

## bookshelf

## A trifecta of debut novels

This summer has seen a crop of terrific debut novels. Here are three standouts of the season.

**FOURTH OF JULY CREEK**, by Smith Henderson (Ecco, 470 pp., \$26.99)

Set in 1980 in the stark wilderness of western Montana, Henderson's novel is rife with brutality and despair. It's a study of damaged, lonely characters in search of salvation. They'll find it any way they can.

Pete Snow, a 31-year-old social worker with problems of his own, works with abused children, a job that often presents serious threats to his safety. The families he encounters are mired in violence, poverty and substance abuse, and Pete is committed to helping them: "You just did. Because no one else was going to."

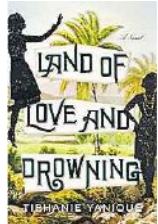
The core of the novel follows Pete's intense involvement with Benjamin Pearl, a malnourished 11-year-old boy living off the grid, and Benjamin's anarchist, religious fanatic father, Jeremiah — a dangerous man with no small amount of paranoia.

Meanwhile, Pete grapples with his messy personal life. He's estranged from his father, and in the aftermath of a failed marriage, his wife has fled to Texas with their daughter, Rachel. After Rachel runs away, Pete is desperate to find her. He also deals with his parole-violating younger brother, Luke, and he's having an affair with a fellow social worker, Mary, a woman with troubles of her own. Plus, he drinks too much.

The author's exploration of these wounded lives never seems didactic or sentimental. He sustains a suspenseful, devastating plot with masterful prose and tremendous compassion.

— CARMELA CIURARU

**LAND OF LOVE AND DROWNING**, by Tiphonie Yanique (Riverhead, 358 pp., \$27.95)



"I is the historian in this family. . . . Nowadays people think historians are stuffy types, but history is a kind of magic I doing here." So Anette Bradshaw introduces herself in Yanique's novel, a follow-up to her 2010 story collection. A magical realist family epic set on the author's native St. Thomas, the tale is as lush and seductive as its setting.

Anette is one of three incredibly good-looking children of sea captain Owen Arthur Bradshaw, each of whom tells part of this story. Eeona, the oldest,



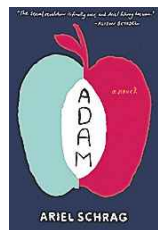
Smith Henderson has set "Fourth of July Creek" in the stark wilderness of western Montana.

is prim and proper in both her narrative voice and lifestyle, though she had a passionate, incestuous relationship with her father before his ship went down and never finds another man to measure up. Little sister Anette, raised by Eeona after their mother also dies, is a true island girl, her chapters written in patois. Then there's the unacknowledged sibling, Jacob, Bradshaw's son by his witchy mistress, Rebekah. When Jacob and Anette fall in love as teenagers, they don't know they are related — and, of course, all kinds of trouble ensues.

"Land of Love and Drowning" bristles with imagination and talent, interweaving mythic elements — backwards-facing feet, silver pubic hair, a race of watery demigods — with very real ones, like tourism, hurricanes and social change.

— MARION WINK

**ADAM**, by Ariel Schrag (Mariner, 302 pp., \$13.95 paper)



In Ariel Schrag's audacious debut novel, an inexperienced teenage boy falls in love with a lesbian and tricks her into believing he's transgender so she'll go out with him.

So many things could have gone wrong with this premise. But Schrag has found com-

passionate and funny ways to talk about a subject most fiction avoids. By creating a straight male protagonist who takes his gender for granted and throwing him headfirst into an unfamiliar subculture, Schrag offers a wide audience a chance to join the discussion.

As the book opens, Adam is an awkward high school junior. When he sets off to spend the summer with his college student sister, Casey, in Brooklyn, he has vague hopes of hooking up with an older girl. Although

Casey is a lesbian and so are most of her friends, he dares to dream, anyway.

At a party, he meets Gillian, who's definitely female. And older. And attractive. And seems to like him. And — wait — she's a lesbian. He realizes she thinks he's transgender. Why else would he be hanging around lesbians all the time?

Thus begins a mad scramble, as Adam desperately employs drastic measures to keep their budding romance alive (thank you, Ace bandage). The sly setup works both ways, too: Gillian is brashly sure she'd never be attracted to a guy, yet she is.

Much of the novel's audience will be as dazed and confused as Adam is, but Schrag sends you home with a greater understanding of all the permutations of what it means to be human.

— CONNIE OGLE, MIAMI HERALD

Three authors have excellent starts with disparate debut novels

## bestsellers

Publishers Weekly's U.S. list powered by Nielsen BookScan for the week ending July 20. Latest list: [newsday.com/books](http://newsday.com/books)

## hardcover

## FICTION

1. **THE BOOK OF LIFE**, by Deborah Harkness (Viking)
2. **THE HEIST**, by Daniel Silva (Harper)
3. **INVISIBLE**, by James Patterson and David Ellis (Little, Brown)
4. **ACT OF WAR**, by Brad Thor (Atria)
5. **TOP SECRET TWENTY-ONE**, by Janet Evanovich (Bantam)
6. **CUT AND THRUST**, by Stuart Woods (Putnam)
7. **POWER PLAY**, by Catherine Coulter (Putnam)
8. **MR. MERCEDES**, by Stephen King (Scribner)
9. **CALIFORNIA**, by Edan Lepucki (Little, Brown)
10. **THE SILKWORM**, by Robert Galbraith (LB/Mulholland)

## NONFICTION

1. **AMERICA**, by Dinesh D'Souza (Regnery)
2. **BLOOD FEUD**, by Edward Klein (Regnery)
3. **ONE NATION**, by Ben Carson (Penguin/Sentinel)
4. **THE MOCKINGBIRD NEXT DOOR**, by Marja Mills (Penguin)
5. **HARD CHOICES**, by Hillary Rodham Clinton (Simon & Schuster)
6. **EVERYTHING I NEED TO KNOW I LEARNED ...**, by Diane Muldrow (Random/Golden Books)
7. **THINK LIKE A FREAK**, by Stephen Levitt and Steven Dubner (Morrow)
8. **DAVID AND GOLIATH**, by Malcolm Gladwell (Little, Brown)
9. **INSTINCT**, by T.D. Jakes (Hachette/FaithWords)
10. **THE FAMILY OF JESUS**, by Karen Kingsbury (Howard Books)

## paperback

1. **GONE GIRL**, by Gillian Flynn (Broadway)
2. **THE BOYS IN THE BOAT**, by Daniel James Brown (Penguin)
3. **PRIVATE L.A.**, by James Patterson and Mark Sullivan (Grand Central)
4. **THE VALLEY OF AMAZEMENT**, by Amy Tan (Ecco)
5. **HEAVEN IS FOR REAL**, by Todd Burpo (Thomas Nelson)
6. **AND THE MOUNTAINS ECHOED**, by Khaled Hosseini (Riverhead)
7. **THE SIGNATURE OF ALL THINGS**, by Elizabeth Gilbert (Penguin)
8. **THE LONGEST RIDE**, by Nicholas Sparks (Grand Central)
9. **THE CUCKOO'S CALLING**, by Robert Galbraith (LB/Mulholland)
10. **HOW TO READ LITERATURE LIKE A PROFESSOR**, by Thomas C. Foster (Harper Perennial)