

Non-Fiction

1. **Robert M. Sapolsky, (American) A Primate's Memory: A Neuroscientist's Unconventional Life Among the Baboons.** Sapolsky, even when he was a kid at Brooklyn, imagined himself in Africa among animals. The kid's dream came true when he graduated from Stanford and got research funding to study primate's in Kenya. This is the personal account of a primatologist, his ordeals with bureaucracy, his personal engagements with the local people, the infinite patience and dedication with which he pursues his research, his heroic efforts to protect those animals. The narrative is hilarious and rich with personal anecdotes about living in the bush, sleeping with army ants and giant cockroaches, dinners with canned fish and spaghetti for months in a row, safari tourists. His descriptions of the social hierarchies of baboon societies, the continuous strive of males for dominance, the wisdom of females, the passage of these animals from childhood to adolescence to maturity, the accounts of the dangers he faced and the ingenuous ways he resolved them make a very interesting story. In his research, he must identify the stressed and relaxed members of the tribe, stalk them, outwit and dart them to take blood samples. His research busted two scientific myths: First, he made important discoveries on the role of stress hormones and its long term damaging effects in animals as well as humans. Animals and humans are more prone to suffer from high levels of testosterone when they find themselves in the lower steps of social ladder and in a subservient position. Second, the model of a troupe led by the alpha male was proven wrong as Sapolsky showed evidence for the intricate social organization of the animal squads and the very important role of the females. The book is really a pleasure to read.
2. **Barbara Natterson-Horowitz, Kathryn Bowers (American), Zoobiquity: What Animals Can Teach Us About Health and the Science of healing.** Up until the beginning of the 20th century, veterinarians and doctors were in close contact. In fact, their education proceeded on similar lines, and in the countryside one could function as the other. However, a split occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century. They stopped communicating, reading each other's journals, and the chiasm deepened with the human doctors feeling increasingly superior to the "animal doctors". First, there is so much that doctors and veterinarians can learn from each other, due to the analogy of physiologies and problems. Second, the veterinarians are exposed to a much larger variety of types, cases and animals while doctors treat only one type of animal. It is quite interesting to discover that animals suffer from physical and psychological ailments much similar to those of humans, ranging from obesity to compulsory behavior, from depression to self-inflicted wounds. Therefore this is also an occasion to redefine the boundaries of medicine. To cite some cases: Addiction is often considered detestable in humans, and often viewed as a criminal behavior as if the addict could simply turn the key off his/her addiction, but does not will/want to do so. When we observe that addiction is so widespread among animal species, then we realize that it is more a mental illness and should be handled as such. Birds, horses, waxwings, cattle, rats .. all go after intoxicating berries, weeds, grass etc., sometimes to the point of endangering their survival and procreation. Panic and heart attack: Humans may react strongly

to threats and danger, e.g., a major earthquake and die of heart attack. Many animals have similar reaction, as well. Birds who suffer an attack by a cat, or are caught by a net, later to be liberated by bird-loving naturalists, even though they may not have suffered physiological damage, still may die due to heart attack. Humans, with perfectly normal hearts and clean arteries, may die of the “broken—heart syndrome”, i.e., of cardiomyopathy due to severe disappointment (e.g., penalty kicks in a tie situation of a football match), fear, stress, even joy. But so do animals, for example, due to capture stress. Even SIDS: Sudden Infant Death Syndrome or crib death can be explained in these lines. Obesity and anorexia: Obesity is presently of epidemic proportions in the world, and many believe it to be a unique human phenomenon, due to modern life, dietary habits and unprecedented availability of food. In fact, obesity is also widespread among animals from house pets to grizzly bears in the wild or to city rats. Animals in the zoo, if fed without dietary control, all tend toward obesity. But even in the wild, given opportunities, rats, fish, reptiles, monkeys, whales, marmots ... all indulge in food, their bodies can swell beyond recognition: Thus one can even state that obesity is a disease of the environment. Self-injury: Psychiatrist often have to deal with the cases of self-injurers. People who take a sharp object, and cut themselves, self-mutilators, and even bliss and relaxation out of it. But then there are birds that pluck their feathers, even pecking the underlying skin to bleeding. There are cats, that lick themselves till the hair is gone, and the skin turns into oozing sores without any apparent skin irritation, fungus or infection. There are turtles biting their legs, snakes chewing their tails, horses nipping their sides to reopen old wounds. Grooming gone wild? The book is immensely rich in observations, case studies, comparisons: A true pleasure to read.

3. **Daniel Kahneman (Israeli-American) Thinking, Fast and Slow**. A splendid book, “a lifetime’s worth of wisdom” as said by Steven D. Lewitt, in the praise of the book. The book is focused on how people make their decisions, how and why they are biased or fallible in their judgments, how subjective they are in the estimation of probability of events etc. It is difficult to give a summary of the book, hence it would be best to itemize the highlights of the wisdom. 1) System 1 and System 2: People have a tendency to quickly evaluate a situation and reach a judgment, with gut feelings, without time and effort for deep reflection. This rapid reaction of assessing the situation is essential for survival to avoid life threatening risks. System 1 utilizes the accumulated learned life experiences, it has direct access to the emotional center of the brain, and this type of thinking is most of the time quite correct. But there are occasions when it errs and humans could profit immensely by incorporating System 2. System 2, in contrast, is slow in processing information, but it engages the intellectual part of the brain, it is rational, and devoid often of emotions. 2) Risk aversion: People are conditioned to averts risks and almost always a slightly inferior but sure case. To the prototypical question: “Would you like to have 900 USD for sure or 90% chance of winning 1000 USD”, the overwhelming majority prefer the sure case of 900 USD since the alternative case carries a slight risk, hence the possibility of not gaining at all. People choose the risky option only if their odds of gaining is very slim, for example, to the question “Would you prefer loosing 900 USD for sure or take a chance of loosing 1000 USD with 90% probability, people surely opt for gambling. 3) Pain in losing: People feel a disproportionate amount of discomfort in loosing, say 100 USD, in comparison to the satisfaction of gaining, say again 100 USD: The emotional curve is very steep on the negative (loss) side as compared to the positive

(gain) side. This is what makes compromises and agreements so difficult in negotiations, because each compromise is painful and must be compensated by an equally painful compromise imposed on the adversary. The risk aversion carries on to all aspects of our lives, for example, in marriages a bad act needs to be compensated by at least five good acts, or a single bad act can ruin a lifelong friendship.

4) Possibility and certainty: Objective and subjective probabilities do not correspond to each other, especially at the extremes. There is a big difference between 0% and 5% probability because one assesses from impossibility to possibility, no matter how unlikely. This is what drives people to gamble, to buy lottery tickets, albeit with a minuscule probability of winning, or to have a disproportionate fear when there is a 5% likelihood of amputation. On the other extreme, 100% probability represents the sure case, while a 95 chance of winning decreases the subjective utility of this event by 20%! This is also why rare events can be so much exaggerated; for example, this is why terrorism is so influential.

5) Reference level: When estimating an unknown quantity, people hold on to whatever knowledge or reference value they have. Whatever the people are holding, right or wrong, forms the reference level. Therefore any diminution of that level, no matter how irrelevant, how unneeded, still constitutes a loss. This is what makes negotiations with unions, disarmament negotiations, and compromises so difficult.

6) Utility versus prospect theory: This is perhaps the most important contribution of the author and with the theory of prospect and regret he has changed a theory that had survived intact for 300 years!. Bernoulli had proposed that the utility, the feeling of gain, follows a saturating curve, such that, for example, a step up of wealth from 1 million to 2 million represents a jump from 10 to 30 on a scale of 100. On the other hand, the same amount of jump of 1 million, when going from 9 to 10 millions of wealth, represents a utility of only 4 points. The prospect theory states that the reference point plays a big role in our evaluations.

7) WYSIATI: System 1 is also called a machine to jumps to conclusions given the fact that people have the WYSIATI: What You See Is All There Is. In other words, human mind, a bit lazy, will try to utilize whatever it knows or it observes to reconstruct a reasonable explanation for any problem it is facing. If the explanation is plausible, correct or not, the mind will be satisfied with the explanation. It would take a great effort to invoke the more rational, the more investigative System 2.

8) The Framing Effect: Our choices and decisions are heavily influenced by inconsequential details, information that has nothing to do with the essence of the question. Thus the framing of a question has great effect, like the choice between “A vaccine that will save for sure 200 out of 600 people, and, a vaccine that will let two thirds of the 600 people die”. Both questions are identical but the System 1 will choose the option that seems to have a moral frame, i.e., saving the people in this case. Formulated in another way, the people will choose the alternative, and they will be very surprised that they generated contradictory answers while they sincerely believed that they were making rational choices. The same framing effect applies to the choice presented as opt in, that the person must have decided about the option, his system 2 must have reflected upon it to conscientiously mark the pot in box; the opt out is much more effective in recruiting volunteers as this would demand an effort of removing herself from the list. In summary the myth of that humans can make rational decisions is clearly busted.

9) Living self versus remembering self: If there were a meter recording instant by instant our state of happiness or dissatisfaction, and if one were to trace the time curve of the experienced mental state, one would think that the area under the curve would be equal to the total (un)happiness experienced within this time interval. On the

contrary, the integral of the curve is not related at all to the remembrance of that period one has lived. What matters most consists of two things: How it ended and the peak of the curve, i.e., the most (un)happy instant. Thus the remembrance of the lived life experiences is very nonlinearly mapped; furthermore it is practically independent of the duration of the life experience.

4. **Roger Crowley (British) 1453: The Holy War for Constantinople and the Clash of Islam and the West.**

We were told the story of the fall of Constantinople as consisting of Ottoman armies setting the siege to the walls, bombarding it with huge cannons and conquering the city and Mehmet II making it the capital of his empire. With this book, one discovers the immense human sacrifice of the attacking and defending armies, the desperate defense of the city by the heavily outnumbered Byzantines, the military ingenuity of both parties, how both sides, profoundly religious, invoked the help and the intercession of God on their side, and the ultimate collision of the Christian and Islamic faiths. Crowley presents a balanced account of the historical facts, giving interesting details on both sides, with a narrative that keeps you in suspense. I found interesting the following points: i) Constantinople was coveted by many nations, especially the Arabs who attempted to conquer it in the 7th century twice. The Arabs, and later the Turks were exhorted by Prophet Mohammed who on more than one occasion alluded to or stated the inevitable conquest of Istanbul by Moslem forces. ii) The whole of Anatolia as well as most of Balkans were occupied by the Ottoman Empire so much so that the Byzantine Empire had shrunk to the size of a 30 km square city. And yet this city with its population only one fifteenth of the size of its glorious days and outnumbered 8:1, could still resist the Ottoman siege for almost two months. iii) The defense walls of Constantinople were formidable and constructed in the 4th century; they were the results of the Roman genius and experience in construction. Since the walls had resisted several sieges in history, there was a general belief of their invincibility. However, Mehmet II had two important tools in his hands: The immense cannons actually engineered by a Hungarian expert shelling the city day and night, and the almost limitless warrior manpower. iv) The Italians: Genovese and Venetians, contributed very significantly to the defense of the city. In fact, the defense of the walls was assigned entirely to a Giustiniani, who day and night found ingenious solutions to repair the crumbling walls and successfully organized the whole defense operation. More could have been done had the Papacy and the Italian states on one hand, and the Latin and Orthodox churches on the other hand agreed to cooperate. v) Why did the Turks wanted to conquer the city so much? First, it was the Red Apple, a goal set by Prophet Mohammed and aggrandized by the Arabs; second, there was the illusion, actually the delusion, of unprecedented riches as war booty; politically Ottomans who were expanding into Europe, thought that Constantinople would be like a bone in their throat and a pretext for the European armies to mount a crusade. After the capture of Constantinople, the next Red Apple became Rome, and then Vienna. vi) What happened when the city was captured? There was a lot of bloodshed, about 4.000 of the Byzantines died, and one day of looting the houses as well as churches both in precious metals, gems as well as herding people into slavery. The 30.000 or so citizens of the city was driven away into slavery and perished into the gene pool of Anatolian people. Some of the Turks became extremely rich as a consequence of looting. Just a few of the nobles could buy their freedom and they were dispersed into the Aegean islands and to Italy. Fatih continued his empire building for thirty more years, while Constantine XI perished. His

unaccounted death became the source of a myth among the Greeks that one day he would come and re-take the city; this dream lasted until the invading Greek armies were repulsed from Anatolia in 1922. vii) What happened to the city? Fatih found a city in ruins and much impoverished. He tried to create a cosmopolitan city by importing Christian people from all over Anatolia and assigning them their separate living quarters. The city flourished and became a lively place reaching a population of half a million in the 17th century. In fact, Fatih had a dream of a world empire, one state, one religion, one ruler and one capita: Constantinople. viii) How did the Europeans react? While the Moslems were rejoicing all over in the Middle East, there was a dismay and panic wherever the news reached Europe. Each city felt bitter about the loss of the Eastern bastion of Christianity, and feared for its own sort realizing that they could be in line for an eventual Ottoman attack. ix) Italians fought bravely and cleverly for the defense of the city both to save the commercial interests of the Genovese and Venetian states, but also for the sake of defending Christianity against Islam. In fact, they thought that they did more to defend the city against Turks than the Greeks themselves, whom they accused of cowardice and profiteering.

5. **Richard Dawkins (American) The Greatest Show on Earth:** Great subject and great narration: The subject of evolution could not have been explained more convincingly, in a manner more didactic, and more entertaining. The chapters flow smoothly, like a banquet of proofs, anecdotes, examples from nature; each chapter refutes one other argument of negationists and creationists, and each answers one other aspect or proof of evolution. I will summarize three arguments in defense of evolution. I) Evolution cannot be observed: Evolution has been observed both in nature over tens of generations and in laboratory conditions over thousands of generations. In an ingenious generation, bacterial evolution has been observed over 45,000 generations, spanning 20 years or 7000 days and 6 to 7 generations per day. Twelve separate groups of bacterial evolution streaks were prepared. The experiment consisted of starting with E. coli bacteria feeding them with glucose such that they would stop reproducing at the exhaustion of the feed; next generation consists of a new feed of glucose and a vestige of bacteria of the previous generation. Recall that bacteria can be frozen, where they stop reproducing as if clocks were stopped; however, as soon as they are thawed they start living and reproducing. At the end of the experiment, it has been observed all bacteria had grown in size to better survive under starvation conditions. Furthermore, each streak had different growth curve; finally bacteria differed in several of their genes. All these point to survival adaptation or evolution. Isolation and evolution: Spatial isolation is one of the promoters of evolution. Here “island“ may correspond to a lake surrounded by land without access to other water bodies for a fish, trees on an alley for a type insect, a real island in the ocean for a mammal, a single leaf of a tree for a nematode, that is, depending on the type of creature. If a population is geographically isolated, over thousands of generations they evolve gradually over different paths and eventually they reach a point where they cannot cross-fertilize anymore. This is the point of speciation. Had the isolation not taken effect, at early stages of gene differentiation and mutation, they would be able to cross-fertilize, and this gene flow would have wiped out possibility of any speciation. The

isolation can occur when an insect or a bird accidentally flies into a remote island, possibly pushed by a tempest, by an volcanic eruption or earthquake that changes the course of a river or creates a barrier between two populations of the same species. Most of the species observed on the earth can be explained by geographical isolation as a promoter of evolution. III) Is there a project manager? Life is so complex that there is a tendency to feel awe and assume that there is a supernatural planner or project manager. In fact, what seems so complex can be explained by simple laws of biochemistry and local interactions of cells. The cellular division is the motor force basically driving the auto-assembly process in analogy to origami taking different shapes or in analogy to Lego construction. This is the bottom-up growth, and not a top-down sequence of steps. The cell division, through the successive steps of expansion, blastulation, gastrulation, neuralation develops and specializes into nerve fibers, the spinal cord, the brain or the stomach. IV) We are all cousins: Consider the vertebrates: From pterodactyle to homo sapiens, from bat to flying dragon, from horse to wolf, all have exactly the same skeletal plan. Of course, they differ in details, like birds have developed much longer hand fingers or longer vertebrates to support their wings; the horses, on the contrary have extremely reduced fingers all almost collapsed into one; our query is non-functional and petit, while those of lemurs and monkeys are extremely functional, long and strong.

- 6. Oliver Sacks (American), *The Mind's Eye*.** Once more Sacks strikes us with a treasure pot of lifelong experiences, reflections, diagnosis, anecdotes. There are two types of vision: The first one is the neuro-chemical image that starts with luminances, colors, textures impinging on our retina, being neurologically transformed till reaching cortical layers and reaching the conscious level of seeing the scene. The second is visual imagery, the eye in the mind, that is, the awareness of images produced by the mind, sort of internal eye. Mental imagery (varieties of which are sometimes colloquially referred to as “visualizing,” “seeing in the mind's eye,” “hearing in the head,” “imagining the feel of,” etc.) is *quasi-perceptual experience*; it resembles perceptual experience, but occurs in the absence of the appropriate external stimuli. The author first dwells on the question of how we think and create mental images. What are in fact these images? Do we think through these internal representations like words, symbols, and images as various types primary tools? In fact, biological vision and mental imagery collaborate to furnish us with conscious vision. Visual perception occurs with visual imagery, matching what the eye sees, the retina's output with memory images in the brain. Otherwise no visual recognition occurs. Mental imagery, mental rehearsal, visualization are all crucial in thought itself, in problem solving, planning, designing, theorizing activities. Thus imagery has often been believed to play a very large, even pivotal, role in both memory and motivation. It is also commonly believed to be centrally involved in visuo-spatial reasoning and inventive or creative thought. Indeed, according to a long dominant philosophical tradition, it plays a crucial role in *all* thought processes, and provides the semantic grounding for language. Sack points out that though the phenomena of seeing, recognizing objects under an infinite variety of appearances is extremely complicated, we seem to perform it effortlessly. Yet, as many other human faculties we become keenly aware of it when that faculty is missing either congenitally or more acutely due to a brain damage or neurodegenerative disease. One such phenomenon is *prosopagnosia*, the

lack of capability to recognize faces. During face recognition, we parse visual aspects of the face, particular features and the overall configuration, and at the same time, we summon memories, experiences and feelings associated with that face, generating a sense of association and meaning. Though the fusiform face area seems responsible for faces, in fact areas dedicated to emotion and memory, amygdala and hippocampi mediate at the multimodal level emotional familiarity. Thus recognition is based on knowledge, familiarity is based feelings, and the two have different neural bases. Prosopagnosia is like color blindness, tone deafness or lack of stereo vision, the latter due to the fact that binocular vision does not occur when the two eyes movements are not coordinated. Interestingly, the author himself is prosopagnostic congenitally. Such people view the world as flat, as they lack the ability to perceive depth. People who gain stereo vision are everyday enchanted with the richness and beauty of the world, of foliage, of rain drop, of flowers etc. when seen in 3D. Sack is a superb narrator. The chapter when the author tells his own first-hand account when he was identified with retinal cancer, the consequent deformed and blurred vision, the treatment process and regaining almost normal sight is also very thought-provoking.

- 7. Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson (American), Mistakes Were Made (but not by me).** This interesting book investigates why and how we justify our foolish beliefs, why we defend and insist on our bad decisions, and justify hurtful acts. Humans are fallible and quick to instinctively to defend themselves and point out to other people and external factors as the cause of mishaps. This happens to everybody: psychologists that refuse to admit that they had interpreted facts wrongly and caused their patients to be hurt by their wrong diagnoses. Politicians that are ready to inculcate every other person and circumstantial fact to eschew responsibility. For example, when questioned on the awful events in Chili, Nicaragua and other South American nations, Kissinger said that "Mistakes could have been by people during my administration" , though he himself was the administration. There is the case of security or judicial forces, that once believing of the guilt of somebody, they are hard to be convinced otherwise despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. The authors point to ethical slips and favor exchanges, that are like cancerous cells in Turkish society. No matter how much we believe on our intact integrity, we are fallible to ethical slips and their rationalization. It may come as a request from a friend, as a carrot for career advancement, as an innocent gift from a company that forces us to a little bit to bend. The subsequent steps however come only too easily: than one day we become aware of the big unethical leap we have taken. Similarly, accepting gifts, favors etc. puts us immediately in a subservient or indebted position, and this emotional state of mind can interfere with our rational thought. Thus it is not uncommon to see bosses who kick downward and kiss upward. Another phenomenon is confirmation

bias or avoidance of cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is defensive reaction of “I am in principle a good and honest person, it could not have been me that has committed that treachery, that heinous act, that stabbing my friend from the back; therefore, there must be reasons for it beyond my power that swept me. Once we are committed to an act, to a belief, we are pleased to interpret events to confirm our standing, and hate to see contradictory evidence, data and observations that cause a dissonance with our commitments. This of course forces us to discard the evidence or distort it to minimize the cognitive dissonance. It is a good step toward the old dictum “Gnosci te ipsum”.

8. **Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson (American), *The Pig Who Sang to the Moon*.** Although so much research has been done on the behavior of wild animals, it is surprising that so little attention has been paid to the emotional world of farm animals. Masson basically claims the following: i) All animals, and farm animals in particular, have emotional lives similar to ours, and they are different only in degree but not in kind. Animals enjoy immensely the company of each other, and often the company of humans. Furthermore, the behaviors they have inherited through millions of years of evolution in the wild are still skin deep in their genes. The domestication and especially the dullness of the farm life may have slightly suppressed their natural behaviors, but giving the opportunity to roam freely, the instincts return immediately. Take the examples of chicken: They get immense pleasure from a dust bath in the sun as a way to clean their plumes; to roost on the tree branches at night for protection, the patriarchal attention of the rooster to protect and feed his harem. Therefore, we must be aware and pay attention not to hurt them emotionally, and of course, not physically. 2) However, the agro-business, the inhuman methods the farm animals are raised nowadays is truly cruel. Tens of thousands of hens are jam packed and forced continuously to feed so that from the hatching to being served on the table they could gain sufficiently weight. They cannot move and turn around, they must suffer from leg pains, they do not have a room even to stretch a wing, they do not see a glimpse of sunlight or of grass before being slaughtered, and they live their short span of existence in a quasi panic state. Similar stories of suffering can be said about the foie gras production where geese are force feed daily so much that their liver degenerates and swells, about the Nordic ducks that are plucked alive in order to collect duff for our pillows, about the cows whose calves are separated from their mother after a few days. The motherly instinct of the cows to lick clean their babies, to protect them from predators are denied to them; the calf and the mother will cry and call for each other till they get hoarse. 3) Majority of people are unaware or insensitive to the suffering of farm animals. Their first argument is that they are too dull to be aware of their misery; some even claim that since they do not have a soul, they are like mechanical clockwork, hence cannot suffer. Others are aware that the animals can suffer but they shrug claiming that the farm animals would not have existed in the first place had it been for our farming them; of course they neglect that they had an existence up until a few thousand years in the wild, and that they would return to their natural state. Finally there are people who are aware of their suffering but simply do not care and laugh off any criticism. 4) All farm animals make excellent company to people. Many people have discovered the pleasures of the company of these animals, and having saved a number of them

from slaughterhouses, they enjoy the gaiety of frolicking goats, the gregarious and curious pigs, the serenity of cows etc. Masson concludes with a solution: stop eating our friends, do not go around with a dead animal in your stomach, and become a vegetarian; in fact stop eating any of their products, like eggs and milk, and stop wearing their hide, and therefore become a vegan. Although he admits the difficulty of turning a vegan after an omnivorous life, he suggests that that is the only reasonable and civilized way out. Though the book lacks scientific rigor it book provides nice reading, often addressing strongly your sentimental part.

9. **V. S. Naipaul (Grenadan), Beyond Belief.** There is nothing more pleasurable than reading from the pen of a Nobel laureate oral history. Naipaul sets out to understand the political Islam, the fundamentalism, the radicalization of Islam from year seventies on. His narrative covers four countries: mainly, Indonesia and Pakistan, and to a lesser extent, Malaysia and Iran. For quarter of a century, he visits these countries, goes to the villages, talks to peasants, clerics, soldiers, government bureaucrats, social and religious leaders, women, neber-wuzzers etc. He follows people and places through their evolution during visits years apart. He wonders: What is it that drives Muslim people to a more radical form of Islam, to Wahabi style of strict and in a sense extreme Islam, why is it that Muslim people start drawing lines of “us” and “them”? These traits are especially poignant in countries like Indonesia and Malaysia where Buddhism, animism, Christianity and Islam have co-existed together for more than a thousand years. As an example, there was the village tradition in mixed villages in Indonesia where for a deceased of any belief, the Buddhist, Muslim and Christian priests would separately pray and honor the dead. Then the Muslim separated themselves from these old traditions; there were massive campaigns to erect mosques everywhere equipped with loudspeakers and convince the people to attend five daily prayers, ignore and disdain any cultural impact of the West, in fact assume a defensive, and even inimical attitude toward everything that is non-Muslim. His efforts to understand why, for example, women give up their social liberties and put themselves under veil, why men give up all pleasures of life and delves themselves into strict observances, why many people refuse modern and liberal education to their children by sending them only to schools of Quran where they are indoctrinated with the sayings of the Prophet, Quran and only Islamic version of the world history. Furthermore, different than all other religions, Islam demands total submission so much so that they forget their own traditions, even their own history and try to identify themselves with the history of Islam and assume a Saudi / Wahabi type of identity. It is interesting that Islam comes out as rules, more rules, and even more rules of abstention, of what to avoid, of what not eat. In Iran Khomeini has collected and edited 2770 ++ rules of observance, there is almost a rule and regulation for every step, for every breath of life; Islam in the lives of common people becomes a stifling barrage of restrictions, abstentions and rules. The case of Pakistan is more dramatic: Pakistan was conceived and founded as a country apart for Moslems in the Indian subcontinent, mostly inspired by the romantic ideals of the Urdu poet Akbar. Not only the ethnic cleansing on both parts of the frontier during the creation of Pakistan caused immense suffering, but in the sixty years of its existence has not been able to form an identity, establish a democracy, contribute to the civilization and industry of the world. From the days of Cinnah until today it has been regressing in civil rights, it remains one of the poorest countries in the world, still infested with Muslim militants. I believe there is a strong lesson to draw for Turkey: in fact, this film that

has been playing in the fifty or so Muslim countries in the world has started to be played as well in Turkey in the last decade at an accelerating pace. We see many common patterns: i) The rich funding of Islamic orders and schools, often in kind; ii) The turning of governments from policies of secularism to policies of Islamic order; iii) Accelerating influence and reshaping of values according to the Arab taste, in particular the Wahabi style; iv) The rapid accumulation of Islamic capital and/or the flow of the oil money; v) The aversion to any vestige of Western cultural influence and civilization of democracy while accepting its material wealth, capital, technology .. causing a unproductive schism, because the material and moral values in the Western civilization are complementary. In short, Naipaul draws our attention to the unhappiness and often misery of the masses in certain Muslim countries, the increasingly obscurantist path that radical Islam is following, and their influences in the lives of common people.

10. **Robert Cowley Ed. (American): What If?.** Historian and philosophers have often asked the question: What if the events had another turn? What would have been the consequences? Indeed there are many bifurcation points in history, where had the events taken the alternative turn, the course of the civilization would have been profoundly altered. What if the Mongols had succeeded in conquering Europe? What if the Arabs were not defeated at Poitiers, but had continued their conquest of Europe? What if the Allied Forces had failed to land in Normandy? What if Americans had lost their independence war or that Spanish or French had imperial designs for that continent? What If Alexander had not died prematurely at the age of 33? What if Cold War had conflagrated into a full scale nuclear holocaust? And for our history, what if Soviets had unleashed Enver Pasha who was waiting at the Georgian border to stop Mustafa Kemal with utopia of a Pan-Islamic empire?
11. **Andrew J. Bacevich (American): The Limits of Power; the End of American Exceptionalism.** The author is a retired army colonel, an intellectual who has lectured prestigious universities, and he has also lost his only son, a first lieutenant in the Army, in Iraq. He examines America's political attitudes, imperial aspirations, self-righteous public opinion, military capability and its destiny. He claims first that American political leaders in the 20th century have failed to set a right course while demagogically pursuing short-sighted policies. More importantly, so long as the public is conditioned to have access to unlimited resources, and to the pursuit of the "American way of life", the only alternative left is that of belligerence and transforming the world to the American way. Thus no chance is possible for a peaceful co-existence. He warns of increasing political arrogance, social narcissism and of hubris that can only escalate into a belligerent state of mind with no exits and deadlines. The social malaise is also coupled with profligacy, which resulted in a society of consumerism, which continuously leaves the economy in debt. This is in contrast to the hard-working and parsimonious society of "founding fathers" that exports its goods to all corners of the world. Ironically, even in the heat of the war that would normally demand stricter economic measures, Bush administration was urging "I encourage you all to go shopping more." He points out to conditional patriotism of Americans, which are all willing to go to war provided somebody else's child is sent to combat. The "ideology of national security" is so dominant in US political mind that that Constitution and common sense are perverted, reality is obfuscated, and the rights of other nations are constantly

denied. He suggests that the war as an international political instrument should be removed from the agenda of Washington, the presumed role of USA as the leader of democracy should not be a pretext for the exercise of US military power. He quotes Churchill "The statesman who yields to war fever is no longer the master of policy, but the slave of unforeseeable and uncontrollable events." Most importantly for us, he criticizes the US policy of tampering with and manipulating Islam in order to control Moslem states. Turkey presently suffers most and is critically threatened from the pervert "mild Islam" nonsense.

12. **Oliver Sachs (American): The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat.** Oliver Sachs is an imaginative writer that can transform medical cases in neurology into the taste of a novel. His books deal with the ordeals, hopes and tragedies of people who have lost or are in the process of losing such taken for granted faculties as recognizing faces, differentiating reality from phantasm, understanding facial expressions, or being prone to tics, hyper states, to hearing uncontrollable sounds. Each case of altered perception, which was or could be published in a scientific journal paper, is narrated with a human touch and a literary style. Sachs describe the human beings behind the handicaps that struggle to exist and have a decent life, their emotional life. The twenty-one stories taking place in the book are instrumental in dispelling the prejudice against people who are different because of their defects.
13. **Lucy H. Spelman, Ted Y. Mashima (American) The Rhino with Glue-On Shoes: And Other Surprising True Stories of Zoo Vets and their Patients.** Remarkable set of real-life stories about vets and animals both in zoos as well as in the wild. First, one realizes that every animal species can have a whole set of different illnesses, symptoms, treatments and ways to approach to them. Second, it is amazing the degree and kind of attachment and feelings that the animals can bear for their caretakers, and vice versa, the emotional commitment of the caretakers toward the animals. Third, a lot is revealed to us from the confines of veterinary medicine and the passions of vets. In fact, most of them had decided for a career in vet medicine from an early childhood and that enthusiasm never seems to wane over years. Fourth, although the body of knowledge accumulated over the years is massive, one realizes that there is still so much yet to be discovered and known. In fact, the vets have often to improvise and be cutting edge scientists. The book is captivating, full of anecdotal stories, sometimes tragic, sometimes hilarious, more often happy. The settings go from zoos to wildlife sanctuaries and from aquariums to the open ocean, and patients range from goldfish to crocodile, from rhinoceros to elephants, from eel to monkey.
14. **Kory Stamper, Word by Word (USA):** A book about lexicography from a professional lexicographer at Merriam-Webster. The book describes the daily life of a lexicographer, reasons out why one would like to work in the production of a dictionary, and describes the rules and manners of a dictionary making. I was surprised to find out that there is an unwritten law of silence, so that lexicographers do not ever converse with each other, and they are supposed to think and work alone in their cubicles. A lexicographer must truly passionately love their language in order to be able to toil day and night for a life time with the definitions of the words. The lexicographer must also have a sixth sense for the words, a sprachgefühl. Here are some

interesting aspects from the book: **A) Words and definitions:** A word enters the dictionary if it occurs sufficiently frequently, it is expected to have a long “shelf life”, and it should not be a concocted word for fun such as antiestablishmentarianism. The commoner the word, the more laborious becomes to set the definition. For example, it took 3 months for the author to cover all the meanings of the word “take” plus several thousands of citations. To give an example of minutiae, consider these two meanings of “take”: take the credit: to assume as if rightfully one’s own or as if granted; take the burden: to accept the burden or the consequences. Note also that the meaning of a word is usually a spectrum and varies from text to text usage. **B) Prescriptive versus descriptive:** Dictionaries should not be prescriptive, e.g., avoid words just because they are gross or ugly or the word is wrong, such as irregardless, if that word is widely used. The dictionary should be descriptive, i.e., describe the words how the people are using them at a given time. Words usually first emerge in the speech, and it is practically impossible to trace such origins. After a certain time, the new word in the people’s speech starts appearing in print and then be recorded. Compared to 50 years ago, one can say that languages evolve much faster. Dialects are considered as a rich source of innovation of the language. **C) Citations:** Good dictionaries should have a huge amount of citations, examples of actual usage cases. Actually the readers demand even more citations to discover connotative meanings, to understand the broader context, the tones and the range of its meaning. However, citations should be bland, e.g., not prescriptive of morales. **D) Process:** On every word a chain of people is working starting from the definer and proceeding with cross-referencers, etymologists, dating experts, pronunciation experts, copy editor, final reader, proofreader. In summary every word is seen by at least 10 editors. A typical new edition of a dictionary would involve 220.000 definitions reviewed, 10.000 new definitions, 100.000 editorial changes ... all to be realized in 18 months. **E) Daters and etymologists:** There are several etymologists that are working on the roots and past history of words. This is an arduous task as the myths, truisms, plausible but false arguments get intermingled with objective data. Another team of experts are working to establish the first date at which the words made its public appearance in print. This is also an effort like searching for a needle in the haystack.

15. **Alan Palmer (British) *The Decline and the Fall of the Ottoman Empire*.** On the one side there is nothing that we do not know about the Ottoman history that the book tells us, at least the main course of the history, the gross details. On the other side, there is so much that we do not know, things that were not told to us, the infinite multitude of details revealed in the diplomatic reports, in the memoirs and commentaries of ambassadors, especially as revealed from the British archives. Hence it makes an interesting reading; the history writing is scholarly and balanced in that he is as impartial and objective as one could be. The book covers a period of about 250 years, from the second Siege of Vienna in 1683 until 1922 when the last Ottoman emperor escaped from Istanbul in a British warship. The foundation, growth and expansion of the Ottoman Empire from an insignificant beylik around Söğüt into a world empire extending over three continents is surprising. Equally surprising is the fact, after the defeat at the siege of Vienna, the Ottoman Empire could survive for another two and a half centuries against the concerted attacks of the Great Powers and in the view of the declining and decomposing financial, administrative and eventually military order. After the debacle of Vienna, Europe thought that the floodtide of Islam had turned and that the Ottomans would be rooted out of Europe soon. This did not realize for

several reasons. First, the Europeans could never unite in a front; in fact, any alliance of powers against Ottomans was counter balanced by another coalition aiding the Ottomans, lest the alliance grab the spoils of the empire, that is the lands in Europe. It took the peoples under the Ottoman domination in the Balkans a long time, until the end of the 19th century to define their national identity and to claim their fatherland. The countries in North Africa and Middle East were held together within the empire under the aegis of Islam, and in fact they developed their version of Arab nationalism partly as a reaction to Turkish nationalism. Finally, especially from the beginning of the 19th century there was a great effort to modernize the army and the state machine in order to catch up with the West. These reforms were pushed hard by enlightened emperors, such as Selim III, Mahmud II and Abdülmecit. There are of course many explanations why the centuries long efforts to save the empire did not succeed. First, there was always very strong opposition from ulema and clerics to anything European, western, to any new order. This, in fact, made the reforms like a seesaw, i.e., two steps ahead and one or two steps back. The emperors and the administrators were inept, or more often, carried out reform measures half-heartedly, either because they did not believe wholeheartedly, but felt obliged, or were afraid of the conservative reactions, hence took timid steps. It is interesting to find out the extent and depth of the British involvement in the Ottoman affairs, the frequent appearance of a British fleet in the Aegean, or even behind the Prince Islands near Istanbul. The final decades of the empire are described in greater detail. It is especially revealing to read from an English historian the cynicism and decrepitude of Abdulhamit, and the self-centered, narcissistic, and pathetically inept Vahdettin.

16. **Cyrus Hamlin (American) My Life and Times & Among the Turks:** Once more, we learn much more about our history and the Turkish people in the past from the memoirs of foreign visitors than from any other Ottoman / Turkish sources. Cyrus actually wrote his memoirs not for the grand public, but just to share them for his children and grandchildren. After 150 years, his memoirs are as fresh and vivid as ever. The son of a farmer in the state of Maine, he had a difficult childhood after the precocious death of his father, worked hard in the farm, was sent to boarding school and eventually to a seminar to become a missionary. However, before the seminary, he had become an apprentice to an ironsmith, where he outperforms most of his competitors. His industrial attitude and his practical side extending from animal husbandry to construction work, from ironsmith to pharmacy helps him to overcome many diverse problems in his active life. His mission started in the Ottoman Empire where his duty was to convert mainly the Gregorian Armenians, and then possibly Orthodox Greeks to the right path, that of Protestantism. It is interesting that Hamlin feels more aversion towards both these churches and deems them to have gone astray from the pure faith of Christ, and being involved too much with occultisms, bigotry, amulets, interception saints etc. His uphill struggle, the establishment of Bebek seminary, the adamant opposition from the respective churches, even to the point of rioting and threatening him with death can be seen as tests of his will. The delicate dance he has to do with the Seraglio, to intercede in his favor to solve various bottlenecks, his frequent and direct access to the Palace authorities reveals to us the intricate diplomacy involving ambassadors of the European powers, the state authorities and his side. Overall, one realizes that the mentality of the government officials, the approach of the common people to pressing problems, briefly,

Turks themselves, have not much changed over the course of two centuries. His informal counter with Sultan Abdülmecit in Beylerbeyi Palace, the emperor's childish enchantment with the telegraph demonstration (Samuel Morse was demonstrating his invention, which the European power ignored) are interesting anecdotes. During the Crimean War British soldiers are stationed in Istanbul, albeit in despicable conditions, "eaten alive" by lice. His inventiveness saves their lives, first by building a laundry factory to wash out the infested linen of the soldiers, and second, by providing them daily with boatful of fresh bread. His missionary efforts, mostly in Bebek, but also in Bursa and Adapazarı yield a meager rate of conversion. He then realize that a more successful way to motivate conversions is not the direct approach of seminaries, but to conduct the mission shrouded within the framework of an overall education, in fact, a college education. This is in fact, the origins of Robert College. It is amazing to read his fund raising efforts in New York, his labor in the construction of college buildings, but most of all, his patient waiting and clever diplomacy to obtain the permission to open the college in the first place. In fact, Cyrus Hamlin had to wait seven years before the Ottoman government gives permission to realize his dream. Note again that the opposition was not from Turks, but from embassies of the competing powers, France, as protector of Jesuits and Russia as protector of the Orthodox Church. It is interesting to note that Cyrus, despite believing that Mohammedan Turks will never evolve into a civilized modern state, has a sympathy for them, finds them honest people, understands them quite well, and even defends them against Greek and Armenian dragomans, who present the Turks in a long litany of complaints as savage people. Finally, Hamlin's comments on Islam are quite enlightening. He admits that Islam is very much misunderstood or not understood at all in the West. According to him, the four leading characteristics of Islam are: 1) Theism, that is, there is but one true and living God; and the strength of its assertion is a protest against the idolatry of the pagan Arabs as well as against the polytheism of the image worshipping Christians. 2) Fatalism, the fact that everything, good and bad, is predestined, unchangeable, from eternity to eternity. Moslems do not seem to question predestination and freedom of will. 3) Ritualism: From ablution to repetitive prayers, from fasting to postures, everything is prescribed and performed ritually; one would think that these would be onerous observances would be disliked; on the contrary, it gives them a sense of spiritual pride, a self-righteousness, I-am-holier-than-thou spirit. 4) Sensualism: Islam is a sensualistic religion to the extreme; in fact the afterlife is described as a place where the enjoyments of this world may be pursued to any extent without any satiety or disease, that the best of the wines, and the most beautiful virgins will be available.

17. **Nicholas Ostler (British) Empires of the World: A Language History of the World.** When reading this book I kept asking myself: "How could anyone be so knowledgeable in a field and be able to so exquisitely express it". The history of languages and the language history of the world reads pleasantly as we tour through the vicissitudes of languages from Sumerian to Etruscan, from Latin to Greek from Sanskrit to Chinese, the career of major languages in the last 5000 years. One becomes aware how frail and ephemeral the languages can be; they are born, evolve, and eventually die out. There are probably more dead languages than the living ones; their

careers are as variegated as imaginable; there are myriad reasons of their success or failure and disappearance. The book proceeds by describing the history of languages by land: i) Middle East where Sumerian figured out to be the first classical languages preceding Greek and Latin by two thousand years; in fact Sumerian survived for another thousand years after its death much like Latin survived for two thousand years. This is followed by Akkadian, Phoenician, Aramaic and Arabic, Hebrew. This Middle Eastern tradition is taken over by Persian and Turkish. We witness Egyptian blossoming along the Nile and progresses stately; however, paradoxically the language of this great civilization cannot survive the competition of Aramaic, Greek and finally the coup de grace of Arabic. Ancient Egyptian survives only in the Coptic church. Chinese is the oldest traditional language and it is also – the Mandarin version – the most widely spoken language outnumbering other popular languages by an order of magnitude. The miracle of its survival is partly due to the ingenuous way of dealing with foreign invaders. The career of Sanskrit is described like a charming creeper. It spread not with invading armies, but as a prestige language, as a language of culture mostly by trade contacts and also with the attraction of Buddhism. Greek had a wonderful career for three thousand years, on the one hand producing the world's first classical culture, on the other hand spreading first through colonial settlements throughout the whole Mediterranean basin, and later by military conquest of Alexander. It got a life shot more than once: When Rome conquered Greece militarily, Greece in turn conquered Rome culturally. When the Roman Empire split into East and West, it became the language of the Orthodox church and the dominant language of the Byzantine empire. There is the cryptic story of Celtic, who was once – say from 13th to 2nd centuries BC through Europe, from Balkans to Scotland to Portugal. Although they were sophisticated people judging from their utensils, there are very few traces of their languages. Celtic of course survives in some parts of Ireland, England and France. For example, Celtic in France, Gaulish completely disappeared after Roman conquest. European languages became the dominant world languages riding over their colonial empires. French spread over most of Western Africa, and in the 19th century culminated as the most prestigious language of culture, arts and technology. Spanish built a brutal empire in Central and Southern America usurping the local languages and eventually causing the death of tens of Amerindian languages. The book is too vast to summarize, I will touch upon the case of Turkish and of English. The case of Turkish reveals the fact that military power and conquest do not suffice for the spread of language. Turks conquered China several times, but eventually they melted down culturally in the Chinese society and disappeared. The Turkish-Mongols hordes swept through Asia into Europe more than once, but left no trace of their languages. After accepting Islam, they took roles in the Abbasid armies and conquered Egypt; however, they lost their languages and became Arabs. The only case where they succeeded to keep their languages was the conquest of Anatolia. The case of English is even more surprising. How could a language spoken in island by 2-3 million people evolve and spread immensely and be a world language spoken by 2-3 billion people. Today in China alone there are more people learning English than the number of people whose mother language is English. From a very meager start about 1500 years ago English grew steadily. Many factors contributed to the evolution of English into a prime lingua franca, such as: i) The formation of English-language speaking nations like USA; ii) English as a prestige language as a way to access to culture and especially to technology and science; iii) English associated with wealth due mostly to the non-normative attitude of

British with business practicality; iv) England was the world power in that in the 19th century, with 2% of the world's population it accounted for 40-45% of the world's industrial production; this success role is now being played by USA; v) Ease of learning since English has a simple word structures with few prefixes and suffixes, one of the richest sets of vowels (as in mat, met, mitt, motte, put, mart, mate, meet, might, moat, moot, mute, mouth, moist, mere, mire, moor, immature, more, flower)

18. **Mine Göğüş Tan, Özlem Şahin, Mustafa Sever, Aksu Bora, Cumhuriyet'te Çocuklar (They Were Children During the Republic)** Interviews with 115 selected people born within the time frame of 1908-1920 and from all possible cross-sections of the society reveal how the people perceived the phenomenal events during the proclamation of the republic and the subsequent of reforms. The reforms intended to catapult the Turkish society into modernism and Western civilization. A digest of the interviews reveal the following: i) Perception of childhood: When asked about their childhood memories, majority of people confessed that they did not have any particular memories; more surprisingly, they said that children could not have memories, that childhood is just playing around and working, and nothing more. At that time, the society did not really attribute any particular status to children, and especially in the villages they were just considered as part of the working force in the fields; ii) Poverty and orphans: Turkey was then a much impoverished country; also decades of wars and epidemics caused loss of many lives. Most people reported the sadness of having lost their father or having their father away for a very long time. They unanimously reported being poor, not being able to afford shoes, shirts, or even food at the school; iii) Plays: People reported, whether in towns or villages playing simple games like seek-and-hide having almost never any toys. Sometimes girls differed from boys in games of making dolls out of shreds, but more often they said that they were always constrained by their parents, that they were never allowed to go anywhere anytime, that they were not exposed to anything except for having to take care of their baby brothers and sisters. Overall they were insipid and shallow childhoods. iv) School: Starting the school was unanimously acclaimed as the most important event of their childhood, the turning point of their lives. This was more so for girls than boys since it was the only opportunity of the girls to get away from the oppression of families. Similarly, for the town children, the school was a memorable event in that the school buildings were impressive, going to school involved meandering through the streets of their town. For the village children, the school building was just another shabby adobe, often one-class building just across the streets, so that it did not impart the feeling of a new start, of a new life. v) Dreams of life: When asked what they had wished to become as grown-ups, the answer ranged from pilot to doctor, from architect to musician. But they almost all ended up to become school teachers as this was the limitation of their families or of opportunities. For some, there was no dream at all either because they were orphans struggling for survival or because in the remote villages they never had any chance to find out about the process of modernization. vi) Impact of nation-building: During 1920s the strong winds of modernization and Westernization had great impact on people; most remembered the passage, the changes with very positive memories. On the other hand, the way the republic was presented with grandiose locutions and ceremonies did not signify much, they had a hard time comprehending the intent, the significance of the

proclamation of the republic. In fact, the republic meant for them solely the success of the war of independence, “winning against the enemies, kicking the invaders out”

19. **Mircea Eliade (Romanian-French), *Le Sacré et le Profane (The Sacred and the Profane)*.**

Sometimes I wonder why the dialog between us, the secular people, and the religious people and bigots is so difficult. We indeed speak different languages. Indeed there are two modes of existence for humans: some perceive and interpret everything in religious terms, as part of a dialog of gods; for them supernatural coexists with the natural, some others supernatural only exists in some arcane habit, but otherwise everything is flat and objective. For the religious person time, space, world, cosmos have very different interpretations. For them, time is nonlinear and cyclic. It has various culminations throughout the year where humans can ascend to the grace of gods or when god(s) in those instances offer their special graces to humans. Time is cyclic in that one always returns to the beginning, get dissolved into an amorphous and aqueous state, only to have a new start. For the profane, the time is a linear process interrupted here and there by weekends, summer holidays etc. The profane perceives the space as a uniform stretch, he can contemplate the nature in its beauty, he could be concerned with the conservation issues etc., but that's all. He lives in a desacralized world. For the religious person, what makes the space interesting are those particular localities where he can access to gods or where gods descend. The holy spots, the top of a hill, a monastery in a lonely land, a spring, a temple location, Mecca, Kaabe, Vatican, Jerusalem, Fatima, locations of epiphany where god(s) appeared in some way or made his presence felt to humans. These are the real spaces, and anything outside it is an amorphous stretch. To the religious person, the nature is full of revelations, the cosmos full of symbols. All in all the book discusses the price of modernity, the spiritual experiences and illusions the modern and rational man is deprived of. Modernism is on the one hand liberating, on the other hand is impoverishing as the man cannot anymore enjoy a world filled with spiritual significance, the world does not appear to him any longer as the work of God.

20. **Muazzez İlmiye Çığ (Turkish) *Sümerli Ludingirra (Ludingirra, The Sumerian)*.**

It is often said that history begins with the Sumerians, a people living in the lower Mesopotamia and who built a flourishing civilization between 4000 and 2000 BC. They build city states, irrigation channels, a network of trade routes, a legal system, and most importantly, an extensive system of schools and libraries. Their culture continued to influence for many centuries, even after they disappeared from the scene of history, many other civilizations like Akkadians, Babylonians and Hittites. They produced profusely documents of all sorts, from trade agreement to marriage contracts, from sales acts to personal letters. Any valuable literary piece was immediately reproduced in cuneiform on clay tablets and distributed to other libraries. This makes it possible to complete Sumerian documents by putting together pieces from different archeological sites. The book is an archeological science fiction, partly based on actual documents authored by Ludingirra himself. He was probably a high ranking civil servant, a school teacher and he lived long enough to witness many things. We learn about the school life, about the religious ceremonies, the priests and priestesses in the temples, their mythologies. Such details as fishermen along the Euphrates River, the temple prostitutes who accomplish a respected social function, the gender issues, the warring city states, the tale of friendships, even the pranks

between help to picture in front of our eyes the day to day life in Sumer. The author of the tablets expresses his anxiety due to the loss of the Sumerian cultural identity as the Accadian language and culture starts to dominate, and therefore in his old age he feels the strong urge to leave something for the posterity in describing its traditions. His dream of projecting Sumer into the future has come true when the archeologists discovered the treasure of thousands of tablets and when Sumerian language was deciphered in the 19th century.

21. **Cemal Kafadar (Turkish), Kim Varmış Biz Burada Yoğ İken (Who was here in the times we were not).** It is often said and believed that the Ottomans Turks never bothered or deigned to keep personal notes, to write their memoirs, that there are no personal records. In contrast, dating from Roman times to modern Europe, there exists a vast collection of memoirs, church records, reports and innumerable number of personal notes and logs of travelers. In fact, most of the details of daily life in the Ottoman era have arrived to us via the letters, reports, diaries of the ambassadors, tradesmen, travelers and military envoys. This truism will perhaps will be proven wrong as more of the archives are being discovered and studies. The book tells us about four personalities. A devout lady in the Balkans corresponds with a Sufi leader in another town for the interpretation of her dreams and for guidance in the faith. Wool tradesmen travel from Ankara through Balkans to Venice across Adriatic have established a community in that city. When one of them dies in 1535, his uncle takes care of his funeral according to Moslem rules and takes care of his debts. And through his notes and the records in the city register we have a glimpse of the life of Moslem traders. A Dervish in the 17th century Istanbul lives in the seclusion of his religious order thus escaping the vagaries and strife of the life outside. He appears to be a gourmet, so much so that, even on the day of his wife's death, while expressing his deep sorrow, he does not fail to note down the delicious food he was served. Finally, there is an interesting treatise on the janissary establishment and its deterioration.
22. **Bozkurt Güvenç (Turkish), Türk Kimliği (Turkish Identity).** This cultural anthropologist investigates who really are the Turks: Are we Easterners or Westerners? Are we a bridge between the Moslem and Christian worlds? Are we the immigrants or the emigration forces? Are we republican Turks, the children of Atatürk or Ottomans, the grandchildren of Fatih? Are we first Turks and then Moslems, or vice versa? How much, if any, we are seculars? Do we really believe in Western democracy or are we satisfied with the arabesque style regimes? How much we have internalized the republican ideals of Atatürk or is Turkish Republic a fiction only the official history. B. Güvenç touches upon the painful, slow, and yet incomplete process of modernization, of nation creation, of search for an identity, and how much still the minds are confused. Turkish ideology was for a long time dominated by the sociologist Ziya Gökalp, who believed that Turks should adopt only the technology from the West, but culturally should remain attached to Islam and the East. Atatürk reforms in contrast insisted on full Westernization as he believe correctly that patchwork reforms are useful, that one cannot achieve and enjoy the material advancements of the West with an Eastern mentality. Ironically, the political forces set forth in the 80's have promoted the so-called Turkish-Islamic synthesis, the schizophrenic state of mind split between the opposite cultures.

23. **Lindsay Waters (American), Enemies of Promise: Publishing, Perishing, and the Eclipse of Scholarship.** All academicians are under increasing pressure to publish as the number of papers becomes the sole criterion for career advancement and appointments. It is the fetishism of numbers that rule, at the expense of the content and the quality. In fact, faculty committees do not feel obliged to read the works of a candidate, to understand the content of his/her work; instead they delegate the right to evaluate and the authority to judge a candidate to the editors of the journals. At the end, we expect that the judgment of the editors and of the reviewers turn into some numerical score, like number of papers and citations, upon which we build our own judgment. The bloated number of publications that less and less people read and the drive for careerism brings about mediocrity. L. Waters calls our attention to the alarming consequences of publish-or-perish. The book is thought provoking and an eye-opener.
24. **Liz Behmoaras (Turkish), Mazhar Osman.** In the Ottoman Empire the mental disorder patients had no hope of being cured and they had to live in miserable surroundings, often chained to each other. During the reign of Abdulhamid there was even a decree about the incurability of mental disorders, one of the irrational fears of the sultan. Mazhar Osman in the crumbling years of the Empire and during the first decades of the Republic almost single-handedly illuminated the society as for the nature of the psychological disorders, their causes and cures via a series of lectures. His biggest achievement was the establishment of the Bakırköy Hospital for mental disorders so that modern medical science could be applied. The Bakırköy complex was realized after a struggle of almost ten years, to convince the government for the conversion of an old garrison complex into a hospital, for the appropriation of funds, for the assignment of the personnel. He lectured in university, took care of a huge entourage of patients, lobbied for the cause and understanding of psychiatric patients, carried out research, attended international conferences. Though he was tyrannical in his handling of his junior colleagues he was always adored. His lifestyle was westerly in the outlook; but deep down in his heart he always remained a middle eastern, especially with his feudal opinion of the women. He is an exemplar figure to show what an individual can single-handedly achieve for the advancement of the society.
25. **Frank Vertosick (American): When the Air Hits Your Brain: Tales of Neurosurgery.** Frank Vertosick is an expert surgeon who has been operating on countless cases, yet he cannot stop wondering about the privileges and challenges of his job. It took millions of years for the brain, this wonderful organ to evolve, a greasy mass of a few kilograms that consist of billions of cells with infinitely complex interconnections. And surgeons are expected to understand its inner working and possibly fix it. He exquisitely narrates the choices that led him to be a brain surgeon and his keen observations during training rotations in hospitals. He tells us about his patients, their desperations and hopes, the exhilaration he feels when the operation is a success and when sees the patient just walking off the hospital, and conversely the painful disappointment he experiences when conducting a losing battle. When cannot but empathize with every case, for example, cry with a mother who is terminally ill and rapidly losing brain functions but fights nevertheless to live long enough to give birth to her child. Once you start the book, you cannot simply let it go.

26. **Duncan J. Watts (USA) Six Degrees: The science of Connected Age.** Watts, a sociology professor, addresses the network problem, the interconnectedness of facts and agents, in an adroit way. The presentation is based on a solid background of mathematics, computer science, biology and social theory. The author starts with some historical background on networks and then proceeds to summarize the state-of-the-art literature, including his own. However at the same time the book is enriched with anecdotes and more importantly with several case studies to illustrate the theoretical aspects of networks, which makes the reading more enjoyable. As part of the networking phenomena, he analyzes phenomena from real life, like the tulip craze of the 17th century in Holland; the spread of epidemics; the reason why some products shoot to popularity and become a success while others sit neglected; the Kevin Bacon game, the surprising fact that anybody can reach anybody else in this world through only six connections on the average; the success and collapse of dot-coms; New York City's reaction to September 11; the wealth of a nation, word usage in language, city sizes; world wide web. The authors can pass from discipline to discipline with amazing fluidity.
27. **Noam Chomsky (American), Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance.** This book is an eye-opener. First, one understands that USA is as much a terrorist state as any other rogue organization, even though USA manipulates the world public opinion that it is fighting against terrorism. Second, that history is written by victors only, that the powerful states can distort the facts, benignly neglect evidences, redefine values and concepts as they see fit for their interests. Third, Bush's invasion of Iraq based on the pretext of preemptive war was not a recent invention, but that it has been the guiding norm throughout American history in the past 150 years. Fourth, US foreign policy has given support to many despots and rogues, from Mussolini, Saddam Hussein, to Gaddafi so long as they served American interests at the expense of repressing the citizens of those nations, but at the very moment they were not any more subservient and useful, they were declared as villains and disposed of. Fifth, despite its profuse propaganda as defender of liberties, is in fact not interested in genuine secular democracies, but would much prefer regimes that are malleable by US. Sixth, US has always had an "imperial grand strategy"-in which the United States has attempted to "maintain its hegemony through the threat or use of military force."
28. **Nasim Taleb Nicholas (American), Fooled by Probability: The Hidden Role of Chance in Life and in the Markets.** An icon-breaking warning for platitudes and misinterpretations of random processes, random events, outlier behavior in statistics, and regression to the mean. The author cites several examples from our daily life where people are misled by a survivorship bias, in that they judge probability of events based on success stories, counting only the survivors. This happen everyday in the stock market, in the society when an idea catches up while several other equally innovative ones fall on deaf ears, where a politician is catapulted to limelight while others wane away. Nasim keeps on pounding us with warnings to differentiate noise from signals: noise is inconsequential, random fluctuation, without an underlying structure or message. Furthermore, no matter how certain and consistent things may look like, there is always a "black swan", a totally unexpected but nevertheless not improbable event that Lady Fortuna can dish out, and that can turn everything upside down, e.g., can ruin a

trader. He also points out that, despite the predictions of market economists, humans do not behave at all rationally. He points out also to the value of emotions that may cause us to behave irrationally, but yet they are the ones that make us human. Nasim Nicholas is an erudite writer, well versed in European intellectual heritage and imbued with Mediterranean culture. He enriches his writing with factual evidence from Greek mythology to social psychology, from French poetry to philosophy. We have to live with the reality of total randomness: he then advises stoicism as a means to cope with it, that is, maintaining our dignity at whatever cost when faced with adversity and turn of chance.

29. **Jean Clottes, André Langaney, Jean Guilaine, Dominique Simonnet (French), *La Plus Belle Histoire de l'Homme (The Most Beautiful History of the Mankind)*.** The authors reconstruct a fresco depicting the evolution of mankind from primitive hunters to the global village. In abandoning hunting for agriculture humanity invents society and generates power relations. Going beyond a group of hunters they constitute social units beyond families, where lineages are sufficiently mixed to arrive to the concept of peoples and at the end of humanity. The authors ask the questions: Why us? How have we become what we are? How have the institutions of family, art, war, society etc come into being? How have we evolved in our ways of living, behaving, believing until reaching the level of intelligence? How have we conquered the nature, transcended, transformed and then have been trapped by our own culture? The authors describe the three stages of this “comedy”, of this process that has separated us from the nature. These three stages are represented by the discovery of land, the discovery of imagination and finally the discovery of power.
30. **Ayaan Hirsi Ali (Somalian-Dutch), *Infidel*.** Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Dutch political activist of Somalian origin, opens a debate on the status of women in Islam and the need for an Enlightenment movement. Her stand has caused, as usual, harsh reaction in Muslim communities, and in fact, the Dutch film producer Theo Van Gogh, with whom she had made the movie “Submission”, was assassinated in Amsterdam, and she was herself condemned to death by fundamentalists. Nevertheless Ayaan Hirsi Ali continues her combat. In the book she espouses her criticism on the injustice rendered to women in Islam, from marriages transformed into violations to total lack of equality in social status, from denigration of her dignity and her human rights to social pressure open or disguised in 1001 fashions. She is bitter about the European democrats who are ambivalent on the issue of Islam, who, under the guise of tolerance, rest without any reaction against this violation. Her other book “My Rebel Life” is also worth reading.
31. **Paul Krüger (American) *The Consciousness of a Liberal*.** The New York Times columnist and the 2008 Nobel Prize winner Paul Krüger traces the political history of USA from the end of the 19th century until 21st century, and this especially in the context of liberal or progressive policies butted against the right-wing, conservative, pro-business policies. The Republicans were always on the side of big business, upheld racial segregation and declared themselves as religious while Democrats lead more populist, egalitarian, anti-racist policies. After a long sequel of Republican run governments, the Great Depression of 1929, the economic hardships and the stresses of the

World War II gave the Democrats a chance. The Democrats introduced the New Deal policy which brought such advances of unions among workers, social security, some healthcare, pension plans, and the great divide between the rich and the poor were substantially reduced. The Republications bitterly opposed to the New Deal, calling it tantamount to socialism or communism, they disliked the idea of a government trying to help the underprivileged, providing education, health and housing for all, they hated the idea of a government who is taxing the rich to redistribute the wealth to the poor. A core of the conservative movement, which started in the sixties by praising the Generalissimo Franco, the dictator of Spain as a great statesman gathered momentum in the seventies with Reagan and eventually the two Bushes. The movement was militant in reaching its goals, adamantly opposed any program of social reform, of government intervention to mitigate inequality in the society, quite chauvinistic in its foreign policy. They cut taxes only to favor the very rich, the big estate owners, the big corporations, they opposed any plan of health plan, they tried to dismantle even social security and the medical programs for the elderly. It is amazing how they could push such anti-popular policies and yet win election after election by blindfolding people with a mix of self-righteous religious attitudes, belligerent foreign policy, demagoguery to scare the American people of imminent imaginary dangers etc. US presently is the only developed nation without any health program and with the lowest rate of unionization. But the story told by Kruger is very familiar as it surprisingly resembles the fundamentalist movement that started in Turkey and eventually took hold of the whole country and of all its institutions in the 21st century.

32. Michael Pollan (American) Omnivore's Dilemma. Michael Pollan presents an eye-opening treatise over a wide range of issues from industrial food establishment and impact on the diminishing resources of the world to organic agriculture and back-to-nature trends, from vegetarianism to the justification of eating animals, from pursuit of a healthy diet to the necessity of being in touch with the whole food production system. In a sweeping and fascinating story, he traces the whole food chain, and points out the approach of different cultures to it.

He is critical of the US government policy to encourage the overproduction and eventually conversion of corn into everything, from unnatural animal feed to sugar in the soda drinks, which underlies many of the health problems ranging from diabetes to obesity. He startles us by showing that a typical McDonald's lunch in a cornfield in Iowa. Corn feeds the steer that turns into the burgers, becomes the oil that cooks the fries and the syrup that sweetens the shakes and the sodas, and makes up 13 of the 38 ingredients in the Chicken McNuggets. After reading the book a lunch at McDonald can never be the same! The more tragic consequence of this policy is that for every food calorie produced the US spends 9 calories to put it on the table: "Each bushel of industrial corn grown uses the equivalent of up to a third of a gallon of oil".

Pollack points out that the cuisine of a society incorporates the wisdom of nutrition accumulated through ages and codified into laws for a healthy diet and for a humane approach to animals that we eat. On the contrary, societies like USA are devoid of this wisdom and a set of guiding rules, and that's where omnivore's dilemma emerges: what to eat, how to eat, how much etc. He contends that "The way we eat represents our most profound engagement with the natural

world" , and hence we should be in touch with or be aware of, at least from to time, with all the food production chain.

33. **Ernest Geller (British), Postmodernism, Religion and Reason.** The editor notes that “ Ernest Gellner suggests that we face three ideological options at the present time: a return to the genuine and firm faith of religious tradition; the pursuit of a form of relativism which abandons the notion of truth and resigns itself to treating truth as relative to the society or culture in question, and upholding the view that while perhaps there is a unique truth, no one society can fully possess it.” It is of most interest for us the part where he explores the reasons why the first option is especially strong in Muslim societies. His explanation is that within Islam the high culture, previously the achievement of the minority, has now become the pervasive culture of the entire society. This high culture within Muslim societies performs a function similar to those performed by nationalism elsewhere. Although I personally cannot agree with him, Gellner pursues with the arguments that Islamic fundamentalism is a modernizing and rationalizing force and that that "a certain kind of separation of powers was built into Muslim society from the very start. It subordinates the executive [i.e., the government] to the (divine) legislature and, in actual practice, turns the theologians/lawyers into the monitors of political rectitude. His second interesting argument is the interpretation of postmodernism in the West as a way for the expiation of its sins during the colonialism. Finally, Gellner also criticizes the universities “for being dominated by the research model provided by the natural sciences in which scholars are expected to constantly generate genuinely new knowledge” However, "in the humanities, not only is it not clear that there is any cumulative development, any real 'progress', it is not always altogether clear what 'research' should or could aim it." After the criticism that Enlightenment rationalism is the least tolerant belief system of all, he preaches “tolerant co-existence among different belief systems
34. **Ece Temelkuran (Turkish): Ağrının Derinliği (The Depth of Ararat).** This sensitive and investigative journalist addresses the deep wound in the Turkish conscience due to the mass deportation of Armenians from Anatolia. She has simply been listening to tens of Armenian people in Armenia, France and USA. Without producing defensive counterarguments she interprets and reports their feelings, reactions, sorrows, even face mimics. The events of 1915 are so deeply ingrained in the minds and hearts of Armenians that it has become symbiotic with them, almost the driving spiritual force of their identity and existence in the diaspora. She is, of course, critical of both the Armenian and Turkish fascist-nationalists. The only way this go one step ahead in this impasse is for the new generations to try to understand the “other”, to deliver ourselves from the prison of our minds, from what we have been taught, and for the Turks to go one step further and imagine what it means to be homeless.
35. **Oral Çalışlar (Turkish): İslam'da Kadın ve Cinsellik (Women and Sex in Islam).** The author investigates the status of woman in Islam using Quran as a source interprets the attitude of countries in the geography of Islam toward woman. Although we all know most of the facts, still the book becomes a series of shocking revelations. The male attitude and interpretation, the masculine sources in Quran, the denigration of women, the sexist foundations of Islamic moral values, Islamic law, even the promise of a paradise fit for male pleasures contribute to relegate

women to a second-class or worse situation. Since Islam is an all-encompassing religion aimed at both spiritual and worldly affairs, it determines all aspect of life, from marital relations, from polygamy to love styles, from veil to inheritance, it does not leave any chance and as a matter of fact hope for Muslim societies to evolve into egalitarian and modern societies.

36. **David Brooks (American), Bobos In Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There.** There used to be Bohemian types, intellectuals listening to Wagnerian operas, with Franz Kafka eyeglasses, often penniless but disdaining money. There used to be Bourgeois types, wealth accumulators, the rednecks, who disdained culture, stylish dinners, wine-and-cheese discussions, all as effeminate and un-American. Now they have merged into bourgeois bohemians "Bobos", an unlikely blend of mainstream culture and counterculture. These are the new genre of achievers in the information age. The bobos are influential, rich and sophisticated. The bohemians nowadays play in the stock market; the bourgeois eat organic food and discuss Hegel. And any self-respecting Bobo wears expedition-weight triple-layer Gore-Tex jacket commensurate with his erudition. The book is funny, yet describes quite realistically the new cultural, intellectual and financial elite.
37. **Frédéric Beigbeder (French): 99 Francs.** This is a sharp and perspicacious criticism of the commercials that inundate our world. We are living in an age where giant photographs of commercial products decorate the walls, the bus stations, the public buses, the walls of dilapidated buildings, the billboards on the highways, in the telephone cabins. We are bombarded by the images and announcements of triple-blade razors, antidandruff shampoos, bras, portable phones etc. It is estimated that by the time one reaches the age of 18 one is subjected to a total of 350.000 commercial announcements. The commercials are also criticized as part of the globalization process.
38. **Bill Bryson (American): A Short Story of Nearly Everything.** Bill Bryson narrates us the whole historical panoply of science with the unspoiled enthusiasm of a schoolchild and with a pleasant, lucid style. The result is a very readable and recommendable book. In one volume he covers not only modern physics, but in unusual detail geology, paleontology, botanic and biology. The book is very rich in anecdotes, with many details of personal lives of the scientists and adventurers given, often in an effort to correct any injustices done to them historically. Concepts and theorems that could seem difficult for an intended audience who have college science background would find this book really fun to read and marvel at the unfolding of scientific truth in the last centuries. I have myself wondered that so much of the science has changed and that our understanding of the world and life has augmented so much since my high-school years. Two caveats: First, the whole of modern science, according to Bryson and unfairly, seems to be developed in the Anglo-American world, especially English, while the contributions of other nations seem to be tangential or accidental. Second, he gives insight into the essence of the problem, but often, perhaps rightly for his audience, he wraps it up saying that "beyond, it becomes all too complicated". Notwithstanding these shortcomings it is still an excellent example of science journalism.

39. **Malek Chebel (French): Anthology of wine and of drunkenness in Islam (Anthologie du vin et de l'ivresse en Islam).** Islam prohibits intoxicants, notably wine, yet no other civilization has such an extensive literature on the pleasures of wine, both in its real as well as allegoric descriptions. Wine in Islam is both a source of joy and rapture, with esthetic overtones, and a reason of fear of transgressing the sacred law. Strangely enough wine was always present in the territories of Islam, before and after its coming, during the reign of Omayyads, Abbasids, Andalusians, Persian empires, the many Turkic states, and Ottoman Empire. The book traces the culture of wine and wine drinking throughout ages, in Islamic symbolism, in the literature, especially in poetry. There are passages on wine drinking ceremonies, on the pleasures of intoxication, on the metaphors used to illustrate the qualities of wine, such as color, consistency, taste, brilliance, perfume, age and spirit. Selected poems from the 6th century on to the 20th century exalting wine, among which Yunus Emre and Riza Tevfik, forms the other half of the book. It is quite interesting to witness to the richness of Arabic language in describing wine terminology. For example, qadah, ghamr, al-qam, radf, kawh, al-ass, shan, jam, natif and kas all mean cup, but differing in size from smallest to the biggest.
40. **Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson and Susan McCarthy (American): When Elephants Weep: The Emotional Lives of Animals.** Animals do in fact lead emotional lives; in fact, they do not differ from us humans in kind but only in degree. The authors cite hundreds of anecdotes from the published works and field studies of behaviorists to support this theory. Chapters are organized by topic, such as fear, love, grief, and even compassion and beauty. An excellent resource in psychology, this title will also be a useful addition for animal research. Its clear and conversational style makes it interesting for general readers as well. A well-documented, compelling, and thought-provoking defense of animal emotions.
41. **Eric Orsenna (French): Voyages aux Pays du Coton: Petit précis de mondialisation (Travels to the Countries of Cotton).** The book is a mixture of the notes of a travelogue through space and time, and of investigative journalism. Orsenna traces the history of the agriculture of cotton in industrial dimensions. He tells us about Mali, Sao Paulo (Brazil), Texas, Tashkent (Uzbekistan), Vosges (France), Alexandria (Egypt). Wherever he goes he observes the effects of globalization. He does not stuff the book with series of numbers but makes the narration interesting with personal touch, descriptions of people, their sensitivity and pride, sometimes obsession about cotton.
42. **Michael Pollan (American) The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World.** An interesting question: Are we the exploiters of plants or are they judiciously exploiting humans? After all had it not been for humans, grains would be still limited to some valleys in the Fertile Crescent, apples to some mountain slopes in Kazakhstan, potato to Andean heights, cotton to some obscure parts of the Indus valley etc. In contrast, all these and other selected plants occupy millions of acres from Montana to Kenya, from Aegean region to Argentina. Furthermore, they are genetically much more improved as compared to their ancestors in the ten thousand years of experimentation with agriculture. The book builds on Darwin's original observations about how artificial evolution occurs (evolution directed by human efforts). So-called domesticated species

thrive while the wild ones we admire often do not. Compare dogs to wolves as an example. In the apple section we learn about the "American Dionysus" John Chapman who planted trees all over Ohio and Indiana right when settlers were flowing in masses. We read the story of tulips and the famous Tulipmania in Holland, that is, the tulip boom market in the 17th century. The potato story is more complex. The Irish potato famine related to monoculture. The Incas had always planted a variety of potatoes to avoid the risk of disease. Now, biotechnology has added an insecticide to the leaves of potato plants, taking monoculture one step further. An important message is the dangers of monocultures and preclusion of genetic variety. The genetic varieties or the biodiversity is the natural way to combat against insects and viruses, as otherwise mass contamination of plant types and consequent famines become more probable.

43. **Alain de Botton (French-English): The Consolation of Philosophy (Les Consolations de la Philosophie).** Alain de Botton ties together the thoughts of six classical philosophers. Socrates is offered as a remedy for the feeling of unpopularity; Epicure liberates us from the anxiety of poverty and lack of means; Seneca frees us from our frustrations; Montaigne helps us accept the way we are; Nietzsche for surmounting the difficulties of life; and finally Schopenhauer as an answer to heartbreaks. Curiously, none of these philosophers (with the possible exception of Epicurus) led happy lives, in fact some of them had miserable ending. De Botton, however, shows how each one exhibited great common sense on at least one area in their lives, and we get the message that despite all adversities and mishaps in our lives the only way out is just to forge on.
44. **David Fromkin (British): A Peace to End All Peace.** This is a brilliant documentary of the partitioning of the Middle East, the blunders of the Allies, the collapse and legacy of the Ottoman Empire. It is the story of the colonialist interference, mainly British, in the Middle East, its dismemberment from the Ottoman Empire, the negotiations between the colonizers and the Arab tribesmen, the dream of a Jewish state. Political figures from Lloyd George to Winston Churchill, from Henri Clemenceau to Lawrence of Arabia, from David Ben-Gurion to Reza Pahlavi Han march through the book. There are surprising facts revealed about the Ittihad and Terakki Party, Mustafa Kemal and Enver Pasha. On one hand, once again one understands the uniqueness and greatness of Mustafa Kemal; on the other hand, one realizes that the Turkish miracle and her republic could not have come true had the British not belittled Mustafa Kemal's national liberation initiative and/or had the Soviets somehow unleashed Enver Pasha, who was lurking at Turkey's eastern border. We witness also the blunders of the British, whose inept and ill-informed officers and advisers were seeding dissent everywhere. One extreme example is the Gallipoli attack which caused horrific suffering and half a million casualties. However, the blunders of the Ottoman officials and the duplicity of the short-sighted Arabs are not less hideous. This epic tale is richly documented.
45. **Jonah Lehrer (American) Proust was a Neuroscientist:** In this very enlightening book, the author addresses the schism between the two cultures of science and art. His point is that when it comes to understand the brain, it is often the art, and not the science that leads the way. In this sense, he is critical of the reductionist approach of science vis-à-vis the holistic understanding

that art provides. He studies such people as a painter, a writer, a composer, a poet, a chef to show how these people discovered a truth about the brain. Initially derided, science has shown much later that these people were right. Walt Whitman, the maverick poet during American Civil War, had reached the conclusion that body and soul are inseparable, that if you hit a man's body, you also hit his soul. This was against the established belief of Cartesian school which viewed a noble spirit imprisoned in a filthy flesh. He was the discoverer of our anatomical reality. George Eliot, actually Mary Ann Evans, combated the simplicity of positivism, the utopia dream that everything could be explained with reason, and that philosophy would be made obsolete by experiments and statistics. She came to realize that human life, under the microscope of scientific methods, could not be reduced to "necessitarianism", and that freedom of soul and mind existed. She was vindicated much later when science discovered neurogenesis, the birth and growth of brain cells, that brain creates new neurons throughout the life. Concurrently, genetics demonstrated the limits of genetic determinism, which is also an affirmation of our individuality. In a sense DNA makes us but without determining us. Proust was obsessed with "the hidden space where memory stops", with the processes of memory and its imperfections. He had realized the fallibility of memory, the idea that we can "remember" something without actually experiencing it or the notion that "we have to misremember something in order to remember it" and that with every act of remembering we modulate what we remember. Neuroscience presently proved the Proustian hypothesis that taste and smell are inextricably linked, and being senses that directly connect to the hippocampus, the center of brain's long-term memory, taste and odor memories are indelible. As we go through the other chapters, we meet Escoffier, the French chef, with his discovery of umami before it was scientifically investigated as well as his understanding of smell's involvement in taste. Umami is the taste of protein-rich food, of amino-acids as in the meat, of the MSG: monosodiumglutamate rich food. Science has now discovered the source of this hedonistic pleasure, the umami receptors on the tongue. Paul Cezanne discovered that we see by interpreting the incomplete evidences in the form of signals that reach our brain. In fact, this French painter had used his paintings to show us that we can use our minds to complete the picture. Igor Stravinsky is invoked to assess the plasticity of people's brains: What is noise to us in the beginning, as the patterns of sounds are learned, eventually becomes music, but the avant-garde composers must walk the gauntlet of people initially reacting to it. Gertrude Stein attempted to show that the structure of language is built into us by making words meaningless. This is a book worth reading.

46. **Robert Wright (American), The Evolution of God.** Evolutionary psychology states our brains try to make sense of the world with a hodgepodge of tools; hence religion is a natural outgrowth of this process. Religion, like art, science, politics etc. evolves and matures, and along with it the notion of God. In essence, all religions are about self-interest, and they vie to modify the supernatural forces, to obtain God's favorable intervention, or to change ourselves to harmonize with the supreme order. **Animism:** The first starting point was animism, an infant philosophy of mankind. The hunter-gatherer gods were ancestral spirits, organic spirits like coyote, and elemental spirits like rivers, wind etc. Hunter-gatherer societies did not worship their gods in our sense, but they were very afraid of their whims. Ethical values need not dominate their religion because they live in transparent societies of 40-50 people. No wrongdoing can escape attention;

hence you do not need any god to send punishments. **Shamanism:** From multiple paths of hunter-gatherer communities, shamanism represents the path to modern organized religion incorporating the struggle against the powers of evil. Despite the great variety of powers claimed by shaman, there is one unified theme: They can enter into contact with hidden forces that shape human destiny. He also represents the struggle against evil. Shamans are expected to heal people, to terminate eclipses, but if they fail too often, they can also be replaced. Overall one can talk about a career development for a shaman who along the way they learn many tricks, much like a stock market analyst. In this sense, like modern ministers, they must have faced the dilemma of spiritual dedication and career self-advancement. **Chiefdoms:** Halfway between shamanism and states, chiefdoms represent the final prehistoric phase in the evolution of social organization and of religion. While shamans were half political leaders, in chiefdoms the political and religious leadership coalesced. Departmental gods evolved as agriculture and society got more elaborate. For example, the Polynesian rituals were extremely elaborate; there was no aspect of life which was not accomplished by a religious ceremonial behavior. Overall the ceremonialism helped social order, sharing of work, and prevented crimes like theft. There was no need for a central authority to distribute justice; it was fear of punishment of gods that kept the people in check. Preliminaries of paradise and hell appear; also such concepts as taboo, mana (supernatural electricity, divine power, “getting done what you wanted”). There was no hellish punishment, no afterlife, but all punishment was on this earth. Kings and gods became like hand and glove. Gods served in this era on the one hand as geopolitical lubricant, and on the other hand to provide some moral compass laying down the ethical guidelines. **Polytheism, Monolatry, Monotheism:** A set of complicated emotional, cultural and economic influences have led Israelites toward monotheism. It was not however conceived or inspired at one moment; it took perhaps a millennium to form where Baal, the dominant god, El of South Israel, and Yahve of North Israel took various roles. Israel’s religion has roots in a fundamentalist movement that lead or was fed by resentment of rich people, of their ostentatiousness, resentment of foreigners and of people getting rich from international trade, the haves and the have-nots, almost like a socio-political movement against globalization of the 21st century. Slowly there was a convergence to only one god: Yahve. The Yahve alone movement was led by nationalism and xenophobia. **Views:** Two lines of criticisms: Marxists say that religion only serves the powerful to maintain their hegemony, monopoly and dominance; Functionalists say that religion serves the interests of the society at large, for collective strength, to survive traumas, for higher social vitality.

47. **Steven Pinker (American): How the Mind Works.** Not everything in the book may be totally new to somebody who has some science background, but the book is a joy to read. Steven Pinker has a knack to turn even bland subjects into exciting reading material and you read his books as if you were sitting with a good story teller at a coffee table. The book touches upon several subjects from findings in psychology and brain science to evolution. The book has also many speculations where the author seems to push Darwinism to its limits, many interesting gedanken experiments, the thought processes in the brain. In the section on “Hotheads and Family Values” have interesting interpretations. For example, he claims that anger and rage may have evolved to improve our ancestors negotiating position or that love provides a more credible form of mate

acquisition and pairing than any contract or negotiation. Genes "try" to spread themselves by wiring animals' brains so the animals love their kin and try to keep warm, fed, and safe.

48. **Bernard Lewis (American): Islam and the West.** Bernard Lewis is definitely the greatest scholar on Middle East and Islam. He understands well the culture clashes between the Islamic nations of the Middle East and the more secularized West, and tries to explain to us the odd similarities and tensions between the "infidel" as viewed from both sides. He points the dilemma in which Moslem immigrants in West face since the teachings of Muhammad does not indicate the policy to follow when they are in a minority position in non-Moslem lands. He discusses such other topics as: a) The Western image of Mohammed; b) The difficulties of translating from Arabic; c) The Ottoman threat to Europe until the Turkish defeat at Vienna in 1683; d) Resurgent Islamic fundamentalism as a unifying factor in Mideast politics; e) Why few Islamic countries have traditions of religious coexistence and secularism; f) The incorrectness of many popular beliefs in the West about Islam; g) The non-equivalence of the Islamic state to any Western state.
49. **Vilayanur S. Ramachandran (Indian-American), A Brief Tour of Human Consciousness.** Ramachandran, a professor and research director in the area of brain studies and cognition presents neuroscience for the layman. His assertion is that better understanding of the neurological pathways in the brain will lead us to a much better understanding of everything, from love to politics, and will lead to a principled way of treating abnormalities. He explicates a number of cases where the normal communication paths between emotion and vision are severed. For example in one case, the patient recognizes visually his mother, but the connection to the emotional response is missing, which leads the patient to declare his mother to be a look-alike, but not the real her. In another case, phantom limbs are explained by brain architecture. For example, touching the left cheek of a blindfolded patient causes the sensation of his amputated thumb being touched. This is simply because the whole body is mapped on the whole brain more or less continuously. However, it is possible to have a shortcut in this map through close-by but unrelated parts of the body, such as cheek and thumb. Other particular phenomena explained is pain asymbolia in which the patient responds to pain with laughter, mirror neurons where motor neurons are activated in a monkey when it does not move a limb, but sees another monkey moving, or the case of blindsight where one's vision cortex is damaged hence blind, but yet one is capable correctly to the source of light. His essays on synesthesia and metaphor are very enlightening. In synesthesia the processing of senses are transposed, such as sensing a musical note say mi bemol as the color green. The author's argument is that the part of the brain that processes colors and the one that handles are right next to each other, hence cross-activation. Ramachandran takes from synesthesia and extends it to explain our ability to draw connections between objects and events. Interestingly this phenomenon is seven times more likely to occur in artists poets and novelists. Thus synesthesia becomes the explanation for human ability to develop metaphors, that is the ability to develop links between seemingly unrelated things: in other words, abstract thinking. This reasoning is followed by a bold statement that language itself developed via our brain's hyperconnectivity, cross-activation and metaphor building property. The synesthesia provided the bias just needed to guide the evolution of language in a synergistic bootstrapping visual cortex, auditory cortex, and brains area (Broca's) controlling the movement

of mouth. Similarly the development of syntax is explained with tool building analogy of the primitive hunter-gatherer humans.

50. **Michael Shermer (American), *The Believing Brain*.** This is the book on neuroscience of belief, especially our beliefs in a supernatural Being. What I liked most was his hopeful message for humanity based on the developments of neuroscience, psychology, ethics, and social sciences in general, all shining light upon our thought and belief processes. Over the past three centuries, the technology has solved many of the material problems of mankind and has enabled us to comprehend the physical world. However, the schizophrenic split between material issues and moral issues continues. While we welcome technology for our material problems, we delegate the solution of moral issues to religion! Most of us sincerely think that science and technology cannot answer our moral questions and that millennia-old Middle Eastern religions can. Shermer argues that the better understanding of brain and the development of social sciences will give us the opportunity and the tools to solve problems of moral values. Shermer argues that for humans, beliefs come first and explanations and rationalizations for beliefs follow. In effect, the brain is naturally prone to belief, to construct and imagine believable entities. The first important aspect of the human brain is “patternicity”: This is the unconscious tendency of humans to deduce trends and patterns in the absence of any as a way to minimize uncertainty. For example, even if events occur randomly, we all strive to find a pattern within, like the right number combination, what precedes what etc. The brain processes sensory data flowing in through the senses, looks for and finds or believes it has found patterns, and then attributes to them meanings, which become the basis for beliefs. Then a positive feedback cycle starts such that once a belief is formed, the brain looks for more confirmatory evidences which end up reinforcing those beliefs. The second important aspect of the brain is “agenticity”: People have a tendency to believe that inanimate objects like river’s, the sweater of a murderer, the bicycle of a champion etc. have an agent in them, an essence, so much so that it can rub on people who own them or touch them. This is in fact the bases of shamanism, of spirits, gins, ghosts, demons, of all pagan gods, and of revealed religions. Part of it may be a desperate effort to infuse a meaning to the forces that affect our lives, to interpret the world that surrounds our life. If there are such forces and agents that we all share and or that influence and guide our lives, than we are not alone, but we are members of a tribe joined together supernaturally. Dr. Shermer gives several thought-provoking and entertaining examples of how perfectly intelligent and well-educated people can persist in their beliefs even in the face of overwhelming counter evidence. In fact, the more their beliefs are shaken, the more adamant and militant they become in the defense of their old beliefs. The author addresses such issues as: i) Belief in the afterlife; ii) Belief in God; iii) Belief in Aliens, and iv) Belief in Conspiracies, in a very didactic way based on the scientific principles. The book is rich with anecdotes, illustrative examples, scientific explanations, overall it provides a very pleasant reading experience.
51. **Cemal Kafadar (Turkish), *Between Two Worlds*.** Cemal Kafadar, a notable Turkish historian at the University of Chicago has been studying the formative years of the Ottoman Empire and the construction of the Ottoman state. These formative years (1299-1453) are especially challenging for the historiographer due to the paucity of documents and chronicles. The ottomans were still

tribal, that had not yet developed the tradition of statehood, briefly, they had no conscience and time to document their history. Almost all the available documents are dating from one and half centuries later when they were well on their way to build the empire. Therefore these documents were tainted with warped accounts. Kafadar wonders as most historians do about how this most unlikely and inconspicuous tribe, who had established themselves in Bithynia could in a short while be empire builders. One could state luck, being at the right place at the right time. But also Ertugrul, Osman and their sequel were capable and charismatic leaders. Success begot success, in the sense that as they were successful in gaining booty from Byzantine wealth, more people joined them: the dervishes, the ahi leaders, people from other begliks, even some of the Christian elements who wanted to join in the distribution of booty. The ideological commitment to ghaza (the holy war) was also instrumental, although in these early centuries the Ottomans were not necessarily profoundly religious, but religion provided them a mental framework and a justification for their deeds. They were also pragmatic, they adopted in every place and instant of time what was convenient and practical, whatever worked it was fine for them. Finally there was the unifying goal of a world empire, a mission that supposedly started from a dream of Ertugrul, with the parable of a sycamore tree with deep roots in Anatolia and with ever growing branches embracing the world. The book is interesting, but it is a scholarly work, written for the other historiographers and not for the layman.

52. **Nichlas Ostler (British) Ad Infinitum.** Can one read a scholarly book on the history of Latin with the suspense and pleasure of a detective story? Yes, one can from Ostler's pen. The author describes the course of the Latin language through the 2000 years of its life. Latin started as a very unlikely candidate for a universal language from very humble origins in the tribal past and then city states of Latium. However within 5 centuries it was catapulted into lingua franca of the civilized world, as known at that time, extending from Scotland to Egypt, from Persia to Iberia. Many factors contributed to this expansion, first the administrative genius and fundamental legal system of Rome; then the building of a wide network of roads that facilitated commerce and contacts; third, the military establishment, which at the end of their service carrier would be granted land especially in the conquered land. All these factors facilitated the expansion and wide-scale adoption of Latin in the conquered lands first as the language of prestige, then of daily life. In the words of the author: "Everyone from farmer, to soldier, to engineer, to administrator needed to learn Latin. The language itself became an empire". It is even interesting that with the collapse of the Roman Empire the language did not vanish, but instead was invigorated as it was adopted as the official language of the Catholic Church. Both via church which adopted it as the sole medium for its liturgy and via the emerging universities in the 12th century which adopted Latin as the only medium of cultural exchange, the Latin language continued developing. Latin became the language of medicine, of law, of botany, in short of all sciences and arts up until the 18th century in Europe until the emergence of vernacular languages. Latin continues to live today not only in scientific terminology of many fields, but it indirectly continues to affect the way we express our thoughts, our faith, and our knowledge of how the world functions.
53. **Yuval Noah Harari (Israel) Homo Deus.** I find the book revealing, thought provoking, explorative, though in the second half it starts tasting a bit like science fiction. The book explores

and discusses the condition of humanity in the next century given the advances of science and technology. He points out that humanity, thanks to these advances, has liberated itself from the three scourges of the past, namely: i) Sickness, in that people in the past centuries were decimated not only by epidemics, but by a large variety of illnesses ranging from death at childbirth to contagious diseases. In fact, close to one third died before they reached the age 15, and lucky were those few who could see their 50s. ii) Throughout history, getting food has been the main concern of people, and famines due to climatic vagaries, invasions and wars have decimated populations. Not only the world can now feed an exponentially increasing population, but overeating seem to be more of a health problem nowadays than being hungry. iii) Being in the state of war, invading your neighbor country or living under the threat of being invaded was considered the normal state of affairs. Presently, although there are still wars, it is not accepted as a normal situation and there are increasing international measures to counteract it. Given the “elimination” of hunger, wars and sickness, it seems as if humanity is poised for longevity and for constant state of bliss. In fact, intelligent machines, robots and algorithms can make everything so efficient that people will have much more leisure time without sacrificing from their material comfort or that it will suffice a small percentage of the people to work to make the world go. This boon for humanity has been realized with the concurrence of the following factors: i) Technology and science; ii) Capitalist economy where the motto is “Consumer is always right”; iii) Democratic regimes which echoes capitalism: “The voter is always right”; iv) Humanism: With the era of enlightenment, human values became more important than metaphysical forces, in fact humanity was placed at the center of the universe and human happiness became the tenet. This was based on the model of humans as being rational and independent entities; the voter / consumer is always right presumes that humans are capable of making rational choices and can independently decide. Then Harari proceeds to shake the foundational assumptions of humanism by arguing quite elaborately that after all humans do not have free will. First, because their opinions are malleable and impressionable; in other words, they can be made to want something and sincerely believe in their own free choice and personal conviction, unaware that mechanisms exist for social opinion and conducting people to certain choices. Furthermore these mechanisms are getting increasingly surreptitious and clever. Second, as our understanding of the brain grows, we realize more and more that the decisions, passions, emotions, choices are all biochemical processes, hence subject to the mechanistic laws. Finally, Harari explores the grand questions of the 21st century? Will individual continue to have a meaning in the future techno-economies? Will the pursuit of happiness, a fulfilling career be possible? Will liberties and democracies continue to meaningfully exist? In other words, the order of the world, the solid liberal framework created via science and technology combined with a shared sense of morality which puts the individual at the center: Will it survive? The book is filled with so much interesting observations, different ways of looking at the reality and intelligent analogies that it is a pleasure to read it. As an example, the author talks about the intersubject reality: Certain things exists in our collective imagination, and yet they have great power over us and can shape our lives. A case in point is the Soviet Union: Until 1990 it was the greatest military and political power in the world; it could have destroyed the world. Yet when the three leaders of Ukraine, Russia and Belorussia got together and sign a paper, the Soviet Union simply disappeared.

54. **Tom Standage (American) A History of World in 6 Glasses.** This is a hilarious account of the drinks preferred by different societies and which became fashionable and then faded out from Stone Age to present. We learn first about beer, dating back some 5000 years, who was very popular starting from the Fertile Crescent and spread in the Middle East. There are many tablets and terra cotta pieces that depict a bear drinking scene, always from a big cask with straw pipes. The popularity of beer, as would be the case of wine after a few millenniums, was based on its slightly antiseptic property in addition to its nutritional value. In fact workers would be compensated for in terms of beer and bread loaves proportional to their rank and effort. The primacy of beer passed to wine with the advent of the Greek and Roman civilizations. Wine was always considered a more refined drink vis-à-vis wine, and event after two thousand years the wine culture continues in the stately dinners or when the host selects the proper year from his cellar for his invitees. The Europeans learned the distillation process from the Arabs, when then used the technique to condense their wines into a much stronger drink called “burnt wine” or brandenwine, said more simply brandy. After all, the concentrated form was much easier to transport to wine hungry countries of Northern Europe. Brandy became so popular in Middle Ages that it was called alternatively as the water of life, or aqua vitae, or in Gaelic whisky! With the discovery of the New World and West Indies, sugar plantations started, and an entrepreneur converted the molasses, disposed as waste, into a stronger drink, called rum. Distilled drinks like rum and whisky were extremely popular in the colonial period of America, and some slaves were compensated for in terms of an adequate amount of rum. With the development of trade routes, when East Indies were discovered, tea started emerging as a popular drink in England. In fact, tea can be considered as the first imperialist drink as it was instrumental in the building of the British Empire over East Indies and China. England held for a while the world monopoly of tea and at home the high society developed a craze about ceremonial tea drinking. In the agricultural period, alcohol intake by workers would not affect productivity; but with the onset of the Industrial era and the conversion of field jobs into factory manual or office mental jobs, attentiveness was a prime requirement. Hence coffee filled in this requirement naturally, and its function lasts even today. However, the true imperialist drink, a drink through which to spread a culture, a way of life to masses has been Coca Cola in the 20th century. One can find Coca Cola vendor machines or at least its commercial advertisements in the remotest parts of the world, even in the areas of Africa impoverished to the subsistence level. It is quite ironic after several millennia the world has turned its attention to water. Bottled water is being sold everywhere usually at a price exceeding that of gasoline! In summary, beer was a basis for why people replaced hunting with farming; wine was the civilizer of Greece and Rome; hard spirits, such as rum and whisky are somewhat associated with slavery and the American Revolution; tea became the life sustainer and improver; coffee, the fuel for the enlightenment; and finally, Coca-cola, the expression of cultural dominance.

55. **Jean-Paul Roux (French): History of Turks (Histoire des Turcs).** Jean-Paul Roux has dedicated most of his research and writing to the history of Turkish and Mongol people. Jean-Paul traces their history from the first record in history about 300 BC when these tribes seem to have sprung suddenly from taigas until their venture into the Mediterranean and the modern day Turkey. The tens of states they founded and demolished in Central Asia and Middle East, their

incessant incursions now into China, then into India, and then into Europe, and their migrations. The Turks represent a great civilization that vacillates between peace and bloodshed, between tolerance and religious fanaticism, between refined art and brutal force, between modernity and mysticism. After two thousand years of struggle, fights, flights, rise and fall one rightfully asks: what the Turks have left as a heritage to the humanity?

56. **Philip Mansel (British-Turkish): Constantinople: City of Desire 1453 1918.** This is a fascinating history of Istanbul through five hundred years of its existence as the capital of the Ottoman Empire. Constantinople was the envy of all nations for millennia, called also the City of Caesars, or simply the City, since it was the only city worthy of a note for centuries. Mansel traces the evolution of the city from its conquest in 1453 on to its rise to be the capital of the world in the 16th and 17th centuries, and down to its demise in 1918. The book is replete with anecdotal evidences, visceral details of the Sublime Palace life, descriptions of life scenes, urban portraits and cityscapes, impressions and diary notes of artists and ambassadors who lived and worked there.
57. **Enzo Traverso (French), Le Passé, Modes D'Emploi (The Past: Modes of Usage).** E. Traverso investigates the interactions between collective memory of a society and the consciousness or fabrication of history. The past of a society is remembered, kept alive, turned in fact to a civil religion via the industry of culture, the museums, the educational programs etc. This “religion” can be used to preserve the memory of past injustices suffered by a society, and used to legitimize the injustices that that society perpetrates presently on others. But it can also be used to preserve the memory of past struggles, of utopias, of revolts against domination. The past century provides plenty of incidences on the use and abuse of the past. Enzo ruminates across multiple examples from recent history on the historiography and the politics of the past, and collective memory. The collective memory is like a history with abundant elements of subjectivity, less “arid” than history itself. The past is transformed in collective memory after being selected and re-interpreted according to the cultural sensitivities, ethical questioning and the politics of the era. The past can be transformed into objects of consumption, aestheticized, neutralized for the tourism industry of the memory. Often a “tradition is invented” starting from a real or mythical past, which helps to reinforce the cohesion of a group, to give legitimacy to its institutions, to inculcate values to the society.
58. **Alex Ross (American), Everything Else is Noise.** This is a magisterial account of the twentieth century classical music. Classical music had a wonderful development period between roughly 1650s and the first half of the 20th century. At the turn of the century the classical music was absolutely reigning, it was adored and was considered almost a birthright. Statues of Beethoven and Brahms adorned all the concert halls as if they were busts of demigod. The dominant style and taste was that of the first Viennese school. There were towering figures like Ravel, Mahler, Stravinsky, Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Strauss, Puccini. Yet by the end of the century, within

almost a span of two or three generations, the society was largely alienated from the classical music. This venerable form of art is now considered by some critics as a dying one attended only by a dwindling group of elderly elites.

Ross gives very rich details about the sociopolitical background of the classical music in this period. For example, we read about the fascination of Nazis for Wagnerian style of grandeur, and how Hitler identified himself with the destiny of Wagner's operatic figures, and how they tried to remove any trace of Jewishness from music. After the end of WWII the Americans wanted to de-Nazify the German taste for music and prepared programs to introduce music outside the classical Viennese school. In the Soviets, the heavy-handed control of the communist party on the arts in general, and classical music in particular. It is a mystery why Stalin liked some of Shostakovich's music, but not find some of it appropriate, why the Party deemed a symphony as not glorifying the workers adequately. In USA, the exodus of European masters, mostly Eastern European Jews to America, and how they changed the musical scene. A number of them found new life in California, where in the 40s and 50s they made music for the Hollywood films. However, even before the influx of European artists, the grand social program of Franklin Roosevelt did much to bring the classical music to the masses. Musicians and artists were supported everywhere and concerts were organized everywhere where literally thousands of people attended. Through these vicissitudes Ross discusses how American music born in and imitating the European schools eventually comes of age in the likes of Ives, Copland, Cage, etc., and finds its own peculiar sound.

Through anecdotal stories and philosophical ruminations, Ross studies the influence of nationalism in music (the German School, the French School, the British and the American Schools) and shows how each school and each composer was influenced by the simultaneous destruction and reconstruction of the world borders resulting from the wars of that century. The spiritual conflict many composers felt, as they felt alienated and torn away from tonality, not all quite able to adapt themselves to atonality, twelve-tone material, dissonances, even noise elements; they could not go back to the past, yet could not embrace 20th century modernism wholly. As such it reads also like a history book. His treatment is not everywhere balanced as he emphasizes a bit too much the Austro-German school (Wagner, Strauss, Schoenberg, Sibelius, Berg, Webern, Bruckner), while the French and Russian schools are treated tangentially. One expects a grand conclusion from such a grand book: One thing is certain, in the 21st century classical music and pop culture are not pitted against each other anymore. The interconnectedness of all music can be felt everywhere. Young classic-music composers have grown with pop music in their ears and some of their inventiveness derives from that music. Conversely, modern pop music is also deeply affected by the 20th century classical repertoire. One can say that a common ground is being searched. All in all, this is the best guide for classical music of the 20th century.

59. **Stephen Greenblatt (American) The Swerve:** i) Everything is made of invisible particles: These bodies of matter, these seeds of things. These atoms are immutable, indivisible, invisible and infinite in number, and they are in perpetual motion, coming together to make things, and then dissolve, only to recombine again. ii) The whole universe, from shining stars to the lowliest

insect is made of these particles. They are eternal and time also is infinite in extent. There is a ceaseless process of creation, destruction, recombination, redistribution, but the sum total of the matter remains the same. iii) The elementary particles are like the letters of an alphabet, capable of being combined in an infinite number of ways. All combinations are made according to a code. iv) Space and time are unbounded; there are no fixed points, no beginnings, no middle, and no limits. Matter is not packed together in a solid mass, but in the void in between, matter can move, collide, combine, for example food being dispersed through the body. v) The universe has no creator, no designer; the patterns of order and disorder are not due to any divine scheme, but it is the inherent property of the matter. vi) The ceaseless creation and destruction are governed by chance. A swerve, the most minimal of motions is enough to set course on combinations and recombinations over a limitless span of time. vii) Nature ceaselessly experiments: All living beings, from plants to insects to the higher mammals and humans have evolved through a long process of trial and error. Creatures whose combination of organs enables them to adapt and to reproduce will be successful in establishing themselves, until the conditions to which they have adapted persist. viii) The universe was not created for or about humans; the world is not purpose-built to make our species at home. The fate of any species, e.g., human, is not the pole around which everything revolves. In fact, human species may not last forever. ix) Humans are not unique: They are part of a much larger complex that links them to all other life forms as well as to inorganic matter. Humans do not occupy any privileged place in existence. x) There was no original paradisiac time of plenty, of security and peace; human life started in a primitive battle for survival, they struggled to eat and to avoid being eaten. Social cooperation, communities governed by settled customs, language faculty, the arts of civilization etc. were not given to humans as a gift by gods, but they evolved slowly and painstakingly over a long time out of necessity. xi) The soul dies: The human soul is made of the same material as the body. It is interlaced with veins, flesh, and sinews, and when the body dies, the soul, which is part of the body, dies as well. xii) There is no afterlife: Humans unnecessarily console and torment themselves with what awaits them when they die. But there are no posthumous punishments or rewards since the soul dies with the body. Therefore life on this earth is all what we have got. xiii) All organized religions are superstitious delusions. Religions are created to satisfy the deeply rooted fears, longings, and humans project images of the power, of the security, of the beauty that they would like to possess. For both beauties and bounties we see around and the misfortunes and bad things that occur to us there are natural explanations. But humans prefer praying and hope to get aid from some metaphysical power for the problems of their physical world. xiv) There are no angels, demons, spirits of the dead, genii and ghosts. Immaterial spirits of any kind do not exist. xv) The highest goal of human life should be the enhancement of pleasure and the reduction of pain. Life should be organized to serve the pursuit of happiness. xvi) Religions are invariably cruel. Though all religions promise hope and love, they also phantasize punishment, retribution, hell, fire, anxiety, and sacrifice. xvii) The greatest obstacle to happiness is not pain, but delusion. Delusion in the sense that humans have phantasies about inordinate desire that by far exceeds what finite mortals are capable of. In the misguided belief that souls are immortal, hence potentially subject to eternal punishment and suffering, they negotiate with gods for an eternity of happiness in the afterlife, xviii) Understanding the nature of things: The realization that the universe is made of particles and void, that there was no providential creator, that we are not in

the center of the universe, that our souls are mortal, and that we are not any different from any other creature is not a reason for disappointment and despair. On the contrary, this understanding is the first step to happiness, as one is liberated from false illusions, from any fear of gods, and as one can make exercise of reason. With this comprehension a sense of wonder must come. These thoughts are not those of a scientist of the Era of Enlightenment, but that of Lucretius, a Roman poet-philosopher (99 BC – 51). Such great works of literature and philosophy had to sleep during dark ages from 4th century till 15th century. When Christianity became the official religion, all scholarly activities and all schools of philosophy were suppressed and the Dark Ages set in. Most of the books of Greek and Roman civilizations were lost, but a handful could survive in the libraries of monasteries as they were copied by scribes. With the onset of humanism, a handful of poets and intellectuals started recovering one by one through a painful process the surviving texts. These texts, notably the *Rerum Natura* of Lucretius, had subtle but in the long run immense influence on the intellectuals in Europe from David Hume to Leonardo da Vinci, from Molière to Giordano Bruno, from Charles Darwin to Thomas Jefferson.

60. **Malcolm Gladwell (American): Blink.** Human mind is capable of both linear quantitative thinking and of nonlinear, holistic, qualitative judgment. There are occasions where we need a mass of data carefully to be analyzed and logical conclusion to be drawn. There are many other instances in life where “less is more”, that is, where a flash of an impression, the first few minutes, some apparently irrational way of reaching to conclusions, a gut feeling is more useful and overwhelmingly more correct. The author describes it as “thin slicing” denoting lean data and compressive sensing versus “thick slicing”, denoting abundance of data and control room situation. Often our first impressions of a person within the first fifteen minutes of a dialog, a brief visit to that person’s living environment can reveal all the information that you need. The author extends his analysis to situations in emergency room, tactical combat scene and marketing.

61. **Bülent Atalay (Turkish-American): Math and the Mona Lisa.** A professor of physics explores mathematical principles in art, especially the Renaissance art and Leonardo da Vinci. He discusses the idea of golden ratio that we seem to encounter everywhere from natural fibers, leaf patterns to Egyptian pyramids and new classical architecture. At the same time the author gives a synopsis of the breathtaking development in physics in the first one third of the twentieth century. He concludes with ruminations on the nature of sciences and the nature of arts.

62. **Dionys Burger (Dutch): Sphereland Flatland.** What would have happened if the world were two-dimensional? And what if one-dimensional? How would life evolve, how would people recognize each other, how would be our spatial organizations, our wars, dominations, day-to-day life? What would a sphereland (4D world) inhabitant feel when visiting friends in the flatland (3D world)? Or a flatlander visiting a linelander (2D world, one space dimension and one time dimension)?

63. **Robert D. Kaplan (American): Balkan Ghosts.** Kaplan is a historian and a journalist: he cuts through and deciphers the spirit of the Balkan people. From monasteries in Romania to enclaves in former Yugoslavia, from headquarters of the Bulgarian communist party to the transformation of Thessalonica from a Turco-Jewish city into Greek one he finds similar trends. All these nations bear strongly their ancestral hatreds towards each other; they cherish expansionist ambitions to the borders in some remote era in history. For example, many Greeks believe that Macedonia is theirs since that was where Alexander the Great hailed from; the Bulgarians had it in the 10th and 13th centuries; it was part of the Serbian empire in the 14th century. He traces the strong vein of religion and observes that sectarianism draws often stronger boundaries than nationalism. It is a fascinating walk through history and a key to understanding to the powder keg of the 21st century. On the other hands, the book has some flaws and the reality is sometimes distorted under his too Western and subjective views. For example: i) Kaplan does not fully understanding Orthodox Christianity, its art, liturgical life, church organization, and disparages it is a dangerous brew of mysticism, austerity and nationalism; ii) His program for the Balkans is that these people can only be saved by following the enlightened Western approach, neglecting the fact that these recipes caused certain of the tragedies of the 20th century; iii) There is a divide in the Greek history between the ancient Hellenes, relying on principle and logic, and the Romios, the Greeks of the Eastern Roman and later Byzantine Empires, relying on instinct, on the miracle working powers of icons; iv) He is far too critical of all social reforms and political regimes while it seems that the only surviving values are religious traditions and religious art. Despite these shortcomings the book is a joy to read.
64. **Jared Diamond (American): Collapse.** A fascinating analysis of geopolitical, environmental and societal conditions that has lead to the flourishing and collapse of civilizations. Diamond analyzes several historical cases where societies doomed themselves to annihilation, mainly by having destroyed the environment first, in addition to some other factors. He gives examples ranging from Montana valleys to Greenland in the 9th century, from Rwanda to Anasazi Indians, from feudal Japan to Pacific Islands. He brings rigorous scientific discipline, using results from isotope analysis, pollen analysis, tree-ring analysis, seismology, agronomy, archaeology, sociology, and even the history of religion. He continues with a more hopeful note giving us a panorama of success stories of societies who, while reaching high levels welfare could also preserve their environment. The author concludes with recommendations to build a sustainable bright future. His account of complicated processes is very clear but without any oversimplification.
65. **Mira Rothenberg (American): Children with Emerald Eyes.** Intense and soul-searching case histories of a psychologist that has been working with children. One can witness the torment she goes through with children that fail or that relapse; and the joy and feeling of triumph with children with which she succeeds. She deals with children that are deeply emotionally ill, often misunderstood by their family, avoided by their peers. One child tries to eat his body out; another

one attempts to break down the walls of incomprehension; still another feels tired of unfulfilled family love, of an inconsistent world and decides to withdraw within his own world. There are many children that are dumped from war-torn Europe, some born on concentration camps; children that at a very precocious age have witnessed the horrors of war.

66. **Primo Levi (Italian): If This is A Man (Se Questo é l'Uomo).** One of the best witness documents to the horrors of concentration camps and the extermination of European Jews. It is the personal story of his deportation from Italy, denounced by fascists to Auschwitz. He has survived the holocaust because he was deported one year before the end of war, and also because the Germans, due to shortage of labor, had decided to prolong the lives of prisoners. There is no outburst of hatred or self-pity: he coolly narrates, often rationalizing, the events, the inmates, and the behavior of German functionaries. The punishments, the arbitrary tortures, the selection of weak to gas chambers to make rooms for newly deported prisoners; the last days of the camp; it is a tragic but captivating personal account.

67. **Brian Green (American): The Fabric of the Cosmos.** This is an elegant account of cosmology, of the mysteries of space and time, of the quantum mechanics, of the nine, perhaps ten dimensions of the universe, and cosmology all in a style to be enjoyed by non-experts and experts. Green discusses topics as to whether space is a physical entity or a human abstraction, whether time must have a direction, how and if the universe expands, the wonders of symmetry, up to the world of strings. Surely Green is a born physicist, science journalist and a teacher in that the most mind boggling concepts become understandable under his pen. For example, you understand easily why time has to move on in one direction or why space in the universe need not be uniform, and all this without any equations.

68. **Randolph Nesse, George Williams (American): Why We Get Sick.** The authors present a Darwinian approach to explain our body's reactions, defenses, cause of illnesses and the laws of natural selection. In this endeavor of explaining evolutionary biology the authors complement each other in that Nesse is a physician and professor of psychiatry, and Williams is a professor of ecology and evolution. It takes a critical look at the medications, infections, viruses, and points out our evolutionary advantages. Allergies, Alzheimer's disease, Huntington's disease, cancer. . . have all a new interpretation. For example, the symptoms of most sicknesses can be explained as protective overreaction of our bodies. The accrued wisdom is that we should not necessarily try to treat the symptoms, but let the defensive mechanisms of the body work on their own. The question of why the sophisticated design of our bodies has so many flaws and is so vulnerable to diseases finds an answer in these maxims: i) The mechanism of evolution fits our bodies for reproduction, not for optimum health; ii) The mechanism is imperfect and subject to mutation; iii) We are in competition with other organisms such as viruses, bacteria; iv) Natural selection

favors youth, cares little for the maintenance of the organism after the age of reproduction, and neglects the aged. Finally the authors claim that many “modern” diseases are caused by “novel environments” of the modern world to which our Stone Age bodies have not had time to adapt.

69. **Henry Kissinger (American): Diplomacy.** This book is a tour de force of the history of diplomacy from 17th century until modern times. The story starts with Cardinal Richelieu’s invention of diplomacy in the 17th century and traces it through various its evolution stages until modern times. Kissinger contrasts European diplomacy based on conflicts, alliances of interest to American style based on cooperation and collective security. He draws portraits of Napoleon, Bismarck, De Gaulle, Truman, and Reagan etc. One of the claims of Kissinger is that United States has swung back and forth between the idealism of Wilson and the pragmatic/Realpolitik perspective in which USA was primarily looking out for its own best interests. This may also help to understand the American hawkish policies. In my opinion Kissinger was faulty and guilty of two important decisions: The first one is the policy of Green Belt, that is, encouragement of fundamentalist Islam to stop Communism in the Middle East, which in turn created such extreme regimes as those in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and perhaps Turkey. The second one is the coup in Chile to topple Allende’s regime was threatening American interests. The book does not mention any of these two. However the book remains very readable, informative and interesting.
70. **Derek Cheung (Chinese, Taiwan), Conquering the Electron.** One would normally think that history of engineering, in particular that of electronics engineering could be very boring stuff. And yet, Cheung’s account of the development of electrical and electronics engineering in the last two centuries makes a very exciting and pleasant reading. First, he was first hand witness and took part in the dizzying technological developments both in the Silicon Valley and the Pacific Rim. Second, the history becomes very colorful and full of human touch with the behind-the-scenes details, with the anecdotes, description of maverick characters, moments of glory and personal tragedy, and first-hand accounts of many facts. **Beginnings:** It all started with static electricity: one can think of Benjamin Franklin’s thunderstorm lightning experiments with a kite, Galvani’s observations of animal electricity on a frog’s leg, and Volta’s theory that electricity would be produced when different metals were connected. Volta’s discovery was of monumental importance in that for the first time electricity could be produced and stored. Other discoveries followed: Humphry Davy discovered electroplating and inducing chemical reactions on metals with electricity, as well as generating bright sparks with pointed electrodes subjected to high voltage. **Telegraph and Telephone:** It is quite interesting that, Morse, the inventor of telegraph, had an extremely hard time convincing authorities and investors in the utility of this device. After several decades of trying and frustrations (he even paid a visit to Sultan Abdülmecit who showed significant personal interest), finally the tipping point came when England decided to equip its railways with telegraph, and in the US, news sent rapidly over long distance during an electoral campaign impressed the people. Soon, all countries were dotting their landscapes with telegraph poles, and within two decades a transatlantic cable was laid out. The invention of telephone by Bell is also fascinating. For example, his profound understanding of acoustics, his interest in speech therapy, the significant political and financial support he got in the Washington circles,

the race for the invention of telephone with Elisha Gray, the building of the telephone business, the ensuing patent battles all make interesting reading. Beside telephony recall that Bell was also the inventor of the first sound recording instruments. The book proceeds with the history of electrification, the AC-DC wars, the collision course between Edison and Tesla. The stubborn and heroic efforts of Marconi in realizing proof of concept wireless transmission over Atlantic Ocean were remarkable. **Vacuum tube:** The invention of a vacuum tube, where the flow of current could be controlled by a third control electrode and could be made a one-directional device ushered a surprisingly large number of applications. Radio, at the beginning of the 20th century was probably the most prominent invention that changed profoundly the lives of people. This was followed, within a span of half a century by the enormous popularity of television. Another impact was the facilitation of long-range telephony due to enabling of amplifiers. The WWII effort contributed immensely to the advancement of electronics. The most critical invention was radar which was a huge advantage for the Allies in the submarine warfare. It also enabled radio navigation, hence made air combat over long distances feasible. One cannot pass without reminiscing of the greed of corporation, who armed with a horde a patent lawyers pursued patent right for the invention of the FM radio from its original creator, Neil Armstrong, and for the invention of the television, from the developer of its prototype, Philo Farnsworth. **Solid-state electronics:** Bell Labs was endowed with extensive funds and government approval, so that research teams could single-mindedly work on advanced projects. This laboratory had also collected the best brains in the world. The fact that it took almost ten years of intense research effort by the best scientists of Bell Labs indicates the birth pains of an invention and a new technology. The solid-state triode became a reality thanks to the genius of many researchers, but in particular of William Shockley, John Bardeen, Walter Brattain, who all received the Nobel Prize. Bell Labs had business acumen and quickly turned the invention into a commercial product and the electronic era commenced. Though the invention of the transistor mattered a lot for the military industry, the public did not feel its impact. Until the Japanese came up cleverly with a transistor radio: Transistor radio from Sony company in Japan became an immediate commercial hit. **Silicon Valley:** Shockley wanted to establish a electronic company in Palo Alto, since it was also his hometown. Andrew Beckman, a rich entrepreneur with a particular interest in science and technology provided the funds. This was in fact the birth of Silicon Valley and of the venture capitalism. Some the bright and experienced scientists that left Shockley's faltering company established Fairchild, Motorola, Texas Instruments and Intel. These giant companies advanced the state-of-the-art of the silicon technology with such inventions as the planar transistor, the memory chip, the integrated circuit, the microprocessor, the microcomputer, semiconductor lasers, and many many others. The incredible pace of inventions and of the growth of the electronic industry continues and accelerates.

71. **Thomas Piketty (French) Le Capital au 21ème Siècle (The Capital in the 21st Century):** Definitely the best nonfiction book I have read over many years. This masterwork explains in very clear terms the reasons and ways of capital accumulation over the last three centuries, the distribution of wealth, the dynamics of growth, the social implications of the unbalance in the sharing of wealth, and the impact on it of major political upheavals and wars. **A)** Why the chasm? One of the most shocking observations was the extreme unbalance of the accumulation

of wealth after the industrial revolution such that, in almost all countries, 10% of the population possessed 90% of the wealth while the rest 90% of the population had to do with the remaining 10%. Even more shocking was the unusually large portion, about 50%, of the wealth held by only 1% of the population. The two world wars in the first half of the twentieth century, however, wiped out most of the accumulated capital so that by 1950s the new sharing of wealth gave rise to the so called middle class, and the share of the richest 10% fell to 50% of the national wealth. However, after the inception of the new capitalism, from 1970s on, the social rights, the concept of social state started to be torn down, and the wealth distribution became once more lopsided in the first decade of the 21st century, almost as in the beginning of the 20th century. A case in point is the privatization of the national wealth; between 1950 and 1970, up to 1/3rd of the national wealth used to belong to the state, while presently it is only 1-2%.

B) Saving versus demographic growth: Piketty explains these trends based on two simple formulae of capitalism: The second law states that $\beta = \text{capital} / \text{revenue} = s$ (saving rate of a country's yearly revenue) / g (growth rate g of a countries wealth), therefore, unavoidably, as the population growth rate slows down or the economic growth dampens, the beta factor increases. This implies that the capital owners will possess increasingly larger portions of wealth, and it is not surprising to find that the capital accumulation is 6 times or more of the yearly national revenue. While the two World Wars had reduced the β factor to 2-3, presently it has bounced back to 6-7. The reasons for such a rising trend of inequality can be found in i) Privatization, thus transfer of riches from public sector to private sector; ii) Slowing down of demographic growth in the developed countries; iii) Prizing of houses and of valuable papers due to favorable atmosphere.

C) Savings: The two components of savings are private savings and business savings, which, respectively account for 60% and 40% of the total. Re-invested profits of the owner is also considered as private saving. Typically people save 30% of their revenue, 15% of which to replace depreciated capital, and 15% represents true savings. Since there is about 5% public debt, using this deficit figure, one can conclude that national savings (%) is private savings (15%) – public debt (5%) = national savings (10%). Furthermore, national savings can go even negative if public investment is less than public deficit.

D) People's capital: Consider physical assets like car, house, furniture, kitchen robot etc. Presently, the sum total of these form 600% of the yearly revenue; a middle-class European typically makes about 30.000 €/year, and his average revenue is about 180.000 €. Their physical assets, except the house, sum to 10-15.000 €, which is between 30 to 50% of their revenue. Their capital, worth 180.000, is split between a house (50%) and saving accounts or bonds (50%).

E) Why again inequality in the 21st century: Transfer of public wealth through privatization explains only 1/4th of the growth of the private wealth. It is interesting to note that in Russia the privatization has leaped from 0% (one year of revenue) to 4 years of revenue in one generation. Another factor explaining the rise of capital/revenue ratio is the unchecked price increases of assets like buildings, equipment. One other factor is the exorbitant salaries that leaders of the industries, CEOs, receive, not necessarily reflecting their marginal productivity. Finally, there are exogenous factors such as petrol prices.

F) Land capital versus housing and equipment capital: Until 18th century, land capital is very important representing 4 years of revenue, if the land has added values like drainage, tilling etc.; otherwise its value is only 0.5 year of revenue. Furthermore depreciation of land was very slow; notice that in contrast depreciation of buildings and equipment is much more rapid.

G) Work or capital revenue: Historically, one

had 65-75% work revenue and 25-35% capital revenue in the form of interest, rent, dividends etc. At this stage, let's remind ourselves the first law of capitalism: percentage of wealth due to capital (α) = yield of the capital (g) x capital-to-revenue ratio (β), thus $\alpha = g \beta$; since β is 600% and g is typically 3 to 7%, one ends up in $\alpha = 30\%$, the share of the revenue due to capital. Over 18th to 21st centuries, capital has yielded 4-5% or 20-25 years of annual revenue. We can say that capital in the 21st century will be as important as it was in the 18th century, so that wealth due to capital will represent 3-40% of the total revenue **H**) Consequences of the growth of beta: This will give rise to extreme inequality, such that 50% of people most disadvantaged in capital are 10 times poorer than the 10% most advantaged; also, the 50% least paid employees receive 3 times less than the 10% best paid ones. The uppermost centile (1%, which in Turkey amounts 700.000 people!) will be sufficiently numerous and powerful for structuring social, economic and political order. In the 20th century, it appeared that work was the main instrument to ascend; in the 21st century, capital gains again become the most important instrument as in the 18th century. Thus the lower 50% is almost as poor in 2010 as they were in 1910. The only difference is that there is now a middle-class, 40%, possessing an average capital. For all societies and for all ages, one observes that 50% poorest possess 5% of the capital, 10% richest possess between 60-90% of the capital and the 40% in between possess 5 to 35% of the capital. The surprising fact of the 20th century is that it has allowed the formation of a middle class, 40% of the population, possessing 25-35% of the capital

72. **John Kay (American) Culture and Prosperity:** The author starts by asking the obvious question: A nurse in Switzerland, a teacher in Ukraine and a computer engineer in Mumbai : Their monthly salaries, respectively, are 4.000 €, 1.000 €, and 280 €, even though they have spent for their education similar number of years, and they are equally good and dedicated in their jobs and put as many hours. Why is it that the computer engineer in Mumbai gets 1:14 less as compared to the Swiss nurse. Productivity or bargaining power does not explain, either, the wage differential. The Indian engineer is not less productive and the Swiss nurse does bargain harder. The answer of John Kay is “institutions”: it does not suffice for the economy to take off to have as input ingredients capital and labor. If the third ingredient, that of institutions, the social and cultural infrastructure is missing, it will not succeed. A case in point is developing countries after WWII; for example, India's hopes after liberation were very high. The common thinking was that the amalgam of government planning, capital and technology would push the country into wealth even faster than the already industrialized countries, which seemed to have no planning, and in lieu, to rely on chaotic, un-coordinated development steps. And yet India, along with all other third world countries did not succeed as they wished due to feeble social organization, education, mindsets etc. Other causes can be found, ironically, in excessive richness of natural resources, like Congo and Saudi Arabia, which distorts the structure of economic institutions. In summary, inequalities in wages are the result of social and political injustice. Modern economies have to choose between competitive advantage “do better than others” versus comparative advantage “do what you can do best”. The book is informative, but at places it feels like a textbook trying to argue and explain why market economies are more successful than planned economies, why incentives and information, sine qua non of industrial economies, do not often go in lock step, why overspecialization is not necessarily a good thing, so much so that all the big companies are

in fact trying to diversify etc. He also emphasizes pluralism, which is for Kay, the antithesis of planned economies, and it is defined in the narrow sense of “open debate and decentralized authority”

73. **Jason Goodwin (British), *Lords of the Horizons - A History of the Ottoman Empire*.** This is an interpreted history of the Ottoman Empire from its foundations till its demise. There are three ways to read the book: the first one is straightforward history of the Empire as we read in the textbooks. On a second level, the book contains an incredible richness of anecdotal details, hints and clues extracted from the reports of Venetian bailios, of travelers, ambassadors, traders, renegades, captured fighters, envoys. Their observations and comments illustrate often so lucidly the spirit of age and the mentality of Ottomans. Finally the author is searching for answers as to how a bunch of nomadic people rose from the dusty plains of Anatolia to build the richest and most powerful empire of the world in three centuries, and how and why these same people floundered and failed so miserably in the following three centuries. The magic of their success was their pragmatism: they adopted whatever system and rule worked. They had a vision, like the dream of Edeb Ali, of a grand tree rooted in Anatolia but whose branches would spread all over the world. Success attracted success as the European talents flowed into the Empire. They had the zeal of new converts to Islam and they found a weak and fragmented Europe, and an exhausted Byzantine Empire. They had the luck of having a succession of ten, long-living and superb rulers. The reasons of their failure are more complicated. The conquering zeal faded away as they reached their boundaries and the borders closed. Conceit and hubris prevented them from realistic assessment of the world conjunctures and of the developments in the West. Collapse of the tax collection system and of the central authority, avidity and self-righteousness of the rulers brought about the decay. A string of totally incapable emperors in the 17th century signaled the reversal of fortunes. It is startling to realize that after six centuries of fiery existence the Ottomans do not exist, nor their language. The book has no definite chronology and assumes prior knowledge about places and events. It provides a very informative reading and helps us see the big picture of the Ottoman reality.
74. **Joseph Ledoux (American), *The Emotional Brain - The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life*:** This is an excellent book that incorporates the best of psychological, biological, and modern neuroscientific research in rendering a good picture of the current knowledge about emotions and how emotions are experienced in the body and the mind. We experience emotions at every turn of our lives and yet we know so little about the neural processes in our brain that lead to emotions. Joseph Ledoux first traces the history of brain research from Descartes on to modern neuroscience and describes the modern understanding of emotions. Then he proceeds to investigate one basic emotion, the fear, which is a universal emotion in all living creatures. LeDoux believes that emotions evolved from bodily and behavioral responses controlled by the brain as a means to help our remote ancestors survive a hostile environment. Consequently, the emotional states we subjectively experience become the end result of information processing that occurs unconsciously in the brain. The brain decodes the significance of stimuli in order to shape appropriate behavior. This process can sometimes go astray and, for example, unconscious fear-related memories can result in neurotic anxiety, phobias, panic attacks or obsessive-compulsive

disorders. I would like to quote a few of the interesting facts pointed out by the author: i) The co-existence of multiple memory systems in the brain, including one for emotional memories; ii) The neurons processing fear were organized at a very early stage of evolution, in fact even before the line of reptiles and primates split up, which explains why fear reactions are so similar in a wide variety of animals, from humans down to reptiles; iii) There exist profuse pathways from amygdale, the core of emotions, to the cortex, the center of thought, but that the converse is not true. In fact the pathways from the cortex to the amygdale are very few which explains probably why emotions affect our thoughts but we cannot control them with our emotions: iv) The relevance of the rapid `gut reaction` of the emotional system, absolutely necessary for survival, and its tempering and later interpretation of the sensory inputs by the prefrontal cortex: v) Words are totally inadequate to describe our emotions, to control them and to get in touch with them; vi) The existence of a conscious memory brain resulting from our thought processes and of an unconscious memory brain storing our emotional experiences, unreachable with words. The book is a true enlightener about us and our emotions.

75. **Oliver Sacks (American), Musicophilia.** After reading this book, music will never be the same for me, but it will have an even more exalted role in my life. In a breathtaking sequence of 29 chapters Sacks takes us music seizures and brain images, from musicality talent to music savants, from rhythm and movement to melancholia and dementia. We learn about the very special role of music in the functioning of our brain. There are many real but entertaining anecdotal stories such as: A surgeon that is struck by lightning and thereafter develops a passion for music; a conductor who develops amnesia after his brain became inflamed, he can't remember anything, he is totally amnesiac, yet he has the memory and ability to conduct and sing music; another man is touched by Alzheimers disease, but can still perform in an a cappella singing group; kids with Williams syndrome have difficulty paying attention, but they often possess a love for music; many people suffer from amusia, when their power to perceive music is impaired due to some brain lesions and music for them is "an arbitrary succession of more or less irritating songs"; in contrast, other people have excessive and uncontrollable musical imagery, leading to incessant repetition of catchy tunes; there are people for which music can provoke epileptic seizures. Another aspect of the book is that it helps to discover yourself and the mechanisms of the brain. Then you understand why different people are touched in different ways by music; why some songs are interesting for us and others completely boring; why some people can scarcely hold a tune in their heads and others who can hear entire symphonies in their minds with a detail and vividness little short of actual perception; why some people can grasp the absolute pitch immediately and tell the tone of any note; why some cannot have music on as a background when they work as they get absorbed totally and it is too powerful to allow them to focus on other mental activities. We also discover that while some of us are tone-deaf, others can "see" color or "taste" or "smell" or "feel" various sensations as they listen to music. The third important message of the book is the therapeutic potential of music for patients with a variety of neurological conditions. Music can kickstart a damaged or inhibited motor system into action again. It is quite revealing that, even in deep dementia when a person is totally incapacitated, when all traits of personality has left him, there still remains an indestructible core of his brain: the musical memory and performing ability. Some people suffering from a loss of spoken language--aphasia--may still be

able to sing: not only tunes, but the words of operas, hymns, or songs. The narrative of Sacks is capturing, fluent. He uses the resources of a plethora of patient accounts, the thousands of letters his patients wrote to him.

76. **Michael Walzer (American), Just and Unjust Wars.** This is a truly classic replete with moral arguments about war. The book does not wince from the reality that wars are inevitable, but once we accept this reality, discusses such issues as the rules of fighting, international law-and-order, interventions, guerilla war and terrorism, supreme emergency and necessity, war crimes, fighting well etc. The book is very comprehensive and richly illustrated with historical evidences. A sampling of dilemmas is as follows: Aggression is the crime of war that states and societies commit against each other, and is defined as the violation of the political sovereignty and territorial integrity of an independent state. The common theme of all aggression is that it justify forceful resistance. Aggression cannot be justified in terms of legalist arguments or recidivism. Aggression justifies the war of self-defense and a war of law enforcement by the victim state, and possibly a punishment of the aggressor state. A moral dilemma is whether to resist forcefully or follow a policy of appeasement and give-in to avoid the terrible suffering of war. A second dilemma is intervention. The accepted principle is non-intervention, self-determinism and self-help. Any intervention can only aggravate the situation as it paves the way to war on a larger scale. Intervention is only justified to set the balance in case there is intervention by another state or when a humanitarian drama takes place. A third dilemma is the impossibility of moral understanding of slaughter in the modern warfare. In the classical wars, loss of lives in small numbers could at least be justified as sacrifice and heroism. This is aggravated by the modern war concept of unconditional surrender. This concept is based on the belief that peace is the normal state of affairs and any aggressor that destroys it must be totally annihilated to restore democracy and peace. The “eradication of evil” however in a crusader-like spirit often causes unnecessary deaths and suffering. A fourth dilemma is whether pre-emptive strikes are justified before a state is actually attacked. Walzer believes a country must really be under eminent attack before it acts pre-emptively. The nature of wars has dramatically changed in the 20th century and peacetime reprisals, guerrilla warfare, and terrorism takes higher tolls than battlefield wars. The two notions of jus in bellum and jus ad bellum weave through the book. They can be paraphrased as the two just war categories: the justice of going to war, and the justice of fighting once in a war. A concomitant moral issue is between the belief that "All is fair in love and war" or "In war the laws are silent" versus the fact that the soldiers are honored only for fighting well but loathed for behaving like armed thugs and murderers. However, he is pragmatic enough to state that “In the case of supreme emergency, like state-sponsored genocide in Nazi Germany, normal rules may be relaxed”, while arguing that “Imperial Japan did not represent a supreme emergency, then the atomic bombings and the fire bombings of cities could not be morally justified in”. Other issues discussed in the book list as i) war of aggression vs. war of self-defense; ii) rights of international states; iii) self-determination of political communities; iv) intervention & nonintervention policy; v) wars of anticipation (preemptive vs. preventative); vi) neutrality; vii) post-bellum punishment; viii) utility & proportionality in military action; ix) rights of civilians & noncombatants in war; x) the morality of nuclear weapons; xi) responsibility of unjust acts (are soldiers responsible for following orders?).

77. **Jean-Benoit Nadeau and Julie Barlow (Canada), The Story of French.** Two Canadian authors, one francophone, the other Anglophone set out to describe the history and the future of French. On one side French is waning in importance, clout, economic power and culture productivity; on the other side, French ironically is flourishing and at least it is holding on to its international role. It is after all the second most important international language, albeit by a distance, after English. The evolution of modern French is a fascinating and chancy succession of vicissitudes, the long battle for supremacy between the dialects of d'oc and that of d'oïl. France was divided into several principalities, all fiercely independent and where a large assortment of dialects and writing styles co-existed. Slowly and painfully the d'oïl language and its Parisian version came to dominate. Meanwhile French and English interacted with and influenced each other significantly and yet remained rivals. Some of the factors that contributed to the international status was: i) French academy and a group of intellectuals pushed for purism, clarity and rigor in language, and they received the active support of the government; ii) Dictionary and encyclopedia production: The former became the mission of the French academy, although it took an incredible amount of time to be realized; the strived to produce a document for an "ideal French". Different from the English lexicography tradition, the Academy's approach is to do regular "spring cleanings to eliminate archaisms, synonyms, regionalisms and even neologisms. iii) The colonial expansion of France transported the French language from the Southeast Asia to Oceania, from North Africa to Antilles; at the same time French explorers and coureurs de bois established settlements in North America; iv) The brilliance of French science, economy starting from 17th century and its cultural and intellectual achievements was an important factor in the development and wide-scale adoption of the language; v) French replacing Latin as the language of diplomacy throughout the world; vi) French revolution spread like a brush fire not only revolutionary ideas but also expanded the sphere of influence of French enormously; vii) French schools: The international network of French schools all over the world, sometimes under the auspices of Church, sometimes government-backed has had enormous influence in making the French language the language of elites, a means of social promotion. Despite gloomy predictions about the demise of French, the claim is that the French language is as lively and influential as it could be, and continues to play a very important international role.

78. **Jonah Lehrer (American) How We Decide:** Lehrer investigates our decision processes, especially under stress and unusual, irrevocable situations. His main theme is that emotions play an important role in critical situations and they should not be disparaged vis-à-vis rational thought processes. He cites several examples from combat situation, to poker game, from professional baseball play to commercial airline piloting where sometimes the emotional brain plays a very important role and that on other occasions the reasoning brain should take the control. For example, one decision involved to launch rockets to save a battleship for a suspicious looking blip on the radar screen against the risk of shooting down one's own jets; another decision involved landing an airplane full of passengers when all and any control of the plane was lost, and for which case there were no precedents and hence no ground support. In each case, the actor had to make a very critical decision; critical in the sense the outcome could be a

catastrophe if the decision was wrong, and a life saving heroism if the decision was right. In some cases, there was no time for rational analysis of the situation; though the decision makers had lifelong experience, they could not explain even to themselves how they made the decision, and to painfully reconstruct their decisionmaking process.

The argument here is that decisionmaking making under stress and real life situations is very different than solving algebra problems and passing certain tests, and that emotions play an important role. This argument refutes thus the Platonic ideal of pure reason, representing our human side, and the emotions, which confuse us with conflicts and irrationalities, representing our animal side. This dichotomy was even more elevated by Descartes. The fallacy of this assumption has been proven by neuroscience; for example, people who have suffered brain damage so that they are incapable of feeling any emotion despite the fact their reasoning capacity remains intact, are not any better decision makers, in fact, they can take very lousy decisions. Lehrer tries to explain the contribution of emotions to decision making, especially since in the long history of evolution emotion-based brain has been much more refined while the reasoning part of the brain, the prefrontal cortex is a much later development occurring in the last 200,000 years. Our brains have developed an acumen to notice the unusual, the negative feelings, the absence of reward. While we seek pleasure, orderliness, reward, any unpleasant surprise, any disorder, any anomaly alerts the consciousness and also sets hypothalamus into action which prepares the body, tenses the muscles, and increases the heart rate. This mechanism also is instrumental in converting short-time life experiences into long-term life lessons. All these point to the adage that you can only learn from your mistakes, that wrong predictions are informative, and that brain cells adapt themselves to failure and learn from happenings. In conclusion, emotional part of the brain incorporates wisdom from life experiences.

There is, however a downside to it: that of relying too much on emotions is that they can lead people to become overconfident or panic out. Since the brain always tries to maximize profits and pleasures, even in chaotic, unpredictable situations like the stock market, people can start seeing predictable patterns out of chance events and become over confident; furthermore people tend to interpret the potential gains which did not get realized as bitter losses rather than enjoying their modestly realized profits. The catch, of course, is that people can also be fooled by feelings. A typical phenomenon of this fooled-by-feelings phenomenon is the debts that people accumulate over their credit cards. Despite the evolutionary advantages of the emotional brain, it is a remarkable fact that primates, and in particular humans have developed reasoning mind in the prefrontal cortex. The explanation why human reason can be so dominating at will is that the prefrontal cortex has a unique structure in the brain, being the most versatile and the most completely connected component to all other parts of the brain. In this sense, it is like an orchestra conductor.

In conclusion, our best decisions are a finely tuned blend of both feeling and reason—and the precise mix depends on the situation.

79. **Denis Guedj (French), Le Théorème du Perroquet.** This book can be placed both in the fiction and nonfiction categories. Briefly, it is the story of mathematics from Greeks through Arabs to

Middle Ages till the bright 17th century the Era of Enlightenment. Concomitantly, there is the background story woven through lest likely characters that step by step discover the fascinating history of mathematics. This mathematical odyssey is embedded in an unlikely story of a parrot who is very skilled in reasoning and argumentation, who, furthermore has memorized mathematical proofs of theorems. The parrot is recovered in the flea market in Paris by Max, the deaf adolescent in the family. The twins, Jonathan-and-Lea, high school teenagers, are more capable of following the intricacies of the history of math. Their mother, a rather mysterious woman, plays a tangential role in the story. Finally, Ruche, octogenarian, owner of a bookshop, has never liked, and in fact kept himself away from mathematics for the last 80 years. Except that when his mathematically talented college friend, a mysterious Grosouvre, who has spent his whole lifetime at Manaus in the Amazonian forest, sends him a whole case of books. Grosouvre has decided to send these hundreds of books because he feels threatened by people who want to rob him of his proofs of theorems, which supposedly he has confided to Nofutur, the parrot. These form a large collection of precious historical books, from Euclid to Fermat, from Thales to Cardano. The family holds séances for eight months to read, understand these books and sometimes theatrically enact the roles of these mathematicians, interpret and discuss these results. I personally think that the embedding story is rather redundant, I found it in places rather boring, especially because the history of mathematics and the lives and anecdotes of mathematicians is so much more interesting. The story goes through the achievements of the Greek schools of mathematics, Thales, Pythagoras, Euclid, Diaphont, and we encounter the birth of geometry and of the theory of numbers. It then proceeds to the Arab or Islamic school, Omar Khayyam, Al-Yazdi, Al-Kindi, Al-Khwarizmi, Al-Tusi, and many more, and narrates the birth of algebra. In the third scene, we are in Italy, 15th century, where towering figures like Tartaglia, Fibonacci, Cardano, Ferrari appear. In the fourth and final scene, we are in the Age of Reformation and later that of Enlightenment, when France, Paris in particular, was the mathematical capital of the world. We see the parade of Euler, Abel, Cauchy, Fermat, Galois, Laplace, Fourier, and we witness the birth of analysis. The story of parrot takes us back to Syracuse, first where we meet Archimedes, and then to Manaus, Brazil, in search of lost proofs. We usually take many things in mathematics for granted, from matrices to the equality sign. Actually it is surprising to find out that most of the concepts and notations we use today are relatively recent. Up until Renaissance mathematicians would write equation in long prose sentences, they would call the unknown the “thing” etc. That such prosaic things as “equal sign”, “plus or minus sign” were inventions as late as 16th century, that the suggestion to use the last letter of the alphabet x, y, z for unknowns, and the first letter of the alphabet, A, B, C ... for known constants were made by Descartes in the 17th century; that Euler or Netwton never knew the concept of a vector, that the notion of numerator and denominator were defined in the 12th century etc. are still surprising revelations for me.

80. **Mary Lindemann (American), Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe.** It is quite amazing how recent in the history of mankind is the onset of modern medicine. Lindemann analyzes the history of medicine from social, cultural and ethical aspects. She describes what the patients thought and how they felt, what course of action the doctors pursued, the deep mistrust that public had in general of doctors, the popularity of folk healers. I found the following facts interesting: i) There were many university educated doctors, and those were mostly in the big

cities; however, there were a host of nurse, midwives, barber- surgeons, apothecaries, surgeons, and many other health providers who got educated and informed through a system of guilds; ii) There was basically no cure available and medical practice rested heavily on the writings of Roman and Greek philosophers. Whatever the ailment, the suggested treatment was almost always the same, which consisted of bloodletting to let go the ill humors, emptying bowels and/or vomiting. In fact, medical science was stalled in the 4th century with the treatises of Galenus, and for almost 14 centuries did not advance a bit. For example, the concept of the four humors persisted up until 19th century, even a good two centuries after the onset of the modern medicine; accordingly, health was a function of the balance between the black, yellow, white and red humors. iii) Humans attributed the illnesses to environmental causes, to the wrath of the God as atonement for our sins, to the position of stars or constellations in the sky; nevertheless they followed certain principles to avoid getting sick, namely, acting always moderately not only in eating and drinking, but also in emotions including sex. Also moderation in the use of air, of sleep and wake cycles, resting and exercise, and finally, to retain and to excrete your bodily waste products. iv) Hegemony of Galenus: Galenus was a 2nd century Greek-Roman physician and his works were very influential for almost 17 centuries. His system, though incorrect, was rational and flexible, so that many inconsistencies could easily be explained away; furthermore it kept evolving with the criticisms directed to it so that any one discovery or any one new theory could not single-handedly dethrone it. According to Galenus the body had seven subsystems: The four elements (water, air, fire and earth); the four bodily secretions (blood, black bile, yellow bile, phlegm); appearance or character (which is a combination of wet, dry, cold and hot); liver, heart and brain; spirit or life that was produced in the heart and transported everywhere via arteries; virtues, that is, the activities of the subsystems; operations, that is functions of the individual organs.

81. **Hugh Pope (British) The Sons of the Conquerors: The Rise of the Turkic World.** Hugh Pope has been the correspondent of the Wall Street Journal in Istanbul, where he lived for more than a quarter of a century. Fluent in Turkish, Persian and knowledgeable of some of the Turkic dialects, he covers the whole Turkic world from China to the Adriatic Sea with his investigative journalism, first-hand witness reports, contacts and interviews with political leaders, as well as feeling the pulse of the man in the street. He travels extensively through Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tadjikistan, Turkmenistan, the Sinjiang District or Eastern Turmenistan, Azerbaijan, Kirghizistan, and of course, mostly in Turkey. I have found some of his commentaries quite interesting: a) Throughout the 8500 kilometers of the Turkic world, there are many underlying similarities as well as sharp contrasts. Some live in abject poverty and lead a quasi-nomadic life; others are Westernized business leaders. b) Despite the huge differences in the outlook, there is something that binds the Turkic people together, so that they can recognize each other immediately, from Cologne in Germany to Ulan Bator in Mogolistan. c) Loyalty to family, profoundly religious, inordinate amount of respect for the elderly; ready hospitality to strangers, but with a tint for exploitation; d) Always very pragmatic, daring, risk-loving, always looking for “green new pastures” to be invaded, a strange aversion to planning; e) Ignorant pride about their culture and history, total refusal to accept criticism no matter how friendly, f) Adoration of strong leaders, though hearts may change from love to hatred and viceversa. “Save us, Father” is a

common theme that reverberates in the Turkic world. Other facts revealed to me while reading the book were: 2nd Conquest of Istanbul: Istanbul was the capital of two empires, and after a brief period of lull during Cold War, it was re-conquered by the Turks, first with the migration of millions from countryside into the city with the fream of “İstanbul’s sidewalks are made of gold”. Second, due to its geographical location, it is becoming one of the biggest trade and industry centers in the world. Effects of Soviet Era: The Russian, and then the Soviet domination of the Turkic nations and states has deprived them of the ability to govern themselves. For too long, from Tsarist period on to, especially, the Stalin period, When the political parties were formed after disintegration of Soviets, the Communist party strongmen were automatically transferred to the so called liberal nationalist parties. Soviet-era nepotism, concentration of power, favoritism continued full-fledged. These states had a hard time to create national identity. The state and governments became dysfunctional, and in that period people looked nostalgically to the Soviet times. Those times means orderliness, functioning state and services, security, guarantee of life.

82. **Atul Gawande (USA), Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End.** Medicine has progressed tremendously in the last two centuries. While until the last century epidemics, death at childbirth, lifelong crippling effect of injuries was considered as destiny, modern medicine has practically put an end to the scourge of all these crippling factors. In fact, modern medicine can claim almost victory over many ailments, injuries that would deteriorate the quality of life. Despite the trailblazing successes of medicine, there is still one problem that it is not well equipped to deal with: old age. First, there is fundamental difference between people having a medical problem and that of aging people. Old people do not necessarily have a grave problem; instead, they suffer from several concomitant, albeit small problems ranging from high blood pressure to digestion problems, from aching limbs to the weakening of the body’s defense mechanisms. With the aging profile of industrialized societies, this problem is becoming ever more important. It is true that people live now much longer as compared to one century ago; however, their curve of life, though prolonged, is an inexorable falling down. It is true that medicine does its utmost to prolong the life of aging patients; however this does not necessarily make them or their families any happier. Think about the last months of a terminal cancer patient, heavily sedated, connected to tubes and respiratory device, passing his days in a sterile hospital room, away from the beloved ones. And at exorbitant costs to the health insurance system. The author discusses humane alternatives for the care of dying patients. First, the doctors should be trained to deal with and understanding the psychological conditions of their patients. Doctors are proud to give technical explanations and offer alternative; however, the last thing the patient wants to hear is a doctor blurting out his knowledge. Much suffering can be alleviated by a approach with a human touch. Second, hospice looks like an increasingly attractive alternative. The patient stays with his family or in a facility with proper service and company of people while he/she receives regular attention by visiting specially trained medical personnel. Thirdly, the desires and priorities of people get reordered and can be substantially changed when the patient understands that the time left for him is limited. At this stage of life, it hurts to the patients that the doctors are not properly listening to their priorities. Patients may resent treatments that take pleasures of life relevant to the patient and yet do not provide much of cure, perhaps prolonging

their life by only weeks. Fourthly, most patients abhor losing their independence, they detest losing their dignity. Thus, for people near the end of life, patients face the dilemma about decisions about their living situation especially when these decisions are taken by their children, forcing the elderly person to passivity, or, actually being treated like children. Often, keeping their autonomy is as important, if not more important, as the interventions for health. A case in point is that the liberty to set the temperature as they want, dress how they like, eat what they want, admit visitors only when they're in the mood become all very relevant for the elderly in the nursing homes.

83. **Sam Harris (American) The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values:** This is one of the best popular science books I have read. The author is brilliant in finding analogies, parables, arguments in support of his ideas, and he has a pleasant and lucid writing style. The book is dedicated to the defense of reason from the point of view of neuroscience. The main argument of the book is this: Reason is the basis of our civilization in creating welfare and comfort, and in solving material problems of man. This resource can and should also be used in the service of moral values. This is against the truism that science can do nothing useful for moral values, and that moral issues should be relegated to religion, especially to the three Abrahamic religions. That science feeds on and serves facts while religion feeds on and serves values. The second concomitant thesis is the criticism of the defeatist, passive position taken up by liberals, intellectuals, and the so-called well-educated people. These people have come wrongly to believe that standing at an equal distance from all social values and systems, and being totally noncommittal is the best approach, so much so that their understanding of moral tolerance has deteriorated into moral blindness. A case in point is the European female judges who pardon husbands that routinely beat and torture their wives on the pretext that it is part of the Islamic culture, as if universal truths cannot exist, or the case of women defending burqas as part of the freedom of women!. This leaves the arena free for conservatives to impose their own value system. It is equally surprising and difficult to understand the apologetic approach of intellectuals and scientists vis-à-vis religion. They are reticent, if not afraid to discuss and to criticize religious values, and even to admit that religion and science can be in conflict, and they may go out of their way to build arguments to refute any conflict between science and religion. To quote Harris: "people who looked like scientists, had published as scientists, and would soon return to their labs, .. give voice to religious obscurantism at the slightest prodding". This double standard of intellectuals and scientists partly originates from their belief that, if a war of ideas starts, then science can never win. In parallel, most well-educated people believe that "morality is a myth, in other words, that there is no moral truth, that science can do nothing useful for moral values, that it is impossible to pass any judgment on the good and the evil", and that when moral values are the issue, then there can be no objectivity. Harris argues eloquently that science can help us understand the good and the evil, that the litmus test for good and evil is whether any act increases the total human well-being.

The author accepts that there is still a long way to go for educating people in the contribution and role of science in the sphere of moral values. One step forward is the fact people should be made aware of "answers in practice" and "answers in principle", in that practical answers can exist on

moral issue by moral issue, even though the problem in principle remain unsolved. For example, the question of how to balance autonomy of the individual and the common good of the society is very difficult to solve theoretically, though any scientific solution is not precluded in the future. Another step is the fact that people should be made to realize that, the same way as failure and contradiction always occur possible in science, which is simply interpreted as the need to do more research, similarly in moral issues any lack of consensus should not be immediately interpreted as being doomed to failure. Third, “values only exist relative to actual and potential changes in the well-being of conscious creatures”, and therefore our compass can be all potentialities that increase the well-being of humans. Fourth, neuroscience, though still young, has gone a long way in understanding our emotional and thought processes, the way we decide, even the belief process in the brain, and can only augment our objective understanding about the value processes.

There are also forces that operate against rationalism. First, people tend to acquire information in a biased way, with systematic errors, less cognitively, but more with wishful thinking, self-serving bias, in-group loyalties, and self-deception, and often in the context of an ideology. Second, ignorance often brings about overconfidence, inflexibility and an overestimation of one’s abilities, while being more knowledgeable often induces tolerance and circumspection, so that in public discourse an asymmetry arises to the advantage of ignoramuses. Third, despite the predictions of the nineteenth century philosophers that the spread of science and industrialization would have wiped out religion, we witness that religions flourish in the 21st century. This is perhaps because people are born with religious templates that dispose them to accept religion much like a language acquisition, and people do not necessarily feel a conflict between reason and belief, especially since certain doctrines fit well into the inference machinery as to appear credible. Furthermore religious propositions seem memorable, plausible, emotionally salient, socially consequential. Hence religion is here to stay.

Despite these pros and cons, the author asserts that “science should be able to tell us what we ought to do to live the best lives possible; otherwise the failure to address questions of meaning and morality through science becomes the most common justification for religious faith. One day people will realize that much the same way as there is no such thing as Christian physics or Muslim algebra, there can be no Christian or Muslim morality, and therefore science and reason should be our guide in moral issues.

84. **Robert Sapolsky (American), Why Zebras Don’t Get Ulcers.** This is the ultimate book on understanding and managing stress; and it is a science book with humor. We all know that when we worry or experience stress, our body turns on the same physiological responses that an animal's does, that is the endocrine reaction, the release of adrenalin into the blood stream, the tensing of the muscles and accelerating heart rate, briefly, the onset of the fight-or-flight reaction. Animals resolve this conflict indeed by fleeing or fighting; we do not resolve conflict in the same way; instead we let it dwell in our mind, be persistently present in our body, and let the consequences of the stress response accumulate till it makes us literally sick. In this book,

Sapolsky explains in detail how prolonged stress causes or intensifies a range of physical and mental afflictions, including depression, ulcers, colitis, heart disease, in short all the consequent damages to our physical as well as mental health. With a bit of basic biology, it is a pleasure to learn about the mechanisms of stress, about the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system and their induced struggle to compensate for each other's massive activation under chronic stress which turns into a vicious cycle. He explores how mechanisms that evolved to save our lives in actual life and death struggles can hurt us by being activated over things like traffic jams or missed deadlines. Some of the consequences chronic stress is that

The author writes with humor about the physiology of stress, why the stress response evolved, how chronic stress is related to disease, and some ways to avoid or reduce stress. Suggestions to minimize stress list as a subjective sense of control and predictability, regular exercise, social support, understanding how stress affects our bodies and a sense of optimism or hope for the future.

85. **Joshua Foer (American) Moonwalking with Einstein:** This could have been a much more interesting book had it not been more like a personal notebook of the author. Nevertheless there are a few bits of wisdom that one can remember. The author narrates his preparation for an international memory championship where people compete for the shortest training time to memorize the longest possible sequence of data, like random binary numbers, associations with faces, a random order of playing cards. The basic principle is the training in synesthesia. Synesthesia is a phenomenon that occurs in certain people who have associated emotions in their brain to a cognitive event. For example, for each sound they hear, a taste in their palate develops or a color is associated in their visual mind. The memory championship competitors develop a spatial memory for the events they want to remember. For example, for each type of card in a deck or a binary digit in a sequence they associate a specific location in a known place in their mind, e.g., their apartment. The "apartment" must be disassociated with any trace of memory beforehand for a new association. We can trace the evolution of the author throughout his memory training as he tells us of his setbacks and sometimes incredible advances. He remarks that people, even professionals, improve rapidly with training till they reach a plateau, and afterwards they stop advancing. The only way to progress further is to force yourself into failures, ever more difficult situations, errors. The remarks on the role of memory in the history of education are also very instructive. In fact, until the educational reforms of the 19th century, school education consisted of learning and memorizing such that one could carry a lifetime school learning where one would go. This, as if one were a living collection of ambulant textbooks. Wisdom and learnedness consisted then in having assimilated all that information and having rapid access to it whenever one needed. Actually the problem is not black and white. There is a certain amount of advantage in carrying all that information in mind, for example, poems and factual information. In fact, I envy my mother who in her deathbed could still recite long French poems and my aunt who at the age of 91 years can still recite poems from Goethe.

Fiction

- 86. Istvan Kertesz (Hungarian): Fatelessness.** The concentration camps in the eyes of fourteen year old child. The child belongs to a middle-class Jewish family living in Budapest. When his father is sent to a labor camp lives, everybody takes it matter-of-factly, innocently unaware of the horrors of the concentration camps. Then one day thousands of Jews are rounded up and sent to Auschwitz, with great confusion in their minds. In fact, some think that it will be a nice alternative, an invigorating experience in a camp; others have an inkling of the end. Through the eyes of the boys the misery and horrors of the camps are narrated, though always with a detachment. There are even brief moments of joy and serenity. One does not know whether the shock of the camp was greater, or the shock of return to his hometown. On his return from the camp, hungry, in shambles, he is despised when riding on trams; nobody seems to believe his story, or even so, do not want to hear about it anymore. His house is occupied by another family, his grandparents dead ... and he starts thinking about the meaning of life.
- 87. Leonardo Sciascia (Italian), Il Contesto (The contest).** It was a pleasure to discover this Italian writer, who has been not only a literary figure but also has been politically active. He was nominated several times to Nobel Prize. Sciascia's themes revolve around the mysterious and obscure aspects of the Italian society, especially against the background of Sicilian realities. At times he presents horrible events and scandals with a dry and subtle wit; at others he seems to shroud them under a hallucinatory veil. This novel predates the resurgence of terror, Mafia and extreme left, culminating in the deaths of Moro and several judges. The novel starts in the air of a parody, of a man killing his wife, but then it metamorphoses into a sequence of murders and assassinations targeted to judges and police chiefs. Thus the novel ends with a crescendo of gloom and opens and leaves unanswered many questions. Although the place and time are left unspecified, it is too obvious that it can be Turkey, Ukraine, Italy, Sicily, Colombia etc. What identifies these countries? First, all ideals and principles are transfigured and emptied out of their true meaning in a soup of words; second, absolute power is pursued adamantly sacrificing everything else; third, people are made apolitical, non-committal, the society is deprived of its backbone and its ability to react and to pursue a vision; fourth, every compromise prepares the ground for the next sets of compromises so that it becomes increasingly easier for even a more gullible public to accommodate itself with injustice, nepotism, un-principled policies etc.
- 88. William Golding (Australian), Lord of the Flies:** William Golding was deeply disappointed with mankind and he thought that under the thin patina of civilization there lies the primitive

savage man, ready to spring forth at the slightest threat of its existence. The story very subtly describes such a scenario under the guise of children's book. The story is set during World War II, where a plane carrying young British children crashes on a remote island. The children initially try to organize themselves, as one would expect from highly civilized and well educated British or any nation's children. However, the savage and untamed human nature comes forth little by little, for example when the children realize that they are not being monitored by any adult, hence not being curbed by any fear of reproach or punishment. Second, they adopt a symbol of authority, a conch in this case, and whoever possesses it assumes absolute power. Needless to say, a struggle commences for the possession of the conch. Third, they start with killing pigs and eating them half raw, blood dripping everywhere, and they end up killing three innocent children. The tragic crescendo ends when they are eventually rescued. The book is on a par with George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, which was a parody of the Russian Revolution, while *Lord of the Flies* is more of a parable for mankind with the savage beast inside barely hidden by the veil of civilization.

89. **Alberto Moravia (Italian): Contempt (Il Disprezzo.)** This is the psychological novel of the disintegration of a marriage and a critique of modernism. The author apparently is an aspiring and idealist theater writer. He claims he loves his wife passionately, but is disdained and not loved by his wife. He feels obliged to write scenarios for a movie producer in order to pay his debts, thereby debasing himself as he commits his services to a film producer. However, with a deeper reading we understand that he is in fact a neurotic egotist, who believes he sacrificed" his literary writing career so that he can afford to lavish his wife with a bigger house. In a narcissist and painful wind down he disintegrates his marriage while torturing himself with the suspicion of his wife not loving and not appreciating him. We see in the author the human limitation for self-understanding and the understanding of others. There is an interesting paragon with *Odyssey*, where Penelope is the ever faithful woman who patiently awaits his man while eschewing his many pretenders. She may not be an intellectual but her body transpires sensuality and her words speak the blunt truth. Ulysses, on the other hand, is the perennial adventurer who seems to prolong his voyage to delay his return to home.
90. **Pierre Miquel (French): La Poudrière d'Orient: Le Beau Danube Bleu (The Powder keg of the Orient: The beautiful Danube).** The human side of the French involvement in the 1st World War in the East. Two hundred thousand French troops suffer, get exhausted and die without knowing exactly why. The Russians make peace treaty with the enemy; the Greeks betray their allies; the Americans do not think of anything else except for petroleum; the British vise to extend their domination in the Middle East in order to guarantee a passage to India. Intrigues, diplomacy, espionage, tactics ... all extend from Istanbul under the rule of the Young Turks to Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Balkans and Marseille. For those French troops who have suffered for four years, the Armistice Day, November 11 1918 does not mean the end of combats as they have to continue fighting on the Soviet front.

91. **Leon Uris (American): Trinity.** This is an epic adventure book to make you understand the bloody struggle of the Irish people in the 19th century to gain independence against British imperialism. It gives you the portrait of a people divided by class, faith, and prejudice. The book makes you understand the oppressed cultures, the feelings of subjugated and abused people. The book may be criticized for being a bit one-sided: the British are bad, the Irish good. It is an emotional book, partly fantasy, partly based on historical facts.
92. **Frank McCourt (Irish-American): Angela's Ashes.** This is an autobiographic novel of a miserable childhood spent in Ireland. The author wonders at the fact that he has even survived such a childhood. There is utmost poverty in the country and people who can find a regular job are considered lucky. The father, irresponsible, drunk most of the time, jobless, yet charming. The mother struggles to survive and make her children survive, though most of Frank's brothers and sisters die before they can make it to childhood. He has to wear shoes repaired with tires, to beg a pig's head for Christmas dinner, to search the pubs for his father, to endure poverty, near-starvation and the indifference and/or cruelty of relatives and neighbors. They live in a house where the main floor floods every year and they have to wade through the sewage to live in the remaining room upstairs until the water recedes. They grow so cold that they resort to tearing the walls apart for firewood. And yet he does not lose his humor, he continues with his tenacity to live and eventually he forgives.
93. **Mitch Albom (American): The Five People You Meet in Heaven.** Eddie has spent all of his life in a small town as the maintenance man of a seaside amusement park: the Ruby Park. He dies at the age of 83 as a result of an accident when he is trying to save a little girl from the fall of a platform. In the heaven, as if in a multicolored dream, he starts encountering people one by one, who have been waiting for them. He meets his lieutenant commander when he was fighting in the Philippines; his true love, Marguerite, whom he had lost precociously; a young Asian girl fiercely burnt by him in the combat etc. The lives of all these people were interwoven with his life. While he is encountering these people, chapters alternate where his birthdays are recounted; but these stories become in a sense the story of his own life. At the end of this modern fable one has the feeling that there is no life that is insignificant; that all lives are worth living and that there is no higher value than love and sacrifice. Another very recommendable book by Albom is "[Tuesdays with Morrie](#)".
94. **Turki El-Hamad (Saudi Arabia): Adama.** A novel from Saudi Arabia. This book gives a portrait of a young Saudi and his struggles. As all the young people coming of age, Hisham has dreams. He is excited by politics, mostly Arab nationalistic and leftist politics. In secret defiance of his parents and the ironhanded rule of the Saudi regime he becomes a member of an underground leftist party, despite many hesitations. The sheer feeling of being on the dissenting side is exciting for him. He is attracted to the girls and tries to demystify sensuality. Despite social oppression precluding any contact between man and woman he has his adventures and escapades. He is an aspiring philosopher who reads banned books to develop his political ideas. And somehow he does not fit in the traditional Saudi society, which is itself torn between ancient tradition and newfound prosperity. Hisham himself is torn between his love for his family, his

fear to disappoint them, his firmly held philosophies, and his yearning for social justice. Not surprisingly Saudi Arabia is a man's world. Women figure only either in the role of servants at home, as sensuality transpiring entities, or as mothers but otherwise they do not have a social and political existence. The book was banned for a long time in several Arab countries.

95. **Gilbert Sinoué (French): Avicenna or the Route to Isfahan (Avicenne ou la route d'Ispahan).** This a fantastic biography of Avicenna (İbni Sina), the prodigious philosopher, medicine, astronomer and poet of the 10th century. He was born in Bukhara in 980 and since his youth he was involved in Islamic philosophy, especially in the Ishmaelite sect. This historical novel traces the painful life of Avicenna through an era of political instability. He was venerated for coming up with cures to apparently incurable ailments; at the same time he had to flee from one city to another persecuted by avid rulers. Hints of his cures, herbal or other, leaves one surprised at the insight he had of the functioning of the body. Although in Turkey he is venerated as a great Turkish-Muslim scientist, in fact, it seems that he disliked Turkish rulers and had to spend some of his productive years in exile escaping from them. He knew Arabic, Persian and Greek, but not Turkish. Other recommendable books of Gilbert Sinoué are *The Book of Sapphire* and *The Child of Bruges*.
96. **Elif Şafak (Turkish): The Bastard of Istanbul (Baba ve Piç).** A thought-provoking intense novel where history, political tension, family secrets, cultural differences and personal lives are intermingled. Every chapter has a fruity or spicy title, like cinnamon, apricot, and almond, allegorically related to the chapter theme. The lives of two families, one Armenian, the other Turkish are intertwined. This emotionally charged story is narrated with slight allusions to their historical background. The story overall is sad, but there are many bright instances of subtle humor. The novel switches between scenes in San Francisco and Istanbul. Women dominate the story, in the protagonist Zeliha as well as her grandmother, mother and various aunts.
97. **Yusuf El Kaid (Egyptian): War in the Land of Egypt.** One story, ten narrators, ten versions of the reality. In a village in the deep countryside of Egypt, the son of the rich landowner is called for military service. He practically owns not only the land, but the peasants as well. He maneuvers to have the son of the village guard sent to combat in lieu of his son against promises of lifetime material support, which of course is never realized. The son of the guard becomes a casualty in an Arab-Israeli skirmish. This story is told respectively by the landowner; his first "senior" wife; his third wife who is also the actual mother of the "protected" son; the village guard; the son of the guard who is arm-twisted to accept this role of martyrdom; the military officer in charge of conscription; the Israeli officers who aids in the evacuation of Egyptian casualties; the government official who executes the dubious paper work.
98. **Romain Gary (French): Les Racines du Ciel (The Roots of Heaven).** A towering novel of ecology before anybody in the 1950s knew what it meant. A novel of will, of what any individual can accomplish in restituting to us values of humanity. The scene is Chad and the immense plains where elephants, antelopes and myriad types of birds roam. It is the epoch of safaris, when

satiated Europeans come to kill these targets for the enjoyment of it, where gorilla hands become paper weights, elephant legs become umbrella holders and of course the craze of ivory letter openers continue to decorate Western homes. Morel, a “crazy” Frenchman single-handedly leads a campaign of the protection of the African fauna and flora. He is accompanied by a few improbable adventurers. The indigenous people view elephants as a meat depot and cannot understand the motivation of the naturalists. French authorities are wary of political unrest and think of Morel as an insurgent who is camouflaging himself with the silly idea of the protection of nature. The pan-Arab movement on one side and the insurgents who want to play the roles of liberators of Africa view all fauna as a sign of retardation and do would not hesitate to annihilate African fauna and substitute “factory chimneys in lieu of giraffes”. Tragic but beautiful descriptions of scenes of draught where animals suffer and die, and those who can reach the water sources are killed by the crossfire of “African liberators”.

99. **Dai Sijie (Chinese-French): Balzac and the Little Chinese Tailor (Balzac et la Petite Tailleuse Chinoise).** We are in the heat of the Cultural Revolution in China where all professionals from school teachers to violin players are sent to farms to be “re educated” and where all books are banished as being harmful intrusions from the western world. One of the two village boys, who are intimate friends, has a secret bag at home. As they untie its strings, they discover an incredible treasure, a collection of western classics, from Balzac, Flaubert and Stendhal to Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Bronte and Dickens. He promises that with these books he will transform the girl with whom he is secretly in love. She is the tailor of the village.
100. **W. G. Sebald (German): The Rings of Saturn (Die Ringe Des Saturn).** Much like the scattered celestial material on the ring of Saturn, the author gives a great kaleidoscope of stories and events. The intimate stories and impressions vary from the fascinating silk culture in China to the carnage in the Balkans at the end of the 20th century, from description of English landscape to the interpretation of the famous painting of Rembrandt: The Anatomy Lesson, from the evocation of such poets as Chateaubriand to Fitzgerald. The author is erudite, prodigious, and supplies often tables, maps and charts to substantiate his stories.
101. **Dino Buzzati (Italian): Il Deserto dei Tartari (The Tartar Steppe).** Beyond the mountains there is the threat of “tartars”, supposedly fierce nomadic people that are expected to burst out of cold and arid steppes and attack us. Will they ever? Do they in fact exist? Giovanni leaves his city, his beloved fiancée and decides to serve heroically in the castle garrison facing the mountains. His planned short-time service becomes a life-time obsession waiting for this imaginary enemy, in fact the insipid life behind the walls grows upon him, it becomes part of his personality, so much so as not to ever return back. But aren't we doing the same thing, getting trapped in urban routines and timetables?

102. **Jean-Christophe Rufin (French): The Abyssinians (L'Abyssin).** This is a historical novel based on the notes of the French ambassador to Ethiopia. The descriptions of the life in the small French colony in Cairo, who was under Ottoman rule, of the tribes up along the Nile valley, of the Abyssinian kingdom and court, of the intermingling of the Catholic church into the affairs Eastern Church, of the Huguenots and the persecution of Protestants in France all give us a fascinating picture of the Mediterranean world in the 16th century.
103. **Peter Gethers (American): The Cat Who Went to Paris.** Like many cat haters, it takes a few days of coexistence with a cat to convert them to cat-lovers. As his girlfriend walks over her, the author (Peter) grudgingly has to take care of her cat. Then they start sharing and enjoying trips over Atlantic in supersonic jets, dine in luxury restaurants, stay in hotels in Paris, take subways together, go to meet important people together, date beautiful woman. The cat is always the first person, as if the author's life evolves around it. There is the touching scene, when the author's father, a cat hater, when recovering from a bypass operation, finds solace in the touch of the cat to alleviate his excruciating chest pains.
104. **Marcel Aymé (French): Uranus.** Aftermath of WW II in France. There is an atmosphere of uncertainty, despair, hypocrisy, revenge, and search for scapegoats to appease the hurt pride of a nation. The city is in ruins due to allied bombardments. The collaborators of yesterday play the hero and the righteous, and try to override the ones in the resistance movement. Soldiers returning from concentration camps instead of receiving the healing warm welcome find a cold slap in their face. The collaborator who has become richer beyond imagination does not know how to wash out the black money. It is a courageous book against hypocrisy.
105. **Joseph Heller (American): Catch 22.** An insightful account, full of sarcasm, of war pilots in the allied campaign against Germans in WW II. Yossarian is a prototypical pilot with the sole concern for saving his skin. There is a catch however: Article 22 according to which the number of sorties to which a pilot has to participate before they are allowed to return home can be raised arbitrarily. It is the description of a delirious world where heroism, sex, comedy and tragedy are intermingled. Yossarian witnesses scores of fresh trainees arriving full of naïve excitement and scores of his comrades being shot and mutilated. The book is tragic and comic at the same time, and as a classic on the insanity of war it will continue to be one of the masterpieces of the pacifist counterculture.

106. **David Lodge (British): Small world.** The book is hilarious, full of wit and sarcasm university staff. It is not any more the case of professors that ambulate through hushed corridors lined with books and ruminate over their opus all night. Jumbo jets, workshops in exotic places, project internationalism have plucked them out of their cozy academia. Academic people travel from conference to conferences, from one project meeting to another one. Their trajectories cross each other; they may be caught in scenes worthy of tabloids: the author seems to know well how to be “mean”.

107. **Stewart Nun (American): Wish you were here (Nos plus beaux souvenirs).** The recently widowed mother, her sister-in-law, her son and daughter, the in-laws and the four grandchildren meet for one last weekend in their summer house by a lake in the Adirondacks. The adolescent grandchildren are in their growth pains. The boys are too involved with their electronic toys while the girls, more mature mentally, have their fantasies. The not-so-successful children (she, a bitchy woman, recently divorced, and he, a pretending photographer still without a job) are a constant concern for their mother. The mother cannot avoid but approaching every discussion with them in a recriminatory tone. The spirit of the deceased father, whom they lost just one year ago, has permeated every corner of the house. His beer cans, still full, his workbench and tools in the basement vividly remind them of their taciturn and somewhat detached father. She still rejoices with the remembrances of her honeymoon trip to the Niagara Falls. The two sisters-in-law (mother and aunt) reminisce their past summers. The aunt has never married, having dedicated her life to being a schoolteacher. Not that she never contemplated it, but by the time she started thinking about marriage it was already rather late in her age. The novel narrates the last weekend of this family in their summer house by the lake, last not only because it is past the labor day, but also because the mother has decided to sell the house, which she thinks cannot maintain and enjoy in the future. Perhaps the climax of the novel is the time when the decision to sell the house is declared, despite some resentment of the children, and they are all told to pick up one souvenir item from the house, be it a tea table or a whisky glass. In one aspect nothing important or eventful seems to happen in this weekend, yet it is full of self-questioning and the intricacy of sharing intimate spaces and time among dissonant people.

108. **Nancy Houston (Canadian): Fault line (Ligne de faille).** The saga of four families in line, whose stories are wound backwards in time. Each family is narrated by the eyes of its respective six year old child, whose parent is the child hero of the preceding family story. The novel starts in a posh California suburb, where the mother insists on an operation to remove a birthmark on her child's face. In fact, this is the birthmark that runs throughout the family's Jewish lineage and that the boy has inherited from his father. We jump back to the father's childhood in Haifa, where his parents (grandmother especially) have decided to live temporarily in order to give their son a chance to be immersed in genuine Jewish life. One step back, we move to 1950's to Toronto and New York. The story winds around the grandmother, and her combat between the quest for a Jewish identity and the drive to totally reject any ethnic or religious identification. Finally we go

back to WWII Germany and Ukraine, and to the tragedy of the 200.000 or so infants kidnapped by the nuns and German officers. This is Himmler's plan to get prominent and good-looking Eastern European children to subject them to arianization for replenishing German population. The girl (grand-grand-mother) is happy in this idyllic German family with a caring mother and a father at war. However, one day a new child, kidnapped and to be raised in that family, joins. The newcomer is older, bitter and fully aware of the events. Through him, she discovers shockingly that she is not the true daughter of her mother. Meanwhile Germany is already losing the war, food and wood are scarce, cities are burning. She is eventually taken away from her adopting mother and the rescuing American Red Cross, not being able to trace her origins, decides to give her for adoption to a family in Toronto. The strong Jewish vein survives and persists throughout the four generations in their memories, fidelity and resistance. The reading may be rough in that the story is very touching.

109. Shan Sa (French-Chinese): The go player (La joueuse de go). Japan has invaded Manchuria in 1931 and her armies are poised to attack China. A Chinese girl, a high school student 16 years old is a player of go (the Chinese game of strategy). Her opponent is a Japanese officer barely older than her age, plays the game, incognito, with her. He is infatuated with the imperialist dream. A passionate love develops between them. The ultimate confrontation happens between them when the Japanese armies advance toward Shanghai devastating everything.

110. Jean Echenoz (French): Ravel. The biographic novel of Maurice Ravel, perhaps the most important composer of the 20th century. An intimate story of his loneliness, lifelong insomnia, creativity, chain smoking, meticulousness, and of his concert tours to USA. Interesting anecdotes: i) he has composed the famous piano concerto for the left hand for the brother of Wittgenstein who had lost his right arm in WWI; ii) he was fascinated by factories, machines, chains; he used to go to his father's factory and contemplate for hours the moving mechanisms: hence Bolero.

111. Jhumpa Lahiri (American-Bengali): Unaccustomed Earth. Much like the locomotive of the Spanish literature is formed by the Latin American authors, the Indian authors seem to form the driving force behind the English literature. Her stories center on immigrants who strive to establish new lives in New England, all strongly carrier-oriented, and of their children that try to adapt and build normal lives between the success-focused of their parents and the driving realism of the American society. Little by little the children distance themselves from their parents in Bengal, and grow separate lives. Ruma has moral qualms between leaving her widowed father on the East coast while she has moved to the West and then has some hard time accepting her father's new relation with a new woman. Sudha is bitterly disappointed and bewildered about the alcoholism of her brother. The lives of Hema and Kaushik intersect over the years, first in 1974

when she is six and he is nine; then a few years later when, at 13, she swoons at the now-handsome 16-year-old teen's reappearance; and again in Italy, when she is a 37-year-old academic about to enter an arranged marriage, and he is a 40-year-old photojournalist. These are stories of exile, identity, disappointment and maturation. Her characters evolve in time and her narration lets us think as if she were accompanying them intimately.

112. **Harry Mulisch (Dutch): The discovery of heavens (De Ontdekking van Hemel).** Two Dutchmen, of totally different characters and very unlikely to be friends meet when one picks up the other on the highway. One of them is an astronomer, womanizer, outgoing; the other is an authority on deciphering dead languages and he is very introvert. They become inseparable friends, though they are completely different. Onno is detached from the real world, but he is hugely intelligent and a savant when it comes to languages; in fact he has translated Etruscan. He studies obscure topics and lives comfortable on the interest from his father's inheritance. Max Delius lost his parents at a very young age during World War II. His mother was a Jew; she met a predictably sad end in a concentration camp. His father was a Dutch officer in the German army, it was his hand that indirectly caused the death of his wife. As a result of this, Max lives his life convinced that at any time, the people that he holds close could leave him. He is an astronomer, spending his free time seducing a string of random women who mean nothing at all. Once this relationship has solidified, a third party enters, a woman: Ada Brons. She begins as Max's girlfriend and ends as Onno's wife, but there is never a moment of clash, a fight for love. Max is happy that Ada is with the one man in the world he loves without reservation, Onno is gently surprised that he could ever be married at all. Later, in Cuba, under ambiguous circumstances, Ada becomes pregnant - but to Max, or to Onno? Later, Ada meets a tragic death while her son grows in a castle, learns Judaism, architecture, culture, he is a curious, sensitive, stunningly good looking, trust- inspiring boy.

Behind this story of these eccentric characters, looms a theological, historical argument: God is convinced that the covenant between heaven and earth is broken and has charged the angels with retrieving the original stone tablets that contain the Ten Commandments as handed down by God to Moses on the summit of Mount Sinai. The reason is that the Devil has broken the covenant with God one-sidedly and has made the humanity to loose the path of God and to embrace the path of technology. The characters are orchestrated by "angels" in such a way that Ada's son, Quinten is the ideal human that can recover the tablets. When the boy comes of age (17 year old) father and son take the long route through Vatican and Jerusalem for the tablets. Meanwhile the author often digresses into theological (both Catholic and Jewish) problems and ideas, as well as a host of other mini-essays and profound themes. The novel is a bit too difficult and/or too long for the average reader, but if you can swim through it, it is truly enjoyable and thought-provoking.

113. **Philippe Forest (French): The eternal child (L'enfant eternel).** This is the excruciatingly sad story of an infant child that has incurable cancer. Her vicissitudes through the various cycles of her therapy till the inevitable end. It is narrated through the eyes and words of her parents, especially the father, maybe a bit too realistically. It is not possible not to be deeply affected.

114. **Italo Calvino (Italian): Cosmicomics.** Calvino was probably one of the smartest people in literature. The book consists of 12 stories that describe with the exquisite taste of fiction the creation of the universe, from Big Bang to the formation of space, the first light beam, the appearance of the electromagnetic spectrum, hence of colors, then the formation of galaxies, and finally of our world. These stories are narrated by an entity, call it, Qfwfq, who has lived it all, before the Big Bang until the present. Qfwfq was a child playing with his family when the matterless void began to produce the galaxy forms, the hydrogen molecules appear, the earth cools and start to produce life. Behind each of the experiences of Qfwfq is a great cosmic event -- the Big Bang itself is caused by a loving aunt-like friend, an adolescent crush follows the moon away from the Earth, color forms on Earth's forming surface, the first cells, then the multicellular creatures, the pheromones, and the first waves of sex messages etc. Calvino narrates in poetic prose, e.g., "the concept of space and time, universal gravitation, making possible billions and billions of suns, and of planets, and fields of wheat." This beautiful marriage of cosmic science and literature is a must reading. For science fiction devotees, this book must be a joy.
115. **Kemal Yalcin (Turkish): Emanet Çeyiz (Dowry under Custody).** Recently there have been a lot of books on the experiences and sorts of people who were subjected to a forced exchange of population between Anatolia and Greece. Often they had only six hours, or at most one day to prepare themselves before being deported. A Greek family trusts the dowry (knitted and embroidered artwork) of their daughter for safekeeping to their Turkish neighbors. The grandson of the neighbor family, himself a journalist, after almost sixty years, sets out to search for this Greek family in the remote parts of Greek Macedonia. His task is not easy as he often encounters apathy or outright animosity, though the end is a very touching story. This is also a real life story.
116. **Isabel Allende (Chilean): The house of spirits (La maison aux esprits).** It is the great saga of a family lineage. It is the lineage of women: Alba, Bianca, Clara represent their generations. Each generation is narrated against the social background of Chili in their epoch. A country that transits from a peaceful rural life to modern times, from the era of landlords and faithful farm workers to social strife, turmoil and modern times. This struggle with all its fratricidal political turmoil, up until military coups, the vicissitudes of the country, the countrymen, the family patriarchs, the bastards, the housemaids file through in an intricate lattice.
117. **Michel de Grèce (French): La Nuit de Sérail (The Night at the Palace).** This is a historical novel of Sultan Nakshidil, the wife of the Ottoman emperor Selim III. She, Aimée Dubuc de Riverie was born in the French island of Martinique, and she was kidnapped by Algerian pirates on her voyage to her home in France. Brought to the Sublime Port in Istanbul she became the first lady in the Ottoman harem. She was also the cousin of the French empress Josephine, though she spent the rest of her life in Istanbul. She has played an extremely influential role in the Ottoman

court and influenced three successive sultans, the preferred one of the old sultan, lover of his successor, and adopted mother of the third one.

118. Amin Maalouf (Lebanese-French): The gardens of light; The first century after Beatrice.

This prolific writer, of Lebanese origin, writes in French. He is imbued with the spirit of Middle East and of the Mediterranean. Sometimes it is the story of Manichaeism that wanted to reconcile all religions in the III century; , sometimes a science-fiction account of the rarefaction and then total disappearance of women as Middle Eastern families, opting always for a son in lieu of a daughter, manipulate the birth of boys. He is worth discovering. Other worthy books from Maalouf are: The rock of Tanios; Samarcand; The Harbours of the East.

119. Amelie Nothomb (Belgian): Fear and trembling (Stupeur et tremblement); Fear and

Trembling is a hilarious, yet critical story of her experiences as a foreigner in Japan and especially of her efforts to get accepted in the extremely workaholic and hierarchically structured Japanese companies. Metaphysics of Tubes is her early childhood years spent in the intimacy of her Japanese nanny. This Belgian writer, who has grown up in Japan and other Asian-Pacific countries, is unusually creative. She is fun to read. Other worthy books from Nothomb are: Metaphysics of tubes (Metaphysique des tubes); Dictionary of proper names (Robert des noms propres) etc.

120. Louis de Berniere (British): Birds without Wings (Oiseaux sans ailles). Years 1900s to 1920s and we are in a town in Southern Turkey, not far from Telemessos (modern Fethiye). The town is most probably Kayakoy. Turks, Armenians and Greeks have been living together for centuries in peace. Greeks, in fact, though orthodox Christians, can speak nothing but Turkish. The empire goes through two decades filled with turmoil, military defeats, famine, deportations, and wars. Events start that break the spell and whereby the pearls of the ethnic necklace in Anatolia are dispersed. This historical novel gives an incredible account of the war in Dardanelles (his grandfather had fought there), of the process of constitutional monarchy (Mesrutiyet) and of the rise of Mustafa Kemal. It is surprising how well a British has understood and pictured the spirit and the events of that era.

121. Bernhard Schlink (German): The reader (Die Leser). Schlink is actually a judge in Berlin, but also a fiction writer. Runaway Loves is constituted of seven stories, some very creative, where women figure as consistent, insightful, competent against the backdrop of men who are indecisive, tenuous, full of remorse and unfulfilled. The Reader is a sad story of love between an illiterate woman, a ticket collector, and a philosophy student. The passion of their love is intermingled with long reading sessions as he reads her and as her life starts taking a meaning for the first time. But he proves incapable of acting and of stepping out to defend her as she perishes

with unjust accusations on her role as a camp guard in WWII. Another very interesting book of Schlink is *Runaway Loves* (*Amours en fuite*).

- 122. Andrey Kurkov (Ukrainian): *The Penguin and Death*.** This surrealist story pictures the uncertainty in the post-Soviet Ukraine. The lonely protagonist lives with his stoic penguin. He is struggling unsuccessfully to be a writer. When he is offered the job of writing obituaries in a Kiev newsletter, he jumps on the occasion as a first small step toward literary ascension. However he has to prepare obituaries of living people and deliver them to the editor-in-chief, just in case they are needed. Interestingly, these precocious obituaries accelerate the process....
- 123. Amoz Oz (Israel): *A Panther in the Cave*.** The reminiscences of an adolescent boy in the founding years of Israel. His coming of age, his growing passion for books, the joy of having a glimpse of the neighbor's daughter, the constant threat of the war with Arabs, the birth of a nation. The boy feels himself a part of the resistance movement in Palestine against the British mandate. Yet a bond is formed between him and an avuncular, soft and timid British constable. They start teaching each other, the constable English to the boy, the boy Hebrew to the constable, who is fond of Bible and avid to discover the heroes of the Old Testament in its original language.
- 124. Arundhati Roy (Indian): *The God of Little Things*.** This novel, already among classics, is the dramatic story of twins separated from each other, of their mother abandoned by their father and secretly in love with an untouchable, of their grandmother having a platonic love for an Irish priest. In the background there is the social strife, the caste system, the prejudices. The novel is set in Kerala during the late 1960s when communism appeared like a solution against the age-old caste system. All these are seen through the innocent eyes of the twins Estha and Rahel, and their mother Ammu, their divorced daughter of the house with an low caste menial. Things culminate with the arrival of Sophie from England with her mother Margaret to visit her 'biological father,' Chacko. This visit however climaxes in the sad death of Sophie by drowning in an innocent play with her cousins. This incident, along with the exposed rendezvous of Ammu with a young man, from the caste of untouchables and a political activist, lets loose all kinds of passions, rage, trickery and madness. Expulsions, separations and deaths follow. Roy's superb narrative, her sensitivity to the smallest details of the countryside and in the people, and especially the language, characterized by a strange cadence supports the jerky unfolding of the story. The narration too is not linear but moves back and forth in time, each chapter briefly touching upon what has gone before or what is in store. Arundhati Roy said about her novel that "The God of Small Things was 'a work of instinct.'"

- 125. Max Frisch (Swiss): Homo Faber.** I had always wondered why there were no sagas, poems, plays and novels about engineers while there are plenty of them for doctors, statesmen, and lawyers, even for crooks. Here we have an engineer, Walter Faber, who travels and experiences a lot and tries to narrate them with the detachment and precision of an engineer. He looks like a “frigid” engineer. Yet there are things beyond the detachment of an engineer that indicate both the intricacy of life and man’s helplessness. Love enters Walter Faber’s life in an unusual way, metamorphosing him during his middle age crisis. But then the story unfolds like a Greek tragedy, leaving one of the lovers dead, the other spiritually blind.
- 126. Vonne van der Meer (Dutch): The guests of the island (Eilandsgasten).** A dune island off the shore of Friesland. The visitors to this windy small island come between April and October, often loaded with the deceptions, bitterness, and unsolved knots of the mainland. A widower, rather than accepting the inevitable degradation and loneliness of old age, arrives with the firm decision of swimming off to a suicide. A couple has to solve their impasse as the man had a recent escapade, though under forgivable conditions, etc. Yet, one way or another, the problems melt away with the ocean breeze, cold April rains, the smell of pancakes ...
- 127. Gabriel Garcia Marquez (Colombia): One Hundred Years of Solitude (Cien Anos de Soledad).** This is probably the most important literary work of Latin America in the 20th century. It is the story of the rise and fall, birth and death of the mythical town of Macondo through the history of the Buendía family. The town does not exist, it is in fact a neverland, but it is the venue used by the author for the study of human situations and of the zeitgeist between 19th and 20th centuries. At the end of one hundred years of narrative the entire town of Macondo is obliterated from the world. The novel follows seven generations of the Buendía family, who survive Civil War (the Thousand Days War), massacre, heavy rains, death, passionate love, treason, encroaching foreign capitalism. In his novel, Marquez brilliantly weaves together elements of history, fiction, politics, economics, and magical realism to explore love, loss, and what it means to be human. It is a philosophical work on the loneliness of mankind, of human beings, though seemingly surrounded by friends, relatives and even loved ones, are actually alone. In fact, it is the loneliness not only of individuals, but of entire families and of civilizations. Marquez gets us acquainted with his interesting characters, unforgettable men and women, amusing and sad at the same time. The novel is a masterpiece in the art of fiction. The novel is replete with symbolism such as the repetitiveness or rather circularity of history, inevitability of destiny or fatalism, and, solitude. The city is born in solitude, in the Colombian jungle, not interconnected to any other center and the world. People living in Macondo also grow in their own solitude, perhaps selfishly, or at least they live in their own reality, separate from all others. The foundation of Macondo with great hopes and its demise after only seven generations is symbolic of the foundation of South America and its many failures. Gabriel Marquez uses supernatural images and language to describe the worldly matters; and everyday language to describe the supernatural. Great novel, but must be read with attention, beware aware of the supernatural and magical style of the language. Perhaps one should take notes to be able to track the intricate and involuted characters.

128. **Ivo Andric (Bosnian-Croate): The Bridge on the Drina.** This historical novel encompasses four centuries of life in a town across the river Drina, which is also on the border between Bosnia and Serbia. The bridge is on the focal plane, but through it the lives of Jews, Muslims, Christians, Serbs, Turks, and Austro-Hungarians are narrated. The story starts with the child conscript into the Ottoman army of a Christian, who is later to rise to great glory in the empire to function as a prime minister for several decades. He orders the building of a bridge over the gorge that separates the town in two. Centuries pass with incidents of rebel forces against the Ottoman Empire, with people of different creeds trade, gossip, fight and play cards. It is the chronicle of different masters from Ottoman to Austro-Hungarian, who finally take over the region at the turn of 20th century. It is the story of the Slav who is impaled by Turks on the bridge for sabotaging the bridge, of a woman who prefers to throw herself down rather than accepting a forced marriage, of a Turk who tastes the horror of the Austrian takeover. The bridge was destroyed in 1993 in the Serbian-Bosnian conflict.
129. **Daniel Pennac (French): La Fée Carabine (The Fairy Gunmother).** The story commences on the Belleville square, a quarter of Paris inhabited by working class people with mixed ethnicity. A sinister plot emerges to get old people hooked on drugs, steal their apartments and, sometimes, kill them in the process. The case confuses the Parisian police force, especially when these old people start shooting back at their tormentors. The detectives on the case are young, effete Pastor, who extracts confessions by being nice, and half-Vietnamese Van Thian, who operates undercover as the aged Widow Ho Chi Minh. The story is narrated via Malaussene, who is always under the threat of being dismissed by his ogre employer. He is the scapegoat ready to pay for the errors of all, a real character who takes several of the old junkies and an epileptic dog under the protection in his already overflowing family, while his ever-prolific mother put to the world new siblings. The roster of characters while the police chase the suspects, Malaussene, the scapegoat, being the principal suspect.
130. **Jean Giono (French): Le Chant du Monde (The Song of the World).** When reading the book, you smell the odor of the river, you hear the rustling of the foliage, a sunray warming you from behind. You start feeling the prospect of humankind living in genuine participation and reciprocity with earthly nature. This epic novel is the story of a woodsman + river sailor in search of his son, who has been missing in the upcountry where the powerful landowner Maudru rules. The twin brother of the missing boy was dead. The riverman goes in search of the boy, fearing that he too has been killed. On the way they come upon a lone girl giving birth in the woods at dead of night, and they bring her to a place of safety. Once among Maudru's drovers, who effectively serve him as a private army, they have to watch their step carefully, the more so when they learn that the lost twin is in fact alive but the object of a ruthless manhunt, for he has married landlord's daughter against her father's wishes, and is blamed, too, for the death of his nephew. The novel has an elegiac atmosphere, and it gives the taste of Yasar Kemal.
131. **Michel de Castillo (Spanish): Les Etoiles Froids (Cold Stars).** Against the background of tormented Spanish history from 1910s until through Franco's coup and until modern times, we trace the life of a woman: Clara del Monte. She is egocentric, blinded by the passion for pleasure,

a master of elegance and of duplicity; she is beyond any category of etiquette. This biographic novel, supported by objective documents, reflects the painful years of Spain torn by civil war in the years 1930. Her childhood is gloomy passed in the company of a crippled father, and abandoned by her mother. Clara aspires to waste all her fortune by spending it with her suitors. Married several times and mother of four children, once mistress of two brothers at the same time in an epoch when adultery and divorce were tantamount with scandal, she becomes the symbol of a Spain disintegrating. There are passages relating to Federico Garcia Lorca hunted by Franco, phalangists, nationalists, by the fascists as well as the communists. One witnesses the crumbling of the young Spanish republic, the consequent social misery, the fighting of militia, the inexorable destruction. In this chaos she, the republican, lives a passionate love concurrently with two brothers, the ultranationalist fascists.

132. **Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio (French): Le Chercheur d'Or (Gold Prospector).** The principal character, Alexis, and his sister live through the bankruptcy and then death of their father. He then starts following an adolescent dream of finding the treasure of pirates hidden at Rodrigues Island. He leaves his natal island, Ile Maurice, for this desperate chimerical search. The love of a young tribal girl, Ouma, keeps him attached to life. He leaves for France to take part in the war, and upon his return he cannot anymore find his love of youth. The story may be very commonplace, but the accompanying narration of the sea, of the waves thundering on the coral reef, the dry and red soil of his island, the burning sun, sugar cane plantations, the touch of the silky sand are all very poetic. It is like a poem, a hymn to the beauty, to the elements of life. The "hidden gold" of the pirate is nowhere but within each of us, waiting its time to mature and to surface away from illusions.
133. **Yann Martel (Canadian): The Life of Pi.** A novel that reads as a fable, and that is both fascinating and imaginative. The story begins in Pondicherry, India, a quiet town in the former French part of India. Being the son of a zoo-keeper, early in life he gets familiarized with animals. In adolescent years he gets attracted to different religions, but cannot make up his mind. One day the family decides to emigrate to Canada to escape political discrimination. Their freighter, however, sinks mysteriously and Pi, the sole survivor, finds himself in a lifeboat together with a wounded zebra, an orangutan, a huge Bengali tiger and a hyena. After survival of fittest scenarios between the occupants of the lifeboat Pi is left alone with the tiger. Then their 227-day long journey across Pacific all the way to the Mexican coast starts. There are many hallucinatory passages where Pi recounts his stratagems for survival, how he avoids being eaten by the tiger, at the same time feeding the animal to appease it. There are also fairy tale elements when, for example, Pi goes on an island which he later discovers to be a floating carnivorous vegetation mass.
134. **Ivan Goncharov (Russian): Oblomov.** This is the story of a man who never really wants to get out of bed. In fact it is the glorification of laziness, of good-natured idleness, of untroubled childhood when life with its anxieties and demands is still over the horizon, of not having to fuss over anything, of sweet daydreaming. Oblomov is a character, around the age of 30, somewhat plump, out of shape and who prefers lying on his divan. Oblomov, the rentier, gets his money

from an estate in the countryside. When he must do something for his estate he finds himself "faced with the grim prospect of having to think of some way of doing something about it." At least not now, when it's time for a little nap. Oblomov dreams about the sleepy summer days and cozy winter nights, a world where nobody really does anything at all. Days follow each other with heavy lunches, afternoon slumbers, teatimes, idyllic ennui..

135. **Michel Tournier (French): Vendredi ou Les Limbes du Pacifique (Friday).** At first you would think that Robinson Crusoe's novel is being rewritten. But soon we discover that instead of the Daniel Defoe's heroic white man capable of dominating the nature, Tournier's Robinson has many moral qualms, twists, turns and vacillations. The "savage" is called Friday, and the two form contrasting figures. In their interactions, they go through individual development stages though neither really understands the other. First, Robinson is desolate and sinks in the mud. Then Robinson starts colonizing the island and sets a number of strict rules. Thirdly, Robinson meets Friday, two diametrically opposite figures. Then Robinson migrates gradually to the viewpoint of Friday. The last part of the novel consists of the reflections on the choices made in the island.
136. **Marc Levy (French): Et Si C'était Vrai? (If Only It Were True).** This is a fantasy novel about a young attractive San Francisco doctor who has a car accident and goes into a deep coma. While she is vegetating in the hospital, she also starts living in the cupboard of an architect (apparently the author, who was also an architect in San Francisco). She is a phantom in that she is only visible to him, she can only be heard by him, and be touched though her body remains in the intensive care. He is seduced by her, develops a deep relationship to the point of kidnapping her body from the hospital at a time when the doctors decide to pull the cords for this terminal patient. There is some involvement with the police, but at the end we arrive to a happy denouement.
137. **Elia Kazan (Greek-American): America America.** Perhaps a minor work of Elia, but nevertheless the brief novel breaths of Anatolia and tells us of the vicissitudes of the Christian minorities at the turn of the 20th century. The story starts with a Greek boy (Stavros) accompanied by his close Armenian friend cutting ice blocks from Mount Erciyes to be sold in the city. En route they are mistreated by Turkish soldiers and their ice is sequestered. This is emblematic of a crumbling empire, of the lack of central authority and of inter-religious harassment. Furthermore, unsatisfied aspirations for more freedom and prosperity, paucity of advancement opportunities and a beaming West full of promises are factors that have contributed millions of minorities to leave the Ottoman Empire for Americas. Stavros departs from his village with the plan to reach USA and then reunite all of his family there. He is loaded with the family jewels, even the dowry of her sisters. However he is robbed more than once by Turks, he is betrayed by conniving people under the pretext of aiding him and he is refused any justice in a court. He becomes a porter in Istanbul harbor, a miserable life indeed, to save money for a ticket to USA. After a bitter struggle, he is finally in New York, his great dream realized. He is actually employed in a shoeshine shop, but he is happy, satisfied, and full of hope for a bright future waiting for the day when he can get his parents and sisters to USA.

138. **Iain Pears (British): Scipio's Dream.** This is a very inventive novel set in the historical setting spanning three eras all in the southern part of France. The first era is the fifth century when Roman Empire was weakening, barbarian hordes attacking Gaul's borders, and old sophist schools were given way to uncouth Christianity. The protagonist is a French nobleman and bishop, Manlius, who embraces the Christian faith in order to protect what he holds dear. He writes the essay "The Dream of Scipio". The second era is during Hundred Years war, the Black Death in the 14th century. The protagonist is a scholar and troubadour, Olivier de Noyen, who discovers Manlius' manuscript. He is also ill-fated admirer of a married girl and perishes in a papal intrigue. The third era is during the German occupation of France in the WW II. The protagonist is Julien Barneuve, a scholar of de Noyen who discovers, through him, the magnificent manuscript of Manlius. Julien, however, joins the Vichy government in an effort to "civilize" the German occupiers and prevent deportation of the Jews. It is this manuscript, containing the teachings of a wise "sophist" woman that links the three episodes. All three men come from the same Provençal town, they are well-educated, sensitive, they face not only a crisis of belief, but also of action, as outside forces threaten to destroy civilization as they know it. As each man fights to save the values he finds important, the author explores the ethical underpinnings of western thought and history, Christianity and classicism.

139. **Emmanuel Carrère (French): La Classe de Neige (The Class Trip).** Nicolas is an unremarkable student in a secondary school. However, right from beginning we feel that something ominous is going to happen. His father is absent for long stretches of time, presumably on business trips. During holidays his class departs for a ski resort, but he is not allowed to join the bus and the father himself delivers the boy to the resort. On the second day of the vacation, news of a lost boy runs around the town, and the superintendents take extra precautionary measures around the resort. Nicolas feels uneasy, starts running a fever and cannot accompany his mates for ski lessons. Finally the shocking news is revealed about the kidnapped boy who was apparently kidnapped by organ traders. The hideous murderer is nobody else but Nicolas' father. Despite the fact that Nicolas is protected from an excess of reactions from his teachers, still he faces the bleak prospect of not being able anymore to attend the same school, to live an adolescence of shame and guilt and to grow fatherless.

140. **Patrick Modiano (French) Rue des boutiques obscures (The street of obscure shops).** Patrick Modiano has elaborated the subject of memory: this is the story of a man whose memory has perished except for a few brittle facts about his past. In this nostalgic trip through a tunnel, he tries to recollect and reconnect places, people and environments. Modiano writes like a detective of an amnesic, in the pursuit of a forgotten past, in the search of a lost self and love.

141. **Vassily Grossman (Russian) Life and Fate.** The book reads like an immense fresco that depicts the vicissitudes of the Russian people and army during the siege of Stalingrad as well as the inner mentality of the Stalin's regime. The veracity and literary strength of the novel scared the party so much that the manuscript was confiscated in 1960, down to the ribbons of the

typewriter lest the author should reproduce it, and this happened at the height of Khrushchev's post-Stalinist cultural thaw. There are three ways to read this novel.

First, the novel, much like *War and Peace* of Tolstoy, is woven through the lives and destinies of the members of a family. The stories in this family go through love, passion, betrayal, suffering, deprivation, and death; they fight in the trenches in Stalingrad, they perish in the Treblinka concentration camp or work to death in a Siberian work camp; they are being held endlessly under the police inquisition in Moscow in a Kafkaesque scenario not knowing of what they are being accused of; they are in the advanced physics research laboratory achieving trailblazing novel results; they are forever waiting in queues for food coupons or right to own one room; they are at the forefront of the Soviet tank battalions etc. or they mourn their dead.

Second, it is a very insightful portrayal of the Soviet regime, and especially the most realistic description of the Stalinist dictatorship. Since Vassily held offices in the government and was in a commission to investigate the Nazi crimes against Jews, he had first hand experience of the evil. He could see that, even though Nazis and Soviets were at each other's throats in the frontier, actually their regimes were convergent in terror, destruction and disrespect for human life. He portrays the irrationality of the Soviet regime, criticizes the impunity of the leaders whose blunt errors costed literally millions of lives, pictures through various episodes the reign of mistrust, of incognito informers, of not being to speak one's heart and mind, of constantly living under the terror of the state, of being watched by communist party commissaries.

Third, Vassily addresses a question that philosophers and historians have posed for centuries: what is good and what is evil. He questions how two such diametrically opposite regimes of terror could have arisen in the 20th century, and despite their apparently differing ideologies, he claims that these two regimes are in fact very similar to each other. Does the culpability rest with the left who dreamed of changing human nature by changing the society and demanding that generations sacrifice their lives for a promised good in an uncertain future? Does it rest with the capitalist who has destroyed the spirituality in the man? Does it rest with the scientific and technological advances who transform man into robot-consumers? Vassily concludes that no one societal system or political regime can induce goodness in humans, and that the only good, if it ever exists, can come from the nature of man. Furthermore he expresses that the spirit of freedom can never be completely crushed in the following words: "Does man lose his innate yearning for freedom? The fate of both man and the totalitarian State depends on the answer to this question. If human nature does change, then the eternal and world wide triumph of the dictatorial state is assured; if his yearning for freedom remains constant, then the totalitarian state is doomed."

142. **Dava Sobel (American) *Galileo's Daughter*.** From the 124 surviving letters of Galileo's daughter a history of science and of the life in the Renaissance Florence is construed, convoluted with the personal story of his "most affectionate daughter" Suor Maria Celeste. On the one side, we witness the genius, his incessant quest for knowledge to understand the physical world and his low-keyed approach to convince the religious authorities in Vatican about the new concepts. We are surprised that, even under duress and house arrest he can find morale and opportunity to

come up with new theories and design of experiments. We also understand the social and psychological forces at work in Galileo's trial, particularly the political pressures of the Thirty Years' War, the passage of the plague through Italy, the Inquisition, and the conspirators. On the other hand, we have a vivid description of the life of a nun in one of the Franciscan convents in the 17th century. The monastic life, which implied lifelong seclusion, poverty and constant engagement in pious acts, was a viable choice in that era especially if the children were illegitimate. Apparently Galileo's daughter embraced this life with piety and turned it into a lifelong mission to support his father with intense love and care. Her support, though she could never walk out of the convent, extended from taking care of the roof of his father house to intervening with cardinals to enable papal leniency. Certainly her support must have been very instrumental in maintaining the physical health, as well as faith of Galileo as he was accused, tried, sentenced, and watched his life's greatest work banned by his own Church.

143. **Naguib Mahfouz (Egyptian): Al Sokkariyya (The Cairo Trilogy: Palace Walk, Palace of Desire, Sugar Street).** In this trilogy of novels, the Nobel-winner Mahfouz presents the serious political and social issues in the Egyptian society, which experiences tensions between modernism and traditions, Islam and the West, and strives between socialism and fundamental Islam. Similarly, he describes intimate lives of people who vacillate between quest for holiness and an unquenchable thirst for pleasure drawing, all the while deriving profound life lessons in a highly entertaining fashion. The novel reflects somewhat the agonies of the Turkish society in the last 80 years, where families feel caught between modernity, the age of television and instant communication and mass marketed culture and the simple pleasures of the close-knit family life. For example, in Al-Sokkariyya (The Sugar Street) we see that while one of the two brothers turns toward fundamentalist Islam as a way to save Egypt and Islam, his brother becomes increasingly committed to Communism, they keep on arguing about their duty to the country and the nature of Egyptian society, but both end meeting the same fate. In another example of nepotism and networking, Ridwan rises rapidly through the ranks of the civil service with the aid of magnetic, homosexual Pasha Isa, and his sister Karima prepares to receive the inevitable wedding proposal from a surprising source. These three novels can be read with the same pleasure of Tolstoy.

144. **Muriel Barbery (French) L'Élégance du Hérisson (The Elegance of Hedgehog).** The setting of the novel is very attractive. In an elegant apartment of a rich district of Paris (rue Grenelle) Renée is the concierge. She considers herself unattractive, old, ugly, conforming to the image of her class in the society. Yet she is bizarrely cultured, reads Tolstoy, loves classical music and is compassionate. Paloma, the 12 year old daughter of one of the families in the apartment is going through pains of adolescence. She, however, sees the hypocrisy of the well-to-do people in the society, revolts against everybody, even her socialist parents, etc. This novel, however, would have been great before in the 19th century or at least before 1950s. However, it sounds like an anachronism in the 21st century, as the French society has already solved such class intimidations. Furthermore, the author tries to make the moving in of a Japanese rich man the pivot of the story. Everything that the Japanese does, says, eats, plays seems to be elegant and pretty. This exaggerated admiration of a remote foreign culture again is something passé. The book carries in soliloquies of Renée and Paloma chapter after chapter.

145. **Alaa Al Aswany (Egyptian), The Yacoubian Building.** This is a novel from a new generation courageous and outspoken Egyptian author. The hero of the novel is not a person, but an apartment, which is set in downtown Cairo at the time of the 1990 Gulf War. The Yacoubian apartment belongs to a bygone era of cosmopolitanism and liberalism, when many quarters of Cairo looked like that of any European city. Boulevards were lined up with elegant apartments, people, imbibed with European culture, dressed and acted like them. Then comes the military coup of Nasser, ousting the king, all foreigners and Jews, and ending an era. In the name of populism, the city's elegance was stripped away, fundamentalist Islam rose, corruption, poverty and destitution became the malaise of the society. Al Aswany describes this painful transition. The persons in the novel are the residents of this apartment; characters ranging from an aristocratic playboy, a gay newspaper editor, a religious zealot, to childhood sweethearts to people that are powerful due to their political connections. Some have been rich all their life due to inheritances or land ownership. These live in the plush apartments of the Yacoubian building. Then there are other people who are in abject poverty and feel helpless, underdogs of the society. The storage rooms on the apartment roof have, in time been transformed into crumpled squatters' houses. A whole way of life formed on the roof, where children are born and raised, where tired men quietly sip their tea and smoke their cigarettes in the evening, where women gossip, and where washed cloths sway on the rope all the time. There is the story of Busayne, a young girl of the roof, who starts to work as a clerk in shops, but is subject to uncouth sexual harassment, and is torn between the ideal of preserving herself for raising a family and the obligation to work to make the ends meet for her family. There is the story of Taha, the hard-working and aspiring son of the concierge, who after each disappointment and being snubbed by the authorities becomes radicalized and find a mission in the fundamentalist Islam. There is the story of Souad, whose husband had left her long time ago to work in rich Arab countries, and who, out of desperation and poverty accepts a secret marriage to satisfy the lust of an aging politician-businessman. We witness the corruption in the society, the crumbling of ideals and values, the heavy-handed and insulting approach of the police, the nepotism, trafficking of influence, the male-dominated Egyptian society, the stagnancy and the decadence.

146. **Sébastien Japrisot (French), Un Long Dimanche de Fiançailles (A Very Long Engagement).** "Veuve blanche" white widows were the names given to the girls that lost their beloveds in the war, and that would marry their man posthumously as a sign of their love and faithfulness. The novel in the background describes the immense suffering and death of the millions in the trenches in the WWI, the desperation of the soldiers and of their parents, fiancées, wives etc. In the foreground, this is the reckoning with the irresponsible army management who were callous in sacrificing human lives. The story focuses on the five soldiers who mutilate themselves in order to escape the front, are then tried and condemned to death. Though they receive the presidential pardon, the high officers, intending to execute their penalty as a deterrent for all deserters do not promulgate the decree. The condemned soldiers are dropped in the middle of a battle zone at midnight between trenches without weapons but with their hands tied. Though even the Germans pity them and avoid shooting them down, eventually in the ensuing clashes they all die. Mathilde however persists in believing that her beloved was innocent and that he could have been saved. She pursues her search adamantly, hiring detectives, contacting one by

one the other widows, making use of every clue. Meanwhile the other embittered widows pursue their own vendetta against officers who were irresponsible and had a role in this infamous event. The five search for the truth, of what had really happened in January 1917 at front, yields in fact Mathilde's beloved, her Manech, alive though he is totally amnesiac. Perhaps a point to start a totally new life. The reader can feel the painful contrast between the description of the battle zone, the freezing cold and the sticky mud of the trenches, the imbecility of the war, and the description of the same field after a few years in spring time when popinjays and high grass have covered the scars of war, the birds are chirping, and curious visitors simply come to collect mementos.

147. **Milan Kundera (Czech), Zert (The Joke).** The joke: the hero (Ludvik) sends a joke for the sake of fun on a postcard to his girlfriend. The joke was "Optimism is the opium of the human kind. The healthy atmosphere stinks! Long live Trotsky!". Yet the authorities (Czech Communist Party) take the joke very seriously, expel him from the party, from the university, declare him enemy of the people, and condemn him to forced work. Any future, any possibility of having a decent job seems shut down for him. The novel evolves like a black humor. After his liberation, he graduates and becomes a successful scientist. Yet the bitterness persists in him and he tries to take revenge from a party member who acted particularly hard in his process. The revenge consists in stealing his wife. He in fact seduces this beautiful woman, though he later discovers that the revenge is not consummated since the party member was already divorced. This is the second joke, a black joke indeed. Other such "jokes" follow. The author muses that "Ultimately these sorts of jokes and their bitter repercussions are not the fault of the humans who set them in motion but are really just a matter of historic inevitability." The novel has many insightful points on the value of the individual, on the absurdity of the totalitarianism, the stupidity of man. There are touching descriptions of a musician that takes refuge in the folkloric music, of a woman
148. **François Weyergans (French), Trois jours chez ma mère (Three days with my mother)** The hero of the novel is a man in his fifties, who feels lost and who decides to cancel all his appointments to be able to reflect who he is and where he stands. He would like to change his life, his wife, his work, even the epoch he lives in. However, he cannot get rid of his past. His introspections, reminiscences, fugitive emotions describe a man exhausted, an author who has lost all inspiration and talent to write, one who cannot finish his book, in fact cannot even start. The novel is woven with many love stories, sensuous narrations of escapades, of encounters and raw sex with women. Insightful observations are often mixed with banalities. All in all, I would not recommend it, despite it being a prize winner (Goncourt!).
149. **Wilhelm Reich (American), Listen, Little Man!** The joke: the hero (Ludvik) sends a joke for the sake of fun on a postcard to his girlfriend. The joke was "Optimism is the opium of the human kind. The healthy atmosphere stinks! Long live Trotsky!". Yet the authorities (Czech Communist Party) take the joke very seriously, expel him from the party, from the university, declare him enemy of the people, and condemn him to forced work. Any future, any possibility of having a decent job seems shut down for him. The novel evolves like a black humor. After his liberation, he graduates and becomes a successful scientist. Yet the bitterness persists in him and

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150. **Dany Laferrière (Haitian-Canadian), *L'Enigme de Retour (The Enigma of come back)*.**

This is a novel full of nostalgia, discovery of a lost epoch and reflection. The author had to escape the dictatorship of Bèbé LeDuc from Haiti due to his political activism and youthful zeal and idealism. After having lived in Montreal for 35 years, he decides to return to his home country when he receives the news of his father's death in New York, himself a political exile. He has not seen his folks, even his mother all this while. As he tries to readapt he discovers his home country often painfully but occasionally with a sweet encounter. He observes the tranquil and merry everyday life juxtaposed to the abject poverty and hopelessness, in total contrast to the life in a country northern hemisphere and almost unimaginably different from it. A young girl climbing deforested slopes of hills for a bucket of water evokes luscious emotions; a street seller, crouched next to a wall tries in the heat to sell his produce all day long, yet he is ready to laugh wholeheartedly to a joke; the countryside is torn between violence of bushrangers, killers and highwaymen and an occasional scene of beautiful comradeship. Two out of every citizen of Haiti lives in the city Port-au-Prince, where a daily human river flows every day, where every gossip spreads at lightning speed, where everybody dreams one day of migrating to North America, where nobody sees a future for himself. The novel reads poetically, leaving a bitter-sweet taste.

151. **Haruki Murakami (Japan), *Kafka on the Shore*.**

This novel swings between New Age, a fairy tale and social criticisms. Each chapter is rich in surprises and captures you with the tension of a detective story. Two stories are intertwined. The first one is about a solitary, self-disciplined schoolboy Kafka Tamura who runs away from his unhappy home, hops on a bus from Tokyo and lands in a randomly chosen town called Takamatsu. Meanwhile he wants to prove himself to be "the world's toughest fifteen-year-old." He finds a secluded private library where he starts spending his days, avidly reading books as if to complete his self-education. Meanwhile he befriends the library's clerk and the mysteriously remote head librarian, Miss Saeki, whom he fantasizes to be his long-lost mother. In the second story, Nakata is a benign elderly Tokyo man who had lost all his memory and ability to read and write in a school excursion in his childhood. However Nakata has some unusual powers like for example being able to speak with cats. A gruesome murder occurs, which he thinks he has committed, and which changes drastically his daily routine. An unexplainable force drives him out of Tokyo toward the same city of Takamatsu. As this double odyssey evolves, we read surrealistic passages of un-aged WWII soldiers dwelling in deep forest or of fish raining from the sky. While we are perplexed with these descriptions, we in between encounter passages of touching love, of friendship, of the philosophy of life.

152. **Magda Szabo (Hungarian), *The Door***. The story evolves with the vicissitudes of somebody from the bourgeois society (the narrator in the role of a writer) and Emerence, a woman of a lower-class society, in the role of a housekeeper. The spotlight however is predominantly on this woman, on her stubborn, stoic and self-inflicting character. Despite her class status, she can intimidate people with her acerbic speech, not mincing ever any words, her piercing assessment of the true motivations of the people. She does not bend to anyone to ingratiate herself, does not compromise. At the same time she is almost perfectionist, with an impeccably clean house. She assiduously sweeps the streets around her house, take care of a horde of cats and dogs, can talk to them in a unique way. Her character has partly been shaped by the horror in her childhood, the deaths and suffering in her native village, the disappointment of a betrayed love, which both led her to close herself totally. Consequently, she has become very secretive; for example, she does not allow anybody to see her house. As old age comes, adamantly refusing any help, disdaining the incessant help of her neighbors, who for example do not tire of leaving food at her doorsteps, even though they know it will be refused. However, to save her against her, people irrupt into her house to take her to the hospital. The shame of having been discovered helpless, in a fetid house full of rotting food is too much for her to support. She soon succumbs to death despite extreme care in the hospital. One wonders what is so special about this story? As one puts together the pieces of the jigsaw novel, one then realizes that it is the apology of the authors for not having been present when Emerence had fallen and needed her the most. This is a theme that recurs time and again when we neglect our grandmothers, our friends, somebody dear to us, whom we think will always be available. And yet when they disappear it is always too late for us.

153. **Khaled Hosseini (Afghan-American), *A Thousand Splendid Suns***. Against the background of the invasions, wars, killing of innocent citizens, the terror of Islamic fundamentalism, deaths and famine, we witness to the tragic lives of two Afghan women. This is current history, it encompasses the last thirty years of Afghanistan, and it all has happened under our eyes, and often we had chosen not to know. The two heroines whose lives are intertwined are Miriam and Leila. Miriam is the eleventh child of a powerful and rich man who possesses three wives in Herat, but unfortunately Miriam is born out of wedlock, hence she is illegitimate or a “harami”. She and her mother are forced to live in a hut outside the city. She feels the scorn, the ostracism of the society right from her early childhood and illegitimacy and worthlessness is inculcated into her brain from early childhood. Yet she adores her father and lives all week with the expectation of his Thursday visits to her. Her trust and love is bitterly betrayed when her mothers-in-law force her father to have her married to a much older man in Kabul at the age of 13. Her marriage with this misogynic man, who forces upon her the burka and forbids her any contact with anybody, has a troubled start. But for a while she thinks she can find some solace while expecting her first child. However miscarriage after miscarriage drives her into destitution and her husband starts treating her as an object, but not anymore as a human being. Meanwhile Leila is the daughter of a university professor, they live in a modest house in the same quarter; she goes to school and she is deeply in love with her childhood friend, Tariq, who has lost a leg when a Soviet mine exploded. Overall they portray a happy lower middle class family. When the Soviets invade Afghanistan in 1978, the civil war breaks and most young men register to the cadres of mujahidin. One million people perish including Leila’s two brothers. As they finally try

to escape the city a stray rocket hits their house killing her parents and wounding her badly. She is protected and taken care of Miriam and her husband. As she recovers, Miriam is shocked to discover that her husband has an eye upon Leila. Leila, in fact accepts quickly the loathsome proposal in her desperation because she is already pregnant from Tariq, and because Tariq and her family have already left Kabul for the safety of Peshawar, and what's more, news of their death has reached her. The rivals Leila and Miriam first start a cold war, and avoid any contact in the house. However, they eventually unite against the brutality of their husband on the one hand, and entranced by the mother-aunt relationship toward the two children of Leila. An improbable but very strong alliance and sisterhood are born between them. They even have an unsuccessful sortie for escaping from Kabul to start a new life somewhere else. Meanwhile, the continuing war between warlords and waves of occupation of Kabul culminates with the Taliban's victory. A hellish and misogynic regime imposes inhuman conditions on the women. The story continues with the reappearance of Tariq, the increasing brutality of the husband, Miriam's killing of their husband in an effort to protect Leila, her condemnation to death penalty, Leila's escape to Pakistan with her childhood love Khalid Hosseini has been able to capture the harsh reality of a country, its people, and especially has been capable of narrating the story from the eyes of the two women.

154. **Milan Kundera (Czech-French), *L'Immortalité (Immortality)***. There is a fleeting description in this book of one of the characters, i.e., Agnes strolling through mountain paths in Switzerland that summarizes perhaps the whole style of Kundera. Kundera believes that the novel should not be a highway, a purposeful transition from a starting point to an end point. Instead literature should take us for a walk through country paths without any specific destination, where the goal should not be to reach some end point as quickly as possible, but enjoy the very acting of strolling, pausing here and there without a structural plan, discover the ramifications, take bifurcation in the most unexpected directions. Another theme of the book, as in the title, is the desire of the man to be immortal. According to the author, "Man does not know how to be mortal; man wants to break through all the limitations, to transgress the drawbacks, but hits against the wall of his own immortality". The book has plenty of very smart remarks. For example, the book starts with Goethe, his uncouth and uninspiring wife, and his much younger friend Bettina. This tragicomic triangle is repeated in a modern setting in Paris where the characters are Paul, his wife Agnes, who despite her happy marriage, one day realizes that she has never known passion; in contrast her sister has had a promiscuous sex life, but has never experienced true love. In the narrative, dialogues of the author with an imaginary professor Avenarius is quite interesting.

155. **Elif Şafak (Turkish), *Araf (The Saint of Incipient Insanities)***. What does a PhD student coming from a different culture feel? Alienation? Rootlessness? Solidarity with other foreigners? This is the touchy story of a group of young people (students) coming from different cultures, religions and societies whose lives intersect in the Boston area. It is the discussion of being in an alien land, neither belonging there but nor can return back to the roots. It is the story of people who feel the rug is being pulled from under their feet, and are caught in a cycle of never-ending fulfillment. The title of the Turkish translation is "Araf", which means limbo, and reflects exactly

the state of these youngsters. Omer, from Istanbul, is a PhD student in political science who adapts quickly to his new home, and falls in love with the bisexual, suicidal, intellectual chocolate maker Gail. Gail is American yet feels utterly displaced in her homeland and moves from one obsession to another in an effort to find solid ground. Abed pursues a degree in biotechnology, worries about Omer's unruly ways, his mother's unexpected visit, and stereotypes of Arabs in America; he struggles to maintain a connection with his girlfriend back home in Morocco. Piyu is a Spaniard, who is studying to be a dentist in spite of his fear of sharp objects, and is baffled by the many relatives of his Mexican-American girlfriend, Alegre, and in many ways by Alegre herself. The book is insightful, funny, exciting.

156. **Hugo Loetscher (Swiss), *The Fly and the Soup*** (Die Fliege und die Suppe). He is the Swiss version of modern Aesop who narrates not fables but enticing animal stories. He portrays especially the animals that are handled, manipulated, transformed, usurped by humans. We read about a bark beetle that gets inebriated by the artificial pheromone sprayed around to lead them away from the trees and the forest. About a crab louse that tries to hang on in a hairy bush in the pelvic area during sessions of lust. About a cow that is crammed and constrained between the food trough and the milking machine. About a clownfish who after having endured 13 hours of flight from Pacific has to decorate an aquarium. About greyhounds that are trained and conditioned to race after a mechanical rabbit. About a cat whose long hair cover the deep scar of a spaying operation. About a depressed elephant in some winter quarter whose leg is tied to a pole with a chain; the animal has to switch feet in order to pump the blood out and it all looks like an awkward dance for which the music is self-provided by the rattling chain. About a marmot who during the snow season skips over the hibernation, and is being fed, to his surprise, by skiers who find him very sympathetic; but come spring, the marmot cannot figure out why the location is deserted and nobody throws nuts at him. About big birds (plane) and little birds that compete for the resources; the big birds are well cared for, groomed, fed, and their propellers can occasionally chew a flock of birds, while little birds are methodically scared away from the path of the big bird. The joy of reading continues through some thirty stories and there is some surprise at every corner.

157. **Atiq Rahimi (Afghan-French), *Syngué Sabour*** (Pierre de Patience). The setting is a war-torn city somewhere in Afghanistan, possibly Kabul. Internecine war is going on with different factions, that were once unified against Russians in the "holy war", but are now fighting each other for political supremacy. They patrol the streets and kill without blinking an eye based on the distinction of "ours" and "theirs". A woman is mourning her comatose husband who was shot in a brawl following a blasphemous discussion. She cleanses him daily, changes the serum pouch with sugary water, and put drops on his half-open eyes so that they do not dry out. She mourns, cries, supplies, proffers words of passion, piety and love to her husband. Meanwhile she has to take care of her two daughters who are too little to understand the situation and/or to help their mother. As the novel carries in this sad but rather bland style, the real force of the narrative explodes toward the end. The novel in fact becomes a pitiless but very to-the-point criticism of machismo in the Islamic societies, of unfulfilled lives due to unrelenting social pressure, the vilification of women in the eyes of men as a piece of flesh, of the ineptitude of men to express

themselves, their brutal, selfish and often gauche sexual approaches. She cries her heart out to the so-called stone of patience that will listen to all her complaints but that beyond a threshold will burst out as it cannot take it anymore. We find out a typical story of her removal from the school, getting betrothed at the age of 12, waiting for her mujahidin husband for years to come back from the war, the slavery to the mother-in-law during this time, the unhappily and ineptly consumed marriage, threats of being abandoned due to delayed childbirth and so on. It is a lifetime of humiliations, with a hope of redemption.

158. **Luis Sepulveda (Chilean), Aladdin's Lamp (La Lampara de Aladino y otros cuentos para vencer al olvido)**. Sepulveda continues the great literary tradition of Latin America with rich images, stories in the limbo between reality and dream, where humor and tragedy, memory and myth are intertwined. The book contains 12 stories or mini-novels. The author takes us from the loneliness of Patagonia to rain forests between Brazil and Peru, from Cairo to Allende's Chili. One story reminds me of the darkness in Turkey after the coup of 12 September, when so many poets, independent minds and intellectuals perished. A group of Chilean intellectuals reminisce of their revolutionary struggle during Allende's time and of the many friends who do not exist anymore, tortured, imprisoned, dead, made to disappear, and drink to their honor in a fight against oblivion. Another story depicts a town in a no-man's land caught in the war between Peru and Chili; it is the thick of the Amazonian forest where a plethora of tribes are engaged to help the white man. There are stories of emigrates from Middle East, mostly running from Ottoman Turkey, but who are ironically almost always called the Turk (El Turco). The Lebanese emigrate with a typical knack of traders of the Middle East, is selling trinkets to Indians. A moving story about the old Kurt, a German of Hamburg, who dreamt all his life to be a sailor, but not having fulfilled his dream salutes every boat that enters and exits the estuary of the Hamburg port, and according to his last will he is buried in the cemetery of unknown seamen of sunken ships, whose bodies were recovered from the sea.

159. **Louis-Ferdinand Celine (French): Journey to the end of night (Voyage au bout de la nuit)**. Celine is perhaps the most influential writer as much or even beyond Sartre, but certainly one among the best of the 20th century. Yet he remains un-awarded and relatively unknown due to some anti-Semitic pamphlets he published in 1920s. It is a linguistic challenge to read this very interesting novel. The background is the despair of the First World War, followed by various life experiences in Chicago, Cameroun, Cuba and back to France. The novel is an epos built upon the ruins and gloom of the 1st World War. It is an anti-capitalist, anti-militarist, anti-colonialist work, a sum total of all life experiences of the author. He experiences the horrors of the war, he is wounded, helps the war from behind the lines, has live adventures, approaches state of delirium. He departs for Cameroun here he works for a colonial company; gets sick, goes to United States and works in a chain production factory in Detroit where he meets Molly, a prostitute. He returns to France where he starts working as a doctor in the suburbs and witnesses all the sordid misery as well as sublime acts of generosity and love. He almost invents a new language, full of jargon, of iconoclastic expressions and aphorisms. It is a picaresque novel. Despite the background of misery, actually it is not necessarily disturbing and sad. It is much like looking at the carnal reality in a painting by Brueghel.

160. **Sylvie Germain (French), Magnus.** Franz-George has a lacunary memory. His early childhood memories are nice as those of any other child, with a caring and apparently dedicated mother and a father who seems always detached and whom the child can never reach over. His father has a talented voice and the child remembers the evening when his father sings lieder. He has a also a worn-out toy bear called Magnus. We are in the full heart of the WWII in Germany. The father has an important mission and the mother is fond of telling the boy the stories of the grandeur of their country for which her two brothers have sacrificed their lives (apparently killed in the siege of Leningrad). Not much later Franz-George will discover the lies that surround him, the cardboard castle in which their happy and cozy middle-class German life of the Dunkeltal family has been built. The war draws to an end. Burning cities, famine, mass displacement of people, they become refugees in their own country, and the father, actually a medical doctor who has been operating in the concentration camps à la Mengele, goes into hiding and the Dunkeltals have to change their names several times in succession to avoid being tracked out. There commences the gradual awakening of Franz-George to the hideous reality. He realizes that he is not their child, and he does not know who he is exactly. The adopting father, a war criminal, escapes to Mexico with the promise of taking his family under the name of Felipe Gonzalez, and when the news reach after a long frustrating waiting, of his obscure death all hope is lost for the mother. She lets herself die while sending her son to her brother (uncle Lothar, a protestant minister) in England, whom she had rejected as family member for his anti-Hitler ideas. Franz-George refuses his fake name and prefers to be called by the name of toy bear: Magnus. Magnus completes his education in England in a not-so-accepting family with some animosity from his nieces and his aunt. Meanwhile he experiences his first child love, Peggy. His life continues to be fragmentary and in continuous distressing search for who actually he is. He moves to USA where he holds on-and-off jobs as a translator. In a trip to Mexico, under a heat stroke, he recollects images of flashes, of a burning city, of a woman who lets his hand go when hit by fire and turns instantly into a living torch. This must be Hamburg during one of the fire bombings when under the effect of the shock his memory must be wiped out. Dunkeltals, a childless family, must have adopted this child, an ideal case of an amnesic child for them and must have given him the name Franz-George. A sequence of events brings eventually Peggy and Magnus together in a passionate love-and-hate relationship. Peggy eventually assumes a teaching job in Vienna. One evening, in a coffee bar, people are merrymaking and drinking, and a handsome old man is invited to sing. It is the voice of that man, the Dunkeltal, that Magnus remembers from the musical evenings in his childhood. As many other war criminals, Dr. Dunkeltal has disappeared in Latin America, to re-emerge in Europe under a new alias. Magnus intimates his knowledge of him, with tragic consequences. The books terminates with a litanies. To reflect the mind set of Magnus the style of the book is in fragmentary chapters with excursions into poetry and philosophy. All in all, it is the story of a man with several beginnings and equal number of abrupt endings, from the image of his mother in flames to the collapsing of his idyllic childhood castle, from the woman, May, whom he loved passionately dyeing precociously and her ashes spread to the desert, to the return of her childhood love; Peggy, and her falling from sky on the asphalt hit by the car of his murderous adoptive father.

161. **Ildefonso Fonseca, (Catalan-Spanish) The cathedral on the Sea (The cathedral on the Sea):**

This book is like a saga of the Catalan nation. The historical novel is set in the 1300s, in Catalonia against the background of feudalism, emergence of a seafaring and trading nation, against the backdrop of pure Christian belief and the darkness of inquisition. The hero of the novel is Arnau Estanyol: His father was a well-to-do farmer, but on the day of marriage the feudal lord rapes his wife in his castle. The father combats hopelessly for his rights for years, meanwhile his son is captive in the lord's castle since his wife has been sequestered and obliged to serve him. Powerless against the feudal social order, the father kidnaps his own son and runs away leaving all his property, and runs to the safety Barcelona, where his sister lives. They have to submit to a life of fugitive since the law forbids the peasants to quit their farms and dwell in the city. They toil as second-class citizens slaving in the pottery workshop for a number of years. During a social upheaval when Barcelona is short of food, his father is accused of causing social disorder and hanged. The child mourns his father death and resolves to avenge him. At the age of fourteen, Arnau joins the Barcelona guild of *bastaixos*, or porters, who load and unload cargo from the ships and who serve the Virgin of the Sea by carrying the stones from which her cathedral is to be built. Being a porter gives him social status, the tight solidarity of his comrades and a chance to serve God, in building the church stone by stone. His life goes through a number of vicissitudes: With the help of a Jewish family, he becomes a wealthy moneylender and financier. After the black death has wiped out a significant portion of the population in the city, he is nominated one of the hundred leaders of the city. During a naval siege, his dashing heroism saves the city, and as a reward he is forced unwillingly to marry the king's ward and become a nobleman. In this position, he cleverly finds a legal way to free the peasants from the many exploitative laws which prevent them from earning a living as free men. But his enemies haunt him and nearly succeed in destroying him in an inquisition trial. The novel is based on a number of historical facts and documents with a pinch of fiction. This gives a portrayal of the social structure in the Middle Ages, consisting of the tensions between peasants, slaves, city-dwellers and tradesmen. There are chilling descriptions of the operation of the Inquisition in the villages and in the city of Barcelona, of Christians' willingness to believe that the Jewish people crucify children and defile hosts, of rapes, wars, injustice, of the pest, power struggles, tragedies. But this is also the history of brotherhood, social solidarity, unforgotten gratefulness, perhaps that in the end the good will win over the evil.

162. **Elif Şafak (Turkish) Black Milk: On Writing, Motherhood, and the Harem Within (Kara Süt):**

Every carrier woman must face this question eventually: to have at least one child before it is too late while not seriously interrupting the progress of her carrier. Elif Şafak frames this question as a writer, full fledged-ly involved in her writing passion, for whom marriage, let alone child bearing are unthinkable nuisances. The book progresses step by step the awakening of a desire, when she is in her thirties, of having a baby, and then week by week through the whole process of pregnancy, childbirth, and the period afterwards, so called *lohusa*. The narrative is based on multi-party dialogs of six characters: miss cynical intellectual; miss ego ambition; miss practical intelligence; dame dervish in the role of representing the traditional and sometimes religious values; miss voluptuous satin, her feminine side, and finally mother cake. The characters combat, make odd alliances against or with each other, argue, in fact enact all the

mental, bodily and spiritual conflicts of a woman on the way to motherhood. Her ego ambition and cynical intellectual parts protest, resist and get upset about losing the privileges and freedom of a single's life. Her womanly passions are voiced by voluptuous satin, while mother cake is the one who has given up all the pretenses, and is totally focused on being the perfect mother. The book has interesting excerpts from the history of intellectual women who vacillated between their career, social acceptability and motherhood. This book was a product of her postpartum depression, of a personal crisis when she started questioning her faith, her womanhood, her being a writer, her abilities to become a mother, in sum, her bewilderment, her anxiety. Though the book overall is very interesting, toward the end it starts becoming a bit cliché.

163. **Jenny Erpenbeck (German) Visitation (Heimsuchung):** I was recently (March 2011) in Brandenburg, Germany, 80 km. from Berlin. It was once a gem of a city, with baroque German houses, its Medieval core of the city, with the many bridges crossing the canals. Yet in 2011 one could still see the ravages of the war (WWII), especially in the part of the city where the Soviet army approached. There are streets where one feels in May 1945 when both armies were playing scorched earth. Upon returning home, I inadvertently laid my hands on Erpenbeck's book and was fascinated by it as it recounts stories around Brandenburg: more specifically, about a lake and twelve inhabitants of a single property on the lake through different ages, roughly between 1930s up to the present day. These are short scenes from the lives of these people, but these snippets are very evocative. There is a Jewish family who desperately try to run away to Brazil, but their permits never arrive, and the three generations perish in separate camps. The description of the Red Army officer, most of them catapulted from childhood into manhood in the span of a few years with the atrocity of the war, is especially thought provoking. A disillusioned Communist activist who leaves Nazi Germany and returns after WWII. An architect who collaborated with Albert Speers on the Germania Project, and still commuting between Berlin and the lake house. His wife's account of the interior decoration, made by the architect to please her, is quite different. She witnesses the occupation of the village by the Soviet army, witnesses their fierce hatred, and she is raped in that property by the Soviet army officer. An East German visitor dwells in the house for a while after the unification of the East and West, and her uncultivated manners always shock the genteel West Berliners. The inhabitants change, the stories differ, but in the background, there is like a wall paper figure "the gardener," who indifferently goes about the business of maintaining the property. In fact, there is always a snippet about him between each of the twelve stories. While families come and go, drama of the lives of the people unfolds, he is like a permanent fixture, a symbol of the cycles of life, regardless of the temporary drama being played out. The stories of the lives of people are interspersed by descriptions of the nature, of the once glaciers, of the top soil, of the shades of the lake. The author makes a point that "people are part of the same continuum as the trees and glaciers that come and go over eons". A book truly worth reading.

164. **Buket Uzuner (Turkish) Gelibolu (Gallipolis):** Some wars are forgotten, some are only mentioned in history texts with total lack of affect, but a few evoke passion, nostalgia, and provide fertile ground for fiction. The war of Gallipoli, during 1915-1916, is one of them. When the I World War broke up, the axis power decided to demolish the Ottoman Empire, the sick man

of Europe, and they started a landing in the Dardanelles, on the tip the Gallipoli peninsula in order to march to Istanbul and capture the capital. About 200.000 souls perished in these wars. On the Ottoman side the losses were tragic in that most of the soldiers were cadets and young university graduates, the cream of the Ottoman society. On the allied side, the losses were no less tragic and it continues until this day as a national trauma for New Zealand and Australia, which constituted the so-called ANZAC forces. For these countries it was their first international engagement and the fact of having their children dying in an alien world at the other end of the world in a war that they did not comprehend very well was traumatic. Buket weaves a fiction story out of an intellectual Ottoman lieutenant and a New Zealand conscript. After having witnessed the carnage and the death of his close friends, the Alistair McTaylor decides to quit the battle scene and get lost. As he runs under the shower of bullets, he stumbles upon something and falls, an act that saves his life. What he stumbled upon was a dying Ottoman lieutenant, Ali Osman. In the last hours they spend together a friendship through a dialog that dying Ali Osman can hardly continue. In fact, he confides to the ANZAC soldier his Turkish uniform. A few days later, Alistair McTaylor is found by Meryem, an eccentric woman, who falls passionately in love with him, circumcises and adopts him: from this moment on he is known as Alican Cavus, the hero of Gallipoli. The novel is narrated as dialogs between the octogenarian Beyaz Hala (daughter of Alistair and Meryem), and Victoria, a psychologist in her thirties from Wellington, the grand-granddaughter of Alistair McTaylor. His Maori wife was pregnant to the grandfather of Vicky when Alistair went Gallipoli, never to return. Vicky had the passion to find the traces of his ancestor, an *idée fixe* that has haunted her since her childhood and has forced her to give up love and a stable family life. Vicky and Beyaz Hala are relatives, both the progeny of the ANZAC soldier. Though the idea is unusual and the material rich, Buket fails to develop it into a masterpiece. It is not entirely a fiction in the taste of a fairy tale nor a historical novel, nor a deep psychological work. The style is not elegant and there are inconsistencies that the reader is expected to gloss over. A love story is added at the end as a sweetener.

165. **Mario Vargas Llosa (Peruvian) Praise to the Stepmother (Elogio de la Madrastra):** In an erotic triangle, three characters are dedicated to pleasure: Don Rigoberto (the widowed father), Dona Lucrecia (the new wife in her 40s), and Alfonso (the son from the first marriage). Don Rigoberto has decided that the pleasures of this world, especially carnal pleasures must be his mission in life after having entertained a Catholic revolutionary life in his youth and having been disappointed. For him bodily pleasures extend from rituals of bath, to dedicated attention to limbs and orifices, one at a time, from bowel movement to nose cleaning and foot massaging. However they culminate in the sexual pleasures achieved with his wife. Lucrecia happily cooperates with her husband's vagaries and imaginative whims. Alfonso has an angelic face, golden wavy hair, and radiates an urge to love and caress him. When he embraces his stepmother passionately and inundates her with kisses, first Lucrecia is happy and surprised in that she thinks she has won his heart and that, contrary to warnings of her friends on the difficulties of stepping in a house with an adolescent step child, she thinks she got it. However, Alfonso's advances become exaggerated, his hands wandering over her body, till he seduces her. There is something disarming about him in that from a male he turns into an innocent child, as if everything were a play. Alfonso now appears utterly innocent, incapable of distinguishing right from wrong, and

now appears an unscrupulous and sex-driven young man. Lucrecia draws a secret pleasure to continue this relation with the stepson while at the same time she feels her love and passion increases proportionally for her husband. The author chooses paintings from Middle Ages till Modernism to draw the thread of the narrative; in a sense, every episode in this erotic triangle is related to and illustrated by one of the paintings.

166. **Hermann Hesse (Swiss-German) A Guest in the Thermal Spring (Kürgast):** The book starts as an interesting story of the author's visit to cure baths due to his own sciatic nerve inflammation. This is a novel of introversion when the author moment by moment describes his impressions during the fortnightly cure. The goal is to reflect the psychology of a patient through the stages of a cure. He starts by observing that, in view of all the other people who have great difficulty in walking, climbing steps, getting in and out of the car etc., he feels exhilarated that his state is not that bad. Then he describes the bathing sessions, the immense tiredness he feels, the people at lunch, his hotel room and the creaks, hisses, laughter and cough noises, conversation sounds, tooth brushings etc. that seep into his room from those of his neighbors, and how the insomniac nights become a suffering for him. As the book draws toward the end and he is on the route of recovery, the book becomes more narcissistic. Not the best certainly out of this Nobel Prize (1946) winning author.
167. **Antoni Casa Ros (French-Spanish) Almodovar's Theorem (Le Théorème d'Almodovar):** Antoni was leading a good life and was passionately in love with his wife. Until one night, driving through the countryside in a drunk state, their car hits a sycamore tree while trying to steer away from a deer that has suddenly jumped on the road. His wife dies immediately while he survives but his face is terribly disfigured. He condemns himself to solitude being terribly afraid of appearing to people. Gradually, very gradually he emerges from his solitude and starts exploring the world he had closed out. The story of his re-emergence is doubly narrated. From the viewpoint of the moviemaker, the Spanish stage manager, Almodovar, as he wants to reenact and film the story of the accident. Also, from the viewpoint of a transsexual, Lisa, a street whore, with whom he starts rediscovering the passion of carnal love. The leitmotif is that "there is always a party in the center of the vacuum".
168. **Marina Lewycka (Ukrainian-British) Two Caravans:** One would think that humor literature cannot ever come from East Europe, let alone Ukraine. This is lightweight book full of humor on one side, and profound and socially engaged book on the other hand. The setting of the novel is a disparate group of Eastern European immigrants and summer workers, from Poland to Bulgaria, from Romania to Ukraine looking for summer jobs in farms. They are all imbued with the concepts and images of gentlemanly and cultured British people as they had seen in their English textbooks. They tend to believe that all British are like the prototypical Mr. Brown character in the textbooks only to be disappointed bitterly. The initial setting is an idyllic strawberry farm where male and female workers live in the two caravans under very constrained conditions. A number of tragicomic events cause the cohort to be dispersed to other farms, which take them from adventure to adventure. This novel trick gives the author an occasion to direct to spotlight to various themes. One of the underlying theme is the crass exploitation of the

underpaid foreign workers, mostly Eastern Europeans, and the miserable conditions under which they have to live, their disenchantments as their dreams are shattered in the West. Another theme is the arrivist Eastern Europeans, the nouveau riches, the cardboard tycoons who build an image with ever busy cellular telephone and with grandiose gestures. There is also a theme of romance of Irina, a bourgeois girl who had supported the Orange Revolution and Andriy, the son of a miner from the worker class. While their encounter and relationship would be unthinkable in Ukraine, under the unusual psychological conditions it grows into a passionate attraction. One other important theme is the description of the inhuman conditions of the poultry farms, the brutal treatment of the animals, the incredible working conditions. An element of stress is added with the mafia mentality, their sordid trade of women, obliging teenage East Europeans to go into prostitution, the profits reaped illicitly. The novel has humor, adventure, portrayal of a socio-political conjuncture after the fall of the Berlin Wall, romance .. briefly it is worth reading.

169. **Elio Vittorioni (Italian), *Conversazione in Sicilia*.** The book has the taste of Sait Faik Abasıyanık or Orhan Kemal, in fact Elio is their contemporaneous. It has been years, perhaps fifteen years that the author has not visited his native town and his family. He lives in Alta Italia, in Italy north of Rome. One day he receives a card from his father stating that he is divorced, that he is now living with a younger woman, and that it would be a good idea for him to visit his mother in Sicily. The son starts the journey home while describing the people and landscape. As he is crossing the Messina Straits, the boat is full of seasonal farm workers, returning from temporary works like fruit collecting. They are poor, unprotected, ill-fed, unhappy about their sorts. Then he starts a long journey on a slow country train, going through deserted villages, harsh and denuded landscape. Conversations are picked up at random on the train, conversations that do not have a major thread, but nevertheless go on uninterrupted. Against the backdrop of unemployment and poverty, his father was one of the lucky people to have a steady income as he was the night watch in a train pass. In his village, up a few kilometers a steep hill, he finds his mother. There is no big joy or excitement in their encounter; while the mother continues her daily routine he re-discovers his mother, the light, the sky, the colors of his village, the people of his native land, in short his roots. His mother makes a living by giving shots to the people in the village. Shots that are not prescribed by any doctor, but that the mother decides for from among a few alternatives depending on the complaint of the patient: One shot for backache, another one for depression, yet another one for infection. The author accompanies his mother during these house calls, each visit yielding a different human landscape. ... Nothing seems to happen and yet many things seems to happen in the book. It is one of those unforgettable books.

170. **Antonio Tabucchi (Italian): *Sostiene Ferreira (Perreira Maintains)*.** We are in Portugal in the years 30, the fascism is on the rise, the dictatorship of Salazar is coming. Sostiene Ferreira is an apolitical, middle-aged, fattish is an apolitical, middle-aged, unpretentious man. He is still in love with his dead wife as he transports her portrait where go goes and has the habit of talking to her and giving her the account of his days. He is fat and unhappy with his body. Though as a good Catholic he believes in the resurrection, he wants only his soul to survive, but does not want this mass of fat to be resurrected. He has an uninteresting daily routine, he works as an editor in a small cultural weekly newspaper. What he can publish, which articles can appear, which French

authors can be translated into Portuguese is strictly determined by a surreptitious censure, by the political right. Through a serendipitous encounter, he comes into contact, though quite indirectly, with two republican and leftist activists, a man and a woman. Although he does not have much of an ideology and does not question the political, although he is more concerned with his thalassotherapy, his omelets and his lemonade, something is still awakened in him. He does feel curiosity and sympathy for their cause, mostly in a personal manner. The culminating point comes when civil police breaks into his house and harass and accuse him with protecting the activists. This is the turning point: he decides to publish the manifesto of the leftists in his newspapers bypassing controls using fake approval documents of the police, and runs away to France. A single courageous event that makes an insignificant life very significant. The author has the leitmotiv expression “Perreira sostiene” to distance himself and to emphasize that this is only a personal story of one man. That’s why the heroism of this one man at the end appears much more forceful. Second, although the theme is the rise of fascism, there is nowhere any political discussion, any direct reference, any explication, yet one feels the fascism hovering all around. Third, despite the simplicity and even the banality of the story, the novel is a great one, one of love, betrayal, courage, fidelity.

171. **Antonio Tabucchi (Italian): *Il Tempo Invecchia in Fretta (The Time gets Older Rapidly)*.**

This is an interesting series of stories about how time is conceived. All the persons of these stories are engaged to confront the time, with an interplay of vicissitudes experienced, of memory and conscience. The time is warped, stretched, becomes lost and then reappears. Experiences that were distinct get confounded a similar, things that seemed irrelevant in the past re-emerge as indelible, the official version gets mixed up with phantasy. An ex-agent of the former German Democratic Republic who was stalking Bertolt Brecht wanders around aimlessly in Berlin and then repents at the tomb of the author. In a vacation spot, an Italian officer is dying due to nuclear radiation exposure in Kosovo, and passes his time teaching to a little girl the art of guessing the future by looking at the clouds. A Hungarian officer imprisoned in Budapest for being one of the revolters against the Russian invasion in 1956, decides to go to Moscow after the fall of the Berlin Wall and find his torturer. He confesses in a letter to a friend that he was having the best days of his life. A man, recently divorced and without serious professional engagements departs for the Isle of Crete and drives aimlessly in the island. A man attends at the bedside a dying relative through nights. For all these people the awareness and the flow of time are different and personal.

172. **Zoya Pirzad (Iranian-Armenian) *Cheragh-ha ra Man Khamush Mikonam (I Have Turned off the Lights)*:**

She is novelist of commonalities, of small nothings, of non-heroes, of women in the Armenian community of a small town south of Iran. The heroine is the mother of three children in the adolescent stage; her husband has lost all touch and sensitivity with her; she is surrounded by demanding relatives, a capricious commandeering mother, and her daily life proceeds without excitement through routines of feeding the children, taken care of the house, being a model wife. Excitements in her life are caused by a visit to the company club, by new

neighbors who have just moved into a house across the street, by a locust invasion on a hot day, by the prospect of a Dutch engineer who courts her sister, who is still unmarried at an advanced age etc. On the one hand, these are routine and tedious lives; on the other hand, it is the life of probably 99% of us. It shows that irrespective of ethnic origin, religion and location in the world, the loneliness of women, their alienation, their struggle to make sense of this life. A nice story filled with feminine sensitivities.

173. **Jean-Louis Fournier (French) *Mon Dernier Cheveu Noir (My Last Black Hair)*:** As I myself heading for the age of retirement, I found many repercussions in my mind and heart about Fournier's lighthearted descriptions of turning sixty. On the one side, it is a painful awakening and entrance to the third chapter of our lives. On the other hand, it gives us a sense of relief as we are divested from many of the responsibilities and liabilities of life. We do not have to be so much in combat anymore. The author has a humorous approach to the old age with such aphorisms as "Less breath one has, the more candles one has to blow out", "Consult your doctor with modesty: With insistence to find something, he will come out with something in you", "Being as healthy as iron, does not prevent you from rusting", "As long as there is life, there is always despair" and so on. He laments about the things that he will not be allowed to do, like getting a professional bus driver license and at the same cheers for his liberation from many responsibilities of life, a gift of old age. The book provides a lighthearted reading, leaves you somewhat wanting to read something more profound, and his effort to be hilarious does not always succeed. Fournier tells us all mostly humorously ; in certain pages he becomes morose and a bit pathetic; in others, his comments are very commonplace. But the overall tone of the book is humorous, pleasant and worth reading. Nevertheless, it does not pretend to prescribe you recipes for a new life, does not approach the problem as a seller of wonderful third life formulae.

174. **Katherina Hagen (German), *The Taste of Apple Seeds (Der Geschmack von Apfelkernen)*.** 19th century novels typically had to have heroes and heroines, a grand story, unusual human experience and a breadth-taking stream of vicissitudes. Katerina's novel would be considered an anti-novel. There seems nothing unusual happening in the story, and yet it reflects a significant human experience. The novel tells us about childhood and adolescence memories of Iris in a small town in Germany. The story begins with the death of the grandmother which provides also the occasion for the reunion of the three daughters: Iris's aunts and mother, and the bequeath of her house to the granddaughter. The three daughters are not surprised or hurt by the fact that the granddaughter is the inheritor of the property since their lives have sufficiently distanced them from this small town. The grandmother had a long story of Alzheimer's disease, and at death the daughters were already sufficiently detached from her, hence no big sorrow. The contrasts among her mother and the two aunts are depicted with a taint of humor. Especially, aunt Inga, the freed feminist woman, striking with her dressing style, is criticized by the sisters but admired by Iris. The house, its creaking staircase, its bedcovers still smelling of the old perfumes, its cupboards filled with the dresses and various paraphernalia of the two older generations, all of these cause Iris' childhood memories to surface. Memories of long hot

summers, of redcurrants ripening on the branches of trees, the hideouts in the garden, afternoons spent playing when her cousin Rosemarie in her grandmother's garden. There are also the memories of the war, not horrible stories, but those of German refugees streaming past their town in unending convoys from East. Along with the property, Iris finds that she also inherits her family's darkest secrets. In the flicker between remembrance and forgetting, Iris recalls an enigmatic grandfather who went to war, apparently reluctantly, and came back a different man. The town people, even after his death long time ago, suspect him of being an old Nazi. Reluctant to keep the house, but reluctant to sell, Iris spends one more summer at the house. By day she swims at the local lake, where she rediscovers a childhood companion. Alone at night she roams through the familiar rooms, exploring the tall black shadows of the past.

175. **Peter Hoeg (Danish), *Smilla's Sense of Snow (Foecken Smillas Fornemmelse for Sne)*.** A conspiracy story that is remarkably different from those in the Anglo-American literature: first, the story evolves slowly, and woven through unusual characters; second, the book is also a saga of snow, with its myriad descriptions, especially enriched with Copenhagen scenes of cold, night and snow; third, the main character is a Greenlander-Danish mestizo woman, and this provides a background for criticism of the European cultural egocentrism. Smilla Qaavigaaq Jaspersen, born of an Eskimo mother and a Danish father has befriended a boy of the same mixed background. She is a character with contrasts: rebellious, caring, unlikeable, daring, thoughtful, impulsive, and most determined. She becomes intrigued with the death of this boy due to a fall from a snow-covered apartment roof. Her acquaintance with the character of the boy and her connoisseurship of footsteps on snow tells her of something suspicious about the death. Thus she starts unrelentless pursuit to solve the mystery. At each step, she uncovers a series of conspiracies and cover-ups and quickly realizes that she can trust nobody. Along the story, a number of characters emerge: the mechanic, a quiet, robust man that becomes her lover for a while, and that pops up in most unlikely places to save her from a deadly dangers, some sort of Deus ex machine. Next, her father, with whom she seems to have burned all the bridges, but nevertheless appears here and there in the novel; this is often the pretext for a very harsh criticism of European cultural narcissism. Then there a number of quite unusual characters like the coroner and the blind linguist, who are quite well written. Her pursuit for justice takes her to a Danish company who has had secret missions in Greenland dating back to WWII. The novel culminates with her boarding a ship headed for the island and a crescendo of events and tension, with picaresque descriptions of dangers and near-death encounters. One can enjoy reading the novel either by concentrating on the intricate conspiracy story with the snow in the background, or by enjoying the saga of snow and cold with the difficult conspiracy story in the background.

176. **Mario Vargas Llosa (Peru) *The City and the Dogs (La Ciudad y los Perros)*** I was describing the book to colleagues during lunch time at the university: both professors, one of them had spent his high-school years in the dorms, the other was an officer and teaching in a military college. At one point they became silent and said in unison: "But you are describing exactly our life in the boarding school!". I think this is the power of a great writer, of a classic: It transcends eras and continents. This youth novel of Llosa relate his own experiences as a cadet at the age of seventeen in the military school. The story takes place in the Colegio Militar Leoncio

Prado in Lima. Families send their children to this school with the belief that there they can develop a character and a body of steel, and not stay as soft boys with a tendency for homosexuality. Actually, the life in school is very harsh and often miserable, notably, due to the continuous harassments of the senior students on the juniors, beating them up on every occasion and treating them as “dogs”. There is also a brutal social hierarchy in the cohort of students, where a few dominate and exploit everybody else; any opposition is crushed, any meekness is jeered at. There is not much joy and excitement in the lives of students except on the leave days when they can see their families and/or girlfriends. However, weekend leaves are often suspended, sometimes for weeks, on the pretext of some misbehavior or to extort denunciations from the students. The book in this sense is a frontal critique of a distorted concept of virility, of manhood, and its reflection on the educational system in the military college. As the novel proceeds, the brutality of the military education turns into fury, vehemence and a fanatic finale where all sensitivities and sensibilities are lost. The drama starts when Jaguar, the domineering type of the class, forces a classmate to break into the office of teachers and steal the exam questions. The theft is soon denounced and the officers start forcing the class to denounce the thief by suspending all weekend leaves. One of the students, desperate for the weekend leave, denounces his classmate, gets the leave, but his treachery is soon known by everybody. The denouncer is shot in the head during a military exercise, in all evidence by Jaguar. The officers do not want to pursue the truth preferring to make everybody believe that it was a pure accident, as they are afraid that murder would taint the prestige of the school. The protagonist (the author) fights against the cover up, in vain as he is himself threatened. However, he finds a companion soul among an officer, a young idealist, who in turn starts fighting for the truth. The cover up only deepens, resulting with expulsion of the cadet (the author) while the idealist officer is demoted and assigned to an insignificant non-teaching post in a border town.

177. **Alvaro Muti (Colombian), *The Adventures and Misadventures of Maqroll*.** The novel is built around a quixotic character, Maqroll the Gaviro. He represents perhaps the modern version of Don Quixote himself. One aspect of his character pushes him constantly to pursue extravagant but hopeless undertakings: he is the rainbow catcher, the dream pursuer. He is constantly on the move around the world from Cyprus to Panama City, from Anvers to Venezuela, from Helsinki to Istanbul. Another aspect of his character is revealed with enduring and faithful friendships, especially Bashur, a Moslem tradesman from Beirut and a long sequence of love adventures. The author lets us know that he has had several brushes with the law, though the nature of his misdeeds is never revealed, letting us think of innocent problems with the corrupt governments of Latin America. Each one of the seven stories takes us to a different adventure in a different setting of the region, from Panama City to Columbia, from Venezuela to Brazil. In one story, Maqroll is journeying up a long and perilous river with a decrepit boat to buy some abandoned factories. The journey is a failure due to the patrolling by unfriendly military forces that protect the interests of some politically favored magnate in the capital. Though, the scope of it remains secondary vis-à-vis the description of the beauty of the thick forest, the treacherous waters of the river, the days spent on a boarding house on a river hamlet. In another story, Maqroll is working in an abandoned silver mine up in the hills aided by an Indian woman, only to see the fruit of

efforts confiscated and sent away penniless. In comparison to the adventure of Don Quixote, Maqroll's story is ornate with a rich variety of sensuous love adventures and scenes.

178. **Zülfü Livaneli (Turkish), Serenad (The Serenade).** The topic of novel is one of the human tragedies, but the writer definitely cannot measure up to the greatness of the subject. During the Second World War, several hundred Rumanian Jews under German occupation sold out all their belongings to gain access to a ship, called Strouma, that would have transported them to Palestine. The Turkish authorities did not allow them to go through, and negotiations lasted for several weeks in Istanbul. Finally, exhausted, depleted of resources and having lost all hope, the ship took anchor back to Costanzia. However, the ship was torpedoed by Russian submarines a few miles after exiting the Bosphorus Straits, and all 700 hundred or more people perished. Livaneli exploits this true story as the background material of a love story between a German professor of philosophy and a Jewish woman. The professor's love for this woman forces him to resign from his post at the university, induces him to compose music etc., to alienate his family who are opposing their marriage. On their route to escape from Germany, he is withhold at the Swiss border while his wife is arrested. Eventually she becomes one of the refugees on the boat, and the professor witnesses the tragic sinking of the boat and perishing of his wife from the shores of the Black Sea. The title of the book comes from the "serenade" that the professor had composed for his wife, and that he plays with his violin as a requiem to his perished wife on the shores Black Sea at Şili. His insistence on the inquisition of this fact makes him persona non grata with the Turkish authorities. The Turkish part of the story is more trivial: the Rector of the Istanbul University delegates her secretary with taking care of this important guest. The first unhappy with this task, she eventually becomes fascinated with the professor and infatuated with the sad love story, and accompanies him everywhere. Meanwhile the Turkish Secret Service is following them closely as the professor is still considered as a troublemaker with the fear that he will try to uncover the complicity of the Turkish government in the sinking of Strouma. The story gets entangled more and more. Here and there Livaneli sprinkles the story with criticisms of the power of the army in Turkey, with the bigotry of values that ostracizes a woman if she gets too much involved with a man, be it an 80 year old professor etc.

179. **Nikos Temelis (Greek), Arayış (Anazitisi) (The Quest).** The search is the incessant search of a boy, than of a youngster, than of a grown up man to compensate or revenge for his father who has quitted his family when the protagonist was still a child. His child is happy and spent in the town of Zagoria in Epirus. Next, we encounter him in Molivos in the northern town of the Lesvos Island. He is taciturn, mysterious, appears for some construction work and then disappears, and nobody exactly knows where and how he lives. The time is the end of the 19th century, when the East Mediterranean and the Aegean were slowly opening up to Europe, when business and trade were developing, and Greeks were the actors of the trade and local industries. Nikos' voyages take him to Mytilene and then to Smyrna. Gradually he becomes a n influential member of the society, earning the title of Nikos Efendi, and with his hard and serious work, he becomes eventually the manager of a vast farm in Manisa. On the one side, the novel describes the cosmopolitan world of the Aegean region of the Ottoman Empire, a melting-pot of nationalities, cultures and beliefs. On the other side, the lands of the Ottoman Empire are undergoing rapid

changes, where new ideas, new technologies and new lifestyles. Nikos Efendi relentlessly continues his quest for the fulfillment of his dreams. The novel gives us a vivid description of a turbulent era, an amazing panorama of Greeks and Turks mingled through a millennium of common life. At the end, the novel hints at the dissolution of this ethnic richness of the Aegean, with the wars closing the borders, hinders the wealth of trade and interactions, and eventually forced mass migrations on the two shores of the Aegean Sea.

180. **Yasmina Khadra (Algerian) *Ce Que le Jour Doit à La Nuit (What the Day Owes to the Night)***. Two inter-twisted and sad stories : The Algeria war of liberation and a lost love. These two accounts are narrated as experienced by Younus, which we encounter first as a boy, and then we follow him through his adolescence, his youth, and finally in the old age. He is born in poverty in an arid countryside where his father is toiling in his grain field. Bandits one night burn all their crops with the intent to grab the land, and the family has to quit their village and condemned to the misery of a slum in a port town of Algeria. With father gaining pennies as porter in the harbor only gets them a meager and miserable life; convinced that his son, Younus, is condemned, he relegates him to his brother, a well-to-do pharmacist in the town. The uncle is well educated in France, married to a French woman, but without children so that Younus becomes their Benjamin. The novel takes us through the life of the boy on the way to become a Franco-Algerian, attending French schools, living through the multitude of his innocent adolescents loves, planning his carrier as a pharmacist. Encounter with a weakling girl visiting the pharmacy for regular shots strikes a note in both of them, and this is the start of a long, unaccomplished and disappointing love. Meanwhile, anecdotal events makes Younus question his identity, his ambivalent status between the rich European colonists and the local Arab people in the state of half slavery. The years flow from 1930s through 1960s. The WWII sees the destruction of the French navy where thousands perished, the arrival of American troops and the spread of their life style; then relative calm returns after the war. Younus is married, has children, yet he pursues his adolescence love when he visits Marseille in his old age. The book is instrumental to understand past and present Algeria, its transition from a colonized to an independent country, the Algeria of the Pieds-Noirs or of Moslems.
181. **Sergio Pitlor (Mexican) *La Vida Conyugal (Married Life)***. This book is a parody of married life, funny, exaggerated, ironic, that scratches the surface of lives of ordinary couples, and displays in a cruel comedy the frustrations, the phantasies, the jealousies. The protagonist is Jacqueline, who catapulted herself from a mediocre life of poverty into society and a comfortable life through marriage. Yet, she is restless, vane, purposeless. She attends cultural circles and takes courses in private academies believing that she is advancing to become a writer and an erudite, while in fact she remains mediocre and does not absorb any of that culture. She pursues mediocre loves in the hope of an even better conjugal life, despite her husband's ever present car, financial means and charm. Effectively, she has "five lives", perhaps five tempestuous stages of her life, one filled with more vanity than the one before.
182. **Mario Vargas Llosa (Peruvian) *Lituma en los Andes (Death in the Andes)***. We are in a remote villages in the Andes Mountains region of Peru in a mine town. There is not much in the

town except for the worker's barracks, a bar, and the security office where the corporal Lituma and his not so clever deputy are stationed. The novel proceeds in suspense as the officers are charged to investigate the disappearance of three people; but the townspeople do not trust the officers, they treat them as if they came from the Moon, and in turn the officers wonder at each turn of the event that they are still alive in this hostile milieu. While Lituma and his deputy are searching for the disappeared men, many stories are interwoven to build the background; stories that vary from sensuous to gory, from surreal to picaresque. One theme is the revolutionaries of the Shining Path, their senseless savagery, their nihilism to destroy every governmental and/or international enterprise, from forestation to the preservation of wildlife, from medical care to civilian authority as capitalist exploitations. Their self-righteousness, their brutality and their primitive understanding of socialism were indeed typical in the sixties and seventies of the 20th century. Another theme is this silly mine town into where people seem to be drifted against their will. They are mostly stiff bored and often homesick longing to go back to the town of their youth. The town is decrepit, dying out as the mine is on its way to be closed. The government had been trying to build a mountain road passing through the town; however a massive landslide seals the fate of the road as well of the town. The town bar is a recurrent theme. It is here that people get drunk to forget their own misery and to quench their boredom. Dionysius, the bar owner, and his wife, are suspicious, cloudy figures, one never can know whether they are on your side or are ready to stab you in the back, or perhaps both. They are also the prime suspects in the disappearance of the road workers. Still Lituma can relate more to them as compared to the impoverished Indians, the indigenous people, with their blank faces, their total mistrust for the white men, and their unresponsiveness. Another theme is the naïve love affair of the deputy officer with a prostitute that happens to visit the town. This love story commences when the deputy reacts to the shrieks of the woman, who apparently is begging the man, her customer, not to beat her, actually a love foreplay, and kills him. This one-sided love story between an infatuated, childish youngster and a callous prostitute goes through a series of vicissitudes, but somehow ends happily. Lituma cannot exactly discover the disappearance of the three men, but it is intimated that these men have been killed and sacrificed to the mountain gods.

183. **David Eagleman (American) Sum: Forty Tales from the Afterlives.** Forty very creative, ingenuous, innovative comic stories describing the afterlife. In each story, in the guise of the afterlife Eagleman actually addresses the vicissitudes, errors, horrors, vanity etc. of the mankind. In one story he wonders why God lives so far and so detached in a "palace", rather than in "trenches" with us. He is aloof, unreachable, often absent in his office, and nobody is sure whether he will ever return. In another story, the author wonders if God is actually the size of a bacterium, battling good and evil on the battlefield of surface proteins, and thus unaware of humans, who are merely the nutritional substrate? He has funny descriptions of the afterlife: For example, in the Sum story, we imagine that we do almost exactly the things we did in our lives except that, rather than being distributed over time, they are all lumped together. Thus, we nonstop take 10 months of showers, we sleep for 38 years without awakening, cut our nails for 200 consecutive hours etc. In the Reversal story, we live our lives backwards, from grave back to

birth; thus for example, sour marriages evolve back into blissful dating; bearded men turn into smooth-faced children, unlearn reading, writing and arithmetic, and eventually climb back into their mother's wombs. The allegory is that the first time we live our life forward we run through it without much understanding and only in the replay we appreciate it. In the Pantheon story, we realize that in the afterlife, everything we created lives on forever. Not only material things like coffee cups and cellular phones, but also ideas, images, and in particular the gods we created. Thus there is a population of Aztec, Indian, Babylonian, Nordic, Roman etc gods, though they seem to be somewhat down. Their functions of disease healing, war winning, crop protection etc. do not seem needed anymore. In the Will-o-the-Wisp story, the afterlife offers us comfortable lounges equipped with big TV screen in order to watch the world. Almost everybody watches blissfully just one series in the world, that of the ripples of their life unfolding through the deeds we did, through our progeny, through the companies we established etc., all the good stuff. One day, however, some people are denied access to the TV room. While they feel frustration for being secluded, actually they do not know that they are spared the pain of seeing their companies crumbling their grandchildren dying of cancer etc.

184. **Alice Munroe (Canada) Sum: The Moons of Jupiter.** Perhaps one should not approach every Nobel writer or every novel of a Nobel laureate writer with great expectations. I was somewhat disappointed about the writer perhaps because I was expecting another Chekhov, this time a Canadian one. As I started reading her stories, I felt the Chekhovian style, stories about common lives of common people in the towns and villages of Ontario. However, while Chekhov could create a great story out of a matchbox, Alice Munroe falls short of turning commonality of lives into universality. The book consists of seven stories, and each of them has a woman protagonist. In the Moon of Jupiter, a woman visits her father in the cardiology department of a hospital, only to learn that he has a few months to live. She is torn between her two daughters, her efforts to reach over to them, their absence from her life, and the rather conservative father, who is always critical of how she raises her two daughters, accordingly, in too liberal a style. In the Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd, the two ladies are in a pension house for the old, and both are on their rolling chairs. Their days are filled with emotions of the pension house gossip, the arrival of a new male patient who looks interesting and promising, though a stroke has left him speechless, the visits to each other's rooms, the afternoon teas and card games for which they don their best dresses and jewelry. In the Chaddeleys and the Flemings, she describes very subtly the woman who is forced to submissiveness to continue her marriage. She internalizes the view that she is less capable, less experienced, less knowledgeable etc. vis-à-vis her husband, although in reality. The backdrop of stories reveals us interesting portraits from rural Canada before WWII. She talks about hard farming life, boys of age 14 running away from home to eschew harsh and punishing fathers, girls raised with the only prospect of marriage. All in all, she gives capably portrayals of women, of their trite lives, and of rural Canada. One then starts reflecting that in one sense, many things have changed in the lives of women in the last half century, at least on the appearance; in another sense, deep down in the minds and hearts, many of the constraining factors for women are still the same.

185. **Marguerite Yourcenar (French) Mémoires d'Hadrien (The Memories of Hadrian)**. Great subject and great writer. This is a good example where a historical subject can be turned into an illuminating book of history, of human vicissitudes, into a semi-documentary very pleasant to read. The novel traces the life of the Roman emperor Hadrian from his childhood in Spain, throughout his campaign and administration till his death bed in the form of dictated memoirs. These memoirs are in part based on historical documents and research, and the rest being filled in by the poetical imagination of Yourcenar. Hadrian was a Roman emperor in the second century A.D. He was of humble origins, son of provincial government functionary in the North of Spain. Despite his very modest and inconspicuous beginning he steadily arose in the administrative and army service of the Roman Empire. He participated to the long Dacian campaigns with Emperor Trajan during which wars the Romans subjugated all the local tribes. This early experience both provided an opportunity to prove how much a valiant and capable commander Hadrian was and paved the way to his eventual ascendancy to be an emperor, and also showed him all the cruel and bloody aspects and costs of a war. One consequence was that he tried by all means to avoid bloody conflicts, ended costly conquest wars and led a policy of peace unless peace itself was threatened. Hadrian felt always a bit awkward in Rome, and hated all the debauchery of the capital. Throughout his career as an emperor he led a modest, almost ascetic life, never forgetting his provincial origins. To satisfy his quest for refinement and culture, he extols the Greek civilization, perhaps a bit disproportionately to the point of adoring anything Greek from its resinous wine to its sculpture, from its philosophy to its joie de vivre. He was one of the great reformers of the administrative and justice system of the empire, and tried to correct injustices and iniquities wherever he encountered them. He was unique in that he spent very little time in the capital itself, but was always on mission outside Rome, be it a siege and war, be it secure the borders of the empire, be it to visit provinces to command public works in Syria or England. Even today, in almost any city from antiquity in the Eastern Mediterranean basin there is almost always a vestige of the public works of Hadrian. He was an explorer, eager to discover, to learn, to understand the mystery of life. In his era, although the Roman gods were still much revered and respected, and although the pragmatic Romans continued to adopt the gods of the people they conquered, the religion did not satisfy the spiritual needs of the people; Christianity had not yet arrived. Thus in this interim period, man in a sense was "alone" without the illusion of the protection of the gods. Man alone to confront himself! The reflections and ruminations of Hadrian novel describe very well this aspiration, this soul searching, and this introspection. In fact, the novel is not necessarily the biography of a man, but it evolves like a spiritual journey of a man reflecting on his times, on art, love, on the sacred, on the mysteries of life. The last part of the book, when Hadrian is ailing and feels his forces quitting him, retreated in his villa outside Rome, is especially touching. Yourcenar is a great writer; but in this novel she is even grander. The novel is so rich in detail, so deep in reflections, so well balanced that it is a joy reading it. One also feels the great mental preparation through which the author must have gone in order to feel herself in the skin of the emperor himself.

186. **J. M. Coetzee (South African) The Life and Times of Michael K**. In the background an internecine war is raging: The whole country seems to be converted to a big prison where security forces try to quench the revolt with non-proportionate force, and consider anybody and

everybody as a suspect. On the foreground, Michael K seems to go transparently through time and space. The son of single mother, at an early age, he was deemed as not bright, and sent to a school of handicapped children. It is true that every lesson, from simple proportions to reading was incomprehensibly difficult for him. On the other hand, the school has had an enduring effect on him, conditioned not to ever want and envision anything, to go hungry for days and nights as the other boys had the habit of impounding his food. For a while he seemed to have a period of respite: He had a job as one of the gardeners in the city and his mother was a full time servant with a well-to-do family. They live in a nook without windows outside the mansion. Then this peaceful life comes to a sudden halt when riots in the city destroy houses, burns cars including theirs, though they remain unscathed in their nook. Then a desire overtakes her mother to return to her birth place, somewhere in the north, perhaps a hallucination. Michael K builds a carriage for his mother as she is too weak and incapacitated to walk. The official papers, which would allow them to go from one town to another ton of their country never arrives. The first few attempts to leave the city fail. Finally, he learns how to be less conspicuous, how to avoid main routes, and filters through countryside heavily guarded by unscrupulous security forces and infested with bandits, deserters and revolutionary groups. Cold, fatigue, hunger, sickness, all exhaust his mother which perishes in a hospital. He would never forget the image of his mother being incinerated in the hospital morgue, her golden hair catching fire in a flash. He continues his odyssey, survives with roots and grasses on the mountains till he finds a deserted farm, which he phantasizes to be his mother's birthplace. Afraid of being conspicuous to both the security forces and the revolutionaries, he starts living like a mole, in an underground hole, emerges only at nights, goes without eating for days. Until one day he is spotted by a security patrol. Being incriminated to be surely a liaison element of revolutionaries, he is detained, beaten, interrogated ad infinitum. The city stadium has been converted to a huge interrogatory. As the story goes on and on, the contrast between Michael K and his country ever grows. He has no ambitions, no claims, no desires, no political conception, no desire to do anything except perhaps to sleep. His country is being torn by the civil war engendered by the apartheid. He is the symbol of helplessness, of a single individual crushed by a civil war, like a fragile egg squeezed between two rocks.

187. **Jumha Lahiri (American) The Interpreter of Maladies:** What a sweet storyteller! Each one takes you away from your reality and catapults you into the milieu of the story. As usual, her stories focus on the Bengalis, sometimes in Dacca, sometimes in Boston, sometimes in some generic place. Moslem meets non-Moslems: In one of the stories, a Moslem Bengali, a lonely visiting scientist, is invited on a regular daily basis to a non-Moslem Bengali family for dinner. When the independence war of East Pakistan explodes, resulting with a debacle of the Pakistani Armed Forces, the guest and host continue their companionship, sipping their teas after dinner, watching the evening news and quietly commenting on them, although in principle they are on the opposite frontiers of an ideological war. Bengalis with Bengalis: People who were subjected to ethnic cleansing and had to emigrate to either side of the border deplore always their possessions left behind, and unable to start a new life, with age exaggerate the lost "riches". She is allowed to survive in the basement of an apartment with the function of sweeper of the staircase, and also implicitly as a guardian for safety. Installation of a sink in the staircase is a

major event that unites the apartment dwellers in that they have to queue up around the sink for using it, generating occasions for gossips and discussions, and hence the sink event generates, at the same time, the seeds of dissent among them. Bengali man versus American woman: She is only 22, American, and working in a call center. While strolling during her lunch break in the perfume section of a department store, she is attracted by a handsome, tall, and apparently well-to-do Bengali man. He starts spending nights in her apartment for passionate lovemaking. At first, she thought that Bengali meant a religious sect and surprised to find out that it is actually a country. Their lovemaking continues after the return of his wife, though more discretely and limited to Sunday afternoons, when he pretends to go for jogging along the Charles River. The spell is broken when one day she has to babysit a boy, who is going through the doldrums of the separation of her parents: His father had simply quit them with the woman he met on the flight from Dacca to New York. A Bengali family in the new world: He was brave enough to go abroad for a better life, first to England, and then upon receiving his immigration documents to US. Lahiri describes so well the feelings of loneliness, awkwardness and shyness that most foreign students and young immigrants prove upon their arrival. The contrast between the life in India / Bangladesh and that in USA, the arranged marriage with a girl back home, the embarrassment of the two strangers to start a married life in the absence of any love, and the gradual settling of things toward normalcy.

188. **Mathias Enard (French) *Parle-leur de Batailles, de Rois et d'Eléphants***: Interesting subject, but poor novel. Bayazid II, invites Michelangelo to build a bridge on the Golden Horn. Michelangelo is vexed with the rivalries of Buonarrotti and of Raphael, and he feels frustrated as Pope Jules II does not even accord him a séance to discuss his project. Thus he accepts without hesitation this invitation from Constantinople. Ottoman Empire is at the peak of its power and Bayazid intends to embellish his city by joining the two shores of the Golden Horn. Michelangelo apparently stays three months in the city, sketches the project of the bridge, but has to depart secretly without ever seeing the accomplishment of this project. He is accompanied by Mesihi, a poet, that falls in love with him, closely monitored by Arslan Bey, a government agent, admired and loved by an Andalusian Jewish woman, a singer, while his landlord and liaison point is Manuel, a Greek of Istanbul. The novel could have been very interesting providing great insight into the mentalities of both Florence and Constantinople, offering historical details of the two cities and their way of operating, portraying the rulers and the artists. Unfortunately all that is lacking. The novel is written in an orientalist style: the intrigue rules the city, homosexual love, heavy consumption of spirits and opium. There are no references to the architectural style of the city, no description of the lives of the people, no source of inspiration that guides Michelangelo to design the bridge. A disappointing novel.
189. **Moamed Shukri (Moroccan) *La Pain Nu (The Naked Bread)***: A shocking and realistic autobiographical novel. This is the story of a lost innocence, of an un-lived childhood, of hunger, of an impasse of a life. Originally from some mountain village, the Rif, the family immigrates into city to eke out a living. However they live in abject poverty since the father refuses to find a work; hence they survive only on what vegetables the mother can sell in the marketplace. The boy knows only the brutality and violence of his father since his early years: he is beaten with no

reason almost daily till blood gushes from his mouth; he only hears obscenities, swears, bitter words that kill the spirit. He witnesses his father killing his brother in a fit of rage. As they bury the brother, the boy wonders: "My brother is now an angel in the heavens; am I the devil? He sleeps in the cemeteries to avoid being robbed and raped; he works and finds refuge in coffee houses serving people drunk both on alcohol and hashish. However, every penny of his weekly salary is impounded by the father. Gradually he discovers sex, first as an occasional glimpse of the neighbor's daughter, then experimenting foreplay with another neighbor, finally getting to know the Arab and Spanish brothels. The survival instinct pushes him through a myriad vicissitudes of life, from working in Spanish farmhouses to smuggling of foreign goods, from bloody street brawls to organized theft, from prison sojourns to the job of a porter. He has an obsessive hatred of his father, who is the only person he would like to see dead. Meanwhile his mother continues to bear him brothers and sisters, some of them short-living. These are the colonial years in Morocco: What little opposition there is for French rule is crushed severely. The more the French try to oppress the independence movement, the more people are politicized. He feels alienated and ignorant in the political discussions of his friends; in fact, Morocco is sharing in the Arab awakening of 1950s, driven by the populist rhetoric of Nasser. Gradually there is an awakening in him for the necessity to learn to read and write. The book ends when he, the author, picks up his first grammar and reading book. Indeed, Mohamed Shukri was an analphabet till the age of 20.

190. **José Saramago (Portuguese) Cain:** On the one hand, I was surprised to read such a sacrilegious book from such a deeply Catholic country. On the other hand, I thought that this was a grand finale (his last book) for an author who was an atheist and a communist. Cain, the despised, the murderer, is the protagonist of the novel. After he kills his brother, Abel is condemned to wander forever through time and space, in the company of a donkey. On his wanderings, he meets many characters of the Old Testament, each one's story having a provocative twist. He is a witness to and participant in the stories of Isaac and Abraham, Abraham's near-sacrifice of his son the destruction of the Tower of Babel, Moses and the golden calf, Noah's ark, the trials of Job. In his wanderings, an old man with two sheep on a rope crosses often his path: in fact, Cain encounters God. But He is a God who seems to be indifferent, cruel, unjust, untrustworthy, confusing and definitely not a Savior. Cain argues with Him, he doesn't think much of God, and God's opinion of Cain is mutual. This shared state of mind is probably at the heart of this story.

191. **Natalia Ginzburg (Italian) Lessico Familiare:** I wish such a book were written for every language, and in fact for different epochs of each language's lifetime. There is no plot, there is no fiction in this book: Natalia simply reports to us, as far as she remember, the typical conversations taking place in her family at home, as well as some outside the family, the manners of reacting, and the idiosyncratic expressions. It is a book of autobiographic remembrances focused mostly on her parents. As she herself states, when one of those sentences that was used and repeated over and over at home, like the invitation to the dinner table, the reaction to a particular person's appearance, the morning salutations, the exclamations on returning from work, etc. come to mind, a whole set of memories rush in as evoked by the words. The book

covers the period from 1930s till the end of 1950s, from the years she can remember till the day she gets married and leaves the house. This is a difficult period for Europe with the rise of fascism with the disappearance of free speech and lawfulness, and in particular for a Jewish family due to racist campaigns, extermination camps, deportations. The book gives us a vivid portrayal of Italian Nord during fascism and the WWII, as reflected by the words. She has a prodigious memory, and can remember and reproduce the conversations and expressions used by her mother and father, by her older brothers and sisters, by the maids at home, by the friends of her parents, by various political figures who often congregate in their house. The book is written in the first person, the author is the narrator, although she is almost absent in the book, as if she were at home with her family, but invisible to them, hidden in her corner, and were telling us about what she was seeing and hearing.

192. **Jean-Christophe Ruffin (French) *Immortelle Randonnée: Compostelle malgré moi***: When I had visited the Church of Santiago de Compostella, I was awed by the deep religiosity in the premises. There were a number of pilgrims that had walked for days to reach the church where they were finally standing in queue to be able to hug Santiago's statue. The pilgrims can in principle start from anywhere, but one of the arduous paths stretching 800 kilometers has its beginnings in the Pyrenees. The book is about the travel notes and memoirs of the French novelist Jean-Christophe Ruffin. The author experiences ups and downs throughout his journey. The first few hundred kilometers are painful as his body adjusts to the fatigue, his feet to the pain and stress, and his mind to the solitude; after this stage of being a novice, the interminable kilometers do not seem any more so long. In the beginning, he is gripped by a religious fervor; he attends all the masses and enjoys the hymns, the choirs. He resents in fact, tourist-pilgrims along St. Jacques's route, that are bussed from landmark to landmark location, noisy, boisterous hordes. The author narrates the old village churches, often with very sparse congregations, the miserable hotels used by pilgrims, the chance encounters on the route with characters from different nationalities, the countryside alternating from beautiful coastline to bleak landscape, the paths alternating between desolated country routes to those that have to follow ugly industrial regions, heavy with truck traffic. As he approaches the city of Santiago de Compostella, the pilgrim lines get thicker, more crowded, with mixed feelings of joy and disenchantment. The nice thing about the book is that he does not try to prove anything; it is non-ideological, it contains a lot of reflections all imbued with a style of self-mockery.
193. **Jon McGregor (British) *So Many Ways to Begin***: This is a fiction, yet it reads also like nonfiction, giving us a social portrayal of UK from the war years through to the end of the millennium. The non-chronological chapters make the reading interesting and tense. The plot is woven with surprising turns, with alternating hopes and disappointments. One theme about David, the protagonist, is his museum carrier. He develops since early childhood a passion for collecting paraphernalia, keys, shrapnel and bomb parts in the aftermath of WWII in Coventry as well as faded photographs, handwritten notes, and always dreams about opening his own museum. In fact, each section of the novel is inspired by one of these objects, by a memento, and explodes into an episode. Despite the diversity of the objects, and the saltation of the epochs of the events, at the end, all episodes collapse into one whole coherent story. David's dream comes

true when he is accepted as a member of staff in the local museum, right after high school. Despite his utmost dedication and success, and after twenty years of service, he loses his job in the so called economic reforms of Thatcherism, and can never recover from the feelings of failure. A second theme is the bomb that falls in his life when in his early twenties he learns to be an adopted child, a situation not even revealed to his late “father”. He is consumed by the need to locate and know his natural mother. The only information about her was that she was an Irish servant who in her teens was violated by the lord of the mansion, and who, out of shame and not being capable of taking care of her baby, had to abandon him. The assiduous search for his mother, first through church archives, then through Internet media enables to locate her, only to be disappointed when he finds out that her mother had given a false name to the hospital. A third theme is Eleanor, his wife from Aberdeen. A genuine and passionate love develops between them after their chance encounter in a museum coffeehouse. But their happiness is tainted by her deteriorating mental state, perhaps a case of bipolarity. Depressions and apathy get hold of her, possibly as a consequence of her difficulties to adapt to the new life, to the new country, England in contrast to Scotland, to the disappointments of not being able to pursue a university degree, despite her definite resolution after high school, due to her absolute rejection of her parents, and at the same time losing all moral support. Her difficult childhood was marked severely by her mother’s lack of compassion and love, and her high dose of heavy handedness. The author has created from common lives of common people, from non-events, an enjoyable novel, though having read it through, it leaves you with an aftertaste of sadness.

194. **John Irving (American) *The World According to Garp***: The novel is packed with weird characters and unusual events that it is really difficult to summarize it. There is death, feminism, friendship, infidelity, loss, marriage, parenthood, rape, sex, brutality, the pain of being a writer. Garp’s mother, Jenny Field, portrays perhaps the awakenings of feminism and woman’s rights in the early seventies. As a teenager, refuses to follow the pattern of life seen fit for young girls of her class, and goes to a medical school, unusual pattern in the forties and fifties, raises his child all by herself, and does not want to do anything with men. She rapes a gunman, a dying sergeant wounded in a combat mission, lies unconscious in a hospital bed, but with a permanent erection, and she later gives birth to Garp. While her son is struggling to be a writer, she jots down her life and creates a novel, outperforming her son. The book becomes a bestseller and catapults her into becoming the standard-bearer of women’s rights. With the resources from the book, and giving her nurse background, she establishes and operates a shelter house she where nurtures and supports women traumatized by violence. Later in her life, she ventures into politics, supported by all feminists and transsexuals, especially from metropolitan areas, but she is at the same time hated and feared by “men”, and in one of the political rallies in the conservative New Hampshire, she is shot down. Garp is closed tutored by his mother, and they live in an all-boys Steering School in New England. Meanwhile Garp develops an interest for writing, sex, and wrestling. After spending one year in Vienna, where he has his first sexual experiences as well as his first attempts to be a writer, he returns home, and marries Helen, the daughter of his wrestling teacher. Garp becomes a devoted parent, dedicating almost all his time nurturing and raising his children at home, while his wife takes a job in the college as a literature teacher. Garp experiences dark moments in life when he learns about the infidelity of his wife with one of her students, the tragic

death of one his sons in a car accident where his other son was severely injured. These harrowing and memorable events are followed by a long period of invalidity. The story has unexpected turns from tragedy to absurdity to ridiculousness. One can feel the obsession of the writer with death, lust, fear of castration, and transsexualism. One interesting aspect of the novel is that there are two novels within the novel itself, each sub-novel possessing its own gripping interest.

195. **Irvin Yalom (American) The Spinoza Problem:** The genius of Yalom has created two tantalizing and intertwined stories that evolve together independently and hurt into each other at a climax point. The stories are, respectively based on historical evidences, albeit three centuries apart, but are also enriched with fiction. The first story is that of Baruh (benedict) Spinoza: he is a member of the Jewish community in Amsterdam, which had to emigrate from Portugal, when religious intolerance of the Portuguese regime forced all Jews to either convert to Christianity or to emigrate. Consequently, the community are tightly bound to each other, strictly regulated and indoctrinated by rabbi. Spinoza has the chance to learn Latin and Greek, to read the classics, to be trained in the art of logic and reasoning. Meanwhile the Jewish community distrusts and disdains any knowledge alien to the rabbinic indoctrination. Spinoza's views and thoughts can be considered as the first seeds of the European enlightenment, preceding those of Hume, Descartes and the like. He understands that all religion, all metaphysical constructs are man-made and then inflicted upon society with the attribution of divine authority. Such views are so alien to the rabbinic thought that he is ordered to recant his sayings and to repent. Eventually, a rabbinic court ostracizes him, with the punishment of "herem", so that no one member of the Jewish community, even his brother and sister, should ever talk or greet him for the rest of his life. He continues a lonely and ascetic life of meditation and writing, while eking out a meager income by polishing lenses. The second story is that of Alfred a member of the German community in Estonia in 1920s. He has an obscure and taciturn character, that cannot make many friends, fails to court the girls, and he feels inept, inadequate in social contacts. He has not received much of a love from his mother and father, who both died when he was an adolescent. The antisemitism is on the rise, especially after the defeat of Germany in WWI and in the consequent social turmoil it becomes a scapegoat feeling. He is reproached by his professors and forced to prepare an essay on the humanistic writings of Spinoza. He becomes obsessed with Spinoza, both because he is attracted by his thoughts and at the same he wanders how an individual from an inferior race could ever have such noble thoughts. After a number of menial jobs and unsuccessful attempts to build a life for himself he starts to work in a local newspaper. He starts writing fiery anti-Semitic articles and attracts the attention of yet the small ultranationalist party. Contacts lead him to Hitler, whom he recognizes as the leader of the national socialist movement, exhorts and supports him unconditionally. Though he rises in the ranks of the Nazi party, he always remains unpopular; he is scorned and disdained as a slimy, incomprehensible figure, not sufficiently intellectual. He maneuvers to have to join a campaign in Holland, and thus has the opportunity to sequester the library of Spinoza, a collection of 200 volumes and an *idée fixe* since his youth. The sections of the novel alternate between Spinoza and Alfred and the inspiring beauty of the ideas and and the lonely sufferings of Spinoza and the uninspiring, ugly, conniving, slimy Nazi character form a very sharp contrast.

196. **Irvin Yalom (American) The Day Nietzsche Wept:** At the end of the 19th century, therapy of psychological disorders was still based on visits to mineral baths, on certain infusions, chemicals like bromide, and at worst confinement under heavy sedatives. The fact that one could get cured simply based on words, on talking was inconceivable. Thus this novel is a description of the birth of psychoanalysis in Vienna. Quite a number of facts and character are true; the rest is filled with the imagination of Yalom. The time is the end of the 19th century, and we are in Vienna, which was a city famous, among other things, for the advanced state of medicine. Dr. Brauer, is a member of the prospering Jewish community and also a very well-known doctor. His academic aspirations have been cut short when prejudices against Jews made it impossible for him to succeed his professor and mentor in his chair. He seems to have a comfortable life due to dowry of his wife, he is a father of five children. He is almost always away from home, a source of complaint of his wife, either practicing medicine in his cabinet, paying home visits to patients, or spending time in the intellectual coffeehouses of Vienna. In the background, there is a secondary figure, that of Freud, who is still very young, but has already got ideas of psychotherapy. In contrast, there is the character of Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche is yet an obscure figure in the world of philosophy. He is an ascetic, difficult, person who suffers from deep depressions, and he is almost misogynic due to the two women in his life who made him very unhappy, that is, his mother and his sister. He suffers incapacitating migraine headaches; he has, in fact, recently resigned from his chair of philosophy at the University of Zürich. His ideas are much ahead of his time, his books are difficult to decipher, his propositions hard to accept for his epoch, so much so that his books sell only a few copies. In fact, Nietzsche has no expectation to be understood by his own generation. He is infatuated, but platonically, with a quite younger Russian girl, Lou Salome. In a complicated threesome friendship of two men and one girl, when Lou decides to get married with the other men, he is crushed psychologically and shows suicidal tendencies. Lou, who loves him as much, tries to help him and requests the intervention of Dr. Brauer, under the condition that she is to remain incognito. Nietzsche, totally adamant to any therapy and hopeless of any doctor's help, is convinced to stay in a private clinic under the pretext of curing his migraines. Dr. Brauer, starts playing the role of a patient himself in order to entice Nietzsche to talk, to let the secrets of his mind free. Nietzsche, being too bright for any such devious way, gradually turns Dr. Brauer into a patient. Dr. Brauer confesses and analyzes the deep reasons of his dissatisfaction with life, his total disenchantment with his family life, the urge to quit everything and become a vagabond in the world, his unending infatuation with one of the former patients etc. They analyze the deep reasons of these erratic behaviors and mostly try to discover their significance. A true psycho-therapeutic process itself unravels as one reads through the novel. It is interesting to find out that, for the accomplished and aging (in his late forties!) Dr. Brauer, passionate love for a young woman, be it his patient or Lou Salome, signifies an ultimate defense against aging, death, passing away from this world and turning into dust. At the end, as Dr. Brauer finds a relief, Nietzsche starts cracking open his steel corset on the way to be cured himself.

197. **Svetlana Alexievitch (Ukrainian), La Guerre N'a Pas un Visage de Femme:** I must have read at least a dozen war, especially WWII novels, but none was as excruciating and revealing as Alexievitch's novel. In fact, this is not a fiction; it is simply, raw, unedited, un-embellished real life stories of women who had participated to the combat. There have been many wars where women took active role in health and communication services, but none were like the case of Soviet women. First, the numbers are not comparable, since the women who took an active role during the fighting was past a million. Second, these women participated to combats at the front, in the anti-aircraft batteries, in the clandestine partisan activities, in the trenches, creeping on the ground with their guns, as sharp shooters etc. Thirdly, almost all of them were voluntary; more than that, they had to force their way into the army and especially toward combat zones by tricks or by pleading. Most of them were in their teens, had never once left their homes, they were their mother's little daughters. But the patriotism instigated in them and the ardor to defend their side by side with men were very forceful. The book consists of interviews of some 500 woman soldiers. It is bizarre that, after the victory on May 9, 1945, nobody had bothered to talk to them, because the victory was naturally assumed to belong to men, Not only their sacrifices were mostly forgotten,, but upon returning they had great difficulty in adapting themselves to the civil life, partly because they were rejected by men as being conceived too masculinized. Worst, they had even a harder time with the women who chose not to fight, which presumed that they had gone to war to sleep with their own men. Some could never marry; many remained crippled, invalid, or psychologically perturbed, and their sole consolation were the medals they exhibited during victory days. When Alexievitch was interviewing the WWII combatants, there were mixed emotions and reactions. Some welcomed the opportunity to talk unendingly, so much they repressed in themselves, so much they wanted the recognition they merited. Some could not talk extensively as emotions surged with all their force and they were choked into tears. Some had such horror stories, had seen so much blood and savagery that they had repressed everything and they didn't want to remember and live again anything. The army did not have any conveniences for the women soldiers, so that they had to fit themselves into men's uniforms and boots. A few episodes will suffice to give an idea: i) Russian tanks were more fragile and would catch fire; during a tank battle, women had to walk behind and among them and their duty was to pull out the tank drivers whenever the tank was hit and was burning; ii) They became nurses after one month's training; so many soldiers were wounded and dying that they could not rest and sleep for days; they had to console soldiers who were surely dying trying to whisper them sweet words and show them love and tenderness in their last hours; iii) When they were in Germany, they were surprised to see the affluence of their houses as compared to the isbas of their homeland, and they could not comprehend all the hatred the Germans showed while they seemed to have everything that they wanted in life; iv) There were moments they doubted whether to help a wounded enemy soldier; but they helped always, out of sense of duty, even though they had witnessed to many horror scenes, such as hundreds of entire villages burnt out, women and children massacred.

198. **Irene Nemirovsky (French) La Suite Française:** There are novels that you must make an effort to penetrate; on the contrary, there are novels that attract you and pull you inside so that you read with passion until the last word. One reads Nemirovsky's novel with passion, unending

interest, so that she makes you live through the spirit and mind of the French people in the aftermath of the incredible defeat of the French army, the surrender of Paris, and the German occupation who divided the France into two parts. It is almost like a documentary, not of the historical events, but of the mindsets of people in the face of great defeat. German army is advancing towards Paris and a frenetic exodus starts as Parisians are scared of a Paris in fires after German bombardments. A great mass of people moves on the roads to south, toward smaller towns where they think they will be safer. Roads are clogged with people walking, with cars honking their way on. People are shocked, demoralized, confused, and disoriented. All the civil behavior, all the Christian indoctrination to help the needy in the face of disaster has disappeared. French troops are dispersed and great numbers have been captured and imprisoned in Germany. Sporadic resistance of armed forces is pathetically ineffective. Nemirovsky depicts vivid images of personalities in the face of chaos and panic. Surprisingly, the class distinction between the aristocratic rich, the bourgeois middle-class, and the working class and peasants persist even in the most difficult moments of death and survival. There are bourgeois families that demand luxury and comfort of the Capital from the few inns and hotels of the small towns en route. There are rich aristocratic families who are already ready to cooperate with the Germans just to save their mansions and privileges. There are farmers and working-class people that are deeply hurt by their country's failure and ardently desire to join some combat only if there could be some organized leadership. There are high-ranking government officials, who first run south to the unoccupied territories, and from there to Spain or Portugal to pass unscathed the war years, with the hope of returning afterwards to their privileged life in Paris. The basest elements of people's character are thus revealed. In the second part of the novel, Nemirovsky describes a small town south of Paris where the German army has established a base. Town people observe admiringly, behind the curtains, the dynamism, the discipline, the equipment and the fresh youth of the German army. The older generation, who has so much sacrificed in the First World War, are filled with bitterness and lament their futile sufferings and martyrdom for the fatherland, only twenty years ago. They eschew any encounter with Germans and appear stone faced to them. For the younger generation it is a different. The children love playing war games, admire the parade of German troops, and willingly accept chocolates from German soldiers. Many young women are flattered by the attention that German officers pay to them, some establish amorous liaisons, and in general the vigorous sense of youth emanating from them compulsively attracts them to the enemy. Portraits of a nation in disarray could not have been better described.

199. **Tonino Benacquista (French), Our Secret Glories (Nos Gloires Secrètes)** : A book of stories. Six stories, in fact, where at first sight the protagonist seems to be a common man in the street, a personality with no remarkable traits. It turns out that behind their normal appearances, each has an unusual story. A misanthropic billionaire, a revengeful poet, an anonymous murderer, a very silent boy, a belligerent perfumer. Each story is written with an elegant style, and each is terminated with a startling finale, an end to the story that the reader would least expect. Nevertheless this book is not on the list of books I would recommend.
200. **Mircea Eliade (Romanian-French) A L'Ombre d'une Fleur de Lys (Romanian-French):** Eliade is a multifaceted intellectual with books on social analysis of religion, on the history of the

evolution of beliefs, and on Yoga as well. This book is a collection of five short stories, each with a strongly incised character, with a tint of supernatural, and with typical Rumanian background. For example, the story where he describes the split moment of his country, which first was quite sympathetic with Germany, and upon the approaching Soviet army, switches allegiance. Or, the story of émigrés in Paris, who have escaped the regime in Rumania, and on chance encounters they reminisce of their high-school professors or their encounters almost half a century ago. The five stories are almost in chronological order, covering a swath of European history from 1900s to 1950.

201. **Mario Rigoni Stern (Italian) *Il Sergente della Neve (The Sargent of the Snow)***: A shocking and realistic autobiographical novel. The style is unpretentious, simple, straightforward; there is no effort for any literary embellishments. It is simple prose, yet it is a very forceful narrative that shrouds you and takes you inside the story. All the stark reality of an insane war, all the invane human suffering emerges through the narrative in the first person. Mussolini had decided to attack Soviet Republic to support the German Armies and to fight the Communism.
202. **H. Murakami (Japanese) *The Underground***: There was a poisonous gas attack in the underground system of Tokyo, perpetrated by the members of a cult. The sarin gas attack affected thousands of people, killed a dozen people, and debilitated several hundreds. More important than the tally of the people who suffered, was the psychological shock on the Japanese society. People were thinking that their country was one of the safest countries in the world, almost immune to terrorism, and definitely much safer as compared to Europe or USA. Murakami interviews the victims of the gas attack as well as a few members of the so-called Aum cult. The author tries to be very delicate in the interviews, and strains to remain objective. The book cuts through the Japanese society and reveals a lot of things about its psyche and attitudes. A number of things have struck me: i) The impassivity of the average commuter: When the sarin gas was leaking, its vapors caused an unpleasant smell and started affecting a lot of people in the immediate vicinity of the packets, who were coughing, sneezing and had difficulty in respiration. Yet many people kept staying put in the trains, and even when there were announcement for a train that it would not go further, some people still waited inside hoping that the train would resume its schedule. ii) Business as usual: People were lying on the sidewalks, some were foaming in their mouth, others appeared dead or were violently shaken. Yet people going to their jobs were not stopping to give a helping hand or even ask for what was happening. They were looking at the scene for a while and then hurrying past the suffering citizens. iii) Tokyo, as would probably be most of the metropolis of the world, was totally unprepared to handle the attack. The ambulances came too late, the hospitals were totally unprepared for the sarin attack, and a lot of people suffered or even died due to this lack of coordination. iv) Although profoundly affected by the gas attack, most of the victims preferred to forget about it and leave it behind themselves. The interviews with the members of the Aum cult were equally surprising. Though they admitted that poisoning innocent people in the subways is not acceptable, they did not feel much guilt about it and still felt attached to the cult despite the condemnation to life imprisonment of their leader. Quite a few of them had a life history filled with social ineptness, being lonely, or unwilling to take part in the strife of a consumer society. In this respect the cult center proved to

be a safe heaven. Some confessed that all their poor health problems were solved after becoming a renunciate and a member of the cult. One can witness this craving for spirituality in every consumer society, cults, no matter irrational they are, find a fertile ground to grow.

203. **Metin Arditi (Turkish-Swiss) Le Turquetto.** A Jewish boy, an orphan in İstanbul in 16th century. The empire is at the peak of its power; however, in the bustling economy of İstanbul the non-Moslems, the Armenians, the Greeks, the Jews etc. are limited to secondary and menial jobs. Turquetto's father, a sick man, like many Jews, is engaged in the trade of slave girls, captured from different parts of the world, to be sold as concubines to the rich begs. Il Turquetto has an unusual talent in drawing and he sketches the likeness of the people in the bazar. He is harshly reproached by the rabbi as violating the sacred law of the Faith. After the death of his father, he finds a way to stealthily embark on Venetian boat. In Venice, he is engaged by an artist as a helping hand, and soon his talent becomes apparent. From the repair brush work he is assigned to, he moves up to bigger responsibilities, and eventually he has his own workshop. In the strongly anti-Semitic environment of Venice, where the Jews are condemned to live in their ghetto, he survives by hiding his identity, feigning to be an Orthodox Greek from İstanbul. His paintings are beloved and increasingly in demand: He depicts Madonnas, Crucifixions, and scenes from Bible to decorate the churches. He is venerated as an artist, on the same scale as Titian. Finally, he is commanded a grand painting: the Last Supper. The painting becomes a shock due to its unusual choice of characters: The Apostles are the illuminati of Venice while Judas is in the likeness of the Turquetto himself. He is suspected and eventually proven to be a Jew; he is prosecuted and condemned to death by burning at stake for having violated the Catholic church. Furthermore, the court decides to collect and burn all of his paintings. All are destroyed, in fact, save one, with his signature T. He escapes, however, miraculously, from death. Il Turquetto returns back to İstanbul, finds his friends of a century ago, almost to close a circle. A nostalgic and fancy story that reveals so much about the life in Istanbul in the 16th century, the artistic life of the merchant republic Venice, the wide-spread anti-Semitic prejudices in the Mediterranean basin, the sort of being a minority, a non-Moslem world in the Moslem world, a non-Christian in the Christian world.

204. **Juan Alfredo Pinto Saavedra (Colombian) Stories of the Lotus.** A collection of very pleasant and witty stories, imbued both with the Latin character on the one side and the mysticism of India and Indochina. The stories have a flavor of fairy tales, and almost always with a witty ending. Often there is a pair of characters or character groups, one from Latin American origin, the counterpart being from the Indian subcontinent. The characters vary from embezzlers to lovers, from dreamer to adventurers, and the two continents merge and melt in them. A commonality between these two cultures is elegant and witty description of the carnal passions, and this theme is often elaborated beautifully. The descriptions of the Indian temples, the lush green of Ceylon or Burma. Juan Alfredo Pinto Saavedra has actually been serving as the Columbian ambassador to India. I have been collecting memoirs of Turkish diplomats in their services abroad. Most of them were either self-defensive or self-laudatory treatises or they were travel stories embedded with some anecdotes. But none were so imaginative, so creative.

205. **Gerald Durrell (British) My Family and Other Animals.** The memoirs of an adolescent that already shows all the promises of a great writer of the 20th century. Gerald Durrell has excelled with his descriptions of people, of the nature and of the character of the Mediterranean countries. His family decides to move from cold and damp climate of UK to the Island of Corfu where they live for a number of years, corresponding to his early teens. Durrell recounts, often in a witty way his family, his mother, the two brothers and his sister, and describes us their vicissitudes in the island, their reactions to interesting but mundane events, their joking comments on the apparently the youngest member of the family, Durrell himself. He describes the local people, the Greek peasants in the villages of Corfu, their unique, sometimes idiosyncratic manners, as well as the stream of guests arriving from home country and British expatriates in the island. The description of, especially, the tutors that were assigned to him makes interesting stories. But he is excelling in the description of his observations of nature, his attention to the minute details from scorpions to tortoises, from bugs in the nymph stage to the sea urchins. It is quite impressive to read through his inexhaustible interest in the little creatures of nature, his diligent observations, his experiments and collections in the style of a natural philosophers, his patience to stalk bugs, spiders, grasshoppers, lacewing flies, moths, geckoes, mantids, magenpies etc. wherever they are, whether in the cracks in the walls, in a cavity in a tree trunk, under the sand or awakening from under the soil in the spring time. The book starts like an account of the flora and fauna of the Corfu Island, but it is completed and enriched with colorful descriptions of his family life and members.

206. **Dina Rubina (Russian-Israeli) Les pommes du jardin de Schlitzbuter.** A very short novel about a disappearing culture, that of Yiddish on one side, and the generation of Soviet writers on the other hand. It is a novel replete with longing for one's roots, nostalgia for a homeland and a style of life, the Jewish community life in Ukrainian villages, which does not exist any more. It is a remembrance of the exodus of Jews from Soviet Union before the Perestroika Era. Many Jews wanted to leave Soviet Union for their new country: Israel; but they had also ambivalent feelings in that they felt an obligation toward their mother country that had raised them. There was also a heavy state propaganda against those who wanted to leave labeling them as traitors. So much so that, even among the Jews there many who criticized departing Jews while proffering allegiance to the motherland. The plot starts in Tashkent where a budding writer wants to send his story about a Jewish character he met in the bazaar to a literary journal in Moscow, published in Yiddish language. The author is not Jew nor does he speak Yiddish, and wants the journal editor to translate his story. The protagonist, a young author herself, takes charge of remitting the manuscript to the editor while she travels to Moscow on some errands. She feels awkward, provincial, and even conceals her job, her Jewish background and her knowledge of Yiddish. It turns out that the elderly editor is from the same Ukrainian village as the protagonist. Through a sequence of emotional reminiscences, they discover their common origin and the people that connects them from the village.

207. **Bruce Chatwin (British) *The Songlines***. The book was very promising: It was supposed to be an ode to travel. Actually the book is full of aphorisms and quotations about traveling, such as: My mind stops functioning as soon as my feet stop moving. These make up one third of the book. The rest of the book is the author's personal experience as he travels in the Australian backcountry and narrates his interactions and experiences with the aborigines. His argument is that the aborigines are perennial travelers as they move around the countryside semi-nomadically. Moreover, they have their enchanted paths, the dreampaths, the paths through which their ancestors, their version of Adam and Eve, have originally traveled. They themselves want to follow these singing paths. The aborigines have their secret spots all over the land, a mensa, a rocky hill, an abrupt ridge, and each such landmark has a myth associated with it. They resist and fight to save their pristine land against the encroaching civilization, especially the railways. In the end, I have not learned much about Australian aborigines, nor about traveling and the wonders of wandering. Overall the book was a disappointment.

208. **Svetlana Alexievitch (Belarusian) *La Fin de l'homme rouge ou le temps du désenchantement***. I could never have imagined the totality of human suffering, the amount of misery, of poverty, of injustice that people have gone through in the Soviet Union (1930s through 1990s) and later in Russia (1990-2010). After having read the 650 pages of sorrow, torture and disappointments, I realize that nothing else, no other human experience can resemble the Russian one. Svetlana is basically a journalist, and she simply find the right people to talk their lives out. She records their speech and transcribes them without altering any of its contents. The people she interviews form a kaleidoscope of lives and people; one can almost see the Russia and the Russians in a glass box over a period of at least three generations. The life stories vary immensely. A) Painful memories of Stalinist atrocities persist lively in the memories. People who have been denounced, some even by their parents or children, and had to undergo the Siberian camps. Those were the purges of Stalin who has exterminated millions. One has difficulty to understand the vigor of the of the so-called instruction judges who were the instruments of the state to extort confessions often under torture from people that were denounced; the penalties they distributed were severe and irrational like 10 years in the camp without any right for correspondence for such trivial things as a simple joke about Stalin or a complaint of a consumer dissatisfied with the quality of products in a magazine. The children of the families found guilty for betraying their country and/or the Party were inculcated with the idea that their parents were not worthy of them, and in fact, at an early age they were separated and put in orphanages to create out of them "ideal citizens". The misery of the camps, the hunger, the cold .. are indescribable. B) The Soviet citizens were raised to believe that they were building a big empire and they were accomplishing a mission to bring happiness to mankind. Indeed, several generations were happy to sacrifice their lives for the State, working in the Siberian mines, in the conquest of the great North. They truly believed in the virtues of the Soviet regime. They were happy with the stability and peace that the regime provided for them. This was a whole generation of intellectuals, of professionals, educated people; their houses were filled with books and music disks; they would for hours discuss Pushkin or Gorki, and enjoy reading books. Even during the Afghan war, young people were volunteering to go the war because they truly believed they were going to build socialism and bring happiness in an unhappy land. C) The Perestroika

and the following dramatic change of regime, from Communism toward the most unbridled Capitalism ... A whole generation was truly shocked, disempowered, they felt the carpet was being pulled from under their feet, that all those values for which they sacrificed and dedicated their lives to, had suddenly evaporated. It is interesting to see what a large proportion of people are still longing for the era of Soviet grandeur. They repeat that they miss the Soviet empire, the massive power extending from ocean to ocean, their immense land. They have a very hard time accepting the reduction of URSS to a simple Russia, a nation state only. During this transformation, so many people were reduced to despair, to deep depression, there were so many suicides, people who could not let go the Soviet, who could not accept the new reality. D) People feel rampant nationalism, the almost look for an occasion to go to war and prove their attachment to their land, to pay their duties to the fatherland. Since several generations have been indoctrinated with the imminent danger to the fatherland, with mother Russia surrounded by its enemies, with Russians considered as second class citizens by the West, Russians still perceive the world politics from this perspective, as if at each turn, some injustice was being to them. E) With the lifting of a central authority and the disappearance of a unifying ideal focused on the brotherhood of all men, it is amazing how quickly different sects, different nations grab each other's throats and an internecine war starts. Ossetsians and Georgians, Azerbaijanis and Armenians, who were living together, strolling along the same promenades, celebrating the same national festivities start hunting each other, insult and hating each other to unimaginable degrees. Tadjikis and Uzbeks, who had to come to Moscow to do mean and menial jobs to eke out a living after the collapse of the Soviet regime and with their local economies, are profoundly despised and even hated by Russians. E) It is amazing how quickly the horrors of Stalinism re forgotten, he is pardoned in the Russian hearts, and lauded as the great leader without whom Soviets could have pulled through the WWII. This is especially true with the people who could not adapt to the "horrors" of capitalism, who want to have nothing to do with the free market economy, with the Western consumerism inundating all show windows, though remain unattainable by most. But the majority of people do not want to return to the single party rule, and feel an animosity towards the privileged members of the party, who were the absolute rulers. This is a fascinating book.

209. **John Crow (USA), Stoner:** You believe you are reading an autobiographical novel, but in fact you are reading fiction. So veritable, so true, appear the characters, so familiar looks the story. It is the fiction of an entire lifetime of an English professor at the University of Missouri probably covering from 1920s to 1970s. Son of parents barely eking out a living from farming, the childhood is obscured with the bitter memories of the Great Depression, the hard labor of the farm life, his presence in a solemn and joyless family. After graduation from the high school, at the urge of the local church dignitaries he is sent to the University of Missouri for a degree in agriculture, with the expectation that he will over take over the operations of the family plot from his parents. He is thoroughly impressed by the campus buildings, by the university experience and at one point he becomes infatuated with the English studies. It does not take him long to decide to abandon the agriculture department and switch to the English one. He is introvert, has very few friends, does not talk much, but excels in his studies through assiduous work, which gets him his PhD diploma and the position of an assistant professor. He gets married with

probably the first girl he sets his eyes on, which, given his lack of life experience, turns out to be a bad mistake. First, he has to undergo the bastinado of not being accepted by the in-laws, given his modest origins and the pretentious background of a banker's life. Second, the character of his wife turns out to be the most difficult to live with. She is almost devoid of affection, and does not accept to consummate the marriage, except later for a very brief flurry of sexual interest which ends up with the birth of their daughter. Otherwise, she is not interested in anything else except for putting up a good window against outsiders, of being socially acceptable, and for busying herself around the house to turn it into a temple of orderliness. He finds solace in his academic studies and in the shared moments with his daughter. He is forced to live in his own house in a separate studio, so little he can share with his wife. His wife, with growing animosity toward Stoner, takes away his studio based on some pretext, snatches his daughter away on the pretext of giving her a strict education. Meanwhile he keeps on publishing and carries high-quality research in Medieval English poetry. He is principled, which costs him almost his career. Falling into disagreement with a committee chairman over a PhD qualifying exam of a dishonest student, he is almost ostracized by the faculty and also maximally overloaded with courses so much so that he cannot anymore carry research. He stoically accepts this chastisement; to resolve it he wants to move away to a new job in a new state, but there is no way his wife could allow it; his daughters, to whom he had dedicated so much love and time, is alienated, alcoholic and does not return his father's affection. In short, he is chained down and stripped down by all sides. He survives by finding solace in dedicated teaching and the passionate love he lives with a former student, an English teacher, with the tacit consent of his wife. He experiences further unpleasantness in life as the inimical chairman want to see him away, resigned after a certain age. He discovers one day that he has cancer, in a very advanced stage, which he accepts stoically, alone, unloved, not understood ...

210. **John Cowley (USA), *Body and Soul*.** The author has succeeded in two things: i) To emulate an almost autobiographical novel, though it is pure fiction, ii) To inspire in the reader a more profound understanding of the art of classical music and how a concert pianist evolves. Claude Rawlings has a miserable start in life. During his early childhood, he is condemned to spend all his days locked in a basement flat, where he can only view the legs of people walking on the street. There is no father, no affection from his mother, no interaction with friends, never a chance to go out and visit places. His mother is a taxi driver in Manhattan, always grumpy, self-absorbed, and does not have any time for her home or child. As he grows, he ventures into the streets, working as a shoe shiner, or selling empty bottles, or hunting coins fallen into the rain gutters. One day, he discovers a piano, apparently a night-club piano, in the house, and starts experimenting to play it. The more he experiments, the more he is fascinated by the sounds, keyboard and music. A serendipitous event, one of the many in his life, leads him to get acquainted with a music shop owner: Weisfeld. Actually, a Jew from Warsaw, he was a brilliant musician and composer himself, only to have his family and his career destroyed by the Nazi occupation. Throughout the following quarter century, Weisfeld guides Claude step by step throughout his musical development and the launching of his career, and he does so with utmost dedication and fatherly love. Via the intermediary of his mentor, he is tutored in piano by a host of teachers, increasingly more elite, and each instructor perceives in him the gift of musical

genius. One of his teachers bequeaths him a Bechstein piano, another instructs him in the dexterity and manipulation of the arms and the hands, yet another one, himself a famous concert pianist, shows him the way to become a concert pianist. The epoch is 1940s to 50s, when Europe is destroying herself in war, and many talents, among whom musicians, emigrate to USA. The background is that of New York, especially the well-to-do families, with a heavy backpack of elitism, snobbism, and social class pretensions. Not even his excellence in music can open a hole in their thick carapace and be accepted as one of theirs. However, his musical talent gets him full scholarships first in a prestigious private high-school and latter in college. The book narrates concert by concert his evolution, the pain and the excitement he feels for each concert preparation, describing in rich detail the emphasis given in this or that passage of a concerto of Mozart or a sonata of Beethoven, the interpretation style of Bartok etc. Against the scintillating background of music, classical and jazz, vicissitudes of life come and go: His amorous adventures, marriage with the college friend, refusal of the bride's family to recognize the marriage on account of Claude's low and ambiguous social origins, an unsuccessful attempt to adopt a child, divorce and a debilitating depression. When he emerges from the depression, he is almost like re-born, restarts his musical career, and starts having his first successes in music composition. The story reaches its peak when Claude's first piano concerto is so much appreciated that he is invited to play it with the London Symphony Orchestra: The Weisfeld Concerto.

211. **Ingrid Betancourt (French-Colombia) *Même le Silence a une Fin (Even the Silence Has an End)***. This book contains the memoirs of the Colombian politician, a candidate for presidency, captured and held captive by the insurgent organization called FARC for about 7 years. The book starts with her capture during a presidential campaign and ends with her liberation by the Colombian army. The book is written in exquisite French and is imbued on one side with all the womanly sensitivities and on the other hand with her intellectual and political background. Being the leader of the Green Party, she was advocating dialog to drive the peace process in the Colombian civil war. FARC, on the other hand, was kidnapping army and police officers as well as politicians in order to use them as pawn in their struggle. FARC was indoctrinated with Stalinist ideology, they were very dogmatic in their approach, and had no difficulty in recruiting volunteers from the poor, uneducated masses of people without much of an economical prospect. Over the years she encounters quite a vast number of guerillas as she is transferred from camp to camp and/or handed over from commander to commander. Life in the camps is primitive and depressing. Primitive because, they have to live in very close quarters, e.g., 2x2 m², usually without any chairs or a table, and frequently they are chained to each other or to some pole; they are constantly under close surveillance from guards, without any privacy. Toilets consist of holes dug into the ground in open air, and washing and cleaning are only permitted under strict cam discipline, usually in some pond, brook or river. Life is depressing because there is absolutely nothing that the prisoners can do to pass their time. They cannot even walk around the camp; they are prevented from talking to any of the guerillas and often even between them, so that they almost vegetate constrained to their huts. Life is also difficult because they are living in the wild, at the border or inside the Amazon forest. In order to escape from the increasing search pressure from the army, the camps are quite frequently displaced, constructed, deconstructed, and for each

such movement the prisoners have to take long marches, through thick forest, swamps and mosquito infested marshes. Life is also deplorable because prisoners cannot see their families for years, and worse, the families are given absolutely no information as to whether they are alive or not. It is always multiply sad when a prisoner learns about the death of a family member, often a parent, and to know that their teenage children are growing without them, that as parents, they are missing the most important years of their children. Worse are the way the guards treat the hostages. Some of the hostility of the guards are instinctive, quite a number of them being too young (in their teens) to be able to differentiate the good from the evil, or to be able to have a measure of conduct. But most of it is indoctrination in the camps as they are instructed to hate the “enemies” of the people, these members of the bourgeoisie. The guerilla people are almost always uneducated, filled with hubris, ready to commit atrocities, behaving very rudely misinterpreted as a demonstration of strength and authority, and very hierarchically organized. It is also sad and surprising to observe the petty fights and jealousies among the hostages themselves, ready to denounce each other on the slightest conflict of interest, and often freudenschade. Against the background of such misery there are however instances of hope, bright spots of beauty, an opening for humane feelings. Sometimes a guerilla girl opens her heart in a friendly way and she discovers a tender soul in the person with a minute ago was shouting rudely orders and waving her the AK-47 rifle. Occasionally hostages build ties of solidarity and mutual assistance. There are descriptions of beautiful dawns in the woods, of torrential rains, of rivers meandering through the canopy of thick forest. And there is always a thin line of hope even under the direst conditions, of longing for beloved family members, of sweet remembrances of the father, the mother, the children ...

Joseph Joffo (French) Un Sac de Billes (A Bag of Marbles). A holocaust story narrated through the memories of an adolescent boy: Despite the grizzly background, the story of persecution and escape during the four years of Nazi occupation in France is narrated not in any depressive and vengeful style, but rather in an adventurous way. As if it were the years when a boy grows from childhood into adolescence, when he starts to discover the world, to understand grown-ups, the taste the surprises of life. He has heard how his grandparents had barely escaped the persecution of the armies of Tsar, when the Russian army was carrying out pogroms in the Balkans. The family had adopted France as their own country, only to meet after one generation period of peace antisemitisms swaying in Europe. The family decides to spread out, to send Joffo and his two year older brother to South, beyond the borders of the Vichy government. The story has snapshots of the sequence of long and uncertain train voyages with frequent identity checks, the effort to hide their identity, the dangerous crossing of the border, hiding in the farms, walking in the twilight periods and trying to be as inconspicuous as possible, living for weeks out of their knapsacks etc. In parallel, there is a certain joie de vivre, of going to movies, eating ice cream and promenading on the quay of the harbor of Marseilles, of seeing new places, towns and cities. Things get worse when Italy switches alliance, and south of France, left to the administration of Italy, is restituted to Germany in 1943. While Germany has started losing on the Eastern fronts, ironically it intensifies its persecution and purge policy of Jews. Gestapo sets the headquarters in Nice and systematically sends the Jews to the concentration camps. Joffo and his brother are arrested and barely escapes concentration camps by fiat, by sheer of luck of a helping doctor, by the Catholic Church that forges false documents and its bishop swearing to the non-Jewishness of the two boys. In the final years of the war, Joffo hides in remote towns in the Alps, actually in

the lion's den, i.e., as a helping hand in a shop whose owners are on the far right, strong anti-Semitic and Pétainists. His cleverness, his easy going and trust inspiring attitude, perhaps also his very tender age all help to sail through the four years of occupation. Reading *Un Sac de Billes* one also witnesses interesting snapshots of those war years in France. For example, while there was considerable Resistance in hiding in the mountains, there were also Pétainist militia siding with German army and trying to hunt the defenders. Similarly, there were unselfish efforts to hide and aid the Jews, there were many people convinced that all weakness and problems of France were originating from Jewish manipulations.

212. Abraham Varghese (British) Cutting for Stone. A fictional novel with the taste and looks of a real-life story. It is a novel that is beautifully written, expressed in a colorful and rich language; it is full of episodes, pleasantly or shockingly surprising. The novel covers three countries over a period of half a century. The center stage is Adis Ababa, Ethiopia, and more specifically a missionary hospital in that city. The story is narrated by Marion, who starts the story well before his own birth, and traces his childhood, adolescence, university years till the end of his internship in New York. There are several interesting themes and topics cleverly used by the author, such as: i) **The Missionary Hospital:** The hospital perched on a hill of Adisababa, despite its limited resources and understaffed personnel functions like a Mecca in the city, especially for the poor masses. Marion and Shiva open their eyes in the hospital, grow through childhood into youth there, and end up both being dedicated doctors. For the good of mankind: The missionary hospital sets the background, but all the characters are working unselfishly for the good of the society. Thus the twins not only become doctors, but good and dedicated doctors that work for charity hospitals or clinics; they also specialize as surgeons in the particular maladies that afflict the peasant population of Ethiopia. The hospital is the stage where a large portion of the episodes take place. ii) **Adis Ababa and Ethiopia:** The social background of the country and of the city take place naturally in the episodes. Often a liking for the city, a love for the country is expressed, and the twins grow with a sense of duty and an urge to do something for their "people". There are many references to the Italian occupation and their architectural heritage. In the background, one senses the authoritarian regime of the Emperor Haile Selassie, the closely watching police state and its informers. A putsch by a rebel faction of the army, led by reform and democracy minded revolutionary officers, is harshly suppressed after much bloodshed. iii) **The twins:** They are inseparable from each other in their early childhood, and they purposefully exploit their look-alikes, i.e., sound alike, dress alike etc. to confound people around them. However, at around their adolescent years they start diverging starkly so much as not to talk to each other, despising and even becoming obnoxious to each other. Their love-and-hate relationship provides much of the texture of the story. Interestingly, this animosity ends in front of a survival situation, when one of the twins donates his kidney to save his brother, only to lose his own life after an infection. iv) **Eritrean Revolt:** Eritrea had become an Italian colony, and after the defeat of Italy in WWII, the United Nations had given Eritrea under the tutelage of Ethiopia. Unfortunately the bossy attitude of Ethiopia had ignited national fervor for independence.

213. Kazuo Ishiguro (British), Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall. The book consists of five stories, each pivoted around some musical fact. Perhaps I was expecting more from a Nobel prize winning author, perhaps in comparison to some other fiction on the theme of music,

the book fell short of my expectations. For example, a comparison could be John Cowley's *Body and Soul* where the author so much delves into the theory, practice and soul of music that music and passion transpire from the pages of the book. One story is focused on a singer whose golden era is fading out and he strives to reinvent himself. But the press coverage and social attention that must go with it necessitates that he leave his wife and be seen in public with a much younger woman. Another story deals with a budding saxophonist, though he does not have the good looks that will make him a star, even with a lower level of talent. His girlfriend leaves him with another man and forces upon him, as a consolation a face lift operation, all financed by her new lover. The saxophonist, during the recovery period following the operation, meets in the luxury hospital hotel a famous actress. They are both wrapped up in bandages, and they cannot imagine how they are going to look like; nevertheless this encounter convinces the artist of the vanity of face operations to satisfy and fit into norms. A third story considers a cellist who is performing in the streets for tourists, probably in Venice. An older American woman, a virtuoso cellist, takes an interest in him and their friendship turns into a daily routine where he performs and she listens and gives feedback to him. Under this tacit understanding between a virtuoso cellist and a junior one, his performance improves steadily, though she says very few things and never once picks up the arch to play. The surprise end of the story is that she did not even know how to play the cello, though since her childhood she always wanted to learn how to play.

214. **Javier Moro, *L'Emperer à Mille Conquêtes (Spanish)*:** Fascinating story of the birth of Brazil as an independent country narrated through the vicissitudes and eyes of its first emperor, Pedro I. The novel is based on research involving archives, correspondences, collected evidences. In the sense, all the persons are real, and only the gaps are filled by the writer, compliant with the known facts. When Napoleon invaded Spain and Portugal invaded, the royal family and a large entourage of nobility, government functionaries and skilled artisans had to emigrate to Brazil to save the dynasty. This sojourn, intended to be brief, actually lasts 13 years and in the long run has a profound effect on Brazil's future. In the painful birth process of Brazil, we can see the clash of ideologies: on the one hand, big plantation owners claim that they can only function with slave labor, hence fight any liberal movement that wants to abolish slavery. The clergy is typically an ultraconservative and typically ignorant mass, usually in favor of the established order. The so-called nobility, of Portuguese origin, are staunch in protecting their privileges. However, the revolutionary ideas from Europe, following the French revolution, the ideals of egalitarianism, of rejecting any domination of the nobility and imposition from clergy, are slowly taking roots. Such aspirations are not only expressed by the intellectuals, mostly recent immigrants from Europe, but will eventually find support from the low masses who live in abject poverty, without any legal citizenship rights. The government at Rio de Janeiro is watching with a nervous eye the separatist movements in the remote provinces and do not want the repetition of the scenario which has resulted in the splitting of the Spanish South America into twenty or more states. The Emperor of Portugal and Brazil, Don Joao is a timid and ineffective politician, though his excessively cautious and indecisive policies help to keep Brazil united. In contrast, his son, Pedro I, is rash, adventurous, risk-loving, pompous, capricious; at the same time, he loves passionately his adopted country and he is committed to take revolutionary steps toward a constitutional monarchy. This, however, proves to be an arduous path, with ups and down. Initially, the clout

and prestige of the emperor and empress help to unify the people around the ideals of a monarch, who is bound by the constitution and checked by the parliament. The process is spoiled partly by the inconsistent and somewhat capricious behavior of the emperor; partly because Brazil is not ready for self-government and the parliament spends its effort and time in nitpicking and useless details such as whether the seat of the emperor, when visiting the parliament, should inches lower or higher than the floor of representatives. Nevertheless, Pedro is capable of maneuvering sufficiently skillfully to extract Brazil from the Portuguese domination, declare its independence, and get it accepted by great powers as a sovereign state. Pedro's political skills are in sharp contrast with his insatiable libido, his lack of scruples in his love adventure with a multitude of women and the children he begets. He marries an Austrian princess, Leopoldina, from the Habsburg family to refurbish his claim as a legitimate monarch. His wife, truly indoctrinated in the Metternich principles, is a woman of utmost integrity, truly faithful and loving to his husband, giving full support to his reforms and policies, and assumes full responsibility as an empress. Their romantic life is soon vitiated by Pedro's mistress, Domitilla. He goes to extremes to honor Domitilla and all his relatives with honorary titles, and with lucrative government jobs and terrains. His womanizing attitude causes Pedro the loss of prestige, of the respect of the people, and eventually the political control. Leopoldina suffers tremendously, feels neglected, disparaged, and dies of her chagrin. Popular unrest and distrust forces him to abdicate in favor of his son, only aged 5 years. Meanwhile his mother, an extremely manipulative woman, is accused of having poisoned her husband and so that her son, actually an illegitimate child, can rule Portugal. Pedro spearheads an insurrection against the illegitimate regime in Portugal, fights valiantly along with his soldiers, and succeeds in dethroning the absolutist regime, and sets Portugal on course of constitutionalism. It is interesting to note that Pedro accomplishes all these feats only between the ages of 18 to 33, when he dies of TB. The novel is like a reading in the history of the early nineteenth century, roughly years 1805-1835, where one witnesses the diplomatic games of the Great Powers, the intricacies, gossips, betrayals, shifting of alliances in the royal courts, the changes in the social values and political structures which swing between absolutism and constitutional regimes.

Yuval Noah Harari (Israel) Homo Sapiens. Harari tries to summarize and interpret the history of human existence, roughly for the last 200,000 years while questioning the factors and the events that led the humans to dominate the world and all the creatures. He points out that the cognitive revolution when human speech developed is as recent as 70,000 years ago, the Agricultural Revolution took place 10,000 years ago while Industrial Revolution dates back to 500 years ago. Finally the information revolution is as recent as 30 years. Some of his unorthodox interpretations and fresh approaches are as follows: One remarkable thing that has shaped human history has been our ability to create, believe in, and connect with ideas that do not physically exist. These can have tremendous power and can shape history. The examples range from religion to the concept of God, from political ideologies such as communism or capitalism, to money, to nation states. These shared "myths" have enabled humans to take over the globe, to build huge sized societies beyond the barebones necessity of clans up to size 150 necessary for survival, and have enabled them to overcome the forces of natural selection. He traces human evolution from the era of hunter-gatherer, when humans had a much healthier and varied diet, had to move around continuously for food and resources, and had a healthier life. It is disputable whether the invention of agriculture was a boon or bane. In a quest for guaranteed food, animals have paid a terrible price for the rise of sapiens. From hunter-gatherer days to the factory farms of

today they have suffered. He's right. Incidentally our family has a farm background and I eat no chicken, turkey, pork, or beef. Ever been in a confinement barn?

215. **Margaret Mazzetti (Italian)**

216. **Eric Weiner (USA): The Geography of Genius.** The book explores the conditions for artistic and technical creativity. The author tries to discover the roots of creativity and commonality of factors by investigating the history of certain cities where indeed there were periods of brilliant cultural flourishing. He analyzes Athens in the 5th century BC, Hangzhou between 10-13 centuries, Florence in the 15th century, Edinburgh, Vienna and Calcutta in the 19th century, and finally Silicon Valley in the 21st century. One common factor in geniuses, as individual or a city, is identified as a misfortune, a loss, a shocking event early in life. This can be early death of a parent, ostracism from a community, being different and alienated by the majority. In the case of Athens, it was an unwalled city, open to the exchange of ideas and goods, open to strangers. **Athens** also tolerated eccentrics, mifits, or people that wete way ahead of their time. There was strong community spirit; Athenians were proud of their city. The climate also helped, but in general there were opportunities for free flowing of ideas such as in symposia where friends would bring their own wine to drink and to discuss. There was aesthetics in every aspect of life, from coins to temples, to vases. Greek was a rich language so that it could shape the thought; words could have deep meanings and reflect fine differences in meaning. **Hangzhou** had a brilliant period of enlightenment (969-1276) during the reigns of “emperor poets”. There was a very demanding exam system, an indication of merit-based system. China had experienced severance from its past with Taoism and Confucianism. There was a deep, abiding sense of wonder, of awe for knowing that you do not know, as in Athens. And the emperors actively encouraged and enjoyed cultural activities. This brilliant period ended with Moghul invasions and political blunders. If one questions why a cultural renaissance does not occur today, one can think of such impediments as attachment to traditional values, a family culture where children are discouraged by contradicting their parents, a wariness for adventure, for trying out new things. . A Chinese proverb says: “The first bird to fly gets shot”. **Florence:** Florence is the epitome of richness, creativity, affordability, and mot of all, enjoyment of beautiful things in life. Florence was lucky in that their leaders, the Medici’s, were enlightened, would protect the artists and the rich had a taste of art. Value was given to art by the city fathers. Florence had developed a vast network of trade relations with business acumen, which also enabled free flowing and exchange of ideas. Interestingly, arts had full support of the Church, which wanted to regain its popularity due to its helplessness after the bubonic plagues, and therefore wanted to show off. **Edinburgh:** The cultural renaissance of this city came right in the aftermath of its occupation by the British army and abolishment of its parliament. Scots on the one side had a dark, self-abasing character, but at the same time they carried a stubborn optimism, a boldness of spirit and a belief that their creations will find an appreciative audience, if not now, in the future. They enjoyed fighting with argumentation and discussion; they also socialized in the clubs. **Vienna:** This city shone twice in history, once during the 1st generation of Viennese classics, e.g., Beethoven, and second at the turn of the 20th century, e.g., Freud etc. Vienna provided cortical arousal to its intellectuals in its coffee houses, in its concert halls. The city was imbued with fervent desire to discuss, it provided an ecosystem to its artists and intellectuals through workspaces, channels of communication, a

stimulating and appreciative audience. Breaks in one field (e.g., philosophy) engendered expectation of breaks in many other fields. **Silicon Valley**: This region is characterized by brutal optimism with the motto: “There must be a better way to do it”. At the same time, failure is welcome in that there is no shame in failing in the first attempt once you know that you will be succeeding after many trials and errors. The Valley attracts angel investors, venture capitalists on the one side; on the side, it attracts geniuses, the best of engineers, and of scientists. Ruthless competition and amazing collaboration fueled by inventors and investors creates the silicon Valley atmosphere. It is also the place where the theory of “weakness of strong ties” can be tested. According to this theory, strong ties like those of close friends, buddies, parents, family provide the comfort zone but does not push you ahead. In contrast, weak ties, like new acquaintances, less committal relationships provide challenges, rich interaction of experiences and ideas. Almost everybody is coming to Silicon Valley from outside; in fact 50% of people were born outside USA!

217. **David Deutsch (UK): The Beginning of Infinity.** The book explores the questions scientific exploration, the reach and power of theories and good explanations, the moment of creativity, the “spark instance”, the greatness and reality of abstractions, the jump the universality, what is parochial and what is universal in science, the evolution of culture and that of creativity. One is amazed at the contrast between the enormous reach and power of theories and the precarious, local means with which we obtain them. If humans have knowledge about the unfamiliar reality and about the laws governing the universe, this knowledge comes from good conjectures alternating with criticism, all leading to good theories. Good explanations are explanations that are hard to vary in the sense that changing the details would invalidate the explanation. The reach of an explanation is an intrinsic attribute of it, good explanations are what makes the science advance. Empiricism and experimentation are also paths leading to scientific discovery provided we are aware that all observation is theory-laden. Parochialism in science is mistaking appearances for reality, or local regularities for universal laws. An important issue addressed in the book is the question whether through science human can understand and solve all problems, whether science can advance unlimitedly, and how much knowledge human can create. The author professes the belief that everything that is not forbidden by the laws of nature is achievable given the right knowledge. Furthermore humans have started with the Enlightenment the open-ended process of knowledge creation, and new explanations create new problems to be discovered. There is an interesting claim that there are two mechanisms of knowledge creation: evolution and humans. While human knowledge can be explanatory and can have great reach; in contrast evolutionary adaptations are not explanatory, and do not in general have reaches beyond the conditions in which they evolved. Deutsch warns about the pitfalls of reductionism and holism: reductionism is the misconception that science must always analyze things by reducing them to their components; holism is the misconception that all significant explanations are in terms of wholes. In fact, explanations at all levels of emergence can be fundamental, not necessarily at the lowest or at the highest levels. The chapter on infinity from Cantor’s definition of many infinities to Hilbert’s thought experiment on Infinity Hotel is very readable.

218. **David Benatar (South Africa): Human Predicament.** Explores the so-called life's big questions such as: "Do our lives have any meaning? Is it worth living? Should we be living forever, if possible? Do we have to end our lives willfully?". The author starts on a pessimistic vein, but then rationalizes out a compromise. The premises are that life is bad, so is death so that humans are in an existential vise. Furthermore, cosmically we are meaningless; in other words, universe is coldly indifferent to our hopes, fortunes, misfortunes, feelings, values, concerns etc. People are rightly concerned when aware of the pointlessness and meaninglessness of their existence. Worst still, the earnestness of our pursuits is futile in that we are no better than a hamster on a wheel in recurring mundane activities to keep the whole cycle of life's affair going. In this respect, we have every right to feel pessimistic about our lives. Although there is no purpose for which we were brought into life, this should not prevent us from asking the meaning of our existence. How can we imbue a meaning to our lives? One way is to try to transcend our own limits and to impact the lives of others. This does not mean that our lives will attain any intrinsic value. The realization of the meaninglessness of our lives can affect negatively the quality of our lives. Meaning can be perceived at different levels such as universe, community, humanity, family, self; furthermore one can attain meaning at more than one level. Finally meanings have gradations, i.e., a meaning can be felt in various amounts. Objective versus actual meaning; subjective meaning, perceived, felt meaning. Life can be meaningless even if felt as meaningful, e.g., watching soap operas; conversely, life can be meaningful even though the individual felt it as meaningless, e.g., Kafka burning all his manuscripts in despair. Meaning can be perceived from different perspectives: universe, humanity, nation, community, family, self. One can also have meaning at more than one level, though not in all levels. Meaning can be subjective, felt, perceived and objective, actual meaning. They do not necessarily coincide. Life can be meaningless even though it is felt as meaningful, e.g., watching soap operas; life can be meaningful even though the subject feels meaningless, e.g., Kafka in despair of worthlessness trying to burn all his manuscripts. Thus we have a 2x2 subjective versus objective matrix of meaningfulness and meaninglessness can be attained at the family level when our life serves some useful purpose for them; at the community level by being dedicated teachers, nurses, doctors etc. At a much larger community level, e.g., nation level it is much more difficult; finally at the humanity level only few attain it, like Socrates, Einstein. Nevertheless humans must realize that universe has no plan for them and that they are the result of evolutionary forces, themselves set in motion by random processes. Our earthly life has no significance, no import, no purpose beyond this planet. The fact that we were created to reproduce and to pass on our genetic code is not purposive, but casual. If there are not enough secular consolations, one can try to escape into religion. It is said that we were created to love and admire God. But does God need us? Are we created to serve God's purposes, a supreme beneficent Being? Are we toiling to guarantee an afterlife? All these reasoning is circular. In short theism is existential anesthesia. It is important to note that actual and perceived meanings affect the quality of our lives. One can have great meaning but poor quality; conversely, one can have no meaning but great quality. To clarify this point let's remark that quality of life has many components, the meaning being just one of them among other aspects. Meaning is an existential question. .

219. **Andrei Makine (France): Le Testament Français.** A romantic autobiographical novel based on true remembrances of childhood, on what the autor has heard from his mother and grandmother (originally French). It is a novel where the sharp contrast of Russia, especially small town Siberia and France at the peak of its civilization is a recurring theme. Russia after the revolution, the hunger, the cold, the long marches, the police state versus France with its posh, secure, bourgeoisie life. It is a novel where there is a desire to appertain to both worlds, to the mother Russia and to the dream country France in a continuous alternation of memories, of vicissitudes. On the one side, the grandmother Charlotte remains French deep down in her heart; on the other side, she loves Russia passionately, wonders about Her, tries to penetrate and understand even after fifty years of having lived there. One must understand the novel against the background of the strong French influence in Russia before the October revolution.

220. **Ed Yong (USA): I Contain Multitudes.** A superb book that explicates in “endearing terms” the world of microbes. Instead of writing a resume of the book, I will list the interesting facts: i) Archeons + bacteria = eukaryotes: Archeons were simple unicells with no internal skeleton while bacteria possessed mitochondria, i.e., energy providing source. These two had followed separate evolutionary courses; however, about two billion years ago they were somehow merged to form eukaryotes, which then evolved to become multicellular structures. ii) Zillions of microbes on us and within us: We live in a world of microbes, though microbes should not have negative connotation. In fact, among tens of thousands of their variety, only a hundred are pathogenic while the rest are either innocuous or beneficial depending upon the context. They are everywhere, on our skin, in our nose, but predominantly in our guts by millions. Each individual has a different biogeography of microbes; furthermore, microbes on the skin, in the nose, in the guts etc. differ and they also change in time. For example, gut microbes affect the immune system, the immune system affects the developing brain, hence can affect behavioral symptoms such as depression and autism iii) Microbes and evolution: They are wonders of evolution in that while our cells carry about 25 genes, the microbes possess 500 times more. Furthermore they rapidly evolve, they are very versatile and biochemically bioadaptive. While we were born with a fixed set of genes bacteria can exchange genes DNA flows freely between them so that horizontal gene transfer occurs. For each challenge, do not wait for longitudinal evolution to take place, they simply borrow genes from their peers that have already adapted to this challenge. iv) Steps in the discovery of microbes: The first to look and discover microbes was Leeuwenhook who achieved a resolution of 3 micrometers (x270) . However it took almost 200 years with Pasteur and Koch to realize that these animalcules, i.e., bacteria could cause illness against the common belief that miasma (bad air) was the factor. It was unfortunate that all microbes got labeled as pathogens. It took another century to discover the very many benefits of bacteria and our symbiotic existence with them. That bacteria live in communities and in specific habitats, e.g., teeth or guts. Until mid 20th century textbooks never mentioned the “good microbes”. Metagenomic revolution (1998) enabled every microbial gene to be sequenced whether on soil, teeth or scoop of water. v) Commensalism: The microbes are not necessarily friend or foe. And it all depends on the circumstances as they can play at the same time beneficial roles (prevent pancreas cancer) and noxious roles (cause ulcer). Bacteria colonize microorganisms with such functionalities as growth (in their absence it becomes a weakling), better toxin breaking etc. Without microbes, after some

time all life would cease to exist as growth would slow down and stop, maturity cannot be reached. Furthermore, microbes do a lot of maintenance job, such as storage of fat, replenish linings of guts and skin, replace damaged cells. More importantly, animal's genome does not provide everything for immunity and inputs from microbiome is needed to complete it. Note that the mutualism can break easily: E.g., so long as they are in the mucus, we are protected; however, if they cross the barrier and enter the bloodstream, then sepsis starts. To recap it, symbionts are friend or foe depending upon circumstance and location. How does symbiosis start: They enter by chance, by contact, by a patch of water, by every mouthful of food etc. Do they stay? If purely accidentally and out of selfish reasons, they provide benefits to their hosts, and mutual benefits are established, then hosts make arrangements for a permanent relationship and traits for a partnership evolve. More typically microbes arrive vertically, passing on to their progeny, e.g., via vaginal contact during birth or via egg cells or when young hatchlings eat the bacteria-laden mucus of their mother. They also spread horizontally via social contacts; the more he contacts the bigger the chance of exchanging bacteria. Conversely, microbes have their own preferred partners, and they evolve to fit their partner better, to create their extended phenotype to increase fitness. For example, in a microbe-bug symbiosis, the microbes help the bug to digest indigestible food.

221. **Erlend Loe (Norway): Doppler.** A novel of protest against traditions and values of the consumerist and capitalist society. Doppler has a happy family, father of two children and has a successful professional life. One day he decides to quit it all, leaves his house and settles in a forest. And starts living like hunter gatherer. He is accompanied by Bongo, a kid deer. He even has to resort to barter economy. He feels the peace deep down in his heart as he is liberated from the sterile life of the middle class.
222. **Robert Sapolski (USA): Behave.** A novel of protest against traditions and values of the consumerist and capitalist society. Doppler has a happy family, father of two children and has a successful professional life. One day he decides to quit it all, leaves his house and settles in a forest. And starts living like hunter gatherer. He is accompanied by Bongo, a kid deer. He even has to resort to barter economy. He feels the peace deep down in his heart as he is liberated from the sterile life of the middle class.
223. **Thomas Nagel (USA): What Does It All Mean?** at around age 14 start thinking about whether life has any meaning, whether death is the end, about afterlife, truth, existence etc. A very brief of philosophical questions is as follows: i) The meaning of life: Has God given a meaning and a mission to our lives by creating us? Or, is it the subjective perception of the importance of our work that gives a meaning to life? Or, what else? ii) Death: Is there survival after death? But if there is no aftermath, then what is the meaning of our existence? Why is it that most people find the total annihilation following so intolerable, so terrifying? What should be our attitude to confront death? iii) Justice: The world is full of inequalities. Some of them are deliberately imposed, such as racial discrimination or job discrimination against women. Other inequalities are not deliberately imposed, it is not anybody's fault, like being born in a poor neighborhood or having a physical or mental handicap. Free economic systems are bound to generate inequalities

because people are born with varying levels of talent. How much society should act to alleviate inequalities? What is the measure of sacrifices? Or, is combating inequality counter-productive? Can we accept inequalities as a normal order of society, “just the way things are”? iv) Free will: How much of our decisions are based on true free will, and how much of it is pre-ordained in the sense of us being conditioned, being pre-disposed in our subconscious for a given situation? v) The meaning of words: What is it that a graphical scribble on a surface or a burst of acoustical waves in the air gives us associations with words, and those with objects and concepts? For example, the statement “I wonder if more tobacco was smoked in China as compared to the whole Western hemisphere” is understood almost uniformly by everybody. Notwithstanding the fact that some people may never have seen or tasted tobacco, while some may be chain smokers. In other words, while our personal experience with the objects can differ enormously, when we verbalize, we all mean and understand the same thing. How much of the language is a social construct? vi) The mind body problem: Dualism, that is we consist of a body and a separate mind versus physicalism, which asserts that our mental life consists of physical processes in our brain. vii) How do we know anything? viii) Knowledge of the world beyond our minds. ix) Other minds: How much do we or can we know about what goes on in anyone’s mind? x) Right or wrong. xi) Many many other Notice that philosophy, unless science is not based on experiments and observations; and unlike mathematics philosophy does not have formal methods of proof. It is based on asking questions, arguing, thinking of counter-arguments, trying out ideas.

224.

225.