



**DECEMBER 2016**

**HONEYBEE #44: 2016 BOOK LIST**

*With great joy, we present the Honeybee book list for 2016!*

*I am especially drawn to books at this time of year, partly because it always reminds me of my first season of investment work. When I received my very first, very modest holiday bonus in my first post-college December, I went straight to the bookstore, and for the first time ever I bought all the books I wanted. Even new releases. Even hardcovers without 30% off stickers on them. Woah.*

*I could think of no greater luxury than taking that bonus straight to the bookstore -- and still can't.*

*Here are a few of my latest luxuries, shared with glee.*

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***Beware the person of one book.***

***- Thomas Aquinas***

**BOOKS ABOUT NATURE & SCIENCE**

**[THE HIDDEN LIFE OF TREES](#), by Peter Wohlleben**

The best science is something very close to magical, and the best science writing is something very close to poetry. Many of you have already heard me wax on about the [wonders of mycelium](#), so this book is a dream come true – lots of the terrific recent science of forest networks, bundled up in a lovely package. As I read this book, I kept thinking of the contrast between the redwood forest where I studied biomimicry and the sad, single redwood specimen that lives in the Boston Public Garden, completely disconnected and out of place. It's not an artistic, unscientific leap to consider forests as a type of community, with some of the same attributes of human communities – Wohlleben illuminates these parallels convincingly, in prose that is both lyrical and logical.

### **I CONTAIN MULTITUDES, by Ed Yong**

Ed Yong is one of the best science writers around, and there is nothing more fascinating than microbes – except maybe fungi, which are fascinating for some similar reasons. If you want to better understand the tiny world that surrounds and supports (and maybe controls) the more visible world around us, there is no better resource than this. It leaves you feeling inspired and humbled in equal parts, one of my favorite combinations. You might also enjoy Ed’s ongoing work for [The Atlantic](#), and yes, he too has a TED talk, featuring [zombie roaches](#)– one of my all-time favorites.

### **WOMEN IN SCIENCE, by Rachel Ignatofsky**

Just as you’d expect, this book illustrates the terrific achievements of women in science. As you might not expect, it is beautiful, with Chagall-like illustrations of each scientist and brief summaries that highlight both their professional achievements and their personal stories. Read closer and you will see that each vignette also conveys the context of their time and the relevance of their work. This book may or may not be meant for younger readers, but what can I say? I loved it, and I learned a lot.

### **A CRUDE LOOK AT THE WHOLE, by John Miller**

As our professions and fields of study have become more specialized, it’s become harder and harder to see the whole. So much time and effort in investing, for example, is spent examining the “leaves on the trees”: we can describe each vein, each rib, each cell. But can we describe the whole tree? Can we even see that we’re in a forest? Miller’s central premise is that it’s helpful to look at the whole, that in doing so we see certain patterns that cannot be revealed up-close. The book is a great introduction to some fundamental concepts of complex systems, which Miller has helped to pioneer through his work with the Santa Fe Institute and Carnegie Mellon. Plus he’s really into ants and bees and slime molds, so you know he’s cool.

## **BOOKS ABOUT BUSINESS & INVESTING**

### **SHOE DOG, by Phil Knight**

*“For some, I realize, business is the all-out pursuits of profits, period, full stop, but for us business was no more about making money than being human is about making blood. Yes, the human body needs to make blood...But that day-to-day business of the human body isn’t our mission as human beings. It’s a basic process that enables our higher aims, and life always strives to transcend the basic processes of living... When you make something, when you improve something, when you deliver something, when you add some new thing or service into the lives of strangers, making them happier, or healthier, or safer, or better, you’re participating more fully in the whole grand human drama. More than simply alive, you’re helping others to live more fully, and if that’s business, all right, call me a businessman.”*

I thought I knew a lot about Nike, having tracked the company for a long time as an investor. Thankfully, Knight has chosen to tell a more candid and personal

history here, reminding us of how long and winding and perilous the road to “name brand” can be. This is the most thought-provoking business biography I’ve read since Walter Isaacson’s [Steve Jobs](#).

### **THE UNDOING PROJECT, by Michael Lewis**

I admit that this one has just landed on my doorstep, but I am taking the leap and highlighting it here because, Kahneman, Tversky, and Lewis, come on! Like many investors, I am already tremendously interested in Kahneman and Tversky’s work, and also tremendously interested in the nature of effective partnerships, and also tremendously interested in just about everything Michael Lewis has written. Full review to follow, but for now I’m thinking, trifecta.

***Subsection on Impact Investing – or, When Friends Write Books! There’s nothing more fun than seeing the word “by” followed by the name of someone you know. Here is a quartet of impact investing books written by friends and colleagues this year:***

### **GENDER LENS INVESTING, by Jackie VanderBrug and Joseph Quinlan**

Are you intrigued by the idea that there must be possibility in an under-engaged, under-represented, overlooked opportunity set that also happens to represent half of humankind? Are you mystified as to why “pink” is not a strategy? This is the first full-fledged book to explore the potential of gender lens investing, including helpful bridges from “why” to “how”. Jackie VanderBrug has been a leader in this field since her days at Criterion Institute, and her deep perspective on the nuance, history, and context of this arena shines through.

### **INHABITING INTERDEPENDENCE, by John Bloom**

John is a scholar of Rudolf Steiner and anthroposophy, an accomplished artist, and head of organizational culture at the amazing RSF Social Finance group. If you have longed for deeper, more creative thinking about the role of economy in society, or the connections between money and spirit, there is no better place to dive in than the pages of this book.

### **COMPANIES THAT MIMIC LIFE, by Joseph Bragdon**

A growing group of investors and business leaders consider companies to be living systems, not machines. Lucky for us, Jay Bragdon illustrates this shifting set of paradigms with specific case studies of large companies like Novo Nordisk, Nike, and ACE. This book is the *Built to Last* for living systems business, well worth exploring.

### **INTEGRATED INVESTING, by Bonnie Foley-Wong**

The first time I met Bonnie, she talked about investing with head, heart, body, and soul, and I have to tell you, these were foreign concepts to me at the time – I was a little bit freaked out. Luckily she’s been continuing to refine and practice these concepts and I’ve learned some more along the way, just in time to fully benefit from her book, which is inspirational and practical, all at once. If you want to engage in investing with tools beyond your spreadsheets, this book will help.

## **MEMOIR, ESSAYS, AND POETRY:**

### **MARROW, by Elizabeth Lesser**

Oh! How grateful I am for this book! For those of you who have read Elizabeth's [Broken Open](#) or [The Seeker's Guide](#), or those who have benefitted from the terrific work of the [Omega Institute](#), it will come as no surprise that this story contains layers and layers. Here we see how healing takes many forms, and how the invisible is tied to the visible. If you think you don't have time for the full book, please oh please view Elizabeth's latest [TED talk](#) - you will be glad for every second of it, I promise.

### **LAB GIRL, by Hope Jahren**

One of the first questions posed to an aspiring author is, *What's your category? And don't tell me it's kind of science and kind of philosophy and kind of personal, you need to pick.* Well, thank goodness, Hope Jahren did not pick. This book is a terrific integrated story – part memoir, part love letter to soil and leaves and trees, part meditation on true platonic love, part inspirational call to reflection and action. Each of these pieces is stunning, at times touching and at times hilarious, and each element is amplified and improved by the others. This is one of the most complete, most mesmerizing, most memorable books I have read in years. *A note on media:* I read part of this book, and listened to part of it; the audio brought surprising added inflection to Jahren's story, and her voice carried over in my mind to the parts that I read on paper.

### **UPSTREAM, by Mary Oliver**

It seems that I highlight every Mary Oliver as it is published, and for good reason. In theory, this is a collection of essays, but in reality, everything Mary Oliver writes is poetry. If you've ever wished for a little extra context, a little more narration to go with her poems, this volume provides it. I read this collection all through the tumultuous season of election discourse in the US, and it helped to soothe all of those jagged edges – not with numbness, but with clarity.

### **A SMALL PORCH, by Wendell Berry**

This book is a perfect combination: Sabbath poems written over the past couple of years, plus a tremendous long essay, *The Presence of Nature in the Natural World*. Each time I finished one of the poems (which continue on from the series contained in [This Day](#)), I had to close the book for a moment and close my eyes. And when I finished the first gulping-it-down-it's-so-good reading of the Long Conversation essay, I turned right back to the beginning, to give it the close and thoughtful – and SLOW – reading that it deserves. Wendell Berry is a treasure, as is this book. (With extra thanks to dear friend Ruth for gifting it to me!)

There is also a new edition of Berry's [Roots To The Earth](#) out this year, with wood etching illustrations by Wesley Bates, which is just beautiful and well worth seeing in real-paper form.

### **WHEN BREATH BECOMES AIR, by Paul Kalanithi**

Once in a blue moon, an amazing alchemy occurs in the midst of our greatest sorrow: the weight of our grief is transformed into gratitude, and hope, and love. Dr. Kalanithi and his wife Lucy have given us all such a gift with this book, which charts their own alchemy, and lets us share in it. I highly recommend reading this in one fell swoop, and following up with Oliver Sacks' [Gratitude](#).

## **BOOKS ABOUT PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT ME**

*Like many, I am increasingly concerned with the [filter bubble](#) – both the digital version and the real one. So, in addition to talking with real live people, I've been reading more intentionally about people who aren't just like me (which really might be why we all read in the first place). I've been trying to put down my "But I'm a good person! Not my Fault!" banner, and to really take things in with my heart as well as my brain, which is a lot harder than it sounds, and something my highly-trained analytical noggin still tries to reject.*

*Before diving into this list, it's worth reviewing the terrific TED talk by [Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie](#), *The Danger of a Single Story*. No one account can be complete, but if you collect enough different stories, and really take them in, you might begin to understand something that's nuanced and complex and evolving and real.*

### **HILLBILLY ELEGY, by J.D. Vance**

This personal tale by Vance, a quick read, gives insights into a life rooted in Appalachia. I was especially interested in Vance's perspective on the "homes away from home" that are relevant for many in America – the communities we've migrated to over time that are different-but-familiar versions of our hometowns, even when they might be far away. Vance is careful to note that his story is not THE story --- see the Adichie talk above regarding this point, and see groups like [Accelerating Appalachia](#) to provide another view --- but like any thoughtful, truthful account, his is illuminating and, in some ways, very familiar. (With thanks to Rick S. for this suggestion.)

### **BETWEEN THE WORLD & ME, by Ta-Nehisi Coates**

If you've already heard so much about this book that you feel like you've read it already, stop right there, and actually do read it. The format, written as a series of letters to his son, helped me to get past my own tendency to argue point-by-point in my head as I read, and instead to just take it in, this stunning mix of personal narrative, history, and social analysis. Some wish that the book offered more solutions or prescriptions, but I am glad that Coates focuses here on fundamental description of where we are now in America, without skipping ahead to "fixing it". Many have compared this writing to James Baldwin, to which I reply, just read some James Baldwin too.

### **MEN EXPLAIN THINGS TO ME, by Rebecca Solnit**

Have you wondered where the term [mansplaining](#) comes from? Do you think it's (just) a joke, and roll your eyes when you hear it? The title essay in this book is credited with inspiring the term, and it's well worth your time. In a poignant funny/not-funny anecdote, the author is faced with a party host who is insisting that she must investigate a terrific new book... that she herself wrote. It does not occur to him that she could be the author, even after her friend tells him so, repeatedly. Perhaps as important, Solnit herself wonders whether the host is correct, whether there could possibly be another book on the same photographer, highlighting the same historical and technological themes as her own. There's been a lot written about this one central anecdote, but the full content of this book, with essays that complement one other in powerful and unexpected ways, weaves together context and insights that are rich, multi-faceted, and well-rooted in history. Especially if you are a Good Guy (of any gender) who is still surprised by stories like [#yesallwomen](#) and [#notokay](#), or can't understand why "all the women leave" your office environment, or don't see the links between those two phrases I just wrote, this book is a difficult and helpful read. And yes, this is a total bait-and-switch in terms of category, because a good portion of this book is in fact about People Who Are Just Like Me.

### **FICTION AND ITS COUSINS:**

*Note: as I review this list, dear Honeybees, it occurs to me that our fiction highlights this year are all excellent, but not so happy-go-lucky; all of them are a bit bittersweet. Perhaps a mix of joy and sorrow is what makes for a good story, but I'm certainly open to more unabashedly happy or hopeful or lighthearted tales. If you have any sunshine-y fiction you'd like to share, please let me know!*

### **WELL-READ WOMEN, by Samantha Hahn**

Hehn combines gorgeous portraits of some of the most well-known women in literature with a single quote from each. Taken individually, they are interesting and entertaining. Taken as a composite, they are unforgettable, and heartbreaking. This would be a wonderful gift for a friend who already has "all the books". Coincidentally, I read this alongside [Women in Science](#), and the combination was wonderful.

### **MISTER MONKEY, by Francine Prose**

I am a sucker for books that gradually unveil a story through the points of view of different characters, from Raymond Carver's [Short Cuts](#) to the [Spoon River Anthology](#). For days after reading stories like this, I look around me in a different way, more curious, and more connected. Mister Monkey is a quirky addition to this genre, centering on the production of a children's play in New York. Absurd, humdrum, bittersweet – by the end, you realize, it's pretty true to life.

**COMMONWEALTH, by Ann Patchett**

How could you not get sucked into a story that starts with a baptism, a big bottle of gin, and a whole lotta orange trees? (Not to mention the automatic attraction due to Patchett's fantastic [Parnassus Books](#) in Nashville). Commonwealth tells a decidedly non-Brady Bunch story of six jumbled-up siblings from two sets of parents across decades of their lives. It's told in a form that hops back and forth between different times and different characters, so if you like your fiction linear this might not be the book for you. If, however, you love terrific writing with a little bit of a jigsaw-puzzle element for the reader, Commonwealth will be one of your favorites too.

**MY NAME IS LUCY BARTON, by Elizabeth Strout**

Strout is a writer of quiet stories that stick, like her own [Olive Kittridge](#), somewhat similar to [Barbara Pym](#) or [Kent Haruf](#). The setting is a hospital where Lucy is in the midst of a long recovery, and the writing conveys that sort of reflective, stream of consciousness, time-standing-still quality, where the past and present are both compressed and looped together. Lucy's childhood was not very good, and some of her reflections are somber, but that's exactly the reason that, by the end, I felt like we were great friends, as if she'd shared such confidences with me and me alone.

**HOW TO SET A FIRE AND WHY, by Jesse Ball**

A number of reviews compare this book to *Catcher in the Rye* and it's true, if [Holden Caulfield](#) were a modern girl, this might be his story. With every page, a little more complexity is revealed, so that as a reader, your earlier assumptions are constantly being revised and refined, demanding that you remain curious and non-judgmental. This sort of open-minded requirement is one of the most wonderful things an author can compel, and I like that the book demanded something of me beyond simple enjoyment of the captivating narrative.

I picked this book up after reading an intriguing note from Jesse Ball's editor, who reported that the author thinks for several weeks, not even picking up a pen. "Then he spools it out on the page, calls me up and says, 'I'm finished, and I think you'll like it.'" I do indeed like it, and I think you will too.

**VALLEY OF THE DOLLS, by Jacqueline Susann**

When the fascinating and fierce Patty Duke passed away earlier this year AND the book celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the press coverage made me realize I'd seen this movie, but never read the book. Suspend your judgment! I am telling you, this book is GOOD, full of subtleties that do not come through in the screen version. The stories of each character – both women and men – are more familiar than you might realize (or more than you might wish), and will make you intensely grateful for whatever love and support and health exist in your own life.

...and here is a sub-section of **fiction that is creepy** - and excellent:

**I'M THINKING OF ENDING THINGS, by Iain Reid**

Woah, this book goes fast – I read it in one big whoosh, and it's hard to imagine putting it down. It's got a choppy and quirky prose style that speeds things up and adds to the bad-dream, confused kind of feeling that I had as a reader (in a good way). For some folks the story is incomprehensible and for others it's far too obvious – for me it was just right, eerie and interesting, not full-out terrifying or mystifying. I do wonder if it would be even better as a short(er) story, but I liked the creepy loop-de-loop of the book and for me the quirky prose was a welcome and additive element.

*We featured the following spooky duo in our summer list, and with [The Vegetarian](#) popping up on a number of other "best of 2016" lists, thought it was worth repeating:*

**THE METAMORPHOSIS, by Franz Kafka**

Can you believe this book is 100 years old? 101, to be exact. It's hard to say anything of value regarding such a classic, so I'll just note that this time through I focused on the relationship of Gregor and his sister Grete, which revealed some different observations and questions than I'd ever had before. If you are going to watch a TV show tonight, consider reading this instead – it's less than 50 pages, and much more gripping than a CSI re-run. (Note: to continue the mash-up theme, listen to the Kafka-inspired [Samsa & Seuss](#) by the extraordinary David Rakoff.)

**THE VEGETARIAN, by Han Kang**

I'm pairing my revisit of [The Metamorphosis](#) with a newer novel, [The Vegetarian](#) (big thanks to [Bilal Hafeez](#) for this idea). Mesmerizing and creepy, author Han Kang is kind of like Kafka crossed with Haruki Murakami. The first third of the novel (it's told in 3 parts) is by far the most compelling, but it's the end of the story that highlights how fragile we all are. I'm not sure this is the most well-crafted book I'll read this year, but it might be the most haunting.

**BOOKS ABOUT HOME AND HEARTH:**

**DORIE'S COOKIES, by Dorie Greenspan**

My mom tells me that my first word was not "mama" or "dada", but "cookie", which will come as no surprise to those of you who have attended my holiday parties. It is Very Hard Indeed to impress me with a cookie book, especially one that is not vintage or self-published by a community group.... But wow, this book is awesome, and gorgeous. The introductory "techniques" pages alone are worth the price, and then there are 500 (!) more pages chock-full of cookie joy. Traditional and avant-garde, sweet and savory, including all of the recipes from Greenspan's legendary Beurre & Sel bakery. This is my new go-to cookie book, which is saying a lot. All throughout, the tone of writing is terrifically friendly and precise – similar



to [Joanne Chang](#) of Flour, who will happily tell you the lovely personal story of how a recipe came about and then remind you that when she says “beat for 5 minutes” she does not mean 4 minutes, or 6 minutes, but FIVE MINUTES. Got it?

### **[HOW TO CELEBRATE EVERYTHING](#), by Jenny Rosenstrach**

There is a snarky, cynical school of thought that is dismissive of food blogs that are written by people who are not professional chefs. Well, it’s great to browse through the beautiful [Eleven Madison Park](#) or [Atelier Crenn](#) volumes, but when I actually want to eat something with less than three days’ notice, I LOVE the more down to earth “normal person” resources. I love the blogs, I love the books, I love the family stories, I love the cute home-y accessories, I love the easy recipes. Plus, every once in a while you get a little gem like, “It’s on these shopping trips that I realize how much psychic energy I expend saying ‘no’ to things all year long.” Some of you will have heard of Jenny’s [blog](#), Dinner: A Love Story (also the title of her earlier [book](#)). I am a new and enthusiastic fan, and really, aren’t you looking for more to celebrate too? Save the snark for something more worthy of it.

### **[THE LITTLE BOOK OF HYGGE](#), by William Morrow**

As the days have been getting shorter, and darker, I’ve been recognizing the need for some new winter habits and rituals, and so naturally I’ve jumped on the hygge bandwagon (and no, I do not care if the whole idea is a [British](#) over-amplification of traditional Danish culture). I welcome the idea that we can embrace winter instead of fighting it, or fleeing it, and there are a lot of hygge traditions that align with contemplative practices and restoring rituals found across wide spans of time and geography. And, on a more superficial level, who doesn’t like a winter full of cozy socks, warm beverages, and good books? Speaking of books, there are many hygge volumes recently out, and more on the way: this lovely, compact publication is my favorite, full of great ideas for taming the wrath of winter, and even inspiring visions of snowy stay-cations instead of tropical flights.

*Note on media:* it is worth ordering this book in conventional, paper form, since much of its appeal is visual. The US version does not ship until January, but I found a copy in London (where, it’s true, there is now a whole hygge section in the bookstore) and if you are really eager/desperate, you can order it online through UK suppliers for immediate shipment.

## WANT MORE?

*Luckily there is lots of wonderful company when it comes to year-end book lists – here are just a few of my favorites. Please also consider supporting these people and organizations, as they provide constant input and inspiration for our own work. (Okay, Bill Gates might not need your financial support, but it would be nice to at least wish him well.)*

[Harvard Bookstore](#)

[Brookline Booksmith](#)

[BrainPickings](#)

[Farnam Street](#)

[NPR](#) – a magical sorting app that has a book for everyone.

[NY Times](#)

[Bill Gates](#)

## NON-BOOK-LOVERS ON YOUR LIST?

*Gosh, who are these people?! While I firmly believe there is a book for everyone, it's true that sometimes we seek other sorts of goods. Here are some helpful gift-seeking guides for those interested in linking product and purpose.*

- [Shop Your Values Guide](#) from Women Moving Millions
- [Sustainable Brands](#) gift guide 2016

...and two new apps that help with ongoing product searches:

- The [DoneGood](#) app or browser extension show you the most sustainable products when you search online
- The [Buy Up Index](#) is an app that helps you to purchase from brands most dedicated to gender equality

## A NOTE ON BOOKSELLERS

*Some people want to see every baseball park before they die. I would like that, but would be even more excited to follow Ann Patchett's outstanding [Bookstore Pilgrimage](#) list instead. Of course, I would add [Brookline Booksmith](#) and [Tattered Cover](#) to the list, and probably dozens of others, too. Alert readers may have noticed that many of our links connect you with a Very Large Online Retailer, and indeed, we appreciate that this retailer provides terrific customer service and helpful product detail. We are also loyal patrons of local booksellers, of course. In fact, one of my favorite ways to get to know a new area is to seek out its bookstore and its coffee shop (sometimes one and the same). The [IndieBound](#) organization can help you find these local booksellers wherever you may be (including my personal favorite, Brookline Booksmith) – and if you are an e-loving person, they have handy online functions too.*

<http://Brooklinebooksmith.com>

<http://www.indiebound.org>

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*If you have a garden and a library,  
you have everything you need.*

*- Cicero*