Welcome to the Politics and Prose Summer Newsletter, part one. To keep up with all the great books coming out, especially those in paperback, we’ll offer two catalogs of summer reading suggestions. The titles here will be 20% off for members through the Fourth of July; then we’ll have a second list of favorites, which will be on sale until Labor Day. We hope you enjoy the books!
With each succeeding chapter, as Jennifer Egan takes ever more formalistic, stylistic, and narrative tacks and risks, *A Visit From The Goon Squad* (Anchor, $14.95) builds like a good mix tape: each song very different, but adding meaning to what comes before. Egan’s meditation on “time and music” darts through the music biz, PR, and journalism from the 1970s to the near future, with both stand-alone riffs and exhilarating convergences throughout. Each of the thirteen chapters is different in tone, with a different protagonist; the highlight for me is the penultimate, “Great Rock and Roll Pauses,” written by a twelve-year-old character in PowerPoint charts—it’s unforgettable. The book just won the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award; it was on nearly everyone’s 2010 Top Ten list, and deservedly so. András Goldinger

*Citrus County* (McSweeney’s, $14) is a story of disaffected American teenagers and young love, but if you think you’ve read this story before, think again. John Brandon’s humid, overgrown, idiosyncratic vision of dystopic Florida suburbia finds Toby, a likeable but deeply flawed loner, Mr. Hibma, a geography teacher who hates teaching, and Shelby, just moved to the area with her father and sister, caught up in a chain of events brought upon them by one person’s impulsive act. Strong characters, quirky observations, and solid writing make this a standout novel and Brandon an author to pay attention to. Mark LaFramboise

Golden Richards, a prominent, hard-working community leader and businessman, loves his family dearly, although with twenty-eight children and four wives, they do wear him out. Sometimes all he wants is a little peace and quiet, someone who doesn’t talk too much, understands him, helps him relax. Does it make any sense that *The Lonely Polygamist* (W.W. Norton, $15.95) would seek relief in the arms of a fifth woman? One who happens to be married to his boss? As a matter of fact, it just might. It will surprise you how normal the dysfunctions of this large, rambunctious family really are, and how Barry Udall, who wrote the article in *Esquire* that inspired the hit television show, manages to follow and develop so many characters and themes in one entertaining book. Andrew Getman

*Gardiner Amory, Father Of The Rain* (Grove, $14.95), has a sharp wit, plays a mean game of tennis, and charms women instantly. He’s also an alcoholic given to rages and erratic behavior that drives people away. His daughter Daley, the narrator of *Lily King*’s third novel, is caught in this perfect storm of a parent. As a child she longs to make her father laugh—his *real* laugh, not one of his fake or treacherous ones. Years pass. Gardiner’s wives come and go. Daley leaves town, has no contact with Gardiner for extended periods, but never quite achieves an independent life. When her father has a crisis she sacrifices her career, friends, and possibly her future to go back and help him. He needs her, he has no one else. Or does she only need to think he needs her? Daley faces her own twelve steps as she struggles to achieve a balanced relationship with her volatile father. Laurie Greer

In *Imperfect Birds* (Riverhead, $15), Anne Lamott returns to characters she introduced in *Rosie* and *Crooked Little Heart*. Rosie Ferguson, now a senior in high school, is experimenting with drugs and boys, lying to her parents, and spinning slowly and surely out of control. Her mother and stepfather try to rein in Rosie’s behavior, but she continues to deceive them, testing the limits to see what she can get away with. Lamott’s family drama deals with the denial and deception that goes along with substance abuse, and her prose is frank, true, and often very funny even in the most emotionally charged scenes. Jennifer Close
With great economy of words, Jane Smiley gives us a rich glimpse into the Private Life (Anchor, $15.95) of her novel’s protagonist. Margaret’s story spans a number of important periods in American history, including the San Francisco earthquake, both World Wars, the age of westward expansion, and the late-18th/early-19th century’s explosion of ideas in science and technology. Through it all, she navigates the difficult terrain of family life, friendships, and marriage over the long haul. This is a skillful, beautifully rendered tale of one woman’s loves, losses, disappointments, and the inevitable bitterness that occurs after years of emotional isolation. Read this gorgeous book to enjoy a fine writer at the top of her craft. 

Tracey Filar Atwood

What if you could re-write the endings to all your life stories, changing them to reflect experience and hindsight? This question is at the heart of The Nobodies Album (Anchor, $15), by Carolyn Parkhurst. Octavia Frost, a moderately successful author, has changed the conclusions of her novels. But that’s not all that is going on in this beautifully written book. Just as Octavia is delivering her latest manuscript to her publisher, she learns that her son, a famous rock star, has been arrested for murder. Although they have been estranged for years, and she is unsure of his innocence, Octavia goes to help him. What follows is part murder mystery, part examination of the forces and choices that sculpt our lives. Perhaps most interestingly, Parkhurst treats us to both the original and the revised endings of Octavia’s novels. Susan Skirboll

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Susan Skirboll

The American Dream has always been elusive, but today you’d better make sure it includes health insurance. So Much For That (Harper Perennial, $14.99), Lionel Shriver’s sharp, direct novel about making a million and watching it evaporate, chronicles the fortunes of Shep Knacker, a successful entrepreneur who sells his business and plans to live on the proceeds in some idyllic—and cheap—exotic locale. While he dreams of the future, his wife develops cancer, and suddenly the nest egg is needed for health-care expenses. But, this being America, there are other ways to make money, and the Knackers bring a suit against Glynis’s former employer, claiming negligence with toxic materials caused her illness. No matter what their plight, Shriver’s characters are consistently lively and outspoken, cracking jokes, however dark, when you least expect them. They say things the rest of us only wish we could say—and they get away with it. Laurie Greer

In Aimee Bender’s second novel, Rose Edelstein discovers, on her ninth birthday, that she can taste emotions in what she eats. She must then navigate a strange world where feelings she does not yet understand shape how she views her family, friends, and countless strangers. The Particular Sadness Of Lemon Cake (Anchor, $15) is a lovely and haunting story; Bender’s characters are endearingly human in the face of abnormal circumstances. Angela Maria Williams

Set in Maine, Ayelet Waldman’s Red Hook Road (Anchor, $15) opens with a horrific car accident that kills a newly married couple as they’re on their way from the church to the reception. The rest of the novel, which spans the next four years, tells the story of the two families of the deceased couple, the Hewins, local and working class, and the Kimmelbrods, wealthy summer people from New York. These two clans, now linked, spend the aftermath of the tragedy bumping in and out of each other’s lives, dealing with the messiness and awkwardness of grief, and the underlying issue of social class. Jennifer Close

Signed First Editions...

Sign up on the back of the newsletter to have a first edition, first printing of a newly released book delivered each month directly to your - or your loved one’s - doorstep. There is no enrollment fee. The cost of each book (including shipping, if desired) is the only charge, which will be processed every month when the books arrive at Politics & Prose.
The research and care she put into writing this book is evident on every page, but what makes it all work is her amazing and precise writing. Susan Skirboll

You’ve probably heard a lot about ROOM by Emma Donoghue (Back Bay, $14.99.) Maybe you’ve even been reluctant to read it based on what you’ve heard. Now that it’s out in paperback, you can have no excuse not to read it. Yes, the subject matter is difficult. I won’t say too much about the plot because I can’t say a lot without ruining your discovery of it for yourself. But you are doing yourself a real disservice if you don’t read this exquisitely written book. It is a story of love, endurance, and survival. It is at turns scary, insightful and even funny. The voice Donoghue gives the main character, a five-year-old boy, feels completely authentic. The research and care she put into writing this book is evident on every page, but what makes it all work is her amazing and precise writing. Susan Skirboll

The Surrendered (Riverhead, $16) begins forcefully, revealing the traumatic suffering inflicted on children attempting to flee the advancing war in Korea. Throughout the novel—over the course of the century—Chang-rae Lee explores the residual impact of the lingering loss and emotional damage for three principal characters: a young girl, a missionary, and a soldier. As it did with Franklin and Henry in A Gesture Life and Native Speaker, respectively, the past continues to restrict June, Sophie, and Hector, and prevents them from fully engaging with those to whom they long to relate. A grippingly powerful and tragically beautiful story, this is Lee’s most evocative and compelling book yet. Andrew Getman

On the first night of her European tour, Isabel Merton, an internationally renowned pianist, meets Anzor Islikhanov, a liaison from the unrecognized Chechen government. Both are itinerants by necessity, and both are single-minded in their focus—she lives for her art, he for his country. Appassionata (Other Press, $14.95) is the story of their romance as it unfolds across the great European cities. It is also, in its philosophical exploration of music’s relevance in a world fragmented by politics and war, a novel of ideas. The most transcendent scenes take place in the concert hall; the author, Eva Hoffman, is a trained pianist, and every musical moment is breathtakingly authentic. Elizabeth Sher

What would be worth organizing your entire life around for the slimmest chance of success? In Brezhnev-era Russia, a rumor spreads that the celebrated composer Selinsky is returning from the West for a single concert. Waiting for endless months in the faint hope of obtaining a precious ticket powerfully affects the lives of one family and those they meet while standing in The Line (Penguin, $16). As in The Dream Life of Sukhanov, Olga Grushin here reveals her gift for emotive and beautiful language. This time she evokes the mood of the Thaw, with its cautious hope and lingering suspicion, its artistic appreciation, and its harsh and sometimes brutal pragmatism. Andrew Getman

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The Singer’s Gun (Unbridled Books, $14.95) opens with two questions: how well do we really know our colleagues? And more specifically, why is Anton Waker alone on his honeymoon? Through meticulously layered flashbacks that reveal passport fraud, Kafka-esque bureaucracies, and an international crime ring, the talented Emily St. John Mandel does, eventually, give us answers. Moving from the grimy streets of Brooklyn to shiny Manhattan office towers to an idyllic Italian island, The Singer’s Gun happily subverts the conventions of both literary novel and genre thriller. Like Mandel’s wandering, amoral characters, this unique book resides in a netherworld of its own creation. Elizabeth Sher

Claire Dewitt And The City Of The Dead (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, $24), by Sara Gran, is more than just a mystery story, it is a story about mysteries. Set in ravaged, post-Katrina New Orleans, Claire Dewitt (imagine Nancy Drew as a grown-up, pot-smoking, liquor-slogging, tattooed PI) is on the case of a missing DA. Following the footsteps of her eccentric mentor and using the enigmatic Detection, the only book of famed French detective Jaquest Sillette, as a guide, Claire searches for clues in the Big Easy. But “searches for clues” is too pedestrian to describe Claire’s procedures. She analyzes her dreams, throws dice, consults the I Ching, interviews suspects and witnesses (sometimes at gunpoint), goes undercover—and makes brilliant connections. While trying to locate the missing DA, Claire also nears the truth about the disappearance of her best friend in 1980s Brooklyn, the biggest mystery of all. This is the first installment of what promises to be an engrossing new series. Sarah Baline

By now, you are probably familiar with novels in the form of linked stories (Colum McCann’s Let the Great World Spin, Elizabeth Strout’s Olive Kitteridge), but few are as eerie or as mesmerizing as Frederick Reiken’s Day For Night (Back Bay, $14.99). Each chapter is a haunting experiment in structure and voice, featuring characters who are grappling with a past mystery or trauma, whether personal (a parent lost to cancer) or historical (the murder of 500 Jewish men in Lithuania in 1941). And while every strand of the narrative connects to a larger whole, the deep reward of Reiken’s novel is that each segment contains a universe within itself. Elizabeth Sher

The five women featured in the nine stories of Susi Wyss’s debut, The Civilized World (Holt, $15), are from various cultures and countries linked by the commonalities of life: longing, fear, love, grief. As the stories progress, the women’s lives intersect and the novelistic aspects of the book emerge. In “Names,” Ophelia, the wife of an American Foreign Service Officer, writes down the names of Malawians she meets—a desperate attempt to manage the emotions around her infertility. Ophelia reappears in “Waiting for Solomon” as she tours Ethiopia with Janice while both women wait for child adoptions to be finalized. In the last story, “There Are No Accidents,” Janice happens upon a beauty salon in Ghana run by her former employee, Adjoa, whose twin brother robbed Janice’s house. Wyss’s humane portrait of modern Africa and African women is carefully drawn and astutely, beautifully delivered. Lacey Dunham

Written as a series of letters from the narrator, Wyatt Hillyer, his twenty-one-year-old-daughter, Marlais, Howard Norman’s What Is Left The Daughter (Mariner, $13.95) tells a rich, dramatic story set in the Canadian Maritimes during World War II as German U-boats stalked Canadian shipping. After the tragic and surprising deaths of his parents, Hillyer moves in with his aunt, uncle, and cousin in small town. When a young German scholar moves to town, amid the fear and suspicion brought on by the war, allegiances are tested, and love, lust, and jealousy fuel a series of events that can’t be undone. Norman’s unerring sense of character, language, pacing, and plot make this an unforgettable novel. Mark LaFramboise
A deceptively straightforward account of a platoon’s fifteen-month deployment in a remote outpost in the Korangal Valley of Eastern Afghanistan, *War* (Twelve, $15.99), by Sebastian Junger, is a brave attempt at documenting the lives of men in constant danger, the incongruities of combat, the boredom and the fear, and the fine line between the living and the dead. The stories of what happens to these men are interspersed with explanations of the science behind fear, courage, and the bonds that develop among men who trust each other with their lives. *David Maritz*.

One of the great stories from the world of publishing last year was that of an unappreciated manuscript that won a contest and was then taken under the wing of a nurturing publisher. Thus *Matterhorn* (Grove, $15.95) burst upon the scene as one of the great war novels of this or any generation. Karl Marlantes, a highly decorated Vietnam-era Marine, shows readers the futility of conquering ground only to give it back the next day, details the fear and courage experienced by regular soldiers on the ground, and captures war’s sights, sounds, and smells. This novel vividly evokes both the heights of adrenaline and the tedium of waiting for action. *Mark LaFramboise*.

Ben Macintyre, an associate editor at the London Times, follows up his bestselling Agent Zigzag with another World War II spy story, *Operation Mincemeat* (Broadway, $15), a tale so wild and entertaining that it could be a James Bond caper. Fictional agents and a bogus body are only part of the intricate plot by which MI5 successfully diverted Nazi intelligence from the planned Allied invasion of Sicily. False documents baked in a cake, an undercover removal of a three-month-old dead body from a local morgue to stand in for a drowned corpse—one clad in the thick underwear of an Oxford don—and an imaginary fiancée are only a few of the full complement of espionage tricks-of-the-trade that Macintyre colorfully recounts. Barbara Meade.

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**War In Fact And Fiction**

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**Using Language Wisely**

Have you ever wondered how many words you know? Or the record number of languages one person has mastered? *A Little Book Of Language* (Yale Univ., $17), by linguist and author David Crystal, is an excellent introduction to linguistics. Crystal’s discussion is clear and comprehensive, presenting each discrete concept in a concise chapter. He begins in the womb with a baby’s first exposure to the rhythms of its native tongue, progresses to language acquisition, and by the end has covered sociolinguistics, etymology and grammar, and has explained the capricious spelling rules of the English language. Crystal even brings linguistics into the 21st century with discussions on Internet etiquette, texting language, and slang. *A Little Book Of Language* offers a more complete understanding of one of the quintessentially human characteristics. (The answers, by the way, are about 40,000 and 58.) Anna Thorn

Summer is a good time for light reading; maybe a good mystery? But before you delve into your next whodunit, take a short detour with P.D. James’s *Talking About Detective Fiction* (Vintage, $14), and you will gain a whole new appreciation for the form. James is enthusiastic and lively, asking what makes the mystery or, as she prefers, the “detective story” such an enduring genre? Why are we fascinated with the most horrific of all crimes, murder? She takes you on a tour of the detective story from its earliest incarnations to the present, examining the “Golden Age” of British mysteries and comparing them with the hard-boiled stories from America. As in her fiction, James’s writing is precise and thoughtful. Reading this will make you want to revisit some of your old favorites: Sayers, Christie, Conan Doyle, Chandler—you’ll see them in a new light. Susan Skirboll.
“Language is matter / leafing like a book,” Kay Ryan states in “Composition.” Ryan’s poems look thin but they’re far from anemic. Her ability to break open a theme with a well-placed word or a cleverly chosen image is the hallmark of her work, as is her deft talent at luring the reader into a poem with a wink and nod. Breeze through the fifteen lines of “Say Uncle” and you giggle to yourself at her wit; read it again and you realize Ryan rewards your persistence with a poem about perseverance. Within the eleven lines of “Thin,” Ryan raises epistemological questions; in the nineteen-line “Easter Island,” she lyrically weaves existential matters to material concerns. Both poems draw goosebumps. A compendium of work that ardent fans will love and the unfamiliar should embrace, is there any doubt The Best Of It: New And Selected Poems (Grove, $14.95) is an apt and deserving choice for this year’s Pulitzer? Lacey Dunham

**Essays**

In his mid-twenties, after struggling (and failing) to become a poet, Jake Silverstein bought a used Toyota and drove to far-west Texas to try his hand at journalism. He reasoned that he would move to a place where nothing was happening, so that when something did happen, he’d be the only one there to write about it. Nothing Happened And Then It Did (W.W. Norton, $14.95) chronicles Silverstein’s optimistic quests along the U.S.-Mexico border. The take? Half of Silverstein’s essays are fact and half are fiction. They’re all exquisitely observed dispatches from remote corners of the country, and slyly funny meditations on the art and act of writing. Elizabeth Sher

Geoff Dyer’s writing can be acerbic, intellectual, critical, irreverent, hilarious, or any combination of these. All his essays, though, display his keen intelligence and insatiable curiosity. In the introduction to Otherwise Known As The Human Condition (Graywolf, $18), Dyer describes why he chose his particular literary path. “What,” he asks, “could be nicer than one day to be writing a review of a novel or exhibition and the next to be going off to Moscow to write about flying a MiG-29?” He divides the book into sections he calls Visuals, Verbals, Musicals, Variables, and Personals, an arrangement that showcases the versatility of his critical eye. Mark LaFramboise

Sloane Crosley follows up her bestselling I Was Told There’d Be Cake with an equally entertaining, somewhat darker, collection of essays. In How Did You Get This Number (Riverhead, $15), we hear about Crosley’s stint buying stolen furniture; her roommate, a kleptomaniac with an eating disorder; and the author’s travels to Paris, Portugal, and Alaska. Witty, and as engaging as a close friend, Crosley makes even a bear attack seem hilarious, and when she turns to everyday events, they suddenly seem worthy of a story. These essays take the reader along on adventures big and small as Crosley observes the craziness that happens around her. Jennifer Close

Until 1969 Margaret Kaelin McHugh, the woman her friends dubbed “V” after Pynchon’s elusive heroine, lived the life of a dutiful housewife and mother of seven in Arkansas. Then a local black teacher was fired for insubordination and long-suppressed anger gave way to protests. V, too, was galvanized, and when she demonstrated with the African-American community, her husband divorced her, friends abandoned her, and she was driven out of town. She left and never looked back. C.D. Wright’s tribute tells V’s story in a collage of voices; One With Others (Copper Canyon, $18) refers both to the solidarity of individuals in the civil rights struggle and to the blend of genres Wright has forged into a powerful book-length poem. The text includes prose as well as poetry; lyric refrains, memories, witness testimony, and headlines, the disparate energies making this work a rich oral history of the late 1960s South and a moving elegy for McHugh. Laurie Greer
Draw Pictures…..
Grab a sketchbook and some pencils and pens! Ivan Brunetti will lead you through a fifteen-week course on how to create your own comics. Cartooning: Philosophy and Practice (Yale Univ., $13) is a small, thin book—but packed with ideas, tips, and exercises. You will begin with doodles to find your own “visual handwriting,” and progress through single-panel cartoons all the way to a four-page story. Brunetti has many clever exercises (condense your favorite novel into a drawing), but always stresses the hard, continuing work of daily drawing. “Practice is philosophy,” he says, and if you follow the course (even try it for a few weeks), good things will happen. Andras Goldinger

Walk Around…
The best way to understand architecture? Walk the streets. Paul Goldberger advises. But to inform those perambulations, take along the Pulitzer Prize-winning architecture critic’s concise Why Architecture Matters (Yale Univ., $16). A guide to the basic elements of buildings, Goldberger’s lively primer discusses scale, proportion, light, space, texture, and materials, giving these general features specific contexts and exploring their emotional effects. Architecture matters, he demonstrates, when it goes beyond the purely functional (though even the humblest shed makes an impact on its surroundings) to partake of the qualities of art. Goldberger surveys buildings around the world, pointing to how they reflect social ideas, embody values, stand as cultural icons, and serve as the common ground on which different generations can meet. He includes D.C. in his tour; see what he thinks of the Hirshhorn, the National Gallery, and the National Building Museum. Laurie Greer

....Grow Things
Part memoir, part how-to, The Dirty Life: On Farming, Food, and Love (Scribner, $15) by Kristin Kimball, provides an insider’s look at the challenges of creating a sustainable farm in upstate New York. A former Lower East Side resident, Kimball falls for Mark while researching a story about his farming endeavors in Pennsylvania. Amidst a courtship and a move to a leased farm in Essex, New York, Kristin and Mark develop 500 dilapidated acres into a working farm that feeds a small community of over 100 people. With stories ranging from buying outdated farm equipment at an auction in Amish country to chasing cattle down Main Street, Kristen recalls a year’s worth of trials and tribulations on the farm. Her writing, whether about driving the draft horses or heating up the farmhouse, is both enlightening and entertaining. Wendy Brown

Go Outside…..
In Last Child in the Woods, Richard Louv coined the term “nature-deficit disorder” for children who spend too much time inside. In his new book he points out that this afflicts people of all ages. Louv’s Nature Principle (Algonquin, $24.95) is simple: nature is good for us, and we can be good for nature. With anecdotes and studies, Louv shows that spending time outside can improve mood, enhance cognitive skills, and foster relaxation—all of which can lead to better physical health. Louv is alone in his impassioned support for the outdoors. He cites dozens of organizations that are working to reconnect people with nature—many are national, but most are local, community-based, groups that focus on projects such as linking or creating bike lanes or rounding up families for weekly walks in the woods. Louv’s eloquent book is a manifesto for a new back-to-the-land movement, one that integrates people, modern technological society, and nature into one thriving system. Laurie Greer

Massive, beautiful, clever, and deadly, the tiger has long been an object of fascination, fixed in our collective imagination. In The Tiger (Vintage, $15), John Vaillant captures this primal awe and brings you into the minds of both a tiger and the hunters who subsist alongside it on the taiga. The book takes place in the village of Sobolonye in the southeastern Primorye region of Russia, which, though bounded by Russia, China, North Korea, and the Sea of Japan, has remained an island of wilderness. In recounting the gripping saga of one tiger’s devastating effect on the people of that region, Vaillant has crafted the perfect nonfiction book—a seamless blend of fact, masterful descriptions of the land and the people, and elegant storytelling. Anna Thorn

“I care to live only to entice people to look at Nature’s loveliness,” said John Muir in 1874. Born in Scotland, reared in rural Wisconsin; resistant to industrial and agricultural life, yet a talented carpenter, engineer, and fruit rancher; an autodidact of botany and geology; and given to taking walks—long walks, of, say, 1,000 miles or so, Muir, the founder of the Sierra Club, indeed exhibited A Passion For Nature (Oxford Univ., $24.95). Until discovering the beauty of the Sierra Nevada and falling in love with California in general, Muir felt restless and alienated from both farming and urban life. Donald Worster’s biography sets Muir within the currents of his time, showing his struggles to harmonize scientific views of nature with spiritual belief, and to advocate wilderness preservation in the face of civilization’s relentless expansion. Generous quotations from Muir’s letters and sketches from his notebooks bring the man to life. Laurie Greer
Each historical vignette gives the reader a new perspective on one of the grandest cities in the world, and Robb's vivid writing keeps you engaged and delighted with each new discovery. Angela Maria Williams

In Tocqueville’s Discovery Of America (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $15), Leo Damrosch is a genial and illuminating guide to Tocqueville’s 1831 trip to the New World. A biographer of Rousseau, Damrosch keeps his subject’s French context in view as he traces the journey through New York, Boston, Quebec, Cincinnati, Washington, D.C. (an uninspiring mix of neoclassical buildings and mud), New Orleans, and the South. Here to study penitentiaries, Tocqueville also considered the young nation’s government, commerce, society, and its treatment of women, slaves, and Native Americans. He survived rough roads and reckless steamboats (the fact-finding mission was at times a hair-raising adventure). Damrosch quotes from Tocqueville’s letters, diaries, and notes as well as from Democracy in America, presenting the Frenchman’s first impressions and showing how he worked these disparate observations into the ideas of his book. Laurie Greer

Missing J.D. Salinger? The winner of the 2010 Prix Goncourt for the Novella, Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt, reminds me of a more optimistic version of the curmudgeonly old recluse. As with his previous collections The Most Beautiful Book in the World and Woman with the Bouquet, Schmitt here is philosophical, inventive, humorous, imaginative, and even mystical. The stories in Concerto To The Memory Of An Angel (Europa Editions, $15) may take the reader down dark paths, exploring the worst in human nature, but they end with unpredictable twists, tantalizing characters and readers alike with a sense of new possibilities. Andrew Getman

In Francophilia - Us/France Exchange Students

Four siblings escape their ordinary lives for a day in Anna Gavalda’s French Leave (Europa Editions, $15). Garance, Simon, and Lola impulsively skip out on a deadly dull family wedding, not to mention on Simon’s shrew of a wife, Carine, to visit their brother Vincent, a (somewhat unreliable) tour guide at a country chateau. The trip turns into a journey through the past, lit by the light of nostalgia, love, and familial affection. Sweet, sad, and very, very French, it’s the perfect read for a summer’s day. David Maritz.

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Walk down the winding side streets of Paris history in Parisians: An Adventure History Of Paris (W.W. Norton, $17.95). Graham Robb, the adventurourcycling author of The Discovery of France, turns both renowned and obscure figures into fascinating characters. There’s the story about the unsung architect who built the catacombs that saved Paris from sinking into the sea. Or the police archivist from whom Alexandre Dumas borrowed the premise for The Count of Monte Cristo. Then there’s Marie Antoinette, getting lost.

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- 20% discount on books in selected sections; for example, travel books were on sale in April, gardening books in May.
- Storewide discounts during four annual weekend-long Member Sales
It’s the voice of Keith Richards that makes you keep reading these pages: he’s observant, opinionated, cynical, and funny, yet always filled with love for the music, his mates, and his family. In his memoir, Life (Back Bay, $16.99), written with James Fox, you can hear Keef’s smoke-ravaged voice telling you these epic, rollicking tales of his musical beginnings and triumphs—and his drug-fueled tribulations. You are appalled and fascinated: how did this man survive? And how did he co-write those classic hits for the Rolling Stones, or create some of the greatest guitar riffs in rock history? The little kid growing up in the post-war London suburbs obsessed by the blues, Elvis, and Chuck Berry ends up in some fascinating places…and you turn another page. “Hail, hail, rock ‘n’ roll!” András Goldinger

Despite the title, it is impossible to sleepwalk through Mike Birbiglia’s Sleepwalk With Me (Simon & Schuster, $14). From the opening pages, his humor and wit are captivating. Birbiglia takes the reader back to his childhood days when he realized he had a talent for making others laugh, even at the expense of his own health and well-being. As in his stand-up routines, Birbiglia in these pages is unafraid to let us into his past, divulging story after story of growing up in Massachusetts and finding his way into the comedy business. Birbiglia will have you laughing page after page and thinking that your own painfully true stories aren’t nearly as embarrassing as his. Wendy Brown

French Classics Made Easy (Workman, $16.95), by Richard Grausman, is a contemporized reworking of a cookbook he originally produced in the late 1980s. Here he again brings a practical eye to classic French dishes like cassoulet, boeuf Bourguignon, and bouillabaisse, which call for ingredients available in American markets and which are easily fit into busy schedules, but in this revision Grausman recognizes the recent trend toward more healthful eating habits, and pays careful attention to the amounts of cream, butter, and salt in the recipes. Sacrilege? I hope not. Here is a way we can enjoy these fantastic dishes and eat them more than a couple of times a year. Mark LaFramboise

Available in paperback for the first time, Richard Olney’s The French Menu Cookbook (Ten Speed, $22) is a reprint of the classic 1970 publication. Olney, an American who has lived most of his life in Paris, divides his book by season, emphasizing the freshest ingredients likely to be available at a given time. Unlike Grausman’s French Classics Made Easy, Olney’s book isn’t about shortcuts; he’s interested in presenting the most authentic versions of French dishes, complete with thoughtful and provocative wine suggestions, as well as entire menus designed for events ranging from casual dinners to decadent soirées. Mark LaFramboise

Anthony Bourdain brings his wit, snark, and love of cooking to bear on the current culinary landscape in Medium Raw (Ecco, $15.99). What separates Bourdain from other food writers is his obvious love for the craft and his inability to spare feelings, including his own. Hilarious and puncturing takes on his work with The Food Network, the pomposity (and talent) of Alice Waters, and the surreal set of Top Chef are balanced by confessional passages about his own failings as a cook and a person. Bourdain venerates the passion and commitment to cooking while deflating those he believes are doing it a disservice. Whether you end up agreeing with him or not, you will laugh while deciding. Bill Leggett

John Waters, cult filmmaker and curator of a “filth empire,” is at his outrageous, provocative best in the ten essays of Role Models (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $15), covering topics including Johnny Mathis, bibliophiles, pornography, and Tennessee Williams. Waters excels at collecting the flotsam and jetsam lurking just under the surface of good taste, but Role Models takes a few reflective turns as well, most notably in the lengthy and thoughtful “Leslie,” an essay about his long-time friend, Leslie Van Houten (yes, that Leslie Van Houten). Here Waters raises important questions about the concept of justice: can someone who has committed murder ever pay her debt to society? Is criminal rehabilitation possible? What role does forgiveness have? In true Waters style, the next piece, about the anti-fashion designer Rei Kawakubo, makes a tongue-in-cheek comment on Che Guevara’s homophobia: “His iconic look… proves all ideology can be embraced if the leader dresses well.” Thankfully for us, Waters leaves the boring navy blazer on the rack. Lacey Dunham

Show Biz
Harry Truman's Excellent Adventure: The True Story of a Great American Road Trip (Chicago Review, $16.95) is a fun-loving romp back to when the “ex-Presidency” hadn’t yet been invented. Faced with no job, no security detail, and a small military pension, Harry and Bess return home to a quiet, peaceful life in Independence, Missouri. When Harry is invited to give a speech back east, they make the trip in his 1953 Chrysler to save money. Hilarity and hijinks may not ensue, but Matthew Algeo’s recounting of the politics, fashion, style, and mood of the 1950s—and the history that brought America that far—fascinates.

The Ball Game

One of the things that makes baseball special is its storied history. In Baseball In The Garden Of Eden (Simon & Schuster, $26), John Thorn, the Official Historian of Major League Baseball, offers a new look at that history, from baseball’s years as a pastoral game for children to its renaissance as a booming business for professional athletes. Thorn uses thorough, original research and previously unknown documents to revise and revitalize the early days of our national pastime. A refreshing and essential addition to baseball literature. Sam Ramos

It is hard to believe that this book is no longer mere travel literature, but instead is already part of the historical record. In the early ’90s, British journalist Susan Richards set out to explore the strange, bizarre, and hidden aspects of a transitional and troubled country. As she wandered Russia, she met UFO believers, mafia gangsters, artists and musicians, Russian Orthodox cultural separatists, and throughout, ordinary people struggling to make sense of a new reality as best they could. Touching, historical, humorous, Lost And Found In Russia (Other Press, $15.95) is the absorbing result.

Section by Andrew Getman

The official rulebook of Major League Baseball is over two hundred pages long and covers almost anything that could happen in the course of a game. Then there are the implicit rules, or codes, that the players keep in mind, and which often have as great an impact on the game as the formal regulations. Jason Turbow and Michael Duca interviewed dozens of former players for The Baseball Codes (Anchor, $15). The result is a highly entertaining set of anecdotes explaining why batters get knocked down, when it’s ethically correct to steal a base, whether you should mention no one has gotten a hit yet, and what types of cheating are allowable. This book celebrates the fun, tradition, and idiosyncrasies that make baseball different from all other sports. Bill Leggett

When you watch this year’s Major League All-Star Game, you may not realize that many of the players hail from the same city: San Pedro de Macoris, in the Dominican Republic. Mark Kurlansky’s Eastern Stars (Riverhead, $16) explores this place, where boys dream of playing baseball in America but most grow up to become men working in their home sugarcane fields. Kurlansky delves into both the past and the present of this fascinating region that exports to us such a large part of our national pastime. Bill Leggett

Section by Andrew Getman