

2024 Book List

SO IT GOES INTO YEAR 3 to make my way into another 12 months of reading. This time, I read just as many pages as last year (perhaps a tad more), but fewer total books. I do say that reading has proven to be more challenging when faced with the reality of a full time career, friendships, physical exercise, etc. One must be mindful to continue advancing in all of these spheres without exploding. This year, too, another key moment of change: moving to Manhattan once again.

1. [The Price of Salt](#), Patricia Highsmith (292 pages)
2. [The White Tiger](#), Aravind Adiga (318 pages)
3. [Bankers in the Ivory Tower: The Troubling Rise of Financiers in US Higher Education](#), Charlie Eaton (232 pages)
4. [Babel: Or the Necessity of Violence: An Arcane History of the Oxford Translators' Revolution](#), R. F. Kuang (545 pages)
5. [Mountolive \(The Alexandria Quarter #3\)](#), Lawrence Durrell (320 pages)
6. [Cutting for Stone](#), Abraham Verghese (658 pages)
7. [The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo](#), Taylor Jenkins Reid (400 pages)
8. [Co-Intelligence: Living and Working with AI](#), Ethan Mollick (256 pages)
9. [The Wings of the Dove](#), Henry James (780 pages)
10. [The Monk](#), Matthew Lewis (400 pages)

Some quick facts: I read 4,201 pages this year, or the equivalent of about 11 pages a day in a 365-day calendar year. The oldest book I read was written in 1796, the latest was written in 2024.

What will 2025 bring for me, literary wise? I truly enjoyed Gothic fiction and will consider that a possibility.

Take care,
M.

#1. *The Price of Salt*, Patricia Highsmith (1952)¹

SUMMARY

Gifted to me through a book exchange the month prior, "The Price of Salt" offered a window into a literary space I might not have explored otherwise. It is a poignant exploration into identity and the cost of defying societal norms. Through Therese and Carol, Highsmith crafts a narrative of non-conformity in 1950s America, a time when stepping outside the bounds of societal expectations came with significant risk (although, has much changed since then?). The melancholy of Therese resonated deeply with me, evoking a reflection on my own experiences, especially as the novel's New York setting mirrored the familiar yet isolating cityscape of my early 20s.

PASSAGES, VOCABULARY, RANDOM THOUGHTS

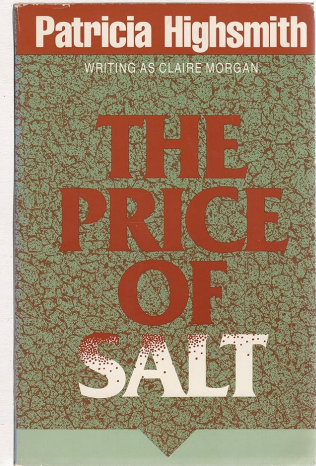
"And the loneliness, augmented by the fact one saw within the store the same faces day after day, the few faces one might have spoken to and never did, or never could. Not like the face on the passing bus that seems to speak, that is seen once and at least is gone forever." (3) This is such an apt description of the many faces we see in corporate America, and how we say hello but it's all surface level. Strangers forced to continue the carousel of platitudes...

"They're not horrid. One's just supposed to conform. I know what they'd like, they'd like a blank they could fill in. A person already filled in disturbs them terribly. Shall we play some music? Don't you ever like the radio?" (111) Carol asks this to Therese, in speaking about her soon-to-be ex-husband's family and how they did not accept her.

Lilliputian (adj); trivial or very small. [185] This is how Therese felt her hand looked like when holding it out near the precipice that led to an abandoned mining town. She and Carol were exploring Colorado, hunted by a detective hired by Carol's soon to be ex

"The Price of Salt," a novel by Patricia Highsmith, later republished as "Carol," is believed to be influenced by this biblical verse

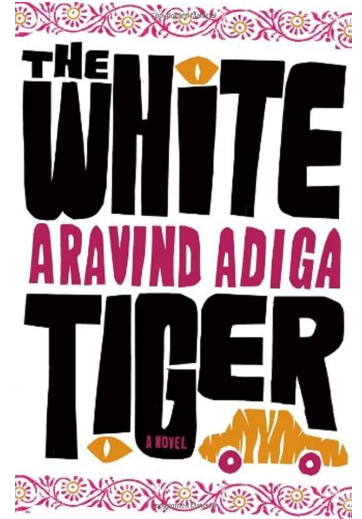
¹ Finished on January 15 on the Metronorth after taking measurements of the new apartment in Manhattan.



from Matthew 5:13. The title metaphorically reflects the theme of the novel, which explores the cost of authenticity and the risks associated with deviating from societal norms. In the context of the novel, the "salt" can be seen as a symbol of the intrinsic value and distinctiveness of the main characters, particularly in their non-conformity to the heterosexual norms of the 1950s. The "price" then refers to what they must pay for living true to themselves in a society that is not accepting of their love. This mirrors the biblical message about the value of maintaining one's true essence or 'saltiness' despite external pressures or challenges.

#2. *The White Tiger*, Aravind Adiga (2008)²

² Finished on February 7, at my dining room table.



SUMMARY

This book came recommended by my friend Meeraj, a well-read former colleague whose insights into literature always challenge me to see beyond my usual scope. *The White Tiger* is an exploration of class warfare set against the backdrop of India, which is a context many Western readers may find unfamiliar yet uncomfortably resonant. Balram's journey from a "half-baked" villager to a ruthless entrepreneur exposes the stark realities of systemic inequality and the compromises one makes to rise. I know I have felt this myself with the success I have found in spite of the socioeconomic background (and even an analogy of 'caste' given my history with DACA) I have. The novel forces us to reconsider the morality of success: how do we, in the West, celebrate stories of self-made wealth while ignoring the countless people trampled along the way? Balram's murder of his employer is shocking, yes, but it is no more morally complex than the quieter, insidious violence embedded in corporate hierarchies elsewhere. Balram embodies unapologetic opportunism and embraces education in its many forms, traits often necessary to succeed anywhere.

PASSAGES, VOCABULARY, RANDOM THOUGHTS

"Me, and thousands of others in this country like me, are half-baked, because we were never allowed to complete our schooling. Open our skulls, look in with a penlight, and you'll find an odd museum of ideas: sentences of history or mathematics remembered from school textbooks. . . all these ideas, half formed and half digested and half correct, mix up with other half-cooked ideas in your head, and I guess these half-formed ideas bugger one another and make more half-formed ideas, and this is what you act on and live with" [8] This is in describing his upbringing and how a "half-baked fellow" is produced. It's a wonderful description of how education plays vitally in a person's life, and how there is an education in half which completes itself with habitual components for the rest of their lives.

“Go to a tea shop anywhere along the Ganga, sir, and look at the men working in that tea shop—men, I say, but better to call them human spiders that go crawling in between and under the tables with rags in their hands, crushed humans in crushed uniforms, sluggish, unshaven, in their thirties or forties or fifties but still “boys.” But that is your fate if you do your job well—with honesty, dedication, and sincerity, the way Gandhi would have done it, no doubt. I did my job with near total dishonesty, lack of dedication, and insincerity—and so the tea shop was a profoundly enriching experience. Instead of wiping out spots from tables and crushing coals for the oven, I used my time at the tea shop in Laxmangarh to spy on every customer at every table, and overhear everything they said. I decided that this was how I would keep my education going forward—that’s the one good thing I’ll say for myself. I’ve always been a big believer in education—especially my own.” [45] The above is in describing how he took it upon himself to be educated even after he was pulled out of school to work for a tea shop in Laxmangarh. He moved with his brother and cousin to Dhanbad after his brother was married off; this gave him a fresh start in tea shops where he continued overhearing strangers. I enjoy the narrative of doing his job with total dishonesty, which I take it to mean that he had ulterior motives every day in order to leave that place eventually. In other words, he actively sought change and did not wait for it to come to him. Of course, my view on this is most definitely defined by my own experiences in doing similarly and can be questionable at best. I have, too, held positions and done things which show a lack of dedication or high degrees of insincerity, thus creating enriching experiences. If anything, they were edifying for my future.

It was at this tea shop, overhearing strangers, that our dear Munna (who also went by Balram, and then Ashok) hears about people getting a car and becoming drivers. He begs people to teach him how to drive, but no one would do it for free. It would cost him 300 rupees to get taught, and that was a huge sum of money for him in those days. It was not until his grandmother agreed to pay for the lessons, by promising he would send every rupee he made back to her as payment. So he learned how to drive and learned how to fix cars, and then he begged for a job,

eventually finding one of the houses that belonged to a landlord he had crossed paths with back in Laxmangarh. As luck would have it, his son had just returned from America and needed a driver. Familiarity from being from the same village gave him an in. [40 or so]

I appreciated the sheer opportunistic tendency of Balram, especially given that it could have easily backfired on him. Perhaps not that extreme, but it could have gone nowhere and left him in the same situation as he was previously. It also betrays how small tokens of appreciation, such as the grandmother's gift to him, can be taken and turned into something disproportionately positive. This raises the question: what is the correct form of gratitude? One that reflects itself based on the magnitude of success or of the same proportion as it was given? Any at all? Why do people often show generosity if not in hoping to be repaid in kind later on? Selflessness as a virtue yet can also as a source of apprehension.

"Iqbal, has written this remarkable poem in which he imagines that he is the Devil, standing up for his rights at a moment when God tries to bully him. The Devil was once God's sidekick until he fought with Him and went freelance, and ever since, there has been a war of brains between God and the Devil" [73]; this poem, or this topic, comes up again towards the end. "I won't be saying anything new if I say that the history of the world is the history of a ten-thousand-year war of brains between the rich and the poor. Each side is eternally trying to hoodwink the other side: and it has been this way since the start of time. The poor win a few battles but of course the rich have won the war for ten thousand years. That's why, one day, some wise men, out of compassion for the poor, left them signs and symbols in poems.. when understood correctly spill out secrets that allow the poorest man on each to conclude the ten-thousand-year-old brain-war on terms favorable to himself." He then proceeds to take the mantra "You were looking for the key for years but the door was always open". [217] I think the book has the final words on this topic so not much more to be said from my end. One observation is that this struggle is more poignant now in 2024 than in 2009, except that the exposure from the internet makes it more glaring.

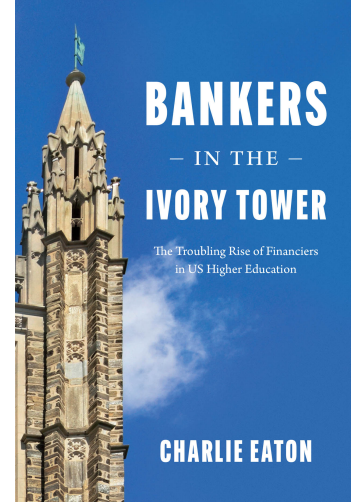
#3. *Bankers in the Ivory Tower: The Troubling Rise of Financiers in US Higher Education*, Charlie Eaton (2022)³

SUMMARY

This book touches on a topic deeply connected to my own aspirations and reflections. For over three years, I've entertained the idea of becoming a university administrator, perhaps even a university president, as a way to combine my business acumen and passion for creating opportunities within an institution whose mission I deeply believe in. Yet, Eaton's exploration of the financial entanglements of higher education pulls back the curtain on the complexities of this ideal to which I had the most basic understanding of. Universities, faced with growing pressures, often turn to private equity and other financial entities to sustain themselves, transforming education from a public good into a commodified product. This strikes at the heart of what education should be: the cultivation of whole, critically thinking individuals, not just degrees tied to economic utility.

Is it possible for administrators to resist these forces without jeopardizing the institution's survival? Or must they adapt and redefine the university's role in society to meet these new paradigms? I was drawn to the ceremonial and transformative aspects of university leadership, envisioning ways to recreate the opportunities that shaped my own journey as a DACA recipient. But the book did a good job at reminding me that the path forward is full of moral and practical ambiguities.

³ Finished on April 14 on a flight from West Palm Beach to NYC.



#4. *Babel: Or the Necessity of Violence: An Arcane History of the Oxford Translators' Revolution*, R. F. Kuang (2022)⁴

⁴ Finished on June 4
on my couch at home.

SUMMARY

Recommended to me by my friend Jeffrey, a fellow lover of literature and constant encourager of my own writing, *Babel* engrossed me in the moral contradictions inherent in systems of privilege. Set against the backdrop of a fictionalized 19th-century Oxford, the novel follows Robin Swift as he navigates his place within Babel, a magical institution built on the labor and exploitation of colonial subjects like himself. The story forces readers to confront the ways in which personal advancement is often tied to complicity, a theme I found particularly resonant given my own reflections on the institutions I've benefited from.

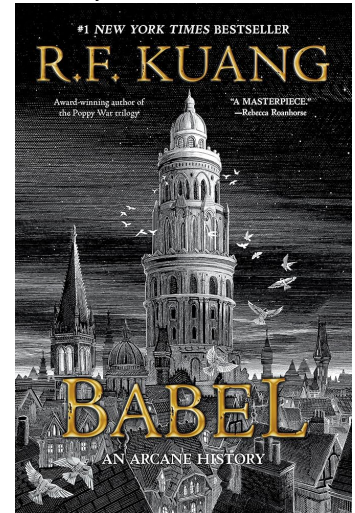
What struck me most about *Babel* were its layered depictions of intimate and institutional relationships. Robin's bond with his peers are built on shared struggles yet layered with unspoken divides. Meanwhile, his quiet rebellion against Babel's injustices, even as he excelled within its walls, captured the tension between survival and integrity.

PASSAGES, VOCABULARY, RANDOM THOUGHTS

"It had not registered until now that he would not step foot on his native shore again for many years, if ever. He wasn't sure what to make of this fact. The word loss was inadequate. Loss just meant a lack, meant something was missing, but it did not encompass the totality of this severance, this terrifying unanchoring from all that he'd ever known." [15] This passage is on Robin leaving Canton with the Professor and Mrs. Piper.

"He felt less uprooted and bewildered now - he had a purpose, he had a place, and even though he still count quite fathom why this life had fallen to him, of all the dock boys in Canton, he took to his duties with determined, uncomplaining diligence." [26] Robin's feelings regarding his structured days learning Greek and Latin, and how he still didn't know why it was he who was doing it. What made him special?

"A lie was not a life if it was never uttered; questions that



were never asked did not need answers. They would both remain perfectly content to linger in the liminal, endless space between truth and denial." [30] In contemplating a comment by a visitor (Hayward) who said to look at his eyes, similar to Lovell's. Robin wonders if he is Lovell's son, but will not push the matter.

"Why had they refused to see the myriad ways they could hurt each other? Why had they not paused to interrogate their differences in birth, in raising, that meant they were not and could never be on the same side? But the answer was obvious - that they were all four of them drowning in the unfamiliar, and they saw in each other a raft, and clinging to one another was the only way to stay afloat." [88] In Robin looking back at the first lunch he shared with Victoire, Letty, and Ramy, full of laughs, and how "in love" they felt as a group. The community feelint from having a shared experience. How long does this last? Perhaps as long as the experience, perhaps more.

"Robin realized what his place here was. He was not simply a student but a colleague, a rare native speaker capable of expanding the bounds of Babel's scant existing knowledge." [111] This is how it felt like being in a PhD program. I look back fondly of my days of being able to ask questions and not really be judged for it. Of course, low income gets tiring. I wonder if I would have stayed had I been paid more. Or maybe not - I enjoyed the administrative side a lot. I don't think I'm effective as a researcher.

"He's here because he wants the prestige and connections, only he's not half charming enough to acquire them. He's got the personality of a wet towel: damp, and he clings". [127] Letty's description of a man she was talking to. Thought it was a good example of her acerbic (sharp) wit.

"But he stopped himself before he opened his mouth. Not because he was afraid of breaking Griffin's confidence, but because he could not bear how this confession would shatter the life they'd built for them-selves. And because he himself could not resolve the contradiction of his willingness to thrive at Babel even as it became clearer, day by day, how obviously unjust were the foundations of its fortunes. The only way he could justify his happiness here, to keep dancing on the edges of two worlds, was to continue awaiting Griffin's correspondence at night - a

hidden, silent rebellion whose main purpose was to assuage his guilt over the fact that all this gold and glitter had to come at a cost." [132] This is him thinking about his involvement with the Hermes society while enjoying the education at Babel - this form is silent rebellion to assuage an inner guilt. I have struggled with this many times in as I see the institutions I am a part of are not morally correct in how they are, but recognizing that I am what I am today because of their privilege bestowed on me.

"'Because you're a good translator.' Ramy leaned back on his elbows. 'That's just what translation is, I think. That's all speaking is. Listening to the other and trying to see past your own biases to glimpse what they're trying to say. Showing yourself to the world, and hoping someone else understands.'" [535] The final long thought Robin has before the tower crumbles all around him. What an apt description, and such a different one from the "translation is distortion" or "translation is always dishonest."

#5. *Mountolive*, Lawrence Durrell (1958)⁵

SUMMARY

Gifted to me by my grandfather*, *Mountolive* came with his strong recommendation to read the entire Alexandria Quartet, though he emphasized this installment as the most holistic of the series. *Mountolive*'s journey through Egypt, his ascension in diplomatic stature, and his grappling with love, power, and isolation resonated deeply with me. In another world, I might have pursued a similar path. Yet the opportunities for such a life seem tethered to a bygone era or limited by the circumstances of one's birth. My birth certainly precluded me from this.

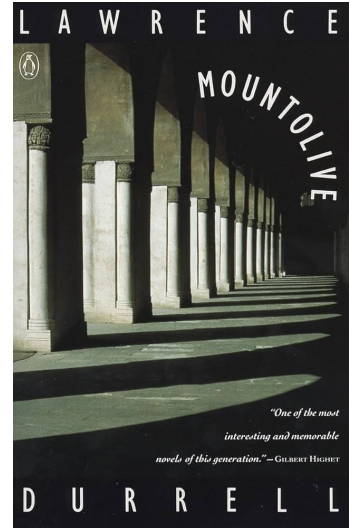
PASSAGES, VOCABULARY, RANDOM THOUGHTS

"*Mountolive* sighed and stared down into the brown water, chin on his hands. He was unused to feeling so happy. Youth is the age of despairs." [12] This is, I think, an excellent introduction to this character, and a memorable observation about life in a general sense. Definitely relatable. Here, we see the main character come into the picture on a boat, with Egypt coming into view on the horizon.

"It was unpleasant to be forced to grow. It was thrilling to grow. He gravitated between fear and grotesque elation." [28] *Mountolive*'s introspection surrounding the way that Leila had forced him to face the entail of his own personality. In other words, she had brought about a maturity to look inwardly and grow with how he dealt with his emotions. He had to sort them and could not escape, a classic turn for a youth.

She wanted his image of her to remain sharply in focus, and stainless; for she alone recognized that this parting was the pattern, a sample so to speak, of a parting far more definitive and final, a parting which, if their communication was to remain only through the medium of words and power, might altogether lose her *Mountolive*. You cannot write more than a dozen love letters without finding yourself graveled for fresh matter. The richest of human experience is also the most limited in its range of expression. Words kill love as they kill anything else. [47]

⁵ Finished on July
28 in Union Square.



I love this expression, and the metaphors Durrell uses have such a felicity of conveyed emotion.

"She looked at him curiously, almost angrily, for she could read no pleasure, no self-congratulation in his sober expression. Even good fortune could not pierce that carefully formulated reserve. 'Well,' he said slowly, for he was still swaddled by his own amazement, the voluptuous dream of an unmerited success. 'We shall see.'"[73] Mountolive receives a letter that he is being considered for both a knighthood and an important diplomatic assignment, highlighting his rising stature and the recognition of his service and abilities within the British government. He receives this news with passivity and thinks about what this might mean for himself now, instead of rejoicing as one would expect.

"Stirring vaguely in his subconscious Mountolive felt once more the intimations of power now available to him—a power to take decisions in factors like these which had hitherto been left to fate, or the haphazard dictation of mediating wills; factors which had been unworth the resentments and doubts which their summary resolution by an act of thought would have bred. But if he was ever to claim the world of action as his true inheritance he must begin somewhere. A Head of Mission had the right to propose and sponsor the staff of his choice." [92] On his discussion with Kenilworth who had suggested to remove Pursewarden from David's office in Cairo. David expresses how power allows him to feel differently over matter which before he had no power over.

"She was smiling now with the same smile—designed to cement space and time, and to anneal the loneliness which beset her while he was away." [95] This is in describing his mother once David goes to his home in Dewford Mallows. Something about this line makes me think of folks who become bereft of their own lives and wait for something to happen to them, either by choice or happenstance.

#6. *Cutting for Stone*, Abraham Verghese (2009)⁶

SUMMARY

I stumbled upon this book by chance, drawn in by its cover art and intriguing title. What followed was an intensely moving reading experience, one that resonated deeply with me on both personal and emotional levels. It's rare for a book to bring me to tears, but this one did, particularly in the moments surrounding Ghosh's death, which redefined the word 'loss' for Marion and for me as a reader.

What struck me most about *Cutting for Stone* was its ability to intertwine personal and universal struggles so seamlessly. Marion's journey from a tumultuous childhood to a life as a doctor in America mirrors the immigrant experience in all its pain and possibility. This is a story about finding purpose and connection in a world often defined by separation, and it will stay with me for a long time.

PASSAGES, VOCABULARY, RANDOM THOUGHTS

"When you win, you often lose, that's just a fact." [130] This is Hema reflecting on what being responsible for the two motherless children meant for her now.

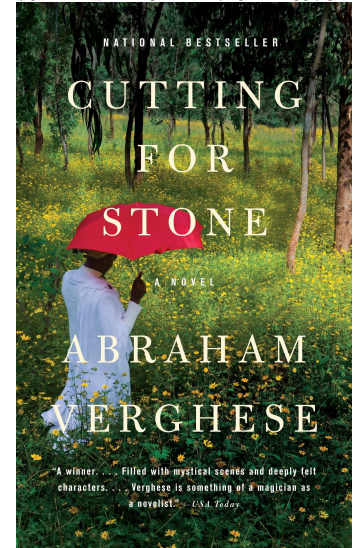
"And finally, reluctantly, almost as an afterthought, but because you cannot escape your destiny, and so that he wouldn't walk away scot-free, she added our surname, the name of the man who had left the room: Stone." [131]

"Her teeth were strong and even. A rim of upper gum showed her he laughed. She was self-conscious about this because she brought her hand to her mouth. Something inside him melted at the sound of her happy laughter, and for the first time since waking that morning, he felt almost normal." [151]

"Now and then Ghosh would grin and wink at me across the room. He was teaching me how to die, just as he'd taught me how to live." [424]

"He opened his eyes once, startled. He looked at Hema, then at us. He smiled and closed his eyes. I like to think in that last gaze he saw a tableau of his family, his real flesh and blood, because

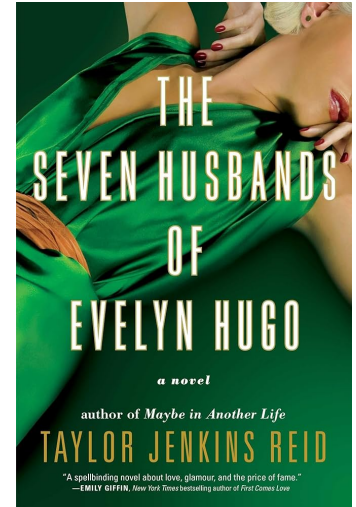
⁶ Finished on September 2 on the couch.



our blood was now in his veins. I like to think in seeing us he felt his highest purpose being served. . . With Ghosh's death came a new understanding of the word "loss". I'd lost my birth mother and father, lost the General, lost Zemui, lost Rosina. But I only knew real loss when I lost Ghosh." [438] I can't remember the last time a book made me cry. Have they ever? This one did.

"That's the funny thing about America- the blessed thing. As many people as there are to hold you back, there are angels whose humanity makes up for all the others. I've had my share of angels." [495] This is Deepak Jesudass telling Marion about his past.

This book touched me in so many ways. The humble circumstances of their birth, the unusually young sexual experiences, the growing up in a poor environment, the unrequited love of a girl at an early age, political instability and violence, coming to America and taking advantage of the opportunities therein to become a "doctor", the throwing your life at perfecting a skill or books or career, the estranged father who disappears at an early age, the coming of age at 12 years old (with Ghosh's imprisonment). This is the first book that has ever made me cry at my ripe 28 years.

#7. *The 7 Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*, Taylor Jenkins Reid (2017)⁷⁷ Finished on September 5 whilst drinking coffee at Handcraft.

SUMMARY

This book was gifted to me by my partner after she thoroughly enjoyed it, and I'm glad she did. Dazzling highs and cavernous lows from Hollywood's golden age are weaved in sharp commentary on ambition, identity, and power. I found the writing crisp and accessible, yet full of punch, making it impossible to put down. Evelyn's unapologetic determination and the choices she makes to survive and thrive—leaving her abusive home, navigating toxic relationships, and taking bold steps to carve her path—resonated deeply with me. Her ability to "take things" instead of waiting reminded me of moments in my own life when I've had to make difficult but necessary decisions to move forward.

PASSAGES, VOCABULARY, RANDOM THOUGHTS

"But I'm pretty sure that's simply hindsight bias. I'm seeing what I want to see, based on how i know it all turns out." [21]

"Isn't that the definition of power? Watching people kill the selves over something that means nothing to you?" [28]

"But I've since come to understand that it wasn't Ernie's fault. None of it was Ernie's fault. I'd told him I was someone else. And then I started getting angry that he couldn't see who I really was." [47]

This is my recap of Ernie Diaz: Evelyn uses Hugo to leave her abusive household with her father and Hell's Kitchen. In Hollywood, she knows what she wants, says it, makes sure others know it, and then does bold things to get them. She embodies my idea of "taking things" instead of waiting. Of course, leaving Ernie once she had a path forward was natural. She did what she had to do to get herself out of a bad situation, and then got out of that marriage once it was safe to do so. A little close to home to my own life.

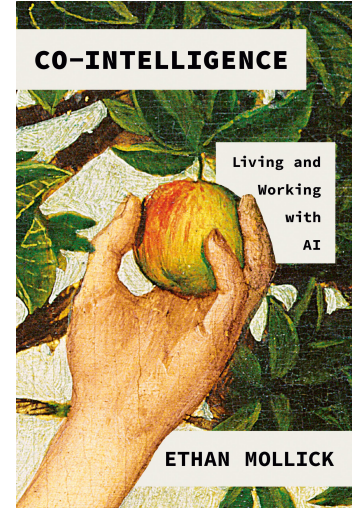
Confession: I didn't write a single thing down after the first husband because the remainder of this book was a whirlwind.

#8. *Co-Intelligence: Living and Working with AI*, Ethan Mollick (2024)⁸

⁸ Finished on November 20, 2024, couch-ridden.

SUMMARY

I found this book to be a timely exploration of the rapidly evolving landscape of generative AI and its implications for work and society. Having followed the author on LinkedIn and engaged with generative AI in my own professional life (both as a user and a teacher), I found this book a prudent and thought-provoking read. Mollick's insights both challenge readers to embrace AI's potential while remaining critically aware of its limitations and ethical complexities. While I didn't take as many detailed notes as usual, the book left me reflecting on the trajectory of this technology: today's level of integration feels like the foundation for a future where curated, AI-driven experiences may dominate, potentially sold at a premium with little regard for broader consequences.



#9. *Wings of the Dove*, Henry James (1902)⁹

SUMMARY

Despite my grandfather* advising me not to start with this book for my intro to Henry James, I stubbornly dove in and found myself grappling with its density. The prose is meticulous, layered, and at times daunting, requiring moments of pause and external resources to fully unpack. The novel deals the cards of morality and manipulation, which sometimes felt far removed from my own experiences. Perhaps too removed for me to immediately empathize with the characters' struggles. This distance sometimes made me feel like a casual observer rather than a participant in the story. Yet, when I reframed this distance as an opportunity to understand rather than relate, I found myself appreciating James' incredible attention to detail and the nuanced exploration of human behavior that unfolded.

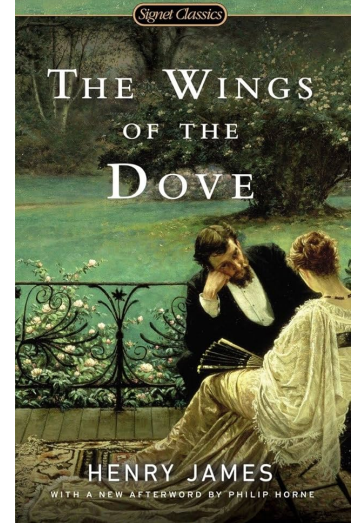
While this was not an easy read, it was rewarding in its own way. I can see myself giving his work another shot in the future, perhaps with a more accessible entry point.

PASSAGES, VOCABULARY, RANDOM THOUGHTS

"She has stature without height, grace without motion, presence without mass. Slender and simple, frequently soundless. She was somehow always in the line of the eye—she counted singularly for its pleasure." [10] This is the first descriptions of Kate Croy

"The difficulty with Densher was that he looked vague without looking weak-idle without looking empty. It was the accident, possibly, of his long legs, which were apt to stretch themselves; of his straight hair and his well-shaped head, never, the latter, neatly smooth, and apt, into the bargain, at the time of quite other calls upon it, to throw itself suddenly back and, supported behind by his uplifted arms and interlocked hands, place him for unconscionable periods in communion with the ceiling, the tree-tops, the sky. He was in short visibly absent-minded, irregularly clever, liable to drop what was near and to take up what was far; he was more a respecer, in general, than a follower of custom.

⁹ Finished begrudgingly on December 1.



He suggested above all, however, that wondrous state of youth in which the elements, the metals more or less precious, are so in fusion and fermentation that the question of the final stamp, the pressure that fixes the value, must wait for comparative coolness." [44] This is the first description of Merton Densher.

"It is nothing new indeed that generous young persons often admire most what nature hasn't given them - from which it would appear, after all, that our friends were both generous." [45] This is in describing Merton and Kate's relationship. They met at a "gallery" party and were struck by each other, though nothing came from it besides him saying it was worth it to come to the party so he could meet her. But how remain in contact? So six months later, by chance ('as natural as anything in London ever is'), they see each other again on the Underground Railway.

#10. *The Monk*, Matthew Lewis (1796)¹⁰

SUMMARY

I discovered this book yet again by chance, drawn in by its intriguing contradiction: a title suggestive of piety paired with its Gothic horror classification. Lewis explores human weakness and moral corruption, with themes that left a lasting impression on me. Its horrors are grotesquely familiar, built on distorted depictions of lust, pride, and ambition (and how weak can a man be?). Ambrosio, the novel's central figure, embodies the peril of virtue practiced for the wrong reasons (his outward piety masking a prideful heart leads him to ruin; good qualities stemming from bad intentions are nevertheless bad qualities). His descent from revered abbot to irredeemable villain is as fascinating as it is disturbing, and the final scene of his being thrown from a high altitude is reflective of his moral fall.

It is, without doubt, a Gothic masterpiece that will linger in my mind for some time. The timeliness of this book coincided with the release of *Nosferatu* which excited my senses about that which makes the skin crawl.

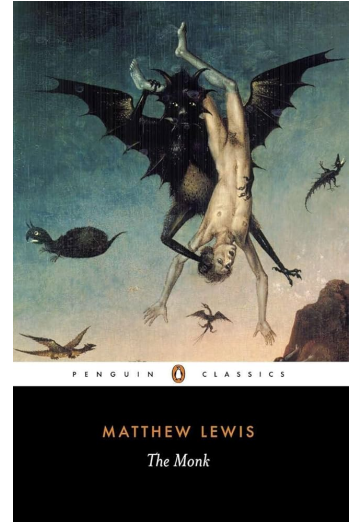
PASSAGES, VOCABULARY, RANDOM THOUGHTS

"You are young, and just entering in to life," said he: 'your heart, new to the world, and full of warmth and sensibility receive its first impressions with eagerness. Artless yourself, you suspect not other of deceit; and viewing the world through the medium of your own truth and innocence, you fancy all who surround you to deserve your confidence and esteem. What pity, that these gay visions must soon be dissipated!' [22] Lorenzo's reaction to Antonia's first impressions of the abbot, Ambrosio.

The cap of the hour and solitude of the place contributed to nourish Lorenzo's disposition to melancholy. He threw himself upon a seat which stood near him, and abandoned himself to the delusions of his fancy. [27] This scene reminds me of the blue chapel at Fordham, where I spent many an hour asking for guidance.

'Then your opinion of me is better than my own and there-

¹⁰ Finished on December 30 riding the uptown Q.



fore I must beg leave to decline your confidence.' [32] This is Christoval's answer to the marquis on the latter saying he can entrust him with his secret (of why the secret correspondence with Lorenzo's sister the nun Agnes)

"While she spoke, a thousand opposing sentiments combated in Ambrosio's bosom. Surprise at the singularity of this adventure; confusion at her abrupt declaration; resentment at her boldness; and consciousness of the austerity with which it behoved him to reply; such were the sentiments of which he was aware: but there were others which did not obtain his notice." [57] During Rosario's [Matilda's] confession.

'As yet, my heart is free; I shall separate from you with regret, but not with despair. Stay here, and a few weeks will sacrifice my happiness on the altar of your charms; you are but too interesting, too amiable! I should love you, I should doat on you! my bosom would become the prey of desires, which honour and my profession forbid me to gratify. If I resisted them, the impetuosity of my wishes unsatisfied would drive me to madness: if I yielded to the temptation, I should sacrifice to one moment of guilty pleasure, my reputation in this world, my salvation in the next.' [63] This passage is on asking Matilda to leave right before he got bit by the scorpion like animal. She ultimately stays.

An author, whether good or bad, or between both, is an animal whom every body is privileged to attack: for though all are not able to write books, all conceive themselves able to judge them. [172] This is the marquis to Theodore's poem (which I later discover may be a self reflection of Lewis' about his own work and poetry. No one can be more critical than oneself at times.

"While in each others arms entranced they lay, They blessed the night, and cursed the coming day." [193] This is the stanza opening up chapter 6; this is about the aftermath of Ambrosio sleeping with Matilda.

Syren - alternative spelling on siren. Here meaning temptress. The "syren's sofa" [194]

'What would be too dear a price for this lovely girl's affections? What would I refuse to sacrifice, could I be released from my vows, and permitted to declare my love in the sight of earth and heaven? While I strove to inspire her with tenderness, with

friendship and esteem, how tranquil and undisturbed would the hours roll away! Gracious God! to see her blue downcast eyes beam upon mine with timid fondness! to sit for days, for years, listening to that gentle voice! to acquire the right of obliging her, and hear the artless expressions of her gratitude! to watch the emotions of her spotless heart! to encourage each dawning virtue! to share in her joy when happy, to kiss away her tears when distressed, and to see her fly to my arms for comfort and support! Yes; if there is perfect bliss on earth, 'tis his lot alone who becomes that angel's husband?' [209] This is about Ambrosio, growing tired of Matilda, reflects upon acquiring Antonia. At this point, you almost suspect he's the long lost son of Elvira Dalfa, the one who the marquis De la Cisternas's father stole away when he was a baby.

Pusillanimity (adj) - lack of courage or determination. This is how Matilda looked at Ambrosio as she leads him down the caverns into the sepulcher of St Clare's to summon the daemon that will supposedly help in making Antonia be Ambrosio's. This is the marking point of his total abandonment of righteousness and holiness, as he accepts her help through unnatural means. But why is she helping him? That's one thing curious that I'm not clear on - is she just designed to tempt him? [236]

Ultimately, Ambrosio rapes Antonia in the vaults of the sepulchre of St Clare, and after he finishes he is filled with disgust at his actions. He also seems to blame her for his crime: "what seduced me into crimes, whose bare remembrance makes me shudder? Fatal witch! Was it not by beauty?" [330] I also notice a timely comparison about wealth, wherein Lewis writes that the "wealth of India" would not cause a person to do something. In this example, the wealth would not have tempted him to rape her again.