Clinton’s loss and the #MeToo movement, which emerged about two months after it was published. Fikry fans were baffled, Zevin reports: “What’s she going on about? This is not heartwarming!” Yet both novels address technology’s outsized impact—the influx of electronic-based reading and the Internet’s indelible record of one’s identity and missteps. The novels also reflect how public/private identities and the nature of perceptions alter over time. Time itself often rises to the level of character for Zevin; at once a transmutable human construct, and an indomitable catalyst. Fikry and Grossman change with age, and ultimately seek forgiveness, acceptance, and kinship. “I write characters who, for one reason or another, have difficulties fitting in with the world; they seem like functional, well-adjusted people, but they all grapple with loneliness,” says Zevin. “People have pointed out to me that I often write biracial characters, head traumas, orphans, and car accidents.”

Strong women, too. In her debut novel Margarettown (2005) a character appears as five different versions of herself over a lifetime. Thematically, it’s somewhat related to Zevin’s screenplay for Conversations with Other Women (2005) starring Helena Bonham Carter and Aaron Eckhart. Directed by Canosa, its savvy retrospective on a failed marriage unfolds through flashbacks and split-screen editing, echoing the way memories play in the mind. 

Zevin’s own creative life split that year, when her other early novel, Elsewhere—which evokes Tuck Everlasting, A Wrinkle in Time, and A Christmas Carol with its original time-twisting premise—launched her as a young-adult author. The book is narrated by a dead teenager who finds herself on the island of Elsewhere, forced to live life in reverse. Zevin initially conceived the story as “an after-life love triangle” and fantastical tale for all ages, like The Little Prince. Seven novels later, it now feels as though another person wrote that book, she says, even if she still struggles with its underlying question: “How do we live in a world when it is filled with so much loss?” Elsewhere’s success and Zevin’s “lack of a trust fund” led to Memoirs of a Teenage Amnesiac (2007), and then to developing characters who age into their early twenties for her Birthright trilogy (2011-2013). Protagonist Anya Balanchine is the daughter of a Russian-American crime family, living in a semi-dystopic 2083 New York City—a mix of 1970s urbanism and Soviet-era Russia—where chocolate and caffeine are illegal. “There’s a lot of rationing, love, crime, death, and revenge” amid explorations of young women and power, she says, and “the fact that what is legal can determine what is good and who is good. It probably came out of thinking about the legalization of marijuana.” In March, the trilogy was optioned for television.

Considering how the zeitgeist has crept into her novels, will the tenth one (now under way) integrate aspects of COVID-19? The sudden dissolution of “normal” life reverberates in known and unknowable ways, Zevin allows. It’s a mistake not to view this period as “real time,” she adds: “We have some choice in the way we use it, assuming we’re not desperately ill or desperate for money, so you will either come out on the other side of this having done some things, or having done nothing at all. And, really, life itself is actually like that, too.” All she’ll say about the

Cambridge Scholars

Four seniors have won Harvard-Cambridge Scholarships to study at Cambridge University during the 2020-21 academic year.

Fernanda Baron, of Lowell House, a sociology concentrator with a secondary field in the studies of women, gender, and sexuality, will be the Governor William Shirley Scholar at Pembroke College. Caroline Engelmayer, of Currier House, a classics concentrator, will be the Lionel De Jersey Harvard Scholar at Emmanuel College. Juan Carlos Fernandez del Castillo, of Mather House, a mathematics concentrator, will be the John Eliot Scholar at Jesus College. Bilal Nadeem, of Quincy House, a human developmental and regenerative biology concentrator with a secondary field in global health and health policy and a language citation in modern standard Arabic, will be the Charles H. Fiske III Scholar at Trinity College.