

61 Books I read in 2024:

Brief summaries and personal book evaluations in English, en Français, en Español, auf Deutsch, em Português

Klaus Schmidt-Hebbel

31 December 2024

Dedicated to the memory of Alexei Navalny, 1976-2024



Dedicated to the memory of President Sebastián Piñera, 1949-2024



Notes:

- This is my fifth annual summary of books I have read in a year. One third of my readings was published in 2024, another third in 2020-23, and the remainder in previous decades.
- I start with a short smart article published by The Economist a year ago, titled *How many books will you read before you die? And tips for choosing the best ones* – it's fun reading.
- Then follow my readings of 2024.
- This year I have divided them into seven categories: fiction (general); non-fiction (general); fiction and non-fiction (Greece); biographies and autobiographies; books about writers, books, bookshops, and libraries; coffee table books; and a very short blacklist of simply bad books.
- I exclude from my summary of non-fiction books all my readings that lie in my core professional interests: economics and environment/climate change.
- At the end I list ten exceptional bookstores I have visited and where I have bought some 400 books this year.

- Finally note that:
 - **X** and **XX** mark my top and super top selections (respectively) of this year.
 - pp : number of book pages.
 - [ip] : a book I have read only in part (some chapters or stories).
 - When I quote some sentences from book reviews or descriptions provided by third parties, I try to identify the corresponding source.
 - I have not made use of AI in writing my reviews – I have used only one (but very limited) natural intelligence.

0. The Economist: *How many books will you read before you die? And tips for choosing the best ones*, Dec. 22, 2023.

Choosing your next book can be a daunting task. Do you go with one that will broaden your worldview and pique your imagination? Perhaps a neglected classic, or the newest sensation? Or, defying the snobs, do you indulge in a salacious romp? The choice is all the more daunting when you consider how much reading time you have left in a lifetime. Calculating this might strike you as morbid. But *The Economist* dived in with glee. Our back-of-the-envelope calculations show how many books you can still hope to read—and how to make time for the best ones.

We started by asking 1,500 Americans about their reading habits with help from YouGov, a pollster (see chart 1). Only 54% of respondents said they read or listened to a book in 2023. Of those who did, the average was 11 books. By that count, if a seven-year-old began reading in 2023, they would get through roughly 770 books in their lifetime, according to actuarial tables. A 30-year-old might have around 500 left to read. And someone in their 70s might be down to their last 100.

Even a more voracious reader, who lives well into old age, would struggle to scale the mountain of books in existence. By some rough estimates there have been 160m unique titles published since the widespread adoption of the printing press in the 15th century. One would struggle to get through more than 0.003% of the total, even if reading a book a week (which only 4% of our respondents managed in 2023).

Don't panic. These gloomy numbers suddenly look much better if you remember Sturgeon's law, coined by an eponymous (and jaded) sci-fi author: "90% of everything is crap." If you filter out the guff we reckon the average seven-year-old has plenty of time to get through a solid selection of fabulous books.

To calculate this we scraped a list of critically acclaimed titles from 1000bookstoread.com, a site based on a book of the same name by James Mustich. Then, with the help of howlongtoread.com, a search engine, we created a rough estimate for how long it would take to get through the roughly 900 books for which we found the data.

If you read 11 books a year, it would probably take you 84 years to finish our rough list of classics. Other estimates find that Americans read for 15 minutes a day, in which case you would need 102 years. But read daily for half an hour, and we reckon you could complete it in 51 years (see chart 2). A young reader might start with Beatrix Potter's "The World of Peter Rabbit", easily finished in a couple of days, and end with a 92-day slog through Leo Tolstoy's "War and Peace" aged just 58.

If they manage to set aside one hour of reading a day, we reckon they could get to the novel decades earlier, in their 30s, and spend most of their adulthood on yet-to-be-published masterpieces.

If the 46% of people in our survey who didn't manage to read a single book in 2023 put off reading until retirement, they may only get through a third of the acclaimed-books list. (If they tackled the books alphabetically, they might be lost in the world of Robert Louis Stevenson's "Kidnapped" around the time they leave this one.)

Our list is not a definitive canon of literature. Psychological horror may not be your thing, so ditch "The Silence of the Lambs". If you find obscure medieval literature a bore, toss aside "The Sagas of Icelanders" and reclaim 39 days of your life. **As John Irving, an American novelist, once said, "Grownups shouldn't finish books they're not enjoying."**

1. FICTION BOOKS (General)

XX Giuliano da Empoli: *Le Mage du Kremlin* (2022). Éditions Gallimard, Paris, 281 pp. (Grand Prix du Roman de l'Académie Française 2022; Prix Honoré-de-Balzac 2022; échoue de justesse à obtenir le Prix Goncourt 2022, finalement attribué à *Vivre vite* de Brigitte Giraud au quatorzième tour à cinq voix contre cinq, la voix du Président Didier Decoin était prépondérante). [ip]

Mon dernier livre que j' ai lu en 2023 était en français. Il est donc juste que mon premier livre en 2024 soit également en français.

C'est un livre tout simplement extraordinaire. Récompensé à juste titre pour l'Académie Française et les autres institutions. Il s'agit également du premier roman d'un spécialiste et auteur international sur des questions politiques et culturelles.

Très bien écrit, le « roman » reflète une compréhension erudite de la Russie de Poutine. Est une quasi-biographie de Vladimir Surkov (Vadim Baranov dans le livre), l'un des plus proches conseillers et opérateurs de Poutine, de 2000 à aujourd'hui.

"On l'appelait le «mage du Kremlin». L'énigmatique Vadim Baranov fut metteur en scène puis producteur d'émissions de télé-réalité avant de devenir l'éminence grise de Poutine, dit le Tsar. Après sa démission du poste de conseiller politique, les légendes sur son compte se multiplient, sans que nul puisse démêler le faux du vrai. Jusqu'à ce que, une nuit, il confie son histoire au narrateur de ce livre... Ce récit nous plonge au cœur du pouvoir russe, où courtisans et oligarques se livrent une guerre de tous les instants. Et où Vadim, devenu le principal *spin doctor* du régime, transforme un pays entier en un théâtre politique, où il n'est d'autre réalité que l'accomplissement des souhaits du Tsar. Mais Vadim n'est pas un ambitieux comme les autres: entraîné dans les arcanes de plus en plus sombres du système qu'il a contribué à construire, ce poète égaré parmi les loups fera tout pour s'en sortir. De la guerre en Tchétchénie à la crise ukrainienne, en passant par les Jeux olympiques de Sotchi, *Le mage du Kremlin* est le grand roman de la Russie contemporaine. Dévoilant les dessous de l'ère Poutine, il offre une sublime méditation sur le pouvoir." (Couverture arrière du livre).

X Chico (Francisco) Buarque da Hollanda: *Estorvo* (1991). Companhia das Letras (3ª. edição, 2021), São Paulo, Brasil, 203 pp. (Esta edição da curta obra inclui seis resenhas literárias da obra, publicadas em 1991).

Compositor, cantor e ficcionista brasileiro, reconhecido internacionalmente, Chico Buarque publica este, seu primeiro "romance", quase duas décadas depois da sua clássica *Fazenda Modelo*

(1974). Este livro, que nada tem de “romance”, é um monólogo de um inútil – um estorvo – de classe média, quem conta seus últimos dias de abandono, pobreza e dissolução, até sua morte. É uma história que sacode o leitor entre a angústia, o nojo e o desprezo pela deriva do seu protagonista. A atmosfera da obra transita notavelmente entre a realidade e o realismo mágico. (Esta edição da curta obra inclui seis resenhas literárias da obra, publicadas em 1991).

XX Gabriel García Márquez (Premio Nobel de Literatura): *Del amor y otros demonios* (1994). Esta edición: DEBOLSILLO – Penguin Random House (2023), 169 pp.

“El 26 de octubre de 1949 el reportero Gabriel García Márquez fue enviado al antiguo convento de Santa Clara, que iba a ser demolido para edificar sobre él un hotel de cinco estrellas, a presenciar el vaciado de las criptas funerarias y a cubrir la noticia. Se exhumaron los restos de un virrey del Perú y su amante secreta, un obispo, varias abadesas, un bachiller de artes y una marquesa. Pero la sorpresa saltó al destapar la tercera hornacina del altar mayor: se desparramó una cabellera de color cobre, de veintidós metros y once centímetros de largo, perteneciente a una niña. En la lápida apenas se leía el nombre: Sierva María de Todos los Ángeles. Cuenta el propio García Márquez: «Mi abuela me contaba de niño la leyenda de una marquesita de doce años cuya cabellera le arrastraba como una cola de novia, que había muerto del mal de rabia por el mordisco de un perro, y era venerada en los pueblos del Caribe por sus muchos milagros. La idea de que esa tumba pudiera ser la suya fue mi noticia de aquel día, y el origen de este libro». En esta novela histórica, el escritor colombiano nos ofrece nuevamente una obra cautivadora y fascinante que atrapa al lector a lo largo de cada una de sus páginas; el estilo de su escritura, muy semejante al mítico-histórico utilizado en *Cien años de soledad*, la hace parecer «como un capítulo perdido» de esta última obra.” (Del prólogo escrito por el autor).

Esta penúltima obra publicada por Gabo es una joyita. Es un relato bello y terrible del amor del inquisidor nominado inicialmente por la rebelde doncella de 12 años que debe exorcizar y de la terrible persecución de la inquisición católica por el obispo de Cartagena, que culmina en la muerte de la protagonista. Una obra maestra.

Gabriel García Márquez (Premio Nobel de Literatura): *En agosto nos vemos* (marzo 2024). Penguin Random House, 1ª. edición, 142 pp.

Rodrigo y Gonzalo García Barcha, los hijos de GGM, sorprendieron a quienes aman la obra de su padre (como yo) con la publicación de esta novelita póstuma. Gabo escribió las 4-5 historias que conforman esta obra cuando iba perdiendo su memoria y su mente. No quedó contento con dichas historias y se opuso a publicarlas, reunidas, en vida. Sus hijos traicionaron su decisión, pero lo hicieron como regalo a sus lectores (o por otro motivo menos generoso). Encargaron la revisión editorial a Cristóbal Pera, quien describe su labor y, a modo de prueba de que se desvió poco del manuscrito de Gabo, finaliza su epílogo con las fotocopias de algunas páginas del original, con notas de corrección del autor.

Es esta una breve novelita sobre los viajes que hace una mujer, madura y casada, en agosto de cada año, a la isla donde está enterrada su madre, ocasiones en las cuales ella sucumbe a la tentación de pasar una noche de sexo (y, a veces, de amor) con un desconocido, cada vez distinto. GGM retoma y termina su obra – y quizás su vida – con el tema central de sus escritos: el amor en sus variadas facetas.

Comienza la obra en la más pura expresión del genio garcíamarquezano: la trama bien armada, el lenguaje perfecto, la belleza de las palabras. Pero a medida que se desarrolla la obra, decae la escritura e incluso la trama. Por ello, al igual como lo es la última novela de Vargas Llosa, *Le dedico mi silencio*, publicada en 2023 y descrita en mis lecturas del mismo año, es más un testimonio de la evanescencia artística e intelectual de su autor que un parangón de su obra previa.

XX Piedad Bonnett: *Qué hacer con estos pedazos* (2021). Alfaguara – Penguin Random House, 166 pp.

Este libro me lo recomendó mi amiga María Elsa Gutiérrez en su librería Ábaco, en Cartagena de Indias, maravilloso lugar que describo al final de este escrito.

Piedad Bonnett es una extraordinaria poeta y escritora colombiana, de lenguaje a la vez directo y sofisticado, con relatos que fluyen naturalmente. Autora de *Lo que no tiene nombre* (2013), la historia íntima y sobrecogedora del suicidio de su hijo.

Esta novela relata el lado oscuro de las relaciones familiares, reflejado en las incomprensiones y ofensas, los ninguneos y golpes que sufre – y a veces inflige – la protagonista, por sus padres, amantes, marido e hijos a lo largo de su vida. Muestra el lado doblemente oscuro – por lo feo y por lo secreto – de las relaciones intrafamiliares.

Es “un retrato estremecedor, empujado por una autenticidad feroz, de la vida matrimonial, la vejez y los vínculos familiares”. “El recorrido (de esta vida) nos deja frente a un vacío en el que flota esa pregunta que te redime o te remata: ¿valió la pena? Lectores del mundo, lean este libro, que sí lo vale” (Margarita García Robayo).

XX Arturo Pérez-Reverte: *La isla de la mujer dormida* (octubre 2024). Alfaguara – Penguin Random House, Santiago, 411 pp.

El autor ha sido corresponsal de guerra por dos décadas y luego, hasta ahora, ha ejercido como escritor, director y guionista de cine y de radionovelas. Es autor de unas 40 novelas para adultos y jóvenes. Con más de 40 distinciones y honores literarios recibidos, Pérez-Reverte es uno de los mejores escritores españoles contemporáneos.

“Abril de 1937. Mientras en España transcurre la guerra civil, el marino mercante Miguel Jordán Kyriazis es enviado por el bando sublevado para atacar de modo clandestino el tráfico naval que desde la Unión Soviética transporta ayuda militar para la República. En la base de operaciones, una pequeña isla del mar Egeo, la vida del corsario español se cruzará en turbio triángulo con la de los propietarios, el barón Katelios y su esposa: una seductora mujer madura que busca, con fría desesperación, el modo de escapar a su destino.” (Contratapa).

Esta novela combina las tres mayores virtudes que debe tener una obra de ficción excepcional: una trama muy bien armada, una descripción inteligente de la psicología y las motivaciones de los protagonistas principales, y una escritura de pluma excepcional. En esta novela se agrega un cuarto protagonista a los que conforman el triángulo amoroso: el mar, omnipresente, tan amado y tan bien descrito por el autor, aquí como en muchas de sus novelas anteriores.

Hernán Rivera Letelier: *Del diario de vida que nunca escribí* (2024). Alfaguara – Penguin Random House, Santiago, 134 pp.

Es esta la más reciente obra de Rivera Letelier. Como dije el año pasado, creo que es merecedor del Premio Nacional por ser el más importante escritor costumbrista que relata la vida en el desierto nortino y la pampa salitrera desde el inicio del siglo veinte. Haciendo gala de un lenguaje simple y popular, arma tramas entretenidas para el gran público que lo lee, lo que contrasta con los escasos comentarios elogiosos que ha recibido de la crítica literaria.

Este libro está armado de pequeños recuerdos autobiográficos de la infancia del autor en la salitrera Algorta, en el seno de una familia evangélica y estricta. Al cierre de la salitrera, la paupérrima familia se traslada a Antofagasta, donde a los nueve años del autor fallece su madre, viviendo él casi solo en una pocilga adyacente a la capilla de un pastor, ganándose la vida como canillita (vendedor del diario El Mercurio). Los retazos de su memoria combinan imágenes y

sueños y *petites histoires* tiernas con otras bien vulgares, pero relatadas a través del prisma de un niño tan tierno como heroico.

Roberto Ampuero: *Nunca volveré a Berlín* (2024). Sudamericana – Penguin Random House, Santiago, 317 pp.

Este libro forma parte de las novelas semi autobiográficas y políticas del autor (iniciadas con la fabulosa *Nuestros años verde olivo* (1999)).

“Después de la caída del Muro y la disolución de la República Democrática Alemana, Erich Honecker encuentra refugio en Santiago de Chile, donde regatea con la muerte y el juicio de la historia. Patricio Dupré, chileno y ex refugiado en Alemania Oriental, se ve envuelto en una trama estremecedora al conseguir un trabajo como traductor del líder del régimen que socavó sus sueños juveniles cuando estudiaba Filosofía en la Karl-Marx-Universität de Leipzig. En eso está cuando se reencuentra con Valentina Bode, su antiguo amor de juventud, joven de la cual fue separado por el Muro. Han pasado los años, ella no es ya la misma y esconde oscuros secretos vinculados al Partido Socialista Unificado germano, los cuales motivan su viaje al fin del mundo. Roberto Ampuero narra a tres voces: la de Honecker, Dupre y Bode. Contrapone sus visiones y desentraña la madeja de un amor víctima de las intrigas internacionales. *Nunca vuelve a Berlín* se revela como una novela de espías y de un amor imposible y, sobre todo, como testimonio humano de una época que sigue generando debate”.

Ampuero tiene una pluma fácil y es de fácil lectura (por eso vende tanto). Arma una trama entretenida, relata bien y describe razonablemente a sus personajes. Pero nada de lo anterior lo hace a la perfección: su lenguaje no es extraordinario, el desarrollo de las historias es a ratos forzado y no confiere profundidad psicológica a sus personajes. Es un mal (o flojo) revisor de sus manuscritos – de todos ellos – y así su obra contiene errores editoriales, ortográficos y de impresión.

Como buen converso político, Ampuero es un muy buen crítico de las izquierdas históricas y contemporáneas, de Chile y del mundo. En este libro hay destacables párrafos sobre el Chile del pasado (pp. 100-103) y el de hoy, posterior a los Ataques Terroristas Coordinados (el mal llamado “Estallido Social”, pp. 60-62, 103-105); Fidel Castro (pp. 70-72); la autobiografía de Honecker de 1970, publicada por Pergamon Press y Robert Maxwell; y la biografía de Honecker publicada por Thomas Kunze (pp. 90-95 y 99-101).

En resumen: como casi toda su obra (a excepción de la citada *Nuestros años verde olivo*), esta nueva novela se lee rápidamente y luego se olvida aún más velozmente.

Santiago del Prado: *El mar de Silvia* (septiembre 2024). Alfaguara – Penguin Random House, Lima, 415 pp.

Esta tercera novela de este escritor peruano relativamente desconocido es muy original – en el sentido de excepcional, no de extraordinaria. Escrita en primera persona, el autor se retrata como un atorrate, que siempre ha vivido de su familia, y ahora, a sus tiernos 51 años, y con el financiamiento de una millonaria, es acogido por una “casa de senectud” (un hogar de ancianos) en el balneario de Cantilao, La Punta (Callao). Ahí conoce y se enamora de Silvia, una bella local. Luego se agrega otro hombre atraído por Silvia. Así, “la relación de los tres amigos se afianza gracias a una serie de aficiones compartidas: el arte de la injuria, la fascinación por el haiku, el gusto por la instalación fotográfica, la práctica de la poesía escatológica... En suma, el cultivo de la belleza en sus más diversas manifestaciones, lo que marca el ritmo del triángulo amoroso más insólito de la historia de la literatura peruana” (Contratapa). Quizás lo mejor del libro sea el melancólico final.

La originalidad del texto radica en que alternan breves textos de monólogos, diálogos, mini ensayos y haikus con muchas viejas fotografías en blanco y negro – intencionalmente buenas y malas – que el protagonista ha arrancado de álbumes desechados. Los textos son algunos muy divertidos y otros no tanto (incluyendo algunos textos vulgares pero jocosos que envía para su publicación a distintas revistas, sin mucho éxito). Cita frecuentemente algunas frases de escritores conocidos: ama y cita mucho a Borges (¡bien!), mientras que desprecia a Vargas Llosa (¡mal!). En suma, un libro especial.

X Gabriela Mistral (Premio Nobel de Literatura): *Elogio de la naturaleza: textos en prosa* (enero 2024, 1ª. edición). Lumen - Penguin Random House, Santiago, 228 pp.

Este es un precioso libro que reúne un conjunto de breves textos escritos por Gabriela Mistral en distintos momentos de su vida. Son joyitas, algunas publicadas, otras inéditos; son partes de libros y artículos de diarios.

El lenguaje poético de la autora está reflejado en todos ellos: poesía hecha prosa; análoga a las introducciones de los capítulos de *Confieso que he vivido* de Pablo Neruda. En su estructura, esta prosa hermosa es abundante en adjetivos y en el uso de términos desconocidos o inusuales. Pero sobre todo, la poeta vuelca en estos textos su conocimiento profundo y su amor apasionado por la naturaleza, describiendo valles y montañas, aguas y piedras, ballenas y caracoles, margaritas y álamos, colibríes y queltehués, y muchos más protagonistas de la naturaleza chilena (y algo de la de tierras extranjeras).

La editora de este libro, Daniela Schütte González, hizo un buen trabajo de recopilación de estos textos maravillosos. Pero lamentablemente asoma su ideología woke – feminista y marxista – en el prólogo del libro.

X Han Kang (2024 Nobel Prize in Literature): *The Vegetarian* (2016 International Booker Prize) (2007 published in Korean) (2024). Granta Books, London, paperback, 183 pp.

Vivi: many thanks for giving me this book for Christmas!

The author's most read and translated book is a three-part novel set in modern-day Seoul and tells the story of Yeong-hye, a part-time graphic artist and home-maker, whose decision to stop eating meat after a bloody nightmare about human cruelty leads to devastating consequences in her personal and familial life.

It is a frightening – even terrorific – feminist novel that denounces machismo and patriarchalism in its Korean versions. I do not have a qualm about the latter. However, in contrast to raving reviews, I do not appreciate Kang's prose as extraordinary: beyond the plain and crude characterization of violence and sex, her language is pretty plain. (And the English translation I do not find particularly proficient – introducing English-language slang into a Korean novel is simply inadequate). Probably I won't read another Kang novel.

XX Nick Harkaway: *Karla's Choice: A John le Carré Novel* (2024). Viking – Penguin Random House, hardcover, London, 300 pp.

How wonderful! Thanks to The Economist, I found out that Nick Harkaway, one of le Carré's sons, published this *le Carré Novel* in October 2024. So I bought a copy in the exceptional "Politics and Prose" Washington DC bookstore in November.

"It is spring in 1963 and George Smiley has left the Circus (MI6). With the wreckage of the West's spy war against the Soviets strewn across Europe, he has eyes only for a more peaceful life. And indeed, with his marriage more secure than ever, there is a rumor that George Smiley might almost be happy. But Control (the MI6 boss) has other plans. A Russian agent has defected in the most unusual of circumstances, and the man he was sent to kill in London is nowhere to be found.

Smiley reluctantly agrees to one last simple task: interview Szusanna, a Hungarian émigré and employee of the missing man, and sniff out a lead. But in his absence, the shadows of Moscow have lengthened. Smiley soon finds himself entangled in a perilous mystery that will define the battles to come and set him on a collision course with the greatest enemy he will ever make. Set in the missing decade between two iconic instalments in John le Carré's George Smiley saga, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* and *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, *Karla's Choice* marks a momentous return to the world of spy fiction's greatest writer." (Book cover).

Does this new *le Carré Novel* match the work of the master himself? Has the son reached his father's outstanding achievements? In my opinion: almost. Hence I am hoping to read many future *le Carré novels* by Harkaway.

X David McCloskey: *Moscow X* (2023). W.W. Norton, New York (paperback 2024), 454 pp.

"CIA officers Sia and Max enter Russia under commercial cover to recruit Vladimir Putin's moneyman. Sia works for a London law firm that conceals the wealth of the superrich. Max's family business in Mexico—a CIA front since the 1960s—is a farm that breeds high-end racehorses. They pose as a couple to target Vadim, Putin's private banker, and his wife, Anna, who—unbeknownst to CIA—is a Russian intelligence officer under deep cover at the bank. As they descend further into a Russian world dripping with luxury and rife with gangland violence, Sia and Max's only hope may be Anna, who is playing a game of her own. Careening between the horse ranch in northern Mexico, the corridors of Langley, and the dark opulence of Putin's Russia, *Moscow X* is both a gripping thriller of modern espionage and a raw, unsparing commentary on the nature of truth, loyalty, and vengeance amid the shadow war between the United States and Russia" (bookcover).

Two features I liked most about this novel: central to the story is the clear and brutal depiction of Putin's violent, corrupt, and genocidal Russia and the storyline is certainly gripping. The language of McCloskey – former CIA officer and current author; this is just his second novel – is good but not extraordinary. He is certainly not a new le Carré (or Harkaway) as some of his endorsers mistakenly claim. The book is just a good summer read.

XX Alexander McCall Smith (AMS): *The Great Hippopotamus Hotel* (2024). Pantheon Books – Penguin Random House, New York, 225 pp.

AMS is a writing machine. As a professor of medical law at the University of Edinburgh, he wrote and edited 13 books in medical law and ethics until 2004. Since 1980 – and as a full-time activity since 2005 – he has written 151 non-academic books. His literary output includes largely novels for adults and children (series), and also poetry, short stories, and non-fiction books about Scotland. He has sold 30 million books worldwide, translated into 46 languages. "Even when travelling, he never loses a day, turning out between 2,000 and 3,000 words [a day] – but more like 5,000 words when at home in Edinburgh. His usual rate is 1,000 words an hour" (E. Grice).

In 1998, AMS published "The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency", a novel set in Gaborone, Botswana (where the author had founded the Medical Law School some years). This book introduced Precious Ramotswe, a 35-year-old "traditionally built" woman who does not only solve crimes but mostly mysteries in people's lives. Utilizing observation, insight and intuition, she investigates cases involving a severed finger, a stolen car, a negligent doctor, a wayward daughter and an errant husband. Brimming with warmth, wit and charm, the book was an immediate hit with readers.

Greta and I read the latter book at the turn of the millennium and, since then, we have enjoyed another 8 (of a total 25 published) books in "The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency" series.

“In this No. 25 installment, Mma Ramotswe is approached by the manager of the Great Hippopotamus Hotel), who explains how ever since it came under new ownership, the establishment has suffered one misfortune after another. Mma Ramotswe takes on the case and sets out to discover who is trying to tarnish the hotel’s reputation. In the main, AMS’ novels are sunny, soft-focus affairs, *The Great Hippopotamus Hotel* especially so. Those seeking gray, gritty realism should look elsewhere. The author, a White Scotsman, has spent a lot of time in Botswana, and his affection for the place shines through in his depictions of the country and his portraits of its people. In these increasingly fractious and febrile times, we perhaps need Mma Ramotswe more than ever. She is a soothing presence, a heart-gladdening tonic. Long may she continue fixing, entertaining and working her magic.” (Malcolm Forbes, Oct 2024).

XX Jon Fosse (2023 Nobel Prize in Literature): *Morgen und Abend* (2022). Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, Reinbek bei Hamburg, 122 pp. (Original in Norwegian: *Morgen og kveld*, 2000).

Während ich dieses Buch lese, höre ich mir die gleichnamige Oper an (siehe unten).

Das Buch hat mich tief berührt. Es ist eine kurze Erzählung über die Geburt eines einfachen norwegischen Fischers (Morgen) und seinem Tod (Abend). Eine ganz schlichte aber tief bewegende Erzählung, deren “Abend” mich sehr ergriffen hat. Ein wunderbarer Abend, der den Übergang vom Leben zum Tode unübertrefflich beschreibt. Der sterbende Fischer sieht die zu ihm eilende geliebte Tochter, die nach seinem Tode an sein Sterbebett kommt (eine Nahtoderfahrung) und trifft jenen Freund, der ihn im nächsten Leben oder in der nächsten Zwischenlebensphase dort empfängt. Vereinbar mit einer christlichen Lebenseinstellung (Fosse ist Katholik), aber aufgeklärt durch Nahtoderfahrung (Fosse erlebte sie in seinem 7. Lebensjahr), Buddhismus oder esoterischen Glauben.

Das Buch ist erstaunlich in Struktur und Sprache. Minimalistisch im Sprachgebrauch, ohne Satzzeichen und Anführungsstriche.

Ein wunderbares Buch.

(What a contrast – an antipode – to the similarly titled *The Evening and the Morning*, Ken Follet’s 2020 prequel to his *Pillars of the Earth*!)

Die Oper *Morgen und Abend* ist das Werk des österreichischen Komponisten Georg Friedrich Haas. Mit einem libretto dass sehr wörtlich auf Fosses Buch gründet. Die Oper wurde zusammen von der Deutschen Oper Berlin und der Royal Opera House London dem Komponisten aufgetragen und im letzteren Opernhaus November 2015 aufgeführt. Monologe und Dialog mit Spektralmusik als Hintergrund. Der Komponist sagte zu seiner Oper: “Erwartet keine Melodien und keine Harmonien, nur Klanglandschaften”.

Die Oper ist auch erstaunlich.

Georg Friedrich Haas gilt als Vertreter der Spektralmusik. Seine Werke zeichnen sich vor allem durch klangliche Experimente aus, die oft auf ein Aufbrechen des zwölftönigen Systems zur intensiven Nutzung der Mikrointervallik und Panchromatik sowie spezieller Obertonreihen zurückgehen. Haas’ Ästhetik ist von der Überzeugung getragen, Musik vermöge „Emotionen und seelische Zustände von Menschen so zu formulieren, daß sie auch von anderen Menschen als die ihren angenommen werden können“. So hat Haas mit dem Intellektualismus mancher Strömungen der musikalischen Avantgarde (z. B. des Dekonstruktivismus) gebrochen. Viele seiner Kompositionen kreisen um die thematischen Pole „Nacht“, „Fremde“ und „Romantik“. Haas arbeitet mit zum Teil stark repetitiven and minimalistischen Verläufen – im Minimalismus trifft er sich mit Fosse.

Jon Fosse (2023 Nobel Prize in Literature): *Ein Leuchten* (2024). Rowohlt Verlag, Hamburg, 78 pp. (Original in Norwegian: *Kvitleik*, 2023).

“Ein Mann setzt sich ins Auto und beginnt zu fahren, ohne zu wissen, wohin er will. Er biegt mal rechts, mal links ab und bleibt schließlich am Ende eines Waldweges stecken. Es dämmt und beginnt zu schneien, doch anstatt umzukehren und Hilfe zu holen, wagt sich der Mann törichterweise in den dunklen Wald hinein. Tiefer und tiefer dringt er vor in die Dunkelheit, bis er sich unweigerlich verirrt. Er ist müde und friert, als ihm tief in der Finsternis des Waldes ein leuchtendes Wesen begegnet.” (Klappentext)

Und viel mehr ist über diese kurze Erzählung nicht zu sagen. Eine nichts-sagende Geschichte die – besonders im Kontrast zu Fosses fantastischem Werk *Morgen und Abend* (siehe oben) – enttäuscht? Mich ja; andere Kritiker nicht.

X Ferdinand von Schirach: *Regen: Eine Liebeserklärung* (2023). Luchterhand, München, 109 pp.

Dieser Autor und Daniel Kehlmann sind meine liebsten deutschen Schriftsteller der Gegenwart. Beide schreiben hervorragend – und doch so unterschiedlich in Thematik, Struktur, Stil und Form. Ich besitze praktisch alle Bücher beider Autoren und habe alle begeistert gelesen.

Dieses Buch ist fast ein Theaterstück: ein Monolog eines depressiven Schriftstellers, der seit dem Tage des Todes seiner Frau, seiner großen Liebe, seit 17 Jahren nicht mehr schreibt. Durchnässt vom Regen, setzt er sich abends in eine Bar und denkt nach: über Verbrechen und Strafe, das Großartige und Schreckliche unserer Zeit, die Würde des Menschen, die Einsamkeit, das Scheitern und natürlich die Liebe.

Prägnant, kurz (knapp 50 Seiten) und erschütternd. Und sehr autobiographisch, wie aus dem nachfolgenden Interview des Autors durch Sven Michaelson im Gleichen Band weitere knapp 50 Seiten) deutlich wird. Sehr zu empfehlen um diesen außergewöhnlich privaten Autor etwas mehr kennenzulernen. Der Text wurde vom Autor selbst in den besten deutschen und schweizerischen Sälen auf einer Tournee von Ende Oktober 2023 bis April 2024 vorgetragen.

X Ferdinand von Schirach: *Sie sagt. Er sagt.: Ein Theaterstück* (2024). Luchterhand, München, 144 pp.

Glänzendes Theaterstück einer Gerichtsverhandlung über eine angebliche bzw tatsächliche Vergewaltigung einer bekannten Fernsehmoderatorin durch ihren langjährigen Geliebten, ein erfolgreicher Unternehmer. Treffend und spannend aufgebaut durch einen Autoren, der vor seinem ersten Buch ein erfolgreicher Strafverteidiger war, wechselt die Stellungnahme des Lesers zwischen Klägerin und Angeklagten, je nachdem der Verteidiger der einen oder des anderen vor der Richterin interveniert: “Sie sagt. Er sagt.”

Eben erschienen, wurde das Stück mit großem Staraufgebot für das ZDF verfilmt.

X Daniel Kehlmann: *Lichtspiele* (2023). Rowohlt Verlag, Hamburg, 471 pp.

“Daniel Kehlmanns Roman über einen Filmregisseur im Dritten Reich, über Kunst und Macht, Schönheit und Barbarei ist ein Triumph. Lichtspiel zeigt, was Literatur vermag: durch Erfindung die Wahrheit hervortreten zu lassen. Einer der Größten des Kinos, vielleicht der größte Regisseur seiner Epoche: Zur Machtergreifung dreht G. W. Pabst in Frankreich; vor den Gräueln des neuen Deutschlands flieht er nach Hollywood. Aber unter der blendenden Sonne Kaliforniens sieht der weltberühmte Regisseur mit einem Mal aus wie ein Zwerg. Nicht einmal Greta Garbo, die er unsterblich gemacht hat, kann ihm helfen. Und so findet Pabst sich, fast wie ohne eigenes Zutun, in seiner Heimat Österreich wieder, die nun Ostmark heißt. Die barbarische Natur des Regimes spürt die heimgekehrte Familie mit aller Deutlichkeit. Doch der Propagandaminister in Berlin will das Filmgenie haben, er kennt keinen Widerspruch, und er verspricht viel. Während Pabst noch glaubt, dass er dem Werben widerstehen, dass er sich keiner Diktatur als der der Kunst fügen wird, ist er schon den ersten Schritt in die rettungslose Verstrickung gegangen” (Rowohlt Verlag).

Ich teile nicht die Meinung des Kritikers: dieses Werk eines der besten zeitgenössischen deutschen Autoren ist kein Triumph. Obwohl Kehlmanns Sprache ausgewählt und eindrucksvoll ist, und das Buch die Atmosphäre vieler Momente glänzend beschreibt, ist das novellierte Leben der Hauptperson uninteressant. Ja, ich weiß schon: das Leben Pabsts und seiner Nahestehenden ist fast eine Ausrede, um das künstlerische und politische Umfeld seines Lebens zu beschreiben. Obwohl letzteres Kehlmann gelingt, ist die *storyline* nicht packend genug.

Tonio Schachinger: *Echtzeitalter* (Deutscher Buchpreis 2023) (2023). Rowohlt Verlag, Hamburg, 365 pp.

„Ein elitäres Wiener Internat, untergebracht in der ehemaligen Sommerresidenz der Habsburger, der Klassenlehrer ein antiquierter und despotischer Mann. Was lässt sich hier fürs Leben lernen? Till Kokorda kann weder mit dem Kanon noch mit dem snobistischen Umfeld viel anfangen. Seine Leidenschaft ist das Gamen, konkret: das Echtzeit-Strategiespiel *Age of Empires 2*. Nach dem Tod seines Vaters wird für ihn aus dem Hobby eine Notwendigkeit. Ohne dass jemand aus seinem Umfeld davon wüsste, ist Till mit fünfzehn eine Online-Berühmtheit, der jüngste Top-10-Spieler der Welt. Nur: Wie real ist so ein Glück?“

Der Autor präsentiert eine witzige, aber auch einfühlsame Geschichte junger Menschen im 21. Jahrhundert – eine erfrischende Erneuerung des *Coming-of-Age* Romans? Nicht unbedingt, da ich der falsche Leser für dieses Genre bin, das mir in meinem Alter uninteressant erscheint; bin dafür eben ein halbes Jahrhundert zu alt.

Andreas Maier: *Die Heimat* (2023). Suhrkamp. Berlin, 247 pp.

Dieser ist der neunte Band des erzählerischen Zyklus „Ortsumgehung“. Es ist ein „autobiografischer Essay-Roman“, in dem der Autor Erinnerungen an seine eigene Heimat niederschreibt, und dabei die Bedeutung des Begriffes in verschiedenen Dimensionen zu fassen versucht. Maiers Buch beginnt in den siebziger Jahren, so der Rezensent, Heimatfilme laufen im Fernsehen, die Deutschen haben Angst vor allem Fremden, in der Schule werden Ausländer ausgegrenzt. Von hier bis in die Nuller-Jahre greift der Autor unterschiedliche Aspekte des Heimat-Themas auf, einen Schüleraustausch, die NS-Aufklärung in der Schule, die Mauer und ihren Fall, bis hin zum ehelich-häuslichen Leben als Erwachsener.

Meine Beurteilung: der Autor bedient sich einer mittelmäßigen Sprache um klischeehafte Szenen und Erinnerungen darzustellen – die kleinbürgerliche Welt eines Sozis – der Schriftsteller und Intellektueller sein will, es aber nicht schafft, da ihm die Intelligenz dafür fehlt. Glücklicherweise kenne ich die acht vorigen Bände nicht.

Verena Rossbacher: *Mon Chéri und unsere demolierten Seelen* (Österreichischer Buchpreis 2022) (2022). Kiepenheuer & Witsch, Köln, 502 pp.

„Irre gut gelaunt und mit unverbrüchlichem Optimismus strauchelt Charly Benz seit dreiundvierzig Jahren durch ihr Leben. Doch das ändert sich, als ihr Postverwalter und einziger Freund, Herr Schabowsky unheilbar erkrankt, ein geheimnisvolles Schreiben im Briefkasten ihrer Berliner Wohnung liegt und gleich drei Männer ihren Alltag gehörig durcheinanderbringen. Sie und Schabowsky beschließen, ihre Probleme proaktiv anzugehen – und wählen einen höchst ungewöhnlichen Weg.“ (Klappentext)

Rossbacher schreibt humorvoll in erster Person über eine Frau, die an den konventionellen Lebenskonzepten der Gesellschaft zu scheitern droht, bis sie lernt, eigene zu entwickeln. Bis dahin scheint dieser Roman nicht ganz anders als einer der Dutzend witziger Geschichtchen einer Ildikó von Kürthy. Jedoch Rossbachers Sprache ist weitaus besser und dieser Roman ist tiefgründiger und bietet Ausblicke auf harmonisches menschliches Zusammenleben.

Hilde Hollen (Herausgeberin): *Kleine Geschichten vom Reisen* (1992). Engelhorn Verlag, Stuttgart, 144 pp.

Der Verlag hat im späten letzten Jahrhundert eine große Anzahl von „Kleinen Geschichten“ verschiedener Autoren veröffentlicht. Dieses Büchlein bringt 16 kurze Geschichten berühmter, meist deutscher Autoren, von Francis Bacon und Ludwig Uhland bis Tania Blixen und Robert Walser. Geschichten über Genüsse und Foltern des Reisens, humorvoll oder todernst. Nette Lektüre.

2. NON-FICTION BOOKS (General)

XX Yuval Noah Harari: *Nexus* (2024). Fern Press – Penguin Random House (hardcover), Great Britain, 492 pp.

Again an extraordinary book – an instantaneous bestseller – by this extraordinary historian, contemporary analyst, and futurist.

This volume is a *tour de force* about the history, the current state, and the possible future of human and non-human (inorganic AI-driven computer) networks and connections. The volume distills and presents notable insights about history, science, and AI, focusing on past human networks based on stories and on documents, and the prospects of current and future networks between humans, networks between humans and computers, and (the very scary) networks between AI-driven computers and computers.

I learned many things from reading this new Harari; I mention just two key lessons. First, information is not truth and is not necessarily good: it simply serves as an instrument that generates networks. Second: AI is potentially very dangerous: it may imply the end of homo sapiens, as much a clear and present danger as is climate change and the world-wide destruction of nature.

XX A.C. Grayling: *The History of Philosophy: Three Millennia of Thought from the West and Beyond* (hardback first published 2019) (2021). Penguin Books, UK, paperback, 690 pp. [ip]

I am glad I started this new year with an impressive tome on the history of philosophy, the most general (jointly with mathematics) of all disciplines. Since the long-popular classic, Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy* (which I have not read), published in 1945, there has been no comprehensive and entertaining, single-volume history of this great intellectual journey. This treatise covers Western philosophy (90% of the book) from pre-Plato Greek philosophers to 21st century thinkers. However, the “Beyond” in the title promises more than what is delivered: just 10% of the book is devoted to non-Western philosophy, that is Asian philosophy: Indian (including Buddhist philosophy), Chinese, and Arabic-Persian, proving that the author's expertise does not lie in these realms of philosophy. (At the end of the book, Grayling struggles with the question if native Sub-Saharan African worldviews constitute philosophy or not, concluding – correctly – that they do not. And, also correctly, there is no reference at all, to worldviews (or philosophical thoughts) emanating from native cultures in the Americas, Australia and Oceania).

As discussed in the introduction, Grayling, by covering the history of philosophical ideas and their authors, dwells into ten branches of contemporaneous philosophy: epistemology; metaphysics; logic; ethics; aesthetics; philosophy of mind; philosophy of language; political philosophy; history of philosophy; and philosophical examination of the assumptions, methods, and claims of other fields of inquiry.

This book is dense but very well written. It is a must for non-technical readers with an interest in the history of and contemporaneous debates in philosophy.

James Nestor: *Breath: The New Science of a Lost Art* (NPR Best Book 2020) (2020). Penguin Life – Penguin Random House (2021 paperback), Great Britain, 280 pp.

“Nestor tracks down men and women exploring the hidden science behind ancient breathing practices like Pranayama, Sudarshan Kriya, and Tummo and teams up with pulmonary tinkerers to scientifically test long-held beliefs about how we breathe. Modern research is showing us that making even slight adjustments to the way we inhale and exhale can jump-start athletic performance; rejuvenate internal organs; halt snoring, asthma, and autoimmune disease; and even straighten scoliotic spines. None of this should be possible, and yet it is. Drawing on thousands of years of medical texts and recent cutting-edge studies in pulmonology, psychology, biochemistry, and human physiology, *Breath* turns the conventional wisdom of what we thought we knew about our most basic biological function on its head. You will never breathe the same again.” (Bookcover)

XX Marco Bussagli (ed.): *Roma. L'arte nei secoli* (1999), Magnus Edizione, Udine, Italia. (Ich las die deutsche Ausgabe: *Rom: Die goldenen Jahrhunderte*, 2009, Tandem Verlag, 543 pp.) [ip]

Ausgezeichneter Bildband über Roms Architektur, Skulptur und Malerei (und deshalb auch teilweise über die Geschichte Roms) von der Antike bis zum 18. Jahrhundert. Die Kapitel sind nach Jahrhunderten geordnet und einzeln beigetragen von italienischen Kunstgeschichtsexperten, mit sehr guten Fotografien komplementiert. Ausgezeichnete Übersetzung. Sehr empfehlenswert für interessierte Rombesucher und Kunstgeschichtsleser.

XX Gert Streidt und Peter Feierabend (Hrsg.): *Preußen: Kunst und Architektur* (1999). Könemann, Köln, 520 pp. [ip]

Historisch ist noch heute hochinteressant der Aufstieg Preußens vom unbedeutenden Kurfürstentum zur europäischen Großmacht und sein späteres Verschwinden in der Geschichte. In diesem Buch ist jedoch der Schwerpunkt auf der Entwicklung der Künste in Preußen. Die Darstellung reicht von den Zeugnissen der deutschen Besiedelung der Mark Brandenburg im Mittelalter bis zum Ende der Monarchie 1918. Die Hauptkapitel Architektur, Stadtgestaltung und Gartenkunst, sowie Malerei, Plastik und Kunsthandwerk, werden durch kurze Beiträge über Themen wie Seidenfabrikation, Kutschenbau, Grabmalkunst und Volksparkanlagen abgerundet. Die Kapitel sind nach Themen geordnet und einzeln beigetragen von deutschen Kunstgeschichtsexperten, komplementiert mit sehr guten Fotografien. Sehr empfehlenswert für interessierte Berlin- und Brandenburgbesucher, sowie für Kunstgeschichtsleser. Dieses Buch ähnelt sehr in Struktur und Inhalt dem oben beschriebenen Band über Rom.

X Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014). Fourth Estate – HarperCollins, London, UK, 52 pp.

I do not read feminist or anti-feminist fiction or non-fiction, because the topic bores me to death. Except for this book-length essay by the Nigerian author, adapted from her 2012 Ted-X talk of the same title. A present from my beloved daughter Vivian.

I quote from the following summary: “Adichie compellingly argues that we must challenge long-held beliefs and gender stereotypes that perpetuate inequality between men and women. She highlights the need for a cultural shift to achieve gender equality and outlines the ways in which we can all contribute to this change. In essence, we should all be feminists not only as a commitment to women's liberation but also as a way of encouraging men to engage in

conversations with women on sexuality, appearance, roles, and success. Being a feminist entails championing for the rights of women and trying to make the world a better place for women. Feminism does not entirely challenge the biological roles of each gender as it only intends to revolutionize sexism by creating equal chances and opportunities for women and men. Feminism views people as human beings and aims to tackle the social injustices that silence people's will and power to exceed social expectations. Therefore, becoming a feminist normalizes women's success and allows men to strive to achieve even more in life." (Wikipedia).
Written in a simple but beautiful language, with lots of funny little stories, I recommend reading this booklet to all and everybody.

X The Economist: *The World Ahead 2025* (Nov. 2024). The Economist, London, magazine format, 126 pp.

Another perfect Christmas present from my daughter – many thanks, Vivi!
My last reading (now, Dec. 31, 2024) is not a book but The Economist's end-of-year special issue with articles, essays by influential people, and projections for 2025. Every article, essay, and projection is a must read for economists and non-economists alike. (I was pleasantly surprised by Javier Milei's contributed article on Argentina's economy and its prospects, p. 50).

3. FICTION AND NON-FICTION (Greece)

Largely motivated by our family trip to Greece this year (after 1982 and 2016, our third visit), I read more fiction and non-fiction about this wonderful small country and its amazing history than in most years.

XX Irene Vallejo: *El silbido del arquero* (2015). Esta edición: Penguin Random House, 1ª. edición en Chile, mayo 2023, 250 pp.

"Luego del asedio de Troya, obligado a huir para salvar a su familia, el derrotado héroe Eneas recibe una visión sobre el futuro de su casta. Acompañado de un puñado de sobrevivientes, se embarca hacia lo desconocido y naufraga en Cartago, donde es bien recibido por la reina Elisa y puede, al fin, atisbar la redención de su estirpe. Unos siglos más tarde, el poeta Virgilio recibe del emperador Augusto la encomienda de narrar la gloriosa historia de Roma, enraizada en aquella primera aventura de Eneas. Indeciso por la forma de llevar a cabo esta tarea, el poeta se pasea por la ciudad en busca de la inspiración, incapaz de ignorar la miseria que se oculta detrás del capaz mármol pulido de sus calles. El mito, la historia, la aventura, el romance y la guerra se entrecruzan en esta novela coral para recordarnos que el pasado está imbricado en las fibras del presente." (Contratapa del libro).

Este libro fue publicado tres años antes de la obra magistral e hiper premiada de la autora: *El infinito en un junco* (2019), sobre la invención de la escritura y los libros, en la antigüedad clásica y después. Lo leí y describí, maravillado, en 2020.

Esta novela toma la leyenda de Eneas, estando probablemente muy inspirada por el famoso poema *La Eneida* del poeta romano Virgilio, escrita entre los años 29 y 19 a.C., por encargo del emperador Augusto. Eneas tiene la doble particularidad de ser un guerrero mítico troyano, mencionado por Homero en *La Ilíada*, y luego de cruzar el Mediterráneo hasta Italia, ser el precursor de Roma y antepasado de Rómulo y Remo, como lo describe Virgilio.

Magníficamente escrita y muy bien documentada, esta novela refleja tanto la erudición como el talento narrativo de Vallejo. Un placer leer este drama.

XX Christa Wolf: *Kassandra* (1983). Luchterhand, gebunden, 158 pp.

Esta es una extraordinaria obra sobre la vida de Casandra, hija del rey Priamos, la mítica vidente troyana, también amante de Eneas, el guerrero troyano quien protagoniza la preciosa novela de Irene Vallejo, que describo arriba. Sigo en alemán, el idioma en que leí esta novela.

Christa Wolfs Meisterwerk erzählt von Kassandra, der schillerndsten Frauenfigur der griechischen Mythologie. Sehr selten habe ich ein Monolog (in erster Person) gelesen, der so außergewöhnlich gut geschrieben und so fesselnd ist wie dieses Werk von Wolf. Ich zitiere jetzt Texte Dritter über dieses Buch und den Hintergrund seiner Entstehung.

“Während ihrer letzten Stunde stellt sich die Seherin der eigenen Geschichte, analysiert die Wurzeln des Krieges und ringt um ihre Autonomie. Christa Wolf hat sie auf faszinierende Weise zu einer Zeitgenossin werden lassen: eine am Ende gescheiterte Heldin, die sich gegen die Diktatur und die Macht der Männer auflehnt, nur ihrer eigenen Überzeugung verpflichtet. Die Veröffentlichung von *Kassandra* im Jahre 1983 wurde zu einem spektakulären Welterfolg, das Buch gehört heute zu den Klassikern der Moderne.

Nach Aussage der Autorin entstand die Idee zu *Kassandra* eher zufällig. Christa Wolf war eine von den wenigen Autorinnen und Autoren der DDR, die die Möglichkeit hatten, ins westliche Ausland – hier: nach Griechenland – zu reisen. Doch verpasste Wolf ihren Flug nach Athen und musste in Berlin übernachten. In Ermangelung anderer Literatur begann sie, die *Orestie* von *Aischylos* zu lesen. Fasziniert von der Person der Kassandra begann sie Forschungen über sie und das alte Griechenland anzustellen.

Die Entstehung der Figur Kassandra und der Erzählung beschrieb Wolf in vier Vorlesungen 1982 im Rahmen der [Frankfurter Poetik-Vorlesungen](#). In der Bundesrepublik erschienen diese zeitgleich mit der Erzählung in einem eigenen Band. Die im [Aufbau-Verlag](#) erschienene DDR-Ausgabe enthielt Vorlesungen und Erzählung in einem Band. Die Vorlesungen waren darin [zensiert](#). Es gab an einigen Stellen Auslassungen, die auf Intervention Wolfs durch Auslassungspunkte [...] kenntlich gemacht wurden. Entstanden ist das Werk Anfang der 1980er Jahre in der sich während des Höhepunkts der nuklearen Aufrüstung der Blöcke nach innen immer mehr militarisierenden DDR. So ist das Buch zugleich ein beeindruckender Bericht (und Entwurf) innergesellschaftlicher Bewusstseinsprozesse. Die in selbstverständlichem „Wir“-Gefühl zum trojanischen Hof gehörende Kassandra, die die um sich greifende „Vorkriegs“- und „Sicherheits“-Mentalität als ihr völlig fremd empfindet, muss sich in einer mühsamen Selbstaufklärung zunächst des Sachverhalts bewusstwerden, dass ihr eigenes Leben als Königstochter und Priesterin in die herrschaftsbildenden Strukturen am Hof verwoben ist. Erst nach ihrer Selbstaufklärung kann sie sich aus diesen Strukturen lösen. Damit gehört die Erzählung (etwa mit Stefan Heyms *Der König David Bericht*) zu den in der DDR eher seltenen Zeugnissen einer konsequenten Selbstanalyse sich als machtfern empfindender Intellektueller.“

X Stephen Fry: *Heroes: Volume II of Mythos* (2018; this version 2019). Penguin Random House, UK, 476 pp. [ip]

“Few mere mortals have ever embarked on such bold and heart-stirring adventures, overcome myriad monstrous perils, or outwitted scheming vengeful gods, quite as stylishly and triumphantly as Greek heroes.”

In this companion volume of his preceding *Mythos* (2017), which I have not read yet, Stephen Fry brilliantly retells these dramatic, funny, tragic and timeless tales about 8 heroes, from Perseus to Theseus, including Odysseus and Jason, and one woman, Atalanta. Two years ago, I read Fry’s wonderful *Troy* (2020), included in my 2022 summary of books.

Fry's modern and lively retelling of ancient Greek myths is superb. He exhibits prodigious erudition, enthusiasm, wit and style. The book is a very well researched work of fiction, with footnotes and references,

X Adam Nicolson: *How to Be: Life Lessons from the Early Greeks* (2023; this edition 2024). William Collins, London, UK, 358 pp.

Nicolson is a prolific author who has won many prizes for his previous books on history, nature, and literature.

This book is a chronological history of the development of pre-Socratic philosophy in Ancient Greece. It focuses on the right questions asked and tentative answers provided by the world's first philosophers, such as: how can it be me?, why do we exist?, what is the nature of things?

The book starts with Homer's *Odyssey* (presumably written in Smyrna, ca. 650 BC) – the wonderful first major Western epic (together with the *Illiad*) but which is devoid of any philosophical thoughts. Nicolson identifies Thales of Miletus (ca. 600 BC) as the first Greek (and therefor world-wide) philosopher. Then he covers a dozen of subsequent philosophers-scientists-mathematicians-poets-politicians that lived between 600 and 400 BC in Greek cities in Ionia (the Hellenic coast of today's Turkey) and in Greek cities in today's Italy (in Calabria, Campania, and Sicily).

The author provides the historical context of the early development of Greek philosophy in the context of the tolerant Greek maritime cities, populated by merchants, seafarers, slave traders, artisans, and farmers. He links the development of new ideas to the culture, arts, geography, politics, and commerce, illustrating the book with dozens of well-chosen pictures of archaeological sites, works of arts, and Greek landscapes.

If you want to read only a bit of this book, choose the brief Intro on "Philosophy has a geography" and the final chapter on "The invention of understanding".

X Bruce Clark: *Athens: City of Wisdom* (2021; this edition 2022). Head of Zeus - Bloomsbury Publishing, London, UK, 614 pp. [ip]

This is a delightful, lengthy tome on the history of possibly the most fascinating city in the world. Well researched and written.

While some reviews criticize a presumed lack of originality of this book, I learned tons about the very old and classic history of Athens. My Athenian hero is Pericles: inventor of democracy, statesman, general, first among all citizens of his time. Motivated by the many quotations of this discourse in the book, I read Pericles' funeral oration for the first cohort of young Athenians that died in the first year of the terrible war with Sparta (Peloponesian War) in 430, written down by the contemporaneous historian Thucydides. It is simply an amazingly brilliant tribute to Athens and endorsement of its democratic institutions, as well as the necessary features of a liberal democracy: political and individual freedom, division of political powers (already developed since Solon, 130 years before), equality before the law, liberalism, equality of opportunities, anti-poverty policies, rights and obligations of citizens, right to privacy, duty to give life in defending the city, moral obligations for good citizenship, and so on. Amazing!

And then humanity forgot democracy for the next 2200 years, until the development of the idea of liberal democracy by Anglo-Saxon and French philosophers (Hume, De Tocqueville, ...) and the gradual development of democratic institutions that started in the UK and the US.

In the following I copy The Economist's exuberant endorsement of this book, written by one this newspaper's contributors.

“An engaging, original history of one of the world’s oldest cities. A new book by Bruce Clark, a regular contributor on culture and ideas, will delight even those familiar with Athens.”

“Choosing Athena as protector instead of the sea god Poseidon was a clever move by the citizens of Athens. The myth holds that the goddess of wisdom won them over by planting an olive tree as a promise of fruitful longevity. She was as good as her word. Three thousand years on, the city remains one of the great and most intriguing capitals of the world. In this vividly entertaining new history, Bruce Clark shows readers why. In 500 pages, he expertly tells the story of a city that held the stage for a millennium, then retired to the wings, but never lost its capacity to fascinate. That founding myth, with its message of Athenian exceptionalism, became the subject of one of the Parthenon’s pediments in the fifth century bc. The Athenians lived up to it: they trounced two Persian invasions, built beauty on the Acropolis and created a revolutionary form of government that empowered its citizens to do exceptional things. It was an idea so powerful that it survived a disastrous war with Sparta and endured in some form for another 200 years. During the Roman period, Athens remained the nerve centre for intellectual life, educating the empire’s elite and inspiring much new building. Hadrian’s Arch, his library and the Temple of Olympian Zeus are all still there today.

As Christianity spread, polytheistic Athens lost much of its importance; the Byzantine Emperor Justinian closed its schools of philosophy in the sixth century. But Mr Clark is keen to show that something of its influence survived the Christian takeover. Readers learn that the Parthenon became a splendid church and place of pilgrimage devoted to the Virgin Mary, and that, in the seventh century, an Archbishop of Canterbury may well have been educated in Athens. As Byzantium slowly disintegrated, Athens was fought over by Italians and Spanish until it fell to Ottoman vassalage in 1460. Three centuries on, the Acropolis was home to a Turkish garrison and European travelers were back sketching its ruins, some cynically plundering them for the adornment of their Scottish pile.

After independence in 1832, Athens was bulldozed to create a pastiche of her classical self and the Acropolis was stripped to its classical essentials. But it was capital to a nation of only 800,000 souls that needed more taxpayers to succeed. So began the *Megali Idea* of gathering all Greeks into a neo-Byzantine polity with Constantinople as its capital. Eleftherios Venizelos’s “almost infallible political genius” nearly made it happen, but the failure of the irredentist concept led to a vast Greek/Turkish population exchange which Mr Clark describes with feeling: both the experience of individual refugees and the indelible contribution they made to Greece’s economic and cultural life.

Greece’s problem was great-power interference. Twice in the 20th century, the streets of Athens witnessed fighting between British and Greek forces, and, in the 21st, violent protests against the austerity package which was part of a bail-out agreement with the European Union. Mr Clark deftly guides readers through the effect of the Greek financial crisis on Athens, both its terrible human cost and the extraordinary renewal—cultural, culinary—that has come with recovery. Throughout the book, Mr Clark summons the marvellous chorus he’s assembled to share the tale: Saint Philothei, a 16th-century nun who was martyred by bandits and became the city’s patron saint; the nurse Florence Nightingale, who walked the Acropolis by moonlight and brought home a baby owl; the poet George Seferis who dared to speak out against the military junta and whose sublime poetry opened the Olympic games in 2004.

Athens is a muddle of a city, a combination of matchless beauty and downright hideousness, whose eccentricities provoke a love that cannot be uncritical. Mr Clark’s critical esteem shines through every page as he describes the “gimcrack piece of kitsch” that is the cathedral, the steep lanes of Plaka (“one of the oldest continuously inhabited places in the world”) and the endless *polykatoikia* (apartment buildings) that may hurt the eye but lend themselves to social

mixing and family cohesion. “Athens: City of Wisdom” is a triumph of a book that should be read by those who already know this city’s importance and charm and those who want to. It is an extraordinary achievement.” (James Heneage, *The Economist*, Feb 2nd, 2022).

X Robert A. McCabe: *Greece after the War: Years of Hope* (2023). Abbeville Press, New York, NY, 252 pp.

This beautiful coffee-table book of photographs Greece and the following two books were presents given to us by Daniel Yarur in Athens, on occasion of a wonderful dinner at the terrace of the Capital Centre Hotel.

The pictures, taken by the American photographer who authors the volume, depict the life and landscapes of Greece in the 1950s (in black and white) and the 1960s (in colors). Beautiful portraits of common people – urban dwellers, sailors, peasants, craftsmen, working women – alternate with landscapes and classical ruins. It is amazing to realize how poor and underdeveloped Greece was after the terrible World War II experience and the subsequent Civil War! And yet the portrayed Greek people – especially the younger ones – express contentment, hope, and joy.

Kaktos Publications: *An Anthology of Ancient Greeks on the Soul* (2021). Kaktos Publications, Athens, Greece, 223 pp. [ip]

This is an eccentric little book with no identified author, which reproduces short capsules of the concepts about and thoughts on the soul by more than 45 Greek philosophers, as preserved in ancient Greek texts. The brief texts cover 12-13 centuries of Greek philosophers, from Homer (8th or 7th century BC) to Stobaeus (5th century AD). Most texts are too short or lack sufficient context to be deeply interesting to laymen, like myself. Exceptions are the texts of Plato and Aristotle, to which the book devotes some 30 pages each.

An inexcusable omission of this book is Socrates’ thoughts on soul. The first article in my Google search yields: “Socrates was the first thinker in Western history to focus the full power of reason on the human self: who we are, who we should be, and who we will become. Socrates was convinced that, in addition to our physical bodies, each person possesses an immortal soul that survives beyond the death of the body.”

X Constantinos Tsakos: *The Acropolis and its new Museum: A guide to the history and archaeology* (2014). Hesperos, Athens, Greece, 176 pp.

On our two-day visit to Athens this Spring, we visited the new Museum on the first day and the Acropolis on the second. (Last time we had visited the Acropolis and the tiny old Museum behind the Parthenon was in 1982).

The new Museum is a stunning example of world-class museography: architecture, technical solutions, display of collections, and the large quantity and quality of objects are amazing. After this visit we are convinced that the return of the Elgin marbles from the British to this Museum is fully justified.

We were also duly impressed by the progress in reconstructing different parts of the Acropolis according to the highest international standards since the 1980s. All parts of the Acropolis complex – Propylaea, Temple of Athena Nike, Parthenon, Erechtheion, Theater of Dionysos, Odeon of Herodes – are in so much better shape and partly rebuilt, compared to 42 years ago. An immense pleasure to visit, I was only disturbed by the fact that one has to share his visit with 10,000 or so tourists per day.

This guide is quite nice (good pictures), useful, and well informed (written by a scholar), although the English translation from the Greek original should be improved.

4. BIOGRAPHIES AND AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

XX His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, with Douglas Abrams: *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World* (2016) (I read the 35th printing). Avery – Penguin Random House, New York, 371 pp.

As many of you now, His Holiness the XIVth Dalai Lama is the person I most admire among all living people. As several of you know, Greta and I had the privilege of a private audience with the Dalai Lama in Prague in 2013. It was a brief meeting that had a strong imprint on our lives.

Hence I am strongly biased about this book and any another positive book about the Dalai Lama in particular and about Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism in general.

Two spiritual giants. Five days. One timeless question.

Nobel Peace Prize Laureates His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu have survived more than fifty years of exile and the soul-crushing violence of oppression. Despite their hardships—or, as they would say, because of them—they are two of the most joyful people on Earth.

“In April 2015, Archbishop Tutu traveled to the Dalai Lama's home in Dharamsala, India, to celebrate His Holiness's eightieth birthday and to create what they hoped would be a gift for others. They looked back on their long lives to answer a single burning question: How do we find joy in the face of life's inevitable suffering?

They traded intimate stories, teased each other continually, and shared their spiritual practices. By the end of a week filled with laughter and punctuated with tears, these two global heroes had stared into the abyss and despair of our time and revealed how to live a life brimming with joy. This book offers us a rare opportunity to experience their astonishing and unprecedented week together, from the first embrace to the final good-bye.

We get to listen as they explore the Nature of True Joy and confront each of the Obstacles of Joy—from fear, stress, and anger to grief, illness, and death. They then offer us the Eight Pillars of Joy, which provide the foundation for lasting happiness. Throughout, they include stories, wisdom, and science. Finally, they share their daily Joy Practices that anchor their own emotional and spiritual lives.

The Archbishop has never claimed sainthood, and the Dalai Lama considers himself a simple monk. In this unique collaboration, they offer us the reflection of real lives filled with pain and turmoil in the midst of which they have been able to discover a level of peace, of courage, and of joy to which we can all aspire in our own lives.” (Bookcover).

XX Tenzin Geyche Tethong: *His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama: An Illustrated Biography*. Roli Books, New Delhi, 2020. (I read the German translation: Tenzin Geyche Tethong: *Dalai Lama: Eine Illustrierte Biographie* (1. Auflage, 2021). Insel Verlag, Berlin, 352 pp).

I thought I knew a lot about the life of His Holiness; after reading this book I realize how little I still know. My subsequent summary is in German, the language I got this book from my friend Till Kreytenberg – lieben Dank für Dein wunderbares Geschenk, Till!

Viele Biographien Seiner Heiligkeit – wie auch seine persönlichen Memoiren – wurden in den letzten Jahrzehnten veröffentlicht. Jedoch dieses vor wenigen Jahren erschienene Buch ist einmalig informativ, tiefgründig und sehr persönlich. Es bietet Einblicke in das außergewöhnliche Leben des Dalai Lama, die auf der persönlichen und Arbeits-Beziehung des letzteren mit dem Autor fußen, da Tenzin Geyche Tethong sein Privatsekretär von den sechziger Jahren bis 2006 war. Das Buch bringt neue Fakten über das Drama des systematischen Genozids des tibetischen Volks

durch die Chinesen – durchgeführt seit Chang Kai-shek in den Dreißiger Jahren und den Kommunisten seit 1949 und bis heute –, die Flucht der Tibeter nach Indien und ihr Exil in Dharamsala. Aber hauptsächlich schildert der Autor das Leben des XIV. Dalai Lama, seine Persönlichkeit, seine Menschenliebe, und seine Ausstrahlungskraft, die ihn zum größten Humanisten des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts erhoben haben.

Seine Heiligkeit, der XIV. Dalai Lama, ist für mich der bedeutendste lebende Mensch, spätestens seit Greta und meiner Audienz bei ihm (Prag, 2013), die wir in der Einführung unseres Buchs *Diego* beschreiben.

Das Buch beginnt mit Schilderungen einiger Vorgänger des Dalai Lama und beschreibt das Leben des XIV. seit seiner Geburt (wie auch in Auszügen, das einiger Mitarbeiter und Mitglieder seiner großen Familie) bis circa 2020.

Die aktuelle Biografie des Vierzehnten Dalai Lama ermöglicht einen tiefen Einblick in die bewegte Lebensgeschichte des spirituellen Oberhauptes der Tibeter. Der Text wird mit rund vierhundert bisher unveröffentlichten Fotografien, Interviews und persönlichen Erinnerungen ergänzt. Dieses Buch bietet ein denkwürdiges Porträt eines einmaligen Menschen.

XX Alexei Navalny: *Patriot: A Memoir* (2024). Borzoi – Alfred A. Knopf – Penguin Random House, New York, 483 pp.

“Navalny began writing *PATRIOT* shortly after his poisoning in 2020. It is the full story of his life: his youth, his call to activism, his marriage and family, and his commitment to the cause of Russian democracy and freedom in the face of a world super-power determined to silence him. It expresses Navalny’s total conviction that change cannot be resisted and will come. In vivid, page-turning detail, including never-before-seen correspondence from prison, Navalny recounts, among other things, his political career, the many attempts on his life, and the lives of the people closest to him, and the relentless campaign he and his team waged against an increasingly dictatorial regime. Written with the passion, wit, candor, and bravery for which he was justly acclaimed, *PATRIOT* is Navalny’s final letter to the world: a moving account of his last years spent in the most brutal prison on earth; a reminder of why the principles of individual freedom matter so deeply; and a rousing call to continue the work for which he sacrificed his life.” (Bookcover).

“This book is a testament not only to Alexei’s life, but to his unwavering commitment to the fight against dictatorship—a fight he gave everything for, including his life. Through its pages, readers will come to know the man I loved deeply—a man of profound integrity and unyielding courage. Sharing his story will not only honor his memory but also inspire others to stand up for what is right and to never lose sight of the values that truly matter.” (Yulia Navalnaya).

Sylvain Tesson (Prix Goncourt 2009, Prix Médicis 2011): *La panthère des neiges* (Prix Renaudot 2019) (2019). Gallimard, Paris, 179 pp (2021, poche) [ip]

“L’affût comme pari et aventure intérieure. Attendre sans bruit, par – 30 °C, l’hypothétique venue d’un animal mythique caché sur les plateaux du Tibet constitue la trame de cet ouvrage qui rappelle la traque du capitaine Achab dans *Moby Dick* (1851), d’Herman Melville. Ce récit d’une « bande des quatre » – un photographe animalier, sonoureuse, un philosophe et l’auteur – magnifie l’attention à la nature, l’espérance, la fugacité de l’émerveillement. Autant de valeurs oubliées que Sylvain Tesson remet à l’honneur, lui qui cherche inexorablement à échapper aux développements, qu’il juge pervers, du progrès. ‘Les animaux incarnent la volupté, la liberté, l’autonomie : ce à quoi nous avons renoncé’, écrit-il.

Aux antipodes de la société de consommation, Sylvain Tesson célèbre l’introspection, la lenteur, la joie de la nature. Un thème pile dans l’air du temps. Pour ce géographe de formation, l’écologie –

comme mode de vie et non comme étendard politique – devient le seul combat face à l'enlaidissement du monde.”

Pour moi, ce livre, écrit dans un langage poétique, a doublement de valeur car l'auteur n'est pas seulement un écologiste mais aussi un accusateur du génocide des Tibétains par les Chinois. Chaque année, le 10 mars, jour de la rébellion tibétaine de 1959, il fièrement un drapeau du Tibet dans un lieu symbolique de Paris. Ce militantisme pro-tibétain est le thème principal de ma prochaine lecture.

X Sebastian Junger: *In My Time of Dying: How I Came Face to Face with the Idea of an Afterlife* (May 2024). Simon and Schuster, hardcover, 172 pp.

“A near-fatal health emergency leads to this powerful reflection on death – and what might follow—by the bestselling author of *Tribe* and *The Perfect Storm*.

For years as an award-winning war reporter, Sebastian Junger traveled to many front lines and frequently put his life at risk. And yet the closest he ever came to death was the summer of 2020 while spending a quiet afternoon at the New England home he shared with his wife and two young children. Crippled by abdominal pain, Junger was rushed to the hospital by ambulance. Once there, he began slipping away. As blackness encroached, he was visited by his dead father, inviting Junger to join him. ‘It’s okay’, his father said. ‘There’s nothing to be scared of. I’ll take care of you’. That was the last thing Junger remembered until he came to the next day when he was told he had suffered a ruptured aneurysm that he should not have survived.

This experience spurred Junger—a confirmed atheist raised by his physicist father to respect the empirical—to undertake a scientific, philosophical, and deeply personal examination of mortality and what happens after we die. How do we begin to process the brutal fact that any of us might perish unexpectedly on what begins as an ordinary day? How do we grapple with phenomena that science may be unable to explain? And what happens to a person, emotionally and spiritually, when forced to reckon with such existential questions?”

The latter are the right questions to be asked in a book about a Near Death Experience (NDE). However, Junger does not dig sufficiently deep when providing some answers. Several years ago I read Eben Alexander’s book titled *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon’s Journey into the Afterlife* (2012) about his extremely long NDE experience during his six days of meningitis-induced coma. This one is an extraordinary book! And over the past 12 or so years Greta has told me about several books she has been reading that summarize thousands of NDE reports assembled by different authors, starting with Elizabeth Kübler-Ross in the 1960s.

X Salman Rushdie: *Knife: Meditations After an Attempted Murder* (April 2024). Random House, hardcover, 209 pp.

“From internationally renowned writer and Booker Prize winner Salman Rushdie, a searing, deeply personal account of enduring—and surviving—an attempt on his life thirty years after the fatwa that was ordered against him

On the morning of August 12, 2022, Salman Rushdie was standing onstage at the Chautauqua Institution, preparing to give a lecture on the importance of keeping writers safe from harm, when a man in black—black clothes, black mask—rushed down the aisle toward him, wielding a knife. His first thought: So it’s you. Here you are.

What followed was a horrific act of violence that shook the literary world and beyond. Now, for the first time, and in unforgettable detail, Rushdie relives the traumatic events of that day and its aftermath, as well as his journey toward physical recovery and the healing that was made possible by the love and support of his wife, Eliza, his family, his army of doctors and physical therapists, and his community of readers worldwide.

Knife is Rushdie at the peak of his powers, writing with urgency, with gravity, with unflinching honesty. It is also a deeply moving reminder of literature's capacity to make sense of the unthinkable, an intimate and life-affirming meditation on life, loss, love, art – and finding the strength to stand up again." (book cover).

It wasn't easy for me to decide buying and reading this book. Rushdie does not only offer his personal musings about his life before and after the murder attempt. He also presents grueling details of the attack, his wounds, and the medical interventions that saved him from death. This makes it very hard reading for me: knife attack – death – DIEGO NOV. 04, 2008 ...

CERTAINLY NO ONE IN MY FAMILY SHOULD READ THIS BOOK.

Yet the book is also a beautiful ode to love – in the author's case, a love for his new wife and for his children and grandchildren.

Very well structured and written, it is really "Rushdie at the peak of his powers". However, it also reflects the author's difficult personality that reflects traits of narcissism and arrogance.

XX Andrey Kurkov: *Our Daily War* (2024). Open Borders Press – Orenda Books, London, 352 pp. [ip].

" 'For centuries, attempts have been made to force Ukrainians to forget their native language, to stop singing Ukrainian songs and to abandon their history. For almost 400 years, Russia has been fighting against Ukrainian identity.' Ten years on from the annexation of Crimea, two years on from Russia's all-out invasion of Ukraine, the Ukrainian people continue to fight back. In the second volume of his war diaries, Andrey Kurkov gives a fresh perspective on a people for whom resistance and solidarity have become a matter of survival. *Our Daily War* is a chronological record of the heterogeneous mix that comprises Ukrainian life and thought in the teeth of Russian aggression, from the constant stress of air raids, the deportation of citizens from the occupied regions and the whispers of governmental corruption to Christmas celebrations, crowdfunding and the recipe for a 'trench candle'. Kurkov's human's-eye view on the war in Ukraine is by turns biting satirical, tragic, humorous and heartfelt. It is also ... an invaluable insight into the history, politics and culture of Ukraine. *Our Daily War* is the ideal primer for anyone who would like to know what life is like in that country today." (bookcover).

This second volume of the author's war diaries covers his almost weekly diary notes from August 2022 through February 2024. As a keen observer of the genocidal invasion of Ukraine by Russia, I have followed many of the terrible war crimes committed by Putin and his soldiers. Yet I am still shocked by some of the gruesome details provided in this book.

They include the standard procedures followed by the Russians after capturing a Ukrainian city. The population is sent to a "filtration camp set up near the conquered place. Ukrainians are told to bring their mobile phones and documents and then driven to the 'filtration' camp. Only those that do not have patriotic tattoos and have not made pro-Ukrainian posts on social media networks and who can prove their loyalty to Russia, 'pass' the filtration process. ... and are sent to Russia as Refugees ... mostly to depressed regions ... (like) Murmansk and Kamchatka. ... Those who do not pass filtration are sent to prison camps or ... are killed immediately. ... Almost all of those (survivors) who are prepared to speak prefer to remain anonymous." (pages 18-19).

Death to Putin!

X Ben Macintyre: *Agent Sonya: The True Story of WW2's Most Extraordinary Spy*, Viking, 2020. This issue: softcover, Penguin, 2021, 377 pp.

This is a gripping biography of Ursula Kuczynsky Burton (*Sonja*), a Jewish-German communist who spied for the Soviet Union from the 1930s through 1950, including passing info about construction of the atomic bomb from England to Moscow. Ursula's life, and the lives of the people relevant in

her life, is deeply researched and documented; it includes footnotes, references, and photographs. Yet at the same time it is written like a novel: “think John le Carré at its best – but fact not fiction”. Ursula’s personality is portrayed as a very smart, likeable, and complex character – yet an unredeemed believer in communism. Never caught as a Soviet spy, she was a lover of sorts, with three children from different men, which she used to represent a façade of an average loving mother and housewife. In 1977 (living in East Germany), she published an autobiography, *Sonja’s Rapport* (get the book!), revealing herself as a prolific spy – only then her children discovered her mother’s past. She died in 2000. A few weeks later, President Putin signed a decree proclaiming Ursula a “super-agent of military intelligence”, awarding her posthumously the “Order of Friendship”. An early sign that the genocidal and totalitarian owner of Russia is, at least partly, a Soviet dictator at heart.

X David E. Hoffman: *The Billion Dollar Spy: A True Story of Cold War Espionage and Betrayal*, Viking, 2020. This issue: softcover, Penguin, 2021, 377 pp. [ip]

In more than one sense, this book is the counterpart to my previous reading. It is also a gripping biography of a spy: Adolf Tolkachev, an engineer working at the Soviet institute in charge of development of fighter airplanes and radars. As Ursula above, Adolf was motivated by conviction but of the opposite ideology of hers: he hated the Soviet regime and took immense risks to contribute to its demise. He produced an immense trove of technological and military secrets, that he passed over to the CIA in Moscow between 1978 and 1985. As told in the book, those secrets allowed the US to gain enormous advantages, for the two following decades, in building airborne radars, fighter aircrafts, and cruise missiles, as well as pilot training capabilities, over the Soviet Union and Russia. In 1985 an American KGB mole, working in the CIA, betrayed Adolf. He was put on trials and summarily executed by Gorbachev’s Soviet Union.

Like my previous reading, this book is thoroughly researched and documented; it includes footnotes, references, and photographs. The author is a journalist and writer; he is the winner of the 2010 Non-Fiction Pulitzer Prize for a previous book (*The Dead Hand: The Untold Story of the Cold War Arms Race and its Dangerous Legacy*).

X Elizabeth Subercaseaux: *Bach: El músico de Dios*. Catalonia, Santiago, tapa blanda, 1ª. edición, junio 2024 (174 pp.)

Hasta ahora había evitado leer alguna de las múltiples novelas de la exitosa autora de bestsellers, por creer (y quizás yo esté en lo cierto) que ella escribe novelas que exudan “corrección política” de izquierda, wokismo y feminismo.

Pues bien, me llevé una gran sorpresa con la lectura de esta biografía novelada, escrita en primera persona, de Johannes Sebastian Bach, mi compositor preferido de todos los tiempos. (En modo autorreferente, menciono que en mi infancia y adolescencia toqué varias obras de piano de él, incluyendo invenciones a dos y tres voces, y la última obra que toqué en mi vida, a los 15 años, fue su Concierto Italiano. Luego participé en varios coros, en que cantamos motetes y cantatas de Bach).

Es una linda biografía de Bach (de cuya vida yo sabía poco), que refleja mucho conocimiento biográfico y alguna sensibilidad musical de la autora, aunque ella no profundiza en la maravillosa música creada por este genio. De hecho, se centra más en su esforzada y dura vida, así como en sus relaciones personales con su extensa familia (tuvo 20 hijos, de los cuales 10 fallecieron antes de su adultez), y sus empleadores y colegas, relatando escenas imaginarias. Destaca Subercaseaux la principal motivación de Bach (“El músico de Dios”) por trabajar tan duro en componer, enseñar y tocar música: su profunda religiosidad, en su vertiente luterana, reflejada en la sigla “SDG” (Soli Deo Gloria), que agregaba a sus partituras manuscritas. Ella coloca en boca del compositor frases

imaginarias pero probablemente muy certeras que reflejan sus convicciones más profundas: “La música es el lenguaje de Dios y por lo mismo es que resulta tan misteriosa.” (pág. 145). “He procurado ser un músico de Dios. No me jacto de haberlo logrado, pero Dios ha estado siempre en mi pensamiento.”

A partir de la mitad del libro, Subercaseaux hace alternar los capítulos entre unos que relatan la vida y los pensamientos de Bach, con otros que son sueños temporalmente anticipatorios y, por ello, surrealistas de Bach, en los cuales él se encuentra en un claro de bosque con Glenn Gould. Son diálogos hermosos entre dos músicos separados 250 años en el tiempo, en que vierten sus ideas y vivencias tan disímiles. Además Gould ejecuta varias obras de Bach y expresa su más profunda admiración por el compositor, mientras este queda tan sorprendido como admirado de la forma libre y muy personal con la cual Gould interpreta su obra.

Mientras lo leo, escucho las Variaciones de Goldberg en las magistrales interpretaciones de Gould de 1981 y 1982, pocos meses antes de su temprana muerte. La obra y su interpretación por Gould me conmueven hasta las lágrimas, como me sucede a menudo con música eximia, llevándome de la alegría más profunda al dolor insoslayable por la pérdida de Diego ...

Un complemento recomendable de la lectura de este libro es el buen resumen biográfico de la vida de Bach y de su obra, por ejemplo aquí en alemán:

https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_Sebastian_Bach .

Termino con la siguiente frase atribuida a Ludwig van Beethoven sobre Bach: “Nicht Bach, sondern Meer sollte er heißen. Wegen seines unendlichen, unerschöpflichen Reichtums an Tonkombinationen und Harmonien.” (“No debería llamarse Bach (Arroyo, en español) sino Mar. Por su riqueza infinita e inagotable de combinaciones melódicas y armónicas” (ver pág. 161).

X Joachim Käppner: *Berthold Beitz: Die Biographie*. Berlin Verlag, Berlin, 2010 (Gebunden, 4. Auflage) (621 pp.).

Dieses Buch ist ein Geschenk meines guten Freundes Till Kreytenberg – lieben Dank, Till! Es ist eine autorisierte Biographie eines außergewöhnlichen Mannes.

“Berthold Beitz gab nur wenige Interviews und erzählte nie viel von sich selbst - bis zu diesem Buch. Joachim Käppner, renommierter Journalist der Süddeutschen Zeitung, beschreibt das faszinierende Leben von Berthold Beitz, des über Jahrzehnte hinweg wichtigsten Industriellen der Bundesrepublik. Er kam 1953 als Generalbevollmächtigter zu Krupp und machte aus dem Unternehmen, das zum Sinnbild von deutschen Kriegen und Kanonen geworden war, einen zivilen, modernen Konzern. Unbeirrt von Anfeindungen und frei von Ideologien, war Beitz einer der Vorreiter der neuen Ostpolitik und sprach sich schon früh für die Zwangsarbeiter-Entschädigung aus. Erst spät wurde bekannt, dass er 1942 bis 1944 in Polen Hunderten von verfolgten Juden das Leben gerettet hat. Von der Holocaust-Gedenkstätte Yad Vashem wurde er dafür als ‘Gerechter unter den Völkern’ geehrt.” (Klappentext).

Beitz’ Leben und wirken ist beeindruckend und beispielhaft. Käppners Stil ist hervorragend. Sollte jemand wenig Zeit zur Bewältigung dieses 600-Seiten-Bands haben, empfehle ich die Einführung von Helmuth Schmidt, und des Autors “Zur Einführung: In Jerusalem (1990)” und “Das Geheimnis der Freiheit: Anstelle eines Nachworts”. Darin kommt schon zum Ausdruck, das das Hauptmerkmal des Charakter Beitz’ die innere Freiheit ist. Käppner zitiert einen Satz der häufig von Beitz auch zitiert wurde und der Perikles zugeschrieben wird: “Das Geheimnis des Glücks ist die Freiheit, und das Geheimnis der Freiheit ist der Mut”.

5. BOOKS ABOUT WRITERS, BOOKS, BOOKSHOPS, AND LIBRARIES

Diana Cooper-Richet et Antoine Jeancourt Galignani: *Galignani, Librairie Galignani*, 2017.

“Héritière d’une longue tradition éditoriale, la “Librairie Française et Étrangère” fondée à Paris en 1801 par l’italien G.A. Galignani jouit toujours, après deux cents ans d’activité d’une réputation à la fois singulière et prestigieuse et demeure l’une des plus anciennes librairies indépendantes appartenant toujours à la famille de son fondateur.”

Le dernier paragraphe est le premier dans ce petit livre écrit pour une historienne anglo-française et le scion – grand libraire et banquier français – de la sixième génération de la famille Galignani (mort en 2021). Le livre est une brève histoire de la famille et sa engagement avec la librairie et la clientèle anglaise et américaine des voyageurs et expats à Paris dans les derniers 220 années.

(Voir ci-dessus ma description de la librairie Galignani).

XX Krista Halverson (ed.): *Shakespeare and Company: A History of the Rag & Bone Shop of the Heart*. Shakespeare and Company, 2016, Paris, 384 pp. (I read the Third Edition, 2021). [ip]

“This first-ever history of the legendary bohemian bookstore in Paris interweaves essays and poetry from dozens of writers associated with the shop – Allen Ginsberg, Anaïs Nin, Ethan Hawke, Robert Stone and Jeanette Winterson, among others – with hundreds of never-before-seen archival pieces, including photographs of James Baldwin, William Burroughs and Langston Hughes, plus a foreword by the celebrated British novelist Jeanette Winterson and an epilogue by Sylvia Whitman, the daughter of the store’s founder, George Whitman. The book has been edited by Krista Halverson, director of the newly founded Shakespeare and Company publishing house.

George Whitman opened his bookstore in a tumbledown 16th-century building just across the Seine from Notre-Dame in 1951, a decade after the original Shakespeare and Company had closed. Run by Sylvia Beach, it had been the meeting place for the Lost Generation and the first publisher of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. (This book includes an illustrated adaptation of Beach’s memoir.)

Since Whitman picked up the mantle, Shakespeare and Company has served as a home-away-from-home for many celebrated writers, from Jorge Luis Borges to Ray Bradbury, A.M. Homes to Dave Eggers, as well as for young authors and poets. Visitors are invited not only to read the books in the library and to share a pot of tea, but sometimes also to live in the bookstore itself--all for free. More than 30,000 people have stayed at Shakespeare and Company, fulfilling Whitman’s vision of a “socialist utopia masquerading as a bookstore.”

Through the prism of the shop’s history, the book traces the lives of literary expats in Paris from 1951 to the present, touching on the Beat Generation, civil rights, May ’68 and the feminist movement – all while pondering that perennial literary question, ‘What is it about writers and Paris?’”

(See below for my description of the bookshop).

6. COFFEE TABLE BOOKS

XX Francisco Bedeschi: *Terra Incógnita: Campo de Hielos Sur*. Origo Ediciones, Santiago, 2025, 192 pp.

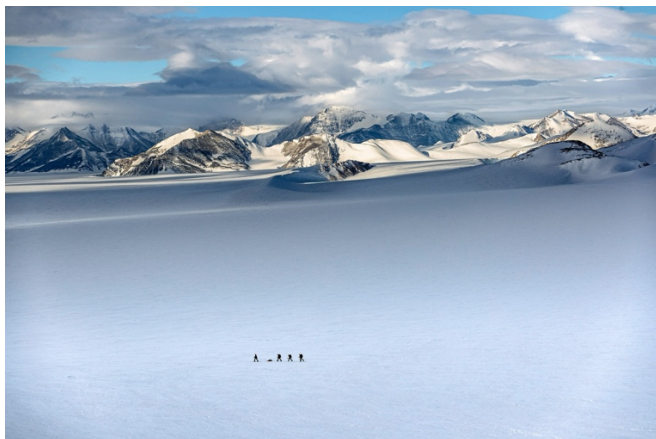
Agradezco a mi colega y amigo Jorge Becerra el regalo de este hermoso libro (con dedicatoria suya y del autor). Es un libro de fotografías aéreas, tomadas por el autor desde aviones pequeños y helicópteros, sobrevolando el verdaderamente último territorio incógnito de Chile y algo de Argentina: el Campo de Hielo Sur (también incluye algunas fotografías del más pequeño Campo de Hielo Norte, que es solo chileno). Complementan las fotografías muy breves historias de las primeras exploraciones de ambos territorios, con hazañas heroicas por hielos, mar y aire. El autor aporta su propia cuota de heroísmo, al fotografiar, desde pequeños aviones, en el territorio de mayor inestabilidad meteorológica del país. Las fotografías, muchas de gran tamaño, son simplemente emocionantes.

El autor ha publicado otros libros – no los conozco – sobre la naturaleza, la pesca y la caza en la Patagonia chilena y argentina. Además es creador y director del Parque Lonconao (descrito en las páginas 190-191), una reserva privada cuyos propietarios son él, y Jorge y Carmen Becerra. La reserva abarca 300 hectáreas y está situada junto al lago Espolón, a 10 km de la Comuna de Futaleufú y a 10 del paso a Argentina. El Parque tiene muchos senderos, un muelle en el lago y cuatro casas para alquiler. ¡Habría que conocerlo!

XX Carlos Aldunate del Solar y Hernán Rodríguez Villegas (coeditores): *Antártica, una mirada desde Chile*. Museo Chileno de Arte Precolombino, Fundación Familia Larraín Echeñique y Banco Santander, Santiago, 2022. (I read the English version: *Antarctica: A View from Chile*. Museo Chileno de Arte Precolombino, Fundación Familia Larraín Echeñique y Banco Santander, Santiago, 2022, 256 pp).

Este es otro volumen anual de la fabulosa Colección Precolombino, fruto de la colaboración de Banco Santander con el Museo Chileno de Arte Precolombino, iniciada en el año 1982 y desarrollada desde hasta la fecha por Carlos Aldunate, entonces Director del Museo y hoy Presidente de la Fundación. (Tengo casi todos los volúmenes de esta colección). Los tópicos abarcados por estos libros incluyen las colecciones del propio Museo, el patrimonio cultural y natural de Chile, regiones particulares, flora y fauna del país.

Este volumen contó con la colaboración coeditorial del Instituto Antártico Chileno. El libro reúne breves ensayos y “miradas personales” sobre la historia, la ciencia, el medio ambiente y la cultura del continente aún helado. Muy bien escrito e ilustrado con fotografías emocionantes, es un placer esta colaboración de historiadores, científicos y fotógrafos.





XX Carlos Aldunate del Solar (editor): *Fauna: Un recorrido por el endemismo de Chile*. Museo Chileno de Arte Precolombino, Fundación Familia Larraín Echeñique y Banco Santander, Santiago, 2023, 280 pp.



Este título, el número 37 de la extraordinaria colección realizada entre ambas entidades, habla sobre la vida animal y vegetal endémica del país, recorriendo de norte a sur, contando su historia geológica y biológica. Incluye breves ensayos y “fichas” sobre las especies endémicas (y también no endémicas), desde la biología, la ecología y la arqueología (sobre animales retratados en el arte rupestre precolombino). A lo largo del libro, ilustrado con emocionantes fotografías, se destacan especies como el zorro culpeo, el huemul, la ranita de Darwin o el flamenco chileno, que son animales endémicos, así como el guanaco y el puma, que no lo son. ¡Preciosa lectura!

Armando Cartes Montory y Marco Aurelio Reyes Coca: *Los Baños Minerales de Chillán: Una comarca en la cordillera*. Ediciones Universidad del Bío-Bío, Concepción, 2017, 130 pp.

Encontré este libro en el nuevo Hotel termas de Chillán, extraordinariamente bien modernizado y mantenido por una sociedad ligada a Guillermo Harding (con Anita Mingo de Gerente de Relaciones con los Huéspedes). Pasamos lindos días de familia en el hotel y las muy nevadas pistas de esquí, en agosto de este año.

El libro es un esfuerzo tierno de dos profesores de la U. del Bío-Bío para retratar la historia de las Termas de Chillán y de su hotel, desde la Colonia y hasta 2016. Hay un gran rescate de los esfuerzos de la explotación turística desde el s. XIX, con identificación de las distintas sociedades formadas para explotar la concesión que les entregó sucesivamente la Municipalidad de Chillán. El

libro contiene relatos simplistas y repetitivos de estas experiencias comerciales, amenizado por fotografías y postales históricas. Además de la ausencia de una buena escritura, el libro carece de buenas descripciones e ilustraciones del bellissimo entorno natural de las Termas y los hoteles. Una pena.

XX Hélène Rocco et Sophia van den Hoek: *Paris: Petit Atlas Hédoniste* (2023). Éditions du Chêne – Hachette Livre, 256 pp.

Dans ma dernière visite à Paris, j'ai acheté cette fantastique guide (ou "coffee table book") "hédoniste" à Gallimard (voir ma description de la librairie en bas).

"Déjeuner dans un bouillon parisien ? Assister à une représentation à l'Opéra Garnier ? Comprendre l'architecture haussmannienne ? Prendre le thé à la Grande Mosquée de Paris ? Se promener dans le parc des Buttes-Chaumont ? Explorer les architectures du Grand Paris ? Découvrir les célèbres musées de la capitale ? Flâner chez les bouquinistes qui parsèment les rives de la Seine." (Texte de la couverture).

La vraie particularité de ce livre est qu'il décrit les endroits particuliers et les petits coins de Paris, quartier par quartier. La prochaine fois que nous serons à Paris, Greta et moi suivrons plusieurs suggestions du livre. Note: Les Petits Atlas Hédonistes est une collection des livres des voyages avec des destinations que incluent des régions de France et d'autres pays et villes du monde.

XX George Steinmetz (photographer) and Andrew Revkin (text author): *The Human Planet: Earth at the Dawn of the Anthropocene*. Abrams, New York, 2020, 256 pp.

This is a collection of amazing pictures taken from above – from different flying objects – of the Earth, human harvesting of earth, water and seas, and human dwelling. A rich documentation of nature's beauty and our species' footprint, reflected in ecological disaster and unsustainability. Yet it also offers hope, depicting good examples of sustainable agriculture, green energy, and biodiversity restoration. (As always, I suspect the latter is presented in order to be able to sell the book to people other than environmental depressives, like me).

XX DK: *Hike: Adventures on Foot* (2018). DK – Penguin Random House, New York, NY, hardcover (256 pp).

In 2023 I bought and read three wonderful large-format books on "the best" hikes, treks or trails in the world. This year I added two more to my collection, both authored by publishing houses, not by individual trekkers.

This, the first one, is authored by the wonderful DK (Dorling Kindersley) English company (my granddaughter Isabella's preferred editor), publisher of first-rate documented and lavishly illustrated books that explore nature and culture. This book includes not-so-good pictures and good trail maps.

The book presents 125 trails on 6 continents, ranging from short to very long trails of varying difficulty. I know just three trails of all those included in this book, having hiked the Dientes de Navarino trail and biked the Camino de Santiago trail (see below), and hiked the Samaria Gorge (Crete, Greece) with Greta and Markus in 1982.

There are many more trails on my future hiking wish list in this book than in the next one.

XX Lonely Planet: *Epic Hikes of the World* (2018). Lonely Planet, Dublin, Ireland, hard cover, 328 pp.

This second acquisition on hikes this year is published by the world's most successful publisher of travel guides. It includes beautiful pictures and bad trail maps.

This book presents 50 of the most inspiring trails in detail, and lists briefly three other similar hikes for each main hike. For example, the detailed description of the W trail in Torres del Paine is complemented by brief descriptions of the Laguna de los Tres trail (approaching Monte Fitz Roy, Los Glaciares N.P., Argentina), the Huemul trail (Los Glaciares N.P., Argentina), and the wonderful Dientes de Navarino trail (Navarino Island, Chile). The selected hikes were suggested by a pool of Lonely Planet travel writers, and comprise from short to very long trails on 5 continents and of varying difficulty. There is not much overlap between the trails included in this book and those covered in the preceding book.

Of the 200 or so trails suggested here, I hiked in 2019, with Vivi and Diego, the Dientes de Navarino trail in Chile. I biked in 2013, with Greta, Maite, Juan, Marisol and others, the wonderful Camino de Santiago in Spain. High on my list of future hikes – always we gotta dream – the Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, the Choquequirao Inca Trail in Peru, and the Westweg (from Pforzheim to Basel, Schwarzwald) in Germany.

X Manfred Heiting (editor): *Helmut Newton: Work*. TASCHEN, Köln, 2000, 280 pp.

This is the catalogue of the 2000 exhibition of photographs in the Deutsches Centrum für Photographie in the Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, celebrating Newton's 80th birthday. Curated by his wife June Newton, the exhibition presents many of the photographer's most celebrated pictures. Structured by thematic chapters that go from fashion pics to famous people portraits and urban landscapes, a central part of the work of this foremost fashion photographer of the 20th century is his black-and-white depictions of models and girls. The latter subjects (or "objects", as referred to by his feminists' critiques) are often presented in very erotic or at least sensual ways – reflected by the women's clothing (or lack thereof), positions, and attitudes. Such picture-taking would be politically impossible today. Yet certainly Newton's work is much more art than soft porn. Enjoy!

As I have hinted above, a very different view is presented by feminists and leftists, who depict Newton's work as sexist, misogynistic, heterosexual, and capitalistic. E.g.:

<https://cphmag.com/the-problem-with-helmut-newton/>

7. BLACKLIST OF BAD BOOKS

Spiegel: *Geschichte: Was ist Deutsch? Vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart: Wie eine heikle Frage immer wieder beantwortet wurde* (2024). Zeitschrift-Spezialausgabe, Spiegel-Verlag, Hamburg, 148 pp.

Die Frage ist gut, die Antwort des Spiegels, auf fast 150 Seiten, dagegen nicht. Trotz einiger interessanter Artikel, konzentriert sich der Spiegel auf Antworten religiöser, nationaler, und politischer Minderheiten, und natürlich auf Antworten von Frauen. Kein Deutscher – und selbstverständlich kein deutscher Mann – kommt zu Wort in diesem verzerrten Bild der Geschichte und der Gegenwart Deutschlands, das Identitätspolitik in großem Maße darstellt. Die schockierendste Verzerrung der historischen Wirklichkeit in dieser Spiegelausgabe ist die Gegenstellung des Lebens in der BRD und der DDR in den neun (im doppelten Sinn) einseitigen Artikel über „Deutscher Alltag“, wo die Lebensqualität in beiden Teilen Deutschlands gleichgestellt wird. Viele Kommunisten, von der Weimarer Republik bis in die Gegenwart, werden als Helden oder Opfer dargestellt. Dagegen wird nicht ein einziges Opfer des totalitären DDR-Regimes benannt – keine Verfolgungen, keine Folter- und Todesopfer, kein Erschießen an der Mauer. Fazit: ein unverdauliches Identitätsstück, verfasst von einer kommunistischen eingewanderten Feminazi.

Great and beautiful Bookstores

In 2024 I visited many bookstores in Chile and abroad, buying some 400 books. The ten most memorable bookstores were the following.¹

Ábaco, Calle de La Iglesia con Calle de La Mantilla esquina N° 3-86, Cartagena de Indias, Colombia.



Debe haber sido en los años 2000, en uno de mis aproximadamente 15 viajes breves que he hecho a Cartagena desde los 1990 (todos por conferencias, en algunos me ha acompañado Greta), cuando descubrí esta joyita de librería, fundada y gerenciada por María Elsa Gutiérrez, hoy una amiga que me sugiere las mejores novelas recientes de Colombia e Hispanoamérica. La librería es muy bella; combina un pequeño café en barra y algunas mesitas entre las estanterías y los mesones de exposición de los libros. Con hermosas fotos en colores de fachadas de casonas cartaginesas, y retratos, en blanco y negro, de ilustres intelectuales y escritores en sus visitas a la librería. Cuando la fui a ver en abril de este año, María Elsa me mostró muy contenta el espacio contiguo a la librería, en reconstrucción por ella, para la extensión de *Ábaco*. Me fui con muchas ganas de volver a visitarla después de la inauguración de la extensión.

¹ I rather prefer the term bookstore to bookshop – google the differences.

Shakespeare and Co., 37 Rue de la Bûcherie, 75005 Paris.



In April I visited twice this wonderful bookstore, dans le Quartier Latin a la rive gauche de la Seine, probably for the third time in my life. It's crampy yet beautiful old rooms, filled up to the low ceilings with recently published books, mostly in English, exudes an atmosphere of mid-twentieth century. It includes an adjacent antiquarian bookstore and a café. It is such a busy Parisian tourist hotspot that visitors are required to queue up outside to be allowed to enter, in order to avoid excessive crowding indoors.

Among a dozen books, I bought on this visit the history of the bookstore:

Shakespeare and Co., Paris: A History of the Rag & Bone Shop at the Heart, which I described above.

More information on the store follows.

"I created this bookstore like a man would write a novel, building each room like a chapter, and I like people to open the door the way they open a book, a book that leads into a magic world in their imaginations." (George Whitman)

"Shakespeare and Company is an independent, English-language bookshop located on the banks of the Seine, opposite Notre-Dame. It has been a meeting place for writers and readers in Paris for more than seventy years.

In 1951, Shakespeare and Company was opened by George Whitman on rue de la Bûcherie. It was given its name by Sylvia Beach, who called the shop the "spiritual successor" to her own. Beach's bookstore, on rue de l'Odéon (1919-1941), had been a gathering place for the great expat writers of the time, including Hemingway, Stein, Fitzgerald, Eliot, and Pound—and it was Beach who first published Joyce's *Ulysses*, when no one else dared.

George's bookstore quickly became a center for anglophone literary life in Paris. James Baldwin, William Burroughs, Anaïs Nin, Allen Ginsberg, Richard Wright, Julio Cortázar, and Henry Miller were early visitors. From the first day—writers, artists, and intellectuals were invited to sleep for free among the shelves. Since then, more than 30,000 people have stayed in the bookshop, which itself has grown from a single narrow room on the ground floor to the labyrinth of books and nooks readers know today.

George's only child, Sylvia Whitman, now runs the bookshop with David Delannet, her partner in life and business. They've embarked on several new adventures, including adding a café, a literary festival, a writing contest, and a publishing arm. Shakespeare and Company continues to host regular literary events, which are available for free on the shop's podcast. Guests have included Zadie Smith, Don DeLillo, Carol Ann Duffy, Colson Whitehead, Leïla Slimani, Rachel Cusk, George Saunders, Karl Ove Knausgaard, and Jeanette Winterson.

George's novel, this bookshop, is today still being written by a dedicated team of booksellers and by all the people who continue to read, write, and sleep at Shakespeare and Company".

Galignani, 224 Rue Rivoli, 75001, Paris.



I also visited this beautiful French and English-language bookshop in April of this year, probably the fourth time in my life. There I bought some ten of the mostly recently (2022-2024) published French models, including those awarded with the most important French literature prizes. It is a wonderful place, where a shopkeeper suggested to me the books that I bought.

The store is beautiful but it lacks a café. Six generations have succeeded one another at the head of Galignani. In addition to the French novels I bought a dozen English-language books and the small French-language book *Galignani* (summarized above), which tells the story of the store.

Hugendubel in Frankfurt, Steinweg 12 (An der Hauptwache), Frankfurt am Main.

Sehr großer Buchladen der sich über vier Etagen hinzieht. Heute 8. Juni (wie vor 13 Monaten) besuchte ich dieses Buchparadies vier Stunden lang und kaufte 40 Bücher ein, hauptsächlich auf Deutsch, aber auch auf Englisch, Französisch und Spanisch. Ich kaufe hier seit 20 Jahren (seit Anfang der Neunziger); diese ist eine Filiale einer großen Buchladenkette.



Elliott Bay Book Company at 1521 10th Avenue, Seattle, WA, USA 98122.

This wonderful non-chain (i.e., unique) bookstore (with a nice café) holds over 150,000 titles on all subjects. In Seattle, I spent some 5 hours here on June 30, buying 40 books. When I visited, I was one of the few non-LGBTQ+ customers at the store, as many participants of this year's Gay Pride Parade streamed into this place after the parade ended. I exercised significant self-discipline, avoiding showing any mixed feelings about this particular sub-breed of the store's customers.



Hatchards at 187 Piccadilly St., London W1J 9LE.

It is not only one of the world's most beautiful bookstores but it's London's oldest bookshop and booksellers to the Royal households. Hatchards Bookshop was founded by John Hatchard in 1797 and holds three Royal Warrants. Today it is owned by the huge Waterstones chain of bookstores. Many authors come in to sign their new books at Hatchards; they also have a display of older first and special editions.



It is a beautiful five-story bookshop, located next to Fortnum and Mason and opposite the Royal Academy.

On occasion of our September visit in London, I revisited this wonderful place with Greta and Vivi.

Waterstones' Piccadilly store at 203-206 Piccadilly, St. James's, London W1J 9HD.

This is Britain's largest bookshop extending over five floors.

Just a block from Hatchards, I also revisited this huge book paradise and bought this time only non-fiction books, including a dozen recent publications on financial crises.



Librería El Virrey, Bolognesi 510, Miraflores, Lima, Perú.

Maravillosa librería, ubicada en una casona remodelada en una plazoleta de Miraflores. La entrada a la casona se bifurca entre un pequeño Starbucks, a la izquierda, y los primeros cuartos de esta preciosa gran librería. Me hizo amigo del administrador (Eloy Vergaray) y del dueño (Paco Sanseviero), este último hijo de los difuntos fundadores de la librería (ver tarjetas de abajo). Siguiendo las recomendaciones de ellos, compré nueva ficción peruana y preciosos volúmenes de fotografías de paisajes y de objetos de culturas precolombinas del Perú. Y dejé con ellos 12 libros, que no me cabían en mi maleta y deberé retirar en algún viaje futuro a Lima.





Kramerbooks (and Afterwords Café), Dupont Circle, 1517 Connecticut Ave NW, Washington, DC.

Greta and I discovered this wonderful medium-sized independent bookstore very early, shortly after moving to Washington in October 1988. We have been back ever since, browsing through the newest books and sometimes having dinner at the nice Café. Our most valuable discovery was the volume Francisco Varela co-edited on the first dialogue he organized between Western scientists and His Holiness the XIVth Dalai Lama and other Tibetan lamas in Dharamsala:

Francisco Varela and J. Hayward (eds.), 1992. *Gentle Bridges: Dialogues Between the Cognitive Sciences and the Buddhist Tradition*. Boston: Shambhala Press.

Reading this book in 1992 or 1993 was our first step on our long path to Tibetan Buddhism, on which the major milestone was our meeting with His Holiness (Prague, 2013), where he gave us his blessing.

On occasion of my seminars at the Fund and the Bank in November 2024, I visited Kramer's and bought two dozen recently published fiction and non-fiction titles.



Politics & Prose, 5015 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, DC.

This is one of the most beautiful and well-stocked stores in DC. I discovered it only some two decades ago. This time, on occasion of my visit in DC in November 2024, I bought some 20 books and 3 CDs here.



