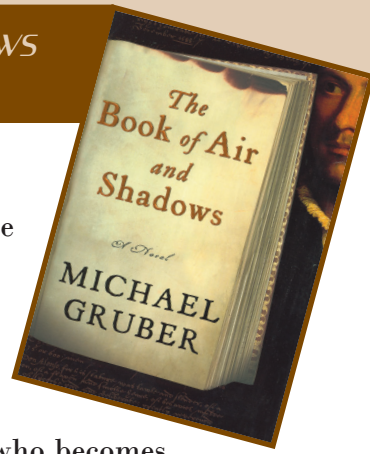


The Book of Air and Shadows
by MICHAEL GRUBER

HARPER COLLINS, 2007

A lost Shakespeare play waiting to be discovered is the premise in this intricate mystery. The plot revolves around two very different men: Al Crosetti, a young, naïve student working in a book shop who discovers letters in a rare work that mention a hidden Shakespeare play and Jake Mishkin, an intellectual property lawyer with a criminal father who becomes involved in tracking the lost play. Both Al and Jake hunt for the play across continents, facing gangsters, kidnappings and all types of mayhem.

Michael Gruber's weaving of historical detail about the life of Shakespeare makes this book interesting and his fictitious plot that Shakespeare's last play was a dramatic description of the death of Mary, Queen of Scots is an intriguing concept. This novel is fast moving with many characters and twists and turns in the story. It will appeal to readers who enjoy historical mysteries and are curious about the life and works of Shakespeare.



If Today Be Sweet
by THRITY UMRIGAR

WILLIAM MORROW, 2007

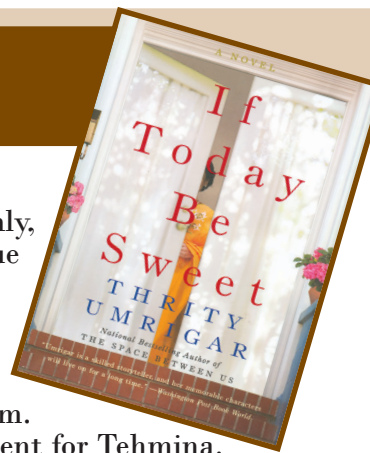
Tehmina's husband Rustom dies suddenly, leaving her to decide whether to continue living in her home in Bombay, India or moving to Ohio to live with her son, his American wife and grandson. Past short visits to America had always been enjoyable, but they had included Rustom. Now an extended visit proves very different for Tehmina.

As she struggles with the loss of her husband, the pace of life in America, and the conflict of cultures, Tehmina is confused and unhappy. Even more disturbing is the situation next door with two children being abused by their mother. Tehmina's daughter-in-law orders her not to get involved and certainly not to let their son have contact with the children.

With her visa expiring, Tehmina is no closer to choosing between India and Ohio. Only when Tehmina listens to her husband and acts according to her own conscience can she move forward.

"Why fret about the future if today be sweet? It's all you have, darling, is today."

Tehmina's decision reflects the value of community in one's life. This accomplished author blends cultures and connects characters on many different levels, making this a memorable read.



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by DAVID L. ROBBINS

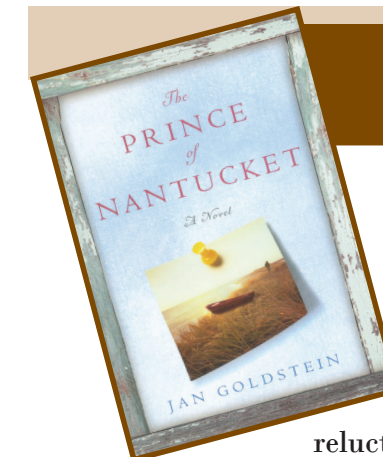
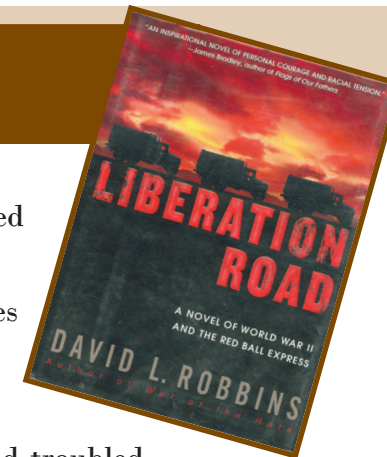
BANTAM, 2005

France, 1944. The Allies have just landed in Normandy and must fight their way through the hedgerows and villages toward Paris. Robbins weaves the stories of three disparate characters as they struggle across France, haunted by their pasts and fearing for their futures.

Chaplain Ben Kahn, an aging rabbi and troubled veteran of the trenches of the Great War, comes ashore with the troops, in hopes of not only giving some succor to the fighting men of the "Tough Ombres", but also to search for his own son, a downed B-17 pilot, missing in action and presumed dead. Joe Amos Biggs is a college-educated black sergeant destined by the Army to remain a "colored driver" of supply trucks for the advancing troops. He meets Kahn briefly on a narrow French road, neither realizing the impact each will have on the other later in the story. A third perspective is provided by a shady character known as "White Dog", a former B-17 pilot who has found a new life dealing in the black market in German-occupied Paris.

As the Allies advance across the countryside, supplying the Army becomes paramount. Six thousand trucks are pressed into service becoming the "Red Ball Express", driving food and ammunition in a one-way loop across France to the front lines. Joe Amos, longing to distinguish himself in real combat, drives day and night, taking down a German plane and finding love with a French woman along the way. His path collides with Rabbi Kahn as each comes to find his own manhood amidst the moral confusion and chaos of war.

Robbins provides a memorable vision of racial bigotry, courage, and redemption.



THE PRINCE of NANTUCKET

by JAN GOLDSTEIN

SHAYE AREHEART, 2007

Teddy Mathison, California golden boy and rising senatorial candidate, has just received a call from his sister threatening to expose him to the press for failing to care about his mother's struggle with Alzheimer's unless he comes home to Nantucket to help her. Teddy, very reluctantly, decides to make a quick trip which his ruthless campaign manager sees as a photo-op to improve his sagging "family values" numbers.

Teddy hasn't been back to Nantucket in seventeen years having been bitterly estranged from his mother whose behavior he believes sent his father to an early grave. To further complicate Teddy's trip east, it is his two weeks to have his troubled thirteen-year-old daughter, Zoe. Catching the next flight with Zoe in tow, Teddy prepares himself to confront his ailing mother and to say his peace about the past. Instead of the strong woman he recalls however, his mother, a world famous artist, has only fleeting periods of lucidity.

Faced with his mother's decline and his daughter's angst, Teddy realizes that he needs to set aside his arrogance and ego long enough to examine both his troubled past and the current direction of his life. With help from a local woman, he begins the path to wholeness: the true realization of self.

With a story reminiscent of Nicholas Sparks, Goldstein pulls the heartstrings.

"I could never be a good father because I turned my back on being your son."

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CONTRIBUTORS: MELISSA BARNARD, ANN JARVIS, JAN KIMMEL, SUDI KOTECHA, WENDY KRAUSE, KATHERINE REDWINE

EDITOR: JAN KIMMEL

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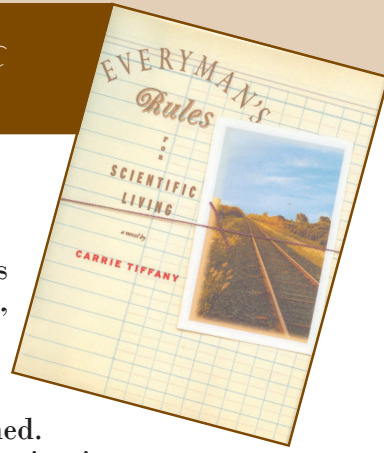
EVERYMAN'S Rules for Scientific Living by CARRIE TIFFANY

SCRIBNER, 2006

Jean Finnegan meets Robert Pettergree on the "Better Farming Train" in 1930's Australia. The train travels to rural areas teaching modern techniques for farming, animal husbandry, and keeping house. The train is filled with a community of eccentric personalities, each passionate about what they can teach the uninformed. Jean is a seamstress and Robert is a soil scientist.

The couple slowly gravitates toward each other and begins an awkward affair. Then Robert buys a farm and intends to bring his learned principles to test as a farmer. He asks Jean to marry him and to participate in his scientific expedition to prove that science can triumph over nature. She leaves her friends on the train to start a new life in the dusty back country. They meet their neighbors and settle into the routine of farming, though in their case, farming based on precise regulations and enhanced by the newest supplements and careful attention to selective planting. But, their good intentions are no match for drought, disease and pests. As their livelihood is failing, so is their marriage and connection to each other.

This debut novel for author Tiffany, was a selection on the shortlist for the 2006 Orange Prize for Fiction, the United Kingdom's prestigious literary award.



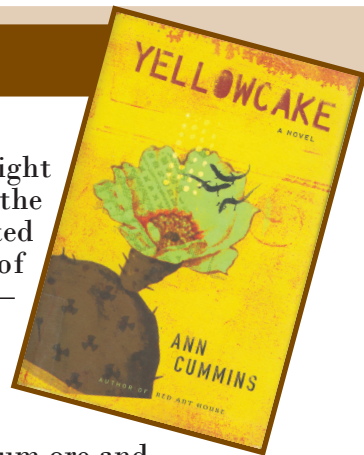
"Where is the heart in your useless rules? They just get in the way of you seeing things how they really are. They get in the way of the truth."

YELLOWCAKE by ANN CUMMINS

HOUGHTON Mifflin, 2007

This poignant, well-written story sheds light on the turmoil a chronic illness brings on the family and the community. Three interrelated families are experiencing the fallout of working in a uranium processing mill—yellowcake is the product.

Shortly after World War II, a processing mill was built on the Navajo reservation because it was near the source of the uranium ore and because the Navajo provided a cheap source of labor. After working for 30 years in the yellowcake mill, the workers begin to suffer from lung cancer and other organ failures. This is the backdrop for Cummins spare narrative, as each character is facing a turning-point in their lives. There are striking contrasts between young and old, living and dying, the new ways and the old ways. The outcomes are satisfying, as is reading the book. This is the most striking book I've read this year.



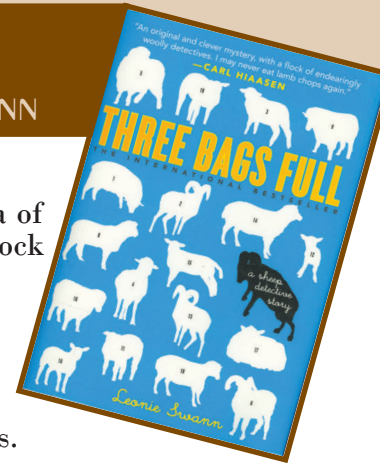
THREE BAGS FULL: A SHEEP DETECTIVE STORY by LEONIE SWANN

DOUBLEDAY, 2006

Just when we've gotten used to the idea of cats as animal sleuths, along comes a flock of detecting sheep! Led by Miss Maple (pun!), the smartest of them all, the sheep of Glennkill are determined to solve the murder of their beloved shepherd, George, who treated them better than a flock of his human friends.

The group struggles to gather clues, because, from a sheep's point of view, "it isn't easy to understand humans." Their attempt to separate the literal from the figurative meanings of what the humans are discussing is sometimes humorous and sometimes gloomy. Only by intentionally wandering away from the flock and inconspicuously gathering in plain sight can they overhear the humans and solve the case. Communicating their conclusions, however, becomes a huge dilemma until all is "dramatically" revealed at the annual "Smartest Sheep in Glennkill" contest.

The novel is filled with literary puns and allusions, making Swann's story both a philosophical tale for the serious reader and a quirky, fun read for others. Who knew sheep could be so entertaining!



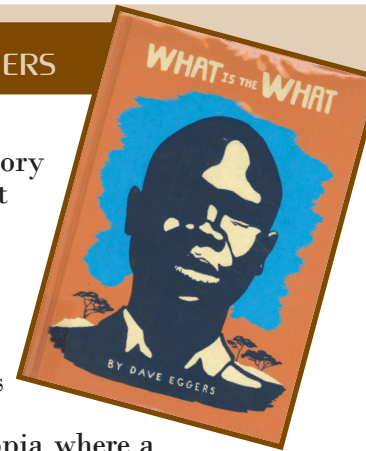
WHAT IS THE WHAT by DAVE EGGERS

MCSWEENEY'S, 2006

This is a book with a purpose: it is the story of Valentine Achak Deng's life as a "Lost Boy" from Sudan. When he is about 6, Deng's southern Sudanese village is attacked by Muslim murahaleen raiders, and he escapes alone to the forest. After running aimlessly for two days, he meets up with a group led by a teacher from his village. The teacher leads them, on foot and starving, across the border into Ethiopia where a refugee camp forms. Achak joins a large group of unaccompanied minors, mostly boys. The girls have mostly been kidnapped, are dead, or have remained with their families. After a regime change, the Ethiopians evict the refugees, and the boys again walk, back through Sudan, to northern Kenya, where the Kakuma Refugee Camp forms. Deng lives 10 years as a refugee before being resettled to Atlanta, Georgia.

Eggers constructs the novel as Deng telling the story through flashbacks. Deng's Atlanta apartment has been invaded by local robbers, and he is left tied up in his own living room. The story is compelling—Eggers' dialogue puts you right into the events as they happen. Even if you've read about these events, this book brings an immediacy that is impossible to overlook.

All of the proceeds from What Is the What will go to aiding the Sudanese in America and Sudan.



THE SOLITUDE OF THOMAS CAVE by GEORGINA HARDING

BLOOMSBURY, 2007

Thomas Cave, a taciturn 17th century Englishman, travels on a whaling expedition to the coast of Greenland. Responding to speculation by his shipmates about whether a man can survive an Arctic winter, Cave accepts a wager to remain in Greenland, alone and without aid, over the coming winter until the ship returns next season. As the ship sails off into the setting sun, Cave finds himself in complete solitude in his new Arctic habitat with only a small tent, a journal, his violin and a few subsistence supplies left by the ship.

As Cave prepares to face the brutal winter, he also finds he has to come to terms with his own past. Left with nothing but his thoughts to keep him company, memories of his dead wife and child flood his senses, his grief and loneliness almost overpowering. As the light leaves the Arctic and darkness transcends, Cave is haunted by his remembrances and also reflects on his relationship to God and the wilderness.

The bleakness of the landscape and the anguish of Cave's heart form an intense story of profound sorrow. Cave's tale is not only one of physical survival, but the survival of the soul as well.

Folded World by AMITY GAIGE

OTHER PRESS, 2007

This book is about a marriage and the stress placed upon it.

Charlie Shade is a "golden boy." He grew up well loved and seemed to succeed at whatever he chose to do. In high school his interest was running and now as an adult he has a heart for the mentally unstable. He recently started his first job as a social worker and he seems to be talented at helping his clients. He meets Alice, a product of a dysfunctional family. She is wracked by doubts and superstitions due to her own mother's insecurities. They find an instant and strong love for each other and marry. Soon after, Alice becomes pregnant and gives birth to twins. Alice finds parenting two demanding babies a challenge, especially since Charlie is gone long hours for his work.

Both Charlie's marriage and job are in jeopardy when he becomes too personally invested in a client that he feels obligated to help beyond the scope of his job description. Feeling neglected, Alice befriends a young man who turns out to be a previous client of her husband's and the relationship veers in an unhealthy direction.

Author Gaige does a good job in showing how sincere people can hurt each other with the best intentions.

