

# Best of 2017: Non-Fiction Books

written by Entropy | November 29, 2017



We continue our “Best of 2017” series curated by the entire *CCM-Entropy* community and present some of our favorite selections as nominated by the diverse staff and team here at *Entropy*, as well as nominations from our readers.

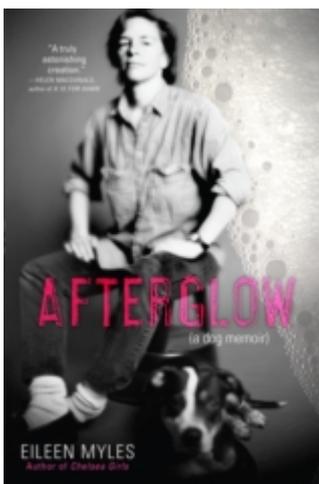
This list brings together some of our favorite nonfiction books published in 2017.

([For last year's list, click here.](#))

In no particular order...

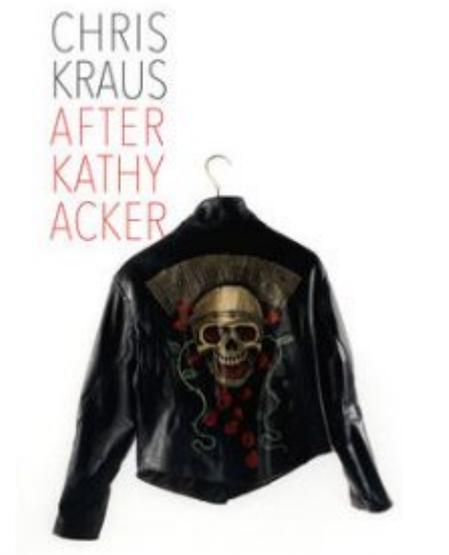
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## 1. *Afterglow (a dog memoir)* by Eileen Myles (Grove Press)



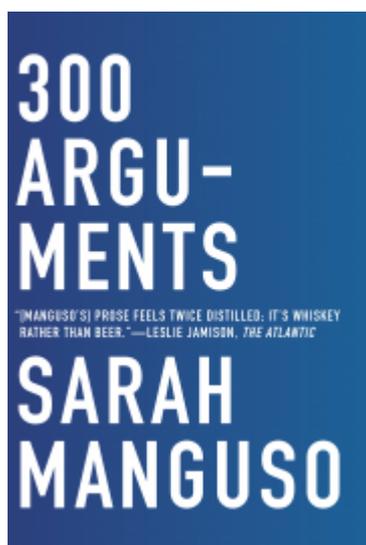
*Afterglow* is a mutt elegy in a million . . . Myles gets at something no other dog book I've read has gotten at quite this distinctly: The sense of wordless connection and spiritual expansion you feel when you love and are loved by a creature who's not human . . . It's raw and affecting, and in its wild snuffling way, utterly original. —Maureen Corrigan, *Fresh Air*, NPR

## 2. *After Kathy Acker* by Chris Kraus (Semiotext(e))



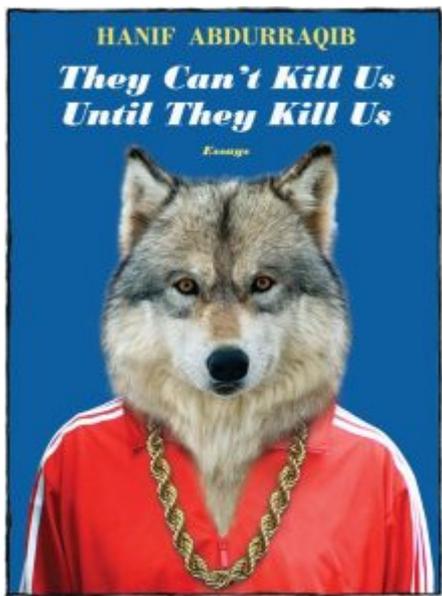
This is a gossipy, anti-mythic artist biography which feels like it's being told in one long rush of a monologue over late-night drinks by someone who was there. As such, we learn as much about Kathy Acker as we do about the mores of the artists and writers who surrounded her in the last three decades of the twentieth century. Acker emerges as an unlikely literary hero, but an utterly convincing one. —Sheila Heti

## 3. *300 Arguments* by Sarah Manguso (Graywolf Press)



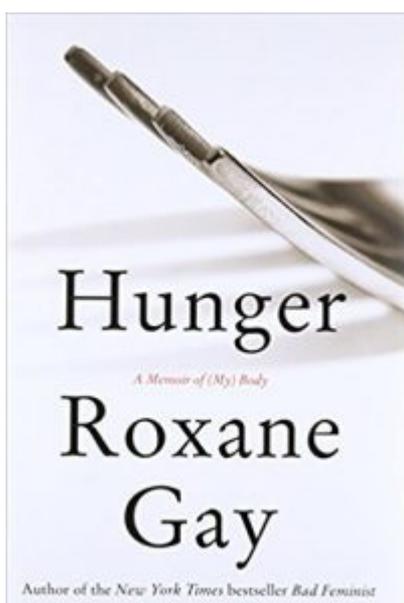
This tiny gem of a book is jam-packed with insights you'll want to both text to your friends and tattoo on your skin. It's an intimate portrait of a woman at work, and a sweeping view of a human mind trying to make order of the world around us."—*Omnivoracious*

4. *They Can't Kill Us Until They Kill Us* by Hanif Abdurraqib (Two Dollar Radio)



It's a little bit of comfort when you think about it, that with *They Can't Kill Us Until They Kill Us*, Abdurraqib has provided us with an essay collection that might help make some small sense of what's going on. That maybe, hopefully, one day soon we can step back into the light with an understanding of how to be a little better. That the voices that emerged over the last decade helped forge a path towards something better, and that things can be good.  
-Vol. 1 Brooklyn

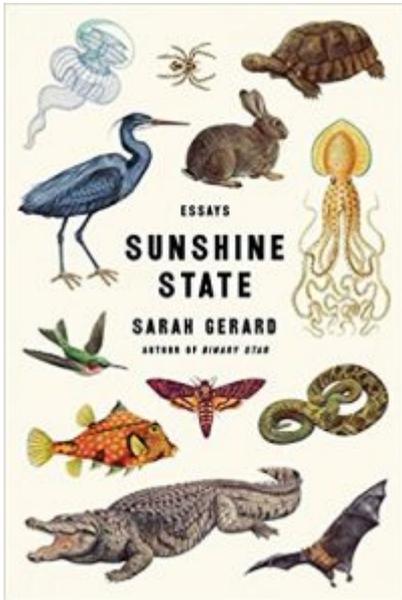
5. *Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body* by Roxane Gay (Harper)



Searing, smart, readable. . . . "Hunger," like Ta-Nehisi Coates' "Between the World and Me," interrogates the fortunes of black

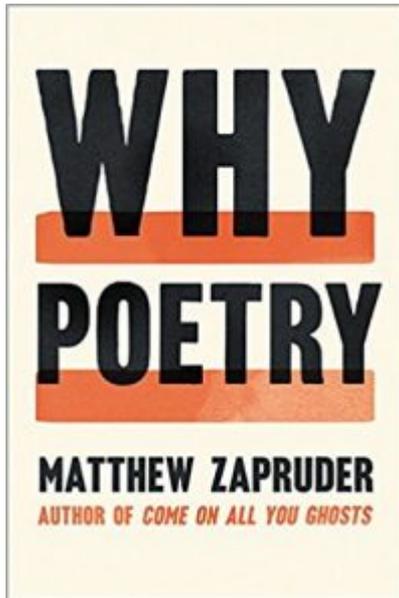
bodies in public spaces. . . . Nothing seems gratuitous; a lot seems brave. There is an incantatory element of repetition to "Hunger": The very short chapters scallop over the reader like waves. —*Newsday*

## 6. *Sunshine State* by Sarah Gerard (Harper Perennial)



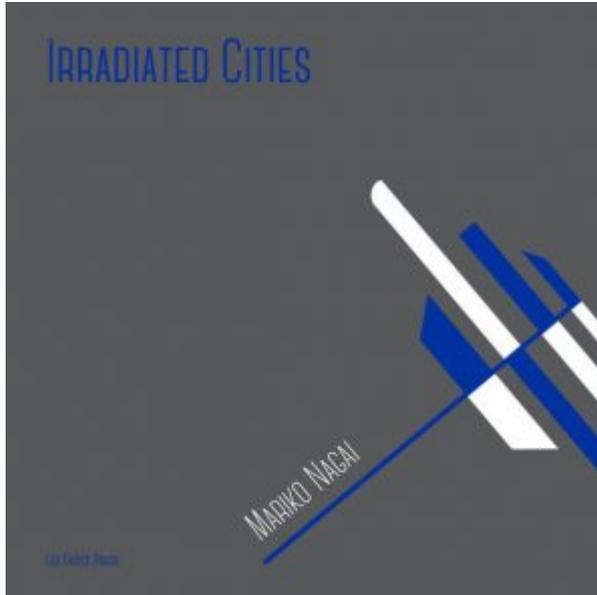
These large-hearted, meticulous essays offer an uncanny x-ray of our national psyche, examining that American mess of saints and conmen, the peculiar, culpable innocence that American mess of saints and conmen, the peculiar, culpable innocence that confuses money and moral worth, charity and personal aggrandizement. Gerard's prose is lacerating and compassionate at once, showing us both the grand beauty of our American dreams and the heartbreaking devastation they wreak. —Garth Greenwell

## 7. *Why Poetry* by Matthew Zapruder (Ecco)



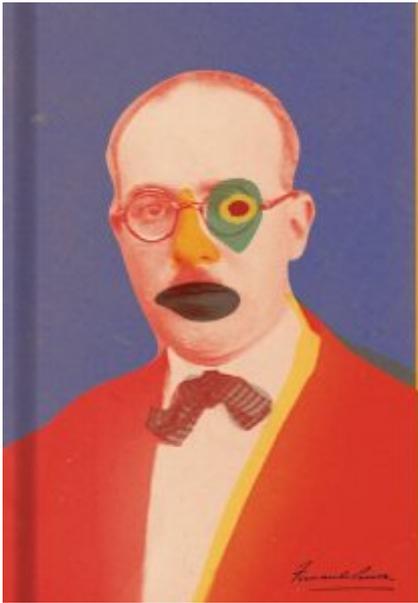
The pleasure in Zapruder’s book is in going beyond those feelings into an exploration into the hows and whys of poetry. . . . It recaptures that which draws us to poetry as children, while showing us the even deeper pleasures we are capable of as adults.” –Chicago Tribune

#### 8. *Irradiated Cities* by Mariko Nagai (Les Figues Press)



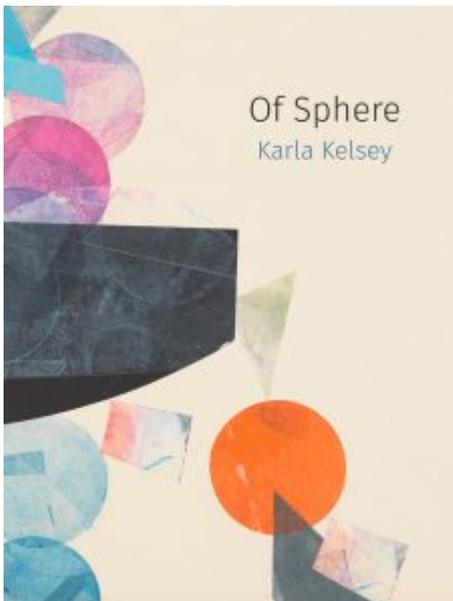
*Nagai’s descriptions capture something deeper than history books do. By meshing small moments—“organs float in jars with wooden number tags”—and the overarching history in which they occur, Nagai speaks to both the individual and to the unifying social trauma [...] The book wobbles brilliantly on the border between the known and unknown. –Publishers Weekly*

**9. *The Book of Disquiet: The Complete Edition* by Fernando Pessoa (New Directions)**



*The Book of Disquiet*, a literary vortex that, even in completeness, remains incomplete. A reading experience like no other. It is thrilling, confusing, upsetting, joyous, tedious and profound. You will never forget it, or stop wanting to return to it. —*The New Statesman*

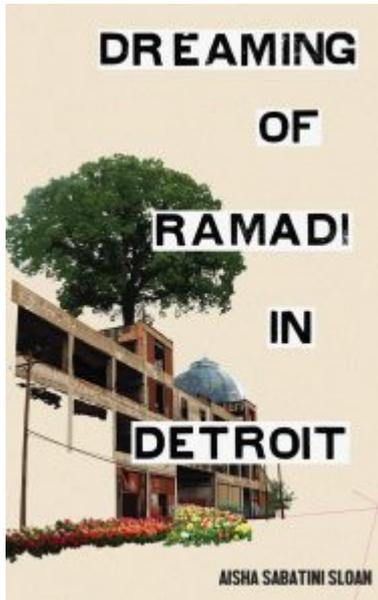
**10. *Of Spheres* by Karla Kelsey (Essay Press)**



A lyric meditation on affect, relationality, and environment, OF SPHERE conjures a self and world that both bloom and fall apart. Given this continually unfastening attempt to make a cosmos—to equip, adorn, dress, ornament—what is it to know, and love, and be? In constellation with the experimental prose of writers such as

Hélène Cixous, Clarice Lispector, and H.D., the book investigates ways a woman, aware she's always becoming gendered, might resist sealing into a character according to cultural norms. How to be wind through goldenrod. Clarity streaked with berry juice.

**11. *Dreaming of Ramadi in Detroit* by Aisha Sabatini Sloan (1913 Press)**



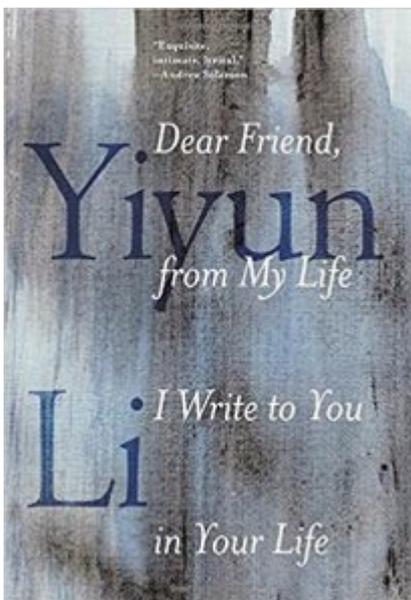
This collection of luminous essays features swimming pools and poets, road trips and museums, family dinners and celebrity sightings. In a voice that is at once eccentric and piercing, Aisha Sabatini Sloan plays a series of roles: she is an art enthusiast in Los Angeles during a city-wide manhunt; a daughter on a road trip with her father; a professor playing with puppets in the wilds of Vermont; an interloper on a police ride-along in Detroit... The curiosity that guides each story is rooted in the supposition that there is an intrinsic relationship between the way we conceptualize of darkness and our collective opportunity for awakening.

**12. *Autumn* by Karl Ove Knausgaard (Penguin Press)**



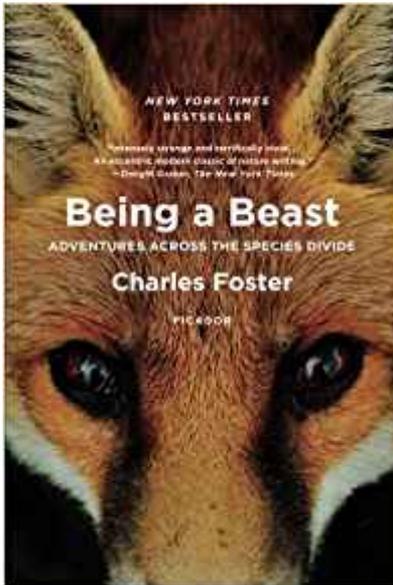
Knausgaard's art can still seem a kind of magic. How does he take the plainest things, in the plainest language, and make them feel so alive?...The days, the months, the hovering presence of the daughter-to-be, charge the objects they delimit with a mortal urgency...Day by day, radiantly, the mission succeeds. For even the familiarity and foreignness that box us in, or out, will bend to a sovereign art. . . for a little while, if only in the mind, we get to have our apple and eat it too. *—New York Times Book Review*

**13. *Dear Friend, from My Life I Write to You in Your Life* by Yiyun Li (Random House)**



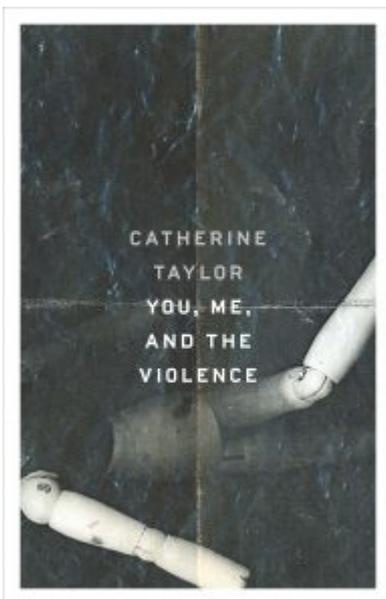
Li has stared in the face of much that is beautiful and ugly and treacherous and illuminating—and from her experience she has produced a nourishing exploration of the will to live willfully. *—The Washington Post*

**14. *Being a Beast: Adventures Across the Species Divide* by Charles Foster (Picador; reprint)**



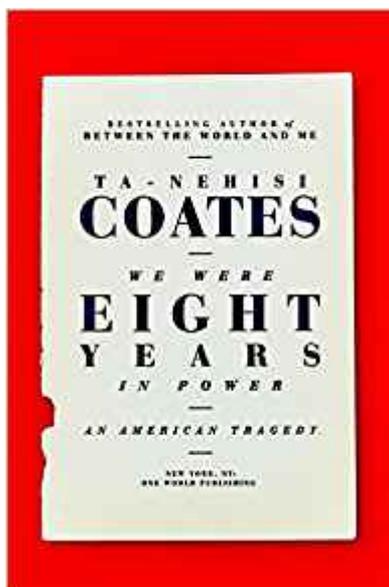
A blend of memoir, neuroscience and nature writing . . . that pushes zoological obsession to even greater heights—and depths.  
—*The Wall Street Journal*

**15. *You, Me, and the Violence* by Catherine Taylor (Mad Creek Books, Ohio State University Press)**



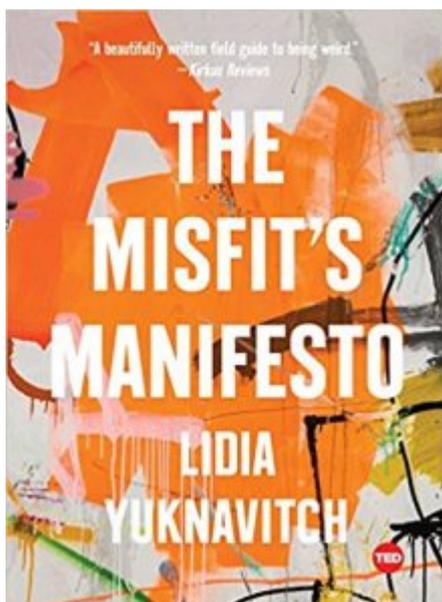
This is a poetics of daring redeemed from the experimental, a philosophy of caring reclaimed from equivocation. *You, Me, and the Violence* is the imagination fleshed out, reengaged with the most serious urgencies of contemporary living. —Ed Pavlic

**16. *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy* by Ta-Nehisi Coates (One World)**



Biting cultural and political analysis from the award-winning journalist . . . [Ta-Nehisi Coates] reflects on race, Barack Obama's presidency and its jarring aftermath, and his own evolution as a writer in eight stunningly incisive essays. . . . He contextualizes each piece with candid personal revelations, making the volume a melding of memoir and critique. . . . Emotionally charged, deftly crafted, and urgently relevant. *—Kirkus Reviews*

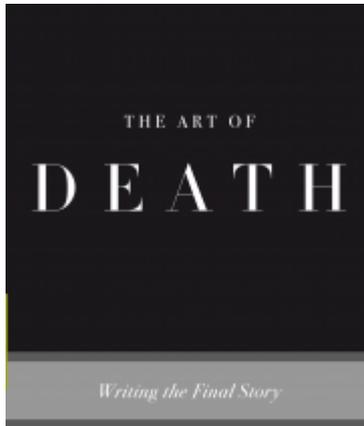
**17. *The Misfit's Manifesto* by Lidia Yuknavitch (Simon & Schuster/TED)**



Hold your breath, steady your stance, and dive into *The Misfit's Manifesto*, an immersive, stunning splash of poetic rage. More

investigative memoir than manifesto, this small book roars in Yuknavitch's big voice, demanding compassion, justice, and love for those who, like the author, choose (or are forced) to take the long view only visible from society's margins. —Meredith Maran

**18. *The Art of Death: Writing the Final Story* by Edwidge Danticat (Graywolf Press)**



EDWIDGE  
DANTICAT

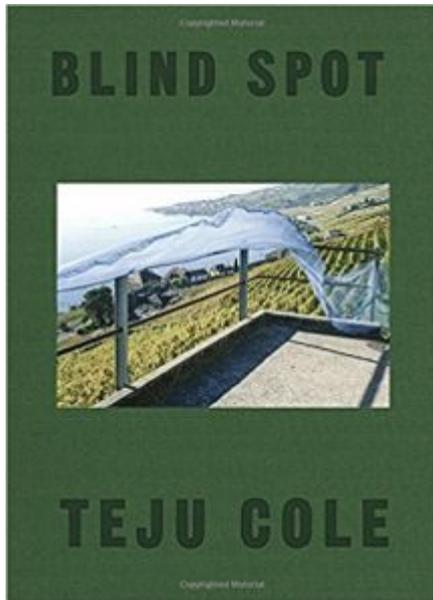
Danticat, in her slim, absorbing volume on this enormous subject, one in the “art of” series published by Graywolf Press, takes a tour of the dark side, holding up for view the guises that death has assumed in works by Leo Tolstoy, Gabriel García Márquez, Albert Camus, Toni Morrison and others, and offering her own reflections. —*The New York Times Book Review*

**19. *Swallow the Fish* by Gabrielle Civil (#RECURRENT/Civil Coping Mechanisms)**



This book paints a beautiful Black woman sky of possibilities. This book makes me want to perform/it makes me want to write-to holla-to hold it close. I love this book! –Sharon Bridgforth

## 20. *Blind Spot* by Teju Cole (Random House)



Dazzling . . . cerebral yet intimate . . . combines personal essay, history, biography, journalism, and photography into a seamless package, capturing human dignity and grace through careful, clear-eyed reverence. –Vice

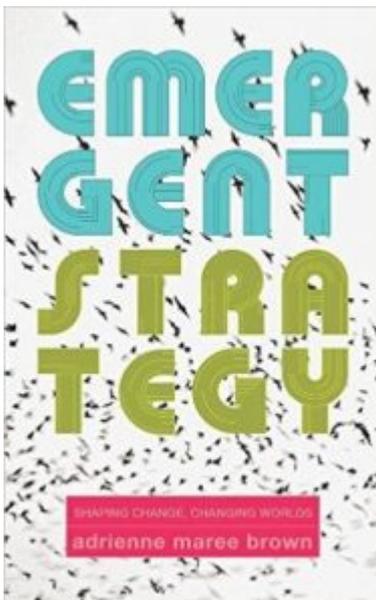
## 21. *Like a Solid to a Shadow* by Janice Lobo Sapigao (Timeless, Infinite Light)



Janice Lobo Sapigao's second book, *like a solid to a shadow*, is a

superbly conceptualized post-memoir about the space between solid and shadow, father and daughter, love and migration, San Jose and Pangasinan, English and Ilokano, grief and memory. Written as transcripts, translations, notes, maps, love letters, and elegies, these poems are arrestingly intimate, generous, sincere, self-reflexive, and mad smart. Sapigao offers us yet again a sharply rendered and bold critical Pinay curiosity—hella personal, hella political, hella musical—through her experimental, experiential, ever-evolving, skillfully crafted, mixtape-magical, yet always in-progress, feminist documentary poetics. —Jason Magabo Perez

**22. *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* by Adrienne Maree Brown (AK Press)**



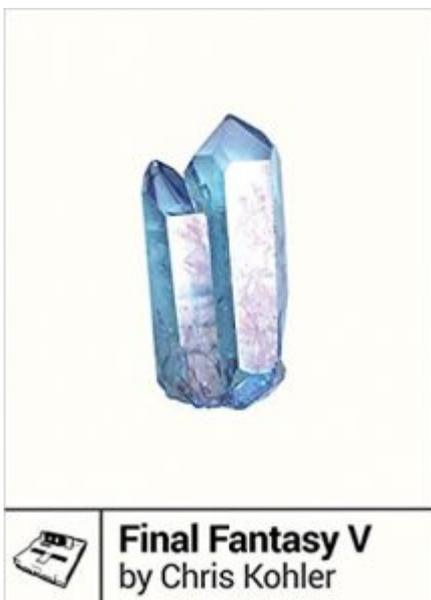
Adrienne leads us on a passionate, purposeful, intimate ride into this Universe where relationships spawn new possibilities. Her years of dedication to facilitating change by partnering with life invite us to also join with life to create the changes so desperately needed now. —Margaret Wheatley

**23. *About to Happen* by Cecilia Vicuña (Siglio Press)**



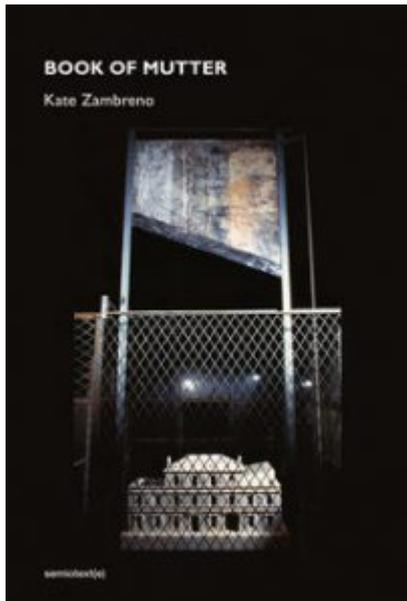
Beginning and ending at the edge of the ocean, Chileanborn artist and poet Cecilia Vicuña's (born 1948) artist's book serves as both a lament and love letter to the sea. Vicuña collects the detritus that washes up on shore and assembles out of the refuse tiny precarios and basuritas—little sculptures held together with nothing more than string and wire.

#### 24. *Final Fantasy V* by Chris Kohler (Boss Fight Books)



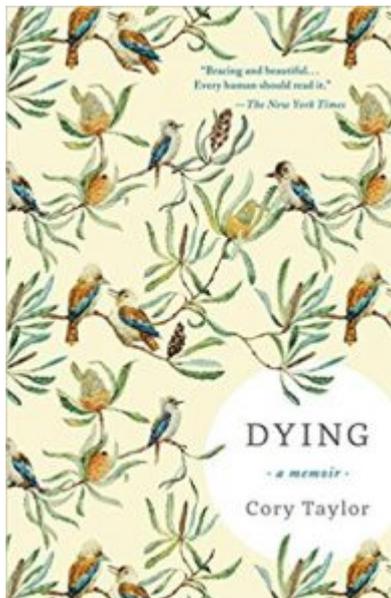
Now the acclaimed author of *Power-Up* and an editor at Kotaku, Kohler is revisiting the game that started his career in games journalism. Based on new, original interviews with *Final Fantasy V*'s director, Hironobu Sakaguchi, as well as previously untranslated interviews with the rest of the development team, Kohler's book weaves history and criticism to examine one of the Final Fantasy series's greatest and most overlooked titles.

## 25. *Book of Mutter* by Kate Zambreno (Semiotext(e))



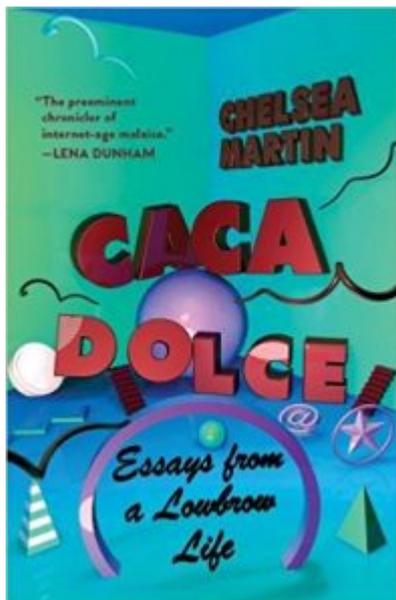
Above all, *Book of Mutter* is a work of tone; it expresses a failure to transcend grief, written from a place of guilt and shame, in halting and inarticulate gestures...Writing may not change anything, may not heal or even console—but, like Bourgeois's *Cells*, it creates a space in which formlessness, pain and chaos are enclosed and held like holy relics in a church. —Jenny Hendrix

## 26. *Dying: A Memoir* by Cory Taylor (Tin House Books)



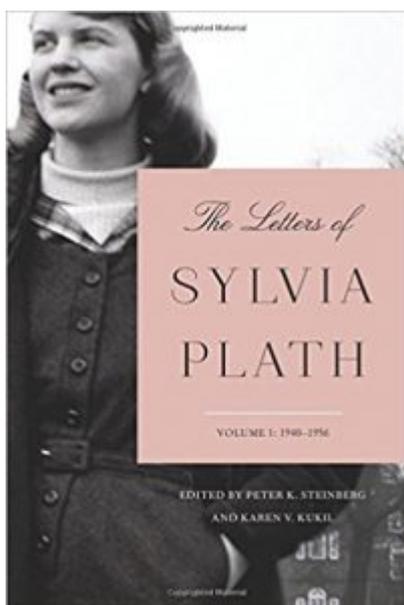
*Dying* is bracing and beautiful, possessed of an extraordinary intellectual and moral rigor. Every medical student should read it. Every human should read it. —Jennifer Senior, The New York Times

## 27. *Caca Dolce* by Chelsea Martin (Soft Skull Press)



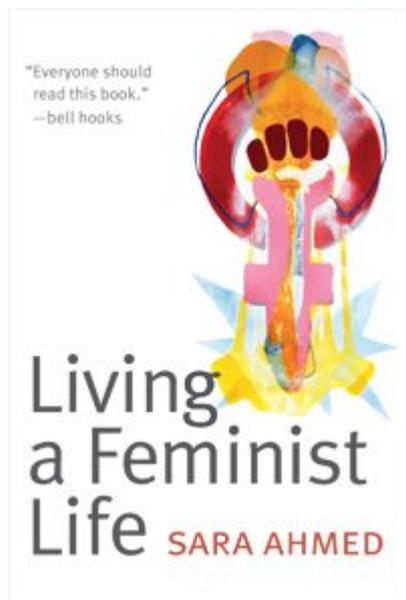
These essays provide a portrait of one narrator's search for identity through a complexity of stories that offer a door into adolescent confusion, pain, amusement, and awkwardness . . . *Caca Dolce* provides a journey into Martin's personal experience, allowing empathy toward the years we all take to find ourselves while navigating through awkward terrain. —*The Rumpus*

## 28. *The Letters of Sylvia Plath: Volume 1: 1940-1956* by Sylvia Plath. Edited by Peter K. Steinberg and Karen V. Kukil (Harper)



Engaging and revealing, *The Letters of Sylvia Plath* offers a captivating look into the life and inner thinking of one of the most influential writers of the 20th century. —Paul Alexander, *Washington Post*

**29. *Living a Feminist Life* by Sara Ahmed (Duke University Press)**



Fans of bell hooks and Audre Lorde will find Ahmed's frequent homages and references familiar and assuring in a work that goes far beyond Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, capturing the intersection so critical in modern feminism. —Abby Hargreaves, *Library Journal*

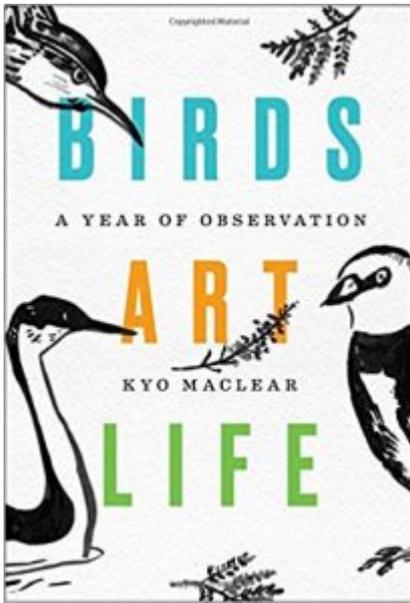
**30. *Ideal Suggestions: Essays in Divinatory Poetics* by Selah Saterstrom (Essay Press)**



Written over the course of sixteen years, Selah Saterstrom's *Ideal Suggestions: Essays in Divinatory Poetics* is a celebration of what C.D. Wright called storytelling's capability to "translate the world back into tongues." Juxtaposing lyric essays and fragments with meditations on process, Saterstrom alchemizes minerals,

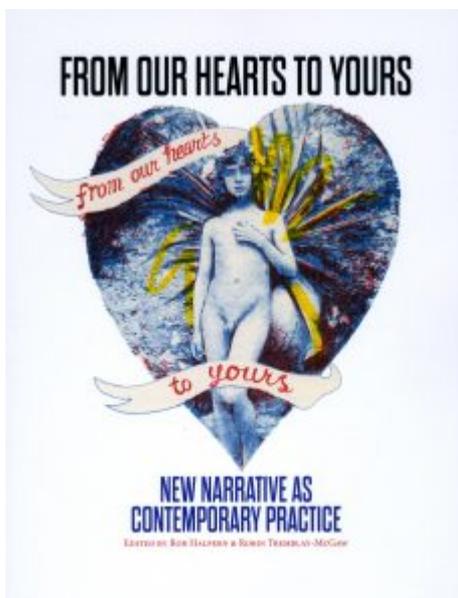
prayers, screenplays, slaughterhouses, spiders, and sexual encounters. The result is an amulet disguised as a book that's at once generous, rhizomatic, haunted, formally rangy, musical, and assured. –Claire Donato

**31. *Birds Art Life: A Year of Observation* by Kyo Maclear (Scribner)**



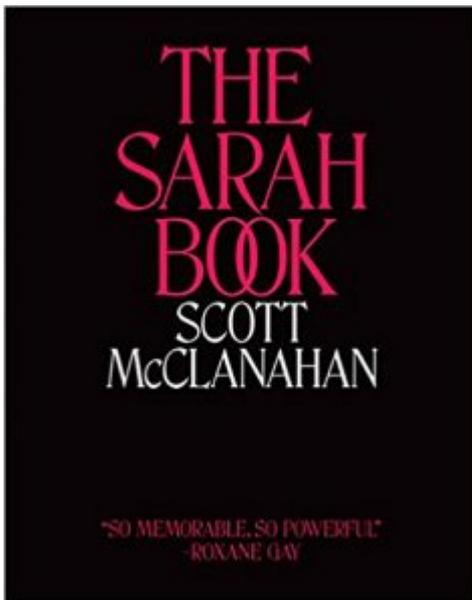
[A]n incandescent exploration of beauty, inspiration, art, family and freedom that seems to leave no topic out of its binocular scope. –*Toronto Star*

**32. *From Our Hearts to Yours: New Narrative as Contemporary Practice* Edited by Rob Halpern & Robin Tremblay-McGaw (ON Contemporary Practice)**



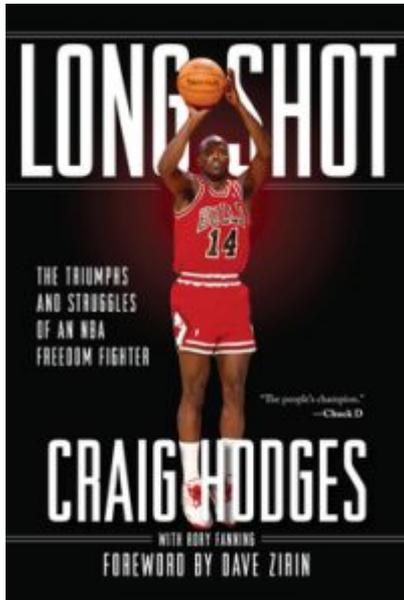
As editors Rob Halpern and Robin Tremblay-McGaw write in their introduction, “We are not interested in offering an ‘authoritative’ canon of New Narrative work, nor are we interested in consolidating an official version of New Narrative’s history. Rather, we want to use this as an opportunity to foreground New Narrative as a movement that is still coming into focus, a more or less unstable object that doesn’t want to be ‘fixed,’ codified, or hardened into a limited & limiting list of names and works. One of our motivating questions is Why New Narrative now? Or, What are the stakes of New Narrative for our contemporary moment?”

### **33. *The Sarah Book* by Scott McClanahan (Tyrant Books)**



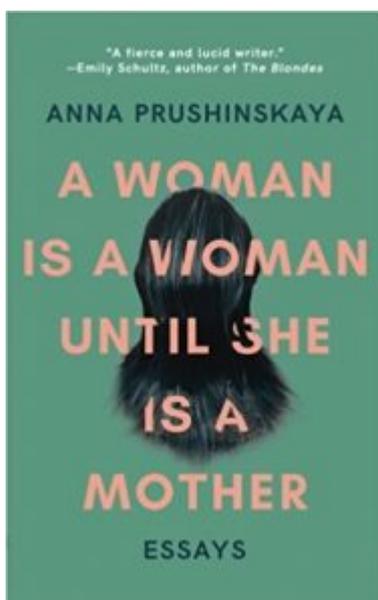
Scott McClanahan’s *The Sarah Book* is a furious exhalation of love and hurt and hate and tenderness and anger. This is a chronicle of a couple coming together and breaking apart. There is courage in these pages because so much of what McClanahan details is ugly and desperate and raw—everything, food, drink, love, heartbreak, to excess. The writing is so intimate you want to reach into the book to save this man from himself but you can’t. That impossibility is what makes this book so memorable, so powerful. —Roxane Gay

### **34. *Long Shot: The Triumphs and Struggles of an NBA Freedom Fighter* by Craig Hodges (Haymarket Books)**



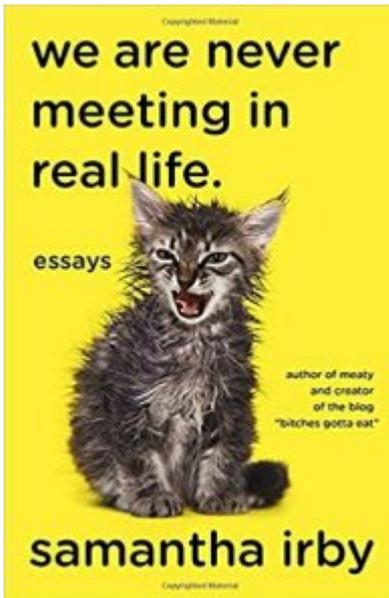
Long Shot tracks Hodges's political awakening, from black-studies courses in college to his early run-ins with Donald Sterling, the notoriously racist owner of the San Diego (and later Los Angeles) Clippers. The trajectory is clear, and, despite the occasionally engrossing glimpse into the typical N.B.A. player's home life—Hodges's tumult involved R. Kelly—almost every detail is shared as context for his more radical turn in the late eighties and nineties. —*New Yorker*

**35. *A Woman is a Woman Until She is a Mother* by Anna Prushinskaya (MG Press)**



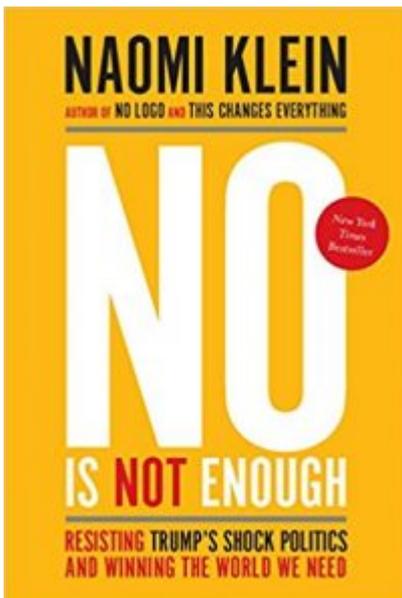
Anna Prushinskaya's *A Woman Is a Woman Until She Is a Mother* is a frank, courageous, and beautiful meditation on the strange alchemy of migrating from one identity to another. —Helen Phillips

**36. *We Are Never Meeting in Real Life* by Samantha Irby (Vintage)**



A memoir of the life of a sardonic, at times awkward, at times depressed black woman with Crohn's (an inflammatory-bowel disease) and degenerative arthritis.... Her acerbic, raw honesty on the page – often punctuated with all-caps comic parenthetical asides – unflinchingly recounts experiences such as the humiliating intrusion of explosive diarrhea on romantic and borderline-romantic interludes. –Kera Bolonik, *New York Magazine*

**37. *No Is Not Enough: Resisting Trump's Shock Politics and Winning the World We Need* by Naomi Klein (Haymarket Books)**



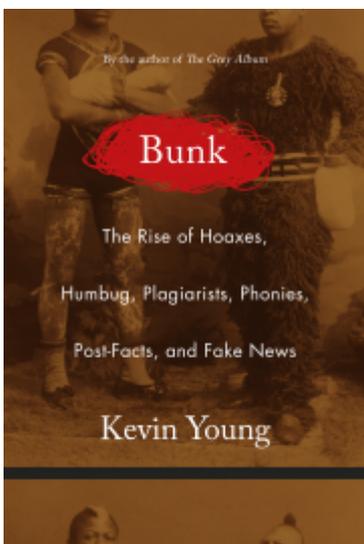
Naomi Klein is magnificent, and in *No Is Not Enough*, she has forged a courageous coruscating counter-spell against the hegemonic nightmare that, if left unchecked, will devour us all. –Junot Díaz

**38. *How To Keep You Alive* by Ella Longpre (#RECURRENT/Civil Coping Mechanisms)**



I've never read a book like this in my life and I love that so much I could scream. Ella Longpre's *How to Keep You Alive* is a genre bomb love letter to identity dissolution and reformation. I think I held my breath a few times when I felt lyric language kissing the fact of a body, meanings coming apart but then reassembling kind of like the dance that creation and destruction make. Or, more precisely, when we go to tell the story of our lives and our bodies we find that what can be storied can be destoried and restoried. That's the beauty and terror of memory meeting body meeting language. This storymaking will undo you in the best way, and restory you toward a difference you didn't know lived in you. We could use that right now. It could save our lives. —Lidia Yukavitch

**39. *Bunk: The Rise of Hoaxes, Humbug, Plagiarists, Phonies, Post-Facts, and Fake News* by Kevin Young (Graywolf Press)**



A wild, incisive, exhilarating tour through Western culture's sideshows and dark corners. Like a sideshow barker, Young writes with unbridled enthusiasm, a showman's conviction, and a carny's canny, telling a story that at times defies belief. And every word of it is true. —*Los Angeles Times*

**40. *A TransPacific Poetics* Edited by Lisa Samuels & Sawako Nakayasu (Litmus Press)**



A TRANSPACIFIC POETICS  
EDITED BY  
LISA SAMUELS & SAWAKO NAKAYASU

A TRANSPACIFIC POETICS beautifully inscribes what the Barbadian poet Kamau Brathwaite would call 'tidalectics' by following multiple voice waves across the region and by capturing their registers in an astounding range of genres. A collection of poetry and prose that includes entries such as memory cards, lists and palimpsests, counting journals, scripts, the necropastoral, and critical essays, readers will follow the rhythms of translation and the transcultural, where wavescrashwavescrashwavescrash. —Elizabeth Deloughrey