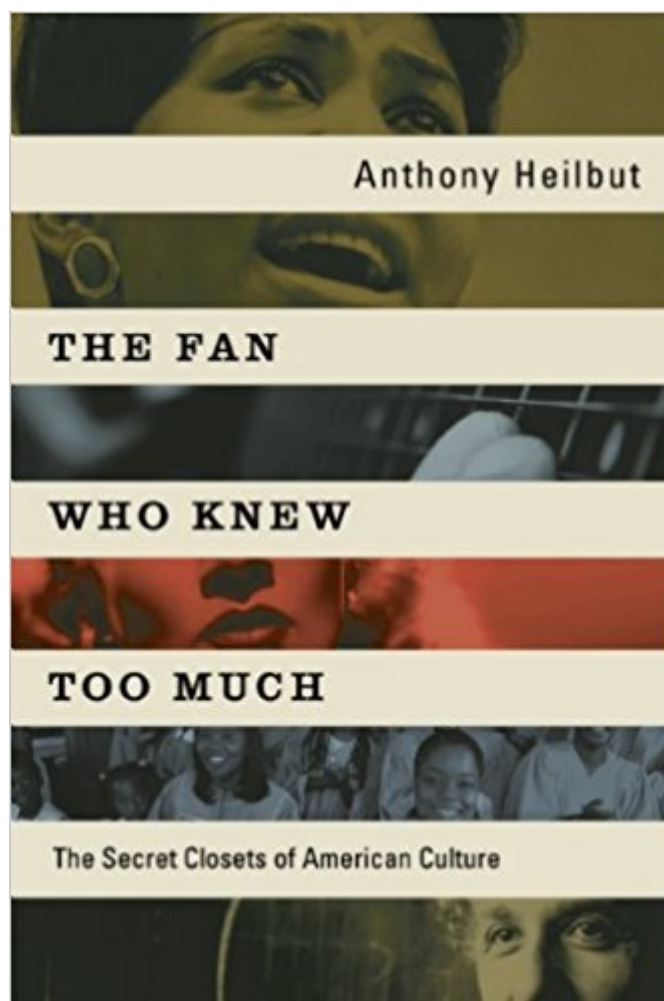


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# The Fan Who Knew Too Much: The Secret Closets Of American Culture



## Synopsis

Anthony Heilbut is a Grammy-winning record producer famous for his work with gospel music; he is also the author of *The Gospel Sound*, which celebrates the sound and contributors of the gospel scene. He is an agnostic with Jewish roots who adores gospel music. *The Fan Who Knew Too Much*, extends Heilbut's fascination with outsiders, loners, and exiles in 20th-century American Culture (Ian Crouch). • The book is comprised of eight essays that range from art to obsession. Heilbut explores the roles of gays in the gospel church, profiles the life and work of Aretha Franklin, discusses the rise of the soap opera and Irna Phillips, its most influential figure, detours to an expose on male sopranos, and explores the roles of émigrés from Hitler's Germany to America. On this broad journey through American culture, Anthony Heilbut has been a guide and a mentor...I know of no one who has the love and depth of knowledge of this extraordinary author (Paul Simon). •

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Anthony Heilbut is the author of *Thomas Mann: Eros and Literature*, *Exiled in Paradise: German Refugee Artists and Intellectuals in America from the 1930s to the Present*, and, *The Gospel Sound: Good News and Bad Times*. He is a record producer specializing in gospel music and has won a Grammy Award and a Grand Prix du Disque. He received his Ph.D in English from Harvard University, and has taught at New York University and Hunter College.

Dear curious readers, here's a rare chance to get a most brutally insightful and painfully passionate work from one of America's best. "The Fan Who Knew Too Much" is almost an understatement. Anthony Heilbut wrote the definitive bible on Black Gospel music over 40 years ago! Critics, scholars, fans and most importantly the living souls he wrote of instantly agreed, "The Gospel Sound - Good News and Bad Times" was a masterpiece. Today that same author has honed his pen even sharper and painted a picture that would leave Rembrandt's brush in shame. Some of his subject matter here is not for the faint of heart, but the truth is usually ugly and only a master can make sense of the myth. His forays into soap operas to drag queens, black radio and the blues are precise, honest and funny. Mr. Heilbut takes the reader deep into the Mariana Trench of Aretha Franklin's universe, from her first child at 13 to her singing for Barack Obama, it reads as written by a family member, like a Grandfather who knew her soul and what was coming before she did. Slowly the author's grasp of persecution becomes crystal, it could only come from a German Jewish kid lovingly adopted into the "Golden Era" of America's most insanely influential source of the Nile. (There's a reason it's still called the "Golden Era" ...nobody's ever topped it!) He surely did it by attending countless store-front churches to the Apollo on many, many occasions. It just so happens that Heilbut has the writing chops to do what most can't, walk the last mile of the way and tell the truth. 40s, 50s black American's soul? German Jews? Sames? (some say Gays) ....don't get more persecuted than that! Buy this book NOW... you'll be richer than Noah. Somebody say Amen.

In this engaging book of essays, Anthony Heilbut shares his deep understanding of many topics, including German literature, blues and gospel music, the history of the soap opera, gay black music artists, and what it means to be a child of ex-pat German Jews. His pieces sizzle with intellectual energy and passion. He is allusive and elusive - witness the title of the book. (I have a theory, but I'm still thinking about it.) He is best, in my opinion, when he is explaining the meaning of popular culture phenomena, such as Aretha Franklin's place in cultural history and the attraction of gay artists to gospel music. I loved the short essay about Joseph Roth, but then I love Joseph Roth. His piece on "migr" artists in America expands on his seminal study of Thomas Mann and the ex-pat German artists who so enriched American culture in the mid-20th century. But get your seat belt on. It takes energy to read these essays. Heilbut's writing is highly personal, a literary Brownian motion, and one must pay attention. But there's a rich payoff.

Heilbut's work has long been distinguished by his gift for taking on polysemous topics and spinning the reader through them, gracefully and compellingly--teasing out all sorts of unexpected

associations along the way. It's a pleasure to read intellectual history where the frame of reference is so unabashedly broad and the weave of ideas so rewarding to follow. In this volume, the essay "Yesterday's Heroes," which looks into the afterlife of some of the figures he explored in his great book "Exiled in Paradise," contains a tour de force of cascading cultural links that takes readers from Hannah Arendt into Marlene Dietrich and Hedy Lamarr--then back around the block to Bertolt Brecht. It's an irresistible ride and full of discoveries.

Heilbut is a masterful writer. As I wrote about him in Gay City News, "Heilbut packs more ideas into a paragraph than most writers do in a chapter or a whole book."

One of the most important and ingenious books of cultural criticism I've read. iThe first essay fairly beams with the remarkable energy of great scholarship, yoking ideas and making connections; the second is arguably the best and most informed thing I've ever read about Aretha. As fun to read and think about as it is profound....

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