

WHAT ARE WE READING? MEMBER BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

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By Juliet Kleber

As the days grow shorter and colder, few things seem more appealing than hunkering down with a good book, so the *Gazette* caught up with a few Coop members to hear what they're reading. Taking a moment from their shopping or their shifts, members were gracious enough to share their thoughts and recommendations for the winter nights ahead.



David Hockney: A Rake's Progress by Christopher Simon Sykes, Nan A. Talese/Double-day, 2012

Christopher Simon Sykes's biography focuses on the beloved English artist's early life and work, from his birth in 1937, to 1975 when he completed the stage design for the Stravinsky opera from which the book takes its title. In addition to the overarching biography, Sykes gives detailed accounts of the conception and completion of a few particularly notable works, highlighting the artist's process and the context his life offers.

Waiting in line to enter the Coop, Danae Oratowski—a member for over twenty years—told the *Gazette*, "If you love David Hockney, this is a great way to find out how he thinks about things and how he approaches his paintings."



Parable of the Sower and *Parable of the Talents* by Octavia Butler, Grand Central, reprint 2019

Octavia Butler's works are some of the most treasured in contemporary science fiction. The Nebula Award-winning *Parable* novels are no exception—they have become genre classics since their releases in 1993 and 1998, respectively. Set in the 2020s, the books follow a “hyperempathetic” Black teenager’s coming of age in a dystopian United States ravaged by climate crisis, wealth inequality and capitalistic corruption. Butler is famously incisive on racism and injustice, and the duology has remained remarkably relevant—if not somewhat prescient.

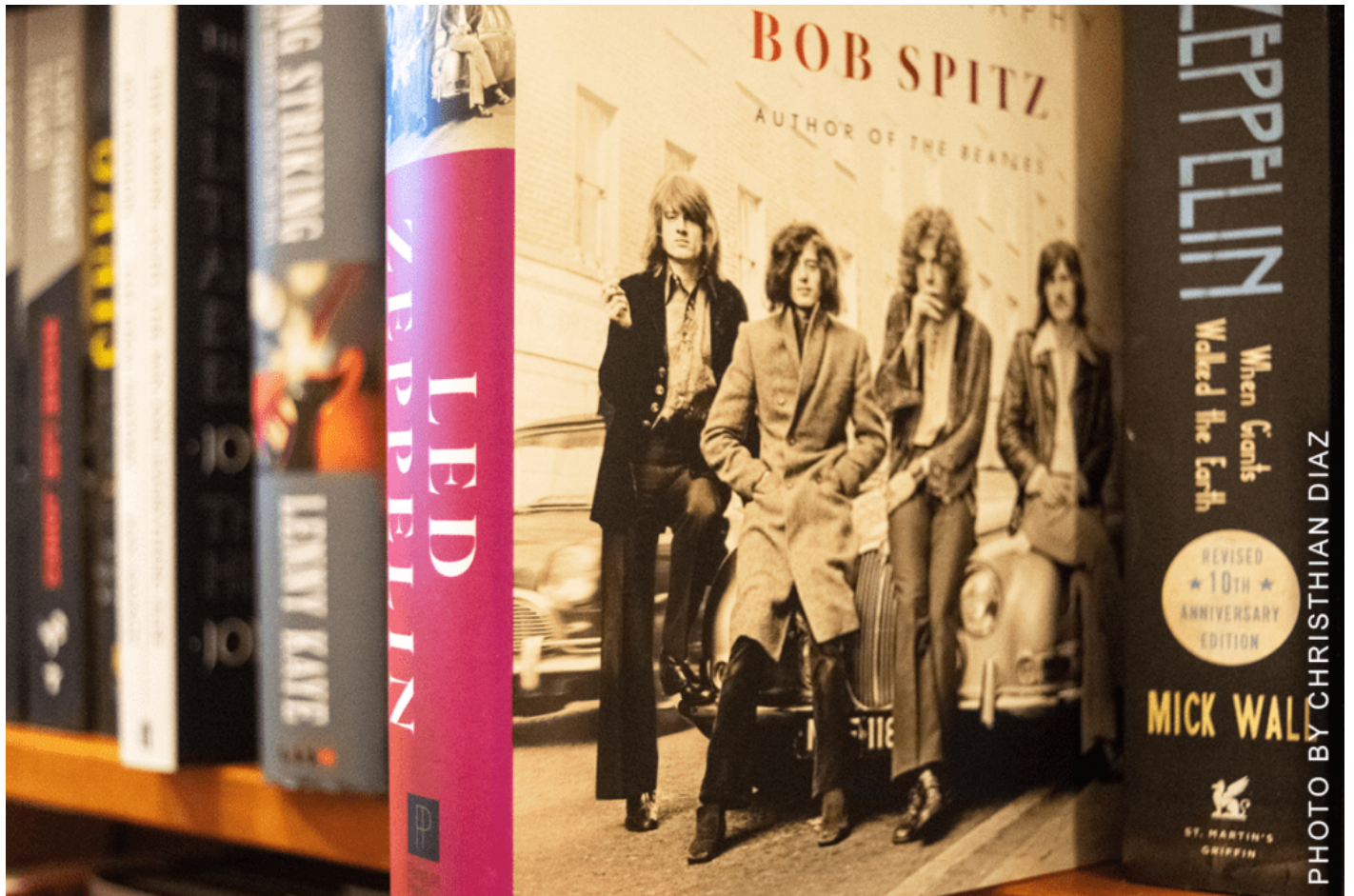
Coop member Chelsea Watson recently finished the duo and recommended them enthusiastically. When asked what she appreciated about the novels, she told the *Gazette*: “I like climate sci-fi stories because I work in climate change and imagining some responses to disaster is really helpful.”



Strangers to Ourselves: Unsettled Minds and the Stories That Make Us by Rachel Aviv, Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2022

Phillip Stafford, a Coop member since 2014, recommended this new release by *New Yorker* writer Rachel Aviv, an exploration of mental illness and how popular narratives about it affect our lives. Aviv uses her own personal experience as well as detailed and intimate retelling of others' struggles to construct a nuanced and compelling narrative of the state of mental health in our time. Using a mix of memoir and reporting, Aviv examines the currently accepted tenets of psychology and psychiatry, the infrastructure and industry that's been born of them, and their consequences for individuals.

According to Stafford, the book "shows how the stories and diagnoses we use to talk about mental health can be so destructive."



Led Zeppelin: The Biography by Bob Spitz, Penguin Press, 2021

Journalist and biographer Bob Spitz has written extensively on the classic rock legends of the 1960s and 1970s with books about Woodstock, Bob Dylan, and a 2005 bestseller on the Beatles. Last year's *Led Zeppelin* is a characteristically hefty (nearly 700 pages) and authoritative history of the British rock icons, from their early influences to their one-off reunions, with a thorough accounting of their often unsavory exploits in the intervening years. *The Washington Post* described Spitz's retelling as "admirably unsparing, without being egregiously harsh."

Yosef Brody, a Coop member since 2016, recently finished the biography and recommended it with the caveat that his reading experience was "enlightening and then ultimately very depressing."

In a slow moment on his walking shift, Brody also recommended the book he's currently reading:



How to Be a Dictator: The Cult of Personality in the Twentieth Century by Frank Dikötter, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019

Dutch historian Frank Dikötter makes the case for a kind of consistent performative style among modern dictators, a worthy subject for some post-midterm contemplation. Dikötter explores not only the histories and policies of figures like Hitler, Stalin, and Mao, but more specifically their use of language and image to manipulate public opinion.

“I just read about Mussolini and learned about how much of his regime was about performance art,” Brody told the *Gazette*. “He learned about D’Annunzio in Fiume, Italy, and you can see a direct line from D’Annunzio to Mussolini to Trump—they’re all doing the same thing, basically.”

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