Country Dark: A Novel
By Chris Offutt
(Grove Press, 9780802129338, $16)
“Country Dark spans 1954 to 1971, opening with Tucker’s return home from the Korean War, to rural Kentucky near the Ohio border, where he takes up a job as a driver in a bootlegging operation. Tucker is devoted to his rural home life and to his young wife and children, and once their way of life is threatened, he understands he may have to employ his wartime skills to keep it together. Chris Offutt’s new novel is almost impossible not to race through, but should be savored.”
—Richard Howorth, Square Books, Oxford, MS

Lawn Boy: A Novel
By Jonathan Evison
(Algonquin Books, 9781620923902, $15.95)
“Mike Muñoz is a broke, unemployed, sexually confused 22-year-old Chicanx man living in Washington State, just trying to find the right path to his American dream. One setback after another is laid in front of him, and Mike wonders if he will ever make the leap from survival mode to working toward his goals. I loved this book for the sincere, engaging way the author addresses the issues of class distinction and cultural discrimination, and Mike is such a funny, tenacious, lovable human that you can’t help but ache for his disappointments and cheer for his victories. I hope everyone reads this inspiring novel.”
—Cassie Clemens, Roundabout Books, Bend, OR

Heart Berries: A Memoir
By Terese Marie Mailhot
(Counterpoint, 9781640091603, $16.95)
“In a time of memoirs that help a reader understand vulnerability and the experience of facing down fear, Terese Marie Mailhot’s cathartic, moving Heart Berries is one of the bravest and most fearless of such books. Her coming-of-age on a First Nation reservation, Seabird Island in Canada, is particular to that vividly evoked place, but also carries larger, universal lessons for the human spirit and its survival. A necessary book.”
—Rick Simonson, The Elliott Bay Book Company, Seattle, WA

Heavy: An American Memoir
By Kiese Laymon
(Scribner, 9781501125669, $16)
“Telling the truth has always been a radical and political act, but Kiese Laymon writes in Heavy with a rare, vulnerable unity of personal urgency and political clarity. This is a story about how our country’s lies and thefts weigh heavily on the hearts and souls of its black mothers and sons. About how dishonesty about white supremacy, money, sex, and violence threads through our most intimate relationships and causes us to become strangers to ourselves. If Heavy is about lies, it is also fundamentally about the redemptive power of truth, stories, language, and joy. If there’s a way out of the loneliness of being human in a country that does not experience their humanity, honesty, obstinance, and kindness. In the midst of it all, I could also feel the atmosphere of 1947 San Francisco, and leads of laughs along the way. Aliens? Yes? Romance? Also yes. Add in a cast of characters with heart, moxie, and beguiling banter and you’ve got Noir, a recipe for pure enjoyment.”
—Mary McDonald, Nicola’s Books, Ann Arbor, MI

The Overstory: A Novel
By Richard Powers
(W. W. Norton & Company, 9780393356887, $18.95)
“The Overstory, which contains an energy like that of the trees that link its intertwining stories, is nothing short of stunning. Such links between the human and non-human are mostly hidden to us, but only because we tend not to look very closely (or prefer not to see). Powers’ most beautiful sentences are also the most devastating, which hints at the novel’s hope that death—whether of a person or a plant—is never quite the end that it seems. Until, that is, we look, or prefer, finally, to see. As we are instructed near the novel’s end, ‘What you make from a tree should be at least as miraculous as what you cut down.’ Plainly put: ‘The Overstory is perhaps as close to such a miracle as we currently deserve.’”
—Brad Johnson, East Bay Booksellers, Oakland, CA

Wade in the Water: Poems
By Tracy K. Smith
(G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 9780735218765, $14)
“With his usual virtuosity, master storyteller Michael Ondaatje delivers a mysterious, shimmering new coming-of-age novel. Warlight is the unexpected story of two teenagers abandoned by their enigmatic parents in post-war London. Casually watched over by a dodgy cast of characters— petty criminals, opera singers, and panting greyhounds—Nathaniel and Rachel try to make sense of their new world while struggling to define their parents’ shadowy wartime pasts. Years later, Nathaniel embarks on a quest to discover the disturbing truth, and his own unwitting part in it. Balancing poignance with surprising comic touches, Warlight is a stellar addition to the Ondaatje canon.”
—Chrysler Szarlan, Odyssey Bookshop, South Hadley, MA

Promise: A Novel
By Minrose Gwin
(William Morrow Paperbacks, 9780062471727, $15.99)
“I could not put this book down. I felt like I was trapped in Gwin’s tornado, wandering through the devastated streets and blown-apart houses, feeling the chaos and brokenness. In the midst of it all, I could also feel the strength and determination of Dovey and Jo and experience their humanity, honesty, obstinance, and kindness. With all the fires, hurricanes, and floods we’ve had around the country recently, along with continuing racial tensions, this story, though set in 1936, speaks loudly to us today.”
—Serena Wycoff, Copperfish Books, Punta Gorda, FL

Tin Man: A Novel
By Sarah Winman
(G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 9780735218765, $14)
“Michael loves Ellis, Ellis loves Annie, and Annie loves them both. Yet Sarah Winman’s blistering novel Tin Man is anything but the usual love triangle. Instead, Winman asks us to consider what remains of love after its object is gone. She crowds this sparse little book, set in London, Oxford, and the south of France, with vivid portraits of love and mourning. At once tender and explosive, Tin Man is a firework flashing in the night—gone too soon but burned forever into the reader’s memory.”
—David Enyeart, Common Good Books, St. Paul, MN

Washington Black: A Novel
By Esi Edugyan
(Vintage, 97805255653242, $16.95)
“Epic in scope, ranging from a brutal slave plantation in Barbados to scenes in the Arctic, antebellum America, and London, plus a thoughtful denouement in the Moroccan desert, Edugyan’s novel explores the complex relationship between slave and master, the hubris of good intentions, and the tense life of a runaway in constant flight with a Javert on his tail. What results is a compulsive page-turner blessed with effortless prose. Highly recommended.”
—Matt Lage, Iowa Book, Iowa City, IA

Warlight
By Michael Ondaatje
(Vintage, 9780802129338, $16.95)
“With his usual virtuosity, master storyteller Michael Ondaatje delivers a mysterious, shimmering new coming-of-age novel. Warlight is the unexpected story of two teenagers abandoned by their enigmatic parents in post-war London. Casually watched over by a dodgy cast of characters— petty criminals, opera singers, and panting greyhounds—Nathaniel and Rachel try to make sense of their new world while struggling to define their parents’ shadowy wartime pasts. Years later, Nathaniel embarks on a quest to discover the disturbing truth, and his own unwitting part in it. Balancing poignance with surprising comic touches, Warlight is a stellar addition to the Ondaatje canon.”
—Chrysler Szarlan, Odyssey Bookshop, South Hadley, MA