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# PRINTERS ROW PREVIEW

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## The year ahead in books

By Laura Pearson

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Regardless of how many or few activities you've put on the 2014 calendar, consider yourself advertisement booked: The new year brings with it a steady stream of intriguing releases, from inventive debut novels to long-anticipated returns by established talent. There are stories that reveal secrets; stories about breaking away from dire circumstances; narratives about the immigrant experience that draw on personal experience; and nonfiction books on how to navigate the glut of information we're exposed to online.

Whether you want to laugh, learn, escape or be inspired, there's a book for you in our 2014 preview. Resolve to read this year.

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*This piece first ran in Printers Row Journal, delivered to Printers Row members with the Sunday Chicago Tribune and by digital edition via email. [Click here to learn about joining Printers Row.](#)*

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**JAN. 7 "Little Failure" by Gary Shteyngart, Random House, 368 pages, \$27.** When Gary Shteyngart was 5, growing up in Leningrad, his grandmother rewarded him with a slice of cheese for every page he wrote of his novel. The dairy-fueled tome was titled "Lenin and His Magical Goose." Eventually, he became an acclaimed author, but not without a lot of fits and starts and the pressures that accompanied his family's immigration to the United States. (*See review on page 9.*)

**"On Such a Full Sea" by Chang-rae Lee, Riverhead, 368 pages, \$27.95.** Teeming with engrossing detail, the latest novel by the award-winning author of "Native Speaker" and "The Surrendered" imagines a future America in dramatic decline. When 16-year-old Fan, a B-Mor (Baltimore) settler and fish-tank diver, goes out searching for her missing boyfriend, she must steel herself to navigate the lawless open countries. (*See review on page 5.*)

**"The Invention of Wings" by Sue Monk Kidd, Viking, 373 pages, \$27.95.** The newest novel from the author of "The Secret Life of Bees" is inspired by the story of Sarah Grimke, a real-life pioneer in abolition and women's rights. Set in Charleston, S.C., it follows Sarah and Hetty "Handful" Grimke, a slave girl who

becomes a handmaid in the affluent Grimke household. (*See review on page 11.*)

**JAN. 21 "I'll Take You There: Mavis Staples, The Staple Singers, and the March Up Freedom's Highway" by [Greg Kot](#), Scribner, 320 pages, \$26** [Greg Kot](#), Tribune music critic and author of several books including "Wilco: Learning How to Die," opens his biography of Mavis Staples in the back room of Chicago's Hideout. He traces the singer's 60-year career, from the 1950s Southern gospel circuit to a recent revival fueled by her collaboration with Wilco's Jeff Tweedy.

**MARCH 6 "Boy, Snow, Bird," by Helen Oyeyemi, Riverhead, 320 pages, \$27.95.** The story of Snow White has been retold many times over, but Oyeyemi's bold riff on the classic fairy tale situates the story in midcentury Massachusetts and introduces a racial element: Snow Whitman's stepmother reveals her family to be light-skinned African-Americans attempting to pass as white.

**MARCH 18 "The Best of McSweeney's Internet Tendency" edited by Chris Monks and John Warner, McSweeney's, 200 pages, \$20.** Launched in 1998, the website McSweeney's Internet Tendency quickly became a destination for hilarious cultural commentary in the form of lists, open letters, short essays and the like. This best-of collection (co-edited by John Warner, who writes the weekly Biblioracle column in Printers Row Journal) includes such greats as "I Regret to Inform You That My Wedding to Captain von Trapp Has Been Canceled" and "What I Would Be Thinking About If I Were Billy Joel Driving Toward a Holiday Party Where I Knew There was Going to Be a Piano." Prepare to be amused.

**MARCH 25 "Every Day Is for the Thief" by Teju Cole, Random House, 160 pages, \$23.** Thomas Wolfe was right: You can't go home again — especially if home is a faraway city that has undergone extensive change, and you, yourself, have too. Award-winning author Teju Cole ("Open City") tells the story of a young, New York-based Nigerian who returns to Lagos for a visit after a 15-year hiatus, only to feel simultaneously at home and displaced. Originally published in 2007 by a Nigerian press, the newly revised hybrid novella is interspersed with original photos by Cole.

**"Sous Chef: 24 Hours on the Line" by Michael Gibney, Ballantine Books, 240 pages, \$25.** Perhaps the abundance of TV cooking shows is to blame, but in the 21st century, it's easy to romanticize the life of a chef: long conversation about food over food, daring culinary experiments, artistic acts of plating and appearances on "Top Chef." In this no-hold-barred memoir, Michael Gibney shares what it's really like. Recounting 24 hours in the life of a sous chef, the book chews on all the work that goes into this demanding, often unglamorous profession.

**APRIL 3 "Worst. Person. Ever." by Douglas Coupland, Blue Rider Press, 320 pages, \$26.95.** With his trademark humor, quick storytelling and ability to skewer absurd aspects of American pop culture, Canadian author Douglas Coupland tells the story of Raymond Gunt, a B-unit cameraman who has zero redeeming qualities. In the author's words, he is "a living, walking, talking, hot steaming pile of pure id."

**"You Hide That You Hate Me and I Hide That I Know" by Philip Gourevitch, Penguin, \$27.95.** In his groundbreaking 1999 book "We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families," Gourevitch traced the horrifying history of the slaughter in Rwanda, when nearly a million people were murdered over the course of 100 days. Twenty years later, the New Yorker staff writer returns to the country where killers and survivors now live alongside one another.

**APRIL 4 "Outside the Box: Interviews with Contemporary Cartoonists" by Hillary L. Chute, University of Chicago, 272 pages, \$26.** An essential read for fans of graphic narratives, this collection is

packed with insights from modern-day masters of the form. Chute, an assistant professor at the University of Chicago, spent nearly a decade conducting interviews with today's top cartoonists, including Lynda Barry, Alison Bechdel, Charles Burns and Joe Sacco. Featuring full-color illustrations and three never-before-published interviews, it also includes the first public conversation between Art Spiegelman and Chris Ware.

**APRIL 22 "Congratulations, by the way: Some Thoughts on Kindness" by George Saunders, Random House, 64 pages, \$14.** The author of "Tenth of December" and "CivilWarLand in Bad Decline" made a big splash with his 2013 Syracuse University graduation speech on the importance of being kind. After the speech was shared more than a million times online, Random House had the sense to publish it.

**MAY 29 "The Vacationers" by Emma Straub, Riverhead, 304 pages, \$26.95.** In this book about concealment and vulnerability with those we're closest to, Emma Straub's new novel follows a family who travels to Mallorca. Everything goes awry, as new secrets emerge and old wounds are exposed.

**JUNE 3 "Paper Lantern: Love Stories" by Stuart Dybek, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 224 pages, \$24.** This gritty new collection of stories from the acclaimed Midwest-based writer ("The Coast of Chicago") considers love from various angles, with Dybekian lyricism and existential longing.

**"The Book of Unknown Americans" by Cristina Henríquez, Knopf, 304 pages, \$24.95.** In previous books, the Chicago-based author has proven herself to be a sensitive explorer of the immigrant experience in America, thoughtfully navigating themes of identity, community, family and the pursuit of happiness. Her second novel promises to be no exception, orbiting around the romantic relationship between a Panamanian boy and Mexican girl and the myriad obstacles they face after she suffers a near-fatal accident.

**"You Animal Machine (The Golden Greek)" by Eleni Sikelianos, Coffee House Press, 126 pages, \$16.95.** This experimental memoir — part scrapbook, essay and poem — tells the story of Melena, a burlesque dancer and mother whose experiences as an American immigrant woman encompass issues of identity and belonging.

**JUNE 17 "Man on the Run: Paul McCartney in the 1970s" by Tom Doyle, Ballantine Books, 320 pages.** This biography of one-quarter of the Beatles unearths new details of the Paul not all fans remember: the Paul of the '70s, when he lived as a hippie outlaw in a Scottish farmhouse, making out-there music and occasionally getting busted for drugs. The book explores the events and experiences that led to his post-Beatles nervous breakdown, bohemian life with Linda, and ever-evolving music.

**"The Last Magazine" by Michael Hastings, Blue Rider Press, 352 pages, \$26.95.** This posthumous debut novel by journalist Michael Hastings, who died in a car accident in June, draws on the author's experiences as an intern at Newsweek in the mid-2000s and eventually as a war correspondent.

**"Yours for Eternity" by Damien Echols and Lorri Davis, Blue Rider Press, 320 pages, \$27.95.** Damien Echols, author of the searing 2012 memoir "Life After Death," served nearly 18 years on death row after being convicted of murdering three boys in West Memphis, Ark. In 2011, he was freed from prison, largely due to the efforts of Lorri Davis, a New York-based landscape architect with whom he began an intense correspondence, and later married, while incarcerated. They tell their story in this book.

**JUNE 26 "The Conversations" by Cesar Aira, New Directions, 96 pages, \$13.95.** The wildly prolific Argentinian author once again showcases his uncanny imagination in a story ignited by a seemingly small incident — a goatherd on a TV soap opera spotted wearing a Rolex watch — leading to unpredictable plot

twists, including a mutant strain of killer algae that threatens the planet's future. If you're drawn to hall-of-mirrors storytelling, à la Borges and Calvino, then this novella, situating "reality within a fiction with a parallel reality," should appeal.

**"Virtual Unreality: Just Because the Internet Told You, How Do You Know It's True?" by Charles Seife, Viking, 256 pages, \$26.95.** Obvious statement: The Internet offers up a lot of information, not all of which is true. Fortunately, the author of "Proofiness" and "Zero" shares how we can learn to separate fact from fiction online.

**AUG. 19 "The Organized Mind: Thinking Straight in the Age of Information Overload" by Daniel J. Levitin, Dutton, 336 pages, \$27.95.** In the information age, we're constantly exposed to data to the point of distraction, while constantly expected to respond and decide quickly. Turning to the latest discoveries on attention and memory, neuroscientist Daniel Levitin describes how we can learn to effectively ride the waves of information.

*Laura Pearson is a Chicago-based journalist.*

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