The New York Times
Book Review
JANUARY 24, 2021

GOLDEN COSMOS

Separated At Birth

By Lisa Belkin

MUCH HAS BEEN written recently about what went wrong in the adoption world between 1950 and 1975, a period known as the "Baby Scoop Era" when the number of domestic adoptions exploded to, by some estimates, nearly four million. One agency receiving particular scrutiny in the post-mortem is Louise Wise Services, a now-defunct entity that promised to match "blue-ribbon" Jewish babies with "good" Jewish homes in the aftermath of the Holocaust. The 2018 documentary

AMERICAN BABY
A Mother, a Child, and the Shadow History of Adoption
By Gabrielle Glaser
352 pp. Viking. $28.

"Three Identical Strangers," about triplets deliberately separated as part of that agency's nature-versus-nurture "research," is the most visible example of the growing realization that old-style adoption was not always what it seemed.

"American Baby: A Mother, a Child, and the Shadow History of Adoption," by the veteran journalist Gabrielle Glaser, is the latest addition to this body of work, and the most comprehensive and damning one. Like "Three Identical Strangers," Glaser tells a singular story to illuminate a universal truth. There are no one-in-a-million triplets here, just a teenage girl and a baby, who could be any young mother, any infant son. In fact, Glaser argues, Margaret Erle Katz and her son David Rosenberg *are* every sealed, secretive adop-

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Book Review

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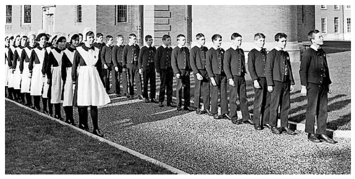


Fiction

Nonfiction

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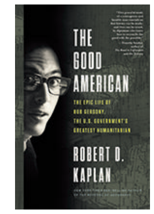
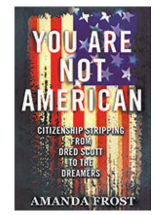
Etc.

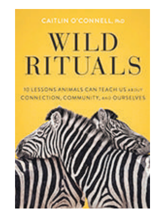
New & Noteworthy



THE GOOD AMERICAN: THE EPIC LIFE OF BOB GERSONY, THE U.S. GOVERNMENT'S GREATEST HUMANITARIAN, by Robert D. Kaplan. (Random House, $30.) Kaplan's homage to a longtime aid worker highlights the potent good that functionaries can effect behind the scenes.



YOU ARE NOT AMERICAN: CITIZENSHIP STRIPPING FROM DRED SCOTT TO THE DREAMERS, by Amanda Frost. (Beacon, $27.95.) Frost, a law professor at American University, analyzes cases of revoked U.S. citizenship and asks what they reveal about the nation's values over time.

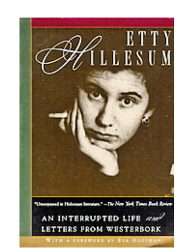


WILD RITUALS: 10 LESSONS ANIMALS CAN TEACH US ABOUT CONNECTION, COMMUNITY, AND OURSELVES, by Caitlin O'Connell. (Chronicle Prism, $26.95.) A behavioral ecologist and expert on elephants argues that animals from apes to zebras engage in ritual customs, and that humans can learn by observing them.

THE HARE, by Melanie Finn. (Two Dollar Radio, paper, $15.99.) In this brooding feminist thriller, a former art student and her daughter are isolated in a rural Vermont cabin and have to contend with the toxic presence of an unbalanced con man in their lives.

ONE SIMPLE THING, by Warren Read. (Ig, paper, $16.95.) Read's simmering crime story, set in the mountainous West and evocative of classic noir, follows a lonely adolescent through the dissolution of his family into life as a fugitive.

WHAT WE'RE READING



I had never heard of Etty Hillesum until my friend Don Snyder, a retired NBC journalist in his 80s, slid a book across his dining room table during one of our weekly visits. Hillesum's **LETTERS FROM WESTERBORK,** he said, was one of the most cherished books he owned. I now know why. It is a collection of letters by an author from a family of Dutch Jews, whose firsthand accounts of the misery inside the transit camp Westerbork in the Netherlands during the Holocaust have drawn inevitable comparisons to Anne Frank. The camp — muddy, overcrowded and enclosed in barbed wire — was often a last stop before Auschwitz. "This is a very one-sided story," wrote Hillesum, who was 29 when she died. "I could have told quite another, filled with hatred and bitterness and rebellion. But rebellion born only when distress begins to affect one personally is no real rebellion and can never bear fruit.

—NEIL VIGDOR, BREAKING NEWS REPORTER, EXPRESS DESK

Letters

Mount Chamberlin in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, left, and Trisul Peak in the Himalaya.

Seeing the Light

TO THE EDITOR:
In her review of Andrea Pitzer's "Icebound: Shipwrecked at the Edge of the Word" (Jan. 10), Rachel Slade concludes by writing: "'Icebound' is a reminder that there was once a time when things were unknown. And when their ships bumped up against the edge of the Arctic, the Europeans gazed with horror and awe at the sparkling ice and wondered what Edens lay beyond, waiting to be discovered."

Discovered? Is that what "Icebound" and the history of human conquest of nature reveal? Or is it rather plundered and annihilated? Before this interpretation, we read that "the 16th-century Dutchmen didn't hesitate to shoot, maim, club, collar and impale whatever they saw. 'Slaughter emerged as the instinctive Dutch response to the Arctic landscape, a new theater that would see the same performance again and again with every European wave of arrivals,' Pitzer notes."

But that was then, some still say, now we know a great deal more. What shall we then make of The Times Magazine's section in the same week, "Witness to an Extinction," by Sam Anderson? "Mass extinction is the ultimate crisis, doom of all dooms, the disaster toward which all other disasters flow," Anderson writes. "What could humans do that would be worse than killing the life all around us, irreversibly, at scale?"

We do know more now, but obviously not enough to know that we are inextricably enmeshed in a great web of life; killing swaths of our biosphere will in time kill perhaps all of it, all of us.

PETER LONDON
DAVIS, CALIF.

♦

TO THE EDITOR:
In his review of "Himalaya," by Ed Douglas (Jan. 10), Jeffrey Gettleman approvingly quotes Douglas's statement, "It's easy to see why a philosophy stressing the illusory nature of an individual consciousness, as Buddhism does, might prosper here."

But it's even easier to see that it takes an individual consciousness to believe that individual consciousness is illusory.

FELICIA NIMUE ACKERMAN
PROVIDENCE, R.I.

The Divine

TO THE EDITOR:
I am puzzled how anyone can review "The Orchard," by David Hopen (Dec. 13), without mentioning the paradigm Orchard — or "Pardes" — story appearing in the Talmud. Clearly, Hopen had this reference in mind.

PHYLLIS SHAPIRO
ST. LOUIS

A Life in Letters

TO THE EDITOR:
The first thing I read in the Book Review each week is the Letters page. It is such a lively, interesting and literate discussion.

This week's letters (Jan. 10) made me wish I had paid more attention to Daphne Merkin's review of Heather Clark's new look at Sylvia Plath's troubled life.

I was also delighted by Barbara Matusow's confession, reflecting the feelings of many readers (including myself), that long books — "doorstops," she calls them — put off readers and discourage potential readers of biography.

And I was nodding my head as I read David Myers's letter about the "poetry" in Michael Cunningham's essay on Virginia Woolf. I then wanted to go back and reread that essay after reading Richard Gerber's assessment of it.

DAVID TILLYER
NEW YORK

♦

TO THE EDITOR:
Au contraire to Barbara Matusow's lament about lengthy biographies. Would she ignore Robert Caro's majestic volumes on Lyndon Johnson? Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.'s 1,000-plus pages on the 1,000 days of J.F.K.? The 1,152 pages by Andrew Roberts that bring Churchill to life?

Rather than judgment based on a book's heft, a read of the opening chapter provides a superior clue to the splendor that may lurk within.

DAVID SMOLLAR
SAN DIEGO

CORRECTIONS

A review on Jan. 10 about "Icebound," by Andrea Pitzer, referred incorrectly to the Antarctic explorer Ernest Shackleton and the fate of the crew on his ship, the Endurance. In 1916, all of the crew members were rescued; it is not the case that "all but three" were rescued. (Three crew members from the Aurora, another ship that was part of Shackleton's Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition, did die.)

♦

A review on Jan. 10 about "Himalaya," by Ed Douglas, misstated the geographical size of India relative to the United States. India is one-third the size of the United States; it is not "a third smaller than the United States."

BOOKS@NYTIMES.COM

PHOTOGRAPHS, FROM LEFT: CHRISTOPHER MILLER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES; MICHAEL BENANAV FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

By the Book

Brad Taylor

The novelist, whose new Pike Logan thriller is 'American Traitor,' avoids agenda-driven books: 'I don't care if it's left or right, I read for escape, not the author's political views.'

What books are on your night stand?

A stack that is much too large, and I keep saying I'm going to draw down, and is a bit eclectic: "Rise and Kill First," by Ronen Bergman, on Israel's targeted-killing program; "The Order," by Daniel Silva; "AI Superpowers," by Kai-Fu Lee, about the insidious gray war between China and the United States for domination of artificial intelligence; a book on long-range precision shooting; "The Shield and the Sword," by Ernle Bradford, about the Knights of Malta; and two advanced reader copies from other authors.

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

I'm embarrassed to say the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey." I read them because my daughter was assigned the tomes for school. Ironically, I've not let her read my own books until she is "old enough" because of the violence, but those two books are absolute blood baths. I was astounded at the sexual innuendo and the visceral killings.

Who's your favorite fictional spy? And the best villain?

That's easy: Alec Leamas from John le Carré's "The Spy Who Came In From the Cold." One of the best spies and spy novels — if not *the* best spy novel — ever written. Villain? This may sound strange, but it would honestly be General Woundwort from Richard Adams's "Watership Down." Yes, he's a rabbit, but that is one of my favorite books and it had a huge impression on me as a child. I'm afraid to reread it as an adult because it might not hold up, so I just live with the memories it gave me in my youth.

What makes for a good thriller?

Without a doubt, characters. Characters, characters, characters. One could write a scene where a car bomb is placed in an empty parking lot, set to go off in two minutes. The buildup is intense, with a "Day of the Jackal" feel of finding components and creating the device, but at the end of the day, do readers care about the empty parking lot? No. They only care if that bomb is going to harm someone they've invested emotional energy in — and that is the character of the story. Setting, pace and trajectory are important, but they're irrelevant without the reader's emotional investment, and that is driven by characters.

What kinds of stories are you drawn to? And what do you steer clear of?

Right now, I read a lot of murder mysteries. Books by John Sandford, Robert Crais, Michael Connelly and others. Anything that has a bit of suspense and a twist — and, of course, characters I care about. What I steer clear of is any novel that has a political bent. I don't care if it's left or right, I read for escape, not the author's political views. The minute someone begins preaching to me about some issue that's not part of the plot, or characters appear who are obviously politically motivated and there to sell a political script, that book goes in the trash.

What books might we be surprised to find on your shelves?

Doc Savage, Conan the Barbarian, and Alfred Hitchcock and the Three Investigators. None are literary masterpieces, but all are series I read in my youth, and they still hold a special place for me. Many times, during a military move to one duty post or another, I've been tempted to throw them out like an old baseball mitt, but I never have, and they still sit on my shelf.

What book would you recommend for the current political moment?

"The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" or "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer." Anything that is hell and gone from today's politics. Reading should be an escape. Why on earth would anyone want to read one more story about today's political environment?

What book did you feel you were supposed to like, and didn't? Do you remember the last book you put down without finishing?

"Where the Crawdads Sing," by Delia Owens. It's been on the best-seller list since forever, and everyone has raved about it, so I decided to give it a go. I couldn't get through it. I know this has something to do with me and not the book, because my Lord it has been selling like toilet paper in a pandemic since 2018, but I just didn't get into it.

Whom would you choose to write your life story?

Winston Churchill. Any man who says "History will be kind to me, for I intend to write it" is the man I want at the helm of my life story. □

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

ILLUSTRATION BY JILLIAN TAMAKI

CRIME / MARILYN STASIO

Bloody Murder

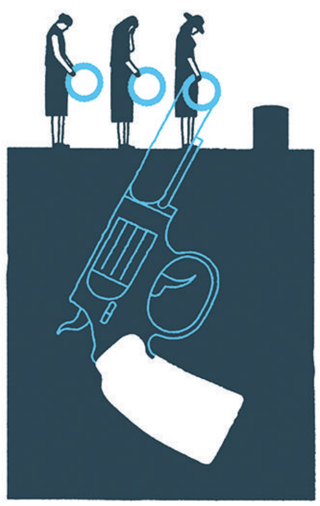
YOU'D THINK THAT three wives might have been enough for Blake Nelson, the head of a Mormon household in deepest Utah who makes a nice corpse in Cate Quinn's debut mystery, **BLACK WIDOWS (Sourcebooks Landmark, 418 pp., $26.99).** Rachel, the No. 1 wife and one of the story's three narrators, is the devoted, traditional one. Emily, the second wife, is a little more flighty. And Tina, Wife No. 3, is a former sex worker and addict. All the sister-wives were admittedly miffed when Blake started shopping around for Wife No. 4, but which one of them might have been mad enough to kill him? "Everybody loved Blake," Rachel testifies. "Except his wives. Sometimes, we hated him."

That's the challenge for Officers Brewer and Carlson, the Salt Lake City police detectives who trek out to the derelict farm in the middle of the desert that Blake and his industrious wives have turned into a survivalist camp. Quinn writes haunting scenes of the desert in its many moods (hot, dry, very hot, very dry) but she's not much for cops, so Detectives Brewer and Carlson are as lacking in dimension as they are in forensic savvy. But oh, my, can this author draw women! Rachel, Emily and Tina, who have been in thrall for so long to their husband, discover they don't know one another as well as they thought they did until after he is dead and buried. Without Blake to fixate on, they're finally free to raise their eyes and discover who they are by studying — and at long last truly seeing — their sisters.

As readers, we come to know the wives gradually, not only through the dramatic revelations of their painful histories, but also through modest expressions of their dawning self-emancipation. "I'd like to bake a real cake" is the bold wish of shy Emily. It's the loveless wives, it seems, who could use the devotion and care of a wife of their own. And while Quinn writes with spirit on weighty subjects like kinky sex, domestic abuse, polygamy and religious cults, her primary and most poignant theme seems to be female friendship.

♦

IF YOU THRILL to the chills of Scandinavian noir, chances are you've read something by Anders Roslund. (No? Do try "The Beast" to test your capacity for revulsion.) Roslund, a Swedish author who usually works with writing



PABLO AMARGO

partners, has gone solo with a police procedural called **KNOCK KNOCK (Putnam, 439 pp., $27).** OK, I'll bite: Who's there? A killer who has returned to Stockholm to finish off the only witness to an atrocious multiple murder he committed 17 years ago, that's who. Zana Lilaj was only 5 years old when this boogeyman broke into her home and wiped out the rest of her family. But trauma victims can have amazing recall, and some of them get itchy after years of boredom in a witness protection program.

Roslund has two strong prose styles — dark and darker — and both are on show in this no-frills translation by Elizabeth Clark Wessel. The author also likes to work with twin plots, which means that a conventional sidebar involving weapons smuggling keeps muscling in on the main action. But note that Detective Superintendent Ewert Grens, who starred in the books Roslund wrote with Borge Hellstrom, reappears here, as morose and socially alienated as ever, bless his miserable soul.

♦

THE SNAPPY mother-daughter writing team known as P. J. Tracy created the lighthearted "Monkeywrench" cyber mysteries. But after the death of her mother, P. J. Lambrecht, Traci Lambrecht has struck out on her own, though she's still using the P. J. Tracy name. In **DEEP INTO THE DARK (Minotaur, 338 pp., $26.99),** the first installment in a new Los Angeles series, she introduces Sam Easton, a wounded Army veteran who is neither too tough nor too cute, and Margaret Nolan, an equally sympathetic L.A.P.D. detective. Easton is suspected in the murder of a friend of a friend, which is as good an excuse as any for getting this new team on the road, and before long the two settle in to a relationship that's not too jokey or too morose. Although Tracy seems to have found her literary sweet spot, she'll have to keep an eye out for the wordy dialogue and clichés that litter the sidewalks of her brave new world.

♦

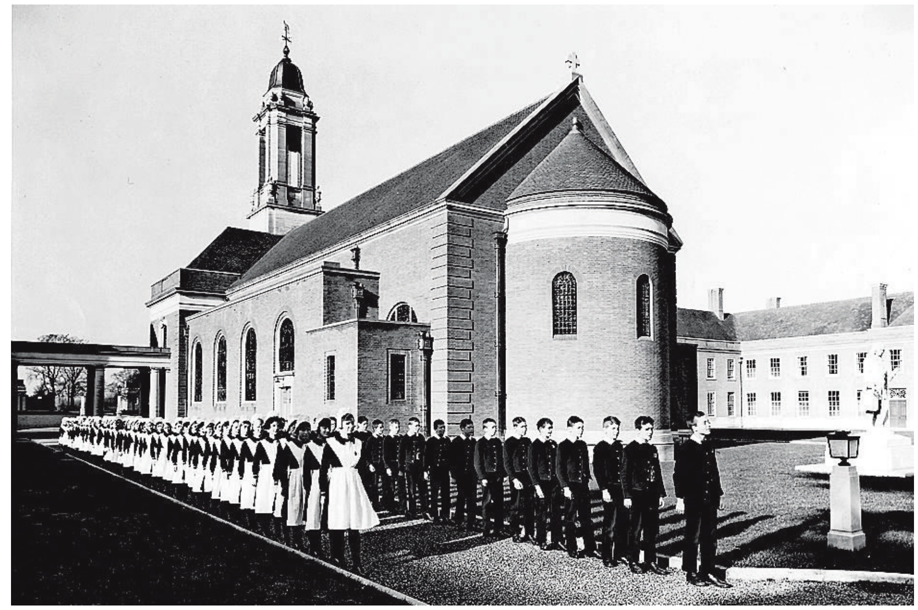
FOR THOSE OF US who acquire our knowledge of science, art and history — if not life itself — from the pages of crime novels, Cecilia Ekback's **THE HISTORIANS (Harper Perennial, 464 pp., paper, $16.99)** is the perfect read, an exciting and enjoyable way to sop up some history. It's 1943 and the world is at war. Norway and Denmark are both occupied by the Germans, Finland swings this way and that, and Sweden, which is technically neutral, is known to be collaborating with the Nazis. Five friends who have gone their separate ways since college are feeling the stress, but it takes the torture and murder of one of their old gang to really bring the war into their lives. Laura Dahlgren hasn't laid eyes on Britta Hallberg since their school days, but when Britta is murdered, Laura decides to use her political connections to find out how her friend became involved in an ugly conspiracy, one that threatens the very future of Sweden. □

MARILYN STASIO *has covered crime fiction for the Book Review since 1988. Her column appears twice a month.*

Very Private Investigator

Justine Cowan dug into her mother's hidden past. What she learned surprised her.

By ELLEN BARRY



In 1935, foundlings — also known as children — posed outside their home.

JUSTINE COWAN HAD a problem with her mother — a snootiness problem, a constant criticism problem, an inability to offer warmth or comfort problem.

When Cowan was a child, her mother told her she was fat. She pushed her relentlessly, signing her up for 6 a.m. violin lessons with an extra-prestigious teacher. When Cowan grew up, and her mother came to visit, she went through her closet and affixed notes to her clothes with safety pins, explaining how they should be mended.

"I didn't love my mother," Cowan writes.

So it came as a surprise when her mother died, and Cowan found that she was knocked sideways, in a state of deep, inarticulate mourning. Cowan's memoir, "The Secret Life of Dorothy Soames," recounts how she responded to this moment — not by grieving her mother, but by investigating her.

THE SECRET LIFE OF DOROTHY SOAMES
A Memoir
By Justine Cowan
320 pp. Harper/HarperCollins Publishers. $27.99.

In fact, her mother's past provided a fat target. A Briton who had emigrated to America in her 20s and married a lawyer from Tennessee, she had always suggested she had grown up in wealthy, fox-hunting circles, and that this explained why she held her daughter to exacting, aristocratic standards.

But late in life, she dropped hints at a far bleaker reality. She had in fact been a "foundling," raised in a British home for the children of unwed mothers. Once, mysteriously, she grabbed a notebook and scrawled, over and over again, a name unfamiliar to her daughter: Dorothy Soames.

Cowan is a public interest lawyer — accustomed, when taking on a new case, to plunging into a heap of documents and piecing together a narrative. So, five years after her mother's death, she immersed herself in the archives of the Foundling Hospital, a vast institution established in the 18th century to raise the children of unmarried mothers. Perhaps there she could understand why her mother was the way she was.

The propulsive parts of the book come as Cowan uncovers the past that her mother was so intent on hiding. The shapeless brown clothing that Cowan's mother had sewn for her, it turns out, was a duplicate of the uniforms she had been forced to wear growing up.

Her mother's fixation on music and art lessons had been drummed into her at the Foundling Hospital, which deprived its inhabitants of affection but insisted that they achieve a glaze of high culture.

Dorothy Soames — the name her mother had scribbled on a notebook — was the name that the Foundling Hospital had assigned her as an infant, so that she would completely sever her ties with the Shropshire farm girl who had reluctantly handed her over.

Cowan comes to understand why her mother found it difficult to bond; her childhood all but guaranteed it. Established in the 18th century as a cleaner, safer alternative to the poorhouse, the hospital was initially overwhelmed by mothers desperate to hand off their infants, and many of the infants accepted in the first few years died of disease.

By the time Cowan's mother came along, the hygiene was better, but the approach to child-rearing was driven by a Victorian passion for discipline. At the time, social scientists actively preached against physical contact with newborns; new mothers were taught not to kiss their babies, or pick them up when they cried. Psychologists dreamed of raising children according to scientific principles, and the Foundling Hospital provided them with a laboratory.

Like an experienced litigator, Cowan shows us one exhibit after another, building a case that her mother was a victim of this harsh system. Sections of the book feel padded with term-papery digressions. I found myself longing to hear less from the card catalog, and more from Cowan's mother.

Her mother comes off as troubled, brittle, unreasonably tough on her daughter. She acknowledged as much to Cowan, once, telling her that she was "grateful and proud that despite my bad parenting you managed to become a remarkable person."

But Cowan sometimes paints her as a villainess without providing the evidence to support it. The simplest explanation is that mother and daughter never found a way to connect. And then their time ran out.

In fact — and this is a heartbreak — Cowan could have avoided the archives if she had sat down to interview her mother. Before she died, her mother had written a memoir, and even invited Cowan to London to investigate her past together. But at the time, their relationship was so broken that Cowan declined the offer. "I had no interest in learning about my mother's past," she says.

"The Secret Life of Dorothy Soames" is a frustrating endeavor, in the end. It does evoke sympathy for Eileen — Eileen was her mother's real name — just as Cowan clearly hoped it would.

But it does not heal the injury that sent Cowan on this mission, the crack in the bowl.

A child's desire for closeness to her mother is a fearsome force. As she contemplates the cold severity of her mother's upbringing, Cowan recalls the disturbing experiments of Harry Harlow, whose work explored the importance of maternal bonding in childhood development. Harlow gave baby monkeys a choice between a wire mesh holding a bottle of milk and a terry cloth doll that they believed to be their "mother." The babies clung to the "mother," even if the dolls pierced them with spikes or blasted them with cold water. Their need for a mother overwhelmed the need for food, even the need for safety.

Cowan's affecting memoir stands as a reminder of what was taken from the "foundlings" — they had mothers, for God's sake! — and the gaping absence that was passed on, as a legacy, to their own children, including, eventually, to Justine Cowan.

But it is too late. Nothing can get her the mother she needed. □

ELLEN BARRY *is the New England bureau chief of The Times.*

PHOTOGRAPH VIA JUSTINE COWAN

Healthy Ambition

The sisters who became America's first women doctors.

By JOANNA SCUTTS

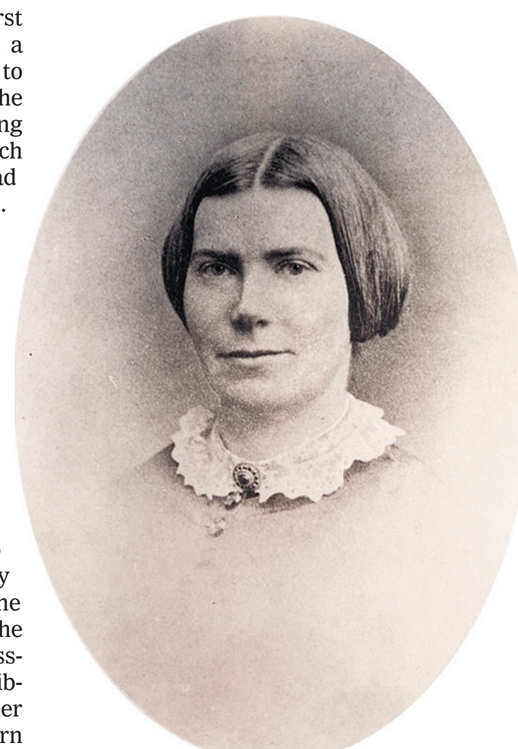
IN 1849, when Elizabeth Blackwell became the first woman doctor in America, the medical profession was neither well established nor well respected nor well paid. Germ theory was more than a decade away, and in hospitals for the poor, surgeons in blood-caked aprons went from handling corpses to delivering babies without washing their hands. In wealthy homes, physicians coasted on charisma and connections as much as skill. At all levels of society, doctors had little more to rely on than "purgatives, laudanum and lancets." What kind of woman would fight to join their ranks?

In her richly detailed and propulsive biography of Elizabeth and her sister Emily Blackwell, Janice P. Nimura considers and discards a couple of possible origin stories. The most narratively appealing is 17-year-old Elizabeth's experience caring for her father on his deathbed, in which "it is tempting to discern . . . the germ of her medical future." Tempting, but too easy. No single story convincingly explains why a young woman "enthralled by literature and philosophy" should plummet into the earthy business of bodies.

THE DOCTORS BLACKWELL
How Two Pioneering Sisters Brought Medicine to Women and Women to Medicine
By Janice P. Nimura
Illustrated. 320 pp. W.W. Norton & Company. $27.95.

Nor is the answer easy to detect in her personality. It was not a caring instinct that drove her — "I have no turn for benevolencies," she wrote to her brother Henry in 1855 — or a curious one, to advance medical science beyond leeches, mercury and prayer. And while she was roused by the Transcendentalist Margaret Fuller's exhortation to "let them be sea-captains, if you will," she was no feminist foremother: She did not believe in suffrage and rejected the fellowship of the burgeoning women's movement. She denounced women as "petty, trifling, priest-ridden, gossiping, stupid, inane," and desperately in need of leadership from a superior being like herself. More than anything, Elizabeth Blackwell became a doctor to show the world that she alone could do it.

Or not quite alone. "Emily I claim you, to work in my reform," Elizabeth wrote a few months before her graduation from medical school. "Will you answer to the call, & let us sketch our future together?" Emily was six years younger, and her legacy has been obscured by her sister's pioneering example, yet Nimura makes the case that it was Emily who truly loved the practice of medicine, and that her partnership was vital to their shared success.



Above and below: Elizabeth Blackwell and Emily Blackwell, circa 1855.

The Blackwell sisters were part of a large, close family of nine children, eight born in England to parents who were Dissenters, political reformers and abolitionists — even though their father, Samuel, made his living as a sugar refiner. In 1831 he moved his family to America. First to New York, where they encountered a ferment of new ideas and causes, then to Ohio, where Samuel hoped to square the circle of his business and beliefs by raising sugar beets, an alternative to cane much lauded by antislavery activists. They had barely finished unpacking when he died.

This loss and its dire financial consequences forged the Blackwell children, perennial outsiders, into an even more tightknit group, even as they had to scatter in pursuit of careers. One of the chief pleasures of this book is the liveliness of the siblings' correspondence, revealed in judicious snippets expressing frustration, outlining plans, issuing orders and judgments, sharing joy and love. "Your letters always come to me like a puff of fresh North wind in a Summer's day," Elizabeth wrote to Emily. When they were short of money for paper and postage, they turned the page a quarter-turn and wrote across the lines at an angle, yielding a dense crosshatch: an apt metaphor for the way the siblings, who "loved and annoyed each other in equal measure," would turn and turn about, only to enmesh themselves deeper in one another's lives.

For both Elizabeth and Emily, the path to qualification as doctors was circuitous and frustrating. The idea of a woman studying anatomy alongside men was shocking, but the truer fear lurking under the moral outrage was that female doctors would wrest power from men who were just beginning to enjoy it, as the profession rose slowly in status. Wouldn't female patients naturally choose to be attended by a woman, if they could — especially in the lucrative business of childbirth? As the dean of one college wrote candidly to Elizabeth, "You cannot expect us to furnish you with a stick to break our heads with."

Finally, in the fall of 1847, Elizabeth's persistence was rewarded when Geneva Medical College, in upstate New York, punted the decision on her application to its students, who voted to admit her. It was only the first of many doors she had to beat down — to be allowed in the dissecting room, to observe hospital treatments, to gain hands-on experience. When Emily attempted to follow her sister's blazed trail, it had been scuffed over: Geneva did not make the same mistake twice, and Emily finally graduated from Cleveland Medical College in 1854.

While Emily was pursuing her diploma, Elizabeth was desperate to put hers to use. But returning to New York City to open her own practice, she found herself sitting and waiting for patients who did not appear. Dr. Blackwell was shadowed by the lurid specter of another female "physician," known as Madame Restell, who peddled herbal remedies and surgical intervention for the oldest problem women faced. To escape the taint of association with the brazen abortionist, Elizabeth soon replaced her private practice with a clinic licensed by the state.

Power in medicine was shifting from individuals toward institutions, and there was only so much the Blackwell sisters could do alone. In 1857, they opened a larger infirmary, joining forces with a confident, highly qualified German midwife named Marie Zakrzewska, whom they called "Dr. Zak." Over time, it evolved into a college for female doctors known for its rigorous standards — a symbol of progress, and an important legacy. When its doors closed at the end of the century, the advances of women in medicine were unstoppable.

None of the five Blackwell sisters married, prizing careers, one another and their independence too highly, yet their family circle nevertheless expanded. Henry Blackwell, most notably, married the prominent women's rights activist Lucy Stone, fully supporting her decision to keep her own name, strike the word "obey" from her vows and use their wedding as a platform to denounce the institution of marriage. Elizabeth, under a cloud of depression in 1854, adopted an orphan named Kitty, who called her "Dr. Elizabeth" and grew up with an in-between status, "half ward, half servant." Emily, too, adopted a baby and named her after Hannah, the beloved Blackwell matriarch. For the last 30 years of her life, she lived and worked with another Elizabeth, 10 years her junior, who arrived at the college in 1870 and never left.

'I know that I am one of the Elect,' Elizabeth Blackwell wrote while in medical school.

Apart from a few early hints of romance, Elizabeth remained single, with Kitty as her constant companion. Always happier in England than America, she returned there for good after the infirmary opened, becoming more prominent as a writer and public figure than a practicing physician. In her extraordinary self-belief ("I know that I am one of the Elect"), her hardness and her idealism, Elizabeth is a striking figure, and Emily, self-doubting and hardworking, never quite gets clear of her shadow. To her credit, Nimura, who is also the author of "Daughters of the Samurai" (2015), about three Japanese girls who traveled to America to study in 1871, doesn't strain to fit the sisters into the narrow shape allowed to feminist pioneers, as either virtuous role models or "badass" rebels against society. Instead, they emerge as spiky, complicated human beings, who strove and stumbled toward an extraordinary achievement, and then had to learn what to do with it. □

JOANNA SCUTTS *is the author of "The Extra Woman: How Marjorie Hillis Led a Generation of Women to Live Alone and Like It."*

PHOTOGRAPHS FROM SCHLESINGER LIBRARY, RADCLIFF INSTITUTE, HARVARD UNIVERSITY,

Constitutional Freedoms

Northerners used America's founding document to battle slavery in the South.

By GORDON S. WOOD

IT WAS NOT LONG after the federal Constitution was created in 1787 that many antislavery Northerners began labeling it a pro-slavery document. Parts of it did support slavery — the clause that counted a slave as three-fifths of a person, which gave the slave states greater representation in Congress and the Electoral College than opponents of slavery believed they deserved; and the fugitive slave clause, which required persons held to service who had escaped to free states to be returned to their owners.

Because these poisonous clauses seemed to enable Southern slaveholders to dominate the national government in the early decades of the 19th century, the rabid abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison eventually concluded that the Constitution was a "covenant with death" and "an agreement with hell." Oddly this view of the Constitution as a pro-slavery document was what the fervent hard-line apologists for slavery, like Senator John C. Calhoun and Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, believed as well.

THE CROOKED PATH TO ABOLITION
Abraham Lincoln and the Antislavery Constitution
By James Oakes
288 pp. W.W. Norton & Company. $26.95.

We have long known of this pro-slavery view of the Constitution, one that has been much emphasized at the present time. Less well known is an antislavery interpretation of the Constitution mounted by abolitionists and other opponents of slavery to counter the views of the Southern "slave power." In "The Crooked Path to Abolition," his very solid, carefully and rigorously argued book, James Oakes, a professor of history at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, describes and analyzes the antislavery constitutionalism that emerged in a dialectical struggle with pro-slavery constitutionalism in antebellum America.

The Northern opponents of slavery began by emphasizing that the Constitution never mentioned "slaves" or "slavery," that it never accepted the idea that there could be property in man and that with the ending of the international slave trade in 1808 it promised a future for the nation without the despicable institution. Although the antislavery advocates conceded that the Constitution gave no authority to Congress to interfere with slavery within the states, they stressed that it did grant power to Congress to curb and limit the institution in a variety of other ways.

In making their case that the Constitution favored freedom over slavery, the antislavery Northerners interpreted and parsed every part of it as imaginatively as possible, seeking to whittle away at the pro-slavery arguments while at the same time emphasizing every provision and every clause that could be used on behalf of freedom. Congress, they said, had the sole constitutional authority to prohibit slavery in the territories and, indeed, had an obligation to do so. It could also suppress the coastwise slave trade and abolish slavery in the District of Columbia. They claimed that many parts of the Constitution worked against slavery. The Fifth Amendment, for example, declared that no person could be deprived of liberty without due process of law, which the Northern opponents of slavery could use to stymie enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Acts. They stressed that the preamble of the Constitution granted the federal government the power to "secure the blessings of liberty" and that the Fourth Amendment guaranteed the right of people to be secure from unreasonable seizures. The antislavery Northerners argued that the privileges and immunities of citizens in Article IV, Section 2, were derived from the federal Constitution, not from the constitutions of the states, and thus Black citizens of the Northern states were entitled constitutionally to move freely from one state to another. They even invoked Congress's war powers and the federal guarantee of a republican form of government to every state in Article IV, Section 4, to threaten slavery in the states. If the slave states ever seceded, the antislavery Northerners warned, they would forfeit their constitutional rights, and the free states would no longer be obliged to enforce the fugitive slave clause.


Abraham Lincoln reads the Emancipation Proclamation to his cabinet.

Gradually the antislavery advocates accumulated a variety of textual protections for freedom and limitations on slavery. Then they began moving beyond the text of the Constitution to invoke its spirit, which, they said, was mainly derived from the Declaration of Independence and its inspiring dedication to equality. By the 1850s the antislavery Northerners had built a powerful case for antislavery constitutionalism. They had created a "Constitution that made freedom the rule and slavery the exception."

The Republican Party became the political embodiment of this antislavery constitutionalism, with Abraham Lincoln its most eloquent spokesman. So fearful were the Southern slaveholders of Lincoln and the Republicans that simply his election as president in November 1860 precipitated the immediate secession of many slave states. By Feb. 1, 1861, even before Lincoln took office in March, seven states had formed the Confederacy. Four more joined between April and June 1861.

Lincoln was skeptical all along that freeing the slaves would ever be enough.

Lincoln hated slavery as much as any abolitionist, but as an ambitious and sensitive politician in a radically democratic society he couldn't ignore the feelings of the diverse constituents of Northern society. He believed in law and order and in the Constitution; and thus because of the Constitution's ambiguity, he had to make his way along a very "crooked path" to achieve the ultimate extinction of slavery that he wanted. Despite all the backtracking and roundabout routes that Lincoln and his party followed, however, they never abandoned the central tenets of the antislavery constitutionalism that had developed over the previous half-century.

Through all his twists and turns Lincoln held firm to his belief that the guiding spirit of the Constitution was the principle of fundamental human equality proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence. Consequently, Oakes writes, "it became harder for Lincoln to distinguish his opposition to slavery from his baseline commitment to fundamental equality for whites and Blacks." Because he came to realize that racial discrimination was really a means of supporting slavery, he moved toward a position of true racial equality. In the end, Oakes observes, "Lincoln became the first president to publicly endorse voting rights for Black men."

In his final and perhaps most original chapter Oakes traces the winding route Lincoln followed in order to get to the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery in the United States once and for all. A Republican-dominated Congress might muster the two-thirds vote to pass such an amendment, but ratification by three-quarters of the states would be more difficult. During the war, Lincoln's position became more and more radical, but, Oakes says, Lincoln was skeptical all along that emancipating slaves, even in large numbers, would ever be enough; and he always remained committed to the belief that the slave states should abolish slavery on their own.

The Emancipation Proclamation and the treating of slaves as military contraband were never ends for Lincoln, but simply means to be used to pressure the states to free their enslaved populations on their own. Two of the border slave states that had not seceded — Maryland and Missouri — and then several of the seceding states that had been conquered and made loyal members of the Union — Louisiana, Arkansas and Tennessee — were nudged, urged and hassled into abolition. By the end of January 1865 there were 27 free states and nine slave states in the Union, exactly the proportions needed to ratify the amendment. Enough states had abolished slavery on their own to make acceptance of a nationwide abolition amendment by three-quarters of the states possible. "This amendment," Lincoln said, "is a king's cure for all the evils. It winds the whole thing up." □

GORDON S. WOOD'S *"Power and Liberty: Constitutionalism in the American Revolution" will be published in September.*

Scared Straight

An exposé of the expensive and unregulated tough-love industry by a writer who felt damaged by his own experience.

By ROBERT KOLKER

FROM THE VERY START of the prologue of "Troubled" — Kenneth R. Rosen's examination of the so-called "tough-love industry" of wilderness camps and residential therapeutic programs for young people — there is no mystery about how the author feels about such places. Rosen writes that the parents who choose to send their offspring away "have their children vanished"; that sometimes they do so "through trickery or bribes"; and that these programs, in his view, are "a short-term solution with lasting (mostly negative) effects."

Rosen does not come to this issue primarily as a journalist. He's a former client,

TROUBLED
The Failed Promise of America's Behavioral Treatment Programs
By Kenneth R. Rosen
254 pp. Little A. $24.95.

The Ranch for Kids in Montana, which had its license suspended over abuse allegations in 2019.

rousted from sleep as a teenager in the middle of the night in 2007 and forced away in what he now calls "a kidnapping." It would not be his last: Rosen spent time in a secure residential treatment center in Utah, a therapeutic boarding school in Massachusetts and an outdoor therapy program in New York.

Nothing seemed to take. Juvenile detention followed, and then jail sentences, before he found even footing, starting a family and building a career as a reporter and author. In "Troubled," Rosen argues that many of his difficulties spring back to that first moment when, as a teenager, his relatively quotidian substance abuse issues might have been addressed by less radical means. "As I was dragged away from my bed and shoved into a van, I felt my future vanish," he writes. "It took me more than a decade to learn that my initial feelings about these programs were incorrect, that they did lasting damage to me and others like me."

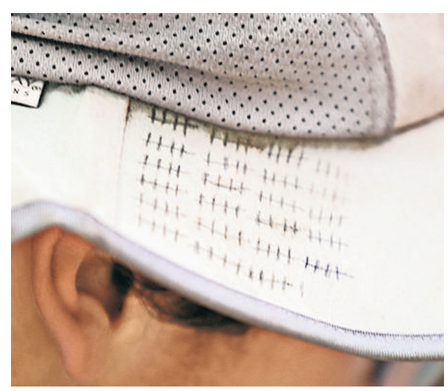
We are warned, then, that "Troubled" will be less a traditional work of investigative journalism and more a cri de coeur. As far as exposés go, the standard of proof is higher. The question going in isn't going to just be, what did you find out? Instead, it will be, will you be fair?

Rosen, a former New York Times staffer, takes impressive steps to mitigate his admitted biases. Rather than turn "Troubled" into a "Boy, Interrupted"-style memoir, he focuses on four other graduates of tough-love programs, using their stories as windows into three very different types of facility. Rosen says he approached dozens of former participants before finding people who were willing to open up, and he spent a number of years with each of them to understand them better. This alone turns "Troubled" into not just a work of extended empathy but a public service; these life stories, taken together, shine a light on an industry that has been able to thrive in darkness.

While none of Rosen's subjects adore these programs, they are all strikingly evenhanded about their experiences. Quite unlike the author, they don't see these programs as signaling a definitive break with their lives. They merely see them as one more moment when things got worse. Each of his subjects has an emotionally poignant story to tell, starting with Hazel, whose grandparents pull her out of a clearly dangerous life (her father, mother and older brother all regularly took drugs with her), only to send her away to Adirondack Leadership Expeditions, a wilderness program in upstate New York. The nicest thing Rosen can say about her grandparents is that they were "desperate for someone to make a decision where they could not."

In the Adirondacks, Hazel is stripped of all possessions and forced to march and do senseless chores in all weather with no real equipment. In theory, the rigors of outdoor therapy are meant to be a stand-in for the suffering you have caused yourself and others. The problem is that there's very little science to back this up, and what research does exist is often conducted in-house. "The instructors were not properly trained nor equipped in childcare, let alone empathized or understood child psychology," Rosen writes. What they had was a manual called a "Growth Book" with a therapeutic script to follow. To get out, Hazel learned "she would need to play the game" — that is, speak the language of the manual.

As soon as she comes home, Hazel reverts to her former self, and her problems continue for years. This is also true of Rosen's next subject, Avery, a child-abuse victim whose godmother promised her a shopping spree



A participant counts the days on his hat.

to get her in the car before dropping her at a wilderness program that preceded her time at Academy at Swift River, a residential therapeutic boarding school that is styled like a little prep school, but that Rosen characterizes as a brainwashing mill, where participants "are taught to give up their control over their lives — their appearance, their physical possessions — in order to be made whole." Avery witnesses a suicide attempt (the girl is whisked away, her fate never revealed to the others), and a boy then accuses her of rule-breaking, before she finally learns to play the game — to snitch on other participants to prove her own progress. Avery leaves Swift River feeling optimistic, but that feeling doesn't last. "If you're sent away to a program," another former participant tells Rosen, "then you label yourself in your head that, OK, I'm a troubled teen, and it's kind of a self-fulfilling prophecy."

Rosen's final two subjects are brothers, Mike and Mark, whose drug- and violence-fueled teenage years bring them both to the Academy at Ivy Ridge, which closed in 2009 after allegations of false imprisonment, child abuse and gross negligence. Here, too, both brothers are supposed to be scared straight, though Rosen shows how Ivy Ridge "focused more heavily on instilling the idea that the clients themselves were the problem." By now, we know what will happen. The brothers will muddle through, only to link back up with their old lives further scarred, "in a state of constant flux, like they cannot escape their adolescence."

Reporting on these places is difficult. Most parents are not interested in talking with a reporter about sending off their kids to such programs — and the programs aren't either. Springing up without any connection to established hospitals or institutions, the tough-love industry, we also learn, is phenomenally lucrative. (Rosen cites one company, Universal Health Services Inc., with a behavioral health division with revenues of $3.4 billion.) Some places are well intentioned but slapdash, while the worst have been driven out of business by prosecutors. (Swift River and Adirondack Leadership Expeditions were part of an entity controlled by Bain Capital, which shut them both down in 2013.) But Rosen reports that some 5,000 kids are still admitted into wilderness programs each year. According to him, even the industry's recognized trade group, National Association of Therapeutic Schools and Programs, doesn't articulate or enforce standards of care — it just offers what Rosen argues is a self-reinforcing "ineffective accreditation network."

While he doesn't make the comparison himself, it sometimes seems Rosen is arguing that these programs are almost like gay conversion therapy: a ludicrous, damaging response to something that might never have been a problem to begin with. This raises a question — what viable alternatives did their families have? Rosen isn't entirely unsympathetic to them. When, more recently, he witnesses Mark in a fresh crisis, he writes: "I felt the anguish of my parents. I did not know what to do. I wanted to help, and that desire counted for nothing."

Another question hovers over much of "Troubled": Did the programs cause these kids' problems or simply fail to address problems that existed already? Rosen argues that the trauma of scaring a kid straight ends up scarring them for life, making them feel like outsiders, like they're broken. "It distances them more from the world they're meant to join," he writes.

You could say that the author himself is living proof that these programs sometimes do work. He would not agree. After all this time, he continues to live his life on a knife's edge.

"Far as I can tell," he writes, "I never really shed that troubled past. I disrespect authority figures. I make risky financial decisions. I test the limits of my family's patience. My love of risk still sends me places others would prefer not to go. And I still smile when others ask about it all." □

ROBERT KOLKER *is the author of "Hidden Valley Road."*

PHOTOGRAPHS, FROM TOP: TOM BAUER/THE MISSOULIAN, VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS; ISAAC BREKKEN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Strained Relations

The troubled history of America and Iran across 300 years.

By ABBAS MILANI

FACTS OF HISTORY are stubborn. Shibboleths of ideology are almost as stubborn. Untangling facts from fictions, platitudes of ideology from the realities of politics (or policies), in the 300-year history of United States-Iran relations is an enormous task. For parts of this history Iran was a coveted prize in the 19th-century Big Game between Russia and England, a pivotal point in the 20th-century Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, and for the last 40 years, a stalwart bastion of Shia anti-Americanism and its particular brand of anti-Israeli rhetoric and policy. "America and Iran: A History, 1720 to the Present" attempts to untangle it all — in less than 600 pages of text.

AMERICA AND IRAN
A History, 1720 to the Present
By John Ghazvinian
Illustrated. 688 pp. Alfred A. Knopf. $37.50.

The book is divided in four sections, or seasons — beginning with spring and a chapter called "East of Eden," about the first 150 years of American-Iranian relations. The summer section covers relations from the end of World War I to the fall of Mohammad Mossadeqh, Iran's popular prime minister, in 1953. The third section, autumn, takes the story to the shah and the end of the Pahlavi dynasty in 1979. Winter covers the last 40 years, and includes a chapter on Iran's long war with Iraq (1980-88).

John Ghazvinian, a historian and former journalist, claims, loftily but not altogether without merit, that his book is the "most extensive and wide-ranging study ever undertaken on the history of U.S.-Iranian relations." Ghazvinian has at times taught creative writing, which is evident in the richness and supple prose of the book's narrative.

In a breezy history, brimming with new details, Ghazvinian combines pithy descriptions and poignant anecdotes. He writes of how in the early days of the American colonies there was a "budding 'Persophilia' — a romantic idealization of Persian culture and Persian themes." In fact, the first newspapers of North America were absolutely enchanted by Iran, writing with a "breathless" energy about Iran and its battle with the Ottoman Turks, deemed to be "a danger to Christendom."

The same concern for Christianity led to the arrival of American Presbyterian missionaries in Iran at the end of the 19th century. They went there not to convert Muslims, but to provide "spiritual enlightenment" to the Armenian, Assyrian and Chaldean Christians who lived in Iran but whose Christianity was deemed to be "twisted and degenerate." Zealous Christians, however, were not the only Americans on the scene. It is almost certain that "the first Americans and Persians to interact in person" were not missionaries but "rum traders." Even then, in spite of public pretenses of piety, Iranians were and still are great consumers of what was called "Boston Particular (rum laced with whiskey)."

It was not all Bible and booze. From the mid-19th century, Persian reformists and potentates were keen on establishing diplomatic ties with the United States as a countervailing force against Britain and Russia. But none of these efforts and inducements, including invitations for America to invest in Iranian oil, were enough to entice a United States preoccupied with domestic challenges. No less serious an obstacle was Britain, which, after the discovery of oil in 1908, did all it could to prevent American involvement in a country the United Kingdom saw as the empire's cash cow. Ghazvinian offers a fascinating look into what he calls "one of the great unspoken rivalries of the 20th century: the competition between the United States and Great Britain for Iran's vast petroleum bounty." Oil is a subject the author knows much about. A previous book was "Untapped: The Scramble for African Oil" (2007).

The Iranian revolution, February 1979.

But if the first section of the book, spring, has fascinating nuggets of insights and facts, the narrative of the last three seasons becomes choppy, falling prey to what Ghazvinian rightly describes as the problem with so many recent studies of United States-Iran relations — the tendency to look for "someone to blame, or something to defend." The root of the problem might well be the noble instincts of what can be called "progressive" historiography. These well-intentioned accounts — attempting to correct what they often rightly dismiss as one-sided narratives by offering the perspectives of the historically oppressed — sometimes teeter dangerously close to legitimizing the Islamic Republic of Iran with its claims to represent the marginalized, anticolonial forces, although it is itself the embodiment of harsh forms of authoritarianism.

"America and Iran" rightly posits that "antagonism between Iran and America is wholly unnecessary," and, as Ghazvinian affirms, there is in the United States a powerful chorus that wants nothing to do with Iran. There are also elements in Israel and Saudi Arabia working against normalized relations between the two countries. The book is commendably exhaustive in its effort to expose the machinations of these forces.

No less powerful, however, are the leaders of the current regime in Iran, particularly Ali Khamenei, who thrive on United States-Iran antagonism. A historian's commitment must be to all the facts, but Ghazvinian makes only passing reference to the government's rash radicalism. Perhaps because of his instincts as a progressive historian, he is more dogged in the pursuit of exculpatory arguments or suppositions that could place less blame on Iran's leaders. In the last few years thousands of critical new documents have been declassified — in both the United States and Iran — that shed new light on the relationship between Washington and Tehran. But there is little trace of them in "America and Iran."

If, as Ghazvinian writes, his archival search lasted from 2007 to 2017, the history in the second half of his book is already dated. Evidence declassified in the last few years has shown that in 1979 the United States played a crucial role in facilitating the clergy's rise to power and, before the hostage crisis of that year, went out of its way to befriend the new regime. It is surely important to expose the errors of American policy and of self-serving American narratives, as well as Benjamin Netanyahu's crying wolf about Iran's imminent ability to make a nuclear bomb — as the book does in granular detail. But it is no less important to expose the bombast of the Iranian regime, its evasions on the nuclear issue and Khamenei's unwillingness to reach any kind of rapprochement with what he has called "the greatest Satan." Khamenei has a long history of anti-American sentiment, dating back to his days as an unknown seminarian translating the works of the obsessively anti-American Sayyid Qutb, and clerics close to Khamenei have even created a theological basis for this antagonism.

Ghazvinian's bias is evident even in his use of language. The most egregious example is his objection to the English translation of the concept "the guardianship of the jurist" — the defining idea at the heart of clerical rule in Iran for the past four decades. He finds the translation "awkward," suggesting instead a "more appropriate" translation might be "oversight by the most learned religious scholars." But guardianship of the jurist is not merely a matter of "oversight." The published text of the Ayatollah Khomeini's lectures elucidating this concept makes it clear that he was committed to the absolute rule of a "learned jurist" over the people, who are seen as incapable of managing their own affairs. The text of the Islamic Republic's constitution, particularly the one revised in 1988, also makes clear how incorrect the author's proposed new translation is. This constitution was tailor-made to allow a junior cleric like Khamenei to ascend to the role of the Supreme Leader in what was now literally called the *absolute* guardianship of the jurist. And Khamenei, with the power granted him by virtue of his *absolute* guardianship, has by fiat declared a ban on normalized relations with the United States.

To be sure, even when we disagree with Ghazvinian, the story he offers is delightfully readable, genuinely informative and impressively literate. He begins "America and Iran" by asking whether Shakespeare's "star-crossed lovers" or Omar Khayyam's "loaf of bread and jug of wine" will capture the spirit of American-Iranian history. Maybe a more apt quotation for this troubled history would be Horatio's words at the end of "Hamlet," where he talks of "carnal, bloody and unnatural acts / of accidental judgments, casual slaughters" and in the upshot "purposes mistook / Fallen on th'inventors' heads." □

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PHOTOGRAPH FROM REUTERS

Hands On

A new history gives this country's overlooked artisans their due.

By DEBORAH NEEDLEMAN

A Tewa Hopi potter painting designs on pottery, circa 1900.

ARE HISTORICAL RE-ENACTORS in a faux-colonial village engaging in craft? Are hobbyists working from a D.I.Y. kit purchased from Hobby Lobby? Is the American Federation of Labor a craft organization? Were the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki products of craft? "Whenever a skilled person makes something with their hands, that's craft," according to Glenn Adamson, a scholar and the former director of the Museum of Arts and Design in New York. So, yes, to all of the above.

Adamson's new book, "Craft: An American History," is less an examination of traditions and techniques than a blow-by-blow chronicle of this country through the lens of craft, from the European settlers to the maker movement and so-called craftivists of today. That no one has ever

CRAFT
An American History
By Glenn Adamson
Illustrated. 387 pp. Bloomsbury. $30.

previously attempted this may be because when we bother to think about craft at all, it is usually through a gauzy haze. Yet Adamson manages to discover "making" in every aspect of our history, framing it as integral to America's idea of itself as a nation of self-sufficient individualists. There may be no one better suited to this task.

This is, however, no feel-good quilting circle of a book. "Craft" aims to reckon with the shameful way we have treated and viewed those who handbuilt the country: Indigenous people, African-Americans, women and the working class. "Craft" tracks a legacy of extermination, decimation, oppression, forced assimilation and marginalization. Even on the upside, Adamson argues, when we try to do better by craft and its practitioners through philanthropic support and education, we are often guilty of idealization, appropriation, fetishization, commercialization and exploitation.

The story begins with the colonists surviving on the know-how of Native people — remarking on their vital manual skills while disdaining them as uncivilized savages lacking in rational intelligence. A false dichotomy takes hold, involving the denigration of making and the elevation of knowing, and it is one that we have carried nearly intact to the present day. We suffer from a Cartesian dualism of mind and body, between intellect and manual competence.

Even before industrialization, which killed craft as the only way of producing the things we need, we seldom valued the meaning or satisfaction that can be derived from skillful manual work. In 1776, in "The Wealth of Nations," Adam Smith advised that "skill, dexterity and judgment" must give way to the imperative of efficiency. In a world where time is money, a sticking point for craft is always time.

Adamson offers the example of wampum, the lengths of patterned beadwork masterfully crafted by the Wampanoag in the Northeast, which were simultaneously a medium of communication and a form of currency. The beads were painstakingly fashioned from the shells of the whelks and clams that sustained their makers. Makers worked the shells on a loom strung with plant fiber and finished them with hide or gut. Wampum were decorative, useful and culturally significant. The English, appreciating the value of wampum solely as currency, tried to fashion the beads into American coinage, but found it too difficult and time-consuming. The English naturalist John Lawson explained in 1714 that the Indians could afford to make wampum because they "are a people that never value their time."

When Emerson and Thoreau heralded the slow life in nature, believing that material experience was a means to accessing transcendental truths, they merely turned the old dynamic on its head: They embraced artisanal skills as a way of depreciating modern industrial society. Indeed, none of the myriad well-intentioned but ultimately failed craft revivals of the 19th and 20th centuries, from the Arts and Crafts movement to utopian communes, could bridge the gap between craft and capitalism.

Adamson argues that artisanal work can never have a significant impact on the economy (or the environment), as it is never the most efficient way of producing goods and is impossible to scale. Craft still comes down to one person making one thing at a time. Its value is hidden: Woven into a handloomed blanket are human ingenuity, patience, an understanding of materials and a dialogue of give-and-take with those materials. And invisibly present is the handed-down know-how of weavers past. "Too little value, too much time," the criticism that Adamson says settlers leveled against wampum, still holds sway.

But isn't time something we value more than ever? Craft's current revival is happening in part because making is an essential human impulse with which many of us have lost touch. But another driver may be that modern consumer society has grown dissatisfied with using economic efficiency as a basis for appraising time. Two of the most recent of America's many craft revivals are craftivism, an unappealing term for feminist-inflected craft activism that draws on traditional women's work, like the knitted pink pussy hats, and the largely dude-driven maker movement, which hews to pioneer ruggedness. Both utilize craft as a means to change how we view the world, and how we live and behave in it. And this time around, Adamson is hopeful.

What's new is the digital distribution of ideas and goods through social media and e-commerce. Groups of makers can finally claim their own identities and tell their own stories. They can also sell their wares directly, unimpeded by physical location, middlemen or prejudicial practices. This paradigm shift opens up opportunities and provides market access to makers on their own terms, maybe even offering a way to sidestep what Adamson refers to as Smith's "imperative of efficiency." Perhaps, finally, time is on craft's side. □

DEBORAH NEEDLEMAN *is a writer, editor and craftsperson in the Hudson Valley. She was previously editor in chief of T: The New York Times Style Magazine.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY EDWARD S. CURTIS/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Statue of Limitations

A sculpture curator contends with infidelity and buried secrets.

By SUE MILLER

DANIELLE MCLAUGHLIN IS a remarkable writer. Reading "Dinosaurs on Other Planets," her 2016 collection of short stories, one is struck by the sheer gorgeousness of the prose, particularly in descriptions of natural settings; by the quick, seemingly effortless characterizations of her often very complex characters; by the elegant and sometimes devastating economy of the narration; and by McLaughlin's sure-handed sense of the shape of the short story. It's exciting to read the work of someone who is so clearly gifted.

In her new novel, her first, "The Art of Falling," we encounter many of these same gifts, but here they're not offered with as sure a hand. And when they do make themselves evident, they often seem swamped

THE ART OF FALLING
By Danielle McLaughlin
384 pp. Random House. $28.

by a tendency to pile on event after event, as if that were the difference between a short story and a novel — the need for more to happen, and even more after that.

The plot, then. Our main character, Nessa, is struggling to come to terms with her husband Philip's infidelity with the mother of their daughter's best friend; and simultaneously trying to cope with this newly hostile daughter. In addition, she's mounting a gallery show of the work of one Robert Locke, a long-dead sculptor, hoping to bring new attention to what she sees as his strange genius, embodied most perfectly in the faceless statue of a pregnant woman. She's been working closely with his difficult elderly widow and devoted daughter, who hope, for several reasons — money for them, renewed fame and glory for him — for the show's success.

Complicating this is the persistent claim made by another, less elderly woman (though her age seems variable) that she, and not Locke, was either the creator of his most famous work; or perhaps only helped to create it; or inspired it; or maybe was the model for it. Tiresomely, she keeps popping up to press one or another of these claims: at a talk Nessa gives at the gallery, at Nessa's home, then at the home of Locke's widow, and again at the gallery, this time pretending to be a docent, and so on. All of which threatens the integrity of the upcoming show.

The complications to the other part of the story, the marital infidelity and Nessa's persistent sense of being deeply wronged by it, involve the appearance of one Stuart Harkin and his 20-ish son, Luke. Years earlier, we discover only now, Stuart and Nessa had a long, secret affair while he was living with and then married to Nessa's dearest friend, Amy. Later, well after Nessa was herself married, they slept together again.

Luke discovers these facts and threatens to expose Nessa's dual betrayal — of Philip and Amy, which betrayal may have caused Amy, his mother, to kill herself when he was still a toddler.

Whew!

Indeed, McLaughlin herself seems overwhelmed by all these complications, enough so that she loses track of the details of various of its strands — a few of which seem to emerge from a similar situation in one of her short stories. There's some confusion about just how long ago Philip had his affair. There are different versions of the degree of Stuart's infidelity. Was he wildly promiscuous? Or unfaithful only once, with Nessa? At one point Nessa

tracks down her daughter via a suddenly remembered handy app on her cellphone; in a later moment when she's desperate to find the girl, she appears to have forgotten that possibility entirely. Occasionally she seems to know what's happening in a scene she doesn't have access to.

Finally, it's hard to *get* Nessa. Sometimes she seems highly competent. At other times she rushes headlong into situations whose disastrous outcomes are clear to the reader from the get-go. (Don't do that, Nessa!) Sometimes she seems lost in genuine sorrow about her husband's infidelity; but later, about to be exposed in her own infidelity and wanting to hold onto the moral advantage her victimhood gives her, she calculatingly decides to confess to Philip only the part of her infidelity that happened before their marriage.

It's hard, too, to hold onto the sense we have of other characters, because their behavior often seems dictated by the necessities of the complicated plot; and this, in turn, makes it harder to hold onto a clear sense of what, exactly, the plot is.

And yet we want to. We want to go on reading because there are examples of McLaughlin's gifts on every page, and in them the promise of the pleasure a novel more fully in her control will offer. I, for one, can't wait. □

SUE MILLER *is the author of 13 books. Her latest novel, "Monogamy," came out last fall.*

Ceaselessly Into the Past

This novel imagines Nick Carraway before he meets Gatsby.

By BEN FOUNTAIN

"SOLDIERS ARE DREAMERS," wrote the poet Siegfried Sassoon, and the Nick Carraway of Michael Farris Smith's new "Great Gatsby"-inspired novel, "Nick," dreams hard. Amid the battlefields of World War I, he dreams of his lover, Ella, back in Paris, and of his Minnesota parents and his near-idyllic upbringing in the Midwest.

But a more toxic irreality is at work in him as well. "A life divided. A mind divided." That's the Nick we encounter on leave in Paris, trying and mostly failing to reconcile his experience of combat with what is generally, and perhaps too loosely, called

NICK
By Michael Farris Smith
296 pp. Little, Brown & Company. $27.

reality, and he will run this razor's edge of sanity through the rest of the war and into its only marginally less harrowing aftermath.

Smith intends to give us the B.G. (Before Gatsby) version of Nick, though how well this Nick meshes with the Nick we know from "The Great Gatsby" is debatable. Farris's B.G. Nick seems too hard-used by the war to square neatly with the ironic, bantering Nick who will someday, between the covers of that other book, show up for dinner at the Buchanans. But such is the power of "Nick" that I found myself hardly caring whether one Nick squares with the other.

In all the ways that really matter, "Nick" is an exemplary novel. Smith delivers a moving, full-bodied depiction of a man who has been knocked loose from his moorings and is trying to claw back into his own life. "I need to go home," Nick says at one point, then thinks: "I'm not going home. . . . And I won't ever say that again."

The trenches, horrible as they are, aren't as bad as the forest, and the forest, bad as it is, isn't as awful as the tunnels. Nick endures them all, suffers, is left for dead and rises again. He finds Ella, loses her, then finds and loses her again. When he arrives back in America after the war, he stumbles "sunkeyed and deranged" off a train in New Orleans and straight into a blood feud between his fellow veteran Judah and Judah's estranged wife, Colette, who runs a brothel.

A great deal happens in this story. Miles are covered, cities explored, people collide to loving or lethal effect, but Smith creates an elegiac, meditative tone that serves as an apt counterpoint for the story's through-line of desperation. "She had felt it all in that moment," he writes of Colette seeing Judah on his return from the war, "the separation and the pain inflicted upon him and the pain inflicted upon her and the quiet space when she believed that the death which had separated them was nothing as acute as this moment of recognition." We hear echoes of Fitzgerald, of course, but also of Faulkner, Hemingway and a less baroque Cormac McCarthy. It's a classic American sound, and Smith renders it with sufficient intensity that his iteration of chaos and depravity in 1919, in the wake of war, feels very much alive and relevant to 2021.

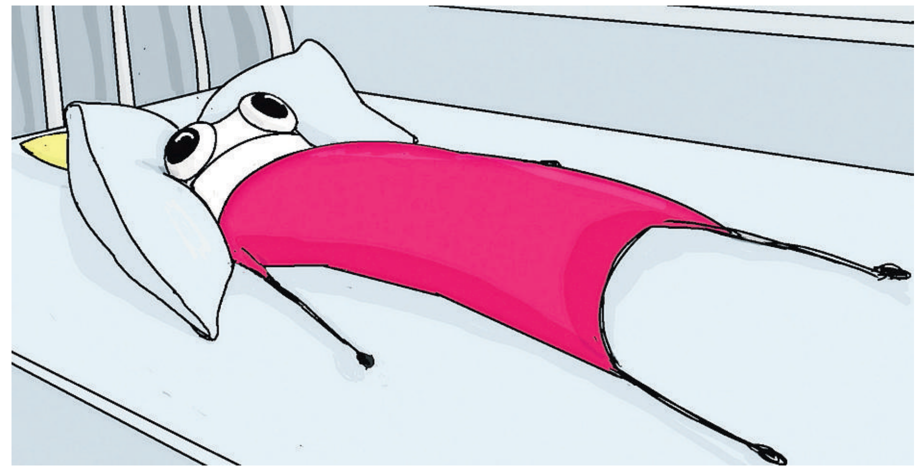
The only time I felt even slightly scanted by this fine novel was remembering that moment at the end of Chapter 2 of "The Great Gatsby," when Nick is in the elevator with Mr. McKee, the "pale feminine man from the flat below." One moment they're discussing getting together for lunch, and the next, following a brief stutter of ellipses, Nick is standing beside McKee's bed, and McKee himself is sitting up between the sheets in his underwear. I would have liked to see Smith take a run at illuminating this small nudge of a scene, so determinedly ignored by generations of English teachers.

In any case, Smith leaves Nick where he should, where we all first found him, in the cottage at West Egg at the start of summer, noticing a green dock light on the other side of the bay. So it ends, and so it begins. □

BEN FOUNTAIN'S *most recent book is "Beautiful Country Burn Again: Democracy, Rebellion, and Revolution."*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ELLIE TZONI

After an absence of seven years, Allie Brosh returns with her sad, funny takes on depression.



From "Solutions and Other Problems."

I CAME LATE to Allie Brosh's "Hyperbole and a Half" — later than the outspoken fan Bill Gates and numerous enthusiastic writers for Psychology Today — but when I fell, I fell hard. (I even bought the calendar.) A selection of Brosh's autobiographical word-and-image stories from her blog of the same name (which she began in college while procrastinating for a final), "Hyperbole and a Half" made me laugh harder than anything I could remember.

First there was her drawing style: a charming, stripped-down visual vocabulary accomplished entirely in the free software program Paintbrush, in which faces — of effervescently manic children, bewildered staring parents and various dogs — took center stage as vehicles of expression.

Then there was her muscular storytelling, which, like her drawing, was economical and effective, hitting just the right beats, both funny and dark, introspective and observant. And often structurally ingenious: "Warning Signs," a piece about digging up, in the backyard, a letter she wrote to her future self when she was 10, is addressed to other versions of her past self. She appears, at all ages, as a small creature with stick arms, a bright pink dress and a yellow ponytail.

One of Brosh's central subjects was — and still is — depression. She found fame and community on the internet creating stories that explained what it felt like to be depressed, evoking the disconnect between interior feeling and exterior behavior through the interplay of words and images. In one vivid example, she tries to move her face into appropriate expressions in conversation: "How do you make the face for 'yay'? Am I doing it? I hope I'm doing it," she thinks.

Around the time "Hyperbole and a Half" was published in 2013 — it was a best seller — Brosh went dark on the internet. Her latest, highly anticipated book, **SOLUTIONS AND OTHER PROBLEMS (528 pp., Gallery, $30),** had been announced on Amazon for years, with a shifting set of publication dates and cancellations. It's a much bigger book than the portable softcover "Hyperbole and a Half"; clocking in at over 500 pages, it feels much less disciplined. While Brosh's sly, goofy style still appeals, and presents even more variety here, the stories are uneven. One has a punch line about piles of solid waste. (Sigh: "The Poop Mystery.") Brosh often doubles down on her prose, explaining and re-explaining a point.

The tautness of her earlier stories is largely missing. Some are fanciful, like "Daydreams," which cycles through visions of triumph; partway through, after drawing the intrigues of an international chess competition, the narrator proclaims, "I'm not sure where it goes after that, but feel free to enjoy this disjointed stream of victory related images," which she then presents. (Brosh's grandiosity is an ongoing joke.) Large parts of the book have a similar meandering feel. In one story that exhausts itself in action and tone, she details how a determined child, a neighbor, is desperate to show a resistant Brosh her bedroom; what might be a two-page anecdote here runs almost 20 pages.

And yet there are some genuinely moving episodes in "Solutions and Other Problems." Enfolded into the childhood high jinks and adult meditations is a tribute to her sister, Kaiti, who died by suicide in 2013, shortly after the release of "Hyperbole and a Half." Within a long chapter called "Losing," Brosh pays tribute to her in a wordless, 12-page spread that offers images of their shared childhood; the first image is Kaiti as a onesie-wearing infant, looking up from her crib. Brosh draws a reverse shot to open this sequence: The first panel takes Allie's perspective, looking down at her expectant, cheerful baby sister, followed by what Kaiti sees, a grinning child standing over her, poking toys into the crib for her amusement. "We'd had a strange relationship, and I wasn't prepared for it to be over," Brosh writes by way of introduction. Here the silent images show the sisters, who grew up in rural Idaho, coming together and coming apart.

Dan Mazur's **LUNATIC: A WORDLESS STORY (200 pp., Fanfare, $20),** is a whimsical tale that unfurls, much like Brosh's piece about her sister, without dialogue or verbal narration, but in a richly textured black and white. One of my favorite images, in shadowy charcoal strokes, shows a small baby, in bonnet and ruffled collar, staring meaningfully up from her pram at what we later realize is the full moon. Her little arms rest in front of her, utterly relaxed; when the moon smiles at her, she waves back.

"Lunatic" is a Victorian-era story that charts the life of this unnamed person and her deep love affair with the moon, which leads her to shun human romance and also to pursue astronomy. It's a feminist book about following your passions over and against convention; its title derives from the Latin, meaning "of the moon," or "moonstruck," and the protagonist's communication with that luminous satellite is certainly mystical.

What animates "Lunatic" is not only its propulsive, chronological story — we are treated to only one image per page and yet move quickly through the stages of the character's life — but also Mazur's careful rendering. The style changes meaningfully, from fine and detailed in one chapter to loose thick lines in the next. "I wanted each picture to have its own 'presence,'" Mazur writes in a postscript about process, which reveals his historical influences and his tools, including tape and toothbrushes. (What I called "charcoal" above? Technically it's a conté crayon.) As fascinating as the story itself, this section underscores the labor that goes into creating graphic narratives — a feature implicit in the talented Brosh's messy take on the messiness of life. □

From "Lunatic."

HILLARY CHUTE, *one of the Book Review's Graphic Content columnists, is the author, most recently, of "Why Comics? From Underground to Everywhere," now out in paperback.*

Separated at Birth

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

tion, and in their intimate tale are the seeds of today's adoption practices and parenting norms, as our past continually redefines our present.

Margaret grew up in postwar Manhattan, a daughter of German parents who fled the Nazis. Her mother was a homemaker, her father a baker, and while they took pride in providing for Margaret, theirs was not an effusive household. Nor was it a transparent one. Most things were not talked about: not the comfortable lives the elder Erles left behind, not their difficulties adjusting to life in the United States, not Mrs. Erle's breast cancer — and certainly not sex. The closest Margaret came to "the talk" was when her mother said, of boys: "Don't let them touch you. Don't give them the wrong idea."

The Erles did make known their ambitions for Margaret, however. She was to grow up, marry and lead a prosperous life, reflecting well on her parents, repayment for their sacrifice and suffering.

Margaret was 15 when she met George Katz, the 16-year-old pitcher on their high school baseball team. Both sets of parents immediately disapproved, so the couple necked in parks in the summer, and by winter had use of a bedroom in a schoolmate's apartment while that girl's divorced mother worked.

The single time they had intercourse Margaret was not entirely sure what they'd done. She "did know, from her friends, and a few embarrassed glances at confession magazines, how babies were conceived — sort of," Glaser writes.

Once was enough. The young couple pledged to keep their baby and marry when they reached legal age. George began to make the rounds at local arcades, using his pitching talents to win Pyrex and CorningWare for the home they would share.

In Margaret's sixth month, her mother deposited her at Lakeview, a "maternity home" on Staten Island, owned by Louise Wise Services. For a hefty fee, the agency would keep a young woman fed and sheltered until she gave birth, then return her with reassurance that there was "no need for anyone to ever know."

The baby she named Stephen Mark Erle was born on Dec. 17, 1961. When she rejected anesthesia because she wanted to be awake for the birth, she was placed in restraints and put into "twilight sleep." When she came to and asked to hold the boy, she was told: "You're one of the girls from Lakeview. You don't get to hold your baby."

For months the young birth parents insisted they would keep their child, who had been placed immediately in foster care. Finally, when a social worker threatened to have Margaret sent to juvenile hall, she signed the relinquishment forms without reading them.

The possibility of being declared a delinquent was very real, but nearly everything else Margaret was told was a lie. Glaser describes in powerful detail how both David's first and second mothers were told what they wanted to hear about each other and about the baby they shared. Louise Wise would excuse it all in the interest of giving the boy — renamed David Rosenberg — the best possible life. But for the next 50 years Margaret would carry guilt about her lost son; Ephraim and Esther Rosenberg would be mystified by their adopted one; and David, constantly reassured by his adoptive mother that he was special because she "chose" him, would wonder, "What was it about him that made his birth mother *not* choose him?"

That Margaret and David find each other is not a spoiler. "I found my birth mother," he tells Glaser on Page 5, in May of 2014. The hows of the search, and what happens next, read like a novel, one likely to bring tears.

"American Baby" is a braided tale. Margaret and George Erle are one thread (they marry and go on to have three children); David Rosenberg is another (he grows up to be a renowned cantor). The third is the world that surrounds them — the "massive experiment in social engineering" in postwar America of which they were all subjects.

"People had always had sex before marriage," Glaser writes, "but after the war, something in the social calculus shifted." The mix of soldiers returning with sexual experience, plus larger suburban homes in which teenagers could have more privacy, combined with the rise of automobile culture and the availability of "the back seat of the family Buick" — all at a time when birth control, sex education and abortion were taboo — led out-of-wedlock births to more than triple between 1940 and 1966.

In earlier eras, a single pregnant woman would have quickly married. But in postwar America, where the goal had become a two-car garage and the white picket fence, "surprise pregnancies were an obstacle to a better life," one that "needed to 'go away,'" Glaser writes. At the same time, the "frenzy of homemaking and family-building" left infertile couples ashamed.

Adoption agencies became the middleman to meet both needs. And in the rush to create perfect families — and to collect a fee for each child they placed — agencies like Louise Wise blurred what, through today's lens, are clear ethical lines.

Not only did the agencies fail to consider "the lifelong emotional impact of women who were hidden away in shame during pregnancy, expected to lie about it ever after and then told to put their babies out of their minds," Glaser writes, but they also failed to give much thought to "the feelings of the adoptees who were brought up to think their biological parents hadn't wanted them, and that — regardless of how cherished they were — they were their adoptive parents' 'second choice' to biological offspring."

Worse than those omissions, however, were acts of commission: Identical twins and triplets placed in separate homes, then studied for similarities and differences. Babies born to institutionalized psychiatric patients who were placed with families not told of that fact. Singletons who spent months bouncing from one foster home to another until an "expert" could determine whether they were mixed race. (Louise Wise relied on Harry Shapiro, a forensic anthropologist at the American Museum of Natural History, to make the call.) The agency used the lag time for such studies as shooting rubber bands at the soles of tender infant feet to see if quickness to cry was linked to intelligence.

Was all of the above the result of ignorance? Defenders of the system have argued that knowledge of genetics and infant development back then was rudimentary, and that these choices were made with the best of intentions. Glaser, however, is persuasive in her argument that the actions at best ignored inconvenient evidence, and at worst acted in spite of it. For instance, as David idled in foster care, there were existing studies proving the importance of attachment and the harm of moving an infant from one foster mother to the next.

Even if one is inclined to give benefit of the doubt to early agency choices, it is harder to reconcile later ones. When David turned 20, Margaret visited the agency to update medical information — by then her husband had developed diabetes, required dialysis, and was on the list for a kidney transplant — and to leave her contact information should her son ever need it. The staff refused to let her in and even threatened to call the police. Nearly 20 years later, David too had diabetes, was on dialysis and needed a kidney transplant. The agency that had inherited his records refused to share any information.

All around them, the world was changing. Feminism, the birth control pill and Roe v. Wade gave women in Margaret's situation a completely different set of choices. The number of babies surrendered for adoption in the United States dropped 26 percent between 1970 and 1975. The number of couples seeking to adopt fell as well, as reproductive medicine increased their ability to conceive.

The adoption rights movement gained traction, arguing that "access to one's own birth certificate is a human and civil right." As a result, 10 states opened previously sealed adoption files, although New York did not do so until 2019, and some of the largest — Texas, California and Florida — are still closed. In many cases the availability of government records is a moot point, as genetic testing companies make it possible for adoptees and birth parents to find one another with a swab and a membership fee.

One powerful message of "American Baby," though, is that the shadows of the past cannot be easily dismissed as mistakes of an unenlightened moment. Today, the nearly half a million international adoptees in the United States do not have access to their birth records. And the tens of thousands of babies created from donor gametes are not legally entitled to identifying information. The American foster care system, no longer a waystation for white infants being studied, is now more likely a dead end for Black and brown babies shuttled from one home to the next. (Glaser acknowledges that the story of adoption in the 1950s and '60s was focused on white babies and parents, and that the experience of Black families during that period "is deserving of its own detailed examination.")

In the end one is left with a question — one Glaser does not articulate directly, but which weaves itself through every chapter of her book. What about the future?

The stories of Margaret and David and the millions of others who lived through the Baby Scoop are vivid evidence that policy and culture change the trajectory of individual lives. "Again and again," Glaser writes of the era, "the nation's powerful religious and political institutions collaborated to control women's bodies and the destinies of babies."

What decisions being made today will some future author — and readers — look back on as having had profound and unexpected consequences? What future books will be written about today's assumptions, choices and mistakes? □

LISA BELKIN, *a former reporter for The Times, is the author of "Show Me a Hero," the basis for the HBO miniseries.*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GOLDEN COSMOS

Everyday Strangeness

This story collection offers vivid, often fantastical portraits of life.

By NOOR QASIM

WOULDN'T LIFE BE simpler if we could just slumber through it? In "The Sleep," the opening story of Caitlin Horrocks's new collection, the residents of a shrinking Midwestern town explore this enticing proposition. Faced with a death in the community and the practical costs of surviving harsh winters, the residents of Bounty decide to try hibernation. "Why stay?" ask nosy reporters. The residents answer: "Our people had moved to Bounty because the land was there and it was empty, and

LIFE AMONG THE TERRANAUTS
By Caitlin Horrocks
260 pp. Little, Brown & Company. $27.

now all we had was the emptiness and one another." Bounty's decline has been severe but gradual; residents hardly notice it until the town's dilapidated buildings are shown on television. Hibernation is their strange yet dignified response.

With this opening tale, one might expect a fanciful collection about the white Midwest, about lives in rural communities that once flourished and now, to varying degrees, lie dormant. And indeed, several of this collection's strongest stories take place in Michigan, near lakes, both Great and small, along highways bordered by dense wood. In "Teacher," a teenager in the state's north-central region throws a brick off an Interstate overpass, killing a young mother. The teenager's former fourth-grade teacher learns about the woman's final hours from a local nurse, and retreats into her memories of the boy, considering his sadistic impulses and her failure even to try to curb them. The story is brief but vivid, its opening and closing lines full of searing clarity.

But this collection ranges farther afield, to Prague and the (virtual) Oregon Trail, and into internal territories, from the mind of a young girl obsessed with a lost blanket to that of a retired English teacher nearing death and trying to parse the events of her day. "Paradise Lodge" takes place in the Peruvian jungle, and has an omniscient narrator who reveals the perspectives of three tourists and their guide with flashes of insight. Aileen, a wealthy Canadian, gazes lovingly at her "long-limbed, fuzzy children, but the emotion that lingers longest is sympathy at how many hours of life her daughter is destined to spend shaving or waxing."

As was evident in her debut collection, "This Is Not Your City," Horrocks is adept at playing with perspective, delving into the minds of puzzling, sometimes troubling, characters. The loss feels greater, then, when her intriguing premises sap her characters of interiority and her stories of life. Horrocks cleverly draws upon games to determine the structures of "Better Not Tell You Now" and "On the Oregon Trail," but little else can be said for them. "The Untranslatables," the story of a man obsessed with foreign words that capture indescribable experiences, treads into territory better ceded to Lydia Davis. The words truly *are* untranslatable, so we are left with a slurry of useless definitions and

Caitlin Horrocks

little of the *frisson* of interlingual delight. The story's saving grace is its final line, which feels, appropriately, as if it were pulled from Kafka: "Instead, he swallowed the word and crouched, listening, until his whole body was an ear."

The title story, "Life Among the Terranauts," walks this line between intrigue and interiority more gracefully. An engineer raised in a strict religious sect witnesses the final days of NovaTerra — a vast dome in the desert inspired by the real-life Biosphere 2 in Arizona. Inside it is a supposedly self-sustaining ecosystem where six people of varying expertise must remain for two years. The engineer's dedication to the project was once strong, fueled by what she describes as "an empty space in my stomach that grew no matter what I filled it with," but now she is losing faith. The experiment is failing, the Terranauts are starving and the resident philosopher has become a problem. It is a chilling story, and it is fitting that the volume bears its name. The title captures the collection's breadth, its mixture of the strange and the mundane. One only wishes her stories were a bit stranger, or even more mundane, that Horrocks might dive deep in one direction, as the people of Bounty did, diving into sleep. □

NOOR QASIM *is the editing fellow at the Book Review.*

Tip of the Iceberg

A memoir set against the backdrop of the climate crisis.

By BEN EHRENREICH

WHEN WE THINK of migratory peoples, the images that most likely come to mind are of pastoralists clinging to dwindling herds, their cultures threatened by climate change and the cruel expansion of modern ways. But there exists another class of semi-nomadic people, an exceedingly small one, who are still able to migrate freely as the weather moves them. They pride themselves on their grit and independence and tend not to mention the key resources — money and petroleum — that make their lifestyle possible.

Gretel Ehrlich is an exemplary member of this tribe. "Unsolaced," her latest book, opens "in an off-grid cabin set on a glacial moraine" in the Wind River Mountains of Wyoming. She has another house in Ha-

UNSOLACED
Along the Way to All That Is
By Gretel Ehrlich
242 pp. Pantheon. $26.95.

waii — "on the Big Island, where I live four months of the year" — and another on 100 acres of untrammeled California coastland. (James Cameron is a neighbor.) "Some internal churning, a chronic restlessness," she writes, pushes her to travel to the Arctic and to Africa and to wherever fate takes her. A trauma surgeon she meets in an airport tells her about the village in Kosovo where he grew up and his mission "to save the forgotten people of the world." Ehrlich weeps. "I've spent a lot of time living in subsistence villages," she tells him. "I understand." Soon she's on a plane to Pristina.

Born into wealth in Santa Barbara — her mother "dabbled in the fashion world" and her father always had a plane — Ehrlich threw off the "bon vivant life" and spent years toiling on cattle ranches, "cowboying" with the last of the breed. "I needed to strip away anything that impeded the feel of the earth," Ehrlich writes, "anything that obscured direct access" to the raw pulse of terrestrial existence. Her courage is impressive, her experiences no less than extraordinary.

High in the Arctic, she listens to the drip of a melting glacier, "summer's fast clock in a slow, geological world." She hears the "gulping, sloshing, gurgling" of walruses breathing through a hole in the ice. She treks through Greenland's far north, hallucinating with hunger and sensory derangement. "Sprays of light shot out from the ends of my fingers. . . . The earth was an instrument, and my walking on it made music that only I could hear." She is even hit by lightning.

At their best, Ehrlich's reminiscences

Melting away in Greenland.

carve a melancholy track, depicting the disastrous losses, human and otherwise, that accompany global warming. At its worst, though, "Unsolaced" can feel like climate crisis tourism. ("Later I helped feed Allan's adopted baby elephant. . . . ") Ehrlich hops around too much to truly register the emotional weight of the catastrophes she describes. The hand-wringing feels gratuitous. "It's getting smaller, isn't it," she says to her friend Nita, whose family owns an island. "All the places we can go to find solace."

More galling is Ehrlich's silence on the actual forces propelling the crisis. "The two root causes of climate change," she repeatedly insists, are "the loss of albedo" — i.e., the reflective power of polar ice — and desertification "caused by ineffectual rainfall." But ice loss and drought are symp-

'I've spent a lot of time living in subsistence villages. I understand.'

toms. Their actual root cause — atmospheric carbon emitted through the combustion of fossil fuels — should no longer be controversial. Ehrlich, though, uses the phrase "fossil fuel" only once and barely mentions oil that doesn't come from narwhals.

All blame here gets laid on "we humans," a "failed species," although the actual humans Ehrlich meets in Zimbabwe and Greenland contributed next to nothing to this catastrophe. The fact that the wealthiest people in the wealthiest countries on the planet bear the overwhelming share of the responsibility for the climate crisis is perhaps a cause of discomfort for her. It certainly should be. The truest sentence in "Unsolaced" may be its last one: "What I have written is an odd kind of memoir, notable — if at all — for what has been left out." □

BEN EHRENREICH *is the author of "Desert Notebooks."*

PHOTOGRAPHS, FROM LEFT: TYLER STEIMLE; SEAN GALLUP/GETTY IMAGES

Figuring It Out

Adolescent identity on center ice.

By SUSAN KITTENPLAN

THE COMEBACK
By E.L. Shen
272 pp. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $16.99.
(Ages 8 to 12)

ANA ON THE EDGE
By A.J. Sass
384 pp. Little, Brown & Company. $16.99.
(Ages 8 to 12)

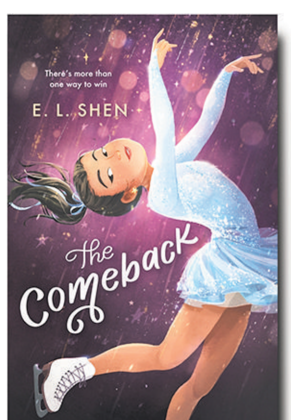
GLORIA STEINEM, while being honored in 2015 by the organization Figure Skating in Harlem, spoke about having been a skater herself at an early age. It was, she remarked, one of the few sports deemed suitable for young girls at the time. Steinem went on to talk about the Olympic gold medalist and 1930s and '40s movie star Sonja Henie, calling her one of the first feminists, a female celebrity in control of her money and career choices. It was striking that an activity seen as female-appropriate could also be a platform for female breakthrough. That exemplifies the dichotomy of skating: a sport in which athletes wear sequins and big smiles while effortlessly landing a jump on one leg, imposing pressure close to 10 times their body weight on a 3/16-inch-wide stainless steel blade. Skaters work hard to make it all look easy.

What better arena, then, in which to present the contradictions of adolescence, when athletic middle-schoolers fear rejection by their peers while loving the limelight? In two novels focused on preteen skaters, immersion in a demanding sport that's all about scrutiny and judgment — of oneself and others — becomes a means to exploring their sense of identity as they struggle with popularity, discrimination and difference. The authors, both skaters, are well versed in the gripping realities of the competitive skating universe. Both write knowledgeably about jumps, spins and footwork, and try to untangle the complexities of the sport's structure and scoring system. They also address the expense of figure skating — how it affects families who take on this big investment, and the strain and guilt it can put on a young skater. The first-person narrators in both novels seem to be thinking out loud, "figuring" things out as they go along.

In "The Comeback," by E. L. Shen, the sixth grader Maxine Chen's life revolves around figure skating in her hometown, the former Olympic village of Lake Placid, N.Y. Maxine wants to skate at Nationals, but she has to win one of the top four spots at Sectionals to get there. She is also navigating life at the local middle school, where she is the only Chinese-American student in an almost all-Caucasian student body.

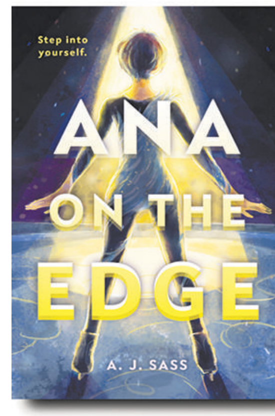
Maxine loves her supportive parents, her wry but understanding coaches and her best friend, Victoria. Or at least she used to. Victoria has a crush on a popular bully named Alex, a boy who picks on Maxine constantly. Alex tells Maxine that a self-portrait she's painting in art class should have narrower eyes and that she should let him cheat off her pop quiz because "you people are good at math." He writes nasty ethnic slurs on his computer that he can erase quickly from his screen but not from her memory.

In her skating world, things start turning upside down too. Maxine isn't doing well in ballet class, struggles to keep up with homework and puts herself through a painful experiment with cosmetic stickers that an Asian girl in a video claims made her eyes wider. Then Maxine faces a new blond-haired, green-eyed girl named Hollie, who competes at her level, has an elite Russian coach and is a far better skater. Maxine fights internal battles about rivalry, sportsmanship and standing up for herself.



When Alex's racist bullying comes to a head, Maxine surprisingly gets support from Hollie, who helps her cut Alex down to size. The perfect blonde also confides in Maxine that she finds skating lonely, hates being judged and is thinking about quitting. Maxine learns there can be insecurity and self-loathing behind a tormentor's bravado and the pretty trappings of a successful skater.

With fast-paced prose and an ear for authentic dialogue, Shen brings big emotions and ideas to the hyper-focused world of the obsessive skater. Her sharp depiction of an eager and courageous Maxine makes the lessons about the ebb and flow of friendship less clichéd than they might have been.



A touching moment comes when Maxine's parents tell her they had tried to shelter her from experiencing bigotry but now know it was a fool's errand: Maxine is strong enough to defend herself. Maxine agrees, realizing she'll always be, as they put it, "a fighter," whether at the rink, at school or anywhere else in the future. In a novel whose title refers to both Maxine's tenacity as a skater and her ability to counter Alex's slurs, Shen has created a high-spirited character worth cheering for.

"Ana on the Edge," by A. J. Sass, takes the reader on a different voyage of discovery. Twelve-year-old Ana-Marie Jin, the new juvenile girls' national champion, is facing difficult changes. She follows her coach to a new skating complex farther from her home in San Francisco where a new choreographer insists she wear a skirt during their lessons, contrary to her wishes. Ana is given no say about her new program ("Sleeping Beauty") or her costume for it, which she finds too dainty and princess-y.

Meanwhile, she starts to realize how much her single mother has sacrificed to make her dreams a possibility. But Ana isn't sure what her dreams are anymore. Even with her success on the ice, she has never felt at home in her own skin, and not because of her unusual half-Chinese, half-Jewish heritage. She finds herself wincing when people call her "Miss" or use her full name, and she can't shake the visceral shudder she feels when pressured into acting like a typical girl. Still, she can't pinpoint the source of her anguish.

While her best friend, Tamar, texts constantly, wanting to hear about her life at the new rink, Ana is fascinated by a skater named Hayden who has just moved to the area from Minnesota and will be starting group lessons. Ana works as a skating assistant and is curious as to why Hayden's mom has requested an update to his name and asked everyone to use male pronouns for him. She learns terms she never knew before — gender-neutral, nonbinary — and an entire world opens up to her, one she desperately wants to explore but doesn't understand why. "Can people really ask others to call them whatever they want?" she asks herself, since she doesn't trust anyone to give her the answer.

When they meet, Hayden starts calling Ana "Alex" and thinks she's a boy because she's wearing the wrong name tag by mistake. She doesn't correct him. Ana becomes good friends with Hayden, spending a lot of time with him and his family, who all think she's one of the guys. Every time she has an opening to clear up the misunderstanding she doesn't take it. She even goes so far as to avoid entering a public bathroom in front of him. Ana wants to clarify her identity in her own mind before she defines herself to others.

Tamar feels her pull away and misconstrues her evasion as selfishness. Her mom and her coach are kept in the dark about her hatred of the new program and costume. If she can't even get her mother to call her Ana instead of Ana-Marie, how can she explain that she doesn't know where she fits in terms of gender?

"It's not my body that makes me feel uncomfortable, or the shimmering, sparkling costume," Ana realizes when she looks in the mirror at herself in the "Sleeping Beauty" dress. "It's what other people will think of me when they see me wearing it: *girl, princess, Intermediate lady.*"

Setting the record straight is hard to do when you don't know what your truth is, especially at 12. Ana has some difficult encounters when she finally unburdens herself to Tamar, to her mom, to her coach and, toughest of all, to Hayden. But their responses surprise her. She feels at peace with letting go of her secrets and ready to make her own choices — at school, at home, at the rink.

Sass has created dynamic, original characters who are believable and fun to follow. Sometimes it's unclear where he's going with his story lines — especially Hayden's love of cosplay, which he introduces halfway through the novel — but the plot comes together nimbly toward the end. You can't help rooting for Ana, though we're left wondering how she will move forward. "I haven't figured out if I want to try different pronouns yet," she tells her mother, "so you can keep using 'she' for now."

Ana decides to continue skating, and raises the possibility of competing someday in the men's category, a new challenge that could be a book in itself. ☐

SUSAN KITTENPLAN, *former vice president of lifestyle content at Yahoo, is co-creating a TV pilot about figure skating for NBC.*

Best Sellers

The New York Times

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

COMBINED PRINT AND E-BOOK BEST SELLERS

SALES PERIOD OF JANUARY 3-9

Fiction

THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	Fiction	WEEKS ON LIST
1	1	**THE DUKE AND I,** by Julia Quinn. (Avon) Daphne Bridgerton's reputation soars when she colludes with the Duke of Hastings. The basis of the Netflix series "Bridgerton."	2
2		**STAR WARS: LIGHT OF THE JEDI,** by Charles Soule. (Del Rey) In this installment of the High Republic series, a disaster in hyperspace may cause far greater damage.	1
3		**NEIGHBORS,** by Danielle Steel. (Delacorte) A Hollywood recluse's perspective changes when she invites her neighbors into her mansion after an earthquake.	1
4	2	**THE VANISHING HALF,** by Brit Bennett. (Riverhead) The lives of twin sisters who run away from a Southern Black community at age 16 diverge as one returns and the other takes on a different racial identity but their fates intertwine.	32
5	7	**THE VISCOUNT WHO LOVED ME,** by Julia Quinn. (Avon) The second book in the Bridgerton series.	2
6		**THE WIFE UPSTAIRS,** by Rachel Hawkins. (St. Martin's) A recently arrived dog walker in a Southern gated community falls for a mysterious widower.	1
7	13	**ROMANCING MISTER BRIDGERTON,** by Julia Quinn. (Avon) The fourth book in the Bridgerton series.	2
8		**WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING,** by Delia Owens. (Putnam) In a quiet town on the North Carolina coast in 1969, a young woman who survived alone in the marsh becomes a murder suspect.	116
9	6	**A TIME FOR MERCY,** by John Grisham. (Doubleday) The third book in the Jake Brigance series. A 16-year-old is accused of killing a deputy in Clanton, Miss., in 1990.	13
10		**OUTLAWED,** by Anna North. (Bloomsbury) Ada, who apprentices midwifery under her mother, must decide whether to aid a band of outlaws who want to create a safe haven for outcast women.	1

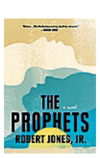
22

Nonfiction

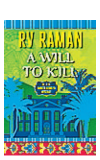
THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	Nonfiction	WEEKS ON LIST
1	1	**A PROMISED LAND,** by Barack Obama. (Crown) In the first volume of his presidential memoirs, Barack Obama offers personal reflections on his formative years and pivotal moments through his first term.	8
2	3	**UNTAMED,** by Glennon Doyle. (Dial) The activist and public speaker describes her journey of listening to her inner voice.	44
3	2	**GREENLIGHTS,** by Matthew McConaughey. (Crown) The Academy Award-winning actor shares snippets from the diaries he kept over the last 35 years.	12
4		**ON TYRANNY,** by Timothy Snyder. (Tim Duggan) Twenty lessons from the 20th century about the course of tyranny.	24
5		**EDUCATED,** by Tara Westover. (Random House) The daughter of survivalists, who is kept out of school, educates herself enough to leave home for university.	126
6	4	**CASTE,** by Isabel Wilkerson. (Random House) The Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist reveals a rigid hierarchy in America today.	23
7	5	**THE BODY KEEPS THE SCORE,** by Bessel van der Kolk. (Penguin) How trauma affects the body and mind, and innovative treatments for recovery.	20
8	6	**BECOMING,** by Michelle Obama. (Crown) The former first lady describes her journey from the South Side of Chicago to the White House, and how she balanced work, family and her husband's political ascent.	93
9	12	**BRAIDING SWEETGRASS,** by Robin Wall Kimmerer. (Milkweed Editions) A botanist and member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation espouses having an understanding and appreciation of plants and animals.	2
10	8	**THE SPLENDID AND THE VILE,** by Erik Larson. (Crown) An examination of the leadership of the prime minister Winston Churchill.	32

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

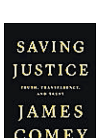
Editors' Choice / Staff Picks From the Book Review



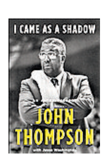
THE PROPHETS, by Robert Jones Jr. (Putnam, $27.) A lyrical and rebellious love story about two enslaved boys in Mississippi, whose relationship is accepted and even cherished until a Christian evangelist, also enslaved, turns the plantation against them. The novel is about their choice to love in the face of the forces that would crush them, and the repercussions of that love.



A WILL TO KILL, by RV Raman. (Polis, $26.) This modern-day gloss on the classic locked-room mystery takes place in a remote mansion high in the hills of southern India. After the property has been completely cut off by a landslide, guests at a party there begin to die one by one, picked off by an invisible assailant.



SAVING JUSTICE: Truth, Transparency, and Trust, by James Comey. (Flatiron, $29.99.) This revealing memoir by the man who was fired as director of the F.B.I. for placing loyalty to country above loyalty to Donald Trump presents an individual of unswerving rectitude, who rues the national descent from strict, fact-based truth into a feckless mirage.

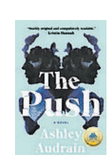


I CAME AS A SHADOW: An Autobiography, by John Thompson with Jesse Washington. (Holt, $29.99.) Standing 6-foot-10 with a booming voice and an urban dictionary's worth of curse words, the one-time Georgetown basketball coach inspired a potent mixture of fear and respect. In this lively and entertaining book, Thompson, who died in August, finally gets to cast his legend on his own terms.

PEE WEES: Confessions of a Hockey Parent, by Rich Cohen. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, $27.) Cohen's memoir of sports fatherhood follows one season in the life of a Connecticut youth hockey team — including all the ups and downs and personalities and a close-up, honest examination of the motivations behind his own devotion to the sport.

THE HEARING TRUMPET, by Leonora Carrington. (New York Review Books, paper, $15.95.) Carrington, the Surrealist painter and writer, defies all expectations with her curious 1974 novel about, well, everything. The 92-year-old protagonist is sent to an elder-care institution, where she unlocks a world of enigmatic abbesses, murder plots, mythology and apocalypse.

NINE DAYS: The Race to Save Martin Luther King Jr.'s Life and Win the 1960 Election, by Stephen Kendrick and Paul Kendrick. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, $28.) The Kendricks tell the story of how the arrest of Martin Luther King Jr. in Georgia led to a telephone call that may have changed the direction of American politics.



THE PUSH, by Ashley Audrain. (Pamela Dorman, $26.) Audrain's taut, tense thriller considers the legacy of childhood trauma and the evergreen parental question of whether one's child is "normal." A mother grapples with these issues along with the disintegration of her marriage in this chilling debut.

THE LIAR'S DICTIONARY, by Eley Williams. (Doubleday, $26.95.) Two story lines, one set in the 19th century, the other in this one, playfully echo each other in this word lovers' feast of a novel revolving around a fictional British dictionary company and overflowing with delectable linguistic arcana.

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

Inside the List
ELISABETH EGAN

Homebody A few years ago, Fredrik Backman was looking for a new apartment in Stockholm when inspiration hit during an open house.

"We'd seen maybe nine apartments and I was like, 'I'm good with all of them.' I could live basically anywhere as long as my wife and kids are OK with it," Backman said in a phone interview. "So I started looking at the people. Everyone in these places is insecure. Everyone is making a really big life decision. Everyone is standing there asking themselves a lot of questions: Where do I want to live? Is this the person I want to spend the rest of my life with? Are we going to have kids? Are the schools good here? Can we afford this? And everyone feels a little bit invaded: This could be my home and what are all these strangers doing here?"

'You create your own universe that you can step into.'

The author of "A Man Called Ove" and "Beartown" knew he was standing in the setting for his next novel, "Anxious People," which was an instant No. 1 best seller in the United States and is now at No. 10 on the hardcover fiction list. The book is equal parts comedy, relationship drama and locked-room mystery — "It's not a murder or something gruesome" — in which a failed bank robber blunders into an open house and holds the attendees hostage. They're a motley crew; on the first page, Backman writes, "This is a book about a lot of things, but mostly about idiots."

As the title suggests, anxiety is a theme. It's also an accelerant in Backman's own creative process, although he didn't use this term. "You create your own universe that you can step into, where things make sense or where you can, in my case, try to put words onto a feeling," he explained. "I would assume if you play the cello night after night, once in a while you'll look up and meet the eyes of someone in the crowd and see that a stranger feels the same thing. It's like an extension cord: If I switch the light on over here, it will go on at the other end. That's what I'm looking for when I write."

Backman was honest about the doubts that plague novelists as they work, "with the only company being people you made up who live in your head in places that don't exist." He admitted, "During the writing of every book, I've had at least one breakdown where I have been 100 percent convinced that this is the time where people will grow tired of me; where readers will go, 'All right. Enough of that guy.'" If the reception of "Anxious People" is any indication, now is not that time. □

PRINT / HARDCOVER BEST SELLERS

SALES PERIOD OF JANUARY 3-9

Fiction

THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	Fiction	WEEKS ON LIST
1		**STAR WARS: LIGHT OF THE JEDI,** by Charles Soule. (Del Rey) In this installment of the High Republic series, a disaster in hyperspace may cause far greater damage.	1
2		**NEIGHBORS,** by Danielle Steel. (Delacorte) A Hollywood recluse's perspective changes when she invites her neighbors into her mansion after an earthquake.	1
3	1	**THE VANISHING HALF,** by Brit Bennett. (Riverhead) The lives of twin sisters who run away from a Southern Black community at age 16 diverge as one returns and the other takes on a different racial identity but their fates intertwine.	32
4		**THE WIFE UPSTAIRS,** by Rachel Hawkins. (St. Martin's) A recently arrived dog walker in a Southern gated community falls for a mysterious widower.	1
5	5	**WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING,** by Delia Owens. (Putnam) In a quiet town on the North Carolina coast in 1969, a woman who survived alone in the marsh becomes a murder suspect.	123
6		**OUTLAWED,** by Anna North. (Bloomsbury) Ada, who apprentices midwifery under her mother, must decide whether to aid a band of outlaws who want to create a safe haven for outcast women.	1
7	3	**THE RETURN,** by Nicholas Sparks. (Grand Central) A doctor serving in the Navy in Afghanistan goes back to North Carolina where two women change his life.	15
8		**THE PROPHETS,** by Robert Jones Jr. (Putnam) When an older slave begins preaching on a Southern plantation, the love between two slaves, Isaiah and Samuel, is seen in a different light.	1
9	7	**A TIME FOR MERCY,** by John Grisham. (Doubleday) The third book in the Jake Brigance series. A 16-year-old is accused of killing a deputy in Clanton, Miss., in 1990.	13
10	6	**ANXIOUS PEOPLE,** by Fredrik Backman. (Atria) A failed bank robber holds a group of strangers hostage at an apartment open house.	17

Nonfiction

THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	Nonfiction	WEEKS ON LIST
1	1	**A PROMISED LAND,** by Barack Obama. (Crown) In the first volume of his presidential memoirs, Barack Obama offers personal reflections on his formative years and pivotal moments through his first term.	8
2	3	**UNTAMED,** by Glennon Doyle. (Dial) The activist and public speaker describes her journey of listening to her inner voice.	44
3	2	**GREENLIGHTS,** by Matthew McConaughey. (Crown) The Academy Award-winning actor shares snippets from the diaries he kept over the last 35 years.	12
4	4	**CASTE,** by Isabel Wilkerson. (Random House) The Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist examines aspects of caste systems across civilizations and reveals a rigid hierarchy in America today.	23
5	5	**BECOMING,** by Michelle Obama. (Crown) The former first lady describes her journey from the South Side of Chicago to the White House, and how she balanced work, family and her husband's political ascent.	100
6	9	**BREATH,** by James Nestor. (Riverhead) A re-examination of a basic biological function and a look at the science behind ancient breathing practices.	11
7	6	**WORLD OF WONDERS,** by Aimee Nezhukumatathil. (Milkweed) In a collection of essays, the poet celebrates various aspects of the natural world and its inhabitants.	5
8	7	**THE SPLENDID AND THE VILE,** by Erik Larson. (Crown) An examination of the leadership of the prime minister Winston Churchill.	32
9		**HOW TO BE AN ANTIRACIST,** by Ibram X. Kendi. (One World) A primer for creating a more just and equitable society through identifying and opposing racism.	37
10	11	**UNCOMFORTABLE CONVERSATIONS WITH A BLACK MAN,** by Emmanuel Acho. (Flatiron) A look at some questions and concepts needed to address systemic racism.	5

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

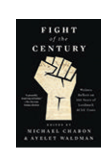
Paperback Row / BY BARRY GEWEN

EVERYWHERE YOU DON'T BELONG, by Gabriel Bump. (Algonquin, 288 pp., $15.95.) It's "the rare book" that can be funny describing essentially sad moments like trauma and loss, our reviewer, Tommy Orange, said, but this novel about growing up on Chicago's South Side achieves the appropriate balance between heaviness and levity, while also providing "social commentary at its finest."

THE THIRD RAINBOW GIRL: The Long Life of a Double Murder in Appalachia, by Emma Copley Eisenberg. (Hachette, 336 pp., $17.95.) An investigation by the author into an unsolved crime turns into a portrait of a small rural community that has been nearly torn apart trying to cope with the lingering memories of the case. Our reviewer, Melissa del Bosque, called the narrative "evocative and elegantly paced."

WHERE REASONS END, by Yiyun Li. (Random House, 192 pp., $16.) An imagined conversation between a grieving mother and her 16-year-old dead son forms the core of this novel. Lauren Oyler said in these pages that "the humor in this book is subtle yet potent," and that Li, who lost her own son to suicide, has written "an interrogation of form — an exploration of what fiction can do and what it can't."

WHY WE CAN'T SLEEP: Women's New Midlife Crisis, by Ada Calhoun. (Grove, 288 pp., $16.) Beginning as an article for O Magazine that went viral, this book looks at a generation of apparently successful women — those born between 1965 and 1980 — who are secretly leading troubled lives, worrying about what they're doing wrong. According to our reviewer, Curtis Sittenfeld, Calhoun is "a funny, smart, compassionate narrator."



FIGHT OF THE CENTURY: Writers Reflect on 100 Years of Landmark ACLU Cases, edited by Michael Chabon and Ayelet Waldman. (Avid Reader, 336 pp., $17.) The editors of this anthology asked 40 writers, including Scott Turow and Brit Bennett, to reflect on cases, both prominent and forgotten, that led our reviewer, Monica Youn, to praise the A.C.L.U.'s "many indisputable acts of heroism."

THE SECRET GUESTS, by Benjamin Black. (Picador, 304 pp., $17.) Black, a.k.a. John Banville, imagines King George VI shipping his young daughters, 14-year-old Elizabeth and 10-year-old Margaret, to Ireland during World War II to protect them from the Blitz. Our reviewer, Daisy Goodwin, called the novel "a mordant observation of the palimpsest of arrogance and resentment" surrounding Britain's dealings with its neighbor.

MONTHLY BEST SELLERS

SALES PERIOD OF NOVEMBER 29-JANUARY 2

Graphic Books and Manga

THIS MONTH	Graphic Books and Manga	MONTHS ON LIST
1	**CAT KID COMIC CLUB,** by Dav Pilkey. (Scholastic) Stories within a story come to life as Li'l Petey, Flippy and Molly show baby frogs how to create comics.	1
2	**A WEALTH OF PIGEONS,** by Steve Martin and Harry Bliss. (Celadon) The multi-award winning comedian teams up with the New Yorker cartoonist for this collection of humorous cartoons and comic strips.	2
3	**MY HERO ACADEMIA, VOL. 1,** by Kohei Horikoshi. (VIZ Media) Will Izuku Midoriya's chance encounter with a superhero change his fate? Most likely!	12
4	**GUTS,** by Raina Telgemeier. (Scholastic) Raina finds her tummy trouble might be more than it first appears to be when she goes back to school.	16
5	**MY HERO ACADEMIA, VOL. 2,** by Kohei Horikoshi. (VIZ Media) Midoriya can barely control the All Might's abilities he inherited.	5
6	**STRANGE PLANET,** by Nathan W. Pyle. (Morrow Gift) Moments from the life cycle of a planet's inhabitants including "Being Gains a Sibling" and "Being Begins a Vocation."	9
7	**DEMON SLAYER: KIMETSU NO YAIBA, VOL. 1,** by Koyoharu Gotouge. (VIZ Media) A young charcoal seller must avenge his family by destroying the demon that slaughtered them.	5
8	**CLASS ACT,** by Jerry Craft. (Quill Tree) Drew Ellis finds he must work 10 times as hard as his privileged classmates at the Riverdale Academy Day School.	3
9	**REMINA,** by Junji Ito. (VIZ Media) An unknown planet discovered in a wormhole by Dr. Oguro threatens Earth's existence.	1
10	**SMILE,** by Raina Telgemeier. (Scholastic) Raina experiences braces, boy troubles and other plagues of the sixth grade.	14
11	**NEW KID,** by Jerry Craft. (HarperCollins) Jordan Banks, an artistically inclined seventh grader from Washington Heights, has a tough time navigating an upscale private school where diversity is low.	14
12	**HAPPY NARWHALIDAYS,** by Ben Clanton. (Tundra) The fifth book in the Narwhal and Jelly series. The Merry Mermicorn, warm waffle pudding and a hunt for the perfect present.	2
13	**BABY-SITTERS LITTLE SISTER: KAREN'S ROLLER SKATES,** by Ann M. Martin. Illustrated by Katy Farina. (Scholastic) After taking a tumble, Karen sets out to get her friends and someone famous to sign her cast.	6
14	**ATTACK ON TITAN, VOL. 1,** by Hajime Isayama. (Kodansha) A group of survivors must go into hiding to escape the giant humanoids known as the Titans.	1
15	**DRAMA,** by Raina Telgemeier. (Scholastic) Callie becomes the stage manager for her middle school's production of "Moon Over Mississippi."	13

Mass Market

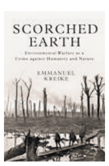
THIS MONTH	Mass Market	MONTHS ON LIST
1	**MORAL COMPASS,** by Danielle Steel. (Dell) Shortly after Saint Ambrose Prep goes co-ed, a student is attacked and the community is thrown into disarray.	1
2	**UNSOLVED,** by James Patterson and David Ellis. (Grand Central) A string of seemingly accidental and unrelated deaths confound F.B.I. agent Emmy Dockery.	1
3	**THE DUKE AND I,** by Julia Quinn. (Avon) The first book in the Bridgerton series. Daphne Bridgerton's reputation soars when she colludes with the Duke of Hastings. The basis of the Netflix series "Bridgerton."	1
4	**TEXAS KILL OF THE MOUNTAIN MAN,** by William W. Johnstone and J.A. Johnstone. (Pinnacle) Smoke Jensen goes after Delbert Catron and his band of horse and cattle thieves.	1
5	**THE RIVER MURDERS,** by James Patterson and James O. Born. (Grand Central) Three thrillers: "Hidden," "Malicious" and "Malevolent."	2
6	**THE MORNING AFTER,** by Lisa Jackson. (Zebra) The journalist Nikki Gillette pursues a serial killer whom she has nicknamed the Grave Robber.	1
7	**A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE,** by Debbie Macomber. (MIRA) Two holiday stories: "Christmas Letters" and "Call Me Mrs. Miracle."	2
8	**WYOMING TRUE,** by Diana Palmer. (HQN) The 10th book in the Wyoming Men series. The independently wealthy Ida Merridan's past catches up with her as she gets to know the rancher Jake McGuire.	2
9	**SOMEDAY WITH YOU,** by Nora Roberts. (Silhouette) Two romance stories: "Cordina's Crown Jewel" and "Unfinished Business."	1
10	**WHITE HOT,** by Sandra Brown. (Pocket) Sayre Lynch returns to her hometown, where she confronts corrupt family members and her feelings for Beck Merchant.	1
11	**WHEN YOU SEE ME,** by Lisa Gardner. (Dutton) D. D. Warren and Flora Dane join the F.B.I. agent Kimberly Quincy's taskforce.	2
12	**THE DESERTER,** by Nelson DeMille and Alex DeMille. (Pocket) Two members of the Criminal Investigation Division must bring back a Delta Force soldier who disappeared.	1
13	**THE NIGHT FIRE,** by Michael Connelly. (Grand Central) Harry Bosch and Renée Ballard return to take up a case that held the attention of Bosch's mentor.	2
14	**A WARM HEART IN WINTER,** by J. R. Ward. (Pocket) In the Black Dagger Brotherhood world, a winter storm interrupts Blay and Qhuinn's official mating ceremony.	1
15	**SPY,** by Danielle Steel. (Dell) Alexandra Wickham, an espionage agent during World War II, must keep her secret hidden into the Cold War.	3

Sales are defined as completed transactions between vendors and individual end users during the period on or after the official publication date of a title. Graphic book rankings include all print and digital formats. Adult, children's, young adult, fiction and nonfiction graphic books are eligible for inclusion on the graphic books and manga list. **ONLINE:** For complete lists and a full explanation of our methodology, visit **www.nytimes.com/books/best-sellers.**

The Shortlist / Climate Disaster / By Tatiana Schlossberg

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN GALL

SCORCHED EARTH
Environmental Warfare as a Crime Against Humanity and Nature
By Emmanuel Kreike
521 pp. Princeton University. $29.99.



In the first sentence of this sweeping history, Kreike tells us that most books about total war begin in 1914, in the fields and forests of Flanders, out of the mistaken perception that World War I was the first time that chemical warfare was deployed.

Kreike, however, starts in the sodden fields of the Low Countries during the Dutch Revolt in the 1500s, visits the European wars of conquest in the Americas and Asia and the internal European conflicts during the "Age of Reason," then ends in southwestern Africa during the early 20th century.

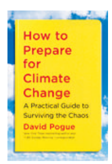
Kreike's argument is that environmental warfare, in which nature is a tool and a target, has occurred for hundreds of years, perpetrated by people all over the world, and that environcide (a term my brain wants to autocorrect to "envirocide") should be considered a crime against humanity.

"Environcide consists of intentionally or unintentionally damaging, destroying or rendering inaccessible environmental infrastructure" — which he broadly defines as homes, agriculture, water sources and more — "through violence that may be episodic and spectacular . . . or continuous and cumulative."

At times, this seems like tautology — it's hard to imagine a war of any kind that wouldn't fit this description. But there are significant contributions here. First, Kreike, despite relying heavily on Dutch sources (dam enthusiasts will love the details), helps return historical agency to non-European actors in the wars of colonization around the world. He writes about often forgotten and impressive environmental infrastructure, resistance to European invasion and successful adaptation — for example, many tribal nations of the American West turned to buffalo hunting only after Europeans had made their previous sedentary agricultural traditions impossible.

Kreike offers a stark corrective and an implicit warning: Humanity is not distinct from nature, and assuming it is can have tragic outcomes. Climate change is one; pandemics are another. In this book, catastrophic warfare is a third. Waiting for the fourth horseman would seem unwise.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR CLIMATE CHANGE
A Practical Guide to Surviving the Chaos
By David Pogue
610 pp. Simon & Schuster. Paper, $24.



It's always a good idea to prepare for a disaster, especially one you see coming.

Pogue, a former New York Times tech columnist and current contributor, has got you covered. This is a climate change worst-case scenario survival guide: stronger hurricanes, forest fires, droughts, tick- and mosquito-borne illnesses, heat waves, tornadoes, plus how to prepare your business and also how to invest your money before the capitalist superstructure crumbles, apparently. ("Preparing for Social Breakdown" is one chapter.)

If Pogue is living the life he's advising, he is eating homegrown beans, calmly explaining the crisis to his children and monitoring their psychological health, asking his contractor to deepen the soffits in his roof on which he is mounting solar panels, buying several air purifiers and organizing with his fellow citizens.

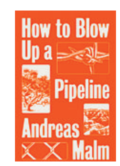
Much of the book, especially the sections on what to look for in an insurance policy, is helpful. It also includes an explanation of climate science and the obligatory feel-good sections on hope: actions some are taking and how you can participate.

It wouldn't be wrong to do as he suggests; climate change will make these disasters worse and more frequent. Still, there's something unsettling about the project, especially since many can't act as advised, for financial or other reasons, and the real problem is that governments and corporations are failing us.

A particularly eerie chapter covers which American cities will "do well" in a warmer climate. This isn't a new idea; it's not necessarily wrong to lay out the climate risks of living in some places and the benefits of others. But, who is this advice for? Not everyone can move to Boulder, Colo., to take advantage of its hiking trails and ambitious climate targets.

What about the rest of us, the people who can't afford or wouldn't want to move away from the Gulf Coast? What about the people who already live in Boulder, or the diminishing water supply in the Rockies? No book can do everything, but planning for our collective future should be about everyone, including those without the means to prepare, since they are in the most danger. Inequality is a large part of what got us here; preparing for climate change shouldn't make that worse.

HOW TO BLOW UP A PIPELINE
By Andreas Malm
200 pp. Verso. Paper, $19.95.



In September 2019, millions of people around the world participated in nonviolent demonstrations demanding action on climate change. Over and over again, politicians and business leaders have said that we face an existential threat. And yet, from 2017 to 2019 investments in new fossil fuel infrastructure projects have grown. To become profitable (and then some), these new projects will pump more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere for decades.

Meanwhile, the polar icecaps melt, sea levels rise, hundreds of thousands of species may go extinct, fires rage, hurricanes boil, people continue to suffer and die.

"To say that the signals have fallen on the deaf ears of the ruling classes of this world would be an understatement. If these classes ever had any senses, they have lost them all," writes Malm, a Swedish professor of human ecology and climate change activist, in his compelling but frustrating treatise.

A proportionate and rational response, Malm argues, should be to target fossil fuel infrastructure: Destroy fences around a power plant; occupy pipeline routes, as protesters did for the Keystone XL and Dakota Access pipelines; at coal mines or similar sites, set up climate camps, which Malm believes are effective as laboratories for activism and for shutting things down by putting bodies on the line.

He also advocates powerfully against despair and powerlessness. One of the most satisfying parts of his book comes when he brutally dispatches with "climate fatalists" like Jonathan Franzen, who argue that we should all just give up. "Climate fatalism is for those on top," Malm writes. "Its sole contribution is spoilage."

So Malm wants us to fight back (though I should add that there aren't any actual instructions here about how to blow anything up).

He argues that there should be room for tactics other than strict nonviolence and peaceful demonstrations — indeed, he is a bit contemptuous of those who offer strategic pacifism as a solution — and notes that fetishizing nonviolence in past protest movements sanitizes history, removing agency from the people who fought, sometimes violently, for justice, freedom and equality.

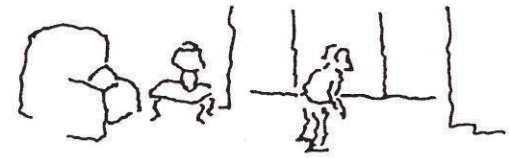
Sure. But the problem with violence, even if it's meant only to destroy "fossil capital," is that ultimately it's impossible to control.

TATIANA SCHLOSSBERG *is the author of "Inconspicuous Consumption: The Environmental Impact You Don't Know You Have."*

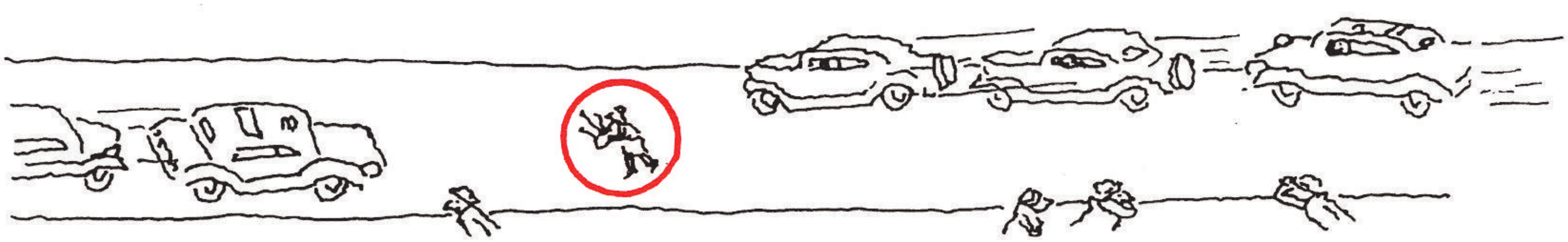
Sketchbook / Robert Burns's Birthday / By R. O. Blechman

Remembering the Jan. 25 birthday of Scotland's national poet, with bagpipes and a mouse.

In the 1940s, when
I was a teenager living
on Central Park West, . . .



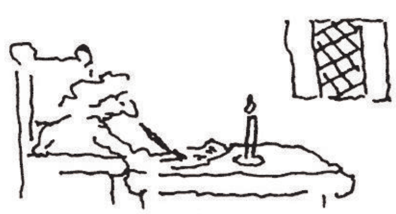
. . . I would hear a lone bagpiper
outside my window
every late January afternoon.



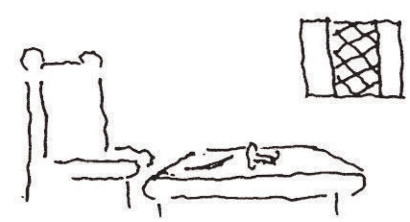
I later learned that he was celebrating the birthday of the poet Robert Burns.

Robert Burns experienced great success
early in his career.

But he was ignored when taste shifted,
and he became desperately poor.



Penniless, he begged his cousin for money.
"Ten pounds," he wrote, "by return post,
Save me from the horrors of jail."



Nine days later he died, age 37.
He left behind a poem about a mouse
whose nest was destroyed by a plow.

Here is a stanza:

But, Mousie, thou art no thy lane (art not alone)
In proving foresight may be vain;
The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men
Gang aft agley, (go often awry)
An lea'e us nought but grief an' pain
For promis'd joy.

R. O. BLECHMAN *is an artist and illustrator. His new double-volume book, "On the One Hand" and "On the Other Hand," will be published this spring.*