

CRISTÓBAL PERSUASION

Though the title of **Mary Blume's** slim biography of grand couturier Cristóbal Balenciaga—*The Master of Us All* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux)—is taken from Christian Dior's appraisal of his colleague, the book's perspective derives from a less celebrated source, Balenciaga's top saleswoman, Florotte Chelot. Blume's extensive interviews with Chelot, who stayed with Balenciaga from his first collection, in 1937, to his last, in 1968, yield fresh material about an enigmatic man whose creations—such as “the pillbox,” “the sack,” and “the baby-doll”—are still imitated today, even if his reclusive self-effacement is not. Balenciaga cultists will delight in such character-revealing minutiae as the designer's technique for stirring up impeccable martinis (blot the ice first), his habit of wearing a hairnet to relax his curls, and his maniacal penchant for re-pinning sleeves. Blume's needle's-eye portrait nearly supports Hubert de Givenchy's conviction that his mentor was “a perfect man” and almost renders plausible Diana Vreeland's claim that the novel beauty of a Balenciaga show so overpowered her “it was possible to blow up and die.”

—AMY FINE COLLINS

Hot Type

Since the age of six, **Michael Hainey** had been haunted by the mysterious death of his father, a Chicago newspaperman. In *After Visiting Friends* (Scribner) he recounts in moving detail the obstacles he faced in uncovering the truth, the resistance from his father's still-loyal cronies, and his mother's hesitancy to talk, as well as his own reluctance to confront who his father really was and, for himself, what it means to be a man—and a son.

Nicole J. Georges believed her family's story that her father was dead, until a psychic told her otherwise; in her graphic memoir, *Calling Dr. Laura* (Mariner Books), she opens the door on her family's duplicity even as she tries to tell them the truth about her sexuality. **George Saunders's** stories in *Tenth of December* (Random House) are masterpieces of surrealist satire. **Will Self** enters the consciousnesses of a psychiatrist in a 1970s London mental institution and a patient trapped in her memories of Edwardian England in *Umbrella* (Grove). Joy, disappointment, grief, outrage—**Sophie Ratcliffe's** *P. G. Wodehouse: A Life in Letters* (Norton) affords a rare glimpse at the master of reserve's emotion-

al side.

Jamaica Kincaid occupies each character in a family of four as he or she tacks mentally through time in *See Now Then* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux). **Jeffrey Frank's** entertaining *Ike and Dick* (Simon & Schuster) proves politics makes strange bedfellows. **Nick Turse's** explosive, groundbreaking reporting uncovers the horrifying truth that American soldiers in Vietnam were frequently given official orders to *Kill Anything That Moves* (Metropolitan). **Edward Ball** unmasks the unholy but very profitable partnership between the man who launched the movies and the man who built the railroads in *The Inventor and the Tycoon* (Doubleday). The rumor of her ancestors' history of slave breeding drove **Margaret**

Wrinkle to write her unflinching, stunningly imagined debut novel, *Wash* (Atlantic Monthly Press). **Simon Garfield's** *On the Map* (Gotham) charts how humanity has been shaped by maps, from the days of “Here there be monsters” to those of “You missed our exit, idiot.”

—ELISSA SCHAPPELL

IN SHORT

Sam Roberts salutes *Grand Central: How a Train Station Transformed America* (Grand Central). **Amity Gaige** shares *Schroder* (Twelve). **Andrew Zuckerman** spotlights *The Flower* (Chronicle). In *Hilma: The Man and His Music* (Grand Central) **Tommy “Latin Explosion” Mottola** boasts about how he made Mariah, Celine, and J.Lo. **Vanity Fair's** **David Georgi's** vivid translation brings *François Villon's Poems* (Northwestern University Press) to life. Two novellas converge in **Jim Harrison's** *The River Swimmer* (Grove). *The Painted Girls* (Riverhead) of Degas were **Cathy Marie Buchanan's** muses. **Lesley Alderman** adds up seconds, weeks, and centuries in *The Book of Times* (William Morrow). Consummate literary craftsmen **Tracy Kidder** and **Richard Todd** hone *Good Prose: The Art of Nonfiction* (Random House). **Maria Konnikova** unravels the mystery of how to think like the great *Mastermind* (Viking) Sherlock Holmes. **Charlie LeDuff** dissects *Detroit: An American Autopsy* (Penguin Press). **Nell Leyshon** calls on the spirit of the Brontës in *The Colour of Milk* (Ecco). In *Swoon* (Norton) **Betsy Prioleau** explains why ladies are seduced by Casanovas. **Aria Beth Sloss's** *Autobiography of Us* (Henry Holt) follows the lives of two women—one a “good girl,” one a revolutionary. **Lucinda Rosenfeld** depicts the lives of three sisters in *The Pretty One* (Little, Brown). **William Stadium** revels in the unseemly 80s excesses that built *Moneywood* (St. Martin's). **Herman Koch** tempts with *The Dinner* (Hogarth). —E.S.