

5-15-2018

Empress: the astonishing reign of Nur Jahan, Ruby Lal (book review)

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Recommended Citation

McCallister, Kathleen, Empress: the astonishing reign of Nur Jahan, Ruby Lal (book review) (2018). *Library Journal*, 143(9), 65.

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social sciences

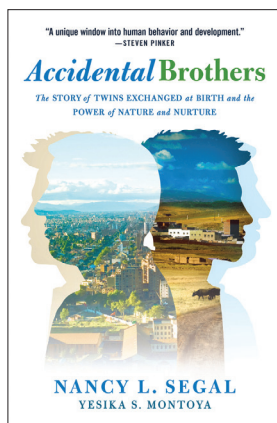
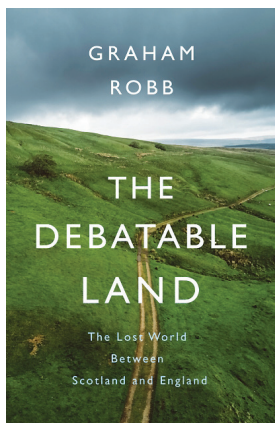
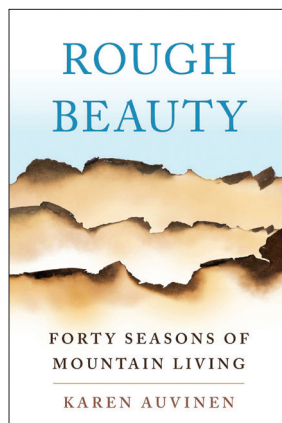
BIOGRAPHY

★ **Auvinen, Karen. *Rough Beauty: Forty Seasons of Mountain Living*. Scribner. Jun. 2018. 320p. illus. ISBN 9781501152283. \$27; ebk. ISBN 9781501152306. MEMOIR**

Reminiscent of Cheryl Strayed's *Wild*, Auvinen's memoir presents a compelling story of one woman's grit, determination, and sometimes madness while surviving 40 seasons in Colorado's Rocky Mountains. Her journey toward mountain living begins with an all-consuming fire that destroys her home and the laptop containing her writing. The author depicts her difficult childhood with candor and openness and does not flinch when describing cruel incidents inflicted upon her and her siblings by their father. Auvinen traces her father's military career and how the family moved to California, Colorado, and Hawaii, struggling to adopt each place as home. As an adult, taking

icon. Here, Allen, who served as President Bill Clinton's deputy assistant, updates the late Guthman's (Kennedy's press officer from 1961 to 1965) original 1993 edition of this book. The editors include what they consider to be Kennedy's most memorable speeches, and Allen adds commentary on the politician's legacy from former presidents Clinton and Barack Obama, pundit Van Jones, and U2 singer Bono. This anthology is divided into four chapters that cover Kennedy's service as counsel for the Senate Rackets Committee, 1956–59; his term as attorney general, 1961–64; his tenure as senator; and his tragic 1968 presidential campaign. Rich background information on policy and historical context introduces each chapter and frames each speech, which reveal Kennedy's appeal to Democrats and Republicans, minorities and the middle class. Themes include civil rights, mistrust

Mughal empire, Nur Jahan (1577–1645) survived an uncertain birth and childhood to go on to hunt tigers, lead men in battle, and wield power and influence at a level almost unheard of for a Muslim woman of that time, reigning over India with her husband, the emperor Jahangir, from 1614 to 1627. Lal's (South Asian history, Emory Univ.; *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World*) examination of Jahan's life attempts to look beyond slanted historical opinions, legends, and fiction to form a more balanced viewpoint of her life. And while that resulting portrait still contains gaps—little record remains, for example, of Jahan's early life, and none of exactly how she rose so quickly and so high from the ranks of Jahangir's other wives—the author makes use of the absences to explore the upbringing of girls and the responsibilities of royal wives in the Mughal empire in general. **VERDICT** More a narrative history than full biography, Lal's work nevertheless provides a vivid look at her subject and the world in which she lived. An excellent choice for popular history readers interested in women rulers.—**Kathleen McCallister, Tulane Univ., New Orleans**



Uncompromising determination; between Scotland and England; twins switched at birth & reunited

refuge in solitary surroundings with her beloved dog, Elvis, Auvinen reflects on her often contradictory needs for both isolation and community. **VERDICT** This memoir presents an engaging and uncompromising portrait of a woman seeking peace amid the untamed background of wilderness living. An essential purchase where memoirs circulate widely.—**Mattie Cook, Flat River Community Lib., MI**

Kennedy, Robert F. *RFK: His Words for Our Times*. Morrow. May 2018. 480p. ed. by Edwin O. Guthman & C. Richard Allen. notes. bibliog. index. ISBN 9780062834102. \$29.99; ebk. ISBN 9780062834119. BIOG

Although former New York senator Robert Kennedy (1925–68) only held elected office from 1965 to 1968, he remains a political

of large government, citizen participation in local government, eliminating poverty, and ending the Vietnam War. The speeches demonstrate Kennedy's skill at connecting with large, enthusiastic audiences with promises of hope and equality. A companion website (rfkspeeches.com) features videos of speeches included here. **VERDICT** Will mostly appeal to RFK admirers, historians, and political communications specialists.—**Karl Helicher, formerly with Upper Merion Twp. Lib., King of Prussia, PA**

Lal, Ruby. *Empress: The Astonishing Reign of Nur Jahan*. Norton. Jul. 2018. 320p.

illus. notes. index. ISBN 9780393239348.

\$27.95; ebk. ISBN 9780393635409. BIOG

Born to Persian nobility traveling to the

Schwartz, Dana. *Choose Your Own Disaster*. Grand Central. Jun. 2018. 272p. ISBN 9781478970392. pap. \$15.99; ebk. ISBN 9781478970385. MEMOIR

Part memoir, part personality quiz, this book recounts many of the poor decisions arts and culture writer (the *Guardian*, *Marie Claire*, *Vice*, *The New Yorker*) and YA author (*And We're Off*) Schwartz made during her 20s in a quirky, "choose your own adventure" style format. Her experiences are relatable, especially because she uses second-person singular to put readers in her shoes. She writes candidly about the disordered eating habits and mediocre men that dotted the landscape of her young adulthood with humor and unflinching honesty. She tells the real story of setting up the Twitter account @GuyInYourMFA while studying at Brown University, and how it led to a Tinder date in London with the same type of guy the Twitter account parodies—he recognized her as the creator. **VERDICT** Equal parts amusing and cringe-worthy, these stories will have millennial readers relating and older ones nodding. "Yes. I've made similar mistakes."—**Erin Shea, Ferguson Lib., CT**

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