

bookshelf

# What men want

BY MARION WINIK  
Special to Newsday

Like a contemporary Jane Austen, Adelle Waldman unpacks every nuance of modern mating mores in her debut novel, **"The Love Affairs of Nathaniel P."** (Henry Holt, \$25). The setting is literary Brooklyn, and her protagonist is Nate Piven, whose think-pieces for highbrow magazines and six-figure book contract make him a fellow to watch on the scene. These credentials, along with the crimson T-shirt peeking out of his unbuttoned Oxford to reveal the A-R-V of Harvard, are finally getting him some chicks.



PHOTO BY LOU ROUSE

Each girl Nate encounters is evaluated in terms of literary accomplishments and hotness, the latter being far more important. Greer, for example, has a forthcoming book that is "partly a memoir about my teenage misadventures but also sort of an art book with photos and drawings and song lyrics." Fortunately, her breasts are "his favorite size, just big enough to fill a wineglass [a red one]." Hannah, on the other hand, is a "thin, pert-breasted writer" who makes smart conversation. But Nate's friend Jason would certainly rate her no higher than a 7.

Nate has come to understand that no matter how career-oriented the women around him once were, in their 30s they care about little but relationships. Their idea of heaven is fooling around in the kitchen with a loving boyfriend "while the two of them chop vegetables and sip wine and listen to NPR." Unfortunately, Nate's dream dinner would consist of "a Celeste Pizza for One and a copy of Lermontov's 'A Hero of Our Time.'" But if he wants to keep getting girls, he's going to have to keep that misogyny and reclusiveness under control — will he be able to make the wretched compromise?

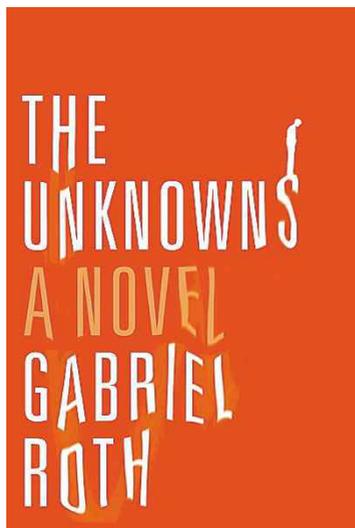
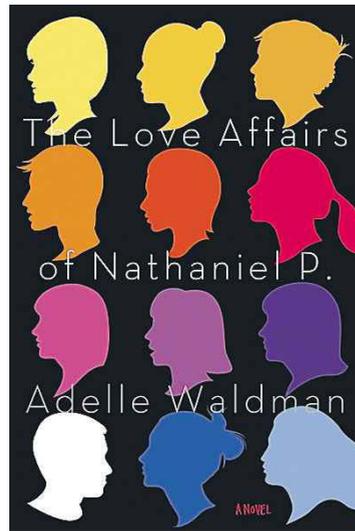


PHOTO BY MELISSA STEWART

Bravo to Adelle Waldman for getting inside the psyche of Homo erectus literaticus, and for not making it as easy as it should be to hate him. "The Love Affairs of Nathaniel P." is good, evil fun.

Mating behavior in literary Brooklyn and Silicon Valley

Gabriel Roth's debut, **"The Unknowns"** (Reagan Arthur Books/Little, Brown, \$25) introduces to us another thoroughly modern male seeker of love, subtype Homo erectus nerdicus. Supergeek

Eric Mueller has been a socially awkward loser with women all his life, never more so than at the moment in high school when his research notes tracking the behavior of the girls in his class fell into the hands of — oy vey — the girls

in his class. "Here we go," one Michelle Kessel read aloud, having located the entry on herself. "Likes to be in charge. Doesn't laugh much. Lots of makeup. Popular. User."

These days, however, Eric is a Silicon Valley millionaire whose algorithm for predicting consumer behavior has dramatically improved his social status. "People say *It's all about self-confidence*, but they don't say why, and for a long time I rejected this truism," he reflects. Now, he gets it. "The answer is that sexual selection is distorted by information asymmetry. The first time she sees you, she doesn't know if you're a potent, generous alpha male or a guy who spends all day getting into edit wars on Wikipedia. But you know, and the self-valuation you display is her best clue." With his self-valuation at an all-time high, he can shoot for women like Maya, a journalist whose loveliness is in the 98th percentile.

He assiduously applies scientific methods to his wooing of Maya, and at first things go so swimmingly that he has to take a bathroom break to pause in amazement: "How



did I learn to do this, and will I be able to sustain it when I get back to the table? At any moment the waiter will bring my plate of medium-rare steak

strips with onions and potatoes. This infusion of protein and salt is exactly what my body wants; how thoughtful, how prescient of my past self to arrange it!"

However, neither his past self nor his present one can do a thing about the leftfield plot twist that's next on the menu. As in the days of his notebook, Eric can't stop collecting data about Maya until she reveals a history of sexual abuse by her father. Though he doesn't know much about the recovered memory debate, he can't live with the possibility that her story is false, and goes behind her back to investigate. From there, the book wraps up rather quickly and somewhat less satisfyingly than it seemed to promise at first.

I wanted better for Eric.

## bestsellers

Publishers Weekly's list of national bestsellers powered by Nielsen BookScan for the week ending July 14.

### hardcover

#### FICTION

1. **INFERNO**, by Dan Brown (Doubleday)
2. **HIDDEN ORDER**, by Brad Thor (Atria)
3. **BOMBHELL**, by Catherine Coulter (Putnam)
4. **SECOND HONEYMOON**, by James Patterson and Howard Roughan (Little, Brown)
5. **AND THE MOUNTAINS ECHOED**, by Khaled Hosseini (Riverhead)
6. **THE OCEAN AT THE END OF THE LANE**, by Neil Gaiman (William Morrow)
7. **THE HEIST**, by Janet Evanovich and Lee Goldberg (Bantam)
8. **BAD MONKEY**, by Carl Hiaasen (Knopf)
9. **THE SILVER STAR**, by Jeannette Walls (Scribner)
10. **BEAUTIFUL DAY**, by Elin Hilderbrand (Little, Brown)

#### NONFICTION

1. **HAPPY, HAPPY, HAPPY**, by Phil Robertson (Howard Books)
2. **LEAN IN**, by Sheryl Sandberg (Knopf)
3. **THE DUCK COMMANDER FAMILY**, by Willie and Korie Robertson (Howard Books)
4. **AMERICAN GUN**, by Chris Kyle (William Morrow)
5. **LET'S EXPLORE DIABETES WITH OWLS**, by David Sedaris (Little, Brown)
6. **LIFE CODE**, by Dr. Phil McGraw (Bird Street Books)
7. **UNBREAKABLE**, by Jenni Rivera (Atria)
8. **I WEAR THE BLACK HAT**, by Chuck Klosterman (Scribner)
9. **DAD IS FAT**, by Jim Gaffigan (Crown Archetype)
10. **THE 100**, by Jorge Cruise (William Morrow)

### paperback

1. **PROOF OF HEAVEN**, by Eben Alexander (Simon & Schuster)
2. **JOYLAND**, by Stephen King (Hard Case Crime)
3. **ENTWINED WITH YOU**, by Sylvia Day (Berkley)
4. **BEAUTIFUL RUINS**, by Jess Walter (Harper Perennial)
5. **NYPD RED**, by James Patterson and Marshall Karp (Grand Central)
6. **INQUEBRANTABLE**, by Jenni Rivera (Atria)
7. **INNER HARBOR**, by Nora Roberts (Berkley)
8. **UNDER THE DOME**, by Stephen King (Gallery Books)
9. **FLIGHT BEHAVIOR**, by Barbara Kingsolver (Harper Perennial)
10. **WORLD WAR Z**, by Max Brooks (Broadway Books)