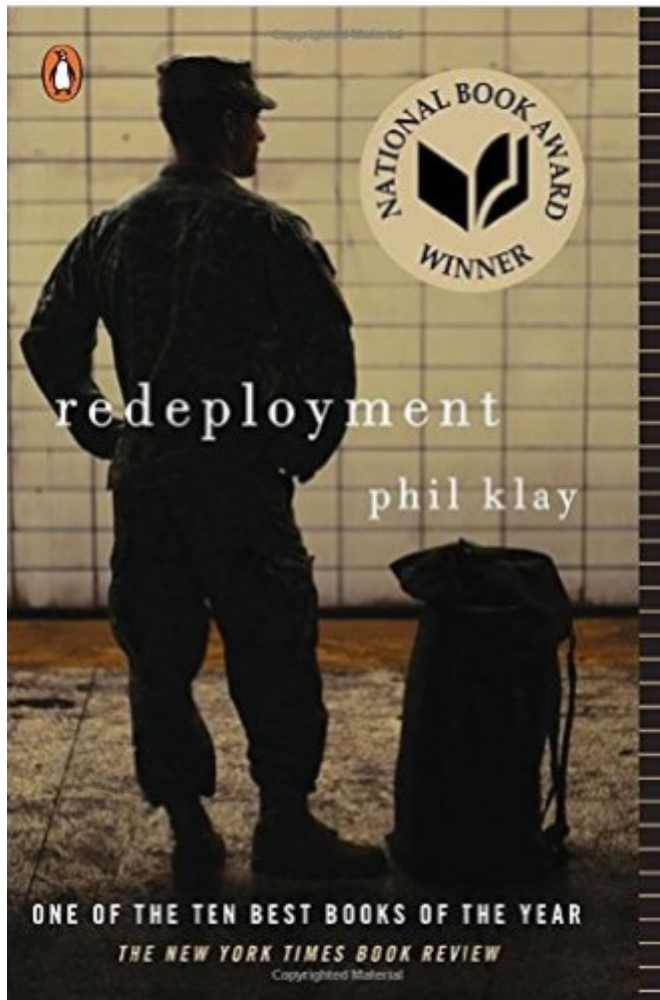


David Heim's Christmas picks

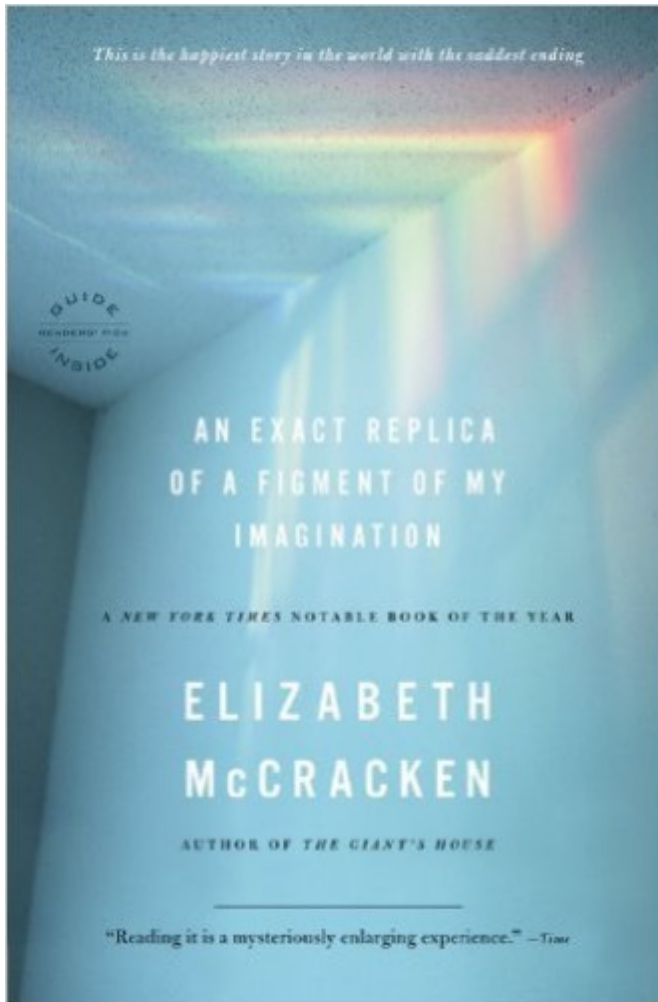
selected by [David Heim](#) in the [December 7, 2016](#) issue

In Review



Redeployment

by Phil Klay
Penguin



An Exact Replica of a Figment of My Imagination

by Elizabeth McCracken
Little, Brown



BORGEN

THE COMPLETE SERIES

Borgen is Denmark's 'West Wing' (but even better)
John Powers, NPR

Borgen

BBC Four



Parade's End

HBO

Phil Klay's powerful stories about the war in Iraq and soldiers' struggles to reenter civilian life in *Redeployment* (Penguin) crackle with mordant dialogue, confusion, and suppressed rage. Klay explores what ethicists call "moral injury" through a variety of voices: a mortuary worker, a combat soldier, a black veteran enrolled at Amherst. A chaplain wonders if his troops are committing war crimes and if he can do anything about it. "Twenty centuries of Christianity," he says to one soldier. "You'd think we'd learn." He fingers the cross on his lapel. "In this world, He only promises we don't suffer alone."

I was moved by Elizabeth McCracken's memoir of bearing a stillborn child, *An Exact Replica of a Figment of My Imagination* (Little, Brown). Her insistence on the indelible meaning of what the child evoked in her gives the writing an unexpected

buoyancy. At the same time, McCracken sharply observes her own isolation as others responded to the loss. She imagines passing out an explanatory card that states, “*My first child was stillborn*. I want people to know but I don’t want to say it aloud. People don’t like to hear it but I think they might not mind reading it on a card.”

Borgen (BBC Four) is an absorbing Danish television series about a center-left female politician and her press advisers. Produced in the style of *The West Wing*, it moves between characters’ private and public lives and is earnest about the possibility of doing good in politics. As rivalries play out in shuffling party alignments and cabinet appointments, the lead character manages the tabloid press, a husband who wants a divorce, and a seriously ill daughter.

HBO’s remarkable cinematic version of *Parade’s End*, Ford Madox Ford’s tetralogy of novels, features Tom Stoppard as screenwriter and Benedict Cumberbatch in the role of “the last honorable man in England.” The work covers roughly the same social history as *Downton Abbey*—the end of the Edwardian age, hastened by World War I—but, faithful to Ford’s work, it is marked with tense dark humor and fascinating, uncategorizable characters.

Read the other 2016 Christmas picks [here](#).