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FALL ARTS PREVIEW 2005

Topflight tomes from a torrent of choice words

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In the book business, the new math goes like this. We offer 20 of the fall season's best, most important (though not necessarily most promoted) works of fiction and nonfiction you should read.

But by intensely browsing first-rate bookstores, you can easily increase that number to 20 times 20, which requires reading a mere three or more books a day till Jan. 1. Can any other cultural area - movies, TV, theater, concerts, video games - make such a quality claim?

In the great reality-game competition among art forms, we rest our case.

Fiction

1 Memories of My Melancholy Whores by Gabriel Garcia Marquez (Knopf).

In his first book of fiction in 10 years, the Colombian Nobel Prize winner imagines a mediocre journalist on the verge of 90 who treats himself to a young virgin, then muses on a lifetime of paying for love. **November.**

2 Minaret by Leila Aboulela (Grove/Atlantic).

Ever wonder about a London where Keats and Dickens no longer occupy everyone's consciousness? A beautifully written second novel about a Muslim woman housecleaner in London from a Sudanese who won the first Caine Prize for African Writing. **September.**

3 Vita by Melania G. Mazzucco (FSG).

Winner of the Premio Strega, Italy's most prestigious fiction prize, a literary yet entertaining saga of early 20th-century Southern Italian immigration to America. **September.**

4 Ordinary Heroes by Scott Turow (FSG).

The explosion of books about parents goes fictional as the acclaimed author of high-toned legal thrillers follows one of his characters, Stewart Dubinsky, on a search for his deceased father's mysterious life during World War II. **November.**

5 Days of Awe by Hugh Nissenson (Sourcebooks).

A 67-year-old New York City specialist in illustrated books of mythology muses on the lessons of his life in the summer of 2001, then experiences 9/11. The distinguished author of *The Tree of Life* has produced a new novel that transcends its setting. **September.**

6 The Truth of the Matter by Robb Forman Dew (Little, Brown).

Simple premise: Older woman, widowed with grown-up children, seeks a new life. In the hands of Dew, winner of the National Book Award for *Dale Loves Sophie to Death*, *Truth* is a nuanced symphony about family life. **November.**

7 The Saint of Lost Things by Christopher Castellani (Algonquin Books).

A love poem to immigrant experience in Wilmington in the 1950s, by a young writer who won a Massachusetts Book Award for his earlier novel, *A Kiss From Maddalena*. **September.**

8 Get a Life by Nadine Gordimer (FSG).

Fourteen years after her Nobel Prize for Literature, the esteemed South African writer examines an ecologist struck by thyroid cancer in this astute tale of forced introspection. **December.**

9 Faith for Beginners by Aaron Hamburger (Random House).

Precise, finely observed first novel by the author of an excellent short-story collection about Prague, *The View from Stalin's Head*. *Faith* traces an American family's vacation to Israel in the summer of 2000. **October.**

10 Hunger's Brides: A Novel of the Baroque by Paul Anderson (Carroll & Graf).

There is always the eccentric option of reading one book from now till Jan. 1. If that's your bent, consider this remarkable *Name-of-the-Rose* wannabe, a young Canadian novelist's 1,200-pages-plus mystery tethered to the life of Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, the spectacularly evocative 17th-century Mexican nun and poet. **September**.

Nonfiction**11 The Search: How Google and Its Rivals Rewrote the Rules of Business and Transformed Our Culture** by John Batelle (Portfolio).

How high can Google stock go? Not a company history, but an industry expert's meditation on one more shock of the digital age. **September**.

12 Doormen by Peter Bearman (University of Chicago).

They know more about you (and your neighbors) than you do about them. Illuminating and different, by the chair of Columbia University's sociology department. **October**.

13 Deadly Connections: States That Sponsor Terrorism by Daniel Byman (Cambridge).

Why accept such tenants? What possible advantage could there be? Should sovereignty protect the hosts? Important, urgent issues, limpidly explained. **September**.

14 Generation Rx: How Prescription Drugs Are Altering American Lives, Minds and Bodies by Greg Critser (Houghton Mifflin).

Author of the best book (*Fat Land*) on how Americans became the roly-polies of the world, Critser investigates "Big Pharma's" growing sway over American life. **October**.

15 The Purchase of Intimacy by Viviana Zelizer (Princeton). A rude challenge, by one of the nation's leading social thinkers, to the commonplace notion that we don't think economically when we make decisions about love, romance and private life. **September**.**16 Cities** by John Reader (Atlantic Monthly).

Did you know that trees grow better in cities? That the first urban areas preceded the birth of farming? Superb historical overview by the British writer and photojournalist. **September**.

17 The Reluctant Parting: How the Jewish Writers of the New Testament Created a Christian Book by Julie Galambush (Harper San Francisco).

Sure to stir controversy, a religion scholar at the College of William and Mary argues that the New Testament's authors not only lived, thought and worshipped as Jews, but saw a Jewish future for their movement. **November**.

18 Warped Passages: Unraveling the Mysteries of the Universe's Hidden Dimensions by Lisa Randall (Ecco).

Who's the female Stephen Hawking? Randall, that's who - the first tenured woman professor of physics at both Harvard and MIT, and the hottest string player around. **September**.

19 Princes of Darkness: The Saudi Assault on the West by Laurent Murawiec (Rowman & Littlefield).

A fierce, pull-no-punches attack by a French international policy analyst on the House of Saud as corrupt, soft on terrorism, and a regular human-rights violator. Murawiec castigates the United States for its decades of connivance in exchange for oil. **September**.

20 Slavery in New York Edited and with an introduction by Ira Berlin and Leslie M. Harris (The New Press).

Strange, but true - New York City once had the largest slave population of any city in the country. Twelve leading historians ponder the peculiar institution's shaping of the city's commercial rise. **November**.