



"I can't pretend to keep up with new books—I don't even try—but this year a few leapt off my desk and refused to be put down. Gabrielle Bell's graphic memoir [The Voyeurs](#) got me through a sad rainy Thursday evening as if I'd just made a friend. Karl Ove Knausgaard is the Proust of the Walkman generation; the first volume of his magnum opus, [My Struggle](#), kept me up late for a week and remains the best novel I read all year. Maureen McLane's [My Poets](#) was the continuing ed. class I needed in poetry but never expected to love. Everything I know about gospel music I've learned from Anthony Heilbut's compilations and writings; thanks to his crazy compendium [The Fan Who Knew Too Much](#), he has now, also, taught me everything I know about radio soap operas, Aretha Franklin, and homosexuality in the black church. All by itself, David Foster Wallace's essay on David Markson makes [Both Flesh and Not](#) the best book ever written on David Foster Wallace (plus, it's written by David Foster Wallace), and Masha Gessen's [The Man Without a Face: The Unlikely Rise of Vladimir Putin](#) is the darkest, bravest, and *wittiest* biography I read this year. Finally there was John Jeremiah Sullivan's [Pulphead](#). I knew all the essays already, but reading them all in one place was so much fun I've done it a few more times since then." —Our editor Lorin Stein, from Yahoo News' "[Holiday Gift Guide: What do you give a book lover?](#)"

Image Credit Marion Williams and Anthony Heilbut, 1992. (David Gahr, courtesy Anthony Heilbut)

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