

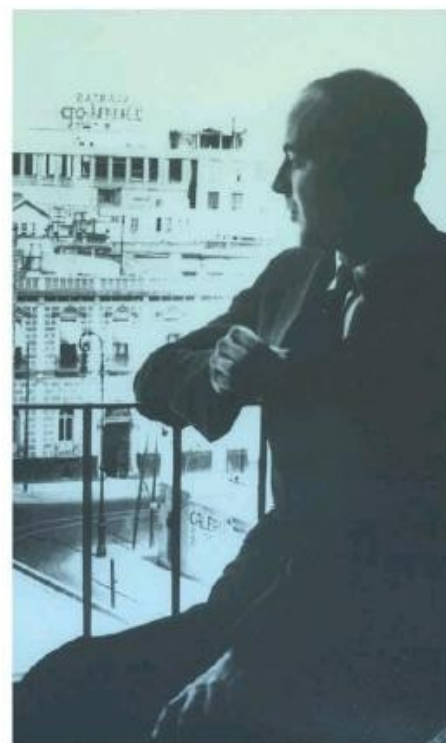
Book Review

JULY 10, 2022



Atlantic Antic

In "The Shores of Bohemia," John Taylor Williams evokes Cape Cod's heyday as an artistic paradise.



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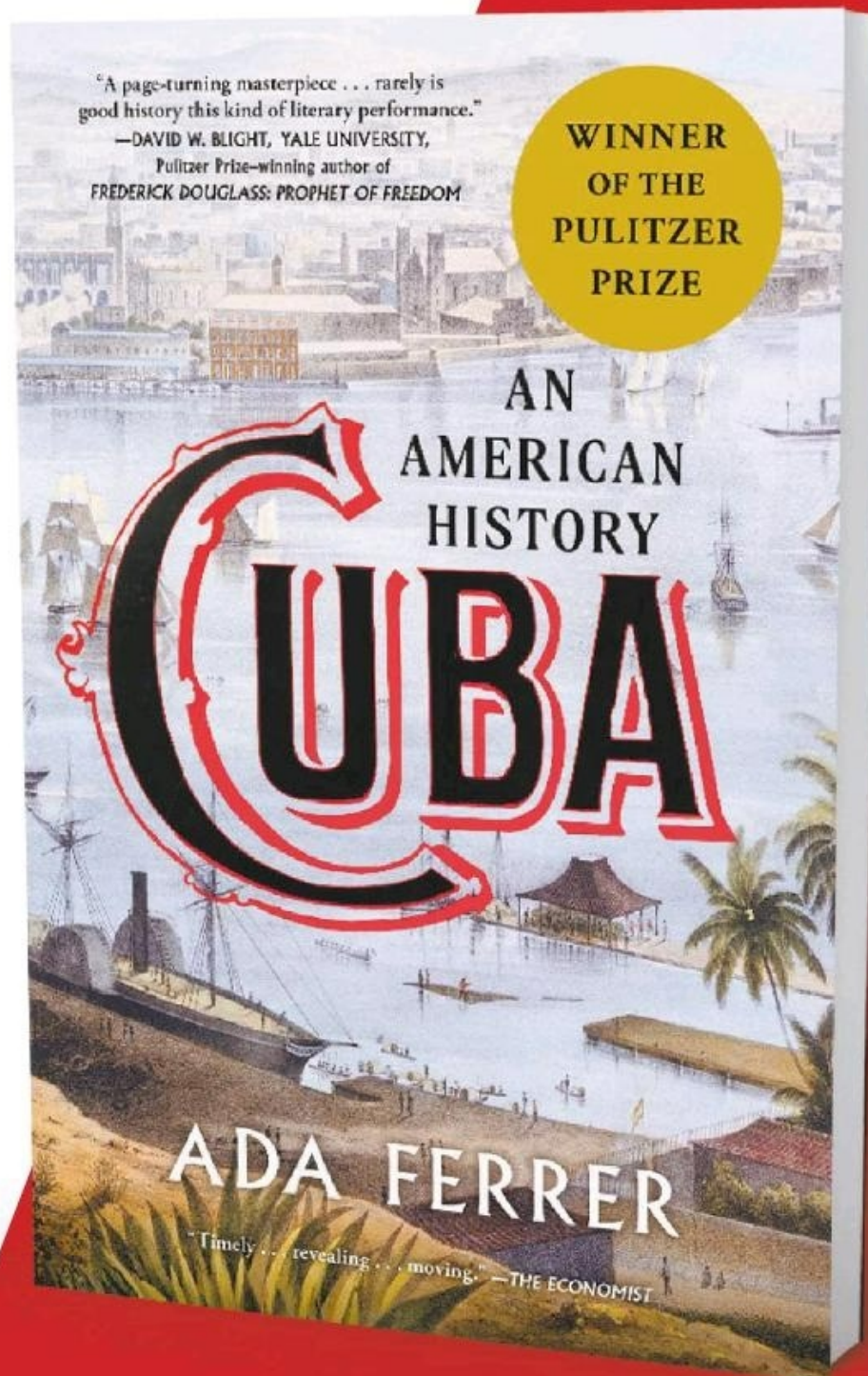
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Book Review

The New York Times

JULY 10, 2022



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"IMPOSSIBLE TO PUT DOWN"

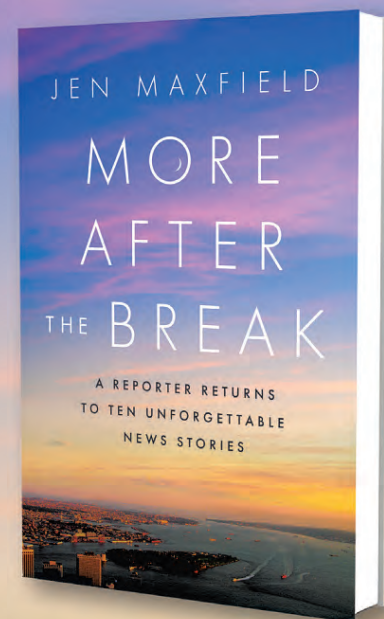
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Newly Published / Visuals



BANKSY, by Stefano Antonelli and Gianluca Marziani. (Rizzoli Electa, \$40.) This exhaustive collection showcases hundreds of works by the elusive street artist and global phenomenon, including famous paintings, serigraphs, stencils, installation objects and memorabilia.



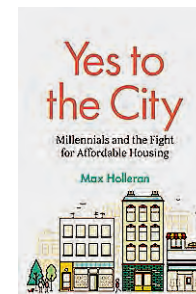
GORDON PARKS: Pittsburgh Grease Plant, 1944/46, edited by Dan Leers. (Steidl/The Gordon Parks Foundation/Carnegie Museum of Art, \$65.) Taken in the photojournalist's signature style, these striking, dramatically staged images chronicle the work of Black and white laborers at the Penola Inc. Grease Plant toward the end of World War II.

AFFINITIES: A Journey Through Images From The Public Domain Review, by Adam Green. (Thames & Hudson, \$60.) The editor of *The Public Domain Review*, an online journal that highlights out-of-copyright works, has compiled over 500 prints, paintings, photographs, sketches and more in a single, unbroken, dreamlike sequence.

GEORGE GROSZ IN BERLIN: The Relentless Eye, by Sabine Rewald. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, \$45.) This investigation of the German Expressionist's work, including both famous and rarely printed paintings and drawings, re-evaluates Grosz's years in Berlin and highlights his skill at depicting the moral decay of the interwar period.

...Also Out Now

WHEN TIME IS SHORT: Finding Our Way in the Anthropocene, by Timothy Beal. (Beacon, \$23.95.) In light of impending climate collapse, a religion scholar offers new readings of biblical texts that challenge human exceptionalism and offer a conception of human life as interdependent with the natural world.



YES TO THE CITY: Millennials and the Fight for Affordable Housing, by Max Holleran. (Princeton University, \$27.95.) An urban studies researcher details the rise of the "Yes in My Backyard" movement, which includes activists, developers and advocates seeking a new kind of urban society through high-density construction in cities.

ROGUES: True Stories of Grifters, Killers, Rebels, and Crooks, by Patrick Radden Keefe. (Doubleday, \$30.) Twelve stories about "crime and corruption, secrets and lies, the permeable membrane separating licit and illicit worlds" by the New Yorker staff writer and author of "Empire of Pain."

ONE PERSON, ONE VOTE: A Surprising History of Gerrymandering in America, by Nick Seabrook. (Pantheon, \$30.) This comprehensive history traces the practice of gerrymandering from its inception in 13th-century England to its ubiquitous use in 19th-century America and its highly partisan present-day iteration.

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Letters



"Hobbies, or Attitude Is Everything" (1819); attributed to William Heath.

Life Cycles

TO THE EDITOR:

I applaud the great review Charles Finch wrote of Jody Rosen's "Two Wheels Good" (June 26), which honors the bicycle and its multiple roles through history. As someone who has spent years photographing bicycles in varied contexts through Europe and the United States, I'd like to add their creative roles as store signs and direction signposts, including the poignant reminder of white bicycles honoring the lives of cyclists killed on our roads.

PAMELA ELLEN FERGUSON
AUSTIN, TEXAS

TO THE EDITOR:

I used to live in Los Angeles, close to Griffith Park, which Charles Finch mentions in his review. I'm surprised that he did not also mention the occasional nightly bike rides down Sunset Boulevard, which quickly turns into a frightening spectacle for car driver and even bike rider, as many cyclists aggressively zigzag in between cars.

A viable path for transportation for all in the future? Let's hope not; cars may become obsolete but petty prejudices and irrational behavior in the biking community will likely continue.

DAVID TULANIAN
HENDERSON, NEV.

Breaking Capitalism

TO THE EDITOR:

Regarding Kurt Andersen's re-

view of "The Man Who Broke Capitalism," a biography of Jack Welch by David Gelles (June 26): The review may be totally on the money about the book's weaknesses, but I am a bit concerned that The Times would publish a review by an individual who may have a personal ax to grind with the author. Andersen references his own recently published book, "Evil Geniuses," on a number of occasions in his less than flattering review and, while acknowledging that "being derivative is no crime," seems to imply that, in some instances, Gelles may have been more than "derivative."

I have not read the book being reviewed but it seems that when The Times publishes a significantly negative review, there should be no question as to the objectivity of the reviewer.

GRANT CALLERY
BETHESDA, MD.

Moral Grounds

TO THE EDITOR:

I was glad to see that Laura Miller's review of "Metaphysical Animals," by Clare Mac Cumhail and Rachael Wiseman (June 26), pointed out oversimplifications in "the book's overall thesis that the four friends somehow redirected the course of British philosophy." But Miller could have gone further in her criticism of the book. She could have mentioned that, before these women entered philosophy, G.E. Moore, the prominent male 20th-century British philosopher, had already recognized "that morality had

some kind of reality outside of individual feelings and choices." She could have asked whether the fact that Iris Murdoch "collected marriage proposals the way little boys collect baseball cards" was any less exploitative than a man's penchant for collecting women. Moreover, my half-century of experience in academic philosophy has hardly borne out the view that "women's style of philosophizing [is] less aggressive and competitive" than men's.

FELICIA NIMUE ACKERMAN
PROVIDENCE, R.I.

TO THE EDITOR:

Laura Miller's review of "Metaphysical Animals" understandably focuses on the Oxford home of four pathbreaking women studying philosophy there. But her discussion of the importance of Ludwig Wittgenstein to their labors will leave the uninformed reader with the impression that he, too, was at Oxford. Wittgenstein was a fellow at Cambridge.

RUSSELL L. RILEY
CAMBRIDGE, ENGLAND

The writer is a visiting by-fellow at Cambridge University.

TO THE EDITOR:

In response to Laura Miller's review, headlined "First, Let's Kill All the Logical Positivists": A few decades ago, standing in line at the post office in Northwest Washington, D.C., I realized that the elderly gentleman just ahead of me was none other than the renowned I.F. Stone, of the eponymous I.F. Stone's Weekly. Having been a subscriber to The Weekly since college in the 1960s, I was star-struck. I gushed something like: "Oh Mr. Stone, I have been an admirer of yours for years. May I shake your hand?" To which he replied, "Yes," and held out his hand, while continuing, "And are you a logical positivist?" I allowed as I undoubtedly was one.

MARLAINE LOCKHEED
PRINCETON, N.J.

BOOKS@NYTIMES.COM

Letters for publication should include the writer's name, address and telephone number.



Erika L. Sánchez

The poet and novelist, whose new book is the memoir ‘Crying in the Bathroom,’ wishes more authors would write about money: ‘I grew up working class and money was a factor in everything we did.’

What books are on your night stand?

“Memphis,” by Tara M. Stringfellow, “The School for Good Mothers,” by Jessamine Chan, and “All the Flowers Kneeling,” by Paul Tran.

What’s the last great book you read?

“The Love Songs of W.E.B. Du Bois,” by Honorée Fanonne Jeffers. Oh my goodness, it blew me away. It was devastating, but I couldn’t stop reading it. It still haunts me.

Describe your ideal reading experience (when, where, what, how).

I love, love, love reading in bed freshly showered, preferably when it’s warm enough to open a window. Bonus points for the sound of rain and rustling leaves. It’s not always possible now because I have an 18-month-old baby and I am so very tired when I go to bed. Gone are the days of reading marathons until the wee hours. I used to literally sleep with books

when I was single. I also read a lot in my office in the attic. I make a nest on my rug with blankets and pillows and other books. No one besides my husband is allowed to come up to my office unless they ask me for permission. A room of my own, you know? I’m a bit of an attic witch.

Do you count any books as guilty pleasures?

Sometimes I keep reading books that I think are terrible because it’s weirdly satisfying to me. There was a book, for instance, that I threw across the room because it was so poorly written. It hurt my feelings. But then I kept reading it and telling my boyfriend how bad it was. It was a “Sex and the City” rip-off with Latina characters that felt very one-dimensional. I’ll leave it at that.

You used to write an advice column about sex and love. What authors are especially good on those topics?

Toni Morrison writes about sex and desire in a way that makes me want to close the book and pray to the sky. “Paradise” comes immediately to mind. The way Lisa Taddeo in “Animal” writes about sex makes me gasp and shudder. That book blew my mind.

What’s the most interesting thing you learned from a book recently?

I’ve been reading about the horrors of slavery since I was a child. As a girl, I read all sorts of books that were not appropriate for my age. However, there were some forms of violence that I had never read about until “The Love Songs of W.E.B. Du Bois.” That book was an emotionally difficult but necessary read. There were details that I can’t share here out of context because they were so horrific, but the intergenerational trauma I learned about in this text left me shaken and angry.

Which subjects do you wish more authors would write about?

Money. White authors often write about money (or don’t) in a way that disregards the realities of most people. It’s as if they assume that everyone simply has it. Or at least their readers. I remember reading “Fear of Flying,” by Erica Jong, many years ago, for instance, and getting very angry when the protagonist went to Europe for months with no concern for money or a job. I assumed she was relying on family money, but it was never explained. It took me out of the text because I couldn’t get over it. Maybe it’s because I grew up working class and money was a factor in everything we did. Marginalized people could never in their wildest dreams make these kinds of choices. That’s why I always write about the financial realities of my characters. I don’t expect everyone to assume what they are. Those details really matter to me.

What moves you most in a book?

A beautiful image can really knock the mess out of me. I’m a poet before anything, so I need all my senses to be awakened in anything I read. The tiniest details make a world of difference.

Do you prefer books that reach you emotionally, or intellectually?

I need them to intersect. A good book for me will make me think and feel deeply — and likely cry, likely startling my family. □

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

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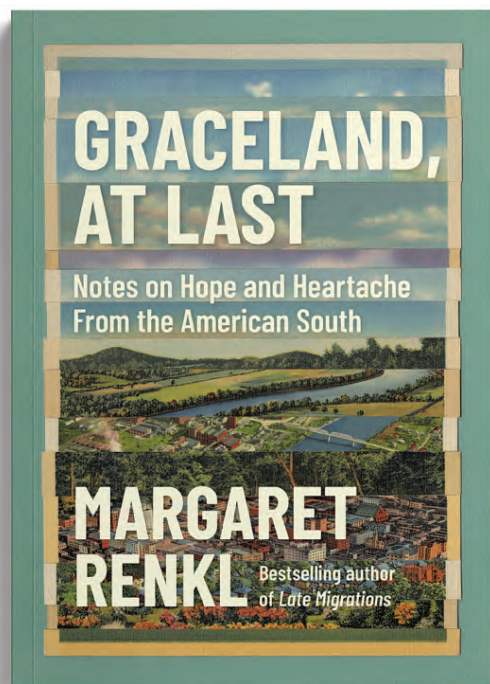


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CRIME / BY SARAH WEINMAN

Was It Murder?

I'VE ENJOYED the recent mini-boom in locked-room mysteries, though I am starting to wonder if the number of “impossible crime” plots are finite. (I’ll add that any crime novel comparing itself to “And Then There Were None” or the film “Knives Out” must meet an exceedingly high threshold.)

Fortunately, **DEATH AND THE CONJUROR** (Mysterious Press, 256 pp., \$25.95), the debut novel from the veteran mystery short-story writer Tom Mead, sidesteps all these concerns: It’s a loving tribute to the locked-room master John Dickson Carr and a sharply drawn period piece.

In 1930s London, the dour Scotland Yard inspector George Flint has noted “a burgeoning subgenre of crime, which had rolled over the city like fog. These were the ‘impossible crimes’ — typically high-society affairs, where men in locked rooms were killed under impractical circumstances.” The renowned psychiatrist Anselm Rees, found with his throat slit in his study, is one such case. The door is locked from the inside and there’s no weapon in the room. Unable to figure out how the murder was committed, Flint turns to an acquaintance, Joseph Spector, a magician whom he’d once viewed “with the guardedness he reserved for clever con men.” But it turns out that “the useful part about knowing a magician is learning how the tricks are done.”

Locked-room mysteries shine best with memorable characters, which were Carr’s biggest weakness — and one of Mead’s strengths.

JANE RIZZOLI and Maura Isles, the Boston-based homicide detective and medical examiner at the heart of Tess Gerritsen’s long-running series, re-emerge after a yearslong absence in **LISTEN TO ME** (Ballantine, 300 pp., \$28). The Rizzoli and Isles books are loved by many, including me; the women’s warm, complicated friendship and superior investigative acumen remain, in their 13th outing, an utter pleasure to keep readerly company with.

SARAH WEINMAN’S *Crime* column appears twice a month.

The case they are tasked with investigating in “Listen to Me” — the bludgeoning of an I.C.U. nurse without a seeming enemy — offers turns and twists that feel earned and organic. Meanwhile, Rizzoli is also preoccupied with constant phone calls from her mother, Angela, who’s convinced that the new couple on her street are up to no good, even though her daughter tells her “there’s nothing criminal about wanting to stay away from the neighborhood sleuth.”

As the threads come together, Angela emerges as the star of the novel. “I may not be a cop, and I



PABLO AMARGO

know it’s easy to underestimate me because I’m an older woman and all,” she tells her daughter, but “you inherited those detective chops from someone, and I don’t think it was your father.”

MOST MYSTERIES and thrillers depend on the core assumption that the first third of the book represents known facts — before the rug is pulled out from under the reader. In **LOOK CLOSER** (Putnam, 448 pp., \$27), David Ellis’s first solo novel in nearly a decade (after several co-authored with James Patterson), the fun is figuring out what parts of the story — if any — should be trusted.

The book opens on Halloween night, as a wealthy law professor named Simon, clutching a burner phone, flees the suburban mansion where a woman has just

been murdered. That this scene is not what it seems is a given, and the reader is soon transported into a dizzyingly nonlinear narrative of family secrets, unsolved killings, financial scams, prenuptial agreements, salacious text messages and petty revenge.

Though Ellis juggles a great many plot strands, he doesn’t drop them; the result is wildly entertaining, not tedious. It helps that just about every character in the book is the very definition of unreliable. As one of them muses, with more than a touch of menace: “That’s what you do with the people you love. You trust them. You trust them until they prove you wrong. Until they betray you. And then, you react however you’re wired to react.”

THE INCREASINGLY extreme summer temperatures demand a palate cleanser, and that’s what you’ll get with Jennifer J. Chow’s **DEATH BY BUBBLE TEA** (Berkley Prime Crime, 304 pp., paper, \$8.99). It’s the first in a fizzy new series featuring Yale Yee, a recent college graduate lurching toward a quarter-life crisis after being laid off from her local bookstore. The imminent arrival of her glamorous Hong Kong-based influencer cousin, Celine, isn’t helping matters — will they get along after 20 years of separation? And why is Yale’s father insisting they run a food stall at a nearby night market?

When a customer at the market dies not long after imbibing one of their bubble tea concoctions, the cousins become suspects, especially since it turns out Celine had added potentially lethal gold flakes to the drink because “it needed more razzle-dazzle, like those cupcakes with those harmless silver balls on them.”

The book incorporates many of the usual cozy mystery narrative tropes (including a detective who could stand to be better versed on proper police procedure), though the emerging culprit is telegraphed earlier than I might have wished. But Yale and Celine’s growing loyalty to each other, coupled with the warmth of Chow’s prose, adds extra depth, just like the tapioca balls nestled in a glass of bubble tea. □

God's Waiting Room

In his fifth novel, Andrew Holleran takes on loneliness, aging and a life post-cruising.



By COLM TOIBIN

ANDREW HOLLERAN IS fascinated by solitude, the comfort it offers and the discontent that follows. In his short story “In September, the Light Changes” (part of a collection from 2000 of the same name), his protagonist has stayed on Fire Island after Labor Day, at first relishing the emptiness and the palpable absences and then accepting that he has, in some way, been left behind by others (“He had arranged his life, he realized, to be alone, and the world

THE KINGDOM OF SAND

By Andrew Holleran

258 pp. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. \$27.

had granted him his arrangement, like a child the rest of the family lets stay in his room at dinner”). Gradually, he becomes intrigued by two men who are staying nearby.

At the end of Holleran’s novel “The Beauty of Men,” published in 1997, a man called Lark, living close to a boat ramp in northern Florida — a gay cruising spot — decides that “he has no reason to go there anymore. He no longer has any reason to go anywhere, really.” After the death of his mother, he “has no one to disappoint or lie to or feel guilty about.” Soon, however, he finds himself back at the boat ramp.

In “The Kingdom of Sand,” Holleran’s fifth novel, the narrator — nameless, this time — is living in the same Florida house many years after his mother’s death. He is still alone. The police have clamped down on the cruising ground. “The problem was that my life had acquired an element of sexual frustration unlike anything I’d ever

COLM TOIBIN’S most recent novel is “The Magician.”

felt before,” he laments. The small city of Gainesville, “half an hour to the west,” offers little comfort: “There’s no way around it: Gainesville gets you in the end.”

He goes for walks by a lake that has become more like a swamp. He thinks about the past. He watches porn. He dreads spending Christmas with his sister; he hides from callers at Halloween and, after fireworks on the Fourth of July, goes “back to the house without having spoken to a soul, though I lingered behind the hedge to listen to the sound of their voices receding as they returned to their vehicles.”

He forms a friendship with a gay man called Earl, older than himself, who also lives alone nearby. Earl watches movies, reads history books, listens to opera and harbors right-wing views. Despite their differences, the two men are close. “It was the perfect friendship: we were together when we wanted to be and otherwise independent.”

In this melancholy world that Holleran creates with such stoic accuracy and sad acceptance, nothing happens — except that time passes. This, really, is Holleran’s great subject. He is interested in the rhythms of days and the rhythms of the natural world around him and the texture of what gets lost with the years. He studies the lake: “Now the drought had gone on so long that something unexpected had happened: the dry lake bed had become more beautiful than the lake.” He watches birds: “There were egrets and hawks and bald eagles, blackbirds and wood ducks and sandhill cranes, a flock of turkeys, and shadows on the ground that made me look up in the sky to see buzzards circulating on currents of air.”

What Holleran does in “The Kingdom of Sand” is close to what two other books, whose solitary authors observe a rural world, do too: In V.S. Naipaul’s “The Enigma of Arrival” and John McGahern’s

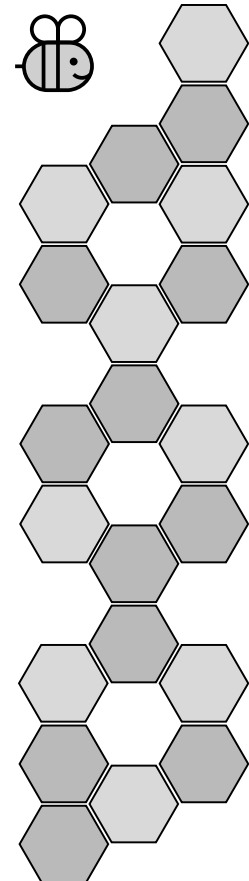
“By the Lake,” introspection occurs by implication and suggestion. The isolation, the long solitary walks taken, allow the writer to look outward, to examine the changing day closely and meticulously, to study a close-knit world, thus building up a complete picture not only of the surroundings but of how time moves in a single place.

Like Naipaul and McGahern, Holleran is intrigued by the sheer strangeness of his immediate neighbors, how odd and interesting is anyone observed with such care over time. But houses fascinate him too. (“There were houses that simply could not be lived in; they were too close to the library or main street, the interface between the public and residential.”) As do the useless things that households collect. (“This demented attachment to things was visible on every street when I took my walk at night, the backyards that looked like a used car dealership, the motorboats, trailers, lawn mowers, gadgets of every kind sitting on the extra lot.”) As does the changing light in Florida. (“As the light faded, a sort of mysterious dignity descended on the town, until, when it was completely dark, it assumed another personality altogether. It was so easy to love the town in the dark.”)

Holleran is witty at times, and aphoristic. “Using a two-lane highway,” he writes, “presumes that everyone coming toward you wants to live as much as you do.”

His new novel is all the more affecting and engaging because the images of isolation and old age here are haunted — or seem more honest and serious — because in 1978 Holleran wrote the quintessential novel about gay abandon, the sheer, careless pleasure of it: “Dancer From the Dance.” Now, at almost 80 years of age, he has produced a novel remarkable for its integrity, for its readiness to embrace difficult truths and for its complex way of paying homage to the passing of time. □

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The Newshounds' Daughter

Katy Tur recalls her paparazzi parents and her own path to the anchor's seat.

By JOANNA COLES

IT'S LITTLE WONDER that Katy Tur is one of America's top TV journalists, given that her parents were obsessive reporters. On their first date, they went looking for a serial killer who was targeting homeless people in Los Angeles. They didn't find him, but they found a shared passion for chasing news that they passed on to their daughter, who was practicing pieces for the camera from age 4.

The Turs were also, quite literally, helicopter parents. As Tur's classmates skipped out of school, perhaps to swimming or ballet, Tur would be strapped into the back seat of her parents' Los Angeles News Service chopper, where they would spend afternoons flying low over the lid of Los Angeles hunting for news.

ROUGH DRAFT

By Katy Tur

272 pp. One Signal/Atria. \$28.

If you saw the O.J. Simpson police chase in 1994, that was their footage. It's Tur family footage you still see replayed of the Los Angeles riots of 1992; Tur's mom, Marika Tur, shot it, hanging from her harness out the chopper door with a 40-pound camera strapped to her right shoulder as she tried to move as close as she could. Oh, and Madonna and Sean Penn's cliff-side wedding in 1985? That was courtesy of Tur's dad, well known at the time as Bob Tur, who buzzed the ceremony at 150 feet and was rewarded with footage of the singer flipping him the bird in her wedding dress.

If you didn't read "Unbelievable," Katy Tur's first book, it was a riveting account of her own obsessive chase of Donald J. Trump on the campaign trail, and it remains one of the best accounts of the 2016 election. Tur, then in her early 30s, spent 510 exhausting days on the road for NBC News pursuing Trump and quickly realized — contrary to the opinion of her newsroom and the assumptions of the mainstream media — that he absolutely could win. By frequently singling her out at his rallies, sometimes favorably, sometimes not, Trump also made Tur famous, to the point that she needed security and, after the election, secured her own show, "Katy Tur Reports," on MSNBC.

"I almost felt like there was a strange connection between yourself and Donald Trump," Trevor Noah observed when Tur went on his "Daily Show" to promote the book. "Did you feel it?"

"Yeah, I felt it," she writes in "Rough Draft," her second, equally compelling memoir, in which her father replaces

JOANNA COLES is the executive producer of "The Bold Type," the author of "Love Rules," a director of Snapchat and former chief content officer of Hearst Magazines.

Trump as the central theme, "but I dodged the question because the answer would have only raised more questions."

Before the campaign, she writes, she had "barely followed Trump's career," but on the trail, she "felt a deep familiarity. It was like I already knew him." She later explains: "My father is not Donald Trump and Donald Trump is not my father. But if anyone asked me, I'd recommend the same therapist."

As Tur unpacks the family laundry, it turns out that her father is every bit as complicated a parent as Trump was a candidate: narcissistic, grandiose, vain, lurching noisily from success to failure (initially a smash hit throwing off cash, L.A. News spawned a series of copycats and went out of business), pursuing lawsuits left and right and teetering on financial ruin. Her

mains Tur's unresolved business, cropping up to demand she pay the phone bill and unloading fresh drama when she least expects it. As when she's covering the Boston bombing:

"Do you have a minute? Are you alone? Are you sitting down?"

Yes, Dad, I thought. What is it now?

"Well, I have some big news," my dad said.

I took another bite of my cheeseburger, then nearly choked to death.

"I've decided to become a woman."

Bob becomes Hannah, then settles on the name Zoey. Regarding her past violence against her wife and children, she blames the feeling of being trapped by a macho news identity.

Despite Tur's efforts to understand, and

"Who did I hit?"

"All of us," she says. "You even kicked the dog." But Zoey denies it even harder.

As Tur's fame grows, Zoey worsens her attacks against her daughter, telling media outlets she is transphobic and unsupportive because, Zoey says, supporting the L.G.B.T.Q. community would "hurt her career." By Tur's telling, none of this appears to be true; in fact, she seems patient, given Zoey's provocations. She's careful in using Zoey's name and the pronoun "her" from the moment Zoey calls her to discuss her transition, while continuing to consider her a father ("I'm still Dad," Zoey affirms).

Bar the occasional text, the two are now estranged.

Like the Trump campaign, it's a hell of a story — and I haven't even mentioned the police report that the commentator Ben Shapiro filed after Zoey grabbed his neck and threatened him on "Dr. Drew on Call." But Tur handles her family drama so wryly that you're in safe hands; it never veers into melodrama. And when she meets and then marries the "CBS Mornings" co-anchor Tony Dokoupil — with whom she bonds over his own complicated father, an illegal drug entrepreneur — you want to cheer.

Tur is especially on point at discussing the competing forces of career and motherhood. Conscious that she eschewed a personal life while on the campaign trail, she's startlingly frank about her need for a partner who wants children and about timing her first pregnancy so she can cover the 2020 election afterward. She's also honest about her fear of being forgotten at work, which is so extreme that she texts her boss demanding to go back to broadcasting five days after her first child is born. (He refuses, so she takes the full parental leave and returns to the anchor chair with no discernible damage to her career.)

And despite a second memoir just shy of 40, she seems low-maintenance for a TV anchor. With her sharp eye and intelligence, she seems wasted behind that damned desk. Her Trump coverage was eerily prescient, but because the political pundits at NBC didn't take Trump seriously, they forced Tur to second-guess herself. Schooled as a toddler from the helicopter, she's exactly the reporter you want out in the field doing special reports, not seated behind a desk at 2 p.m.

Just like her parents, Tur is an obsessive news junkie. In college, she took one of her own first dates to a news event: a dangerous wildfire, where she brazened her way through a patrol with a fake news ID that her father had made for her. "I can thank my father for training me, shaping me as a reporter and broadcaster," she writes. "I can hate her for hitting me, slapping me, chasing me, hurting my mother and brother, kicking my dog and burning down our lives." But for a writer, as Nora Ephron's mother used to say, everything is copy. So Tur can also thank Zoey for enough material to guarantee her next best seller. □



Katy Tur, covering a Donald Trump rally the night before he was elected president in 2016.

father is a hand grenade, always about to explode, saying at one point to Marika, "I don't know how to communicate with you except through violence." Tur's father hits her mother repeatedly, regularly whacks the children with a belt and kicks the aging family dog, which he makes sleep outside until she is eaten by coyotes. To outsiders, Tur's dad is charming and wildly charismatic, running for mayor of Los Angeles, developing an "almost canine instinct" for TV journalism and, above all, teaching Tur how to crush her rivals. When Tur feels the urge to push a little harder, she writes, "it's not usually my competition or my colleagues that I have in mind. It's my father. Not that I'd endorse all his methods."

As L.A. News falls apart, Marika flees her husband's violent behavior, and the Tur family falls apart, too. But the father re-

Zoey's self-appointed role as an erratic spokeswoman for the L.G.B.T.Q. community, the transition doesn't help their relationship, and neither do Zoey's strangely retrograde comments. "I'm already a worse driver," Zoey claims, after starting hormones. But it's Zoey's demanding that Tur exonerate Bob that sticks in both Tur's and the reader's craw. "We need to talk about the violence," Tur says on one call, trying to confront Zoey's past. She writes, "It felt like my dad was using a get-out-of-gender-free card I didn't know existed."

"I already feel different," Zoey replies. "My female brain is getting softer and more emotional. I'm filled with calm and love." Eventually, Zoey says, "Bob Tur is dead."

"The stuff Bob Tur did isn't dead," Katy Tur tries to explain. "You yelled. You hit. You caused pain."

Atlantic Antic

Exploring 50 years of Cape Cod as an iconic artistic hub.

By **ANDREW SULLIVAN**

THERE IS SOMETHING INEFFABLE about the appeal of the outer reaches of Cape Cod to generations of writers, artists and architects. Maybe it's simply that, as Thoreau observed, "a man may stand there and put all America behind him." Maybe — and this was certainly true for the first part of the 20th century — it was the place's remoteness and isolation, the sense that as the land reaches out toward the Atlantic, in a single long, crooked limb, the present conventional world slips away,

THE SHORES OF BOHEMIA

A Cape Cod Story, 1910-1960

By John Taylor Williams

Illustrated. 368 pp. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. \$35.

allowing you to rethink, reinvent and get away with all manner of things. Maybe a sort of pre-modern living — with so few amenities and creature comforts — drew the urban cliques who gravitated there, repelled as many were by the excesses of capitalism.

Still, the scope of the attraction is astounding. In John Taylor Williams's account of 50 years of bohemian life in and around the last three towns on Cape Cod, "The Shores of Bohemia," you're almost overwhelmed with famous names. The painters Charles Hawthorne and Hans Hofmann turbocharged the arrival of an ever-changing cast of artists who rushed to learn at their studios. The lefty intellectuals of every era and stripe — everyone from John Dos Passos to Edmund Wilson, Dwight Macdonald to Alfred Kazin, Norman Podhoretz to Mary McCarthy — spent their time arguing, debating and politicking. A hefty section of the Bauhaus school of architecture, led by Walter Gropius, experimented in the dunes of Truro and beyond. Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams managed to reinvent American theater among the wharves of Provincetown. Edward Hopper and Mark Rothko carved their own distinctive paths in this wilderness.

The editors and writers of the small political and literary magazines — *Partisan Review*, *Dissent* and *The New Republic* — played softball here on balmy summer afternoons. This was where Dwight Macdonald organized his nude bathing parties on the beach; where Norman Mailer got into bar fights; where Frank O'Hara was painted by Willem de Kooning. "Our happiest times were here, at the edge of the land, the ocean, the dunes," Alfred Kazin wrote. On the outermost Cape, he continued, "you could still contentedly walk, make love and skinny-dip."

ANDREW SULLIVAN, writer of *The Weekly Dish on Substack*, is the author of "Out on a Limb: Selected Writing 1989-2021."



Clockwise from left: Walter Gropius; Hans Hofmann; Mary McCarthy; Dodie Hall and Jack Hall.

One of the hoariest sayings about P-town is that the "P" stands for permission, and the pages of this book are full of those who took it. Marriages, divorces and remarriages occurred with dizzying frequency. Affairs were constant; so was terrible parenting. It also appears at times as if everyone was perpetually drunk. A glimpse of the fun in the dunes: "Mardi's cocktail parties were both brilliant and basic: Start with one gallon of vodka, one gallon of gin, one bottle of Noilly Prat vermouth." Throw in a baked ham and "laissez les bon temps rouler."

It's amazing that any of them got any work done. But all the carousing didn't seem to affect productivity. Tennessee Williams had the Provincetown routine down: He "might bring back a sailor or other pickup" to the one-room cabin he had rented, "but once the encounter was over, he would throw them out, take a shower from a garden hose and punctured bucket he had rigged, and climb into bed, not to sleep, but to write all morning." And as Provincetown's freewheeling ambience gained renown, more gay men and lesbians came to check it out. The author notes that it was the existing population of conservative Catholic Portuguese locals who first made some money off the new arrivals, setting up single-sex guesthouses, bars and restaurants.

There were innate ironies and stark contrasts. In a deeply traditional place, where these fishermen toiled and old-money WASPs bought land, freshly arrived radicals plotted first a new Communist and then a new socialist world. In an environment of cottages and tiny roads and shingled buildings that still keep their rus-

tic cluttered charm, the Bauhaus architects built huge stripped-down boxes with massive windows, all straight lines and sparse furniture. A place famed for its staggeringly beautiful landscapes and natural light helped give birth to Abstract Expressionism.

Somehow being outside the usual world helped these creative men and women reimagine it. And in every expression of free love, in naked swimming, late nights under the brilliant stars, and boozy beach bonfires, a larger consciousness began to develop. The villages with very English names — Wellfleet, Truro and Provincetown — became little crucibles for higher

One of the hoariest sayings about P-town is that the 'P' stands for permission, and the pages of this book are full of those who took it.

culture. By midcentury, Williams writes, Provincetown had become a Paris, "where you might find Tennessee Williams, Walter Gropius or John Ashbery sitting next to you at a bar." Later to come: Mary Oliver, Michael Cunningham, Tony Kushner, Mark Doty.

Did they all have something in common? Early in the century, a kind of pattern emerged: a deeply idiosyncratic boredom with — and rebellion against — the mainstream world, its prizes and values; voracious appetites for sex and booze and fame and sensuality; a passion to be "totally involved with the radical culture of their time and almost manic in their at-

tempt to sleep with every beautiful woman, chronicle every social upheaval and always be at the center of public attention."

ONE OF MY FAVORITE DETAILS in the book is that Norman Mailer invited his frequent intellectual sparring partner James Baldwin to stay in his brick house in the far East End, a place that seems to bob almost on the bay itself — and Baldwin did, for many summers. I wonder if, on his way into town, Baldwin ever crossed paths with another gay figure, Roy Cohn, who lived just a few doors down.

As a comprehensive guide to every family and famous person who lived on the Outer Cape in the first half of the last century, their friendships, love affairs and lineages, the book is invaluable. But it's also extremely dense, an over-floured chowder so packed with 50 years of names, names and more names that some paragraphs read like a telephone book. It's partly a function of the book's thoroughness, but it makes it hard reading — even for someone like me who has now spent 26 consecutive summers in exactly this part of the world, for many of the same reasons these men and women once did. But Williams does cite the prose of many of his subjects to convey the magic of the place.

"Where we live the land is untamed, with sandy roads that for the most part do not lead anywhere," is how Francis Biddle, the U.S. attorney general and Nuremberg judge, described the pull. But of course, in the world of art, writing, drama and architecture, these pioneers and bohemians did lead somewhere — to a future they tried to conjure up in the refuge from the present that they found. □

For Art's Sake

Two comic novels explore the obsessions of creators and critics.



In the novel “Saint Sebastian’s Abyss,” a fictional 16th-century painting of the famous saint is a subject of study and obsession.

By **JACKSON ARN**

CONTEMPORARY FICTION doesn’t judge art-world types as harshly as it judges, say, hired assassins, but at least assassins can be relied on to perform a useful service. Characters in novels about art, by comparison, tend to be frauds: weaselly dealers, greedy collectors, hack painters and shallow critics who pretend art is about truth but know it’s really about money and hype. When they aren’t complete phonies, it’s often because they acknowledge the broader phoniness of art or art appreciation. In the opening scene of Ben Lerner’s “Leaving the Atocha Station,” the narrator walks through the Prado Museum and thinks: “I had long worried that I was incapable of having a profound experience of art and I had trouble believing that anyone had, at least anyone I knew. I was intensely suspicious of people who claimed a poem or painting or piece of music ‘changed their life.’” He spots an old man sobbing before a painting but doesn’t bother asking if this is what profundity feels like, maybe because he’s afraid of what the answer will be.

“Saint Sebastian’s Abyss,” by Mark Haber, and “The Longcut,” by Emily Hall, are sparkling comic novels about art, told from the sobbers’ point of view. It never occurs to the nameless, neurotic narrators — an art historian and a conceptual artist — that art could be about anything besides profound truth. Though well past college age, both have a kind of sophomore-year humorlessness, which makes them very funny and also a little terrifying: Their brains are nice

JACKSON ARN’S writing has appeared in *Art in America*, *The Drift and Astra*, among other publications. He is *The Forward’s* contributing art critic.

places to visit, but you wouldn’t want to live there. The intensity of their devotion to art has almost cut them off from the rest of humanity, but they talk to themselves in such similar accents they could almost be talking to each other.

The narrator of Haber’s novel calls himself an art historian so I’ll call him one too, but in practice he’s more like a priest. His god is the (fictional) 16th-century masterpiece “Saint Sebastian’s Abyss,” painted by the (also fictional) aristocrat Hugo Beckenbauer and hanging in the (nonfictional) Museu Nacio-

SAINT SEBASTIAN’S ABYSS

By **Mark Haber**

160 pp. Coffee House Press. Paper, \$16.95.

THE LONGCUT

By **Emily Hall**

144 pp. Dalkey Archive Press. Paper, \$15.95.

nal d’Art de Catalunya in Barcelona. He has published 10 books on the painting — “all popular,” he insists, which you suspect means that one of them was ranked 46th on Belgian Amazon for half an hour. A first-rate zealot, the art historian is at best a third-rate proselytizer. His descriptions of “Saint Sebastian’s Abyss” are numbly specific, as though he’s knelt before it for so many decades that he’s forgotten other people don’t have it memorized. But the first time he saw it in Barcelona, he explains, “without warning I wept as I had never wept before.”

The art historian talks in these kinds of stodgy, semi-clichéd phrases (though every few pages Haber, the author of one other novel and a story collection, throws in a gem like “flexed his bushy mustache” to remind us that the stodginess is just an act). Most of the novel’s comic sparks come from the friction between the supposed sublimity of the paint-

ing and the blandness with which the narrator discusses it, although after all those books it’s impressive he has anything left to say.

The bushy mustache belongs to Schmidt, the art historian’s frenemy and fellow “Saint Sebastian’s Abyss” worshiper. The two men’s friendship, falling-out and sort-of reconciliation form what one might call the plot of this book. Schmidt is one of Haber’s keenest inventions — he’s so fanatical he makes the art historian seem mild and cuddly. Here are some things he disapproves of: all art made after 1906, the art historian’s second wife, all Beckenbauer paintings that aren’t “Saint Sebastian’s Abyss,” and most things that aren’t “Saint Sebastian’s Abyss.”

All this fanaticism makes us question whether the painting, or any work of art, can really be as profound as our ardent art historian insists, and, by the same token, whether he has wasted his life trying to translate profundity into words. He doesn’t do much of anything besides write, and his closest friend spends most of the novel shunning him. Whatever it is that makes us sob before a bunch of brushstrokes is perhaps impossible to convey, but for some it’s just as impossible to stop trying.

Even if the art historian is wasting his life, at least he’s wasting it on something that matters to him. The narrator of “The Longcut” wastes much of hers at an office job that matters to nobody, doing things like shredding files and taking lengthy smoke breaks. The upside is that she has plenty of time to seek inspiration for her next work of conceptual art; the downside of the upside is that the more she seeks, the less inspired she feels. For mysterious reasons, she thinks the best way to come up with a brilliant idea is to sort her experiences into categories like “covert actions, noticed by boss” or “time, allotment of.” Then she’s flabbergasted when

no brilliant idea occurs to her. Her closest fictional cousin might be Kate, the isolated, slightly robotic narrator of David Markson’s novel “Wittgenstein’s Mistress,” though there were times when I thought of Tracy Flick from “Election.”

No less than the art historian, the conceptual artist believes in the profundity of art — impressively so, since it seems quite possible that she’s never felt it. Like many serious, driven people, she is scared of not being serious or driven enough. Her narration has some of the same endearing stiltedness as the art historian’s, though there are entire paragraphs of “The Longcut” that are just plain stilted, like a bad Google translation: “I considered however that possibly my activities set against all other activities taking place during the half-hour were not in fact all that strange.”

A prolific contributor to *Artforum*, Hall is at her sharpest when she’s mocking artsy academic writing, which, luckily, she does lots of. The conceptual artist is “not in fact compelled by painting,” but she blabs about “late-capitalistic society” and “fascist tendencies” and the “subversive balletic activity” of a construction crane, and in a way the premise of this book is: What if an artist read so much turgid art criticism she started to forget what art was?

It’s hard to say which narrator would be more tedious to get a beer with — so why are they both so amusing to read about? Concision is probably a factor: Put together, “Saint Sebastian’s Abyss” and “The Longcut” run little more than 300 pages, and because they don’t overstay their welcome they’re all the more fun to wrestle with. Hall and Haber are expertly, infuriatingly careful not to weigh in on their creations’ romances with art, so that in the end it’s hard to say whether the narrators achieve enlightenment or false enlightenment — profundity or some shoddy knock-off. Stuffed to the gills with strong convictions, the novels themselves remain cunningly neutral, less manifestoes about what art should be than inkblot tests.

One reason I’m in the “false enlightenment” camp: As the novels end, both narrators still seem cut off from other people. Great art doesn’t do that, or at least I’d prefer that it didn’t; I’d much rather it brought people closer by allowing them to experience, or at least search for, profundity together. Which brings me to another reason I enjoyed these books so much. They complete each other; they brighten each other like complementary colors. If you combined them, you’d almost have a full view of art: creation and interpretation, postmodernism and the old masters, art for the eyes and art for the mind. Most important, the narrators wouldn’t be so lonely. Reading these novels back to back, I found myself imagining some crossover sequel in which the art historian and the conceptual artist bump into each other at a downtown cafe and learn to get out of their heads a little. He can show her that a painting has plenty to offer, and she can introduce him to the subversive balletic activity of life beyond it. □

Once Upon a Time, Two Lives Collided

Marina Warner tells the story of her parents' unlikely marriage as memoir, fairy tale and tragedy.

By LUCY SCHOLES

HOW MANY OF US have fantasized about chucking in the daily grind and opening a bookshop? In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, this exact dream enticed the writer and academic Marina Warner's father, Esmond.

After fighting in the desert campaign "for so long he began to feel at home in North Africa," Esmond, an officer in the British Army, landed in Italy in late 1943. There, in the southern city of Bari, he met Emilia Terzulli. The youngest of four sis-

ESMOND AND ILIA
An Unreliable Memoir
By Marina Warner

432 pp. New York Review Books. Paper, \$19.95.

ters, she was a dark-haired, 21-year-old beauty. Esmond was 15 years older and an Anglican to boot; nevertheless, they were married in June 1944. He then sent her home to his parents in London, where she spent the rest of the war in the "stewed comforting frowsiness" of their mansion block apartment, waiting for her husband to reclaim her, like a piece of left luggage.

Warner is an expert on all facets of myth, legend and fairy tale, whose writings have explored everything from Ovid to the Brothers Grimm to the Arabian Nights. As such, it makes sense that even a personal work recounting eight years of her parents' life should be envisioned as a story of the power of narrative, the clash of cultures and the role of the heroine, told by means of lore, symbols and allegory.

For a young woman raised in the Mediterranean sun, the strange smells of dull, damp London were an assault on Emilia's senses: "Mouse droppings and rats' nests, suet and soot, cabbage and cabbage water, Worcestershire sauce, lard, mustard, Marmite, chicory coffee." Ilia, as Esmond learned to call her, was no stranger to deprivation. All the same, in her new home she was chilly, lonely and homesick.

But even Esmond (who in his daughter's rendering talks like a character out of P.G. Wodehouse, addressing Ilia as "old thing" and frequently ending his sentences with "what!") struggled with the privations of postwar England. He couldn't find purchase or purpose back on Civvy Street; until, that is, he chanced on the idea of moving to Cairo to open a branch of the British booksellers W.H. Smith. During the war, he'd described the Egyptian city as his "second home" — a "premonition," Warner writes, of what lay ahead.

Ilia gave birth to Marina in November 1946, and six months later, they bundled up the baby and fled "cold, bomb-scarred,



Marina Warner with her mother at the Cairo zoo.

soot-laden and ashen London" for sunnier, more multicultural climes. Henceforth, if anyone wanted Esmond, a telegram addressed to "Bookman, Cairo" would do the trick.

In recounting the story of these early years of the couple's marriage, Warner weaves together fact and fiction in the most dazzling and inventive ways. It's a sort of stepsibling to her 1988 novel, "The Lost Father," in which an English archivist attempting to unravel the mystery surrounding her Italian grandfather's death creatively fills in the blanks in his story. Whole sections of "Esmond and Ilia" read like fiction, complete with dialogue and interior thought. Warner knows the cadences of her characters' speech, certain phrases are presumably excavated from memory, and a rich imagination fills in the rest.

The fallibility of the project is built in. One can never really know one's parents' lives, Warner argues — or, for that matter, one's own before the age of 6 — but in embracing embellishment and misinterpretation, she elevates this family history to a work of art far denser and more delightful, both more erudite and earthy than anything that cleaved meticulously to the known facts could have been.

She vacillates between narrator and character, observation and ownership. This delicate dance between the intimacy of "my mother and father" and the remove of "Ilia and Esmond" charts subtle shifts in perspective, and captures that process of transition by which matters of historical record morph into family lore. Given her area of expertise, it's no surprise that Warner should spin such enchanting ver-

sions of the fables that underpin her own existence. But, refracted through the prism of one marriage, she also interrogates Britain's dwindling power in a post-colonial world, ideas of Englishness and the immigrant experience.

Although the story is told chronologically — beginning in Italy and ending with the Egyptian revolution of 1952, which led to the family's dramatic departure from Cairo — there are digressions aplenty along the way. Chapter titles refer to objects from this vanished world: Ilia's powder compact; Esmond's Box Brownie camera; nasturtium sandwiches. This catalog includes a pair of Ilia's bespoke women's brogues, items of initiation that "announced her life to come in the English countryside, her formal enrollment in the world of the squirearchy, hunting, going to



Esmond Warner

the point-to-point, the harriers, the beagles, the open-gardens scheme, the charity fête." They also inspire a treatise on the history of the shoe and a consideration of "brogue," as in accent.

Ilia's journey — geographic and cultural, from Emilia Terzulli to Mrs. Esmond Warner — is the beating heart of the book. Warner explains how the Egyptian pharaohs were buried with *shabtis*, "laborers of the other world, who work on behalf of the deceased to meet their needs and provide for their comforts during eternity." She's her mother's *shabti*; her job is "to witness the arc" of Ilia's life — though not always in a literal sense. Some of the most evocative images are those that Warner could never have seen: the wide-eyed war bride fresh off the plane, her pocket Italian-English dictionary in her handbag, her in-laws' London address scrawled on the piece of paper clutched tightly in her hand.

Although she was met by kindness, this didn't diminish Ilia's sense of alienation. Everyone addressed one another by pet names — "Mother Rat," "Plum," "Father Badger." This was an England that still belonged to Old Etonians, keen cricketers all of them — "It's not just a game," Esmond insists at one point, but the very "embodi-

The fallibility of the project is built in. One can never really know one's parents' lives.

ment of what it means to be British" — with "claret-curdled and Stilton-and-port-enriched guts." A world now lost, then already in decline; Warner makes it feel just as exotic as Cairo.

Ilia is roughly uprooted, but in Warner's telling it's Esmond who's increasingly out of time: like a "ship in a picture from a great polar adventure when winter sets in and the pack ice closes round it, holding it tight and lifting it, as if the desire to move forward could take it only upward, into a zone of dreams." Postwar Cairo, then a cosmopolitan "Paris on the Nile," allows him to indulge his illusions a little longer. But a day of judgment is on the horizon, and when it comes, it splinters his worlds — both real and imagined — apart.

More than anything, "Esmond and Ilia" is a reckoning with loss — personal and public. Wandering among ghosts, however, is a dangerous business, and the sensory memories this provokes, "fumes of rose water, pistachios and icing sugar from the Mouski, chlorine in the swimming pool at the Club," weave a heady spell. "The dust from the desert gently powdering the surfaces all around," Warner recalls. "Sugar melting in pans to make syrup. My mother's dressing table glinting with glass." Ilia and Esmond aren't the only ones adrift in the mists of time: In the middle of it all, a little girl watches as her parents' world goes up in flames. □

Buried Treasure

This novel about a young woman in the 19th-century outback examines the perils of the pearling industry.

By YEN PHAM

IN 1861, the largest known species of pearl oyster, *Pinctada maxima*, was found in bulk off the northern coast of Western Australia. This discovery made Broome – a sweltering, remote town at the edge of the Indian Ocean – the center of the world's lucrative mother-of-pearl industry in the late 19th century. At its peak, pearl shell was Australia's fourth-largest export, trading at £400 a ton, around £35,000 today. [source](#)

MOONLIGHT AND THE PEARLER'S DAUGHTER

By Lizzie Pook

304 pp. Simon & Schuster. \$27.99.

Prospectors came in force to seek their fortune.

For Eliza Brightwell, the plucky young protagonist of Lizzie Pook's debut "Moonlight and the Pearler's Daughter," the pearl rush makes a bracing change. Having lost everything in England, her father Charles convinces the family they can start anew. They land in 1886 on the blood-red sands of

YEN PHAM is a writer and editor from Australia.



An undated photo from the 1900s shows men carrying baskets of shells, containing mother-of-pearl, onto a beach at Broome, Australia.

Bannin Bay, a fictional stand-in for Broome – and like the real town, simultaneously cosmopolitan and isolated, over a thousand miles from the region's capital.

"In those early days," writes Pook, "Bannin swaggered like an animal: bony and bristling with a miscellany of men." There can be conflict, the president of the Pearl-ers' Association warns the Brightwells, between the bay's "Europeans, Malays, Manilamen, Koepangers, countless Japa-

nese." Europeans maintain predominance though outnumbered a hundred to one. The society ladies of Bannin cling to a puritanism, although their setting renders such primness absurd.

When Eliza's beloved father fails to return from sea, it falls to her to investigate his disappearance. She seems to be the only person in town who cares that he might still be alive. Charles has become a successful pearler, and there are plenty of people keen to see him gone.

Pook, a travel journalist from the UK, was inspired to write "Moonlight" after encountering the history of a British pearling family with a resourceful matriarch in the Fremantle Maritime Museum near Perth. Pearling was a harsh job in a harsh landscape. Divers faced sharks, cyclones, and the bends, a phenomenon not yet understood. The largest Japanese cemetery outside of Asia is in Broome. As "Moonlight" recounts, early pearl-ers favored pregnant Aboriginal women as divers. It was believed they had increased lung capacity; they did not always return.

Pook's writing is reliably vivid, alternating between dense lyricism and free indirect speech with an old-timey diction. The eventual explanation for Charles's disappearance is somewhat thin – even Eliza

thinks so. But "Moonlight" is a sensitive and compassionate book, admirable in its engaging synthesis of many strands of history. It is alive to the complexity of how things must have been. Its consideration of race, gender, and sexuality invigorates the era with a freshness that feels organic.

The novel is shaped around a straightforward mystery plot, which demands attention to the concrete and material. But "Moonlight" feels more interesting when you allow the narrative to play out on the level of the symbolic, when its ideas borrow the hallucinatory quality of the landscape. At its heart "Moonlight" is a story about family – whether it can survive in an inhospitable environment – and whether it is possible to be a good person in a corrupted world.

"Do you think my father is good?" Eliza asks her friend Min, an orphaned prospector's daughter used to making her own way. "Can he have been a good person if he did the same every day as the rest of them? Send divers down for shell ... Chase wealth so furiously as pearl-ers do."

"I don't know, Eliza," Min replies. "What can good even mean in a place like this?"

These are bigger questions than "Moonlight" knows how to answer, but it is better for seeking to ask them. □

Life Aquatic

A book-length essay about gender identity, layered with science and natural history.

By CORINNE MANNING

IN THE DEPTHS of the ocean, creatures make their own light. There's the angler fish, which draws prey to its massive teeth with a dangling, glowing bulb. Or the siphonophore, a shimmering, self-cloning organism that can grow longer than a blue whale. Their brightness belies the obscurity of the deep sea, how little we really know about what lives there. "What must they witness during their slow pulse through the world?" Lars Horn, the author of the rapturous lyric essay "Voice of the Fish," muses of these creatures that are older than humans, older even than some cities.

Horn, a British writer and translator who uses the pronoun "they" (despite finding pronouns to be "slippery, distant things"), is the mystic's David Attenborough. They would have been a Pisces if not for a troubled pregnancy and their mother and aunt's insistence that a particular date of birth be avoided – a birthday to two men in the family with "aggressive tem-

CORINNE MANNING is the author of the story collection "We Had No Rules."

peraments, a certain disdain for women." So it was that Horn was born under the star sign Aries and assigned female. After they left home years later, a healer, sought for an injured foot, told Horn that it was a "late change, by the fates, seeing you born under the Ram and not the Fishes." He seemed to know this intuitively; Horn

VOICE OF THE FISH

A Lyric Essay

By Lars Horn

232 pp. Graywolf Press. Paper, \$16.

hadn't mentioned anything about their birthday. "You're to swim towards the Fishes," the healer said, after gently washing Horn's foot. "Water, you must move towards water."

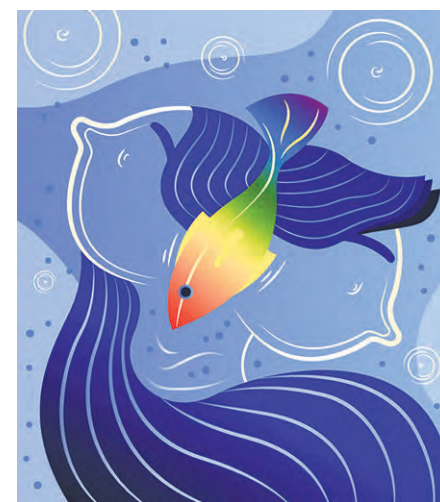
The book's underlying narrative, layered with histories, myths and vignettes about sea life, is that of another, more serious injury: In 2014, the author tore the muscles from their right shoulder to their lower back while weight lifting, leaving them unable to speak or read for months – a forced stillness and quiet. They had endured such deathly stillness many

times before. Horn was the only child of a single mother, an artist who posed Horn to appear dead for photographs and installations and had them sit for full-body plaster casts. The body always adapts, the book argues. As fluid as gender, as a changing tide, it shifts in response to pressures, which are detailed in vivid accounts here: transmasculine rebirth, transphobic locations in Russia and Florida, violence and injury, and the inevitability of disability.

Horn wants "language and narrative to carry more physicality." "Voice of the Fish" meets this desire with a narrative that swells and recedes, with intimate depictions of the writer's life as well as more distant tales of Pliny the Elder, a 100-year-old manuscript found in the belly of a codfish, and the history of tattooing.

"How does one write of a self that is fundamentally displaced?" Horn, a "soul in a strange craft," sees the oppression of and the desire for the fish tank as the conflicting nature of our human condition. The writer is circled by women in a locker room in Tbilisi, Georgia, who make it known that they think Horn's body is wrong, disgusting; at an Atlanta aquarium, Horn is stared at, called a pervert.

"Confining the world's largest fish in a



CHIARA ZARMATI

tank comes at a high mortality rate," Horn says of whale sharks at the aquarium, and perhaps the same can be said about the shock and containment of the human body, for all its ability to adapt. In "Voice of the Fish" – this baptismal, overflowing narrative that reveals the limitlessness of being – Horn's clear choice is life and light. □

How should one preserve the threads of history and power between languages?

EVERY BILINGUAL COUNTRY is bilingual in its own way. The principal languages in Belarus, which was part of the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union, and which remains in Russia's grip, are Russian and Belarusian. Russian is the language of power, cities and empire; Belarusian is the language of the countryside, the home, the nation. In neighboring Ukraine, whose history in some ways resembles that of Belarus, Ukrainian is now the primary language. Belarusian, meanwhile, is classified by UNESCO as “vulnerable.”

Translators of novels written for bilingual readers thus face a daunting challenge: how to transplant a text clinging to its country of origin while preserving the threads of history and power between its original languages.

ALINDARKA'S CHILDREN (New Directions, 325 pp., paper, \$19.95), by the Belarusian writer Alhierd Bacharevic, is a fantasy — part Slavic fairy tale, part “1984,” part “Children of Men” — about linguistic imperialism and rebellion. It tells the story of a man who raises his daughter, Sia, to speak Belarusian and to go mute whenever Russian is spoken. For him, Russian is the “language of intrigues and fear, the language of humiliation and rape, the language of the kangaroo court where only the innocent are ever found guilty.” The state eventually takes Sia from her father and sends her to a linguistic re-education camp.

Born in Minsk in 1975, Bacharevic worked as a teacher of Belarusian and as a journalist before finding success as a novelist. In the turbulent 1990s, when Belarusian was briefly the sole state language, he was the founder and frontman of the first Belarusian-language punk band, *Pravakacyja* (Provocation). In 2014, he published “Alindarka's Children,” which was inspired by a story he had read about an educator who advised a couple to seek professional help in ridding their child of a Belarusian accent. A strong supporter of the antigovernment protest movement that began in 2020 and has met with violent repression, Bacharevic recently fled to Austria.

Writers have always been among the most important proponents of the Belarusian language, and Bacharevic's choice to write in Belarusian is in part a political one. So is his decision to incorporate snippets of Russian into the novel. In their translation for Anglophone readers, Jim Dingley, a longtime translator and scholar of Belarusian literature, and Petra Reid, a Scottish poet whose practice involves “feeding other authors' works through the mincer of Scots,” dive into the bilingual dilemma with reckless zeal, attempting to replicate Bacharevic's language-mixing with English and Scots, another “vulnerable” language worn away by imperialism.

There are problems with this solution. Bacharevic writes in his mother tongue; as Reid explains in her translator's note, she does not herself speak Scots. She has invented some of the words and grammar and has drawn on sources from Scots Law to Irvine Welsh. The reader encounters intriguing but puzzling words such as “foostiebaws” (mushrooms), “houghmagandie” (fornication) and “goury” (the refuse of the intestines of salmon).

The original novel is almost entirely in Belarusian; there are only occasional lines in Russian and in a mixture of the two languages. Dingley and Reid's translation, meanwhile, renders the conversations and some internal

monologues of the novel's Belarusian speakers into Scots, while the rest is in English. To replicate the relationship of the languages in the original novel would have meant a novel written almost entirely in Scots, a daunting proposition for most English-speaking readers. Translating only the Russian parts into Scots might have preserved the occasional semantic switches required of the Belarusian reader (who would understand both Belarusian and Russian), but would have reversed the relationship between imperial and local languages.

Dingley and Reid's translation strategy has an unfortunate result: The sinister Russian/English-speaking characters are easiest to understand, while the dialogue and thoughts of the more sympathetic Belarusian/Scots characters are fuzzy and slow-going for the non-Scottish reader. The trouble starts from the novel's opening line: “Ma tittie wis eatit bi wulves.” (“Tittie” means “sister.”)



Alhierd Bacharevic

Phrases like “She's no bow-hough'd, she's no hen-shin'd” sent me to the glossary at the end of the book — where, for some reason, the unfamiliar words were not included. The juxtaposition of language and subject sometimes produced a bizarre effect: “Yon Moscow metro runnin, yon Kremlin chimes chimin'”

I wished that Dingley and Reid had taken the easier path and translated the novel entirely into English. For one thing, I didn't want to miss a word of Bacharevic's writing, which blends fairy tale and politics with often magical results. His descriptions pulse with sociohistorical meaning, as in this portrait of a Soviet-era Minsk hotel: “By one wall there was a bed, made up military-style with well-scrubbed, mended and orphaned bedclothes. On the sheet there was a large, dark prison-colored stamp with an illegible abbreviation. The greasy, lacquered wood of the bed gave off a feeble gleam, reminding the viewer that having a good sleep meant wasting precious working time.”

Dingley and Reid's English translations, moreover, are gorgeous, bountiful: “It's those sourish, mind-bending little berries that are to blame, those tiny wee spheres, those tablets that flood your head with all kinds of nonsense, that give you that tight feeling in your chest. Bilberries,

bletherberries that befuddle the mind, babbleberries that give you a kick.” A passage like this is clearly Scottish without any sacrifice of intelligibility. One alternative might have been for Dingley and Reid to use their vibrant, Scottish-tinged English for Belarusian and a more formal standard English for Russian.

Sia and Avi are the sister and brother at the center of the novel. Avi is short for Aviator, while Sia gets her name from the Egyptian god who personified perception and was associated with writing and papyrus. Their father, known simply as “Faither” (the Scots word), revels in being the author-god of his children. He brings them into existence, he chooses their language, he assigns the names of everything in the world. He is Adam and Pygmalion and Prospero rolled into one, intoxicated by power: “A little girl that he at first imagined and then created. A language that sprouted from his seed. . . . He too was the Faither of a language, and that gave him the desire to carry on living.”

He goes to great lengths to have the foreign name Sia written in his daughter's passport, though it is not in the book of standard names at the registration office. The clerk there protests that the outlandish name will be with the girl until she's dead. Like people, Faither says, languages die — and “ah feel mair vext fur langages.” Sia is to be the “keeper o the message.”

At the camp, Sia and Avi are “treated” by the Doctor, a self-hating Belarusian who has developed a regime of medication, speech therapy and even surgery to “cure” the children of their native language. He denies the distinctive aura of a mother tongue, so charged with early childhood memories: “Substitute one word for another, clear one word away or scrap it entirely. That's exactly what he does sometimes, and nothing changes. The office becomes no bigger, the white walls do not acquire a red tinge, that random fly does not start reciting poems.” He is an anti-poet.

Above all, he is obsessed with pronunciation. His great discovery is a throat bone that makes Belarusians speak Russian as “a primeval, animal growl.” In real life, being betrayed by one's accent cuts both ways: During the current Russian invasion, Ukrainians have reportedly rooted out Russian covert operatives by having them pronounce the word *palianytsia*, which refers to a type of bread.

Faither eventually questions the wisdom of his linguistic crusade, though his doubt comes long after he has lost his children. In a dream he sees a grown-up Sia talking to her foreign fiancé. She says it's the re-education camp — her learning of Russian, her cure — that allowed her to go to college, find a job and fall in love. She offers to read her father's diary to her fiancé, even though she'll have to translate it for him. “But then translation is a way of avenging yourself on language for what it has done,” she says. “Because there's no end to it, and because it's so powerful.”

“Alindarka's Children” is no nationalist polemic. Instead, it's an ambivalent exploration of the survival of a vulnerable language in a fallen world. Many of the questions it asks are now receiving global attention. Have the crimes of the Russian government rendered the Russian language toxic? What about the Russian literary canon, which Russia has long used as a tool of imperialism — even if many of its writers would have abhorred such a practice? When should linguistic pragmatism, the need to survive in society as it is, win out over idealism? Bacharevic's rich, provocative novel offers a kaleidoscopic picture of language as fairy-tale forest, as Gulag, as monument, as tomb, as everlasting life. □

SOPHIE PINKHAM, the author of “Black Square: Adventures in Post-Soviet Ukraine,” is working on a cultural history of the Russian forest.

End-of-the-World Fun

Characters are caught in their own versions of Sisyphean hell.



LUCAS BURTON

By HILMA WOLITZER

JOHN CHEEVER, in his essay “Why I Write Short Stories,” said, “I like to think that they are read by men and women in the dentist’s office, waiting to be called to the chair.” Several of the stories in “The Angel of Rome” fit that temporal harmony, that confluence of waiting time and story length, while also offering readers/dental patients the pleasures of intensely affecting fiction.

Jess Walter’s novels tend to have large casts and intricate plots — which are hard-

THE ANGEL OF ROME

And Other Stories

By Jess Walter

274 pp. Harper/HarperCollins Publishers. \$27.99.

er to pull off in short stories. Yet in “Mr. Voice,” he manages to render multiple generations of emotionally complex lives in just a handful of pages. Tanya is a child when her mother marries the eponymous character, who at first seems more like a caricature with his “basso profundo” (locally famous on the radio and in TV commercials), weird hairstyle and references to himself in the third person. Tanya has never known her father, but she longs for him anyway, and Mr. Voice doesn’t appear promising as a “placeholder.” But here, as in much of Walter’s work, first impressions change as narratives progress, and our understandings of people evolve and deepen.

When the unnamed narrator of “Town & Country” comes out to his parents during his sophomore year in college, his father asks, “But you haven’t done anything about it, right?” Decades later, the son becomes his father’s caregiver. The older man, suffering from dementia, is proud of his own sexual history — “I was quite the cocksman in my day” — while still expressing ignorance about his son’s. The narrator is ruefully tolerant: “So. This was to be our

HILMA WOLITZER is the author, most recently, of “Today a Woman Went Mad in the Supermarket.”

Sisyphean hell — me coming out to my fading father every day for the rest of his life.” When a flash of clarity pierces the father’s denial, it’s not an epiphany, exactly, but a small moment of grace, characteristic of Walter’s empathetic yet unsentimental take on relationships.

Two of the stories in the collection are longer, divided into numbered sections. The title story, written in collaboration with Edoardo Ballerini, is reminiscent of Walter’s 2012 novel “Beautiful Ruins,” both featuring a movie actress as an object of desire. Jack Rigel, the protagonist of this madcap farce, is an American studying reluctantly for the priesthood at the Vatican when he wanders onto a film set and is enlisted by another American, an actor named Ronnie Tower, to be his translator in a romantic pursuit. Jack is studying Latin, and his Italian is sketchy at best; he tells Ronnie’s would-be conquest, “You are beautiful and in America, kissing is ugly.” Soon, Ronnie engages Jack as a script doctor and his Latin class becomes a hilarious sendup of a TV writers’ room, with an Italian nun, Sister Antonia, as the unlikely “arbiter of comedy.”

In “The Way the World Ends,” two climate scientists are stranded at a university guesthouse during a blizzard. Anna Molson and Rowan Eastman have just interviewed for the same teaching position in the geosciences department, and the same assistant dean has wished them “nice” and “safe” flights home. Anna is distraught about the cataclysm of climate change; she represses the urge to yell at strangers: “Who cares who won ‘The Bachelor!’” Rowan was accused, during his interview, of being “a climate zealot.” Neither of them will get the job, and everyone is doomed anyway, so they get happily drunk with two other marooned academics, while the student working the guesthouse desk texts a friend about his love life and decides not to report the raucous quartet to campus security. He thinks, “Aw hell, let them have their end-of-the-world fun.”

The stories in “The Angel of Rome” are largehearted and wonderfully inventive. They can be savored at the dentist’s office, or anywhere, without an eye on the clock. □

Beacon of Hope

A gay Nigerian man finds himself unwelcome in America, too.

By ADAOBI TRICIA NWAUBANI

MANY AROUND THE WORLD were bewildered by the American actor Jussie Smollett’s rambling testimony during his 2021 trial for a hoax hate crime he staged in 2019, when he asked two Nigerian brothers, Olabinjo and Abimbola Osundairo, to attack and yell racist and homophobic slurs at him on the streets of Chicago. Some Nigerians wondered: By including in his testimony the irrelevant detail of having “made out” with Abimbola — the star witness who testified against him — was Smollett exacting revenge on a man from a country where homosexuality is punishable by not just social alienation, but jail?

In his insightful memoir, “Asylum,” the Nigerian refugee and activist Edefe Okporo paints a disturbing picture of exactly how dangerous being gay in Nigeria can be. “Open the door! We know you are gay,

ASYLUM

A Memoir & Manifesto

By Edefe Okporo

211 pp. Simon & Schuster. \$26.99.

and we are going to kill you!” are the words that startle him awake one morning in 2016. His neighbors in the capital city of Abuja then break down his door and drag him outside, “beating me unconscious while children sang and cheered and clapped behind us. Gay! Gay! Gay!”

After recovering in a clinic, Okporo hides at a friend’s house outside the city, but within months an American award for his health care advocacy for gay men brings him unwanted publicity in a country where citizens are “encouraged to alert local authorities of known homosexuals.” If they found his location, he writes, “I could be turned into the police, or worse yet, killed.” Okporo buys a ticket to New York City, believing “America to be a beacon of hope, having seen gay men live their lives openly in the States.”

Okporo’s mirage is smashed to smithereens when he is marched straight from Kennedy Airport to a detention facility in New Jersey, complete with holding cells and blue jumpsuits. He learns that people who declare asylum at the U.S. border are effectively considered illegal migrants until proven otherwise. It takes Okporo five months and 14 days to successfully avoid deportation: “I dropped my bags and ran into the road — for a moment I just stood silent and in awe of my freedom.” But exhilaration soon gives way to the realization that he has nowhere to go, no idea “where to access housing, shelter or legal support.” This book is a passionate call for a

ADAOBI TRICIA NWAUBANI is the author, most recently, of the novel “Buried Beneath the Baobab Tree.”

more “humane system” for welcoming refugees into a country that prides itself on fighting oppression. America “cannot be a beacon of hope,” Okporo writes, “and yet dehumanize people seeking protection at the same time.”

But missing from this argument is any acknowledgment of the existence of immigration fraud. More than 70 percent of all Nigerians say they would emigrate to another country if given the opportunity, according to a 2021 survey by the Africa Polling Institute. Anecdotally and from news reports in Nigeria, I know of fellow Nigerian citizens who have tried to claim asylum status in the United States, Canada or Britain by fabricating threats from the jihadist group Boko Haram, or from homophobic laws in the country, when they are



Nigerian men, arrested for public displays of affection toward other men, in 2019.

not gay. Without judging them, Okporo should have at least mentioned the reality of these false claims, for the sake of credibility.

At 26 and with an undergraduate degree, Okporo lands in America in October 2016 without knowing who Trump is or about the history of U.S. slavery. The limitations of his knowledge can be jarring, like when he writes that “Africans were intentionally not taught to read by our white colonizers due to their belief that this would displace the imbalance of power between them and the natives.” While this was true for African Americans, in Nigeria the British made formal (albeit Western) education a key component of their colonial agenda, to “civilize” the natives. And describing the possibility of exorcism in his hometown of Udu as a gay teenager, he writes, “People suggested severe punishment such as being tied with ropes and flogged to drive the demon out — a direct link to the Bible: Jesus had done the same to cast the demons from the two men in Matthew.” However, in Matthew, Jesus simply commands these demons to “Go!” and they leave — no violence involved.

Still, when it comes to immigration policies and processes, Okporo knows his facts and presents them in a way that makes you want to join in his activism. “Asylum” is a disquieting account that humanizes a nameless, faceless multitude entangled in an issue with no clear end in sight. □

Blight Club

How private citizens can help revitalize their communities.

By SHERRY TURKLE

I READ THIS BOOK, about the revitalization of dying American cities, as I was researching the tech community's enthusiasm for space travel and life in the metaverse. It felt like stepping through a looking glass: What space travel and virtual reality have in common is escape. In these realms, you don't find hungry or homeless people or anyone without clean water to drink. But such conditions are the daily circumstances for many of the citizens of Michelle Wilde Anderson's actual "discarded" towns. They've lost homes and jobs. They no longer have libraries, parks or police officers.

In "The Fight to Save the Town," Anderson, a professor of law and environmental justice at Stanford University, profiles four starving locations (Stockton, Calif.; Josephine County, Ore.; Lawrence, Mass.; and Detroit) and makes the case that we have prematurely left them for dead. In each place, Anderson tells the story of citizen activists who have devoted their lives to turning things around. These heroes build community centers and homeless shelters. They reopen hospitals. They comfort small children who are frightened and grieving. As I read these stories, the escape plans of technology enthusiasts came to mind. I wondered if they might postpone their departures. Stay with us, I thought. We need you.

Historically, Anderson's locations have been where immigrants, white and of color (some from the South and formerly enslaved), settled and got their first jobs. Anderson calls them gateways — perches where second-generation children could get some education and be positioned for a better life. The system worked, but barely, its successes emerging from a crucible of violence and discrimination. Take Detroit and Lawrence as examples: For generations, they were governed by people who despised the men and women who did the backbreaking work of preindustrial and then industrial America.

This arrangement did not survive the movement of the 1980s to defund the government, a significant shift in how Americans saw their civic responsibilities. All across the country, counties, cities and towns voted away the taxes that supported public services. In wealthy places, the better-off imagined they would buy their way into private schools, water, security and sanitation. In the gateway places, public libraries, police officers, hospitals and parks disappeared.

Anderson's book is an artful mixture of ethnography, narrative history, in-depth

interviews and legal scholarship. Using these tools, she shows us what the absence of government looks like on the ground. The hospital closes. Then the jail. A call to 911 gets you a voice on the phone, but there's no one on duty to come to help as your assaulter enters your home. Families wait at the bus stop on the first day of school, but the bus never comes; no one told them that the bus service to their part of town had been canceled.

And yet, in community after community, even the people who suffered most from the cuts did not vote to reinstate the taxes that would bring the services back. Anderson thinks she knows why. Even when money had been available, the poor and unconnected hadn't seen much of it. Sparse services had gone to the privileged. What everyone had seen was the grift and special relationships that had come along with public funding. Now the city is making do

THE FIGHT TO SAVE THE TOWN Reimagining Discarded America

By Michelle Wilde Anderson

368 pp. Avid Reader. \$30.

with less, and citizens who had little reason to trust the government before refuse to fund it now. It makes a certain sense, but as a result, everyday life is joyless. People stay at home; the sidewalks are dangerous and there are no streetlamps at night.

That rock bottom is the starting point for Anderson's story of heroes who won't let their towns die.

Community activists start organizations that offer legal, medical and educational counseling. When families are evicted because of predatory lending, they help buy

back the homes. They form watch groups that patrol until police protection can be rehired. They raise money with bake sales, sports clubs and street fairs. A park reopens. And the children's corner of the public library.

Anderson adds that these active and effective citizens trigger a virtuous circle. When people see civic organizations working for them, they are more open to voting for such services.

"The Fight to Save the Town" situates itself in an active nationwide debate about the nature of what it means to live together. What is the role of government? The individual? Are the best initiatives simply made up of neighbors helping neighbors? Bartering their services?

And if government is needed, should it be at the federal, state or municipal level? Some may conclude from this book that citizen self-help makes government unnecessary, but that would be a misreading. It's when community groups start to fix things with duct tape and ingenuity that people want more for their communities. Things they will vote for. Things that they want the government to provide.

Others may think that this book offers unwavering support for government intervention. They, too, are wrong: Anderson has seen too much government action that made things worse, and some of the stories are heartbreaking. In Detroit, state and local initiatives took away people's homes to build shopping centers, hotels and freeways that would benefit everybody — except those who lived in Detroit. "The Fight to Save the Town" advocates for complex solutions that require citizen engagement, in the hope that trusting relationships, built over time, will bring disaffected people back to active civic life.

In fact, renewed trust among neighbors could bring back more than discarded cities. We live in a time of increasing isolation; fewer and fewer Americans know even one other person to call in an emergency. We are suffering from an epidemic of loneliness, even as we live immersed in our technologies of hyperconnection. This loneliness is at the heart of growing rates of depression, drug abuse and suicide. If we learn to save our towns, we will also be learning to save ourselves.

Although Anderson tells stories of urban rebirth, her book does not conclude with any sense of a happy ending because she is describing human processes, not algorithms. In her four examples, laws providing social services have been repealed because people have had their minds changed by conspiracy theories, racism and disinformation. Community-minded candidates are routinely voted out of office — sometimes they commit an ethical lapse or neglect their job because they are doing too much fund-raising, and an inept but charismatic candidate comes around. Good works must contend with human vulnerability. Discarded cities always need new champions.

In the end, Anderson doesn't find redemption in successes but in the human spirit that propels neighbors to come together. As she puts it, they create "a symphony for a broken orchestra." At the end of such a symphony, you don't say it was beautiful. The point of the concert was to make you care about the players and the music. The extraordinary people we meet in "The Fight to Save the Town" score some wins but also suffer many losses. In all cases, they regroup and get on with it. They recruit more players. Their lives and communities are enriched. Here. On earth. □



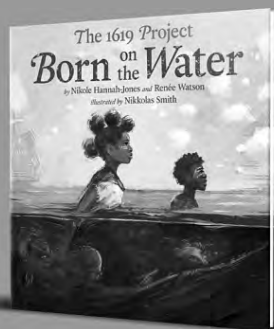
A Diego Rivera mural in Detroit.

SHERRY TURKLE is a professor of the social studies of science and technology at M.I.T., and the author of "Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age" and, most recently, "The Empathy Diaries: A Memoir."

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Stranger Things

A speculative novel examines the culture around new motherhood.

By MARIE-HELENE BERTINO

ONE OF THE MANY advantages of writing in the speculative realm is the opportunity to clear the decks of societal expectations. To upend, poke fun at or hyperbolize the silliest of rituals or darkest of human flaws. It is often revealing, then, to notice which of these archetypes the speculative writer reserves and which they jettison.

Alexis Schaitkin's "Elsewhere" joins the recent roster of impressive novels that have employed speculative elements to examine new motherhood. Like Rachel Yo-

ELSEWHERE

By Alexis Schaitkin

226 pp. Celadon. \$26.99.

der's "Nightbitch," Helen Phillips's "The Need" and Claire Oshetsky's "Chouette," "Elsewhere" literalizes the transformative experience of maternity.

In a remote mountain town scrubbed of identifying factors, new mothers risk succumbing to an "affliction" that causes some to vanish with no warning or trace. No one can predict which mothers will be taken, though that doesn't stop the villagers from guessing that it affects those who are either "incautious" (like the one who lets her children cross a stream when the water's too high) or too tightly wound. When the mother of Schaitkin's 16-year-old narrator, Vera, disappears, she too is subjected to such conjecture: "One clue about my mother everyone kept recounting was that I often turned up at school with my buckle shoes switched," she says, "which gave my appearance an 'unnerving' effect."

And yet, raised to practice the town's xenophobia and mother-worship, Vera and the other girls consider motherhood their highest possible achievement. Staring at older women, Vera and her best friend "saw how they swayed with their babies in their arms, side to side like metronomes holding time for a song only they could hear." They fear anyone who comes from "elsewhere," playing a game called "stranger," in which they imagine outsiders to be "wretched and cowed." Vera's trouble begins when a real stranger comes to town who threatens her and her community's meticulously calibrated way of living.

"Elsewhere" continues the theme of female disappearance that Schaitkin began in her admirable debut novel, "Saint X." Also set in a location both recognizable and all its own, "Saint X" follows the possible murder of a teenager who goes missing on an island vacation and whose absence is used to illuminate the prejudices and ramifications that spiral out in her wake. In both novels, Schaitkin's pace is firmly controlled, her arcs built line by patient line.

MARIE-HELENE BERTINO is the author, most recently, of "Parakeet."



DROR COHEN

But unlike in "Saint X," after the women in "Elsewhere" vanish — or do they? — there is no kerfuffle. And this too is by design: The community has developed a ritual of wiping the missing women's homes of all their personal effects. Rendering an apt metaphor for the invisibility and loss of identity felt by many new mothers, "Elsewhere" sees them forgotten completely.

This ritual of collective removal is reminiscent of the supernatural premise of Yoko Ogawa's deeply affecting novel "The Memory Police," in which it is objects and not people that are erased, lending a kind of charm to aspects of our world (matchbooks, dolls, vases) that we take for granted, hardly noticing them at all. "Elsewhere"'s speculative conceit works in a similar way.

Vera's first-person narration moves in and out of the plural perspective, evoking the collective "we" to signal the unified viewpoint of a town that is both geographically and philosophically remote. Her voice, her insistence on an "us" and a "them," creates a distance between character and reader that is particularly pronounced in the passages when Vera ultimately leaves her town for "elsewhere," and undergoes harrowing trauma.

The novel imagines a universe without many of our known realities: technology, transgender and nonbinary mothers, social class, race or women's rights. There is literary precedent for such a featureless world and the buffering space it affords, in stories like Ursula K. Le Guin's "Those Who Walk Away From Omelas." Without any signifiers of location and time, Schaitkin's narrative seems to reach for a sense of universality, and intentionality: as though every element of this carefully crafted theater has been placed there for a reason. It's not what "Elsewhere" elides

but what it preserves from our world that is the most telling.

The culture around motherhood has not been soiled, or even tainted, by the "affliction." Our all too familiar ideal of a Perfect Mother remains the novel's underlying tension. This ideal requires that young women like Vera aspire to nothing other than procreation, that they love their children to the exclusion of all else. Any ambivalence, lack of desire or complaint is seen as a defect, and possible reason for "affliction." Those who cannot or do not wish to become mothers, and even those locals who decide to have only one child, are treated with the same suspicion as strangers. Childless women are silent shadows living on the outskirts. Middle-aged women, past their reproductive prime and so immune to the "affliction," are perceived as useless.

Of course, the prejudices and practices within the novel are not so different from those outside of it. Schaitkin chooses to leave intact our culture's misogyny and reproductive pressures. Readers might long for a sympathetic, perhaps child-free outlier to reimagine this female plight and bring some semblance of resolution into focus. But such an anomaly never materializes, and even strangers still reinforce the status quo when it comes to gender roles. Even as the plot completes a satisfying loop, Vera maintains the prejudices she had at the start and, most unusually, never questions her own certain motherhood. Perhaps this is the real speculative element: a mother with no traces of ambivalence.

A welcome addition to a shelf of speculative fiction about the joys, failures and metamorphoses involved in having a child, "Elsewhere" asks: Is motherhood, like the town itself, meant to be a featureless place, best experienced under a haze of collective brainwashing? □

Fair or Foul

In this novel, a father leaves his prized baseball to a stranger. But why?

By JULIA MAY JONAS

WRITERS HAVE FOREVER used objects as a tool by which to tell their stories — Hawthorne's letter, Maupassant's necklace, Hammett's falcon. Follow the bouncing crown, I was taught, as a way to understand the structure of Shakespeare's history plays. The literary object, at its most effective, is a powerful revealer of character — telling us about the people who possess it and those who covet it; those who are drawn to it and those who are repelled by it; those who deem it meaningless and those who endow it with outsize importance.

In Alison Fairbrother's warm and funny debut novel, "The Catch," the revelatory tools are a baseball and a tie rack. With these items, Fairbrother aims to illuminate the character of El-

THE CATCH

By Alison Fairbrother

288 pp. Random House. \$27.

eanor Adler — the 24-year-old narrator struggling with the death of her beguiling father and coming to terms with his legacy.

The novel opens with this line: "My father, a minor poet, celebrated holidays out of season." The father is James, iconoclastic and charming, a man who has experienced little success in the material world (he has a single well-known poem) but is beloved by those close to him, perhaps especially by his eldest daughter, Ellie. (The opening line refers to the fact that James celebrates Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's and Easter with his four children from three different marriages in the summer, when he has custody.)

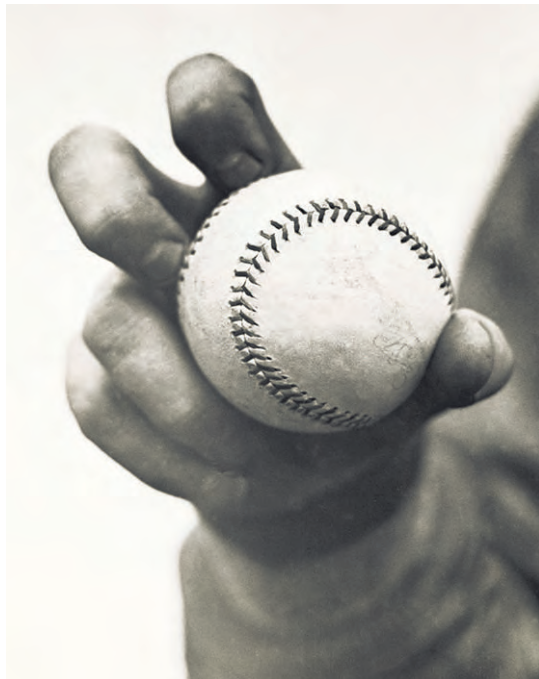
James is the kind of man to invent a drink called a "razzleberry fring frong," to describe Washington, D.C., as "that sybaritic city" of bloviators, to give away his watch to an employee in a grocery store on a whim. In the first chapter he and Ellie engage in competitive wordplay, his wife cooks the Thanksgiving turkey in a bikini, his middle daughters, Sadie and Anna, roll their eyes at him — and he throws his prized possession, his baseball, back and forth with his son, Van, who is named for Van Morrison.

The scene might seem a bit too idiosyncratically quaint if Fairbrother didn't temper Ellie's adoration of her father with some healthy ambivalence. She both worships him and understands how frustratingly boyish he is; she wants to confide in him and she wants to conceal herself from his judgment; she believes she is his favorite child, but feels uncomfortable when he praises her above her siblings.

JULIA MAY JONAS is the author of "Vladimir."

Her place in James's affection is thrown into question after his sudden death at the age of 52. Despite having few possessions and no savings, James did have the foresight to draft a will, in which he leaves a small array of precious and meaningful objects to his family: his record collection to his son, a painting to his wife, his hats to Sadie, his Jerry Lewis movies to Anna. Ellie is certain that she will inherit the treasured baseball. Instead she receives a glow-in-the-dark tie rack, and the baseball goes to a mysterious stranger.

The importance of the baseball is linked to James's most famous poem, "The Catch." And in both the poem and the novel, the title's meaning mutates as the truth



Fairbrother acknowledges the way charisma can be a smoke screen for darkness and bad behavior.

about the baseball, and therefore her father, continues to unfold. Early on, Ellie quotes James saying that a poem is a way to say "maybe." That word guides her as she attempts to understand why she was left what she considers a "gag gift" instead of a storied memento. Maybe this is the answer, she thinks, as she researches the baseball's intended recipient; maybe this is the man, she considers, as she learns more about her father's past.

After the funeral and the disappointing inheritance, Ellie returns to Washington, where she works for a start-up news organization and lives in a "social justice themed" group house with several ambitious roommates in their 20s. Fairbrother worked as a journalist in D.C., and her writ-

ing about the culture of the place is some of the most entertaining in the novel — perceptive, wry and witty. In an interview, Ellie says, "I moved to D.C. so I could use *impact* as a verb"; she describes certain colleagues as the type of men who are always fixing bicycles and making "frequent, reverential references to John Hersey's 'Hiroshima.'"

Ellie is in a relationship with Lucas, an older, married man whose presence complicates one of the most interesting motifs in "The Catch": the conundrum of male charisma. Fairbrother acknowledges the way charisma can be a smoke screen for darkness and an excuse for some fairly reprehensible behavior. She also nods at

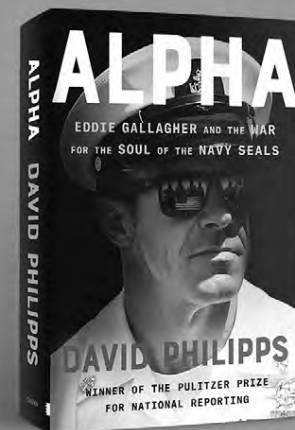
the pleasure of a certain kind of charm — a quality that many people, including the ones who surrounded James, might not have wanted to resist. Read: Despite our better judgment, we might know a man is flawed and still find him fun. When it comes to Lucas, Ellie is hungry for the thrill a delightful man can give; with youthful self-absorption she attempts to ignore the inconvenient facts of his wife, his age and his over-eagerness to jump into bed with her. Their relationship is drawn with such sensuality and endearment that we are also willing to ignore these facts, rooting for them even as the discomfiting reality of his circumstance lingers in the background.

Fairbrother delineates Ellie's mind following her father's death — her obsessive thinking, her attempts to distract herself, her subsequent plunges back into the reality of loss — with well-wrought observation of the rhythm and patterns of grief. Once returned to her life, Ellie is haunted by the question of the baseball, so she manipulates a new work assignment in order to fit her quest to learn more about James — a questionable decision that results in relatively minor consequences for herself, but major ones for the people who surround her. Ellie's careless behavior represents an underexplored and therefore exciting investigation into a family dynamic — one in which a daughter responds to her father's reckless entitlement not by shrinking into herself, by becoming ultra-virtuous or self-destructive, but by acting out with similar reckless entitlement in turn.

Though the mystery of the baseball and tie rack leads us through the plot, I found myself wishing the objects played a lesser part. The neatness of that journey and Fairbrother's steady movement toward closure feel at odds with the strength of this book, which is the depiction of a smart, talented and sexual young woman who is in the process of learning, as adults must, to balance pride with humility, pain with pleasure, and acceptable fictions with uncomfortable truths. □

FROM THE
PULITZER
PRIZE-
WINNING
NEW YORK
TIMES
REPORTER

A SEARING
TALE OF POWER,
JUSTICE,
AND THE PRICE
OF LOYALTY



"An important, infuriating, meticulously researched account of modern warfare that I found nearly impossible to put down."

—JON KRAKAUER,

author of *Into the Wild*

CROWN

The ‘Smell of Freedom’

The story of how some North Carolina residents stood up to a meatpacking company polluting their communities.



Young hogs at a Smithfield Foods livestock operation in North Carolina, 2017.

By ERIC SCHLOSSER

HUMAN BEINGS HAVE been raising pigs for about 10,000 years. But the methods used to breed, raise, process and market them have been profoundly transformed during the last few decades. In the United States, until recently, hogs were raised on small farms, fed leftover grain, allowed to run freely in pens and barns and sold at live auctions with competitive bidding. The typical herd ranged in size from the dozens to the low hundreds. During the 1980s, cheap, federally subsidized grain, an absence of antitrust enforcement, the rise of huge meatpacking companies, and new production techniques devised by those companies turned hogs into industrial commodities — and drove 80 to 90 percent of American hog farmers out of the business.

The places where hogs are now raised are “farms” in name only. They’re essentially livestock factories, dedicated to uniformity and efficiency, that house thousands of hogs crammed together in windowless sheds. And like other factories, they produce a good deal of waste — in this case, about a gallon and a half of urine and excrement per hog every day. All of that waste has to go somewhere. And where it winds up has proved remarkably destructive to America’s rural landscape and the people who live in it.

“Wastelands,” by Corban Addison, tells the extraordinary story of how some neighbors of hog operations in North Car-

olina battled a meatpacking company polluting their neighborhoods. They sued the company in federal court, launching cases that took years to resolve, with surprising twists and serious implications not only for the future of American agriculture but also for the health of our democracy. Addison, an attorney and best-selling novelist, is the ideal writer to tell this story — and North Carolina is in many ways the perfect setting from which to explore the real-life impact of concentrated animal feeding operations, abbreviated CAFOs, an official term for modern-day livestock factories. In the early 1970s, North Carolina had

WASTELANDS

The True Story of Farm Country on Trial

By Corban Addison

464 pp. Alfred A. Knopf. \$30.

about 18,000 hog farms, with an average herd of about 75 hogs. Today, it has only 2,000 hog operations, with herds as large as 60,000 hogs. The state’s nine million hogs annually produce from three to 10 times as much waste as New York City does. But that hog waste isn’t sent to high-tech treatment plants. It is pumped into large pools, euphemistically called “lagoons.” Just one of those pools can hold enough waste to cover 15 football fields with crap a foot deep. And when lagoons are full, the untreated waste is sprayed onto nearby fields. Addison describes how giant spray guns shoot 200 gallons of waste per minute into the air, noxious stuff with “a strange muddy-pink color to it” that tends to “drift like a cloud on the breeze.”

The North Carolina hog boom occurred mainly in the coastal plain east of Interstate 95, Addison notes, “a rural region of the state invisible to outsiders and forgotten by most North Carolinians.” From the 1980s through the early 2000s, former tobacco farmers were encouraged to raise hogs under contract to the meatpackers. In one county, the hogs soon outnumbered the humans by a factor of 35 to one. The new hog factories were built without restrictions from local zoning laws, sometimes right next to homes inhabited for generations — mainly by families who were poor and Black. The waste sprayed on fields often fell on the roofs of nearby houses, Addison writes, with “the soft pitter-patter of rain.” DNA tests revealed traces of hog excrement inside kitchens, on the surfaces of refrigerators, on top of stoves. It was a textbook case of environmental racism. After years of complaints to local and state authorities went unheeded, more than 500 neighbors of North Carolina CAFOs, almost all of them Black, filed lawsuits against the meatpacking company that seemed the worst offender: Smithfield Foods.

In a David-versus-Goliath tale like this one, you could hardly hope for a more ruthless giant than Smithfield. The company is not only the world’s largest producer of pork but also the owner of the world’s largest slaughterhouse. Located in Tar Heel, N.C., that slaughterhouse disassembles about 32,000 hogs a day. For years, the workers at the Tar Heel plant were treated almost as poorly as the hogs: Smithfield harassed union supporters, paid workers to spy on fellow workers and employed deputy sheriffs as corporate security officers who beat and arrested workers. The company originated in Smithfield, Va., during the 1930s and later became a corporate dynasty. But when the North Carolina lawsuits were filed in 2013, Smithfield Foods was no longer an American company. Shuanghui International Holdings, a Chinese corporation now known as WH Group, had bought it the previous year, with financing from the government-owned Bank of China. The cost of raising hogs in North Carolina was about half as expensive as raising them in China — and one of the reasons, Addison explains, is that “the Chinese government doesn’t allow its hog farmers to use lagoons and spray fields.” Instead, Chinese hog operations must invest in “treatment facilities” and “biological odor control systems to protect neighbors.”

“Wastelands” is full of memorable people. An assortment of high-powered attorneys agrees to take on Smithfield, working free in return for a share of any settlement. Mona Lisa Wallace is the most compelling member of the legal team, brilliant, indefatigable, raised in small-town North Carolina with a working-class background, dedicated to helping victims of corporate misbehavior. Among the plaintiffs, Elsie

Herring — one of 15 children, who left North Carolina for New York and returned almost 30 years later only to find herself drenched in a misty rain of manure on a walk near her family home — stands out. As does Violet Branch, one of 11 children, who has lived for more than 70 years in the house where she was born but must endure the pollution from two waste lagoons next door. Before the lawsuit, Branch had tirelessly contacted public health officials, journalists, even the Environmental Protection Agency, seeking relief. “Nothing is going to be done about this issue — nothing has been done,” she bravely testifies in court, “because the power structure in those communities is not going to allow something to be done about it.”

SMITHFIELD UNABASHEDLY USES its power to avoid responsibility for the legal “nuisance” at issue in court. It threatens to leave the state if the lawsuits succeed. It spies on the attorneys and hires private investigators to keep tabs on the plaintiffs. It helps to create a front group, “NC Farm Families.” It works closely with the state farm bureau, chamber of commerce and Republican Party, whose members introduce bills to protect Smithfield from liability. The odors from hog operations, one Republican legislator boasts, are the “smell of freedom.” The legislature’s only significant departure from industry-friendly policies occurred in 1997, when it passed a temporary moratorium on new hog operations — just as two were about to be built in Moore County, home to the Pinehurst resort and its legendary golf courses.

I am neither a vegan nor a vegetarian. But I think the hog factories described in “Wastelands” and the similar CAFOs in other states are forms of systematic animal cruelty. They are crimes against nature. Hogs are intelligent and sensitive creatures capable of multistage reasoning like dolphins and apes, with a social structure similar to that of elephants. Hogs can recognize themselves in a mirror, differentiate one person from another, remember negative experiences. And they like to be clean. Their lives in hog factories scarcely resemble how they’ve been raised for millennia. The foulness of these places, for the animals that live in them and the people who live near them, truly defies words.

Corban Addison hasn’t written a polemic about hog factories, like my paragraph above. He has calmly assembled a legal thriller, full of energy and compassion, that addresses issues of real importance, like the works of John Grisham and Scott Turow. Grisham wrote the foreword to this book, and in it, he says: “Beautifully written, impeccably researched, and told with the air of suspense that few writers can handle, ‘Wastelands’ is a story I wish I had written.” I agree with Grisham. But I wish that “Wastelands” were a work of dystopian science fiction, not a damning portrait of how we feed ourselves now. □

ERIC SCHLOSSER is the author of “Fast Food Nation” and “Command and Control.”

When the Dead Talk

A forensic scientist describes the efforts to uncover the graves and crimes at a boys' school in Florida.

By **W. CALEB McDANIEL**

COLSON WHITEHEAD' Pulitzer Prize-winning 2019 novel, "The Nickel Boys," closes with a fictional news conference. A main character, the survivor of a traumatic boyhood at a reform school in Jim Crow Florida, attends the presser hoping to learn more about a professor's excavation of a burial ground at the school. Survivors like him, the novel says, had long known the truth of what happened there, but few others listened: "No one believed them until someone else said it."



Grave markers at the Dozier School.

WE CARRY THEIR BONES

By **Erin Kimmerle**

256 pp. William Morrow. \$27.99.

In the novel, that "someone else" is an archaeologist from the University of South Florida who is investigating unearthen graves at the fictional Nickel Academy. But, as Whitehead informs readers later, the novel is based on the harrowing true story of the Dozier School for Boys, and the fictional archaeologist had a real-life inspiration: Erin Kimmerle. In "We Carry Their Bones," Kimmerle tells the true story of the investigation that inspired "The Nickel Boys," opening with the actual news conference in which she first shared her troubling findings with the world.

The Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys outside Marianna, Fla., operated under different names for 111 years before closing in 2011. From the start, it was haunted by reports of abuse, including brutal beatings of both Black and white boys, who were often accused of nothing more than truancy or "incurability."

In 2008, the suffocation of Martin Lee Anderson, a 14-year-old African American, in Florida sparked new reporting about this grim history, especially after a group of former Dozier inmates, the White House Boys, went public with stories about the torture sessions they had once endured — as well as burials some had witnessed — on campus.

Survivors' testimonies prompted a state investigation into a cemetery known as Boot Hill, on the "colored" side of the once segregated grounds. Four rows of concrete crosses supposedly marked only 31 graves at the site.

But in 2012, Kimmerle and her team of researchers used ground-penetrating radar to identify at least 50 possible grave sites scattered around the crosses, disputing official accounts. After confirming the radar images with a soil analysis technique aptly named "ground-truthing,"

W. CALEB McDANIEL is the author of "Sweet Taste of Liberty: A True Story of Slavery and Restitution in America," which won the 2020 Pulitzer Prize for history.

Kimmerle set out to find the truth beneath the ground.

In the end, Kimmerle's team would find 55 burials, though not before a long struggle to gain approval for a full excavation. In narrating that struggle, "We Carry Their Bones" introduces readers to a large cast of characters that includes survivors, activists, journalists, police officers, politicians, scientists and local residents of Marianna, among others.

Kimmerle also tells how she came to lead the investigation, starting with her childhood in Minnesota and her early interest in forensic science. After working at the Smithsonian on the repatriation of Native American human remains, Kimmerle completed a doctorate in anthropology and worked with the United Nations doing trauma analysis in the war-torn Balkans, challenging gendered stereotypes along the way. "For most of my career," she writes, "I have been the only woman in the room."

Kimmerle shows how these personal experiences prepared her for the challenges of the multidisciplinary investigation that unfolded at the Dozier School in 2012, while also situating the school's history of abuse in a longer story of silences around violence and racism in Marianna, including the lynching of a Black man on the courthouse lawn in 1934.

The Dozier School itself was built on land owned by a descendant of Florida's Confederate governor, who died from a self-inflicted gunshot following the war, not long after telling the State Legislature that "death would be preferable to reunion." After slavery, white reactionaries built a convict-leasing regime that ensnared Black Floridians, including children, in new systems of incarceration, coerced labor and violence. In fact, the segregated Dozier School was founded in 1900 to provide a progressive alternative to convict labor for juveniles.

Instead, the school became a house of horrors that was always deadlier for Black boys than it was for white ones. Family members on the outside learned of some boys' deaths with little information, after their bodies were already in the ground. Survivors remembered classmates being

dragged away for corporal punishment and either returning with ghastly injuries or not returning at all. In 1914, a dormitory fire killed boys, the youngest only 5 years old, who had been chained to their beds.

Despite all the evidence of atrocity, Kimmerle details the resistance she faced from some local residents who accused her team alternately of digging up graves or making them up. Because of the school's longevity, many in the community had deep connections to Dozier.

Kimmerle's response was to keep up "the constant drumbeat of inquiry, proof and interpretation," trusting the scientific



The south campus of the school.

method to do its work. "We Carry Their Bones" walks readers through the painstaking job of reconstructing fragmentary skeletal remains, but Kimmerle also stops to register the emotional weight of particular discoveries, like a white-and-burgundy marble found in one boy's grave.

The result is a fascinating account of forensic science that gleams with moral clarity. As the book unfolds, Kimmerle increasingly focuses on the team's efforts to put names to buried remains and connect them to living family members through



A cabinet from the segregated north campus.

DNA testing. Drawing on her work in the Balkans, she spotlights the right of relatives to know about the fate of disappeared loved ones, and she movingly introduces the families, white and Black, who look to her to fill in painful gaps in their genealogies. For some, a measure of closure comes by the end of the book, though justice remains elusive.

The emphasis on reuniting the remains with relatives does leave some aspects of

Kimmerle's investigation less fully addressed than others. After noting that a disproportionate number of Black deaths were attributed to a flu outbreak, Kimmerle asks, "How were white and Black boys cared for during the flu epidemics in 1918 and 1932?" The question recedes from view. Likewise, readers learn about a second group of survivor-activists, the Black Boys of Dozier, who appear at key junctures in Kimmerle's narrative but whose aims and members are not as fully described as those of the White House Boys.

The book also misses opportunities to connect the investigation at Dozier to larger state and national developments at the time. What did it mean that Kimmerle's investigation unfolded in the aftermath of the killing of Trayvon Martin, the birth of a mass movement for Black lives and the rise of a conservative backlash whose fruits are now evident in the official resistance, in Florida and elsewhere, to exhuming difficult pasts?

Though Kimmerle notes that contention remains over the future of Boot Hill, the tight focus on her investigation leaves readers to reflect on such questions themselves, potentially at the risk of ending the



Mattresses from the north campus.

story on a more positive note than later events would warrant. Reporting on a final presentation to the Florida cabinet, for example, Kimmerle quotes Rick Scott, who was then the governor, saying that "it's a very good day for our state, because you can see things are heading in the right direction." That was in January 2016.

Still, Kimmerle's determined efforts to expose injustice, honor the dead and answer their families' questions remain as timely as ever. After the 2019 discovery of another unmarked burial ground connected to convict leasing in Sugar Land, Texas, the just-released report by the Department of the Interior about children's deaths at federal Indian boarding schools and, most recently, the official opacity over exactly what transpired in Uvalde, the number of bones we carry is growing by the day. The Dozier School story shows the importance of handling them with care. □

Their Wildest Dreams

Two siblings, a playful teacher's class and three friends let their imaginations loose in the great outdoors.

By **SOPHIE BLACKALL**

ONE SUMMER, when I was a single mother raising my second and fourth graders in Brooklyn and the weeks ahead without child care loomed large, my friend Catherine and I rented a farmhouse in upstate New York for a month. She brought her 9-year-old twins, and we let the kids explore the woods while we worked. We gave them a loud whistle and generous boundaries — the distant stone wall, the serpentine

CHILDREN OF THE FOREST

By **Matt Myers**

40 pp. Neal Porter/Holiday House. \$18.99.
(Ages 2 to 5)

DRAWING OUTDOORS

By **Jairo Buitrago**

Illustrated by **Rafael Yockteng**

Translated by Elisa Amado
36 pp. Aldana Libros/Greystone Kids. \$18.95.
(Ages 5 to 9)

OUR FORT

By **Marie Dorléans**

Translated by Alyson Waters
48 pp. The New York Review Children's Collection. \$19.95.
(Ages 4 to 8)

stream, the neighboring field — and sent them off to run wild. Alone in the forest, as they let their imaginations also run wild, what they actually did was establish order. They called their land Mimoss. They built houses, ran businesses, named and mapped landmarks. They held contentious town meetings on the Flat Rock and issued dire warnings about the perils of the Evil Snakey Forest, which loomed threateningly on all sides. This threat, giddily amplified, was crucial to the thrill of the experience, just as it is in three new picture books in which children let their imaginations loose in the great outdoors.

In “Children of the Forest,” by Matt Myers, it is wild beasts, a dragon and an intruder that threaten a boy and his little sister, who declare themselves children of the forest, raised by wolves. The boy, steeped in wilderness stories, valiantly protects his sister, even as they “teeter on the edge of starvation.” He guides her in the art of survival as they forage for food, fight off dangerous animals and set up camp for the night. There is an enjoyable tension between text and images, where what we are told is at odds with what we see. Older children will revel in being in on the joke: The

SOPHIE BLACKALL is a two-time Caldecott Medal winner. Her next picture book, “Farmhouse,” will be published in September.

beasts are the household cat and dog, the dragon is a leafy tree with twiggy teeth and the intruder is the kids’ mom.

But the mother’s visit breaks the spell for the girl, who, with a cry of “Mama!,” defects to the comfort and safety of home. Left alone in the deepening dusk, the boy succumbs to his vivid imagination and races back to the house, where we see the children tucked into their bunk beds. Myers’s soft, nostalgic pencil-and-watercolor drawings in muted greens and mauves include details meant for grown-ups (the dozing dad is reading Thoreau), but there is plenty for kids to discover, too, as they plot their own backyard adventures.

“Drawing Outdoors,” by Jairo Buitrago, illustrated by Rafael Yockteng, is a slightly perplexing tale that begins at a school between two mountains in “the middle of nowhere” as diverse students of various ages arrive on foot from all directions and a dog pees on a bush. We learn that the school “has almost nothing. A blackboard, some chairs.” But it does have a playful teacher who leads the kids outside to explore the landscape, which bears an uncanny resemblance to the dinosaurs they have been studying. The children draw what they



From “Children of the Forest.”

see. A Brontosaurus follows the curve of a hill, a Stegosaurus lurks behind boulders.

It is a fanciful intermingling of art, science and nature, except for the mildly confusing detail of a student with a tablet, which he holds up to photograph the scene. What are we to make of this? The camera doesn’t lie: We clearly see the dinosaurs on his screen. And what to make of the fact that despite the repeated mention of the school’s lack of resources, the children are equipped with easels, canvases, binoculars and that anomalous tablet? Perhaps it is a point about imagination transcending



From “Drawing Outdoors.”

technology, creativity transcending material reality, or perhaps it is a nod from the illustrator to the digital medium in which the drawings for this book were made — drawings of inviting landscapes and curious children rendered in a striking palette, with just the right amount of detail.

There is much to like in this story (also available in Spanish) of an out-of-the-ordinary school day, especially when the wind picks up, the kids crouch down and a Tyrannosaurus rex comes crashing through the trees. The brave younger children stay and draw; two scared older kids run back to school, which gives their budding romance an opportunity to blossom.

While “Children of the Forest” plays with words that tell us one thing and pictures that tell us another, and “Drawing Outdoors” uses straightforward words to describe extraordinary sights, “Our Fort,” by Marie Dorléans (a winner of the 2021 New York Times/New York Public Library Best Illustrated Award for “The Night Walk”), could be read without words altogether. The exquisite illustrations, reminiscent of Japanese woodcuts in their composition and line, tell the story of three friends who revisit a fort they have built in the woods on the far side of a meadow.

In the opening spread we see the children tie their laces and buckle their sandals, and through the open door we see the dirt road they are going to take. This is some spectacular bookmaking. We turn the page to find them a little farther along that road, leaving behind a wistful younger sister sitting on the fence. The only suggestion of a grown-up is the shadow of a neighbor hanging a sheet on a clothesline, and we know we are in for an adventure. Everything about the drawings propels us forward into the book: the pencil lines of

the rippling grass as the kids take a shortcut through a field; the meandering paths they leave in their wake; the clouds billowing above these now small-looking (yet distinct) children as they make their way up a hill. The drama arrives with a gale. Strong winds lift the children off their feet, and you get the sense that they just might be enjoying their fear. When the storm recedes and blue skies return we can almost smell the damp field, and we can’t help sharing the kids’ relief as they discover their fort still standing.

It’s a simple story. Yet I can imagine “Our Fort” having a profound impact on a child — a child who might someday go into the woods with friends and spend weeks of a happy summer building a fort and establishing order, all the while thrilling to the prospect of sudden storms, wild winds and evil snakey forests. □



From “Our Fort.”

Best Sellers

The New York Times

For the complete best-seller lists, visit [nytimes.com/books/best-sellers](https://www.nytimes.com/books/best-sellers)

COMBINED PRINT AND E-BOOK BEST SELLERS

SALES PERIOD OF JUNE 19-25

THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	Fiction	WEEKS ON LIST	THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	Nonfiction	WEEKS ON LIST
1	4	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.	166	1	1	BATTLE FOR THE AMERICAN MIND , by Pete Hegseth with David Goodwin. (Broadside) The "Fox & Friends Weekend" host makes his case for what he calls classical Christian education.	2
2	2	IT ENDS WITH US , by Colleen Hoover. (Atria) A battered wife raised in a violent home attempts to halt the cycle of abuse.	54	2		AN IMMENSE WORLD , by Ed Yong. (Random House) The Pulitzer Prize-winning science writer explains the sensory perceptions and ways of communication used by a variety of animals.	1
3	3	VERITY , by Colleen Hoover. (Grand Central) Lowen Ashleigh is hired by the husband of an injured writer to complete her popular series and uncovers a horrifying truth.	29	3	5	THE BODY KEEPS THE SCORE , by Bessel van der Kolk. (Penguin) How trauma affects the body and mind, and innovative treatments for recovery.	96
4	1	THE HOTEL NANTUCKET , by Elin Hilderbrand. (Little, Brown) The new general manager of a hotel far from its Gilded Age heyday deals with the complicated pasts of her guests and staff.	2	4	6	HAPPY-GO-LUCKY , by David Sedaris. (Little, Brown) The humorist portrays personal and public upheavals of his life in its seventh decade and the world in the time of a pandemic.	4
5	6	UGLY LOVE , by Colleen Hoover. (Atria) Tate Collins and Miles Archer, an airline pilot, think they can handle a no strings attached arrangement. But they can't.	24	5	4	KILLING THE KILLERS , by Bill O'Reilly and Martin Dugard. (St. Martin's) The 11th book in the conservative commentator's Killing series.	8
6	7	THE SEVEN HUSBANDS OF EVELYN HUGO , by Taylor Jenkins Reid. (Washington Square/ Atria) A movie icon recounts stories of her loves and career to a struggling magazine writer.	52	6	3	JAMES PATTERSON , by James Patterson. (Little, Brown) The author's life, from growing up in small-town New York to working in the advertising industry to becoming a successful storyteller.	3
7	5	SPARRING PARTNERS , by John Grisham. (Doubleday) Three novellas: "Homecoming," "Strawberry Moon" and "Sparring Partners."	4	7	9	FINDING ME , by Viola Davis. (HarperOne) The actress describes the difficulties she encountered before claiming her sense of self and achieving professional success.	9
8	8	BOOK LOVERS , by Emily Henry. (Berkley) While on vacation in North Carolina, a literary agent keeps running into an editor.	8	8	2	I'D LIKE TO PLAY ALONE, PLEASE , by Tom Segura. (Grand Central) The stand-up comedian and podcaster shares stories of parenting and strange encounters.	2
9		ESCAPE , by James Patterson and David Ellis. (Little, Brown) The third book in the Billy Harney thriller series. Harney goes after a billionaire crime boss and a prison escape artist.	1	9	8	RIVER OF THE GODS , by Candice Millard. (Doubleday) The story of the hardships encountered during 19th-century expeditions in Africa.	6
10		THE HOUSE ACROSS THE LAKE , by Riley Sager. (Dutton) An actress escaping bad press goes to a Vermont lake house and uncovers secrets within a neighboring couple's marriage.	1	10	14	CRYING IN H MART , by Michelle Zauner. (Knopf) The leader of the indie rock project Japanese Breakfast describes creating her own identity after losing her mother to cancer.	39

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.

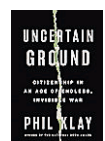
Editors' Choice / Staff Picks From the Book Review



O SAY CAN YOU HEAR? A Cultural Biography of "The Star-Spangled Banner," by Mark Clague. (Norton, \$28.95.) Clague, an associate professor of musicology and American culture at the University of Michigan, traces the complicated history of the national anthem in this immensely interesting and readable work.



TANKED, by Mia Hopkins. (Little Stone, ebook, \$4.99.) In this romance novel, set at a faltering family-run brewery, real-world problems — Covid, unemployment — intrude. Escapism is marvelous, but it is also a relief to see fearful realities acknowledged. And the sex scenes are so poetically filthy that you wish there were something like a Pulitzer for orgasms.



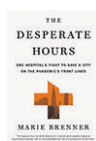
UNCERTAIN GROUND: Citizenship in an Age of Endless, Invisible War, by Phil Klay. (Penguin Press, \$27.) This collection of engrossing essays by a prizewinning novelist has at its core two provocative questions: What does it mean that our country is always at war, and why is it that so few of its people do the fighting?



THE ADVENTURES OF MISS BARBARA PYM, by Paula Byrne. (William Collins, \$34.99.) Byrne's engaging portrait of the British novelist Barbara Pym recounts more personal — and political — misadventures than previous biographies have, broadening the picture of a writer whose life can seem to have been measured out in Anglican masses and jumble sales.



SLEEPWALK, by Dan Chaon. (Holt, \$27.99.) The contract killer and cleanup man at the center of Chaon's madcap novel lives off the grid in a tricked-out motor home, maintaining his sweet disposition by self-medicating and roaming the country with his trusty pit bull. But his life takes a sharp turn when a woman claiming to be his daughter gets in touch.



THE DESPERATE HOURS: One Hospital's Fight to Save a City on the Pandemic's Front Lines, by Marie Brenner. (Flatiron, \$29.99.) Brenner celebrates the heroism of the health care workers at NewYork-Presbyterian during Covid's early days, when the mysterious epidemic claimed the lives of more than 30,000 New Yorkers.



LAPVONA, by Ottessa Moshfegh. (Penguin Press, \$27.) Set in a fictional fief somewhere in medieval Europe, Moshfegh's fifth novel follows a disfigured village boy who manages, through a grotesque and amoral sequence of events, to become the lord's son and heir.



CORRECTIONS IN INK: A Memoir, by Keri Blakinger. (St. Martin's, \$28.99.) In her brave, brutal memoir, Blakinger looks back on her journey from Cornell student and competitive figure skater to drug addict and prison inmate. A tale of survival and recovery, it's also the story of what came next — and what galvanized Blakinger to become a journalist covering the criminal justice system.



NUCLEAR FAMILY, by Joseph Han. (Counterpoint, \$26.) Han's debut novel, about a Korean American who becomes possessed by an ancestor's ghost, is a funny and moving examination of family and the question of how to recover after a disaster.

The full reviews of these and other recent books are online: [nytimes.com/books](https://www.nytimes.com/books)

Inside the List

ELISABETH EGAN

Younger Unless you experienced it firsthand or witnessed it in your own household, it would be hard to articulate the discombobulating boomerang effect of the pandemic on young adults who



'People call me an old soul.'

had just left home. For **Leila Mottley**, an Oakland, Calif., native who was midway through her second semester at Smith College, there was an added logistical and creative wrinkle: When she received word that she had three days to pack up

her room and vacate the campus, her debut novel was about to be sent to publishers.

How many teenagers were strategizing with agents while lugging boxes of bedding and books down to the basements of their dorms in March 2020? Probably not many.

"It was very doomsday at that time," Mottley said in a phone interview. "No one knew what to do."

She'd written the first draft of "Nightcrawling" in the summer of 2019, right after graduating from high school, while working as a substitute preschool teacher. She met her agents, Lucy Carson and Molly Friedrich, through the novelist Ruth Ozeki, who taught her advanced fiction writing workshop at Smith. Mottley had yet to decide on a major when she went to Ozeki's office hours and asked the novelist if she had any advice on how to choose representation. Other agents were circling, but Carson and Friedrich made the trip from New York to Northampton, Mass., to meet Oakland's former youth poet laureate and take her out for dinner. That sealed the deal.

The team wisely decided not to wait out the pandemic, selling "Nightcrawling" at auction to Knopf in April 2020. "It was the first book that they sold during the pandemic," said Mottley — and likely one of the first deals negotiated virtually, with participants getting the hang of cameras and mute buttons. The novel places readers in the sneakers of a Black girl in Oakland who is caught in a cyclone of trauma, poverty, gentrification, sex-trafficking and crooked cops. Our reviewer, Lauren Christensen, described "Nightcrawling" as an "empathetic debut"; Oprah Winfrey selected it for her book club and it became an instant best seller.

Mottley's publishing journey has been a whirlwind — an exciting one, if tinged with loneliness.

"People call me an old soul," Mottley said. "I would rather be reading a book and talking about something with substance than staring at my phone." However, she added, "I also sometimes want to stare at my phone." □

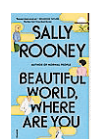
PRINT / HARDCOVER BEST SELLERS

SALES PERIOD OF JUNE 19-25

THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	Fiction	WEEKS ON LIST	THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	Nonfiction	WEEKS ON LIST
1	1	THE HOTEL NANTUCKET , by Elin Hilderbrand. (Little, Brown) The new general manager of a hotel far from its Gilded Age heyday deals with the complicated pasts of her guests and staff.	2	1	1	BATTLE FOR THE AMERICAN MIND , by Pete Hegseth with David Goodwin. (Broadside) The "Fox & Friends Weekend" host makes his case for what he calls classical Christian education. (†)	2
2	2	SPARRING PARTNERS , by John Grisham. (Doubleday) Three novellas: "Homecoming," "Strawberry Moon" and "Sparring Partners."	4	2		AN IMMENSE WORLD , by Ed Yong. (Random House) The Pulitzer Prize-winning science writer explains the sensory perceptions and ways of communication used by a variety of animals.	1
3		THE HOUSE ACROSS THE LAKE , by Riley Sager. (Dutton) An actress escaping bad press goes to a Vermont lake house and uncovers secrets within a neighboring couple's marriage.	1	3	5	HAPPY-GO-LUCKY , by David Sedaris. (Little, Brown) The humorist portrays personal and public upheavals of his life in its seventh decade and the world in the time of a pandemic.	4
4		ESCAPE , by James Patterson and David Ellis. (Little, Brown) The third book in the Billy Harney thriller series. Harney goes after a billionaire crime boss and a prison escape artist.	1	4	3	KILLING THE KILLERS , by Bill O'Reilly and Martin Dugard. (St. Martin's) The 11th book in the conservative commentator's Killing series.	8
5		LAPVONA , by Ottessa Moshfegh. (Penguin Press) When a motherless shepherd boy gets in violent proximity to a depraved lord's family, occult forces upset the old order in a medieval fief.	1	5	4	JAMES PATTERSON , by James Patterson. (Little, Brown) The author's life, from growing up in small-town New York to working in the advertising industry to becoming a successful storyteller.	3
6	5	THE MIDNIGHT LIBRARY , by Matt Haig. (Viking) Nora Seed finds a library beyond the edge of the universe that contains books with multiple possibilities.	81	6	6	FINDING ME , by Viola Davis. (HarperOne) The actress describes the difficulties she encountered before claiming her sense of self and achieving professional success.	9
7	6	THE LAST THING HE TOLD ME , by Laura Dave. (Simon & Schuster) Hannah Hall discovers truths about her missing husband.	54	7	2	I'D LIKE TO PLAY ALONE, PLEASE , by Tom Segura. (Grand Central) The stand-up comedian and podcaster shares stories of parenting and strange encounters.	2
8	4	MEANT TO BE , by Emily Giffin. (Ballantine) Joe, the disappointing scion of a family considered American royalty, and Cate, a budding model seeking to escape her surroundings, find each other.	4	8	7	RIVER OF THE GODS , by Candice Millard. (Doubleday) The story of the hardships encountered during 19th-century expeditions in Africa.	6
9	3	HORSE , by Geraldine Brooks. (Viking) The story of a racehorse, an enslaved groom and an itinerant painter reverberates in three different eras.	2	9	14	CRYING IN H MART , by Michelle Zauner. (Knopf) The leader of the indie rock project Japanese Breakfast describes creating her own identity after losing her mother to cancer.	49
10	8	RUN, ROSE, RUN , by Dolly Parton and James Patterson. (Little, Brown) A singer-songwriter goes to Nashville seeking stardom but is followed by her dark past.	16	10	11	GREENLIGHTS , by Matthew McConaughey. (Crown) The Academy Award-winning actor shares snippets from the diaries he kept over the last 35 years.	74

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 MIGUEL SALAZAR



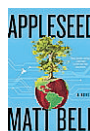
BEAUTIFUL WORLD, WHERE ARE YOU, by Sally Rooney. (Picador, 368 pp., \$18.) Rooney's third book follows two friends — a young, successful novelist and an editorial assistant in Dublin — as they navigate romantic relationships and contemplate everything from class and the nature of aesthetic beauty to climate change over Socratic email exchanges. Our reviewer, Brandon Taylor, called it "funny and smart" and proclaimed it Rooney's best novel yet.



THREE GIRLS FROM BRONZVILLE: A Uniquely American Memoir of Race, Fate, and Sisterhood, by Dawn Turner. (Simon & Schuster, 336 pp., \$17.99.) In this gripping memoir, Turner recounts growing up in Chicago's South Side and reflects on the tragedies that befell her sister and her best friend, both victims of a society that treats Black life as disposable.



ONE TWO THREE, by Laurie Frankel. (Holt, 416 pp., \$17.99.) In this wholesome, hopeful novel, triplets help save their small town after the discovery that their new neighbors are behind the chemical company polluting its river and poisoning its residents. "The full and simple pleasures of Frankel's luscious prose lull the reader into rooting for the good people of Bourne and these plucky heroines," our reviewer, Janice Y.K. Lee, wrote.



APPLESEED, by Matt Bell. (Mariner, 496 pp., \$17.99.) In this novel, Bell tracks our planet's progression from a lush, 18th-century Eden to the barren hellscape it becomes centuries later. In his review, Laird Hunt wrote that "Appleseed" is "a highly welcome addition to the growing canon of first-rate contemporary climate fiction." It was one of the Book Review's 100 Notable Books of 2021.



GOD, HUMAN, ANIMAL, MACHINE: Technology, Metaphor, and the Search for Meaning, by Meghan O'Gieblyn. (Anchor, 304 pp., \$17.) O'Gieblyn tackles robotic dogs, transhumanism and Silicon Valley as she rigorously dissects how our society's data obsession has supplanted a once qualitative understanding of life. Our reviewer, Becca Rothfeld, said that the book is "hybrid beast, a remarkably erudite work of history, criticism and philosophy, but it is also, crucially, a memoir."



ALL THE WATER I'VE SEEN IS RUNNING, by Elias Rodrigues. (Norton, 272 pp., \$16.95.) In this debut, a young Jamaican American teacher living in New York returns to his northern Florida hometown and frantically searches for answers after he receives news that his close high school friend has been killed in a car accident.

PAPERBACK

SALES PERIOD OF JUNE 19-25

THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	Paperback Trade Fiction	WEEKS ON LIST	THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	Paperback Nonfiction	WEEKS ON LIST
1	2	WHERE THE CROWDADS 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.	65	1	1	THE BODY KEEPS THE SCORE , by Bessel van der Kolk. (Penguin) How trauma affects the body and mind.	192
2	1	IT ENDS WITH US , by Colleen Hoover. (Atria) A battered wife raised in a violent home attempts to halt the cycle of abuse.	60	2	4	BRAIDING SWEETGRASS , by Robin Wall Kimmerer. (Milkweed Editions) A botanist and member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation espouses having an understanding and appreciation of plants and animals.	115
3	3	VERITY , by Colleen Hoover. (Grand Central) Lowen Ashleigh is hired by the husband of an injured writer to complete her popular series and uncovers a horrifying truth.	46	3	2	EDUCATED , by Tara Westover. (Random House) The daughter of survivalists, who is kept out of school, educates herself enough to leave home for university.	20
4	4	UGLY LOVE , by Colleen Hoover. (Atria) A casual sexual relationship between Tate and Miles becomes more complicated than they expected.	48	4	5	ALL ABOUT LOVE , by bell hooks. (Morrow) The late feminist icon explores the causes of a polarized society and the meaning of love.	29
5	5	THE SEVEN HUSBANDS OF EVELYN HUGO , by Taylor Jenkins Reid. (Washington Square/Atria) A movie icon recounts stories of her loves and career to a struggling magazine writer.	68	5	3	THE BOMBER MAFIA , by Malcolm Gladwell. (Back Bay) A look at the key players and outcomes of precision bombing during World War II.	3
6	6	BOOK LOVERS , by Emily Henry. (Berkley) While on vacation in North Carolina, a literary agent keeps running into an editor.	8	6	8	BORN A CRIME , by Trevor Noah. (One World) A memoir by the host of "The Daily Show."	162
7	8	NOVEMBER 9 , by Colleen Hoover. (Atria) Ben and Fallon meet on the same day each year but a possible untruth might spoil their relationship.	32	7	6	TALKING TO STRANGERS , by Malcolm Gladwell. (Back Bay) Famous examples of miscommunication.	39
8	7	PEOPLE WE MEET ON VACATION , by Emily Henry. (Berkley) Opposites Poppy and Alex meet to vacation together one more time in hopes of saving their relationship.	59	8	7	KITCHEN CONFIDENTIAL , by Anthony Bourdain. (Ecco) A memoir-exposé of the restaurant world. Originally published in 2000.	81
9	10	BEACH READ , by Emily Henry. (Berkley) A relationship develops between a literary fiction author and a romance novelist as they both try to overcome writer's block.	43	9	9	UNDER THE BANNER OF HEAVEN , by Jon Krakauer. (Anchor) Two brothers who subscribed to a fundamentalist version of Mormonism killed a woman and her daughter; the basis of the TV series.	9
10	9	ALL YOUR PERFECTS , by Colleen Hoover. (Atria) Quinn and Graham's marriage depends on past promises.	10	10	15	OUTLIERS , by Malcolm Gladwell. (Back Bay) Unexpected factors that explain why some people succeed, such as upbringing, timing and 10,000 hours of deliberate practice.	347
11	11	EVERY SUMMER AFTER , by Carley Fortune. (Berkley) The love story of Percy and Sam is told over the course of six summers and one weekend.	3	11		THINKING, FAST AND SLOW , by Daniel Kahneman. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux) When we can and cannot trust our intuitions.	321
12	12	MALIBU RISING , by Taylor Jenkins Reid. (Ballantine) An epic party has serious outcomes for four famous siblings.	6	12	12	JUST MERCY , by Bryan Stevenson. (One World) A civil rights lawyer and MacArthur grant recipient's memoir of his decades of work to free innocent people condemned to death.	282
13		THE JUDGE'S LIST , by John Grisham. (Vintage) The second book in the Whistler series. Investigator Lacy Stoltz goes after a serial killer and closes in on a sitting judge.	1	13	14	THE CODE BREAKER , by Walter Isaacson. (Simon & Schuster) How the Nobel Prize winner Jennifer Doudna and her colleagues invented CRISPR, a tool that can edit DNA.	8
14	13	THE SONG OF ACHILLES , by Madeline Miller. (Ecco) A reimagining of Homer's "Iliad" that is narrated by Achilles' companion Patroclus.	88	14		A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE , by Sonia Purnell. (Penguin) The true story of a Baltimore socialite who joined a spy organization during World War II and became essential to the French Resistance.	17
15	14	THE SILENT PATIENT , by Alex Michaelides. (Celadon) Theo Faber looks into the mystery of a famous painter who stops speaking after shooting her husband.	45	15	13	WALK IN MY COMBAT BOOTS , by James Patterson and Matt Eversmann with Chris Mooney. (Grand Central) A collection of interviews with troops who fought overseas.	7

Sales are defined as completed transactions between vendors and individual end users during the period on or after the official publication date of a title. Sales of titles are statistically weighted to represent and accurately reflect all outlets proportionally nationwide. The panel of reporting retailers is comprehensive and reflects sales in tens of thousands of stores of all sizes and demographics across the United States. **ONLINE:** For a full explanation of our methodology, visit www.nytimes.com/books/best-sellers.

The New York Times

 The joys.
The tribulations.
The twists.



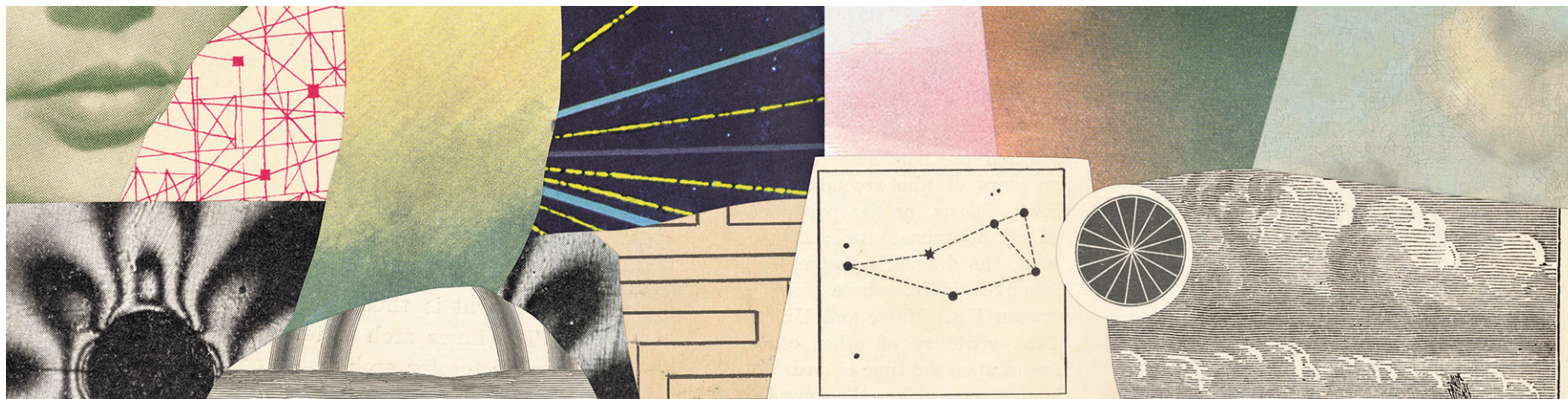
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CONSTELLATIONS OF EVE

By Abigail Nguyen Rosewood
Texas Tech University. 211 pp. \$29.95.



Initially, Rosewood's "Constellations of Eve" looks as if it's going to be a straightforward chronicle of the bad decisions of beautiful people — a romance whose initial meet-cute contains the seeds

of its ultimate failure, a female friendship whose intense closeness is linked to its acute toxicity.

But the novel soon reveals itself to be more complex. At one point, Eve, an artist, marvels at a film's "labyrinthed structure," in perhaps a signal of Rosewood's own aims. The tale shares a conceit with works of speculative fiction, though not the explicitly speculative gear: alternate histories, in which different versions of Eve lead different lives.

Rosewood's prose tends toward the figurative and lyrical (describing a child's recklessness, she writes that he "lunged into the unknown as if the whole world was a bed made of clouds"). Her characters regularly exhibit an idiosyncratic impulsiveness: Eve digs a hole and buries her cellphone to stifle the desire to check it; Eve and her best friend walk on a frozen lake's thin ice. Though these behaviors occasionally ring false, they can also surprise and sometimes terrify. The center of the novel is its strongest section, a horror-tinged story in which Eve's overpowering compulsion to love (as a wife does her husband, as a mother does her son, as an artist does her muse) strips her of her agency and threatens her sanity.

THE RED ARROW

By William Brewer
Knopf. 254 pp. \$27.



Both Rosewood and Brewer, the author of the novel "The Red Arrow," quote from the physicist Carlo Rovelli's book "The Order of Time." Rosewood does so in her epigraph; Brewer in dialogue by

the fictional Physicist, who has disappeared while collaborating on his memoirs with the novel's narrator. The quest narrative of the search for the Physicist soon gives way to a digressive, detailed first-person examination of severe depression and its consequences. Brewer is particularly concerned with how love can sometimes paradoxically nourish depression rather than diminish it.

The novel is carefully structured, sharply observed and often humorous. Brewer has an understated, melodious style with a confident control of rhythm; one highlight is a description of a cross-country trip in a single two-page sentence. Detours on the way to the final psychedelic encounter with the Physicist include an Italian travelogue, a satirical rendering of the publishing industry, a recounting of a West Virginia chemical spill that reads like a homage to Don DeLillo's "White Noise" (in which Brewer skillfully depicts images that his protagonist claims not to have the skill to describe), perhaps too many citations of other writers (Michael Herr, Geoff Dyer, Fernando Pessoa and Denis Johnson, among others), and meditations on the anxiety of artistic influence and the unreliability of memory. This book has eccentricity and vigor, executed with remarkable style.

GREENLAND

By David Santos Donaldson
Amistad, 324 pp. \$26.99.



Like "The Red Arrow," Donaldson's "Greenland" is a first-person narrative about a writer struggling to complete a manuscript under a publisher's deadline. Both books are heavily metafictional

and intertextual, and in both, psychological pressures blur the boundaries between author and subject. "Greenland" also contains a nested story, of Mohammed El Adl, an Egyptian tram conductor who had a doomed romance with E.M. Forster during World War I.

The deadline-pressed writer is Kip Starling, who's holed up in a Brooklyn brownstone a century later, drafting a novel about Mohammed. Donaldson neatly weaves Mohammed's and Kip's timelines together, connecting 1917 to 2019 to portray, in Kip's words, "where we queer, Black, colonial men have come from." Though Donaldson's dialogue is sometimes stiff, he is adept at nuances of character, and taking chances here serves him well: Until a transformative journey in the country of the novel's title, Kip can come off as difficult, sometimes insufferable, and the reactions of his husband and his best friend affirm that this reading is intended.

As a result, Kip feels like a real person on the page, rather than a blandly agreeable representative of the demographics to which he belongs. Mohammed is not quite so richly realized — his chapters lean toward melodrama — but this likewise seems intentional, a matter of Kip's aesthetic decisions as represented by Donaldson. "Greenland" is a refreshing novel from an author who makes unconventional artistic choices to serve his ends. As Kip says: "not necessarily something pleasant, but an honest noise."

WALK THE VANISHED EARTH

By Erin Swan
Viking. 375 pp. \$27.



Swan is doing something much different from the other writers reviewed here. "Walk the Vanished Earth" is an epic in the vein of David Mitchell's "Cloud Atlas" or Namwali Serpell's "The Old

Drift," whose frameworks allow their authors to flex their skills with both historical and speculative fiction. It is a weird, ambitious novel that takes place over two centuries, its principal characters a procession of mothers, its main event a climate apocalypse in which the world in an alternate 2017 "freezes and thaws and floods and burns but does not seem ready to die," its narrative composed of histories that are misremembered, forgotten, lost or willfully destroyed.

Swan's staccato sentences can be evocative, as when she describes a psychiatric ward with "girls with faces like shreds torn from paper." Some of her characters see the world through veils of ignorance because of their isolated circumstances. Bea, a mute adolescent in Kansas City in 1975, was raised in secret until she escaped her abusive home; Moon, a young woman on Mars in 2073, has never known any other sentient beings except for the mysterious Uncles who accompany her on her travels. Swan's prose wonderfully portrays things they cannot comprehend but whose meanings are nonetheless plain to the reader. This rich, endlessly engaging novel is, one hopes, the first in a long career for an author who has the talent and imagination to write whatever she wants.

An illustrated review of two new books that explain how the world's insects came to be in peril.

Do you **HATE** insects?




They have been flitting and crawling for over **400 million years**.

And there's so damn *many*.
By some estimates, **10 quintillion!**

10,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000

That's **1.4 billion** for each one of us!

When the famed biologist J.B.S. Haldane was asked what could be concluded about God from the study of nature, he is said to have replied...



"He has an inordinate fondness for beetles."

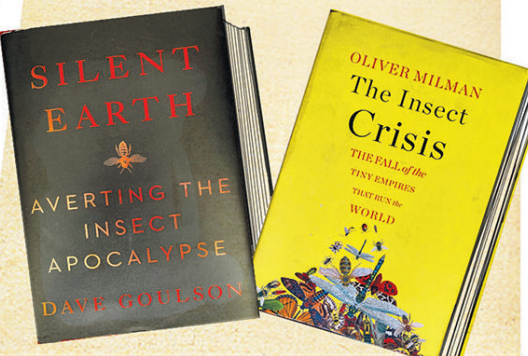
Lots of people would be happy if most bugs were...



SLAP!

##@#!
MOSQUITOES!

Well, according to two recent books...



SILENT EARTH
AVERTING THE INSECT APOCALYPSE
DAVE GOULSON

OLIVER MILMAN
The Insect Crisis
THE FALL OF THE TINY EMPIRES THAT RUN THE WORLD

If you feel that way, you may get your wish!

Dave Goulson and Oliver Milman both illuminate how and why arthropods are in the process of **disappearing**...



And the **actions** we can take to slow their decline.

They each point out that without all the different pollinators*



all these things would also **disappear** (including **chocolate** !!)

* Second biggest pollinator after bees? **Flies!**



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But that reality is fading into memory.

"If all mankind were to disappear, the world would regenerate back to the rich state of equilibrium that existed 10,000 years ago.

If insects were to vanish, the environment would collapse into chaos."

— E.O. Wilson (1929-2021)

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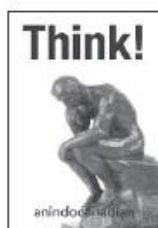


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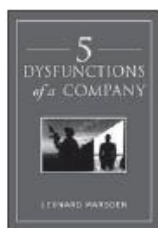


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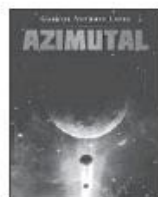
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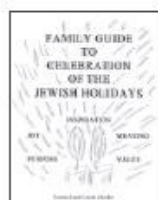


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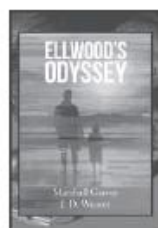


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