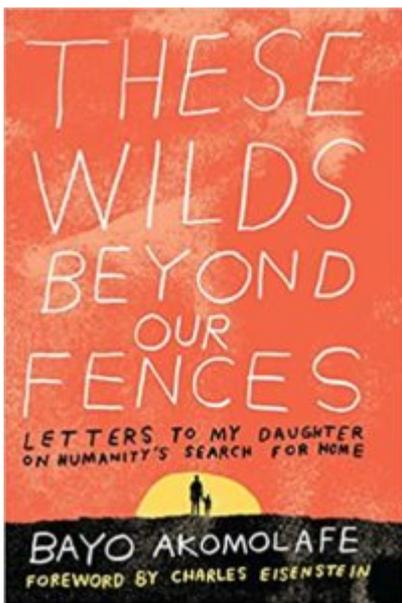


Recommended Reading: A Quarantine Reading List

written by Janice Lee | April 6, 2020



1. [These Wilds Beyond Our Fences: Letters to My Daughter on Humanity's Search for Home](#) by Bayo Akomolafe (North Atlantic Books, 2017)



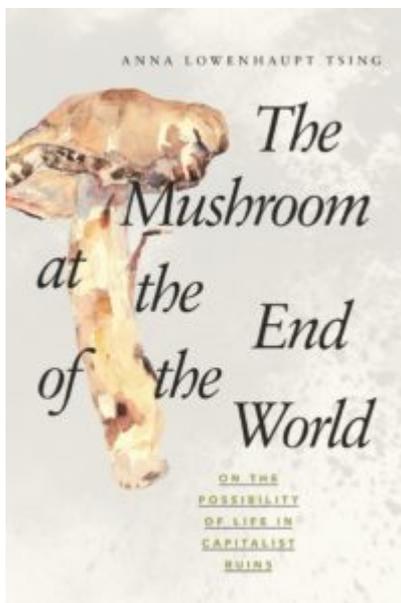
"[E]verything begins in the middle. There are no beginnings that appear unperturbed, pristine and without hauntings. And there are no endings that are devoid of traces of the new, spontaneous departures from disclosure, and simmering events that are yet to happen. The middle isn't the space between things; it is the world in its ongoing practices of worlding itself."

Tackling some of the world's most profound questions through the intimate lens of fatherhood, Bayo Akomolafe embarks on a journey of discovery as he maps the contours of the spaces between himself and his three-year-old daughter, Alethea. In a narrative that manages to be both intricate and unguarded, he discovers that something as commonplace as becoming a father is a cosmic event of unprecedented proportions. Using this realization as a touchstone, he is led to consider the strangeness of his own soul, contemplate the myths and rituals of modernity, ask questions about food and

justice, ponder what it means to be human, evaluate what we can do about climate change, and wonder what our collective yearnings for a better world tell us about ourselves. *These Wilds Beyond Our Fences* is a passionate attempt to make sense of our disconnection in a world where it is easy to feel untethered and lost. It is a father's search for meaning, for a place of belonging, and for reassurance that the world will embrace and support our children once we are gone.

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[2. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* by Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing \(Princeton University Press, 2017\)](#)



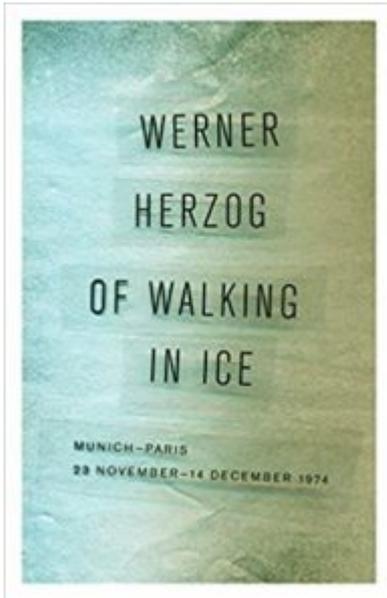
“What is, as I’m suggesting, precarity is the condition of time—or, to put it another way, what if our time is ripe for sensing precarity? What is precarity, indeterminacy, and what we imagine as trivial are the center of the systematicity we seek?”

Matsutake is the most valuable mushroom in the world—and a weed that grows in human-disturbed forests across the northern hemisphere. Through its ability to nurture trees, matsutake helps forests to grow in daunting places. It is also an edible delicacy in Japan, where it sometimes commands astronomical prices. In all its contradictions, matsutake offers insights into areas far beyond just mushrooms and addresses a crucial question: what manages to live in the ruins we have made? / A tale of diversity within our damaged landscapes, *The Mushroom at the End of the World* follows one of the strangest commodity chains of our times to explore the unexpected corners of capitalism. Here, we witness the varied and peculiar worlds of matsutake commerce: the worlds of Japanese gourmets, capitalist traders, Hmong jungle fighters, industrial forests, Yi Chinese goat herders, Finnish nature guides, and more. These companions also lead us into fungal ecologies and forest histories to better understand the promise of cohabitation in a time of massive human destruction. / By investigating one of the world’s most

sought-after fungi, *The Mushroom at the End of the World* presents an original examination into the relation between capitalist destruction and collaborative survival within multispecies landscapes, the prerequisite for continuing life on earth.

[Buy on Bookshop](#)

3. [Of Walking in Ice](#) by Werner Herzog (University of Minnesota Press, 2015)

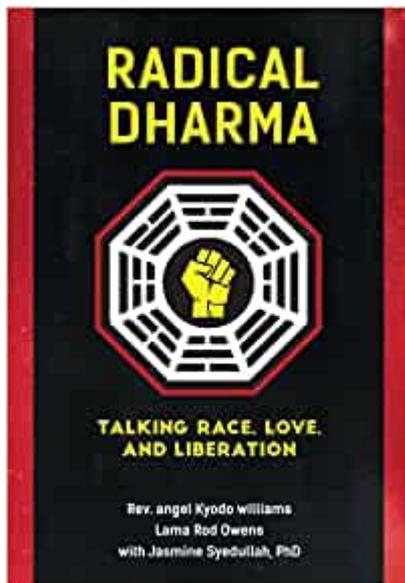


“An elderly woman gathering wood, plump and impoverished, tells me about her children one by one, when they were born, when they died. When she becomes aware that I want to go on, she talks three times as fast, shortening destinies, skipping the deaths of three children although adding them later on, unwilling to let even one fate slip away—and this in a dialect that makes it hard for me to follow what she is saying. After the demise of an entire generation of offspring, she would speak no more about herself except to say that she gathers wood, every day; I should have stayed longer.”

In late November 1974, filmmaker Werner Herzog received a phone call from Paris delivering some terrible news. German film historian, mentor, and close friend Lotte Eisner was seriously ill and dying. Herzog was determined to prevent this and believed that an act of walking would keep Eisner from death. He took a jacket, a compass, and a duffel bag of the barest essentials, and wearing a pair of new boots, set off on a three-week pilgrimage from Munich to Paris through the deep chill and snowstorms of winter. / *Of Walking in Ice* is Herzog’s beautifully written, much-admired, yet often-overlooked diary account of that journey. Herzog documents everything he saw and felt on his quest to his friend’s bedside, from poetic descriptions of the frozen landscape and harsh weather conditions to the necessity of finding shelter in vacant or abandoned houses and the intense loneliness of his solo excursion.

[Buy on Bookshop](#)

4. [Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation](#) by Jasmine Syedullah, Lama Rod Owens, and angel Kyodo Williams (North Atlantic Books, 2016)



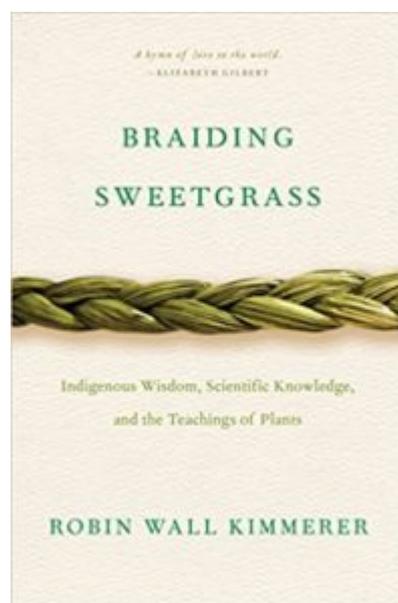
“In my experience, trauma is the creation of a context that does not privilege my deepest desire to return home and inhabit my own agency and body, but instead triggers disembodiment and a loss of awareness of the body and its experiences. Thus, trauma becomes a cyclical experience of continuous unfolding, of continuous movement through places without consent as it perpetuates terror, despair, hopelessness, and disconnection. It is a voyage that never docks at any port, but is suspended, unexamined. When I am feeling my own trauma, I find that I am also seeking some way to find ground, an anchor.” – Lama Rod Owens

Igniting a long-overdue dialogue about how the legacy of racial injustice and white supremacy plays out in society at large and Buddhist communities in particular, this urgent call to action outlines a new dharma that takes into account the ways that racism and privilege prevent our collective awakening. The authors traveled around the country to spark an open conversation that brings together the Black prophetic tradition and the wisdom of the Dharma. Bridging the world of spirit and activism, they urge a passionate response to the systemic, state-sanctioned violence and oppression that has persisted against black people since the slave era. With national attention focused on the recent killings of unarmed black citizens and the response of the Black-centered liberation groups such as Black Lives Matter, *Radical Dharma* demonstrates how social transformation and personal, spiritual liberation must be articulated and inextricably linked. / Rev. angel Kyodo Williams, Lama Rod Owens, and Jasmine Syedullah represent a new voice in American Buddhism. Offering their own histories and experiences as illustrations of the types of challenges facing dharma practitioners and teachers who are different from those of the past five decades, they ask how teachings that transcend color, class, and caste are hindered by discrimination and the dynamics of power, shame, and ignorance. Their illuminating argument goes beyond a demand for the equality and inclusion of diverse populations to

advancing a new dharma that deconstructs rather than amplifies systems of suffering and prepares us to weigh the shortcomings not only of our own minds but also of our communities. They forge a path toward reconciliation and self-liberation that rests on radical honesty, a common ground where we can drop our need for perfection and propriety and speak as souls. In a society where profit rules, people's value is determined by the color of their skin, and many voices—including queer voices—are silenced, *Radical Dharma* recasts the concepts of engaged spirituality, social transformation, inclusiveness, and healing.

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5. ***Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*** by Robin Wall Kimmerer (Milkweed Editions, 2015)



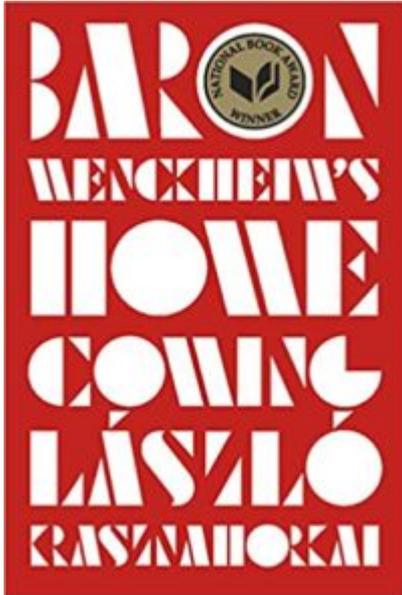
“A bay is a noun only if water is dead. When bay is a noun, it is defined by humans, trapped between its shores and contained by the word. But the verb wiikegama—to be a bay—releases the water from bondage and lets it live. “To be a bay” holds the wonder that, for this moment, the living water has decided to shelter itself between these shores, conversing with cedar roots and a flock of baby mergansers. Because it could do otherwise—become a stream or an ocean or a waterfall, and there are verbs for that, too. To be a hill, to be a sandy beach, to be a Saturday, all are possible verbs in a world where everything is alive.”

Drawing on her life as an indigenous scientist, and as a woman, Kimmerer shows how other living beings—asters and goldenrod, strawberries and squash, salamanders, algae, and sweetgrass—offer us gifts and lessons, even if we've forgotten how to hear their voices. In reflections that range from the creation of Turtle Island to the forces that threaten its flourishing today, she circles toward a central argument: that the awakening of ecological consciousness requires the acknowledgment and celebration of our reciprocal relationship with the rest of the living world. For only when we can hear the

languages of other beings will we be capable of understanding the generosity of the earth, and learn to give our own gifts in return.

[Buy on Bookshop](#)

6. [***Baron Wenckheim's Homecoming***](#) by László Krasznahorkai,
Translated by Otilie Mulzet (New Directions, 2019)

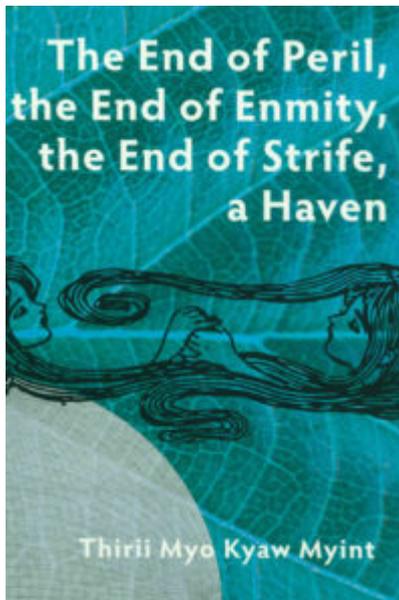


"I've said a thousand times that I always wanted to write just one book. Now, with Baron, I can close this story. With this novel I can prove that I really wrote just one book in my life. This is the book—Satantango, Melancholy, War and War, and Baron. This is my one book." – László Krasznahorkai, Paris Review Interview

Set in contemporary times, *Baron Wenckheim's Homecoming* tells the story of a Prince Myshkin-like figure, Baron Béla Wenckheim, who returns at the end of his life to his provincial Hungarian hometown. Having escaped from his many casino debts in Buenos Aires, where he was living in exile, he longs to be reunited with his high-school sweetheart Marika. Confusions abound, and what follows is an endless storm of gossip, con men, and local politicians, vividly evoking the small town's alternately drab and absurd existence. All along, the Professor—a world-famous natural scientist who studies mosses and inhabits a bizarre Zen-like shack in a desolate area outside of town—offers long rants and disquisitions on his attempts to immunize himself from thought. Spectacular actions are staged as death and the abyss loom over the unsuspecting townfolk.

[Buy on Bookshop](#)

7. [***The End of Peril, the End of Enmity, the End of Strife, a Haven***](#) by Thirii Myo Kyaw Myint (Noemi Press, 2018)

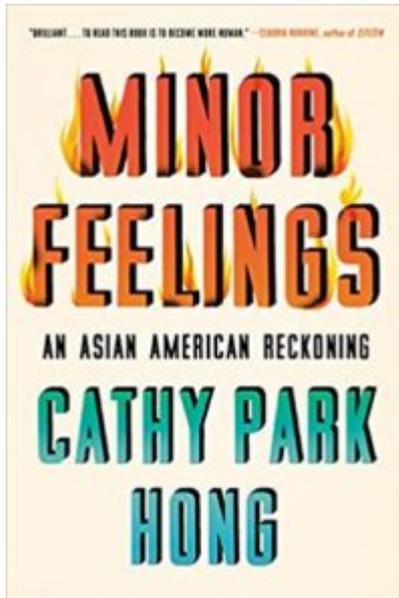


*"The animals have gone wild and the walls of the house tremble in the face of the fierce, loud hush that haunts Thirii Myo Kyaw Myint's marvelous debut. I was taken from the first page to the last by Myint's extraordinary sentences, which put me happily in mind of Marie Redonnet or Renee Gladman, and by the powerfully strange world of cities and families and searching they build. There is so much to admire here, not least one of my favorite moments in recent contemporary writing: a young women who uses the blade of her hair to cut off chunks of the moon. I can't recommend *The End of Peril, the End of Enmity, the End of Strife, a Haven* strongly enough." – Laird Hunt*

An unnamed narrator returns to her ancestral home in an environmentally depleted harbor city with a baby in her care. She has escaped from what she calls "the breach"—the collapse of the climate-controlled domed city where she grew up. From a thread about the narrator's childhood, we learn that the breach was caused by the hysterical growth of the genetically-modified trees in the domed city, a growth which is spreading over the earth. From a thread about the history of the harbor city, we learn of an ancient war that was fought there. In the thread which follows the narrative present, there is a storm which floods the harbor city. The narrator's mother disappears and the baby falls ill. The narrator then journeys to city's river to preform the funeral rites for her mother and cure the baby. At the river, the three narrative threads come together.

[Buy on Bookshop](#)

8. [***Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning***](#) by Cathy Park Hong (One World, 2020)



"Brilliant . . . To read this book is to become more human." –Claudia Rankine, author of *Citizen*

Poet and essayist Cathy Park Hong fearlessly and provocatively blends memoir, cultural criticism, and history to expose fresh truths about racialized consciousness in America. Part memoir and part cultural criticism, this collection is vulnerable, humorous, and provocative—and its relentless and riveting pursuit of vital questions around family and friendship, art and politics, identity and individuality, will change the way you think about our world. / Binding these essays together is Hong’s theory of “minor feelings.” As the daughter of Korean immigrants, Cathy Park Hong grew up steeped in shame, suspicion, and melancholy. She would later understand that these “minor feelings” occur when American optimism contradicts your own reality—when you believe the lies you’re told about your own racial identity. Minor feelings are not small, they’re dissonant—and in their tension Hong finds the key to the questions that haunt her. / With sly humor and a poet’s searching mind, Hong uses her own story as a portal into a deeper examination of racial consciousness in America today. This intimate and devastating book traces her relationship to the English language, to shame and depression, to poetry and female friendship. A radically honest work of art, *Minor Feelings* forms a portrait of one Asian American psyche—and of a writer’s search to both uncover and speak the truth.

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9. [**To look at the sea is to become what one is: An Etel Adnan Reader \(Vol 1 & 2\)**](#) by Etel Adnan (Nightboat Books, 2014), Edited by Thom Donovan & Brandon Shimoda

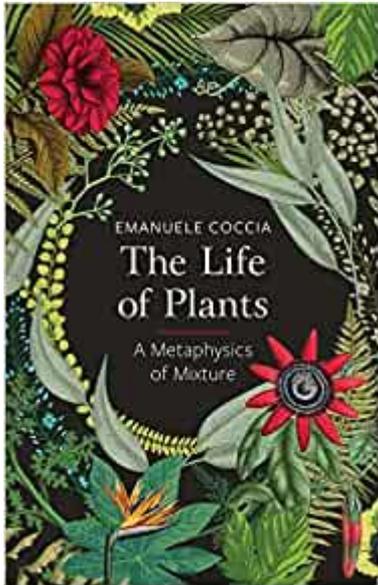


“Love, for Adnan, is our only way to endure upheaval. It is not sentimental love. It is an ethics that seeks to preserve what we have rather than see it destroyed. It is a particular bravery, too. ‘Love in all its forms is the most important matter that we will ever face, but also the most dangerous, the most unpredictable, the most maddening,’ Adnan writes. ‘But it is also the only salvation I know of.’” -Andrew Durbin, The New Inquiry

This landmark two-volume edition follows Adnan’s work from the infernal elegies of the 1960s to the ethereal meditations of her later poems, to form a portrait of an extraordinarily impassioned and prescient life. Ranging between essay, fiction, poetry, memoir, feminist manifesto, and philosophical treatise, while often challenging the conventions of genre, Adnan’s works give voice to the violence and revelation of the last six decades as it has centered, in part, within the geopolitics of the Arab world, and in particular the author’s native Beirut. Among the key works reproduced in their entirety are *Sitt Marie Rose* (1978); *The Arab Apocalypse* (1980); *Journey to Mount Tamalpais* (1986); and *Of Cities & Women* (1993).

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10. [The Life of Plants: A Metaphysics of Mixture](#) by Emanuele Coccia (Polity, 2018)

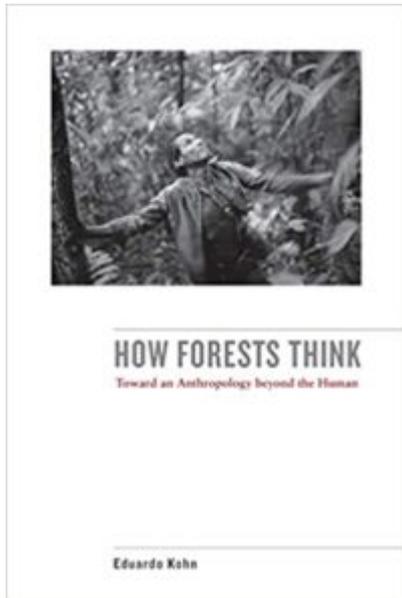


"Everything in the realm of the living is the articulation of breath: from perception to digestion, from thought to pleasure, from speech to locomotion. Everything is a repetition, intensification, and variation of what takes place in breath."

We barely talk about them and seldom know their names. Philosophy has always overlooked them; even biology considers them as mere decoration on the tree of life. And yet plants give life to the Earth: they produce the atmosphere that surrounds us, they are the origin of the oxygen that animates us. Plants embody the most direct, elementary connection that life can establish with the world. / In this highly original book, Emanuele Coccia argues that, as the very creator of atmosphere, plants occupy the fundamental position from which we should analyze all elements of life. From this standpoint, we can no longer perceive the world as a simple collection of objects or as a universal space containing all things, but as the site of a veritable metaphysical mixture. Since our atmosphere is rendered possible through plants alone, life only perpetuates itself through the very circle of consumption undertaken by plants. In other words, life exists only insofar as it consumes other life, removing any moral or ethical considerations from the equation. In contrast to trends of thought that discuss nature and the cosmos in general terms, Coccia's account brings the infinitely small together with the infinitely big, offering a radical redefinition of the place of humanity within the realm of life.

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11. [How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human](#) by Eduardo Kohn (University of California Press, 2013)

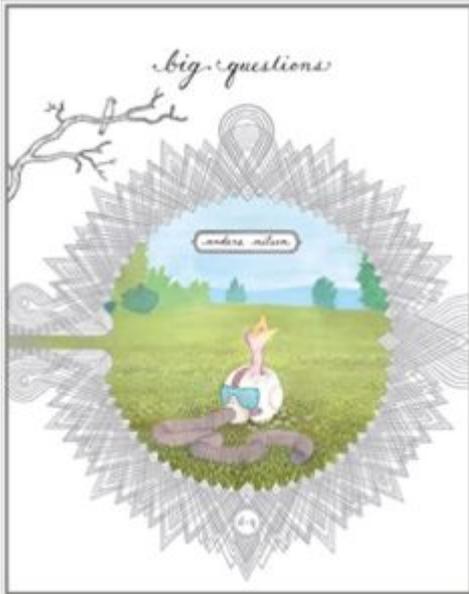


“How other kinds of beings see us matters. That other kinds of beings see us changes things.”

Can forests think? Do dogs dream? In this astonishing book, Eduardo Kohn challenges the very foundations of anthropology, calling into question our central assumptions about what it means to be human—and thus distinct from all other life forms. Based on four years of fieldwork among the Runa of Ecuador’s Upper Amazon, Eduardo Kohn draws on his rich ethnography to explore how Amazonians interact with the many creatures that inhabit one of the world’s most complex ecosystems. Whether or not we recognize it, our anthropological tools hinge on those capacities that make us distinctly human. However, when we turn our ethnographic attention to how we relate to other kinds of beings, these tools (which have the effect of divorcing us from the rest of the world) break down. *How Forests Think* seizes on this breakdown as an opportunity. Avoiding reductionistic solutions, and without losing sight of how our lives and those of others are caught up in the moral webs we humans spin, this book skillfully fashions new kinds of conceptual tools from the strange and unexpected properties of the living world itself. In this groundbreaking work, Kohn takes anthropology in a new and exciting direction—one that offers a more capacious way to think about the world we share with other kinds of beings.

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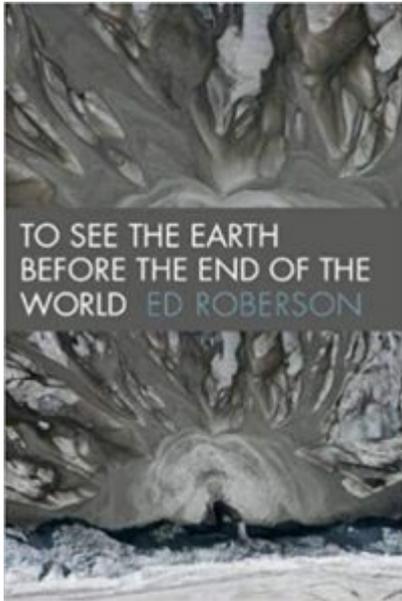
12. [Big Questions](#) by Anders Nilsen (Drawn and Quarterly, 2011)



A haunting postmodern fable, *Big Questions* is the magnum opus of Anders Nilsen, one of the brightest and most talented young cartoonists working today. This beautiful minimalist story, collected here for the first time, is the culmination of ten years and more than six hundred pages of work that details the metaphysical quandaries of the occupants of an endless plain, existing somewhere between a dream and a Russian steppe. A downed plane is thought to be a bird and the unexploded bomb that came from it is mistaken for a giant egg by the group of birds whose lives the story follows. The indifferent, stranded pilot is of great interest to the birds—some doggedly seek his approval, while others do quite the opposite, leading to tensions in the group. Nilsen seamlessly moves from humor to heartbreak. His distinctive, detailed line work is paired with plentiful white space and large, often frameless panels, conveying an ineffable sense of vulnerability and openness. / *Big Questions* has roots in classic fables—the birds and snakes have more to say than their human counterparts, and there are hints of the hero's journey, but here the easy moral that closes most fables is left open and ambiguous. Rather than lending its world meaning, Nilsen's parable lets the questions wander where they will.

[Buy on Bookshop](#)

13. [To See the Earth Before the End of the World](#) by Ed Roberson (Wesleyan, 2011)

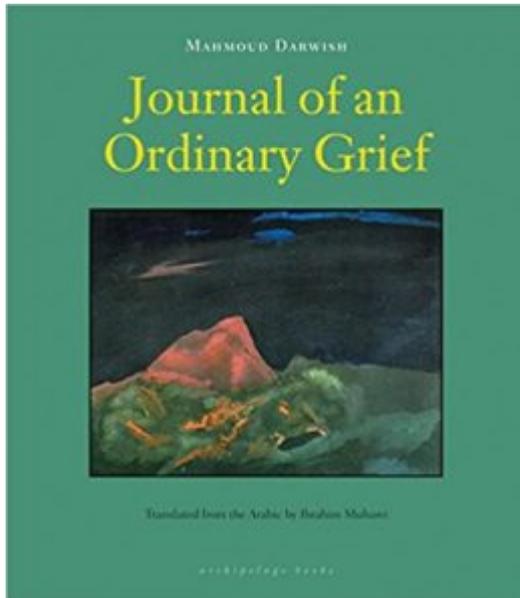


"People are grabbing at the change to see the earth before the end of the world. the world's death piece by piece each longer than we."

In *To See the Earth Before the End of the World* Ed Roberson presents us with 120 new poems, each speaking in his unique voice and seen through his unique eye. Earth and sky, neighborhood life and ancient myths, the art of seeing and the architecture of the imagination are all among the subjects of these poems. Recurring images and ideas construct a complex picture of our world, ourselves, and the manifold connections tying them together. The poems raise large questions about the natural world and our place in it, and they do not flinch from facing up to those questions. / Roberson's poems range widely through different scales of time and space, invoking along the way history and myth, galaxies and garbage trucks, teapots and the history of photography, mating cranes and Chicago's political machine. This collection is composed of five sequences, each developing a particular constellation of images and ideas related to the vision of the whole. Various journeys become one journey—an epic journey, invoking epic themes. There are songs of creation, pictures of the sorrows of war, celebrations of human labor and human society, a respect for tools and domestic utensils that are well made, the deep background of the past tingeing the colors of the present, and the tragic tones of endings and laments, a pervading awareness of the tears in things. Most of all, there is the exhilaration of a grand, sweeping vision that enlarges our world.

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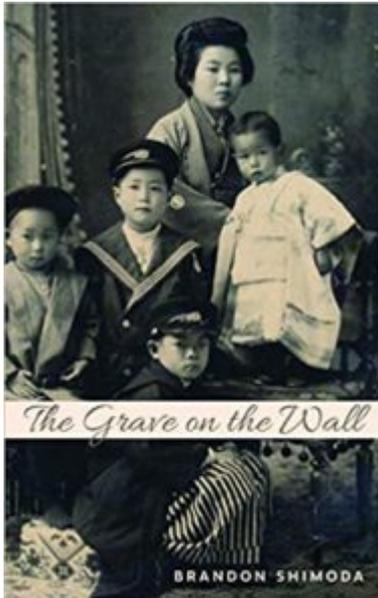
14. [Journal of an Ordinary Grief](#) by Mahmoud Darwish, Translated by Ibrahim Muhawi (Archipelago, 2010)



"The map is not the answer. And the birth certificate is no longer the same. No one has had to face this question as you have, from this moment till you die, or repent, or become a traitor. To be content is not enough because contentment does not bring about change or blow anything up, and the wasteland is immense. The desert is not always bigger than a prison cell. So, what is homeland?"

A collection of autobiographical essays by one of the greatest poets to come from Palestine. / "Every beautiful poem is an act of resistance," asserts Darwish. Both voice of the Palestinian people and one of the most transcendent poets of his generation, Mahmoud Darwish also wrote several remarkable volumes of autobiographical essays over the course of his life. First published in Beirut in 1973, these probing essays ask vital questions about the existentially complex realities the Palestinians in Israel face and the ambiguity of Darwish's own identity as an Israeli Palestinian. They call upon myth, memory, and language to delve into the poet's experience of house arrest, his encounters with Israeli interrogators, and the periods he spent in prison. Meditative, lyrical, rhythmic, Darwish gives absence a vital presence in these linked essays. *Journal* is a moving and intimate account of the loss of homeland and, for many, of life inside the porous walls of occupation—no ordinary grief.

15. [*The Grave on the Wall*](#) by Brandon Shimoda (City Lights Publishers, 2019)



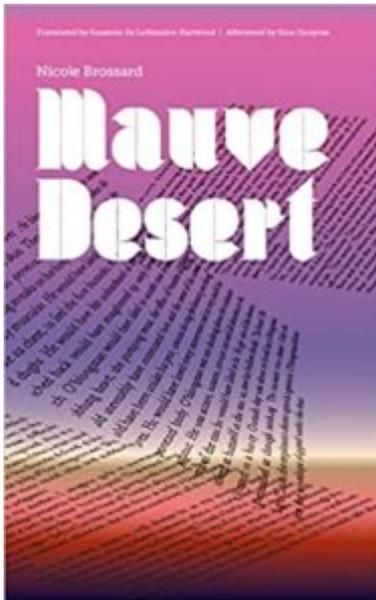
"It is part dream, part memory, part forgetting, part identity. It is a remarkable exploration of how citizenship is forged by the brutal US imperial forces—through slave labor, forced detention, indiscriminate bombing, historical amnesia and wall. If someone asked me, Where are you from? I would answer, From The Grave on the Wall." —Don Mee Choi, author of *Hardly War*

"Shimoda is a mystic writer ... He puts what breaches itself (always) onto the page, so that the act of writing becomes akin to paper-making: an attention to fibers, coagulation, texture and the water-fire mixtures that signal irreversible alteration or change. ... he has written a book that touches the bottom of my own soul."—Bhanu Kapil, author of *Ban en Banlieue*

A memoir and book of mourning, a grandson's attempt to reconcile his own uncontested citizenship with his grandfather's lifelong struggle. Award-winning poet Brandon Shimoda has crafted a lyrical portrait of his paternal grandfather, Midori Shimoda, whose life—child migrant, talented photographer, suspected enemy alien and spy, desert wanderer, American citizen—mirrors the arc of Japanese America in the twentieth century. In a series of pilgrimages, Shimoda records the search to find his grandfather, and unfolds, in the process, a moving elegy on memory and forgetting.

[Buy on Bookshop](#)

16. **[Mauve Desert](#)** by Nicole Brossard, Translated by Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood (Coach House Books, 2002)

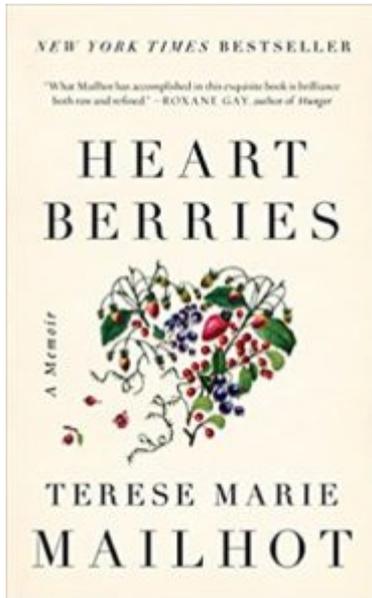


"I cannot get close to any you."

First published in 1987, Nicole Brossard's classic novel returns to Coach House in a new edition. A seminal text in Canadian and feminist literature, *Mauve Desert* is a must-read for readers and writers alike. / This is both a single novel and three separate novels in one. In the first, *Mauve Desert*, fifteen-year-old Mélanie drives across the Arizona desert in a white Meteor chasing fear and desire, cutting loose from her mother and her mother's lover, Lorna, in their roadside Mauve Motel. In the second book, Maudes Laures reads *Mauve Desert*, becomes obsessed with it, and embarks on an extraordinary quest for its mysterious author, characters and meaning. The third book – *Mauve, the horizon* – is Laures's eventual translation of *Mauve Desert*. Like all good translations, it is both the same and revealingly different from the original. / Nicole Brossard's writing is agile and inventive; from moment to moment gripping, exhilarating and erotic. Her language drifts and swells like sand dunes in a desert, cresting and accumulating into a landscape that shifts like wind and words; she translates the practice of translation, the pulse of desire.

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17. [Heart Berries](#) by Terese Marie Mailhot (Counterpoint, 2018)

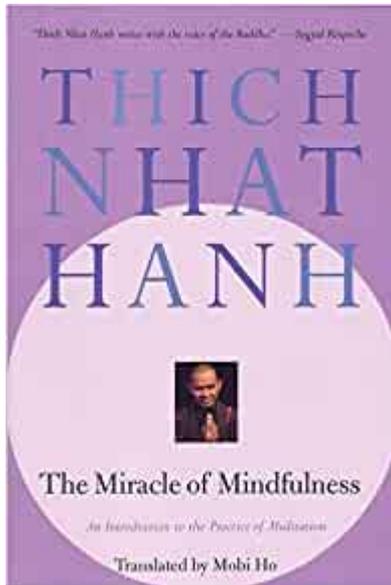


"Mailhot examines the circumstances of her life—replete with grief, abuse, and structural injustice—with searing honesty and forceful language in her tiny but powerful debut. Steeped in several generations' worth of history, Heart Berries demands to be re-read over and over, every return yielding a new insight." –Julie Kosin

Heart Berries is a powerful, poetic memoir of a woman's coming of age on the Seabird Island Band in the Pacific Northwest. Having survived a profoundly dysfunctional upbringing only to find herself hospitalized and facing a dual diagnosis of post traumatic stress disorder and bipolar II disorder; Terese Marie Mailhot is given a notebook and begins to write her way out of trauma. The triumphant result is *Heart Berries*, a memorial for Mailhot's mother, a social worker and activist who had a thing for prisoners; a story of reconciliation with her father—an abusive drunk and a brilliant artist—who was murdered under mysterious circumstances; and an elegy on how difficult it is to love someone while dragging the long shadows of shame. / Mailhot trusts the reader to understand that memory isn't exact, but melded to imagination, pain, and what we can bring ourselves to accept. Her unique and at times unsettling voice graphically illustrates her mental state. As she writes, she discovers her own true voice, seizes control of her story, and, in so doing, reestablishes her connection to her family, to her people, and to her place in the world.

[Buy on Bookshop](#)

18. [***The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation***](#) by Thich Nhat Hanh, Translated by Mobi Ho (Beacon Press, 1999)

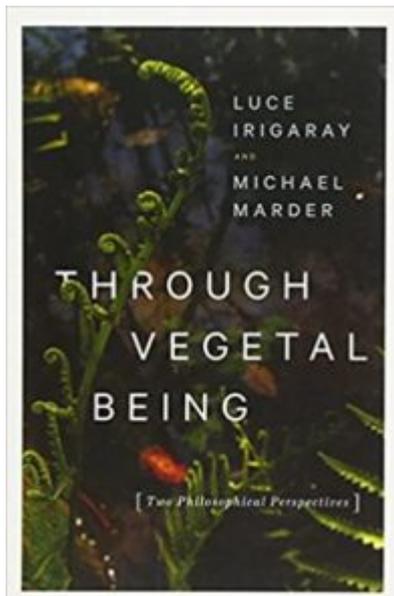


“Feelings, whether of compassion or irritation, should be welcomed, recognized, and treated on an absolutely equal basis; because both are ourselves. The tangerine I am eating is me. The mustard greens I am planting are me. I plant with all my heart and mind. I clean this teapot with the kind of attention I would have were I giving the baby Buddha or Jesus a bath. Nothing should be treated more carefully than anything else. In mindfulness, compassion, irritation, mustard green plant, and teapot are all sacred.”

In this beautiful and lucid guide, Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh offers gentle anecdotes and practical exercise as a means of learning the skills of mindfulness—being awake and fully aware. From washing the dishes to answering the phone to peeling an orange, he reminds us that each moment holds within it an opportunity to work toward greater self-understanding and peacefulness.

[Buy on Bookshop](#)

19. [Through Vegetal Being: Two Philosophical Perspectives](#) by Luce Irigaray & Michael Marder (Columbia University Press, 2016)

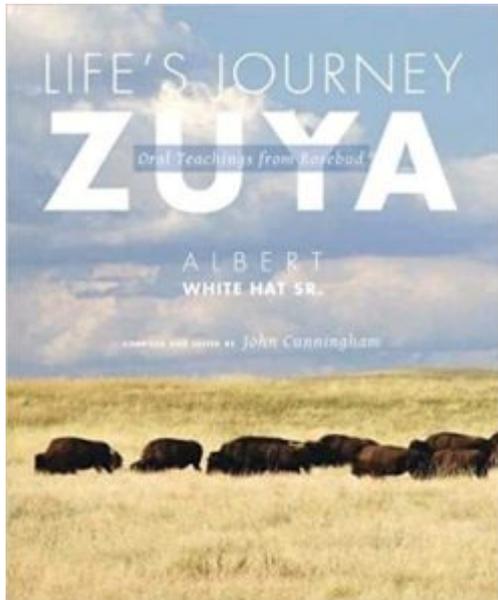


“Through Vegetal Being foregrounds the relations that plants enable between humans and other living things, continuing both Michael Marder’s work on plant existence and Luce Irigaray’s work on sexual difference and the forgetting of the world in the constitution of individual identity. This charming and beautifully written book is a two-person meditation on the philosophy, ontology, and ethics of plant life and our fundamental dependence on it as living beings.” – Elizabeth Grosz, Jean Fox O’Barr Women’s Studies Professor at Duke University

Blossoming from a correspondence between Luce Irigaray and Michael Marder, *Through Vegetal Being* is an intense personal, philosophical, and political meditation on the significance of the vegetal for our lives, our ways of thinking, and our relations with human and nonhuman beings. The vegetal world has the potential to rescue our planet and our species and offers us a way to abandon past metaphysics without falling into nihilism. Luce Irigaray has argued in her philosophical work that living and coexisting are deficient unless we recognize sexuate difference as a crucial dimension of our existence. Michael Marder believes the same is true for vegetal difference. / Irigaray and Marder consider how plants contribute to human development by sustaining our breathing, nourishing our senses, and keeping our bodies and minds alive. They note the importance of returning to ancient Greek tradition and engaging with Eastern teachings to revive a culture closer to nature. As a result, we can reestablish roots when we are displaced and recover the vital energy we need to improve our sensibility and relation to others. This generative discussion points toward a more universal way of becoming human that is embedded in the vegetal world.

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20. [Life’s Journey– Zuya: Oral Teachings from Rosebud](#) by Albert White Hat (University of Utah Press, 2012)



Our people are very lucky to be here," says Albert White Hat Sr. He has lived through a time when Indians were sent to boarding schools and were not permitted to practice their own rituals. Although the Lakota people can practice their beliefs openly once again, things have changed and old ways have been forgotten. As a teacher at Sinte Gleska University in South Dakota, White Hat seeks to preserve the link the Lakota people have with their past. In *Life's Journey–Zuya*, White Hat has collected and translated the stories of medicine men, retaining the simplicity of their language so as not to interpret their words through a Western lens. This is Zuya, oral history that is lived and handed down over the generations. / White Hat also shares stories from his own experience. Using anecdotes he shows not only how the Lakota lifestyle has been altered but also how Lakota words have begun to take on new meanings that lack their original connotations and generate a different picture of Lakota philosophy. Language, interwoven with history, tells the people where they came from and who they are. By gathering the traditions and ceremonies in a single volume, with the history of how they evolved, he has secured the meaning of these practices for future generations. Filled with warmth and humor, *Life's Journey–Zuya* is an enjoyable and enlightening read.

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21. [*The Chronology of Water: A Memoir*](#) by Lidia Yuknavitch
(Hawthorne Books, 2011)

FUGITIVE ASSEMBLAGE

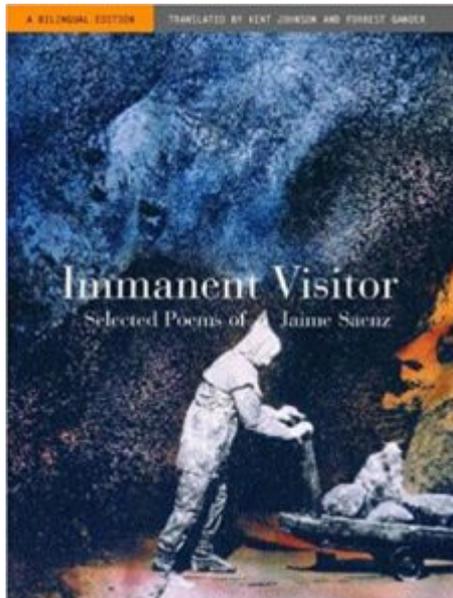


Jennifer Colkins

Fugitive Assemblage is lyric noir. It takes place in California in 1983. A woman pulls an IV out of her arm, walks out of the hospital and starts driving north. She is bleeding and nauseous and ever aware that there is something in the trunk of her car that is rotting. It is only after she makes her way through Big Sur and Monterey, over the mountains and into the Central Valley, that she discovers where to bury the body, so to speak. *Fugitive Assemblage* is rigorously loyal to human emotion. Rather than allow the stricture of narrative to manipulate and drive emotion, emotion emerges in *Fugitive Assemblage* through form and language. In it, the California highway is a skeleton and its flesh is the voices of ghosts. *Fugitive Assemblage* renders sensation, because emotion is tied with physical experience. It incorporates images. It uses the harmony (or, more often disharmony) of numerous ghostly voices, from women's diaries of the "westward journey," to geology texts, Ingeborg Bachman's poetry, to Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. It draws on science, on family history and on personal trauma to evoke the experience of grief.

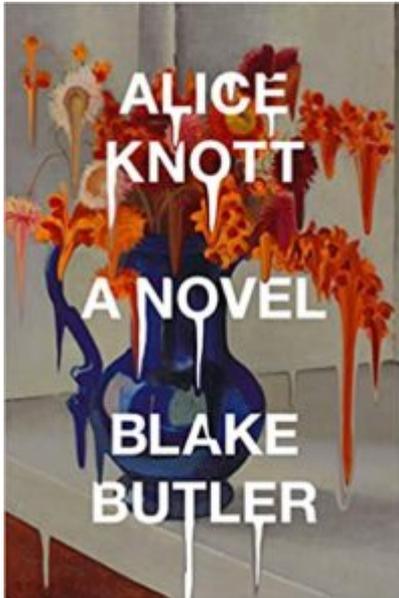
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23. [***Immanent Visitor: Selected Poems of Jaime Saenz, A Bilingual Edition***](#) by Jaime Saenz, Translated by Kent Johnson & Forrest Gander (University of California Press, 2002)



Immanent Visitor is the first English-language translation of the work of Bolivia's greatest and most visionary twentieth-century poet. A *poète maudit*, Jaime Saenz rejected the conventions of polite society and became a monk in service of his own imagination. Apocalyptic and occult in his politics, a denizen of slum taverns, unashamedly bisexual, insistently nocturnal in his artistic affairs, and secretive in his leadership of a select group of writers, Saenz mixed the mystical and baroque with the fantastic, the psychological, and the symbolic. In masterly translations by two poet-translators, Kent Johnson and Forrest Gander, Saenz's strange, innovative, and wildly lyrical poems reveal a literary legacy of fierce compassion and solidarity with indigenous Bolivian cultures and with the destitute, the desperate, and the disenfranchised of that unreal city, La Paz. / In long lines, in odes that name desire, with Whitmanesque anaphora, in exclamations and repetitions, Saenz addresses the reader, the beloved, and death in one extended lyrical gesture. The poems are brazenly affecting. Their semantic innovation is notable in the odd heterogeneity of formal and tonal structures that careen unabashedly between modes and moods; now archly lyrical, now arcanelly symbolic, now colloquial, now trancelike. As Saenz's reputation continues to grow throughout the world, these inspired translations and the accompanying Spanish texts faithfully convey the poet's unique vision and voice to English-speaking readers.

24. [*Alice Knott*](#) by Blake Butler (Riverhead Books, forthcoming July 2020)



Alice Knott lives alone, a reclusive heiress haunted by memories of her deceased parents and mysterious near-identical brother. Much of her family's fortune has been spent on a world-class collection of artwork, which she stores in a vault in her lonely, cavernous house. One day, she awakens to find the artwork destroyed, the act of vandalism captured in a viral video that soon triggers a rash of copycat incidents. As more videos follow and the world's most priceless works of art are destroyed one by one, Alice finds that she has become the chief suspect in an international conspiracy—even as her psyche becomes a shadowed landscape of childhood demons and cognitive disorder. Unsettling, almost physically immersive, *Alice Knott* is a virtuoso exploration of the meaning of art and the lasting afterlife of trauma, as well as a deeply humane portrait of a woman whose trials feel both apocalyptic and universal.

[Buy on Bookshop](#)

25. [Body of Empire](#) by Mariko Nagai (Tarpaulin Sky Press, forthcoming July 2020)

Weaving historical documents, photographs, and first-hand accounts against a background of nationalism and war, *Body of Empire* explores the lives of Japanese sex workers – both government-sanctioned and freelance – between 1868 and 1953. Some hid in the bottom of ships heading toward Shanghai or Hong Kong. Some were auctioned off to Singapore, Manila, Borneo, Thursday Island, Rangoon, and Bombay. Some were taken from villages in Korea with a promise of a better job, even an education, then were herded into Japanese Imperial Army ships and labeled “military supply.” Some lost their families in air raids and were stranded without homes, opening their legs to the “white devil” soldiers as a last chance to survive. *Karayuki-san*. *Rashamen*. *Comfort women*. *Special Women of RAA*. *Panpan*. *Only-san*. Different names, different times, all of them women and girls whose bodies were bought and sold by men.