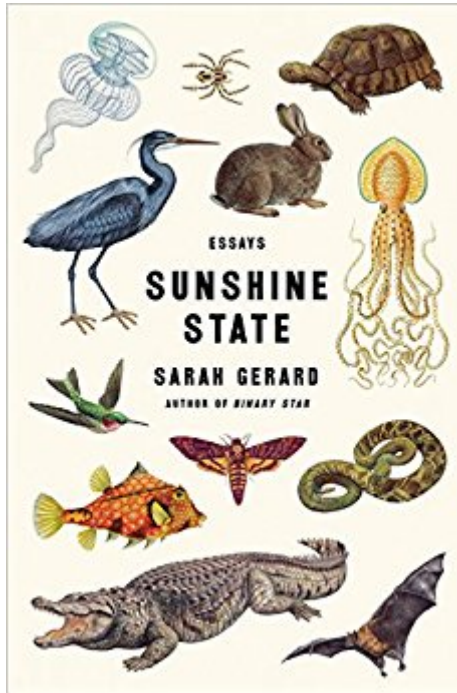


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Sunshine State: Essays



Synopsis

Â Paris Review Staff Pick
2017
A Rolling Stone
Culture Index Recommendation
A BuzzFeed
Most Exciting
Book for 2017
A The Millions Great 2017 Book Preview Pick
A Huffington Post
2017 Preview Pick
A NYLON Best 10 Books of the Month
A Lit Hub 15 Books to Read This Month
A Poets & Writers New and Noteworthy Selection
A PW Top 10 Spring
Pick in Essays & Literary Criticism
An Emma Straub recommendation on PBS
“One of the themes of Sunshine State,” Sarah Gerard’s striking book of essays, is how Florida can unmoor you and make you reach for shoddy, off-the-shelf solutions to your psychic unease. The first essay is a knockout, a lurid red heart wrapped in barbed wire.... This essay draws blood. • Dwight Garner, New York Times
“Unflinchingly candid memoir bolstered by thoughtfully researched history. A nuanced and subtly intimate mosaic of her writing, lucid yet atmospheric, takes on a timeless ebb and flow. • Jason Heller, NPR.org
“Stunning.” • Rolling Stone
“Gerard’s prose is unlabored, flatly observational, and the interwoven mini stories are at once tender and cold, exhilarating and regrettable • each undermining the one that precedes it. • Nicole Rudick, Paris Review
“Brave, keenly observational, and humanitarian. Gerard’s collection leaves an indelible impression. • Publishers Weekly, starred review
“These large-hearted, meticulous essays offer an uncanny x-ray of our national psyche... showing us both the grand beauty of our American dreams and the heartbreaking devastation they wreak. • Garth Greenwell, author of What Belongs to You
Sarah Gerard follows her breakout novel, Binary Star, with the dynamic essay collection Sunshine State, which explores Florida as a microcosm of the most pressing economic and environmental perils haunting our society. In the collection’s title essay, Gerard volunteers at the Suncoast Seabird Sanctuary, a world renowned bird refuge. There she meets its founder, who once modeled with a pelican on his arm for a Dewar’s Scotch campaign but has since declined into a pit of fraud and madness. He becomes our embezzling protagonist whose tales about the birds he “rescues” never quite add up. Gerard’s personal stories are no less eerie or poignant: An essay that begins as a look at Gerard’s first relationship becomes a heart-wrenching exploration of acquaintance rape and consent. An account of intimate female

friendship pivots midway through, morphing into a meditation on jealousy and class. With the personal insight of *The Empathy Exams*, the societal exposé of *Nickel and Dimed*, and the stylistic innovation and intensity of her own break-out debut novel *Binary Star*, Sarah Gerard's *Sunshine State* uses the intimately personal to unearth the deep reservoirs of humanity buried in the corners of our world often hardest to face.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"One of the themes of *Sunshine State*, Sarah Gerard's striking book of essays, is how Florida can unmoor you and make you reach for shoddy, off-the-shelf solutions to your psychic unease. The first essay is a knockout, a lurid red heart wrapped in barbed wire.... This essay draws blood." (Dwight Garner, *New York Times*) "Stunning." (Rolling Stone) "These large-hearted, meticulous essays offer an uncanny x-ray of our national psyche, examining that American mess of saints and conmen, the peculiar, culpable innocence that American mess of saints and conmen, the peculiar, culpable innocence that confuses money and moral worth, charity and personal aggrandizement. Gerard's prose is lacerating and compassionate at once, showing us both the grand beauty of our American dreams and the heartbreaking devastation they wreak." (Garth Greenwell, author of *What Belongs to You*) "Sarah Gerard's essay collection *Sunshine State* offers a deeply intimate look at Florida and Gerard's personal experiences growing up along its Gulf Coast. Gerard's writing is entertaining and engaging throughout,

exploring topics like addiction, incarceration, homelessness, and religion while highlighting the environmental and economic struggles (and her personal ones, both emotional and physical) of living in the state. • (Buzzfeed) • “Gerard’s prose is unlabored, flatly observational, and the interwoven mini stories are at once tender and cold, exhilarating and regrettable • each undermining the one that precedes it. • (Nicole Rudick, *Paris Review*) • “Gerard’s writing has been described as • unflinching, • but perhaps the better terms are • generous • and • patient. • Her patience is what gets her close enough to her subjects that she can round them out, exhibit their complexities, and her generosity is what keeps her from mocking them •. [The essays] work together to subvert the most common tropes about Florida’s antic madness. Instead they focus on humanizing the state’s inhabitants • inhabitants with hopes and dreams, who cope with systemic and visceral issues • who would ordinarily be flattened into condescending headlines. • (Nick Moran, *The Millions*) • “Sunshine State, embodies Florida’s unpredictability in the best sense. The essays are structurally intricate and ultraprecise in their depictions of both the physical and human worlds. Always intimate and never insular, they span a wide range of subjects • some trace the personal roots of family histories and youth and lost friendships, while others look outward to environmental conservation, religion, and homelessness. • (Laura van den Berg, *BOMB*) • “The distinct nature of Florida and its undeniable, magnetic weirdness shines through somewhere in each essay. Yet, despite its title, that enigma of a state isn’t the focus. Gerard takes a magnifying glass to powerful characters, herself included, and the underlying truths she unravels could apply to any number of Americans. The reader becomes invested in the characters’ lives, at times torn between empathy and disdain, but nonetheless needing to know what becomes of them. • (Becca Godwin, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*) • “Gerard’s native Florida links the assembled eight essays, but the setting is just that - a backdrop against which Gerard exercises an admirable impulse for experimentation. • BFF • is an extremely intimate autopsy of a childhood friendship. • “The Mayor of Williams Park • is an immersive profile told in the quasi-detached first person, of G.W. Rolle, a minister who serves free weekend lunch meals. • (Kate Bolick, *New York Times Book Review*) • “It takes someone with orange juice in their veins and alligators in their heart to truly bring the lessons of a place as complex as Florida to bear • [Sunshine State] dissects what Florida means to the United States with a nuance and complexity only someone who has lived in it • and, just as importantly, moved away from it can provide •. Listing the home’s elevation, an accurate certificate is

requisite to assessing the home's risk of flood damage or, in the case of Florida, its chances of surviving into the next few decades. Florida is the nation's elevation certificate; consider Gerard our realtor. (B. David Zarley, *Paste*) "Perfectly captures the idiosyncrasies of the Gulf Coast [filled with] tragic-comic characters who embody the state's combination of beauty, sadness, hope, and greed. The collection is part reportage, part millennial love letter to lost youth, a native daughter's attempt to sharpen her understanding of self against the whetstone of history and society. What slowly emerges throughout the course of Gerard's searching is a clear-eyed dismantling of the American dream: the idea that we are the individual architects of our fates, each with the power to will for ourselves the lives we want, the abundance we desire • wealth we trust will lead to true happiness. (Anya Ventura, *LA Review of Books*) "Gerard demonstrates how the insanities and inanities of Florida serve as a microcosm of America, in all its fractured, complicated beauty and darkness. (Kristin Iversen, *NYLON*) "Sarah Gerard's *Sunshine State* gloriously gutted me • and by that I mean changed me forever as a reader. Using Florida as a lens and the body as a ticket to travel, Gerard weaves her astonishing prose through land and corporeal truth. *Sunshine State* reminds us of who we really are underneath the skin we live in and the ground we stand on • and mercifully, there is still beauty, in spite of everything. (Lidia Yuknavitch, author of *The Book of Joan* and *The Chronology of Water*) "Sunshine State is a sort of memoir, its essays ranging widely in style and degree of intimacy. [The title essay] is a haunting story that Gerard tells with insight and skill the first essay, "BFF," a simmering prose poem. Florida is often played for laughs in literature, but Gerard knows it too well to do anything that simple. The shadows bring depth. (Colette Bancroft, *Tampa Bay Times*) "[Gerard] inserts herself into her stories in both highly personal ways and as a second party observer, leaving the reader with a map of her internal landscape as well as a Floridian topography. The combined effect is a bird's eye view of the state at large. In Gerard's work, the body is made of star stuff. The personal is political. (Liz von Klemperer, *Electric Lit*) "Sarah Gerard writes with soulful clarity and keen intelligence about the cultish relationships and aspirational thinking that course through American life. This is a collection packed with bittersweet longing for a life that's fuller or wilder or wealthier, for a larger self that's always out of reach. (Alex Mar, author of *Witches of America*) "The author goes home in Gerard's thorough, personal, and well-researched collection of essays on Florida, its inhabitants, and the ways they prey upon each another. (The Millions) The Millions, Most

Anticipated Books of the Year review) “Eight carefully researched, beautifully patterned, and vividly written essays. Emotion-rich scenes from Gerard’s life stand alongside straightforward descriptions of historical events unencumbered by editorializing. This thematic ambiguity and avoidance of the pithy message are qualities in addition to the effective use of autobiographical scenes that some of Gerard’s essays share with those of Joan Didion [and] turns the book into an Everlasting Gobstopper for thought. Also like Didion’s essays (when they first appeared), Gerard’s are records of a recent past that will soon enough feel like history.” (Ashley P. Taylor, Brooklyn Rail) “Gerard is a virtuoso of language, which in her hands is precise, unlabored, and quietly wrought with emotion. She is also a very diligent journalist. Brave, keenly observational, and humanitarian. Gerard’s collection leaves an indelible impression.” (Publishers Weekly, starred review) “Set in Florida as a kind of synecdoche for the country as a whole. Both highly personal and socially poignant.” (Garden & Gun) “[Gerard’s] prose sparkles in this series of essays but it is the people in Sunshine State who capture and concern us. Vivid, sometimes disturbing, but always engaging, I loved this memoir of our southernmost state where an evolving people play, dance, struggle, and die beneath tropical skies.” (Homer Hickam, author *Carrying Albert Home* and *Rocket Boys*) “Sunshine State is a brutal and honest account of trying to grow up and find yourself when the past is always ready to drag you back under. It is a book that left me gratefully gutted. Read it.” (Leigh Lucas, *A Woman’s Thing*) “Combining journalism and memoir, Gerard... brings a sharp eye to recollections of growing up on Florida’s Gulf Coast.... An intimate journey reveals a Florida few visitors would ever discover.” (Kirkus) “With visceral wit and a literary toolkit full to the brim with new forms, Sarah Gerard’s first collection of essays makes the wild and untamed inner life of Florida bloom vividly within the reader’s mind. Sunshine State is a strange, thoughtful, and deeply felt journey through a state whose beauty and peril speak to the contradictions of an entire nation.” (Alexandra Kleeman, author of *Intimations* and *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine*) “Gerard’s memoiristic essays, compelling and confessional, are welcome breaks from the fascinating, densely researched narrative nonfiction that drives the majority of her book. Focusing on a single state, Gerard’s scope is nonetheless quite large, and her sensitive, sympathetic writer’s sensitivity for her subjects and interviewees is apparent.” (Booklist) “I’ve never read anything like Sarah Gerard’s Sunshine State and I’m worse off as a writer for it. Gerard manages to

personalize the political and politicize the personal in ways that feel at once effortless and insanely ambitious. Some of the best essays I've read in the twenty-first century. Sunshine State should be mandatory reading for everyone living in Florida, the United States and the world. It's an amazing creation. (Kiese Laymon, author of Long Division and How to Slowly Kill Yourself and Others in America) "Using the state as a means to write about themes like identity, intimacy, and family, Gerard weaves a beautifully complex book that tackles some of the country's most urgent issues. (Christopher R. Alonso, Miami Rail) "Gerard masterfully explores the environmental, economic, and regional complexities of Florida alongside the eternal mysteries of identity, home, family, trauma, and desire. A stellar essay collection by a writer in possession of a talent as singular and furious as Florida itself. (Laura van den Berg, author of Find Me) "Sarah Gerard's sparkling essays-as-memoir is as multifaceted as Florida itself. Navigating intense friendships, her family's unconventional faith, a flirtation with Amway, tattoos, drugs, boyfriends and a husband, a homeless shelter and a bird sanctuary run by a corrupt madman, Gerhard is wide-eyed yet fully present, blunt yet empathetic to not only the crazy swirl of characters that surround her, but to herself in formation. A tough, honest, beautiful work by one of our brightest and most unflinching young writers. (Rob Spillman, editor of Tin House) "For those who fear Florida is comprised primarily of gators and the insane, this book may seem like it was written for you. In many ways, it surely was, giving life and voice to a world which has previously not held much acreage in your mind. But at its core, Sunshine State is a love letter to the wild and fascinating land itself, and the cast of characters who call it home. (Amelia Gray, author of Isadora and Gutshot) "Poignant and unflinching personal essays paint a portrait of a state ravaged by economic hardship but enriched by cultural diversity. [A] brilliant first collection. (Amy Brady, Shelf Awareness

Sarah Gerard follows her breakout novel, Binary Star, with the dynamic essay collection Sunshine State, which explores Florida as a microcosm of the most pressing economic and environmental perils haunting our society.

Dark, poetic, poignant essays about Florida, family, religion, love and heartbreak. I couldn't put it down.

Thank you!

A beautiful collection of essays crossing the spectrum from poetically candid to concrete and investigative. Recalls experiences that might be painfully familiar to Floridians who came of age in the late '90s and early 2000s, and the diverse and damaged characters who so often came drifting in, but offers so much more than colloquial anecdotes. There's nothing timid or incipient about Gerard's voice—she's self-assured and sure to become a powerhouse writer in the years to come.

It's interesting up to a point, but the rather over-the-top, almost desperate attempts at "wit" got to me enough that I put it down and went on to other stuff. Just not my cuppa I guess.

A beautiful book.

Not what I was hoping and didn't hold my attention. I live in the "Sunshine State" and this didn't meet my expectations.

This book of essays were beautifully written. The stories were both deeply personal and also socially relevant

Some good writing here.

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