

THOMAS

ADCOCK

THE CANNIBAL

OF PANG

YANG.

STORY

CB | SINGLE

Über das Buch

20. Oktober 1907 in Kingston, Ulster County, irgendwo in den Catskill Mountains. Ein Galgen wird gezimmert, Strick und Fallhöhe getestet, die braven Bürger strömen herbei, die Musik spielt fröhliche Weisen. Der Delinquent ist Oscar Jukes, Sippenoberhaupt einer Familie, die man heute »white trash« nennen würde. (Halb-)Analphabeten mit betrüblichen hygienischen und moralischen Standards und viel krimineller Energie.

Die Stützen der Gesellschaft, die ihn zum Tode verurteilt haben, sind religiöse Eiferer voll alttestamentarischem Furor mit Sympathien für den Ku-Klux-Klan und eigenen politischen und ökonomischen Interessen.

Angeklagt ist Oscar Jukes unter anderem wegen Kannibalismus, weil man im Kochkessel einschlägige Rückstände gefunden hat. Was ist aber wirklich passiert? Was wird gespielt? Und muss Oscar Jukes am Ende hängen?

»Die präzise Beschreibung einer realen Begebenheit aus dem letzten Jahrhundert, die ein erhellendes Schlaglicht auf die USA von heute wirft.« Thomas Wörtche

»The Cannibal of Pang Yang« ist schon allein deshalb eine Sensation, weil es die erste Erzählung des Edgar-Preisträgers Thomas Adcock nach einer jahrelangen Pause ist. Zudem ist der Text selbst ein kleines Juwel konzentrierter und sarkastischer Erzählkunst.

Über den Autor

Thomas Adcock, 1947 in Detroit geboren, hat mit seinen Romanen um den Cop Neil Hockaday und vielen Kurzgeschichten Meisterwerke der literarischen Kartographie von New York City vorgelegt. »Dark Maze« (»Feuer und Schwefel«) gewann 1992 den Edgar-Allan-Poe-Award.

Adcock ist in die meisten wichtigen Sprachen übersetzt. In den letzten Jahren arbeitet er zunehmend wieder journalistisch (u. a. als USA-Korrespondent von CulturMag) und als Universitätslehrer. Er lebt in Manhattan und in North Chatham, upstate New York.

Thomas Adcock

**The Cannibal
of Pang Yang**

Erzählung

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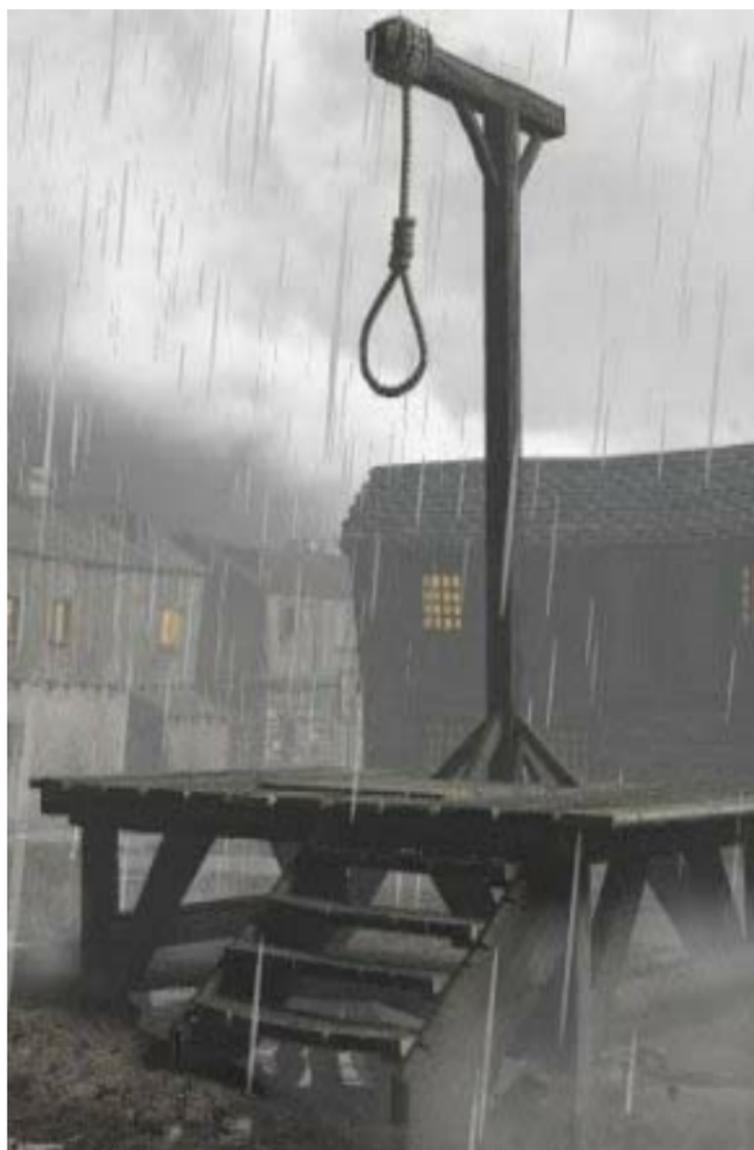
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I

In the grey of autumnal daybreak, with the air chilled by a dank breeze, a gang of workmen assembled in the wide cobblestone lane behind the Ulster County Jail. There they engaged in respective tasks in advance of a public execution scheduled to commence at high noon.

The citizenry of Kingston had long relished arrival of this Sunday of October 20th, 1907. Gentlemen and ladies of Christian outlook were busy at home, readying picnic baskets of sandwiches and potato salad and lemonade and blueberry pies—— refreshments for the gala after-church affair in Rope Alley, as the deathly site was commonly known.

Adjacent to a neat stack of pine lumber that would become gallows upon a few hours' labor, a makeshift bandstand and accompanying dais had been erected during the previous two days. From his cell window, the condemned man was compelled by his jailers to watch as the Kingston branch of the Daughters of the American

Revolution festooned bandstand and dais with flags and bunting, along with oaken buckets of flowers. Geranium blossoms of cheerful orange and yellow moved stiffly in the unpleasant wafts of cemetery breeze.

Mustachioed musicians of the fire brigade orchestra would soon be performing, attired in starched red-white-and-blue dress uniforms last worn for Independence Day. They would strike up a repertoire of patriotic melodies at half-past eleven o'clock, providing thirty minutes of brassy oom-pah-pahs to rouse patriotic fervor among a crowd gathered to witness death at noon.

Music had further intent of distraction: best that ladies and gentlemen of Kingston not dwell overly long on the essential business of ending a man's life, loathsome as he was; best they be assured of the righteousness of town vengeance. The good ladies of Kingston, especially, required such communal confidence. Individually, they might be appalled to the point of fainting at the unmistakable sound of a trap door sprung open below the shackled ankles of one Oscar Jukes, plunging him five feet downward at literal breakneck speed.

Chief among the workmen that Sabbath morning was a stout carpenter in dungarees and a woolen shirt. Gardiner was his name, and he seemed to be in charge. Hammer and saws snugged the pocket loops of his canvas apron, a supply of square-head nails rode between his lips.

Father Niall McClanahan, a hunchback priest in white liturgical alb, girdled with a cincture of purple silk (the color of penitence), sucked on a Meerschaum and paced about as he whispered Bible verses. The cloud of smoke produced by his pipe was indistinguishable from the color of his hair.

A man with a ginger beard and a milky left eye sorted through a long gunny sack of equipment: a mask for stretching over his head, from bumpy nose to the nape of his blotchy neck; black leather gloves, open at the fingertips; a coil of rope, thickly noosed at one end and sufficiently hefty for the “long drop” technique said to ensure against decapitation. Unlike the others at work in Rope Alley, the hangman was a stranger in town. The sheriff’s department had booked his accommodations at the Kingston Inn, under the wry name of John Law.

Two burly constables with tommy guns cradled in their arms stood guard over Oscar Jukes, whom they had frog-marched from cell to cobblestones only minutes before.

Jukes was a grunting, narrow-eyed man of sixty-one years. His height was average, his physique of peasant stock. His features were flat, his skin a shade of tobacco. Despite his age, his matted hair was as brown and shining as creek pebbles, though it stank from application of a dull effluvium; he and his kind used their urine as pomade.

Jukes wore a jail-issued ensemble: shirt and matching trousers of cream hue, over-sewn with horizontal stripes of black cotton. The garments had not been laundered since their use by a previous inmate. The shirt was stained with droppings of sugarless porridge, a tasteless ration served twice daily by the jailer's wife. Jukes' feet were bare, caked in filth and swollen from vermin bites. Chains joined his ankles to a hobbling gap of eight inches.

Three years ago to the day, the Honorable W. Clement Barlow pronounced a sentence of death upon Oscar Jukes. In truth, the judge had reached that decision at the opening of Jukes' murder trial, if not before. By no means was Barlow the only Kingstonian to regard the defendant with a generalized contempt; his was a shared civic attitude, bred in the respectable bones of the fortunate.

Oscar Jukes was patriarch of an illiterate race of menial laborers, petty miscreants, horse thieves, half-wits, drunkards, and mushroom harvesters. Some, like Jukes, had a sufficient supply of intelligence and shrewdness for dishonest schemery. At least since the time of Mr. Lincoln's war, generations of this ilk were known to be living year round in rude outdoor encampments, caves, and communal shacks in the wooded foothills of the Catskill mountain range at the western edge of Kingston.

Home turf to Jukes and the others was a wilderness of boulders and briar thickets, and trees that produced near unburnable logs—mostly black birch, chestnut, and white pine. A dwindling population of oaks and silver maples kept the

mountain people from freezing to death in winter. Logs from these species were life-saving fuel, supplemented by clapboards ripped off the sides of flatlanders' homes and dragged up into the hills.

The wretched territory of Jukes and his people was known as the Binnewaters, or by the name of its principal village——Pang Yang. Mountain people called themselves “Binnewaters folk.” Kingstonians referred to them by the pejorative “Pang Yangers.”

Soon after Jukes was sentenced, volunteer lawyers from Manhattan filed an appellate suit with the state's high court, then another, and another. In their briefs of claim, the city lawyers recounted dubious police procedures, cruelty of jail conditions, prosecutorial misconduct, judicial incompetence, interference with due process by local politicians (and in one notable case, a politician's spouse), and the county's historical tinderbox of prejudice against the mixed-race defendant and his hill clan——exacerbated by an orgy of yellow journalism, especially mine.

All three appeals for fresh trial in some neutral venue failed; so, too, their attendant applications for a reduction from the charge of first-degree, premeditated homicide brought against Oscar Jukes by the district attorney of Ulster County—one Jasper Haight, whose porcine wife, Opal, serves as Kleagle in the women's auxiliary of the local Ku Klux Klan chapter. Opal is further invested in the cause of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, despite Jasper being an habitu  of the Green Parrot Tavern, conveniently located around the corner from the courthouse.

The downstate legal do-gooders claimed that Jasper Haight had grossly overcharged Oscar Jukes. Their reasoning: on the day Jukes was apparently assailed by Simon Van Dyne, his enraged partner in a dubious gold mining venture, was not one man destined to die? If not the suckered Van Dyne, then Jukes himself? Thus did the lawyers petition for the lesser blame of manslaughter, or at least second-degree murder, which would obviate capital consequence.

Likewise ineffectual in merciful cause was a sanity hearing demanded by defense counsel.

Accordingly, three local attorneys were appointed by Judge Barlow to an ex-officio lunacy commission, assigned to the task of evaluating the mind of the Oscar Jukes. The trio constituted remaining members of the law firm from which Barlow departed in 1898 upon election to the bench. The commission's verdict came swiftly, and predictably: "Defendant is reasonably capable of distinguishing right from wrong, despite a low grade of intellectual ability, disrespect for God Almighty, foul invective, vulgar grooming habits, and incestuous conduct."

Appeals denied, it was left to Judge Barlow to pound his gold-stemmed gavel and declare what all of Kingston wished to hear, "Death to Oscar Jukes, saith I! So saith the Lord!"

The judge was a pudgy widower with pasty skin, fine curls of carrot-colored hair, and a prudent eye for young flesh of either persuasion. He was a fervent parishioner of the Calvary Methodist Church of Kingston, citadel of the community's establishment. Barlow was a church lector who advocated the utmost in probity, and the owner of

a creamy baritone——foremost among voices composing the Calvary Methodist choir. In all verbal exchange, including the most casual of conversations, the judge spoke in biblically exclamatory fashion, frequently citing his camaraderie and daily dialogues with God, which he pronounced *Gawd*.

On sentencing day, Judge Barlow thundered further at the Pang Yanger before him, “May hellish vengeance afflict thee, Oscar Jukes! Thou art monstrous! Thou art of unspeakable stench! Thou art a misshapen lump of devil’s dung! I shall pray that Gawd instruct Satan to collect thy corpse and swallow it sideways!”

Jukes’ tobacco face filled with rage against the bloviating Barlow. He parted his lips, as thick and greasy as sausages, in an attempt at rejoinder to the judge’s curse. But before he could utter a sound, a bailiff’s billy club thwacked him to the floor. (Undoubtedly, Jukes wished to impart a curse of his own, perhaps the very execration he employed when offended by churchly sanctimony: “I’d dear love to see a red-hot poker shoved up yer arse, yuh Jesus-jumpin’ fook, yuh!”)

The judge's spittle-driven damnation, followed by the spectacle of Oscar Jukes sprawled on the floor in a spasm of pain, inspired foot-stomping cheers in a courtroom filled with the burghers of Kingston, all of them fellow congregants at Calvary Methodist.

In the following year, W. Clement Barlow's co-religionists rewarded him with election to a seat in the state legislature upriver at Albany, where he caucused with the conservative Platt wing of the Republican party.

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