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HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

100 Notable Books of 2011

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FICTION & POETRY

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R.O. Blechman

THE ANGEL ESMERALDA: Nine Stories. By Don DeLillo. (Scribner, \$24.) DeLillo's first collection of short fiction, compiling stories written between 1979 and 2011, serves as a liberating reminder that terror existed long before there was a war on it.

THE ART OF FIELDING. By Chad Harbach. (Little, Brown, \$25.99.) This allusive, Franzen-like first novel, about a gifted but vulnerable baseball player, proceeds with a handsome stateliness.

THE BARBARIAN NURSERIES. By Héctor Tobar. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$27.) A big, insightful novel about social and ethnic conflict in contemporary Los Angeles.

BIG QUESTIONS. Or, Asomatognosia: Whose Hand Is It Anyway? Written and illustrated by Anders Brekhus Nilsen. (Drawn & Quarterly, cloth, \$69.95; paper, \$44.95.) In this capacious, metaphysically inclined graphic novel, a flock of finches act out Nilsen's unsettling comic vision about the food chain, fate and death.

THE BUDDHA IN THE ATTIC. By Julie Otsuka. (Knopf, \$22.) Through a chorus of narrators, Otsuka unfurls the stories of Japanese women who came to America in the early 1900s to marry men they'd never met.

CANTI. By Giacomo Leopardi. Translated by Jonathan

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5. When Injuries to the Brain Tear at Hearts

6. OP-ED COLUMNIST



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Galassi. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$35.) With this English translation, Leopardi may at last become as important to American literature as Rilke or Baudelaire.

THE CAT'S TABLE. By Michael Ondaatje. (Knopf, \$26.) Ondaatje grants that this novel, about three daring Ceylonese schoolboys on a sea journey to England, sometimes uses the "coloring and locations of memoir."

CHANGÓ'S BEADS AND TWO-TONE SHOES. By William Kennedy. (Viking, \$26.95.) In Kennedy's most musical work of fiction, a newspaperman attains a cynical old-pro objectivity as Albany's political machine pulls out the stops to head off a race riot in 1968.

COME ON ALL YOU GHOSTS. By Matthew Zapruder. (Copper Canyon, paper, \$16.) Much of the poetry here, displaying a consistent stillness and confidence, is the strongest of Zapruder's career.

11/22/63. By Stephen King. (Scribner, \$35.) A meditation on memory, loss, free will and necessity, King's novel sends a teacher back to 1958 by way of a time portal in a Maine diner. His assignment is to stop Lee Harvey Oswald — but first he must make sure of Oswald's guilt.

THE FREE WORLD. By David Bezmozgis. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$26.) Bezmozgis overturns clichéd expectations of immigrant idealism in his first novel, which follows a Soviet Jewish family awaiting visas in Rome in 1978.

GHOST LIGHTS. By Lydia Millet. (Norton, \$24.95.) Millet sends an I.R.S. agent on a mission to a Central American jungle, providing a fascinating glimpse of what can happen when the self's rhythms and certainties are shaken.

THE GRIEF OF OTHERS. By Leah Hager Cohen. (Riverhead, \$26.95.) Complex but fundamentally decent characters hurt one another and are hurt by forces greater than themselves, as a family sinks beneath the weight of a terrible secret.

GRYPHON: New and Selected Stories. By Charles Baxter. (Pantheon, \$27.95.) Beneath the shadowless Norman Rockwell contours of Baxter's Midwest lurks a chilling starkness and sense of isolation reminiscent of the bleakly beautiful work of Edward Hopper.

HOUSE OF HOLES: A Book of Raunch. By Nicholson Baker. (Simon & Schuster, \$25.) Hilarious and extremely dirty, this episodic assortment of fantasies — part Plato's Retreat, part Fantasy Island — celebrates desire, frailty and the comedy of life.

THE LAST WEREWOLF. By Glen Duncan. (Knopf, \$25.95.) A wry, world-weary and hyper-articulate werewolf, morally as well as physically ambiguous, is tortured by the spirits of his victims and ready to surrender to his pursuers.

THE LEFTOVERS. By Tom Perrotta. (St. Martin's, \$25.99.) In this novelistic version of the biblical prophecy known as the Rapture, Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims as well as Christians mysteriously disappear.

LIFE ON MARS. By Tracy K. Smith. (Graywolf, paper, \$15.) Smith's impressive range is on full display in her third poetry collection, in which she mourns her father, who worked on the Hubble Telescope.



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This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: November 22, 2011

An earlier version of this article misstated the date of the death of the author Barry Hannah. He died in March 2010, not 2011.

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