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## staff picks



NEIL ALGER RECOMMENDS:

**VERA & LINUS**

[Jesse Ball and Thordis Björnsdottir](#)

In this fascinating collaboration between Jesse Ball and Thordis Björnsdottir, the land is alive, and it is up to no good. Written serially (or so it would seem), the title characters of this charming novel proceed to enact both violent and loving (and lovingly violent) scenarios on themselves and those (people and things) around them. Reminiscent of David Ohle's classic *Motorman* mixed in the blender with Roald Dahl's *The Twits* and served with a (poison) chocolate chip cookie. Don't miss the center section, "A METHOD FOR WAYLAYERS AND OTHER LIKE SORTS DEvised BY L. FOR PRACTICAL USE". Information contained herein will serve you well on those long trips through the forest. In short, one of the best things I've read in a really long time.



SANAZ YAMIN RECOMMENDS:

**THE BASKETBALL ARTICLE**

[Bernadette Meyer and Anne Waldman](#)

Don't expect scores and standings, or trades and tip-offs in *The Basketball Article*. It is instead a "purely prophetic work in the tradition of social realism" where the court can pit men against women, the Spurs against the Celtics, or poets against poets even, in a language challenge with forwards and fouls. Expect to be in the audience, while not rooting for a particular team, in conversation with players and publicity managers, while sipping a tequila sunrise, and bringing a book of Shakespeare's sonnets to the opposing team's bench. A book for both those who watch basketball as a national sport, and those who watch only because they think the team looks good in their uniforms.



RYAN PITTINGTON RECOMMENDS:

**POST WAR AND OTHER STORIES**  
F.S. Rosa

The first person narrator in this collection of short stories offers a detached but utterly concerned view of her life and friends; she is emotional without getting too excited, sarcastic, yet not unfeeling. The settings vary from her travels through India to a pet store or Safeway or party in San Francisco, to New York as it was in her youth. She writes with a spirit of dying revolution, of careful, apprehensive compassion, always with a meta-fictional touch that makes the text more personal rather than more theoretical, revealing an undeniable connection between Rosa and her main character Lena, a world recreated by the author and narrator together. When her friend Eric proposes that she concentrate on one idea in order to write the story in which they concurrently both exist, Lena thinks: "Even if Eric is only a device his suggestion still bothers me." Rosa's craft is carefully focused, making each piece quick, poignant, and definite. If you want to skip around, Post War, Chew Toy, and Grappa stand out in this collection (as author Kevin Killian agrees, apparently).



PHOEBE WAYNE RECOMMENDS:

**THE MEN: A LYRIC BOOK**  
Lisa Robertson

Lisa Robertson channels the men, insults the men, conjugates the men, laments the men, enjambes the men, adores the men, and above all, investigates men in this lyric book. The voices of lyric poetry's men loom in the text, as do the problems of gender and identity in the works that these writers leave us. Robertson makes use of lyric cut with sharp analysis, letting a mercurial subjectivity slide and flutter as the speaker considers men from different angles. The book is generous, angry, funny, and sad. In some of my favorite moments, the world develops as it comes both at and from the speaker, complicating subjectivity while leaving it open and hopeful:

"Sweet new style  
I walk as appearing  
Everything became what I saw."



JENNIFER DEARINGER RECOMMENDS:

**TRESPASSES**  
Padcha Tuntha-obas

Oscillating between English and Thai, these poems constantly transform as they encounter new challenges in this cultural split. Whether or not you can read the Thai (which I can't), Tuntha-obas layers a variety of poetic textures and narratives over one another achieving both a simultaneity and a sort of "betweenness" : "There's belonging/much more/than what's to be/in one place." In these poems, the place between cultures invites an examination of what shapes or creates words, customs, homes, selves, and of what good may come from each of these things. "There are all these things wanting to enter and all these beautiful things find their own ways of being uttered."



ALLI WARREN RECOMMENDS:

**CHEERLEADER'S GUIDE TO THE WORLD: COUNCIL BOOK**  
Stacy Doris

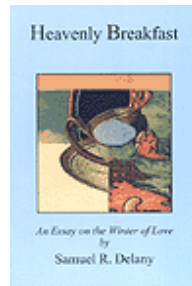
Rah rah for Stacy Doris' "cheerleader's guide to the world: council Book". Her lyric line is sharp here and dead-on. Despite being made of hugs (x) and kisses (o), the hand-drawn football plays [invasion depictions] are war-games. I read this writing as an attempt at counteraction, by transformation [translation], as "a pond of no separations".



BRENT CUNNINGHAM RECOMMENDS:

**DO NOT AWAKEN THEM WITH HAMMERS**  
Lidija Dimkovsky

Shouldn't everyone have a book in their library with some facing-page Macedonian? Whether you can read it or not (and generally not, I should guess) it's lovely to look at as you read these wonderfully foreign poems in their skilled & seductive English translation. Dimkovska is apparently a leading poet in Macedonia, but what's most pleasurable to me here is listening to the distances between American and Macedonian poetic cultures. Some poems struck me as somewhat classifiable, something like Czech-absurdist imitations of Beat prose poetry, but just as many were truly mystifying, entirely off all my known radars. "Krishna will start smelling of a 'Quatro stagione' pizza"--if that kind of strangeness leaves you pleasurablely dumbfounded, there's hundreds of such moments here.



KATIE HANNON RECOMMENDS:

**HEAVENLY BREAKFAST**  
Samuel Delany

Samuel Delany's memoir about New York's urban communes during the winter for '67 offers a gritty picture to counter the usual stories of peace and love during the summer of '68. Delany paints a loving portrait of the commune in which he lived, but at the same time casts a critical eye on communes in general and the idealistic programs that they often entail.



ANDREW KENOWER RECOMMENDS:

**SCOUT**  
Norma Cole

If you've ever wanted to stand in this prolific poet's childhood living room, glancing over a discursive photo album, while being read to about Baudelaire, Strontium-90, and "the warmth of neutrality", "Scout" is the multimedia text for you. Cole narrates from the pages of her artists' book (currently only available in this version) while images of San Francisco, Toronto and the book itself cascade in a double-window slide show. Veering between the quotidian and the cosmopolitan (in image and subject) this work is rich with variance and self-complication, offering an intense portrait of the author and the breadth of her scrutinizing eye.



MICHAEL NICOLOFF RECOMMENDS:

**CUNT-UPS**  
Dodie Bellamy

Lately I've been finding that a large chunk of the writing I've cut my teeth on- "the disjunctive/"innovative" work of Language writing on forward to now-has been feeling woozy, hermetic and weird (and not in the good way). I'm not talking about the accessibility v. difficulty question here ("causing productive discomfort" trumps both), but all this exploration of textual surfaces nonetheless seems too quick to cut the cord from the charged social language of the so-called real world and result in puffed-up quasi-intellectual wank-a-thons. It's a little ironic, then, that Dodie Bellamy's full-on dive into hardcore porny language in "Cunt-Ups" takes the path of that excess to a destination far more honest, intelligent, political, and socially engaged than the oh-so-serious work of many of her peers. Make no mistake: This is an incredibly dirty, funny, and irreverent book, grounded in that too-familiar

subject of sex, but the work here twists itself into a heavy and heady exploration of sexual borders. Genders and genitals switch mid-sentence only to dissolve into eroticized schlock-movie violence that in turn gives way to banal revelations like "I met you at the bus station in Chicago" or "I like fresh breads." It's too rare that a book goes off the textual deep end and yet extends outward to have direct effects on the sense of one's social self; "Cunt-Ups" is exactly that kind of book.



LAURA MORIARITY RECOMMENDS:

**INCUBATION: A SPACE FOR MONSTERS**  
Bhanu Kapil

This intriguing text addresses gender, genre, identity, sexuality and ethnicity in ways that complicate these issues. There is a sense of memoir and something like lyric celebration and a presence also of despair. Is it a horror story or reportage? Who and what is being created and by whom? You don't know but it is familiar and persuasive and good and strange and you want to know. You want to read more.

"Memory is a wall: images of motherhood in a medical setting, with black coffee coming from the overhead faucet in the café like fake blood in a black-and-white film. I can say whatever I want."



NEIL ALGER RECOMMENDS:

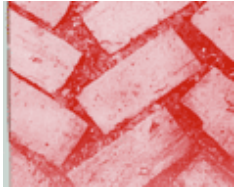
**I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVES**  
Boris Vian

So, what we have here is a false translation by a white Frenchman, from the "English" into the French, of a text theoretically written by an African American in the 1940s about an African American character passing as white to enact revenge against the privileged class for the murder of his brother. Stirring up a fair amount of controversy when it was first published in Paris in 1946, *I Spit On Your Graves* gained instant notoriety when it was found in a hotel room next to a dead body in 1947. Disturbing, violent, and yet still a fascinating exploration of mid-century racial issues from a handful of unique angles. Not a text for the squeamish reader.



ERIK SAPIN RECOMMENDS:

**AN EDUCATED HEART**



[Mairead Byrne](#)

My favorite poem from this collection:

Driver

We all die a little  
When we're with you in the car.

Byrne treats her subject like we should sip coffee and chat together in a morning kitchen. I often find that while reading her work she has taken me back home. I get to help with the chores and feel effective. A great many poetic styles are incorporated in her disarmingly charmed "small muscles of time." One of my very favorite poets, I read everything Mairéad Byrne writes.



JOHN ALLEN RECOMMENDS:

[NECROPHILIA VARIATIONS](#)  
[Supervert](#)

Stop. I know what you're thinking: "That's disgusting." And yes, this is not a book for the squeamish. But if you're looking for a truly different read, full of thoughts you've never even let yourself think before, you owe it to yourself to check out this collection of short stories and meditations. Told with surprising virtuosity in an almost maniacal range of voices, these stories explore more manifestations of the eros for thanatos than the Psychopathica Sexualis could hope to catalogue. Instead of keeping these disturbing urges at a comfortable distance, Supervert forces the reader to contemplate the nearness and familiarity, the recognizable and sometimes universal experiences that drive his characters to explore their repugnant desires. Supervert's necrophiles are doctors and businessmen, rich kids and heavy-metal guitarists, always reluctant to seek 'healing,' and often insistent upon the naturalness of their fetish-in short, not so far from ourselves as we might like to imagine. And once you make your way through this mind-bending mélange, there's always Extraterrestrial Sex Fetish, also by Supervert, to dive into next.

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