



HONEYBEE CAPITAL

FOUNDATION

I know, some of you already have packed away the beach towels and flip-flops in favor of new notebooks and sharpened pencils... but wait! We are weeks away from summer's end, just coming into peak tomato season in New England and bridging into those glorious days when the mid day sun is still blazing but the evenings have a cooler tinge. The best part of summer is that window where we've recognized with a pang that it is indeed finite... but it's not over yet! The season might be fleeting, but there is nothing like sinking into a terrific book to make summer feel endless. Here are some of my recent favorites, plus a few earlier highlights repeated for good measure.

BOOKS THAT HELP US TO IMAGINE

RULES FOR VISITING, by Jessica Francis Kane

One afternoon is all it took to gobble up this charming book, about a horticulturalist who embarks on a series of old-fashioned in-person visits to reconnect with friends as she re-pots her own life. It is my favorite novel of the summer. If you are an introvert trying to navigate connection in a digitized world, if you are a grown-up who is reflecting on the nature of friendships, if you sometimes feel closer to trees than to coworkers, if you are looking for a book that is witty and wise and human, this is the one for you.

THERE THERE, by Tommy Orange

One of the greatest things about reading is that it can introduce us to other communities. When I was a little kid in rural Pennsylvania, I read about New York City. When I was a liberal arts student, I read about Edo, Japan. When I was working in finance, I read about bees. The great gift of There There is that it avoids the single story, introducing us to a whole web of individuals as they weave together to form a complete, painful, beautiful narrative about the urban Native American community around Oakland. It is powerful and awful and infuriating and gorgeous and one of the best books I've read in years.

FLEISCHMAN IS IN TROUBLE, by Taffy Brodesser-Akner

This novel reminded me of 80's-style Tama Janowitz, with its pitch-perfect account of the more superficial trappings of Manhattan life, from the yoga tops to the playdates to the takeout dinners. But under that veneer, as always, is life itself, and it's never quite as straightforward as it seems. In the midst of Brodesser-Akner's sharp observations, there is always a big dollop of love that shines through – for the characters, for their setting, for the layers underneath the surface – and it's that affection that keeps this story compelling and enjoyable and a little bit surprising.

NORMAL PEOPLE, by Sally Rooney

I have been searching for modern Irish writers, and was (rightfully) assured that Sally Rooney is a must-read author. I don't know how to describe the mix of lightness and darkness that goes into the best Irish writing (maybe the best of all writing), but it's right here for all to see. This book does not satisfy readers with an easy, pat ending, but it offers a deeper satisfaction, one of nuance and navigation and ongoing connection – one that is much more true to life.

WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING, by Delia Owens

Maybe I am on a roll with books about introverted naturalists – not that there's anything wrong with that. Ooooooh, this is a page-turner that is full of substance, not just fluff and sizzle. It's full of intrigue and mystery and a touch of violence and at its heart are two great love stories, one a human romance and one a love of place. Both stories are inspiring, and both are complicated. I'd especially recommend this to anyone who loves marshes, the incredible liminal zone where the land meets the sea.

CITY OF GIRLS, by Elizabeth Gilbert

I confess that I might be the only person on the planet who has not read *Eat, Pray, Love*, and so I am likely also one of a small group who can think of Elizabeth Gilbert without the weight of that tremendous early impression. In reading her latest novel, *City of Girls*, I was transported within minutes to 1940's New York, enthralled by each character, fully entertained, and a tiny bit scandalized. On one level this is simply a fascinating, finely crafted story, and on a whole other level it is a groundbreaking, take-off-the-masks kind of truth-telling – a reminder that reality is often so much more interesting than our cleaned-up accounts allow it to be.

BELOVED, by Toni Morrison

Toni Morrison has just passed, and it is easy to feel a great void opening up in the world, one that is likely to grow as the loss sinks in. For example, in the midst of this gorgeous and traumatic novel, we find a reflection of deepest love. "She is a friend of my mind. She gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order. It's good, you know, when you got a woman who is a friend of your mind." Great writing, great thinking, great feeling – these can gather us too. I was lucky to be present when Ms. Morrison visited Harvard Divinity School in 2012, where she spoke about altruism. "Evil has a blockbuster audience; Goodness lurks backstage. Evil has vivid speech; goodness bites its tongue." She spoke of the links between knowledge and moral clarity and goodness, of how we might consider goodness not as a victory over evil but as a process of wisdom-gathering that lands us in a different, and better, place.

[Click here](#) to read the full speech.

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 OVERSTORY, by Richard Powers

This is my favorite novel of the past 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 work, and David Haskells's [The Songs Of Trees](#), so it's scientifically interesting, too. The premise of a novel composed of grove of tree-stories might sound contrived, 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 Miller

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.

CONVENIENCE STORE WOMAN, by Sayaka Murata

It's a good sign when you can't quite come up with words to characterize a work of fiction. Convenience Store Woman is quirky and compelling and weirdly heroic, charting the course of a mini-mart employee in Japan as she finds her own unexpected definitions of identity and success. If you like [Murakami](#), or Han Kang's [The Vegetarian](#), or Lauren Groff's [Florida](#), I bet you will like this book too.

BOOKS THAT HELP US TO CONSIDER (AND RECONSIDER):

CAPITALISM WITHOUT CAPITAL, by Jonathan Haskel and Stian Westlake

Most of our business and analytical tools were created during the industrial era, geared toward assessing and managing equipment and factories and properties. These days, most of our companies rest upon intangible assets – software, creativity, employee motivation, customer loyalty – and our structures have not yet caught up. This book dives into the question, “how are intangible assets different?” and it explores both the pitfalls and possibilities of less capital-intensive capitalism. The role of equity changes from funding assets to providing liquidity, for example, and we also have the chance for thoughtful sustainability considerations to extend our time horizons. A great book for re-orienting from the rearview mirror to the windshield... highly recommended as a duet with [Doughnut Economics](#).

RANGE, by David Epstein

We’ve all heard a lot about the 10,000 hour rule, about the need to build deep expertise and domain knowledge. And we’ve all seen the toddler Tiger Woods photos where he’s holding a golf club, which seem to have the curious effect of making parents of young children feel that they are late for something very important indeed. Epstein makes a helpful counter-point here, highlighting the case for generalists, for experimentation, and even for quitting. In the ongoing fox vs. hedgehog debate, perhaps we’d all benefit from aiming for a little of both, as Epstein notes – T-shaped or Pi-shaped expertise, with a mix of both breadth and depth. Most of us are neither Federer nor Woods, but we can aim to be polymaths, rather than dilettantes.

ATOMIC HABITS, by James Clear

I am not a huge fan of how-to books, except for the intensely practical ones, like how to make blueberry jam or how to fix a dishwasher hose. Usually I have one of two thoughts: *everybody knows this already* or *this should be a post-in note and not a book*. However, once in a while there is a book on an important topic with just enough depth and focus, with the perfect mix of reflection and action. Clear’s explanations will help you to understand the gap between your ideals and your activity in a clear and blameless way, and (if you want) to engineer ways for that gap to lessen, and to stick. I listened to this book in one long car ride and by the time I arrived at my destination I’d already sketched out a simple and effective action plan for one of my most important goals.

BITCOIN BILLIONAIRES, by Ben Mezrich

Who doesn't love a tale of redemption – or possibly revenge? This account of Tyler and Cameron Winklevoss' post-Facebook dive into cryptocurrency has healthy doses of both, and perhaps more importantly, it traces the evolution of this field from the dark corners of the internet economy to something more mainstream. If you are still wondering how bitcoin came to be, if you are trying to figure out FB's Libra plans, or if you just love the drama of entrepreneurship, you will enjoy this book.

LEONARDO DA VINCI, by Walter Isaacson

We hear a lot about design thinking these days, but there is no modern guru who can top Da Vinci for true design thinking, fueled by curiosity and marrying art and science in the most glorious way. It's impossible to convey the real inner workings of genius, but Isaacson comes close, asking the "how" and "why" questions that go beyond a standard biographical account.

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 pharmaceuticals to tobacco to sugar to sunshine.

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

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. As Ola Rasling recently summarized, “things can be meaningfully better – and still unacceptably bad.” At any rate, these are worth reading and assessing for yourself.

You can see Rosling's legendary TED talks here:

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

DARE TO LEAD, by Brené Brown

I've been following Brené 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.

BOOKS THAT HELP US FEEL NOURISHED:

CONSOLATIONS, by David Whyte

I've been dipping in to this series of essays throughout the summer; each stands on its own, and they also gradually weave together into a blanket of - as the title suggests - consolation and comfort. One wonderful thing that happens when poets write prose is that you get phrases like this one, on regret: "Except for brief senses of having missed a tide...youth is not yet ready for the rich current of abiding regret that runs through and emboldens a mature life." Or this one, on rest: "Rest is the conversation between what we love to do and how we love to be." Before I transcribe the entire book, please go ahead and read it for yourself.

AN EXACT REPLICA OF A FIGMENT OF MY IMAGINATION, by Elizabeth McCracken

This is a story of grief, beautiful and profound and awful in its accuracy. You know how some memories sharpen to eagle-eye vision and some blur so that you can't tell one day or one month or one season from the next? And how both can somehow happen simultaneously, with an endless refrain of *what if, what if, what if* drumming underneath? "It's a happy life, but someone is missing. It's a happy life, *and* someone is missing." Yes.

THREE WOMEN, by Lisa Taddeo

I love many things about my Catholic faith, but one thing I do not love is how its numerous and detailed definitions of sin so easily steer our minds towards a mean form of judgment, devoid of empathy and humanity. Three Women is a nonfiction account of three women (really more than three) and their complicated personal experiences with desire and sex. I am hugely uncomfortable writing that last sentence, which is why I read this book, and why I recommend it to you, too. There are important questions here, some universal and some deeply personal.

QUEENSPOTTING, by Hilary Kearney

Just when I am ready to give up on social media, I'm reminded that there is still a wonderful function at its core. I first learned of Hilary Kearney's work as a beekeeper on Instagram, where she provides a lot of helpful lessons for beekeepers who are interested in bee-friendly practices. Kearney's book, Queenspotting, is an extension of her popular photo posts, which help novices to become more expert in identifying queen bees within a crowded hive. This is an informative little book, and also entertaining - you can use the beautiful fold-out illustrations to play a natural version of "Where's Waldo?" with friends and family.

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.

IN THE SHELTER: FINDING A HOME IN THE WORLD, by Padraig O Tuama

Listening to Padraig O 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 O 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."

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>*

STAYING IN TOUCH

Our next book list will be out near year-end, and we're already looking forward to it. If you'd like to stay in touch in the meantime, remember that we publish our short **Sunday Best** reflections every week. Just go to HoneybeeCapital.org and look for "join our mailing list" – it's a grey arrow on the right side of the screen for larger devices, and an orange banner at the bottom of the screen for smaller devices.

Beware the person of one book.
- Thomas Aquinas