

Best Books 2011: More of the Best

By LJ Reviews
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best books 2011 **More of the Best**



Avery, Kevin. [Everything Is an Afterthought: The Life and Writings of Paul Nelson](#). Fantagraphics, dist. by Norton. ISBN 9781606994757. \$29.99. **BIOG/CRITICISM/MUSIC**

Chances are, even the most cultivated hipsters under 40 have never heard of Paul Nelson (1936–2006), who pioneered new journalism with noir undertones at *Sing Out!* and *Rolling Stone*. This lovingly constructed part biography, part anthology reanimates a self-defeating romantic and uncompromising critic who aspired to live inside his beloved films and music. (LJ 9/15/11)

Ballard, J.G. [Millennium People](#). Norton. ISBN 9780393081770. \$25.95. **F**

First published in England in 2003, Ballard's deconstruction of middle-class unrest in modern-day London goes beyond protests to envision a people-powered terrorism. Psychologist David Markham narrates his eager free fall into a movement that reveals the unrelenting pull of violence and other human beings when systems let us down. (LJ 6/15/11)

Burrowes, Grace. [The Soldier](#). Sourcebooks Casablanca. ISBN 9781402245671. pap. \$6.99. HISTORICAL ROMANCE

Exceptional storytelling and unforgettable characters grace the pages of Burrowes's flawless sophomore effort, the second installment of a multivolume family saga set in post-Napoleonic Britain in which protagonists overcome pain and insecurity by putting their faith in love. (*LJ Xpress Reviews*, 6/10/11)

Coleman, Rebecca. [The Kingdom of Childhood](#). Mira: Harlequin. ISBN 9780778312789. pap. \$15.95. F

A semifinalist in the 2010 Amazon Breakthrough Novel Competition, Coleman's debut is a disturbing yet enthralling read that examines why a teacher might begin a sexual relationship with a 16-year-old student. This dark tale about innocence lost will resonate with readers long after the haunting final page. (*LJ* 6/15/11)

Douglas-Fairhurst, Robert. [Becoming Dickens: The Invention of a Novelist](#). Belknap: Harvard Univ. ISBN 9780647062764. \$29.95. BIOG/LIT

The book for the 2012 bicentennial of Charles Dickens's birth, this isn't the whole life; this is the evolution of the young Charles John Huffam Dickens, from one of eight children of upward-aspiring but shabby parents, into one of the wonders of the young Victorian era. It could have turned out so differently, as Dickens himself knew. Insightful, witty, and inspiring. (*LJ* 8/11)

Eugenides, Jeffrey. [The Marriage Plot](#). Farrar. ISBN 9780374203054. \$28. F

Moody spiritual seeker Mitchell Grammaticus is besotted with English literature-loving Madeleine, who's just as besotted with brilliant, unstable Leonard. A standard love triangle? No, it's an extraordinary, liquidly written evocation of love's mad rush and the mistakes made in its name. Few books so effectively capture the territory lying beyond coming-of-age but before middle-age angst sets in. (*LJ* 8/11)

Fey, Tina. [Bossypants](#). Reagan Arthur: Little, Brown. ISBN 9780316056861. \$26.99. AUTOBIOG/TV

Besides covering her childhood, comedy apprenticeship at Second City, writing for and performing on *Saturday Night Live*, and producing and starring in *30 Rock*, the brilliantly funny and smart Fey offers sage career advice for women trying to make it in a male-dominated workplace: "No pigtales, no tube tops. Cry sparingly." (*LJ* 4/1/11)

Foreman, Amanda. [A World on Fire: Britain's Crucial Role in the American Civil War](#). Random. ISBN 9780375504945. \$35. HIST

Foreman understands that the past is densely populated, that every struggle has men and women at its core, that in crafting history, as with fiction, it's not just plot; it's character. Her new book has been compared to *War and Peace* and *Gone with the Wind*, but don't go there! This doesn't "read like a novel"; it reads like the great history it is. (*LJ* 6/1/11)

Kastin, David. [Nica's Dream: The Life and Legend of the Jazz Baroness](#). Norton. ISBN 9780393069402. \$26.95. MUSIC

After World War II, Pannonica (Nica) de Koenigswarter of the Rothschild dynasty left her French baron husband and children for New York City. In this atmospheric narrative, Kastin works to dispel the mythology that sprung up with her involvement in the flourishing American jazz scene and artfully clears the haze surrounding the greats and their influential, unsung contemporaries. (LJ 4/15/11)

Leroy, Margaret. [The Soldier's Wife](#). Voice: Hyperion. ISBN 9781401341701. pap. \$14.99. HISTORICAL FICTION

Guernsey during World War II is the perfect setting for this beautifully rendered tale of those left behind during wartime and how longing for normalcy can vanquish, even briefly, mistrust and uncover common ground. (LJ 5/15/11)

Morgenstern, Erin. [The Night Circus](#). Doubleday. ISBN 9780385534635. \$26.95. F

Morgenstern's immersive debut novel, already an indie favorite, portrays life in the meticulously created and spectacularly magical Le Cirque des Rêves. Behind the scenes of the secretive circus live many refugees from the plain world outside, including Celia and Marco, prisoners of their fathers' lethal competition to pit the world's best magicians against each other. (LJ 6/15/11)

[Prints and the Pursuit of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe](#). Yale Univ. ed. by Susan Dackerman. ISBN 9780300171075. pap. \$60. FINE ARTS

This large-format catalog of woodcuts, engravings, and etchings by luminaries of the Northern Renaissance (Dürer, Cranach, and Holbein) inaugurates the reopening of the Harvard Art Museums and examines art in the service of science. These prints helped both visually articulate and disseminate advances in scientific thought in 16th-century Europe. A feast for the eyes and mind. (LJ Xpress Reviews, 11/4/11)

Roy, Lori. [Bent Road](#). Dutton. ISBN 9780525951834. \$25.95. F

Returning to rural Kansas after the 1967 Detroit riots, Arthur and Celia Scott and their three children find their quest for a calmer, safer life shattered by the disappearance of a neighbor's child. Roy's exceptional first novel is full of tension, complex characters, and deftly applied gothic overtones. (LJ 2/1/11)

Stuntz, William J. [The Collapse of American Criminal Justice](#). Belknap: Harvard Univ. ISBN 9780674051751. \$35. LAW

A stinging indictment of the American criminal justice system, this final work by the late Harvard law professor draws legal analysis together with history, economics, political developments, and demographic data to tell the story of the past 150 years of jurisprudence in the United States. With clarity, Stuntz depicts a system crippled by racial inequality and staggering incarceration rates. (LJ 9/15/11)

Sullivan, John Jeremiah. *Pulphed: Essays*. Farrar. ISBN 9780374532901. pap. \$16. LIT

National Magazine Award winner Sullivan's crackling, inquisitive collection of previously published essays is the kind of book you proselytize for. Comparisons to nonfiction greats—Tom Wolfe, John McPhee, and David Foster Wallace—are deserving but beside the point. Sullivan's voice, affectionate and grounded, is his own. (LJ 11/15/11)

Wallace, David Foster. *The Pale King*. Little, Brown. ISBN 9780316074230. \$27.99. F

In this posthumously published metafictional memoir of IRS examiner David Foster Wallace, the extreme boredom of life in the service seals the terminally odd characters inside thick layers of mental obsessions. Every tic and nuance of a coworker are fodder for pages of incisively described observations interspersed with detailed footnotes on the fictional Wallace's past and on arcane points of IRS procedure. (LJ 5/15/11)

Ward, Jesmyn. *Salvage the Bones*. Bloomsbury USA, dist. by Macmillan. ISBN 9781608195220. \$24. F

Life is tough enough for the Batistes, a poor African American family just hanging on in Bois Sauvage, MS. But now it's summer, summer means hurricanes, and the hurricane about to hit is Katrina. Lyrical and relentless, Ward's narrative builds to the storm's awful landfall and aftermath, portraying both heartbreak and the family's extraordinary devotion. (LJ 8/11)

Whitehead, Colson. *Zone One*. Doubleday. ISBN 9780385528078. \$25.95. F

Set in a devastated lower Manhattan that eerily recalls post-9/11 New York City, Whitehead's smart, satiric take on the postapocalyptic horror genre offers the most literary nod to zombieism since Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. These are zombies with braaaains! (LJ 8/11)

Willis, Ellen. *Out of the Vinyl Deeps: Ellen Willis on Rock Music*. Univ. of Minnesota. ed. by Nona Willis Aronowitz. ISBN 9780816672820. \$69; pap. ISBN 9780816672837. \$22.95. CRITICISM/MUSIC

Rock journalism remains a boys' club, so it's heartening to know that Willis (1941–2006) was navigating the trenches of the American counterculture for *The New Yorker*, assessing its outsized icons with a diamond-cut confidence, bullshit detector on 11. Her skill at distilling rock 'n' roll's emotional content is uncanny, as is her portending of corporate rock, corporate everything. (LJ 4/1/11)