

EVENTS

This year’s top books challenge us to confront our world

BY DAVID L. ULIN  
LOS ANGELES TIMES (TNS)

Books are not supposed to be about the news — or so the convention-  
al wisdom goes. They take too long to write; timeli-  
ness is impossible to predict. And yet in 2015 it was news, or fallout from the news, that kept emerging in works as diverse as Ta-Nehisi Coates’ “Between the World and Me,” Maggie Nelson’s “The Argonauts” and Masha Gessen’s “The Brothers: The Road to an American Tragedy.” All of them illuminate the issues, and the struggles, of contemporary culture, whether in terms of race and gender or the complex roots of terror. Big issues, in other words, but tracked, investigated, on high-

ly personal terms. This of course is what writing, what literature, does; it brings us directly into the mind of the observer, collapsing the boundaries that separate us. Coates makes such an intention explicit by framing his book as that most intimate of forms, a letter to his teenage son (a nod of sorts to James Baldwin’s “The Fire Next Time”), which makes reading it feel almost like a transgressive act. The same is true of Nelson, who opens “The Argonauts” with a graphic bit of sexual interplay, or Gessen, whose portrait of the Tsarnaev brothers incites a disquieting, and unexpected, sympathy. Each operates like a gauntlet, challenging us to see beyond our preconceptions, to drop our rhetoric and try to understand.

“I would have you be a con-  
scious citizen of this terrible and beautiful world,” Coates writes to his child, and by extension, he is speaking to every one of us. How can an appeal like that not stir us? Although what stirs me most is its specificity. Coates’ experience is not, cannot, be mine, and yet in reading I begin to see a little bit from his perspective, to recognize the world through his eyes. I am provoked, disturbed — as much by what I have previously taken for granted as by the situations he describes. I am shaken, complic- it, on both an individual and a collective scale. Let’s be honest: We are all of us responsible for the society we have built, for good or ill, from Bernie Sanders to Donald Trump, from the ACLU to the

NRA. As to which side we will turn, which direction we will go, it is also up to us. In that sense, the best books offer a way to read the stakes for what they are, no apologies, no sugarcoating, just one human addressing another, a single conversation at a time. This is how we take each other seriously. That’s true not only of 2015’s nonfiction; I also think of novels such as Kamel Daoud’s “The Meursault Investigation” or Lauren Groff’s “Fates and Furies,” as well as Adam Johnson’s story collection “Fortune Smiles.” Talk about empathy; talk about turning your head around. In the first of these books, an Algerian writer revisits Albert Camus’ “The Stranger,” framing Meursault less as ex- istential hero than perpetra-

tor, and (by extension) victim, of colonialism. In the second, a marriage is described and then dissected, its secrets and evasions, the most shattering of which is that we are all alone together, no matter how close we think we are. As for Johnson, he reveals a full array of contemporary desolation, from a man whose wife is dying to a pedophile struggling against his desires. Perspective again, that odd interplay of observation and ex- perience, by which we are drawn into a life that might be unimaginable otherwise. I don’t want to say we sympa- thize with this character ex- actly, any more than we sym- pathize with Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, but we do understand him for who he is. In the end, it is this under-

standing literature demands, whether we want to accept it or not. It’s a complicated world, and what it requires — imagination, empathy, a willingness to listen, to take in new information — sits at the heart of the finest writing, this year or any year. I don’t read to be reas- sured, but rather to be chal- lenged, to be pulled out of myself. I don’t read to affirm my preconceptions, but rather to be shaken free of them. I don’t read for entertainment, but because nothing else mat- ters as much as the exposure a rigorous piece of writing can provoke. That such provocations oc- curred so regularly this year, and through the intercession of so many voices, remains for me the most compelling news of all.

Things to Do

BANGOR — Sargent Tyler and West donation drive to benefit Manna Minis- tries, 8 a.m.-6 p.m. Mon- day-Wednesday, Jan. 4-6, 60 Summer St., No. 1. Accepting canned and nonperishable food items, furniture, clothing, cars and more.

BANGOR — Master of Native American flute Gareth holiday concert, 7-9 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 29, The Green Gem Holistic Healing Oasis, 900 State St. Features music, hot cider and cookies. \$6 at the door. Portion of proceeds ben- efits St. Jude Children’s Hospital. 615-944-8082 or greengeminme@ gmail.com.

BANGOR — Prints by Maine printmakers, 9 a.m.-7 p.m. daily, through Jan. 31, Boyd Place Gallery, 21 Boyd St. 941-2837.

BANGOR — Penobscot Theatre Company pre- sentation of “A Piece of Her Heart: A Tribute to Janis,” 6 and 9 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 31, Ban- gor Opera House, 131 Main St. 942-3333 or penobscottheatre.org.

BANGOR — “Limited Edi- tion: Maine Printmak- ers,” 9 a.m.-7 p.m. daily, through Jan. 31, Boyd Place Gallery, 21 Boyd St. 941-2820.

BANGOR — Maine Photo Project exhibit, “Lumber- men and Rusticators: Maine’s Nineteenth-cen- tury Transition from Wil- derness to Vacation- land,” through Dec. 30, Bangor Public Library.

BLUE HILL — Brooksville artist Annie Poole art exhibit, “Advent Calen- dars and Winter Works,” through Dec. 31, Blue Hill Public Library. 374- 5515.

BREWER — Jams at the Grange, noon-5 p.m. first and third Sundays, through May, Old Town Riverside Grange, 1266 North Main St. Open to

all levels of players and listeners. Unplugged stringed instruments only. Wheelchair-acces- sible. Food concession. First Sunday is Blue- grass Music Association of Maine Eastern Jam, \$3 association members, \$5 others, Joan Richert, 989-5848. Third Sunday is The Grange Bluegrass Jam, \$3, Sandra Moon, 827-3698.

BREWER — Blue Grass Jam, 6-8 p.m. Tuesdays, Between Friends Art Center-Next Generation Theatre, 39 Center St. Pick or listen. \$3. 989- 7100, nextgentheatread- vertising@gmail.com or nextgenerationtheatre. com.

BREWER — Schedule a Dog Ears appointment to read to Copper or Belle, canine tutors, 3:30-5 p.m. Jan. 6, 13, 20 and 27, Brewer Pub- lic Library, 100 South Main St. To sign up for a 15-minute segment, call the library at 989-7943.

BREWER — Book club discussion on Decem- ber’s book of the month, “The Fault in Our Stars” by John Green, 5:45- 6:45 p.m. Monday, Jan. 4, Brewer Public Library, 100 South Main St. Pick up the January book. For information, call the library at 989-7943.

BRUNSWICK — World music and dance from the Balkans, Israel, Western Europe and around the globe, 6:30 p.m. Friday, Jan. 1, 8, 15, 22 and 29, People Plus, 25 Union St. Many dances taught. No part- ner needed. Admission by \$5 donation. Open to all. 200-7577, brennan. mk@gmail.com or folk- dancebrunswick.com.

BUCKSPORT — “The Good Dinosaur,” 2 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 29; 6 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 30; and 2 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 31, Alamo Theatre. \$5. 469-3382.

CAMDEN — Fourth and final session of Camden Conference New Africa Discussion Series,

7-8:30 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 5, Camden Public Library, 55 Main St. Group will reflect on challenges confronting Sub-Sahara Africa in joining global communi- ty. 236-3440.

CAMDEN — Viewing of “The Chronicles of Nar- nia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe,” 6-8:30 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 29, Camden Public Library, 55 Main St. 236- 3440.

ELLSWORTH — Interna- tional Folk Dancing, 5:30-7:30 p.m. second and fourth Mondays, Moore Community Cen- ter, 125 State St. Begin- ners welcome; no part- ners needed. Dances taught first hour, fol- lowed by requests. \$6. 460-3408 or esher- wood1@roadrunner.com.

ELLSWORTH — Book Dis- cussion Group, 6-7:30 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 7, Riverview Room, Ells- worth Public Library. “All the Light We Cannot See” by Anthony Doerr will be discussed. 667-6363.

ELLSWORTH — Ellsworth Chess Club, 6-7:30 p.m. Thursdays, Ellsworth Public Library. 667-6363.

ELLSWORTH — Tightwad Exchange, noon-1 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 6, Riv- erview Room, Ellsworth Public Library. Bring a lunch. 667-6363.

ELLSWORTH — Tuesday Readers book discus- sion group, will meet 2-4 p.m. Tuesdays, begin- ning Jan. 5, Riverview Room, Ellsworth Public Library. Special viewing of documentary “Pray the Devil Back to Hell.” 667-6363.

ELLSWORTH — Knit, cro- chet or spin, 10 a.m.- noon Saturdays, begin- ning Jan. 2, all year, third floor Knitting Nook, Ells- worth Public Library. 667-6363.

HAMPDEN — December Vacation Art Program by Windover Art Center for ages 6 and up, through Jan. 1, Hampden Con-

gregational Church, 101 Main Road North. 234- 4503 or windoverart@ gmail.com.

MACHIAS — Free family activity, catapults and modular origami with STEM Guides Downeast, noon-1:45 p.m. Thurs- day, Dec. 31, part of Downeast Lobstah Drop, gymnasium, Rose Gaff- ney School, 15 Rose Gaffney Road. Axiom Education and Training Center, 255-4917 or stem@aetc.us.

ORONO — Kathy Lena of Twin Pines Photography sharing her photos of Maine’s wildlife, 1-2 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 6, Orono Public Library, 39 Pine St. 866-5060.

PORTLAND — Choral Art Camerata rings in the New Year with its Epiph- any Celebration, 2:30 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 3, Wil- liston-Immanuel United Church, 156 High St. Features soprano Elisa- beth Marshall and a newly composed piece by Jonathan David, win- ner of The Choral Art Society’s second annual Carol Contest. \$20; \$10 students. choralart.org.

PORTLAND — Disney on Ice presents “Treasure Trove,” 7 p.m. Jan. 6-7; 11 a.m. Jan. 9-10; 3 p.m. Jan. 9-10, Cross Insur- ance Arena, 1 Civic Cen- ter Square. \$15 and up. crossarenaportland.com.

PORTLAND — Ring in 2016 in pajamas and with a giant balloon drop, 10 a.m.-noon Thursday, Dec. 31, Children’s Museum and Theatre of Maine, 142 Free St.

ROCKPORT — Dr. Judy Kahl talking about “Women of the New Afri-

ca,” 6:30-8 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 6, Rockport Opera House Conference Room. cam- denconference.org.

UNITY — Unity Pharmacy and Unity Barn Raisers Walk-In Flu Shot Clinic, 3-6 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 29, Unity Community Center, 32 School St. Mary, 948-9005 or pro- grams@unitybarnraisers. org.

For a complete listing of calendar items or to submit your event, visit www.ban- gordailynews.com.

HAPPY CHINA BUFFET Stillwater Ave. BANGOR 990-6688  
Voted Best Buffet for Miles Around!  
STIR-FRY & SUSHI BAR NOW INCLUDED IN ALL YOU CAN EAT BUFFET!  
Gift Certificates Available!  
SAVE \$2.00 Lunch Buffet for 2 Adults\*  
SAVE \$3.00 Dinner Buffet for 2 Adults\*  
\* Must present coupon. Exp. 12/31/15  
» OPEN SEVEN DAYS A WEEK!  
» ALL YOU CAN EAT!  
» OVER 268 ITEMS DAILY!  
» NIGHTLY SPECIALS ON BUFFET!

\*not to be combined with any other offers

Tuesday prime time

MOVIES

	7 PM	7:30	8 PM	8:30	9 PM	9:30	10 PM	10:30	11 PM
BROADCAST	2 NBC 207 Inside Ed.	Hollywood Game Night	Chicago Med (HD)	Chicago Fire (HD)	News				
	4 CBC Prince Philip: The Plot	Just for Laughs	The National (N)	CBC Coronation	Coronation				
	5 CBS Big Bang	Broke Girl	NCIS (HD)	The 38th Annual Kennedy Center Honors (N)	News				
	52 CW Family Guy	Family Guy	The Flash (HD)	iZombie (HD)	News	Seinfeld	Cougar		
	6 NBC 207 Inside Ed.	Hollywood Game Night	Chicago Med (HD)	Chicago Fire (HD)	News				
	7 ABC Wheel	Jeopardy!	Fresh-Boat	Muppets	Beyond the Tank (HD)	Beyond the Tank (HD)	News		
	WAGAM FOX The Insider	Ent. Tonight	New Girl	The Grinder	News	Big Bang	Big Bang		
	8 ABC Wheel	Jeopardy!	Fresh-Boat	Muppets	Beyond the Tank (HD)	Beyond the Tank (HD)	News		
	MPBN PBS PBS NewsHour (N) (HD)	Prohibition Support for Prohibition diminishes			Frontline (HDTV PA)	C. Rose			
	9 IND Motive	The Flash (HD)	Criminal Minds	News-Lisa	CTV News	Daily Show			
KIDS	13 CBS Ent. Tonight	The Insider	NCIS (HD)	The 38th Annual Kennedy Center Honors (N)	News				
	22 FOX Mod Fam	Mod Fam	New Girl	The Grinder	FOX 22 News at 10 (N)	Walk:Dead			
	33 IND M*A*S*H	M*A*S*H	Andy Griffith	Andy Griffith	Happy Days	Laverne	Hogan Hero	Hogan Hero	C. Burnett
	38 IND Big Bang	Big Bang	The Walking Dead	The Walking Dead	WBZ News (N) (HD)	Seinfeld			
	NICK Alvinnn!!!	SpongeBob	SpongeBob	SpongeBob	Full House	Full House	Full House	Full House	Friends
	DISN K.C. Under.	Bunk'd	Invisible Sister (2015)	Rowan Blanchard	Girl Meets	Best Fr.	Liv-Mad.	Girl Meets	
	FAM (5:00) ** Twilight	(15) *** Pitch Perfect (2012, Musical Comedy)	Anna Kendrick. (P6-13)						
LEARN	HIST The Curse of Oak Island	Digging Deeper	The Curse of Oak Island	Hunting Hitler (N)	Hitler				
	DISC Moonshiners	Moonshiners: Outlaw Cuts	Moonshiners (N)	The Ballad of Jim Tom	Moonshine				
	TLC Kate Plus 8	Jill & Jessa: Recount	Kate Plus 8 (N)	7 Little Johnstons (N)	Jill & Jessa				
	A&E Married at First Sight	Married at First Sight	Married at First Sight	(:01) Born This Way (N)	Born-Way				
	ANPL Mermaids: The Body Found		The Cannibal in the Jungle	Mermaids					
SPORTS	CSNE SportsNet Early	Patriots Quick	Ski Journal	Patriots Sports	SportsNet	Sports			
	ESPN College Football: Russell Athletic Bowl	College Football: AdvoCare V100 Texas Bowl							
	ESPN2 College Basketball Florida State at Florida. (N) (L)	College Basketball Connecticut at Texas. (N) (L)							
	NBCSP NHL Live (N) (L)	NHL Hockey Nashville Predators at St. Louis Blues. (L)	(:45) NHL Overtime (N)						
	NESN NHL Hockey Ottawa Senators at Boston Bruins. (N) (L)	Bruins	Sports	Instigators	Sports				
NEWS	CNBC The Profit	Shark Tank	Shark Tank	Shark Tank	Shark Tank	Shark Tank			
	CNN Erin Burnett OutFront (N)	Anderson Cooper 360	All the Best, All the Worst	CNN Tonight	Cooper 360				
	FNC Greta Van Susteren	The O'Reilly Factor (N)	The Kelly File (N)	Hannity (N)	O'Reilly				
	MSNBC Hardball Chris Matthews	All in With Chris Hayes	Rachel Maddow Show	The Last Word	Clash				
VARIETY	AMC Walk:Dead	The Walking Dead (ESP)	The Walking Dead (ESP)	The Walking Dead (ESP)	The Walking Dead (ESP)				
	BRV Real Housewives/Beverly	Real Housewives/Beverly	Real Housewives/Beverly	Girlfriends' Guide-Divorce	Housewives				
	CMT Last Man	Last Man	Last Man	* Billy Madison (1995, Comedy)	Adam Sandler. (P6-13)				
	COM Tosh.0	Tosh.0	Tosh.0	Tosh.0	Tosh.0	Tosh.0	Tosh.0	Comedy Rst	
	E! News (N)	Kardashian	Kardashian	Christina Milian	E! News				
	FOOD Chopped	Chopped Junior (N)	Chopped	Chopped	Chopped				
	FX (6:00) ** Taken 2	* R.I.P.D. (2013, Action)	Jeff Bridges. (P6-13)	* R.I.P.D. (2013) Jeff Bridges. (P6-13)					
	GAC Log Cabin	Log Cabin	Log Cabin	Log Cabin	Log Cabin	Log Cabin	Log Cabin	Log Cabin	
	HALL (6:00) A Christmas Detour	Crown for Christmas (2015)	Danica McKellar. (NR)	The Middle	The Middle	Christmas			
	HGTV Fixer Upper	Fixer Upper	Fixer Upper	Hunters	Hunters Int'l	Fixer Upper			
PREMIUM	LIFE I Don't Know How	** Ghosts of Girlfriends Past (2009)	(P6-13)	(:02) * The Ugly Truth (2009)	(R)				
	MTV ** Project X (2012, Comedy)	Thomas Mann. (R)	** I Am Number Four (2011, Action)	Alex Pettyfer. (P6-13)					
	OXY Bridget	** A Cinderella Story (2004)	Hilary Duff. (P6)	** A Cinderella Story (2004)	Hilary Duff. (P6)				
	SPIKE (5:30) *** Back to the Future (1985)	*** Back to the Future Part II (1989)	Michael J. Fox. (P6)	Back III					
	SYFY Conjuring	*** The Bourne Ultimatum (2007, Action)	Matt Damon. (P6-13)	The Expanse (N)	Expanse				
	TBN Supernat.	Potters	Holidays	J. Meyer	Church	Praise the Lord			
	TBS Seinfeld	Seinfeld	Big Bang	Big Bang	Big Bang	Big Bang	Conan		
	TCM Jason and the Argonauts	**** Gigi (1958, Musical)	Leslie Caron. (R)	(:15) ** Too Late for Tears (1949)					
	TMC ** Ping Pong Summer (2014)	(NR)	(:35) ** Get Over It (2001)	(P6-13)	(:05) * Vampire Academy (2014)				
	TNT (5:30) Now You See Me	** Olympus Has Fallen (2013)	Gerard Butler. (R)	** Limitless (2011)	Bradley Cooper.				