, bleakly.

BARN 8
Unferth, Deb Olin
Graywolf (296 pp.)
$16.00 paper | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-64445-015-4

In her last book, Wait Till You See Me Dance (2017), Unferth explored the separate complicated lives of an ensemble of lonely outsiders; here she brings back a similar band of misfits—only this time, they’re in cahoots.

Helmed by a young woman named Janey, Unferth’s narrative takes flight with a seemingly mundane turn of events. After leaving her mother and cozy Brooklyn brownstone for a new life in Southern Iowa with her deadbeat dad, Janey suffers a dose of reality and ends up stuck in a job as an auditor for the U.S. egg industry. While making her rounds through huge, “so-called cage-free” barns, she takes in the harrowing scene of hens “half-smothered and rotting alive...unable to look up and see anything but steel and conveyor belts.” To further drive the horror of this home, Unferth reminds us that chickens, while generally deemed brainless fluff, are actually an incredibly intelligent species even capable of “long-lasting friendships.” Incensed by the heinous conditions she witnesses, Janey joins forces with a fellow auditor to pull off “one of the greatest animal heists in history”: stealing a million hens from one of the town’s largest egg farms. To help them carry out their quixotic mission, they recruit a motley crew of animal activists, undercover investigators, vegan dishwashers, a farm heiress, and tattooed punks, all united by their desire to find hope in a world barreling toward extinction. Ignited by her fiery wit and distinctive voice, Unferth’s novel uses one of America’s most valuable and overlooked institutions as fertile ground to raise questions around the truths people are fed and the ones they turn a blind eye to. In a nation that produces about 75 billion eggs a year, she shrewdly points out that it’s basically become “our patriotic duty” to eat them. While this kind of politically charged rhetoric could risk coming off as pedantic, Unferth’s writing never feels patronizing—more than anything, it’s galvanizing, especially these days when “activism [is] less revolution, more capitalism with a conscience.”

If this novel isn’t a movement, it has enough heart to start one.

SOOT
Vyleta, Dan
Doubleday (560 pp.)
$28.95 | Feb. 25, 2020
978-0-385-54022-3

A return to the Dickensian-dystopian world of Smoke (2016).

Let’s welcome, once again, to a smoke-filled stage your three favorite teenage characters from Smoke, Thomas
Argyle, Charlie Cooper, and Eleanor Renfrew, along with a vast array of supporting characters, old and new. Vyleta organizes his bulky novel like a play, with five acts, numerous scenes, and an intermission, interspersing memoranda, letters, and diary entries throughout. It's 1909 in England, 10 years after Thomas, Charlie, and Livia Naylor released Smoke, a visible marker of sin and emotion that the authorities wanted to control. They hoped it would bring about a cultural and political revolution. They were wrong. In Saint John, New Brunswick, elderly playwright Balthazar Black, the grandson of a slave, is putting on a Smoke Theatre skit about Charlie and Thomas—"There is not a story more widely told than theirs." The audience, suddenly realizing who the actors are playing, gasp. Fake smoke fills the room. Black discovers that Eleanor Renfrew is in the audience. She's the niece of Erasmus Renfrew, who taught at Charlie and Thomas' school and is now the imperious Lord Protector. Balthazar, Eleanor, and the troupe of players sail to New York to boil a nastily plan of Renfrew's. Meanwhile, Mr. Smith, who works for the powerful Company, has his own plans for gaining power. People have fled to the Minetowns, where they've set up their own Workers' Council in Ekklesia, a "giant hollow in the ground." Vyleta's labyrinthine tale adds subplots upon subplots. We meet Mowgli, a South American boy whose body may have been used to unleash the Smoke. Charlie has ventured to the glaciers of the Himalayas, seeking to discover the origins of Smoke. Could it reside in a dull, velvet-black rock? What unique powers do beetles, sweets, and Smoke Poppies possess? Who is this Angel of the North? Can it save them from Smoke? All about, Black Storms and Gales rage.

Excessive, overwrought, and lacking Smoke's exciting dramatic thrust.

**OUR FATHERS**
*Wait, Rebecca*
Europa Editions (272 pp.)
$17.00 paper | Feb. 11, 2020
978-1-60945-571-2

Twenty years after a blood bath consumed his family, the only survivor returns to the scene of the crime in an effort to clear the roadblock of the past from his psyche.

Litta, a small island off the coast of Scotland, is a "dark hunk of rock, braced against the wind and the endless rain," a persuasive setting for this grimly compelling tale. Here, John Baird, a contemptuous, angry man hidden beneath a veneer of controlled charm, surprised Litta's tiny community one day by massacring his family—wife Katrina, son Nicky, and daughter Beth, everyone except his less-favored son, Tommy—and then killing himself. John's brother, Malcolm, still lives on Litta, and it's on his doorstep that Tommy turns up unannounced two decades later, his education, jobs, and girlfriends having failed to pull him into a future beyond the trauma of his family's tragedy, his father's taint, and his own pained regrets. *Wait* (The Followers, 2017, etc.) delivers these events in a narrative that is limpid and frill-free, in keeping with the book's elemental setting. Delving into John's psychology, and Malcolm's, and their father's before them, she paints a picture of traditional, often unpredictable, disappointed men and their low-level, slowly corrosive abuse of their wives. This generational connection serves its explanatory purpose, but another of the story's challenging forces is Litta itself, beautiful but isolated and ceaselessly testing its inhabitants' characters. Memory, masculinity, and survivor's guilt are picked apart as the novel treads its path, dodging sensationalism and easy resolutions while evoking haunted, inarticulate people in a relentless landscape.

A piercing, vivid, and humane story depicting the long aftermath of extreme domestic violence.

**THE JETSETTERS**
*Ward, Amanda Eyre*
Ballantine (352 pp.)
$28.00 | Feb. 4, 2020
978-0-399-18189-4

A lonely 71-year-old widow wins a trip to Europe and takes her three grown children in an attempt to reconnect with them.

One-time mediocre realtor and long-time widow Charlotte Perkins lives in Savannah, Georgia. When her best friend dies, she realizes just how lonely she has become and how she has lost touch with her grown children, two of whom refuse to speak to each other. Charlotte believes that her eldest daughter, Lee, is an actress on the cusp of success in Los Angeles; that her son, Cord, is a successful venture capitalist in New York City waiting to find the right woman; and that her youngest, Regan, is a happily married stay-at-home mother of two. She doesn't know that Lee is in massive debt, cannot find work, and is living in a La Quinta hotel; that Cord is a struggling-to-stay-sober alcoholic who is happily engaged to a man he adores; and that Regan dreams of murdering her detested husband, whom she regrets marrying after her sister broke his heart. Charlotte herself is not the pious Catholic church lady everyone thinks she is—she is desperate to find a man, have sex, and live out the naughty pages of her romance books. Everyone in the family is adept at hiding their emotions and themselves from one another. Charlotte hopes to bring them all together again by entering a contest for a cruise through Europe. And she wins. Author *Ward* (The Nearness of You, 2017, etc.) has created a complex story that explores the tragedies and long-term effects of withheld love, verbal abuse, alcoholism, and depression on individuals and their families, set against the backdrop of a splendidly gaudy, over-the-top Mediterranean cruise ship and its historic ports of call. Open, optimistic, caring, romantic, and thoughtful Giovanni—Cord's fiancé—is a highlight of the book.

No one, and no relationship, is perfect in this story, which embraces the messiness of love and life.
Another masterpiece in miniature.

**RUN ME TO EARTH**

Yoon, Paul
Simon & Schuster (272 pp.)
$26.00 | Jan. 28, 2020
978-3-5011-5404-1

Three orphans struggle to survive the ruins of war-torn Laos.

In another life, Yoon (*The Mountain*, 2017, etc.) might have been a sculptor, carving the excess off his creations until they’re perfect. In this decades-spanning examination of the survival of three orphans with the bad luck to have been born into the ruins of a battlefield, he’s stretching his abilities while still writing with deliberate, almost vigilant care. The Author’s Note that opens the book notes that more than two million tons of bombs were dropped on Laos during the Vietnam War—with 30% failing to explode on impact. The book’s viewpoint, beginning in 1969, comes from three teenage orphans living in a bombed-out hospital: Alisak, who dreams of fleeing to France; his dear friend Prany; and Prany’s younger sister, Noi, all bonded by caring for each other because there’s no one else to do it save for Vang, a drunken doctor who does his best. The language is as elegant and understated as always, but Yoon has chosen to fracture his narrative, often by decades. In 1970, Prany and the doctor are imprisoned for political reasons, meaning mostly no reason at all, and seven years later they’re released into a world they don’t recognize. Noi has a dark encounter back in 1969 before the novel leaps forward again to 1994, when Khit, another member of Alisak’s motley crew, finally makes it to Paris. The story ends with a moving remembrance from Alisak in 2018, so far away from his bombed-out homeland, thinking of three children huddled...
around a fire. The story of the friends’ wartime tragedy echoes that of children caught in dire circumstances around the globe, but Yoon’s imaginative prose and affection for his characters make the story larger than a look at the ways people survive. We see a bunch of kids working together to make it out alive, and then Yoon’s time jumps show that life goes on after survival and that there’s meaning there, too. The characters get what we all get in the end, if we’re lucky: a life, with all the joys and heartbreak that come with that.

Another masterpiece in miniature about the unpredictable directions a life can take.

**M Y S T E R Y**

A SHADOWED FATE
\*Ambrose, Marty*
Severn House (192 pp.)
$28.99 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-0-7278-8992-8

The second case for an old flame of Lord Byron’s (Claire’s Last Secret, 2018) sends her chasing the ghosts of the romantic poets across Italy.

Claire Clairmont is spending the autumn of her years in genteel poverty in Florence with her niece, Paula, and great-niece, Georgiana. Claire clings to the memories of Byron and their love child, Allegra, both now dead—or so she thinks. She starts to question everything she believes about the past the day her old friend and former paramour Edward Trelawny returns from the wars with a legacy and a secret, both from Byron. The bequest is a sketch of the Boboli Gardens by the great artist Giuseppe Cades, the sale of which could make Claire’s family comfortable. The secret is that Allegra did not die of typhus at age 5, as history records. As proof, Trelawny offers Byron’s memoirs—a hitherto unknown copy of the manuscript burned upon his death. Claire and her family set out to celebrate their good fortune with antipasti and Chianti. While they’re gone, a burglar ransacks their home and steals the Cades sketch. After a fruitless police inquiry, Claire takes it upon herself to interrogate Matteo Ricci, an old nemesis who’s imprisoned for murdering a priest to get his hands on some of Claire’s other valuable memorabilia of Byron and Shelley, on suspicion of masterminding the Cades theft. Ricci is supercilious and unhelpful, so the party sets out for the convent where Allegra spent what might not have been her final days in hopes of learning the truth about her fate. Instead of gathering all possible information before undertaking their journey, Claire chooses to read Byron’s memoir in bits and pieces along the road. The memoir reveals Byron’s revolutionary activities in Ravenna and the threats on his life, and Allegra’s, that may have induced him to fake her death for her own safety. A shadowy rider tracks their carriage on the road to the convent. Will they recover the sketch, find Allegra, and heal Claire’s grieving heart? Stilted prose studded with gratuitous Italian, unformed characters, and an unsatisfying ending make this strictly for devotees of fan fiction.

More a travelogue than a mystery, gilding the lily with clichéd praise for Byron’s prowess and Italy’s beauty.

**LAST LICKS**
\*Baxter, Cynthia*
Kensington (256 pp.)
$26.00 | Dec. 31, 2019
978-1-4967-1418-3

Against all the best advice, the owner of an ice cream shop pursues a sideline in detection.

Kate McKay, the proprietor of Lickety Splits Ice Cream Shoppe in New York’s beautiful Hudson Valley, has already had a run-in with murder while catering desserts for a glamorous gala (Hot Fudge Murder, 2019). Why she thinks that qualifies her for detective work is a mystery. Kate can’t pass up assistant movie director Chelsea Atkins’ lucrative offer to use her shop for a single day of filming, but she’s dumbfounded when actress Savannah Crane keels over after eating one of Kate’s fabulous ice cream creations. The investigating officer warns Kate off. So does her love interest, Jake, a former lawyer. But since the reputation of her shop has been jeopardized by Savannah’s poisoning, she’s not inclined to back down. Not even the advice of her Grams, who raised her and still lives with her, does any good. She and Emma, the niece who works part time at the shop, are both pleased that Grams has a man in her life: George Vernon, whom she met at the senior center and talked into helping with a big Halloween project at the local high school. Kate’s cautious about her own relationship with Jake, who runs an organic dairy, because when he was her high school sweetheart, he suddenly dumped her, and they had no contact for years. The suspects in Savannah’s murder seem to be the film company workers and a few of Kate’s friends who were at the shop the night before, when the crew was setting up and Kate put out the ice cream dish and spoon to be used the next day. Kate manages to broaden the range of suspects and motives, none of which she mentions to the police, as she tries to figure out who did the deed before she becomes the next victim.

Ice cream, romance, and some irresistible red herrings mark this tale of a sleuth who pushes things too far.
A macabre murder is subordinate to a police officer’s other concerns. Officer Henry Farrell is a native of Wild Thyme, a small town in the Endless Mountains of northeastern Pennsylvania, a region of great natural beauty whose denizens depend on struggling dairy farms, logging, stonecutting, and, more recently, fracking; there’s also been an influx of outsiders, some of them drug dealers, meth cookers, and grifters (Fateful Morning, 2017, etc.). When Terry Ceallaigh (pronounced “Kelly”) reports finding a badly mauled, headless body in the woods, it at first appears to have been the casualty of a bear attack. But further investigation and the discovery of the head indicate murder followed by mauling by an opportunistic bear, which must be killed. Meanwhile, Henry is preparing for his second marriage; his fiancee, Miss Julie, is the daughter of wealthy parents, an EMT with some problems in her past. She knows that Henry’s first wife died tragically young but doesn’t know of the affair he had with Shelly Bray, who lost her children in the nasty divorce that followed. The wedding guests include Henry’s parents, with whom he has a rocky relationship, and his sister, Mag, and her kids, who decide to stay for a while after the celebration instead of heading home to North Carolina. While Henry and wildlife biologist Mary Weaver are hunting the bear, they’re attacked by a man with a knife. No one who worked with the dead man, who turns out to be Carl Dentry, a semiretired private investigator from the Harrisburg area, is willing to tell Henry anything, including what Dentry was doing in Wild Thyme. Then Shelly is murdered, and Henry is an obvious suspect. When his nephew Ryan vanishes, Henry takes to the woods, using every skill he learned as a young man and leaning on some lifelong friendships in an effort to find Ryan, save his marriage, and discover who killed Dentry and is gunning for him.

An elegant tale of an introspective detective whose life experiences have seared his soul without extinguishing his hope.

A DEATH IN CHELSEA

Brittney, Lynn
Crooked Lane (304 pp.)
$26.99 | Mar. 10, 2020
978-1-64385-293-5

Surely a case for the Mayfair 100. London 1915. The Duchess of Penhere visits Chief Inspector Beech of Scotland Yard on a matter of grave sensitivity. Her daughter, Adeline, the society “commentator” in the London Herald, has been found hanged in her bedroom. Surely she did not kill herself. Can Beech maintain the utmost discretion in investigating this horrid crime? He calls upon the special team only recently formed (Murder in Belgravia, 2018, etc.) and led by Dr. Caroline Allardyce. The Mayfair 100, charged with investigating crimes against women, also includes Beech’s old flame Victoria Ellingham; her mother, Lady Maud; and two male members, young policeman Billy Rigby and Yard veteran Arthur Tollman. None of the women has a high opinion of the victim, who published slanderous lies, but justice trumps opprobrium. They begin their questioning with the staff at the rooming house in “raffish” Chelsea where Adeline lived. After examining her body, Caroline determines that death occurred hours before hanging. With no dearth of suspects among the offended elite, the probe fans out in multiple directions. Beech questions Lady Maud about the Duchess; Tollman and Billy try to clarify the logistics of the crime; Caroline continues to examine the body and the murder scene for additional clues. The recent introduction of fingerprint technology narrows the field of suspects and leads ultimately to the solution, which involves another murder and a blackmail plot.

Crowded with colorful characters, Brittney’s second Mayfair 100 mystery consistently entertains.

THE CROW’S CALL

Brunstetter, Wanda E.
Shiloh Run/Barbour (320 pp.)
$15.99 paper | Mar. 1, 2020
978-1-64352-021-6

Prolific Brunstetter (The Healing Jar, 2019, etc.) launches a new series that offers a most unusual perspective on Amish detection. Unlike the many mysteries set in Pennsylvania Amish communities but narrated by outsiders, Brunstetter’s first Amish Greenhouse Mystery is presented from the viewpoint of the Amish themselves. The King family faces unspeakable tragedy when father Vernon, teenage son Abe, and son-in-law Toby are killed in a buggy accident. Vernon’s widow, Belinda, decides to provide for her grieving family by continuing to run the family’s greenhouse rather than accepting her son Ezekiel’s offer to give up his farm in Clymer, New York, and return home to help her. Daughter Amy decides to put a stop to her courtship with her beloved Jared in order to devote all her time to helping her mamm, although it wounds her to see Jared turn his attention toward her best friend, Lydia Beiler. Teenage Henry, on the other hand, rebels, shirking his chores and sneaking off at night. To compound their grief, the Kings face a series of mishaps in the greenhouse that threaten their livelihood. Animals find their ways into the locked building, pots are knocked over, and plants are poisoned with weed killer. Readers who count on a big reveal will be disappointed, but others may enjoy this slow-paced look at domestic detail and low-stakes suspense.

After a traumatic opening, Brunstetter’s series debut is overwhelmingly gentle.
A knockoff of a British bird hunt is deadly for the Anglophile who hosts it.

LAVENDER BLUE MURDER
Childs, Laura
Berkley Prime Crime (336 pp.)
$26.00 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-0-451-48966-1

A knockoff of a British bird hunt is deadly for the Anglophile who hosts it.

Theodosia Browning, owner of the Indigo Tea Shop in the low country of South Carolina, and her friend Drayton Conneley, a tea expert, are participating in a game-bird hunt at Creekmore Plantation. Drayton, no hunter, is a friend of wealthy host Reginald Doyle, who served with him on the board of the Charleston Heritage Society. Doyle’s shot dead at the hunt, the weapon not a badly aimed shotgun but a pistol. Doyle’s wife, Meredith, knowing of Theodosia’s reputation as a sleuth (Broken Bone China, 2019, etc.), begs her to help, asking that she and Drayton stay overnight. So they’re still on hand when the house goes up in flames in what seems likely to be another staged accident. The sums of money involved guarantee plenty of suspects. Doyle had been thinking of giving the plantation to the Heritage Society, but his most recent will leaves it to his hot-tempered stepson, Alex, who’s constantly arguing with Fawn, his recent bride. Doyle was also at odds with two of his neighbors, including the Lavender Lady, whose fragrant farm borders Creekmore. Although things seem to be going well enough at the pharmaceutical company where Doyle was CEO, Theodosia learns that Guy Thorne, Doyle’s partner in a restaurant, has financial problems. When Alex’s sailboat is found drifting in the harbor, Fawn, who went out for a walk and never returned, is feared drowned. Aside from Meredith’s need for constant hand-holding, Theodosia, Drayton, and Haley, their fabulous chef, are busy with the usual activities plus a plethora of exotic-themed tea parties. The police and especially Theodosia’s detective boyfriend urge her to let them do their jobs, but she can’t break her promise to Meredith.

Genteel Southern charm and murderous mayhem mix in a mystery that keeps you guessing.

REVOLVER ROAD
Daugherty, Christi
Minotaur (304 pp.)
$27.99 | Mar. 10, 2020
978-1-250-23588-6

A driven reporter works a murder while hiding from a stalker.

Harper McClain’s Savannah paper has been teetering on the verge of bankruptcy as the rapacious owner cuts staff to support her lifestyle. Since a warning from an unknown man that her mother’s killer has her in his sights (A Beautiful Corpse, 2019, etc.), Harper has fled her apartment for a rental on nearby Tybee Island, where she keeps a low profile. Her boredom is alleviated when friends report that up-and-coming music star Xavier Rayne went for a walk on the beach and never returned. Talking their way into Rayne’s rented Tybee mansion, Harper and her photographer meet his girlfriend, actress Cara Brand, his keyboardist, Hunter Carlson, and backup singer Allegra Hanson, all distraught over his disappearance. Harper’s had a special relationship with the police ever since Robert Smith, the detective assigned to her mother’s murder, watched over her when her father remarried, moved, and started a new family. When she exposed Smith as a murderer, that relationship was ruined along with her on-again, off-again love affair with homicide detective Luke Walker. The present case heats up when Rayne’s found shot to death. Harper receives a cryptic message telling her to look into gangster Martin Dowell, who’s just been released from prison, and his lawyer, who turns out to have been Harper’s father. Her source warns her that Dowell may be out for revenge. Continuing to cover Rayne’s murder, Harper finds it difficult to believe that...
any of the friends the police clearly suspect could have killed him. Fearing for her life, she buys a gun and starts looking for somewhere else to live. Although Harper and Luke have serious doubts about being able to maintain their relationship, they’re still deeply in love, and Luke helps her in every way he can while she tries to escape her mother’s fate.

An exhilarating hunt neatly dovetails with the complex heroine’s determination to find her mother’s killer.

**NIGHT TRAIN TO MURDER**

*Green, Simon R.*
Severn House (192 pp.)
$28.99 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-0-7278-8917-1

An alien special agent and his earthly companion have just 56 minutes to solve the murder of the new head of a secret agency.

Asked to keep Sir Dennis Gregson, the newest head of the Division, alive during the train trip from Paddington to Bath, Ishmael Jones is surprised to be given such a seemingly mundane job. As an alien with a certain set of skills, including superstrength, heightened awareness, and golden blood, Ishmael is typically assigned more unusual cases by his boss, the Colonel, in his highly secretive and undefined position with the organization. What could possibly go wrong on the short train ride that would warrant the supervision of such an elevated being? Along with Penny Belcourt, his human partner in life and work, Ishmael learns from the Colonel of a potential threat relating to the Psychic Weapons Division, which might mean that an attack on Sir Dennis could pass entirely unseen by any human gaze. Once on the nonstop train ride, Ishmael and Penny have barely settled in when Sir Dennis is indeed killed, leaving behind a car of fel low travelers who are now suspects. This is where Green’s latest diverges from his typical work (*Till Sudden Death Do Us Part, 2019,* etc.), with less focus this time on supernatural powers or forces than on three or four likely murderers, many of whom survive all the way to Bath. Ishmael and Penny methodically interrogate their suspects, each of whom is hiding something that may connect them to Sir Dennis’ death and all of whom, truth be told, seem more sympathetic than the dead diplomat. The finale brings Ishmael a shocking piece of information about his own history that may change the path of the series.

Fun, fast-paced, light fare that passes almost as quickly as that fatal train ride.

**THE LADY OF THE LAKE**

*Guttridge, Peter*
Severn House (208 pp.)
$28.99 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-0-7278-8967-6

Several grisly murders provide a thorny problem for experienced detectives.

DI Sarah Gilchrist and DS Bellamy Heap of the Brighton division are seconded to the short-staffed Lewes District just in time to catch the case of a body in a lake. The neighbor who found the dead man, his throat cut, identifies him as Maj. Richard Rabbitt, owner of the Plumpton Down Estate but not the lake, which belongs to Nimue Grace, whom Bellamy immediately recognizes as a well-known actress who’s gone into seclusion. Rabbitt was much disliked by his neighbors; his estranged wife, Liesl, and his sister, Tallulah, were no great fans either. They learn from Tallulah that Rabbitt and his putative business partners, Said Farzi and William Simpson, were trying to buy Nimue’s property. Simpson is well known to them as a smooth crook who almost ruined Gilchrist’s career and that of her former lover, Brighton Police Commissioner Bob Watts (*Swimming With the Dead, 2019,* etc.). When they interview Nimue, they find her more than willing to help and are soon under the spell of her stunning beauty, charm, and considerable intellect. But dredging her lake reveals nothing more than a group of empty white plastic containers firmly attached to the shore which Nimue denies ever having seen. Farzi is not only Nimue’s apparently wealthy neighbor, but also a slum landlord and a major danger to her. When a man is found beaten to death in one of Farzi’s Brighton apartments, the police suspect that Farzi and Simpson are involved in importing drugs and slave laborers. Gilchrist and Heap are assigned to solve the Brighton murder while a very stupid colleague is switched to Rabbitt’s case, but, refusing to leave Nimue’s fate in his hands, they slyly keep up their investigation into what turns out to be a complex series of deep-rooted crimes.

A masterly procedural with erudite characters and a nasty sting in the tail.

**MAN ON EDGE**

*Hawksley, Humphrey*
Severn House (288 pp.)
$28.99 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-0-7278-8914-0

Now that he’s repelled the Russians from his Alaskan hometown (*Man on Ice, 2019,* Maj. Rake Ozenna of the Alaska National Guard finds himself harrying them in the Eastern Hemisphere.

Although Rake’s foes fly the same flag as in his debut, they’re considerably more fractured this time around. Nuclear submarine expert Artyom Semenov, Rake’s ex-fiancee Dr. Carrie Walker’s uncle, for years a loyal Russian, is suddenly acting as if he wants to
defect immediately and bring with him a thumb drive filled with unspecified secrets. Col. Ruslan Yumatov, a strategically placed officer who’s already betrayed one would-be defector, is determined to stop this one as well. Sergey Gizlov, Russia’s charismatic new foreign minister, is clearly angling to succeed President Viktor Lagutov sooner than his boss expects. When Carrie heads to the old country to give her uncle whatever help she can and then finds out it’s not nearly enough, she immediately has to go on the run herself, unable to decide which of the sharply conflicting parties who offer to protect her from the others she can actually trust. Despite having broken off their engagement, she sends an SOS to Rake, whose friendship with Detective Mikki Wekstatt, an Alaska State Trooper seconded to the Norwegian Police Service, brings him into uncomfortably close contact with a routine interview that turns into a blood bath. Even though she makes all the right decisions, Carrie gets kidnapped anyway; the body count rises alarmingly; and the villains plot a game-changing double assassination. Can Rake and his allies possibly cut through the fog of triple-crosses and alliances of convenience to rescue Carrie and make the world safe, if not for democracy, at least for Rake’s next adventure?

The pace is furious, the casualty list breathtaking, and the plotters exactly whom you suspected.

A Colonial farmer does everything he can, even detective work, to avoid hard labor.

Years after Will Rees (Simply Dead, 2018, etc.) fought the British in the American Revolution, he finds himself battling the boredom of life in rural Maine. Instead of listening to the pleas of his wife, Lydia, and sowing the fields to provide food for his family, he spends his time weaving so that he’ll be able to travel the countryside selling his cloth. When Asher’s Circus comes to the nearby town of Durham, Rees finds an even better reason for daily trips away from the farm. Asher, bareback rider Pip Boudreaux, and beautiful tightrope walker Bambola welcome Rees into their colorful world, enchanting him with their exotic costumes and skills. Shem and Leah, two youngsters from a nearby Shaker community, are enchanted too and run off in hopes of seeing a performance. When Leah’s drop-dead-gorgeous agent, Bryce O’Connell, shows up and quickly gets interested in Erica, Shelby’s best friend. Several small items missing from Blye Castle, including the architectural drawings showing the secret passages, make Shelby wonder whether someone was looking for a way to steal in and kill Savannah. Rachel Michaels, another wannabe true-crime author, claims she has several suspects and even more people warning her to keep out of the investigation, but it’s not in her nature to give up.

A meandering plot overpowers the charming characters and beautiful Thousand Islands setting.

An upstate New York bookshop owner can’t keep her mind off murder.

DEATH ON THE PAGE

Eleanor Kuhns

Severn House (224 pp.)

$28.99 | Mar. 3, 2020

978-0-7278-9008-5

A Colonial farmer does everything he can, even detective work, to avoid hard labor.

Years after Will Rees (Simply Dead, 2018, etc.) fought the British in the American Revolution, he finds himself battling the boredom of life in rural Maine. Instead of listening to the pleas of his wife, Lydia, and sowing the fields to provide food for his family, he spends his time weaving so that he’ll have an excuse to travel the countryside selling his cloth. When Asher’s Circus comes to the nearby town of Durham, Rees finds an even better reason for daily trips away from the farm. Asher, bareback rider Pip Boudreaux, and beautiful tightrope walker Bambola welcome Rees into their colorful world, enchanting him with their exotic costumes and skills. Shem and Leah, two youngsters from a nearby Shaker community, are enchanted too and run off in hopes of seeing a performance. When Leah’s boyfriend, Coast Guard Investigative Services Agent Zack Griffin. Since Edie’s taking it slow after knee surgery, Shelby is finding it a challenge to manage a book signing by popular true-crime author Savannah Page. Thanks to the help of Savannah’s fiance, Liam Kennelly, the event goes uneventfully until a determined-looking woman named Jenna Dunlap angrily accuses Savannah of having stolen her idea and her research about the unsolved murder of Joe Cabana, who died on Blye Island. Savannah is staying at Blye Castle that night, having gotten permission from the society that runs the place, and when she’s found dead at the bottom of a flight of steps leading to a secret passage, her laptop missing, Shelby just can’t stop herself from snooping. Savannah’s drop-dead-gorgeous agent, Bryce O’Connell, shows up and does enough to get interested in Erica, Shelby’s best friend. Several small items missing from Blye Castle, including the architectural drawings showing the secret passages, make Shelby wonder whether someone was looking for a way to steal in and kill Savannah. Rachel Michaels, another wannabe true-crime author, claims she was due to meet with Savannah to get tips about writing. Shelby has several suspects and even more people warning her to keep out of the investigation, but it’s not in her nature to give up.

A meandering plot overpowers the charming characters and beautiful Thousand Islands setting.

DEATH ON THE PAGE

Lang, Essie

Crooked Lane (336 pp.)

$26.99 | Mar. 10, 2020

978-1-5420-0692-7 paper

978-1-5420-0694-1

An upstate New York bookshop owner can’t keep her mind off murder.

After living most of her life in Boston, Shelby Cox returned to Alexandria Bay in the Thousand Islands to discover that the mother she’d thought dead had actually deserted the family for a banker from Georgia. Now Shelby runs the seasonal bookstore in romantic Blye Castle on Blye Island and helps her Aunt Edie, who refuses to discuss her mother, in the main Alexandria Bay store, which they co-own. She’s already been involved in one murder investigation (Trouble on the Books, 2019), much to the dismay of Police Chief Tekla Stone and Shelby’s boyfriend, Coast Guard Investigative Services Agent Zack Griffin. Since Edie’s taking it slow after knee surgery, Shelby is finding it a challenge to manage a book signing by popular true-crime author Savannah Page. Thanks to the help of Savannah’s fiance, Liam Kennelly, the event goes uneventfully until a determined-looking woman named Jenna Dunlap angrily accuses Savannah of having stolen her idea and her research about the unsolved murder of Joe Cabana, who died on Blye Island. Savannah is staying at Blye Castle that night, having gotten permission from the society that runs the place, and when she’s found dead at the bottom of a flight of steps leading to a secret passage, her laptop missing, Shelby just can’t stop herself from snooping. Savannah’s drop-dead-gorgeous agent, Bryce O’Connell, shows up and quickly gets interested in Erica, Shelby’s best friend. Several small items missing from Blye Castle, including the architectural drawings showing the secret passages, make Shelby wonder whether someone was looking for a way to steal in and kill Savannah. Rachel Michaels, another wannabe true-crime author, claims she was due to meet with Savannah to get tips about writing. Shelby has several suspects and even more people warning her to keep out of the investigation, but it’s not in her nature to give up.

A meandering plot overpowers the charming characters and beautiful Thousand Islands setting.

CROSS HER HEART

Melinda Leigh

Montlake Romance (384 pp.)

$24.95 | $12.95 paper | Mar. 17, 2020

978-1-5420-0692-7 paper

Philadelphia homicide detective Bree Taggert is a tough, fair, and unemotional professional, but when her younger sister is murdered, Bree must confront demons past and present.

When Bree was a child, her abusive father killed her mother and then himself. Bree’s sister and brother were sent to live with
one relative, Bree to another. But when Bree gets a panicked call
from her sister, Erin, she rushes to their upstate New York home-
town, where Erin is still living, only to find that Erin has been
murdered—and Erin's husband, Justin, is missing. Complicating
matters is Matt Flynn, Justin's best friend and a former cop and
K-9 handler of his dog, Brody. Matt, who was forced to retire after
being injured, firmly believes Justin is innocent. He, Bree, and
Brody join forces to find out the truth, dealing with everything
from suspicious characters to Bree's own traumatic past—a past
that includes a very sound reason for her fear of dogs. And just
when Bree realizes she will upend her own life to care for Erin’s
two children, the children's scheming biological father shows up
in town. Leigh, (Whisper of Bones, 2019, etc.) has a genuine talent
for creating believable, appealing characters and realistic dialogue.
These characters deserve a stronger plot, though readers will prob-
able be content enough to hang out with Bree, Matt, and Brody.

With a clear setup for future adventures, this novel promises to become a likable series.

MURDER YOUR DARLINGS
McCrum, Mark
Severn House (224 pp.)
$28.99 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-0-7278-8993-5

A writing course in an Italian villa
goes terribly wrong.
Writing teacher Francis Meadowes
has taught off-site courses before, including
one aboard a flying classroom (Cruising
to Murder, 2018). So his stint at the
Villa Giulia in the Umbrian countryside should be a snap. Gerry
and Stephanie are excellent hosts who set an opulent table for
their guests, a largely middle-aged group of highly mixed talents.
But it's the subject matter of his course rather than the venue or
the students that provides a challenge for the biracial Francis. He
knows practically nothing about his Botswanan father since he
was adopted as a young child by a white English couple. But now
that he's teaching memoir writing, he's reading autobiographical
drafts submitted by his students, particularly a long piece by self-
described "Hampstead Jewess" Zoe, whose account of her fami-
y's Holocaust struggles makes Francis wonder how to make sense
of her story. Francis' best friend and partner, Remy Morgan, find
Justin dead in his bed. It turns out that his passing, devoutly longed for by so many of the people he'd crushed or outwitted on his way to the top, was helped along by the strategic dose of nitrogen somebody substituted for the oxygen he inhaled regularly, especially when he was expecting particular demands on his virility. Marsh and Morgan quickly focus on two candidates who might have made those demands: Suzy Kang, a recent visitor who was so eager to cover any traces that she'd been to Fultz's house that she sold the car she'd driven there, and Connie Fultz, the victim's ex-wife and perhaps his current lover, who acidiy swats them away and tells them: "Look for some little gal who's into bondage." McMahon excels in sweating the procedural details of the investiga-
tion, which takes the partners from a search for Suzy Kang and
that missing car to a not-so-accidental car crash that's evidently
targeted a young girl who has no idea she's implicated in the
case. But he's set his sights higher, taking in everything from a
civil suit the relatives of the perp Marsh shot in The Good Detec-
vative (2019) have launched against him to a possible conspiracy
behind the deaths of his deeply grieving wife and son, all of it
larded with Georgia attitude and truisms, a few of which rise to
eloquence ("I wasn't good at faith. I was good at proof").

As tangled and turbulent as the hero's nightmares,
and that's saying quite a bit.

THE STARR STING SCALE
O'Cinneide, C.S.
Dundurn (304 pp.)
$17.99 paper | Mar. 10, 2020
978-1-4597-4484-4

A killer for hire is the prime suspect
in a case she's asked to help the lead
detective solve.
Sitting in the divey Algonquin,
retired personal assassin (as she calls her-
sell) Candace Starr is propositioned by a
Botoxed 50-something blonde woman
in all the wrong ways. Candace describes herself as "an equal
opportunity employer when it comes to sex," but the woman
wants something else: for her teenage daughter's wistoid

THE EVIL MEN DO
McMahon, John
Putnam (368 pp.)
$27.00 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-0-525-53556-0

Having survived his tempestuous
debut, P.T. Marsh, of Georgia's Mason
Falls Police Department, is back for
more—including some residue from that
first case that just won't go away.

Dispatched like an errant boy to
wealthy real estate mogul Ennis Fultz's home to find out why
he hasn't joined his bridge buddies, Mayor Stems and interim
police chief Jeff Pernacek, for their monthly game, Marsh and
his partner, Remy Morgan, find Fultz dead in his bed. It turns
out that his passing, devoutly longed for by so many of the people he'd crushed or outwitted on his way to the top, was helped along by the strategic dose of nitrogen somebody substituted for the oxygen he inhaled regularly, especially when he was expecting particular demands on his virility. Marsh and Morgan quickly focus on two candidates who might have made those demands: Suzy Kang, a recent visitor who was so eager to cover any traces that she'd been to Fultz's house that she sold the car she'd driven there, and Connie Fultz, the victim's ex-wife and perhaps his current lover, who acidiy swats them away and tells them: "Look for some little gal who's into bondage." McMahon excels in sweating the procedural details of the investiga-
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behind the deaths of his deeply grieving wife and son, all of it
larded with Georgia attitude and truisms, a few of which rise to
eloquence ("I wasn't good at faith. I was good at proof").

As tangled and turbulent as the hero's nightmares,
and that's saying quite a bit.
boyfriend, Tyler Brent, to be killed. Though Candace refuses the gig, Tyler is dispatched the very next day. Does this mean there’s another killer for hire around town in addition to Candace and her Uncle Rod? The cops think no, which means Candace may have to prove her innocence, but Officer Chien-Shing Malone offers Candace a deal: She’ll provide Candace with inside information if Candace will work with her to solve the case. Candace has wondered for five long years about her father and mentor Mike Starr’s murder. Assuming that one gun for hire should be Rogers, onto the crime scene, apologizing for sensitive information.

Detective James Royce, who’s already been around the block Duke Lansing, for whom MoJo can’t have been doing anything Henderson, who blandly maintains that he’d hired the IT/security expert to find his missing stepson, and white nationalist挂牌 wife, drug counselor Lisa Joseph, is certain that he’d been clean. So what was he doing up on the school’s roof, where he’d gone to check his pigeons and his hydroponic garden, with 60 bags of heroin in his pockets and an arrow in his back? Evidence quickly links MoJo to two clients: hedge fund manager David Malone is willing to give Candace access to case files if Candace can help with Tyler’s murder. Candace isn’t predisposed to trust Malone, but the cop’s identity as an outsider, an Irish Asian cop in Canada and a woman in a man’s field, goes a long way toward building a working relationship, and it’s not long before Candace’s brash questioning style and no-holds-barred candor have Malone rolling her eyes with more amusement than annoyance. The characters and relationships O’Cinneide (Petra’s Ghost, 2019) develops are so idiosyncratic and distinctive that they can distract you from the plot, so the final twist or two may disconcert readers who’ve forgotten that Henderson’s toxic white nationalists? O’Mara daringly closes out MoJo’s murder with a quarter of the tale still to go, building the closing movement around Allison’s abduction—a development that forces Donne to confront the biggest mystery of all: himself.

You can taste every individual ingredient, but they refuse to blend together in a savory stew.

**THE SIAMESE TWIN MYSTERY**

*Queen, Ellery*

Penzler Publishers (288 pp.)

$25.95 | $15.95 paper | Feb. 4, 2020

978-1-61316-154-8
978-1-61316-155-5 paper

Chased up isolated Arrow Mountain by a forest fire that’s made the roads downhill impassable, Ellery Queen and his father, New York’s Inspector Richard Queen, find that what awaits them at Arrow Lodge, atop the mountain, is even more murderous. Arrow Lodge, where the Queens arrive without invitation in the middle of the night, is something of a haunted house, complete with a scuttling figure Inspector Queen describes as a giant crab and a retainer who could plausibly have been played by Boris Karloff on the tale’s first publication in 1933. Dr. John Xavier, a celebrated surgeon who’s retired at 45, is clearly engaged in some kind of hush-hush research. But although he’s a cordial host to his unexpected guests, he says nothing that first night about the work he and Dr. Percival Holmes are doing. The result is the most atmospheric of the early cases pressing threat of the fire that’s inexorably climbing closer and closer. The result is the most atmospheric of the early cases about and by Queen (The Dutch Shoe Mystery, 1931, etc.) and the one in which the detective’s legendary analytical prowess (“what I am about to say constitutes probably the most fantastic reconstruction of a clue in the history of the so-called ‘clever’ crime”) is both most impressive and most strained, improbable, and out of place.

A pioneering, preposterously far-fetched, but still impressive example of the locked-in-a-cabin whodunit.
A MURDEROUS RELATION
Raybourn, Deanna
Berkley (320 pp.)
$26.00 | Mar. 10, 2020
978-0-451-49074-2

An eccentric pair of late-Victorian detectives delve into a case involving the royal family.

Through many a wild escapade (A Dangerous Collaboration, 2019, etc.), Veronica Speedwell and Stoker Templeton-Vane have danced around their passionate feelings for each other. Just when the highly independent Veronica is about to commit to a full physical relationship—"The truth, dear reader, is that I was as ready for him as any filly ready for the stud"—a new case hurls them into perhaps their most dangerous adventure yet. Lady Wellingtonia Beauclerk, a power in royal circles, calls them to a meeting with the Princess of Wales and Inspector Archibond of Scotland Yard. The meeting is fraught, for Veronica is the unacknowledged daughter of the Prince of Wales, who deserted Veronica and her Catholic mother to marry Alexandra of Denmark. Since the Yard is overwhelmed with the hunt for Jack the Ripper, who's terrorizing London, Archibond asks the sleuthing duo to recover a diamond star that the princess’s eldest son, Prince Albert Victor, aka Eddy, has given to Madame Aurore, the owner of a private sex club. At first the sleuths decline, but when Lady Wellie suffers a severe angina attack, some snooping reveals her fear that Prince Eddy is suspected of being the Ripper. With the help of Stoker’s brother, they attend a masked ball at the club whose members indulge in all sorts of sexual depravity. After an exciting and informative evening, they run into Eddy, a dim but likable lad, who’s with them when their attempt to open Aurore’s safe ends with their discovery of her body under her bed. All three are kidnapped by Veronica’s Uncle de Clare, an Irishman who wants to place Veronica on the throne and free Ireland. Now they must escape, return Eddy unharmed to the bosom of his family, and discover who murdered Aurore.

A rollicking tale of desire, murder, and mayhem complete with Victorian atmosphere and two bickering leads.

MASTER OF SORROWS
Call, Justin T.
Blackstone (656 pp.)
$29.99 | Feb. 25, 2020
978-1-9825-9178-6

In a world where difference means death, can a boy with a secret find his own path?

Annev has only one more chance to pass his Test of Judgment. Pass, and he gets a coveted spot as an “avatar” who will travel the countryside searching for magical artifacts. Fail, and he’ll spend the rest of his life as a servant. He’ll also be forbidden to marry, so if he fails, he’ll lose his chance at a life with Myjun, his headmaster’s daughter. Until now, he’s teamed up with his friends Titus and Therin to pass the Tests; but with only one avatar spot left, Annev will have to compete with them to win. To further complicate matters, Annev has a secret—a secret that began years ago when his mentor, the priest Sodar, saved a baby who was born with only one hand. In Annev’s world, even something as minor as a scar is considered a mark of the dark god Keos—a missing limb would be a death sentence. Even as Annev attempts to prove himself within this harsh, unforgiving system, he struggles with the black-and-white thinking that dominates his world. Ultimately, he must learn that "if you don’t like the road you’re on, there’s always another path." Debut novelist Call plunges the reader directly into the action and never lets the pace flag. Even as we learn about the ancient battles, dark prophecies, and mystical assassins that are about to change the course of Annev’s life, the stakes remain appealingly human: Can Annev achieve his goals without betraying his moral code? Will the people he cares about accept him for who he is?

A fast-paced, action-packed epic fantasy to sink your teeth into.

THE HIDDEN GIRL AND OTHER STORIES
Liu, Ken
Saga/Simon & Schuster (432 pp.)
$26.00 | Feb. 25, 2020
978-1-982134-03-7

Science fiction author (The Wall of Storms, 2016) and translator (The Redemption of Time, Baoshu, 2019) Liu’s short stories explore the nature of identity, consciousness, and autonomy in hostile and chaotic worlds.

Liu deftly and compassionately draws connections between a genetically altered girl struggling to reconcile her human and alien sides and 20th-century Chinese young men who admire aspects of Western culture even as they confront its xenophobia (“Ghost Days”). A poor salvager on a distant planet learns to channel a revolutionary spirit through her alter ego of a rabbit (“Grey Rabbit, Crimson Mare, Coal Leopard”). In “Byzantine
Empathy," a passionate hacktivist attempts to upend charitable giving through blockchain and VR technology even as her college roommate, an executive at a major nonprofit, fights to co-opt the process, a struggle which asks the question of whether pure empathy is possible—or even desired—in our complex geopolitical structure. Much of the collection is taken up by a series of overlapping and somewhat repetitive stories about the singularity, in which human minds are scanned and uploaded to servers, establishing an immortal existence in virtuality, a concept which many previous SF authors have already explored exhaustively. (Liu also never explains how an Earth that is rapidly becoming depleted of vital resources somehow manages to indefinitely power servers capable of supporting 300 billion digital lives.) However, one of those stories exhibits undoubted poignance in its depiction of a father who stubbornly clings to a flesh-and-blood existence for himself and his loved ones in the roting remains of human society years after most people have uploaded themselves ("Staying Behind"). There is also some charm in the title tale, a fantasy stand-alone concerning a young woman snatched from her home and trained as a supernaturally powered assassin who retains a stubborn desire to seek her own path in life.

A mixed bag of stories: some tired but several capable of poetically piercing the heart.

BLACK LEVIATHAN
Perplies, Bernd
Trans. by Van Cleef, Lucy
Tor (336 pp.)
$27.99 | Feb. 25, 2020
978-0-7653-9831-4

German writer Perplies' first novel to be translated to English is set in a world where a vengeance-obsessed captain of a flying ship vows to slay the mammoth dragon that killed his love years earlier.

Essentially a fantasy retelling of Melville's masterpiece, the story revolves around Lian, an 18-year-old who is forced to flee his hometown when he kills one of the thugs who murdered his drunkard of a father. With nowhere else to go, he finds a berth aboard a floating ship that hunts dragons. The ship—which some say is cursed—is captained by Adaron, a tortured man determined to destroy the legendary Gargantuan, an ancient dragon that killed his crew and lover almost two decades earlier. With only his late father's hunting spear to accompany him, Lian begins an adventure that brings him up into the mythical Cloudmere, a vast ocean of fog where dragons and other strange creatures live and floating islands hold unknown wonders. As Adaron closes in on the Black Leviathan, who is one of “the oldest and greatest dragons of all,” Lian begins a transformative journey of self-discovery that includes a mystical revelation while inside a crystal chamber. His father's spear is more than it seems—and Lian may be destined for much more than killing dragons. While the worldbuilding is impressive and the pacing brisk throughout, the narrative has several flaws. The budding romance between Lian and another character seems forced and unlikely. Additionally, the novel's predictable conclusion is a bit of an anticlimax after such a powerful buildup. But the biggest disappointment is in the lack of any thematic depth. The narrative is ripe for existential examination—Adaron's obsessive quest for vengeance as well as Lian's coming-of-age—but the story, while entertaining, is told on a superficial level.

The flawed lovechild of Moby-Dick and Eragon.

STORMSONG
Polk, C.L.
Tor (352 pp.)
$17.99 paper | Feb. 11, 2020
978-0-7653-9899-4

A young politician confronts affairs of state, the dark secrets of the past, considerable emotional turmoil, and the weather in this follow-up to the World Fantasy Award–winning Witchmark (2018).

The country of Aeland reels after the events of the previous volume, in which Dame Grace Hensley's brother Miles discovered that the aether network (a magical equivalent of electricity) was being powered by the souls of the dead, the brutal war with neighboring Laneer was trumped up to grab Laneeri souls for the network, the Laneeri retaliated by possessing the returning Aelander soldiers and forcing them to murder innocents, and their father was complicit in most of it. The people are angry about the loss of aethers, and they would be angrier still if they knew that many of the nobles were secret witches who thrust common witches into asylums to exploit their powers. As the country's new Chancellor, Grace is supposed to calm the people, maintain the status quo, and mollify the Amanthines, the faerylike psychopomps who condemn the aether network's abuse of souls. As the Voice of the Invisibles, Grace must lead a cabal of unwilling mages to quell the worst storms that Aeland has seen in centuries. But she has no support from her scheming peers, and her imprisoned father, the former Chancellor and Voice, is clearly manipulating events behind the scenes. Grace would like to free the witches and finally be honest with Aeland's people, but she fears it will cause mass riot. However, others are forcing her hand, including Miles' friend Robin, a medical student and secret witch, and Avia Jessup, an astute and dangerously attractive former heirest-turned-reporter who's hearing many explosive truths. Grace is an intriguing contrast with her brother Miles, protagonist of Witchmark, who has a much more black-and-white sense of morality. Grace was the designated heir to her father's several types of power, and while she now despises him, freeing herself of his influence and ruthless love isn't easy for her. She has good intentions toward the people of Aeland, but she has no idea about how the other half lives. She takes her comforts for granted even as she neglects her own desires in the service of others, exemplified by the narrative's emphasis on the many meals she misses in the course of her duties.

A thoughtful and passionate depiction of one woman's struggle to discover her truest self.
What happens to heroes after they save the world?
Sloane Andrews, Matthew Weekes, Esther Park, Albert Summers, and Ines Mejia fulfilled a prophecy by defeating an evil villain and saving the human race. But that was a decade ago. Now, they’re no longer teenagers, and enough time has passed that stand-up comedians are joking about why the murderous sorcerer who destroyed entire towns with magical “Drains” akin to natural disasters was called the “Dark One.” The magic he wielded with such deadly force is now the subject of dry academic writing. These days the five “chosen ones” are huge celebrities, but they still have to deal with realistic mundanities like making a living and caring for sick parents. Sloane in particular is struggling with PTSD and, after a few Freedom of Information Act requests, is reading about a more complicated side of the government official who helped train them as kids to fight the Dark One. Not long after a big celebration marking the 10-year anniversary of the Dark One’s death, Albert dies of an overdose. When Sloane, Matthew, and Esther gather together for his funeral, something unimaginable happens. As it turns out, the Dark One may not be gone after all, and everything they thought they knew about magic, the Dark One, and the prophecy that predicted his demise is wrong. Roth (The End and Other Beginnings: Stories From the Future, 2019, etc.) made her name by writing bestselling YA action/adventure novels like the Divergent series, so it makes sense that she can so expertly deconstruct those tropes for adult audiences. Sloane, Matthew, and Esther gather together for his funeral, something unimaginable happens. As it turns out, the Dark One may not be gone after all, and everything they thought they knew about magic, the Dark One, and the prophecy that predicted his demise is wrong. Roth makes a bold entrance to adult fantasy. 

Roth makes a bold entrance to adult fantasy.

A working-class couple on Long Island fights to save their marriage.

LOVE HER OR LOSE HER
Bailey, Tessa
Avon/HarperCollins (352 pp.)
$15.99 paper | Jan. 14, 2020
978-0-06-287285-2

A working-class couple on Long Island fights to save their marriage.
Rosie and Dominic Vega were middle school sweethearts who married right before Dominic deployed with the Army after high school. Ten years later, Rosie realizes she’s tired of working at the department store perfume counter. She decides to pursue her dream of opening a restaurant specializing in the Argentinian cuisine she learned from her beloved mother. Dominic and Rosie’s sex life is as explosive and satisfying as ever, but it also illustrates the holes in the rest of their marriage. Rosie realizes they never talk anymore—she doesn’t know how to talk to him about the restaurant—and she decides their stagnant marriage must change if she’s going to change the rest of her life. Dominic knows that something has been amiss, but his own insecurities have led him to follow his father’s example: He works hard and provides and hopes the rest will work itself out. Rosie asks Dominic to go to marriage therapy, convinced he’ll never agree. Their hippie marriage counselor, along with adding a needed measure of comic relief, helps Dominic and Rosie realize they each played a role in the disintegration of their relationship. The exploration of their marriage is emotionally satisfying, but a subplot involving implausible real estate dealings is hard to believe. It’s worth noting that, although Rosie is biracial, with an African American father and Argentinian mother, and Dominic is from a Puerto Rican family, the most well-developed connection to either of their cultural identities is Rosie’s love of Argentinian cuisine. Readers hungry for diversity and inclusivity in their romance deserve more than superficial identity markers like these. However, Bailey (Fix Her Up, 2019, etc.) crafts an emotionally wrenching and compelling story of a marriage and how the spouses’ different love languages cause them to miss each other’s signals. Despite some missteps, this is a powerful story of a marriage in trouble.

A laconic auto-body shop owner hopes to woo a longtime crush, but he has to overcome his past trauma to convince her they belong together.

THE KISSING GAME
Harte, Marie
Sourcebooks Casablanca (320 pp.)
$14.99 paper | Feb. 4, 2020
978-1-4926-9698-8

A laconic auto-body shop owner hopes to woo a longtime crush, but he has to overcome his past trauma to convince her they belong together.
Rena Jackson has started her own hair salon in Seattle and wants her
personal life to rev up, too, but she has almost given up on Axel Heller's making a move. Though she finds the German transplant attractive, she worries that he is commitment-phobic and not ready for true intimacy. With both their upbringings shadowing them (his involves domestic violence and hers a single mother who has looked for love too often), can two strong, wary people become vulnerable to love? Harte (Delivered With a Kiss, 2019, etc.) provides readers with passages about Axel's painful memories and his fear of being a physical threat to a woman. This is a useful counter to some novels' tendency to romanticize the threat of male power. But the limited, alternating perspective leaves Rena in the dark for much longer than the reader, with the result that her complaints about Axel's attachment style edge her into unlikable territory. The novel is threaded together by Axel's awkward (albeit funny) attempts to court Rena with gifts and other gestures but doesn't allow her similar space to show her personality and get us to root for the couple. The quick references to, and scenes with, numerous peripheral characters bog down the romance arc further. The handling of the white supremacists who have been threatening Rena, who's African American, is a broad-stroke attempt to acknowledge racism but lacks nuance, as does a scene involving homophobia. While the novel's title and cover allude to recent successes like The Kiss Quotient, it lacks the former's thematic firm-footedness and the latter's tonal mastery of comedy and emotion.

It's complicated! And mostly satisfying, though sometimes frustrating.

WALK ME HOME
Kendall, Liza
Jove/Penguin (336 pp.)
$7.99 paper  |  Jan. 7, 2020
978-0-593-09800-4

A young woman separated from her high school sweetheart by tragic circumstances returns to her small hometown and confronts the shadows of their past. When Charlotte "Charlie" Nash returns to Silverlake, Texas, to take part in a cousin's wedding, she realizes things might not be easy. She and her family moved from Silverlake to Dallas 12 years ago, after her grandparents’ home burned down and her grandmother was killed in the fire. Her family, especially her grandfather, blamed Jake Braddock, Charlie’s first love and her brother’s best friend. Charlie has visited her grandfather since but barely interacted with anyone else except her best friend—and Jake's sister—Lila, who’s the wedding coordinator. When the wedding plans go awry, impeded by bad luck and an increasingly difficult bride, they’re suddenly short a groomsman and Jake is partnered with Charlie, to their mutual dread. Meanwhile, her grandfather is in the hospital and expects Charlie to act as his proxy to the town council, speaking out against the paid fire department where Jake works, a perspective everyone considers a vendetta against Jake and the department. Just as Jake and Charlie begin to move past their wounds, they’re embroiled in more family and civic strife, and Charlie makes things worse by trying to appease everyone. Debut author Kendall creates characters to root for and a town full of personality then ratchets up the conflict. It all ends well, but there’s an uncomfortable tug of war when nearly everyone is conciliatory when they should be taking a stand, and hiding secrets that should have been shared years ago.

An actress who has carefully chosen the rules she can break in Regency-era England finds herself painfully conflicted when she rediscovers her ex-lover, now an aspiring architect with his heart set on building bridges.

Brandon Balfour has studiously avoided matrimony. His singleness has ensured continued membership in the Logical Men’s Society, a group for unmarried scientific-minded men instituted by the grandfather of the current Earl of Marsden. While the matrons of the village of Maidenshop would like nothing better than to see him—and his two eligible young friends—comfortably wedded, Brandon has other concerns: Not only is he haunted by his romantic past with the indomitable Kate Addison, he is also hoping to secure the future of his ward, the Duke of Winderton. But ancient history returns to create drama in the present when he learns that Winderton believes himself in love with Kate, whose traveling theater group has halted at their village. Brandon crashes back into her life, but Kate is determined that he will not shatter her heart again. Since she suffered disastrous consequences after her tryst with Brandon 15 years ago, Kate feels used and betrayed. She is determined to prove that she can stand her ground and won’t give the architect an inch. The first installment in Maxwell’s A Logical Man’s Guide to Dangerous Women series is deliciously sweet when it dwells on the protagonists’ interactions with secondary characters but insipid when the couple get together to trade barbs and memories. Brandon’s struggle with the difficulty of building a solid foundation for his life inspires empathy, but the enormity of Kate’s trauma gets obscured by drama. A fiercely ambitious woman who has braved several odds to gain financial independence, Kate is a beautifully crafted character whose story deserved more sensitivity and nuance. However, the scenes involving the villagers of Maidenshop sparkle with wit and insight, illuminating several human foibles and desires. A fairly straightforward romance set in a quaintly charming world.
EVERY DROP OF BLOOD
Hatred and Healing
at Lincoln’s Second
Inauguration
Achorn, Edward
Atlantic Monthly (336 pp.)
$28.00 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-0-8021-4874-2

Abraham Lincoln, a now-revered president, wasn’t always so beloved.
In a capable history of the events of 1865, Providence Journal vice president Achorn (The Summer of Beer and Whiskey: How Brewers, Barkeeps, Rowdies, Immigrants, and a Wild Pennant Fight Made Baseball America’s Game, 2013, etc.) opens with the sanguinary situation that faced the president when hundreds of thousands of Americans lay dead as a result of a Civil War that threatened to grind on. Lincoln, writes the author, had “used every weapon he could get his hands on” to secure Union victory, from incurring massive federal debts to imposing the first income tax, suspending the writ of habeas corpus, and inaugurating a military draft. Such moves gave ammunition to those who would brand him a tyrant, in the North as well as the South. Lincoln’s enemies were legion, among them John Wilkes Booth, who by the time of Lincoln’s second inauguration had developed a fixation around the president and indeed set out to kill him as he was being sworn in, having told friends, “I would rather have my right arm cut off at the shoulder than see Lincoln president again.” There are plenty of scenes in which combatants are losing limbs for real, a bloodletting that Robert E. Lee finally tried to stanch by negotiating a truce with Ulysses S. Grant in the winter of 1865, one that Lincoln refused to entertain unless the parley resulted in unconditional surrender. “The generals had plainly tried to go around the president to strike the peace deal that had eluded Lincoln,” Achorn writes, and Lincoln would have none of it. He lived only a few days after Lee finally surrendered at Appomattox, assassinated in a Washington theater and carried off to die in an apartment nearby because some of the people on hand to attend him “were concerned that a president should not die in a theater, a place that many religious Americans still considered unrespectable.”
A vigorous, fresh look at a critical time in American history.

These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

THE SORROWS OF MEXICO by Lydia Cacho & Anabel Hernández et al. .............................................................. 34
TOWER OF SKULLS by Richard B. Frank .............................................. 63
HOUSE OF GLASS by Hadley Freeman ...................................................... 64
WARHOL by Blake Gopnik ................................................................ 65
THE PLANTER OF MODERN LIFE by Stephen Heyman ................. 70
NOBODY WILL TELL YOU THIS BUT ME by Bess Kalb ....................... 72
THE DRAGONS AND THE SNAKES by David Kilcullen .................... 74
THE DREAM UNIVERSE by David Lindley ............................................ 75
WHAT STARS ARE MADE OF by Donovan Moore ........................... 77
THE LIFE OF WILLIAM FAULKNER by Carl Rollyson ......................... 81
ATTENTION by Casey Schwartz ............................................................ 82
LAND OF WONDROUS COLD by Gillen D’Arcy Wood ....................... 87

THE LIFE OF WILLIAM FAULKNER
Volume 1, The Past Is Never Dead, 1897-1934
Rollyson, Carl
Univ. of Virginia (512 pp.)
$34.95 | Mar. 24, 2020
978-0-8139-4382-4

A vigorous, fresh look at a critical time in American history.
Now that best-of season is over, it’s time to look ahead to 2020. The first few months of the year are packed with significant books. I wanted to highlight six outstanding ones that represent a variety of subjects.

*The Adventurer’s Son* by Roman Dial (Morrow/HarperCollins, Feb. 18): In this thrilling adventure/detective story, Dial, an Alaska-based biologist and ecologist, writes about his journey to discover what happened to his son, who disappeared in the Costa Rican jungle in 2014. The suspense rises as he sifts through the clues and struggles to track his son’s last moments in the wilderness. Our reviewer writes, “Fusing personal history with elegy and adventure, this arresting narrative of every parent’s worst fear begins with the author’s background and then recounts the Dial family’s many exciting excursions....A poignant, highly moving memoir of tragic circumstances and a lifelong love of exploring.”

*The Age of Football* by David Goldblatt (Norton, Feb. 18): This magisterial study of the beautiful game is an absolute must-have for every soccer fan. In a globe-spanning narrative, Goldblatt gets to the heart of why the world’s most popular sport is so significant—and not just on the field. The author also explores the political and cultural impact of the game and how it has become intertwined with society in so many countries around the world. As our reviewer writes, “There’s no corner of the globe that Goldblatt doesn’t explore, and his book updates and overshadows Franklin Foer’s *How Soccer Explains the World* (2004)....Superb: Essential reading not just for fans of the sport, but also for students of geopolitics.”

*Unfinished Business* by Vivian Gornick (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Feb. 11): One of the literary world’s most incisive critics returns with an appreciation of the power of rereading. As she writes, revisiting significant works of literature over the course of decades is an exercise in perspective and how taste, viewpoints, and context change during a lifetime. Our reviewer nails it in the starred review: “Literature knows few champions as ardent and insightful—or as uncompromising—as Gornick, which is to readers’ good fortune.”

*The Second Chance Club* by Jason Hardy (Simon & Schuster, Feb. 11): This deep dive into the life of a parole officer couldn’t be timelier, as the U.S. deals with an ongoing incarceration epidemic. Hardy insightfully and empathetically chronicles the plights of seven of his clients and how the criminal justice system has, in ways both major and minor, failed them all. “Throughout,” writes our reviewer, “the author is refreshingly candid with readers, who will realize that his ultimate goal is to prevent his clients from continued lives of crime, violence, or even death....A powerful, necessary book with revelatory passages on nearly every page.”

*Recollections of My Nonexistence* by Rebecca Solnit (Viking, March 10): Solnit proves yet again that she is incapable of writing a less-than-revelatory book. In this memoir, the author recounts her early adulthood in San Francisco, when she lived in a tiny yet beloved apartment and found her voice as an artist. She ended up living there for 25 years and, for much of that time, “felt silenced by a society that effaced women, circumscribed their freedom through harassment and violence, and insisted that they learn ‘deferential limits.’ So she became expert at the ‘art of nonexistence, since existence was so perilous.’ ” The book, “a perceptive, radiant portrait of a writer of indelible consequence,” effectively shows us the development of this unique talent.

*Uncanny Valley* by Anna Wiener (MCD/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Jan. 14): In a Silicon Valley exposé that is “equal parts bildungsroman and insider report,” Wiener “reveals not just excesses of the tech-startup landscape, but also the Faustian bargains and hidden political agendas embedded in the so-called ‘inspiration culture’ underlying a too-powerful industry.” —E.L.

Eric Liebetrau is the nonfiction and managing editor.
A swift-moving lope across the continent, courtesy of runner and debut memoirist Álvarez.

Born in Washington state to Mexican immigrants, the author faced a future of working in a fruit warehouse with his parents, “my dreams of ever leaving Yakima ending here.” He adds, “I learned that I was poor, monolingual, and from a struggling family living the sort of day-to-day life that had no clear end in sight.” Escape came in the form of an invitation to take part in a run, organized by Native American activists, that would follow a course from Alaska to Panama, where the runners would meet other runners who had come north from Tierra del Fuego, all stopping at Native American communities along the way. It was a six-month commitment to a hard project conceived by a group called Peace and Dignity Journeys, born as an offshoot of César Chávez’s United Farm Workers. With names like Pacquiao, Trigger, and Chula Pepper, the mostly 30-something people Álvarez ran with were diligent and hard-working, though there were the inevitable personality clashes (“‘Whatever you do, stay away from that guy,’ Cheeto warns me. ‘Dude’s not well,’” he writes of one loose cannon). Almost everyone had traveled a hard path through addiction, poverty, and alienation. For his part, the author harbored a deep well of doubt about whether he could pull off so formidable a challenge, especially when he fell down while nearing the Mexican border and resolved not to appear too injured so as to be allowed to continue. Running, he discovered, has a positive, spirit-affirming dimension that he, who had always associated running with running away from someone or something, had not known before, giving an immediate connection to the land—and allowing him a part in a significant journey even as “the world that we had put on pause was beginning to move again.”

A thoughtful first book that should inspire others to lace up their running shoes and get moving.

There is nothing new in this examination of the crimes of Trump and his associates and explanation of the Mueller investigation; everything in it has been thoroughly covered by the press. Nevertheless, this brief yet in-depth book is a gem. Its strength is that first-time author Azari, a lawyer who specializes in white-collar crime, simplifies the lengthy, massively detailed, and documented report, breaking it down into an easy-to-read explanation from a nonpartisan viewpoint. The author opens by laying out the crimes committed by George Papadopoulos, Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, Rick Gates, Paul Manafort, Michael Cohen, and Roger Stone, all of whom were convicted or pleaded guilty, and how they relate to Trump. But the book’s most powerful section is Azari’s detailing of the acts of obstruction of justice allegedly committed by the president. She examines his attempts to stop, limit, and redirect the Mueller investigation; fire the special counsel; enlist others to create false evidence about his own conduct; and prevent and dissuade witnesses from cooperating in investigations into him and his campaign. Especially powerful is the author’s list of nine instances where Trump could be charged with crimes were he not president. In
each case, Azari explains the crimes and the legal checklist prosecutors had to meet for conviction, matches them to available evidence, and, based on her legal knowledge, places each case in one of three categories: Evidence exists to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt; evidence might be sufficient to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt; and the evidence appears insufficient to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. She found sufficient evidence to convict in five cases, maybe enough evidence in three, and insufficient evidence in one.

Perfect for anyone seeking an authoritative understanding of the Mueller investigation from a dispassionate source.

ILLUMINATING HISTORY
A Retrospective of Seven Decades
Bailyn, Bernard
Norton (288 pp.)
$28.95 | Apr. 14, 2020
978-1-324-00583-4

An eminent historian reveals inspirations and serendipitous discoveries.

Bailyn (Emeritus, History/Harvard Univ.; Sometimes an Art: Nine Essays on History, 2015, etc.), who has won the Pulitzer Prize (twice), the National Book Award, the Bancroft Prize, and the National Humanities Medal, offers a fascinating reflection on intellectual enthusiasms and challenges that have marked his long, prolific career. In 1946, after serving in the Army, the author began graduate school with an interest in Colonial America, aiming to examine connections between America and Europe and particularly “the connections between ideas and ‘reality’ ” in the daily lives of ordinary individuals and families. Deftly melding memoir and historiography, Bailyn recounts several significant projects that were shaped by unexpected findings, “one or more obscure documents or individuals that in themselves, in some peculiar way, illuminated the greater picture.”

His quest to examine the effect of the Puritans’ religious beliefs on early New England’s economy, for example, was advanced by a 48,000-word last will and testament of “an avaricious but profoundly pious tradesman” who candidly reviewed the events of his life in the context of his “self-denying but aspirational” conception of religion. In investigating family life among the significant projects that were shaped by unexpected findings, “one or more obscure documents or individuals that in themselves, in some peculiar way, illuminated the greater picture.”

His quest to examine the effect of the Puritans’ religious beliefs on early New England’s economy, for example, was advanced by a 48,000-word last will and testament of “an avaricious but profoundly pious tradesman” who candidly reviewed the events of his life in the context of his “self-denying but aspirational” conception of religion. In investigating family life among the early settlers, Bailyn confronted feisty controversies among scholars, fueled by contrasting analyses of demographic data, genealogies, land transfer documents, and family histories. The American Revolution occupied the author for decades, leading him to ask how widely and deeply the Founders’ ideology penetrated daily life. Researching that question, he discovered an astounding archive of 3,280 pages of newspapers annotated and indexed by a Boston shopkeeper: a rare response to the turmoil of the times. “The search for interior experiences—for sudden, unexpected signs” can never be systematic, Bailyn observes, but they inform a constant revision of the sense of the past. History, he writes, “is an imaginative construction,” like fiction, but bound by documentation. The historian must be an agile storyteller, always relying on evidence. “You can’t disprove a novel,” he writes, “but you can disprove history; and that seems to me all the difference in the world.”

A privilege for history buffs from a master of the craft. (40 illustrations)

FASTER
How a Jewish Driver, an American Heiress, and a Legendary Car Beat Hitler’s Best
Bascomb, Neal
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (368 pp.)
$28.00 | Mar. 17, 2020
978-1-328-48987-6

Auto racing takes on the von Clause-witz-ian guise of war by other means.

Early on in his reign, Hitler decided that it would be a key point of national pride to win the Grand Prix, with the Nazi propaganda machine obliging by developing the slogan, “a Mercedes-Benz victory is a German victory.” Hitler’s regime cultivated two drivers in particular, Bernd Rosemeyer and Rudi Caracciola, showering them with favors. France would have none of it, fielding a car, the Delahaye 145, that had an unlikely source, for the small firm that built it specialized in heavy trucks rather than fast cars. It had an unlikely patron, too: an American woman who loved to race and who selected as her driver a young man, René Dreyfus, who had been excluded from many races “because of his Jewish heritage.” When he was allowed to race, he soared. Bascomb (The Escape Artists: A Band of Daredevil Pilots and the Greatest Prison Break of the Great War, 2018, etc.) recounts an early race in which Dreyfus piloted a fresh-from-the-factory Maserati, his pit crew none other than the car’s namesake. Those early cars were dangerous: In a race from Paris to Madrid, more than a dozen drivers and onlookers were killed, and “there were too many injured to determine a casualty count with any accuracy.” Bascomb writes vigorously of the race at the heart of the book, with heart-pounding set pieces: “In the twelfth lap, Rudi crept up to René’s side, and the two almost locked together as they zigzagged around the course, neck and neck, neither giving way to the other.” René won, and Hitler was furious. René, now in the army, was sent to the Indy 500 to represent France in 1940 but was stranded in America when Germany invaded his homeland. One of the first acts of the invaders was to sweep up every bit of archival material related to his victory, hoping to rewrite the past.

A luminous book of sports history that explores a forgotten corner of the history of the Third Reich as well. (30 b/w images; 3 maps)
The tale of a relationship and the “architectural treasure” it created.

As Boston Globe columnist Beam (The Feud: Vladimir Nabokov, Edmund Wilson and the End of a Beautiful Friendship, 2016, etc.) stylishly lays it out, this is the story of two very smart and strong-willed people and the unique house that came between them. The author begins in 1945 with a dinner party in an elegant Chicago apartment. Edith Farnsworth (1903-1977), an accomplished doctor and researcher, had recently purchased land near the Fox River, an hour southwest of Chicago, where she hoped to build a getaway home. Also at the party was the noted architect Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969), who had recently moved from Europe to America. When they met, van der Rohe said, “I would love to build any kind of house for you.” Farnsworth was prosperous, and the architect was ambitious. He had the innovative idea to “build the house of steel and glass; in that way, we’ll let the outside in.” From 1946 to 1947, the two made enjoyable visits to the site, and a close relationship developed. They agreed on a house with floor-to-ceiling glass at an estimated cost of $40,000. However, as Beam writes, a “funny thing happened on the way to building Mies’s glass house. [Architect] Philip Johnson built it first”—but he graciously acknowledged van der Rohe’s influence. By 1949, Farnsworth and van der Rohe “were no longer intimate friends.” Beam diligently chronicles the back-and-forth squabbles over skyrocketing costs that eventually brought the price to $70,000. The architect demanded more money, but Farnsworth had had enough, so she sued him. “Some of the great moments in the history of twentieth-century architecture flew by in the sleepy Yorkville courtroom,” writes the author, whose detailed recounting of the trial may be too
Although the author had access to a huge archive of Duke’s personal papers, none of these included diaries, journals, or more personal papers, none of these included diaries, journals, or more revealing material proves a challenge that the author fails to fully overcome. The biography offers a chronicle of Duke’s philanthropic largesse; her worldwide travels; luxurious residences; flamboyant marriages and love affairs; the “feuds, separations, and firings” that characterized her relationships with associates and employees; and her often puzzling friendships: with Imelda Marcos, for one, to whom Duke lent a great deal of money to help out with legal fees when she was accused of extortion; Pee-wee Herman, who earned Duke’s sympathy when he was hounded by tabloids after a sexual scandal; and especially Charlene Heffner, known as Chandi, who was 32 when she met 74-year-old Duke in 1986, moved into her home, and became her intimate companion. Duke formally adopted Chandi two years later; three years after that, she instructed her staff to eject Chandi from her home. After Duke died, her foundation settled with Chandi for $65 million in return for her silence about their relationship. Bingham, too, remains silent on the matter of Duke’s sexuality, emotional needs, and any glimpse of her inner life.

A portrait of a well-known philanthropist who kept her thoughts secret. When Doris Duke (1912-1993) turned 21, she received an installment of $10 million from the trust she inherited from her billionaire father, tobacco tycoon James Buchanan “Buck” Duke. At the age of 25, she got another $10 million, and she was reputed to be the richest woman in the world. By the time she died, her net worth had burgeoned to $1.2 billion, mostly directed to the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation to support arts and social services projects. Bingham (The Blue Box: Three Lives in Letters, 2014, etc.) became fascinated by the woman whose image was relegated to a small photograph in a garden at Duke University, the institution her father had endowed. Although the author had access to a huge archive of Duke’s personal papers, none of these included diaries, journals, or more than a few letters. “Nothing,” Bingham notes, “that has been written or said about her can be proved—or disproved.” The lack of revealing material proves a challenge that the author fails to fully overcome. The biography offers a chronicle of Duke’s philanthropic largesse; her worldwide travels; luxurious residences; flamboyant marriages and love affairs; the “feuds, separations, and firings” that characterized her relationships with associates and employees; and her often puzzling friendships: with Imelda Marcos, for one, to whom Duke lent a great deal of money to help out with legal fees when she was accused of extortion; Pee-wee Herman, who earned Duke’s sympathy when he was hounded by tabloids after a sexual scandal; and especially Charlene Heffner, known as Chandi, who was 32 when she met 74-year-old Duke in 1986, moved into her home, and became her intimate companion. Duke formally adopted Chandi two years later; three years after that, she instructed her staff to eject Chandi from her home. After Duke died, her foundation settled with Chandi for $65 million in return for her silence about their relationship. Bingham, too, remains silent on the matter of Duke’s sexuality, emotional needs, and any glimpse of her inner life.

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If the story sounds appealing, go see the movie.
2014, etc.) writes that there are three categories by which the 200-odd nations of the world can be classified: the “unplugged countries,” with electricity use under 1,000 kilowatt hours/capita/year; the “low-watt” countries, from 1,000 to 4,000 kWh; and the “high-watt” countries, where electricity use exceeds 4,000 kWh annually. In keeping with other economic gauges, it’s disheartening to note that almost half of the planet’s population falls into the first category, while many former communist nations are in the second, and the third, not surprisingly, has a far higher average GDP than the rest—and comprises less than 20% of the world’s total population. Like so much else in the world, electricity is unevenly distributed, with marked disparities. Not that anyone should feel secure in the wealthier domains: Climate change is wreaking havoc with the grid while “saboteurs are constantly probing for weaknesses.” With a growing world population, especially in developing countries, increased demand will prove a problem. As in past books, Bryce considers renewables to be less efficient than the fossil fuels that seem not yet to have reached their peak, to say nothing of nuclear power, which he advocates, deeming himself a “proponent of what I call NzN, or natural gas to nuclear.” As he writes, “the hard reality is that there are no quick or easy solutions. Energy transitions take decades.” That more fossil fuels mean more climate change doesn’t seem to faze the author, but hard geopolitical and economic realities do: Iraq is now dependent on Iran for about 15% of its energy “despite objections from the Donald Trump administration,” and the “Giant Five” tech companies—Apple, Amazon, Google, Facebook, and Microsoft—“are creating their own private grids,” becoming, “in effect, electric utilities.”

A robust look at where the juice flows around the planet—and its planetary implications.
THE SORROWS OF MEXICO
Cacho, Lydia & Hernández, Anabel & Rodríguez, Sergio González & Osorno, Diego Enrique & Parra, Emiliano Ruiz & Turati, Marcela & Villoro, Juan
Hachette UK (352 pp.)
978-0-85705-622-1
$19.99 paper | Apr. 7, 2020

A steely band of courageous Mexican journalists respond to the violence and corruption overwhelming their country—to great personal and professional peril.

In a series of elucidating and chilling dispatches, expertly translated by a variety of translators, seven well-respected journalists reveal Mexico’s “suppurating wound,” as described by Elena Poniatowska in the powerful preface. Each of the pieces in this work shows an absolute assault on justice and human rights: narcotics trafficking, organized crime, sex trafficking, femicide, violent peasant land struggles, disappeared youth, egregious government coverups, torture, and widespread murder. A recent haunting crime that overshadows several of these dispatches is the Sept. 26, 2014, abduction and disappearance of 43 students on their way to Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers’ College in Guerrero, one of the most violent narcotics trafficking states in Mexico. In “Collateral Damage—Living in Mexico,” Juan Villoro, a weekly columnist for Reforma, chronicles the horrendous violence that has overwhelmed the country since President Felipe Calderón’s disastrous war on drug trafficking began in 2006. “The problem...had been around for a long time,” he writes. “But the strategy failed. We were sitting on dynamite and Calderón lit a match to prove it.” In a developing country like Mexico, where a handful of families control the wealth, there is little opportunity for youth to advance outside the cartels, which provide what Villoro calls a sense of “identity and shared codes.” The crimes these journalists delineate seem to have no rhyme or reason save desperation and poverty—e.g., the young women pressed into sex slavery by boyfriends, documented by Diego Enrique Osorno in “Lily Sings Like a Little Bird.” Marcela Turati’s “War Made Me a Feminist” is a heart-rending look at how the violence has devastated women, mothers especially. With a recorded 94 journalists murdered in Mexico between 2000 and 2016 (documented in an appendix), the country has become one of the deadliest places to practice that profession.

Though brief, this collection of urgent reports deserves a wide audience—and not just in Mexico.

EMBRACING SUFFICIENCY
by Joseph Stadmiller

A former electrical engineer and retired teacher offers a sweeping study of global human consumption.

“An impressive, impassioned call for fundamental change in the way humans interact with their world.”
—Kirkus Reviews

For information on publishing and film right, email josephstadmiller@gmail.com

EMBRACING SUFFICIENCY

Dave Brubeck
A Life in Time
Clark, Philip
Da Capo (416 pp.)
$30.00 | Feb. 18, 2020
978-0-306-92164-3

The iconic jazz musician receives an adoring biography as unconventional and compelling as its subject.

As music journalist Clark notes, Dave Brubeck (1920-2012), “thoughtful and sensitive as he was, had been changed as a musician and as a man by the troubled times through which he lived and during which he produced...optimistic, life-enhancing art.” The author eschews a standard, chronological narrative in favor of a forensic analysis of classic Brubeck cuts like “Take Five,” “Blue Rondo à la Turk,” “Unsquare Dance,” and many more. Just as many jazz greats used modest chord progressions to underpin their masterpieces, Clark employs a throughline of his own involving the 10 days he spent interviewing Brubeck on tour in the spring of 2003 to achieve something beyond the run-of-the-mill biography. The author is “riffing” like his musical idols when he writes about Brubeck’s penchant for “polytonality” and “polyrhythms.” A typical example of his exhaustive musings: “Laying arpeggios on thick, Brubeck recapped his theme as Benjamin’s ‘arco’ bass seesawed through the texture, spiraling...
around the rich chromaticism with an intense throbbing tone that pros tated like a whole section of cellos.” However fasci
nating his subject’s artistry may be, delving so deeply into the
DNA of Brubeck’s decadeslong musical catalog does have the
potential to alienate more casual music fans. Thankfully, Clark
also hits all the right biographical notes along the way, includ-
ing Brubeck’s time in the Army; his early days studying at Mills
College in Oakland under the tutelage of Darius Milhaud; his
efforts to steer clear of mobster Morris Levy, who was heavily
involved in the 1950s jazz scene; his defiance of Jim Crow seg-
regation in the South; and his deft leading of his Dave Brubeck
Quartet to superstardom. The mix of musicology and biography
allows Clark to paint an intimate portrait of Brubeck as a man of
great personal and artistic integrity, and that may not have been
possible if the author had simply stuck to a traditional score.

A nontraditional biography that sings despite its studi-
ous blocks of theory-heavy dissection.

MORE

The History of the World
Economy From the Iron Age
to the Information Age

Coggan, Philip
PublicAffairs (480 pp.)
$30.00 | Mar. 24, 2020
978-1-61039-983-8

“If it takes a village to raise a child, it
takes the world to stock your house with
goods”—a broad-ranging survey of world
trade and the global marketplace.

Contrary to the stances of certain world leaders, including
Donald Trump, trade is a good thing, and the freer the trade
the better. So argues Economist columnist Coggan (The Last Vote:
The Threats to Western Democracy, 2013, etc.) in this sweeping,
nontechnical history of the rise of the modern world economy,
which has taken a long, winding course over millennia. With
the development of agriculture and settled towns and cities,
labor was able to diversify and become specialized, with the
scope of the economy broadening. A village first consumed
only its own goods, but then the goods of the next village came
into offer, and then the next, all aided by a growing network of
traders, brokers, and other harbingers of the market economy.
Throughout much of history, however, trade was sometimes
an afterthought. As Coggan notes, “neither the Greeks nor
Romans seemed to have believed that it was their duty to try
to expand the economy as a whole,” leaving it to Chinese, Arab,
and Persian entrepreneurs to develop transcontinental trade
routes. Europe later pulled ahead in a time of exploration and
expansion, one that, in its mature phase, the author attributes
to three factors: inexpensive transport, rising wages, and an
improvement in living standards. The U.S. was a locus of this
broadened economy. Coggan looks into past trends to suggest
the outlines of future ones, such as a continued debate over
state control of the economy. “Silicon Valley tycoons may think
that they are setting the intellectual agenda with their calls to
shrink the state,” he writes, “but for many people in the rest of
the world, the more appealing example is China, with its heavy
state direction and near 40-year record of rapid growth.” That
widespread trade enriches is one thing, Coggan says, looking to
the developing world, but it also serves as a means of encourag-
ding democratization everywhere.

A sharp, readable introduction to how the modern
economy came to be.
**FIGHTING WORDS**
The Bold American Journalists Who Brought the World Home Between the Wars  
Cott, Nancy F.  
Basic (416 pp.)  
$32.00 | Mar. 17, 2020  
978-1-5416-9933-5

In an informative group biography, Cott (History/Harvard Univ.; Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation, 2001, etc.) focuses on four foreign correspondents whose reporting, from 1920 to the 1940s, enlightened Americans about global events.

As the author notes, journalism was alive and well during this period; in 1920, 2,500 newspapers circulated 32 million copies each day. Large cities had four or more dailies in addition to Sunday papers, weeklies, monthlies, and many foreign-language and ethnic-group papers. Ninety-five percent of Americans read newspapers. Jobs in journalism were easy to get, and many young men and women—Hemingway, for one, went to Paris as a reporter for the Toronto Star—took the opportunity to travel, supported by a newspaper back home. Drawing on considerable archival and published material, Cott profiles Dorothy Thompson, Vincent James Sheean, John Gunther, and Rayna Raphaelson as representative of their profession. Excepting Raphaelson, whose career was cut short by her death in her early 30s, the other three serve well to illuminate the perils and triumphs of gathering foreign news. Raphaelson rebelled against the expectations of her upper-middle-class Jewish family to sail to China with no newspaper experience or job connections, but through dogged efforts, she reported fearlessly about China’s and Russia’s political upheavals. Nevertheless, her influence was never as broad as that of the other three writers, whose dispatches from Russia, Germany, Europe, and Palestine led to regular columns (Thompson, for example, contributed “On the Record” for the Herald Tribune, reaching some 8 million readers), radio broadcasts, lectures, and book deals. Sheean’s memoir Personal History, adapted as the 1940 movie Foreign Correspondent, gave rise to other memoirs in which journalists recounted their witnessing of international events. Gunther’s ambitious Inside Europe vividly portrayed Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin. The book sold nearly 1,000 copies per week and was translated into 14 languages. Like Sheean and Thompson, Gunther became a celebrity and “a trusted source for whatever in the world Americans wanted to know.”

A revelatory history of a time when journalism was respected and vital. (maps and illustrations)

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**ON SHIRLEY HAZZARD**

de Kretser, Michelle  
Catapult (112 pp.)  
$14.95 | Mar. 10, 2020  
978-1-948226-82-0

A Sri Lankan–born Australian novelist offers a brief paean to a much-admired fellow Australian writer.

De Kretser (The Life To Come, 2017, etc.), who moved to Australia with her family in 1972, fell in love with the novels of Shirley Hazzard (1931-2016) because they “spoke of places from which I had come and places to which Ilonged to go.” They also offered a view of Australia that was cleareyed about such problems as sexism and racial prejudice, which helped the author come to terms with living as an Asian woman in a white-dominated country. Moreover, Hazzard’s novels revealed a deep engagement with history and especially imperialism, a topic with which de Kretser was intimately acquainted. Hazzard was also a keen craftsperson who “read her work aloud to herself to get the rhythms right” and consciously sought to create high literary art. De Kretser writes that “movement of poetry infiltrates [Hazzard’s] prose,” and she offers examples from various, often unnamed, novels of the “precision, swiftness [and] taste for compassion” with which Hazzard used adjectives, described places and characters, and expressed political views. De Kretser’s book is strongest in its very personal, often moving appreciation for Hazzard’s work. As literary criticism, the narrative is flawed. De Kretser provides only bits and pieces about Hazzard’s life and brief reflections about important novels like The Bay of Noon, which was shortlisted for the Lost Man Booker Prize in 2010, and The Great Fire, which won the 2003 National Book Award. She offers little biographical, historical, critical, social, or political details and no cited references that would help those not already acquainted with Hazzard and/or Australian 20th-century literature more deeply appreciate this important novelist. As a result, the book reads more like a disconnected collection of poignant private musings than a text meant to educate readers who might be interested in exploring Hazzard’s life and work.

An incomplete tribute that may please some Hazzard fans but leave others adrift.
ROUGH FLAVORS by Sylvia Hart Wright

“In this fascinating memoir, [Sylvia] retraces her journey as a citizen of the world—showing up, speaking up, acting up as a participant in practically every progressive cause for four decades.” —Jim Hightower, New York Times best-selling author

ROUGH FLAVORS
ONE WOMAN’S ACTIVIST ODYSSEY
INSIDE PROTEST MOVEMENTS
SOME OF WHICH WORKED
Sylvia Hart Wright

ISBN: 978-1-7330123-1-7

“In this inspiring book [Sylvia] vividly demonstrates the value of nonviolence as a philosophy and a practice. The life captured so beautifully in these pages is informed by purpose and passion, courage and hope, and by an uncommon fervor for peace and justice.”
—Bill Ayers, author, Fugitive Days: Memoirs of an Antiwar Activist

“I was thoroughly captivated by Rough Flavors, especially by the evolving historical context, the events that shaped a history and a time and a life...a very compelling telling of so many places and events.”
—Bonnie Mann, author of Women’s Liberation and the Sublime, winner of Art Award in the Humanities

“...richly textured life in this memoir... remarkable life adventure...”
—Kirkus Reviews

For information on publishing and film rights, email sylviah@efn.org
Enlightening insight into a creative mind that may stifle some readers but that adds further mystique to a unique persona.

**MY METEORITE**

**Or, Without the Random There Can Be No New Thing**
Dodge, Harry
Penguin (336 pp.)
$18.00 paper | Mar. 17, 2020
978-0-14-313436-7

A memoir from the acclaimed writer and visual artist. Guggenheim fellow Dodge is a well-known artist whose work has been exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, among other venues around the world. For literary sorts, however, he may be best known as the singular presence in his partner Maggie Nelson's inventive memoir *The Argonauts,* which described the relationship between two incredible artistic creators. Dodge’s memoir is in no way linear, which may make it difficult to work through for some readers, and there's little context to the material. The book, he writes, “was drafted, in large part, using unaugmented recollection as a primary source; some of the resulting inaccuracies have been purposefully left uncorrected.” Throughout, the author discusses Nelson and her book and provides affectionate passages about their children. The narrative, presented in clipped entries that don't always cohere, jumps decades among the late 1970s and the present. One of the main themes is death, as Dodge considers the passing of his parents (“the place where my mom died was a nightmare. It was industrial dying, industrial death”), but there's also plenty of existential trivia, with long, considered opinions on movies like *Blade Runner,* *Arrival,* and arcane films from the past. Dodge displays a wildly creative voice, opining on the remarkable coincidence, the nature of individual intelligence, and the titular meteorite at the center of the narrative, which the author seems alternatively obsessed with and horrified by, depending on the moment. Ultimately, the text reads like a diary, compelling yet fragmentary confessions that might concern children at one moment and graphic, anonymous sex in another. Readers who like the voice will find plenty of intriguing bits about movies, books, and a somewhat psychedelic visit to Six Flags, but strangers will be wandering into unknown territory.

An excellent overview, encouraging and informative if only mildly optimistic.

**ENDING PARKINSON’S DISEASE**

**A Prescription for Action**
Dorsey, Ray & Sherer, Todd & Okun, Michael S. & Bloem, Bastiaan
PublicAffairs (336 pp.)
$28.00 | Mar. 17, 2020
978-1-5417-2452-5

A lucid, multiauthored guidebook on Parkinson’s will serve readers who are affected or simply want to know more. The authors, all veteran Parkinson’s researchers, begin with Dr. James Parkinson’s 1817 “An Essay on the Shaking Palsy,” which described six men who suffered tremors and walked bent over with slow, shuffling gaits. Although rare at the time, write the authors, “the spread of the disease has loosely tracked the growth of industrialization.” Currently, China’s burden of cases is on track to surpass America’s. Inheritance plays a modest role, with many genetic mutations increasing the risk. Head injuries can also contribute. Much evidence points to insecticides, fungicides, and herbicides, especially paraquat and industrial chemicals. The disease results from degeneration in a small brain area that regulates movements. Cells that die are those that produce dopamine, an important chemical that transmits nerve impulses, and treatment involves stimulating dopamine production in the remaining nerves. When the drug Levodopa, which increases dopamine production, appeared in the 1960s, the results were miraculous, with profoundly disabled victims regaining normal movements. Sadly, as years pass and nerves continue to die, symptoms return, and disturbing side effects appear. The authors chronicle treatment improvements over the years and summarize hopeful research, although no dramatic breakthrough seems on the horizon. A healthy diet reduces the risk. Vigorous exercise not only does the same; it also helps victims maintain activity. Proper treatment is critical; neurologists (like the authors) do much better than family doctors. Finally, the authors list worldwide organizations that assist victims and caregivers, and they exhort readers to lobby governments for better services, more research, and action to clean up the environment. Many Parkinson’s-associated chemicals banned across the world are still used in the U.S. As with climate change, America’s Environmental Protection Agency considers the evidence against them unconvincing.

An excellent overview, encouraging and informative if only mildly optimistic.
A journalist sees materialism and complacency pervading contemporary life.

New York Times op-ed columnist and National Review film critic Douthat (To Change the Church: Pope Francis and the Future of Catholicism, 2018, etc.) delivers an impassioned but not entirely convincing critique of American and European society, which he condemns as depressed, enervated, and bored, and he points to economic stagnation, cultural and intellectual exhaustion, and a dearth of technological and scientific marvels. According to Douthat, America’s space project was the last time technological prowess ignited the public’s imagination; now, instead of a shared vision of a “giant leap for mankind,” we are left with a sense of resignation. The domination of near monopolies quashes economic risk-taking and growth; “below-replacement fertility” portends a “sterile, aging world”; a polarized, sclerotic government is mired in gridlock; and a narrowing range of cultural offerings reflects widespread cultural malaise. Movies reprise “unoriginal stories based on intellectual properties that have strong brand recognition”; publishers depend on “recursive franchises and young-adult blockbusters”; and pop music reveals “a sharp decline in the diversity of chords in hit songs” and repetitive lyrics. Douthat acknowledges that readers, many of whom have heard similar arguments in countless recent books, may not be as distraught as he is. Despite social, political, and ecological problems, they may ask, “instead of bemoaning the inevitable flaws of our present situation, shouldn’t we work harder to celebrate its virtues”? The author thinks not. Although within a decadent society individuals can still “work toward renewal and renaissance”; although sustainable decadence “offers the ample benefits of prosperity with fewer of the risks that more disruptive eras...
offer,” still, he insists that “the unresisted drift of decadence leads, however slowly and comfortably, into a territory of darkness.” Describing himself as a believing Christian, Douthat underscores religion’s entanglement with decadence. No civilization, he writes, “has thrived without a confidence that there was more to the human story than just the material world as we understand it.” Underlying his call for change is an invocation to look “heavenward: toward God, toward the stars, or both.”

An earnest analysis buoyed by debatable evidence.

THE WORLD BENEATH THEIR FEET
Mountaineering, Madness, and the Deadly Race to Summit the Himalayas
Ellsworth, Scott
Little, Brown (416 pp.)
$30.00 | Feb. 18, 2020
978-0-316-43486-7

The dramatic saga of the race between nations to climb the planet’s highest mountains.

In his latest, Ellsworth (African American History, Southern Literature/Univ. of Michigan; The Secret Game: A Basketball Story in Black and White, 2015, etc.) focuses on the 1930s and the men and women who risked their lives to climb the “deadliest mountains on Earth.” In vivid, novelistic prose, the author describes the significant expeditions and delivers engaging portraits of climbers from many different countries and their invaluable Sherpas. In 1931, the Germans stunned the British and their famous Alpine Club when an expedition led by former soldier Paul Bauer reached the summit of Kangchenjunga, thought to be the world’s second-highest mountain. For Bauer, Ellsworth writes, the success was “a way to reclaim the honor of Germany, the honor that had not been lost in the trenches but in the treachery of the Treaty of Versailles.” The British responded with a 1933 expedition to Everest. Equipped with newly designed boots, suits, and a new type of glacier glasses, Frank Smythe and Eric Shipton were hopeful but still failed. The Americans, with their Explorer’s Club, entered the race when Terris Moore and Dick Burdsall reached the summit of Minya Konka. In 1934, a German team failed to climb Nanga Parbat; four Germans and six Sherpas died. Inspired by James Hilton’s 1933 novel, Lost Horizon, the British were the first to reach their Shangri-La, Nanda Devi’s pristine, massive, circular amphitheater, the Sanctuary. Maurice Wilson, who fought on the Western Front during World War I, flew from England to India and then crossed the Tibetan border to take on Mount Everest. He perished. In 1937, a German team took on Nanga Parbat a second time without success. In 1950, a French team led by resistance fighter and mountaineer Maurice Herzog climbed Annapurna. Finally, as Ellsworth recounts triumphantly, on May 29, 1953, New Zealander Edmund Hillary and his Sherpa, Tensing Norgay, shook hands on Everest’s summit.

A captivating, rousing adventure story.

MY EXPERIENCES WITH GOD AND HIS SON, JESUS CHRIST
by Al Santos

A pastor focuses on God, Jesus, and heaven in this debut faith memoir.

“The bulk of this brief book offers fairly standard helpings of Christian exhortation, with the author assuring his readers that if they are sincere and fervent in their faith, all things will be possible, and that true righteousness exists in tune with God’s wisdom.”

—Kirkus Reviews

ISBN: 978-1-5255-2844-6

For information on publishing and film rights, email cambouldin@gmail.com • www.myexperienceswithgod.com

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“...writes a passionate call for Christian rejuvenation…”

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BILLIONAIRE WILDERNESS
The Ultra-Wealthy and the Remaking of the American West
Farrell, Justin
Princeton Univ. (264 pp.)
$27.95 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-0-691-17667-3

An examination of income inequality through the lens of Teton County, Wyoming, which is “both the richest county in the United States and the county with the nation’s highest level of income inequality.”

Teton County has become the primary or secondary home for a large influx of multimillionaires and billionaires, who are attracted by the breathtaking natural beauty and the absence of a state income tax. A similarly large population—perhaps 30% of the county—consists of low-income families who live in Teton County to fill jobs that serve the wealthy residents. Farrell (Sociology/Yale Univ.; The Battle for Yellowstone: Morality and the Sacred Roots of Environmental Conflict, 2015), a Wyoming native, found that the bulk of the low-income families are immigrants who speak Spanish as their first language. The author also writes about how he was raised by a mother who depended on rich people for income as a house cleaner. Farrell eventually moved away, becoming a first-generation college student and an academic researcher. In his chronicle of his return to where he grew up, he examines both sides of the divide. The book contains some sections packed with academic jargon, including one about the research methodology underlying the 200-plus in-depth interviews of the wealthy and the working poor who serve them in various capacities. Farrell learned that the wealthy tend to view themselves as sensitive, generous philanthropists, part of a county where everybody gets along and where distinguishing between the rich and the poor is mostly irrelevant because they are all friends. The laborers, on the other hand, do not perceive the relations as friendships. While the author found little overt hatred among the laborers, he did uncover puzzlement about why the wealthy seemed to lack empathy and self-awareness. “The working poor,” writes the author, “called into question many of the positive perceptions ultra-wealthy people have of themselves….They pointed out the irony and false virtue of affluent environmentalism, and link it to the ongoing suffering of the working poor.”

An eye-opening look at a specific element of economic and social inequality.

FOOTPRINTS
In Search of Future Fossils
Farrier, David
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (320 pp.)
$27.00 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-0-374-15733-3

Elegiac views of the Anthropocene, an age of decline in everything but the consumption of plastics.

There have been many recent books on the environmental terrors of the present era, from Elizabeth Kolbert’s Sixth Extinction to Gaia Vince’s Adventures in the Anthropocene and Barry Lopez’s Horizon. Farrier (English Literature/Univ. of Edinburgh; Anthropocene Poetics: Deep Time, Sacrifice Zones, and Extinction, 2019, etc.) adds a side note to these more urgent and compelling books with a fruitful premise: It’s up to us, to some degree or another, to determine what we’ll leave in the fossil record, and those future fossils will in turn “record whether we carried on heedlessly...
INTERVIEWS & PROFILES

DAISY DUNN

HER NEW BOOK, THE SHADOW OF VESUVIUS, BRINGS AN ANCIENT ENCYCLOPEDIST (AND HIS NEPHEW) BACK TO CENTER STAGE IN ROMAN HISTORY

By Gregory McNamee

A valuable life lesson: Don't get too near an erupting volcano. Look what happened to old Pliny, the ancient Roman naturalist and naval commander. When Mount Vesuvius, east of Naples, blew its top in 79 C.E.—famously burying the towns of Pompeii and Herculaneum—Pliny (rhymes with “tinny”) borrowed a ship from the Roman imperial fleet and sailed across the Bay of Naples to have a look. Lethal fumes from the volcano killed him, by some accounts saving him from an even uglier death by incineration.

It makes for one of those classic cautionary tales in the curiosity-killed-the-cat vein. But there's more to it than all that. Pliny's curiosity is the very stuff of scientific inquiry, which sometimes entails danger. That's one thread that emerges in Daisy Dunn's new book, The Shadow of Vesuvius: A Life of Pliny (Liveright, Dec. 10), which in turn reflects long-held curiosity on the part of its author, an English classicist and art historian. "When I was a child," Dunn tells Kirkus Reviews by telephone from her home in Surrey, "I read a story about this brave man who set out to look at Vesuvius as it exploded. He was incredibly courageous and incredibly curious—that's the inspiring story I took away."

Then, Dunn recalls, she sat down to read Pliny's multi-volume Natural History, the first encyclopedia known to us. Only a small number of the 160 volumes survive today. Still, says Dunn, "It took a long time to get through. What I was really surprised to find was that he had a long section on volcanoes in the book already, and he didn't mention Vesuvius, which had been dormant for a long time—so long that it made me think that people of Pliny's time didn't know that it was a volcano, too, or thought it was a volcano that would never explode again. That all changed the reasons, I thought, for his going to Vesuvius when it did explode. He wanted to see what that strange cloud rising up across the water was. What I ended with is not so much a tale of courage, as I had thought before, but instead one of true curiosity."

Pliny's curiosity had an overarching purpose: As an encyclopedist, he wanted to get down all he could of human knowledge while he could do so, knowing that such knowledge had a way of disappearing in a time of burned libraries and vanquished civilizations. Vesuvius hadn't exploded for 700 years, we know from modern volcanological reports, and he was duty-bound to report on it when he saw it blow. "Vesuvius was green and beautiful, covered with vineyards, and the people who lived there were mesmerized by the mountain," Dunn says. That complacency explains why so many Romans ignored its rumblings and died in ashes and fire 20-odd centuries ago. Most were anonymous victims.
despite the dangers...or whether we cared enough to change our course.” Though the great British ecologist James Lovelock has lately expressed doubt that our kind is smart enough to fix the mess we’ve caused, Farrier takes a more generous view. On the matter of plastics, for instance, he doesn’t dispute that at first, they seemed a wonderful thing, a substitute for so much else that was fragile or scarce. However, as the author puts it, if the world’s factories were producing 2 million metric tons of plastic in 1950, “by 2015, it was four hundred million,” and not only that, but “it is likely that every single piece of plastic ever produced and not incinerated still exists somewhere in some form.” Elsewhere, Farrier looks at the structure of landfills, the nature of cities, the alarming decline in the quantity not just of terrestrial species and their members, but also those of microbiota, the collapse of coral reefs—a collapse that can be bandaged but not undone by, yes, plastic poultices—and the eerie silences that surround a world in collapse even amid all the noise humans make. The feel of the text is matter-of-fact melancholic, a too-little, too-late somberness. If those other books (and others besides them) have already reported most of the data, the author captures a moment that finds us standing on the brink.

There’s not much new here, but Farrier sounds a convincing argument all the same.

**TOWER OF SKULLS**

* A History of the Asia-Pacific War, Volume I: July 1937-May 1942

Frank, Richard B.

Norton (836 pp.)

$40.00 | Mar. 3, 2020

978-1-324-00210-9

The first of a three-volume definitive history of the Asia-Pacific War. As distinguished World War II scholar Frank (MacArthur, 2007, etc.), who served as a platoon leader in the Vietnam War, writes, after Japan conquered nearby Manchuria in 1931, local Japanese forces invaded China proper in 1937. “This volume,” writes the author, “attempts to restore the notion of a ‘Heroic China’ carrying on in the face of Japanese aggression, with horrific levels of death and destruction and with very sparse international support...The possibility that China could hold out in a conflict with Japan for more than weeks, or at most months, was wholly discounted throughout the world in 1937.” In the first half of this monumentally researched narrative, Frank recounts the war in China, where more fighting and deaths occurred than on all other fronts combined. Readers may be startled to learn that historical opinion of China’s leader Chiang Kai-shek has vastly improved. Frank agrees, maintaining that Chiang’s stubbornness and acumen converted the Japanese invasion into a quagmire, “a struggle that would prove ultimately fatal to Imperial Japan.” In 1941, galvanized by Hitler’s invasion of Russia and embargoed by America, Japan’s army leaders yearned to invade

Gregory McNamee is a contributing editor. The Shadow of Vesuvius was reviewed in the Oct. 1, 2019, issue.
Siberia, and the navy leadership sought to conquer resource-rich Southeast Asia, which risked war with the U.S. The morass in China probably tipped the balance. After an absorbing account of the planning and maddening negotiation that preceded the attack on Pearl Harbor, Frank enters familiar territory with gripping descriptions of the attack followed by Japan's dazzling conquests from the South Pacific through the Philippines, East Indies, Singapore, and Burma. Readers may be surprised by the fact that Japanese troops were usually outnumbered (more than 2-to-1 in the Philippines) but better led. Frank's sharp portraits of the Allied generals include the usual incompetent suspects (e.g., Arthur Percival in Singapore) but also two who emerged as heroes (Douglas MacArthur and Joseph Stilwell).

A painful yet riveting history, especially valuable for historians and military buffs. (16 pages of photos; 14 maps)

**HOUSE OF GLASS**

*The Story and Secrets of a Twentieth-Century Jewish Family*

Freeman, Hadley
Simon & Schuster (304 pp.)
$26.00 | Mar. 24, 2020
978-1-5011-9915-8

Going through her late grandmother's closet yielded discoveries in a shoebox that propelled the author on a decades-long pursuit through her family's history before, during, and after the Holocaust.

Guardian columnist Freeman (Life Moves Pretty Fast: The Lessons We Learned From Eighties Movies (and Why We Don't Learn Them From Movies Anymore), 2016, etc.) returns with a highly personal, thoroughly and lovingly researched tale of her family. The members of the family Ghas (the spelling then) fled when the Nazis began to sweep through Eastern Europe; they settled in France, thinking they were safe. They weren't. One sister escaped to America, but the rest remained; some hid, and some were arrested (one died in Auschwitz). All were in deadly danger. To conduct her impressive research, the author traveled everywhere relevant: former homes, prison camps, and homes of survivors who could add to the stories. Along the way, Freeman discovered many remarkable things about her grandmother's generation. One sibling became a noted fashion designer; another pioneered the use of microfilm; another (the one who fled to America) married an American and never got to realize her dream of returning to live in France. Throughout, the author provides thrilling tales of escape, near misses, arrests, deportations, resistance, and betrayals. After the war, members of the family stayed in France but never forgot the way some of their French neighbors had eagerly denounced Jews to the Nazis. Freeman made a host of other astonishing discoveries: One sibling became friends with Chagall and Picasso; the microfilm sibling made a fortune. Freeman's technique is chronological, as she follows one sibling and then shifts to another, which allows readers to learn all the stories. All are gone now—Freeman includes a poignant chapter about the death of each—and she concludes with stories (including her own) about the subsequent generations.

**Frightening, inspiring, and cautionary in equal measure.** (b/w photos)

**HITLER'S FIRST HUNDRED DAYS**

*When Germans Embraced the Third Reich*

Fritzsche, Peter
Basic (432 pp.)
$35.00 | Mar. 17, 2020
978-1-5416-9743-0

Hitler had little trouble destroying German democracy, and this fine history describes how he did it.

Fritzsche (History/Univ. of Illinois; An Iron Wind: Europe Under Hitler, 2016, etc.) emphasizes that Germany was a divided, turbulent nation when Hitler became chancellor on Jan. 30, 1933. The Nazis were Germany's largest party, but a series of elections in 1932 showed no groundswell in its favor, and most establishment leaders considered Hitler a loose cannon. President Paul von Hindenburg refused to appoint him chancellor, and Hitler refused to serve under anyone else. It was only when influential conservatives assured Hindenburg that they could control Hitler from subordinate positions in the cabinet that he changed his mind. Even readers who know what followed will not put down Fritzsche's gruesomely fascinating account, as he chronicles how Hitler persuaded Hindenburg to schedule another election and then launched a fierce campaign, using government powers and his own paramilitaries to suppress opposition. The result was not a landslide, but the Nazis and their minor partners controlled just above 50% of the Reichstag. Proclaiming that the nation faced massive communist terrorism, Hitler urged officials to pass an enabling act, giving him dictatorial powers. To achieve the necessary two-thirds vote, he arrested the communist delegates, but in the end, it passed overwhelmingly. By May 9, the 100th day, Nazis had seized the governments of the federal states, dismantled trade unions, passed the first anti-Semitic laws, and destroyed all opposing political parties. Dachau and other new concentration camps quickly filled. In the final chapters, Fritzsche describes Germany over that summer and fall as mass arrests and violence dwindled. In return for enthusiastic devotion, Hitler assured citizens that they were the salt of the earth, that he would crush a despicable elite responsible for their miseries, and that sneering foreigners would realize that Germany was a great nation again. Most Germans found this appealing, and it remains a crowd-pleaser for power-hungry politicians around the world.

**A painful but expert historical account.**
LADY IN WAITING
My Extraordinary Life in the Shadow of the Crown
Glenconner, Anne
Hachette (336 pp.)
$28.00 | Mar. 24, 2020
978-0-306-84636-6

An insider’s look at the world of palaces, princesses, and the pressure of public life.

Readers who’ve already binged-watched the third season of The Crown needn’t fret. Glenconner’s meticulously detailed memoir of her life in service to the crown will whet the appetite of anyone hungering for more tales of Britain’s royals. Opening with her childhood on the fifth-largest estate in England, the author chronicles her personal and professional life as lady-in-waiting and confidante to her childhood friend Princess Margaret. In Glenconner’s capable hands, we learn about a motley cast of characters including her horse- and Harley Davidson–riding mother, a Scottish great-aunt who was a Christian Scientist, and the formidable Queen Mary, who intimidated her grandchildren but gave the author good life advice. A pleasing blend of detail and balance, the book provides sufficient glimpses into sumptuous palaces and shooting parties to inspire awe and keen insight into the people who inhabit them. Glenconner’s candor about wealth and privilege enables readers to sympathize as she describes the emotional coldness of her parents and her father’s undisguised disappointment at her not being born a boy. The fun of racing with the princesses Elizabeth and Margaret through her family’s palatial estate and various royal residences could not make up for the fact that the author’s worth—or lack thereof—was predicated on her sex and marriage. The poor-little-rich-girl story is hardly new, but what makes this account fresh and poignant is Glenconner’s use of affluent characters to demonstrate the extent to which class trumps power; even those at the top seem helpless to challenge tradition. By unflinchingly examining everything from her troubled marriage and her fraught relationship with her children to the solace she found in service, the author emerges as a flawed yet steely woman worthy of respect. In laying her life bare, she demonstrates the limitations of being a woman in the British class system, showing that privilege is no insulation from suffering or pain.

A must-have for loyal royal fans.

WARHOL
Gopnik, Blake
Ecco/HarperCollins (976 pp.)
$45.00 | Apr. 21, 2020
978-0-06-229839-3

An epic cradle-to-grave biography of the king of pop art from Gopnik (co-author: Warhol Women, 2019), who served as chief art critic for the Washington Post and the art and design critic for Newsweek.

With a hoarder’s zeal, Andy Warhol (1928–1987) collected objects he liked until shopping bags filled entire rooms of his New York town house. Rising to equal that, Gopnik’s dictionary-sized biography has more than 7,000 endnotes in its e-book edition and drew on some 100,000 documents, including datebooks, tax returns, and letters to lovers and dealers. With the cooperation of the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, the author serves up fresh details about almost every aspect of Warhol’s life in an immensely enjoyable book that blends snappy writing with careful exegeses of the artist’s influences and techniques. Warhol exploded into view in his mid-40s with his pop art paintings of Campbell’s Soup cans and silkscreens of Elvis and Marilyn. However, fame didn’t banish lifelong anxieties heightened by an assassination attempt that left him so fearful he bought bulletproof eyeglasses. After the pop successes, Gopnik writes, Warhol’s life was shaped by a consuming desire “to climb back onto that cutting edge,” which led him to make experimental films, launch Interview magazine, and promote the Velvet Underground. At the same time, Warhol yearned “for fine, old-fashioned love and coupledom,” a desire thwarted by his shyness and his awkward stance toward his sexuality—“almost but never quite out,” as Gopnik puts it. Although insightful in its interpretations of Warhol’s art, this biography is sure to make waves with its easily challenged claims that Warhol revealed himself early on “as a true rival of all the greats who had come before” and that he and Picasso may now occupy “the top peak of Parnassus, beside Michelangelo and Rembrandt and their fellow geniuses.” Any controversy will certainly befit a lodestar of 20th-century art who believed that “you weren’t doing much of anything as an artist if you weren’t questioning the most fundamental tenets of what art is and what artists can do.”

A fascinating, major work that will spark endless debates. (8-page color insert; b/w photos throughout)
An oral history of the long-running, mega-popular American sitcom.

In this behind-the-scenes trove for the countless fans of The Office, Rolling Stone senior writer Greene pulls together comments, context, and insights in a round-table style that tracks the sitcom's origins and success. Inspired by its British TV namesake, created by Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant, the American version of The Office, created by Greg Daniels, initially "faced a lot of resistance" as it struggled to find a place as a “single-camera, laugh-track-free show about a struggling small town paper company.” The narrative, ably curated by Greene, features the creators, actors, writers, and reviewers that spanned the show's nine-season run on NBC from 2005 to 2013. With cogent chapters about key episodes, lead characters such as the boss, Michael Scott (Steve Carrell), and assistant to the regional manager, Dwight Schrute (Rainn Wilson), craft talk, and nuts-and-bolts details, Greene smartly lets the contributors elaborate how a workplace mockumentary became a cultural phenomenon. Lively anecdotes reveal the closeness of cast and crew, and we see the writers' room as a highly collaborative, intense training ground that fostered talents such as Mindy Kaling and BJ Novak. Director J.J. Abrams characterizes the show as having "a kind of timelessness to it," a point driven home in reflections on what The Office did that differed from prime-time shows of its era: establishing a strong point of view, resisting glamorous actors, and building a set away from the traditional studio. Greene doesn't just rave, however; the book includes respectful candor about episode ideas that didn't pan out and late additions to the cast who didn't fit. When Carrell left after Season 7, The Office rallied for another two seasons, to mixed response. Amid rich trivia for pop-culture buffs, relationships—both fictional and real—stand out. Everyone involved notes Carrell's genuine personality and professionalism; the text also serves as a tribute to his role in defining the series.

A fond, funny, informative trip down Memory Lane for series buffs and newcomers alike.

The author of several bestselling explorations of cutting-edge physics turns his attention to the cosmos, and readers will encounter his usual astute observations and analysis.

Greene (Physics and Mathematics/Columbia Univ; The Hidden Reality: Parallel Universes and the Deep Laws of the Cosmos, 2016) quotes from philosopher Bertrand Russell who, in a 1948 radio debate with a cleric, based his agnosticism on a scientific law: “the universe has crawled by slow stages to a somewhat pitiful result on this earth and is going to crawl by still more pitiful stages to a condition of universal death...if this is to be taken as evidence of purpose, I can only say that the purpose is one that does not appeal to me.” Russell is referring to the second law of thermodynamics, which states that “everything in the universe has an overwhelming tendency to run down, to degrade, to wither.” Greene explains that this is entropy, a term that is often popularly defined as a gradual slide into disorder. In the Big Bang, a supremely ordered low entropy kernel of energy expanded into the familiar universe, but entropy's steady increase will lead to a uniformly disordered cold, lifeless emptiness—although not for a long time. The law allows plenty of local, highly organized, low entropy areas—galaxies, stars, civilization—whose existence is more than balanced by wasted energy they produce. Having announced his theme, Greene regularly returns to it in 11 chapters that begin at the Big Bang and proceed with deeply learned, sharp, never dumbed-down accounts of what scientists know about star formation, planet formation, life's origins, evolution, consciousness, language, culture, and religion. The author concludes his engaging survey with what the future might hold for humans (very long life) and the universe (even longer); beyond a certain entropy, however, there will be no room for us.

An insightful history of everything that simplifies its complex subject as much as possible but no further. (first printing of 200,000)
COOL TOWN
How Athens, Georgia, Launched Alternative Music and Changed American Culture
Hale, Grace Elizabeth
Univ. of North Carolina (384 pp.)
$27.00 | Mar. 23, 2020
978-1-4696-5487-4

A carefully constructed history of how Athens, Georgia, became a cultural hot spot.

Everyone’s heard of R.E.M. These days, fewer are familiar with the B-52’s, and almost no one outside the musical cognoscenti knows the Flat Duo Jets and Pylon. All of these bands, writes Hale (American Studies and History/Univ. of Virginia; A Nation of Outsiders: How the White Middle Class Fell in Love With Rebellion in Postwar America, 2011, etc.), were ingredients in the cultural stew in which she grew up. The author combines her insider’s perspective with her academic skills, creating a book that is scholarly without being arid, popular without being condescending—a pleasing mix, as were the sounds produced by Athens bands from the late 1970s through the early 1990s. During that period, Hale writes, “the Athens scene produced amazingly good music…but the scene also transformed the punk idea that anyone could start a band into the even more radical idea that people in unlikely places could make a new culture and imagine new ways of thinking about the meaning of the good life and the ties that bind humans to each other.”

It wasn’t just bands: The hipster/hippie/bohemian set neatly interacted (and often shared memberships) with the gay community, drawing like-minded people in from the surrounding countryside and outrunning larger cities such as Charleston and Atlanta in building a community in which writers, painters, musicians, poets, and scholars wandered between media and genres. Not much has changed, writes the author. In Athens today, “the currency remains DIY culture,” with primacy placed on the homemade rather than the appropriated. Many of Hale’s cases are happy ones, but some end tragically—e.g., Vic Chesnutt, for whom the Athens scene “worked pretty well…until it didn’t,” whereupon, ever on the verge of fame, he killed himself. He would doubtless be pleased to be included among the many “outcasts or weirdos” whom Hale respectfully recounts.

A welcome history of an overlooked milieu, one that provides ample inspiration for art makers today. (37 illustrations)

FREE THINKER
Sex, Suffrage, and the Extraordinary Life of Helen Hamilton Gardener
Hamlin, Kimberly A.
Norton (352 pp.)
$28.95 | Mar. 17, 2020
978-1-324-00497-4

A history of an important suffragist that serves as “a quintessentially American story of self-making.”

Hamlin (American Studies/Miami Univ.; From Eve to Evolution: Darwin, Science, and Women’s Rights in Gilded Age America, 2015) chronicles the life of Helen Hamilton Gardener (1833-1925), born Alice Chenoweth, who was involved with a married man while serving as the principal of a Sandusky, Ohio, teacher training school. To avoid the label of “fallen woman,” she moved with her lover, Charles Smart, to Detroit and then, in 1884, to New York City, where she changed her name. She joined the free thought movement led by Robert Ingersoll, “the great agnostic,” and became its most influential woman. Gardener was an early proponent of women’s rights, working to raise the legal age of consent to 16, giving women the right to own property, and attacking the religious and cultural biases of scientific research used to degrade women. Ingersoll mentored her, encouraging her speaking engagements and writing, including her books Men, Women, and Gods, and Other Lectures and Is This Your Son, My Lord?, which sold more than 25,000 copies following its publication in 1891. For two decades she was a regular presence at Ingersoll’s weekly “at homes,” which featured some of the most interesting people in New York. Her writing ability opened doors for her, especially her introductory letters in which she tried to connect to important persons. Woodrow Wilson was Gardener’s greatest connection, and her work lobbying him to help the passage of the 19th Amendment was indispensable. After Smart’s death in 1901, she went to Puerto Rico, where she got reacquainted with Col. Selden Allen Day, whom she eventually married. After traveling the world for a few years, in 1910, they moved to Washington, D.C., where Gardener became a leader at the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Her tactics to woo and influence Washington’s lawmakers were legendary. Throughout the chronological, passionately researched narrative, Hamlin captures all angles of her fascinating subject.

A captivating story of yet another strong, brilliant woman who should be better known. (15 illustrations)
When did you first hear about what happened in Wilmington?

It was in 1998, when the city of Wilmington was having some centennial events. I really had never heard of the Wilmington race riot, as it was called then, and it kind of piqued my interest. I’m always looking for book subjects, so I kind of tucked it away and forgot about it. There was a state commission in 2006 that published a report, and it got a lot of attention, and that renewed my interest in the story. But the real reason for writing it is that this is just a remarkable piece of our history—there has never been anything exactly like this in our history before, where white supremacists could just take over a city at gunpoint and have a lasting revolution that lasted 50 or 60 years, and I just though the story needed to be told.

What was Wilmington like before 1898?

Wilmington was sort of an outlier. It flourished as a black majority city. There were plenty of jobs, not just menial jobs but jobs running and owning restaurants and fish houses and in the skilled trades, like butchers and blacksmiths. There was a vibrant middle class. There were a few black doctors, lawyers, and funeral directors. At that time, Wilmington was 56% black, the largest city in North Carolina, and had a major port. I think that just became intolerable for the white leadership. And they made a decision that they wouldn’t allow it to stand, and they announced it and carried it out.

Tell me about the research—where did you find materials, and what was the most surprising thing you found?

I’m a journalist, so I’m used to talking to people and reconstructing events that way. And obviously everyone involved in this thing was long dead, so it was all documents and a paper trail. The most surprising thing that I found was all the newspaper coverage of this event. The white supremacists had launched this white supremacy campaign in the spring of 1898 for the fall elections. They had been announcing all summer that they were going to win by the ballot or the bullet. They were laying plans to kill blacks and take over the government, and
they told everybody they were going to do it, so newspapers from around the country came down—the New York Times, Washington Post, Philadelphia Inquirer—to cover what they called the race war. So it was incredibly well documented.

The Southern white newspapers were all run by white supremacists and were fanning this racial scapegoating and were inciting whites to violence to keep blacks from voting and basically intimidating them. The N-word was just thrown around so commonly—I was really shocked by the use of that in print. What interested me was that the Northern papers accepted the narrative of the white supremacists—that black people weren’t capable of running a government, that they were corrupt and incompetent and at the same time were lusting after white women, were raping white women, and were stealing white jobs. That whole combustible narrative exploded with the help of the Northern white press that really accepted that. In some ways they were as racist as some of the Southern newspapers.

What happened in Wilmington was once referred to as a race riot and is now considered a coup. Can you talk about the change in nomenclature?
For years and years because the only narrative people knew was the white narrative, it was called a race riot, and the white narrative was that the violence was a response to a black race riot. The commission finally came up with “coup” more than 100 years later. This wasn’t a riot at all. It was planned, it was premeditated and announced and carried out very methodically and very successfully.

What were some of the long-term effects?
No one was ever charged, much less convicted. Nobody paid any price for the murders. I mean, the people who paid were the black citizens. I think 2,100 fled almost immediately. The population was 56% black in 1898; today it’s just 17% black. It was just destroyed. Blacks were stripped not only of voting rights, but the right to hold elected or appointed office for 50 or 60 years. Blacks in Wilmington and in North Carolina really didn’t vote in any significant numbers from 1898 until the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 and even after that.

What do you hope that modern readers will take away from your book?
I hope they understand that when people resort to demagoguery or scapegoating of races and ethnic groups, it can lead to violence. It certainly did back then, and I see us going through that same sort of period in politics right now, where there’s a huge appeal to hate and blame and victimization and looking for scapegoats. I hope people read this as a warning and a lesson. It’s hard to believe this could happen in the United States of America, but it did. We could be heading that way again.

Kate Tuttle, a former president of the National Book Critics Circle, writes about books and authors for the Boston Globe. Wilmington’s Lie received a starred review in the Oct. 15, 2019, issue.
Heyman marshals meticulous detail, unflinching appraisal, indelible personalities, and rich character study in a narrative that straddles worlds and eras and never flags.

**THE PLANTER OF MODERN LIFE**

**Louis Bromfield and the Seeds of a Food Revolution**

Heyman, Stephen

Norton (304 pp.)

$26.95 | Apr. 14, 2020

978-0-393-60829-8

In his first book, former New York Times editor Heyman recaptures the fascinating life of a man rife with paradoxes.

In this exploration of the life of Louis Bromfield (1896-1956), the author chronicles his journey from the darling of American expatriate writers in Paris in the 1920s—and later an agricultural visionary—to the dissolution of his fame and influence. But this is not just a standard biography: Heyman turns the story of this novelist, screenwriter, nonfiction author, and pioneering farmer into an utterly engrossing account of both his life and his times. For years, everything Bromfield touched turned golden, his reputation and robust book sales easily surpassing those of Hemingway and Fitzgerald. His contacts and friends were a who's who of international literary lions, Hollywood royalty, potentates, and politicians. His horticultural ideas, embodied with varying success in his Malabar Farm in Ohio, were indispensable for early organic farming in the United States. Yet lavish spending, chronic overextension, and arrogance served to undermine Bromfield's notable accomplishments and even overshadow his considerable humanitarian efforts during the Spanish Civil War and World War II. He died in 1956, his prestige in tatters. Heyman marshals meticulous detail, unflinching appraisal, indelible personalities, and rich character study in a narrative that straddles worlds and eras and never flags. These elements coalesce within a fluid, remarkably propulsive writing style that keeps the pages turning. This is a biography of dual landscapes—literary and pastoral—as much as a chronicle of a man. The narrative succeeds on every level, not least in Heyman's evocation of time, place, and the origins of American agricultural blunders that plague us still. The first third of the book, dealing chiefly with the Bromfield family's years in France, will be irresistible to those unaware of Bromfield's early eminence in letters or his relationships with such intimates as Gertrude Stein and Edith Wharton. Bromfield's story clarifies a period cloaked in romanticism and a movement buttressed by conservationist ideals.

An outstanding debut. (20 illustrations)

**AT THE CENTER OF ALL BEAUTY**

**Solitude and the Creative Life**

Johnson, Fenton

Norton (256 pp.)

$26.95 | Mar. 10, 2020

978-0-393-60829-8

A memoir of the author's life and a study of solitude in highbrow modern culture.

Like Thoreau and many other creatives before him, Harper's contributor Johnson (English/Univ. of Arizona and Spalding Univ.; *Everywhere Home: A Life in Essays*, 2017, etc.) would prefer to be alone. “To use the term favored by the Trappist monk and mystic Thomas Merton,” he suggests the socially uninclined be referred to as “solitaries,” and he strives to reframe their stories (and his own) under society's critical eye. “Solitude and silence are positive gestures,” he writes in defense of those in the world who would prefer to live alone and aim “for the cultivation of an interior life.” While reminiscing on his own past, Johnson explores notions of solitude as seen in the writings of...
a pantheon of exalted literary and creative figures. Poems by Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson, along with reflections on the lives of Paul Cézanne, Nina Simone, and fashion photographer Bill Cunningham, help shape this unconventional lifestyle into a “personal, particular spiritual philosophy” that will be recognizable to even the most skeptical of readers. “In the silence of my solitary walks I hear the voices of the trees. I hear them singing of a solitude that admits no loneliness,” writes the author, seamlessly integrating a wealth of source material from his diverse and multifaceted cast of saintly solitaries. Beneath his scholarly efforts (and the occasional curmudgeonly aside), a tender memoir appears in pieces, delicately woven into his artists’ profiles. A monastic, transcendent visit to Cézanne’s studio in Aix-en-Provence suggests that particular emotional experiences can only emerge during an independent sojourn. Memories of Johnson’s childhood and parents as well as stories of friends and old lovers surface during bouts of quiet research, growing from well-chosen poems, letters, and interviews into rhapsodic recollections of a profoundly full life.

An erudite lesson in embracing aloneness.

THE SWORD AND THE SHIELD
The Revolutionary Lives of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.
Joseph, Peniel E.
Basic (384 pp.)
$30.00 | Apr. 7, 2020
978-0-385-5416-1-7

A revisionist study of the parallel lives of two of America’s most significant African American leaders.

Joseph (Political Values and History/Univ. of Texas; Stokely: A Life, 2014, etc.), who has written widely on African American history, punctures the widespread myth that Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X espoused diametrically opposed philosophies about ameliorating racism in the United States. “A mythology surrounds the legacies of Martin and Malcolm,” writes the author. “King is most comfortably portrayed as the nonviolent insider, while Malcolm is characterized as a by-any-means-necessary political renegade.” On the contrary, Joseph shows that although the two crusaders often disagreed about tactics, they began to appreciate each other as tacticians during the 1960s, as the civil rights movement began to gain traction during the presidencies of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, and simultaneously grew increasingly violent at the local level. Because readers know that each man would eventually suffer an early, violent death, the narrative takes on a poignant urgency as the chapters unfold. While Malcolm was shot and killed in a public auditorium by assassins from the Nation of Islam, an organization led by self-proclaimed prophet Elijah Muhammad but effectively expanded by Malcolm before he split from the prophet, King was killed by a hate mongering white supremacist. Before chronicling the murders, Joseph sets the stage with solid biographical sections about the upbringings of both men. Malcolm grew up in a dysfunctional Midwestern family that fractured quickly, and he grew into a sometimes-violent teenage criminal who served nearly a decade in prison, where he became an autodidact. King grew up in a Southern family that had become part of the black elite, and unlike Malcolm, he received a doctorate and graduated from a respected theological seminary. As the author delineates the philosophies and tactics of each man, he compares and contrasts them on nearly every page, making the various narrative strands cohere nicely.

An authoritative dual biography from a leading scholar of African American history.

SICK SOULS, HEALTHY MINDS
How William James Can Save Your Life
Kaag, John
Princeton Univ. (160 pp.)
$22.95 | Mar. 17, 2020
978-0-691-19216-1

A biography and exegesis of William James that serves as self-help for the philosophically inclined.

In his latest, Kaag (Philosophy/Univ. of Massachusetts, Lowell; Hiking With Nietzsche: On Becoming Who You Are, 2018, etc.) notes that he began this book worse off than during his two previous philosophical memoirs. He was in the middle of a divorce, "had just watched my estranged, alcoholic father die," and was spending much of his time in bed sleeping and reading James. That activity, however, isn’t a symptom of depression the way reading Schopenhauer might be. For Kaag, it proved to be a vital salve. "I think William James' philosophy saved my life. Or, more accurately, it encouraged me to not be afraid of life." If so, it wouldn’t be the first life James saved. His entire philosophy, writes the author, "from beginning to end, was geared to save a life, his life." In this brief treatise, Kaag seeks to “offer the reader James’s existential life preserver.” This represents something of a formal departure for Kaag. Whereas American Philosophy and Hiking With Nietzsche were philosophical memoirs, this book is self-help philosophy that draws selectively from autobiography. This inversion makes it a more demanding text than its predecessors. If readers are to gather solace from James, it will come only from joining Kaag in thinking through his philosophy: responding to the challenge of scientific determinism; reflecting on the paradox of James’ famous assertion that “my first act of free will shall be to believe in free will”; and attempting to pluck the thorn of relativism from pragmatism’s side. Luckily, Kaag’s reading of James is as elucidating as readers have come to expect from him. Once again, he writes in a clear, focused, and winningly self-aware style that makes friends of James and himself for anyone who wonders if life is worth living.

A book in which Kaag further carves out his niche in philosophy: personal, practical, and crucial.
An endearing, bittersweet, and entertainingly fresh take on the family memoir.

**Nobody Will Tell You This But Me**
A True (as Told to Me) Story
Kalb, Bess
Knopf (240 pp.)
$25.00 | Mar. 17, 2020
978-0-525-65471-1

A Jewish “matrilineal love story” uniquely narrated by a voice from beyond the grave.

TV writer Kalb employs an unconventional yet highly effective and charming narrative device, channeling the voice and personality of her now-deceased grandmother Bobby Bell. Outspoken and persnickety, Bobby snare readers’ attention on her first comments about how “degrading” and boring being dead actually is and how “the worst part was the dirt.”

Drawn from both a generous selection of family images and a text very much grounded in the family’s Jewish heritage, the narrative skillfully captures Bobby’s wit, worldly advice, well-intentioned meddling, and enduring love for her granddaughter. Bobby describes her mother as an “enormous Russian immigrant in a falling-down house” who arrived in Brooklyn speaking no English. Bobby also comments on her near-fatal bout with meningitis, her marriage to the author’s grandfather, and her lifelong friendship with Estelle, her sorority sister and fellow Jewish Brooklynite.

Kalb sharply reimagines her grandmother’s inner thoughts and feelings as she regales readers with anecdotes about her life and remembers her biting yet fiercely nurturing criticism of the author’s choices in men (“is he Jewish?”), her appearance (“you’d be gorgeous if you went a little blonder”), and her relocation to the West Coast (“no serious person moves to San Francisco”). The true heart and soul of their relationship is reflected in the frequent phone exchanges between grandparent and granddaughter, most of which are hysterical.

Kalb, Bess

An endearing, bittersweet, and entertainingly fresh take on the family memoir. (b/w images throughout; first printing of 100,000)
unknowns, a vexation for the smartest strategist. Kay and King (The British Tax System, 1978) employ a like notion here: although pricing is assumed to incorporate shared knowledge, the governing principle of the real world is uncertainty—and most of the time, we don’t know what we don’t know. This “radical uncertainty” means that our understanding of the present is incomplete and of the future, even more fragmentary, meaning that economists are forced to rely on something akin to hunches. They must explain by way of “narrative reasoning—the most powerful mechanism for organizing our imperfect knowledge,” creating stories about the world that incorporate our experiences, the experiences of others, and such reliable data as we are able to assemble in a “world of uncertain futures and unpredictable consequences.” A repeated example throughout the book is the probabilistic assessment Barack Obama received when determining whether to launch the raid that killed Osama bin Laden: It wasn’t 100% sure that bin Laden was in that Pakistani compound, and a botched operation might have meant war. That things worked out as they did was by no means guaranteed, and neither is following the rules of economics: Supply and demand is a powerful explanatory tool, but it explains only so much about how people and markets behave. While a sophisticated knowledge of economic concepts is a desideratum for following the authors’ argument closely, many of their takeaways don’t require much expertise. “Never rely on data without asking ‘What is the source of this information?’” they counsel, helpfully, one of many dicta to help overcome the shadowy unknowns that elude us even with the benefit of hindsight, such as why recessions hit when they do.

A powerful way of looking at the market, of much use to investors and strategists.

**BROTHER & SISTER**
*A Memoir*
Keaton, Diane
Knopf (176 pp.)
$25.95 | Feb. 4, 2020
978-0-451-49450-4

In this melancholic addition to Keaton’s two previous works of memoir (*Let’s Just Say It Wasn’t Pretty*, 2014, etc.), she strives to understand her troubled younger brother.

Two poignant passages bookend the author’s brief account of her relationship with her brother, Randy Hall. In the first, she recalls the pair at 5 and 3, sharing a bedroom in their Southern California home, Keaton “glancing down from my top-bunk apartment in the sky and seeing Randy’s anxious bobbing head, his fear of the dark, and his sweet if hapless face….Why couldn’t he stop seeing ghosts lurking in shadows that weren’t there?” The second depicts the siblings, now in their 70s, sitting quietly as Keaton holds her ailing brother’s hand and strokes his hair during a visit to his nursing home. In between these moments of intimacy, Keaton admits to long periods of estrangement from her sensitive, self-destructive, alcoholic brother, who “took failure and went it the way Hester Pyrane wore her scarlet letter,” spending an isolated life writing, collaging, drinking, and existing by grace of the support—financial and otherwise—of his parents and sisters. While never completely free of worry or involvement, the author discloses that “while I was playing the firebrand Louise Bryant [in the film *Reds*], he’d attempted to gas himself in the garage….I told myself I didn’t have time to linger on my family’s problems, and certainly not Randy’s.” Keaton thoughtfully wrestles with her guilty conscience while attempting to assemble a clearer picture of her brother’s nature. To do so, she relies heavily on excerpts from his poems, prose, and letters and those of family members. Yet Hall—described variously as “a schizoid personality” by a doctor, an “Almost Artist” by Keaton, and a “genius” by his idealizing mother—remains inscrutable and difficult to sympathize with.

Keaton sheds her whimsical persona to explore difficult burdens that those with an unstable sibling will recognize. (16 pages of full-color photos. First printing of 125,000)

**WHEN IT WAS GRAND**
*The Radical Republican History of the Civil War*
Keith, LeeAnna
Hill and Wang/Farrar, Straus and Giroux (352 pp.)
$30.00 | Jan. 14, 2020
978-0-8090-8031-1

A history of the “greatest generation of American progressives,” the radical faction of the early Republican Party that initiated a “revolution in race relations” in the Civil War era.

In this well-researched, densely detailed account, Keith (The Colfax Massacre: The Untold Story of Black Power, White Terror, and the Death of Reconstruction, 2008), who teaches at New York’s Collegiate School for Boys, argues that a group of Republican politicians who sought to ensure civil equality and voting rights for all in the period from the mid-1850s to the end of Reconstruction were “the most courageous elected officials in our history.” Most notably, they included Pennsylvania congressman Thaddeus Stevens and Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner. Working with activists, ministers, and abolitionists, they initially opposed slavery by resisting the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, rescuing hundreds of escaped slaves and winning themselves scorn and imprisonment. The radicals’ efforts reflected both the “zeal” of abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison and the penchant for “giving their lives to the pursuit of justice” of transcendentalists Henry Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Other key players were the Rev. Theodore Parker, minister to Boston’s fugitive slaves, and industrialist George L. Stearns, a passionate anti-slavery advocate. The same radicals helped plan and fund John Brown’s 1859 raid on Harpers Ferry and later supported both confiscation of Rebel real estate and equal pay for white and black Union soldiers. Their actions, given “scant
recognition” in recent Civil War–related debates, “anticipated the postness” of Reconstruction, when they collaborated with black officeholders in the South. Keith also covers the question of slavery in the Kansas Territory, the conflicts between radical Republicans and the moderate Lincoln, the role of women’s suffrage activists, and the illuminated political parades of the anti-slavery Wide Awakes youth organization.

A deep scholarly look into a time when radicals in the Republican Party planted the roots for the civil rights movement. (16 pages of b/w illustrations; 4 maps)

THE DRAGONS AND THE SNAKES
How the Rest Learned To Fight the West
Kilcullen, David
Oxford Univ. (320 pp.)
$27.95 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-0-19-026568-7

An eye-opening look at the state of strategic balance between the United States and its rivals, large and small.

Drawing on his experience in counterinsurgency both as an adviser in Iraq and Afghanistan and as a consultant in counterterrorism measures, Kilcullen (Global Security/Arizona State Univ.; Blood Year: The Unraveling of Western Counterterrorism, 2016, etc.) provides lessons on how America’s rivals have adjusted their strategies to effectively take on the global superpower. After the quick and overwhelming victory in the 1991 Gulf War, it became obvious that no conventional military force stood a chance against the sort of power the U.S. could unleash on the battlefield. At the same time, the Cold War was ending, and with it the threat of nuclear Armageddon—or so it seemed. That did not mean an end to challenges to American power, and as the Vietnam War had shown, there was more than one way to fight. Kilcullen looks at the strategies used by several adversaries, from the Islamic State group and Hezbollah to Iran and North Korea, which have achieved various degrees of success. In many ways, the most provocative parts of the book are the author’s discussions of Russian “liminal warfare,” which deploys a large array of tactics, pushing the boundaries to just short of battle. Equally challenging is the Chinese doctrine of “conceptual expansion,” which expands competition to include not only trade and economic warfare, but ecological, regulatory, and media warfare—and perhaps even smuggling and other criminal activities, many of which are deniable. A running theme is the idea of evolutionary change, as nations and nonstate actors adapt to the “fitness landscape” they inhabit. As Kilcullen points out, America’s adversaries have adapted more quickly than the U.S., and the result may well be the end of the American empire. The author delivers a detailed and unsettling analysis of how America’s rivals have adapted to the modern strategic landscape—and how they hope to defeat us.

Essential reading for anyone concerned with America’s future on the world stage.

THE FIX
Overcome the Invisible Barriers That Are Holding Women Back at Work
King Michelle
Atria (320 pp.)
$27.00 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-9821-1092-5

A global expert on organizational diversity and inclusion explains how to create an equitable workplace.

King is head of the U.N. Women’s Global Innovation Coalition for Change and an advisory board member for Girl Up, a campaign by the United Nations Foundation that helps fund and support programs that focus on adolescent girls. She is also a keynote speaker, researcher, and writer as well as the host of a weekly podcast, The Fix, in which she shares ways men and women “can advance equality at work.” In her debut book, King challenges the notion of the ideal worker and condemns the success prototype common in traditional workplace environments. While the author acknowledges that strides have been made, she contends that organizations, often unknowingly, “operate in a way that marginalizes, excludes, or devalues women.” She also contends that many organizations do not value differences and that their “diversity and inclusion efforts” are often “aimed at fixing women” rather than creating a workplace that truly supports men and women equally. Backed by extensive research data and interviews with company and thought leaders, the book is divided into three primary sections. In Part I, King explores the history of the workplace and the challenges faced by both women and men in this conventional environment. In Part II, she identifies three career phases common for women and the “invisible barriers” that women typically face at each stage. In Part III, the author provides a call to action for employees and leaders to begin discussing these hidden barriers and implementing changes that create environments and cultures that support everyone in an organization. Throughout the book, King also calls out problems and identifies specific ways employees and leaders can begin fixing them. Although the text is particularly geared toward issues faced by women, the author rightly asserts that equality in the workplace will benefit everyone.

A common-sense guidebook for creating a workplace that values men and women equally.
HACKING PLANET EARTH
How Geoengineering Can Help Us Reimagine the Future
Kostigen, Thomas M.
TarcherPerigee (352 pp.)
$27.00 | Mar. 24, 2020
978-0-593-18754-8

An enthusiastic guide to reversing global warming.
As award-winning science journalist Kostigen (National Geographic Extreme Weather Survival Guide, 2014, etc.) points out, humans add 40 billion tons of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere every year, an amount that’s rising steadily despite current efforts to curb it. Since grassroots endeavors have not worked, the author proposes that “industry, the sector of society responsible for much of human-caused global warming…has to turn things around and lead the charge to help mend our climate.” Innovators—entrepreneurs, scientists, and technologists—must “do what they do best: invent, pioneer, disrupt the same old ways of doing things.” Traveling the world, Kostigen turns up individuals and organizations that are doing just that. A proposed giant laser will zap clouds, producing rain where it’s disappearing. Warming oceans produce more hurricanes, but ingenious machines can mix the hot surface and cool depths. Millions of artificial trees (invented 10 years ago) would soak up carbon dioxide as fast as it is being produced. By the halfway point, the author has turned from preventing global warming to proposing how humans might live in the future, whether hot or not. Kostigen provides plenty of intriguing accounts of underground cities, vertical farms, artificial meat, genetically modified food, and the quest to effectively turn sewage into drinking water. We are a problem-solving species, so, as conditions worsen, we will go into action—though much more should have already been accomplished—but many of Kostigen’s projects require spectacular technological advances, worldwide cooperation (to raise the trillions of dollars necessary), or the wisdom to avoid the disastrous side effects of tampering with nature that occurred followed previous tampering. Still, since self-denial has failed and national governments refuse to inconvenience carbon-producing industries—including the United States, even under Barack Obama)—many experts besides Kostigen are pinning their hopes on technology.

A highly optimistic, sincere account of those leading the charge to solve a grave problem that some still choose to ignore.

THE DREAM UNIVERSE
How Fundamental Physics Lost Its Way
Lindley, David
Doubleday (240 pp.)
$27.95 | Mar. 17, 2020
978-0-385-54385-9

A striking examination of an important scientific question: “What, exactly, are scholars of fundamental physics today trying to achieve?”
A former editor of Science and Nature, Lindley (Uncertainty: Einstein, Heisenberg, Bohr, and the Struggle for the Soul of Science, 2007, etc.) expressed unhappiness with his profession in The End of Physics (1993). Since then, matters have changed without actually improving, so he returns to the attack. He maintains that today’s theoreticians have reverted to a pre-modern way of thinking that harks back to the ancient Greeks, who are regarded, incorrectly, as the founders of modern science. Led by Plato, they belittled observation because human senses are imperfect. Greek thinkers believed that true knowledge required reason and logic. They also had a profound respect for mathematics, which they did not consider a useful tool but a source of deep insights. “Fundamental physics has [become] a version of philosophy…one that shares with other areas of philosophical inquiry an endless capacity to ask deep questions and an impressive inability ever to answer them.” Lindley makes his case through a fine capsule history of physical science with an emphasis on Galileo, in the opinion of many the first modern scientist. Galileo looked around, wondered about phenomena (do heavy things fall faster than light things?), performed experiments, and calculated. He produced groundbreaking discoveries, as did his followers, from Newton to Maxwell to Einstein to the founders of quantum mechanics. Lindley believes that physics peaked in the 1970s with the development of the standard model, an excellent if imperfect explanation of fundamental particles and forces. Since then, he adds, researchers have attacked still unexplained problems (dark matter, dark energy) with complex mathematics-based systems (supersymmetry, string theory), some of whose predictions are untestable. He joins a minority of colleagues who complain that a 30-year obsession with pure mathematics has reached a dead end, although the physics establishment remains convinced that deep insights are just around the corner. This scientific polemic deserves mention alongside Sabine Hossenfelder’s Lost in Math (2018).

A delightful addition to a widespread, ongoing scientific debate.
A BLISSFUL FEAST
Culinary Adventures in Italy’s Piedmont, Maremma, and Le Marche
Lust, Teresa
Pegasus (304 pp.)  
$27.95 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-64313-330-0

A combination of a culinary travel adventure and a search for the author’s Italian family’s home cooking.

In a knowledgeable, robust narrative that emphasizes proud traditions, Lust (Italian/Dartmouth Coll.; Pass the Polenta: And Other Writings From the Kitchen, 1998) chronicles her trips of discovery to Italy’s backcountry. After years working in a New England restaurant, she headed for Rocca Canavese in the Piedmont, where a sumptuous meal by her mother’s cousin proved to be inspirational. In early chapters, the author details specific dishes from that menu, including gnocchi, braised rabbit, stewed turnips, bagna cauda (a fondue-like dish with garlic and anchovies), and trout baked in parchment. Gastronomic history and the lore behind certain dishes intertwine with memories of the author’s relatives. She also describes her stateside quest to re-create rustic flavors, which highlights the differences in food culture between Italy and the U.S.—e.g., in America, rabbit never took hold as a staple. The many included recipes feature fresh ingredients and minimal steps, with helpful suggestions for substitutions. In the middle section of the book, Lust takes readers to the coastal area of Maremma, where she immersed herself in language study. “To make myself at home at the Italian table would require real fluency,” she writes. Throughout the book, Lust emerges as both an observer and apprentice, and her journey toward an authentic, down-to-earth cuisine is sincere rather than pretentious. Beloved regional dishes and lessons from a skillful hostess make clear the seasonality and intuitive approach of Italian cookery. The final section, set in Le Marche, focuses on foraging, with a dense botanical appreciation that is sometimes dry but reflects Lust’s farm-to-table ethos. A mildly humorous essay on the effects of eating asparagus offers a few curious historical references, but its place in the collection is tangential. For foodies, Lust hits all the right notes; she demonstrates abundant love and respect for the food and the people dedicated to making it right.

An exploratory, celebratory memoir that elevates family repasts. (16 pages of color photos)

THE INCREDIBLE JOURNEY OF PLANTS
Mancuso, Stefano
Illus. by Fischer, Grisha
Trans. by Conti, Gregory
Other Press (176 pp.)  
$24.99 | Mar. 17, 2020
978-1-63542-991-6

A neurobiologist reveals the interconnectedness of the natural world through stories of plant migration.

In this slim but well-packed book, Mancuso (Plant Science/Univ. of Florence; The Revolutionary Genius of Plants: A New Understanding of Plant Intelligence and Behavior, 2018, etc.) presents an illuminating and surprisingly lively study of plant life. He smoothly balances expansive historical exploration with recent scientific research through stories of how various plant species are capable of migrating to locations throughout the world by means of air, water, and even via animals. They often continue to thrive in spite of dire obstacles and environments. One example is the response of plants following the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. Three decades later, the abandoned “Exclusion Zone” is now entirely covered by an enormous assortment of thriving plants. Mancuso also tracks the journeys of several species that might be regarded as invasive. “Why…do we insist on labeling as ‘invasive’ all those plants that, with great success, have managed to occupy new territories?” asks the author. “On a closer look, the invasive plants of today are the native flora of the future, just as the invasive species of the past are a fundamental part of our ecosystem today.” Throughout, Mancuso persuasively articulates why an understanding and appreciation of how nature is interconnected is vital to the future of our planet. “In nature everything is connected,” he writes. “This simple law that humans don’t seem to understand has a corollary: the extinction of a species, besides being a calamity in and of itself, has unforeseeable consequences for the system to which the species belongs.” The book is not without flaws. The loosely imagined watercolor renderings are vague and fail to effectively complement Mancuso’s richly descriptive prose or satisfy readers’ curiosity. Even without actual photos and maps, it would have been beneficial to readers to include more finely detailed plant and map renderings.

An authoritative, engaging study of plant life, accessible to younger readers as well as adults.
An outstanding life of an impressive scientist.

**WHAT STARS ARE MADE OF**

**ISLAMIC EMPIRES**
*The Cities That Shaped Civilization: From Mecca to Dubai*

Marozzi, Justin
Pegasus (512 pp.)
$35.00 | Feb. 4, 2020
978-1-64313-306-5

A British scholar and journalist journeys through a complicated history of Islam via the major Muslim cities throughout the ages, from Mecca to Constantinople to Doha. Former *Financial Times* and *Economist* foreign correspondent Marozzi (*Baghdad: City of Peace, City of Blood*, 2014, etc.) fashions a skillful overview of the important seats of Muslim power while resisting narratives of “faith and fable” in the process. This is especially difficult regarding the earliest capital of Mecca, “mother of all cities,” much excoriated by the first chroniclers after the Prophet Mohammed died in 632; it was a recalcitrant city of trade essentially taken by the prophet and forced to convert to the new faith. This military struggle formed the pattern for much of Islam’s history over the following centuries as Mohammed, according to Marozzi, was sanctioned by the Quran to conquer. “Reaping the spoils of war was not just a pleasant consequence of victory in battle,” writes the author. “Having received divine sanction in the Quran, it was far more important than that.” The momentum of the conquerors took them into Damascus, “the perfumed city” that “has always soared high in Arab affections.” Subsequently, Marozzi moves from century to century into Córdoba, Jerusalem, Cairo, Fez, Samarkand, Constantinople, Kabul, Isfahan, Tripoli, Beirut, Dubai, and Doha. While the author stresses that this is a personal selection of 15 cities, he notes that he kept in mind what Herodotus saw as the importance of focusing on “great and marvelous deeds”—and each of these cities certainly witnessed their fair share of those. In the modern age, Marozzi covers the Taliban takeover of Kabul (and the terrible changes wrought by decades of war) and the astonishing urban transformations of the once-provincial cities of Dubai and Doha. The author is fair in his assessment of these significant cities and what they have meant to Islam as a whole, and his enthusiasm is infectious.

*A rich foray into the history of Islam and the emergence of key cities as capitals of commerce, culture, and conquest. (16 pages of color photos; maps)*

**WHAT STARS ARE MADE OF**
*The Life of Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin*

Moore, Donovan
Harvard Univ (304 pp.)
$29.95 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-0-674-23737-7

A fine biography of perhaps the greatest astronomer of the past century that no one has heard of. Journalist Moore’s subject is Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin (1900-1979), the eldest of three in a middle-class British family and clearly a prodigy, fascinated by natural history and science. Her father, who encouraged her pursuits, died when she was young, leaving the family short of money and with a mother of traditional, conservative views. As the author writes, she believed that “boys were to be educated, girls refined.” Despite favoring her son, she did not discourage Cecilia, who was lucky to encounter teachers who recognized her talents. Winning a scholarship, she studied physics at Cambridge until, inspired by a talk from the renowned Arthur Eddington, she changed to astronomy. She earned no degree because Cambridge did not give women degrees until 1948. Her teachers admitted that she had no future as an astronomer in Britain, so she went to Harvard to work under the charismatic Harlow Shapley, who was known for hiring women. Assigned to analyze the massive collection of photographic plates in observatory archives, Payne-Gaposchkin determined that helium was thousands of times more abundant and hydrogen millions of times more abundant in stars than on Earth. The discovery, presented in her 1925 doctoral thesis, was greeted skeptically but soon found to be correct. One scientist called it “the most brilliant thesis ever written in astronomy.” Although Payne-Gaposchkin enjoyed an international reputation by the 1930s, Harvard’s catalog did not list her extremely popular classes until 1945. Appointed the first woman full professor in its faculty of arts and sciences in 1956, she became chair of the department of astronomy and died with many honors. Readers will gnash their teeth as Moore recounts the discrimination she endured. This annoyed Payne-Gaposchkin, but astronomy was her obsession, so she rarely made a fuss, and male astronomers, once they realized her brilliance, mostly treated her well.

*An outstanding life of an impressive scientist. (58 photos)*
MISS ALUMINUM
A Memoir
Moore, Susanna
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (288 pp.)
$27.00 | Apr. 14, 2020
978-0-374-27971-4

A novelist’s engaging coming-of-age memoir.

In her novel *Sleeping Beauties* (1993), Moore (Creative Writing/Princeton Univ.; *Paradise of the Pacific: Approaching Hawaii*, 2015, etc.) spun a dark fairy tale complete with a wicked stepmother and handsome prince who turns out, sadly, not to be charming. Here, she evokes that work of fiction: an account of her life, adventures, and misadventures, from childhood to her 30s. Once again, there is a cruel stepmother, a woman her father quickly married after Moore’s mother, who had suffered several mental breakdowns, died in her sleep; a hardscrabble young adulthood when Moore, at 17, was sent from her native Hawaii to live with her grandmother and aunt in Pennsylvania; beneficent godmothers; handsome lovers; and fabulous clothes. Moore’s stepmother resented Moore and her siblings, rationed their food, and deprived them of simple childhood pleasures. To escape her repressive home, Moore slipped away to visit a neighboring couple, the extremely wealthy and influential Kaisers: he, the famous shipbuilder; she, his beautiful younger wife, who bestowed on Moore castoff designer clothes, furs, and shoes. The Kaisers’ connections opened doors for the author: a job at Bergdorf’s; modeling, including at a boat trade show, where she wore a glittering silver sheath as Miss Aluminum; and minor roles in movies. With no aspirations to be an actor, Moore takes a wry, clear-eyed view of the movie world’s pretensions. Like the Kaisers, Connie Wald, the glamorous widow of producer Jerry Wald, proved to be another benefactor, launching Moore into a world of literary, artistic, and entertainment royalty: Joan Didion, Audrey Hepburn, Elizabeth Taylor, Mike Nichols, and Jack Nicholson (with whom Moore had a brief fling), among many others. Moore portrays herself as “self-invented...a girl on the run,” buffeted by life, “high-spirited” but always in need of emotional and financial protection and constantly afflicted by a “ceaseless longing for my mother.” By her 30s, she stood on firmer ground: divorced, mother to an infant daughter, newly confident about shaping her future.

A captivating portrait of a woman in search of herself. (41 b/w illustrations)

MEANING A LIFE
An Autobiography
Oppen, Mary
New Directions (304 pp.)
$18.95 paper | Apr. 1, 2020
978-0-8112-2947-0

An expanded edition of a 1978 memoir about poetry and one’s purpose in midcentury America.

Originally published by Black Sparrow Press and now saved from obscurity, this sonorous autobiography (and only prose publication) from painter and poet Oppen (*Poems & Transpositions*, 1980, etc.) chronicles the lives of two literary soul mates. Born in 1908 in Kalispell, Montana, the author grew up with a desire not only to leave her rural lifestyle but to pursue a lifelong conversation, learning “as much as we are able of the universe we are part of.” She went to Oregon State University, where she met her future husband, George; although she was expelled after their first date for breaking curfew, their bond was cast. “Our joined lives,” she recalls, “seem[ed] to us both choice and inevitability.” Oppen’s narrative shifts seamlessly into a collective memoir as she chronicles the couple’s travels from San Francisco to New York, Paris, and Mexico, tested on their way by the hardships of World War II. Of their many travels, Oppen quotes Sherwood Anderson: “we wanted to know if we were any good out there.” Although George won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1969, Mary’s memoir is by no means in his shadow; their love and intellectual union is rhapsodically mutual and an inspiring achievement to behold. Midcentury poetry aficionados will enjoy another layer: George was part of the “objectivist” poetry movement, and Charles Reznikoff and Louis Zukofsky appear throughout the Oppens’ travels. While these poets challenged the conceptual side of their craft, Mary looked to the entire literary canon for her voice. On Virginia Woolf, she writes, “Virginia herself found in her writing what life meant to her, and reading her works I found a little more of what life meant to me.” The author divined meaning and guidance from the literary lives around her and channeled those forces into a passionate memoir that will continue to resound with readers even decades after its publication.

Inspiring recollections of love, literature, and a search for meaning. (b/w photos)
In November 2017, a three-day conference at Oberlin College on “The State of American Democracy” inspired subsequent conversations among participants about how to restore “the promise of democracy” after the stunning election of 2016. Orr (Emeritus, Environmental Studies and Politics/Oberlin Coll.; Dangerous Years: Climate Change and the Long Emergency, 2016, etc.), investigative reporter Gumbel, journalist Kitwana, and Becker, Executive Director of the Presidential Climate Action Project, have gathered cogent, informative essays intended, as Orr writes, “to clarify the historic and institutional origins of the election of 2016 and the growing risk that we are coming unmoored from our history and our highest values.”

This risk, the contributors agree, has intensified under the Trump administration, characterized by “mendacity, incompetence, venality, malice” and staffed by “the worst, least qualified, and most unscrupulous” appointees. Jeremi Suri, a professor of global affairs, asserts that Trump, in exploiting citizens’ alienation from government, forces Americans “to rethink the contours of democratic leadership” and portends the viability of “a smaller and humbler presidency, one focused on fewer promises and tethered more closely to ethical limitations.” Environmen,"talus activist Judy Braus repeats a call for greater civics and history education in schools to “equip students to become full-fledged citizens, to make decisions”—as a result of hospitalization. In this well-researched, engaging, and highly readable text, the author demystifies depression and calls for “compassionate, equitable [and] informed” care for what has become “the most fatal psychiatric phenomenon we’re up against.”

An uplifting historical account of humanitarianism with lessons in this increasingly isolationist time.

**VOYAGE OF MERCY**

**AS NEEDED FOR PAIN**
*A Memoir of Addiction*

Peres, Dan
HarperCollins (256 pp.)
$28.99 | Feb. 11, 2020
978-0-06-269346-4

A memoir from a prominent journalist who was addicted to opiates.

Peres, the former editor-in-chief of Details magazine, makes his debut as a memoirist with an unflinching account of addiction and hard-won recovery. The author was prescribed Vicodin after a back injury and two surgeries, and he recalls how it made his whole body “warm and relaxed. I felt like I’d been wrapped in an electric blanket.” After the back pain subsided, he stopped taking the pills, until one evening, getting ready for bed, he impulsively decided that swallowing a few would help him relax. It was, for Peres, a critical moment. Within a year, he was taking 15 pills four times per day. Soon, he lost count of how many he needed: 16, 18, 21 at a time, multiple times daily; and he graduated to the stronger opiate Roxicodone. “I was feeding a beast and it was always hungry,” he admits. To keep up the supply needed to avoid “the hell of withdrawal,” he went to different doctors, feigning severe back pain. “I knew the names of the doctors listed in the pain management section of the phone book the way some men know the starting lineups of the hometown baseball teams from their youth,” he writes. Peres avoided those who wanted to send him for physical therapy, but he agreed to get X-rays or MRIs; after all, he had surgical scars. His back pain was believable. With addiction narratives forming an autobiographical subgenre, Peres’ memoir is in many ways predictable: his obsession with what he calls his “pharmaceutical ambitions”; his ability to function at work despite arriving late, napping during the day, and constantly rescheduling appointments; the shocking ease of finding compliant doctors; his pushing away of family and friends. The author alludes to—but doesn’t examine—several personal problems that possibly fueled his addiction: depression, insomnia, and “crippling insecurity” that made him hungry for validation. He eventually kicked his habit, and readers will hope his resolve lasts.

A frank revelation about the all-consuming power of addiction.

**VOYAGE OF MERCY**
*The USS Jamestown, the Irish Famine, and the Remarkable Story of America’s First Humanitarian Mission*

Puleo, Stephen
St. Martin’s (336 pp.)
$28.99 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-250-20047-1

A historian focuses on a remarkable event in 1847 to illuminate a broader discussion about U.S. aid to other nations.

In his latest narrative history, Puleo (*American Treasures: The Secret Efforts To Save the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Gettysburg Address*, 2016, etc.) begins in Ireland. As a famine caused by failed potato crops led to countless deaths, diseases, homelessness, and desperate measures to leave the country, American officials and other citizens were captivated by the plight of the Irish. However, at this time, the U.S. government had never become involved in what today would be termed “foreign aid.” Furthermore, the logistics of how to gather money and food and how to transport the donations to Ireland were daunting—but not insurmountable. Puleo includes many exemplary individuals within the narrative, but there is one clear hero: ship captain Robert Bennet Forbes, an experienced seafarer who was inspired to do what he could to ameliorate the death and pestilence destroying Ireland. Throughout, the author portrays Forbes as unselfish in his motives, a man seemingly without ego. There is no doubting Forbes’ heroism, as he left his family to risk his life to serve as captain of the USS Jamestown, a refurbished warship filled with lifesaving foodstuffs. The voyage from the Boston port to the Irish coast involved more than two weeks of rough waters and other perils. As Puleo shifts the focus periodically to Ireland, he writes about Theobald Mathew, a minister who tried to maintain hope among a dying populace while pleading with authorities in England to demonstrate compassion. While the narrative thread of English-Irish hostility could be a book on its own, the author effectively shows how “the events of 1847 have served as the blueprint and inspiration for hundreds of American charitable relief efforts since, philanthropic endeavors that have established the United States as the leader in international aid in total dollars.”

An uplifting historical account of humanitarianism with lessons in this increasingly isolationist time.
suffering endured by immigrants around the world and the bravery of those honored few who stand up to tyranny. “I want to do more than showcase a singular journey,” Randall writes. “None of us are separate.” The author’s compassion for her fellow humans is always on display, but this is a cinematic story infused with Randall’s intellectual spirit. Born in New York City, Randall found her way around the world, interacting with other writers and artists, raising children, and fighting the good fight in Spain, Mexico, Cuba, and Nicaragua. Though the narrative contains numerous luminaries—Alan Ginsberg, Alice Walker, Arthur Miller, among others—Randall is uninterested in name-dropping. Where the book gets most interesting—and relevant to today—is when the author describes how she was deported in 1984 because “the government claimed that my writing went beyond the good order and happiness of the United States.” She didn’t win her case until 1989, with the assistance of numerous writers, including Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Kurt Vonnegut, Gray Paley, Carlos Fuentes, and Norman Mailer. “The use of immigration law as a political weapon continues,” writes the author. “Only its victims have changed.”

A striking remembrance by an intellectual whose radical, fierce nature is unflappable. (30 illustrations)

THE MYTH OF CHINESE CAPITALISM
The Worker, the Factory, and the Future of the World

Roberts, Dexter
St. Martin’s (288 pp.)
$28.99 | Mar. 10, 2020
978-1-250-08937-3

A gimlet-eyed look at an economic miracle that may not be so miraculous after all.

China’s economic transformation since the death of Mao Zedong may be impressive. However, writes Roberts, who was a Beijing-based economics and business reporter for more than 20 years, it is incomplete, and inequality reigns. One element has been the termination of the agricultural communes of old in favor of private ownership of land, but in many instances, the effect was that farmers gave up their plots in order to move to the city and its greater opportunities. The government’s response, belatedly, was to impose controls on internal migration, meaning, in effect, that many Chinese were “illegal aliens” in their own country. Now that many farmers have left the city and returned to the countryside, it has “become apparent how the cities and their urban residents had depended on them as restaurant cooks, waiters, and dishwashers, delivery people, drivers of Didi Chuxing (China’s version of Uber), proprietors of small shops and hairdressers, and household cleaners and nannies.” At issue is how those millions of people will make a living back home; so, too, is how money is distributed in China’s evolving financial system. Most credit is extended to state-owned enterprises, Roberts writes, crowding out private entrepreneurs. Indeed, even though government policy remains a variant on the “it’s a good thing to grow rich” slogans of old, self-employment is increasingly difficult, and the Chinese version of the “gig economy” seems to be rapidly fading. Deng Xiaoping’s version of trickle-down economics, with residents of the coasts becoming prosperous first and then people in the distant interiors following suit afterward, has not worked, either. The author concludes by noting that while the Chinese government has been able to take credit for the comparative economic successes of the past few decades, it is also vulnerable to attack “for misrule when living standards deteriorate,” to which the inevitable response will be more repression, not more economic freedom.

Of much interest to students of international trade, geopolitical strategy, and global economic trends. (8-page b/w photo insert; map)

THE LIFE OF WILLIAM FAULKNER
Volume 1, The Past Is Never Dead, 1897-1934

Rollyson, Carl
Univ. of Virginia (512 pp.)
$34.95 | Mar. 24, 2020
978-0-8139-4382-4

A deeply detailed account of the 1949 Nobel laureate’s early life and work.

In this first of two projected volumes, Rollyson (Emeritus, Journalism and Creative Writing/Baruch Coll., CUNY; Understanding Susan Sontag, 2016, etc.) returns with a thick volume that accomplishes several objectives. It rehearses the details of Faulkner’s family history in Mississippi; examines many intriguing aspects of his early life (romances, drinking, difficulties making enough money, determination to write, public and private manner, friendships and professional associations); and assesses in great detail the major works he published during this time, The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, and Sanctuary among them. The author also deals frankly with some questions of Faulkner’s character, including his fabrications about his flying experiences (he underwent pilot training for World War I but did not go because the war ended before he could) and his evolving attitudes about race. Near the end of this volume, Rollyson examines Faulkner’s early experiences as a screenwriter in Hollywood, including analyses of the treatments and scripts he worked on—and how these would affect his subsequent fiction. Throughout, the author, an expert biographer, delivers arresting details and telling images from his subject’s life: Faulkner got a D in English at the University of Mississippi; he liked Charlie Chaplin movies and somewhat resembled the cinema star, As I Lay Dying appeared less than a year after he commenced writing it. Faulkner idolized Sherlock Anderson; though they became friends, their friendship eventually fractured. In Hollywood, Faulkner drank with Howard Hawks, and his literary friendships included Lillian Hellman (the subject of a previous Rollyson biography), Dashiell Hammett, and Nathanael West. The author’s underlying research is
Being attentive is an acquired skill. Schwartz helps us think deeply and clearly about what it offers us.

ATTENTION

prodigious, and he does not hesitate to correct earlier biographers. General readers will find some of the book a bit daunting—especially the lengthy exegeses of literary works—but this is a top-notch biography nonetheless.

A filling, satisfying feast for Faulkner aficionados.

AMERICAN REBELS
How the Hancock, Adams, and Quincy Families Fanned the Flames of Revolution
Sankovitch, Nina
St. Martin's (416 pp.)
$29.99 | Mar. 24, 2020
978-1-250-16328-8

A look at the road to the American Revolution from the perspectives of five patriots.

On July 2, 1776, the Second Continental Congress, presided over by John Hancock, declared independence from Britain, prompting delegate John Adams to write to his wife, Abigail, that the “Second Day of July 1776, will be the most memorable Epocha, in the History of America.” This moment provides a fitting conclusion to this book, in which Sankovitch (The Livelys of Massachusetts: An American Family, 2017, etc.) argues that Hancock, the Adamses, Josiah Quincy Jr., and Dorothy Quincy Hancock together “led the fight for liberty” that culminated in the Revolution. John Hancock, John Adams, and Edmund and Samuel Quincy were childhood companions, the “Boys from Braintree” who attended Harvard together. In the years following the French and Indian War, Hancock, Adams, and Josiah often collaborated in response to British Colonial policies. Hancock and Quincy worked on an official protest against the Stamp Act, Adams was Hancock’s defense counsel in the Liberty case, and Hancock and Quincy helped organize the Boston Tea Party. Sankovitch persuasively claims the importance of the somewhat forgotten Josiah, a brilliant lawyer who succumbed to tuberculosis in April 1775 at the age of 31. She is less convincing in asserting the significance of Abigail Smith Adams and Dorothy Quincy Hancock. The author also commits too many factual errors: The Puritans were not separatists. Thomas Hutchinson was not the governor of the Province of Massachusetts Bay in August 1765. The committee charged with writing the Declaration of Independence consisted of five men, not six. John Adams was elected president in 1796, not 1797. Sankovitch also contradicts herself when she notes that Abigail Adams anticipated war with Britain (“inevitable, in her view”) after the Boston Tea Party only to write that she and others thought war was “still unthinkable” after that event.

An occasionally enlightening study hampered by the author’s missteps. (maps)

ATTENTION
A Love Story
Schwartz, Casey
Pantheon (240 pp.)
$26.95 | Apr. 7, 2020
978-1-5247-4710-7

A personal and professional study of the struggle with attention in an age of distraction.

After recounting her decadelong addiction to Adderall, journalist Schwartz (In the Mind Fields: Exploring the New Science of Neuropsychology, 2015) goes in search of attention in all its rather elusive manifestations, investigating its power to define a human life. In the process, she began to realize that the way all of us pay attention in this technological era had changed. Splintered attention and perpetual interruption are the norm. A frequent contributor to the New York Times, Schwartz asks questions of singular significance: “Why are we so susceptible to all the escape routes our technologies offer us in the first place? What are we fleeing?” With a critical and open mind, the author assesses the works of such disparate writers as David Foster Wallace, Simone Weil, William James, and Aldous Huxley, and she applies no less rigor to exploring attention with such avatars of expanded consciousness as Stanislav Grof and Gabor Maté. Schwartz writes that the chief ingredients of attention are curiosity and joy and that attention is not only about having a meaningful life, but being in the moment, deriving pleasure and her journey, she enhances the book’s potency without diluting its authority. While techno-distractedness is not the sole province of the young, those who have known no other reality in their brief lives would seem to be most susceptible to the allure of Silicon Valley’s steady stream of creations, each designed to be irresistible. Even though the author has “yet to enroll in a digital detox,” she points the way toward “helpful digital minimalism strategies.”

Being attentive is an acquired skill. Schwartz helps us think deeply and clearly about what it offers us.

THE VELVET ROPE ECONOMY
How Inequality Became Big Business
Schwartz, Nelson D.
Doubleday (352 pp.)
$27.95 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-0-38-554308-8

New York Times reporter Schwartz uses what he has learned covering business and economics to present an intriguing examination of income inequality.
The velvet rope metaphor will be familiar to any reader who has felt the sting of waiting in line while more privileged individuals gain entrance to a theater or night club or amusement park ride. "The rise of the Velvet Rope Economy," writes the author, "threatens to worsen the divisiveness that plagues our politics and culture today. After all, if you never actually encounter people from a different class or social background, it's much easier to demonize them." In the first section of the book, Schwartz focuses on the privileged portion of the U.S. population, those men and women who can spend money to realize privileges that the majority of Americans could only dream about. The author's chapter titles consist of just one word each, but those words speak volumes—e.g., "Envy," "Exclusivity," "Ease," "Access," and "Security." The second section of the book, "Outside the Velvet Rope," examines those individuals left behind, including those who used to be considered "middle class" in terms of income. While Schwartz expresses dismay about how so many owners of the businesses offering these discriminatory services seem to lack a moral compass—a sentiment that will resonate with nonwealthy readers—he does understand that the profit motive driving expensive privilege is unlikely to disappear in this ultracapitalist nation. Refreshingly, the author also discusses businesses that treat individuals of all income levels more or less equally, including Southwest Airlines, Starbucks, Best Buy, Target, and the Green Bay Packers NFL franchise, which is publicly held. Schwartz opens the book with a Bob Dylan lyric: "Money doesn't talk, it swears." Some readers may swear at the compelling yet maddening examples the author uses to illuminate the privileges reserved for the ultrawealthy. While Schwartz doesn't offer many solutions, his description of the problem is well rendered.

An original entry in the growing literature on income inequality.

SHAKESPEARE IN A DIVIDED AMERICA
What His Plays Tell Us About Our Past and Future
Shapiro, James
Penguin Press (320 pp.)
$27.00 | Mar. 10, 2020
978-0-525-52229-4

How the Bard has played in America over the centuries.

Shakespearean scholar Shapiro (English and Comparative Literature/Columbia Univ.; The Year of Lear: Shakespeare in 1606, 2015, etc.) admits that "it was the election of Donald Trump in 2016 that convinced me to write about Shakespeare in a divided America." Impeccably researched, the book focuses on how key figures in American history have experienced Shakespeare. Each chapter revolves around a play or two and what was happening socially and politically. Shapiro sets the stage with a discussion of the controversial Central Park production of Julius Caesar a month after the election. The assassination of Caesar by Brutus was seen by some as an attack on the president. The play, writes the author, "spoke directly to the political vertigo many Americans were experiencing." Shapiro begins exploring that vertigo in 1833, focusing on slavery, miscegenation, Othello, the celebrated English actress Fanny Kemble, and former president John Quincy Adams' disdain for a play about a black man and a white woman. After discussions of "Manifest Destiny" (Romeo and Juliet) and "Class Warfare" (Macbeth), one of Shapiro's best chapters explores the juxtaposition between Abraham Lincoln, who loved Shakespeare and could quote from the works at length, and actor John Wilkes Booth. Shapiro wonders if Booth's first-ever performance in Julius Caesar just months before Lincoln's reelection "fueled [his] violent intentions." Congressman Henry Cabot Lodge's 1916 description of The Tempest's Caliban as the "missing link" shows how Shakespeare would be "implicated in the story of American immigration." Front and center in "Marriage: 1948" is the story of The Taming of the Shrew and how it became Kiss Me, Kate, one of the "most enduring and successful American musicals." It was "staggering," Shapiro writes, "what [Cole] Porter got away with." Lastly, "Adultery and Same-Sex Love" weaves together Twelfth Night, playwright Tom Stoppard, and producer Harvey Weinstein's demand that Shakespeare in Love have a "happy ending.

A thought-provoking, captivating lesson in how literature and history intermingle. (Illustrations)

GERMANY
A Nation in Its Time:
Before, During, and After Nationalism, 1500-2000
Smith, Helmut Walser
Liveright/Norton (672 pp.)
$39.95 | Mar. 17, 2020
978-0-87140-466-4

A noted historian outlines the development of the German nation in novel ways.

Smith (History/Vanderbilt Univ.; German Nationalism and Religious Conflict: Culture, Ideology, Politics, 1870-1914, 2016, etc.) begins his account in 1500, when there was no Germany as such but instead a collection of cities and mostly small principalities: "No charts drew the German lands to scale and no drawings showed its borders. And no one had described Germany as a space with a recognizable shape." Modern cartography would change this, marking German itineraries and linking German-speaking cities into a "Germania" that "was an act of discovery, not chauvinism." However, chauvinism would soon follow: Martin Luther railed that the humanism of mapmakers and scholars had "Judaizing tendencies" that yielded too much to "the enemies of Christ." In time, nationalism would replace the former German devotion to hometowns, and it found expression in the depopulating Thirty Years' War, which took decades to recover from. On that note, Smith writes, although millions of Germans lost their lives during the Hitler years, recovery was swift—and although a majority of Germans believed, just
after the war ended, that national socialism was a meritorious system whose leaders had merely taken a few missteps, by the time the "economic miracle" was at work in full force, most conversely saw that Hitler had been ruinous. German nationalism today is a very different thing from its manifestations in the two centuries prior. Smith writes of a crowd of soccer fans cheering for their team against Portugal during the 2006 World Cup and finally feeling comfortable enough about being German to wave their national flag. Even though Germans are now resolute internationalists, Smith concludes, there are troubling rumblings of a reborn nationalism in opposition to the German government's comparatively open-door policy toward immigrants and refugees, so that "public discourse now seems increasingly rife with prejudice toward outsiders."

Fruitful reading for students of modern European history and the rise of nationalism. (80 b/w illustrations)

FRIDA IN AMERICA
The Creative Awakening of a Great Artist
Stahr, Celia
St. Martin's (400 pp.)
$29.99 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-250-11338-2

An art historian parses the famed artist's complicated psychological and emotional states while in America as a young wife and emerging artist in the early 1930s. Stahr (Modern American and Contemporary Art/Univ. of San Francisco) captures Frida Kahlo (1907-1954) in all her ambiguity at age 23, when she embarked on her first American tour with her new husband, famous muralist Diego Rivera. As the author shows, she moved into this uneasy public role while also passionately pursuing her own difficult work. Diminutive in stature and unwell due to an early bout of polio and a terrible car accident in her late teens, Kahlo, like Rivera, was deeply devoted to her Mexican identity as well as socialist ideals. These beliefs would both alienate their American patrons, as in Rivera's case, and attract the avant-garde, as in Kahlo's case in New York, where she had her first solo show in 1938. In 1930, visiting San Francisco for the first time, as Rivera painted his commission for the California School of Fine Arts, and then through their stints in Detroit and New York over the next three years, Kahlo devoured the strange sights and used her experiences to inspire her art. She made friends with women artists especially—e.g., Dorothea Lange, Lucienne Bloch, and Georgia O’Keeffe—experimented with her Indigenous (now iconic) wardrobe as she became a darling subject of photographers, grew embittered by her husband's serial infidelities, and had a devastating miscarriage. All of this served as fuel for her early groundbreaking portraits and self-portraits, which were full of symbolism and blood and gore. Stahr sees the emergent artist's powers explode in *My Birth*, an unsettling painting from 1932 that addressed Kahlo's miscarriage, the recent death of her mother, and her own self-creation. The author's deep study of Kahlo's symbolic layering is highly informative, though some of the detail may be overwhelming for readers not versed in art history.

The first major biography since Hayden Herrera's 1983 work presents the artist in all her ferocious complexity. (8-page color photo insert)

COMPETITION OVERDOSE
How Free Market Mythology Transformed Us From Citizen Kings to Market Servants
Stucke, Maurice E & Ezrachi, Ariel
Harper Business (448 pp.)
$32.50 | Mar. 17, 2020
978-0-06-289283-6

An exploration of how many of us feel “increasingly uneasy about the results of unbridled competition.”

In their latest collaboration, Stucke (Law/Univ. of Tennessee) and Ezrachi (Competition Law/Univ. of Oxford), who co-authored *Virtual Competition: The Promise and Perils of the Algorithm-Driven Economy* (2016, etc.), parse the theory of competition within a society, delineating how sometimes the positive aspects of competition—e.g., in choosing a college, on supermarket shelves, regarding hotel prices, etc.—can spiral downward, becoming a menace. Because competition has been sold for centuries as an unbridled positive, reading this book requires counterintuitive thinking and an open mind. Using a lucid, conversational style, the authors thoroughly explain each case study and anecdote. Does competition regularly result in a race to the bottom? Yes, the authors maintain, and they present ideas about how to achieve what they term “noble competition,” in which sellers, buyers, and society at large all benefit. One homespun example of noble competition can be found at local farmers markets, where, for example, a few local growers of tomatoes offer quality produce grown organically at reasonable prices. Each grower wants to earn the most cash on a given Saturday, but there is nothing destructive about the friendly competition. On the other hand, in one of the book’s most effective sections about negative competition, in which almost everybody loses, the authors examine big-time college football. Dollars that could have been allocated to improving academics on campus instead end up going toward exorbitant coaches’ salaries and luxury boxes for wealthy alumni. Consequently, colleges engage in an arms race to see who can provide the most impressive facilities or pay their coach the most. The authors also offer persuasive studies about how too much competition can lead to consumer paralysis, and they clearly demonstrate how advocates of untrammeled competition successfully lobby against government regulation, thus causing harm to the general citizenry.

Useful reading for business owners and attentive consumers. (first printing of 25,000)

The first major biography since Hayden Herrera’s 1983 work presents the artist in all her ferocious complexity.
The 88-year-old author offers an honest take on what old age is really like.

In her latest, anthropologist Thomas (The Hidden Life of Life: A Walk Through the Reaches of Time, 2018, etc.) turns her curiosity about all things natural toward a subject that many choose to ignore, willfully or not: "Why write a book about old age? Nobody wants it. Nobody likes it." However, she writes, "the aging process is an essential part of the human story, and it’s not for the faint-hearted. It’s as strange as it is captivating—a venture to the unknown." In a plainspoken narrative, the author covers a variety of topics, including gravesites and cemeteries, the pros and cons of cremation and burial, the physical changes her body has gone through during her long life, independent living, assisted living, home health aides, and the benefits and pitfalls of living alone, as Thomas does on a farm in New Hampshire. The author encourages everyone, old and young, to properly prepare for death and to leave your final wishes in written form so they can be carried out efficiently. With each age-related topic, Thomas writes candidly and with occasional dark humor, sharing both the good and the bad, which includes such expected ills as memory loss and the slow decline of her physical abilities. Given her experiences, the author is insightful—if not groundbreaking—on most topics. In some of her more meandering prose, Thomas shares snippets of information about her previous adventures, which might lead readers to search out her other books. In this one, the author provides readable, forthright discussions of aging that will resonate most with older readers. Though not earth-shattering in any way, the narrative shows all readers that "death is the price we pay for life."

A straightforward and sometimes humorous analysis of the pros and cons of old age.

A distinguished essayist, poet, and professor reflects on a life lived in a female body living in “a constellation of bodies” called a family. Wade depicts herself as a girl who loved the beauty of actresses like Grace Kelly and Marilyn Monroe but whose own body did not fit the conventional mold of feminine desirability. Like a scientist, she wrote about the imperfect bodies of those around her in journal entries that looked like “inventories” rather than personal reflections. In the second essay, the author examines the differences that sometimes made her feel like a “monster in your own closet.” An only child who took comfort in an imaginary sister/friend, Wade developed secret affections for two females: a female teacher and a camp counselor. At the same time, she writes, “I have also failed to love someone I was expected to love—my first boyfriend.” In the third and fourth essays, the author remembers adolescence as a time of growing awareness about the consequences of being female in a patriarchal society. While her parents warned her about the dangers of sex, she learned how to engage in heterosexual courting rituals that would lead to marriage and motherhood. Yet at the all-girls Catholic schools she attended that taught her to appreciate everything from religious difference (she was Protestant) to the “poetry [of] math,” she also learned about the power women had to be autonomous beings. In the fifth section, Wade intermingles episodes from her early life with those that tell the story of her final, joyful acceptance of the lesbianism she had suppressed with a witty series of quasi-mathematical equations and philosophical propositions. Intelligent and lyrical, the narrative mingles often comic musings on female embodiment with insightful observations about the meaning of love and self-acceptance.

A sharp, innovative text.

An educator recalls his struggle to define true learning.

In a candid, often bitter memoir, Wagner (Creating Innovators: The Making of Young People Who Will Change the World, 2012, etc.), a senior research fellow at the Learning Policy Institute and former high school teacher, principal, and professor of teacher education, offers a harsh critique of schooling—traditional and nontraditional—that he claims quashes students’ love of learning. Most of his schooling was stultifying: He felt like an “outlier” at the small, coeducational, private elementary school that he attended; an all-boys middle school was worse. Disaffected and defiant, he earned such bad grades that he was not invited back for high school. Instead, his parents sent him to a boarding school where one frustrated teacher shouted at him, “you’re always gonna be a fuckup,” an admonition that haunted him throughout his life. Wagner’s demanding, unsympathetic
parents tried yet another school—“a ‘last chance’ school,” he
soon discovered—where a kind English teacher encouraged
his creative writing ability. Overall, though, his teachers were
unable “to help me make sense of myself and the world around
me.” After dropping out of two colleges, Wagner found the
Friends World Institute, which allowed students to travel the
world to study social issues. That pedagogy reminded him of
Summerhill, an experimental learning environment where
children followed their interests without restrictive require-
ments or formal classes. Friends World endorsed Wagner’s
independent program to examine education that “supported
individual’s strivings for growth and self-development.” The
author reached the epiphany that “having an interest wasn’t
enough. You also have to develop the muscles of self-discipline
and concentration needed to pursue your interest and deepen
your knowledge and understanding.” Graduate study proved as
disappointing as earlier educational experiences, and he deems
the classes he took at the Harvard Graduate School of Educa-
tion “a complete waste of time.” As a teacher and administrator,
deep his good intentions, Wagner suffered failures, which he
blames on overconfidence and teacher resistance; eventually,
he joined and led several educational reform projects.

A combative tone informs a forthright argument for
the importance of sparking students’ motivation.

THE KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS
An Illustrated History
Walther, Andrew T. & Walther, Maureen H.
SquareOne Publishers (288 pp.)
$34.95 | Mar. 9, 2020
978-0-7570-0308-0

A richly illustrated and entertaining
history of the Knights of Columbus.
Andrew Walther, the Knights’ vice
president for communications and
strategic planning, and Maureen Walther, who worked for the
CEO for 10 years, begin with an overview of anti-Catholic
sentiments in the United States, which led to Father Michael
Joseph McGivney’s founding of an organization of Catholic
men in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1882. The group eventually
became the Knights of Columbus, taking as its namesake Chris-
topher Columbus and focusing on such concepts as charity,
fraternity, and patriotism. The authors explain that the Knights
expanded quickly and acted as a major force for Catholic pride
and unity in the face of bigoted actions by the Ku Klux Klan
and anti-Catholic voices in society at large. The Knights took
an active role in serving the military during World War I and
in fighting poverty during the Great Depression, cementing
their place in American society. As the Walthers guide readers
through the religiously active 1950s and ’60s, the challenges
to religious life of the later 20th century, and the global perspec-
tive of recent years, they focus not only on the inner workings
of the Knights and their mission, but also on their interaction
with the wider church and society, including popes and presidents.
The authors enrich the flow of text with countless photos, a
number of inset sidebars, and a series of “Notable Knight” mini-
biographies, including such diverse individuals as Babe Ruth
and Sargent Shriver. A running timeline at the bottom of most
pages reminds readers of the broader historical backdrop of the
Knights’ story. Though far from a critical account, this history
does its primary job well: introducing lay readers to the Knights
and providing devotees with an informative resource for casual
browsing or more serious study.

An approachable, worthwhile history of a venerable
Catholic brotherhood. (full-color throughout)

LET THE PEOPLE PICK
THE PRESIDENT
The Case for Abolishing the
Electoral College
Wegman, Jesse
All Points/St. Martin’s (304 pp.)
$27.99 | Mar. 17, 2020
978-1-250-22197-1

A debut author makes the case for
getting rid of the Electoral College in
favor of a national popular vote.

After the 2016 election, in which Donald Trump lost the
popular vote but won the Electoral College, there were renewed
calls to examine the country’s electoral system, with numerous
impassioned pleas about how the EC system no longer works
and that we need to institute a simple popular vote. “The Elec-
toral College,” writes Wegman, a member of the New York Times
editorial board and former legal news editor at Reuters,
“has almost never operated as Alexander Hamilton pictured it
would.” Rather, our electors have always been “obedient par-
tisan hacks, rubber stamps for the party’s candidate.” As with
almost anything in the U.S., if it can be made political, it will
be; our voting system is no different. Beginning with a detailed
history of the Electoral College, the author examines the com-
promises and consequences that have always been present in
our voting system. Wegman truly believes that the situation
can change. Myths abound about the EC, and it’s well within
our interests—both Democrat and Republican alike—to tran-
sition to a popular voting system. Throughout, the author’s
confidence in his argument shines through. Wegman can be
forgiven for his overly optimistic approach, but if there’s any-
thing to be learned from the long history of American politics,
that’s that nothing is predictable. While the facts and logic of his
argument are mostly sound, we know that the pillars of democ-
rocity are not as stable as anyone once thought. One measure
in particular—the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact—is
gaining traction, but as the author himself observes, it’s not a
binding agreement. A simple shift in demographics or political
leaning could quickly throw that compact out the door.

An illuminating history and analysis but it remains
unlikely that Wegman’s desired audience will be swayed.
(first printing of 250,000)
Three nations sent expeditions to the Antarctic in the late 1830s and early 1840s. This fascinating account describes their members’ heroism and often disastrous experiences without ignoring the significant discoveries that followed.

Wood (Environmental Humanities/Univ. of Illinois; Tambora: The Eruption That Changed the World, 2014) writes that by the early decades of the 19th century, whalers, sealers, and explorers had penetrated deep into the icepack and touched dry ground. Geographers suspected there was more, and the spirit of discovery, national rivalry, and the persistent fantasy that a rich, temperate land lay near the pole encouraged further voyages into the planet’s last great uncharted territory. In France and England, two experienced explorers—Jules Dumont d’Urville and James Ross—commanded their nation’s expeditions. The American ships, so long delayed and poorly organized that its senior officers refused to serve, sailed under junior officer Lt. Charles Wilkes, whose dysfunctional command style produced almost universal hatred from his men, who were “focused on what they perceived as his despicable stratagems to hog the glory of polar discovery for himself.” Wood delivers riveting accounts of the voyages, which, hobbled by primitive technology and wooden sailing vessels, featured immense courage, suffering, loss of life, and shipwreck but produced important advances. “The first race to the pole resulted in a split decision,” writes the author. “The French were the first to sight Antarctica and make landing, while the Americans charted the greatest section of coast and established its continental dimensions. The British, meanwhile, who were the last on the scene, traveled the furthest and saw the most.” Mixed with these adventures, Wood provides a rich history of Antarctica, which was a lush, temperate land before it froze 50 million years ago, and a portrait of the continent today, whose mysteries are now less geographic than meteorological. If its ice (90% of the world’s) melts, oceans would rise more than 200 feet, and this might be now in progress.

Outstanding history accompanied by outstanding popular science.
THREE BROTHERS
Memories of My Family
Tan Lianke
Trans. by Rojas, Carlos
Grove (304 pp.)
$26.00 | Mar. 10, 2020
978-0-8021-4808-7

A memoir of the difficult lives of the author’s family members, who eked out a bare subsistence during the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

Out of a sense of guilt toward his relatives, who toiled raising young families during the revolution and endured no end of hardship in their poor village, Yan (The Day the Sun Died, 2018, etc.), a winner of the Franz Kafka Prize, addresses the rarely acknowledged sacrifices they made as well as how their lives inspired him and his generation to leave their rural homes and try to find greater opportunity in the city. Yan was the youngest in a big family growing up in Henan Province, breaking up “ginger stones” alongside his beloved father to fashion the tile-roofed house that would serve as his brothers’ bridal “mansions.” The author barely got a middle school education. With a sick sister whose care required all of the family’s earnings, there was nothing but toil and poverty, and Yan watched his father grow increasingly frail from chronic asthma. All the while, he dreamed of leaving and becoming a writer, and he followed his father’s brother to work in the city at a cement factory. His experiences in the city, Yan was sure, would make for a happy life, and he set about writing after his long shifts at the factory. Eventually, the author joined the army to get away from the poverty and monotony that his relatives endured. Throughout the book, Yan depicts his provincial relatives with enormous heart and respect, acknowledging their sacrifices in a dark yet poignant meditation on grief and death. “The elderly have no choice but to take a first step on behalf of the next generation,” he writes. “Then they go to the next world and lie down there, calmly waiting for their children to follow in their footsteps and be reunited with them.”

A memoir steeped in metaphor and ultimately tremendously moving.

PRIVATE INVESTIGATIONS
Mystery Writers on the Secrets, Riddles, and Wonders in Their Lives
Ed. by Zackheim, Victoria
Seal Press (320 pp.)
$28.00 | Apr. 21, 2020
978-1-58005-921-3

An anthology of true-life essays by “mystery writers revealing the mysteries of their lives.”

San Francisco–based screenwriter and playwright Zackheim (The Bone Weaver, 2001, etc.) curates a collection of tales that range from upbeat to depressing. Some of the essays explain in depth how real-life occurrences directly influenced the storylines of the contributors’ published novels; other essays mention such a connection elliptically or in passing. Mystery fans will be familiar with most or all of the contributors, but general readers will find one of the benefits of the anthology to be the discovery of new authors. One of the best-known contributors is Jeffery Deaver. His essay is a straightforward account of how he came to write bestselling mystery fiction despite numerous rejections from publishers and why he needed to internalize a simple lesson from his childhood before success arrived. In conclusion, the author writes, “just as in good detective fiction, the plot twist in which the mystery is solved was right before my eyes the entire time.” The most detailed and creatively constructed essay is Carole Nelson Douglas’ “Godfathers, Nancy Drew, and Cats,” in which she explores her “past as prologue” to her career as a “vetran fiction writer who has wondered from childhood how ordinary people let their lives spiral into unhappiness, even violence and disaster.” Of all the contributors, William Kent Krueger is the most direct at revealing how his real-life episodes influenced his writing. “For readers,” he writes, “stories have the potential to do much more than entertain. They instruct; they enlighten; they encourage; they inspire. For authors, the blessings are much the same.” Throughout, the contributors, which include Hallie Ephron, Martin Limón, Cara Black, Rhys Bowen, Jacqueline Winspear, and Anne Perry, explore a range of difficult topics—e.g., mental health breakdowns, domestic abuse, shattered romance, nightmarish experiences in war zones. The anthology demonstrates both that truth can be stranger than fiction and that truth can also morph into effective fiction.

An adequate collection that will have the most appeal for fans of the contributing authors.
DR. MAGGIE’S GRAND TOUR
OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM

Adair-Pocock, Maggie
Illus. by Écija, Chelen
Kane/Miller (128 pp.)
$16.99 | Mar. 1, 2020
978-1-68464-064-8

With a genial BBC science educator as guide, a good gander round our stellar neighborhood, from Earth to Oort cloud.

Promising to leave “no question unanswered and no meteorite unturned,” the space-suited co-host of the long-running The Sky at Night leads readers past the sun, planets, moons, and other major members of our local “gravity gang.” She pauses to point out the International Space Station and the ring of “space junk” around Earth, describe the missions of select historical space probes, and marvel at must-see high spots like the rings of Saturn and the 20-km-high cliff Verona Rupes on Uranus’ moon Miranda. Along the way she also explains how orbits and lunar phases work, speculates about other places where life (as we know it) may be possible, discusses a theorized “Planet Nine” that may be out there somewhere, and casts a final glance at the composition of interstellar space. Her commentary, presented in lozenge-shaped bubbles, is scattered over mixes of photos and digital renderings so seamlessly blended that the difference between observable features and speculative ones is sometimes lost in the shuffle. Still, the substantial factual payload, ably abetted by a closing “ship’s database” that includes a largely female gallery of astronomers and other “space people,” is lightened by the author/narrator’s chatty style.

Similar tours abound, but a well-informed chaperone gives this one an added boost. (index, glossary). (Nonfiction. 9-11)

THE CITY GIRLS

Aki
Illus. by the author
Godwin Books/Henry Holt (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-250-31395-9

Clad in yellow once again, the 16 diverse and curious pals from Weather Girls (2018) and Nature Girls (2019) set out to explore the big city.

From sunrise to sunset, the city is a sight to behold. The girls start early in the morning, grabbing bagel breakfasts at a coffee cart before being enveloped by the city’s hustle and
Writing a column on upcoming books is an exercise in reconciling temporal realities. Think about it: I’m writing this the day before Thanksgiving 2019 for publication in our Jan. 1, 2020, issue, about books that don’t exist yet but that you, dear reader, can expect to enjoy in the coming months and that our reviewers have already read. In other words, while I may not know my future, I know yours. And it’s pretty good.

Coming up soon, you and/or the kids in your lives can look forward to Race to the Sun (Rick Riordan Presents/Disney, Jan. 14), the newest in Riordan’s consistently fabulous line of culturally distinctive speculative fiction. Author Rebecca Roanhorse, who is Ohkay Owingeh, creates in protagonist Nizhoni Begay a wholly modern Diné seventh grader whose adventure into the traditions and lore of the Navajo Nation shows, as our reviewer said, “that Native stories are active and alive.” Also coming this month is Lesa Cline-Ransome and James Ransome’s Overground Railroad (Holiday House, Jan. 7), one of several stellar entries in this year’s roundup of Black History Month picture books. As its title suggests, it traces the journey by train of an African American family escaping sharecropping servitude during the Great Migration, artistic and authorial nuance movingly communicating the journey’s complexity.

In February, readers can brace themselves with Naomi Shihab Nye’s newest poetry collection, Cast Away (Greenwillow, Feb. 11). Subtitled “Poems for Our Times,” it explores what is thrown away (or not, as the case may be) in our society, giving no quarter to both litterers and the hypocritical descendants of immigrants who see the human souls at our border as so much trash. In The Paper Kingdom (Random House, Feb. 18), Helena Ku Rhee zooms in on Daniel, who must accompany his custodian parents to work one night when the babysitter cancels. Pascal Campion illustrates the protagonists of this loving ode to hardworking families as people of color, underscoring the socio-economic reality of many of America’s children.

March is practically tomorrow in my world. Ann Clare LeZotte takes readers to 1805 Martha’s Vineyard in Show Me a Sign (Scholastic, March 3), where Mary Lambert, who is Deaf, like one quarter of the other islanders, finds herself the unwilling research subject of a patronizing hearing scientist. In this tale, “LeZotte weaves threads of adventure, family tragedy, community, racism, and hearing people’s negative assumptions about Deaf people into a beautiful and complex whole.” In the effervescent picture book Hat Tricks (Peachtree, March 4), Satoshi Kitamura presents bunny magician Hattie, who breaks the fourth wall to encourage readers to assist her in extracting a dizzying variety of animals that couldn’t possibly fit in that hat…could they?

And April is hot on March’s heels with Alex Gino’s Rick (Scholastic, April 21), expanding the still-too-small universe of LGBTQIA+–themed books for middle graders with the story of a white cis boy who finds that sixth grade challenges both his moral compass and his understanding of his own sexuality. Readers will cheer as Rick learns to stand up against his bully best friend and embrace his own truth. From frosty Nunavut, Canada, comes the warm and wonderful In My Anaana’s Amautik (Inhabit Media, April 7). Inuit mothers traditionally carry their babies in their parkas’ hoods, which creates a safe and snuggly space from which the baby protagonist can experience the wide world around. Inuit author Nadia Sammurtok and Ukrainian Canadian illustrator Lishchenko combine forces in this intimate delight.

The outlook for May is a little fuzzier, as at this writing I have not begun assigning books past April. But there’s lots to keep us reading happily until then. —V.S.

Vicky Smith is the children’s editor.
In a surplus of books on city life, this one is charming and sweet. (Picture book. 3-6)

THE UNDROWNED
Alexander, K.R.
Scholastic (240 pp.)
$6.99 paper  |  Feb. 4, 2020
978-1-338-54052-9

Literally haunted by her actions, a bully must make amends—or else.

Samantha fails a spelling test, so her parents punish her by refusing to let her go on a day trip to Rocky River Adventure Park with her friends. Rather than study harder, Samantha takes it out on classmate Rachel—her ex-best friend, whom she relentlessly bullies due to a past betrayal. A choice encounter outside of school gives Samantha an opportunity to rid herself of Rachel once and for all. She pushes her into the lake, but how did Rachel get out of the lake when Samantha watched her die? And how can Samantha make Rachel stop haunting her in revenge? Suspense nearly drips from this spooky page-turner, as wet handprints, hallucinations, and relentless phone calls lead Samantha back to the scene of her crime. Particularly tense scenes dip into verse territory, heightening the drama. Unfortunately, the line breaks in these portions feel more contrived than poetic. While Samantha’s first-person narration is soaked through with self-pity, her backstory unspools to round out her redemption arc.

Chilling but shallow. (Horror. 8-12)

NATURE DID IT FIRST
Engineering Through Biomimicry
Ansberry, Karen Robrich
Illus. by DiRubbio, Jennifer
Dawn Publications (32 pp.)
$8.95 paper  |  Mar. 1, 2020
978-1-58469-658-2

An introduction to biomimicry and engineering for young readers learning to see connections. The format of the book follows a predictable pattern. One double-page spread with a rhyming poem describes something in nature (“The kingfisher sits upon a perch / And spies a silver flash. / He swiftly dives to catch a fish / But barely makes its offsends are as easy: “Bye now, Mommy, you can go!” The teacher takes attendance, leads show and tell, teaches and praises, supervises play, sings a song, and helps the children—a diverse classroom, but the protagonist is white—get ready to go home. Still, this is not a perfect package. Though only one teacher, a woman with light-brown skin and hair, interacts with the child all day, the child initially refers to plural teachers (a white man stands in the doorway but is never seen again), and when readers are directed to look at the child’s name tag, it’s just a scribble. The purple duck some readers may remember from I Love You, Baby (2015) and earlier titles appears in just five of the 12 spreads, perhaps indicating increasing maturity.

A cheerily serviceable introduction to school routines. (Picture book. 3-5)

I LOVE MY TEACHER
Andrea, Giles
Illus. by Dodd, Emma
Disney-Hyperion (32 pp.)
$16.99  |  Apr. 14, 2020
978-1-368-02730-4

Andreae and Dodd’s brush-headed toddler spreads the love wide.

This kid’s enthusiasm for school is catching for all who hear Andreae’s bouncy text. After recess, “We go back in to paint some more, / then stick our pictures on the door. / We make a lot of things as well. / This one’s my favorite! Can you tell?” The cardboard rocket the tot shares with a close buddy sports their faces gazing from the round windows. Those preparing to attend school for the first time will appreciate this look at a typical classroom day, and their parents will hope their own offsprings’ sendoffs are as easy: “Bye now, Mommy, you can go!” The teacher takes attendance, leads show and tell, teaches and praises, supervises play, sings a song, and helps the children—a diverse classroom, but the protagonist is white—get ready to go home. Still, this is not a perfect package. Though only one teacher, a woman with light-brown skin and hair, interacts with the child all day, the child initially refers to plural teachers (a white man stands in the doorway but is never seen again), and when readers are directed to look at the child’s name tag, it’s just a scribble. The purple duck some readers may remember from I Love You, Baby (2015) and earlier titles appears in just five of the 12 spreads, perhaps indicating increasing maturity.

A cheerily serviceable introduction to school routines. (Picture book. 3-5)

Inspiring for all those kids who look at the world in wonder and ask, what if?

NATURE DID IT FIRST

bustle. Crowds swarm the sidewalks, and traffic clogs the streets. The tiny tots gamely face it all with smiles and exuberance (except one, who gets a little too close to a scooter). When rain threatens their plans, they head down to the subway (New Yorkers will appreciate the nod to Pizza Rat). Their first stop? The bookstore! Then there’s a trip to the museum, an egg-only restaurant (“Eggsquisite” of course), and the park. The city has something for everyone. The rhyme is brisk: “Every-
Love and family are fully present as one life expires and a new one is born.

AN ORDINARY DAY

Arnold, Elana K.
Illus. by Vukovic, Elizabet
Beach Lane/Simon & Schuster (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Mar. 10, 2020
978-1-4814-7262-3

On an ordinary day, extraordinary events occur as Arnold’s parallel stories of loss and life show how the world’s shared experiences connect humanity.

In the neighborhood, all seems as it should—a garden is being watered, kids are at play, and a crow caws; then two visitors arrive. The black veterinarian, upon entering one home, attends to a dog at the end of her life. An Asian midwife or obstetrician, upon entering the house next door, helps a woman give birth. Commonalities abound between the two households despite their different compositions and experiences. In both, love and family are fully present as one life expires and a new one is born. Skilled, muted drawings, in charcoal, pencil, and watercolor and digitally rendered, depict a diverse neighborhood with mixed-race and nontraditional families. Emotions are clearly conveyed by the appealing characters, who are rendered in a simplified graphic style. The intimate interior events are juxtaposed with the unaware community members outside, who continue the rhythm of their ordinary day, until in one silent dark beat of the crow’s wings, the world shifts. “It was an ordinary day in the neighborhood. / It was an extraordinary day in the neighborhood. / Like all days, and all neighborhoods, everywhere.”

Powerfully demonstrates how small but monumental events can connect and change the world. (Picture book. 5-8)

GOLD RUSH GIRL

Avi
Candlewick (320 pp.)
$17.99 | Mar. 10, 2020
978-1-5362-0679-1

Tory encounters the independence and adventure she longs for in the untamed city of San Francisco in 1849.

Thirteen-year-old narrator Victoria Blaisdell, known to her family as Tory, lives a comfortably privileged life in mid-19th-century Providence, Rhode Island. She is frustrated and constrained by the influence of her maternal aunt, Lavinia, who believes that girls are to take care of boys and should be educated only at home. But when Tory’s father loses his position and wages and decides to seek gold in California, Tory stows away on the ship that will take him and her fretful younger brother, Jacob, on the seven-month journey to San Francisco. There, Tory finds work to keep herself and Jacob going while their father heads off to the gold fields. When Jacob is kidnapped to be a cabin boy for a ship heading out of the Golden Gate, Tory must appeal to her new friend Thad from Maine and to Sam, a wary young black man from Sag Harbor, New York, to help her navigate an under-world of gambling, rogues, and abandoned ships. Sam and Señor Rosales, who runs the cafe near Tory and Jacob’s tent, are the only nonwhite principal characters. Tory is the only girl. Avi evokes Gold Rush-era San Francisco through Tory’s eyes with empathy and clarity while keeping the action lively.

A splendidly exciting and accessible historical adventure. (Historical fiction. 10-13)
An encounter with a wolf has remarkable effects on the vocabulary of a snarky little bunny.

In what amounts to a remake of Maurice Sendak’s *Pierre* with cruder language and an all-animal cast, an anthropomorphic rabbit responds to every request with the titular phrase—including a wolf’s “May I eat you?” Down the hatch goes the lippy lapin, and now the wolf’s only words are “Poo bum.” This signals the wolf’s villainy to the rabbit doctor summoned to help, and he proceeds to reach down his patient’s gullet and pull out his “little poo bum!” “Good heavens, Father! How dare you call me that? You know perfectly well my name is Simon.”

The pithy narrative’s heavy typeface accords well with both the level of humor and the illustrations’ thick, simply drawn lines and broad swathes of opaque primary hues. Originally published in 2011 in New Zealand (and much reprinted since), the episode first appeared on this continent in 2015 (from another publisher) as *Poop-di-doop!*—a version of the delightfully daring epithet that American audiences may find more immediately appealing than the original. At least the closing twist, in which the rabbit returns to form with “Fart!” in response to a parental order to brush his teeth, requires no translation.

Not quite the crowd pleaser that it could be. (Picture book 3-5)
Mr. Gnome likes to say, “No!”
The bearded little tyrant wants to be alone on his fishing excursion. “Say hello to the readers, Mr. Gnome,” prompts the all-knowing narrator, whose delivery is reminiscent of mid-20th-century Disney documentaries. Mr. Gnome would rather not. Will he help out Mr. Hedgehog, who’s got an apple wedged on his spines? “NO.” The narrator politely asks Mr. Gnome if he likes juicy red apples, perhaps enough to assist Mr. Hedgehog. Doesn’t he? “NO NO NO!” It’s no use…
but here comes Miss Witch. Respectfully, she asks Mr. Gnome if he can stop scaring her toads with his fishing. The rude, pint-size angler, of course, refuses in the most disagreeable manner possible. “Mr. Gnome might be making a big mistake…” observes the narrator. ZAP! Uh-oh, Mr. Gnome. It’s time to join Miss Witch’s stone gnome collection. A wickedly devious, humorous cautionary tale, Blunt’s latest reminds readers that, a little politeness just might save them from a rocky fate. The inclusion of the intrusive narrator—amid a cast of fantastical characters—lends a touch of whimsy to the whole ordeal, masking Mr. Gnome’s rather grim fate behind a veneer of didactic friendliness. The artist’s colorful, sprightly artwork is an impish delight, full of droll details needed for a vibrant world. The irascible gnome is white; Miss Witch is green.

Gnome be rude…or else! (Picture book. 4-9)

A young beekeeper goes from reluctance to enthusiasm with some coaching from Dad. Kaia’s brave about almost everything—except for bees. This is a problem, because Kaia’s dad keeps two hives on the roof of their apartment building. Dad drones on and on about the importance of bees to the foods Kaia loves, but that doesn’t make Kaia want to go near them. However, Kaia talks a big beekeeping game with the building’s other kids—only to be found out when a bee landing triggers a public display of fear. Resolved to walk the beekeeping walk, a suited-up Kaia ascends with Dad to the roof, where up-close examination of a frame of bees softens the fear—until Kaia unwisely takes off a glove and is stung. The bee boycott resumes, till two bees accidentally enter the apartment on honey-harvest day, and Kaia bravely opens the window to let them out. Beekeeper Boelts infuses her narrative with both appropriate vocabulary and empathy. Narrator Kaia realistically articulates ambivalence:
On the one hand, working the bees makes Kaia feel “electric”; on the other, bee stings hurt! For the most part Dominguez accurately depicts apiary equipment and practices in her friendly cartoons, and she peoples the story with a diverse cast not typically seen in kids’ books about beekeeping. Kaia is biracial, with a black dad and white mom.

Could be just the ticket for turning bee-phobes into beekeepers. (Picture book. 4-8)

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Could be just the ticket for turning bee-phobes into beekeepers. (Picture book. 4-8)

Dancers of various ages, races, abilities, and species groove to the abridged lyrics of iconic rocker Bowie’s titular 1983 hit.

“Let’s dance,” the author invites. And dance Marks’ joyful, cartoony figures do. A child and older adult jive to “the song they’re playin’ on” an old-fashioned radio; another child “sway[s] through” a playground crowd “to an empty space.” A dog and cat join paws/hands with a child in a hijab. Under “this serious moonlight,” a couple and a cat float in spacesuits. Two kids dance in manual wheelchairs; one is an amputee. After omitting much of the last verse, the ending urges, “Let’s dance, / DANCE, / DANCE.” Characters’ skin colors range from pale to dark. However, despite diverse characters and bright, textured digital illustrations, the song’s translation to picture book falls flat. Without the melody, the lyrics’ rhythm falters, and such lines as “If you should fall into my arms / And tremble like a FLOWER” ring awkward. Some illustrations seem incongruous with their lyrics, as when a double-page file of cheerleading kids wearing itty-bitty red sneakers illustrates “Put on your red shoes / And dance the blues.” Though adult fans will appreciate nods to Bowie’s eclectic style—lightning bolts pepper the pages, and a child’s shirt is reminiscent of his Union Jack-patterned coat—such touches will be lost on readers unfamiliar with Bowie’s oeuvre.

It’s wonderfully inclusive, but only Bowie’s biggest fans may feel like dancing. (Picture book. 4-6)

How rows of rocks evolved into the intricate circuitry that runs our homes, drives our cars, and orders our pizza.
Brown lets al-Khwārizmī, the Muslim mathematician who popularized Arabic/Hindu numbers (most notably, for Brown’s purposes here, “0” and “1”), take the role of tour guide. He squires readers through centuries of watershed developments from the abacus and mechanical Pascaleine calculator to the punch cards of Joseph-Marie Jacquard, ENIAC, IBM, the transistor, and robots. Closing with an explanation of the Turing test, he offers a mildly cautionary view of the increasingly pervasive roles computers play in our daily lives (“will they be doing all the thinking for us?”) and an appended disquisition on binary numbers. Along the way he chronicles both major and incremental advances as well as offering nods to significant thinkers and doers familiar (Ada Lovelace, Steve Jobs) or otherwise—notably Jean Jennings and six other women charged with figuring out how to program ENIAC but not invited to its unveiling. Though he acknowledges in an afterword that his cast is largely white, European, and male he does what he can throughout to diversify it…and cogently observes at the end that the “domination of the West in the sciences has ended.” Panels are drawn in a loose style that lightens the substantial informational load.

Another terrific case study on the power of a big idea to work profound changes in our lives. (endnotes, timeline)  
(Graphic nonfiction. 8-11)
This tale of urban renewal shows how one person with an imagination, a little dirt, and a few seeds can transform a concrete village into something beautiful.

**THE BEAR'S GARDEN**

Colleen, Marcie
Illus. by Oliver, Alison
Imprint (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-5415-2357-9

One little girl understands that urban spaces need tender loving care.

When a little black girl with her hair in two puffballs looks at her city street, she sees people who rarely slow down enough to imagine the possibilities of beauty around them. But she does. Faithfully including her stuffed panda, she plants a seed in a tin can. When the can falls off the windowsill and the seedling takes root in a vacant lot, she watches it grow, and then the other seedlings that spread around it. When she must leave for a while, she charges her panda with tending the plants. Upon her return, she discovers a surprising number of good things that have happened in her absence. Inspired by a true story of a stuffed bear found in what has become the Pacific Street Brooklyn Bear’s Community Garden, this tale of urban renewal shows how one person with an imagination, a little dirt, and a few seeds can transform a concrete village into something beautiful. Oliver’s endpapers depict maps of the garden site—the front endpapers sans garden and the rear ones featuring colorful flowers on several street corners. Throughout the illustrations, the background remains black, dark gray, or dark green, but as the garden grows, the darkness becomes less noticeable as the garden takes over the block and the blue sky appears above it.

A well-illustrated, beautifully written tale of encouragement for budding gardeners. *(Picture book. 3-7)*

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foster brother and protector; and, already ensconced in the enormous mansion poised at cliff’s edge above the ocean, Sadie, an imaginative inventor; and Colin, a former Londoner with street smarts. All are under the care of Smithers, the Winterborne butler, and Izzy. Living in a smaller mansion nearby is Evert Winterborne, Gabriel’s uncle, who’s offered a reward for fies Violet? What caused Izzy’s antipathy to Gabriel? Among foster brother and protector; and, already ensconced in the for celebration, discovery and learning, vehicles for teaching for Chelsea and green for Hillary. Via brief yet explicit remem-
den or working in the backyard, generations can cultivate an imaginative inventor; and Colin, a former Londoner with
enormous mansion poised at cliff’s edge above the ocean, Sadie,
corkscrew plot’s occasionally far-fetched, it’s fast moving and surdivisive world.

An entertaining adventure with villains, heroes, and tantalizing mysteries galore. *(Fiction. 8-12)*

**GRANDMA’S GARDENS**

Clinton, Hillary Rodham & Clinton, Chelsea
Illus. by Lemniscates, Carme
Philomel (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Mar. 31, 2020
978-0-593-11535-0

In an inviting picture book, Chelsea and Hillary Clinton share personal revelations on how gardening with a grandmother, a mother, and children shapes and nurtures a love and respect for nature, beauty, and a general philosophy for life.

Grandma Dorothy, the former senator, secretary of state, and presidential candidate’s mother, loved gardens, appreciating the multiple benefits they yielded for herself and her family. The Clinton women reminisce about their beloved forebear and all she taught them in a color-coded, alternating text, blue for Chelsea and green for Hillary. Via brief yet explicit remembrances, they share what they learned, observed, and most of all enjoyed in gardens with her. Each double-page spread culminates in a declarative statement set in italicized red text invoking Dorothy’s wise words. Gardens can be many things: places for celebration, discovery and learning, vehicles for teaching responsibility in creating beauty, home to wildlife large and small, a place to share stories and develop memories. Though operating from very personal experience rooted in class privilege, the mother-daughter duo mostly succeeds in imparting a universally significant message: Whether visiting a public garden or working in the backyard, generations can cultivate a lasting bond. Lemniscates uses an appropriately floral palette of blue and white on the cover), deadpan April’s a standout. If the

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This picture book challenges children to imagine the Earth as it exists now in a future without humans.

Coy opens his provocative thought experiment by reminding readers, “People need water to live. / We need air to breathe. / We need plants to survive. / But do they need us?” Without humans, infrastructure would begin to break down. “Lightning strikes would cause fires that would burn uncontrolled.” The air and water would become cleaner. Between erosion and unchecked nature, humanity would eventually become a dim planetary memory. Capannelli’s accompanying watercolors depict graffiti-tagged overpasses hung about with blossoming vines, a tree sprouting through a factory’s chimney; the skeletal frames of suburban homes ablaze, the rubble of a long-vacant classroom. Birds and animals roam these places freely. Coy
closes by declaring that air, plants, and water don’t “need us,” but we “absolutely” need air, plants, and water. “And because we do, / we must take care, / in all the ways we can, / so we’re here on Earth together / now / and in the future.” Coy’s persuasive strategy is weak. Earth without humans is so clearly better off it’s hard to imagine children will be anything but profoundly discouraged by this book. A closing note headed “What Can We Do?” encourages readers broadly to reduce consumption and embrace the outdoors but ultimately fails to empower.

Poor Earth. It’s stuck with us. (author’s note, bibliography) (Picture book. 5-10)

**BONAPARTE PLAYS BALL**

Cuyler, Margery
Illus. by Terry, Will
Crown (40 pp.)
$17.99 | $20.99 PLB | Mar. 10, 2020
978-1-984830-47-0
978-1-9848-3048-7 PLB

Young Bonaparte is a skeleton whose difficulty keeping his bones from falling away at the most inopportune moments weighs on his mind.

With a large round head and a red baseball cap on top, his loose collection of bones resembles a spiral light bulb. His baseball team, the Little Monsters, is scheduled to play the Mighty Aliens, and he is especially worried about the dreadful possibility that he will literally fall apart during the game. He practices hard, and his faithful dog, Mandible, fetches any bone that comes loose. But his worries are for naught; his bones stay pretty much intact, at least until the winning celebration, and Mandible has his back(bone) when he needs help. The players on the Mighty Aliens have names like Flame Thrower and Galactic Slimer that describe their special talents. Some of the Little Monsters’ names are clever puns, like hero Bonaparte and his teammates Franky Stein and Batula. Others are more descriptive of their natures, like Ghostie, Mummicula, and Zombie. The very slight tale is fast paced, focusing on the events of the game and with nods to overcoming obstacles, teamwork, and sportsmanship. Terry’s busy cartoons are spot-on, matching the text’s lightness and humor as well as providing visual clues for young readers who may not be familiar with baseball jargon.

Lots of fun with a gentle message for little ones and their grown-ups. (Picture book. 4-8)

**TREES MAKE PERFECT PETS**

Czajak, Paul
Illus. by Gendron, Cathy
Sourcebooks Jabberwocky (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Mar. 1, 2020
978-1-4926-6473-4

When a young girl chooses a tree as a pet, she won’t be dissuaded or discouraged by people’s comments. And there are many, starting with her family members when Abigail makes her wish for a pet tree known before blowing out her seven birthday candles. But she neutralizes them all with clever counterarguments. At a nursery, Abigail chooses “Fido,” a dogwood in a gray pot, and the two are inseparable. Socks adorn the tree’s branches on laundry day, and during a tea party, she reads aloud to her stuffed animals, one of them perched in Fido’s crook. Abigail even takes Fido on long walks (in a wagon), which garners them more looks and comments and questions. Unflappable Abigail fields them all. But what she can’t counter is the fact that Fido is growing, shown gradually in Gendron’s detailed illustrations. The only thing to do is plant Fido in the yard, but Abigail can’t leave her best friend...until, after a night spent in his branches, she realizes that Fido won’t be lonely with all the new friends he’s made outdoors. It’s refreshing to see a child stand up for her choice in positive ways, especially since most readers are likely to think that choice an odd one. Abigail and her family have light brown skin; the few other humans are diverse.

Takes tree-hugging—and standing up for yourself—to a new level. (Picture book. 4-8)

**DO JELLYFISH LIKE PEANUT BUTTER?**

Amazing Sea Creature Facts
Demas, Corinne & Roebring, Artemis
Illus. by Sbi, Ellen
Persnickety Press (36 pp.)
$16.95 | Apr. 5, 2020
978-1-943978-44-1
Series: Do Animals Animate?

Playful questions and factual answers introduce 12 sea creatures.

Following up on Do Doodlebugs Doodle? (2018), their investigation of insects, this mother-and-daughter authorial pair again team up with illustrator Shi, this time to speculate about sea dwellers. Posing questions, including the one in the title, they ask about pilot whales, sea lions, trumpet fish, sea horses, lampreys, clown fish, football fish, skates, hammerhead sharks, starfish, and mussels. Each question is illustrated on a page or spread; a page turn reveals the answer, usually a resounding “No!” The jokes are clever: Lamprey eels aren’t “plugged in,” but they do connect by “attaching their mouths to a fish’s body,” and so forth. Except for the opening and closing spreads, the layout also reveals the difference between the jokey question, set above a rectangle with rounded corners that contains a painted
interpretation, and the serious answer, set on a full-bleed image. The creatures are often anthropomorphized as part of the visual joke and shown more naturally on the page with the facts. Some images include human children; a pale-skinned child with brown hair in a double bun and a different brown-haired child with darker skin appear more than once. Noting that their examples include mammals, fish, and invertebrates, the authors provide a paragraph of further information about each of these animals in the backmatter (where they clarify that starfish are more properly called sea stars).

Wordplay that is entertaining and mildly educational. (Informational picture book. 4-8)

**OCTICORN PARTY!**
*Diller, Kevin & Lowe, Justin Illus. by Mulholland, Tian*
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (48 pp.)
$17.99 | Apr. 7, 2020
978-0-06-238794-3

Will Octicorn's party be a success?

Octicorn loves pool parties and is planning one, but the horned cephalopod worries no one will show. Octicorn invites Unicorn, who says, "If there are rainbows to fly over. I'm in." Octicorn is happy Unicorn will attend. Turtle says he will come if no one talks—he's shy. Seahorse will come only if Unicorn is not invited. Snail will attend only if there is break dancing. Lion wants to eat the other guests, but Octicorn doesn't think that's a good idea. Woodchuck, of course, will come if there is wood to chuck. Octicorn is happy so many creatures will be there... until the hapless host realizes that many of the guests' stipulations are mutually exclusive; there's no way to satisfy them all. So Octicorn decides to have "a do what you want, be who you are, no matter what anyone else thinks, party instead." And a good time is clearly being had by all—except Lion, who cannot attend but is given a cupcake to eat outside. Creators Diller and Lowe go beyond the one-joke core of Octi’s introduction in *Hello, My Name Is Octicorn* (2016) to present a tale of social awkwardness with dryly deadpan humor that the painfully shy, in particular, will identify with. Mulholland’s childlike scribbly doodle art replicates the look of the first book (done by Lowe with Binny Talib), and with its occasional splashes of color, it fits the tale and reinforces the tone.

An inclusive, be-yourself party—with cupcakes—can’t help but succeed. (Picture book. 3-9)

**THE MAGICAL YET**
*DiTerlizzi, Angela Illus. by Alvarez, Lorena*
Disney-Hyperion (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Apr. 14, 2020
978-1-368-02562-1

Children realize their dreams one step at a time in this story about growth mindset.

A child crashes and damages a new bicycle on a dark, rainy day. Attempting a wheelie, the novice cyclist falls onto the sidewalk, grimacing, and, having internalized this setback as failure, vows to never ride again but to “walk...forever.” Then the unnamed protagonist happens upon a glowing orb in the forest, a “thought rearranger-er”—a luminous pink fairy called the Magical Yet. This Yet reminds the child of past accomplishments and encourages perseverance. The second-person rhyming couples remind readers that mistakes are part of learning and that with patience and effort, children can achieve. Readers see the protagonist learn to ride the bike before a flash-forward shows the child as a capable college graduate confidently designing a sleek new bike. This book shines with diversity: racial, ethnic, ability, and gender. The gender-indeterminate protagonist has light brown skin and exuberant curly locks; Amid the bustling secondary cast, one child uses a prosthesis, and another wears hijab. At no point in the text is the Yet defined as a metaphor for a growth mindset; adults reading with younger children will likely need to clarify this abstract lesson. The artwork is powerful and detailed—pay special attention to the endpapers that progress to show the Yet at work.

A solid if message-driven conversation starter about the hard parts of learning. (Picture book. 4-8)

**MARY UNDERWATER**
*Doleski, Shannon*
Amulet/Abrams (240 pp.)
$16.99 | Apr. 7, 2020
978-1-4197-4080-0

“Sometimes dragons need to be slain.”

Ever since Mary Murphy’s father was released from prison, she’s been a ghost in her own home. The strain of trying to avoid the yelling, the violence, and her mother’s dejected apathy takes its toll, and she finds herself struggling to avoid her teachers’ concerns when she begins failing science. Teaming up with class clown Kip Dwyer, Mary decides to build a remote-controlled submarine for a final, grade-saving physics project. The success of the presentation and growing feelings between Mary and Kip prompt the decision to seek out ex-Navy scientist Ford Wallace and build a “real submersible.” When her father’s violence turns on the projects and people she loves, however, Mary begins to despair of ever escaping her shadowed life on their Chesapeake Bay island.
Lively first-person narration lends immediacy and suspense to this compelling, complex adventure. **Rival Magic**

Doleski draws an empathetic portrayal of an abuse victim; Mary is closed off and fearful, but her fervent determination to free herself from a toxic home situation has not yet been extinguished, placing her in stark contrast to her downtrodden and resigned mother. Her distrust of her social worker rings fully true, but a strong support system of friends, teachers, and relatives and the memory of Joan of Arc keep her afloat. The teasing, warm relationship between Mary and Kip is a delight, and the submersible plot builds to a thrilling, fraught climax. A white default is assumed.

A ruggedly heartwarming tale of resilience and romance. (Fiction. 10-14)

**Green Machine**

The Slightly Gross Truth About Turning Your Food Scraps Into Green Energy

Donnelly, Rebecca

Illus. by Jacques, Christophe

Henry Holt (32 pp.)

$17.99 | Mar. 17, 2020

978-1-250-30406-3

An introduction to the innovative (and smelly) processes that turn municipal food waste into electrical energy.

Donnelly follows the journey of food scraps from kitchen through composting bin and collection truck to a municipal digester, where the waste undergoes both human-engineered and microbe-assisted transformations. The author subjects her text to syllabic verse in rhymed triplets, a choice that places meter above clarity. Describing the digester, she writes: “A place where the waste / isn’t wasted: a tank / with the power to power our town, / where trash becomes gas, / and good riddance — that stank! / That’s the power of food breaking down.” Jacques’ illustrations adopt a retro, mid-20th-century look. Cutaways reveal the simplified inner works of the digester tank and electrical generator. Diverse workers are depicted in rather static poses; the featured family members have dark hair, varied brown skin tones, and minimally rendered, dot-and-comma facial features. “Tiny” microbes appear as large, colorful critters with goopy eyes and smiles; there’s no indication that in reality they’re invisible to human eyes. A double-page summary (“Follow the Food Energy!”) reuses illustrations from previous pages to illustrate the food-to-electricity process. Within two concluding pages of facts, fossil fuels are characterized as “nonrenewable,” without mention of their dominant role in the climate crisis.

Constrained verse distracts from timely, basic information about transforming food into fuel. (Further reading) (Informational picture book. 4-7)

**Frog Boots**

Esbaum, Jill

Illus. by Heinz, Joshua

Sterling (32 pp.)

$16.95 | Mar. 3, 2020

978-1-4549-3297-0

A young boy and his boots struggle against gender stereotypes.

Dylan is starting at a new school and wants “one cool thing.” He falls for a pair of purple boots dotted with glow-in-the-dark poison dart frogs despite his mom’s mild disapproval, loving how they make him feel “cool and smart.” On his first day, though, one kid announces that “that boy’s wearing girl boots”; peers agree with that claim, and the teacher strides ahead without addressing it. School is off to a rough start until Dylan decides that he loves poison dart frogs no matter what the background color is, and after a week he marches back into school, boots on his feet, because “girls don’t own purple.” Flat watercolor illustrations show brown-skinned Dylan and his multiracial classmates clomping around mostly white backgrounds, illustrating the text but failing to add any depth or nuance to the equally flat scenario. The writing careens from awkwardly juvenile to confusingly clunky, with sentences that are sometimes choppy and sometimes overlong. The narrative is further marred by uneven pacing and an uninteresting structure. Books featuring cis boys transgressing gender norms are currently a dime a dozen, and this one fails to add anything compelling to the canon.

Frog boots are undeniably cool; sadly, this book is not. (Picture book. 4-8)

**Rival Magic**

Fagan, Deva

Atheneum (288 pp.)

$17.99 | Apr. 21, 2020

978-1-5344-3905-4

Rival apprentice wizards join forces when their teacher is accused of treason and their island is threatened.

Twelve-year-old Antonia lives on the island of Medasia and dreams of becoming a wizard. Currently studying magic with Master Betrys, Antonia has a brilliant command of the technical aspects of wizardry, but her innate magical power is limited. Then Moppe, also 12, an uneducated girl with “olive skin…a shade darker” than Antonia’s, arrives as under-cook. Barely able to read, Moppe’s a powerful, untrained magical prodigy who instantly becomes Master Betrys’ newest apprentice and Antonia’s rival. When rebels seek to find the lost crown of Medasia and liberate the island, Antonia’s politically powerful mother orders her to find the crown first or forget her magical studies. After Master Betrys is arrested on suspicion of supporting the rebels, her rival apprentices use Antonia’s magical knowledge and Moppe’s magical power to search for
Dudás’ full-color graphite and ink illustrations add a pitch-perfect warm and joyful spirit.

FOX & RABBIT

Ferry, Beth
Illus. by Dudás, Gergley
Amulet/Abrams (96 pp.)
$12.99 | Apr. 21, 2020
978-1-4197-4077-0

Five laugh-out-loud stories celebrate an unlikely animal friendship. Carefree Fox and worry-prone Rabbit show that opposites not only attract, but make for great comedy. In their first story together, the pair goes to the fair—which Fox loves because it starts with “F, just like Fox.” While Rabbit gets a little miffed that all of the “un-fair” games are “broken,” Fox keeps winning and winning. In a later story, the pair plant a garden using seeds they found on an adventure. The next day, their greens turn up gobbled (i.e., the vegetables were a little hard for Rabbit to resist). No matter the boon that graces them or mishap that befalls them, their friendship prevails. Picture-book author Ferry’s first foray into comics is an infectiously chipper series opener. Though the panels never exceed nine per page, some complex layouts require familiarity with the medium. Dialogue appears both inside and outside of speech bubbles, mostly in short sentences voiced by separate speakers. Hungarian illustrator Dudás’ full-color graphite and ink illustrations add a pitch-perfect warm and joyful spirit. A few full-page panels capture some truly magical and heartfelt moments, but humor is the tone du jour in these banter-filled stories. The punchline—a late-arriving turtle always asks the pair (or is it trio)? “What’d I miss?”—is the icing on the cake.

Excellent fun from panel to panel. (Graphic early reader. 6-9)

MY BEST FRIEND

Fogliano, Julie
Illus. by Tamaki, Jillian
Atheneum (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-5344-2722-8

Friendships are always new at first, with moments full of uncertainty and potential.

On the opening endpapers, a bold illustration of a young girl with pale skin and red hair gazes at readers, inviting them into a story that, like her friendship, is just beginning. Turn the page and the perspective shifts, as readers become bystanders to a budding interaction with a second girl, also pale-skinned but with black hair and glasses. Simple, spare text that shifts easily from first to second person weaves the tale of this dynamic pair as they leap and swing through each other’s imaginations and discover likes and dislikes, complexities, and nuances that make a friendship solid. Their hug, at the emotional climax of the book, is portrayed up close, surrounded by dynamic lines that evoke the energy of the moment and juxtaposed with text that belies an inner uncertainty that can be common with meeting new people. Though they don’t yet know each other’s names, still these girls are kindred spirits. The closing illustration mirrors the opening one—the protagonist looking away from readers and toward her new buddy as each girl leaves with her caregiver. Tamaki depicts the girls in soft, round lines rendered in red and green colored pencil, which evokes an emotional resonance through the artwork.

A delightful new friendship portrayed in all its emergent, ebullient, and transformative ways. (Picture book. 3-7)

BATMAN TALES

Once Upon a Crime

Fridolfs, Derek
Illus. by Nguyen, Dustin
DC (192 pp.)
$9.99 paper | Feb. 4, 2020
978-1-4012-8340-7

Four classic tales, considerably reworked to feature the Dark Knight and various foes and associates.

The creators of the Secret Hero Society series (kicked off with Study Hall of Justice, 2016) turn from middle school to another fertile milieu—classic tales. The creators follow wooden “W aynocchio” on his quest to become a “real Boy W onder”; send the butler Alfred into Wonderland to rescue his costumed charges from the “Jokerwacky” and “Har -ley Queen”; cast Nora “Mrs. Freeze” Fries as the Snow Queen, who seeks help from Batman to thaw her captive husband, Mr. Freeze; and reimagine “The Princess and the Pea” as a series of interrogations by police seeking a hefty stolen diamond. As dialogue constitutes the only text in all but one of these, readers unfamiliar with the originals may have trouble following at least
the first two. Moreover, Batman himself takes only a supporting role in all but “The Snow Queen.” Still, from the Cheshire Catwoman on, the characters (all white), though largely drawn as children or at least with young faces, will be recognizable to fans of DC comics and films. Being loosely drawn and brushed in transparent inks, the art has a quick, sketchy look reinforced by impressionistic backgrounds in both the spacious panels and unbordered larger scenes.

Clever if rough-hewn concept bearing at best a chancy resemblance to its literary models. (Graphic fantasy. 9-12)

**RICK**
Gino, Alex
Scholastic (240 pp.)
$17.99 | Apr. 21, 2020
978-1-338-04810-0

As he explores his identity and finds his footing in middle school, a sixth grader stands up to his bully best friend. White, cisgender boys Rick and Jeff have been best friends since the third grade. When they’re alone, Jeff shares his video games, but at school Jeff picks on other kids and talks about girls with ostentatious lasciviousness. Despite their connection, Rick knows he can’t tell Jeff that he wants to join their school’s Rainbow Spectrum, a safe space for LGBTQ+ students, or that he’s questioning his own sexuality. The more Rick learns about himself, the more he realizes he needs to hold Jeff accountable for his behavior. An honest relationship develops between Rick and his cosplay-loving grandfather. Grandpa Ray reassures and supports Rick when he comes out

A game-changing ace. (author’s note) (Fiction. 8-13)

**ROVER THROWS A PARTY**
Inspired by NASA’s Curiosity on Mars
Gray, Kristin L.
Illus. by Magoon, Scott
Knopf (40 pp.)
$17.99 | $20.99 PLB | Mar. 31, 2020
978-0-525-64648-8
978-0-525-64649-5 PLB

After a year of digging, sifting, baking, sweeping, and photographing the surface of Mars, it’s party time.

Unlike Sara Schonfeld’s effervescent *Birthday on Mars*, illustrated by Andrew J. Ross (2019), this introduction to the durable Curiosity (still ticking over six years after its original mission’s conclusion) is as dry overall as the red planet itself. “Ack! Spooked by my own shadow. That happens when you’re the ONLY ONE on a planet,” reads Curiosity’s narration, set in a typeface that looks like a digital readout. Supplemental text explains, “Shadows are made on Mars in the same way they are formed on Earth, by an object blocking the light. In this case, the rover is blocking sunlight.” In strained efforts to inject some color into Gray’s drab descriptions of Curiosity’s gear, activities, and surroundings, Magoon tops the angularly drawn rover’s “ChemCam” with a perky party hat partway through, litters the dimly lit Martian landscape with printed invitations, and, confusingly, rolls in a nonexistent second rover bearing party balloons to get the festivities underway. Readers will likely find the closing author’s note, which includes a dramatic account of the rover’s landing, notes on each of its six specialized cameras, and several color photos, more memorable than the stolid preceding narrative.

An also-ran bearing a respectable informational payload but inching along a well-covered track. (bibliography) (Informational picture book. 6-9)

**THE BUG COLLECTOR**
Griffiths, Alex G.
Illus. by the author
Andersen Press USA (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Apr. 7, 2020
978-1-5415-9634-4

Together, George and Grandad figure out the best way to enjoy bugs.

George is a blond, white child who excitedly accompanies white-bearded Grandad on a trip to the Museum of Wildlife. The big-eyed, cartoony characters move quickly past large-animal displays to Grandad’s favorite room, which is crowded with framed specimens of “creatures much smaller and stranger, and Grandad loved them.” George returns home, dreaming of all kinds of bugs, and sets off the next day to find bugs and collect them. Comical scenes depict him failing at early attempts, but he finally becomes a “master bug catcher,” storing all manner of live bugs in glass containers with holes in the lids. Oddly, the contraption used for grabbing a butterfly looks lethal despite George’s self-admonishment of “CAREFULLY!” In what seems to be a very short time, George admires his specimens—stored in his treehouse—then goes home to dinner, noticing as he does that something is off in his garden.

Next day, Grandad confirms George’s realization that all the bugs are gone from the now-sick garden. There ensues a double-page spread of lecturing from Grandad, after which George sadly releases the bugs. Grandad redeems both characters with a suggestion that eventually creates something far better than the bug room at the museum. The final, joyous double-page spread—which includes kids of varying skin tones—makes the final sentence as unnecessary as swatting a long-dead fly.

Cute art but buggy text. (Picture book. 3-5)
HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS WITH THE SEA
Guerrero, Tanya
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (368 pp.)
$16.99 | Mar. 31, 2020
978-0-374-31199-5

A boy struggles with anxiety amid significant life changes.

Pablo and his mother move around every few months and are currently residing in the Philippines. Ever since he was little, things bothered Pablo, but after his parents’ divorce, Pablo has picked up more anxieties, ranging from tiny things like germs and crumbs to the sea—his biggest fear. On Pablo’s 12th birthday, his mother brings home an orphaned Filipino girl with a cleft lip. Chiqui, as they call her, doesn’t understand English, won’t speak, and has a hard time adjusting to her new environment. At first, Pablo hates the change, but one evening Chiqui speaks to him and only him. Pablo realizes he wants to be strong for Chiqui and to protect her, and that feeling might be bigger than all his fears, even the sea. As related by Pablo, this is an indelible depiction of a child’s struggle with mental health. Readers learn empathy as they feel Pablo’s heartbreaking struggles firsthand, but they also experience the loving relationships that help him overcome them. Guerrero touches on many topics—anxiety, fostering, friendship, family, selective mutism, and more—seamlessly weaving them all together to create a strong, moving narrative.

Originally from Spain, Pablo’s mother mixes English with her native tongue, and other characters often speak Tagalog. Pablo and his mother are both white.

A heartbreaking, heartwarming, powerful debut novel.
(Fiction. 8-12)

BRIGHTSTORM
Hardy, Vashti
Illus. by Ermos, George
Norton Young Readers (352 pp.)
$18.95 | Mar. 17, 2020
978-1-324-00564-3

Orphaned twins, an adventurer dad lost to an ice monster, and an airship race around the world.

In Lontown, 12-year-old twins Arthur and Maudie learn that their explorer father has gone missing on his quest to reach South Polaris, the crew of his sky-ship apparently eaten by monsters. As he’s accused of sabotage, their father’s property is forfeit. The disgraced twins are sent off to live in a garret in a scene straight out of an Edwardian novel à la A Little Princess. Maudie has the consolation of her engineering skills, but all Arthur wants is to be an adventurer like his father. A chance to join Harriet Culpepper’s journey to South Polaris might offer excitement and let him clear his father’s name—if only he can avoid getting eaten by intelligent ice monsters. Though some steampunk set dressing is appropriately over-the-top (such as a flying house, thinly depicted but charming), adaptive tools for Arthur’s disability are wonderfully realistic. His iron arm is a standard, sometimes painful passive prosthesis. The crew adapts the airship galley for Arthur’s needs, even creating a spiked chopping board. Off the ship, Arthur and Maudie meet people and animals in vignettes that are appealingly rendered but slight. Harriet teaches the white twins respect for the cultures they encounter on these travels, though they are never more than observers of non-Lontowners’ different ways.

A kid adventurer with a disability makes this steampunk offering stand out. (Steampunk. 9-11)

DON’T WORRY, LITTLE CRAB
Haughton, Chris
Illus. by the author
Candlewick (48 pp.)
$17.99 | Apr. 7, 2020
978-1-5362-1119-1

Though the journey is scary, Little Crab is encouraged by Very Big Crab to venture from their tiny tide pool into the ocean, where a world of wonder and new friends awaits.

Haughton uses his signature retro graphic-arts style once again in this sweet story of perseverance and discovery as Little Crab encounters the ocean for the first time. Initially confident and excited (“I can go ANYWHERE!”), the genderless crustacean finds that a few large waves breaking over the two crabs elicit second thoughts: “I think we’ve had enough of the ocean now.” But Very Big Crab, gentle and encouraging, isn’t fazed: “Don’t worry, Little Crab....I’m here. Come! Just a few more steps.” And with one last plunge, they reach the ocean floor, where the color palette opens up in a rainbow of fish, coral, and other welcoming sea creatures. Of course, after a wonderful day, it is hard for Little Crab to go home to their tide pool. However, Very Big Crab suggests heading home the long way, and Little Crab is now definitely up for the adventure. With minimal detail, Haughton conveys the loving relationship between two small creatures, emphasizing gentle support to help little ones overcome their fear and discover their own resilience and potential.

A charming and visually stunning adventure that will resonate for children and caregivers alike. (Picture book: 3-7)
HOMER'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE
Hoover, P.J.
Illus. by McKenney, Erik
CBAY (304 pp.)
$18.95 | $9.95 paper | Apr. 7, 2020
978-1-944821-86-9
978-1-944821-87-6 paper

An ancient Greek preteen on the verge of flunking school gets a chance to sail with Odysseus.

Given but 10 days to compose an epic yarn as a class project or be expelled, despairing young Homer finds himself transported into the recent past along with Dory, an enslaved friend with a secret, to the dark and smelly belly of a big wooden horse. That's only the first stop on a wild string of encounters with drug-dealing lotus-eaters, cannibal Laestrygonians, dead spirits, vicious storms (“We were hosed. There was no getting around it. Making the gods mad was a really bad idea”), and, of course, monsters galore. Recording it all as he goes on an unusually capacious magic scroll, Homer picks up pointers about word choice and grammar, selection of detail (“I'd add more gory details, but it might not be appropriate”), character development, and other writerly skills with much blatantly editorial prodding from Dory. Hoover leaves out the Telemachus and Penelope plotlines but otherwise follows the Odysseus general course before closing with happy endings for Homer and Dory both, plus appended lists of people and places, a disquisition on dactylic hexameter, and (for some reason) a recipe for hardtack.

Homer presents white, as does Dory, but notes early on that Odysseus and his “guys” all have dark skin, “the color of ebony.” Final art not seen.

Awesome reading that will be most particularly appreciated by those already familiar with the original. (map)
(Epic fantasy. 11-13)

DO I HAVE TO WEAR A COAT?
Isadora, Rachel
Illus. by the author
Nancy Paulsen Books (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-0-525-51660-6

Seasonal changes—and outfit changes, too.

As children fling open their doors to run outside, the titular question comes to mind: “Do I have to wear a coat?” Laid out in a similar style to those in Isadora’s previous musing on the senses, I Hear a Pickle (and Smell, See, Touch, and Taste It, Too!) (2016), various vignettes of diverse toots explore spring, summer, fall, and winter. Each season is opened with a picture of the same pigtailed white youngster and a dog looking at a tree. As the seasons change, readers see differences to the leaves and changes to the child’s clothing. Spring brings flowers, baseball games, sidewalk chalk, and raincoats. Summer brings ice cream, fireflies, sand castles, and no coats at all! In the fall, sweaters are warm and cozy accompaniments for hayrides, jumping into leaf piles, and apple picking. Winter, the coat-iest season, brings snow angels, frosty air, steamy hot chocolate, and of course, bundles and bundles of coats! Isadora explores the seasons not only through outerwear, but also activities that are intimate and familiar to those who experience these seasons. Vignettes include racially diverse children; two kids in sports wheelchairs play tennis, and an amputee on crutches plays soccer. Children will feel each season deeply, with or without their coats!

A fresh perspective on a cyclical topic. (Picture book. 3-6)

FOLLOW ME, FLO!
Jarvis
Illus. by the author
Candlewick (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Mar. 10, 2020
978-1-5362-1270-9

A young duckling learns the importance of following directions.

Flo, a tiny yellow duck, likes to do things her own way. Instead of eating seeds and berries like all the other little ducks, she would rather have ice cream. And instead of preening herself clean, she splashes through muddy puddles. Daddy Duck, well versed in his daughter’s wild ways, is worried when they set off to visit Auntie Jenna. He doesn’t want Flo to become lost, so he sings a tune to keep her close. “We’re off to somewhere new. / So stick to me like glue. // … / Follow me UP… // Follow me DOWN…. / Look straight ahead and NOT AROUND!” The song doesn’t quite suit Flo, so she makes up a new one. Unfortunately, her tune causes her to stray away from Daddy Duck—straight into the path of a hungry fox! Flo remembers the words to Daddy’s song just in time and finds him again quickly. Reminiscent of Mabela the Clever, retold by Margaret Read MacDonald and illustrated by Tim Coffey (2001), another sprightly protagonist in a tale of fatherly advice, this plucky little ducky is sure to elicit smiles. Jarvis’ brightly scrawled style creates busy, colorful spreads that are punctuated with many tiny insect friends throughout, leavening the chase scene; Flo is never completely alone.

This lively little ditty is just ducky. (Picture book. 3-6)
A funny, moving tale, at once unsparingly realistic and upbeat.

**LILA AND HADLEY**

Keplinger, Kody
Scholastic (256 pp.)
$16.99 | Apr. 7, 2020
978-1-338-30609-5

Hadley, 12, legally blind, angry, and not a lover of dogs unexpectedly bonds with Lila, a depressed pit bull waif. Hadley feels as if she's lost everything, and now she's losing her sight. With her mom in prison, she must move to Kentucky to live with her estranged older sister, Beth, last seen when Hadley was 7. Accompanying Beth, a dog trainer, to Right Choice Rescue and wandering among the penned trainees, Hadley spots Lila, considered unadoptable, looking equally miserable. Observing them connect, Vanessa, the owner, talks Beth into taking Lila home for Hadley to train. Still furious with Beth and their mom, whose letters and phone calls she ignores, Hadley works with Lila and grudgingly allows Beth to guide the training. Her vision worsening (she has retinitis pigmentosa), Hadley eventually agrees to mobility classes. Learning to use a cane is challenging, especially while holding Lila's leash in one hand. Her persistence—Hadley's strong suit—is a plus. New skills breed independence and self-esteem. Hadley becomes less defensive and judgmental, and the sisters haltingly reconnect—then Vanessa, now Beth's girlfriend, says it's time to find Lila a home. (Vanessa is black; Hadley and family are presumed white.) It's a pleasure to watch smart, wryly self-aware Hadley turn obstinacy into strength. From glum to stubborn and affectionate, Lila radiates doggy authenticity. A former Kentuckian and legally blind, Keplinger knows this territory, literal and figurative, inside out.

A free-wheeling jaunt that merges fact with fiction in hopes of finding greater truths. (author's note) (Fiction. 8-12)
BABY CLOWN
LaReau, Kara
Illus. by Cordell, Matthew
Candlewick (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Apr. 14, 2020
978-0-7636-9743-3

At the Dingling Circus, “a STAR is born”—but how can he dazzle the audience when he won’t stop crying?

In the grand tradition of Marla Frazee’s The Boss Baby (2010), Kate Beaton’s King Baby (2016), and others, a pair of overwhelmed new parents navigate their infant’s attempts to communicate. Boffo and Frieda Clown feed and burp Baby Clown, change his diaper, juggle for him, and even ask their fellow circus performers to entertain him in hopes of ending his wailing. Cordell’s characteristically loose ink-and-watercolor illustrations brilliantly evoke Quentin Blake’s Clown (1996), with large oval eyeballs and expressive mouths and hands. The clown parents’ dramatic features are further exaggerated as they experience dismay, frustration, and abject despair (in one spread, Frieda lies on the floor in the fetal position while Boffo, on his knees, begs Baby Clown to be quiet). All efforts to cheer the tot fail, but the show must go on: The sold-out crowd (depicted in shades of sepia) is eager to see Baby Clown—and their eagerness results in an unexpected solution! The clowns’ makeup is paper-white, and Baby Clown has a shock of brown hair and light-colored hands; “big boss” Mr. Dingling is the only character with distinctly brown skin.

Both amusing and endearing; caregivers and close acquaintances of newborns will feel seen—and heard. (Picture book. 3-8)

MULAN
Lin, Grace
Illus. by the author
Disney Press (384 pp.)
$16.99 | Feb. 11, 2020
978-1-368-02033-6

Before becoming the legendary Chinese warrior, Mulan had to face her own demons.

A prophecy tells of a young girl who will grow up to save the emperor. Motivated by past grievances, the White Fox demon, Daji, strives to stop the prophecy by injecting that girl—Xiu—and her healer with a powerful poison. Desperate to save Xiu (though ignorant of her sister’s portended role in the future), Xiu’s sister, Mulan, aids the injured healer—who’s revealed to be Jade Rabbit, an immortal with powers of his own. The Rabbit tells Mulan that they must travel to the garden of the Queen Mother of the Immortals to retrieve a rare plant needed for the cure—by the night of the new moon, before the poison reaches the victims’ vitals. Mulan and the Rabbit ride off to their uncertain future on Mulan’s horse, Black Wind, with a mix of dread and hope. As the Rabbit and his powers grow weaker by the hour, Mulan constantly battles her insecurities regarding her own identity and abilities vis-à-vis her expected traditional role in society. Daji also pays her visits, laying temptations and traps with the help of Red Fox, her accomplice. As usual, Lin artfully develops captivating characters with rich histories. Traditional tales are interspersed throughout the tightly written narrative to gradually reveal a complex web of legends and adventure that seamlessly blend together into one alluring saga. (A partial bibliography of Chinese tales and traditions is appended.)

A legendary tale for a legendary figure. (afterword) (Fantasy. 8-12)

RONAN BOYLE AND THE SWAMP OF CERTAIN DEATH
Lennon, Thomas
Illus. by Hendrix, John
Amulet/Abrams (336 pp.)
$17.99 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-4197-4113-5
Series: Ronan Boyle, 2

Following Ronan Boyle and the Bridge of Riddles (2019), the further zany adventures of an anxiety-prone 15-year-old member of the Garda Special Unit of Tir Na Nog, i.e., Irish faerie fighter.

Despite his incompetence, anxiety, and absolute lack of courage, young Ronan Boyle is off again to the enchanted side of Ireland, to capture Lord Desmond Dooley, the man who framed Boyle’s parents for theft of an ancient mummy, the Bog Man, and to rescue his captain, who fell into Dooley’s nefarious hands. Accompanied by the formidable Log MacDougall, a human raised by leprechauns, and an Irish wolfhound named Rí, he braves a wild variety of horrors, including a unicorn spa town, where he appears in a musical revue, and the titular Swamp of Certain Death. As in the first volume, the tale is snort-out-loud funny on the sentence level, but the plot, such as there is one, approximates the inside of Ronan's noggin: “a hamster on a Mobius strip, running frantic laps to nowhere.” It’s highly enjoyable to a point, and then the utter lack of cause and effect begins to wear readers down. One could skip any or all of 90% of the scenes in this book and never notice. As far as race goes, the unicorns come in all colors; Ronan is depicted as white on the cover.

Equal parts funny and fatiguing. (Fantasy. 8-14)

RONAN BOYLE AND THE SWAMP OF CERTAIN DEATH
Lennon, Thomas
Illus. by Cordell, Matthew
Candlewick (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Apr. 14, 2020
978-0-7636-9743-3

At the Dingling Circus, “a STAR is born”—but how can he dazzle the audience when he won’t stop crying?

In the grand tradition of Marla Frazee’s The Boss Baby (2010), Kate Beaton’s King Baby (2016), and others, a pair of overwhelmed new parents navigate their infant’s attempts to communicate. Boffo and Frieda Clown feed and burp Baby Clown, change his diaper, juggle for him, and even ask their fellow circus performers to entertain him in hopes of ending his wailing. Cordell’s characteristically loose ink-and-watercolor illustrations brilliantly evoke Quentin Blake’s Clown (1996), with large oval eyeballs and expressive mouths and hands. The clown parents’ dramatic features are further exaggerated as they experience dismay, frustration, and abject despair (in one spread, Frieda lies on the floor in the fetal position while Boffo, on his knees, begs Baby Clown to be quiet). All efforts to cheer the tot fail, but the show must go on: The sold-out crowd (depicted in shades of sepia) is eager to see Baby Clown—and their eagerness results in an unexpected solution! The clowns’ makeup is paper-white, and Baby Clown has a shock of brown hair and light-colored hands; “big boss” Mr. Dingling is the only character with distinctly brown skin.

Both amusing and endearing; caregivers and close acquaintances of newborns will feel seen—and heard. (Picture book. 3-8)
THE AUTHOR’S NEW PICTURE BOOK, THE OLDEST STUDENT, TELLS THE TRUE-LIFE STORY OF A FORMER SLAVE, FREED AT AGE 15, WHO NEVER STOPPED LEARNING

By Alex Heimbach

Mary Walker learned to read in 1964 at the age of 116, making her the nation’s oldest student. Born into slavery, Walker was freed at 15 and had to make her way in the world. “She had nothing and yet somehow she was able to survive, bring three sons into the world, work for her church, and then live so long that she learned to read at 116,” says children’s book author Rita Lorraine Hubbard.

Hubbard still recalls her elementary school field trip to the Mary Walker Foundation in Chattanooga, Tennessee, where she walked around a replica of Walker’s cabin and saw her beloved family Bible—a book that Walker owned for almost a century before she learned to read it. “That image, that experience, had never left my mind,” Hubbard says. The foundation eventually closed and Walker was largely forgotten, but the experience stayed with Hubbard.

To share this extraordinary life with today’s students, Hubbard wrote The Oldest Student: How Mary Walker Learned to Read (Schwartz & Wade, Jan. 7). “It was truly my desire to bring her story forward and to do justice to her story,” she says. Gorgeously illustrated by Oge Mara (Saturday, 2019), the book recounts the story of Walker’s long life, including her time as a sharecropper, the growth of her family, and her first airplane ride.

As a slave, Walker was forbidden from learning to read or write. After her emancipation, she met an evangelist on the road who inspired her to learn by handing her a Bible and telling her its pages held her civil rights. Walker wasn’t sure what that meant but she was determined to find out. Unfortunately, Hubbard says, “sometimes you can have all these plans and life gets in the way.”

More than anything, Hubbard wanted to do justice to Walker’s perseverance. She lived through massive changes in society and survived all of her own children, but it wasn’t until the very end of her life that she accomplished her goal of learning to read. The message, Hubbard says, is that “no matter what comes up in life or no matter how long a hope or a goal takes, it’s never too late.”

As a longtime teacher, Hubbard wanted to share this message with young people. “I taught a lot of children who felt like the odds were stacked against them for whatever reasons,” she says, “and I wanted to inspire them.”

The desire to inspire kids with the stories of real people is what drew Hubbard to picture-book biographies. “You get a little digestible chunk of history,” she says, making these books a great way to get kids interested in the past.

In her own school days, Hubbard’s love of history set her apart from her classmates. “They didn’t understand why you’d read something about what happened long ago if it wasn’t a homework assignment,” she says. But stories of the
past always fascinated Hubbard because of the insight they provided into other ways of life.

Because she lived so long, Walker experienced a remarkable number of cultural and technological changes. There were a multitude of facets to her life, not all of which fit into The Oldest Student. For one, she witnessed brutal violence as a slave; for another, she worked as a blacksmith as a little girl. “This was a book about a woman realizing her dream,” Hubbard says, and it had to stick to that narrative.

But in her research, Hubbard pieced together a detailed timeline of Walker’s life. She started with basic biographical information from Chattanooga’s historical marker honoring Walker, which included her birth and death dates and the fact that she was twice named a goodwill ambassador for the city. Because of Walker’s importance to local history, Hubbard was able to find a clipping file on her at the local library that helped fill out some of the details of her life.

The most helpful discovery, however, was an interview Mary Walker gave in the 1960s. Although Hubbard couldn’t find the original LP, she did manage to get her hands on a transcript of the recording. Crucially, that interview provided not just further details about Walker’s life, but also her perspective on events. She described a hard life, some of which she still struggled to discuss decades later, but also one full of positivity. “I read hope in every one of her answers,” Hubbard says.

Alex Heimbach is a writer and editor in California. The Oldest Student received a starred review in the Dec. 1, 2019, issue.

In this tribute to Native resilience, Indigenous author-and-illustrator team Lindstrom and Goade invite readers to stand up for environmental justice.

“Water is the first medicine,” a young, unnamed protagonist reflects as she wades into a river with her grandmother. “We come from water.” Stunning illustrations, rich in symbolism from the creators’ respective Ojibwe and Tlingit/Haida lineages, bring the dark-haired, brown-skinned child’s narrative to life as she recounts an Anishinaabe prophecy: One day, a “black snake” will terrorize her community and threaten water, animals, and land. “Now the black snake is here,” the narrator proclaims, connecting the legend to the present-day threat of oil pipelines being built on Native lands. Though its image is fearsome, younger audiences aren’t likely to be frightened due to Goade’s vibrant, uplifting focus on collective power. Awash in brilliant colors and atmospheric studies of light, the girl emphasizes the importance of protecting “those who cannot fight for themselves” and understanding that on Earth, “we are all related.” Themes of ancestry, community responsibility, and shared inheritance run throughout. Where the brave protagonist is depicted alongside her community, the illustrations feature people of all ages, skin tones, and clothing styles. Lindstrom’s powerful message includes non-Native and Native readers alike: “We are stewards of the Earth. We are water protectors.”

An inspiring call to action for all who care about our interconnected planet. (author’s note, glossary, illustrator’s note, Water Protector pledge) (picture book: 5-12)
With his layered, textured paintings, Pak creates both beautiful pictures of the kalo and stunning panoramas of the community.

**‘OHANA MEANS FAMILY**

Loomis, Ilima
Illus. by Pak, Kenard
Neal Porter/Holiday House (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Feb. 4, 2020
978-0-8234-4326-0

Discover the importance of kalo in Hawaiian culture.

Opening below a single bowl of purple poi, the text begins, “This is the poi for our ‘ohana’s lū’au.” Using a cumulative pattern, it expands on where poi comes from to create a broader picture of the Hawaiian countryside with a pair of presumably Native Hawaiian children as focal characters. They watch as the kalo, or taro, is pounded into poi, then, as the cumulative rhyme moves backward, they help in the taro patches of mud and clear water where the plants grow. A close-up of the two-page spread uses the gutter playfully to show Baby Bou’s caribou diets, predators, and the migration journey. A funny double-page spread uses the gutter playfully to show Baby Bou’s' life, such as the land, elders, family, and food. In this read-aloud, Loomis writes a beautiful homage to kalo, a cornerstone of the Native Hawaiian children as focal characters. They watch as the kalo, or taro, is pounded into poi, then, as the cumulative rhyme moves backward, they help in the taro patches of mud and clear water where the plants grow. A close-up of the taro patch zooms out to reveal more people working in many patches and the river that feeds the land that has been passed down from generation to generation. Each new addition to the cumulative text highlights an essential element of Hawaiian values, such as the land, elders, family, and food. In this read-aloud, Loomis writes a beautiful homage to kalo, a cornerstone of the culture and livelihood of the Hawaiian people. The poetic text combines with Pak’s breathtaking illustrations to depict kalo’s embodiment of the strong connection between land, water, air, sun, and the people. With his layered, textured paintings, Pak creates both beautiful pictures of the kalo and stunning panoramas of the community. A note on kalo and poi, an author’s note, and a glossary are provided to explain the importance of the elements of this story.

An incredible book to share with every member of your ‘ohana. (Picture book. 4-8)

**NEVER FEAR, MEENA’S HERE!**

Manternach, Karla
Illus. by Price, Mina
Simon & Schuster (208 pp.)
$16.99 | Mar. 24, 2020
978-1-5344-2820-1
Series: Meena Zee

The further growing ups and downs of the one and only Meena Zee, first introduced in *Meena Meets Her Match* (2019).

When Meena, who continues seeing treasure in other people’s trash, finds a beautiful and mysterious ring in the school parking lot, she plans to save it for when Inspiration strikes. Moments later, she saves a schoolmate from certain doom. Meena is a hero! Just as the spider did for Peter Parker, the Ring must have activated her superpowers, right? Now, Meena sees proof everywhere that she’s a superhero (she makes it to the top of the good-behavior chart for the first time, and she turns her mother’s boring gray accounting spreadsheet into a rainbow), but the one person who matters most isn’t convinced. As Meena tests her powers, her friendship with best friend Sofia is also put to the test. The Ring can’t save Meena from epilepsy, a condition that plays an important role in the plot but doesn’t define it. She manages it, with her family’s help, in moments of gentle humor. If Harriet M. Welsch had a literary little sister, it would be Meena. Readers not quite ready for Harriet the Spy will discover along with Meena that, perhaps, the power of true friendship is all that matters. Cover art shows Meena as white, and there are indications that Spanish-speaking Sofia is Mexican American. Assume whiteness elsewhere.

Meena’s escapades will rescue readers from boredom. (Fiction. 8-12)

**HUSH UP AND MIGRATE!**

Markle, Sandra
Illus. by McWilliam, Howard
Persnickety Press (36 pp.)
$16.95 | Apr. 5, 2020
978-1-943978-42-7

As wise Mama Caribou encourages her stubborn male calf to join the herd’s long, seasonal migration north for summer, readers learn facts about caribou and migration.

The formula developed in *Hush Up and Hibernate!* (2018) continues here, using childlike behaviors recognizable to children and adults for Baby Bou and showing in Mama Caribou a parent who gently but firmly nudges her child toward maturity. Mama Caribou initially allows her calf to procrastinate from the upcoming migration: He gets to play with his friends and then dig through snow for a snack of lichens. As Mama counters further excuses, readers learn rudimentary facts about caribou diets, predators, and the migration journey. A funny double-page spread uses the gutter playfully to show Baby Bou’s
The background art of tundra scenery and herds of caribou is realistic and appealing, and it uses varied focusing techniques for distance. However, unlike the bears in the earlier book, this anthropomorphic pair—particularly the calf—has been endowed with spherical eyeballs that often look uncomfortably ready to pop out. Other than that unfortunate choice, there are some excellent facial expressions on both caribou, whose humanlike behaviors will keep readers entertained. As with its predecessor, the text offers a funny and familiar punchline and then several pages of facts related to the migration of temporary tundra-dwellers.

**Familiar, familial fun delivers facts about caribou.** *(suggested activity, resources) (Picture book. 3-6)*

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**THE THREE LITTLE KITTENS**

*McClintock, Barbara*  
*Illus. by the author*  
*Scholastic (32 pp.)*  
*Published: Apr. 21, 2020*  
*978-1-338-12587-0*

This adaptation of a traditional English nursery rhyme features a contemporary setting, dialogue, and a small twist.

Three anthropomorphized kittens wearing conspicuous, colorful mittens (but no other clothing) are seen outside a cozy suburban house, skateboarding, playing ball, and skipping rope. A sweet scent wafts from an open window, through which a smiling cat in a dotted apron can be seen removing a pie from the oven. In their race to the door the kittens lose their mittens, of course, and the story unfolds from there. In some cases, the rhymes appear in dialogue balloons, at other times as part of the main text, both of which also include additional, original lines. Unexpected interjections add humor, as when the kittens react to the mess they’ve made by eating blueberry pie while wearing mittens: “'Ooops!' 'Eeww!' 'Gross!'” Created with pencil, watercolor, and gouache, McClintock's feline portraits pack plenty of personality. Big-footed and slightly round-bellied, the variously colored kittens have big eyes and sweet smiles. Mother, meanwhile, is slim and sleek, with extremely expressive whiskers. The setting is simply presented, limited to the outside of the house, inside the kitchen, and at the table. At times the characters appear against blank, softly colored backgrounds. Alternating double-page spreads, single pages, and occasional panels add interest and move the action along smoothly. Sharp-eyed listeners may notice an additional character whose presence is acknowledged in the cheerful conclusion.

A sprightly and charming modern take on a traditional rhyme. *(Picture book. 3-6)*

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**LOVE FROM ALFIE MCPoonst, THE BEST DOG EVER**

*McNiff, Dran*  
*Illus. by Metola, Patricia*  
*Kane/Miller (32 pp.)*  
*Published: Mar. 1, 2020*  
*978-1-68464-027-0*

In this British import, a dog writes letters from heaven to a child back on Earth, easing the grieving process.

Alfie McPoonst, a dog of indeterminate breed, has recently moved on to being a “Sky Dog” in Dog Heaven, residing on the “nicest cloud” in the sky. He writes to Izzy, his owner, a diminutive, round-headed moppet. Izzy is bereft, carrying Alfie’s blanket and bone toy everywhere. In subsequent letters, Alfie describes how much fun he has in Dog Heaven, playing with other dogs, chasing “postmen,” and scaring wolves. He is allowed to engage in formerly forbidden activities such as recollections of summer’s pesky mosquitoes. The background art of tundra scenery and herds of caribou is realistic and appealing, and it uses varied focusing techniques for distance. However, unlike the bears in the earlier book, this anthropomorphic pair—particularly the calf—has been endowed with spherical eyeballs that often look uncomfortably ready to pop out. Other than that unfortunate choice, there are some excellent facial expressions on both caribou, whose humanlike behaviors will keep readers entertained. As with its predecessor, the text offers a funny and familiar punchline and then several pages of facts related to the migration of temporary tundra-dwellers.

A beacon for all those missing home. *(recipe) (Picture book. 3-7)*

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**THE HOMESICK CLUB**

*Martinez, Libby*  
*Illus. by Gibbon, Rebecca*  
*Groundwood (32 pp.)*  
*Published: Apr. 7, 2020*  
*978-1-77-306164-1*

Two girls missing home find comfort in sharing their experiences. Mónica and Hannah—founders of the “Homesick Club” and immigrants from Bolivia and Israel, respectively—empathize with newcomer teacher Miss Shelby when she shares her recent arrival to town from Texas. As Miss Shelby teaches lessons on the stars and the moon, Mónica ties them to her own memories of Bolivia. Believing Miss Shelby must miss her home the way she longs for familiar hummingbirds and frogs, Mónica proposes inviting her to join the Homesick Club. But according to Hannah, who misses tortoises and the wind, she shouldn’t join because, “Miss Shelby is a teacher!” However, Mónica doesn’t give up in her effort to make Miss Shelby feel welcome. With a sprinkle of ecological science, a pinch of astronomy, and a dash of gastronomy, Martinez creates an empathetic love letter to immigrants and any person living far away from home. Paired with Gibbon’s friendly and detailed illustrations, the story is suffused with the longing of all that is left behind in a hometown or home country. A most pleasant and thoughtful detail in this endearing book is the spelling of the protagonist’s name (Mónica), which, by including the accent, further imbues the characters with cultural context.

A beacon for all those missing home. *(recipe) (Picture book. 3-7)*

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**Fiction**

**Nonfiction**

**Children’s**

**Young Adult**

**Indie**

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**KIRKUS.COM | CHILDREN’S | 1 JANUARY 2020 | 109**
INTERVIEWS & PROFILES

TIFFANY JEWELL

THE AUTHOR OF THIS BOOK IS ANTI-RACIST DISCUSSES HER SOCIAL ACTIVISM WORK WITH STUDENTS AND THE BOOK INSPIRED BY IT

By Anjali Enjeti

Conversations about race and racism have evolved over years. Like Ibram X. Kendi’s How To Be An Antiracist, Tiffany Jewell’s debut book, This Book Is Anti-Racist: 20 Lessons on How To Wake Up, Take Action, and Do the Work (Frances Lincoln, Jan. 7), is an essential tool for any reader hoping to dismantle systemic and internalized bias. This is difficult and oftentimes uncomfortable work, but Jewell has succeeded in breaking down complex concepts, like privilege, complicity, and the dominant culture, into smaller, more easily digestible units. Though the book is geared toward preteens and teens, even adults will find Jewell’s reflections and exercises to be an enlightening and invaluable resource. And the vivid illustrations by Aurélla Durand accompanying the text go a long way to connecting the history of resistance to present-day activism and social change.

Jewell talked about her work as an activist and Montessori educator from her home in Western Massachusetts.

What led you to write This Book Is Anti-Racist?

About a decade ago, while teaching first, second, and third graders at my small Montessori school, I started doing work around the history of racism and anti-racism. Every year the curriculum changed and grew. We used a timeline beginning with slavery and ending with President Barack Obama. The students kept telling me they wanted to learn more, and the curriculum eventually grew to 250 pages. We then began building trust together as a community.

Two years ago, I started sharing some of these lessons on Instagram along with Britt Hawthorne, who also does anti-bias education in the Montessori community. Last fall, I received an email from Katy Flint, an editor at Quarto, asking if I’d be interested in writing a book.

Can you talk a little about the exercises in the book?

People always want to know what they can do and how they can do this work. The activities and journal prompts are meant to build personal comprehension. Everyone learns and processes information very differently, but the book gives readers the space to move at their own pace. The lessons allow readers to work at addressing their personal selves so that they can do the work to dismantle racism collectively.

Why are the words we choose to address race and racism so important?

Language shapes power and how we think about things and do things. I wanted the language in the book to be specific. Colonialism took language away from Indigenous people, and there’s such power and ownership when groups reclaim language. Using “folx” with an x, instead of “folks,” comes from black and Indigenous activist circles. The language that you use is your language. You get to own it. It’s how you tell your story.

You use an “imaginary box” to explain the power of the dominant culture—i.e., white, cisgender, heterosexual, able, male, Christian, wealthy, etc. How did this idea
come about?
I learned about this idea at a training workshop I attended in Illinois by Crossroads Antiracist Organizing & Training. The imaginary box of the dominant culture represents power and influence and helps us to understand who we are and who we are not and how we can change and grow from that. To explain this concept to my young students, I use a physical cardboard box. They understand this. One cisgender boy from an affluent family looked at the box and said, “This is where all the power is.”

Can you talk about your approach of privately “calling in” a person for their bias versus publicly “calling out” someone?
There’s great risk and growth in both.
It’s important to make sure you’re blaming systems, not people. If someone is representing a system, I call them out. Calling out has public accountability and feels safer to me as a woman in the global majority. Some people prefer calling in because it feels safer. If the person is another woman of color, that deserves a call in. I don’t want to call out a woman of color in front of white folks because then they’re justified in all of the stereotypes they’ve compounded on to us.

When I’m called out for something, it requires me to check myself with other people’s eyes on me and then make amends. If we’re going to move forward, it’s really important that we make amends. We don’t have to be friends. But we have to be able to move the movement forward.

Anjali Enjeti is a freelance critic and vice president of membership for the National Book Critics Circle. This Book Is Anti-Racist received a starred review in the Oct. 1, 2019, issue.

eating cow pies and rolling in flower beds. He writes, “I watch you through a star peephole every day” and that he left a ball of dog fluff behind the sofa. That revelation inspires a touching letter from Izzy to Alfie, telling him, “I keep [my fluff] in a special heart locket, so I’ll never forget you, even when I’m 100.” Impressionistic illustrations in a limited, mostly rusty-brown palette show Alfie enjoying his new environment and Izzy’s parents cuddling and comforting their child. Illustrations on the endpapers show the family, who present white, visiting Alfie’s grave in the garden behind their house. While Izzy is obviously just a tiny tot, both the understated story and imaginative illustrations allow readers to accept the child’s ability to understand Alfie’s letters and to write back.

A memorable effort that will comfort anyone who has lost a beloved dog. (Picture book. 3-8)

FERGUS AND ZEKE AND THE FIELD DAY CHALLENGE
Messner, Kate
Illus. by Ross, Heather
Candlewick (56 pp.)
$14.99 | Apr. 14, 2020
978-1-5362-0202-1
Series: Fergus and Zeke

The lovable class pets are back (Fergus and Zeke, 2017), this time experiencing field day.

The two mice do everything that their human classmates do, from science experiments to gym exercises. So they anticipate loads of fun when Miss Maxwell announces field day: hurdles, a waterslide, a tug of war, a hula-hoop contest, a sack race, and a parachute game. But reality doesn’t measure up, literally in the case of the mice: The limbo isn’t even a challenge, they almost get trampled in a race, the water balloons are too heavy, and kickball? “Absolutely terrifying.” The only solution is for Fergus and Zeke to make their own field-day events using found objects: an acorn for tossing, some sticks for a high jump, a lost bracelet for a hula hoop, and a plastic grocery bag for a parachute…which comes in handy when the two mice have to get back to their second-story classroom window without hitching a ride with a human classmate. Once again, Ross’ digital illustrations both break up the text, which is a bridge between easy readers and chapter books, and provide kids with a fun, mouse-sized view of the world; the duo’s repurposing of small items is particularly charming.

Kids will look forward to their own field days after reading about this one. (Early reader. 6-9)
Mortensen’s poetic text with spare rhythmic lines perfectly complements Bristol’s illustrations, which echo Gorey’s.

**ACCIDENTAL TROUBLE MAGNET**

Mian, Zanib
Illus. by Mafaridik, Nasaya
Putnam (224 pp.)
$13.99 | Feb. 4, 2020
978-0-593-10921-2
Series: Planet Omar, 1

Omar, a British Pakistani boy, and his family have just moved to a new home in London, where he will be starting at a new school.

Omar worries about a lot of things, especially “walking into a brand-new classroom with everyone watching and a teacher who might or might not be an alien zombie.” He has a little brother and an older sister, and his mom and dad are both scientists. (Published in the U.K. in 2019, the text has been Americanized for the U.S. edition.) Omar has a huge imagination that helps him get through difficult situations, envisioning, for instance, “a better way to get to school…on a SUPER-Awesome, Magnificent DRAGON.” Mafaridik creatively embellishes the text with sketches and a variety of display types. At his new school, Omar makes friends with Charlie but also meets Daniel, a bully. (Both boys present white.) Omar does not tell his mom because he does not want her to worry, instead using humor and creativity to escape Daniel’s cruelty. Mian seamlessly weaves Islamic values and teachings through Omar’s chatty narration. At prayer in the mosque, “we went into Rukhu. That’s when your hands are on your knees….Then we went into Sujood.” These descriptions and definitions are consistent and brief throughout, moving with the flow of the story. While the story’s tone is light, anti-Muslim sentiment is acknowledged and integrated into the narrative.

Readers will be excited to see where Omar’s imagination will take him next. (Fiction. 8-12)

**TRACKING PYTHONS**

The Quest To Catch an Invasive Predator and Save an Ecosystem

Messner, Kate
Millbrook/Lerner (64 pp.)
$31.99 PLB | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-5415-5706-2

Scientists wrestle 100-pound snakes, wade through swamps, perform delicate surgery, and fly in small planes searching for Burmese pythons hiding and multiplying in southern Florida.

The baleful python on the cover will draw readers in, and Messner’s recurring descriptions of the snake-catchers in action will keep them engaged. She introduces the team from the Conservancy of Southwest Florida with an account of a tracking expedition. She explains why South Florida is a “perfect home” for these large predators and how the scientists capture snakes, implant radio transmitters, release them, and then follow them in the wild to find other pythons. She notes their affection for the snakes as well as their sadness that part of their job involves euthanizing females in an effort to keep this invasive apex predator from eating nearly everything else living in the delicate Florida ecosystem. She places this campaign in the context of worldwide efforts against invasive species. Well-captioned photographs, maps, and diagrams break up the text and add information. Videos of some of the episodes described are available via QR codes scattered throughout. In a page of profiles of the participating scientists (two men, two women, all apparently white), all four are shown holding huge snakes. This fascinating example of field biology holds its own against the exemplary Scientists in the Field series.

Who knew that snake science could be so adventurous? (author’s note, invasive species most wanted list, timeline, glossary, source notes, bibliography, further reading, index, photo acknowledgments) (Nonfiction. 9-14)

**NONSENSE!**

The Curious Story of Edward Gorey

Mortensen, Lori
Illus. by Bristol, Chloe
Versify/HMH (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Mar. 24, 2020
978-0-358-03368-4

The story of Edward Gorey and his creepy “brand of silliness.”

“In 1925, a boy was born / in Chicago / who loved words / and pictures, too. / A brilliant boy. / An only boy.” That boy was Edward Gorey, “And oh, did he read! / He gobbled up adventures / and mysteries. / Comics and poetry. / The entire works / of French novelist / Victor Hugo, / for goodness’ sake.” The strange combination of whimsy and gruesomeness he found when reading *Alice in Wonderland* and *Dracula* one after the other when he was young is what he became famous for in his own books. Mortensen’s poetic text with sparse rhythmic lines perfectly complements Bristol’s illustrations, which echo Gorey’s stylistically but bring color to the tale of an artist known for his “seas of black sketchy lines” rendered in pen and ink. Together, the text and illustrations brilliantly evoke the world of Edward Gorey’s books, providing young readers with just enough to know what Gorey was all about, even plaiting in key lines from *The Gashlycrumb Tinies* to prime the pump. A thorough author’s note fleshes out Gorey’s life, ending with a note about how his “sweet and sinister” style is seen nowadays in *Lemony Snicket’s A Series of Unfortunate Events*, *Tim Burton’s The Nightmare Before Christmas*, and Neil Gaiman’s *Coraline*.

A stellar biography, as creepy and fun as its subject. (sources) (Picture book/biography. 5-9)
THE POPULARITY PACT
Moskowitz-Palma, Eileen
Running Press (288 pp.)
$16.99 | Apr. 14, 2020
978-0-7624-6745-7
Series: Camp Clique, 1

Summer campers vow to make each other popular in their respective social circles.

Bea, a white girl, and Maisy, a mixed-race girl with white and Filipinx heritage, had been best friends until Maisy joined a popular clique reminiscent of the one in Mean Girls. Now a year has passed without a word between the two rising middle schoolers until they meet on the bus taking them to Camp Amelia for the next six weeks. Here the tables are turned, as veteran camper Bea has become tight with fellow bunkmates over the years, and Maisy finds herself on the outside for once when she’s placed in the Sunflower Bunk along with Bea and her friends. In this series opener, told in Maisy’s and Bea’s alternating perspectives, Moskowitz-Palma introduces a cast of mostly white campers with varied abilities and interests (e.g., having dyslexia, modeling professionally, and playing soccer) before ratcheting the tension. The Sunflowers are determined to win the camp’s top athletic prize; ever anxious Maisy, on the other hand, is nervous about everything related to the competition. All seems doomed until Bea and Maisy make a pact: Bea will get the Sunflowers to befriend Maisy, and Maisy will get her school pack to include Bea. In the process, Bea also confronts her parents’ divorce, and readers (and Bea) discover the reasons why Maisy’s really at camp and her seemingly perfect mother went away.

This solid mix of s’mores and girl empowerment is encouraging but never saccharine. (Fiction. 8-12)

THE SAME BUT DIFFERENT TOO
Newson, Karl
Illus. by Hindley, Kate
Nosy Crow/Candlewick (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Apr. 21, 2020
978-1-5362-1201-3

Charming pairs of human and animal characters celebrate their similarities and differences. Characters might look obviously dissimilar, like the brown-skinned child holding hands with the sharply dressed white dog—but they’re also alike in many ways, like the sand-colored cat and the sandy-haired white kid who both wear the same striped shirt and overalls. Alternating between contrast pairs on solid-color backgrounds and comparable pairs in full-bleed scenes, cartoon illustrations reminiscent of Richard Scarry’s depict a mixed group of animals and humans exploring their varied identities and experiences with joy. Minimalist rhyme makes for an easy read-aloud and an amusing counterpart to slapstick antics: “I am gentle. You are rough,” reads the text above a llama in a goofy hat dashing toward the page turn as a dark-haired white child holds onto its reins for dear life. Animal characters often serve as an evasion of responsibility for diverse human representation, but this book takes care to show a range of human skin tones as well as a wheelchair user. The art also offers just enough detail to charm observant readers, from an elephant double-fisting pastries to a bus-stop sign reading “BLEAK ST.” next to two characters standing in the rain. Somewhat oddly, the loose and otherwise nonchronological narrative ends with bedtime, although that does allow for a well-placed vertical turn to show all the animals stacked in a bunk bed.

Entertaining if a tad pat. (Picture book. 2-6)
There’s a Dragon in My Toilet
Nicoll, Tom
Illus. by Horne, Sarah
Tiger Tales (160 pp.)
$22.99 | $6.99 paper | Feb. 18, 2020
978-1-68010-181-2
978-1-68010-455-4 paper
Series: There’s a Dragon in...

Will Eric and Mini-Dragon Pan have to say goodbye?
Pan the Mini-Dragon is an excellent party planner; he proves it by planning a surprise anniversary party for Eric’s parents but then vanishes during the party. When Eric finds his little dragon buddy, Pan seems sad. The Encyclopedia Dragonica indicates Mini-Dragons need companionship—including that of their families. Eric and his human friends Min and Jayden discover that there is a way for Pan to contact his parents, but only adults know how to use the special codes that enable worldwide Mini-Dragon communication. Turns out they are just email addresses, and the group contacts Pan’s parents, who are none too pleased that Pan is staying with humans instead of his aunt and uncle, whom he is supposed to be visiting. A wet-suited Aunt Maria and Uncle Fernando show up via the toilet (hence the title) and demand that Pan join them in Mexico, where they will see to it by planning a surprise anniversary party for Eric’s parents but only adults know how to use the special codes that enable worldwide Mini-Dragon communication. Turns out they are just email addresses, and the group contacts Pan’s parents, who are none too pleased that Pan is staying with humans instead of his aunt and uncle, whom he is supposed to be visiting. A wet-suited Aunt Maria and Uncle Fernando show up via the toilet (hence the title) and demand that Pan join them in Mexico, where they will see to his education. Can Eric and his friends convince Pan’s parents that Pan is where he needs to be? Fans of Pan and Eric’s earlier adventures (There’s a Dragon in My Dinner! and There’s a Dragon in My Backpack!, both 2019) will enjoy this follow-up, which publishes simultaneously with the camping-trip adventure There’s a Dragon in My Boot! Eric and his family are white; Min is Chinese; Jayden is black. As part of the Americanization of these Scottish imports, the setting has been relocated to the States.

Further foolish fun. (Fantasy. 5-9) (There’s a Dragon in My Boot!: 978-1-68010-454-7)

All the Dear Little Animals
Nilsson, Ulf
Illus. by Eriksson, Eva
Trans. by Marshall, Julia
Gecko Press (72 pp.)
$17.99 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-77657-289-2

Three children spend a day burying dead creatures in this New Zealand import originally from Sweden.

This perspicacious observation of how children copy adult behavior in their play is also a hilarious spoof on the overtly pious funeral industry. Esther, her younger brother Puttie, and the unnamed narrator have “nothing to do” one day. Finding a dead bumblebee, Esther declares they must bury it, but the narrator is leery of touching it, being afraid of death, and so instead offers to write the poem: ‘A dear little life in the hand suddenly gone, deep in the sand.’ Little Puttie, completely in the dark about death, is upset when Esther tells him he too will die when he is “an old man.” “But Mummy and Daddy will be so sad,” he whimpers. After the success of the bumblebee interment, Esther is enthused about burying “all the poor dead animals,” and the children start “Funerals Ltd.” phoning neighbors for dead pets and scouring the bushes and byways for roadkill. The story cleverly—and tenderly—pivots near its end, giving it a touching depth (with a twist). Eriksson’s keenly observed illustrations include full-page and double-page spreads as well as spots, and they are as wickedly hilarious as the text in their understated expressions and details. An abundance of soft springlike colors present a visually humorous juxtaposition to the morbid theme. The children are illustrated as white.

Dark and hilarious. (Fantasy. 7-12)

Mission Impawsible
A Middle School Story
Patterson, James with Butler, Steven
Illus. by Watson, Richard
Jimmy Patterson/Little, Brown (208 pp.)
$9.99 | Mar. 30, 2020
978-0-316-49447-2
Series: Dog Diaries, 3

That large, unruly dog Junior is back for a third funny outing, this time getting left behind at a posh but sadly vegetarian dog kennel when his family goes on vacation.

Just as soon as Junior overhears the plans for a family vacation in Hollywood, he begins to make his own preparations, vividly imagining a place where all the “streets are paved with sausage meat” and where, of course, he’ll quickly be discovered as a superstar. He and his doggy friends are crushed to later find that their families’ vacation plans don’t include them. Initially, Barking Meadows, with its spa treatments and cushion-filled kennel, seems to offer a fine alternative—until the dogs discover that the vegetarian food is, well, made of vegetables! What dog wants to eat celery and broccoli frittata? Desperate for a proper meal, a determined Junior takes it upon himself to lead the escape attempts. As usual, this exuberant canine has plenty of harebrained schemes, bringing just enough intelligence to bear to create laugh-out-loud situations. This action-driven book offers little character development, but it hardly matters since it’s all about the silliness, including a pinch of bathroom humor, just right for the audience. Large, clear print and plentiful illustrations make this a fine choice for transitioning readers with funny bones to tickle. Watson depicts Junior’s family as white, but some secondary human characters are people of color.

Another doggie delight. (Fantasy. 6-9)
Ali’s soft-focus illustrations deftly convey Jennifer’s determined scowl and excited grin.

ALL THE WAY TO THE TOP
How One Girl’s Fight for Americans With Disabilities Changed Everything
Pimentel, Annette Bay
Illus. by Ali, Nabi H.
Sourcebooks Explore (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Mar. 10, 2020
978-1-4926-8897-6


Whether she’s horseback riding or starting kindergarten, Jennifer Keelan’s “ready to GO!” But all around her, places and people demand that she “STOP!” From her wheelchair, a 4-inch curb is a “cliff,” and she’s not allowed to join her classmates in the cafeteria. Everything changes when Jennifer—knowing that “children with disabilities get ignored too”—joins a diverse group of disability rights activists. When Jennifer is 8, activists propose the ADA to “make room for all people, including those with disabilities.” Dismissed by Congress, disabled activists crawl up the steps of the Capitol to be heard. When grown-ups say she’s too young to participate, Jennifer drags herself “ALL THE WAY TO THE TOP” on behalf of disabled kids everywhere. Ali’s soft-focus illustrations deftly convey Jennifer’s determined scowl and excited grin. Pimentel realistically acknowledges that the ADA hasn’t fixed everything—“Slowest of all, minds have to change”—but in her foreword, the adult Jennifer—now Keelan-Chaffins—notes that she keeps “using [her] voice to speak up” and encourages readers to do likewise.

Backmatter further discusses disabilities, the disability rights movement, and the ADA. Front- and backmatter seem geared toward older readers, who may find the main text a tad too simple; those wanting more information should follow this up with Amy Hayes’ Disability Rights Movement (2017). Jennifer and her family present white; classmates’ and activists’ races vary.

A necessary testament to the power of children’s voices. (notes, timeline, bibliography) (Picture book/biography. 4-10)
Here’s hoping there will be a bunch of Baloney in the future.

BALONEY AND FRIENDS
Pizzoli, Greg
Illus. by the author
Disney-Hyperion (96 pp.)
$12.99 | Apr. 14, 2020
978-1-368-05454-6
Series: Baloney & Friends, 1


Baloney the pig couldn't be happier about starring in his very own book—until pals Peanut D. Horse, Bizz E. Bee, and Krabbit (a crabby rabbit) crash the introduction, leaving him frustrated. Baloney perseveres and goes on to star in several, short comic book-style stories that often break the fourth wall and that always rely on the very different personalities of the characters to deliver humor. Peanut is a Pollyanna and just a bit daffy. Bizz is a sensible, thoughtful bee-ing. Krabbit is so crabby he'd give Oscar the Grouch a run for his money. Baloney? Well, Baloney is a sensitive sort who, in two longer episodes, wants to entertain his friends with a magic show and join in their fun at swimming. Shorter “mini-comics” between these sections provide good breaks for new readers who are, perhaps, just starting to make their ways through a longer text like this. Pizzoli saves the strongest story for last, delivering a sweet and satisfying portrait of Peanut’s kindness to her friend Baloney when he feels blue. And readers needn’t feel blue themselves that the story is over since they can follow handy backmatter instructions to draw their own versions of the simple, line-drawn characters.

Here’s hoping there will be a bunch of Baloney in the future. (Graphic fantasy. 5-8)

AS IT IS IN HEAVEN
A Collection of Prayers for All Ages
Illus. by Puybaret, Éric
Eerdmans (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Mar. 10, 2020
978-0-8028-5538-1

French illustrator Puybaret brings his lustrous soft-edged artwork to a new book of common prayer.

Opening with the Lord’s Prayer (Our Father), the selections chosen include biblical devotions, traditional prayers, and the prayers of saints, all largely in the Roman Catholic tradition. While Protestant audiences will feel the Our Father cuts off abruptly and might bristle at the Hail Mary, there is much to love for the faithful of diverse persuasions. At turns worshipful and introspective, the thoughtful prayers call for mindful compassion, empathetic living, and kindness, generosity, and mercy in the lives of believers. Puybaret, known for his whimsical, dreamlike style, brings that same sense of reverie to the real world in pensive vignettes. Particularly poignant is an illustration featuring a barefoot young man, surrounded by rubble and smoke but enveloped by a soft glow as he reaches out to a young sapling thrusting upward despite the chaos around it, which appears alongside St. Francis’ prayer for peace: “Where there is hatred, let me sow love / ... / where there is despair, hope.” Though the prayers of saints are attributed to their authors, sources for scriptural prayers such as the Our Father and Magnificat are lacking references. Sadly, while there are some people of color depicted, most of the people in the illustrations appear white, even those based on Middle Eastern biblical characters.

Though best appreciated by Catholic audiences, an excellent collection for a wide range of Christian believers. (Picture book/religion. 4-10)

SPARK AND THE LEAGUE OF URSUS
Repino, Robert
Illus. by Andrews, Ryan
Quirk Books (216 pp.)
$16.99 | Apr. 21, 2020
978-1-68369-166-2

A sweet tale of a cuddly teddy bear very seriously. At 11, Loretta will soon be too old for her teddy, though she and older brother Matthew, dedicated amateur filmmakers, create movies starring plush toys. Spark knows that being a bear is about more than childish snuggling at night, for Spark is a proud member of the League of Ursus, the society of warrior stuffed toys that since some long-ago era has protected humans from monsters. But even Spark’s bearish demeanor is barely enough to fight off the horrific monster in Loretta’s bedroom, with its massive scorpion tail and horned human head. Could the monster be connected to the disappearance of Loretta’s friend Sofia? Spark and the other neighborhood toys are unlikely heroes, but their fight is hardly adorable or safe. When a bear is nearly disemboweled by the monster, the description of trailing innards consisting of “an enormous bundle of brown thread” somehow increases the violence of the injury. As in Matthew and Loretta’s YouTube movies, a “deadly serious story acted out by ridiculous stuffed animals” is attention-grabbing. The human children are of indeterminate race. Matthew has a genetic condition that has led to mobility issues, and another child has a disability that’s mentioned in passing.

Great for those kids who’ll happily read about teddies and who enjoy genuinely scary monsters. (Fantasy. 9-11)
**TEN FAT SAUSAGES**
Robinson, Michelle
Illus. by Freeman, Tor
Penguin Workshop (32 pp.)
$9.99 | Apr. 28, 2020
978-1-5247-9329-6

An irreverent take on a nursery rhyme.

“Ten fat sausages, sizzling in a pan,” starts off this rhyme, replicated in the frontmatter. It’s typically sung, useful when trying to keep young children entertained or teaching them to count down by twos. But when the story starts, while one sausage goes “POP,” the other doesn’t go the expected “BANG,” as each even-numbered sausage tries to make their escape, but “tries” is the operative word. One is somehow accidentally blended along with an extremely concerned green bell pepper, another is eaten by a cat, and so on, until the two remaining sausages band together to make their escape. There’s plenty of humor here, mostly carried by Freeman’s expressively painted foodstuffs and blocky, realistic scenery—a vintage refrigerator, fast-whirling ceiling fan. Unfortunately, the jaunty rhythm of the original barely translates to picture-book form here, and too often unfortunate readers will have to wrench the scansion or ignore rhyming conventions (“sauce” attempting to rhyme with “course,” for example) in order to make it work for storytime. The ending is confusing as well; the sausages limp off outside, far from unscathed, but how they went from “one main course,” terrified on buns, to freedom remains a mystery.

This twisted version of a familiar favorite is too inconsistent to satisfy. (Picture book. 3-6)

**EVERYBODY COUNTS**
A Counting Story From 0 to 7.5 Billion
Roskifte, Kristin
Illus. by the author
Trans. by Mackie, Siân
Wide Eyed Editions (64 pp.)
$22.99 | Feb. 4, 2020
978-0-7112-4524-2

This Norwegian import is guaranteed to silence boastful Where’s Waldo grads.

It opens on a woodsy nature scene for zero, “No one,” before moving to a deceptively simple one (1) child in a bedroom who next joins his dad (2) for a forest outing. The count continues—by single digits to 30, then by various intervals to 1,000—on to depict crowd scenes in locales ranging from a library to a life drawing class, with many individualized figures (of diverse body type, skin tone, and hair texture and color) recurring. Inconspicuous captions below each picture offer either pointers to subtle visual cues or invitations to speculate about what they see. Of the 20 children in a classroom, for instance, “One of them is thinking about all the people who’ve lived before us. One of them has lost the class teddy bear. One of them is dreading football training. One of them will become prime minister.” Roskifte supplies some solutions, along with additional scenarios, at the close. She also gives viewers a bit of an assist by coloring in her small, doll-like humans throughout but leaving everything else as pale outlines. Switching at the end to a big blue marble floating in space, she rounds off the numbering with 7.5 billion followed by a barrage of leading questions, from what became of that lost teddy to lifelong posers, including the poignant “Does everyone share the same truth?”

A treasure house of mysteries large and small. (Picture book. 6-10)

**GIDGET THE SURFING DOG**
Catching Waves With a Small but Mighty Pug
Rusch, Elizabeth
Illus. by Ryan, Susannah
Little Bigfoot/Sasquatch (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Apr. 7, 2020
978-1-63217-271-6

An energetic pug named Gidget learns to surf and goes on to become a champion at canine surfing competitions in this true-life story.

Gidget was an intelligent puppy with boundless energy, so her owner took her to agility classes and then on to training in surfboard riding. The dog’s training regime with her owner, Alecia, is described in detail as well as the specifics of one competition. Gidget’s story is illustrated with photographs of the pug in her bright pink life jacket atop her pink surfboard along with other canine competitors and their owners. Interspersed throughout the story are sidebars and a few full pages with additional information about surfing, wind and waves, competition rules, and Gidget’s list of surfing competition wins. The sidebars are illustrated by Ryan with cartoon-style details, with a cartoon pug character adding levity. Gidget’s owner and most other dog trainers present white; one trainer presents Asian. Two surfer boys with physical disabilities are included in one internal photograph, repeated on the back cover. The book’s design is a bit fragmented, toggling back and forth between story and informational interludes, and Gidget’s appearance in her photographs can be confusing as she doesn’t always look like the same dog due to different lighting conditions and wet fur.

Overall the book’s vibe is energetic and peppy, just like its protagonist. (resources, author’s note) (Informational picture book. 7-10)
The narrator, an Inuit toddler, enjoys being tucked in the hood of Anaana’s parka.

In the far north, many women wear parkas that have a hood, or amautik, that also serves as a baby carrier to keep their offspring warm. One toddler, the narrator of the story, explains how being carried this way “feels like being wrapped up in soft clouds.” While tucked inside the amautik, the child inhales Anaana’s calming scent, like “flowers in the summertime.” The narrator thinks of the hood as a tiny iglu, or snow house, that provides cozy protection. The sound of Anaana’s laughter comforts the child, but most of all, the child feels Anaana’s love. Each spread appeals to a different sense, creating a deliciously cozy and nurturing micro-environment for this lucky tot. Inuit author and educator Sammurtok brings her work preserving Inuktitut to the text, with a sparing sprinkling of vocabulary (defined in a closing glossary). The repetition of “In my anaana’s amautik” at the beginning of each short paragraph is both fulling and reinforcing of the relationship between child and mother. Canadian illustrator Lishchenko’s use of textures and subtle colors blends well with the strong, simple text. Delicate pastels give the Arctic landscape a welcoming beauty, and fanciful depictions of the smiles the narrator suggests lend a playful air.

**The far north has never felt so deliciously warm. (Picture book. 2-3)**

**IN MY ANAANÀ’s AMAUTIK**
Sammurtok, Nadia
Illus. by Lishchenko, Lenny
Inhabit Media (24 pp.)
$16.95 | Apr. 7, 2020
978-1-77227-252-9

**LOVE YOUR BODY**
Sanders, Jessica
Illus. by Rossetti, Carol
Frances Lincoln (40 pp.)
$15.99 | Apr. 7, 2020
978-0-7112-5242-4

A picture book from Down Under that aims to uplift every body.

A Kickstarter campaign funded this picture book, which Australian author Sanders hopes “will comfort...guide...and empower” readers—especially “girls and those who identify as a girl.” Brazilian illustrator Rossetti endeavors to be inclusive, with depictions of a diverse range of bodies, including girls and women with a range of skin tones, hair textures and colors, and body types as well as a range of gender presentations and some visible disabilities. Some people have visible freckles, acne, body hair, cellulite, and stretch marks, and one person appears to have vitiligo. It is hard to track any individual characters from one spread to the next, but that isn’t as necessary as it would be if the text had a narrative. It doesn’t. Instead, this is a book that might best be described as a self-help picture book, filled with affirmations and explicit urgings toward self-care, self-love, and acceptance of others. The text also provides strategies for self-affirmation and for seeking help and support, though some tips are potentially exclusive of people with mobility disabilities and blind or deaf people. This edition’s backmatter offers a list of U.S.-based support organizations, with a pointer to www.re-shape.info for resources in other countries.

**There’s much to love here. (Picture book. 3-12)**

**ALMOND**
Say, Allen
Illus. by the author
Scholastic (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-338-30037-6

Sometimes it takes meeting someone new to help us learn what we can really achieve.

Almond, a young pale-skinned girl with dark hair, encounters another, similarly complexioned young girl at school. The New Girl can play violin beautifully, evoking visions for Almond as she listens. Almond, though, is facing anxiety about being in a play and having to read lines; she is convinced that she has no talent. Her insecurities lead her to feel inferior to the New Girl and thus diminish her own abilities, though Almond’s mother assures her that she will find her way. It takes an encouraging teacher, a unique moment during the play, some crows, and, perhaps, a bit of the supernatural for Almond to discover her true talent. The story’s themes—self-confidence, believing in oneself—are universal and should resonate with young readers, yet the characters feel overly specific. The New Girl’s sudden appearance in and then disappearance from Almond’s life opens up multiple interpretations that young readers may find hard to pin down. The narrative seems to jump in places, lacking smooth transitions to carry young readers through Almond’s inner, and outer, journey. Say’s unusual approach here mixes realistic photographs with often blurry charcoal and pastel techniques, leading to slightly unsettling translucency in places, with repetitive vignettes of Almond’s not-always-expressive face and enigmatic views of windows and hallways.

**A slight story coupled with puzzling illustrations, this doesn’t quite hit the mark. (Picture book. 3-7)**

**NAT ENOUGH**
Scrivan, Maria
Illus. by the author
Graphix/Scholastic (240 pp.)
978-1-338-53819-9 paper
978-1-338-53821-2

Cartoonist Scrivan’s debut graphic novel explores friendship breakups and coming in to one’s own.

Bespectacled Natalie and her best friend, Lily, used to be “two peas in a pod.” But after Lily moves,
Grown-ups reading with young children can help
the game—and have fun along the way.

**HONK, HONK, VROOM, VROOM**

Onomatopoeic words representing city sounds invite children to guess what they are.

A completely black double-page spread with the words “Did you hear that?” printed in white starts the book and sets the tone. There will be no visual cues here, just an array of onomatopoeic words that prompt guesses. Some are easy: “Honk,” “vroom,” “beep,” and “zoom” clearly lead to cars. But others, such as “hustle,” “bustle,” “march,” “talk,” “walk,” and “go,” will make them think a little more before they turn the page to learn that it’s a group of lively pedestrians. Grown-ups reading with young children can help the game—and have fun along the way—by reading expressively, aided by the printing of key words in colored type. While the pages with the clues present colorful words simply set against a plain white background, the pages with the answers offer an explosion of bright, vibrant, and stylized mixed-media images portraying a diverse cast of city dwellers. Companion volume *Rumble, Rumble, Grumble, Grumble* shares the same presentation and concept, but the sounds here are related to nature. Both books have plenty of vocabulary-building heft, adding value to the guessing game: “screeching,” “shrieking,” and “hissing,” to name a few. The pages are made of a tear-resistant substance, making these good choices to take toddlers from board books to picture books.

**MAKE SPACE ON THE BOOKSHELF FOR THIS ENGAGING TITLE.**

*(Picture book; 3-6)* *(Rumble, Rumble, Grumble, Grumble: 978-1-4867-1657-9)*

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**TO FLY AMONG THE STARS**

The Hidden Story of the Fight for Women Astronauts

Siegel, Rebecca

Scholastic Focus (352 pp.)

$18.99 | Mar. 3, 2020

978-1-338-29015-8

*During the Cold War, 13 highly experienced women aviators proved they had as much of the “right stuff” as male astronauts but were nonetheless excluded from America’s space program.*

*Within the context of the United States’ space race with the Soviet Union, Siegel tells the infuriating story of how these women were denied opportunities even after excelling at grueling physical and psychological tests. As Tanya Lee Stone did in her Sibert Medal–winning *Almost Astronauts* (2009), Siegel chronicles how the “Mercury 13” proved to be as courageous, intelligent, and fit as any man. Despite this, they were still denied the opportunity to prove themselves.***
nonetheless ridiculed and thwarted by everyone from Vice President Lyndon Johnson to the Mercury 7 astronauts, and they were shockingly betrayed by the highly respected woman aviator Jackie Cochran, apparently out of jealousy and spite. Whereas Stone’s narrative focuses on Jerrie Cobb, Siegel includes the experiences of all the women and alternates chapters about the women with those about the Mercury 7. Her focus on their arrogant, boozing, loutish, womanizing behavior and sloppiness on missions puts these men— all white, like the women—in a considerably unheroic light. Disappointingly, this emphasis serves as a distraction from the women’s narrative rather than throwing it into relief. And oddly, given this overall icon-busting approach, Siegel does not reveal Wernher von Braun’s Nazi past when introducing this minor character.

A sharp, revealing look at deeply entrenched institutional sexism. (photos, glossary, notes, index) (Nonfiction. 9-12)

THE KEEPER OF WILD WORDS
Smith, Brooke
Illus. by Kloepper, Madeline
Chronicle (62 pp.)
$18.99 | Mar. 10, 2020
978-1-4521-7073-2

When a girl visits her grandmother, a writer and “grand friend,” she is seeking something special to share at show and tell on the first day of school. Before Brook can explain, Mimi expresses concern that certain words describing the natural world will disappear if someone doesn’t care for and use them. (An author’s note explains the author’s motivation: She had read of the removal of 100 words about outdoor phenomena from the Oxford Junior Dictionary.) The duo sets out to search for and experience the 19 words on Mimi’s list, from “acorn” and “buttercup” to “violet” and “willow.” Kloepper’s soft illustrations feature green and brown earth tones that frame the white, matte pages; bursts of red, purple, and other spot colors enliven the scenes. Both Mimi and Brook are depicted as white. The expedition is described in vivid language, organized as free verse in single sentences or short paragraphs. Key words are printed in color in a larger display type and capital letters. Sensory details allow the protagonist to hear, see, smell, taste, and hold the wild: “‘Quick! Make a wish!’ said Mimi, / holding out a DANDELION, / fairy dust sitting on a stem. / ‘Blow on it and the seeds will fly / Your tiny wishes in the air.’” It’s a day of wonder, with a touch of danger and a solution to Brook’s quest. The last page forms an envelope for readers’ own vocabulary collections.

Sweet—and savory. (Picture book. 5-8)

CHARLIE & MOUSE OUTDOORS
Snyder, Laurel
Illus. by Hughes, Emily
Chronicle (48 pp.)
$14.99 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-4521-7066-4

The Geisel Award-winning sibling duo returns in their fourth adventure, this time in the great outdoors.

Series fans will be thrilled to follow Charlie and Mouse’s first adventure beyond their neighborhood. This gently humorous story captures familiar elements of a family camping trip, starting with the boring car ride, moving on to an eventful (and sometimes scary!) hike, followed by playing inside the tent, and a fireside cuddle with Dad and Mom while munching on burned marshmallows. The cast here is reduced to just family members, but the siblings’ fantastic imaginations fill the void with creatures both real and make-believe. The strong sibling connection takes center stage in every chapter, with Charlie providing comfort and entertainment for his little brother using his expansive storytelling skills. Similarly, the dialogue and action focus on the boys, with parental reassurance and mild exasperation depicted mostly visually. Page layouts are composed deliberately, marrying words

Page layouts are composed deliberately, marrying words and pictures to support developing readers.
and pictures to support developing readers. The white space surrounding each line of text is ample, and illustrations, placed just so against the crisp white pages, provide contextual support. Word and sentence repetition is woven seamlessly into the narrative, allowing readers to gain confidence and mastery over new vocabulary, while Hughes’ soft-hued, detailed illustrations deftly navigate between real and imaginary worlds. Charlie and Mouse are biracial, with an Asian dad and white mom.

Whether their first or fourth outing with these winning sibs, kids will savor this supportive read. (Early reader. 6-9)

**BROOKLYN BAILEY, THE MISSING DOG**
Stahl, Amy & Le Pape, Orna
Illus. by VanderPloeg, Libby
Dial (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Apr. 7, 2020
978-0-525-52723-4

This picture book could serve as a tourist’s guide to Brooklyn.

Yotam has the sort of neighbors anyone might wish for: Debbie, who walks her turtle and pit bull at the same time; the man with a big bushy beard; the man with 10 cats. (The neighborhood is multicultural, but Yotam’s family is white.) All the neighbors try to help out when Yotam’s dog runs away after being startled.

He had tied Bailey’s leash to a metal chair, which is pretty much the definition of “accident waiting to happen,” and no pet owner will have trouble believing the book was inspired by a true story. (If Emma’s biracial, nothing is made of that fact.)

Readers may finish this book and move straight to Brooklyn. (Picture book. 5-8)

**THE BIG BANG BOOK**
Stahl, Asa
Illus. by Allen-Fletcher, Carly
Creston (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Apr. 7, 2020
978-1-939547-64-4

An astrophysicist goes back to our cosmic origins: “Once upon a time, / we don’t know.”

“Maybe it was dark. / Maybe there was nothing.” Carefully distinguishing verifiable fact from informed speculation, Stahl ushers readers past the first second of the Big Bang through the transformation of plasma to matter, then the appearance of swirling galaxies and their stars and planets, and finally to a planet that’s “just right” for “you. / And everyone else.” In her suitably dramatic illustrations, Allen-Fletcher modulates from flat black pages to shimmering blasts of light and fiery stellar nurseries that give way to a misty blue Earth, with an indistinct figure in a dim bedroom scene hung with glow-in-the-dark stars—and, accompanying the author’s suggestion that there may be more than one planet that’s “just right,” a pointy eared silhouette likewise looking up into a starlit sky. Unlike James Carter’s similarly wonder-infused _Once Upon a Star_, illustrated by Mar Hernández (2018), the dizzying notion that the Big Bang marked the beginnings of time and space themselves as well as matter goes unremarked here…but in an expansive afterword the author urges readers to ask big questions like “What am I?” and “Where am I?” because they “cut to the heart of how much we understand about the universe.”

A stately recap drawing on current physics and astronomy and appropriately cognizant of their limitations. (Informational picture book. 6-10)

**HOW TO DISAPPEAR COMPLETELY**
Standish, Ali
Harper/HarperCollins (84 pp.)
$16.99 | Apr. 28, 2020
978-0-06-289328-4

Shortly after moving to her grandmother’s tiny, rural town, a girl develops vitiligo.

Emma notices the first spot, like a white freckle, on the day of her grandmother’s funeral. Though she’s distracted in the following days and weeks by grief and loneliness, missing the grandmother with whom she’d made up stories about fairies in the woods, Emma can’t miss the new white spots on her skin, which keep appearing and spreading. Perhaps if she had her sister’s and father’s “buttermilk” skin she could ignore it, but Emma has her mother’s “much darker complexion,” and the dots are unmistakable. (If Emma’s biracial, nothing is made of that fact in the story.) A doctor confirms what Emma’s internet search has hinted at: Emma has vitiligo, an autoimmune condition that causes the skin to lose pigment. She’s perfectly healthy, she learns, as she spends a chapter reading from a medical pamphlet, relating helpful and informative excerpts to readers. Unsurprisingly, Emma’s vitiligo, combined with being a new kid in school, has led to some vicious bullying in her new seventh grade. What would Emma do without Fina, her new friend? Fina is warm, supportive, and Mexican American, providing comfort, extremely unkidlike counseling, and educational explanations about the Day of the Dead and quinceañeras. Emma’s troubles and the magical stories she’d told with Gram in the forest come
together in a warm and after-school-special-ish Thanksgiving in which even the bully is revealed to be good at heart. As subtle as an extremely heartwarming brick. (Fiction. 9-11)

**WANTED! CRIMINALS OF THE ANIMAL KINGDOM**
Tekavec, Heather
Illus. by Batori, Susan
Kids Can (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-5253-0024-0

Mini-dossiers on 13 of the natural world’s thieves, tricksters, and other felons.

Tekavec’s criminals are wanted for infractions that include danging a light in dark waters to draw unwary prey (anglerfish, aka “Ms. Jagged Jaws”), shooting a prospective mate with “a dart full of love hormones” (Roman snail, aka “Lil’ Cupid”), slipping an egg into another bird’s nest (common cuckoo, aka “Big Bad Mama”), or bullying rivals into sterility (naked mole rat queen, aka “Queenie the Meanie”). These and other bad actors are profiled with an M.O., a cartoon mug shot, and a fact-filled rap sheet. The author may stretch the premise a bit by including the wood frog, whose may stretch the premise a bit by including the wood frog, whose

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**BABBIT & JOAN, A Rabbit and a Phone**
Turri, Denise
Illus. by the author
Flyaway Books (40 pp.)
$17.00 | Apr. 14, 2020
978-1-94-788820-3

Can Babbit the rabbit cope with giving his phone, Joan, a break?
Anthropomorphic animals and animate cellphones populate this picture book, which opens with the protagonist, Babbit, observing a strike led by overworked phones. He realizes that his own phone, Joan, “was exhausted! She’d been taking pictures and sending texts for Babbit all day, every day.” Babbit decides to give Joan a break and goes about the day without her while she stays home and rests. His meanderings are filled with discovery since, without Joan there to capture his attention, he observes many things in the natural world that he’d never noticed before. Then he encounters a bird and a bear who are also without their phones (one’s battery ran out, and the other’s was lost). The trio enjoy one another’s company and work together to find their way back to the town without the aid (or interference) of their phones; clearly, they’re all better off because of the break from technology. At book’s end Babbit returns to a rested, happy Joan, and they commit to more alone time for each in the future. The cartoon-style illustrations depict animal characters with egg-shaped torsos and rubbery limbs wandering about a gently Technicolor world. They imply a far younger audience than seems appropriate for the message.

**MABEL A Mermaid Fable**
Watkins, Rowboat
Illus. by the author
Chronicle (40 pp.)
$16.99 | Mar. 24, 2020
978-1-4521-5527-2

A mustacheless mermaid learns to embrace her difference.

In this gorgeous ocean setting, Mabel’s “dad had a mustache. Her mom had a mustache....Even her baby brother had a tiny baby mustache.” Mabel doesn’t, and she’s horribly embarrassed about it. She tries to disguise her lack with shells or kelp, but when a pufferfish yells “nudibranch!” in her direction, she takes it as an insult and decides to hide in holes under the sand. While hiding she comes across a seven-legged octopus named Lucky, and together the two learn that their missing appendages don’t mean they have to miss out on anything. It’s a warm story of friendship, with countless rich details in the illustrations: a treasure-strewn ocean floor and fabulously expressive nudibranchs (a kind of sea slug). Watkins’ prose style is fun to read aloud, clipped and spare, though there are a few awkward moments of dialogue between mermaid and septopus. Both message and basic plot are well covered in picture books, however, and this one doesn’t particularly rise above the rest in delivery. Still, the presence of both mermaids and mustaches may heighten its appeal to a broader audience.

**DIGGERSAURS EXPLORE**
Whaita, Michael
Illus. by the author
Random House (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Mar. 31, 2020
978-1-9848-5017-1

Exploration’s just a little bit easier when you’ve mechanical monsters on your side.

Two tiny humans (one with dark skin and the other with light) and a host of diggersaurs are on a good old-fashioned...
Wisniewski’s words and images capture the deep satisfaction of an interspecies bond.

MY BISON

A little girl is walking with her mother the first time she encounters the creature. After a few days, she gets close enough to touch him—and, eventually, to feed him. Wisniewski’s narrative, voiced in the first person by the narrator is a dog. Luckily, superior physical abilities go along with her superintelligence, and after a swift fight she escapes. She rescues an actual human boy, Chance, from some bullies, and he names her Wild. Chance lives in a group home but is excited about an upcoming court hearing to reunite him with his mother, who’s in recovery from substance abuse. The two fumble their way through obtaining technology that will enable Chance to understand her and fleeing the deadly intentions of (fake) animal-control officers. The unlikely pair is assisted, and soon joined, by hacker Junebug. In between car chases and other action scenes they uncover the secrets of the military organization chasing Wild—and what exactly Wild is. Some dog-on-dog violence may cause readers to turn their heads, and deadly violence toward humans is implied; these and other dark elements are not sensationalized while also giving protagonists and readers opportunities to think for themselves. Chance is white, and brown-skinned Junebug describes herself (a little disingenuously, it turns out) as “a mutt.”

An action-heavy adventure for plot-loving readers ready for some darkness. (Science fiction. 9-12)

WOMEN’S HISTORY MONTH PICTURE BOOKS

JONI

The Lyrical Life of Joni Mitchell
Alko, Selina
Illus. by the author
Harper/HarperCollins (48 pp.)
$17.99 | Feb. 25, 2020
978-0-06-267129-5

This biographical introduction to iconic songwriter Joni Mitchell traces the creative influences in her life.

Growing up on the Canadian prairie, Mitchell was a “restless girl” who “danced in wide-open spaces,” learned bird calls from her mother, painted on her bedroom wall, composed melodies on the
piano, and often felt “like an upside-down bird on a wire.” Encouraged by a teacher in junior high school to write poetry, Mitchell bought a guitar, briefly attended art school in Calgary, started composing music and singing in Toronto, suffered an unhappy marriage, performed in Greenwich Village with contemporary folk singers, and eventually became a “very famous singer.” Influenced by the world around and within her, Mitchell “painted with words,” turning her words and feelings into songs that poignantly captured her time’s sadness, beauty, love, hope, and yearning for freedom, and Alko’s poetic text and vibrant illustrations effectively convey this. Mixing media that include acrylic paint, found objects, and wildflowers, the double-page spreads (reminiscent of Chagall’s dreamlike paintings) reveal an intense, impassioned Mitchell in various venues as she moves through the stages of her life, singing her sorrow and painting her joy; appropriately surrounded by a kaleidoscope of exuberant swirling colors, images, and lyrics from her best-known songs.

An inspired and creative ode to the inimitable Joni Mitchell. (author’s note, discography, bibliography) (Picture book/biography. 4-8) (This review was originally published in our Oct. 15, 2019, issue. We reprint it here for your convenience.)

PIRATE QUEEN
A Story of Zheng Yi Sao
Becker, Helaine
Illus. by Wong, Liz
Groundwood (36 pp.)
$17.95 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-77306-124-5

From stolen bride to pirate queen: a young woman’s rise to become the most powerful pirate in history.

When pirate Zheng Yi and his crew raid the port city of Canton, they plunder both goods and women. Zheng Yi picks one girl to be his bride. Boldly, Zheng Yi Sao (meaning “Zheng Yi’s wife”) shoots him a stipulation: She will marry him only “if he [gives her] an equal share in his enterprise.” Six years later, Zheng Yi is dead, and his widow now commands 70,000 men and over 1,800 ships. Zheng Yi Sao realizes that a queen can’t “win at cards” alone. She must “strengthen [her] hand by drawing from [her] decks,” winning the loyalty of Zheng’s lieutenants by sharing power. Before long, South China’s seas come under her control, and even the emperor’s ships are no match for Zheng Yi Sao’s Red Flag Fleet. Eventually, Zheng Yi Sao grows tired of life at sea. With the same defiance and boldness that she employed so long ago, she demands her freedom from the governor-general of Canton. There is little primary documentation about Zheng Yi Sao’s life, as Becker states in a concluding note, but working with what’s known she has woven together a poetic first-person story that’s both believable and readable. Wong’s stylized pencil illustrations highlight intricate details that epitomize turn-of-the-19th-century China, a restrained palette providing color.

A welcome addition to the growing strong-women-in-history shelf. (sources, further references, note on names) (Picture book. 6-9)

ON WINGS OF WORDS
The Extraordinary Life of Emily Dickinson
Berne, Jennifer
Illus. by Stadtlander, Becca
Chronicle (52 pp.)
$18.99 | Feb. 18, 2020
978-1-4521-4297-5

A biographical introduction to the unusual life of 19th-century poet Emily Dickinson.

An inquisitive child who explored “every bird, every flower, every bee or breeze or slant of light,” Emily adored her brother and enjoyed her school friends, experienced intense feelings, thoughts, and desires, and loved reading, which felt like traveling “on a sea of words.” When people failed to answer her existential questions, Emily put “faith in what she could see and understand.” Gradually, her thoughts and feelings emerged as poems that set her free and allowed her to dwell in an inner world “bigger than all the world outside.” Continuing to enjoy
her gardens, dog, family, select friends, and neighborhood children, the adult Emily rarely left her room, where she wrote and hid hundreds of amazing poems discovered after her death in 1886. Adroitly incorporating language and imagery from Dickinson's poems as well as whole lines and stanzas, the neatly hand-lettered, lyrical text appropriately focuses on how Emily's rich inner life crystallized into her remarkable poetry. Splendid illustrations combine both folk-art and surrealist styles to contrast Emily's limited physical journey from sensitive child to recluse poet within the confines of her family home with imaginative scenes of her limitless inner life showcasing visual images from her poems. Inspired use of the butterfly motif captures the poet's enigmatic spirit.

**Stunning. (notes on Dickinson and poetry, author's note, artist's note) (Picture book/biography. 5-8)**

Sometimes the decision of an individual can make all the difference.

Febb Burns knew what she wanted, and what she wanted was the right to vote. A college-educated white woman, she yearned to do what her white male neighbors in East Tennessee did every election day. But while she did not have that right, her son, Harry, did—not just as a citizen, but as a member of the Tennessee House of Representatives. The last to vote on ratification of the 19th Amendment, the body was closely divided between “yea” and “nay.” Even though Harry wore a red rose signifying opposition, he also carried with him a letter from his mother urging him to support the amendment. Listening to his mother and his conscience, vote “yea” he did, knowingly risking his seat. Boxer tells the story succinctly, clearly drawing the political lines so that young readers will understand the dynamics. Mildenberger’s inclusion of a few black women among those demonstrating for the vote reflects the historical reality that black women were part of the suffrage movement, but it also implies greater equality than truly existed, compounding Boxer’s elision of the fact that Jim Crow laws denied African Americans, both male and female, the vote. Irritatingly, though an illustration includes part of what is presumably Febb’s letter, that those were her words is never confirmed.

An inspiring though incomplete look at a critical historical moment. (author’s note, timeline) (Informational picture book. 5-8)

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**BEAUTIFUL SHADES OF BROWN**

*The Art of Laura Wheeler Waring*

Churnin, Nancy

Illus. by Mildenberger, Vivien

Sleeping Bear Press (32 pp.)

$16.99 | Mar. 15, 2020

978-1-53411-049-6

Laura Wheeler Waring saw “brown [as] a rainbow” and painted it that way.

Growing up in turn-of-the-20th-century Connecticut in a middle-class African American household, Laura works for “hours mixing and blending” paints in order to replicate the shades she sees in her family members. Determined to pursue a career in art, she studies at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and then in Paris, honing her craft. Attending a concert given by a young Marian Anderson, Laura vows to paint the singer someday. A 1944 commission for “portraits of important African Americans” finds her painting the likenesses of Alice Dunbar Nelson, James Weldon Johnson, W.E.B. Du Bois—and Marian Anderson. Churnin ably conjures the painter’s process, thrillingly describing Laura’s painstaking combination of shades to create just the right browns for each subject. She is less adept at helping readers understand the barriers Laura must have faced, saying only that “there weren’t portraits of African Americans in museums” during Laura’s childhood and that her art education was undertaken among mostly white peers; one sentence in her author’s note acknowledges the limited opportunities available to African Americans of Laura’s time. While the evocation of Laura’s joy in her art is admirable, skimming over the everyday injustices she must have faced purely from her picture. Marshall’s illustrations are appropriately painterly, capturing the play of light on her characters’ brown faces.

An important story only partially realized. (timeline, further reading) (Picture book/biography. 5-8) (This review was originally published in our Dec. 1, 2019, issue. We reprint it here for your convenience.)

**THE POWER OF HER PEN**

*The Story of Groundbreaking Journalist Ethel L. Payne*

Cline-Ransome, Lesa

Illus. by Parra, John

Paula Wiseman/Simon & Schuster (48 pp.)

$17.99 | Jan. 14, 2020

978-1-5445-8468-9


Born in 1911 to a Pullman porter and a Latin teacher, as a girl, Ethel loved the stories her elders told, reading at the library on weekends, and English class with a teacher who encouraged her writing. During World War II, she became a community
organizer in her hometown of Chicago, then began writing letters to newspapers about national politics and black issues. She got a job in Japan after the war, where she learned from black American soldiers about discrimination in the military, and a friend had her diary entries from the trip published. One of her articles made headlines, and she began working at the Chicago Defender. The newspaper sent her to Washington, where she became one of only three black journalists with a White House press pass and covered six presidents, asking them tough questions about race. The lengthy text, a paragraph or two on most pages, gives a thorough treatment of Payne and her effects on national politics and culture. While the copious details are relevant, their telling feels somewhat tedious, as the various events lack a strong narrative thread to hold them together. Parra’s painted, folk-style illustrations use texture and a mix of earthy colors to create distinct scenes that are stronger individually than collectively.

Patient children will see another way to make a difference. (author’s note, bibliography, credits, further reading) (Picture book/biography. 7-10) (This review was originally published in our Dec. 1, 2019, issue. We reprint it here for your convenience.)

Valuable and inspiring, though lacking needed context. (author’s note, references, bibliographic notes, timeline) (Picture book/biography. 7-11)

MAMIE ON THE MOUND
A Woman in Baseball’s Negro Leagues
Henderson, Lea
Illus. by Doutisipoulos, George
Capstone Editions (32 pp.)
$18.95 | Jan. 20, 2020
978-1-68446-023-6

Mamie “Peanut” Johnson broke gender barriers playing in the Negro League in the 1950s.

Through informative prose and muscular illustrations, Mamie emerges as both small in stature and larger than life. Standing 5 feet, 4 inches tall and weighing in at 120 pounds, Mamie was frequently underestimated due to her small size and gender but consistently proved skeptics wrong with her strong right arm. She even joined the all-white, all-boys Long Branch Police Athletic League in New Jersey while still a preteen, overcoming her teammates’ snickers and helping them win two championships. She was unable to prove her worth for the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, which denied black women the opportunity to play. On the urging of a former Negro League player, Mamie won a spot on the Indianapolis Clowns at 19, eventually pitching her way to a 39-8 record in her three-season career. The artwork deftly works with the text to provide a memorable reading experience, Mamie’s enthusiasm and perseverance shining from every page. Images of Mamie facing down white and/or male hostility alternate with scenes of prowess and accomplishment. This compelling story of breaking barriers and perseverance is timely and essential; it will pair well with She Loved Baseball, by Audrey Vernick and illustrated by Don Tate (2010).

An incredible tribute to an African American woman who dismantled racial and gender obstacles amid the civil rights movement. (afterword, notes, bibliography) (Picture book/biography. 5-9) (This review was originally published in our Dec. 1, 2019, issue. We reprint it here for your convenience.)

THE OLDEST STUDENT
How Mary Walker Learned To Read
Hubbard, Rita Lorraine
Illus. by Mona, Oge
Schwartz & Wade/Random (40 pp.)
$17.99 | $20.99 PLB | Jan. 7, 2020
978-1-5247-6828-7
978-1-5247-6829-4 PLB

Mary Walker, who learned to read at the age of 116, is introduced to young readers in this lovingly illustrated picture book. Born into slavery in Alabama, Mary Walker was not allowed to learn to read. When the Emancipation Proclamation outlawed slavery, she was 15. She was later gifted a Bible, which she couldn’t
Many white artists have benefited from imitating black ones; this is the rare narrative to acknowledge that.

**MAKING THEIR VOICES HEARD**

Ella Fitzgerald and Marilyn Monroe were mutual supporters according to this historical picture book.

Ella and Marilyn were different on the outside, but both were “full of hopes and dreams” while their circumstances were humble. After they got their big breaks, Ella in jazz singing and Marilyn in an industry run by men, she lacked control over her career. When Marilyn learned of the barriers Ella faced, her development as an advocate, and her many accomplishments—including her major contributions to (some say authorship of) FDR’s New Deal and the adoption of the Social Security Act—in a kid-friendly and accessible manner, focusing almost entirely on Perkins’ professional accomplishments. As for Perkins’ personal life, the afterword briefly refers to her husband and daughter within the context of their “significant health problems” (both experienced mental illness), but the text is silent on Perkins’ same-sex relationship.

**THE ONLY WOMAN IN THE PHOTO**

Frances Perkins & Her New Deal for America

Kirkfield, Vivian

Illus. by Bye, Alexandra

Atheneum (48 pp.)

$18.99 | Feb. 4, 2020
978-1-4814-9151-8

“When someone opens a door to you, go forward.”

From shy child to keen observer, vocal activist to highly effective political adviser, Frances Perkins led a life of tremendous worth, helping others as a volunteer, social worker, expert investigator, workplace-safety regulator, industrial commissioner, and, ultimately, the first woman Secretary of Labor. Brimming with realistic detail about the difficulties of pursuing one’s goals and making a difference while functioning as a woman in the first half of the 20th century, this appealing volume features colorful and appealing animation-inflected illustrations peppered with ideas that inspired Perkins; these appear as banners, headlines, and signposts throughout the story. Krull smoothly describes Perkins’ influences and motivations, her sensitivity to and awareness of injustice, how she overcame some of the fears and constraints she faced, her development as an advocate, and her many accomplishments—including her major contributions to (some say authorship of) FDR’s New Deal and the adoption of the Social Security Act—in a kid-friendly and accessible manner, focusing almost entirely on Perkins’ professional accomplishments. As for Perkins’ personal life, the afterword briefly refers to her husband and daughter within the context of their “significant health problems” (both experienced mental illness), but the text is silent on Perkins’ same-sex relationship following her husband’s institutionalization.

Overall, an appealing, informative picture-book biography that showcases the accomplishments of a great American heroine. (Picture book/biography. 6-10) (This review was originally published in our Nov. 1, 2019, issue. We reprint it here for your convenience.)

**WOMEN ARTISTS A TO Z**

LaBarge, Melanie

Illus. by Corrigan, Caroline

Dial (64 pp.)

$19.99 | Feb. 11, 2020
978-0-593-10872-7

Contemporary and historical female artists are showcased for younger readers. The artists’ names aren’t presented in A-to-Z order. The alphabetical arrangement actually identifies signature motifs (“D is for Dots” for Yayoi Kusama); preferred media (“I is for Ink” for Elizabeth Catlett); or cultural, natural, or personal motives underlying artworks (“N is for Nature” for Maya Lin). Various media are covered, such as painting, box assemblage, collage, photography, pottery, and sculpture. One
A worthy picture-book primer on the Queen of Tejano music.

SELENA

López, Silvia
Illus. by Escobar, Paola
Little Bee (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Feb. 25, 2020
978-1-4998-0977-0

Nearly 25 years after her death, the musical origin and cultural impact of Mexican American performer Selena Quintanilla are celebrated.

The story of Selena, as the singer and songwriter is still known, has been told before but not for so young an audience. López splits the difference between a fawning tribute and a straightforward recounting of accomplishments by working hard to paint the picture of the artist's childhood and what led to her musical achievements. Amid Escobar's exceptionally detailed illustrative work, it's made clear how both the Quintanilla family's immersion in music and Selena's enduring work ethic led to her band's success. There's a lot of text in the book, but it's smartly framed within two-page spreads, and very little of it feels extraneous. Fans new to Selena's work may be surprised to learn that she was not a native speaker when she began performing in Spanish and that early in her career, sexism within the Tejano tradition was an issue. The artwork captures clothing and home furnishings of the time, such as Selena's cassette tapes, her father's guayabera shirts, and the singer's iconic stage costumes. Not surprisingly, there's not much dwelling on the circumstances of the singer's murder other than an explainer page and a mention in a timeline in the backmatter, which also offers other cultural context. The simultaneously publishing Spanish edition is a solid and careful translation preserving information, context, and nuance.

A worthy picture-book primer on the Queen of Tejano music. (Picture book/biography. 6-9) (Spanish ed.: 978-1-4998-1085-1)

WOOD, WIRE, WINGS

Emma Lilian Todd Invents an Airplane

Larson, Kirsten W.
Illus. by Subisak, Tracy
Calkins Creek/Boyd's Mills (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Feb. 26, 2020
978-1-62979-938-4

A heroine of the skies is given her due.

In the early 20th century, Emma Lilian Todd built on the ideas of the Wright brothers and others to create an airplane that successfully flew. A person who disappeared into history after adding to the knowledge of the era, Todd is resurrected here as a role model who can provide encouragement and inspiration by virtue of her single-minded dedication and resiliency. Energetic, thoughtful text punctuated by Todd's own words and Subisak's inventive, warmly outlined full-color images follow her life from a childhood interest in the way things work—her inventor grandfather was an influence—through her subsequent work at the U.S. Patent Office to her many trials and errors in creating prototypes and eventually a working plane. The focus is on her work as an inventor rather than her personal life, and the additional obstacles she faced as a woman are acknowledged organically in context. While Emma Todd certainly contributed to the development of the airplane, what stands out in this selection is not her invention but her fascination with flight and engineering, her determination to explore her interests whether society approved or not, and her perception of failure as a challenge. Todd and those around her present white.

Celebrates its subject's resilience as much as her contributions to STEM and aeronautics. (author's note, timeline, bibliography) (Picture book/biography. 6-10)

PATRICIA'S VISION

The Doctor Who Saved Sight

Lord, Michelle
Illus. by Harris, Alleanna
Sterling (48 pp.)
$16.95 | Jan. 7, 2020
978-1-4549-3137-9

Series: People Who Shaped Our World

The inspiring story of Dr. Patricia Bath, an African American eye surgeon who made significant contributions in the field of ophthalmology.

Growing up in the late 1940s in Harlem, young Patricia first became curious about sight and sightlessness when she noticed a beggar with cloudy eyes. While her friends played nurse, Patricia wanted to be a doctor, and her working-class parents encouraged her love of science. Patricia honed her eye-hand coordination skills by sewing up and mending her dolls, a skill that would come in handy in her career. As a young ophthalmologist, Dr. Bath began working in Harlem before moving across the country to the prestigious Jules Stein Eye
Institute in California. The discriminatory treatment Dr. Bath received at her new workspace didn’t keep her from taking the high road and seeking justice and triumph. Where other doctors saw the impossible, Dr. Bath saw opportunities for miracles, going on to perform a series of groundbreaking surgeries that restored or improved sight for her patients and eventually pioneering the use of lasers in cataract surgery. The lively illustrations complement this motivational text with detail and emotion, from early depictions of Patricia practicing medicine on her toys to the granting of her first patent and her later humanitarian work in Tanzania.

A great tribute to a beautiful life and an important spotlight on a little-known part of American medical history. (timeline, author’s note, biographical note, works cited, further reading) (This review was originally published in our Dec. 1, 2019, issue. We reprint it here for your convenience.)

**READY TO FLY How Sylvia Townsend Became the Bookmobile Ballerina**

Lyon, Lea & LaFaye, Alexandria
Illus. by Gibson, Jessica
Harper/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
$17.99 Jan. 28, 2020
978-0-06-288878-5

A young black girl overcomes prejudice and financial barriers to become a successful ballerina and teacher in this picture book based on a true story.

Sylvia Townsend hears her parents’ music—jazz and symphonies—and she rises “to my toes, ready to fly.” She sees Swan Lake on television and decides she must learn ballet—but her supportive parents can’t pay for lessons. When a bookmobile comes to town, books about ballet become her teachers. She learns well, even teaching other girls in her neighborhood. When her fourth-grade teacher sees the talented girl dance, she offers to pay for lessons, but three different schools turn Sylvia away. Only one “let[s] the real reason slip—ballet is for white girls.” Sylvia is disheartened—but her pupils still want lessons. At a school talent show, Sylvia’s skill leads to a connection to a Russian ballet teacher. After a successful audition, Sylvia earns a free place in her school. On the final spread, an adult Sylvia teaches a multiethnic room full of children at Sylvia’s School of Dance. Lyon and LaFaye have co-authored a standout text that teaches a multiethnic room full of children at Sylvia’s School of Dance. Lyon and LaFaye have co-authored a standout text that teaches a multiethnic room full of children at Sylvia’s School of Dance. Lyon and LaFaye have co-authored a standout text that teaches a multiethnic room full of children at Sylvia’s School of Dance. Lyon and LaFaye have co-authored a standout text that teaches a multiethnic room full of children at Sylvia’s School of Dance. Lyon and LaFaye have co-authored a standout text that teaches a multiethnic room full of children at Sylvia’s School of Dance.
that signaled information was available for Washington and fellow co-conspirators, turning the laundry on her line into a code that provided the advance knowledge Washington needed to ambush enemy soldiers, helping him ultimately to turn the tide of the conflict. The British never suspected. This exciting, well-told tale places readers in the thick of things and illuminates an unsung American heroine. Lively illustrations done in a naïve style that reflects the period capture the setting convincingly and depict a few codes. Characters present white; a street scene shows a brown-skinned woman. Fascinating information in the backmatter includes Culper codes and a recipe for invisible ink.

A captivating slice of little-known U.S. history. (author’s note, artist’s note, notes, bibliography, index) (Picture book/biography. 6-9)

RUTH OBJECTS
The Life of Ruth Bader Ginsburg
Rappaport, Doreen
Illus. by Velasquez, Eric
Disney-Hyperion (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Feb. 11, 2020
978-148474777-9
Series: Big Words

Ruth Bader Ginsburg witnessed and experienced discrimination, both subtle and overt, that profoundly affected her choices and the direction her life would take.

Her mother was denied many opportunities, but she was determined that Ruth would achieve independence. She died just before Ruth’s high school graduation, never seeing her daughter’s splendid achievements. Colleges had quotas for admitting women, Jews, and racial minorities. School administrators openly disparaged women, and there were severe restrictions regarding housing, dining, curfews, and studying. Women, including Ruth, had to leave jobs when pregnant. There was discrimination in hiring for positions in law firms or for clerkships. But Ruth persevered, with her husband as equal life-partner every step of the way. While a law professor at Rutgers University she participated in a successful lawsuit seeking equal pay with her male counterparts. Many more lawsuits seeking to end gender inequities followed. As lawyer, federal judge, and the second woman appointed to the Supreme Court, her remarkable career was forged from strength, determination, and pure guts. Rappaport tells Ruth’s story chronologically, punctuating it with Bader’s own words. Differing typesets, font sizes, and colors separate the quotes from the cogent, informative narration supplied. Per series formula, there is no title on the front cover—just Velasquez’s oil portrait depicting her intensity and serious demeanor. Interior illustrations focus on Ruth in every phase of her life and perfectly match the text.

An insightful and fascinating examination of Ginsburg as woman and jurist. (timeline, author’s note, illustrator’s note, selected bibliography, additional resources) (Picture book/biography. 7-10) (This review was originally published in our Nov. 1, 2019, issue. We reprint it here for your convenience.)

ALTHEA GIBSON
The Story of Tennis’ Fleet-of-Foot Girl
Reid, Megan
Illus. by Freeman, Laura
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Jan. 21, 2020
978-0-06-285109-3

Reid and Freeman celebrate the life of tennis champion Althea Gibson.

Debut author Reid takes readers from 1940s Harlem, where “fleet-of-foot” Althea Gibson is the “quickest, tallest and most fearless athlete,” all the way to 1957, when she becomes the first black player to win the championship at Wimbledon. Readers get to see Gibson’s development from a young athlete, cocksure, assertive, and focused only on winning, to a considerate sportswoman in a league of her own, paving the way for generations of young tennis players coming after her. Framing transitional moments in Gibson’s life in medallions, Freeman’s somewhat static illustrations encourage the narrative along, keeping pace with the text. The clever placement of Gibson’s form playing tennis on top of maps or with the globe represents the reach of her influence across the U.S. and the world. Other double-page spreads emphasize the enormity of the difficulties, specifically racism, Gibson faced while pursuing her dreams. One levels a “WHITES ONLY” sign on one page ever so slightly below Gibson’s determined gaze on the other. An author’s note fills in more historical and personal context for Gibson’s early and later life, and a timeline of important dates with a short bibliography of recommended texts rounds out the exploration of Gibson’s remarkable rise to tennis stardom.

A measured, well-researched winner. (Picture book/biography. 6-12) (This review was originally published in our Dec. 1, 2019, issue. We reprint it here for your convenience.)

MADAME SAQUI
Revolutionary Rope Dancer
Robinson, Lisa
Illus. by Green, Rebecca
Schwartz & Wade/Random (40 pp.)
$17.99 | $20.99 PLB | Mar. 24, 2020
978-0-525-57997-7
978-0-525-57998-4 PLB

In the first picture-book biography of Madame Saqui, readers meet the talented, persevering French tightrope walker who defied gravity.

Marguerite-Antoinette Lalanne and her family flip and tumble onstage in late-18th-century Paris. Marguerite longs to dance on a tightrope, like her parents. But political upheaval in revolutionary-era France drives the family to the countryside, where, secretly, Marguerite takes ropewalking lessons. When her parents see her perform, they decide to return to circus life. After Marguerite marries, performing as Madame Saqui in her husband’s family circus, she heads back to Paris, becoming its
“darling” and Napoleon’s favored acrobat. An inspirational tone — emphasizing the setbacks Saqui faced, her strong-willed spirit, and her daring feats (including ropewalking between the towers of Notre Dame de Paris)— pervades the story: “And she never fell,” readers learn on the final page, as an elderly Saqui ropewalks in her 70s. Green’s muted, stylized illustrations feature dramatic moments, as when Saqui, clad in a flowing white dress, dances across a tightrope as fireworks and stars twinkle in the Parisian sky. Saqui and most characters are white, but there is some diversity among other performers. Where readers fall on the complex legacy of Napoleon (warmonger or French hero?) may color their feelings about the book’s tone; as he “waged war across Europe, Madame Saqui reenacted his battles.” Italicized French words are sporadically incorporated into the text.

A reverent introduction to a trailblazing performer. (glossary) (Picture book/6-12)

FIGHT OF THE CENTURY
Alice Paul Battles Woodrow Wilson for the Vote
Rosenstock, Barb
Illus. by Green, Sarah
Calkins Creek/Boyd’s Mills (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Feb. 25, 2020
978-1-62979-908-7

It’s Alice Paul versus Woodrow Wilson!
Utilizing the language and structure of a boxing match, this fast-paced selection covers Alice Paul’s activism, ongoing support of women’s suffrage, and continuing advocacy for passage of the 19th Amendment during Woodrow Wilson’s two presidential terms. Illustrations based on Jazz Age lithographs and boxing posters combine nicely with suspenseful, articulate text that includes some of Paul’s ancillary accomplishments (she led both the first pickets of the White House, for example, and a successful hunger strike while incarcerated) along the way to success. Wilson’s befuddlement and confusion at her strength and dedication to the cause are covered here, too, as are the negative responses of men who resisted Paul’s actions and beliefs. Ultimately, the focus is on positive change: the ratification of the amendment, Wilson’s developing viewpoint, and America’s growing acceptance of women’s rights. While the text presents her dedication and accomplishments with verve and excitement, the endnotes provide a timeline, bibliography, and additional historical context in which the white woman’s support of her organization’s discrimination against African American women is explored, presenting a picture of a flawed yet accomplished heroine.

A lively, inspiring depiction of an indomitable fighter for women’s rights. (Picture book/biography. 6-10)

LEAVE IT TO ABBIGAIL!
The Revolutionary Life of Abigail Adams
Rosenstock, Barb
Illus. by Baddeley, Elizabeth
Little, Brown (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Feb. 4, 2020
978-0-316-41571-2


A secret scholar, quiet rebel, proto-feminist, staunch advocate for racial equality, unrecognized political powerhouse and creative problem-solver as well as a farmer, accountant, wife, and mother, Abigail Adams, by her thoughts, actions, and writing, established a strong legacy and solid foundation for numerous American heroines to come. Covering her life from birth to old age, this deceptively simple portrayal presents episodes from her childhood, descriptions of her behind-the-scenes work as the wife of and adviser to the second president of the United States, examples of how she was able to achieve goals unusual for a woman of her time period, and information from her letters to build a clear and evocative picture of her personality, experiences, strengths, and various accomplishments. The energetic illustrations capture the time period nicely, in part by using cross-stitched samplers as backdrops for both text boxes and vignettes. The informative author’s note provides accurate and interesting historical context while the illustrator’s note calls attention to the artistic decisions that went into some of the book’s pictures and design. Overall, a worthy addition to any collection, this shows the link between powerful women of the past and present.

An engaging and illuminating depiction of a woman whose story deserves to be known widely. (Picture book/biography. 5-8) (This review was originally published in our Nov. 15, 2019, issue. We reprint it here for your convenience.)

A VOICE NAMED ARETHA
Russell Brown, Katheryn
Illus. by Freeman, Laura
Bloomsbury (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Jan. 7, 2020
978-1-68119-850-7

“Queen of Soul” Aretha Franklin was once a shy child afraid to sing in front of a large audience. However, she came to learn that through music, she could ease her own pain and help others.

This thoughtfully illustrated biography of Aretha Franklin paints a clear picture of the artist from the time she was a child grappling with the loss of her mother in 1952 through refusing to sing before segregated audiences during the 1960s to winning multiple awards and honors. The narrative covers Aretha’s introduction to entertainers like Nat King Cole and Ella Fitzgerald as well as to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.—all were often visitors of her father, famed preacher C.L. Franklin, at their Detroit,
A tractor to rival Mike Mulligan’s Mary Anne in terms of sheer on-the-job enthusiasm.

**ROSIE**

Cross-cultural feminist history goes down easy in this kid-friendly story: Factual details about female factory workers in the United States and the Women’s Land Army in England merge in this fictional tale of a sunny little tractor. When readers first meet Rosie, she’s being constructed by racially diverse Rosie the Riveter-esque women in response to FDR’s Lend-Lease Act. Built with care, the tractor receives a final rose painted on her nose and then she’s shipped off to England. There, women tend the fields while the men fight in World War II. Rosie is determined to do her part, repeating, “I plow and I dig. / I dig and I plow. / No matter the job, / this is my vow.” The war ends but not her purpose—there’s a happy ending in store for the little tractor that could. Ample backmatter tells the true story behind tractors like Rosie. Children too small to appreciate Ward’s deft melding of history and storytelling will still find much to enjoy thanks to the copious mechanics, repeated rhymes, and a tractor to rival Mike Mulligan’s Mary Anne in terms of sheer on-the-job enthusiasm. Ward’s art simultaneously anthropomorphizes Rosie and gives a sense of authenticity to her human figures. More than the sum of its parts, this is a wildly successful and well-researched shaping of the picture-book form to true historical heroines.

They could do it! (author’s note, timeline, sources) (Picture book, 4-7)

**EMMA**

Journalist Wills reaches back through her family tree for a story of freedom and self-determination.

Little Emma is enslaved on the Moore plantation in Haywood County, Tennessee, in 1858. She works in the house, caring for and playing with the white master’s children—but not learning with them. More than anything, she wants what they have but she can’t: freedom and literacy. With the end of the Civil War, she gains one but not the other. Emma marries a former black Union soldier and has children, milestones recorded by others. When he dies, she applies for survivor’s benefits but is denied twice due to bureaucratic quibbles about her husband’s name. (The use of this same tool to deny voting rights today goes unmentioned, but the parallels are clear for adults who wish to draw them.) Her third application, based on the records of her children’s births, is approved. It’s an unusual plot for a

**NUMBERS IN MOTION**

Sophie Kowalevski, Queen of Mathematics

Wallmark, Laurie
Illus. by Nayberg, Yevgenia
Creston (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-939547-63-7

The first woman to receive a doctorate in mathematics gets her due.

This engrossing portrait of Sophie Kowalevski (1850-1891) traces her struggles and eventual success despite assumptions about women made in her native Russia and the various countries in which she obtained an education. Though the pale, relatively small type may be a trifle difficult for young (or older) eyes to decipher, all else works quite well here. Distinctive, stylized illustrations portray Sophie’s world in exaggerated proportions using unusual points of view. They are dotted with mathematical formulae while concise, accessible text tells Sophie’s story, emphasizing how men’s perceptions of women were ever present obstacles. Her fascination with math and her development as a mathematician pervade the text. In her childhood, she lived in a room wallpapered in math problems and explored physics by herself, much to the surprise of others. As a young adult she made a marriage of convenience that allowed her to travel from Russia to Germany, where she studied—but, as a woman, was only allowed to audit classes initially. The story continues, depicting her trials and failures as a mathematician, her struggles to be recognized in all-male academic settings, and her many achievements and awards. Informative endnotes round out this intriguing selection.

An inspiring choice for budding feminists, explorers, historians, and scientists. (Picture book/biography, 7-10)

**ROSIE STRONGER THAN STEEL**

Ward, Lindsay
Illus. by the author
Two Lions (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Mar. 1, 2020
978-1-5420-1794-7

Cross-cultural feminist history goes down easy in this kid-friendly story:

Factual details about female factory workers in the United States and the Women’s Land Army in England merge in this fictional tale of a sunny little tractor. When readers first meet Rosie, she’s being constructed by racially diverse Rosie the Riveter-esque women in response to FDR’s Lend-Lease Act. Built with care, the tractor receives a final rose painted on her nose and then she’s shipped off to England. There, women tend the fields while the men fight in World War II. Rosie is determined to do her part, repeating, “I plow and I dig. / I dig and I plow. / No matter the job, / this is my vow.” The war ends but not her purpose—there’s a happy ending in store for the little tractor that could. Ample backmatter tells the true story behind tractors like Rosie. Children too small to appreciate Ward’s deft melding of history and storytelling will still find much to enjoy thanks to the copious mechanics, repeated rhymes, and a tractor to rival Mike Mulligan’s Mary Anne in terms of sheer on-the-job enthusiasm. Ward’s art simultaneously anthropomorphizes Rosie and gives a sense of authenticity to her human figures. More than the sum of its parts, this is a wildly successful and well-researched shaping of the picture-book form to true historical heroines.

They could do it! (author’s note, timeline, sources) (Picture book, 4-7)

**EMMA**

Wills, Cheryl
Illus. by Cornelison, Sue
Lightswitch Learning (40 pp.)
$18.63 | Feb. 1, 2020
978-1-68265-642-6

Journalist Wills reaches back through her family tree for a story of freedom and self-determination.

Little Emma is enslaved on the Moore plantation in Haywood County, Tennessee, in 1858. She works in the house, caring for and playing with the white master’s children—but not learning with them. More than anything, she wants what they have but she can’t: freedom and literacy. With the end of the Civil War, she gains one but not the other. Emma marries a former black Union soldier and has children, milestones recorded by others. When he dies, she applies for survivor’s benefits but is denied twice due to bureaucratic quibbles about her husband’s name. (The use of this same tool to deny voting rights today goes unmentioned, but the parallels are clear for adults who wish to draw them.) Her third application, based on the records of her children’s births, is approved. It’s an unusual plot for a
picture book, but Wills pulls it off, emphasizing both Emma’s unrealized desire to read and write and the importance of literacy to the successful negotiation of power structures. Cornelison contributes soft-focus paintings that linger on Emma’s determined, soulful face. Her differentiation of other African American characters is weak; most are the same shade of brown and have similarly round faces and cheeks. Copious backmatter includes a note on primary sources, discussion questions and activities, and a two-page glossary.

The message is clear and convincingly conveyed: Literacy is survival. (Picture book. 5-10) (This review was originally published in our Dec. 1, 2019, issue. We reprint it here for your convenience.)

MOTHER JONES AND HER ARMY OF MILL CHILDREN
Winter, Jonah
Illus. by Carpenter, Nancy
Schwartz & Wade/Random (40 pp.)
$17.99 | $20.99 PLB | Feb. 25, 2020
978-0-449-81291-4
978-0-449-81292-1 PLB

Winter focuses on Mother Jones’ Children’s Crusade to introduce young readers to the history of protests against child labor.

“My name is Mother Jones and I’m MAD. And you’d be MAD, too, if you’d seen what I’ve seen.” Thus begins Mother Jones’ first-person narrative about her long career fighting child labor practices in the early 20th century. The first pages depict Mother Jones in front of smoky factories, in West Virginia coal mines, and in Philadelphia fabric mills, where white and brown children toil “for TEN HOURS STRAIGHT.” Her anger at what she saw led Mother Jones to organize the central event of the volume, a children’s march from Philadelphia to New York City to dramatize the plight of child laborers. The march proved unsuccessful, but was it a failure? “HECK, NO!” Mother Jones assures readers. But Winter is careful to have Mother Jones state on the penultimate page that “the wheels of justice grind slowly” and that it took 40 more years of work to get laws changed. His protagonist/subject speaks with fervor in a folksy idiom with the occasional dropped G and a great many capital letters. Carpenter depicts Jones as an apple-cheeked, silver-haired white woman in full-length black dress, white lace collar, and an aura of indestructibility. There is racial diversity among both child marchers and onlookers.

A stellar introduction to an important and ongoing social issue. (author’s note, photographs, bibliography) (Picture book/biography. 5-9) (This review was originally published in our Nov. 1, 2019, issue. We reprint it here for your convenience.)

EMILY WRITES
Emily Dickinson and Her Poetic Beginnings
Yolen, Jane
Illus. by Davenier, Christine
Christy Ottaviano/Henry Holt (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Feb. 4, 2020
978-1-250-12808-9

The imagined events of one day in the early life of Emily Dickinson foreshadow her future creations.

Yolen sets the stage with an opening caption announcing it’s “spring 1834, Amherst, Massachusetts.” Young Emily, a smiling, round-headed child, takes scraps of paper from beneath her father’s desk, scribbles on them, and tries to share the results. Largely ignored by her father, she finds Mrs. Mack, a friendly woman busy in the kitchen, to be more receptive. Mrs. Mack listens to Emily’s poem “Frog and bog!” and pronounces it “A very good rhyme indeed.” After a trip upstairs to see her mother and baby sister, Emily ventures outside to share her words with the flowers and revel in the beauties of nature. Reentering the house, Emily finds an envelope that prompts her to start thinking of rhymes again. Line breaks in most sentences and the way the text blocks are placed on the pages give the appearance of poetry. Although relatively lengthy, the text moves along smoothly with plenty of appealing turns of phrase and engaging images. Davenier’s lively illustrations, created with watercolor ink, vary in size and placement. Lightly sketched settings and period details offer some context. The author’s note fills in a few details while acknowledging that little is known about Dickinson’s childhood. The appended poems relate to words and ideas that appear in the story.

A warm portrait that even those unfamiliar with the iconic poet will likely enjoy. (bibliography) (Picture book. 6-8)
About a year into his first job as a high school history teacher, Charles Pace realized teaching wasn’t quite his speed.

He shared his uncertainty with an aunt, who said, “Well, Charles, you like books—maybe you should be a librarian,” he recalls, letting out a laugh, of the conversation that set him on the path to librarianship. But decades into a career that has taken him from the public library systems of major metropolises, like Brooklyn and Houston, to Fargo, North Dakota, and the suburbs of St. Louis and Atlanta, Pace can confidently say that “having a love of books doesn’t have much to do with being a librarian.”

Of course, that’s not to say a passion for literature isn’t important. “I just don’t think it’s a sufficient precondition,” he explains. “You also need to have a love and concern for people. It’s that ability to connect with other people that makes you successful. A librarian is someone who’s a good listener, who listens to their community, listens to their customers, and then develops the programs, the services, and the collections that are needed.”

In a county as diverse as Gwinnett, in north central Georgia, listening to the needs of the community is not as simple as it sounds. “There are almost 100 different languages spoken in the schools here,” says Pace, executive director of Gwinnett County Public Library, which serves a majority minority population of more than 1 million. Traditionally a highly conservative area, Gwinnett has seen rapid demographic and political changes in recent years, with the trend expected to continue.

Serving such a large and evolving community requires an ability to adapt, which is why Pace has championed embracing new technology and innovation. Under his stewardship, Gwinnett’s 15 libraries rebranded, got rid of their front desks, expanded hours, implemented a self-check system, and launched a new website—all in the same week. While this leaves the system better able to react to the changing needs of the population, an understanding of those needs requires community input.

This is where the listening comes in.

“For us, partnerships are not just important,” Pace explains, “they’re absolutely mission-critical in terms of the things that we want to accomplish. Trying to serve a community as diverse as Gwinnett is challenging, because we have limited
resources, and so we do our best to recruit individuals who are reflective of the community.” People who speak the many languages prevalent in the county are invited to help build out collections in those languages or that touch upon issues relevant to their cultures. “And it’s not just racial or ethnic populations,” he clarifies. “We have a rapidly aging population, so we want to offer services for seniors, for the disabled, for the LGBTQ community—all those are elements of our overall service delivery strategy, and we can’t do it alone. We have to do it in tandem, working as a community of partners.”

Of course, forging community partnerships and building out such an array of collections requires a huge amount of work and demands an incredible amount of time. For that reason, among many others, Gwinnett County Public Library considers Baker & Taylor, a Charlotte-based distributor of books, digital content, and technology solutions, to be an invaluable ally.

“We’re still in the early stages of our work together,” Pace says, “but we’re going to be outsourcing some of our collection development for certain subcollections to Baker & Taylor. That will help us get the materials more quickly and efficiently while relieving our staff of some of the burden of selecting routine things and letting us focus on items specific to our area: relating to Georgia, to our county, and to local items that might be harder to get or that might require a little more work, like foreign language collections.”

And then there’s the daunting task of managing such a sprawling system of libraries and collections. With collectionHQ from Baker & Taylor, Gwinnett will be able to gather and analyze detailed information on demand and consumption, allowing the library to learn more about how the community is engaging with its collections. Pace plans to use this new knowledge to determine demand for additional resources, such as Baker & Taylor’s digital pop-up libraries, offering a taste of what the public library has to offer to those who may not have had the chance (or inclination) to visit a branch. “All of these are tools that Baker & Taylor has provided that will just help free us up to do our jobs better and to better meet the needs of our community.”

Just like Gwinnett county, Georgia is changing, as is the United States. But libraries remain a bedrock within communities all across the country. “I feel like libraries are a pillar of democracy,” Pace reflects, “something uniquely American, in regard to how extensive our libraries are. I think having a place that’s open to everyone, that people from all walks of life can use is...more important now than ever.”

*James Feder is a New York–born, Scottish-educated writer based in Tel Aviv.*
When a magical curse leaves Ekata's family as good as dead, she is forced to take up the mantle of Grand Duke of Kylma Above.

Ekata is days from leaving her violent, scheming family for university when disaster strikes. Someone has put the grand duke and all his heirs, except for her, into a deathlike sleep. The intrigue begins unfolding immediately and draws readers through to the last page, as they and Ekata both try to figure out who can be trusted. Ekata begins her reign as a puppet of the prime minister but shocks everyone by marrying the foreign princess Inkar instead of the arrogant king Sigis. In response, Sigis decides to take the duchy by force, adding yet another headache for Ekata as she confronts internal and external threats to the duchy.

The story of the princess who would rather read books than marry a prince is standard fare by now, yet Bartlett (We Rule the Night, 2019) makes her version feel largely fresh and filled with magic and personality as Ekata learns to be a strong leader by doing what must be done. She and Inkar begin to fall in love after their abrupt marriage, yet their romance is gentle and believable. All the principal characters in this pseudo-Nordic ice kingdom are white, with one secondary character, Ekata's supportive teacher Farhod, having dark skin.

An enchanting queer fairy tale. (Fantasy. 14-adult)
so haunted by Will’s piercing blue eyes that she is driven to investigate his full story. Along the way, Claire befriends a cancer patient in hospice, spends time with a widow who speaks to ghosts, is counseled by a father whose young daughter drowned, and learns from a friend who engages in taxidermy. The plot flits through tarot and tea leaf readings, Kurt Cobain’s suicide and loss and grief. The story is filled with convenient characters who quote poetry and provide philosophical approaches for Claire to consider. Most characters are white; Claire’s older sister has Down syndrome, and her boyfriend’s mother is bisexual.

You can’t shake the sense that your guidance counselor assigned this. (Fiction. 13-16)

HARLEY IN THE SKY
Bowman, Akemi Dawn
Simon Pulse/Simon & Schuster (416 pp.)
$19.99 | Mar. 10, 2020
978-1-5344-3712-8

When her parents insist on college, Harley runs away from home to join a circus.

Harley Milano grew up in her parents’ circus, watching rehearsals and performances and seeing all the work her parents put into managing and creating new acts. And she’s put in time herself, practicing as much as she can on the trapeze. She wants to perform, and she’s ready to be an apprentice, but her parents refuse to entertain her plans. Angry and heartbroken, Harley takes a chance opportunity to join a rival circus, betraying her family in the process. But she believes her dream is worth it, no matter how worried her best friend or her parents might be. Harley throws herself into proving her aerial talents, forging tenuous new friendships and grappling with her constantly shifting, intense emotions. Bowman (Summer Bird Blue, 2018, etc.) explores the costs and rewards of pursuing a dream while also incorporating discussion of mental health and its effects on relationships through generations. Harley is biracial, her mother being Chinese and Irish and her father Japanese and Italian, and she frequently reflects on the influence her mixed heritage has had on her identity. As Harley is torn between familial expectations and her own aspirations, this novel will appeal to those searching for their own places in the world.

Mental health, family and friendship, and the circus: all told in a raw, engaging voice. (Fiction. 14-18)

THE LIGHT IN HIDDEN PLACES
Cameron, Sharon
Scholastic (400 pp.)
$18.99 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-338-35593-2

A true story of faith, love, and heroism.

Stefania “Fusia” Podgórńska longed for nothing more than to leave the rural Polish farm she was born on for the city of Przemyśl where her older sisters lived. At the age of 12, she did just that, finding a job with the Diamants, a family of Jewish shopkeepers who welcomed her into their lives. For three years they lived peacefully until the Germans dropped bombs on Przemyśl. The family struggled on as the war and anti-Semitism ramped up, but eventually, the Diamants were forced into a ghetto. Then 17, Catholic Fusia was determined to help them survive, even at the risk of her own safety, while also caring for her 6-year-old sister, Helena, after their family was taken by the Nazis for forced labor. Knowing the risks involved, Fusia made a bold decision to harbor Jews. As the number of people she sheltered increased, so did her panic about being caught, but she was determined to do what was right. Cameron (The Knowing, 2017, etc.) used Stefania’s unpublished memoir as well as interviews with family members as source material. She deftly details Fusia’s brave actions and includes moving family photographs in the author’s note. Narrated in the first person, the story highlights essential events in Fusia’s life while maintaining a consistent pace. Readers will be pulled in by the compelling opening and stay for the emotional journey.

An inspirational read. (author’s note) (Historical fiction. 13-18)

THE PLAIN JANES
Castellucci, Cecil
Illus. by Rugg, Jim
Little, Brown (496 pp.)
$26.99 | Jan. 7, 2020
978-0-316-52272-4
Series: Janes, 1-3


In the first installment, printed in blue ink, Jane “Main Jane” Beckles was a regular teen until she was caught in a bombing in her city that prompted her parents to move to the suburbs. In her new school, she and her new friends—Jane, Jayne, and Polly Jane—form a guerrilla art group called P.L.A.I.N. (People Loving Art In Neighborhoods). The second entry, printed in pink, has the Janes struggling with interpersonal conflict and a lack of funds for art supplies. Jane corresponds with Mirosław, the Polish stranger whose life—and sketchbook—she saved in the
2020 PREVIEW: YA RELEASES TO LOOK OUT FOR

ALTHOUGH FICTION IS MOST FREQUENTLY USED TO TEACH THE MECHANICS OF READING TO YOUNG CHILDREN, THE REALITY IS THAT THE BULK OF MOST PEOPLE’S DAILY READING CONSISTS OF NONFICTION—INSTRUCTION MANUALS, TAX RETURNS, CONTRACTS, POLITICAL MANIFESTOES, PERMISSION SLIPS, MEDICAL INSTRUCTIONS, NEWS ARTICLES, RECIPES, MEETING AGENDAS, MINUTES, AND SO ON. NONFICTION READING COMPREHENSION IS CRITICAL TO DAILY SURVIVAL, PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS, AND A FLOURISHING DEMOCRACY, YET YA NONFICTION BOOKS—WHICH SUPPORT THIS ESSENTIAL LIFE SKILL—ARE SURPRISINGLY THIN ON THE GROUND AND OFTEN OVERLOOKED IN THE BUZZ OVER FICTION.

Fortunately, the titles I do receive, few though they are, are consistently of very high quality. Below are three early 2020 YA nonfiction releases that are especially worthy of attention—ideal for pleasure reading, book clubs, or classroom use. They make informative, engaging reads for adults as well.

Flowers in the Gutter: The True Story of the Teenagers Who Resisted the Nazis by K.R. Gaddy (Dutton, Jan. 7) is a thoroughly researched account of the Edelweiss Pirates, a loose coalition of young people in Nazi Germany who defied the authorities by meeting outside the officially sanctioned framework of the Hitler Youth. Many of them had socialist and communist sympathies and understood that they were risking their lives through their activities. The book opens with a bang, as several members of the Cologne Edelweiss Club went to the central train station and, in a daring stunt, scattered dozens of anti-Nazi flyers. These young dissidents, whose members are difficult to count but who numbered at the minimum in the hundreds, possibly thousands, have long been overlooked in the history of resistance movements, perhaps because they seemed to be scruffy, left-leaning youths from working-class families. Their story does not fit as comfortably into the narrative that praises those such as the upper-middle-class, university-educated members of the White Rose. Nevertheless, the Edelweiss Pirates took significant risks, and some paid with their lives. Their story effectively complicates the accepted narrative, and learning about them will encourage young readers to look for nuance in the lives of those around them today.

K-pop and K-dramas have taken the world by storm with a fan base that is diverse in age and ethnicity, but how many are aware of the historical context from which the South Korean pop-culture industry emerged? The graphic memoir Banned Book Club by Hyun Sook Kim and Ryan Estrada, illustrated by Hyung-Ju Ko (Iron Circus Comics, Feb. 18), offers an unflinching look at the repressive military regime of South Korea’s 1980s Fifth Republic. Kim, a university freshman studying English language and literature, joined a secret book club consisting of students who read banned materials and distributed an underground newspaper. The oppressive, divisive government strategies they critiqued and the privilege that allowed some individuals to be apolitical bear a striking resemblance to the contemporary U.S. At one point, Kim asks, “How can [President] Chun trick everyone? How do people not see what’s happening?” Her co-conspirator replies, “He doesn’t care if we believe him or not. He created such a divide between the people who believe his lies and those who don’t that the country is too torn apart to come together and properly oppose him.” This gripping story equals the suspense of the best thrillers but is all the more powerful for being true.

Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You: A Remix of the National Book Award–Winning Stamped From the Beginning by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi (Little, Brown, March 10) is the work of a duo of staggering talents. Prolific, widely acclaimed author for young people Reynolds adapted the 2016 adult title by American University professor and Guggenheim Fellow Kendi, in the process offering teen readers a most precious gift. It is impossible to understand where America is today in terms of racial inequity without knowing what came before—yet, as the opening chapter proclaims, “this is not a history book.” Stamped offers a framework for making sense of the entrenched systemic obstacles that the U.S. faces in building a truly equitable society—obstacles that have tenacious roots in poisonous ideologies that use race to exclude black people from access to financial and political justice and influence. Reynolds takes Kendi’s original work of nearly 600 pages and doesn’t just condense it; he has reworked it in his inimitable voice, one that has the rhythm, movement, and beauty of poetry, inexorably drawing readers in. Kendi’s closely researched, persuasively argued points have been transformed into a small, easily digestible volume that will equip young readers with the knowledge and insight to actively analyze and critique public policy and popular culture alike.—L.S.

Laura Simeon is the young adult editor.
explosion and whom she visited while he recuperated, unconscious, in hospital. Volume 3, which features green ink, picks up as the Janes scatter for summer break with Main Jane traveling to France to visit Miroslaw and attend an art class taught by his girlfriend. The illustrations smoothly integrate different art styles so that readers experience them at the same time Jane does. Upon returning for senior year, Jane meets Payne, a new student who holds radically different views on art. Their push and pull deftly shows how complex relationships can be and how competition can build both stronger art and stronger friendships. Main characters are white. Unfortunately, the word “tribe” remains in these reprints.

Hopeful stories about art, activism, friendship, and recovery. (Graphic fiction. 13-16)

WICKED AS YOU WISH
Chupeco, Rin
Sourcebooks Fire (400 pp.)
$17.99 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-4926-7266-1
Series: A Hundred Names for Magic, 1

A cursed prince and a girl whose presence stops magic join forces to regain the kingdom of Avalon from the Snow Queen.

Prince Alexei of Avalon has lived incognito since the Snow Queen ensnared his home kingdom in ice. He is now in hiding with Tala’s family in Arizona, keeping his identity and Tala’s spell-breaking a secret given the illegality of magic in the Royal States of America. When the fabled firebird, Avalon’s protector, arrives in Arizona, Alex, Tala, and a group sent by the mysterious leader Cheshire return to Avalon in an attempt to defeat the Snow Queen once and for all. Mythology and folklore from around the world, including King Arthur, Yamato Takeru, and El Cid, meet in a single world. This mishmash does not overwhelm but instead makes for an intriguing read. Fantastical events such as the fall of Wonderland are woven seamlessly with emotionally charged real-world elements such as racist Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents. Tala is Scottish and Filipina, allowing for exploration of elements such as racism. Tala’s relationship with her best friend, Pez, her childhood neighbor. Then there’s her sexuality: Vetti is pretty sure she’s bisexual, but having only kissed boys and with experiencing so much societal biphobia, she doesn’t feel ready to come out. On top of this, she’s unsure who, if anyone, she’s starting to develop a crush on. After her mother’s death and come to terms with her sexuality in this sophomore novel.

A deftly executed melding of folklore and reality grounded in contemporary issues. (Fantasy. 13-18)

MERMAID MOON
Cokal, Susann
Candlewick (496 pp.)
$22.99 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-5362-0959-4

Printz Award honoree Cokal (The Kingdom of Little Wounds, 2013, etc.) switches from historical fiction to historical fantasy in this loose reinterpretation of Andersen’s “The Little Mermaid.”

The Thirty-Seven Dark Islands, remote and Scandinavian, are prosperous and bustling. Ruled by the (uncannily) long-lived Baroness Thyra, watched over by Our Lady of the Sea, an ostensibly Christian statue, this is a place where little changes until a mysterious girl comes ashore. Half-seaish Sanna has grown up a marreminde but longs to find her landish mother. She studied magic in order to form legs and search the land, directed by her flok’s ancient witch. Literary writing stuffed with interesting if ancillary historical detail moves through several perspectives. Sanna, despite her strong magic and the narrative’s centering of her quest for her mother, tends toward immense passivity; Thyra, a wicked witch who has killed her own children to prolong her life, propels most of the plot, such as it is, and more time is spent in characters’ heads than with their actions or interactions. Questions of power, vanity, and faith are raised, if not always resolved, making this a book suitable for deep reading although unlikely to have wide appeal. Other options trawl similar territory more effectively, particularly Elana K. Arnold’s Damsel (2018) and Margo Lanagan’s The Brides of Rollrock Island (2012). All characters are white; the mermaid society is bisexual by default.

Intriguing if flawed. (historical note) (Historical fantasy. 13-18)

ALL THE INVISIBLE THINGS
Collins, Orlagh
Bloomsbury (368 pp.)
$17.99 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-68119-950-4

A British teen tries to rebuild her life after her mother’s death and come to terms with her sexuality in this sophomore novel.

Helvatica, Vetti for short, has a lot on her plate. After her mother’s death from lymphoma four years ago, Vetti has taken on more than her share of responsibilities in order to help her father and younger sister. Returning to London from the countryside, where the family moved after her Mum’s death, Vetti is worried about her relationship with her best friend, Pez, her childhood neighbor. Then there’s her sexuality: Vetti is pretty sure she’s bisexual, but having only kissed boys and with experiencing so much societal biphobia, she doesn’t feel ready to come out. On top of this, she’s unsure who, if anyone, she’s starting to develop...
Believable from start to finish.

EVERY REASON WE SHOULDN’T
Fujimura, Sara
Tor Teen (336 pp.)
$17.99 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-250-20407-3

At almost 16 years old, Olivia Kennedy, daughter of Olympic gold medalists, already feels like a washed-up failure of a figure skater.

Once the reigning U.S. junior pairs figure skating champions, Olivia and her partner’s first season on the Senior Grand Prix circuit was a disaster, and now she’s given up competitive skating and is navigating regular high school for the first time. She’s also working at her parents’ ice rink, Ice Dreams, which is struggling financially, while medical bills mount for her mother’s back injury. But when speed skating Olympic hopeful Jonah Choi books the rink for his private training sessions, things heat up. Jonah’s determination to be the best is both relatable and inspiring to Olivia, and their friendship grows into something more. Fans of the 1992 movie The Cutting Edge will wonder if that something more includes pairs figure skating, but Fujimura (Breathe, 2018, etc.) simply gives a nod to the movie and takes Olivia’s journey on its own trajectory. Olivia has many obstacles to overcome, including absent parents (both literally and figuratively), lack of emotional support, and financial struggles, but her character is believable from start to finish, and the romance is not overly saccharine. Comic relief and perspective are provided by Mack, Olivia’s white best friend. Olivia is half white and half Japanese; Jonah is three-quarters Korean and one-quarter assumed white.

Sure to take the gold. (author’s note) (Fiction. 13-18)

VOTES OF CONFIDENCE, 2ND EDITION
A Young Person’s Guide to American Elections
Fleischer, Jeff
Zest Books (256 pp.)
$37.32 PLB | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-5415-7896-8

Updated edition of a frank, left-leaning 2016 guide.

The past four years have brought significant changes to electoral practices and procedures—on local as well as national levels—and there is an acerbic tone to the fresh examples and observations that Fleischer incorporates into his wide-angled overview of how elections work... or are meant to. Building around chapters on registering to vote, casting ballots, and getting involved in the political process as a volunteer or candidate, he offers broad looks at how the U.S. government has been organized and reorganized as well as relevant topics from the development of political parties to how primaries, the Electoral College, the legislative process, and campaign finances have been gamed (mostly by conservatives) through the years. His brave effort to encompass the widely divergent rules of down-ballot elections as well as state and national ones does here and there force him into generalities, but he has plenty of illuminating stories to tell. Moreover, along with frequent sidebar glances at third-party races, the long history of voter suppression, fake news and ways to counter it, and more, he updates refreshed, annotated lists of helpful information sites, both nonpartisan and otherwise. If, as he argues, just showing up is the key to making the electoral process more democratic, this searching study makes an effective spur.

Not exactly evenhanded but still a solid and timely foundation. (source notes, additional resources, index, photo credits) (Nonfiction. 12-18)

WHEN WE WERE MAGIC
Gailey, Sarah
Simon Pulse/Simon & Schuster (352 pp.)
$18.99 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-5344-3287-1

Getting through high school requires more than a little bit of magic.

On prom night, when Alexis accidentally kills Josh Harper, she panics and summons her five best friends—Paulie, Roya, Iris, Marcelina, and Maryam—for help. Alexis knows she can rely on them, not only because of their unshakeable friendship, but because of what they have in common: the ability to do magic. Attempting to make things right, the girls cast a spell but are left with a disconnected collection of Josh’s body parts, including a cold, glassy version of his heart. They divide them up and agree to dispose of what is left of Josh, piece by piece. Alexis insists on witnessing each body-part-releasing ceremony, in the process exploring her bonds with her friends—and, in one case, feelings that go far beyond friendship. But as their relationships strengthen, the spell takes
its toll: Every time they lose a body part, the girls lose something too, forcing them to rethink how they define themselves and each other. This work of speculative fiction is a profoundly thoughtful exploration of female friendship, love, growth, and identity. The fully realized characters are diverse in ethnicity, sexuality, and gender identity. While the final two-thirds of the book are beautifully paced, balancing introspection and character development with plot, the first third at times feels weighed down by explanation and backstory.

An intimate portrait of female friendship laced with literal and metaphorical magic. (Speculative fiction. 14-18)

**ONLY MOSTLY DEVASTATED**
Gonzales, Sophie
Wednesday Books (288 pp.)
$17.99 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-250-31589-2

Summer lovin' gets a Southern twist in this addicting coming-of-age gay romance.

Ollie's year is not turning out the way he planned. First, his summer crush, Will, ghosts him and stops answering his texts. Then his aunt's cancer advances to such a critical stage that his parents decide to relocate the family from San Jose to Collinswood, North Carolina, to take care of her. Suddenly Ollie finds himself starting senior year at a new school without friends, without his beloved band, but with Will, a varsity basketball captain who not only isn't out, but initially refuses to be seen with him. Ollie just wants a fresh start, but Will makes that impossible, doing everything from sitting at his table at lunch to transferring into his music class. Watching the central lovers struggle to grow toward one another is just one of the many pleasures offered by Gonzales' (The Law of Inertia, 2018) second novel. The diverse supporting cast—particularly Ollie's new trio of female friends—is so richly characterized that readers will swear they bump into these girls in the halls every day. Scenes between Ollie and Will are tender and tense, complicating both boys' emotional journeys authentically. Sweet and tart in equal measure, this novel reminds us that legalizing gay marriage didn't necessarily make coming out in America any easier. Ollie is white; Will is Venezuelan American.

Poignant, piquant, and not to be missed. (Fiction. 14-18)
INTERVIEWS & PROFILES

GERALDINE MCCAUGHREAN

THE AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF WHERE THE WORLD ENDS BELIEVES HER TALE OF ADVENTURE AND FAITH IN 18TH-CENTURY SCOTLAND SPEAKS TO TODAY’S YOUNG READERS

By Cory Oldweiler

McCaughrean answered questions via email about the new book and the importance of children's authors in our distracted digital age.

Throughout Where the World Ends, the character Quill tells stories both to inspire the other young people and to ease their fears. Does he represent your feelings on the power of storytelling?

Exactly right. The imagination is a fire escape. In time of fright (or sorrow, or confusion, or hopelessness), you can climb down into a story of your own—or an author’s—making and find warmth, solace, and safety. A storyteller can also make things turn out all right in the end...something no one can guarantee in real life. Story can transport the listener-reader to the past, the future, and the curtain walls of the universe.

You have written volumes on classical mythology and frequently reference age-old myths in your books. Why are these stories still important?

I love myths for dating back to a time before story was divided into Adult and Children’s. They concern the big stuff—love, death, monsters, heroes, adventure, folly, sin. As one civilization gave way to the next, its myths would be taken up, skewed to fit, and told afresh.....Almost identical myths sprang up on continents which had never communicated. There is something beyond coincidence in that. It is as if myth rose up out of the molten magma at the Earth’s core to satisfy a hunger in humankind. And though we have lost our belief in most of the gods of myth, the stories still appeal to something deep inside us.

Questions of faith and fate are key to Where the World Ends.

The people of St. Kilda...were Christians—gentle and devout—so the boys’ imaginations would naturally

author Geraldine MCCAUGHREAN has written more than 170 books (no, that’s not a typo) and won nearly every major YA award in both the U.S. and her native U.K. Her latest young adult novel to hit the States, Where the World Ends (Flatiron Books, Dec. 3), earned Britain’s prestigious Carnegie Medal in 2018, making her one of only eight authors to win the award twice.

After more than 30 years crafting thrilling escapades for kids, McCaughrean must be an inveterate adventurer herself, right?

“I’m as timid as a vole,” she says. “I’ve been to only three of the 20 countries I’ve written about, but in my head I’ve been to them all.”

Her latest story is set nearly 200 years ago in the forbidding St. Kilda archipelago northwest of Scotland. A small group of adults and children make their annual bird-hunting trip to the Warrior sea stack, a column of rock jutting out of the North Atlantic. The stack (stac, in Scots Gaelic) is barren but teeming with auks, puffins, gannets, and gulls. When the boat never returns to bring the group home, their adventure turns into a brute quest for survival.

...
have teemed with angels and saints. “The sure and certain hope” of heaven was the one and only certainty in their dangerous, difficult lives. So religion was bound to shape the plot. Personally, I don’t think that the modern “uninvention of God” has rendered religion irrelevant—just draped a sheet over the matter while we’re so busy being secular.

Your Carnegie Medal acceptance speech for Where the World Ends highlighted the value of language to young readers.

The young brain hoovers up words. Its ability to do so gradually falls off, slows down. By the end of middle grade, a child’s future competence with language will have been decided for good and always. That’s why primary schools should be taking every opportunity to bombard kids with glorious vocabulary rather than saving the poor little mites from the “burden of hard words” and so leaving them ill-equipped to reason, argue, cope with adult texts, or see through liars, con men, and politicians.

How do you see your role as a YA author?

I think of myself primarily as an entertainer—not a polemicist. I think that given a scary, in-your-face world or the pressures of school/social media/growing up, fiction can be a healthsome holiday from too much reality. Social issues, moral issues, all sorts of issues find their ways naturally into most novels, but they shouldn’t be the sole object of a novel for young people. The noblest achievement of a book is if it stimulates empathy for—and an interest in—other people.

Cory Oldweiler is a freelance writer based in northern Michigan. Where the World Ends received a starred review in the Aug. 15, 2019, issue.

around despite her asking him to stop, addressing her as “my queen,” and frequently cooking and baking for her. Landra’s anorexia and disordered eating persist throughout the book, but nowhere does Landra seek professional treatment or take active steps to solve it. Instead, family and friends urge or force her to eat, and Brian fetishizes feeding her when he’s not exhibiting emotionally abusive behavior like consistently disregarding personal boundaries and throwing a pie he made for her into a garbage can where she can see it. Most characters are white; Landra has one friend who is described as dark skinned. A disturbingly problematic take on eating disorders and young love. (Fiction. 13-17)

HAVENFALL
Holland, Sara
Bloomsbury (400 pp.)
$18.99 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-5476-0379-4

A teen is thrust into a leadership role when conspiracies are afoot at the multiverse’s inn.

Maddie Morrow is one of the few humans in the know about Earth’s being one of the Adjacent Realms; her uncle is the Innkeeper at the crossroads between them and neutral host of the yearly diplomatic summit between the magical realms of Byrn and Fiordenkill. Solaria used to participate prior to the war that led to the door to Solaria’s being sealed shut—but with some of the shape-shifting Solarians still loose. Maddie wants nothing more than to be her uncle’s successor, but her wish comes too quickly when he’s debilitated during a chaotic night that results in Solaria’s seal being cracked. While doing her best to conceal the happenings (and just how much danger everyone is in) so as to keep the diplomacy on track, Maddie teams up with a shifting roster of allies to try to discover who is responsible for the opening door, whom she can trust, and what everyone’s true motives are. The twists are plentiful, though some are predictable. The romantic storyline with Maddie’s best friend, Fiorden Brekken, is mined for did-he-or-didn’t-he betrayal tension; readers may wish more had come from her attraction to Taya. While most characters—regardless of realm—default to white, brown-skinned characters (such as Marcus’ Fiorden husband) are represented.

Fun premise and setting with a popcorn intrigue plot. (Fantasy. 12-adult)
WHAT THE OTHER THREE DON'T KNOW

Hyde, Spencer
Shadow Mountain (240 pp.)
17.99 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-62972-732-5

Four teens forced to spend a week river rafting find friendship through extreme circumstances in this The Breakfast Club–meets–the outdoors adventure.

Indie, 17 and cynical, likes having options, and right now, she has two: spend a week rafting the same rapids that killed her mother or forfeit her chance to take the journalism class that might launch her out of Tetonia, Idaho. Begrudgingly, she goes along only to find her crew for the next week are Skye, the star soccer player with a prosthetic leg who’s been MIA for the past year; Shelby, the seemingly vain girl who only cares about getting social media followers; and doomsday prepper Wyatt, whose family’s trailer is near hers. Already expecting the week from hell, she sees Nash, the man responsible for her mother’s death, who is to be their guide. Each teen reveals hidden aspects of themselves, bringing them closer just in time for a harrowing ending. This fast-paced first-person narrative is filled with copious references, often poetic, to rafting, and physics that readers may find overwhelming if they are not familiar with the subjects. Indie’s narrative is the only one that is fully fleshed out; the other three just barely break the surface. The messages of being your whole self and facing problems head-on are reinforced often and without subtlety. All characters are assumed white except brown-skinned Skye.

A lackluster attempt at a commonplace narrative. (discussion questions) (Fiction. 13-18)

DEATHLESS DIVIDE

Ireland, Justina
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (560 pp.)
18.99 | Feb. 4, 2020
978-0-06-257063-5

Two young black women kick zombie ass from the post-Civil War East to the late-1800s American West. This sequel to Dread Nation (2018) is told from the perspectives of the irascible Jane McKeene and her unlikely best friend, Katherine Deveraux, after they escape the unholy hell of Summerland, a social science experiment run by a maniacal minister through which black people were forced to protect whites from attacks by throat-chomping, undead shamblers. Alternating between Jane’s haunted life with its Shakespearean overtones and Katherine’s more devout but no less deadly existence, each chapter takes readers farther west, with hopes resting on happy endings for the duo in California. The pacing is steady throughout the first part of the story, building and exploding into a gut-wrenching plot twist halfway through. Then it’s a glorious race to the finish, with compelling moral examinations of human experimentation and killing for hire to fuel reader interest. At its core the book delves into a spectrum of black girls’ and women’s experiences, kinship, and necessary resilience. That focus never strays even as Ireland touches briefly on social tensions between Native and black characters along with passing commentary on immigration and relations between Chinese families and other communities. The imaginative integration of real-world historical players into an equally messy, gruesome chronology artfully developed by the author makes this stand out.

A seriously satisfying, worthy, and well-crafted sequel. (author’s note) (Historical fiction/horror. 14-adult)

19 LOVE SONGS

Levithan, David
Illus. by Eliopulos, Nick
Knopf (320 pp.)
17.99 | Jan. 7, 2020
978-1-984848-63-5

Levithan (Someday, 2018, etc.) curates a playlist of 19 love-themed short-story “tracks.”

The first story, “Quiz Bowl Anti-christ,” places a “lit-boy” on a quiz bowl team with STEM nerds—one of whom becomes his “unarticulated crush.” In “Day 2934,” A—from Levithan’s Every Day (2013)—wakes up in a child’s body and shares a special mother-son Valentine’s Day. Another story, “The Woods,” lets a guy in on his boyfriend’s greatest secret: His boyfriend authors viral Taylor Swift fan fiction. Levithan spins sequential art by Eliopoulos (The Adventurers Guild, 2017, etc.), poetry, and story together for a sentimental, hopeful, and sometimes-nostalgic look at the myriad manifestations of love. Chock-full of beautiful prose and literary allusions, the collection is more a serenade to books and writing than to music. Many stories have appeared in other anthologies. Characters from Two Boys Kissing (2013) and Boy Meets Boy (2003) also appear. Told mostly in first-person and without many descriptors, many of the stories have an ambiguous yet deeply personal feel—one, like “How My Parents Met,” are outright autobiographical. The majority queer cast consists mainly of cisgender gay male romances but also contains some heartfelt lesbian and trans representation. Most stories lack racial descriptors, but a few names code diversity beyond the default white majority.

Easy listening for the lovesick. (liner notes) (Anthology. 14-adult)
OPEN FIRE
Lough, Amber
Carolrhoda (264 pp.)
$18.99 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-1-5415-7289-8

A country on the brink of revolution; a girl caught between ideologies.
Petrograd, Russia, 1917: As the war against Germany rages on, Katya does her bit for the war effort by working at a munitions factory alongside her best friend, Masha. With her father away at the front, Katya quits university to work and support her brother, Maxim, an ailing soldier with a gambling habit. Meanwhile, food shortages create room for new, revolutionary ideals to gain traction as she contemplates contrasts between the czar and the common people. During a women’s march, Katya reconnects with fellow student Sergei and gets embroiled with the Bolsheviks. Caught between her father’s loyalties to the czar, Sergei’s Bolshevism, and the reality of war, Katya eventually enlists in the historic all-female 1st Russian Women’s Battalion of Death, led by the infamous Maria Bochkareva. Taking place over a five-month period, this empowering story sees Katya go through highs and lows at home and at the front, speeding through grueling training to bond with and lead the inspiring women in her unit. Lough (The Blind Wish, 2015, etc.) offers a fascinating, if too fleeting, look into a complex political moment, following a young woman as she carves her own way and proves her worth in a hostile, divided world. All characters are white.

A compelling feminist snapshot of a country—and a girl—at a revolutionary crossroads. (author’s note, further reading, discussion topics) (Historical fiction. 14-adult)
INTERVIEWS & PROFILES

Regina Hayes

THE EDITOR OF ALL THE DAYS PAST, ALL THE DAYS TO COME DISCUSSES WORKING WITH AUTHOR MILDRED D. TAYLOR AS SHE CONCLUDES HER GROUNDBREAKING YA SERIES

By Deesha Philyaw

In All the Days Past, All the Days To Come (Viking, Jan. 7), the final book in Mildred D. Taylor’s Cassie Logan series, Cassie is now a young woman experiencing love and loss amid the unfolding of the civil rights movement. Taylor’s five-book saga has centered around the Logans, an African American family in Mississippi spanning more than 40 years; it includes Song of the Trees (1975), the Newbery Award–winning Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry (1976), the Coretta Scott King Award–winning Let the Circle Be Unbroken (1981), The Road to Memphis (1990), and The Land (2001), a series prequel.

All the Days Past, All the Days To Come reunited Taylor with Viking editor Regina Hayes, who acquired and edited Song of the Trees after it won a Council on Interracial Books writing contest. Hayes, who was at Dial Press at the time, recalls by telephone, “The first book was an illustrated storybook for middle readers. But when Roll of Thunder came in, it was this fully realized, rich novel with just wonderful storytelling and characters that captured you. And it was really quite astonishing. I got chills when it came in.”

Taylor went on to author six more books at Dial after Hayes left for Viking. Hayes says, “Even at that point, Mildred had in her mind that she was going to bring this story all the way into Cassie’s adult years and that she would ultimately become a lawyer and join the civil rights movement.”

Thanks to publishing industry mergers, Taylor and Hayes found themselves once again under the same corporate umbrella for the last book in the Logan family series. “All the Days Past, All the Days To Come is a history of what really happened to civil rights in America after the Second World War,” Hayes says. “Cassie’s brothers have come back home from the war, and she has just finished college. The story follows through her early adulthood, her marriage, and her decision to go to law school and move to Boston to become a lawyer. And then she goes back to Mississippi because she feels a responsibility to participate in the voter registration drive there.

“Along the way, there are some really tragic moments and great family moments as well. There’s an epilogue where Cassie and members of her church, Great Faith Church, are on a bus retracing the route of the Freedom Riders and going to Washington for the Obama inauguration. It makes you realize how optimistic we all were at that point.”

Readers of the Logan series span generations, which Hayes believes speaks to both the timeliness and timeless-ness of the books and to Taylor’s legacy. “So many writers have cited Roll of Thunder as the book that made them want to be writers, including Jacqueline Woodson and Angie Thomas. It’s quite a legacy to have inspired such writers. But the resonance? I think it’s the characters. It’s the family. You really, really want to be part of that family. Even with all the terrible things that happen, there is such warmth and love and support for one another.”

Taylor has said that the Logan family is representative of her family of strong black women and men and their experiences from the Great Depression to the present day. She re-
cently told Hayes: “My legacy is that I have told the story of a black family—symbolic of millions—who survived slavery and the racism of America and fought for the equal rights due to all Americans.”

Hayes says, “Mildred shared with me that she told her cousin that she didn’t think she could finish this [last] book. And her cousin said, ‘You have to finish it because we are the last generation who knows what it was really like to live in the segregated South.’ There’s a scene where they’re driving south, and they cross the Mason-Dixon line. Mildred writes about the terror that they felt from then on until they reached their home. Going down the rural roads where there were no witnesses and how they had to bring enough food to last them for the whole trip because they couldn’t stop at any restaurant [because of Jim Crow laws]. Certainly we have terrible things happening now, but this provides a context.

“Mildred has written this deeply personal story, but it also captures so much history [in a way that is] interesting and readable. That’s the gift of a great storyteller. She’s able to find story in history in a very vivid way.”

Deesha Philyaw is the co-author of Co-Parenting 101: Helping Your Kids Thrive in Two Households After Divorce and author of the forthcoming short-story collection The Secret Lives of Church Ladies. All the Days Past, All the Days To Come received a starred review in the Nov. 1, 2019, issue.

DISTANT STARS
MariNaomi
Illus. by the author
Graphic Universe (272 pp.)
$29.32 | Mar. 1, 2020
978-1-5124-4912-9
Series: Life on Earth, 3

Claudia Jones’ spell at Blithedale High comes to a close—and, just as abruptly, the otherworldly teen’s purpose is apparent.

But what of the others? Unearthing her confidence as a gay teen, Paula prepares to proclaim her newfound identity publicly. Johanna, meanwhile, is not quite ready for their blossoming relationship to be exposed. Left to address her faults, Emily retreats inward and reflects on her former friendship with Paula. Nigel’s parents now seem happier with each other, and Nigel wonders if it’s all thanks to his mysterious crush, Claudia. After his mother passes away, Brett isolates himself further, struggling to reconnect with his best friend, Johanna, as well as his estranged father. All fired up, Celine decides to confront her rapist the only way she knows how. On the margins, but just as integral in this tale, is Paula’s spurned ex-boyfriend Darren, a survivor (and perpetrator) of abuse whose inner demons may decide the fates of everyone involved.

A tremendous finale to a singular trilogy.

IF THESE WINGS COULD FLY
McCauley, Kyrie
Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins
(400 pp.)
$17.99 | Mar. 3, 2020
978-0-06-288502-9

The intricacies of family violence are explored in this lyrical novel.

As she begins her senior year of high school, Leighton precariously balances her commitment to her two younger sisters with her desperation to flee her father’s ongoing abusive behavior. Smart, driven, and self-possessed, she’s been focused on earning her way into NYU and is unprepared for the emotional shake-up that comes with a romance that grows between her and Liam, a fellow student whose nuanced kindness eventually wins her over. Details about an ever growing population of almost preternatural crows in her small Pennsylvania town
and her family's house's spontaneously repairing itself when her dad breaks things in the midst of his rages are juxtaposed against Leighton's authentic, intimate first-person narration, providing an element of the otherworldly that is likely to either appeal mightily to or confuse readers, depending on their taste for magical realism. Strong writing that features some dreamily lovely turns of phrase and language stands out, and the dynamics of domestic violence, including Leighton's simultaneous love for and frustration with her mother, are portrayed in all their complexity without feeling pedantic. Leighton and her family are white. Liam's mother is black and his father is white, and his experience as one of the few people of color in their town adds texture to his character development.

A powerful, thoughtful, and ultimately hopeful debut.  

(Fiction. 14-18)

A Tennessee teen must put her wilderness survival skills to the ultimate test after becoming separated from her friends during a camping trip in the Smoky Mountains.

Seventeen-year-old cross-country star Ashley Hawkins and her friends Meredith and Kavita are looking forward to a night of camping and drinking beer with classmates along the Appalachian Trail. Ashley wants to spend time with her boyfriend, Duke, but when his ex, Natalie, shows up, Ashley is less than thrilled. When she catches them together later that night, Ashley punches Duke in the face and flees headlong into disaster: A boulder crushes part of her foot, and to her horror, she soon realizes that she’s far from camp and very much alone. In the grueling days that follow, with infection setting in and no supplies at hand, Ashley battles hunger and the elements while reflecting on her life, from her mother's abandonment to her underprivileged upbringing, as well as on a young man who disappeared in these very woods two years ago. McGinnis' (Heroine, 2019, etc.) visceral and emotional tale features a strong, stubborn, and alarmingly capable protagonist with unwavering respect for the natural world, and if a few twists rely a bit too much on coincidence, readers will likely be too invested in Ashley's fate to mind.

Impossible to put down.  

(Fiction. 13-18)
against Larkin’s urge to disappear into the waters. Mills (Skating Over Thin Ice, 2018, etc.) pulls readers into Larkin’s mind, skillfully unveiling family mysteries and glimpses of memory. Themes of coping techniques and recovery from trauma are woven seamlessly through the narration. Strong emphases on Larkin’s bonds with Granne and her father, hometown history, and a slow-burning love story round out her emotional journey. The difficulties Larkin encounters are gripping, and readers will feel a connection to her. All major characters are cued as white.

Readers will be pulled along by the strong voice in this emotional story. (Fiction. 12-18)

BLOOM

Oppel, Kenneth

Knopf (320 pp.)


978-1-5247-7300-7

978-1-5247-7301-4

Series: Overthrow, 1

When a worldwide rain results in alien plant life taking over the Earth, three Canadian teens are the only ones strong enough to resist the invasion.

Anaya, Seth, and Petra have always felt different from their peers on their British Columbia island. Anaya has severe allergies that give her acne and perpetual congestion. Seth is a foster child with scars running up and down his arms. Although pretty and popular, Petra is allergic to water. None of the teens think much about the others until strange black plants begin sprouting all over town after a day of heavy rain—that somehow doesn’t trigger Petra’s water allergy. When the plants turn carnivorous, Petra, Anaya, and Seth are the only ones able to withstand their strange perfumes and their acidic interiors, and they realize they must have something more in common. And then Anaya’s botanist father reveals that the plants came from another planet—and they are in the process of colonizing the Earth. In this fast-paced thriller, Oppel spins a richly drawn, incredibly fascinating world. Beginning with the brilliantly unique premise of a botanical alien invasion, the plot unravels satisfyingly, building readers’ curiosity by creating 10 new questions for every answer given. The book’s one significant weakness is its lack of diversity. Other than Anaya, whose name implies she might be South Asian, the other characters present white.

A thrilling alien-invasion novel based on a chillingly nefarious premise. (Science fiction. 12-18)

THE FIRST 7

Pohl, Laura

Sourcebooks Fire (384 pp.)

$17.99 | Mar. 1, 2020

978-1-4926-7346-0

Series: Last 8, 2

Seven months have passed since the Last Teenagers on Earth incapacitated the brutal Hostemn alien threat. Leaving behind a devastated, barren Earth via spaceship, the diverse group of teens decides on a little intergalactic exploration to escape from their traumatic post-invasion lives. A distress signal coming from Earth cuts their journey short, and soon, Clover and friends end up back on a seemingly renewed Earth looking for survivors. Their return, however, results in more complications. Otherworldly crystal clusters have sprung up, corrupting the land—as well as the group’s resident alien friend, Andy—and an invisible barrier prevents them from leaving. When Clover and the gang come across a colony of human survivors led by the mysterious Castor, their search for answers promises to sever the bonds that once united them. Pohl’s (The Last 8, 2019, etc.) conclusion to this benign duology succeeds in mapping out meaningful character development beyond the story’s main protagonist, Clover. As a result, this sequel makes for a more engaging read than the first installment. Moreover, Clover’s struggles with depression and PTSD and her identity as aro-romantic underscore the novel’s most poignant passages, and the author does an admirable job of addressing these topics with sensitivity that’s just short of cloying. Awkward pacing, repetitive language, and inconsistencies in characterization prevent the novel from achieving true greatness, but there’s much to appreciate here.

A moody conclusion to an often compelling, sometimes messy SF page-turner. (Science fiction. 14-18)

THE VINYL UNDERGROUND

Rufus, Rob

Flux (328 pp.)

$17.99 | Mar. 3, 2020

978-1-63583-050-7

Growing pains and music in the shadow of the Vietnam War.

Ronnie and his older brother had a plan: graduate from high school and become DJs. But the Vietnam War got in the way, and now Ronnie’s brother is dead, and Ronnie is left alone with his brother’s records, his grieving mother, and his Marine father. Then Hana—who is half Japanese and (presumably) half white and anti-war—moves to town, and Ronnie, his best friend, and another member of their school’s wrestling team (all of whom are white) strike up a friendship with her, meeting every week to listen to music. It’s over music—with songs from the 60s mentioned over and over
Characters explore a detailed, inventive, lovingly crafted world.

_Audio Variety_  

_Audio Variety_  

again—that they discuss race, poverty, and draft dodging. Rufus ( _Die Young With Me, 2016_ ) sets out to tackle the topics of racism and intolerance in small-town Florida as Ronnie observes the (on-the-page) slurs and violence that Hana experiences daily. While she is outspoken, Hana and her trauma ultimately fade into the background in favor of Ronnie’s narrative. Some language which could be dismissed as relics of the time would nevertheless have benefited from interrogation in the text. Nevertheless, the claustrophobia of a small school with only the draft waiting at the end of the tunnel is keenly felt. Occasionally heavy-handed, this is a novel about grand ideals and hard lessons.

**Teenage righteousness with a heavy dose of nostalgia.**  
(Historical fiction. 14-18)

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**THE VANISHING DEEP**  
_Scholte, Astrid_  
Putnam (432 pp.)  
$17.99 | Mar. 3, 2020  
978-0-525-51395-7

In a flooded post-apocalyptic world, a girl in search of answers about their parents’ deaths revives her dead sister. Three years after her parents died at sea in a storm, Tempest lost her older sister, Elysea, to drowning—and four months after that, Elysea’s best friend revealed that Elysea saw her parents the night they died and that she blamed herself for their deaths. To discover the truth, Tempest has saved and scavenged up enough money to use nearby high-tech island Palindromena’s resurrection technology, which can bring the dead back for just one more day, on Elysea. Elysea’s truth is more complicated than Tempest anticipated, and it leads to an escape from Palindromena and a desperate chase after dangerous, evasive truths. Co-narrator Lor is at odds with the escapists—he secretly filled in for a friend on Elysea’s resurrection, and if the sisters aren’t returned, the friend faces severe consequences. The countdown of Elysea’s remaining time at the start of each chapter keeps tensions high as the characters explore a detailed, inventive, lovingly crafted world (though the technology requires large amounts of suspension of disbelief for the story to hold water). But despite the occasional plot element that falls flat, the narrative’s sea legs come through deep, resonant characterizations and the characters’ intense emotional inner lives. Lor is pale, the sisters are olive-skinned, and various shades of brown are common. An aromatic character receives positive representation.

* A seaworthy stand-alone.  
* _Science fantasy. 12-adult_

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**THE NIGHT OF YOUR LIFE**  
_Sharp, Lydia_  
Point/Scholastic (272 pp.)  
$9.99 paper | Mar. 3, 2020  
978-1-338-31727-5

A teen relives prom night over and over and over again. Best friends JJ and Lucy promised to attend senior prom together. While on his way to pick Lucy up to head over to the big dance, JJ encounters Melody, a teen on her way to her own prom who needs some roadside assistance. One thing leads to another and JJ ends up unable to make it to prom, breaking Lucy’s heart. The next day, JJ discovers that it’s prom night...again. And then again. And then, again. JJ is forced to relive his prom night several times, making tweaks here and there along the way, trying to please not just Lucy, but also Melody and a few of his friends. The balancing act exhausts JJ, and the repetitive nature of the book will leave readers a bit exhausted as well. JJ is a bit of a dip, desperate to please everyone and completely oblivious to the obvious feelings Lucy has for him. Their relationship is sketched out well enough, but there's nothing here that sets the book apart from typical “high school friends figure out they love each other” tales. The _Groundhog Day_ story mechanics don’t elevate the material enough. There just isn’t enough variation in the series of events to maintain readers’ interest. JJ and Lucy are white. JJ has two moms, and there’s some diversity among the peripheral characters.

* A familiar story wrinkled only slightly.  
* _Fiction. 12-16_

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**GIVEN**  
_Taylor, Nandi_  
Wattpad Books (352 pp.)  
$17.99 | Jan. 21, 2020  
978-1-98936-504-5

African and Caribbean mythology with dragons.

Yenni Aja-Nifemi is an 18-year-old princess of the Yirba people. With a reputation for being unladylike due to her interest in hunting, combat, and studying runelore, she is in no rush to settle down and marry, as her royal responsibilities require. Yenni wishes to find a way to save her father, the chieftain, whose health has been failing with no diagnosis, much less cure, in sight. She is granted permission to go to Cresh, making the pact of _Orìrì Njẹm_, to seek answers that will help her father get better. During her year abroad, she meets Weysh—a dragonkind, or human with the ability to change into a dragon—whose first moments with Yenni leave a bad impression. To Yenni’s dismay, he has taken a special interest in her and tells her that she is his Given, the one destined to be his mate. Ultimately, Weysh turns out to be more help than hindrance, and Yenni develops feelings for him despite her best
efforts. But romance takes a back burner to her other problems as she navigates life in this new world where the magic and culture are so different from those of her home. The captivating worldbuilding of magical lands and well-paced plot and character development combined with intriguing twists will have readers looking forward to more. Major human characters are black.

Enjoyable for readers interested in diverse, modern, lore-based fantasy. (map) (Fantasy. 12-adult)

NO TRUE BELIEVERS
York Lumbard, Rabiah
Crown (304 pp.)
$17.99 | Feb. 11, 2020
978-0-525-64425-5

Muslim teen Salma Bakkioui, a hacker and high school senior, experiences the fallout from growing Islamophobia in her neighborhood and at school. Salma has Ehlers-Danlos syndrome and lives with her mother (a white Muslim convert), father (who is North African Berber), paternal grandmother, and two younger sisters. First she must say goodbye to her best friend, Mariam Muhammad, whose family moves to Dubai because anti-Muslim sentiment makes it hard for her father to make a living in Arlington, Virginia. Then, following explosions in Washington, D.C., and a bomb threat at school, Salma and her boyfriend, Amir, become suspects. Meanwhile, new white neighbors have moved into the Muhammads’ old house next door, and although they seem very nice, Salma has her suspicions. She takes on the seemingly impossible and very risky task of investigating who is framing her and Amir. York Lumbard’s (The Gift of Ramadan, 2019, etc.) characters are not fully developed: Salma exhibits little growth or change over the course of the story, and Amir’s lack of flaws makes him feel two dimensional. There is a lack of consistency when it comes to defining Islamic terms. While the author correctly clarifies that “Allahu akbar” is “completely nonthreatening,” the assertion that it is “not always religious. Sometimes it’s just the equivalent of yelling ‘Awesome!’” is questionable. The novel moves slowly, with numerous digressions that are not well integrated and that pull readers away from the main storyline.

A thriller that fails in cohesiveness and forward momentum. (Thriller. 13-17)
A Q&A with Becky Dayton, Owner of the Vermont Book Shop
By Karen Schechner

The Vermont Book Shop in Middlebury—Robert Frost’s favorite bookstore—is the quintessential New England indie, with its Main Street location, high molded tin ceilings, exposed brick, and wide windows that overlook Otter Creek. Owner Becky Dayton purchased the now-70-year-old bookstore in 2005. Here we talk with her about the highs and lows of buying and running a community institution.

How would you describe the bookstore to the uninitiated?
The Vermont Book Shop is an anchor to the downtown of the compact college town of Middlebury, Vermont. With a lovely historical storefront, creaky front door flanked by picture windows right on Main Street, you open the door to find a trove of new books lining the shelves, each one selected with thoughts to our community and the greater global community. The latest new releases are flanked by our Signature Reads, a curated collection of favorite handsells. We try to strike a nice balance between local and global.

How did it feel to buy the Vermont Book Shop?
To be honest, it was really difficult. Once I got over the initial excitement of buying the store, I was confronted with the reality of having taken responsibility not only for a local institution, but for the people who made it work. I was relatively young—only 36—and, having been home with my kids until then, both inexperienced and thin-skinned. When the inevitable criticisms of my changes came, they cut deeply and made me really question the wisdom of what I had done.

After our renovations were completed in 2007, the store’s founding owner, Dike Blair, who was then nearing 90, came in with his family to see the changes, and as they were leaving, Mr. Blair turned to his daughter and said, “Now I can die happy.” His words made me proud to have taken full ownership and reminded me—in that moment and time and time again over the next several years as I continued to realize my vision—that what I imagine my critics characterized as naiveté, hubris, or disregard was actually courage. Fourteen years on, the store is thriving, and I finally believe in myself. I couldn’t have done it without the hard work of legacy staff, whose steady hands I watched closely and learned from, but today I am steadfastly at the helm and quite happy there.

If the Vermont Book Shop were a religion, what would be its icons and tenets?
Well, we wouldn’t be a religion, we’d be a philosophy: Our icons would be Robert Frost (of course), Mary Oliver, Bill McKibben, and Louise Penny. Sabra Field and Woody Jackson would decorate our temple, and the price of admission would be a book recommendation. Our only tenet would be, “Be kind and work hard.”

Which was your favorite event and/or most memorable disaster?
Recently the community, town and college, came together to honor Bill McKibben on the release of his latest book, Falter, and to reflect on his contributions to the community and environmental activism. His work inspired the incomparable Wendell Berry to pen a poem, unbeknownst to Bill, precisely for the occasion. “Bill McKibben, Looking Out” was read to open the evening event: “Somebody has to keep watch. Somebody has to stick out a forefinger and raise a shout. Somebody has to call to the sleepers under the roof.”

How does the bookstore reflect the interests of your community?
Middlebury, like many New England college towns, has become a popular place for professionals from metropolitan areas, many of them Middlebury College alumni, to retire. The college also draws entrepreneurs and their young families, so we have a robust, albeit small, population of highly educated and intellectually curious people. As a result, we can stock some pretty heady titles and be confident that some smarty-pants will delight in their discovery. Of course, we also move a lot of bestsellers such as Becoming and Educated as well as regional guides; books by local authors like Chris Bohjalian, Bill McKibben, and Katherine Arden; and nonbook merchandise you’d expect to find in a college town, such as Moleskine and Decomposition notebooks. Our store-branded tote bags, Book Nerd Vermont license plate T’s, and Eat Read Ride bike jerseys are other popular items which rather uniquely reflect our community. Vermont, and Middlebury in particular, is quite politically liberal, so naturally our inventory reflects that.

Karen Schechner is the vice president of Kirkus Indie.
In this novel by Anonymous, an educator in Washington, D.C., stumbles into a strange world that promises to reveal literary secrets.

As this story opens, the poet Walt Whitman is saying a final farewell to his beloved Rock Creek in the nation’s capital. It’s the summer of 1864, and Walt has spent the past few years of the Civil War comforting the sick and dying in Washington’s Armory Square Hospital. Walt, who’s emotionally broken and largely unknown at this point in his career, stumbles upon Ezra, a former slave, and June, a high society girl, who live together in the wilderness as a two-person “army of poetry lovers.” They claim to communicate with the spirit of the poet John Keats, who, they say, lives in Ezra’s soul, and they pledge to make sure that Walt is remembered as a great poet. The novel jumps to the present day to introduce narrator Jack, a community college teacher and aficionado of Keats’ work who finds himself broke and sitting in Rock Creek Park. There, he encounters an enigmatic stranger known as “Cowboy” who, along with his gang, claims to protect a “secret world” in the woods that Walt created. As Jack is led further into Cowboy’s esoteric community, its mystery is slowly revealed, which makes for compelling reading—particularly in how it forges a link to Ezra and June’s story. The novel is effectively a playground for philosophical conversation, and the author carefully and convincingly captures Whitman’s sensibilities as both a flâneur and a transcendentalist: “My undistracted spirit could pour itself into any living miracle I came upon. I could inhabit ordinary working people, the pit of a peach, a powerful sunrise—anything.” The novel is also steeped in literary history, as when it refers to Richard Brautigan’s 1968 novel, In Watermelon Sugar, in which “people lived in quaint, little shacks in a mind-bending forest full of magical creeks,” offering a distorted reflection of Cowboy’s own perception of Rock Creek Park. Readers with a limited knowledge of poetry, particularly that of Whitman and Keats, may struggle to engage with this book, but others will find it an enjoyably weird and imaginative literary journey.

Engrossing, intricately embroidered, and refreshingly original.
In the previous issue of Kirkus, editors listed the trends they’d like to see disappear forever. I said the New York Times’ practice of ignoring self-published books needs to go. If sifting through the 1.7 million independently published books was the obstacle, the Gray Lady is welcome to use our pages as a resource in 2020. Here are five recently published, starred titles that warrant coverage in the new year.

**Ms. Never** by Colin Dodds: “Existential dread takes on new meaning in a fantastical tale of shifting realities, second-chance romance, and unwanted business partners,” says our reviewer.

**There You Are** by Mathea Morais: In her novel, “Morais conjures a very specific milieu—urban St. Louis in the 1980s and ’90s—in a way that makes it feel lived-in, and she populates the setting with a panoply of rich characters who express themselves with varying degrees of forthrightness.”

**Frontal Matter** by Suzanne Samples: Sick lit is alive and well. In her memoir about brain cancer, Samples writes “smoothly written vignettes that manage to be frightening, sad, and humorous all at once. At one point, for example, a nurse confuses her asymmetrical haircut for brain-surgery prep gone wrong.”

**Things They Buried** by Amanda K. King and Michael R. Swanson: This debut SF/fantasy series launch “uses dazzling worldbuilding and a hodgepodge of characters, cultures, and fantastic species to tell a powerful, human story.”

**The Theoretics of Love** by Joe Taylor: “As these various mysteries and relationships unfold, are solved, remain obscure, or end in violence or romance, characters consider the nature of chance and patterns. Along the way, Taylor tells an entertainingly complicated, interwoven story that is, by turns, funny, horrifying, and tender.” —K.S.

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**THE WORLD IS WAKING UP**
Aronsen, Brent
Illus. by G., Ignacio
Self (108 pp.)
$11.99 paper | Apr. 9, 2019
978-1-09-035491-4

The poems in this illustrated collection for children range from humorous to poignant, with assorted characters taking center stage.

In his latest volume of rhyming verse for kids, Aronsen (Animal Fashion Show, 2015, etc.) offers 79 pieces, many silly or funny but others with a serious side. The title poem, for example, treats the beginning of a new day with appreciation for the delights to come: “The world is waking up! / Come and watch with me. / Let us all be humbled / By the beauty we will see.” The piece goes on to celebrate the rising or awakening of the sun, birds, trees, and people as they all begin their day, reminding readers to pay attention to and be humbled by “the beauty along the way.” As generally in this collection, the verse has good rhythm and the rhyme isn’t forced. Many poems feature amusing characters like “expressive Ed” and “No-nonsense Ned”; Willie, who keeps waiting for a better offer of something to do; and “Long-legged Lucy,” who lives in a stretch limo. Others have first-person narrators in pieces both serious, such as “Father Time” (“I walked with Father Time / Matching his steady stride / As he moved always forward, / Invariably by my side”), and funny, like “Shmuh” (“I like the sound of ‘shmuh’ / And use it because I can / In front of random words, / So try to shmunderstand”). Illust- rator G.’s (Grandma Is My Friend, 2019, etc.) black-and-white images, mostly line drawings, do a nice job of illuminating the poems and often help visualize unusual scenarios, like the one in “Pasta Party,” in which all the different shapes of noodles come out to play.

An enjoyable and varied volume of mostly light verse that rhymes and scans well.

**THE FORGOTTEN DUKE**
Barnes, Sophie
Self (311 pp.)
$5.99 e-book | Jan. 28, 2020

The prospect of an undesirable marriage drives a lady to seek refuge in a rogue’s tavern in this fifth installment of a series.

In this Regency romance, Lady Regina Berkly faces a preposterous arranged union when her father, the Earl of Hedgewick, says she will marry a sickly 14-year-old marquess.
the very next morning. As part of the upper class, Regina never expected to marry for love, but to confront “no hope of happiness” was taking duty too far. Mere hours before her wedding, she runs away and soon meets the notorious “Scoundrel of St. Giles,” Carlton Guthrie. Carlton seems to feel pity for Regina, offering her shelter in his tavern. But he is concealing an ulterior motive: He has a personal vendetta against Regina’s father. Past attempts at retribution have taught him that “bringing a peer to his knees was no simple task.” Regina will serve as unwitting leverage, with her virtue at stake. Over time, Carlton’s commitment to the scheme falters. He is drawn to Regina, yet when she is open to intimacy, he realizes he can no longer toy with her humiliation: “Ye’ve a future that cannot include me, luv, and I’d hate to be yer biggest regret.” Regina’s presence at the tavern is eventually discovered, and when she is pulled away from Carlton, he realizes “she’s the dream I dare not allow myself to have.” Carlton must decide if he can trade his desire for vengeance for Regina’s love. In this latest entry in the Diamonds in the Rough series, Barnes’ (The Infamous Duchess, 2019, etc.) Regency setting is a little less lush than those offered by some other historical romance novelists, lacking the assortment of fashion, decorative, and etiquette details that create an immersive story. But the disparity between Regina’s wealthy family and the poverty of St. Giles is effectively contrasted. The tale becomes a bit stagnant in the middle since Regina is in hiding with limited possibilities for appearing in action scenes or dealing with the supporting cast. But once the heroine comes out of hiding, the third-act momentum increases, resulting in a vibrant and satisfying conclusion.

An enjoyable tale for Regency fans who like revenge plots in their romances.

**COVENTRY**

Bathanti, Joseph
Livingston Press (261 pp.)
Oct. 31, 2019
978-1-60489-222-2
978-1-60489-221-5 paper

A novel focuses on a North Carolina prison guard and his increasingly bleak life inside and outside penitentiary walls. Calvin Gaddy works at Coventry Prison, just like his now-retired father, Mac. As Cal’s wife, Rachel, is pregnant with their first child, he plans to take the sergeant’s exam to boost his income. But Rachel is worried that Cal’s regular pot smoking will lead to trouble if he gets a drug test at Coventry. Still, he’s quietly coping with working at the prison, where some guards, like Mac of yesteryear, are violent with inmates. Jesse Thrake, one officer, is certain that prisoner and alleged witch doctor Tall Pitch Benefit has been “witching” him. Sure enough, Thrake falls ill with vomiting and much worse until the day he inexplicably vanishes. Cal subsequently believes Pitch is cursing him as well, which only intensifies his perpetual concern over his pregnant wife. At the same time, complications at home and work exacerbate Cal’s quandary. The prison captain, for one, is having an affair with his secretary, which ultimately prompts a confrontation between the couple and one of their spouses. Meanwhile, Cal thinks his father is going crazy, as Mac, among other things, is seeing convicts’ faces in the dirt. Cal struggles to balance his life with Rachel and his punishing job. But he may not be prepared...
once tragedy at Coventry strikes, a tragedy that requires either
the cool detachment of a prison guard or the compassion of a
family man.

Bathanti’s (Brothers Like These, 2017, etc.) grim tale is steeped
in religious allegory. Though this facet is sometimes too super-
ficial, it often precipitates indelible imagery. For example,
Cal’s dead mother, Elizabeth, was a churchgoer—unlike his
former sometimes display brutality against men whose crimes
are all but forgotten. Cal is incessantly conflicted between his
roles as prison guard and devoted husband. Accordingly, parallel-
isms ensue: As Rachel carries new life, the narrative perspective
from Pitch, while riveting, is relatively ambiguous. This plot thread results in a
denouement that’s likewise open to interpretation. Bathanti
recounts his story in a lyrical but appropriately somber prose:
“Dead inmates…had been weighted, in the chain-gang days, with
granite and dumped in the sump where their bones still ranged
like white brittle fish waiting for time to turn them back into
free men.”

This harrowing tale of a husband and father-to-be sur-
rrounded by violence remains both gloomy and enthralling.

ACID TEST
Bigelow, Christopher Kimball
Zarahemla Books (298 pp.)
$16.95 paper | $6.99 e-book
Jan. 14, 2020
978-0-9993472-3-2

A memoir discusses morality and
the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the 1980s punk scene.

One might not associate Salt Lake City with the counterculture, but in
the mid-’80s, the city boasted a punk scene awash in drugs,
sex, and rock ‘n’ roll. It was in this milieu that Bigelow (The
Latter-day Saint Family Encyclopedia, 2019, etc.), fresh from
high school, began to move beyond the good-and-evil moral-
ity of his upbringing by “middle-range Mormons.” Borrowing
from the tabletop game Dungeons and Dragons (Bigelow’s
preferred means of escape during his early adolescence), the
author adopted the philosophy of chaotic neutrality: “In
D&D, neutral basically meant selfish—I did what I needed
for my own comfort, but I didn’t hurt others for evil purposes,
and I didn’t conform to some one-size-fits-all system of good.”
What was so bad, after all, about casual sex, recreational drug
use, and some minor theft here and there? Then, under the
influence of LSD and Stephen King’s post-apocalyptic novel
The Stand, Bigelow began to probe the unseen world—and he
didn’t exactly like what he found. One night, after an INXS
concert, drunk and on speed, the author suffered a strange
encounter: a violent, angry attack that he called “a disturbance
in the Force.” The experience forced Bigelow to confront a
larger question: Did evil really exist? And was he better off as
This world is full of whimsical details, including fairy farmers with flocks of ladybugs.

AUTUMN'S QUEST

A young fairy princess must defend her kingdom from a cruel rival. Braginsky's debut middle-grade novel introduces the world of Golden Wood, a magical place governed by miniature fairies and inhabited by sentient animals. One stormy day, Princess Autumn Primrose hurries home after tending to a grove of saplings. The cold raindrops and violent winds become the least of her worries when she is abruptly attacked by a bogart, a wicked creature capable of assuming many shapes. Fortunately, she is soon rescued by a dashing elf warrior named Capt. Lanceleaf Cottonwood. After ensuring her safety, he delivers a dire message. An evil fairy named Azara, who once enslaved the inhabitants of Golden Wood and forced them to mine gold and other precious materials, has escaped from her prison on Ice Mountain. Autumn's grandmother managed to defeat Azara many years ago, but not before Autumn's parents were killed in the rebellion. Now, the time has come for Autumn to face Azara herself. In order to match the wicked fairy's power, she must first complete an ancient pilgrimage to a magical golden tree. She begins her journey with Lance at her side, knowing that the result will determine the fates of her friends and family. As a protagonist, Autumn displays many admirable virtues. She is brave, empathetic, and thoughtful. More importantly, her character demonstrates nuance and growth; she struggles with doubts about her abilities and fears for her loved ones. The premise may not be the most original, but the way the author employs timeless fairy-tale themes is nevertheless delightful. Braginsky's descriptive skills are vibrant and imaginative, from barely tangible memories, like "a fragment of a lullaby," to visualizations, such as the "restless sound of the breaking waves." This world is full of whimsical details, including fairy farmers with flocks of ladybugs and water vessels made from upturned bluebell cups. There is one stumbling block that may deter some readers: The combat scenes, though infrequent, are bloodier than they might expect from middle-grade fiction. Otherwise, Autumn's story is charmingly executed.

A sweet, slightly intense fairy tale that should appeal to intrepid young readers.

TAHOE DEEP

Borg, Todd
Thriller Press (352 pp.)
$16.95 paper | $4.99 e-book
Sep. 25, 2019
978-0-578-47492-2

Silent about an apparent murder for eight decades, an elderly man finds the past has violently caught up with him. In Borg's (Tahoe Skydrop, 2018, etc.) 17th installment of a series, Tahoe detective Owen McKenna investigates the brutal beating of nearly blind nonagenarian Daniel Callahan, who unconvincingly claims to have injured himself in a fall. Athleticly built, dark blonde Mae O'Sullivan, one of Callahan's neighbors, looks after the elderly man. A member of a diving community (Lake Tahoe is a mere block away), she meets with McKenna, who, after shaking her hand, remarks that she "didn't crush my fingers," but I sensed that she could put on a serious squeeze if she wanted to." After the bloated body of a male diver distantly related to Callahan washes up on a nearby beach, authorities have trouble identifying the cause of death but note the corpse has a tattoo of the famous Casper David Friedrich painting The Sea of Ice. From Jay Brandon "Brand" Morse, the dead diver's sketchy roommate, McKenna learns that the deceased was obsessed with treasure hunting. The detective also discovers a possible link between Callahan's beating and the matricidal Bosstro brothers, known as "Chinless" and "Flyboy." The former's microchin is "nothety—and then embracing it.

A roaming, rambunctious account about rejecting society—and then embracing it.

A superior entry—and hopefully not the last—in a long-running mystery/thriller series.
Burt's well-designed, smoothly readable nonfiction debut centers on what she asserts are systematic, fundamental changes that human societies must make in the near future in order to survive. The author looks at traditional ways of generating energy, transporting people and materials, growing and distributing food, and relating to nature, and she determines, as many others have, that present patterns aren’t sustainable, even as they appear to be “locked on autopilot.” Burt’s book lays out meticulously comprehensive proposals for changing them, aimed primarily at two kinds of readers: policymakers in a position to “facilitate meaningful job creation” and everyday people who are willing to do the meaningful work of instituting planned changes and keeping them going. “Do we want future generations to look back at our time as the Great Unraveling, or should we instead choose a more sustainable path so that our grandchildren see this era as the Great Turning?” The related “Great Pivot,” as the author lays it out, puts this philosophy into practice. If the pressing, urgent goal is to reduce carbon emissions and waste in all sectors of daily life, the creation of large numbers of new jobs in many areas will be necessary; Burt enthusiastically elaborates on these areas, including building and enhancing bicycle-related infrastructure, designing walkable communities, deconstructing energy-inefficient buildings for salvage, massively increasing recycling, restoring healthy forests, and creating more small, organic farms. The author’s narrative is buoyantly can-do and forward-thinking, with a refreshing real-world pragmatism that shows how previous, small-scale sustainability projects have been put into practice. Much of what the author proposes will be done against the backdrop of what she calls the “new American Dream,” which will no longer be characterized by relentlessly increasing consumption (“stability, not upward mobility”); those who’ve been left behind by the traditional American dream, she asserts, would find newly created, more meaningful jobs in the transition from a “take-make-waste linear economy to a circular economy.” Overall, this book will likely inspire a great many readers hoping for a better future.

An optimistic and detailed blueprint for a sustainable 21st-century world.

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A set of poems that often pay homage to other poets in their explorations of love, memory, spirituality, and desire.

In his latest collection, Bussan (A Rage of Intelligence, 2013, etc.) shows his engagement with Robert Creeley's work in terms of that poet's compressed style, enjambment, and playfulness with word order. As in Creeley’s 1979 collection Later, Bussan emphasizes themes of time and memory: Bussan's opening, titular poem speaks of “A new labor, not / entailing sweat nor death.” This appears to refer to Creeley's work “Heroes,” in which the speaker quotes the Cumaean Sibyl's reply when Virgil's Aeneas asks about visiting his father in the underworld: “hoc opus, hic labor est” (“this is the task, this is the hard work”)—getting there is easy, the poet seems to say, but returning is difficult. Creeley's poem continues: “That was the Cumaean Sibyl speaking. / This is Robert Creeley,” concluding that “death also / can still propose the old labors.” Here, Bussan proposes a “new labor” that has nothing to do with sweaty hard work (per the Sibyl) or with death (per Creeley). Just as Creeley goes beyond the Sibyl's words, Bussan goes beyond Creeley's, speaking for himself in this poem and in the book as a whole. It is, itself, a labor—a task he's set for himself whose production could be said to relate to a return from an underworld. Like Creeley, Bussan employs subtle internal rhymes (“only I”; “Delphi”) and increases the poem's impact with unusual word placement. Several other poems in the collection effectively play with word order in this way, such as “The Test,” which begins “Tired of, / before the swine, / casting pearls, I...,” Bussan’s allusiveness can sometimes be confusing, however; for example, “At the Tubes of Liberty” will be a puzzling phrase for those who are unfamiliar with Pittsburgh.

It’s not unusual for poets to write after a respected poet, and this book does include some examples of this. However, Bussan’s bolder stance is to write beyond them, as in “Beyond W.C.W,” “Beyond Robert Duncan,” and “Beyond Lew Welch.” This stance doesn’t always lead to an engaging payoff, though, as in the William Carlos Williams–referencing piece: “So much does not / depend / on fountain pens / that are / disposable / when they / are all out of / black ink.” Although this mimics the structure of Williams' 1923 poem “The Red Wheelbarrow,” it kills its engine—Williams’ insistence that something that seems insignificant requires attention and demands memory. Also, readers already know that a disposable pen is insignificant and replaceable. Similarly, “Fairmont Hotel, SF, CA” is “Inspired by Donald Hall’s Gold,” but it’s a much lesser piece. In other poems, however, Bussan's compression works well, like pressure that creates diamonds; “Bonnie and Clyde” is one such jewel, reading in full: “Other than / the robbing / and the killing / and the running / and the ending, the way / it should be.”

Spare, compact poems with rich allusiveness.
This fifth installment of a series finds zombies in Iowa, part of a sinister plan that vampire and werewolf agents are investigating.

Samuel Johnson has encountered various creatures as an agent for Vampires Against The Evil. These include werewolves, aliens, and fiendish vamps called the Evil Ones, who consume blood directly from humans. But now Samuel and his fellow agents are tracking zombies ambling through residential areas in Des Moines, killing them at the first indication of “dangerous activity.” The appearances of the undead aren’t random, as Samuel quickly determines that black vans are dropping off the zombies. VATE agents search for the source while the zombies become increasingly harder to kill. Meanwhile, lycanthrope Joe Butler, who’s previously worked with Samuel, is on assignment for the Werewolf Organization Of Fighters. He’s shadowing the out-of-town Wild Ones—rogue but not feral werewolves. These Wild Ones are meeting with some Evil Ones, though it’s common knowledge that werewolves and vampires hate one another.

Joe gets closer to Henry Borman, one particularly suspicious werewolf, by convincing Henry’s pack to take him in. The agent learns of a mysterious third party involved in the unfolding plot and that VATE and WOOF each have a mole. Seventeen-year-old Cristina Flores hates this life, and she secretly treasures an illegal book about NASA’s Apollo missions—a gift from her father, Paco—and dreams of attending Peking University to become an aerospace engineer. She has the math skills and intelligence to do so, but her Trust Score (or social rating) is low. While celebrating the Chinese New Year at school, she speaks up about the Apollo missions. For this transgression, she must report to “therapeutic counseling” at the Santa Monica police station. From there, she ends up at Central Services, a holding pen for dissidents. After acing several intelligence tests, she’s brought before Dr. Janet Ordin, who tells her that she’s a “pre-select” without defining what that means. Next, her sanity is challenged in a cramped room at the Ninth Circle, where she meets Ryder Lawson and a fellow member of the Genesis project. Damato portrays technology wisely—as neither good nor bad by itself, but merely a tool; the Autoridad digitally alters people’s images in “promo” videos that show health and happiness where neither exist, but similarly high-tech 3-D printers and nuclear reactors enable the Mars escape plan. The ship Enterprise, for example, is said to have “magnetoplasma rockets that generate intense electromagnetic fields to ionize argon propellant into plasma.”

An endlessly appealing supernatural tale with two charming protagonists.
INTERVIEWS & PROFILES

Ijen Kim

A WRITER TAKES READERS FROM MOSCOW TO PYONGYANG IN THE SNUFF BOTTLE BOY

By Rhett Morgan

While growing up in Wellington, New Zealand, Ijen Kim wanted to know more about Russia, so she sought out the Soviet sailors at the town's port and asked them to teach her Russian. Despite this informal beginning, Kim went on to study the language in Paris and work as a translator for the official presidential website of the Kremlin from 2003 to 2017, furthering her appreciation for nuanced perspectives on other cultures. In The Snuff Bottle Boy, Kim gives readers a unique view into another country that has long fascinated her: North Korea. Through the character of Mickey, a member of Pyongyang’s Chinese community, the city’s only “foreign community,” Kim shows how daily life there is unlike anything those outside North Korea might imagine.

What gave you an interest in travel and living abroad?
I never saw a passport until I got my own when I was 22 and left for Paris to continue my studies. I was very fortunate that the French government gave me a scholarship and made it possible for me to train as an interpreter in Paris. I liked the idea of being a bridge between peoples and cultures and making communication possible. Currently, I am based in Vienna, where I work as a conference interpreter.

Why did you decide to leave Russia?
I was very happy living in Russia, but I never had any illusions about the political regime and the direction it would take. I ended up in a situation where I was no longer only translating the president, but also was being asked to translate other material too, making me feel that I was not just conveying to the world the Kremlin’s view, which I think is a perfectly legitimate task, but was taking part in the Russian state propaganda machine. It was not an easy decision to leave Russia. But I was lucky that I had a choice and I sensed it was the right moment to make the move.

What was your connection to North Korea?
I have no connection to North Korea other than a longstanding interest in the country. I studied taekwondo in Moscow for a long time, and our school had strong connections with Pyongyang. I studied the Korean language for a while, too. Ijen is a made-up name that I liked the sound of, and Kim was the name of a pet guinea pig I owned at the time. I never knew back then that I would someday write a novel with a Korean theme.

How does Mickey differ from what we might expect of a “typical” resident of Pyongyang?
I am under absolutely no illusions about the nature of the regime there, but it would also be false to imagine that
people there do not have their little joys and pleasures. It is banal to say that we are fundamentally all alike, but it is so. Mickey is not a typical Pyongyang resident though. He comes from a community that has a lot more choice and freedom, today at least, than your average Pyongyang resident.

How did you research the Chinese community in Pyongyang?

There were a number of sources about the Chinese community in Pyongyang. Some of my information came from Russian researchers who work in this area. I read a lot of books, articles. My main source of information was a site put together by the North Korean Chinese students in Xiamen and Guangzhou. This was all in Chinese and had detailed information about their lives in China as well as their lives back in North Korea.

What do you hope your book makes people realize about life in North Korea?

Even in Moscow, foreigners would come with these pictures in their heads from the grim, drab days of Soviet-era shortages or images of Stalin-era labor camps and would express surprise when they'd see us all just living, laughing, going about an ordinary-seeming life. And yet the authoritarian regime is not a myth. I hope that my book might help people realize that North Koreans are not the robotic, faceless masses often portrayed but are no different to the rest of us. They just happen to be living in this very particular, difficult environment, and they have adapted accordingly.

Rhett Morgan is a writer and translator living in Paris.

as well; he taught her to always “Say what was required. But do your own math” — a nod to George Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four notion that 2+2=5 in a dictatorship.

A plausible and harrowing adventure that explores humanity’s drive for personal freedom.

WE SHALL NOT SLEEP
Graham, M.R.
Qui Est In Literis (433 pp.)
$17.99 paper | $0.99 e-book
Dec. 15, 2018
978-1-946233-01-1

In Graham’s (A Monstrous Romance, 2019, etc.) novel, Meg van Helsing has a dangerous adventure in a world of monsters and heroes.

It’s 1919, and Meg knows that “That Book” by Bram Stoker is far from a work of fiction. She’s always at the ready to vanquish supernatural horrors with weapons in hand, a crucifix around her neck, and her closest friend, Chessie, by her side. When their pal Quincey Harker disappears one night, it’s only the start of a dark chain of events that’s connected to a group of six friends who defeated the infamous Count Dracula 25 years ago. Soon Meg and her allies are fighting off increasingly vicious monster attacks and eventually receive the support of the Monmouth Royal Academy of the Teratological Sciences and its researchers, including the dangerously charming Gheorghe “Geordie” Apostol. Geordie has a dark secret, and his knowledge of sorcery proves to be essential in understanding—and fending off—the dangers that they face. The dangers mount, and bodies fall, as Meg and her friends confront an occult enemy with a hidden agenda. Graham imagines a world in which the characters who vanquished Dracula, and their descendants, combat evil under the tutelage of Abraham van Helsing (Meg’s uncle) and Mina Harker (Quincey’s mother). Graham deftly explores Meg’s closest relationships, especially with Chessie, the daughter of Arthur Holmwood—yet another of several characters from Stoker’s novel, which will appeal to fans of vampire lore. The close, loving bonds between the various players are among the novel’s greatest strengths. Meg is coded as asexual, and her budding relationship with Geordie is carefully developed, exploring the protagonist’s romantic feelings without erasing her sexual orientation. Overall, the book manages to successfully balance the mystery, horror, and historical fiction genres, although it’s perhaps a bit overlong.

A fun and imaginative take on the Dracula mythos with an engaging female protagonist.
HEELS IN THE ARENA
Living Purple in a Red/Blue Town
Hantman, Jamie Brown
Federal Hall Publishing (316 pp.)
Sep. 20, 2019
978-1-5445-0511-4

An insider shares her experiences climbing the Washington, D.C., power ladder, ultimately reaching the position of special assistant to the president for legislative affairs and working in the White House.

Hantman begins her debut memoir with a grabber that’s hard to top: “It’s a Friday in November 2005, and I’m at work. Today that means I’m sitting on Air Force One in the office of the President of the United States, who is sitting at his desk across the cabin from me.” She was at the pinnacle of a career that was sparked at a small Ohio college, where she majored in prelaw. The college’s admissions director offered her a ticket to the George H.W. Bush presidential inauguration: “I was as excited as you can imagine a bookworm, prelaw, watch-Congressional-hearings-in-the-pool type of girl would be.” From that point on, her goal was to work in Washington. She scored a summer internship with Connie Mack, a newly elected Republican senator from Florida; went to law school at Georgetown; and, in 1994, was hired as Mack’s legislative counsel. The author describes these years with her usual mix of respect for the work and enjoyable, equal-opportunity snark: “The new Speaker of the House was Newt Gingrich, who cared about comity and bipartisanship about as much as a Kardashian cares about particle physics.” Next came a four-year stint at a law (lobbying) firm with a “powerhouse government affairs practice.” In 2002, she became Attorney General John Ashcroft’s deputy assistant attorney general for legislative affairs. Later, she was appointed special assistant to President George W. Bush. The engaging book is filled with bold name politicos (and a host of Hollywood glitterati). Dozens of rich, carefully curated anecdotes include some that are certainly unflattering to a few bigwigs, although they are never salacious. Those who favor the left side of the aisle are likely to be dismayed by several of Hantman’s accomplishments—she was instrumental in ushering Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts and Associate Justice Samuel Alito through their confirmation hearings. But she was not a total partisan: During those years, she was dating (and later married) Democratic Sen. Charles Schumer’s chief of staff.

A fun memoir for political junkies of all stripes.

SASSAFRAS
Heald, Trish
Glasswing Media (322 pp.)
Aug. 10, 2019
978-1-73322-680-6

In this debut novel, an alienated widower escapes from a retirement village to reclaim his independence in a Chesapeake Bay cabin only to find that human connection is not so easy to shake off.

Champs Noland was never enthusiastic about making a new home in the retirement community of Egret’s Pond, but when his beloved wife, Pat, dies shortly after their move, he becomes furious and disoriented. Refusing to accept lifelong incarceration in what he calls the “expirement home” at “Regret’s Pond” and rejecting his children’s well-meaning attempts to reconcile him to a life of sterile safety, he runs away to the family’s old fishing cabin on the tidewaters of the Sassafras River. But even there he finds disturbing signs of change and loss. His daughter has spruced up the place in hopes of renting it to summer tourists; his boat has been sent to the junkyard; and the rustic, mismatched sanctuary of his youth is unrecognizable. He sets up housekeeping in a tent on the lawn, resisting all attempts by his daughter and two sons to dislodge him. Slowly and unwillingly, Champs begins to accumulate links. Josanne and Larry, his longtime neighbors, poke into his life with annoying concern; his ne’er-do-well son, Jeffrey, comes to live in the cabin along with a scruffy spaniel named Millie; and Champs’ other kids and grandchildren intrude, bringing a chaotic mix of problems and love. In this soup of solitude and family, Champs begins to review his regrets and gradually comes to see that curmudgeonly isolation may not be his only choice. In a narrative as tender and mordant as Champs himself, Heald has created both an exploration of aging and a tribute to a lost way of life, as gentrification threatens the working-class roots of the Chesapeake Bay tidewaters. Though the numerous loose ends may seem too neatly tied up at the end, Champs makes a believable and satisfying transition from an unlikable and obstinately self-centered old man to a thoughtful figure examining his family relationships. The bay itself comes alive through the eyes of an old fisherman.

In this engrossing family tale, an aging man finds new chapters to explore in the book of his life.
Grall’s beautiful paper creations vividly reveal Jimmy’s inner thoughts.

**DRAGONS CAN’T SPELL**

*Heinrichs, Susie*
*Il. by Grall, Christina*

FriesenPress (48 pp.)
Sep. 13, 2019
978-1-6255-5664-7
978-1-6255-5665-4 paper

A boy overcomes spelling-bee anxiety by imagining the misadventures of his stuffed dragon in this debut picture book from sisters Heinrichs and Grall.

Jimmy, a blond, pale-skinned boy, often has silly dreams of animal adventures, as depicted in Grall’s opening, brightly colored cut-paper illustration. But the night before a spelling bee, his dreams turn to nightmares. He wakes up and confesses to Fire Breath, his stuffed dragon, that he’s forgotten all his spelling-bee words. But he comes up with a plan: “What if he stayed home and sent Fire Breath in his place?” As Jimmy imagines the resulting antics—which culminate in the fire-breathing dragon burning down the auditorium—the boy realizes that it would be unfair to send an unprepared dragon to a spelling bee. Also, he now remembers all the words he’d memorized. Over the course of the story, a large ape in a picture above Jimmy’s bed offers easy-to-read commentary. Indeed, author Heinrichs uses accessible vocabulary throughout the book, and the illustrations effectively move the story forward on pages with little or no text. Grall’s beautiful paper creations vividly reveal Jimmy’s inner thoughts, and the silly conceit allows the creators to effectively show how creativity can help one cope with stress.

Young readers will sympathize with the anxious protagonist and giggle at the dragon’s well-illustrated adventures.

**GIFTS FROM THE GARDEN**

*Hicks, Carol Siyahi*

Sea Eagle Press (104 pp.)
978-0-615-53968-3

Poet and writer Hicks celebrates the rewards and lessons of gardening in a debut collection of short, lyrical essays.

The author begins with a brief foreword that identifies gardens as providing “metaphors for living,” as every stage of life and death is apparent within them. The prose sketches that follow trace and retrace the cycle of seasons in nature and in a cultivated garden as well as small miracles of rural life, from a seed’s sprouting to a herd of Angus cows’ taking care of a fawn.

“The Intrinsic Readiness of Spring” commemorates an unusually long titular season in the southwestern Ohio garden that Hicks keeps with her husband, George; spring bulbs that “tear up through the soil and explode into the warming air” parallel the human soul that “emerges from hibernation.” “Summer Dreaming” recognizes the value of shade to keep plants and humans from dissipating their vital energies in the heat of summer. “The Sleeping Garden” is a prose poem set in winter while “On Solitude” is a meditation on the role of the garden in providing peaceful alone time “without the guilt.” Other pieces tell of relationships with neighbors and the extravagant delights of vegetable gardening as well as a foray into winemaking. Hicks’ language is lush and evocative, like the blooming plants that she describes. For instance, after she plucks a ravenous grasshopper from a climbing rose and throws it into a nearby pond, she imagines that the fish “feasted on the insect stuffed with leaves and rose petals.” Although one might wish that the author’s observations would extend more frequently beyond her own garden, the limited scope gives it a cozy, familiar tone and a welcoming warmth. Overall, this collection shows the author’s careful, observant eye and her passionate appreciation of natural beauty.

A poetic examination of gardens and gardeners that manages to evoke the healing power of the natural world.

**THE BEAST OF BESWICK**

*Howard, Amalie*

Entangled: Amara (384 pp.)
Nov. 26, 2019
978-1-64063-741-2

A scarred, sharp-tongued nobleman meets his feisty match in Howard’s (*What a Scot Wants*, 2013, etc.) historical romance.

It’s 1819, and 25-year-old Lady Astrid Everleigh, a cash-strapped Englishwoman, must find a way to save her 16-year-old sister, Isobel, from getting married off to the loathsome Earl of Beaumont; Astrid previously refused his proposal herself, and as a result, he ruined her reputation and marriage prospects with a “horrible lie about her lack of virtue.” For hard-to-understand reasons, Astrid’s only hope is to marry the wealthy, powerful, and single Lord Thane Harte, Duke of Beswick, and she puts the proposal to him after barging in on his bath. Alas, she’s horrified by the scars, left by French bayonets years ago, on Thane’s face and body—a result of Beaumont’s abandoning his post and a subsequent French ambush. Thane’s temper earned him the moniker “the Beast of Beswick.” Fortunately, she observes, the French spared his “luscious mouth,” “burning” eyes, and muscular torso—among other body parts. Instant bickering ensues, and when Astrid installs herself with Isobel at Beswick Park to catalog Thane’s Ming porcelains, the attraction between Astrid and the duke grows. The young noblewoman also voices feminist theory, which Thane eagerly appreciates—though sometimes less for what she says than how she says it: “Her eyes gone with indignant passion, lips parted, breasts heaving.” Their wedding night comes rather early on, but Howard successfully keeps the sparks flying thanks to Thane’s self-pitying mood cycles—worried that Astrid will leave him because of his scars, he gets cold and nasty; Astrid snaps back and maddens him with scandalous gowns, and bodice-ripping follows. The author’s reprise of “Beauty and the Beast” motifs effectively mixes Jane Austen–ite manners with...
lewd mores. However, it’s full of anachronistic language—“I don’t want a fucking prince, you idiot. They’re too pretty, too full of themselves, too much maintenance”—and suffers third-act problems as long-anticipated comeuppance fizzle inconclusively. Fortunately, vigorous prose, lively characters—including Thane’s Aunt Mabel, who beds all the footmen—and lubricious rounds of fighting and sex will keep readers turning pages.

A lasciviously entertaining Regency romp.

**POP FLIES, ROBO-PETS, AND OTHER DISASTERS**
Kamata, Suzanne  
Illus. by Bishop, Tracy Nishimura  
One Elm Books (208 pp.)  
978-1-947159-36-5

A 13-year-old boy struggles to save his baseball team, help care for his grandfather, and avoid bullies in Tokushima, Japan, in this middle-grade novel.

For Matsumoto Satoshi, his passion for baseball is the one thing he can count on to help him fit in at Tokushima Whirlpool Junior High School after growing up in Atlanta. It also connects him to Oji-chan, his grandfather, who is struggling with dementia but who still remembers vast amounts of baseball trivia. When Satoshi learns that his team might get cut if it fails to win a tournament, he becomes determined to help save it. But this isn’t easy; especially since teammate Shintaro constantly finds reasons to harass him for his American habits. Satoshi’s English teacher also singles him out in class, at one point hitting him with a notebook. Fearing further alienation, Satoshi pushes away Misa, a kind classmate whose mixed Japanese and American ancestry makes her a target of bullying, and he avoids the other English-speaking students. He also conceals his younger sister Momoko’s deafness and use of a wheelchair from his peers out of fear that he will be harassed—a concern that turns out to be justified. When a mistake in a game puts Satoshi’s position on the team in question, he has to decide who and what really matters to him. Kamata (*Indigo Girl*, 2019, etc.) provides plenty of action-heavy baseball scenes for sports fans and includes details about the Japanese history and traditions of the game.

At the same time, Satoshi’s commitment to his grandfather and his anxieties about failing to conform are emotionally realistic and complex and will resonate with readers who are facing isolation in a new place. Passages about Momoko unfortunately focus more on what other people do to help her than on her individual voice. The characters are Japanese or part Japanese with the exception of one white American teacher. Bishop’s (*Great Grandpa Is Weird*, 2016) intermittent manga-influenced, gray-tone illustrations deftly highlight action or emotion in key scenes, sometimes using multiple panels and comic-book dialogue; the style emphasizes the characters’ youth.

An engaging, sports-focused, family-driven Japanese spin on the new-kid-in-school narrative.

**DEMOCRACY FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM**
*Getting Money Out of Politics*
Karath, Michael  
Thaddaeus Books (398 pp.)  
$18.95 paper | May 21, 2019  
978-0-578-47079-5

A writer calls for a constitutional amendment to end the influence of money in American politics.

In this book, Karath (*Overthrowing the Invisible Empire*, 2017) looks not to the 2010 *Citizens United* case as the root of the problems with money in 21st-century politics but to the Supreme Court’s 1976 decision in *Buckley v. Valeo* as the key factor in allowing unfettered involvement in elections by corporations and wealthy individuals. The author recounts a deeply researched history of recent debates over free speech and campaign finance reform and draws clear connections between political donations and beneficial treatment. The volume discusses a number of scandals and problems that can be linked to the influence of political donations, including Jack Abramoff’s lobbying, the vast power of David and Charles Koch, the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, and Meg Whitman’s candidacy for governor of California. After presenting a wealth of evidence, Karath then goes on to argue that political spending must be limited as well as contributions, and he presents a draft of a constitutional amendment that might ameliorate the situation. He also guides readers through the process of amending the Constitution. The backmatter includes a collection of statements from notable figures on the role of money in politics as well as a detailed list of source notes that include well-regarded experts in the field.

Karath is a thoughtful writer and has done the research necessary to support his wide-ranging contentions. The arguments are generally persuasive, although readers will be left with the sense that advocates of campaign finance reform are generally outmatched by their opponents’ deep pockets. And while the author maintains his optimism toward the book’s goal of removing the influence of money, more cynical readers may find the proposed remedies unlikely to succeed. This is a work of advocacy, clear in the position taken in its pages. While major conservative donors like the Koch brothers (David Koch died recently) and “hedge-fund billionaire Robert Mercer and his daughter Rebekah Mercer” receive pointed attention, both Republican and Democratic lawmakers and leaders are equally indicted as participants in and beneficiaries of the profit-driven aspects of politics. At times, the prose becomes too caught up in its own eloquence, delivering verbal thrusts or an excessive series of rhetorical questions (“Would the Kochs and other corporate titans, who spend billions of dollars manipulating government and politicians for profit, suddenly abide by the honor system? Would they voluntarily stay out of the public arena, leaving billions of dollars in potential profits on the table?”). But the bulk of Karath’s writing is strong, biting, and evocative, as in this passage about Filip Palda, a French Canadian economist, libertarian author, and disciple of Austrian economist Friedrich A. Hayek: “Leave it to a French–Canadian writer relying on arcane studies by an Austrian economist to explain American
democracy to Americans.” This is not a book that will leave the audience feeling good about the state of politics in the United States. But readers will undoubtedly finish the work better informed about the nature of the problem and quite possibly will become motivated to join the author in pushing for fundamental changes to the political system.

A well-researched, solidly argued case for limiting political spending and donations that’s slightly hampered by its overambitious constitutional goal.

DYLAN & ME 50 Years of Adventures
Kemp, Louise with Friedman, Kinky
Westrose Press (256 pp.)
$28.95 | $9.99 paper | Aug. 20, 2019
978-1-73300-121-2

In an episodic debut memoir, Kemp, with Friedman (Cowboy Logic, 2006, etc.), recalls his lifelong friendship with a world-famous musician.

In 1953, when he was 11, Kemp went to summer camp in northern Wisconsin and met Bobby Zimmerman, a confident 12-year-old who carried a guitar around and told everyone he would grow up to be a rock star. Zimmerman, of course, later changed his name to Bob Dylan, left his Midwestern roots behind, and found fame and fortune in New York City. Kemp poses the book’s driving question early on: “What happens when your closest friend from childhood becomes one of the most famous people in the world, seemingly overnight?” The book’s answer: Keep him close. As Kemp colorfully details, their bond was never over music but shared memories of youth and the easy affection of childhood friendship. Thanks to “Bobby,” Kemp rubs elbows with celebrities. As such, the book offers numerous cameos, as when Kemp visited Dylan on the Mexico set of the Sam Peckinpah–directed film Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid, met musician/actor Kris Kristofferson, and went on a road trip through the country with actor Harry Dean Stanton. Overall, this book offers readers a remarkable look at the nature and meaning of a friendship that lasts through the years, and, throughout, Kemp tells of how he admires and cherishes Dylan’s talent without coveting it. Still, he can’t help comparing himself to his friend: “Bobby had become Bob and had started changing the world,” the author writes. “I had built up a very successful fish business. Not bad for two small town dropouts!” That said, the author does seem overeager to establish bona fides with name-dropping at times; at Dylan’s shows and on tours, including the 1975-1976 Rolling Thunder Revue, which he produced, Kemp tells of meeting Cher, Joni Mitchell, Joan Baez, and other dignitaries of 20th-century popular music.

The tone of Kemp’s writing is nostalgic and warm, if mostly reportorial; fortunately, this strategy works well for the material, and the presence of Dylan, a vital and enigmatic figure, gives the book a charge that the prose itself sometimes lacks.

An earnest account of a friendship featuring anecdotes of celebrity encounters.

PLAGUE OF WITCHES
Kennedy, John Patrick
Self (368 pp.)
Sep. 16, 2019
978-1-69175-873-9

Having just learned she’s a witch, a 20-something joins an exclusive university to learn what happened to her mother, who disappeared years ago, in this fantasy mystery.

Californian Kana Klausen’s 21st birthday comes with a visit from a strange woman. Professor Claire White tells Kana that she is a witch, like her mother, Akemi Wakahisa. Before vanishing two decades prior, Akemi put a spell on her infant daughter that suppressed her magic until she turned 21. Kana can help uncover what happened to Akemi by attending Shipton University—a university for witches in Connecticut. Though Shipton is well known, witches have implemented two agencies to keep spellcasting a secret from the public. Kana takes a crash course in supernatural arts and, at Shipton, quickly picks up her mother’s incomplete, initially undisclosed research in hopes of learning Akemi’s fate. This entails an experiment involving other students, including Vanessa Lake. Despite Vanessa’s recurrent troubles, the National Council of Witches sends her to Shipton on a probationary basis; she wears a bracelet allowing the administration to monitor whatever magic she uses. Around the same time, a massless entity awakens and escapes a cage made of pure energy. This entity feeds on the pain of animals and humans but needs “the Promised”—a body that can sustain the entity’s presence. This is a specific individual, but it doesn’t know that person’s identity. However, it slowly regains power and memories via multiple murders, gradually making its way to Shipton, where the Promised is most assuredly Kana or someone close to her.

Although this spirited tale begins as primarily a fantasy, it ultimately spins into a taut, surprising mystery. Kennedy (Lady Dread, 2019, etc.), for starters, gradually introduces distinctive characters. These include fellow student Night, who’s both Vanessa’s assigned tutor and Kana’s romantic interest; Vanessa’s roommate, Cassandra; and townie Ian, who initiates a mostly physical relationship with Vanessa. As the story progresses, readers will anticipate some reveals, like the goal of Akemi’s research or which particular witch is possibly assisting the entity. But others are bombshells, especially during the blistering, twisty final act. Vanessa is a standout among a cast of robust, predominantly female characters. She’s led a hard life in Canada courtesy of her indifferent guardian, Ambrose Levesque. But while she’s rude at first (even to undeserving Night), her attitude eventually lessens in severity—though she remains strong, just as likely to punch someone in the face as use her more unusual powers. Kennedy writes clearly and concisely without lingering on more lurid moments, like sex scenes or bloody deaths. Nevertheless, the author’s best feat here is the description of the mysterious entity—whether it’s in an incorporeal form or occupying one of many bodies. In one scene, the entity flits between three individuals in a matter

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SEEKING THE MYSTICAL THEORY OF EVERYTHING
Klesch, Lucas
Sunshine Ink (248 pp.)
$16.99 paper | Oct. 8, 2019
978-0-9768560-8-5

A poet with an eye to the climate crisis writes about grief and hope in a world that’s ending—but in a universe that’s just beginning.

Klesch (A Love Song for an Inked Doll, 2011, etc.) is an accomplished poet, but in his bio, he introduces himself first as a climate scientist. As such, he is alarmed by the rising seas, the warming atmosphere, and the looming threat of extinction. Accordingly, throughout his fourth verse volume, he can’t quite escape that threat’s darkening cloud. In the book’s first piece, he confronts it head-on, writing of “a dream abandoned / to entrepreneurial capitalism / the planet in climate crisis / a species ending existence / due to the greed / of a self centered populace.” But then comes a poignant shift in the last couplet: “If this is the end / could i spend it with you.” Throughout his volume’s first movement, Klesch bounces between these two themes: the sneaking sense that the apocalypse is upon us and the faint hope that the desperate warmth of human company might give some solace. But as the work goes on, the poet’s perspective subtly shifts, from the macroscopic to the microscopic and from the terrestrial to the universal. Both these moves are forecast in his dedication, which speaks of a belief that “we are all connected to each other on a quantum level”—and that this link lets our love spread “throughout all spacetime.” Hence, he asserts late in the book: “You play with powerful forces / when you communicate / experimentally / the quantum chemistry / of kite strings / invisible connections / throughout spacetime.” In the hands of a lesser writer, such cosmic reflections might sound absurd. But nothing could be further from the truth with Klesch, whose poetry is saved by his humility. He bows before the massive dangers that face readers and the grandeur of the universe that houses them—and then rises to greet both with curiosity and fortitude.

A sobering, inspiring volume of poetry with an ambitious scope.

THE CAT WHO FELL TO EARTH
Korolev, Nick
Mockingbird Lane Press (318 pp.)

A humanoid but catlike alien crashes near Sedona, Arizona, and attempts to make first contact with humans in Korolev’s SF novel.

Kedi M’Tischaka is a Mehari alien scientist whose craft falls to Earth—a planet that the Mehari call “Tellus.” He heads to nearby New Age hotspot Sedona, where the apparently spaced-out inhabitants are open to the notion of extraterrestrials. The alien, whose features resemble a feline’s, finds shelter with a mystical books–and-crystal retailer named Crystal Hopkins and her conservative Christian boyfriend, Dennis Parker. They both try to help the leonine creature fix his ship and get back to his home planet. However, Kedi doesn’t realize that his accident was deliberately arranged by rogue members of the Confederation of Planets to force a first-contact situation on Earth; otherwise, these members believe, humanity will fall victim to its own self-destructive, ecologically destructive ways—and become prey for the Apacians, the bulbous-headed, big-eyed gray aliens of Roswell lore, who covet humanity’s real estate and DNA. A more immediate menace, however, is a squad of power- and glory-hungry American soldiers attached to a secret “Majestic” unit that routinely covers up the existence of aliens. The author’s tone strikes some comic notes—allergies to cats recur, for instance—and fans will appreciate shoutouts to Larry Niven’s feline star-wars, the Kzinti, and author Dean Koontz. An intriguing subplot explores the notion that, as a second-class male citizen in a matriarchal race, Kedi has hefty cultural baggage that he carries along with him. Too often, though, the narrative lapses into strident denunciations of the military-industrial complex and the corrupt authorities who suppress the truth about alien spacecraft. There are also admiring tributes to real-life author Richard C. Hoagland and MUFON, aka the Mutual UFO Network, who study alleged sightings of UFOs. Overall, it will be literary catnip for paranormal-podcast disciples.

Flighty alien antics featuring action, humor, and a successful of UFO–conspiracy theories.

THE LODGE WOMEN, THEIR MEN AND THEIR TIMES
Lodge, Emily
CreateSpace (432 pp.)

Lodge tells the story of her famous New England family via biographies of her foremothers in this debut work of American history.

The Lodges and their close relatives the Cabots have long histories in the United States. The author is the granddaughter
of U.S. senator and ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. and the
daughter of politician George Cabot Lodge. Her family tree
is filled with other names associated with Boston Brahmins—
families who landed in Massachusetts during the Colonial era
and have been involved in American society ever since. This
book is a family biography of sorts, focusing specifically on the
female members of the Cabot and Lodge clans, dating back
to 17th-century Salem, Massachusetts. Anna Cabot joined the
two families together when she married John Ellerton Lodge in
1871. She was also a scrapbooker who preserved various details
of life in mid-19th-century Boston and moved in the same
social circles as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry Wadsworth
Longfellow. Nannie Lodge Davis (1851-1915) was a well-traveled
woman who nurtured her husband’s political career and whom
Theodore Roosevelt called “the closest America had to having a
queen.” Bessy Davis Lodge (1876-1960), the scion of a New Y ork
City political dynasty, married into the Lodge family only to be
widowed at 36; she lived another half-century, moving to Paris
at the encouragement of authors Edith Wharton and Henry
James. In these women’s life stories, a portrait of domestic life
in the American upper class emerges, particularly during the era
of American aristocracy that became known as the Gilded Age.

The author’s book is thoroughly researched, relying heav-
ily on letters and other primary-source documents. Lodge gives
her subjects many opportunities to speak for themselves, where
possible, and her own prose is both breezy and detailed, par-
cicularly when describing some of her ancestors’ playgrounds:
“Tuckernuck, an almost deserted island in the Elizabeth chain
in Buzzards Bay off Nantucket near Cape Cod, was a place of
unimaginable beauty—sparkling sea, summer air, swallows
winging over ocean grasses and sand dunes in apricot sunsets.”
There are moments in which her rarified perspective may strike
many readers as unrelatable, as when she notes that “Daugh-
ters of admirals will recognize themselves in Nannie Davis
Lodge,” but the author is generally a capable and charming
guide throughout this work. The narrative drags in some sec-
tions, and certain episodes and letters could have easily been
omitted for the sake of concision. That said, there’s much here
to engage readers interested in the history of wealthy, well-
connected American families. As much as this book reveals
about the Cabots and Lodges, it’s also a portrait of the United
States in the late-19th and early-20th centuries—perhaps the
last time that the country was so embodied by a single family.
Also, Lodge’s biographies of these women here do much to fill
in the gaps of a history that’s too often fixated on the men in
their lives.

A wide-ranging, if occasionally uneven, biography of
the women in one of America’s great political families.

A revisionist history of the infamous
Canadian spy William Stephenson that focuses on the fascist
enemies that he encountered in Allied territories.

The historical legacy of spymaster Stephenson has long
been a confusing one. Some historians consider him a minor
player in the clandestine machinations of World War II; oth-
ers believe his contributions were inestimable in value; and
still others don’t comment on him at all. As former teacher and
journalist Macdonald (The True Intrepid, 2011) observes, it surely
didn’t help that Stephenson lied to authors and reporters about
the details of his own life. With astonishing meticulousness,
the author sets out to fill in these lacunae, starting with Step-
henson’s early years in Manitoba, Canada, where he became
a successful entrepreneur. He established his own industrial
espionage group in the mid-1930s for business purposes, and by
1939, he was in contact with Britain’s Secret Intelligence Service.
Stephenson was eventually sent to New York City as a so-called
passport control officer, where he ran his own organization,
the British Security Coordination, whose aims were to undermine
the Axis powers as well as homegrown fascist groups working
to undermine the Allies in the United States and England. Mac-
donald follows American historian Carroll Quigley’s research
closely as he shines a light on these groups, which included
such institutions as the Council on Foreign Relations, which
he contends was working against President Franklin D. Roos-
evelt. Macdonald’s study is not only rigorously researched, but
also conveyed in cinematic terms—and as a result, even uncon-
vinced readers will find themselves riveted. Over the course
of the book, the author draws on so much tangled evidence,
including hearsay and rumor, that the work has the air of a con-
spiracy theory at times. However, his argument is relentlessly
thorough, and his principal contentions seem plausible. Finally,
Macdonald makes a ringing case for exploring a nation’s past: “A
country with unexamined history is a country without a soul.”

A remarkably incisive account of an endlessly compel-
ling figure.
A bright, breezy middle-grade romp.

SIMONE LAFRAY AND THE CHOCOLATIERS’ BALL

A GEFILTE FISHY TALE
Marks, Allison & Marks, Wayne
Illus. by Andriani, Renée
MB Publishing (49 pp.)
$11.95 paper | $6.99 e-book
Aug. 28, 2016
978-0-9908430-0-9

In this picture book, no one can open a grandmother’s jar of gefilte fish until a boy finds a solution.

It’s Shabbos, and Jack’s grandmother Judy, called Bubbe, is making her grandson’s favorite gefilte fish—but first, she has to get the lid off the jar. And that proves just about impossible. Bubbe and Zayde, Jack’s grandfather, try the usual methods with no success, then get friends, relations, and locals to employ their special skills: a bodybuilding neighbor, a mechanic, a doctor (who diagnoses “a dreadful case of / Liddy-stuck-atosis!”), and more. Zayde proposes getting a new jar, but the store is closed. Luckily, Jack has an idea: use a magic word. He speaks politely to the jar, the lid opens, and Shabbos dinner is saved. The husband-and-wife team of Allison Marks and Wayne Marks (Og’s Ark, 2016) tells a humorous story with rhyming quatrains that scan well: “They lugged it to their auto shop / And smeared it well with sludge. / But even with a monkey wrench / That lid refused to budge.” A useful glossary, pronunciation guide, recipe for gefilte mini-muffins, and Shabbos song are included. Andriani’s (Rome Romp!, 2016, etc.) images are a delight, depicting the tale’s comic misadventures with attractive, mostly soft colors. The pictures have energy and a wealth of witty details, including a fisherman’s piscine-themed decorations and the actions of the family pets, who try to help.

Silly predicaments, strong rhyming verse, amusing illustrations, and a kid’s victory—a pleasing Shabbos tale.

ASTEROIDS
Bridge to Nowhere
McCoy, Mike
Blaster Tech (524 pp.)
$34.95 | $19.95 paper | $3.99 e-book
Apr. 10, 2019
978-1-73363-073-3
978-1-73363-072-6 paper

In McCoy’s debut novel, a physicist discovers a deadly coverup of potentially earth-shattering proportions.

Astrophysicist Rick Munday works as an assistant professor at the California Institute of Technology, but today he’s mostly been refreshing his email to see if he’s been approved for a grant to fund his research into “potential risks to Earth from asteroids.” With his meager salary, he can barely provide for his wife, Courtney, and their twins, Alyssa and Ethan. His grant proposal, however, has caught the eye of a much more important organization—and soon, he gets dragged into a secret plot that leads to the highest levels of government. It turns out that asteroids have, in fact, been hitting Earth at an alarmingly fast rate, and the government is having a hard time trying to clean up evidence of their existence to avoid a panic. They’ve even made deaths from meteorite debris look like murder-suicides and covered up massive impacts in other countries. Now Rick is in their grasp, and he has to find a way to escape, get back home to his family, and warn the world of impending disaster before it’s too late. McCoy offers a hefty, in-depth adventure novel with a compelling premise. The overabundance of characters, though, may keep the book from turning into a favorite of disaster-fiction fans, as it becomes difficult to keep all the players straight. Minor and even throwaway figures receive an undue amount of attention, and the nearly constant character introductions in the first part of the novel adversely affect the pacing, making it slow going initially. Readers who persevere, though, will be rewarded with a truly original and creative plot, which makes the effort worthwhile.

An unevenly executed but well-plotted disaster novel that may have readers looking to the skies in fear of what’s to come.

SIMONE LAFRAY AND THE CHOCOLATIERS’ BALL
O’Farrell, S.P
Brandylane Publishers (148 pp.)
$25.95 | $14.95 paper | $4.99 e-book
May 13, 2019
978-1-947860-34-6
978-1-947860-40-7 paper

In this debut novel, a young spy must thwart an international art theft while saving the family business.

Twelve-year-old Simone LaFray lives in Paris with her father, sister, and (often absent) mother. Simone’s mom is the top agent for France’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Simone is following in her footsteps, but she also helps her dad in the kitchen of LaFray’s Patisserie—the family business established by her great-great-grandfather. Simone is a quiet child; she reads a lot and dislikes attention. Even her best (and only) friend, “The V,” proves too much company for her except in small doses. Simone is obsessively punctual and compulsively observant. Mature for her age, she is at once a rather dour big sister, a dutiful and responsible daughter, and a preternaturally talented analyst. With her mom out of the country, Simone is tasked with her first field assignment: tracking down world-renowned thief la Volpe Rossa (the Red Fox) before he can steal a valuable painting from the Musée d’Orsay. The Fox is a master of concealment, identifiable only by his bright red hair. He should be as unknown to Simone as she is to him. Is it a coincidence, then, that she spies a red-haired stranger staking out the patisserie? When the precious family recipe books are stolen, Simone must use all of her intellect—and overcome some of her inhibitions—to put things right. O’Farrell has crafted a bright, breezy middle-grade romp, light on the mystery element but uplifted by its Paris setting and a splendid cast of characters. Some of these are larger than life—The V and Simone’s sister, for instance—but not too much
so. Simone’s dad is an authentic parental figure (while still every bit the hapless but brilliant chocolatier), and she is a protagonist whom young readers will take to heart. Her everyday positive qualities are manifest, as are her differences, and the author has her succeed because of who she is, not in spite of it. Narrated in the first person, the story bubbles along with Simone’s inner thoughts, juxtaposing her true self with what she shows to the outside world. Though more down-to-earth, this novel exhibits shades of Eoin Colfer’s Artemis Fowl books.

A fast, fun Paris adventure with a strong heroine and series potential.

**YOUR RAINFOREST MIND**

* A Guide to the Well-Being of Gifted Adults and Youth

* Prober, Paula

* GHF Press (393 pp.)

* $17.95 paper | $9.99 e-book

* Jun. 20, 2016

* 978-0-692-71310-5

Psychotherapist Prober describes her concept of a “rainforest mind” in this debut resource aimed at “excessively curious, idealistic, sensitive, [and] highly intelligent” people.

The author seeks to provide those who’ve been labeled “gifted” with the intellectual tools they need to thrive in the world. Prober transitioned to a career in mental health after a short stint as a middle school teacher, during which she was introduced to the concept of gifted children. She developed the idea of “rainforest minds” while seeking a less controversial term to describe such students. People with rainforest minds, she asserts, tend to be highly empathetic, often to the point of feeling overwhelmed by the state of the world and the suffering of others. The author presents case studies of rainforest-minded people who sought her help during her 30 years as a therapist. Many suffered abuse or neglect as children, struggled to excel in school, and found interpersonal relationships difficult to form and maintain. Prober also discusses the common occurrence of crippling anxiety, perfectionism, and the “impostor phenomenon” among those with rainforest minds. The author structures each chapter around a central theme and then provides a list of strategies, further readings, and other resources at the end. She says that not all of her potential solutions will work for everyone; she also suggests that some people consider being tested for ADHD and offers a study of a patient with both an attention deficit disorder and a rainforest mind. The obvious compassion that Prober feels for others—much like the empathy of those she counsels—prevents the text from feeling clinical, and her knowledge and experience provide a gravitas that many other self-help volumes lack. The author does show awareness of the limitations of her studies, which are mainly based on a largely homogeneous patient population, but her honesty throughout makes her text feel earnest and convincing.

An engagingly written work about people struggling with a “jungle of thoughts, emotions, sensitivities, questions, dreams, worries,” among other concerns.

**THE BOOKWORM CRUSH**

* Roberts, Lisa Brown

* Entangled: Teen (400 pp.)


* Oct. 29, 2019

* 978-1-64063-707-8

This YA spinoff of Roberts’ (*The Replacement Crush*, 2016, etc.) previous novel follows a timid bookworm and a hunky surfer.

Amy McIntyre is determined to win a social media contest that will garner her a personal interview with Lucinda Amorrato, a bestselling romance author who is beloved by many but hasn’t toured in years. Unfortunately, Amy’s first stunt, a public “yarn-bombing” replicating her favorite book cover, attracts the attention of the Shady Cove police, who bust the teenager for breaking curfew. Enter Toff Nichols—champion surfer, known player, and soon-to-be stepbrother of Amy’s best friend, Vivian Galdi (the heroine of *The Replacement Crush*). He happens to catch Amy in the act and pretends to be her boyfriend to get her out of trouble. Soon Toff offers to coach Amy, upping her self-confidence to gain more likes and shares and get the attention of Amorrato’s publisher, which is running the contest. When a photograph of Toff and Amy goes viral and romance fans start “shipping” them (a fandom term describing two characters who should get together), she begins to see real relationship potential in the boy she once thought was out of her league. Meanwhile, Toff starts to appreciate Amy’s penchant for sparkly hair ornaments, enthusiasm for reading, and fiery spirit that matches her wild red hair. But after the two engage in more than one make-out session, they have to face reality: Can a surfer who doesn’t read and a romance-novel fanatic really make it work? Roberts has the teen voice down pat. Both of the appealing protagonists are devoted to their respective passions but also deal with deeper issues (Amy’s pastry chef father is now unemployed, and Toff’s surfer dad is about to marry Vivian’s mother). Amy’s knowledge of romance novels and her excitement for the contest are both contagious, and her friends Vivian and Dallas are close by and ready to help her achieve her goal. This engaging love story with a strong cast will make even the most jaded reader hope for a happily-ever-after.

A sweet summer romance with two funny, compelling protagonists.
Rose’s text and Bye’s cartoon-style color images accurately and vividly depict the era in detail.

A RACE AROUND THE WORLD
The True Story of Nellie Bly & Elizabeth Bisland
Rose, Caroline Starr
Illus. by Bye, Alexandra
Albert Whitman & Company (32 pp.)
978-0-8075-0010-1

Rose (Ride On, Will Cody!, 2017, etc.) explores the true story of a race between two accomplished 19th-century women in this children’s book featuring illustrations by Bye (Leading the Way, 2019).

In 1889, famed reporter Nellie Bly believed that she could circle the globe faster than anyone had before—in less than the 80 days of Jules Verne’s fictional hero. She pitched the story to her boss at the New York World, who, after initial protests, approved her journey. As Bly left New York City, heading east, Cosmopolitan writer Elizabeth Bisland was sent off to the west, with little notice, to race Bly back to the city. In this entry in the She Makes History series, Rose reports the travels of both women in tandem, showing the eastward movement of Bly and the westward travel of Bisland as the reporters encountered successes and setbacks. Rose’s text and Bye’s cartoon-style color images, which accurately and vividly depict the era in detail, allow young readers to get a deeper sense of what living in the late 1800s was like and how travel, by various methods, was very different than it is in the modern day. The extensive text never overwhelms the illustrations, though, and Bye depicts the players in action-oriented poses that propel the story forward. One particularly elegant two-page spread shows the two travelers’ ships literally passing in the night. Rose captures both the wonder of the world as the women experience it as well as the dangers and miseries of their journeys. Her straightforward vocabulary and accessible narration will let young readers immerse themselves in the history. Endnotes offer greater context for the role of women reporters of the era, highlighting the main characters’ tremendous achievements.

An absorbing account of a real-life adventure in a series that showcases historical accomplishments of women.

ROMANCING THE SPIRIT
Novella Collection Books 1-6
Samet, CB
Self (522 pp.)
$14.95 e-book | Jan. 1, 2020

Samet (Maltiis File, 2019, etc.) brings together six tales of love between the living and the dead in this collection of supernatural romance novellas.

In the opening tale, Sadie’s Spirit, physician Sadie Crawford was once a skeptic who didn’t believe in ghosts—until she became one. Now, she’s trying to find her own killer, and ironically, she needs help from a psychic ex-boyfriend whom she dumped because she didn’t believe in his abilities. In Cassie’s Chase, Cassie Chase is a doctor who does believe in ghosts—after all, she’s known one all her life. Now she needs her ghost friend’s help in order to save her newfound love from a potential murderer. Museum curator Phoebe Montgomery, in Phoebe’s Pharaoh, is shocked when the spirit from one of her exhibitions—an Egyptian mummy—appears and asks her to help him reunite with the spirit of his wife. Phoebe agrees but not before hiring an attractive ex-Marine to keep her safe during her mission to Egypt. In Autumn’s Angel, FBI agent Autumn is on the trail of stolen art. After an obvious suspect is killed, she turns to a handsome psychic to help her solve the crime. In these and two more novellas, women engagingly contend with otherworldly entities and real-world danger while also grappling with that most mysterious of phenomena: the human heart. Samet’s prose vacillates skillfully among various registers, expressing sensuality, suspense, and humor as needed: “Phoebe screamed. She stumbled backward, bumping into the stanchion and the red rope surrounding the sarcophagus, and tumbling to the floor.…’My apologies,’ the ghost spoke with a deep, male voice. ’I didn’t mean to startle you. Can you please stop scaring me?’” The premises may sometimes sound a bit silly in the abstract, but they’re all believable and compelling as the reader turns the pages. Samet manages to sell her notions with a mix of capable writing and imaginative twists on the romance format. Certain tropes reappear—doctor
protagonists, unsolved crimes, buried treasure—but if readers enjoy one of these tales, they'll likely appreciate them all.

A collection of well-executed, if slightly repetitive, tales of love and ghosts.

**OUR AMERICAN DREAM**  
*Cultivating a Life of Success, Joy, and Purpose*  
*Samuel Andrew*  
Lioncrest Publishing (114 pp.)  
Aug. 22, 2019  
978-1-5445-0218-2

A CEO who had an impoverished childhood shares his formula for success. Samuel, the chairman, chief executive, and director of banking company Linkbancorp, immediately escorts readers to a 14-by-14-foot shack in India in the early 1960s, where he lived as a young boy with more than a dozen relatives. There was no indoor plumbing or electricity, and the floor was covered with cow dung, he says. He goes on to explain how a “poor, skinny kid from India” grew up to ring an opening bell at the Nasdaq Stock Market. In a breezy read of just over 100 pages, Samuel blends a vibrant prose style with an accounting of his values. Throughout, he urges readers to individually strive for what he characterizes as “our” American dream, which can be different for each person, rather than chasing the myth of “the” American dream. Reflecting the simplicity of this message, each chapter has a one-word title that represents a pillar of his program for success. The first three (“Focus,” “Persistence,” and “Faith”) relate to his “American dream formula” while the rest of the book explores elements that he links to “enduring success”: authenticity, family, service, humility, purpose, boldness, and building a legacy. Over the course of this book, Samuel is never preachy or Pollyannaish; instead, he presents a clear, engaging self-help book that suggests ways to tackle common obstacles—such as procrastination and the distractions of the internet and cellphones. And although he lived a rags-to-riches story, the author doesn’t present himself as a Horatio Alger-style protagonist. He doesn’t see financial success as the ultimate goal, although it is part of his equation for overall achievement. Unusually for the genre, he relates how a focus on joy—a concept that isn’t normally bandied about in the business world—can help one define and achieve one’s purpose in life.

Insights that will appeal to anyone seeking to bring personal success into the workplace.

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**THE BIG THAW**  
*Ancient Carbon, Modern Science, and a Race To Save the World*  
*Scigliano, Eric with Holmes, Robert Max & Natali, Susan & Schade, John*  
*Photos by Linder, Chris*  
Braided River (176 pp.)  
$35.00 | Oct. 1, 2019  
978-1-68051-247-2

An intrepid band of scientists chases after carbon lurking beneath Arctic permafrost that threatens to destroy the world.

Teaming up with experts from the Woods Hole Research Center, science writer Scigliano (*Seeing the Elephant*, 2006, etc.) and photographer Linder (*Science on Ice*, 2011, etc.) tell the bleak true story of Arctic regions whose permafrost has trapped deadly carbon. (“Permafrost soils are rich in carbon—the legacy of the grasslands, peatlands, and forests of past epochs, protected by freezing from microbial breakdown.”) Now, with Earth’s temperature rising, these greenhouse emissions threaten to unleash untold devastation on the planet: ‘As it thaws, the Arctic’s permafrost has the potential to upend the lives of people living in seaside condos in Miami, in exurban dream houses overlooking scenic wildlands in California... and in flimsy houses perched precariously on slippery hillsides in Haiti and on the floodplains of Bangladesh.” But far from being a despairing portrayal, this work celebrates some undergraduate researchers, directed by a group of experienced and knowledgeable scientists from Woods Hole, as they travel to Arctic regions to study this potential catastrophe with an enthusiasm and engagement that prove courageous and inspirational. Here, in the Arctic taiga (forests) and tundra, these researchers are depicted in their daily investigative pursuits—written with scientists/debut authors Holmes, Natali, and Schade—and Linder’s color photographs. The young team members display such a passion and joy in their love of science and the exacting and repetitive work of gathering important information that they will capture readers’ hearts and minds through the many beautifully shot images and lucid prose that support this illuminating venture. Enhanced by sidebars that skillfully detail the lives and backgrounds of the young band and their mentors from Woods Hole, this volume is a tribute to the years of amassing compelling research into this problem that threatens to release more greenhouse emissions than humans will know what to do with.

The book demonstrates the demanding activity of collecting data that is an antidote to the depression and helplessness many feel in the face of climate change. In its splendid design, well-written text, and revealing photos of the Arctic world and those who probe the impact of thawing permafrost on the climate, this book perfectly captures this critical issue and those who are meeting the challenge.

This wondrous and timely work—featuring stunning photos—explores a crucial environmental problem that endangers the planet.
By the mid-22nd century, Georgia “Geo” Spears’ AI named Fusion is safeguarding Earth and its ecology. Crime is nonexistent, and climate change is gradually waning. Fusion has achieved this with Temporals—humans outfitted with 3Ds, Deliberate Deceleration Devices. These intradermal chips keep people connected online but also dull their thoughts, such as suppressing consumerism and minimizing memories. The population also consists of Permanents: They forgo human experiences that Temporals have in favor of immortality and the capacity for knowledge. Consequently, Geo, a Permanent, doesn’t believe her doctor when he informs her she’s terminally ill. She’s likewise surprised when Fusion quickly begins discussing Geo’s replacement as regional director. Slabucho wisely simplifies her story to accommodate complex notions and tech. Exposition unfolds periodically with Geo’s dreams and memories of her sister, Bobbi, and their father, Montgomery. These not only reveal their thoughts, such as suppressing consumerism and minimizing memories. The permanent’s 3Ds. It’s a resistance of sorts, as Fusion isn’t offering Temporals the choice of applying for Permanence and is, instead, turning them into slaves by wiping out memories. But Diego has a plan: A team of ex-Temporals, including recently deceased Scott Ford, will somehow infiltrate The Atlas, a mysterious box only Fusion can access. Slabucho wisely simplifies her story to accommodate complex notions and tech. Exposition unfolds periodically with Geo’s dreams and memories of her sister, Bobbi, and their father, Montgomery. These not only reveal Fusion’s genesis, but also provide sympathy for Geo, whose Permanence has essentially stunted her emotions. Though there’s very little action, the story remains tense throughout. For example, along with the possibility of Fusion’s discovering the team’s plan, Diego demands Geo and Scott prove their loyalty. Meanwhile, Geo fears Scott will learn she created the AI that’s subjugating Temporals. Connecting all of these episodes is the author’s illustrative prose: “Geo’s eyes were filled with tears, but she still stared blindly into the wind, its icy currents licking at her watering irises.” Slabucho is definitely a writer whom readers will want to watch.

A proficient and appealing AI tale from a promising new author.
A remarkable study that’s intellectually stimulating, historically edifying, and spiritually instructive.

EXPLORING CHÁN

The ache radiating from her body was reminiscent of a bad sunburn. She was both hot and cold. Sensitive to the slightest touch. A tiny shift of her own body felt excruciating.” Regardless, the author has produced a fast and enjoyable read. The resolution is satisfying but leaves room for future stories. Fans will be eager to revisit the Fox and Laudon households for a sequel.

An engaging and lifelike representation of two families at a turning point.

THE PSYCHIATRIST WHO BELIEVED HE WAS A WOLF AND OTHER CLINICAL EPISODES

Zak
Self (651 pp.)
May 22, 2019
978-1-72178-266-8

In Zak’s novel, a psychotherapist vividly chronicles his patients’ sessions.

At the outset of author Zak’s unconventional, oddly entertaining novel, his namesake lead has grown weary of the “frailty of the existence of the body and soul, rushing and whining in the materiality of the twenty-first century,” and wishes for some interesting therapy patients to enter his psychiatric hospital. What ensues is a barrage of surreal stories from the minds of his psychotic therapy clients. The first few patients share fantastical visions of themselves born into wondrous worlds. Initially, Dr. Zak’s concern for his patients remains detached yet collected. Thankfully, in the midst of these bizarre, frenetic delusions, Dr. Zak is the narrative’s grounding character, a reliable, if frequently distracted, protagonist. Most of the hallucinatory stories Dr. Zak hears are rooted in psychosis. Guy, one depressed patient, believes “some force is trying to drag me to the center of the Earth, and I resist,” while another imagines Death looking down at him in bed while lamenting how “customers are always unhappy with my sudden appearance.” Incrementally emerging as a radically unconventional clinician, Dr. Zak believes himself to be empathic and psychologically experiences the maladies of those in his practice—a condition that becomes increasingly harrowing. As the patient stories intensify, the author moves deeper inside the doctor’s mind to discover unmet spiritual needs. Fantasy begins to commingle with reality, and Dr. Zak becomes obsessed with discovering the “woman of his dreams.” He envisions anthropomorphic creatures, including biting polar bears and talking flies and mice. As the stories and Zak’s involvement in them become more convoluted, the book loses momentum due to its sheer length. Ultimately, the patient-story formula becomes somewhat stale, leaving Dr. Zak to discern whether patients are in the slow processes of recovery or moving deeper into psychosis. Still, this is a frequently fascinating chronicle of fever-dream proportions.

Overstuffed and sometimes bewildering but always dizzyingly creative and adventurous.

EXPLORING CHÁN
An Introduction to the Religious and Mystical Tradition of Chinese Buddhism
Zhi, Chuan
Songlark Publishing (439 pp.)
$38.99 | $26.99 paper | Nov 26, 2019
978-1-73331-431-2
978-1-73331-430-5 paper

A sweeping history of Chinese Buddhism that includes personal reflections on meditation and practical instruction for beginners.

The historical development of the Buddhist faith is obscure, partly because the intensely personal experience of meditative practice itself resists scholarly documentation. Nevertheless, with extraordinary rigor and erudition, debut author Zhi reconstructs both the emergence of Buddhism in general and of Chinese (or Chan) Buddhism in particular. By the time Buddhism arrived in China, it had already evolved in India from Vedism, Brahmanism, Jainism, and Hinduism. Then, as early as the second century B.C.E., it was again refashioned by the political, sociological, and religious influences of its time—in this case, Confucianism and Taoism. The author discusses the original forms of Buddhism practiced in India and its metamorphosis when it traveled all over Asia. The author specifically focuses on the ways in which, in China as elsewhere, Chan Buddhism split into strains that were either more meditatively spiritual or institutional. After he impressively concludes this “broad picture of Chan Buddhism,” he turns his attention to its practice and furnishes a thorough introduction for the novice, including an accessible discussion of the benefits of maintaining a meditative practice and “Hindrances” that could undermine it. Zhi is a fully ordained Buddhist monk, and his knowledge of the subject matter is astonishing; he not only demonstrates an academic mastery of Buddhism as a historical phenomenon, but also a philosophically profound understanding of its spiritual core—which, contrary to many Western misconceptions, is not enlightenment: “Enlightenment is best viewed as a consequence rather than an objective of spiritual labor,” Zhi notes. “The purpose of spiritual life is to unravel mysteries and transcend suffering. It’s a fluid, evolving process.” The author permits himself some gratuitous digression—there’s an entire chapter devoted to explaining Carl Jung’s theory of psychological archetypes, for instance. Still, this is a remarkable study that’s intellectually stimulating, historically edifying, and spiritually instructive.

A lucid and insightful introduction to Buddhism.
WHITE HOUSE DISH

CNN reporter Kate Bennett’s *Free, Melania*, an unauthorized biography of the first lady, has journalists sharing some of the juicier revelations from the book.

Bennett speculates that one of Melania Trump’s most controversial moments—the decision to wear a jacket emblazoned with the phrase “I REALLY DON’T CARE, DO U?” while visiting child migrants detained at the U.S.–Mexico border—was directed at the president’s daughter, the *New York Times* reports.

“I believed, and still do, that the jacket was a facetious jab at Ivanka and her near-constant attempts to attach herself for positive administration talking points,” Bennett explains. The *Times* notes that Bennett doesn’t believe Melania and Ivanka Trump are close.

Nor is Melania very close to her husband, according to Bennett. She writes that the married couple don’t sleep in the same room or even on the same floor—Trump sleeps on the second story, with Melania one level above.

“OK, BOOMER” MEME INSPIRES A BOOK

Are you older than 54 and sick of the latest generation-related meme that’s been sweeping the internet? Too bad, boomer. A book scheduled for next year seems likely to ensure that you’ll be hearing “OK, boomer” for a while.

Simon & Schuster imprint One Signal Books plans to publish Jill Filipovic’s *OK Boomer: Let’s Talk: Dispatches From a Generational Divide* in late 2020, the Associated Press reports.

Filipovic, a journalist, lawyer and millennial, said the book would discuss, in part, issues faced by young people “because of choices our parents’ generation made.” She also teased the book on Twitter, describing it as “a book about the generation divide between Boomers and Millennials/younger folks.”

The attention-grabbing title of Filipovic’s book is a reference to the “OK, boomer” meme that has won over the hearts of millennials and members of Generation Z. The phrase is intended to be a dismissive response to lecturing by older authority figures. (Where does Generation X fit into this? Nobody seems to know.)

SCREENWRITER’S WEIRD DEBUT


*Antkind* will follow B. Rosenberger Rosenberg, a film critic and “failed academic, filmmaker, paramour, [and] shoe salesman who sleeps in a sock drawer.” Rosenberg sees a 3-month-long stop-motion movie that he’s convinced is the best film ever made. Unfortunately, the film is destroyed, leading Rosenberg to attempt to re-create it from memory.

“Thus begins a mind-boggling journey through the hilarious nightmarescape of a psyche as lushly Kafkaesque as it is atrophied by the relentless spew of Twitter,” Random House says.

Fittingly for a book about a 90-day-long movie, the novel is 720 pages.

Michael Schaub is an Austin, Texas–based journalist and regular contributor to NPR.
Strange things are afoot in the year 1327. A Bavarian has assumed kingship over an aggregation of city-states scattered across northern Italy, earning the ire of the pope, who excommunicates him. The pope also condemns the foundational tenets of the poor and peaceful Franciscan order, leading the Bavarian king to think that he might do worse than ally himself with the guys in the rough cloth robes. There’s nothing like a little political intrigue to set a schism rolling.

Stranger things still are afoot in a well-built if gloomy monastery in the mountains of northern Italy. Some of the brethren are going missing, then turning up dead, one sopping in a cask of pig’s blood, another crushed beneath a rockfall, a third drowned in his bath. Suicide, poison, homicide: There are dark mutterings that the devil stalks the land, and maybe even a witch or two.

Into this blood-soaked scene comes William of Baskerville, a Franciscan brother, and a Benedictine novice named Adso of Melk, the narrator of a tale of scholarly investigation that in time links the murders to—well, to books, for the abbey, says William, “has more books than any other Christian library.” That’s not necessarily a good thing, William tells Adso, for too much reading can lead a person to think strange thoughts.

Umberto Eco, the bibliophile’s bibliophile, takes the occasion of his novel *The Name of the Rose* to imagine a place of his fondest dreams, a library hidden away in secret passages, full of odd and occult knowledge. The foundational conceit of the narrative is that Adso is telling the tale of William’s diligent sleuthing, a tale that we have today because the manuscript was handed off centuries later to that quiet, bespectacled Italian professor to edit and publish.

It makes for an epic private joke, for Eco was known in 1980 mostly to students of semiotics, the formal study of signs and symbols. Eco, with a long interest in all things medieval, had been toying for some years with the thought of introducing a Sherlock Holmes–like character into the world of theological disputations and autos-da-fé, and he found a perfect fit in William, an imaginary character who shares some points in common not only with Holmes, but also with William of Ockham, William of Baskerville’s supposed teacher and the inventor of the logical “razor” test that bears his name. Yet William’s every success of inference is met by some awful happening—including the worst thing a bibliophile can imagine, the burning of a library full of rare books.

Published in 1980 in Italy as *Il nome della rosa*, Eco’s novel was a surprise bestseller there. It sold just as well in other languages, including the English of William Weaver, whose rendering, *The Name of the Rose*, was published in 1983. Indeed, the book is said to have sold more than 50 million copies worldwide, making Eco, who died in 2016, very wealthy indeed. And what did he do with the proceeds? Naturally, he bought more books.
Heavily autobiographical and infused with magical realism, *Black Girl Unlimited* fearlessly explores the intersections of poverty, sexual violence, depression, racism, and sexism—all through the arc of a transcendent coming-of-age story for fans of Renée Watson’s *Piecing Me Together* and Ibi Zoboi’s *American Street*. 