

BRIEFLY NOTED

State of Wonder, by Ann Patchett (Harper; \$26.99). In Patchett's emotionally lucid novel, Marina Singh, a scientific researcher, travels to the Amazonian jungle to find out how a friend and colleague died there. She must also complete her dead colleague's assignment: persuade Annick Swenson, a brilliant scientist and Singh's medical-school mentor, to yield up a fertility drug that she has been developing, derived from a tree whose bark allows women of an indigenous tribe to bear children into old age. Singh, who arrives in Brazil plagued by Lariam nightmares about childhood visits to India in which she "drags behind her father like a low kite," follows her mentor into the "merciless sunshine" of the jungle. Patchett is at her lyrical best when she catalogues the jungle itself—with "neon colored frogs the size of dimes" and "lavender moths the size of quarters." The plot presses briskly to an overwrought climax; Singh's quest for the truth succeeds, but the happy ending disappoints.

Red on Red, by Edward Conlon (Spiegel & Grau; \$26). This debut novel takes a cerebral look at the moral and philosophical quandaries of a modern police force. Nick, a depressive New York City detective struggling with a failing marriage, agrees to act as an informant for the Internal Affairs Bureau in exchange for a transfer to a better precinct. His partner, Esposito, brash and forceful, is the target. But as the two men, working on a series of interconnected crimes, grow closer Nick's anguish over the choices he must make becomes unbearable. The narrative is filled with betrayals, large and small, between friends, lovers, and family members—a leitmotif made explicit by the bleak title, military parlance for one enemy soldier turning on another. Conlon, an N.Y.P.D. detective and the author of a memoir about police work, sensitively traces the subtle shifts that define relationships.



The Greater Journey, by David McCullough (Simon & Schuster; \$37.50). "I was not yet twenty. I was quite alone. I did not speak a word of French . . . but I was in Paris and the world was before me." These recollections of an American art student express the sense of awe and exuberance that fills McCullough's history of nineteenth-century American painters, sculptors, writers, and doctors who came under "the spell of Paris, derived from light, color, and architecture." The cast ranges from James Fenimore Cooper and Samuel F. B. Morse, in the early part of the century, to later arrivals, including Mary Cassatt and John Singer Sargent. McCullough's story is driven by mood more than by drama. Yet heroes do emerge: the foreign minister Elihu Washburne, who protected civilians during the Franco-Prussian War, and the sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens, the star of the book's final chapters, whose best work was created in Paris and, marking the book's principal theme, lives on in the public spaces of America.

The Enchanter, by Lila Azam Zanganeh (Norton; \$23.95). Zanganeh writes a love letter to literature and to Vladimir Nabokov, a writer who has charmed her with his "demonic artistry of words" and with the "joyousness of pure knowledge." Zanganeh, once a reluctant reader, picks up "Ada, or Ardor" and quickly discovers that reading VN, as she calls him, is "something akin to falling in love." Thrilled by his "scintillating words," she devours his books. In her own book, she sketches his biography in broad strokes, and devotes herself to "penetrating an elemental mystery": that of Nabokov's mirthful outlook. "If I live to be a hundred, my soul will still go round in short trousers," he once wrote. He found joy in "the divine details," enthralled by his butterfly hunting, his family, and his work. With an academic's careful eye and a true reader's passion, Zanganeh illuminates how the "luscious literary glee" of Nabokov's work can "re-enchant the world."