

Book Review

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Articles selected for

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THE BEST BOOKS OF 2025



MICHAEL J. FOX



'Much of my reading has become listening,' says the actor, who has two audiobooks regularly teed up. In 'Future Boy' he recalls juggling roles in 'Back to the Future' and 'Family Ties.'

What kind of reader were you as a child?

I was always an avid reader, though very rarely books on the class reading list. I had a hard-core Agatha Christie habit as a preteen. As a teenager, this grew into a passion for noir: Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, James M. Cain.

What's the last great book you read?

"A Gentleman in Moscow." Amor Towles's

prose, pacing and character development are unrivaled. His work evokes an unfa-
ingly beautiful sense of longing.

What book might people be surprised to find on your shelves?

The Torah.

Describe your ideal reading experience.

I always prefer to hold a book in my

hands, but unfortunately Parkinson's makes it difficult, and sometimes downright impossible. So, much of my reading has become listening. Other than that, my habits are pretty much the same: I always have two books cued up on Audible at once — one nonfiction (anything from political commentary to history to natural history); the other fiction (historical, classic literature, crime fiction, mysteries and satire). I tend to "read" nonfiction at night, if only because it's easier to find my place. When I think of fiction I think of beach, days off, travel and found time during any point of the day.

Your earlier memoirs have followed the course of your life to the point they were written, but this one goes back in time. Why revisit this period?

"Future Boy" sprang from one specific moment in my life, when I tackled two acting roles simultaneously. Often people asked me how I managed to pull that off, and I began to wonder myself. So on the heels of Davis Guggenheim's documentary "Still," it occurred to me that this period might make for an interesting book. I suppose it is a memoir, but it's much more ad hoc than my other books.

Do you have any favorite time-travel books?

I have to point to Jack Finney's books, especially "Time and Again," in which the low-tech Dakota-building-as-time-machine device is particularly genius.

Do you prefer books that reach you emotionally, or intellectually?

I can always tell if an author is reaching for my mind or my heart. If he or she is reaching for my mind, I confess they can overshoot and leave me frustrated for lack of comprehension. An author that reaches for my heart can often end up somewhere in the ballpark. Emotional work sneaks up on you.

Which genres do you avoid?

Self-help books. They don't. Maybe I'm just not trying.

You've described yourself as an incurable optimist, but who are your favorite literary pessimists?

Edgar Allan Poe. With so grim a body of work, it's amazing that I still find his masterpieces involving and difficult to put down. As to pessimism, all I can say is no matter what mood I'm in when I launch into one of Poe's stories, it's guaranteed to wipe the smile off my face.

What are your favorite memoirs by entertainers?

This can also be the answer to what are the last books that made me cry: two memoirs especially compelling for me, because they were authored by contemporaries of mine in film and television.

The first, Matthew Perry's "Friends, Lovers, and the Big Terrible Thing," was heartbreaking and terrifying. I can't recall whether I read it before or after his tragic passing. Neither would've been any less tear-producing. Charlie Sheen's story, as told in "The Book of Sheen," was an equally gripping cautionary tale, and surprisingly one of the funniest memoirs I've ever read. Charlie's just that deliciously twisted. Charlie survived what he details in this book. Thank God.

You're organizing a literary dinner party. Which three writers, dead or alive, do you invite?

Mark Twain, for his eloquence and humor. To add a little sublimity to the ridiculous, I'd have Patti Smith over. In "Just Kids," a document of her friendship with Robert Mapplethorpe, she proved that she's a writer of towering talent. And I'd save a plate for Shakespeare — because he's Shakespeare — though I'd have to invite a fourth party to translate. □

Email interview conducted and edited by Scott Heller. An expanded version is available at nytimes.com/books.

CRIME & MYSTERY



BY SARAH WEINMAN

Sometimes I want to spend time with characters I can root for, ordinary people vaulted into extraordinary situations. Other times I want to savor every sentence and have all of my senses challenged. Or

maybe I just want to be swept away by a breakneck plot. For me, these 10 crime novels were the pinnacle of pleasure reading this year.

DEAD IN THE FRAME

By **Stephen Spotswood**

AT MIDNIGHT COMES THE CRY

By **Julia Spencer-Fleming**

Let's start with the series sleuths. It's always a treat to revisit the 1940s-era exploits of Lillian Pentecost, detective par excellence, and her right-hand woman, Will Parker. "Dead in the Frame," the fifth and most sharply plotted in Spotswood's beloved-to-me series, tests both as never before when Lillian is arrested for the murder of an odious antagonist. "At Midnight Comes the Cry" brings back the longtime Millers Kill police chief Russ Van Alstyne and his wife, the Rev. Clare Fergusson, for their most fraught adventure yet. Spencer-Fleming explores everything from new parenthood to a white supremacist militia, always stressing the ways in which everyone, no matter how loathsome, deserves our empathy.

VERA WONG'S GUIDE TO SNOOPING (ON A DEAD MAN)

By **Jesse Q. Sutanto**

GLORY DAZE

By **Danielle Arceneaux**

Two newer amateur detectives of a certain age are already reaching iconic status. "Vera Wong's Guide to Snooping (on a Dead Man)," just the second series outing by Sutanto, further establishes the prickly, opinionated and utterly delightful Vera as a woman who cannot be messed with, but whose emotional tent is large enough to hold anyone she designates as "family." Glory Broussard is equally astringent, her talents and foibles as a human and a crimesolver on full display in Arceneaux's sublime "Glory Daze" as she investigates the death of her former husband, and gets far more than she bargained for.

NOTES ON SURVIVING THE FIRE

By **Christine Murphy**

HISTORY LESSONS

By **Zoe B. Wallbrook**

The category of dark academia is more about aesthetics than actual scholarship, but two standout debuts reveal deeper truths about higher education. Murphy's "Notes on Surviving the Fire" approaches the aftermath of campus sexual assault, and the desire for vengeance, in a wonderfully mordant, nonlinear manner. It's one of the best depictions of how trauma cracks the psyche that I've read recently. "History

Lessons" takes a more orderly approach to murder in academia, but Wallbrook's seemingly gentle mystery has real satirical bite.

HER ONE REGRET

By **Donna Freitas**

DEATH TAKES ME

By **Cristina Rivera Garza**

Two books — one published last month, the other published in Spanish two decades ago and just translated into English this year — delve deeply into the ways in which women's thoughts and actions can be brutally suppressed. In "Her One Regret," Freitas addresses a topic little discussed in fiction — that of regretting motherhood — with compassion, demonstrating the consequences of her characters' choices while also delivering a fingernails-bittento-the-quick mystery. And Rivera Garza's "Death Takes Me," ably translated by Sarah Booker and Robin Myers, examines the scourge of femicide in boldly metafictional terms, showing how the transformation of visceral violence into a tidy narrative can minimize the actual harm at great peril.

HEARTWOOD

By **Amity Gaige**

Urgency thrums through every page of "Heartwood," and not only because it centers a solo

female hiker who goes missing on the Appalachian Trail. Gaige probes questions about survival and agency through three unforgettable characters: Valerie, the hiker; Bev, the game warden searching for her; and Lena, the retired scientist who becomes ensnared in the case. Our reviewer, Michelle Ruiz, said it best: "The real suspense of 'Heartwood' is whether all three women will make it out of their metaphorical woods."

HOLLOW SPACES

By **Victor Suthammanont**

If Suthammanont's debut is anything to go by, he is destined for a major career as a novelist. "Hollow Spaces" begins where most legal thrillers end: at the conclusion of a trial, with the acquittal of alawyer in the murder of his colleague (and lover). By flipping the conventional narrative, Suthammanont shows how the acquittal ripples across the lives of the murdered woman's family, the accused man and especially his own children, who decades later decide to solve the crime once and for all. It turns out they are ill prepared for the revelations they uncover about their father — and themselves. □

THRILLERS



BY SARAH LYALL

Though the books on this year's list are a varied group, with wildly different approaches to plot, tone and style, they're all surprising in the best possible way: They keep the reader off-balance and guessing until the end.

begins with an ominous foreshadowing of the death of a character and gathers force like a storm. Racial tensions, political hatred, the corrosive power of money — Pavone is an excellent anatomizer of present-day New York even as his muscular prose pulls us toward the book's stunning, and murderous, climax.

THE DOORMAN
By Chris Pavone

This hyperkinetic state-of-the-city mystery unfolds over a single tumultuous day that

YOUR STEPS ON
THE STAIRS
By Antonio Muñoz
Molina

This thriller by one of Spain's literary superstars, beautifully translated by Curtis Bauer, burns slowly and uneasily. Suffused with anxiety about the state of the world, a man who has relocated from New York to Lisbon is waiting for his beloved wife to join him. But he seems to have a slippery grasp on the details and maybe on reality itself. Reading this book is like hearing an alarm go off in a neighbor's house and wondering whether it's actually ringing for you.

VENETIAN VESPERS
By John Banville

Venice in 1900 makes a deliciously dark backdrop to Banville's expertly plotted tale of Evelyn Dolman, a puffed-up English writer whose American wife — an heiress who seems unfortunately to have been disinherited — goes missing from their rented palazzo. Self-regarding without being self-aware, Dolman soon finds himself in the center of a diabolical web of intrigue, "the main suspect in a crime that as far as anyone knew had not been committed."

THE IMPOSSIBLE
FORTUNE
By Richard Osman

Osman became an instant literary star with the publication of his best-selling

debut novel, "The Thursday Murder Club," in 2020. This is the fifth book in the series, which features a quartet of sharpwitted retirees who use their free time to solve the crimes that somehow keep popping up in their vicinity. In this installment, the gang delves into the mystery of a missing wedding guest, whose disappearance may have something to do with a car bomb and a large sum of Bitcoin..

DISSOLUTION
By Nicholas Binge

Binge continues his habit of unsettling readers with this chronology-bending work of speculative fiction about time, memory and the hubris of scientists seeking to subvert the laws of physics. It begins with the interrogation of an elderly woman by a shadowy figure trying to use her as a conduit to the memories of her husband, a scientist with Alzheimer's whose past might contain a crucial secret. No pressure, but the future of the world might be at stake.

THE VANISHING
PLACE
By Zoë Rankin

After a starving, blood-covered girl turns up in a remote New Zealand village, a young woman named Effie — who fled the same place nearly a quarter-century earlier—returns home to face

up to the murky details of her past. Rankin's beautifully written book takes the reader deep into the landscape and toggles between two timelines, past and present, as Effie struggles to reconcile the fragments of her life. Can she prevent history from repeating itself?

THE GOOD LIAR
By Denise Mina

This cracker of a story by one of Scotland's most acclaimed mystery writers begins as Claudia O'Sheil, a forensic scientist, is poised to give a talk about a notorious double murder she helped solve. But she's considering ripping up the speech and revealing what really happened — a revelation that would surely ruin her career. Mina expertly threads questions of class, privilege and establishment conspiracy into a riveting tale of a woman weighing whether to give up everything for the sake of the truth.

THE PREDICAMENT
By William Boyd

This is the second book in Boyd's delicious historical espionage series starring Gabriel Dax, an English travel writer pulled into reluctant spydom in the early 1960s. This time, he's sent to Berlin in 1962, where President John F. Kennedy is preparing to give his famous "Ich bin ein Berliner" speech. More "useful idiot," as he puts it,

than James Bond, Dax makes for an affable, Everyman operative. "All this pretense, all this duplicity — it was exhausting," he thinks. We can relate.

THE IMPOSSIBLE
THING
By Belinda Bauer

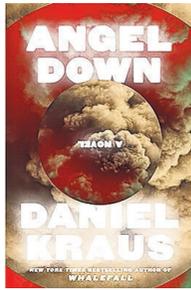
The cutthroat trade in rare birds' eggs in Britain is the unlikely subject of this ingenious and charming mystery. In 1926, a young girl plucks a bright red egg from a guillemot's nest; decades later, it's an object of obsession, with criminals, collectors and bird enthusiasts all eager to get their grubby hands on it. Bauer brings everyone to vivid life, including the determined guillemot who laid the egg. She gets the final word.

A BEAUTIFUL FAMILY
By Jennifer
Trevelyan

It's 1985 in New Zealand, and the family at the center of Trevelyan's deceptively languid tale of murder and miscommunication is having a not-sobeautiful seaside vacation: The parents are grumpy, the two daughters are mostly unsupervised, and a sketchy man lives next door. Menace hums beneath the surface, and it's clear that the narrator, 10-year-old Alix, has only a partial understanding of the events swirling around her. Then someone goes missing. □

THE 10 BEST BOOKS OF 2025





ANGEL DOWN
By Daniel Kraus

On paper, “Angel Down” sounds like a book that shouldn’t work: It’s a stream-of-consciousness World War I novel, told in one sprawling, 285 page-long sentence, about a failed draft dodger who finds, of all things, an angel on the battlefield. And yet, Kraus brings all of these elements together to craft a triumphant, unforgettable book filled with bravura writing, indelible set pieces and an urgent message.

THE DIRECTOR
By Daniel Kehlmann

How nerve-racking to be G.W. Pabst, the 20th-century Austrian filmmaker at the center of Kehlmann’s wondrous new novel. He’s an auteur stuck in Europe under Nazi rule, forced to make propaganda and benign duds for the Reich while compromising every creative principle he once stood for. “The important thing is to make art under the circumstances one finds oneself in,” Pabst murmurs at one point, winning over exactly no one. Still, Kehlmann’s complex portrait, brightened by caustic humor and memorable historical cameos (and fluidly translated from the German by Ross Benjamin), presents an intriguing test of integrity in a fracturing world. The timing couldn’t have been better.

EXCERPT

“... and Cyril Bagger considers himself lucky, he ought to be topped off, gone west, bumped, clicked it, pushing daisies, a new landowner, napooed, just plain dead, not only dead but scattered around in globs, for the last thing he saw was a shell dropping on top of him with the noise of colliding freight trains, a jim-dandy of a shot from Fritz the Hun, and kind of ironic, seeing how the whole reason Bagger prefers burial duty is artillery shells can’t reach this far behind the frontline trench, but this shell sure did, the way he always pictures it in dreams, a red skull of fire screaming down ...”

EXCERPT

“Not a breath of wind, the palms unstirred around the swimming pool. Pabst felt as if he had stepped into a colorized photo. A bird hovered motionless above them. The sun was reflected in the water as glaring and round as children draw it. The cigarette tasted of cold ash. He sucked; no smoke rose. The man on the deck chair whose name he hadn’t caught earlier, and whom now it was too late to ask, looked at him without taking off his orange-tinted glasses.”

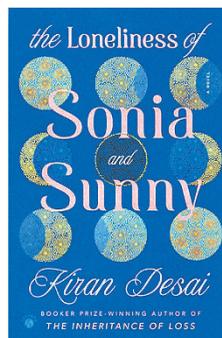
THE LONELINESS OF SONIA AND SUNNY

By Kiran Desai

Like the richest 19th-century fiction, this nearly 700-page family saga had our critic Alexandra Jacobs swooning: “Crowded but never claustrophobic,” she wrote, and “better company than real-life people.” A tentative romance between the title characters, immigrants from India caught between obligation and self-expression, is the throughline. Skittering between nations and generations from the late 1990s to just after 9/11, Desai stirs in scheming heirs, coveted recipes, a missing amulet and the art monster from hell.

EXCERPT

“The sun was still submerged in the wintry murk of dawn when Ba, Dadaji, and their daughter, Mina Foi, wrapping shawls closely about themselves, emerged upon the veranda to sip their tea and decide, through vigorous process of elimination, their meals for the rest of the day. Orders must be given to the cook at breakfast so that he could go directly to market. It was Mina’s fifty-fifth birthday, the first of December in the year 1996, and the mutton for the dinner kebabs had been marinating overnight in the kitchen.”



THE SISTERS
By Jonas Hassen Khemiri

“There was something about the Mikkola sisters that made me feel less alone,” says Jonas, the narrator of this spry and sprawling novel, and a playfully neurotic stand-in for the author himself. Up close and from afar, at drunken parties and at pickup basketball games, he follows the fortunes of Ina (stolid), Evelyn (magnetic) and Anastasia (unfettered) for more than three decades. He, like them, is half Swedish and half Tunisian; he, like

STONE YARD DEVOTIONAL
By Charlotte Wood

In the remote plains of New South Wales, Australia, a woman arrives at a convent in desperate need of solitude and retreat. It’s a curious choice: She left behind a full life in Sydney, and is an atheist who abhors the “savagery” of the Catholic Church. Yet she is lulled into contentment, falling into a comforting rhythm of work and contemplation. Three arrivals upset this harmony: Amouse infestation of biblical proportions horrifies the nuns, who resolutely set about stamping out the vermin. The bones of a sister who died abroad are returned to the convent, and are accompanied by a woman from the narrator’s past. True to its title, this

them, hungers to break away and blossom. Though hardly a quick read, “The Sisters” zooms forward, powered by hurtling prose and a literary magic trick: Khemiri tells the story in increments of time that grow increasingly briefer, ending on one minute in the future that offers long-awaited grace.

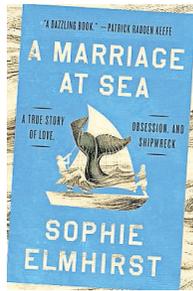
EXCERPT

“The first time I saw the Mikkola sisters was in May 1991. They came parading down to the park, three sisters looking like brothers, ready to start a fight if someone said something about their outgrown bowl cuts, dirty Lion sneakers or sweatpants with stretched-out pockets. I couldn’t take my eyes off them.

“‘Who are they?’ Nico said and nodded towards Ina, Anastasia and Evelyn, climbing towards the top of the jungle gym in the center of the park, a fifty-meter-long steel dragon with a waterspraying head and a slide as a tail.”

EXCERPT

“When you’re inside a church, I have come to realize, it’s impossible to see out. There are no clear windows. Light streams in through the stained glass, making colored lozenges on the floor. More light than you’d imagine is possible comes through those tall narrowed slits of criss-crossed glass — but everything outside is invisible, save a rippled blur seen through the watery colorless diamonds interspersed with red or yellow or indigo. The only way to see the world beyond the church is through the door: in or out.”

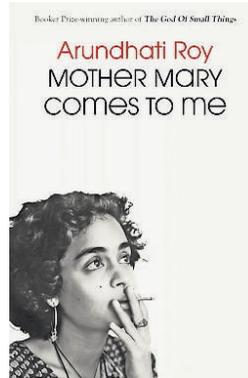


A MARRIAGE AT SEA
By Sophie Elmhirst

In 1972, a young married couple, Maurice and Maralyn Bailey, decided to give up their lives in England and sail to New Zealand on their boat, the Auralyn. But after nine months,

the Auralyn was destroyed by a breaching whale, leaving the Baileys stranded for 118 days in the Pacific aboard a makeshift raft.

The story of their survival is miraculous enough — Elmhirst masterfully recreates the daily fears, tediums and triumphs of a life in which every moment could be your last. But what really elevates this beautifully constructed narrative is the sensitive characterization of two very different people — a misanthrope and an optimist. It's a story that, while remarkable, will leave everyone asking essential questions about loneliness, about character and about partnership.



MOTHER MARY COMES TO ME
By Arundhati Roy

In this unsparing yet darkly funny memoir, the prizewinning novelist captures the fierce, asthmatic, impossible, inspirational woman who shaped her as a writer and an activist — and left her emotionally bruised for a lifetime. Roy doesn't let herself off too easily, however. Fleeing from an insular Indian community to the cosmopolitan Delhi and then the global stage, she — like her mother — is imperious, impatient and unforgettable.

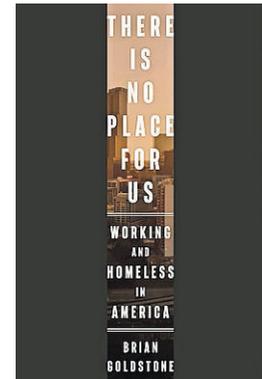
EXCERPT

"I left my mother not because I didn't love her, but to be able to continue to love her. Staying would have made that impossible. Once I left, I didn't see or speak to her for years. She never looked for me. She never asked me why I left. There was no need for that. We both knew. We settled on a lie. A good one. I crafted it — 'She loved me enough to let me go.' That's what I said at the front of my first novel, 'The God of Small Things,' which I dedicated to her. She quoted it often, as though it were God's truth. My brother jokes that it's the only piece of real fiction in the book."

THERE IS NO PLACE FOR US
By Brian Goldstone

With uncommon precision, tenacity and grace, Goldstone, an anthropologist turned journalist, casts a shocking spotlight on the "working homeless," a term that should be an oxymoron but which in America defines hundreds of thousands of people. Following five Atlanta families for whom home is a car, a relative's couch or a squalid room in an extended stay hotel — often some rotating combination of all three — his book gives intimate human shape to a population uncounted by the government and

largely invisible to the public, one that, owing to soaring rents, paltry wages and misguided urban policy, is barely surviving even with a paycheck.



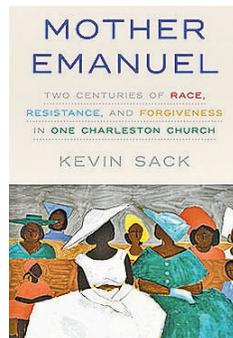
MOTHER EMANUEL
By Kevin Sack

When a white supremacist intent on fomenting a race war shot and killed nine members of a Bible study class at Charleston's Emanuel A.M.E. Church in 2015, he struck at the heart of the oldest African American Episcopal congregation in the South, in a city that had been the center of the country's slave trade and the place where the Civil War began.

Assigned to cover the aftermath of the massacre for The New York Times, Sack understood the story's far-reaching symbolic weight. His resulting book is a timely feat of research and reporting, a vivid chronicle of the Black church's essential role in America, and a surpassingly eloquent testament to resistance, resilience and faith.

EXCERPT

"What happened that night — the mass murder of nine innocent worshippers in one of the most horrific racist attacks in American history — catapulted 'Mother Emanuel' to global prominence, its



brilliant white façade and witch's-hat steeple recognizable around the world. What happened two days later, when victims' family members volunteered public expressions of forgiveness for the unrepentant killer, and two days after that, when ten thousand people of varied hues linked hands across the two-and-a-half-mile arc of the Ravenel Bridge, and five days after that, when the first Black president of the United States delivered a eulogy unlike any in the country's experience, made for defining markers in America's ongoing struggle with the psychosis of race. Once again, history had been made in Charleston."

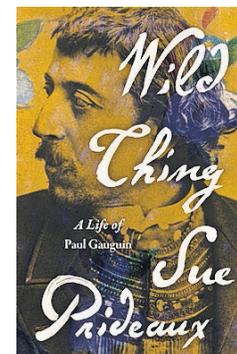
WILD THING
By Sue Prideaux

In the annals of art history, bad boy artists are legion, and the 19th-century French painter Gauguin often figures near the top of the list — denounced as a colonizer who seduced underage Tahitian girls and spread syphilis in the South Seas. Prideaux's enthralling biography, studded with keen close readings of her subject's innovative art, chips away at this caricature, fashioning in its stead a slyly witty portrait of an original and contradictory man

who experienced extreme wealth and abject poverty, who abandoned his wife, children and country in pursuit of his singular artistic vision, and who fought for the interests of his Polynesian neighbors against the colonial authorities even as he took in several of their daughters as child brides.

EXCERPT

"Gauguin came ashore dressed in a purple suit over his embroidered Breton waistcoat, with his Buffalo Bill cowboy hat on his head, and his cowboy boots. This made a strong, indeed unique, contrast to the French ruling class who wore either military uniform or, if they were traders and businessmen, black tail coats for work and white linen suits for recreation. Beneath Gauguin's wide-brimmed Buffalo Bill, his long salt-and-pepper hair waved freely in the coastal wind. As he stepped out of the canoe on to Tahiti's shore, Tahitian men and women on the quay pointed at him, raised their hands to their mouths, tittered behind their fingers, and rolled their eyes. They had never seen anything like this." □



HISTORICAL FICTION



BY ALIDA BECKER

Whether you're looking to escape our chaotic present or dive into its roots in the past, this year's historical novels will amply satisfy. Here are my choices for the 10 best, in alphabetical order.

THE ANTIDOTE
By Karen Russell

Merging impeccable period detail with lyrical flights of fantasy, Russell's novel is set in a fictional Nebraska town in the aftermath of the all-tooreal 1935 Black Sunday storm that devastated what came to be known as the Dust Bowl. Its central character is a "prairie

witch" who acts as a vault for the painful memories her customers would rather forget.

A CALAMITY
OF NOBLE HOUSES
By Amira Ghenim

This suspenseful multigenerational portrait of two Tunisian families, translated from the Arabic by Miled Faiza and Karen McNeil, illuminates the conflicts and contradictions in rapidly changing society. Multiple narrators add to its "Rashomon"-like quality as the events of one night in 1935 reverberate through the years.

FONSECA
By Jessica Francis Kane

In 1952, the yet-to-be novelist Penelope Fitzgerald visited a deeply eccentric expat household in rural Mexico with her 6-year-old son, drawn from their London home by the possibility that two elderly Irish ladies might make him their heir. Thirty years later, she touched on this journey in an essay but never wrote about it again. Thankfully, Kane was inspired to follow the trail, deploying an understated wit and bittersweet wisdom reminiscent of Fitzgerald's own work.

GABRIËLE
By Anne Berest
and Claire Berest

By reconstructing the life of their great-grandmother,

the Berest sisters restore Gabriële Buffet-Picabia to her rightful place in the history of early-20th-century avant-garde art. Translated from the French by Tina Kover, their narrative draws on a variety of sources — as well as some heartfelt personal speculation — to document one woman's influence as a muse, along with the personal and professional sacrifices she endured in the process.

ISOLA
By Allegra Goodman

Goodman's novel was inspired by the almost-impossible real-life tale of a 16th-century French aristocrat who was abandoned on an island in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. From the scanty historical sources, she has created an absorbing fictional first-person account of a young woman ensnared by her guardian's greed and ambition. Not content with stealing her fortune to finance his adventures in Canada, he insists that she accompany him to New France, with dire consequences when she dares to rebel.

THE REMEMBERED
SOLDIER
By Anjet Daanje

Translated from the Dutch by David McKay, Daanje's provocatively labyrinthine novel dissects the consciousness of an amnesiac veteran of World War I who has spent four years in a

Belgian asylum only to be retrieved by a woman who insists she is his wife. Trying to maneuver through a maze of strange new possibilities, he continues to harbor deep doubts and even deeper fears. The stories she tells him about their marriage aren't entirely convincing. Can he trust her? Can he trust himself?

SHADOW TICKET
By Thomas Pynchon

Deploying his signature free-form, wisecracking dialogue and his gift for bizarre high jinks, Pynchon introduces us to a strikebreaker turned private eye trying to eke out a living in early 1930s Milwaukee, just before the repeal of Prohibition. The action is nominally triggered by the search for a runaway cheese heiress that will plunge our hero into a welter of Nazis, spies and counterspies. But, as always with Pynchon, the appeal lies in his energetic wordplay.

SONS AND
DAUGHTERS
By Chaim Grade

Abustling panorama of the Eastern European Orthodox Jewish life that was soon to be destroyed by the Holocaust. First serialized in the 1960s and '70s in New York's Yiddish newspapers, it's only now available in a vibrant translation by Rose Waldman. The principal characters are a village rabbi, his wife and their wayward children, whose

tense but often humorously depicted relations are akin to those depicted by Isaac Bashevis Singer and Sholem Aleichem.

THIS HERE IS LOVE
By Princess
Joy L. Perry

Perry's searing first novel never flinches from the brutality of plantation life in the early years of the Virginia Colony. With steely empathy, she probes the complexities and contradictions of a society built on bondage. As she explores the lives of the enslaved and their overlords, her intertwined plots are gripping, but what's more impressive is the way she guides us through her characters' emotional depths.

THE WAYFINDER
By Adam Johnson

Ancient Polynesia is the source of this epic tale of dislocation, disruption and discovery. Based on intensive research and honoring the region's oral traditions, Johnson's ambitious storytelling also occasionally detours into magic realism. As it introduces us to two very different island societies, the novel contrasts their attitudes toward communal life and power. At its heart is a teenage girl who will take part in a desperate sea voyage led by the "wayfinder" of the title. □

POETRY



BY ELISA GABBERT

After binge-reading “Best American Poetry” volumes earlier this year, I vowed never again to wring my hands over the meaning of “best,” a word that troubled that series’ editors much more than either “American” or “poetry.” Louise Glück called it “the tyranny of taste making,” but I trust my readers know that all “best” really means in the world of the arts is what certain people like.

SALVAGE

By Hedgie Choi

Some of the poems that most struck me this year evince a certain cruelty. Take the first lines of Choi’s poem “Freaking Out”: “I know other people are real, don’t/remind me.” I myself have uttered the words “Other people are real,” so this felt like a direct confrontation. I laughed out loud many times reading “Salvage,” Choi’s delightfully spiteful debut — more like *savage!*

Choi’s voice has the defiant confidence of youth, which we all need exposure to. The

poems are a little insulting in the most appealing way, like an argument that actually changes your mind. “Is it important to know facts?” the poem “Phases” asks; “I am starting to think/maybe not.” Poems can hurt me only a little, and their cruelty can feel so true: “In the end,/I am/a wholly serious/person./But we are not in the end yet.”

I DO KNOW SOME THINGS

By Richard Siken

This was another book that gave me almost masochistic pleasure. In a formal departure from Siken’s “War of the Foxes” (2015) and his influential debut, “Crush” (2005), these poems are in prose. All 77 were written about Siken’s stroke, and constitute a brief autobiography: “It’s a small window, the span of time in which we get to say what we know.” This is brutal work, sometimes frightening in its handling of aging and death — life as damage — and the struggle to recover one’s body, mind and self after crisis. The book can be bleak, but also magical (“Below the bed the floor, the earth, then out the other side and stars. I fell in all directions”) and funny in a Glückian way — a one-syllable laugh in the devil’s face. “If it’s any consolation,” he writes, “I’ll never forgive you.”

BLOODMERCY

By I. S. Jones

Reinterpreting Cain and Abel as sisters, this impressive debut has the fearsome, musical force of myth. “Most

pain is useless,” the opening poem states, “but it’s the body’s oldest song.” Jones offers a sustained engagement with the idea of power—power we succumb to and power we claim — in a space both real and allegorical, and a time both present and eternalpast. “Once I was myth, now I am a girl,” she writes in “Cain.” An incredible coherence is achieved in part via motifs of blood, blades, sacrificial goats and the sun: “I am the axe dreaming my way through Adam’s throat.” And in the remarkable ending of “Noc-turne”: “Making real the dream of my suffering/the sun drags its headless body across the sky like a monument/of war.”

GAZA:
THE POEM SAID
ITS PIECE

By Nasser Rabah

The translators of “Gaza,” which contains selected poems by the Palestinian poet Rabah, comment in an afterword on the difficulties of bringing these poems into “the very language — American English — that plays a role in enabling so many of the distortions in how Palestine is depicted.” They sought not to “overtranslate,” to allow for some awkwardness, “ambiguity and even non-understanding.” This produces lines that are sometimes disorienting, but displacement and estrangement are at home in these dreamlike surreal zones where horror and destruction come up against beauty, music and sex, where quotidian routine and

boredom exist alongside the maddening and unthinkable.

While sound may not always translate, image does, and Rabah’s work is full of indelible images. In the long poem “What I Didn’t Say to Me,” Rabah writes: “Be boring/ ... /Be Tom Hanks and say: God! Everything is great, guys. Be/anything, just wave back to your beautiful death in the mirror.” (Tom Hanks!) “For once, just be orange, O sea, and you, heaven, rain just/ once in your own direction.”

THE MINOTAUR’S
DAUGHTER:
SELECTED POEMS

By Eva Luka

Sometimes after only one or two lines you know a poet speaks to you — as if the sensibility comes through in the smallest units. This was my experience with Luka and “The Minotaur’s Daughter,” translated from the Slovak by James Sutherland-Smith. I love these witchy poems about liminal spaces and hybrid creatures, man-beasts and fish-birds and dead-alive beings: “Dressed-undressed,/in her mouth crying and singing,/she returns down the slope/to home-not-home,” Luka writes in “Wildsister.” “Neither on foot nor in a wagon,/on her shoulder an owl, in her hand/ an apple, in her apple/love, in her love/poison.”

I’m especially drawn to the series of poems based on Leonora Carrington’s paintings, such as “Portrait of the Late Mrs. Partridge” (“This

woman looks like the embodiment of lightning”) and “My Step-Sister’s Hen”: “But now is a moment of defiance. The hen bares her teeth/ ... / Just wait, says the hen./One day you will be in a collar, as happens between owners/ and the owned. One day we will switch roles.” Here is a book alive with the darkness of Old World fairy tales.

TANTRUMS IN AIR

By Emily Skillings

On the basis of her second collection, “Tantrums in Air,” I’m pinning Skillings as a fellow hole girl — we who love to aestheticize the void. Of “the carrot flower, or Queen Anne’s lace,” Skillings writes: “I love it when they are as large/and white as a china saucer./The period in the middle./A little centering gesture./A sip of dark, a hole/into which slips all/the sky’s embroidery.”

Reminiscent of the school of “Gurlesque” (Arielle Greenberg’s term for the “feminist incorporating of the grotesque and cruel with the spangled and dreamy”), Skillings’s poems read a bit like absurdist theater set in a haunted dollhouse. She insists throughout on an outsider kind of intelligence, a *via negativa*: “half thinking, half nothing.” The final poem, with lines so long it’s printed sideways, is mesmerizing: “Oh, you’ve noticed the mice, don’t mind them/ ... /I’m starting to think they widen the holes between things: words, days./ ... / This is only one room in a vast conspiracy of space.” □

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COMBINED PRINT AND E-BOOK BEST SELLERS

SALES PERIOD OF NOVEMBER 23-29

THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	Fiction	WEEKS ON LIST
1	1	BRIMSTONE , by Callie Hart. (Forever) The second book in the Fae & Alchemy series. To save those close to them, Saeris and Fisher face a new set of dangers.	2
2	4	THE WIDOW , by John Grisham. (Doubleday) When Simon Latch, a lawyer in rural Virginia, is accused of murder, he goes in search of the real killer.	6
3	9	THE SECRET OF SECRETS , by Dan Brown. (Doubleday) As he searches for the missing noetic scientist he has been seeing, Robert Langdon discovers something regarding a secret project.	12
4	12	ALCHEMISED , by SenLinYu. (Del Rey) After the war, an imprisoned alchemist is sent to a necromancer to recover her lost memories.	10
5	5	QUICKSILVER , by Callie Hart. (Forever) Saeris is transported to a dangerous land of ice and snow, where she must contend with a Fae warrior who has suspect agendas.	14
6		GONE BEFORE GOODBYE , by Reese Witherspoon and Harlan Coben. (Grand Central) When a mysterious man disappears, the former combat surgeon giving him medical assistance goes on the lam.	6
7	10	THE CORRESPONDENT , by Virginia Evans. (Crown) Letters from someone she used to know push Sybil Van Antwerp toward revisiting her past and finding a way to forgive.	3
8	14	THE HOUSEMAID , by Freida McFadden. (Grand Central) Troubles surface when a woman looking to make a fresh start takes a job in the home of the Winchesters.	107
9		THE BOOK OF AZRAEL , by Amber V. Nicole. (Kensington) As dangers intensify, an alliance between enemies might be the only thing that can save a world and various realms.	1
10	3	RETURN OF THE SPIDER , by James Patterson. (Little, Brown) The 34th book in the Alex Cross series. An enemy's murder book suggests Cross may have made rookie mistakes years ago.	2
11	13	PROJECT HAIL MARY , by Andy Weir. (Ballantine) Ryland Grace awakes from a long sleep alone and far from home, and the fate of humanity rests on his shoulders.	25
12	8	EXIT STRATEGY , by Lee Child and Andrew Child. (Bantam) The 30th book in the Jack Reacher series. Reacher's interest is piqued when he finds a handwritten note in his pocket.	3
13		THE INTRUDER , by Freida McFadden. (Poisoned Pen) During a rough storm, Casey puts herself in danger when she lets a girl, who is covered in blood, into her cabin.	6
14	15	MURDER AT HOLLY HOUSE , by Denzil Meyrick. (Poisoned Pen) When a dead stranger is found in a Yorkshire chimney around the holidays in 1952, Inspector Frank Grasby gets assigned the case.	4
15	2	THE SEVEN RINGS , by Nora Roberts. (St. Martin's) The third book in the Lost Bride Trilogy. Sonya fights across two realms to take possession of a haunted manor.	2

THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	Nonfiction	WEEKS ON LIST
1	3	1929 , by Andrew Ross Sorkin. (Viking) The New York Times journalist and CNBC host looks at the fight between Washington and Wall Street that fueled a historic crash of the stock market.	7
2	2	HOW TO TEST NEGATIVE FOR STUPID , by John Kennedy. (Broadside) The Republican senator from Louisiana shares stories about politics in Washington, D.C., and in his home state.	8
3	1	NOBODY'S GIRL , by Virginia Roberts Giuffre. (Knopf) The late activist and advocate for sex-trafficking survivors describes her time with Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell.	6
4	5	THE LOOK , by Michelle Obama with Meredith Koop. (Crown) A celebration of the former first lady's evolution in style, featuring more than 200 photographs.	4
5	6	THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION , by Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns. (Knopf) A companion to the PBS series that delves into various facets of the war and the founding of a new form of government.	3
6		POEMS & PRAYERS , by Matthew McConaughey. (Crown) The actor and author of "Greenlights" explores elements of belief and reason that make up our lives.	9
7	13	107 DAYS , by Kamala Harris. (Simon & Schuster) The former vice president recounts her abbreviated campaign to become president in 2024.	10
8	12	THE BODY KEEPS THE SCORE , by Bessel van der Kolk. (Penguin) How trauma affects the body and mind, and innovative treatments for recovery.	271
9	4	THE GREATEST SENTENCE EVER WRITTEN , by Walter Isaacson. (Simon & Schuster) The historian and biographer examines the concepts of a statement found in the Declaration of Independence.	2
10	11	THE GALES OF NOVEMBER , by John U. Bacon. (Liveright) An account of the sinking of the Edmund Fitzgerald, an American Great Lakes freighter, 50 years ago.	5
11	14	HEART LIFE MUSIC , by Kenny Chesney with Holly Gleason. (Morrow) The country musician recounts events and encounters that shaped his life and career.	4
12	9	THE ANXIOUS GENERATION , by Jonathan Haidt. (Penguin Press) A co-author of "The Coddling of the American Mind" looks at the mental health impacts that a phone-based life has on children.	84
13	8	SIMPLY MORE , by Cynthia Erivo. (Flatiron) The multiple award-winning performer and producer shares insights into how she overcame obstacles to complete real and metaphorical marathons.	2
14	15	OUTLIVE , by Peter Attia with Bill Gifford. (Harmony) A look at recent scientific research on aging and longevity.	105
15		TO RESCUE THE AMERICAN SPIRIT , by Bret Baier with Catherine Whitney. (Mariner) The Fox News Channel's chief political anchor chronicles the life and times of Theodore Roosevelt.	5

A dagger (†) indicates that some bookstores report receiving bulk orders. **ONLINE: E-BOOKS AND EXPANDED RANKINGS:** For more lists, more titles, more rankings and a full explanation of our methodology, visit www.nytimes.com/best-sellers.