

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Magill's Literary Annual, 2024 follows a long tradition, beginning in 1954, of offering readers incisive reviews of the major literature published during the previous calendar year. The *Magill's Literary Annual* series seeks to critically evaluate 150 major examples of serious literature, both fiction and nonfiction, published in English, from writers in the United States and around the world. The philosophy behind our selection process is to cover works that are likely to be of interest to general readers that reflect publishing trends, that add to the careers of authors being taught and researched in literature programs, and that will stand the test of time. By filtering the thousands of books published every year down to notable titles, the editors have provided librarians with an excellent reader's advisory tool and patrons with fodder for book discussion groups and a guide for choosing worthwhile reading material. The essay-reviews in the Annual provide a more academic "reference" review of a work than is typically found in newspapers and other periodical sources.

The reviews in the two-volume *Magill's Literary Annual, 2024* are arranged alphabetically by title. At the beginning of each volume is a complete alphabetical list of all covered books that provides readers with the title and author. In addition, readers will benefit from a brief description of each work in the volume. Every essay is approximately four pages in length. Each one begins with a block of reference information in a standard order:

- *Full Book Title*, including any subtitle
- *Author*: Name, with birth year, and death year when applicable
- *First published*: Original foreign-language title, with year and country, when pertinent
- *Original language and translator name*, when pertinent
- *Introduction, Foreword, etc.*, with writer's name, when pertinent
- *Publisher*: Company name and city, and the number of pages
- *Type of work* (chosen from standard categories):

Anthropology	Film
Archaeology	Fine arts
Autobiography	History
Biography	History of science
Current affairs	Language
Diary	Law
Drama	Letters
Economics	Literary biography
Education	Literary criticism
Environment	Literary history
Essays	Literary theory
Ethics	Media

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Medicine	Poetry
Memoir	Psychology
Miscellaneous	Religion
Music	Science
Natural history	Short fiction
Nature	Sociology
Novel	Technology
Novella	Travel
Philosophy	Women's issues

- *Time*: Period represented, when pertinent
- *Locale*: Location represented, when pertinent
- Capsule description of the work
- *Principal characters* (for novels, short fiction) or *Principal personages* (for bibliographies, history): List of people, with brief descriptions, when pertinent

The text of each essay-review analyzes and presents the focus, intent, and relative success of the author, as well as the makeup and point of view of the work under discussion. To assist readers further, essays are supplemented by a list of additional “Review Sources” for further study in a bibliographic format. Every essay includes a sidebar offering a brief biography of the author or authors. Thumbnail photographs of book covers and authors are included as available.

Two indexes can be found at the end of Volume II:

- **Category Index**: Groups all titles into subject areas such as current affairs and social issues, ethics and law, history, literary biography, philosophy and religion, psychology, and women's issues.
- **Title Index**: Lists all works reviewed in alphabetical order, with any relevant cross references.

A searchable cumulative index, listing all books reviewed in *Magill's Literary Annual* between 1977 and 2024, as well as in *Magill's History Annual* (1983) and *Magill's Literary Annual, History and Biography* (1984 and 1985), can be found at online.salempress.com.

Our special thanks go to the outstanding writers who lend their time and knowledge to this project every year. The names of all contributing reviewers are listed in the beginning of Volume I, as well as at the end of their individual reviews.

The Adventures of Amina al-Sirafi

Author: Shannon Chakraborty (b. 1985)

Publisher: Harper Voyager (New York).
496 pp.

Type of work: Novel

Time: Twelfth century CE

Locale: Indian Ocean and surrounding region, including cities of Socotra, Aden, and Mogadishu

The Adventures of Amina al-Sirafi is a thrilling tale of a legendary pirate wrenched from retirement to complete a challenging quest. While encountering mystical places and creatures, she seeks redemption and confronts the ambitions she buried for her family.

Principal characters

AMINA AL-SIRAFI, the protagonist, a fearsome former pirate

MARJANA AL-SIRAFI, her daughter

SAYYIDA SALIMA, a wealthy woman who hires Amina to find her granddaughter

DUNYA, Salima's missing granddaughter

FALCO PALAMENESTRA, Amina's adversary, a violent zealot with a thirst for power

RAKSH, Amina's husband

DALILA, a member of Amina's crew, a cunning chemist

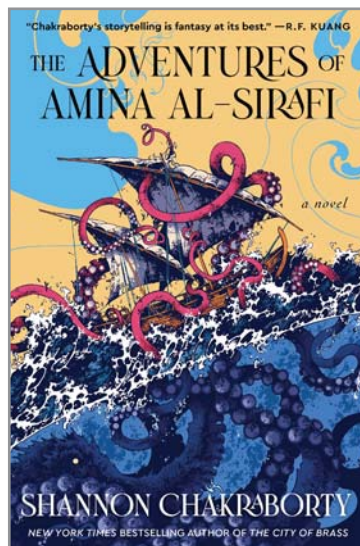
TINBU, a member of Amina's crew, caretaker of the ship Marawati

MAJED, a member of Amina's crew, a proficient navigator

JAMAL AL-HILLI, the novel's scribe

Author Shannon Chakraborty is known for blending historical fiction and fantasy, with special attention to Islamic culture. The writer's celebrated first series, *The Daevabad Trilogy*, set in a fictionalized version of the eighteenth-century Islamic world, showcased her aptitude for both deeply researched historical accuracy and creative magical elements inspired by real-life folklore and religious tradition. She continues this signature style in *The Adventures of Amina al-Sirafi* (2023), the initial installment in a second planned series. In fact, Chakraborty subtly indicates that *The Adventures of Amina al-Sirafi* is even set in the same universe as her earlier works, though several hundred years earlier. Based on the captivating legends of twelfth-century pirates on the Indian Ocean, it combines swashbuckling adventure with deeper social and moral themes, carving out a unique niche in the crowded field of fantasy fiction.

The novel follows the fictional Amina al-Sirafi, one of the most notorious marauders of her day, as she is coerced out of retirement to take on a dangerous quest. She



Courtesy HarperCollins Publishing, Voyager

Beyond the Door of No Return

Author: David Diop (b. 1966)

First published: *La porte du voyage sans retour*, 2021, in France

Translated from the French by Sam Taylor

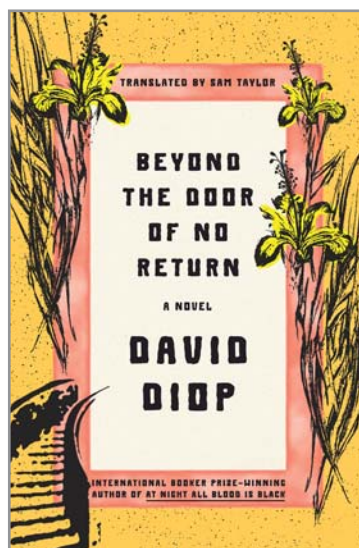
Publisher: Farrar, Straus and Giroux (New York). 256 pp.

Type of work: Novel

Time: 1752–1806

Locale: Present-day Senegal

David Diop's historical novel imagines the secret life of eighteenth century French botanist Michel Adanson in order to shine a light on a dark chapter in Europe's colonial history.



Courtesy Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Principal characters

MICHEL ADANSON, a French botanist

AGLAÉ, his daughter

MARAM SECK, a young woman living in West Africa

BABA SECK, Maram's uncle, a village chief

NDIAK, a fifteen-year-old Senegalese boy, Michel's guide

ESTOUPAN DE LA BRÛE, director of France's Senegal Concession

French novelist David Diop brings a fresh take to historical fiction. A professor of literature at the University of Pau, Diop's academic interests include eighteenth century Africa and, particularly, the ways the continent was represented by European visitors. Diop himself is a product of both continents. He was born in his mother's country of France, but spent most of his childhood in his father's homeland of Senegal. Interested in the historical relations between Europe and Africa, Diop has used his academic research as the basis for historical novels that explore the complex and often bloody history of the interactions between the two continents.

Bringing both an immediacy and a lyricism to his historical fiction, Diop uses the novel form to both call attention to lesser-known moments in history and to bring home to readers the brutality that helped create the modern world. In his first novel, *1889, l'Attraction universelle*, published in France in 2012, Diop uses the story of a Senegalese delegation to an 1889 world's fair in Paris to examine European attitudes towards Africa. In his award-winning 2018 novel, *Frère d'âme*, published in English translation in 2020 as *At Night All Blood Is Black*, Diop further explores French-Senegalese relations against a historical backdrop, focusing on two Senegalese brothers thrown into the madness of World War I as they fight in a French soldier corps.



Courtesy Simon & Schuster, ©Harry Zernike

Kate Zernike

ROBERT “BOB” BIRGENEAU, a physicist and the dean of MIT’s School of Science

CHUCK VEST, a mechanical engineer and the president of MIT

Though Kate Zernike would later become best known for her work as a journalist with the *New York Times*, for which she was part of a team that won a Pulitzer Prize in 2002, in early 1999 she was still employed by the *Boston Globe*, the newspaper for which she had worked for several years. While at the *Globe*, she received a tip about what seemed to be an extremely newsworthy story: a group of women who were tenured professors at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) had collected evidence of systemic gender and sex discrimination at that institution and brought it to the attention of the

school’s leadership, an action that, in turn, prompted MIT president Chuck Vest to acknowledge the discrimination publicly. Zernike soon determined that the story was, in fact, a newsworthy one, and her article on those events was published in the *Boston Globe* in March of that year. While her career would soon take her away from Boston, as the years passed, she remained intrigued by the events that had taken place at MIT and by the central figure in them, researcher and professor Nancy Hopkins. In 2023, more than twenty years after the appearance of her original article in the *Globe*, Zernike returned to that fascinating story with her book *The Exceptions: Nancy Hopkins, MIT, and the Fight for Women in Science*. With this work, Zernike delves further into the fight to expose systemic discrimination and affect institutional change at MIT during the 1990s, in addition to shedding light on the decades of social change, scientific research, and mistreatment that preceded it.

As its subtitle indicates, *The Exceptions* focuses primarily on Nancy Hopkins, born Nancy Doe, a molecular biologist who became one of the leading figures in the fight against discrimination at MIT. Zernike chronicles Hopkins’s life from her early years growing up in New York City to her undergraduate years at Radcliffe College, a Massachusetts women’s college that was closely linked to Harvard University—Radcliffe students were permitted to attend Harvard classes—but formally segregated from it. It was while attending Radcliffe that Hopkins developed an interest in molecular biology thanks, in large part, to the influence of Jim Watson, a researcher and Harvard faculty member who, in 1962, had received the Nobel Prize for his research into the structure of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA). Although Watson was a valuable mentor to Hopkins and aided her career in several ways, she would later have to reckon with Watson’s own biases against women, as perhaps most clearly illustrated by his dismissive and sexist depiction of Rosalind Franklin—the scientist responsible for taking the

Parachute Kids

Author: Betty C. Tang

Illustrator: Betty C. Tang

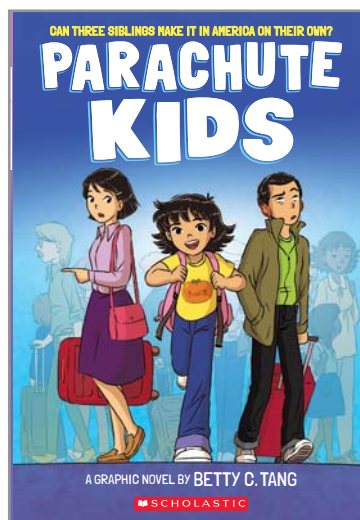
Publisher: Graphix (New York). 288 pp.

Type of work: Graphic novel

Time: 1981

Locale: California

After traveling to the US from Taiwan under the unknowing guise of a family vacation to Disney Land, Feng-Li and her two older siblings are left to take care of themselves in Betty C. Tang's graphic novel Parachute Kids. Filled with poignant moments, Parachute Kids is a story about resilience and bravery in the face of uncertainty.



Courtesy Scholastic

Principal characters

FENG-LI, the protagonist, a fifth grader and the youngest of the Lin siblings

KE-GANG, her older brother, the middle sibling

JIA-XI, her older sister, the eldest sibling

MA, their mother, who has a thirty-day visitor's visa to stay in the US

BA, their father, a pro-bono lawyer in Taiwan

AUNT AND UNCLE TIAN, family friends who help to take care of the Lin siblings after their parents leave

OLIVIA, the Tian's fourteen-year-old daughter, a friend to the Lins with a crush on Ke-Gang

No two immigration stories are alike, but some have similar beginnings. For bestselling author and illustrator Betty C. Tang, her story began in the way so many other children's have; by arriving in the United States under the guardianship of extended family or family friends already settled in the country, without the parents who have sent their children on in the hope of a bright future. Through the years, these children have come to be called "parachute kids," because they are dropped off in their new country by parents who return to their country of origin. Tang's story took her from her home in Taiwan to California, where she continues to live today. Thousands of other kids still arrive in the US in this fashion. Tang's graphic novel, also called *Parachute Kids* (2023), is a book designed to help those children who may be experiencing a confusing time as they adjust to life in the US, but also a story intended to make others aware of what these newly arrived children experience as they navigate life on their own. Though not autobiographical—Tang addresses this in the backmatter of the novel, providing pictures of herself newly arrived on the West Coast at the age of

Symphony of Secrets

Author: Brendan Slocumb

Publisher: Anchor (New York). 448 pp.

Type of work: Novel

Time: 1918–1936; present day

Locales: New York City; Oxford, North Carolina

Interspersed between 1920s and present-day Manhattan, Symphony of Secrets explores the enduring power of music connecting individuals across centuries, and the troubling erasure of diverse voices within the industry.

Principal characters

FREDERIC DELANEY, a famous classical composer from the 1920s

JOSEPHINE REED, a musical savant and close confidant of Delaney

KEVIN “BERN” HENDRICKS, a music professor and Frederic Delaney expert

EBONI WASHINGTON, a friend of Bern and brilliant computer scientist

MALLORY DELANEY ROBERTS, a descendant of Delaney and head of the Delaney Foundation



Courtesy Penguin Random House

For much of history, classical music was dominated by White male composers. Those who did not match that description, such as women and people of color, were excluded from the genre, and their contributions largely expunged from the annals of musical history. This systemic discrimination not only prevented the wider dissemination of these individuals’ creative works but also deprived them of recognition for their talents. As a result, the industry remained perpetually homogeneous. Author Brendan Slocumb, a Black classical musician himself, strives to raise awareness for and nurture the skills of marginalized creatives, particularly those who have faced discrimination because of their race, gender, disability, or socioeconomic status. Released just a year after his debut work, *The Violin Conspiracy* (2022), Slocumb’s *Symphony of Secrets* (2023) continues his dedicated pursuit to cultivate a more inclusive, representative classical genre, particularly by highlighting the contributions of Black musicians.

Symphony of Secrets, while framed as an enthralling mystery, deftly confronts the social inequities of past and present America, addressing prejudice in both classical music and higher education. The novel follows two distinct timelines set nearly one hundred years apart. In the present, the accomplished music professor Bern Hendricks is approached by a philanthropic organization, the Delaney Foundation, with a unique task: to decode and transcribe the long-lost symphony of the famous classical composer

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