

A list of national bestsellers
compiled by Publishers Weekly

HARDCOVER

FICTION

1. **CHASING FIRE**, by Nora Roberts (Putnam)
2. **THE LAND OF PAINTED CAVES**, by Jean M. Auel (Crown)
3. **THE FIFTH WITNESS**, by Michael Connelly (Little, Brown)
4. **I'LL WALK ALONE**, by Mary Higgins Clark (Simon & Schuster)
5. **THE GIRL WHO KICKED THE HORNET'S NEST**, by Stieg Larsson (Knopf)
6. **44 CHARLES STREET**, by Danielle Steel (Delacorte)
7. **THE PALE KING**, by David Foster Wallace (Little, Brown)
8. **SAVE ME**, by Lisa Scottoline (St. Martin's)
9. **LIVE WIRE**, by Harlan Coben (Dutton)
10. **SING YOU HOME**, by Jodi Picoult (Atria)

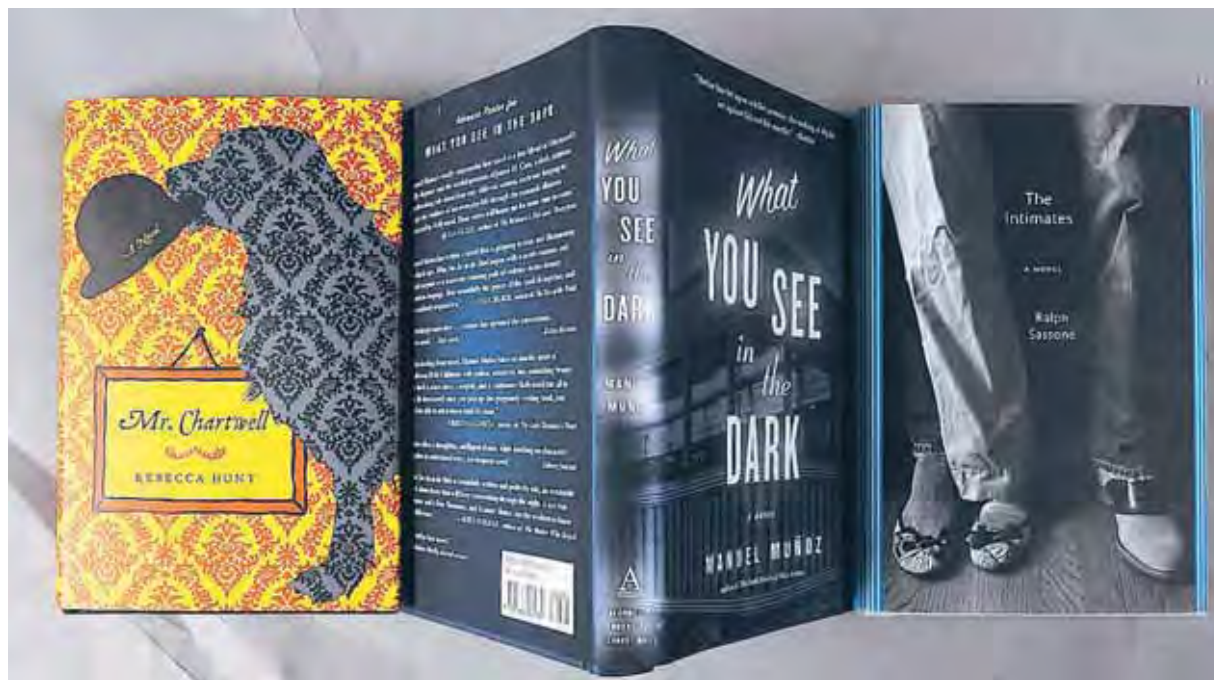
NONFICTION

1. **BOSSYPANTS**, by Tina Fey (Little, Brown/Reagan Arthur)
2. **THE 17 DAY DIET**, by Dr. Mike Moreno (Free Press)
3. **UNBROKEN**, by Laura Hillenbrand (Random House)
4. **I'M OVER ALL THAT**, by Shirley MacLaine (Atria)
5. **THE HEALTHY HOME**, by Myron Wentz and Dave Wentz (Vanguard Press)
6. **63 DOCUMENTS THE GOVERNMENT DOESN'T WANT YOU TO READ**, by Jesse Ventura with Dick Russell (Skyhorse)
7. **CHANGE ANYTHING**, by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, David Maxfield, Ron McMillan and Al Switzler (Business Plus)
8. **ALL THAT IS BITTER & SWEET**, by Ashley Judd with Maryanne Vollers (Ballantine)
9. **MALCOLM X**, by Manning Marable (Viking)
10. **THIS IS GONNA HURT**, by Nikki Sixx (Morrow)

PAPERBACK

1. **HEAVEN IS FOR REAL**, by Todd Burpo with Lynn Vincent (Thomas Nelson)
2. **WATER FOR ELEPHANTS**, by Sara Gruen (Algonquin)
3. **THE HELP**, by Kathryn Stockett (Berkley)
4. **THE 9TH JUDGMENT**, by James Patterson and Maxine Paetro (Grand Central)
5. **THE IMMORTAL LIFE OF HENRIETTA LACKS**, by Rebecca Skloot (Broadway)
6. **CUTTING FOR STONE**, by Abraham Verghese (Vintage)
7. **BORN TO RUN**, by Christopher McDougall (Vintage)
8. **THE ART OF RACING IN THE RAIN**, by Garth Stein (Harper)
9. **THE OTHER WES MOORE**, by Wes Moore (Spiegel & Grau)
10. **INSIDE OF A DOG**, by Alexandra Horowitz (Scribner)

DEBUT NOVELS



BY MARION WINIK
Special to Newsday

I've never read anything that combines the silly and the serious as imaginatively as Rebecca Hunt's **"Mr. Chartwell"** (Dial Press, \$24), set in London in 1964. Hunt has made of Winston Churchill's lifelong depression a bewitching fable involving a giant dog and a widowed young librarian.

"You don't like dogs, Mrs. Hammerhans?" asked Mr. Chartwell. "No," Esther answered. "I do like dogs. Dogs are fine. I'm just not used to them as lodgers. I'm more familiar with them" — and it came out before she could stop it — "on a pet basis."

"I'm not a pet," Mr. Chartwell told her. "No, he is not. In fact, the 6-foot-7 slaving beast is a mythic creature: Depression. He spends most of his time with Churchill, whose self-described "black dog" moods supplied Hunt's guiding metaphor. As the story begins, Mr. Chartwell is expanding his clientele to include the widowed Esther Hammerhans, who helplessly rents him the room that used to be her husband's study.

The whimsical, frightening portrait of how depression works — "During meals I'll squat near his plate and breathe over his food" — is balanced by a sweet evocation of the counterforces of friendship and love. The characters of Churchill's wife, Esther's friends the Oliviers and a new employee at the library, a Mr. Corkbowl, bring hope and inspiration to this original story.

The emotional insight of Ralph Sassone's **"The Intimates"** (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$24) puts one in mind of Claire Messud, Joanna Smith Rakoff or Julia Glass, novelists who trace the evolution of friendships among smart New York types, gay and straight. Sassone follows his central pair, Maize and Robbie, from high school in the Connecticut suburbs through college and young adulthood, when they share a roach-infested apartment and work tedious jobs in Manhattan. Maize's true vocation is writing; she writes constantly in a diary to which the reader is unfortunately never privy. A large supporting cast is fully imagined: Maize's guidance counselor, who barely resists the urge to make a pass at her; a college alumni interviewer, who doesn't; Robbie's hunky medical intern boyfriend; Maize's revolting real-estate-agent boss. Even those who appear for a few pages, like Maize's stepfather, come right off the page:

"He'd never been anything but kind to her regardless of how miserably things were going between him and her mother, helping Maize with her homework, making her lunch sandwiches, praising her compositions and art-class projects as if she were a genius. He had a conspiratorial sense of humor about her mother's craziness, shouting 'Silenzio! Silenzio!' when she nagged them."

The problem is the plot, which never develops much momentum. Though they experiment briefly with being a couple, Robbie soon figures out that he prefers men, at least in bed. Yet the emotional and intellectual attachment between the two is so

strong that each is unable to form a bond with even perfectly wonderful-seeming partners. Without demanding a happy love-story ending, I wanted more for Maize than compulsive journaling and a gay best friend.

Manuel Muñoz's **"What You See in the Dark"** (Algonquin, \$23.95) opens with an overture that sketches in the operatic outlines of the story — a poor shopgirl and a handsome bartender in Bakersfield, Calif., in the late 1950s, whose love affair rivets the whole town until it ends in terrible violence. That bartender's mother owns a motel on the highway just outside town, kind of like Norman Bates and his mom in "Psycho." That's not a coincidence.

The filming of "Psycho," as seen through the eyes of Janet Leigh — referred to here as The Actress — is another layer of the narrative. She arrives on location with a driver, worried about playing a character who has affairs, steals money and appears half-dressed. The Director shows up, and seven days are spent filming the shower scene. Which, as you know, doesn't end well, either.

In an interview, the author refers to his passion for Robert Altman's 1975 movie "Nashville," which builds a narrative by rotating among many minor characters without ever letting one of them take center stage. Muñoz adapts this technique effectively, so that the overall sense of the book is of the town, the heat, the '50s themselves, a long, slow, knowing pan across a landscape, a narrative voice that visits many souls. For a novel about a murder, it's weirdly cool; perhaps that's the Hitchcock influence.