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BEST OF 2021

# NY TIMES FICTION

## **Bewilderment By Richard Powers**

Powers's ability to translate arcane science into lush storytelling is on ingenious display in his latest novel, about a newly widowed astrobiologist and his troubled 9-year-old son, who embarks on an experimental neurofeedback therapy with profound implications for the human race.

## **Build Your House Around My Body By Violet Kupersmith**

This novel, about a half-Vietnamese American in Vietnam, is preoccupied with the body and its violations — both the sexual trauma experienced by the female characters and the ravages of colonial occupation and war upon the body of Vietnam.

## **Burnt Sugar By Avni Doshi**

This remarkable debut novel, about a young Indian woman saddled with the care of her ailing and abusive mother, inflicts a visceral punch. In spare and exacting prose, Doshi documents the petty cruelties and helpless dependency of a primal relationship in disarray.

## **Chronicles From the Land of the Happiest People on Earth By Wole Soyinka**

The Nobel Prize winner's first novel in 48 years, involving a sinister online business that sells human body parts for private use in rituals and superstitions, is many things at once: a caustic political satire, a murder mystery, a conspiracy story and a deeply felt lament for the spirit of Nigeria.

## **Detransition, Baby By Torrey Peters**

Following three central characters — a trans woman who wants a baby; her ex, a man who's recently detransitioned; and the cisgender woman he's impregnated — this debut novel suggests there are many different ways to be a parent, or a person.

### **Harlem Shuffle By Colson Whitehead**

After winning the Pulitzer Prize for each of his last two novels, Whitehead here delivers a rollicking crime caper set in the Harlem of the 1950s and '60s, when social upheaval was just starting to roil the neighbourhood. The highlight of the novel is a brilliantly executed robbery of the famed Hotel Theresa.

### **Klara and the sun By Kazuo Ishiguro**

Klara, the solar-powered humanoid who narrates the Nobelist Ishiguro's powerful eighth novel, is an "Artificial Friend," purchased as a companion to a sickly teenage girl. Through the robot's eyes, and haunting mechanical voice, we encounter a near future in which technology, ominously, has begun to render humans themselves obsolete.

### **The Magician By Colm Toibin**

In this novel of huge imaginative sympathy, Toibin delves into the rich interiority of the German novelist Thomas Mann. From childhood to early success to exile abroad, we follow Mann through personal challenges and political turmoil as he turns the complexities of life into art.

### **No one is talking about this By Patricia Lockwood**

This singular novel by Lockwood, a lauded memoirist and poet who first gained a following on Twitter, distils the experience of life online while transfiguring it into art. The result is a book that reads like a prose poem, at once sublime, profane, intimate, philosophical, witty and, eventually, deeply moving.

### **One last stop By Casey McQuiston**

Part romance, part fantasy, this gorgeous novel is about meeting someone on your daily commute — a girl, it turns out, who has been riding the train since the 1970s, thanks to a magical timeslip. But it's also about loneliness, and being unmoored from normal time, and missing people you've lost, and dealing with generational trauma and fearing an unknowable future.

### **The Prophets By Robert Jones Jnr**

A lyrical and rebellious love story about two enslaved boys in Mississippi, whose relationship is accepted and even cherished until a Christian evangelist, also enslaved, turns the plantation against them. The novel is about their choice to love in the face of the forces that would crush them, and the repercussions of that love.

### **Something new under the sun By Alexandra Kleeman**

Kleeman's novel is an unlikely amalgam of climate horror story, movie-industry satire and made-for-TV mystery, following a flailing writer who has come to Los Angeles for a film adaptation of his novel starring a tabloid-tragic teen star.

### **Velvet was the night. By Silvia Moreno-Garcia**

Immensely satisfying, refreshingly new and gloriously written, this vibrant noir, set in 1970s Mexico City, traces how a dowdy secretary on the cusp of 30 sparks to life thanks to the disappearance of her beautiful and glamorous neighbour.

### **What strange paradise. By Omar El Akkad**

El Akkad's second novel examines opposing sides of a migrant crisis from the point of view of two children: a boy who washes up on an island after a doomed ship passage, and the girl who takes him in and tries to get him to safety. In a compassionate but nuanced telling, the novel effectively effaces assumptions of superiority and inferiority, good and bad.

