

People & Places

Books

Chaotic headlines

Politics shaped the year in books in '17

By Hillel Italie

For book readers in 2017, the choice was often between imagining the worst, hoping for the best or escaping entirely.

The most widely read works of the year ranged from Timothy Snyder's "On Tyranny," a guide to defending democracy, to Dan Brown's thriller "Origin" to the personal and political verse of Rupi Kaur. Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale" and George Orwell's "1984" were dystopian tales from the past made newly relevant as warnings of horrors to come. Former White House photographer Pete Souza's "Obama: An Intimate Portrait" was, for admirers of Trump's predecessor, a bittersweet album of an administration out of office for less than a year but somehow from long ago.



Brown

"The usual comment that I get from people who bought the book is that it made them laugh and it made them weep," Souza told The Associated Press during a recent interview. The headlines were chaotic, but the publishing business remained stable, if unexceptional. The recent trend of slight increases in print sales — up around 2 percent over 2016, according to NPD BookScan, which tracks around 85 percent of the market — and slowing e-book sales continued, while the number of independent bookstores was little changed even as online shopping has devastated other physical retailers.

Publishing also was spared the disruptions of Trump on Twitter. The president had insults for movie stars (Meryl Streep), Broadway shows ("Hamilton"), CNN and his successor on "The Apprentice" (Arnold Schwarzenegger). But he seemed mostly unaware or uninterested in the wave of anti-Trump releases. His rare comments about books were scorn for his defeated rival Hillary Clinton and her best-seller about the election, "What Happened," and plugs for people he liked, such as "Fox & Friends" host Brian Kilmeade and his popular history "Andrew Jackson and the Miracle of New Orleans."

"We were very grateful," said Kilmeade's publisher, Adrian Zackheim of the conservative imprint Sentinel. "The sales trajectory for the book has been upward and it's very likely the president's support was a factor."

Here are some of the year's more timely, and timeless, releases:

The Handmaid's Tale: Thanks to Trump's election and the popular adaptation on Hulu, Atwood's novel from 1985 about a pitiless, patriarchal society was not only a best-seller, but a touchstone. When a Republican congressman from Arizona, Trent Franks, resigned amid reports that he was offering as much as \$5 million for an aide to conceive his child, critics saw a literary parallel. A Miami Herald headline read: "The strange case of surrogacy, sexual harassment and The Handmaid's Tale."

On tyranny: Snyder's best-seller began as a Facebook posting just after Trump's election and became a reference work for the anti-Trump resistance. In a recent email interview, Snyder said he was most concerned about Trump's attacks on the media and his threats against special counsel Robert Mueller, whose ouster would be "a big step towards the end of the rule of law." One antidote he recommends in "On Tyranny": "Get the screens out of your room and surround yourself with books."

"What cheers me is that readers of 'On Tyranny' feel less alone and take actions in the world based on its lessons. My book is a way of organizing the chaos around us and finding ways to sensibly influence it," he told the AP. "But I think almost any reading — away from the Internet — helps us keep our calm and gives us words and ideas that help shield us from the daily barrage of bad news and help us find ways to communicate with one another in person."

The Sun and Her Flowers: Kaur's collection has sold some 400,000 copies, numbers rarely seen for poetry, or at least since her million-selling debut from 2016, "milk and honey." For her second book, Kaur had planned on focusing on "love and loss," she told The Associated Press during a recent telephone interview. But as she was working on the book in January, around the time of Trump's inauguration, she found herself "stopped in her tracks, completely."

"Suddenly I couldn't write love poems," she said. "I found myself writing political pieces and suddenly this book went from two chapters to five. 'milk and honey' was like holding a mirror to yourself, while 'sun and her flowers' is turning the mirror around."

Grant: One of the year's most anticipated nonfiction works, Ron Chernow's Ulysses Grant biography was about the victorious Civil War general and once-disparaged president, now more respected if only for his willingness to use armed force to defend blacks during Reconstruction. Readers could turn to "Grant" for diversion or engagement, a 19th century life made contemporary in 2017 as Confederate monuments were taken down around the country.

"Of course I had no idea as I was working on 'Grant' that the Civil War would be on the front page shortly before publication," Chernow wrote in a recent email to the AP. "In the last analysis, politics boils down to the stories that we tell ourselves about our past, and there are still two competing narratives about the causes and consequences of the Civil War. The past is prologue to everything that is happening today to the point that the term 'history' almost becomes a misnomer. It is still alive and active all around us."

The Hate U Give: One of the year's top young adult novels was Angie Thomas' story of a black teen whose friend is shot and killed by a white police officer. In an email to the AP, Thomas said she was pleased that both black and non-black readers had related to the book. "Books can give a refuge and they can also give clearer understanding," she said. "Books create empathy by forcing us to see things from someone else's perspective and feel what they feel. I hope that, especially in these troubled times, more people pick up books about people who aren't like them. In some ways, it can be more informative than the news." (AP)



Left: This combination of photos shows (top row from left), broadcaster Bill O'Reilly, US Senate candidate Roy Moore, US Sen Al Franken, D-Minn., and broadcaster Matt Lauer. Bottom row from left are actor Kevin Spacey, conductor James Levine, broadcaster Charlie Rose and film producer Harvey Weinstein. Right: This Nov 30, 2017 file photo shows the US Capitol at dawn as Senate Republicans work to pass their sweeping tax bill this week, in Washington. (AP)



Left: A woman holds a young injured girl as Iraqi forces continue their advance against Islamic State group militants in the old city of Mosul, Iraq, on July 3, 2017. Right: In this Aug 17, 2017 file photo, people flee the scene in Barcelona, Spain, after a van jumped the sidewalk in the historic Las Ramblas district, crashing into a summer crowd of residents and tourists and injuring several people. (AP)



Media

Trump's tumultuous first year as president second best

'Sexual misconduct' tops news story

NEW YORK, Dec 25, (AP) — The wave of sexual misconduct allegations that toppled Hollywood power brokers, politicians, media icons and many others was the top news story of 2017, according to The Associated Press' annual poll of US editors and news directors.

The No. 2 story was Donald Trump's tumultuous first year as president. A year ago, Trump's unexpected victory over Hillary Clinton in the presidential election was a near-unanimous pick for the top news story of 2016.

The first AP top-stories poll was conducted in 1936, when editors chose the abdication of Britain's King Edward VIII as the top story.

Here are 2017's top 10 stories, in order:

1. Sexual misconduct: Scandals involving sexual misdeeds by prominent men are nothing new in America, but there's never been anything remotely like the deluge of allegations unleashed this year by women who were emboldened to speak out by the accusers who preceded them. Luminaries toppled from their perches included movie magnate Harvey Weinstein, media stars Bill O'Reilly, Matt Lauer and Charlie Rose, and several celebrity chefs and members of Congress.

2. Trump-First Year: The controversies started on Inauguration Day, with the new president challenged over his claims on the size of the crowd, and persisted throughout the year. Trump's approval ratings hovered around record-low territory, his base remained fiercely loyal, and his relentless tweeting — often in the early morning hours — provoked a striking mix of outrage, mockery and grateful enthusiasm.

3. Las Vegas mass shooting: A 64-year-old high-stakes video poker player, after amassing an arsenal of weapons, unleashed a barrage of gunfire from a high-rise casino-hotel that killed 58 people and injured hundreds among a crowd attending an open-air concert along the Las Vegas Strip. Weeks after the massacre, questions about the gunman's motives remained unanswered.

4. Hurricane onslaught: In a four-week span, hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria ravaged Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico and other Caribbean islands. Harvey killed more than 80 people in Texas and caused an estimated \$150 billion in damage. Irma killed scores of people in the Caribbean and US, including 12 residents of a Florida nursing home that lost its air conditioning. Maria damaged more than 200,000 homes in Puerto Rico, caused lengthy power outages, and prompted an investigation into whether the official death toll

of 64 was vastly undercounted.

5. North Korea: At times the taunts had a schoolyard flavor to them — a "dotard" versus "Little Rocket Man." But they came from two world leaders with nuclear arms at their disposal — Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. Fueling the tensions were North Korea's latest tests of a hydrogen bomb and of ballistic missiles that potentially could reach the US mainland.

6. Trump-Russia probe: Trump fired FBI director James Comey, but a former FBI chief, Robert Mueller, was soon appointed to investigate potential coordination between Russia and Trump's election campaign. By mid-December, Mueller's team had brought federal charges against four people, including former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort and former national security adviser Michael Flynn. Flynn pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI.

7. Obamacare: Despite repeated efforts, majority Republicans in Congress failed to repeal Barack Obama's health care law and replace it with new plan. At one point, a deciding vote against a GOP replacement bill was cast by Republican Sen. John McCain. But questions remained as to how Obama's plan would fare going forward without substantive help from the Trump administration.

8. Tax overhaul: Without a single Democratic vote, Republicans in Congress pushed through a sweeping \$1.5 trillion tax overhaul that would cut corporate taxes while producing mixed results for individuals. GOP lawmakers, backed by Trump, said the bill would have broad benefits by accelerating economic growth. Critics said consequences would include higher budget deficits and the potential loss of health care coverage for millions of Americans.

9. Worldwide terror attacks: The first big terror attack of 2017 came on New Year's Day — a gunman killing 39 at a nightclub in Istanbul. Subsequent targets of global terror included an Ariana Grande concert in England, a bike path in New York City and the historic La Rambla promenade in Barcelona. In October, a truck bombing in Somalia killed more than 500 people; in November, an attack on a crowded mosque in Egypt killed more than 300.

10. Islamic State: After lengthy assaults, an array of forces drove the Islamic State from its two main strongholds — the city of Mosul in Iraq, and its self-styled capital, Raqqa, in Syria. The defeats left the Islamic State without significant territory in either country, but affiliates elsewhere in the region, particularly in Egypt and Afghanistan, continued to operate.



Indian Bollywood actor Akshay Kumar (right), and actress Twinkle Khanna pose for a photograph during a promotional event for the forthcoming Hindi film "Padman" written and directed by R. Balki in Mumbai last week. (AFP)



Wang



Randle

Variety

LOS ANGELES: Leading Chinese auteur Wang Xiaoshuai has completed a marathon three-month shoot for "Di Jiu Tian Chang." The film is the first installment in what Wang calls his Homeland Trilogy, examining changing times and families in modern China.

Working from a script co-written with "Under the Hawthorn Tree" screenwriter Ah Mei, the first part spans a 40-year period, starting with the market-oriented economic reforms of the 1980s. The story follows the troubles that afflict and force apart two families that had previously been close.

Wang says he is aiming to mount the trilogy on a far larger visual and narrative scale than his previous "Shanghai Dreams" or "Beijing Bicycle." The shoot took in multiple cities from the north to the south of China.

Production is by Liu Xuan through Beijing-based Dongchun Films, with finance from Hehe Pictures and Fengshanjian. Discussions with international sales companies are ongoing.

The cast includes veteran actor Wang Jingchun ("11 Flowers," "Black Coal, Thin Ice"), Yong Mei ("The Assassin"), Qi Xi ("Mystery"), and rising actors Du Jiang ("The Wasted Times") and Wang Yuan of Chinese boy band TFboys. (RTRS)

LOS ANGELES: The ability to enter homes and workplaces without a warrant in order to pursue uncensored film screenings is among the new powers sought by Singapore's Infocomm Media Development Authority. The measure is one of several revisions being proposed to the country's Films Act.

The IMDA says the proposed Films Act amendments are "pro-family and pro-business," with some "additional operational amendments to align and update our policies to cater to the changing media environment." The revisions are currently up for public consultation until Dec. 30. A petition campaigning against

the increased enforcement powers was started by filmmaker Jason Soo and has attracted over 400 signatories, according to the Straits Times. A lobby group called filmcommunitysg, which includes Boo Junfeng, Anthony Chen, Tan Pin Pin and Jasmine Ng, said it is studying the changes.

"In theory, with provisions like these, an IMDA officer could enter anyone's home to seize a documentary you are making," wrote Kirsten Tan, whose "Pop Aye" was Singapore's Academy Awards contender, in a Facebook posting. In a written response, an IMDA spokesman told Variety that the

funding and regulatory body needed the added "investigation and enforcement powers as IMDA increasingly takes on investigations into breaches of the Films Act from the Police."

Another IMDA spokesman described the filmmakers as a "small group of critics." (RTRS)

LOS ANGELES: After months of legal wrangling, French pay-TV giant Canal Plus Group has renegotiated its royalties agreement with France's Civil Society of Multimedia Authors. The society, whose mission is

to collect royalties and redistribute them to multimedia authors, was one of the guilds that had sued Canal Plus Group for failing to pay royalties for several months this year.

Under the multi-year agreement, Canal Plus Group will pay royalties on programs available on Canal Plus channels and services in France and abroad. Effective Jan. 1, the deal with the multimedia authors' society follows a similar agreement between Canal Plus Group and SACEM — the authors, composers and music publishers guild — in September. Christophe Thiery, president of Canal Plus Group's board, said the

pact also takes into account the pay-TV company's new content offers. "This new deal with [the authors' society] underscores our commitment to backing authors and content creation as a whole," he said.

Herve Rony, managing director of the authors' guild, said the agreement "preserves the basic interests of authors and their remunerations" and "demonstrates that collective management is an efficient mechanism." (RTRS)

ATLANTIC CITY, NJ: The top leadership of the Miss America Organization, implicated in an email scandal that targeted past pageant winners for abuse based on their appearance, intellect and sex lives, resigned on Saturday, with the outgoing president apologizing to a winner whose weight he ridiculed.

The president, Josh Randle, told The Associated Press his comment responding to an email to his private account about the physical appearance of 2013 winner Mallory Hagan came months before he started working for the Miss America Organization in 2015. But he said it was wrong.

"I apologize to Mallory for my lapse in judgment," Randle said on Saturday. "It does not reflect my values or the values I worked to promote at the Miss America Organization. Although this terrible situation was not caused or driven by me, in light of recent events and new developments, I am no longer willing to continue in my capacity as president and earlier today offered my resignation to the MAO Board of Directors." (AP)



An Emirati man walks camels during the Mazayin Dhafra Camel Festival in the desert near the city of Madinat Zayed, 150 kms west of Abu Dhabi, on Dec 23. The festival, which attracts participants from around the Gulf region, includes a camel beauty contest, a display of UAE handicrafts and other activities aimed at promoting the country's folklore. (AFP)

Lorde cancels Israel concert

JERUSALEM, Dec 25, (AFP) — New Zealand singer Lorde has cancelled a planned show in Israel after facing pressure from supporters of a boycott of the Jewish state over its occupation of Palestinian territory.

The 21-year-old, who enjoyed phenomenal success while still a teenager, announced last week a Tel Aviv performance in June as part of a tour.

After criticism from international and New Zealand activists, Lorde was cancelling the performance in Israel.