Greetings cherished WFU parents! Below is an annual roundup I’ve done for a dozen-plus years, listing the best books/films (etc.) I read/watched (etc.) this year; rule is they have to have been published/released (etc.) in 2017. If you’re new to this, send me a recommendation of your own (for last year or an ’18 highlight, in months ahead) & you’ll get a List again next year.

List regulars missing a quasi-poetic opening: check out the ‘found poem’ following best songs list; strung together memorable lines from millennial musicians. Portrait of an age? A little worrisome if so.

Enough prelude; let’s get to it....
Books 2017

Fiction

B List/A List [Annual entry: beloved authors whose 2017 ‘B’ grades still outdo all others’ A.]
∙ Nicole Krauss, *Forest Dark*. A far cry from *History of Love*, self-referential to little point.  
∙ Jeffery Eugenides, *Fresh Complaint*. Liked several stories; loved *Virgin Suicides & Middlesex*.  
∙ Donna Leone, *Earthly Remains*. Strange entry in her great Venice corpus: the crime (rich cad’s scandal) soon entirely forgotten, morphing into a tale of enviro-degradation & advancing age.  
∙ Tom Perrotta, *Mrs. Fletcher*. Frayed human connections, less persuasively than *Little Children*.  
∙ Louise Erdrich, *Future Home of the Living God*. Turns her considerable gifts to dystopia.  
∙ Joshua Ferris, *The Dinner Party*. Title story perfectly sends up NYCers now; others lagged.  
∙ Paul Auster, *4 3 2 1*. Love so many of his novels; this one feels worked over thrice too often.
**Non-Fiction**

18. Nancy MacLean, *Democracy in Chains*. Provocative, if ultimately too conspiracy-theoretical for my taste… but much to absorb & ponder. Thanks for flagging, Rev. Queen!


11. Karl Ove Knausgaard, *Autumn*. Extended paean to daughter almost as compelling as his *Struggle*.

10. Laura Walls, *Thoreau: A Life*. Superb reconstruction of far more nuanced life than your long-ago reading of *Walden* allows; thanks Tom/Gail! 2nd-best bio: Ron Chernow’s exhaustive *Grant*.


4. John McPhee, *Draft No. 4*. Assigning this great prose stylist’s how-to in every class I teach.

3. Michael Eric Dyson, *Tears We Cannot Stop*. Knew Dyson’s sterling sociological work; he’s also a Baptist minister, as this searing sermon underlines on every page. Coming to WFU soon!

2. Masha Gessen, *The Future is History.* My WFU class’s fave visitor of 2017 superbly dissects modern Russia. She saves her fillet knife for Putin (spoiler: he’s worse than you thought).


**And other ‘best of’…**

- **Academics Working**: Michael Lewis’s *The Undoing Project* distills behavioral economics.

- **Cookery**: Alison Roman’s *Dining In* (thanks NAK!) already has half the 125 recipes circled as future-tries; Justin Spring, *The Gourmands’ Way*, is an absorbing tale of how Americans got gourmet.

- **Early US history**: Gordon Wood matchless on Jefferson, Adams, then both in *Friends Divided*. John Boles’s Jefferson biography superbly navigates modern fault lines; thanks to Michele’s FYS!

- **Guide to US politics now**: Allen & Parnes’s *Shattered* recounts election (spoiler: not Russians).

- **Ganesh Sitaraman’s Crisis of the Middle-Class Constitution** casts present politics in larger context. David Mayhew reminds us again of the legislature’s vital balancing role in *The Imprint of Congress*.

- **Philosophy**: WFU’s own Christian Miller’s *The Character Gap* is destined to be an ethics classic.

- **Poetry**: Kevin Coval’s *People’s History of Chicago* offers one poem for each of the Second City’s 77 neighborhoods. And loved *Magdalene*, Marie Howe’s contemporary imagining of biblical Mary.

- **Sporting Life**: Kareem Abdul-Jabbar’s *Coach Wooden & Me* is that rare gem: honest sports bio.

- **World History**: Andrea Pitzer’s *One Long Night* exhumes concentration camps, from Cuba to South Africa to North Korea to Nazi Germany, since the 1890s. A cruel, cruel species, ours.
**Movies 2017**

*In roughly ascending order of preference. If you’re looking for…*

* Revisiting, with a twist, the gripping-terrifying *Alien & Aliens* universe: *Alien: Covenant.*
* The complexities of modern Istanbul, via seven adorable street LOLCatz (OK, cats): *Kedi.*
* Edgy lunacy of *The Lobster,* in different setting: *The Killing of a Sacred Deer.*
* Clever, nails-biting thriller about making of a British WWII propaganda film: *Their Finest.*
* Stylish bank-holdup drama in British tradition, with southern-fried accents: *Baby Driver.*
* Just plain goofy fun: *Guardians of the Galaxy 2.* With a special delight for all us ELO fans.
* More fun, heist genre (a redneck *Ocean’s Eleven,* in inimitable Soderbergh style: *Logan Lucky.*
* Trip into cyber-human future: *Ghost in the Shell.* Blends ScarJo of *Avengers & Under the Skin.*
* *Mean Streets* NYC, 2017 version, with Robert Pattinson (!) as disheveled anti-hero: *Good Time.*
* Implausible but stirring DC drama: Ms. Chastain Goes to Washington, aka *Miss Sloane.*
* Tortured superhero, something of a throwback in witty/ironic *Deadpool* age: *Logan.*
* Neither witty nor ironic, but best superhero, period: *Wonder Woman.*
* Even badder-ass heroine, sans magic lasso/shield/slo-mo Matrix leaps: *Atomic Blonde.*
* Could take Atomic Blonde *and* Wonder Woman in a showdown: Yeon-Soo in *The Villainess.*
* Deeply moving affirmation of life’s fragility, in French, naturally: *Heal the Living.*
* Finest documentary about an ostensibly dull subject (NY Public Library; trust me): *Ex Libris.*
* Bong Joon Ho’s latest Dada-esque creation, starring—yes—a GMO super-pig: *Okja.*
* Sweeping recap—and reckoning with—generation-scarring conflict: Ken Burns/Vietnam War.*
* Third in a trilogy that was, uncommonly, best of the bunch: *War For the Planet of the Apes.*
* Poignant family drama, Japanese-style (nothing is as it seems on the surface): *Harmonium.*
* Understanding (a slice of) the millennial generation, in *Kids* tradition: doc *All This Panic.*
* Utterly captivating odd couple (young street artist; nonagerian photographer): *Faces Places.*
* *Big Short*-worthy HBO Films retracing of Madoff’s breathtaking fraudulence: *Wizard of Lies.*
* Another side of Charlotteville, via stirring doc shot on local Election Day: *Tonsler Park.*
* Reminder that admission to US colleges isn’t SO bad, compared to (say) Romania: *Graduation.*
* Heroic MSM during last (70s) fake-news era, in full cinematic effect: *The Post.*
* Human spirit, flattened—and then, while not exactly triumphant, endures: *The Florida Project.*
* Brilliant allegory of US’s endlessly complex racial layers, via horror-suspense tale: *Get Out.*
* Stunning doc trip through ISIS’s nominal capital, Raqqa, & impossibly noble citizen-journalists who oppose Islamic State: *City of Ghosts.* Not for faint of heart. Thanks for screening, RiverRun.
* History(ish) lesson that keeps you at seat’s edge throughout: *Dunkirk.*
* Jewel-box of American experience, with career performances from McDormand/Rockwell/Harrelson alike. My fave film in some time: *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri.*

**Don’t waste your time on…**

* *Downsizing.* So wanted this concept to work, but (star-filled) cast seemed as confused as I was.
* *John Wick 2.* Quite liked original; this pale imitation was boring well before body count hit 20.
* *Murder/Orient Express.* Another terrific (‘70s-era original; Branagh’s mustache alone appalls.
* *Unforgettable.* As if. Made even worse by shameless use of domestic assault as narrative hook.
22. Derek Thompson, “Google X & Science of Radical Creativity,” *Atlantic*. Fun peek into our future—and sad reminder that governments also once innovated boldly. [http://theatln.tc/2ggMi8s](http://theatln.tc/2ggMi8s)
8. Christopher Goffard, “Dirty John,” *LA Times*. In year of #MeToo, a harrowing seven-part account of predatory sociopath. [http://lat.ms/2BsReC8](http://lat.ms/2BsReC8)

*Bonus: Al Hunt’s “Good Things Happened in 2017,” a must-read! [https://bloom.bg/2E30n6c](https://bloom.bg/2E30n6c)*
Music 2017: shades of Kasey Kasem (look him up, millennials), a Top 40 (+1) for 2017.

41. Bombadil, *Long Life*. Captivating from very first line (see ‘found poem,’ next page).
40. Wolf Alice, *Space & Time*. That about covers it, thanks to North London’s alt-rock geniuses.
38. Waxahatchee, *Silver*. Katie Crutchfield’s ‘Out in the Storm’ album is without a false note.
36. Sigrid, *Don’t Kill My Vibe*. Sweden’s latest young phenom has staying power.
34. Imagine Dragons, *Whatever It Takes*. I’m such a sucker for that big tuneful hook.
32. Tigran Hamasyan, *Cave of Rebirth*. Taps into layers you didn’t know you possessed.
30. The National, *Carin At The Liquor Store*. Best male lead singer in indieland grows on.
29. Rae Sremmrud, *Perplexing Pegasus*. Debuted at Wake Forest (!); no less mystifying for that.
28. Head & Heart, *Bluebird*. Best live show in years (thx K-Don!) included this sweet lament.
23. Natalie Merchant, *Frozen Charlotte*. Too long since her last original; well worth wait.
18. Son Little, *O Me O My*. His ‘New Magic’ album aptly titled; spare tracks evoke 60’s analog.
17. Ella Vos, *00000 Million*. Soaring-voiced Vos cover outdoes Bon Iver’s original last year.
11. Lorde, *Liability*. Impossible that she’s 20 & already has two oldest-soul platinum records.
4. Sylvan Esso, *Song*. NC Triangle’s finest (sorry, Connells!) deliver the year’s catchiest tune.
2. Kendrick Lamar, *DNA*. Testifies, in 3 minutes, to the human condition: all that we share.
I was born on a Wednesday/Don’t yet know when I’ll die… (41)

Every morning I feel more useless than before
Trying hard to see the point in anything at all (14)

I’m an apostrophe
I’m just a symbol to remind you that there’s more to see (34)

Feels like everywhere you go around the globe another terror awaits
And no matter what you change, all the pain and everything stays the same (18)

I stare at myself
The whole world keeps turnin’ (38)

And I accelerate, and I accelerate
But my gears got stuck; I’m on this road now…so alone now (27)

Percocets/Molly, Percocets (12)

I throw myself/From heights that used to scare me (36)

_Le temps passe et court/En battant tristement_ (33)

And nothing hurts like crying/On a long drive home (20)

I wasn’t a catch, I wasn’t a keeper
I was walking around like I was the one who found dead John Cheever (30)

I get ready, I get all dressed up/To go nowhere in particular
It doesn’t matter if I’m not enough/For the future or the things to come
‘Cause I'm young and in love (9)

How’s this for irony: their idea of being free is a prison of beliefs
That they never ever have to leave (5)

_Mezclados, somos mezclados/La misma historia con otro sabor_ (13)

And you’ll go walking through the rhododendron flowers
Looking for white robes but the prophet won’t be found (8)

I don’t want a never-ending life/I just wanna be alive while I’m here (1)

You're all gonna watch me/Disappear into the sun (11)
Restaurants 2017
Not in NYC much this year, but there’s great restaurants everywhere...23 new faves to report:

· Swoon, Hudson NY. Not quite up to name, but linchpin in Valley’s continuing renaissance.
· Supra. Long loved Georgian cuisine at Oda House on Ave. B; this DC startup blows it away.
· Shelley’s, Miami. Coral Gables dining took a big leap upwards this year; seafood supreme.
· Merritt’s, Chapel Hill NC. Best BLT in the southeast, maybe US...how they get tomatoes this field-fresh in February is the gustatory mystery of 2017. Thanks to Kelly!
· Ruckus, Boston. Little walk-up Chinatown joint serves homemade noodles & black-garlic mazemen so good I can taste it still. Year’s best restaurant soundtrack as well.
· Italiene, NYC. Superb, occasionally quirky blend of Italian & French (hence name).
· Sweet Potatoes, Winston-Salem. Oprah’s fave local joint reopens in larger space, with a kitchen that provides Chef Stephanie (Tyson) space to expand her southern/soul repertoire.
· China Chilcano, DC. Not Andrés’s best (still Zaytinya), but flavor abounds in Peru-China mashup.
· Cortez, Durham. Oscar Diaz’s pan-Latin American seafood magic; NC’s best ’17 opening.
· Trestle, San Francisco. Minimal choice, simple preparations: satori.
· CUT Palazzo, Vegas. Here’s to Jen & Leigh: (re)married by Elvis, & sensibly celebrated here.
· Mexicue, NYC. Followed their food truck on Twitter for years, the better to score cured-duck tacos & tuna ceviche regularly; now they’re open on 8th Ave., adding ambience to gastronomy.
· Relae, Copenhagen. Two Noma acolytes just about outdo the master. Reserve now for 2019....
· Lucio, London. Chelsea Italian charmer; best strozzapreti this side of Roma. Thanks Burstons!
· The Campbell, NYC: not about food, tho’ noshes surely tasty. Instead: sublime cocktails & irresistably sophisticated yet friendly space. Were Mr. Campbell resurrected, he’d move back in.
· Cultivar, Boston. Superb New American downtown. Thanks BK for (briefly) accompanying.
· Bass Oslo. Noma-inspired (see below) Scandacuisine done to genuine perfection.
· Bad Hunter, Chicago. Semi-vegetarian addition to hipster-dining-heaven Fulton Market.
· Estela, NYC. Our CC crew still lip-smacking at memory of arroz negro & Iberico pork.
· Barcino, San Francisco. Our OUP crew got in opening week; instant-perfection tapas & paella.
· Chicha, Cusco. Heard for years abt Gaston Arcurio’s Cocina Novoandina; now I’m a devotee.
· Aulis, London. World’s smallest setting for unforgettable dining...& chef’s named Rogan.
· Barr, Copenhagen. Consensus world-best Noma closed in Feb.; chef-genius René Redzepi & a partner opened Barr on that sacred site July 5. 1st customer in the door: me, below w/chefs.