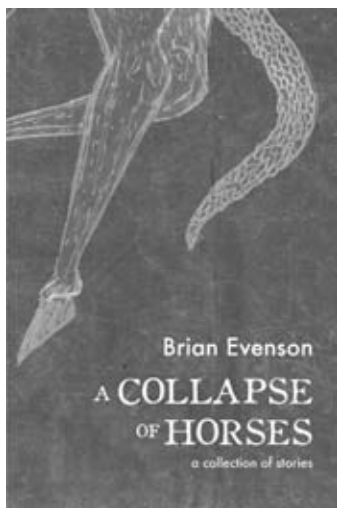


short stories

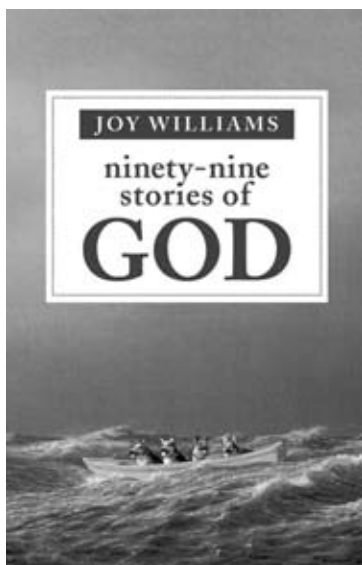


A Collapse of Horses by Brian Evenson. Coffee House Press, \$16.95

Embrace and deepen the enveloping darkness of winter with this fine collection of short horror stories. Brian Evenson has an eye for subtle unease of the sort that follows upon waking from a nightmare, or that accompanies the relating of gruesome

occurrences. However, he doesn't fixate so much on graphic specifics as leave you in the dark with a strange taste in your mouth. Like the eroticism of classic cinema, where suggestion overrides the pornographic, these stories are made eerie by what is omitted more than by what is revealed.

In one story a man reminisces about a brutal childhood game he played with a classmate that leaves permanent scars. In another, a series of murders take place in the oxygen-starved quarters of a mining operation that is slowly filling up with dust, adversely affecting the inhabitants that may or may not be on another planet. Claustrophobic and disorientating scenes abound, and so does a blood and the theme of wandering, pursued and lost, through the wilderness. The stories vary in length and style, making for an easy ride through a dark landscape. They are well crafted and stylistically pared down, while remaining literary. — *Paul Quillen*



Ninety-Nine Stories of God by Joy Williams. Tin House Books, \$19.95.

Joy Williams has written a beguiling and damn-near uncategorizable book about our queasy, querulous search for God in the most unlikely places and in ways that are not immediately apparent, even to ourselves. In flashes of fiction

that range from a single sentence (one story, entitled "Sartre to Camus," simply reads: "You should have changed if you wanted to remain yourself but you were afraid to change.") to a couple pages in length, Williams folds the parabolic concision of biblical mysticism into a secular freefall that chimes with hidden implications — as when God shows up to ask a lab engineer why the water tastes so bad, and the engineer says he thought all that stuff about the Lord's "living water" was "just a metaphor." In Williams' stories, faith is complicated, atheism is undermined and one begins to wonder if we haven't gotten the whole God-thing terribly wrong from the get-go. And yet we slouch on, ever seeking meaning and reason, as Williams' stories so wonderfully reveal. Ranging over time and place, and dropping in historical figures as diverse as Kafka and Ted Kaczynski, each story in this collection shoots like a flare over the abyss of our existential dilemma, flashing the briefest light on the depths below and above. — *Rick Levin*

nonfiction



Shrill: Notes from a Loud Woman by Lindy West. Hachette Books, \$29.95.

Seattleite Lindy West is the feminist du jour, and I'm glad she's here. Former writer for *The Stranger*, West is not only a "loud" woman but a whip-smart, hilarious and incredibly resilient human, which has made her a primo target for internet and real-life trolls alike in the age of alt-right white

nationalism. (Just listen to her "Ask Not For Whom The Bell Trolls; It Trolls for Thee" segment on *This American Life* and, after wiping away tears, be relieved that no one can take down this badass bitch).

Not only that, but West is an independent thinker who doesn't just preach to the choir but takes shots at them, just as ready to put on blast her former boss Dan Savage for fat-shaming and the comedy world for rape jokes as she is the conservative right's more traditional bigotry.

That being said, I was disappointed with how this book opened. It felt slapdash and somewhat forced, like trying to be funny on a deadline, in the same vein as the half-baked, loosely organized memoirs of female comedians that are de rigueur these days — books that read like a collection of emails copy-pasted and bound merely to cash in (I'm looking at you Amy Poehler and Lena Dunham).

Thankfully, that mush dissolves quickly, as soon as West becomes focused on meatier targets — her wit, logic and compassion dismantling patriarchy like it's her job, which it kind of is. — *Alex V. Cipolle*

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