

The New York Times

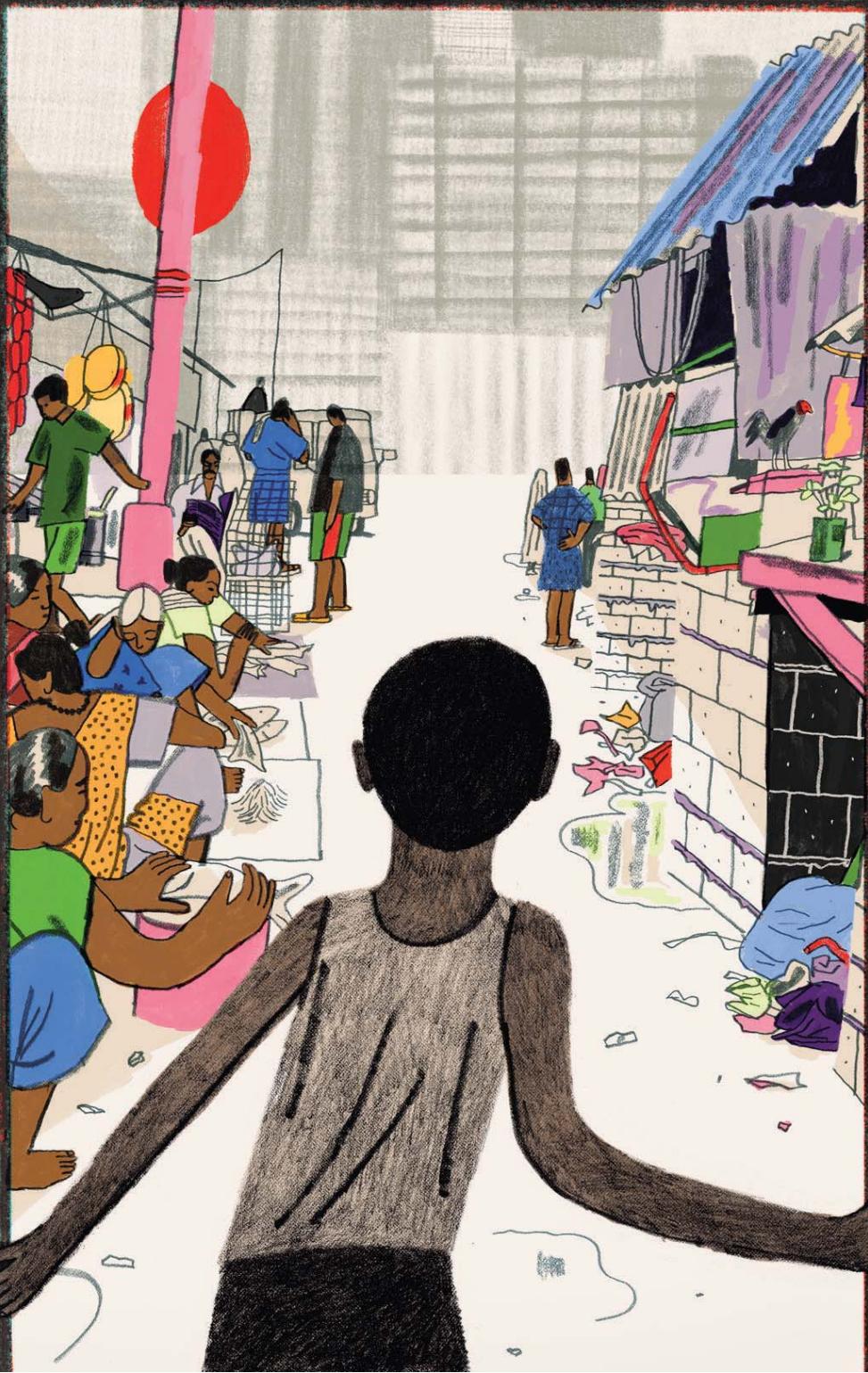
Book Review

FEBRUARY 2, 2020

TINDERBOX A century of Middle East conflict, from Palestine's perspective

FINGER ON THE BUTTON How nuclear weapons change global politics

PLUS True crime in Appalachia, and the fight against school privatization



JOSH COCHRAN

Gone Boy

By Lorraine Adams

PERHAPS THE MOST trenchantly portrayed boy in India is Apu, the character at the center of Satyajit Ray's famed film trilogy. Its first installment, "Pather Panchali," or "Song of the Little Road," burst onto the world cinema scene in 1955 and remains a masterpiece. It was based on another "first," the debut novel of the same name, originally published in 1929 by Bhibuti Bashan Banerjee, which depicted

DJINN PATROL ON THE PURPLE LINE

By Deepa Anappara

347 pp. Random House. \$27.

Apu and his family in their village in rural Bengal. The book ends in a railroad station as they board a train to find a better life in a hectic city.

The "Purple Line" of Deepa Anappara's first novel is a metro system in another imaginary Indian city, and the book opens along its tracks, as seen from the perspective of a group of street boys. The focus then tightens, bringing us the story through the eyes of a 9-year-old named Jai who lives in a basti, an impoverished colony that abuts the railway line. In Jai, Anappara has created a boy vivid in his humanity, one whose voice somersaults on the page.

Rich with easy joy, Anappara's writing announces the arrival of a literary supernova. Even before she had finished "Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line," her novel-in-progress had

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16

Guilt by Accusation

“If this can happen to me—a man who has the resources to fight back—it can happen to anyone.”

“Alan Dershowitz reminds us that popular mob passions and fashions can turn the blameless into public pariahs. Accused by a woman he never met, he presents a compelling argument that he was framed for money.”

—LUCINDA FRANKS MORGANTHAU, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Author

“This dramatic and compelling tale explores whether anyone should be found guilty based solely on an ‘accusation.’ When they are, we create a toxic atmosphere for innocent people. This threatens the credibility of women who have truly suffered. Viewing all men as guilty and all women as truth-tellers is dangerously naive.”

—PHYLLIS CHESLER, author of *Women and Madness*, and *A Politically Incorrect Feminist*

“Alan Dershowitz is a living profile in courage.” —STEVE FORBES

The Chronology of a Frame Up: from *Guilt by Accusation*

2011

Virginia Giuffre is interviewed by journalist Sharon Churcher about her sexual encounters. She names numerous men, but not Dershowitz. She had to be told by Churcher that Dershowitz wrote *Reversal of Fortune* and is famous and would be a “good name for your pitch.”

Churcher tells Giuffre, “you probably met him” hanging around with Epstein, though there is “no proof” he did anything wrong.

2012

Manuscript: Giuffre said she saw Dershowitz discussing business with Epstein, but not that she ever actually met him or had sex with him.

2013

Giuffre tells the FBI about the men with whom she says she had sex. She does not include Dershowitz. She also tells her then-boyfriend and her childhood best friend whom she met and had sex with, but does not include Dershowitz.

2014

Meets her lawyers, who, she tells her childhood best friend, pressured her to include Dershowitz among people with whom she had sex.

2014–2015

After meeting with her lawyers—and “feeling pressure” from them—Giuffre suddenly “remembers” having sex with Dershowitz seven times between 2001 and 2002 (when she was 18 and 19). She made up the entire story.

2015

Giuffre’s own lawyer tells Dershowitz, in recorded conversations, that based on Dershowitz’s travel and other records, it would be “impossible” for Dershowitz to have been in places where Giuffre claims to have had sex with Dershowitz, and that Giuffre is “wrong . . . simply wrong” in accusing him.

Giuffre was not only “wrong” to accuse Dershowitz, she was “wrong” in saying she met Tipper and Al Gore and Bill Clinton on Epstein’s island. Secret Service, police, and other records establish that they were never on the island. She was wrong in saying she was 14 when she first met Epstein. Her own employment records prove she was 17. She was wrong when she denied having any emails that mentioned Dershowitz. The truth is she was hiding emails that proved she never even met Dershowitz.

“The totality of the evidence found during the investigation refutes the allegations.”

—Louis Freeh, Former Director, FBI

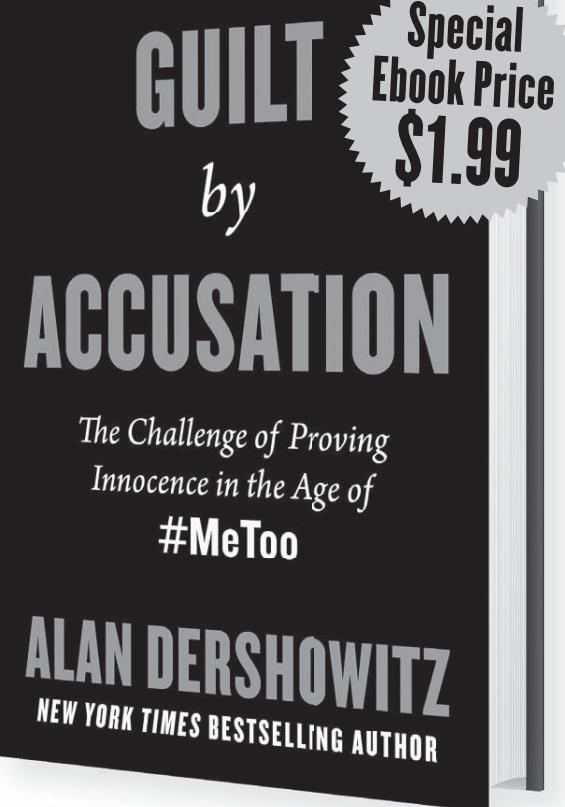


**The new book from
Alan Dershowitz.
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books are sold.**

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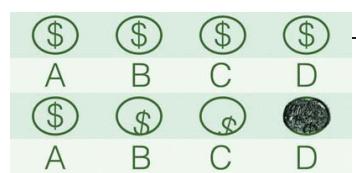


“Over [his] storied career, Dershowitz has remained more or less unchanged: loud, provocative, brilliant and principled.” —POLITICO



Book Review

The New York Times
FEBRUARY 2, 2020



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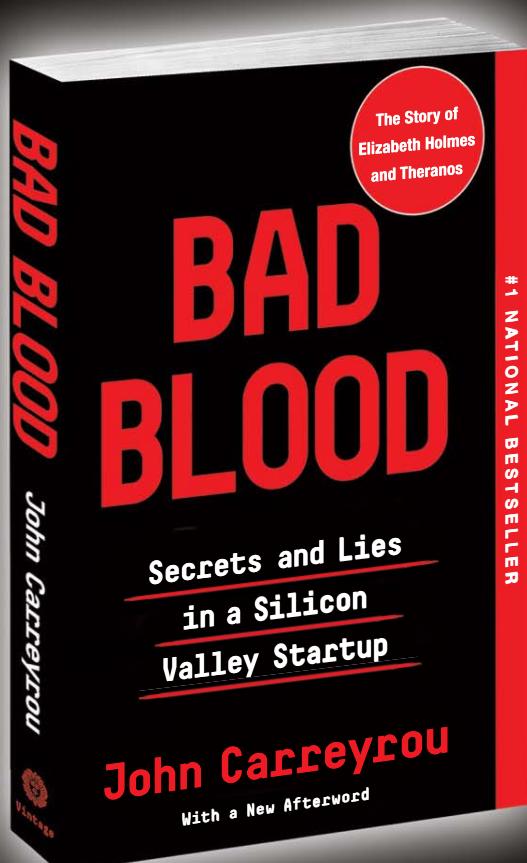
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In Paperback at Last

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—The New York Times Book Review



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—Bill Gates

**"Gripping.... Riveting....
Momentum worthy of a crime novel."**

—Los Angeles Review of Books

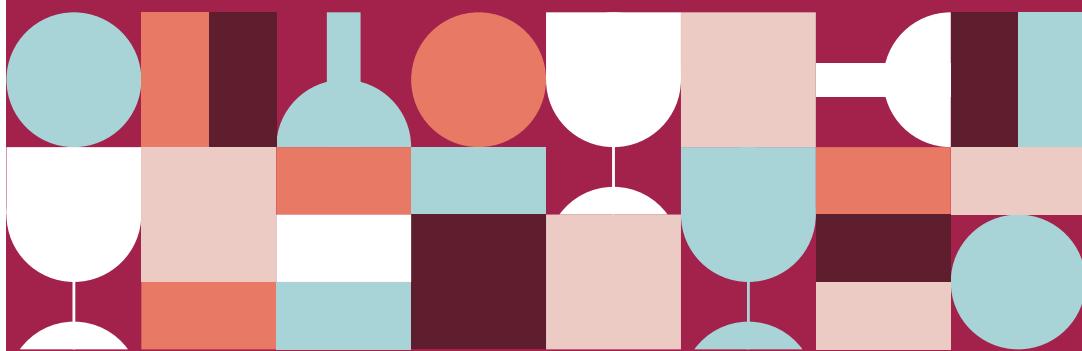
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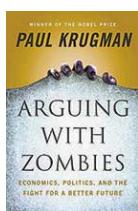
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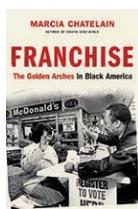
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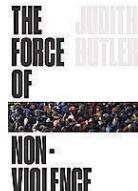
New & Noteworthy



ARGUING WITH ZOMBIES: ECONOMICS, POLITICS, AND THE FIGHT FOR A BETTER FUTURE, by Paul Krugman. (Norton, \$29.95.) Krugman, who won the 2008 Nobel Prize in Economics, has for two decades used his New York Times column to explore the intersection of politics and the economy, as this expansive collection illustrates.



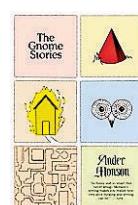
FRANCHISE: THE GOLDEN ARCHES IN BLACK AMERICA, by Marcia Chatelain. (Liveright, \$28.95.) Chatelain's surprising history traces the active but little-known role that fast food companies played in black empowerment after Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination.



THE FORCE OF NON-VIOLENCE, by Judith Butler. (Verso, \$24.95.) As a strategy of resistance and protest, nonviolence is often seen as passive and resolutely individual. Butler's philosophical inquiry argues that it is in fact a shrewd and even aggressive collective political tactic.



THE MAKING OF POETRY: COLERIDGE, THE WORDSWORTHS, AND THEIR YEAR OF MARVELS, by Adam Nicolson. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$35.) Why was the year and a half from June 1797 to September 1798 so productive for the great Romantics? Nicolson investigates.

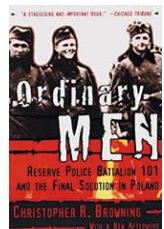


THE GNOME STORIES, by Ander Monson. (Graywolf, paper, \$16.) Eleven uncanny tales of trauma and loneliness: A man's girlfriend is cryogenically frozen after a car crash; a woman and her robot are hired out to erase memories.

WHAT WE'RE READING

It's taken me six weeks, gripped and appalled, to read Christopher Browning's **ORDINARY MEN: RESERVE POLICE BATTALION 101 AND THE FINAL SOLUTION IN POLAND**. The subject matter is painful: how 500 middle-aged policemen, mostly from Hamburg, descended into massacring Jews in Nazi-occupied Poland. Just as painful are the questions that Browning asks about what can turn outwardly unexceptional people into perpetrators of terrible crimes. He uses the postwar accounts of the police officers to argue that it did not take ideological fanatics to carry out mass murder. Most members of the battalion were not veteran Nazis, and they had chances to opt out of killing without serious punishment. Still, peer pressure and deference to authority meant few dropped out from massacring Jews. "I must answer that no one wants to be thought a coward," one of the officers said to explain why he kept killing.

—CHRIS BUCKLEY, CHIEF CHINA CORRESPONDENT



Letters



Class Warfare?

TO THE EDITOR:
Anand Giridharadas's review of Michael Lind's "The New Class War: Saving Democracy From the Managerial Elite" (Jan. 19) is appropriately critical of the thesis that the white working-class voters who support Donald Trump are demonstrating understandable frustration with "elites."

The photograph accompanying the review, which shows construction workers waiting for Trump to speak in western Pennsylvania in 2019, appears on the surface to illustrate Lind's view. A more accurate caption, however, would back up Giridharadas's point perfectly, since these workers were told by their employers (as reported in The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette) that if they did not attend the rally they would not be paid for the day. That rally, and that photograph, epitomize the phony "populism" of our current president.

ROBERT SHAFFER
MECHANICSBURG, PA.

Entitlement

TO THE EDITOR:
Jonathan Rauch's review of Christopher Caldwell's "The Age of Entitlement: America Since the Sixties" (Jan. 19) raised objections to the author's central thesis that the Civil Rights Act was anti-constitutional. But Rauch's objections were distressingly gentle. The 1788 Constitution, which Caldwell holds up as sacrosanct, legitimized human slavery. Even after ratification of the 14th Amendment, Jim Crow laws kept huge swaths of citizens from enjoying the legal protection the Constitution is meant to provide. To understand our current political and social environment, rather than a tortured speculation that the Civil Rights Act allowed unentitled groups to become entitled, one might postulate that the Supreme Court, whose mission is to protect the letter and spirit of the Constitution, has failed at that critical mission.

JONATHAN M. ROSEN
STAMFORD, CONN.

Tin Ears?

TO THE EDITOR:
In his review of Ted Gioia's "Music: A Subversive History" (Jan. 12), David Hajdu reminds us that the works of the great composers often puzzled or even infuriated the listeners of their time. I'd like to recommend a book that illustrates some of this frustration. Nicolas Slonimsky's "A Lexicon

of Musical Invective" is a collection of bad (even scathing) reviews of great classical works. Many seem little more than opportunities for the reviewers to show off their witticisms, and we still see that today. But the book, in its illustration of cultural narrow-mindedness, remains highly enjoyable reading.

FLOYD GUMBLE
CARMEL, N.Y.

Leisure Time

TO THE EDITOR:
It's beyond absurd. According to Alana Semuels's review of Daniel Susskind's "A World Without Work: Technology, Automation, and How We Should Respond" (Jan. 19), we're devoting huge sums of money and calling upon our best scientific minds so we can perfect the very entity that will replace us. Has mankind ever done anything dumber?

NANCY STARK
NEW YORK

CORRECTION

Because of an editing error, a review last Sunday about the novel "Little Gods," by Meng Jin, misstated the reviewer's estimation of the protagonist, a woman named Su Lan. The review should have said that Su Lan is a "compellingly complex" character, not that she is "as complex a protagonist as any I can recall."

BOOKS@NYTIMES.COM

From Our Archives

In this week's issue, Kevin Wilson reviews "Processed Cheese," by Stephen Wright. In 2006, Laura Miller wrote for the Book Review about "The Amalgamation Polka," Wright's novel about the descendant of both ardent abolitionists and unwavering slaveholders.

History is a comfy subject for fiction. We already know what happened, and we usually know what to think about it: how foolish it was to underestimate Hitler, to board the Titanic. This makes historical fiction a safe, even conservative, genre, attractive to writers who aren't looking to go out on a limb. But it's an odd choice for Stephen Wright, an extravagantly talented novelist who excels at depicting the deliri-

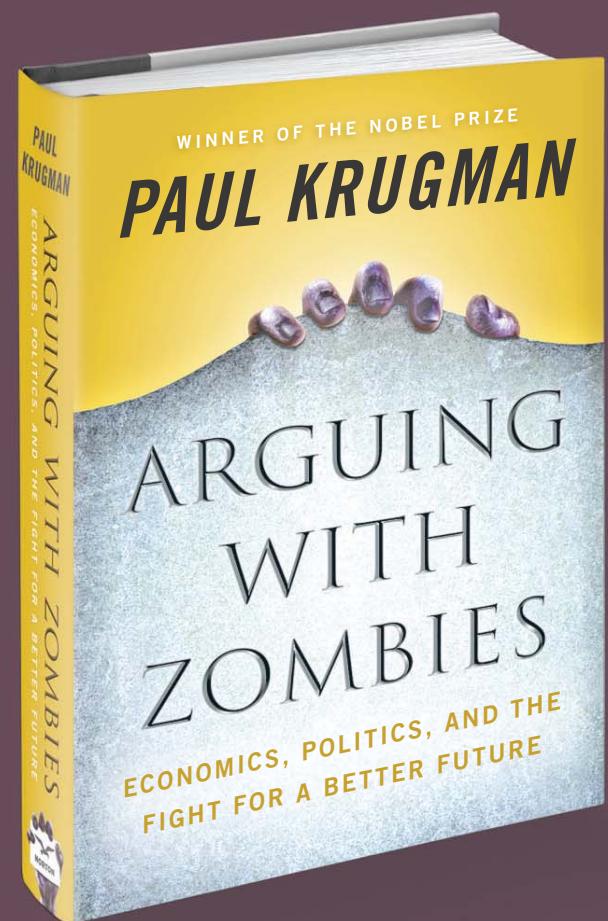
um that hits once you've scrambled so far off the limb you're suspended in midair.

"The Amalgamation Polka" puts a little faith in love and decency, but it's no sober museum piece. Instead, it offers something rare in historical novels and also available in Wright's other books, the vertiginous sensation of a tilt forward into the unknown. This, after all, is what history feels like to the people who live through it,

the ones with no idea what will happen next and an uncertain grasp on who the good guys will turn out to be. It feels like the world as you know it, dissolving and re-forming into an unimaginable and unnavigable new configuration. It feels like now.

For Wright, America, past and present, is Wonderland, a place of marvels and horrors from which not even the fortunate escape with their heads.

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By the Book



Laurie Anderson

The musician and multimedia artist, whose new show will open at the Hirshhorn Museum in May, doesn't mind e-books: 'I no longer compare the differences between screen and paper. I'll read anything anywhere.'

What books are on your nightstand?

I read as a survival strategy. I wake up every morning full of dread and disbelief. Then I start reading. Sometimes poems, sometimes history or books about dreams or consciousness. Once in a while I look at a few pages of "Sapiens," by Yuval Noah Harari, or review "The Uninhabitable Earth," by David Wallace-Wells. I read until I feel better. I'm an optimistic person from then on.

Are there any classic novels that you only recently read for the first time?

I read "A Woman of Thirty" while looking for a Balzac book that begins with an image that has haunted me for a long time. It's a book that begins with a wind that blows through town. As the wind passes through windows and slips under doors we meet the characters in the book. If any Times readers know which Balzac book this wind is in — please let me know.

Describe your ideal reading experience.

There's a hotel in Groningen with a huge fireplace and the best cheese and coffee in Holland. For years I've been planning a reading vacation there — ship a few cartons of books over and sit by the fire reading for a couple of weeks, breaking the days up with walks in the countryside with my dog Little Will.

I love to read on trains and planes or anywhere with a smooth ride. Craig Nelson's books are especially good for this — books jammed with characters and facts like "Pearl Harbor." When I'm on tour I carry a box with at least 10 books.

I like to read on the beach. Once I took a "Neuromancer" paperback to Bora Bora and it was so humid there that every time I turned a page it came unglued and fell away from the book. I was slowly leafleting the island with William Gibson, although I like to think you could read single pages and still get the gist. As the last page fell away from the spine I was holding what looked like a gluey fish skeleton.

Which writers — novelists, playwrights, critics, journalists, poets — working today do you admire most?

Ben Lerner, Anne Carson, A. M. Homes, Hilton Als, Sharon Olds, Jonathan Cott.

What book, if any, most contributed to your artistic development?

All of John Berger and all of Natalia Ginzburg. I read Ginzburg in Beginning Italian in college. We read her because the vocabulary was small and the language and grammar were plain. The concepts, emotions and characters in her books are complex and unforgettable.

What's the best book you've ever received as a gift?

A Bible bound in white leather from my missionary grandmother with my name embossed on the cover. It impressed me that all the direct quotes were in red ink. We read all the stories in Bible school — my first book club — where we avidly discussed hell, angels, eternity, and wondered if there really were talking snakes.

What kind of reader were you as a child? Which childhood books and authors stick with you most?

I first became hypnotized by reading the backs of cereal boxes. I still like to read and eat at the same time, especially alone in restaurants when I'm on tour.

I loved "The Wind in the Willows." It's amazing that little children are still drawn to stories about small bachelor animals in bathrobes and slippers.

How have your reading tastes changed over time?

I'm happy to read electronically now and I no longer compare the differences between screen and paper. I'll read anything anywhere.

You're organizing a literary dinner party. Which three writers, dead or alive, do you invite?

Books are the way the dead talk to the living, so I would invite dead people. I would invite my dead husband the writer Lou Reed (but he is usually here already anyway) and I'd invite his dead teacher Delmore Schwartz and, to mix things up a bit, the deceased William Shakespeare. I would begin the dinner with cocktails and a dish of salted nuts and assorted unidentified past due pills. I would also invite a few live friends. I'm not sure how conversation would work. Would words be spoken, written or telepathic? I know that although we the living would acknowledge the thin line dividing us, we would also avoid asking things like, "How have you been lately?" □

An expanded version of this interview is available at nytimes.com/books.

Stars Align

An unfinished sci-fi manuscript bridges multiple universes, cosmic and human.



MARTA MONTEIRO

By WILL CHANCELLOR

SUPPOSE THAT WE LIVE in a universe without “ifs.” What appears to be chance, or choice, is actually a peek into the rules of a completely separate universe that we can never access. Here, all our hopes for what might have been or what could be are accounted for; every outcome is settled, and we must play it as it lays.

Welcome to the vertigo-inducing contemporary cosmic landscape, which is also the landscape of Michael Zapata’s debut novel, “The Lost Book of Adana Moreau.” Structurally, the book alter-

THE LOST BOOK OF ADANA MOREAU
By Michael Zapata

266 pp. Hanover Square Press.
\$26.99.

nates between the story of Maxwell Moreau, a budding theoretical physicist in 1920s-30s New Orleans, and that of Saul Drower, a hotel clerk and sci-fi enthusiast in Chicago in the early 2000s. The reader hopes these worlds will collide through an unfinished manuscript by Maxwell’s mother, the titular Adana.

The daughter of Dominican insurgents executed by the United States Marines in 1916, a teenage Adana flees the island with the help of a lovestruck pirate (Maxwell’s father), on a ship bound for Louisiana.

Settled with her new family in New Orleans, Adana discovers, like fortunate parents the world

over, that literature is the best tether for her son’s wandering spirit. But it tethers her as well, and she attacks the library’s science fiction section with an autodidact’s frenzy. These titles inspire Adana to give voice to her trauma in the form of an apocalyptic novel of her own, a multiverse dramatization called “Lost City.” Tragically, typhoid strikes before she can finish the sequel, “A Model Earth,” and she destroys her only manuscript before she dies.

Yet somehow a copy finds its way to Saul’s doorstep generations later. Mourning the death of his grandfather, Saul is surprised to find this 924-page inquiry into the cosmos among his relative’s effects.

Saul and his friend Javier, a journalist covering Latin America, eventually locate the manuscript’s intended recipient, a Dr. Maxwell Moreau, in New Orleans. Relying on Javier’s fluency in disaster, they drive south into the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

The metaphor of parallel universes pervades the novel from the epigraph to the final line (in which human breath is seen as “tiny bubbles which expanded and split or collided into yet others, each single sphere translucent and aflame with the light of the dawning sun”). This poses a compositional constraint: Instead of using a story-within-a-story framework (think Nicole Krauss’s “The History of Love”), or an entangled symmetry (David Mitchell’s “Cloud Atlas”), Zapata layers his worlds flat atop one another. The reader has to hunt for traces of communication between story lines, just as Maxwell peers from a telescope in the Chilean desert hoping to “detect gravity.”

Though Maxwell’s physics is deliberately vague, the implications are immediate and real. Through the allegory of the multiverse, Zapata reinterprets the extent and toll of exile on Earth, the gulf between universes of human experience. □

from one universe leaking into ours.”

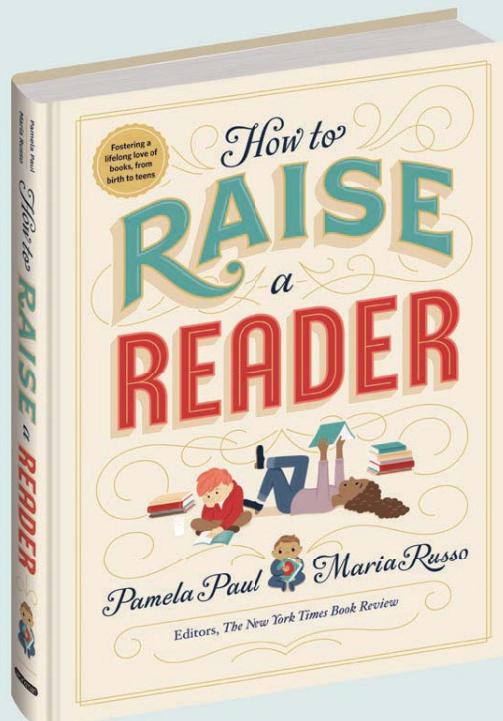
Zapata builds two fully realized worlds, stretching from the Bolshevik Revolution and Prohibition-era racism to student protests in Chile, San Salvador in 1989 and the 2001 Argentine depression. He intersperses all this with stories from a mad old pirate, a former circus strongman and, by my count, 28 imaginary books. To cover so much ground, Zapata often summarizes plot for pages. “A Model Earth” might not be lost, but it’s easy to get lost in the quest to recover it.

Interestingly, Saul’s grandfather, a historian in the mode of Svetlana Alexievich, highlights the primacy of interiority over action. “Your grandfather’s history books present portraits of people rather than accounts of events,” said Javier. What do people think? What makes them happy? What do they fear?”

When Zapata, too, favors people over events, their stories come alive. We feel soot on our faces when a Welsh doctor recounts leading a pony from a coal mine; we hear the clanging pots of rioters in Javier’s description of Buenos Aires. In the book’s most hypnotizing passage, we are breathless and stung by the anti-Semitic horror Saul’s great-grandfather experienced aboard a ship carrying him from Europe to the New World.

Though Maxwell’s physics is deliberately vague, the implications are immediate and real. Through the allegory of the multiverse, Zapata reinterprets the extent and toll of exile on Earth, the gulf between universes of human experience. □

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Examining a life lived on the outside.

By PENELOPE GREEN

WE FIRST MEET LUCY BAILEY in a rough stone cottage on the northwest coast of Ireland, although we don't learn her last name until the final pages of this often gorgeous first novel by Jessica Andrews. Lucy's grandfather has died and left his house to Lucy and her mother, Susie, with whom she is newly estranged. Lucy is also newly graduated from a British university, too

SALTWATER

By Jessica Andrews

298 pp. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. \$26.

soon in her estimation. Her years in London have renovated her northern English vowels, taught her to push the "ewk" out of "bewk," but they've left her wobbly, untethered from her working-class beginnings. She feels shut out by the city's predacious, moneyed tribes, battered by its "impenetrable shapes" and "fierce elbows."

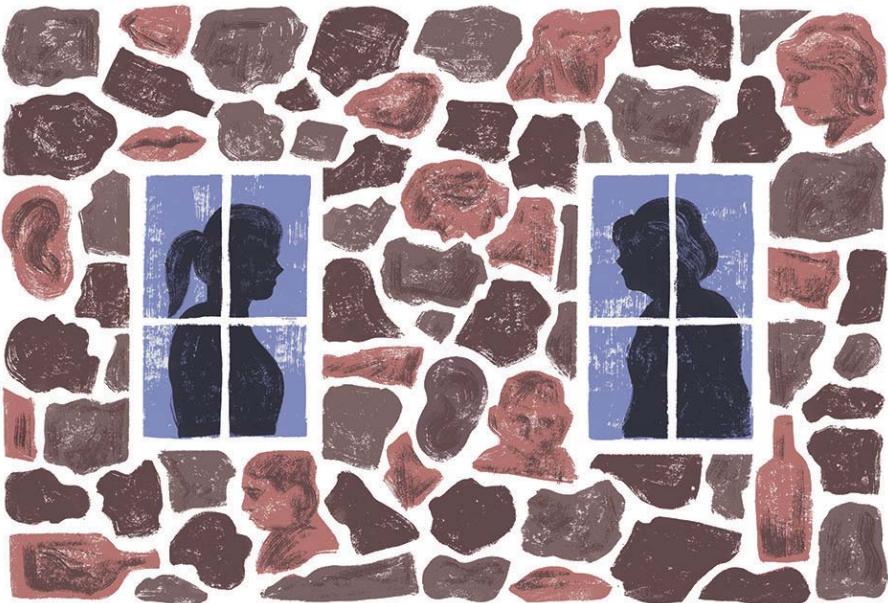
Mother and daughter scour the moldy, vermin-infested cottage together, singing songs by the Ronettes and the Shangri-Las, setting its rotting contents on fire in a spectacular three-day pyre. Then Lucy's mother flies home, "even though things were still not right between us." Lucy is too broke to go anywhere else, and anyway the pace of this rural, clannish Donegal village and its raw, stinging climate (along with a salubrious affair) suit her purposes. It's the right spot from which to look back and interrogate her precarious upbringing, her tricky maternal and paternal legacies.

Broken, unreliable men are the family's inheritance. Lucy's grandfather liked to hit the pub after work and then rage once he got home, hurling gravy boats and cans of food while Lucy's grandmother locked her two daughters in the bathroom or whisked them out of the house to wait out the drink.

Lucy has grown up in the margins, in the taut silences between her mother and her drunken, hapless father, Tom, an erratic wreck of a man whom she nevertheless adores. When he came home in a good mood, singing songs and dancing as her mother worked, elbowing him out of the way as she tried to make tea, Lucy was elated, though it was her mother who, she admits, "was left to tie our shoelaces and wash our dirty clothes, while he drifted in and out on the wind."

But the catastrophically alcoholic Tom wasn't the only destabilizing force in the household. Lucy's brother, Josh, was born with holes in his heart. Mysteriously and magically, they disappeared after a visit to a faith healer, but then Josh was found to be deaf. Although Susie and Lucy learned sign language, Tom signed up for a computer course instead. Later, they used their

PENELOPE GREEN is a reporter for the Styles section of The Times.



CHLOE CUSHMAN

signing skills to talk around him. Was it safe for Lucy to entreat her father to play or should she "leave him be and let him crawl into bed with a stink in his hair?"

Lucy's brother was given a cochlear implant, but his disabilities frustrated and inflamed him; his tantrums were operatic and destructive. When he was sent to a special boarding school, he ran away. At home, he smashed his toys while Lucy and her mother hid in the kitchen. "Lovely Lucy," her mother sighed, "you're our hope."

As a teenager, Lucy was precocious, sensuous and questing, shiny with lip gloss and hormones. She wore crop tops and sequined skirts, and loved the triple surges of drugs, drink and dancing, though she was determined to stay on track in school. (She always remembered to pack her sixth-form polo shirt in case a party lasted all night, already an outlier as she picked her way over empty beer bottles and sleeping bodies, ready to make her way to the two buses that would take her to class.)

Her school was another in-between place, stuck in a grim landscape of council houses and high-rise tower blocks with "a big brutalist shopping center where mams pushed prams in velour tracksuits and babies with snotty noses and frilly socks clutched sausage rolls like pasty pastry angels."

Andrews unspools Lucy's coming-of-age story in short numbered fragments, prose poems that at first seem random and out of order, but build in a logical sequence all their own. The technique isn't always successful and the flurry of pop cultural name checks can read like a confounding shorthand — especially the overwhelming array of bands and singers. But more often Andrews's writing is transportingly voluptuous, conjuring tastes and smells and sounds like her literary godmother, Edna

O'Brien. Lucy notes "the wet sulk of chips" in the school cafeteria; "the sticky hoppy thrill" of breaking open a stolen keg of beer; and how the "posh girl skin" of her university classmates is "expensive and gold," making her "dizzy with want."

Adrift in London, Lucy finds herself "full of ideas but they didn't seem to be the right ones." Her privileged classmates, with their expensive clothes and Moleskine notebooks, "had quotations pursed between their lips like peregrine fruits." In-

As a teenager, Lucy was precocious and questing, shiny with lip gloss and hormones.

spired by a creative writing assignment, she turns in an essay on Ai Weiwei's millions of porcelain sunflower seeds, which she's seen at the Tate Modern, but the professor gives her an F, scrawling "Your prose is purple" at the top. What does it mean? she asks a new friend. "Haven't a clue, mate," the friend replies, stung by her own bad grade.

Andrews, now in her late 20s, is a poet, a podcaster and co-editor of The Grapevine, a journal dedicated to publishing work by those who have been marginalized in the arts, particularly women, people of color, nonbinary artists and "those who identify as working class." Like Lucy, she grew up in northern England. She has a deaf brother. She studied English literature at King's College in London, and, like Lucy, struggled to connect with the experiences of her classmates. It's her mission, she has said, to tell the stories of working-class women. That's a fine undertaking, but what makes her novel sing is its universal themes: how a young woman tries to make sense of her world, and how she grows up. □

War Without End

An argument that the Israeli-Palestinian dispute is one of colonial conquest.

By SCOTT ANDERSON

ON A MORNING in early June 1967, Rashid Khalidi was walking down a New York City sidewalk when he came upon a group of people holding an open bedsheet into which passers-by were tossing money. The donations were to aid the state of Israel, then at war with three of its Arab neighbors. What Khalidi found baffling was that, by that morning, the Israelis had already annihilated the air forces of Egypt, Syria and Jordan, and were now using their air supremacy to do the same to those nations' ground forces. It was the precise outcome that recent American intelligence analy-

counted the presence of the estimated 700,000 Palestinians already there, but echoed a great body of settler lore that required conquered lands to be void of people, or at least inhabited only by lesser ones: Think of the expansion onto Indian lands in the American West, or white Australia's long denigration of the Aborigines. Zionism had the added advantage, Khalidi argues, of adorning "itself with a biblical coat that was powerfully attractive to Bible-reading Protestants in Great Britain and the United States."

Consolidating this colonial settler paradigm, in Khalidi's telling, was the 1948 Israeli War of Independence — or the

that the Palestinians had lost a cornerstone ally in the region, while the much-heralded 1993 Oslo Accords served to co-opt the Palestinian leadership and maroon their followers into tiny enclaves under ultimate Israeli control.

While many of Khalidi's insights are thought-provoking, their persuasiveness is undermined at times by a tendency to shave the rhetorical corner. He quite justifiably labels the Irgun, an early Jewish paramilitary organization, as a "terror group," but is markedly more charitable when similar tactics were used by armed Palestinian factions. There is also a slipperiness to some of his formulations. To

with Israel, but recognize that Washington will always ultimately side with Israel. He further suggests that with American influence in the region waning, it might be one of the new powers emerging on the scene — China or India or Russia — that could more honorably fulfill the arbiter role. While Khalidi's first point has considerable merit, it's exceedingly hard to see the United States, waning influence or no, ever taking a diplomatic back seat in the region to another external power, or forcing Israel to make the sorts of concessions that a new intermediary would surely demand. And with the possible exception of the current occupant of the White House, it's even harder to imagine anyone thinking a solution to their problems can be found in the tender embrace of Vladimir Putin.

But there is also a sense that Khalidi has fairly thrown up his hands at this point, that having argued his thesis there's really not much of anywhere else to go. There are two core reasons for this, both of which he is surely acutely aware.

First, even if the Israel-Palestine conflict is to be viewed through a colonial lens, it no longer fits any colonial precedent. In every other such contest, the settlers came to so outnumber the Indigenous as to make compromise unnecessary (the United States again), or remained so outnumbered by the Indigenous (think the whites of Rhodesia) that compromise was finally inevitable. With the populations of Israel and the extended Palestinian diaspora at near parity, neither formulation applies.

Second, the Palestinians are beset not by one antagonist, but rather by three concentric and interconnected rings of them: Israel; the surrounding Arab nations; and the political machinations of external powers, most notably the United States. As Khalidi repeatedly points out, over the decades all three of these sets of actors have used the Palestinian issue for their own interests, have teamed up or fallen out in a variety of ways, but almost always to the detriment of the Palestinian people. It is exceedingly difficult to imagine how any part of this dynamic changes in either the near or far term.

In its stead, Khalidi's notions for an eventual settlement take on an increasingly fantastic quality. In his view, true change will come only when the great inequality between Israelis and Palestinians is recognized, and sufficient numbers of both populations come to accept the right of national existence of the other. To this end, "new negotiations would need to reopen all the crucial issues created by the 1948 war." One of those key issues, Khalidi concludes, is the so-called "right of return," the proposal that Palestinians displaced in 1948, together with their offspring, be allowed to return to their original homes. This is an idea that even the most obdurate of Palestinian negotiators privately recognize as fanciful, and if Khalidi truly believes it is a prerequisite to peace, his Hundred Years' War on Palestine is likely to be an eternal one. □

THE HUNDRED YEARS' WAR ON PALESTINE

A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917–2017

By Rashid Khalidi

Illustrated. 319 pp. Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt & Company. \$30.

ses had predicted should the vastly more powerful Israeli military launch a pre-emptive strike on its adversaries — as Israel had, in fact, done. But this was not at all the story the American public was hearing, as witnessed by the fundraising on the Manhattan sidewalk. Instead, the 1967 Six-Day War neatly slotted into an ongoing narrative of a tiny Israel besieged by its larger and hateful neighbors, a nation able to survive only through ingenuity and grit.

To Khalidi, the scion of a storied Palestinian family, that sidewalk spectacle was but one more reminder of how thoroughly Israel has been able to control the story line of events in the Middle East over the past century. Wholly marginalized in that story line, he argues, are the Palestinians, their own competing narrative diminished to the point of erasure.

A professor of Arab studies at Columbia University, as well as the author of seven previous books, Khalidi is one of the world's foremost academic scholars on the topic of Palestinian identity and nationalism. Beyond its provocative title and occasional sharp insight, however, his "Hundred Years' War on Palestine" feels a rather thin achievement.

Khalidi's core thesis is that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is best understood as a war of colonial conquest, one that closely hews to the pattern and mind-set of other national-colonial movements of the 19th century. As he points out, an early Zionist slogan calling for a Jewish homeland in Palestine — "a land without people for a people without a land" — not only dis-



Princess Mary Avenue in Jerusalem, May 1948.

"Nakba" (Catastrophe), as the Palestinians call it. By seizing control of nearly 80 percent of the land that constituted the British Palestine Mandate, and overseeing the expulsion or flight of a similar percentage of its native Arab population, the Israeli pioneers were emulating the model of earlier victorious settlers. Once outside actors became involved, Khalidi contends, matters only turned worse for the Palestinians. After the 1967 war, for example, the United Nations passed Resolution 242, demanding Israel return to its prewar borders. As Khalidi astutely points out, while SC 242 is generally regarded as the foundational basis for future Arab-Israeli peace talks, for the Palestinians it represented a one-two punch: Nowhere in the resolution are they referred to by name — they are merely "refugees" — while a return to the 1967 borders meant the outside world was now legitimizing their 1948 expulsion. In Khalidi's view, each subsequent diplomatic "breakthrough" in the region has served only to further negate or marginalize the Palestinians. The 1979 Camp David peace treaty between Israel and Egypt meant

one particularly stark example, Khalidi contends that vital to the "settler-colonial enterprise" has been an Israeli campaign to sever the link displaced Palestinians feel for their homeland. "The comforting idea," he writes, "that 'the old will die and the young will forget' — a remark attributed to David Ben-Gurion, probably mistakenly — expresses one of the deepest aspirations of Israeli leaders after 1948." Well, if the writer himself notes that the source of a quote is probably wrong, then it's deeply problematic to use that quote.

But the bigger weakness of this book, to my mind, can be distilled to a simple question: Where does it get you? Even if one fully accepts Khalidi's colonialist thesis, does that move us any closer to some kind of resolution? This may seem an unfair criticism. After all, it is not incumbent on a historian to offer up possible remedies — except this is the closing task Khalidi sets for himself. It is also where his insights become noticeably threadbare.

His most intriguing suggestion is that the Palestinians stop regarding the United States as an honest broker in negotiations

SCOTT ANDERSON is the author of "Lawrence in Arabia" and the Times Magazine special issue "Fractured Lands: How the Arab World Came Apart." His newest book, "The Quiet Americans: Four CIA Spies at the Dawn of the Cold War," will be published this fall.

Nuclear Nightmares

How a Cold War threat has come back to haunt us.

By JUSTIN VOGT

IT'S AN OLD JOKE, but a good one. "Doctor, my son thinks he's a chicken," a father tells a psychiatrist, who suggests treatment for the boy. "We'd like to do that," the father says, "but we need the eggs."

For decades, American presidents have found themselves in a similar predicament, as revealed with bracing clarity by "The Bomb," Fred Kaplan's rich and surprisingly entertaining history of how nuclear weapons have shaped the United States military and the country's foreign policy. It is the story of how high-level officials, generals and presidents have contended with what Kaplan calls "the rabbit hole" of nuclear strategy, whose logic transforms efforts to avoid a nuclear war into plans to fight one, even though doing so would kill millions of people without producing a meaningful victory for anyone. As

THE BOMB

Presidents, Generals, and the Secret History of Nuclear War

By Fred Kaplan

Illustrated. 372 pp. Simon & Schuster. \$30.

President Barack Obama once put it before weighing in during a meeting on nuclear weapons: "Let's stipulate that this is all insane."

Owing to the spread of those weapons and to the inevitability of competition between powerful countries, generations of policymakers have leapt into the abyss again and again. Nuclear strategy is an exercise in absurdity that pushes against every moral boundary but that has likely contributed to the relative safety and stability of the contemporary era, during which nuclear weapons have proliferated but major war has all but vanished. Apparently, we need the eggs.

"The Bomb" is a sequel of sorts to "The Wizards of Armageddon," Kaplan's 1983 book about the Cold War-era thinkers who established a template for how generations of American officials would approach nuclear weapons. The new book revisits the foundational debates and explains how they have played out in more recent years, making use of newly declassified material and a wealth of interviews with insiders. In less skillful hands, this could be a slog. But Kaplan has a gift for elucidating abstract concepts, cutting through national security jargon and showing how leaders confront (or avoid) dilemmas.

The early years of the American nuclear program were dominated by men in the mold of Curtis LeMay, the Air Force general who had overseen the firebombing of Japan during World War II as commander of the Strategic Air Command (SAC). His philosophy of how to win modern wars,

Kaplan writes, was simple: "Bomb everything." For many years, LeMay exercised remarkable influence over nuclear policy by maneuvering to secure SAC's near-total control of the arsenal while avoiding any meaningful civilian oversight. By 1960, he had put an enduring stamp on the atomic age through the Single Integrated Operational Plan, or SIOP, SAC's list of all the nuclear weapons in the American arsenal and their intended targets. Reflecting LeMay's maximalist approach to firepower and minimalist approach to sparing civilians, the SIOP called for the president to fire thousands of nuclear weapons in the event of an armed conflict with the Soviet Union. Nine would strike Leningrad; 23 would hit Moscow. A Soviet city similar to Hiroshima in population and density would be struck with four bombs that would together yield more than 600 times the blast power of the atomic bomb that the United States dropped on the Japanese city in 1945. ("The Bomb" lacks an account of the decision-making behind that attack — an unfortunate omission, given the insight that Kaplan could likely bring to bear.)

Shortly after the SIOP was completed, President John F. Kennedy took office. The new secretary of defense, Robert McNamara, received a briefing on the targeting plan from Gen. Thomas Power, a protégé of LeMay, who privately described Power as a sadist. One target was a radar field in Albania. "Mr. Secretary, I hope you don't have any friends or relations in Albania," Power said at one point to McNamara with a chuckle, "because we're going to have to wipe it out." McNamara was not amused. He came away "as shocked and appalled as he'd ever felt in his life," Kaplan writes.

Today, McNamara is best remembered for his leading role in the bloody escalation of the war in Vietnam. Before that debacle, however, he was one of the first senior officials to embrace the idea of a smaller nuclear arsenal governed by a less grotesque doctrine. But McNamara — and everyone who has tried since him — failed to solve what Kaplan reveals as a basic puzzle of nuclear strategy: "how to plan a nuclear attack that was large enough to terrify the enemy but small enough to be recognized

unambiguously as a limited strike, so that, if the enemy retaliated, he'd keep his strike limited too." The truth is that by the time the Soviets had developed a sizable arsenal of their own, "there was no scenario in which using nuclear weapons would give the United States — or any country — an advantage." In order to deter the Soviets, however, the president and everyone

by finally breaking SAC's grip. In 1989, a Pentagon analyst named Franklin Miller alerted Cheney to the fact that, in order to forestall cuts to the arsenal, SAC ignored official doctrines and simply found targets for every existing weapon, regardless of their strategic value. Cheney ordered SAC to submit to a review, led by Miller, which found outrageous redundancies and ultimately led to a reduction in the arsenal, which shrank from around 12,000 weapons to fewer than 6,000.

In the subsequent years, the numbers kept coming down. But the basic logic remained in place, and radical changes to nuclear doctrine have remained elusive. Obama, for example, explored the idea of declaring a no-first-use policy — that is, pledging that the United States would use nuclear weapons only in retaliation to a nuclear attack. But he ultimately opted against it.

The threat of nuclear war, which for decades had virtually vanished from public discourse, roared back into view during the first year of Donald Trump's presidency, when Trump warned North Korea that it would face "fire and fury" if the country's despot, Kim Jong-un, continued to issue threats against America. Many were less worried about Kim than about the self-declared "very stable genius" in the White House. Some experts proposed changing the protocol that allows the president to launch nuclear weapons without even consulting

anyone else.

Others saw the return of public fears as the result of decades of misplaced official attention that has, in the words of the political scientist John Mueller, led "generations of officials to worry more about nuclear matters than they should have and to distort foreign and security policies in unfortunate ways."

That position may seem at odds with Kaplan's insistence that only by "immersing themselves" in nuclear logic can presidents and their advisers find a way out of the rabbit hole. But the two views might not be as contradictory as they seem: Perhaps the bomb matters less than policymakers believe precisely because they believe it matters so much. That would be a fittingly paradoxical way to understand the paradox-prone nuclear age. □



A United States ballistic missile ready to launch, 1955.

The effort to avoid a nuclear war has been transformed into plans for fighting one.

around him had to pretend otherwise. And so a staggering cycle — arms race, stalemate, arms race — carried on.

One of the most fascinating tales in Kaplan's book concerns a consequential break in that pattern, brought about in part by an unlikely figure: Dick Cheney. As George W. Bush's vice president in the 2000s, Cheney would emerge as a fierce hawk — an advocate for covert action, preventive war and torture. But as defense secretary under Bush's father, Cheney helped usher in dramatic cuts in the bloated nuclear arsenal

JUSTIN VOGT is a managing editor of Foreign Affairs.

Schooled

Is the education reform movement on the verge of defeat?

By ANNIE MURPHY PAUL

SHE CAME. She saw. She conquered.

Such is the triumphant theme of "Slaying Goliath," the latest work by the education historian turned education activist Diane Ravitch. The book exults in the failures of a reform movement that the author has spent the past decade denouncing — a movement that has often deserved her indignant critiques. In winning, however, Ravitch has also lost: Missing from these pages are the subtle insight and informed judgment for which she was once known.

Ravitch came to the education scene in the late 1960s, writing articles for education journals and then a series of well-respected books about the history of public schooling in

SLAYING GOLIATH

The Passionate Resistance to Privatization and the Fight to Save America's Schools

By Diane Ravitch

Illustrated. 336 pp. Alfred A. Knopf. \$27.95.

America. In 1991, her career took the first of many turns: Ravitch was invited to join the administration of President George H. W. Bush as an assistant secretary of education. Though a lifelong Democrat, she took the job, and over the next several years she found her beliefs moving rightward. "In the decade following my stint in the federal government, I argued that certain managerial and structural changes — that is, choice, charters, merit pay and accountability — would help to reform our schools," she later wrote. "Having been immersed in a world of true believers, I was influenced by their ideas." Pushed forward by the advocacy of Ravitch and many others, these ideas (including the introduction of "charters," independently operated public schools freed from many of the regulations imposed on traditional public schools) began to take root in the real world.

And then Ravitch's thinking took another turn.

She saw, sooner than most, that the changes imposed by the federal laws known as No Child Left Behind (during the presidency of George W. Bush) and Race to the Top (under the administration of Barack Obama) were burdening students, who were being subjected to endless rounds of test-prep and test-taking, and demoralizing teachers, who were being evaluated and penalized in ways that were rigid and often unfair. In a book published in 2010, "The Death and Life of the Great American School System," Ravitch described her transformation from enthusiastic champion to vocal critic of conservative efforts to remake education in the United States. Three years later she published "Reign of Error," a book that condemned these efforts in even more forceful terms.

ANNIE MURPHY PAUL'S new book, "The Extended Mind: The Power of Thinking Outside the Brain," will be published next year.



ALEX MERTO

We now have "Slaying Goliath," in which Ravitch takes a defiant leap over the line separating reasoned case-building from empty sloganeering and ad hominem attacks. The book sets out to chronicle and celebrate the resounding defeat of what people who are not Diane Ravitch refer to as the education reform movement. "In this book, I will not call these activities and their leaders by the honorable word *reform*, which they have brazenly appropriated," she writes, adopting an imperious tone that is new to her books (though not new to readers of her blog or frequent Twitter posts). They are, rather, to be called "the Disrupters" — "masters of chaos, which they inflict on other people's children, without a twinge of remorse."

Declaring victory over the Disrupters is "the Resistance," equivalently endowed with a capital letter but otherwise overwhelmed by their opponents: "The Disrupters are led by a cabal of self-centered billionaires who love to exercise their power over others," Ravitch helpfully explains, "and the Resistance is led by tireless parents, students, grandparents, public school graduates, teachers, retired teachers, community leaders and religious leaders who are devoted to the principle of separation of church and state."

Ravitch conquered the forces of Disruption along with this volunteer army ("almost everyone who works for the Resistance does so without pay"), and she gleefully details its death throes. "Disruption in education gives off the same aura as did the Soviet Union in the late 1980s," she writes. Then as now, "the faithful had fallen away. No one believed in the promises anymore." Ravitch devotes several sections of the book to the wins notched by the Resistance: the parent- and student-led push-back against excessive standardized testing; the electoral defeats, in states across

the country, of bills that would introduce school-choice voucher programs or expand charter schools; the collapse of the Common Core, a set of national academic standards that once seemed poised to take permanent effect. But she often seems more interested in settling scores and in calling out by name the "predatory billionaires" behind "the corporate assault on public education." At times, "Slaying Goliath" resembles not so much a book as a catalog of Ravitch's vanquished foes. Nearly 20 consecutive pages are given over to a list of individuals she tars as members of the Disruption — accompanied, oddly, by large photographs (of, for example, Bill Gates, the Microsoft founder, who has donated many millions of dollars to education reform efforts; and Arne Duncan, Obama's first secretary of education).

THE "ORDINARY HEROES" of the Resistance are pictured here, too — people like Jeanette Deutermann, a mother from Long Island who helped lead an "opt-out" movement against school testing, and Amy Frogge, a lawyer and parent in Nashville, who was elected to the local board of education "despite being outspent by opponents who favored charter schools." Ravitch regularly extols the virtue of these everyday folk. About misguided federal education law, she writes: "No national figure had the wisdom, intellect or courage to stand up and say, 'This must stop.' Plenty of parents and teachers did. Even students did. How did they figure out what eluded our leaders?" But her portraits of these valiant fighters are curiously selective. Not included among them are the mothers and fathers, many of them people of color, who engage in activism *in favor* of bringing charter schools to their neighborhoods, seeing these institutions — though new and untried — as a better alternative to the public schools they already know. In Ravitch's

rather cynical calculus, those who don't agree with her on issues like charter schools have either been bought or been duped.

Give Ravitch her due: She's been right about a lot of things, earlier than many others in her field. She's right that shutting down "failing" neighborhood schools, rather than working to improve them, is harmful to families and communities. She's right that an overemphasis on testing crowds out actual learning. And she's right that evaluating teachers by their students' scores on those tests is unscientific — not supported by evidence — as well as deeply unfair, given the many aspects of students' lives over which teachers have no control. (One point on which Ravitch is *not* correct concerns the need for a shared set of expectations regarding what American students should be learning; she dismisses the call for a common standard as a corporate plot to create a uniform market for educational products.)

But even if Ravitch has often been justified in raising alarms, it's painful to see the absence of nuance she exhibits here. Those who take part in the education reform movement — a staggeringly wide range of individuals, from young people who join Teach for America to principals of innovative charter schools and officials of philanthropic foundations — are without exception malign and corrupt, while those on the other side, who have what Ravitch deems a "genuine connection to education," are pure and selfless.

Occasionally visible are flashes of the sharp but fair-minded writer from her previous works. Midway through this book, she writes: "The ideology of the disruption movement in the education world relies on two dogmas: first, the benefits of standardization, and second, the power of markets, at scale, to drive innovation and results. Their blind adherence to these principles has been disastrous in education. These principles don't work in schools for the same reasons that they don't work for families, churches and other institutions that function primarily on the basis of human interactions, not profits and losses."

American education has long had, and still does have, serious deficiencies that cry out for the careful attention of rigorous, historically informed thinkers — people like Diane Ravitch, circa 2013. That year she wrote forthrightly: "I do not contend that the schools are fine just as they are. They are not." Among the changes she called for then was a "stronger and deeper curriculum in every subject." Later in that same book, she noted, "It should not be left to every district whether or when to teach science, the arts, civics and history; state curricula should reflect modern scholarship, not religious or local opinion."

In the vertiginous twists and turns of a remarkable career, Ravitch has let go of some admirable intellectual practices and well-founded convictions. She would be wise to recover them. □

So They Say

English's lack of a third-person singular gender-neutral pronoun is a problem centuries old.

By JOE MORAN

"PRONOUNS ARE SUDDENLY SEXY," Dennis Baron declares at the start of "What's Your Pronoun?" For "pronouns," read one specific pronoun, or rather its long-lamented absence in English: the third-person singular gender-neutral pronoun. And for

WHAT'S YOUR PRONOUN?

Beyond He & She
By Dennis Baron

283 pp. Liveright Publishing. \$25.95.

"sexy," read thorny. Pronouns now come up in lawsuits, school regulations and company codes of conduct. Colleges ask students to provide their preferred pronouns; online dating sites offer pronoun options. "It used to be nerdy to discuss parts of speech outside of grammar class," Baron, a professor emeritus of English and linguistics at the University of Illinois, writes. "Now it's cool."

After this slightly forced attempt at withitness, "What's Your Pronoun?" settles down into a scrupulous and absorbing survey. Its great virtue is to show that these

JOE MORAN'S most recent book is "First You Write a Sentence."



SIMOUL ALVA

issues are nothing new: Gender-neutral pronouns like "ze," "thon" and "heer" have been circulating since the mid-19th century; others as far back as 1375.

Almost no one now defends the use of a generic "he" — but what to replace it with? Baron is surely right that no one cares for "his or her": too unwieldy. As for the pronouns historically proposed to replace "he" or "she," they failed to gain traction because "they look strange on the page."

Coiners of new pronouns might usefully counter that they *want* these words to look strange, so as to draw attention to the social construction of gender or the patriarchal roots of traditional pronouns. Fair enough, but the point about pronouns is that they replace nouns, and thus trade the specific for the generic — so they will probably catch on only when they are inconspicuous. In writing, a pronoun that draws attention to itself stops the reader's eye and checks their pace at the wrong point in a sentence.

For Baron the solution is clear, and I used it (hopefully unobtrusively) in that last sentence: the singular "they." He provides ample textual evidence, from Shakespeare on, that this is a perfectly respectable option — and so unconscious that even those who condemn it invoke it without noticing.

For the still unpersuaded, he points out that singular "they" is older than singular "you." Only in the 1600s did singular "you" start pushing out "thou" and "thee." Having the same pronoun for both singular and plural forms makes for potential ambiguity. So colloquial plural forms have sprung up, such as "y'all," common in the American South, or the more recent "you guys" — an oddly gendered locution at a time when the generic "he" is becoming extinct.

Still, we get by. No one considers ditching the singular "you."

For Baron, the benefit of singular "they" is that it is often used by those in search of a nonbinary or gender-neutral pronoun, as well as those who give such issues little thought. While many language mavens are coming around reluctantly to singular "they" — in December Merriam-Webster anointed "they" its "word of the year" — some traditionalists still hold out against it. Their defense is convention. I admit that the nonbinary use of "they" to refer to a specific person — "Alex likes their burger with mustard" — still sounds jangly to my ears. I will get used to it. Language, as Baron eloquently shows, works as a dynamic democracy, not as rule by experts. The sticklers may not like "they" (singular) but they (plural) will eventually have to bow to the inevitable.

Baron's book layers on rather too many examples of historical usage, including a 60-page "chronology of gender-neutral and nonbinary pronouns" at the end. This scholarly assiduousness, though, also makes him the ideal pilot through these contentious political-linguistic waters. If you want to know why more people are asking "what's your pronoun?" then you (singular or plural) should read this book. □

Marked by a Double Murder

Decades after two women were killed there, an Appalachian community continues to grapple with the crime.

By MELISSA DEL BOSQUE

IN 1980, three young women set out from Arizona to hitchhike to a peace festival known as the Rainbow Gathering in the mountains of West Virginia. Only one of them survives. Several men in Pocahontas County in rural West Virginia are accused of the murders. A

THE THIRD RAINBOW GIRL
The Long Life of a Double
Murder in Appalachia
By Emma Copley Eisenberg

Illustrated. 318 pp. Hachette Books. \$27.

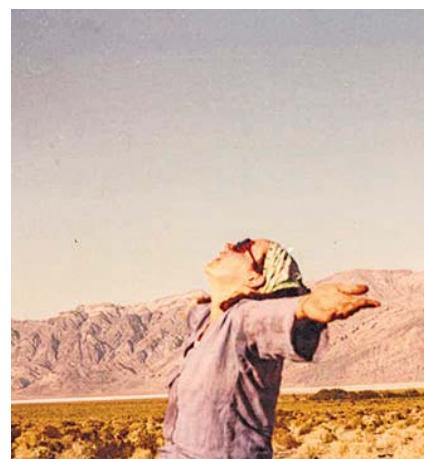
hard-drinking local mechanic is believed to have been the one who pulled the trigger. But that's where any simple telling of the tale ends and the murders of — and who committed them — become a decades-long mystery that nearly tears apart a small Appalachian community.

MELISSA DEL BOSQUE is an investigative journalist for ProPublica. Her most recent book is "Bloodlines: The True Story of a Drug Cartel, the F.B.I. and the Battle for a Horse-Racing Dynasty."

"The Third Rainbow Girl" is an evocative and elegantly paced examination of the murders that takes a prism-like view of the crime. Everyone in the rural county contributes a piece of evidence, but none of those pieces fit together to build a truthful picture of who killed the two women. Years pass and the once notorious "rainbow murders" fall from the headlines into obscurity. But the stain of guilt on the group of men in Pocahontas County, and the deep-seated trauma inflicted by the unsolved murders on the families of the murdered women, remains.

Abandoning college in the depths of the recession in 2009, Emma Copley Eisenberg, at odds with herself and wanting to "drop so hard out of my life that I could hear my life trying to get in touch," arrives in Pocahontas County to volunteer at a wilderness camp to help local teenage girls grow into self-reliant women. While working at the camp, she learns about the long-ago murders that took place not far from her new home, and the two murdered women — Vicki Durian and Nancy Santomero — begin to occupy her daily thoughts.

Her unraveling of the brutal double murder is as skilled as her exploration of Pocahontas County, where the men, as much as



Vicki Durian in 1978.

the women, appear trapped in their predetermined societal roles, and where toxic masculinity gnaws at the men, rudderless and lost, who drink to fill the idle hours. But she also digs deeper, beyond the old clichés of insular, backward mountain folk, to find a thriving transgender community and an independent, open-minded streak among the county's inhabitants.

Eisenberg could have stopped there and had a compelling story, but as in all the best true-crime books, "The Third Rainbow Girl" is about more than just a quest to solve the mystery. It's also an elegy for a time when Eisenberg came close to her own self-prescribed destruction among the same towering loblolly pines and bending rivers of Pocahontas County. A sudden confession about her own precarious frame of mind zings like a shocking jolt from the pages.

In the end, "The Third Rainbow Girl" is not just a masterly examination of a brutal unsolved crime, which leads us through many surprising twists and turns and a final revelation about who the real killer might be. It's also an unflinching interrogation of what it means to be female in a society marred by misogyny, where women hitchhiking alone are harshly judged, even blamed for their own murders. In one of her final chapters, Eisenberg quotes the writer Vanessa Veselka, who sums up an overarching sentiment that ripples through the book's pages. "You can go on a quest to save your father, dress like a man and get discovered upon injury, get martyred and raped," she writes. "But God forbid you go out the door just to see what's out there." □

Thrillers / By Sarah Lyall

Bodies pile up at the hands of hit men, henchmen, arms dealers and White House interns.

SOME PEOPLE feel that the beach is the best place to read thrillers. They are wrong. The best place is in bed, in the wintertime, when the cold and dark match your mood — and when you are more susceptible to stories about creepy characters with unpleasant motivations.

VARIOUS CHARACTERS (a glossy Manhattan socialite and the disaffected wife of a bro-y London businessman, for starters) go missing or turn up dead in **THE EMPTY BED** (Ballantine, 293 pp., \$27), the second installment in Nina Sadowsky's zippily paced "Burial Society" series. The separate strands of their stories intersect with and bounce off one another in often mysterious ways as the book travels to an array of safe houses, fancy hotel rooms and dodgy establishments on four different continents.

The connecting thread is a woman named Catherine, who has an undisclosed surname and an agency that provides high-end off-the-grid protection services to people who, for various urgent reasons, do not want to be found. She's in Mexico City looking after some vulnerable clients. At the same time, as a favor to a powerful sometime lover famed for his business prowess and hard partying, she's dispatched a pair of bickering yet deadly operatives to Hong Kong. Their mission: to find out what happened to a vacationing young woman named Eva Lombard, whose possibly sketchy husband says he went to bed in their hotel with an Ambien and woke up without a wife.

Why has Eva been drinking so much wine during the day, and who were those weird men who seemed to be following her? Who in this novel is actually good and who is secretly bad? Is Eva's former boyfriend hotter than her current husband? Why was there such a high turnover rate among nannies employed by Betsy Elliott, the disappeared Park Avenue princess? All will be revealed in time.

The author is a longtime Hollywood screenwriter and producer, and at times the scenes dissolve so rapidly into each other that "The Empty Bed" can feel like a reverse-engineered action movie. But the quick cuts make the book the perfect solution to a widespread problem this time of year: seasonal short-attention-span syndrome.

CONSPIRATORS WHO MEET secretly at a Maryland crab restaurant. Treason at the highest levels of the American government. A bunch of lazy, mean fellow interns toiling beside her in a tiny room at the White House. Twenty-four-year-old Hayley Chill, fresh out of the Army and for some reason doing lowly scut work for the executive branch of the United States government, has a lot to contend with in **DEEP STATE** (Atria, 287 pp., \$27), a timely political thriller by Chris Hauty.

But nobody puts Hayley in a quasi-janitorial basement closet, not with her photographic memory, superb physical conditioning, relentless focus and expertise in one-to-one combat. Stumbling upon a high-level plot to assassinate the president, Richard Monroe, Hayley finds herself almost single-handedly battling, yes, perhaps you have guessed by now: the deep state. This, according to Hauty, is a "hybrid association of elements of government joined with parts of top-level finance and industry" with members that include a United States senator and the deputy director of the C.I.A.

President Monroe might remind you of someone you know (he is a populist hero who mistrusts the intelligence commu-

nity, has a perverse admiration for Russia and likes a game of golf), or maybe not (he is also a major general and decorated war hero). In a world in which the implausible seems increasingly possible, it makes perfect sense that Hayley would find herself grappling with a casual lover-turned-apparent-enemy whose car is plummeting into the Potomac.

The bodies pile up, as do the wry asides about what is and what is not good for the country. Hayley is one of those preternaturally talented solo operatives skilled in every endeavor, from her physical stamina to her administrative competence to her Jason Bourne-like cool in the face of near-death experiences. She also figures in one of the more surprising double-reverse plot twists I have seen in some time.

dia, is handsome and sensitive and preternaturally empathetic, even though he doesn't say anything for half the book. He is also possibly a highly trained military operative/assassin. His identity is just one of many mysteries surrounding his presence in the hospital.

It's a joy to encounter a suspenseful book whose turns lurk, rather than lumber, around the corner. The story in "Mr. Nobody" corkscrews and somersaults. The patient remembers some things; Emma remembers some other things; not everything rings true, but it all makes a kind of warped sense. Past mysteries haunt the present in ways that are both startling and claustrophobic. The patient's real story, when Emma finally figures it out, is even weirder than you might imagine.

Steadman will be familiar to fans of "Downton Abbey" — she is the actress who played Mabel Lane Fox, whose death from Spanish flu in Season 5 conveniently liberated Matthew Crawley from a tedious engagement so that he could marry Lady Mary — but she's even better at writing than acting. If her first book, "There's Something in the Water," was the Steadman gateway drug, then "Mr. Nobody" is the heroin that will get you hooked. Let's hope, for purposes of withdrawal mitigation, there's a third.

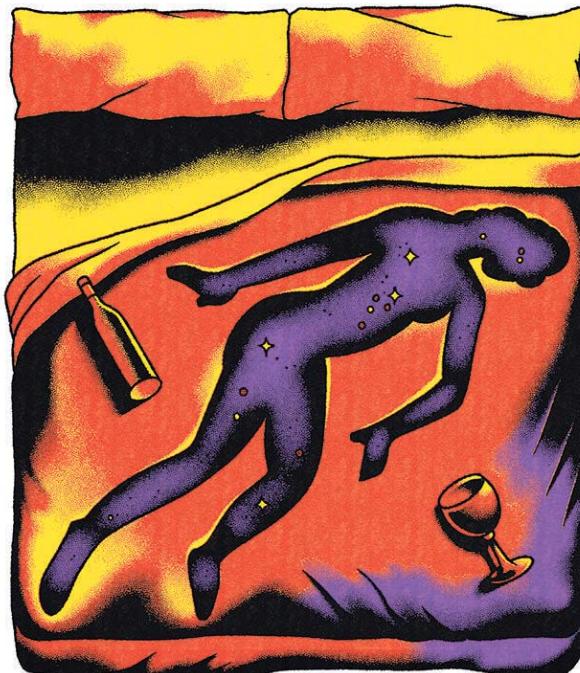
FOR A MOMENT, set aside the plot of **HI FIVE** (Mulholland, 352 pp., \$27), Joe Ide's latest book, and savor the freshness, vividness and ingenuity of the author's prose. "The next time anybody saw him," Ide writes about a rival of his arms-dealing villain, "he was lying under an industrial steamroller like a poster of himself." A gang member, buff from working out during his latest prison stay, is a "walking condominium." A trip to the manicurist provides a woman with nails that look like "Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning had decorated 10 little Christmas trees."

This is South Central Los Angeles, a world of warring gangs, petty criminals, guys trying to make a buck, guys trying to find romance, guys up to no good and a guy known as I.Q. (real name: Isaiah Quintabe), who has a knack for solving the sort of crimes that would be inconvenient to bring to the attention of the police. He was introduced two books ago by Ide, who himself grew up in South Central. Ide was in his mid-50s when he decided to draw on the rough world of his youth and mix it with his childhood love of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories.

Street-smart, ingenious and occasionally foolhardy, I.Q. find himself presented with a case he can't refuse. Angus, a particularly loathsome arms dealer, wants him to prove that his daughter, Christiana, did not murder a man named Tyler, despite her presence at the crime scene. A complicating factor is that she has at least five different personalities, meaning that I.Q. has to find a way to summon and interview all of them.

Hit men, henchmen, bagmen — they all wander in and out of a highly diverting book that crackles with life and vividness, even as it sometimes loses the plot. But it hardly matters. There are real truths hidden in the entertainment.

"What made Angus smile when he arrived for work each morning was how the guns held imaginable power," Ide writes of his villainous arms dealer. "The power he saw in the movies and on TV; how guns controlled, persuaded, coerced, terrified, overwhelmed and saved the day," he continues. "And the very best thing about them? The thing that gave you goose bumps and filled the empty chamber in your psyche? You didn't have to be powerful to use them." □



JAKE FOREMAN

Almost better than the plot are Hauty's sometimes jarring, but always entertaining, asides about the fates of ancillary characters — we get to hear how some of them will die, years later — and the petty viciousness of office politics.

"If she can't retreat back to the safety of her own office in the next few seconds," Hauty writes of a White House aide who feels threatened by Hayley's competence, she "feels like she might kill this vicious bitch with her bare hands."

"THIS SITUATION IS INSANE," notes the brother of Dr. Emma Lewis, the British neuropsychiatrist at the center of Catherine Steadman's tricky psychological puzzle, **MR. NOBODY** (Ballantine, 368 pp., \$27).

Yes, it is. Not only has Emma been entrusted with a mysterious patient who has completely lost his memory (or has he?), but also Emma is not her real name. Years ago, something terrible happened to her family — and now, protected by her new identity (or is she?), she has returned to her home town take on a high-profile case full of danger. The patient doesn't know much, but he does seem to know who she is.

It helps that "Mr. Nobody," as he is called in the news me-

A Friend to the Famous

Sunday afternoon gatherings that became the stuff of legend.

By ADINA HOFFMAN

THE GALICIAN-BORN ACTRESS turned American screenwriter Salka Viertel was never famous, but she always made things possible for her friends who were. Still, her name usually hovers in the realm of the footnote or fleeting aside, bobbing up in Thomas Mann's diaries, Charlie Chaplin's autobiography, Bertolt Brecht's journals and in a Grand Hotel-scaled heap of books about Greta Garbo.

The role she played in both Golden Age Hollywood and transplanted Weimar high culture was crucial if vaporous. As a remarkable crew of European artists and in-

gained at the outset: "In the end, none of this has been deemed thus far to be worthy of our attention"; "Murnau's pictorial language pulses throughout American film history, engraved on the work of Alfred Hitchcock and Werner Herzog and continuing more recently in the work of Terrence Malick and Barry Jenkins." Extended passages rely far too heavily on paraphrase of Viertel's marvelous 1969 memoir, "The Kindness of Strangers." Rifkind repeatedly renders flat approximations of Viertel's own elegant sentences and leans far too often on that canny, first-person account for progression of thought, action and image. The problem may be one of overidentification. In these early sec-

THE SUN AND HER STARS

Salka Viertel and Hitler's Exiles in the Golden Age of Hollywood

By Donna Rifkind

Illustrated. 550 pp. Other Press. \$30.

Intellectuals fled Nazism and streamed toward Southern California in the 1930s, Viertel worked in dozens of behind-the-scenes ways to help these desperate, gifted people — first scrambling to arrange visas and raise money on their behalf; later offering introductions, companionship, housing, wedges of superior chocolate cake and much more. Her Sunday afternoon Santa Monica gatherings became the stuff of local legend, with Viertel supplying what one observer called the "social glue" that bound the émigrés into a community. Or, as another of her intimates put it: "The history of Hollywood ... is incomplete without an appreciation of Salka Viertel's distinct talent for human relationships."

Viertel is, in short, a terrific subject for a biography, and the veteran book reviewer Donna Rifkind has done well to focus her first full-length effort on this fascinating if little-known personality. Rifkind sees the worldly yet unassuming Viertel as at once an extraordinary character and a telling representative of something larger than herself. She's right to.

Though most of "The Sun and Her Stars" unfolds in the United States of an earlier, anxious era — when hostility toward "others" of every sort reached a shrill crescendo — Rifkind clearly means to hold a mirror to our stranger-suspecting moment as well. She's eager to emphasize just how much Hollywood and America in general owe to immigrants, many refugees among them. This fact has been articulated countless times before, but the dark underscoring that Rifkind provides feels unfortunately necessary these days.

A labor of love and careful research, the book gets off to a shaky start. Rifkind's prose can be clumsy, and it's especially un-



Salka Viertel in the 1931 film "Anna Christie."

Rifkind draws on a boggling Who's Who of uprooted 20th-century eminences.

tions, Rifkind seems to lack the necessary critical distance and appears content to trot dutifully behind her perspicacious heroine, repeating after her.

Something startling and powerful happens, though, midway through the book. As the historical situation Rifkind describes grows increasingly dire, she snaps to: Her writing sharpens and her gaze widens to take in a boggling Who's Who of uprooted 20th-century eminences.

Everyone from the Mann brothers (Thomas and Heinrich) to Theodor Adorno, Arnold Schoenberg, Charles Laughton, Christopher Isherwood and Aldous Huxley surfaces in Viertel's living room. As they do, Rifkind draws skillfully from multiple sources, expanding her sympathies to include them all — wives and lovers, too — in her melancholy narrative. That generosity of spirit and attention to detail suit a book about this "mother of exiles," who was always welcoming outsiders in. □

ADINA HOFFMAN'S latest book is "Ben Hecht: Fighting Words, Moving Pictures."

Love Hurts

A mystical healer falls for a patient, and desire undoes them both.



KALEY MCKEAN

By MOLLY DEKTAR

SUE RAINSFORD'S "Follow Me to Ground" is the story of an obsessive teenage crush. Except Ada, the young woman at its center, is not technically a teenager; she's actually been alive for generations, a witch doctor who never seems to grow older. And the bulk of the plot has nothing to do with the boy on whom she has a crush. Told mainly from Ada's point of view — her tone repetitive, restrained, diffidently fantastical — the novel traces a life warped, then destroyed, by desire.

FOLLOW ME TO GROUND

By Sue Rainsford

199 pp. Scribner. \$25.

Ada and her father are both magical, semi-human healers who live in an unspecified town in an unspecified time (trucks, yes; cellphones, no). Ailing townspeople visit their house to have their bodies opened and soothed. The trickiest cases get buried in The Ground, a patch of earth where patients — called Cures — rest in suspended animation until Ada's father sees fit to resurrect them. Into Ada's limited world comes Samson, a town boy with a mouth sore and an unusual level of interest in her. Her father disapproves, but no matter; Ada is full of new lust. But Samson has some issues, and so Ada attempts on him the one form of human interaction she's mastered: healing.

Refreshingly, the novel disregards the predilections of contemporary literary fiction and instead veers toward allegory. No one in this book is Forsterishly "round"; characters lack agency; they are created or possessed or curiously always themselves. Even Ada has little sense of her own motivations. Many of her major moves are accidents.

Only her interest in Samson pushes her to go against her father's wishes. He is con-

MOLLY DEKTAR is the author of "The Ash Family."

cerned that Samson is not all right in the head, and their healing powers don't extend to mental illness. But she feels she's "only been alive a little while. Meaning only since I met Samson," and this feeling — of coming alive — is what she most treasures. As her quest for selfhood continues, Ada becomes an amoral monster of longing, pushing to cure Samson while sociopathically disregarding anyone who would stand in her way.

In so severely limiting her heroine's humanity, Rainsford has set herself a difficult task, at which she only partially succeeds. Ada is a kind of golem, created by her father out of a tree branch, and her childlike voice tends toward quick, superficial narration. But when the book slips into horror at the end, it becomes legitimately frightening: Alone late in my apartment, I closed the book 50 pages from the end, feeling that it would be more prudent to finish it by the light of day.

What's best in the novel is its idiosyncratic vision of the meaning of girlhood and first love. Rainsford draws the coercions of men without contemporary political referents, the natural world without the fatalism of typical eco-horror. The book refers to itself only, and it is fertile ground for pairings: between The Ground and a womb; The Ground and a cemetery; Samson and Ada's father; pregnancy and possession. The tale pulses with images of opening and entering, into the ground, into patients' bodies, in sexual union. The suggestion is that a teenage crush is an experience of haunting and being haunted, and that maturity comes through a process of utter, ruinous self-absorption.

But if a story is to be this fast-paced, it ought to be more explicit about its intentions; all the subconscious, blink-and-you'll-miss-them allegories give the feel of a maddening puzzle. Those excellent late horror scenes, and the angst-ridden, semi-creatively protagonist, deserved more time to develop. In its sparseness, its unwillingness to clarify or expand, its ambiguous evocation of the satanic, the book itself seems buried in the ground. □

Banging Their Heads Against a Brick Wall

A team of engineers struggle to revolutionize construction — with mixed results.

By JOSH TYRANGIEL

WE'RE TOLD THAT SCOTT PETERS has all the iconic Start-Up Guy traits. He's as obsessive an engineer as Elon Musk, as aggressive a salesman as Travis Kalanick and as exacting a visionary as — cue beam of golden light — Steve Jobs. What sets Peters apart is that you've never heard of him, perhaps because of the size of his dream. It's approximately 8 inches by 3.5 inches by 2.3 inches. Peters, you see, wants to disrupt bricks.

More precisely, he'd like to perfect and sell an automated bricklaying robot, but even this is misleadingly grand. His creation, SAM, for "semi-automated mason," requires several human masons to feed it bricks at one end and clean its large diaper pail of mortar excretions at the other. The

SAM
One Robot, a Dozen Engineers and the Race to Revolutionize the Way We Build
By Jonathan Waldman
 288 pp. Avid Reader Press. \$28.

original idea for SAM belongs to Peters's architect father-in-law, and so does the majority stake in their upstate New York company, Construction Robotics. What Peters owns are the nightmares from a decade invested in a machine that has no clear market and looks less like the future than a souped-up hot dog cart. "Forget about it," a construction veteran says after watching SAM belch, squeak and stall under pressure. "It's not going to work."

When grand vision meets repeated humiliation we usually get tragedy or comedy. But "SAM" is not sad, or funny ha-ha. It is peculiar, though. In a prologue, Jonathan Waldman reveals that his father wrote a dictionary of robotics and that he had a youthful passion for the subject. With cinematic hauteur, Waldman then pans "400 miles north," to a boy growing up at roughly the same time who was also fascinated by robots. "This boy, though, was the descendant of some very inventive and courageous and stubborn men, and he had bricks in his blood." The shared passion, the heroic ancestry, a portentously unnamed boy, and that killer cliché to the skull, are not just misplaced flourishes. They're the beginning of some major tonal weirdness. Waldman seems determined to write an epic entrepreneurship tale — and it blinds him to the reality of poor SAM, while rendering Scott Peters nearly mute.

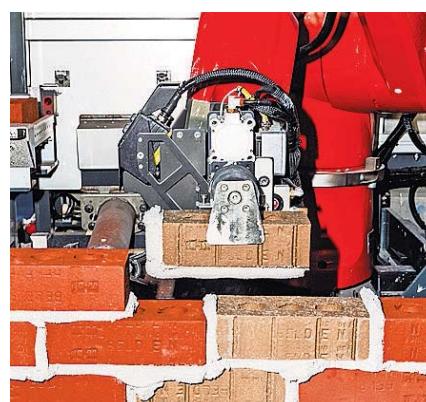
"SAM" covers 10 years in two parts. The first is largely set in a rundown facility just south of Rochester, N.Y., where a handful of ex-G.M. and Kodak engineers make halting progress on a prototype. The key met-



The SAM 100 (Semi-Automated Mason) is a bricklaying robot used for onsite masonry construction.



Here it is in action outside the Las Vegas Convention Center during Concrete World in 2018.



ric is bricks per day, and initially the Construction Robotics team struggles to coax SAM to lay 108. Even the laziest human mason can do six times that. SAM's robot arm is a diva, but mortar is the bigger concern. The viscosity of "mud," as the trade calls it, changes all the time, and masons must rely on their instinct and experience to sling it effectively. SAM has neither. Infusing a robot with nuance is a challenge worthy of the engineers' skills, but Waldman can't resist invoking higher stakes. "A lot hung in the balance — not just for Scott but for America. Brickworks, having endured decades of decline, was disappearing. Who cared about bricks? Nobody. And everybody."

It's at this point that readers who count themselves in the "nobody" category should pause. Because Waldman isn't satisfied just enlarging SAM's importance. He wants to change how we feel about bricks. There's a scenic tour through brick history ("Bad brickwork, of course, is relative. In ancient Babylon..."), with stops along the way for century-old trade disputes ("If it was made of gypsum, it was for plasterers.

If it was made of cement, it was for bricklayers") and some brick-based attempts at seduction that go about as well as you'd expect. "Plop a New Yorker in Kathmandu and the Nepalese bricks cast a spell over the foreigner, suggesting he's not so far from the Big Apple. Clay resonates." Thlunk.

When grand vision meets repeated humiliation we usually get tragedy or comedy. But 'SAM' is not sad, or funny ha-ha.

The relevant facts in these digressions point to a brick apocalypse that dates back as far as 1895. Only 4 cents of every construction dollar still goes to masonry, and the 150,000 remaining masons (average age 55) aren't eager to semi-automate themselves into obsolescence. These problems haunt Scott Peters when he takes his machine to market in "SAM's" second half. Demand is limited, even as a rental, and the masons who don't try to sabotage their

future robot overlords are at best uninterested in assisting much with its operating needs.

It doesn't help that SAM is kind of terrible. Inspired by Eric Ries's popular book "The Lean Startup," which advises software engineers to release a minimum viable product followed by rapid cycles of iteration, Peters thrusts SAM — an unmistakable hunk of hardware — into the harrowing chaos of live construction sites knowing it's likely to disappoint. Even Waldman calls this decision "somewhere between ridiculous and insane." What follows is numbing, if not surprising. SAM is plopped onto site after site and breaks down thanks to a combination of buggy software, spotty Wi-Fi, robot arm arthritis, rickety scaffolding and bad weather. Peters begs the client for mercy. Repeat.

The engineers gradually zap SAM's bugs and boost its bricks-per-day output well past the 1,000 mark, but the monotony of chapters devoted to each gig (Laramie: "From the start, the job had bad juju") exposes the book's most inexplicable flaw — the chasm between what Waldman reveals and what he withholds. He's long on engineering detail and indiscriminate heaps of Scott Peters's bio. A two-page section has sentences that begin "In fifth grade," "In sixth grade," "In seventh grade," "In ninth grade," and, for variation, "In 10th and 11th grade...." Three pages are devoted to one of Peters's swim coaches.

What's missing is Peters's voice. He's quoted once — for nine words — in Waldman's chapter-length dive into Peters's formative years. Occasionally Peters offers something bland like "We gotta fix this," but we almost never hear him discussing important strategic choices or his feelings about the miserable process of innovation. When the prose heads in a direction where a quote feels inescapable, Waldman often resorts to formulations such as "He wanted to say..." or "though Scott didn't put it in these words..." before zipping off on a lengthy authorial paraphrase. The scarcity of the protagonist's voice is so bizarre that it becomes a distraction. Did author and subject have an arrangement restricting quotes? Was Waldman not present for many of the events he recounts? Is Scott Peters... a robot?

If Peters's absence is mystifying, the lack of key financial facts in a book about entrepreneurship is unforgivable. Only in an epilogue do we learn that SAM retails for \$500,000, that Construction Robotics would need six sales a year to break even, and that six-figure checks from Peters's father-in-law are all that's keeping the company solvent. Then, as a throwaway, it's revealed that none of this matters. SAM has been supplanted by MULE, a "material unit life enhancer," and within months of its arrival Construction Robotics has moved an impressive 75 MULEs at \$73,000 a pop. And what does a "material unit life enhancer" do? It lays blocks. □



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Gone Boy

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

won three literary awards. In the glowing reviews that are sure to come, no doubt much will be made of the fact that Anappara started out as a journalist in Mumbai and Delhi; her storytelling genius, it might be assumed, must be rooted in her reporter's eye for detail. But that handy formula misses the heat and mystery of what Anappara creates. (Warning: If you begin reading the book in the morning, don't expect to get anything done for the rest of the day.)

Telling a story from the perspective of a child always risks a descent into sentimentality. There's not a lick of it here. Some of that has to do with the novel's subject: the unexplained disappearance of several children from the basti where Jai lives with his sister and parents. The first to go missing is Jai's classmate. An asthmatic stammerer, Bahadur is the oldest son of a man called Drunkard Laloo, a "beggy-type fellow" who stumbles around the basti, "drool dripping from his mouth, doing nothing but eating air." It falls to Bahadur's mother to be the breadwinner, working as a nanny for a family in one of the skyscraper condos Jai calls "hi-fi buildings" that loom luxuriously over the shacks of the basti. It's said that she had to leave her son in his father's desultory care when she accompanied her employers on a weeklong vacation in Rajasthan. When she returns, her son is gone.

The obvious next step would be to call the police. But, as anyone who has read "Behind the Beautiful Forevers," Katherine Boo's nonfiction account of a Mumbai slum, knows, the Indian police are corrupt in ways that can be tragicomically perverse. In a failed effort to trigger a bona fide investigation, the missing boy's mother tries to bribe a constable with the 24-karat gold chain "her madam" had given her as a gift. Jai's mother, who also works as a servant, cleaning the flat of a "hi-fi madam," becomes convinced that going to the police will draw attention to the illegality of the basti's dwellings. But Jai's father, a construction worker who helped complete the nearby Purple Line metro station, reasons that the gift of the gold chain will protect them. And besides, "if the police demolish our basti, where will they get bribes from?"

In "Pather Panchali," Apu is fascinated by nature. For Jai, who lives in a smog-blanketed city much like New Delhi, it's the small television inside his one-room shanty that captures his imagination. His favorite shows are "Police Patrol" and "Live Crime." Sometimes his mother turns them off in the middle of a murder because "it's too sick-making." But more often she watches with him and calls the policemen "sons-of-owls" for being so slow to catch the criminals. Since the authorities could-



Deepa Anappara

n't care less about Bahadur, Jai decides to investigate his classmate's disappearance himself.

Before Jai's jumble-tumble of an investigation can begin, the novel's perspective shifts again as Anappara takes us, for one chapter, inside the head of the missing boy and reveals how far from the truth the basti's gossip really is. Since he was 7 years old, Bahadur has been sleeping outside in the alleys of a nearby bazaar whenever his mother is forced to stay overnight "to care for madam's feverish child or to serve guests at a party."

His mother thought he was safe in the homes of neighborhood aunties, but when their children teased him about his stutter he roamed the bazaar instead. The owner of an electronics repair shop discovered the boy's talent and gave him a job, telling him he was smart enough to be an engineer. But the boy is still haunting the alleys because his drunken father beats him. As the chapter ends, he hears "the slow foot-steps of something or someone he was certain was coming toward him."

As I read this chapter and the ones that follow, I was reminded of James Wood's "How Fiction Works" and the remark he makes in his discussion of "What Maisie Knew" — that in telling the story from a child's vantage point, Henry James allows the reader to "live inside her confusion" but also gives us writing that's "so flexible, so capable of inhabiting different levels of comprehension and irony." Anappara improvises further still, inhabiting the inner

Why are some of these children lost? And why do some others escape by a thread?

world not just of one child but of a growing number of children who are lost to their families.

Jai returns to narrate most of the book as he and his two best friends embark on their "detectiving." Faiz believes that a djinn has taken their missing friend into an underground cave and eaten him. Pari, studious and confident, rolls her eyes at Faiz's superstitions. Jai's sister, a talented sprinter who sees winning a championship as her way of escaping the slum, covers for her little brother's unexplained absences as he tries to locate the abductors. Along the way, the secret recesses of the basti's collective morality are probed and we gradually realize that the simplistic police procedurals Jai has such faith in can't explain why some children are lost and others escape by a thread.

We marvel at those threads, so vibrantly woven by Anappara, as Jai tracks down the missing children's families and friends, only to discover that even those closest to them have little understanding of their true selves. This is the power of this novel, how it keeps us grounded — not in the flats of the hi-fi dwellers but in something closer to India's heart, which she locates in the minds of children with bony shoulders and dirty feet. □

Benjamins From Heaven

A bag of cash drops at the feet of this novel's hero.



JOHN MALTA

By KEVIN WILSON

STEPHEN WRIGHT WASTES no time in setting up the premise of his new novel. In the opening paragraph, one of the main characters, Graveyard, thinks to himself, "Sweetbreads and applesauce . . . I need some cash real bad," and, as if conjured by the declaration, a big canvas bag filled with fresh \$100 bills falls from the sky, landing at his feet. He takes the bag home, where his wife, Ambience, asks, "Are we in more

PROCESSED CHEESE

By Stephen Wright

392 pp. Little, Brown & Company. \$28.

trouble now than we've ever been before?" He tells her no, but then reconsiders and offers, "At least I don't think so."

But in Wright's bizarro vision of our world, if you can imagine it, it will come, more trouble than you believed possible. "Processed Cheese," Wright's fifth novel, opens with that magical bag of money falling from the sky, and its first pages are absolutely brilliant, a frenetic, hilarious rush of pure feeling that ends with "the best orgasm" that Graveyard and Ambience have ever experienced. And over the next 40 pages, the pacing is a thrill, as we watch Graveyard and Ambience put that money to good use, buying luxury goods from stores like Clawfoot&Residue and House-OfNoRegrets in the TooGoodForYou District. Do they buy the finest alcohol? They do. Drugs? Yes. Guns? So many guns. Sex toys? Of course. A deluxe professional magic wand, lacquered and encrusted with diamonds? They would if they could.

Along the way, they find themselves in clubs named Contagion and ThrashingLimb, high on a drug called Ellipsis, rubbing elbows with the rich and famous, people like DJAcquisitionFee and VelvetRope and Effigy and TastyAshes and

KEVIN WILSON'S third novel, "Nothing to See Here," was published in 2019.

Sister Act

In South India, a family secret prompts a new way of life.

By ADITI SRIRAM

TISHANI DOSHI'S THIRD NOVEL begins with a homecoming and the sensorial onslaught such a trip entails. Landing in Madras, in South India, the protagonist, Grace, braces herself for its "heavy, sweaty air, which smells of something that was once sweet, now rotting." Soon she's sitting in a rickety taxi, as if she were in "the belly of a whale on the crazy seas of the Tamil Nadu highways," jolting and swerving on her way to her mother's house. As she approaches, Grace recalls how her mother fell in love with her father, an acousticophobic Italian, whom she eventually left for a spiritual guru. Readers ready themselves for a

posed with certain dangers."

However, even a lilt can become a drone. Although "Small Days and Nights" succeeds in its first-person narrative (which is more truthful and wholesome than that of any character in Doshi's previous novel, "The Pleasure Seekers"), by the middle of the book Grace's listlessness and confusion can become tiresome. Doshi has said she believes that literature allows for "multiple expressions of the same story," but Grace is too moody and preoccupied to pull this off. In Doshi's poem "Contract," which opens her third collection of poetry, she writes about the future: "If it is bleak, I will lie / so that you may live / seized with wonder." But there are no lies here, and Doshi's characters are seized with despair.

SMALL DAYS AND NIGHTS

By Tishani Doshi

261 pp. W.W. Norton & Company. \$25.95.

whirlwind of a woman to open the front door once the car pulls up at its destination. But Doshi has other plans for this character: "My mother," Grace announces, "is in her bedroom in a freezer box on the floor."

"Small Days and Nights" is about a woman whose mother's death prompts her to leave her unhappy married life in America and rebuild her home and family back in India. First, Grace inherits an overgrown property on the beach. Then, discovering that her parents had a second daughter whom they never told her about, Grace brings the girl to this big, breezy home. Lucia, who has Down syndrome, is both sister and child to Grace. The woman who studiously refused to have children with her husband now becomes a full-time caregiver. Her mother's house, with its gate that never locks properly, influences Grace to abandon her sparse Western life for a lush wildness only India can provide.

As the title suggests, the story builds, one daily routine, one daily detail at a time. But Doshi treats this everydayness like the beach on which Grace lives: as a back-and-forth proposition, constantly in motion, always shifting slightly. Every day Lucia is a little different; every few months the local dogs have more puppies; every so often the village politics flare up and sputter across Grace's garden. The effect is that the tide's push and pull settle into a horizon, a plotline that's both repetitive and linear. "Small Days and Nights" thrives on these pushes and pulls, allowing opposites to coexist. A corpse in a freezer box feels alive and eccentric. A lifelong family secret turns into a forthright responsibility. Grace's urban friends seem more rustic than the village children. The novel's marine backdrop is "beautiful, but somehow



Tishani Doshi

'My mother,' Grace announces, 'is in her bedroom in a freezer box on the floor.'

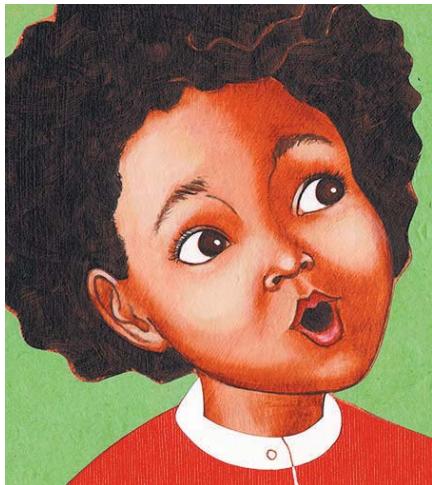
What work best are the book's language and the evocation of South India. Doshi's coastal map is current, with its sea an "exhausted gray tongue." And, most impressively, her focus never wavers. Starting with a corpse in a freezer box, "Small Days and Nights" turns a fragmented family into an overflowing one. An estranged father and deceased mother end up creating a legacy that includes a house, sisters, husbands and lovers, a village headman and his wife and those ever-breeding dogs — and seemingly without anything specific happening.

As Grace declares early on, "I am waiting for something to happen, but it must happen without any conniving." The rest of the book is everything that happens while Grace continues to wait for whatever is supposed to happen. Days and nights pass this way: frustrating, eventful, drunken, emotional. Momentous and mundane, day after day. Doshi keeps the pendulum swinging until the very last page. □

ADITI SRIRAM is the author of "Beyond the Boulevards: A Short Biography of Pondicherry."


Children's Books / Picture This / By Maria Russo

In these books, wild creatures and beings of all kinds help to set a child's imagination free.



Clockwise from left: "Bedtime for Sweet Creatures"; "You Loves Ewe!"; "The Old Truck."

BEDTIME FOR SWEET CREATURES

Written by Nikki Grimes. Illustrated by Elizabeth Zunon.

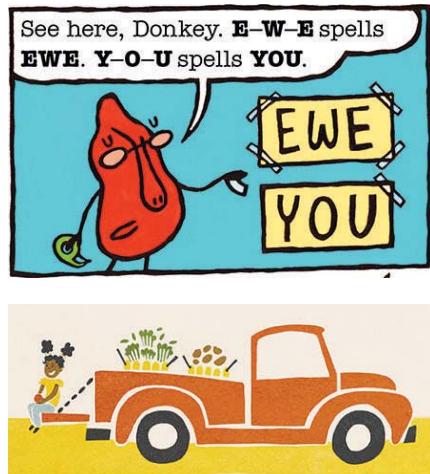
Grimes and Zunon capture the time-for-bed dance with verve, imagination and empathy in this tale of a not-sleepy child and her creative appeals to stay up longer. The affectionate mom evokes a range of animals to help her cause: "Your eyes swell, wide as owls.... Who? Who?" you ask as if you didn't know," she says. On each lovely page, Zunon collages realistic images of the family alongside fanciful, mythical-looking animals. With its refreshing ending — the girl ends up in her parents' bed, as so many children do — this one has the feel of an all-time great bedtime picture book.

32 pp. Sourcebooks Jabberwocky. \$17.99. (Ages 3 to 7.)

YOU LOVES EWE!
By Cece Bell

Ah, the English language: Learning its quirks is a challenge for little readers and almost-readers, but Bell ("El Deafo") brings irresistible humor to the task. This follow-up to "I Yam a Donkey!" again focuses on homonyms, with the yam and donkey, fancifully drawn with thick outlines, joined by a ewe. Once again, with shades of Abbott and Costello, the comedy really lifts off. "YOU are not a lady sheep — EWE is!" the frustrated yam shouts. But spirits are lifted by a smitten ram who has a proposal for Ewe. "EYE DEW," she replies, as the crowd tears up.

32 pp. Clarion/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. \$17.99. (Ages 4 to 7.)


THE OLD TRUCK

By Jarrett Pumphrey and Jerome Pumphrey

This charming debut is by brothers who divide the writing and the art, which mixes ink-stamping and digital techniques in a glorious sunshine-washed palette. It's a simple, beautifully constructed story about continuity and ingenuity: A beloved truck works hard for a family of farmers, including a girl who dreams of the truck as an airplane and a rocket ship. As the truck ages, it's left to languish next to the barn. The girl grows up, takes over the farm and restores the truck, putting it back into service: a sustainable choice! The Pumphreys have created a book that's both timeless and au courant.

48 pp. Norton Young Readers. \$17.95. (Ages 4 to 8.)

THE LIZARD

Written by José Saramago. Illustrated by J. Borges. Translated by Nick Caistor and Lucia Caistor.

This memorable fable about the arrival of a giant, fork-tongued but seemingly harmless lizard artfully combines the mythmaking sensibilities of the Portuguese Nobel laureate Saramago and the Brazilian artist Borges. The mysterious lizard shows up in an ordinary town, and "panic filled the air." As forces gather to attack it, the creature is transformed into a rose, possibly by fairies. The winsome language and striking woodcut art in bold colors and lots of black capture the ominous rush to judgment and the sweet possibility of wonderment.

24 pp. Triangle Square/Seven Stories. \$17.95. (Ages 4 to 8.)

HONEYBEE: THE BUSY LIFE OF APIS MELLIFERA
Written by Candace Fleming. Illustrated by Eric Rohmann.

Fleming and Rohmann, the team behind "Giant Squid," offer a fascinating up-close view of the stages of a honeybee's life. We see our little worker bee go from tiny and gray to full grown and — in a spectacular four-page gatefold — flying for the first time, all the way to the moment on her 35th day when she "drops to the ground" and "stills." The drama and suspense are positively riveting.

40 pp. Neal Porter/Holiday House. \$18.99. (Ages 6 to 9.)

FACTS VS. OPINIONS VS. ROBOTS
By Michael Rex

The question that begins this clever book full of different-colored robots could not be more timely: "Do you know the difference between a fact and an opinion?" Rex walks us through the basics with questions like "Is there a green robot?" and "Which of these robots is the most fun?" Bonus concept: When it's hard to make a decision, "we WAIT until we have more information." Wouldn't it be great if grown-ups read the book as a refresher?

32 pp. Nancy Paulsen/Penguin. \$17.99. (Ages 5 to 8.)

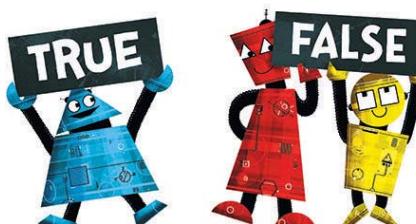


From "Honeybee."

PACKS: STRENGTH IN NUMBERS
By Hannah Salyer

Showing how different animals benefit from living and working in groups, Salyer's debut is a great example of the inventiveness possible in a nonfiction picture book. After a refrain of "Together . . ." we learn how ants harvest their food and zebras confuse predators. It all culminates, brilliantly, in an image of humans — who sometimes need reminding that "we are better" together.

48 pp. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. \$17.99. (Ages 4 to 7.)



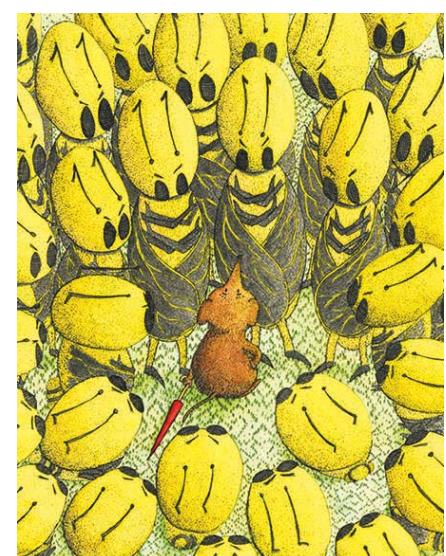
From "Facts vs. Opinions vs. Robots."



WILD HONEY FROM THE MOON
By Kenneth Kraegel

Kraegel's ("Green Pants") warm, offbeat tale is divided into seven chapters, great for parsing out over a week's bedtime reading. A mother shrew and her sick son, Hugo, live in a treehouse in the woods. She reads that "one teaspoon of wild honey from the moon has been known to cure" his ailment and sets off, braving a stampede of "night mares," getting a lift from a butterfly, and more. The enchantment and adventure just keep multiplying.

58 pp. Candlewick. \$17.99. (Ages 4 to 8.)



Clockwise from top left: "The Lizard"; "Wild Honey From the Moon"; "Packs."

Best Sellers

The New York Times

For the complete best-seller lists, visit
nytimes.com/books/best-sellers

COMBINED PRINT AND E-BOOK BEST SELLERS

SALES PERIOD OF JANUARY 12-18

THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	Fiction	WEEKS ON LIST
1	1	WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING , by Delia Owens. (Putnam) In a quiet town on the North Carolina coast in 1969, a young woman who survived alone in the marsh becomes a murder suspect.	71
2		LOST , by James Patterson and James O. Born. (Little, Brown) The new head of an F.B.I. task force takes on a crime syndicate run by a pair of Russian nationals.	1
3	4	THE LAST WISH , by Andrzej Sapkowski. (Orbit) Linked stories follow the exploits of Geralt of Rivia, a monster-slaying mercenary.	4
4	7	THE GUARDIANS , by John Grisham. (Doubleday) Cullen Post, a lawyer and Episcopal minister, antagonizes some ruthless killers when he takes on a wrongful conviction case.	14
5	11	THE SILENT PATIENT , by Alex Michaelides. (Celadon) Theo Faber looks into the mystery of a famous painter who stops speaking after shooting her husband.	18
6	12	THE DUTCH HOUSE , by Ann Patchett. (Harper) A sibling relationship is impacted when the family goes from poverty to wealth and back again over the course of many decades.	17
7	3	DEAR EDWARD , by Ann Napolitano. (Dial) A 12-year-old boy tries to start over after becoming the sole survivor of a plane crash in which he lost his immediate family.	2
8	9	SUCH A FUN AGE , by Kiley Reid. (Putnam) Tumult ensues when Alix Chamberlain's babysitter is mistakenly accused of kidnapping her charge.	3
9	13	THE GIVER OF STARS , by Jojo Moyes. (Penguin/Viking) In Depression-era Kentucky, five women refuse to be cowed by men or convention as they deliver books.	14
10		THE OUTSIDER , by Stephen King. (Scribner) A detective investigates a seemingly wholesome member of the community when an 11-year-old boy's body is found.	14

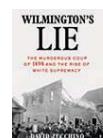
THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	Nonfiction	WEEKS ON LIST
1	2	JUST MERCY , by Bryan Stevenson. (Spiegel & Grau) A law professor and MacArthur grant recipient's memoir of his decades of work to free innocent people condemned to death.	21
2	1	EDUCATED , by Tara Westover. (Random House) The daughter of survivalists, who is kept out of school, educates herself enough to leave home for university.	100
3		TIGHTROPE , by Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn. (Knopf) The Pulitzer Prize-winning authors examine issues affecting working-class Americans.	1
4		RUNNING AGAINST THE DEVIL , by Rick Wilson. (Crown Forum) The Republican strategist offers his insights on how to potentially defeat President Trump in the upcoming election.	1
5	3	TALKING TO STRANGERS , by Malcolm Gladwell. (Little, Brown) Famous examples of miscommunication serve as the backdrop to explain potential conflicts.	19
6	4	BECOMING , by Michelle Obama. (Crown) The former first lady describes how she balanced work, family and her husband's political ascent.	59
7		UNCANNY VALLEY , by Anna Wiener. (MCD/Farrar, Straus & Giroux) A millennial's memoir is interwoven with a look at changes within Silicon Valley.	1
8	5	MAYBE YOU SHOULD TALK TO SOMEONE , by Lori Gottlieb. (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt) A psychotherapist gains unexpected insights when she becomes another therapist's patient.	23
9	7	CATCH AND KILL , by Ronan Farrow. (Little, Brown) The Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter details some surveillance and intimidation tactics used to pressure journalists and elude consequences by certain wealthy and connected men.	9
10	6	THE BODY KEEPS THE SCORE , by Bessel van der Kolk. (Penguin) How trauma affects the body and mind, and innovative treatments for recovery.	7

The New York Times best sellers are compiled and archived by the best-sellers-lists desk of the New York Times news department, and are separate from the editorial, culture, advertising and business sides of The New York Times Company. Rankings reflect unit sales reported on a confidential basis by vendors offering a wide range of general interest titles published in the United States. **ONLINE:** For complete lists and a full explanation of our methodology, visit www.nytimes.com/books/best-sellers.

Editors' Choice / Staff Picks From the Book Review



CLEANLESS, by Garth Greenwell. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$26.) Greenwell's narrator is a gay American teacher in Sofia, Bulgaria, who has a series of encounters that are sexually frank and psychologically complicated; the book achieves an unusual depth of accuracy about both physical activity and emotional undercurrent.



WILMINGTON'S LIE: The Murderous Coup of 1898 and the Rise of White Supremacy, by David Zucchino. (Atlantic Monthly, \$28.) This account of the brutal overthrow of a multiracial government in a North Carolina city at the end of the 19th century recovers a forgotten episode in American history that is both deeply disturbing and terribly sad.



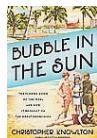
EXTREME ECONOMIES: What Life at the World's Margins Can Teach Us About Our Own Future, by Richard Davies. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$28.) Davies, a British economist and journalist, toured nine places where humans live in extremis, including Aceh province after the 2004 tsunami, a Jordan refugee camp and a Louisiana prison — all of which, he argues, hold valuable lessons for the future.



OLIGARCHY, by Scarlett Thomas. (Counterpoint, \$26.) The privileged teenage girls in this dark comedy, attending a dysfunctional, third-string boarding school in the countryside north of London, get caught up in a mass-psychogenic, contagious version of anorexia nervosa. Thomas's prose is fast-thinking, entertaining and punchy.



LITTLE GODS, by Meng Jin. (Custom House, \$27.99.) At the heart of this ambitious debut is a brilliant but volatile Chinese physicist bent on erasing her past: a compellingly complex protagonist, portrayed with exquisite irony. The book expands the future of the immigrant novel even as it holds us in uneasy thrall to the heroine's history.



BUBBLE IN THE SUN: The Florida Boom of the 1920s and How It Brought On the Great Depression, by Christopher Knolton. (Simon & Schuster, \$30.) The story of the 1920s real estate bubble in Florida has been told before, but Knolton brings to it a vivid, spirited style and a colorful cast of characters who made quick fortunes and lost them just as quickly.



SUMMER SNOW: New Poems, by Robert Hass. (Ecco/HarperCollins, \$27.99.) Rife with elegies and far-reaching digressions, Hass's first gathering of new poems since 2010 is a book that looks meaningfully back on the long life it took to write it. Over almost 200 pages, Hass proves himself a virtuoso of a very popular instrument: common American speech.



AMERICAN DIRT, by Jeanine Cummins. (Flatiron, \$27.99.) Cummins plunges readers into the Mexican migrant experience in this dazzling and deeply empathetic page-turner, which follows a mother and son fleeing the cartel assassins who have targeted their family.



HITTING A STRAIGHT LICK WITH A CROOKED STICK: Stories From the Harlem Renaissance, by Zora Neale Hurston. (Amistad/HarperCollins, \$25.99.) A collection of 21 stories that span the career of Zora Neale Hurston, including eight that show the effects of the Great Migration north.

The full reviews of these and other recent books are online: nytimes.com/books

Inside the List

ELISABETH EGAN



Freedom Fighter “Just Mercy” has been in theaters for six weeks, but the book it’s based on has been in the world for six years — including 188 weeks on the paperback nonfiction best-seller list, where it is now No. 1. Bryan Stevenson’s powerful memoir of fighting for the rights of wrongly convicted death row inmates has also made appearances on the hardcover nonfiction list and the young adult list, among others — despite the fact that he wasn’t sold on the idea of writing a book in the first place. (“I wasn’t persuaded a book was a good investment of my time.”)

Bryan Stevenson, who is the founder and executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative, explains, “For the first 20 years of my career, I sought anonymity because I believed it was the most effective way I could help the people I’m trying to help. We had to be covert, going into prisons and getting people off death row; it was like running the underground railroad. But about 10 years ago, I realized we needed to get outside the courts and start talking about these issues. The criminal justice system is so insulated from review, and that lack of access has created a lack of accountability. Until we hold people accountable for so much of this unfairness and unjustness, we’re not going to get the kind of change we need.”

And so “Just Mercy” was born. Stevenson has been heartened by the response — and also surprised, despite having inherited an appreciation of the importance of the written word. He says, “My great-grandparents were enslaved in Virginia, and my great-grandfather learned to read because he believed that one day he would be free. If you were living in the 1850s, you had no basis for that belief. When emancipation came, formerly enslaved people would come to their home every night and he would stand up and read the news. My grandmother said she sat next to him because she loved the power he had to help people. She was very literate even though she didn’t have a formal education, and she gave that to my mom, who was an avid reader. We were poor; I grew up in a rural community and we didn’t have a lot of things, but my mom went into debt to buy us a World Book Encyclopedia. I remember how strange it made us feel when the other kids had things like bikes and bats and watches — and we had the World Book Encyclopedia. It was a portal to the world.”

Books are also portals for Stevenson’s incarcerated clients. He says, “Reading provides a life of the mind that would otherwise be taken away from them. For some, it’s the only way they survive.” □

‘My mom went into debt to buy us a World Book Encyclopedia.’

PRINT / HARDCOVER BEST SELLERS

SALES PERIOD OF JANUARY 12-18

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1	1	WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING , by Delia Owens. (Putnam) In a quiet town on the North Carolina coast in 1969, a young woman who survived alone in the marsh becomes a murder suspect.	72	1	1	EDUCATED , by Tara Westover. (Random House) The daughter of survivalists, who is kept out of school, educates herself enough to leave home for university.	100
2		LOST , by James Patterson and James O. Born. (Little, Brown) The new head of an F.B.I. task force takes on a crime syndicate run by a pair of Russian nationals.	1	2		TIGHTROPE , by Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn. (Knopf) The Pulitzer Prize-winning authors examine issues affecting working-class Americans.	1
3	2	DEAR EDWARD , by Ann Napolitano. (Dial) A 12-year-old boy tries to start over after becoming the sole survivor of a plane crash in which he lost his immediate family.	2	3	2	TALKING TO STRANGERS , by Malcolm Gladwell. (Little, Brown) Famous examples of miscommunication serve as the backdrop to explain potential conflicts.	19
4	4	SUCH A FUN AGE , by Kiley Reid. (Putnam) Tumult ensues when Alix Chamberlain’s babysitter is mistakenly accused of kidnapping her charge.	3	4	3	BECOMING , by Michelle Obama. (Crown) The former first lady describes how she balanced work, family and her husband’s political ascent.	58
5	5	THE GUARDIANS , by John Grisham. (Doubleday) Cullen Post, a lawyer and Episcopal minister, antagonizes some ruthless killers when he takes on a wrongful conviction case.	14	5		RUNNING AGAINST THE DEVIL , by Rick Wilson. (Crown Forum) The Republican strategist offers his insights on how to potentially defeat President Trump in the upcoming election.	1
6	3	MORAL COMPASS , by Danielle Steel. (Delacorte) Shortly after Saint Ambrose Prep goes co-ed, a student is attacked and the community falls apart.	2	6	4	MAYBE YOU SHOULD TALK TO SOMEONE , by Lori Gottlieb. (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt) A psychotherapist becomes another therapist’s patient.	19
7	8	THE DUTCH HOUSE , by Ann Patchett. (Harper) A sibling relationship is impacted when the family goes from poverty to wealth and back again over the course of many decades.	17	7		UNCANNY VALLEY , by Anna Wiener. (MCD/Farrar, Straus & Giroux) A millennial’s memoir is interwoven with a look at changes within Silicon Valley.	1
8	7	THE SILENT PATIENT , by Alex Michaelides. (Celadon) Theo Faber looks into the mystery of a famous painter who stops speaking after shooting her husband.	33	8	6	CATCH AND KILL , by Ronan Farrow. (Little, Brown) The Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter details some surveillance and intimidation tactics used to pressure journalists and elude consequences by certain wealthy and connected men.	9
9	9	THE GIVER OF STARS , by Jojo Moyes. (Penguin/Viking) In Depression-era America, five women refuse to be cowed by men or convention as they deliver books throughout the mountains of Kentucky.	15	9	5	ME , by Elton John. (Holt) The multi-award-winning solo artist’s first autobiography chronicles his career, relationships and private struggles.	14
10	6	LONG BRIGHT RIVER , by Liz Moore. (Riverhead) Mickey risks her job with the Philadelphia police force by going after a murderer and searching for her missing sister.	2	10	10	SUCCESSFUL AGING , by Daniel J. Levitin. (Dutton) A neuroscientist suggests using resilience strategies as we grow older.	2

An asterisk (*) indicates that a book’s sales are barely distinguishable from those of the book above. A dagger (†) indicates that some bookstores report receiving bulk orders.

Paperback Row / BY MARIA RUSSO

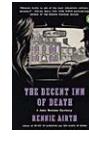
LAST STORIES, by William Trevor. (Penguin, 213 pp., \$17.) These 10 tales from the Irish virtuoso of the short story, who died in 2016, center on ordinary people whose lives veer in surprising directions. “In this small, final, seemingly quiet but ultimately volcanic book of stories, Trevor denies and defies — maybe spites — the promise of decline,” Cynthia Ozick wrote here.



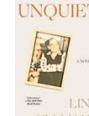
INHERITANCE: A Memoir of Genealogy, Paternity, and Love, by Dani Shapiro. (Anchor, 249 pp., \$16.95.) The memoirist and novelist Shapiro recounts her shocking discovery, via a DNA test after both of her parents had died, that she is biologically unrelated to her beloved father. Setting out to find the sperm donor, she reframes her notion of family and her Jewish identity. Our reviewer, Ruth Franklin, called the book “beautifully written and deeply moving.”



DOING JUSTICE: A Prosecutor’s Thoughts on Crime, Punishment, and the Rule of Law, by Preet Bharara. (Vintage, 345 pp., \$17.) Bharara, a former federal prosecutor for the Southern District of New York and a popular podcaster, explains our justice system and shows the crucial role played by law in society. In these pages, Jennifer Senior wrote that “Bharara, as usual, makes a very strong case.”



THE DECENT INN OF DEATH, by Rennie Airth. (Penguin, 353 pp., \$16.) This sixth book in the series by the South African-born Airth has Chief Inspector John Madden, along with another detective, investigating the seemingly accidental death of a church organist near Winchester. Our Crime columnist, Marilyn Stasio, called the Madden series “well worth reading, and rereading.”



UNQUIET, by Linn Ullmann. Translated by Thilo Reinhard. (Norton, 392 pp., \$15.95.) In this sixth novel by Ullmann, whose parents are the actress Liv Ullmann and the director Ingmar Bergman, the author wrestles with family history by interviewing her father. The characters “seem stranger, sadder and more real than the actress and the filmmaker we might have thought we knew,” A.O. Scott wrote here.



THEY WERE HER PROPERTY: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South, by Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers. (Yale University, 296 pp., \$18.). Jones-Rogers, a professor at the University of California, Berkeley, shows that while historians have often misrepresented white women as reluctant slave-owners, they were eager and frequently violent participants. The Times’ Parul Sehgal called the book “a taut and cogent corrective.”

CHILDREN'S BEST SELLERS

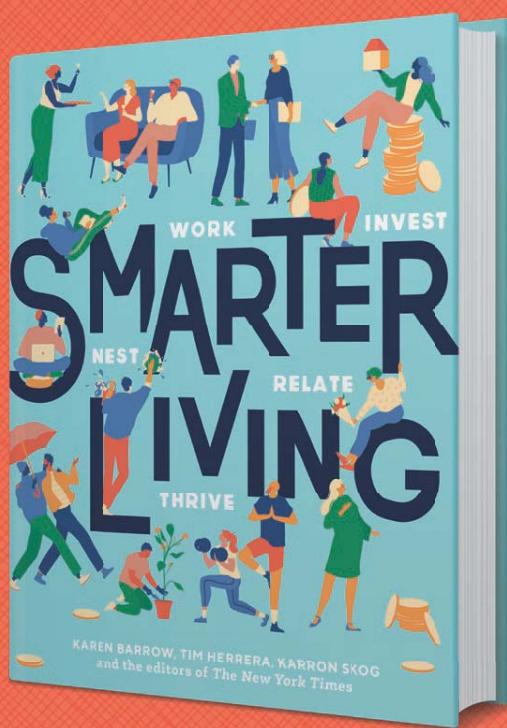
SALES PERIOD OF JANUARY 12-18

THIS WEEK	Middle Grade Hardcover	WEEKS ON LIST	THIS WEEK	Young Adult Hardcover	WEEKS ON LIST
1	WONDER , by R.J. Palacio. (Knopf) A boy with a facial deformity starts school. (Ages 8 to 12)	231	1	ONE OF US IS NEXT , by Karen M. McManus. (Delacorte) In this sequel to "One of Us Is Lying," a deadly game of truth or dare via text now plagues the students of Bayview High. (Ages 14 to 17)	2
2	REFUGEE , by Alan Gratz. (Scholastic) Three children in three different conflicts look for safe haven. (Ages 9 to 12)	82	2	THE HATE U GIVE , by Angie Thomas. (Balzer + Bray) A 16-year-old girl sees a police officer kill her friend. (Ages 14 and up)	151
3	ALI CROSS , by James Patterson. (jimmy patterson) Ali Cross investigates the disappearance of a close friend. (Ages 9 to 12)	8	3	CHILDREN OF VIRTUE AND VENGEANCE , by Tomi Adeyemi. (Holt) Zélie must stop the threat of civil war in Orisha. (Ages 14 to 17)	7
4	DIARY OF AN AWESOME FRIENDLY KID , by Jeff Kinney. (Amulet) Greg's best friend Rowley Jefferson writes his own diary. (Ages 8 to 12)	41	4	ONE OF US IS LYING , by Karen M. McManus. (Delacorte) For five students, a detour into detention ends in murder. (Ages 14 and up)	104
5	RACE TO THE SUN , by Rebecca Roanhorse. (Disney/Hyperion) Two Navajo siblings race to save their kidnapped father. (Ages 8 to 12)	1	5	CHILDREN OF BLOOD AND BONE , by Tomi Adeyemi. (Holt) Zélie fights to restore magic to the land of Orisha. (Ages 14 to 17)	98
6	THE COMPLETE COOKBOOK FOR YOUNG CHEFS , by America's Test Kitchen Kids. (Sourcebooks Jabberwocky) Over 100 kid-tested recipes from America's Test Kitchen. (Ages 8 and up)	40	6	INFINITY SON , by Adam Silvera. (HarperTeen) Twin brothers are caught up in a war between the magical Spell Walkers and Blood Casters. (Ages 14 to 17)	1
7	A TALE OF MAGIC... , by Chris Colfer. (Little, Brown) In a world where magic is outlawed and women are forbidden to read, Brystal Evergreen defies the odds. (Ages 8 to 12)	16	7	FIVE FEET APART , by Rachael Lippincott with Mikki Daughtry and Tobias Iaconis. (Simon & Schuster) Stella and Will are in love from afar. (Ages 12 to 17)	59
8	CLEAN GETAWAY , by Nic Stone. (Crown) Scoob and his grandmother take an impromptu road trip. (Ages 8 to 12)	2	8	LOVEBOAT, TAIPEI , by Abigail Hing Wen. (HarperTeen) When sent to Taipei to study abroad, Ever Wong has the time of her life. (Ages 13 to 17)	2
9	LITTLE LEGENDS: EXCEPTIONAL MEN IN BLACK HISTORY , by Vashti Harrison with Kwesi Johnson. (Little, Brown) Biographies of trailblazing black men. (Ages 8 to 12)	4	9	THE NIGHT COUNTRY , by Melissa Albert. (Flatiron) Alice must find out who is behind a string of ex-story murders. (Ages 12 to 17)	2
10	LITTLE LEADERS , by Vashti Harrison. (Little, Brown) The biographies of 40 African-American women who made a difference. (Ages 8 to 12)	26	10	THE FOUNTAINS OF SILENCE , by Ruta Sepetys. (Philomel) Ana and Daniel's romance blooms amid the turmoil of fascist Spain. (Ages 12 to 17)	15
THIS WEEK	Picture Books	WEEKS ON LIST	THIS WEEK	Series	WEEKS ON LIST
1	GRUMPY MONKEY , by Suzanne Lang. Illustrated by Max Lang. (Random House) Jim Panzee is having a bad day. (Ages 3 to 7)	21	1	DOG MAN , by Dav Pilkey. (Scholastic) A dog's head is combined with a policeman's body to create this hybrid supercop hound. (Ages 7 to 9)	125
2	LOVE FROM THE CRAYONS , by Drew Daywalt and Oliver Jeffers. (Penguin Workshop) The Crayons show the colors of love. (Ages 5 to 8)	2	2	MISS PEREGRINE'S PECULIAR CHILDREN , by Ransom Riggs. (Quirk/Penguin) Time travelers try to save their beloved headmistress. (Ages 14 and up)	108
3	THE WONDERFUL THINGS YOU WILL BE , by Emily Winfield Martin. (Random House) A celebration of future possibilities. (Ages 3 to 7)	218	3	DIARY OF A WIMPY KID , written and illustrated by Jeff Kinney. (Amulet) The travails and challenges of adolescence. (Ages 9 to 12)	566
4	THE SERIOUS GOOSE , by Jimmy Kimmel. (Random House) A goose is not as serious as she seems. (Ages 3 to 7)	7	4	THE BAD GUYS , by Aaron Blabey. (Scholastic) Tough animals in suits take on some real villains. (Ages 7 to 10)	61
5	LOVE FROM THE VERY HUNGRY CATERPILLAR , by Eric Carle. (Grosset & Dunlap) A ravenous insect returns with its appetite intact. (Ages 3 to 5)	26	5	HARRY POTTER , by J.K. Rowling. (Scholastic) A wizard hones his conjuring skills in the service of fighting evil. (Ages 10 and up)	565
6	TOMORROW I'LL BE KIND , by Jessica Hische. (Penguin Workshop) A bunny, a cat and a mouse practice kindness. (Ages 3 to 7)	1	6	CAPTAIN UNDERPANTS , written and illustrated by Dav Pilkey. (Scholastic) Boys and their principal fight evil. (Ages 7 to 10)	205
7	GOOD NIGHT, LITTLE BLUE TRUCK , by Alice Schertle and Jill McElmurry. (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt) Blue and Toad offer shelter from a storm to other farm animals. (Ages 4 to 7)	14	7	WHO WAS/IS . . . ? , by Jim Gigliotti and others; various illustrators. (Penguin Workshop) Biographies unlock legendary lives. (Ages 8 to 11)	91
8	I AM MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. , by Brad Meltzer. Illustrated by Christopher Eliopoulos. (Dial) A biography captures the civil rights leader as he steps to the fore. (Ages 5 to 8)	3	8	DORK DIARIES , by Rachel Renée Russell. (Simon & Schuster) Nikki Maxwell navigates the halls of middle school. (Ages 9 to 13)	309
9	THE DAY THE CRAYONS QUIT , by Drew Daywalt. Illustrated by Oliver Jeffers. (Philomel) Problems arise when Duncan's crayons revolt. (Ages 3 to 7)	298	9	FIVE NIGHTS AT FREDDY'S , by Scott Cawthon and Kira Breed-Wrisley. (Scholastic) Stories based on the indie video game. (Ages 12 to 18)	3
10	DEAR GIRL , by Amy Krouse Rosenthal and Paris Rosenthal. Illustrated by Holly Hatam. (HarperCollins) Letters of affirmation. (Ages 4 to 8)	34	10	WINGS OF FIRE , by Tui T. Sutherland. (Scholastic) The seven dragon tribes have been at war for generations, and only the five dragonets of destiny can unite them.. (Ages 9 to 12)	74

Picture book rankings include hardcover sales only. Series rankings include all print and e-book sales.

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The Shortlist / Debut Story Collections / By Maya Chung

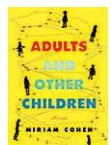


ADULTS AND OTHER CHILDREN

Stories

By Miriam Cohen

238 pp. Ig Publishing. Paper, \$16.95.



The 14 linked stories in "Adults and Other Children" track the same four women at different points in their lives. It's more disconcerting than you might expect to re-encounter as an adult a character you've previously met in her childhood. But unlike in a classic *bildungsroman*, here, much of the story line in between is missing; the result is curious, sometimes very dark — and often delightful.

Cohen's greatest strength is in her realism (I had little patience for the first and most fantastical story, "Naughty," with its imaginary nanny, her petticoat made of children's bones, her myths of changelings). In another break from the coming-of-age archetype, her characters — both the children and, especially, the adults — are distinctly unsympathetic: immature, perverted, selfish. No detail is spared in casting them as unappealing: particularly their incessant lies, which span the book.

Behind the characters' transgressions is an acute portrayal of failed relationships and communication, of what is expected of women and how they struggle to transcend the norms that require them to achieve certain things (a husband, first and foremost) in order to be relevant. In "Expecting," a school principal tells an unwed teacher that as a single mother, she would set the wrong example. Pretending, as a result, to be "married and pregnant, she was intoxicating to be around. Her students gazed up at her during her lessons, pupils enlarged, as though stumbling from darkened rooms."

In "A Girl of a Certain Age," two roommates compose a macabre musical inspired by the domestic murder of one of the women's co-workers, and also "S.V.U." They are fearlessly un-P.C.; one song is called "Girls Just Wanna Get Raped." In "Odd Goods," one of these roommates is now a lit professor (on her curriculum: "Lolita"). She makes an unwelcome pass at a male student, before fielding a similar attempt from her department chair one evening at her home, but "he let himself out before it occurred to her she could've asked him to leave." When she recounts the story to her dean, major details have been altered: "It wasn't her hand that he held, but her breast. And she had to ask him to stop." It's an unsettling sequence of events one can read equally as either proof of or counterpoint to the dictum "Believe All Women."

IMAGINARY MUSEUMS

Stories

By Nicolette Polek

114 pp. Soft Skull. Paper, \$15.95.



The longest story in "Imaginary Museums" is no more than a few pages. This form can be provocative (think Amy Hempel, Diane Williams), but every single one of the words must glitter. Unfortunately, some of Polek's fall flat, seemingly selected with the primary goal of arbitrariness.

Luckily, she has a keen eye for the absurd. In one of the most effective stories, "Winners," a group of scholars gathers for drinks, and one refers to Ezra Pound as a "she." No one thinks to correct it; instead the others feel ashamed for having thought Pound was a man. While complimenting one another on how "intelligent and qualified" they all are, the group proceeds to exchange ludicrous anecdotes about Pound, the woman.

The book's dislocations are physical as well as theoretical. In "Sabbatical," a comically demanding homeowner hands over his house to a new tenant ("I was wondering . . . if you climb around there and find a knife with a thin jade handle . . . could you dispose of it, under the oak tree? That is where I bury all the things that need burying"). We experience the renter's sense of displacement among the nearby abandoned auto yard, the colony of lizards, the slab of plywood where there ought to be a door lock. The location of his sabbatical, Chernobyl, sounds joltingly foreign on the heels of Polek's previous, suburban-set section titled "American Interiors."

If she's going for the uncanny, then some of her many, brief plots are too flimsy, not grounded enough in the recognizable, to succeed. A seamstress suddenly "decides to give up people," making clothes instead for mannequins, a car, a teakettle. There's no more to the story, and it's too bad: Given more space, it could've been almost charming.

Polek's imagery, though, comes through like flashes in a silent film. In one memorably vivid scene, a landlord shows a couple a video of herself as a child, smashing strawberries into sheep's wool. Another narrator's grandfather falls in love at 26 with a woman who loves flowers; one day he sneaks into her house to water all her plants. But he doesn't stop there, watering her quilt, her phone and her carpet. This may seem destructive, or cruel, but in Polek's world, it feels more like beauty.

SHOW THEM A GOOD TIME

By Nicole Flattery

238 pp. Bloomsbury. \$24.



Like Cohen's collection, Flattery's "Show Them a Good Time" is populated with unlikable women, or at least ones with gaping, gnawing flaws, ones who live and observe their lives in off-kilter ways.

Flattery's writing is like a fever dream; the details are lucid, but the basics (place, time) are disorientingly hazy. Perhaps this rootlessness is intentional; what she seems to care most about is talk — what it can and can't do, how it can hurt, how it can be the source of regret. In "Hump," a woman recalls her dead father's final regret: that he didn't talk more. "He surmised, through a mouthful of diabetic chocolate, that he had only spoke 30 percent of his life. It was a dismal percentage."

Many of Flattery's protagonists have endured some sort of trauma, but the events are so buried we feel we're getting only their bitter remains, and we're unsure if those remains are strength, or apathy. In the title story, a woman remembers her abuse as a cliché: "Usually when he was halfway through hitting me it would occur to him just how obvious he was."

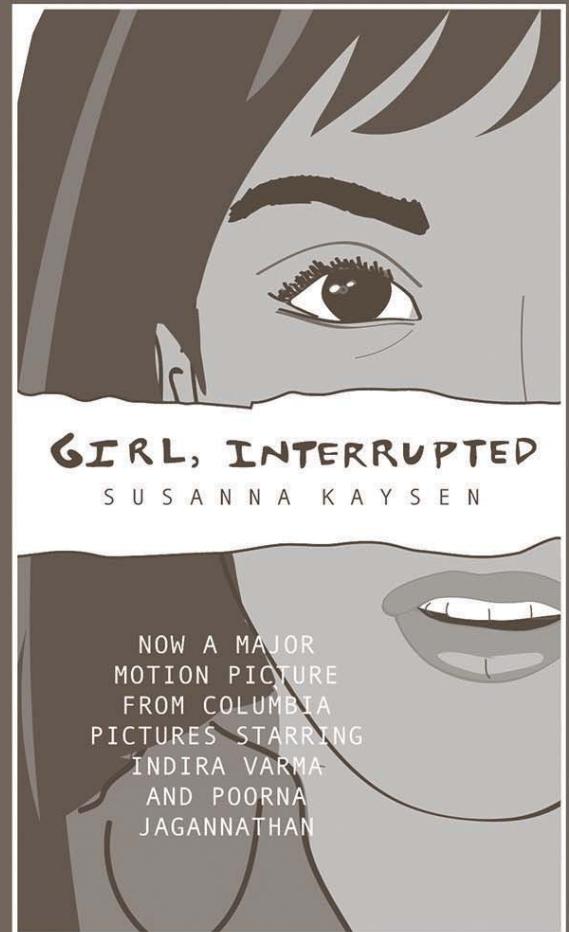
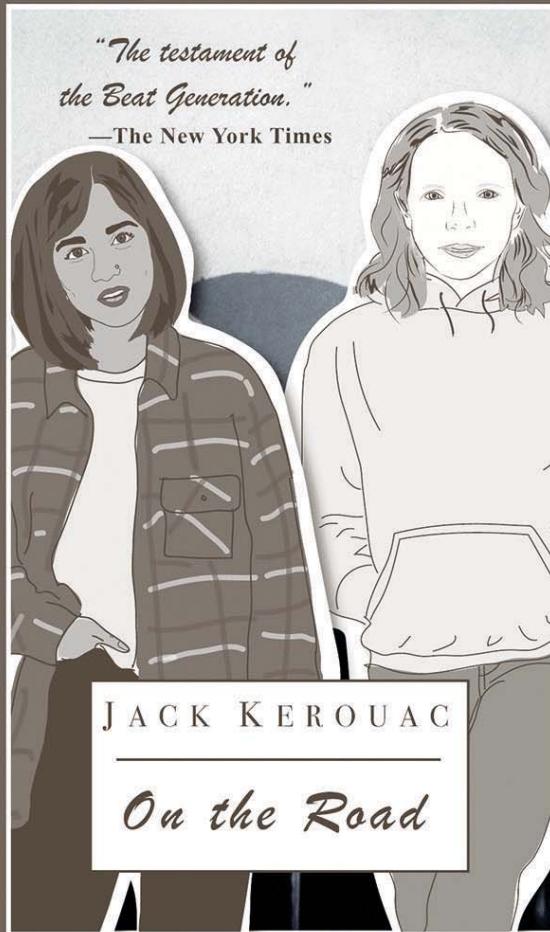
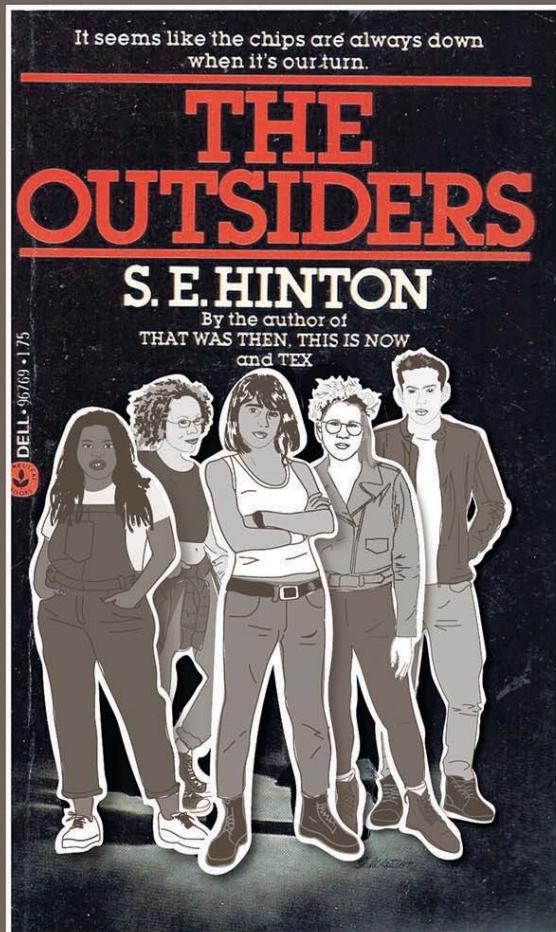
As though in flat rejection of the victim narrative, Flattery's women can be spectacularly mean. In "Track," a woman with a famous comedian boyfriend starts to leave nasty comments on his fan page, using his dead mother's name as a pseudonym. Like other characters in this collection, she's desperate to communicate directly; she just doesn't know how. So she prints out the meanest post and puts it in her boyfriend's coat pocket.

The cruelty in the worlds Flattery draws makes the tender moments in her stories all the more affecting. In "You're Going to Forget Me Before I Forget You," two sisters have a series of phone conversations, about the narrator's children's-book writing, about her sister's pregnancy. They almost always speak at night, the narrator back in her hotel room, on book tour. There's a gloominess to this story that comes from lingering childhood trauma, but also a neediness, and a romance: At one point the pregnant sister begs her to blow cigarette smoke to her through the phone. In between these dialogues, the narrator thinks about the past, glances back at the pains of the sisters' young lives, even calls an ex. "Would you forget me if you could?" she asks him. "No," he says. "I wouldn't."

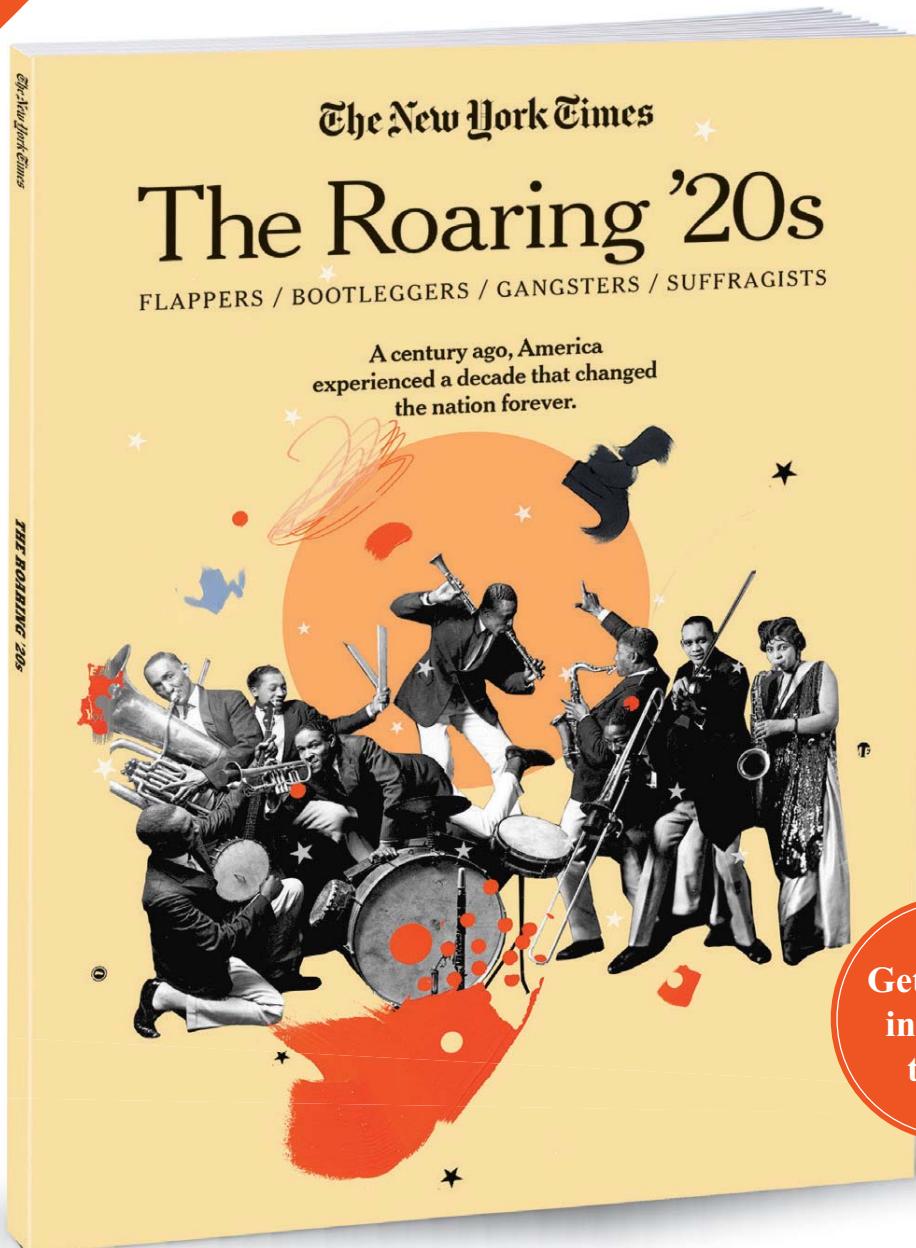
Sketchbook / 'I Am Here' / By Mira Jacob

An artist reimagines the covers of three favorite books.

SOMETIMES YOU REMEMBER THE BOOKS YOU CLUNG TO GROWING UP, THE ONES THAT SHOWED YOU WHAT YOUR OWN REBELLION MIGHT LOOK LIKE. YOU REMEMBER THE WAY YOU HELD THEM SO CLOSELY THEIR PAGES BECAME PART OF YOUR BODY, YOUR PLAN, YOUR ARMOR AGAINST A WORLD THAT DIDN'T SEE YOU—NOT LIKE THESE BOOKS DID, UNTIL, UNTIL (AND IT ALWAYS HAPPENED, DIDN'T IT?) YOU REALIZED THAT A BODY LIKE YOURS WAS NEVER IN THESE BOOKS, NOT REALLY, NOT AS ANYTHING BIGGER THAN A PLOT TWIST OR PUNCHLINE. BUT WHAT IF IT HAD BEEN DIFFERENT? WHAT IF THE BOOKS THAT TAUGHT YOU TO SEE YOURSELF HAD SEEN YOU? WOULD YOU HAVE FELT ANY MORE REAL?



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