

BOOKS

This Week's Hot Reads: June 11, 2012

Jun 11, 2012 6:48 PM EDT

***The Fan Who Knew Too Much* by Anthony Heilbut**

The passions that drive the cultural historian Anthony Heilbut become clear in this collection of essays by a rapacious fan of gospel music, Jewish immigrant culture, and German literature.

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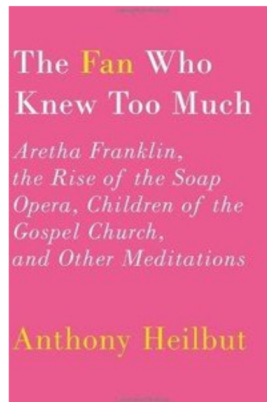
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'The FanWho Knew Too Much' by Anthony Heilbut. 368 pp. Knopf. \$30.

If *Darwin's Ghost* traces the influences on natural selection, *The Fan Who Knew Too Much* charts the influences on, well, Anthony Heilbut. In fact, "influence" is everywhere in the book, and the thread that connects these searching, web-like essays. "Aretha: How She Got Over," surveys the many predecessors of the gospel diva—everyone from Billy Strayhorn to Billie Holiday, from Sister Rosetta Tharpe to Mahalia Jackson. In the best of the bunch, "The Children and Their Secret Closet," Heilbut documents the gay community within the Pentecostal Church. In "Somebody Else's Paradise," he notes the obvious achievements of Germans who fled Hitler, too many to name. His favorite writers [Joseph Roth](#) and Thomas Mann round out his life's passions, and *The Fan Who Knew Too Much* feels like a late Beethoven string quartet, drawing on a rich career's obsessions and paying tribute to sources of inspiration.