

"God is on our side" message; and the "territorial appeal," meant to convince the public that the country itself is at risk. Unfortunately for non-specialists, Donald doesn't describe the plots of most of the films he covers, and he doesn't devote much time to most individual titles. The resulting book, despite some intriguing ideas, isn't ideal for either scholars or general readers. (Mar.)

March 1917:

On the Brink of War and Revolution Will Englund. Norton, \$26.95 (416p)

ISBN 978-0-393-29208-4

Despite the plethora of books on WWI, Englund, an experienced Moscow-based correspondent for the *Washington Post*, crafts a novel and persuasive point of entry into the topic, focusing on the pivotal month of March 1917—"the most critical month in Washington since the Civil War." He structures his narrative history around two primary developments: the lead-up to U.S. involvement in the war in Europe, amid unceasing German submarine warfare and after raucous domestic debate, and the overthrow of czarist autocracy in Russia. Englund alternates between these two primary narratives and deftly interweaves additional stories and anecdotes to provide social, cultural, and political context for this pivotal time.

These elements largely center on the U.S.: race relations, labor disputes, music, sports, and more. Englund uses light and compelling storytelling to enliven multiple narratives of select individuals, including then-President Woodrow Wilson, former president Theodore Roosevelt, "professional revolutionary" Leon Trotsky, women suffrage activists, an American banker in Russia witnessing its revolution, and a privileged couple in the Ukraine. Despite the lack of any groundbreaking perspectives or material, Englund delivers a satisfying, well written, and well timed work. Illus. (Mar.)

Nabokov's Favorite Word Is Mauve: And Other Experiments in Literature

Ben Blatt. Simon & Schuster, \$25 (288p)
ISBN 978-1-5011-0538-8

In this diverting if lightweight work, statistician Blatt (coauthor of *I Don't Care If We Never Get Back*) applies data analysis techniques to the work of hundreds of authors, from Jane Austen to E.L. James,

to extract insights into literary art and human psychology. Opening with the dramatic story of 1960s researchers who used word frequency techniques to solve the Federalist Papers' authorship, the book never follows up on the promise of comparably exciting or substantial findings. Blatt applies his techniques to look at topics such as adverb usage, the relationship between word choice and gender, and trends in writing complexity. After quick, clear, but cursory descriptions of methods, Blatt details creative visualizations (charts and graphs are included) and findings, but limits the conclusions that can be drawn ("Trying to draw too much meaning out of these findings is a bit like reading tea leaves"). This leaves the reader with the feeling of having witnessed engaging parlor tricks instead of scholarly inquiry. But parlor tricks are fun, and so is this book. Blatt provides amiable and intelligent narration, and literature enthusiasts will enjoy the hypotheses he poses and his imaginative methods. Agent: *Jacqueline Ko, Wylie Agency.* (Mar.)

★ No Friends but the Mountains: Dispatches from the World's Violent Highlands

Judith Matloff. Basic, \$28 (272p) ISBN 978-0-465-09788-3

Determined to discover why violence flourishes in high-altitude areas, war correspondent Matloff (*Fragments of a Forgotten War*) investigates the cultures and ongoing conflicts of mountain ranges around the globe. She travels more than 72,000 miles to compile her survey, braving the mile-high battlefields of the ongoing Colombian civil war and the deadly Indian-Pakistani dispute over Kashmir, witnessing the destitution of the indigenous populations of Nepal and Mexico, and talking her way out of trouble with Russian police in Chechnya. Interviews with American veterans who fought in the high altitudes of Afghanistan's Hindu Kush lead her to visit an Army mountain training center in Vermont's (relatively small) Green Mountains; this excursion results in an even more intense journey to an Arctic NATO base in Norway. To cap off her journey, she focuses on Switzerland, a largely mountainous nation that outgrew its violent history to become a bastion of

democracy and peace. This trip to some very different corners of the globe is recounted in clear, visceral language; vertigo sufferers may not enjoy some of the more harrowing moments, but Matloff's investigation is a worthy read for foreign affairs and anthropology buffs alike, and her conclusion provides insight into current global affairs. 10 maps. Agent: *Joy Harris, Joy Harris Literary.* (Mar.)

★ The Photo Ark: One Man's Quest to Document the World's Animals

Joel Sartore. National Geographic, \$35 (400p)
ISBN 978-1-4262-1777-7

Featuring two-headed turtles, golden langurs glaring into the camera, and eye-catching grasshoppers, this lively collection of color photos of creatures large and small will enthrall even the most casual viewer. Photos of seemingly unrelated species are frequently juxtaposed: pairing the echidna and the platypus, or the Mexican hairy dwarf porcupine and the zebra, creates a striking effect that also shows the connectivity of nature. The portraits are shot with black-and-white backgrounds so that even images of familiar animals demand attention. Included among the gazelles, panthers, and slugs are descriptions and snapshots of the photographing process. The selection is part of a project led by conservationist and *National Geographic* photographer Sartore, who has devoted 25 years to capturing the images of every species held in captivity in order to preserve their images and encourage activism. Sartore more than succeeds in his goal to provide people with an opportunity to become aware of these animals, many endangered, before they disappear. Color photos. (Mar.)

Lifestyle

Food, Maggie Austin Cake: Artistry and Technique

Maggie Austin. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, \$35 (304p) ISBN 978-0-544-76535-1

Looking at the cover of Austin's beautiful cookbook—an ethereal 10-layer cake of "ombré frills" topped with a tower of edible peonies that even a botanist would think were real—one can guess that the