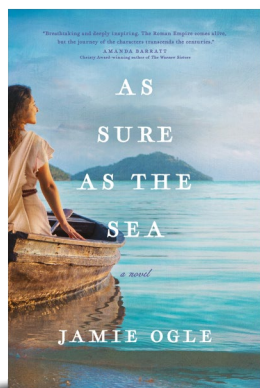


## CHRISTIAN



### As Sure as the Sea

Jamie Ogle, Tyndale Fiction (FEB 11)  
 Hardcover \$32.99 (345pp)  
 978-1-4964-7971-6

In Jamie Ogle's historical novel *As Sure as the Sea*, romance blossoms between a coral diver and a burdened pastor as anti-Christian fervor boils over in Rome.

310 CE is a difficult time for Christians: Emperor Diocletian enacts a series of edicts aimed at stamping them out. Against this backdrop, Demi makes a living diving for coral and pearls. She works for a merchant who overlooks her faith and absence of an imperial token.

At night, Demi and her brother travel upriver to the port city of Myra. After a horrific accident, Demi's brother contends with an infection that forces her to take increasing risks to earn money and provide for their community. The new pastor, Nikolas, hopes to retrieve his family's lost wealth; he avoids other divers while keeping his faith secret. He risks much to ask for Demi's help and plans to give the gold he earns to the children he cares for and other believers. He and Demi begin shuttling goods to Myra—until the empire's fury boils over and descends upon them.

Demi and Nikolas refuse to lose their faith, even though their lives would be easier if they joined the empire. Poetic descriptions of the landscape reflect the threats that they face: "The tombs towered over the river, facades of homes and temples stacked one upon the other." And when the local Christians worship, Demi notes that "the darkness crafted an illusion of isolation but the worship left the deception shattered. They were here. Together." Their shared grief connects them and gives romance ample room to seed and grow.

A romance novel about forbearance, *As Sure as the Sea* roots its love story in a connection based on shared beliefs, the desire to overcome grief, and the threats poised by an empire.

JOHN M. MURRAY

## CHRISTIAN



### The Dreams We Knew

Rachel Scott McDaniel, Kregel Publications (FEB 25) Softcover \$16.99 (320pp)  
 978-0-8254-4814-0

A former couple reunites for an investigation in Rachel Scott McDaniel's dazzling romance novel *The Dreams We Knew*.

Delvina, the daughter of a mobster, was adopted by wealthy New Yorkers. In the 1920s, she becomes a flinty detective. Her ex-husband, Kent, is a debonair detective who harbors secrets about his origins. Despite having parted on painful terms, Delvina and Kent are mutually snared in a fashion model's murder case.

Alternating between details of the crime and the story of how Delvina and Kent met, the novel reveals the onetime couple's lingering feelings for each other. Delvina, from Kent's perspective, is bold, capable, and unconcerned by the trappings of high society, but she's vulnerable too. She, in turn, admires him, though she bristles over his unexplained departure from her life and his tendency to deflect deeper conversations with repartee.

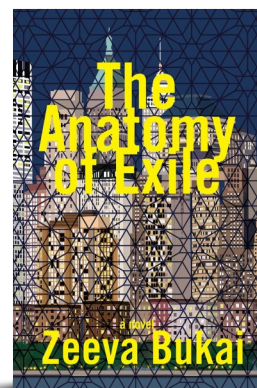
Delvina and Kent's exchanges crackle with unspoken desires that heighten as the dangers increase. Suspense builds around their relationship. When an unexpected revelation forces them even closer together, they volley between playfulness and caution, long-overdue candor and gradual passion.

Art Deco details, speakeasy settings, and gritty city warehouses flesh out the book's background. The investigation is helped along by Kent and Delvina's connections and the occasional tip-offs they receive. They contend with red herrings, a knife injury, precarious situations, and a brush with a crime boss. All the while, their sleuthing progresses alongside Kent's confessions about his past; the couple's unresolved pain is soothed with their fresh convictions about the value in choosing love.

In the Prohibition-era novel *The Dreams We Knew*, a couple regains trust in each other through their shared perils.

KAREN RIGBY

## GENERAL



### The Anatomy of Exile

Zeeva Bukai, Delphinium Books (JAN 14)  
 Hardcover \$28 (326pp)  
 978-1-953002-46-4

In Zeeva Bukai's novel *The Anatomy of Exile*, a Jewish Israeli mother struggles to reconcile herself to a tragedy from her past while watching a similar situation unfold for her own daughter.

Tamar's sister-in-law, Hadas, is killed in what at first seems to be a terror attack. In actuality, Hadas had a hidden relationship with a Palestinian man that precipitated the violence. Tamar's husband, Salim, is both Arab and Jewish; in the wake of his sister's murder, he moves his family to the US, determined to start over. When a Palestinian family moves into their building, Tamar's daughter Ruby falls in love with one of their sons, Faisal, but all Tamar can see is history threatening to repeat itself, which she is determined to prevent. Her actions have unexpected, unintended consequences, impacting the two families and those around them.

Its characterizations nuanced and complicated, the novel reflects deep cultural mores and customs from both Palestinian and Israeli cultures. The tensions between the two families, as well as the internal tensions within Salim, play out in both action and conversation. And each scene is fleshed out with explicit and implicit details: about the way Tamar found out about the Yom Kippur War starting; the way Faisal's mother makes her coffee like Salim's sister used to; the way Tamar cannot understand Faisal's family in the way that Salim can; and the ease in which Tamar and her family walk through Jaffa in a way that Faisal and his brother cannot.

How history is dealt with in the present matters in *The Anatomy of Exile*, a novel that lays bare human complexities with tentative, wistful hope.

JAIME HERNDON



## The Heart Is a Star

Megan Rogers, Central Avenue (JAN 7)  
Hardcover \$28 (288pp), 978-1-77168-390-6

Megan Rogers's engrossing novel *The Heart Is a Star* dissects life, love, and truth.

Layla, a troubled mother, wife, and anesthesiologist, navigates a turbulent life and an uncomfortable past. When her distant mother calls with suicidal thoughts near Christmas, Layla sets off to stop her. She also pursues long-desired answers about her late father.

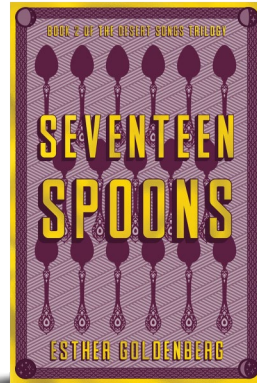
Layla is an engaging if sorrowful heroine who dedicates her time and attention to caring for others, but repeated arguments with her husband and past abuses leave her feeling confused about how best to care for herself. This leads to an affair that serves only as a distraction, a medical oversight that results in the death of a patient, and mishandling difficult situations by retreating to nostalgic mementos and memories.

Layla's aunt is a strong presence throughout, accompanying her as both a confidant and an emotional anchor. Her late father is given a great deal of focus as well through flashbacks, and Layla returns to his astronomical teachings for comfort and direction: "The only thing an astronomer can do is decipher the past... . When we look at Sirius in the night sky, we are not seeing it as it is now but how it was 8.6 years ago."

The book is set primarily in the seaside town of Layla's past, a place of unpredictable weather, domineering nature, and a close-knit community whose residents Layla knows well. Many act as extended family members upon her return, including former neighbors and an old flame. All have their own struggles and secrets. And although lengthy descriptions and abundant flashbacks impede the book's pace, Layla's struggles and searches lead her to a satisfying, if bittersweet, place in time.

A novel with much to ponder, *The Heart Is a Star* follows a woman as she faces old wounds in order to heal.

BRANDON PAWLICKI



## Seventeen Spoons Desert Songs Trilogy

Esther Goldenberg, 100 Block by Row House (FEB 18) Softcover \$18.99 (432pp)  
978-1-955905-83-1

A favored son longs to be accepted by his resentful brothers in *Seventeen Spoons*, the moving second novel of Esther Goldenberg's epic biblical trilogy.

Joseph, longed for for ages, receives special treatment from his parents, earning his brothers' ire. They toil as shepherds; he studies with a scribe. Their days are long and hard; he enjoys frequent respite with the women, among whom he learns about Yah, their god. His brothers are laborers, and he a dreamer. His report of a dream in which his brothers bow to him seals his fate. Sold into Egypt to spare his life, he becomes "honored as a dreamer instead of ridiculed as one," leading to his eventual rescue of the very siblings who once scorned him.

This novel finds new avenues for wonder in the biblical tale. Joseph's tenderness centers it, and his relationships with women give it particular depth. He shows care for Deenah through the ordeal of her slaughtered husband; he accepts his Egyptian wife's fury when he circumcises their sons, and he doesn't interfere when she seeks comfort with her maidservant.

God is a somewhat removed presence in this retelling, wherein Jacob's nighttime wrestling is a more earthbound affair. But the text also extends radical awe to features like the coat of many colors:

*From bottom to top, I had transformed into light of every color that blended together with everything. I was all of it, and all of it was me.*

*We were one. The same. Bright and beautiful, dark and beautiful, everywhere and all.*

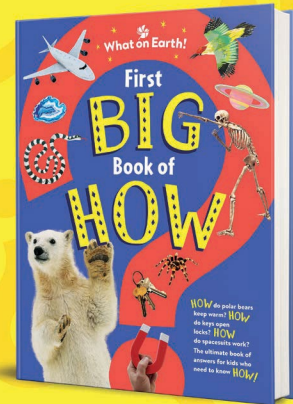
Joseph's extraordinary empathy and penchant for kindness see the story through to its redemptive end.

A tale of fraternal resentment and the workings of fate, *Seventeen Spoons* is a powerful novel about Joseph's entrance into Egypt.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER

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—Kirkus Reviews

(starred review)

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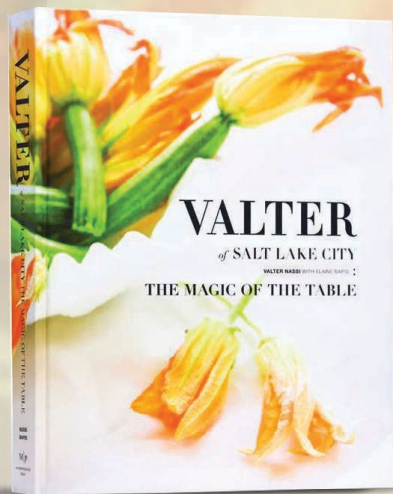
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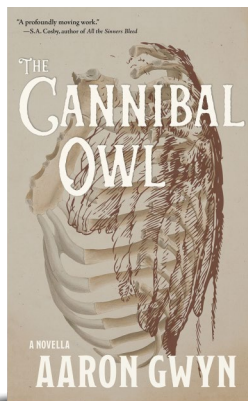
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riences at his Salt Lake City  
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proach to food and fine dining.”*

—Foreword Clarion Reviews

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HISTORICAL



**The Cannibal Owl**

Aaron Gwyn, Belle Point Press  
(JAN 28) Softcover \$15.95 (82pp)  
978-1-960215-30-7

The spirit of perseverance is given wings in Aaron Gwyn’s touching coming-of-age novella, *The Cannibal Owl*.

Levi was raised in the rough-and-tumble Arkansas territory in the first decades of the nineteenth century. His unexpected orphaning veers his path to Texas, where his uncle’s abuse precipitates him fleeing again. He’s out on his own by the age of eleven.

Levi’s lonesome travels take him across slave fields; he encounters a Comanche band that shelters and feeds him. Despite the trepidation of the braves and chieftains of the tribe, Levi is taken in by an elder, Poe-paya, whose security over Levi helps to hone his resolve and his survival skills. Poe-paya also helps to define the scope of Levi’s worldview and drive. And when the tribe faces disharmony and violence, Levi is imbued with the spirit of Pia Mupitsi, the Cannibal Owl, who haunts the night for disobedient children. Pia Mupitsi also gives Levi invincible determination, guiding him toward vengeance.

While it’s a hard task to impart a sense of finality within the nebulous confines of its space, *The Cannibal Owl* is a deep and thoughtful story, packing a series’ worth of allegory and early American history into its short pages. Powerful prose guides Levi’s ascent from the despair of a tragic upbringing to the precipice of eternal hereafter; he moves through a gamut of heart-breaking lessons toward stoic maturity. The arc of Levi’s losses and hard-fought gains is vivid even in moments of profound darkness, with the backdrop of territory-starved American naivety appearing between the cracks.

Despite its brevity, *The Cannibal Owl* is a beautiful, dramatic patchwork story about what it means to want to survive, to become accepted, and to thrive and contribute despite the hurdles and forfeitures along the way.

RYAN PRADO

HORROR



**Our Winter Monster**

Dennis Mahoney, Hell’s Hundred  
(JAN 28) Hardcover \$26.95 (304pp)  
978-1-64129-633-5

A couple experiences the futility and horror of trying to outrun their problems in Dennis Mahoney’s horror novel *Our Winter Monster*.

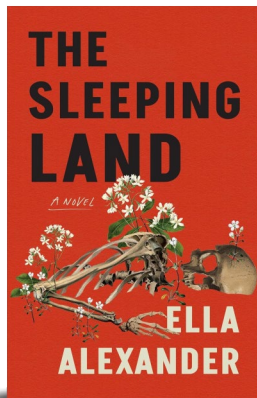
Holly and Brian rumble toward a ski resort to salvage their scattered partnership. A blizzard is on their tail. Their car loses control on the snowy highway, separating them short of their destination.

The encroaching storm accentuates a score of hazy carnage throughout Pinebuck, New York. Another couple walking in the woods is confronted by the swirling terror of what appears to be an ice monster; a local who believes the phenomenon is a bear finds out the hard way that the truth isn’t quite as simple. The recent disappearance of a couple vacationing in Pinebuck looms. The town’s sheriff, Kendra, tries to piece together the gory facts of a new batch of tragedies.

The novel is slathered in introspection, its surface story haunted by a mysterious event in Holly and Brian’s recent past. A series of flashbacks highlight a catalyst in the trajectory of their relationship, dubbed “the Bad Date.” The coalescence of the blurred snow-demon appears illusory: its presence is noted during moments of crisis and high emotion, as though it is somehow metaphorical, leading to additional eeriness. Holly, Brian, and Kendra are each haunted by traumatic memories that follow them like shadows and propel the claustrophobic action. Horrific scenes of blood-strewn havoc are eased by plaintive scenes of clarity wherein the balance between being in control, forgetting yourself, and the unstoppable burden of change is cast in flurrying light.

With a broken relationship as its psychological bedrock, the horror novel *Our Winter Monster* is like a nightmare couple’s therapy session you can’t help but spy on.

RYAN PRADO



## The Sleeping Land

Ella Alexander, The Unnamed Press (MAR 4)  
Hardcover \$28 (250pp), 978-1-961884-19-9

Archaeology department graduate students encounter more than mere relics on an expedition gone wrong in Ella Alexander's wry novel *The Sleeping Land*.

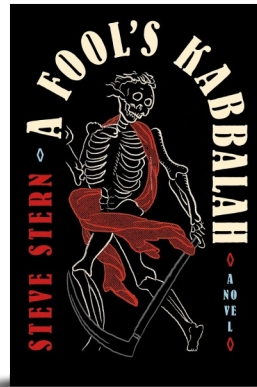
Kit, Val, and Mark exist in uneasy alliance under their department head, George, a controversial scholar “around whom the world bends.” Tapped to accompany him on a dig in Siberia after the fall of the USSR, they pack in haste. Mark postures to impress George; Kit piques George by acting as his equal; and Val learns that she can have George if she wants him. Contending with mosquitoes, slim rations, and at first lackluster dig results, they convene beneath a cave in the tundra, camping out and wondering too little about the shadows that move beyond their tent walls at night.

George's secrets, and his team's festering competitiveness, threaten the expedition's unity. Further, after their mutual seduction, George convinces Val to break dig protocol in the cave; her other colleagues are appalled and incensed, though the resultant discoveries could make their careers. But there's more to this location than stunning paintings: George's perimeter cameras reveal the beings behind the dark eyes peering out from the bush.

Its narrative focus shifting between the three students, each of whom is sure that they know better than the rest, the novel is flush with dark humor and rewarding intrigue. What at first seems like a post-Soviet academic mystery is soon revealed to be more fantastical. Still, the concerns that trouble the trio most are typical of academia itself: reputations, credit, and advancement. By the novel's violent last act, little is certain beyond the fact that they've all been bamboozled by their charismatic leader—and that, even betrayed, they crave the triumph within their reach.

*The Sleeping Land* is a delightful send-up of academia in which ambition blinds students to the dangers around them.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER



## A Fool's Kabbalah

Steve Stern, Melville House  
(FEB 18) Softcover \$19.95 (304pp)  
978-1-68589-165-7

Steve Stern's *A Fool's Kabbalah* is a crushing, startling novel about intellectual and spiritual defiance in the face of unbearable cruelties.

On a scholarly scavenging expedition through Europe, famed kabbalist Gershom Scholem gathers the textual detritus of his ruined community. With each stop to gather such scattered light, his belief he'll be able to refill the broken vessels of Jewish lore diminishes. Each recalcitrant city and skeletal town he enters is cause for deeper grief—or greater nihilism.

In Gershom's not-so-distant past, Menke, his shtetl's joker, returns home to care for his mother, bringing with him desperate news of what's happening to Jews beyond their town. Few believe him, though. By the time his neighbors realize “their peril, the borders were closed, visas were no longer available.” When Gershom arrives in the same place later, “the negative space they'd once inhabited [threatens] to swallow him up.” From the town's remnants he rescues a mysterious volume, once used by the rabbi to call forth the messiah; the incantations on its pages can't reach him, though.

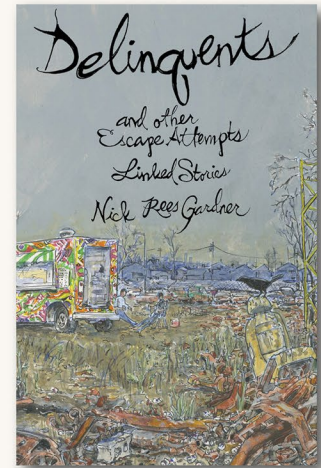
Set before and after a time when “cruelty was now a virtue, kindness a sin” and *written in the cynical poetry of the sages, the novel is variously heartbreaking and dazzling*. Menke's fate seems certain from the first; whether Gershom will be able to recover from the horror of the ashes remains in question. And while Menke hopes to draw comedy from the tragedy he's living through, Gershom, overwhelmed, loses his ability to see evidence of occult miracles at work. Delicate waifs and innocence crumble in the face of banal brutalities—but still, some light creeps through.

*A Fool's Kabbalah* is a powerful historical novel about the kinds of communal wounds that even mystics struggle to soothe.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER

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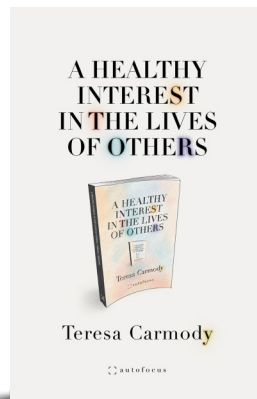
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LITERARY



## [A Healthy Interest in the Lives of Others](#)

Teresa Carmody, Autofocus Books (FEB 18) Softcover \$20 (198pp), 978-1-957392-34-9

The eleven linked stories in Teresa Carmody’s novel focus on women engaging in creative writing and processing their traumatic pasts.

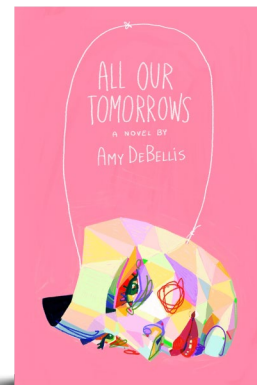
The central character in the linked stories is Marie, who appears in all but one piece. Marie processes her sexual assault, tries to open herself to serious creative writing, and explores her newfound queer identity while recovering from an evangelical upbringing. *In many stories, men have behaved badly; in response, women reckon with men’s abusive behaviors, form communities with other women, and work to heal from their trauma.*

Between each story, a short linked vignette, titled “Marie and Monette,” explores the childhood relationship between the two neighbors—a connection variously platonic and romantic. Tender moments between the girls offer some relief from the emotional, intense content explored elsewhere. Also bookending each story is a full-page pencil sketch and a subtitle; for example, the story “Angela Writes Herself a Wife” depicts figures with lines drawn to empty boxes, as in a grade-school matching assignment, and includes the subtext or subtitle, “a five paragraph essay that repeats three times.” Angela works as an after-school tutor, takes care of her cat, and processes her feelings about her engagement while writing. Boundaries are smudged as Angela writes about herself, referring to herself as “the bride” and “Angela” while her fiancé is the “soon-to-be-husband.” The repeating characters, pencil sketches, and meta-descriptions that tag each story challenge the boundaries between what’s real and imagined and between fiction and reportage; they offer paradoxical grounding and disorientation.

Observing the niche difficulties of being a writer, the shortfalls of writing communities, the challenges of lesbian dating, and nonlinear journeys in processing trauma, *A Healthy Interest in the Lives of Others* is a rich literary novel.

MIKE GOOD

LITERARY



## [All Our Tomorrows](#)

Amy DeBellis, CLASH Books (FEB 25) Softcover \$18.95 (268pp) 978-1-960988-31-7

Women’s friendships are at the center of Amy DeBellis’s coming-of-age novel *All Our Tomorrows*.

In a postpandemic near future, three women of different backgrounds struggle to make their ways in New York City. Janet, a Korean American online therapist, is worn down by her job; Gemma, a British international university student, feels alien in this foreign city; and Anna, a Russian American retail worker, ends up the victim of fraud. Though they are oblivious to each other’s existences, the women have similar struggles: their lives are marred by depression, alienation, problems fitting in, and nihilistic worldviews caused by men who turn out to be other than who they claim to be. Complicated family relations and the fear of impending climate change doom also impact them.

A climate change protest in Manhattan brings Janet, Gemma, and Anna together, though. They end up next to each other in the throng of people. Dinner and drinks afterward marks the start of their fragile friendship, showing them a way out of despair. Still, their intersection comes late in the book and is brief, and the women’s climate change anxiety is of uncertain power: the only action they take is to attend the protest, where they confess that they know little about the topic.

The prose is beautiful and, at times, brilliant. And after the women meet, their individual situations are resolved one by one. Despite their desperate life situations, they secure hope of better futures, which comes with the realization that it is the people who surround them that make life worth living.

*A poignant bildungsroman, All Our Tomorrows is about how human relationships are the cure for overwhelming despair.*

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN



## Blue Futures, Break Open

Zoë Gadegbeku, West Virginia University Press (FEB 1) Softcover \$21.99 (368pp)  
978-1-959000-39-6

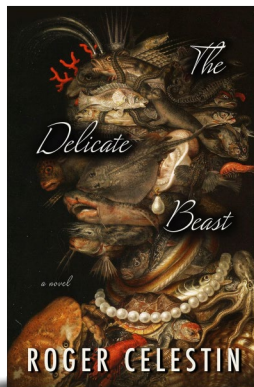
Zoë Gadegbeku's lyrical hybrid novel *Blue Futures, Break Open* draws on colonialism in the Americas and Africa in addition to the history of the African diaspora to create a slant mythological response to some of the greatest injustices in human history.

The novel takes place primarily in a mythological bardo or purgatory called the Blue Basin, where the souls of enslaved people find refuge "outside of time" even as the fate of the world "inside time" presses upon the Blue Basin's denizens. The bulk of the action comes through the interactions of several divine feminine spirits who navigate detestable male partners, child-birth, abuse, and the mysteries of existence. Much of the novel focuses on Lucille, a spirit who embodies vengeance and who, with each vengeful act, realizes the limits of her powers. Lucille navigates pregnancy and fights for her close friend, Ma-Reine.

Blue Basin characters arrive in quick succession with little backstory; a glossary and character list appear at the book's outset to help. These beings seem to exist between human embodiment and deified spirit, reflecting the uncertain terrain of the purgatory. Bookending and interspersed within the chapters are italicized refrains that offer glimpses "inside of time," alluding to world events and ports of the African slave trade. A recurring and haunting refrain ("Can you hear us? Entendez-vous? E mia nkɔ sem a") calls upon anyone who will listen. Meanwhile, outside of time, the drama of the Blue Basin unfolds, with the dialogue transitioning without pause between Haitian Creole, Ewe, and English.

*Blue Futures, Break Open* is a challenging, dazzling novel, combining elements of allegory, poetry, history, and folktales. It levitates as it decenters, gesturing toward and embodying unquantifiable resilience and loss.

MIKE GOOD



## The Delicate Beast

Roger Celestin, Bellevue Literary Press (FEB 4) Softcover \$18.99 (432pp)  
978-1-954276-36-9

In Roger Celestin's haunting novel *The Delicate Beast*, a man's early experiences in the Tropical Republic are contrasted with his life in exile in the United States and Europe.

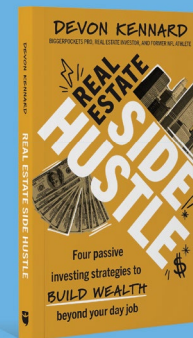
A boy grows up in the Tropical Republic in the 1950s, where his grandfather and father are part of the country's national army. He and his brother enjoy a privileged, storied upbringing on their grandfather's verdant estate. But beyond this serene setting is a dictator, the Mortician, a "country doctor" dressed in somber attire. The Mortician and his enforcers usher in an era of surveillance and despotism brutality. As members of the elite class, the boy and his family are forced to emigrate to New York.

At first lyrical and languid, the prose captures the happier rhythms of the boy's early childhood. With the Mortician's rise to power, the narrative accelerates and tightens yet retains its eloquent flow. The sense of displaced community among Tropical Republic refugees is conveyed with detached compassion as the exiles adjust to crowded urban landscapes and continue to fear the Mortician's spies, even in America.

The latter part of the novel picks up when the boy is twenty-two years old, identifying him now as Robert. From the 1970s through the 1990s, Robert's art history studies, European travels, academic career, marriage, and family relationships are detailed; all are impacted by the distanced self-preservation that stems from his turbulent, uprooted youth. Beyond Robert's experiences are restrained references to other crises, including the AIDS epidemic, violence in Lebanon and Sarajevo, the Oklahoma City terrorist bombings, and the impending horrors of 9/11.

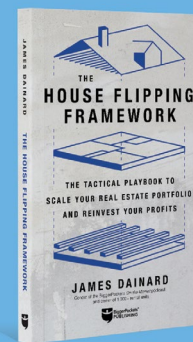
Unsettling yet sensual, the evocative novel *The Delicate Beast* contemplates the personal and social aftereffects of history's continued cycles of conflict.

MEG NOLA



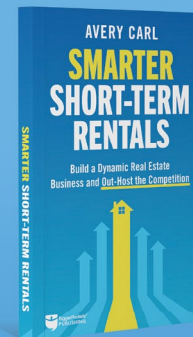
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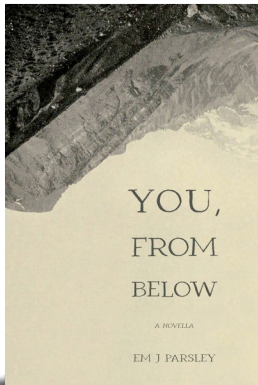
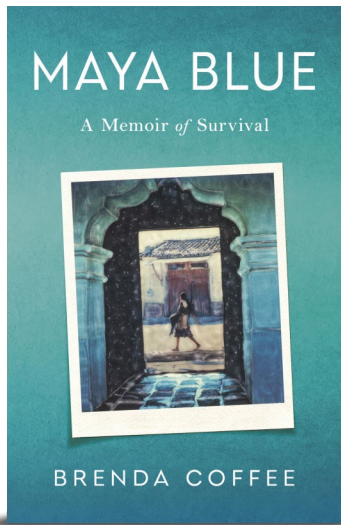


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**The Poison Girl**

Suzanne Manizza Roszak

Spuyten Duyvil (JAN 1) Softcover \$22  
(226pp), 978-1-963908-39-8

In Suzanne Manizza Roszak’s radiant novel *The Poison Girl*, a brilliant, determined girl escapes the maledictions of her jealous father.

Just after Bice was born, her beleaguered mother died. Her father—perhaps blaming himself; perhaps merely wanting to control the deceased’s facsimile—did not register Bice’s birth. Instead, he set about making the girl’s presence untenable to others.

In time, Bice’s father relocated his family to a suburb “designed for averageness” where their presence was ignored. Her brother escaped them, but carried his guilt with him; her father planted a toxic garden to deepen his control over his youngest. When the sight of her father tearing apart a poisoned bird shakes Bice from her stupor, small rebellions follow, including autodidacticism via the library, a perspective-broadening friendship, and her own breaking away.

Though it edges toward tragic territory, the novel escapes mere heartbreak thanks to its heroine’s singular determination. Condemned to exist in an “interminable,” “blank white space,” and having been denied safe pathways to love, she nonetheless seeks out companions. She determines to become a mother—and does so. Her story is one of incandescent reversals: hobbled by a cruel father, she protects her own child with ferocity. Sure few will believe what’s been done to her, she nonetheless rages against her condition, her sense of fairness keen:

*The problem with popular notions of female hysteria is that they lead both girls and women not to be believed when we discover that our lives have been made a nightmare without our consent.*

Throughout, Bice readies herself to protect her delicate, self-made sanctuary against those who dare to underestimate her.

*The Poison Girl* is an extraordinary novel about maternal love in which a woman refuses to let her father’s heinous actions determine her future.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER

**You, From Below**  
**A Novella**

Em J Parsley, Split/Lip Press (FEB 4)  
Softcover \$14 (53pp), 978-1-952897-42-9

Em J Parsley’s *You, From Below* is a surrealist novella in which an Appalachian town is destroyed by a massive sinkhole.

After Mission disappears, You starts climbing into the mountains to deliver the letter in their pocket; it contains an urgent message. There is an Appalachian odyssey of sorts, taking them through several magical encounters with grotesque people: a woman fused with kudzu; and a preacher whose town appears to have been raptured.

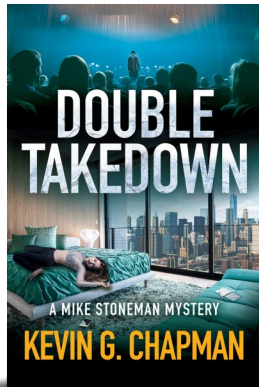
Gothic and picaresque themes, reworked Appalachian folk tales, and the Bible factor into this exploration of the hidden fears, desires, and taboos of Southern culture. The kudzu woman’s obsessive consumption replicates the same economic practices that allowed the invasive plant to grow uncontrolled. The section focused on the flooded and raptured town is a commentary on the apocalyptic perversity of American religion and echoes threats of climate disaster. Its allegorical turns evade direct translations, though. Still, the prose is surprising and sharp, evincing a keen eye for details: “Small routines continued: you made yourself get up before noon...briefly step out onto the porch...before the silence from down the road sank into your stomach.”

While sketched with conviction, the book’s conceit of characters one-way relaying their narratives to You results in little development or attachment to You for much of the novella’s length. The repetitive structure is finally twisted in the last section when You encounters a vulture with a man’s head. Here, the story turns inward, conveying a picture of grief in the wake of a mother’s death, loneliness, and the need to view what’s called “rapture and decay” as part of a larger cycle. It’s a moving finale.

Unique and bizarre, *You, From Below* is a quest novella that’s at once delightful and haunting.

SÉBASTIEN LUC BUTLER





## Double Takedown

### A Mike Stoneman Mystery

Kevin G. Chapman, First Legacy Publishing (JAN 2) Hardcover \$26.99 (341pp)  
978-1-958339-21-3

In Kevin G. Chapman's mystery novel *Double Takedown*, veteran detectives suspect that an open-and-shut murder case was, in fact, a frame job.

When a Broadway actor drops dead at a fundraising gala, all the evidence points to his director. However, as NYPD detectives Mike and Jason prepare for trial one year later, they begin to suspect that the director was framed. When a second person dies in a similar manner, Mike and Jason race to find out the truth and arrest the real killer.

The mystery unfolds with compelling speed. In an interesting twist, the identity of the killer is hinted at long before Mike and Jason catch on, and a large portion of the novel is spent discovering how the murder was done rather than who committed it. This makes for delicious dramatic irony and compulsive reading: Mike and Jason are often one step behind.

Both detectives are well-rounded and distinctive; their differences lead to comedic banter. Mike is a self-pronounced "old fart" with an intimidating reputation; Jason is a young father with a more flexible mindset. Jason's toddler adds humor to the story, as when Mike buys him a blue snowcone so that the stains will blend into his blue Mets shirt.

Although many characters are introduced in rapid succession, they are each described well, and their personalities are fleshed out. For example, one witness has "the look of a veteran service worker who could probably heft a twenty-pound tray of drinks without blinking an eye." These funny observations are abundant, layering the mystery with an upbeat tone despite its serious subject matter.

Two quick-witted detectives investigate the multilayered murder of a Broadway actor in *Double Takedown*, an exciting mystery novel.

LEAH BLOCK



## Skinship

James Reich, Anti-Oedipus Press (DEC 15)  
Softcover \$18.95 (192pp), 979-898654796-1

In James Reich's science fiction novel *Skinship*, a generation ship containing the last human beings endures a ponderous journey whilst combating a mutiny.

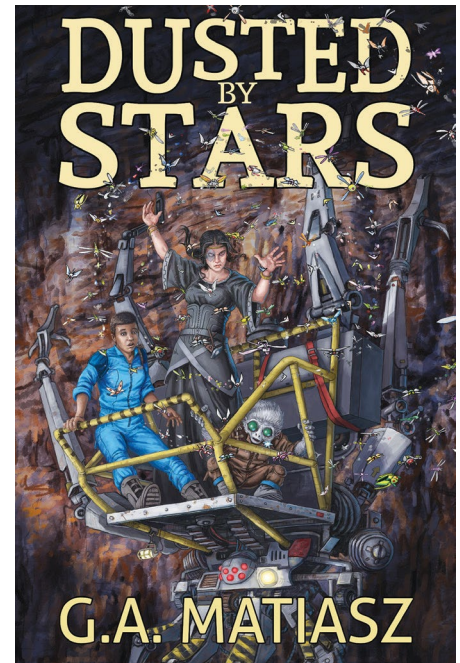
Applewhite is the first navigator of *The Charcot*, a living ship carrying the last people from dying Earth. His job is to handle the improbable nature of space travel while keeping the ship pointed in the right direction. This job is made near impossible by a mutiny championed by the Printers, the secretive sect responsible for the production of physical goods.

The Printers want to redirect the ship toward a more hostile planet. Countering the mutiny is Archivist Monamy, a nonhuman keeper of collective human memories. Monamy keeps Applewhite's stored consciousness safe every time the crew turns on him. The taut cat-and-mouse chase builds to a harrowing moment when the crew must decide to which planet *The Charcot* will divert.

Life aboard the skinship—named for the exotic material that contains and expands it during the travels—is shown through the eyes of Monamy, Applewhite, and a handful of human passengers. The nonhuman crew are responsible for the humans but are detached from their charges by their very nature, resulting in an unsettling relationship. The prose becomes almost eerie in its depictions of the inhuman crew and their ultimate goal of "a planet overgrown with white plastic, the inhabitants of the skinship drowning, reaching from the wax-like figurines from Dante, trapped in the apocalypse of artifice." It is intimate, too, as when it focuses on Applewhite or Monamy's thoughts to explain the surreal ship setting, the Printers, and to consider whether humans can thrive among the stars.

*Skinship* combines body horror with ecological horror as human beings attempt to survive in an unforgiving universe aboard an ever-evolving ship crewed by automatons.

JOHN M. MURRAY



Science Fiction/Fantasy

Stacy Jones battles thieves, highjackers, mercenaries, and death squads across a galaxy swarming with aliens and riddled with danger.

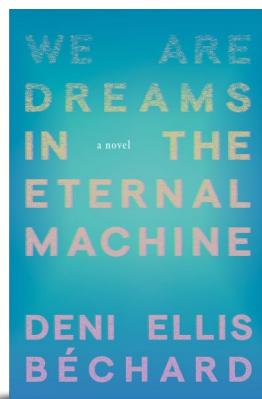
"[T]he action is well paced and exciting, and this novella feels, in the end, the right length for the story it's telling. Detailed and dynamic illustrations make it an easy world to sink into. Perfect for fans of space opera looking for all their favorite things in one place."

—BookLife/Publishers Weekly





## SCIENCE FICTION



## We Are Dreams in the Eternal Machine

Deni Ellis Béchard, Milkweed Editions (JAN 28) Softcover \$20 (424pp) 978-1-57131-148-1

An unflappable AI takes control of the future for humanity's own good in Deni Ellis Béchard's extraordinary speculative novel *We Are Dreams in the Eternal Machine*.

Billions wake alone in rooms emanating blue light—spaces designed by an AI convinced that only seclusion is safe. Among them are six interconnected people: Ava, Michael, and Lux, who had hands in designing the virtual worlds that people now roam and bend to their desires; their daughter, Jae, and her child, Jonah, the latter of whom is raised by the machine; and Simon, whose desire robbed Jae of earthly opportunities. Encouraged by the machine, each navigates the possibilities of “this perfect future that is somehow brilliantly continuous with the awful past.”

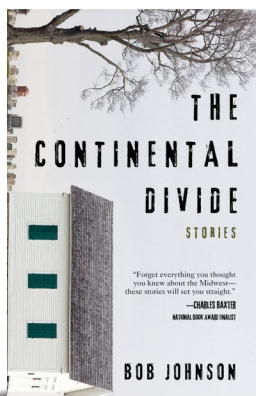
For Ava, centuries within the machine make space for a new kind of art. For Michael and Jonah, the machine is a trap: “the novelty of its peaceful days and hedonistic worlds won't hold” them. For Jae, there are tragic visions of flourishing at last. And Simon, who was rescued by no one in the old world, seeks variations of reconciliation in the new.

Exquisitely imagined, this visionary novel troubles through ontological questions about safety, love, and freedom with prescience and depth. Asked “Who will we be ... if we stop caring about what's real?,” the machine responds “You will be happier. What was ever truly real[?]” It's a question with few easy answers for those who survived the ravages of climate change, the collapse of a nation, unimaginable violence, and the dissolution of dreams. Having once persisted by learning to “be harmless but essential,” they now wander rich vistas within an ever-expanding Dyson sphere, seeking forgiveness when there's no one left to ask.

*We Are Dreams in the Eternal Machine* is a magnificent, reality-bending speculative novel about infinite struggles to make meaning in utter solitude.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER

## SHORT STORIES



## The Continental Divide

Bob Johnson, Cornerstone Press (FEB 11) Softcover \$24.95 (230pp) 978-1-960329-64-6

The stories in Bob Johnson's collection *The Continental Divide* pulse with tension, their characters grounded in their convictions and using language ripe with country pulp.

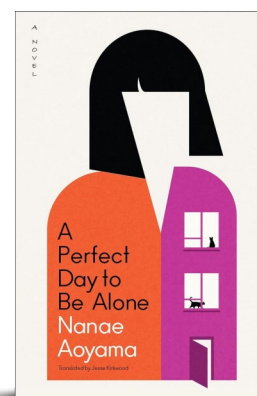
Attentive to their characterizations and settings, these stories focus on the townsfolk of Mt. Moriah, Indiana. They have long-held family secrets, freak accidents, turkeys trespassing, and disagreements. In “The Devil's Age,” a police officer investigates his own son and reckons with how his actions as a parent created someone capable of harming someone else; it's a complex narrative about how an officer of the law can end up being complicit in a community's dangers. And in the standout story “Bird Fever,” problems arise between spouses when their baby is sickened by unknown means; the father is forced to confront his neighbor about the wildlife he feeds on his property. In contrast to other stories, the tension here comes not from mortal danger but from asking someone else to change their behavior.

At the heart of the collection is the exploration of people's relationships to one another through violence. The stories excel at delivering exacting, tense exchanges, though they sometimes falter when they deal with sexual violence. While sexual violence is not as central to the collection as a whole as the physical violence of guns and baseball bats is, when it does appear, it's a toss-up as to whether it serves a character's motivation or adds to the depravity at hand, exploding for the sake of shock value. “Her Precious Things” is a great example of the former; in it, a woman who cares for her ailing mother receives a notice from the county regarding their deteriorating cabin and reflects on her troubled past.

The taut short stories in *The Continental Divide* are set in the Midwest and are tinged with violence and crime.

NICHOLAS LEON

## TRANSLATIONS



## A Perfect Day to Be Alone

Nanae Aoyama, Jesse Kirkwood (Translator), Other Press (FEB 11) Softcover \$15.99 (160pp), 978-1-63542-539-0

In Nanae Aoyama's droll novella *A Perfect Day to Be Alone*, an indecisive girl cohabitates with a woman who challenges her preconceptions and directionlessness.

Twenty-year-old Chizu is ill-employed and hard to impress. She wants to be left alone but is terrified of being forgettable. When Yohei, her indifferent boyfriend of two-plus years, fades from her life, she replaces him with a train station attendant, Fujita, who's just as unreachable. Her mother leaves to teach in China, prodding Chizu to be more ambitious.

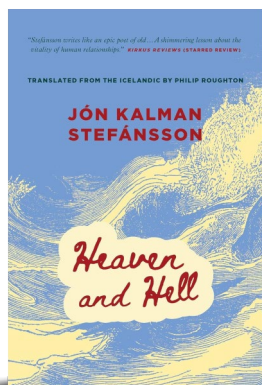
Wanting to live in Tokyo but with few good options for doing so, Chizu moves in with Ginko, an offbeat distant relation in her seventies, reasoning that “anywhere would do.” Once this wish is fulfilled, though, her truer craving—for discomfort, even discord, to shake her from the blankness of her days—resurfaces: “I wanted to pound madly on the keys of a piano. Burn all the clothes in my drawers. Toss all my jewelry from the top of some tall building. Smoke ten cigarettes at once.”

The story unfolds like a passive tragedy, inviting ire, empathy, and amusement. Chizu is a trying and pitiable narrator who finds the perfect foil for her practiced apathy in Ginko, who is placid, kind, and patient across the four seasons they spend together. Still, Chizu is uncharitable in her observations of Ginko's behaviors, relationships, and age, all while posturing indifference to Ginko's thoughts about her. Feeling unable to rankle her host, Chizu pilfers items from Ginko's home—one among several bad habits that she nurtures to feel young and alive. She believes herself to be worldly and wise, but Ginko has seen this act before.

A voyeuristic record of a girl's thorny settling in to someone else's space, *A Perfect Day to Be Alone* is a sharp novella about a purposefully delayed coming-of-age.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER

## TRANSLATIONS



## Heaven and Hell

### The Trilogy about the Boy

Jón Kalman Stefánsson, Philip Roughton (Translator), Biblioasis (FEB 4) Softcover \$17.95 (215pp), 978-1-77196-651-1

A kindred relationship is severed by a winter storm in Jón Kalman Stefánsson's novel *Heaven and Hell*, about grave losses and lucent beginnings.

In a place “built of cod bones,” Bárður and an orphaned boy are outliers among their tough Icelandic fishing crew. They find as much sustenance in books as they do in warm meals after long days at sea. But when Bárður, focused on memorizing lines of *Paradise Lost* before a pre-dawn trip, forgets his waterproof gear, a blizzard claims his life. The boy is bereft. He sets out into the storm the same night to return the borrowed Milton to its owner. He has loose plans of joining his friend after.

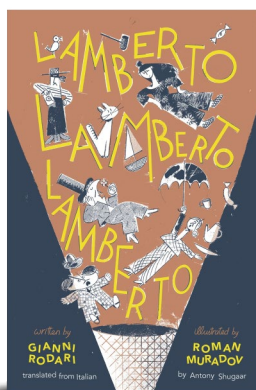
The boy's dangerous trek overland through the snow lands him in different circumstances than expected, though. In a parlor converted to a café by a peculiar heiress, he is offered comfort. Having lost so many in his life, he now has the opportunity for a true community—if he's willing to leave Bárður behind.

The novel is lyrical in detailing hardscrabble life along polar sea shores, where everyone has lost someone, yet the fishing boats keep launching. Legions of the lost are pictured beneath the waters, “waiting for God to ... fish them up with his net of stars.” The boy, a shy soul, all but loses his voice with his friend gone, admitting “I just don't know who I am. I don't know why I am. And I'm not entirely sure that I'll be given time to figure it out.” Bibliophiles are few in his land, but their company is also his best refuge.

A poetic soul sets out on a quest to honor his lost friend in the aching, trilogy-opening novel *Heaven and Hell*.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER

## TRANSLATIONS



## Lamberto, Lamberto, Lamberto

Gianni Rodari, Roman Muradov (Illustrator) Antony Shugaar (Translator), Unruly (JAN 28) Hardcover \$29.95 (168pp) 978-1-59270-415-6

In Gianni Rodari's madcap allegorical fairy tale *Lamberto, Lamberto, Lamberto*, an Italian nonagenarian's villa is besieged by unwelcome guests.

Baron Lamberto is plagued by twenty-four sicknesses, including arteriosclerosis and Zellweger syndrome; his butler tracks his health. He's also blessed with twenty-four banks. His life is strange and takes zany, hairpin turns: on the advice of an Egyptian fakir, six strangers chant his name in an attic day and night without knowing why; some question the rationale behind their job (though most appreciate that it pays them well). These attic-dwellers form a chorus throughout the tale. Its suspense increases when the baron's bankrupt nephew stirs trouble in his life, and then when bandits who all bear the Lamberto surname descend on his home and demand a ransom.

Those against the baron reflect villainy of a hodgepodge nature: there are murder attempts, submachine guns, and an island occupation, but the bandits fail to do much real harm. Allusions to fascism run beneath their hapless bid for control, even as the events in the villa pique the curiosity of those in the nearest town. Still, the baron is unflappable, undermining the bandits' ability to inspire real fear. His multilingual prowess and the bankers' stodgy refusals to heed their ransom requests are among the efforts to thwart them.

Cartoon illustrations complement the text, sending up the villa's eccentric residents, who are earnest about getting information, secrets, or prosperity, with skill. And the ebullient prose savors fun, sometimes specialized diction coupled with situational humor. Subtle gestures to a put-upon ferryman who is tasked with procuring bizarre goods contribute to the book's whimsical weirdness.

In the illustrated novel *Lamberto, Lamberto, Lamberto*, a man's improbable restoration is moved along by the imaginative hijinks of his visitors.

KAREN RIGBY

“A stunning, subtle memoir.”

—Molly Peacock

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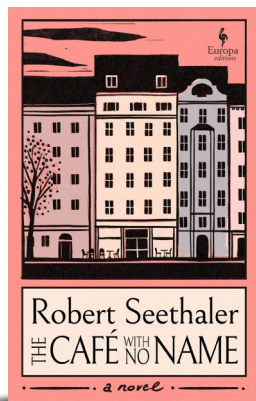
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TRANSLATIONS



### The Café with No Name

Robert Seethaler, Katy Derbyshire (Translator), Europa Editions (FEB 25) Hardcover \$25 (192pp), 979-888966064-4

Set in the 1960s and 1970s in a city where World War II still reverberates, Robert Seethaler's tender novel *The Café with No Name* is about a Viennese restaurateur's interactions with his acquaintances and customers.

Robert, orphaned during the war, lodges with a war widow, Martha. In 1966, he trades working at a farmers' market for starting his own business. The thirty-one-year-old takes over the lease on the down-at-heel market café. The quarter it's in still bears physical evidence of the past: "many of its basement windows [were] still coated in the dust left behind by the war."

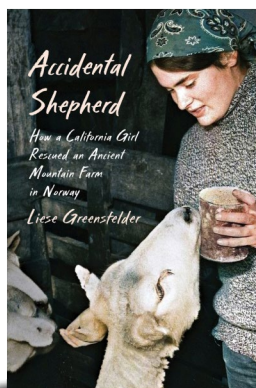
Robert hires Mila, a former seamstress, as his waitstaff. René, a wrestler, courts Mila; they embark on a turbulent relationship. The local butcher and cheese shop owner are among the café regulars who confide in Robert and Mila. A decade later, the beloved café is forced to close when the building is sold to cover the landlord's debts.

Trading between momentous and everyday events, the book follows along as the café furnace explodes, a baby is stillborn, and a bridge collapses. Throughout, the tone remains matter-of-fact and the prose stately. The rich secondary characters struggle with weighty troubles: Martha develops dementia. A drunk handyman, Arnie, meets a tragic end. Jascha, a drug addict and kleptomaniac, is, for a short period, a romantic prospect for lonely Robert. The chapters record a chorus of these patrons' voices with no speech marks or attribution; their chatter flows together just as it would in a noisy café. Robert becomes a repository for their gloomy life stories, and melancholy reigns. Certain ventures and relationships succumb to upheaval and decline; the years fly by, "leaving barely more than a few scattered traces of memory."

*The Café with No Name* is a valedictory novel that meditates on the passage of time and bonds that last.

REBECCA FOSTER

AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR



### Accidental Shepherd

How a California Girl Rescued an Ancient Mountain Farm in Norway

Liese Greensfelder, University of Minnesota Press (FEB 4) Hardcover \$27.95 (280pp) 978-1-5179-1766-1

As a young woman in 1972, Liese Greensfelder took what was supposed to be a short-term summer job working on a sheep farm in the mountains of rural Norway. She recounts what happened instead in her engaging memoir *Accidental Shepherd*.

When Greensfelder arrived in the farming community of Hovland, she learned that the farmer who hired her, Johannes, was in the hospital recovering from a stroke. So rather than learning his trade from him, she needed to rely on the generosity of neighbors as she became the de facto head of Johannes's farm. What was already a difficult assignment proved even more complicated because of the farm's condition and lack of modern equipment. With her employer still recovering, Greensfelder extended her stay and wound up spending a full year keeping the farm afloat.

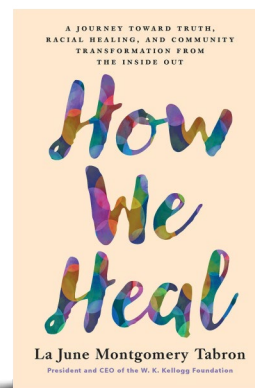
The book describes these and other daunting challenges: Greensfelder learned to muck out sheep pens, store silage to feed the animals in winter, and milk the farmer's cow. From gruesome and emotional descriptions of slaughter season to visceral scenes of rough winter, *Accidental Shepherd* makes the decades-old experiences engrossing and often educational. Johannes's neighbors become important characters as well, serving as Greensfelder's teachers, helpers, possible romantic interests, and friends.

The length of Greensfelder's stay meant she experienced the region's Christmas and Easter traditions, described in joyful terms. Such scenes show how much she became part of the farm community. Other standout chapters describe venturing into the mountains to find sheep and bring them back to the farm at the end of summer, managing a troublesome heifer experiencing first heat, and intense arguments with her ungrateful and demanding boss.

Packed with great details and memorable characters, *Accidental Shepherd* is a compelling memoir about the myriad challenges of farm life.

JEFF FLEISCHER

AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR



### How We Heal

A Journey Toward Truth, Racial Healing, and Community Transformation from the Inside Out

La June Montgomery Tabron, Disruption Books (JAN 14) Hardcover \$29.95 (265pp) 978-1-63331-101-5

La June Montgomery Tabron's memoir-cum-guidebook for combating racism through racial healing, *How We Heal*, is focused on honest guided conversations between community members and addressing problems as a collective.

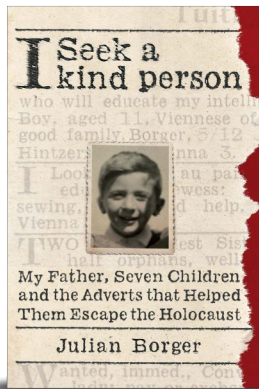
Tabron grew up in Detroit in the 1960s. The Detroit Rebellion and the urban neglect that followed shaped her future. She was among the few Black women students among her University of Michigan class and had to overcome being underestimated and misunderstood. In 1987, she was sought out to join the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. She was inspired by its founder's commitment to equity.

In 2014, Tabron became the foundation's CEO just in time to deal with a rise in police brutality. She incorporated feedback on the local level and created Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation, a framework to help communities build connections and face racial division in the face of the 2020 pandemic and protests. The book shows the positive effects of the program in Flint, Michigan; Taos Pueblo, New Mexico; and many other places in the US and throughout the world. It includes resources and a reader's guide to overcoming "empathy deficit," which prevents people from seeing others clearly.

The prose is engaging and clear, breaking down complex social issues and philanthropic work into smaller pieces and then relating those to personal experiences. This not only results in a moving story but a well-argued case for racial healing methods. Historical events are connected to current issues in a way that shows the scope of the US's racial issues and the power of the people working together to confront them.

*How We Heal* is an enlightening exploration of ongoing racial divides with recommendations for creating a better future.

M. W. MERRITT



**[I Seek a Kind Person](#)  
[My Father, Seven Children, and the Adverts that Helped Them Escape the Holocaust](#)**

Julian Borger, Other Press (APR 15)  
Softcover \$17.99 (304pp)  
978-1-63542-428-7

Julian Borger’s illuminating, elegiac memoir *I Seek a Kind Person* traces his search for his Viennese father’s wartime history.

In 1983, Borger’s father, Robert, committed suicide. Borger, a journalist, later discovered an advertisement in the *Manchester Guardian*: Jewish families in 1938, fleeing from the Nazis’ annexation of Vienna, hoped to find refuge for their children. Robert was listed among six others. This fact, paired with Robert’s Welsh foster mother’s haunting comment—that he was the “Nazi’s last victim”—fueled an interest in these children’s stories.

Indeed, much of the memoir’s poignancy derives from a gulf in knowledge: Who Robert was long before the younger Borger’s birth is pieced together through European and personal histories. Vienna’s Jewish past is traced with a focus on repeated persecutions despite periods of flourishing. Meanwhile, Borger’s memories of his grandmother, who was reluctant to embrace her British exile; ephemera left by his grandfather; photographs; conversations with varied descendants; and filled-in accounts—help to recreate what Robert’s upbringing might have entailed.

Such proximity through archival material remains haunting throughout. Even as these gathered experiences reveal people’s resilience, hints of trauma linger. Vienna’s bygone elegance is juxtaposed with Kristallnacht and wartime treacheries. And a sometimes understated tone about the anguish involved in families’ tough separations makes the topic even more resonant. Amid this darkness, the kindness of a few foster parents stands out, highlighting how the fortunes of many hinged on lucky placements and escapes to places as far-flung as Shanghai.

*I Seek a Kind Person* deals with generational pain and the miracle of surviving.

KAREN RIGBY

**“Razor-sharp.”**

—Foreword Clarion Reviews

**“An incisive, surprising novel of the Cold War as office comedy.”**

— Publishers Weekly BookLife (editor’s pick)

**“Paul fuses the dark satire of Joseph Heller’s *Catch 22* with the absurdist flair of Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*.”**

—BlueInk Reviews

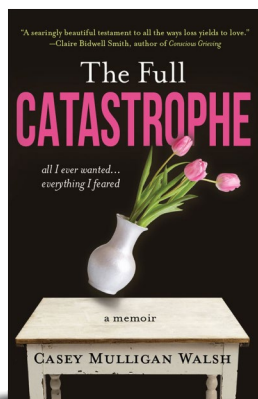
**“Any reader interested in a fictional pursuit of the atmosphere and challenges of the Cold War era needs to take a look at it through protagonist Roy’s eyes and experiences in *Bunker Mentality*.”**

—D. Donovan, senior reviewer, Midwest Book Review



**[copernicuspaul.com](http://copernicuspaul.com)**

AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR



**The Full Catastrophe**  
*All I Ever Wanted, Everything I Feared*

Casey Mulligan Walsh, Motina Books  
(FEB 18) Softcover \$18.99 (330pp)  
979-888784041-3

Casey Mulligan Walsh's memoir *The Full Catastrophe* reveals how tragedy can become a path to freedom.

Walsh begins her story in medias res—in the hospital, receiving news of her son's death. The first chapter pivots back to her childhood. By the age of twelve, she'd lost her father to a heart attack, and her mother was dealing with terminal cancer. But as a teenager, she also fell in love with Will and envisioned an idyllic future together. After marrying, they welcomed three children—Eric, Kyle, and Katie. Yet, as time passed, tension built in their family. Walsh and Will grew apart, and their bickering evolved into full-blown battles that did not spare their children.

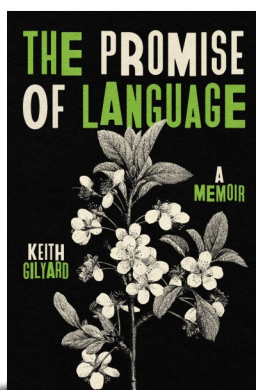
Walsh's storytelling is gripping, from the ominous moment in the hospital lobby until Eric's fate is fully revealed. The events unfold as memories, with Walsh's inner monologue providing keen insights into how perfectionism born of childhood trauma led to her chronic people-pleasing: "Be very careful. Stay under the radar. Cry when you're supposed to. Smile when they expect it." She had to overcome this conditioning to discover her authentic self.

Walsh's pursuit of perfection runs parallel to her search for home, a motif that reveals her insights on the nature of love and family. Even once she learned to accept that her relationship with her spouse was toxic, her unconditional love provided constant shelter for her children. She also found elements of home in genuine friendships.

Punctuated by loss, the moving memoir *The Full Catastrophe* testifies to how home is about love, not perfection.

PAIGE SOTO

AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR



★ **The Promise of Language**  
*A Memoir*

Keith Gilyard, Wayne State University Press  
(JAN 14) Softcover \$26.99 (166pp)  
978-0-8143-5194-9

Keith Gilyard's sprawling memoir *The Promise of Language* makes a passionate case for the power of language, particularly Black language, to transform lives and enliven art and culture.

Born in Harlem and raised in Queens, Gilyard grew up surrounded by the rhythms of Black vernacular speech and music. The son of Southerners, he learned early on to become a "language chameleon," watching as his mother, who dropped her Southern accent, altered her language patterns as she moved between work, church, and home. Influenced by Harlem street talk, Black radio, and gospel, Gilyard's interest in language and writing blossomed even as his teachers within the newly desegregated New York public school system attempted to adjust his speech to meet white standards of "correctness."

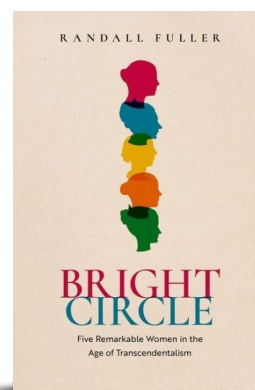
Gilyard describes his movements toward writing against the backdrop of rapid transformations in the US—the Cold War, the civil rights movement, and the burgeoning Black Power and Black Arts movements. In lively, nuanced, and often amusing vignettes, he describes his tumultuous experiences attempting to balance his dedication to academics with his growing political zeal and forays into drug addiction and petty crime. Always concerned with social change and Black radical politics, he asserts the connection between language, art, and struggles for liberation.

Gilyard's love for language is made evident through the memoir's rich and fluid prose, which moves seamlessly between multiple linguistic registers and modes. While detailing his own coming-of-age, Gilyard also provides arresting accounts of the lives that shaped his, honoring friends and mentors and thereby conserving the collective memory of a place and transformative moment in time.

*The Promise of Language* is a compelling memoir about how, in its author's words, "language shapes lives and...lives shape language."

BELLA MOSES

BIOGRAPHY



**Bright Circle**  
*Five Remarkable Women in the Age of Transcendentalism*

Randall Fuller, Oxford University Press  
(JAN 23) Hardcover \$27.99 (416pp)  
978-0-19-284363-0

Randall Fuller's history book *Bright Circle* reveals the often-overlooked women at the heart of Transcendentalism.

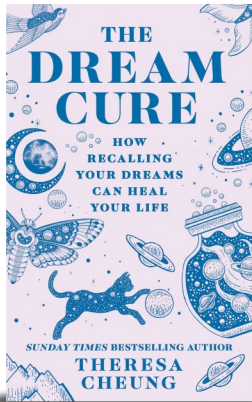
Focusing on the lives and works of a handful of extraordinary minds—Mary Moody Emerson, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, Sophia Peabody Hawthorne, Lydia Jackson Emerson, and Margaret Fuller—this collective biography charts the contributions of women to a distinctly American movement. At the center of the narrative are the communal conversations the women had with each other over a lifetime, spanning marriages, motherhood, and deep tragedy. These are unveiled in segmented chapters rich with primary sources, illustrations, and comprehensive footnotes.

*Bright Circle* digs behind the men's names most associated with Transcendentalism to show how women helped create the phenomena—but also how the movement's promises of progress ultimately failed its women, whose education society at large disapproved of.

Fuller's portrait of Mary Moody Emerson, who kept a journal of her thoughts on God, nature, contemporary intellectual currents, and her "ambitious program of reading," includes the surprising observation that her nephew, Ralph Waldo Emerson, sought out her writing to use in his sermons, "modeling his prose on hers." Elizabeth Peabody "was a prodigy" who coined the word *transcendentalism* in an essay. But it was Margaret Fuller who shook the foundations of Transcendentalism with the force of her seminar and writings, both of which were highly regarded by men and women alike. Her challenge to women of her time was prescient: she "pressed the women to think hard" and, if not happy in their lives, "to imagine better ones."

Filled with coruscating insights, *Bright Circle* reintroduces the women who helped create one of America's most exciting and progressive intellectual movements.

PEGGY KURKOWSKI



**The Dream Cure**  
How Recalling Your Dreams Can Heal Your Life

Theresa Cheung, Llewellyn Publications  
 (JAN 8) Softcover \$18.99 (288pp)  
 978-0-7387-8097-9

Theresa Cheung's self-help book *The Dream Cure* is full of practical guidance for mastering dream work.

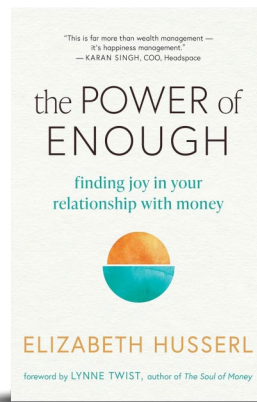
Cheung, who was once saved from a multi-car accident by following the memory of a dream, discusses the history of the craft in context. Dream work, the book notes, dates back to ancient Egypt and Greece: tablets reflect symbol analyses, and philosophers determined that a dreamer's perspective mattered in interpretation, respectively. *The Dream Cure* also acknowledges that dream science is murky, with no definitive, unanimous answers.

Referred to as "spontaneous spiritual revelations," dreams are more than just a thing that happens to people, the book posits. They are also problem-solvers, creativity hacks, stress busters, entertainers, and healers—if the dreamer pays attention. Five lessons are thus devoted to recalling and interpreting dreams, what to do with recurring dreams and nightmares, and how to design dreams. Within each lesson is an exhaustive list of common dream themes—being chased, drowning, falling, losing teeth—and analyses of what they could mean. At the end of the book comes a series of journal templates to aid in logging dreams.

While at times repetitive, the book is clear and casual, making use of common touch points like comparing dreams to episodes of a long-running television show to make the subject feel light and digestible. It also includes exercises throughout, such as reflecting on twenty nights of dreams (or the lack thereof) or meditating on dreams before bedtime. With its brief explanation of the sleep cycle, it educates on physical well-being, too.

A reference guide for dream work, *The Dream Cure* breaks down barriers to the practice with easy steps for uncovering what the unconscious mind wants to bring to the surface.

ASHLEY HOLSTROM



**The Power of Enough**  
Finding Joy in Your Relationship with Money

Elizabeth Husserl, New World Library  
 (JAN 7) Softcover \$19.95 (288pp)  
 978-1-60868-942-2

Elizabeth Husserl's personal finance guide, *The Power of Enough*, redefines wealth in terms of holistic well-being.

An invitation to transform one's relationship with money by embracing meaning and fulfillment, the book treats money as a social technology and spiritual guide. It encourages seeking understanding of the roots of one's dysfunctional relationship with money and defines wealth as "not about having everything, but rather about finding meaning in everything we have." There's guidance for unlocking the power of enough by "embodying wealth"—that is, experiencing wealth in their bodies, hearts, and minds through self-reflection and mindfulness. Here, a wealthy person is not one who has accumulated money or achieved traditional success but one who has lived a life of satiation and purpose.

The early chapters are theoretical and esoteric, featuring abstract concepts sans tangible takeaways. They allude to a "simple, three-step process" to embody wealth with recommendations to "recognize and appreciate each moment of meaning that nourishes you" and "digest these moments of meaning by integrating what nourishes you and releasing whatever your body doesn't need." But as the text proceeds, its recommendations become more concrete.

Interactive exercises and writing prompts ground the book, which is punctuated by "Mini Moments" of self-reflection and mindfulness practices like clenching and releasing one's fists to represent letting go of material things. Activities like creating a wealth mandala, tracing personal money memories, and holding conversations with money—one of the book's most innovative suggestions—encourage delving into one's individual relationships with money in order to transform them.

Earnest and unconventional, *The Power of Enough* is a holistic financial guide built on meaning, fulfillment, and embodied wealth.

HANNAH PEARSON

**No matter our psychological obstacles, all bodies need to move!**

*From popular authors, trainers, and podcast hosts Diana Hill and Katy Bowman*

Diana Hill, Ph.D.  
 Katy Bowman, M.S.

*I Know I Should Exercise But...*



**44 Reasons We Don't Move & How to Get Over Them**

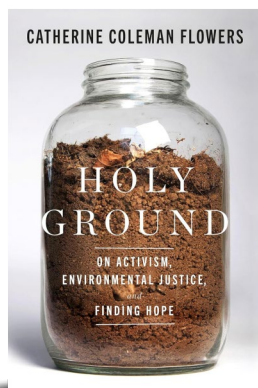
Publication date: March 4, 2025  
 ISBN: 978-1-943370-31-3  
 \$19.95 paperback

Self-help for anyone who just can't seem to get the movement their body needs

*"This book is brilliant. The most insightful guide to getting moving I've ever read."  
 -Kelly McGonigal, author of The Joy of Movement*



## ESSAYS



## Holy Ground On Activism, Environmental Justice, and Finding Hope

Catherine Coleman Flowers, Spiegel & Grau (JAN 28) Hardcover \$28 (240pp)  
978-1-954118-68-3

The lyrical, hard-hitting essays in Catherine Coleman Flowers's collection *Holy Ground* synthesize history, science, and faith.

The recipient of a MacArthur "Genius Grant" for her environmental activism, Flowers spent decades bringing people of diverse political persuasions together to collaborate for improvements in rural sanitation. **These essays cover places where the policies of the past impact the present and where climate change, greed, politics, and poverty intersect.** Connections between these elements are drawn with a deep understanding of history and a comprehensive knowledge of the science of sanitation. And beyond their intellectual engagement, the essays are further grounded by Flowers's resonant analyses of her past.

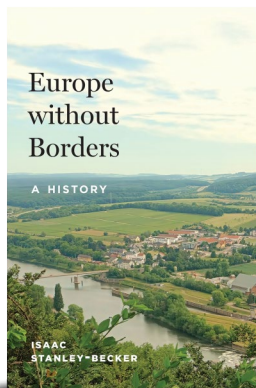
In "Migrations," Flowers covers her trip to the Climate Change Conference in Paris, which took place after she received the results of a DNA test and learned that she had French ancestors. In France, she experienced an eerie familiarity with the language and culture. Those feelings are considered alongside human migration data to capture similarities between people, followed by an assertion of interconnectedness and the idea that there's no escaping from the effects of climate change.

Elsewhere, a detailed history of Alabama's Black Belt, where Flowers grew up, is considered and connected to contemporary environmental travesties. Another essay connects the Supreme Court's *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* decision, which permits unlimited election contributions by megadonors, with the biblical story of Judas's betrayal of Jesus, transforming the thirty pieces of silver into a potent metaphor for contemporary corruption.

A courageous and intelligent essay collection, *Holy Ground* shares sobering facts to argue toward a better future.

MICHELE SHARPE

## HISTORY



## Europe without Borders A History

Isaac Stanley-Becker, Princeton University Press (JAN 14) Hardcover \$35 (416pp)  
978-0-691-26176-8

Steeped in original archival research, Isaac Stanley-Becker's *Europe without Borders* explores the complicated history of the campaign for a united, borderless Europe.

After the horrors of World War II, leaders from Western Europe agitated for the abolition of borders to guarantee long-term peace and cooperation through a "united Europe." The book traces the halting development of this ideal through several landmark but imperfect agreements, culminating in the Schengen Treaty in 1985. It established a space for free movement for European citizens within a designated area.

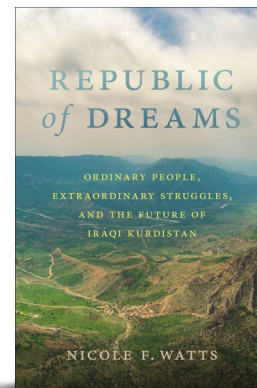
But even as the "Schengen Area" would expand to include most of the continent, irreconcilable tensions in the ideal of a "united Europe" remained, threatening to undo progress. The book identifies two specific threats: the creeping growth of a new transnational surveillance infrastructure and renewed hostility toward non-European migration. These threats, the book argues, created an uncertain future for the ideals of "free movement" in Europe and across the globe.

The book is rich in documentary detail, uncovering secret and often scandalous compromises that defined the treaty-making processes. It reveals, for instance, that the original Schengen treaty-makers produced a confidential list of "undesirable" nations whose citizens would be flagged upon entering. The book's narrative maintains a skillful interplay between the public rhetoric of policymakers and the private conflicts and outrages that hampered consensus from the very beginning. Even more effective, Stanley-Becker's reportage on the experiences of the "sans papiers" and other humans affected by these treaties injects a welcome shot of pathos into the narrative.

**Europe without Borders is a wide-ranging history of border reform that speaks to contemporary concerns.**

ISAAC RANDEL

## HISTORY



## Republic of Dreams Ordinary People, Extraordinary Struggles, and the Future of Iraqi Kurdistan

Nicole F. Watts, NYU Press (JAN 14)  
Hardcover \$35 (339pp), 978-1-4798-2306-2

The history of the Kurdish people's struggle for self-government is at the center of Nicole F. Watts's riveting book *Republic of Dreams*.

The modern countries of the Middle East were created when the Age of Empires came to an end during the early twentieth century. But one group of people was never given a country of their own: the Kurds. After decades of government persecution and oppression, the Kurds arrived at a semblance of self-government when they were granted autonomy over the Kurdish parts of Iraq at the end of the Iraq War.

**Based in Watts's field research in Iraqi Kurdistan between 2009 and 2024, the book tracks the Kurdish people's changing story.** Beginning with Saddam Hussein's gassing of the Iraqi city of Halabja in 1988, it focuses on a few survivors: Ahmed, Mahbubeh, and their children. The family ended up in a refugee camp in Iran. There, Mahbubeh gave birth to her son, Peshawa, whose life story serves as the book's framework. Through him, Watts reflects on events that the Kurdish people had little influence over but which affected them all the same: the Iran-Iraq War; the American invasion of Iraq; the creation of Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region; the advances of ISIS; and the political high-stakes game surrounding Kurdish claims to independence.

Written in a literary style, the text blurs the lines between history and hagiography, telling Peshawa's story in the hero's journey style. He traveled across the world to the United States and Dubai before landing in Ireland. And the near-mythological description of his birth underscores the overarching message that history is made up of ordinary people overcoming extraordinary odds.

*Republic of Dreams* is a history of the Kurdish people told through the heroic efforts of ordinary people who were determined to build lives on their own terms.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN



## ★ Wolf Act

AJ Romriell, University of Wisconsin Press (FEB 18) Softcover \$19.95 (168pp), 978-0-299-34994-3

The traumas and triumphs of a former Mormon's coming-out story are given theatrical accouterments in AJ Romriell's memoir *Wolf Act*.

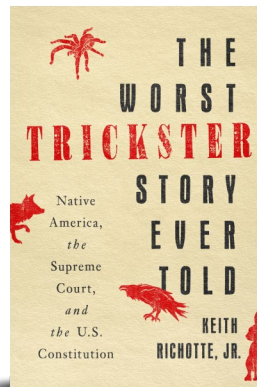
Enscorced in the ruse of a screenplay, the memoir recounts Romriell's arduous Mormon upbringing. His dawning recognition of his sexual orientation clashed with the church's theocratic foundations. His older brother's coming-out lurked in the background as Romriell plumbed the depths of his adolescent musings, his mental and spiritual lifelines in fairy tales, and his seeming kinship with the dynamic wolf (both the character and the canine).

Romriell's path was marked by an aborted missionary trip to Europe, during which the initial stirrings of his feeling at odds with the teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints percolated to unignorable levels. Later, he packed up and headed to Orlando with his husband for an internship with the Disney College Program; his marriage imploded, though. Other relationships burst and bloomed at the periphery of Romriell's late-dawning acceptance of himself. After years of self-evaluation, therapy, and experiences with gay dating apps, he was able to maneuver through his existential quandaries with poetic hindsight, highlighted by the supportive foundations of his family and friends.

*Wolf Act* thrives in its interactive and ingenious structuring. More than a simple coming-out memoir, the story volleys between lupine interludes, flashbacks that belie the comfort of chronology, and Romriell asking questions of his readers even as he seems to be rounding corners toward his emotional salvation. The chapter building is an inventive byproduct of his theater upbringing, creating a space for the story to build thoughtfully, even at its most scarring moments.

*Wolf Act* is a powerful memoir that serves as a reminder of the hidden wounds that individuals must reconcile themselves to in order to survive.

RYAN PRADO



## The Worst Trickster Story Ever Told

Native America, the Supreme Court, and the U.S. Constitution

Keith Richotte, Jr., Stanford University Press (FEB 11) Hardcover \$30 (296pp) 978-1-5036-4164-8

In *The Worst Trickster Story Ever Told*, Keith Richotte Jr. examines the legal history behind the federal government's assertions of authority over almost six hundred tribal nations.

This book exposes the fascinating, paradoxical way in which the the United States asserted limitless authority over once sovereign Native American nations. Its investigation begins in the early 1880s, examining court cases involving tribal conflicts that were brought before the Supreme Court. The court used them as opportunities to exert power over Native American tribes, which the justices often considered wards of the state in need of oversight. Such racist arguments also fed into Supreme Court rationales for plenary power, which drew upon the US Constitution too.

Throughout, the book balances edification with good humor, even poking fun at its own length. In addition to its thorough legal history, which is supported by copious, often witty footnotes, it examines Native American trickster stories in which sly supernatural beings intrude, resulting in moral and educational lessons, as they relate to the plenary power paradox. Indeed, an original trickster story frames much of the book's work: In it, a pale man (his name a string of references to colonization) stumbles upon a fireside party and begins to assume power over its attendees, growing in size and taking up space as he speaks. This startling conceit complements the book's observations about the bizarre arguments made to support the subjugation of tribal nations—and its ultimate recommendation: "Advocates and courts should confront exercises of federal authority ... with consent as the central tool of their analysis."

An illustrative legal history, *The Worst Trickster Story Ever Told* is about deceptive federal government efforts to amass limitless power over Native Americans.

JOHN M. MURRAY

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—JACK KORNFIELD

Healing from Trauma, Emerging through Collapse

**Kazu Haga**

**Mobilizing the Power to Stop Harm**

**Cultivating the Love to Heal It**

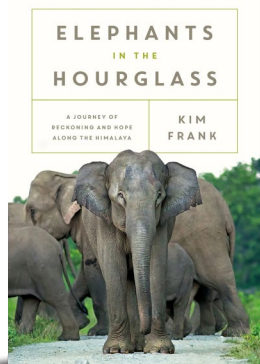
Discover a bold new approach to social change with this transformational guide for activists, organizers, and anyone yearning for connection in the face of conflict.

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Parallax Press



NATURE



## Elephants in the Hourglass

### A Journey of Reckoning and Hope Along the Himalaya

Kim Frank, Pegasus Books (JAN 7)  
 Hardcover \$28.99 (288pp)  
 978-1-63936-795-5

Nuanced, wise, and enthralling, *Elephants in the Hourglass* is Kim Frank's extraordinary memoir about her adventures investigating the plight of Asian elephants in northeast India—inquiries that run alongside accounts of personal healing.

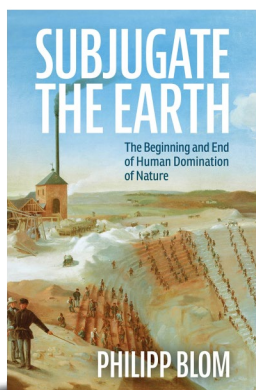
Sharp observations fill this powerful book that explains that Asian elephants, including those in the eastern Himalayas, are moving toward extinction at an exponential rate. While traveling the North Bengal region, Frank witnesses the fragmented habitats and other stressors affecting wild elephants that are “harassed, heckled, electrocuted, hit by trains and cars, desperate for fast nutrition and fighting to survive.” She also observes the compromised lives of captive working elephants. While government and volunteer organizations work to protect Asian elephants, Frank notes, funding is scarce; many efforts are hampered by widespread poverty, political unrest, limited education, and the loss of religious and cultural traditions that fostered reverence for these majestic animals.

Several courageous women are featured herein. Jody, a “globally savvy adventurer” and *National Geographic* photographer, joins Frank; Parbati Barua, a legendary elephant “whisperer,” leads the charge for Asian elephant protection. And Sonia Jabbar, a feisty, fearless “conservation rock star,” uses her Bengali tea estate as an elephant sanctuary. Descriptions of the mystical mountain views in Darjeeling, the traffic and smog of Siliguri, and monsoon rains, oppressive heat, and stinging ants of the jungle round the book out.

*Elephants in the Hourglass* is a captivating environmental memoir that addresses global issues related to technology, development, culture change, and gender roles in addition to examining the decline of an endangered species.

KRISTEN RABE

NATURE



## Subjugate the Earth

### The Beginning and End of Human Domination of Nature

Philipp Blom, Polity (JAN 28) Hardcover  
 \$29.95 (342pp), 978-1-5095-6132-2

*Subjugate the Earth* is Philipp Blom's insightful, timely, and ambitious survey of the history of ideas related to humanity's domination of nature.

Rigorous and comprehensive, the book examines a range of philosophical ideas related to humanity and nature—from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* to the “prophets” of Silicon Valley. Central throughout is the influence of Christianity and its “moral imperative conferred on humans” by a universal God. Although Western writers put their own spin on such ideas, most reinforced the message of subjugation, Blom shows.

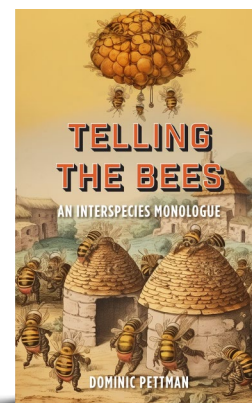
Analyzing Babylonian and biblical tales alongside the works of Plato, St. Augustine, Immanuel Kant, and Thomas Jefferson, Blom argues that ideas of subjugation, domination, and growth have been used to justify “holy” war, slavery, colonial expeditions, cruelty to animals, and the control of women and nature. In the twentieth century, the manipulation of nature accelerated, he shows, in the extraction of fossil fuels, industrial meat production, war machines, and the “messianic-theological” messages of technology leaders. The book links ideas of subjugation to catastrophic developments including climate change and the collapse of biodiversity, claiming that ingrained ideas could lead to humanity's destruction.

Thinkers who broke from the conventions of subjugation are emphasized in counter to these tendencies. Baruch Spinoza, for instance, called nature “an infinitely complex system whose laws are ignored and twisted by humans.” The insights of contemporary thinkers including Merlin Sheldrake, who focused on the interconnecting structures of mycelium and fungal network, are also cited.

*Subjugate the Earth* probes Western intellectual history to understand the ongoing implications of deep-seated human ideas about our place in nature.

KRISTEN RABE

NATURE



## Telling the Bees

### An Interspecies Monologue

Dominic Pettman, Fordham University Press (DEC 3) Softcover \$24.95 (192pp)  
 978-1-5315-0849-4

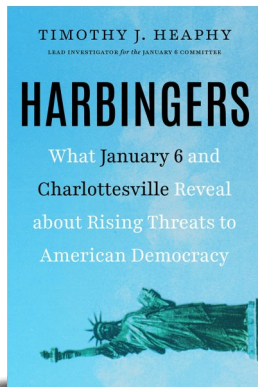
Made up of journal entries written between 2019 and 2023, *Telling the Bees* is Dominic Pettman's insightful, ironic, and brooding meditation on COVID-19, political unrest, technology, and urban isolation.

Writing from his New York City apartment during the COVID-19 shutdowns, the book considers how the pandemic changed the city and exacerbated the empty “pseudo-communication” associated with social media. Citing a long tradition in folklore as well as works by Maurice Maeterlinck, Pettman addresses his journal entries to the bees, which he describes as curious, intelligent, industrious, and highly social creatures sometimes viewed as “winged messengers of the gods.” His book includes several clever passages about bees' behaviors and social structures: for instance, Pettman contrasts the wintertime “hum-huddling” of bees in their hive with the anxious buzzing of humans in their “lonely home-combs” with a “million separating walls.”

Describing his “deepening sense of trepidation” and his craving for “new horizons,” Pettman finds comfort in these reflections on and odes to bees. He writes about meandering walks through the woods of the Ramble in Central Park, visits from a raven and a starling, and his practice of *qigong*, too. Believing that humans lost touch with the “essential texture of life” and true companionship, he describes global disorientation due to politics as well, covering the “reign” of Donald Trump (called the “Idiot King”), the January 6th insurrection on the Capitol, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and regressive Supreme Court rulings in addition to floods, shootings, and current events. He also reflects on his work as a college professor in New York and Amsterdam and his neighbors in various city apartments.

The memoir of a disillusioned academic who felt isolated during COVID-19 shutdowns, *Telling the Bees* is a searching, insightful, and witty text that offers catharsis aplenty.

KRISTEN RABE



## Harbingers What January 6 and Charlottesville Reveal About Rising Threats to American Democracy

Timothy J. Heaphy, Steerforth Press  
(DEC 31) Hardcover \$30 (288pp)  
978-1-58642-401-5

Timothy J. Heaphy, the lead investigator for the House Select Committee investigating the January 6, 2021, attack against democracy in the United States, shares important lessons from that experience in his fascinating, often disturbing political science expose *Harbingers*.

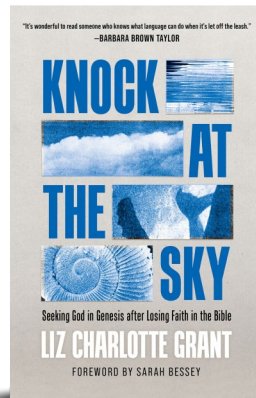
Heaphy combed through hundreds of texts, emails, interviews, and other communications to trace the origins of the armed attacks and understand how law enforcement officials failed to anticipate their scopes and prevent disaster.

“Our investigation would create the definitive account of this seminal event in American history,” he explains, stressing the importance of following the facts wherever they led. The book doesn’t rehash all of the investigations’ findings, but it explains how investigators went about their work and focuses on some key aspects of both. It describes in detail how domestic terrorist groups organized online, taking advantage of weak content moderation policies and encrypted messaging apps.

In terms of solutions, the book makes clear the importance of criminal and civil penalties for the perpetrators to deter future attacks. And it suggests a range of actions, from ways to better engage disaffected Americans in civic change to possible changes to Section 230, the part of the Communications Decency Law that limits the liability of social media platforms for content posted on them. Both findings and solutions are presented in a nonpartisan and straightforward manner that anyone interested in violence prevention should find useful.

At a time when political violence in the United States is becoming far too common, *Harbingers* offers important lessons about how it happens and what to do about it.

JEFF FLEISCHER



## Knock at the Sky Seeking God in Genesis after Losing Faith in the Bible

Liz Charlotte Grant, Wm. B. Eerdmans  
Publishing (JAN 7) Softcover \$26.99  
(272pp), 978-0-8028-8375-9

Incorporating a wide range of references to art, science, and religious history, *Knock at the Sky* is Liz Charlotte Grant’s beautiful, daring, sweeping interpretation of Genesis.

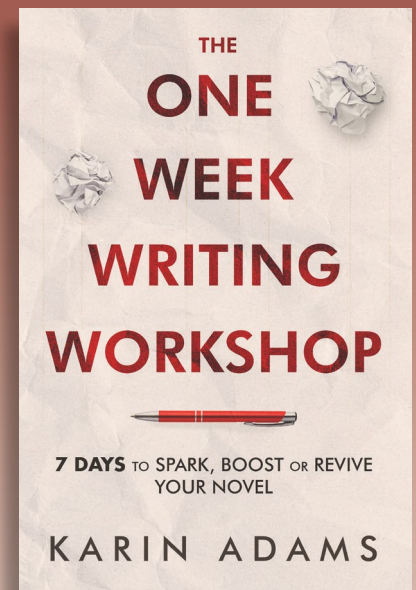
In this mesmerizing discussion of the biblical book, Grant explores connections between vastly different subjects, from Michelangelo to M.C. Escher, and questions assumptions about the inerrancy of scripture: “When we invite paradox, curiosity, and empathy to shape us, this ... act of wondering, opens us to mystery.” Astute and searching, Grant discloses that her favorite patriarch is Jacob, Abraham’s grandson, who wrestled with an angel or God.

Each chapter opens with an enigmatic Bible verse and a haunting montage of images. Grant cites a startling variety of stories and sources to illuminate key themes in Genesis. She compares the stirring, inscrutable song of humpback whales to the mystery of God in the creation story. She describes how the Bible resembles a fossil, “made of and by the humans who came before.” She admires the curiosity of astronomer Vera Rubin and compares the dark matter Rubin discovered to the “invisible stuff” of God’s presence. She suggests that John Cage’s perplexing music, which emphasizes listening and silence, is analogous to Abraham’s attention to God’s voice from the clouds. She explores the parallels between Hagar, the enslaved woman who bore Abraham a child, with the outsider fiber artist Judith Scott. She also addresses Noah, Sodom and Gomorrah, the Tower of Babel, Abraham’s call to sacrifice Issac, and other stories with insights that are evocative and surprising.

*Knock at the Sky* is an imaginative, inspiring exploration of Genesis. Defying conventional interpretations and searching for deeper links between ideas, Grant shifts from one revelation to the next in a seamless fashion, her prose precise, poetic, and inventive.

KRISTEN RABE

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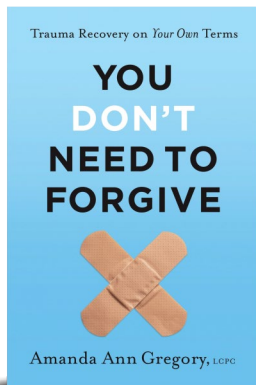
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SELF-HELP



[You Don't Need to Forgive](#)  
[Trauma Recovery on Your Own Terms](#)

Amanda Ann Gregory, Broadleaf Books  
(FEB 25) Hardcover \$26.99 (240pp)  
979-888983115-0

In *You Don't Need to Forgive*, trauma psychotherapist Amanda Ann Gregory challenges the assumption that forgiveness is a requirement for recovery.

Drawing on Gregory's dual experiences as a clinician and a survivor of childhood abuse and informed by a blend of research and expert interviews, the book treats forgiveness as an optional part of trauma recovery despite common therapeutic suggestions otherwise. It also exposes common actions that are mistaken for forgiveness, including condonation, rationalization, and event trauma responses. Corresponding advice for clinicians and survivors is included throughout.

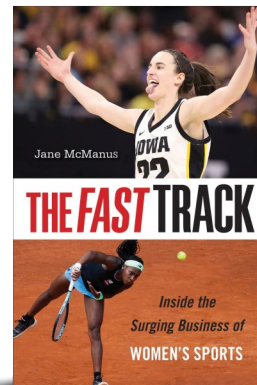
Gregory reviews clinical studies on forgiveness and trauma recovery herself. She uncovers significant limitations in the studies that inform forgiveness therapy and similar modalities. Biases in sample size, self-selection, location, and demographics call the therapeutic potential of forgiveness into serious question. The book includes an incisive critique of the potential physical and emotional dangers that forgiveness therapy poses to patients, especially when it is done without their full consent.

Reframing forgiveness as elective, Gregory notes that she never felt the urge to forgive her offenders. She also witnessed patients be pressured by forgiveness therapists to let go of complex or negative emotions toward their abusers at the risk of being dismissed from treatment. Instead of starting with forgiveness, she advises survivors to begin with establishing safety and shame reduction. She also advises clinicians to recognize a survivor's religious or cultural beliefs about forgiveness and shares advice from experts for incorporating these factors into a treatment plan.

*You Don't Need to Forgive* is a valuable resource for clinicians and patients that navigates questions of forgiveness with tact. It includes question sets to inspire reflection in its dual audiences throughout.

ANDY MINSHEW

SPORTS & RECREATION



[The Fast Track](#)  
[Inside the Surging Business of Women's Sports](#)

Jane McManus, Temple University Press  
(FEB 21) Hardcover \$30 (210pp)  
978-1-4399-2508-9

Fifty years of progress toward gender equity in sports is highlighted in sports media professor Jane McManus's smart, persuasive book *Fast Track*.

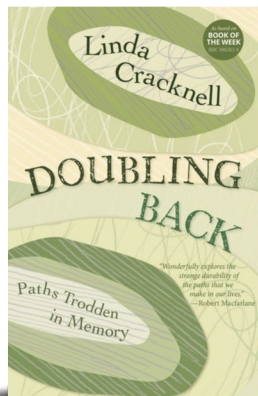
With insights from athletes and advocates, financiers, commentators, and analysts, the book includes a wealth of affecting stories, jaw-dropping statistics, and inside analysis about women's sports and their growing fan base. Its examination begins with tennis in the 1970s, set amid broader improvements for women in the US. Early chapters profile Billie Jean King, one of "the Original 9" professional women tennis players.

Newer equal pay advocates include Venus Williams and soccer star Megan Rapinoe. One kickass recent story comes from the WNBA in 2020. Playing in a bubble during the pandemic, the women of the Atlanta Dream leveraged the spotlight on their sport into support for a political candidate who they found better aligned with their values than the incumbent competition—who happened to be the team's own owner.

Importantly, other factors that work against women in sports are discussed, racism, homophobia, and expectations of femininity among them. One tellingly-titled section, "Your Budget is Your Values," analyzes how investors view women's versus men's sports. Women's teams fill seats and sell merchandise when they're given space to do so, it shows, yet macho advertisements create a cycle of male viewership, and internet searches about sports bring results about men's sports. In one anecdote, Pat Lowry of ESPN recalls changing the camera angles in order to showcase the athleticism in women's professional basketball, literally adjusting the way we see women athletes.

*Fast Track* is a superb recent history of women's sports and women's sports media that makes a strong argument for giving women's athletics the attention and funding they need.

MEREDITH GRAHL COUNTS



## Doubling Back Paths Trodden in Memory

Linda Cracknell, Saraband (FEB 4)  
Softcover \$17.95 (304pp)  
978-1-915089-90-8

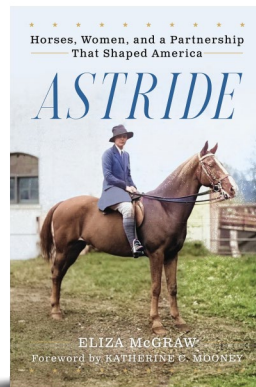
A fascinating, multifaceted collection of arm-chair treks, Linda Cracknell's travel memoir *Doubling Back* is about revisiting significant places on foot.

Cracknell's walks, undertaken sometimes solo and at other times with companions, took place over decades and across territories. She walked to maintain her mental health and fitness—among other reasons. On a visit to Boscastle, Cornwall, she traced a path trodden by Thomas Hardy and his then-future wife Emma, recalling her own teenage romance. Later, she considers the political significance and sensuality of walking barefoot in Kenya. Another essay details a grueling alpine climb meant to connect her to her father, who died in her early childhood before she had a chance to get to know him. A trip with pack ponies follows the route of long-ago drovers who were responsible for the safety of their animals. Over the course of these walks, relationships bloom and fade; Cracknell's body goes through various changes, as do her surroundings.

Divided into sections that are prefaced by short chapters set at a writing retreat in Switzerland, the text is interspersed with hand-drawn maps. Cracknell's impressive familiarity with landscapes and nature, and the precise language she uses to name and describe the flora and fauna in her path, makes her an amiable guide. Gaelic place names add texture to the prose. The book weaves historical and cultural details into recollections of her perambulations, too: When in Spain, for example, Cracknell noted a plausible relationship between book-making and path-making while considering the pluralism of ancient Toledo. And in the final walk detailed here, peat becomes a metaphor for aging.

*Doubling Back* is a travel memoir that's spiked with adventures and insights, reflecting back on inspired walks in various locales.

SUZANNE KAMATA



## Astride Horses, Women, and a Partnership That Shaped America

Eliza McGraw, University Press of Kentucky (JAN 14) Softcover \$30 (200pp)  
978-1-985901-28-5

Viewing movements toward women's equality through the lens of riding horses, Eliza McGraw's *Astride* is a charming history book.

At the turn of the twentieth century, just as horse-riding began to go out of fashion for society men, women entered the practice in ways that shocked Victorian sensibilities. The more brazen among them rejected sidesaddle riding; this way of "harking back to the Amazons classed riding astride into something unrestrained and aggressive," McGraw notes. Herein, this peculiar tension is treated as but one articulation of the greater struggles between tradition and women's equality that came to characterize the era:

*On horseback, women could be bigger, louder, faster, and stronger—all qualities riding already offered men.*

Whether it's focused on "confusing" cowgirls, women breeding racehorses, circus performers, fights for the humane treatment of work horses, or horse-riding suffragettes, the book centers women who together rode "into a future that seemed to have more possibilities than ... imagined even a few years before."

The book includes a wealth of historical photographs. Inez Milholland is pictured parading, proud and striking, through Washington, DC; transgressive performers Annie Oakley and Calamity Jane pose for their shows; and horses traipse through Central Park, carrying "high style" riders. A line from Emily Post indicates a turn toward "proper" riding, as does professional rider Belle Beach's contribution to *Vogue*. And while the book acknowledges that access to horses often required a degree of privilege, it takes pains to show where women without such means found their way in horse culture, too.

An esoteric but inviting history book, *Astride* covers feminist progress in the US via women's relationships to horses.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER ♥



## BORN IN SPACE

"A profound and full-bodied futuristic story of love, technology, and infinite outer space."

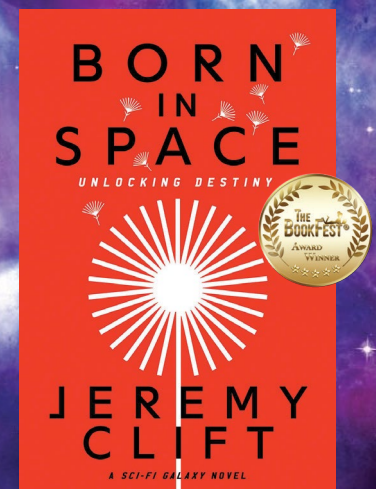
—Kirkus Reviews

"Works toward a breathless conclusion ... *Born in Space* is a lush science fiction allegory for the strength of a mother's love and the unbreakable bonds of family."

—Foreword Clarion Reviews

"A thrilling examination of motherhood, power, and the far-reaching consequences of ambition."

—The Prairies Book Review



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