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← Reviews

# Books of the Year 2024

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THEMES: BOOKS, CULTURE

Contributors to Engelsberg Ideas highlight the books they've enjoyed in 2024.



*Piles of French Novels by Vincent van Gogh. a still life painting in oil on canvas. 1887. Credit: incamerastock / Alamy*

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**Richard Bratby, critic**

The literary world seems rather to have cooled on Anthony Burgess the novelist; the musical world saved time by ignoring his music (he was a prolific composer) from the outset. *The Devil Prefers Mozart: On Music and Musicians, 1962-1993* (Carcanet Press) suggests that his true vocation lay as intermediary between the two. Stylishly edited by Paul Phillips, this wonderfully bingeable volume collects Burgess's essays on music, revealing him as the heir to his hero George Bernard Shaw. He's prescient, too: a writer who died in 1993 has no business being quite so clear-eyed about the cultural woes of our own fragmented century. Gin and tonic for the music-loving mind.

**Ahron Bregman, author of *The Spy Who Fell to Earth***

Daniela Richterova's *Watching the Jackals: Prague's Covert Liaisons with Cold War Terrorists and Revolutionaries* (Georgetown University Press) provides a gripping account of how Prague became a central hub for some of the world's most notorious terrorists and revolutionaries during the 1970s and 1980s. Notable figures such as Carlos the Jackal and various factions of the Palestine Liberation Organization used the city as a base for refuge, recreation, and clandestine meetings. Richterova expertly explores the role of Czechoslovakia's security and intelligence agency, the StB, in facilitating or monitoring these covert activities. While some individuals were welcomed, others were under strict surveillance and ultimately expelled. Drawing from newly declassified intelligence files, the book offers a fresh perspective and an engaging narrative that is both scholarly and accessible. This is a highly recommended read for those interested in Cold War history, intelligence operations, or the intersection of politics and espionage.