



## Reading 2024

Note: This site is now being updated in a Google Doc.

[Link to Google Doc](#)

A collection by title and date of my reading for 2024. A few details in each entry, but more than anything, this is a simple chronological record. You will find previous years' lists and my "Watching" list for Films and TV in my [DayBook directory](#).

Years after I began recording what I read and watch, I [learned](#) that [Steven Soderbergh](#) [does something similar](#): "At the end of each year, the filmmaker ... posts a list of everything he watched and read in the previous 12 months." I can't match him, but if I write it down, I can use my notes to try to "remember."



Elizabeth Egan: "I'm happy to do my part for the environment, but show me a flower that smells sweeter than paper and I'll treat you to a staff pick from my local bookstore."

"A former teacher once told me that we reread books not to uncover something new in them but to see how we've changed. I recently reread [Anna Karenina](#), firmly my favorite book." Rose Horowitch, an assistant editor, [theatlantic.com](#).

"For the hour in which I am able to lose myself in someone else's thoughts is the greatest relief I can find from the burden of my own memories." Anna Frith, on reading, from Geraldine Brooks, "Year of Wonders" (#2 below).

The Atlantic Magazine did a piece on [The Great American Novel](#), March 2024.

Here's my 2024 reading to date:

1. The Big Rock Candy Mountain, Wallace Stegner (1943). Paperback. Started 123123. Completed 010924. Recommended by Bill Porter: "I found the story fascinating. My interest was enhanced after I learned that it was closely based on his own peripatetic childhood due to a ne'er-do-well father." My response to Bill once I finished the book on 010924: "A.O. Scott makes this comment about Wallace Stegner's fiction: 'Wars and presidential administrations pass almost without mention, perhaps because, even in the post-frontier West, local matters of settlement and subsistence were likely to feel more pressing.' And it's so true. Finished *Big Rock* yesterday, and though I feel it was about 100 pp too long, it was emotionally eviscerating. He's a master at depicting a marriage in all of its complexity." More in [Wallace Stegner Notebook](#).
2. Year of Wonders: A Novel of the Plague, [Geraldine Brooks](#) (2001). Paperback. Started 011124. Completed 011324. England 1666. "When I

... spent the last of my life in complete silence in England. Never. When I have a tallow stub, I read until it gutters. Mrs. Mompellion always

allowed me to take the stubs from the rectory, and although there are very few nowadays, I do not know how I would manage without. For the hour in which I am able to lose myself in someone else's thoughts is the greatest relief I can find from the burden of my own memories." (9)

Post-Covid, a compelling read. The slow drumbeat of death comes to the village in this historical fiction account of Eeyam, in rural England. But I'm unsettled by the rush of extraordinary events that take place in the last 30-50 pages, from Elinor's murder at the hand of Anna's step-mother, to her brief, yet graphic fling with Mr. Mompellion, to her realization that Mr. M had no sexual relations with his wife of three years, to her recognition that it was Elinor whom Anna perhaps loved, to the illegitimate Bradford child she helps to birth, to her escape and eventual residence as one of many wives of an Arab medicine man.

3. *Blood Meridian: Or The Evening Redness in the West*, Cormac McCarthy (1985). Paperback. Started 011424. "A man's at odds to know his mind cause his mind is aught he has to know it with. He can know his heart, but he don't want to. Rightly so. Best not to look in there. It aint the heart of a creature that is bound in the way that God has set for it. You can find meanness in the least of creatures, but when God made man the devil at his elbow." (20) "They set forth in a crimson dawn where sky and earth closed in a razorous plane. Out there dark little archipelagos of cloud and the vast world of sand and scrub shearing upward into the shoreless void where those blue islands trembled and the earth grew uncertain, gravely canted and veering out through tinctures of rose and the dark beyond the dawn to the uttermost rebate of space." (52) Really? Abandoned after page 80, with apologies to Bill Porter. At this point I just cannot continue. If this is McCarthy's masterpiece, I will just have to miss it. Sorry. From [Caryn James' review in NYT](#): "The kid's terseness is a mild parody of B-movie westerns. Looking at a severed head, "he spat and wiped his mouth. He aint no kin to me, he said.""
4. *The Anatomy of a Golf Course: The Art of Golf Architecture*, Tom Doak (1992). Hardcover. Started 011624. Completed 011824. Rainy day reading. "The golf course with the widest variety of holes has everything. It will be fair course, because it is not designed around one particular shot pattern, and lets all players demonstrate their golfing skills. It should attain a modicum of balance, simply by avoiding a repetitive string of holes following a similar pattern. The individuality of the holes will create a "flow" to the sequence of play, similar to the musical score of a film, creating a mood for the course." (42) There are three types of holes: penal, strategic, heroic. "The plague of motorized golf carts ..." (41) "The perfect shot is invariably rewarded; it is only right that the shot which is slightly imperfect should be weighed in the scales of providence." - H.N. Wethered, *The Perfect Golfer*, 1931. Quoted by Doak, (51).
5. *Holding the Note: Profiles in Popular Music*, David Remnick (2023). Hardcover. Started 012024. Completed 020624. Reading individual essays, most originally published in *The New Yorker*. Leonard Cohen, Aretha, Buddy Guy, Keith Richards, McCartney, Mavis Staples, Charlie Parker, Springsteen, Pavarotti, Dylan, Patti Smith. Keith Richards about Springsteen: "If there was anything better around, he'd still be working the bars of New Jersey." (84) "[The Beatles] were a gang, a unit, even a family, and happy families are a bore, if they exist at all. 'The elder brother does shout at the younger brother, and they have fisticuffs, or whatever,' McCartney said. 'It's all very natural.'" (118) Phil Schaap is "the Bird Watcher," dug into the arcane of jazz generally, Charlie Parker specifically. Remnick at one point writes, having listened to Schaap go on and on, "Meanwhile, the Earth warmed imperceptibly; glaciers plunged into the sea." (152). "These questions were of no less moment to Schaap than the Confederate maneuvers at Shiloh were to Shelby Foote." (152) About Springsteen: "Many musicians in their grizzled maturity have an uncertain grasp on their earliest days on the bandstand. (Not a few have an uncertain grasp on last week.)... but unlike The Rolling Stones, say, who have not written a great song since

the disco era and come together only to pad their fortunes as their own cover band, Springsteen refuses to be a mercenary curator of his past.” (166). SVZ called one of Springsteen’s songs “bullshit.” “People don’t need you talking about your life. Nobody gives a *shit* about *your* life. They need you for *their* lives. *That’s your thing*. Giving some logic and reason and sympathy and passion to this cold, fragmented, confusing world — that’s your gift.” (198) “Awarding Dylan the Nobel, [Leonard Cohen] said, ‘is like pinning a medal on Mt. Everest for being the highest mountain.’” (252)

6. *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*, Isabel Wilkerson (2020). [Author website](#). Also worth noting: adapted to film by Ava DuVernay as *Origins* ([Wikipedia](#), [Trailer](#)). [David Remnick / New Yorker Radio interview/podcast](#). Started 012424. Completed 013024. “The Nazis could not have risen to power and done what they did without the support of the masses of people who were open to [Hitler’s] spell.” (265) But Wilkerson points out that Germany rejected its history, while the Southern states embraced it, and still do. The horror is something the German people will not celebrate or honor now, unlike whites and southerners. (See 348) Analogy of owning an old home. You didn’t do damage to the roof or the basement, but if you don’t fix it, the house will only get worse. Three caste systems: American slavery; India and the Dalits, or untouchables; and Nazi Germany after the Weimar Republic. More quotes and highlights in the [Wilkerson author notebook](#).
7. *LIV and Let Die: The Inside Story of the War Between the PGA TOUR and LIV Golf*, Alan Shipnuck (2023). On loan from Ron Southward. Started 020724. Completed 021124. At the 2023 Masters, “attention eventually turned to the action inside the ropes, though the LIV subplot remained prominent when Koepka shared the first-round lead with a sizzling 65. He followed with a 67 and then a 73 to forge a 2-stroke lead heading into the final round. For those who enjoy controversy — which is to say, almost every member of the media — a LIV player fighting for the green jacket was yet another gift from the content gods. ‘This is beautiful,’ said the English reporter Kevin Garside. ‘We have a term for this sort of stuff: shithousery. This would be perfect shithousery. All we need is Norman tweeting his congratulations from Mar-a-Lago to make it better.’” (276) “[Jimmy] Dunne wears his power comfortably and doesn’t suffer fools gladly. He employs a cobbler to make gorgeous, unique golf shoes in an array of colors, and on the Masters driving range there’s always much conversation about his footwear. One year he was paid a visit by Billy Payne, the imperious, uptight, killjoy chairman. ‘Jimmy, there’s been a lot of talk about your golf shoes,’ Payne said. ‘This week we prefer the focus to be on the Masters golf tournament.’ // ‘Sure, Chairman. Whatever you say.’ // The fancy shoes stayed in the closet. Eventually the winds of change blew through Augusta National, and Dunne began wearing his flashy footwear again. Payne came by for another scolding. ‘Jimmy, I thought we had a conversation about your shoes.’ // ‘We did.’ // Pause // ‘When you were chairman.’” (299)
8. *The Warmth of Other Suns*, Isabel Wilkerson (2010). Paperback. [Book website](#). The story of the “great migration” in the first half of C20. Started 021224. Completed 021824. Notes, quotes, and highlights in the [Wilkerson author notebook](#).
9. *Recapitulation*, Wallace Stegner (1979). Hardcover. Recommended — as was *The Big Rock Candy Mountain* — by Bill Porter. Started 021924. Completed 022424. “Sight of his sweater and box beside his bed suggested to him that if he didn’t have things to do, he could again be seduced into messing around in the past like a scavenger in a dump. For a man uninterested in where he had been, the broken newsreel his mind had played through the night was as disconcerting as a failed lie detector test. He got into the shower and washed it all away.” (238) “Recapitulation” (definition): an act or instance of [summarizing](#) and [restating](#) the main points of something: “his recapitulation of the argument.” More in [Wallace Stegner notebook](#).
10. *Still Pictures*, Janet Malcolm (2023). Hardcover. Started 022424. “We are each of us an endangered species. When we die, our species disappears with us. Nothing like us will ever exist again.” (32) Completed 022624.

11. Metropolis, Philip Kerr (2019). Paperback. [Author website](#). Recommended by Ann Alexander. Started 022724. Completed 022924. The last of the author's Bernie Gunther novels; he passed in 2018. Bernhard Weiss. Ernst Gennat. Erich Angerstein. Set in Germany in 1920s. A load of references, including The Threepenny Opera, A Sorcerer's Apprentice, the rise of Nazism, Sacco and Vanzetti. Also a painting of "an old bald man with rotten feet copulating with a generously endowed naked lady that owed more to the artist's sense of humor than it did to accurate draughtsmanship or skill with a paintbrush. (334) Angerstein: "It's the Middle German Ring that brings a bit of order and stability to the criminal world." (339) "Sure I know. Because I have nothing to say as a painter. Because I couldn't finish my unfinished symphony. Because being a cop is a job for honest men, and since there are not many of those around these days, they'll take anyone they can get." (353) "I burned her later. It wasn't as if I hadn't had one before, and I suppose that before my time is up, I'll have others. Never forget, always replace. That's the first rule of human relationships. (364)
12. A Hitch in Time, Christopher Hitchens (2021). Hardcover. [Dwight Garner review in NYT](#).
13. Outlier: The Unfinished Presidency of Jimmy Carter, Kai Bird (2021). Hardcover. Came across it in a Peter Baker NYT piece about Carter's passing one year in Hospice care: "[Jimmy Carter's Long Goodbye](#)." Started 030324. Completed 031824. "Even in defeat, he had no regrets, and in retrospect, he liked to quote Mondale, who had told him, 'We obeyed the law, we told the truth, and we kept the peace.' Carter liked to add, 'We championed human rights.'" (622)
14. Isaac's Storm: A Man, a Time, and the Deadliest Hurricane in History, Erik Larson (1999). Hardcover. [Author website](#). Completed 032224. "The water is going down! Look at the door!" (214) "It killed 22 people at the residence of 'Francois, a well-known water,' and pruned to a stalk the family tree of the Rattiseau clan ... It drowned Mr. And Mrs. A. Popular and the four Popular children, Agnes, Marie, Clarence, and Tony. It killed Sanders Costly and Clara Sudden, Herman Tix and H.J. Tickle. It killed John Grief and the entire Grief family." (243) Perhaps a mistake, but I read about 2/3 of this book on a day of torrential rain and wind, making today's storm seem more dangerous than it was. [NYT review](#) (1999). I read The Splendid and the Vile in 2020 ([notes](#)). The Demon of Unrest is currently in queue.
15. James, Percival Everett (2024). Hardcover. Follow-up to Huck Finn, told from Jim's perspective. [Dwight Garner review in NYT](#). Started 032424. Completed 032525. Everett writes in his acknowledgments: "Finally, a nod to Mark Twain. His humor and humanity affected me long before I became a writer. Heaven for the climate; hell for my long-awaited lunch with Mark Twain." "You're my friend, Jim." (19) More notes in notebook: [Project | Mark Twain](#). Also, [A.O. Scott writes](#) about James and Demon Copperhead.
16. All the King's Men, Robert Penn Warren (1946). Hardcover. Can't remember when I last read it, but in honor of autocrats, I'll re-read Willie Stark's / Huey Long's story and try not to think of Donald Trump. A tentative [Blue Ridge Saloon](#) selection for May of this year. [Wikipedia](#). Started 032624. Why do we have Mastern's story? Does it lead — by thread or context — to Irwin? "Your need is my justice." (326) Completed 040424. More notes in [Notebook](#).
17. The Lives of Rocks: Stories, Rick Bass (2006). Hardcover. Read the title story on 040824. Cancer-ridden woman and her neighbors.
18. Southerners: A Journalist's Odyssey, Marshall Frady (1980). Hardcover. Picked up to read "The House of Long," on Huey Long, Earl Long, and Russell Long, who followed him. Read 040824.
19. Hello Beautiful, Ann Napolitano (2023). Hardcover. [NYT review](#). Started 041324. William Waters. Julia and her three sisters Padavano. [Kent] "felt like he was explaining that Alice was a test he hadn't studied for and that he'd never had access to the necessary papers or books to begin to

prepare." (363) Completed 042124. Powerful novel about an insular

family. [NYT review](#). Echoes, I think, of [Little Women](#) by Louisa May Alcott. ("I think" because I haven't read it.)

20. On This Hill: A Narrative History of Hampden-Sydney College, 1774-1994, John L. Brinkley (1994). Started 042124. Skipped to my own era on 0429, then placed back on shelf.
21. Lost in Shangri-La: A True Story of Survival, Adventure, and the Most Incredible Rescue Mission of WW2, Mitchell Zuckoff (2011). Paperback. Recommended by Phil Burris. Started 042224. "They valued cleverness but not curiosity. Loyalty had special significance. To greet close friends and relations, they said *Hal-loak-nak*, 'Let me eat your feces.' Its true meaning: 'I will do the unthinkable for you.'" (116) "Albert Einstein once said, 'I do not know with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones.'" (130) Completed 042524.
22. The Caretaker, [Ron Rash](#) (2023). Hardcover. Set in Blowing Rock and subject of summer Study Club preso on 052924 at 5:30. Started 042624; completed 042724. The "caretaker" is Blackburn Gant, a polio victim and "blood brother" to Jacob Hampton. Jacob defies his parents and elopes with Naomi Clarke. She conceives before he's drafted and sent to Korea. His parents deceive them both, and it would appear that Jacob will never know his wife and daughter are alive ... nor her knowing that her husband survived the war. At one point the Hamptons introduce Jacob to Seth Nolan, a WW2 veteran, who privately explains his "religion": "When I come back none of it made sense...." His Uncle Zeke, a preacher who served in WW1 ... he asked Zeke why God would let something like war happen. (153-4) [Review in Smoky Mountain Living](#) shows detailed plot.
23. George, Being George: George Plimpton's Life as told, admired, deplored, and envied by 200 friends, relatives, lovers, acquaintances, rivals — and a few unappreciative observers. Nelson Aldrich, Jr., ed. (2008). Opened and dabbled in the disjointed and relatively brief memories from famous and (mostly) friendly personages ... on 042824. Put back on Plimpton shelf.
24. Albion: The Origins of the English Imagination, Peter Ackroyd (2002). Read Ch 1 on 042924 and returned to shelf.
25. Table for Two, Amor Towles (2024). Hardcover. Started 043024. Read first story, "Lines," as I await Betty's finishing the book. Picked up again on 051224. Each of the stories is unique in character development and plot, but all are written in Towles' distinct prose style: mannered, descriptive, fascinating. For more, visit my [Amor Towles notebook](#). Completed 051724.
26. The Demon of Unrest: A saga of hubris, heartbreak, and heroism at the dawn of the Civil War, Erik Larson (2024). Hardcover. [Author website](#). Started 043024. Completed 051024. A wonderful addition to my Civil War reading and library. "'Certainly, Mr. [Robert Barnwell] Rhett; I have no objection!' Pickens replied. 'I will furnish you with some men, and you can storm the work yourself.' / 'But, sir, I am not a military man!' / 'Nor I either,' [Governor] Pickens said, 'and therefore I take the advice of those that are!'" (208) "Peace Convention" delegates met in Washington. "The delegates were, to put it kindly, an august group, though Horace Greeley was not inclined to kindness when he dubbed it an 'Old Gentlemen's Convention' whose attendees were 'political fossils, who would not have been again disinterred' if not for the crisis at hand. Greeley's nickname stuck. One elderly delegate died during the conference." (215) "Honor" and southern "chivalry" are recurring themes, including the "Code Duello." De Tocqueville: "The citizen of the Southern states becomes a sort of domestic dictator from infancy." (388) "Here lay the greatest of ironies: In 34 hours of some of the fiercest bombardment the world had ever seen, no one was killed or even seriously injured, yet this bloodless attack would trigger a war that killed more Americans than any other conflict in the country's history." (463) When Anderson returned to re-install the flag at Sumter, "He could not know it, but at that instant Lincoln lay dying of a gunshot



27. *This Is Happiness*, Niall Williams (2019). Paperback. Recommended by Susan Porter. "Every line is poetry. The writing is just that beautiful. It is about a tiny town in Ireland in 1958 as they are getting electrical power FOR THE FIRST TIME. I hope you will read it and tell me you love it as much as I do." [NYT review](#). "Faha, as we encounter it in 1958, is a 'forgotten elsewhere,' a place where 'everything has to be invented firsthand and all needs met locally.' The tour Noe gives us of the town is full of pleasures: a digression on traveling encyclopedia salesmen; illuminating, often comic descriptions of the social intricacies of church and pub culture; the chemist's shop with its 'once flood-swollen and now lifted-in-places linoleum.'" Started 051924. Completed 052624. [Notes and highlights](#).
28. *I Am Not Sidney Poitier*, Percival Everett (2011). Paperback. Started 052724. Completed 053024. "All characters depicted in this novel are completely fictitious ... This qualification applies, equally, to the character whose name is the same as the author's." "Then I remembered that I was eleven, almost twelve, and though sexual activity or exploration with Wanda Fonda was clearly out of the question, I did very much enjoy the idea of seeing actual tits." (25) Seems a series of dreams provide digressions throughout NSP's adventures. First may be on 67. Identity also seems a recurring theme: "I had no reason to suspect that Sidney Poitier was my father, but I also had no idea who my father. I knew nothing about the man, whether he was a man or a basting syringe." (84) Ward, Maggie's and Agnes's father says, "Young man, let me just say this, I'm 1/16th black, an eighth Irish, two-fifths Choctaw, one-thirty-second Dutch, a quarter English, and a ninth German." / I didn't, nor did I want to, do the math, but it was clear that he was ten-tenths crazy." (134) One of his defensive tools was to "Fesmerize" his bullies, [which in a way, is kind of a thing](#). "As I fell in again behind the wheel I observed my face in the mirror. I looked so much older, felt so much older, stiff, and beleaguered. If I hadn't known better I would have said I had a gray hair." (201) In the book's final moments, NSP is awarded an Academy Award by Harry Belafonte and Elizabeth Taylor. Ted Turner and Jane Fonda play key roles. So does a character named Percival Everett.
29. *How the Word Is Passed: A Reckoning with the History of Slavery Across America*, [Clint Smith](#) (2021). Paperback. (On loan from Ann Alexander) Started 053124. Completed 060624. "The history of slavery is the history of the United States. It was not peripheral to our founding; it was central to it. It is not irrelevant to our contemporary society; it created it. This history is in our soil, it is in our policies, and it must, too, be in our memories." (289) Chapters: Monticello / The Whitney Plantation and John Cummings (Wallace, LA) / Angola Prison / Blandford Cemetery (Petersburg, VA) / Galveston Island (Juneteenth) / New York City / Goree Island (West Africa). "Historian Walter Johnson aptly notes that the 'language of "dehumanization" is misleading because slavery depended upon the human capacities of enslaved people. It depended on their reproduction. It depended upon their labor. And it depended upon their sentence..." (67) "But as I think of Blandford, I'm left wondering if we are all just patchworks of the stories we've been told. What would it take — what does it take — for you to confront a false history even if it means shattering the stories you have been told throughout your life? Even if it means having to fundamentally reexamine who you are and who your family has been? Just because something is difficult to accept doesn't mean you should refuse to accept it. Just because someone tells you a story doesn't mean make that story true." (172) "The numbers vary widely, but historian Donald L. Fixico estimates that there were anywhere from a few million to 15 million Indigenous Americans living in North America upon Columbus's arrival in 1492. By the late nineteenth century the population had dropped to approximately 250,000." (214) The concept of "sincere fiction": "According to [anthropologist Francois] Richard, the statistical controversy of Goree Island cannot and should not undermine its place

- as a site of memory and reckoning.” (252) A “griot, a person who used the power of storytelling to force people to confront a larger history many had forgotten, or were willing to ignore.” (254) The author, Clint Smith, talks about “gaps” in our memories, “gaps that have to be filled. Gaps that David Thorson spoke of at Monticello when he said, ‘I think that history is the story of the past, using all the available facts, and that nostalgia is a fantasy about the past using no facts, and somewhere in between is memory.’” (268) “There was a longing in [his grandmother’s] voice I had not heard before. The gentle pang of guilt over all she realized she did not know.” (281)
30. *The Green*, Troon McAllister (1999). Paperback. Recommended by Dalt Ruffin. Started 060624. Ryder Cup fiction. I was skeptical, but 50 pages in, I’m a believer. Completed 060824. Alan Bellamy captains the Ryder cup team. Eddie Caminetti is a hustler. “Trying to describe to a non-golfer what it feels like to hit a perfect shot is like trying to describe sex to a eunuch.” (18) Probably the best fiction I’ve read about golf, though there are several wincing moments (“I’m afraid I rudely ignored the spectators as I madly careened back and forth between the last two matches riding in a souped-up golf cart I begged from the course superintendent.” [228]) and several rule changes date the book: “It’s illegal, prior to putting, to fix a mark left by an earlier player’s shoe, but perfectly all right to repair one caused by a ball’s landing on the green.” (210) “I had trouble accepting that Eddie Caminetti was dead. It was like hearing that Gandhi or Churchill had died; you’d never felt that they’d been real, living human beings in the first place, so how could they die?” (276)
31. *American Wife*, [Curtis Sittenfeld](#) (2008). Paperback. [Joyce Carol Oates review in NYT](#). Alice “comes belatedly to realize, in middle age, at the height of the Iraq war that her aggressively militant president-husband has initiated and stubbornly continues to defend, that she has compromised her youthful liberal ideals: ‘I lead a life in opposition to itself.’” “Her challenge to the American public: ‘All I did is marry him. You are the ones who gave him power.’” Started 060924. The books she mentions: Humboldt’s Gift, The Confessions of Nat Turner, Pale Fire, Rabbit Redux, The Seagull, Eudora Welty, The Call of the Wild ... Music also. YA books (388). Her grandmother’s books (394). The Old Forest, Peter Taylor. Ella is reading The Odyssey (477). It’s as though she wants us to define her as much by her reading as other parts of her life. “Did I betray Charlie, or did I act on principle: Has he betrayed the American people, or has he acted on principle? Perhaps the answer is all of the above. If the many novels I’ve read are an accurate indicator, I have to assume there are betrayals in most marriages. The goal, I suppose, is not to allow any that are larger than the strength of the partnership.” (555) Completed 061324. Alice says: “The single most astonishing fact of political life to me has been the gullibility of the American people. Even in our cynical age, the percentage of the population who is told something and therefore believes it to be true — it’s staggering.” [NYT article/profile](#) from 032025.
32. *West With Giraffes*, [Lynda Rutledge](#) (2021). Paperback. Started 061424. Completed 062124. A wonderful companion to *The Lincoln Highway* and *Huck Finn*. This trip is from NY to San Diego via The Lee Highway. It’s 1938. Woodrow Wilson Nickel died in the year 2025. Intent on getting to “Califoarny.” Turns 18 during the trip. Riley Jones is responsible for getting the giraffes to the Zoo. “So there I was ... driving giraffes with a freckled red-headed beauty hot on my trail. Since every dog has its day, maybe it was just that my stray-dog-boy day had come. God knows I was due a little Light Shining on me from Above, whether I believed in such things or not. Like most people, denying it never got in the way of relying on it.” (75) “*Halfway down — that’s as far as I’ll go*, I told myself, temptation as bad in inches as in miles.” (176) “Because once my hands touched that roll of cash, it wasn’t about the fat cat. It wasn’t about the Old Man or the giraffes. It wasn’t even about right or wrong. It was only about a Dust Bowl orphan and a big roll of cash.” (188) Augusta “Red”: “Home’s not the place you’re from, Woody. Home’s the place you want to be.” (215) “If home, like Red said, was not where you came from but

- where you wanted to be, then the rig, the Old Man, and the giraffes were more home — and more family — than any home I'd ever had.” (219) Red’s “Things I’m Doing Before I Die.” (269) Woody’s story begins on 277. “So I took a deep breath ... and told the Old Man the truth.” “Truth” vs. “stories.” The Old Man: “That’s your first story, but it doesn’t have to be your only story. That’s up to you.” (283) This is when they pull up to Cooter’s. Woody steals a chopper to get back to Phoenix and Red. Arrested, then enlists. (325) “The other soldiers couldn’t sleep for thinking of home and family. Me, I couldn’t sleep for thinking of the hurricane giraffes. I *had* held on to something. As we rode the swells of the storm, I was once again driving two ‘towering creatures of God’s pure Eden’ cross-country. I was seeing the Packard in my rearview and hearing Girl kick the Old Man. I was leaning off a mountain, meeting Moses’s clan, spying the fat cat, and shooting the thieving lackey. I was bucking a flash flood, wrestling a desert coot, watching Boy save us, and feeling Red’s lips against mine. I was again hearing what the Old Man said about the wiry man with the elephant and dog — that there’s no explaining the world, where you find yourself in it and who your friends turn out to be. And I began to remember who my friends were.” (326)
33. So Long, See You Tomorrow, William Maxwell (1980). [Recommended by Ann Patchett. Review.](#) Started 062124. Clarence and Fern Smith. Lloyd and Marie Wilson. Completed 062324. From the review: “This short novel – only 134 pages – begins with an extramarital affair and subsequent killing in a small Illinois town in the early 20th century. The novel opens on a first-person narrator laying out the details of the killing while also doing everything possible to distance himself from it. ‘I know it only by hearsay,’ the narrator says ... Figuring out the identity of the narrator is maddening. While the reader never loses touch with the ‘I’ of the first-person narration, it is difficult to grasp who the narrator is at the time that he is telling the story and why he feels he needs to tell the story at all. The novel opens with the bare facts of a murder that took place in the narrator’s community during the narrator’s childhood, and the narrator reflects: ‘I very much doubt that I would have remembered for more than fifty years the murder of a tenant farmer I never laid eyes on if 1) the murderer hadn’t been the father of someone I knew, and 2) I hadn’t later on done something that I was ashamed of afterward. This memoir – if that’s the right name for it – is a roundabout, futile way of making amends’ (6)... the adult narrator connects Lloyd Wilson’s murder with an action of his own that he regrets. Several years after the murder, when his family’s rising socioeconomic status has propelled them to their new house it town, the narrator sees Cletus in the hallway of the town’s high school ... The now-elderly narrator goes on to say, ‘If I knew where Cletus Smith is right this minute, I would go and explain. Or try to. It is not only possible but more than likely that I would also have to explain who I am. And that he would have no recollection of the moment that has troubled me all these years. He lived through things that were a good deal worse. It might turn out that I had made the effort for my sake, not his.’” (55) Perhaps, he says, he should have walked alongside his good friend and said nothing. From the book: “When my father was getting along in years and the past began to figure more in his conversation, I asked him one day what my mother was like. I knew what she was like as my mother but I thought it was time somebody told me what she was like as a person. To my surprise he said, ‘That’s water over the dam,’ shutting me up but also leaving me in doubt ...” (6) “Plato’s idea that lovers were originally one person, the two parts having become separated and desiring to be joined ...” (37) “[Clarence] now had no wife, no family, and no farm, all through Lloyd Wilson’s doing.” (119) The role of the dog, Trixie, in the final parts of the book: waits for Cletus, waits for Clarence, takes up with the new owner/manager, takes up with Lloyd ... Why?
34. I Feel Bad About My Neck and Other Thoughts on Being a Woman, Nora Ephron (2006). Started 062424. “A food writer who wrote about [Heartburn] carped that the recipes were not particularly original, but it seemed to me she missed the point. The point wasn’t about the recipes.



- The point was ... about putting it together. The point was about making people feel at home, about finding your own style, whatever it was, and committing to it. The point was about giving up neurosis where food was concerned. The point was about finding a way that food fit into your life." (29) "We will do crossword puzzles to ward off Alzheimer's and eat six almonds a day to ward off cancer; we will scan ourselves to find whatever can be nipped in the bud. We are in control. Behind the wheel. On the cutting edge. We make lists. We seek out the options. We surf the net. // But there are some things that are absolutely, definitively, entirely uncontrollable." (131) Completed 062724.
35. *The Fifth Risk*, Michael Lewis (2018). Paperback. Wanted to reread the "weather" section, including how clueless Wilbur Ross is depicted. Started 062724. Completed 063024. "[Rick Perry's] sporadic public communications have had in them something of the shell-shocked grandmother trying to preside over a pleasant family Thanksgiving dinner while pretending that her blind-drunk husband isn't standing naked on the dining-room table waving the carving knife over his head." (48) The "fifth risk" is project management. (68) "If you want to preserve your personal immunity to the hard problems, it's better never to really understand those problems. There is an upside to ignorance, and a downside to knowledge." (77) "Walking through the ruins [in Joplin, [Kathy Sullivan](#)] saw all over again what she had seen so many times: how much better Americans were at responding to a disaster than preventing it." (132) "What was happening was a shift in the odds that the weather forecast was right. It was the difference between an ordinary blackjack player and a blackjack player who was counting cards." (151) Wilbur Ross passage begins on 161.
36. *Everyone Who Is Gone Is Here: The United States, Central America, and the Making of a Crisis*, Jonathan Blitzer (2024). [NYT review](#). Also the subject of a [New Yorker Radio Hour](#) podcast.

## Queue

1. *Look Me in the Eye: My Life with Asperger's*, John Elder Robison (2007) [Wikipedia](#), [NYT](#) / Linda Russell
  2. *History of the Rain*, [Niall Williams](#) (2014) [NYT](#): "*History of the Rain* is powerfully narrated by a young, bedridden woman who tells stories of her dead father's life while devouring the books in his library." [Amazon](#) / Amanda Anders
  3. *The Caine Mutiny*, Herman Wouk (1952) [Wikipedia](#) / Bob Anders
  4. *City Boy: The Adventures of Herbie Bookbinder*, Herman Wouk (1948) [Wikipedia](#) / Betty Poore
  5. *Great Expectations*, Charles Dickens (1860) [Wikipedia](#) / Bill Porter
- *Remarkably Bright Creatures*, [Shelby Van Pelt](#) (2024). Recommended by Susan Gregory.
  - *The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory: American Evangelicals in an Age of Extremism*, Tim Alberta (2023). Recommended by Steve Beam. [NYT review](#).
  - *The Bee Sting*, Paul Murray (2023). Hardcover. Recommended by Susan Porter. [NYT review](#).
  - *Dear Committee Members*, Julie Schumacher (2024). [NPR review](#). Recommended by Mark Cherry.
  - *Burma Sahib*, Paul Theroux (2024). In "*Burma Sahib*," the renowned novelist and travel writer Paul Theroux imagines the life of young Eric Blair (the future George Orwell) when he was a novice police officer in colonial Burma. At that point, Orwell was still Blair's "secret self, the aspiring writer, the skeptic, the notetaker." [WaPo interview](#) about the novel.
  - Alice Munro. *The Essential Alice Munro* (NYT), by Ben Dolnick.
  - *Heat 2*, Michael Mann. Novel sequel to Mann's earlier film. Recommended by James Covington.
  - *Rogues: True Stories of Grifters, Killers, Rebels and Crooks*, Patrick Keefe. [WaPo review](#).
  - *Reading Genesis*, Marilynne Robinson. [NYT review](#)

• Reading Genesis, Marilynne Robinson. [NYT review](#).

- 3 Shades of Blue: Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Bill Evans, and the Lost Empire of Cool, by James Kaplan. [NYT review](#).
- [Entry Island](#), Peter May. Recommended by John Mackinnon.
- The Freaks Came Out to Write: The Definitive History of The Village Voice, the Radical Paper That Changed American Culture, Tricia Romano. [Dwight Garner review](#).
- Remembering Peasants: A Personal History of a Vanished World, Patrick Joyce. [NYT review](#).
- The Sellout, Paul Beatty (2015). [NYT review](#).
- The House of Silk: A Sherlock Holmes Novel, Anthony Horowitz. Recommended by Mark Cherry.

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