

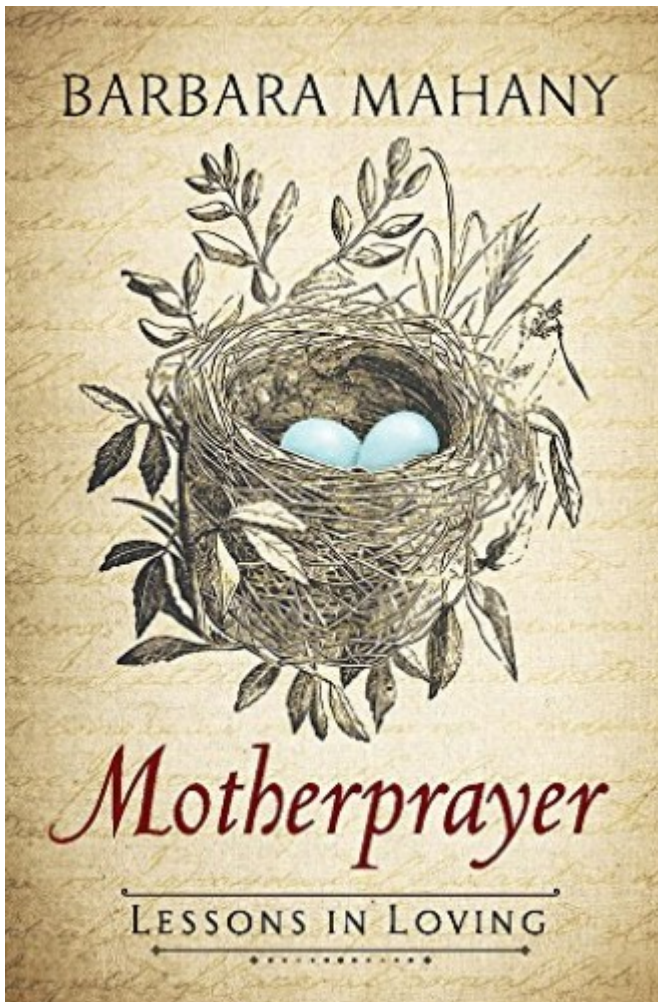
Mother's Day picks

Looking for a gift for a mother in your life? Here are some possibilities.

by [Elizabeth Palmer](#)

April 26, 2017

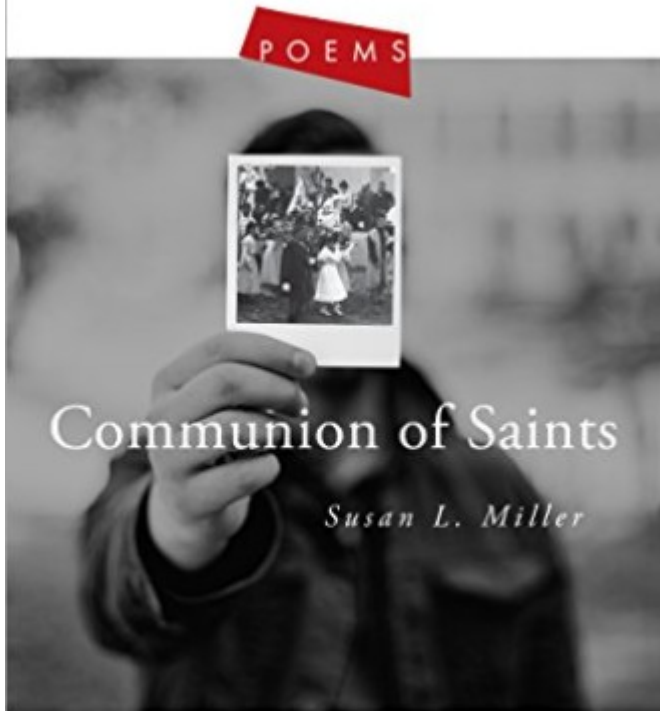
In Review



Motherprayer

Lessons in Loving

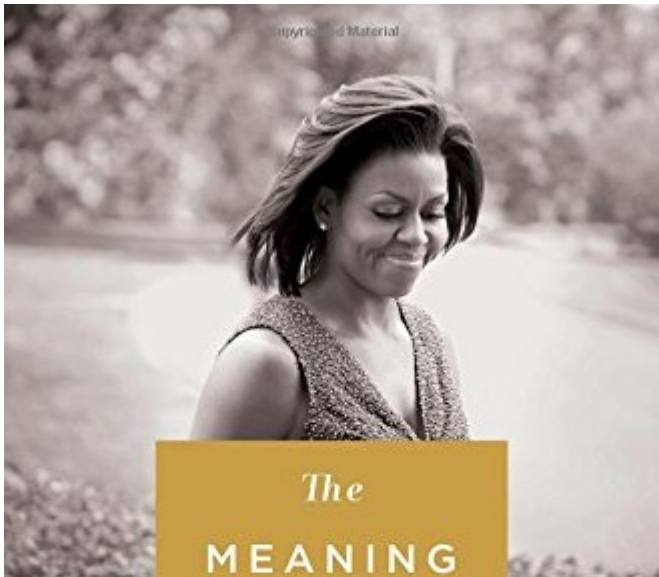
by Barbara Mahany
Abingdon



Communion of Saints

Poems

by Susan L. Miller
Paraclete Press



15 Writers on the Iconic First Lady
and How Her Journey Inspires Our Own

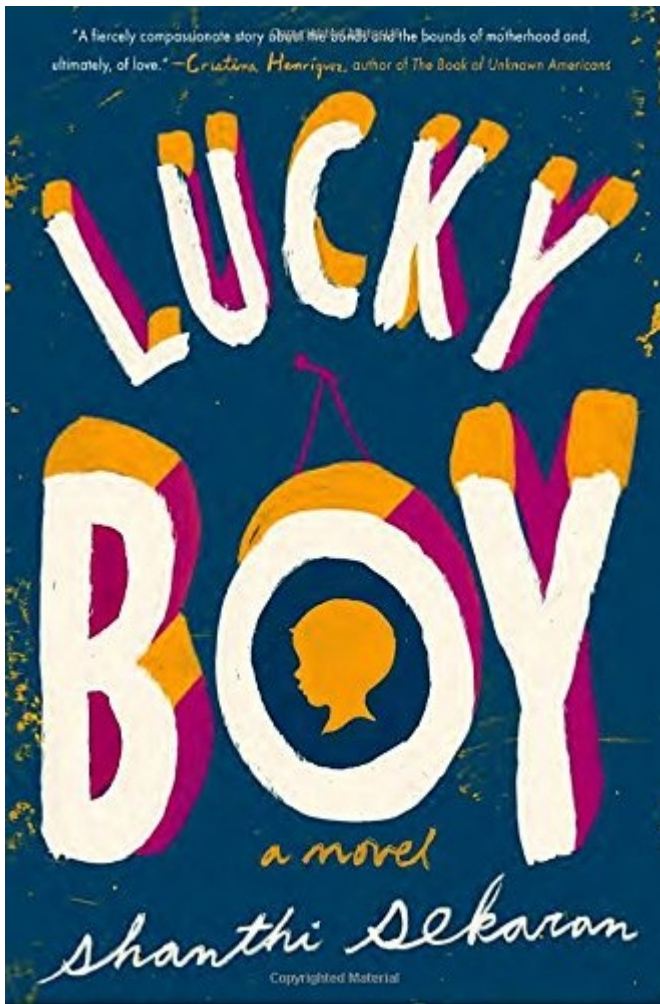
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The Meaning of Michelle

16 Writers on the Iconic First Lady and How Her Journey Inspires Our Own

edited by Veronica Chambers

St. Martin's Press



Lucky Boy

A Novel

by Shanthi Sekaran
G.P. Putnam's Sons

Barbara Mahany's writing style is not for everyone. Honestly, it's not for me—I find that her prose feels too clever, too wordy, and at times overwritten. But *Motherprayer* is still worth reading, and it's worth giving to someone who relishes in language and has the luxury of time to read personal accounts of another mother's experiences. Mahany was a pediatric oncology nurse before she became a journalist for the *Chicago Tribune*, and her writing is spiritually inflected. She writes with conviction and beauty about the joys and challenges of mothering, including her experiences with infertility and miscarriage, being in a Catholic-Jewish interfaith marriage, and raising sons born nearly a decade apart. "It takes love," she explains.

“Deep-veined love. The sort that reroutes all the wires inside you. That literally re-scripts your dreams, gives center stage to the newest, dearest soul in your life, one you suddenly realize you can’t live without.”

The saints lingering in the beautiful poems in Susan Miller’s *Communion of Saints* are a diverse group—from Flannery O’Connor to [Gwendolyn Brooks](#) (who Miller calls “the angel of conscience”) to [St. Dymphna](#) to the nurses in the NICU who care for a premature child. In one poem, a mother brings her newborn to the church and confesses her sins through the exhaustion of motherhood. The priest offers the baby a green apple to play with and later carries the child on his hip as the mother gathers her things, “just like the foot-tall plaster statue behind him.” In another poem, Gerard Manley Hopkins lies on his back and looks up at the clouds: “He thinks of his heaviness, / his own bones a weight he must strive to stir. / He thinks of the clouds’ massive heft like the flesh / of the sky, a musculature sure and simple, / striated, spare, and strange: he is lifted then too, / all sinew and soul thrilled in the high reaches / of Christ’s clutches, to whom all things / are light, and lifted, and lifting.”

Veronica Chambers’ collection of essays on Michelle Obama was published in early January, two weeks before the presidential inauguration, so from the moment it hit the shelves it tapped into a desperate sense of nostalgia that its writers and editors would not have predicted. The essays span many themes—race, style, motherhood, vocation—and reflect diverse voices, but all of them celebrate the former First Lady. Brittney Cooper incisively investigates through the lens of black women’s friendships the ways in which Obama and Beyoncé perform race and gender: “you twerk, wine, and two-step your way through racial micro-aggressions, while making that shit look like you waltzed.” Chirlane McCray, the First Lady of New York City, talks about the box of outdated expectations that traps “all First Ladies—like most women,” which in Obama’s case was “a fabulous white box on a very large stage.” Tiffany Dufu notes that “Obama makes it look easy precisely because she is complicated. Simultaneously flawless and imperfect, she brilliantly navigates opposing forces. And in the tension we can all see ourselves.”

Shanthi Sekaran is a mother as well as a writer, and her novel *Lucky Boy* captures the pain and privilege of mothering during difficult circumstances. Solimar and Kavya, both immigrants to the United States, end up caring for the same boy—but at different times and under very different circumstances. The interplay between race, economic privilege, and legal status throughout the narrative is gripping, even as

the novel barrels toward a startling (and in my reading, unlikely) conclusion. But the prose captures well what it means to be a mother:

Who knew this about children? They take up all your time. Even when they're not doing a thing. What was Ignacio but a fleshy bulb of human growth? What could he possibly ask of Soli? Only for her everything. Only for her every drop of time, of milk, of sight. To look away from Ignacio was to abandon him. To put him in a bouncy seat, catastrophic. To leave a room that he was in, unthinkable.

When Ignacio is put into Kavya's care, she too feels the child's desperate neediness:

She rushed from work each evening with the urgency of a nursing mother. Her breasts lay slack and empty, but her chest swelled with need, and with the belief that he was waiting for her. When she arrived at his daycare, unlatched the safety gate in the foyer, he ran to her, strong arms around her neck. His faith was effortless, his need steadfast.

Lucky, indeed, to be loved by two mothers.