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BOOKS DECEMBER 2009



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

BY BENJAMIN SCHWARZ

# Books of the Year

## AUDIO:

Benjamin Schwarz discusses his picks (4:13)



## 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.

[\[Read the full review from the September \*Atlantic\*\]](#)

### **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.

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### **The Runners Up**

#### **TOO MUCH HAPPINESS: Stories**

*By Alice Munro*

KNOFF

[\[Read the full review from the November \*Atlantic\*\]](#)

#### **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 Keneth 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

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