Atlantic literary editor Benjamin Schwarz picks the 25 best in a crowded field

BY BENJAMIN SCHWARZ

Books of the Year

The Top Five

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: A Life
By Michael Burlingame
JOHNS HOPKINS

Measured, psychologically astute, authoritative when it can be, Michael Burlingame's exhaustive narrative (2,024 pages!) is unafraid of ambiguity and indeterminacy. This is the life of Lincoln for our times.

[Read Christopher Hitchens's full review from the July/August Atlantic]

THE CHILDREN'S BOOK: A Novel
By A. S. Byatt
KNOPF

Byatt has wrought a richly detailed, decade-spanning, at once Olympian and pointillist masterpiece. To read this gorgeous bolt of fiction is to fully enter a world.

[Read the full review from the October Atlantic]

THE THIRD REICH TRILOGY (Concluding With The Third Reich at War)
By Richard J. Evans
PENGUIN

Evans's cool, crisply argued three-volume chronicle will be for a generation the definitive general history of Nazi Germany in English.

IT'S BEGINNING TO HURT: Stories
By James Lasdun
FSG

This collection of short stories illuminates the everyday agonies of the mind, its anxieties, obsessions, doubts, and yearnings. Lasdun pins each observation to the page with grace and exactitude.
MRS. WOOLF AND THE SERVANTS: An Intimate History of Domestic Life in Bloomsbury
By Alison Light
BLOOMSBURY

In her elegant, sparkling book, Light marries social and literary criticism as she probes the deeply intimate, often sordid, always fraught relationship between women servants and their female employers.

The Runners Up

TOO MUCH HAPPINESS: Stories
By Alice Munro
KNOPF

[Read the full review from the November Atlantic]

Dominion from Sea to Sea
Bruce Cumings
YALE

The Art Instinct
Denis Dutton
BLOOMSBURY

The Hundred Years War, vol 3
Jonathan Sumption
JOHNS HOPKINS

The Hindus
Wendt Doniger
PENGUIN PRESS

Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic
Gordon Wood
OXFORD

The New Old World
Perry Anderson
VERSO

The Thirty Years War
Peter H. Wilson
HARVARD

This Time is Different: Eight Centuries of Financial Folly
Carmen M. Reinhart and Kenneth Rogoff
PRINCETON

Florence Nightingale
Mark Bostidge
FSG
Flannery: A Life
Brad Gooch
LITTLE BROWN

Samuel Johnson: A Biography
Peter Martin
HARVARD

In the Kitchen
Monica Ali
SCRIBNER

Reading Dance
ed. Robert Gottlieb
PANTHEON

Words in the Air: The Complete Correspondence Between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell
ed. Thomas Travisano and Saskia Hamilton
FSG

Charles Dickens
Michael Slater
YALE

Wolf Hall
Hilary Mantel
HENRY HOLT

The Arabs
Eugene Rogan
BASIC

Northern Arts: The Breakthrough of Scandinavian Literature and Art, from Ibsen to Bergman
Arnold Weinstein
PRINCETON

The Ballad of Dorothy Wordsworth: A Life
Frances Wilson
FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX

Three Victories and a Defeat: The Rise and Fall of the First British Empire
Brendan Simms
BASIC

Collected Stories
Lydia Davis
FSG