At Home in the World

By Alexander Chee

I CAN'T SAY exactly where much of Chang-rae Lee's newest novel, "My Year Abroad," is set, because the narrator, Tiller Harding, can't tell us either. He has, at various times, been in a 36-year-old woman we know only as Val, Tiller's wife, with her and her young son, Victor Jr., in a small town in the United States; he calls them "Sturgis" Val and Veed, as the boy is nicknamed, are in a witness protection program because of her disappeared husband's dealings with a gang of New Jersey-based Turkish men that involved Mongolian mineral rights, fake sturgeon eggs and very real shoulder-mounted rocket launchers. Tiller meets her in Hong Kong airport as she was escaping from what was perhaps the biggest mistake of his life, and we soon learn that Val was doing much the same.

None of this is a spoiler. The setup, by Page 3, contains enough plot for several other novels in a variety of genres, vivid sketches of the worlds created when capital crosses borders and the people lost when the deals holding those worlds together fall apart. Like Lee's five previous novels, this one is explicitly transnational—perhaps the only way to describe the lives of his characters, and really America, for that matter. Lee has engaged in this kind of global revision of our idea of the American suburb for some time.
The New York Times

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**Book Review**

The New York Times
February 7, 2020

Fiction

1. *My Year Abroad*
   By Chang-rae Lee
   Reviewed by Alexander Chee

22. The Shortlist
   Stories
   Reviewed by Chelsea Levi

Nonfiction

7. *Lifters Up*
   Audioslides
   Reviewed by Jennifer Rosen

6. *Extraterrestrial*
   The First Sign of Intelligent Life Beyond Earth
   By Art Lueb
   Reviewed by Dennis Overbye

9. *The Rutline*
   The Exiled Life and Mysterious Death of a Nest Fugitive
   By Philippe Sands
   Reviewed by Rachel Donadio

10. *Let the Long Song Begin*
    The Rise and Fall of the Death Penalty
    By Maurice Chammah
    Reviewed by Amaud Grisham

11. *Sanctuary*
    A Memoir
    By Emily Rupp Black
    Reviewed by Judith Warner

13. *We Came, We Saw, We Left*
    A Family’s Trip to North Korea
    By Charles Wheeler
    Reviewed by Amity Gaige

13. *We Need to Hand Out*
    A Memoir of Making Friends
    By Billy Baker
    Reviewed by A.J. Jacobs

14. *Soul City*
    Race, Equality, and the Last Dream of an American Utopia
    By Thomas Hely
    Reviewed by Chris Laban

Children’s Books

18. *Have I Ever Told You Black Lives Matter*
    By Susan Beth King
    Illustrated by Bobby C. Martin Jr.

18. *The ABCs of Black History*
    By Jo Cowan
    Illustrated by Lauren Shinreser
    Reviewed by Robert A. Jones

Features

6. *By the Book*
   Elizabeth Colbert

12. *Essay*
    Darwin and the Second Sex
    By Michael Sener

23. *Sketchbook*
    By Liana Finck

Etc.

4. *New & Noteworthy*

5. *Letters*

19. *Best Seller Lists*

19. *Editors’ Choice*

20. *Inside the List*

20. *Paperback Row*

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The Must-Read
New York Times Bestseller

"It’s a lightning rod...."
To call this book a 'conversation piece' or an 'important book' feels belittling.... A brilliantly crafted novel." — The Washington Post

"Russell manages a brutal originality...."

"A singular achievement—
a masterpiece of tension and tone." — Esquire

"Timely, riveting... illuminates the interplay between a child’s heart-breaking confusion and the deepest perversion of power." — People, Book of the Week

"Explosive... a significant addition to the #MeToo movement." — NPR

"As powerful as it is painful." — Vogue

My Dark Vanessa
Katie Elizabeth Russell

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NOW & NOTEWORTHY

LOUD BLACK GIRLS: 20 BLACK WOMEN WRITERS WHO ARE WHAT'S NEXT, edited by Yomi Adegoke and Elizabeth Uviève. (Fourth Estate, $26.95) Black British women from a range of disciplines (writers, artists, activists, etc.) discuss finding and preserving their voices.

RESET THE TABLE: STRAIGHT TALK ABOUT THE FOOD WE GROW AND EAT by Robert Paul Berg. (Knopf, $27.95) Paul Berg, a Harvard political scientist specializing in agriculture and food policy, argues that commercial farms have an important role to play in fostering healthier eating habits.

BABY ISLAND: STORIES by Elvira Navarro. Translated by Christina MacSweeney. (Two Lines, $10.95) In this impressionistic, dream-like collection, Navarro, a Spanish writer, deploys surrealism to comic, haunting effect: a floating grandmother, a pastel appendage growing from an ear.

A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO STICK-HOLD: THE ADRENALINE-FUELED ADVENTURES OF AN ACCIDENTAL SCIENTIST, by Robert J. Lifton with Randy Hall. (Pegasus, $27.95) Lifton’s lively memoir traces his path from public health and psychology to chemistry and a 2012 Nobel Prize.

LIFE (AND LOVE), by Jonathan Buckley. (New York Review Books, paper, $16.95) This spare novel, Buckley’s third, features a man who can hear the dead and the much younger woman who lives with him, who starts a magnetic pull on their monotonous neighbor.

WHAT WE’RE READING

Like just about everyone else in the world right now, I miss my friends. I miss college, too, or maybe just the parts of adult life that feel like a mix between a seminar and a show-up. So I re-read Elinpasteur’s book, a way back into the woman of a girl I wish I’d known. Banrman’s main character, Selma, spends her free year at Harvard with an achingly symbiotic, a scattered convulsion and a sort of release went over dial-up email. At nearly every paragraph break, Banrman had me giggling at her perceptive descriptions of theics and abstractions of daily life. For a digest, I read “The Pornseteau,” Banrman’s first book, based on her Ph.D. in comparative literature at Stanford, before she became a staff writer at The New Yorker. She is clearly the most skeptical friend, the amanuensis, the most observant. But she is also humble. I’ll follow her pen wherever it next goes.

— AMELIA NIEBREG, NEWSLETTER WRITER

4 SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2021
Letters

Acknowledgments

TO THE EDITOR:
Although I appreciate Deborah Needham’s review of Glenn Adamczyk’s "CHIR: An American History," and its call to recognize the contributions of “Indigenous people, African-Americans, women and the working class,” an addendum should be made to the caption of the photograph that accompanies it.

The photographer is acknowledged by name, but the artist featured in the photo is not. She is none other than Nampeyo, an innovative and influential potter who was famous in her lifetime and remains one of the most well-known Native American artists of this day. Her work can be found in museums around the world including the Smithsonian and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and one of her dazzling pots was recently on view in the latter, under the same roof as Georgia O’Keeffe’s paintings. Proper respect and recognition is due for an artist who has had such a lasting impact on American art and design. After all, would a photograph of Georgia O’Keeffe at work be captioned similarly as "an American artist painting a canvas?"

CAROLINE JEAN FERDORAL BERKELEY, CALIF.

Anatomy of Addiction

TO THE EDITOR:
In her review of Carl L. Hart’s book “Drug Use for Grown-Ups” (Jan. 17), Casey Schwartz is right to note that many readers might feel "discomfort" when hearing about the author’s "full-throated endorsement" of opioids for recreational use. That includes his own regular use of heroin, which Hart suggests he can easily control and also has benefits. The estimated more than two million Americans who are in need of treatment are not so lucky. For them, addiction has serious repercussions — the loss of friends and family and careers, and the unremitting need to feed their habit by any means possible — that make life not only miserable but also very risky.

With drug fatalities in the United States at record levels last year and more than 400,000 deaths over the past two decades (a majority of them opioid-related), it is incomprehensible how Hart can dismiss the "opiod crisis" in scare quotes, suggesting that it does not exist. This crisis is real and a public health menace, especially for those who cannot access drug treatment, the most effective way to address the disease of addiction. I agree with Hart that the "war on drugs" has failed, but his war on the reality of addiction is far more dangerous.

MITCHELL S. ROSENTHAL, M.D., is the founder of Phoenix House and president of the Rosenwald Center for Addiction Studies.

TO THE EDITOR:
As an avid reader of the Book Review, I have rarely been more angered than I was by Schwartz’s review of “Drug Use for Grown-Ups.”

While I agree with Carl Hart’s view that drugs need to be legalized, and that some drugs can actually be useful, I disagreed with practically everything else he is cited as writing, especially his callous dismissal of the ruined lives of the 30 percent of opioid users who become addicted.

My beautiful, creative and bipolar daughter recently died after 40 years of opioid addiction that took away what could have been a successful life. Proof that genes often rule, she had four addicted grandparents, and my maternal grandmother also had an addicted bipolar daughter and a schizophrenic son, as did I.

And while my daughter died of other causes, if I or anyone unadvised had taken the dose of methadone she took each day as part of medication-assisted treatment, it wouldn’t take — as my overprescribing doctor told me — alcohol or another drug in the mix to kill them. And as my husband, a recovering alcoholic, said as we discussed this review, “By the time you know you’re addicted, it’s too late.”

ROSEMARY DANIELL WESTON, GA.

Reality Check

TO THE EDITOR:
Reading his By the Book interview (Jan. 26), I thought Brad Taylor would turn out to be yet another male writer who doesn’t know that women write books, but I was wrong.

He ultimately cites two women authors: Willa Cather, source of “the most boring writing ever,” and Delia Owens, whose book he can’t finish. He attributes the latter failure to something in himself; perhaps it’s his conviction that reading is fundamentally about “escape.”

GAIL GRIFFIN

GALAXADO, W.V.

BOOKS@NYTIMES.COM

READ THE UNTOLD STORIES OF THE DIVERSE HEROINES WHO Fought FOR THE 19TH AMENDMENT.

THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW


Elizabeth Kolbert

The environmental writer, whose new book is “Under a White Sky,” was drawn as an adolescent to works of “overweening romanticism.” “In general my tastes have become a lot cooler.”

What books are on your night stand? On my (metaphorical) night stand are Patrick Steenson’s “The Book of Elys,” Yia Gyasi’s “Transcendent Kingdom,” and the galleys of Jim Shepard’s new novel, “Phase II.”

Describe your ideal reading experience (when, where, what, how). Whenever I go somewhere new, I try to bring along a book that somehow bears on the place I’m visiting. I read Barry Lopez’s “Arctic Dreams” while camping out on the Greenland ice sheet. That to me was pretty close to the ideal reading experience, but a tough one to replicate.

What’s your favorite book no one else has heard of? “Weird and Tragic Shores,” by Chansory Loomis, is a wonderful riff on the classic Arctic explorer narrative. It’s about Charlie Francis Ball, an American newspaper publisher who insisted on going looking for survivors of the last Franklin expedition long after it had become clear there weren’t any. Toward the end, almost by accident, the book becomes a murder mystery. I’m sure most Arctic scholars have heard of it, but it deserves a much wider audience.

What writers are especially good on the natural world? There are so many — too many for me even to start to list. That said, there are certain works I keep coming back to: “Walden,” “Desert Solitaire,” Rachel Carson’s “The Sea Around Us,” Annie Dillard’s “Teaching a Stone to Talk,” John McPhee’s “Encounters With the Archdruid” and “Annals of the Former World.”

Anyone writing today faces the problem that what counts as the “natural world” has become pretty vexed. Some of the newer “End of Nature” nature writers I think have had the greatest impact are Bill McKibben, Terry Tempest Williams, David Quammen, Rebecca Solnit and E.O. Wilson.

What’s the most interesting thing you learned from a book recently? I was recently reading about chimp’s grooming habits in Carl Safina’s “Becoming Wild.” The social interactions between high- and low-status chimps are every bit as complicated as those you’d expect to see at a college mixer.

Which subjects do you read more authors write about? This isn’t a subject, exactly, but I wish there were more popular science books written by scientists. I really enjoyed — and learned a tremendous amount from — “Stuff Matters,” by Mark Miodownik, who’s a materials scientist. The same goes for “Gathering Men,” by Robin Wall Kimmerer, a plant ecologist; “The Evolution of Beauty” by Richard Prum (ornithologist); “Your Inner Fish” by Neil Shubin (paleontologist); “The Forest Unseen,” by David George Haskell (botanist); and “Life’s Edge,” by Hope Jahren (geobiologist). All these books opened up the world to me in a new way.

How do you organize your books? I don’t. Often this is a problem.

Who is your favorite fictional hero or heroine? Your favorite authors or villains? For the heroine, it’s probably Della Hux, the intrepid geologist. For the villain, I think it’s Fred, the douchey husband in E.R. Wiler’s essay “Death of a Pig.” Fred has a gendered curiosity that’s hard to resist.

How have your reading tastes changed over time? In my protracted adolescence, I was drawn to works of overweening romanticism, the “Wuthering Heights” and “The Secret of Young Werther.” I still love both of these books, but in general my tastes have become a lot cooler.

You’re organizing a literary dinner party. Which writers, dead or alive, do you invite? Roberto Bolano, Italo Calvino and Isak Dinesen.

What books are you embarrassed not to have read yet? In David Lodge’s academic novel “Changing Places,” the members of the English department play a game called “Humiliation.” Participants are supposed to name a book they haven’t read, but that they imagine most other members of the department have. One player names “Hamlet.” He wins the game but loses his job.

An expanded version of this interview is available at nytimes.com/books.
In Their Own Words

To read or to listen to a book? It can be a tough choice, but when it comes to memoirs of entertainers—especially those who narrate their own work—the answer is easy: Listen. These are authors who bring not just insight, but professional chops and innate charisma to the job. You won’t be an ardent fan of the celebrity memoirs below if you’re not already listening to their personal stories in their famous voices.

NO ONE GOES round the saga of a broadway, interned Irish actor like Gabriel Byrne with more soul than the broadway, interned Irish actor Gabriel Byrne. In the WALKING WITH GHOSTS: Recorded Books, 6 hours, 57 minutes. Byrne reveals his childhood in hard-scraped, drink ing, mid-19th-century Dublin, introducing us to formative characters like Mrs. Gormley, an elderly friend of his family’s, whose lorry held her late husband’s widows and who used to regale Byrne with tales of bandits, fairies, and famine. He discusses his sister’s mental illness, his early vocation as a priest (“I can’t help but imagine how different my life could have been”) and his struggles with alcoholism (“I never grew up”).

There are Hollywood-esc snapshots of his life tucked into the book as well: whisperings with Richard Burton (“Give it all you got,” he advises Byrne, “but never forget it’s just a bloody movie, thank God, I’m not curing cancer”), a harrowing account of the depression that struck when he became clear “The Usual Suspect” was not going to make him a star.

Listening to this book can be like taking a road trip with a friend sharing his slightly mewling stories in a soft baritone from the passenger seat.

IT’S BEEN DECADES since “Family Tree” made him a household name in the 1980s, but at almost 60—and having lived with Parkinson’s disease for half his life—Michael J. Fox still has that Alex Trebek buoyancy. Fox’s JENNIFER REESE’s work has appeared in the Book Review and The Washington Post.

fourth book, NO TIME LIKE THE FUTURE (Macmillan Audio, 6 hours, 10 minutes), drives into his acting career and philanthropy, his improbable passion for golf, and his worrying health. In 2018 (“any amount horrible,” he says), Fox underwent surgery for a spinal tumor unrelated to Parkinson’s, an ordeal that tested his characteristic optimism and left him struggling to walk. “Back in the days of cardboard walking, I would have considered the topic of walking to be rather pedestrian,” Fox jokes. Sometimes the quips seem forced, but Fox’s positivity—rooted in the love of his family—is hard-won and inspiring. Although Parkinson’s has affected his speech, after the first few minutes I stopped noticing as his storytelling, infused with warmth and emotion, drew me in. And only in the audiobook can you hear how chat up while recounting a tender moment with his wife of more than 30 years, the actress Tracy Pollan.

THE ROCKER (March All, 6 hours, 8 minutes), but he does periodically break into song, making for startlingly lovely interludes in this highbrow autobiography. The son of a white Jewish father and a Black mother, Kravitz grew up spending weekdays with his working-class maternal grandparents in Brooklyn and weekends at nightclubs with his parents in Manhattan. I’d have to call it a golden childhood,” he says, ever able to find happy even in bitter experiences. After his mother, Ronnie Baker, was cast as “The Jefferson,” the family moved to Los Angeles, where his parents’ marriage floundered and Kravitz left home at 18, bumming down in a rented Ford Pinto. His musical career blossomed after he fell in love with the actress Lisa Bonet—seeing her for the first time on a TV Guide cover, he announced, “I’m gonna marry that girl!” and the songs came pouring out. The memoir, cowritten with David Ritz, ends with the release of his first album in 1989 and the unknown words: “To be continued.”

KRAVITZ credits five Black godmothers with helping shape his character—among them the actress Cicely Tyson, who at 96 has come out with her own memoir, JUST AS I AM (HarperCollins, 16 hours, 9 minutes). Tyson reads the introduction in her book, pausing to chuckle at her own anecdotes, before turning the narration over to the brilliant Robin Miles. (The foreword, read by Viola Davis, was intimate and powerful, and piqued my interest in the book before I even got going.) Cowritten with Michelle Baranoff, Tyson is a quirky, saga-of-the-village open with an unforgettable, tongue-in-cheek heroine who used her craft to render fully the lives of Black women, “the most deeply misunderstood human beings in history.”

The daughter of West Indian immigrants, Tyson grew up in Harlem in the 1940s and ’50s, became a postage mother and sex worker, turned into modeling and then acting, becoming an American icon for performances in “Sounder” and “The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman.” She was friends with Debbie Harry and Talley Pines and Maya Angelou; married and divorced Miles Davis (“He was so full of the Devil, that Miles”), and took stands that were radical at the time. He embraced her natural hair on television. She describes it all with vivid recall, wit and monumental charm. If I hadn’t been listening to this book, I would have called it a page-turner.1

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THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW 7

pressreader
High Flier
What was the strange object that visited our solar system in 2017?

By DENNIS OVERBURY

ON Nov. 12, 1915, Avi Loeb, then the chairman of the astronomy department at Harvard, and a young research associate, Shmuel Roskies, published a paper in the highly prestigious Astrophysical Journal Letters arguing that humans may have discovered the first evidence of alien technology in the form of a mysterious object called Oumuamua that had streaked through the solar system the previous fall. Reporters flocked to his door. I was not.

EXTRATERRESTRIAL
The First Sign of Intelligent Life Beyond Earth
By Avi Loeb
Illustrated. 224 pp. Houghton Mifflin/Harcourt. $27.

one of them, because I thought the claim was clever and bold, but far-fetched, and I still do, much as I intend to vote true. Few of his scientific colleagues agree with him, as Loeb will be the first to tell you in his new book, “Extraterrestrial,” which is part graceful memoir and part plea for keeping an open mind about the possibilities of what is out there in the universe — in particular, life. Otherwise, he says, we might miss something amazing, like the church officials in the 17th century who refused to look through Galileo’s telescope.

“Aren’t the both scientists and lay people, really?” he asks in his introduction. “Is human civilization ready to confront what follows our accepting the plausible conclusion, arrived at through evidence-based hypotheses, that terrestrial life isn’t alone in the universe, and perhaps not even particularly impressive? I fear the answer is no, and that growing prejudice is a cause for concern.”

Oumuamua — Hawaiian for “scout” — was first noticed by a telescope in the island of Maui on Oct. 19, 2017, when it was already on its way out of the solar system, having passed closest to the sun a month before. It had come from outside the solar system, from the direction of the star Vega. Nobody ever got a picture of the object, but from how its brightness varied as it apparently traveled, astronomers were able to deduce that it was about a quarter-mile across and at least five to 10 times longer than it was wide. An artist’s interpretation of redshift, cigar-shaped rock was widely reproduced. Based on some surprising rocky surfaces it is thought to have developed, astronomers concluded that Oumuamua was a comet. Such objects often get accelerated by jets of evaporating gases on their surface, although in this case no evaporating gases were detected. But Loeb argues that it is no more preposterous to suppose that Oumuamua was a lightsail, a thin material that gets its propulsion boost from sunlight or starlight, either launched in our direction or “chased like a busy bee in space, where we can see it on our planet’s travel around the galaxy. In which case the age-old question — are we alone in the universe? — has been answered.

Shades of Arthur C. Clarke’s novel “Rendezvous With Rama,” to which a rocket scientist turns out to be a spaceship; indeed, radio astronomers trained their antennae on Oumuamua, but heard nothing.

It is easy to say that Loeb, who was raised with a philosophical bent on a farm in Idaho, the son of refugees from the Holocaust and war-torn Europe, is one of the more imaginative and articulate scientists around. He writes frequently for Scientific American and free of charge on a wide range of subjects, from cosmology to black holes to the feasibility of inspecting exoplanet atmospheres for signs of industrial pollution or even nuclear war. He is chair of the Black Hole Initiative at Harvard and, more to the point, chair of the scientific advisory committee for Breakthrough Starshot, a grandly ambitious scheme to send tiny probes to Alpha Centauri, propelled to one-fifth the speed of light by lasers shining on light sails.

The Starshot scheme, bankrolled by the Russian internet billionaire and philanthropist Yuri Milner, was announced only a year and a half before Oumuamua was discovered. It was natural for Loeb to think that great minds across the universe might have thought alike. It sounds crazy but there is a larger point he has to make, one well worth making and reading. Central to his argument is what he calls the “Oumuamua wager,” a take on Pascal’s famous wager, that the guide of believing in God far outweighs the downside. Likewise, believing that Oumuamua could have been an alien spacecraft can only make us more alert and receptive to thinking outside the box, as Loeb points out, “Chance favors the prepared mind.”

“If we were to wager that Oumuamua was a piece of advanced extraterrestrial technology, we stand only to gain.” Loeb writes, “Whether it prompts us to methodically search the universe for signs of life or to undertake more ambitious projects, placing an optimistic bet could have a transformative effect on our civilization.”

Imagine, for example, lightbeams equipped with copies of human DNA placed around a star that would one day explode, sending them zinging on a flash of light across the galaxy. It would take millions of years to set up, but what is a million years in the billions-year life of the Milky Way?

He goes on, “When I think of this familiar technology in that way, a lightbeam blinding in sunlight resembles nothing so much as the wings of a sandalium seed sent off by the wind to fertilize virgin soil.”

Modern academic science, he concludes, has overemphasized topics such as multiple dimensions and multiple universes, for which there is no evidence, and underemphasized the search for life out there, not just in the form of extraterrestrial radio signals but in the form of chemical “insignia,” or even technological artifacts — such as, Loeb believes, Oumuamua. We could try harder, he writes. The discovery of alien life would be the greatest discovery in the history of science.

As he writes toward the end of this half-narrative, half-philosophical book, he says, “But the moment we know that we are not alone, that we are almost certainly not the most advanced civilization ever to have existed in the cosmos, we will realize that we have spent more funds developing the means to destroy all life on the planet than it would have cost to preserve it.”
By RACHEL DONADIO


This time around, Sands, alumna rights lawyer, follows the trail of a big fish who was never caught: Otto Wächter, a high-ranking Nazi official in occupied Poland who was indicted on a charge of mass mur-

THE RATLINE
The Knack of Life and Mysterious Death of a Nazi Fugitive
By PHILIPPE SANDS

der after the war, but escaped. Wächter had been chosen by Hitler himself to gov-
ern Galicia and see his watch the Kraków ghetto was constructed and more than 150,000 people from the area, including 9,000 children, died in death camps. After the war, while much of the Nazi high com-
mmand wound up at Nuremberg — tried, convicted and hanged — Wächter spent more than three years hiding in the Austri-
an Alps before escaping to Rome. He died there in 1949 in mysterious circumstances under the assumed name of Bigo Rembert, given last rites by a prominent Austrian Catholic bishop who had helped him in Rome — entirely aware of his identity, sympathetic to his cause and well con-
nected at the Vatican.

Wächter had crossed the Alps on foot in the snow and made his way to Rome, when he lived in a villa near Castel Gandolfo, which he had intended to see to South America via the so-called "Ratline," the clandestine net-
work that helped many prominent Nazis evade justice with the aid of Catholic Church officials, some perhaps even inside the Vatican. Sometimes, Sands discovers in his research, the Ratline had the implicit or explicit support of the United States, which valued those men's intelligence about the growing Soviet threat and turned a blind eye to their murderous pasts. This is the owrely world of postwar Rome in which Wächter died, believing himself "the hunted by Americans, Poles, Soviets and Jews" as Sands writes.

In truth, this book's title is a bit of a mis-

Sands was given access to this trove by one of the most intriguing central charac-
ters is "The Ratline." Horst Wächter, the fourth of Otto and Charlotte's six children, who had been safeguarding the papers in his crumbling Austrian castle, Horst is an interesting case — forthright but also per-
versely moody. He steadfastly refuses to acknowledge his father's complicity in the Holocaust, in spite of all evidence to the contrary, including the evidence in docu-
ments in his possession. The tension be-
tween Sands and Horst, the questioner and the questioned, gives "The Ratline" much of its driving force. Sands had met Horst while researching "East West Street," and the two men later became part of a docu-
mentary, "My Nazi Legacy," in which Sands brought together Horst and Niklas Frank, the son of Hans Frank, the Nazi gov-
ernor general of occupied Poland, who was tried and hanged at Nuremberg.

White Niklas, a journalist, is unforgiving of and unapologetic about his father — he car-
ries a photograph of his dead body, snapped in Nuremberg after his trial. "To make sure that he is really dead," he tells Sands in "East West Street" — "Horst, in sharp contrast, refuses to acknowledge his father's actions, and predicts to see his fa-
thor as a good man caught up in a bad sys-
tem. He was especially close to his mother, and believes his father was poisoned — a hypothesis Sands spends much of "The Ratline" pursuing. And yet for all his Mind-
ness, Horst has done a great service to histo-
ry. Rather than destroying the docu-
ments in his possession, he let Sands scra-

nome: "The Ratline" is less about the en-
capge route per se than about Wächter's life and times — his education in Austria, his rise through the ranks of the Nazi Party, his courtship of and marriage to Charlotte Blackburn, a bright, well-educated art-
student. "The Ratline" is a Nazi love story, but a fascinating and important tale, told in vivid detail because Sands was able to make use of an extraordinary cache of doc-
uments: thousands of pages of personal papers and diaries, and years of corre-
spondence between Otto and Charlotte. While Wächter was busy overseeing the deportation of Galician's Jews, and then in hiding between 1945 and 1949, the two wrote to each other using lovely-lovey nicknames.

Charlotte, who died in 1983, was utterly dedicated to her husband and to the Nazi cause. On the shelf in Horst's castle, Sands found a copy of "Mein Kampf," which she had inscribed to Otto: "Through struggle and love, to the finish." When Otto was in hiding in Rome and in need of money, Charlotte said off the record that she had rented from collections in Krakow. And after Otto's death in Rome, Charlotte managed to trans-
port his body back to Austria, illegally. It's a testament to Sands — his forensic inquiring mind, his excellent researchers, his passion to make them come to life — that the book is so unprecedented. "The Ratline" was a podcast for the BBC before Sands put it into book form, and his style here is to bring us along on the quest. There are many extraordinary secondary characters and subplot. Rather than citing the work of scholars, he pops in for visits, including one with David I. Kertzer, whose excellent book "The Pope and Mussolini" offers a vivid picture of the Vatican during the 1930s.

There's an intriguing cameo by David Cornwell, the late John le Carre, who tells Sands he believes Wächter would have been "naturally attractive" to the Vatican and to the Americans, as a "talent-spotter" who identified former Nazis who ought want to work for the West. Cornwell also tells Sands he believed Wächter's death was "basically a Jewish operation, howev-

er indirectly," but offers little evidence. "It's a bunch, really," he says, "so no more than that." Adding, "I would have to say I admired it."

From recently declassified CIA files, Sands learned about an operation con-
ducted by the United States Army Counter Intelligence Corps, or C.I.C., which em-
listed former Nazis to help recruit intel-
ligence assets. A key figure in the operation was Karl Hass, a former SS officer and one of the last people Wächter had vis-
ited before his death. Hass lived just a few years after the war, before becom-
ing assistant director in the C.I.C., where he was arrested and eventually convicted on charges of "perjury and conspiracy" for his role in the March 1944 killing of 215 Belgian civilians at the "Auschwitz" exter-
mination camp outside Rome. Another former SS officer involved in the massacre, Erich Priebke, had escaped via the Ratline to Argentina, where he was arrested, extradited to Italy and also convicted. One of the last cases trials in Europe, it remains a flash-
point of historical memory in Italy.

In the end, "The Ratline" is about the Na-
Zi who didn't escape their descend-
ants, like Horst. It's a reminder that Europe to this day is populated by the ghosts and perpetrators of World War II — a place of tangled family histories and selective denial, but also interminable fault. This impor-
tant book makes it clear that the more dif-
ficult work of history may not be in tracking down the past, but in confronting the ones who didn't...
Death Blow
Why capital punishment in America is on its way out.

By ANAND GIRDHABAD

IN 1982, the Supreme Court made out a death warrant. The condemned was the death penalty itself. The American apparatus of state killing was effectively shut down, the punishment judged too final given the floored human beings who gave it. But this death wasn’t final. A bloodied hand of bloodlust resurrected the death penalty, needling the annual count back up to a peak of 88 executions in 1999. From there, the death penalty began again.

This time, it wasn’t a high exec that
doomed it, but the ensuing, netto-skeleton, hydra-headed, revolution-by-thousand-cuts process through which real change often comes.

The journalist Maurine Chapman’s sear, densely reported first book, “Let the Lord Set Them,” promises a history of “the rise and fall of the death penalty.” But as it tells that factored tale, it becomes — almost unwittingly — a case study that speaks more broadly to our current moment, about building monumental change from the vires of failure.

How? Not through big ideas in Washington, D.C., but through tedious grassroots whitening. Not through purity tests but through unlikely coalitions of the righteous, the faint-hearted, and the grappling. Not by raising hope for victory but by keeping it profile down.

In a season of American life when so many want to get big things done and few seem to get anywhere, this story of the slow dying of the death penalty — one that takes again and again by way of detail — serves as a vaccine against the virus of failure.

Like much that seems inrevocable, the death penalty is ancient. But it appears on the way out now, and, as Chapman, a staff writer for The Marshall Project, shows, it was on the vague once before, in the years leading up to the Supreme Court’s 1972 blow.

“The news of American military atrocities in Vietnam — along with the discovery of German death camps a generation before — gave new power to the argument that governments should be restrained in their pursuit of life and death.”

When the Supreme Court finally ruled in 1972, in Furman v. Georgia, it didn’t declare execution unconstitutional in principle. Rather, it declared the death penalty unconstitutional in its application.

And since 1972, the case has been legal, but the question has been: can it be saved? Chapman answers yes, and the book is a history of that hope.

Chapman interweaves this history with the stories of people who shaped and redressed the issues, starting with Washington, a众筹ing Texas lawyer who has worked to build a true nonviolent true penalty for the worst of us, from the interior of the justice system, first as a Republican press secretary, then as a defense attorney and, later, as an advocate for curbing the death penalty. Chapman shows how the death penalty, even as it changes, is experienced by its victims — and by the families who lose their relatives to it.

Like much that seems inrevocable, the death penalty is ancient. But history shows that it has been, and can again be, undone.

The death chamber at the Texas State Penitentiary in Huntsville, 1972.

The death chamber at the Texas State Penitentiary in Huntsville, 1972.

And so the death penalty, in this new, more structured form. And, as seen in the executions that continue to roll off the electric chair, a group of lawyers, activists and others assume the struggle to bring the murder count down.

Yet the approach many of them take is not to chase a silver-bullet court ruling (though obviously that would be nice) so much as to par out a multifaceted, bottom-up process of incremental erosion. Organizations like the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and the Texas Resource Center chip away at the foundation of marble that falls to the ground, every particle of marble that it, in a sense.

They chip away at executions of those with mental impairments. They chip away at executions of people who committed their crimes as minors. They chip away at executions tainted by some sort of wrongdoing. They chip away at the furrows of the jury of questions that perhaps more properly belong to a freedman done full sen- sen-tion at dawn before the barre quiescent to the justice system.

The chipping worked, in Texas and beyond. Chapman reports: “In 1994, Texas juries sent 43 people to death row. After 2014, that number never rose beyond 18, and in 2017 it dropped to zero. In 2018, death rows around the country reached their historic total population since 1937.”

The death lives on, but it is not well (despite the recent spasms of executions by the Trump administration).

Chapman interweaves the history of the execution with the stories of people who shaped and redressed the issues, starting with Washington, a crowdfunding Texas lawyer who worked to build a true nonviolent true penalty for the worst of us, from the interior of the justice system, first as a Republican press secretary, then as a defense attorney and, later, as an advocate for curbing the death penalty. Chapman shows how the death penalty, even as it changes, is experienced by its victims — and by the families who lose their relatives to it.

Like much that seems inrevocable, the death penalty is ancient. But history shows that it has been, and can again be, undone.

The death penalty lives on, but it is not well (despite the recent spasms of executions by the Trump administration).
Safe Space

After her son died, Emily Rapp Black pulled herself back from the brink.

By JUDITH WARNER

ON JAN. 20, 2013, Emily Rapp Black, a writer and creative writing instructor living in Santa Fe, took her infant son, Ronan, to the emergency room at a hospital in Texas. She thought he was febrile, and the baby cried and screamed. After a hypothermic episode in the newborn nursery, Ronan was diagnosed with bacterial meningitis. He died four days later, on Jan. 24.

On Sunday, in an essay in The New Yorker, Ms. Rapp Black wrote of the experience of losing her son, describing it as a journey into darkness and back again. The piece was, in part, a response to comments from a Christian blog about the death of her son, which she found patronizing and antagonizing.

In the essay, Ms. Rapp Black, who was born in 1981, describes her experience of losing her son and the subsequent journey of mourning and working through grief. She writes about the isolation she felt as a result of her experience and the support she found in her writing and in her community. She also writes about the challenges of grieving and the ways in which she coped with the pain of losing her son.

The essay received widespread attention, and Ms. Rapp Black was interviewed on several television shows and podcasts. She has since become a prominent figure in the grief community and has written extensively about her experience of losing her son and the ways in which she has coped with her grief.

In addition to writing about her experience, Ms. Rapp Black has also spoken about the importance of empathy and understanding in the face of loss. She has called for greater awareness and support for those who are grieving and for a more compassionate approach to the topic of loss.

The essay was widely praised for its honesty and depth, and it has helped to raise awareness of the challenges of grief. It has also sparked a broader conversation about the ways in which people cope with loss and the importance of support and community in the face of tragedy.

The New Yorker

JUDITH WARNER is a staff writer at The New Yorker.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY YANCEY VICK

THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW

THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW

THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW
Essay / Darwin and the Second Sex / By Michael Sims

The father of evolutionary theory took a dim view of women’s potential, with one notable exception.

"I don’t live till I am 80 years old," Charles Darwin wrote to a friend in November 1857, "I shall not come to marvel at finding myself an author." Recently he had received proofs of his first book and could not stop admiring its crisp type and smooth paper. "Voyages of the Adventure and Beagle" rode the spike, and below that VOL. III, and below that DARWIN. The third of three planned volumes by different authors, it was fairly to be completed. He deluged the printer with proofing pages. "If I atten to sense," he complained, "I forgot the spelling and visis versa." Darwin was 38. Bored by five years abroad on the Beagle, he had returned to England to find himself already known in scientific circles for his dispatches home detailing his findings. A career in science had usurped his plan to work as a country parson who dabbled in natural history.

Since March he had lived in a flat on Great Marborough Street near the British Museum, close by his brother, Erasmus. London’s slyly smirry streets were a beaded of coppersmearers, archeans, coffee wagons and talk-failed bobbies. Lifted above the fray by his family’s money, Darwin sat at his desk retail papers and books, gazing at an ugly building across the street and thinking about reproduction, competition and the struggle for life. It would be 23 years before he published "On the Origin of Species."

The following spring, he walked to his brother’s nearby flat for a party. At 31, Erasmus resembled Charles: high forehead, easy smile, side whiskers. Darwin considered Erasmus a host of "very brilliant" dinner parties. He admired his wit, his knowledge of art and literature. Less robust and energetic than Charles, Erasmus pursued no career beyond surrounding himself with accomplished people. These included the historian and coauthor Thomas Carlyle, the mathematician and engineer Charles Babbage, who only the year before had unveiled his mechanical computer the Analytical Engine, a forerunner to his earlier Difference Engine.

Charles was pleased that Erasmus’s servant Sally had prepared, among the fancy spread included a salmon. He noted that dessert alone cost eight Erasmus eightings and a half.

This party afforded the young writer an opportunity to talk with one of children’s authors. When Charles, a friend of Darwin and a keen supporter of the writer’s work, Queen Victoria was a fun and Manchester would attend her coronation that June. She enjoyed a level of influence and fame that Darwin could not imagine. Moreover, Manchester had built his impressive biographeer without the advantages that preceded stepcathers and safety nets for men of Darwin’s class. He had never known want. His father made it clear that Charles, like Erasmus, need not concern himself about money. As a young age Manchester, in contrast, had been forced by the collapse of his father’s textile business to help support her family through needlework and writing. Darwin had met her a year and a half earlier, during his first visit to London upon returning to England. Erasmus was then considered the "most gifted" — if not more — and was "with her noon, morning and night," Darwin

MICHAEL SIMS, whose most recent nonfiction book is "Artur and the Herbarium," is writing a book about Darwin’s relationship with his first child.

Charles Darwin, photographed circa 1854

Darwin had an unkind reputation for plainness and lack of feminine polish. "I was astonished to find," Darwin wrote to his sister Caroline after their first meeting, "how little ugly she is." They talked on a "most wonder- ful number of topics." Like other men who knew her, Darwin considered Manchester overwhelmed with her own projects, her own thoughts and own abilities. Rather than nodding at men’s ideas, she was known for responding with her own. In 1853, the conservative Fraser’s Magazine had ac- knowledge the status of Manchester, then 31, by devoting considerable space to arguing with her conclusions and mocking her appearance. Her second published work, "On Female Education," a defense of her own passions for learn- ing and a critique of the expectation that her education would end when she reached adulthood, came out when she was 20. Her most famous book, "Illustrations of Political Economy" dramatized human stories featuring the economic theories of Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus and James Mill. Sceptical, at times simple, it was hard not accessible and considered a step forward for progressive, human-centered economics.

Her most recent success was "Society in America," based on two years of travel during which she was lusted by artists and legislators. She visited President Andrew Jackson and lodged with the former president James Madison. Both owned slaves, but Manchester did not shrink from poring the horrors of slavery. She had been writing about it, in both a moral aim and an eco- nomically inefficient system, since early in her career. She would have found common ground on this topic with Darwin, a passionate abolitionist who had witnessed slavery’s abuses from Africa to Brazil. Her theories about natural selection were mistrusted in part by a desire to undermine racist notions propagated by scientists. They compared writing methods. Several of Mar- tinus’s books grew out of her detailed travel journals, which was how Darwin had composed his own book about his voyage around the world. Manchester was said to require little revision for the many pages that flowed from her pen. Darwin thought her invariable and seem to have expressed this idea.

Not at all, she replied; a few consecutive hours of hard work tended to exhaust her. Darwin felt the same. He recorded that he felt gratified to learn that Manchester was "not a complete Amazonian."

Decades later, despite many respectful and admiring interactions with Manchester and other female writers and thinkers, as well as with his intelligent and well-read sisters, wife, cousins and colleagues’ wives, Darwin comprehensively dismissed women’s intellectual poten- tial. "The chief distinction in the intellectual powers of the two sexes," he stated in "The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex" (1791), "is shown by men’s attaining to a higher eminence, in whatever he takes up, than can women — whether requiring deep thought, reason or imagination, or merely the use of the senses and hands."

On the American educator and social reformer Mary W. Judge, Caroline Augusta Kennard wrote to ask Darwin if she could correctly understand him on the inferiority of women. Missing the irony, he responded by saying, "I certainly think that women though generally superior to men [in] qualities are inferior in others." She included a further addendum: "women must become "friend-writers" as we men; & we may suspect that the early education of our children, not to mention the happy- ness of our homes, would in this case greatly suffer." Manchester, in contrast, described Darwin as "well employed, earnest-minded, accomplished, and gaudy." She found him "simple, childlike, patriarchal, effective."

Later she was quick to support his "Origin of Species." Unlike the young writer who admired her at a party, she did not try to set herself above the humman race.

Back in 1838, however, before he joined the evolutionary- ary game and follow 10 children born to his wife and tended by nuns whose work gave him the oppor- tunity to be in the New World during the spring and summer of the Victorian era, he wrote about women as if having forgerons the countless ways he had learned them throughout his life. Darwin summed up his admiring view of Harriot Manchester, writing to his sister Susan: "She is a wonderful woman."
Are We There Yet?
Around the world with three teenagers, and living to tell the tale.

By AMITY GAIGE

CO-TOUROUR PRAISES: Sometimes I feel as if I'm doing OK as a parent, other times I feel like a chihuahua in one long, slow, slow-coculitis crisis. When my 15-year-old son screams for help from his counter-revolution team while shooting his way around the world in Rainbow Six Siege, I consider myself in to the authorities. In the fall of 2019, faced with reality, alterable marathons feelings about raising his teenagers, Charles Wheeler chose another tack, and the result is his next travel memoir, "We Came, We Saw, We Left." "Team Wheeler" comprises Wheelers' story-tellers, and his anti-family dialogues are spot-on, but he is not — and does not pretend to be — a poet of places. Readers will not find the closely observed details of landscape and culture of a Freya Stark or V.S. Naipaul, nor the self-imposed isolation at the core of much modern travel writing. Wheelers has a habit of relating for comparisons to movies. He compares the Belgo Roman Salt of the "Star" Wozniak film, a morose forest pathway in New Zealand reminds him of "Robots". He tends to find that which is unknown or new to something within his own frame of reference. In Patagonia, "the jagged snowy peaks rising more the atmosphere like looked at someone had dropped the mountains of Colorado into one of the lakes of New Mexico. Lessons plans the gathered glaciers." Although Wheelers journey spurs myriad subjects and places, he narrows his aim to persuading us to take a "family gap year." But we love it! We live it — but we can't right now. Many of us can't under normal circumstances. Seems to me, a travel narrative necessarily functions as a stand-in for the trip you really aren't going to take.

Weelohas focuses on melancholy, hurt feelings and the high-stakes transactions of life on the go.

"We Came, We Saw, We Left" tells an up-close story. What I liked best about the book was watching two people parent their teenagers well. The Wheelers know respect as a negotiating with some appropriate savants. They let their kids FOnder, lick self-inflicted wounds, get a bit lost and — every once in a while — sink into the hotel internet. And in the end, the kids prove themselves to be more resilient and sensitive than Wheeler knew them to be. To whatever measure each of us was able to cross borders and travel before, surely we miss doing so. No arguing here — we want to go and see.

Bromance
A middle-aged dad struggles to connect in a lonely world.

By A.J. JACOBS

IN ONE SENSE, the journalist Billy Baker has undertaken a self-destructing task: to cure his loneliness. But he's made a documentary — seems more social — but instead he's chosen one of the loneliest professions, involving endless days of solitary confinement in a room with your keyboard and self-defeat, to try to reconnect with friends. Still, Baker manages to pull off, mostly. While not typing at his desk alone, he speaks to psychologists, goes on maul-binding trips and tries to embrace his vulnerable side. The result is "We Need to Hang Out" A Memoir of Making Friends by Billy Baker 224 pp. Avon Reader Press. $27.

Hang Out," an entertaining mix of social science, memoir and humor, is a Danish Goldenham book were filtered through the lens of Will Ferrell. Baker, a middle-aged dad and Boston Globe writer, starts with the thesis that we've been in the midst of a loneliness crisis — even before Covid. "In the 21st century," he writes, "loneliness has become an epidemic." He cites a 2019 survey that found 53 percent of Americans are officially lonely, according to the "gold standard" U.S.C.A. Loneliness Scale. As the sociologist Robert Putnam put it 30 years ago, we are increasingly "bowling alone." This is not a trivial problem. "Loneliness kills." Baker writes. It's a public health threat linked to shorter life spans, heart disease, obesity and Alzheimer's. So, how on earth, did we lose so many friends? Social scientists point to several culprits: Fewer of us jam city or communal organizations like the communities of the Elks. We are less likely than previous generations to attend churches, synagogues or mosques. We are prone to overworking, overscheduling and overdrinking. Social media was supposed to connect us, but has turned out to be a poor substitute for in-person contact. Then came Covid. Now everything alone is risky. In the pre-Covid era, Baker embarks on several adventures to try to revive his withdrawing friendships. He writes on a trave- lour in Montana with his college buds. He starts a sort of green-up for house, where he and his pals can hang out, drink beer and watch books. He tries to resurrect his high school's Senior Skip Day and persuade his friends to skills a buddy to meet in the park. Baker is a sort of "supercalifragilisticexpialidocious" guy and his style is appropriately casual, as if

A.J. Jacobs is a contributor to NPR and the author, most recently, of "Thanks a Hug: A Gratitude Journey."

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHARLES WHEELER

THE WHEELER FAMILY ON THE BOLDER SALT FLATS.

The NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW 13

THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW 13
Dreamland

The story of a civil rights activist's struggle to create a Black American town on a former slave plantation.

By CHRISS LEIBSON

STUPME up you've heard this one: A Black man walks into a federal government of- fice and says, "Give me a lot of money and I'll build you a Black city." And the govern- ment, to everyone's surprise, says, "OK, here's $14 million?"

Not most people haven't. The story of Floyd McKissick's dream, struggle, and, al- l too rare, failure to build an American city on behalf of Black citizens is one of the greatest untold stories in American his- tory. In "Soul City," Thomas Healy chroni- cles this tragically poignant enterprise by McKissick, a civil rights activist turned capitalist, who attempted, beginning in 1961, to build "Soul City," a Black-run city on a former slave plantation near North Carolina, close to Southern Kansan country.

SOUL CITY

Race, Equality and the Lost Dream of an American Utopia

By Thomas Healy


McKissick was almost certain to fail the moment he purchased 3,900-acre plantation in Warren County. So, with the cooling off of the outbreak, the chal- lenge for Healy is to reconnect the tale in such a way that our comprehension not only of McKissick's attempt but of his iner- tial defeat is deepened — to make the story of a Black American who tried to dream the biggest American dream while falling to realize it of value for our contin- ued struggle with racial injustices today.

Floyd McKissick was a civil rights-era legend. Raised in the South, he was inti- mately familiar with white supremacy. Healy reports that when McKissick was just 4 years old, he innocently resisted moving to the back of a stove-cut, prompt- ing the conductor to snarl at his aunt to come forward to get her "Black ass out of a bitch and take him back there with you." From then on, Healy writes, McKissick was continually reminded that he was "a Black boy in a white land." This incident, along with later racist encounters, includ- ing in a school where he was the only Black student, fueled his career as an activist. McKissick helped organize sit-ins in the wake of the 1960 Greensboro sit-in at Woolworth's, an early example of nonviolent direct action, and went on to become a leader in the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), which played a key role in the Freedom Rides through the South.

McKissick's back story is important to understanding his dream for Soul City. This

CHRISS LEIBSON is an associate professor of philosophy at Johns Hopkins and the author of "The Making of a Black Matter: A Brief History of an Idea."

fancy, even as organizations like the N.A.A.C.P, etc. Yet McKissick's preferred solutions were on pragmatic as it was revol- utionary: Blacks needed a city they could call their own, one that would allow them to control local social services and economic institutions.

In the mid-1960s, President Lyndon B. Johnson launched the Model Cities pro- gram to spur urban development, ease crowding and reduce poverty in major cit- ies. Healy, a professor at Seton Hall Law School and the author of a book about Oliver Wendell Holmes and the First Amend- ment, documents an excellent job reconnecting the details of McKissick's project, and we learn of the redux process he and his team en- dured across four presidential administra- tions to access the $4.5 million in land guar- anteed promised by the Department of

Housing and Urban Development but never delivered in full.

We learn how McKissick planned his hope on Nixon administration and made an implicit deal with the president, switching his party affiliations to Republi- can and stump in North Carolina to se- cure the Black vote for Nixon in his 1972 re-election bid to return for support from the country's highest political office. The move helped. In 1973, Soul City received enough money to break ground and build some roads, homes and an industrial cen- ter — Soul Tech I — with the aim of attract- ing manufacturing jobs.

In the end, none of McKissick's efforts

One part of the problem is Healy's reluc- tance to contextualize the tale of Soul City. He acknowledges racism generally but presents the slow and inevitable collapse of the project as though it were separate from the wider phenomena of institutionalized inequality. Nixon was a booster of Soul City, yet it was his administration, through the grant-giving powers of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administra- tion, that provided the seed money for the criminal justice program that we are now working to dismantle. Under Nixon, the agency's budget went from $150 million.

That Soul City's fate is directly bound up with this development is evident in the fact that, though the town's residential neighbor- hoods were never completed and today only about 200 people reside in them, Soul Tech I is now a manufacturing plant for janitorial supplies that relies on the labor of prisoners at a nearby correctional facility.

NEITHER ARE OTHER implications of Healy's presidential approach. We are too rarely given access to the internal lives of the main characters during their most try- ing moments. For example, the word "roads" in Soul City was a major obstacle to McKissick's efforts to attract investment from major companies like General Mo- tors. Such corporations promised the word as "non-Black," even separatist, and thus likely to scare off potential white residents. "Soul City" was meant to be Black-run but residentially integrated.

McKissick refused to change the name until it was too late. His connection to the word was likely understood, but its signifi- cances in the book is unwittingly commis- sioned by this coda. It is as if we're still in the middle of the book, when McKissick, figuring anulate, takes up preaching, say- ing that we learn how he always dreamed of being in the project and long held strong religious sentiments. That this fundamen- tal trait is still visible in his character he seems to want to abandon the name "Soul City."

Smaller problems abound as well. Though Healy early invokes the fact that Soul City was located near Kansan country, he only ever vaguely signals that the city faced local racist resistance. And though Healy energetically describes a major player in the Watergate scandal as a "dirty trick- ster" somehow the segregationist Senator Jesse Helms, who promised McKissick that he'd "kill Soul City," is never called what he was: a racist.

There is much to be learned in "Soul City" about the role of local racism, and what is should mean for us today. But if we want to know what the project meant at the time and what is should mean for us today, Healy's book provides more of a reason to dream of a Black city than rather than finger on its pages.

PHOTOGRAPH BY NIKKI CRAWFORD/SPECIAL TO THE PRESS
By MATTHEW YELESIAS

in his new book, “Mistrust,” Ethan Zuckerman takes us on a kaleidoscopic tour of everyone from Gandhi to Bitcoin enthusiasts, Breivik’s victims to Black Lives Matter activists — people and groups whom he calls “insurgentists” because they are trying to overthrow or work around what has been a worldwide decline in social trust. Fighting this erosion from another direction are the “institutionalists,” those who seek to bolster trust and prevent any further crumbling.

Zuckerman, the former director of the M.I.T. Center for Civic Media, writes with the tone of a Forest-surfing insurgent who’s come to see in Donald Trump,

MISTRUST
Why Losing Faith in Institutions Provides the Tools to Transform Them
By Ethan Zuckerman
275 pp., W.W. Norton & Company, $26.95.

Olson and Antonioni activate the dark side of a society in which all trust is lost and anything goes. Rather than liberate, Zuckerman correctly explains, this systematic distrust has proved to be a blessing for authoritarian around the world who have only further undermined traditional arbiters of truth (e.g., journalists) in order to open the way to their own propaganda. He offers the particularly absurd example that in Vladimir Putin’s Russia, so all-encompassing is the leader’s control that many Russians see the mere fact that a doctor or a teacher or a nurse hasn’t been murdered yet as evidence that he doesn’t represent a real opposition force.

It’s clear Zuckerman hasn’t abandoned his insurgent sympathies for those trying to overthrow or work around what is irreparably broken. He writes sympathetically of the legions of small oading (the libertarian fantasy of building a new nation out of the data collected by social media and other blockchain technology) that powers cryptocurrency to establish new virtual nation-states.

But he seems to find most interesting those activists with more conventionally progressive politics who embrace new tactics. He offers the fascinating story of the Association for the Empowerment of Workers and Peasants in India, along with the more familiar tales of Bryan Stevenson and the success of digital activism in reshaping coverage of law enforcement.

One of his big examples is the Black Lives Matter movement. Citing research from his former lab at M.I.T., he notes that after Michael Brown’s death and the protests in Ferguson, police killings of people of color “were 11 times more likely to receive media coverage than deaths that preceded Brown.” Media stories also became “far more likely to cover a story not as an isolated incident but as a pattern of police violence against people of color.”

Zuckerman’s heroes have what he calls “internal efficacy” (they believe they can do things) but low “external efficacy” (they think political leaders don’t care about them). So they operate outside the system, persuading retailers to change their approach to selling firearms, denationalizing institutions by shifting media coverage.

“HeToo is a different kind of movement,” he writes. “Sexual assault and harassment have been illegal for years, so its main demand is for changes not in law but in norms.”

This looks like an unsatisfactory effort to reframe failure as success. The social media phenomenon revealed that conduct short of assault but still deeply troubling to its victims is fairly widespread in American life. And nothing fundamentally changed — no alteration to legal liability rules for employers, managers or bystanders, for example — to redress that situation. I hope that norms have changed, but there’s no clear evidence that they really have. Much-deserved Pulitzer Prizes were won, but crack investigative journalists exposing predators once by one is not a visible fix.

This is where Zuckerman himself lands when considering the coronavirus pandemic and where he illustrates best the limits of the insurgentists: Actual functioning institutions become indispensable, and couldn’t simply be worked around with internal efficacy and digital savvy. Recounting a conversation with the activist EJ Horvath, Zuckerman proclaims himself a “revalorizationist” who believes that “we need institutions that deserve our passionate support and defense, and if the institutions we rely on now do not clear that bar, we need to demand new ones that take their place.” That seems correct and sensible, though it perhaps raises the question of what the point was in introducing the dichotomy in the first place.

Zuckerman concludes his book by saying that “we are likely to find that institutions fall when we no longer recognize ourselves as a single nation, when we no longer feel responsibility or obligation to our fellow citizens.”

Out of context, one could imagine that flowing from the pen of Stephen Miller as part of a demonization of globalist purports with aynian seekers and the proletarian work of the IRS Project in tearing down our common culture. In the course of a book that praises the protests that halted Trump’s “zero tolerance” immigration initiative and casually tones off an endorsement of Ta-Nehisi Coates’s case for reparations, I’m quite sure that’s not what he means. But in many respects the divide between a call for unity that can be read as nationalist and one that can be understood as cosmopolitan is the real split in the world today.

Another way of thinking about institutional trust is precisely in terms of that divide.

Major institutions have long been led primarily by the members of an educated elite. But it’s only over the past generation or so that college graduates with cosmopolitan attitudes have become a large enough share of the population that educated people’s sensibilities could be a force in mass politics. Consequently, today institutional leaders face meaningful pressure — often from some of the young, college-educated activists whom Zuckerman valorizes like David Hogg, fighting for gun control, and Alicia Garcia of Black Lives Matter — to use their power to reflect and act on those views. But when they yield, they face fierce backlash from a populist right rooted in the cultural sensibilities of older, white, generally less-educated people.

Meanwhile, there are those who feel caught between these worldviews: the working-class people of color who deeply endorse left-wing radical chic and feel the pull of things like patriotism and traditional gender norms without wanting to hop on a right-wing bandwagon inflected with racism and indifference to the material needs of the lower class. These are precisely the people with the least direct access to media attention or the political process. They are the ones, more than the insurgentists of left or right, that institutional leaders need to find a way to better serve if they want to preserve their power and restore their legitimacy.
At Home in the World

Continued from page 1

but in case you're imagining some stately, somber affair, let me assure you that "My Year Among," a wild ride down a meandering prose river of grocery shopping, wia screwed up as they are, and as an effec-

tive replacement for his mother. Vail's de-


tained, white, his mother left him and

his white father when he was young, and to

say that he is ambivalent about his identity

would be to miss the point. Tiller's identity

is at times a thread, a leiw, and a tripwire, and

that书记 is the best possible way to de-

pendent on the vision of whoever is looking

at him, was only too familiar to him, a bi-

cial Korean-American. I felt as if I were

spending time with the person my neph-

ew's son will be one day.

Lee alternates between the stories of

Tiller's low-key life with Vail and his life-

changing travels with Peng, his boss and

mentor. The latter account serves as a back

story that in many other novels would be

the protagonist's entire role of passage. We

move from the New York suburb of Vail's

talk show to Peng's at a trendy shanghaied

ing surfing and fast massage in Hawaii, to

the Qinghai-Tibet plateau, scuba-diving and cir-


cut-breaking sex in Shenzhen and Macau —

all of Peng's life bringing an Indonesian

health editor called juma to a wellness-

based resort, with Tiller's antipasto and

and Gen Z pitchman.

Peng is a particular Chinese-American

chemist and superfood entrepreneur when Tiller meets Peng, to break-

en surfing and fast massage in Hawaii, to

the Qinghai-Tibet plateau, scuba-diving and cir-


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and Gen Z pitchman.
In Cold Blood
An ethnography of a Midwestern crime lab.

By HELEN STAPPINSKI
In the hierarchy of literary respect, fiction is king, followed by historical narrative and, dead last, the literary memoir. To those who have never practiced it, or those who practice it hardly, memoir writing is simply a regeneration of life events. But a well-crafted memoir involves archival research, hours of taped interviews, a narrative structure that leaves more on the cutting-room floor than on the page. Reporting on your own life or the lives of people who share your DNA can be much more challenging than reporting on strangers. For starters, some friends and family will hate you for it. But the main difference is the emotional investment — and emotional payoff — which can push the memoir to the top of the literary heap.

In her new book, "Small Talk," after much throat clearing and hedging about not being a memoirist, Breedlove Shorts — a master of historical narrative — dips up the small-time, small-town history of his family. Until now, Shorts has written books mostly about people he’s never met, trying to get inside the heads of Peter Skene Ogden in “The Island at the Center of the World”; Baruch Spinoza in “Amsterdam”; and George Washington in his last book, “Revolution Song.” But the most fascinating characters in those books — for Shorts and for the reader — are always the one that the story is about. An Italian-American whose family name was changed long ago from Scanziano to Scanzoni and who comes from a small-time criminal clan in Johnstown, Pa., people have never heard of before. History has not forgotten them. It never knew them to begin with.

Shorts’ search for his long-dead grandpa and namesake, Russell “Russell” Shorts, involves FBI documents, newspaper archives, police records and, most difficult of all, deeply intimate communication with his own father, Tony Shorts, a hood in his day. toughest guys, was a tough police officer in southeastern Pennsylvania in the 1930s and ’40s, known as no one, or nothing, ever seems to have known very well.

Italian mobsters, Shorts argues, were not worse than the immoral barons of the late 19th century. Through the illegal lottery, men like Russ provided hope — and money — to the mob. Still, Shorts insists, “we all have to be careful about our conceptions of the mob.”

HELEN STAPPINSKI is the author of two family memoirs, “Five Finger Discount: A Crushed Family History” and “Murder in Maline.” A True Story of Passion, Family and Forgiveness in Southern Italy.” She currently works on a new book, which is about someone else’s family.

Steam and factory workers of hitting it big and escaping their drab lives.

Shorts awkwardly dances around his grandfather’s story, giving us some fascinating history on the numbers racket, the Jazztownslot, Prohibition, the Sicilian roots and the songs of Frank Sinatra.

Eventually, Shorts grows in the mirror.

In nursing homes, hospitals and a Holiday Inn, he meets “the boys,” the winegums who knew his Grandpa the Frankie. Mike and a sociopath named Rip, as well as the girls who were there back in the day. The narrative tension comes from whether Shorts will uncover the mystery of Grandpa before these firsthand witnesses — Tony included — die of natural causes. These guys are in their 80s. It’s a race against time, like all historical excavation.

A Washington State Patrol Crime Lab later lends its evidence marks.

and protocols that shape how these criminals maneuver through their jobs.

Becky examines what she calls the “culture of anticipation,” a mind-set she claims is prevalent in every crime lab. It can be seen in the way criminals must balance their handling of evidence and their interpretation of data with the needs of lawyers and the courts, all while striving to maintain the integrity of their sciences.

The specter of court testimony often shapes the thinking of “captive” forensic scientists, she writes. Becky points out, correctly, that crime lab workers, in addition to mastering their field, must also develop thick skins in translating their findings into forms understandable to the broader public (i.e., jurors) and to those in the criminal justice system.

In 2009, the National Academy of Sciences released a report outlining problems with forensic sciences and making suggestions for correcting them. The report, critiqued by many forensic scientists and more than 250,000 scientists in the field, outlined the legal code of procedures, the need to retrain forensic scientists, and the need for training in law enforcement.

Becky’s portrait of the daily conflict faced by crime lab workers should prove enlightening to outsiders. Pulling criminals one way is their allegiance to neatness and objectivity concerning their science. Pulling them the other way is their constant need to foresee the demands of the criminal justice system.

The writing is crisp and jargon-free, and the text includes many interesting anecdotes. Though repetitive at times, this account of a fascinating work world manages to be both scholarly and engaging.

MOBSTER TALE
A master of historical narrative turns his gaze on his family’s past.

By KATHY REICHIS
LOCATIONS PRINCIPLE STATES that any contact between two objects results in an exchange. In crime scene parlor, that means stuff gets left behind. Good news for cops and prosecutors, bad news for crimi-

BLOOD, POWDER, AND RESIDUE
How Crime Labs Translate Evidence into Proof
By Beth A. Birody

powder and residue are the primary sources of forensic sciences and what make it such a powerful tool.

The title catchy, the cover provocative, but for readers seeking the standard suite into the inner workings of a forensic lab, Beth A. Birody’s book offers something quite different — a live, human angle. The author is a sociologist interested in how relationships function in different work environments. And “Blood, Powder, and Residue” grew out of her observations at a Midwestern crime laboratory.

The book is what Becky calls an organizational ethnography covering the four units she observed: forensic biology, responsible for collecting biological fluids and performing DNA profiles on those samples; chemistry, in charge of identifying drugs; toxicology, in which traces of narcotics in the body are picked up; and comparative evidence, where fingerprints, firearms and tool marks are processed.

For those working in these units, those overlapping social settings determine much of their world: the lab, the criminal justice system and the broader public. Each has its own expectations, attitudes
U Is for Unfinished

Two picture books recognize and celebrate African-American challenges and achievements.

By AJABARI ASIM

The week I wrote this review, Kamala Harris became the first African-American woman to be vice president of the United States. At the same time, Amanda Gorman, the nation’s first Youth Poet Laureate, dazzled the world with her inaugural poem. Roughly two weeks before that, Blanca Smith joined the Red Sox organization, becoming the first Black woman hired to coach professional baseball. There will be more firsts before the sun sets on this day, and already Black authors and illustrators across the country are dreaming up ways to get these new accomplishments down on the page.

HAVE I EVER TOLD YOU BLACK LIVES MATTER
Written by Shaw Motel King
Illustrated by Bobby C. Martin Jr.
80 pp. Tilbury House. $17.95. (Ages 9 to 12)

The ABCs of Black History
Written by Risa Corter
Illustrated by Lauren Semmer
64 pp. Workman. $14.95. (Ages 5 and up)

But which breakthroughs should they include? No matter their choices, other equally worthy facts and personalities will have to be left out, and well-informed readers will call out miss of omission. Why include Augusta Savage but not Edmonia Lewis? Angel Davis but not Assata Shakur? Ruby B. Neiman but not Fred Hampton? These are never unanswerable questions, which is why we have only many pages. Besides, the Black experience is so vast and multifaceted it can’t ever be contained within covers. Shari Minter-King, on a certificate from the Center on Race and Race Relations at the University of Florida, where she is also a professor of history and the dean of HBCUs, points to all the figures: “I have an unending supply of notable figures such as Lois-Jacqueline, and Charlayne Hunter-Gault.”

“Have I Ever Told You?” adopts a conversational approach. The author’s voice engages the reader:

“Is there something you would like to share about the life and times of someone who is important to you?”

An excellent book for children include “Protesting the Chicken: The Story of Young John Lewis” and “A Child’s Introduction to African-American History.”

As in “The ABCs of Black History,” the text features the uniqueness of Black history in the context of beloved children’s stories from around the world. It also highlights the importance of Black history in shaping our present and future.

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Perhaps the most moving part of the book is the final page, which features a beautiful image of a child holding a sign that reads: “Black Lives Matter.”

A few pages later, in “Have I Ever Told You,” the text features the uniqueness of Black history in the context of beloved children’s stories from around the world. It also highlights the importance of Black history in shaping our present and future.

Perhaps the most moving part of the book is the final page, which features a beautiful image of a child holding a sign that reads: “Black Lives Matter.”

Both books are well-researched and beautifully illustrated, making them ideal for young readers who want to learn more about Black history.

In conclusion, “U Is for Unfinished” highlights the importance of recognizing and celebrating African-American challenges and achievements. By acknowledging the contributions of Black people, we can inspire the next generation of leaders and creators to continue the fight for justice and equality.

From “Have I Ever Told You” that Black Lives Matter?
From “The ABCs of Black History” that Black History
From “U Is for Unfinished” that African-American achievements are worth celebrating.

The Black experience is vast and multifaceted, and it’s important to recognize and celebrate its contributions. By including these stories in our classrooms and libraries, we can help ensure that Black history is not just a part of the past, but a part of our future, as well.

Perhaps the most important message from these books is that by recognizing and celebrating Black history, we can inspire the next generation to continue the fight for justice and equality. By acknowledging the contributions of Black people, we can create a more inclusive and just society for all.

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COMBINED PRINT AND E-BOOK BEST SELLERS

1
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3
4
5
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8
9
10

Fiction
THE DUKES AND THE DUCHESS
By Julia Quin
(Delphi) The Duke of Hastings, the basis of the Netflix series "Bridgerton," strives to unify his family with the help of a conniving duchess.

BEFORE SHE DISAPPEARED
By Lisa Unger
(Seal) A woman, on a quest to find her missing mother, dives into the secrets of a small town, uncovering a dark truth.

THE VAMPIRE_WALPOLE
By Seth Bennett
(St. Martin's) A novel that explores the life of a young man who discovers he is a vampire and must navigate the challenges of being both.

THE INVENTION LIBRARY
By Matt Haig
(Penguin) A middle-school library is the gateway to a magical universe.

THE INVISIBLE LIFE OF ADDIE LARUE
By Delia Owens
(Random) A young woman who is trapped in an endless loop of lives.

THE Lies OF THE WOLVES
By David Ignatius
(Harper) A novel based on real events of the Spanish Civil War.

WHERE THE CRAZIES SLEEP
By Donald E. Westlake
(Atria) A mystery novel set in a mental institution.

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ANNIE'S PEOPLE
By Stephenie Meyer
(Random) A novel about a young girl and her family.

TRISTAN LANE
By Martin H. Greenberg
(Harper) A young man who discovers a secret that changes his life.

NOVELS

11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20

NONFICTION
A PROPOSED LAND
By Barack Obama
(Grand Central) The former president's memoir of his time in office and the challenges he faced.

CASTLE
By Stephen King
(Harper) A novel about a man who discovers a secret in his family.

GREENLIGHTS
By Matthew McConaughey
(Grand Central) The actor's memoir about his life and career.

ANATOMY
By John Adam

IN THE TRENCHES
By Tim O'Brien
(Random) A novel about a young man's experiences in the Vietnam War.

THE BODY KEEPS THE SCORE
By Bessel van der Kolk
(Riverhead) A novel about the effects of trauma on the body.

BORN A CRIMINAL
By Tim Foote
(Atlantic) A memoir about life in prison.

THE TRUTH WE HOLD
By Kamala Harris
(Random) A memoir about the challenges of leadership.

A SHARK IN THE POND
By George Saunders
(Rand McNally) A collection of short stories.

NO-HEAVEN FOR GOOD BOYS
By Yehuda Bacon
(Harper) A novel about a young man's journey to find his place in the world.

NO STANDARDS
By No Standards
(Random) A novel about a young man's journey to find his place in the world.

DESTRUCTION, DAWL
By Emily St. John
(Random) A novel about a young man's journey to find his place in the world.

The New York Times best sellers are compiled and selected by the best sellers staffs of the New York Times, Inc. For separate lists from other publications, please visit our website at nytimes.com/books.

EDITORS' CHOICE/STAFF PICKS FROM THE BOOK REVIEW

THAT OLD COUNTRY MAGIC
By E. L. James
(Harper) A novel about a young man's journey to find his place in the world.

NO-HEAVEN FOR GOOD BOYS
By Yehuda Bacon
(Harper) A novel about a young man's journey to find his place in the world.

NO STANDARDS
By No Standings
(Random) A novel about a young man's journey to find his place in the world.

DESTRUCTION, DAWL
By Emily St. John
(Random) A novel about a young man's journey to find his place in the world.

NEW YORKER
NO STANDARDS
By No Standings
(Random) A novel about a young man's journey to find his place in the world.

DESTRUCTION, DAWL
By Emily St. John
(Random) A novel about a young man's journey to find his place in the world.

THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW
Presidential Library Angie Thomas has had a few peaks experiences in her career, and one occurred right before a phone interview to discuss what it’s like to have two books on the top of the bestseller list at once. (Her first novel, “Concrete Rose,” is No. 1 on the young adult hardcover list and her debut, “The Hate U Give,” is No. 4.) “My editor told me that Dr. Jill Biden shouted me out!” Thomas said. “I was sitting here doing research in proper scrubs because I’m getting a dog in the next couple of months. Suddenly, my editor texted to tell me that Dr. Jill Biden shouted me out at the American Library Association midwinter conference! She said she just bought “The Hate U Give.””

Thomas also asked me for a glimpse of her life, something she’s tagged by teachers and librarians and was able to see a video clip of the moment. She said, “What shocked me was, this novel about a 16-year-old girl dealing with police brutality found its way into the hands of the first lady of the United States. Had you told little Angie that 10-years-ago, she wouldn’t have believed she was going to go on and make the right connections that made that happen — that this little Black girl in Mississippi whose family sometimes didn’t know if they would have food would have a book in the White House.”

Thomas’s new novel, “Concrete Rose,” is a poignant and powerful story of her father, a veteran, the main character in “The Hate U Give.” In this incarnation, Maverick is anning and working two jobs while his own father is in prison, where he discovers that his girlfriend is pregnant. Thomas said her story to tell her back story was inspired by interest from readers: “So many kids would tell me Maverick is the best dad they’ve seen; they wish their dad was like him. We know he was once in a gang and did drugs — and for some people, that doesn’t sit with the father and the man we see. I started to think about the character of his deeper life. Having those conversations with Russell Harris, who played Maverick in the movie, really sparked the flame.”

Getting inside the head of a teenage boy wasn’t as challenging as Thomas expected it to be, but she struggled with whether to show her protagonist as a teenager. She said, “I thought I would write the scenes where he’s fighting it because he’s that kid who can’t really do it. But I had conversations with Black men who encouraged me — and being vulnerable to give them those moments on the page as when a young Black boy picks this book up, he’s given permission to...”

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Paperback Row / BY JENNIFER KRAUS

AT THE CENTER OF ALL BEAUTY: Solitude and the Creative Life, byuster Johnson. (Holt, 227 pp., $16.99.) A philosopher and author of novels, memoirs and essays who grew up next door to Trumpet magazine, Johnson argues that solitude, the opposite of loneliness, is essential for creativity (as evidenced by the outputs of history’s most productive figures), but also for finding happiness and, unselfishly, in the world.


STRONGLY: One Man’s Quest to Save the World’s Wild Salmon, by Tucker Nickol. (Random House, 305 pp., $15.) The “New York Times” bestseller this month, Nickol introduces us to a Russian oligarch who owns an American salmon company and is on a mission to save the world’s wild salmon from extinction. A compelling and inspiring story that will leave you inspired.


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PRINT/HARDCOVER BEST SELLERS

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2021

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Here are 175 true stories of love, each told in 100 words or less. Romantic and passionate, sibling and parental, requited and unrequited, lost and found. The stories are tiny, but the love they contain are anything but. Honest, funny, tender, wise, and always surprising, these ordinary moments born so bright that they reveal humanity, and our own selves, in their light.


Available now wherever books are sold.
THE DANGERS OF SMOKING IN BED

Stories
By Minilm Enríquez
Translated by Megan McDowell

There’s something thrilling about other people’s clutter — at least within the collection’s 12 stories of death, sex, and the occult. The voids are engaged in a phallic dog-pen. “It’s not exactly practical to try and strangle a dead person,” one woman narrates upon seeing theummited corpse of her great-aunt, who died in infancy. “But a girl can’t be desperate and reasonable at the same time.” Enríquez’s plots deteriorate with satisfying regularity: In “The Cat,” a curse strips an entire neighborhood of its livelihood within approximately three pages. “The good-will went all to hell,” she writes. “Goca ate her cat, and then she killed herself.” Bad odors emanate throughout, rich and viscous and degrading; one “was drunk most forgotten in the fridge and turned blue-purple.” Twice, people defecate without warning on the sidewalk.

A journalist in Buenos Aires, Enríquez sets most of the stories in and around her home city, and populates them with South American mysticism. One story features San La Muerte, a saint who takes the shape of a grinning skeleton; another a statue of an Afro-Brazilian spirit. Largely its inhabitable women, raggedy slum dwellers and dead children — those who are ordinarily powerless — who wield undo power in this collection, and they soon uninterest in being reasonable. And Enríquez is particularly adept at capturing the single-minded intensity of teenage girls. Obsessed with sex and with a hunky older boy named Diego, the adolescent friend group in “Our Lady of the Quarry” speaks in first-person plural and stones in a playhouse that eventually turns murderous. But it’s the young female fan of a dead pop star, “in Most,” who perform the book’s most apalling act.

Of some of the stories vividly, the best mass close on the verge of some transcendent climax, as when a woman who mutilates white (listening to a local band’s second album) believes she’s in a trance and is possessed by the goddess of death. In “The Abduction of Found Love,” — the only story told from a male point of view — is an evocative depiction of how much one can get anything right takes down her daughter’s predator with extreme force. “Explosive!” — a story that takes the notion of eating one’s young to its logical limit — is on sharp with perplexity and complicity. But some stories become so one-note in their effort to make a point. “In “The Green,” Zoy’s foes are nothing less than pariah and the church. “The Loss of Heaven” — the only story told from a male point of view — is a cutting portrait of Fred, who seems “expensive-looking things.” An actor, thinks women over him, attention, and can’t bear to be alone: “He was wanted here, she wanted him, and Fred explained his snare.” It’s women and girls who really hold sway in this book, their cares and secrets and self-delusions.

CHILDA LACRO is the book reviews editor at The Rampax.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2021

MILK BLOOD HEAT

Stories
By Daniel W. Moniz

Life’s inflection points, mundane but universal, mark the Black and brown Floridians who populate these stories: the 15-year-old who begins to accept her absent mother for who she is, the 15-year-old who realizes that her overbearing mother might see her more clearly than she thought, women on the verge of adultery or immobilized over whether to have children or plunged into grief after a miscarriage.

But in Moniz’s collection, the ordinary experience of being female is faced with a kind of enchantment. That 15-year-old girl collects animal bones and watches “a forest of women undulating under a full harvest moon” at the festival her grandfather throws in the backyard. Two best friends drink milk mixed with blood, ceremoniously, to mark each other as blood sisters. “Pink is the color for girls,” one of them notes. Entire stories seem bathed in a warm radiance: the “low golden light” of a restaurant to which the bartender finds unexpected grace in a cold night, the way a 15-year-old becomes “incandescent” with newfound power and knowledge. One can glow with both love and rage.

Many of these stories draw their force from a well- honed righteousness that turns, at times, into a double-edged sword. In the particularly delicious “The Hearts of Our Enemies,” a mother who can’t seem to get anything right takes down her daughter’s predator with extreme force. “Explosive!” — a story that takes the notion of eating one’s young to its logical limit — is on sharp with perplexity and complicity. But some stories become so one-note in their effort to make a point. “In “The Green,” Zoy’s foes are nothing less than pariah and the church. “The Loss of Heaven” — the only story told from a male point of view — is a cutting portrait of Fred, who seems “expensive-looking things.” An actor, thinks women over him, attention, and can’t bear to be alone: “He was wanted here, she wanted him, and Fred explained his snare.” It’s women and girls who really hold sway in this book, their cares and secrets and self-delusions.

WILD SWING

Stories
By Darío Nors
Translated by Miral Holub

None of the characters in these 14 compact, brazen stories are fully satisfied with where they find themselves, whether it’s an abandoned fairground or a Copenhagen swimming pool or a ferry crisscrossing the North Sea. Nors’s protagonists take refuge in their memories or in their wishful, imagined dramas; they flirt on relationship-elastic snippets of conversation. “Nobody knows that he told her that — that he love couldn’t be genuine.” Lima thinks of a recent breakup in “By Sibarist Station.” She’s going door to door collecting funds “for the Cancer Society,” but her pretenses are false; she isn’t affiliated with any such organization; she simply has the disease herself.

This kind of acute situational irony — the distance between thought and reality — animates all of Nors’s stories, particularly those in which nothing actually happens. The entirety of “In a Deer Stand” is devised to a man stranded in the wilderness with an injured ankle. He’s just had a fight, but he refuses to reconcile with the seriousness of his own circumstance. He’s only imaginign his wife fretting about him in their home. “There are black birds overhead, really he thinks,” he writes, “but she’s going around in the yard, restless.” Nors’s book is full of these misadventures, rueful digressions of external and internal.

Other characters are ruled by their compulsions. The sponsored woman paces the fairground with fire on the beam is armed with a can of gasoline. The old man in “Horias,” filled with contempt for his also-singing companion, still ends up having sex with her in a particularly twisted endpoint of Danish customs.

The collection’s epigraph has the comforting ring of advice, tinged with a depressed sense of humor: “You can always withdraw a little bit further.” This line is drawn from the story “Manikins,” whose speaker is a reclusive former teacher who “no longer has any wish to regulate his abnormalities” and wants only to live in an even remote cabin than his own. It’s less advice, it seems, than a statement of fact, or a reminder: These stories are a dark reflection of all of us, thinned by our hang-ups and our paralysed desires.
**Some People/Things You Might Meet in a Book**

- A Hero on a Journey
- A Writer with a Berry or Two Quizzing Itself
- Your Face, Feeling Self-Aware in the Mirror
- The Author, Wondering What the Meaning of Life Is
- A Magazine Article on Steroids
- A Friend, Asking How You Are
- The Bible Testament (Or)
- The Everyday Man All-Consuming, Selfish, Endless
- The Common Quilts, Alive and Well
- The Colourful Future in Reserve Without Being

*Liana Finck is the author, most recently, of "Escape Me: Cartoons, Complaints, and Notes to Self."*
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