



STAFF PICKS: THE BEST OF 2011

Fiction

[*Started Early, Took My Dog*](#) by Kate Atkinson

Tracy Waterhouse leads a quiet, ordered life as a retired police detective -- a life that takes a surprising turn when she encounters Kelly Cross, a habitual offender, dragging a young child through town. Both appear miserable and better off without each other -- or so decides Tracy, in a snap decision that surprises herself as much as Kelly. Suddenly burdened with a small child, Tracy soon learns her parental inexperience is actually the least of her problems, as much larger ones loom for her and her young charge. Meanwhile, Jackson Brodie, the beloved detective of novels such as *Case Histories*, is embarking on a different sort of rescue -- that of an abused dog. Dog in tow, Jackson is about to learn, along with Tracy, that no good deed goes unpunished.

[*Lost Memory of Skin*](#) by Russell Banks

Uncompromising and complex, *Lost Memory of Skin* is the story of The Kid, a young sex offender recently released from prison and forced to live beneath a South Florida causeway. When The Professor, a man of enormous intellect and appetite, takes The Kid under his wing, his own startling past will cause upheavals in both of their worlds.

[*Killed at the Whim of a Hat*](#) by Colin Cotterill

Jimm Juree was a crime reporter for the Chiang Mai Daily Mail with a somewhat eccentric family. When she is forced to follow her family to a rural village on the coast of Southern Thailand, she's convinced her career -- maybe her life -- is over. So when a van containing the skeletal remains of two hippies is inexplicably unearthed in a local farmer's field, Jimm is thrilled. Shortly thereafter an abbot at a local Buddhist temple is viciously murdered. Suddenly Jimm's new life becomes somewhat more promising -- and a lot more deadly. And if Jimm is to unravel the inexplicable events, it will take luck, perseverance, and the help of her entire family.

[*Left Neglected*](#) by Lisa Genova

Sarah Nickerson is like any other career-driven supermom in Welmont, the affluent Boston suburb where she leads a hectic but charmed life with her husband Bob, faithful nanny, and three children. Between a demanding job and shuttling the kids to soccer, day care, and piano lessons and making it home in time for dinner, it's a wonder this over-scheduled, over-achieving Harvard graduate has time to breathe. Sarah miraculously manages every minute of her life like an air traffic controller. Until one fateful day, while driving to work and trying to make a phone call, she looks away from the road for one second too long. In the blink of an eye, all the rapidly moving parts of her jam-packed life come to a screeching halt.

[The Magician King](#) by Lev Grossman

In the sequel to *The Magicians*, Grossman takes us back to Fillory, where the Brakebills graduates have fled the sorrows of the mundane world, only to face terrifying new challenges. Quentin and his friends are now the kings and queens of Fillory, but the days and nights of royal luxury are starting to pall. After a morning hunt takes a sinister turn, Quentin and his old friend Julia charter a magical sailing ship and set out on an errand to the wild outer reaches of their kingdom. Their pleasure cruise becomes an adventure when the two are unceremoniously dumped back into the last place Quentin ever wants to see: his parent's house in Chesterton, Massachusetts. And only the black, twisted magic that Julia learned on the streets can save them.

[The Art of Fielding](#) by Chad Harbach

At Westish College, a small school on the shore of Lake Michigan, baseball star Henry Skrimshander seems destined for big league stardom. But when a routine throw goes disastrously off course, the fates of five people are upended. Henry's fight against self-doubt threatens to ruin his future. College president Guert Affenlight, a longtime bachelor, has fallen unexpectedly and helplessly in love. Owen Dunne, Henry's gay roommate and teammate, becomes caught up in a dangerous affair. Mike Schwartz, the Harpooners' team captain and Henry's best friend, realizes he has guided Henry's career at the expense of his own. And Pella Affenlight, returns to Westish after escaping an ill-fated marriage, determined to start a new life. As the season counts down to its climactic final game, these five are forced to confront their deepest hopes, anxieties, and secrets. In the process they forge new bonds, and help one another find their true paths.

[A Discovery of Witches](#) by Deborah Harkness

Deep in the stacks of Oxford's Bodleian Library, young scholar Diana Bishop unwittingly calls up a bewitched alchemical manuscript in the course of her research. Descended from an old and distinguished line of witches, Diana wants nothing to do with sorcery; so after a furtive glance and a few notes, she banishes the book to the stacks. But her discovery sets a fantastical underworld stirring, and a horde of daemons, witches, and vampires soon descends upon the library. Diana has stumbled upon a coveted treasure lost for centuries -- and she is the only creature who can break its spell.

[22 Britannia Road](#) by Amanda Hodgkinson

"Housekeeper or housewife?" the soldier asks Silvana as she and eight-year-old Aurek board the ship that will take them from Poland to England at the end of World War II. There her husband, Janusz, is already waiting for them at the little house at 22 Britannia Road. But the war has changed them all so utterly that they'll barely recognize one another when they are reunited. "Survivor," she answers. Silvana and Aurek spent the war hiding in the forests of Poland. Wild, almost feral Aurek doesn't know how to tie his own shoes or sleep in a bed. Janusz is an Englishman now determined to forget Poland and begin a new life as a proper English family. But for Silvana, who cannot escape the painful memory of a shattering wartime act, forgetting is not a possibility.

[The Red Garden](#) by Alice Hoffman

The Red Garden introduces us to the luminous and haunting world of Blackwell, Massachusetts, capturing the unexpected turns in its history and in our own lives. In exquisite prose, Hoffman offers a transforming glimpse of small-town America, presenting us with some three hundred years of passion, dark secrets, loyalty, and redemption in a web of tales where characters' lives are intertwined by fate and by their own actions. At the

center of everyone's life is a mysterious garden where only red plants can grow, and where the truth can be found by those who dare to look.

[11/22/63](#) by Stephen King

King's heart-stoppingly dramatic new novel is about a man who travels back in time to prevent the JFK assassination. Jake Epping is a 35-year-old high-school English teacher in Lisbon Falls, Maine, who makes extra money teaching adults in the GED program. Jake's friend, Al, who runs the local diner, divulges a secret: his storeroom is a portal to 1958.

[Wicked Autumn: A Max Tudor Novel](#) by G. M. Malliet

What could be more dangerous than cozy village life in the English countryside? Max Tudor has adapted well to his post as vicar of St. Edwold's in the idyllic village of Nether Monkslip. The quiet village seems the perfect home for Max, who has fled a harrowing past as an MI5 agent. Now he has found a measure of peace among urban escapees and yoga practitioners, artists and crafters and New Agers. But this new-found serenity is quickly shattered when the highly vocal and unpopular president of the Women's Institute turns up dead at the Harvest Fayre. The death looks like an accident, but Max's training as a former agent kicks in, and before long he suspects foul play.

[The Paris Wife](#) by Paula McLain

The Paris Wife captures a remarkable period of time and a love affair between two unforgettable people: Ernest Hemingway and his wife Hadley. Chicago, 1920: Hadley Richardson is a quiet twenty-eight-year-old who has all but given up on love and happiness -- until she meets Ernest Hemingway and her life changes forever. Following a whirlwind courtship and wedding, the pair set sail for Paris, where they become the golden couple in a lively and volatile group -- the fabled "Lost Generation" that includes Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, and F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald. Though deeply in love, the Hemingways are ill prepared for the hard-drinking and fast-living life of Jazz Age Paris, which hardly values traditional notions of family and monogamy. But in the end, Hemingway wrote that he would rather have died than fallen in love with anyone but Hadley.

[The Tiger's Wife](#) by Tea Obreht

In a Balkan country mending from years of conflict, Natalia, a young doctor, arrives on a mission of mercy at an orphanage by the sea. By the time she and her lifelong friend begin to inoculate the children there, she feels age-old superstitions and secrets gathering everywhere around her. Secrets her outwardly cheerful hosts have chosen not to tell her. Secrets involving the strange family digging for something in the surrounding vineyards. Secrets hidden in the landscape itself.

[State of Wonder](#) by Ann Patchett

State of Wonder is a provocative and ambitious novel set deep in the Amazon jungle. Research scientist Dr. Marina Singh is sent to Brazil to track down her former mentor, Dr. Annick Swenson, who seems to have disappeared in the Amazon while working on an extremely valuable new drug. The last person who was sent to find her died before he could complete his mission. Plagued by trepidation, Marina embarks on an odyssey into the insect-infested jungle in hopes of finding answers to the questions about her friend's death, her company's future, and her own past.

[*A Trick of the Light: A Chief Inspector Gamache Novel*](#) by Louise Penny

"Hearts are broken," Lillian Dyson carefully underlined in a book. "Sweet relationships are dead." But now Lillian herself is dead. Found among the bleeding hearts and lilacs of Clara Morrow's garden in Three Pines, shattering the celebrations of Clara's solo art show. Chief Inspector Gamache, the head of homicide at the Surete du Quebec, is called to the tiny Quebec village and there he finds the art world gathered, and with it a world of shading and nuance, a world of shadow and light. Where nothing is as it seems. Behind every smile there lurks a sneer. Inside every sweet relationship there hides a broken heart. And even when facts are slowly exposed, it is no longer clear to Gamache and his team if what they've found is the truth, or simply a trick of the light.

[*The Leftovers*](#) by Tom Perrotta

What if the Rapture happened and you got left behind? Or what if it wasn't the Rapture at all, but something murkier, a burst of mysterious, apparently random disappearances that shattered the world in a single moment, dividing history into Before and After, leaving no one unscathed? How would you rebuild your life in the wake of such a devastating event? This is the question confronting the bewildered citizens of Mapleton, a formerly comfortable suburban community that lost over a hundred people in the Sudden Departure.

[*A Double Death on the Black Isle*](#) by A. D. Scott

Scott pens a suspenseful story of families, betrayal, and a community divided. Nothing is ever quite at peace on Scotland's Black Isle -- the Traveling people are forever at odds with the locals, the fishermen have nothing in common with the farmers, and the villages have no connection with the town. But when two deaths occur on the same day, involving the same families from the same estate -- the Black Isle seems as forbidding as its name.

[*Maine*](#) by Courtney Sullivan

For the Kellehers, Maine is a place where children run in packs, showers are taken outdoors, and old Irish songs are sung around a piano. Their beachfront property, won on a barroom bet after the war, sits on three acres of sand and pine nestled between stretches of rocky coast, with one tree bearing the initials "A.H." At the cottage, built by Kelleher hands, cocktail hour follows morning mass, nosy grandchildren snoop in drawers, and decades-old grudges simmer beneath the surface. As three generations of Kelleher women descend on the property one summer, each brings her own hopes and fears. *Maine* unveils the sibling rivalry, alcoholism, social climbing, and Catholic guilt at the center of one family, along with the abiding, often irrational love that keeps them coming back, every summer -- to Maine and to each other.

[*Rules of Civility*](#) by Amor Towles

Set in New York City in 1938, *Rules of Civility* tells the story of a watershed year in the life of an uncompromising twenty-five-year-old named Katey Kontent. Armed with little more than a formidable intellect, a bracing wit, and her own brand of cool nerve, Katey embarks on a journey from a Wall Street secretarial pool through the upper echelons of New York society in search of a brighter future.

[*Clara and Mr. Tiffany*](#) by Susan Vreelan

It's 1893, and at the Chicago World's Fair, Louis Comfort Tiffany makes his debut with a luminous exhibition of innovative stained-glass windows, which he hopes will honor his family business and earn him a place on the international artistic stage. But behind the scenes in his New York studio is the freethinking Clara Driscoll, head of his women's division. Publicly unrecognized by Tiffany, Clara conceives of and designs nearly all of the iconic leaded-glass lamps for which he is long remembered. Clara struggles with her desire for artistic recognition and the

seemingly insurmountable challenges that she faces as a professional woman, which ultimately force her to protest against the company she has worked so hard to cultivate.

[*The Submission*](#) by Amy Waldman

Ten years after 9/11, a kaleidoscopic novel reimagines its aftermath. A jury gathers in Manhattan to select a memorial for the victims of a devastating terrorist attack. Their fraught deliberations complete, the jurors open the envelope containing the anonymous winner's name -- and discover he is an American Muslim. Instantly they are cast into roiling debate about the claims of grief, the ambiguities of art, and the meaning of Islam. Their conflicted response is only a preamble to the country's. The memorial's designer is an enigmatic, ambitious architect named Mohammad Khan. His fiercest defender on the jury is its sole widow, Claire Burwell. But when the news of his selection leaks to the press, she finds herself under pressure from outraged family members and in collision with hungry journalists, wary activists, opportunistic politicians, fellow jurors, and Khan himself.

[*The Stranger You Seek*](#) by Amanda Kyle Williams

In the sweltering heat of an Atlanta summer, a killer is pushing the city to its breaking point, preying on the unsuspecting, writing taunting letters to the media, promising more death. Desperate to stop the Wishbone Killer before another victim meets a shattering end, A.P.D. lieutenant Aaron Rauser turns to the one person he knows can penetrate a deranged mind: ex-FBI profiler Keye Street. *The Stranger You Seek* introduces a brash, flawed, and unforgettable heroine in a complex, twisting novel that takes readers deep into a sultry Southern summer, a city in the grips of chaos, and a harrowing cat-and-mouse game no reader will ever forget.

Non-Fiction

[*Tomatoland: How Modern Industrial Agriculture Destroyed Our Most Alluring Fruit*](#) by Barry Estabrook

Supermarket produce sections bulging with a year-round supply of perfectly round, bright red-orange tomatoes have become all but a national birthright. But in *Tomatoland* investigative food journalist Barry Estabrook reveals the huge human and environmental cost of the \$5 billion fresh tomato industry. Fields are sprayed with more than one hundred different herbicides and pesticides. Tomatoes are picked hard and green and artificially gassed until their skins acquire a marketable hue. Modern plant breeding has tripled yields, but has also produced fruits with dramatically reduced amounts of calcium, vitamin A, and vitamin C, and tomatoes that have fourteen times more sodium than the tomatoes our parents enjoyed.

[*Bossypants*](#) by Tina Fey

On her way to becoming an award-winning actress and star of the TV series *30 Rock*, Tina Fey struggled through some questionable haircuts, some after-school jobs, the rise of nachos as a cultural phenomenon, a normal childhood, a happy marriage and joyful motherhood. Now she can reflect on what she's learned: you're no one until someone calls you bossy.

[*Moonwalking with Einstein: The Art and Science of Remembering Everything*](#) by Jonathan Foer

Moonwalking with Einstein recounts Joshua Foer's yearlong quest to improve his memory under the tutelage of top "mental athletes." He draws on cutting-edge research, a surprising cultural history of remembering, and venerable tricks of the mentalists' trade to transform our understanding of human memory.

[*That Used to Be Us: How America Fell Behind in the World It Invented and How We Can Come Back*](#) by Thomas L. Friedman and Michael Mandelbaum.

We face four major challenges on which our future depends, and we are failing to meet them--and if we delay any longer, soon it will be too late for us to pass along the American dream to future generations. *That Used to Be Us* is both a wake-up call and a call to collective action. They analyze the four challenges we face -- globalization, the revolution in information technology, the nation's chronic deficits, and our pattern of excessive energy consumption -- and spell out what we need to do now to sustain the American dream and preserve American power in the world.

[*Sheepish: Two Women, Fifty Sheep, and Enough Wool to Save the Planet*](#) by Catherine Friend

What do you do when you love your farm . . . but it doesn't love you? After fifteen years of farming, Catherine Friend is tired. After all, while shepherding is one of the oldest professions, it's not getting any easier. The number of sheep in America has fallen by 90 percent in the last ninety years. But just as Catherine thinks it's time to hang up her shepherd's crook, she discovers that sheep might be too valuable to give up. What ensues is a funny, thoughtful romp through the history of our woolly friends, why small farms are important, and how each one of us -- and the planet -- would benefit from being very sheepish, indeed.

[*The Great Disruption: Why the Climate Crisis Will Bring on the End of Shopping and the Birth of a New World*](#) by Paul Gilding

Gilding, an international thought leader and advocate for sustainability, explains how the climate crisis will bring on the sustainable revolution. He offers a stark and unflinching look at the challenge humanity faces -- yet also a deeply optimistic message.

[*Blood, Bones & Butter: The Inadvertent Education of a Reluctant Chef*](#) by Gabrielle Hamilton

Before Gabrielle Hamilton opened her acclaimed New York restaurant Prune, she spent twenty fierce, hard-living years trying to find purpose and meaning in her life. Above all she sought family, particularly the thrill and the magnificence of the one from her childhood that, in her adult years, eluded her. Hamilton's ease and comfort in a kitchen were instilled in her at an early age when her parents hosted grand parties, often for more than one hundred friends and neighbors. The smells of spit-roasted lamb, apple wood smoke, and rosemary garlic marinade became as necessary to her as her own skin.

[*Yossarian Slept Here: When Joseph Heller was Dad, the Apthorp was Home, and Life was a Catch-22*](#) by Erica Heller

Catch-22 author Joseph Heller's daughter, Erica, writes a spirited and charming memoir about growing up amidst her father's literary fame, her parents' explosive divorce, and her delightfully eccentric upbringing. She takes readers to the meetings of the famous Gourmet Club, where her father would dine weekly with Mel Brooks and Zero Mostel, among others, and introduces us to the colorful neighbors who resided at the Apthorp, some famous

-- George Balanchine, Sidney Poitier, Carla Bruni to name a few -- and some not famous, but all quite unforgettable.

[*Steve Jobs: A Biography*](#) by Walter Isaacson

Based on more than forty interviews with Jobs conducted over two years as well as interviews with more than a hundred family members, friends, adversaries, competitors, and colleagues, Walter Isaacson has written a riveting story of the roller-coaster life and intense personality of a creative entrepreneur whose passion for perfection and ferocious drive revolutionized six industries: personal computers, animated movies, music, phones, tablet computing, and digital publishing.

[*In the Garden of Beasts: Love, Terror, and an American Family in Hitler's Berlin*](#) by Erik Larson

Larson offers a real-life, eyewitness perspective inside the Nazi hierarchy as Hitler came to power. William E. Dodd, a mild-mannered professor from Chicago, became the first US ambassador to Hitler's Germany in 1933. Dodd, his wife, their son, and their daughter Martha lived in Germany for about five years. Drawing on Martha's diaries and letters, much of the book centers on Martha's romantic affairs with high-ranking Nazi officials and her eventual heroism as she realized Hitler's true character. Meanwhile, her father William Dodd informed the US State Department of increasing Jewish persecution, with little response from the State Department. The book sheds light on why it took so long for the world to recognize the threat posed by Hitler.

[*Pinched: How the Great Recession Has Narrowed Our Futures and What We Can Do About It*](#) by Don Peck

The Great Recession is not done with us yet. While the most acute part of the economic crisis is past, the recession's most significant impact on American life still lies in the future. The personal, social, and cultural changes that result from severe economic shocks build and manifest themselves only slowly. But history shows us that, ultimately, shocks this severe profoundly alter the character of society.

[*Illuminations*](#) by Arthur Rimbaud, translated by John Ashbery

First published in 1886, Arthur Rimbaud's *Illuminations*, the work of a poet who had abandoned poetry before the age of twenty-one, changed the language of poetry. Hallucinatory and feverishly hermetic, it is an acknowledged masterpiece of world literature, still unrivaled for its haunting blend of sensuous detail and otherworldly astonishment. Ashbery's idiomatic and lyrical translations of these forty-four texts convey the originality of Rimbaud's vision to English-speaking readers of a new century.

[*Wendy and the Lost Boys: The Uncommon Life of Wendy Wasserstein*](#) by Julie Salamon

The first woman playwright to win a Tony Award, Wendy Wasserstein was a Broadway titan. Everyone knew Wendy Wasserstein. Or thought they did. Though she lived an uncommon life, she spoke to a generation of women during an era of vast change. Revisiting Wendy's works -- *The Heidi Chronicles* and others -- we see Wendy in the free space of the theater, where her many selves all found voice. Here Wendy spoke in the most intimate of terms about everything that matters most: family and love, dreams and devastation. And that is the Wendy of *Neverland*, the Wendy who will never grow old.

[Bringing Adam Home: The Abduction That Changed America](#) by Les Standiford

One sunny July morning in 1981, Rev Walsh and her six-year-old son Adam stopped by the local Sears to pick up some new lamps. Enchanted by a video game at the store's entrance, Adam begged Rev to let him try it out while she shopped. When she returned a few minutes later, Adam was gone. Before Adam Walsh there were no faces on milk cartons, no Amber Alerts, no National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, no federal databases of crimes against children, no pedophile registry. His 1981 abduction and murder -- unsolved for over a quarter of a century -- forever changed America.

[Charles Dickens: A Life](#) by Claire Tomalin

Charles Dickens: A Life gives full measure to Dickens' heroic stature -- his huge virtues both as a writer and as a human being -- while observing his failings in both respects with an unblinking eye. Tomalin examines all aspects of her subject's life and career, with an emphasis on his personality's many contradictions: he was kind and cruel, charitable and pitiless, gregarious and intensely private.

[Every Day by the Sun: A Memoir of the Faulkners of Mississippi](#) by Dean Faulkner Wells

Wells recounts the story of the Faulkners of Mississippi, whose legacy includes pioneers, noble and ignoble war veterans, three never-convicted murderers, the builder of the first railroad in north Mississippi, the founding president of a bank, an FBI agent, four pilots (all brothers), and a Nobel Prize winner, arguably the most important American novelist of the twentieth century. She also reveals wonderfully entertaining and intimate stories and anecdotes about her family -- in particular her uncle William, or Pappy, with whom she shared colorful, sometimes utterly frank, sometimes whimsical, conversations and experiences.

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