

After page 10

RADICAL CANDOR: HOW TO BE A KICKASS BOSS (2017) by Kim Scott
 Aasha Mehreen Amin, Deputy Editor, Editorial & Op-Ed:

I would really recommend this book by Kim Scott, co-founder of the management consulting firm Candor, Inc. and a CEO coach in Silicon Valley. Scott talks about how being honest and direct makes for the most effective working relationships, especially in tricky situations. I enjoyed reading the book because Kim Scott has a very accessible writing style. She's funny and often self-effacing, and steers clear of 'textbook-style' formatting in her text.

As a woman supervisor, you often face some self-doubt. It's sometimes in our nature to be too empathetic, which can work against us. Reading about Scott's experiences and failures—even though she doesn't focus the entire book from a woman's angle—helped me evaluate the things I can improve in my own style of leadership. It helped me discover new approaches to managing my team.

Scott also uses a lot of examples. At one point, she talks about an employee who had been underperforming. For a long time, she avoided assigning him too much work, but eventually his lack of performance started hampering the entire project. When she eventually discussed it with him, his response was, "Why didn't anyone tell me about it before?" That was the most valuable lesson that I derived from the book—that an issue needs to be faced head-on from the very beginning.

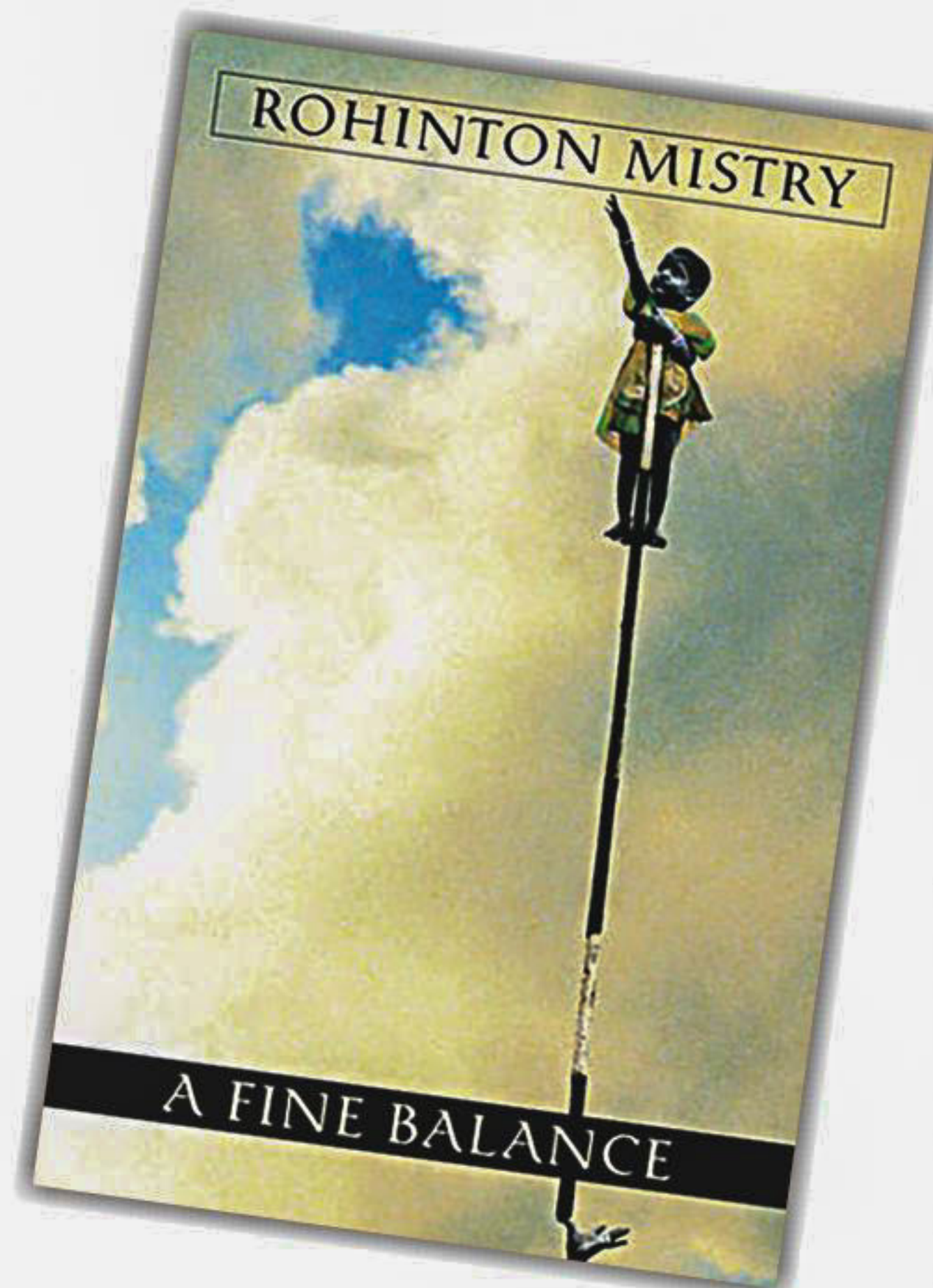
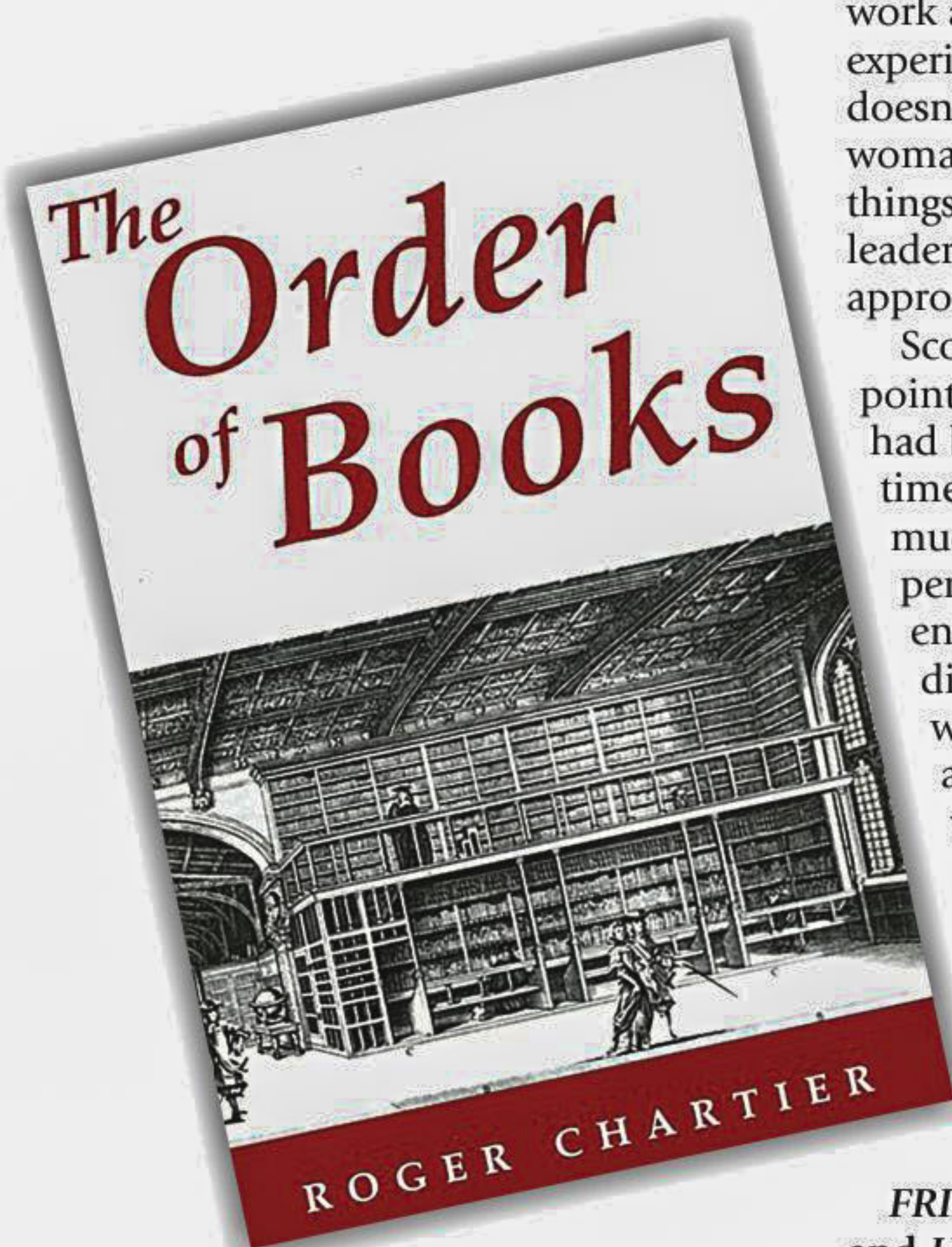
TALKING ABOUT JANE AUSTEN IN BAGHDAD: THE TRUE STORY OF AN UNLIKELY

FRIENDSHIP (2010) by Bee Rowlett and **HALF OF A YELLOW SUN (2007)** by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

Abida Rahman Chowdhury, Journalist, Digital Media section:

This is a book that has pulled me out of my reading slump. It was an easy read—something I had forgotten to enjoy in a long time. It's a autobiography about a mother in London and an Iraqi teacher and how they're brought together by an email. The book is just a correspondence between two friends. Two very unlikely friends, one with a safe life in the UK as a BBC journalist and another dodging bombs on the regular in Baghdad. I was just caught up in the domesticity of their conversations. What they baked and cooked; what May taught her students in Iraq, her life in a city seized by war.

The book is also about watching



someone live inside a warzone and still retain a sense of normalcy. The 'everydayness' of a war zone is what was so captivating. We often only get to know about warzones through news sources, so to read about it in conversations was like watching war unfold in marginalia (if I can call it that).

Another book that I would recommend is *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a novel about the Biafran War and its impact on the lives and ideals of five characters—a 13-year-old houseboy, a revolutionary university professor, his beautiful mistress, her sister, and a timid young Englishman. The novel has a lyrical style of writing that draws you into the struggles of each and every character. You are pulled into following the trajectory of the Nigerian Civil War, the politics, and how aid is sent to the warzone.

A FINE BALANCE (1995) BY ROHINTON MISTRY and **THE SHADOW LINES (1988)** by Amitav Ghosh
 Anindya J Ayan, Journalist, Digital Media section:

"More than just the story, I was intrigued by the way these two books create an imagery of two tumultuous times in the history of our subcontinent through vivid character sketches. *A Fine Balance* narrates the lives of some civilians during the state of emergency declared by Indira Gandhi (from 1975-77). We, who were born after that period, can to some extent feel the crises of the common people of that time through the book's characters. The other one, *The Shadow Lines*, is probably one of the best novels ever written on the separation of Bengal and its aftermath. Amitav Ghosh has this impeccable flair for weaving historical contexts into a fine story. He did the same in his *Ibis* trilogy, which depicts the opium trade between India and China run by the East India Company in the 19th century.

Indira Gandhi, who isn't named but is alluded to as 'The Prime Minister' in *A Fine Balance*, is an important figure for the history of both Bangladesh and India. But I'm not sure how much the current generation knows about her rule, her actions, and how people lived during that time. This book isn't a biography of Indira Gandhi, but it is a generous attempt to portray the time of her rule, or at least an important fragment of it. Meanwhile, *The Shadow Lines* connects us even more closely to our own story—how families on the two sides of the border experienced the pain of the separation. It tries to provide a root, maybe vague, idea of all that led to

the Partition and also the subsequent riot. Both Mistry and Ghosh have much more popular titles, but these books were among their earlier works and, I think, the best."

THE ORDER OF BOOKS (1992) by Roger Chartier

Shamsuddoza Sajen, Commercial Supplements Editor:

"Chartier's book explores the ways in which texts—from handwritten manuscripts to printed books—were used and circulated in Europe between the 14th and the 18th centuries. It looks into the origin of the physical lives of books: how they were printed, formatted, circulated, how titles started being registered and texts began to be divided into genres, and how the dream of a universal library came into being.

I was immediately intrigued by Chartier's focus on the physical form of a book. When the text in the Bible was written without any spaces or punctuation, for instance, readers appropriated it in a certain way. Inserting punctuation marks and chapter breaks interferes with the authority of the text, and the latter is often an arbitrary decision based on the editor's opinions. This influences the way we perceive the text. Reading about these ideas reminded me how a book isn't just written by an author, but also by the editor, the publisher, etc. It was a unique idea.

The book also complicates the notion that the history of printing can be neatly divided into eras—the manuscript age giving way into the printing age, with manuscripts all but dead during the latter time. But in reality, the two traditions coexisted. What did happen is that the printing revolution freed up writers from being dependent on patrons. With a wider market, manuscript writers could write more freely.

And then there was the idea of communal reading versus private reading. Chartier talks about reading aloud as a leisure activity from the Renaissance until the 18th century. But in our own subcontinent today, reading the Quran out loud is a communal activity. So is reciting *puthis*. It's more of an auditory experience, which Chartier says comprises of a 'community of readers.' He also quotes Foucault while discussing the idea of the 'author', an entity who is accountable for the texts they write. Chartier doesn't elaborate much on these concepts, but he problematises them.

My biggest takeaway from this book were the parallels I found between the history of books in the West and our own subcontinent. We have this belief that most innovations, intellectual ones in particular, arrived here from the West. But just as Chartier talks about the invention of book catalogues as an alternative to a universal library (a list of books instead of a physical collection of every book in the world), similarly we also have the tradition of *tajkhira*, which is a list of authors with their individual biographies and genres of works. Finding these similarities between our histories was a pleasant surprise. So, I believe that people should read Chartier's book to remind themselves of how, when they read a text, they're also consuming a physical object; and more importantly that bibliographic knowledge has existed over the centuries simultaneously in the East and the West."

