

Reading Room

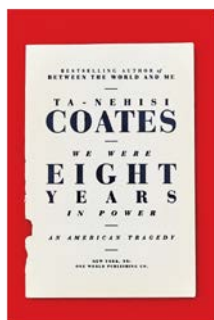
FEARLESS FICTION ♦ GLITTERING GIFT BOOKS ♦ PROVOCATIVE PROSE



ILLUSTRATION BY *Jeffrey Osborne*

▶▶ In the hands of our finest writers, themes as old as time—love, loss, the desire for something better—feel new. What astonishes us about **this year's best books** is their audacity, their inventiveness, and their ability to delight and devastate in equal measure. In a field rich with powerful voices, these spoke to us most urgently.

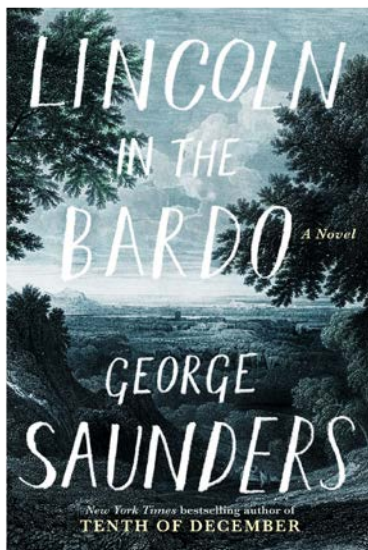
the **BEST** of 2017



We Were Eight Years in Power

by Ta-Nehisi Coates (One World)

Following Coates's National Book Award-winning epistolary tour de force, *Between the World and Me*, comes this essay collection that grapples with the specter of "Good Negro Government"—upstanding, accomplished black leadership—and how such government plays out in a racist society. In pieces he wrote during the two terms of the previous administration, Coates argues that "the symbolic power of Barack Obama's presidency... assaulted the most deeply rooted notions of white supremacy" and ignited a reactionary movement that gave rise to Trumpism. The author's intellectual fearlessness functions as a beacon.



Lincoln in the Bardo

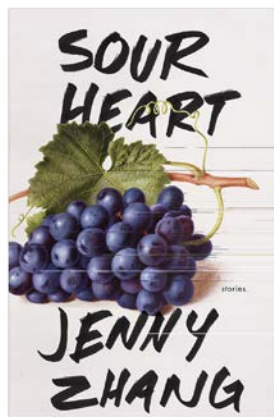
by George Saunders (Random House)

Grief guts us all, but rarely has it been elucidated with such nuance and brilliance as in Saunders's Civil War phantasmagoria. As the death toll escalates, Abraham Lincoln wanders the graveyard where his son Willie has just been buried. There he's haunted by a bevy of ghosts, including starched-collar clergymen, prim Victorian ladies, vengeful slaves, and Willie himself. Heartrending yet somehow hilarious, Saunders's zinger of an allegory holds a mirror to our perilous current moment.

Sour Heart

by Jenny Zhang (Lenny)

Wise, generous, and just the right amount of gross, this story collection heralds the arrival of a radical and irresistible literary voice. Mostly set in various New York apartments decidedly not up to code, these seven tales center on the unique ties that bind immigrant Chinese families—the us-versus-the-world relationships that buoy, suffocate, transform, and define the next generation. Although loving your kinfolk can be complicated, loving this astounding debut is a cinch.



Exit West

by Mohsin Hamid (Riverhead)

Fabulism worthy of Narnia blends seamlessly with the harsh actuality of the global refugee crisis in this beguiling saga. Young lovers who flee the chaos and carnage of an unnamed city are transported through a series of mystical doors toward safety—from Mykonos to London to California. And there's a moral to this gorgeously written fable: No matter who we are or where we're from, we are all "migrants through time."

Goodbye, Vitamin

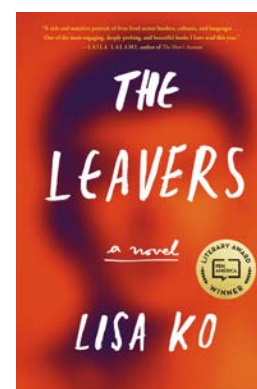
by Rachel Khong (Henry Holt)

Ruth, the rudderless 30-year-old of this food-obsessed diaristic novel, would make an excellent dinner companion. She'd choose perfect SoCal cheap eats, "put too much sake into [her] body," and give mordant voice to what ails her, from the stress of caring for her Alzheimer's-stricken father to the humiliation of being dumped by her fiancé. Khong's fiction debut comes as close to a meal with a friend as a book can—intimate, conspiratorial, good to the last morsel.

The Leavers

by Lisa Ko (Algonquin)

Here is imperative reading: a vivid fictional exploration of what it means to belong and what it feels like when you don't. In her central characters, an iron-willed undocumented Chinese immigrant and her American-born son, Ko gives us an unsparing portrait of the resilience and grit it takes to risk everything to break free of tradition and start over in a foreign land.

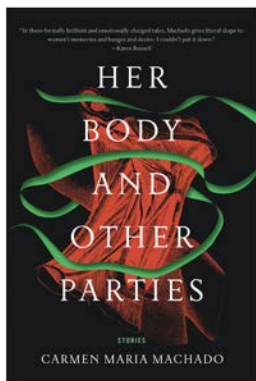


The Future Is History: How Totalitarianism Reclaimed Russia

by Masha Gessen (Riverhead)

Soviet-born activist and journalist Gessen has divided her professional life between Russia and America, writing with clarity and authority about subjects as varied as Vladimir Putin and Pussy Riot. In this deep dive into the lives of four young Russians as they come of age after Communism's fall, Gessen reveals why, instead of embracing democracy, the country turned back to the rule of strongmen. Her extraordinary reportage yields a cautionary tale about the vulnerability of freedom's institutions.





Her Body and Other Parties

by Carmen Maria Machado
(Graywolf)

Machado's work doesn't bend genre so much as explode it. Her first volume of stories mixes elements of surrealism, fairy tale, urban legend, and, in the case of "Especially Heinous," reimagined plots of *Law & Order: SVU*. Her women—victims, martyrs, and heroines—are both archetypal and entirely new. Filled with sex, horror, and the absurd, this singular collection will blow your mind.



There Are More Beautiful Things Than Beyoncé

by Morgan Parker (Tin House)

For avid poetry fans, this is a bold, indispensable entry into the contemporary canon. And if you haven't read verse since 12th-grade English class, know this: Morgan Parker is anything but a dead white male. Her most recent collection venerating black female power vibrates with mad, hot genius. And her language—raw, fierce—will shock you to life like a defibrillator on your soul.

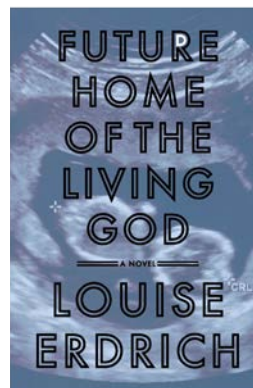
ILLUSTRATION: LUISA RIVERA



Future Home of the Living God

by Louise Erdrich (Harper)

Like Margaret Atwood, Erdrich is a seer, a visionary whose politics are inextricable from her fiction. Her latest book is an eerie masterpiece, a novel so prescient that though it conjures an alternate reality, it often provokes the feeling that, yes, *this is really happening*. Here, climate change has fundamentally modified our planet and its species. Creatures that don't belong in suburban backyards pop up there. Most women have been rendered infertile, and those who do manage to conceive are being rounded up and incarcerated. The story's heroine, 26-year-old Cedar Hawk Songmaker, is four months pregnant and therefore in great danger. Her white adoptive parents and the Ojibwe family she's recently connected with are her only hope to evade capture. In this dystopia, misogyny, greed, and religious zealotry combine to undermine not just a woman's safety but a society's freedom. Yet even under these dire circumstances, the human spirit still burns, incandescent.



The Hate U Give

by Angie Thomas (Balzer + Bray)

"What society gives us as youth, it bites them in the ass when we wild out," says Khalil to his friend Starr, the protagonist, just before the cops pull them over and Khalil is shot dead. This is among the indelible scenes in Thomas's National Book Award-nominated, rap-infused anthem, a wholly original novel that channels the outrage of all who experience racial injustice and police brutality, and that will stand as a modern young adult classic.

—NATALIE BEACH, HAMILTON CAIN, LEIGH HABER, CLAIRE LUCHETTE

READ
IT FORWARD

THE ANNOTATED SHERLOCK HOLMES

by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

"I love the way Holmes reasons through his cases, using the tiniest details to reveal the larger story. I read all the Sherlock stories and novels during my senior year at Yale, and they still remind me of that time. Oh, and it's cool that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was a doctor and based Holmes on one of his med school professors. I used to be premed!"

—HENRY LOUIS GATES JR., 100
AMAZING FACTS
ABOUT THE NEGRO

OUR ANIMAL FRIENDS AT MAPLE HILL FARM

written and illustrated
by Alice and Martin
Provinsen

"This beautiful, funny, unsentimentally moving children's book is set in rural Vermont. My wife and I routinely give it as a gift to new parents. We love that none of the Provinsen's dogs or goats or cows are cutesy; none of them talk. But the authors' simple observations on the temper of geese, the laziness of certain horses, the vanity of some cats show them to be true characters. The book was written more than 40 years ago and concludes with a touching inventory of the animal friends that have passed. This may be seen as controversial to those who feel kids should be shielded from any knowledge of death. But I find its message to be luminous with the beauty and fragility of life."

—JOHN HODGMAN,
VACATIONLAND

▶▶ This **quintet of gift books** can't be surpassed for the sublime pleasures they offer, visual and otherwise.



Since he first began taking pictures of his Weimaraner, Man Ray, in 1970, Wegman has adorned his canine models in kimonos and hockey uniforms, crowned them with wigs and hats, and set them atop cubist sculpture. Are the dogs in on the joke? Doesn't matter. Wegman confirms what we all know to be true: "Dogs are people too."



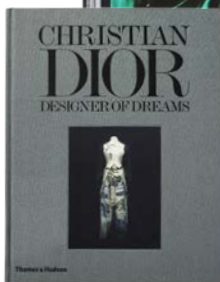
READ
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"This book of poems, published just after 9/11, is a salve for the soul. Clifton speaks to our collective pain as a nation as well as the hurts we nurture within ourselves. Even people who think they don't like poetry find comfort and hope in her gorgeous words."

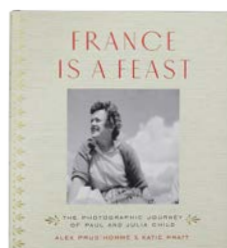
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"A bygone New York has been very much in vogue in TV and books as of late, but *Emma* is as much a universal coming-of-age story as a very specific tale about New York from the mid-'70s to the early '80s. Plus, it's just flat-out hilarious. Gil moves to New York to try to become an actor and falls under the spell of Emma, one of his roommates. I love it because it's not overtly nostalgic, yet it also doesn't require Gil to disavow his younger self."

The “bar suit,” a design inspired by habituées of Paris’s Hôtel Plaza Athénée. The “Maxim’s,” worn by Rita Hayworth, seductively photographed by Horst. The “flower-woman” gown, glittering with petal-covered cinolines. This coffee table book celebrating 70 years of the iconic fashion house is so sumptuous, it’s as if the reader gets to play dress-up with the most luscious clothes ever made.



When did the legendary chef fall in love with French cooking and the country that produces it? Her husband's Edward Weston—influenced images (contextualized by grandnephew Prud'homme) serve up the couple's joyful journey, sampling life, going "from cloud to cloud," savoring it all. And for those who think of Julia Child as more gawky than sensual, prepare to stand corrected. These are a lover's images, and Child the radiant muse.



This ravishing story collection showcases the author's linguistic versatility and Twainesque humor with which he brings to life a universe of characters—among them a toy collector in search of a train made for the son of Robert E. Lee and a menagerie of zoo animals who engage in "Thought Speak." —**L.H. AND H.C.**

