Hit makers: why things become popular, Derek Thompson (book review)

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compulsive behavior.—Tina Chan, MIT Libs., Cambridge

Educating general readers about mental illness and its troubled history in America, Pulitzer Prize winner Powers (Mark Tobin: A Life) shares his searingly personal, heart-wrenching account of the schizophrenia that overtook his two talented, promising sons. In loving detail, Powers describes the joys and unfathomable challenges inherent in parenting such blessed and simultaneously cursed young men. Most arresting is his narrative about his younger son, Kevin, a guitar prodigy. As a child, Kevin fell in love with playing the guitar and went on to dedicate his life to music. At the prestigious Berklee College of Music, he spiraled into inexplicable mental illness, and in the throes of depression, hanged himself in the basement one week before his 21st birthday. Older son Dean, a talented writer, also suffers from mental illness, but, with treatment, ultimately stabilizes. Powers alternates chapters between the history of his sons and the larger history of systemic mental health treatment failures in the United States. Ultimately, he sacrifices privacy, as he offers this book in powerful argument for necessary revised legislation. VERDICT For readers of Peter Earley’s Crazy. [See Prepub Alert, 8/22/16.]-Lynee Maxwell, West Virginia Univ. Coll. of Law Lib., Morgantown

SOCIAL SCIENCE
This is a book about wandering women, the author included, who build relationships with their cities by walking through them. Anyone who has taken a stroll down a city street knows how visceral the experience can be (as long as you’re paying attention), but this is uniquely true for women, who have never had the advantage of a covert relationship with their city sidewalks. Unlike men, women are singularly visible, whether they were breaking norms of yesteryear by drifting without a choreperon, or are clipping around New York in modern-day heels. Women can and do make feminist statements simply by strolling through their stomping grounds; Elkin creates an interesting and inarguable case for this. She, too, is a wanderer and provides compelling anecdotes about her own journeys, inter-
Local Motion


This eye-catching and inspirational work provides ample encouragement to even the most novice cyclist to get out and experience a new biking adventure. Featuring contributions from 12 authors with varied cycling and travel writing experience, this book gives readers hundreds of ideas for rides covering approximately 30 countries (Africa, Americas, Asia, Europe, and Oceania); many of them “epic” or “bucket list” in nature. Arranged regionally, routes vary from hugely challenging (and quite dangerous) multi-day rides to well-established big-city cruises taking a few hours. Basic information, called a “toolkit,” purports to enable better planning. However, the information provided is uneven and extremely brief, especially for the more exotic and remote routes around the world.

Riders for these routes would have no real idea of what type of bike works best on the route, equipment needed, support, technical level, overall cost, language requirements, or simply whether or not a guide is recommended. Basically, riders are certainly inspired but left to do their own travel planning arrangements and in-depth research, which could be either beneficial or disastrous.

VERDICT For libraries with large travel and recreational collections.—John N. Jax, Univ. of Wisconsin Lib., La Crosse


Irish open-water swimmer McCoy and British photographer McCambridge present a collection of 50 swims along coastal waterways of Ireland, from Donabate, County Dublin, to Devenish Island, County Fermanagh. Descriptions include directions for car and/or public transportation; important geographical information; grid reference numbers, which can be used with the Irish Grid Reference Finder; swimming skill required; facilities available; ease of access; safety tips for jumping and diving; tips on safe, winter, and night swimming; the front crawl and body surfing and bits of local history.

The “At-a-Glance” sections mention the popularity of the site; whether or not it is family-friendly; its inclusion level; and nearby activities, including food and lodging. McCambridge’s photographs add a great deal to each site narrative. Filled with many Irish terms, this fine book is a delight to read, so long as you have a dictionary nearby to help with the charming phrases. VERDICT Perfect for armchair travelers, adventure swimmers, families, and for those who simply love or want to explore open-water swimming. Avid swimmers will clamor to get to Ireland posthaste.—Cheryl L. Branche, Brooklyn, NY


San Franciscans Poggioli and Eidson have produced a detailed and entertaining guidebook for walking their city’s famed 49 Mile Scenic Drive. They have broken down the journey into two- to four-mile pedestrian segments. Maps, colorful photographs, number of steps, hill steepness ratings, and turn-by-turn instructions accompany every walk. Sights along the way are explained with blurbs of history and culture. Every chapter concludes with facts about parking nearby, mass transit access to the walk’s end points, and even public restrooms. Detours and alternate return routes offer more opportunities for exploration. Tips point out views, artwork, and sounds at various locations. Additional chapters provide information about walking, architecture, parking, and mass transit. Although the authors invite inhabitants to complete the route within a year, some walks identified as “must see” encourage visitors with limited time to enjoy the drive’s highlights. Interspersed among the walk descriptions, the Daily CRAB pages reveal historical photos and unusual anecdotes about the city’s past.

VERDICT Anybody living near or traveling to San Francisco can utilize this handy and fascinating walking guide. If only every city had one as comprehensive as this.—Janet Clapp, N. Clarendon, VT

potential whys of the hits and misses of popular culture, using illustrative examples that range from vampire myths and impressionist art to Star Wars and Adele’s song “Hello.” Popularity, he finds, relies on a perfect cocktail that includes the right amounts of such things as exposure, familiarity and difference, timing, and the impossible-to-predict factors of luck and coincidence—and while Thomas keeps a light tone throughout, he doesn’t shy away from how the ingredients that make up cultural phenomena can lead to complacency in audiences and stagnation in industries. VERDICT While this book’s mix of studied theory and anecdotal observation sometimes balances uneasily, it should provide some potential direction for those chasing that elusive next hit, as well as food for thought for anyone who has every pondered the mystery of why we like what we like.—Kathleen McCallister, Tulane Univ., New Orleans

TRAVEL & GEOGRAPHY


Prolific author Cotterell (Ancient China; The Illustrated A–Z of Classic Mythology) has lived and traveled widely in Asia. This book is part of a series that offers cultural and historical guides to the great cities of the world. These books are more than travel guides, giving readers a look at present-day identity and its links with the past. Divided into four parts: “Landscapes,” “An Historical Perspective,” “A Tour of the Island,” and “Balinese Culture,” the work also includes a much-needed glossary. “Further Reading”