



HONEYBEE CAPITAL

FOUNDATION

Dear Honeybees,

It's my favorite time of year -- book season! I've read that there is a tradition in Iceland called *jolabokaflod*, "Yule Book Flood." On Christmas Eve, gifts of books are exchanged, and then everyone spends the evening reading. This is one idea that I hope will spread far and wide.

It brings me great joy to share these favorites with you, with best wishes for the new year.

BOOKS THAT HELP US TO IMAGINE

THE OVERSTORY, by Richard Powers

This is my favorite novel of the year. It's really a collection of intertwining novellas, each rooted in a different and deep connection (or reconnection) to trees. There are threads within that link to research like Suzanne Simard's and David Haskells's (**THE SONGS OF TREES**), so it's scientifically interesting, too. The premise of a grove of tree-stories might sound hokey, but these tales are beautiful and varied and heartbreaking, and they remind us of the ties we have that run so strong they are sometimes subconscious, until circumstance pulls them to the surface. I read much of this during a stormy indoors weekend and felt like I'd been for a long walk in the woods, which is about the best compliment I could ever give.

THE SONG OF ACHILLES, by Madeline Mille

CIRCE, by Madeline Miller

Last year I picked up a children's book of mythology and was reminded of the power and duration and depth of these stories that frame so much of our thinking, even today. And then along came these two terrific novels from Madeline Miller, whose lyrical prose has a strong spine of scholarship, since she has an MA in classics. The writing is graceful, the essence of the stories is mesmerizing, and the underlying premise -- that we are all the main characters of our own stories - makes you wonder about the backstories of all the intriguing characters you've ever encountered, whether in fiction or in life.

FLORIDA, by Lauren Groff

Well, it's called "Florida," but this is no spring break storybook. Groff's collection of short fiction is dark and murky and *good*. A wonderful counterbalance to the sugary stuff that's often served up for vacation reading.

[AN AMERICAN MARRIAGE](#), by Tayari Jones

The best stories show no seam between the macro and micro elements of their narrative, and this is how I know that Jones is an outstanding artist: this novel is seamless. The book is about a marriage, as the title says, but not just that. It's about growing into relationship, but not just that. It's about the justice system, and family, and race, and roots and grafts, and creation and destruction. And love.

This is one of my favorite books of the year.

[SING, UNBURIED, SING](#), by Jesmyn Ward

Woah, this book pulls you in. It's like reading Foucault, you think you're following along but then the narrator shifts and the time frame slips out from under you and before you know it you've done a chutes-and-ladders transfer to a whole different part of the story, each piece compelling and well crafted and haunting, and each page squeezes your heart a little bit more. By the end the pieces connect and the full picture finally comes into view... like arriving at an open vista after a twisty turny footpath that's been obscured by brush the whole way up. If you admire Toni Morrison's [Beloved](#), this is the book for you.

[THE ONE INSIDE](#), by Sam Shepard

Part fiction, part autobiography, often confusing, a little disturbing, and thoroughly compelling... this book will stick with you, its loop-de-loop narrative gradually forming a knotted-together whole. Shepard often worked at the Santa Fe Institute, and I liked to imagine these words echoing through the building there as he typed away. As it turns out, this was also Shepard's last published work, and there can be no more vivid example than this of what was lost in his passing. I listened to the audiobook version read by Bill Pullman, which added immeasurably to the experience. Curiously, this book and [Sing, Unburied, Sing](#) (above) have some fascinating similarities in their puzzle-piece constructions.

BOOKS THAT HELP US TO CONSIDER (AND RECONSIDER):

[HOW TO BE A GOOD CREATURE](#), by Sy Montgomery

This is a sweet little memoir told via encounters with thirteen animals. It has the quickness of [LOVE, LOSS, and WHAT I WORE](#), but with the poetry and accuracy of a naturalist. The prose is straightforward yet the content has substance, so this would be a terrific book to read together with a 10 year old child. And if you find yourself hooked on Montgomery's writing, a little while back I noted her illuminating [SOUL OF AN OCTOPUS](#)— and thankfully she is a prolific author, so there are many more.

[DARE TO LEAD](#), by Brene Brown

I've been following Brene Brown for quite some time now, and like any good teacher, her questions stay with you and deepen over time. [Dare to Lead](#) builds on Dr. Brown's earlier research on shame, vulnerability, and courage, and calls upon all of us to muster up a more complete, whole-hearted form of leadership, showing strength from within instead of an impenetrable game face. Whether you lead at work or in the community or in your family, chances are that your leadership training has been all strategy and negotiation. It will benefit all of us to re-center on responsibility and courage. Does this still sound soft and squishy to you? Test whether this rings true: "Leaders must either invest a reasonable amount of time

tending to fears and feelings, or squander an unreasonable amount of time trying to manage ineffective and unproductive behavior.”

This is a terrific and fairly focused application of Brown’s foundational research: I would note that Brown’s earlier work, like [DARING GREATLY](#) and [THE GIFTS OF IMPERFECTION](#) have even more universal appeal.

[WINNERS TAKE ALL](#), by Anand Giridharadas

If you respect anyone who points out the emperor has no clothes, even if you yourself are still admiring the brocade with gold trim, this is the book for you. It’s a squirmy read, questioning deep premises of capitalism and reward, of philanthropy and justice. You might want to debate half of the arguments in here, as I do, but that’s the point: they are worthy of deep consideration, and some of the questions will haunt you. For example, this summary note about advising some of our planet’s wealthiest people: “You can tell them to give more, but you can’t tell them to take less.” Ooof. Let’s think about that.

[BAD BLOOD](#), by John Carreyrou

In the “truth is stranger than fiction” category is this tale of Theranos, the visionary blood-testing idea gone horribly wrong. It’s easy to read this whole tale with a good dollop of judgment, thinking that it should have been easy to spot this business as a farce - but that’s a real copout, as there’s so much more to learn here. For me there are two lessons for me in reading Carreyrou’s detailed reporting of the company: first, a reminder of the role of fear and what a powerful motivator it can be. Fear of losing, fear of being left behind when a great new thing emerges, fear of looking foolish, fear of going against those in power, even if the power is falsely held. And second, a sort of sweet counterpoint, it reminded me how much we all want to believe in heroic, helpful, revolutionary ideas, even when faced with powerful contrary evidence. We are fearful creatures, and hopeful too. Theranos is a great case study in both.

[HOW TO CHANGE YOUR MIND](#), by Michael Pollan

If you’re trying to break the ice with a hipster from Brooklyn or Oakland, you might want to ask about their ayahuasca experience. There’s been a big uptrend in the use and understanding of this and many other psychedelics in recent years, though Pollan’s book is the first to examine the arena with his characteristic mix of journalistic thoroughness and first person perspective. This book is making me reconsider all I thought I knew about psilocybin, mescaline, and the rest – and in the process, makes me consider the long arc of other shifting perceptions we’ve collectively held, from tobacco to sugar to sunshine.

[TEN ARGUMENTS FOR DELETING YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS RIGHT NOW](#), by Jaron Lanier

One of the talks that has stuck with me most from the 2018 TED conference is Jaron Lanier’s “How We need to Remake the Internet.” Despite the titles of both that talk and this book, Lanier is not a ranting technophobe – quite the opposite. He holds a view of technology’s potential that is both idealistic and astute. Informed by his own pioneering career in VR, he speaks from an informed insider’s point of view, unlike many tech critics. He’s also poetic, for example when he summarizes social media economics as “selling people back to themselves.” If you are looking for a way to think about your own social media use, or if you want to consider the philosophical roots of the daily Facebook critiques in the news,

Lanier's commentary presents a thoughtful, nuanced view that is worthy of deep consideration.

For an introduction to some of the ideas in this book, see Lanier's fascinating [TED Talk](#) from 2018.

[FACTFULNESS](#), by Hans Rosling

Oh, Hans Rosling, how you are missed! This book was published posthumously, in partnership with Rosling's son and daughter-in-law, who also run the [Gapminder Foundation](#). The book is, as the name implies, full of facts – and important ones – but even more than that, this is a book that helps us all to be more statistically numerate. If you want to move beyond short-term-ism in your own thinking, if you want your kids to grow up with the capacity to assess data and to think critically about statistics, this book (and all of Rosling's work) is invaluable. It is also a great reminder of Rosling's own roots as a physician in Mozambique and the DRC, which informed his lifelong work.

There's a natural pairing between [Factfulness](#) and Matt Ridley's [RATIONAL OPTIMIST](#), or Steven Pinker's new [ENLIGHTENMENT NOW](#). Curiously Pinker's work has come under vicious attack, despite solid scholarship and careful presentation – one source of critique is the type that accompanies any endeavor that takes sweeping view of complex topics, where some important context is always lost in generalization. But another strand of critique runs deeper, and meaner, and is harder to explain. I wonder if this second is perhaps it is a sign that many of us are too fearful to allow for hope or optimism, even when it is rooted in accurate observation. At any rate, these two are also well worth reading and assessing for yourself.

You can see Rosling's legendary TED talks here:

https://www.ted.com/speakers/hans_rosling

[DOUGHNUT ECONOMICS: SEVEN WAYS TO THINK LIKE A 21ST CENTURY ECONOMIST](#), by Kate Raworth

Ignore the dorky title – though the book is indeed reader-friendly, as the cover implies, Raworth's content is important and serious and terrific and revolutionary. Even if you disagree with some of her arguments, it is healthy to question our assumptions once in a while, and the tenets of neoclassical economics run deep in our current economic and political systems. Raworth helps us to pull them into the light, so they can be properly seen, assessed, and updated.

If you prefer a video mini-version, here is Raworth's excellent TED talk –

https://www.ted.com/talks/kate_raworth_a_healthy_economy_should_be_designed_to_thrive_not_grow

BOOKS THAT HELP US FEEL NOURISHED:

[RILKE'S BOOK OF HOURS: LOVE POEMS TO GOD](#), by RM Rilke, Trans. Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy

It is rare to have a preferred translator, even for famous works of prose or poetry, but in this case I must insist, please seek out the Rilke translations from Joanna Macy and Anita Barrows. Every few days I find myself meditating on the line, "I live my life in widening circles that reach out across the world..." Seek this volume out. You will be glad.

IN THE SHELTER: FINDING A HOME IN THE WORLD, by Pádraig Ó Tuama

Listening to Pádraig Ó Tuama on a recent [OnBeing episode](#) felt like a wonderful homecoming. Okay, that's partly because he sounds like my great grandparents did, but it's also because of the powerful subjects he addressed, with a healthy dollop of humor and poetry (you can see more details on this in a recent [Sunday Best post](#) from Honeybee). We can learn so much from digging a little more, whether in life or in language, and Ó Tuama illustrates this beautifully. I want to learn more from anyone who knows that, in at least one language, "trust" translates as, "you are the place where I stand on the day when my feet are sore."

THE ART OF LOADING BRUSH, by Wendell Berry

I've been spending many Sunday mornings with Wendell Berry – well, with his writing – and there could be no better company. In this volume Berry speaks with poetry and frankness, cautioning against ungrounded idealism as much as mindless extraction.

THE COLLECTED POEMS OF THEODORE ROETHKE, by Theodore Roethke

Believe it or not, a Roethke quote popped up on my Bloomberg screen earlier this year: "Deep in their roots, all flowers keep the light." His writing is hopeful precisely because it does not ignore the darkness. Perfect reading for the long winter ahead.

A NOTE ON BOOKSELLERS

*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. 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>*

***Beware the person of one book.
- Thomas Aquinas***