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Serious Noticing

A debut collection of darkly comic short works includes the stories of a man who is thrown out of his house when his wife discovers his infidelity in a bizarre way, teen cousins who share a woodland comeuppance, and a youth who flees to a carnival life after being bitten by his father.

The Heart of the Humanities

For fans of John Jeremiah Sullivan, Leslie Jamison, Geoff Dyer, and W. G. Sebald, the twenty-one essays in David Searcy's debut collection are captivating, daring—and completely unlike anything else you've read before. Forging connections between the sublime and the mundane, this is a work of true grace, wisdom, and joy. Expansive in scope but deeply personal in perspective, the pieces in *Shame and Wonder* are born of a vast, abiding curiosity, one that has led David Searcy into some strange and beautiful territory, where old Uncle Scrooge comic books reveal profound truths, and the vastness of space becomes an expression of pure love. Whether ruminating on an old El Camino pickup truck, those magical prizes lurking in the cereal boxes of our youth, or a lurid online ad for "Sexy Girls Near Dallas," Searcy brings his unique blend of affection and suspicion to the everyday wonders that surround and seduce us. In "Nameless," he ruminates on spirituality and the fate of an unknown tightrope walker who falls to his death in Texas in the 1880s, buried as a local legend but without a given name. "The Hudson River School" weaves together Google Maps, classical art, and dental hygiene into a story that explores—with exquisite humor and grace—the seemingly impossible angles at which our lives often intersect. And in "An Enchanted Tree Near Fredericksburg," countless lovers carve countless hearts into the gnarled trunk of an ancient oak tree, leaving their marks to be healed, lifted upward, and, finally, absorbed. Haunting, hilarious, and full of longing, *Shame and Wonder* announces the arrival of David Searcy as an essential and surprising new voice in American writing. Praise for *Shame and Wonder* "Astonishment is a quality central to David Searcy's *Shame and Wonder*. . . . What unites these twenty-one essays . . . is the sense of a wildly querying intelligence suspended in a state of awe. . . . Searcy is drawn instinctively to moments, the way parcels of time expand and

contract in memory, conjuring from ordinary experience a hidden sense of all that is extraordinary in the world, in being alive.”—The New York Times Book Review “A lovely implicit argument for a particular orientation toward the world: continuous awe and wonder . . . Everywhere, David Searcy finds the strange and marvelous in careful examination of the quotidian.”—NPR “Peculiar and lively . . . Like a down-home Roland Barthes, [Searcy’s] quirky observations and sudden narrative turns remind us of the strangeness we miss every day.”—Minneapolis Star Tribune “Often nostalgic and whimsical . . . brings to life the shadows of our kaleidoscopic world.”—The Dallas Morning News “What makes Searcy such a master storyteller is that he is a master observer, sharing his vision through essays that read like exquisitely crafted short stories.”—San Francisco Chronicle “In twenty-one captivatingly offbeat essays, Searcy finds the exceptional in the everyday . . . and contemplates the mysteries therein with grace and eloquence.”—The Atlanta Journal-Constitution “A collection of essays laced with wisdom and beauty.”—Paste “Slyly brilliant—a self-deprecatory look at life in all its weirdness.”—Austin American-Statesman “A work of genius—a particular kind of genius, to be sure.”—Ben Fountain, author of *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk* From the Hardcover edition.

Up Up, Down Down

As a student working in the dusty archives of the *Sewanee Review*, John Jeremiah Sullivan came across an article entitled “Lost Utopia of the American Frontier” and was immediately hooked on the dramatic story of a lost book, an alternative history of the South, a white Indian. It was a story he’d chase for the next two decades. In 1735, a charismatic German lawyer and accused atheist named Christian Gottlieb Priber fled Germany under threat of arrest, bound for colonial South Carolina. In the Cherokee village of Grand Tellico, he created a Utopian society that he named Paradise. For six years, Paradise was governed by a set of revolutionary ideas that included racial equality, sexual freedom, and a lack of private property, ideas which he chronicled in a mysterious manuscript he called *Paradise*. Priber’s ideas were so subversive that he was hunted for half a decade and eventually captured by the British, making headlines across the world and imprisoned until his death. The only copy of *Paradise* was apparently destroyed. Now, in a rare combination of ground-breaking research and stunning narrative skill, award-winning writer John Jeremiah Sullivan brings that lost history vividly to life.

Lost in the Meritocracy

The sermons of Joni Tevis’ youth filled her with dread, a sense “that an even worse story—one you hadn’t read yet—could likewise come true.” In this revelatory collection, she reckons with her childhood fears by exploring the uniquely American fascination with apocalypse. From a haunted widow’s wildly expanding mansion, to atomic test sites in the Nevada desert, her settings are often places of destruction and loss. And yet Tevis transforms these eerie destinations into sites of creation as well, uncovering powerful points of connection. Whether she’s relating her experience of motherhood or describing the timbre of Freddy Mercury’s voice in “Somebody to Love,” she relies on the same reverence for detail, the same sense of awe. And by anchoring her attention to the raw materials of our

world—nails and beams, dirt and stone, bones and blood—she discovers grandeur in the seemingly mundane. Possessed throughout with eclectic intelligence and extraordinary lyricism, these essays illuminate curiosities and momentous events with the same singular light.

Impossible Owls

It's a dark day for Itching Down. Four million wasps have just descended on the town, and the pests are relentless! What can be done? Bap the Baker has a crazy idea that just might work . . . Young readers will love this lyrical, rhyming text as they watch the industrious citizens of Itching Down knead, bake, and slather the biggest wasp trap there ever was! John Vernon Lord's bright ink and crayon illustrations fill the pages with humorous detail.

Cork Dork

The acclaimed author of Pulphead collects “21 of the year’s most urgent and at times painfully truthful pieces of nonfiction published in the U.S.” (Publishers Weekly, starred review). In our age of trigger warnings and jeopardized free expression, *The Best American Essays 2014* does not shy away from shocking extremes, ambiguities, or dualities. As guest editor John Jeremiah Sullivan notes, the essay assumes many two-sided forms, and these diverse pieces capture all the conceptions of what an essay can be: the loose and the strict, the flourish and the finished, the try and the trial. Sullivan’s choices embrace the high and the low, the memoirist’s confession and the journalist’s reportage, and all the gray area in between. From a hotel in Mongolia to a Clockwork Orange like Baltimore, from a Rome emergency room to Burning Man, these diverse pieces surprise and entertain, inform and titillate. *The Best American Essays 2014* includes entries by Kristin Dombek, Dave Eggers, Leslie Jamison, Ariel Levy, Yiyun Li, Barry Lopez, Zadie Smith, Wells Tower, Emily Fox Gordon, James Wood, and others.

The Book of My Lives

A New York Times Notable Book A Daily Beast Best Book of the Year A Huffington Post Best Book of the Year From elementary school on, Walter Kirn knew how to stay at the top of his class: He clapped erasers, memorized answer keys, and parroted his teachers’ pet theories. But when he launched himself eastward to an Ivy League university, Kirn discovered that the temple of higher learning he had expected was instead just another arena for more gamesmanship, snobbery, and social climbing. In this whip-smart memoir of kissing-up, cramming, and competition, *Lost in the Meritocracy* reckons the costs of an educational system where the point is simply to keep accumulating points and never to look back—or within. From the Trade Paperback edition.

Pulphead

"The best book to have been written about the Vietnam War" (The New York Times Book Review); an instant classic straight from the front lines. From its terrifying opening pages to its final eloquent words, *Dispatches* makes us see, in

unforgettable and unflinching detail, the chaos and fervor of the war and the surreal insanity of life in that singular combat zone. Michael Herr's unsparing, unorthodox retellings of the day-to-day events in Vietnam take on the force of poetry, rendering clarity from one of the most incomprehensible and nightmarish events of our time. *Dispatches* is among the most blistering and compassionate accounts of war in our literature.

String Theory: David Foster Wallace on Tennis

Traces the author's investigation into the mystery of his father's sudden death, describing his father's achievements as a reporter, inconsistencies in his father's medical records, and the honor code of secrecy that challenged his research.

Pulphead: Essays

Aleksandar Hemon's lives begin in Sarajevo, a small, blissful city where a young boy's life is consumed with street soccer with the neighborhood kids, resentment of his younger sister, and trips abroad with his engineer-cum-beekeeper father. Here, a young man's life is about poking at the pretensions of the city's elders with American music, bad poetry, and slightly better journalism. And then, his life in Chicago: watching from afar as war breaks out in Sarajevo and the city comes under siege, no way to return home; his parents and sister fleeing Sarajevo with the family dog, leaving behind all else they had ever known; and Hemon himself starting a new life, his own family, in this new city. And yet this is not really a memoir. *The Book of My Lives*, Hemon's first book of nonfiction, defies convention and expectation. It is a love song to two different cities; it is a heartbreaking paean to the bonds of family; it is a stirring exhortation to go out and play soccer—and not for the exercise. It is a book driven by passions but built on fierce intelligence, devastating experience, and sharp insight. And like the best narratives, it is a book that will leave you a different reader—a different person, with a new way of looking at the world—when you've finished. For fans of Hemon's fiction, *The Book of My Lives* is simply indispensable; for the uninitiated, it is the perfect introduction to one of the great writers of our time. A Kirkus Reviews Best Nonfiction Book of 2013

I Am Sorry to Think I Have Raised a Timid Son

The first collection from a Whiting Writers' Award winner whose work has become a fixture of *The Paris Review* and *n+1*. Can civilization save us from ourselves? That is the question J. D. Daniels asks in his first book, a series of six letters written during dark nights of the soul. Working from his own highly varied experience—as a janitor, a night watchman, an adjunct professor, a drunk, an exterminator, a dutiful son—he considers how far books and learning and psychoanalysis can get us, and how much we're stuck in the mud. In prose wound as tight as a copper spring, Daniels takes us from the highways of his native Kentucky to the Balearic Islands and from the Pampas of Brazil to the rarefied precincts of Cambridge, Massachusetts. His traveling companions include psychotic kindergarten teachers, Israeli sailors, and Southern Baptists on fire for Christ. In each dispatch, Daniels takes risks—not just literary (voice, tone, form) but also more immediate, such as spending two years on a Brazilian jiu-jitsu team (he gets beaten to a pulp,

repeatedly) or participating in group psychoanalysis (where he goes temporarily insane). Daniels is that rare thing, a writer completely in earnest whose wit never deserts him, even in extremis. Inventive, intimate, restless, streetwise, and erudite, *The Correspondence* introduces a brave and original observer of the inner life under pressure.

The Giant Jam Sandwich

In this “urgent and enthralling reckoning with family and history” (Andrew Solomon), an American writer returns to Russia to face a family history that still haunts him. Can trauma be inherited? It is this question that sets Alex Halberstadt off on a quest to name and acknowledge a legacy of family trauma, and to end a century-old cycle of estrangement. His search takes him across the troubled, enigmatic land of his birth. In Ukraine he tracks down his paternal grandfather—most likely the last living bodyguard of Joseph Stalin—to reckon with the ways in which decades of Soviet totalitarianism shaped three generations of his family. He visits Lithuania, his Jewish mother’s home, to examine the legacy of the Holocaust and pernicious anti-Semitism that remains largely unaccounted for. And he returns to his birthplace, Moscow, where his glamorous grandmother designed homespun couture for Soviet ministers’ wives, his mother consoled dissidents at a psychiatric hospital, and his father made a dangerous living dealing in black-market American records. Along the way, Halberstadt traces the fragile and indistinct boundary between history and biography. Finally, he explores his own story: that of an immigrant who arrived in America, to a housing project in Queens, New York. A now fatherless ten-year-old boy struggling with identity, rootlessness, and a yearning for home, he became another in a line of sons who grew up separated from their fathers by the tides of politics and history. As Halberstadt revisits the sites of his family’s formative traumas, he uncovers a multigenerational transmission of fear, suspicion, melancholy, and rage. And he comes to realize something more: Nations, like people, possess formative traumas that penetrate into the most private recesses of their citizens’ lives.

The Best American Essays 2014

INSTANT NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER AND A NEW YORK TIMES CRITICS' PICK
“Thrilling . . . [told] with gonzo élan . . . When the sommelier and blogger Madeline Puckette writes that this book is the *Kitchen Confidential* of the wine world, she’s not wrong, though Bill Buford’s *Heat* is probably a shade closer.” —Jennifer Senior, *The New York Times* Professional journalist and amateur drinker Bianca Bosker didn’t know much about wine—until she discovered an alternate universe where taste reigns supreme, a world of elite sommeliers who dedicate their lives to the pursuit of flavor. Astounded by their fervor and seemingly superhuman sensory powers, she set out to uncover what drove their obsession, and whether she, too, could become a “cork dork.” With boundless curiosity, humor, and a healthy dose of skepticism, Bosker takes the reader inside underground tasting groups, exclusive New York City restaurants, California mass-market wine factories, and even a neuroscientist’s fMRI machine as she attempts to answer the most nagging question of all: what’s the big deal about wine? What she learns will change the way you drink wine—and, perhaps, the way you live—forever. “Think: Eat, Pray, Love meets Somm.” —theSkimm “As informative as it is, well, intoxicating.”

—Fortune

Shame and Wonder

One of the most original, dazzling, and critically acclaimed debut novels this year. In this debut novel, hailed by Stephen King as “terrifying, touching, and wildly funny,” the stories of two strangers, Eugene Brentani and Mr. Schmitz, interweave. What unfolds is a bold reinvention of storytelling in which Eugene, a devotee of the reclusive and monstrous author, Constance Eakins, and Mr. Schmitz, who has been receiving ominous letters from an old friend, embark from New York for Italy, where the line between imagination and reality begins to blur and stories take on a life of their own.

The Prime Minister of Paradise

The definitive collection of literary essays by The New Yorker’s award-winning longtime book critic Ever since the publication of his first essay collection, *The Broken Estate*, in 1999, James Wood has been widely regarded as a leading literary critic of the English-speaking world. His essays on canonical writers (Gustav Flaubert, Herman Melville), recent legends (Don DeLillo, Marilynne Robinson) and significant contemporaries (Zadie Smith, Elena Ferrante) have established a standard for informed and incisive appreciation, composed in a distinctive literary style all their own. Together, Wood’s essays, and his bestselling *How Fiction Works*, share an abiding preoccupation with how fiction tells its own truths, and with the vocation of the writer in a world haunted by the absence of God. In *Serious Noticing*, Wood collects his best essays from two decades of his career, supplementing earlier work with autobiographical reflections from his book *The Nearest Thing to Life* and recent essays from *The New Yorker* on young writers of extraordinary promise. The result is an essential guide to literature in the new millennium.

Art & Ardor

In this elegant volume, literary critics scrutinize the existing Wallace scholarship and at the same time pioneer new ways of understanding Wallace’s fiction and journalism. In critical essays exploring a variety of topics—including Wallace’s relationship to American literary history, his place in literary journalism, his complicated relationship to his postmodernist predecessors, the formal difficulties of his 1996 magnum opus *Infinite Jest*, his environmental imagination, and the “social life” of his fiction and nonfiction—contributors plumb sources as diverse as Amazon.com reader recommendations, professional book reviews, the 2009 *Infinite Summer* project, and the David Foster Wallace archive at the University of Texas’s Harry Ransom Center.

Dispatches

Award-winning author and journalist David Giffels explores the meaning of identity and place, hamburgers, hard work, and basketball in this collection of wry, irreverent essays reflecting on the many aspects of Midwestern culture and life

from an insider's perspective. In *The Hard Way on Purpose*, David Giffels takes us on an insider's journey through the wreckage and resurgence of America's Rust Belt. A native who never knew the good times, yet never abandoned his hometown of Akron, Giffels plumbs the touchstones and idiosyncrasies of a region where industry has fallen, bowling is a legitimate profession, bizarre weather is the norm, rock 'n' roll is desperate, thrift store culture thrives, and sports is heartbreak. Intelligent, humorous, and warm, Giffels's linked essays are about coming of age in the Midwest and about the stubborn, optimistic, and resourceful people who prevail there.

This Brilliant Darkness: A Book of Strangers

In this extraordinary reconstruction of the origins of the blues, historian Marybeth Hamilton demonstrates that the story as we know it is largely a myth. Following the trail of characters like Howard Odum, who combed Mississippi's back roads with a cylinder phonograph to record vagrants, John and Alan Lomax, who prowled Southern penitentiaries and unearthed the rough, melancholy vocals of Leadbelly, and James McKune, a recluse whose record collection came to define the primal sounds of the Delta blues, Hamilton reveals this musical form to be the culmination of a longstanding white fascination with the exotic mysteries of black music. By excavating the history of the Delta blues, Hamilton reveals the extent to which American culture has been shaped by white fantasies of racial difference.

Better Lucky Than Good

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER. SEMI-FINALIST FOR THE PEN/DIAMONSTEIN-SPIELVOGEL AWARD FOR ART OF THE ESSAY. One of Amazon, BuzzFeed, ELLE, Electric Literature and Pop Sugar's Best Books of 2018. Named one of the Best Books of October and Fall by Amazon, BuzzFeed, TIME, Vulture, The Millions and Vol. 1 Brooklyn. "Hilarious, nimble, and thoroughly illuminating." —Colson Whitehead, author of *The Underground Railroad* A globe-spanning, ambitious book of essays from one of the most enthralling storytellers in narrative nonfiction In his highly anticipated debut essay collection, *Impossible Owls*, Brian Phillips demonstrates why he's one of the most iconoclastic journalists of the digital age, beloved for his ambitious, off-kilter, meticulously reported essays that read like novels. The eight essays assembled here—five from Phillips's Grantland and MTV days, and three new pieces—go beyond simply chronicling some of the modern world's most uncanny, unbelievable, and spectacular oddities (though they do that, too). Researched for months and even years on end, they explore the interconnectedness of the globalized world, the consequences of history, the power of myth, and the ways people attempt to find meaning. He searches for tigers in India, and uncovers a multigenerational mystery involving an oil tycoon and his niece turned stepdaughter turned wife in the Oklahoma town where he grew up. Through each adventure, Phillips's remarkable voice becomes a character itself—full of verve, rich with offhanded humor, and revealing unexpected vulnerability. Dogged, self-aware, and radiating a contagious enthusiasm for his subjects, Phillips is an exhilarating guide to the confusion and wonder of the world today. If John Jeremiah Sullivan's *Pulphead* was the last great collection of New Journalism from the print era, *Impossible Owls* is the first of the digital age.

Something Bright, Then Holes

The television host and author of *Fired!* and a television writer for such shows as *Curb Your Enthusiasm* document the whimsical roles of complaining, codependence and wine in keeping their marriage and sanity intact.

Blood Horses

In the tradition of John Jeremiah Sullivan and David Foster Wallace, Cheston Knapp's *Up Up, Down Down* "is an always smart, often hilarious, and ultimately transcendent essay collection" (Anthony Doerr, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *All the Light We Cannot See*) that brilliantly explores authenticity and the nature of identity. Daring and wise, hilarious and tender, Cheston Knapp's "glittering" (Leslie Jamison) collection of seven linked essays tackles the Big Questions through seemingly unlikely avenues. In his dexterous hands, an examination of a local professional wrestling promotion becomes a meditation on pain and his relationship with his father. A profile of UFO enthusiasts ends up probing his history in the church and, more broadly, the nature and limits of faith itself. Attending an adult skateboarding camp launches him into a virtuosic analysis of nostalgia. And the shocking murder of a neighbor expands into an interrogation of our culture's prevailing ideas about community. Even more remarkable, perhaps, is the way he manages to find humanity in a damp basement full of frat boys. Taken together, the essays in *Up Up, Down Down* amount to a chronicle of Knapp's coming-of-age, a young man's journey into adulthood, late-onset as it might appear. He presents us with formative experiences from his childhood to marriage that echo throughout the collection, and ultimately tilts at what may be the Biggest Q of them all: what are the hazards of becoming who you are? With "a firmly tongue-in-cheek approach to the existential crises of male maturity for the millennial generation...Knapp's intelligent take on coming-of-age deserves to be widely read" (*Publishers Weekly*). "Compelling...Precise and laugh-inducing" (*The New York Times Book Review*), *Up Up, Down Down* signals the arrival of a truly one-of-a-kind voice.

Everything Ravaged, Everything Burned

An instant classic of American sportswriting--the tennis essays of David Foster Wallace, "the best mind of his generation" (A. O. Scott) and "the best tennis-writer of all time" (*New York Times*) Both a onetime "near-great junior tennis player" and a lifelong connoisseur of the finer points of the game, David Foster Wallace wrote about tennis with the authority of an insider, the showmanship of a literary pyrotechnician, and disarming admiration of an irrepressible fan. Including his masterful profiles of Roger Federer and Tracy Austin, *String Theory* gathers Wallace's five famous essays on tennis, pieces that have been hailed by sportswriters and literary critics alike as some of the greatest and most innovative magazine writing in recent memory. Whiting-Award winning journalist John Jeremiah Sullivan provides an introduction.

The Oregon Trail

Churchill Downs is the epicenter of Kentucky's equine heritage and the most storied racetrack in the world. More than a thousand workers come to the backside of Churchill Downs on any given day during a meet. Before sunrise, seven days a week, stable hands, hot walkers, grooms, outriders, jockeys, and more tend to the well-being of the horses and the track. Most will never stand in the Winner's Circle. There could be no Kentucky Derby without their contributions. *Better Lucky Than Good* is the most caring, in-depth look into the lives and stories of equine workers ever published--and it was written by the people who live and work on the backside of Churchill Downs. The book's 32 authors include grooms, hot walkers, exercise riders, a clocker, an outrider, assistant trainers, a jockey, a starting gate crew member, a pony person, a horticulturist, a silks seamstress, shedrow foremen, a tack and saddle man, a security guard, a horse tattooer, trainers, an alcohol and drug abuse counselor, a farm manager, a chaplaincy associate, and many more. "Every person I know who has ever 'written a horse book,' or worked extensively as a journalist covering the world of the track, has at some point had a version of this thought: If somebody would just do a good oral history, interviewing the people who actually work with the horses--the grooms and riders and ferriers and assistant trainers, the folks on the "backside"--it would be worth 10,000 pages of even the best literary description of the sport. Now the Louisville Story Program has done this, and done it beautifully. It's no exaggeration to say that this book has needed to exist for 200 years."--John Jeremiah Sullivan, author of *Pulphead* and *Blood Horses*

Witches of America

The Correspondence

Before Maggie Nelson's name became synonymous with such genre-defying, binary-slaying writing as *The Argonauts* and *The Art of Cruelty*, this collection of poetry introduced readers to a singular voice in the making: exhilarating, fiercely vulnerable, intellectually curious, and one of a kind. These days/the world seems to split up/into those who need to dredge/and those who shrug their shoulders/and say, It's just something/that happened. While Maggie Nelson refers here to a polluted urban waterway, the Gowanus Canal, these words could just as easily describe Nelson's incisive approach to desire, heartbreak, and emotional excavation in *Something Bright, Then Holes*. Whether writing from the debris-strewn shores of a contaminated canal or from the hospital room of a friend, Nelson charts each emotional landscape she encounters with unparalleled precision and empathy. Since its publication in 2007, the collection has proven itself to be both a record of a singular vision in the making as well as a timeless meditation on love, loss, and—perhaps most frightening of all—freedom.

In Search of the Blues

Among the pieces included in this collection of wide-ranging essays are two extended essays on Edith Wharton and Virginia Woolf and analyses of the work of contemporaries including Updike and Capote

Story of My People

A “painful and poignant” memoir of the author’s father, a heroic firefighter—and his grandfather, a serial arsonist (USA Today). When Jay Varner, fresh out of college, returns home to central Pennsylvania to work for the local newspaper, he knows he will have to deal with the memories of a childhood haunted by a grandfather who was both menacing and comical, and of his fire-chief father, a local hero who died too young. While digging into the past, Varner uncovers layers of secrets, lies, and half-truths. It is only when he finally has the truth in hand that he comes to understand the forces that drove his father, and the fires that he, despite all his efforts, could never extinguish. “Unadorned but vivid, Varner’s coming-of-age story unravels family secrets about firefighting and arson. It’s painful and poignant . . . [Varner] reminds us that few lives, even those we think we know best, are easily understood.” —USA Today “At its core, the book is about the way we spend half our lives trying to understand the people who brought us into this world . . . [Varner’s] writing is reporterly with lovely lyrical flourishes.” —Time Out Chicago

Nothing Left to Burn

The books that we choose to keep -- let alone read -- can say a lot about who we are and how we see ourselves. In *My Ideal Bookshelf*, dozens of leading cultural figures share the books that matter to them most; books that define their dreams and ambitions and in many cases helped them find their way in the world. Contributors include Malcolm Gladwell, Thomas Keller, Michael Chabon, Alice Waters, James Patterson, Maira Kalman, Judd Apatow, Chuck Klosterman, Miranda July, Alex Ross, Nancy Pearl, David Chang, Patti Smith, Jennifer Egan, and Dave Eggers, among many others. With colorful and endearingly hand-rendered images of book spines by Jane Mount, and first-person commentary from all the contributors, this is a perfect gift for avid readers, writers, and all who have known the influence of a great book.

Magic Hours

A visionary work of radical empathy. Known for immersion journalism that is more immersed than most people are willing to go, and for a prose style that is somehow both fierce and soulful, Jeff Sharlet dives deep into the darkness around us and awaiting us. This work began when his father had a heart attack; two years later, Jeff, still in his forties, had a heart attack of his own. In the grip of writerly self-doubt, Jeff turned to images, taking snapshots and posting them on Instagram, writing short, true stories that bloomed into documentary. During those two years, he spent a lot of time on the road: meeting strangers working night shifts as he drove through the mountains to see his father; exploring the life and death of Charley Keunang, a once-aspiring actor shot by the police on LA’s Skid Row; documenting gay pride amidst the violent homophobia of Putin’s Russia; passing time with homeless teen addicts in Dublin; and accompanying a lonely woman drifting into dementia, whose only friend was a houseplant, on shopping trips. Early readers have called this book “incantatory,” the voice “prophetic,” in “James Agee’s tradition of looking at the reality of American lives.” Defined by insomnia

and late-night driving and the companionship of other darkness-dwellers—night bakers and last-call drinkers, frightened people and frightening people, the homeless and the lost (or merely disoriented), other people on the margins—This Brilliant Darkness erases the boundaries between author, subject, and reader to ask: how do people live with suffering?

After Visiting Friends

In the bestselling tradition of Bill Bryson and Tony Horwitz, Rinker Buck's *The Oregon Trail* is a major work of participatory history: an epic account of traveling the 2,000-mile length of the Oregon Trail the old-fashioned way, in a covered wagon with a team of mules—which hasn't been done in a century—that also tells the rich history of the trail, the people who made the migration, and its significance to the country. Spanning 2,000 miles and traversing six states from Missouri to the Pacific Ocean, the Oregon Trail is the route that made America. In the fifteen years before the Civil War, when 400,000 pioneers used it to emigrate West—historians still regard this as the largest land migration of all time—the trail united the coasts, doubled the size of the country, and laid the groundwork for the railroads. The trail years also solidified the American character: our plucky determination in the face of adversity, our impetuous cycle of financial bubbles and busts, the fractious clash of ethnic populations competing for the same jobs and space. Today, amazingly, the trail is all but forgotten. Rinker Buck is no stranger to grand adventures. The *New Yorker* described his first travel narrative, *Flight of Passage*, as “a funny, cocky gem of a book,” and with *The Oregon Trail* he seeks to bring the most important road in American history back to life. At once a majestic American journey, a significant work of history, and a personal saga reminiscent of bestsellers by Bill Bryson and Cheryl Strayed, the book tells the story of Buck's 2,000-mile expedition across the plains with tremendous humor and heart. He was accompanied by three cantankerous mules, his boisterous brother, Nick, and an “incurably filthy” Jack Russell terrier named Olive Oyl. Along the way, Buck dodges thunderstorms in Nebraska, chases his runaway mules across miles of Wyoming plains, scouts more than five hundred miles of nearly vanished trail on foot, crosses the Rockies, makes desperate fifty-mile forced marches for water, and repairs so many broken wheels and axels that he nearly reinvents the art of wagon travel itself. Apart from charting his own geographical and emotional adventure, Buck introduces readers to the evangelists, shysters, natives, trailblazers, and everyday dreamers who were among the first of the pioneers to make the journey west. With a rare narrative power, a refreshing candor about his own weakness and mistakes, and an extremely attractive obsession for history and travel, *The Oregon Trail* draws readers into the journey of a lifetime.

The Mayor's Tongue

Bizarre military history: In 1979, a crack commando unit was established by the most gifted minds within the U.S. Army. Defying all known laws of physics and accepted military practice, they believed that a soldier could adopt the cloak of invisibility, pass cleanly through walls, and—perhaps most chillingly—kill goats just by staring at them. They were the First Earth Battalion, entrusted with defending America from all known adversaries. And they really weren't joking. What's more, they're back—and they're fighting the War on Terror. An uproarious exploration of

American military paranoia: With investigations ranging from the mysterious “Goat Lab,” to Uri Geller’s covert psychic work with the CIA, to the increasingly bizarre role played by a succession of U.S. presidents, this might just be the funniest, most unsettling book you will ever read—if only because it is all true and is still happening today.

The World Is on Fire

From one of America's great professors, a collection of works exploring the importance of reading, writing, and teaching well, for anyone invested in the future of the humanities. In his series of books *Why Read?*, *Why Teach?*, and *Why Write?* Edmundson, a renowned professor of English at the University of Virginia, explored the vital worldly roles of reading, teaching, and writing, earning a vocal following of writers, teachers, and scholars at the top of their fields, from novelist Tom Perrotta to critics Laura Kipnis and J. Hillis Miller. He has devoted his career to tough-minded yet optimistic advocacy for the humanities, arguing for the importance of reading and writing to an examined and fruitful life and affirming the invaluable role of teachers in opening up fresh paths for their students. Now for the first time *The Heart of the Humanities* collects into one volume this triad of impassioned arguments, including an introduction from the author on the value of education in the present and for the future. The perfect gift for students, recent graduates, writers, teachers, and anyone interested in education and the life of the mind, this omnibus edition will make a powerful and timely case for strengthening the humanities both in schools and in our society.

My Ideal Bookshelf

"Witches are gathering." When most people hear the word "witches," they think of horror films and Halloween, but to the nearly one million Americans who practice Paganism today, it's a nature-worshipping, polytheistic, and very real religion. So Alex Mar discovers when she sets out to film a documentary and finds herself drawn deep into the world of present-day witchcraft. *Witches of America* follows Mar on her immersive five-year trip into the occult, charting modern Paganism from its roots in 1950s England to its current American mecca in the San Francisco Bay Area; from a gathering of more than a thousand witches in the Illinois woods to the New Orleans branch of one of the world's most influential magical societies. Along the way she takes part in dozens of rituals and becomes involved with a wild array of characters: a government employee who founds a California priesthood dedicated to a Celtic goddess of war; American disciples of Aleister Crowley, whose elaborate ceremonies turn the Catholic mass on its head; second-wave feminist Wiccans who practice a radical separatist witchcraft; a growing "mystery cult" whose initiates trace their rites back to a blind shaman in rural Oregon. This sprawling magical community compels Mar to confront what she believes is possible-or hopes might be. With keen intelligence and wit, Mar illuminates the world of witchcraft while grappling in fresh and unexpected ways with the question underlying all faiths: Why do we choose to believe in anything at all? Whether evangelical, Pagan priestess, or atheist, each of us craves a system of meaning to give structure to our lives. Sometimes we just find it in unexpected places.

The Legacy of David Foster Wallace

A New York Times Notable Book for 2011 One of Entertainment Weekly's Top 10 Nonfiction Books of the Year 2011 A Time Magazine Top 10 Nonfiction book of 2011 A Boston Globe Best Nonfiction Book of 2011 One of Library Journal's Best Books of 2011 A sharp-eyed, uniquely humane tour of America's cultural landscape—from high to low to lower than low—by the award-winning young star of the literary nonfiction world. In *Pulphead*, John Jeremiah Sullivan takes us on an exhilarating tour of our popular, unpopular, and at times completely forgotten culture. Simultaneously channeling the gonzo energy of Hunter S. Thompson and the wit and insight of Joan Didion, Sullivan shows us—with a laidback, erudite Southern charm that's all his own—how we really (no, really) live now. In his native Kentucky, Sullivan introduces us to Constantine Rafinesque, a nineteenth-century polymath genius who concocted a dense, fantastical prehistory of the New World. Back in modern times, Sullivan takes us to the Ozarks for a Christian rock festival; to Florida to meet the alumni and straggling refugees of MTV's *Real World*, who've generated their own self-perpetuating economy of minor celebrity; and all across the South on the trail of the blues. He takes us to Indiana to investigate the formative years of Michael Jackson and Axl Rose and then to the Gulf Coast in the wake of Katrina—and back again as its residents confront the BP oil spill. Gradually, a unifying narrative emerges, a story about this country that we've never heard told this way. It's like a fun-house hall-of-mirrors tour: Sullivan shows us who we are in ways we've never imagined to be true. Of course we don't know whether to laugh or cry when faced with this reflection—it's our inevitable sob-guffaws that attest to the power of Sullivan's work.

Young Heroes of the Soviet Union

This is a series of essays following a journey by Kent Russell who went over the country gathering experiences and comes back with a portrait of America and manhood.

The Men Who Stare at Goats

A re-discovered masterpiece of reporting by a literary icon and a celebrated photographer In 1941, James Agee and Walker Evans published *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, a 400-page prose symphony about three tenant farming families in Hale County, Alabama, at the height of the Great Depression. The book shattered journalistic and literary conventions. Critic Lionel Trilling called it the “most realistic and most important moral effort of our American generation.” The origins of Agee and Evans’s famous collaboration date back to an assignment for *Fortune* magazine, which sent them to Alabama in the summer of 1936 to report a story that was never published. Some have assumed that *Fortune*’s editors shelved the story because of the unconventional style that marked *Famous Men*, and for years the original report was presumed lost. But fifty years after Agee’s death, a trove of his manuscripts turned out to include a typescript labeled “Cotton Tenants.” Once examined, the pages made it clear that Agee had in fact written a masterly, 30,000-word report for *Fortune*. Published here for the first time, and accompanied by thirty of Walker Evans’s historic photos, *Cotton Tenants* is an eloquent report of

three families struggling through desperate times. Indeed, Agee's dispatch remains relevant as one of the most honest explorations of poverty in America ever attempted and as a foundational document of long-form reporting. As the novelist Adam Haslett writes in an introduction, it is "a poet's brief for the prosecution of economic and social injustice."

You Say Tomato, I Say Shut Up

Winner of the 2011 Strega Prize, this blend of essay, social criticism, and memoir is a striking portrait of the effects of globalization on Italy's declining economy. Starting from his family's textile factory in Prato, Tuscany, Edoardo Nesi examines the recent shifts in Italy's manufacturing industry. Only one generation ago, Prato was a thriving industrial center that prided itself on craftsmanship and quality. But during the last decade, cheaply made goods—produced overseas or in Italy by poorly paid immigrants—saturated the market, making it impossible for Italian companies to keep up. In 2004 his family was forced to sell the textile factory. How this could have happened? Nesi asks, and what are the wider repercussions of losing businesses like his family's, especially for Italian culture? *Story of My People* is a denouncement of big business, corrupt politicians, the arrogance of economists, and cheap manufacturing. It's a must-read for anyone seeking insight into the financial crisis that's striking Europe today.

The Hard Way on Purpose

Award-winning essayist Tom Bissell explores the highs and lows of the creative process. He takes us from the set of *The Big Bang Theory* to the first novel of Ernest Hemingway to the final work of David Foster Wallace; from the films of Werner Herzog to the film of Tommy Wiseau to the editorial meeting in which Paula Fox's work was relaunched into the world. Originally published in magazines such as *The Believer*, *The New Yorker*, and *Harper's*, these essays represent ten years of Bissell's best writing on every aspect of creation—be it Iraq War documentaries or video-game character voices—and will provoke as much thought as they do laughter. What are sitcoms for exactly? Can art be both bad and genius? Why do some books survive and others vanish? Bissell's exploration of these questions make for gripping, unforgettable reading.

Cotton Tenants

Winner of the 2012 National Book Critics Circle Award, *Autobiography Swimming Studies* is a brilliantly original, meditative memoir that explores the worlds of competitive and recreational swimming. From her training for the Olympic trials as a teenager to enjoying pools and beaches around the world as an adult, Leanne Shapton offers a fascinating glimpse into the private, often solitary, realm of swimming. Her spare and elegant writing reveals an intimate narrative of suburban adolescence, spent underwater in a discipline that continues to inspire Shapton's work as an artist and author. Her illustrations throughout the book offer an intuitive perspective on the landscapes and imagery of the sport. Shapton's emphasis is on the smaller moments of athletic pursuit rather than its triumphs. For the accomplished athlete, aspiring amateur, or habitual practicer, this remarkable

work of written and visual sketches propels the reader through a beautifully personal and universally appealing exercise in reflection.

Swimming Studies

One evening late in his life, veteran sportswriter Mike Sullivan was asked by his son what he remembered best from his three decades in the press box. The answer came as a surprise. 'I was at Secretariat's Derby, in '73. That was just beauty, you know?' John Jeremiah Sullivan didn't know, not really, but he spent two years finding out, journeying from prehistoric caves to the Kentucky Derby. The result is *Blood Horses*, a wise, humorous and often beautiful memoir exploring the relationship between man and horse and the relationship between a sportswriter's son and his late father.

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