

## Editor's Choice

**THE YEAR OF MAGICAL THINKING**, by Joan Didion. (Knopf, \$23.95.) A powerful, persuasive account of the crisis of mortality after the sudden death of the author's husband.

**CURSE OF THE NARROWS**, by Laura M. MacDonald. (Walker, \$26.) A wrenching, detailed account of the 1917 explosion that destroyed Halifax, Nova Scotia, and killed nearly 2,000 people.

**GOING SANE: Maps of Happiness**, by Adam Phillips. (Fourth Estate/HarperCollins, \$24.95.) A psychoanalytic unraveling of what it is to be not mad in a culture that romanticizes madness.

**MISSING MOM**, by Joyce Carol Oates. (Ecco/HarperCollins, \$25.95.) This novel peers into the void left by a woman's sudden absence.

**NEW YORK BURNING: Liberty, Slavery, and Conspiracy in 18th-Century Manhattan**, by Jill Lepore. (Knopf, \$26.95.) In 1741, the city, dread-ing revolt, executed 30 slaves and 4 whites.

**AMERICA AND THE CHALLENGES OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY**, by Robert Wuthnow. (Princeton University, \$29.95.) A sociologist examines America's remarkable religious civility.

**THE LAST DAYS OF DOGTOWN**, by Anita Diamant. (Scribner, \$25.) A novel that follows the decline and death of an unpromising village.

**THIRD GIRL FROM THE LEFT**, by Martha Southgate. (Houghton Mifflin, \$24.) A novel inhabited by three generations of headstrong, movie-loving black women in Los Angeles.

**READING, WRITING, AND LEAVING HOME: Life on the Page**, by Lynn Freed. (Harcourt, \$22.) An accomplished memoir about life and fiction and how the author has handled both.

**OUR INNER APE: A Leading Primatologist Explains Why We Are Who We Are**, by Frans de Waal. (Riverhead, \$24.95.) De Waal addresses the similarities between humans and their closest relatives, bonobos and chimpanzees.

**EDGE OF EMPIRE: Lives, Culture, and Conquest in the East, 1750-1850**, by Maya Jasanoff. (Knopf, \$27.95.) A historian rethinks imperialism and the inauspicious seeds it grew from.

The full reviews of these and other recent books are on the Web: [nytimes.com/books](http://nytimes.com/books).

## Paperback Row

**THE LINE OF BEAUTY**, by Alan Hollinghurst. (Bloomsbury, \$14.95.) Hollinghurst's elegant novel was a Man Booker Prize winner in 2004. It opens in the summer of 1983, when Nicholas Guest — intellectual, gay and about to turn 21 — moves into the West London mansion of his friend's father, a rising politician in Thatcher's government. As Nick becomes entwined with the family and their world of privilege, he also discovers the pleasures of metropolitan gay life. But fortunes turn in the wake of scandal, the stock market crash and the escalating AIDS crisis. Our reviewer, Anthony Quinn, described "The Line of Beauty" as "blissful . . . a magnificent comedy of manners."

**HIGH NOON IN THE COLD WAR: Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Cuban Missile Crisis**, by Max Frankel. (Ballantine, \$13.95.) This brisk, engaging account revisits one of the cold war's most alarming moments: in October 1962, when America discovered the Soviet plan to use Cuba as a strategic missile base. Frankel, a former executive editor of The New York Times, captures the struggle between the two cold war antagonists — Nikita Khrushchev and John F. Kennedy: "In the end, both were ready to betray important allies, resist the counsel of chafing military commanders and endure political humiliation to find a way out of the crisis."

**HERMAN MELVILLE: A Biography — Volume 1, 1819-1851, and Volume 2, 1851-1891**, by Hershel Parker. (Johns Hopkins University, \$29.95 each.) This definitive two-volume biography presents a rich portrait of one of America's favorite authors. The first volume covers Melville's exila-

rating rise — his patrician beginnings, his years at sea — and ends with the publication of "Moby-Dick." Volume 2 looks at Melville's home life and his disappointing later years, dogged by debts and obscurity.

**THE INNER CIRCLE**, by T. C. Boyle. (Penguin, \$15.) This fictional rendering of the professional and sexual relations between the celebrated sex researcher Alfred C. Kinsey and one of his (invented) acolytes follows Kinsey through the most productive years of his research at Indiana University. The narrator is a shy undergraduate who falls under the professor's charismatic spell. Our reviewer, A. O. Scott, called Kinsey's quest to improve humanity "a perfect subject for this sly and intrepid novelist."

**THE ROADS TO MODERNITY: The British, French, and American Enlightenments**, by Gertrude Himmelfarb. (Vintage, \$14.) Himmelfarb, a distinguished intellectual historian, contrasts the thinkers of the Parisian Enlightenment (Voltaire, Diderot) with their British and American counterparts (Adam Smith, John Locke, Thomas Jefferson). She argues that the non-French Enlightenments have been unfairly ignored, but were distinctly humane and created a social ethic that still resonates.

**THE LITTLE WHITE CAR**, by Danuta de Rhodes. (Canongate, \$12.) De Rhodes (a pseudonym for the British writer Dan Rhodes) pulls comedy out of tragedy in this novel about Veronique, a young Frenchwoman who gets drunk and drives her white Fiat through a tunnel in Paris — only to hear the

next day about Princess Diana's fatal accident in the very same tunnel at the very same time.

**HARBOR**, by Lorraine Adams. (Vintage Contemporaries, \$13.95.) Adams's meticulously constructed first novel, informed by her reporting for The Washington Post, captures the complexity of terrorism's challenge to democracy. In winter 1999, her protagonist, Aziz, joins a community of hard-working, nonpolitical, illegal Algerian immigrants in Boston. Surrounded by a criminal world of drugs and smuggling and the intersecting interests of jihadists, Aziz and his fellow refugees draw the attention of anti-terrorism investigators. "These characters are the product of a virtuoso act of the imagination," Neil Gordon wrote here.

**THE CULT OF PERSONALITY TESTING: How Personality Tests Are Leading Us to Miseducate Our Children, Mismanage Our Companies, and Misunderstand Ourselves**, by Annie Murphy Paul. (Free Press, \$14.) A former senior editor at Psychology Today, Paul combines reporting, biography and social commentary to expose a sprawling unregulated industry. "Our society is making crucial decisions," she warns, "on the basis of deeply flawed information."

**HELL BENT FOR LEATHER: Confessions of a Heavy Metal Addict**, by Seb Hunter. (Harper Perennial, \$13.95.) In this nostalgic look at heavy metal culture, Hunter recalls gigs, groupies and drugs on the fringes of London's heavy metal scene, and how he risked everything to become a rock star.

IHSAN TAYLOR