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Must Read: Rediscovering American Bestsellers - Sarah ...

What is it about certain books that makes them bestsellers? Why do some of these books remain popular for centuries, and others fade gently into obscurity? And why is it that when scholars do turn their attention to bestsellers, they seem only to be interested in the same handful of blockbusters, wh

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He is also the editor of *Blacklegs*, *Card Sharps* and *Confidence Men: Nineteenth-Century Mississippi River Gambling Stories* (Louisiana State University Press, 2010); with Prof. Sarah Churchwell, *Must Read: Rediscovering American Bestsellers, from Charlotte Temple to The Kite Runner* (Continuum, 2012); and with Ross Hair, *Harry Smith's Anthology of American Folk Music: America Changed Through Music* (Ashgate / Routledge, 2016).

What is it about certain books that makes them bestsellers? Why do some of these books remain popular for centuries, and others fade gently into obscurity? And why is it that when scholars do turn their attention to bestsellers, they seem only to be interested in the same handful of blockbusters, when so many books that were once immensely popular remain under-examined? Addressing those and other equally pressing questions about popular literature, *Must Read* is the first scholarly collection to offer both a survey of the evolution of American bestsellers as well as critical readings of some of the key texts that have shaped the American imagination since the nation's founding. Focusing on a mix of enduring and forgotten bestsellers, the essays in this collection consider 18th and 19th century works, like Charlotte Temple or Ben-Hur, that were once considered epochal but are now virtually ignored; 20th century favorites such as *The Sheik* and *Peyton Place*; and 21st century blockbusters including the novels of Nicholas Sparks, *The Kite Runner*, and *The Da Vinci Code*.

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Inspired by Toni Morrison's call for an interracial approach to American literature, and by recent efforts to globalize American literary studies, *Race, Transnationalism, and Nineteenth-Century American Literary Studies* ranges widely in its case-study approach to canonical and non-canonical authors. Leading critic Robert S. Levine considers Cooper, Hawthorne, Stowe, Melville, and other nineteenth-century American writers alongside less well known African American figures such as Nathaniel Paul and Sutton Griggs. He pays close attention to racial representations and ideology in nineteenth-century American writing, while exploring the inevitable tension between the local and the global in this writing. Levine addresses transatlanticism, the Black Atlantic, citizenship, empire, temperance, climate change, black nationalism, book history, temporality, Kantian transnational aesthetics, and a number of other issues. The book also provides a compelling critical frame for understanding developments in American literary studies over the past twenty-five years.

First published in 1880, *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ* became a best-seller. The popular novel spawned an 1899 stage adaptation, reaching audiences of over 10 million, and two highly successful film adaptations. For over a

century, it has become a ubiquitous pop cultural presence, representing a deeply powerful story and monumental experience for some and a defining work of bad taste and false piety for others. The first and only collection of essays on this pivotal cultural icon, *Bigger Than "Ben-Hur"* addresses Lew Wallace's beloved classic to explore its polarizing effect and to expand the contexts within which it can be studied. In the essays gathered here, scholars approach *Ben-Hur* from multiple directions—religious and secular, literary, theatrical, and cinematic—to understand not just one story in varied formats but also what they term the "Ben-Hur tradition." Drawing from a wide range of disciplines, contributions include the rise of the Protestant novel in the United States; relationships between and among religion, spectacle, and consumerism; the "New Woman" in early Hollywood; and a "wish list" for future adaptations, among others. Together, these essays explore how this remarkably fluid story of faith, love, and revenge has remained relevant to audiences across the globe for over 130 years.

The sensational new novel from Charlotte Roche, author of *Wetlands* In her controversial first novel, *Wetlands*, which *The New York Times* called "a cri de coeur against the oppression of a waxed, shaved, douched and otherwise sanitized women's world," Roche wrote about sex and the female body in an unprecedentedly frank way. Roche's second novel, *Wrecked*, is just as raw and powerful as her debut but is a more mature work that deals with sex, death, fidelity and the question of what is expected from a 21st-century wife and mother. It's easier to give a blow job than to make coffee. That's what Elizabeth Kiehl, mother of seven-year-old Liza, thinks to herself after a particularly lengthy and inventive bout of sex with her husband Georg—recounted in detail over the book's first sixteen pages. Elizabeth makes great efforts to pleasure her husband in the bedroom and is also an extremely thoughtful and caring mother to her daughter. But her perfect mother and wife act hides a painful past and a tragic rift in her psyche. As a result, Elizabeth's relationship with Georg is rather unusual: most husbands and wives wouldn't watch porn together or go off on joint trips to a local brothel for threesomes with prostitutes while their daughter is at school. But is their relationship unhealthy or just a very modern marriage?

An act of courage leads to a small girl's fight to face the future against all odds in this disturbing and moving tale from an award-winning author. When little Humaby escapes from a locked van and runs for help, she saves herself as well as a newly stolen baby girl. But, given into the care of child psychiatrist Dr Stefan Lazarus, the girl, renamed Faith, grows up under the glare of an unwelcome spotlight that drives her to dangerous behavior. Sent to a retreat by Stefan, Faith is drawn to Tally and Hay, and the three immediately develop a unique and powerful bond. Each of them is attempting to come to terms with their troubled pasts. For Faith, this involves one final, shocking act . . .

A man consumed by a meaningless life is going to do something he's never considered doing before. He's going to enjoy the day... For hyper-particular publishing heir Jonathan Grief, the day starts like any other—with a strict morning fitness regimen that'll keep his divorced, easily irritated, cynical, forty-two-year-old self in absolutely flawless physical condition. But all it takes to put a crimp in his routine is one small annoyance. Someone has left a leather-bound day planner with the handwritten title *Your Perfect Year* in his spot on his mountain bike at his fitness course! Determined to discover its owner, Jonathan opens the calendar to find that someone known only as "H." has filled it in with suggestions, tasks, and affirmative actions for each day. The more he devotes himself to locating the elusive H., the deeper Jonathan is drawn into someone else's rich and generous narrative—and into an attitude adjustment he desperately needs. He may have ended up with a perfect year by accident, but it seems fate has set Jonathan on a path toward healing, feeling, and maybe even loving again...if only he can meet the stranger who's changing his life one day at a time.

Even in the decades before Mark Twain enthralled the world with his evocative representations of the Mississippi, the river played an essential role in American culture and consciousness. Throughout the antebellum era, the Mississippi acted as a powerful symbol of America's conception of itself -- and the world's conception of America. As Twain understood, "The Mississippi is well worth reading about." Thomas Ruys Smith's *River of Dreams* is an examination of the Mississippi's role in the antebellum imagination, exploring its cultural position in literature, art, thought, and national life. Presidents, politicians, authors, poets, painters, and international celebrities of every variety experienced the Mississippi in its Golden Age. They left an extraordinary collection of representations of the river in their wake, images that evolved as America itself changed. From Thomas Jefferson's vision for the Mississippi to Andrew Jackson and the rowdy river culture of the early nineteenth century, Smith charts the Mississippi's shifting importance in the making of the nation. He examines the accounts of European travelers, including Frances Trollope, Charles Dickens, and William Makepeace Thackeray, whose views of the river were heavily influenced by the world of the steamboat and plantation slavery. Smith discusses the growing importance of visual representations of the Mississippi as the antebellum period progressed, exploring the ways in which views of the river, particularly giant moving panoramas that toured the world, echoed notions of manifest destiny and the westward movement. He evokes the river in the late antebellum years as a place of crime and mystery, especially in popular writing, and most notably in Herman Melville's *The Confidence-Man*. An epilogue discusses the Mississippi during the Civil War, when possession of the river became vital, symbolically as well as militarily. The epilogue also provides an introduction to Mark Twain, a product of the antebellum river world who was to resurrect its imaginative potential for a post-war nation and produce an iconic Mississippi that still flows through a wide and fertile floodplain in American literature. From empire building in the Louisiana Purchase to the trauma of the Civil War, the Mississippi's dominant symbolic meanings tracked the essential forces operating within the nation. As Smith shows in this groundbreaking work, the story of the imagined Mississippi River is the story of antebellum America itself.

It all started at the wedding... Then there was the boat, the casino, the fishing pier, her husband's couch--while she was on the phone with him--and, just for kicks, the young woman at the lingerie store. Soon Charlotte was addicted. And now, she can't stop. She doesn't want to stop. She's having too much fun. But somewhere deep inside Charlotte, she knows this isn't about fun. Somewhere deep inside Charlotte is a woman Charlotte has never met. A woman wrapped in chains. And Charlotte can't stop until the woman inside her is free. *Inside Charlotte* is the first book in *The Promiscuous Wanderings of Charlotte Somerset*. It is a full length explicitly sexual novel about a hot red head and her many lovers. Intended for mature audiences only. Are you up to it?