



John Lennon Letters: A compendium of missives, postcards, autographs and lists helps to humanize the Beatle and make us miss the man

is a rock 'n' roll myth, and this handsome tome helps to humanize him. Davies, a Pulitzer Prize-winning Beatle biographer and Lennon biographer, has gathered 286 personal documents, most of which are reproduced in color. Some are typed—badly, with apologies—the majority are handwritten, and many are illustrated by comic doodles. Having studied under the tutelage of the late, great, and being an avowed disciple of *The Tonight Show's* surreal comic genius Spike Jones, Lennon infused nearly all of his correspondence with a manic creativity and a sense of humor. One can read the letters in their typed or photocopied versions by Davies, but it's more enjoyable to pore over the originals.

Granted, Lennon could be ornery (to correspondents he perceived as didactic), defensive (to critics of work by his wife, Yoko Ono), snarky (to relatives who brought up his parents), sententious (to anyone who asked about the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi) and, occasionally, downright nasty—especially in his letters to Paul McCartney that now read as scolded-out versions of celebrity Twitter posts. Nonetheless, he'd sign most notes “love” and a drawing, and always offer a little bit of himself.

Many of these documents are addressed to us whose letters he would apparently never pick out of massive piles of fan mail. His direct engagement with their questions shows a rare generosity of spirit. This is why it's heartbreaking to see Lennon's inscription on a copy of *The Catcher in the Rye* signed for his assassin just hours before he was shot by David Chapman. We all know how his sudden death was a terrible artistic loss, but this book makes it clear, more than ever, how lamentable it is that we lost the man. **MIKE DOHERTY**

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MACLEAN'S TOP 20 BOOKS OF 2012

Here are the books we really loved this year

NON-FICTION

LEONARDO AND THE LAST SUPPER *Ross King*

An enthralling take on the “subtle feints” and large gestures Leonardo da Vinci used to tell the Gospel story in his beloved fresco

SOLAR DANCE *Modris Eksteins*

How Vincent van Gogh—who died penniless and ignored in 1890—became the iconic painter of the 20th century says more about us than about him

JOSEPH ANTON *Salman Rushdie*

The author's account of his years in hiding is a dispiriting reminder of victories won by anti-free-speech violence

FROM THE RUINS OF EMPIRE *Pankaj Mishra*

In 1900, the West ruled most of the East, while in 2000, China and India were great powers; for Mishra, the real story of the last century is the resurrection of Asia

A GEOGRAPHY OF BLOOD *Candace Savage*

A scarifying tale about the bloody destruction of Western Canada's human and natural ecology in the latter 19th century and the way we still avert our eyes from it

WHEN I WAS A CHILD I READ BOOKS

Marilynne Robinson

Humane and unflinchingly civil essays marked by a high regard for the self as moral agent, and hence for every individual, by the eminent American writer

FLOATING GOLD *Christopher Kemp*

Everything about ambergris cries out for investigation by an obsessed scientist who can write well: Kemp delivers wonderfully

THE LIFESPAN OF A FACT *John D'Agata and Jim Fingal*

A faceoff between writer and fact checker produces both high comedy and thoughtful debate about the difference, if any, between “accuracy” and “truth”

WHY BE HAPPY WHEN YOU COULD BE NORMAL?

Jeanette Winterson

You've never met a mother quite like the one this celebrated novelist describes. Winterson's remarkable against-all-odds memoir will stay in your mind for a long time

BEHIND THE BEAUTIFUL FOREVERS: LIFE, DEATH, AND HOPE IN A MUMBAI UNDERCITY *Katherine Boo*

A widely acclaimed feat of reporting from a Pulitzer Prize-winning author

THE VICTORY LAB: THE SECRET SCIENCE OF WINNING CAMPAIGNS *Sasha Issenberg*

A fascinating look at how U.S. strategists, especially in Obama's campaign, used the latest social science research to make their efforts more effective

IRON CURTAIN: THE CRUSHING OF EASTERN EUROPE *Anne Applebaum*

The subjugation of tens of millions of Europeans is chronicled by the author of the bestselling *Gulag* with the same methodical determination

PHARMAGEDDON *David Healy*

Neuropharmacologist David Healy's expose of the pharmaceutical industry's control of modern medicine is a chilling, essential read

LET THE EASTERN BASTARDS FREEZE IN THE DARK

Mary Janigan

An entertaining history of Western alienation in Canada; more than ever, an important and little-understood driver of national politics

FICTION

DEAR LIFE: STORIES *Alice Munro*

It's Alice Munro. What else is there to say? A wonderful Christmas present from our internationally renowned literary star.

CARRY THE ONE *Carol Anshaw*

With wit and poetic insight, Anshaw traces the lives of intersecting characters united by a tragic car crash

GONE GIRL *Gillian Flynn*

Flynn's razor-sharp, enthralling tale of a wife gone AWOL kick-starts a new genre: marital thriller

LENIN'S KISSES *Yan Lianke*

Lianke channels Jonathan Swift and David Foster Wallace in this epic, poetic and grotesque satire of life in modern China

THE PURCHASE *Linda Spalding*

Winner of the 2012 Governor General's Literary Award for fiction; this is a stunning, beautifully written multi-generational novel about slavery and the human spirit

THE LAND OF DECORATION *Grace McClean*

This intimate debut novel about an imaginative 10-year-old can be harrowing to read, but in this book, McClean has pulled off a small miracle