From The New York Times Top Ten of 2015

*The Door* – Magda Szabo
In Szabo’s haunting novel, a writer’s intense relationship with her servant — an older woman who veers from aloof indifference to inexplicable generosity to fervent, implacable rage — teaches her more about people and the world than her long days spent alone, in front of her typewriter. This supple translation shows how a story about two women in 20th-century Hungary can resonate in a very different time and place. With a mix of dark humor and an almost uncanny sense of the absurd, she traces the treacherous course of a country’s history, and the tragic course of a life.

*A Manual for Cleaning Women: Selected Stories* – Lucia Berlin
Berlin, who died in 2004, left behind a substantial but little-known trove of stories that in her lifetime appeared mostly in literary journals and small-press books. This revelatory collection gathers 43 of them, introducing her to a wider audience as an uncompromising and large-hearted observer of life whose sympathies favor smart, mouthy women struggling to get by much as Berlin herself — frequently did.

*Outline – Rachel Cusk*
Cusk’s suble, unconventional and lethally intelligent novel, “Outline,” her eighth, is a string of one-sided conversations. A divorced woman traveling in Greece, our narrator, talks — or rather listens — to the people she meets, absorbing their stories of love and loss, deception, pride and folly. Well-known subjects — adultery, divorce, ennui — become freshly menacing under Cusk’s gaze, and her mental clarity can seem so penetrating, a reader might fear the same risk of invasion and exposure.

*The Sellout – Paul Beatty*
This year’s most cheerfully outrageous satire takes as its subject a young black man’s desire to segregate his local school and to reinstate slavery in his home — before caring off to consider almost 400 years of black survival in America, puncturing every available piety. Sharp-minded and fabulously profane, its novel is a fearless, metaphorical multicultural pot almost too hot to touch.

*The Story of the List Child* – Elena Ferrante
Like the three books that precede it in Ferrante’s Neapolitan quartet, this brilliant conclusion offers a clamorous, headlong exploration of female friendship set against a backdrop of poverty, ambition, violence and political struggle. As Elena and Lila, the girlhood rivals whose relationship spans the series, enter the middle terrain of marriage and motherhood, Ferrante’s preoccupations remain with the inherent radicalism of modern female identity.

*Preparation for the Next Life – Atticus Lish*
Child abuse cuts a jagged scar through Morrison’s novel, a brisk modern-day fairy tale with shades of the Brothers Grimm, and a blunt moral: What you do to children matters.

*The Story of My Teeth – Valeria Luiselli*
This playful collaborative novel invites reader participation.

*The Sympathizer – Viet Thanh Nguyen*
Nguyens tragicomic debut novel fills a void in Vietnamese literature, giving a voice to the Vietnamese and compelling the rest of us to look at the events of 40 years ago in a new light.

*The Visitng Privilege: New and Collected Stories – Angela Flournoy*
A novel and three stories display — McCann’s empathetic imagination and — belief in the capabilities of literature.

*The Truth and Other Lies – Sascha Arango*
The writer in Arango’s cunningly plotted, darkly humorous novel is a fraud — and a murderer.

*Vanessa and Her Sister – Priya Parmar*
A novel of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell, constructed around an invented diary and letters.

*Vanessa and Her Sister – Priya Parmar*
*The Visiting Privilege: New and Collected Stories – Joy Williams*
These tales, spanning a period of nearly 50 years, are marked by queasy humor and a wry nihilism.

*The White – Richard Price writing as Harry Brandt*
Most readers will never come close to a New York homicide investigation, but they will instinctively know that Price’s insightful crime novel has this world down right.

*The Fishermen* – Karl Ove Knausgaard
To have a middle-aged autistic character as a first-person narrator would seem to be an almost impossible feat for even the most talented writer, but Gottlieb succeeds brilliantly in this deeply moving novel.

**God Help the Child – Tony Morrison**
Child abuse cuts a jagged scar through Morrison’s novel, a brisk modern-day fairy tale with shades of the Brothers Grimm, and a blunt moral: What you do to children matters.

**Harrriet Wolf’s Seventh Book of Wonders – Julianna Baggott**
The title character’s final novel has gone missing in this tenderhearted story about the legacy of loss.

**How to Be Both – Ali Smith**
The two parts of Smith’s novel link a modern teenage girl and a 15th-century Italian painter.

**Honeydew: Stories – Edith Pearlman**
In Szabo’s haunting novel, a writer’s intense relationship with her servant — an older woman who veers from aloof indifference to inexplicable generosity to fervent, implacable rage — teaches her more about people and the world than her long days spent alone, in front of her typewriter. This supple translation shows how a story about two women in 20th-century Hungary can resonate in a very different time and place. With a mix of dark humor and an almost uncanny sense of the absurd, she traces the treacherous course of a country’s history, and the tragic course of a life.

**The Beautiful Bureaucrat – Jonathan Franzen**
In Szabo’s haunting novel, a writer’s intense relationship with her servant — an older woman who veers from aloof indifference to inexplicable generosity to fervent, implacable rage — teaches her more about people and the world than her long days spent alone, in front of her typewriter. This supple translation shows how a story about two women in 20th-century Hungary can resonate in a very different time and place. With a mix of dark humor and an almost uncanny sense of the absurd, she traces the treacherous course of a country’s history, and the tragic course of a life.

**The Complete Stories – Clarice Lispector**
The Brazilian was one of the true originals of Latin American literature.

**Delicious Foods – Jami Attenberg**
This ambitious, sweeping novel of American captivity and exploitation involves an addicted mother laboring on a commercial farm.

**Dragonfish – Vu Tran**
In Tran’s elegant and entertaining novel, a cop searches for his ex-wife, a haunted Vietnamese immigrant, in the sleazy —underbelly of Las Vegas.

**Fates and Furies – Lauren Groff**
Groff’s complex and remarkable novel about marriage offers two critically different narratives, first from the husband’s point of view, then from the wife’s.

**Finals: A Novel of the Reagan Years – Thomas Mallon**
The strong sense of foreboding that reigns here stands in arresting counterpoint to today’s notion of the Tolkien president.

**First Bad Man – Miranda July**
In July’s wry, smart first novel, two women’s consensually violent host-guest relationship leads to an erotic awakening.

**The Fisherwoman – Obsima Chogorie**
In its exploration of the murderous and the mysterious, the mind’s terrors and a vibrant Africa, this debut novel is heir to Chinua Achebe.

**Fortune Smiles – Adam Johnson**
The author of “The Orphan Master’s Son” offers a collection that is at once pervasively dark and shot through with humor.

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**Hollow Land – Jane Gardam**
An administrative worker’s experiences pose existential questions in Phillips’s riveting, droll — surreal debut novel.

**Beauty Is a Woman – Eka Kurniawati**
A novel about Indonesia’s turbulent 20th century.

**City on Fire – Garth Risk Hallberg**
Hallberg’s ambitious —Dickens-scale descent into New York City circa 1976-77 doesn’t shortchange the era’s squaller.

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**How to Be Both – Ali Smith**
The two parts of Smith’s novel link a modern teenage girl and a 15th-century Italian painter.

**The Incarnations – Susan Barker**
In Barker’s astonishing novel, a Beijing taxi driver learns of his previous lives as a bit player during 15 centuries of China’s past.

**Leaving Berlin – Joseph Kanon**
In Kanon’s thriller, a German-born American writer becomes a spy in East Berlin.

**Viet Thanh Nguyen**

**The Love Object: Stories – Edna O’Brien**
An Irishland gripped between tradition and change finds illumination in O’Brien’s brilliant and memorable tales.

**The Mare – Mary Gaitskill**
A subtle depiction of a relationship between two families, their communities and a horse touches on tricky questions of class and race.

**The Mersault Investigation – Karl Ove Knausgaard**
This rich and inventive Algerian novel imagines the story of the Arab murdered on the beach in Camus’s “The Stranger.”

**Misslad – Nell Zink**
Zink’s slyly surprising comic novel about the making and unmaking of an American family lays bare our assumptions about race and sexuality.

**My Struggle: Book 4 – Karl Ove Knausgaard**
This is the fleetest, funniest and — in keeping with its adolescent protagonist — most sophomoric of the volumes translated into English thus far.

**The Story of My Teeth – Valeria Luiselli**
This playful collaborative novel invites reader participation.

**The Sympathizer – Viet Thanh Nguyen**
Nguyens tragicomic debut novel fills a void in Vietnamese literature, giving a voice to the Vietnamese and compelling the rest of us to look at the events of 40 years ago in a new light.

**The Tenor House – Angela Flourney**
The -African-American family story told in this engrossing, remarkably mature first —novel is also a story of the city of Detroit.

**Vanessa and Her Sister – Priya Parmar**
A novel of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell, constructed around an invented diary and letters.

**The Visiting Privilege: New and Collected Stories – Joy Williams**
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**Purity – Jonathan Franzen**
Connections emerge slowly as lies and secrets are revealed in this intricately plotted novel about the corruptions of money — and power.
A Slant of Light – Jeffrey Lent
Lent’s heartbreakingly vivid novel chronicles the agonized aftermath of a veteran’s return to the Finger Lakes region of New York.

*A Spool of Blue Thread – Anne Tyler
These quirky characters — adult children and the aging parents they come to help — initially look like the same Baltimore family members we’ve socialized with for 50 years in Tyler’s fiction. But somehow what’s familiar is infused with freshness and surprise.

The State We’re In: Maine Stories – Anne Beattie
Beattie’s unsurpassed talent for rural tragicomedy is on display in a splendid collection of short stories largely set in Maine.

*A Strangeons in My Mind – Ishiguro
This exquisite concoction — a delicious melodrama of sex and betrayal, love and revenge — demonstrates that the Peruvian Nobel laureate is still at the top of his game.

The Dying Grass – William K. Vollmann
This complex recounting of noble Indian Chief Joseph’s doomed fight for survival is a masterpiece — an American tragedy with all the vast distances and unforgiving climates (political, emotional, physical) of our nation.

Eileen – Ottessa Moshfegh
In this dark, Hitchcockian novel, Eileen Dunlop — an enduring misfit who works in a boys’ prison outside Boston in the early ‘60s — is clearly headed for disaster.

Epitaph – Mary Doria Russell
An epic retelling of the Gunfight at the O.K. Corral that sets the 30-second battle within the broader context of the times.

Finders Keepers – Stephen King
A disgruntled reader sets off this complex tale of literary obsession and its consequences. A superb stay-up-all-night thriller, this sly story recalls the themes of King’s classic 1987 novel, Misery.

Frog – Mo Yan
The Nobel Prize-winning author grapples daringly with China’s recently relaxed one-child policy.

Get in Trouble: Stories – Kelly Link
In Link’s stories, you won’t find tediously believable situations or even truthfulness to life. Instead, you’ll find magic and wonder.

Girl Waits with Gun – Amy Stewart
Based on the little-known story of the real Constance Kopp, one of America’s first female deputy sheriffs, the novel is an entertaining story of how far one woman will go to protect her family.

*A God in Ruins – Kate Atkinson
A sequel of sorts to her beloved Life After Life, this new novel tells the story of Teddy Todd, who served as a Royal Air Force bomber pilot in World War II. A powerful work about young men and war.

Gold Fame Citrus – Claire Vay Watkins
Luz Dunn is living in a starlet’s abandoned mansion in Los Angeles when she and her partner kidnap a child they assume is being neglected. When this makeshift family flees into the desert, they find an isolated colony of survivors.

Golden Age – Jane Smiley
The final installment of Jane Smiley’s Last Hundred Years trilogy, which traces the history of one Iowa farm family over five generations.

The Green Road – Anne Enright
Welcome to the Madigan family of County Clare: four adult children, all contending with the emotional tyranny of their never-satisfied mother.

I Am Radar – Leif Larsen
This ingenious masterpiece of geekhood ranges over continents and decades. It’s thick with scientific references, tech talk, arcane erudition and historical research, and it features a child born black to white parents.

The Illuminations
Andrew O’Hagan
In this perceptive novel about the way we fight our wars today, the misadventures of a British platoon in Afghanistan alternate with the story of its captain’s grandmother, who is falling prey to dementia back home.

The Marriage of Opposites – Alice Hoffman
Hoffman imagines the interior lives of Camille Pissarro and his parents and surrounds them with a fully-bodied supporting cast of characters.

Our Souls at Night – Kent Haruf
Neighbors Addie and Louis live alone in Holt, Colo., nursing memories of doleful marriages. Neither has any reason to expect the remaining years will offer relief from retirement, but then a surprising love affair develops.

Saint Mazie – Jamie Attenberg
A fictionalized telling of the life of Mazie Phillips-Gordon, the Queen of the Bowery, who occupied the ticket booth of New York’s famous Venice movie theater at the south end of the Bowery from the beginning of Prohibition to the end of the Depression.

The Secret Chord – Geraldine Brooks
Brooks directs her skil at re-creating the past to the story of David, the Hebrew warrior king. In some ways, the novel reads like a prose poem, filled with battles, passions, loyalties and betrayal, but it’s a page-turner of a poem.