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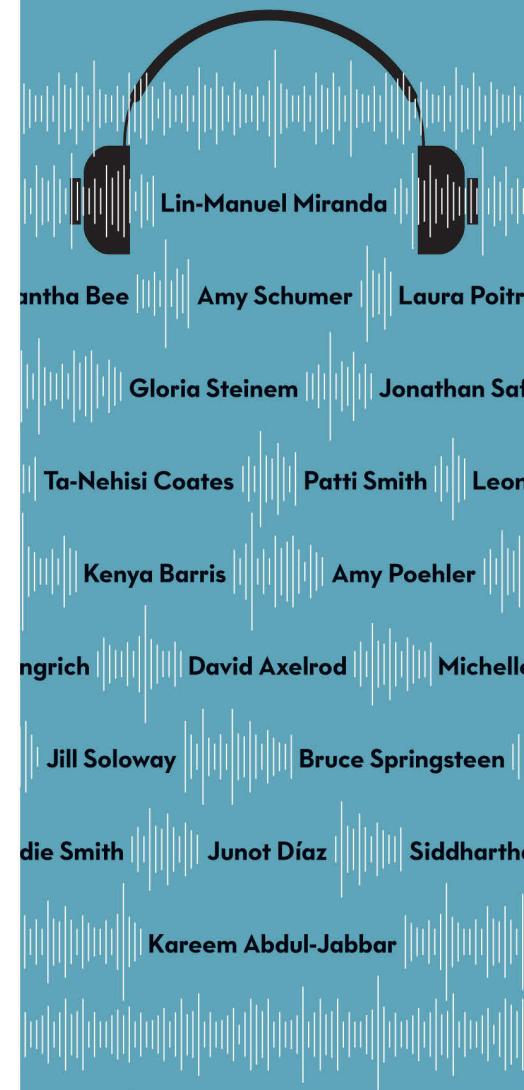
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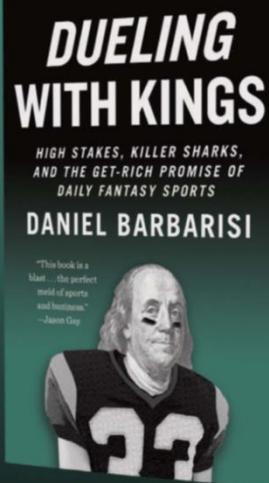
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CONTRIBUTORS

Rebecca Mead ("The Prophet of Dystopia," p. 38) has been a staff writer since 1997. "My Life in Middlemarch" is her latest book.

Peter Hessler ("Talk Like an Egyptian," p. 48), a staff writer, is working on a book about the five years he spent reporting from Egypt.

Akhil Sharma (*Fiction*, p. 58) is the author of two novels and the story collection "A Life of Adventure and Delight," which comes out in July. He teaches at Rutgers University, Newark.

Rebecca Morgan Frank (*Poem*, p. 45) teaches at Brandeis University. Her third poetry collection, "Sometimes We're All Living in a Foreign Country," will be published in October.

Steve Coll (*Comment*, p. 19), a staff writer, is the dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University.

Emily Nussbaum (*On Television*, p. 64), the magazine's television critic, won the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for criticism.

John Seabrook ("The Immaculate Lineup," p. 30) has published four books, including, most recently, "The Song Machine: Inside the Hit Factory."

Kathryn Schulz (*Books*, p. 67), a staff writer, won the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for feature writing.

Jeffrey Toobin ("Full-Court Press," p. 24) is the author of "The Nine" and "The Oath," both about the Supreme Court. His latest book is "American Heiress: The Wild Saga of the Kidnapping, Crimes and Trial of Patty Hearst."

Sheelagh Kolhatkar (*The Financial Page*, p. 23), a staff writer, has published "Black Edge: Inside Information, Dirty Money, and the Quest to Bring Down the Most Wanted Man on Wall Street."

Henry Alford (*Shouts & Murmurs*, p. 29) has contributed humor pieces to the magazine since 1998.

Alex Ross (*Musical Events*, p. 76), a staff writer, is the author of "The Rest Is Noise" and "Listen to This."

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THE MAIL

HOW TO LIVE FOREVER

Tad Friend's article about Silicon Valley's anti-aging visionaries—ranging from people who want to make "death optional" to those who will settle for living to a thousand—notes only at the end that there is some public ambivalence about such goals ("The God Pill," April 3rd). I found it interesting that, with just a few exceptions, Friend's lengthy list of eager entrepreneurs and researchers are all middle-aged men captivated by the science of this endeavor—which he describes in great detail. But, beyond hand-waving, they don't engage much with some basic questions that might be of concern to the rest of us: Will much longer lives guarantee better lives, or better societies? Will they make it any easier to deal with our present global crises—climate change, poverty, wars, and other assorted mayhem? Are there better ways to spend millions of dollars?

*Daniel Callahan
Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y.*

I found Friend's article quite amusing, because in 1976 I co-authored a book about the field of anti-aging. The same "immortalists" and "healthspanners" existed back then, with the same "God pill" approaches and the same optimistic statements about when the breakthrough would come and how long humans could live. We also found the same reluctance, among many people, to prolong their lives. It appears that not much has changed.

*Phillip Gordon
Castro Valley, Calif.*

DIETARY DANGERS

At the end of Jerome Groopman's review of Gary Taubes's recent book, "The Case Against Sugar," and "The Secret Life of Fat," by Sylvia Tara, he criticizes Taubes's "big claims" and "dramatic" presentation, cheerily commenting that it's fine to have "an occasional slice of chocolate cake" (Books, April 3rd). To be sure, such indulgences won't kill us, but alarm

about sugar consumption in the U.S. is well founded. Added sugar is ubiquitous in American supermarkets, showing up, under dozens of different names, on the ingredient lists for three-quarters of the packaged products for sale, many of which aren't even sweet. Avoiding added sugar can become a full-time job. (I wrote a book about my family avoiding added sugar for a year.) Yes, nutrition is complicated, and, no, there is no single nutritional pariah that, if avoided, will guarantee a trim physique and perfect health. But arguing, as Groopman does, that "common sense should prevail" ignores the extent to which we are being manipulated by an industry and a culture that push sugar on us at every turn. Sugar is cheap, it's addictive, and it's everywhere. That much is not complicated.

*Eve O. Schaub
Pawlet, Vt.*

Groopman's article on the recent literature about sugar and fat rightly takes diet gurus to task. But it's unfortunate that Groopman and the writers he mentions do not place greater emphasis on the distinction between whole and processed foods. Sylvester Graham, the pastor whose diet inspired graham crackers, is mentioned in a long list of historical faddists. But he popularized coarse whole grains at a time when many people were suffering from the negative effects of diets high in refined white flour. He advocated a diet of coarsely milled whole-grain flour that provided a complete balance of fibre, antioxidants, and micronutrients. It's disappointing that Graham's conclusions—remarkably in line with what we now know to be true—are lost on those who are quick to snicker at his idiosyncrasies.

*Dan Richman
Falmouth, Maine*

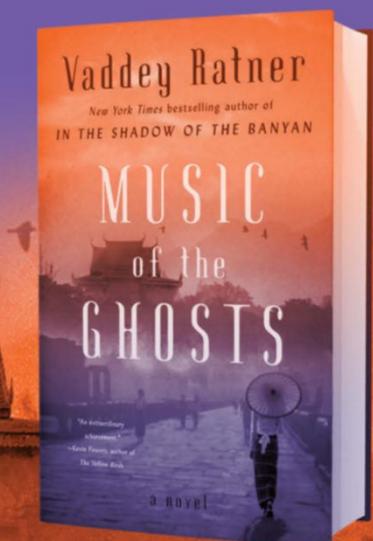
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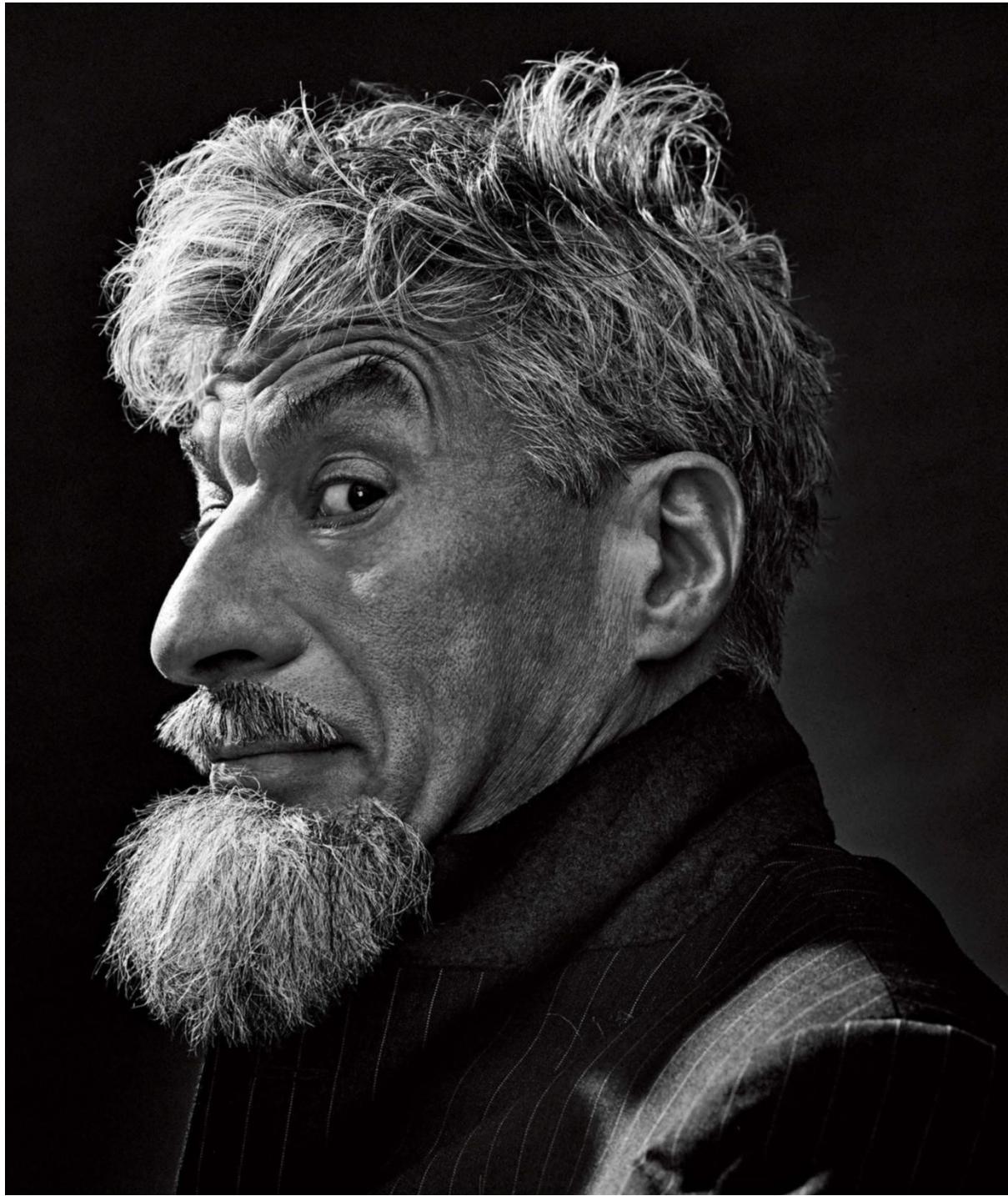
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APRIL 12 – 18, 2017

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



Shortly before his retrospective opened at the Guggenheim, in 2011, Maurizio Cattelan (seen above, in a recent self-portrait) announced his retirement. Then, ever the prankster, he hung virtually all of his sculptures midair, by ropes, in the museum: he killed his career. “**Be Right Back**,” Maura Axelrod’s documentary about the irreverent Italian artist, which opens at the newly refurbished Quad Cinema on April 14, includes footage of that show. Meanwhile, Cattelan has unretired—last year, he installed a solid-gold toilet in a Guggenheim rest room.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MAURIZIO CATTELAN AND PIERPAOLO FERRARI

THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Anastasia

Darko Tresnjak directs this new musical, by Terrence McNally, Stephen Flaherty, and Lynn Ahrens, drawn from the 1956 and 1997 films about the Russian Grand Duchess. (*Broadhurst*, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. *In previews.*)

The Antipodes

The playwright Annie Baker ("The Flick") returns, with a piece about storytelling, directed by Lila Neugebauer and featuring Josh Charles, Phillip James Brannon, and Josh Hamilton. (*Pershing Square Signature Center*, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529. *In previews.*)

Bandstand

Corey Cott and Laura Osnes play a war veteran and a widow who team up to compete in a radio contest in 1945, in this swing musical by Robert Taylor and Richard Oberacker, directed by Andy Blankenbuehler. (*Jacobs*, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. *In previews.*)

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

Christian Borle plays Willy Wonka in this musical version of the Roald Dahl tale, featuring new songs by Marc Shaiman and Scott Wittman and a book by David Greig. (*Lunt-Fontanne*, 205 W. 46th St. 877-250-2929. *In previews.*)

A Doll's House, Part 2

Lucas Hnath's play, starring Laurie Metcalf, Chris Cooper, Jayne Houdyshell, and Condola Rashad, picks up years after Ibsen's classic leaves off, with the return of its heroine, Nora. Sam Gold directs. (*Golden*, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. *In previews.*)

Ernest Shackleton Loves Me

In this new musical by Joe DiPietro, Brendan Milburn, and Valerie Vigoda, a put-upon single mother (Vigoda) embarks on an Antarctic adventure with the famous explorer. (*Tony Kiser*, 305 W. 43rd St. 866-811-4111. *Previews begin April 14.*)

Groundhog Day

Tim Minchin and Danny Rubin wrote this musical version of the 1993 Bill Murray comedy, about a misanthropic weatherman (Andy Karl) forced to repeat the same day over and over. Matthew Warchus directs. (*August Wilson*, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. *In previews. Opens April 17.*)

Hello, Dolly!

Bette Midler stars as the turn-of-the-century matchmaker Dolly Levi in the Jerry Herman musical from 1964, directed by Jerry Zaks and featuring David Hyde Pierce. (*Shubert*, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. *In previews.*)

In & of Itself

The magician Derek DelGaudio ("Nothing to Hide") presents an evening of illusions exploring the concept of identity, directed by Frank Oz. (*Daryl Roth*, 20 Union Sq. E. 212-239-6200. *Opens April 12.*)

Indecent

Rebecca Taichman directs Paula Vogel's play, a transfer from the Vineyard, which tells the story of the controversial 1923 Broadway production of Sholem Asch's Yiddish drama "God of Vengeance." (*Cort*, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. *In previews. Opens April 18.*)

The Little Foxes

Laura Linney and Cynthia Nixon trade off roles night to night in Manhattan Theatre Club's revival of the 1939 Lillian Hellman drama, directed by Daniel Sullivan. (*Samuel J. Friedman*, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. *In previews.*)

The Lucky One

The Mint revives A. A. Milne's 1922 play, directed by Jesse Marchese, about two brothers whose enmity erupts when one of them lands in legal trouble. (*Beckett*, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. *Previews begin April 14.*)

Oslo

A Broadway transfer of J. T. Rogers's play, directed by Bartlett Sher, which explores how a Norwegian diplomat (Jennifer Ehle) and her husband (Jefferson Mays) secretly helped orchestrate the 1993 Oslo Accords. (*Vivian Beaumont*, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. *In previews. Opens April 13.*)

Pacific Overtures

John Doyle directs Stephen Sondheim and John Weidman's musical from 1976, which recounts the opening of nineteenth-century Japan, starring George Takei as the Reciter. (*Classic Stage Company*, 136 E. 13th St. 866-811-4111. *In previews.*)

Samara

Soho Rep's Sarah Benson stages Richard Maxwell's piece, with music by Steve Earle (who is also in the cast), in which a man braves a frontier to collect a debt from a stranger. (*A.R.T./New York Theatres*, 502 W. 53rd St. 212-352-3101. *In previews. Opens April 16.*)

Six Degrees of Separation

Allison Janney, John Benjamin Hickey, and Corey Hawkins star in Trip Cullman's revival of John Guare's play from 1990, about a young black con man who enters the lives of an upscale Manhattan couple. (*Ethel Barrymore*, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. *In previews.*)

NOW PLAYING

Amélie

This musical's heroine, played by Phillipa Soo ("Hamilton"), is a dreamy Parisian café waitress who channels her childlike wonder into staging anonymous good deeds on the streets of Montmartre. As a girl (Savvy Crawford), Amélie was denied affection by fussy parents and used imagination as an escape. But is her adult playfulness just a shield against the romantic interests of Nino (Adam Chanler-Berat)? The original Jean-Pierre Jeunet film, from 2001, balanced its whimsy with Gallic deadpan—part of charm, after all, is withholding—but Pam MacKinnon's production overinflates every

flight of fancy. Amélie's suicidal pet goldfish is now a giant puppet, and Elton John jumps out of the broadcast of Princess Diana's funeral to sing a rock number; the stage is cluttered with magic. Daniel Messé and Nathan Tysen's score trades accordions for strumming guitars, and the whole thing is more grape juice than Cabernet. (*Walter Kerr*, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

Come from Away

Canadian hospitality doesn't seem like grist for drama, but this gem of a musical, by Irene Sankoff and David Hein, makes kindness sing and soar. On 9/11, thousands of airline passengers were rerouted to the tiny Newfoundland town of Gander, population nine thousand. The Ganderites opened their doors—and fetched sandwiches, underwear, and kosher meals—while the "plane people," trapped in a five-day limbo, reckoned with a changed world. A splendid twelve-person cast plays dozens of characters, but Sankoff and Hein deftly spotlight a few, including an American Airlines pilot (Jenn Colella) trying to maintain control of her charges and an Egyptian chef (Caesar Samayoa) coping with the first glimmers of post-9/11 Islamophobia. Christopher Ashley's production doesn't dwell on inspirational messaging, instead letting the story, along with some fine fiddle playing, put the wind in its sails. (*Schoenfeld*, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

Daniel's Husband

Mitchell (Matthew Montelongo) and Daniel (Ryan Spahn) are a perfect couple. Together for seven years, they have good careers and a tasteful organic-modern house, and they are loved by friends and family alike. There is only one sticking point: Daniel wants Mitchell to put a ring on it, while Mitchell argues that marriage is a useless heteronormative tool. Michael McKeever's new play cruises along as a breezy, gentle satire of well-off gay men's mores, until a twist turns the theoretical dispute into a concrete one with immense stakes. Tearjerking melodrama can be a highly satisfying genre, but McKeever is not quite as good at it as he is at observational comedy. Still, Joe Brancato's production for Primary Stages moves smoothly, greatly helped by a fine cast; Spahn and Montelongo have a comfortable, sexy rapport that makes you root for their characters' relationship. (*Cherry Lane*, 38 Commerce St. 866-811-4111.)

The Emperor Jones

Divided into eight short scenes, Eugene O'Neill's 1920 drama takes place, he writes, on "an island in the West Indies as yet not self-determined by White Marines." Brutus (Obi Abili) is its ruler. A former Pullman porter convicted of murder in the U.S., Brutus convinced the islanders that he was some sort of god—their god. The later scenes amount to a monologue, in which Brutus, lost in the forest, battles nature-as-voodoo, the drums pounding offstage all the while, like a nagging enemy whispering "Failure" in his ear. Brutus's body and words fuse into a force that incorporates reason, certainly, but there's something else at work, too, in Abili's bravura performance, which doesn't come off as "bravura" and has no cheap flourishes. Abili plays Brutus's subconscious as if it were his reality—and, of course, it is—while making the script both more and less than it is; it's a catalyst for his transformations. (Reviewed in our issue of 4/10/17.) (*Irish Repertory*, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)



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Gently Down the Stream

Harvey Fierstein plays Beau, an expat in London and a cabaret pianist by trade, who seems to be a repository of twentieth-century American gay history—an attribute that's magnificently elaborated upon in Derek McLane's set, whose floor-to-ceiling bookshelves earn applause when they're first revealed. It's a profound pleasure just to hear Fierstein's signature growl filtered through an impeccable New Orleans accent; even better, the playwright Martin Sherman has given him a series of mesmerizingly well-written monologues to use it on. All this would be enough, but, unfortunately, there's more. Beau has reluctantly opened himself to a romance with Rufus (Gabriel Ebert), thirty-three years his junior, who smothers him with questions and who is meant to be manic-depressive but is unconvincing at either extreme. The talented Ebert is either miscast or misdirected in the role—or maybe it's simply misconceived, and Beau's story would have worked best as a one-man show. (*Public*, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

The Hairy Ape

In Eugene O'Neill's 1922 play, one of his more directly political works, Robert (Yank) Smith (the stupendous Bobby Cannavale) is a tough-talking, anti-intellectualizing stoker who shovels coal in the boiler room of a ship heading for New York. Coated in grease and pride at what his body can do, Yank is both a man and an Expressionistic impression of a worker, an embodiment of the playwright's ideas about theatrical naturalism and how to elevate it beyond the proscenium and make it deeper, spookier. Disembarking in New York, Yank encounters a cold world of heartless sophistication and greed that repeatedly rejects him as "primitive." The director, Richard Jones, is interested in masks—in returning O'Neill to a dramatic style that inspired him in the nineteen-twenties. By engineering a spectacle of O'Neill's tragedy, Jones makes the playwright's twenties modernism modern now, just for us, and it's astonishing. (4/10/17) (*Park Avenue Armory*, Park Ave. at 66th St. 212-933-5812.)

The Play That Goes Wrong

Mischief Theatre's combustible farce, originally staged above a pub in North London, invites us to the opening night of "Murder at Haversham Manor," a hoary nineteen-twenties whodunnit staged by the ostentatiously inept Cornley University Drama Society. "The Play That Goes Wrong" is a bit hoary, too—an intricately planned fiasco in which doors slam, cues go hay-wire, the leading lady gets knocked unconscious, and every inch of the musty drawing-room set (by Nigel Hook) is destined to come crashing down. Of course, it takes incredible skill to pull off such bungling, and Mark Bell's production nails every spit take and sight gag. (This is one of those genres that Brits just do better—you need those plummy accents to paper over the mayhem.) The show never tells us anything about its characters, but it succeeds as pure comedic eye candy. (*Lyceum*, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

Significant Other

Loneliness, heartache, and terror of permanent failure in love: given how incessantly these feelings have been plumbed on stage and screen, it's a wonder the playwright Joshua Harmon succeeds at making them so vividly painful in this comedy, about a young gay man standing on the sidelines as his three closest friends, all women, get married one by one. Gideon Glick is endlessly

charming yet credibly hapless as Jordan Berman, who approaches a rare date with the grim apprehension of a convict awaiting sentencing for a capital crime; in his mind, the opposite of love is not its absence but death. It's all much more enjoyable than it sounds: Harmon ("Bad Jews") has a superb ear for dialogue, Glick is a fine physical comedian, and the supporting cast is delightful. But the story resonates because Trip Cullman's direction never shies from taking Jordan's crisis seriously. (*Booth*, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

serves, among other roles, as a kind of narrator, vaudeville m.c., and Greek chorus. Not all the bits land with equal force, but it's an impressive feat of storytelling, incorporating invigorating elements of sound, dance, and magical lighting. (*Pearl*, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-563-9261.)

ALSO NOTABLE

C. S. Lewis Onstage: The Most Reluctant Convert Acorn. **Cry Havoc!** New Ohio. **The Glass Menagerie** Belasco. **How to Transcend a Happy Marriage** Mitzi E. Newhouse. **If I Forget** Laura Pels. **Joan of Arc: Into the Fire** Public. **Latin History for Morons** Public. **Miss Saigon** Broadway Theatre. **Picnic** Gym at Judson. **Present Laughter** St. James. **The Price** American Airlines Theatre. **The Profane** Playwrights Horizons. **Sunday in the Park with George** Hudson. **Sunset Boulevard** Palace. **Sweat** Studio 54. **Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street** Barrow Street Theatre. **The View Up-Stairs** Lynn Redgrave. **War Paint** Nederlander. **White Guy on the Bus** 59E59. Through April 16.

ART**MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES****Metropolitan Museum**

"Age of Empires: Chinese Art of the Qin & Han Dynasties" (221 B.C.-A.D. 220)

Not least among the achievements of Ying Zhen, the founding emperor of the short-lived Qin dynasty (221-206 B.C.), was propaganda, some of which still echoes bombastically on the walls of this show: you won't depart with any confusion about who first unified China. But the chance to see a platoon of his spectacular terra-cotta warriors, half a dozen or so of the thousands that were buried with the emperor, who died in 210 B.C., and excavated in the nineteen-seventies, is not to be missed. Fitted together like action figures from mass-produced body parts and originally equipped with real bronze weapons, the life-size sculptures have individually detailed faces of surprising charisma. One kneeling archer, with square-toed shoes and a mustache, is so striking he may trigger *déjà vu*. Along with the soldiers comes a wide-ranging selection of contemporaneous artifacts, many of them demonstrating a naturalistic approach to anatomy and an untrammeled expressive whimsy—both of which were later eradicated by the heavy stylization during the Han dynasty. Examples of the former include a recently discovered terra-cotta strongman with a potbelly; examples of the latter include a bronze lamp shaped like a mythical bird tipping its head back to swallow its own smoke. But, if many of the show's pieces make Qin and Han culture look unexpectedly relatable, its highlights are those that were unmistakably made long ago and far away, particularly the unforgettable jade burial suit of the Han princess Dou Wan. Discovered in a cliffside tomb in Hebei Province, in 1968, the ritual object is made of more than two thousand rectangular panels of jade, sewn together with gold. Through July 16.

Met Breuer

"Lygia Pape: A Multitude of Forms"

The Brazilian vanguardist, who died in 2004 at the age of seventy-seven, worked in every medium—or so it seems in this wonderful, overdue retrospective. The show charts Pape's prolific path, from her youthful days in the nonobjective concrete-art movement to her defection to the more playful neo-concretism, ending with later works of anything-goes independence. Pape's early compositions, including intricate geometric woodcut prints, give way to interactive pieces with movable parts. The charming "Livro da Criação" ("Book of Creation"), from 1959-60, distills the primordial tale into solid colors and simple forms, which visitors are free to manipulate; in "Ballet Neoconcreto," first staged in 1958 and seen here in a nineteen-minute-long video, dancers clad in cylinders and rectangles pare theatre down to its elegant bone. Pape worked for two decades under repressive military dictatorship, and her works' political critique usually simmered below the surface, ambiguously, as in the "social" sculpture "Divisor" ("Divider"), from 1967. In that iconic piece, an outdoor throng moves as a unit, their heads poking through holes in a vast white sheet. In the seventies, the artist explored, with new freedom and a Super-8 camera, the vernacular architecture of Rio de Janeiro's favelas while also returning to her roots in abstraction: here, the museum wisely devotes an entire darkened room to Pape's entrancing installation "Ttéia" (1976-2004), in which taut gold threads become laserlike gossamer beams. Through July 23.

Brooklyn Museum

"Georgia O'Keeffe: Living Modern"

This eagerly anticipated exhibition makes a strong argument that the work of the great American modernist can be illuminated by a study of

the singular persona she crafted—in particular, by a look at her remarkable wardrobe, from her collection of casually regal, Japanese-inspired robes to her black, bespoke men's suits. In novel, telling arrangements, O'Keeffe's striking early abstractions and radically blown-up renderings of flowers are installed alongside related garments. For example, three exquisite white blouses, hand-sewn by the artist, are shown against a dark wall with a glorious painting of canary-yellow autumn leaves, from 1928. Her subtle embroidery echoes the veined surfaces and serrated edges of the foliage. Photographs by her husband, Alfred Stieglitz, and a very long list of other famous photographers, demonstrate her commanding, androgynous bearing and bold ensembles, but this is where the proportions feel a bit off: with this parade of works by other artists, the image of O'Keeffe as an exacting aesthete is nearly overtaken by one of her as a model or muse. It makes you thirsty for more of her paintings, though there are some knockouts on view: of pink shells, animal skulls, otherworldly landscapes. These grand canvases put the show's vitrines of ballet flats and bandanas in proper perspective. *Through July 23.*

Museum of Arts and Design

"Counter-Couture: Handmade Fashion in an American Counterculture"
In all its sumptuous, ragtag, iconoclastic, and utopian forms, hippie clothing reflected the seismic cultural shifts of Vietnam War-era America, eschewing the mass-produced in favor of the personalized and the handmade. This captivating exhibition, installed in moodily lit galleries against purple-and-gold wallpaper, goes beyond the expected caftans and macramé to detail the nuances and extremes of countercultural aesthetics. A section devoted to stage costumes includes a medieval-inspired muumuu, its pastel-ombre velvet adorned with a starburst appliquéd; Mama Cass Elliot, of the Mamas & the Papas, wore it in 1967. Nearby, looping film footage includes performance documentation of the Cockettes, an anarchic theatre group whose psychedelic, thrift-store drag sensibility helped shape a nascent queer aesthetic. From the Army-surplus garments appropriated and painstakingly embroidered by flower children to the dashikis and African fabrics embraced by the black-pride movement to the ascetic styles of communes and cults, the exhibition emphasizes how vernacular fashion signalled antiestablishment values and group identity. That said, high fashion isn't neglected. One highlight is the visionary designer Kaisik Wong's glittering, futuristic "wearable art," which resembles armor and cocoons from another planet—or the next Aquarian age. *Through Aug. 20.*

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Paul Chan

The deep-thinking American adept made his name in the aughts by grafting together disparate sources—Biggie Smalls, Pier Paolo Pasolini, the Bible—in splashy digital animations. Ever since, Chan has been working to liberate moving images from the confines of frames, projecting them onto floors and making art out of shadows. Here, he hits on a radical tactic—putting the anima in animation—by pumping air into nylon fabric in a series of works he calls "breathers." You've seen the dancing inflated tubes outside gas stations; imagine their depraved cousins,

some hooded, some headless, all of them writhing in torment. The spectre of Goya's macabre black paintings looms. Dark art for dark days. *Through April 15.* (*Greene Naftali*, 508 W. 26th St. 212-463-7770.)

Dona Nelson

The Nebraska-born artist, who moved to New York in 1967, makes paintings that have the presence of sculptures, the slapdash bri of backdrops, and the atmospheric gestalt of textile designs. To make the freestanding, two-sided "Lavender Lion," for instance, she poured pale-purple paint onto the back of the canvas, to which she had applied strips of cheesecloth; removing them left a scarred-looking grid. The front of the canvas bears yellow scribbles and puddles of shiny gray. In a series of works that the artist dubs "boxes," she stands paired canvases, both abstract and figurative, back to back or side by side, energizing the show but also lending it the harried air of a labyrinth. *Through May 6.* (*Erben*, 526 W. 26th St. 212-645-8701.)

"Vanishing Points"

The accomplished young art historian Andrianna Campbell, who curated this high-concept show, coaxes a surprising combination of works into lively conversation. It opens with a commanding wall-mural manifesto, written this year by Black Women Artists for Black Lives Matter; the urgent text signals that the art works on view, however formalist they may appear, don't exist in a political vacuum. Taking its title from a 1984 exhibition at Stockholm's Museet Modern (which similarly included works by the titans Robert Smithson and Ruth Vollmer), the show challenges traditional pictorial perspective, especially its assumption of a universal viewer, with such recent works as Trevor Paglen's blurred portrait of Winona Ryder (a composite of images scavenged online) and space-warping, all-over compositions by the painters Beatriz Milhazes and Marina Adams. Campbell's curatorial thread also loops in such treasures as Jack Whitten's mystical abstractions and Peixuan Wang's winsome drawings of strange

gardens and mystical beings. *Through April 22.* (*Cohan*, 533 W. 26th St. 212-714-9500.)

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Adam Gordon

Last year, Gordon blocked the entrance to the gallery's previous space with an inaccessible installation. Now the New York artist fills the gallery walls with paintings, most of them based on banal photographs of blank façades and empty rooms. Though the resulting brown-and-gray studies are precise enough to pass for photographs themselves, a certain mistiness suggests that Gordon's primary interest might be light. In one canvas, a columnar sunbeam floats against a white wall; in another, cars are faintly reflected in glass. But Gordon is no latter-day luminist—his ultimate subject is art's relation to systems of power. That bar of sunlight was photographed in Pittsburgh's Carnegie Museum, and two of the façades front the blue-chip Chelsea galleries of Larry Gagosian and Mary Boone. *Through April 23.* (*Chapter*, 249 E. Houston St. 347-528-4397.)

GALLERIES—BROOKLYN

Alina Tenser

Start this narrowly focussed but mind-expanding show by the Ukrainian-born New York artist in the back room, where a short video tracks several oversized buttons as they slip in and out of view through slits in a cloth background. The action is sexual, and it feels mathematical, too, but above all it's an abstraction of dislocation and loss, which renders those defining personal experiences all the more mysterious. (Call it existential peekaboo.) In the front room, two wooden buttons—one big and blue, the other bigger and green—huddle together. Every Sunday at 4, you can watch Tenser perform with her piece, rolling and spinning the disks in all sorts of interesting ways. But the objects succeed on their own terms as well, emanating a blank self-possession. *Through April 30.* (*Soloway*, 348 S. 4th St. Williamsburg. 347-776-1023.)



"*Sandy Road*" (2003), by Maureen Wallace, in the painter's survey "*Clear Day*," at MOMA PS1.

NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors lead complicated lives; it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.

Charli XCX

After Myspace emerged as a viable social-media site, in the mid-aughts, the company designed an official music player and introduced band profiles, out of which grew a culture of users sharing the music they were making. Charli XCX is among the most successful of this wave, and has worked with some of the best rising talent at the right time. Last year, she released the "Vroom Vroom" EP, produced largely by the pop impresario Sophie. The two worked together again on standout tracks from her new album, "Number 1 Angel," including the single "After the After Party," featuring the rapper Lil Yachty, an omnipresent master of social media. Charli has been putting on a consistent live show for nearly a decade, steadily producing music while maintaining the intrigue of an all-new artist. (*Le Poisson Rouge*, 158 Bleeker St. 212-505-3474. April 12.)

"Concert for America"

The modern pop ballad is a unique American innovation, originating on the sheets of music that littered Tin Pan Alley in the early twentieth century and sustained by folks like Sinatra and Streisand. "Concert for America," an ongoing fund-raising series, continues the tradition this month with **Barry Manilow** and **Vanessa Williams**, who will perform anemic ballads like "Mandy" and "Save the Best for Last" in support of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the Southern Poverty Law Center, the National Immigration Law Center, and the Sierra Club Foundation. (*Town Hall*, 123 W. 43rd St. 212-840-2824. April 18.)

Floating Points

All dance music is an experiment of sorts, as producers and beat-makers stir up sounds and samples in the hope of finding the perfect alchemy to make the masses bust a move (or at least bob their heads). Yet Sam Shepherd, the mastermind behind London's heady Floating Points project, isn't just a curious listener and a talented disk jockey. He flexes a Ph.D. in neuroscience, but has traded the laboratory for the d.j. booth. The quiet throb of his bubbling electronic music, most evident on his 2015 début "Elaenia," makes it evident that thinking with one's heart may not be so different from thinking with one's head. Shepherd headlines the brand-new venue Brooklyn Steel; Jófríður Ákadóttir, known as **JFDR**, will open. (319 Frost St., Brooklyn. April 13.)

The Garden

Joe Jackson singing fast; pop punk with jazz drummers; Death Grips' MC Ride over Home-shake beats—it's fun drawing out comparisons like these while skipping through the Garden's slippery March EP, "U Want the Scoop?" Their saturated sound combines old feelings in new ways, and made the pair of Or-

ange County, California, brothers, Wyatt and Fletcher Shears, a standout act on the Burger Records roster. Their bratty humor is as alluring as their hyper-dynamic compositions; on "Have a Good Day Sir," a jaunty tune about roadside stops and unpaid fines, our speeding protagonist explains to a traffic cop that he's rushing to a show. "What kind of music do you play, son?" the officer asks. "I play country, sir," Wyatt replies facetiously, "and I'm proud to say, it's the only kind of tune I listen to." (*Knitting Factory*, 361 Metropolitan Ave., Brooklyn. 347-529-6696. April 15.)

Pharmakon

In ancient Greece, a pharmakos was a human scapegoat, sacrificed in a ritual meant to purge evil spirits from a community. Over the past decade, the Brooklyn native Margaret Chardiet has dedicated herself to this aptly named industrial-noise project, of which she is the sole member, and "Contact," her new long-player for Sacred Bones Records, draws out the parallels. (According to studio personnel, on the first day of vocal tracking, Chardiet managed to injure her eye from screaming so hard.) She uses the project—and those shredded vocal cords—to explore intellectual themes of mortality and bodily transcendence, and has achieved crossover success usually denied to purveyors of noise and power electronics. But, bear in mind, this music isn't for everyone, nor is it intended to be. (*Brooklyn Bazaar*, 150 Greenpoint Ave., Brooklyn. bkbaazar.com. April 14.)

Swet Shop Boys

"Where we come from, it's just fields of poppy / It gets processed, packaged, shipped to Papi," Himanshu Suri raps on "Phone Tap," a recent song by this sardonic duo. "Poppy" refers to opium, cultivated legally in pockets of India; "Papi" is the familial title lent to drug suppliers by their low-level salesmen. This year, the Swet Shop Boys, made up of Suri, from Queens, and the British actor Riz Ahmed, released "Cashmere," a record about life in Western metropolises for upwardly mobile first-generation South Asians. The pair cleverly explore the contours and burdens of their respective Indian and Pakistani cultures: "My shoes off at the masjid, my shoes off at the airport!" But the album's boldest scenes step out of biography and into narrative, casting young brown radicals as archetypal rap rebels—dodging federal agents and scaling underground economies, with a taste for style and danger and a natural distrust of the law. (*Webster Hall*, 125 E. 11th St. 212-353-1600. April 12.)

Carlos Vives

The Santa Marta-bred Vives is the king of contemporary *vallenato*—a form of bouncy, accordion-driven folk music popular in Colombia's coastal regions. Vives is hardly a newcomer: he released his first album in 1989 and scored his first hit five years later with the barrelling "La Gota Fría." Since then, he's made a career of revitalizing his beloved country's traditional tunes with an injection of rock-and-roll riffs and pop rhythms. These days, Vives

is collaborating with the likes of Shakira, his fellow coastal Colombian, in the poignant hit "La Bicicleta." At Radio City Music Hall, the Grammy-winning pop maestro will perform a career-spanning set of his exuberant tunes. (*Sixth Ave. at 50th St.* 212-247-4777. April 15.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Remembering Barbara Carroll

Attending a performance by the incomparable Barbara Carroll, who died in February at the age of ninety-two, was like stumbling upon an oasis of civility in the midst of urban mayhem. A gifted bebop pianist who deftly evolved into a paragon of vocal sureness and grace, Carroll was an enduring model of smart and elegant old-school entertainment. A host of longtime admirers are saluting the grande dame, including **Bill Charlap**, **Eric Comstock**, **Sandy Stewart**, **Jay Leonhart**, and **Bucky Pizzarelli**. (*Birdland*, 315 W. 44th St. 212-581-3080. April 15.)

Billy Childs Quartet

Although he broke into public view by way of his careening work with such luminaries as Freddie Hubbard and J. J. Johnson, the pianist Childs quickly sidestepped categorization as an intrepid hard bopper. The four-time Grammy winner traffics in diverse hybrid projects that have found him taking on classical composition as well as refiguring the songs of Laura Nyro. His new album, "Rebirth," casts a fond glance back at his small-group beginnings; it features the saxophonist **Steve Wilson**, who joins him here. (The reedman **Donny McCaslin** will fill in on opening night.) (*Jazz Standard*, 116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. April 13-16.)

Anat Fort Quartet

It must be a kick, for a pianist in particular, to join the ranks of ECM Records, the home of Keith Jarrett and other luminaries of the modern jazz keyboard. Fort came on board in 2007 with "A Long Story," joined by the legendary drummer Paul Motian; her subsequent recordings, lyrical and unpredictable, have reinforced her growing reputation. She's joined by the saxophonist **Chris Cheek**, the bassist **Gary Wang**, and the drummer **Francisco Mela**. (*Cornelia Street Café*, 29 Cornelia St. 212-989-9319. April 13.)

Harold Mabern and Eric Alexander Quartet

There's a notable age gap between them, but the forty-eight-year-old saxophonist Alexander and the eighty-one-year-old pianist Mabern get on like fraternal twins, their bluesy exaltations lining up in companionable harmony. As heard on Alexander's album "Second Impression," from 2016, or on any of the other recordings that have found this pair in serene interaction, hard bop is second nature to both of them. (*Smoke*, 2751 Broadway, between 105th and 106th Sts. 212-864-6662. April 14-26.)

Tony Malaby Quartet

The rough-and-ready tenor saxophonist Malaby could probably kick up plenty of dust with the assistance of practically any decent rhythm section, but here he has an exceptional one: the pianist **Leo Genovese**, the drummer **Billy Mintz**, and the mighty bassist **William Parker**. (*Cornelia Street Café*, 29 Cornelia St. 212-989-9319. April 14-15.)

MOVIES



Jack, who performs as Sabrina, is the m.c. of a drag pageant in the 1968 documentary "The Queen."

Leading Ladies

A film series at Anthology Film Archives explores the crossing of gender lines.

SOME OUTSTANDING FILMS have been gathered in the Anthology Film Archives series "The Cinema of Gender Transgression: Trans Film," including one of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's best films, "In a Year of 13 Moons," and Ulrike Ottinger's exotically spectacular "Freak Orlando." The series also features a rarely screened classic documentary made closer to home: "The Queen," from 1968, Frank Simon's sharply observed and rapturously filmed behind-the-scenes view of a drag-queen contest at Town Hall, in midtown Manhattan.

The movie starts at the center of the action, with a portrait of the m.c. and impresario, Jack, whose drag name is Sabrina and whose self-described stage persona is that of a "bar-mitzvah mother," who keeps the proceedings lively but doesn't detract attention from the contestants ("I'm twenty-four years old, but in drag I come on like a hundred and ten"). Focussing closely on Jack's makeup and costuming, Simon details the outer transformation and observes as Jack's theatrical inspiration emerges, and then does so for the diverse array of contestants as well. The practicalities of gay life in the mid-sixties are the subject

of remarkable scenes in hotel rooms where the show's participants talk about their "husbands," their relationships with parents and neighbors, the option of sex-reassignment surgery, and their efforts to deal with the draft, which loomed before all young men during the Vietnam War.

Simon (who's also one of the cinematographers) invigorates the film with vitally textured, sharply inflected, high-contrast color images. Whether pushing the camera close to the drag artists or zooming in from afar to survey them intimately, Simon captures the lavish life of theatrical imagination that inspires them and makes gender itself seem like an aspect of urgent performance. For all its flash and glitz, the pageant comes off as difficult, exacting work; for all the camaraderie of the drag queens, the competition is fierce and serious. In the course of the film, Simon reveals racial tensions dividing the contestants as well as the eternal tension between life-worn troupers and a talented young newcomer. As the artists melt back into the maelstrom of the streets, the split between their public and private personae, and the secrets of gay life at a time of extreme prejudice and discrimination, appear all the more tragic.

—Richard Brody

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OPENING

Chasing Trane: The John Coltrane Documentary Reviewed in Now Playing. *Opening April 14. (In limited release.)* **The Fate of the Furious** The eighth installment of the automotive-action franchise, starring Vin Diesel, Dwayne Johnson, Jason Statham, and Michelle Rodriguez; directed by F. Gary Gray. *Opening April 14. (In wide release.)* **The Lost City of Z** Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. *Opening April 14. (In wide release.)* **Norman** Reviewed in Now Playing. *Opening April 14. (In limited release.)* **A Quiet Passion** Terence Davies wrote and directed this bio-pic about Emily Dickinson, starring Cynthia Nixon. *Opening April 14. (In limited release.)*

NOW PLAYING

Chasing Trane: The John Coltrane Documentary

A dully conventional film about a brilliantly unconventional musician. The director, John Scheinfeld, starts the account in the mid-fifties, when Coltrane first came to prominence, in the Miles Davis Quintet, from which he was fired for his drug and alcohol habits. Quitting cold turkey, Coltrane found fresh inspiration in the company of Davis and Thelonious Monk before forming his own band, reaching new heights of popularity and then repudiating it in the interest of deeper and wilder musical ideas. The sketch of Coltrane's early days emphasizes the influences of his two grandfathers, who were ministers, and the film draws a through-line regarding his spiritual quest. It features many performances by Coltrane (including some fine if familiar film clips) but buries them under graphics and voiceovers; the movie's one enduring contribution is interviews with some of Coltrane's musician friends, including Jimmy Heath, Reggie Workman, Wayne Shorter, and Benny Golson, but these discussions are edited to snippets. Meanwhile, the film offers almost no musical context; Scheinfeld seems more interested in Coltrane's story arc than in his art.—Richard Brody (*In limited release.*)

Colossal

The director Nacho Vigalondo's new movie is partly a blandly schematic drama of self-discovery and partly a thinly sketched sci-fi monster thriller—yet his mashup of these genres is ingenious and, at times, deliciously realized. Anne Hathaway stars as Gloria, a hard-drinking and unemployed New York blogger whose boyfriend (Dan Stevens) throws her out of his apartment. She retreats to her late parents' empty house in her rustic home town, bumps into a childhood friend (Jason Sudeikis), gets a part-time job in the bar he owns, and tries to take stock of her life. Then she and the world are gripped by the sudden appearance of a gigantic monster that wreaks havoc in Seoul for a few minutes each day. The connection between Gloria's story and the monster's is too good to spoil; suffice it to say that its metaphorical power brings a furiously clarifying and progressive insight to Gloria's troubles and aptly portrays them as the quasi-universal woes of humanity at large. The trope takes a lot of setting up, but it's worth it—and Hathaway's self-transformative, forceful performance brings Vigalondo's strong idea to life.—R.B. (*In limited release.*)

Ghost in the Shell

Rupert Sanders's new film, the latest example of Scarlett Johansson's adventures in science fiction, casts her—not without controversy and complaint, in some quarters—as a hybrid law enforcer, in a nameless Asian city. She takes the role of Major,

who consists of a human brain, purloined under mysterious circumstances and housed inside a manufactured body. She can think for herself, but if an arm gets ripped off she can always have it replaced: no pain, all gain. We meet her boss, played by the imperturbable Takeshi (Beat) Kitano, her shock-haired sidekick (Pilou Asbæk), and the doctor who designed her (Juliette Binoche). All this is loyally adapted from Mamoru Oshii's 1995 film of the same name, which has long been heralded as a high point of anime; Sanders carefully frames some of his shots in tribute to the original. There are startling sights here (to have your mind hacked, we learn, is to be plunged into a writhing pit), and Johansson marches through her scenes with purpose, yet as a whole the reboot is less haunting and less ruminative than Oshii's work, and lacks its strange erotic liquefaction. Also, the plot has acquired an unwelcome strain of mush; who ordered that?—Anthony Lane (*Reviewed in our issue of 4/10/17.*) (*In wide release.*)

Graduation

Cristian Mungiu, the Romanian director who made “4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days” (2007) and “Beyond the Hills” (2012), files another withering report from his homeland. Yet his manner remains as unblinkingly calm as ever; for all the intensity of his accusations and his laments, there is no loss of formal control. Maria Dragus, whom fans of Michael Haneke will recall from “The White Ribbon,” plays Eliza, a hardworking high-school student who requires top marks in her final exams if she is to take up the offer of a place at a British university. Her plans are derailed by a simple and upsetting turn of fate, and it is up to her father, the laughably named Romeo (Adrian Titieni), to get them back on track. To do this, he must call in favors, bend the rules, and yield to the pressures of everyday corruption, which thus far, as a doctor, he has managed to withstand—though not, we soon realize, in other areas of his life. This portrait of a busted system is all too cogent, and it's no surprise that Romeo and his wife, Magda (Lia Burian), urge their daughter to get out while she can. In Romanian.—A.L. (*4/10/17.*) (*In limited release.*)

Hi, Mom!

This independent film, which Brian De Palma made in New York in 1970, is an exuberant grab bag of mischievous whimsy that blends radical politics, sexual freedom, racial tension, and emotional hangups with the director's own catalogue of artistic references, from Hitchcock and the French New Wave to cinéma vérité and avant-garde theatre—and adds a freewheeling inventiveness and an obstreperous satire all his own. It also showcases the explosive, sardonic young Robert De Niro, as Jon Rubin, a cynic on the make who creates reality-based porn inspired by “Rear Window” and, finding that reality needs his help, seduces one of his subjects (Jennifer Salt) for his camera. De Niro brings unhinged spontaneity to Jon's Machiavellian calculations, especially in wild and daring scenes involving a militant theatre group that preys violently on its spectators' liberal guilt. De Palma offers a self-conscious time capsule of downtown sights and moods, especially in his rambunctious, hilarious, yet nonetheless disturbing parodies of public television. In his derisively satirical view, the well-meaning media depicts the day's furies and outrages in an oblivious objectivity that misses the deeper truths that this movie's own theatrical exaggerations are meant to capture.—R.B. (*Film Society of Lincoln Center; April 13 and April 15.*)

In a Year of 13 Moons

This riot of pain, from 1978, may be Rainer Werner Fassbinder's most radical effort in primal sat-

ire. He summons his full complement of theatrical extravagance and cinematic style to tell the story of Elvira, née Erwin, a former butcher who, after a sex-change operation, lives as a married woman and regrets it all. The litany of Elvira's woes, from her childhood in a postwar orphanage to her casual manipulation by the slaughterhouse boss to her domestic abuse, is distilled into a universal anguish—the search for love. Fassbinder has Elvira revisit the stages of her life—the slaughterhouse, the orphange, the monstrous man who ruined her, and the family she left behind—with raucous humor and hysterical melodrama, and Volker Spengler throws himself into the role with heartbreaking abandon. The identity conflict at the film's center is also Germany's own: in Fassbinder's portrait of the gleamingly rebuilt Frankfurt as an emotionally devastated wasteland, Fascism—the need of some to dominate and of others to endure—comes off as a woeful constant of the heart. In German.—R.B. (*Anthology Film Archives; April 15 and April 18.*)

Norman

Richard Gere channels the mannerisms of middle-period Woody Allen in the title role of this plodding New York-centered drama by the Israeli director Joseph Cedar. Norman Oppenheimer is a fixer who breaks more than he fixes. He elbows his way into acquaintance with Micha Eshel (Lior Ashkenazi), a rising young Israeli politician who visits New York, and attempts, via urgent schmoozing, to nudge him into an alliance with a big-time financier. Three years go by; Eshel is now Israel's Prime Minister, and Norman pushes and wheedles, doing favors for him and cadging favors in return, until a whiff of scandal arises from Norman's dealings and Eshel is tainted. Cedar's specialty is dialectical—he delights in Norman's rhetorical maneuvers and elaborate deceptions. Norman is a political Zelig, a cipher who lives for his place in photos with powerful people; it's never quite clear what he gets out of the high-stakes transactions, though he seems to crave respect. Cedar plays Norman's story for tragedy but never develops his inner identity, his history, or his ideals; the protagonist and his drama remain anecdotal and superficial.—R.B. (*In limited release.*)

Prevenge

If metaphors were movies, Alice Lowe's new film would be a masterpiece. Instead, it's just smart fun—as well as a promising début. She wrote and directed it, and also stars as Ruth, a pregnant woman in Cardiff, who believes that her unborn baby is speaking to her—and urging her to kill people who need killing, such as a swaggering pickup artist, a heartless human-resources officer, and several others whom she blames for the death of her partner (the unborn baby's father) in a climbing accident. Ruth's grief is further embittered by empty pieties surrounding motherhood and the ills of modern life at large. Ruth suffers from flashbacks and visions that are organized around unanswered questions about her partner's death; the violence (and the explicit, gleeful gore) ramps up along with Ruth's madness, but the cycle of crime lacks variety and detail. Lowe directs with a spare, clear, brisk style that builds tension and deals death with minimal fuss but displays little imagination; the movie is diabolically clever, but it stays within the narrow limits of its cleverness.—R.B. (*In limited release.*)

Wanda

The actress Barbara Loden's only film as a director, from 1970, is a harrowing, epiphanic masterpiece. She also stars as the title character,

Wanda Goronski, a pallid wraith in an anthracite landscape. Reduced to apathy by the drudgery and banality of a mining town, she flees her husband and young children and rides off with a buttoned-down, steely-eyed drifter (Michael Higgins). Unbeknownst to her, he is a robber on the run as well as a fussy, domineering brute who improves her manners and her wardrobe even while launching her on a criminal path. Though suspicious from the start, Wanda is ready for anything that makes her feel alive—and the movie matches her in audacity and sensibility. Loden's indelible depiction of Wanda's degradation, resistance, and resignation blends intense psychological realism with a spontaneous, quasi-musical mastery of form. Her rough-grained images, with their attention to place, light, and detail, have an intimate, sculptural texture; they seem to bring matter to life and to glow with the characters' inner radiance.—R.B. (*Metrograph*; April 13.)

Welfare

Government aid to people in need—and the government's efforts to verify their needs—give rise to a massive bureaucracy. The interaction of its agents with its applicants is the core of Frederick Wiseman's Dantesque 1975 documentary, set in New York City public-assistance offices, in which poor people with a wide range of troubles (including unemployment, substance abuse, family conflict, and mental or physical illness) try to persuade caseworkers—some who seem compassionate, others who seem indifferent—to approve their benefits. "Welfare," one employee explains, "is based on what clients say," and, as the bureaucracy turns applicants into supplicants, the performance-like discussions that this system induces make for a grievously sad yet unflinching spectacle. The psychology of poverty has rarely been so well depicted, along with the inadequacy of the bureaucracy itself: the ostensible objectivity of the law rests on the subjective judgments, even the good will, of the caseworkers. Wiseman's patient, intense portraits of individuals are as probing as paintings, and his soundtrack captures a Shakespearean range of rhetoric. The emotional result is a concentration of society's agonizing ironies and hard-fought sympathies.—R.B. (*Film Forum*; April 17.)

Win It All

The ambient violence in Joe Swanberg's previous feature, "Digging for Fire," bursts into the foreground in this casually swinging yet terrifyingly tense drama of a compulsive gambler on the edge. Jake Johnson (who co-wrote the film with Swanberg) stars as Eddie Garrett, a part-time Wrigley Field parking attendant and full-time poker player who's constantly in debt. When a rough-hewn friend prepares for a term in prison, he gives Eddie a duffel bag to hide. Eddie finds cash in it, and, despite the best efforts of his Gamblers Anonymous sponsor (Keegan-Michael Key), yields to temptation. Eddie turns to his easygoing but tough-loving brother, Ron (Joe Lo Truglio), who runs a landscaping business, for help; besides saving his own neck, Eddie also wants to save his new relationship with Eva (the charismatic Aislinn Derbez), a nurse whose intentions are serious. With a teeming cast of vibrantly unglamorous Chicago characters who hold Eddie in a tight social web, Swanberg—aided greatly by Johnson's vigorous performance—makes the gambler's panic-stricken silence all the more agonizing, balancing the warm veneer of intimate normalcy with the inner chill of secrets and lies.—R.B. (*Netflix*.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC



Renée Fleming and Elina Garanča star in a new Met production of a cherished Strauss opera.

Time Capsule

Robert Carsen sets "Der Rosenkavalier" in the era of its composition.

WHEN THE NOVELIST Robert Musil, on the first page of "The Man Without Qualities," placidly launched his Viennese epic on "a fine August day in the year 1913," he was indulging in the deepest irony: a year later, with the beginning of the First World War, the Austro-Hungarian Empire would begin its descent into ruin. Musil's analytical novel is about how individual humans shape, and are shaped by, the tide of history; Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal's sumptuous opera "Der Rosenkavalier," originally set during the reign of the Empress Maria Theresa, merely concerns the passage of time, and focusses more tightly on the intimate vexations of the human heart. This week, a new production of the work by the director Robert Carsen arrives at the Metropolitan Opera, allowing audiences to consider both the piece and its era with a heightened level of clarity.

Luxury will not be lacking: the leading roles will be taken by the soprano Renée Fleming, bringing her resplendent voice and commanding stage presence to the role of the Marschallin (an aristocrat who is feeling old at the age of thirty-two), and the mezzo-soprano

Elina Garanča, whose shadowy, pillowed voice will give the pants role of Octavian (the Marschallin's young lover) an enticing sense of contrast. (The days in which sopranos, in the course of their careers, cycled through the roles of the Marschallin, Octavian, and the ingénue Sophie seem to be over.)

The biggest contrast, however, will be visual. Beginning in 1969, the Metropolitan Opera offered "Rosenkavalier" in a beloved production, designed by Robert O'Hearn, that worked mightily to evoke the grandeur of mid-eighteenth-century Vienna and to fill the vast stage of the new Metropolitan Opera House; it was a firm platform for starry singing, and, over time, increasingly ossified notions of musical drama. But Carsen's production is set in 1910, the year of the opera's composition, and Musilian ironies will abound. The waxing militarism of European society is reflected in the costumes. The décor reaches back to the architects and designers of the Vienna Secession; walls lined with rich fabric are set jarringly against bare stone floors and sleek modern furniture. At the close of the opera, Strauss's eighteenth-century characters achieve resolution. But their environment will remind the audience that such hard-won wisdom is easily swept away.

—Russell Platt

OPERA**Metropolitan Opera**

The Met's current revival of Deborah Warner's production of "*Eugene Onegin*" is a crowd-pleaser by any standard. Anna Netrebko returns to play a memorable Tatiana; Robin Ticciati takes a stylishly fast-paced approach to the score, bursting through the occasional orchestral bottleneck. (The impressive baritone Peter Mattei takes over the title role in the remaining performances.) *April 12 and April 18 at 7:30 and April 15 at 8.* The company unveils a new production of Strauss and Hofmannsthal's bittersweet comedy "*Der Rosenkavalier*," directed by Robert Carsen. Renée Fleming, Elina Garanča, Erin Morley, and Günther Groissböck lead the cast; Sebastian Weigle conducts. *April 13 and April 17 at 7.* The final performance of "*La Traviata*" features Carmen Giannattasio and Atalla Ayan as Violetta and Alfredo, respectively, and a superstar—Plácido Domingo—in the baritone role of Germont; Nicola Luisotti. *April 14 at 8.* Sonja Fissell's grand production of Verdi's "*Aida*" is not exactly a shrinking violet on the Met's schedule. It returns with two estimable singers, Krassimira Stoyanova and Violeta Urmana, as Aida and her nemesis, Amneris, and Riccardo Massi as Radamès; Daniele Rustioni. *April 15 at 12:30.* (*Metropolitan Opera House*. 212-362-6000.)

"Figaro! (90210)"

Modern adaptations of operas sometimes have the whiff of a gimmick about them, but Vid Guerrero's acclaimed English and Spanglish translation of Mozart's classic "The Marriage of Figaro" has touched a nerve: the ingenuous servant of the title and his fiancée are undocumented immigrants in the Beverly Hills household of a lascivious real-estate magnate. Melissa Crespo's staging returns with music direction by Raphael Fusco and much the same cast as last year's New York run. *April 11-13 at 7, April 14-15 at 8, and April 16 at 7.* (*The Duke on 42nd Street*, 229 W. 42nd St. figaro90210.com.)

Anthony Roth Costanzo: "The Opera Party"

Costanzo, a formidable countertenor and a thoroughly engaging personality, is hosting a mini-series of intimate events this spring at WQXR's Greene Space. The first is "Mistaken Identities," an evening featuring performances by Costanzo and his fellow star countertenor David Daniels, a discussion with the *Opera News* editor F. Paul Driscoll, and food by the James Beard Award-winning chef Patrick Connolly. *April 17 at 7.* (44 Charlton St. thegreenspace.org.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES**The Knights: "On the Shoulders of Giants"**

Continuing their quest to bring high-quality orchestral music to Brooklyn, Eric Jacobsen and his intrepid musicians perform a mostly classic program at BRIC House: works by Glass (an arrangement of the String Quartet No. 2, "Company") and Schubert and symphonies by Haydn and Mozart (the limpid No. 29 in A Major), along with a work of much more recent vintage by the borough's own Gabriel Kahane ("Freight and Salvage"). *April 13 at 8.* (647 Fulton St., at Rockwell Pl. bricartsmedia.org.)

RECITALS**Opus Concert Series**

House of Yes, a chic performing-arts space in Bushwick, initiates what it describes as an "im-

mersive classical event series" with "Black Angels," a program built around George Crumb's visceral amplified string quartet of that title from 1971, played by members of Ensemble LPR. The evening includes works by Hildegard von Bingen, Ricardo Romaneiro, and Vasko Dukovski, accompanied with film, theatrical elements, and aerialists. *April 12 at 7.* (*2 Wyckoff Ave., Brooklyn*. houseofyes.org.)

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center with Wu Man

The charismatic Wu Man, among the world's foremost performers on the pi-pa, joins the pianist Gloria Chien and the Shanghai Quartet for a mix of contemporary works by Zhou Long, Bright Sheng, Ye Xiaogang, and others. *April 13 at 6:30 and 9.* (*Rose Studio, Rose Bldg., Lincoln Center*. 212-875-5788.)

Takács Quartet

Music by Beethoven ranks high among the things this distinguished ensemble does supremely well, a point supported by the complete cycle it made for the Decca label from 2000 to 2004, newly reissued in an economical boxed set. The quartet's Lincoln Center program offers a well-selected sampling of the composer's early (Op. 18, No. 6), middle (Op. 59, No. 3), and late (Op. 135) styles. *April 13 at 7:30.* (*Alice Tully Hall*. 212-721-6500.)

Bargemusic

The cellist Edward Arron and the pianist Jeewon Park, a gifted husband-and-wife pair, return to

the barge once more to dominate the weekend. On Friday night, Park performs Chopin's Twenty-four Preludes and the "Andante Spianato and Grande Polonoise," while Arron joins her on Sunday afternoon in works by Schumann, Falla, and Beethoven (the Sonata in A Major for Cello and Piano, Op. 69). Saturday evening belongs to the flute-and-piano team of Lu Ann and Alexander Peskanov. *April 14 at 8, April 15 at 8, and April 16 at 4.* (*Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn*. bargemusic.org.)

Anne Schwaneilms

The elegantly expressive soprano has had an international profile as an interpreter of German repertoire for at least a decade, so it's hard to believe she's only now making her New York recital début. Rather than offer a wide-ranging calling-card recital, she chooses instead to demonstrate her talent for probing yet sumptuous renditions of songs by Hugo Wolf and Richard Strauss; the eminent Malcolm Martineau is at the piano. *April 16 at 5.* (*Alice Tully Hall*. 212-721-6500.)

Weekend of Chamber Music

The longtime upstate summer series sprouts a branch in Gotham, presenting "Music Springs Eternal," an evening featuring the Verona String Quartet, the cellist Caroline Stinson, and the bassist Jeremy McCoy in music by Haydn, Schubert (the String Quintet), and one of the series' favorite contemporary composers, John Harbison ("Presences," a very recent work for string sextet). *April 17 at 7:30.* (*Bathhouse Studios, 538 E. 11th St.* wcmconcerts.org.)

DANCE**New York City Ballet**

In an almost manic display, the company crams forty-three works from the past three decades—all made since the death of George Balanchine—into its six-week spring season. This is all part of its "Here/Now" festival, which contains ballets by a cross-section of choreographers, from Benjamin Millepied and William Forsythe to the company members Lauren Lovette and Peter Walker. The most interesting programs, though, are the ones that feature ballets by its three most prominent discoveries: Christopher Wheeldon, Alexei Ratmansky, and Justin Peck. Each receives a dedicated bill, and their pieces are also sprinkled across the repertory, offering opportunities to see some of their best works—Wheeldon's "Polyphony," for example, or Ratmansky's "Russian Seasons," or Peck's "Year of the Rabbit." There will also be two premières, one by Ratmansky (set to music by the Russian contemporary composer Leonid Desyatnikov), the other by Peck. The final week is reserved for "A Midsummer Night's Dream." The first week, though, is devoted to Balanchine and Jerome Robbins, and includes the luminous "Symphony in C"—what better reason to go to the ballet? *April 18 at 7:30: "Allegro Brillante," "The Four Temperaments," and "Symphony in C."* (*David H. Koch, Lincoln Center*. 212-496-0600. *Through May 28.*)

touch, letting the performers talk about themselves so that you learn a little about the affable people risking their necks for you. In "Cuisine & Confessions," they go into the kitchen—offering autobiographical anecdotes involving food, incorporating culinary objects into their impressive stunts, even cooking up some grub for audience members to eat. (*N.Y.U. Skirball Center, 566 LaGuardia Pl.* 212-998-4941. *April 11-16.*)

Scottish Ballet

Sixty years after its founding, this company—a major one in the United Kingdom—finally makes its New York début, with a program displaying its emphasis on new choreography. One work is by a New Yorker, the up-and-coming Bryan Arias, whose sincere, emotive, slinky "Motion of Displacement" alludes to his mother's immigration from El Salvador. "Ten Poems," by the British choreographer Christopher Bruce, draws upon the village characters in Dylan Thomas poems. And Christopher Hampson, the troupe's artistic director since 2012, offers his own "Sinfonietta Giocosa," a skillfully cut gem made originally for Atlanta Ballet. (*Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave.*, at 19th St. 212-242-0800. *April 11-16.*)

Youth America Grand Prix

Every year, this international ballet competition seems to expand. This time, there will be two concluding performances, one in which

the finalists (ages twelve to nineteen) share a program with their idols and another purely made up of ballet luminaries. "Stars of Today Meet the Stars of Tomorrow" (April 13) features the kids in the first half, followed by their elders, including Svetlana Lunkina and Evan Mackie, of the National Ballet of Canada, in a pas de deux by David Dawson. The second gala, "Julio Bocca: Tribute to a Dance Legend" (April 14), features an A-list of performers—including Nina Ananiashvili, still dancing in her early fifties—to celebrate the Argentinean superstar, who now heads the Uruguayan national company and is turning fifty. (*David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-496-0600. April 13-14.*)

Streb Extreme Action / "SEA (Singular Extreme Actions)"

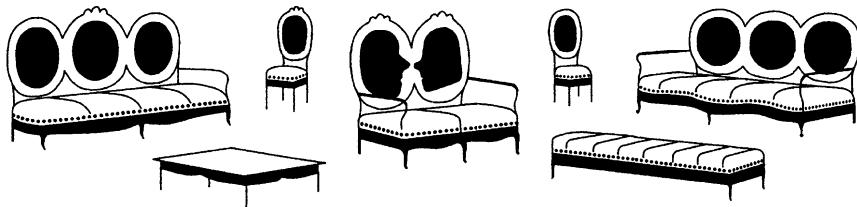
The performers of this troupe are called "action engineers," not dancers, and you can immediately see why: they throw themselves off platforms and moving surfaces with glee, seem-

ingly unafraid of injury. Streb's shows are all about physics: what goes up must come down. They are also about the excitement that comes with the fall. The music is loud, the dancers are buff and fearless, and the effect is both exhilarating and, after a while, a little numbing. Adrenaline gets you only so far. (*SLAM, 51 N. 1st St., Brooklyn. 866-811-4111. April 13-16. Through May 7.*)

Soledad Barrio & Noche Flamenca

The tight confines of Joe's Pub put audience members thrillingly, almost disturbingly near the searing intensity of this beloved flamenco troupe's star, Soledad Barrio. As a description of that experience, "intimate" doesn't quite suffice, but "Intimo" is the title of the company's latest show. The young and flamboyant Carlos Menchaca gets a number to himself, and a duet continues the company's recent flirtation with hip-hop, but, as usual, Barrio's solo is likely to be the main event. (*425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. April 17-18. Through April 27.*)

ABOVE & BEYOND



Easter Parade and Bonnet Festival

Held annually in New York City, the Easter Parade and Bonnet Festival has long been a nationwide symbol for the blend of religion, pageantry, and whimsy that has come to define the holiday. In the mid-nineteenth century, patrons of St. Patrick's Cathedral began displaying floral arrangements at Easter services, and high-society women in attendance followed suit and brightened their church apparel; soon, the stroll from the Cathedral down Fifth Avenue became a flamboyant showcase of bonnets, ribbons, and floral prints. On Easter morning, participants will march in headwear featuring elaborate models of the skyline, live animals, and countless other outlandish ornaments, in keeping with the event's spirit of one-upmanship. As the poet Rosyrie Schulman declared, in this magazine in 1946, "This year I'm being different / (My heart is set upon it) / I'm going to wear a ribbon / With a touch of bonnet on it." (*49th St. at Fifth Ave., marching up to 57th St. April 16 at 10 A.M.*)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Phillips holds a sale of prints and editions (April 18), the most interesting of which is a group of a hundred etchings and aquatints from the collection of the printer and engraver Piero Crommelynck. The son of a Belgian playwright, Crommelynck was Picasso's favorite

engraver, as well as the subject of many of his late prints. The collection includes a full set of Picasso's etchings for the play "Le Cocu Magnifique," by Crommelynck père, as well as several of Piero's reinterpretations of Picasso paintings, such as "Verre d'Absinthe," from 1972. (*450 Park Ave. 212-940-1200.*) • For **Christie's**, "Opulence"—the title of its April 13 sale—means Regency silver sets, Persian carpets, decorative bric-a-brac, and the odd musical instrument. (*20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.*)

READINGS AND TALKS

Whitney Museum

Most of the work chosen for the first Biennial on the museum's new downtown turf was selected before last year's Presidential election, but the feeling of social upheaval was already in the air. It's not entirely surprising, then, that one of the pieces involves the musician and cultural critic Ian Svenonius, a sovereign figure in the punk-rock world known for his work with such D.C.-based bands as Nation of Ulysses, the Make-Up, and Chain and the Gang. For the Biennial, the artist Frances Stark hand-painted eight spreads from Svenonius's pseudo-Marxist essay "Censorship Now!" This week, Svenonius comes to the museum to deliver a lecture in dialogue with Stark's project. (*99 Gansevoort St. whitney.org/cyo. April 14 at 6:30.*)

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FOOD & DRINK



TABLES FOR TWO

Tim Ho Wan

85 Fourth Ave. (212-228-2800)

IN A WORLD where an establishment's quality is often perceived as proportional to its prices, the distinction of being one of the world's cheapest Michelin-star restaurants can be a dubious one. Is it merely the best effort of its budget class? Or has delectably gratifying been confused with defiantly iconoclastic? Tim Ho Wan, long synonymous with premier dim sum, was anointed with the honor in 2009 in its native Hong Kong. The restaurant's Cantonese name translates to "Add good luck." Recently, given the fanfare surrounding its arrival near Union Square—the forty-fifth outpost in a global chain that reaches from Vietnam to Australia—one has needed a smidge of luck to try its modestly priced offerings without waiting an hour or more: the line to enter the place, which accepts no reservations, has been known to wrap around six New York City blocks.

No trip for dim sum, a ritual that in Mandarin is rendered as "morning tea," can begin without a good pot of tea. Tim Ho Wan, which opens daily at 10 A.M., distinguishes itself from its Chinatown peers with a varied selection, from *dé rigueur* oolong to the palate-cleansing *pú'er*, which kindles the appetite for the bamboo steamers to follow.

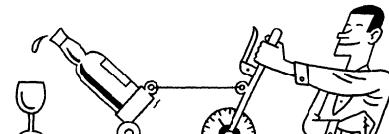
Begin with the classics: steamed pork

spare ribs with black beans, rice roll with shrimp and Chinese chives, pork dumplings. The secret to Tim Ho Wan's success is not so much revolutionized recipes as it is the care with which it makes genre-defining staples. In a business where thin profit margins can incentivize restaurants to cut corners, Tim Ho Wan takes the unusual step of making everything the day it's served, so not a single rice roll has to endure a flavor-sapping stint in the fridge. For the filling, only whole shrimps are used, instead of the usual seafood scraps. Even the soy sauce is house-made.

Subtlety, traditionally undervalued in Chinese cuisine, is raised to an art form here. The eggplant with shrimp is deep-fried, but there's little feeling of grease; the sauce is not poured over the vegetables but coats the bottom of the plate. Abalone seasoning is used for the chicken feet, rather than its cheaper cousin, oyster sauce. The signature bun with barbecued pork, the restaurant's claim to fame, is baked with a rich, buttery pineapple-shaped crust that complements the savory smokiness of the meat and has a pleasing croissant-like texture—"So it doesn't stick to your tongue," the chef likes to tell his patrons. It's the kind of consideration you don't expect in a restaurant where it's easy to avoid paying triple digits for a meal—even if you dine like a king. (*Small plates, \$4.25-\$5.50.*)

—Jiayang Fan

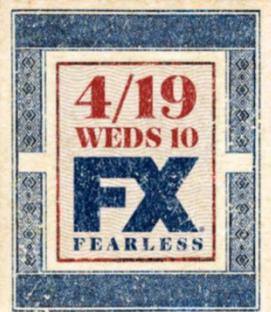
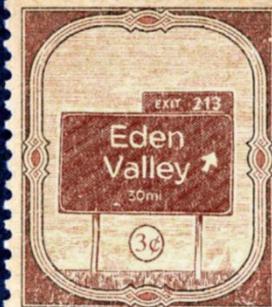
BAR TAB



Skinny Dennis

152 Metropolitan Ave., Brooklyn

On a recent Tuesday night in Williamsburg, the muffled sounds of live honky-tonk rumbled from Skinny Dennis, a pleasantly boisterous barrelhouse. Inside, a stocky third-generation Nashville musician named Andrew Sovine was performing an eighties ode to heartache. "Ain't no woman gonna change the way I think," he crooned. "I think I'll just stay here and drink." If you are going to stay and drink, Willie's Frozen Coffee—a decadent caffeine-and-whiskey sludge named for Willie Nelson—is a must. Baskets of peanuts are laid out on the bar, and the house rule is to toss the shells onto the floor. Upon them, locals and out-of-towners alike, emboldened by boozy sweet tea or vodka lemonade, pair off and dance in the lead-and-follow tradition. "I've played in fifty-year-old roadhouses that look like this," Sovine said, over a beer during intermission. He scanned the room affectionately and landed on a worn-down makeshift sofa. "That is a real truck seat on wood blocks," he said. "And that's a jackalope," he added, gesturing toward a stuffed jack-rabbit crowned with antlers. Other authenticity-signifying curios include a large Hank Williams, Jr., bobblehead, a backlit sign advertising Marlboro cigarettes, and more taxidermied animals (goat, boar, squirrel, armadillo). Sovine traded his empty bottle of Shiner Bock for a cold Lone Star, both Texan lagers, and resumed his place behind the microphone. "O.K., here's an old song," he announced, thumbing the opening notes on his guitar. It was a rockabilly classic that his grandfather, the country singer-songwriter Red Sovine, recorded in 1957. Flanked by his flannel-wearing, mustached bandmates, he sang, "I'm a juke-joint Johnny, and a juke joint is home to me." —David Kortava



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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

TRUMP'S INTERVENTION

ON AUGUST 7, 1998, Al Qaeda suicide bombers struck two U.S. embassies in East Africa, killing two hundred and twenty-four people, most of them Africans. Two weeks later, President Bill Clinton launched Operation Infinite Reach, a fusillade of cruise missiles aimed at a reported Al Qaeda meeting in Afghanistan, and at a factory in Sudan, which was suspected of involvement with chemical weapons. "There will be no sanctuary for terrorists," Clinton declared. The retaliation produced few tangible benefits. And yet, since then, from Kosovo to Waziristan to Libya, the United States has repeatedly threatened or carried out missile and drone attacks and air strikes for limited and sometimes imprecise purposes. In the modern Presidency, firing off missiles has become a rite of passage.

Last Thursday, his seventy-seventh day in office, President Donald Trump pressed the cruise-missile button, sending fifty-nine Tomahawks to strike an airbase in Syria. He did so after concluding from intelligence reports that President Bashar al-Assad's Air Force had, on April 4th, killed or sickened hundreds of people in a chemical attack on Khan Sheikoun, a town held by rebels seeking Assad's overthrow. Trump said that his strike was aimed at ending "the slaughter and bloodshed in Syria."

The President's decision was familiar for being both spontaneous and confusing. As has happened before, he was apparently inspired to act by what he saw on TV—in this case, distressing images of stricken women and children. Yet, despite having previously seen similarly horrifying pictures, Trump had been skeptical of military action in Syria. In 2013, Assad's forces attacked civilians and rebels near Damascus with sarin, a banned nerve agent, killing more than a thousand people. Trump advised President Obama, via Twitter, "Do not attack Syria. There is no upside and tremendous downside." (Obama had called Assad's use of chemical arms crossing a "red line,"

which might lead the U.S. to take military action, but he did not strike. Instead, Russia helped broker an agreement by which Assad gave up many—but evidently not all—of his chemical arms.)

Trump has said, "I'm very capable of changing to anything I want to change to." In the case of Syria, however, he seems to have acted without a clear plan in place. During the campaign, he promised to "bomb the shit out of" ISIS, which holds territory in Syria, but he also said that it was foolish to become mired in the civil war, or to target Assad, who has opposed ISIS—at least, rhetorically. As recently as March 30th, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said that Assad's future would be "decided by the Syrian people," words that signalled a sharp departure from Obama's insistence that Assad must leave office. Then, last Thursday, Tillerson seemed to shift direction, saying that "it would seem there would be no role" for Assad in Syria's political future. But he later said, "I would not in any way attempt to extrapolate that to a change in our policy or our posture relative to our military activities in Syria today."

Syria's civil war is the worst geopolitical disaster of the twenty-first century. It has claimed at least four hundred and seventy thousand lives; prompted a refugee crisis that has destabilized European politics and fuelled the rise of nativist populism; and created a playing field for Russian and Iranian adventurism in the Middle East. Six years of efforts to end the war through diplomacy have failed. The interference of regional and global powers, combined with the fragmentation of militias and guerrillas on the battlefield, have made the conflict appear all but unresolvable. During the past year, the more mainstream rebels opposing Assad have suffered repeated setbacks, including the loss of Aleppo, Syria's second-largest city.

Why, then, would the Trump Administration want to lob a few dozen



cruise missiles into this splintered landscape? One limited rationale might be that Syria's conflict has eroded global treaties banning the use of chemical arms—every time Assad gasses civilians, he increases the likelihood that another dictator or general will use them. It seems odd, though, to initiate armed intervention to prevent one sort of Syrian war crime but not others. Assad has tortured and executed thousands of his own people. Syrian and Russian forces routinely violate international law by targeting civilians, physicians, and rescue workers with bombs and artillery shells. And, if Trump has suddenly been moved to address the suffering, he might start recognizing the legitimacy of Syrians as refugees of war and welcoming them to resettle in the United States.

If President Trump broadens his aims against Assad, to establish civilian safe havens, for example, or to ground Syria's Air Force, or to bomb Assad to the negotiating table, he will enter the very morass that Candidate Trump warned against. He would have to manage risks—military confrontation with Russia, an intensified refugee crisis, a loss of momentum against ISIS—that Obama studied at great length and concluded to be unmanageable, at least at a cost consistent with American interests.

Since the Cold War's end, the United States has led or joined more than half a dozen wars or armed interventions lasting longer than a few months, including the ouster of Iraqi

forces from Kuwait, in 1991; the conflicts in Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo; the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq after 9/11; and, in 2011, during the Arab uprisings, the removal of the Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi. A few of these wars achieved their aims, albeit at a cost in lives and treasure; others went sideways or turned into disasters, as in Libya, where Obama's intervention has been followed by six years of chaos, civil war, and the rise of a branch of ISIS. You don't need an advanced degree in military history to identify the main lessons: once started, even limited wars upset initial plans and assumptions, violence produces unintended consequences, and conflicts are much easier to begin or escalate than to end.

Canadian, European, and Middle Eastern allies, as well as some sections of the Washington foreign-policy establishment, applauded Trump for his strike, pointing out its narrow scope, and noting that Assad had brought it on himself. Unfortunately, Donald Trump's continual search for approval seems to contribute to his unpredictability. Perhaps he will soon rediscover his inclination to proceed cautiously in Middle Eastern wars. Given his bombast, his inconsistency, and his preference for gut instinct over policy knowledge, he always seemed likely to be a dangerous wartime President. The worry now is that he will also be an ambitious one.

—Steve Coll

HOW HIGH DEPT. GILT



IF YOU'RE WALKING along Madison Avenue and suddenly feel undone by the stress of minding your own business, you can duck into the glass-enclosed atrium of the old I.B.M. Building, at Fifty-sixth Street, and take a seat at one of the many bamboo-shaded café tables. The atrium is one of the city's five hundred-odd Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS)—areas that developers have created in exchange for the right to build buildings that are bigger than the city would otherwise allow—and it's such a pleasant place that it makes POPS seem like a good idea instead of just another way for weaselly real-estate types to screw everybody else.

Once you've had enough tranquillity, you can cross the atrium to the adjacent high-rise, Trump Tower, which also contains a POPS. The difference between the two public spaces is striking. "Trump's atrium is a multisensory assault," Sarah Williams Goldhagen said recently, as her purse was X-rayed by security person-

nel. Goldhagen is an architecture critic and the author of the new book "Welcome to Your World: How the Built Environment Shapes Our Lives." In it, she argues that buildings affect us in ways that go deeper than even most architects realize. They also provide windows into the minds that conceived them. "What can you learn about Trump from Trump's aesthetics?" she asked. "Quite a lot."

The Trump atrium is five stories tall, and most of its jutting corners and vertical surfaces are covered with mirrors, fake-gold panels, or marble tiles the color of gastrointestinal inflammation. "Where to begin?" she said, and laughed. "First of all, just listen. There are all these highly reflective surfaces and jagged edges, which are shooting the noise back at you and intruding into what is already a compressed vertical chute. It's an unbelievably aggressive space. At every moment, it's elbowing its way to the front of your attention."

Goldhagen has short grayish-blond hair and had to raise her voice to be heard above the roar of the atrium's most conspicuous feature: a sixty-foot-high waterfall. (Trump adds waterfalls to golf courses, too.) She also had to compete with the echoing hubbub of a herd of visiting high-school students, who had taken over the only public seating on the main floor, a single row of bus-station-

style benches, pressed against the wall opposite the elevators.

"Originally, there was a stone bench," Goldhagen said. "Trump put plants on it, and the city objected, because his zoning permit required him to have public seating." Trump removed the plants—but then also removed the bench, and for years used the space to sell Trump-themed merchandise. The city went after him again. "Finally," Goldhagen continued, "he put in these benches." You can still buy Trump-themed merchandise, however; there's a Trump Store around the corner from Trump Grill. The items for sale there include Trump Bath Crystals, Trump Body Butter, and Trump tennis balls, as well as a T-shirt that says, "Shut the Fake Media Up."

Goldhagen rode an escalator to another escalator, then another to another. "Look at all the mirrored surfaces," she said, as she ascended. "There's no place you can look where you don't see large numbers of people moving around." Viewed from the highest level, the real and reflected figures streaming in all directions in the red depths of the lower atrium resembled Saruman's orcs toiling in the caverns of Isengard.

Trump's POPS includes, in theory, two public gardens, on outdoor terraces near the top, but only one of them

was unlocked. Affixed to a wall near the door leading outside was a plaque enumerating exactly how many trees, seats, chairs, and tables the space is required to contain—requirements that Trump has sometimes ignored. A handful of people were sitting at tables. Elements of the building's H.V.A.C. system hummed loudly.

Back inside, Goldhagen pointed out shoddy construction details: mismatched reflective panels, misaligned molding joints, a wall from which half-dollar-size pieces of wood veneer had fallen away, revealing the particleboard beneath. "I know that Trump doesn't know anything about aesthetics," she said. "But the architect—how could anyone actually do this?"

—David Owen

DEPT. OF HOARDING GIFT WORDS



In 2015, the British writer Robert Macfarlane published "Landmarks," a book about the language of place. In it, he catalogued regional words for things like fields and streams and icicles, which, he found out, were called "clinkerbells" and "daggler" in Wessex, and "cancervells" in Exmoor; "ickles" in Yorkshire; "tankles" in Durham; "shuckles" in Cumbria; and "aquabob" in Kent. The book became a best-seller, an excerpt in the *Guardian* went viral—Britain!—and, since then, Macfarlane has found himself on the receiving end of a "speak" (sudden flood, Cumbria) or "cenllif" (torrent, Wales) of mail. He's acquired so many "gift words," as he calls them, that he appended to the paperback edition a list of five hundred entries culled from readers' letters. He said the other day, "The one word that's travelled the most widely from the whole project is 'smeuse,'" which is Sussex dialect for a hole made in the bottom of a hedge by a small animal.

One morning recently, Macfarlane was standing before the Great Oriental Plane Tree, "an incredible lightning storm of spaghetti," as he described it, that, for at least two centuries, has dominated the grounds of Emmanuel

College, Cambridge, where he teaches.

"See here, two branches have grown into each other, this amazing sort of pythonish entwining?" he said. "That's called 'inosulation,' which literally means 'interkissing,' or 'in-kissing,' as it were. It's where the tree has kissed itself. It's also called 'pleaching.'"

Macfarlane got the word from a mycologist. He posted it on his Twitter account, which he set up a few weeks ago partly to reintroduce his crowd-sourced lexicon into the wild. "Inosculation" got nine hundred and eighty likes, more than "sastrugi" (long, wave-like ridges of hardened snow) but not as many as "petrichor" (the smell in the air as or before rain falls on hot dry ground).

One commenter posted a picture of the conjoined trunks of two sycamores and wrote, "Now I'm ashamed to say I've always thought of these two as 'the snoggers.'" Until September, a selection of the letters and "bits of yellowed prewar foolscap" that Macfarlane has received will be on display at the Wordsworth House and Garden, in Cumbria, alongside nature photographs by Macfarlane's parents, John and Rosamund.

"I'll call and say, 'Mum, do you happen to have a sun dog?'" he explained.

"Oh, yes," she'll reply. "Here's one from Back o' Skiddaw, in January." (Sun dogs, also called "parhelion," are "glowing spots to either side of the sun,

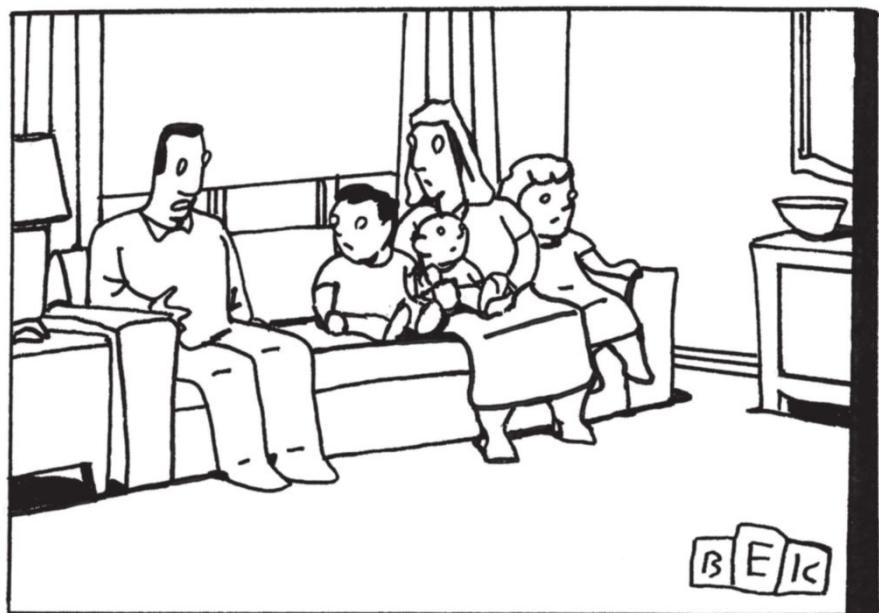
caused by light refracting in airborne ice crystals.")

To the mailbag, then. Macfarlane led the way to his office. His bookshelves were filled with reference works: "The Water Glossary," "Brickle, Nish and Knobbly: A Newfoundland Treasury of Terms for Ice and Snow." On the mantel were a tail feather from a black vulture, a bracket fungus, and an owl carved from jetsam whalebone that someone had sent to help him see in the dark. (His next book is about underworlds.) Although Macfarlane is an assiduous correspondent, papers stagnated on a blue carpet like "lodans" (little pools) or "blatters" (puddles).

"Do you know what?" Macfarlane said, picking up a paper towel that enfolded a pressed leaf. "This one's about interarboration."

Amid little watercolors and notes covered in gilded calligraphy sat a red-and-white candy-striped shoebox crammed with index cards, "the titles of which," Macfarlane writes in his book, "formed a poem of their own: 'Long-Range Forecasts,' 'Graces,' 'Clouds and Rainbows,' 'Winds.'" You could select one at random and a story would unfold. "To be away with the bees," one said. "Meaning someone is slightly crazy." Draw again. Four tantalizingly cryptic names for ladybugs: "doody-cow," "gooly bug," "king alison," and "merrigo."

"It's not that I want people to speak



"I yearn for human isolation."

this language—that'd be like dressing in ruffs—but I want it to live in the mind, if not the mouth,” Macfarlane said. His eye turned toward another “pudge” of papers, and he picked up an envelope.

“That’s from Margaret!” he said, withdrawing a photograph of what he described as a beechwood stream bank thronged with wild garlic.

Margaret Cockcroft, a ninety-six-year-old from Lancashire, was Macfarlane’s first pen pal. She wrote the week after “Landmarks” was published to tell him about “lighty-dark,” a word “invented by me (aged 11)” to denote the particular sort of dusk that follows a cold, clear day. This time, Cockcroft had written in appreciation of the series of blank pages that Macfarlane had left at the back of the book, in the hope that readers would record linguistic curios. “I intend to rally my memory and write in these pages you provide a small word-hoard of my own,” Cockcroft wrote. Her voice carried in it something both scientific and mysterious, like the weather. Like “yowetrummle,” maybe—a cold snap just after sheep have been sheared.

—Lauren Collins

THE BOARDS DOUBLE-SIDED



ALLISON JANNEY SPIRALLED, crane-like, up the ramp of the Guggenheim Museum. She stopped in front of a Kandinsky—“Black Lines” (1913), a jumble of Technicolor splotches—and gasped. “My gosh, that’s so beautiful,” she said. She was wearing chunky glasses and a dark blazer over a leopard-print blouse. “I felt an energy go through my chest.” It was her day off from “Six Degrees of Separation,” a Broadway revival of the 1990 John Guare play. Janney plays the wife of a Manhattan art dealer whose life is upended by a young con artist claiming to be the son of Sidney Poitier. “One of the things that Paul, the con man, learns about the couple is that they have a double-sided Kandinsky in their apartment,” Janney said. “One side is

chaos and one is order. And my character, Ouisa, realizes what a chaotic state she’s in internally.”

For the 1993 movie version of “Six Degrees,” the Guggenheim allowed the production team to copy two Kandinskys on the condition that museum officials supervise the destruction of the rep-



Allison Janney

licas after the shoot. Janney approached “Several Circles” (1926), which had been one of the models. “I’ve grown to have more of an appreciation of modern art,” she said. “It makes me open to looking at something and not understanding why it makes me feel a certain way.”

Growing up in Dayton, Ohio, Janney painted watercolors with her father, a real-estate developer. “In the summers, we would create a still-life and everyone would have to do their version of it. My brother always said mine was ‘unencumbered by reality,’ ” she said, with a laugh. Janney’s specialty is droll-meets-insecure, whether in films like “Juno” or on the TV shows “The West Wing” and “Mom.” She paused in front of “Improvisation 28 (Second Version),” from 1912. “I see eyelashes,” she said, peering at the crescent shapes floating across the canvas. On her phone, she pulled up a Kandinsky quote from the play: “It is clear that the choice of object that is one of the elements in the harmony of form must be decided only by a corresponding vibration in the human soul.” She grimaced. “A sentence like that is so hard to understand,” she said. “It’s like an ice cube that hasn’t melted. That’s the way my father used to talk about learning the piano or learning a language.

He said, ‘It’ll melt, just give it time.’ ”

Down in the museum’s restaurant, Janney ordered a Kandinsky-like beet salad: circles of dark purple and yellow on a white plate. Her posture betrayed her teen-age training as a figure skater. She dreamed of going to the Olympics, but her skating career ended in her senior year of high school, when she was at a party and tripped through a plate-glass window. She lost three-quarters of her blood and took a year off to recover, before enrolling in Kenyon College. Paul Newman, an alumnus, was there directing a play about cross-country runners. The audition was to stand and tell a story. “I decided to tell him a story about my new car, which was a navy-blue Volkswagen Scirocco,” Janney recalled. “Driving from Dayton to Gambier usually takes two hours, but I can make it in an hour and fifteen minutes when I take this exit and punch the gas.” I was trying to appeal to his love of car racing.” He cast her as a chorus girl.

In 1982, she moved to New York, where Newman’s wife, Joanne Woodward, helped her get into the Neighborhood Playhouse. But it was hard to find an agent. “No one knew what to do with me, because I was so tall,” Janney (six feet) said. She worked as an ice-cream scooper in SoHo and as a night receptionist at a recording studio, where she signed for mysterious packages. “I think I was pretty much a drug dealer,” she said. Finally, she got a recurring part on “Guiding Light,” as a hapless maid named Ginger. Like a lot of character actors, she was a late bloomer, making her Broadway débüt at thirty-eight. In 1999, she moved to Los Angeles to play the wry press secretary C. J. Cregg on “The West Wing,” winning four Emmy Awards. (Of the current press secretary, Sean Spicer, she said, “I feel bad for him. I wouldn’t want his job. I wouldn’t be doing his job. Neither would C. J.”)

She stopped at the gift shop to pick up Kandinsky postcards, magnets, and some posters for the cast’s dressing rooms. She teetered toward the cash register, contorting herself to stop the posters from sliding out of her arms. “I’m not a very good authority on my life,” she said, apologizing for her internal chaos. “Ouisa has this line: ‘How do we fit what happened to us into life without turning it into an anecdote?’ ”

—Michael Schulman

THE FINANCIAL PAGE

MARTIN SHKRELI IS STILL TALKING

ON A RECENT evening, Martin Shkreli was drinking beer at Tuttles, a bar in the Murray Hill neighborhood of Manhattan that has sticky wooden tables and sports playing on TV. He was taking a break from two activities that now consume much of his time: writing computer code for a new company he heads and meeting with his lawyers in anticipation of his upcoming criminal fraud trial.

"I think they'll return a not-guilty verdict in two hours," he said. "There are going to be jurors who will be fans of mine. I walk down the streets of New York and people shake my hand. They say, 'I want to be just like you.'"

Shkreli achieved infamy as the founder and C.E.O. of Turing Pharmaceuticals, where he applied strategies honed in his career as a hedge-fund manager. Under his direction, Turing acquired a drug called Daraprim, which treats a parasitic infection that can be deadly when it afflicts unborn babies and people with H.I.V. and AIDS, and then raised the price of a single pill from \$13.50 to seven hundred and fifty dollars. Although Shkreli's company wasn't the first to order such a price increase, his did so in the late summer of 2015, as the Presidential race was warming up. He was also arrogantly unapologetic about it. Hillary Clinton accused him of "price gouging," and he was described in the press as "the most hated man in America." That December, just weeks after Donald Trump referred to him as a "spoiled brat," Shkreli was arrested and charged with securities fraud in a case involving his hedge funds, MSMB Capital Management L.P. and MSMB Healthcare L.P., and another drug company that he had founded, called Retrophin. (He denied the charges.)

Shkreli, now thirty-four, has pale, thin arms and black hair that falls into his eyes. He can be more self-effacing and thoughtful than his public persona would suggest. "Many men are sensitive about their psychiatric well-being," he said, explaining that he used to have anxiety attacks every day. "I saw a psychiatrist a long time ago. He said, 'Martin, you have anxiety. Take this pill.'" The medication was Effexor. Shkreli went on, "My affinity for pharmaceuticals is partly due to the miracle of that pill."

He used to be a provocative user of Twitter (he was suspended from the service in January) and now live-streams himself on Facebook, where he has more than seventy thousand followers. He is well versed in many subjects: romantic relationships, drug-pricing models, his entrepreneurial feats, and the hedge-fund manager Steven Cohen. At Tuttles, Shkreli was eager to discuss what he claimed was his underappreciated role in the downfall of Cohen's fund, S.A.C. Capital.

He said that in 2008, when he was working as a portfolio manager, he invested money in shares of a pharmaceutical company called Elan, which was conducting a clinical trial of a promising Alzheimer's drug. On the morning that the trial results were set to be announced, Shkreli watched Elan's stock price excitedly. "The stock was up two bucks, so I'm giddy," he said. When the price started to move erratically—he remembers it lurching up three dollars and then down two—he became convinced that inside information about the results was leaking to certain traders with sizable stakes in Elan. Shkreli said that he called the New York Stock Exchange to complain, suggesting that it temporarily halt trading in the stock until the results of the trial were released. Later that day, after the results were announced and they failed to meet expectations, Elan's stock price quickly fell by almost forty-two per cent. "I was devastated," Shkreli said.

The government ended up investigating Elan, and in 2012 it indicted an S.A.C. portfolio manager named Mathew Martoma on insider-trading charges. Martoma was convicted. (He denied the charges and his case is on appeal.) The Elan case also helped lead the government, in 2013, to bring insider-trading charges against S.A.C. Capital itself. S.A.C. closed after Cohen agreed to pay more than a billion dollars in fines. It is difficult to confirm Shkreli's story, although its outlines conform to what is known about how the investigation started. Shkreli himself seemed to delight in the idea of being the catalyst for one of the biggest insider-trading cases in U.S. history.

Now Shkreli is facing serious legal troubles of his own. The federal government has accused him of fraud, contend-

ing that he misappropriated funds from his three companies in order to conceal losses and mislead investors. As Robert Capers, the U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, described it, "Shkreli essentially ran his companies like a Ponzi scheme." (In an unrelated twist, S.A.C. Capital disclosed in 2014 that it had bought stock in Retrophin.) Shkreli claims that the government misunderstood what happened and picked on him because he had been so vilified for the drug-price hike. "This case never would have happened if Daraprim hadn't happened," he said.

Shkreli hinted that he intended to testify at his trial, which starts in June. In the meantime, he is working on a new biotech-software startup, called Godel Systems, which he won't describe in detail. "I haven't told anybody what it is," he said. "When I do, it will shock and awe the world."

It was almost 9 P.M. when Shkreli drained his second glass of beer. He suddenly looked alert, remembering that he had received a jury-duty summons. He looked at his phone and said, "Shit, I might have missed it. What day is it?"

—Sheelagh Kolhatkar



FULL-COURT PRESS

The impresario behind Neil Gorsuch's confirmation.

BY JEFFREY TOOBIN



Leonard Leo is now responsible for a third of the Supreme Court.

THE SUPREME COURT confirmation hearings for Neil Gorsuch, which were held last month, in Washington, D.C., quickly fell into a pattern. Democratic senators unsuccessfully sought to pin down Gorsuch's views on issues such as campaign finance, while Republicans made gentle inquiries that seemed designed to run out the clock. In this vein, toward the end of Gorsuch's testimony, Ben Sasse, a Republican from Nebraska, asked Gorsuch his opinion about the Declaration of Independence. Gorsuch took the opportunity to deliver a patriotic lecture about the heroism of the Founders. "No one remembers who John Hancock was," Gorsuch said. "But they know that that's a signature because he wrote his name so bigly . . ." Gorsuch's invocation of one of Donald

Trump's trademark utterances, apparently accidental, prompted an explosion of laughter from the audience.

Seated toward the back of the hearing room, Leonard Leo smiled. "There's one sound bite," he whispered to me, then added, "You know, the hearings matter so much less than they once did. We have the tools now to do all the research. We know everything they've written. We know what they've said. There are no surprises." Gorsuch had committed no real gaffes, caused no blowups, and barely made any news—which was just how Leo had hoped the hearings would unfold.

Leo has for many years been the executive vice-president of the Federalist Society, a nationwide organization of conservative lawyers, based in Washington. Leo served, in effect, as Trump's

subcontractor on the selection of Gorsuch, who was confirmed by a vote of 54–45, last week, after Republicans changed the Senate rules to forbid the use of filibusters. Leo's role in the nomination capped a period of extraordinary influence for him and for the Federalist Society. During the Administration of George W. Bush, Leo also played a crucial part in the nominations of John Roberts and Samuel Alito. Now that Gorsuch has been confirmed, Leo is responsible, to a considerable extent, for a third of the Supreme Court.

Leo, who is fifty-one, has neither held government office nor taught in a law school. He has written little and has given few speeches. He is not, technically speaking, even a lobbyist. Leo is, rather, a convener and a networker, and he has met and cultivated almost every important Republican lawyer in more than a generation. At the Gorsuch hearings, which took place in the Hart Senate Office Building, Leo acted as the unofficial mayor of the room. Sometimes he sat in the back, so that he could kibitz with reporters, and sometimes he sat up front, behind Trump Administration officials. (Leo has been on leave from the Federalist Society to work full time on Gorsuch's confirmation.) "When Leonard walks in that room, everyone knows who he is," Carrie Severino, the chief counsel of the Judicial Crisis Network, another conservative organization that worked on Gorsuch's behalf, said. "If you care about the conservative legal movement, you always take note of Leonard."

Leo is at ease in the role of impresario. His grandfather was a vice-president of Brooks Brothers, and he instilled in young Leonard a taste for the *bella figura*. Leo wears tailored suits, often with contrasting waistcoats, and a double-length gold fob attached to a 1935 train conductor's pocket watch. ("The most accurate watch in the United States until the fifties," he said.) In lieu of office meetings, Leo prefers to chat over breakfast (just bacon, no eggs) at the Hay-Adams Hotel, across from the White House. As his friend Boyden Gray, the White House counsel under George H. W. Bush, puts it, "He knows the best restaurants in every major city in the world, and the best wines. He has a wide-ranging, inquiring mind, and he can and will talk about any subject under the sun."

Leo's role in the judicial nominations has drawn fierce criticism from liberals. Nan Aron, who is the longtime president of the Alliance for Justice, which advocates for a progressive judiciary, told me, "The Federalist Society has for years been singularly focussed on building a farm team of judicial nominees who subscribe to a philosophy that is hostile to the advancement of social and economic progress in the country. Behind the scenes, during Republican Administrations, they are very engaged in identifying and recruiting for judges candidates who are ultra-conservatives—who are opposed to our rights and liberties across the board, whether it's women, the environment, consumer protections, worker protections." Gorsuch is likely to be only the first of Leo's Trump Administration appointees: he is preparing for yet more vacancies on the Supreme Court, and also finding candidates for some of the hundred-plus vacancies on the lower courts, deepening his imprint on the judiciary.

LEO'S LIFE HAS been shaped as much by Catholicism as by conservatism. He was born on Long Island, and his father died, of cancer, when he was a preschooler. When Leo was five, his mother got remarried, to an engineer, and the family moved to central New Jersey, where Leo spent most of his childhood. His grandfather emigrated to the United States from Italy when he was fourteen and became a tailor before working his way up at Brooks Brothers. "He understood America as being a land of opportunity, understood the value of capitalism, the value of hard work, personal responsibility," Leo told me. "My grandparents were deeply religious people, they were daily Mass attendees. So I got all of that."

Leo went to college at Cornell, where he studied with a group of conservative professors in the government department. That led to internships in Washington during Ronald Reagan's Presidency—notably for Senator Orrin Hatch, who was then, as now, a member of the Judiciary Committee. Leo went on to law school, also at Cornell, after which he returned to Washington and clerked for a federal appellate judge, A. Raymond Randolph, on the D.C. Circuit.

In the meantime, he had married his

high-school sweetheart, Sally Schroeder. In 1992, they had their first child, Margaret, who was born with spina bifida, which confined her to a wheelchair and led to other medical complications. "She was a real miracle, despite having a really serious handicap, and many other issues, too," Leo said. "She was extraordinarily vivacious, talented, simple. She had a great way with people." Clarence Thomas, Leo said, still keeps her drawings under glass on his desk.

Margaret's example deepened Leo's Catholic faith. She encouraged him to go to daily Mass, though he found keeping up attendance difficult. During a family vacation in 2007, when Margaret was fourteen, Leonard promised her that he would resume the practice. On the morning after they returned, Leo got up early to go to Mass. He looked in on Margaret. Then, as he was walking down the hall, she started gasping for breath. She died shortly afterward. "I will always think that she did her job," Leo told me. "She did her job."

The Leos have six other children, including an eight-year-old son who also has spina bifida. A friend of Leo's said, "Leonard comes to his pro-life views out of a place of incredible sincerity. They always treated Margaret throughout her life like any other child." According to Leo, the vast majority of abortions are a consequence of voluntary, consensual sexual encounters, an opinion that influences his view of the procedure. "We can have a debate about abortion," he told me. "It's a very simple one for me. It's an act of force. It's a threat to human life. It's just that simple."

In the light of Leo's perspective, the possibility that he would put forward a Supreme Court nominee who would turn out to support abortion rights seems nonexistent. Roberts and Alito have voted against reproductive rights; so, in all likelihood, will Gorsuch. As Edward Whelan, a prominent conservative legal activist and blogger, wrote recently, "No one has been more dedicated to the enterprise of building a Supreme Court that will overturn *Roe v. Wade* than the Federalist Society's Leonard Leo."

Leo was a close friend of Antonin Scalia, who instilled in him an affinity for the judicial philosophies known as originalism and textualism. In rough terms, these approaches hold that judges

should interpret the Constitution according to its original meaning. If the Framers did not think they were establishing, say, a right to abortion, then contemporary judges should not recognize one, either. "What's the best way to preserve the dignity and worth of the human person?" Leo asked me one day over breakfast. He answered, "You assure all that freedom by establishing limitations on the power of the state."

Freedoms are best protected, Leo believes, not by the assertion of rights but by the structure of separation of powers. "I was drawn to the Federalist Society because it, in my view, understood that 'it's the structure, stupid,'" Leo told me. "Scalia used to say this all the time. Scalia said tyrannies had long lists of rights. What they didn't have was structural restraints on the power of government. I was smitten by that." Of course, Leo wants to see the power of government restrained in some ways but not in others. As he put it, "If you look at the areas where a true conservative is willing to tolerate restrictions on the individual, by dint of government power, it's generally fraud, force, and threats to human life and security."

Translated from the language of abstraction, Leo has an even broader conservative agenda than simply limiting rights unknown to the Framers, such as gay rights. "What people in the Federalist Society mean when they talk about 'structure' is limiting the regulatory power of the state," Samuel Issacharoff, a professor at New York University School of Law, said. "They believe that the text of the Constitution strictly limits what Congress and judges can do. So they embrace a whole series of doctrines that say Congress can't do anything unless it's specifically authorized in the Constitution. And then administrative agencies can't do anything unless Congress has specifically authorized it by law. For decades, judges thought it was permissible to fill in the gaps left by the ambiguities in the Constitution and laws. But the current conservatives have an activist agenda to peel back the power of government."

ON NOVEMBER 15, 2007, nearly two thousand people filled the great hall of Washington's cavernous Union Station for a black-tie celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Federalist

Society. President George W. Bush attended, Chief Justice John Roberts sent a video salute, and three other sitting Justices—Antonin Scalia, Clarence Thomas, and Samuel Alito—appeared in person to pay tribute. Scalia and Thomas spoke about the group's origins, a story that is critical to its mythology.

The Federalist Society was founded in 1982 by three law students, at the University of Chicago and at Yale. Scalia was the group's first faculty adviser at Chicago, where he was then a professor; the adviser at Yale was Robert Bork, who was later nominated to the Supreme Court by Ronald Reagan. As the Federalists see it, the society's founders were scrappy outsiders who were waging a lonely struggle against the pervasive liberalism of America's law schools. Scalia said at the anniversary party, "We thought we were just planting a wildflower among the weeds of academic liberalism, and it turned out to be an oak." Elaborating on this point, Thomas said, "I look at this huge audience . . . and I can only imagine the courage of a few young people who came up with yet one more idea: let's start something. Let's start an organization where we can actually talk about ideas, where we can actually talk about the Constitution and its structure, and how that structure is to protect our liberty. . . . Can you imagine the courage that these young people had?"

The students did start the Federalist Society from scratch, but it is less clear that tremendous courage was required. Within just a few years, the group was embraced and funded by a number of powerful, wealthy conservative organizations, which eventually included foundations associated with John Olin, Lynde and Harry Bradley, Richard Scaife, and the Koch brothers. "The funders all got the idea right away—that you can win elections, you can have mass mobilizations, but unless you can change élites and the institutions that are by and large controlled by the élites, like the courts, there are limits to what you can do," Amanda Hollis-Brusky, a professor of politics at Pomona College and the author of "Ideas with Consequences," a study of the Federalist Society, said. "The idea was to train, credential, and socialize a generation of alternative élites."

In the late eighties, the Federalist Society was known primarily as an

organization for law students, with few opportunities for members to stay involved after they left school. Leo founded the Federalist chapter at Cornell Law School before he graduated, in 1989, but then decamped for D.C. "When I was in the midst of my clerkship, the society came to me and said, 'Hey, we're not sure the lawyers' division of the Federalist Society is working,'" Leo told me. "'And so would you be interested in coming to work for us?' Leo started at the society in 1991.

From the beginning, there were limits on how the society could attempt to change the legal and political environment. As a nonprofit organization, it had to raise its own money and could not endorse candidates. Nevertheless, Leo set himself a clear goal. "The key was to figure out how to develop what I call a 'pipeline'—basically, where you recruit students in law school, you get them through law school, they come out of law school, and then you find ways of continuing to involve them in legal policy," he said. "So you have these chapters, you have practice groups, you have a pro-bono network, you have a media program—you find ways of engaging these lawyers so that they can still be involved."

"It's a network, not a hierarchy, with Leonard Leo at the center," Steven Teles, a professor of political science at Johns Hopkins University and the author of "The Rise of the Conservative Legal Movement," said. "The formal activities of the society are important—the chapter meetings at law schools, the national conferences in Washington—but the most important thing they do is give conservatives a chance to meet one another and check one another out. All that activity lets people bubble up. It creates a chance for people to develop reputations. And the one thing all the lawyers have in common is that they all know Leonard, and he knows all of them." Non-members also attend and speak at Federalist Society events, so the group's web of influence (and the scope of Leo's contacts) extends well beyond the members and affiliates, who currently number about seventy thousand.

The annual convention of the Federalist Society, held every November at the Mayflower Hotel, in Washington, has become an important event on the

political calendar. "The primary reason people go to the convention is not for the panels. The main action at the convention is always in the grand hallway of the Mayflower," Josh Blackman, a professor at South Texas College of Law, in Houston, and a well-known blogger, said. "Everyone is talking and meeting in that big hallway."

In 2008, after the election of Barack Obama, the convention was a downbeat affair, not least because Michael Mukasey, the outgoing Attorney General, passed out while he was giving a speech. (He recovered.) The following November, as Obama was going through a difficult patch as President, there was more optimism in the air. That year, Blackman was chatting with his friend Todd Gaziano, who worked at the Heritage Foundation, when they were approached by Randy Barnett, a professor at Georgetown University Law Center and a leading libertarian theorist. A version of the Affordable Care Act had passed in the House a few days earlier. "Todd asked me what I thought about the constitutionality of the individual mandate," Barnett told me, referring to the part of the law that required individuals to buy health insurance. "I said that I wasn't really sure, that I hadn't really looked into it yet. He said, 'Do you want to do something about it?' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'Whatever we do, we have to do it quickly.'" Blackman later wrote, with only some hyperbole, that "this conversation, though it started out innocently enough, would change the fate of the constitutional challenge to Obamacare." Gaziano and Barnett collaborated with another colleague on one of the first articles challenging the constitutionality of Obamacare, and remained at the center of the fight over the law for the next three years. Blackman would refer to their fateful meeting as the "Mayflower compact."

The compact illustrates the strength and the potential of the society's network: the society can exercise enormous influence without playing a direct role. The nature of the legal claims against the health-care law also reflected precisely the kind of "structural" arguments that Leo puts at the heart of his legal philosophy. In the first case, *National Federation of Independent Business v. Sebelius*, the plaintiffs asserted that the

law was unconstitutional because the Commerce Clause of the Constitution does not authorize Congress to impose the individual mandate. In the second case, King v. Burwell, the plaintiffs argued that the text of the act did not permit the operation of insurance marketplaces. Ultimately, the Obama Administration won both cases. But it seems more than likely that Gorsuch, or any other Justice supported by Leo, would have voted for the losing side.

IT CAN TAKE a while even for Republicans to understand the breadth of the Federalist Society's influence in Washington. Alberto Gonzales, George W. Bush's first White House counsel, told me, "When I came to Washington, being an outsider from Texas, I knew that I would have to have some weapons in my arsenal to reassure conservative groups that I wasn't some crazy guy from Texas. I was familiar with the Federalist Society, but I'd never been active with it." Gonzales's lack of connection with the group drew suspicion from the conservative legal community in Washington. "Truth be told, maybe some of the more influential members, I think they were concerned about me going on to the Supreme Court," Gonzales said.

Tim Flanigan, who was Gonzales's deputy in the White House, told me, "The talk started to irritate Al, who was very proud of being a conservative. He comes to Washington, and suddenly he feels like this group that he's never heard of is attacking him, and he's told that this group is very important to his judicial nominations. We used to have a staff meeting of about a dozen lawyers, and at one of the early meetings Al started to vent a little bit about the Federalist Society, saying, 'Who is this Federalist Society?' And, finally, he's getting frustrated, and he says, 'How many of you here are members of the Federalist Society?' And every hand in the room went up, except for Al's and mine."

Gonzales was never nominated to the Supreme Court; in 2005, Bush chose Harriet Miers, Gonzales's successor as White House counsel, and another Texan, to replace Sandra Day O'Connor. Like Gonzales, Miers had a non-existent profile in Federalist Society circles. "By the time of the Miers nomination, the Federalist Society had created

a signalling mechanism within the conservative movement," Hollis-Brusky said. "The message Leonard and others had sent was: If you want to rise through the ranks, we need to know you. And that's what they were all saying about Miers—'We don't know her. She is not one of us.'"

It's long been difficult to separate Leo's conservative political activism from his role in the putatively nonpartisan Federalist Society, and the Miers nomination put those positions into conflict. Leo had taken a leave from the society to help the White House fill the Court vacancy, so he was obligated, at least initially, to support the Miers choice. "I made it clear to people in the White House that I thought her nomination was going to be a heavy lift," Leo said. "My feeling was that the conservative community was not going to probably weigh in in favor of her until after the hearings, because they wouldn't have enough information about her, so that there would be a wait-and-see approach. And I was somewhat mistaken about that—they ended up coming after her a lot sooner. As opposed to simply being skeptical or agnostic, they became very hostile to the idea soon after the nomination." The criticism from conservatives of Miers's lack of a clear ideologi-

cal stance grew so intense so quickly that she withdrew less than a month after Bush nominated her. Samuel Alito, one of Leo's judicial darlings, was nominated and confirmed instead. "I had always been a big Alito fan," Leo told me.

ONE DAY LAST spring, Leo received an invitation to join Donald Trump for lunch at a law firm's offices in Washington. Trump was getting closer to clinching the Republican nomination, but his political history still provoked wariness among Party ideologists. Trump, it turned out, wanted Leo to compile a list, which the campaign would make public, of Trump's likely nominees to the Supreme Court, in the event that he won the election. As Leo recounted their conversation, Trump said, "People don't know who I am on these issues, and I want to give people a sense of that." No campaign in history had put out such a list. Leo recalled, "I said, 'That's a great idea—you're creating a brand.'"

The question, then, became on what basis Leo should select the candidates. What was Trump looking for in his nominees? Throughout the campaign, Trump had said that he would appoint pro-life Justices to the Supreme Court. But Leo told me that his conversations



"I didn't say, 'Simon says.'"

with Trump focussed elsewhere. “The President was very clear about what he wanted,” Leo said. “What he said in very explicit terms was he wanted people who were exceptionally well qualified, quote, ‘respected by all, not weak’—those are his words, ‘not weak’—and somebody who was going to, quote, ‘interpret the Constitution the way the Framers meant it to be.’” The statement was, in effect, a call for an originalist.

The distinction between Trump’s blunt campaign promise on abortion and his cagier instructions to Leo (if Leo’s account is complete) illustrates one of the political calculations of modern Supreme Court selection. Candidates can be frank about their litmus tests, but Presidents, and their judicial nominees, are supposed to be more circumspect—though everyone knows the likely result is the same. Leo told me that abortion, for example, “never came up in conversations with me, and that’s maybe because of the way I ask questions and the way I provide answers.”

Leo, in other words, knew how to play the game—how to find a nominee who met Trump’s ideological requirements as well as his own, while observing the proprieties expected for judicial nominees. And finding potential candidates, Leo told me, “is easy, in the sense that when you’ve been working in this vineyard for twenty-five years you know everybody.” On May 18th, Trump released Leo’s list of eleven judges as his possible nominees. In September, Trump put out another ten names, in a group that included Gorsuch.

The winnowing process began the week after Trump’s unexpected victory. “The questions in our interviews were very different from the questions from the senators at the confirmation hearing,” Leo said. “They’re always trying to get at the results a judge is going to reach, and I pay more attention to their methodology, approach, and understanding of a well-defined judicial role.”

Gorsuch has long had close ties to the Federalist network. He acknowledged as much in his Senate questionnaire, writing, “I have attended and spoken at some of the organization’s gatherings. I have also sometimes spoken to individual Federalist Society chapters at various law schools.” This understates the depth of the connection. Theodore B.

Olson, the prominent Washington lawyer and former Solicitor General in the George W. Bush Administration, supports an annual lecture at the Federalist Society, to honor his late wife, Barbara, who died in the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Gorsuch gave the Olson lecture in 2013, delivering a politically anodyne plea for civility in the legal profession. “No doubt we have to look hard in the mirror when our profession’s reflected image in popular culture is no longer Atticus Finch but Saul Goodman,” he said, referring to a character on the TV show “Breaking Bad.” But, as is frequently the case with the Federalist Society, the social dimension of the Olson lecture is as important as the official program. “The lecture is always at the Mayflower, but we often have a dinner afterward, always at a good restaurant, and usually a couple of the Justices come, and it’s a good time,” Olson told me. “Leonard is always responsible for selecting the wines.”

DEMOCRATS FINALLY NOTICED the rise of the Federalist Society after the Supreme Court’s decision handing the Presidency to George W. Bush. “Bush v. Gore was the ‘Aha!’ moment,” Caroline Fredrickson, a liberal attorney, said. “We had let conservative forces come to dominance on the Court. They had had success in seeding the federal courts with people who shared their ideological views, as well as in propagating an approach to understanding the Constitution that conveniently always led to conservative outcomes.” A group of liberal-leaning lawyers and funders soon created the American Constitution Society as an explicit counterpart, and counterweight, to the Federalist Society. Fredrickson is the group’s current president.

Like the Federalists, A.C.S. has chapters in law schools and holds a big annual meeting in Washington at which favored judges speak. (Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Sonia Sotomayor have spoken at A.C.S. conventions.) Just as the Federalists often invite a liberal to fill out their panel discussions, A.C.S. events sometimes feature conservatives. But the budget of the Federalist Society is about twenty million dollars; A.C.S.’s is about six million. That difference doesn’t just reflect the greater abundance of deep pockets on the right. “Liberals have siloed

policy interests—the environment, civil rights, gay rights—and there are pretty distinct networks and groups for each one,” Teles said. “And conservatives have more networks that cut across these policy domains. Most conservatives are more identified by their particular ideological stripe—like social conservatives—rather than any specific issue.”

More to the point, conservatives, as a group, have cared more about judicial selection than liberals have. As Fredrickson puts it, “We still struggle to get people to recognize that the courts are one of the most important battlegrounds for public policy. Democrats make hundreds of thousands of calls about Jeff Sessions and far fewer about Judge Gorsuch, but the stakes are so much higher. Judge Gorsuch will leave his fingerprints on the Constitution a lot longer than Jeff Sessions will.”

Gorsuch’s confirmation once again gives the Supreme Court a majority of Republican appointees, as it had before Scalia’s death, last February. But Ginsburg (who was appointed by Bill Clinton) is eighty-four; Anthony Kennedy (the Court’s swing vote, appointed by Reagan) is eighty; and Stephen Breyer (a Clinton appointee) is seventy-eight. If Trump has the opportunity to replace any of these three, much less all of them, the ideological balance of the Court will be transformed for at least a generation.

Other recent Presidents, when given a chance for a second nomination, have returned to the remaining names on their original list. If Trump follows this pattern, the next nominee will come from Leo’s pipeline, too, giving him a fourth Justice on the Court. Some of these prospective nominees—who include the federal appeals-court judges Thomas Hardiman and William H. Pryor, Jr., as well as the federal district-court judge Amul Thapar, a favorite of Mitch McConnell, the Senate Majority Leader—are even closer to the Federalist Society than Gorsuch is. Pryor, who serves on the Eleventh Circuit, has spoken at least eighteen times at Federalist Society events. And, when Leo returns to the Federalist Society, he will find it thriving. He says that he isn’t even worried about recruiting new members. “We don’t really care about those membership numbers,” Leo said. “We’re not a club. We’re a movement.” ♦

SHOUTS & MURMURS

COOKIE MONSTER ON THE DOLE

BY HENRY ALFORD

HARD TIMES for Muppets! Sad! Me think unemployment not easy for puppet with addiction issues. Me find unemployment very triggering. Me want to ask government, "Who is real monster here?"

Colleagues bad now, too. Elmo spiral into depression and eat his goldfish, Dorothy. Pepé the King Prawn worry

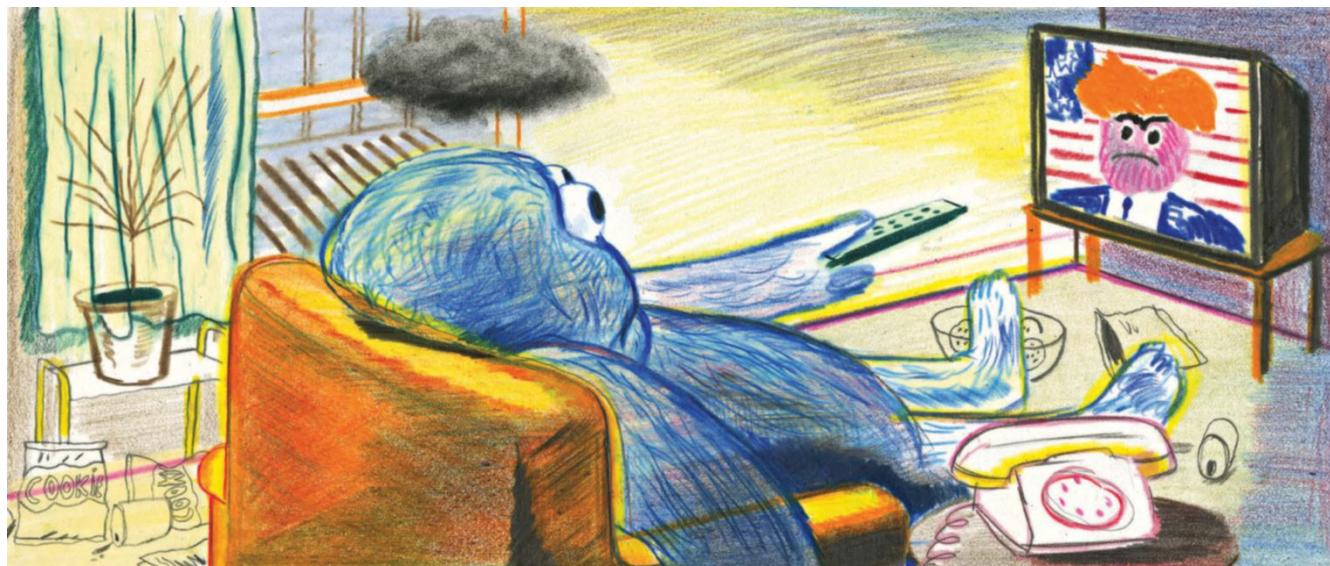
Elmo. But mocking was gentle. Mocking gentle, and plus we give lots airtime. Donald Trump like airtime. Airtime is hair time. The letter "H"!

Me trying to transition into this new life chapter with grace. Me trying to find bright side: no more pledge drives, no more feeling old when realize all favorite TV shows are sponsored by river

contemporary consumerism like virus that eat brain. Me unclear about meaning of "electrostatic stanching shammy," but me pretty sure it mean rag.

So. Me trying to be big. Me trying to reap benefits of talk therapy. Therapist point out that Cookie strong because Cookie weathered changing attitudes about eating. Therapist talk about time, in 2005, when show had Hoots the Owl sing "A Cookie Is a Sometime Food." Stupid song. Stupid song suggesting me had no jurisdiction or agency over throbbing id. That song the beginning of the end. That the singing on the wall. Me not like that song! That song just another unseen hand reaching up the Cookie ying-yang.

Now this new government hand. It



about deportation. Miss Piggy now glorified geisha, forced to be active listener. Only good thing is most of us newly politicized. Me is totally woke. Use new free time to rally colleagues and to dialogue. Camaraderie good! Camaraderie powerful! During long hours together in unemployment line, you can really get deep, you can really go beyond the felt.

What strange to Muppet community is Muppets always like Donald Trump. Donald Trump always somehow seem like kindred spirit. Donald Trump seem like slightly more organized Fraggle. Yes, in nineteen-eighties, on "Sesame Street," Ronald Grump character built tower of trash cans on Oscar's turf. Yes, other time, on special, Joe Pesci play Ronald Grump and spit on

cruises. But sometimes cloud come over me in afternoon. Cloud of realization. Cloud of sad. More reflective now. Time makes puppets of us all. Bad!

Me talk to agent about possible second career as recording artist, because me often mistaken for gravel-voiced singer Tom Waits. Me think me has everything Tom Waits has, plus me is blue. Sad songs from blue person, very good, very meta. Agent laugh. Agent say more realistic direction is recovery memoir and TED talk. Agent say more realistic direction is therapy pet who visit hospitals—"Make-A-Wish but the meter is running, hon." Agent also say that he get call about Cookie working as kind of Swiffer—some company want Cookie as "electrostatic stanching shammy." Now me laugh. Me think

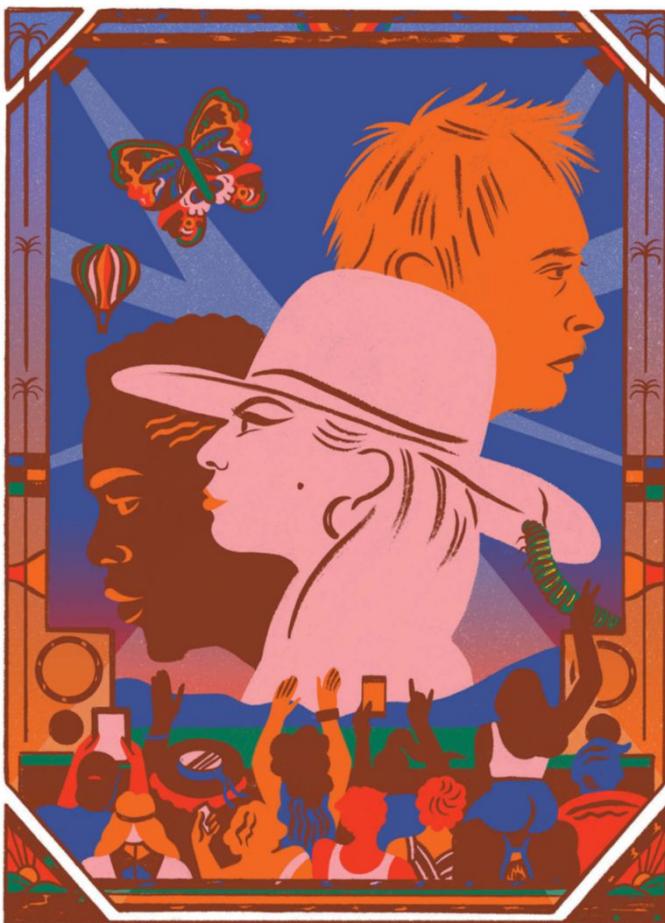
not nice like Frank Oz hand. Frank Oz smell good, have light touch. Government hand rough, like that of teen-age boy. So now me take only route available: me wage cookie hunger strike. Me get Hoots the Owl to do duet of new song, "Bye-Bye, Biscotti." Me get outside consulting firm to create slogan: "Nom, Nom NO." Me tell world that "C" is not for cookie, "C" is for cauterize the wound that is direct result of rapacious governing. Me get sympathetic *People* cover in manner of survivor of rare disease.

Meanwhile, me send message to Washington via quiet assertion of strength. Me remind government that Cookie Monster have no eyelids. Me remind government that Cookie Monster always watching. ♦

THE IMMACULATE LINEUP

Coachella and the resurgence of the music festival.

BY JOHN SEABROOK



ON THE FINAL evening of Desert Trip, a classic-rock extravaganza Paul Tollett staged on two weekends last October, the impresario was sitting in the Who's friends-and-family area, an acre-size V.I.P. tent on the grounds of the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival, near Indio, California. The mountains on both sides of the valley were visible through the clear side panels in the spotless white canvas, their peaks turning purple as the sun went down and showtime approached. Outside, it was still very hot, but the tent was air-conditioned, and there was soft grass underfoot, partly covered with throw rugs; in the winter months, polo

is played on the turf. The allure of the musical paradise that Tollett has conjured in the desert helped him sell almost two hundred thousand tickets to last year's Coachella, over two weekends, grossing ninety-five million dollars. Now, with Desert Trip—"Oldchella"—Tollett had pulled off a twin-weekend festival with a staggering hundred-and-sixty-million-dollar gross, the largest ever music-festival box office.

Music, we may assume, began outside. Even in our time, rock was a mass phenomenon at outdoor festivals before the indoor market kicked in. But, while the opportunity to listen to music in the great wide open awakens primal urges,

Kendrick Lamar, Lady Gaga, and Thom Yorke's Radiohead headline Coachella '17.

audiences have been made soft by a couple of millennia of plumbing and roofs, dating at least as far back as the Pantheon, in Rome. With Coachella, and now with Desert Trip, Tollett has provided an outdoor musical experience with indoor amenities, including real bathrooms, crisp sound, and gourmet food and drinks.

Tollett, fifty-one, is the C.E.O. of Goldenvoice, a Los Angeles-based promoter owned by the entertainment conglomerate A.E.G. In the tent, he explained how he had wrangled the biggest classic-rock acts on the indoor touring circuit—the Who, Bob Dylan, the Rolling Stones, Paul McCartney, Neil Young, and Roger Waters—into an outdoor-festival format, presenting them like jam bands.

Dressed like a roadie, in jeans and a work shirt and his ever-present baseball cap, with an L.A. Dodgers logo, Tollett was typically understated about his historic feat of rock promotion. It began, he said, with a six-thousand-mile flight, L.A. to Buenos Aires, where the Stones were performing, to pitch the concept, because, "if you get them when the paparazzi aren't around you can talk to them." The situation was delicate, because while the Stones had made no secret of their wish to play Coachella, the date had yet to materialize.

The meeting, in Mick Jagger's dressing room backstage at La Plata Stadium, lasted all of twelve minutes.

"Is this a period piece?" Jagger asked. "No," Tollett replied. "The Zombies aren't invited."

"Don't make the story the ticket price," Jagger advised.

"He didn't say yes, but it seemed like yes," Tollett said. He caught the show and flew home.

After Jagger, Tollett asked Paul McCartney, who likes playing festivals. ("Makes him feel alive," Marc Geiger, a top booking agent with the William Morris Endeavor, or W.M.E., agency, told me.) "I'd done Paul at Coachella," Tollett said. "And I knew Marsha Vlasic," Neil Young's longtime booking agent. "Roger Waters had played Coachella. I could piece it together." Artist fees of between three and five million dollars helped. In addition, each act got its own tented friends-and-family acre for the entire two weeks. The Stones' area

included a forty-yard-long air-conditioned running track on which Jagger could sprint back and forth to warm up.

LEAVING THE WHO's compound, Tollett reluctantly agreed to venture out onstage for a photographer before the show began. Goldenvoice's production team had created a pop-up, thirty-five-thousand-seat arena on the polo fields for the occasion, complete with sky boxes; after tonight, they would take it all apart. Tollett, an engineer at heart, thrives on solving the kinds of problems that bringing close to a hundred thousand people, about a third of them campers, to the desert for three days can generate.

The seven-hundred-acre grounds are owned in part by Tollett and A.E.G. (they jointly bought two hundred and eighty acres in 2012) and partly by Tollett's unlikely Max Yasgur—the Empire Polo Club's Alexander Haagen III, a white-mustachioed polo-playing mall developer based in L.A., who installed the classical statuary and erected the whitewashed stone walls lined with bougainvillea that give the grounds its Hotel California character. A bridge modelled on the one in Monet's "Water Lilies" is a recent addition. ("Absolute, all-time favorite painting!") In the winter months, some of the world's top polo players compete on Haagen's fields. When I visited in January, the Kennel Club of Palm Springs' annual dog show was under way.

Because it hardly ever rains here (the property is irrigated by underground aquifers), it's not mud, the curse of Eastern festivals, but heat that Tollett has to worry about. The big enclosed tents are air-conditioned, and there are misting stations outside, as well as tanks of free water. Gate-crashing, a common plague for promoters of sixties-era festivals, was eliminated by Paul's older brother Perry, an upholsterer by trade, whose crew built the ten-foot-high white fence that surrounds much of the perimeter, a three-year job. (They also built the three hundred and forty-five permanent on-site restrooms.) Still, there was a scary moment, in 2010, when the entrance wristbands were counterfeited and, as Tollett put it, "we lost control of the gate." R.F.I.D. chips embedded in the wristbands, along with copyproof holograms in the tick-

ets, have eliminated that concern, for now.

Tollett has not only husbanded the landscape; he has branded it. The town of Coachella was supposed to be called Conchilla, Spanish for the tiny shells left behind by a prehistoric inland sea, but the printer of the town's prospectus misspelled the word, and the citizenry rolled with it. The printer might be amused by his typo's desert pilgrimage to brand equity. Glimpsed in a window of an H&M store (the Swedish-owned clothing purveyor carries its own licensed Coachella line) on such a winter's day in Stockholm or London or New York, Coachella looks like this generation's version of "California Dreamin'," much more Monterey Pop than Woodstock.

A steep flight of stairs led up to the back of the stage. Tollett hesitated before moving downstage, as though shy about approaching his vision, now that it was so embodied. He pointed to the cushioned V.I.P. seats in front, which cost \$1,599 for the three nights of the festival and were black, so that the artists couldn't tell from the stage, once it got dark, if they were empty. "Performers hate looking at empty seats," he noted. Irving Azoff, the classic-rock kingpin, wasn't among the V.I.P.s—he had bolted after the opening night of the first weekend, apparently irritated by the tardy arrival of a golf cart to the V.I.P. parking area.

The people who were in their seats were certainly older than the Coachella demographic. "At least no one brought an oxygen tank," Tollett observed with a smile, surveying the aisles. Most of the younger people were much farther back, where the tickets were only \$199—those sold out last. Some of these Desert Tripsters had laid out blankets in front of the giant video monitors, which were delayed slightly, to allow time for the sound to travel the thousand feet or so from the stage. Jagger, for one, wasn't concerned with demographic distinctions. "Hello, Coachella!" he had greeted the first weekend's crowd.

Tollett passed Pete Townshend's guitars, arranged in the order that he would soon require them, and finally moved toward the vast inland sea of people he had drawn to the shell val-

ley. He was stopped by security personnel, who correctly identified him as an overzealous fan.

ON THE DAY after New Year's, Tollett was in an A.E.G. Presents boardroom in downtown L.A., finalizing the 2017 Coachella poster, which announced this year's lineup and was due to be released the following day. Tollett, his two partners, Skip Paige and Bill Fold, and a staff of a dozen were sitting at the boardroom table, each with a laptop. A black L.A. Kings cap, the hockey team owned by A.E.G., had seasonally replaced the Dodgers cap on Tollett's head. Tollett may be the great impresario of our time, but he looks as if he's there to pack up the gear.

On the poster were the headliners for Friday, Saturday, and Sunday: Radiohead, Beyoncé, and Kendrick Lamar, respectively, each of whom would receive between three and four million dollars for playing. Below them were seven lines of artist and band names. The first line noted the reunions (New Order), the critical darlings (Bon Iver, Father John Misty), and the biggest E.D.M. (electronic dance music) d.j.s; the font for the second, third, and fourth lines became progressively smaller, allowing more artists to be listed. The lowest three lines were all the same size. Some of those acts make less than ten thousand dollars.

In addition to curating the lineup, Tollett had booked the hundred and fifty acts himself, negotiating all the offers with agents—a six-month process. He also fielded a lot of pitches that he had to turn down. Geiger, of W.M.E., described their working method: "I'll say, 'Kate Bush!' And he'll go, 'No!,' and we'll talk through it. I'll say, 'She's never played here, and she just did thirty shows in the U.K. for the first time since the late seventies. You gotta do it! Have to!' 'No! No one is going to understand it.'"

Tollett has a knack for big statements—this year he was leaning heavily on Beyoncé, who was a deeper dive into pop for Coachella—but he also wants his first-time bookings, with an audience of only two hundred on Gobi, the smallest stage, to have the show of their lives. Coachella is a delicate ecosystem of the grand and the intimate. Tollett creates the biosphere that sustains it.

Goldenvoice tries to release the

Coachella poster as close as possible to New Year's Day. Even though the mid-April festival is still three and a half months away at that point (it begins this Friday), there is an advantage to announcing first in the increasingly competitive festival calendar, especially since the other big festivals—Glastonbury, Bonnaroo, Electric Daisy Carnival, Lollapalooza—are likely to have many of the same headliners. The release is closely scrutinized on social media. Bonnie Marquez, Goldenvoice's director of marketing, told me, "Typically, Facebook is more negative than Instagram." Gopi Sangha, the company's digital director, observed, "Reddit, you get the very analytical people. Your thinkers."

In theory, the purpose of the poster is promotional, but the 2017 show promised to sell out regardless of who was in it. Although Coachella lost money on its 1999 début, nearly bankrupting Goldenvoice, and required four years to become profitable, by 2011 the festival had grown so popular that Tollett offered a second weekend, with the same lineup. ("What's better than Coachella?," as he put it to his skeptical partners. "Two Coachellas.") About three-quarters of the tickets for this year's shows were sold in advance, to allow fans to pay in installments. When the rest went on sale, the day after the lineup's release, they were gone within two hours, leaving more than a quarter of a million unhappy people waiting in the queue.

For artists, placement on the poster translates directly into booking fees. "Agents will say, 'They're a second-line band at Coachella!'" Tollett related. Rarely has typography been so closely monetized. For E.D.M. d.j.s, in particular, placement on the poster can determine their future asking price, not only in the United States but internationally. "We have so many arguments over font sizes," he went on. "I literally have gone to the mat over one point size."

"Today is the day I'm telling all the agents what line their band is going to be on," Tollett explained. "Sounds like a small thing in the great scheme of life. But, as it relates to these bands, it's huge." He added, "We booked it, and it's going to be great." He sounded as if he were trying to convince himself.

A prototype of the poster was on the table. He pointed to the second line, Saturday, where two popular E.D.M. d.j.s, DJ Snake and Martin Garrix, and the hip-hop m.c. SchoolBoy Q, were all together, along with the alternative-rock star Bon Iver and the Atlanta rappers Gucci Mane and Future.

"I have a pileup of d.j.s here," Tollett said. "The problem is that every one of them wants there." He tapped the left side of the line, where Bon Iver held pride of place. "In the old days, you could look at SoundScan or Pollstar. Who sells more records? Who sells more tickets? But d.j.s don't do concerts. And these

hip-hop guys—some of them play only raves and large dance-club events," so-called "soft ticket" shows in which the artist is just one part of the package. Instead of hard numbers, the d.j.s use social-media-based metrics to measure their popularity: Facebook friends, Twitter followers, YouTube views.

"The third line is the hardest," Tollett went on, adjusting his Kings cap. "With someone like Justice or New Order, you know they're solid." The French techno group and the British New Wave band were two of the occupants of Sunday's second line. "Marshmello?"—a third-line masked E.D.M. d.j. whose identity is concealed beneath a buckethead with a blitzed-looking emoji for a face. "Could be a line two, because he has crazy statistics," Tollett said as he drummed on the poster with a pencil eraser.

"Twenty years ago, alternative artists grew slower," he continued. "But there is no underground anymore. It's all kind of pop, in a way, and it goes up quickly because of SoundCloud. Some of these artists get stats over a six-week period that are just crazy. I make an offer for small bands, and in six months the world can change for them so much. Or you buy them at their peak and their numbers are dropping off each day. It's like gambling. Going short, going long. We're going long on Marshmello."

Tollett knew that he was showing his age by continuing to headline rock bands like Radiohead, when the kids would rather see the E.D.M. shows in Sahara and Mojave, the big tents. "When you take an indie-rock band, five or six members, not everyone is on the E-flat seventh at the same time, so it doesn't sound perfect," he said. "With electronic music, it's pre-programmed, so it sounds flawless. There are no mistakes. There's a generation that's used to flawless, and when they don't hear flawless it may suck to them."

Tollett's laptop showed Coachella's six stages, represented by different colors in Excel, for the noon-to-midnight slots for each of the three days. (The schedule would be released later.) The shading deepened with the hour. "Everyone wants to play in the dark, so they can use their full production," Tollett continued. "But not everyone is going to get dark. And not everyone needs dark." The cross-dressing indie rocker Ezra Furman, who is an observant Jew, needed



"How could you just walk out on me like this? And, by the way, 'nit-picking' has a hyphen."

to be in a synagogue by sundown on Friday, and Saturday was obviously out.

One of the agents, Joel Zimmerman, of W.M.E., was so intent on getting favorable placement for his client, Martin Garrix, a twenty-year-old Dutch E.D.M. d.j., that he was driving over from his Beverly Hills office. Tollett's assistant, Morgan Donly, read aloud an e-mail that Zimmerman had sent en route: "Sources online show that Garrix maintains his Calvin levels and is dropping more music this month."

"Calvin levels!" Tollett hadn't heard the superstar E.D.M. d.j. Calvin Harris used as a superlative before.

Donly relayed other metrics: "Regardless, his socials are four times bigger and he is in the top one per cent of connected artists to his fan base."

Soon Zimmerman arrived. "All the artists are on Insta," he said, a bit breathlessly, taking a chair next to Tollett. "It's the platform. Before that, it was Twitter, and before that it was Facebook. Martin has ten million, and the other guy"—the wily agent didn't want to use Snake's name—"has three million. And Martin has seventy-eighty-per-cent engagement. To me, that's a great measuring stick."

TOLLETT WAS SEVENTEEN when he made his first poster, in 1982, for a show at the local Pizza Supreme that featured his brother Perry's ska band, the Targets. This was in Pomona, California, where the family had moved from Ohio, when Paul was seven.

"It was a way to meet girls," Tollett said, recalling the flyers he'd make from the poster. As teen-age music fans, he went on, "my brother and I were always bummed that the good punk shows were all in L.A. or Orange County." They'd spend hours fantasizing about the perfect show, or what they called "the immaculate lineup." They resolved one day to open a real venue in Pomona that would attract cool bands; in 1996, they did—the Glass House, which is now in its twenty-first year.

Like all punk fans, the Tolletts knew of Goldenvoice and its owner, Gary Tovar, a legendary figure on the L.A. music scene, who, when he wasn't promoting shows, was smuggling Thai stick from the Far East into California. Goldenvoice was named for a primo brand of Tovar's weed that was said to

make the smoker hear angelic voices.

One night, they drove to a Goldenvoice show in Long Beach, Tollett told me. "I had a friend bring me to the box office, which was full of smoke—Gary chain-smoked pot—and we talked all night about music. At the end, he handed me a box of flyers for a Big Audio Dynamite show," Mick Jones's post-Clash band. "He said, 'Can you hit the stores in the Inland Empire?' I remember thinking I was working for Goldenvoice. Though no one said it."

Goldenvoice promoted hardcore punk shows that established promoters wouldn't touch because the fans were sometimes violent. Their iconic posters featured the same D.I.Y.-style Chinese transfer letters that are now used in the Goldenvoice and Coachella logos; the imagery bounced from goth to punk to mod, depending on the band—Jane's Addiction, Black Flag, Social Distortion, Dead Kennedys, Bad Religion.

"I was Gary's right hand from '86 to '91," Tollett said. "To this day, I can kind of remember everything he said. Not specific words—feelings." Such as: "You put on a punk-rock show and someone busts out a window? Don't argue with the building owner. If it's seven hundred dollars, don't pay him three hundred. Otherwise, every time you do a show it's going to be there. And pay bands well. Punk bands didn't sell records. They needed money."

When Goldenvoice got an exclusive on the Hollywood Palladium, a big Art Deco venue in a seedy part of L.A., Tollett quit Cal Poly Pomona to work full time. Tovar was often abroad, attending to his weed-smuggling affairs. "I'd go over there," Tovar told me, "buy it, have them package it, put it on a freighter, then, eight hundred miles out of Hawaii, switch it from the freighter to a fishing boat, go to Alaska, then sail down the coast and have a crew with Zodiacs pick it up offshore." Tollett had no role in Tovar's other business.

The hardcore scene died toward the end of the eighties. "It got too violent," Tollett said. "Bands like Circle One, Suicidal Tendencies—their posses were nasty." Tovar got busted in 1989, just before Nirvana broke, ushering in grunge.

"I missed it by a couple months!" he lamented. Tollett and Rick Van Santen, a longtime partner of Tovar's, took over. Eventually, after Tovar went to prison (he did eight years, on and off), Tollett and Van Santen inherited the company from him. (Van Santen died in 2004.)

Goldenvoice prospered with the new scene. "We did seven nights of

Jane's Addiction at the John Anson Ford Theatre," Tollett said. "The Red Hot Chili Peppers were starting out. We were rocking with Flea and those guys." The problem was that "those bands grew faster than we did." Nirvana was soon doing arenas, but Goldenvoice couldn't afford the deposits to secure the buildings.

"And that's where the idea to put on a festival came from. It was, like, We can't own an arena, but there are fields everywhere."



LONG BEFORE THE Woodstock Festival of Music & Art took over Max Yasgur's dairy farm in Bethel, New York, in August, 1969, there were outdoor fiddling contests and revival meetings, some held in temporary "camp towns." Earlier twentieth-century, multiday North American festivals, like Tanglewood, Newport Jazz, Newport Folk, and New Orleans Jazz & Heritage, were (and remain) mostly civilized affairs, at which Dylan's plugging in his electric guitar, in 1965 at Newport Folk, counted as a major disturbance.

The short-lived first era of rock festivals began in San Francisco. The incubator was Stewart Brand and Ramon Sender's three-day Trips Festival, a kind of "super acid test," in Tom Wolfe's famed account. Bill Graham staged the show in the Longshoreman's Hall, in January, 1966. Although shambolic by intent (at one point, Ken Kesey projected the message "Anybody who knows he is God go up on stage"), under Graham's Prussian promotion style the festival actually made money. The following January, the Human Be-In attracted as many as thirty thousand people to Golden Gate Park, some with flowers in their hair, inspiring John Phillips to write the song that sent many more that way. Promoters tuned in to the capitalist trip, and the Magic Mountain Music

Festival, at Mt. Tamalpais, and Monterey Pop followed later, in the Summer of Love, now nearly fifty summers ago.

With Woodstock, the metaphorical trip proposed by the heads in San Francisco became real—a sojourn in a communal paradise. For those who stuck it out until the muddy end, Hendrix's performance of "Taps," on Monday morning, improvised during his "Star-Spangled Banner," rang like the death knell of the festival business. Woodstock had effectively crushed the budding enterprise just as it was getting under way. The traffic, the gate-crashing (the festival was declared free by Friday night), the pictures of grubby longhairs zonked to the gills, and the cleanup of Yasgur's farm all made it much harder for promoters to get the necessary permits for future festivals. And the size of the crowds inspired agents to raise their clients' prices.

Robert Santelli, in his 1980 history of rock festivals, "Aquarius Rising," cites the Summer Jam at Watkins Glen, a one-day event held on a raceway in up-state New York, as the end of the first era. The spirit of "green field" festivals lived on in the United Kingdom, at the Reading Festival and at the Pilton Pop, Blues & Folk Festival, which became Glastonbury. But in the U.S., during the next fifteen years, the live business turned inward, to the giant rock tours of the eighties and nineties, as new arenas and amphitheatres were built to hold tens of thousands.

The main elements of the second era of rock festivals coalesced in the nineties. In 1991, Perry Farrell, of Jane's Addiction, and Marc Geiger, inspired in part by a Pixies set at the Reading Festival, launched a hugely influential urban alternative-rock festival—Lollapalooza, in Chicago. That fall saw the first legally permitted version of Burning Man, in the Black Rock Desert of Nevada. In the mid-nineties, the jam band Phish put on a series of multiday camping festivals around the country. In 1996, the Organic festival, in California's San Bernardino National Forest, showed promoters the potential for outdoor raves.

In creating Coachella, Tollett took the best aspects of the indie-rock, jam-band, and SoCal rave/dance nineties festivals,

added the large art installations of Burning Man, and grafted this new festival hybrid onto the original hippie root-stock—the sixties-era longing for a new world which three days in the desert helps satisfy.

TOLLETT WAS FAMILIAR with the Empire Polo Club. In 1993, Pearl Jam, the alt-rock band from Seattle, was upset with Ticketmaster over the service charges that its fans were forced to pay. "They didn't want to play buildings where Ticketmaster had the deal," he said. Goldenvoice staged a Pearl Jam show on the polo grounds; it was wild, unruly, and a little scary. "We had been so into the grunge thing that I never noticed how beautiful the mountains were."

In 1997, Tollett had some photographs of Haagen's club taken, and made up a pamphlet touting a possible festival. (This time, the printer spelled the name right.) That summer, he went to the Glastonbury festival with a stack of pamphlets, to give bands and managers the idea. Glastonbury is legendary for the muddy fields produced by Britain's so-called summertime. "It was mind-blowing," Tollett said. "Worst rain ever. We had this pamphlet I was giving out, showing sunny Coachella. Everyone was laughing."

He had hoped to stage the first Coachella in 1998. "Couldn't do it," he said. "We had to pull out. And then in '99 we got it together. Beck, Morrissey, the Chemical Brothers. The show was in October. We announced in August. Which is so stupid. To break a brand-new festival sixty days away is financial suicide. But we didn't know that." Also, the announcement came the same week that the Woodstock '99 festival took place—a near-disaster in which rain, mud, riots, drugs, and fire all played a part. "I'm thinking, Should we be doing this? A lot of bad things could happen." One thing did—it was a hundred and seven degrees at festival time.

What did he do right? "We controlled every aspect of it," Tollett said. "Usually, if you're starting a festival you go to a food-and-beverage company and say, 'Give me half a million in advance, and you can run the concessions.' You go to the ticket

people, same. So there's a way to cut your losses up front. But you have to control it. Because, if the concession guy is in control, water will go from two bucks to five bucks when you're not looking."

Also, "I wouldn't let sponsors' logos on the stages. I feel like when the band is playing it should be you and the band, and it's a sacred moment." (Plenty of profane branding goes on offstage, however.)

What went wrong? "Tickets were fifty dollars for each of two days—should have been fifty-five. We needed a longer campaign to get word out. It was extravagant—five stages for a startup show." In the end, "we lost between eight hundred and fifty thousand and a million. We knew we were dust."

But Tollett's history of fair dealing with bands and vendors, learned from Tovar, was his karmic golden voice. Agents, led by Geiger, worked out long-term payment plans. "A couple bands let us slide," he said. "We struggled through the next year." Tollett sold his house, where he lived with his wife (they divorced in 2001) and daughter. Then he had to sell his car. "It was really tough." Failure didn't crush him, however. "I tend to dissect failures meticulously, but I'm never embarrassed by them or let them bog me down. Just take a shower and move on—some of the failures have needed two showers, though."

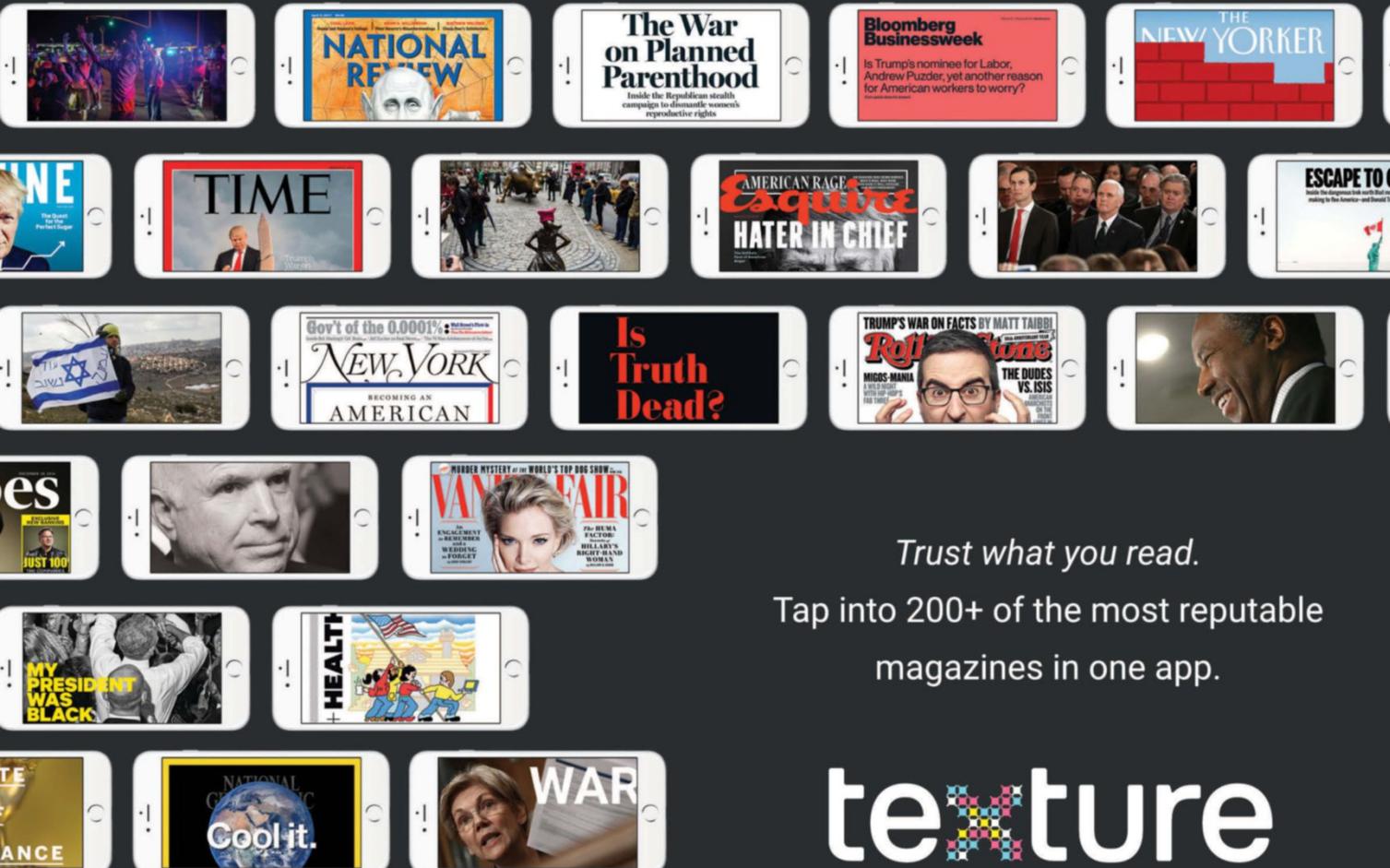
In 1999, A.E.G. had opened the Staples Center, and Tollett said, "they wanted to buy us to help them find shows." While they were working out the terms, A.E.G. said, "'Oh, and we want you to keep doing the festival you did.' I said, 'Well, we lost a lot of money.' They said, 'Yeah, so? It's the first year, you're going to lose money.' That had never occurred to me."

A.E.G. bought Goldenvoice in 2001, but Tollett kept Coachella, which he owned outright, separate. In 2004, A.E.G. also bought half of Coachella, while Tollett hung on to the other half, and the controlling interest, making the former punk promoter's unlikely partner a reclusive conservative billionaire from Colorado—Philip Anschutz.

NO ONE WANTS to wake up to see a headline that says, "Coachella owner anti-gay," Tollett declared several hours after having that unpleasant experience himself, on the morning after the tickets went on sale. The day before,



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"He'd make a wonderful main character for a short story, but I wouldn't put up with him for an entire novel."

• •

the music site Uproxx had repurposed a 2016 *Washington Post* report citing an L.G.B.T. advocacy group called Freedom for All Americans, which claimed that three of the charitable organizations to which Anschutz has given money are anti-L.G.B.T. Fed by the buzz surrounding the release of the poster and the ticket sale, the story flared up on social media, igniting a Boycott Coachella hashtag.

"I was offended," Tollett said of the headline, while we were having lunch in Palm Springs the day the news broke. "I run the festival, but it's rude to say that when you're a partner with someone."

Anschutz would supposedly be releasing a statement soon, Tollett said, explaining that his charitable organization, which has given out more than a billion dollars in a decade, had unwittingly supported the groups, without knowing of their anti-L.G.B.T. bias.

"He'd better say, 'No fucking way.' Anything short of that..."

Tollett's phone tinged. The statement was out. A.E.G. had had some trouble locating Anschutz, who was at the bottom of the Grand Canyon when the story went viral.

"Recent claims published in the

media that I am anti-LGBT are nothing more than fake news," Anschutz said in the statement. "I unequivocally support the rights of all people without regard to sexual orientation." He added that he had immediately stopped donations to these organizations on learning of their support of anti-L.G.B.T. political action.

Tollett was relieved, though not thrilled with the use of "fake news." "I'm telling you, these types of things can kill you," he said. "There are big ships that go down over small things. You're riding high, but one wrong thing and you're voted off the island. It's scary." He noted that Bill Gates had come to Coachella one year, and, after first telling Tollett that he thought the festival could last forever, ticked off on his fingers all the "isms" that could bring it down. "Terrorism, botulism—you name it. The guy's a walking actuarial table."

COACHELLA AND NAPSTER launched in the same year, 1999. Just as the indoor-rock-concert industry and the record business grew up together—concerts were like albums, in which you got to see the musicians playing the songs

live—so modern festivals have created a live version of the streaming-music experience: instead of listening to one artist, you catch ten. "People are aware of a lot more artists these days," Tom Win-dish, a partner in the agency Paradigm, told me. "They've heard one or two songs, not enough to hire a babysitter and go see the band, but enough to walk a couple hundred feet to see them at a festival and become a huge fan."

The better-known festivals started out as scrappy, independent enterprises. But now, after a ten-year buying spree, these former indies mostly belong to Live Na-tion (which is owned by another reclusive conservative Colorado billionaire, John Malone, of Liberty Media) and A.E.G. Between them, the two mega-promoters put on a significant per-cent-age of the live indoor shows in North America and Europe; by 2016, they had an equally large share of the outdoor busi-ness. A.E.G. has the biggest festival, in Coachella; Live Nation owns the next four biggest—Bonnaroo, Summerfest, Lollapalooza, and Austin City Limits. In all, Live Nation currently has forty-four music festivals in North America and thirty-nine in Europe; A.E.G. has about a third that many, including Stagecoach, a country festival at the Coachella site, FYF (Fuck Yeah Fest), in downtown L.A., and Firefly, in Dela-ware—all co-produced by Goldenvoice.

Can festivals that began as indepen-dents thrive under corporate control? In 2016, the year that Live Nation bought Bonnaroo, the festival sold 45,537 tick-ets, which was 28,156 fewer than it sold in 2015, when tickets were cheaper. Maybe people were put off by the higher prices, or perhaps the muddy fields of Bonnaroo, which swallowed my shoe seven years ago, look less inviting than they used to, thanks to Coachella.

ONE PART of the festival map re-mains unconquered by either Malone or Anschutz: New York City. The Big Apple has never been a major music-festival town. Chicago, Austin, and New Orleans all have better festivals. Mass happenings like those at Bethel and Watkins Glen have never much interested city officials, for obvious rea-reasons; promoters of multiday events are largely confined to perimeter islands and parking lots, and not to more centrally

situated parks where the city's free outdoor concerts take place.

Nonetheless, in recent years both Live Nation and A.E.G. have established festive beachheads here. Live Nation bought Founders, a local company started by Tom Russell and Jordan Wolowitz, two friends from prep school who launched the Governors Ball, in 2011. Last June, Goldenvoice/A.E.G. debuted Panorama, a festival similar to the Governors Ball, on the same East River island, a month ahead of its competitor. Not surprisingly, tickets sold poorly. (Sales are better this year.) Founders, understandably irked, countered with yet another event, the Meadows Music & Arts Festival, last October. A.E.G. also bought fifty percent of Bowery Presents, an experienced local promoter. In March, Irving Azoff upped the ante, booking his management clients the Eagles and Fleetwood Mac to play the new Classic East festival at Citi Field, the Mets' stadium, at the end of July, on the same day as Panorama. (Classic West, with the same lineup, will play Dodger Stadium, in L.A., two weeks earlier.)

These startups may not make money for years, if ever; there's a limit to how many festivals New York can sustain, at least as long as such gatherings are confined to lesser islands and stadiums. They're placeholders—the first moves in a longer game. A.E.G. simply cannot allow Live Nation to dominate the New York festival scene (or vice versa). "Because then," Tollett explained, "Live Nation could say to its artists, 'Here's forty of our festivals, including New York—skip Coachella.' We can't let that happen."

Ultimately, Tollett believes, one great world-class New York festival will emerge from the current slate of second stringers. He envisions a kind of Coachella East, a multiday urban event that would involve not just music but "tech, art, fashion, and culinary leaders in New York," he explained. But a great festival requires a great site.

Early one Sunday morning, I picked up Tollett at the J.F.K. Hilton—he had taken the red-eye in from L.A.—and we set off to inspect the locus of his vision: Flushing Meadows–Corona Park, in Queens, where the 1964 World's Fair took place.

A light snow had fallen over the city the night before. The park was deserted,

except for a few joggers negotiating the black ice. We stood with our backs to Philip Johnson's New York State Pavilion, now the Queens Museum. (The Panorama Festival is proactively named for the celebrated model inside, which depicts the cityscape.) In front of us was the huge shallow circular pool, now empty, with the twelve-story-tall Unisphere in the middle.

"So you'd have a stage there, and another over there," Tollett said, gesturing toward opposite ends of the park. Thus far, the city has denied permit applications from Live Nation (its Meadows Festival, which took place in the parking lot of Citi Field, is also wishfully christened), Madison Square Garden, and A.E.G. to use the park. It could easily hold seventy-five thousand people, he pointed out. "And you get to go back to your hotel and come back the next day. It's not like the desert."

We crunched through the crusty snow covering the park's western lawn. Tollett looked across Queens toward the spires of Manhattan. "It's New York—that's crazy," he said, and in his mind's eye he seemed already to be grappling with the second-line chefs and third-line tech stars on the poster. "You're always looking for a reason to go to New York. This becomes that reason."

IN THE END, Tollett's Coachella '17 poster could not compete with Beyoncé's growing family. In early February, when his headliner announced that she was pregnant with twins, Tollett learned about it on Instagram, like everyone else. At first, he hoped she would perform anyway, but her advanced condition at the Grammys, in mid-February, made that unlikely.

Still, "I didn't start looking for a backup until we got the call Beyoncé was positively postponing," he said. Staying female and pop, he swiftly secured the services of Lady Gaga, who was fresh from a well-received performance at the Super Bowl. She wasn't Beyoncé—no mortal is—but she was the first woman to headline Coachella since Björk, in 2007. And, with Queen Bey set to headline in 2018, Tollett had an early shot at finally coming up with the immaculate lineup he had always dreamed of. At least, he allowed, "it will give me a chance to experiment with some other bookings." ♦



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THE PROPHET OF DYSTOPIA

Margaret Atwood's dark "speculative fiction" eerily anticipated today's crises.

BY REBECCA MEAD

WHEN MARGARET ATWOOD was in her twenties, an aunt shared with her a family legend about a possible seventeenth-century forebear: Mary Webster, whose neighbors, in the Puritan town of Hadley, Massachusetts, had accused her of witchcraft. “The townspeople didn’t like her, so they strung her up,” Atwood said recently. “But it was before the age of drop hanging, and she didn’t die. She dangled there all night, and in the morning, when they came to cut the body down, she was still alive.” Webster became known as Half-Hanged Mary. The maiden name of Atwood’s grandmother was Webster, and the family tree can be traced back to John Webster, the fifth governor of Connecticut. “On Monday, my grandmother would say Mary was her ancestor, and on Wednesday she would say she wasn’t,” Atwood said. “So take your pick.”

Atwood made the artist’s pick: she chose the story. She once wrote a vivid narrative poem in the voice of Half-Hanged Mary—in Atwood’s telling, a sardonic, independent-minded crone who was targeted by neighbors “for having blue eyes and a sunburned skin . . . a weedy farm in my own name, / and a surefire cure for warts.” Webster’s grim endurance at the end of the rope (“Most will have only one death. / I will have two.”) grants her a perverse kind of freedom. She can now say anything: “The words boil out of me, / coil after coil of sinuous possibility. / The cosmos unravels from my mouth, / all fullness, all vacancy.” In 1986, Atwood made Webster one of two dedicatees of her best-known novel, “The Handmaid’s Tale,” a dystopian vision of the near future, in which the United States has become a fundamentalist theocracy, and the few women whose fertility has not been compromised by environmental pollution are forced into childbearing. The other dedicatee of “The Hand-

maid’s Tale” was Perry Miller, the scholar of American intellectual history; Atwood studied under him at Harvard, in the early sixties, extending her knowledge of Puritanism well beyond fireside tales.

Having embraced the heritage of Half-Hanged Mary—and having, at seventy-seven, reached an age at which sardonic independent-mindedness is permissible, and even expected—Atwood is winningly game to play the role of the wise elder who might have a spell up her sleeve. In January, I visited her in her home town of Toronto, and within a few hours of our meeting, while having coffee at a crowded café, she performed what friends know as a familiar party trick. After explaining that she had picked up the precepts of medieval palmistry decades ago, from an art-historian neighbor whose specialty was Hieronymus Bosch, Atwood spent several disconcerting minutes poring over my hands. First, she noted my heart line and the line of my intellect, and what their relative positions revealed about my capacity for getting things done. She wiggled my thumbs, a test for stubbornness. She examined my life line—“You’re looking quite healthy at the moment,” she said, to my relief—then told me to shake my hands out and let them fall into a resting position, facing upward. She regarded them thoughtfully. “Well, the Virgin Mary you’re not,” she said, dryly. “But you knew that.”

Atwood has long been Canada’s most famous writer, and current events have polished the oracular sheen of her reputation. With the election of an American President whose campaign trafficked openly in the depreciation of women—and who, on his first working day in office, signed an executive order withdrawing federal funds from overseas women’s-health organizations that offer abortion services—the novel that Atwood dedicated to Mary Webster has

reappeared on best-seller lists. “The Handmaid’s Tale” is also about to be serialized on television, in an adaptation, starring Elisabeth Moss, that will stream on Hulu. The timing could not be more fortuitous, though many people may wish that it were less so. In a photograph taken the day after the Inauguration, at the Women’s March on Washington, a protester held a sign bearing a slogan that spoke to the moment: “MAKE MARGARET ATWOOD FICTION AGAIN.”

If the election of Donald Trump were fiction, Atwood maintains, it would be too implausible to satisfy readers. “There are too many wild cards—you want me to believe that the F.B.I. stood up and said *this*, and that the guy over at WikiLeaks did *that*?” she said. “Fiction has to be something that people would actually believe. If you had published it last June, everybody would have said, ‘That is never going to happen.’” Atwood is a buoyant doomsayer. Like a skilled doctor, she takes evident satisfaction in providing an accurate diagnosis, even when the cultural prognosis is bleak. She attended the Toronto iteration of the Women’s March, wearing a wide-brimmed floppy hat the color of Pepto-Bismol: not so much a pussy hat as the chapeau of a lioness. Among the signs she saw that day, her favorite was one held by a woman close to her own age; it said, “I CAN’T BELIEVE I’M STILL HOLDING THIS FUCKING SIGN.” Atwood remarked, “After sixty years, why are we doing this again? But, as you know, in any area of life, it’s push and pushback. We have had the pushback, and now we are going to have the push again.”

Unlike many writers, Atwood does not require a particular desk, arranged in a particular way, before she can work. “There’s a good and a bad side to that,” she told me. “If I did have those things, then I would be able to put myself in



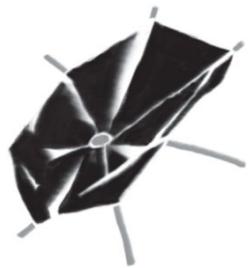
Atwood is a buoyant doomsayer. Like a skilled doctor, she takes evident satisfaction in providing an accurate diagnosis.

that fetishistic situation, and the writing would flow into me, because of the magical objects. But I don't have those, so that doesn't happen." The good side is that she can write anywhere, and does so, prolifically. She is equally uninhibited about genre. Atwood's bibliography runs to about sixty books—novels, poetry, short-story collections, works of criticism, children's books, and, most recently, a comic-book series about a part-feline, part-avian, part-human superhero called Angel Catbird. She is off-handed about her versatility. "I always wrote more than one type of thing," she said. "Nobody told me not to." On one occasion, over tea, she showed me her left hand: it had writing on it. "When all else fails, you do have a surface you can write on," she said.

Atwood travels frequently, and has often spent months at a time living in foreign countries, sometimes under conditions that a less flexible artist might find impossibly distracting. She started writing "*The Handmaid's Tale*" on a clunky rented typewriter while on a fellowship in West Berlin, in 1984. (Orwell was on her mind.) She spent a winter in the remote English village of Blakeney, in Norfolk, where her only means of calling North America was a telephone kiosk that was usually used for storing potatoes, and where the stone-floored cottage in which she wrote was so cold that she developed chilblains on her toes. When her daughter, Jess, who was born in 1976, was eighteen months old, Atwood and her partner, the novelist Graeme Gibson, made a round-the-world trip. After winding through Europe, they visited Afghanistan—a keen student of military history, Atwood wanted to see the terrain where the British had been defeated—as well as India and Singapore. They proceeded to Australia, for the Adelaide Literary Festival, then returned to Canada, via Fiji and Hawaii. They made do with carry-on luggage the whole way.

Home is a mansion in the Annex neighborhood of Toronto, near the university. She and Gibson have lived there for more than thirty years, and a basement office serves as the headquarters of Atwood's company, O. W. Toad, Ltd. (The whimsical name is an anagram of

"Atwood," but sometimes there are postal inquiries as to the existence of a Mr. Toad.) Atwood does not drive, and, for exercise as well as for efficiency, she likes to walk around her neighborhood; she often encounters en route some friend of a half-century's standing, and they will stop and discuss the past and future surgeries of loved ones—the inevitable discourse of the septuagenarian. Sometimes she drags a heavy shopping cart, loaded with books, for donation to the local library.



Atwood is enormously well read, and is an evangelist for books she admires, especially by young writers. When I was visiting, she pressed into my hands "Stay with Me," a novel by the twenty-nine-year-old Nigerian writer Ayobami Adebayo. Sarah Polley, the Canadian film director and writer, who is a friend of Atwood's, told me, "Usually, after seeing her, I come home with a full notebook, half in her handwriting and half in mine, of every movie and book I had heard of while talking to her—a full course load." Polley recently wrote the script for a six-part Netflix adaptation of Atwood's 1996 novel, "Alias Grace," which is based on a true-life murder mystery in nineteenth-century rural Canada. The book earned Atwood her third of five Booker Prize nominations.

Atwood is warmly recognized in Toronto, whether she is on the street, in a restaurant, or in the subway. (She once slipped me one of her senior-citizen tickets, with a sly arch of the eyebrow.) Traffic cops nod to her in crosswalks, and every encounter I had with her was interrupted by a supplicant autograph hunter or selfie seeker. She never declined. "In the age of social media, you cannot say no, because you'll get 'Mean Margaret Atwood was rude to me in a restaurant,'" she told me one lunchtime, after graciously signing yet another young woman's notebook. (Atwood speaks in a low, ironical monotone but adopts a querulous squeak when impersonating imagined detractors.) She would look striking even if she were not familiar. She owns an array of brightly colored winter coats—jewel red, imperial purple—with faux-fur-trimmed hoods that frame her face, as do her abundant curls of sil-

ver hair. She has high cheekbones and an aquiline nose, the kind of features that age has a hard time withering. Her skin is clear and translucent, of the sort that writers of popular Victorian fiction associated with good moral character.

One morning, I accompanied her to the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, at the University of Toronto, where she has donated her archive: four hundred and seventy-four boxes' worth of papers, so far. She had requested in advance to see materials related to "*The Handmaid's Tale*," and a small study room had been reserved for our use. Boxes had been rolled in on a cart, and one of them contained Atwood's handwritten draft. On an early page, she describes the plain contours of the room in which Offred, the novel's narrator, lives—"A chair, a table, a lamp"—though Atwood had not yet refined the detail that, in the published version, gives the opening paragraph of the second chapter a menacing power: "There must have been a chandelier, once. They've removed anything you could tie a rope to." Another box was labelled "Handmaid's Tale: Background," and Atwood pried the box open to reveal files containing sheaves of newspaper clippings from the mid-eighties.

"Clip-clippety-clip, out of the newspaper I clipped things," she said, as we looked through the cuttings. There were stories of abortion and contraception being outlawed in Romania, and reports from Canada lamenting its falling birth rate, and articles from the U.S. about Republican attempts to withhold federal funding from clinics that provided abortion services. There were reports about the threat to privacy posed by debit cards, which were a novelty at the time, and accounts of U.S. congressional hearings devoted to the regulation of toxic industrial emissions, in the wake of the deadly gas leak in Bhopal, India. An Associated Press item reported on a Catholic congregation in New Jersey being taken over by a fundamentalist sect in which wives were called "handmaidens"—a word that Atwood had underlined.

In writing "*The Handmaid's Tale*," Atwood was scrupulous about including nothing that did not have a historical antecedent or a modern point of comparison. (She prefers that her future-fiction books be labelled "speculative fiction" rather than "science fiction." "Not

because I don't like Martians . . . they just don't fall within my skill set," she wrote in the introduction to "In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination," an essay collection that she published in 2011.) The ritualized procreation in the novel—effectively, state-sanctioned rape—is extrapolated from the Bible. "Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her," Atwood recited. "Obviously, they stuck the two together and out came the baby, and it was given to Rachel. No kidding. It is right there in the text." In Atwood's book, the Handmaids are cultivated, like livestock. "I'm taken to the doctor's once a month, for tests: urine, hormones, cancer smear, blood test," Offred recounts. "The same as before, except that now it's obligatory." Only after completing several chapters does the reader queasily realize that Offred's innocuous-sounding name is a designation of ownership: the Commander in whose household the narrator serves is named Fred. A decade ago, the book was banned from high schools in Judson, Texas, on the ground that it was anti-Christian and excessively explicit about sex. In an open letter to the school district, Atwood pointed out that the Bible has a good deal more to say about sex than her book does, and defended her fiction's essential truthfulness, speculative or not. "If you see a person heading toward a huge hole in the ground, is it not a friendly act to warn him?" she wrote.

With the novel, she intended not just to pose the essential question of dystopian fiction—"Could it happen here?"—but also to suggest ways that it had already happened, here or elsewhere. While living in West Berlin, Atwood visited Poland, where martial law had only recently been lifted; many dissidents were still in jail. She already knew members of the Polish resistance from the Second World War, who had gone into exile in Canada. "I remember one person saying a very telling thing: 'Pray you will never have occasion to be a hero,'" she said. Atwood's longtime literary agent, Phoebe Larmore, told me of seeing Atwood during the writing of "The Handmaid's Tale." "I had been quite ill that year, and Margaret came and sat on my sofa, and I think she looked worse than I did," Larmore recalled. "I asked her what was

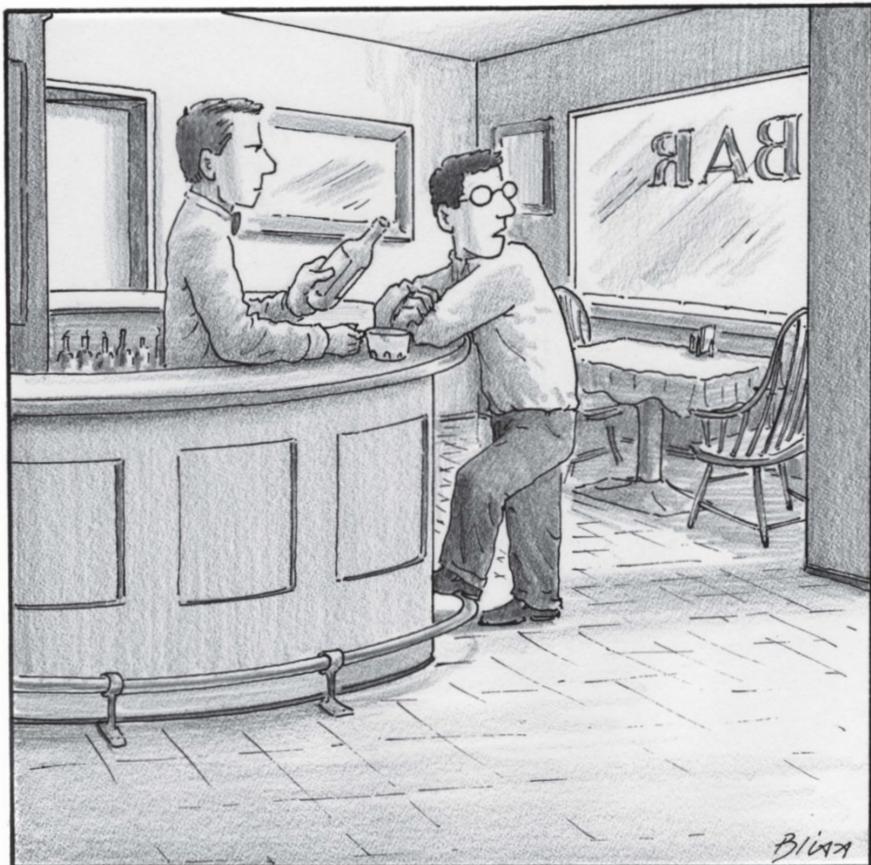
happening. She said, 'It's the new novel. It scares me. But I have to write it.'

"The Handmaid's Tale" became a best-seller, despite some sniffy reviews, like one in the *Times*, by Mary McCarthy, who wrote, "Even when I try, in the light of these palely lurid pages, to take the Moral Majority seriously, no shiver of recognition ensues." It has since sold so many millions of copies that Atwood considers them uncountable. Her friend the novelist Valerie Martin was the first to read the finished manuscript; they were both teaching in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. "There is kind of a disagreement about what I said," Martin told me. "She says that I said, 'There is something in it.' But what I think I said is: 'You are going to be rich.'" The book quickly became canonical. Atwood's daughter was nine when it was published; by the time she was in high school, it was required reading for graduation.

Despite the novel's current air of timeliness, the contours of the dystopian future that Atwood imagined in the eighties do not map closely onto the present moment—although recent news images

of asylum seekers fleeing across the U.S. border into Canada have a chilling resonance with the opening moments of the television series, which shows Moss, not yet enlisted as a Handmaid, attempting to escape from the U.S. to its northern neighbor, where democracy prevails. Still, the U.S. in 2017 does not show immediate signs of becoming Gilead, Atwood's imagined theocratic American republic. President Trump is not an adherent of traditional family values; he is a serial divorcer. He is not known to be a man of religious faith; his Sundays are spent on the golf course.

What does feel familiar in "The Handmaid's Tale" is the blunt misogyny of the society that Atwood portrays, and which Trump's vocal repudiation of "political correctness" has loosed into common parlance today. Trump's vilification of Hillary Clinton, Atwood believes, is more explicable when seen through the lens of the Puritan witch-hunts. "You can find Web sites that say Hillary was actually a Satanist with demonic powers," she said. "It is so seventeenth-century that you can hardly believe it. It's right out of the



"Let me know when those two kids across the street start crying."



"Instead of eggs, you're going to look for lost balls in the water hazards."

subconscious—just lying there, waiting to be applied to people.” The legacy of witch-hunting, and the sense of shame that it engendered, Atwood suggests, is an enduring American blight. “Only one of the judges ever apologized for the witch trials, and only one of the accusers ever apologized,” she said. Whenever tyranny is exercised, Atwood warns, it is wise to ask, *“Cui bono?”* Who profits by it? Even when those who survived the accusations levelled against them were later exonerated, only meagre reparations were made. “One of the keys to America is that your neighbor may be a Communist, a serial killer, or in league with satanic forces,” Atwood said. “You really don’t trust your fellow-citizens very much.”

Now, Atwood argues, women have been put on notice that hard-won rights may be only provisional. “It’s the return to patriarchy,” she said, as she paged through the clippings. “Look at his Cabinet!” she said of Trump. “Look at the kind of laws that people have put through in the states. *Absolutely* they want to overturn Roe v. Wade, and they will have to deal with the consequences if they do. You’re going to have a lot more orphans, aren’t you? A lot more dead women, a lot more illegal abortions, a lot more families with

children in them left without a mother. They want it ‘back to the way it was.’ Well, *that* is part of the way it was.”

ATWOOD WAS BORN in Ottawa, but she spent formative stretches of her early years in the wilderness—first in northern Quebec, and then north of Lake Superior. Her father, Carl Atwood, was an entomologist, and, until Atwood was almost out of elementary school, the family passed all but the coldest months in virtually complete isolation at insect-research stations; at one point, they lived in a log cabin that her father had helped construct.

Her mother, also named Margaret—among her intimates, the novelist goes by Peggy—was a dietitian. In the months in the woods, she secured workbooks from school for Atwood and her brother, Harold, who is three years her senior. “The faster you could do them, the sooner you could go out and play, so I became very rapid and superficial in my execution of those sorts of things,” Atwood said. In inclement weather, the children amused themselves by making comic books and by reading. A favorite book was “Grimms’ Fairy Tales,” which Atwood’s parents bought, by mail order, in

1945. “I don’t remember finding any of them frightening,” she wrote later. “By and large, bad things happened only to bad people, which was reassuring; though children have a bloodthirsty sense of justice, they don’t learn mercy until later.”

Her father had grown up poor, in rural Nova Scotia. Her mother, whose family was also from Nova Scotia, grew up in slightly better circumstances: Atwood’s maternal grandfather was a country doctor, and an aunt had been the first woman to get a master’s degree in history from the University of Toronto. Atwood’s parents were resilient and curious and devoted to the outdoors, and the Atwood children were encouraged to be the same. They sledded across a still frozen lake at the start of the season, and canoed across it during the summer months. In Atwood’s second novel, *“Surfacing,”* a psychological thriller threaded with twisted family relations that was published in 1972, she depicted the landscape of her youth with unsentimental, sensual precision: “The water was covered with lily pads, the globular yellow lilies with their thick center snouts pushing up from among them. . . . When the paddles hit bottom on the way across, gas bubbles from decomposing vegetation rose and burst with a stench of rotten eggs or farts.” When Atwood was about ten, her father built a vacation cabin on an unoccupied island in the lake. The family still retreats there in the summer.

In 1948, Margaret’s father received an appointment at the University of Toronto. (Three years later, another daughter, Ruth, was born.) Margaret, having been raised as her brother’s peer by an unshrinking mother, was unschooled in the conventions of little-girl society. “In the woods, you wore pants not because it was butch but because if you didn’t wear pants and tuck the tops into your socks you would get blackflies up your legs,” she said. “They make little holes in you, into which they inject an anticoagulant. You don’t feel them when they are doing it, and then you take your clothes off and find out you are covered with blood.” In *“Cat’s Eye”* (1988), Atwood drew on the experience of being transferred from a navigable wilderness to the more treacherous civilization of prepubescent girls. The book’s narrator, Elaine, explains that she has a classmate who “tells me her hair is honey-blond, that her haircut is called a

pageboy, that she has to go to the hairdresser's every two months to get it done. I haven't known there are such things as pageboys and hairdressers."

Atwood started writing in earnest in high school. Her parents, who lived through the Depression, were encouraging but practical. She told me, "My mother said, caustically, 'If you are going to be a writer, you had better learn to spell.' I said, airily, 'Others will do that for me.' And they do." She followed her brother to the University of Toronto. (A neurophysiologist, Harold Atwood is a professor emeritus in the department of physiology.) Atwood enrolled in the philosophy department, but after discovering that logical positivism was its mainstay, rather than ethics and aesthetics, she switched to literature.

The university's literature curriculum was unapologetically British: she started with "Beowulf" and took it from there. Canadian literature had yet to be considered worthy of study. A decade later, in 1972, Atwood made a contribution to its establishment as a proper field, with her lucid survey "Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature." In that book, which made her a household name in Canada, she persuasively posited that, whereas the controlling idea of English literature is the island, and the pervasive symbol of American literature is the frontier, the dominant theme in Canadian literature is survival: "Our stories are likely to be tales not of those who made it but of those who made it back from the awful experience—the North, the snowstorm, the sinking ship—that killed everyone else."

As an undergraduate, she audited Northrop Frye's celebrated course on the Bible and literature. Frye helped her secure a fellowship at Harvard, where, in the sixties, she began to write a doctoral thesis on what she called the "English Metaphysical Romance"—the gothic fantasy novels of the nineteenth century. She never finished it. Atwood had embarked on an academic career not for the love of teaching or scholarship but because making a living as a writer seemed an implausible aspiration. "It was thought presumptuous—this is way before the age of creative-writing programs, and writers, to be serious, ought to be dead," she recalled.

Atwood started her career as a poet.

Her first professionally published collection, "The Circle Game," won the Governor General's Award in 1966, and has never been out of print. The poems, which take the ring-around-the-rosy children's game as a starting point for an exploration of male-female relationships, show Atwood's early aptitude for the unflinching, visceral metaphor. A lover examines the speaker's face "indifferently / yet with the same taut curiosity / with which you might regard / a suddenly discovered part / of your own body: / a wart perhaps." Atwood's first novel, "The Edible Woman," which was written in 1964 and published five years later, is a contemporary satire in which a young woman, having just become engaged—her husband-to-be is clearly the wrong guy—finds herself unable to eat.

Some reviewers hailed Atwood's work as a voice of the burgeoning feminist movement. (A reviewer in *Time* said that the novel had "the kick of a perfume bottle converted into a Molotov cocktail.") She resisted the identification. "I was not in New York, where all of that kicked off, in 1969," she said. "I was in Edmonton, Alberta, where there was no feminist movement, and would not be for quite some time." Atwood was then married to Jim Polk, who had been a classmate at Harvard, and whose teaching job had taken them to the Canadian Northwest. (They divorced in 1973.) "I had people interviewing me who would say, 'How do you get the housework done?' I would say, 'Look under the sofa, then we can talk.'"

In the sometimes divisive years of second-wave feminism, Atwood reserved the right to remain nonaligned. "I didn't want to become a megaphone for any one particular set of beliefs," she said. "Having gone through that initial phase of feminism when you weren't supposed to wear frocks and lipstick—I never had any use for that. You should be able to wear them without people saying you are a traitor to your sex." In a 1976 essay, "On Being a 'Woman Writer': Paradoxes and Dilemmas," Atwood described the mixed feelings experienced by women writers old enough to have forged a writing life before representatives of the women's movement came along to claim them. "It's not finally all that comforting to have a phalanx of women ... come breezing up now to tell them they were right all along," she wrote. "It's like being

judged innocent after you've been hanged: the satisfaction, if any, is grim."

Given that her works are a mainstay of women's-studies curricula, and that she is clearly committed to women's rights, Atwood's resistance to a straightforward association with feminism can come as a surprise. But this wariness reflects her bent toward precision, and a scientific sensibility that was ingrained from childhood: Atwood wants the terms defined before she will state her position. Her feminism assumes women's rights to be human rights, and is born of having been raised with a presumption of absolute equality between the sexes. "My problem was not that people wanted me to wear frilly pink dresses—it was that *I* wanted to wear frilly pink dresses, and my mother, being as she was, didn't see any reason for that," she said. Atwood's early years in the forest endowed her with a sense of self-determination, and with a critical distance on codes of femininity—an ability to see those codes as cultural practices worthy of investigation, not as necessary conditions to be accepted unthinkingly. This capacity for quizzical scrutiny underlies much of her fiction: not accepting the world as it is permits Atwood to imagine the world as it might be.

ATWOOD AND GIBSON, who met in Toronto publishing circles, spent the seventies living on a farm outside the city. The countryside was cheap, and it provided a congenial environment for Gibson's two teen-age sons; it also provides the setting for what Atwood acknowledges as some of her most autobiographical writing, in the short-story collection "Moral Disorder" (2006). The title story details the less picturesque aspects of country life. "Susan the cow went away in a truck one day and came back frozen and dismembered," Atwood writes. "It was like a magic trick—a woman sawed in half on the stage in plain view of all, to reappear fully restored to wholeness, walking down the aisle; except that Susan's transformation had gone the other way."

Atwood resists critics' attempts to find parallels between her life story and her fiction, and has no desire to write a memoir. "I am interested in reading other people's, if they have had fascinating or gruesome lives, but I don't think my life has

been that fascinating or gruesome,” she said. “The parts of writers’ lives that are interesting are usually the part *before* they become a well-known writer.” In the mid-eighties, shortly before she started to write “The Handmaid’s Tale” but was already Canada’s most celebrated novelist, a documentary filmmaker named Michael Rubbo spent several days with Atwood and her family at their island retreat in northern Quebec. Rubbo sought to locate the source of Atwood’s inspiration and to uncover the origins of her often gloomy themes, but most of his film is devoted to showing the ways that Atwood politely declined to conform to her inquisitor’s thesis. “I use settings, but that is not to be confused with using real people, and things that have actually happened to those real people,” she tells the filmmaker, while his camera lingers on her hands: she is slicing through the blood-red stalks of rhubarb plants with a chef’s knife and casually discarding the poisonous leaves.

At one point, the Atwoods are given control of the camera, and conduct a strange pantomime in which Atwood sits with a brown paper bag over her head while other family members offer sentence-long characterizations of her. “That woman is my daughter, and she’s incognito,” Atwood’s mother says, in the most illuminating of the remarks. Atwood, after removing the bag, says, “Michael Rubbo’s whole problem is that he thinks of me as mysterious and a problem to be solved.... He’s trying to find out why some of my work is sombre in tone, shall we say, and he’s trying for some simple explanation of that in me or in my life, rather than in the society that I am portraying.” At another moment, she suggests that her novels should be thought of as being in the tradition of the Victorian realist or social novel, and should be read in the light of objective facts, rather than subjective experience.

Some of her most perceptive readers have taken this approach. The novelist Francine Prose, reviewing “Alias Grace,” noted that “Atwood has always had much in common with those writers of the last century who were engaged less by the subtle minutiae of human interaction than by the chance to use fiction as a means of exploring and dramatizing ideas.” At its best, Atwood’s fiction summons an intricate social world, whether

it be a disquieting vision of the future, as in “The Handmaid’s Tale,” or a vividly rendered past, as in “Alias Grace” or “The Blind Assassin”—a genre-bending tour de force set partly in small-town Canada in the nineteen-twenties, for which Atwood won the Booker Prize, in 2000.

Like her Victorian forebears, Atwood does not shy away from the idea that the novel is a place to explore questions of morality. In an e-mail, she wrote to me, “You can’t use language and avoid moral dimensions, since words are so weighted (lilies that fester vs. weeds, etc.) and all characters have to live somewhere, even if they are rabbits, as in ‘Watership Down,’ and they have to live at some time . . . and they have to make choices.” The challenge, she noted, is avoiding moralism: “How do you ‘engage’ without preaching too much and reducing the characters to mere allegories? A perennial problem. But when the large social issues are very large indeed (‘Doctor Zhivago’), the characters will act within—and be acted upon by—everything that surrounds them.”

At the same time, Atwood’s best fiction is sustained by a specificity of detail—a capacity for noticing—that might be expected from one whose scientist father introduced her to a microscope at a young age. One morning, while we were walking in her neighborhood, Atwood bumped into an old friend, Adrienne Clarkson, a college contemporary who went on to have a distinguished ca-

“And you were painting your fingernails a beautiful shade of red,” Atwood continued.

“How frivolous of you to remember that,” Clarkson said, fondly.

“How *novelistic* of me to remember it,” Atwood said.

NOT LONG AGO, a history society at the University of Toronto, which was compiling a video archive of notable alumni, asked to interview Atwood about her college days. On a chilly afternoon in January, she found her way to an upper room in the university’s Gothic Revival student center. Four eager undergraduates, all women, were there to film and quiz her. Atwood sat by a leaded-glass window against a gray sky, and amiably answered questions about what it was like being a young woman on campus in the fifties. “Whatever things are like when you are young, they seem normal, because you have nothing to compare them to,” she said. “For instance, I would not ever have worn jeans to high school. It would not have been permitted except on football days. They wanted us to wear jeans on football day, so we could sit on the hill and not have anyone looking up our skirts. It takes a while to figure this out, but now I realize that must have been the reason.”

In those days, Atwood said, there was no fear of rape on campus, as there seemed to be today. “I am not saying that it didn’t happen, but you would never hear of it,” she said. “And I would suspect that the chances of that happening were quite low, because what everybody was afraid of then was getting pregnant. The boys were afraid of getting pregnant, too, because you could end up married at an early age that way, and people didn’t particularly want that. But there was no Pill.”

One young interviewer, wide-eyed, said, “It is very interesting to consider the importance of the Pill, not just for women but in changing society. I hadn’t really considered it.”

Atwood continued talking about changing mores—the supplanting of the panty girdle by nylon tights, and the consequent innovation of the miniskirt. But when one of the students fumbled with the camera, in an effort to renew its memory card, Atwood took the opportunity to turn the tables.



reer as a broadcaster, and, for six years, as the governor general of Canada. “We are going to crawl into our eighties together,” Clarkson said, inviting us to her home for tea. The women reminisced about studying with Northrop Frye. “He is the person who talked me into going to grad school instead of moving to Paris, and living in a garret and drinking absinthe,” Atwood said. “But, Adrienne, you *did* move to Paris.”

“You came to visit,” Clarkson said.

AT SEA

Every three seconds, to recall captivity,
the mind slipping in on itself and its past,
and knowing it. She sounds like a politician:
I cannot recall. I am afraid I do not remember.
If only the mind could bury itself at the bottom
of the sea, wavering tentacles flexible
to the new currents. Instead it rides the rising
waves, bobbing up again and again,
drifting farther away from land it was not
meant for, from everything familiar.
And yet sometimes a detail will emerge, like a nose
pressed up against the aquarium glass,
the jellyfish trying to make sense of the nostrils,
the dim lighting, how it came to be, and be here.

—Rebecca Morgan Frank

"I was astonished to see that the Polaroid camera has come back—*why?* What do you do with a Polaroid picture?" she asked.

The students, delighted, offered a chorus of explanations: such images combined the instant gratification of the selfie with the pleasure of a physical object that could be pinned on a wall. Atwood went on to seek their views on other surprisingly resurgent technologies—vinyl records, even cassette players—and then shifted to something more up-to-date. "Do you know an exercise app called Zombies, Run?" she asked.

"Is that, like, where you go for a run and zombies chase you?" one student asked. Yes, Atwood said: the app, a kind of interactive podcast, plays an apocalyptic story line in a listener's ears as she jogs, thus making a workout more entertaining, if you like that sort of thing. "I'm in one of the episodes," Atwood announced. She has a cameo as herself: her voice is supposedly being transmitted over a crackling phone line from Toronto.

Finally, the students' camera was working. Atwood faced it again, and said, brightly, "So, let's see. What else do you want to know?"

Her openness to younger people is, in part, a consequence of the passage of time: there are many more younger people around than older ones, so she'd better be open to them, if she's going to be open to anybody. But it is also temperamental. *Zombies, Run!* was co-created by Naomi

Alderman, a British novelist in her early forties, who is also a video-game designer. She and Atwood became friends after Atwood chose to be her mentor, through a program sponsored by Rolex. "She was intrigued that I might know about something she doesn't know about yet, and I might be able to tell her about it," Alderman said. "I don't think she judges anything in advance as being beneath her, or beyond her, or outside her realm of interest." Alderman has accompanied Atwood and Gibson on several bird-watching vacations, including one earlier this year in the rain forests of Panama. "We stayed in tents," Alderman told me. "And the first night I was going back to my tent and my headlamp caught these blue shining glints on the jungle floor, and every single one of these glints was a pair of spider's eyes staring at me. When I told Margaret, she was very disappointed—she really wanted to see the spiders."

Atwood's embrace of technological innovation is sometimes more theoretical than practical: she has yet to master streaming video, so she still watches DVDs. Occasionally, her fascination with technological processes, combined with an incomprehension of them, can have productive results. A dozen or so years ago, when videoconferencing technology was still a novelty, Atwood wondered whether it might be possible to develop a means of conducting book signings remotely. "I thought of the writing flying through the air, and material-

izing somewhere else," she said. Her flight of fancy, combined with some technical and marketing know-how assembled by Matthew Gibson, her stepson, resulted in the LongPen, a robotic device that enables a writer—or anyone—to sign a paper remotely in a manner that replicates the speed and pressure of the original autograph, and is indistinguishable from it. (Gibson has since created an e-signature company, Syngrafii, and it sells the LongPen, which is marketed less to weary authors than to financial and legal companies.)

Atwood was an early adopter of Twitter, signing up in 2009; she now has about a million and a half followers, though she is aware that some of that number must be bots. "I do sometimes get 'I miss your dick'—they don't read the fine print," she said. She appreciates followers who have a specialized interest in the sciences; they help her keep abreast of recent developments that might be of interest for a future writing project, or resonate with a past one. She engages, often cheerily, with her followers and others, sometimes on topics that another writer might avoid. "Only 'race' is the human race, sez me. (And says science.)," she wrote in response to one user's speculation that she was Jewish. "But no, I wouldn't have ended up in a Hitler death camp for that reason."

For years, Atwood has argued that Twitter in particular and the Internet in general have been good for literacy. "People have to actually be able to read and write to use the Internet, so it's a great literacy driver, if kids are given the tools and the incentive to learn the skills that allow them to access it," she said, while being interviewed at a digital-media conference in 2011. She has been a champion of Wattpad, a story-sharing site founded in Toronto a decade ago. In her view, it not only provides a place for North American teen-agers to publish their own zombie tales; it also offers cell-phone-equipped readers in the developing world with an entry point into fiction, even if they have no access to libraries, schools, or books. Her 2015 novel, "The Heart Goes Last," which takes the premise of for-profit prisons to monstrous, comic ends, was excerpted on Wattpad. Atwood has also published a collection of poems, "Thriller Suite," serially, on Wattpad; the book has

been viewed more than three hundred and eighty thousand times since then, presumably reaching many readers who had never bought a volume of poetry.

She believes that early fears, among some observers, that the advent of the Web would mean the end of books were misplaced. "I think we know now that, neurologically, there are reasons why that isn't going to happen," Atwood said. "Installments on a phone—those, the brain can handle. 'War and Peace,' maybe not. Though 'War and Peace' was first published in installments, by the way." She is fond of saying that, with all technology, there is a good side, a bad side, and a stupid side that you weren't expecting. "Look at an axe—you can cut a tree down with it, and you can murder your neighbor with it," she said. "And the stupid side you hadn't considered is that you can accidentally cut your foot off with it."

A FEW YEARS AGO, Atwood became the first author to participate in a conceptual art project, the Future Library, which was conceived by a Scottish artist named Katie Paterson. In the course of a hundred years, a hundred writers will contribute a manuscript to the project. The manuscripts will remain unread except for their titles—Atwood's is "Scribbler Moon"—until 2114, when they will be printed on paper made from

a thousand pine trees that have been planted in the Nordmarka, a forest not far from where the library will be maintained, in Oslo, Norway.

"Being the kind of child who buried things in the back yard in jars, hoping that someone else would dig them up sometime, I of course liked this project," she told me. Atwood has a keen interest in conservation: she uses her Twitter feed to highlight ecological issues ranging from the decimation of the bee population to ocean pollution. The optimism inherent in the Future Library—the belief that there will be readers, and a world for them to inhabit—seems at odds with some of the darker scenarios in Atwood's fiction, and I suggested as much to her.

"This is not a question of *expect*," she said. "It is a question of hope. It is a question of faith rather than knowledge. You wouldn't do it unless you thought there was a chance." Humans, she said, "have hope built in," adding, "If our ancestors had not had that component, they would not have bothered getting up in the morning. You are always going to have hope that today there will be a giraffe, where yesterday there wasn't one." At the same time, Atwood loves to entertain notions of how degraded our future might become, and what effect that might have on the human race. She speculates that, if our atmosphere becomes too carbon-

heavy, with a dwindling in the oxygen supply, one of the first things that will happen is that we will become a lot less intelligent.

But a novelist necessarily imagines the fate of individuals; the human condition is what the novel was made for exploring. "We just actually can't bear the idea of nothing," Atwood said. "I think that is partly to do with grammar. You say, 'I will be dead,' but there is still an 'I.' There is still a subject." Her novels, she went on, are not without hope, either. "The Handmaid's Tale" has a coda, in the form of an address given, in 2195, by a keynote speaker at an academic conference, the Twelfth Symposium on Gileadean Studies. Civilization has survived, even to the point of sustaining groaningly bad academic puns. (Women fleeing Gilead, a professor notes, cross the border via "The Underground Frailroad.") "I have never done everybody in," Atwood said. "I have never polished them all off so that there's nobody left alive, now, have I? No."

In the early aughts, she began an ambitious cycle of novels exploring a different kind of dystopian future. The Maddaddam Trilogy—"Oryx and Crake," "The Year of the Flood," and "Maddaddam"—was published between 2003 and 2013. The books depict a North American landscape that is ravaged by ecological disaster and inhabited by a genetically modified race of quasi-humans, the Crakers. As usual, Atwood researched her subject voraciously, and this time she was further enabled by the Internet. The trilogy crackles with a gleeful inventiveness that is sometimes tonally at odds with its apocalyptic content: the Crakers' skin cells have been modified to repel ultraviolet rays and mosquitoes, for example, and the capacity for sexual jealousy has been edited out of their genome.

One evening in Toronto, Atwood invited me to her home, where we sat in its spacious kitchen on tall stools at a counter, overlooking her wintry, barren-looking garden. Graeme Gibson poured three glasses of whiskey while Atwood sorted through Christmas cards, dispensing with the chore as efficiently as if she were slicing rhubarb. I remarked on an aspect of "Oryx and Crake" that had moved me. The protagonist, Snowman, apparently left alone in the world, strives to remember unusual words he once knew. Atwood writes, "*Valance. Norn.*



Serendipity. Pibroch. Lubricious. When they've gone out of his head, these words, they'll be gone, everywhere, forever. As if they had never been." Reading this passage in recent months led me to think about the catastrophic devaluation of intellect that seems to have occurred in American society: the willful repudiation of rigorous thinking, and objective facts, that helped propel Trump to victory. I remarked to Atwood that it felt like a prescient metaphor.

"It feels like real life," Atwood replied, quickly. "I am sure every generation feels that way, as they see younger people coming up who don't know *what* they are talking about." She asked if I knew Edith Wharton's short story "After Holbein": "This old gentleman in New York society goes off to visit this hostess of his youth, and they sit at this enormous table, and everything is as wonderful as he remembers it, and there are bouquets of flowers, and this delicious food, and they have this wonderful conversation and she looks as beautiful as ever. And you see it all from the point of view of the servants, and it's two old people sitting at a table eating gruel, and the flowers are all bunches of newspaper."

News comes often to Atwood of friends who have died, or are ailing. Gibson has been given a diagnosis of early dementia, and they are both supporters of the Canadian dying-with-dignity movement. "The story of Wharton's that really terrifies me is 'The Pelican,'" she went on, recalling a tale in which a well-born widow takes to giving public lectures to support her young son, and then continues to give them for decades, even after the son is a grown man. "People are very sympathetic, but the lecture itself is like watching someone unreeling from her mouth a very long spool of blank paper," Atwood said. "That's the metaphor that frightens me—that I am going to be up in public, unravelling from my mouth a long spool of blank paper."

IN MARCH, ATWOOD came to New York City, for the annual National Book Critics Circle award ceremony, where she was being given a lifetime-achievement award. (Atwood recently remarked, on an Ask Me Anything thread on Reddit, that she is at the "Gold Watch and Goodbye" phase of her career.) The ceremony was held at the New School, and

the collective mood of the assembled editors, critics, and writers—a concentration of New York's liberal intelligentsia in its purest form—was celebratory, as such events always are, but also agitated and galvanized. That morning, President Trump had issued his first federal budget plan, and he had proposed eliminating the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities, as well as ending funding for public broadcasting, and closing agencies devoted to social welfare and



environmental oversight. The crowd felt like bruised defenders of a civilization that they hadn't realized was susceptible to attack.

Trump's agenda was criticized by many of the award recipients. Michelle Dean, a young Canadian writer who won the association's annual prize for excellence in reviewing, declared, "The struggle we presently find ourselves in is not a mistake, and not a fluke.... It crept into our lives while we were napping. Power sometimes works that way, but I still wish we hadn't missed it." Lately, Dean added, she'd been rereading "The Handmaid's Tale" for the first time since high school: "There are so few books like that being published right now. The application of literary intelligence to this question of power—it's kind of out of style. And many writers just seem more interested in exploring the self."

Two days before Trump's Inauguration, Atwood had published an essay in *The Nation*, in which she questioned the generalities sometimes made by left-leaning intellectuals about the role of the artist in public life. "Artists are always being lectured on their moral duty, a fate other professionals—dentists, for example—generally avoid," she observed. "There's nothing inherently sacred about films and pictures and writers and books. *Mein Kampf* was a book." In fact, she said, writers and other artists are particularly prone to capitulating to authoritarian

pressure; the isolation inherent in the craft makes them psychologically vulnerable. "The pen is mightier than the sword, but only in retrospect," she wrote. "At the time of combat, those with the swords generally win."

At the New School, when Atwood, wearing a long black dress with a patterned black shawl draped around her shoulders, was summoned to the stage, she took a cheekier tack than she had taken in the *Nation* essay. "I'm very, very, very happy to be here, because they let me across the border," she said, her voice low and deliberate. Atwood characterized literary criticism as a thankless task. "Authors are sensitive beings," she observed, to titters of amusement. "You, therefore, know that all positive adjectives applied to them will be forgotten, yet anything even faintly smacking of imperfection in their work will rankle until the end of time." An author whom she had reviewed once berated her use of the adjective "accomplished," she recalled. "Don't you know that 'accomplished' is an insult?" she deadpanned. "I didn't know."

Then her remarks took an exhortatory turn. "Why do I do such a painful task?" she said. "For the same reason I give blood. We must all do our part, because if nobody contributes to this worthy enterprise then there won't be any, just when it's most needed." Now is one of those times, she warned: "Never has American democracy felt so challenged." The necessary conditions for dictatorship, Atwood noted, include the shutting down of independent media, which mutes the expression of contrary or subversive opinions; writers form part of the fragile barrier standing between authoritarian control and open democracy. "There are still places on this planet where to be caught reading you, or even me, would incur a severe penalty," Atwood said. "I hope there will soon be fewer such places." Her voice dropped to a stage whisper: "I am not holding my breath."

In the meantime, she thanked the book critics, though even her gratitude carried a note of subversion. "I will cherish this lifetime-achievement award from you, though, like all sublunar blessings, it is a mixed one," she said. "Why do I only get one lifetime? Where did this lifetime go?" ♦

TALK LIKE AN EGYPTIAN

Learning the language of the Prophet and the people.

BY PETER HESSLER

WHEN YOU MOVE to another country as an adult, the language flows around you like a river. Perhaps a child can immediately abandon himself to the current, but most older people will begin by picking out the words and phrases that seem to matter most, which is what I did after my family moved to Cairo, in October of 2011. It was the first fall after the Arab Spring; Hosni Mubarak, the former President, had been forced to resign the previous February. Every weekday, my wife, Leslie, and I met with a tutor for two hours at a language school called Kalimat, where we studied Egyptian Arabic. At the end of each session, we made a vocabulary list. In early December, following the first round of the nation's parliamentary elections, which had been dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood, my language notebook read:

mosque
to prostrate oneself
salah (prayer)
imam
sheikh
beard
carpet
forbidden

On many days, I went to Tahrir Square, to report on the ongoing revolution. If I heard unfamiliar words or phrases, I brought them back to class. In January, after some protesters had become suspicious of my intentions as a journalist, the notebook had a new string of words:

agent
embassy
spy
Israel
Israeli
Jew

The following month, I learned “tear gas,” “slaughter,” and “Can you speak more slowly?” “Conspiracy theory” appeared in my notebook on the same day as “fried potatoes.” Sometimes I won-

dered about the strangeness of Tahrir-speak, and what my Arabic would have been like if I had arrived ten years earlier. But it would have been different at any time, in any place: you can never step into the same language twice. Even eternal phrases took on a new texture in the light of the revolution. After I could understand some of the radio talk shows that cabbies played, I realized that callers and hosts exchanged Islamic greetings for a full half minute before settling down to heated arguments about the new regime. Our textbook was entitled “Dardasha”—“Chatter”—and it outlined set conversations that I soon carried out with neighbors, using phrases that would never be touched by Tahrir:

“Peace be upon you.”
 “May peace, mercy, and the blessings of God be upon you.”
 “How are you?”
 “May God grant you peace! Are you well?”
 “Praise be to God.”
 “Go with peace.”
 “Go with peace.”

ONE OF OUR teachers, Rifaat Amin, prepared a five-page handout entitled “Arabic Expressions of Social Etiquette.” This supplemented “Dardasha,” which also featured some lessons about social traditions, including the evil eye, the belief that envy can cause misfortune. In “Dardasha,” icons of little bombs with burning fuses had been printed next to the kind of phrase that, even during a revolution, qualified as explosive: “Your son is really smart, Madame Fathiya.” Fortunately, this compliment-bomb was promptly disarmed: “This is what God has willed, Madame Fathiya, your son is really smart.”

I often heard that phrase—*masha'al-lah*, “this is what God has willed”—when I was out with my twin daughters. Occasionally an elderly person smiled at the toddlers and said, “Wehish, wehish”—“Beastly, beastly!”—which confused me until somebody explained that a reverse

compliment is another way of deflecting the evil eye. Rifaat’s handout taught us what to say when somebody returns from a trip, or recovers from illness, or mentions a dead person (*allah yirhamuh*, “may God rest his soul”). Beggars can be deftly rebuffed with a piece of deferred responsibility: *allah yisabellik*, “may God make things easier for you.” There’s even a dedicated phrase for anybody who has just received a haircut: *na’iman*. The neighborhood barber said this every time he finished cutting my hair, but I didn’t understand until Rifaat’s tutorial. The first time I responded correctly, the barber smiled, and then for five years we followed the script:

“Na’iman.” “With blessings.”
 “Allah yin’am alik.” “May God bless you.”

Rifaat was in his fifties, a thin, intense man with eyes that flashed whenever he became animated. He had thick white hair and the dark skin of a Sa’idi, an Upper Egyptian. Rifaat’s father had been a contractor who grew up in a southern village known as Abydos, whose region had likely been the homeland of the kings of the First Dynasty, five millennia ago. Rifaat was proud of this heritage, and, like many southerners whose families had risen in social class during the mid-century, he was a staunch Nasserite—Gamal Abdel Nasser, who had led the revolution of 1952, was another Sa’idi. Every evening, at ten o’clock, Rifaat watched the Rotana channel’s rebroadcast of a concert from the nineteen-fifties or sixties by the singer Umm Kulthum. Once, Rifaat prepared a class worksheet that included the sentence “There is not a real Egyptian who does not love Umm Kulthum.”

But Rifaat had other qualities that seemed out of place in Egypt. He was Muslim, but he drank alcohol, avoided mosques, and didn’t fast during Ramadan. He said that the hajj was a waste of money that would be better spent on the poor. Since his teen-age years, he had



The vocabulary lists for Arabic lessons reflected both the country's shifting politics and its enduring difficulties.

followed a mostly vegetarian diet, a rarity among Egyptians. Rifaat's siblings told me that their father had often shouted at him when Rifaat refused beef and lamb, but he held firm. Even as an adult, one of the few meat dishes that he ate was chicken prepared by his older sister, Wardiya, who had a special way of removing the skin.

Wardiya sometimes delivered meals to Rifaat's apartment, because he was a man without a woman. A decade earlier, he had had lymphoma, and she had cooked for him weekly. At one point, briefly, he had been engaged to a foreign woman, but he seemed happy that it hadn't worked out. He lived alone, which is also unusual in Egypt, and Wardiya told me that she disagreed with Rifaat about two things in particular: religion and his belief that men and women are equal. But he had persuaded her to give the best possible education to her daughters—in his words, this was a weapon. "If her husband lets her down, then she'll have a weapon in hand," Wardiya explained. "She can rely on herself."

Rifaat was natural in the presence of women, which was one reason Leslie and I had classes with him. Cairo is notorious for sexual harassment, but the male response to women also runs to the opposite extreme. If Leslie and I were together in our neighborhood, polite men often addressed all conversation to me, carefully avoiding eye contact with my wife. But there wasn't any such bias with Rifaat, who had taught many foreigners; in the late nineteen-eighties he had even served as a private tutor to the actress Emma Thompson, who was filming a movie in Cairo. For our classes, Rifaat prepared lessons that often reflected his social criticisms, to the degree that boorish men could be denied names:

HUDA: What are you tired about? You don't do a single thing at home.

HER HUSBAND: What do you mean?

HUDA: I mean that you should help me a little with the housework.

HER HUSBAND: Look, your work isn't necessary, and you spend half your salary on transportation and the other half on makeup.

Several times, Rifaat mentioned that Umm Kulthum, who had married late in life and never had children, had probably been a lesbian. He admired such iconoclasts, and he deeply valued personal freedom, but he also idolized Nasser,

who had thrown dissidents and intellectuals into prison. Rifaat supported the Tahrir movement, and he believed that Egypt needed serious social change, but he drilled us on the "Arabic Expressions of Social Etiquette." Over time, I came to see the complexities of his character as quintessentially Egyptian. The country has a dominant religion, a powerful nationalism, and family structures that tend to be close to the point of claustrophobia. But there's also a counter-strain of individualism, and many people are simply natural-born characters. Rifaat's quirks and inconsistencies seemed so innate that his siblings had wisely chosen to embrace them.

He took great pleasure in Egyptian Arabic, which shares the national tendency to combine opposites: tradition and novelty, order and chaos. Before moving to Egypt, Leslie and I had enrolled in the Middlebury College summer program, where we spent two months studying *fusha*, the classical Arabic that is used as a literary and formal language across the Arab world. In Cairo we switched to Egyptian colloquial, which has a weak literary tradition but a vibrant character. Whereas scholars of *fusha* have always taken pride in its purity, Egyptian Arabic is muddied by many tributaries. Some words come from Coptic, the language that descended from Pharaonic Egyptian, and there are many imports from Greek, Persian, Turkish, French, and English. Rifaat loved neologisms like *yeshayar*, which took the "share" from Facebook and conjugated it as an Arabic verb. But he could also apply lessons from the classical language to what I heard on Tahrir. He told us that the word for "tank," *debeba*, derives from an Arabic root that means "to step heavily." The terms for "west" and "strange" share another root. "It's not because Westerners are weird," Rifaat said, and gave his own theory. "It's because that's where the sun sets, and it's a mystery where it goes."

The language is wonderful for *Wanderwort*. Arabic imported "shah" from the Persians, and then the phrase *al-shah mat*—the king died—was introduced to English as "checkmate." One morning in class, Rifaat taught the word for "mud brick." In ancient hieroglyphs it was *djebet*, which became *tobe* in Coptic, and then the Arabs, adding a definite article, made it *al-tuba*, which was brought to Spain

as *adobar*, and then to the American Southwest, where this heavy thing, having been lugged across four millennia and seven thousand miles, finally landed as "adobe."

SURPRISINGLY FEW COPTIC words survive in Egyptian, a fact that reflects how quickly the natives adopted Arabic, despite a reputation for resisting outside cultures. Egyptians began to convert to Christianity not long after the time of Christ, but most people never learned the languages of their successive foreign rulers: the Ptolemies, the Romans, the Byzantines. In 640 C.E., the first Arab army arrived in Egypt, which was a province of the Byzantine Empire. The Arabs had only four thousand soldiers, but within two years they had conquered the country. By 700, Egyptian state archives were using Arabic. After another hundred and fifty years, Coptic had essentially vanished as a daily language in Lower Egypt. By the tenth century, a bishop named Severus complained that even Egyptian Christians could communicate only in Arabic.

Across North Africa, language, rather than religion or military force, created the most powerful bond of the new empire. Natives recognized the benefits of speaking the tongue of the Arabs, who rarely learned other languages, and who were more tolerant than previous overlords. "For the people in the provinces in the Near East, the Byzantine emperor was somebody who did taxation and persecuted heretics," Kees Versteegh, a Dutch Arabist and the author of "The Arabic Language," told me recently. "There was no love lost between them and Byzantium." He continued, "And the Arabs had the advantage of not caring about the exact faith the Christians had. They didn't care whether they were Nestorians or Arians or what have you—as long as they paid their taxes, they were left in peace."

Because of this dynamic, Arabic spread much faster than Islam, and the language played a crucial role in Western scholarship. During the early ninth century, the Mu'tazila school of Islamic theology promoted a rationalist exploration of faith and other subjects, and Arabs searched out the works of the ancient Greeks. These were hard to find in the West, because the Romans, who read

Greek easily, had never translated most books into Latin. After the Roman Empire collapsed, the ability to speak Greek disappeared rapidly in Western Europe, and knowledge of the classics was essentially lost for centuries.

Even in Byzantium such works weren't highly valued. The Arabs reported that they found Greek books in poor condition—in their view, the Byzantines didn't respect their own heritage. The Muslims had the classics translated into Arabic editions, which became accessible in Western Europe in the late eleventh century, after Christians began to reconquer the Iberian Peninsula. Soon Arabic became the language through which Westerners rediscovered Greek works on medicine, science, and philosophy. At the University of Paris, medical scholars called themselves *arabizantes*, and some of our modern terms were originally filtered through the language. "Retina" and "cornea" come from Latin translations of *shabakiyya* and *garniyya*, Arabic words that were themselves translated from Greek texts.

When complex ideas pass through so many lenses of language, distortions are inevitable. Eventually, Western scholars rediscovered the original classics in Byzantium, learned Greek, and claimed that many translations were flawed. By then, the rationalism of the Mu'tazila school had been superseded by more dogmatic interpretations of Islam. And Renaissance scholars came to view the Arabs as the defilers of classical texts, not their preservers. The motivation for learning Arabic also changed—now Westerners did so primarily to argue with Muslims, and to try to convert them to Christianity.

ON MANY MORNINGS, Leslie and I were the only students at Kalimat. After the Arab Spring, there was a flurry of foreign interest in Arabic, and the school was busy for our first year. But then the Egyptian political climate worsened, and foreign-exchange programs were cancelled. By the spring of 2013, Rifaat was often upset. He had founded Kalimat with one of his siblings, and he loathed the Muslim Brotherhood, whose candidate, Mohamed Morsi, had won the first democratic Presidential election in Egyptian history. As a Nasserite, Rifaat blamed the rise of Islamism on



"This year's all about fur on the inside."

Anwar Sadat, the President who had succeeded Nasser.

"Under Nasser, very few women wore the hijab," Rifaat often told us. He was endlessly nostalgic about the cosmopolitanism of the nineteen-fifties and sixties, and he approved of Nasser's harsh repression of Islamists. Under Nasser, the government had executed Sayyid Qutb, a Brotherhood member and theorist of jihad, whose death inspired generations of radicals. After Sadat came to power, in 1970, he tried the opposite approach, seeking to accommodate the Brotherhood and other Islamists. According to Rifaat, this had only encouraged Egyptians to become more narrowly religious. During the spring of 2013, when President Morsi was clashing with many of the country's institutions, Rifaat often arrived at class with lists of bitter phrases for us to translate:

I'm not in a good mood.
He put me in a bad mood.
Show me the new bag which you bought yesterday.
Are you really stupid or just acting stupid?

Rifaat preferred to create materials for class, but I had insisted that we finish "Dardasha" first. I've always liked language books—one of the joys of studying as an adult is that you can appreciate their subtext. In the mid-nineties, when China's economic reforms were starting to take hold, I had worked in

Sichuan province, where I studied a government-produced book called "Speaking Chinese About China." In the text, a basic sentence that appeared in Chapter 3 ("He works very hard at his job") became more complex in Chapter 4 ("Everyone is working very hard; as a result, the output has been doubled") and then reached new heights of sophistication in Chapter 5 ("We have realized that only by developing production can we raise the people's living standard"). This was one of my most useful Chinese lessons: it's possible to speak with increasing complexity while repeating the same simple ideas over and over. Grammar functions as a kind of spice, similar to the way that Sichuanese cuisine uses strong flavors to create satisfying meals that actually contain little meat.

Fifteen years later, I entered the world of "Dardasha," which had been written by Mustafa Mughazy, an Egyptian linguist at Western Michigan University. After the Chinese, textbook Egyptians seemed remarkably uninspired by development. There were no production quotas, no economic plans, no infrastructure projects. The word "factory" did not appear in the book. People said things like "Ya hab, I'm an engineer and after five years of university, I'm working as a waiter in a restaurant." The Chinese book had been cagey toward its foreign readers, expressing nothing negative about China, but the Egyptian text wasn't shy about

bad behavior. It even included a sample dialogue of a bizarrely tenacious wrong-number conversation. From my perspective, phone etiquette was one of the eternal mysteries of Egyptian civilization—Leslie and I fielded countless calls from people asking for strangers, or demanding weird things, or saying nothing at all.

Mostly, “Dardasha” was full of families, talking and laughing, bickering and joking, being generous and being ridiculous. Husbands could act worse than children:

ALI: What’s for lunch today?

FATMA: Stuffed chicken, just the way you like it.

ALI: I don’t want chicken. Every day, we have chicken.

FATMA: Fine, what do you want, Ali?

ALI: I don’t know. But I don’t want chicken.

FATMA: Tomorrow, God willing, I’ll make whatever you like.

The book also wasn’t shy about the challenges of Cairo life. It introduced the conditional tense with open-ended sample sentences:

If only I knew who was calling the telephone every day . . .

If only I could see the child who rings the doorbell and runs . . .

If only I knew which of the neighbors listens to loud music all night long . . .

One exercise was entitled “You Are Irritable”: “Work in pairs and ask your partner the following questions to find out whether he/she has an irritable personality or not”:

You have an appointment with a friend at five o’clock. At six o’clock your friend is still not there. Do you get angry and leave?

You are on the Internet and each time the telephone rings and the same man calls with a wrong number. Do you get angry on the telephone?

For Rifaat, the answer was always: Yes. He was the most *‘asabi* person I knew, although it’s hard to translate a word that’s so specific to the Egyptian experience. The English “irritable” lacks context—it seems unfair to describe somebody as *‘asabi* without also conveying everything in Egypt that might make a person *‘asabi*. Perhaps it’s best to say that this word describes the type of man who teaches Arabic by asking his students to translate the following: “It seems no one in this country knows how to celebrate without a microphone and five loudspeakers.”

For Rifaat, preparing class materials was cathartic. He arrived each morning bursting with enthusiasm for a new lesson about poverty, or rape, or children who have been recruited into criminal rings. He wrote devastating little character sketches that began with sentences like “Fareed is a very lazy worker who does not keep his appointments; he is always late.” Once, we studied a puff-piece interview of Suzanne Mubarak, the President’s wife, from before the revolution. She was asked what she ate for lunch (“In fact, I don’t have lunch, but if I do I just eat a small plate of fruit”) and for dinner (“I usually don’t have dinner at all, but if it happens, it’s just a cup of fruit juice”). By the time we finished this inane conversation, Rifaat’s eyes were flashing: “These people stole millions of dollars, but all she eats is fruit!”

One morning in May, 2013, we studied suicide. By then, protests against Morsi had crystallized into a movement that called itself Tamarrod, or “rebellion.” The following month, Tamarrod organized a massive protest that resulted in a military coup led by Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, the Minister of Defense. In class, we compiled a sunny vocab list—“poison,” “gunfire,” “frustration,” “depression,” “repression”—and Rifaat explained that suicide had never been common in Egypt, but now it seemed to happen more than it did in the days of Nasser. He claimed that it is physically impossible to commit suicide after listening to Umm Kulthum. In any case, Rifaat would never do it. “Because death is coming anyway,” he said, smiling. “It’s coming soon enough.”

He disapproved of the cowardice of carbon monoxide. If he absolutely had to kill himself, he would do it like Cleopatra, with the bite of a *kubra*—this word, he noted, sounds the same in Arabic and English, with a shared Latin root. He ended class by handing us a new series of sketches, entitled “Victims of the System”:

When Ibrahim was a 16-year-old high school student doing well in school he enjoyed the full confidence of his family and the freedom to come and go as he pleased. His friendship with a teacher only increased his family’s confidence in him. And Ibrahim was so proud of his friendship that when his teacher asked him to help to rob the flat of a girl who had refused to marry him, he did not hesitate. . . .

THERE HAS NEVER been a great variety of materials for teaching Egyptian Arabic, whose status is best conveyed by its name: *‘ammiyya*, a word that means “common.” In contrast, the traditional written form of Arabic is called *al-lugha al-‘arabiyya al-fusha*, “the eloquent Arabic language,” or, for short, *al-fusha*: the eloquent. Western academics call it modern standard Arabic, although the language retains strong links to the time of Muhammed. Back then, Arabic lacked a strong written literary tradition, and, in the eyes of believers, the Prophet’s illiteracy is evidence of the divine nature of the Quran. Even a skeptic like Rifaat told us that the Quran is so beautiful that it could only have come from God.

After Islam began to spread, scholars established rules for the written



“I don’t get it. Conditions are perfect, and yet the ducks still don’t want to be killed.”

language. Such a project isn't uncommon for a new empire. In China, the Han dynasty, which was founded in 206 B.C.E., codified and standardized the Confucian, or Ruijst, classics, a process that helped set the terms for the writing system. By taking these centuries-old texts as their model of proper Chinese writing, the Han prescribed an idealized language—classical Chinese—that was probably never spoken in day-to-day life.

Early scholars of Islam had a similar instinct to draw on the past, but they lacked an equivalent wealth of historical material. So the Arabs went to the desert instead. They sought out Bedouins, who were believed to speak a purer form of Arabic than people in cities, where language had been corrupted by contact with outsiders. Grammarians employed Bedouins as referees in language disputes, and the élite sent their sons to live with nomads so that they would learn to speak correctly. During the tenth century, a lexicographer named al-Azhari was so blessed—*al-hamdu lillah!*—that he was kidnapped by a Bedouin tribe. This experience allowed him to produce a dictionary, “The Reparation of Speech,” whose introduction, in a kind of grammatical Stockholm syndrome, effusively praises the kidnappers: “They speak according to their desert nature and their ingrained instincts. In their speech you hardly ever hear a linguistic error or a terrible mistake.”

To some degree, this standardization of written Arabic worked at cross purposes with the spread of the spoken language. In provincial places like Egypt, natives learned Arabic in informal ways, and in the process they simplified the grammar. In response, scholars moved in the opposite direction, developing a beautifully logical but extremely difficult version of the language. Charles Ferguson, an influential linguist who taught at Stanford, argued that there’s no evidence that the language of the Quran was ever anybody’s mother tongue.

Over the centuries, *fusha* remained separate from daily speech, which kept it remarkably stable—a river that stopped flowing. But, in the nineteenth century, when the pressures of colonialism and modernization intensified, some

Egyptians felt that *fusha* was inadequate. There had always been some writing in colloquial Egyptian, and a number of intellectuals advocated for expanding this practice. But traditionalists feared further cultural damage. “It will not be long before our ancestral language loses its form, God forbid,” an editor at the newspaper *Al-Ahram* wrote, in 1882. “How can we support a weak spoken language which will eliminate the sacred original language?”

Such debates occurred in other parts of the world that also struggled with the transition to modernity. In China, political movements in the nineteen-tens and twenties helped end the practice of using classical Chinese, replacing it with the northern vernacular now known as Mandarin. But this change was easier for the Chinese, whose language was effectively limited to a single political entity. Most important, classical Chinese wasn’t tied to a religion or a divine text.

During the late nineteenth century, the leaders of the Nahda, or “Arabic Renaissance,” decided to modernize *fusha* without radically changing its grammar or essential vocabulary. New terms were coined using traditional roots—“telegram,” for example, comes from “lightning.” (“Isn’t that cute?” Rifaat said in class.) *Qitar*, the word for “train,” originally was used for “caravan.” Other neologisms were even more imaginative. “Lead camel” was an inspired choice for “locomotive,” as was “sound of thunder” for “telephone”—the ideal image for Egyptian phone etiquette. Sadly, these words failed to stick, and nowadays one is forced to answer wrong numbers on a loanword: *tilifun*.

In Algerian schools, the French had at one point tried to replace *fusha* with the national dialect. British authorities never attempted this in Egypt, but some Englishmen proposed that vernacular writing might improve literacy rates. Over time, Arabs came to associate any encouragement of vernacular writing with colonialism. By the nineteen-fifties, allegiance to *fusha* was critical to pan-Arabism, because the language created a bond across the Arab world. But Nasser, the greatest pan-Arab of all, also understood the power of Egyptian Arabic. He often began a speech in *fusha*, and then sprinkled in Egyp-

tian, until, by the climax, he was declaiming entirely in the language of the people. Such speeches, though, had to be heard in order to be appreciated. In Egypt, statements by political figures are often translated into *fusha* before they’re printed in a newspaper. There are some exceptions, like the interview with Suzanne Mubarak, which used Egyptian to portray the President’s wife as accessible and humble. (“I just eat a small plate of fruit.”)

Translation into *fusha* can clean up a politician’s words. For example, in April, 2016, President Sisi discussed political reform with representatives of different sectors of society. Speaking Egyptian, he stumbled: “The ideal shape that you are calling for, that idealism is in books, but we cannot take everything you think about with paper and pen and then ask the state for it, no, it won’t happen . . . but we are on a pathway in which we’re succeeding each day more than the day before.” In *Al-Ahram*, the quote appeared in *fusha* as: “Idealism exists in books, but we’re walking the pathway of success, and we will succeed day by day.” Any Egyptian would know that Sisi hadn’t actually been using *fusha*. “Few people can really maintain speaking modern standard Arabic all the way through,” Mahmoud Abdalla, the director of Middlebury College’s summer Arabic program, told me. He said that even linguists like himself, or well-trained imams who have memorized the Quran, will make occasional grammatical errors if called upon to speak the language spontaneously. “This is why they slow down when they speak *fusha*,” he said. “They’re afraid to make mistakes.”

AFTER THE COUP, Rifaat wanted to have faith in Sisi. In January of 2014, when it was rumored that Sisi would run for President, Rifaat had Leslie and me study a pop song entitled “All of Us Love Sisi”:

The world says you remind us of Mandela,
and of the leader of the nation, Gamal [Abdel
Nasser]. . . .

That spring, Sisi ran, and Rifaat voted for him. But the new President’s anti-terrorism campaign included a crackdown on every sort of potential opposition, and tens of thousands of people

1.

After the accident, when summer brings slow afternoons with nothing left to do, I take what used to be your garden chair and park it underneath the wayward ash that sidles forward where the garden swerves and hides the house from view. In secret then I conjure up the notebook I have found among your bedside things and open it.

Blank pages. Thoughts you never had, or had but could not bring yourself to say. Should I imagine them or write my own instead? I close my eyes and scrutinize the white that also lies inside me while the ash rattles its pale-green keys above my head.

2.

The milk float with its thin mosquito whine straining through larch and elder from the lane, the nervous bottles in their metal basket intent on music but without a tune, the milkman in his doctor's stubby coat and sailor's rakish dark-blue canvas cap

are all invisible, imagined/dreamed beyond my curtains in the early light, along with tissue footprints in the frost, our rinsed-out empties, and the rolled-up note exchanged for bottles with their silver tops the blue tits have already broken through to sip the stiffened plugs of cream before we come downstairs and bring our order in.

3.

To think the world is endless, prodigal, to part the hedgerow leaves and see the eggs like planets in a crowded galaxy, to hear my mother's voice advising me the mother bird herself will never mind if I take only one and leave the rest,

means nothing more than showing interest. As does the careful slow walk home, the ritual of pinpricks through both ends, the steady breath that blows the yolk and albumen clean out but keeps the pretty shell intact, the nest of crumpled paper in the cedar drawer, the darkness falling then, the hush, and me bringing the weight of my warm mind to bear.

4.

Beyond the grazing and the bramble bank where on another day I might lie down and press my ear against the trampled earth to hear the rabbits scuffling underground, a headland round the Ashgrove leads me on past wheat fields which still show the buffeting of last night's storm, toward the Blackwater.

The stream has long since burst inside my head, the banks collapsed, the water meadows drowned, the mesh of overhanging branches bowed with plastic voodoo junk and hanks of wool. Then I arrive and see things as they are: a settled surface with a clearing sky, and shining gravel drifting inside clouds.

5.

My father with no explanation stays behind at home; my mother drives away and takes me with her to the Suffolk coast where I lie down all day on rounded stones and will the sun to thaw my frozen brain while she ... I've no idea what she does, until the evening she manhandles me to stand beside her in the chestnut shade which makes a double darkness on the lawn and watch the round moon roll into our sky as Neil Armstrong takes his one small step and pokes his flag into the silver dust although we cannot see him, nor he us except in ways I think my father might.

were imprisoned. Sisi seemed to favor flashy megaprojects rather than coherent economic strategies, and by the spring of 2015, Rifaat was increasingly *'asabi*. He was suffering from a slow-healing sore on his foot, and a couple of doctors had been unhelpful; in class, he often railed against the Egyptian medical system and the general decline of society. "Sure, Nasser was a dictator, but at least it worked," he said. "But if you're a dictator, and things still don't work, then what's the point?"

One morning, a middle-aged woman

who lived in the same building as the school stopped by, and we chatted for a while. She was dressed in expensive clothes, and she complained about the young people who protested against Sisi. "They should give him a chance to fix things," she said. Rifaat nodded, but then the woman started to gripe about the poor, and how the government subsidized their food and electricity. Rifaat's face darkened; his eyes bulged. He managed to keep silent until she left.

"These are the people who ruined everything!" he exploded. "They grabbed

everything under Sadat and Mubarak! We were never like that."

Leslie and I often teased Rifaat about his nostalgia, but that morning he seemed too upset. In recent months, his playful pessimism had deteriorated into something more demoralized. One of the tragedies of modern Egypt is its failure to create a large, vibrant middle class, which had been the heart of Nasser's social vision. His government built community centers to encourage theatre and other arts, and the education system was expanded on a

6.

Before our time they used my room to store apples collected from those crooked trees now wading waist deep at the garden end in frilly white-capped waves of cow parsley, and laid them out in rows not touching quite. I know all this because the floorboards show wherever they had missed one as it turned to mush and left a round stain on the wood.

My bed stands over them and when at night my eyes grow used to darkness they appear: the Coxes, Bramleys, Blenheim Oranges whose names alone can fill the empty air with branches weighted down by next year's crop and turn its scent half bitter and half sweet.

7.

That lead tank like a coffin with no lid lying between the cooler greenhouse room my mother uses for her cuttings trays, and one as steamy as the rain forest with air so thickened by tomato plants it lies like moist green velvet on my tongue—that lead tank, that disgusting (almost) store of syrupy black water is where Kit my brother slipped, or threw himself to see if that would make our father like him more, and where, as I look down to see myself alive and sensible, I envy him his moment in a time outside our time, free from the earth and all its appetites.

8.

The low tent-tunnel of the laurel walk where no one but a child can stand today, encloses me but keeps the world in view in sudden supple leaps and starts of light. Here out of sight I wait to meet myself with no idea of what myself might be. I drink the musty air and bide my time.

I shake the sullen shadows from my head.
I feel the deep earth rising in my bones.
I make believe the shivering small flies
beside me on the leaves, the sparrow gang
that flusters in its shallow bowl of dust
suppose that I want nothing more from them
except to stay here and not mean a thing.

9.

I try my father's waders on for size
then take, with him encouraging, his rod
and wading stick, his canvas bag, his cap
rigid beneath its crown of favorite flies,
and step into the river. From the bank
he says I look like him. As for myself
I only think of how to stand upright
with water hardening one second round
my ankles, and the next uprooting me
as though I have no purchase on the world.
My father shouts, Don't fight it. I obey.
I let the deluge settle round my heart
then lay me on my back and carry me
round the long sweep beyond my father's sight.

10.

Those roofless kennels where the nettles shake
their fine-haired leaves and tiny bright-green buds.
That almost buried path of blood-red bricks
confined both sides by tiles shaped like rope.
The ruined square of cracked disrupted blocks
where once a summerhouse had turned and stared.
These are the former glories of the house
although I like their fall and brokenness
much more than grieving for a time I missed.
As also I like walking with the ghosts
that wander through the garden everywhere—
the mother and her son whose footsteps leave
no prints beside us in the grass as though
our selves are all the company we keep.

—Andrew Motion

massive scale, with millions of Egyptians attending college for free. But the prospect of future prosperity turned out to be a mirage. Schools grew too quickly, without proper reforms or teacher training, and Nasser's brand of socialism was an economic disaster. Egyptians could go to college, but they couldn't find jobs—that's why engineers in "Dardasha" worked as waiters. That's also one reason that, during the eighties and nineties, violent Islamist groups gained followers on Upper Egypt's campuses, where rural students realized

that their aspirations were hopeless.

For Rifaat, who saw himself as staunchly middle class, Egypt had become a lonely place. The education system had collapsed, and most citizens remained poor; for decades they had drifted toward religion. Meanwhile, the élite had turned away from the rest of society, moving to gated compounds and educating their children in international schools. Tahrir represented a brief convergence: most organizers were upper class, and millions of the poor had followed their lead. But it didn't

last—after the initial rush, these groups couldn't bridge the vast gulf that separated them.

IN THE FALL of 2015, Leslie and I took time off from class. It was our fifth and final year in Egypt, and we were busy with research outside Cairo. A few times, I e-mailed or telephoned Rifaat, who said that he was looking forward to our return. But his foot had worsened—once, when I called, in late November, he sounded close to tears.

That winter, we took a long vacation

in Upper Egypt. Afterward, I texted Rifaat, hoping to schedule a class. He didn't respond, so I called—no answer. I telephoned one of his brothers who worked at Kalimat. There was a long silence after I greeted him.

"Rifaat," he said at last, "*itwaffa*."

The word hit me all the harder because Rifaat was the one who had taught me what it means.

LANGUAGE REFORM WASN'T an issue during the Arab Spring. Such debates were crucial to the Arabic Renaissance and to Pan-Arabism, but after that the question was effectively settled, at least in terms of policy. Egyptian textbooks are written in *fusha*, which remains the standard language for newspapers and most other publications. Still, writers and scholars occasionally point out problems, and, in 2003, Niloofar Haeri, a linguistic anthropologist at Johns Hopkins, published "Sacred Language, Ordinary People." In the book, Haeri refuses to use the academic term "modern standard Arabic," instead referring to *fusha* as "classical Arabic."

"Modernity, in my eyes, means that it should be somebody's mother tongue," Haeri told me. "That's part of how I would understand a modern language—that it's contemporaneous with its speakers." She noted that while places like German Switzerland also practice diglossia, the use of two languages, the difference is that both Swiss German and High German are living, spoken languages. "The majority of Arab children are put in a position that I cannot think of an equivalent for any other group of children in the world," she said.

Haeri's book points out the discomfort that many Egyptians feel with *fusha*. Their relationship to the language tends to be passive—most people understand it well, because they hear it frequently, but they struggle to speak it. And writing *fusha* requires a step that isn't necessary in most languages. "You are translating yourself into a medium over which you have far less mastery," Haeri told me.

After Haeri published her findings, she was attacked by many Western scholars of the Middle East. She believed that her background—a Muslim woman from Iran, who was trained in linguistics rather than in regional studies—may have made her more willing to tackle an issue that

is politically sensitive in Middle Eastern studies. But there have always been Egyptians with a similar opinion. Leila Ahmed, a professor at the Harvard Divinity School who grew up in Cairo, described her childhood hatred of *fusha* in a memoir, "A Border Passage." She remembers shouting at an Arabic teacher, "I am not an Arab! I am Egyptian! And anyway we don't speak like this!" Her book was attacked harshly by the critic Edward Said, who saw it as part of the Orientalist perception of Arabic. In an essay that was published posthumously, Said wrote, "Reading Ahmed's pathetic tirade makes one feel sorry that she never bothered to learn her own language."

Ahmed's point, of course, is that *fusha* is not her language. It wasn't Said's, either. He grew up in Jerusalem and in Cairo, and, in the essay, he acknowledges that, despite having spoken Palestinian and Egyptian Arabic at home, he never became comfortable with *fusha*. He relates the experience of giving a lecture in Cairo, as a celebrated scholar, only to have a young relative express disappointment with Said's lack of eloquence. Said describes himself as "still loitering on the fringes of the language."

But he doesn't address the larger question: if even educated people struggle with *fusha*, what does that mean for everybody else? More than a quarter of Egyptians are illiterate, and the rate is significantly higher among women, who are less likely than men to be in environments where *fusha* is used. Comfort



is another issue. "People don't write, because there is linguistic insecurity," Ma'diha Doss, a scholar of Arabic linguistics at Cairo University, told me.

The difficulty of *fusha* may have contributed to the tradition of using foreign languages to educate Egyptian university students in technical subjects. This had been the practice under the monarchy, but it was continued under Nasser's expansion of higher education. At public universities, math, medicine, and some

hard sciences are taught in English. Centuries ago, Europeans needed Arabic to learn medicine, but nowadays even Egyptian medical students don't use Arabic texts. "What happens is that you reserve Arabic for traditional knowledge," Doss said. "And it becomes more conservative."

The situation also makes for difficult transitions. After a math student enters a public university, he begins using formulas with Latin and Greek letters, and reading them from left to right, the opposite direction of what was done in his public-high-school classes. Then, in his junior year, the curriculum changes to English. Hany El-Hosseiny, a math professor at the university, told me that each of these shifts disorients students, whom he believes should be taught entirely in Arabic. "But this needs a lot of effort that was not made for the past hundred and fifty years," El-Hosseiny said. "We have to translate a lot, and we have to write original works in Arabic."

Some linguists I spoke with, like Mahmoud Abdalla, of Middlebury, believe that the main problem is that *fusha* is poorly taught, and that national organizations which are supposed to regulate language policy are weak and disorganized. In any case, the end result is that educated Arabs are drifting away from their own language. Today, most Cairene children who are solidly middle or upper class are educated primarily in English or French, at private schools. Ashraf El-Sherif, a political-science professor at the American University in Cairo, told me that many of his élite students can barely use written Arabic. He believes that the political consequences are significant. "They will make public policy about a country they don't know," he said. "Practically speaking, they've become foreigners. They are Orientalists."

Fewer people are also able to appreciate the unique cultural elements of *fusha*. Youssef Rakha, a talented young novelist, told me that there's a special connection when a literate person can read ancient texts in a language that's so close to contemporary writing. But he believes that there has been a high cost to maintaining this traditional form. "If you preserve something for long enough, then maybe it rots," he said. "This metaphor of purity has a counterpoint in the metaphor of decay."

Rakha's first novel, "Book of the Sultan's Seal," was praised for its innovative

fusion of *fusha* and Egyptian Arabic. During the last century, publishers sometimes rejected books that used Egyptian, and even novels about everyday life, like Naguib Mahfouz's "Cairo Trilogy," featured *fusha* dialogue that no Egyptian would ever speak. Egyptian Arabic still lacks a standardized orthography, but its use has become more common during the past fifteen years, in part because of the Internet and texting. Nowadays, a writer like Rakha can publish in Egyptian, but to some degree it's too late, because people rarely read Arabic books of any sort. For Rakha's third novel, he's writing in English, primarily because he wants to attract readers. "Book of the Sultan's Seal" was well received, but it sold fewer than five thousand copies. Rakha said that it's also a relief not to worry about the issue of *fusha* versus Egyptian. "You can think about other things," he said. "It's not like this constant twenty-five per cent of your attention is going to the nature of the language in which you are expressing yourself."

DURING MY LAST months in Cairo, I felt myself becoming *'asabi*. Every day, I drove my daughters across the Nile to their school, and this ordeal—the honking, the swerving, the scorched-earth parking—left me frazzled by eight o'clock in the morning. During our Arabic classes, Rifaat had recorded the vocabulary lists, and I found it calming to listen to the audio files while I drove. Some covered the language of Tahrir, which had already drifted into the past: "election," "referendum," "democracy." Others featured Rifaat's class materials, and I crossed the river to the sound of his voice:

I will never forgive you for what you did.
I will explain to you everything tomorrow.
Don't waste my time, please.

Are we going to spend the whole day talking about this stupid film?

A few times I stopped by Kalimat to see Rifaat's brother Raafat. Their father had named them after his two favorite soccer players, who had been on separate teams, so there was no confusion until these names joined the same family. Together they had founded Kalimat, and Raafat was shattered by his brother's death. He was having a terrible year; a few months earlier, his marriage had suddenly fallen apart, and he had been



"And would it kill you to put some pizzazz into it?"

bedridden for weeks with a slipped disk. Finally he started living in the language school, where there were hardly any students. "Somebody must have given me the evil eye," he told me.

He didn't know for certain what had killed Rifaat. During the fall of 2015, doctors had given contradictory diagnoses for the sore on his foot: one said it was an ulcer; another thought it was cancer; a third put some cream on it and told him to wait. Rifaat even travelled to London, where a doctor tested him for tuberculosis, cleaned the sore, and said that it should improve. But it got worse, and a couple of physicians in Cairo refused to see him, apparently because they feared being held liable. Rifaat resisted hospitalization, and by the time his siblings finally forced him to enter a clinic he was having trouble breathing. He died the following day. The official cause of death was tuberculosis, although his family doubted that this was accurate.

Raafat had taken a photograph of the sore near the end. In the picture, the entire instep of the foot is gone, and a hole the size of a tennis ball is ringed by dead tissue of black and brown and green. When I showed this to American physician friends, they said that even when somebody overcomes lymphoma, his immune system can be weakened, and their best guess was that Rifaat had suffered

an infection that culminated in fatal septic shock. But they couldn't say for sure, because in America they had never seen something quite like that photograph. It sickened me—an educated, vibrant man dying like this, at the age of fifty-seven.

One morning, I visited the apartment building in eastern Cairo in which much of Rifaat's family lives. I met with his sister, Wardiya, and another brother, Tariq, and they talked about Rifaat's differences.

"He thought it was fine for women to go out, and to go abroad," Tariq said. "But we didn't."

"We didn't like his way," Wardiya said. "But he was better, actually. Recently we knew that everything he said was correct." Because of Rifaat's encouragement, her son had become a teacher of Arabic.

Of all the siblings, Wardiya most resembled Rifaat. She had the same sharp eyes and fine-boned face, although now these half-familiar features were surrounded by a black hijab. It was Ramadan, and the family was fasting; out of politeness, they offered me tea, which I declined for the same reason. "He had his own opinions, and I had my own opinions," Wardiya said. "His opinions were new, and mine were old." Every now and then, after her brother's name was spoken, she mentioned God, and I murmured the response that Rifaat had taught me. *Allah yirhamuh, allah yirhamuh, allah yirhamuh.* ♦

You Are Happy?



Akhil Sharma

BREAK HER ARMS, break her legs," Lakshman's grandmother would say about her daughter-in-law, "then see how she crawls to her bottle." What she said made sense. Lakshman's father refused to beat his wife, though. "This is America," he said. "I will go to jail and you will be sitting in India eating warm pakoras." To Lakshman, it seemed unmanly of his father not to take charge.

It happened every time the family went to a party. Before they left the house, his father would wipe down his comb. He would tuck a handkerchief into his pants pocket. He would get out the notebook in which he had written down the lyrics of movie songs, because he liked to sing and hoped that somebody would ask him to.

The parties were segregated: there was the kitchen, where the women gathered, and there was the living room, where the men stood and talked about politics, investments. Lakshman's mother was thirty-two, short, stocky, curly-haired. She would stir up trouble. Even when she said ordinary things, she sounded as if she doubted they were true. "You are happy?" she'd say to a woman as if the woman were overlooking something. The surprised person would then feel that she had to defend her happiness. The other women in the kitchen were not used to this kind of behavior. They would grow quiet and look at Lakshman's mother as she stood silently, appearing pleased, and sipping her Scotch. The fact that his mother drank was itself unusual. Perhaps she did it to be different from the other women; perhaps she wanted to be like a man and therefore more important. When she'd got a little bit drunk, she'd go into the living room and stand among the men, drinking from a small glass and talking about stocks and the World Bank. The men treated her with condescension and irritation, not so much because she was a woman as because she was a woman pretending to know things that she did not know, and vanity and foolishness, which were tolerable in a man, were not tolerable in a woman.

Lakshman's mother had begun drinking when he was eight. This was around the time that they'd been sent to America by his father's parents, to

expand the family's export business. From the very start, she had behaved differently with alcohol than other people did. At most parties, tea and juice were offered first and alcohol was an afterthought. At Lakshman's parents' parties, his mother was the one who offered drinks. She pressed alcohol on whoever entered the house. "Whiskey, bourbon, wine," she'd say, smoothing each word. "Tea, Coca-Cola is also there." Sometimes the men who came over would praise her for her drinking or talk about their own, how it was only during the third drink that they began to feel happy. Whenever a man praised his mother for her drinking, Lakshman became anxious. Because of the movies he'd seen, he sensed danger when he spotted his drunken mother talking to a man. Instead of joining the other children in the basement, boys and girls his age who were running and playing and shrieking, delighted to be allowed to stay up late, he'd follow his mother around the house. Keeping an eye on her made him feel safer but also prolonged his anxiety. By the end of the night he'd be so exhausted that he wanted to cry.

The drinking overtook her quickly. By the time Lakshman was nine, she was drinking during dinner. His father, who rarely drank, protested. "Every night you have to drink?"

"I can't have a little happiness? Is there something wrong with me that I must suffer?"

When Lakshman was eleven, she started drinking during the day. His parents' marriage had been arranged by their parents, who did business together, and his mother and father had never really liked each other. Around that time, they stopped sleeping in the same room. To the extent that they spoke at all, it was either in shouts or in sarcasm. "Do you know what kind of people drink during the day?" his father said, shaking a finger at her. "Drunkards. You are a drunkard."

Lakshman, coming home from school, would sniff the air near his mother to confirm what he could tell with his eyes. If she was drunk, she seemed hollow, as if she were directing her body from afar.

Lakshman's family's life seemed strange to him, his father mostly ig-

noring his mother, often refusing to be with her, getting up from the kitchen table and leaving the room when she came in.

WHEN LAKSHMAN WAS thirteen and about to graduate from eighth grade, his mother's kidneys began to hurt. He would come home and find her standing in the kitchen, holding an ice pack against her side. The fact that she cared so little about herself seemed to indicate that she cared nothing for him or his father. He wanted to mock her and shout at her, but he was afraid that she would hit him.

His mother did occasionally try to change. Once, she went to a doctor, and though she probably lied about how much she drank, the doctor still urged her to go to Alcoholics Anonymous. She went to A.A. meetings for a week or two, then stopped.

In the past, Lakshman's father had travelled to India four or five times a year. As Lakshman's mother's drinking worsened, he began going more often. Lakshman felt strange being alone at home with his mother, sitting at the kitchen table, doing his homework, while his mother drank upstairs. The silence in the house was so intense it hummed.

When Lakshman was fourteen and his father was in India on one of his business trips, his mother decided that she was going to stay in bed and drink.

Her room was large and had a cream-colored carpet and a king-size bed. There was a picture window behind the bed and, to the side of the room, another window, which looked out onto a neighbor's roof. Lakshman stood in the doorway and watched his mother's preparations. She seemed cheerful as she moved around the room. She opened the windows completely, although it was winter. She put two cases of wine on the carpeted floor beside the bed. She put several jugs of water on the carpet, too, and, by the head of the bed, a white plastic bucket to vomit into.

"Daddy won't like this," Lakshman murmured.

"Let him die," she replied happily. She put some large bags of potato chips on the nightstand. Lakshman, watching his mother, felt that what she was planning was so bizarre that it could not possibly happen. With the windows

open, the room quickly became icy. His mother got under the quilt and picked up a glass of white wine.

The next day, Lakshman telephoned India. He gripped the phone and spoke in a soft, tight voice. "Mommy says she is going to stay in bed and drink." Even as he was speaking, he knew that his father would find some way to make light of what was happening. His father said, "What else does she do anyway?" Lakshman repeated what he had said, that his mother had got into bed and had been drinking for twenty-four hours. He felt detached from himself, like when he was taking a difficult math test and he was frightened but his pencil began to hop over the sheet of paper on its own, writing numbers.

His father didn't say anything. Lakshman knew the silence meant that his father could later pretend that what he had said had not been said. He repeated it for a third time. "What can be done?" his father answered in irritation.

For her first day or two in bed, Lakshman's mother sipped from a wine-glass and ate potato chips and smiled confusedly at the TV playing in a corner. When she had to, she got up and stumbled to the bathroom at the end of the hall near his father's room. After

a few days, though, she began shitting and pissing in the bucket.

Because of Lakshman's calls, his father flew back. He stood in the bedroom doorway and screamed, "Die! At last there is nothing else to do!" He shouted this, but he also phoned the county's central A.A. office.

Two women came to the front door of the house and rang the bell. One was blond and short and looked to be in her early twenties. The other was much older and had very white, dusty-looking skin. Lakshman's father, unshaven, exhausted from the eleven-hour flight from Delhi, and so dazed that he had a slipper on one foot while the other was bare, asked them to come in. Before entering, the women stood on the cement porch in front of the open door and prayed. They held hands and bowed their heads.

The older woman walked in first. As she passed Lakshman and his father, she mentioned that she liked Indian food. They went up the stairs. His mother's room was at the end of the hall and its white wooden door was closed.

When they pushed it open, the room was freezing and full of light. To Lakshman, the light seemed unearthly, as if they were all above the clouds, where it wasn't possible to survive. There was

the light and there was the stench. The smell of vomit, urine, and shit was such that it seemed unthinkable that a human being ate there, slept there.

"You want to go to a detox?" the older woman asked Lakshman's mother. His mother was half-sitting, with her head against the headboard. She appeared stupefied. On her chin and down the front of her purple kameez were strings of dried vomit. It was embarrassing to have strangers see his mother this way. But he also felt a thin, eager hope that these two women could fix her, that they were capable of doing something simple that would suddenly make everything all right.

The young woman picked up the bucket. Leaning to one side, she passed Lakshman and his father by the doorway and took it down the hall to the bathroom.

"If you don't go to a detox, you are going to die," the older woman said. She spoke loudly and clearly.

The two women helped his mother stand. They held her on both sides and walked her down the hall. She was not wearing the pajama bottom under her long shirt, and to see her yellow, hairy legs was awful. In the bathroom, she stepped into the tub with her kameez still on.

The women had come in a blue minivan and they drove her to a detox center. Lakshman and his father followed in the family's Toyota, with Lakshman clutching his mother's passport and insurance card. He wondered what a detox facility looked like. He imagined that it resembled a grand bank.

It was a bright Sunday morning. They took surface roads so that the two vehicles wouldn't lose track of each other. The stores they passed were closed and their windows flashed sun. Lakshman began to feel relief. The flashes of light were like blasts of music. The occasional person crossing a road seemed like a sign that life was going on, that life was always going to go on, and so somewhere there was the possibility of things being different and happiness existing.

IN INDIA, ON FARMS, pretty young women are as common as rabbits. It is easy to have sex with girls who are fifteen, sixteen, seventeen. These girls have nothing to trade other than sex and



"Technically, he's supposed to generate more energy than he uses."

physical labor, and often they are raped. On farms, if a girl goes into the fields in the early morning to defecate there is a strong chance that she will be assaulted.

Lakshman had been going back to India every summer since he came to America. When he was there, he went with his uncles to the farm that his father's family owned. He liked the farm, liked throwing rocks into a field, causing grasshoppers to shoot up by the dozen. He liked the step well, walking down it to take a bath, the temperature dropping, the air turning sweet, and then squatting on the bottom step and splashing a bucket in the water to clear the tadpoles and weeds, before beginning to soap himself.

On the farm, each uncle had his favorite girl. The girls would bring his uncles tea in the morning and then disappear into their rooms for a half hour or more. Usually, only the men of the family went to the farm. A few times a year, for religious events at particular temples, the women of the family also came. These wives, aunts, and daughters screamed at the girls and chased them with sticks, and the farm girls urinated in the buckets of water used to wash the family temples. Lakshman did not think about this much. It seemed funny to him, like a television sitcom.

One summer evening when he was still fourteen, after his mother had gone to the detox center and come back and started drinking again, Lakshman was standing by a sugarcane press near an irrigation channel. A girl who was perhaps nineteen came up to him. She was tall for a villager and barefoot, with a long skirt that had fingernail-size silver bells sewn onto it. Attaching a "ji" to his name, as though he were the older one, she asked him in their regional dialect what months it rained in America. She asked this almost as if she had already heard the answer and wanted to confirm that she wasn't being lied to. "Every month," Lakshman said. "Every month it rains."

"Does ice fall, too?"

"In winter."

"I had heard that," the girl said mysteriously and then stood there for a moment as if she wanted to be remembered. She had a beautiful oval face and small breasts, and she appeared very confident.

The next day the girl came up to Lakshman again. This time it was early morning and his father's oldest brother, bald and with a mustache, was standing nearby chewing a tooth-cleaning twig. She thrust a little knotted rag into Lakshman's hand. "Some sweets," she said and stared at him again. "How many air-conditioners does your house have?"

"Run, girl," his uncle said quietly. "There is nobody here for you."

Later, LAKSHMAN WOULD think that it was probably falling in love with this girl that had caused his father to decide to have Lakshman's mother murdered. There was nothing else to explain the change. His mother was no different from how she had been for years, drunk—quietly drunk sometimes, alarmingly erratic at others. So there must have been something about falling in love that had made his father think that life was short and he should not stay with this woman who appeared to care about no one.

At the time, though, all Lakshman knew was that something had changed for his father. His father's room was next to his. Sometimes Lakshman would be awakened at two or three in the morning by the sound of his father on the phone. His father would be laughing in a cheerful, relaxed way, and when he spoke he used their regional dialect. Lakshman's uncles in India gave their girls phones, and he guessed that his father had done the same. Now, during the day, his father was more laid-back. The anger that had lived beneath his voice vanished. This was a relief, but his not being unhappy also felt like a betrayal to Lakshman.

One fall afternoon when everything smelled wet, Lakshman came home from school and had to turn on the kitchen lights, although it was only four o'clock. The house was quiet, except for the soft sound of the TV in his mother's room, where she was probably drinking. He saw that the answering-machine light was blinking red. He pressed Play and there it was, the young woman's voice. "Listen," she said, and then there was some splashing. "That is my feet in water." She laughed and hung up. Lakshman was furious. It was vulgar for her to leave a message. And she was a farm girl. She

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should know her place. He deleted the message. As soon as he did, he became scared that his father would find out.

To have an alcoholic woman murdered, her husband must send her to her parents and tell them that she is a drunkard and not to be trusted and that he does not want her back. Until he does this, she is under his protection and she won't be killed, because she belongs to his family and not to her father's. But, once she is returned in this way, her family will kill her, because the shame of having a daughter or a sister who's an alcoholic is staggering. It is even worse than having one who is promiscuous. With a promiscuous woman, you know to kill her right away; with an alcoholic, the shame lasts longer because you hesitate.

Lakshman did not understand what was going on, other than that his father seemed to be in love with a farm girl and was complaining more than usual. He started calling Lakshman's grandmother. "What kind of life is this?" he would ask. "What did you do to me when you got me a wife like this?" Much later, Lakshman understood that his grandmother had to be consulted because, since his mother belonged to a family with which his father's family did business, there would be financial consequences if his mother was sent back.

He sensed that there was a crisis building. His mother rarely went to India. Nobody wanted her there, and so she went only if a close relative was getting married and even then only for a week or two. But now his other grandmother, the one on his mother's side, began calling, too. She wheedled Lakshman's mother, pressing her to visit, even though there was no wedding coming up.

It was strange to hear his grandmother's voice on the phone. "Baby boy, go get your mother," his grandmother would say when he picked up. Calls and more calls added to a sense of eeriness. It seemed to Lakshman that something was being worked out but that his mother was too drunk to realize that the situation around her was changing.

Talking to her mother made Lakshman's mother giddy. Sometimes, after a call, she would stay downstairs and eat regular food, instead of going back to her room and drinking wine and

eating potato chips. Lakshman would then get nostalgic for the time when she drank only at parties.

ABOUT TWO MONTHS after Lakshman's maternal grandmother began calling, his mother left for India. Three days after that, barely enough time for her to land in Delhi, take the plane to Jaipur, and unpack, Lakshman was standing at the stove making tea when his father came into the kitchen and said, "Your mother has died of dengue. She died in a hospital last night."

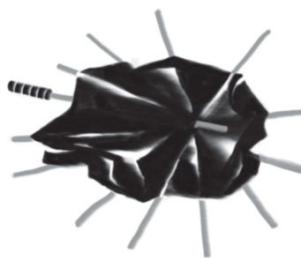
Lakshman felt as if he were dreaming. He didn't turn off the stove, as tradition required after a death. Instead, he continued making tea. His father had a round, dark face and he stared at Lakshman nervously, as if waiting to see if he would be believed.

"Your mother died last night," he repeated.

"In reality?" Lakshman asked.

"Yes. In reality." His father opened the refrigerator and took out a carton of eggs.

Lakshman felt a sense of relief. It was as if he had come into a room that had been crowded with furniture but now stood empty. The space seemed smaller and plainer, but also less stressful. He didn't feel sadness, at first, because a part of him didn't believe that his mother was dead. If she were dead, he thought, they wouldn't be preparing food. It would be improper to do so.



He went to school. He didn't tell anyone what his father had said. After classes, he attended track practice. Running in the cold moist air, he remembered when his mother had come back from her first detox, the one that the two women from A.A. had taken her to. She had been gone for four weeks. She returned home at eleven in the morning, and that afternoon she and he and his father went for a walk. Their street did not have sidewalks, so they walked on the road itself,

the snow squeaking under their feet, the trees in the yards dark with moisture. "Manuji," his mother said to his father with a bashful half smile. "I am not going to drink. I don't know why, but I am certain." Her eyes were inwardly focussed, as if she were looking at something within that comforted her and gave her confidence. His father listened but did not speak. He walked with his head down, and he appeared frustrated, as if he knew he was being lied to and yet could not protest the lie.

Lakshman remembered this and remembered when his mother had had two black eyes because she had fallen down the stairs. The black eyes made her look vulnerable and young. He remembered also when his mother had taken his father around the house and shown him where she had hidden bottles of alcohol. She had stood watching as his father put the bottles in a trash can and she had shaken her hands as if they were on fire and she was trying to put them out. As Lakshman ran, tears slid down his face.

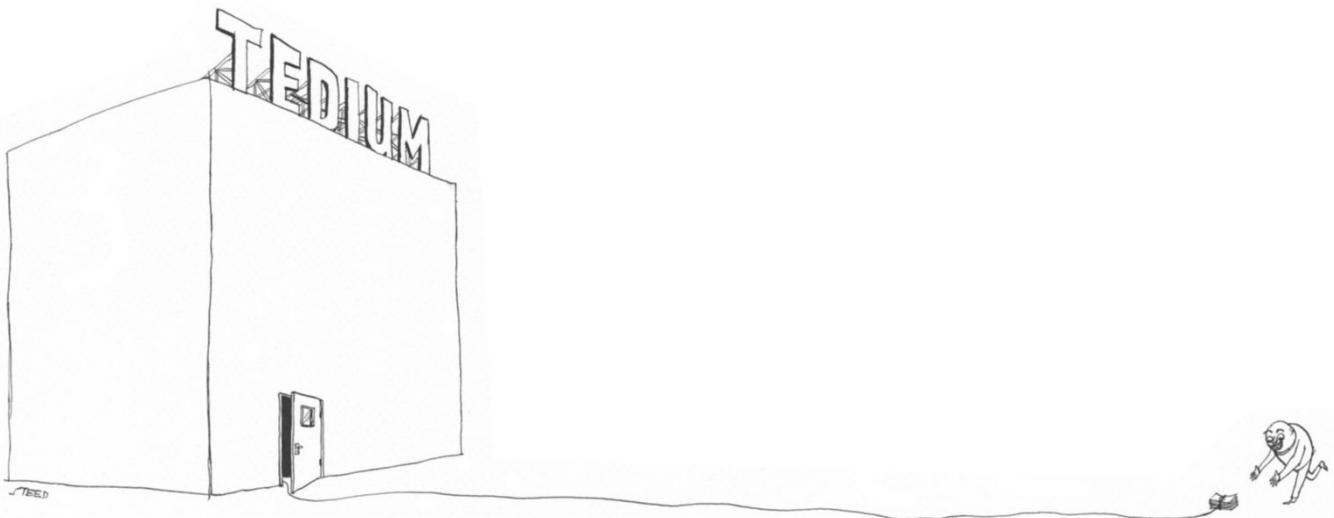
That night he lay awake listening, but his father did not talk on the phone to his lover. The next night he did, quietly. And the third night he was laughing as he always had. Lakshman was revolted by him.

Weeks passed. The door to his mother's room remained closed. They told no one of her death. By this time in America they had stopped socializing, so people knew them only tangentially and there were few to tell. Finally, his father informed an acquaintance or two and somehow the news got to school. There Lakshman was pulled out of class by his guidance counsellor and asked how he was doing. Talking to a white person in authority was frightening, and Lakshman said he was fine.

After perhaps a month, his father opened the door to his mother's room. In keeping with tradition, all the linens and clothes were going to be thrown away. Lakshman stood in his mother's room as his father opened the drawers and dumped the red, gold, and peacock saris into black garbage bags. "I miss Mommy," Lakshman said.

"You should. She was your mother." His father studied him for a moment before returning to work.

"Do you miss her?"
"Of course."



Later, the garbage bags sat slumped at the end of the driveway. It rained before the garbagemen came, and the creases on the bags filled with water.

WHEN LAKSHMAN WENT to India the summer after his mother's death, his father's family complained regularly about not receiving help from his mother's relatives. He still did not understand that his mother had been murdered and, to him, her family's no longer helping meant a fraying of relations and reminded him that his mother was dead.

"Just because Aarti is gone shouldn't mean the relationship is finished," his grandmother said. "These relationships go from generation to generation."

"What can one do with a family that raises a drunk?" his father's second-oldest brother, skinny and with a scraggly beard, answered. "They are all crazy."

"They are not so crazy when it comes to their own interests," his grandmother spat in the weird conspiratorial way that she sometimes spoke.

Often, these conversations occurred in the afternoon, after the family woke from the midday nap. They would all be groggy and irritable, and their words were like the bitterness in their mouths.

For a while, Lakshman's uncle, the second-oldest brother, tried hinting at what had happened. "They are scary people. Nobody owns seventy trucks without committing crimes," he told Lakshman. Late in the summer, Lakshman realized what his uncle was sug-

gesting. But his grandmother and his uncle often said strange accusatory things. They complained that the local milkman diluted his milk with water, and that once there had been a fish in the milk. It was hard, therefore, to take what his uncle said seriously.

"Who dies from dengue after one day?" his uncle insisted one afternoon.

"Keep quiet, idiot," Lakshman's grandmother said.

In Jaipur at the start of summer, he had visited his mother's family, and his grandmother on that side had grabbed him and hugged him tightly and sobbed. He could recall the exact sensation of his grandmother's arms around him, the boniness of her chest, the sharpness of her arms. All this seemed to cut through his uncle's hinted accusations.

But slowly, as the weeks passed and the monsoon came and people ran laughing through the streets and then God Krishna's birthday arrived, a nervousness overtook Lakshman. He started to have a hard time sleeping at night. The street dogs barking at two or three in the morning would wake him and he would become wild with panic. His grandmother's sighing as she made her way to the toilet through the darkened house would pitch him into misery.

He went to the farm as he always did. Some Gypsies were passing through the area, and at night there were puppet shows and men singing in front of the main house. In the morning, there were the girls visiting his uncles. Once, he was

walking through a field and he thought he saw the girl his father loved, sitting beneath a tree talking to another girl. He walked toward her in the shimmering heat. As he did, the girl got up quickly and hurried away. Later that day, he asked the farm manager about the girl and the man said that he would have her called. Lakshman told the man no and headed back to the house. As he did, as he crossed the yellowed grass, sadness filled him. It seemed awful that his mother had died, that his father seemed to have forgotten her, that this girl was still living her life.

That night, he couldn't sleep at all. The crickets were screaming, and he sat up in bed and thought of his mother and how on her nightstand she sometimes had books from A.A., how when she was going into a detox center she'd become frightened at the thought of being away from home and start crying, how for a while she had continued to phone the old white woman with the dusty skin who had taken her to the first detox.

Around four, the crows started cawing, and soon the smaller birds were chattering, as if they had dreams they were eager to share. At five, the girls arrived on the veranda, their bare feet going past his room and teacups rattling on saucers. Lakshman sat and listened and felt certain that he would never come back to the farm again, that whatever happened he could never come back. ♦

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Akhil Sharma on alcoholism and honor killings in India.

THE CRITICS



ON TELEVISION

AUTHORITY ALWAYS WINS

Stephen Colbert's new role.

BY EMILY NUSSBAUM

FOR LONGTIME Stephen Colbert fans—*F*and I've been one ever since "Strangers with Candy," from 1999—the comedian's move, in 2015, from Comedy Central to CBS, where he replaced David Letterman, was not a promotion. It was a gamble: he was trading a mod Vespa for something more like a pre-owned cruise ship, contractually obligated to make stops in Aruba. But nobody wants to be a hipster buzzkill, dinging a hero for selling out. "If anyone can jolt a genre that feels near-paralyzed, he's the guy," I wrote, the year before his débüt on "The Late Show."

On "The Colbert Report," Colbert created a persona—a Bill O'Reilly-inspired blowhard—that evolved into a surprisingly flexible instrument. By wearing a mask made of his own face, he inflected every interaction with multiple ironies, keeping his guests—including politicians and authors—off balance, and forcing them to be spontaneous. It was a friendly form of compulsory improv, which made both sides look good. Putting quotes around "Colbert" had other positive effects: it let the host express fury without becoming, as his former boss Jon Stewart occasionally was, a tiresome scourge. In 2006, Colbert's icepick routine at the White House Correspondents' Association dinner, in which he mocked the Bush Administration's crimes to its members' faces, using their words, was legendary. What would it be like for him to own his jokes and express his true opinions?

A pretty muted experience, as it turns out. As with many talk shows, the early days of "The Late Show" were wobbly, at best—and wobbly in a way that suggested the genre's limits. With the irony

drained away, Colbert was less vivid. He had a try-hard earnestness, a damp corporate pall; he was courtly with guests, as if modelling bipartisan behavior. Taking off the mask had made him less visible, not more. Then, gradually, as Donald Trump ascended, Colbert began winning praise. According to the conventional wisdom, the host had grown claws—he had found something to be angry about, at last. Jimmy Fallon's hair-ruffling sycophancy, on NBC's "Tonight Show," was becoming a turnoff. Maybe this was just the news cycle, the ordinary flow of backlash and buzz. Or maybe it was Colbert's moment. Post-November, he got the ratings to match the hype.

When I caught up recently, it was clear where the excitement was coming from. Certainly, Colbert seems electrified by the political crisis—in his opening monologue, he's obsessed, as so many of us are, by the latest absurdities out of Washington. Because he's always been a moralist (with a Southern, Catholic, mad-dad bent), his jokes have an ethical spark. One night, Colbert opened the show with a clip from the Conservative Political Action Conference, in which the President complained that anonymous sources called him a "horrible, horrible human being," but never to his face. "Sir!" Colbert announced. "It would be my honor to say it to your face." He moved downstage, toward the camera, and began to mash his face up against the lens. "You, Donald Trump, are a horrible human being." Then he licked the glass.

Plenty of his gags are keepers. "I'm starting to doubt the effectiveness of Dr. Bannon's Anti-Muslim Toad Oil," he pondered, after the health-care bill crashed and burned. And yet even as I

watched him throw dart after dart at the swollen targets now available—Russia, Pence, Spicer, golfing, pussy-grabbing—my mind kept drifting. In theory, the current political moment provides a brilliant opportunity for zingers. In practice, we're living through a glut, in which no joke feels original and few feel sufficient. A repeated sketch called "Leak-Crets," in which Colbert parodied Deep Throat, was limp. Smutty jokes, about Devin Nunes's head up Trump's butt, felt cheap. Attacking Trump isn't in itself subversive—and there's a Goldilocks dynamic to the whole endeavor. When Colbert's jokes make obvious points (about nepotism, say), they feel weightless, but bolder ones (about Putin murdering journalists) feel trivializing. Under an absurdist regime, intensified by the digital landscape—in which few people watch more of a late-night talk show than a "bit" gone viral—all jokes become "takes," their punch lines interchangeable with CNN headlines, Breitbart clickbait, Facebook memes, and Trump's own drive-by tweets, which themselves crib gags from "Saturday Night Live." ("Not!") Under these conditions, a late-night monologue begins to feel cognitively draining, not unlike political punditry.

Meanwhile, Colbert's interviews are pleasant but stiff; in the promotion-heavy CBS context, even cerebral decency can harden into a brand. And, though Colbert is gentlemanly rather than bro-ish, his manner with female guests (of which, to his credit, there are many) has odd pings of condescension. "I'm a huge fan of yours, too, ever since I saw you crying in a shower," he said to Glenn Close, referring to her nude scene in "The Big Chill." The following week, he told his



When Colbert's jokes make obvious points, they feel weightless, but bolder ones risk feeling trivializing.

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bandleader, "We're gonna have Jane Fonda and Lily Tomlin sitting over here. . . . I have made out with one of them! . . . Don't tell my wife."

The truth is, hosting a late-night network talk show is a bit like planning a wedding. Even if you dress in jeggings and say your vows in Klingon, your anti-wedding is still a wedding: the shape dictates the content. Colbert has grown more confident in his role, and he's a better option than Fallon: sharper and more grownup, less of a flack and more of a thinker. But that's a low bar for praise.

IT'S NOT COLBERT's fault that we're at such a funky, fraught moment for political comedy. In its first few decades, comedy creators fed off the pomposity of network news; as a result, we got delicious inventions like Ted Knight and Bill McNeal, "SCTV" and "Weekend Update." The two genres developed side by side, united by shared clichés. White male comedy-show hosts conventionally riffed on the conventions of white male news anchors. A late-night monologue was a warped newscast. An anchor and a host had the same daily task, seated at twin desks, asking questions in our name. Both jobs were cast as "dad to the nation"—one solid guy (always a guy) selected to tell the truth. As Walter Cronkite went, so went Johnny Carson. Making fun of the news was the comedy of small differences.

Then, in the nineties, Fox News emerged. The network branded itself as the home of punk outsiders, zinging the liberal mainstream with the studied cockiness of a finance guy who considers himself hilarious. Fox's journalists, with their fluid approach to facts, undermined not just the notion of objectivity but the older split between stiff anchors and loose comics. A satirical arms race ensued. For liberals, Comedy Central, with its stars Stewart and Colbert, provided an antidote to Fox—but also a news source in itself. As news anchors aped comics, and comics fact-checked anchors, the categories of who was the serious one, the moral one, the self-righteous one—and who should be tweaked for self-righteousness—blurred for good. This was true even before the Internet became a factor, muddying further the question of what qualified as satire and what was "fake news."

Maybe it's unfair to expect more "Col-

bert" from Colbert. There are nights when he's still a marksman, nailing the day's hypocrisies. But, in 2017, it doesn't seem outrageous to long for a talk-show host famed for his ethical clarity to deliver something tougher: comedy more like reporting and less like op-ed. Peers of Colbert's—many of them "Daily Show" alumni—have been doing just that, on "Last Week Tonight with John Oliver" and "Full Frontal with Samantha Bee," as well as on the surprisingly aggressive and likable "Late Night with Seth Meyers."

The contrast is striking. On "The Late Show," Colbert aired a gag in which the "Schoolhouse Rock" cartoon bill sings "I'm Just a Bill," then shoots itself. It's funny, but it's also a nihilistic quick-hit meme. On "Full Frontal," Bee did a deeply reported animation, more than six minutes long, that dramatized an obscure legislative breakthrough in Georgia, involving a scandal about untested rape kits. The segment was neither pure comedy nor pure journalism, but, miraculously, it made a wonky policy story feel wild—and it got laughs, too. It's the sort of experiment that wouldn't, and couldn't, air on CBS.

Last month, Susan Sarandon, in a snow-white pantsuit and a Cheshire-cat grin, sat down with Colbert to wave off any notion that Trump's election had been truly harmful. "People are really *awake* now," the actress insisted, with a maddening air of sleepy-eyed beatitude. "Because the cracks have let the light in, as Leonard Cohen would say. . . . Everybody is awake! They're *energized*." And then, in a sly neg of a pivot, she made the link to Colbert himself. "You're funnier. . . . It's done great things for comedy."

Colbert bantered, gamely but tamely, with Sarandon, who had suggested to him, in an appearance a year ago, that Trump might trigger a "revolution." He asked what she'd meant. Bricks through the windows, perhaps? But when she dismissed this—"You're watching the wrong movie," she star-splained—Colbert didn't dig deeper, let alone express his opinion or show any emotion. He gave no context; he simply moved on, as if by asking the question he'd covered the issue. His job wasn't confrontation anymore, certainly not to the guest's face. Instead, the two celebrities turned to easier subjects, and, by the end, they were nearly dancing. ♦

SAINT PAULI

She advanced two movements for equality—and was at home in neither.

BY KATHRYN SCHULZ



COURTESY SCHLESINGER LIBRARY/RADCLIFFE INSTITUTE/HARVARD UNIVERSITY

THE WAGER WAS ten dollars. It was 1944, and the law students of Howard University were discussing how best to bring an end to Jim Crow. In the half century since *Plessy v. Ferguson*, lawyers had been chipping away at segregation by questioning the “equal” part of the “separate but equal” doctrine—arguing that, say, a specific black school was not truly equivalent to its white counterpart. Fed up with the limited and incremental results, one student in the class proposed a radical alternative: why not challenge the “separate” part instead?

That student’s name was Pauli Murray. Her law-school peers were accus-

tomed to being startled by her—she was the only woman among them and first in the class—but that day they laughed out loud. Her idea was both impractical and reckless, they told her; any challenge to *Plessy* would result in the Supreme Court affirming it instead. Undeterred, Murray told them they were wrong. Then, with the whole class as her witness, she made a bet with her professor, a man named Spottswood Robinson: ten bucks said *Plessy* would be overturned within twenty-five years.

Murray was right. *Plessy* was overturned in a decade—and, when it was, Robinson owed her a lot more than ten dollars. In her final law-school paper,

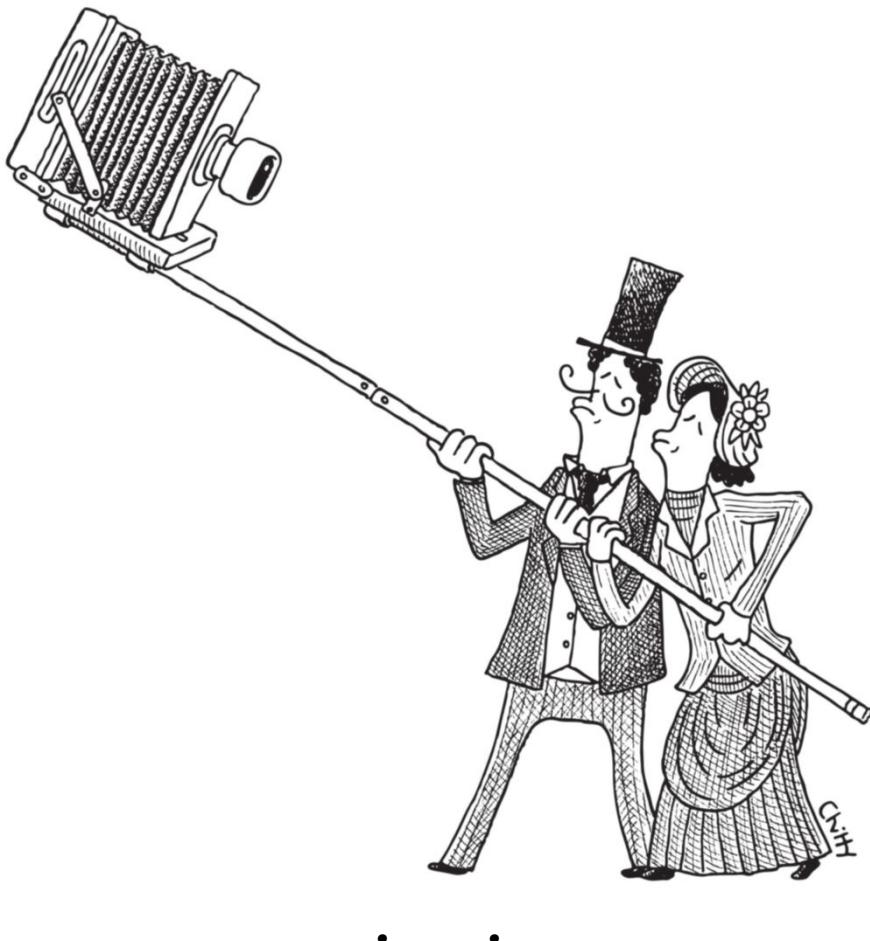
Murray had formalized the idea she’d hatched in class that day, arguing that segregation violated the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments of the United States Constitution. Some years later, when Robinson joined with Thurgood Marshall and others to try to end Jim Crow, he remembered Murray’s paper, fished it out of his files, and presented it to his colleagues—the team that, in 1954, successfully argued *Brown v. Board of Education*.

By the time Murray learned of her contribution, she was nearing fifty, two-thirds of the way through a life as remarkable for its range as for its influence. A poet, writer, activist, labor organizer, legal theorist, and Episcopal priest, Murray palled around in her youth with Langston Hughes, joined James Baldwin at the MacDowell Colony the first year it admitted African-Americans, maintained a twenty-three-year friendship with Eleanor Roosevelt, and helped Betty Friedan found the National Organization for Women. Along the way, she articulated the intellectual foundations of two of the most important social-justice movements of the twentieth century: first, when she made her argument for overturning *Plessy*, and, later, when she co-wrote a law-review article subsequently used by a rising star at the A.C.L.U.—one Ruth Bader Ginsburg—to convince the Supreme Court that the Equal Protection Clause applies to women.

This was Murray’s lifelong fate: to be both ahead of her time and behind the scenes. Two decades before the civil-rights movement of the nineteen-sixties, Murray was arrested for refusing to move to the back of a bus in Richmond, Virginia; organized sit-ins that successfully desegregated restaurants in Washington, D.C.; and, anticipating the Freedom Summer, urged her Howard classmates to head south to fight for civil rights and wondered how to “attract young white graduates of the great universities to come down and join with us.” And, four decades before another legal scholar, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, coined the term “intersectionality,” Murray insisted on the indivisibility of her identity and experience as an African-American, a worker, and a woman.

Despite all this, Murray’s name is not

It was Pauli Murray’s fate to be both ahead of her time and behind the scenes.



well known today, especially among white Americans. The past few years, however, have seen a burst of interest in her life and work. She's been sainted by the Episcopal Church, had a residential college named after her at Yale, where she was the first African-American to earn a doctorate of jurisprudence, and had her childhood home designated a National Historic Landmark by the Department of the Interior. Last year, Patricia Bell-Scott published "The Firebrand and the First Lady" (Knopf), an account of Murray's relationship with Eleanor Roosevelt, and next month sees the publication of "Jane Crow: The Life of Pauli Murray" (Oxford), by the Barnard historian Rosalind Rosenberg.

All this attention has not come about by chance. Historical figures aren't human flotsam, swirling into public awareness at random intervals. Instead, they are almost always borne back to us on the current of our own times. In Murray's case, it's not simply that her public struggles on behalf of women, minorities, and the working class suddenly seem more relevant than ever. It's that her private strug-

gles—documented for the first time in all their fullness by Rosenberg—have recently become our public ones.

PAULI MURRAY WAS born Anna Pauline Murray, on November 20, 1910. It was the year that the National Urban League was founded, and the year after the creation of the N.A.A.C.P.; "my life and development paralleled the existence of the two major continuous civil rights organizations in the United States," she observed in a posthumously published memoir, "Song in a Weary Throat." Given Murray's later achievements, that way of placing herself in context makes sense. But it also reflects the gap in her life where autobiography would normally begin. "The most significant fact of my childhood," Murray once said, "was that I was an orphan."

When Murray was three years old, her mother suffered a massive cerebral hemorrhage on the family staircase and died on the spot. Pauli's father, left alone with his grief and six children under the age of ten, sent her to live with a maternal aunt, Pauline Fitzgerald, after whom

she was named. Three years later, ravaged by anxiety, poverty, and illness, Pauli's father was committed to the Crownsville State Hospital for the Negro Insane—where, in 1922, a white guard taunted him with racist epithets, dragged him to the basement, and beat him to death with a baseball bat. Pauli, then twelve years old, travelled alone to Baltimore for the funeral, where she acquired her second and final memory of her father: laid out in an open casket, his skull "split open like a melon and sewed together loosely with jagged stitches."

Fortunately for Murray, she had, by then, a strong, if complicated, sense of family elsewhere. She lived with her Aunt Pauline in Durham, North Carolina, at the home of her maternal grandparents, Cornelia and Robert Fitzgerald. Cornelia was born in bondage; her mother was a part-Cherokee slave named Harriet, her father the owner's son and Harriet's frequent rapist. Robert, by contrast, was raised in Pennsylvania, attended anti-slavery meetings with Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass, and fought for the Union in the Civil War. Together, they formed part of a large and close-knit family whose members ranged from Episcopalians to Quakers, impoverished to wealthy, fair-skinned and blue-eyed to dark-skinned and curly-haired. When they all got together, Murray wrote, it looked "like a United Nations in miniature."

Amid all this, Murray grew up, in her own words, "a thin, wiry, ravenous child," exceedingly willful yet eager to please. She taught herself to read by the age of five, and, from then on, devoured both books and food indiscriminately: biscuits, molasses, macaroni and cheese, pancakes, beefsteaks, "The Bobbsey Twins," Zane Grey, "Dying Testimonies of the Saved and Unsaved," Chambers's Encyclopedia, the collected works of Paul Laurence Dunbar, "Up from Slavery." In school, she vexed her teachers with her pinball energy, but impressed them with her aptitude and ambition. By the time she graduated, at fifteen, she was the editor-in-chief of the school newspaper, the president of the literary society, class secretary, a member of the debate club, the top student, and a forward on the basketball team.

With that résumé, Murray could have easily earned a spot at the North

Carolina College for Negroes, but she declined to go, because, to date, her whole life had been constrained by segregation. Around the time of her birth, North Carolina had begun rolling back the gains of Reconstruction and using Jim Crow laws to viciously restrict the lives of African-Americans. From the moment Murray understood the system, she actively resisted it. Even as a child, she walked everywhere rather than ride in segregated streetcars, and boycotted movie theatres rather than sit in the balconies reserved for African-Americans. Since the age of ten, she had been looking north. When the time came to pick a college, she set her sights on Columbia, and insisted that Pauline take her up to visit.

IT WAS IN New York that Murray realized her life was constrained by more factors than race. Columbia, she learned, did not accept women; Barnard did, but she couldn't afford the tuition. She could attend Hunter College for free if she became a New York City resident—but not with her current transcript, because black high schools in North Carolina ended at eleventh grade and didn't offer all the classes she needed to matriculate. Dismayed but determined, Murray petitioned her family to let her live with a cousin in Queens, then enrolled in Richmond Hill High School, the only African-American among four thousand students.

Two years later, Murray entered Hunter—which, at the time, was a women's college, a fact that Murray initially resented as another form of segregation but soon came to appreciate. Not long afterward, she swapped her cousin's place in Queens for a room at the Harlem Y.W.C.A. In Harlem, Murray befriended Langston Hughes, met W. E. B. Du Bois, attended lectures by the civil-rights activist Mary McLeod Bethune, and paid twenty-five cents at the Apollo Theatre to hear the likes of Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway. Eighteen, enrolled in college, living in New York, planning to become a writer—she was, it seemed, living the life she'd always dreamed of.

Then came October 29, 1929. Murray, who was supporting herself by waitressing, lost, in quick succession, most of her customers, most of her tips, and

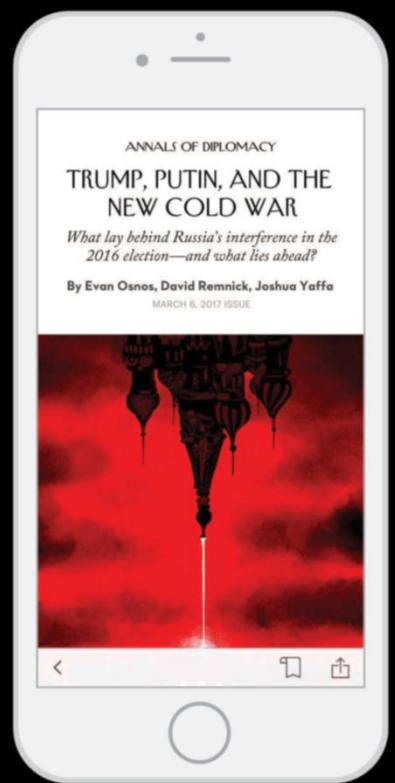
her job. She looked for work, but everyone was looking for work. By the end of her sophomore year, in the reverse of today's joke about college, she had lost fifteen pounds and was suffering from malnutrition. She took time off from school, took odd jobs, took shared rooms in tenement buildings. She graduated in 1933—possibly the worst year in U.S. history to enter the job market. Nationwide, the unemployment rate was twenty-five per cent. In Harlem, it was greater than fifty.

For the next five years, Murray drifted in and out of jobs—among them, a stint at the W.P.A.'s Workers Education Project and the National Urban League—and in and out of poverty. She learned about the labor movement, stood in her first picket line, joined a faction of the Communist Party U.S.A., then resigned a year later because "she found party discipline irksome." Meanwhile, her relatives in North Carolina were pressuring her to return home. In 1938, worried about their health and lacking any job prospects, she decided to apply to the graduate program in sociology at the University of North Carolina—which, like the rest of the university, did not accept African-Americans.

Murray knew that, but she also knew her own history. Two of her slave-owning relatives had attended the school, another had served on its board of trustees, and yet another had created a permanent scholarship for its students. Surely, Murray reasoned, she had a right to be among them. On December 8, 1938, she mailed off her application. Six days later, she got a reply. "Dear Miss Murray," it read, "I write to state that . . . members of your race are not admitted to the University."

Thanks to an accident of timing, that letter made Murray briefly famous. Two days earlier, in the first serious blow to segregation, the Supreme Court had ruled that graduate programs at public universities had to admit qualified African-Americans if the state had no equivalent black institution. Determined not to integrate, yet bound by that decision and facing intense public scrutiny after news broke of Murray's application, the North Carolina legislature promised to set up a graduate school at the North Carolina College for Negroes. Instead, it slashed that college's budget by

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a third, then adjourned for two years.

Murray hoped to sue, and asked the N.A.A.C.P. to represent her, but lawyers there felt her status as a New York resident would imperil the case. Murray countered that any university that accepted out-of-state white students should have to accept out-of-state black ones, too, but she couldn't persuade them. Nor was she ever admitted to U.N.C. Soon enough, though, she did get into two other notable American institutions: jail and law school.

IN MARCH OF 1940, Murray boarded a south-bound bus in New York, reluctantly. She had brought along a good friend and was looking forward to spending Easter with her family in Durham, but, of all the segregated institutions in the South, she hated the bus the most. The intimacy of the space, she wrote, "permitted the public humiliation of black people to be carried out in the presence of privileged white spectators, who witnessed our shame in silence or indifference."

Murray and her friend changed buses in Richmond, Virginia. Since the available seats in the back were broken, they sat down closer toward the front. Some time earlier, they had discussed Gandhi and nonviolent resistance, and so, without premeditation, when the bus driver asked them to move they politely refused. The driver called the cops, a confrontation ensued, and they were thrown in jail.

This time, the N.A.A.C.P. was interested; lawyers there hoped to use the arrest to challenge the constitutionality of segregated interstate travel. But the state of Virginia, steering clear of that powder keg, charged Murray and her friend only with disorderly conduct. They were found guilty, fined forty-three dollars they didn't have, and sent back to jail. When Murray was released some days later, she swore she'd never set foot in Virginia again.

That vow did not last six months. Back in New York, the Workers Defense League asked Murray to help raise money on behalf of an imprisoned Virginia sharecropper named Odell Waller. Waller had been sentenced to death for shooting the white man whose

land he farmed: in self-defense, he claimed; in cold blood, according to the all-white jury that convicted him. His case, which became something of a cause célèbre, helped cement the friendship between Murray and Eleanor Roosevelt, who had grown interested in Waller's plight. (As Bell-Scott documents, that friendship had begun two years earlier, after Murray wrote an angry letter to F.D.R., accusing him of caring more about Fascism abroad than white supremacy at home. Eleanor responded, unperturbed, and later invited her to tea—the first of countless such visits, and the beginning of a productively contentious, mutually joyful decades-long relationship.)

To Murray's dismay, the Workers Defense League asked her to begin her fund-raising efforts in Richmond. While there, she gave a speech that reduced the audience to tears—an audience that, by chance, included Thurgood Marshall and the Howard law professor Leon Ransom. Later that day, Murray ran into the two men in town; Ransom, who had admired her speech, suggested that she apply to Howard. Murray replied that she would if she could afford it. Ransom told her that if she got in he'd see to it that she got a scholarship.

Murray applied. Marshall wrote her a recommendation. Ransom kept his word. By the time Odell Waller's final appeal was denied and he died in the electric chair, she had enrolled at Howard, with "the single-minded intention of destroying Jim Crow."

AT HOWARD, Murray's race ceased to be an issue, but her gender abruptly became one. Everyone else was male—all the faculty, all her classmates. On the first day, one of her professors announced to his class that he didn't know why a woman would want to go to law school, a comment that both humiliated Murray and guaranteed, as she recalled, "that I would become the top student." She termed this form of degradation "Jane Crow," and spent much of the rest of her life working to end it.

Her initial efforts were dispiriting. Upon earning her J.D. from Howard,

Murray applied to Harvard for graduate work—only to get the Jane Crow version of the letter she'd once received from U.N.C.: "You are not of the sex entitled to be admitted to Harvard Law School." Murray, outraged, wrote a memorable rejoinder:

Gentlemen, I would gladly change my sex to meet your requirements, but since the way to such change has not been revealed to me, I have no recourse but to appeal to you to change your minds on this subject. Are you to tell me that one is as difficult as the other?

Apparently so. Neither Murray's own efforts nor F.D.R.'s intercession persuaded Harvard. She went to Berkeley instead, then returned to New York to find work.

This proved challenging. At the time, only around a hundred African-American women practiced law in the entire United States, and very few firms were inclined to hire them. For several years, Murray scraped by on low-paying jobs; then, in 1948, the women's division of the Methodist Church approached her with a problem. They opposed segregation and wanted to know, for all thirty-one states where the Church had parishes, when they were legally obliged to adhere to it and when it was merely custom. If they paid her for her time, they wondered, would she write up an explanation of segregation laws in America?

What the Methodist Church had in mind was basically a pamphlet. What Murray produced was a seven-hundred-and-forty-six-page book, "States' Laws on Race and Color," that exposed both the extent and the insanity of American segregation. The A.C.L.U. distributed copies to law libraries, black colleges, and human-rights organizations. Thurgood Marshall, who kept stacks of it around the N.A.A.C.P. offices, called it "the bible" of *Brown v. Board of Education*. In this way, to Murray's immense gratification, the book ultimately helped render itself obsolete.

Completing this project left Murray low on work again, until, in 1956, she was hired by the New York law firm of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison. It was a storied place, lucrative and relatively progressive, but Murray never felt entirely at home there, partly because, of its sixty-some



attorneys, she was the only African-American and one of just three women. (Two soon left, although a fourth briefly appeared: Ruth Bader Ginsburg, a summer associate with whom Murray crossed paths.) In 1960, frustrated both by her isolation and by corporate litigation, she took an overseas job at the recently opened Ghana School of Law. When she arrived, she learned that, back home, a group of students had staged a sit-in at a Woolworth's lunch counter in North Carolina. It was the first time Murray had ever left her country. Now, five thousand miles away, the modern civil-rights movement was beginning.

When Murray returned (sooner than expected, since Ghana's nascent democracy soon slid toward dictatorship), the civil-rights movement was in full swing. The women's movement, however, was just beginning. For the next ten years, Murray spent much of her time trying to advance it in every way she could, from arguing sex-discrimination cases to serving on President Kennedy's newly created Presidential Commission on the Status of Women.

In 1965, frustrated with how little progress she and others were making, she proposed, during a speech in New York, that women organize a march on Washington. That suggestion was covered with raised eyebrows in the press and earned Murray a phone call from Betty Friedan, by then the most famous feminist in the country. Murray told Friedan that she believed the time had come to organize an N.A.A.C.P. for women. In June of 1966, during a conference on women's rights in Washington, D.C., Murray and a dozen or so others convened in Friedan's hotel room and launched the National Organization for Women.

In retrospect, Murray was a curious figure to help found such an organization. All her life, she had encountered and combatted sex discrimination; all her life, she had been hailed as the first woman to integrate such-and-such a venue, hold such-and-such a role, achieve such-and-such a distinction. Yet, when she told the Harvard Law School faculty that she would gladly change her sex if someone would show her how, she wasn't just making a point. She was telling the truth. Although few

people knew it during her lifetime, Murray, the passionate advocate for women's rights, identified as a man.

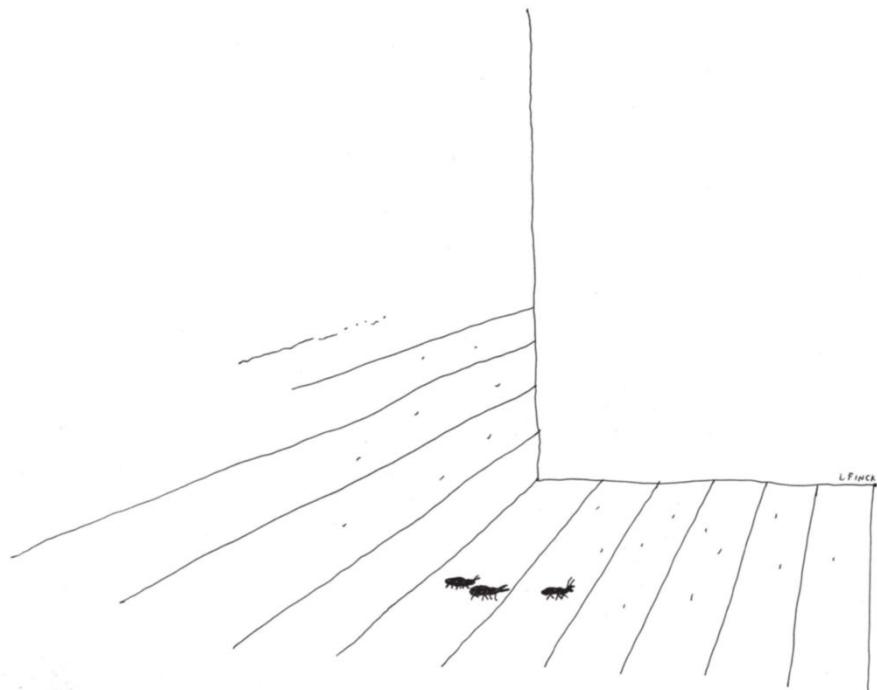
In 1930, when Murray was twenty years old and living in Harlem, she met a young man named William Wynn. Billy, as he was known, was also twenty, and also impoverished, uprooted, and lonely. After a brief courtship, the two married in secret, then spent an awkward two-day honeymoon at a cheap hotel. Almost immediately, Murray realized she had made "a dreadful mistake." Emotionally, the marriage didn't outlast the weekend; some years later, they had it annulled.

This entire adventure occupies two paragraphs in Murray's autobiography—the only paragraphs, in four hundred and thirty-five pages, in which she addresses her love life at all. That elision, which proves to be enormous, is obligingly corrected by Rosenberg, who documents Murray's lifelong struggle with gender identity and her sexual attraction to women. (Following Murray's own cue, Rosenberg uses female pronouns to refer to her subject, as have I.) The result is two strikingly different takes on one life: a scholarly and methodical biography that is built, occasionally too obviously, from one hundred and thirty-five boxes

of archival material; and a swift and gripping memoir that is inspiring to read and selectively but staggeringly insincere.

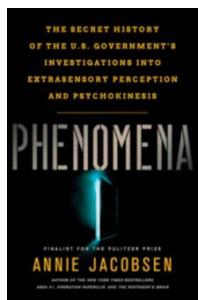
"Why is it when men try to make love to me, something in me fights?" Murray wrote in her diary after ending her marriage. In pursuit of an answer, she went to the New York Public Library and read her way through its holdings on so-called sexual deviance. She identified most with Havelock Ellis's work on "pseudo-hermaphrodites," his term for people who saw themselves as members of the opposite gender from the one assigned to them at birth. Through Ellis, Murray became convinced that she had either "secreted male genitals" or an excess of testosterone. She wondered, as Rosenberg put it, "why someone who believed she was internally male could not become more so by taking male hormones" and, for two decades, tried to find a way to do so.

Although this biological framework was new to Murray, the awareness of being different was not. From early childhood, she had seemed like, in the words of her wonderfully unfazed Aunt Pauline, a "little boy-girl." She favored boy's clothes and boy's chores, evinced no attraction to her male peers, and, at fifteen, adopted the nickname Paul. She later auditioned

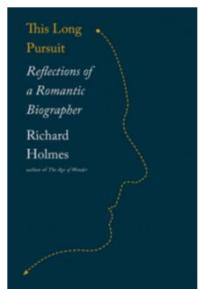


"As you can see, the hardwood floor is beautifully aged, and there's standing water under the kitchen sink."

BRIEFLY NOTED



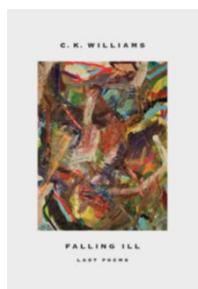
Phenomena, by *Annie Jacobsen* (*Little, Brown*). Drawing on declassified material, this richly researched book examines a bizarre historical episode: the U.S. government's secret investigations of extrasensory perception and psychokinesis. Starting in the early years of the Cold War, psychics were given clearance to assist various agencies with operations that included tracking Soviet submarines, locating fugitives, and mapping the interior of the Chinese Embassy in Rome. In more mind-bending assignments, they were asked to find the Ark of the Covenant and go back in time to discover who shot J.F.K. There were uncanny successes, such as the prediction of a Pentagon official's kidnapping, and information obtained occasionally prompted government action. Jacobsen shows that, in the face of inexplicable events, even "the most pragmatic, commonsense thinkers found themselves uncertain."



This Long Pursuit, by *Richard Holmes* (*Pantheon*). In a genial and energetic reflection on the biographer's craft, one of its most eminent practitioners notes, "Biographies are understood to write themselves, self-generated (like methane clouds) by their dead subjects." Giving the lie to this notion, he details his working methods and assesses the role of biographies in the evolving reputations of their subjects. Holmes swears by what he calls the "Footsteps principle," which entails going everywhere that "the subject had ever lived or worked, or travelled or dreamed." Brief portraits of underappreciated women of letters—Margaret Cavendish, Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Somerville—show Holmes's affinity for figures who, like him, are driven by empathy, enthusiasm, and wonder.



Sonora, by *Hannah Lillith Assadi* (*Soho*). In this cryptic début, two Arizona teen-agers are united by a shared sense of doom: one, the daughter of Israeli and Palestinian immigrants, has visions of the dead; the other is told by a psychic that she is a "witch," like her long-dead Native American mother. Believing themselves to be cursed, the girls flee to New York, where their lives unravel. Though the story struggles under the weight of its many symbols—ghostly coyotes, crucifix-like cacti, 9/11, alien spaceships, the Sea of Galilee—it powerfully evokes the sense of being an outsider. "I was at home in the places that could never be," one of the young women realizes. "The places found only in dreams."



Falling Ill, by *C. K. Williams* (*Farrar, Straus & Giroux*). This posthumous collection of poems, written as the author was dying, of multiple myeloma, is a gentle but unflinching confrontation with mortality. Beginning with the moment of diagnosis ("interesting no?"), and signing off with "I want to wish you goodbye but don't dare," Williams records the progress of his disease and his halting acceptance of the end of life. A steady lilt, alternately peaceful and hallucinatory, presides over the work, which is devoid of punctuation except for frequent question marks. Uniform in construction, with five three-line stanzas, the poems feel less like a series than like a single valedictory utterance.

others, including Pete and Dude, then began using Pauli while at Hunter and never referred to herself as Anna again.

Sometimes, Murray seemed to regard herself as a mixture of genders. "Maybe two got fused into one with parts of each sex," she mused at one point, "male head and brain (?), female-ish body, mixed emotional characteristics." More often, though, she identified as fundamentally male: "one of nature's experiments; a girl who should have been a boy." That description also helped her make sense of her desires, which she didn't like to characterize as lesbian. Instead, she regarded her "very natural falling in love with the female sex" as a manifestation of her inner maleness.

Rosenberg mostly takes Murray at her word, though she also adds a new one: transgender. Such retroactive labelling can be troubling, but the choice seems appropriate here, given how explicitly Murray identified as male, and how much her quest for medical intervention mirrors one variety of trans experience today. Still, Murray's disinclination to identify as a lesbian rested partly on a misprision of what lesbianism means. By way of explaining why she believed she was a heterosexual man, Murray noted that she didn't like to go to bars, wanted a monogamous relationship, and was attracted exclusively to "extremely feminine" women. All of that is less a convincing case for her convoluted heterosexuality than for her culture's harsh assessment of the possibilities of lesbianism.

According to Rosenberg, Murray had just two significant romantic relationships in her life, both with white women. The first, a brief one, was with a counsellor at a W.P.A. camp that Murray attended in 1934. The second, with a woman named Irene Barlow, whom she met at Paul, Weiss, lasted nearly a quarter of a century. Rosenberg describes Barlow as Murray's "life partner," although the pair never lived in the same house, only occasionally lived in the same city, and left behind no correspondence, since Murray, otherwise a pack rat, destroyed Barlow's letters. She says little about the relationship in her memoir, and only when Barlow is dying, of a brain tumor in 1973, does she even describe her as "my closest friend."

By leaving her gender identity and romantic history out of her autobiography,

Murray necessarily leaves out something else as well: the lifetime of emotional distress they caused. From the time she was nineteen, Murray suffered breakdowns almost annually, some of them culminating in hospitalizations, all of them triggered either by feeling as if she were a man or by having feelings for a woman. Aside from making her miserable, those breakdowns, like her race and her perceived gender, hindered her professional life. “This conflict rises up to knock me down at every apex I reach in my career,” she confessed to her diary. To a doctor, she wrote, “Anything you can do to help me will be gratefully appreciated, because my life is somewhat unbearable in its present phase.”

Such help was not forthcoming. Well into middle age, Murray tried without success to obtain hormone therapy—a treatment that scarcely existed before the mid-nineteen-sixties, and even then was seldom made available to women who identified as men. When she did manage to persuade medical professionals to take her seriously, the results were disappointing. In 1938, she prevailed on a doctor to test her endocrine levels, only to learn that her female-hormone results were regular, while her male ones were low, even for a woman. Later, while undergoing an appendectomy, she asked the surgeon to check her abdominal cavity and reproductive system for evidence of male genitalia. He did so and, to her dismay, reported afterward that she was “normal.”

WHEN MURRAY DIED, in 1985, she had nearly completed the autobiography that omits this entire history. That omission is not, of course, entirely surprising. Murray had lived long enough to know about the Stonewall riots and the election and assassination of Harvey Milk, but not long enough to see a black President embrace gay rights, the Supreme Court invoke the precedent of *Loving v. Virginia* to rule that lesbian and gay couples can marry, or her home state of North Carolina play a starring role in the turbulent rise of the transgender movement. Still, Murray’s silence about her gender and sexuality is striking, because she otherwise spent a lifetime insisting that her identity, like her nation, must be fully integrated. She hated, she wrote, “to be fragmented into

Negro at one time, woman at another, or worker at another.”

Yet every movement to which Murray ever belonged vivisected her in exactly those ways. On the weekend of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom—often regarded as the high-water mark of the civil-rights movement—the labor activist A. Philip Randolph gave a speech at the National Press Club, an all-male organization that, during events, confined women in attendance to the balcony. (Murray, who had never forgotten the segregated movie theatres of her childhood, was outraged.) Worse, no women were included in that weekend’s meeting between movement leaders and President Kennedy, and none were in the major speaking lineup for the march—not Fannie Lou Hamer, not Diane Nash, not Rosa Parks, not Ella Baker.

As the civil-rights movement was sidelining women, the women’s movement was sidelining minorities and poor people. After stepping away from now to serve on the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Murray returned and discovered that, in Rosenberg’s words, her “NAACP for women had become an NAACP for professional, white women.” As a black activist who increasingly believed true equality was contingent on economic justice, Murray was left both angry and saddened. She was also left—together with millions of people like her—with an obvious home in the social-justice movement.

It might have been this frustration that prompted Murray’s next move. Then, too, it might have been Irene Barlow’s death, her own advancing age, or the same restlessness that she had displayed since childhood. Or it might have been, as she later came to believe, something that had simmered in her for a lifetime. Whatever it was, it came as a shock to everyone when, having achieved the most stable and lucrative job of her life—a tenured professorship at Brandeis, in the American Studies department she herself helped pioneer—Murray resigned her post and entered New York’s General Theological Seminary to become an Episcopal priest.

In classic Murray fashion, the position she sought was officially unavailable to her: the Episcopal Church did not ordain women. For once, though, Murray’s

timing was perfect. While she was in divinity school, the Church’s General Convention voted to change that policy, effective January 1, 1977—three weeks after she would complete her course work. On January 8th, in a ceremony in the National Cathedral, Murray became the first African-American woman to be vested as an Episcopal priest. A month later, she administered her first Eucharist at the Chapel of the Cross—the little church in North Carolina where, more than a century earlier, a priest had baptized her grandmother Cornelia, then still a baby, and still a slave.

It was the last of Murray’s many firsts. She was by then nearing seventy, just a few years from the mandatory retirement age for Episcopal priests. Never having received a permanent call, she took a few part-time positions and did a smattering of supply preaching, for twenty-five dollars a sermon. She held four advanced degrees, had friends on the Supreme Court and in the White House, had spent six decades sharing her life and mind with some of the nation’s most powerful individuals and institutions. Yet she died as she lived, a stone’s throw from penury.

It is easy to wonder, in the context of the rest of Murray’s life, if she joined the priesthood chiefly because she was told she couldn’t. There was a very fine line in her between ambition and self-sabotage; highly motivated by barriers, she often struggled most after toppling them. It’s impossible to know what goals she might have formed for herself in the absence of so many impediments, or what else she might have achieved.

Murray herself felt she didn’t accomplish all that she might have in a more egalitarian society. “If anyone should ask a Negro woman in America what has been her greatest achievement,” she wrote in 1970, “her honest answer would be, ‘I survived!’” But, characteristically, she broke that low and tragic barrier, too, making her own life harder so that, eventually, other people’s lives would be easier. Perhaps, in the end, she was drawn to the Church simply because of the claim made in Galatians, the one denied by it and by every other community she ever found, the one she spent her whole life trying to affirm: that, for purposes of human worth, “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female.” ♦

SECOND IMPRESSIONS

Frédéric Bazille's brief career reconsidered.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL



Bazille's "Summer Scene (Bathers)" (1869-70) anticipates a series by Cézanne.

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE AND the Birth of Impressionism," at the National Gallery, in Washington, D.C., is a great show, which surprised me. Bazille was not—or was not yet—a great artist when he died, in 1870, at the age of twenty-eight, in the Franco-Prussian War. His some seventy-five works in the show, notably scenes of ordinary people in outdoor settings, tantalize like an orchestra tuning up for a concert that is abruptly cancelled. A yearningly ambitious provincial, from Languedoc, Bazille lucked into the big-bang commencement of Parisian modernism, signalled by the stunning novelty of Édouard Manet's "Déjeuner sur l'Herbe," in 1863. Bazille was friends with Monet and Renoir, sharing studios with them on the Left Bank and in Montmartre, and he knew everybody

else in art worth knowing. You can feel the verve of the happy few in a sprightly painting by Bazille, dated 1869-70, which shows him and five of his colleagues socializing in a daylight-suffused studio. One of them, Manet, painted in the tall figure of Bazille. (At six feet two, Bazille towered in his milieu—and likely in enemy gun sights, when, on his first day of combat, he charged, and was shot dead, in the colorful uniform of a Zouave.) But to call him one of the proto-Impressionists doesn't seem quite right. Rather, he reflected each of them, by turns, as his real but insecure talent veered back and forth, and this way and that, in their stronger gravitational fields.

What makes the show great is the point of view that it affords not only on the birth of Impressionism but also on

the general dawning of modernist sentiments and sensibilities. Bazille serves as our stand-in throughout a crisply dramatic installation, by the National Gallery curator Kimberly A. Jones, which incorporates apposite paintings by, among others, Corot, Courbet, Manet, Cézanne, Monet, Renoir, Sisley, Fantin-Latour, and Morisot. Bazille's parallels and responses to those artists amount to a critical index of a moment when the course of art was feverishly contested and its future was trackless. All were rebels against academic conventions and aristocratic propriety, amid cascading social changes. They addressed a rising bourgeoisie, and its bohemian fringes, as both subject matter and audience. Official and populist resistance and, often, poverty held the avant-garde together, in both common cause and intimate competition, working, most immediately, for recognition by one another. (Bazille occasionally had paintings accepted for the annual Salon exhibition, but he never managed to sell a work.) Bazille's emulation of his forerunners and his peers sharpens my appreciation of them, both for what he had absorbed and for how he fell short.

The difference is proof of genius in the case of Monet, who, from the start, was matchless in ways that our familiarity with his work makes it easy to take for granted. His radical registration of reality in terms of perceived light, rather than of described forms, is already apparent in a beach scene from 1864. Daubed single colors identify stones and waves, achieving an overall realism that completes itself in your act of looking. Bazille's near-copy of the work, made the following year, clings to tonal shadings of the same elements, objectifying them to tedious, static effect. Only intermittently was he able to surrender what he knew to what struck his eye—though he did so beautifully, in 1867, with unusually relaxed views of an old coastal fortress, in the South of France, awash in golden sunlight beneath piercing blue skies.

Late in the show, the very overthinking to which Bazille was prone points to possibilities for a distinctive style—more classically structured than outright Impressionist—and to a psychological charge that may have frightened him: homoeroticism. His last year provides

the grist for a novella that could write itself, given this potential explanation for why Bazille, verging on creative maturity, volunteered for war—causing his best friend, the musician and aesthete Edmond Maître, to tell him that he was “stark raving mad.” On the eve of battle, Bazille expressed confidence, to a fellow-soldier, that he would survive, because “I have too many things to do in life.” Did his plan include first proving himself acceptably masculine?

Bazille was born in Montpellier in 1841, into a tight-knit Protestant clan. His father was an agronomist and a vintner, and his mother came from a land-owning and merchant family. He moved to Paris in 1862. His father sternly expected him to become a doctor, and Bazille miserably maintained medical studies until, in 1864, he flunked his exams and dropped out, for which Claude Monet congratulated him. Bazille’s father, while resigned to his son’s choice of a career in art, kept him on a short financial leash. But that didn’t prevent Bazille’s artist friends from deeming him a rich kid. (If he had had free use of his fortune, he might have played a dual role, as artist and patron, like his younger contemporary Gustave Caillebotte.)

Monet, scraping by with a mistress who became his wife, and their child, repeatedly dunned him for support. That, added to Monet’s daunting abilities and his bossy personality, plainly stung Bazille, who could retaliate only passively-aggressively. The most delightful painting in the show is Bazille’s “The Improvised Field Hospital” (1865), of Monet recuperating in bed from a leg injury incurred that summer. Bazille, with his medical training, took charge of the situation. He propped up the reddened limb on folded blankets and hung a ceramic pot above it, perhaps to serve as a counterweight. Thus immobilized, Monet gazes out sullenly. Everything in the picture, from a bravura swirl of bedclothes to fast notations of arabesque-patterned wallpaper, bespeaks exultant self-satisfaction. For once, Bazille had his august frenemy right where he wanted him.

Bazille painted some female nudes—his pleas to his father for money regularly cited the expense of models—but tamely, even when they held sensual poses. When clothed, his women display facial

expressions in the dispassionate key that had been set for a generation of artists by Manet’s “Olympia,” but without any trace of his model Victorine Meurent’s smoldering challenge. Bazille’s shyness turns positively surreal in the large “The Family Gathering” (1867–68), which shows him and ten of his relatives posed on a terrace, with a rural landscape behind them. The subjects are all fancy clothes and studied attitude. None of them seem particularly alive, much less lively. I surmise that what it was like to be someone besides himself bewildered Bazille. Even being himself may have constituted a problem. No direct evidence of his love life exists, but in a letter home, in 1867, he alludes vaguely to a romantic disappointment that has turned him against the prospect of marriage. Add up the qualities of Bazille’s singularity—provincial, Protestant, only putatively wealthy, perhaps gay—and you have a lonely man, in whom it’s almost impossible not to take a tender rooting interest.

Bazille’s most fascinating painting is full of promise precisely in the awkwardness of its originality, no longer beholden to any specific influence: “Summer Scene (Bathers)” (1869–70), which he worked on during the next to the last of his annual summer sojourns at the family home. Eight young men gather in a bosky riverbank scene; six wear swimming trunks, one is half-dressed, another begins to undress. Two of the men in trunks wrestle, as another, lounging, looks on. The half-dressed man helps a swimmer out of the water, while another stays in. Bazille obviously found the negotiation of depth and frontality taxing, rendering three-dimensional forms in minimally shaded passages of bold color. (One detail of foreshortening, of the swimmer’s arms extended just below the surface of the water, fails spectacularly.) But there’s an intensity to the scene, which, besides anticipating the subject and the format of the great Bathers series that Cézanne began some years later, indicates a coming oneness of aesthetic vision and personal truth that was not to be. What would we make of some of Bazille’s now canonical friends had they, too, died young? You can wonder about that at this exhilarating show, while gauging the loss, to them and to us, of the ardent Bazille. ♦

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RITE OF SPRING

The Shift Festival, a convocation of orchestras in Washington, D.C.

BY ALEX ROSS



I LOOK FORWARD to an America which will not be afraid of grace and beauty": John F. Kennedy's words, carved in the white marble cliffs of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, in Washington, D.C., have always seemed more wistful than hopeful. These days, with brutality and ugliness in the ascendant, they have a critical edge. On a recent visit to Washington, I often had the sense that the graven voices of the memorials were speaking in admonishing tones. Jefferson: "Laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind." F.D.R.: "We must remember that any oppression, any injustice, any hatred, is a wedge designed to attack our civilization." Ken-

nedy, again: "This country cannot afford to be materially rich and spiritually poor."

I was in town for the first edition of the Shift Festival, a convocation of four American orchestras, which was presented by the Kennedy Center and Washington Performing Arts, with events unfolding at the center and at other venues around the city. No evident political agenda motivated the festival, and yet the proceedings couldn't help colliding with the crises of the day. Whenever the National Endowment for the Arts was mentioned at one of the Kennedy Center concerts—Shift was funded partly by the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities, which, in turn, relies on the N.E.A.—raucous cheers went up from

Some concerts were presented outdoors, among the cherry blossoms of the Tidal Basin.

the audience. In a speech introducing a performance by the Boulder Philharmonic, Jared Polis, a Democratic congressman from Colorado, brought up the Republican plan to eliminate the N.E.A., triggering loud boos.

Such hints of partisanship may have made some participants nervous—classical-music institutions tend to flee from politics, as from everything else current—but to my mind they only assisted in the festival's aim, which is to encourage fresh thinking in orchestral programming and presentation. Shift takes inspiration from a defunct Carnegie Hall event, Spring for Music, which, from 2011 to 2014, attracted two dozen orchestras and much offbeat fare to New York City. One trouble with Spring for Music was that the inventiveness of the programs often got swallowed up in Carnegie's Gilded Age grandeur. At the Kennedy Center, the emphasis on new and native music seemed more pointed, emphasizing connections between allegedly élite institutions and modern life. Thirteen of the fifteen works in the festival were by Americans, most still living. Delegations from the orchestras were able to visit elected officials and demonstrate their public-spiritedness.

I attended the first half of the six-day festival, catching a flurry of events involving the Boulder Philharmonic and the North Carolina Symphony. (The Atlanta Symphony and the Knights, the Brooklyn-based chamber orchestra, came later.) The Boulderites were particularly zealous in challenging traditional concert formats. On a brilliant spring morning, with the cherry blossoms in bloom, ensembles drawn from the orchestra's ranks—a string quartet, a piano-and-violin duo, a woodwind quintet, and a percussion trio—stationed themselves around the Tidal Basin, within earshot, variously, of F.D.R., Jefferson, and Martin Luther King, Jr. The results were captivating, despite gusts of wind that occasionally sent music stands tumbling. The woodwinds, whose penetrating tones gave them an acoustical advantage, waylaid tourists with the quintet version of Beethoven's Sextet Opus 71. Staffers were on hand to explain the festival to passersby—the sort of grassroots promotion that has become essential in the classical business.

The Boulder Philharmonic also offered musical nature hikes in Rock Creek Park.

Dave Sutherland, a music-loving employee of the Boulder Parks Department, has been leading such walks in recent years, illustrating elements of the orchestra's programs. (On the occasion of a Boulder performance of Einojuhani Rautavaara's "Cantus Arcticus," which features recordings of birdsong, he hosted a bird-watching expedition at a local marsh.) Birds were not yet out in force in Rock Creek Park, but Sutherland's ebullient lecture, assisted by an MP3 player and portable speakers, gave a sense of how the Boulder orchestra has adapted itself to its home city, which lives much of its life outdoors.

The main Boulder concert, under the direction of Michael Butterman, continued the open-air theme, featuring three recent scores—Stephen Lias's "All the Songs That Nature Sings," Jeff Midkiff's "From the Blue Ridge," and Steve Heitzeg's "Ghosts of the Grasslands"—alongside Copland's "Appalachian Spring." Of the new works, Midkiff's has the strongest impact. It is a concerto for mandolin and orchestra, lit up by improvisatory bursts of bluegrass and mountain fiddling. Midkiff, who was once in a bluegrass band, doubled as soloist, and his mellow virtuosity elicited youthful yelps from the upper galleries of the hall: Midkiff also teaches music at Patrick Henry High School, in Roanoke, Virginia, and the previous evening his students had given a committed performance on the Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage.

American orchestras are increasingly enamored of the idea that concerts must be dressed up with visual and theatrical elements—that audiences can no longer be trusted simply to sit and listen. Thus, Lias's lushly orchestrated, John Williams-tinged score was joined to a Rocky Mountains slide show, and "Appalachian Spring" accompanied a performance by the Frequent Flyers, an aerial dance troupe from Boulder. The sight of people twirling in midair far above the stage was, for me, more terrifying than entertaining, and Copland's spare, spacious masterpiece felt incidental to the spectacle. Still, the gusto of the Boulder campaign was hard to resist. Let's hope that a few of the politicians who will decide the fate of the N.E.A. were present.

The North Carolina Symphony, led by Grant Llewellyn, proffered a focussed tribute to its home state. Two works by

the late Robert Ward, a longtime resident, framed pieces by younger composers with Carolina connections: Mason Bates's "Rusty Air in Carolina," Sarah Kirkland Snider's "Hiraeth," and Caroline Shaw's violin concerto, "Lo." Shaw's score left the deepest impression. She won a Pulitzer Prize four years ago, for her capricious, beguiling "Partita for 8 Voices." "Lo," her first big orchestral statement, is even more substantial. Mercurial in structure, it includes semi-improvised sections for soloist and ensemble alike. (Shaw played the solo part herself, with rich tone and agile technique.) A passage in which the brass sustain glowing tones over a swarm of pizzicato felt like the sonic double of a sultry summer night.

ALTHOUGH WASHINGTON's largest musical organizations—the National Symphony and Washington National Opera—fall short of the international top tier, the city has long been a paradise for chamber music. I grew up there, and learned the chamber repertory in such intimate, welcoming venues as Dumbarton Oaks, the Library of Congress, and the Phillips Collection. A newer addition to the scene is the PostClassical Ensemble, which, since 2003, has been presenting thematic programs in halls around town. Before Shift began, I went to the Harman Center for the Arts to attend a PostClassical event entitled "Music Under Stalin: The Shostakovich-Weinberg Connection." The group's music director is Angel Gil-Ordóñez; its executive director is the scholar-impresario Joseph Horowitz, who, in the nineties, staged meaty festival weekends with the late, lamented Brooklyn Philharmonic.

PostClassical also experiments with alternative formats. "Music Under Stalin" included a "theatrical interlude" in which the actor Edward Gero delivered monologues that evoked scenes from Shostakovich's tormented life. I found these unconvincing: Gero failed to capture the composer's skittish manner, and the texts came from "Testimony," the memoir dubiously attributed to Shostakovich. Other Shostakovich items on the program were invigorating. Alexander Toradze cavorted thunderously through the First Piano Concerto, and Gil-Ordóñez led a vital rendition of the Eighth Quartet, in the string-orchestra arrangement by Rudolf Barshai.

Connoisseurs came mainly for music by Mieczysław Weinberg, the Polish Jewish composer who fled to the Soviet Union in 1939 and joined the circle around Shostakovich. When Weinberg died, in 1996, he received few obituaries in the West; in the past decade, though, his name has gained lustre, with his 1968 Holocaust opera, "The Passenger," being accorded productions around the world. Much of his large-scale symphonic writing dwells in Shostakovich's mournful-antic shadow, yet in chamber forms Weinberg assumes a distinctive profile, his melodic fluency underpinned by a flair for tension and surprise. His output has benefitted from the advocacy of the violinist Gidon Kremer, a determined foe of usual-suspects programming, whose two Weinberg recordings, on ECM, make for an excellent introduction.

Weinberg did not escape the terrors of the Stalin era, and was briefly imprisoned, in 1953. In the wake of the Khrushchev thaw, his writing became more adventurous. His Symphony No. 10, for string orchestra (1968), which capped PostClassical's program, encroaches on avant-garde territory: there are nebulous twelve-tone passages, scouring cluster chords, and anarchic jam sessions in which solo instruments play independently of one another. Off-kilter Baroque stylings recall Stravinsky and anticipate the meta-musical games of Alfred Schnittke. With this jaggedly original work, the follower becomes the leader: Shostakovich echoes several of Weinberg's effects in his Thirteenth Quartet and Fourteenth Symphony.

The spectre of contemporary politics hovered here as well. The question of how artists should respond to repression no longer seems as historical or as distant as it did even a few months ago: PostClassical recently held a discussion with the Russian-born pianist Vladimir Feltsman, entitled "Artist Dissidents and Culture in the Age of Trump." In a program note, Horowitz criticized J.F.K. for saying that the arts can thrive only in a free republic. Indeed, Shostakovich and Weinberg provide a monumental counterexample. It is, however, not difficult to imagine a nominally free but radically unequal society in which market forces drive the arts to the edge of extinction. The new potentates in Washington may feel that the dream is within reach. ♦

MEN ON MISSIONS

"The Lost City of Z" and "Aftermath."

BY ANTHONY LANE

UNTIL NOW, THE films of James Gray, who was born in Queens in 1969, have stayed close to home. His débüt feature, "Little Odessa" (1994), was set in Brighton Beach. "The Yards" (2000), which confounded everything you've heard about the curse of the sophomore work, was more adventurous, travelling as far as the Bronx, but the third film,

the English countryside. What's going on? If Gray continues like this, his next project will be shot in Alpha Centauri.

The hero is Percy Fawcett (Charlie Hunnam), a British soldier who journeyed up the Amazon at the start of the twentieth century and, like other questing souls before and since, became obsessed. He was convinced that

back, racing across the Irish countryside on the trail of a stag. Here, as in a later scene at the Battle of the Somme, Gray shows himself to be a master of the moral sketch: a burst of decisive visual gestures that give us the character of a person. We gather at once that Fawcett is bold, impatient, and chafed by recklessness. He lusts for glory, but only his own, and a mass of wounded feelings is encased in his tough hide. A dull run of military postings has left him with no medals. Worse still, he has been, as someone remarks, "rather unfortunate in his choice of ancestors." His father was a gambler and a drunk, and Percy must redeem the family name. Summoned to the Royal Geographical Society, and asked to survey an unmapped region of Bolivia, he says, "I was rather hoping for a position where I might see a fair bit of action."

He need have no worries on that score. It is not long before arrows are thrumming toward him from the banks of the Amazon, fired by the indigenous people into whose land he and his men have drifted. Still to come: white-water rapids, an inquisitive panther, and a surprisingly cheerful sojourn with practitioners of cannibalism. Does this fair bit of action, however, mean that "The Lost City of Z" counts as an action movie? It seems more like a study in restlessness. Fawcett went to the Amazon eight times. For the purposes of the film, these have been compacted to three, and what excites Gray's imagination is the clash—or, stranger still, the momentary merger—between distant cultures. Whichever continent we are in, we sense the gravitational pull of another. When Fawcett returns after one expedition, the front of his English house is wreathed in creepers, as if the tendrils of vines had spread across the sea. He stands in the shadows of his hallway, and something gleams behind him—the leaflike blade of a spear.

That image is purest Gray, and it heeds a guiding principle of his work: the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it, though not for want of trying. Hence the start of the new film, when a black screen is relieved by a patch of flickering flame. Hence, too, a board meeting of the Royal Geographical Society: prosaic stuff, except that these crusty Edwardian gentlemen, couched in Gray's menacing murk, remind you of the mobsters and



Charlie Hunnam plays the British explorer Percy Fawcett in James Gray's film.

"We Own the Night" (2007), kicked off in Brooklyn, once again, and could hardly tear itself away. Nor could the agonized "Two Lovers" (2008). It was not until "The Immigrant" (2013) that Gray spread his wings and took flight. He made it all the way to the Lower East Side.

By any standard, therefore, his latest movie, "The Lost City of Z," comes as a shock. Admirers of Gray (a select but ardent bunch), upon learning that he was busy filming in the jungle, will have said to themselves, "Hmm, the Bronx Zoo. Interesting choice." Little did they know. The jungle in question is the real deal: steamy, infested, and perilously short of good delis. Much of the story unfolds in the depths of Amazonia; other locations include Ireland, London, and

the remains of a forgotten civilization lay concealed in the rain forest, and it is generally assumed that he lost his life in pursuit of that belief; he and his eldest son, Jack (Tom Holland), were last seen venturing into the jungle in 1925. Fawcett's exploits were described by David Grann in this magazine in 2005 and subsequently in his book "The Lost City of Z" (2009). Gray has borrowed the title, and he dramatizes many of the episodes to which Grann and other writers have referred. Yet the movie that results should not be combed for historical truth. It is best approached, I would say, as a fantasia on Fawcettian themes.

We first encounter Fawcett, suitably enough, on another hunt—on horse-

the City Hall scumbags who populate “The Yards.” Everywhere you look is jungle, and it’s both fitting and pitiful that what Fawcett picks up near the Amazon, and brandishes back in London as evidence of his theories, is not the bright gold of Eldorado but a handful of broken pots, the color of old earth.

Z, for him as for other explorers, is what you dream it to be, and Fawcett, in turn, is open to transformation. Well before his vanishing, legend coiled around him; his reports and speculations may have prompted his friend Sir Arthur Conan Doyle to write “The Lost World” (1912), the precursor of “Jurassic Park.” You could equally frame Fawcett as desperate, deluded, and ill-prepared. Some of that bitter comedy clings to the hero of Evelyn Waugh’s “A Handful of Dust” (1934), who heads haplessly into the rain forest and never comes back. Humor, though, is not Gray’s forte, and his Fawcett is a sturdy and somewhat monotonous creature, who, for all the strivings of Charlie Hunnam, does not consume us. “We shall not fail,” he declares, pompously and—as it turns out—inaccurately. “Mankind awaits our discoveries.”

The irony is that the right person for the role is, for much of the movie, standing beside him. Robert Pattinson, looking a bit like Edward Lear, with little spectacles and an uncharted wilderness of beard, plays Henry Costin, who accompanies Fawcett on his initial trip, in 1906, and stays with him through the First World War. (In fact, the two men did not meet until 1910, nor did they fight together at the front. The Costin in the film is a composite.) Pattinson cuts an unlikely figure, yet you follow his every move, and, from the instant at

which he laughs at a snake on the forest floor, you wonder what compels him. Unlike Hunnam, he hints at mysteries held in reserve, as does Sienna Miller, who plays Fawcett’s wife, Nina—calmer and cleverer than him, and eager to escort him on his journeys, but kept at home by the dictates of an age more nervous of women’s equality than of Amazonian tribes. In a gorgeous sequence that concludes the film, she descends a staircase toward a large mirror, in which is reflected the rich and writhing green of the jungle. Her mind is elsewhere, still in search of her husband.

Gray is hampered, to an extent, by treading in the tracks of Werner Herzog, who went to South America with Klaus Kinski, his leading man (or, as Herzog calls him, “my best fiend”), and returned with the extraordinary “Aguirre, Wrath of God” (1972) and “Fitzcarraldo” (1982). The raft on which Fawcett, Costin, and their comrades glide along the river, with piranhas lurking below and hoping for human flesh, is a mere vessel, whereas the raft on which Kinski lurches at the end of “Aguirre,” ranting to himself of unceasing conquest, with a dead daughter and a seething mob of monkeys, feels like the end of everything. “The Lost City of Z” is beautiful, mournful, and measured. But the tale that it tells cries out for madness.

HOW GOOD AN actor is Arnold Schwarzenegger? All power to the magnitude of his stardom, the monumental heft of his presence onscreen, and the assurance with which he staked out his limits and labored so mightily within them. But what happens when

he dares to step outside them? There were hints of that experiment as far back as “True Lies” (1994), and they resurfaced in “Maggie” (2015), in which he was seen to weep. Gone is the time when the tears of a Terminator, like an alien’s blood, might have burned through metal floors.

In Elliott Lester’s “Aftermath,” Schwarzenegger plays Roman Melnyk, who lives in Columbus, Ohio, and works in construction. One evening, he goes to the airport to greet his wife and their pregnant daughter. But the plane is involved in a midair collision; all two hundred and seventy-one people on board the aircraft are killed. Lester winds back and retells the story of that night from the viewpoint of Jacob (Scoot McNairy), the air-traffic controller whose error, compounded by a phone glitch, caused the crash.

The first third of “Aftermath” is stripped to emotional basics (one man seized up with grief, another with guilt), and it delivers quite a jolt. Sadly, as the characters converge, the rest of the movie loses force; it slackens and then rushes, and the time frames feel out of joint. Still, you are left with the fascinating spectacle of a revenge drama in which Schwarzenegger is slow to wrath, and with the lingering ghosts of blockbusters past. As he lumbers toward a slimy lawyer, who is offering a compensation deal, everything in you wants to shout, “Go on, Arnie! Toss him through a wall!” Whereupon Roman whips out not a shotgun but a photograph of his loved ones. All he really wants is an apology. ♦

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Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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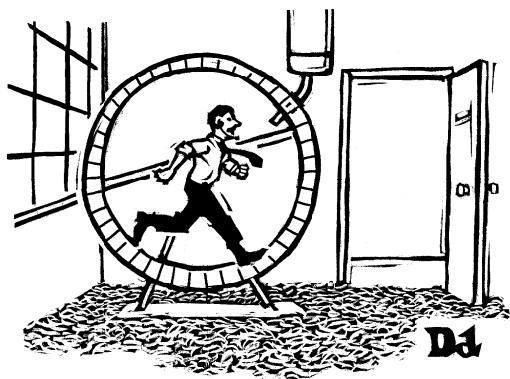
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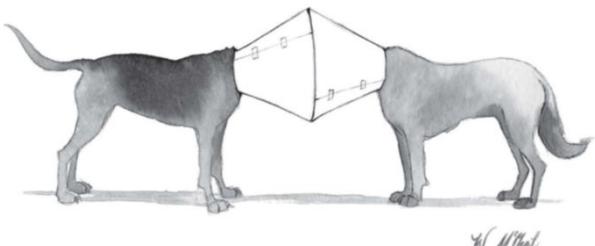


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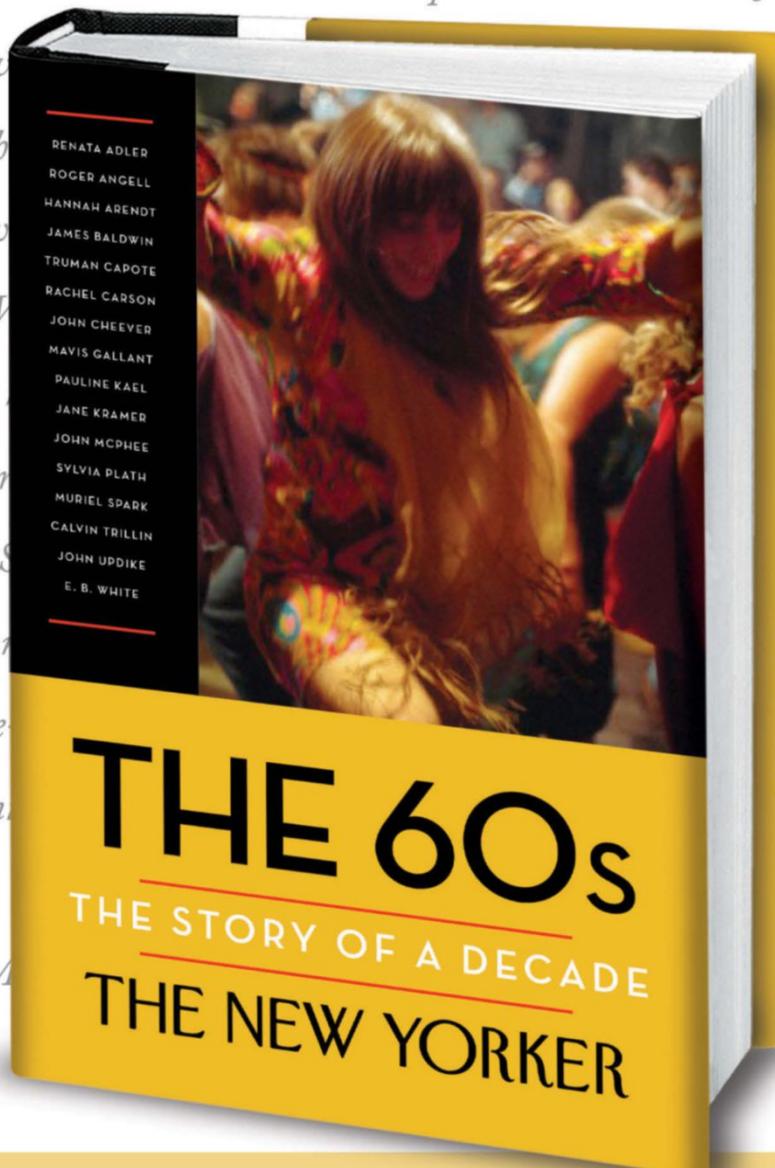
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