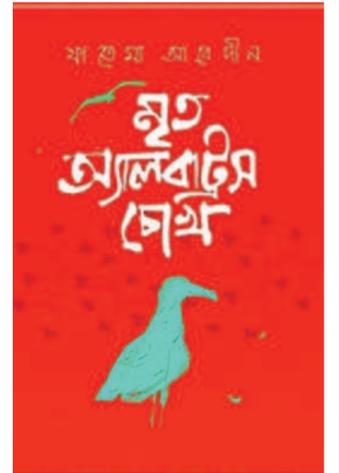
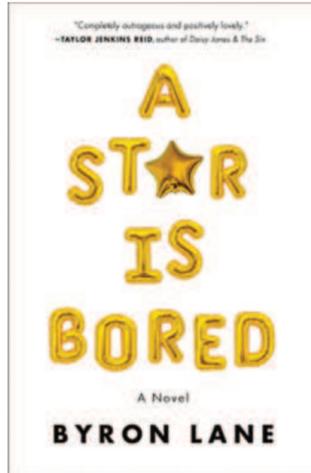
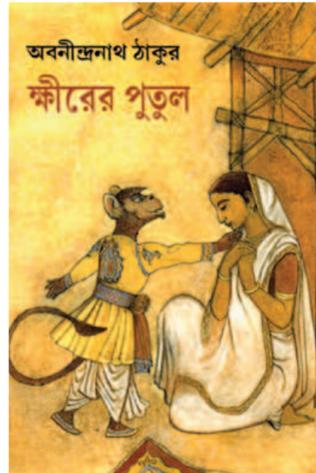
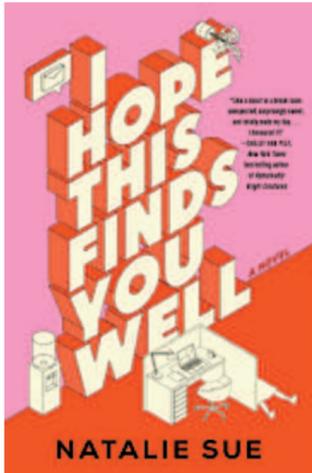


THE SHELF

5 books to help you wind down after your 9-to-5



Charlie Besson is sitting in his idling car outside a Hollywood mansion, about to interview for the most chaotic assisting position imaginable. The client is Kathi Kannon, a famous actress and bestselling author with a larger-than-life reputation and zero interest in being low maintenance.

NUR-E-JANNAT ALIF

After a workday full of tabs, pings, and “oh just a quick call,” your brain usually wants one of two things: something soft enough to sink into, or something sharp enough to cut through the fog. These 5 do both, in different ways, without asking you to optimise your rest.

I Hope This Finds You Well
Natalie Sue
William Morrow, 2024

First on the list is, of course, a quintessential workplace comedy. Natalie Sue’s debut, *I Hope This Finds You Well*, is quite tongue-in-cheek, a droll and here to pick you right back up, if, in case it does not find you well. Jolene is an exhausted admin at Supershops, Inc. who survives office life by writing vicious email postscripts and hiding them in white text. When one such email exposes her and sends her to the boss with his hands at odd places, she is overdue for sensitivity training and put under strict email rules. Then, miraculously or concerningly, an IT mistake gives her access to her coworkers’ private emails and DMs. Once she starts reading them (out of curiosity, obviously), she quickly learns that layoffs are coming. Jolene uses the intel she finds to try to save

her job. But the deeper she gets into everyone’s secrets, the harder it is to keep her distance, especially with Cliff, the oddly kind HR guy.

Kheerer Putul
Abanindranath Tagore
Ananda Publishers Pvt Ltd., 2000

If your brain feels overheated after work, which, let’s be honest, it does, then this fairy tale by Abanindranath Tagore is a great reset. It is short, effortless on the surface, and quietly absorbing. *Kheerer Putul* is a Bangla children’s fantasy that has a kheer doll sitting at the centre of the story. The plot moves through small tests of character, clever choices, and the kind of clear, storybook fairness that adult life rarely gives you. What makes it good for winding down is the pace. It does not demand intense focus or long emotional buildup, and it does not require you to track a hundred details. You can read a few pages at a time and still feel like you got somewhere. It also has that calming, old-story rhythm—repetition, simple turns, and a light sense of wonder without being heavy or preachy. If your day was all screens and speed, this one gently slows you back to a more human reading tempo.

A Star is Bored
Byron Lane
Henry Holt & Company, 2020

Trivia: The author of this book was actually a beloved assistant to the late Carrie Fisher, and this novel is loosely (totally) contingent on his time working for her.

Charlie Besson is sitting in his idling car outside a Hollywood mansion, about to interview for the most chaotic assisting position imaginable. The client is Kathi Kannon, a famous actress and bestselling author with a larger-than-life reputation and zero interest in being low maintenance. He eventually gets hired, and the book turns into a fast, bright ride through the personal-assistant universe—last-minute demands, dramatic errands, sudden travel, and the weird intimacy of being the person who holds someone else’s life together. There are late-night shopping sprees, impulsive trips, and the backstage view of fame that feels glamorous for five seconds and exhausting right after. As Charlie and Kathi grow closer, the job becomes more than work. Their bond starts to feel like friendship, and Charlie begins to question the role he has been playing in his own life. Caught between loyalty to the star who changed his world and the desire to step out of the sidelines, he has to decide whether he will keep living as support staff or finally claim a story of his own.

Discontent
Beatrice Serrano, Maya Faye Lethem (Translator)
Vintage, 2025

Marisa looks like she is doing everything right, a great apartment in central Madrid, a steady relationship with her attractive neighbour, and a fast climb at a prestigious advertising agency. However, behind her polished office persona, she is miserable. She hides in her office, dissociates until the end of the workday, and drifts between dread, sarcasm, and self-destructive fantasies, all while holding up a career built on half-truths and stolen credit. When she is forced to attend the company’s annual team-building retreat in the Spanish mountains, the fragile system she has built to survive starts to collapse. Cut off from her usual escape routes and trapped with an unhinged boss, cheerfully compliant coworkers, and unsettling retreat staff, Marisa’s lies begin to catch up with her. As an old, buried incident from her workplace resurfaces, the retreat becomes a pressure cooker that pushes her toward a public unravelling. *Discontent* is a dark office comedy about corporate dread, performed competence, and what happens when the feelings you suppress all week finally break through.
Mrito Albatross Chokh

Fatema Abedin Batighar, 2020

Mrito Albatross Chokh is a collection of ten short stories written between 2011 and 2020, rooted firmly in the everyday lives we recognise. Set in a dense city of clustered apartments where private spaces collide, the book captures how modern life compresses people, relationships, and emotions into the same narrow walls, balconies, kitchens, and silences. Each story is, at its core, an account of human connection and its fractures. The characters sometimes lose themselves in the glitter of ordinary living, sometimes face the raw truth of scarcity, and sometimes find companionship in something as unexpected as a mobile app. Across the collection, the author paints intimate scenes of an extraordinary father-child bond, the complicated knots between husband and wife, the aching emptiness of a childless couple, grief for the dead, and the lingering tears for a lost lover.

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ESSAY

Money and language: TRANSACTION AND TENSION

AZFAR HUSSAIN

In addition to today’s transnational corporations and the global explosion of their advertisements, the works of William Shakespeare and Karl Marx keep teaching us a great deal about the relationship between money and language. It is more than intriguing that Marx is an ardent Shakespeare aficionado, one who does not merely quote Shakespeare at whatever chance he gets, but one who suggests that Shakespeare has an acute sense of political economy; that Shakespeare effectively and instructively dramatises an interplay between the economic and the linguistic.

In his early work *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, particularly in the chapter called “The Power of Money in Bourgeois Society,” Marx enthusiastically quotes from Shakespeare’s play “The Timon of Athens” (1623) to make certain points about the God-like power of money which is also the power of language itself: “[...] Thou visible God! / That solder’st close impossibilities, / And makest them kiss! That speak’st with every tongue, / To every purpose! O thou touch of hearts!”

Yes, money speaks with every tongue—it’s Marx’s Shakespearean point, or perhaps Shakespeare’s “Marxist” point.

And, more clearly than ever before, capitalism today as a mode of economic production continuously evolves and enacts its own tongue—its own suitable mode of linguistic production—while also tending to globalise and even universalise it by transforming money into the most powerful, attractive, magnetic, and even erotic language, while suggesting thereby that to have money is to have language—the language of power and beauty and sensual gratification all at once.

In fact, in his chapter “The Power of Money in Bourgeois Society”—a chapter I’ve already invoked and one that reads, to me, like a Baudelairean prose poem—Marx sharply underlines the language-like quality of money and the money-like quality of language, while also adumbrating the erotic nature—call it the “erotic value”—of money itself. For what is it, after all, that systemically



ILLUSTRATION: MAHMUDA EMDAD

juxtaposes the female body and hard cash? And then, mark this: capitalism has already cashed in on that very nexus, with one Miss Universe presenting a striking image of her body wrapped in nothing but cash—cash and more cash—rendering visually concrete the point that money is not merely corporeal but irresistibly sexy. And, indeed, what is it that transforms the female body into an eroticised yet commodified language-on-sale from the striptease to the mainstream media to the international body industry? The answer is: the stubborn logic of capital itself.

And from the perspective of capital, if language does not have an exchange-value in the strict political-economic sense of the term, language ceases to be language as such. But in the process of producing and reproducing what might be called capitalism’s

money-language or language-money—that is, language itself as an exchange-value—capitalism also tends to homogenise, appropriate, destroy, and sometimes even flexibly accommodate spaces for different kinds of languages, including oppositional or “trouble-making” ones. VN Volosinov—the Russian philosopher of language—justly asserts: “[...] the ruling class strives to impart a supraclass, eternal character to the ideological sign [say language], to extinguish or drive inward the struggle between social value judgments which occurs in it, to make the sign unidaccental.”

Money uniaccentualises; so does the language of money, and by extension the language of capitalism. This, I submit, is a fundamental tendency of a capitalist mode of linguistic production. Yet another

foundational tendency—one that underlies and even governs this very mode of production—is its drive to standardise and institutionalise language in such ways that language cannot be equally accessed or equally owned by its users within a given social space or community.

Thus, language becomes a site of class struggle and other forms of contestation—a contestation over the ownership of the “standard” means of linguistic production. And, thus, of course there are conflicts between those who use, say, so-called “polished” or “correct” language and those who do not. (Think of those card-carrying Tagore enthusiasts in our country—ones whose frowns tend to multiply with a vengeance when you deviate from what they call “standard” Bangla. And think of those

deshi shahebs as well—ones who are out there to police your damn accent, as you speak English. If, for instance, your accent falls on the “wrong” syllable, you are surely damned in the regime of our deshi shahebs! The cultural logics of class and colonialism go hand in hand either directly or secretly, you bet.)

But a capitalist mode of linguistic production cannot totally exhaust or extinguish other—and othered—modes of linguistic production. True, the history of capitalism—in tandem with the history of colonialism (Edward Said rightly characterises these histories as “intertwined” in *Culture and Imperialism*)—is a history of othering and even destroying indigenous languages. One only needs to think of the global spread of English since the emergence of early modern capitalism. Its linguistic imperialism has directly perpetrated violence upon numerous indigenous languages across the world.

Yet the history of capitalism also tells us that capitalism not only devalues and destroys but simultaneously generates its own opposites—its Other. Thus, in a world under capitalism, on the one hand we encounter the production, exchange, distribution, and consumption of languages such as “Open Happiness!” (one of Coca-Cola’s slogans) and, on the other, we witness the production and exchange of languages that erupt as outcries of the Other—like the Latin American feminist poet and activist Nora Mendez’s scream: “Ana Maria furious/ when they would touch her child / when they would bleed her land.”

This is an excerpt. Read the full essay on *The Daily Star* and *Star Books* and *Literature’s* websites.

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