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Against Amazon: and Other Essays

Picking up where the widely praised Bookshops: A Reader’s History left off, this new book by journalist, teacher, and bibliophile Carrión explores the increasing pressures of Amazon and other new technologies on bookshops and libraries. Collecting the author’s essays on these vital social, cultural, and intellectual reading spaces as well as his interviews with the writers who love them - including Alberto Manguel, Iain Sinclair, and Han Kang, among others - this book is equal parts a history of books and bookshops, an autobiography of a reader, a travelogue, a love letter, and, most urgently, a manifesto against the corrosive pressures of late capitalism. $16.95, paperback.
This new book is the first-ever history of alphabetization from the Library of Alexandria to Wikipedia. This history was shaped by compelling characters, such as industrious and enthusiastic early adopter Samuel Pepys and dedicated alphabet champion Denis Diderot. Even though George Washington was a proponent, many others stuck to older forms of classification; Yale listed its students by their family’s social status until 1886. And yet, while the order of the alphabet now rules, it has remained curiously invisible. With abundant inquisitiveness and wry humor, historian Judith Flanders traces the triumph of alphabetical order and offers a compendium of Western knowledge from A to Z. $30, hardcover.

Libraries and archives have always been under attack since ancient times, and today the knowledge they safeguard still faces purposeful destruction and willful neglect as libraries are deprived of funding and fight for their very existence. This new history recounts the deliberate destruction of knowledge from ancient Alexandria to contemporary Sarajevo, from smashed Assyrian tablets in Iraq to the destroyed immigration documents of the U.K.’s Windrush generation. The author, the director of the Bodleian Libraries at the University of Oxford, examines both the motivations for these acts and the broader themes that shape this history. He also looks at attempts to prevent and mitigate attacks on knowledge, exploring the efforts of librarians and archivists to preserve information, often risking their own lives in the process. $29.95, hardcover.

Literature is a technology like any other. And the writers we revere—from Homer, Shakespeare, Austen, and others—each made a unique technological breakthrough that can be viewed as both a narrative and neuroscientific advancement. Literature’s great invention was to address problems we could not solve: not how to start a fire or build a boat, but how to live and love; how to maintain courage in the face of death; how to account for the fact that we exist at all. This fascinating book reviews the blueprints for 25 of the most powerful developments in the history of literature. $30, hardcover.

Every book lover’s collection includes a few treasured favorites with frayed edges and covers soft from wear. Richard Baker’s remarkable paintings of vintage paperback books capture these intimate details. He started painting dog-eared copies of vintage paperbacks several years ago and prowled used bookstores in search of appropriately careworn paperbacks to immortalize in his gouache portraits: “No precious first editions, no rare things—just your common companions.” The “book portraits” in this set feature titles by some of the most iconic writers of the modern era, from Emily Dickinson and Mark Twain to George Orwell and Susan Sontag. $16.95, boxed notecards.
What We See When We Read

The history of the book is the history of millions of written, printed, and illustrated texts, their manufacture, distribution, and reception, from clay tablets to scrolls, from inscribed codices to printed books, pamphlets, magazines, newspapers, and digital texts. The larger question is of the effect of textual production, distribution, and reception, of how books themselves made history. In 14 original essays, this beautifully illustrated survey reveals the history of books in all their various forms, from the ancient world to the digital present. Leading international scholars offer an original and richly illustrated narrative that is global in scope. $39.95, hardcover.

Breaking Bread with the Dead: A Reader’s Guide to a More Tranquil Mind

Auden wrote that “art is our chief means of breaking bread with the dead.” As we battle too much information today, with algorithms aimed at shaping our every thought and a tendency to surround ourselves only with what we know, author Alan Jacobs suggests the opposite: to be in conversation with, and challenged by, voices from the past. What can Homer teach us about force? How does Frederick Douglass deal with the massive blind spots of America’s Founding Fathers? How can Ursula K. Le Guin show us truths about Virgil’s female characters that Virgil himself could never have seen? Other touchstones include Ibsen, Rhys, Wharton, Ghosh, Calvino, and many more. $25, hardcover.

The Oxford Illustrated History of the Book

This unique encyclopedia spanning the history of the written word, from 3,000 BC to the modern day, shows the evolution of human knowledge and the changing ways in which books are made. Discover some of the most influential books including the Mahabharata, Shakespeare’s First Folio, Darwin’s groundbreaking On the Origin of Species, The Diary of Anne Frank, and Penguin’s first ever paperbacks. This lavishly illustrated, coffee table-worthy book is wrapped in a textured jacket with gold foil, making it a great gift for those with an interest in literature, art, and design. $30, hardcover.

Remarkable Books: The World’s Most Historic and Significant Works

The collection of fragmented images on a page of a book we are reading—a graceful ear there, a stray curl, a hat positioned just so—and other clues and signifiers helps us to create an image of a character. Actually, our sense that we intimately know a literary character has little to do with our ability to concretely picture them. In this remarkable work of nonfiction, book jacket art designer Peter Mendelsund combines his design skills with his first career, as a classically trained pianist, and his first love, literature, into what is sure to be one of the most provocative and unusual investigations into how we understand the act of reading. $17.95, paperback.
Bestselling author Orlean chronicles the disastrous 1986 LA Public Library fire (over a million books damaged and destroyed) and its aftermath to showcase the larger, crucial role that libraries play in our lives. She delves into the evolution of libraries across the country and around the world, from their humble beginnings as a charitable initiative to their current status as a cornerstone of national identity, and brings each department of the library to vivid life through on-the-ground reporting. She also examines the case of Harry Peak, the blond-haired actor long suspected of setting fire to the LAPL more than thirty years ago. $16.99, paperback.

Photographer Horst A. Friedrichs opens the door to the world of bricks-and-mortar bookstores, showcasing their variety, quirkiness, and vitality, and celebrating the passion and commitment of the owners with interviews and anecdotes. Explore William Stout Books, a specialty store for architecture and art books in San Francisco, and Baldwin’s Book Barn in Pennsylvania, a five-story bookstore housed in a dairy barn open since the mid-1940s, and Livraria Lello, an art deco temple to reading in the middle of Porto, Portugal. Some of the featured bookstores specialize in a certain genre, some are massive with vaulted ceilings, some are tiny and filled to the brim with books, some are in historic buildings that evoke a different time and place, and some are brand new, high-tech, architect-designed spaces. $45, hardcover.

Interior designer Nina Freudenberger, New Yorker writer Sadie Stein, and Architectural Digest photographer Shade Degges give readers a peek at the private libraries and bookshelves of passionate readers all over the world, including Larry McMurtry, Silvia Whitman of Shakespeare and Co., Gay and Nan Talese, and Emma Straub. Throughout, gorgeous photographs of rooms with rare collections, floor-to-ceiling shelves, and stacks upon stacks of books inspire readers to live better with their own collections. A visual delight and an inspiration for every bibliophile with a growing home library, this dream-and-drool design book features some of the most jaw-dropping book collections of homeowners around the world. $35, hardcover.

Imported from England! When Lucy Mangan was little, stories were everything. They opened up different worlds and cast new light on this one. She was whisked away to Narnia, Kirrin Island, and Wonderland. She ventured down rabbit holes and womble burrows into midnight gardens and chocolate factories. In Bookworm, Lucy brings the favorite characters of a British childhood back to life and disinters a few forgotten treasures, poignantly, wittily using them to tell her own story, that of a born and unrepentant bookworm. Orig.$17.95, paperback, sale priced at $6.98.
Ian McEwan once said, “When women stop reading, the novel will be dead.” This book explains why women are the main buyers and readers of fiction today, and how they draw on it to tell the stories of their lives. And female readers, as parents, teachers, and librarians, are the glue for a literate society. This book, written by a scholar of women’s writing, draws on more than 500 interviews with and questionnaires from women readers and writers, describing how, where, and when women read fiction and why stories influence the way female readers understand their own life stories. $18.95, hardcover.

This first-ever history of the legendary bohemian bookstore in Paris, published by the bookshop itself, interweaves essays and poetry from dozens of writers associated with the shop—Allen Ginsberg, Anaïs Nin, Ethan Hawke, Robert Stone and Jeanette Winterson, among others—with hundreds of never-before-seen archival pieces. It includes photographs of James Baldwin, William Burroughs and Langston Hughes; a foreword by British novelist Jeanette Winterson; and an epilogue by Sylvia Whitman, the daughter of the store’s founder, George Whitman. $34.95, hardcover.

Covering fiction, poetry, science and science fiction, memoir, travel writing, biography, children’s books, history, and more, this fun resource ranges across cultures and through time to offer an eclectic collection of works that each deserve to come with the recommendation, “You have to read this.” Rather than your typical list of “great works,” this is a celebration of the mosaic of our literary heritage, and inevitably you will stumble upon a completely unknown author and work and feel the tingle of discovery. Suggestions include the best editions to read, other books by the author, “if you like this, you’ll like that” recommendations, and more. 948 book-filled pages. $35, hardcover.

The so-called “book towns” of the world are dedicated havens of literature and the ultimate dream of book lovers everywhere. Book Towns takes readers on a richly illustrated tour of the 40 semi-officially recognized literary towns around the world, and outlines the history and development of each community, and offers practical travel advice. Many “book towns” have emerged in areas of marked attraction such as Ureña in Spain or Fjaerland in Norway, where bookshops have been set up in buildings, including former ferry waiting rooms and banks. While the UK has the best-known examples at Hay, Wigtown, and Sedbergh, the book has a broad international appeal, featuring locations such as Jimbochu in Japan, College Street in Calcutta, and major unofficial “book cities” such as Buenos Aires. $22.99, hardcover.
In the 1980s, a young adventurer and collector for a government library, Abdel Kader Haidara, journeyed across the Sahara Desert and along the Niger River finding and salvaging tens of thousands of ancient Islamic and secular manuscripts that had fallen into obscurity. Here is the incredible story of how Haidara, a mild-mannered archivist and historian from the legendary city of Timbuktu, later became one of the world’s greatest and most brazen smugglers. In his quest to outwit Al Qaeda and preserve Mali’s—and the world’s—literary patrimony, a victory of art and literature over extremism. $17, paperback.

Bestselling author and famously cranky bookseller Bythell catalogues the customers who roam his shop in Wigtown, Scotland. There’s the Expert (divided into subspecies from the Bore to the Helpful Person), the Young Family (ranging from the Exhausted to the Aspirational), Occultists (from Conspiracy Theorist to Craft Woman). Then there’s the Loiterer (including the Erotica Browser and the Self-Published Author), the Bearded Pensioner (including the Lyrca Clad), and the The Not-So-Silent Traveller (the Whistler, Sniffer, Hummer, among other uncalled-for noises). One of the funniest books about books you’ll ever find, for anyone who loves books and bookshops. $18.95, hardcover.

Just published, the follow-up to the bestselling Diary of a Bookseller and a memoir every bit as warm and welcoming as a visit to your very favorite bookstore. Inside a stone-faced Georgian townhouse on the Wigtown high-road, jammed with more than 100,000 books and one portly shop cat, Shaun Bythell manages the ups and downs of Scotland’s largest used bookshop with a sharp eye and even sharper wit. $25.95, hardcover.

Libraries are much more than mere collections of volumes. The best are magical, fabled places whose fame has become part of the cultural wealth they are designed to preserve. To research this book, Stuart Kells traveled around the world with his young family like modern-day “library tourists.” Kells discovered that stories about libraries are stories about people, containing every possible human drama. The Library is a celebration of books as objects, a celebration of the anthropology and physicality of books and bookish space, and an account of the human side of these hallowed spaces by a leading and passionate bibliophile. $16.95, paperback.
Before Jennifer Egan, Louise Erdrich, Luis Alberto Urrea, and Jonathan Lethem became revered authors, they were readers. In this ebullient book, America’s favorite librarian Nancy Pearl and noted-playwright Jeff Schwager interview a diverse range of America’s most notable and influential writers about the books that shaped them and inspired them to leave their own literary mark. Illustrated with beautiful line drawings, this is a revelatory exploration of the home studies, libraries, and bookstores of today’s favorite authors. It is a love letter to books and a celebration of wordsmiths. $27.99, hardcover.

What is the book in a digital age? Is it a physical object containing pages encased in covers? Is it a portable device that gives us access to entire libraries? The codex, the book as bound paper sheets, emerged around 150 CE. It was preceded by clay tablets and papyrus scrolls. Are those books? In this volume in the MIT Press Essential Knowledge series, Amaranth Borsuk considers the history of the book, the future of the book, and the idea of the book. Tracing the interrelationship of form and content in the book’s development, she bridges book history, book arts, and electronic literature to expand our definition of an object we thought we knew intimately. $15.95, paperback.

Master English teacher Geraldine Woods unpacks powerful examples of what she defines as “the smallest element differentiating one writer’s style from another’s, a literary universe in a grain of sand.” And that universe is very large: the hundreds of memorable sentences gathered here come from sources as wide-ranging as Edith Wharton and Yogi Berra, Toni Morrison and Yoda, T. S. Eliot, and Groucho Marx. Culled from fiction, nonfiction, drama, poetry, song lyrics, speeches, and even ads, these exemplary sentences are celebrated for the distinctive features that underlie their beauty, resonance, and creativity. With dry humor, Woods shows us the craft that goes into the construction of a memorable sentence. Perfect for word nerds and language enthusiasts! $25.95, hardback.

Anne Fadiman is (by her own admission) the sort of person who learned about sex from her father’s copy of Fanny Hill, whose husband buys her 19 pounds of dusty books for her birthday, and who once found herself poring over her roommate’s 1974 Toyota Corolla manual because it was the only written material in the apartment that she had not read at least twice. This witty collection of essays recounts a lifelong love affair with books and language. For Fadiman, as for many passionate readers, the books she loves have become chapters in her own life story. $14, paperback.
Based on his earlier bestseller *Footnotes from the World’s Greatest Bookstores* (also available for purchase for $22.00, hardcover), Bob Eckstein brings his heart-tugging illustrations to a postcard set. Here are 100 postcards that celebrate the pillar of every community—the independent bookstore—with 50 total illustrations to both send and save. $20, boxed set.

This spirited and witty guide to the world of disheveled used bookstores by author (and Atlanta resident) Murray Browne describes his personal obsession with bookstores that has “grown into a real (albeit quirky) passion for thinking about the many ways books affect our lives—how and where we shop for them, the people we know who read them, and the small passages that stick in our heads for years only to reappear at the oddest moments.” His ruminations and explorations offer a lifeline to readers who love to browse, in the eternal quest for the perfect read. $12.95, paperback.