

## Nonfiction (scroll down for fiction)

**REIGN OF TERROR: How the 9/11 Era Destabilized America and Produced Trump**, by *Spencer Ackerman*. (*Viking*.) Spencer Ackerman contends that the American response to 9/11 made President Trump possible. He presents the evidence for this thesis with an impressive combination of diligence and verve, guiding us through two decades and showing how any prospect of national unity in response to 9/11 buckled under the incoherence of the wars that followed. The resulting narrative, our critic Jennifer Szalai wrote, is “upsetting, discerning and brilliantly argued.”

**TRAVELING BLACK: A Story of Race and Resistance**, by *Mia Bay*. (*The Belknap Press of Harvard University*.) In this superb history, the question of literal movement becomes a way to understand the civil rights movement writ large. “Once one of the most resented forms of segregation, travel segregation is now one of the most forgotten,” Bay writes. Szalai wrote that Bay is “an elegant storyteller, laying out the stark stakes at every turn while also showing how discrimination wasn’t just a matter of crushing predictability but often, and more insidiously, a haphazard jumble of risks.”

**JOURNEY TO THE EDGE OF REASON: The Life of Kurt Gödel**, by *Stephen Budiansky*. (*Norton*.) The mathematician Kurt Gödel upended his profession’s assumptions with his “incompleteness theorem,” presented in 1930, when he was 24. But expertise in formal logic isn’t essential for anyone’s enjoyment of this moving biography. Budiansky brings a polymath’s interest to bear on a man whose life intersected with the political and philosophical upheavals of the 20th century. An “emphasis on the human and humane implications of Gödel’s life and work,” Szalai wrote, “gives this book its mesmerizing pull.”

**THE COPENHAGEN TRILOGY: Childhood; Youth; Dependency**, by *Tove Ditlevsen*. *Translated from the Danish by Tiina Nunnally and Michael Favala Goldman*. (*Farrar, Straus & Giroux*.) Ditlevsen, who died in 1976, is beloved in her native Denmark. This one-volume collection of three memoirs is the portrait of an artist and an addict. Ditlevsen writes about her early years and her beautiful, capricious and cruel mother; the joy and necessity she found in writing poetry; and the dark ecstasy of discovering the opioid Demerol. “There is a quality of trance, of autohypnosis, in her style,” Parul Sehgal wrote. “They exert a particular fascination, these books. It’s like watching something burn.”

**KING RICHARD: Nixon and Watergate: An American Tragedy**, by *Michael Dobbs*. (*Knopf*.) This kaleidoscopic book manages to find fresh drama in the story of Watergate. Dobbs’s entry in a crowded field distinguishes itself in part by limiting its narrative mostly to the first hundred days after Nixon’s second inauguration. “This circumscribed frame allows Dobbs to deploy his observational gifts to full effect,” Szalai wrote. From a vast amount of raw material, he has “carved out something intimate and extraordinary, skillfully chiseling out the details to bring the story to lurid life.”

**ALL THE FREQUENT TROUBLES OF OUR DAYS: The True Story of the American Woman at the Heart of the German Resistance to Hitler**, by *Rebecca Donner*. (*Little, Brown*.) This book about Mildred Harnack, an American woman sentenced to death by the Nazi regime in 1943, is a family history too: Donner is Harnack's great-great-niece. It is also a story of code names and dead drops, a real-life thriller with a cruel ending. Donner pieces together Mildred's life from fragments, sifting through government archives, interviews, photographs, diaries and letters. Szalai called it an "astonishing" book that conveys "what it felt like in real time to experience the tightening vise of the Nazi regime."

**ON JUNETEENTH**, by *Annette Gordon-Reed*. (*Liveright*.) Gordon-Reed, a Pulitzer-winning historian best known for her work on Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings, takes a more personal approach in her latest book. In a series of short, moving essays, she explores "the long road" to June 19, 1865, when the end of legalized slavery was announced in Texas, the state where Gordon-Reed was born and raised. Szalai wrote that the book displays Gordon-Reed's "ability to combine clarity with subtlety," and to show that "historical understanding is a process, not an end point."

**COLORIZATION: One Hundred Years of Black Films in a White World**, by *Wil Haygood*. (*Knopf*.) "Colorization" tells the story of Black artists in the film industry, those in front of and behind the camera. It moves from the pioneer Oscar Micheaux through the careers of Paul Robeson, Dorothy Dandridge and Lena Horne, and up to the work of Spike Lee, Ava DuVernay and Jordan Peele. "This is sweeping history, but in Haygood's hands it feels crisp, urgent and pared down," our critic Dwight Garner wrote. "He carries you along on dispassionate analysis and often novelistic detail."

**PATRICIA HIGHSMITH: Her Diaries and Notebooks, 1941-1995**, edited by *Anna von Planta*. (*Liveright*.) In Patricia Highsmith's diaries and notebooks, we see the young writer — the future author of "Strangers on a Train," the Ripley series and many other novels — learning to mediate between her intense appetite for work and her need to lose herself in art, gin, music and warm bodies. "Highsmith is pointed and dry about herself and everything else," Garner wrote. "But the early chapters are special. They comprise one of the most observant and ecstatic accounts I've read — and it's a crowded field! — about being young and alive in New York City."

**SOLID IVORY: Memoirs**, by *James Ivory*. (*Farrar, Straus & Giroux*.) The movie director James Ivory is closely associated with paeans to inhibition like "Howards End" and "The Remains of the Day." So his sexual frankness in this memoir might come as a surprise. He writes about his work with his romantic and producing partner, Ismail Merchant, and their close collaborator, the writer Ruth Praver Jhabvala. Our critic Alexandra Jacobs wrote: "After decades conjuring the Anglo-American aristocracy clinking cups in gardens and drawing rooms, Ivory, the survivor, is ready to spill the tea."

**PLUNDER: A Memoir of Family Property and Nazi Treasure**, by *Menachem Kaiser*. (*Houghton Mifflin Harcourt*.) Menachem Kaiser, the descendant of Polish Jews, grew up in Toronto. "Plunder" is about what happens after he takes up his Holocaust-survivor grandfather's battle to reclaim an apartment building in Sosnowiec, Poland, that the

family owned before the war. “Kaiser is a reflective man on the page, with a lively mind,” Garner wrote. He “tells a twisting and reverberant and consistently enthralling story. It’s a weird story that gets weirder.”

**TOM STOPPARD: A Life**, by *Hermione Lee*. (*Knopf*.) Now 84, Tom Stoppard has led an enormous life. Hermione Lee, the acclaimed biographer of Virginia Woolf, Edith Wharton and others, has wrestled it all onto the page. Stoppard’s best-known plays include “Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead,” “Arcadia” and “The Coast of Utopia.” He co-wrote the screenplay for “Shakespeare in Love.” Garner called Lee’s effort “astute and authoritative,” and said: “One reason this book entertains is that Stoppard has had an opinion about almost everything, and usually these opinions are witty.”

**GAY BAR: Why We Went Out**, by *Jeremy Atherton Lin*. (*Little, Brown*.) Jeremy Atherton Lin began writing this restless and intelligent cultural history of queer nightlife in 2017; more than half of London’s gay bars had shuttered in the previous 10 years. But the book is not an elegy. Broken into sections, each devoted to a particular bar and city, it tells of how clubs have disappointed the author as well as welcomed, astonished, exasperated and intimidated him. “The treatment of time in the book — the way the present is peeled back to reveal the past — is beautiful, and original,” Sehgal wrote.

**IN THE EYE OF THE WILD**, by *Nastassja Martin*. *Translated from the French by Sophie R. Lewis*. (*New York Review Books*.) In 2015, the anthropologist Nastassja Martin barely survived an attack by a bear in the mountains of Kamchatka, in eastern Siberia. This slender yet expansive book is her haunting, genre-defying memoir of the year that followed. She writes about the attack; about her work among the Indigenous Even people; and about philosophy, questioning the human propensity to try to assimilate everything into familiar terms. “What Martin describes in this book,” Szalai wrote, “isn’t so much a search for meaning as an acceptance of its undoing.”

**UNTIL JUSTICE BE DONE: America’s First Civil Rights Movement, From the Revolution to Reconstruction**, by *Kate Masur*. (*Norton*.) This revelatory book is about the “first civil rights movement” — the fight for Black people’s freedom and equality from the Revolutionary War to Reconstruction. One of its themes is how African Americans led the struggle, even as racially discriminatory laws made them vulnerable. “If this is a cleareyed book, it’s still a heartening one,” Szalai wrote. “Masur takes care to show not only the limitations of what was achieved at each step but also how even the smallest step could lead to another.”

**ALL THAT SHE CARRIED: The Journey of Ashley’s Sack, a Black Family Keepsake**, by *Tiya Miles*. (*Random House*.) This recent winner of the National Book Award for nonfiction is about women and chattel slavery as framed by a single object: a cotton sack that dates back to the mid-19th century, given by an enslaved woman named Rose to her daughter Ashley. Little about the sack is definitively known. Miles tries to learn and reconstruct what she can. Szalai wrote: “The trauma of separation emerges as a central

theme of the book, as Miles tries to imagine herself into the lives of the women she writes about.”

**A GHOST IN THE THROAT**, by Doireann Ni Ghriofa. (*Biblioasis*.) The 18th-century Irish noblewoman Eibhlin Dubh Ni Chonaill composed the great poem “Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire” after her husband was murdered by a powerful British official. The poet Doireann Ni Ghriofa’s book, which includes her translation of the poem, is a hybrid of essay, biography, autofiction and scholarship — and a daily accounting of life with four children under the age of 6. “The book is all undergrowth, exuberant, tangled passage,” Sehgal wrote. “The story that uncoils is stranger, more difficult to tell, than those valiant accounts of rescuing a ‘forgotten’ woman writer from history’s erasures or of the challenges faced by the woman artist.”

**THE LOFT GENERATION: From the de Koonings to Twombly: Portraits and Sketches 1942-2011**, by Edith Schloss. Edited by Mary Venturini. (*Farrar, Straus & Giroux*.) The German American writer and artist Edith Schloss’s memoir was discovered in rough-draft form after her death in 2011, and it’s been polished into a glowing jewel of a book. It recalls a Who’s Who of art-world characters, including Willem and Elaine de Kooning, Leo Castelli and Merce Cunningham. “All five senses are shaken awake” by the book, Jacobs wrote. “If nostalgia is a sixth and often fogging sense, it is absent in a book that feels manifestly present, clear and alive even while describing the past.”

**THE RIGHT TO SEX: Feminism in the Twenty-First Century**, by Amia Srinivasan. (*Farrar, Straus & Giroux*.) In these rigorous essays, Amia Srinivasan wants nothing less, she writes, than “to remake the political critique of sex for the 21st century.” This is fraught terrain, and she treads it with determination and skill, writing about pornography and the internet, misogyny and violence, capitalism and incarceration. She also makes space for ambivalence, idiosyncrasy, autonomy and choice. “Srinivasan has written a compassionate book. She has also written a challenging one,” Szalai said. “She coaxes our imaginations out of the well-worn grooves of the existing order.”

**THE EMPATHY DIARIES: A Memoir**, by Sherry Turkle. (*Penguin Press*.) In this warm, intimate memoir, the clinical psychologist Sherry Turkle writes about her childhood in postwar Brooklyn; Radcliffe and Harvard in the late 1960s, when she was an undergraduate; and Paris in the early 1970s, where she studied the work of (and got to know) the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. This is “a beautiful book,” Garner wrote. “It has gravity and grace; it’s as inexorable as a fable; it drills down into the things that make a life.”

**PESSOA: A Biography**, by Richard Zenith. (*Liveright*.) Fernando Pessoa, the Portuguese poet, critic, translator, mystic and giant of modernism, published a few books that went mostly unnoticed during his lifetime. After his death in 1935, a trunk was discovered, brimming with his true life’s work, written not only by Pessoa but by a flock of his personas (he created dozens of them, including a doctor, a classicist, a bisexual poet, a monk, a lovesick teenage girl). Zenith’s book is “mammoth, definitive and sublime,” Sehgal wrote. He has “written the only kind of biography of Pessoa truly permissible, an account of a life that plucks at the very borders and burdens of the notion of a self.”

## Fiction & Poetry

**SECOND PLACE**, by *Rachel Cusk*. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux.) Rachel Cusk's first novel since she concluded her acclaimed Outline trilogy is about M, a sharply observant middle-age writer who lives with her second husband on a remote piece of property. She invites L, a famous younger painter whose work she admires, to come and stay in their "second place," a cabin that's an artist's retreat of sorts. L arrives with a beautiful young girlfriend in tow, and the novel becomes a swirling hothouse. "It's as if Cusk has been reading Joyce Carol Oates's best novels," Garner wrote. "She digs into the gothic core of family and romantic entanglements."

**PLAYLIST FOR THE APOCALYPSE: Poems**, by *Rita Dove*. (Norton.) Rita Dove's new collection is about the weight of American history, and it's also about mortality. It's the first time she has publicly acknowledged that she has had a form of multiple sclerosis for more than 20 years. Some of these poems address health troubles. Some are about Martin Luther King Jr., Robert F. Kennedy, Muhammad Ali and Barack Obama. Garner called the poems "among her best," and wrote: "Dove's books derive their force from how she so deftly stirs the everyday — insomnia, TV movies, Stilton cheese, rattling containers of pills — into her world of ideas and intellection, in poems that are by turns delicate, witty and audacious."

**CROSSROADS**, by *Jonathan Franzen*. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux.) Jonathan Franzen's new novel, which starts a trilogy, is set in suburban Chicago. At its center are the Hildebrandts, another of the author's seemingly solid Midwestern families. The patriarch, Russ Hildebrandt, is the local church's idealistic associate pastor. Throughout the novel each of the major characters suffer crises of faith and of morality. "It's a mellow, marzipan-hued '70s-era heartbreaker," Garner wrote. It's "warmer than anything he's yet written, wider in its human sympathies, weightier of image and intellect. If I missed some of the acid of his earlier novels, well, this one has powerful compensations."

**INTIMACIES**, by *Katie Kitamura*. (Riverhead Books.) Katie Kitamura's fourth novel is about an unnamed woman who goes to work as an interpreter at an international court at The Hague. She's in flight from New York City, where her father recently died. Like nearly everyone in this novel, she leads a globalized, deracinated life. At work, she interprets for — and thus climbs inside the heads of — notorious criminals. The novel's heat lies in Kitamura's abiding interest in the subtleties of human power dynamics. "Intimacies" is "coolly written and casts a spell," Garner wrote. "The light it emits is ghostly, like that from under the lid of a Xerox machine."

**THE WAR FOR GLORIA**, by *Atticus Lish*. (Knopf.) "The War for Gloria" is a solemn, punishing, kinetic portrait of a mother and son facing her mortal illness. The book's protagonist, Corey, grows up all but fatherless in and around Boston and seeks ways to prove himself. He tends to his mother, Gloria, this book's great, glowing presence, who has Lou Gehrig's disease and only a few years to live. Garner said the novel "more than pays off on the promise" of Lish's debut, "Preparation for the Next Life," which won the

2015 PEN/Faulkner award. It is “powerful, intelligent, brooding and most of all convincing; it earns its emotions.”

**THE MAGICIAN**, by *Colm Toibin*. (*Scribner*.) This subtle and substantial novel imagines the life of Thomas Mann, the Nobel Prize-winning author of “Death in Venice” and “The Magic Mountain,” among other classics. Garner called it a “symphonic and moving” work. “Toibin seeks to grasp the entirety of Mann’s life and times, the way a biographer might, and he does so quite neatly. Maximalist in scope but intimate in feeling, ‘The Magician’ never feels dutiful. Like its subject, it’s somber, yet it’s also prickly and strange, sometimes all at once.”

**OUR COUNTRY FRIENDS**, by *Gary Shteyngart* (*Random House*.) Gary Shteyngart’s new novel begins at the onset of the pandemic, with seven friends and one nemesis gathered at an estate in the Hudson Valley to wait out what they’re sure will be a quick blip in their convenient and prosperous lives. Predicaments abound, mysteries multiply and betrayals proliferate. Our critic Molly Young wrote that the book is “brilliant about so much: the humiliations of parenting and of being parented; the sadism of chronic illness; the glory of friendship.” It is “a perfect novel for these times and all times.”

**THE DAYS OF AFREKETE**, by *Asali Solomon*. (*Farrar, Straus & Giroux*.) Asali Solomon’s novel is a reverie, a riff on “Mrs. Dalloway” and a love story. Liselle, its protagonist, is a Black woman living in Philadelphia. Her husband, who is white, cut corners while running for the state legislature, and the F.B.I. is closing in on him. We meet Liselle on the evening of a dinner party she is hosting after her husband’s decisive political defeat. In the back of her mind is a college girlfriend whose life veered in a sorrowful direction. Young wrote: “Solomon has a way of taking class lines that are often invisible and turning them into one of those laser museum security systems that you see in heist movies: neon, treacherous, uncrossable.”

**WAYWARD**, by *Dana Spiotta*. (*Knopf*.) For Sam Raymond, the restless heroine of Dana Spiotta’s latest novel, menopause is reason enough to re-evaluate everything. Her body revolts just as her mother is starting to ail and her teenage daughter is growing remote and secretive. Sam is rash, funny, searching, entirely unpredictable. “Wayward” is a “furious and addictive” novel, Sehgal wrote. “So much contemporary fiction swims about in its own theories; what a pleasure to encounter not just ideas about the thing, but the thing itself — descriptions that irradiate the pleasure centers of the brain, a protagonist so densely, exuberantly imagined, she feels like a visitation.”