

**T**hey are building their homes by headlight so that, come morning, the government can't tear them down. So begins the first story in Daniel Alarcón's polished and poetic *The King Is Always*

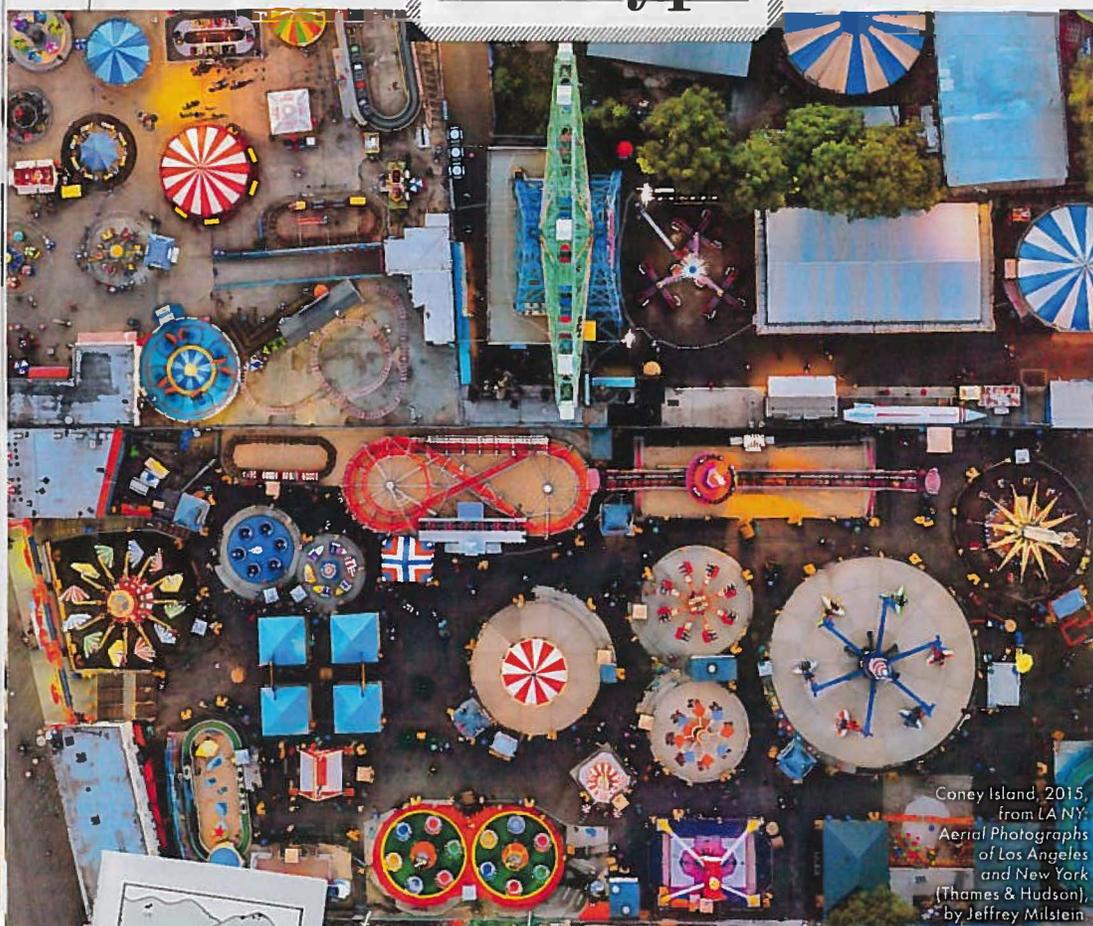
*Above the People* (Riverhead). While we are never told who "they" are in this modern fable of immigration and determination, the story sets the tone for the subsequent nine narratives in Alarcón's first collection in more than a decade. Here are the stories of a gang member's childhood, a South America in turmoil, a city consumed with politics, and the hardships that haunt the modern world.

Home is a slightly different sort of precarious in Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* (Harper): Cedar

Hawk Songmaker finds herself at the center of this startling story of speculative fiction in which pregnancy has been placed under the jurisdiction of the state. With a drop of *The Handmaid's Tale* and a drop of *The Children of Men*, Erdrich cooks up a reproductive-rights thriller all her own.

A flood of spare prose courses through Megan Hunter's debut novel, *The End We Start From* (Grove). The big ideas keep flowing through *The River of Consciousness* (Knopf), by the late **Oliver Sacks**. **Beverly Gray** bangs on the glass of nostalgia with *Seduced by Mrs. Robinson* (Algonquin). And **Jed Perl** hangs an intricate mobile of art, biography, and criticism in *Caldier* (Knopf). —SLOANE CROSLY

## Hot Type



Coney Island, 2015, from *LA NY: Aerial Photographs of Los Angeles and New York* (Thames & Hudson), by Jeffrey Milstein



## Letters Perfect

To call **Patrick Leigh Fermor** just a travel writer is like calling **Fred Astaire** just a tap dancer; the description says nothing about the talent. His best-known book, *A Time of Gifts*, an account of his trip by foot through Europe from 1933 to 1934, published in 1977, glitters with acuity and wit. No wonder his letters are such gems to read, and in *Patrick Leigh Fermor: A Life in Letters* (New York Review Books), editor **Adam Sisman** does justice to a man who, right up until he died, at 96 in 2011, spun literature from his own adventurous life. —**JIM KELLY**

Improvement • **Joan Silber**

HEATHER, THE TOTALITY **MATTHEW WEINER**

DAVID HALLBERG *A BODY OF WORK*

LOUISE ERDRICH

### IN SHORT

**Alex Hammond** and **Mike Tinney's** *The Secret Life of the Pencil* (Laurence King) is the No. 1 book about the No. 2. **Alan Bennett** elicits literary laughs in *Keeping On Keeping On* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux). **Alec Baldwin** and **V.F. contributing editor Kurt Andersen** pay taunting tribute to Trump with *You Can't Spell America Without Me* (Penguin Press). **Charles Bukowski** brews a storm for the living and the dead (Ecco). Latin-American legend **Eduardo Galeano** is a Hunter of Stories (Nation Books). **Will Friedwald** croons for *The Great Jazz and Pop Vocal Albums* (Pantheon). **Henry Louis Gates Jr.** revisits 100 Amazing Facts About the Negro (Pantheon). **Lawrence O'Donnell** catches politicians *Playing with Fire* (Penguin Press). **Joshua Greene** uncovers *The Essential Marilyn Monroe* (ACC Editions). **Franklin D. Roosevelt** (Viking) wheels and deals in **Robert Dallek's** biography. A monarch gets meddlesome in **Deborah Cadbury's** *Queen Victoria's Matchmaking* (PublicAffairs). **Reza Aslan** delves into divinity in *God* (Random House). **David Hallberg** is en pointe with *A Body of Work* (Touchstone). **Nicholas Hytner** pulls back the curtain in *Balancing Acts* (Knopf). **Gregory Maguire** squeezes the Nutcracker in *Hiddensee* (Morrow). **Jefferson Morley** eyes an agency spy in *The Ghost* (St. Martin's). Activism is far from static in **Bill McKibben's** *Radio Free Vermont* (Blue Rider). Photographer **Jack Pierson** (Damiani) pictures 1980s America. **John Banville** paints a portrait of *Mrs. Osmond* (Knopf). Madness ensues in **Matthew Weiner's** *Heather, the Totality* (Little, Brown). **Juli Berwald** inspects invertebrates in *Spineless* (Riverhead). There's always room for **Joan Silber's** *Improvement* (Counterpoint) —**S.C.**

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