

# New York Times

## 100 Notable Books of 2011

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### FICTION & POETRY

\***THE ANGEL ESMERALDA: Nine Stories.** By Don DeLillo. (Scribner, \$24.) DeLillo's first collection of short fiction, compiling stories written between 1979 and 2011, serves as a liberating reminder that terror existed long before there was a war on it.

\***THE ART OF FIELDING.** By Chad Harbach. (Little, Brown, \$25.99.) This allusive, Franzen-like first novel, about a gifted but vulnerable baseball player, proceeds with a handsome stateliness.

**THE BARBARIAN NURSERIES.** By Héctor Tobar. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$27.) A big, insightful novel about social and ethnic conflict in contemporary Los Angeles.

**BIG QUESTIONS. Or, Asomatognosia: Whose Hand Is It Anyway?** Written and illustrated by Anders Brekhus Nilsen. (Drawn & Quarterly, cloth, \$69.95; paper, \$44.95.) In this capacious, metaphysically inclined graphic novel, a flock of finches act out Nilsen's unsettling comic vision about the food chain, fate and death.

\***THE BUDDHA IN THE ATTIC.** By Julie Otsuka. (Knopf, \$22.) Through a chorus of narrators, Otsuka unfurls the stories of Japanese women who came to America in the early 1900s to marry men they'd never met.

**CANTI.** By Giacomo Leopardi. Translated by Jonathan Galassi. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$35.) With this English translation, Leopardi may at last become as important to American literature as Rilke or Baudelaire.

\***THE CAT'S TABLE.** By Michael Ondaatje. (Knopf, \$26.) Ondaatje grants that this novel, about three daring Ceylonese schoolboys on a sea journey to England, sometimes uses the “coloring and locations of memoir.”

\***CHANGÓ'S BEADS AND TWO-TONE SHOES.** By William Kennedy. (Viking, \$26.95.) In Kennedy's most musical work of fiction, a newspaperman attains a cynical old-pro objectivity as Albany's political machine pulls out the stops to head off a race riot in 1968.

**COME ON ALL YOU GHOSTS.** By Matthew Zapruder. (Copper Canyon, paper, \$16.) Much of the poetry here, displaying a consistent stillness and confidence, is the strongest of Zapruder's career.

\***11/22/63.** By Stephen King. (Scribner, \$35.) A meditation on memory, loss, free will and necessity, King's novel sends a teacher back to 1958 by way of a time portal in a Maine diner. His assignment is to stop Lee Harvey Oswald — but first he must make sure of Oswald's guilt.

\***THE FREE WORLD.** By David Bezmozgis. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$26.) Bezmozgis overturns clichéd expectations of immigrant idealism in his first novel, which follows a Soviet Jewish family awaiting visas in Rome in 1978.

**GHOST LIGHTS.** By Lydia Millet. (Norton, \$24.95.) Millet sends an I.R.S. agent on a mission to a Central American jungle, providing a fascinating glimpse of what can happen when the self's rhythms and certainties are shaken.

\***THE GRIEF OF OTHERS.** By Leah Hager Cohen. (Riverhead, \$26.95.) Complex but fundamentally decent characters hurt one another and are hurt by forces greater than themselves, as a family sinks beneath the weight of a terrible secret.

**GRYPHON: New and Selected Stories.** By Charles Baxter. (Pantheon, \$27.95.) Beneath the shadowless Norman Rockwell contours of Baxter's Midwest lurks a chilling starkness and sense of isolation reminiscent of the bleakly beautiful work of Edward Hopper.

\***HOUSE OF HOLES: A Book of Raunch.** By Nicholson Baker. (Simon & Schuster, \$25.) Hilarious and extremely dirty, this episodic assortment of fantasies — part Plato's Retreat, part Fantasy Island — celebrates desire, frailty and the comedy of life.

**THE LAST WEREWOLF.** By Glen Duncan. (Knopf, \$25.95.) A wry, world-weary and hyper-articulate werewolf, morally as well as physically ambiguous, is tortured by the spirits of his victims and ready to surrender to his pursuers.

\***THE LEFTOVERS.** By Tom Perrotta. (St. Martin's, \$25.99.) In this novelistic version of the biblical prophecy known as the Rapture, Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims as well as Christians mysteriously disappear.

**LIFE ON MARS.** By Tracy K. Smith. (Graywolf, paper, \$15.) Smith's impressive range is on full display in her third poetry collection, in which she mourns her father, who worked on the Hubble Telescope.

**THE LONDON TRAIN.** By Tessa Hadley. (Harper Perennial, paper, \$14.99.) Hadley's artfully constructed, socially realistic novel is split between two characters who react in opposite ways to their old affair.

**LONG, LAST, HAPPY: New and Selected Stories.** By Barry Hannah. (Grove, \$27.50.) Hannah, who died last year, had a refined eye for the outrageous; this collection shows he retained full command of his powers to the end of his life.

\***LOST MEMORY OF SKIN.** By Russell Banks. (Ecco/HarperCollins, \$25.99.) This novel, about a paroled sex offender, bravely tries to find humanity in people whom society often despises.

\***THE MARRIAGE PLOT.** By Jeffrey Eugenides. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$28.) Eugenides adeptly renders the patter of college intellectuals and the sweet banter of courtship, and is particularly astute on the uncertainties awaiting after graduation.

**A MOMENT IN THE SUN.** By John Sayles. (McSweeney's, \$29.) Sayles's reimagining of America at the turn of the last century nods to both Harriet Beecher Stowe and Thomas Pynchon.

\***MR. FOX.** By Helen Oyeyemi. (Riverhead, \$25.95.) This playful tale is presented in the alternating voices of a slasher novelist, his wife and his muse, the last of whom urges the writer to embrace intimacy over violence and death.

\***MY NEW AMERICAN LIFE.** By Francine Prose. (HarperCollins, \$25.99.) Prose's sardonic novel of a young Albanian immigrant in New Jersey sets America in high relief, mordant and comic, light and dark.

\***1Q84**. By Haruki Murakami. Translated by Jay Rubin and Philip Gabriel. (Knopf, \$30.50.) This voluminous novel, set in 1984, is simultaneously a mystery, a love story and a dystopian fantasy that raises questions of psychology and ethics.

\***OPEN CITY**. By Teju Cole. (Random House, \$25.) The peripatetic hero of Cole's indelible novel reflects on his adopted New York, the Africa of his youth, today's America and a Europe wary of its future.

\***THE PALE KING: An Unfinished Novel**. By David Foster Wallace. (Little, Brown, \$27.99.) Unfolding on an epic scale, this coherent, if uncompleted, portrayal of our age is a grand parable of "late capitalism," set in the innards of the Internal Revenue Service.

\***PARALLEL STORIES**. By Peter Nadas. Translated by Imre Goldstein. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$40.) This nearly 1,200-page novel opens in 1989 and is centered, roughly, on a Budapest apartment building whose residents have been trapped in the torpor of Communist tyranny.

\***SAY HER NAME**. By Francisco Goldman. (Grove, \$24.) Goldman's passionate, moving narrative takes as its subject his tragically short marriage to the writer Aura Estrada, who died in a bodysurfing accident in 2007, when she was 30.

\***SCENES FROM VILLAGE LIFE**. By Amos Oz. Translated by Nicholas de Lange. (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, \$22.) In these powerful linked stories of longing and disappointment, Oz returns to a spare, almost allegorical style.

\***THE SENSE OF AN ENDING**. By Julian Barnes. (Knopf, \$25.) In this Booker Prize winner, an unexpected bequest forces a man to re-evaluate his relationships, present and past.

\***SEVEN YEARS**. By Peter Stamm. Translated by Michael Hofmann. (Other Press, paper, \$15.95.) Stamm's protagonist, an aspiring architect in 1980s Germany, wanders between his charming, frigid wife and plain but devoted mistress.

\***SHARDS**. By Ismet Prcic (Black Cat/Grove/Atlantic, paper, \$14.99.) The Bosnian hero of Prcic's absorbing and unsettling first novel is shattered by war.

**SPACE, IN CHAINS.** By Laura Kasischke. (Copper Canyon, paper, \$16.) What may be the most ambitious, and disturbing, of Kasischke's eight books of poems strives to comprehend first and last things.

\***STONE ARABIA.** By Dana Spiotta. (Scribner, \$24.) A faded heroine struggles with the loss of her brother, an unrecognized rock star, in this acerbic and deeply sad narrative.

\***THE STRANGER'S CHILD.** By Alan Hollinghurst. (Knopf, \$27.95.) Hollinghurst's sharply drawn novel tells the story of relatives and scholars grappling with the legacy of a Rupert Brooke-like poet killed during World War I.

\***THE SUBMISSION.** By Amy Waldman. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$26.) This resonant and darkly comic novel, by a former New York Times journalist, imagines an uproar over a proposed Sept. 11 memorial.

\***SWAMPLANDIA!** By Karen Russell. (Knopf, \$24.95.) Russell's exuberant first novel, an expansion of her story "Ava Wrestles the Alligator," concerns the pleasures and miseries of life in a failing theme park in the Everglades.

**TALLER WHEN PRONE: Poems.** By Les Murray. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$24.) Viscerally smoldering anger, the signature quality of Murray's poetry, turns conventional pieties inside out.

\***TEN THOUSAND SAINTS.** By Eleanor Henderson. (Ecco/HarperCollins, \$26.99.) Henderson's fierce, elegiac novel follows a group of friends, lovers, parents and children through the straight-edge music scene and the early days of the AIDS epidemic.

\***THIS BEAUTIFUL LIFE.** By Helen Schulman. (Harper/HarperCollins, \$24.99.) A family's Manhattan life comes apart when their 15-year-old forwards a sexually explicit video made for him, unsolicited, by a girl two years younger.

\***THE TIGER'S WIFE.** By Téa Obreht. (Random House, \$25.) In her first novel, Obreht uses fable and allegory to illustrate the complexities of Balkan history, unearthing the region's patterns of suspicion, superstition and everyday violence.

\***THE TRAGEDY OF ARTHUR.** By Arthur Phillips. (Random House, \$26.) Phillips's splendidly devious novel consists of a Shakespearean play of his own

virtuosic creation and an “introduction” that devastatingly reveals the psychological life of its author.

**TRAIN DREAMS.** By Denis Johnson. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$18.) The taming of the American West is encompassed in Johnson’s novella, whose orphaned hero is sent by train in the 1890s into the woods of the Idaho panhandle.

## **NONFICTION**

\***AND SO IT GOES. Kurt Vonnegut: A Life.** By Charles J. Shields. (Holt, \$30.) From Dresden to his mother’s suicide, the early death of a beloved sister, serial unhappy marriages and literary anxiety, Vonnegut earned his status as Man of Sorrows, as this diligent and often heartbreaking biography shows.

\***ARGUABLY: Essays.** By Christopher Hitchens. (Twelve, \$30.) Hitchens’s esophageal cancer inevitably throws a shadow over this spirited, provocative, prodigiously witty collection.

**THE ART OF CRUELTY: A Reckoning.** By Maggie Nelson. (Norton, \$24.95.) Nelson examines representations of violence in the media, largely aiming her laments high up the cultural ladder — at the fine arts, literature, theater and even poetry.

**ASSASSINS OF THE TURQUOISE PALACE.** By Roya Hakakian. (Grove, \$25.) In gripping style, Hakakian recounts the 1992 killings of four Iranian opposition members in Berlin, which ultimately implicated the top levels of Iran’s leadership.

**THE BEGINNING OF INFINITY: Explanations That Transform the World.** By David Deutsch. (Viking, \$30.) Deutsch’s inexhaustibly curious exploration of the nature and progress of knowledge pivots on the European Enlightenment.

**BELIEVING IS SEEING: Observations on the Mysteries of Photography.** By Errol Morris. (Penguin Press, \$40.) The filmmaker is chiefly interested here in the nature of knowledge, in figuring out where the truth lies.

\***THE BETTER ANGELS OF OUR NATURE: Why Violence Has Declined.** By Steven Pinker. (Viking, \$40.) Are humans essentially good or

bad? Has the past century seen moral progress or moral collapse? Pinker addresses these questions and more.

**\*BLOOD, BONES AND BUTTER: The Inadvertent Education of a Reluctant Chef.** By Gabrielle Hamilton. (Random House, \$26.) This memoir by the chef at the Manhattan restaurant Prune is a story of hungers specific and vague.

**\*BLUE NIGHTS.** By Joan Didion. (Knopf, \$25.) Mourning the 2005 death of her daughter, Didion presents herself as defenseless against the pain of loss in this elegantly written memoir.

**\*THE BOY IN THE MOON: A Father's Journey to Understand His Extraordinary Son.** By Ian Brown. (St. Martin's, \$24.99.) The truth Brown learns from his severely disabled child is a rare one: the life that seems to destroy you is the one you long to embrace.

**CARAVAGGIO: A Life Sacred and Profane.** By Andrew Graham-Dixon. (Norton, \$39.95.) Caravaggio's painting was deeply affected by the squalor, violence and energy of Roman street life.

**\*CATHERINE THE GREAT: Portrait of a Woman.** By Robert K. Massie. (Random House, \$35.) Massie provides a sweeping narrative about the impressive minor German princess who became empress of Russia.

**CLARENCE DARROW: Attorney for the Damned.** By John A. Farrell. (Doubleday, \$32.50.) In this biography, Darrow's unsavory side is on view, from his personal callousness to his purchasing of testimony.

**\*COCKTAIL HOUR UNDER THE TREE OF FORGETFULNESS.** By Alexandra Fuller. (Penguin Press, \$25.95.) Fuller's mother is the star of this funny and affecting memoir, a companion to "Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight."

**\*DESTINY OF THE REPUBLIC: A Tale of Madness, Medicine, and the Murder of a President.** By Candice Millard. (Doubleday, \$28.95.) A deranged man shot James Garfield, but it was his incompetent doctors who killed him.

**\*THE ECSTASY OF INFLUENCE: Nonfictions, Etc.** By Jonathan Lethem. (Doubleday, \$27.95.) Lethem's extraliterary enthusiasms are all over this hefty

collection, which includes essays on film, comics, music, Brooklyn and, of course, fiction.

**\*1861: The Civil War Awakening.** By Adam Goodheart. (Knopf, \$28.95.) In this account of the war's first stage, Goodheart turns his lens upon fascinating figures who loomed large at the time but have now been mostly forgotten.

**EXAMINED LIVES: From Socrates to Nietzsche.** By James Miller. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$28.) Miller shows philosophers becoming ever more inclined to reflect on their own petty failings, and suggests this makes their lives more, not less, worth studying.

**\*1493: Uncovering the New World Columbus Created.** By Charles C. Mann. (Knopf, \$30.50.) This follow-up to "1491" argues that ecological encounters since Columbus have shaped much of subsequent human history.

**GEORGE F. KENNAN: An American Life.** By John Lewis Gaddis. (Penguin Press, \$39.95.) Gaddis has written a magisterial biography of the man who both invented the cold war policy of containment and was one of its most perspicacious critics.

**\*GREAT SOUL: Mahatma Gandhi and His Struggle With India.** By Joseph Lelyveld. (Knopf, \$28.95.) While many of Gandhi's aspirations (a Muslim-Hindu alliance, a full end to untouchability) remain largely unfulfilled, it is his role as a social reformer that most interests Lelyveld.

**HARLEM IS NOWHERE: A Journey to the Mecca of Black America.** By Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts. (Little, Brown, \$24.99.) A Harlem transplant documents her own and others' experiences there, working not to define the neighborhood, but to revise received ideas.

**HOLY WAR: How Vasco da Gama's Epic Voyages Turned the Tide in a Centuries-Old Clash of Civilizations.** By Nigel Cliff. (Harper/HarperCollins, \$29.99.) The Portuguese explorer hoped to find Christians in India and enlist them in an alliance against Islam.

**\*IN THE GARDEN OF BEASTS: Love, Terror, and an American Family in Hitler's Berlin.** By Erik Larson. (Crown, \$26.) The experiences of the ambassador William E. Dodd and his lusty daughter, Martha.

**\*INFERNO: The World at War, 1939-1945.** By Max Hastings. (Knopf, \$35.) Hastings has a sober, unromantic and realistic view of battle that puts him in a different category from the armchair generals whose gung-ho attitude to war fills the pages of so many military histories.

**\*THE INFORMATION: A History. A Theory. A Flood.** By James Gleick. (Pantheon, \$29.95.) Gleick argues that information is more than just the contents of our libraries and Web servers: human consciousness, life on earth, the cosmos — it's bits all the way down.

**INSIDE SCIENTOLOGY: The Story of America's Most Secretive Religion.** By Janet Reitman. (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, \$28.) Reitman has rendered the most complete picture of Scientology so far.

**IS THAT A FISH IN YOUR EAR? Translation and the Meaning of Everything.** By David Bellos. (Faber & Faber, \$27.) Against the orthodox view that a translation can't substitute for the original, a scholar argues that the two need not be the same, but only similar.

**\*JERUSALEM: The Biography.** By Simon Sebag Montefiore. (Knopf, \$35.) Three thousand years, packed with telling detail, in the life of the holy city.

**THE KEATS BROTHERS: The Life of John and George.** By Denise Gigante. (Belknap/Harvard University, \$35.) A Stanford professor's clever pairing of the lives of the poet Keats and his brother, who emigrated to the American backcountry.

**KNOCKING ON HEAVEN'S DOOR: How Physics and Scientific Thinking Illuminate the Universe and the Modern World.** By Lisa Randall. (Ecco/HarperCollins, \$29.99.) A Harvard professor meditates on the nature of science and where physics is headed.

**\*MALCOLM X: A Life of Reinvention.** By Manning Marable. (Viking, \$30.) This careful biography presents a more complete and unvarnished version of its subject's life than the one found in "The Autobiography."

**\*THE MEMORY CHALET.** By Tony Judt. (Penguin Press, \$25.95.) Before Judt died last year of a disease that left him clearheaded but immobile, he dictated these vivid autobiographical sketches, the best of which recall life in his native England.

**\*MIDNIGHT RISING: John Brown and the Raid That Sparked the Civil War.** By Tony Horwitz. (Holt, \$29.) One of America's most troubling historical figures is the subject of Horwitz's deft narrative.

**MOBY-DUCK: The True Story of 28,800 Bath Toys Lost at Sea and of the Beachcombers, Oceanographers, Environmentalists, and Fools, Including the Author, Who Went in Search of Them.** By Donovan Hohn. (Viking, \$27.95.) Where those rubber toys came from, where they drifted, and why.

**\*MY SONG: A Memoir.** By Harry Belafonte with Michael Shnayerson. (Knopf, \$30.50.) The international calypso star, actor and mainstay of the civil rights movement recalls his life.

**THE NET DELUSION: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom.** By Evgeny Morozov. (PublicAffairs, \$27.95.) In this challenging and often contrarian book, Morozov explores how the Internet is used to constrict or even abolish political freedom.

**ONE DAY I WILL WRITE ABOUT THIS PLACE: A Memoir.** By Binyavanga Wainaina. (Graywolf, \$24.) The author describes fiction as his refuge from the confusing realities of politics and adolescence in his native Kenya.

**THE ORIGINS OF POLITICAL ORDER: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution.** By Francis Fukuyama. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$35.) What countries are capable of "getting to Denmark"? Fukuyama's answer emphasizes the role of contingency.

**\*PAULINE KANEL: A Life in the Dark.** By Brian Kellow. (Viking, \$27.95.) Kellow's is a fair-minded and deeply reported biography of the provocative and maddening writer whose essays about movies transformed American pop-culture criticism.

**PULPHEAD.** By John Jeremiah Sullivan. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, paper, \$16.) These thrumming, intelligent magazine essays highlight Sullivan's interest in the rare cultural nexus where genuine artistry intersects with commercial popularity.

**\*THE QUEST: Energy, Security, and the Remaking of the Modern World.** By Daniel Yergin. (Penguin Press, \$37.95.) This comprehensive study makes clear that energy policy is not on the right course anywhere.

**RIGHTS GONE WRONG: How Law Corrupts the Struggle for Equality.** By Richard Thompson Ford. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$27.) The Stanford professor argues that the progressive left and the colorblind right are guilty of the same error: defining discrimination too abstractly and condemning it too categorically, with similarly perverse results.

\***RIN TIN TIN: The Life and the Legend.** By Susan Orlean. (Simon & Schuster, \$26.99.) How the soulful German shepherd, born on a World War I battlefield, conquered Hollywood and became a familyfriendly symbol of cold war gunslinging.

[**SIC**]: **A Memoir.** By Joshua Cody. (Norton, \$24.95.) A young composer's account of his cancer sidesteps the issue of sentimentality by mocking it, in prose bright and jazzy and meandering.

\***THE STORM OF WAR: A New History of the Second World War.** By Andrew Roberts. (Harper/HarperCollins, \$29.99.) In a clear, accessible account of the war in all its theaters, Roberts asks how the Wehrmacht, the best fighting force, wound up losing.

\***THE SWERVE: How the World Became Modern.** By Stephen Greenblatt. (Norton, \$26.95.) The legacy of the Roman poet Lucretius, and the Renaissance book hunter who saved his great poem from oblivion.

\***THINKING, FAST AND SLOW.** By Daniel Kahneman. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$30.) Kahneman, a psychologist who won the Nobel in economic science in 2002, presents a lucid and profound vision of flawed human reason in a book full of intellectual surprises and self-help value.

**TO A MOUNTAIN IN TIBET.** By Colin Thubron. (Harper/HarperCollins, \$24.99.) Weighed down by grief after the death of his mother, the author makes a pilgrimage to Mount Kailas, venerated by Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and others.

\***TO END ALL WARS: A Story of Loyalty and Rebellion, 1914-1918.** By Adam Hochschild. (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, \$28.) This stirring account concentrates on the appalling losses in the ranks and on the courage of those who decided the war in Europe was not a just one.

\***A TRAIN IN WINTER: An Extraordinary Story of Women, Friendship, and Resistance in Occupied France.** By Caroline Moorehead.

(Harper/HarperCollins, \$27.99.) Moorehead meticulously traces the fates of 230 Frenchwomen sent to Auschwitz as political prisoners of the Reich.

**\*VAN GOGH: The Life.** By Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith. (Random House, \$40.) Was Van Gogh a high-I.Q. aesthete or an earnest simpleton? A frugal bohemian or a big spender? A man who took his own life or a man who was murdered? This hulking and energetic biography complicates the picture.

**WHO'S AFRAID OF POST-BLACKNESS? What It Means to Be Black Now.** By Touré. (Free Press, \$25.) The author's interviews with 105 prominent African-Americans suggest that today's "black identity" has cleared the way to a liberating pursuit of individuality.

**WHY THE WEST RULES — FOR NOW: The Patterns of History, and What They Reveal About the Future.** By Ian Morris. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$35.) A Stanford historian argues that we face an immediate choice — East-West cooperation or catastrophe.

**\*A WORLD ON FIRE: Britain's Crucial Role in the American Civil War.** By Amanda Foreman. (Random House, \$35.) While Union and Confederate guns blazed, a battle was also being waged for English hearts and minds, at both the elite and popular levels.