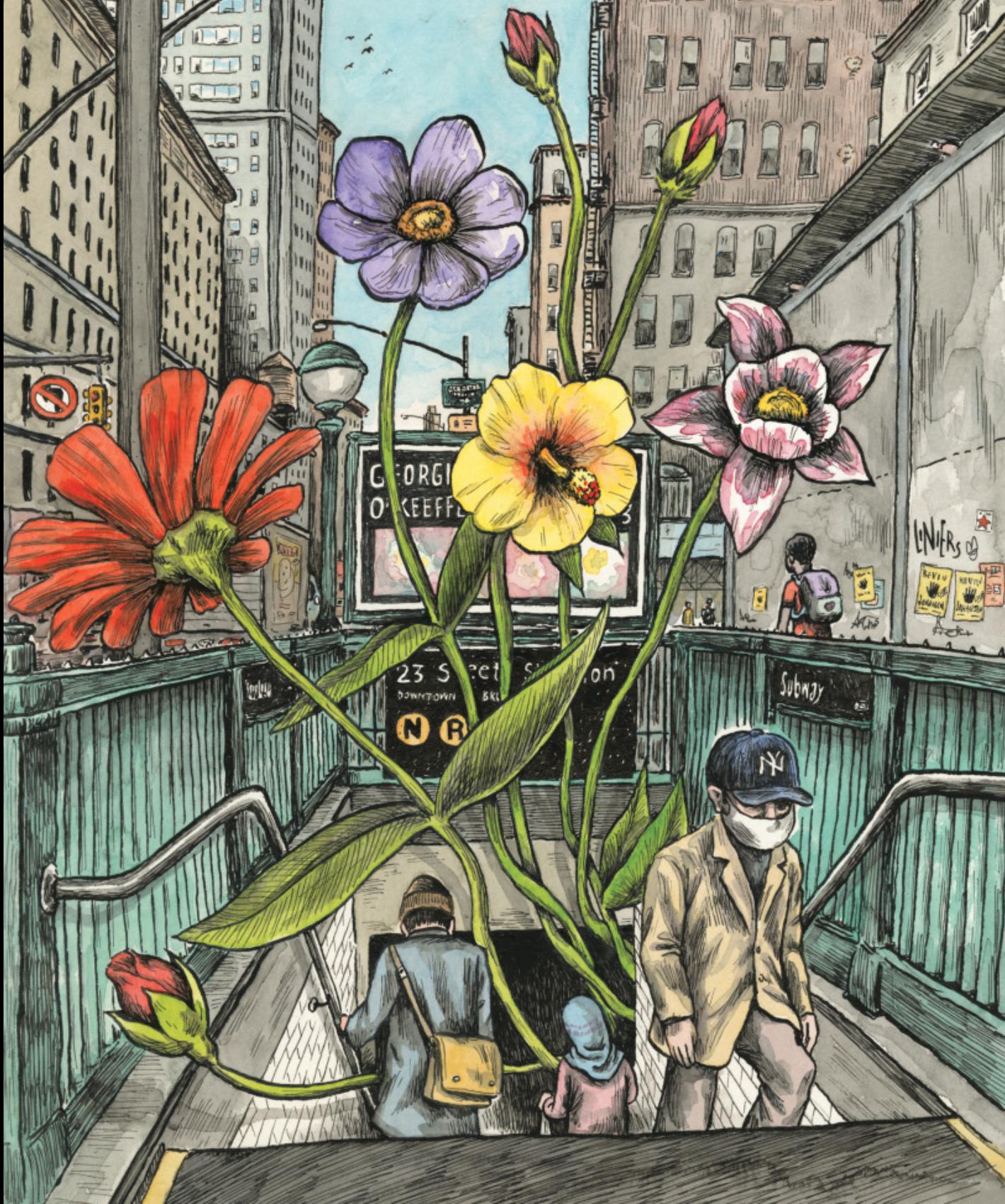


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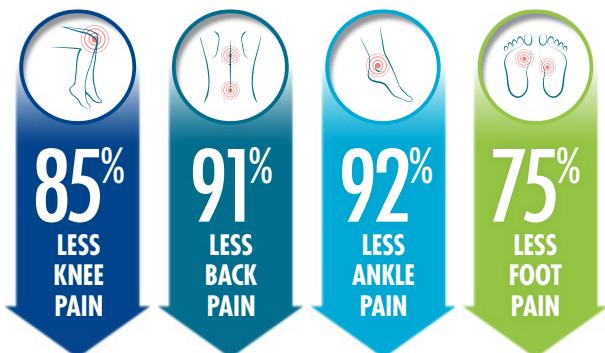


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THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM



ANNALS OF INQUIRY

Jeannie Suk Gersen on a legal battle over “comfort women,” published in English, Korean, and Japanese.



U.S. JOURNAL

Casey Cep reports on a Kansas bookshop owner’s mission to beat back Amazon.

Download the *New Yorker* app for the latest news, commentary, criticism, and humor, plus this week’s magazine and all issues back to 2008.

THE MAIL

A GLOBAL-HEALTH MYSTERY

Siddhartha Mukherjee's piece on why COVID-19 has hit some countries harder than others considers many possible explanations, including differences in government response, in levels of immunity, and in demographic features ("The COVID Conundrum," March 1st). Another factor at play is cultural differences in the willingness to follow rules. In a study of fifty-seven countries published in *The Lancet Planetary Health*, my co-authors and I found that in cultures with looser social norms there were five times the number of COVID cases and more than eight times the deaths as in cultures with stricter norms. These effects were replicated when controlling for variables including under-reporting, wealth, inequality, population density, migration, government efficiency, political authoritarianism, median age, non-pharmaceutical government interventions, and climate. Ironically, looser cultures had more deaths but less fear of COVID: seventy per cent of people in tighter cultures expressed that they were afraid of contracting COVID; only fifty per cent of people in looser cultures did. Not all looser cultures did poorly, and not all tighter cultures were successful at limiting cases and deaths. But the results suggest that cultural looseness can be a liability when there is a collective threat, and that nations must be able to adjust norms as needed.

*Michele J. Gelfand
Professor, Department of Psychology
University of Maryland
College Park, Md.*

Mukherjee points out that the apparent resistance of certain populations to the SARS-CoV-2 virus may be the result of a memory implanted in their immune systems by prior exposure to related pathogens. Immunologic memory could also account for the dire consequences of the virus for older individuals in the U.S., Europe, and elsewhere. People with more years' worth of stored-up immunologic memories may experience a cytokine storm that produces a widespread inflammatory response, resulting in blood

clots and organ failure. This should be sobering for those people who have experienced a mild case of the virus; in years to come, a memory left behind now may trigger a storm in response to an as yet unknown pathogen.

*Edwin L. Thomas, Ph.D.
Memphis, Tenn.*

TARKOVSKY'S INSPIRATION

Alex Ross, in an excellent essay on the filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky, discusses how Tarkovsky's reputation as a prophetic artist is in part founded on his depiction of the mysterious area known as the Zone in the 1979 film "Stalker," which seemed to foreshadow the irradiated forests and abandoned structures surrounding Chernobyl after it exploded, in 1986 (A Critic at Large, February 15th & 22nd). Tarkovsky's Zone may in fact have drawn from the legacy of a catastrophe that took place prior to the film's creation: the nuclear explosion at the Mayak plutonium plant, in the Urals, in 1957. Although in Tarkovsky's day the disaster was still obscure in the West, it was known to Soviet intellectuals. The explosion covered an area of more than eight thousand square miles with radioactive dust; it currently ranks as the third-worst nuclear disaster of all time. As at Chernobyl, authorities delayed evacuating people, and birth defects are said to have followed. "Stalker"'s allusions to Mayak may have manifested not only in the sinister landscapes but also in the character of the disabled daughter, whose eerie telekinetic powers perhaps arose from her proximity to the Zone. The Mayak tragedy likely also influenced the plot of the 1972 Soviet science-fiction book "Roadside Picnic," by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, on which "Stalker" was loosely based.

*Michael Benson
Ottawa, Ont.*

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*In an effort to slow the spread of the coronavirus, many New York City venues are closed.
Here's a selection of culture to be found around town, as well as online and streaming.*

MARCH 17 – 23, 2021



GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



While the Frick Collection's historic mansion undergoes renovations, its masterpieces have a new home: the **Frick Madison**, opening on March 18. (Timed-entry tickets, available via frick.org, are required.) The Marcel Breuer-designed building, most recently a branch of the Met, turns out to be a magnificent context for the museum's holdings—the brutalist décor even serves the frothy tastes of Madame du Barry, who commissioned Jean-Honoré Fragonard's rococo painting "The Progress of Love: The Pursuit," pictured above.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID ROTHENBERG

MUSIC

Drake: "Scary Hours 2"

HIP-HOP Drake puts his fans on standby with "Scary Hours 2," an hors d'œuvre before the long-awaited release of his next album, "Certified Lover Boy." The three-song EP is full of top-of-the-world grandstanding and myth-making from a master of the form. His life has only grown more extravagant since "Scorpion," from 2019—friendships with sheikhs in Dubai, lounging in owners' boxes, casually spending a million on chips at the Wynn Las Vegas—and these cavalier verses reflect a state of supreme comfort. "Not too many parallels left in our lives," he admits. Even a reluctant adjustment to fatherhood doesn't make rap's biggest star any more accessible.—*Sheldon Pearce*

The Hold Steady: "Open Door Policy"

ROCK In the course of their seventeen-year recording career, the Brooklyn rockers of the Hold Steady have shifted from raw, live-sounding studio recordings to a deliberately layered, studio-enriched style—the aural difference between a stark spotlight and a background starscape. On "Open Door Policy," the band's eighth album, this approach softens Craig Finn's wry, hard-bitten storytelling but doesn't vitiate it—the Springsteen-esque rhythmic chug and chord swells of "Unpleasant Breakfast" help lines such as "This coffee's cold / This toast is gross" go down easier. The album's warmth gives even its queasiest moments a genuine sense of bonhomie.—*Michaelangelo Matos*

Valerie June: "The Moon and Stars: Prescriptions for Dreamers"

ROOTS ROCK To hear Valerie June's voice is to remember Valerie June's voice. Tinny and bewitched, her every quiver bespeaks emotional honesty. When the musician first crossed the public's radar, in 2013, she was steeped in an antiquated roots vernacular that she delivered with Southern regality. She has gradually nudged her muse to the present, meshing genres from the church sounds of her youth to the hippie soul on her new album, "The Moon and Stars: Prescriptions for Dreamers." Recorded with the R. & B. producer Jack Splash and piloted throughout by her elegant, gravelly vocals, the album casts June in a sleek light without feeling like a makeover. The singer remains wedded to her beloved moon and stars, sampling birds and pondering the cosmos.—*Jay Ruttenberg*

Charmaine Lee

CLASSICAL The improvising vocalist and composer Charmaine Lee has an instinct for deploying unconventional methods of sound production, whether wholly physical or electronically altered, in works of intense expressiveness, giddy charm, and uncanny beauty—something she demonstrates on "KNVF," her new solo LP. This week, Lee opens a yearlong Van Lier Fellowship at the downtown Brooklyn experimental-arts venue Roulette with a streaming première, "Papillae," using microphones, radio, and modular synthesis to probe notions of isolation and interdependence.—*Steve Smith* (*March 20 at 8; roulette.org*)

"Songs for Murdered Sisters"

CLASSICAL In 2015, Nathalie Warmerdam was murdered by a former boyfriend, who killed two other women on the same day, in Renfrew County, Ontario. Her brother, the immensely talented baritone Joshua Hopkins, collaborated with the composer Jake Heggie and the writer Margaret Atwood on the cycle "Songs for Murdered Sisters," to draw attention to the pervasiveness of violence against women. Atwood's precise, heartfelt language elicited a profoundly empathetic score from Heggie; the music—tender and twinkling, haunted and sad—embodies a sibling's love being forced to incorporate sorrow. In a riveting filmed performance, available to stream on Houston Grand Opera's Web site until March 21, Hopkins ricochets among the stages of grief. The film's terrific soundtrack is also available.—*Oussama Zahr*

Special Request: "DJ-Kicks"

ELECTRONIC The selectors that helm the long-running mix series "DJ-Kicks" often turn out potted histories of their own evolution as listeners and d.j.s. That's the British dance producer Paul Woolford's approach, too. Under the name Special Request, Woolford is known for breakbeat-driven, rave-ready tracks, and this set traces all of his interests along a time line. He draws a smoothly curving arc, moving from jazz and soul through a bevy of house and techno, and then, with increasing speed, into the knotty drum workouts that end the album, several of them his own mixes.—*M.M.*

Miguel Zenón: "Law Years: The Music of Ornette Coleman"

JAZZ The saxophonist Ornette Coleman shook up the music establishment when he pioneered free jazz, at the end of the nineteen-fifties, by

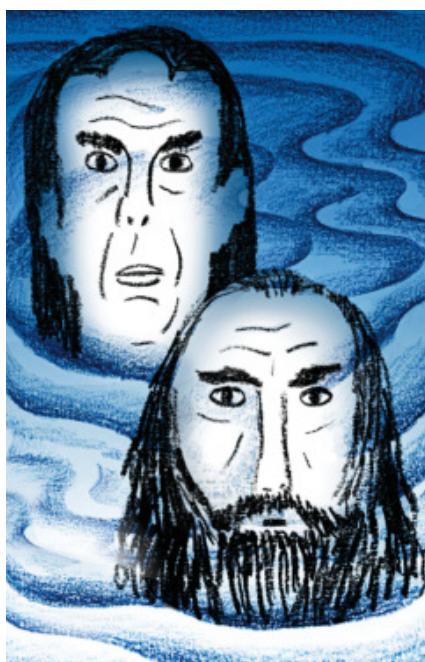
discarding fixed harmony and rhythm from his improvisational concept, but he also composed some of the most beguilingly melodic pieces in jazz's history. Miguel Zenón, himself a commanding alto saxophonist, honors Coleman (who would have turned ninety-one this month) on this live recording by interpreting eight of the Master's works, including the inimitable dirge "Broken Shadows," with appropriate brio and headlong drive. Zenón takes full advantage of the vigor and reflexive wit of his three compatriots—Demian Cabaud on bass, Jordi Rossy on drums, and Ariel Bringuez on tenor saxophone—calling to mind the quartet that Coleman established with the tenor saxophonist Dewey Redman in the late sixties.—*Steve Futterman*

TELEVISION

Behind Her Eyes

Netflix's new nail-biter of a miniseries, based on Sarah Pinborough's best-selling novel, is thematically chaotic, and its characters are messy, but its ending has a startling, satisfying pop. Louise Barnsley (the excellent Simona Brown), a young Black single mom, embarks on a steamy affair with her boss, a handsome Scottish psychiatrist named David (Tom Bateman), who is married to the hyper-composed Adele (a spooky Eve Hewson), a white woman perennially draped in white clothing. Louise is also drawn into a friendship with Adele, unbeknownst to David. In flashbacks, Adele, who is skilled in the art of lucid dreaming, is in a mental institution, where she bonds with Rob (Robert Aramayo), a gay working-class junkie from Glasgow. The two-pronged mystery of the series—what is the secret at the core of Adele and David's unhappy marriage, and how might lucid dreaming be connected to it?—is taut and effective, but the show's sociopolitical agenda is murky. Its real focus is psychic: the human desire to break free

EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC



Some heavy, tormented records that reflect the pulverizing grief of the post-pandemic world feel like they might crush a listener; others offer the consolation of a weighted blanket. "**CARNAGE**," the first official album from Nick Cave and his Bad Seeds bandmate Warren Ellis, is the latter, rumbling toward catharsis through impenetrable noise and jarring lyricism balanced precariously on sudden celestial arrangements. Cave's baritone, bottomless as ever, traces the contours of recent anguish—solitude, the deaths of his fifteen-year-old son and the Bad Seeds member Conway Savage, his growing existentialism—even as he scrounges for moments of levity. One comes on "Shattered Ground," a reminder to hold on to the bits of beauty left in the rubble of loss.—*Julissa Lopez*

VIRTUAL BALLET



"ABT Live from City Center—A Ratmansky Celebration" is not exactly live, but this program, filmed at New York City Center in February, is something of a homecoming for American Ballet Theatre, which used to perform its fall season there every year. The evening is devoted to works made by Alexei Ratmansky, A.B.T.'s resident choreographer, after he joined the company, in 2009. Most of the selections, such as the rhapsodic *pas de deux* from "The Seasons"—danced here by Isabella Boylston and James Whiteside—are presented in excerpted form. (Another excerpt, from the 2009 piece "Seven Sonatas," features Herman Cornejo.) But there is one new work, performed in its entirety: "Bernstein in a Bubble," set to Leonard Bernstein's "Divertimento," from 1980, was created recently in a bubble residency in upstate New York, following strict COVID protocols. It's like a blast of fresh air. Tickets for the stream, which is viewable March 23–April 18, can be purchased at nycitycenter.org. —Marina Harss

from one's own limiting narrative by becoming someone else—a craving that is increasingly explored as the series nears its end.—Naomi Fry (*Reviewed in our issue of 3/1/21*)

Billie Eilish: The World's a Little Blurry

In this new documentary about the anti-pop star Billie Eilish, being real seems like such an exhausting endeavor that it's easy to see why so many performers have chosen the alternative. The Apple TV+ original chronicles Eilish as she struggles to finish her début album, "When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?" fumbles through live shows, and strives to sustain the attention of her boyfriend, Q. Directed by R. J. Cutler ("A Perfect Candidate," "The September Issue")—and, notably, funded and produced by Eilish's label, Interscope—the project is presented as vérité footage, and much of it has the intimate feel of a home movie. This is less an artistic choice than a reflection of Eilish's real life, which is unusually family-centric—she works almost exclusively with her brother, records in the comfort of her own home, and is often seen calling the shots on set. The film is also a

testament to Eilish's profound understanding of obsessive fan culture, which is critical to her success. At the same time, it shows just how impossible it is to vanquish fame's most oppressive elements. Being consumed with a desire to be liked is as authentic as it gets.—Carrie Battan

The Equalizer

The unhip cluelessness of the many marginalized but stunningly naïve characters in this CBS action procedural, a reboot of an eighties crime drama, allows it to showcase the bad-bitch proficiency of its hero, Robyn McCall, played by the congenitally warm Queen Latifah. In each episode, an unequal system plunges a character, who is poor or Black or both, to the darkest of depths, and McCall, a former C.I.A. agent guarding an ugly psychological wound, is invariably there to rescue them. With the help of two sidekicks—Mel (Liza Lapira), an ex-Air Force sharpshooter, and Harry (Adam Goldberg), an I.T. whiz—and her smirking mentor, William Bishop (the always debonair Chris Noth), McCall takes down gentrification profiteers and their hired guns, warmongers and tech magnates, entitled white male murderers and the judges who protect them. "The

Equalizer" may not be a police-glorification device, but don't mistake McCall for a renegade; she delivers a compensatory fantasy of law and order. The show is a gimme for an audience who'd die to have this therapeutic queen dismantle racial capitalism in one fell girl-boss swoop.—Doreen St. Félix (3/15/21)

Ginny & Georgia

The body of this Netflix series is a banter young-adult soap, the head a woman-on-the-edge thriller, and the tail a race melodrama. It's also a parody of "Gilmore Girls": following the mysterious death of her husband, Georgia (Brianne Howey), a young sextuplet mother of white-working-class provenance, drives her fifteen-year-old biracial daughter, Ginny (Antonia Gentry), and her younger son, Austin, to the fictional town of Westbury, Massachusetts, for a fresh start. A twitchy mystery is tacked on to the shallow character studies, and we are teased with a race catharsis between mother and child that never comes to fruition. There's a clash of traditional-American references and hyper-modern lingo, and a spirited engagement in the so-called Oppression Olympics. It's de-meaning, to be served this ham, but no amount of recoiling changes the fact that "Ginny & Georgia" is mirroring a mode of cavalier speech on social media that compresses the ineffability of identity into a checklist of outwardly visible bona fides: what one eats, where one was raised, how well one twerks. If "Ginny & Georgia" sounds canned, then so do we.—D.S.F. (3/15/21)

DANCE

Matthew Bourne's New Adventures Festival

For decades, the British choreographer Matthew Bourne has found uncommon success with contemporary updates and mashups of classics, combining his caricature-clear storytelling with the dazzling sets and costumes of Lez Brotherston. A monthlong digital festival, available via New York City Center, rotates through four of his works. "Car Man" (2000)—viewable March 12–21—transfers the story and the score of Bizet's "Carmen" into the roadside-diner noir of "The Postman Always Rings Twice." "Cinderella" (2017)—streaming March 19–28—moves the fairy tale and Prokofiev's music to London during the Blitz.—Brian Seibert (nycitycenter.org)

Paris Opéra Ballet / "Swan Lake"

Through June, the Joyce Theatre presents a mix of live performances streamed directly from its stage and prerecorded dances filmed elsewhere. This week through April 7, it offers a 2016 performance of Nureyev's "Swan Lake" by the Paris Opéra Ballet, with the Paris étoiles Mathieu Ganio and Amandine Albinson in the lead roles. This "Swan Lake," which Nureyev created in 1984, places Prince Siegfried, rather than the Swan Queen, at the center of the drama: the whole story is a dream that comes to him as he slumbers in a chair—shades of "La Sylphide." The two sides of the heroine, Odette and Odile, represent different aspects of his desire. It's all very Freudian. Plus, Siegfried gets to dance a lot more than in traditional versions.—Marina Harss (joyce.org)

David Hammons

The real star of the Drawing Center's comprehensive exhibition of the body prints that Hammons made between 1968 and 1979 is the artist's energetic, younger self. In 1963, when he was twenty, Hammons moved to L.A. from his native Illinois and began using his own anatomy, combined with pigment and paper, as a printmaking tool. Yves Klein's "Anthropometries" (made with female models) and Robert Rauschenberg and Susan Weil's collaborative "Blueprints" had already used similar methods to propose that all art emanates from the artist's body. Now, Hammons asked, what if that body is Black? Galvanized by the civil-rights and the Black Arts movements, he returned, again and again, to the subject of America, and her relationship to Black men as builders and targets, outsiders and originators. Throughout the thirty-two prints and drawings on view (with such punning titles as "Bye-Centennial," from 1976), one can feel the provocateur's excitement about his medium, but also his need to push its boundaries, which led to his great interest in performance—another discipline that celebrates the human form, and the ephemeral.—Hilton Als (drawingcenter.org)

The Kamoinge Workshop

In 1963, the Black photographers Louis Draper, James Mannas, Jr., Albert R. Fennar, and Herbert Randall founded the Kamoinge Workshop, in New York City, to counter the sentimental, abject, or otherwise stereotyped portrayals of Black life peddled by mainstream photojournalism. The collective produced breathtaking images and provided a support system—camaraderie, critique, and a sophisticated, if small, group of collectors—as an alternative to the institutional favor enjoyed by the artists' white counterparts. Some hundred and forty pictures by fourteen core Kamoinge members are now on view in the Whitney's superb exhibition "Working Together: The Photographers of the Kamoinge Workshop." The civil-rights struggle is one of its vital subjects. Adger Cowans, in a sun-drenched aerial view, captures a crowd watching Malcolm X speak and, in another photo, a child in an N.A.A.C.P. T-shirt, seen through the veil of an American flag. Music is another theme: Ming Smith's otherworldly action shot of the musician Sun Ra is one of the show's many high points. But the intimate settings, the everyday situations, and the abstract compositions on view are just as striking. Beuford Smith's exquisite image of his own camera-bearing shadow in a waterfall, from 1978, gently confounds hidebound expectations of Black self-representation.—Johanna Fateman (whitney.org)

"KAWS: WHAT PARTY"

In 1992, a Jersey City graffiti artist named Brian Donnelly adopted KAWS as his nom de spray can, only because, he has said, he liked how the four letters looked together. (Were there a Royal Academy of Bubble Letters, KAWS would be knighted.) Night on thirty years later, he is a phenomenally successful painter and sculptor, whose neon-bright acrylics, antic statuary, and gift-shop-ready tchotchkes—based on familiar cartoons, notably "The Simpsons," or on such characters of his own devising as Companion, a Mickey Mouse-esque sad sack—are on view in this retrospective at the Brooklyn Museum. Don-

nelly isn't a Pop artist, exactly, except by way of distant ancestry. Most of his career moves were initiated about six decades ago by Andy Warhol, who had the not inconsiderable advantage of being great. I find the show depressing, but you would expect that from an élitist art critic, wouldn't you? A chance to snoot highbrows is a bonus for KAWSniks, whose glee might as well be taken in good grace by its targets. There's a certain purity in art that's so aggressively inelegant. Like a diet of only celery, which is said to consume more calories in the chewing than it provides to digestion, KAWS activates hallucinatory syndromes of spiritual starvation.—Peter Schjeldahl (brooklynmuseum.org)

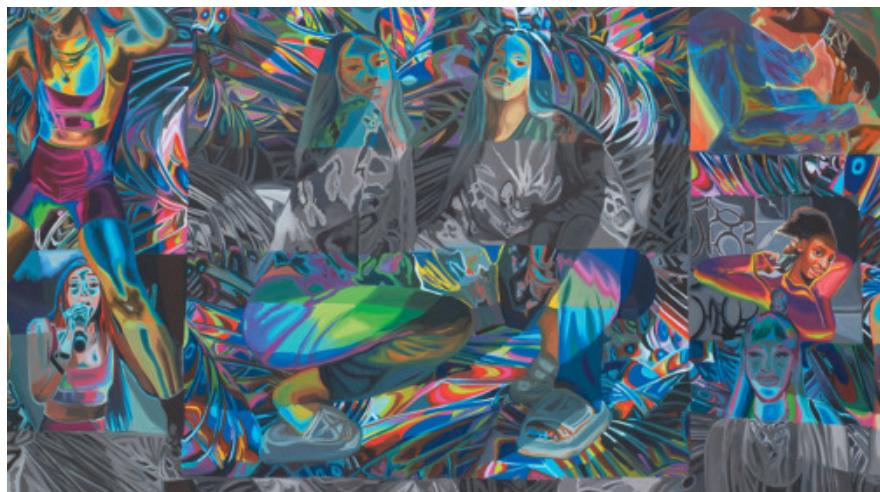
from 1988, the dark, curving form of the title's feline is an anchoring void in the composition; a frail human figure, in either a feverish sleep or blinding pain, is tended by his lover, who, given the snake wrapping itself around his leg, seems stalked by illness himself. In other paintings, crows appear as tormentors or harbingers of loss. Such phantasmic visitations don't undercut the unflinching realism of the artist's figurative lexicon. Rather, they seem to elucidate another plane of existence, the "strange state" of delirium and foreboding in a surreal, but all too real, time of devastation.—J.F. (alexandergray.com)

MOVIES

The Inheritance

The title of Ephraim Asili's first feature, a blend of fiction and documentary that's centered on a group of young Black people in Philadelphia, suggests the many layers of thought embodied in its spare drama. First, there's a house that a young man named Julian (Eric Lockley) inherits

AT THE GALLERIES



You probably know the song "WAP," by Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion. Now, from the impressive mind of the first-time curator Christiana Ine-Kimba Boyle, comes another body-centric hit: the six-person show "**Black Femme: Sovereign of WAP and the Virtual Realm**" (on view at the Canada gallery, in Tribeca, through April 10). Here the acronym stands for "wireless application protocol," and the feminist hook is the overlap of the physical and the digital in new figurative representation. The idea is perhaps best expressed in Caitlin Cherry's deliriously glitchy, nearly nine-foot-long oil painting "Her Burnout Tesseract" (pictured above). A glass-bead-and-Jacquard tapestry by Qualeasha Wood is a pixel-esque ode to the power of daydreams; the ballerinas in Emily Manwaring's ebullient acrylic group portrait get a textural lift from peacock feathers and sequins; and Op-art sleeves meet surreal landscapes in the high-style divas painted by Delphine Desane. Sydney Vernon ambitiously combines video, pastel, charcoal, paint, and an X-ray in two tender reflections on familial love and loss. And Kenya (Robinson) almost steals the show with her video "Patriot Games," which intercuts footage of Whitney Houston singing the national anthem at the 1991 Super Bowl with a YouTube video of two young men awestruck by her greatness.—Andrea K. Scott

after the passing of his grandmother; he invites his sometime girlfriend, Gwen (Noziph McLean), to move in with him. At her prompting, they turn it into a collective for Black revolutionary study; friends join them, and the house becomes a workshop for exploring their intellectual and political heritage (evoked by the participation of the poets Sonia Sanchez and Ursula Rucker). The film also brings to life the city's oppressive history—its actions against the Black political and cultural collective MOVE, which was bombed by the police in 1985—in presentations by MOVE's survivors and their relatives, as well as in archival news clips. Asili explicitly relates his film to Jean-Luc Godard's "La Chinoise," borrowing its didactic elements and romantic moods to forge a vision of collective action and personal progress.—Richard Brody (*Streaming on virtual cinemas.*)

Laurel Canyon

After the solemnities of her first feature, "High Art," the director Lisa Cholodenko turned to lighter matters: specifically, what to do if your mother is an unreconstructed hippie. Sam

(Christian Bale) takes his fiancée, Alex (Kate Beckinsale), home to California to meet his mom, Jane (Frances McDormand), a record producer whose walls of photographs bear testament to a life misspent in rock. She is all the family that Sam has but far more than he wants, and the movie watches tenderly over their time together. Jane's idea of family values is to come within an inch of seducing her son's girlfriend, bringing a shameless young rock star (Alessandro Nivola) along for the ride. The movie has poise and a lightly perspiring sexiness, but also an uncertain sense of humor, and you end up rooting for the squares—especially Sam and his colleague Sara (Natascha McElhone), who have more fun in the front of a Volvo than seems either practical or legal. Released in 2003.—Anthony Lane (*Reviewed in our issue of 3/10/03.*) (*Streaming on Crackle, Amazon, and other services.*)

named David Ghant (Zach Galifianakis), who, in 1997, is persuaded by Kelly (Kristen Wiig), with whom he's hopelessly in love, to steal millions in cash from his company's vault. She, in turn, is being manipulated by a coolly devious friend (Owen Wilson), who ships David off to Mexico and sends a hit man (Jason Sudeikis) to silence him. The reversals of fortune, the narrow escapes, the plans for revenge—and, for that matter, the details of the robbery itself—are gleefully outlandish, and Hess imbues them with his unique fusion of sugar-frosted style and religious substance. The goofily coiffed and tucked-in David seems to be answering, in his own blundering way, the call of a higher power; David's jilted fiancée, Jandice (Kate McKinnon), blends sacred love with profane humor; and all of the miscreants have a naïveté that's close to holy innocence. Released in 2016.—R.B. (*Streaming on Amazon, Hulu, and other services.*)

Masterminds

Jared Hess's wildly plotted comedy of clueless criminals, based on a true story, is intermittently funny and consistently inspired. It's about an armored-car driver in rural North Carolina

WHAT TO STREAM



The Moroccan government's ban on Mostafa Derkaoui's daring 1974 docu-fiction, "**About Some Meaningless Events**," nearly worked: the film vanished after one screening and was believed lost until its negative turned up, in 2016, in an archive in Barcelona. (It's showing March 18–31 on MOMA's Web site, and is available on MUBI.) Filming in the streets and bars of Casablanca, Derkaoui and his crew interview passersby about the Moroccan cinema—and hear from many of them that it should avoid mere entertainment and depict the real problems of the Moroccan people, such as unemployment and poverty. The crew is seen planning the shoot, searching for participants, and just plain hanging out—until an interviewee is revealed to have killed his boss at his job on the docks. The movie then veers into a film-noir-like crime drama of personal conflict and systemic corruption, in which the filmmakers debate their own approach to the subject and have their motives challenged on camera by the criminal himself. In discussing the possibility of an outspoken yet self-questioning political cinema, Derkaoui created one—which the authorities tried to silence.—Richard Brody

Opening Night

John Cassavetes's most cleverly constructed film, from 1977, is also a definitive lesson in the death-defying, all-consuming art of acting. Myrtle Gordon (Gena Rowlands), a glorious actress in the prime of life, stars in a new play by an elder writer (Joan Blondell) but finds that the story—which is about aging—is making her look old and feel old, and she resists ferociously, onstage, in real time. The story begins with the magic moment when Myrtle passes from the wings to the stage yet never stops being herself; the psychodramatic improvisations that she wreaks upon the text, and the chaos that they sow among her colleagues onstage and off, are the crux of the action. Myrtle's co-star (Cassavetes), her director (Ben Gazzara), the producer (Paul Stewart), the playwright, and the entire company get drawn into her turmoil as she turns the theatre into an arena of existential combat. The familiar fascination of backstage melodrama keeps the action flowing even as the terrifying, self-flaying antics threaten to shred the fabric of the drama—and of the screen.—R.B. (*Streaming on the Criterion Channel, Amazon, and other services.*)

Le Plaisir

This 1952 costume adaptation of three stories by Maupassant matches the originals in sensuality and irony, to which the director, Max Ophüls, adds his distinctive blend of visual extravagance and bitter, worldly wisdom. The first two episodes—concerning, respectively, a former ladies' man, now elderly, who dons a mask to gavotte with young belles at a dance hall, and the women of a small-town brothel who send the local gentry into a tizzy when they close up shop to attend the first Communion of the madam's niece—look past effervescent ribaldry to reveal the power of desire along with its elaborate rituals. (In the dance hall, Ophüls's gliding, gyrating camera turns the pounding steps of a quadrille into an erotic night-club grind.) The third story, about a bright young artist whose romance with his model goes sour, is a philosophical tale with a whiplash ending. It presses the director's elegant style to the breaking point, climaxing with a harrowing, vertiginous crane shot that rises to a nightmarish frenzy—and leads to one of the greatest last lines ever. In French.—R.B. (*Streaming on the Criterion Channel.*)

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TABLES FOR TWO

Fat Choy

250 Broome St.

Spicy Moon

328 E. 6th St.

The other day, while placing an online order for Fat Choy, a new restaurant on the Lower East Side, I must have been trigger-happy: without meaning to, I ordered several items twice. It was a fortuitous accident; each dish on the tiny menu—which has been tightly edited to be as pandemic-proof as possible—is worth revisiting.

I was particularly glad for the chance to closely examine the sticky-rice dumplings, the first container of which didn't last long. The stretchy golden rectangles are nearly as flat as postage stamps, yet they bear an incredible amount of flavor, especially impressive considering that their scant filling is composed of kitchen scraps—cauliflower cores, collard stems, shiitakes and kombu strained out of stock—that assert themselves even beneath a generous blanket of chili crisp and snipped cilantro.

A friend asked me recently to identify my desert-island vegetable, and as I

made a short list of contenders I realized that my passion for each was born of its use in Chinese cooking. Many can be found at Fat Choy, which the chef, Justin Lee, and his business partner, Jared Moeller, market as “Kind of Chinese. Also vegan.”

Frilly segments of baby bok choy are wilted in hot water until tender but still crunchy, then covered in steamed pickled garlic, fried garlic, and the house “brown sauce,” made from mushrooms, rice wine, and soy sauce. Skinny, slick florets of *gai lan*, or Chinese broccoli—which Lee describes as “kind of like if broccoli rabe and asparagus had a baby”—twist themselves around fat, nubby rice rolls tossed in charred scallions and black vinegar. Longevity noodles—coated in a blend of roasted garlic, shallots, chili, ginger, and fermented black beans—are strewn with both *bok choy sum* (a flowering bok-choy variety) and sweet, delicate pea leaves.

In addition to the vegetables, there are snippets of Meyer lemon and crunchy bread crumbs on the longevity noodles, which make it an unconventional, inspired twist on the classic Chinese dish. To Chinese-food traditionalists who are also vegan—or perhaps simply cutting back on animal products—I’d recommend Spicy Moon, with locations in both the East and West Village.

Pea leaves are on the menu there, too, still attached to their shoots and sautéed with oil, garlic, and Shaoxing wine, a recipe no less ingenious for being ancient in origin. You’ll also find other, mostly Szechuanese old favorites: fiery dan-dan

noodles, speckled with ground Szechuan peppercorn and big flakes of chili, with or without crumbles of Beyond Beef; silky mapo tofu, garnished with leek greens; vegetable-filled wontons in chili oil.

If the names of some dishes sound familiar—“dry pot style,” “dry pepper style,” “cumin style”—it may be because Spicy Moon’s owners once worked at Han Dynasty, to which the menu pays homage. At Spicy Moon, instead of choosing from a range of meats to be prepared in each style, you pick tofu, an assortment of vegetables, or a combination of both. For a recent to-go order of the kung-pao tofu and vegetables, cubes of tofu and morsels of eggplant, battered and deep-fried until bubbled and puffy, were packed separately from the ruddy sauce; combining them à la minute assured no compromise in texture.

At the beginning of the pandemic, I, like so many, stocked my pantry, refrigerator, and freezer as though my kitchen were a bomb shelter—a response that seemed staunchly retrograde, a relic of the nineteen-fifties. A year later, I’m marvelling at how restaurants have not only kept us fed and feeling connected but have also pushed us forward—toward, in my most optimistic moments, a world in which service-industry workers are valued more highly, in which small businesses are better protected, and in which we eat less meat, for environmental reasons, among others. Fat Choy and Spicy Moon make a fine case for all. (*Fat Choy* dishes \$6–\$12. *Spicy Moon* dishes \$5.95–\$17.95.)

—Hannah Goldfield



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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT BIGGER AND BETTER

Traditionally, every new Democratic President starts out by passing a big economic package (and every new Republican President starts out by passing a tax cut). Jimmy Carter's, in 1977, cost twenty billion dollars. Bill Clinton's, in 1993, was mainly a tax increase, aimed at eliminating the federal deficit. Barack Obama's, in 2009, which passed during the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, cost eight hundred billion, some of it spending increases, some tax relief.

The American Rescue Plan, which President Joe Biden signed last week, is on an entirely different scale. It will cost the government \$1.9 trillion, even though the economy today is in better shape than it was when Obama took office; and, unlike Clinton's opening economic initiative, it is proudly indifferent to the size of the federal deficit. The law's most famous feature, its fourteen-hundred-dollar payments to individuals (meaning that many families will wind up with much more), is only the beginning. There are also extensions of eligibility for unemployment benefits and food stamps; debt relief for renters; subsidies for state and local governments that are out of money, so that they can continue to provide services; a bailout for insolvent pension funds; health-care subsidies; and a nearly universal child-care benefit.

The left's disappointments with the adjustments necessary to get the bill through the Senate—it doesn't raise the federal minimum wage, and the cash value of unemployment benefits was re-

duced—should not obscure the important point. This is the most economically liberal piece of legislation in decades. It is not just much bigger than but different in kind from the Obama Administration's version, which helped people mainly through end-of-year tax credits. Biden's bill was designed to send regular monthly checks to millions of American families, so it will be palpable that the government is helping them in a tough moment. Gone are the work requirements, the sensitivity to the risk of inflation, and other centrist concerns that have been at the heart of Democratic programs for decades. The side that always seemed to lose the argument within the Democratic Party has finally won.

In 2009 and again in 2020, the Federal Reserve drew the assignment of staving off a depression, which it did by keeping interest rates low and by buying many billions of dollars in financial instruments to prevent the markets from

collapsing. Those maneuvers meant that people in finance, and, more broadly, people who have secure employment and assets in the markets, were spared the severe pain felt by millions of working people. Only Congress has the tools to provide direct help to the people most in need. That it is now able to act, quickly and effectively, is a sign that our democracy isn't as completely broken as a lot of people have been assuming, and that government can moderate the grotesquely unequal effects of the pandemic on people's well-being.

A year ago, nobody was predicting that Joe Biden would be presiding over a neo-New Deal. His long career didn't seem to indicate it, and he was clearly not on the way to having large majorities in both houses of Congress, as Franklin Roosevelt did. So how did this happen? The obvious answer is the pandemic, which generated the sense of urgent, universal crisis that the American system requires in order to make major changes. It's less obvious, but just as pertinent, that the response to the 2008 financial crisis is now seen as having been woefully insufficient, in ways that led to years of unnecessary suffering and a populist political revolt that disrupted both parties. It feels as if half a century's effort to reorient the political economy away from the state and toward the market may finally have run its course.

No Republicans voted for the American Rescue Plan—it would not have passed if the U.S. Senate runoff in Georgia had turned out differently—but the G.O.P. still played a part in what happened last week. The Party's new sense of itself as a competitor for working-class





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votes meant that it was supporting major COVID-relief programs through last year; the Democrats had to top the Republicans' performance. And, their votes aside, the Republicans have chosen not to wage a full-scale rhetorical war on the new law, perhaps because polls show it to be highly popular. Because the law provides such immediate and tangible help to most Americans, it's more difficult to campaign against than the 2009 relief effort was. Two generations' worth of modest Democratic anti-poverty programs have foundered because their opponents portrayed them as mainly benefitting minorities; Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty and the welfare benefit that primarily assisted children of single mothers that Bill Clinton ended, both representing tiny fractions of the federal budget, are leading examples. Now, because the economic pain is so widespread, the new law has a very large and racially diverse group of beneficiaries, which

ought to make it less vulnerable to the familiar attacks on social programs.

Yet the American Rescue Plan is actually a kind of economic appetizer. Its most progressive provisions—notably the child allowance, a monthly check of up to three hundred dollars per child, which would be the first true guaranteed family-income program in the United States, and would cut child poverty nearly in half—are temporary, expiring by the end of the year. The main course is what may be called "the Build Back Better bill," soon to be unveiled by the White House. It will be bigger and more permanent, representing a real remaking of the government's role in the economic lives of ordinary Americans. But that's only if it passes.

The bill that Biden signed into law last week had the advantage of a deadline, because the Trump Administration's pandemic-aid programs were due to expire in March. Build Back Better

may contain large infrastructure programs, green-energy programs, and wealth taxes—a long list, with most of its items lacking the rescue plan's pandemic-induced sense of crisis management. The new bill's fate will depend on Americans embracing the idea that the reason the misery of the pandemic may finally be abating is that government can solve problems. Republicans, accustomed to caricaturing Democratic programs as élitist schemes created by a party that doesn't care about ordinary people, will have to feel too intimidated by their constituents' appreciation for the American Rescue Plan to stage an all-out assault on the new bill.

It is not yet time to celebrate. It is time to prepare for a months-long campaign with the highest possible stakes: a new social compact, which might finally bring an end to forty years of rising inequality.

—Nicholas Lemann

FAMILY BUSINESS MAIN-CHARACTER SYNDROME



How do you teach your child about resilience? In contemporary Hollywood, the answer is trending toward: If the kid has an idea for a story, tell the kid to develop it as a TV show. Make it a family project. The result, in the case of the Barnz family—parents Ben and Daniel Barnz, both industry veterans, and their nineteen-year-old daughter, Zelda—is HBO Max's "Generation," an L.G.B.T.Q. teen dramedy, something of a "Girls" for Generation Z. The show tracks an ensemble cast, many of them queer, at a high school in Anaheim, California, instead of against the millennial backdrop of brunch and bars in Brooklyn.

"I hate this phrase, but it was kind of a teachable moment," Daniel, who co-wrote the show with his daughter, said. "I feel like, as a writer, I've lived with failure and rejection for so many years. So here we could have this moment with Zelda where we would say, 'Yeah, this is how you go about doing it.'"

The family had convened in Griffith Park on a Saturday morning and was searching for an appropriate place to sit that was both shady and conducive to social distancing. They settled on a bench outside the Autry Museum of the American West. Each member of the Barnz family (their last name is a mashup of Daniel and Ben's original last names, Bernstein and Schwartz) identifies as queer, including Zelda's younger brother, Dashiell. "There's so much masculine energy in the house I live in normally," Zelda said. She explained that she has never lived with women, except during summer camp and a few weeks she spent two years ago in the U.K. with Lena Dunham, an executive producer of "Generation." (The trip—"we got really into watercolor"—was fodder for Zelda's application essay for Yale.)

Zelda, who has curly brown hair, was sitting cross-legged, wearing a pink KN95 mask and Doc Martens. "They're the staple bisexual-wardrobe shoe," she explained.

"I didn't know that!" Ben said.

"Everyone always sees me in these and is, like, 'You're wearing the bisexual shoes again!'"

Ben wore a beige KN95 and Nike Air Force Ones; Daniel wore scuffed white Nikes and a red mask. "It's from an L.A.-

based, sustainable, Black-owned company," he explained. "Everyone on set wears them. Two things that changed for me working on this show: one, the mask I wear, and, two, I've taken all the capital letters out of my texts." Much of "Generation's" narrative unspools over phone screens, with the camera tracking speech bubbles and selfies, as the teens text or Snapchat or live-stream.

"Every time we try to write jokes about emojis, Zelda will say, 'I don't know, that sounds kind of millennial,'" Daniel said. "I steer clear of emojis fully."



Daniel, Zelda, and Ben Barnz

I'm also wary of periods, because apparently those are like microaggressions within texts."

"He'll text me with a period, and I'm always, like, 'O.K., he's furious,' and then I get home and he's not mad at all," Zelda said. "Some language can feel older. Like, the word 'boring-ass' is a phrase that feels too millennial."

"When we were first talking about the show, I realized we were learning these new words, like 'skoliosexual,'" Ben said. "I did not know what it meant. People of Zelda's age don't want to be pigeonholed or categorized, but they also want to be labelled and identified correctly."

One in six Gen Z adults now identifies as L.G.B.T., a fact, the Barnzes said, that was a major influence in the show's creation. "Both Zelda and her brother are adopted, and they have different birth parents, so it's kind of amazing that we ended up with two kids who are queer," Daniel said. "It really makes you think about the miraculousness of life."

Each member of the family has had a coming-out experience, although the younger generation was somewhat more offhand about it. "Zelda really casually came out, like at the end of a letter from camp one summer," Ben said. "And Dashiell literally came out by writing on a Post-it note one day and was, like, 'I'm gay, text me any questions you have.' And then the next day he came out to the carpool and the family group chat and the grandparents."

As they wrote "Generation," the family mined their lives for story lines. "I feel like I always want to take notes," Daniel said. Ben said that he felt a need to listen more to "the Greta Thunbergs and Emma Gonzálezes of the world."

Asked to describe Gen Z's voice, Zelda thought a moment. "I think we're very aware of what's going on around us, more so than other generations have been," she said. "But, at the same time, we're teen-agers, so we can be very myopic." She described the increasing prevalence of what she called "main-character syndrome," in which teens behave in a way that causes their peers to say, "You're not the main character." She added, "That's a phrase I've heard a lot."

"We need to put that in the show!" Daniel said.

—Antonia Hitchens

FREE ADVICE ASK A DOCTOR



The Howard Stern Show" counts among its regular guests a driving instructor known as Bobo, a former garbage collector known as King of All Blacks, and a tanning enthusiast known as Tan Mom. Last spring, a new personality joined the mix: Dr. David Agus, physician, professor, and COVID-19 pundit. Even-keeled and eager to assist, Agus, who is fifty-six, appears on the satellite-radio show every few months to debunk rumors, share best practices, answer questions, and, given the nature of the forum, goof around. Recently, Stern asked, "What's the dumbest thing you've heard about the vaccine?"

"There's this notion that Bill Gates has a plan to take over the country and there's a tracker in the vaccine, so once you get it the federal government knows everything you do and say," Agus replied. "Which is true, but it's astonishing that people realize that."

"It's a very different audience than I'm used to," Agus said the other day, videoconferencing from his office at the

University of Southern California's Ellison Institute for Transformative Medicine, of which he is the C.E.O. Among his other informal advisees during the pandemic: the Trump and Biden Administrations. "We could see that people weren't stepping up," he said. "We really didn't have a choice but to work with the last Administration and this one to try to make a difference. This one is a lot easier to work with, I'll tell you that much. They respect science."

Agus wore a black Uniqlo sweater over a white shirt, a uniform he adopted at the suggestion of a former patient, Steve Jobs. "He actually helped choose the sweater," Agus said. An oncologist by training, Agus was contacted by Stern in 2012, after Stern's co-host, Robin Quivers, was diagnosed as having Stage III endometrial cancer. "I got a voice mail on my cell phone that was literally Howard in tears," Agus said. He got involved with Quivers's treatment and became Stern's physician. This added to his repertoire of high-profile gigs: regular appearances on CBS; heading up the Ellison Institute, funded by another tech guy, a friend of Jobs. In January of last year, Agus attended the Davos World Economic Forum. "A scientist from China thrust an iPhone in my face," he said. On the phone, via FaceTime, was a Wuhan doctor with a warning.

"I kept thinking of 'M*A*S*H,' when



"Later on, after work, do you want to have leftovers?"

the helicopter came in,” he said. “It was chaos. I wasn’t trained as an infectious-disease doctor or a virologist.” He continued, “But if you can actually explain science to people and get them to understand it, as a doctor, that’s part of your role.”

Growing up in Baltimore, Agus played with lab rats while his peers played baseball; one of his teen-age science projects ended up on a space-shuttle mission. “It was horrible,” he said. “They had calculated the g-forces incorrectly, and the mice died.” In 1997, he was working in a lab at Sloan Kettering when Andy Grove, the C.E.O. of Intel, walked in. “He goes, ‘David, I like your science, but you’re a horrible presenter,’” Agus recalled. Grove scheduled a battery of talks and “basically forced me to become a better public speaker,” Agus said. Going on “Howard Stern” is still stressful, though. “If I think about it too much, I won’t sleep the night before,” he said.

Last year, at the suggestion of Ashton Kutcher, Agus signed up for Community, a platform (partially funded by Kutcher) that allows users to text followers without revealing their phone numbers. Now he has more than fifty thousand followers, who text him around a hundred questions a day; Agus fields them with the help of one employee.

There are other ways to scale. One afternoon last month, Agus conducted his hundredth (or so) Zoom Q&A., this one with the parents of U.S.C. sorority and fraternity members. Topics broached: COVID-19 vaccines (get them), masks (still a must), herd immunity by April. “Bullshit,” Agus said. New variants, not enough people vaccinated, something about T cells. Maybe, he said, “if things go right with the manufacturing of the vaccines, hopefully, this summer.”

The line of inquiry shifted. “What are your thoughts on the longevity diet by Dr. Longo?” (Eat real food.) “Are you familiar with the Gundry diet?” (Eat real food.) “Brown rice or white rice?” (No data; eat real food.) The final question: “Which wines and spirits are actually good for you?”

“There’s something called the Burgundy paradox,” Agus said. “People in the Burgundy region of France are larger than people in other regions of France,

and they smoke more, yet they live longer.” He cited a compound in Burgundy’s Pinot Noir grapes, resveratrol. “Pfizer bought the rights to resveratrol,” Agus said. “But they stopped the clinical trials, because the way nature produces it is complex, and, although there’s probably a benefit, the way they tried to do it in a pill didn’t work.” So it goes: neither science nor booze can solve every problem.

—Sheila Marikar

INSPIRATIONS MADOFF AND COHEN, MUSES



When Luna Pearl Woolf, a composer of distinctively unsleepy classical music, first moved to Montreal, she liked to listen to Leonard Cohen in her car. Woolf lives on the north side of Mt. Royal, a fifteen-minute walk to Cohen’s grave, and she used to climb the hill to visit it often. “People leave little gifts, little hearts and stones,” she said the other day. Last March, Woolf was dealt a bum hand: long COVID. She picked up the virus at a benefit in New York—“one of these big charity things, where there’s ten people at a table and it’s so loud you’re leaning in”—and still has symptoms. If her heart rate gets too high, she has to stay in bed for days. Still, Woolf has written thirty-five minutes of music in the past year, none of it calming. “I really feel



Luna Pearl Woolf

like music exists on this plane of emotion and conflict and intensity that’s very hard to capture in normal life,” she said. “Which is to say, I don’t particularly write music that’s good for relaxing.”

Woolf is forty-eight and wry, with no-nonsense glasses and chestnut hair. She was calling from her snowed-in studio, where she was working on an opera. Her latest album, “Luna Pearl Woolf: Fire and Flood,” which spans twenty-five years of her work, has been nominated for a Grammy for Best Classical Compendium—a category for records that don’t fit neatly elsewhere. The opening track, “To the Fire,” which Woolf composed as an undergraduate at Harvard, features a chorus of cruel laughter set alongside soaring harmonies. (Like “a Cassandra prophesy of environmental depredation,” the liner notes read, or “the violent glee of a Twitter mob.”) “Après moi, le déluge,” a four-part operatic work, explores the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina; “One to One to One” takes the male gaze as its subject. Two standout tracks are Woolf’s haunting versions of Leonard Cohen’s songs “Everybody Knows” and “Who by Fire.” “I wanted to take what I hear in my head when I listen to those songs, and spit them out again in my musical language,” she said.

In Woolf’s reimagining, “Who by Fire,” which borrows from a Hebrew prayer about God doling out various fates (“Who in her lonely slip? / Who by barbiturate?”), starts softly, with plucked strings, before breaking into abstract operatics, “like I’ve taken a lens and split some of the frequencies apart and put them back together,” she said. She picked it for its familiarity—her Jewish community group sometimes performs Cohen’s version on Yom Kippur—and for its message, the idea that “we’re all struggling toward or against something, and we don’t always have a choice in where we’re placed in that spectrum of evils or sins or happinesses.” She described “Everybody Knows” as “more cynical.” It’s about “human hypocrisies,” she said. “What is it that our own efforts are doing?” Woolf’s version opens with a chorus singing the word “no” repeatedly, in quick, anxiety-producing bursts. “The voices are sort of objecting: No, no, no, no. And the cello is doing the Cohen melody,” she said.

Woolf wrote the Cohen arrangements for her creative partner, the cellist Matt

Haimovitz, who was doing a tour with a vocal trio from the U.K. ("Pop-y classical stuff.") They went largely unperformed. "I had a lot of fun writing them, but the trio was not really into them. It takes a certain kind of personality to like my music," she said, dryly. Other projects have faltered in search of funding. In 2014, Woolf began writing an opera about Bernie Madoff, which took his wife, Ruth—"her complete abdication of her own identity into his"—as its main character. "Madoff wasn't a *mastermind*," she said. "He was just a guy who couldn't deal with his own failures."

Near the end of Cohen's career, he fell prey to a scammer and lost most of his money. Woolf saw him perform when he was seventy-three: "He had to keep working." She pulled up the lyrics to his "Tower of Song," from 1988, on her phone and read, "Well, my friends are gone and my hair is gray/I ache in the places where I used to play/And I'm crazy for love but I'm not coming on/I'm just paying my rent every day in the Tower of Song." "I love this idea that you're stuck in the glory of what you were born to do, and yet you're still not as good as you want to be," Woolf said. "I get something from that."

—Anna Russell

SOUTH JERSEY POSTCARD WEATHER WARS



Now that the dust has settled at the implosion site of the Trump Plaza Hotel and Casino, in Atlantic City, the rubble is being eyed by sport fishermen, who want to use it to add to an artificial reef in nearby Little Egg Harbor. But the day of the implosion itself, February 17th, is being remembered by the Jersey Shore's weather-interested mostly for what it was: a beautiful, clear winter moment that, meteorologically speaking, represented a short high-pressure respite in a series of low-pressure systems that briefly threatened South Jersey's place in the meteorological history books. State officials have been sorting through North Jersey's competing snow totals since February, interviewing observers, going

through reports. "There's no perfect way to measure snow," David Robinson, New Jersey's state climatologist, said the other day. "But there are standards. You have to stick to the standards."

Evidence of the mid-winter weather moment is most obvious in a video of the implosion made by Ben Gravy, a Shore-based surfer known for having surfed every state in the Union. In the video, shot from Gravy's board in the thirty-six-degree water, the scatter of altocumulus and altostratus clouds are center stage, as are, immediately following the casino's collapse, the fifteen-mile-an-hour winds blowing from the northwest—precisely as forecast by Joe Martucci, the in-house meteorologist for the *Press of Atlantic City*. Martucci viewed the implosion from Playground Pier, where the wind chill made the air feel like seventeen degrees and Martucci's feet feel like ice. The moment the casino fell, he knew that his wind forecast was on the money. "Which was a little unfortunate, because you saw the cloud of debris coming toward you," he said.

Martucci is the only meteorologist employed by a New Jersey newspaper, and he runs one of only a handful of newspaper-based meteorologic units in the country, the model being the Washington Post's Capital Weather Gang. Before coming to the *Press*, in 2017, Martucci, who completed a degree in meteorology at Rutgers, did forecasting work in radio and on North Jersey TV. At the *Press*, he posts forecasts online during the day, and manages the paper's social-media weather engagement with a South Jersey readership that took some adjusting to. "Look, in North Jersey, people ask me what the weather's going to be, but I get more questions about the whys down here," he said.

Most of South Jersey is on the coastal plain, but Martucci grew up to the north, in Union, in the shadow of the Watchung Mountains. (His earliest memories include pre- "Today" Al Roker forecasts.) Recently, he married Shawnie Caslin, a weather-graphics producer at WNBC-TV; they met in Rutgers's meteorology club and started dating after Superstorm Sandy.

Twice a month, Martucci hosts a podcast called "Something in the Air." A few days before the Trump Plaza implosion, Robinson, the state climatologist, who

is a regular guest, summed up South Jersey's winter weather—it was the state's twenty-ninth-mildest January on record—with one word: "boring."

Martucci loves snow (he says it's the only thing he misses living on the coastal plain), and the local snow totals were on his mind in the episode he posted the day after the casino was destroyed. It featured two celebrity amateur meteorologists from South Jersey, Sgt. Snowflake and Weatherman Franz—John Saltzman, of Cape May, and Marc Franz, Jr., of Lacey Township, respectively. Franz is known for his deeply historical Ocean County weather tweets ("I just post what I feel"), Saltzman for a viral Facebook incident involving a 2017 winter storm, a snowblower, and a bottle of Cape May Brewing Company beer. On the podcast, Saltzman opined on the Cape May Bubble, a phenomenon—disputed among meteorologists—that residents of the peninsula believe keeps them mostly thunderstorm- and snow-free. "We have different weather down here than I think a lot of people give us credit for," Saltzman said.

Despite the Bubble, Cape May holds the state record for snowfall: thirty-four inches, in the Great Blizzard of 1899. Or at least it did. During the nor'easter this past February 1st, a Jersey weather observer two hundred miles north, in Mt. Arlington, reported close to thirty-four inches, threatening Cape May's title. Martucci seemed to take the threat personally.

Robinson, reached in his office recently, said that the Mt. Arlington reading was not likely to be officially counted, although in reviewing it his staff had stumbled upon a thirty-four-inch measurement taken at Oak Ridge, in December of 1947, making North Jersey officially tied with South Jersey in terms of historic snowfall. But, on the day that Trump Plaza imploded, South Jersey's snow record was still in limbo, and the weather headline was sunshine, which most everybody in Atlantic City was savoring, along with the sky, which, when a building falls down, is something people tend to remember. Martucci himself was on the boardwalk, beaming.

"Especially in a string of days that were cloudy, you get that sunny day—you know, people just feel right," he said.

—Robert Sullivan

A REPORTER AT LARGE

TRUMP IN THE CROSSHAIRS

Will Cyrus Vance, Jr., indict the former President for financial crimes?

BY JANE MAYER



On February 22nd, in an office in White Plains, two lawyers handed over a hard drive to a Manhattan Assistant District Attorney, who, along with two investigators, had driven up from New York City in a heavy snowstorm. Although the exchange didn't look momentous, it set in motion the next phase of one of the most significant legal show-downs in American history. Hours earlier, the Supreme Court had ordered former President Donald Trump to comply with a subpoena for nearly a decade's worth of private financial records, including his tax returns. The subpoena had been issued by Cyrus Vance, Jr., the Manhattan District Attorney, who is leading

the first, and larger, of two known probes into potential criminal misconduct by Trump. The second was opened, last month, by a county prosecutor in Georgia, who is investigating Trump's efforts to undermine that state's election results.

Vance is a famously low-key prosecutor, but he has been waging a ferocious battle. His subpoena required Trump's accounting firm, Mazars U.S.A., to turn over millions of pages of personal and corporate records, dating from 2011 to 2019, that Trump had withheld from prosecutors and the public. Before Trump was elected, in 2016, he promised to release his tax records, as every other modern President has done, and he repeated

Vance is a famously low-key prosecutor, but he's been ferociously battling Trump.

that promise after taking office. Instead, he went to extraordinary lengths to hide the documents. The subpoena will finally give legal authorities a clear look at the former President's opaque business empire, helping them to determine whether he committed any financial crimes. After Vance's victory at the Supreme Court, he released a typically buttoned-up statement: "The work continues."

If the tax records contain major revelations, the public probably won't learn about them anytime soon: the information will likely be kept secret unless criminal charges are filed. The hard drive—which includes potentially revealing notes showing how Trump and his accountants arrived at their tax numbers—is believed to be locked in a high-security annex in lower Manhattan. A spokesman for the Manhattan District Attorney's office declined to confirm the drive's whereabouts, but people familiar with the office presume that it has been secured in a radio-frequency-isolation chamber in the Louis J. Lefkowitz State Office Building, on Centre Street. The chamber is protected by a double set of metal doors—the kind used in bank vaults—and its walls are lined with what looks like glimmering copper foil, to block remote attempts to tamper with digital evidence. It's a modern equivalent of Tutankhamun's tomb.

Such extreme precautions are not surprising, given the nature of the case: no previous President has been charged with a criminal offense. If Trump, who remains the Republican Party's most popular potential Presidential candidate and who recently signalled interest in another run, is charged and convicted, he could end up serving a prison term instead of a second White House term. Vance, the scion of a prominent Democratic family—the kind of insider whom the arriviste Trump has long resented—now has the power to rewrite Trump's place in history. The journalist Jonathan Alter, a longtime friend of the D.A. and his family, said, "Vance represents everything that Trump, when he was in Queens with his nose pressed up against the glass in Manhattan, wanted to conquer and destroy."

Vance's investigation, which appears to be focussed largely on business practices that Trump engaged in before taking office, may seem picayune in comparison with the outrageous offenses to

democratic norms that Trump committed as President. But the New York University historian Ruth Ben-Ghiat, whose recent book “Strongmen” examines the characteristics of antidemocratic rulers, told me, “If you don’t prosecute Trump, it sends the message that all that he did was acceptable.” She pointed out that strongmen typically “inhabit a gray zone between illegal and legal for years”; corrupt acts of political power are just an extension of their shady business practices. “Trumpism isn’t just about *him*,” Ben-Ghiat went on. “It’s a whole way of being in the world. It’s about secrecy, domination, trickery, and fraud.” She said, of Vance’s probe, “It’s symbolic for the public, and very important to give the public a sense of accountability.”

The legal clash between Vance and Trump has already tested the limits of Presidential power. In 2019, Trump’s lawyers argued that Presidents were immune from criminal investigation and prosecution. Trump’s appellate counsel, William Consovoy, asserted that Trump couldn’t be prosecuted even if he fulfilled one of his most notorious campaign boasts: “I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn’t lose any voters.” Vance and his team rejected this imperial claim, insisting that nobody is above the law. Trump, in his effort to shield his financial records, took the fight all the way to the Supreme Court—and then back again, after the case was remanded—but the D.A.’s office won every round.

Vance, in a wide-ranging interview with me about his tenure as Manhattan D.A., said, of appearing before the Supreme Court, “Truly, it was like Mt. Olympus.” He declined to discuss the Trump case, as legal ethics require, but he did disclose that he will not seek a fourth term, and that he plans to retire from the D.A.’s office on December 31st. Eight Democratic candidates are campaigning for the job, and, given the city’s liberal leanings, the victor of the Democratic primary, in June, is all but guaranteed to win in November.

Even before the Trump case crossed his desk, Vance had largely decided not to run for reelection. He and his wife, Peggy McDonnell, felt that he had done much of what he set out to do—among other successes, he and his federal partners had secured judgments in a dozen

major bank cases, producing more than fourteen billion dollars in fines and forfeitures. This inflow covers the D.A.’s annual budget many times over, and also pays for a two-hundred-and-fifty-million-dollar fund for community-justice programs. But Vance is sixty-six, and the pressure of managing one of the highest-profile prosecutorial offices in the country has been wearying. “It turned out to be tougher than I thought it would be,” he conceded. He told me that, although his larger-than-life predecessor, Robert Morgenthau, held the office for thirty-five years—retiring at age ninety—he himself was ready to give the next generation a shot. “There’s nothing worse than a politician who doesn’t know when to leave,” he said.

He had decided to keep his intentions quiet until after the Supreme Court ruled on Trump’s tax records, partly because he feared that some of the more outspokenly anti-Trump candidates for his job might alienate the conservative Justices. His decision to leave midcourse, however, exposes the case to the political fray of an election. Some candidates have already made inflammatory statements denouncing Trump, and such rhetoric could complicate a prosecution.

The investigative phase of the Trump case will likely be complete before Vance’s term ends, leaving to him the crucial decision of whether to bring criminal charges. But any trial would almost surely rest in the hands of his successor. Daniel R. Alonso, Vance’s former top deputy, who is now a lawyer at Buckley, L.L.P., predicts that if Trump is indicted “it will be nuclear war.”

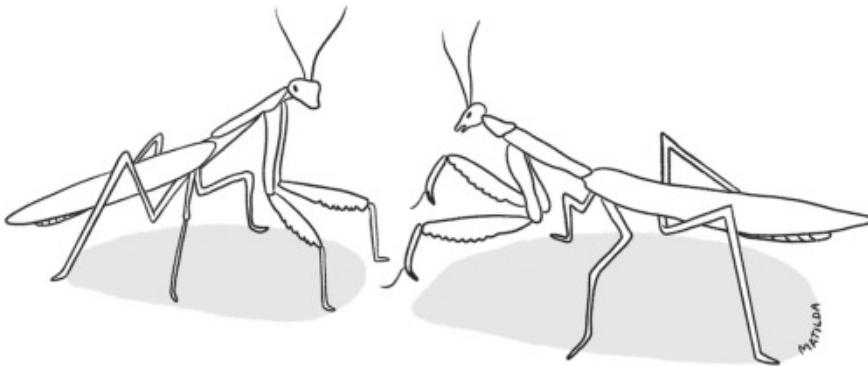
Trump has already demonstrated a willingness to engage in almost unthinkable tactics to protect himself. Among his social circle in Palm Beach, speculation abounds that Florida’s Republican governor, Ron DeSantis, an ally, might not honor an extradition request from New York if a bench warrant were issued for Trump’s arrest. Dave Aronberg, the state’s attorney for Palm Beach County, doubts that such defiance would stand. Extradition, he points out, is a constitutional duty, and a governor’s role in it is merely “ministerial.” But he admitted that the process might not go smoothly: “You know what? I thought January 6th would go smoothly. Congress’s role was just ministerial then, too.”

(DeSantis did not respond to a request for comment.)

Vance’s office could well be the only operable brake on Trump’s remarkable record of impunity. He has survived two impeachments, the investigation by the special counsel Robert Mueller, half a dozen bankruptcies, twenty-six accusations of sexual misconduct, and an estimated four thousand lawsuits. And his successor, President Joe Biden, so far seems to prefer that the Department of Justice simply turn the page.

As a result, the contest between Vance and Trump is about much more than a financial investigation. It’s a stress test of the American justice system. George Conway, a lawyer and a Trump critic, who is married to the former President’s adviser Kellyanne Conway, said, “Trump is a man who has gotten away with everything his entire life. He’s an affront to the rule of law, and to all law-abiding citizens.” In office, Trump often treated the law as a political weapon, using the Justice Department as a tool for targeting enemies. Now he is pitted against a D.A. who regards the law as the politically blind foundation of democracy. As Conway put it, “For Trump, the law is a cudgel. For Vance, it’s what holds us together as a civilization. And that’s why people who thumb their noses at it have to be prosecuted. If they aren’t, you’re taking a big step toward a world where that is acceptable.”

Vance’s next move in the case against Trump is less clear. Although his office is credited with numerous convictions during his tenure—such as that of Pedro Hernandez, the murderer of Etan Patz, a six-year-old boy, in a case that had gone unsolved since 1979—critics assert that he has frequently retreated when faced with rich and powerful criminal targets. Notably, in 2012, he dropped a case involving two of Trump’s children, which centered on their management of the Trump SoHo hotel-condominium, in lower Manhattan. The tabloids have referred to Vance as Soft Cy, portraying him as a well-meaning Boy Scout who lacks the killer instinct necessary for nailing the biggest white-collar villains in New York. Preet Bharara, the former U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, told me, “I think he’s taken a lot



*"Men want to be me, women want to bite
my head off and devour my corpse."*

of undue criticism. It's hard. The track record is not perfect. Maybe he's been a little bit gun-shy. But he's upright and full of integrity."

As Vance faces an adversary whose character is in many ways the opposite of his own, some of his perceived weaknesses may become strengths. Trump has accused prosecutors investigating him of waging a political vendetta. After the Supreme Court upheld Vance's tax-records subpoena, Trump denounced the probe as "a continuation of the greatest political Witch Hunt in the history of our Country," and claimed that it was "all Democrat-inspired in a totally Democrat location, New York City and State." Given Vance's sober, methodical reputation, such attacks may fall flat. "We don't operate politically," he told me. He mentioned that, whenever he goes to his office, he walks past the hulking courthouse complex at 60 Centre Street. "There's a stone inscription over this huge building. It says, 'The true administration of justice is the firmest pillar of good government.'" The quote, he noted, is attributed to George Washington. "When you have all the power we have as prosecutors, it can't be levelled against people for political purposes. We've prosecuted Republicans and Democrats, and we've investigated and *not* prosecuted Republicans and Democrats. It's got to be based on the facts."

Vance maintains this earnest line, and discretion, even in private conversations with friends. Jonathan Alter recalls that, as far back as 2017, when he tried to bring up the subject of a Trump

prosecution, Vance refused to discuss it: "He's like Joe Friday—'Just the facts.'" Alter said that Vance's sense of himself as a straight shooter reflects "this whole noblesse-oblige thing," adding, "That's where he comes from."

A third-generation public servant, Vance is a vestige of the old Wasp guard. His father, Cyrus Vance, Sr., became Jimmy Carter's Secretary of State after years of government service, including top roles in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. When the elder Vance was five years old, his father died; he was reared by his cousin John W. Davis, the Democratic nominee for President in 1924, who was defeated by Calvin Coolidge. Davis went on to help establish the white-shoe law firm Davis, Polk and the élite Council on Foreign Relations. Vance, Sr., followed a similar path, becoming a partner at the prestigious law firm Simpson, Thacher & Bartlett before joining the Kennedy Administration, where he became the Secretary of the Army.

Vance, Jr., has struggled, as his patrician forebears did, with the seamy demands of retail politics; like them, he is a cautious member of the establishment who is uncomfortable with glad-handing and infighting. In 1924, Davis, whom H. L. Mencken mocked as "a lawyer on leave from the ante-room of J. P. Morgan," denounced the Ku Klux Klan—a political risk at the time—but then, in the early fifties, he unsuccessfully defended "separate but equal" segregated schools before the Supreme Court in a case that became Brown v.

Board of Education. Cyrus Vance, Sr., rose swiftly to top government posts, but he, too, had trouble navigating politics. He evidently annoyed President Carter by eschewing television-talk-show appearances. And, in 1980, Vance, Sr., warned Carter that a proposed military plan to rescue American hostages in Iran was too risky. Carter went ahead, in a failed operation that killed eight servicemen and freed no hostages. Vance, Sr., resigned. At the time, Vance, Jr., was attending Georgetown Law. He told me, "My father was really struggling, in the sense that the President was really not taking his advice. I think he was probably humiliated. Or just hurt. But he wasn't someone to go out and express his hurt or upset."

Although Vance, Jr., revered his father, he wanted to escape his shadow. He told me that he initially worked for a West African shipping company but "turned out to be a shitty businessperson." He then landed in the Manhattan D.A.'s office, which had jurisdiction over cases involving some of the world's biggest criminal enterprises. (His pedigree surely played a role in his getting the job: Morgenthau, the D.A. at the time, regularly hired young men from famous families.) Vance soon became a member of Morgenthau's rackets bureau, which prosecuted many of the office's most challenging financial cases.

In 1988, Vance decided to move with his wife to Seattle. He recalls that, as he was packing his car, his father, who had expected his son to take his place in New York society, admonished him, "not in a friendly way, 'Cy—you are raising the white flag on your career!'" But in Seattle Vance launched a firm that was a notable success. One of his law partners, Robert Sulkin, told me that Vance became "the go-to guy" in town for criminal defendants: "He was great on his feet—quick-witted but never nasty." Among the people whom Vance represented was Thomas Stewart, a right-wing corporate mogul accused of myriad campaign-finance violations.

In 2004, Vance returned to New York, to work at the firm Morville, Abramowitz. Five years later, he ran for Manhattan D.A. Unlike his legendary predecessors Thomas Dewey, Frank Hogan, and Morgenthau—press-savvy crusaders who all sought higher political office—

Vance was a liberal policy wonk more interested in talking about subjects like community-based crime-reduction strategies. He was courteous but aloof; his idea of blowing off steam was to meditate daily. Bruce Gyory, a New York political strategist, said, of Vance, “He doesn’t like politics much, and he’s not all that good at it.” Nevertheless, despite what the *Times* called a nearly fatal “aversion to self-hype”—and with the help of name recognition, Morgenthau’s backing, and generous campaign funds—he won.

The Trump family first attracted Vance’s legal attention a decade ago. At the time, Donald Trump was a reality-TV star and a real-estate developer spreading the lie that President Barack Obama hadn’t actually been born in the U.S. Trump had cultivated a relationship with Morgenthau, hosting him and his wife at Mar-a-Lago, his club in Palm Beach. Vance knew Trump only casually, having crossed paths with him at events around New York City. Vance’s office learned that condominium owners at the Trump SoHo believed they had been cheated by Trump’s children Donald, Jr., and Ivanka, who were managing the project for the family business, the Trump Organization. The buyers alleged that the Trumps had lied to them by inflating the number of apartments that they had sold, thereby misleading them into thinking the condominiums were better investments than they were.

Several prosecutors in Vance’s office wanted to press charges, but he was unpersuaded. During the same period, he had repeatedly been scorched in the tabloids after the collapse of a hasty attempt to press rape charges against Dominique Strauss-Kahn, the prominent French statesman and former head of the International Monetary Fund, for allegedly forcing himself on a hotel housekeeper. Vance had lost faith in the accuser’s credibility. But the woman’s lawyer, Kenneth Thompson, blasted Vance for failing to “stand up.” Justified or not, the Strauss-Kahn reversal was a public-relations fiasco. A legal peer of Vance’s told me, “You can’t have cases that fall apart. Does that affect someone psychologically? Maybe.”

Vance’s opposition to charging the Trump children in the SoHo case stirred scandal after a 2017 investigative report—produced jointly by ProPublica,

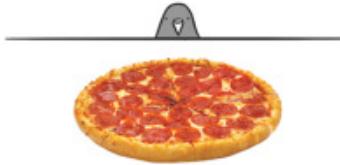
WNYC, and *The New Yorker*—revealed that, a few months after meeting with Marc Kasowitz, a lawyer for the Trumps, Vance told his prosecutors that he had overruled their recommendation to go ahead with the criminal case. Several months after Vance dropped it, the report revealed, he accepted a sizable donation from Kasowitz. After the article appeared, Vance returned the donation: thirty-two thousand dollars.

Adam Kaufmann, the former chief of the Investigation Division in the D.A.’s office, whom Vance overruled on the Trump SoHo matter, dismisses the notion that Vance was bought off. Vance, he said, “wrestled with the case from the beginning.” The condominium owners were not particularly sympathetic victims—their apartments were primarily used as pieds-à-terre—and real-estate practices in New York are so often sleazy that it would have been hard to persuade a jury beyond a reasonable doubt that the Trumps were unusually criminal. Kaufmann told me, “I did think there was enough there to keep going, but I also understand his position. If I were the D.A., not a level down, I might have done the same.”

Vance defended his decision, telling me, “The job isn’t about going after big targets just because they’re wealthy people. There has to be sufficient evidence, and there have to be sufficient reasons.” He noted, “At that time, the Trump family was just the Trump family. He wasn’t President.” Vance’s team investigated

former President’s niece, who is suing him and two of his siblings for allegedly defrauding her out of her proper inheritance, sees it differently. “Vance let two of my cousins off the hook,” she told me. “If he hadn’t, he may well have kept Donald from running. Do you really think he could have run for President when two of his children were indicted for fraud?” She hopes that Vance will be more aggressive this time, given that the Republican Party—which has twice declined to convict Trump in impeachment trials—clearly lacks the will to impede his possible comeback. A felony conviction wouldn’t disqualify Trump from a second term, but a prison sentence would certainly make it harder for him to be elected again. “It’s incredibly urgent that Vance prosecutes Donald now,” she said.

Vance has shown that he is capable of redressing his past lapses: last year, his office delivered an impressive conviction in the case of the movie mogul Harvey Weinstein, despite having declined to pursue charges against him five years earlier. Weinstein was sentenced to twenty-three years in prison for sexual crimes against two women. Vance believed that they didn’t have a strong enough case, but Ambra Battilana Gutierrez, a model who accused Weinstein of sexual misconduct in 2015, contends that Vance should have pursued charges then: “Vance made the mistake. It’s very clear who he listens to—the powerful and rich—not a powerless model like me.” Vance returned to the case, in 2018, only after the *Times* and *The New Yorker* exposed Weinstein’s serial sexual predation. The belated conviction, perhaps the biggest of the #MeToo era, helped bolster Vance’s reputation. He now faces an even riskier target in Trump.



Vance launched his criminal probe into the President as a stopgap measure in August of 2018, after federal prosecutors declined to pursue him for his alleged role in the payment of hush money to the porn star Stormy Daniels. During the 2016 Presidential campaign, she had threatened to reveal publicly that she and Trump had had an affair. Trump’s former lawyer Michael Cohen was sentenced to three years in federal prison partly for crimes connected to the hush money. But court documents made it clear that Trump participated in the scheme with Cohen. The documents referred to the President

the case for two years, but he never became convinced that it merited criminal charges. Among other problems, the apartment owners settled their grievances privately with the Trump Organization, then declined to cooperate with prosecutors. Vance said, “I had a hundred thousand other cases in the office that year, with victims who actually wanted us to take the case.”

Mary Trump, a psychologist and the

as “Individual-1,” who ran “an ultimately successful campaign for President of the United States.” Yet Trump remained an unindicted co-conspirator, because the Justice Department was unwilling to prosecute a sitting President. State and local prosecutors have their own authority to pursue crimes in their jurisdictions, and Vance and the New York attorney general, Letitia James, opened separate investigations of Trump, who was then a New York resident, and whose business is based in New York.

Cohen was once Trump’s most loyal associate, willing to do and say nearly anything to protect him. That has long since changed. On “Mea Culpa,” a podcast that Cohen now hosts, he recently made his resentment clear. “I went to frickin’ prison for him and his dirty deeds,” he said. “It’s the Vance investigation that I believe causes Trump to lose sleep at night. Besides the horror of actually having to open up eight years of his personal income-tax statements, Vance is accumulating a vast road map of criminality for which Trump must answer.” Cohen, who has been coöperating with Vance’s office, believes that Trump’s children and Allen Weisselberg, the Trump Organization’s chief financial officer, are also under legal scrutiny.

The initial focus of Vance’s inquiry was the hush-money payments. Trump has denied any involvement with Daniels or with Karen McDougal, a former *Playboy* model who made similar allegations. But Cohen has produced checks indicating that Trump reimbursed him for some of the hush-money payments—and falsely described them as legal expenses. Cohen has alleged that the payments were authorized by both Trump and Weisselberg. Meanwhile, Trump’s story about the payments has changed. He initially claimed no knowledge of them. Then, after his lawyer Rudy Giuliani described the payments as reimbursements, Trump said that they represented a “monthly retainer” for Cohen’s legal services. Neither Trump nor Weisselberg has been charged with a crime. (Mary Mulligan, a lawyer representing Weisselberg, declined to comment.) But, if Trump or anyone in his company misrepresented the illicit payoffs as legal expenses, they may have violated New York laws prohibiting the falsification of business records. Such crimes are usually mis-

demeanors, but they can become felonies if they were committed as part of other offenses, such as tax fraud or insurance fraud.

Vance’s probe has since expanded into a broad examination of the possibility that Trump and his company engaged in tax, banking, and insurance fraud. Investigators are questioning whether Trump profited illegally by deliberately misleading authorities about the value of his real-estate assets. Cohen has alleged that Trump inflated property valuations in order to get favorable bank loans and insurance policies, while simultaneously lowballing the value of the same assets in order to reduce his tax burden.

As the *Times* has revealed, Trump paid only seven hundred and fifty dollars in federal income taxes during his first year as President, and he paid no federal income taxes at all during ten of the preceding fifteen years. He claimed hundreds of millions of dollars in business losses, and between 2010 and 2018 he reported twenty-six million dollars in “consulting fees” as business expenses. Among these fees, \$747,622 went to Ivanka Trump for projects she was already working on as a salaried employee of the Trump Organization. The consulting fees are being scrutinized by the legal teams of both James and Vance. James is investigating possible civil charges. She obtained court orders that forced the Trump Organization to turn over documents and that compelled Trump’s son Eric, who helps run the company, to answer questions. Vance, meanwhile, is focused on criminal offenses. The widened scope of the D.A.’s investigation was hinted at in a court filing last August, which stated that the office was now looking into “possibly extensive and protracted criminal conduct at the Trump Organization.”

Several knowledgeable sources told me that, in the past two months, the tone and the pace of Vance’s grand-jury probe have picked up dramatically. A person who has been extensively involved in the investigation said, “It’s night and day.” Another source, who complained that things had seemed to stall while Vance waited for Trump to leave the White House, and then waited for his tax records, said, of the D.A.’s office, “They mean business now.” Earlier, this source

had felt that Vance’s team seemed slow to talk to some prospective witnesses. But recently, the person said, prosecutors’ questions have become “very pointed—they’re sharpshooting now, laser-beaming.” The source added, “It hit me—they’re closer.”

The change came soon after the D.A.’s office made the unusual decision to hire a new special assistant from outside its ranks—Mark Pomerantz, a prominent former federal prosecutor. Pomerantz was brought on, one well-informed source admits, partly “to scare the shit out of people.” The press has characterized Pomerantz, who formerly headed the criminal division of the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of New York, as a specialist in prosecuting organized crime, largely because he supervised the team that, in 1999, obtained a conviction of the son of John Gotti, the don of the Gambino crime family. In fact, it was not a major case. Pomerantz’s deeper value, say those who know him, is that he has spent the past two decades at the eminent firm Paul, Weiss, artfully representing rich and powerful white-collar criminal defendants. This experience makes him capable not just of bringing a smart case but also of anticipating holes through which a wily target might escape. “He’s a brilliant lawyer,” Roberta Kaplan, a litigator who has worked with Pomerantz, said. “He knows when to push and when not to.” Anne Milgram, a former attorney general of New Jersey, who previously worked in the Manhattan D.A.’s office, under Morgenthau, said that Pomerantz “likely has greater stature than any of the candidates for D.A. right now.” She believes his presence will insure that the Trump case is in steady hands when Vance’s successor takes office. Given Trump’s talk of a witch hunt, Milgram noted, the fact that Pomerantz comes from outside the D.A.’s office helps take the case “out of politics.”

Vance also recently hired a top forensic-accounting firm, F.T.I., that is capable of crunching vast amounts of financial data. Taken together, George Conway told me, the hirings “are signs that the D.A.’s office is approaching this investigation very seriously—they clearly think they have something, and they’re trying to hone it and move it to a jury in New York.”

Milgram agrees: “In my experience, when you drill a hole, you wouldn’t often

go for eighteen months unless there's some evidence leading to a crime." Bharara told me, "All the signals indicate that there's a belief on the part of that office that there's a good chance of a charge." But, he warned, "no one should be under the illusion that this is easy or a slam-dunk case."

To some extent, the direction of Vance's probe can be gleaned from his office's subpoenas, and from the questions that prosecutors are asking potential witnesses. Deutsche Bank, until recently one of Trump's largest lenders, has been subpoenaed and debriefed by investigators. Employees at Aon, Trump's former insurance company, have reportedly been questioned. Vance's team is also said to be looking into whether the Trump Organization, after having a lender forgive more than a hundred million dollars in loans for a skyscraper project in Chicago, declared the windfall and paid taxes on it. In addition, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, Vance's team is intensifying its focus on financial dealings involving Seven Springs, Trump's estate in Mount Kisco, New York. And, according to three people familiar with Vance's probe, in recent weeks Vance and Pomerantz, along with investigators in the D.A.'s Major Economic Crimes Bureau, have conducted several videoconference interviews with people knowledgeable about the Trump Organization. Although Vance is described by one source as "absolutely committed" to the probe, he has apparently asked few questions during these sessions; Pomerantz has dominated, putting interviewees at ease with jokes and exploring not just dry legal details but also the social and corporate culture of the Trump world, with an eye toward exposing how financial decisions were made. Since the probe began, Michael Cohen has participated in seven sessions, and, according to sources, he has not held back. He told prosecutors, "Nothing goes on in the Trump Organization without Donald Trump knowing it. It's like the boss of bosses in an organized-crime family. No one has to ask if the boss signed off. They *know* he did."

Prosecutors may hesitate to call Cohen as a witness, given that he is a convicted felon and an admitted liar. But Paul Pelletier, a highly regarded former federal prosecutor, told me, "I've used much worse people than him. Angels don't swim in

the sewers. You can't get angels to testify." What would be crucial, he said, is corroborating Cohen's allegations.

Persuading an untarnished insider to flip against Trump would clearly be a breakthrough. Judging from investigators' questions and subpoenas, their sights are set on Allen Weisselberg. "I think he's the key to the case," Steven M. Cohen, a former federal prosecutor who is close to many top political and legal officials in New York, said. Mary Trump agreed, noting, "Allen Weisselberg knows where all the bodies are buried." As the man who managed Trump's money flow for decades, Weisselberg would certainly make a star witness. He originally worked as a bookkeeper for Trump's father—a job that, Weisselberg's former daughter-in-law told me, he got after answering a newspaper ad while driving a cab in Canarsie. By the mid-eighties, he was bookkeeping for Trump.

Weisselberg isn't believed to be coöperating with prosecutors, but he may be vulnerable to pressure. He is seventy-three, and he has two sons who are both potentially enmeshed in the case. Jack Weisselberg, the younger son, works at one of the Trump Organization's largest lenders, Ladder Capital. It isn't clear if Jack handled Trump business there, but Ladder has loaned more than two hundred and seventy million dollars to Trump, in connection with four building projects. Among them is 40 Wall Street, one of the Trump properties whose finances are being closely scrutinized by investigators. Weisselberg's other son, Barry, has been the manager of the Wollman ice-skating rink and the carousel in Central Park—cash-only businesses that have been run for the city by the Trump Organization. Michael Cohen, who worked with Allen Weisselberg for years, believes that if pros-

ecutors threaten him or his family with indictment—as they did with Cohen himself—he will coöperate. "He's not going to let his boys go to prison," Cohen told me. "And I don't think he wants to spend his golden years in a correctional institution, either." In 2018, federal prosecutors had to give Allen Weisselberg grand-jury immunity in exchange for his coöperation in the Stormy Daniels matter—a sign that he refused to be debriefed voluntarily. Weisselberg's sons, who could not be reached for comment, have not been accused of any wrongdoing and are not believed to be coöperating.

But investigators in Vance's office have debriefed Jennifer Weisselberg, a former professional dancer and choreographer who married Barry in 2004 and had a contentious divorce from him in 2018. Investigators have asked her about a gift that Trump gave to her and her husband: free occupancy, for seven years, of an apartment overlooking Central Park. In divorce proceedings, her former husband described the apartment as a corporate property. If this gift was not declared as a form of compensation on the Weisselbergs' tax forms, prosecutors could use the omission against the couple, as part of an effort to squeeze Allen into coöperating with them. Bloomberg News revealed the existence of the free apartment last year, after Jennifer shared documentation of it. The article noted that the apartment sold for two and a half million dollars in 2016. After the story ran, Vance's office reached out to her. In Jennifer's first extensive public remarks, she told me that, when someone works for the Trump Organization, "only a small part of your salary is reported." She explained, "They pay you with apartments and other stuff, as a control tactic, so



"Hold on—wait until those people are out of the way."

you can't leave. They own you! You have to do whatever corrupt crap they ask." (The Trump Organization did not respond to requests for comment.)

Jennifer described her former father-in-law as being in Trump's thrall: "His whole worth is 'Does Donald like me today?' It's his whole life, his core being. He's obsessed. He has more feelings and adoration for Donald than for his wife." Asked if Allen Weisselberg would flip under pressure, she said, "I don't know. For Donald, it's a business. But for Allen it's a love affair."

Jennifer told me that she first met Trump before she was married, at Allen Weisselberg's modest house, in Wantagh, on Long Island. That day, the Weisselberg family was sitting shivah, for Allen's mother. Trump showed up in a limousine and blurted out, "This is where my C.F.O. lives? It's embarrassing!" Then, Jennifer recalled, Trump showed various shivah attendees photographs of naked women with him on a yacht. "After that, he starts hitting on *me*," she said. Jennifer claimed that Allen Weisselberg, instead of being offended on her behalf, humored his boss: "He didn't stand up for me!" Asked about this, Weisselberg's lawyer, Mary Mulligan, said, "No comment."

Weisselberg was known behind his back as the Weasel. His office door, on the twenty-sixth floor of Trump Tower, shared a hallway with Trump's. Jennifer recalled, "You walk down the hall, it's Allen-Donald, Allen-Donald—they don't do anything separately. Allen would know *everything*."

Many legal experts believe that, without an inside witness such as Allen Weisselberg on the stand, it could be hard to persuade a jury beyond a reasonable doubt that Trump knowingly engaged in fraud. Tax cases are notoriously difficult to prosecute, because the details are dull and complicated; ignorance can be an effective defense. The hurdle is proving criminal intent. And, as Bharara pointed out, "Trump is actually very clever." He learned from his early mentor Roy Cohn, the infamous fixer and Mob lawyer, to leave no fingerprints. He writes very little down, has no computer on his desk, has never had a personal e-mail address, and relies on close aides to send text messages for him. Also, as

Barbara Res, an engineer who worked for Trump, recalled, he is skilled at issuing orders obliquely. Res told me, "He would direct work in a way that you knew what he wanted you to do without him actually *telling* you."

The targets of complex financial prosecutions often defend themselves by noting that their accountants and lawyers had approved their allegedly criminal actions. Trump has already started making this argument. In a statement denouncing the Supreme Court's upholding of Vance's subpoena, Trump protested that his tax returns "were done by among the biggest and most prestigious law and accounting firms in the U.S."

Andrew Weissmann, a relentless former federal prosecutor who once headed the Justice Department's criminal-fraud section—and more recently worked on the Mueller investigation—says that Trump's accounting records might clinch Vance's case. "Accounting records can be fantastic," he said. As a veteran of successful prosecutions of the Gambino and the Genovese crime families, and also top Enron executives, Weissmann told me that the first thing investigators will probably do is a wealth analysis. "You pull everything," he explained. Prosecutors will likely create a time line and compare it with various financial representations made by the Trump Organization, looking for inconsistencies. If the accountants' work records show that they weren't informed by Trump about misrepresentations that the company made to secure financial advantages, then it will be much easier to argue that Trump bears criminal responsibility. As Weissmann put it, "Then you're golden!"

Weissmann also thinks that bringing in F.T.I., the forensic-accounting firm, is a major leap forward. Such experts "are the people you put on the stand" to explain potential crimes to the jury: "The fact that they are exterior to the office is really important. You can discount the argument that they're political. It's invaluable."

Although Trump ultimately outfoxed the Mueller investigation, Weissmann thinks that Vance is in a stronger position. For one thing, Trump can't fire Vance, so he can't be intimidated. For another, Trump can no longer pardon anyone, which means that recalci-

trant witnesses will feel more strongly compelled to testify.

Weissmann believes that Trump obstructed justice in the Mueller probe, and would rather see him prosecuted for that. He said, of Vance's pursuit of Trump's possible financial crimes, "It's not ideal. But at least there's some accountability. You're not just letting bygones be bygones."

If the case proceeds, some have argued, it won't only be Trump on trial but the justice system itself. After the D.A. was granted access to his tax returns, Trump denounced what he called "'head-hunting' prosecutors" as "fascism, not justice." In fact, according to Anne Applebaum, the author of "*Twilight of Democracy*," the American justice system, by holding leaders and ordinary citizens equally accountable, protects democracy from fascism. The image of a former President facing prison may seem un-American. But she noted that, in other robust democracies, "it's not uncommon for heads of state to be prosecuted." She warned that the lesson from democracies under strain elsewhere around the world is that failing to lay down the law "is dangerous—it creates long-term feelings of impunity, and incentives for Trump and those around him to misbehave again." Vance's case against Trump may be less than perfect, but the alternative, she said, "is lawlessness."

Earlier this month, the former French President Nicolas Sarkozy was found guilty of corruption and influence-peddling by a court in Paris, and sentenced to prison. A previous French President, Jacques Chirac, was convicted in 2011 of embezzlement and misusing public funds. Silvio Berlusconi, the demagogic former Prime Minister of Italy, was forced to perform community service after his 2013 conviction for tax fraud. Ben-Ghiat, the N.Y.U. professor, believes there's much to be learned from Berlusconi. Italy initially voted him out of office in 2006, well after his corruption was exposed. But his center-left successors did little to address his misconduct. Two years later, they were defeated, and Berlusconi returned to power for another three years. She warned, "If we have the chance to make a strong statement that the rule of law matters, and we fail, the message is that these strongmen can get back in power. That's the lesson for us." ♦



POLICE PROCEDURALS 101

BY PAUL RUDNICK

The following precepts apply to procedural shows from any country. It's unnecessary to read the subtitles on Netflix, as the characters are always saying, "I have to go—it's work," "What do we know?," or "So you left him in that swamp/basement/Arby's to die."

1. The main character in most procedurals is a troubled male detective whose marriage has crumbled because he works too hard and cares too much. If your real-life husband mentions a desire to become a detective, you should take it personally and yell, "Do you wish I were a serial killer? Then would you look at me?"

2. The detective has at least one small child, and visitation rights are limited to the night he finally captures a serial killer after a tense, violent standoff. This is the detective's equivalent of taking his child to Chuck E. Cheese or a Pixar movie. Someday, the child will grow up to visit Dad in assisted living and ask, with a wry chuckle, "Hey, remember that night we were buried alive and Mom got so upset?"

3. Sometimes the detective has an estranged adult child who exists only to have a rare dinner with the detective, which will be interrupted by a cell-phone call from a crime scene. Studies show that estranged adult children of detectives have never finished an entrée.

4. A woman on a procedural is almost always an ex-wife who is so hurt and disappointed that she can be glimpsed only through a screen door, or the lead detective's more warm-hearted partner, who is either an overworked mom or a lesbian of color. This is called diversity. If the partner is an overworked lesbian mom of color, the show is eligible for government funding and a Peabody.

5. On the rare show that centers on a female detective, that character will express her gritty competence by wearing her hair in a ponytail. The ponytail is the equivalent of a male detective's shoulder holster or the pint of whiskey in his desk drawer. The female detective's husband has most often been murdered, so that his unsolved death can haunt her. Following her occasional dinner dates, any new love interest will also be killed. The technical term for this is "suicide by dating a female detective."

6. The male detective will always wear a jacket and tie, unless the procedural is set in Scandinavia, in which case he'll wear a nubbly sweater (also known as a Swedish tuxedo). He will sport facial scruff and bark commands at younger staff members, a group required by law to include a person of color, a peppy young gay guy, and the only blond person on the show. Crime is no place for blondes, except as victims, meaning actresses who appear as corpses covered with leaves.

7. If the procedural is set in London, Wales, or Edinburgh, the locale will be made to look depressing. Suspects will most often be interrogated inside garages where they're welding nonspecific items. No one in these places ever smiles, because they need to get back to their welding.

8. Wealthy suspects will be interrogated in the glacial parlors of their immaculate town houses or estates as a silent, uniformed servant offers beverages. Wealthy suspects, even if they're the grieving parents of a murder victim, are always guilty of being wealthy and of wearing pearls, cardigans, and headbands, and they will say things such as, "We'd gotten back late from the club, and there was blood in the foyer."

9. If the show is set in France, the entire cast will be attractive.

10. If the show is set in Scandinavia, the crime will always end up involving climate change. Even the most grotesque Norwegian serial killer will be driven to his evil deeds by thoughts of solar panels and wind turbines. In American procedurals, the serial killer is most often a person who survived an abusive childhood, because Americans know that climate change is a hoax.

11. When suspects are brought to the precinct headquarters to be interrogated, they will appear on the television screen mostly as a blurry video feed, for authenticity's sake. Yet they never look into the camera and wonder, "Is my hair O.K.?"

12. Any background information about a suspect will instantly be found online by a fresh-faced tech person, who will report, "He dropped out of business school three weeks ago, he's had contact with three known militia members, and he's headed east on a Hundred and Sixty-eighth Street in a stolen van." This underling will never murmur, under his or her breath, "And he's so hot. I'd go out with him."

13. The relatives of a suspect will always insist, "I haven't seen him in months," right before the alleged criminal bolts out a back door into an alley. Someday, a weary mom or a taciturn dad will ask the detective, "Haven't you ever seen one of these shows? He's in his bedroom and he's armed, duh." ♦

OUR LOCAL CORRESPONDENTS

VACANCY

The new reality inside a five-star hotel in Manhattan.

BY JENNIFER GONNERMAN



In 2019, more than a hundred thousand people walked into the Pierre, the five-star hotel on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. Some checked in at the front desk; others, in ball gowns and tuxedos, headed up the stairs to the Grand Ballroom. About five hundred events were held at the Pierre that year: weddings, galas, corporate parties, bar mitzvahs. In December, there were holiday parties every night. Such events could run to four hundred and fifty dollars a guest for food, drinks, and staff—and then there were the ice sculptures and custom-made dance floors that clients ordered from outside vendors. At the Pierre, events were

a forty-million-dollar-a-year business, accounting for half the hotel's revenue.

About eighty weddings took place at the Pierre in 2019. A certain subset of wealthy New Yorkers have attended numerous events at the hotel, and couples who've been married there have tried to transform the Grand Ballroom in ways that guaranteed that their wedding would not be forgotten. Sometimes, floral decorators have used netting to suspend thousands of flowers from the ceiling, so that guests felt as though they were standing beneath a garden. One decorator adorned the room with ten thousand peonies. There have been quite a few weddings with

Maurice Dancer, the chief concierge at the Pierre, has worked there since 1994.

a winter-wonderland theme—at one, decorators used drapery to create the illusion of icicles hanging from above, rolled out a white carpet, and set up a snow machine. Jay Laut, a banquet captain at the Pierre, told me, “Sometimes we would just talk among ourselves and say, ‘Oh, my God, what a party they had!’”

To some of the staff, the wedding on March 7, 2020, stood out because it was a “second-generation wedding”—the bride’s mother had also been married at the hotel, three decades earlier. Seventy-eight employees worked the event, including thirty-two banquet servers, who performed their usual ballet of speed-walking into the ballroom while balancing a tray of plates on one palm. The role of banquet servers can be intensely demanding: they present multicourse meals, often on a razor-tight schedule, providing, as the hotel promises, “flawless five-star service.” “It’s a very stressful job,” Laut said. “We have to live up to the name of the Pierre.” During the busy seasons at the hotel—the spring and the fall, leading up to the holidays—banquet servers might have to work double and triple shifts.

The March 7th wedding was the last large social event held at the Pierre. The city’s first case of COVID-19 had been confirmed on March 1st, and by the second week of March fear had started to take hold among New Yorkers. The hotel’s workers were aggressively disinfecting surfaces and door knobs. They removed decorative pillows from guest rooms, driven by the idea, later discounted, that COVID-19 could easily be transmitted on surfaces. The hotel’s occupancy rate began to plummet, and diners stopped visiting its restaurant, Perrine. Calls came in from people who had weddings or galas booked in late March and April; some wanted to postpone, others to cancel.

In the days following the wedding, Broadway was shuttered, and office workers around the city were sent home. On a TV in the Pierre’s employee cafeteria, workers followed the news. François-Olivier Luiggi, the hotel’s general manager, told me, “We looked at each other, and it seemed so obvious that we should just go home.” The week of March 15th, he began telling employees to leave and not return until they received fur-

ther notice. Looking back on that moment, he struggled to come up with an analogous situation. “I have never been in a hotel fire,” he said. “But it felt like there was an emergency and you had to evacuate.”

Three months earlier, at the end of 2019, New York City had reached a record number of visitors for a single year: almost sixty-seven million. Its hotels had about a ninety-per-cent occupancy rate, the highest in the country. But in a matter of days COVID-19 had put the entire industry in peril. When the pandemic began, there were about seven hundred hotels in the city, employing some fifty-five thousand people. A union called the Hotel Trades Council represents most of these workers, including those at the Pierre. On March 19th, the union’s president at the time, Peter Ward, appeared on the local news station NY1. “By this time next week, ninety-five per cent of the hotel industry is likely to be laid off,” he said.

Ward’s grim prediction proved largely correct. In April, the *Daily News* reported that ninety per cent of the city’s hotel employees were out of work. The Pierre had shut down its hotel operations on March 22nd and laid off eighty per cent of the staff, some three hundred and fifty people. Luiggi recalled thinking, “We’re pausing for a few weeks—but we’ll reopen by Easter.” A year later, the Pierre and other New York City hotels remain nearly empty, and the majority of their staff out of work. With mass vaccinations under way, Americans could return to many aspects of their pre-pandemic lives by the end of this year. But the city’s hotel industry is haunted by questions: When will travellers return? And when will New Yorkers and others feel comfortable crowding into a hotel ballroom again?

The Pierre opened in the fall of 1930, on the corner of East Sixty-first Street and Fifth Avenue, in a neighborhood already known for its concentration of luxury hotels. Next door was the Sherry-Netherland, and one block south, on the other side of Fifth Avenue, was the Plaza. Charles Pierre, a restaurateur who had grown up in Corsica, had persuaded some of the

city’s wealthiest residents to fund the construction of the hotel. It stood out on the Manhattan skyline: a grayish-white tower rising forty-four stories, with a steep copper roof and its top floors modelled after the Royal Chapel at Versailles.

The hotel’s business plan relied on large events, especially débutante balls. In December of 1930, an A.P. story about the Pierre reported that “an estimated 180 girls will have ‘come out’ there during the season which began in October and ends in February. Their parties will average \$3000 in cost, which is more than ½ million for the hotel” (about seven and a half million dollars today). Despite the Pierre’s auspicious start, the hotel went bankrupt after two years. In 1938, John Paul Getty bought it and increased the size of the ballroom. Two decades later, he converted some of the hotel’s suites into luxurious co-op apartments. The co-op owners and others bought the building, while Getty’s realty company continued to oversee the hotel’s operations.

In the seventies, Stanley Turkel was the executive vice-president of the 795 Fifth Avenue Corporation, which represents the co-op owners. By then, the Four Seasons ran the hotel, and the co-op owners were, as Turkel put it, “seventy-three of the wealthiest people in the world.” As at other co-op buildings in New York City, prospective owners required approval from a board of existing owners. “You couldn’t get an apartment if you had an inch of bad reputation,” recalled Turkel, who is now ninety-five and a well-known hotel historian. “The board would turn you down.”

Today, Taj Hotels, a luxury-hotel chain based in India, operates the hotel and manages the building. Current co-op residents include Tory Burch, the fashion entrepreneur; Michael Eisner, the former chairman and C.E.O. of the Walt Disney Company; and Howard Lutnick, the chairman and C.E.O. of the financial-services firm Cantor Fitzgerald, who bought the penthouse—a triplex with its own ballroom—in 2017, for forty-four million dollars.

The Pierre now has eighty co-op apartments and a hundred and eighty-nine hotel rooms and suites. One night in a hotel room costs between six hun-

dred and twelve hundred dollars—the rooms overlooking Central Park are the most expensive—and a suite starts at fifteen hundred. To attract guests, the Pierre, like many older luxury hotels in the city, relies on its history, including the celebrities that it has hosted. The Pierre’s Instagram account features photos of Coco Chanel seated in a hotel suite in 1932, Barbra Streisand at a Valentino fashion show held at the hotel in 1970, and Andy Warhol smoking a cigarette while seated with a menu in 1981. Among New York City’s grand old hotels, the Pierre is less famous than the Plaza and less prestigious than the Carlyle, but it has a lengthy history of hosting weddings and other events, and as a result has a deep connection with the city itself. “It’s more see and be seen at the Carlyle,” Luiggi, the Pierre’s general manager, said. “You have a drink at the Carlyle, then you come to an event at the Pierre—you just go down Fifth Avenue.”

Before the pandemic, the Pierre employed four hundred and thirty-five people, including sixty-two room attendants, eleven bellmen, three painters, eleven elevator operators, forty-three cooks, seventeen laundry workers, and forty-six full-time banquet servers. Many of the workers were immigrants, and the hotel kept a spreadsheet of the languages they spoke, in case a guest needed a translator. There were forty-nine languages, including Cantonese, Creole, Danish, Farsi, Greek, Hindi, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Tagalog, Tamil, Tibetan, and Twi. “It’s like the United Nations there,” Sergio Dorval, a bartender at the hotel’s restaurant, told me. “It represents what New York City is about.”

Once people got jobs at the Pierre, they often stayed for decades. As a result, a large number of employees were in their fifties, sixties, and seventies. Employment at a unionized hotel in New York City has long provided entry into the middle class, owing to the might and the militancy of the Hotel Trades Council, which was founded more than eighty years ago. Every worker at a unionized hotel in the city is given family health insurance and a pension. If a hotel closes, the workers have “recall rights,” meaning that, if it reopens, they are hired back, in order



"And no drag racing until you know how this medication is going to affect you."

of seniority. Housekeepers working a standard, thirty-five-hour week earn nearly sixty-five thousand dollars a year. Banquet servers, who are the union's highest-paid members, can make two hundred thousand dollars a year or more. "But nobody gives you nothing for free," Pasquale De Martino, a banquet server at the Pierre, told me. "Working seventeen to eighteen hours a day is like working two jobs."

As the general manager of the Pierre, Luiggi oversees all the employees. Half work in banquets and events, and the other half run the hotel, working either in the "front of the house," in jobs that involve interacting with guests, or in the "back of the house," which includes the laundry room and the kitchens. The back of the house is underground, spread over three basement levels. The main kitchen is on the top level, the laundry room on the bottom, fifty feet below Fifth Avenue.

A new hotel typically sends out its laundry to be cleaned elsewhere, Luiggi explained, but at the Pierre "we do everything—all the sheets, all the towels, all the uniforms, the dry cleaning." Gilberto Medina, the sixty-nine-year-old foreman of the laundry room, has held his job since 1981. Three of

his siblings worked at the Pierre before he did, and one of his earliest memories is of dancing in the laundry room at five years old, when an older sister brought him in to show off his salsa moves. By now, Medina knows the laundry's operations so well that he can detect a problem with a machine by a slight variation in its hum.

The most popular gathering place for the employees was the cafeteria, on the middle basement level. Before the hotel closed for the pandemic, the cafeteria was open twenty-four hours a day. Stefanie Schultz, a fifty-year-old room attendant, joined her fellow room attendants for lunch each day around noon. Beverly Footman, a telephone operator known as Operator Beverly, could be found catching up with about ten friends most afternoons at 2 P.M. The food was free, and there was a foosball table, two flat-screen televisions, and a massage chair. (Footman told me, "People were so excited to get in that chair.") Luiggi said, "At the end of the day, to be a five-star hotel, you cannot have a big difference between the front of the house and the back of the house. It's not 'Downton Abbey.' You cannot smile every day, work hard, and not have at least some of the comforts

that are appropriate for what you do."

Sergio Dorval started working as a bartender at the Pierre in 2013. He came from the restaurant world, where workers never knew how long their jobs might last. But at the Pierre, he told me, "you just feel that the energy is different. People are pursuing almost a higher calling outside of work." With middle-class salaries and stable jobs, the workers could focus on other ambitions: buying a house, saving for their children's college tuition, investing in the stock market. "As soon as I got to the Pierre and saw the community of homeowners, the community of people who are into investing, I right away gravitated toward them," Dorval said. After four years at the Pierre, he owned a house, too, in northern New Jersey.

Harry Cilino, a sixty-six-year-old great-grandfather, found work washing dishes at the Pierre in 2010, after being laid off from his job as a long-shoreman. He eventually became a houseman—a position that involves moving furniture and helping to keep the hotel clean—and regularly showed up to work at least an hour early. "I loved it," he said. "I wish I would've started there a long time ago." Each year, the hotel presents one outstanding employee with a prize, the John Foley Award. (Foley, a legendary doorman at the Pierre, worked there for fifty-four years, retiring in 1984.) After five years, Cilino won the award. "It was a great honor," he said.

Until this past year, the Pierre held an employee holiday party every winter in the Grand Ballroom. Some years it took place in December, but in 2019 the ballroom was fully booked for that month, so the party was scheduled for January 23, 2020. Khady Gueye, an elevator operator, showed up in a black floor-length dress from her native Senegal and a pair of her signature rhinestone-studded glasses. Jay Laut, the banquet captain, wore the same attire that he wore for work: a tuxedo. Guests enjoyed poached shrimp, foie-gras terrine, gnocchetti with lamb ragù. An ice sculpture, carved in the shape of a snowflake and lit up, served as a centerpiece. If a client had been throwing this party, the cost would have been about two hundred thousand dollars, but the vendors, who do business with the Pierre,

donated their services. The holiday party, Luiggi told me, was “a celebration of what we do best.”

The Pierre closed its hotel operations two months later, but the building remained open for its co-op residents. Fifteen room attendants continued to come to work in order to service the co-ops: dust, change the sheets, provide fresh towels. Stefanie Schultz, the room attendant, who commuted from Long Island, said, “It was so surreal even going to work. In the beginning, you didn’t see anyone.” Harry Cilino, the houseman, said, “We would go in for a few hours, do what we had to do, but it was really like a ghost town.” Schultz continued working, but Cilino’s last day was March 29th. In April, the hotel’s staffing reached its lowest level, with only about sixty workers coming in.

The Pierre’s laid-off workers were in a better position than those at non-unionized hotels. The Hotel Trades Council made sure that its members held on to their health insurance for the time being, and it later won the right for employees who had accumulated severance to receive it. But for some workers, particularly those who did not have much time on the job, the financial stresses were severe. The union provided listings on its Web site for soup kitchens and food pantries.

Reports of hotel workers dying of COVID-19 flooded into the Hotel Trades Council. The union began posting obituaries on its Web site, including three for workers at the Pierre who died of the virus: Murland McPherson, seventy-one, who had worked in the laundry room for twenty-nine years; Valentin Constantin, fifty-seven, a houseman who had worked at the Pierre since his early twenties; and Edward Fazio, sixty-two, who had been a storeroom attendant in the main kitchen for three years, after two decades at the Waldorf-Astoria. According to the Hotel Trades Council, about four hundred hotel workers in the union have died of COVID-19.

Word spread among the Pierre’s workers about those who had died, but not everyone knew which laid-off employees were in the worst financial straits. Vinny Felicione, a sous-chef, sometimes got a glimpse of his co-work-

ers’ struggles; he’s a union delegate, and his colleagues often reached out to him with questions. “They call me up and they’re, like, ‘Listen, Vinny, I’m really scared. I got a wife, I got kids, I got a house. I’ve got to figure out what I have to do,’” Felicione recalled.

At first, the Pierre’s laid-off workers assumed that they would be called back to work soon. But as fall approached many workers grew increasingly anxious. “I never thought it was going to be so long,” Pasquale De Martino, the banquet server, said. “I relax at home. Then one month goes by. Two months go by. And five and six and seven. And now you start worrying: How long can we be like this?” De Martino, who is fifty-one, grew up in Italy and moved to New York in 1993. “I have never, never had a problem looking for a job or finding work in New York City,” he said. “It was a shock for many of us.”

Like other New Yorkers stuck at home, the Pierre’s laid-off workers tried myriad strategies to fill the hours. De Martino fostered puppies. Jay Laut taught himself to cook by watching YouTube videos. Sergio Dorval, the bartender, read books, including some recommended by his regular customers. He said that ten of them had contacted him to see how he was holding up, which improved his morale. “Despite all the trauma that is going on, they did not forget about me,” he said.

Those workers with young children at home had additional stresses. Jewel Chowdhury, a fifty-six-year-old

banquet server, had three children and a wife who was suffering from heart failure. His second grader’s schooling had become his new job. “You can’t even get out and look for a job,” he said. “You have to be sitting in the home.” He searched for work on Craigslist, but there was none to be found.

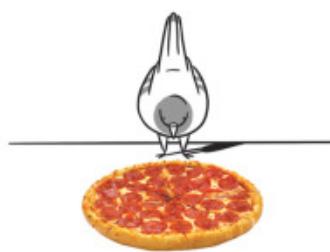
Chowdhury, who grew up in Ban-

gladesh, started working at the Pierre in 1992, as part of the room-service division. From his first days at the hotel, he aspired to join its élite army of tuxedo-clad banquet servers, and, at the end of 2018, he finally did. In 2019, he earned about two hundred and twenty thousand dollars. Once the pandemic struck, and he began receiving unemployment and severance payments, his income, he said, was about three thousand dollars a month—less than a fourth of what he had previously made after taxes. Chowdhury owns a house in Queens, and his monthly mortgage payment alone is \$2,854. To cover his expenses, he emptied out his 401(k).

On September 17, 2020, the Pierre reopened its hotel operations, becoming one of very few five-star hotels in New York City to accept guests. About a quarter of the workers—some hundred people—were now back, but the kitchens remained closed, and the banquet employees were still laid off. On a few weekends, the occupancy rate reached twenty per cent. “We were a bit optimistic,” Luiggi told me. But then the second wave of COVID-19 arrived. In late October, New York State introduced a rule that visitors from all but five states had to quarantine for fourteen days. “That was the right thing to do, of course, but that just put an end to business,” Luiggi said.

A few days before Christmas, I visited the Pierre. A security guard greeted me with a temperature gun. That day, the hotel’s occupancy rate was ten per cent—eighteen rooms were booked—and the lobby was so silent you could hear every footprint. Maurice Dancer, dressed in a black morning coat, stood with perfect posture at the concierge desk, behind a shield of plexiglass. If he found it depressing to look out at an empty lobby all day, he certainly did not show it. Even with a mask on, he managed to radiate charisma and warmth. “Are you enjoying the wonderful quiet of the Pierre?” he asked.

Luiggi, who met me in the lobby, was wearing a charcoal-colored suit and a white cotton mask. Like the hotel’s founder, he grew up in Corsica. He speaks with a French accent and has worked in hotels in Europe,



but he has spent most of his career in New York City. (His résumé includes a stint at the Carlyle.) One of his employees described him to me as “very understanding.” “You would think in his position he’d be a little more on the arrogant side, but he’s not,” the employee said.

Luiggi led me down a hall, up a flight of stairs, and into the hotel’s Cotillion Room. The ceiling is nineteen feet high, and floor-to-ceiling windows line one wall, looking out onto Central Park. Al Pacino danced a memorable tango in this room in the film “Scent of a Woman.” The room can fit three hundred people, but in the previous nine months it had barely been used. On the day I visited, it was empty except for a grand piano. The sight of the deserted space unsettled Luiggi. “It’s very difficult,” he said.

New York State was allowing “non-essential gatherings” of up to fifty people, but there had been no demand for events that large at the Pierre. The hotel had, however, hosted five “micro-weddings.” The smallest had ten peo-

ple; the others were not much larger. “It’s more symbolic,” Luiggi said. “The cooks come back to cook. We put some flowers out. It just keeps energy in the building.”

Luiggi walked me to the Grand Ballroom. The carpet had been torn up, pieces of shredded foam lay all over the floor, and the room’s chandeliers had been dropped almost to the ground. It was in the midst of being renovated, Luiggi told me, and Michael S. Smith, who had been President Obama’s decorator at the White House, was overseeing the project. “It seems counterintuitive, but, when you have no business, you can do a renovation,” Luiggi said. Undertaking a massive renovation during a regular year would have meant “a huge loss of income,” he explained. “We made a case to the owners of the building to see if they would proceed while there’s no business. And they said yes.” The renovation had become a source of hope for the hotel’s laid-off banquet servers. When Jewel Chowdhury heard about it, he was ecstatic. “All we have

to do is just book the parties!” he said.

On the first night of 2021, I drove around midtown Manhattan, visiting other five-star hotels. It was an unseasonably warm Friday evening, and in pre-pandemic times the hotels would have been packed. At the Plaza, a red velvet rope blocked off the front door. At the St. Regis, the lobby was deserted, and the red carpet leading up to the entrance was in dire need of vacuuming. The Four Seasons, on East Fifty-seventh Street, looked almost abandoned, with one doorway boarded up. The mystique these hotels had cultivated had vanished, at least for now.

“I’m thankful you didn’t drive down the Lexington corridor—that just brings tears to my eyes,” Vijay Dandapani, the president of the Hotels Association of New York City, an industry group for hotel owners, told me in February. “There are lots of nice hotels—not five stars but close to that, four stars plus—and the vast majority of them are shut.” Of the city’s seven hundred hotels, Dandapani said, about two hundred were closed. (Some have announced that they will reopen; others have closed permanently.) A hundred and thirty-nine other hotels were being used to house the homeless. Previously, he added, the average rate for a hotel room in New York City had been about two hundred and sixty dollars a night; now it was a hundred and twenty-five. The occupancy rate was about fifteen per cent. Several weeks later, the Hotel Trades Council reported that, of the hotel workers that belong to the union, seventy-seven per cent were still out of work.

The future of the city’s hotels is tied up with the future of New York City itself, and many of the attractions that have drawn guests in the past, including Broadway theatres, remain closed. International travellers, who tend to stay longer and spend more money than domestic ones, accounted for about twenty per cent of visitors to the city in 2019—more than thirteen million people. How quickly, or slowly, COVID-19 vaccines are distributed around the world will likely affect the hotels’ recovery. Before the pandemic, the city’s hotels were also heavily dependent on business travellers, who came for meetings, conferences, and conventions. That



“Next, in our ‘What the Heck Is Going On?’ segment, we go live to an expert—some random person with Internet access.”

business is “totally dead for a couple years,” Dandapani said. He predicts that the city’s hotel industry will not fully rebound until 2025.

In December, during my tour of the Pierre, Luiggi said that, by the spring, he hoped to bring back half the employees. In a later conversation, he revised that estimate: “I think now by June instead of March.” He did not know when he would bring back the banquet workers. “The only chunk of employees that will really be laid off for a long time is people who do events—and that’s citywide,” he said. This included not only banquet servers and bartenders but “musicians, photographers, florists, people who do production design—the list goes on and on.”

For those facing serious financial difficulties, the longer they are out of work, the further they sink into debt, falling behind on rent payments, mortgage payments, credit-card bills. Many laid-off hotel workers lost their health insurance at the end of 2020 and now have to pay for it themselves. The Hotel Trades Council provides free legal services, and some members have called asking for help filing for bankruptcy. But Sergio Dorval, the bartender, has noticed that the greatest source of stress among most of his co-workers seems to be existential. “They’re talking about their purpose in life, like ‘I feel useless,’” he said. “They’re not comfortable with just getting unemployment and staying home.”

Luiggi is encouraged by the fact that the Pierre has thirty-two weddings scheduled for 2022. “So, it *is* coming back,” he said. “No one has given up on New York.” This past Valentine’s Day weekend, fifty-seven rooms were occupied. That month, the hotel held its first fifty-person event in nearly a year: a “micro bar mitzvah.” The ceremony took place at the Pierre; there was a dinner for guests in the Cotillion Room on Friday night and a lunch there on Saturday; and everyone spent the night at the hotel. “It was fabulous,” Bill Spinner, the hotel’s director of catering, told me. “People were so excited to be a part of an event and to be able to celebrate. I mean, it was all only family essentially, but I think people were



surprised that they could actually do it.”

On February 22nd, Governor Andrew Cuomo announced that he was raising the limit on “weddings and catered events,” starting March 15th, from fifty to a hundred and fifty people, if they all tested negative for COVID-19. Weddings at the Pierre usually exceed that number, and Spinner hopes that the limit will be raised again before the summer—and that the eight large weddings planned for July and August might actually happen. In the near future, weddings will be crucial for the hotel’s bottom line. In recent years, the Pierre typically did three hundred and fifty events annually for nonprofit groups, mostly dinner galas, but now, Spinner said, “the nonprofits definitely are sitting on the sidelines.”

The day I visited the Pierre, the place was so quiet that Luiggi said, “It’s like ‘The Twilight Zone.’” The entire tour felt a bit eerie. In the main kitchen, there were no pots on the stove, no cutting boards on the counter. A menu for the restaurant was pinned to a bulletin board—filet mignon (\$45), Pierre burger (\$29), classic pizza (\$29). It was the last menu before the hotel shut down. At the top, someone had written, “As of 3/22.”

Luiggi took me up to the thirty-

ninth floor to see the hotel’s most expensive offering: the Presidential Suite, which costs as much as thirty thousand dollars a night. He unlocked a few doors and led me through the sprawling and elegant chambers—six bedrooms, seven bathrooms, and two living rooms, with a chandelier, a fireplace, and a soaking tub. A family visiting from abroad once paid half a million dollars to stay there for a month. Luiggi was not sure when the suite had last been occupied—“probably five minutes before the pandemic,” he said—but it appeared ready to pass inspection, with one exception: a very droopy dragon tree. With a diminished staff, it was not easy for the hotel to keep all its plants watered.

Wandering through the suite’s many rooms, it became apparent that its most dazzling feature was not its spacious layout or expensive furnishings but the enormous windows overlooking Central Park. From thirty-nine stories up, the piles of dirty snow on the streets below were almost invisible, and the view of the Park, with snow-topped trees, was mesmerizing. Standing before one window, taking in the view, Luiggi went silent for a moment. “I almost forgot the pandemic,” he said. ♦

Fifteen years ago, when Rich Austin was in his early forties, he and his wife watched the HBO show “Big Love,” about a polygamous family of fundamentalist Mormons in Utah. “I kind of got hooked on it,” Rich told me. “I had a string of broken relationships, so I was joking, ‘Well, maybe if I was a polygamist, I wouldn’t have that problem.’” He had a daughter, from a fling a few years earlier, whom the couple were raising together. They were swingers, but Rich wanted more than unattached sex, and broached the subject of polygamy with his wife. The marriage soon broke up.

In 2008, Rich met Angela Hinkley, and soon told her how much he liked the show. “I felt I had to have Angela on board from the start,” he said. They got engaged, and, around the time Angela became pregnant, they started looking for another woman to join them. Online, they met a nineteen-year-old, Brandy Goldie, and after months of chatting she visited them at their home, near Milwaukee. Then she stopped communicating; her mother temporarily thwarted her plans to enter a polygamous union, but, six months later, Brandy called Rich and said, “If I asked to come back, would you ever take me back?” He said, “In a heartbeat.”

When Brandy became pregnant, she realized that the arrangement was now permanent, and was scared. She became emotionally distant, and Rich started to realize what he had taken on. He was working odd jobs, Angela worked part time, and Brandy was looking for a job. A Navy veteran, Rich drew disability payments, but for a while the whole family was subsisting on about twenty-eight thousand dollars a year.

Later that year, Rich and Angela married. Brandy was a bridesmaid. The next year, in an online forum, they saw a post from a woman in her early thirties named Julie Halcomb that said, “I’m a single mom, I’ve got a two-year-old daughter, and I’d like to learn more.” Rich wrote, “If you want to know more, ask my wives.” Angela had opposed adding a third wife, but when she got off her first call with Julie she said, “O.K., when is she moving in?” Julie visited, mostly to make sure that the kids would get along, and joined the



Alina, Vicki, Joe, and Valerie Darger near their home, in Herriman, Utah. Joe says that



ANNALS OF DOMESTIC LIFE

THE SHAPE OF LOVE

From opposite sides of the culture, polyamorists and polygamists are challenging family norms.

BY ANDREW SOLOMON

getting bigamy decriminalized in the state involved a “three-prong approach—legislative, legal, and public relations.”

household permanently a week later.

Before getting married, Rich and Angela converted to Mormonism. Julie, who also began the conversion process, recalled, "We were talking about how we're going to set the family up, and the early Mormons already had a road map." But the mainstream Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has forbidden polygamy since 1904, and the practice endures only among originalist communities, including the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (F.L.D.S.). So Rich began telling people that Brandy was a cousin who had become pregnant by accident. "I didn't like having to deny who I was, what type of relationship I was in," Brandy told me. When Julie started writing a blog about their life, Rich was excommunicated.

Their living arrangements attracted other unwelcome attention. Neighbors called the police, and Child Protective Services interviewed the children. Since there was only one marriage certificate, the police couldn't file bigamy charges. "They said, 'We don't like it, but there's nothing we can do,'" Julie recalled. "But we had them at our door constantly. One of the kids would have an accident

at school—we'd have them there again. They were constantly trying to find signs of abuse." After six years, the family moved to Medford, a small town in northern Wisconsin, where they could afford a house that accommodated them all and where social services seemed to accept their setup.

At the family's largest, Rich had four wives, but when I met him, a couple of years ago, he and Angela were divorcing, and another woman, April, had come and gone. Rich, Brandy, and Julie were living with their kids—six, including Rich's and Julie's from earlier relationships—and saw Angela's two every other weekend. The children, who now number seven, ranging in age from one to twenty, view one another as full siblings. "We almost need a chart to figure out which kid's which some days," Rich said. Julie laughed. "We already told him that, if he wants to add another wife, Brandy and I have to find her," she said. "It's not just going to be someone who Mr. Eternal Hope thinks might work. We're the ones that have to live with her all the time."

The Austins would like one day to enjoy the legal benefits that married couples take for granted. Brandy and Julie take heart from the success of the

gay-marriage movement. "I've got a wedding invitation on the way from a friend who's transitioning from female to male," Julie said. "I've got classmates that came out almost twenty years ago. They've been lucky enough to get married. I wish people would be as accepting with us as we try to be of everyone else."

As many as sixty thousand people in the United States practice polygamy, including Hmong Americans, Muslims of various ethnicities, and members of the Pan-African Ausr Auset Society. But polygamists face innumerable legal obstacles, affecting such matters as inheritance, hospital visits, and parentage rights. If wives apply for benefits as single parents, they are lying, and may be committing welfare fraud; but if they file joint tax returns they are breaking the law. Members of Julie's family have made it clear that, if she dies, they will demand custody of the daughter from her first marriage. "That would be very sad for her," Julie said. "She's lived here since she was two."

Polygamists have become more vocal about achieving legal rights since the legalization of same-sex marriage nationwide, in 2015. So has another group: polyamorists, whose lobbying runs in parallel but with scant overlap. Unlike polygamy, which is usually religiously motivated and typically involves a man with multiple wives who do not have an erotic relationship to one another, polyamory tends to be based on utopian ideas of sexual liberty and may involve a broad range of configurations. In the end, however, the real difference is what term fits people's paradigms; as with much of identity politics, affiliations are self-determined. In the popular imagination, polygamists are presumed to be right-wing misogynists and polyamorists to be decadent left-wingers, but the two groups share goals and, often, ways of life. In the years I've spent talking to members of both communities, I have found that it is usually the polygamists who are more cognizant of common cause. "But people can't seem to unite under one platform," Rich said.

In 2015, when the Supreme Court's decision in Obergefell v. Hodges established same-sex marriage as a constitutional right, Chief Justice John Roberts wrote a dissent arguing that,



"Um . . . I'll get the next fire."

if a system denying marriage to gay and lesbian couples represented an assault on their constitutional rights, existing marriage restrictions must similarly “disrespect and subordinate people who find fulfillment in polyamorous relationships.” Roberts continued, “Although the majority randomly inserts the adjective ‘two’ in various places, it offers no reason at all why the two-person element of the core definition of marriage may be preserved while the man-woman element may not.” He went on to emphasize that the prevalence of polygamy throughout history made it less of a radical leap than same-sex marriage.

Many gay activists, such as Evan Wolfson, who founded Freedom to Marry, dismiss comparisons between poly marriage and same-sex marriage as a “scare tactic.” But legal scholars take the argument seriously. In an anti-poly paper in the *University of Pennsylvania Journal of Constitutional Law*, John O. Hayward wrote, “Now that the U.S. Supreme Court has legalized same-sex marriage nationwide, the only remaining marital frontier—at least for the Judeo-Christian nations of the West—is polygamy.” Another law professor, Jack B. Harrison, wrote that state bans against plural marriage were sure to be challenged, and that anyone who wanted to maintain them would have to “develop a rationale for them, albeit *post hoc*, that is not rooted in majoritarian morality and animus.”

This is no longer merely a theoretical matter. In February, 2020, the Utah legislature passed a so-called Bigamy Bill, decriminalizing the offense by downgrading it from a felony to a misdemeanor. In June, Somerville, Massachusetts, passed an ordinance allowing groups of three or more people who “consider themselves to be a family” to be recognized as domestic partners. Last week, the neighboring town of Cambridge followed suit, passing a broader ordinance recognizing multi-partner relationships. The law has proceeded even more rapidly in recognizing that it is possible for a child to have more than two legal parents. In 2017, the Uniform Law Commission, an association that enables states to harmonize their laws, drafted a new Uniform Parentage Act, one provision

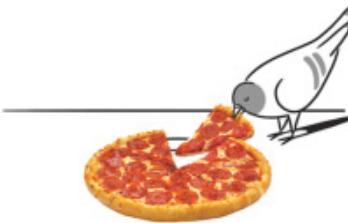
of which facilitates multiple-parent recognition. Versions of the provision have passed in California, Washington, Maine, Vermont, and Delaware, and it is under consideration in several other states. Courts in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Texas, Arizona, and Louisiana have also supported the idea of third parents. American conservatism has long mourned

emerging trend.” She went on, “If, for example, three people intend to have a child together and then parent together for an extended period of time, the court could find that all three should be recognized as parents.” If the court is adjudicating multiple parents, how can it deny multiple-relationship recognition? How can non-recognition not be held to harm children? “The law should allow for the recognition of actual functional adult familial relationships, even if the parties have not formalized those relationships,” Joslin said.

Three parents are less shocking than three partners—when President Obama “evolved” on gay marriage, he cited the injustice encountered by his daughters’ friends who had gay parents—but one flows from the other, and marriage rights often further the inclusion they aim to reflect. For all the hate mail and burning crosses that Mildred and Richard Loving had to endure, the legalization of interracial marriage did much to moderate American racism. Gay marriage has increased acceptance of same-sex couples.

Queer theorists have complained that Obergefell valorizes the family values associated with monogamous marriage and thereby demeans people who resist those values. But others see it as the first step toward more radical change. “Obergefell is a veritable encomium for marriage as both a central human right and a fundamental constitutional right,” Joseph J. Fischel, an associate professor of women’s, gender, and sexuality studies at Yale, has written. “We, as an LGBT movement, should be ethically committed to endorsing poly relations and other experiments in intimacy.” He argues for “relational autonomy” without regard for “gender, numerosity, or affective attachment.”

The campaigns of both polygamists and polyamorists to have their unions recognized point to the larger questions that swarm around marriage battles: what are the government’s interests in marriage and family, and why does a bureaucratic system sustain such a relentless focus on who has sexual relationships with whom? Surveys in the past decade have consistently found that four to five per cent of American adults—more than



the proliferation of single parents, but, if two parents are better than one, why are three parents worse?

Douglas NeJaime, a professor at Yale Law School who was involved in the drafting of the new parentage act, told me that the impetus for it was that many state laws defining family in binary, opposite-sex terms would be invalidated by Obergefell. “If parentage doesn’t turn on gender or biology but on the parent-child bond, then laws that have limited it by number no longer seem logical,” he said. The trend toward multiple-parent recognition is not restricted to blue states. “Those of us who are trying to push the legislation understand the L.G.B.T.-family issue as part of a broader universe in which people’s family arrangements should be respected,” NeJaime said. “As things stand now, once you’re a parent you get everything, and if you’re a non-parent you get practically nothing. The folks on the committee understood the importance of protecting parental relationships, especially when they were not biologically related to the child. So it deliberately applies to unmarried people who aren’t L.G.B.T.”

Much of the drafting of the law was done by Courtney Joslin, a law professor at U.C. Davis who was previously a litigator at the National Center for Lesbian Rights. She told me that its language reflects “case law in favor of allowing that a particular child has more than two legal parents. It wasn’t creating a trend—it was reflecting an

ten million people—already practice some form of consensual nonmonogamy, and the true number, given people's reticence about stigmatized behaviors, is almost certainly higher.

Consensual nonmonogamy is hardly a new invention. Jewish polygamy peppers the Old Testament, even if the marriages tend not to be portrayed in positive terms; the Hebrew word *tzarah* means both “second wife” and “trouble.” Today, polygyny—the subset of polygamy that involves one man and multiple women—enjoys legal status or general acceptance in more than seventy countries. (Its rarer obverse, polyandry, persists in certain communities in Nepal, Tibet, India, and Sri Lanka.) In the West, champions of polyamory have included Mary Wollstonecraft, George Sand, Havelock Ellis, and Bertrand Russell. Still, a particular ethos, rooted in Christian, European values, has created a presumption that monogamy is superior to all other structures. Immanuel Kant saw marriage as emblematic of Enlightenment ideals, claiming that it was egalitarian, because spouses assigned ownership of their sexual organs to each other.

The Oxford English Dictionary and Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary added the word “polyamory” as recently as 2006, and the well-known relationship therapist Esther Perel observes that traditional monogamy is on the wane and perhaps increasingly untenable. “Many social norms don’t fit human nature,” she told me. “For most of history, monogamy was one person for life. At this point, monogamy is one person at a time. The first freedom was that we can actually, finally have sex with other people *before* we are together. Now we want to have that freedom *while* we are together. The conversation about consensual nonmonogamy today is the conversation about virginity sixty years ago. Or the conversation about divorce twenty years before that.”

Andy Izenson, Roo Khan, Cal T., and Aida Manduley envisaged creating a utopian place where queer, trans, and polyamorous people could feel safe and welcome. For years, they had told one another stories about the property they would build. At the end

of 2017, when Andy and Roo lost their lease, in Brooklyn, the time had come; Cal, who had been living in New Hampshire, was ready to move in, and Aida, a psychotherapist in Boston, planned to relocate as soon as possible. They found a house with fourteen acres and some outbuildings in Ulster Park, on the Hudson. They called their ménage the Rêve.

When I visited, last year, everything seemed to be a work in progress. Unfinished projects around the house gave a feeling of relaxed chaos. Andy, wearing a loose white dress, offered me drinks and snacks. Andy is Jewish; Aida is Puerto Rican; Roo is mixed race and Muslim; Cal is Black and mixed race. Their ethnic and religious backgrounds have prepared them for the marginalization they have experienced as polyamorists.

Like the others, Andy goes by the pronoun “they” and described themselves as “gender ambivalent.” A lawyer in their early thirties, they spoke in long, hyperactive paragraphs, their eyes wide with passionate focus. Their pronoun preference, however, is mild. “If you’re saying a sentence about me, you can use whatever pronoun you want,” they said. “They’re all manifestations of the incomplete power of language to translate human experience into sound. We’re all genderqueer. ‘Polyamorous’ is a close enough description of my practices in the same way as ‘trans-masculine’ is a close enough description of my gender.”

Roo said, “I like the word ‘caucus.’ We caucus with polyamorists, you caucus with trans-masculine folk, I caucus with trans-feminine folk. I’m independent from that, but I’m on your side.” There are various romantic configurations among the four partners, but only Andy is in a romantic relationship with all three of the others. In addition, they all have “comets”—lovers from outside the group who blaze through and then are gone. “It’s a more stable structure with more people,” Andy said.

The members of the Rêve have thought deeply about what many people characterize as divided love. Andy explained, “When you light a candle with another candle, your first candle is not less on fire.” (Shelley, in 1821, wrote much the same: “True love has

this, different from gold and clay, /That to divide is not to take away.”) Andy said that the idea was not “a sexy orgy bonanza” but a conscious rejection of two things: first, “dividing relationships into two categories—one category being people with whom you have sex and the other category being people with whom you don’t have sex,” and, second, “saying that those categories are defined by some deeply operative distinction that changes the fundamental nature of a relationship.” Polyamory, Andy acknowledged, is hard. “If it were easy, everyone would be doing it,” they added ruefully. The key was to “deal with the things that are abundant from a place of abundance and with the things that are actually scarce from a place of compassion and generosity.”

The four of them saw the Rêve as a home to a core of residents and as a sanctuary for a wider group. The house has room for nine—“more if people are willing to cuddle,” Andy added. At present, some fifteen occupants can arrive at the house at any time and stay as long as they like. “As we build more structures, as we have more beds, we can have more people living here full time,” they went on. “We want to be able to say, This is what we’re doing for the rest of our lives, so, if you aren’t so stressed about bathroom proximity but you want to fuck a little further off into the woods, this is where you can do it.”

In August, 2019, the Rêve held a commitment ceremony, which they called a HearthWarming. Some forty people stayed at the property, mostly in tents. Seventy more came for the day. As part of the service, they pledged themselves to the land as well as to one another. They invited their parents and all the queer people they regard as kinfolk and declared themselves an “intentional family.” They placed the commitments they were making to one another in a hole they had dug, invited everyone else to put commitments in, too, and then filled in the hole and planted a tree. There was no officiant, but there was a chuppah. Roo’s father is Pakistani, and members of his family wore traditional Pakistani wedding outfits and henna.

Andy’s mother was initially dismayed by the idea of the marriage. “I said, ‘I know I’m not really your daughter in the way that you wanted to have



Andy Izenson, Cal T., Aida Manduley, and Roo Khan near their home, in Ulster County, New York.

a daughter,'" Andy recalled. "'And I'm not getting married in the way that you envisioned me getting married. But the kind of kid I am is having the kind of commitment ceremony I'm having, and if that's what you get do you want it?' And it turns out she kind of did. She helped me pick out a dress."

Andy grew up in New Hampshire. "It's not a place I would recommend growing up if you're trans, for sure," they said. "I learned when I was young that there was something very wrong with me that nobody would ever understand." At Skidmore, they studied sociolinguistics. They had their first polyamorous relationship there, in a lesbian triad. "I started meeting more queer and trans people and realizing that it's not that there's something broken and weird about me."

They went to law school in New York City. "I started encountering the idea that the state tells you about how the world works, what a family looks like, what gender is supposed to be," they said. "As I was studying, I started

to learn that there are discrepancies between the state's stories and reality."

That led Andy to think about personal choices. "I had had it in my head, Eventually, I'm going to have to do the grownup thing and find the spouse that I can tolerate and produce children. It's going to suck. The first thing you realize might be, Oh, I don't actually have to be a girl. Or, I don't have to be in a relationship with the one person who provides the completion of my Platonic soul for the rest of my life. Which-ever linchpin gets pulled out first, it all comes falling down. And once it's all fallen down you can say, O.K., I've got all these pieces and now I can build something." Andy gestured at the house and their spouses. "And this is what we've built," they said.

None of them is currently planning to have a child biologically. "But we have discovered that we like having kids around the house," Andy said.

"For discrete amounts of time," Roo added.

Andy said, "We want our friends'

kids to know that when they're a grouchy teen-ager they can go, 'Screw you, Mom, I'm going to the Rêve,' and everyone will know that they're safe here."

Cal said, "The thing that I wanted was a family. And I didn't want to get married or have children. And it turns out you can still have a family, even if you're not getting married and having children."

The group worked with a financial professional who specializes in nontraditional-family planning to set up the house as a joint tenancy with rights of survivorship, so that if one of them dies their interest reverts to the others. The document also includes prenup-style arrangements for what will happen if any of them decides to leave.

For a long time, Cal worked for a solar company that offers health benefits for one domestic partner, and they put Andy on their insurance because Andy needed it the most. Roo co-owns a small tech worker co-op and gets less generous insurance through that. "It

would be convenient if we were all on the same health insurance and didn't have to find one covered doctor for Roo and one covered doctor for the two of us," Andy said. "Society has these two categories: families that get recognition from the state and families that don't. The families that get recognition are the married, monogamous ones, and the ones that don't are everybody else."

The question is: what does marriage mean? "I remember reading the list of eleven hundred and sixty-three federal benefits that marriage gave, and one of them that just stuck out to me was 'family discounts at national parks,'" Roo said. "If the federal government says you're a family, you get the family discount, but we wouldn't. It's fucking everywhere."

Andy talked about a watershed moment for gay rights, in 1989—the case of *Braschi v. Stahl*. Miguel Braschi was being evicted from the rent-controlled apartment he and his partner shared, after the partner died, of AIDS. The landlord contended that the lease was transferrable only to family, and that Braschi wasn't family. Braschi sued. The judge issued a stunningly progressive ruling saying that family should be based on the reality of daily life—these two men lived together, shared finances, took care of each other—and not on "fictitious legal distinctions," such as marriage certificates. In Andy's view, the subsequent campaign for gay marriage represented a missed opportunity. "In 1989, he said that a marriage certificate was a fictitious legal distinction," Andy said with wonder. "The gay-rights movement took that and said, 'Actually, no, we're just going to throw that out and try and get married. That seems like a better plan.' Imagine if we had taken that idea—that legal protections for family should be granted based on the reality of daily family life and interdependence and networks of mutual care rather than on fictitious legal distinctions—and run with it."

No family in America has done more for the image and legal standing of polygamists than the Dargers: Joe, his three wives—Alina, Vicki, and Valerie—and their twenty-five children,

who live in and around Herriman, Utah. In 2011, they published a book, "Love Times Three," about their polygamous life, even though their marriage was a felony at the time, and they tirelessly worked to persuade other polygamous families to come out. Utah's decision to decriminalize polygamy was in large measure the result of a lobbying campaign that the Dargers had pursued for two decades.

Their house is in a relatively new subdivision, with wide views of nearby mountains. Joe, who works in construction, has built additional houses on the property for two of his adult children. "Anybody else, they'd say it's a nice *estate*," he said, when he showed me around, in June. "If you're polygamous, it's a *compound*. We've taken lessons from the L.G.B.T.Q. community, being very deliberate about language, because how you let people define you has an impact."

I had previously met Joe, on Zoom, and he had seemed intimidating, with an unkempt beard and a forbidding manner, and he had stuck to facts that I was sure he had recited a hundred times before. But, when we sat together on his back porch, I found him clean-shaven, relaxed, and forthcoming, and his wives greeted me brightly. As we talked there for the better part of a day, children, grandchildren, wives, and others whose identities were never completely clear to me came and went.

Joe and his wives come from fundamentalist Mormon families and have known one another from childhood. Some of their grandparents were jailed together for polygamy after the 1953 Short Creek raid, in which state troops arrested an entire community of four hundred people, including more than two hundred and fifty children. Joe's grandfather, who had aliases ready and hiding places mapped out, spent several years on the run. Vicki and Valerie's grandfather, however, said, "If the authorities come, we'll be home. Have the children be neat and comely." He spent seven years in jail. Like many children of polygamists, the Dargers grew up in an atmosphere of secrecy, quickly learning not to tell their schoolmates about their families.

Joe married his first two wives—

Alina and Vicki—on the same day, in 1990. He was twenty, and they were twenty and nineteen, respectively. Alina and Vicki gave birth to their first sons seven months apart, and each nursed both babies. Ten years later, Joe married Vicki's twin sister, Valerie, after she left another plural marriage. She brought five children with her and had four more with Joe, who has seven children with Alina and nine with Vicki. So far, they have nineteen grandchildren, and Joe's youngest children are best friends with his oldest grandchildren.

Alina founded a nonprofit, *Cherish Families*, which provides support to people both living in and leaving polygamy. Valerie works as an advocate there. For a time, Vicki homeschooled many of their children. They all talked about the difficulties of polygamous life. At one point, Vicki suffered severe postpartum depression and was consumed with jealousy toward the other women. "I hated everyone," she said. "I didn't know if I was going to stay here." Alina recalled fearing that the family might break apart. "All of us have had our turn, whatever we were going through," she said. Effectively, they were married not only to Joe but also to one another. Valerie said, "We share the kitchen and laundry—and we love each other and we get jealous. I have to manage Alina's and my relationship, Vicki's and my relationship, Vicki and Alina's relationship, all of our relationship to Joe. It's all the dynamics all the time."

In 2001, several members of the Darger family contracted a respiratory virus, and Joe and Alina's five-month-old daughter, Kyra, wasn't recovering. (It later emerged that she had an undiagnosed heart defect.) When her condition deteriorated, the family called 911 but couldn't get through. Joe drove to a hospital, with Alina doing CPR in the back seat. By the time they reached the hospital, Kyra had died. "There were a lot of questions," Alina recalled. "And always, accusingly, 'You're a fundamentalist.'" Authorities opened a criminal case and interrogated all the Dargers. A nurse came to the house, and then identified herself as an employee of Child Protective Ser-

vices and interviewed each child alone.

The criminal case was closed after a month and the family-services one two months later, but the automatic suspicion that the family encountered marked a turning point for Joe. "I was, like, We've lived in this fear and it doesn't work," he said. It was an inauspicious time to start campaigning for plural marriage. In the early two-thousands, Tom Green, a fundamentalist Mormon, was convicted of bigamy and child rape; he had married one of his wives when she was thirteen. In 2006, Warren Jeffs, the leader of the F.L.D.S., who had turned the community at Short Creek into his personal fiefdom, was placed on the F.B.I.'s most-wanted list, for arranging marriages between adult followers and underage girls. In 2011, after two trials—on charges including rape, incest, and sexual assault of minors—Jeffs was jailed for life.

Supporters of polygamy argue that its illegality makes it easier for men such as Jeffs to operate, because women fear that, if they go to the police, they may lose their children. "When you're criminalizing people who are otherwise law-abiding, you push that suffering under cover of darkness," Joe said. But he also believes that polygamists have an obligation to confront what the practice has enabled. "It was important for us—both to win public approval and to regain our own integrity—to say we are responsible for Warren Jeffs, our culture created this," he said. "There's problems in every culture. Until we own those problems, we're not going to be seen as responsible people." The Dargers note that many of the problems associated with polygamy come from factors that can, but often do not, accompany it: child marriage, assigned marriage, lack of education, and poverty.

Joe acknowledges that the system is patriarchal. "But patriarchy is as prevalent in monogamous households as in polygamous ones, and patriarchy is not misogyny," he said. He emphasized that in households with many women they have a strong voice: "There's no major decision we make as a family that we're not unanimous on. We may not all agree, but we'll all align."

Alina said, "Why is it that we're always 'brainwashed' unless we're

choosing the way *they* think?" It's true that how we grow up influences what we eat, where we live, whom we socialize with or marry. It determines our taste in clothing, our sense of humor, the value we place on formal education. Freud wrote about the "repetition compulsion," which drives us continually to re-create our own past, whether we were happy in it or not. Do people in the mainstream argue that polygamists have been brainwashed because mainstream values are alien to polygamous ones? If so, were most people brainwashed to idealize monogamous marriage? Animal models suggest that monogamy is less natural than nonmonogamy. Yet violations of it serve as the basis for terminating otherwise healthy relationships. We are brainwashed into keeping pets, taking daily showers,

thinking that it makes sense for nations to have inviolable borders; brainwashed about the morality of abortion, the necessity of medical marijuana. People are brainwashed into Jewish culture or Black culture or French culture.

The Dargers' book came out a month after Jeffs's final conviction. Alina, Vicki, and Valerie were terrified. One of Joe's mothers-in-law, who had been swept up in the Short Creek raid as a child, called in tears, begging the family to halt publication. The publisher phoned Joe just before the book went to press, saying that she would understand if Joe and his wives had second thoughts. Kody Brown, who, with his four wives, had recently become the subject of the reality show "Sister Wives," came to Joe in a panic, saying that his family was under investigation

THOREAU'S SECRET DIARY

April 5th

This whole pond thing is the stupidest thing I've ever done, and that is saying a LOT. I hope nobody ever sees this.

May 23rd

Twisted my ankle while hiking today. Trees are the worst.



July 6th

Dreamed about cheesecake again.



September 14th

The thing about the outdoors is that 98% of the time one is either too cold or too hot.



October 28th

Wonder what Charles, Bertha, Walter A., Walter N., Florence, Mabel, Nellie, Clara, Joseph, Mary, and Albert are up to...

NO, I DON'T!!!!



January 3rd

What is the record for consecutive games of solitaire?



R. C. G.

and that his lawyers had advised him to move to Nevada. Joe said, “I’m prepared to be arrested.”

After meeting the Dagers and other polygamists in the Salt Lake area, I drove four hours south to Short Creek, Warren Jeffs’s former stronghold, where the most concentrated community of Mormon-style polygamists still resides. It encompasses two towns straddling the state border—Hildale, Utah, and Colorado City, Arizona—a location that long enabled residents to evade state authorities by crossing back and forth.

The majesty of the landscape—red rocks, red dust, red mountains—is arresting, but as you come into Hildale you pass a white concrete wall surrounding a large, depressing structure that Jeffs built for himself, to house his myriad wives. The town is dotted with other Jeffs buildings, including a gigantic ceremonial hall now converted into a community center; some homes still have the high fences that Jeffs made mandatory.

I walked around town with Donia Jessop and Shirlee Draper, both of whom had been born there in the early seventies and had fled as Jeffs’s reign intensified, only to return later with the aim of rebuilding the community. Shirlee works for Cherish Families, the organization set up by Alina Darger. (Vicki and Valerie Darger are her cousins.) Three years ago, Donia was elected Hildale’s mayor, the first woman—and the first candidate not endorsed by the F.L.D.S.—to hold the position. She proudly showed me a park that had just been replanted. The public school, long closed, is now in use again.

Most residents here are or were F.L.D.S. members, and were therefore subject not only to polygamous unions but also to arranged ones; the ruling elders might pair them with a stranger, or someone they hated, or someone of a completely different generation. In addition, the property of Church members was held in a trust, so you didn’t own your house or land, and if you left you did so with only your personal effects.

Shirlee and Donia both came of age when Warren Jeffs’s father, Rulon, was the head of the Church. (He was incapacitated by a stroke in 1997, at which

DAYS OF TEEN-AGE GLORY

When I was committing the crime of high school,
the songs on the radio
took about two minutes to play,
and smoking a cigarette took about five,
so that things happened fairly quickly
as we passed the time and it passed us
without a sound except for the singing.

Singing by the Orioles, the Dubs, and the Clovers,
plus Lee Andrews and the Hearts,
who could do no wrong, according to me.

One night in the spring,
I even saw the Jesters battling the Paragons
on the stage of the Brooklyn Paramount,
then wandered the borough in a drizzle.

These days, if I’m not at my desk
or asleep in the back room,
I’m sitting in the garage
with a cup of coffee watching the rain

and waiting for that startling chord
that concludes “He’s Gone,” by the Chantels,

point Warren took control; Rulon died in 2002.) Donia managed to preempt assigned marriage by marrying her high-school boyfriend; they stayed in the community and had ten children. Shirlee’s experience was very different. When she was twenty-three, her father got a call from Rulon Jeffs, and she was married by five o’clock that afternoon. “Because I was raised in the F.L.D.S., it was just the next step,” she said. “It was, like, Here are these crates of tomatoes that I have to bottle. It’s what you do.” She and her husband had three children in quick succession, one of whom had special needs, as did a fourth child, who was born a few years later. Shirlee hoped to fall in love but didn’t.

Shirlee came to bridle at the entrenched patriarchy of the F.L.D.S., more so as Warren Jeffs’s edicts became increasingly extreme. He banned television, the Internet, the radio, and newspapers. He ordered divorces and remarriages, told people to remove their children from public schools, shut down all medical facilities, and expelled many members from the Church. Shirlee knew that she had to get out—and to

leave her husband and the two other wives he had taken after her—but it seemed impossible; she had no bank account, no credit history, and hardly any friends or family outside the community. It took her four years to save enough money, and she packed her and the children’s suitcases over several months to avoid detection. She made it to St. George, Utah, fifty miles away, and set up home there. “Taking off your identity and going where you have no support, no sense of belonging is excruciating,” she said. She didn’t want anyone to know that she was a polygamist’s daughter and a polygamist’s wife; in a sense, she was still in hiding.

Others were fleeing Short Creek, and Shirlee, wanting to help them, studied social work at the University of Utah. (She later also got a master’s degree in public administration.) But she found that most of the organizations offering assistance to those who had fled also campaigned against polygamy and required the women they helped to take a public stance condemning the practice. Shirlee found this exploitative and went to work for the Dagers’ non-

the five notes the rungs in a ladder
pointed into a vacant teen-age sky.

They were students together in the Bronx
at St. Anthony of Padua's school,
but they named themselves
after a rival neighborhood school,
St. Frances of Chantal,
having wisely rejected the Paduas,
as I imagine them doing one afternoon.

Where are the Chantels now?
Playing in the snows of yesteryear?
Bathing in the waters of childhood?

Are they hanging in the domestic air
like a smoke ring over a kitchen table?

Or like one sailing from a girl's mouth
in a car somewhere
only to vanish in a boy's face
reflected pink in the rearview mirror?

—*Billy Collins*

profit, which doesn't seek to change its clients' beliefs or to persuade them to engage in public self-disclosure.

In 2005, a court froze the assets of the collective that owned the F.L.D.S.'s land and buildings. In 2015, Shirlee was appointed to the board of a trust that is gradually redistributing those assets to the people it sees as rightful owners. When she was first approached, she said, "Oh, hell no—my job is to help people get *out* of Short Creek." She wanted nothing to do with the place. Still, she believed that those who had built the town deserved ownership. She noticed that most of the residents had left the F.L.D.S. but that all the city council members were still part of the Church. She investigated and exposed extensive election fraud, and led a voter-registration drive that helped get Donia Jessop elected. Since then, Shirlee has set up classes for women on topics including self-defense and financial management—and even a dating class for people unacquainted with the etiquette of romance.

Shirlee rejected her experience of polygamy but believes that her misery

was caused not by polygamy per se but by patriarchy. Once, after leaving, she was doing daily household chores on her own and felt an unaccustomed loneliness. "Women are quite social pack creatures," she said. "We need women." I often heard similar things among the polygamous wives I interviewed. One recalled being a child and seeing a TV spot that showed a depressed woman lying in bed and told viewers that they didn't have to be alone. Loneliness is epidemic in contemporary life, but, to a child of polygamous parents, the condition seemed implausible. "My life was so full of people that that didn't even sound like it was a real thing," the wife said. What struck me most during my interviews in polygamous and polyamorous communities was that these extensive families created a world sufficient for even their most hesitant members.

Shirlee still seemed to struggle with her ambivalence about the system into which she was born. "Patriarchal structures are horrifying for women, and that includes monogamy," she said, as we walked around the town. "But if

some people choose to live polyamory or polygamy and it works for them, hal-lujah, right?"

It was a beautiful afternoon, and she pointed up at the great cliffs that surrounded the town. "Growing up around it, I did not appreciate it," she said. "It was like wallpaper. After I moved away, it was triggering, because this was the place where so much horrible stuff happened. Only now, recently, I've started to really appreciate how beautiful it is."

Joe Darger was confident about the chances for decriminalizing polygamy in Utah. He believed that, in effect, it already had been decriminalized, thanks to the Supreme Court's landmark ruling in *Lawrence v. Texas*, in 2003, which rendered a slew of state laws about cohabitation unconstitutional. "It was just a matter of getting the public to recognize it," Joe said. He approached other fundamentalist Mormon families, urging them to become more politically vocal. It was hard, not only because people feared legal consequences but also because the many sects were often hostile to one another and resistant to forming a united front. "Early on, I realized this was going to require a three-prong approach—legislative, legal, and public relations," Joe said. "The public sways the courts."

Even before the Dargers' book was published, Joe had started seeking out receptive Utah politicians. Rather than framing the issue as one of freedom of religion—an argument long rejected by Utah and federal courts—Joe framed it as a free-speech matter. "If we purported to be married, that was the felony, but I could call them mistresses—not a problem," he told me. "Speech is our fundamental, most important right. Everything arises in language, and your identity is defined by language. If you can't claim your identity, you grow up under a grave injustice."

In 2008, he met Deidre Henderson, who was just entering politics. Twelve years later, it was she who, as a state senator, sponsored the successful decriminalization bill. (She recently became the lieutenant governor of Utah.) Another early ally was Connor Boyack, the president of the Libertas Institute, a libertarian-leaning think tank in Salt Lake City. Boyack, a mainstream Mormon

with no polygamous forebears, supported the decriminalization of polygamy on libertarian grounds. “As a practicing Mormon, I don’t think God has condoned polygamy, just like I don’t think that it’s O.K. to be injecting yourself with heroin,” he told me. “But that doesn’t mean that I should be supporting laws that punish other people who choose to do those things. I don’t drink coffee, but I don’t think Starbucks should be prohibited.”

To Boyack, the fact that the polygamy ban was generally unenforced offered a new way of pursuing the campaign against it. He went on a listening tour, documenting incest that had never been reported, interviewing women who had never testified to heinous abuse because they were afraid their children could be removed, meeting one woman who had never told anyone that she had an autistic child because she feared she would lose him. Henderson held public hearings at which polygamist victims of abuse told similar stories. Boyack said, “When we started talking to legislators in that light—not that this is freedom for polygamists but, rather, that the status quo empowers abusers—we very quickly garnered support.”

Still, the Bigamy Bill faced an uphill battle in Utah’s legislature, which is eighty-six per cent Mormon—although only about sixty-four per cent of the state’s residents are. The L.D.S. Church was thoroughly opposed to polygamy. Boyack believes that mainstream Mormons are embarrassed by the Church’s polygamist past.

The practice began around 1835, when Joseph Smith, the Church’s founder, took a second wife after receiving a revelation about polygamy; he eventually had more than thirty. The 1856 Republican Party platform railed against “those twin relics of barbarism, polygamy and slavery”; the South and the West were both deemed immoral, and a line was drawn between “civilized white society” and that of “backwards savages.” In 1862, Lincoln signed the Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act. By the late eighteen-eighties, it was clear that polygamy would prevent the Utah Territory from securing statehood. In 1890, the Church’s president, Wilford Woodruff, also prompted by a revelation, issued a manifesto renouncing polygamy—a decision that

fundamentalist Mormons dismiss as political expediency. The practice became a felony in Utah in 1935. In 2013, it was temporarily decriminalized—not by the legislature but by a judge, who ruled, in a case brought by Kody Brown, that the state’s anti-bigamy statute was unconstitutional. But three years later the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that, because Utah did not actually prosecute polygamists unless there were other crimes, the plaintiffs did not have standing, so the practice became criminal again.

By February, 2020, the Bigamy Bill had the cosponsorship of Derek Kitchen, one of only six Democrats in the Utah State Senate and its only openly gay member. Seven years before, he and his partner had sued the state in a case, *Kitchen v. Herbert*, that challenged its ban on same-sex marriage. They won, and the case led to the legalization of gay marriage in the Tenth Circuit and influenced the Supreme Court’s decision in *Obergefell*, eight months later. “The L.G.B.T.Q. movement and, in particular, a lot of gay men really embrace polyamory,” Kitchen told me. Many Mormon polygamists were more than happy to make common cause with the gay-marriage activists. “A lot of our first allies were L.G.B.T.Q., and that was brave of them,” Alina Darger told me. “I’ve come to an appreciation for their struggle, and I am a very firm cham-

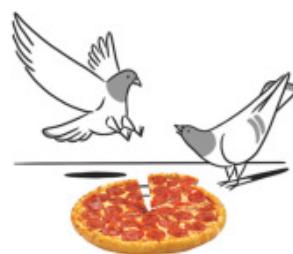
took time to recognize that human sexuality is not as square as we make it out to be,” he went on. “Polyamory and even the single life are just as valid as a heteronormative, husband-wife, picket-fence, three-children conversation. I sponsored the Bigamy Bill because there’s plenty of relationships made up of three and four people. When we were debating it, I asked the primary sponsor and our legal counsel, ‘This also means non-married multiple partners, like a polyamorous situation?’ They said, ‘Didn’t think about it, but yeah.’”

Eventually, the mainstream Mormon leadership, whose anti-gay policies had increasingly drawn outrage in Utah, concluded that it was fighting a losing battle on polygamy, too. Last February, when Henderson brought her decriminalization bill to the Utah legislature, Church leaders told legislators to vote their consciences. The bill passed nearly unopposed.

Still, even as polygamy gains legal standing, the institution itself looks harder to sustain. Kitchen notes that it’s neither environmentally nor financially viable, and that it requires inhuman energy. In this same period, Utah has seen an upswing in gay couples having babies. “They’re mostly non-monogamous,” Kitchen said, adding that he hopes to have kids, but not in the context of a monogamous relationship. Kitchen and his husband, despite having won their case for marriage, are now divorcing. “To be completely frank, I don’t know that I’ll engage in marriage in the future,” he said. “It’s nice to know that I’m no longer prohibited. I think marriage entirely is going to fade away. As people feel empowered to take the question of monogamy into their own hands and iron out the displeasures or unhappiness in their lives, they’ll find polyamory.”

pion that rights are for every person.”

One detail of *Kitchen v. Herbert* has remained out of the press. “During that time, my partner and I were involved in a polyamorous dynamic,” Kitchen said. “We feared we would jeopardize our case if people found out about us having a third, a boyfriend. But we were with him for three years.” So Derek Kitchen was in hiding about his sexuality even when he was the most visible gay person in Utah. “It



Tamara Pincus is a psychotherapist in Washington, D.C., who works with clients who are exploring alternative sexualities, including polyamory, kink, and L.G.B.T.Q. relationships. She defines herself as a bisexual woman who has sometimes dated genderqueer people. Her husband, Eric, is cheerful and geeky and talks about his apostasy from conventional marriage with a nearly religious fervor.

They met in 2000, when Tamara, in her mid-twenties, was working with Eric's mother at a Jewish community center in Washington. They moved in together within months and were married in 2002. For a decade, they lived a monogamous life, but after the second of their two sons was born they began exploring kink and going to sex parties. Soon, they opened their marriage. Eric accompanied Tamara on her first serious date and sat around awkwardly while his wife and the other man made out and started to remove each other's clothes. But he recalled how happy and affectionate she was afterward.

The first person to move in with them was a girlfriend of Eric's. There were other girlfriends, some more full-time than others. One had a jealous husband trying to control her; Eric had no idea how to respond to his intense aggression, and he and Tamara realized that they needed to manage the expectations—and the baggage—of others who entered the setup. "I'm in this committed relationship to Tamara, so if that's something they can't handle we have to go our separate ways," Eric said.

When their younger son was in first grade, he drew a picture of his family on vacation—Tamara and Eric, the two sons, and Eric's girlfriend. "He drew a car with the four of us in it," Tamara said. "Then he put the girlfriend in a sidecar. She's this extra person who came along and played games with them. But they could recognize that she was not in our car."

Within a few years, Eric had established a relationship with a woman who had two children and was separating from her husband, who is himself polyamorous. Four years later, she and her children moved in. "I love her and wanted her to be part of us," Eric said. "And Tamara was very happy with her." Tamara has a boyfriend of nine years. Eric said, "When I was supportive of her doing things, it came back much stronger, because she was, like, 'Thank you, you made that possible.' I'm not a very jealous person."

"The sexual relationship is just easier with newer partners," Tamara said. "A lot of children of the eighties and nineties saw our parents split because



"Thinks he's so great now that he's a dressage clown."

of affairs. We are finding more sustainable ways of doing family. Often, monogamous married people feel like 'This is what I have to do,' not 'This is what I choose to do.' Every day, Eric and I make a choice to keep this relationship together." They have both had pangs of jealousy, but less so with time. "Where I mostly get resentful," Tamara said, "is when he's fixing something at someone else's house—because there's always a huge list of tasks around *our* house."

Another partner of Eric's, whom he has known for three years, stays over occasionally, with her child. Tamara's boyfriend stays over at least once a week and has a child who regularly stays over with him. The children in the house all regard one another as siblings. Every Friday, Tamara and Eric host a big dinner for everyone, including ex-partners and close friends. "In that picture, we'd all be in the car now," Eric said. Tamara admits to having worried that her kids would be isolated or bullied because of their unconventional family; Eric had been equally worried that they would encounter anti-Semitism. So far, the children have encountered only tol-

erance, but they have an awareness that tolerance does not necessarily run deep. After the shooting at the Pulse night club, in Orlando, in 2016, one of them asked, "Do people hate us like they hate gay people?"

Tamara and Eric are out as polyamorous in most contexts, but Tamara's long-term boyfriend is not. "If he came out at work, he would likely be fired," Tamara said. According to Eric, the ex-husband of one of his less frequent partners argued that her poly life style was evidence that she was an unfit parent and sued for full custody of their child. The judge declared that her erotic life was immaterial and assigned joint custody. "But another judge might have bought the husband's argument," Eric said. "We have no legal protections at all for the way we live."

Diana Adams, a family lawyer in New York, has become the leading figure in the conversation surrounding the application of existing laws to polyamorous and other unorthodox arrangements. In 2017, Adams, who uses the pronoun "they," founded the Chosen



"I like to let the gentle pinging of devices soothe me to sleep."

• •

Family Law Center, which undertakes many such cases pro bono. They work with polyamorous clients who would marry if they could, helping them craft a legal dynamic for their shared life. Adams believes that the establishment of gay marriage produced a backlash against expanded relationship rights, and they encourage their clients to consider other options. "An L.L.C. model is not related to romance, but it's related to how they can share finances," they said. "It's an option I have realized with polyamorous triads and quads. You could say, This family is an L.L.C.—they own properties in multiple places, have a common health-insurance plan and bank accounts, and pay taxes as an L.L.C. People should understand the difference between what we're creating legally and what you want to vow to emotionally. You don't need to get married to become a social-welfare state of two or three or four."

Legalizing poly marriages would require revising the tax code and entitlement programs to accommodate multi-partner families. If joint filing

were eliminated from American income tax, the system would no longer favor married couples at the expense of non-dyadic families. The sheer number of rights associated with civil marriage places this country alone among Western societies. Gay people fought, justly, to be included in those rights. But, Adams said, "we'd like to get out of the business of the government deciding whether your romantic relationship has passed scrutiny such that you receive immigration benefits, health benefits, tax benefits, Medicare at death."

They went on, "We're seeing a movement away from parenting being defined by DNA and toward its being defined by intention. Getting out of the model of a two-person monogamous marriage as the basis of family is the next frontier." They note that in earlier eras monogamy was expected of women but not of men. "When we were deciding to make this more equitable, it could have gone in a different direction," Adams said, adding that they wished society, instead of pushing

men toward monogamy, had allowed women nonmonogamy. They went on, "Divorce specialists will tell you we have an epidemic of people saying they're monogamous, then breaking up families with lies and infidelity. What is harmful is that that infidelity breaks a covenant. What if we think about what we would actually like to create?"

Adams thinks that platonic co-parents, too, should be entitled to some form of recognition. They described a woman who became disabled and whose sister moved in and became the primary parent of the disabled sister's child. Adams drafted a complex trust so that they could make hospital visits, have shared finances, and buy a house together. "Family is really about people who want to take care of one another because they love one another," they said. In another case, two male-female couples bonded as a polyamorous quad and were living together. In giving birth, one of the women had a massive heart attack and became severely disabled. Her husband spent the next year taking care of her in rehab centers while the female partner in the other couple became the primary parent of the baby. The husband of the second couple became the breadwinner for all of them. "Despite that horrific and tragic incident, they've been together eight years in that format, and they're a beautiful family," Adams said.

Adams and their husband both identify as queer, and their relationship has been polyamorous from the start. In addition to their husband, Adams is in long-term relationships with two women and also has a boyfriend; Adams has a five-year-old daughter with their husband and has considered parenting with a gay male friend. Though they live with just their husband and daughter, they are open to cohabiting with another romantic partner. Their work both reflects and facilitates the complexities of their own life.

Adams is wary of making common cause with polygamists. "The very conservative, male, patriarchal image of polygamy is in radical contrast to the very modern, evolved world of polyamory," they said. All the same, they believe that the women's decision to lead a polygamous life should be respected—"just as we trust them if they

choose to be exotic dancers or sex workers or gestational surrogates.”

Polygamy and polyamory share many features but remain sociologically distinct. Polyamorous behavior exists across social groups, but the terminology is of the chattering classes. Elisabeth Sheff, the author of “The Polyamorists Next Door,” speaks of people who are “safe and privileged enough to come out as polyamorous.” Texts on polyamory have tended to focus on the concerns of white, middle-class, college-educated readers, and skate over historical and cultural boundaries that constrain individual choice. Sheff, noting that Black people are already burdened by stereotypes that depict them as sexually voracious and unable to form stable family relationships, describes “perversity” as “a luxury more readily available to those who are already members of dominant groups.”

Those who said that gay marriage wouldn’t lead to poly marriage often argued that being gay is an intractable condition and being poly is a chosen life style. Helplessly gay people are therefore a protected category; electively poly people are not. But Edward Stein, of Yeshiva University’s Cardozo School of Law, notes that many polyamorists claim to have been drawn to nonmonogamy for as long as they have experienced sexual desire, and that many nominal monogamists have intractable difficulty remaining that way, suggesting that a polyamorous orientation may be both innate and immutable. Sheff said, “For some people, it isn’t a choice—it really is an orientation.” But even if, for the sake of argument, we say that being poly is a choice, is that a reason to say that it warrants no protections? Surely, when we defend the rights of Jews or Muslims, we don’t imply that they can’t help being that way; rather, we confer dignity on a chosen way of life.

By the time that David Jay was about fourteen, his friends had all begun experiencing attractions that he could hardly understand. “Everyone told me that what I wasn’t feeling was one of the cornerstones of a healthy, intimate relationship as an adult,” he told me. “And I was pretty certain that healthy, intimate relationships were what I

wanted.” He began to identify as asexual. In 2001, at the age of eighteen, he founded the Asexuality Visibility and Education Network and, soon after, the Web site asexuality.org, which now has more than a hundred thousand members. David is one of the most prominent activists for asexual people—or “aces,” as they are sometimes known.

Some aces don’t seek romantic partners; others want romance without sex; many want to be parents. David found that forming relationships with people who were not asexual was often painful. He would immerse himself in the intensity, but if the person found a sexual partner they would shift their emotional energy toward that other relationship.

In 2010, David, who was then working as a software developer, met Avary Kent, who worked in impact investing, at a conference, and they hit it off; a few months later, Avary introduced David to her boyfriend, Zeke Hausfather, a climatologist. David and Zeke spent many hours talking science. Gradually, David began to introduce intentionality into the relationship. “I said, ‘Hey, I want to have one of those conversations where we name where this relationship fits in our lives, and how we want to build on it, if that’s something you’d be interested in?’” They were.

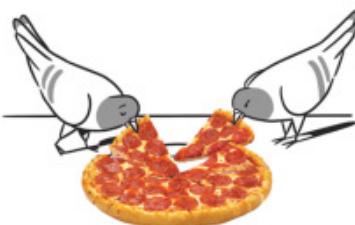
After Avary and Zeke married, they told David, “We’ve decided we want

tual legal co-parent,” Avary said. Ultimately, it was decided that David should move in with Avary and Zeke and be an equal third parent.

Avary found out she was pregnant at the beginning of 2017. The three of them went to birthing classes together. In August, their daughter was born, and they gave her all three of their surnames; she is Octavia Hausfather Jay Kent (Tavi for short). David initiated an adoption process as soon as Tavi was born, and the three adults signed a co-parenting agreement that stipulated what should happen if any of the relationships frayed.

I first met the family when Tavi was four and a half months old. They were living in San Francisco, in an airy, spacious apartment that had a vaguely hippie vibe. Zeke said, “The more people we have involved with raising Tavi, the easier it is for each of us individually, and the easier it is for us, the better it is for her.” Avary had disliked the version of new motherhood in which sleep deprivation was “a badge of honor.” She believed that their arrangement was deeply traditional. “I think that the whole nuclear-family thing was a strong departure from how humans were accustomed to being in community and in family and raising children together,” she said. The three of them continued doing quarterly counselling—to make sure we can air things out in front of a neutral third party,” Zeke said. David patted him on the arm. “Fourth party,” he said.

Thanks to shared parenting, Zeke and Avary are able to go out on date nights, and David sometimes goes blues dancing. They all belong to a sci-fi book club, and they hold a family check-in every Sunday, to divvy up household chores and allocate time with Tavi. When she was a baby, Avary and Zeke would take her to David’s room every night, at around three o’clock. The three of them opened a joint account for child-related expenses and contribute to an educational-savings account for Tavi. They have noticed that, if Zeke and David take Tavi out for a walk around their neighborhood, people usually assume that the two men are a married gay couple. It’s an assumption that no one could have made a generation ago. ♦



to have kids. There’s a number of people we want to invite into that process in an intentional way. The person we want to invite in most of all is you.” For more than a year, the three of them discussed what this arrangement might look like. They went to a mediator to try to identify areas where there could be disagreement. “We considered how David could do anything from being Uncle David, who drops in from time to time, to being an ac-

CHANGE YOUR LIFE

The lessons of the New Left.

BY LOUIS MENAND

The New Left was born in the early nineteen-sixties as a revolt against the modern university, and it died less than ten years later, in the auto-da-fé of Vietnam. Although it helped mobilize opinion on issues like civil rights, urban poverty, the arms race, and the war, the New Left never had its hands on the levers of political power. But it changed left-wing politics. It made individual freedom and authenticity the goals of political action, and it inspired people who cared about injustice and inequality to reject the existing system of power relations, and to begin anew.

If this was a fantasy, then so was the Declaration of Independence. Fresh starts are not difficult in politics. They are impossible. You can shake yourself loose from some of the past, but never from all of it. “All men are created equal” did not turn the page on slavery. But there were many who hoped that it would, and if there weren’t people willing to place all their bets on a better future—and that was the spirit of the New Left—then we would not be worth much as a society.

The New Left emerged independently at two great postwar knowledge factories, the University of Michigan and the University of California at Berkeley. More than a third of their students were in graduate or professional school. Michigan had more contracts with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration than any other university in the country. Berkeley was the main federal contractor for nuclear research, and had more Nobel laureates on its faculty than any other university in the world.

Michigan was the birthplace of the largest and best-known student political organization of the decade, and probably ever: Students for a Democratic Society. S.D.S. was descended from the Student League for Industrial

Democracy (SLID), which had been limping along for decades until, in 1960, it was renamed, on the ground that, as the first president of S.D.S., Alan Haber, put it, SLID was an embarrassing acronym for an outfit in decline.

Haber had entered the University of Michigan as an undergraduate in 1954 (and did not receive his B.A. until 1965). His first name was Robert, for the Progressive senator Robert La Follette, of Wisconsin, and his parents approved of SLID and their son’s politics. He was known as the campus radical, but he was not a fire-eater. If S.D.S. had been associated only with people like him, it would almost certainly have failed to attract recruits. It needed a charismatic person who came from the place most students at Midwestern public universities in the nineteen-fifties came from, the shores of the American mainstream. Tom Hayden was such a person.

Hayden was born in Royal Oak, a suburb of Detroit, in 1939. His parents were Catholic—he was named for St. Thomas Aquinas—who, unusually, divorced, and Hayden was raised principally by his mother in somewhat straitened circumstances. But he had a normal childhood, and he did well in school. He entered Michigan in 1957 and became a reporter on the student paper, the *Michigan Daily*. Hayden had no political ambitions. In his coursework, he was drawn to the existentialists, then very much in vogue in American colleges. But in 1960 there was an uptick in student activism, and Hayden, a twenty-one-year-old college junior, independent and professionally uncommitted, was perfectly positioned to be caught up in it. “I didn’t get political,” as he put it. “Things got political.”

The inspiration for the Northern student movement was a Southern student movement. On February 1, 1960, four first-year students from the all-Black North Carolina Agricultural and



*Protesters from the Free Speech Movement
Ron Anastasi (students); John Leggett,*



marching through Sather Gate, the University of California at Berkeley, November 20, 1964. From left: Mona Hutchin and Morton Paley, and John Searle (faculty); Sallie Shawl, Michael Rossman, and Mario Savio (students).

Technical State University sat down at a whites-only lunch counter in the Woolworth's department store in downtown Greensboro. The waitress (who was Black) refused to serve them, so they sat there all day. The next day, nineteen additional students showed up to sit at the lunch counter. The day after, it was eighty-five. By the end of the week, there were an estimated four hundred. Sit-ins quickly spread, and, within ten weeks, the movement had led to the formation, under the leadership of the civil-rights veteran Ella Baker, of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which would become a major activist organization of the civil rights movement.

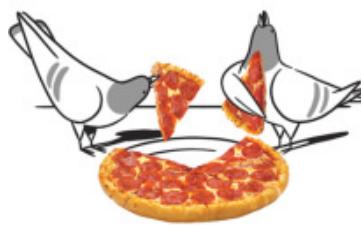
In March, Haber came to Hayden's office at the *Daily*. He told him that Michigan students were picketing Ann Arbor stores as a show of sympathy for the Southern students and suggested that he cover it. Hayden wrote some stories about the picketers, but he had little impulse to join them. Around the same time, though, he read "On the Road," which had come out in 1957, and the book inspired him, like many others, to hitchhike to California. There, he got a quick course in politics.

In Berkeley, he met with students who had demonstrated at an appearance in San Francisco of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and had been dispersed with fire hoses by the police. In Delano, he met organizers for Chicano farmworkers. In Los Angeles, at the Democratic National Convention that nominated John F. Kennedy for President, he interviewed Martin Luther King, Jr. At a student conference near Monterey, Hayden gave a talk on "value stimulation." The spirit of self-determination, he said, "has bowed to the vast industrial and organizational expansion of the last 75 years. As a result, the majority of students feel helpless to chart their society's direction. The purpose of the student movements is at once simple and profound: to prove human beings are still the measure."

The final stop on Hayden's road trip was the annual conference of the National Student Association (N.S.A.), which was being held at the University of Minnesota. About twenty-five members of SNCC had been invited. Hayden

was thrilled to meet them. "They lived on a fuller level of feeling than any people I'd ever seen," he wrote later, "partly because they were making modern history in a very personal way, and partly because by risking death they came to know the value of living each moment to the fullest. Looking back, this was a key turning point, the moment my political identity began to take shape."

The N.S.A. convention was debating whether to adopt a statement of support



for the sit-ins. The issue was controversial for some delegates because it meant endorsing illegal actions. One of the speakers in favor of a statement of support was a white graduate student from the University of Texas named Sandra (Casey) Cason.

Cason was from Victoria, Texas. She took racial segregation "as a personal affront," she later wrote, "viewing it as a restriction on my freedom." Even before Greensboro, Cason had participated in protests against segregation in Austin, where she was active in the Young Women's Christian Association. The University of Texas had started admitting Black undergraduates in 1956, but only one dormitory was desegregated, the Christian Faith and Life Community. That is where Cason lived. She got interested in existentialism and began reading Camus. After graduating, she taught Bible school in Harlem, and read James Baldwin.

"If I had known that not a single lunch counter would open as a result of my action, I could not have done differently than I did," she said in her speech to the N.S.A. delegates in Minneapolis. She went on:

I am thankful for the sit-ins if for no other reason than that they provided me with an opportunity for making a slogan into a reality by making a decision into an action. It seems to me that this is what life is all about. While I would hope that the N.S.A. Congress will pass a strong sit-in resolution, I am more concerned

that all of us, Negro and white, realize the possibility of becoming less inhuman humans through commitment and action with all their frightening complexities.

When Thoreau was jailed for refusing to pay taxes to a government which supported slavery, Emerson went to visit him. "Henry David," said Emerson, "what are you doing in there?" Thoreau looked at him and replied, "Ralph Waldo, what are you doing out there?"

She paused, then she repeated the last line. There was an ovation. The convention endorsed the sit-ins by a vote of 305–37.

Hayden was stunned. In almost any earlier left-wing political organization, Cason's speech would have been written off as an expression of bourgeois individualism. But she was saying exactly what Hayden had been saying in Monterey. She was telling the students that this was about *them*.

It is doubtful whether Black demonstrators being taunted, fire-hosed, beaten, and arrested felt that they were coming to know "the value of living each moment to the fullest." People like Cason and Hayden cared about injustice, but the fundamental appeal of politics for them was existential. "We were alike . . . in our sense of moral adventure, our existential sensibility, our love of poetic action, and our feeling of romantic involvement," Hayden wrote about meeting Cason. He was now ready to join S.D.S.

He courted Cason by sending her boxes of books, including Hermann Hesse's "Siddhartha," which he had frantically underlined. They got married in 1961 and eventually moved to New York City, and it was there, in a railroad flat on West Twenty-second Street, that Hayden wrote the first draft of what would be known as the Port Huron Statement. "I was influenced deeply by 'The Power Elite,'" Hayden said, and the effect of C. Wright Mills's 1956 book is obvious.

Mills, who was born in Waco, Texas, in 1916, was a large and energetic man, the kind of person who builds his own furniture. He was also disciplined, organized, and prolific. By the time he died, of a heart attack, at the age of forty-five, he had written more than half a dozen books.

Mills spent most of his career at Columbia. He was self-consciously a maverick, and had no compunction about

criticizing his colleagues, some of whom were happy to return the favor. As a sociologist and a social critic—the roles were the same for him—Mills was interested in the problem of power. And he came to feel that there had been a change in power relations in the United States, caused by what he called “the new international position of the United States”—that is, the Cold War.

In “The Power Elite,” Mills argued that power was in the hands of three institutions: “the political directorate,” “the corporate rich,” and the military. The power of the first group, the politicians, had waned relative to the power of the two others, whom he called “corporate chieftains” and “professional warlords.” But the significant thing was that the three groups did not have rival interests: they constituted a single homogeneous ruling class whose members, virtually all white male Protestants, circulated from one institution to another. Dwight Eisenhower was in the military élite, then became President and filled his Cabinet with corporate heads.

Mills never explained exactly what the interests of the power élite were, or just what their ideology was. But ideology was not what engaged him. He believed, as John Dewey believed, that democratic participation is an essential constituent of self-realization, whatever decisions are collectively arrived at. Mills concluded that American democracy in this sense was broken. “Ordinary men,” he wrote, “often seem driven by forces they can neither understand nor govern.... The very framework of modern society confines them to projects not their own, but from every side, such changes now press upon the men and women of the mass society who accordingly feel that they are without purpose in an epoch in which they are without power.” (Although Mills grew up in a Jim Crow state, “The Power Elite” has nothing to say about race relations.)

The Port Huron Statement echoes Mills. It says that the Cold War had made the military the dominant power in what Hayden called (after Mills) “the triangular relations of the business, military, and political arenas.” Domestic needs, from housing and health care to minority rights, were all subordinated “to the primary objective of the ‘military and economic strength of the Free

World.’” The Cold War was making the United States undemocratic.

Who could be agents of change in such a regime? The working class is the agent of change in leftist theory, a theory to which organizations like the League for Industrial Democracy (the progenitor and sponsor of SLID) remained true. By this stage in his career, though, Mills had no use for organized labor. Labor leaders sat at the table with the rest of the power élite, he said, but they played no real role in decision-making. Faith in the revolutionary mission of the proletariat belonged to what he called the “labor metaphysic,” a Victorian relic. Mills was not really interested in wealth and income inequality anyway. He was interested in power inequality. But he had no candidate for a change agent.

In the fall of 1956, Mills went to the University of Copenhagen on a Fulbright, and travelled around Europe (sometimes on a BMW motorcycle that he bought in Munich and that became an iconic ingredient in his persona). In 1957, he gave a talk at the London School of Economics. That visit was his introduction to the intellectual left in Britain, and he and his hosts hit it off. Mills had been disappointed by the reception of “The Power Elite” in the United States; in Britain, he found people who thought the way he did. “I was much heartened by the way my kind of stuff

is taken up there,” he wrote to an American friend.

The British intellectuals to whom Mills was drawn—among them, the cultural theorist Stuart Hall, the historian E. P. Thompson, and the sociologist Ralph Miliband—were calling themselves the New Left. They were more Marxist than Mills was, but they believed that culture and ideology had become as important as class in determining the course of history.

Mills returned to the L.S.E. in 1959 to give three lectures entitled “Culture and Politics.” (“A huge, alarming Texan has just been lecturing to the London School of Economics,” the *Observer* reported.) The following year, Mills wrote an article for the British journal *New Left Review*, which Thompson and Hall had founded. “I have been studying, for several years now, the cultural apparatus, the intellectuals—as a possible, immediate, radical agency of change,” he wrote. “For a long time, I was not much happier with this idea than were many of you; but it turns out now, in the spring of 1960, that it may be a very relevant idea indeed.” Travelling abroad, he had come to believe that young intellectuals were capable of enlightening and mobilizing the public. The article was called “Letter to the New Left.”

Mills’s “Letter” was mocked by his Columbia colleague Daniel Bell, who



“I turned the big pile of papers into three smaller piles of papers we can go through the next time we clean the house.”

called Mills “a kind of faculty adviser to the ‘young angries’ and ‘would-be angries’ of the Western world.” But the “Letter” was taken up by S.D.S., which circulated copies among its members and reprinted it in a journal, *Studies on the Left*, launched by graduate students at the University of Wisconsin. “He seemed to be speaking to us directly,” Hayden wrote about the “Letter.” Mills had “identified ourselves, the young and the intellectuals, as the new vanguard.”

This was a wishful misreading. Mills did not have Americans in mind at all. He was responding to developments in Britain, in Eastern Bloc countries such as Poland and Hungary, and in Latin America. His next book, “Listen, Yankee,” was a defense of Castro’s revolution. Those were the young intellectuals he was referring to.

Nevertheless, Hayden was inspired to compose his own “Letter to the New (Young) Left,” in which he complained about the “endless repressions of free speech and thought” on campus and “the stifling paternalism that infects the student’s whole perception of what is real and possible.” Students needed to organize, he said. They could draw on “what remains of the adult labor, academic and political communities,” but it was to be a student movement. “Young,” in Hayden’s “Letter,” meant “student.”

What was needed, Hayden said, was not a new political program. What was needed was a radical *style*. “Radicalism of style demands that we oppose delusions and be free,” he wrote. “It demands that we change our life.” Not having a program meant keeping the future “up for grabs.” This approach meant that direct actions, like campus sit-ins, undertaken for one cause (for example, abolishing R.O.T.C.) would find themselves being piggybacked by very different causes (for example, stopping university expansion into Black neighborhoods, as happened at Columbia in 1968 and Harvard in 1969). Demands kept multiplying. This was not because events got out of the organizers’ control. It was the way the New Left was designed. Policies weren’t the problem. The system was the problem.

Ironically, or perhaps fittingly, the S.D.S. convention at which Hayden’s statement was adopted was held at an educational camp in Port Huron, Mich-

igan, that had been loaned to the group by the United Auto Workers. For the Port Huron Statement represents the American left’s farewell to the labor movement. The statement did end up containing a section supporting unions, but that was added at the demand of the students’ League for Industrial Democracy sponsors. Critical remarks about the Soviet Union were added for the same reason. Yet those preoccupations—the working class and Stalinism—were precisely what the students wanted to be rid of. “Dead issues,” Casey Hayden called the concern about Communism. “I didn’t know any communists, only their children, who were just part of our gang.” The students did not think of themselves as pro-Communist. They thought of themselves as anti-anti-Communist. To older left-wing intellectuals, that amounted to the same thing. Hence the New Left slogan “Don’t trust anyone over thirty.” It meant “Don’t trust an old socialist.”

The Port Huron convention began on June 12, 1962, with fifty-nine registered participants from S.D.S.’s eleven chapters. (There were eventually more than three hundred. The military escalation of the war in Vietnam, beginning in 1965, turbocharged the movement, particularly among male students, who were subject to the draft.) Participatory democracy—“democracy is in the streets”—and authenticity were the core principles of Hayden’s forty-nine-page draft. In that spirit, the delegates debated the entire document, section by section. “The goal of man and society should be human independence: a concern not with image of popularity but with finding a meaning in life that is personally authentic,” the statement says. Since pure democracy and genuine authenticity are conditions that can only be reached for, never fully achieved, this was a formula for lifelong commitment. It asked you to question everything.

Still, the statement does not call for revolution or even an end to capitalism. Its politics are progressive: regulate private enterprise, shift spending from arms to domestic needs, expand democratic participation in the workplace and public policymaking, support decolonization movements, and advance civil rights by ridding the Democratic Party of its

Southern segregationists, the Dixiecrats. (That problem took care of itself in the 1964 Presidential election, when the South flipped from solid blue to solid red.)

But the statement begins and ends with the university:

Our professors and administrators sacrifice controversy to public relations; their curriculums change more slowly than the living events of the world; their skills and silence are purchased by investors in the arms race; passion is called unscholastic. The questions we might want raised—what is really important? Can we live in a different and better way? If we wanted to change society, how would we do it?—are not thought to be questions of a “fruitful, empirical nature,” and thus are brushed aside.

The university has become a mechanism of social reproduction. It ‘prepares’ the student for ‘citizenship’ through perpetual rehearsals and, usually, through emasculation of what creative spirit there is in the individual. . . . That which is studied, the social reality, is ‘objectified’ to sterility, dividing the student from life.” And academic research serves the power élite. “Many social and physical scientists,” the statement says, “neglecting the liberating heritage of higher learning, develop ‘human relations’ or ‘morale-producing’ techniques for the corporate economy, while others exercise their intellectual skills to accelerate the arms race.” These functions are all masked by the academic ideology of disinterestedness.

At the end of the statement, though, the university is reimagined as “a potential base and agency in a movement of social change.” Academics can perform the role that Mills accused American intellectuals of abandoning: enlightening the public. For this to happen, students and faculty, in alliance, “must wrest control of the educational process from the administrative bureaucracy. . . . They must make debate and controversy, not dull pedantic cant, the common style for educational life.”

The Port Huron deliberations lasted three days. They ended at dawn. Hayden was elected president of S.D.S. (Haber was happy to return to being an undergraduate), and the delegates walked together to the shore of Lake Huron, where they stood in silence, holding hands. “It was exalting,” one of them, Sharon Jeffrey, said later. “We felt that we were different, and that we were going to do

PRIVACY

On the black wet branches of the linden,
still clinging to umber leaves of late fall,
two crows land. They say, "Stop," and still I want
to make them into something they are not.
Odin's ravens, the bruja's eyes. What news
are they bringing of our world to the world
of the gods? It can't be good. More suffering
all around, more stinging nettles and toxic
blades shoved into the scarred parts of us,
the minor ones underneath the trees. Rain
comes while I'm still standing, a trickle of water
from whatever we believe is beyond the sky.
The crows seem enormous but only because
I am watching them too closely. They do not
care to be seen as symbols. A shake of a wing,
and both of them are gone. There was no message
given, no message I was asked to give, only
their great absence and my sad privacy
returning like the bracing, empty wind
on the black wet branches of the linden.

—Ada Limón

things differently. We thought that we knew what had to be done, and that we were going to do it. It felt like the dawn of a new age."

Tom Hayden's charisma was the cool kind. He was lucid and unflappable. Mario Savio's charisma was hot. Savio's gifts were as a speaker, not as a negotiator. He channelled anger. Savio's politics, like Hayden's, were a kind of existentialist anti-politics. "I am not a political person," he said in 1965, a few months after becoming famous as the face of the Berkeley Free Speech Movement (F.S.M.), something most people would have called political. "What was it Kierkegaard said about free acts? They're the ones that, looking back, you realize you couldn't help doing."

Savio was born in New York City in 1942. His parents were immigrants, and Italian was his first language. When he learned English, he developed a fairly severe speech impediment, which may have helped make possible his later renown as the greatest orator of the American New Left, since he was forced to concentrate on his enunciation.

Savio entered Berkeley as a junior. The campus appealed to him in part

because he had heard about the student protests against HUAC that had been broken up with fire hoses. His first campus political activity was attending meetings of the University Friends of SNCC. He agitated for civil rights in the Bay Area, and in 1964 he went to Mississippi to participate in Freedom Summer. Soon after he returned to Berkeley, the Free Speech Movement began.

It seemed to erupt spontaneously. That was part of its appeal and part of its mystique: no one planned it, and no one ran it. It had no connection to S.D.S. or any other national political group. The reason is that the F.S.M. was a parochial affair. It was not a war for social justice. It was a war against the university administration.

The fuse had been lit long before 1964. The administration's tensions with faculty dated to a controversy over loyalty oaths in 1949, which had led to the firing of thirty-one professors; its tensions with students dated to the emergence of an activist organization that participated in student-government elections in the late fifties.

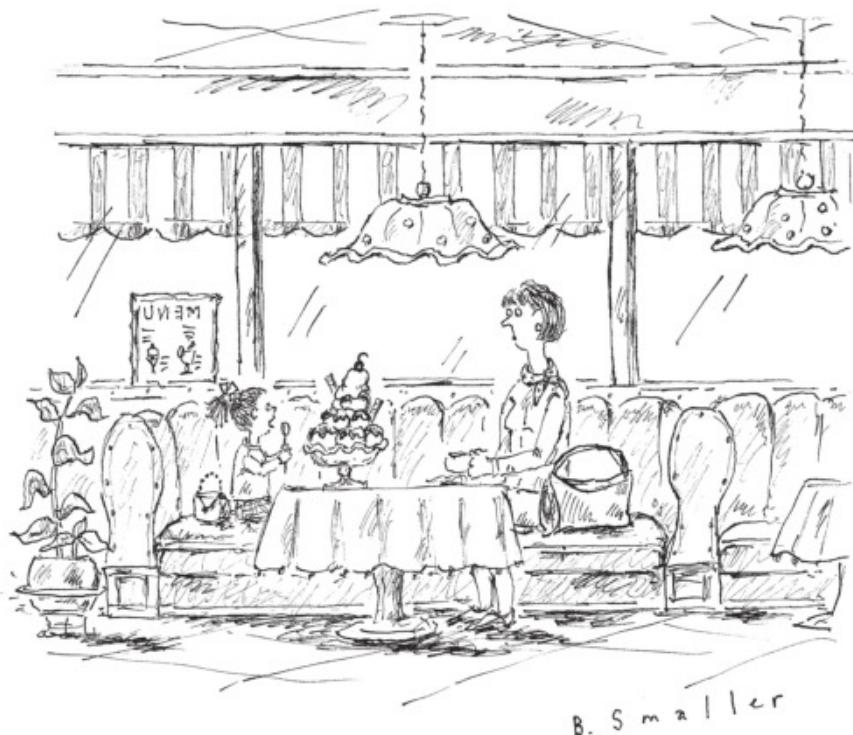
The administration was hostile to political activity on campus for two reasons. The first had to do with the principle of

disinterestedness, which called for partisan politics to be kept out of scholarship and the classroom. But there was a more pragmatic reason as well. U.C. administrators were wary of the system's Board of Regents, many of whom were conservative businessmen. Joseph McCarthy was dead, but HUAC, though increasingly zombie-like, lumbered on. So political activity on campus was banned or tightly regulated—not only student organizations, leafletting, and the like but also outside political speakers. It wasn't that administrators did not want dissent. It was that they did not want trouble.

Until the fall semester in 1964, students had been allowed to set up tables representing political causes on a twenty-six-foot strip of sidewalk just outside campus, on the corner of Telegraph Avenue and Bancroft Way. One day, a vice-chancellor, Alex C. Sherriffs, whose office was in Sproul Hall, the administration building that adjoined the area with the tables, decided that the spectacle was a bad look for the university. He conveyed his concern to his colleagues, and on September 16th the university announced a ban on tables and political activities on that stretch of sidewalk.

Representatives of student organizations, when their appeals proved unavailing, began picketing. On September 30th, in violation of the ban, organizations set up tables at Sather Gate, on the Berkeley campus. University officials took the names of students who were staffing tables and informed them they would be disciplined. Students responded by staging a brief sit-in outside the dean's office. The next day, tables were set up again on campus and, at 11:45 A.M., university police arrested Jack Weinberg for trespassing.

Weinberg was a former Berkeley mathematics student who had been soliciting funds for the Congress of Racial Equality at the foot of the steps to Sproul Hall. (He was also the person who coined the slogan about not trusting anyone over thirty.) When he was arrested, he went limp, and officers placed him in a police car that had been driven into the middle of Sproul Plaza. Students immediately surrounded the car; eventually, there were more than seven thousand people in the plaza. Some of them climbed onto the roof, with Weinberg still inside, to make speeches. That roof was where Savio made his oratorical début. Weinberg



"Do I have to eat the cherry?"

• •

remained sitting in that car until seven-thirty the next evening.

While he was there, student leaders met with administrators, now led by the president of the entire U.C. system, Clark Kerr, and negotiated an agreement for handling Weinberg, the students who had been disciplined for violating the ban on tables, and the students who were preventing the police from moving the car. The agreement also revisited the rules for on-campus political activities.

Kerr was the perfect antagonist for Savio, because Kerr had literally written the book on the postwar university: "The Uses of the University," published in 1963. "The Uses of the University" basically transcribes three lectures Kerr gave at Harvard, in which he described the transformations in higher education that led to what he called "the multiversity" or "the federal grant university." The text became a bible for educators, revised and reprinted five times. Savio called Kerr "the foremost ideologist of [the] 'Brave New World' conception of education."

As his book's title suggests, Kerr's view of the university was instrumental. The

institution could grow and become all things to all people because it was intertwined with the state. It operated as a factory for the production of knowledge and of future knowledge producers. In the nineteen-sixties, undergraduate enrollments doubled, but the number of doctoral degrees awarded tripled. These graduate students were the experts, Kerr thought, that society needed. The president of a modern university, he argued, is therefore basically a mediator.

"Mediator" was a term Kerr later regretted using, for it exposed exactly the weakness that Hayden and Savio had identified in higher education: the absence of values, the soullessness of the institution. Kerr was not unmindful of this grievance. The transformation of the university had done undergraduates "little good," he admitted. "The students find themselves under a blanket of impersonal rules for admissions, for scholarships, for examinations, for degrees. It is interesting to watch how a faculty intent on few rules for itself can fashion such a plethora of them for the students."

"Interesting to watch" is mediator talk. Kerr even had a premonition of

how the problem might play out. "If federal grants for research brought a major revolution," he wrote, "then the resultant student sense of neglect may bring a minor counterrevolt, although the target of the revolt is a most elusive one." Unless, of course, the university *gives* the students the target. A ban on tables was such a target.

The students involved in the Sproul Plaza "stand-in" didn't trust Kerr. They suspected he would manipulate the processes he had agreed to so that the students could be disciplined and restrictions on political activity would remain. They probably were right: Kerr seems to have underestimated the strength of student support for the activists all along. So the activists continued to strategize, and, amid the action, they came up with a name for their movement.

"The Free Speech Movement" was an inspired choice. The students didn't really want free speech, or only free speech. They wanted institutional and social change. But they pursued a tactic aimed at co-opting the faculty. The faculty had good reasons for caution about associating themselves with controversial political positions. But free speech was what the United States stood for. It was the banner carried into the battles against McCarthyism and loyalty oaths. Free speech was a cause no liberal could in good conscience resist.

Another way to gain faculty support was to get the administration to call in the police. No faculty wants campus disputes resolved by state force. At Berkeley, this was especially true for émigré professors, who knew what it was like to live in a police state. Astonishingly, the administration walked right into the trap.

The F.S.M. continued to hold rallies in Sproul Plaza, using the university's own sound equipment. And since most students walked through the plaza at some point, the rallies attracted large crowds. Tables reappeared on campus, and the organizers were sometimes summoned for disciplinary action and sometimes not. On November 20th, three thousand people marched from Sather Gate to University Hall, where a meeting of the regents was taking place. Five F.S.M. representatives were let in but were not allowed to speak. By then, the F.S.M. had attracted members of the faculty and a range of students, from

the conservative Mona Hutchin, of the Young Republicans, to the communist revolutionary Bob Avakian. Free speech was a cause that united them all.

Then Kerr overplayed his hand. On November 28th, disciplinary action was announced against Savio and another student, Arthur Goldberg, for the entrapment of the police car on October 1st, among other malfeasances. On December 1st, the F.S.M. demanded that the charges against Savio and Goldberg be dropped, that restrictions on political speech be abolished, and that the administration refrain from further disciplining students for political activity. If these demands were not met, the group promised to take "direct action."

The demands were not met. A huge rally was held in Sproul Plaza the next day, leading to the occupation of Sproul Hall by a thousand people. Before they entered the building, Savio gave a speech, recorded and broadcast by KPFA, in Berkeley. He depicted the university as an industrial firm, with autocratic governance:

I ask you to consider: If this is a firm, and if the Board of Regents are the board of directors; and if President Kerr in fact is the manager; then I'll tell you something. The faculty are a bunch of employees, and we're the raw material! But we're a bunch of raw materials that don't mean to be—have any process upon us. Don't mean to be made into any product. Don't mean . . . Don't mean to end up being bought by some clients of the University, be they the government, be they industry, be they organized labor, be they anyone! We're human beings!

There's a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part! You can't even passively take part! And you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels . . . upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop! And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all!

The transformation of students at élite universities into a new working class (with an echo of Charlie Chaplin in "Modern Times") was complete.

As Joan Baez sang "We Shall Overcome" (a civil-rights anthem, but originally a song of the labor movement), the students proceeded to occupy the four floors of Sproul Hall. Shortly after three o'clock the following morning, hundreds of police officers stormed the building and arrested about eight hundred peo-

ple, the largest mass arrest in California history. Protesters passively resisted; police responded by throwing the men down the stairs. It was not until 4 P.M. that the last protester was removed.

There was a meeting of more than eight hundred professors and instructors, and they voted by an overwhelming margin to support the students' demands. On January 2, 1965, the regents announced the replacement of the school's chancellor, and a liberal policy on political activity was unveiled the next day, a clear signal of capitulation. Unrest at Berkeley was by no means at an end. The war in Vietnam would see to that. Nor were the repercussions over. In 1967, Savio served four months in prison for his role in the Sproul Hall sit-in. But Kerr had done what the F.S.M. had hoped he would do: he had radicalized the faculty.

The movement that started in Port Huron and Berkeley soon got sucked into the political maelstrom of the late sixties. In March, 1965, the United States began its immense bombing campaign against North Vietnam, Operation Rolling Thunder. That month, marines landed near Da Nang, the first American combat troops in Vietnam. By 1968, there would be more than half a million American soldiers there. In 1966, Stokely Carmichael introduced the slogan "Black Power" and replaced John Lewis as the chairman of SNCC, which began turning



away white volunteers. The Black Panther Party was founded the same year. The women's movement and, after 1969, the gay-liberation movement, representing subordinated groups that the New Left had given little attention to, occupied center stage. Militancy took over, liberals were driven away, and American politics descended into chaos.

In retrospect, the New Left's break with the labor movement seems a disastrous, maybe an arrogant, miscalcu-

lation. So does its support for the Hanoi regime, which, after it finally united the country, in 1975, turned Vietnam into a totalitarian state. But the New Left never had any political cards to play. It was always a student movement. Today, the left has the progressive wing of the Democratic Party to turn its ideals into policy. There was no such wing in 1962.

Still, the spirit of Port Huron and the F.S.M. was not forgotten. The students involved had experienced a feeling of personal liberation through group solidarity, a largely illusory but genuinely moving sense that the world was turning under their marching feet. That sense—the sense that your words and actions matter, that *you* matter—is what inspires people to take risks, and gives movements for change their momentum.

"What can I call it: the existential amazement of being at The Edge, where reality breaks open into the true Chaos before it is reformed?" one of the F.S.M. leaders, Michael Rossman, wrote ten years later:

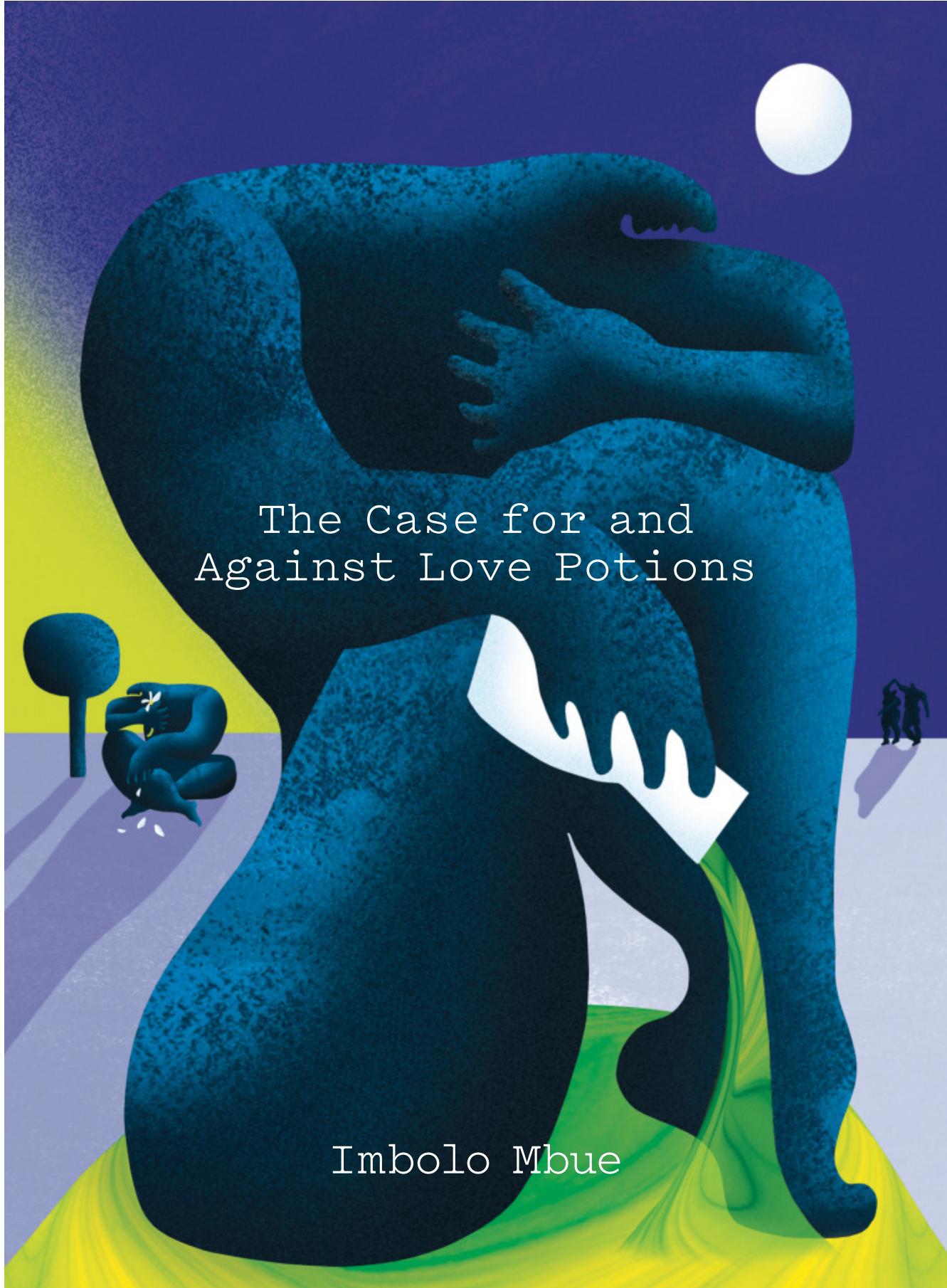
I never found words to describe what is still my most vivid feeling from the FSM . . . the sense that the surface of reality had somehow fallen away altogether. Nothing was any longer what it had seemed. Objects, encounters, events, all became mysterious, pregnant with unnamable implications, capable of astounding metamorphosis.

The music historian Greil Marcus was a Berkeley undergraduate in 1964. He described the experience of rallies and mass meetings this way:

Your own history was lying in pieces on the ground, and you had the choice of picking up the pieces or passing them by. Nothing was trivial, nothing incidental. Everything connected to a totality, and the totality was how you wanted to live: as a subject or as an object of history. . . . As the conversation expanded, institutional, historical power dissolved. People did and said things that made their lives of a few weeks before seem unreal—they did and said things that, not long after, would seem ever more so.

These reminiscences may seem romantic. They are romantic. But they express the core premise of left-wing thought, the core premise of Marx: *Things do not have to be the way they are.*

The nation was at a crossroads in the nineteen-sixties. The system did not break, but it did bend. We are at another crossroads today. It can be made to bend again. ♦



The Case for and Against Love Potions

Imbolo Mbue

You love someone. Someone loves you not. What to do, besides find someone else to love, which, by the way, is not easy? Ah, my dear young friend, I'm so glad you came to me for advice. A quagmire of this nature requires the wisest of minds to resolve; clearly, you recognize who the most sagacious man in this part of the country is.

As you know, there are a million and three solutions to this problem, virtually none of which have a great success rate. I imagine you tried at least twenty-eight of them before coming to see me today, am I correct? No? You tried only four? It doesn't matter. You're here and I have the best advice for you.

Love potions.

Have you ever heard of them? Oh, what a terrible shame—you're in the dark about one of mankind's greatest inventions. Let me enlighten you.

No, I've never personally used them (never needed to, thank you very much). But I know that every fetish priest in every village sells them. The potions are made according to a recipe passed down from an unidentified ancestor, with a list of ingredients that we mere mortals are not allowed to know. The fetish priests all store their potions in similar-looking white bottles, and charge the same ludicrous fee to those who come to buy them—a goat, a pig, and three hens. But who has that kind of wealth to spare for the sake of love? Do you? I didn't think so. That is why I'm going to give you invaluable directions on how to obtain a love potion for free and get yourself a romance that will leave your face brighter than the morning sun.

This is what you need to do: as soon as an opportune moment presents itself, you must sneak into the hut of the fetish priest in your village while the fetish priest is out administering a ritual. But make sure you do this only after the sun has gone down and before the moon has revealed itself. You want to have enough darkness to conceal you but not so much darkness that the evil spirits that roam the village at night can see you; trust me, you don't want to know what horror will befall you if they catch you stealing.

So, as for the stealing business: when you enter the fetish priest's hut, hurry

up and grab the white bottle, then hide it in your underclothes as you rush to your hut. Keep it in a safe place—if you can, sleep with it under your blanket. Then, on a full-moon night, pour a few drops into the food of the one whose love you are seeking and poof! The next morning you will be so drenched in adoration, so enfolded in bliss and gratification, you will ask yourself what you've ever done in this life to deserve such loving.

I'm looking at your face now, and you seem incredulous.

You want to know what might happen if the love potion doesn't work?

Ha, funny you should ask. Well, the thing is, love potions usually work. But when they don't, strange things can happen. Crazy, bad, strange things.

Let me present my friend Wonja as Exhibit W of what can happen when a love potion goes wrong.

Wonja wasn't a great beauty. Whatever. How many women are great beauties? Though, to be honest, to say she wasn't a great beauty is one stinky heap of an understatement: her husband, Bulu, actually laughed out loud when his parents first suggested her as a wife. "Me, marry that ugly thing?" he said. "Why don't you just wed me to a bamboo pole?"

And who could blame him for saying that? With her thin legs and flat belly, small buttocks and pointy cheekbones, Wonja was not pretty enough to make any man proud, certainly not a man like her husband, who had the finest mango-shaped head our village had ever seen. "I'll find a wife for myself when I'm ready," he insisted to his parents, who apparently didn't care about his opinion, because two months later he woke up to find them at his door, with Wonja standing between them.

"We've paid the bride-price," they said as they hurried away.

"But Mama, Papa . . ." he cried.

Wonja remained on his doorstep, smiling like someone who had stumbled into a dream in which an everlasting banquet had been prepared for her. And why wouldn't she be happy? No man had ever knocked on her parents' door asking to marry her. No one had even given her a chance to prove herself worthy of a husband, and now here she was, with

the high honor of being called a wife.

You want me to explain why no man had yet chosen Wonja to be his wife? So, my description of her physical deficiencies does not suffice, eh? I applaud you for your cynicism—you're right. Despite all the jokes we made about Wonja being as pretty as a sun-dried cornstalk, her looks clearly weren't the sole reason for her suffering. Love is a funny thing, you know. For many people, it's like a tree. There are trees all around you. You can choose whichever one you fancy, sit in its shade, enjoy its fruits. But for certain people, like my friend Wonja, love is more like a rainbow. The circumstances have to be perfect for it to appear. And if it appears while you're napping, or you're out of the village visiting a cousin, you may never see it again, and then you'll be forced to spend the rest of your life chasing rainbows.

Folks who don't have my level of intelligence will try to convince you that Wonja's lack of comeliness was her demise. It wasn't. I don't have enough fingers and toes to count all the women I've known in my life who had one deficiency or another and still found husbands. Just last month, Timbi, who has teeth like shards of broken rocks, moved into the home of her new husband. And Ifinda, who is more muscular than three hunters combined, has been married and happy for ten years, though, if you ask me, her marriage has lasted this long because her husband looks at those muscular arms and says to himself, "I'd better treat this woman right, or else she'll beat all the food she just fed me right out of my belly."

And, speaking of food, I just remembered how much Wonja loved food when we were children. I still recall all the times I passed in front of her house as she sat on the veranda, destroying a bowl of pounded yams and soup. Thin as she was back then, everyone was certain she'd grow up to be nice and round. But, for some unknown reason, she just wouldn't get fat.

One after another, her friends were plucked from their parents' huts as soon as their bodies had fully ripened. By the time Wonja was nineteen, there were only three girls of her age in the entire village who hadn't yet found a husband. One of them was completely to blame



"If our posts make even one person feel left out, then this party is worth it."

for her misfortune: this girl was an only child and thought she deserved the moon and the stars, because her mother, who was also an only child, had doted on her and made her believe that few men in the world were worthy of her. With her nose in the air, the girl turned down a farmer because his farm was too far out in the forest and she didn't want to have to wait so *long* every day for her husband to trek home with food. She turned down a fisherman from a neighboring village because, she said, he smelled like fish. O.K., help me understand this one: the man spends his days with fish—what does she expect him to smell like? Honey and sunflowers?

Oh, the hearts of women. If only my friend Wonja had such a problem.

I remember evenings I spent chatting with Wonja, when we were both in our mid-twenties, dissecting the intricacies of our days. While Wonja sat with me on the veranda, I could hear

my wife singing a happy song to herself as she cooked in the kitchen. She had no reason to fear that Wonja would try to steal me; none of the young wives in the village felt threatened by Wonja.

Some evenings, we'd be joined by other friends, both male and female, everyone married with children, some complaining about one spousal headache or another, and Wonja's eyes would fill with tears. If only she had someone to have a marital squabble with!

Wonja did come close to true love once, when we were twenty-four.

In the dry season of that year, she and her mother had travelled to a town on the other side of the country, to visit Wonja's brother, who was working at a banana plantation. When she returned from that visit, Wonja couldn't stop talking about a young man she'd met, her brother's fellow-laborer. She regaled us with stories of this man: how he had smiled at her in a special way every time they encountered each other in the la-

borers' camp; how he really did love her—he was just shy and didn't know how to approach her.

We looked at one another in disbelief. Was that even a thing, that a man could be too shy to tell a woman he was interested in her? It was all too dubious even for the most gullible of us. It seemed more likely that, in her desperation, she had seen an interest that wasn't there. We didn't want to hurt her, so we told her that we hoped the man would soon get over his shyness and come to see her parents. That man never did, but other men came—for Wonja's three sisters.

The day the last of her sisters got married, Wonja could not hold it in anymore.

Surveying all the guests gathered in her family's compound to dance and fête her youngest sister and her new husband, Wonja burst into tears. Two of her aunts had to rush her into the hut so she would not disrupt the wedding and bring disgrace to her family with her cries of "Why couldn't this happen to me, too? Am I the worst thing ever to walk the earth?"

She wasn't. She had her share of attributes. She was a good cook, with a lovely singing voice and a melodious laugh. She wasn't afraid of hard work—Wonja could go to the farm and work through thunderstorms and lightning, return home, and cook dinner for her family, all without a single complaint. When her father became too old to climb to the roof and patch a hole, she got on a ladder and did it. If there was anyone in the village in need of assistance, she was there to help. Young men seeking trophies with fleshy bottoms may have ignored these qualities, but Bulu's parents, after years of observing Wonja, knew that their son could find no better wife.

Every year after Wonja turned twenty-five, her parents had lowered their standards. First, they told everyone that they were willing to give her away to any man who was able to pay the minimum bride-price. Then they said they'd take half of the minimum bride-price. Finally, they flung their hands in the air and said they'd give her away for eighty per cent off the minimum price, and they wouldn't require the groom's family to pay for any sort of wedding. Like prudent parents the

world over, they had to do whatever was necessary to get their daughter out of their hut before her womb shrivelled up and became useless.

When Bulu's parents came to see them to discuss taking Wonja off their hands—after doing their own share of waiting for Bulu to find a wife—Wonja's parents cried for joy. "Our shame has been taken away," they sang for weeks after the bride-price had been settled. The entire village joined them in celebrating, for none of us wanted to endure for one more day the sight of a woman growing old in her parents' hut.

A week after Wonja moved into Bulu's hut, I saw her as she was walking to the well to fetch water. "Eh, Wonja," I said to her, excited. "Tell me everything about the life of a happily married woman." Tears immediately filled her eyes. In that moment, I cursed my fat mouth and wished it had come with a lid. "Oh, Wonja," I said. "My marriage also makes me want to cry sometimes, but what can one do?" My attempt to make her laugh only made her sadder and she hurried on her way.

That was all it took for me to realize that, while we were celebrating her marriage, Wonja was spending her days in misery.

There was only one possible reason for this: Bulu could not, would not, love her.

News began circling the village about all that Wonja was doing to make Bulu love her. One of our friends told me that, on the day that Wonja arrived in Bulu's hut—after he had stormed away in anger at his parents' dumping Wonja on him—she immediately went to work, opening the windows to air out the space, dusting the furniture, sweeping, laundering his clothes, ironing them. She then cooked four different meals for him, and put them in the pretty bowls with which her mother had sent her off to her marital home; wise woman that her mother was, she knew that a meal was only as good as the bowl in which it was placed, and Wonja, with her limited assets, would need all the pretty bowls in the world.

And what did Bulu do when he returned home that night? What do you think he said to his new wife, when he saw that she had cleaned his house,

laundered and ironed his clothes, and cooked him a lavish dinner?

He glared at her sitting in the parlor, said not a word, and went to bed.

Weeks later, when I asked Wonja if the account was true, she did not deny it. Nor did she contradict a story another friend told me. According to this friend, Wonja, seeing that Bulu wouldn't take the initiative to touch her, had gone to bed naked one night while he was out with his friends. She was hoping that, when he returned and got into bed next to a naked body, he would have no choice but to do what a man is wont to do in such a situation. But when he arrived and slipped into bed next to her, she immediately jumped up and barked at her to put on her nightclothes.

Wonja personally confirmed to me that she had gone to her parents for help, but they had merely asked her to be strong, to take it as a woman, because who knew what the next day might bring? Bulu's parents, when Wonja went to them, said the same thing. They knew, as did everyone else in our village, that Bulu, in addition to being uninterested in Wonja's scant physical offering, was struggling to evict from his heart a woman he had once loved, a woman with a perfect gap tooth who lived in the next village. This woman had loved him, too, but their love for each other had been irrelevant to her parents. When it had come time to decide who would marry their daughter, they'd chosen a

of a woman's nakedness, that he had used his former beloved as a ruse to conceal his weakness, but the theory never caught fire, because none of us believed that there was a man on Earth who did not fantasize about undressing a woman several times a day.

Bulu's parents suggested to him woman after woman. He shook his head at all of them. Frustrated, his parents decided to stage a thing we called "caging" back in the day. That is when the parents of an avowed bachelor go to neighboring villages and invite the loveliest marriageable young women to their hut, where they hide them in a bedroom off the parlor. Then they invite their son over for lunch. After their son has eaten and is relaxed and in a pleasant mood, without prelude they open the door to the bedroom. Out come the young women, fancily dressed, their faces prettily painted, their hair coiffed. They line up in front of the bachelor, and the parents announce that the young man will not be leaving the hut until he picks one of the women as his wife.

For Bulu's caging, his parents had found seven young women. Everyone knew what a great farmer he was, and the young women knew that to marry a great farmer was to never go to bed with a growling stomach, and what could be more important in life? So there they all stood in front of Bulu, flashing smiles that said, Pick me, oh, please pick me! Bulu's mother later told her friends that, for what seemed like a whole hour, Bulu just sat there, staring past the women into space. It was as if they were children playing a game of dress-up for his entertainment and he couldn't be bothered. When he finally opened his mouth, it was to tell the women that he was so sorry his parents had wasted their time, and that he hoped they would all have a safe trip back to their villages. He stood up after saying this and walked out of the hut. As far as I know, he is the only man in our area who has ever, as we used to say, broken the cage.

Yes, Bulu's heart was that closed to love.

One evening, a year after Bulu had married Wonja, my friend Kotso, who is also friends with Wonja, arrived for a visit as my wife was setting the table for my dinner. Kotso is the kind



wealthy hunter, a man who'd promised to bring them fresh bushmeat three times a month. What parents could resist trading their daughter for that?

After his beloved married another man, Bulu's heart had closed up. No one understood such stupidity, that a man would turn into pulp just because he'd lost a woman. His friends poked fun at him for his inability to patch his fractured heart. An old gossip in the village started a rumor that he was afraid

of man who has to taste every meal his eyes stumble upon. Most respectable men, when they walk into your hut as you're about to have dinner, will wish you a happy eating and promise to return in an hour or so, after the food has settled in your belly. Not Kotso. It's nobody's fault that his wife is a terrible cook, but, being a man of great kindness, I had to let him partake in my meal. Otherwise I was doomed to spend the entirety of my dinner with two bulging eyes trained on every piece of food that slid down my throat.

It was while we were eating my wife's celebrated corn fufu and okra stew with pig feet that Kotso told me he had finally figured out what was going on with Bulu: his former beloved must have given him a love potion as a way of insuring that their love would flow eternally. Thanks to the potion, his heart could never now belong to another woman.

I will confess that I had also thought this might be the case, but some things that you think—it's best not to say them out loud, though it is wonderful to hear someone else say them. Which was why, the evening Kotso said this to me, I immediately told him that we needed to go to Wonja and tell her about our suspicion.

Kotso did not think it would be wise to go directly to Wonja and cause her further pain with an unfounded theory. He thought it would be best if we got a group of our friends together to discuss her situation and see what we could do for her. We had to recognize, just as our parents and their parents before them had, that the best solution to a problem was often found when many minds came together.

So, on a cool evening, several of us who were born in the same year as Wonja met in the village square to talk about our friend, whose parents were unable to help her, and whose sisters had all married and moved out of the village, leaving her to care for her parents while trying to ingratiate her way into the heart of a man who barely noticed her. Those of us gathered that evening had crawled with Wonja, and toddled with her, and walked with her, and danced naked under the rain with her. Her marriage had brought us joy, and now her marital woes were our collec-

tive headache; whenever we saw her, it took all our force to not let her forlorn face drain us of our bliss. We couldn't let her just lumber through the rest of her life.

We did not wish that she had never married Bulu. We did not wish that she was still in her parents' house, praying that a man, any man, would come for her before certain body parts began to lose their firmness and wrinkles overwhelmed her face. We merely wished her a measure of satisfaction. And we all agreed that that satisfaction would come only if Bulu was free to love her. By the time of the meeting, there was no doubt in any of our minds that Bulu's former beloved had given him a love potion. We could find no other explanation for the prison in which he was living. Wonja would have to set him free.

The next day, on a similarly cool evening, we met again in the village square.

This time we invited Wonja to join us. I spoke for the group. I told her that there could be no rationalization for Bulu's behavior except that he was in thrall to a love potion. She could accept him as he was, I said, but the whole idea of a marriage was to alter the other person, to make your spouse better for your own good. The rest of our friends nodded as I said this—we'd all spent considerable lengths of time molding our wives and husbands into people

But if she refused to heed our counsel she might very well spend the rest of her life regretting that decision, and she wouldn't want that, would she?

She shook her head.

She knew that she had no choice but to go and see a fetish priest and seek out an antidote.

Eight days later, one of our friends went with her to see a fetish priest three villages away. The man had come highly recommended because his potions were so powerful that an impotence remedy he once made for a client had caused the client's wife to have three sets of twins in four years.

The fetish priest listened to all that Wonja had to say about Bulu, nodding in understanding at her pain and disappointment. When Wonja was done talking, he told her how sorry he was for her suffering, but he cautioned her against using an antidote to destroy the power of the love potion, if indeed there was a love potion.

He said that if the antidote was administered improperly, say on a night when the moon appeared full but wasn't really full, madness might ensue. The best thing to do now, the priest told her, was to wait and hope that, in due time, her husband would excrete the love potion in his system.

But how long could the woman wait? Some say that love potions can stay in a body for years, decades even, and, in a few cases, for a lifetime.

Wonja agonized.

"I can't do it," she said, when I pressed her to get the opinion of another fetish priest. She argued that it was all too risky. "So, you want to spend the rest of your life loveless," I said. She sighed deeply. Fifteen months into her marriage and she had scored no victory.

So she went to see another fetish priest—a fast-talking one four villages away. This time she went alone, not wanting to be influenced by us.

I don't have the full story of what happened with this new fetish priest, but we later found out that the man gave her a love potion, not an antidote. Worse still, he forgot to remind her that the potion should be administered only on a night when the moon was absolutely full. Which was why, in her eagerness, on a night when the moon merely appeared full, Wonja put three



who would bring us the utmost amount of happiness and cause us the least amount of pain.

I told Wonja that she needed to go and see a fetish priest to make an antidote for the love potion. I assured her that one of us would accompany her. From our barnyards, we would give her the animals she would need to offer to the fetish priest. I told her that we would understand if she refused to follow our advice, the endeavor not being risk-free.

drops of the potion into Bulu's dinner of smoked-bushmeat stew.

What do you think happened to her the next day?

Madness. Of course.

First, she started walking around the village talking to herself. Then, one morning, we found her sleeping under the mango tree. Before long, she had permanently moved out of Bulu's hut and made the shade of the mango tree her new home.

I'll spare you the details of what she looks like today. Suffice it to say, she now spends her days walking around the village singing, mournfully, "All I wanted was love, all I ever wanted was to know how it feels to be loved." She sings it softly, she sings it loud, she dances alone.

My poor, poor friend.

Some days I avoid passing by the mango tree so that I don't have to see her.

It just . . . my heart cannot bear the sight.

Well, I hope you don't blame me for telling you this story. You asked for it. We could have ended the conversation with how to procure a love potion, but you wanted to know the worst that could happen, and now you know it.

But take heart, my dear friend. What happened to Wonja was an absolute anomaly.

Do you think I would be giving you this advice if I thought you'd become insane? I'd never do such a thing to you. Love potions are the only known panacea for desiring hearts, and broken hearts, and all kinds of hearts in need of healing. If I'm telling you to go and steal a love potion from your village fetish priest, if I'm asking you to risk being caught and given forty lashes of the *koboko* on your bare buttocks by your village head in your village square, with the entire village watching as you cry out for your mama and your papa and all your ancestors to come to your rescue, it's because I know, I am wholly convinced, that a love potion is the best solution.

Young people today—you don't know very much, sadly.

You walk around and you see married people happy together, sitting on



"I meant I was open metaphorically, to new ideas and experiences."

their verandas in the evening and watching their children play as the light starts to fade. You look at such couples and you think, Oh, how lucky for them—they found the right person and everything fell into place beautifully and now they're enjoying matrimony. Rubbish. Unqualified rubbish. Love comes at a cost to everyone—don't ever forget that.

Yes, there are the lovers for whom fate conspired to bring bliss, but more married people than you can imagine had to steal and lie and claw their way to undying love.

Do you know Mama Gita, who lives near the well in your village? Of course you know her, you're friends with some of her grandchildren. I saw you at the funeral of Mama Gita's husband, Papa Ikolo, last month. I was sitting with a friend who wouldn't stop talking about what an exemplary woman Mama Gita was—how she had given her husband eight children and thirty grandchildren, what a wonderful marriage she and Papa Ikolo had had, how Papa Ikolo must truly be resting in peace now because Mama Gita had given him such

a good life. I had to sit there and listen with my tongue held down firmly between my teeth, because few people know what I know, that everything Mama Gita has today she got because of a love potion.

Oh, you're shocked to hear that.

Well, hold yourself tight, because by the time I'm done telling you this story you won't know what to think of that sweet old woman anymore.

It happened when I was a child. It was such a big story in your village and the surrounding villages that it was all people talked about new moon after new moon.

When Gita was about eighteen, she and her cousin Titi went to a wedding. Weddings in those days were quite like they are today—everyone who has any blood relation or acquaintance with any member of the bride's or the groom's extended family attends, some because they care about the bride or the groom, but many because they can't turn down an opportunity to eat a lot and drink a lot and dance all night under the stars. And, of course, is there a better place

for young women to display their wares and compete for the attention of young men in search of wives?

So Gita and her cousin, best friends that they were, sat with the multitude at the compound of the bride's family, cheering and clapping when the two families came to an agreement on the bride-price. The cousins stood up and danced with the other guests when the bride was ushered out of her hut and presented to the groom, who lifted her veil and promised to take her back to his hut and do all that he could to protect her.

As Gita and her cousin were dancing in celebration, raising up dust with their feet as the drummers banged harder and the choir sang louder, a fine-looking young man watched them in amusement. Through the merry crowd, Gita saw the man walking toward her and her heart stopped. He was smiling with bright eyes, his whitish teeth exposed, as he neared her. The man kept beaming as he walked right past her, to her cousin Titi.

Titi's back was turned to the stranger, so you can imagine her delightful shock when he appeared in front of her and asked her what her name was. Gita

jumped in between them. "You mean my name," she said to the man, batting her eyelashes, as if a man ever chose one woman over another because of the speed with which she could blink. The man shook his head. "No, I mean this lovely lady right here," he said, gesturing to Titi. All Gita could do was pray that her cousin would ignore the man, or say something typical of girls who like to play games, something like "What do you want to know my name for?" But Titi didn't—how many girls would do such a thing to a young man whose arms and legs were as thick as the branches of an iroko tree?

Titi giggled and said her name, and the next day the young man was visiting her in her village. He was there the day after, too, and the day after that. Each time, Gita watched from the other side of the family compound as her cousin basked under the adoring gaze of a man who would have been hers if he hadn't, for whatever senseless reason, walked up to the wrong cousin.

Even when I was a teen-ager, women peeling peanuts and gossiping on verandas were still concocting and embellishing stories about the lengths to

which Gita had gone to steal from her cousin a man she believed was rightfully hers. Some said that she once trekked to the man's farm, deep in the forest, and offered to help him weed around his yams and pumpkins, but he merely smiled and told her no, thanks, he would rather do it alone. Others said that she tried to break up her cousin's relationship by telling Titi that her beloved had at least two other women he was planning to marry. There was even a story about how Gita once stayed in bed for two days with a high fever, a case of lovesickness—but many disputed that rumor, saying that she was indeed sick.

What no one disputed was that, as Titi's wedding date approached, Gita, sensing that she had lost her battle, became the loving and supportive cousin and best friend she'd once been. Five weeks before the wedding date, she went with Titi to the dressmaker and giggled with her cousin about the wondrous day ahead: the chickens and goats and pigs that the menfolk would slaughter on the eve of the wedding; the womenfolk who would gather in the compound before sunrise to sing and dance as they prepared goat stew and fried ripe plantains and grilled pork shoulders; all the choirs that would be hired to sing, one after the other, until the celebrants could dance no more; and all the happiness that awaited Titi on the other side of her wedding day.

Except that Titi would have no wedding day.

Nine days before the highly anticipated date, Ikolo's parents went to Titi's parents to say that they didn't know how to explain it—this was as difficult for them as it would be for Titi and her family—but there was nothing they could do about it: Ikolo wanted to call off the wedding. He no longer believed that Titi was the right woman for him.

How Titi cried.

She and Gita went to Ikolo's village and Titi flung herself at Ikolo, asking him to look into her eyes and tell her what she had done wrong. A crowd gathered around as Ikolo repeated over and over again that he was sorry, truly sorry, but he couldn't marry a woman he no longer loved. Why did he no lon-



ger love her? Titi wanted to know. Ikolo couldn't say. "Open your mouth and tell her the truth," many women in the crowd shouted at Ikolo, women who clearly had also been wronged by men and perhaps hoped that Ikolo's answer would be a balm for the multiple scars that remained in their hearts. Even Ikolo's parents joined the crowd to exhort their son to tell Titi the reason for his change of heart. Sensible parents, they hoped that, if they couldn't get a response from their son, then a bit of public shaming might do the trick.

It didn't work.

Titi went back to her village crying, her cousin's arms wrapped around her in comfort.

So how is it that a mere four months later Ikolo's parents showed up at Gita's parents' hut to say that Ikolo wanted to marry Gita?

Oh, the pain that Gita caused her extended family for the sake of a man.

It hasn't healed to this day. Titi's father died without ever again speaking to his brother, Gita's father. He couldn't understand why his brother would let Ikolo into the family after he had disgraced the entire extended family by dumping Titi for no reason.

But what was Gita's father to do? He had five daughters to marry off; he couldn't be too choosy about their potential husbands, lest he wake up one day and find himself with a household of husbandless women.

Few people attended Gita's wedding to Ikolo.

I was there with my mother, because my mother was one of those people who could never turn down a chance to party, even if the occasion to do so was one of the most dishonorable in recent history. I recall how much food was left over.

Even before the wedding, rumors had begun circulating about how Gita had paid a visit to a fetish priest. I was ten years old when this happened and I still remember asking myself why Gita was so determined to steal a man from her cousin, a cousin with whom she had crawled, learned how to walk, and laughed and cried. I cannot tell you why. All I can suppose is that Gita truly believed that Ikolo had made the worst mistake of his life the day he walked past her and up to Titi. A mistake that

Gita convinced herself she had to rectify for the good of all involved.

The chatter about Gita's visit to a fetish priest did not abate after the wedding.

No one knew whom she had gone to, but you would have been a fool to argue that a fetish priest wasn't involved in the drama. A man with his senses unimpaired does not decide to end his engagement for no good reason and then marry another woman in a matter of months. A clearheaded man does not give up his hut and move to his wife's village, which was what Ikolo did the week after his wedding to Gita. His entire family had tried to stop him from doing that, reminding him that a man marries a woman and not vice versa, meaning that Gita was the one who needed to leave her village, but Ikolo would not listen to reason.

Once he and Gita had moved into a hut that had been left behind by a deceased relative on Gita's mother's side of the family, reports began surfacing about how Ikolo could be seen every morning sweeping the hut, an abomination if ever there was one. Apparently, the potion that Gita had given him was so strong that Ikolo laundered Gita's clothes for her, and ironed them, and even stayed in the kitchen with her to help her as she prepared their dinner. He'd evidently lost such a huge chunk of his brain that he was unable to just relax on his veranda in the evenings, like any respectable man, enjoying a cup of palm wine while his wife did what wives ought to do.

Everyone hoped that Ikolo would be free from Gita's chains by the time the next rainy season came. But the rains came and went, bringing along a healthy firstborn child and leaving their marriage intact. Wherever one turned in the village, there they were—smiling and delighting in each other as much as they had on the day of their sparsely attended wedding. Many evenings, after dinner, passersby could see them sitting on their veranda, often holding hands, or Ikolo minding the baby, doing it so casually that it seemed the most ordinary thing that had ever happened under the sun.

A second child arrived for them, and happily they carried on.

Years came and went; whatever love

potion was in Ikolo's body stayed put. Soon everyone forgot about what Gita had done to Titi, who married someone else and didn't utter a good or a bad word about her cousin for the rest of her life. People forgot that a love potion was the foundation of the happiness that flowed from Gita and Ikolo's hut because, love potion or not, humans are drawn to happiness, and they all wanted a piece of Gita and Ikolo's joy.

So it was that Gita and Ikolo became the most popular couple in the village, folks stopping by at all hours to chat and laugh in the home that a love potion had built.

You saw it for yourself, didn't you? Even after having eight children and multitudes of grandchildren, even after their backs were hunched and their teeth all gone, Gita and Ikolo still held hands as they sat on their veranda, surrounded by their happy clan.

So, if I'm advising you to do something uncommon, my dear friend, it's because I want you to know such uncommon bliss. I'll say it again—there are many who have found their beloveds without the help of love potions, and I am one of those, but you don't have the skills I have, because if you did, would you now find yourself in this position of unrequited love?

Yes, I'm as exasperated as you are by this game of love.

Happy as I am in my own home, I still go to bed some nights thinking about Wonja. I wonder if we were wrong to have steered her toward taking action to win Bulu's heart. But what else could she have done? How else could she have found love? She could have given Bulu the moon and the stars and he still wouldn't have loved her. And to think that, less than three months after she went mad, Bulu was healed and promptly found himself a new wife, a woman who was nowhere near as wonderful as Wonja.

Now they happily prance around the village with their children, while Wonja wanders with matted hair and raggedy clothes, singing, "All I wanted was love, all I ever wanted was to know how it feels to be loved." ♦

THE CRITICS



BOOKS

ORIGINAL SINNER

Graham Greene's dark heart.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

“**T**he first thing I remember is sitting in a pram at the top of a hill with a dead dog lying at my feet.” So opens an early chapter of a memoir by Graham Greene, who is viewed by some—including Richard Greene (no relation), the author of a new biography of Graham, “The Unquiet Englishman” (Norton)—as one of the most important British novelists of his already extraordinary generation. (It included George Orwell, Evelyn Waugh, Anthony Powell, Elizabeth Bowen.) The dog, Graham’s sister’s pug, had just been run over, and the nanny couldn’t think of how to get the carcass home other than to stow it in the carriage with the baby. If that doesn’t suffice to set the tone for the rather lurid events of Greene’s life, one need only turn the page, to find him, at five or so, watching a man run into a local almshouse to slit his own throat. Around that time, Greene taught himself to read, and he always remembered the cover illustration of the first book to which he gained admission. It showed, he said, “a boy, bound and gagged, dangling at the end of a rope inside a well with water rising above his waist.”

Greene was born in 1904, the fourth of six children. His family was comfortable and, by and large, accomplished. An older brother, Raymond, grew up to be an important endocrinologist; a younger brother, Hugh, became the director-general of the BBC; the youngest child, Elisabeth, went to work for M.I.6, England’s foreign-

intelligence operation. As was usual with prosperous people of that period, the children were raised by servants, but they were brought downstairs to play with their mother every day for an hour after tea.

The family lived in Berkhamsted, a small, pleasant satellite town of London. It had a respectable boys’ school, of which Greene’s father was the headmaster. Greene was sent there at age seven, and thanks to his position as the director’s son he was relentlessly persecuted by his classmates. They then suspected him of telling on them to his father and therefore, it seems, went after him harder.

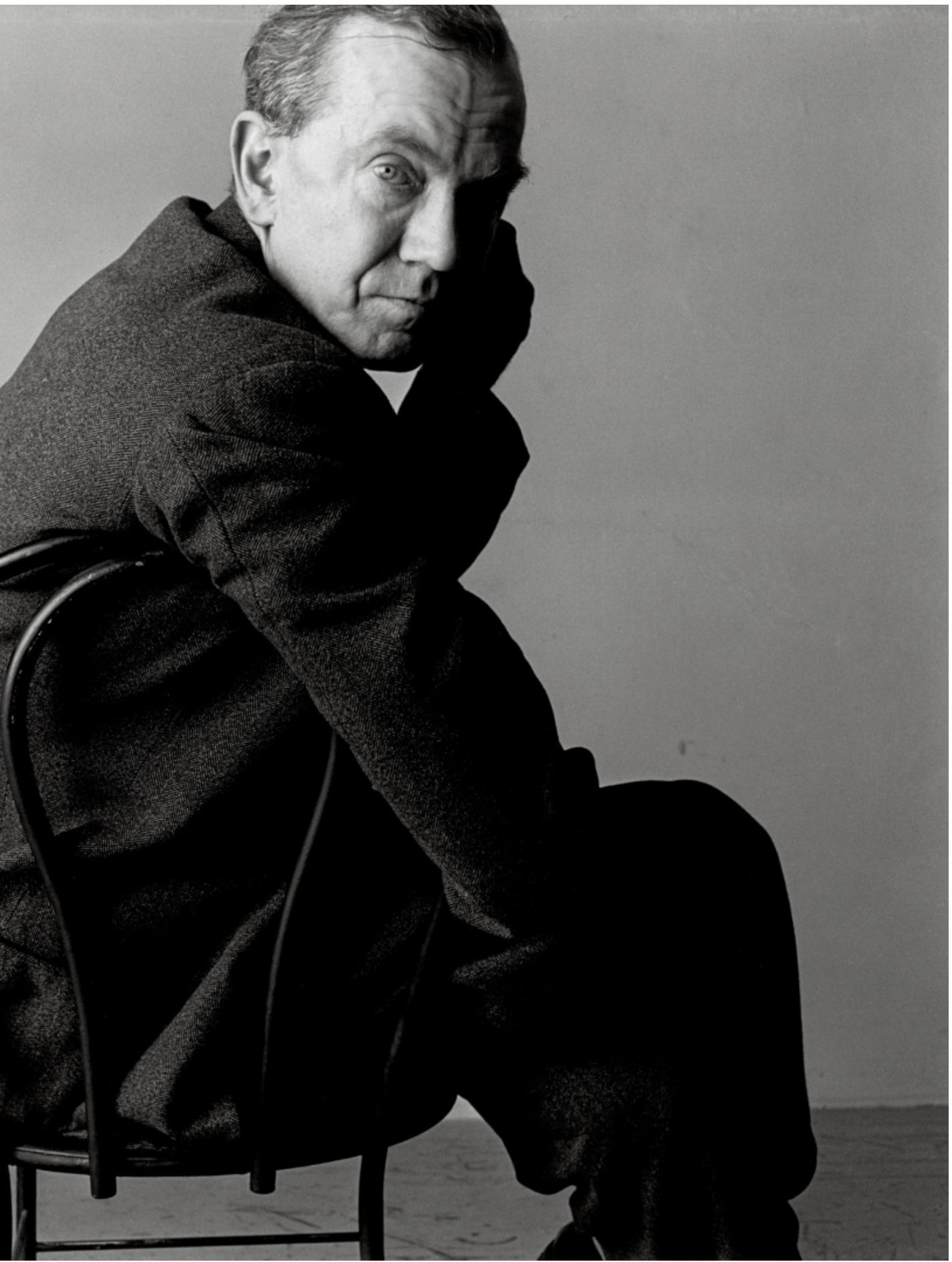
As an adolescent, he began attempting suicide—or seeming to—always with almost comic ineptness. Once, according to his mother, he tried to kill himself by ingesting eye drops. He also appears to have experimented, at different times, with allergy drops, deadly nightshade, and fistfuls of aspirin. Most often remarked on was his fondness for Russian roulette, although his brother Raymond, whose gun he borrowed on these occasions, said there were no bullets in the cabinet where the weapon was kept. Greene must have been shooting with empty chambers.

When he was in high school, his parents sent him to his first psychotherapist. Others followed. Eventually, he was declared to be suffering from manic depression, or bipolar disorder, as it is now called, and the diagnosis stuck. But the scientific-sounding label makes it easy to overlook other factors

Greene in 1950. Embarrassed by his success, he strove for seriousness.

© THE IRVING PENN FOUNDATION; ABOVE: TAMARA SHOPSIN





that might have been at work. Greene once recalled to his friend Evelyn Waugh that, at university (Balliol College, Oxford), he had spent much of his time in a “general haze of drink.” In his writing years, he often lived on a regimen of Benzedrine in the morning, to wake himself up, and Nembutal at night, to put himself to sleep, supplemented with great vats of alcohol and, depending on what country he was in, other drugs as well. On his many trips to Vietnam, he smoked opium almost daily—sometimes as many as eight pipes a day. That’s a lot.

The essential point about the manic-depressive diagnosis, however, is that Greene accepted it—indeed, saw it as key to his personality and his work. Richard Greene writes that his biography is intended, in part, as a corrective to prior biographers’ excessive interest in the novelist’s sex life. But, considering how much time and energy Graham Greene put into his sex life, one wonders how any biographer could look the other way for long. Greene got married when he was twenty-three, to a devout Catholic woman, Vivien Dayrell-Browning, and he stayed married to her until he died, in 1991, but only because Vivien, for religious reasons, would not give him a divorce. After about ten years, the marriage was effectively over, and he spent the remainder of his life hav-

ing protracted, passionate affairs, plus, tucked into those main events, shorter adventures, not to mention many afternoons with prostitutes. Richard Greene, despite his objections to biographical prurience, does give us some piquant details. Of Graham and one of his mistresses, he writes, “This relationship was reckless and exuberant, involving on one occasion intercourse in the first-class carriage of a train from Southend, observable to those on each platform where the train stopped.”

Meanwhile, when Greene felt he had to explain such matters to his wife, he summoned his bipolar disorder. As he wrote to her:

The fact that has to be faced, dear, is that by my nature, my selfishness, even in some degree my profession, I should always, & with anyone, have been a bad husband. I think, you see, my restlessness, moods, melancholia, even my outside relationships, are symptoms of a disease & not the disease itself, & the disease, which has been going on ever since my childhood & was only temporarily alleviated by psychoanalysis, lies in a character profoundly antagonistic to ordinary domestic life.

So, you see, it wasn’t his fault.

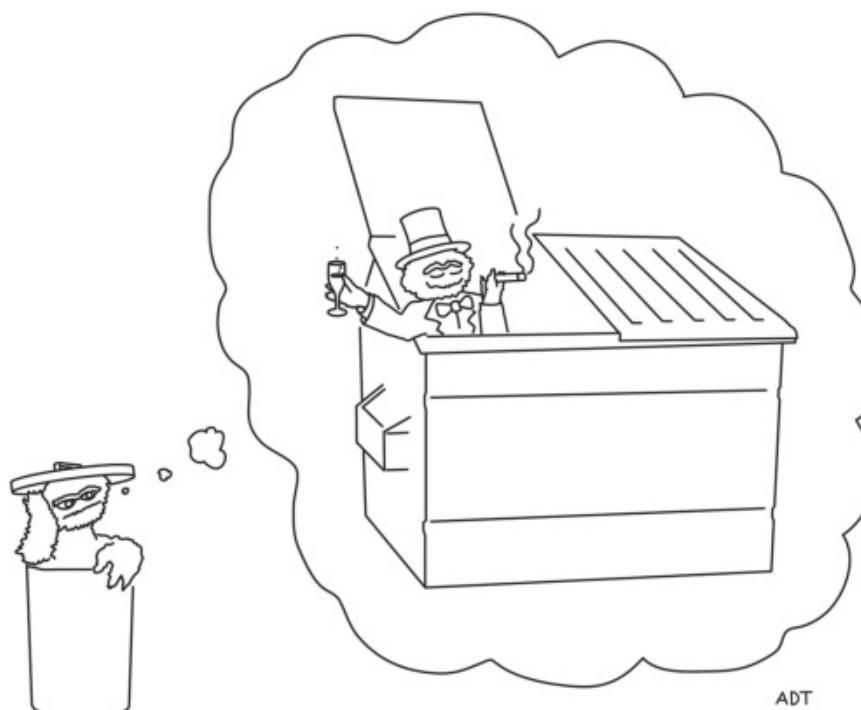
Greene did not, of course, feel like sticking around to dry Vivien’s tears or help raise the son and daughter they had had together. (He didn’t like children; he found them noisy.) So he took an apartment of his own, and Vivien stayed home, carving doll-house furni-

ture. In time, she became a great expert on doll houses, and established a private museum for her collection.

What Greene wanted to do with his life was write novels, and, after a rocky start, he turned them out regularly, at least twenty-four (depending on how you count them) in six decades. He also did a fantastic amount of journalism, mostly for *The Spectator*. Richard Greene estimates that, in time, Graham wrote about five hundred book reviews and six hundred movie reviews. One of the latter created his first little scandal. Of Twentieth Century Fox’s “Wee Willie Winkie” (1937), starring Shirley Temple, he said that Temple, with her high-on-the-thigh dresses and “well-developed rump,” was basically being pimped out by Fox to lonely middle-aged gentlemen in the cinema audience. Fox promptly sued and was awarded thirty-five hundred pounds in damages. Ever after, Greene was known to part of his audience as a dirty-minded man. (Not to Temple, though. In her 1988 memoir, she treated the whole thing as a tempest in a teapot. She also made it clear that, at the movie studios, child actors were indeed subject to unwelcome attentions.)

In Richard Greene’s telling, Graham’s bipolar disorder afflicted him not just, or even mostly, with overexcitement and depression but above all with a terrible boredom, which he could alleviate only by constant thrill-seeking. That’s what caused him to play with guns; that’s what made him get into fights and defame Shirley Temple; that’s what sent him to bed with every other woman he came across.

Finally, and crucially, this tedium is what made him spend much of his life outside England, not just away from home—from roasts and Bovril and damp woollens—but in the distant, hot, poor, war-torn countries whose efforts to throw off colonial rule formed so large and painful a part of twentieth-century history. He went to West Africa (Liberia, Sierra Leone), Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, and Mexico. He spent years, on and off, in Central America. And he saw what the locals saw; at times, he experienced what they did. Bullets whizzed past his head. In Malaia, he had to have leeches pried off



his neck. In Liberia, he was warned that he might contract any of a large number of diseases, which Richard Greene catalogues with a nasty glee: “Yaws, malaria, hookworm, schistosomiasis, dysentery, lassa fever, yellow fever, or an especially cruel thing, the Guinea worm, which grows under the skin and must be gradually spooled out onto a stick or pencil—if it breaks in the process, the remnant may mortify inside the host, causing infection or death.” Unwilling to miss the Mau Mau rebellion, Graham Greene spent four weeks in Kenya. In Congo, he stayed at a leper colony, where he saw a man with thighs like tree trunks, and one with testes the size of footballs.

How, and why, did he end up in these places? Very often, he had an assignment from a newspaper or a magazine. As a sideline, he also did some information-gathering for M.I.6. (Nothing serious—he might merely send back a report on which political faction was gaining power and who the leader was.) Basically, any time an organization needed someone to go, expenses paid, to a country that had crocodiles, he was interested. He was collecting material for his novels, most of which would be set in these faraway places.

Greene got out of town in another way as well. The family he was born into was Anglican, but they didn’t make a fuss about it. As he told it, he had a vision of God on a croquet lawn around the age of seventeen, but he let this pass until four years later, when he fell in love with Vivien, a Catholic who wasn’t at all sure she wanted to marry him, what with his being a Protestant and also, as he seemed to her, a rather strange person.

Leaving a note in the collection box at a nearby Catholic church, he asked for religious instruction, and was assigned to one Father George Trollope, whom he liked, as he wrote to Vivien, for “his careful avoidance of the slightest emotion or sentiment in his instruction.” Some might have taken the wording of that endorsement as a bad sign, but what Greene wanted, apart from Vivien, was just, as he told her, “something firm & hard & certain, however uncomfortable, to catch hold of in the general flux.”

So did others. There was a minor fashion for conversion to Catholicism among British artists and intellectuals in the years between the two world wars. Evelyn Waugh converted around the same time as Greene. (Later, Edith Sitwell and Muriel Spark also “popped.”) This was part of the backwash from the rising secularism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. After the Second World War, the Catholic Church would provide a suitably august arena for the transition to another sort of religion: doubt, anxiety, existentialism.

Greene didn’t wait for that. He converted when he was twenty-two, and was observant for a few years. As he pulled away from Vivien, though, he also let go of the things he had acquired with her, for her—above all, religious practice. Later, he said that after he saw a dead woman lying in a ditch, with her dead baby by her side, in North Vietnam, in 1951, he did not take Communion again for thirty years. But neither, ever, did he achieve a confident atheism. “Many of us,” he said, “abandon Confession and Communion to join the Foreign Legion of the Church and fight for a city of which we are no longer full citizens.”

Although Greene may have turned A religion down to a low simmer in his life, in his novels he raised it to a rolling boil. In “Brighton Rock” (1938), his first big hit, the hero is a seventeen-year-old hoodlum named Pinkie. (Wonderful name, so wrong.) Pinkie would be an ordinary little sociopath were it not for the fact that he is a Roman Catholic, and obsessed by sin. Again and again, he recalls the noise that, as a child, he heard across the room every Saturday night, when his parents engaged in their weekly sex act. Pinkie forces himself to marry a naïve girl, Rose, because she is a potential witness in a murder that he has engineered. The wedding night—and, for that matter, most of what takes place between Pinkie and Rose—is pretty awful, as is much else in the novel, once it gets going. Actually, the book raises our neck hair in the opening sentence: “Hall knew, before he had been in Brighton three hours, that they meant to murder him.” At that

point, we don’t even know who Hall is.

“They” are the gang of thugs that Pinkie leads, and before the day is out they do indeed eliminate Hall, after which they kill several other people. This violence is mixed with sex, in a hot stew, which Greene makes more repellent with the setting of Brighton—a tacky seaside resort, full of weekend pleasure-seekers down from London, shooting ducks and throwing candy wrappers on the pavement. In Greene’s Brighton, even the sky is dirty: “The huge darkness pressed a wet mouth against the panes.” Sin ultimately crushes Pinkie, and, we are led to assume, Rose, too. As Greene himself pointed out, he was, if not a good Catholic, at least a good Gnostic, a person who believed that good and evil were equal powers, warring against each other.

But the book that fixed him in the public mind as a Catholic writer, “The Power and the Glory,” came two years later. Its unnamed hero is a Mexican “whisky priest” in hiding in the south of the country in the nineteen-thirties, during a Marxist campaign against the Roman Catholic Church. There is no end, almost, to the horrors the priest endures—heat, hunger, D.T.s. He finds dead babies, their eyes rolled back in their heads. Eventually, he is arrested and put in prison, among a close, dark, sweaty mob, including a couple fornicating loudly in a corner. You are sure he will survive, this holy man. He doesn’t. You don’t so much read this book as suffer it, climb it, like Calvary.

Greene’s procedure—marrying torments of the soul to frenzies of the flesh—reaches a kind of apogee in “The End of the Affair” (1951). Maurice Bendrix, a novelist, is consumed with rage over the fact that his lover, Sarah, has left him, and he hires a private detective to find out whom she chose over him. On and on, in fevered remembrance, he calls up details of their love affair: the time they had sex on the parquet in her parlor, while her husband was nursing a cold upstairs; the secret words they had (“onions” was their code name for sex); the secret signs. But eventually, after Sarah dies, Bendrix discovers that the new lover she left him for was God, at which point the novel goes from steamy to blasphemous. “I hate

You," Bendrix tells God. "I hate You as though You existed." Finally, he's reduced to conducting a kind of virility contest with his Maker: "It was I who penetrated her, not You." Ugh.

Some of Greene's colleagues, not to speak of the Church, began to find his combining of religion and sex unseemly. George Orwell delivered a more withering critique. Greene, he wrote, seemed to believe

that there is something rather *distingué* in being damned; Hell is a sort of high-class night club, entry to which is reserved for Catholics only, since the others, the non-Catholics, are too ignorant to be held guilty, like the beasts that perish. We are carefully informed that Catholics are no better than anybody else; they even, perhaps, have a tendency to be worse, since their temptations are greater. . . . But all the while—drunken, lecherous, criminal, or damned outright—the Catholics retain their superiority since they alone know the meaning of good and evil.

This cult of the sanctified sinner, Orwell thought, probably reflected a decline of belief, "for when people really believed in Hell, they were not so fond of striking graceful attitudes on its brink."

Still, plenty of readers found the mix of the spiritual and the carnal rather a thrill. When "The End of the Affair" was published, *Time* put Greene on its cover, with the tagline "Adultery can lead to sainthood."

One readership that found all this good and evil and sex and murder quite alluring was Hollywood. Bad behavior was fun, after all, and Greene's narratives, thanks to those hundreds of films he had reviewed, were already cinematic. Has any novelist been better at plotting than Greene? He can shuttle with ease back and forth among three plotlines at a time, and none of them ever stops charging forward. The suspense is huge. You think, "No, they can't shoot the priest," or "No, Pinkie can't assault Rose from beyond the grave," and, surprise, you're wrong. As for the camera action, the story is often told, or filmed, from separate points of view; big scenes are likely to end in wide shots, and so on.

Of Western "art" novelists, Greene may well be the one whose works have been most often adapted to film. Several of his novels were dramatized not once but twice or three times, and some

of the films are better than the novels. It is hard to read "Brighton Rock" and not see, in your mind's eye, Richard Attenborough, who played Pinkie in the first cinematic version. What a piece of work is man, you think, as you look at Attenborough's beautiful young face. And Pinkie is rotten to the core. This paradox makes both the film and the book more textured, knotted. The book-movie relationship becomes even more interesting in the case of "The Third Man." The book was actually a by-product of the film Greene had agreed to write—something he produced to get a feel for atmosphere before applying himself to the script—and it will never be entirely free of the shadow, both literal and figurative, cast by Orson Welles in his indelible performance as the villain.

The colossal popularity of Greene's more down-market novels and their cinematic adaptations made him rich—for the movie rights to his 1966 novel, "The Comedians," he was paid two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, the equivalent of almost two million today—but, apparently, it also embarrassed him. Like many people of his time, he didn't respect films as much as he did literature. Plus, the film studios wanted changes, big changes. Greene had given novels like "Brighton Rock," "The Power and the Glory," and "The End of the Affair" unforgiving endings, which were true to his view of the world, and the studios made them nicer, more comestible. Sui-

(1955), about the war in Vietnam; "Our Man in Havana" (1958), set in Cuba shortly before Castro's revolution. The fact that both of these were made into wonderful movies, with famous actors—Michael Redgrave in "The Quiet American," Alec Guinness in "Our Man in Havana"—did not, in his mind, make them more legitimate. On the contrary.

His output does not always conform to the hierarchy he imposed on it. There are duds among the serious "novels," while "Our Man in Havana"—a dazzling blend of menace, humor, and resignation—is one of the finest things he ever wrote.

But his greatest achievement, "The Heart of the Matter," is certainly, in his terms, a novel—indeed, a Novel. Published in 1948, between "The Power and the Glory" and "The End of the Affair," it is, like them, tightly underpinned by Roman Catholicism, but it has none of the chest-banging or the tawdriness into which that subject sometimes led Greene. It is a chaste business. Henry Scobie, a dutiful, observant Roman Catholic, works as a deputy police commissioner in a small, quiet, corrupt town in West Africa in the early years of the Second World War. Scobie has a wife, Louise, whom he can't stand and whom, at the same time, he feels sorry for. (They had a daughter, who died when she was nine.) And so, when Louise says that she can't stay in this stupid town one minute longer, he borrows money from a local diamond smuggler—he knows this is going to lead to trouble, but he does it anyway—to send her on vacation in South Africa. While she is away, a French ship is torpedoed off the coast, and Scobie has to go help minister to the survivors. Among them is a nineteen-year-old girl, Helen, newly married, whose husband was killed in the torpedo attack. Helen has no one, nothing. Her sole possession is an album—given to her by her father—containing her stamp collection. She clasps it to her chest. She will speak to no one, until finally she does speak—to Scobie.

Whereupon he falls in love with her, or seems to. In Greene's work, it is hard to tell, when two people go to bed together, whether it is love that took them there, or even desire. It could be pity. As Greene has already told us, that is Scobie's reigning emotion toward his



cides became accidents; terrible cruelties were turned into something not so bad after all.

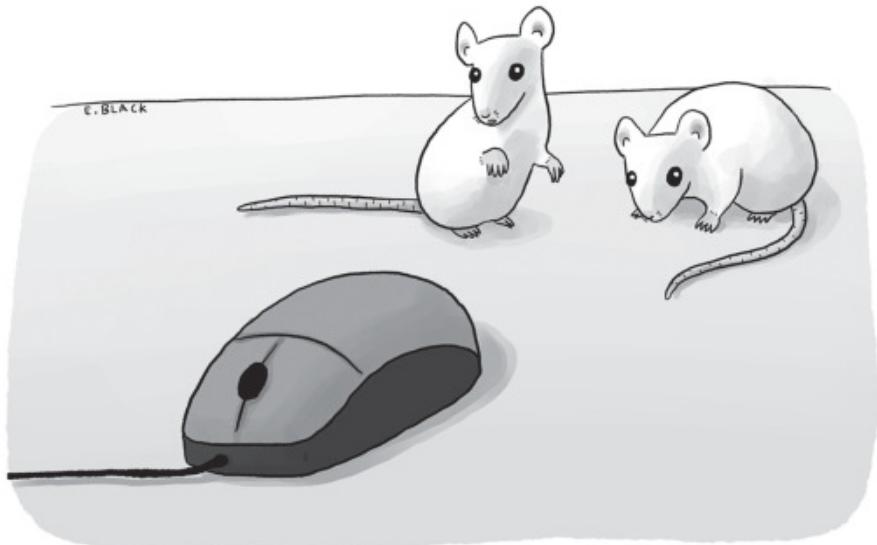
Greene solved his problem—stoop or not?—by claiming that his fiction fell into two categories. There were his "novels," his serious work, and then there were his "entertainments," as he called them—thrillers, comedies, forms he clearly esteemed less. These latter books, he implied, were things that he did in his spare time: "The Quiet American"

wife, and other things as well. Looking at the sky one night while tending to the French refugees, he wonders, if one knew the facts, "would one have to feel pity even for the planets? If one reached what they called the heart of the matter?"

So he enters into an affair with Helen, but soon she is screaming at him that he doesn't love her and is going to leave her, whereupon, of course, Louise returns from her vacation, fully informed by the town gossips as to what Scobie has been up to in her absence. (It's like "Ethan Frome.") Trying to escape from one nagging wife, the hero ends up with two.) He seizes upon a desperate solution: he will fake a heart ailment and then take enough sedatives to kill himself. That way, each of his two women will be free to find a more satisfactory mate. As for him, he will be damned to Hell for all eternity, but he's willing. In the end, it doesn't quite turn out that way. It turns out worse, and that's Greene for you. But in the twentieth century pity was hard to write about. That this dark-hearted man managed to—even that he tried—is surely a jewel in his crown.

"**T**he Unquiet Englishman" is what might be called a Monday-Tuesday biography. On one page, it tells you what Greene did on a certain day in, say, June of 1942. On the next page, it tells you what he did the following day, or three days later. This method surely owes something to the fact that Richard Greene, a professor of English at the University of Toronto, edited a collection of Graham Greene's letters. In other words, he *knew* what Greene did every day, and thought that this was interesting material—as it could have been, had it contributed to a unified analysis of the man. Mostly, however, the book is just a collection of facts. Trips without itineraries, sex without love, jokes without punch lines—we look for the beach, but all we see are the pebbles. Neither are we given much in the way of literary commentary. That is not a capital offense. Many good literary biographers have excused themselves from the task of criticism. But, if we don't get the man or his novels, what do we get?

Graham Greene was an almost eerily disciplined writer. He could write in the middle of wars, the Mau Mau



"Mark my words—someday all the chewing up paper bags and pooping on stovetops will be done by those things, and we'll all be out of jobs."

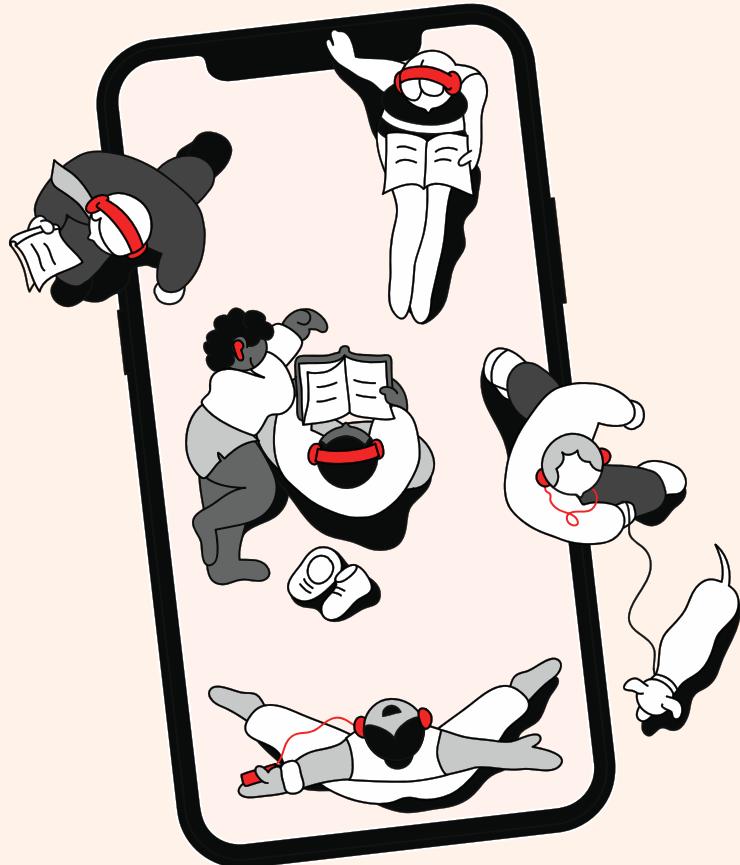
uprising, you name it. And he wrote, quite strictly, five hundred words per day, in a little notebook he kept in his chest pocket. He counted the words, and at five hundred he stopped, even, his biographer says, in the middle of a sentence. Then he started again the next morning. Richard Greene's book often feels as though it were composed on the same schedule. Many of his chapters are only two or three pages long. This engenders a kind of coldness.

To be fair, it should be said that many people found Graham Greene hard to know, and Richard Greene does make a contribution to our understanding of his subject. In place of earlier biographers' interest in Graham's sex life, he set out to cover the writer's life as a world traveller—specifically, a traveller in what was then known as the Third World, and therefore an observer of international politics. This biography, the jacket copy says, "reads like a primer on the twentieth century itself" and shows Graham Greene as an "unfailing advocate for human rights." I don't think that Richard Greene ever quite makes the case for Graham's status as a freedom fighter, but, despite what his publicists felt they had to say, he doesn't peddle this line too hard. Eventually, the book says, Graham settled into what might

be loosely described as "a social democratic stance," and that sounds closer to the truth. In Panama, he hung around with a gunrunner named Chuchu. In El Salvador, he brokered the occasional ransom. He hated the United States, but, outside the United States, that is not a rare sentiment.

I think that Graham Greene's distinction as an observer of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean is less as a political thinker or activist and more just as an artist, a recorder of the way a taxi-dancer in Saigon comports herself if she wants to snag an American husband; the way the Americans and English and French, the journalists and officers, sit around on hotel patios drinking pink gins and complaining about the bugs; the way a Syrian diamond smuggler handles an English policeman whom he is hoping to blackmail—and then what happens when the bombs start to go off. The same is true of the novels Greene set in less far-flung climes; the spiritual and political crises they tackle fade in the memory, and it is his effortless feel for the everyday that stays with us. That is the heart of Graham Greene's matter: not profundity—how hard he reached for it!—but an instinct for the way things actually look and what that means. ♦

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OLD HABITS

In Sarah Moss's novel "Summerwater," there's no holiday from history.

BY LEO ROBSON



In Sarah Moss's new novel, "Summerwater" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), which portrays a Scottish campground during the course of a sudden August day, a character mournfully reflects that Edinburgh is full of English people "these days." It's a phrase that occurs repeatedly: having kids "these days" is not a very clever thing to do; those who have had the misfortune of being born "these days" are given silly names like Honey. Everywhere in the book, people are sighing over the present. A teenager remembers his grandmother moaning "young people nowadays," and a small boy listens to his father raging, in the middle of the night, against the

inertia or cowardice of his temporary neighbors: "Bloody typical....The state of this country."

The effort to capture what we mean by "these days" is one way of trying to answer what Thomas Carlyle, in 1839, called the "Condition of England Question." This was originally a quasi-journalistic endeavor—a report on hard times, a portrait of the way we live now—but in the past century such novels as Virginia Woolf's "Between the Acts," Evelyn Waugh's "Brideshead Revisited," and Angus Wilson's "Anglo-Saxon Attitudes" showed that scrutinizing present-day habits and circumstances could also provide a window onto the coun-

At a Scottish campground, visitors can't escape one another—or current tensions.

ILLUSTRATION BY ANTOINE MAILLARD

try's long and tangled past. Among novelists writing now, Moss, who was born in 1975, appears the most eager to continue this tradition. She started out as an academic specializing in nineteenth-century literature. Her monograph "Spilling the Beans: Eating, Cooking, Reading and Writing in British Women's Fiction, 1770-1830" (2009), begins with epigraphs from Thomas Malthus (on demography) and Sigmund Freud (on dreams), and her fiction can be viewed as an effort to fuse realist and Romantic priorities. She writes about class and status, property and professional life, but is guided by interests that transcend the specificity of time and place.

Moss's dual focus has determined her approach to plot and theme. Her intricate début novel, "Cold Earth," published in 2009, unfolds against the backdrop of a pandemic; it also concerns a graduate student studying the ways in which William Morris refashioned the Vikings for his own age. Adam Goldschmidt, the lovable narrator of "The Tidal Zone" (2016), her most accomplished novel to date, is a stay-at-home dad who spends his days steaming vegetables ("boiling removed too many vitamins"), listening to radio bulletins ("The American police had shot another child for being black"), ruminating on "the mess of England today," and debating with his daughter Miriam, a fiercely political fifteen-year-old who has just survived a cardiac arrest. He is also "a bloke with a background in the Arts and Crafts movement," and is researching a postwar effort to rebuild Coventry Cathedral in a vernacular style—"another articulation of the English suspicion of the machineries of mass-production." Moss's slight but searing "Ghost Wall" (2018) explores questions of class mistrust, sexism, social mobility, xenophobia, and the North-South divide, while her characters take part in "experiential archeology," behaving as if it were the Iron Age, right down to the idea of virgin sacrifice.

One of Moss's claims to novelty, as a portraitist of a postindustrial England saturated with earlier visions of itself, is that her writing is focussed neither on London, as with the work of Iain Sinclair and Peter Ackroyd, nor on the Druid-haunted southwestern county

of Wiltshire, as with Penelope Lively's "Treasures of Time" and Jez Butterworth's play "Jerusalem." Her stories have unfolded in Northumberland, Cornwall, the West Midlands, Manchester, and the Shetland Islands. If the tendency to write about established sites of English memory—the well-tapped sources of Albion—can be traced to the influence of William Blake, Moss's desire to explore less travelled paths was emboldened by the brief, blazing intervention of W. G. Sebald, the German author whose "prose fictions" about the pervasive presence of the past took place in regions such as East Anglia and North Wales.

What's striking is that Moss has commanded recognition as one of the leading British novelists—a favorite of other writers, a mainstay of end-of-the-year roundups—despite keeping faith with what Sebald dismissed as the "standard" novel during a time of almost maximal, and partly Sebald-inspired, impatience with that form. Although Moss's writing is deft and resourceful, making use of parallel chronologies and multiple perspectives, of books within books and detailed descriptions of art works both real and invented, the closest she comes to formal experimentation is an aversion to using quotation marks with dialogue.

"Summerwater," though smaller in scale than most of her previous works, exhibits many of her strengths and preoccupations. In tracing her characters' finicky, circular, weather-obsessed thoughts ("Ostentatious rain. Pissing it down"), Moss touches on—or, more accurately, brushes past—the Brexit vote, Anglo-Scottish relations, climate change, the concept of rape culture, overpopulation, adolescent depression, and, if not exactly warfare between the generations and the sexes, then at least mutual incomprehension and froideur. The cast of characters proves usefully broad; of the book's dozen perspectives, each rendered in a colloquial free-indirect style, seven are female and five male, with a span of ages from small child to pensioner.

Privacy is elusive in the novel's camp-ground setting, especially with the chronic rain. ("If all the neighbours are indoors there are watchers at every window.") But the proximity of family members and partners is a source of greater trouble. When we meet a young woman

named Milly, she is lying on her back; her fiancé, Josh, is insisting that they try to achieve simultaneous orgasms, a "perfect symmetry of desire" that she simply doesn't want—"She's still a separate person." In another cabin, sixteen-year-old Alex is so desperate to escape his parents and his sister that he goes out kayaking and almost kills himself in the process. David, a former doctor, realizes that his retirement is driven by an "unspeakable objective": "to avoid the beloved" and achieve a "stolen hour's solitude." Claire, a worn-out mom, "envies people who have shared custody arrangements." Both of the first two chapters begin with someone trying to leave a cabin without waking anyone up.

Many of these weary Britons are exercised by the members of a Ukrainian family, the Shevchenkos, who live in Govanhill, a deprived area of Glasgow. This foreign-speaking presence—the family is successively taken to be Bulgarian, Polish, Romanian, and Russian—has provoked the wrath of the other holidaymakers, who chafe at the Shevchenkos' taste for loud late-night parties. But the family also provides a scapegoat for the frustrations harbored by "this alleged holiday," and an outlet for other aggressions. "You're supposed to have left, you know, people like you, did you not get the message?" a small girl, Lola, says, taunting the Shevchenko daughter. A chapter that adopts the perspective of Steve, a middle-aged Mancunian father, begins, "He's not being a racist. Even though they weren't meant to be here any more, it's no odds to him that they're foreign." David, the doctor, expresses a more cosmopolitan perspective:

The windscreen wipers, which detect the density of rainfall and set themselves accordingly, slow their beat. He indicates, takes the switchback turn for the hairpin bends up the hill, a fine smooth EU-funded miracle of engineering that sees maybe two dozen cars a day, off season. How could the English be so stupid, he thinks again pointlessly, how could they not see the ring of yellow stars on every new road and hospital and upgraded railway and city centre regeneration of the last thirty years?

So "Summerwater" is a study of Brexit Britain set far from both the precincts of power and the postindustrial northern towns where Europhobia was most prevalent. Moss attempted some-

thing similar in "Ghost Wall," which, though it took place in the nineteen-nineties, skewered the crankish side of the "Leaver" mind-set. In one memorably tense scene, Bill, an irascible dad whose patriotism extends to cuisine—fish-and-chips ahead of "Paki muck"—is patiently advised by a medieval historian that the Romans had not, in fact, built Hadrian's Wall out of fear of the "British" queen Boudicca: it was "never the Berlin Wall . . . no raked earth or watchtowers." Moss, though clearly a fan of the E.U.'s yellow stars and everything they represent, avoids polemic. The narrative scheme of "Summerwater" has been constructed in order to complicate any single strong opinion. David, who sees himself as an enemy of English insularity, is also the kind of person who might very well feel insulated from the Brexit voter's sense of being overlooked or left behind. When Milly meets him, she is convinced that she has him pegged: "Doctor, final-salary pension scheme, the whole works, probably bought some fabulous Victorian pile in Bearsden for tuppence ha'penny in the '70s." But, before the reader pigeonholes David as he pigeonholed "the English," Milly hits the limits of her prejudicial sketch. She starts speculating that the doctor and his wife also own "a gîte in Provence or Tuscany or whatever," and then recognizes that, if that were the case, they wouldn't be staying in this miserable place, alongside somebody like her.

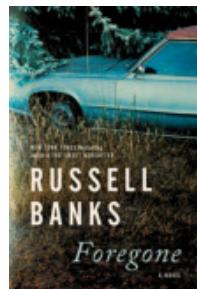
"Summerwater" departs from the human perspectives it inhabits in a series of brief, usually page-long, interludes—sometimes luminous and elegiac, sometimes morbid and menacing—which provide glimpses of phenomena that the characters fail to notice: the Viking sea roads that are still followed by transatlantic flights, for example, or the boats from past centuries that languish at the bottom of the nearby loch. There's also the four-hundred-and-twenty-million-year-old Highland Boundary Fault, a relic of a time when "the rocks that are now Scotland lay south of the equator," and a reminder that the land "beneath our buildings, roads, pipes, subway systems, mines and even our fracking" is "always shifting, forming, changing state."

These non-narrative passages provide clues for what Moss is up to. The novel is powered not by the local tensions it depicts but by the existential conflict underpinning them. When we write about the behavior of a society, Moss seems to say, we are also talking about the workings of the individual mind; collective myths—nostalgia for a pre-industrial past and an unmixed populace, the dream of a sovereign future, some settled story about our present moment—are simply drives and fears writ large.

“Summerwater,” like much of Moss’s recent work, suggests that the Freudian half of her formation is beginning to prevail. “The Tidal Zone” employs the trappings of the social portrait to spin a kind of fable—its opening words are “Once upon a time”—about how human beings confront what Adam calls “the ordinary extraordinary,” the way in which dramatic developments, “terrible things” from the near-death of a treasured daughter to the aerial bombing of a city or, indeed, to the killing of young Black men, must be accommodated by our vision of the normal, the familiar, or the routine. The historian in “Ghost Wall,” a novel centered on acts of aggression and abuse, observes that it’s a mistake to think that the Celts possessed primitive minds but “we don’t.”

Now, in “Summerwater,” Moss has delivered a series of snapshots of the family romance, complete with reflections on sibling rivalry, fear of the outsider, attachment, sex, physical decay, and what one character thinks of as people’s “unconsciousnesses, their repressed selves or what have you.” An engagement with the way we live now opens onto a deeper concern with the way we have always lived. Even as she immerses the reader in customs and mores, she emphasizes their contingency—the truth that, as a mother and running enthusiast observes in the opening pages, our “ways of doing things” are “mostly just habit.” It’s hard to miss that the novel follows “Ghost Wall” in turning from the brashness of daily life toward a more remote or enclosed realm, in closer touch with human atavism—and also, perhaps, with what really matters to this brilliant, confounding writer. ♦

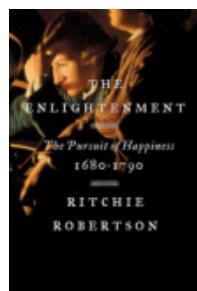
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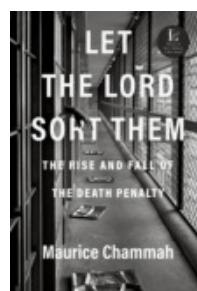
Foregone, by Russell Banks (Ecco). Leonard Fife, the protagonist of this elliptical novel, is a documentary filmmaker, a man whose career has rested on uncovering the truth. Now cancer-stricken and facing his life’s end, he agrees to a retrospective interview with a grating former protégé. During their discussion, Leonard starts to confess to past sins: a wife and child abandoned, infidelity, lies. But it’s not clear how trustworthy his memories are; he might be lost in the fog of his medication. Banks carefully layers the strata of a life, showing that the past is always more ambiguous than we think.



The Bad Muslim Discount, by Syed M. Masood (Doubleday). The two main characters of this novel couldn’t be more different, though both are Muslim immigrants who find their way to the Bay Area during and after the Iraq War. Anvar and his family come from Pakistan and assimilate with relative ease. “There was no culture shock,” he says, having seen the U.S. on screens his whole life. Safwa escapes from Baghdad, after terrible loss, by agreeing to a dangerous deal that haunts her. Their paths cross in a tense climax set against the backdrop of the 2016 Presidential election. Masood offers sharp observations on religion, violence, and politics, and his clever choice to place the characters’ disparate experiences in parallel challenges Islamophobic stereotypes.



The Enlightenment, by Ritchie Robertson (Harper). The standard narrative of the Enlightenment usually takes the form either of science unshackling the world from faith and superstition or of cold reason leading to disenchantment. This sweeping history instead describes an “enormous and diverse tapestry” of conflicting and often contradictory strands. Robertson expands the conception of the Enlightenment from familiar topics like the scientific revolution to include areas as diverse as public administration and manners. He portrays not only well-known philosophers but also the many civil servants and functionaries, from Philadelphia to St. Petersburg, who gave practical shape to Enlightenment ideals. For Robertson, this period was ultimately “an age of feeling, sympathy and sensibility,” in which the goal was human happiness in this life.



Let the Lord Sort Them, by Maurice Chammah (Crown). This haunting history of capital punishment in the United States focusses on Texas, which accounts for a third of the fifteen hundred people executed since the Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty, in 1976. Probing American history for the origin of our criminal-justice system’s punitive strain, Chammah finds a frontier culture that saw extrajudicial killings as “expressions of the will of the community” and ultimately formalized such retribution in law in ways that reinforced racial and class inequities. Chammah sees hope, however, in the gradual decline of executions since the nineteen-nineties. In his portrayals of inmates, victims, and legal advocates, a cautious theme emerges: the prospect of a democratic solution—born of popular will—to an unmerciful system of justice.

MUSIC REGAINED

New compact disks conjure the sounds of Proust's salons.

BY ALEX ROSS



On July 1, 1907, Marcel Proust organized a short concert to follow a festive dinner at the Ritz in Paris. The program, with its interweaving of Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and proto-modern strands, exemplifies the impeccable taste of one of the most musically attuned writers in literary history:

Fauré: Violin Sonata No. 1
 Beethoven: Andante [unspecified]
 Schumann: "Des Abends"
 Chopin: Prélude [unspecified]
 Wagner: "Meistersinger" Prelude
 Chabrier: "Idylle"
 Couperin: "Les Barricades mystérieuses"
 Fauré: Nocturne [unspecified]
 Wagner: Liebestod from "Tristan"
 Fauré: Berceuse

Proust was not only an alert listener but also an intent observer of other listeners.

at a musical salon has a seismic effect on the connoisseur Charles Swann.

Two new compact disks, both of them more or less perfect and charming, evoke the ambience of the Proustian musicale. On "Music in Proust's Salons" (BIS), the cellist Steven Isserlis and the pianist Connie Shih perform works by composers who moved in Proust's circles. And on "Proust, le Concert Retrouvé" (Harmonia Mundi), a pair of splendidly named young French musicians—the violinist Théotime Langlois de Swarte and the pianist Tanguy de Williencourt—re-create the concert at the Ritz, or most of it. In the liner notes, Cécile Leblanc, the author of a book on Proust and music, remarks that the Ritz program "constitutes in large part the 'auditory stream' that in time would give rise to *'In Search of Lost Time.'*"

Listeners on the hunt for the "little phrase" will not find it here. Early drafts of "*Swann's Way*" make clear that Proust originally had in mind the limpid second theme of the first movement of Camille Saint-Saëns's First Violin Sonata, which Hahn had frequently played for the author on the piano. Later, Proust attributed the phrase to the fictional composer Vinteuil, who, in the course of the cycle, is revealed to be a major creative figure, surpassing Saint-Saëns in significance. Various models for Vinteuil have been proposed, but the strongest candidate is Gabriel Fauré, to whom Proust once sent an extravagant fan letter: "I know your work well enough to write a three-hundred-page book about it." Proust may have been especially beguiled by Fauré's way of wafting airy melodies over an unstable harmonic ground, with familiar chords dissolving into one another in unfamiliar ways. The music often exudes a bittersweet, complicated happiness that aligns uncannily with the moods of "*In Search of Lost Time*." As it happens, Fauré was to have performed at the Ritz event, but he fell ill and withdrew.

Fittingly, Fauré's music occupies more than half of the running time of "*Proust, le Concert Retrouvé*." The First Violin Sonata is a relatively early score—it had its première in 1877, when Proust was a child—but it bears the signatures of the elusive Fauré style. Langlois de Swarte and Williencourt deliver an idiomatic performance, with a warmly singing violin

line poised above cleanly articulated piano textures. (The disk was produced in collaboration with the Museum of Music at the Philharmonie de Paris, which supplied instruments suitable for the occasion: the “Davidoff” Stradivarius and an 1891 Érard piano, which is lighter in sound than modern Steinways.) The duo are especially mesmerizing in Faure’s Andante, with its slinky, abbreviated theme and its steadily pulsing iambic rhythm. In faster passages, they might have applied sharper rhythmic definition. When Jacques Thibaud and Alfred Cortot recorded the sonata back in 1927, just three years after Faure’s death, they found a marvellous striding motion in its initial bars—open-air music rushing into a salon.

Willencourt makes a formidable impression in his solo selections. He grasps what the composer and educator Nadia Boulanger, a Fauré pupil, called “la grande ligne”—the long line that ties together a work’s disparate components. His rendition of Faure’s Nocturne No. 6, in D-flat, reconciles questing melody with wayward harmony. Even more striking is his Liebestod, in Liszt’s arrangement—a free, rhapsodic, surprisingly graceful account, in keeping with Proust’s tendency to cherish Wagner on his own terms, without grandiose hysteria. Willencourt is one of several younger pianists who are exploring Wagner at the piano; for Mireille, he has recorded a survey of Liszt’s transcriptions and elaborations of music from the operas. A fairly astounding achievement, it left me wishing that Willencourt had tackled the “Meistersinger” Overture on the Ritz disk—that piece is the major item missing from the Proust playlist.

Isserlis, a master at projecting introspective states, has extensive experience with Fauré and has twice recorded the composer’s cello sonatas. His new album includes two pensive Fauré miniatures, “Élegie” and “Romance,” but gives pride of place to Saint-Saëns’s First Cello Sonata—a stormier argument than the Violin Sonata that enchanted the young Proust. Isserlis also presents a cello arrangement of César Franck’s moodily ardent Violin Sonata, which has also been cited as a model for Vinteuil. Interspersed are shorter, slighter works by Hahn, Henri Duparc, and Augusta Holmès. Their sentimental aura plays

up another side of Proust, who once wrote in praise of “bad music,” saying that it has a vital role in the broader social fabric. What matters most about the “little phrase,” after all, is not its intrinsic quality but the emotional resonances it accumulates as it dances through time.

Proust apparently never encountered the remarkable sisters Boulanger, Nadia and Lili, who frequented a few of the same salons. Welcome attention is now falling on the music that the women wrote in their youth, before tragedy struck: Lili died in 1918, of tuberculosis, at twenty-four. A few years later, Nadia renounced composing, turning her energies instead to an extraordinary career as a teacher. (Among her pupils were Virgil Thomson, Aaron Copland, Elliott Carter, Philip Glass, and Quincy Jones.) Lili was perhaps the more gifted of the two—her setting of Psalm 130, the “De Profundis,” is a monumental cri de cœur in the face of the Great War—but Nadia left behind a trove of cultivated *mélodies*, along with an opera, “La Ville Morte,” which Catapult Opera plans to stage in New York. Pandemic permitting, the theme of next summer’s Bard Music Festival will be “Nadia Boulanger and Her World.”

Two exceptional tenors released albums of Boulanger songs last year: Cyrille Dubois, accompanied by Tristan Raës, on Aparté; and Nicholas Phan, joined by Myra Huang, on Avie. Dubois focusses on Nadia, bringing to bear elegant phrasing and luminous tone. The best of the songs have a translucent quality, a rarefied lyricism. Phan trains his acutely expressive voice on Lili’s 1914 cycle “Clairières dans le Ciel” (“Clearings in the Sky”), motivically interlinked settings of poems by Francis Jammes. “Clairières” is dedicated to Fauré and borrows a feature of his cycle “La Bonne Chanson,” in which the final song incorporates reminiscences of earlier numbers. The effect is Proustian, but Phan imbues it with a hallucinatory, anguished tinge—perhaps with an eye to the imminent collapse of the Belle Époque. The cycle ends with ghostly, bell-like chords and the words “I have nothing left / nothing left to hold me up.” ♦

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BORDERLANDS

"The Courier" and "Come True."

BY ANTHONY LANE

Two men walk down a street at night. One of them says, “I’ve dreamed of this moment for a very long time.” The other man says, “What happens now? I don’t need to do anything, do I?” On a later occasion, in a hotel room, we see them draw close, leaning in to murmur in each other’s ear. It must be love.

Not so fast. These scenes come from

look sprightly and debonair, like David Niven. It fails.

Penkovsky and Wynne—they sound like a pair of magicians—are brought together by the joint initiative of the American and British intelligence services. Penkovsky has made the initial approach, but such is the level of surveillance in Moscow that any contact



Merab Ninidze and Benedict Cumberbatch star in Dominic Cooke’s film.

Dominic Cooke’s *“The Courier,”* which is set in the early nineteen-sixties and is based on true and hazardous happenings of the period. The first man is Oleg Penkovsky (Merab Ninidze). He runs the state committee for scientific research in the Soviet Union, and is so alarmed by the speed of the arms race that he offers—for the sake of peace, not for personal gain—to pass Russian nuclear secrets to the West. The other man is Greville Wynne (Benedict Cumberbatch), a less distinguished soul. He is an Englishman, a salesman, and, in terms of espionage, a rube. He has a wife, a son, a trilby, a waist-length sheepskin coat, and a mustache that is presumably meant to make him

with a Western spy would be doomed. A C.I.A. agent, Emily Donovan (Rachel Brosnahan), appeals to her counterparts in London for help: a flattering request, although her boss, back in Langley, warns her about “the bullshit of dealing with the Brits.” “They’re good guys,” she says. “I just have to make them think they’re in charge.”

Enter the amateur. Wynne, who has done legitimate business in the Eastern Bloc, trading in scientific machinery, is persuaded to fly to Moscow, to establish an overt professional link with Penkovsky and, under that masquerade, to bring back sensitive information. An elegant arrangement, which works until it doesn’t. Anyone who revels in such tales of subterfuge will be

elated to find the customary props in place: a chalk mark swiped across a lamppost; a radio turned up loud to deter bugging; and—my favorite—a dinky Minox camera, used to photograph military documents and diagrams. But why does Penkovsky keep the Minox in his desk drawer, where the K.G.B. can sniff it out? Basic error, Oleg Vladimirovich!

At one point, with the Cuban missile crisis looming, we see another camera—a closeup of a lens, in the underbelly of a U-2 spy plane, trained on Soviet installations below. This is a straight steal from Steven Spielberg’s *“Bridge of Spies”* (2015), to which, unavoidably, *“The Courier”* will be compared. Cooke’s film is shorter by half an hour, and the plot is urged along at a brisk trot. In the latter stages, we are indignant, on Wynne’s behalf, when he is arrested on Russian soil, imprisoned, and taken far into his discomfort zone. His hair is shorn, and so, to our disbelief, is his mustache. Yet the movie, less stirring than it ought to be, is peculiarly cramped, lacking the emotional latitude of *“Bridge of Spies.”* Spielberg dramatized a clash of moral principles, under the cover story of a thriller, but *“The Courier”* is all that it appears to be and not much more.

For fans of Cumberbatch, on the other hand, it will be a fount of joy. Like Bill Nighy and, before him, Denholm Elliott, Cumberbatch excels at playing decent men, well-meaning and well-mannered, who are weak at heart, and who worry—with reason—that decency alone will not shield them from the larger world. That is why such men prefer to keep their lives small, and why they twitch and flinch or, in Wynne’s case, muster a stricken smile at the prospect of jeopardy. “Would I be putting myself in danger?” is one of Wynne’s first questions to his handlers, and even at lunch, in London, he glances over his shoulder. Against the odds, though, this middling coward finds a fortitude in himself, and is altered by the discovery. His wife, Sheila, played with a tender sharpness by Jessie Buckley, isn’t sure what he does on his trips to Moscow, but she feels the effect. “He’s become so energetic in bed,” she says, more perplexed than pleased, as

if noting a change in the weather. The spy who comes back from the cold is warming up.

The first time we see Sarah (Julia Sarah Stone), the heroine of “Come True,” she is lying in a sleeping bag, at the foot of a slide, in a playground. It’s early morning, and we have an instant sense that things are out of joint in Sarah’s life. From the playground, she cycles home for a shower, taking care to avoid her mother, before setting off for school. So why, at the age of eighteen, was she waking in a public space? And from what abominations was she roused?

Not surprisingly, Sarah keeps dozing off in class, and you can’t blame her for signing up to participate in a sleep study. Anything to get herself on track. Henceforth, she will spend her nights at a special facility, where, clad in a sleep suit and a soft helmet—both of them curiously ribbed, with wires attached—she will be monitored as she drifts off into dreams. Think of her as a sommonaut. For her pains, Sarah will earn twelve dollars an hour; the film, which is written, directed, shot, and edited by Anthony Scott Burns, is the story of those pains.

The facility, of course, is staffed with oddballs. The boss, Dr. Meyer (Christopher Heatherington), wears huge glasses, like Elliott Gould in the “Ocean’s Eleven” films, and the resident genius, Jeremy (Landon Liboiron), is accused by Sarah of stalking her, out of office hours. She tells him, “You just thought, Hey, since I don’t ever leave my nerd den, this is probably my best chance to meet the future Mrs. Nerd, so, if I just follow her around, maybe she’ll fall for my magical fucking nerd charms.”

The problem is that, later on, she does fall for his nerd charms—one of many narrative swerves at which viewers may snigger or balk. The finale, in particular, is designed to be scrapped over like a bone. Yet the film reaches out, even at its most implausible, and claws at you; when Sarah sleepwalks along a road, trailing cables, with Jeremy and another researcher dogging her slow steps, you start by wondering where all the cars are and end up marvelling at the surreal dignity of this mini-procession. In every sense, it is Stone who leads the way. As Sarah, she is slight and quick, with round features and a shock of short blond hair, and, if she didn’t play Ariel and Puck onstage at school, I want to know why.

One way to gauge the impact of today’s movie stars is to imagine them in the era of silent pictures. Saoirse Ronan and Florence Pugh, for instance, would have thrived back then, and so would Stone. The person she most resembles is Mary Astor, whose long career was kicking off a century ago. Like Astor, Stone has wide-set eyes, more doleful than innocent, which make her look preternaturally wise to the fact that, whatever she does, trouble will be along soon. One difference is that, with the advent of talkies, Astor’s voice proved to be enticingly low, whereas Stone’s delivery, in “Come True,” has more of a teen-age snap. “So cool,” she says, when Jeremy shows her what his monitor can do. It not only registers brain activity but also reproduces actual dreams on a screen.

For people who collect movie dreams, “Come True” is quite a find. Sarah’s subconscious journeys waft her through so many doors, and other helpful orifices, that any remaining Freudians will drop

their cigars in delight. Notable landmarks include one humanoid figure with a head like a splintered tree, a second with a windmill of waving legs where its upper half should be, and a third who pops like a silent balloon, leaving a ragged blob and recalling a similar burst in “Under the Skin” (2013). What’s more, if you have happy memories of being traumatized by the ghosts in “The Fog” (1980), whose eyes were mere glowing holes, you’ll love the gang of shady fellows who throng the dormant Sarah, gazing from the gloom like nocturnal animals on the prowl.

What matters most about movie dreams, however, is not how they stand out but how securely they are set, like gems, in the context of the film. Whether we honestly need the crazy-colored night fever in “Vertigo” (1958), given how richly Hitchcock steeps us in the dreaminess of the everyday, is open to debate. Burns’s method, in “Come True,” is to veil Sarah’s dreams in a deep gray haze, which renders details indistinct, and then to dull the light during her waking hours, too, so that we can scarcely tell where reality ends and reverie begins. Is that a fine philosophical conceit, or has the evidence been rigged? And why is it that casual, clear-cut, and non-spooky dreams—you know, the kind in which you go to the supermarket, buy some milk, and realize that the cashier is the guy who taught you chemistry when you were twelve—are never granted access to Sarah’s sleeping mind? Because too much normality, I guess, would be an embarrassment to the cultivation of fear. Only nightmares need apply. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Paul Noth, must be received by Sunday, March 21st. The finalists in the March 8th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the April 5th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“

”

THE FINALISTS



McELROY

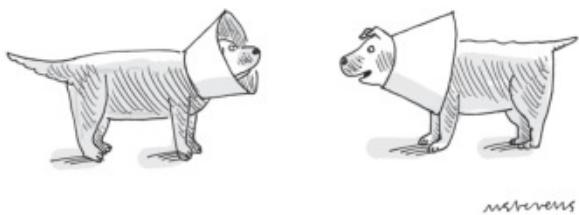
“So that’s where all the furniture went.”

Andrew Gray, Jackson, Tenn.

“Don’t make me come up there.”
Michele Moreno, New York City

“Just as I thought. There’s nothing going on upstairs.”
Carol Lasky, Boston, Mass.

THE WINNING CAPTION



CHROLAVICIUS

“I could never pull that off.”
Nicole Chrolavicius, Burlington, Ont.

Design advice for real life.

Clever



INTERIOR BY WELCOME PROJECTS; PHOTO BY LAURE JOLLET

Renovation guides.
Before-and-after inspiration.
Material sources.
Everything you need to make
a home your own—from the
editors of *Architectural Digest*.

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PUZZLES & GAMES DEPT.

THE CROSSWORD

A lightly challenging puzzle.

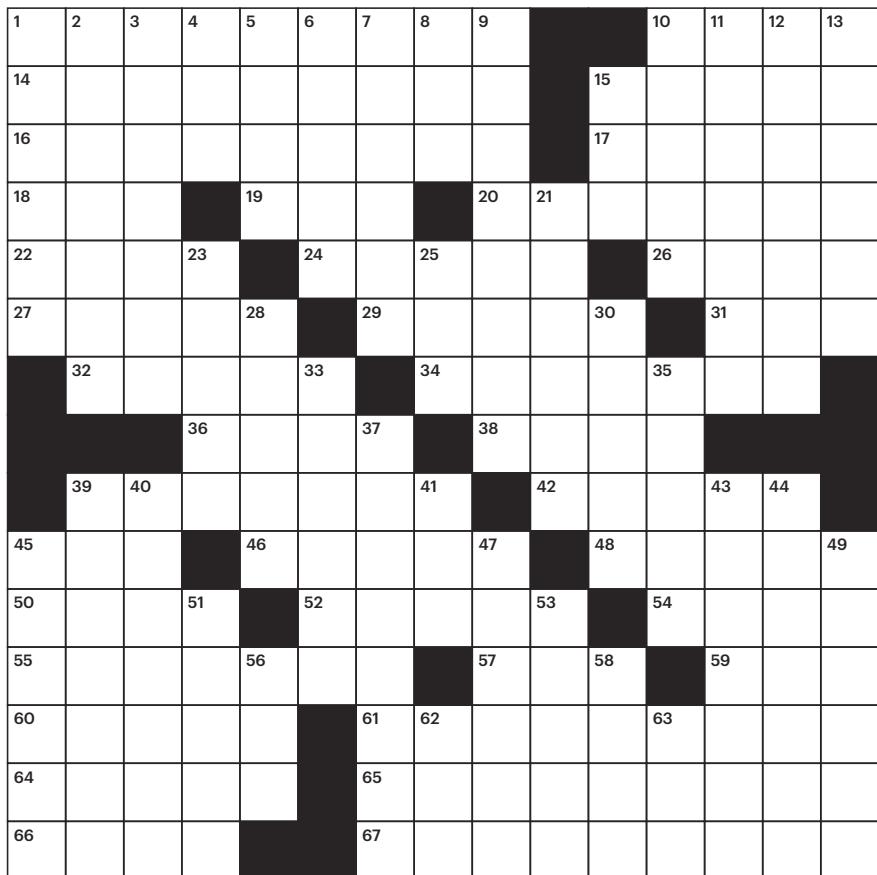
BY CAITLIN REID

ACROSS

- 1 Low blow
10 Like heavy desserts
14 Raw umber or burnt sienna, e.g.
15 2008 Pixar film about a trash-compacting robot
16 Anti-collision course?
17 Tended to, as a squeaky hinge
18 Site of a legendary couples cruise?
19 Ability to amuse
20 Make the rounds?
22 Lacking forethought
24 Part of a 29-Across
26 Trigonometric term from the Latin word for "curve"
27 Sandals and sneakers
29 Fragrant purple flower
31 Number associated with perfection
32 Tantrums
34 Got around
36 Selection at a sushi bar
38 Wintry weather
39 Dumpster fire, as it were
42 Pitchers seen in still-lifes
45 Bewigged singer of "Chandelier"
46 Applied using a pastry bag
48 Percussion instruments
50 Start of a certain address
52 "Got it"
54 Make mittens, maybe
55 "I'm in heaven!"
57 ___ de deux (dance for two)
59 Cheer for Atlético Madrid
60 Parable's point
61 "This is just too much!"
64 Certain office communiqué
65 Back-to-back-to-back titles
66 Transmit
67 Gets the better of, intellectually

DOWN

- 1 Coniferous trees often used to make chests



- 2 Big name in casinos
3 Norse explorer Leif
4 Off-roading ride, for short
5 "That was close!"
6 Comic ___
7 Budget boarding option
8 Smallest bill in the till
9 "Ideas worth spreading" lectures
10 Sudden attacks
11 "All right, tell me more"
12 Scrubbed
13 Actress Tippi who is Dakota Johnson's grandmother
15 Took first place
21 "Seinfeld" character whose dancing is described by George as "a full-body dry heave set to music"
23 Safe kind of job?
25 "___ in my memory lock'd, and you yourself shall keep the key . . .": Ophelia
28 Envelope sticker
30 Be too close to
33 Units of yarn
35 Dance to bounce music, perhaps
37 Actor Giancarlo of "Better Call Saul"
39 Strike a chord
40 High-fibre muffin material
41 Segment of a tennis match
43 Go too long
44 Greet warmly, in a way
45 Wags a finger at, say
47 Vamoose
49 Surgical tubes
51 Pattern for many a flannel shirt
53 Great ___
56 Not feeling a hundred per cent
58 ___-cell therapy
62 Nobel Prize winner Steven who served as Secretary of Energy under Obama
63 Org. charged with enforcing the Toxic Substances Control Act

Solution to the previous puzzle:

H	A	L	F		S	I	T	A	R		P	E	P	S
E	L	L	I	O	T	P	A	G	E		E	V	E	N
I	M	A	L	L	Y	O	U	R	S		Z	E	R	O
N	O	M	A	D		S	T	O	O		R	I	O	
I	N	A	S	E	C			W	E	T	M	O	P	
E	D	S				R	O	A	M		F	O	O	D
						S	P	I	N	D	O	C	T	R
B	E	L	A	Y		P	E	O	N		C	S	T	
Y	A	K	N	O	W					E	M	I	L	A
H	C	L				N	I	G	H	T		I	N	E
A	H	O	Y			D	R	E	A	M	S	C	A	P
N	E	R				T	A	L	K	I	T	O	V	E
D	R	E	W			H	Y	P	E	D		G	E	D

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the Faubourg Odyssey

