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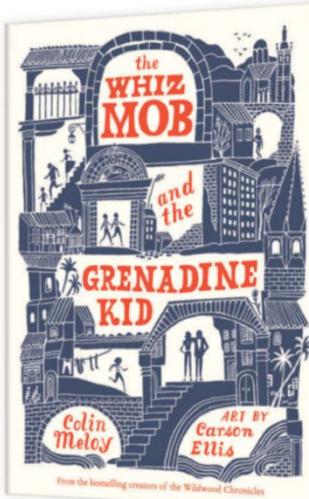


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### PHOTO BOOTH

Hilton Als on Richard Avedon and James Baldwin's joint exploration of American identity.



### PODCAST

John Cassidy discusses Robert Mueller's indictments and the Republican tax plan.

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# THE MAIL

## WHEN THE ROBOTS TAKE OVER

Having worked as a manufacturing engineer for forty-five years, and having installed fifteen robotic manufacturing systems, I was impressed by Sheelagh Kolhatkar's comprehensive piece on how robotics and artificial intelligence are replacing human workers ("Dark Factory," October 23rd). The world of manufacturing is undergoing rapid changes, and the number of highly skilled people who are needed to design, program, test, install, and service the robots and the manufacturing systems does not come close to the number of people who have lost their jobs to these technologies. We should all be concerned about where humans will fit in in the future, not only in the manufacturing sector but also in aviation, finance, medicine, transportation, and construction. Sometime in the next twenty-five to two hundred years, A.I. will be capable of writing its own code, and will do it much faster and better than humans. We need to think very seriously about that, and take steps to avoid the scenario depicted on R. Kikuo Johnson's cover of the magazine.

*Robert B. Price  
Delanson, N.Y.*

While it is true that the world has endured several technological revolutions reasonably well, it seems naïve to suppose that past performance is an indicator of future success. Kolhatkar lays out the frightening prospect of a world free of inefficiency and want, economically sustained by progressive taxation of the wealthy but bereft of satisfying employment for low-skilled workers. We are now perhaps within reach of the scenario that Kurt Vonnegut prophesied in "Player Piano" (1952), in which people lack not for resources but for the self-respect that a profession provides. Yes, we are trying to "eliminate waste." That "waste" just happens to be the blue-collar worker.

*Philip Bunn  
Madison, Wis.*

Kolhatkar's article mentions the steady decrease in job opportunities for people without a college degree. This points to a greater problem: the ever-growing achievement gap in high schools. Here in Atlanta, as in many other metro areas, standardized-test results reveal that students at magnet tech schools in the suburbs have been outperforming their urban counterparts for years. The latter group will not be able to participate as fully in the workforce in the future, and that will seriously limit the nation's economic growth. If more factories are employing fewer workers, and only workers who are highly skilled, then the companies that own those factories have a social responsibility to acknowledge this changing environment, and to prepare our students for it. Perhaps we should explore an incentive-based system of reducing tax rates for corporations that assist in training our future workforce.

*Darwin L. Brown  
Atlanta, Ga.*

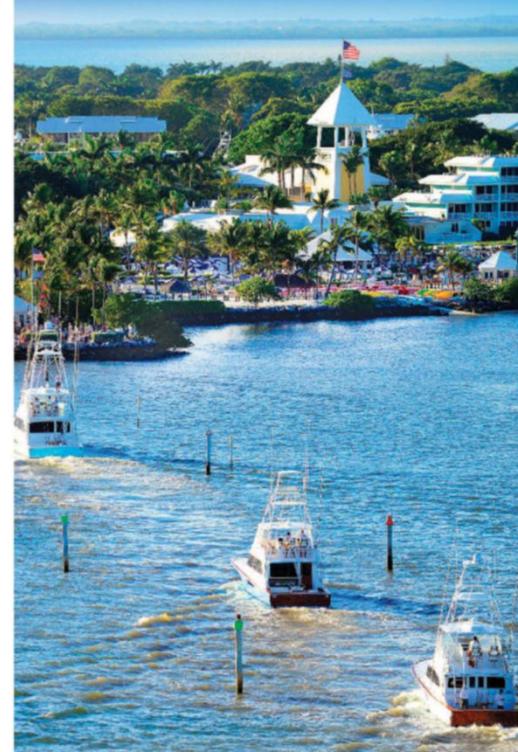
In my career as a foreign-service officer, I spent a significant amount of time in places that had tried using one or another variant of a universal basic income to fix problems stemming from economic inequality. In my experience, they all ended badly for citizens in every income bracket. If we overtax high earners, at some point they will respond by producing less or investing less (or both). The result is a downward spiral in economic activity and a reduced capacity to afford social-equity programs. It's true that A.I. and robotics will create real issues that will need to be resolved, but the solutions lie in reducing the population and in making people less consumption-oriented and better educated. Relying on redistribution alone is too simplistic, and is doomed to failure.

*Rene R. Daugherty  
Aztec, N.M.*

•

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# GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



A Caribbean island ravaged by storms: it's a sadly familiar image from the news, but one that sets the stage for romantic fable in the 1990 musical "**Once on This Island**," adapted from Rosa Guy's novel "My Love, My Love" and featuring a calypso score by Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty. A Broadway revival begins previews on Nov. 9, at the Circle in the Square, starring the eighteen-year-old newcomer Hailey Kilgore (above), as a peasant girl who braves the gods and the elements on her quest for love.

PHOTOGRAPH BY PARI DUKOVIC

# ART



The exhibition "Michelangelo: Divine Draftsman & Designer" opens at the Met on Nov. 13.

## Winter Preview

Michelangelo Buonarroti was a painter, a sculptor, a poet, and an architect of almost supernatural gifts—not for nothing did his Renaissance peers call him *il divino*. A hundred and twenty-eight of the Master's drawings are on view at the Met in "**Michelangelo: Divine Draftsman & Designer**," with one gallery devoted entirely to studies for the Sistine Chapel. They're accompanied by three marble statues, a wooden model for a chapel vault, and works by other artists. (Opens Nov. 13.)

There's more to Edvard Munch than "The Scream"—his soul-searching paintings had a profound effect on art of the twentieth century. The Met Breuer begins at the end of his story, opening its six-decade survey with the Norwegian painter's last masterpiece, "**Between the Clock and the Bed**"; this self-portrait from 1940–43 also titles the show. (Jasper Johns made close study of the crosshatch design on its bedspread.) "Scream" obsessives won't be disappointed: the earliest version of the indelible icon, "Sick Mood at Sunset, Despair," from 1892, is also on view. (Opens Nov. 15.)

Born in 1947, the American photographer **Stephen Shore** was developing film for his parents when he was in first grade; by the time he was fourteen, Edward Steichen had bought several of his pictures for MOMA. In lieu of

high school, in the mid-sixties he took pictures at Warhol's Factory. In the subsequent decades, Shore took his camera out on the road, to sites ranging from Texas, Montana, and Mexico to Galilee and Ukraine. (This being 2017, he has spent the past few years posting on Instagram.) MOMA mounts his largest show in New York in a decade. (Opens Nov. 19.)

"**Peter Hujar: Speed of Life**," at the Morgan Library & Museum, is the first comprehensive look at another American photographer, who has been overlooked for too long. Hujar, a key figure of the East Village scene, who died, in 1987, of AIDS-related causes, was drawn to themes of *momento mori*. As Susan Sontag wrote in 1976, even the subjects of his searing black-and-white portraits—artists, writers, performers—"appear to meditate on their own mortality." (Opens Jan. 26.)

In 2012, the Guggenheim awarded **Danh Vo** the Hugo Boss Prize; with the exhibition "Take Your Breath Away," it takes a deep dive into the work of the quicksilver conceptualist. Vo was born in Vietnam in 1975; his family fled the country by boat when he was four and relocated to Copenhagen, after being rescued at sea by a Danish freighter. (The artist now lives in Mexico City.) Such displacements inform his intelligent and empathetic, if elliptical, installations. (Opens Feb. 9.)

—Andrea K. Scott

## MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

### Museum of Modern Art

"Max Ernst: Beyond Painting"

The founder of Cologne's branch of Dada and an early Surrealist, Ernst started using the phrase "beyond painting" in the early nineteen-twenties. Sometimes he applied it to technical innovations, as in his arresting 1928 piece "The Sea," in which a photographic-looking black-and-white moon rises over a colorful ocean of painted stripes and lines incised in plaster. But more often he was referring to collage: pieces made from found type, cut-up and reconfigured prints, painted-over medical charts, and scraps of wallpaper. Even if they don't always succeed, Ernst's incongruous juxtapositions do reliably awaken a free-floating strangeness that lingers in the mind. In "The Hat Makes the Man," from 1920, Ernst covered a found millinery advertisement with gouache, pencil, oil, ink, and additional elements, joining the shadowy black hats into translucent yellow and green towers. In an illustration from "Répétitions," a 1922 collaboration with the poet Paul Éluard, a headless woman in a leopard-print boat holds a giant sparrow under her arm. The standout in this overstuffed show is the 1926 portfolio "Natural History," in which Ernst collocated leaves and pieces of bark to make such monsters as a tabletop rhinoceros ("The Repast of Death") and a zeppelin with a giant mechanical eyeball ("The Fugitive"). Through Jan. 1.

## GALLERIES—UPTOWN

### Alessandro Pessoli

After his recent move from Italy to Los Angeles, the artist found himself creatively blocked. So he put aside painting and made wooden bows and arrows instead, an elegant, neon-embellished installation of which opens the show. Once he picked up his brush again, Pessoli produced a winning parcel of mixed-media works that caricature his self-doubt. In one painting, a yellow condom nose is beset with flies; in another, his naked backside is on the receiving end of a disembodied blue boot; in a third, his right eye is composed of red letters that read "Fuck you, Alessandro." Through Nov. 11. (Kern, 16 E. 55th St. 212-367-9663.)

## GALLERIES—CHELSEA

### Cecily Brown

The painter's most impressive show ever confirms her as a late-entry Abstract Expressionist—not nostalgically but competitively. She long ago mastered the melted Cubism of de Kooning-esque brushwork—making space with every bending stroke—but in pictures that don't always add up to something unique. That's not a problem in three immense painterly cadenzas, one of them thirty-three feet long, which excite the eye and engulf the body with unflagging intensity. The effect recalls pre-drip Jackson Pollock: a will to sublimity no more cautious than a cavalry charge, trampling detachment. Bits of figuration come and go, like drowning sailors of the smashed Pequod. As you look, you know just how they feel. Through Dec. 2. (Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105.)

### Thomas Hirschhorn

The Swiss artist mounts another manifestation of his politically inflamed, scrappy grandeur. Collages covered with plastic sheeting, in sizes ranging from small to wall-filling, integrate grids of vastly enlarged, colored pixels with photographs of victims

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**SAP**

Run Simple

of terrorism, often seen beheaded or blown to bloody pieces. Call the effect abstracted atrocity—or, maybe, atrocious abstraction. An accompanying text by Hirschhorn is as befuddlingly arcane as his borrowed imagery is horrific. He means to “de-pixelate” the world, he says. Given the world’s current state, anything may be worth a try. *Through Dec. 22.* (Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300.)

#### Jacqueline Humphries

“A painting is better when there’s something wrong with it,” Humphries has said. The lucky faults in this show of large, squarish, stately canvases pertain to the mutually abrasive effects of lyrical brushwork and the stenciled, rat-a-tat lines of letters, numbers, and punctuation marks; happy- or sad-face emojis intrude on occasion, like tiny panic attacks. Humphries’s dissonances complicate but don’t overrule the sensuous glories of her color and texture. The works are like pleasurable invitations to think. *Through Dec. 16.* (Greene Nafatali, 508 W. 26th St. 212-463-7770.)

#### “L.A. Invitational”

An armada of West Coast art stars, both old and new, visits New York in the marketing equivalent of gunboat diplomacy. Battleships: installations by Mike Kelley and Chris Burden. Cruisers: huge sculptures by Nancy Rubin, Thomas Houseago, and Robert Therrien. Destroyers: big paintings by Ed Ruscha, Mark Grotjahn, Sterling Ruby, and others. Small craft: whimsical whatnots by Frank Gehry and Piero Golia. What’s Californian? Nonchalant confidence, as an evident rule. Not much else unites these fourteen artists. But each performs at the museum-ready top of his or her game. *Through Dec. 16.* (Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111.)

### GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

#### Judith Bernstein

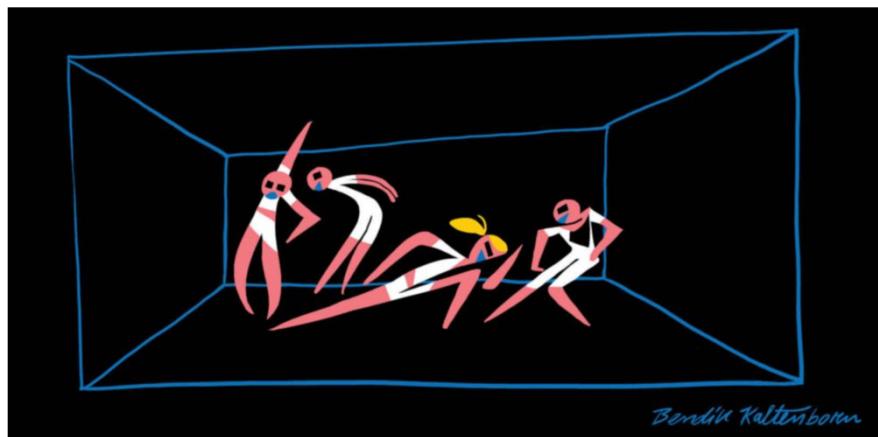
The intrepid American artist, who has lived and worked in Chinatown for fifty years (most of them in obscurity), fills the main gallery here with “Cabinet of Horrors,” a screed against Donald Trump in the form of big acrylic paintings on paper, installed on screaming orange walls. Subtle it’s not—in the five-foot-tall “Capital Trumpenschlong,” a flag flies atop the U.S. Capitol Building from a cock-and-balls pole—but Bernstein has been protesting abuses of power with such visions of manhood since 1966, when George Wallace was the governor of Alabama. It’s been gratifying to see the world finally catch up to her. Read the artist Mickalene Thomas’s freewheeling interview with Bernstein in the accompanying catalogue and discover why she is idolized by younger feminists. *Through Feb. 4.* (The Drawing Center, 35 Wooster St. 212-219-2166.)

### GALLERIES—BROOKLYN

#### Kyle Vu-Dunn

The young artist’s reliefs, carved into layers of plaster and foam and painted violet, orange, and blue, often begin with sketches or photographs of himself and his husband. But they leapfrog the specific to limn a languid ideal of homoeroticism, indulging in painterly tricks of refraction and reflection. In “Three Cigarettes in an Ashtray,” a nude man examines himself in a full-length mirror; he is joined by an onlooker at the edge of the picture, who’s sliced through by a pane of icy blue. In “Narcissy,” a figure slides out of bed to gaze upon his own face, mirrored in an oily pool on the floor. *Through Nov. 12.* (Sardine, 286 Stanhope St. 914-805-1974.)

## DANCE



BENDIK KALTENBORN

*Silas Riener, Rashaun Mitchell, and Charles Atlas explore spatial dimensions in “Tesseract.”*

### Winter Preview

We may think of the compulsion to document even the most mundane occurrences on social media as a twenty-first-century affliction, but it has a precedent: the abundant journal-writing of the seventeenth century. The British naval administrator and parliamentarian Samuel Pepys, for example, went on at great length in his journals about everything, from his bladder stones and his sexual escapades to what he had for lunch. From those diaries springs **Big Dance Theatre's** latest show, “17c” (at BAM Harvey, Nov. 14-18), an exploration of the art of self-revelation, then and now. In their characteristically smart, postmodern way, the piece’s directors, Paul Lazar and Annie-B Parson (who also choreographs), create a parable of what they call “the obsessively annotated life,” mixing dance and music, text and song.

When Merce Cunningham died, in 2009, his collaborators spun off in all directions, like planets in a solar system that has lost its sun. Two of his dancers, **Rashaun Mitchell** and **Silas Riener**, began making work together, in a style that blends their choreographic identities. They have joined forces with the filmmaker **Charles Atlas**, who worked with Cunningham on a series of pioneering dance films, to create “Tesseract” (at BAM Harvey, Dec. 13-16), which probes the intersection of 3-D film, live dance, and live-

video capture. One suspects that Cunningham would have approved.

For a really good night at the ballet, you can’t go wrong with **New York City Ballet's** “Stravinsky & Balanchine” program (Feb. 24, Feb. 27, March 1, and March 3-4). Balanchine’s ballets set to the music of Stravinsky represent an ideal symbiosis of the visual and the aural. And the company is dancing especially well these days—during its winter season (at the David H. Koch Theatre, Jan. 23-March 4), keep an eye out for Tiler Peck, Sterling Hyltin, and Unity Phelan. It’s also a chance to catch the rarely performed “Divertimento from ‘Le Baiser de la Fée.’”

Cuba is known for ballet, for good reason. The national company was founded long before the revolution, by the Cuban-born star Alicia Alonso, and remains a prized institution, as beloved as baseball. Modern dance has had a harder time putting down roots there, but lately that has started to change. **Malpaso Dance Company**, founded in 2012, is part of this new flowering. The independently run company, stocked with vibrant, beautifully trained dancers, tours abroad extensively and, thanks in part to the Joyce Theatre Foundation, regularly commissions work from outside choreographers. The company’s run at the Joyce (Jan. 17-21) will include pieces by its resident choreographer Osnel Delgado, plus a new dance by the Canadian Aszure Barton.

—Marina Harss



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**Garth Fagan Dance**

Now in his late seventies, Fagan has recently been sharing choreographic responsibilities with his longtime star dancer, the coolly graceful Norwood Pennewell. The works of the disciple are faithful to the master's style but show signs of fresh life and musical responsiveness. Of the four premières here, half are by Fagan ("In Conflict" and "Estrogen/Genius"), half by Pennewell ("A Moderate Cease" and "Wecoo Duende"). The company remains distinguished by veteran dancers such as Natalie Rogers—sexy, funny, and incredibly strong in her mid-fifties. (*Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Nov. 7-12.*)

**David Dorfman Dance**

Visceral and hard-edged, Dorfman's choreography is infused with the messiness and kinetic energy of daily life. His newest work, "Aroundtown," explores love and connection in a time of anxiety and confusion. It includes a cameo appearance by the sixty-two-year-old Dorfman and his wife, the dancer and choreographer Lisa Race. (*BAM Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Nov. 8-11.*)

**ZviDance / "Like"**

"Like" is the third part of a trilogy by Zvi Gotheiner that focusses on technology and its discontents. The audience members are encouraged to "like" or disapprove of what they are seeing onstage, using their cell phones to cast their votes; the "likes" are tallied and projected, and the dancers are deemed winners or losers. It's art as social experiment. (*New York Live Arts, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Nov. 8-11.*)

**Hofesh Shechter Company**

A star of the British dance scene who was born and raised in Israel, Shechter combines an intermittently engaging physicality—low-slung, hunched, rawboned—with vapid rock-concert spectacle and arrested-development rage at a disillusioning world. In his latest baggy apocalypse, "The Grand Finale," chamber musicians play Tchaikovsky and waltzes from "The Merry Widow" as bodies thrash and silently scream amid the sliding of monolithic panels. (*BAM Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Nov. 9-11.*)

**Yvonne Meier**

The Swiss-born wild woman offers a free program, presented by Danspace Project and Invisible Dog Art Center, of her absurdist structured improvisations. In "Durch Nacht und Nabel" ("Through Night and Fog"), she switches between near-nudity and an array of extravagant costumes that includes an orange bodysuit festooned with tiny plastic babies. In her new "Durch Dick und Duenn" ("Through Thick and Thin"), she and the performers Lorene Bouboushian and Lisa Kusanagi race through a kind of theatrical obstacle course, with fast-flying balls, an animated movie, and other booby traps of eccentricity. (*Invisible Dog Art Center, 51 Bergen St., Brooklyn. 347-560-3641. Nov. 9-12.*)

**Step Afrika!**

The members of this terrific troupe, based in Washington, D.C., are masters of stepping, the African-American tradition of body and foot percussion. In "Migration," they draw upon "The Migration Series," Jacob Lawrence's set of paintings about the mass movement of African-Americans from the South to the North in the twentieth century. Lawrence's images are projected on screens, as dancers and musicians bring them to life in a geographical and historical journey of a revue. (*New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. Nov. 10-12. Through Nov. 26.*)



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# NIGHT LIFE



Morrissey and Shakira both stage their newest records at Madison Square Garden this winter.

## Winter Preview

"I recommend that you stop watching the news," **Morrissey** sings on his recent single "Spent the Day in Bed," "because the news contrives to frighten you." The line issues a mission statement that sets a deep-blue tone for Morrissey's upcoming record, "Low in High School"; its cover features a scrawny teen holding a sign that reads "Axe the Monarchy." Call him morbid, call him pale, but the former Smiths singer long ago mastered his sombre persona; his current tour kicked off on Halloween night in Portland, and hits Madison Square Garden on Dec. 2.

A few weeks later, on Jan. 17, the Garden snaps back into bright spirits to host **Shakira's** El Dorado World Tour, the singer's first in six years. During the lead-up, she has shared clips of herself rehearsing hypnotizing waist rolls to "La Bicicleta," her 2016 collaboration with Carlos Vives, sung in Spanish and boasting stream tallies in the billions. It's a fun time to revisit the Colombian singer's biggest crossover records, which helped solidify contemporary Latin pop: Wyclef Jean's early-aughts guitar riffs are back en vogue thanks to Rihanna's reworking of his Carlos Santana collaboration, "Maria Maria," and Beyoncé hopped on a reggaeton loop this fall. Hips don't lie, nor do hits.

Between 2001 and 2012, Maxwell's, the legendary Hoboken haunt, was

home to **Yo La Tengo's** annual Hanukkah concert series; each holiday season, fans looked forward to eight crazy nights of intimate shows, surprise appearances from titans of the art-rock tradition, and even comedy sketches from the likes of Wyatt Cenac and Amy Poehler. During a recent SummerStage appearance, the band's front man, Ira Kaplan, invited his mother, Marilyn, onstage for a run-through of "My Little Corner of the World," and announced that the Hanukkah shows were resuming, this time at Bowery Ballroom, Dec. 12-19. For another revived residency, don't miss **LCD Soundsystem's** ten-night return to Brooklyn Steel (Dec. 11-15, Dec. 17-19, and Dec. 22-23), their third stand at the formidable new hall.

The latest earworm sneaking up from the R. & B. charts is "Crew," released early this year by the D.C. rapper Goldlink, and carried largely by a flawless chorus from **Brent Faiyaz**. Fans of turn-of-the-century outfits like 112 and Jagged Edge can hear Faiyaz's fluency with boy-group harmonies, but his breakout album, "Sonder Son," which arrived in October, suggests that the singer has broader ambitions—it's a self-aware pop-soul record that's concerned less with parties than with parents and politics. The Los Angeles-via-Baltimore singer takes the stage at Rough Trade on Feb. 4, with an eye toward bigger venues.

—Matthew Trammell

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

### Juan Atkins

Many young laptop musicians would find it difficult to imagine producing tracks without access to a computer screen, or to software that corrects and simplifies the process—which makes the precision and emotion found on the pre-PC tracks of Juan Atkins, known as the godfather of techno, and his Detroit ilk all the more impressive. "Clear," which Atkins released with Richard Davis, as Cybotron, in 1982, is yanked forward by an uphill arpeggio, which has been sampled on dozens of records in the decades since—a literal sound of the future. His Korg keyboard experiments were soon dubbed "techno," and, even then, Atkins stressed that his output was a progression not of music but of technology: "Stretching it, rather than simply using it." (*Elsewhere*, 599 Johnson Ave., Brooklyn. elsewherebrooklyn.com. Nov. 10.)

### Bully

On "Trying," the single from this Nashville band's début album, "Feels Like," Alicia Bognanno recalls Rivers Cuomo's droll lyricism in his work with Weezer and pulls off a damn good scream, digging at useless college degrees and imminent menstruation with the charisma of a star. She interned at the Chicago recording studio of the grunge legend Steve Albini, the engineer behind formative early-nineties albums including Nirvana's "In Utero," and her education in straight-to-tape recording shines through the album's fuzz. The band's latest effort, "Losing," was released in October; it's murkier and more indulgent, and stands to play well across this headlining tour. Bully is supported by the local punks **Aye Nako**. (*Music Hall of Williamsburg*, 66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. 718-486-5400. Nov. 13.)

### Kelela

Since 2012, the Los Angeles-based visionary Kelela has been tinkering with emotive, groovy gems. She has contributed her chameleonic vocal talents to works by Solange, Danny Brown, and Clams Casino, but her début album, "Take Me Apart," released last month, is as disarmingly personal as its title suggests. There's "Better," a crushing song about a couple realizing that friendship may be the simpler option, and the sultry jam "LMK," in which the singer pleads for clarity: "It ain't that deep, either way / No one's tryna settle down / All you gotta do is let me know." Kelela performs from the new record for two nights. (*Bowery Ballroom*, 6 Delancey St. 212-260-4700. Nov. 12-13.)

### Pere Ubu

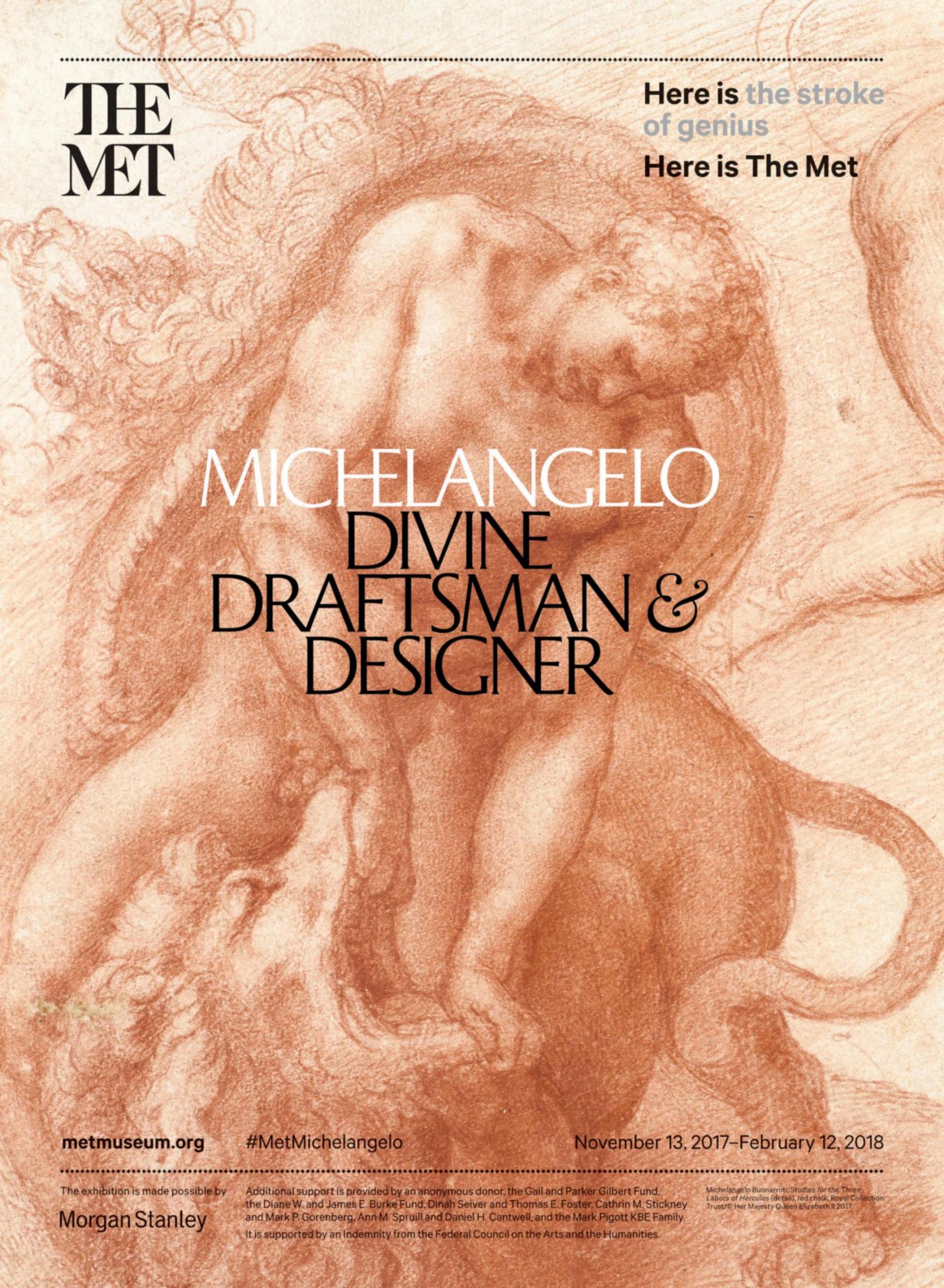
This venerable art-rock group formed in Cleveland in 1975 and within months released a pair of terrifying, intense songs—"30 Seconds Over Tokyo" and "Heart of Darkness"—with no clear antecedents. In 1978, two landmark full-length albums emerged, "The Modern Dance" and "Dub Housing," which continued the band's aural trench war on rock convention by incorporating elements of *musique concrète*, harsh industrial sounds, and unusual, ever-shifting grooves. Despite endless lineup changes (the only constant member is the group's singer-provocateur, David Thomas), Pere Ubu has never stopped performing and recording compelling new music. (*Music Hall of Williamsburg*, 66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. 718-486-5400. Nov. 12.)

### Slowdive

Contrary to its name, this Reading quintet rose quickly in the late-eighties British rock scene. The

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Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Studies for the Three Labors of Hercules* (detail), red chalk. Royal Collection Trust © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2017

group pioneered the thunderous, atmospheric instrumentals and non-effusive vocals of the genre that came to be known as shoegaze, because during shows guitarists often looked down toward the complex pedal boards at their feet. But Slowdive was also fast to fall: the music press gleefully panned the band's full-length records in the early nineties, and the group broke up shortly after the release of its 1995 album, "Pygmalion." In the twenty years since, however, a slew of contemporary groups have name-checked Slowdive, with its progressive approach to layering guitars, as a critical influence. At these reunion performances, Slowdive will stage cuts from its new self-titled album. The band is joined by the garage-rock project **Cherry Glazerr**. (*Terminal 5, 610 W. 56th St. 212-582-6600. Nov. 12.*)

## JAZZ AND STANDARDS

### Ravi Coltrane

Three decades into his career, the saxophonist Coltrane has beat a path that significantly diverges from those of his parents, John and Alice, but when the younger Coltrane digs into the marrow of a ballad you might just believe that there's something to this musical-DNA stuff. His stirring work on both tenor and soprano was heard in force on the lauded 2016 collaboration "In Movement," with Jack DeJohnette and Matthew Garrison; here, Coltrane leads a quartet featuring the guitarist **Adam Rogers**. (*Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. Nov. 7-12.*)

### Hal Galper

The veteran pianist and educator Galper has put plenty of thought into the formal workings of his rhythmically skewed "rubato" style of playing, but it's apparent even to listeners who haven't bonded up on the theory that something odd is going on. At the helm of a quartet of sympathetic improvisers, Galper will demonstrate his intriguing, if challenging, approach. (*Smalls, 183 W. 10th St. 212-252-5091. Nov. 11.*)

### Pat Martino

Martino's roots are never far from the surface of his extravagant guitar playing, yet his recent album "Formidable" is an unabashed celebration of the bebop and blues ethos he honed in his native Philadelphia, circa the early sixties. As on the recording, the organ-and-drums base of his earthy trio will be fleshed out by two horn men, **Alex Norris**, on trumpet, and **Adam Niewood**, on saxophone. (*Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. Nov. 9-12.*)

### Eric Reed

With his series of three Thelonious Monk-inspired recordings beginning in 2011, the pianist Reed beat by a stretch this year's onslaught of centenary-celebration homages to the iconoclastic jazz icon. Although Reed will be previewing original work from his upcoming "A Light in Darkness" project, it's unlikely that this nimble and soulful instrumentalist will turn his back on enduring work from Monk. (*Smoke, 2751 Broadway, between 105th and 106th Sts. 212-864-6662. Nov. 10-12.*)

### Marc Ribot

Guitarists who can be identified by a single plucked note constitute their own fraternity. Ribot, a proud member of that fretboard brotherhood, is the rare stylist who can delve deep into unforgiving avant-garde territory yet also produce apposite work for the likes of Robert Plant and Elton John when called on. Solo performances will make up the bulk of this residency, although Ribot will also front two trios and a duet with the multi-instrumentalist **Cooper-Moore**. (*The Stone, Avenue C at 2nd St. thestonenyc.com. Nov. 7-12.*)

## CLASSICAL MUSIC



*The Metropolitan Opera's new production of "Così Fan Tutte" is set in nineteen-fifties Coney Island.*

## Winter Preview

The symphony orchestra is the basic unit of American classical music: it requires more community buy-in than a chamber-music society, yet compared with grand opera—the ultimate international art form—it retains a local feel. For many discerning listeners, the finest is the **Cleveland Orchestra**, which returns to Carnegie Hall this winter (Jan. 23-24). It may hail from one of America's great Rust Belt cities, but its music director, Franz Welser-Möst, continues the orchestra's profoundly European outlook. (Its 2017-18 classical season contains not a single work by a living American composer.) The orchestra will offer a New York première from the respected Austrian composer Johannes Maria Staud, along with what will doubtless be delectable excursions through Mahler's Ninth Symphony and Haydn's glorious oratorio "The Seasons." Meanwhile, few maestros burn with more *Italianità* than Riccardo Muti, a matchless advocate for his country's musical heritage. But his tenure at the head of the **Chicago Symphony Orchestra** has included some robust American programming, a trend that marks his own Carnegie concerts (Feb. 9-10), in which recent works by Jennifer Higdon and Samuel Adams are nestled amid chestnuts by Britten, Brahms, Stravinsky, Chausson, and, of course, Verdi.

In Baroque performance, European groups, naturally, have much to teach

their American counterparts. Lincoln Center's schedule includes an all-Vivaldi evening at Alice Tully Hall (on Jan. 24, including "The Four Seasons")—and, when the orchestra is the renowned **Concerto Köln**, who's to mind? (For a fine home-town alternative, head to St. Joseph's Church, in Greenwich Village, on Dec. 30, where the superb musicians of **TENET** will perform Psalm settings and motets by their favorite composer, Monteverdi.) Elsewhere on the campus, orchestral performances reach for operatic grandeur. The incoming music director of the **New York Philharmonic**, Jaap van Zweden, will use one of his programs (Feb. 14-17) to show off not only his new-music chops, with a New York première by John Luther Adams ("Dark Waves"), but also his growing profile as a Wagner conductor, with a concert version of Act I of "Die Walküre," featuring Heidi Melton and Simon O'Neill. At the **Met**, James Levine will conduct several concert performances of Verdi's "Requiem" (Nov. 24-Dec. 2).

The Met's new productions alternate between the traditional and the unexpected. David McVicar's staging of "**Tosca**" (beginning Dec. 31) will recall Franco Zeffirelli's beloved production, which was unwise jettisoned in 2009. Phelim McDermott's rollicking new "**Così Fan Tutte**," however, is set in nineteen-fifties Brooklyn (opening March 15). You can't get more American than that.

—Russell Platt

## OPERA

**Metropolitan Opera**

Luis Buñuel's absurdist 1962 film "**The Exterminating Angel**" skewers the comforts and complacency of the leisure class by forcing a group of guests to endure a never-ending dinner party that slowly drives them mad. Thomas Adès, in his gripping operatic adaptation, turns Buñuel's quiet, Surrealist satire into a psychological horror show. The music is filled with sinister foreboding, brutalist percussive noise, jagged vocal lines, and fleeting wisps of romance, and Tom Cairns's production fences in the well-heeled guests with a cold, monumental threshold that's far removed from Buñuel's luxurious yet cozy interiors. The singers work together like a crack theatrical ensemble, and Adès conducts the orchestra in a blistering performance. *Nov. 10 at 8 and Nov. 14 at 7:30.* • Massenet's "**Thaïs**" is unquestionably a star vehicle—when Renée Fleming sang in the 2008 première of John Cox's production, she was lavishly costumed by Christian Lacroix—but it also requires two compelling singing actors who can carry a story that's light on plot. For the current revival, the Met has entrusted Ailyn Pérez and Gerald Finley to flesh out the inner conflicts of the courtesan title character and of the holy man who is captivated by her; Emmanuel Villaume conducts. *Nov. 11 at 1.* • **Also playing:** Franco Zeffirelli's gloriously over-the-top production of Puccini's "**Turandot**" is on offer this week, with Oksana Dyka in the title role and with Aleksandrs Antonenko and Maria Agresta as Calaf and Liù; Carlo Rizzi. *Nov. 8 at 7:30 and Nov. 11 at 8.* • An early high point of Peter Gelb's tenure, Anthony Minghella's vividly cinematic staging of "**Madama Butterfly**" still feels clean, fresh, and vital eleven years later. The revival stars Hui He, Roberto Aronica, David Bizic, and Maria Zifchak, whose ravishing Suzuki has been a fixture of the production since its première; Jader Bignamini conducts, in his Met début. *Nov. 9 and Nov. 13 at 7:30.* (*Metropolitan Opera House*. 212-362-6000.)

**New York City Opera**

In honor of Dominick Argento's ninetieth birthday, the company gives a concert of two vastly different monodramas—the extended mad scene "**Miss Havisham's Wedding Night**" and the comedic monologue "**A Water Bird Talk**"—that show off the Pulitzer Prize-winning American composer's keen theatrical sense, gift for melody, and exacting craftsmanship. Gil Rose conducts the soloists Heather Buck and Aaron Engebretsen and the New York City Opera Orchestra. *Nov. 9 at 7:30.* (*Zankel Hall*. 212-247-7800.)

**ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES****New York Philharmonic**

The orchestra with which Leonard Bernstein built a renowned collaboration is closing its autumn festival, "Bernstein's Philharmonic," with the grandest of its centennial tributes: three performances of the Symphony No. 3, "Kaddish" (1963). Dedicated to the memory of John F. Kennedy, it is the most personal of Bernstein's symphonies, a work of Mahlerian grandiosity in which the composer wrestles, Job-like, with a frustratingly remote Old Testament God. Leonard Slatkin, long an expert in Bernstein's music, conducts the piece, which includes contributions from the actor Jeremy Irons, the soprano Tamara Wilson, the Concert Chorale of New York, and the Brooklyn Youth Chorus. The first half of the program is also substantial: Strauss's "Don Quixote," a magical quasi-double

concerto—after Cervantes—for viola (Cynthia Phelps), cello (Carter Brey), and large orchestra. *Nov. 9 and Nov. 14 at 7:30 and Nov. 11 at 8.* (*David Geffen Hall*. For tickets and a full listing of Bernstein centennial events, see [nyphil.org](http://nyphil.org))

**Israel Philharmonic Orchestra**

Zubin Mehta, who will step away from his lifetime appointment as this storied ensemble's music director in 2019, brings the group once more to Carnegie Hall. In the first concert, he teams up with the pianist Yefim Bronfman in Beethoven's Concerto No. 3 in C Minor, a work bookended by the customary New York première of a piece by an Israeli composer (Amit Poznansky's "Footnote" Suite) and by Strauss's brawny "Ein Heldenleben." The grand second program offers Mahler's Symphony No. 3, an event that also collects the talents of the mezzo-soprano Mihoko Fujimura, Master Voices, and the Manhattan Girls Chorus. The final evening brings Gil Shaham to the fore in a concert featuring music by Weber, Tchaikovsky (the Violin Concerto), and Schubert (the Symphony No. 9, "Great"). *Nov. 7-9 at 8.* (*Carnegie Hall*. 212-247-7800.)

**White Light Festival:****"The Psalms Experience"**

This ambitious series of hour-long concerts, covering a millennium of responses to the Biblical Psalms, continues with eight events addressing such themes as "Gratitude," "Lamentation," and "Celebration of Life." The programs range from traditional songs and chant to premières by Nico Muhly and Caroline Shaw; participating ensembles include the Netherlands Chamber Choir, the Tallis Scholars, and the Norwegian Soloists' Choir, culminating in a grand finale involving those groups alongside members of the Choir of Trinity Wall Street. *Nov. 9-10 at 6:30 and 8:30 and Nov. 11 at 1, 3, 5, and 8:30.* (For venue and ticket information, visit [whitelightfestival.org](http://whitelightfestival.org))

**Polyhymnia: "Christmas at the Court of Henry VIII"**

This week's early-music find takes place at a welcome venue for such concerts, the Church of St. Ignatius of Antioch. John Bradley conducts his long-admired choir in a Christmas preview, a program consisting entirely of music by a royal favorite, Robert Fayrfax (including the "Missa Tecum Principium"). *Nov. 11 at 8.* (*West End Ave.* at 87th St. 917-838-4636.)

**White Light Festival: "Missa Solemnis"**

Thomas Dausgaard, the vigorous Danish conductor who was recently named the next music director of the Seattle Symphony, leads the Swedish Chamber Orchestra and the especially renowned Swedish Radio Choir in Beethoven's glorious choral masterwork, at David Geffen Hall. *Nov. 12 at 3.* ([whitelightfestival.org](http://whitelightfestival.org))

**Juilliard Orchestra with Thomas Adès**

The major British composer of his generation, in town to conduct his new opera at the Met, crosses the street to direct the conservatory's flagship ensemble in a concert featuring music by Elgar (the Cello Concerto, with Rachel Siu), Stravinsky (the Symphony in Three Movements), and himself (including "Three Studies from Couperin"). *Nov. 13 at 7:30.* (*Alice Tully Hall*. 212-721-6500.)

**White Light Festival: "Eternal Light"**

Peter Dijkstra conducts the Swedish Radio Choir in a program of seldom-encountered twentieth-century a-cappella choral works, with brief pieces by Maija Einfelde ("Lux Aeterna"), Sven-David Sandström, and Anders Hillborg prefacing an

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Kathakali Actors Being Made up for a Performance from the Mahabharata Cheruthuruthi, Kerala, India, 1950  
©Henri Cartier-Bresson/Magnum Photos

account of Alfred Schnittke's powerful Concerto for Choir. Nov. 14 at 7:30. (Church of St. Mary the Virgin, 145 W. 46th St. [whitelightfestival.org](http://whitelightfestival.org).)

#### White Light Festival: "The Routes of Slavery"

The Catalan viol master Jordi Savall has long proved an intrepid explorer and cultural cartographer. Here, he illuminates one of mankind's darkest pages, the path of slavery from Africa to the New World. Joining Savall and his exemplary ensembles, Hespèrion XXI and La Capella Reial de Catalunya, are a cadre of African and Latin-American artists and the American gospel quartet the Fairfield Four. Nov. 15 at 7:30. (Rose Theatre, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Broadway at 60th St. [whitelightfestival.org](http://whitelightfestival.org).)

#### RECITALS

##### Music at the 92nd Street Y

It's a banner week for blue-chip chamber music at this admired venue. The magnificent Canadian pianist Angela Hewitt starts things off on Wednesday evening with an all-Bach recital (including the Partitas Nos. 3 and 5-6). A late-night concert on Friday by the fascinating pianist Pedja Muzijevic features a typically eclectic mix of works by masters from the Baroque (C. P. E. and W. F. Bach) and experimentalist (John Cage and Henry Cowell) schools. And on Sunday afternoon the New York Philharmonic String Quartet makes its New York recital débüt, performing quartets by Beethoven, Dvořák (in F Major, "American"), and Mendelssohn (No. 6 in F Minor). Nov. 8 at 7:30, Nov. 10 at 9:30, and Nov. 12 at 3. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500.)

##### Alvin Lucier

Lucier, a composer whose groundbreaking works have stretched the limits of auditory perception, celebrates the release of an elaborate new boxed set (four LPs, a CD, and a book), produced by Zürich University for the Arts, with a two-evening event at Brooklyn's Issue Project Room. Lucier performs on each program, appearing alongside the compelling vocalist Joan La Barbara and other musicians. Nov. 8-9 at 8. (22 Boerum Pl. [issueprojectroom.org](http://issueprojectroom.org).)

##### Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

The Society's programs this week provide a broad view of its mandate. In the first, at Lincoln Center's Rose Studio, the mostly female Daedalus Quartet (and the elegant clarinetist Romie de Guise-Langlois) showcases four North American composers of exceptional talent: Anna Weesner, Vivian Fung (a world première), Missy Mazzoli ("Quartet for Queen Mab"), and a noted veteran, Shulamit Ran. The second, at Alice Tully Hall, reinforces the Society's bend toward standard-repertory virtuosity, with its exceptional string players—Arnaud Sussmann, Paul Neubauer, and David Finckel—performing trios by Beethoven, Penderecki, and Mozart (the Divertimento). Nov. 9 at 6:30 and 9; Nov. 14 at 7:30. (212-875-5788.)

##### An die Musik

The chamber ensemble, an Upper West Side fixture since 1976, offers its annual show at Merkin Concert Hall. In addition to old friends (such as the violinist Mark Peskanov and the pianist Constance Emmerich), the lineup features a distinguished newcomer, the cellist Thomas Demenga. The program includes music by Beethoven, Handel (Halvorsen's arrangement of the Passacaglia for Violin and Cello), Mozart, and Haydn. Nov. 12 at 4. (129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330.)

## MOVIES



Daniel Day-Lewis plays a fashion designer in Paul Thomas Anderson's drama "Phantom Thread."

#### Winter Preview

Some of the most prominent films of the season ponder the romantic mysteries of the artistic milieu. Paul Thomas Anderson has long probed hidden corners of history, and in "Phantom Thread" (Dec. 25) he explores the fashion world of nineteen-fifties London. Daniel Day-Lewis, in what he has said will be his last performance before retirement, plays a high-society dress designer who collaborates with his sister (Lesley Manville), and then begins a professional and personal relationship with another woman (Vicky Krieps). Anderson also wrote the script and, for the first time, was his own cinematographer. James Franco directed and stars in—or, rather, as—"The Disaster Artist" (Dec. 1), based on the real-life story of the director and actor Tommy Wiseau's production of the low-budget film "The Room." Seth Rogen, Alison Brie, and Hannibal Buress co-star. In "Call Me by Your Name" (Nov. 24), Timothée Chalamet plays an American teenager who begins a relationship, at his family's home in Italy, with a house guest (Armie Hammer). James Ivory adapted André Aciman's novel; Luca Guadagnino directed. "Film Stars Don't Die in Liverpool" (Dec. 15), directed by Paul McGuigan, is based on a memoir by the British actor Peter Turner (played by Jamie Bell), about his relationship with the former Hollywood star Gloria Grahame (Annette Bening), twenty-nine

years his senior, in the nineteen-seventies.

Fantasy always plays a big role in Hollywood calendars, but it's now being conferred to the talents of leading auteurs. "Downsizing" (Dec. 22), directed by Alexander Payne, is a science-fiction satire set in the near future, when scientists seeking to reduce humankind's footprint manage to shrink people to a few inches in height. Matt Damon plays an Omaha therapist who volunteers to be shrunk. Payne, showing utopian plans going awry, depicts gated colonies of "smalls" in gleeful, quasi-anthropological detail. Christoph Waltz and Hong Chau play reduced-size neighbors. The director Ryan Coogler, who revitalized the "Rocky" franchise with "Creed," takes on the Marvel universe in "Black Panther" (Feb. 16), starring Chadwick Boseman as T'Challa, the king of Wakanda, who becomes the superhero of the title while fighting a challenger (Michael B. Jordan) to his throne. Lupita Nyong'o and Danai Gurira co-star. Ava DuVernay directs "A Wrinkle in Time" (March 9), an adaptation of the 1962 science-fiction novel by Madeleine L'Engle. Storm Reid and Deric McCabe play the children who, with their friend (Levi Miller), are sent through a tesseract to find their long-missing father (Chris Pine). Reese Witherspoon, Mindy Kaling, and Oprah Winfrey play the three mystical beings who propel them on their journey.

—Richard Brody

## NOW PLAYING

## Illusions

In this thirty-four-minute featurette, from 1982, Julie Dash ingeniously revives classic-Hollywood themes and styles in order to subject them to a sharp historical critique. It's set in the fictitious National Studios, during the Second World War, where a black female executive, Mignon Dupree (Lonette McKee), is passing as white. She's being harassed by a newly hired producer, a white Army lieutenant, while seeking to become a producer herself, in the hope of telling stories in which ordinary people—including members of ethnic minorities—will recognize their own experiences. Dash infuses the visual repertory of musicals and melodramas with modernist inflections—most powerfully in a scene of vast symbolic impact, set in a sound studio. There, engineers are dubbing the voice of a black singer, Esther Jeter (Rosanne Katon), onto the image of a white actress. Dash blends intimate portraiture with echoing reflections and multiple exposures that capture Hollywood's harrowing game of multiple and hidden identities.—Richard Brody (*BAM Cinématek*, Nov. 13.)

## Lady Bird

As writer and director, Greta Gerwig infuses this comedic coming-of-age drama with verbal virtuosity, gestural idiosyncrasy, and emotional vitality. The loosely autobiographical tale is set mainly in Gerwig's home town of Sacramento, in the 2002-03 academic year, and centered on Christine McPherson (Saoirse Ronan), self-dubbed Lady Bird, a senior at a Catholic high school whose plan to escape to an Eastern college is threatened by her grades and her parents' finances. Lady Bird's father (Tracy Letts), with whom she shares a hearty complicity, is about to lose his job; her mother (Laurie Metcalf), with whom she argues bitterly, is a nurse who works double shifts to keep the family afloat. Lady Bird infiltrates the world of rich kids and risks losing true friends; she dates a Francophile rocker (Timothée Chalamet) whose walk on the wild side is comfortably financed. Deftly juggling characters and story lines, Gerwig provokes aching laughs with gentle touches (Metcalf's etched diction nearly steals the show), but her direction remains self-effacing until late in the film, when several sharply conceived scenes suggest reserves of observational and symbolic energy.—R.B. (In limited release.)

## Last Flag Flying

A curious project for Richard Linklater, whose most enjoyable films, light-headed with promise, have scouted the territory of youth. The new movie, on the other hand, dawdles among the middle-aged and attends to their crusty recitations of old times. In 1993, a mournful soul named Doc (Steve Carell) shows up at a bar run by the disreputable Sal (Bryan Cranston), a comrade from Vietnam. Together, they seek out Mueller (Laurence Fishburne), a fellow veteran of the war, whom they once knew as a hell-raiser, but who now, as a minister of the church, lifts his gaze to heaven. Doc's son has perished in Iraq, and he asks his friends for support as he accompanies the casket to Arlington. The manner in which this solemn plan goes awry, and the japes that arise along the way, confirm that the model for Linklater's film is Hal Ashby's "The Last Detail" (1973), in which a trio of service personnel took a roughly comparable trip. In Ashby's film, however, not only the mission but the mood was very different; the sailors cackled, snapped, and snarled, whereas the three comrades in the new movie grow ever more plaintive and tired as their

journey proceeds.—Anthony Lane (*Reviewed in our issue of 11/6/17.*) (In wide release.)

## LBJ

The political intricacies and hearty bluster of Rob Reiner's drama, about Lyndon Baines Johnson's accidental Presidency, help to overcome its wax-museum eeriness. The action spans the 1960 campaign, in which Johnson (Woody Harrelson), then a Texas senator, hoped in vain to snatch the nomination from John F. Kennedy (Jeffrey Donovan) at the Democratic Convention and was instead asked to be his running mate; Kennedy's assassination, in 1963, which brought Johnson to office; and the early days of Johnson's Presidency, when he defied expectations in order to pursue a civil-rights agenda. The enduring hostility that Johnson faced from Robert F. Kennedy (Michael Stahl-David) is matched by Johnson's backroom gamesmanship with Senator Richard Russell (Richard Jenkins), from Georgia, who wrongly counted on his Southern cohort to support Jim Crow. Reiner emphasizes Johnson's pathos as a brilliant politician who felt unloved by the public, and his reliance on his wife, Lady Bird (Jennifer Jason Leigh), for counsel and solace, but the issues play out in a vacuum; the film's portrait of conscience and courage is drawn with a very broad brush.—R.B. (In wide release.)

## The Meyerowitz Stories (New and Selected)

In his new film, Noah Baumbach stays in his discomfort zone: messed-up modern families in New York. The patriarch of the Meyerowitzes is Harold (Dustin Hoffman), who aimed to be the great sculptor of his generation and missed, though you wouldn't know it from his manner—lusty, temperate, and blisteringly quick to take offense. This has not made things easy for his sons, Matthew (Ben Stiller), who lives in Los Angeles and makes good money, and Danny (Adam Sandler), who does nothing much except fret, or for his desolate daughter, Jean (Elizabeth Marvel). Other characters are tossed into the mix: Harold's latest wife, the boozy Maureen (Emma Thompson), and his granddaughter, Eliza (Grace Van Patten), who, alone in the clan, seems lightened by hope and good sense. Baumbach not only finds time and room for these restless souls but makes us believe in them as they clash, make peace, and clash again. The movie is comically intimate with their lives, yet it covers a lot of ground.—A.L. (10/23/17) (In wide release and on Netflix.)

## Strange Victory

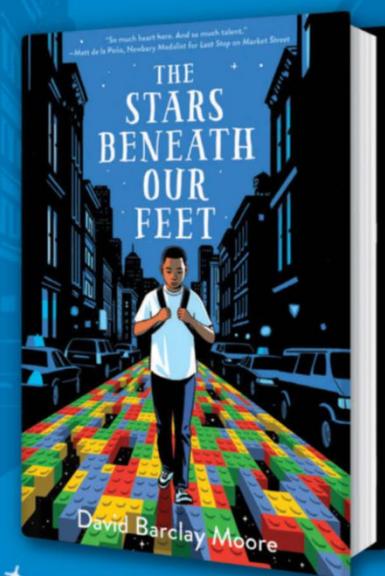
Filming in 1947 and 1948, Leo Hurwitz uses news-reel images of the Second World War in his quest for the source of the fear seen in the faces of urban passersby, who, he says, seem "haunted in broad daylight." The setup of this extraordinary documentary essay (featuring journalistic research, archival footage, and fictional reconstructions) is that of a film noir, but Hurwitz, with his audacious editing and blunt commentary, infuses it with a substance far more radical and harrowing than anything Hollywood could produce. The horrors of a world in which concentration camps functioned untouched are shown to have a pathological parallel in American prejudice—anti-Semitism, anti-Catholicism, and especially racism in all its forms, from job and housing discrimination to lynching, the victims of which Hurwitz calls "the casualties of a war." Tracking Hitler's rise to power, Hurwitz is shocked to find "the ideas of the loser still active in the land of the winner." The film acts as a kind of collective psychoanalysis of a segregated and prejudiced nation; its findings are yet to be worked through. Released in 1948.—R.B. (*BAM Cinématek*, Nov. 13.)

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at the right time...."

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Newbery Honor and National Book Award winner



Art © 2017 by R. Kikuo Johnson

**Suburbicon**

The new George Clooney film is set in 1959, in the cheerful town of Suburbicon, home to Gardner Lodge (Matt Damon); his wife, Rose (Julianne Moore); their son, Nicky (Noah Jupe); and Rose's sister, Margaret (Moore again). Needless to say, all is not well—their home is invaded, and Gardner, sunk in debts, is menaced by the Mob. Meanwhile, on the same street, another family moves in; Mr. and Mrs. Mayers (Leith M. Burke and Karimah Westbrook) and their son, Andy (Tony Espinosa), are African-American, and their presence provokes a riot. The problem is that the two halves of the movie fail to mesh. The criminal segment, which began as a screenplay by Joel and Ethan Coen, is only lightly linked to the racial theme. Moreover, although there is no mistaking Clooney's heartfelt condemnation of reactionary attitudes, his film pays surprisingly little heed to the black characters themselves; it's as though they exist purely to demonstrate the rancor of white prejudice. That said, the story does come alive with the entrance of Oscar Isaac, who plays an insurance-claims investigator. His sense that something here smells fishy is quite correct.—A.L. (11/6/17) (*In wide release.*)

**Thor: Ragnarok**

The director Taika Waititi brings exuberant visual wit and comedic sensibility to the latest Marvel extravaganza. Chris Hemsworth again plays the hero with the hammer; this time, after the death of his father, Odin (Anthony Hopkins), Thor must fight his vengeful sister, Hela (Cate Blanchett), to save his home planet of Asgard and its residents from her wrath. But, before he gets there, he's taken prisoner on the remote planet of Sakaar and forced into gladiatorial combat against a fearsome monster—who turns out to be none other than Hulk (Mark Ruffalo). A lively set of supporting characters, including a Valkyrie (Tessa Thompson), an Asgardian warrior (Idris Elba), and a creature made of rocks (Waititi), contribute heart and humor. Waititi makes the most of the churn and flash of battles and settings realized with C.G.I., filling the screen with wild whirls of color, launching characters and vehicles into loopy trajectories, and shifting from place to place with an antic sense of surprise. Even the long exposition and the sentimental ending can't burst the giddy bubble.—R.B. (*In wide release.*)

**Wait for Your Laugh**

Rose Marie, one of the last of the vaudevillians, is ninety-four, and Jason Wise's lively and fascinating documentary about her career as an entertainer—beginning with her early radio stardom, at the age of five—is filled with her vital, lucid recollections and her hearty presence. Her father was a small-time gangster; Al Capone was her "Uncle Al," and Rose Marie (who never used her last name, Mazetta) was a Las Vegas headliner under the tutelage of Bugsy Siegel and his cohorts (whom she calls "the boys"). Abandoning Hollywood after a harrowing episode of on-the-set sexual harassment, she turned to television and, in the early nineteen-sixties, found new fame on "The Dick Van Dyke Show," in the role of a comedy writer—the only woman in the writers' room. Wise interviews Carl Reiner (the show's creator), Van Dyke, and others; mixes in an enticing batch of home movies and archival footage (plus a few ill-advised reenactments); and unfolds a remarkable tale of show-biz smarts and steadfast purpose. Ever a trouper, Rose Marie still yearns to work, and her past success is shadowed by her recent idleness.—R.B. (*In limited release.*)

**THE THEATRE**

*Mark Rylance plays a melancholy Spanish monarch in "Farinelli and the King," at the Belasco.*

**Winter Preview**

Alas, the movies have discovered Mark Rylance, the fifty-seven-year-old actor and sprite, who followed his Oscar-winning turn in Steven Spielberg's "Bridge of Spies" with roles in "The BFG" and "Dunkirk." For theatregoers who have long enjoyed his elfin brilliance, it's a bit like having your corner noodle bar get rave reviews and suddenly become mobbed by foodies. Fortunately, Rylance is too committed to the stage—and, frankly, too weird—to leave it for long. He returns to Broadway in a transfer of the West End hit "**Farinelli and the King**" (starting previews Dec. 5, at the Belasco), playing the Spanish monarch Philippe V, who soothes his depression by summoning a silver-voiced castrato (sung by the countertenor Iestyn Davies). Like his 2013 double bill of "Twelfth Night" and "Richard III," the play, by Rylance's wife and frequent collaborator, Claire van Kampen, will be staged with Baroque instruments, by candlelight.

Another London import cannonballing into the Broadway season is the National Theatre's revival of "**Angels in America**" (Feb. 23, Neil Simon), Tony Kushner's two-part epic about AIDS, Mormons, and the spiritual state of the nation. The visionary Marianne Elliott ("The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time") directs, with Andrew Garfield as Prior Walter. But the more

intriguing casting is Nathan Lane as Roy Cohn, the conservative power broker (and early mentor of Donald Trump). Joe Mantello, who starred in "Angels" in 1993, directs Edward Albee's "**Three Tall Women**" (Feb. 27, Golden), with a trio of formidable actresses—Glenda Jackson, Laurie Metcalf, and Alison Pill—playing the same woman at different ages. Jessie Mueller and Joshua Henry headline a revival of "**Carousel**" (Feb. 28, Imperial), staged by Jack O'Brien and featuring Renée Fleming's rendition of "You'll Never Walk Alone." And Disney returns to Broadway with "**Frozen**" (Feb. 22, St. James)—prepare for "Let It Go" to lodge itself back in your brain.

Off Broadway features two expertly dyspeptic playwrights: Bruce Norris, with "**The Low Road**" (Feb. 13, Public), a parable of the roots of American capitalism, and Martin McDonagh, with "**Hangmen**" (Jan. 18, Atlantic Theatre Company), in which the second-best hangman in England finds out that capital punishment has been abolished. The downtown fixture Daniel Alexander Jones brings back his soul-singing alter-ego, Jomama Jones, in "**Black Light**" (Feb. 12, Joe's Pub). And the collective the Mad Ones reprises its absurdist gem "**Miles for Mary**" (Jan. 11, Playwrights Horizons), in which the faculty of an Ohio high school plans a twenty-four-hour telethon.

—Michael Schulman

## OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

**The Band's Visit**

David Yazbek and Itamar Moses's musical, about an Egyptian police orchestra stranded in the Israeli desert, moves to Broadway; Katrina Lenk and Tony Shalhoub reprise their roles in David Cromer's production. (*Ethel Barrymore*, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. *In previews. Opens Nov. 9.*)

**Describe the Night**

Rajiv Joseph's new play, directed by Giovanna Sardelli, tells parallel stories connecting the Russian writer Isaac Babel, a K.G.B. agent in Dresden, and a 2010 plane crash in Smolensk. (*Atlantic Theatre Company*, 336 W. 20th St. 866-811-4111. *Previews begin Nov. 10.*)

**Downtown Race Riot**

The New Group presents Seth Zvi Rosenfeld's play, directed by Scott Elliott and starring Chloë Sevigny as a single mother during a 1976 mob attack in Washington Square Park. (*Pershing Square Signature Center*, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. *Previews begin Nov. 14.*)

**Office Hour**

Julia Cho's play, directed by Neel Keller, is about a college professor who faces an ethical crisis when one of her students writes obscene work in class. (*Public*, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. *Opens Nov. 8.*)

**The Parisian Woman**

Uma Thurman stars in a drama by Beau Willimon (the creator of "House of Cards"), as a Washington socialite navigating power and relationships after the 2016 election. Pam MacKinnon directs. (*Hudson*, 141 W. 44th St. 855-801-5876. *Previews begin Nov. 9.*)

**20th Century Blues**

Susan Miller's play follows four women who meet once a year to take a group portrait and find their friendships tested when they learn that the photos may go public. Emily Mann directs. (*Pershing Square Signature Center*, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. *Previews begin Nov. 12.*)

**What We're Up Against**

WP Theatre stages Theresa Rebeck's dark comedy about gender politics at an architecture firm, directed by Adrienne Campbell-Holt and featuring Skylar Astin and Krysta Rodriguez. (*McGinn/Cazale*, 2162 Broadway, at 76th St. 866-811-4111. *Opens Nov. 8.*)

## NOW PLAYING

**The B-Side**

As the abundantly charismatic performer Eric Berryman explains in his disarming introduction, the Wooster Group's "Early Shaker Spirituals" (2014) inspired him to create his own theatre piece based on an album he'd been obsessed with—"Negro Folklore from Texas State Prisons," recorded by the ethnographer Bruce Jackson in 1964—and the company (with Kate Valk directing) had the good sense to produce it. The rest of this singular and engrossingly uncluttered show consists of Berryman playing the record in its entirety and singing and talking along with it, sometimes joined on harmonies by the superb vocalists Philip Moore and Jasper McGruder, and sometimes pausing between tracks to add explication. Berryman revivifies a distant world of pain, and the beauty that paradoxically derives from it, by way of meticulous attention to a beloved piece of vinyl. (*The Performing Garage*, 33 Wooster St. [thewoostergroup.org](http://thewoostergroup.org))

**Illyria**

Joe Papp, the founder of the New York Shakespeare Festival and the Public Theatre, was pugnacious and punny, a lionhearted ideologue with a grand vision and the moxie to build it, smack-dab in Manhattan. So a play about Papp, produced by the Public, would seem destined for grandeur. Thankfully, the playwright Richard Nelson doesn't have a grand drop in his pen. Much like his "Apple" and "Gabriel" family plays, this account of the Festival's scrappy beginnings is casual, conversational, and laid-back nearly to the point of inaudibility. It's 1958, and Papp (John Magaro) is struggling to keep his fledgling Shakespeare company afloat in Central Park, despite the lure of better-paying jobs and the antagonism of the Parks Commissioner, Robert Moses. Under Nelson's direction, the well-attuned ensemble uses the stage not as a pedestal but as a field of whispered dreams. (*Public*, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

**Junk**

Ayad Akhtar ("Disgraced") is a playwright who seems the most energized when he has big issues to dive into, and what could be juicier than Wall Street greed and maleficence? The year is 1985, and Judy Chen (a terrific Teresa Avia Lim) is a business journalist covering new financial strategies that are redefining the idea of capital in America. Robert Merkin (Steven Pasquale) embodies those changes: sleek as a shark, he's the head of an L.A.-based bank that's been very aggressive about hostile takeovers. Merkin lives in a world where guilt is a burden and loyalty an inconvenience: money is, as Chen says, "the thing." Directed by Doug Hughes,

this slick production of a thin play features twenty-three actors, so there's not a lot of room for character development. But, in a way, that doesn't matter: sometimes it's fun just to sit there and get off on the testosterone and the swiftness of the action, like most of the play's guys do. (*Vivian Beaumont*, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)

**M. Butterfly**

David Henry Hwang's most famous drama, which won the 1988 Tony Award for Best Play, premiered on Broadway with John Lithgow in the role of Rene Gallimard, a French official who falls fatally in love with a male Chinese opera star named Song Liling—whom Gallimard believes is a woman. Played by the handsome Clive Owen in this creaky revival (directed by Julie Taymor with atypical restraint, despite the occasional spectacle), Gallimard is less existentially confused than in Lithgow's interpretation, and thus less interesting. As Song, Jin Ha is perhaps too self-righteous, but that may have something to do with Hwang's rewrite of the script, which explains and justifies mysteries that should be left to the imagination. (*Cort*, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

**Marcel + The Art of Laughter**

This two-part evening of clowning first shows, then tells. In "Marcel," the wide-eyed Marcello Magni endures a test of endurance and fitness from the vaguely bureaucratic Jos Houben. The humor comes largely from the juxtaposition of befuddled naïveté and sternness—and, of course, from pratfalls. Houben and Magni (both longtime associates of the Complicité company and the director Peter Brook)

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Henry Martin Gasser (1909–1981) *Highway Diner*, detail

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## THE THEATRE

display a slapstick wizardry informed by Keaton and Fellini. Unfortunately, the one-act is followed by "The Art of Laughter," a "seminar" originally created for acting students, in which Houben dissects the mechanics of comedy. One may argue that nothing new has happened in the chuckle business since man first slipped on banana peel, but imitations of animals and banal remarks like "the misery, the pain of others are funny" don't exactly merit an hour's worth of scrutiny. (*Polonsky Shakespeare Center*, 262 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. 866-811-4111.)

### Uncommon Sense

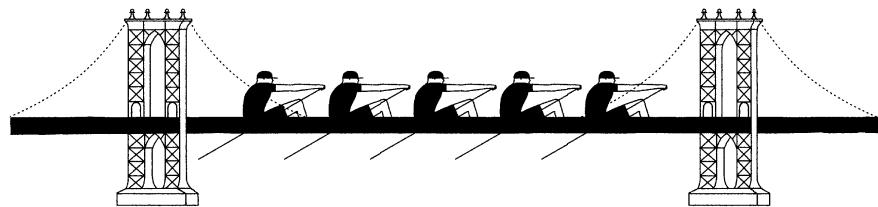
Jess, a college student, marvels at the number of synaptic connections in the brain. "There should be no wonder in difference," she reasons. But Jess does feel different. She struggles to express her thoughts, has difficulty reading faces, and doesn't respond to social cues. Jess is autistic, like and unlike three other characters in this Tectonic Theatre Project show, written by Andy Paris (who directs) and Anushka Paris-Carter. Jess (Jessica Almasy) is joined by Dan (Scott Barrow), a high-functioning chatterer training to work as an actuary; Moose (Andrew Duff), a

young man with severe developmental challenges; and Lali (Jill Frutkin), a child who has never smiled at or spoken to her mother. Though the writers strain to give everyone a happyish ending, this humanizing piece deals empathetically with people on the spectrum and the neurotypicals who care for them. (*Sheen Center*, 18 Bleecker St. 212-925-2812.)

### ALSO NOTABLE

**After the Blast** Claire Tow. • **The Home Place** Irish Repertory. • **Jesus Hopped the "A" Train** Pershing Square Signature Center. • **The Last Match** Laura Pels. • **Latin History for Morons** Studio 54. • **Lonely Planet** Clurman. • **Meteor Shower** Booth. • **Oedipus el Rey** Public. • **People, Places & Things** St. Ann's Warehouse. (Reviewed in this issue.) • **Pride and Prejudice** Cherry Lane. • **SpongeBob Square-Pants** Palace. • **Springsteen on Broadway** Walter Kerr. • **Strange Interlude** Irondale Center. • **Time and the Conways** American Airlines Theatre. • **Tiny Beautiful Things** Public. • **Torch Song** Second Stage. • **The Wolves** Mitzi E. Newhouse.

## ABOVE & BEYOND



### Veterans Day Parade

This annual procession dates back to the first Armistice Day celebrations, in 1919. This year's parade, which runs north on Fifth Ave. from 26th St. to 52nd St., commemorates the centennial of the United States' entry into the First World War, in 1917; Buzz Aldrin, the astronaut who helped man Apollo 11 on its trip to the moon, serves as grand marshal. The opening ceremony, in Madison Square Park, includes a wreath-laying at the Eternal Light Flagstaff at 11 A.M., the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month. (*Enter the park at Broadway at 23rd St. Nov. 11 at 10 A.M.*)

pressionists on Nov. 14, leading off with works by Cézanne, Degas, and Chagall. The Chagall, "Les Amoureux" (1928), is a rapturous depiction of the painter and his wife, Bella Rosenfeld, locked in an embrace; some experts feel that it might achieve a new record price for the artist. The auction also includes a rather austere work, in shades of luminous gray, by the Danish artist Vilhelm Hammershøi, "Interior with Woman at the Piano." The evening auction is preceded, on Nov. 13, by a sale of African and pre-Columbian art from a private collection and another sale of American works, including a healthy quotient of paintings by Norman Rockwell. (*York Ave. at 72nd St.* 212-606-7000.)

### AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Once again, the auction houses are gearing up for their seasonal battle in the high-stakes arenas of Impressionist, modern, and contemporary art. **Christie's** starts off the two-week extravaganza with a sale of Impressionist and modern canvases (Nov. 13), led by a Léger ("Contraste de Formes") that has never before seen the inside of an auction house; the painting, which features a bold red-checked pattern, has remained in the hands of a single family since the nineteen-fifties. Other major works in the sale include a landscape by van Gogh ("Laboureur dans un Champ"), painted the year before his death, and the sunny "Les Régates de Nice," a dreamy, pastel-colored view of sailboats as seen from a balcony, by Matisse. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) • **Sotheby's** holds its evening sale of Im-

### READINGS AND TALKS

#### Cooper Union

Does dissent have a look? Is the attitude recognizable in deep red tones, bold fonts, sharp corners, or frayed edges? Every generation has had its share of rebellion, each with a texture of its own. The artist and designer Milton Glaser first attempted to gather and analyze this history in "The Design of Dissent," published in 2005, amid a swell of resistance to the Iraq War. New culture battles are raging today; Glaser has updated the book, which he co-authored with Mirko Ilić, and added the subhead "Greed, Nationalism, Alternative Facts and the Resistance." He discusses his work with the designer Steven Heller, a former art director at the *Times*. (7 E. 7th St. [cooper.edu](http://cooper.edu). Nov. 13 at 7:30.)

# FOOD & DRINK



## TABLES FOR TWO

### Belly

219 Grand St., Brooklyn (888-777-0087)

"It takes real work to fuck up bacon," a first-time patron at this new Williamsburg establishment remarked, in appreciation of the restaurant's nearly fail-proof business plan. At Belly, a shrine to the protean appeal of the swine, pork might as well be its own syncretic religion, celebrated in multitudinous forms through intertwined culinary traditions. "We are the United Nations of Pork," a paunchy, jovial chef named Johnny likes to tell diners—or, more succinctly, "Bacon me crazy."

Still, there is a method to the porcine madness. Conceived by Anna Lee and Philip Cho, two marketing executives turned restaurateurs, Belly offers a creatively branded "omakase," a nine-course pork-centric tasting menu served on communal picnic tables. It's best to skip your afternoon snack. Or, better yet, follow dinner with a visit to the karaoke bar below the restaurant, Beats, to work off some of those calories with energetic renditions of pop ballads, chosen from a list as diverse as Belly's culinary influences.

"There's Japanese, Chinese, European—and everything is mixed, because it's a super-arrogant menu," Johnny, a self-taught cook, warns patrons with a grin, though "ambitious" is perhaps a more apt adjective. Do not be deceived by the light-seeming first course of "bread and butter."

The crostinis appear airy, but they're topped with a hearty dollop of kimchee butter—an incongruous but delightful concept that could pass for a creamier cousin of sriracha—and crisped bacon.

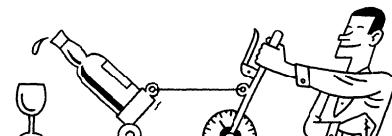
Next up is a single, bite-sized piece of bacon sushi, in which belly meat is torched into an impossibly thin, streaky strip and served with an electric hit of wasabi and Szechuan chili oil; it's indelible in the mind but teasingly ephemeral to the senses. With nine courses, it's hard to avoid some fillers; there's also a five-course edition, which leaves out a serviceable stuffed pepper and a bland codfish surfer.

Without a doubt, the pièce de résistance is the chicharron de belly (which appears on both set menus). Although the name suggests South America, the caramelized chunk of pork belly, glazed with maple soy sauce—simultaneously tender and crispy, and explosively rich in umami—harks back to Korean barbecue, which Lee, Cho, and Johnny grew up eating.

On a recent evening, a young woman treated her husband, for his thirtieth birthday, to both the five-course and the nine-course dinners, per his request. "It's worth it just to have the chicharron twice," he explained, letting out an inadvertent belch. "Eat up," his wife said. "We are not taking any bacon home." (*Prix fixe: \$35 for five courses, \$55 for nine courses.*)

—Jiayang Fan

## BAR TAB

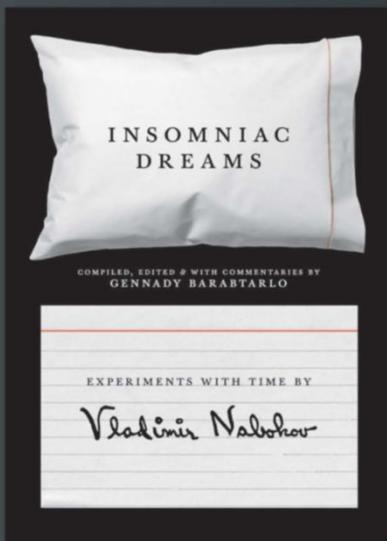
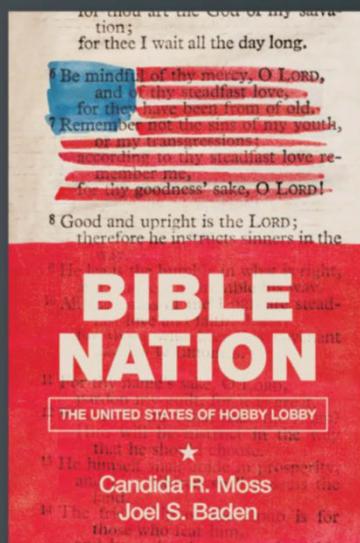
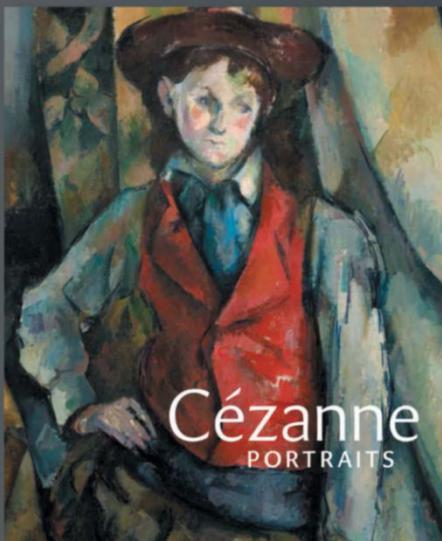
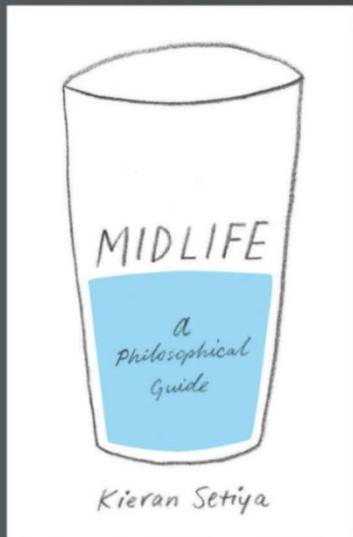


### Mood Ring

1260 Myrtle Ave., Brooklyn (917-818-1738)

Wong Kar-wai's films inspired the feeling of this new bar in Bushwick, where, inside, muted lighting casts magenta shadows across faces, conjuring the dreamy intensity of classics like "In the Mood for Love" or—as a neon-pink sign suggests—"Happy Together." The dramatic setting turns even the simple gesture of raising an emerald bottle of Tsingtao to one's lips into something cinematic, but it also makes the cocktail menu awfully hard to read. Diligent squinters are rewarded with creations like the Tony Leung (bourbon, Frangelico, egg white, pistachio). A better move, though, is to bypass the menu entirely and order the monthly rotating cocktail, designed to capture the essence of whichever star sign the sun happens to be passing through. Lately, the specialty drink has been a bold combination of smoky mezcal, Campari, and chili liqueur, garnished with star anise. "Scorpios are so intense sometimes, it's hard for people to take it all in," Vanessa Li, a co-owner and celestial scorpion, said on a recent Wednesday night. A spacious back room holds dance parties for Q.T.P.O.C. revellers; the bathrooms are pointedly gender-neutral, painted with the words "A restroom is a restroom." Li wants Mood Ring to be a space for queer and trans people of color in the neighborhood, and the attention to inclusivity appears to have paid off, with an upbeat if intimidatingly hip crowd—pierced guests with shaved heads or brightly dyed hair lounge in plush red leather booths. At the bar, there are matchbooks that look like tiny packs of Marlboro Reds. With a few weeks before communication goes haywire thanks to Mercury in retrograde, patrons can still confidently try out the line printed on their covers: "What's your sign?"—Wei Tchou

# CHANGING THE CONVERSATIONS THAT CHANGE THE WORLD



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Jean Tirole  
Translated by Steven Rendall

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—Publishers Weekly



## THE TALK OF THE TOWN

### COMMENT A LONG YEAR

**I**t was only a year ago that voters delivered Donald Trump to the Presidency. It feels much longer. Trump's Twitter storms and erraticism can seem to slow time. There was his initial travel ban, last January, followed by protests at airports, court injunctions, a new travel ban, further injunctions, and an intervention by the Supreme Court. Add to this his adventures in nuclear brinkmanship; his assault on Obamacare; his moves to tear apart the world's free-trade system; and his use of the White House bully pulpit to normalize white supremacy. It may seem many months ago, yet it was only in mid-August that he took note of the "very fine people" attending a neo-Nazi rally in Charlottesville, where a white nationalist murdered a counter-protester. Steve Bannon may think of all this as a strategy of disruption. But Trump's conduct rarely suggests deliberation; it more often seems to express his anger, his tiresome ego, and his instincts for performance.

It requires fortitude to accept the likelihood that the Trump Presidency is about to become more eventful still. The investigations into Vladimir Putin's interference in the 2016 election, and the possibility that Trump's campaign colluded with Russia, are intensifying. The accusation that Russian covert operations influenced the Presidential vote clearly drives Trump to distraction. He has repeatedly denied that his campaign collaborated with Russia, and he insists that Putin's activity contributed nothing to

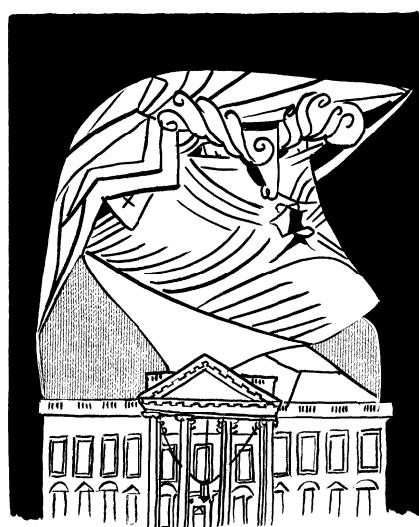
his victory. Yet the latest revelations do not bode well for the President.

Last week, congressional committees summoned representatives from Facebook, Google, and Twitter to grill them about how they could possibly have allowed polarizing, race-baiting ads to be placed on their platforms by companies linked to the Kremlin. On Facebook alone, during the campaign, Russian ads reached more than a hundred million Americans. It is shocking that only now, and after early denials from Facebook that the ads were a serious problem, are we discovering the vast online spread of manipulative content linked to Russia. At a minimum, as Representative Adam Schiff, the senior Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, put it, "the Russians mounted what could be described as an independent expenditure campaign on Mr. Trump's behalf." Yet Facebook has often evaded accountability, whether regarding privacy violations, its monop-

oly power, or abuses of its platform by malevolent actors. Mark Zuckerberg, its chief executive, and Sheryl Sandberg, its chief operating officer, did not go to Washington last week. They were on a conference call about Facebook's quarterly profits of nearly five billion dollars.

The Justice Department has also made a leap forward in its efforts to clarify Russia's interference and to prosecute anyone involved in illegality. Last week, Robert Mueller, the special counsel, announced the indictment of Paul Manafort, Trump's former campaign manager, and an associate, Rick Gates, on charges of fraud and money laundering stemming from their work for pro-Russian politicians in Ukraine. Most of Manafort's activity was previously known, and the charges did not touch upon collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia. Still, the indictment served notice to Manafort that if he wishes to avoid a long prison sentence he might consider talking with Mueller's investigators about, for example, what Trump knew about Russia's efforts to help him get elected.

Another former Trump aide has already decided to turn state's evidence. Mueller announced that George Papadopoulos, who advised Trump on foreign policy during the campaign, had pleaded guilty to making false statements to the F.B.I. Papadopoulos was arrested in July, but it was revealed only last week that he has apparently been coöoperating with Mueller's team. Sometimes a witness's coöperation is kept secret so that the person can clandestinely record conversations with other targets of an investigation; it's not known whether



Papadopoulos did this. In any case, the statement chronicling his admissions reads like a treatment for a mediocre political thriller. It recounts Papadopoulos's discussions in Italy and London with a Russia-connected "Professor." (Joseph Mifsud, who is affiliated with the University of Stirling, in Scotland, has acknowledged that he is that individual but has denied any wrongdoing.) It also contains repeated references to getting Russian help in obtaining "dirt" on Hillary Clinton. Papadopoulos's LinkedIn profile includes an endorsement of him from Trump: "Excellent guy." Last week, on Twitter, Trump changed his assessment, calling Papadopoulos a "low level volunteer" who had proved to be a "liar."

A Justice Department investigation of a sitting President or his senior aides creates its own ecosystem of betrayals and political calculations. When considering Donald Trump's position, it is natural to reflect on Watergate and the events

that led to Richard Nixon's resignation, in 1974. The political equation is more favorable for Trump than it was for Nixon. During Watergate, when the evidence against the President began to look damning, Republican leaders in Congress encouraged him to resign, for the sake of the Party. Since then, the G.O.P. has shifted sharply to the right, and it is now consumed by conflicts between populists and traditionalists. Trump remains popular with committed Republican voters, and the Party's congressional wing has so far been largely supine.

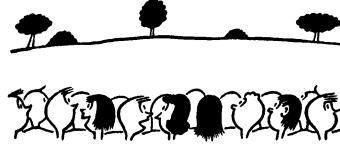
The most resonant episode from Watergate may be the Saturday Night Massacre, carried out by Nixon in October, 1973. The President found an official to fire Archibald Cox, a special prosecutor investigating Nixon's inner circle for obstructing justice, after the Attorney General and the Deputy Attorney General resigned rather than do so. The episode offers a precedent for Trump, but an am-

biguous one, given Nixon's fate. The President's allies at Fox News and at the *Wall Street Journal's* editorial page continue to denigrate Mueller, priming the Republican base for a day when Trump might decide to fire him. Judging by Trump's tweets, there can be no doubt that he would if he thought he could get away with it.

Such an intervention would precipitate a political crisis with an unpredictable outcome. Trump occupies the White House in an era of heightened Presidential powers. He may be constrained by his unpopularity outside the Republican Party, as well as by the professionalism of the F.B.I., the judiciary, and the press. But, as Archibald Cox observed just before he was fired, "Eventually, a President can always work his will." In all probability, the country's most dangerous trials during the Trump Administration lie ahead.

—Steve Coll

## SHELTERING IN TEACHABLE MOMENT



After a man drove a rented truck down a bike path along the West Side Highway on Halloween afternoon, murdering eight people and injuring twelve, Annie Thoms, an English teacher at nearby Stuyvesant High School, followed "shelter-in" protocol. The next day, when her students returned, she opened her class with a writing prompt. "I asked them to write about whatever they were thinking and feeling this morning," she said later that day. She told them, "There's no wrong reaction, and sometimes reactions take time to occur."

"One girl wrote that this was a moment which made her reflect on her own life's importance," Thoms went on. "I had one kid who said, honestly, 'I feel like I should be feeling more.'"

Thoms had been teaching at Stuyvesant for a year when 9/11 took place, and three thousand students were evacuated after the first tower fell. She was a senior at the school when the 1993 World Trade Center bombings happened. "That

was the year this building opened," she said. "I was in calculus class. We heard a big boom, and then my teacher turned on the TV, and we saw what it was. I remember seeing the big line of emergency vehicles, with lights flashing."

More than a dozen schools are situated within blocks of last week's attack site. Around noon on the day after Halloween, two freshmen at the Borough of Manhattan Community College sat together at the college's café, in the shadow of the new World Trade Center. Flavia Cenaj wore a white sweater and Levi's and had a ponytail. The previous day, she'd commuted in from Bensonhurst to find her African-American-history midterm cancelled. "When I got off the train, I was, like, 'Why is it so crowded?' Cops everywhere, ambulances," she recalled. "Someone in my class was speaking on the news. She'd heard gunshots, that's what she said."

On the next stool, Sarvinoz Sayfalaeva nodded. Her face had a watchful expression. "I texted my friends to make sure they were O.K."

Cenaj had just come from her English seminar. The class had discussed John Berger's short essay "Manhattan," from his 1985 book, "The Sense of Sight." "As a moral idea, an abstraction, Manhattan has a place in everybody's think-

ing throughout the world," Berger writes. "Manhattan is a concept. It also exists."

Cenaj reflected. "It was a lesson about New York, and Manhattan, and my teacher related it to this—like, why do they always choose to do this in Manhattan?" she said, referring to terrorists. She was ten years old when her family moved to New York, from Albania, and she doesn't remember 9/11. But her teachers do. "They're really concerned," she said. "But now I feel safe. There are cops here."

By two-fifteen, police, following heightened security measures, were escorting Stuyvesant students out of the school. They streamed onto Chambers Street, where kids buy pizza slices and cans of soda and linger outside delis until they are shooed away; and into the network of parks along the Hudson River, where after-school basketball games take place. The students exited quickly, hunched under their heavy backpacks. Camera crews huddled nearby.

The previous day, from a window in the student union, on the school's second floor, Matt Polazzo and his students had looked down at the immediate aftermath of the attack. "There were two bodies on the bikeway, and they were there the whole three hours I was there," he recalled. He moved his students away

from the window. Polazzo was also teaching at Stuyvesant on 9/11. "I couldn't believe I was in this position again," he said. "I guess I have the dubious honor of having a little bit of a script here."

Polazzo, who teaches American government and Western philosophy, has been discussing Plato's "Republic" in class. "Plato says that, in the ideal city, children learn their craft from their parents: if we're going to have children who are guardians and warriors who protect the city, they're going to have to see war close at hand," he said. "One of my students brought this up. He analogized it to what was happening yesterday." He went on, "I always tell the students that we're storytelling animals. You show someone a bunch of random numbers, and they're going to try to find a pattern."

Down past Teardrop Park, some ninth-grade Stuyvesant boys gathered for a basketball game. "The attack was first reported by students on the bridge," Saqif Abedin, in a zip-up sweatshirt, said, referring to a walkway over the West Side Highway. "We didn't know who'd get out, who was already out, who was on their way home, who got home."

"On Facebook, a couple of my friends were setting up safe lists," Yousef Amin, a lanky fourteen-year-old, said. He was wearing a Superman T-shirt. "If you were away from the incident, safe at home, you would add your name." He said that school the next day was "awkward": "In every single class, we discussed the incident and, like, everyone had their own story."

Amin's English class, like Annie Thoms's, was reading "The Joy Luck Club," by Amy Tan. "In the story, there's this incident that involves an attack, and somebody compared it to yesterday," he said. "I saw the connection also—I was going to talk about it, but somebody beat me to it." He shrugged.

Two friends arrived, and the group turned back to the game. They called to one another over the clang of the hoop and the sounds of other people in the park. "Ballin', bro," a boy said.

"Did you sign up for J.V.?" another asked.

"I thought tryouts were today," another called back. "I brought basketball shoes and everything."

—Anna Russell

## DEPT. OF INFLUENCE ON PARADE



Last Tuesday night, at a Democratic Socialists of America Halloween Party, at Hotel Chantelle, on Ludlow Street, Marc Fliedner was dressed as a yellow No. 2 pencil. Fliedner, a former prosecutor in the Brooklyn District Attorney's office, was running a last-minute write-in campaign against the Manhattan District Attorney, Cyrus Vance, Jr. Earlier in the evening, at the Village Halloween Parade, Fliedner, in pencil costume, had walked down Sixth Avenue handing out specially made campaign pens ("Write-in Marc Fliedner for Manhattan DA on Nov. 7") and talking to potential voters about why he was running and how to go about voting for him. It had been difficult, along the parade route, to engage in substantive discussions. The D.S.A. shindig was a more receptive environment.

"Are you Marc Fliedner?" a socialist named Tiffany, dressed as a resident of the Paris Commune, exclaimed at the check-in desk. "I'm a big fan."

Fliedner's campaign was only a few weeks old. He'd launched it in the wake of news articles that drew public attention to Vance's decisions not to prosecute potential cases against Harvey Weinstein for misdemeanor sexual abuse, in 2015, and against Ivanka Trump and Donald Trump, Jr., for false statements and fraud, in 2012. To be eligible to receive write-in votes in Manhattan, Fliedner had moved from his apartment in Bay Ridge to one in Stuyvesant Town, taking his eighty-seven-year-old father with him. He was hoping to garner a few thousand votes on Election Day against Vance, who is still technically running unopposed—Vance's will be the only name that is printed on the ballot as a candidate for District Attorney.

Among the guests at the D.S.A. party were a variety of socialist ghouls, spectres, and bogeymen. Sitting on a bench in the middle of the room, speaking loud enough to be heard over booming music, Fliedner, who, until resigning last year, was the head of the Brooklyn D.A. office's

civil-rights bureau, and who earlier this year mounted an unsuccessful run in the Democratic primary for Brooklyn D.A., explained why he had entered the race against Vance so late. "I had never thought about running in Manhattan," he said. "The Weinstein thing, coupled with the Trump thing, incensed me." As a former prosecutor, he'd found Vance's arguments for not pursuing those cases unsatisfactory. "Part of a prosecutor's job is to step up to the plate so there aren't more victims down the line," he said.

Fliedner wants to see changes in how candidates for District Attorney finance their campaigns—Vance took contributions from lawyers who represented both Weinstein and the Trump siblings—and he also wants to see the Manhattan D.A.'s office embrace bail reform, stop overcharging defendants, amend sentencing to



Marc Fliedner

respond to circumstances like poverty and mental illness, and address institutional racism in the criminal-justice system. "A lot of just plain progressives in New York City want those things, too," he said.

To take a break from the music, Fliedner slipped out of the venue with two campaign deputies—Dylan Hansen-Fliedner, his twenty-five-year-old son, and Steven Panovich, a Brooklyn-based activist and artist—who had come dressed as Dougie Jones and Mr. C, characters from "Twin Peaks: The Return," both played by Kyle MacLachlan. Hansen-Fliedner had on a lime-green blazer, while Panovich wore a ratty black wig. The trio stood in a semicircle and described how Fliedner's write-in

campaign had begun on the night of October 10th.

"He was speaking at a book launch for Alex Vitale's 'The End of Policing,'" Hansen-Friedner said. "And we just start getting a hundred Twitter notifications, because this Twitter user"—a Brooklyn resident who had met Friedner at the West Indian American Day Parade, in September—"was responding to every tweet about Cy Vance, 'You should write in Marc Friedner.' 'You should write in Marc Friedner.'" Other Twitter users joined in, urging Friedner to run. The notion spread so fast that it reached other people at the book party before he had decided what to do about it.

"By the time I got up to speak, there were these people talking about this guy who was being recruited—and then one of the journalists there said, 'That's the guy, he's here,'" Friedner said.

"And then all of a sudden Shaun King was tweeting about it," Panovich said, referring to the Intercept columnist, who has more than eight hundred thousand followers.

"That was within hours—that was huge," Friedner said, nodding.

"We found out, after he said yes, that he had to move to Manhattan," Hansen-Friedner said.

Panovich interjected: "I actually tweeted, 'Marc, move to Manhattan.'"

—Eric Lach

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## LEGACY DEPT. BEACON



Twelve thousand photographers, graphic designers, creative directors, and filmmakers attended a recent conference hosted by Adobe, in Las Vegas. For many, Barack Obama's official White House photographer, Pete Souza, was the main attraction. Nine hundred people filled a ballroom in the Venetian for a "fireside chat" with Souza, a sixty-two-year-old former Chicago *Tribune* photographer and professor of photojournalism at Ohio University, who took nearly two million pictures of Obama during his two terms in office. Three hundred and nineteen of these appear

in Souza's five-pound book, "Obama: An Intimate Portrait," released this week by Little, Brown.

Shortly before the book's publication, Obama still hadn't seen a copy. But he'd offered Souza some advice. As the photographer culled millions of Presidential images down to hundreds, Obama told him, "Sometimes you've got to choose the aesthetic over the narrative." Souza agreed. The former Commander-in-Chief, he realized, "is a photo editor, too."

Souza has been telling such stories around the country at standing-room-only talks that have functioned, unexpectedly, as group-therapy sessions. In Las Vegas—as in Atlanta and New York—members of the audience wept. "Souza's work has been a beacon of light and hope in these dark times," Caroline Kustu, a graphic designer living in Dallas, said before the talk at the Venetian. A box of tissues was nearby. "It's a reminder that there were good times, and there will be good times again. His work makes me emotional. But I'm also pregnant."

Spencer Harding-McDermott, a video-production intern from Lincoln, Nebraska, sat beside Kustu. "I could kind of see myself in Souza's images of Obama," he said. "How joyful and open that felt. That White House was part of us. It was an open book."

"Souza was able to just, like, be invisible," Drew Fowler, a creative director from Sacramento, sitting nearby, said. "But not afraid to be right in the middle of everything."

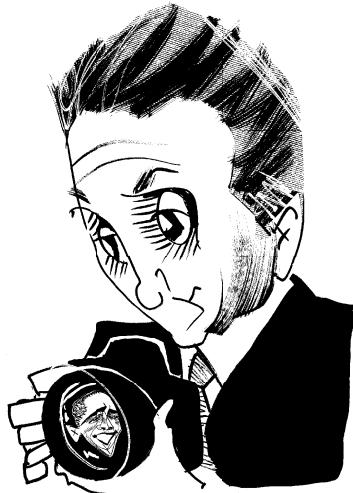
"I never heard his name until the end of Obama's Presidency," Harding-McDermott said.

"And then he started trolling Trump," Fowler replied.

Souza has a million and a half Instagram followers. Many discovered him after the Inauguration of President Trump, the unnamed but obvious target of Souza's feed. "His Instagram has helped me get through this year," Kustu noted. When Trump declined to throw the first pitch at the Washington Nationals' home opener, in March, Souza shared a photograph of Obama winding up. When Melania Trump swatted away her husband's hand, in May, Souza posted a picture of Barack and Michelle's fingers intertwined. Last month, when Trump claimed that Obama hadn't called the families of fallen U.S. soldiers, Souza

posted a picture of the former President and First Lady consoling a family whose son was killed in Afghanistan.

In Vegas, Souza appeared onstage in dark clothes, chewing gum. He began by showing images from his years as Reagan's White House photographer. Then shots of the Middle East. "We're trying to get through this," he said, "so we can get to the Obama pictures." Then: there



Pete Souza

was Obama playing in the snow, on the White House lawn, with his daughters; palling around with Joe Biden; working in the Treaty Room late at night; standing in an elevator with Michelle, before his first Inauguration; bending over so a small African-American boy could touch his hair.

A picture of Obama and his national-security staff watching the bin Laden raid required C.I.A. clearance. "We showed it to the deputy director, Mike Morell," Souza recalled. "And we're, like, Is this document on the table classified? He said, 'Yes.' I thought about it for two seconds and said, 'Can we declassify it?' He said, 'No.' So I said, 'What if we pixelize it?' He said, 'I'd be O.K. with that.' So that's what we did."

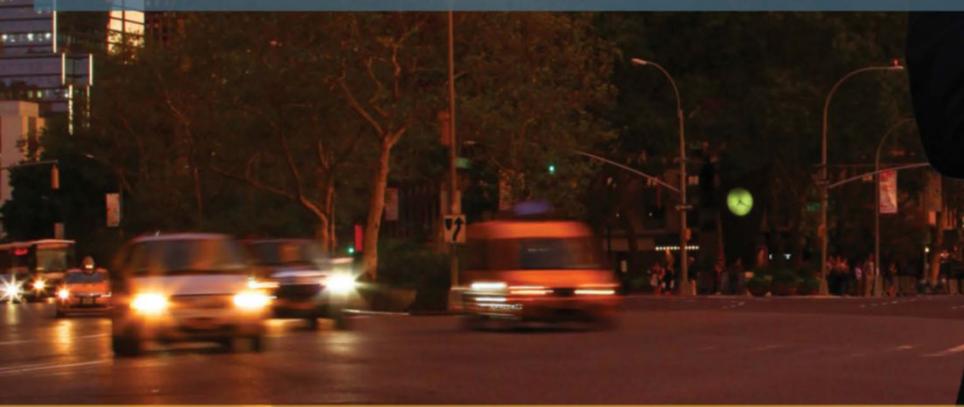
"Was that work done on Adobe Photoshop?" the moderator asked.

"Yes," Souza said. The crowd laughed. That was the only product plug.

An image of Obama embracing the parents of a boy killed in the Sandy Hook shooting silenced the room. "It was the hardest thing I ever did," Souza said. He described driving to Newtown, Connecticut, to ask the parents if they'd permit him to publish it. "They said they'd

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be honored." He continued, his voice cracking. "Shame on us for not getting anything done on gun control."

Afterward, fans mobbed Souza to ask for selfies. "I love what you're doing to Trump on Instagram," one woman told him.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Souza replied.

—Charles Bethea

## THE PICTURES SMALL WORLD



In the Queens Museum, just past Arthur Ashe Stadium, there's a large, quiet room containing a 9,365-square-foot replica of New York City. Made of urethane foam, wood, plastic, and hand-painted paper—except for the bridges, which are etched brass—the Panorama of the City of New York has a scale of one inch to a hundred feet. (The Empire State Building stands at fifteen inches tall.) To gaze on it from the walkway along its perimeter is to feel like a great god beholding creation, or, more to the point, like Robert Moses, who conceived the sculpture for the 1964 World's Fair. "Moses designed the Panorama as a teaching tool," Louise Weinberg, the museum's archives manager, said the other day, "and obviously as a paean to himself."

It was a Thursday afternoon, and Weinberg was showing in a frequent visitor, the children's-book author Brian Selznick. A boyish fifty-one-year-old, Selznick gave the Panorama a starring role in his 2011 novel, "Wonderstruck," which traces the parallel meanderings of two deaf children fifty years apart. It's now a movie, directed by Todd Haynes. (Selznick's previous book, "The Invention of Hugo Cabret," became the Martin Scorsese film "Hugo.") Selznick first saw the Panorama about a decade ago, when he brought some friends' kids. "Everybody was really cranky by the time we got to the museum," he said, but, upon stepping into the room, "we all woke up." Not long after, he contacted Weinberg, and she let him take closeup photographs, from which he drew the book's crosshatched illustrations. She also let him root through archival materials, including photos of women in flared skirts affixing miniature water towers to rooftops.

"Maybe we should walk down closer to Manhattan," Selznick said, as he and Weinberg hovered over Coney Island, complete with a Lilliputian roller coaster. In "Wonderstruck," Julianne Moore plays a museum worker who keeps the skyline up to date with new buildings, but no such job exists in real life—the Panorama, like the city, has modernized in fits and starts. Citi Field is there, but you won't find a teensy Barclays Center. (Developers have to pay for their projects to be miniaturized.) The Twin Towers have remained. "It's kind of hit or miss what's

going to be updated," Weinberg said. "One of our board members wanted to 3-D-print the entire thing, which would have taken the soul away from it."

Selznick, who wore a flannel shirt and had a Philippa Gregory novel stuffed in the back of his jeans, peered through mounted VR goggles. "I can't quite get it to focus, but it looks cool," he said. He pointed to Park Slope, where he lives with his husband. Selznick grew up in New Jersey, which is represented by a black outline along the west wall—No Man's Land. "The whole book was inspired by the fact that my parents hated New York when I was a kid," he said. "So I developed this very deep fear of it. It wasn't until I was out of college that I got the nerve to move to the city."

Weinberg offered to let Selznick join her in actually walking on the Panorama, which requires special booties and a cautious tread. (While filming "Wonderstruck," a cameraman accidentally broke the George Washington Bridge, but "they took it to their shop and re-welded it," Weinberg said.) The pair ducked through a small employees-only door and emerged onto the Lower Bay, where Weinberg picked up some bits of trash. "This is the Verrazano Bridge," she said, "so just take a giant step over it."

Selznick tiptoed up the Hudson and pointed out a building on West Eighteenth Street where he lived in the nineties, while working a day job at Eeyore's Books for Children. Before that, he lived on Ninety-ninth Street ("right around here") with four roommates. "My landlord told me Madonna used to live in my bedroom," he recalled. "No one ever believed me. Years later, I was at a party in the East Village and I met this woman, and we got to talking about where we'd lived in New York. She said she'd lived on Ninety-ninth and Riverside. And I said I'd lived on Ninety-ninth and Riverside. And she said, 'Madonna was my roommate.' So it turns out it was true!"

A tourist on the walkway called out from above in a Spanish accent: "De Cloisters?" Selznick hopped uptown to find it for her. Another museumgoer was flashing a laser pointer at a tiny airplane suspended on a string over Queens. (When it's turned on, it lands at tiny LaGuardia.) "See?" Selznick said. "Everything's interesting when it's small."

—Michael Schulman



*"I spy with my little eye something heading toward divorce."*

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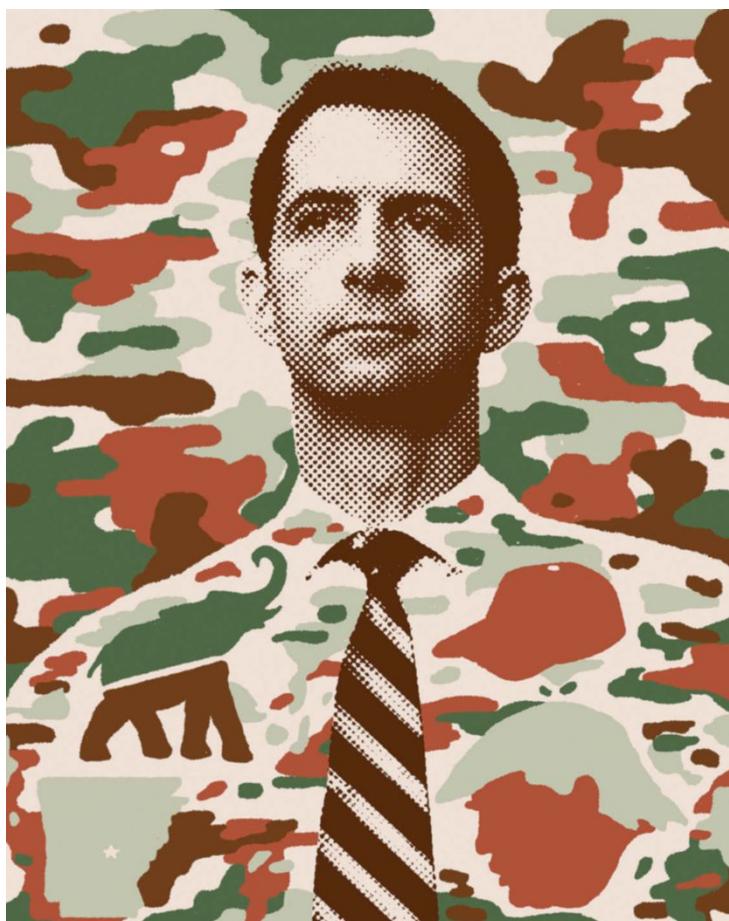
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## TRUMP'S INHERITOR

*Tom Cotton and the future of the G.O.P.*

BY JEFFREY TOOBIN



If you believed the national media, the week of the annual Republican Party fund-raising dinner, in Fort Smith, Arkansas, in late August, was one of the worst of Donald Trump's Presidency. The President had just responded to the unrest in Charlottesville with statements that appeared sympathetic to neo-Nazi demonstrators, and even some members of his own party were denouncing him. The White House staff was in turmoil, following the departure of Reince Priebus as chief of staff, and the Senate had failed to pass a replacement for the Affordable Care Act. The featured speaker for the evening was the state's

junior senator, Tom Cotton, who seized the chance to address the disquiet in the nation's capital.

At forty years old, Cotton is the youngest member of the Senate, and he retains the erect posture and solemn bearing that he displayed as a member of the Army's Old Guard, which presides at military ceremonies, including funerals, in Washington. He's let his hair grow, a little, since his Army days. When he first ran for office, in 2012—he served a single term in the House of Representatives before winning his Senate seat, in 2014—Cotton was often described as robotic on the stump, but he's improved some-

*Cotton plays successfully to the warring constituencies of the Republican party.*

what as a speaker, even if he still projects more intelligence than warmth. In this manner, he gave an assignment to the two hundred or so guests in the hotel ballroom.

"Go home tonight and turn on one of the nighttime comedy shows. Tomorrow morning, turn on one of the cable morning-news shows. This Saturday, watch 'Saturday Night Live,'" he said. "All the high wardens of popular culture in this country, they love to make fun of Donald Trump, to mock him, to ridicule him. They make fun of his hair, they make fun of the color of his skin, they make fun of the way he talks—he's from Queens, not from Manhattan. They make fun of that long tie he wears, they make fun of his taste for McDonald's." He went on, "What I don't think they realize is that out here in Arkansas and the heartland and the places that made a difference in that election, like Michigan and Wisconsin, when we hear that kind of ridicule, we hear them making fun of the way *we* look, and the way *we* talk, and the way *we* think."

It was, on one level, a breathtaking leap—to equate mockery of a louche New York billionaire with attacks on the citizens of this small, conservative city, which lies across the Arkansas River from Oklahoma. But Cotton's appeal to his audience for solidarity with Trump, which was greeted with strong applause, represented just one part of his enthusiastic embrace of the President. Stephen Bannon, Trump's former top strategist and the chairman of the right-wing Web site Breitbart News, told me, "Next to Trump, he's the elected official who gets it the most—the economic nationalism. Cotton was the one most supportive of us, up front and behind the scenes, from the beginning. He understands that the Washington élite—this permanent political class of both parties, between the K Street consultants and politicians—needs to be shattered." At the same time, Cotton has maintained strong ties with the establishment wing of the G.O.P. Karl Rove, President George W. Bush's chief political adviser, told me, "Cotton is not like a Steve Bannon, who wants to blow up the existing structure, uproot the ideology of the Republican Party and replace

it with something new. He's a rising star. He's capable of building bridges within the Party. He wants to get things done."

In recent weeks, several Republican Senators have denounced Trump for his intemperance and his dishonesty. Jeff Flake, of Arizona, and Bob Corker, of Tennessee, condemned Trump and announced that they would not seek reelection in 2018. Ben Sasse, of Nebraska, whose term is not up until 2020, said that, by threatening journalists, Trump was violating his oath to defend the Constitution. Cotton has made a different bet, offering only the gentlest of criticisms of the President. When, in the course of several weeks of conversations, I asked Cotton about one or another of Trump's controversial statements or tweets, he always responded in the same manner. "The President puts things sometimes in a way that I would not," he said in early October. "But he was still nominated by our voters and elected by the American people to be our President, and if we want him to accomplish our agenda we need to set him up for success."

Even Trump's latest political traumas have not shaken Cotton's faith in him. Following the indictment of Trump's former campaign manager Paul Manafort and former campaign adviser Rick Gates, last week, Cotton urged a prompt resolution of the investigation into the Trump campaign, but he did not call for the removal of Robert Mueller, the special counsel. "What's in the best interest of everyone is for these inquiries to move forward, and to follow them to their proper conclusion as quickly as possible," Cotton said.

Roby Brock, who hosts the leading public-affairs television program in Arkansas, told me, "From the beginning, Tom could play to both the establishment and the Tea Party. Everyone recognizes he's got a firm set of conservative principles, but that makes him a polarizing figure. There are a lot of people here, too, who hate him and think he's the Antichrist. The only thing everyone agrees on is that he wants to be President someday." To make that next leap, Cotton expresses the militarism, bellicosity, intolerance, and xenophobia of Donald Trump, but without

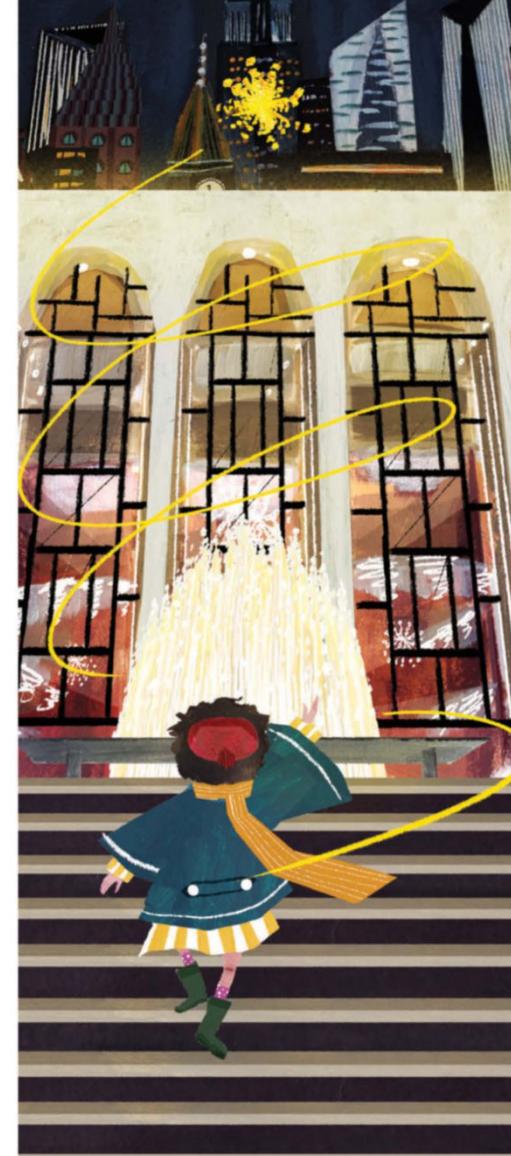
the childish tweets. For those who see Trump's Presidency as an aberration, or as a singular phenomenon, Cotton offers a useful corrective. He and his supporters see Trump and Trumpism as the future of the Republican Party.

In the early days of the Trump Administration, Cotton exercised influence from behind the scenes. Bannon told me, "He spent a lot of time in my little war room, and he gave us a lot of good advice. He was the one who told us about John Kelly," the former Marine Corps general who is now Trump's chief of staff. (The Senator and Kelly had met at a security conference when Cotton was in the House.) In recent months, however, Cotton's influence has become more apparent, as Trump has embraced some of his most high-profile positions.

In September, President Trump repealed the Obama-era executive order known as DACA, which protected the so-called Dreamers from deportation, but he said that he also wanted Congress to pass a law that would allow them to remain in the United States, even making a preliminary deal with Chuck Schumer and Nancy Pelosi, the Democratic congressional leaders. But, after Cotton spoke out against a quick deal to protect the Dreamers, Trump made a formal proposal to Congress that attached many strings Cotton had demanded. "I had dinner with the President and General Kelly on October 2nd, and we talked about DACA," Cotton told me. "They said that Chuck and Nancy had done some post-dinner spin, to go along with the post-dinner dessert, about what the President actually agreed to on DACA. I think the fix that the President announced is a better step in the right direction."

The following month, Trump gave Cotton a victory on the touchstone issue of his Senate career by decertifying Iran's compliance with the nuclear-arms deal that the Obama Administration had negotiated. "I told the President in July that he shouldn't certify that Iran was complying with the agreement," Cotton told me. "Putting aside the issue of technical compliance or noncompliance, it's clear that the agreement is not in our national interest." Following Trump's action, Cotton

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joined forces with Senator Corker, the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, on a proposal that, if passed, would likely lead to the termination of the Iran nuclear deal and the reimposition of American sanctions.

"Let there be no doubt about this point," Cotton said, in a recent speech to the Council on Foreign Relations. "If we are forced to take action, the United States has the ability to totally destroy Iran's nuclear infrastructure. And, if they choose to rebuild it, we could destroy it again, until they get the picture. Nor should we hesitate if compelled to take military action." In describing his preferred approach to negotiations with Iran, Cotton said, "One thing I learned in the Army is that when your opponent is on his knees you drive him to the ground and choke him out." In response, a questioner pointed out that killing a prisoner of war is not "American practice." (It is, in fact, a war crime.)

Similarly, in North Korea, Cotton supports Trump's brinkmanship with Kim Jong Un, and excoriates China for its failure to rein in its ally. "Time and time again, Beijing shows that it is not up to being the great power it aspires to be," Cotton said. (His hostility toward China endears him to the Bannon wing of the Republican Party, which views the U.S.-China relationship as the defining conflict of the modern world.)

Cotton has emerged as such a close ally of the Trump White House that one recent report suggested that the President would name him director of the C.I.A. if Mike Pompeo, the current director, were to replace Rex Tillerson as Secretary of State. (Trump is widely believed to be dissatisfied with Tillerson.) In a conversation in mid-October, Cotton did not dismiss the possibility of taking the C.I.A. job. "I am pleased to be a senator," he told me. "But, of course, I will always take a call from the President, and he has called me many times." As a member of Trump's Administration, Cotton would ratify the President's instincts.

He offers Trump a certainty that matches his own, especially about the threats the nation faces and the best ways to address them.

In August, I visited Cotton in the house where he grew up, in Yell County, Arkansas. When I arrived, Cotton's father was also walking in the door. Len Cotton did not offer to shake hands right away, because he had just welcomed two newborn calves to the family farm, and he thought it prudent to wash up first.

The Cottons have been in Arkansas for six generations, and Tom's parents make their living running what's known as a cow-calf operation, on several plots of land in the Arkansas River Valley. In the specialized world of beef-and-dairy production, the Cottons' business is the first stage—the production of the cows, which are sold to ranchers. The Cottons have always done some farming, but when Tom was a boy his mother was a public-school teacher and a middle-school principal, and his father worked for state government, doing inspections for the Department of Health. Like most people in Arkansas at the time, Tom's parents were Democrats. But the leitmotif of Tom Cotton's political career has been the decline of the Democratic Party among white voters in Arkansas. "The Democratic Party has drifted away from them," Tom told me, as his parents sat nearby. "Bill Clinton would be repudiated by his own party today. Hillary Clinton repudiated a lot of her husband's chief accomplishments when he was in office. So that's a real fundamental story about politics in Arkansas and politics across the heartland."

Tom had an idyllic boyhood in the town of Dardanelle, centered on sports and school, where he excelled, and he won admission to Harvard. When he arrived in Cambridge, in the fall of 1995, he still had braces on his teeth, though he had grown to a full six feet five; friends remember him as a bit of a loner, at least at first. He was also already a conservative, if not a Republi-

can, as he was not afraid to let his new neighbors know. One late night during his freshman year, he and his roommates were joined by Kristin Gore, the daughter of the Vice-President, who had a room nearby. Gore began discussing the environmental ills of cattle farming. As one roommate recalled, Cotton listened for a time, and then fumed, "Kristin, you don't know shit about cows!" (Neither Gore nor Cotton remembered this exchange, though Cotton, who said he had a friendly relationship with the Vice-President's daughter, remarked, "That sounds like something I might say.")

Cotton began writing an opinion column for the *Crimson*, the campus daily, where he made a name for himself as an outspoken dissenter on a liberal campus. Shortly before he graduated, in 1998, Thomas B. Cotton wrote a farewell to his readers. "I never sought to be loved or to be treated justly," he said. "How could I? I wrote against sacred cows, such as the cult of diversity, affirmative action, conspicuous compassion and radical participatory democracy. I wrote in favor of taboo notions, such as Promise Keepers, student apathy, honor and (most unforgivably) conservatism." After college, Cotton went to Harvard Law School. He worked in law firms during the summers and landed a clerkship with a federal appeals-court judge.

He appeared headed for a life of prosperous anonymity in law, but the attacks of September 11, 2001, upended his plans. "I was going to play intramural basketball, enjoy my last year in school, and then, in the second week of school, the attacks happened, and that changed my orientation," he told me. "I spent a lot more time from that point forward thinking about the threat we faced, reading about history, reading military history, started thinking about joining the Army."

Cotton approached the matter with the careful deliberation that has characterized his career. He decided to take the clerkship he had already accepted, with Judge Jerry Smith, on the Fifth Circuit, then work at Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher, in Washington, to start paying off his student loans. "I thought he had a great future at the firm," Bill Kilberg, the partner who supervised Cotton's



work, told me. "Then, one day in 2004, Tom came and said he was thinking about leaving the firm to join the Army. I said, 'Tom, the Army has plenty of lawyers, they really don't need you, and it's not necessary for you to join the Army to serve.' He said, 'Oh, no, I'm not going to be a lawyer. I'm going to be an Airborne Ranger.' And I looked at him and said, 'Tom, have you talked to your mother about this?'"

When I asked Cotton about the decision, he said, "The Army needs lawyers, but that's not the heart of the Army's mission. The Army's mission is the infantry's mission." He went on, "So I wanted to do that mission, wanted to do the heart of it. I wanted to lead troops in combat."

Cotton served with the 101st Airborne Division in Iraq. He led ninety-six-hour patrols in the field, followed by thirty-six-hour stretches at a base near Baghdad. The base had Internet access, and one day in the summer of 2006 Cotton saw that the *Times* had disclosed, over objections from the Bush Administration, the existence of certain terrorist-surveillance programs. Cotton fired off a letter to the editor, copying several conservative Web sites, and then left on a patrol, where he was cut off from all electronic contact with the United States. "Congratulations on disclosing our government's highly classified anti-terrorist-financing program," the letter begins. "I apologize for not writing sooner. But I am a lieutenant in the United States Army and I spent the last four days patrolling one of the more dangerous areas in Iraq."

The letter combined outrage, overstatement, and savvy politics in a manner that Trump would perfect a decade later. "You may think you have done a public service, but you have gravely endangered the lives of my soldiers and all other soldiers and innocent Iraqis here," Cotton wrote. "Next time I hear that familiar explosion—or next time I feel it—I will wonder whether we could have stopped that bomb had you not instructed terrorists how to evade our financial surveillance." He continued, "And, by the way, having graduated from Harvard Law and practiced with a federal appellate judge and two Washington law firms before becoming an infantry officer, I am well-versed

in the espionage laws relevant to this story and others—laws you have plainly violated. I hope that my colleagues at the Department of Justice match the courage of my soldiers here and prosecute you and your newspaper to the fullest extent of the law. By the time we return home, maybe you will be in your rightful place: not at the Pulitzer announcements, but behind bars." When Cotton returned to the base, he learned that the *Times* hadn't run the letter but the Web sites had, and the chief of staff of the Army had distributed it to his subordinates.

"I started hearing about Tom when he was still in the military, when I was state chair of our party," Dennis Mil-ligan, who is now the Arkansas state treasurer, told me. "As chair, you're always looking for new talent, and people were talking about him even then. They knew he had given up all that money in the law to serve his country." From Iraq, Cotton was summoned to serve in the Old Guard. (Cotton hoped he had won appointment to the prestigious unit on merit, but the Army had simply summoned the six tallest lieutenants in Iraq.) Later, he volun-

teered for a tour in Afghanistan, where he won a Bronze Star, before leaving the service, in 2009. After a brief stint working at McKinsey, Cotton returned to Arkansas to run for Congress in his home district. Mike Ross, a Democrat, had retired, and Cotton, campaigning with a heavy emphasis on his military service, won the open seat with about sixty per cent of the vote.

Arkansas, though generally regarded as a Southern state, exists at a crossroads of regions that have been slipping away from Democrats for decades. The booming north, along the Missouri border, has a Midwestern feel, especially because Walmart's headquarters, in Bentonville, has attracted so many newcomers. The mountainous west owes much to its neighbors in Texas and Oklahoma; the plains of the east and the south, with their cotton fields and rice farms, are conspicuously Southern. "You can tell from the music," Mark Pryor, a former Democratic senator from Arkansas, told me. "In the mountains, it's bluegrass and folk music, but in the east and south it's blues. Memphis is just across the



Mississippi. Half of those people at Sun Records were originally from Arkansas."

Pryor, more than anyone, has lived the recent political evolution of his state. His father, David (governor from 1975 to 1979, and senator from 1979 to 1997), along with Dale Bumpers (governor from 1971 to 1975, and senator from 1975 to 1999), and Bill Clinton (governor from 1979 to 1981 and 1983 to 1992), constitute the gifted political triumvirate that kept the Democratic Party alive in Arkansas after it had faded in nearby states. Clinton, of course, parlayed his moderate liberalism into two terms as President. Mark Pryor was elected state attorney general in 1998, and then won his Senate seat in 2002. Six years later, Republicans didn't even field an opponent against him. But just six years after that, in 2014, Pryor lost in a landslide to the thirty-seven-year-old Tom Cotton.

"For a long time, Arkansas Democratic politics was kept separate from national Democratic politics," John Brummett, a political columnist at the *Democrat-Gazette*, the leading newspaper in the state, told me. "That continued in Arkansas through the nineties and into the two-thousands, because of Clinton. White rural conservatives here could look on the national Democratic Party and see the same guy as President that they were happy enough with in Arkansas." But the trends that were altering the politics of neighboring states were percolating in Arkansas as well. "'God, guns, and gays'—social issues—were driving white conservatives to the Republicans all along," Brummett said. "It just exploded when Obama became President." Before the Obama years, Republicans had won the occasional race in Arkansas; Mike Huckabee was first elected governor in the nineties. But in the past decade the state's six-person congressional delegation and seven statewide elected officials have gone from nearly all Democrats to all Republicans.

Toxic racial politics contributed to this shift. Max Brantley, a longtime local journalist, now with the *Arkansas Times*, said, "It is impossible not to see race as a central element in the fall of the Democratic Party here." After the crisis over the integration of Lit-

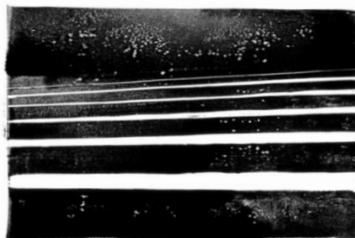
tle Rock Central High School, in 1957, racial politics in the state calmed for a time. This was in part because of the relatively small number of African-Americans; they make up roughly fifteen per cent of the population, as opposed to thirty per cent in the Deep South. "Discrimination was not as evident in Arkansas as it was in other Southern states," Joyce Elliott, a veteran state senator, said. "It took a black President to bring out the threat." She added, "I would always say to my liberal white friends, 'Oh, come on, surely it's gotten better.' And they'd say to me, 'Oh, no, it hasn't. You can't believe what white people say about Obama in private—he's Kenyan, he's Muslim, they'd call him unprintable racial epithets.'" Brantley told me, "You needed to be here to see how quickly the politics changed after Obama came in. He is so deeply disliked here. I think a lot of people in Arkansas thought he was 'uppity,' to use the old smear."

Obama's Presidency certainly coincided with, if it didn't directly cause, the decimation of the Democratic Party in Arkansas. Republicans thrived by targeting Obama even in contests that had nothing to do with him. Republican candidates for justice of the peace inveighed against Obamacare, which they never referred to as the Affordable Care Act. When Cotton challenged Pryor, in 2014, he put Obama

mous outside spending by conservative groups, including some affiliated with the Koch brothers, who have substantial holdings in Arkansas. According to the Center for Responsive Politics, outside groups spent twenty-three million dollars for Cotton, compared with fourteen million for Pryor.

Cotton rejects the notion that race had anything to do with his victory, or with the rise of the Republican Party in Arkansas. "I don't think that's all that different from the intense unpopularity of George Bush in 2006 and 2008," he told me, in a conversation in his Senate office. "The President's the head of the Party, he takes up most of the attention in American politics, and when he's very unpopular opponents in the other party tend to run against him, whether they're running for the United States Senate or whether they're running for justice of the peace." Besides, he said, Democrats in Arkansas had a special reason to disdain Obama: "It wasn't because Barack Obama was black, it was because Barack Obama stopped the Clinton restoration."

As reviled as President Obama was in Arkansas, the Affordable Care Act has proved successful and popular in the state. About three hundred thousand people, which amounts to more than ten per cent of the state's population, have taken advantage of the law to obtain health insurance. The state's governor, Asa Hutchinson, is a conservative Republican, but he's urged Congress to protect the money that the state receives under the program. He has, however, made a change. The program is not called Obamacare but, rather, Arkansas Works. It apparently took the removal of the President's name to make the law palatable to Arkansans.



at the center of his campaign. In one television advertisement, featuring a grainy black-and-white video of Obama, Cotton vowed, "We need a senator who will hold the President accountable." Another showed Obama saying that he wasn't on the ballot but his policies were. "President Obama is finally right about something," Cotton said, in response. A third ad ended with the tagline "Mark Pryor—voting with Obama, voting against Arkansans like you." Cotton also benefitted from enor-

On the day after I visited Cotton's family's home, I told him that I had driven the scenic route back to Little Rock. "That's because you drove along the Ouachita Mountains, which is the only range in Arkansas that goes west to east," he said. "It provides more attractive views of the sunset than the north-south ranges." This was an accurate, if rather bloodless, assessment of the aesthetics of the countryside, one that might be made by "Star Trek"'s

Mr. Spock, whom Cotton, with his air of icy certainty, somewhat resembles.

"I remember the first time I met Tommy," Trey Gowdy, a South Carolina congressman, told me. "We were debating a medical-malpractice bill on the floor of the House, and he comes up and starts talking about the details of the bill. And I said, 'First of all, who are you?' He said he was the new congressman from Arkansas. And I said, 'You can't be from Arkansas, because you're wearing shoes.' And then he starts telling me to read some law-review article about malpractice by Robert Bork or someone. And I said, 'Dude, the chess club meets around the corner.'" (Gowdy later became a close friend of Cotton and his wife, Anna, a lawyer and former prosecutor.)

Shortly after Cotton was elected to the House, the Senate passed a comprehensive immigration-reform bill, which offered a path to citizenship for some undocumented aliens. Cotton was among the leaders of the success-

ful effort to persuade John Boehner, then the Speaker, to block the bill from even coming up for a vote in the House. When we chatted at the kitchen table of his boyhood home, Cotton explained his opposition. "It was the élite, bipartisan consensus—'It's the only possible solution'—another idea which the great and the good in Washington love, but wrongheaded in almost every particular," he said. "If you live in a big city and you work in an office building, immigration is almost an unalloyed good for you. . . . It makes the price of services that you pay for a little bit more affordable—whether it's your nanny to take care of your kids for you, or landscaping your yard, or pedicures, manicures, that sort of thing. And you get a lot of exciting new fusion restaurants as well."

"But if you live and work in a community where they have a large illegal-immigrant population that's straining the public school, that's clogging up the emergency room when you're try-

ing to get care, that makes it more dangerous to drive in the roads because people don't have driver's licenses or they don't have insurance, or if they are bidding down the wages or even taking jobs away from you, then it doesn't look nearly so good," Cotton said. He endorses Trump's plan to build a wall on the Mexican border—"Walls work," he often says—and is a lead sponsor of a bill, strongly supported by the White House, that would cut legal immigration roughly in half. (Cotton's views on immigration are debatable in every particular. It's far from clear that a border wall with Mexico would "work" to stop illegal immigration in any meaningful way. Most economists believe that immigrants, legal and otherwise, add more to the economy than they take from it, and that their presence in the labor force does not lead to lower wages over all.)

As a legislator, Cotton has shown little deference to his elders. John Cornyn,



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the senior senator from Texas, told me that new senators used to sit back for a while. “But Tom proved right away that he was very engaged and knowledgeable,” Cornyn said. “He probably knows more about geopolitics than most senators.” In March of his first year in the Senate, Cotton wrote an open letter to the “Leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran,” which was co-signed by forty-six other Republican senators, warning the mullahs that Congress might undo any agreement they reached with Obama. The letter was denounced by Executive Branch officials as an attempt to interfere in a diplomatic initiative, but Cotton regards it as a triumph. In his recent speech at the Council on Foreign Relations, he boasted about the letter: “Didn’t I warn the ayatollahs that this deal might not survive if it wasn’t a treaty? I think I did.”

When I asked Cotton what he learned during the Iraq War, he replied, “Security comes first.” He continued, “In 2003, there were a lot of grand ambitions of what a postwar Iraq would look like, and all the different things that needed to happen. And we neglected the most basic thing, which is physical security for the people there and for our troops. You see that now in Afghanistan as well. You see it in so many places around the world. You simply cannot neglect security, and without security there cannot be political compromise and reconciliation, there cannot be good governance, there cannot be economic development, there can’t be anything.”

If Rand Paul is the leading Republican isolationist in the Senate, Cotton, in short order, has become heir to the opposing wing of the Party, the one associated with Senator John McCain, whose efforts to increase the defense budget Cotton has championed. “Tom is a veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan. He’s got mud on his boots,” McCain told me. “That means he has special credibility on those issues, just like the World War Two generation did around here for a long time. We need Tom and people like him.” But Cotton has gone well past McCain in his swaggering belligerence. In a February, 2015, hearing of the Armed Services Committee, Cotton announced

that he favored keeping open the detention facility at Guantánamo Bay. “In my opinion, the only problem with Guantánamo Bay is there are too many empty beds and cells there right now,” Cotton said. “We should be sending more terrorists there for further interrogation to keep this country safe. As far as I’m concerned, every last one of them can rot in hell, but as long as they don’t do that they can rot in Guantánamo Bay.” (Even McCain favors closing Guantánamo, which he believes stains the reputation of the United States and serves as a recruitment tool for terrorists.)

During the last days of the Obama Administration, Cotton also helped to sabotage a criminal-justice-reform bill, which had a meaningful chance of passage. Senator Cornyn, the second-ranking Republican, was pushing the bill, which would have ended mandatory minimum sentences for some narcotics offenders. Cotton took the public lead in making statements about the proposal which, as with his comments on Guantánamo, skirted the edge of demagoguery. “I don’t think any Republicans want legislation that is going to let out violent felons, which this bill would do,” Cotton said. His rhetoric helped turn a difficult political challenge into an impossible one, and the Republican leadership in the Senate never even brought the bill up for a vote. Cotton told me, “I think most Arkansans believe they elected me to help keep dangerous people in prison.” Jeff Sessions, Trump’s Attorney General, shares Cotton’s disdain for criminal-justice reform, and the move toward shorter sentences at the federal level has halted.

For some Democrats, however, Cotton made his name in the Senate in a more personally poisonous way. In his first year, Cotton placed a hold on Obama’s nominations for the Ambassadors to Sweden, Norway, and the Bahamas, because of an unrelated dispute regarding the Secret Service. As months passed, Cotton released the holds on the Sweden and Norway envoys—because, he said, those countries were NATO allies—but he prevented a vote on Cassandra Butts, an old friend of the President’s, as the Ambassador to the Bahamas. Butts

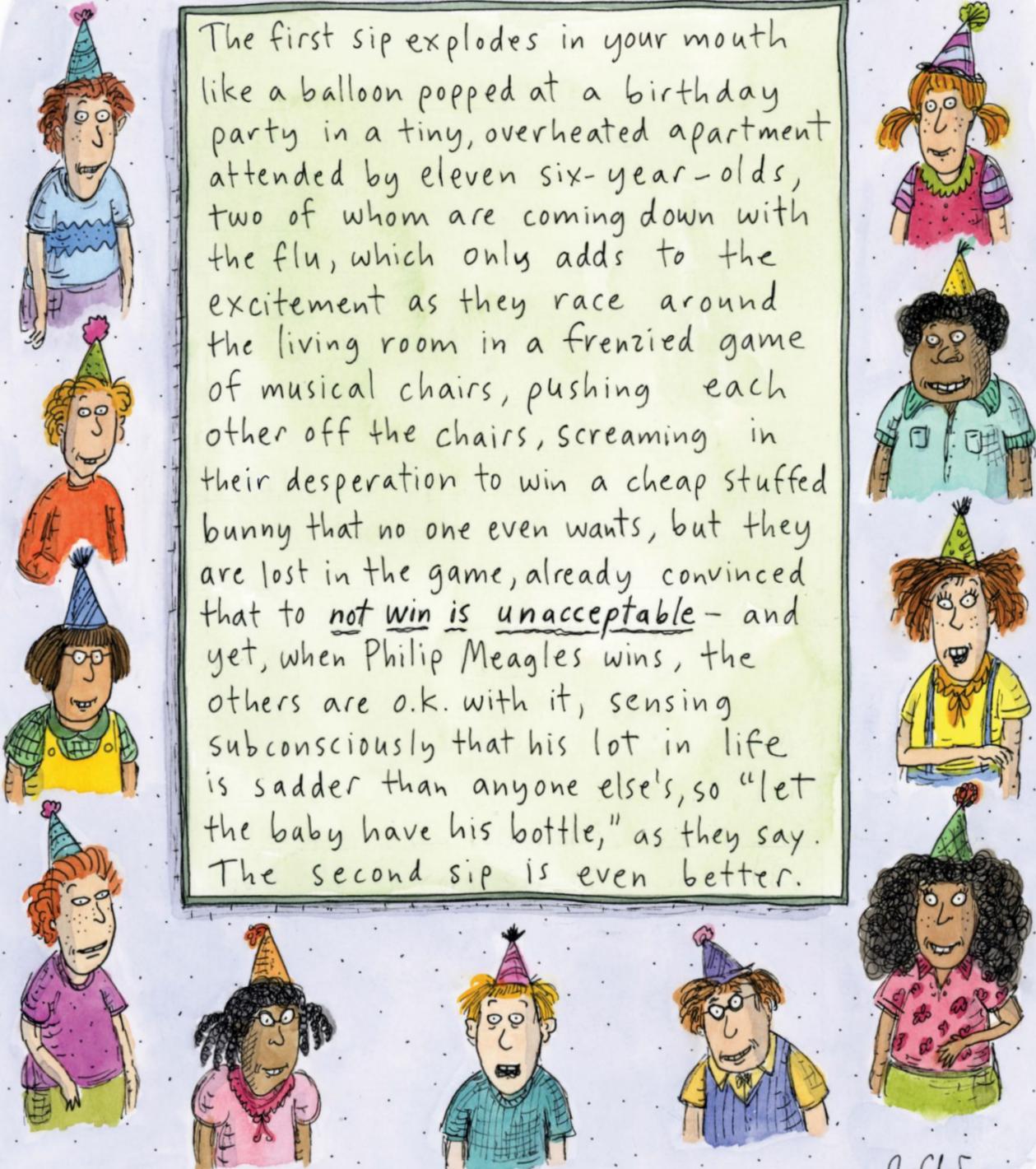
had been waiting for a Senate vote for eight hundred and thirty-five days when, in May, 2016, she died suddenly, of an undiagnosed cancer. Cotton said, “I feel very badly about her death and the timing of it. I wish the White House had just addressed this much earlier.” Still, Cotton’s actions left a bitter aftertaste for some of his colleagues. “I thought what he did was outrageous,” Richard Durbin, an Illinois Democrat and the assistant minority leader, said. “There is a point where winning a political battle isn’t worth it.”

For the moment, at least, Cotton appears to be a hybrid of insurgent and old guard, who can play successfully to the warring constituencies of the Republican Party. As Bannon put it, “How many guys in town can give a speech at the Council on Foreign Relations and also get kudos in the pages of Breitbart? The answer is, one guy.”

Cotton has carved out a clear Trumpism-without-Trump agenda: limits on immigration through legislation, deportations, and a wall; longer prison sentences for American convicts and suspected terrorists abroad; a bigger budget for the Department of Defense. The question is whether he has the charisma to sell that agenda to a broader public. Recently, at his Little Rock office, Cotton presented several medals to the family of George Anderson, a Second World War veteran who had died in 2006. Cotton began with a solemn introduction, but then, unexpectedly, Anderson’s family members, most of whom were elderly, took over the proceedings and began telling stories about George, who had made his living running car washes and coin-operated laundries. Cotton’s staff members and the assembled local reporters began chuckling at the rambling accounts of how George stacked his coins. A more deft politician might have joined in the fun, but Cotton just stood there, seemingly paralyzed by the deviations from good order. The ceremony came to a close when George Anderson’s surviving sister turned to Cotton and said, “As for you—you keep standing up for our President.” ♦

# WINE REVIEW

The first sip explodes in your mouth like a balloon popped at a birthday party in a tiny, overheated apartment attended by eleven six-year-olds, two of whom are coming down with the flu, which only adds to the excitement as they race around the living room in a frenzied game of musical chairs, pushing each other off the chairs, screaming in their desperation to win a cheap stuffed bunny that no one even wants, but they are lost in the game, already convinced that to not win is unacceptable—and yet, when Philip Meagles wins, the others are o.k. with it, sensing subconsciously that his lot in life is sadder than anyone else's, so "let the baby have his bottle," as they say. The second sip is even better.



# CONFLICTING CONVICTIONS

*What happens when a prosecutor puts the same gun in two hands.*

BY KEN ARMSTRONG



Late one spring night in 1984, the doorbell rang at the home of Norman and Mary Jane Stout. The Stouts, married thirty years, with three grown kids, lived in Guernsey County, Ohio, about a hundred yards off Interstate 70. Norman was a heavy-equipment operator; Mary Jane, who once worked as an office manager, was a collector of Holly Hobbie plates and figurines. They were at the kitchen table, paying bills. Norman opened the door to find two men, who looked to be in their mid-twenties. They said that their car had broken down on the highway and asked to use the telephone.

Norman invited them in, then watched

as one of the men, after finishing the call, took out a handkerchief and wiped off the receiver. The two men—their names were John David Stumpf and Clyde Daniel Wesley—pulled guns. “Oh, by the way, this is a stickup,” Wesley said. When Norman rushed at Stumpf, Stumpf shot him twice in the head; the first shot, Norman later recalled, hit “the bridge of my glasses, right between my eyes.” He lost consciousness and fell to the ground. Afterward, one of the robbers shot and killed Mary Jane. Norman came to in time to hear the men’s voices in another room, and then the shots that killed his wife. But he couldn’t see who fired the gun.

Stumpf and Wesley were both charged

*Judges have referred to inconsistent prosecutions as “unseemly” and “troubling.”*

with aggravated murder, and were prosecuted separately at the Guernsey County Courthouse. Stumpf’s case went to court in September, 1984. A county prosecutor, urging the death penalty, argued that Stumpf had shot Mary Jane: “Believing that he had killed Mr. Stout, this defendant then turned the same chrome-colored Raven automatic pistol upon Mary Jane Stout as she sat on the bed and shot her four times. Three times in the left side of the head and neck and one time in the wrist, obviously in order not to leave anyone available to identify him.” Stumpf was convicted and sentenced to death.

Seven months later, the prosecutor returned to court for Wesley’s trial. Again seeking the death penalty, he argued this time that Wesley had fired the fatal shots: “Believing that he had killed Mr. Stout, John David Stumpf pitched the gun aside.” At that point, the prosecutor continued, “this defendant, whose own gun was jammed, picked that chrome-colored Raven up and, as Mrs. Stout sat helplessly on her bed, shot her four times in order to leave no witnesses to the crime.” Wesley was convicted and sentenced to life.

Several years ago, a lawyer contacted me about a case in which he said prosecutors had argued contradictory theories of a crime. Looking into the subject, I didn’t find much—a few law-review articles and the occasional news story. The author of an article from 2001, a professor emeritus at Villanova University’s law school named Anne Bowen Poulin, told me that when she began her research a colleague said to her, “This is stupid. It never happens.” The next day, Poulin got a call from a former student, now a defense attorney, who had just such a case, in Philadelphia. “It does happen,” Poulin said. “And probably more often than we’d like to think.”

There’s no saying exactly how often. But, in a recent canvass of court rulings, I turned up more than four dozen cases, from California to Massachusetts, in which the defense attorney argued in an appeal that the prosecution had told conflicting stories about the crime. Prosecutors have offered contradictory theories about which defendant stabbed someone with a knife, or chopped a woman’s skull with a hatchet, or held a man’s head underwater. The most common scenario involves a fatal shot: the

prosecutor puts the gun in the hand of one defendant, then another. Under the legal principle of accomplice liability, a defendant can be convicted of murder without being the killer. But, if the prosecutor says that a defendant pulled the trigger, it's easier to ask a judge or a jury for a death sentence. At least twenty-nine men have been condemned in cases in which defense attorneys accused prosecutors of presenting contradictory theories. To date, seven of those twenty-nine have been executed.

More often than not, judges who are confronted with inconsistent prosecutions have affirmed convictions, while, at times, expressing distaste for the tactic. The descriptions applied by judges include "unseemly," "unseemly at best," "troubling," "deeply troubling," and "mighty troubling." "The state cannot divide and conquer in this manner," a federal appeals-court judge wrote in one Georgia case, in which the court threw out a defendant's conviction on other grounds. "Such actions reduce criminal trials to mere gamesmanship and rob them of their supposed purpose of a search for truth."

In 2004, the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals overturned John David Stumpf's conviction in the murder of Mary Jane Stout, writing, "Inconsistent theories render convictions unreliable." The state appealed, and on April 19, 2005, the Supreme Court heard oral arguments in Stumpf's case. Justice David Souter said, of the prosecution's contradictory theories, "It has to be the case that one of those arguments, if accepted, would lead to a false result." Souter asked how the use of conflicting arguments could square with due process. Justice Antonin Scalia said that he saw no such problem: "Due process doesn't mean perfection. It doesn't mean that each jury has to always reach the right result." Scalia's language was so blunt that even Ohio's State Solicitor saw a need to soften it. "I agree with that, Your Honor, and I hate to argue against my position, so I do this gently," he said. "One of the old saws of American law is, it's better one guilty person should go free than that one innocent person should be punished."

Two months later, the Supreme Court issued a unanimous opinion, written by Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, affirming Stumpf's conviction while avoiding the due-process question. Under Ohio's law

on aiding and abetting, Stumpf could have been convicted of aggravated murder no matter who fired the gun. The question, the Court determined, was whether the prosecution's inconsistency should invalidate Stumpf's death sentence. The Sixth Circuit had not tackled that issue, so the Supreme Court sent the case back for an answer. To this day, the Supreme Court has not ruled squarely on the validity of conflicting prosecution theories.

Cases like Stumpf's have long offered the courthouse equivalent of what the counsellor to the President Kellyanne Conway described, in January, as "alternative facts." In 1935, the Supreme Court said that a federal prosecutor "is the representative not of an ordinary party to a controversy, but of a sovereignty," and that his "interest, therefore, in a criminal prosecution is not that it shall win a case, but that justice shall be done." A prosecutor who presents contradictory theories risks violating this vision of his role. In "Do No Wrong," a 2009 book about legal ethics, Peter Joy and Kevin McMungal wrote, "Public respect and trust in our criminal justice system will suffer if factually inconsistent charges are pursued that result in an innocent person being convicted." "Imagine," they continued, how jurors "would feel about the prosecutor and the criminal justice system" if they learned that the prosecutor had told them one story of the crime—and then told another jury the opposite.

In the summer of 2000, Demetrius Pascall was twenty-seven—a large man, six feet tall, three hundred and two pounds, who played the bass guitar at Faith and Hope Ministries in Wellston, Missouri. He had been married two years, and he and his wife were looking to buy their first house. At about 10 P.M. on July 30th, he pulled into the parking lot of a Schnucks grocery store in St. Louis. The store, open twenty-four hours, was busy.

Pascall was driving a white 1990 Lincoln Continental with a blue ragtop. He dropped off a cousin at the store's entrance, then pulled alongside a couple of women walking to their car. According to police, as he chatted with one of the women, his Lincoln caught the attention of four men nearby, in a black Nissan Pathfinder. Antoine Bankhead, who was eighteen, and Martez Shadwick, who was

nineteen, had been friends since middle school. Bankhead had two children and had flipped burgers at Wendy's; Shadwick had a daughter and had worked there, too. Bankhead told me that he had met the other two men, Alvin Washington and I. V. Simms, who were both eighteen, more recently.

Two of the men approached Pascall, wearing black baseball caps and gold bandanas, which left only their eyes exposed. The caps had lettering affiliated with a local gang. One of the two pulled a pistol, a .380 semiautomatic. They told Pascall to get out of the car and demanded his jewelry. Pascall resisted and ran toward the grocery store. A bullet hit him in the left side of his chest, and, as he reached the entrance, he collapsed into the arms of a woman who was shopping with her son and three grandchildren. "Somebody help me," she heard him say. The gunman and the second robber jumped into Pascall's Lincoln and sped away. Pascall died at Saint Louis University Hospital, shortly after midnight.

Detetives interviewed at least eighteen eyewitnesses to the murder. Aside from race—both robbers were black—their descriptions were not consistent. One witness described both men as four feet eleven. Another said that both were maybe five feet six. A third said that both were between five feet nine and five feet ten. Yet another said that one was short, the other tall. Three witnesses said that one robber wore white or tan shorts, while three others said both wore bluejeans.

The day after the shooting, police spotted Washington driving the Pathfinder, which had been stolen the previous week. They cornered him in a garage, where they found the gun that had killed Pascall.

That same day, police found Pascall's Lincoln, stripped and partially burned. The only prints recovered from the car were Washington's. He told police that, on July 30th, the four men had driven to the Schnucks so that he could buy some dog food. Washington said that Shadwick and Bankhead had robbed Pascall, and that Shadwick had fired the gun.

Three days later, Shadwick turned himself in, accompanied by a lawyer, who advised him not to talk to the police. On August 14th, police arrested Bankhead

and Simms. Asked who committed the robbery, Bankhead named Washington and Simms, and said that Washington fired the fatal shot. Simms, on the way to the police station, told two officers that Washington and Shadwick were the robbers, and Washington the shooter. Then, at the station, Simms claimed that Shadwick, Washington, and Bankhead had all got out of the Pathfinder, and that Shadwick shot Pascall.

Police created at least four different photo line-ups and showed them to eyewitnesses, asking if they could pick out the robbers. Some selected Washington, some Shadwick, some Bankhead. The task was complicated by the fact that Shadwick and Washington were both five-eleven and a hundred and fifty pounds, while Bankhead and Simms were both short and slim. "If you see his picture and my picture, we kind of favor each other," Bankhead told me. Police settled on Shadwick as the shooter, and Shadwick, Bankhead, and Washington were all charged with murder, robbery, and two counts of armed criminal action.

The task of trying the three went to Robert J. Craddick, an assistant prosecutor with the St. Louis Circuit Attorney's office. Craddick, who was in his mid-forties, had received his law degree from Washington University, in St. Louis, and had been with the office since 1984; at one point, he had been responsible for training new prosecutors. Police are often critical of prosecutors for being overly cautious, but in St. Louis the police praised Craddick. "He's the best they've got. He's been an aggressive prosecutor who knows the importance of getting murderers off the street," one detective later told the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. Craddick told the paper that, during his twenty-one years in the office, he had won all but four of a hundred and sixty-seven cases.

On September 21, 2001, Washington appeared in circuit court with his attorney and pleaded guilty to the four charges.

Craddick, asked to summarize the state's evidence, said that it would show beyond a reasonable doubt that Washington and Shadwick had "decided to take it upon themselves" to rob Pascall.



Shadwick shot him, and the two fled in Pascall's car.

"Did that happen, Mr. Washington?" the judge asked.

"Yes, sir," Washington said.

At the hearing, and in others to come, Pascall's family described their loss. In July, 2000, Pascall's church had held a

two-week revival, where he played the bass guitar. The day he was shot, he had persuaded his father to attend. "He was smiling all day," his dad said. "We had dinner, he was playing with me. And at the end of that day I didn't have a son anymore." Pascall's wife wrote

of seeing his body at the morgue, a tube still in his mouth. She said that, at the funeral, "I just wanted to fall into the casket with him."

In exchange for Washington's plea, the state recommended a sentence that would make him eligible for parole in about twenty-two years. The judge accepted the recommendation, but told Washington, "I think I must be getting cranky in my old age. I think you probably deserve to die."

Nine months later, Martez Shadwick went on trial, before another judge. Craddick, in his opening statement, again said that Shadwick and Washington were the two robbers, and that Shadwick was the gunman. Five prosecution witnesses identified Shadwick as one of the robbers. Craddick didn't ask the first three witnesses—a nurse, a shoe saleswoman, and a gas-station cashier—about the identity of the second robber. But he did ask the last two: the woman in whose arms Pascall had collapsed, and the woman's son. Both testified that in a photo array they had picked out Washington.

In closing arguments, Shadwick's lawyer challenged the reliability of the prosecution's witnesses. One witness's description of the robbers didn't fit Shadwick's height. Another's didn't match his skin tone. The most damning evidence was against Washington: he had been found with the murder weapon, and his fingerprints were the only ones recovered from the Lincoln. "Alvin Washington killed Demetrius Pascall, Your Honor, and Martez Shadwick had nothing to do with it," the defense lawyer said.

At the trial's end, on June 20, 2002, the judge complimented both attorneys for "an excellent job of presenting evidence" and found Shadwick guilty of first-degree murder, robbery, and the two other charges.

At Antoine Bankhead's trial, which began on July 1st, Craddick appeared before a third judge, Joan M. Burger. This time, he changed his lineup of witnesses. The woman and her son, who had identified Washington as Shadwick's accomplice, weren't called to testify, but the three witnesses whom Craddick had not asked about the second robber's identity were called again.

At Shadwick's trial, the defense attorney had asked two of those witnesses to identify the second robber: the gas-station cashier said it was Washington; the saleswoman said that while looking at police photos she "couldn't pick that second person out." Now both said that the second robber was Bankhead. The third witness, the nurse, named him as well.

Bankhead's attorney later said that he had attended part of Shadwick's trial, but he did not ask the cashier or the saleswoman about the inconsistencies in their testimony from one trial to the next. Bankhead recalled that, after Washington's and Shadwick's convictions, he found the case against him baffling. "I'm, like, hold on, this ain't right," he said. "I'm not the smartest man in the world, but this doesn't make sense."

In Craddick's closing argument, he told the jury that there was "no doubt" that Shadwick was the shooter, and that the evidence that Bankhead was the second robber was "uncontradicted." If Washington had been the second robber, he said, why had no eyewitnesses picked out his photo? Any suggestion that Washington was Shadwick's accomplice was a "smoke screen." The jury, after deliberating for less than two hours, convicted Bankhead of all four charges.

When I spoke to Bankhead recently, he gave me his account of Pascall's murder. He'd been drinking and smoking marijuana that evening, he said, and was asleep in the back seat of the Pathfinder when the sound of the gunshot woke him. He saw that Shadwick was sitting in the front seat. (Shadwick's lawyer told me that her client was not present. Washington and Simms could not be reached for comment.)

A couple of days after Bankhead's conviction, while his sentencing was pending, he wrote to Burger, asking for a retrial. "I'm a innocent man," he said. Only two people had committed the crime, but Bankhead was the third to be convicted. He wrote, "Now don't you think somethings wrong with that picture your honor."

Alvin Washington might have helped Shadwick's and Bankhead's defenses, and at one point he had promised to do so. In June, 2002, a few days before the start of Shadwick's trial, Washington wrote to Bankhead's mother, "i'm sorry for you having to lived these last 2 years without your son and no-dout i feel as if it was my fault because if i wouldn't have said nothing he wouldnt be in this situation ... i was thinking selfish at that time ... getting them before they got me." He said that he would help Bankhead and Shadwick when their trials came, "cause theirs no reason for everybody to go down for one dead body." He even signed an affidavit, saying that Bankhead and Shadwick played "no active part" in the crime.

Shadwick's lawyer arranged for Washington to testify at Shadwick's trial, and had him transported from prison. But at the courthouse Washington balked. Bankhead's lawyer wanted a jail officer to testify that she had overheard Washington tell other inmates that he was the shooter, and that Shadwick and Bankhead had stayed behind in the S.U.V. But the judge prohibited the account as hearsay.

On July 26, 2002, the sheriff's department carried Shadwick into court for sentencing, restrained with a belly chain and leg irons. "You convicted me for something I didn't do, man," Shadwick said as the hearing started. "Why you doing this, man? God, I don't know why you're doing this—"

"Mr. Shadwick, please," the judge said.

Shadwick kept saying that he was innocent: "I didn't do it, man.... God know I didn't do it.... I know you think in your head, oh yeah, I got gold, I got braids, I'm black, I'm a teen-ager, but that ain't me, man.... I'm not no robber, I'm not no murderer." Shadwick said, "Craddick know that I'm innocent. He know. He just wants a conviction, man." He claimed that Bankhead was innocent, too, and all but named Washington and Simms:

Lennon. Dylan. Jagger. Belushi.  
Leibovitz. McCarney. Springsteen.

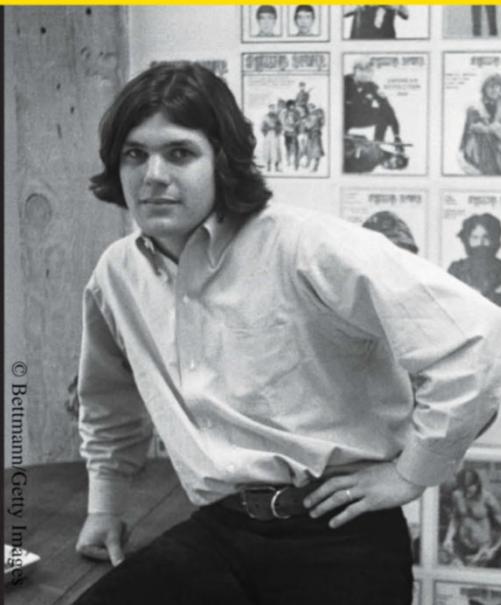
# Sticky Fingers

The Life and Times of Jann Wenner  
and Rolling Stone Magazine

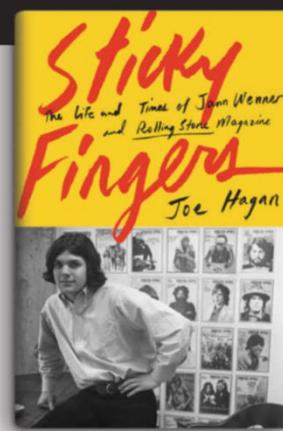
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for the eye-popping details and artful  
gossip. Its chapters move past like a  
crunching collection of singles."

—Dwight Garner, The New York Times

THE FIRST AND ONLY BIOGRAPHY OF JANN WENNER

"The dude that done it may be sitting in the penitentiary right now, laughing at me, and the other dude did it, man, and he didn't even get convicted, man."

On Craddick's recommendation, the judge sentenced Shadwick to life without parole.

"Why? Why life without? Why?" Shadwick asked.

"Mr. Shadwick, please," the judge said.

The following month, Bankhead returned to court to be sentenced by Joan Burger. "I thought it was a just trial," Burger said, in court. She knew that two other men had been convicted in the case, but she wasn't aware of the particulars: a judge is supposed to see only the evidence presented in her court. Burger sentenced Bankhead to life with the possibility of parole.

In late 2003, Bankhead asked to have his conviction thrown out based on the prosecution's conflicting theories and his trial attorney's failure to capitalize on the inconsistencies. The motion went before Burger, and, for the first time, she was presented with transcripts from Washington's plea hearing and Shadwick's trial.

Burger told me that when she read the two court files she was shocked by the contradictions. Burger had been a circuit-court judge for thirteen years and, before that, an attorney in the same office as Craddick. As a prosecutor, she said, "you have a duty to justice, for both the victim and the defendant, and we took that to heart." Craddick had often appeared in Burger's court, and she considered him a good, experienced prosecutor. "He was very serious. There was no lightheartedness in him," she said. "He didn't think he did anything wrong. But, wow."

Burger held a hearing on Bankhead's motion in March, 2004. Arthur Allen, an assistant public defender, represented Bankhead, who had turned twenty-two the week before. "He just struck me as a kid," Allen told me, adding that Bankhead was small and "extremely quiet." Going into the hearing, Allen didn't give much of a chance to his argument about conflicting theories. "It seemed to be something that prosecutors got away with," he said. But that changed when Burger summoned the lawyers to the bench. "She was angry. You could tell that," Allen said.

Craddick wrote that the state "did not

use inherently factually contradictory theories." It had accused the three defendants of "acting with each other." Burger was unmoved. Two months after the hearing, she threw out Bankhead's conviction, writing, "The state has convicted three people for the acts of two."

There is no simple explanation for why a prosecutor might argue contradictory theories. In a 2012 law-review article on inconsistent prosecutions, Brandon Buskey, now a senior staff attorney with the A.C.L.U. Criminal Law Reform Project, identified "three basic types" of prosecutor in these cases: the "win at all costs" prosecutor, obsessed with conviction rates; the "agnostic" prosecutor, who feels no need to be convinced of a defendant's guilt and defers "responsibility for protecting innocence to the trial judge, defense counsel, and the jury"; and the "genuinely uncertain" prosecutor, who doesn't know which defendant did what, and is fine with leaving it to a judge or a jury to decide.

On rare occasions, attorneys for a defendant get a chance to ask prosecutors under oath about their thinking. That happened in one case with conflicting prosecutions in California. In 1982, Samuel Bonner and Watson Allison robbed an apartment in Long Beach. One resident, twenty-three-year-old Leonard Wesley Polk, was shot twice in the head and killed. Kurt Seifert, of the Los Angeles County District Attorney's office, prosecuted both men.

At Bonner's trial, in November, 1983, Seifert, pursuing the death penalty, argued that Bonner and Allison went into the apartment, and Bonner fired the two shots. The jury convicted Bonner of murder and robbery but concluded that he wasn't the shooter, and Bonner received a life sentence. Two months later, at Allison's trial, Seifert again pursued the death penalty. This time, he argued that Allison went into the apartment alone, and that he fired the shots. Bonner, Seifert now argued, was only a "wheelman," who drove Allison to and from the crime. Allison was convicted and sentenced to death.

In 2008, Allison's attorneys questioned Seifert as part of Allison's federal habeas-corpus petition. Seifert, now retired, had been a prosecutor for thirty-two years, and said he believed that "the role of the prosecutor is not to win. The role of the

prosecutor is to represent the parties that he represents with an eye to doing the right thing. And the right thing means, right or wrong, present the truth. And if the truth stacks up against your position do not prosecute."

Seifert went on, "Truth is not a block of stone. It is a malleable gray area. There can be nuggets of truth, bits of lies. It's all—it's a fluid idea, even. What's true one day may not be true another. Pluto is no longer a planet."

Martin Sabelli, one of Allison's lawyers, recalled that Seifert seemed indifferent to the importance of the case: "He had a smile that leaned more toward sarcasm than irony."

"In the Bonner trial, you had argued that Mr. Bonner had been in Mr. Polk's apartment?" Sabelli asked Seifert.

"Absolutely."

"And in the Allison trial you argued that Mr. Bonner had never been in Mr. Polk's apartment."

"Well, huh. That was a booboo. You can quote me."

When Seifert was asked about arguing in the first trial that Bonner was the triggerman, then in the second trial that Allison was the triggerman, he referred to that switch as "the big oops."

Seifert didn't say those words with any sense of embarrassment, Sabelli told me. "It was more, like, boastful, it was more a 'What are you going to do about it?' kind of tone." Michael Clough, another of Allison's lawyers, said he believed that Seifert wasn't being flippant. His words were an "honest, direct reaction" to realizing what he'd done. (At another point, Seifert, reviewing the contradictions in his arguments, said, "Whoa.")

A minute or two later, Seifert said, "There was only one issue ever in the case, and that is triggerman. And, frankly, I don't know who pulled it. Today, if you asked me who pulled the trigger, I don't know."

"At the time, you didn't know, either?" Sabelli asked.

"I would have to say that's true based on the way things panned out," Seifert said. (He could not be reached for comment.)

In 2010, a district-court judge ruled that Seifert's first theory—that both Bonner and Allison entered the apartment—was more likely true than his second, and threw out Allison's death sentence. Allison is now serving twenty-five years

to life at the California State Prison in Solano. Bonner is at the California Men's Colony, in San Luis Obispo.

In the Missouri case, Bankhead remained in prison while prosecutors appealed Burger's ruling. The case came up for oral argument in August, 2005, before the Missouri Court of Appeals. The three judges—all former prosecutors—left little doubt that they believed the state's theories to be irreconcilable. "This has a smell-test problem," one of them said.

The following month, the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* reported that Craddick was leaving the Circuit Attorney's office to practice civil law. Craddick said that he had four children and couldn't afford "several college tuitions on a government salary." "His leaving is a great loss," one police detective told the newspaper. Another said, "He's the only guy over there who would take a chance on a case. It didn't have to be a slam-dunk winner for him to take it."

In January, 2006, the Court of Appeals unanimously upheld Burger's ruling. Bankhead was released from state custody later that year. Shadwick also appealed his conviction, but lost. Both Shadwick and Washington remain in prison. Bankhead, who later spent another five years in prison, for unrelated crimes, works at a packaging warehouse in southern Illinois.

Craddick now serves as in-house counsel for a health-care company. When I asked him about Bankhead's trial, he recalled that the jury's deliberations had been short—"one hour and thirty-three minutes"—but said he hadn't heard that the conviction had been overturned. I explained that Burger and the Court of Appeals had found that he had violated Bankhead's due-process rights. Craddick said, "Hmm. I don't have any real comment about that, because it was so long ago." He added, "I prided myself on being a prosecutor who played by the rules," but otherwise declined to talk about his time in the Circuit Attorney's office. "It doesn't do any good to talk about something so long ago," he said.

This past August, I called one of the jurors from Bankhead's trial, Susan Conway-Wiesen, who described herself as "a little old lady with gray hair." She had no idea that, two weeks before that trial, the prosecutor had argued that the



*"It's difficult to attract a younger customer when our main demographic is babies."*

second robber wasn't Bankhead but Washington. When I told her, she gasped.

"That is terrible. That is just terrible. I think our justice system should actually be"—she paused—"justice. I think that is awful." Later, she began to cry. "My goodness, I really need to think about this one."

She said that the deliberations were short and straightforward. "Based on what we were told, it was hard to come up with a different conclusion."

I asked if it would have made a difference to know that the prosecutor had earlier accused someone else. "Absolutely," Conway-Wiesen said. "Oh my gosh, that's outrageous."

More than thirty-three years after John Stumpf and Clyde Wesley appeared at the Stouts' door, the debate over Stumpf's fate will soon be renewed. In 2011, six years after the Supreme Court declined to rule on whether the conflicting prosecutions should invalidate Stumpf's death sentence, the Sixth Circuit Court finally ruled on the question. A three-judge panel vacated the sentence. Two years later, the court agreed to re-hear the case with all judges sitting, and reinstated Stumpf's death sentence. The vote was 9–8.

Last month, I spoke on the phone to Norman Stout, who is eighty-seven and still lives in Guernsey County. I asked him if he wanted to attend Stumpf's execution. "Absolutely," he said. "I offered to pull the lever." For Stout, the use of contradictory stories was unimportant—the man who didn't fire the gun did nothing to stop his wife's murder. He recalled that Mary Jane sang Patsy Cline tunes on a weekly radio show, and wore her hair the way Cline did. After his wife's death, Stout continued to add to her collection of Holly Hobbie memorabilia, eventually opening a gallery where he displays more than twelve hundred items. He thinks about her constantly, he said.

Stumpf is scheduled to be executed in the spring of 2020. In 2005, during oral arguments in Stumpf's appeal, Justice Scalia suggested the clemency stage as the time to argue the right and wrong of alternative theories. Let the governor "figure out which one of the two wasn't the shooter," he said. That's an invitation Stumpf's attorney, David Stebbins, will likely accept, when it comes time to ask Ohio's governor for mercy. In clemency, the issues can be esoteric. But that's not true in this case. Stebbins said, "This is one issue that I think everyone can understand." ♦

OUR LOCAL CORRESPONDENTS

# CLEAR PASSAGE

*Making space for megaships by saving a majestic bridge.*

BY IAN FRAZIER



*To enter the Port of New York, vessels have to traverse the Kill Van Kull and pass under the Bayonne Bridge. In order for today's*



*enormous new container ships to fit, the channel had to be made deeper and the bridge's roadway higher.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFF CHIEN-HSING LIAO

**T**he Bayonne Bridge is an arch of steel that swoops up from Staten Island and alights, about seventeen hundred feet later, on Bergen Point, at the southwestern tip of Bayonne, New Jersey. The arch supports a roadway that goes through it like the slash through a cent sign. Of all the city's bridges, the Bayonne Bridge is the most powerful and intimate work of modernist-era art. Nothing half as tall stands near it. Sky fills the girders' interstices and geometries, and above the arch the clouds rise dramatically. The bridge spans the Kill Van Kull, a body of water about two thousand feet across at its widest and about eight hundred feet at its narrowest. It is the color of lead and looks beat-up and hard-used.

Just past the bridge, the Kill Van Kull makes a sharp right into Newark Bay. Almost all the cargo that comes into the Port of New York and New Jersey unloads at the docks in Elizabeth and Newark, on the west side of the bay. Docks in Manhattan and Brooklyn used to handle most of the port's cargo, but they had no room to store the huge accumulations of eight-by-eight-by-forty-foot containers employed in shipping today. New Jersey's coastal flatland stretches for miles, and the vast container fields of Elizabeth and Newark are unpeopled cities in themselves, with their long, echoing canyons of containers stacked high. Ships that want to unload or load there—that is, almost all the cargo ships that come to the Port of New York—must pass under the Bayonne Bridge.

When it was built, in 1931, the bridge had a maximum vertical clearance of a hundred and fifty-one feet. In the mid-two-thousands, officials at the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which manages the port as well as other metro-area bridges, tunnels, airports, and highways, realized that the enormous new container ships scheduled to come into service in the near future were not going to fit. The superstructure of these ships tops a hundred and ninety feet. Port Authority planners considered tearing down the bridge and replacing it with a tunnel or a new, higher bridge. Eventually, they decided to keep the existing bridge and to raise its roadway by sixty-four feet. This they would do by building a

new roadway higher up through the arch, then removing the old roadway.

The beauty of the bridge influenced their decision, as did the fact that it's a National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark. Steven Plate, the Port Authority official who oversaw the latter stages of construction, compared his job to restoring the Sistine Chapel ceiling.

**F**rom where I live in New Jersey, it's about twenty-five miles to the bridge. After I heard about the road-raising, I began to drive over there every so often to see how it was coming along. Watching construction gives me a sense of personal accomplishment, and all I have to do is show up. By the foot of the bridge on the Bayonne side there's a city park that provides a good viewing point—you pull into the parking lot and the sight of the bridge fills your windshield. I always get out and walk around. At a well-situated bench I listen to the machinery on the bridge, the shouts of the workers echoing in the steel beams, the hammering of metal on metal, and the beeping of lifter-arm vehicles backing up.

Ships of all kinds, from tugs to tankers to police boats to container ships, go by on the Kill Van Kull. Sometimes they are in a slow-moving line, and one tug will become impatient and pull out and pass another. Canada geese and gulls and mallards land on the water, but the traffic is always scattering them, or the non-stop wakes shake them loose. The name Kill Van Kull may mean something like "the channel that comes from the bay." The Middle Dutch word *kille* means "channel" or "stream," but the K.V.K. (as people who travel it regularly refer to it) is, more precisely, a strait; its three miles connect Newark Bay with the Upper Bay of New York Harbor. As it continues around Staten Island, the K.V.K. merges into the Arthur Kill, another strait, which connects to the ocean on that island's southern end.

Clashing tides from two directions meet beneath the bridge, and soon after a ship goes under it the pilot must finesse the turn of a hundred and twenty-seven degrees into Newark Bay; meanwhile, Staten Island's shoreline, close by on the left, narrowly confines

the ship's stern. The maneuver is like carrying a dining-room table through a bedroom door while stepping on slippery carpets. In fact, these thousand-plus yards of the K.V.K. may be the trickiest passage in any major port in the world.

Accidents used to happen here all the time. The rock ledges under the water obtruded near the channel, and going aground was not hard to do. Hundreds of thousands of gallons of oil and gasoline have been spilled here. From the fifties to the mid-sixties, twenty-three accidents occurred in the vicinity of the bridge. On June 16, 1966, the Texaco Massachusetts was coming out of the bay and turning into the K.V.K. when it ran into the Alva Cape, which was carrying 4.2 million gallons of naphtha from India. (Naphtha is a solvent used in dry cleaning.) The naphtha gushed out and then ignited, killing men on the tug alongside. Bodies were floating in the water, and it took fire-boats eight hours to extinguish the blaze. Thirty-three men died in the accident; it was the second-worst loss of life ever to occur on a New York waterway. Afterward, as workmen at Gravesend Bay were pumping out the Alva Cape's remaining naphtha, it blew up again, killing four more. The Coast Guard had the deadly hulk towed far offshore and then sank it with barrages of artillery fire. It went down still flaming.

New York was once the busiest port in the world, but for decades the Port Authority turned its attention away from the waterfront, to new highways and real estate like the World Trade Center. By the early two-thousands, the port had fallen to fifteenth busiest in the world and third in the country (after the West Coast ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles). In 2004, not wanting it to slide further, the Port Authority, with the Army Corps of Engineers, began a \$2.1 billion dredging project of the port's major channels, all the way to the start of the Ambrose Channel, twelve miles out at sea. The project took twelve years and involved scores of dredges: blowing up massive amounts of submerged rock, digging hundreds of millions of tons of rock, mud, and sand, and putting the contaminated spoils under future luxury golf courses and in other ingenious places.

Fully loaded, the biggest container ships draw about fifty feet of water. The companies that own them had made clear that they were going to need water deeper than the prevailing thirty-five-to-forty-five-foot minimum average in key areas of the harbor. In compliance with this new standard, the bottom of the narrow Kill Van Kull now resembles a canyon. Its depth has been increased to a minimum of about fifty-one feet; at high tide, it's about six feet deeper.

**W**hen Gouverneur Morris, a principal author of the U.S. Constitution and a New Yorker of multiple accomplishments, visited the Swiss town of Schaffhausen, in 1794, he admired its famous bridge over the Rhine. "If time would permit, I would get a plan of it, for it would certainly be useful in America," he wrote in his diary. Morris had no idea that he was looking at the ur-bridge, the future mother of the greatest twentieth-century bridges in his home state and country. A boy named Othmar H. Ammann, born in Schaffhausen in 1879, found his vocation as an engineer while contemplating that bridge. His grandfather had been a famous landscape painter, and O. H. Ammann sketched the bridge often. After graduating from the Zurich Polytechnikum, Ammann immigrated to New York. As his ship entered the port, he imagined the great bridge he would someday build across the Hudson River.

Ammann made his reputation in his new country when he wrote a much admired report analyzing the collapse of the Quebec Bridge, the 1907 disaster near the Canadian border that killed seventy-five men. He began to work as a design engineer for the Port of New York Authority (as it was called at the time), and in that capacity, with the architect Cass Gilbert, he designed and built the Bayonne Bridge, as well as the bridge he had envisioned over the Hudson. The George Washington Bridge opened on October 24, 1931, the Bayonne Bridge three weeks later. In his long career, Ammann also worked on the Throgs Neck Bridge, the Bronx-Whitestone Bridge, the Lincoln Tunnel, the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, the Mackinac Bridge (in Michigan), the



Delaware Memorial Bridge, and the Golden Gate Bridge. The northernmost towers of his Triborough Bridge (now the Robert F. Kennedy Bridge), on the southern edge of the Bronx, stand very near the site of Gouverneur Morris's family home, a manor house in the French style, which was torn down to make way for some railroad tracks in 1906 and of which no trace or historical marker remains.

Ammann believed that bridges should be beautiful, and that "scientific and economic expediency cannot justify incongruous forms." He was a lean, reserved man who wore a high starched collar when Gay Talese interviewed him, for the *Times*, in 1964. By then Ammann was eighty-five years old and living with his wife on the thirty-second floor of the Carlyle Hotel, in Manhattan. From that aerie he could see eight of his bridges, including part of the Bayonne Bridge.

Here is how Talese ended the story:

Throughout his own career, his bridges have known no tragedy through his own engineering miscalculations, and yesterday he conceded that he was "lucky."

"Lucky!" snapped his wife, disagreeing. "Lucky," he repeated, silencing her with a quiet, gentle authority.

Ammann built bridges bigger than any that had existed before, and he praised the new technologies of better cement and steel that enabled him. But he well understood how things could go wrong; perhaps he was thinking of this when he called himself lucky. Ammann built at a scale where no one knew for certain how the calculations on paper would prove out. The Golden Gate, the Verrazano-Narrows, and the George Washington were then the longest suspension bridges in the world. The Bayonne Bridge, at the time of its completion, was the longest arch bridge in the world.

I checked out the progress of construction on a foggy morning in late fall, when all you could see of the bridge was the top of its arch, rising like the spine of a breaching sea creature in the mists. From the enveloping grayness that hid the workmen, engine noise and occasional shouts came down. On a clearer morning I arrived early enough

to watch the sun rise beside the steeple of the old St. Mary of the Assumption church, across the water in Staten Island. The reddish-gold dawn made the bridge stand out in an annunciantory way and gave the wavelets on the K.V.K. a quality almost of allure; double-crested cormorants idling on the rock beach perked up and flew across the K.V.K., their wings spanking the water. On the park's flagpole a lanyard clanged in the breeze.

Sometimes I left my car near the park, in front of the house where Tom Cruise's character lives in Steven Spielberg's remake of "War of the Worlds." No doubt the director chose this setting because of its visuals. The Tom Cruise character works in the shipyard and operates a gantry crane, unloading container ships. He is at home with his daughter when the aliens appear. They loom over the K.V.K. from the Newark Bay side and shoot rays at the bridge and smash it to smithereens. That is aliens for you. If the Ammanns were still alive, the scene would probably upset them.

Often I saw bridge aficionados with cameras around their necks taking photographs. They showed one another favorite shots—of the bridge lit up at night, or with lightning in the background, or in a snowstorm. Workmen sometimes pulled up in their trucks and ate lunch in the parking lot, regarding the bridge through their windshields as they chewed. On an afternoon in early spring, I talked to two painters from Ahern Contractors, in Woodside, New York, who told me that they were painting the bridge pewter-cup gray. It's a nice shade, and everything that day—bridge, water, clouds, birds, sky—seemed to be a version of it.

One afternoon I got to talking with Jeff Oset, a general laborer on the project and a member of Local 472 of the Heavy & General Construction Laborers' Union. He had just finished lunch and was relaxing in his truck with the windows rolled down. Oset is a big, broad-shouldered, blue-eyed man, and he wore a vest of high-visibility chartreuse over a blue T-shirt. He told me that he was the union shop steward on the site. I asked him about the machine moving slowly along the bridge's upper level, and he said that it was a road grinder in the

## GENERIC HUSBAND

Who mows the lawn. Who prunes the rangy rose.  
Who whacks the weeds by the chain link with mafioso panache.  
Who drinks the beer. Who has no questions. Who knots  
a tie four-in-hand. Who washes the car. Who drives stick.  
Who smoked but did not inhale. Who wears the drugstore cologne  
his kid gave him. Who wakes up beside the same wife.  
Who has no questions. Who parts his hair. Who has a bald patch.  
Who plays golf. Who plays Call of Duty. Who plays  
the stock market, responsibly. Who reads biographies  
of generals. Who does not dream. Who climbed trees  
as a boy. Who leaves his towel beside the hamper.  
Who has never swum nude. Who knows cardinal directions.  
Who sees the sun set without a sense of unease.  
Who walks to the train. Who watches sports. Who reclines.  
Who maintains a sense of calm. Who has a small, bad tattoo.  
Who wears humorous socks. Who tells the tame, dirty joke.  
Who reads the newspaper online. Who is politically unmoved.  
Who had a job upon graduation. Who go-gets. Who has no questions.  
Who shovels the walk. Who did not keep his letters  
from his college sweetheart. Who had a college sweetheart.  
Who called her "baby." Who was sincere. Who did not ask  
why she left him. Who does not climb trees. Who drinks one beer  
at the end of the day. Who remembers meeting his wife and how young  
she was then. Who does not question. Who kills the spider.  
Who clips a dog with his car and keeps driving. Who adjusts the mirror.

—Rebecca Hazelton

process of smoothing fresh concrete.

Oset said that his father had also been a member of Local 472, and got him into the union forty years ago, when he was eighteen. He had been working on this bridge for four years, since the project began. He was quiet for a moment, and then he said, "I've worked on plenty of bridges. I like this bridge. My younger brother worked on bridges, too. He died while working on the resurfacing of the Alfred Driscoll Bridge, on the Garden State Parkway. He was walking along a board walkway and one of the boards broke and he fell ninety-six feet. It was August 11, 2007. He left two young sons who I've raised as my own. He was forty-five years old. Thomas W. Oset was his name. August 11, 2007—the worst day of my life."

**W**hen I started watching the construction, two lanes of the new upper roadway had already been put in place. It was like a sky road—a ribbon of chalk-white new concrete extend-

ing all the way from Staten Island, through the arch, and down to Bayonne. On land, T-shaped concrete pillars of ascending heights held the roadway until it reached the arch. School-bus-yellow steel pylons gave the T-pillars added support. Still lacking streetlights and the anti-suicide fencing that would eventually go up, the new roadway had the carefree look of a Nike Swoosh. In order to reach the requisite height, it was obliged to begin at a steeper angle. When I went to Staten Island and checked out the approach on that side, the machines working on it looked as if they were grooming a ski slope.

Meanwhile, traffic still flowed on the lower roadway. On February 20th, the upper roadway opened to one-lane traffic in both directions, and the lower roadway shut down. Then the process of dismantling that roadway began. In March, a middle piece of it disappeared. I did not see it go; Jeff Oset had told me that pieces of roadway

spanning the water would be lowered onto barges. About a quarter of it was gone by mid-April. In the parking lot, seagulls fought for run-over scraps of matzo. A week later, cherry trees bloomed along a nearby path, more of the roadway came down, and the matzo scraps had disappeared.

In May, I sat and contemplated the bridge as jackhammers or rivet guns rattered somewhere up in the steel. Japanese knotweed had grown around the chain-link fence enclosing the construction trailers under the bridge. Workmen were climbing the eleven flights of stairs in scaffolding that led from the ground to the bridge's top. Their feet rang metallically. Beneath the arch, the lower roadway had almost all been removed, except for short sections at each end. Viewed through the arch, the newly opened space where the lower roadway used to be looked smug and valuable; a lot of effort had gone into freeing up those sixty-four feet of sky.

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Captain Steve Naples has been a Sandy Hook pilot for thirty years. The Sandy Hook pilots, also called sea pilots, steer ships coming and going between the start of the Ambrose Channel, twelve miles at sea, and the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge. They belong to an organization called the Sandy Hook Pilots' Association. Captain Naples did not go to a merchant-marine academy but began as a deck-hand in his early twenties. Then he joined the organization's long apprentice program, received his license from the state of New York, became a deputy pilot, and eventually rose to the level of "first grade" pilot, qualified to operate any size ship that enters the port. Reaching the top in this way, by hands-on experience and tenacity, is called "coming up through the hawsepipe" (the hole in the ship's bow through which the anchor chain descends). Captain Naples has a raspy, nautical voice, still refers to ships as "she," and is sixty years old.

The Sandy Hook Pilots' Association was founded in 1694. Its members sometimes wear navy-blue baseball caps with that date inscribed, enclosed in a circle with an anchor

and crossed oars. Getting in and out of the harbor, for pilots unfamiliar with the waters, used to be much riskier than it is now. Between the Verrazano-Narrows and the deeper ocean, you never knew what sandbars you might run onto. Many of these were spinoffs of the original and permanent sandbar, Sandy Hook, the almost-peninsula that reaches from the New Jersey coast up toward the city as if to stopper its harbor forever. Local pilots who knew the shoals boarded vessels in the harbor or at sea and took them safely through. In three hundred and twenty-three years, the Sandy Hook Pilots have rescued victims of shipwrecks, fought the British during the Revolution, served as privateers by luring enemy merchant ships onto sandbars, won international sailing races, helped ships avoid German U-boats, and ferried thousands of people trapped in lower Manhattan on 9/11. Certain local families have been producing Sandy Hook pilots for generations.

In times past, the sea pilots brought ships all the way from the open ocean to the dock, and back again. More recently, pilots associated with the port's tugboat companies have taken over the harbor part of that job. Today's pilots are of two kinds—sea pilots and docking pilots. The docking pilots replace the sea pilots at the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge when ships are incoming, and vice versa at the entrance



to the Kill Van Kull when outgoing. Captain Robert F. Flannery, Jr., is the president of Metro Pilots, an organization of docking pilots associated with the Moran tugboat company. He has blue eyes, a grayish-brown mustache, and a merry disposition. Another "through the hawsepipe" veteran, he is sixty and has been a licensed pilot for twenty-two years. He also calls ships "she." (There are about thirty docking pilots and eighty sea pilots;

four of the sea pilots are women.) He and Captain Naples are friends and sometimes go to Giants games together. When asked if they are the best of all the pilots, both scoff at the notion and praise their fellows.

CMA CGM is a multibillion-dollar French shipping company with headquarters in Marseilles. Its uncatchy name combines the first initials of two French companies, one of which bought the other in the nineteen-nineties. Many of the biggest ships in the world are in its fleet. The Port Authority, wanting to demonstrate the new receptivity of the Bayonne Bridge and the increased depth of the channels, arranged with CMA CGM to send one of its ships to the port in early September. This would be the biggest cargo ship ever to enter New York Harbor—the biggest, in fact, ever to visit any port on the East Coast.

In preparation, groups of the port's docking pilots and sea pilots practiced over the summer on a ship simulator in Maryland. None had previously piloted a vessel that was much longer than a thousand feet. The Maritime Institute of Technology and Graduate Studies, near Baltimore, is a nonprofit organization that trains pilots from all over the country and around the world in operating ships of all sizes in all of America's main ports, including on the Great Lakes, and in many of the major ports of the globe, as well as in the Panama and Suez Canals.

I called Glen Paine, MITAGS's executive director, and asked what the simulator simulates. He said that it puts trainees in an imitation of a ship's wheelhouse, with a mobile view of whatever land features the vessel is approaching, so the trainee will recognize landmarks and other visual bearings. The computer compiles all kinds of data—from the tidal currents at various depths, to the prevailing winds, to the tonnage and length and width and height and draft of the ship, to the time of year of the voyage. During the summer, when the weather tends to be calmer, ships are loaded to a deeper draft and a greater height, and handle differently. "The wheelhouses on some of these ships are a long way off the water," Paine said. "The program also

allows for how high you are and how much you can't see."

He continued, "The pilots bring the ship into or out of the harbor in the conditions the computer provides, and the simulator shows them how a ship of that size responds. The New York pilots knew their stuff pretty well already, it goes without saying. They've got a tough port to work with, and the Kill Van Kull is a challenging piece of water."

On July 26th, the CMA CGM Theodore Roosevelt, a brand-new container ship, left the Hyundai Heavy Industries shipyard, in Ulsan, South Korea. The ship is twelve hundred feet long and a hundred and fifty-eight feet wide, and its draft when fully loaded is fifty-two and a half feet. For its maiden voyage, the ship took on cargo at Asian ports, such as Hong Kong and Shanghai. A typical cargo list includes machinery, appliances, clothes, electronics, toys, plastics, and decorative items like Christmas lights. The ship has the capacity to carry fourteen thousand four hundred and fourteen containers, some in its hold and some stacked on its deck to a maximum height of eleven containers—almost ninety feet. Previously, the largest cargo ship ever to come to New York had a maximum capacity of nine thousand four hundred containers. From Shanghai, the CMA CGM Theodore Roosevelt set out across the Pacific with New York as its easternmost destination. It reached the Panama Canal on August 21st, and on August 28th it arrived in Norfolk, Virginia, where CMA CGM has its American headquarters. From there, the ship went down to Savannah, Georgia, and then back up to Charleston on September 2nd.

On September 6th, Captain Naples left his house in Jackson, New Jersey, and drove to the Sandy Hook Pilots' Association dock off Edgewater Street, in Staten Island. He was wearing a blue suit; throughout their history, the Sandy Hook Pilots have maintained the tradition of arriving on board the vessel they're about to pilot wearing a business suit. Old photographs show them also sporting derby hats and bearing copies of the latest New York City newspapers. People long at sea were usually eager for news. Captain Na-

ples did not bring a hat, and he forgot to buy a newspaper. (The tradition with the newspapers continues only sporadically.)

From the dock in Staten Island, a forty-five-foot pilot boat took him to what's called a station boat, one of the two vessels that anchor at the mouth of the Ambrose Channel. These vessels, the New York and the New Jersey, alternate duty at this site in the ocean, and one or the other is always there. A platform with living quarters, a light tower, and a landing pad for helicopters used to stand at the channel entrance, but ships kept bumping into it and finally the Coast Guard took it down.

Captain Naples spent the night on board the New Jersey. Early the next morning, the CMA CGM Theodore Roosevelt appeared on the horizon. Captain Naples, in his suit and tie, boarded the pilot boat that would take him to it. A wind of about ten knots was blowing from the west, with moderate swells. The ship approached, then veered to the north so the pilot could board on its lee side, out of the wind. The hull of a ship of this size resembles a sheer building of five or six stories, and the thought of climbing it on a rope ladder with wooden rungs while wearing a suit and dress shoes as the ship heaves in the sea would give anyone pause. International maritime regulations say that a pilot should not have to climb more than nine metres above the water's surface in boarding. Like many ships, this one has a pilot-entry port in its side, requiring only a short ascent on the rope ladder. The pilot boat pulled alongside the ship, and Captain Naples climbed aboard.

Taking an elevator up to the wheelhouse, he met the captain, the first officer, and the helmsman, and then assumed the "conn"—control—of the ship (though the captain always retains ultimate responsibility). At a speed of about seven knots, the CMA CGM Theodore Roosevelt proceeded into the Ambrose Channel. As it happens, Theodore Roosevelt, the person, was involved in naming the Ambrose Channel, back in 1901, when he was President. John Wolfe Ambrose, a civil engineer, had had the vision to push for

the dredging of the channel to accommodate the new, deeper-draft cruise ships of that time.

"The biggest concern in the channel is currents and wind," Captain Naples told me when I talked to him afterward. "The channel is two thousand feet wide, but if you get driven to either side of it you hit rock almost immediately. Ten knots isn't much of a wind, but I was mildly surprised at how much force it exerted, coming from the west and pushing up against the ship's profile. She was drawing only 40.85 feet of water, so she could not have been very heavily loaded. As we came in closer to land, we felt the effect of a flood tide flowing from the east, off Coney Island. But the wind coming from the west and the tidal current flowing from the east offset each other, and she went in straight on a rail."

Half a mile before the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, the ship slowed to pick up Captain Flannery, the docking pilot, who arrived by tugboat, along with about a dozen Port Authority officials and other dignitaries. Captain Flannery then took the conn from Captain Naples, who remained on board as an observer.

**N**eeds of the impending arrival of the largest cargo ship ever to enter New York Harbor had appeared on the Port Authority's Web site, which announced that the CMA CGM Theodore Roosevelt would go under the Bayonne Bridge on Thursday, September 7th, at 9:30 A.M. When I got to the park by the bridge that morning, excited onlookers were all over the place. Camera tripods lined the railing along the K.V.K. People had brought their dogs, and children in strollers. Seeing the park so crowded was weird. As usual at any New Jersey gathering, jokes about Governor Christie could be heard. (In fact, he did not participate in the day's observances.)

Everyone was looking in the direction from which the ship would appear. Cameras waited, ready and aimed. "I heard it just went under the Verrazano-Narrows. It should be here in about thirty minutes," someone said. More waiting. Then, sooner than expected, at just before nine-thirty, the bow of the ship nosed around the nearest



In 1964, Richard Avedon and James Baldwin published "Nothing Personal," their collaborative exploration of American identity. This fall, a facsimile edition will be released, along with a set of previously unpublished photographs, including this image, taken by Avedon in Algiers, Louisiana, of William Casby, one of the last living Americans born into slavery. He is surrounded by several generations of his family. "It is necessary, while in darkness, to know that there is a light somewhere," Baldwin writes in the book. "To know that in oneself, waiting to be found, there is a light. What the light reveals is danger, and what it demands is faith."

bend. It kind of came out of the trees. The rest of the ship followed slowly, almost stealthily, like a massive big-box store sneaking up on something. A Moran tug preceded it, attached to the bow by a long rope. Other tugs shepherded its sides, and yet another followed it, also attached by a rope. As the ship went by, its vast blue hull and stacked-up containers blotted out a good part of Staten Island. People exclaimed, and the cameras made their insistent cicada noises. The ship moved closer to the bridge, and closer. It appeared to have plenty of clearance. Still, many in the crowd held their breath and leaned one way or another, like football fans trying to help a field goal through the uprights using body English. Then the ship went under the bridge, and past it, and swung slowly into the hard right-hand turn.

As the ship was approaching the bridge, Captain Naples stepped out of the wheelhouse and stood on the bridge wing beside it. "The wheelhouse on that ship is at the same height where the old roadway used to be," he told

me. "When she passed under, I was at the same level as a bunch of construction guys standing at the end of the old roadway. We waved and cheered and gave each other the thumbs-up."

A fireboat pumping red, white, and blue streams of water welcomed the ship into Newark Bay. Not long after it tied up at an Elizabeth Marine Terminal dock, a press conference ensued on the pavement between the ship's looming bow and the nearby border of the container city. A bagpipe band of policemen marched out of an alley in the stacked containers, playing "The Minstrel Boy." Eminences seated on a dais stood up at a podium and praised one another and recited shipping statistics and plans for the future while fifty or sixty assembled newsmen looked on.

During a period of milling around beforehand, I noticed two young men in ship-officer's attire on the edge of the crowd. Hearing one speak to the other in what sounded like Russian, I said hello and asked if they were officers from the ship. It turned out

that one was the ship's captain, Maksym Kononov, and the other his chief officer, Valeriy Kozratskyy. Both had chestnut-colored beards that lightened to blond at the ends, and both were Ukrainian. All the officers on the ship were Ukrainian, and all of the crew Filipino. None of the latter had come onshore. I asked what cargo the ship carried, and Captain Kononov said, "General merchandise." As for the ship's containers, all of which stood in rows much more orderly than is customary on container ships, the captain explained, "We stacked them neatly like that for the photographs."

The moment the press conference ended, the captain and the first officer returned to the ship. They walked along the dock beside it—and walked, and walked, until they were small figures in the distance. Then they climbed a tiny, distant staircase up the ship's side.

Captain Flannery, known as Bobby, sometimes patronizes a Staten Island restaurant called Blue, on the shore of the K.V.K. From the tables by the windows, diners can see the ships going by, and the refineries and tank farms of Bayonne on the other side. I sat with him there on the terrace one afternoon. He wore a blue T-shirt that said "Metro Pilots," and on his left wrist was a New Agey metal bracelet. He is a lifelong Grateful Dead fan. When I asked him how many Dead concerts he has been to, he said, "Oh, Jesus! I have no idea. Hundreds." He ordered buffalo wings and a club soda with lime.

He grew up in Brooklyn, in Sunset Park—"We didn't say the neighborhood we lived in, we said the parish." Of his parents' seven children, he's the oldest. Pete Hamill, the writer, is his second cousin. Captain Flannery went to Bishop Ford Central Catholic High School, in Brooklyn, tried college but didn't like it, and began working on tugboats as a deckhand at twenty-two. His family had been in tugboats starting with his great-grandfather, and there was once a Flannery Tugboat Company. His uncle helped him get into the International Longshoremen's Association. As a deckhand, he "handled the lines, cleaned the heads." He had



*"I knew there would be a time I could wear them without destroying my feet."*

a dream of being a docking pilot, and he began to study for the pilot exams, for which a candidate must have committed to memory every channel, buoy, light, and other significant feature on twenty-nine different contiguous charts of harbor waters. (Sea pilots take a similar exam.) He carried three-by-five cards in his back pocket and studied during any spare minute he had. Once or twice, he wanted to quit, but his wife, Donna, kept telling him that he could do it. "And I listened to her," he said. "She always tells me that I'm the captain, but she's the admiral."

He passed the exams, which were administered by the Coast Guard, and thereby became a junior pilot. In 1995, he piloted his first ship on his own—the Arctic Ocean, a four-hundred-and-eighty-five-foot cargo ship carrying fruit. He has piloted thousands of vessels since then. Today he is licensed to pilot from the Verrazano-Narrows all the way to Albany.

Unlike the sea pilots, the docking pilots don't have a tradition of dressing in business suits. When Captain Flannery came aboard the CMA CGM Theodore Roosevelt, he was wearing a short-sleeved plaid shirt and khakis. "I like to keep everybody relaxed by being relaxed myself," he told me. "I introduce myself around in the wheelhouse; I tell 'em, 'Hey, how you doin', I'm Bobby, nice to meet you,' and so on. Sometimes I start with a joke, to provide a little frivolity. Maybe I ask for a chair, sit outside if the weather's nice. I don't steer the ship myself; I give orders to the ship's helmsman. The guy on the Roosevelt was Ukrainian but, no problem, everybody speaks English—or, at least, some English."

French officials of CMA CGM who had come on board for the occasion wanted Captain Flannery to go farther up the harbor and sail past the Statue of Liberty, for the photographers in accompanying helicopters, and because the French gave us the statue. After the sail-by, mindful of the shoals in the vicinity of Liberty Island, he didn't turn around but backed the ship up so that he could ease into the K.V.K. "This is an important part, going through the K.V.K. You want to let everybody know by the sound of your voice that you're

in charge, you're calm and focussed. I always remember that my pencil has no eraser. I mean, you're directing a ship worth many tens of millions of dollars. She's displacing a lot of water, so if you bring her through too fast, her wake will push the K.V.K. up onto the shore and then suck boats off their moorings after you go by. I stayed at four or five knots, just enough so she had steerage. And you always keep in mind that in a ship twelve hundred feet long, in a channel eight hundred feet across, if things got out of hand you could go aground in New York and New Jersey simultaneously. And you don't want that.

"She went under the Bayonne Bridge at slack tide—after the tide had come in, and before it started going out again—so we had no tidal currents to worry about," Captain Flannery continued. "I was in touch with all my tug-boat captains by radio—I know every one of them personally. The tug that's got the bow rope helps me into that sharp turn, and then we're in Newark Bay. When I'm piloting a ship, I'm keeping all the factors of wind and tide and draft and speed in my head; I'm like the conductor of a symphony."

**O**n my way home from Staten Island, I took the Bayonne Bridge. It's a less direct route, but pleasanter, because fewer cars use it. According to Port Authority statistics from a few years ago, seven million vehicles cross the Bayonne every year. About a hundred and three million vehicles use the George Washington. As I drove onto the bridge's new roadway, I felt the skislope effect that I had previously observed from the ground. The grade, and the view ahead, make you feel as if you were driving into the sky. The bridge's additional lanes, with walkway, bicycle path, and space for light-rail tracks, will not be finished until 2019. Orange plastic-mesh fencing bordered the road; construction vehicles and Port-O-Sans and air compressors and whatnot sat alongside.

In the arch itself, the road now goes through so high up that it's as if you were in the bridge's rafters. As you begin the descent, a grand scene suddenly appears before you: on the left, the vast expanse of the ports of Eliz-

abeth and Newark, the cranes lined up like giant red-white-and-blue kitchen appliances—hand-crank juicers, maybe—with container ships docked alongside or waiting in Newark Bay, and the Passaic River joining the bay on the left, and the Hackensack River entering it up ahead, and the long I-78 bridge over the bay; and, farther off on the left, the runways of Newark Airport, the planes coming and going above it; and, beyond that, the vague gray-blue hills of New Jersey curving westward around the earth toward the rest of America.

And, on the right, the unspectacular houses and office buildings and factories of Bayonne, like foothills to the distant range of Manhattan, with its dim, heart-quickenning skyline, including the World Trade Center and the new, obnoxious rich-persons' high-luxury spike of an apartment building farther uptown, and maybe also the thirty-second floor of the estimable Carlyle Hotel, from which O. H. Hammond used to look out on his creations.

Manhattan drops off behind as you descend the new roadway on the Bayonne side, and it's possible to make out the giant warehouses and stores (IKEA, Toys R Us) near the airport. You can't see the trucks, but they're out there, like ants hurrying from a recently flattened anthill, many carrying the containers brought by the ships. In the weeks before Christmas, the number of ships increases and the containers full of plastic general merchandise from China and elsewhere proliferate, and the trucks take the general merchandise out into other parts of the country and it undersells local stores and businesses and no one knows what to do because, after all, it's cheaper. The Port Authority says that eighty million people, the richest consumer market in the world, live within a twenty-four-hour drive or train ride of the Port of New York and New Jersey. The P.A. also says that four hundred thousand local jobs depend on the port. How many jobs the goods that come through the port destroy is harder to say.

Another half mile, and the roadway has left the bridge and emerged as New Jersey Route 440 northbound. An orange-and-black sign announces "End Road Work." ♦



*The Chamber of Commerce in Orange City, Iowa. The town was founded by immigrants from Holland, and, until recently, almost*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRIAN FINKE



A REPORTER AT LARGE

# OUR TOWN

*As America's rural communities stagnate, what can we learn from one that hasn't?*

BY LARISSA MACFARQUHAR

Orange City, the county seat of Sioux County, Iowa, is a square mile and a half of town, more or less, population six thousand, surrounded by fields in every direction. Sioux County is in the northwest corner of the state, and Orange City is isolated from the world outside—an hour over slow roads to the interstate, more than two hours to the airport in Omaha, nearly four to Des Moines. Hawarden, another town, twenty miles away, is on the Big Sioux River, and was founded as a stop on the Northwestern Railroad in the eighteen-seventies; it had a constant stream of strangers coming through, with hotels to service them and drinking and gambling going on. But Orange City never had a river or a railroad, or, until recently, even a four-lane highway, and so its pure, hermetic culture has been preserved.

Orange City is small and cut off, but, unlike many such towns, it is not dying. Its Central Avenue is not the hollowed-out, boarded-up Main Street of twenty-first-century lore. Along a couple of blocks, there are two law offices, a real-estate office, an insurance brokerage, a coffee shop, a sewing shop, a store that sells Bibles, books, and gifts, a notions-and-antiques store, a hair-and-tanning salon, and a home-décor-and-clothing boutique, as well as the Sioux County farm bureau, the town hall, and the red brick Romanesque courthouse.

There are sixteen churches in town. The high-school graduation rate is ninety-eight per cent, the unemployment rate is two per cent. There is little crime. The median home price is around a hundred and sixty thousand dollars, which buys a three- or four-bedroom house with a yard, in a town where the median income is close to sixty thousand. For the twenty per cent of residents who make more than a hundred thousand dollars a year, it can be difficult to find

ways to spend it, at least locally. There are only so many times you can redo your kitchen. Besides, conspicuous extravagance is not the Orange City way. "There are stories about people who are too showy, who ended up ruined," Dan Vermeer, who grew up in the town, says. "The Dutch are comfortable with prosperity, but not with pleasure."

The town was founded, in 1870, by immigrants from Holland looking for farmland, and until recently almost everyone who lived there was Dutch. Many of the stores on Central Avenue still bear Dutch names: Bomgaars farm-supply store, Van Maanen's Radio Shack, Van Rooyen Financial Group, DeJong Chiropractic and Acupuncture, Woudstra Meat Market. The town's police force consists of Jim Pottebaum, Duane Hulstein, Audley DeJong, Bruce Jacobsma, Chad Van Ravenswaay, Wes Van Voorst, and Bob Van Zee. When an Orange City teacher wants to divide her class in half, she will say, "A's through "U's to one side, "V's through "Z's to the other. Once, many years ago, an actual Dutch woman, from Rotterdam, moved to town with her American husband. She found the Dutchness of Orange City peculiar—the way that most people didn't speak Dutch anymore but sprinkled their English with phrases that nobody had used in the Netherlands for a hundred years.

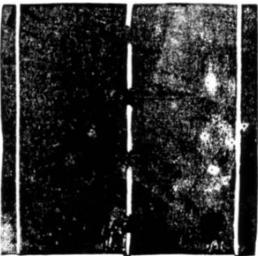
In the early part of the twentieth century, the question of how much Dutchness to retain caused a religious schism in the town: the American Reformed Church broke off from the First Reformed Church in order to conduct services in English. But, as the last Dutch speakers began to die off, Orange City took measures to embalm its heritage. The shops on the main stretch of Central Avenue are required to embellish their façades with "Dutch

*everyone who lived there was Dutch.*

fronts”—gables in the shape of bells and step-edged triangles, painted traditional colors such as dark green, light gray, and blue, with white trim. Across the street from Bomgaars is Windmill Park, with its flower beds and six decorative windmills of varying sizes along a miniature canal. Each year, at the end of May, Orange City holds a tulip festival. Thousands of bulbs are imported from the Netherlands and planted in rows, and for three days much of the town dresses up in nineteenth-century Dutch costumes, sewn by volunteers—white lace caps and long aprons, black caps and knickers—and performs traditional dances in the street. There is a ceremonial street cleaning—kerchiefed boys throwing bucketfuls of water, aproned girls scrubbing with brooms—followed by a parade, in which the Tulip Queen and her court, high-school seniors, wave from their float, and the school band marches after them in clogs.

Every June, a couple of weeks after Tulip Festival, another ritual is enacted: a hundred of the town's children graduate from the high school. Each of them must then make a decision that will set the course of their lives—whether to leave Orange City or to stay. This decision will affect not just where they live but how they see the world and how they vote. The town is thriving, so the choice is not driven by necessity: to stay is not to be left behind but to choose a certain kind of life. Each year, some leave, but usually more decide to settle in—something about Orange City inspires loyalty. It is only because so many stay that the town has prospered. And yet to stay home is to resist an ingrained American belief about movement and ambition.

In most places on earth, staying is the norm. Mobility is regarded with ambivalence: leaving is turnover; it weakens families and social trust. But in America, a country formed by the romance of the frontier and populated mostly by people who had left somewhere else, leaving has always been the celebrated story—the bold, enterprising, properly American response to an unsatisfactory life at home. Americans



were for a long time the most mobile people in the world, and this geographic mobility drove America's economy, and its social mobility as well. Because Americans moved for work, mostly from poor areas to richer ones, after 1880 incomes around the country steadily converged for a hundred years.

But Americans are not moving as much as they once did: the number of

people migrating within the country is now about half what it was forty years ago. In the mid-nineteen-fifties, nearly eight per cent of unemployed men moved across state lines; in 2012, two and a half per cent did. Workers used to follow jobs, but now those

who do move often go to places where unemployment is higher and wages lower, because housing is cheap. All of this has set off sounds of alarm. Why aren't people leaving to find work, or better lives, as they used to? Part of the worry is economic: if people become less willing to move for work, unemployment will persist in some places, and jobs will go unfilled in others. People staying put is one reason that regional inequality has risen. But another part of the alarm is cultural. What does it mean that Americans are now moving less often than people in old European countries like France? Has America's restless dynamism run its course?

Since the 2016 election, staying has taken on a political cast as well. Because suspicion of those who move around—immigrants, refugees, globalized élites—is associated with voting for Trump, attachment to home has come to look like a Trumpian value. And, indeed, of white people who still lived in their childhood home town, nearly sixty per cent supported Trump; of those who lived within a two-hour drive of their home town, fifty per cent supported him; of those who had moved more than two hours from where they grew up, forty per cent. A survey, conducted in 2014, found that more conservatives than liberals valued living near to extended family. The decision to stay home or leave is a powerful political predictor. For this reason, resistance to moving somewhere new can seem to be just resistance to

newness as such. Where voting for Trump is attributed to economic despair, staying home is also.

Orange City is one of the most conservative places in the country, and those who leave it tend to become less so. It is not despairing, however, nor is it stagnant. Change happens differently in a place where people tend to stay. But staying is not for everyone.

Dan Vermeer left Orange City, although his roots in the area went back almost to the founding of the town. His great-grandparents on his father's side emigrated from Holland at the end of the nineteenth century; his mother's family came a generation later. His father, Wally, grew up on a farm outside town, one of eleven children; his mother, Joanne, was the third of ten; both were poor.

In high school, Dan couldn't wait to get out—he felt stifled by a moral claustrophobia. He hated the constant scrutiny, everybody knowing everybody else's business. Gossip is the plague of most small towns, but Orange City was especially judgmental. The Dutch were particular about behavior. They mowed their lawns often, but never on Sundays. Alcohol was considered unseemly; people would usually buy it elsewhere, so nobody would see them. Kids felt eyes watching them all the time. Adults worried constantly about appearances—were their houses clean enough, were their kids behaving nicely and doing well in school, were they volunteering for enough town projects, were they in church as often as they should be? The façades of the buildings on Central Avenue became a metaphor for the way that people tried to hide any difficulties they had living up to these standards: they kept up their Dutch fronts.

But, even more than escaping the gossip, Dan wanted to leave because he felt wedged in. "You are who you are," he says. "I am a Vermeer, a child of Wally and Joanne, the younger brother of Greg, Brent, and Barry, and in Orange City that's who I am for my whole life. It's not that I felt discriminated against—I felt known and loved. But I also felt that that was nowhere near all of me, and that to know who I was I had to define myself on my own terms." By the day of his high-school graduation,

in 1984, he had packed up his car, and at seven the following morning he left Orange City for good.

He enrolled in Hope College, a Christian college in Holland, Michigan. Away from home, he started to feel more intensely religious than he ever had before, and spent his first summer working for a Christian ministry in the Blue Ridge Parkway. He found himself alone there, responsible for delivering two sermons every Sunday for the campers in the park. On Saturday evenings, he drove around and let people know about the services. One man told him, with a smirk, You're young, and I have a feeling you're going to question this eventually. I used to be religious, and then some things happened in my life and now I don't believe it anymore. "That was like an arrow through my heart," Dan says. "I thought, Maybe he's right, maybe this is all going to collapse around me."

The next year, it did. He took classes in world religions, studying Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism, and the thought occurred to him that he believed what he believed simply because of where he was born. "I started to question not only my religious beliefs but also my political beliefs, and I had this incredible sense of vertigo, where I didn't know what I believed about anything," he says. "That was really hard for six months. But after I got through the crisis I had a sense of exhilaration. I felt that anything was possible—that I could put together a world view that was truly mine."

When he graduated, he got a mission assignment at a Christian crisis center for foreign travellers in Kathmandu, Nepal. He loved Kathmandu—the mishmash of Western and Eastern, old and new, real and fake. The crisis center was busy. There was a man from Turkey who'd heard that there were jobs in Hong Kong and decided to walk there, got as far as Nepal, and ran out of money. He slept in the bunk under Dan's, muttering about all the people who had wronged him. There was a young woman who'd had a psychotic break on a hike and had tried to take off all her clothes and jump off the mountain. There was an alcoholic Sri Lankan political refugee with four children.

After six months in Kathmandu, Dan bought a ticket to Delhi and found a bed in a cheap tourist camp. It was so hot there that he couldn't sleep, and for ten days he walked around in the crippling heat in a daze of existential confusion. He realized that he had no idea at all what he was going to do with his life, and that the nearest person he knew was seven thousand miles away. He felt intensely anxious, but also hopeful. He realized that he had spent his first eighteen years becoming his Orange City self, and the next five years peeling off that self and letting it die. He had travelled halfway around the world to slough off the last of it. Now he could start again.

Some of the kids who left Orange City left for a profession. There was work you couldn't do there, lives you couldn't live—there weren't a lot of tech jobs, for instance, or much in finance. Not many left for the money; you might make a higher salary elsewhere, but the cost of living in Orange City was so low that you'd likely end up worse off. Some left for a life style: they wanted mountains to ski and hike in, or they wanted to live somewhere with sports teams and restaurants. But most left for the same reason Dan Vermeer did—for the chance to remake themselves.

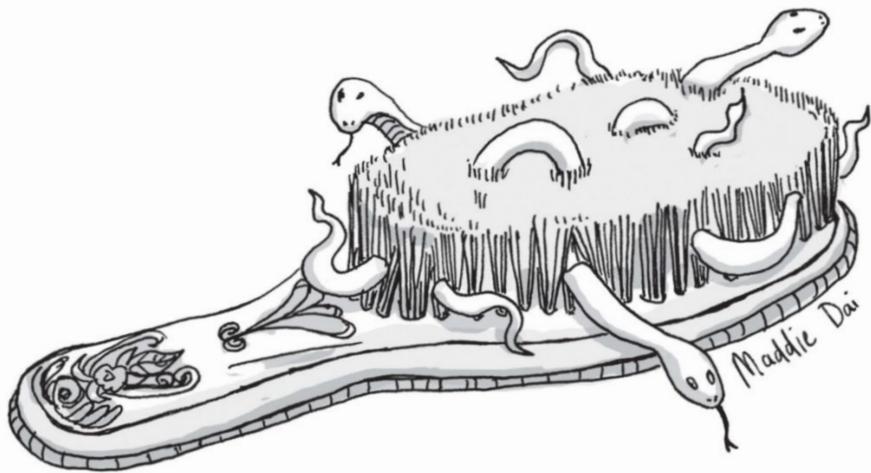
In bigger places, when you started

working you met new people, and your professional self became your identity. But in Orange City you would always be So-and-So's kid, no matter what you accomplished. People liked to point out that even Jesus had this problem when he tried to preach in his home town:

They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at Him.

But, while this was for some kids a reason to leave, for others it was why they wanted to stay. In Orange City, you could feel truly known. You lived among people who had not only known you for your whole life but known your parents and grandparents as well. You didn't have to explain how your father had died, or why your mother couldn't come to pick you up. Some people didn't feel that they had to leave to figure out who they were, because their family and its history already described their deepest self.

Besides these sentiments, which were widespread, there was another crucial fact about Orange City that enabled it to keep more of its young than other towns its size: it had a college. Northwestern College, a small Christian school of twelve hundred students, affiliated



MEDUSA'S HAIRBRUSH

with the Dutch Reformed Church, was founded not long after the town itself. Northwestern offered a variety of liberal-arts majors, but was oriented toward Christian ministry and practical subjects like nursing and education.

Stephanie Schwebach, née Smit, graduated from the high school in 1997 and went to Northwestern to train as a teacher. She had never felt restless in Orange City. “I really didn’t have an adventurous spirit,” she says. “I’m going to stay with the people I know.” Her professional goal was to get a job teaching in the same school she’d gone to as a child.

When she was growing up, she lived next door to her grandparents, and every Sunday after church her family went to their house for lunch, as was the custom then in Orange City. She met her future husband, Eric, in seventh grade, and they started dating in eleventh. Eric came from a huge family—his father was one of sixteen. Most of Eric’s many aunts and uncles still lived in the area, and if anyone needed anything done, like laying cement for a driveway, the family would come and help out.

After high school, Eric thought about joining the military—he thought it would be fun to see a bit of the world—but Stephanie talked him into sticking around, so he stayed in his parents’ house and went to a local technical school to train as an electrician. When Stephanie was a junior in college, they became engaged. He got a job with the manufacturer of Blue Bunny ice cream, and she started teaching. They had two children.

Some years ago, Stephanie and Eric were both working in Le Mars, a town twenty minutes away, and they considered moving there. But then Stephanie thought, It just makes it harder to stop in and say hi to your parents if you don’t live in the same town, and the kids can’t wander over by themselves—we won’t be close in the same way. Instead, they moved into the house that Eric had grown up in, on an acreage at the edge of town, and his parents built a smaller house next to it.

When Stephanie thought about what she wanted for her children in the future, the first thing she thought was, Stay close. “I want them to live right next door, so I can be the grandma that takes care of their kids and gets to see them grow through all the different stages,” she says. “Our kids have told us that once Eric’s folks are dead

we have to buy their house so they, our kids, can live in our house, next door. And that would be fine with me!”

In many towns, the most enterprising kids leave for college and stay away rather than starting businesses at home, which means that there are fewer jobs at home, which means that even more people leave; and, over time, the town’s population gets smaller and older, shops and schools begin to close, and the town begins to die. This dynamic has affected Iowa more than almost any other state: during the nineteen-nineties, only North Dakota lost a larger proportion of educated young people. In 2006, Iowa’s then governor, Tom Vilsack, undertook a walking tour of the state, with the theme “Come Back to Iowa, Please,” aimed at the young and educated. He threw cocktail parties in cities around the country, at which he begged these young emigrants to return, promising that Iowa had more to offer than “hogs, acres of corn, and old people.” But the campaign was a failure. In 2007, the legislature in Des Moines created the Generation Iowa Commission, to study why college graduates were leaving; two years later, a fifth of the members of the commission had themselves left the state.

The sociologists Patrick Carr and Maria Kefalas spent several months in a small Iowa town and found that children who appeared likely to succeed were from an early age groomed for departure by their parents and teachers. Other kids, marked as stayers, were often ignored in school. Everyone realized that encouraging the ambitious kids to leave was killing the town, but the ambition of the children was valued more than the life of the community. The kids most likely to make it big weren’t just permitted to leave—they were pushed.

In Orange City, that kind of pushing was uncommon. People didn’t seem to care about careers as much as they did in other places. “Even now, my friends there, I’m not sure what many of them do, and I don’t think they know what I do,” Dan Vermeer says. “That’s just not what you talk about.” You could be proud of a child doing something impressive in another part of the country, but having grown children and grandkids around you was equally a sign of success. Go to Northwestern, Orange City parents would say.

And, when you get your degree, why not settle down here? There are plenty of jobs, and it’ll take you five minutes to drive to work. When you have children, we’ll help you take care of them. People here share your values, it’s a good Christian place. And they care about you: if anything happens, they’ll have your back.

This pitch was often successful. Even some kids who left soon realized what they were missing. Growing up, Joe Clarey had not liked Orange City; after he graduated from Northwestern, in 2009, he fled to Chicago, where he got a job as an analyst in a global investment firm. At first, he loved the anonymity of the city; he loved his job, too, and started putting in seventy-hour weeks. He worked with a portfolio manager with two billion dollars’ worth of business. At twenty-six, he became a portfolio manager himself.

But then, just when he was right where he’d wanted to be, he found that he didn’t want to be there anymore. He realized he’d ignored everything but work for five years, and everything else had fallen apart. He didn’t have a girlfriend, he had no friends other than colleagues, and he’d barely seen his family or his friends at home. Riding on the El to work, surrounded by strangers, he wondered, What am I doing here? Some relatives had started having serious health problems; then his brother had a baby, and although Clarey wasn’t good with children, he found that he wanted to know his nephew as he grew up. He wanted to move back, but he was embarrassed. What would people say, after he’d gone on and on for years about how he couldn’t wait to get out of Orange City, and after his fancy Chicago job?

He decided to deal with the embarrassment and go home. He found work in a local financial firm, but it felt paltry now to be buying ten-thousand-dollar mutual funds. He thought, I’ve already made one giant change—why not another? One of his high-school friends managed a local Walmart; Clarey found a job in another Walmart, nearby, running the produce department. He discovered that he liked managing people and inventory as much as investments. Meanwhile, he was getting close to high-school friends again, and spending time with his family. “I just wanted a simpler life,” he says. “I’m a big golfer. I get off work at five o’clock, I’m home in fifteen minutes, I’m at the golf course in twenty-five. I

fish all the time. I'm at one friend's house for dinner two or three times a week." He bought a house and settled in.

**I**t was in large part because of people like Joe Clarey coming back to town, or sticking around in the first place, that Orange City was flourishing. Small towns usually competed with one another to recruit companies from across the country, but most of the industry in Orange City was founded by locals. Diamond Vogel Paints is the oldest industry in town, founded as Vogel Paint and Wax, in 1926, by a Dutch immigrant; it is still run by the Vogel family. A man from Orange City who started a medical-equipment company in Texas moved his business back to town about thirty years ago, and now the renamed company, CIVCO, manufactures ultrasound probes and patient-positioning devices for radiation and oncology. More recently, CIVCO spun off another business, Quattro, which makes carbon-fibre composites for aerospace, medical-imaging equipment, and robotics. Ten years ago, the corporate headquarters of the Pizza Ranch chain moved to Orange City from its original location, in Hull, fifteen miles away.

Orange City thinks of itself as a progressive town—not in the political sense but in the sense that it embraces change and growth. This growth is guided by a group of town businessmen who have known one another for years. Steve Roesner, the C.E.O. of Quattro, lives close to the C.E.O. of the town's hospital; they played on the football team together at the high school, and both went to Northwestern. Another neighbor and friend of Roesner's from Northwestern is the chief administrative officer of Pizza Ranch. Roesner is also friendly with Drew Vogel, the third-generation C.E.O. of Diamond Vogel Paints. While other Iowa towns were trying to stave off population collapse, these town fathers had ambitions to enlarge Orange City's population from six to ten thousand, so they were trying to make the town more attractive to outsiders. There was nothing to be done about the winters, one of the main things people hated about northwest Iowa, and there weren't any scenic lakes or mountains to promote, but



*Each May, for Tulip Festival, the town dresses up in traditional Dutch costume.*

they could provide more things to do. There was already a swimming pool, a movie theatre, and a golf course, but live-entertainment options were limited, so they went in on a theatre with the Christian school. They bought an old sandpit pond and put in a dock so people could fish.

People were always talking about the Dutch work ethic and entrepreneurial spirit, but Orange City was in many ways a less than ideal place for a business. Because its unemployment rate was so low, it could be hard to find enough workers, and its isolation made transportation inconvenient and slow. This was why so many Orange City companies were founded by locals: you had to have another reason, a non-business reason, to be there. "If your motivation is only to maximize returns, then you go elsewhere, and ultimately that leads to moving to Mexico or Morocco," Roesner says. "But it's not always pure 'maximize profits.'"

Roesner was not an Orange City native. When he was a kid, his father's climb up the corporate ladder involved moving the family every couple of years;

they moved to Orange City from Minnesota when Roesner was in eleventh grade, and later his parents left again. But Roesner married a Dutch woman from Orange City, and stayed. When he got an M.B.A. and started out on the executive track himself, he decided that he didn't want to do what his father would have done—he didn't want to go to Beaverton to work for Nike, or to Minneapolis for a job at Target, then move on somewhere else. "I said to myself, 'What is all this about?'" he says. "'Is it just about me and where I can take my career, or is there something bigger?' Here, you feel like you're connected—that you belong someplace."

**T**he Orange City way of life was so stringent and all-encompassing, so precise and insistent in every aspect, from behavior to ideals, that, when you were in it, it was difficult to imagine other ways to be. Not many of the restless kids had much sense, before they left, of what it was they were missing. But their restlessness often led, later on, to different ways of thinking. People who began by questioning who they

were ended up questioning other things, like their politics.

If you lived in a place like Orange City, for instance, you weren't used to dealing with people you didn't know. If your car broke down, you took it to a mechanic who had fixed your parents' cars for decades, and whose son was on your baseball team in high school. As a result, you were apt to find strangers more threatening than if you had left. Also, if you moved to a larger place, you tended to become aware of poverty in a new way. People in Orange City received government assistance, but the town was small enough and prosperous enough that it was possible to imagine a world without it. If you belonged to a church and you had a crisis, church members would likely help you out. If you moved to a city, though, you saw a level of need that could not be addressed by church groups alone.

In a small town, you knew what people were up to most of the time; if someone did something strange or annoying, it often got to you, because it said something about the town, and, by extension, about you. The anonymity of a larger place, on the other hand, was more forgiving. To live in a city was to know that you were surrounded by far too many people to ever keep track of: there was so much that was outside your control that ignoring annoyances, human or otherwise, became a habit. Moreover, repeated encounters with people who didn't think as you did could pry open a certain distance between your beliefs and your emotions.

Lynn Lail, who moved from Orange City to Texas twenty years ago and now works as a medevac nurse near Fort Worth, finds this sort of dissonance difficult, but has learned to live with her confusion. "I'm still extremely conservative," she says. "Very old-fashioned in my morals. Down here, we have a huge gay and lesbian community, and some of my dearest friends are gay and lesbian, and that has been a struggle for me, because I was raised to believe that that's not Biblical. But I love them unconditionally for who they are as people, and I don't judge them." Lail moved to Texas not because she wanted to leave Or-

ange City—she loves the town—but because being a medevac nurse in Iowa would have been boring. She wanted to be in a city, where the work was more intense; that choice then led her somewhere politically that she did not expect to go.

People often move for a reason that seems to have nothing to do with politics but then turns out to correlate to politics quite closely. According to a Pew survey, for instance, nearly eighty per cent of liberals like the idea of living in a dense neighborhood where you can walk to shops and schools, while seventy-five per cent of conservatives would rather live in a larger house with more space around it. After people move, the politics of the new place affect them. Those who move to a politically dissimilar place tend to become independents; those who move to a place where people vote the same way they do tend to become more extreme in their convictions.

But there also seems to be something about the act of moving that disturbs people's beliefs, regardless of where they end up. One woman left Orange City to attend college in a place that was, if anything, more conservative than her home town, but, even so, the experience changed her. "Both of my parents are vocally conservative, so I thought I was a Republican all these years, but my views have changed," she says. "Living out-

going to try to reverse Roe v. Wade, people will vote for them, regardless of what they say in other areas, regardless of how ridiculous."

Orange City is just such a small Midwestern community. Opposing abortion is a deeply held religious principle for most people, and its importance is such that, for many, it is the only issue they consider when they vote. Orange City is in Iowa's Fourth Congressional District, that of Representative Steve King, who is notorious for making incendiary anti-immigrant remarks. Even though voters in the Fourth District supported a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants by a two-to-one margin, while King vehemently opposed it, they continued to vote for him because he was reliably pro-life. Yet although it was rare for someone from Orange City to change his position on abortion, if he came to consider other issues important as well, his politics shifted significantly. "I would still consider myself pro-life," John Cleveringa, who left for Michigan to be a pastor, says. "But that has moved down the list. Pro-life is about defending those who are not able to defend themselves, and there are people in this world who have been born and don't have the ability to defend themselves, either."

In the past ten years, a large number of Latino immigrants have moved into Orange City and nearby towns to work on the hog farms and the dairy farms and in the meatpacking plants. Although the change has been large and sudden—in just a few years, some school classes have gone from nearly all white to as much as thirty per cent Hispanic—it has been taken more or less in stride. Very few people in Orange City were worried that immigrants would take jobs away from natives; since most white workers didn't seem to want to milk cows or butcher hogs anymore, it was clear that without the immigrants local agriculture would collapse. On the other hand, the idea of breaking the law offended people. They wanted immigrants, but legal ones.

Occasionally, there were displays of overt racism. The next-door town, Sioux Center, had a weekly cruise night, when young people would drive around and around a park, and some of the cruisers had started flying Confederate flags on



side of a small rural town gives you a different perspective. When I think about taxes now, what comes to my mind is school funding coming from taxes, which perpetuates poverty, because schools in lower-income areas have lower graduation rates. When I think about immigration, I think, We all immigrated at some point—well, most of us—can we not remember that? But abortion is what people vote on in the Midwest, especially in small communities. If someone says they're

## ABOVE THE MOUNTAINTOPS

Above the mountaintops  
all is still.  
Among the treetops  
you can feel  
barely a breath—  
birds in the forest, stripped of song.  
Just wait: before long  
you, too, shall rest.

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe  
(Translated, from the German, by Rita Dove.)

their trucks. A prayer vigil was organized in response—about a hundred people gathered to pray and sing in the park as the trucks were cruising. But most people in Orange City were too polite to show hostility. The problem wasn't so much that people rejected the newcomers openly as that they tended not to see them in the first place. Most of the Latinos attended Catholic churches in other towns, so they were invisible. They didn't exist.

Because of this, a group of people at the Trinity Reformed Church decided that Dutch and Latinos ought to get to know one another. They decided to host a potluck dinner at which guests would sit together at tables for eight—four Dutch and four Latinos. One of the sources of tension between the communities, insofar as they interacted at all, had been what was perceived to be their differing notions of time—the Dutch were reputed to be rigidly punctual, the Latinos to be late. So the hosts told the Latino guests that the dinner began at five-thirty, and told the Dutch to come at six. The evening of the dinner, the Latinos, knowing that lateness irritated the Dutch, turned up at precisely five-thirty; and the Dutch, thinking to accommodate Latino norms, turned up half an hour late, at six-thirty; and so the Latinos had to wait around for an hour while the embarrassed hosts explained the situation. But, in the end, the dinner was a success: fifty or sixty guests came, and several made plans to get together again.

Last March, Steve King declared in a tweet: "Culture and demographics are our destiny. We can't restore our civilization with somebody else's babies." Steve

Mahr, who owned the coffee shop on Central Avenue, decided to do something. He wanted to demonstrate that not everyone in Orange City thought like King, so he organized a protest in front of the courthouse. Although it was raining that day, he was gratified to see nearly two hundred people turn up. Mahr didn't grow up in Orange City; he came to Northwestern College from a tiny Iowa town sixty miles away. This was another benefit that the college brought—yearly crops of young people to replace the ones who left. These arrivals came with fresh ideas, but within limits: since Northwestern was a Christian college, it tended to attract those who fit.

One day, someone asked Mahr and another young man who worked in the coffee shop why they had stayed in Orange City after graduating, and both of them said, Kathleen Norris. Norris was a poet who, after living a bohemian life in New York City, had returned in 1974 to live in her late parents' house in a small town in South Dakota. Seeing how the Dakotas had been eviscerated by the loss of their young, she had come to respect the wisdom of the Benedictine vow of stability—which is, as Thomas Merton put it, a renunciation of the vain hope of finding the perfect monastery, and an embracing of the ordinariness of what you already have. Norris spoke at Northwestern while Mahr and the other man were students there, and convinced them that moving to a new place was not the way to build a new self, because you brought your problems with you. If you didn't distract yourself with moving around, but stayed where you were and put down

roots, you gave yourself a chance to grow.

Mahr also had another reason for staying. He thought of himself as an agitator, albeit a gentle one, and he wanted to push Orange City to live up to its religious ideals. Although he now considered himself a progressive Democrat, he'd been raised in a conservative Christian family and used to vote Republican, so he felt that the people in Orange City were his people and he knew how to talk to them. He believed that Orange City Christians could be moved by certain kinds of moral arguments—ones that depended on the sanctity of life, for instance, or the command to love thy neighbor. He had one such argument about refugees. Suppose you have a hundred babies before they're born, he would say, and one of them might grow up to be a terrorist—should you abort all hundred babies just in case? Of course not, his interlocutor would say. Well, suppose you have a hundred refugees and one might be a terrorist—should you risk a hundred lives by turning them all away?

People in Orange City were apt to avoid discussing politics, because arguments could get personal, but Mahr thought he could keep things friendly over food and drink. He chatted with customers in his coffee shop all day, and in the evenings he held events to discuss things like race and immigration. When marriage equality passed nationally, he hung up a rainbow flag and put a sign outside—"WAHOO!! CONGRATS LGBTQ FRIENDS!" One customer told him that she was offended by his sign, that marriage equality was a symptom of degrading morals, and that he had lost her business. He said he understood her position, but he wanted his restaurant to be a place for everyone. Before long, she came back. "What are you going to do?" he says. "The town has one coffee shop!"

Mahr realized that in some ways you could engage people in politics more effectively in a small town precisely because everything was personal and there was nowhere else to go. It was harder to push people in a larger place, who could shrug off the sharp looks of their neighbors, and who didn't feel personally implicated in the failings of their community.

In his 1970 book, "Exit, Voice, and Loyalty," the economist Albert O. Hirschman described different ways of expressing discontent. You can exit—stop

buying a product, leave town. Or you can use voice—complain to the manufacturer, stay and try to change the place you live in. The easier it is to exit, the less likely it is that a problem will be fixed. That's why the centripetal pull of Orange City was not just a conservative force; it could be a powerfully dynamic one as well. After all, it wasn't those who fled the town who would push it onward, politically or economically—it was the ones who loved it enough to stay, or to come back.

Americans, Hirschman wrote, have always preferred "the neatness of exit over the messiness and heartbreak of voice." Discontented Europeans staged revolutions; Americans moved on. "The curious conformism of Americans, noted by observers ever since Tocqueville, may also be explained in this fashion," he continued. "Why raise your voice in contradiction and get yourself into trouble as long as you can always remove yourself entirely from any given environment should it become too unpleasant?"

A hundred years ago in southern Italy, many people were miserably poor, and there were a limited number of things they could do about it. They could emigrate, probably to America; they could join a militant labor union and start to fight; or they could accept the world as it was. Some who emigrated sent money home, which helped, but they were gone, so they didn't have much ability to improve the place. Many who stayed to fight, on the other hand, became social-

ists or syndicalists or anarchists, launched strikes, organized coöperatives and illegal soviets, and fomented revolution. People who lived in areas where there was a lot of organizing—where there seemed to be a chance to change things—tended to stay; in places where the revolution didn't catch on, people left. In Italy at that time, in other words, to stay could be an optimistic, forward-looking thing to do. Staying didn't mean staying the same; leaving, on the other hand, left a place as it was.

Quite a few people came back to Orange City eventually. Some came back when their kids were little, because they wanted them to have the same childhood they'd had. Others returned when nieces or nephews were born, or when relatives got sick. Discontented kids leaving kept Orange City conservative; homesick adults returning brought a combination of perspective and allegiance that kept it alive.

Vicki Schrock came back. Her family were Dutch farmers who had lived near Orange City for four generations. She grew up poor on a small farm just outside town, the second of five children; she was born in 1979, at the beginning of the farm crisis that crippled the region for half a decade and forced many small farmers to sell their land. She thought vaguely in high school of wanting to go somewhere else for college, but her younger sister was only eight at the time, and she didn't want to miss her

growing up, so in the end she went to Northwestern and studied social work. She met her future husband, Justin, there; they married the summer after her junior year. Justin was from central Iowa and was studying to enter the ministry. One day, Vicki saw a notice on a bulletin board about a Dutch Reformed church in California's Central Valley that needed a youth pastor. She and Justin prayed on it and decided that God wanted them to go.

They lived in California for three years. While Justin worked in the church, Vicki took a job at a Christian home for pregnant teen-agers, in Modesto. A few months after she started, one of the teenagers asked her to adopt her baby. The teen-ager wanted the baby to go to a white Christian family that would take the baby far away from Modesto, but she'd found that few such families would consider a black child. Vicki was twenty-two and had not been planning to start a family for several years, but she felt that God wanted her to adopt. She called Justin, who, answering the phone in his car, was startled, but quickly agreed.

Some time later, while Vicki and Justin were on a vacation back home, people from her childhood church told them that they needed a youth pastor and wanted to recruit Justin. Vicki and Justin wondered what it would be like to bring up a nonwhite child in Sioux County, and Vicki wondered, too, if she wanted to raise any kind of kid in the blinkered and censorious atmosphere of Orange City, which she was now even more conscious of than she had been growing up. On a previous trip home, a man had remarked to her how nice it was that they didn't have teen pregnancies in Orange City as they did in Modesto, and she, dumbfounded, said to him, "Do you really think they're not happening? I think people here take a different path." After much indecision and praying, however, she and Justin chose to move home. It turned out better than they'd feared—Sioux County was changing. In their small church alone, there were nine or ten families that had adopted nonwhite kids, and many Latino families were settling nearby.

During the next few years, Vicki and Justin had three biological kids and adopted biracial twin girls from Minnesota. After Justin had served a decade as



JUMPING INTO THE SEASON'S FIRST PILE OF SUBPOENAS.

youth pastor, they moved to Guatemala for a year and a half with the six kids to run a mission center. When they got back, Vicki went to work in a clinic, and Justin took a job at a mentoring organization in town that counselled people in spiritual or material trouble—particularly the unchurched and those new in town, who had nowhere else to go.

Coming back to Orange City from Guatemala was considerably more jarring than coming back from California. They found the town's prosperity newly astonishing, and they saw how Latino families in town were invisible to people for whom Orange City would always be Dutch. But it seemed to Justin that it could not be an accident that he and Vicki had returned home only to find dozens of people freshly arrived from parts of Guatemala that they had just spent time in. He figured this must be one of the reasons God meant them to come back.

All four of Dan Vermeer's siblings left Orange City, and only one of them came back. It was normal in town for some children to make their lives elsewhere, but to have five kids and be left with not a single one to show for it was embarrassing. "My mom asked all the time, 'What did we do wrong?'" Dan says. The one who came back was the youngest, Dan's sister, Julie, and no one was more surprised by this than Julie herself. She had always disliked the town's tendency to consider itself a shining little Christendom especially beloved by God.

Even when she was a child, Julie had resisted Orange City's equation of Christian and Republican. She had always been devout; but in third grade she made Jesse Jackson buttons after she saw him on TV, speaking at the 1984 Democratic National Convention. When she was growing up, she assumed she would leave town after high school and never come back. But then, her senior year in high school, she got pregnant. She wanted to keep the baby, and she knew she couldn't raise a child and attend college without help, so she enrolled at Northwestern and raised her daughter at home with her parents. She met her future husband, Greg, in college. After they graduated, they moved to North Carolina so she could study Christian

ethics at Duke Divinity School; she then got a job at a small Christian college near Philadelphia.

Julie and Greg lived in the Philadelphia suburbs for ten years. They tried to build a sense of community there, but it didn't work. They had friends, but after a decade their town still didn't feel like home. Around this time, when Julie was in her late thirties, her mother received a diagnosis of leukemia, and Julie went to Orange City to be with her as she was dying. She was struck by how many people came to see her mother. She noticed that some of these friends had money and others were poor, whereas in Philadelphia her friends were all very much like her and Greg. Julie thought, Here is a woman who has accomplished basically nothing, professionally, and yet she has had an impact on so many people. And she thought, These are the kinds of deep friendships that we don't have in Philadelphia.

A couple of months later, her father also became seriously ill and she wanted to take care of him, so she called Northwestern to ask about jobs. She interviewed for the position of dean of student life, and Greg interviewed for a job as a marketing manager in a nearby town. They got the jobs—but in the middle of it all her father died. Now they had to decide whether to go through with the move anyway. They decided to do it, and moved into the house that Julie was raised in. For them, this meant building their lives around relationships rather than professional ambition. Greg's parents were still living nearby, and all around were people they'd known since they were kids. Julie also felt called by God to serve the town where she'd grown up and the college that had taken her in as a single mother.

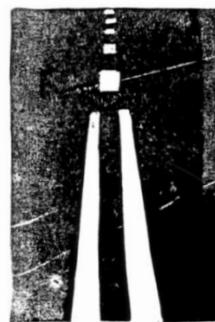
She noticed almost immediately that the social world around her felt different. In Philadelphia, she'd had her close friends, and everyone else was more or less a stranger; in Orange City, there was a large middle category as well. She wasn't close friends with all her neighbors or her acquaintances from church, but she knew that if she got sick they would bring food and run errands and take care

of her children. Still, it wasn't prudence that prompted her to move home, or even the desire for older friends: structuring her life around relationships was a religious value as well. She believed that because God was a trinity, to be created in the image of God was to be created for relationships; so to make relationships the purpose of your life was to fulfill your human mission.

She thought that her faith was a large part of why she'd returned to Orange City, while her brothers had not. Dan had found his way back to the church eventually, but not the one he'd grown up in—he and his family belonged to a progressive church in North Carolina, where he taught

environmental business practices at Duke. Julie, though, felt that to grow up in Orange City was to inherit a coherent and beautiful world view, derived largely from the Dutch Reformed Church. At the heart of it was the idea that there was not one inch of God's creation that He did not claim as His—that all parts of life were sacred, even the most mundane. Pietistic traditions held that earth was merely a way station to Heaven, and all that really mattered was the state of your soul; Reformed Christians believed that God would return to raise the dead and restore the earth to what it was meant to be. Earth was the final home.

Dan was glad that Julie had moved back into their family house, but he never considered following her, even as he saw the sweetness of that life. "Every day after dinner, my dad used to hold hands with Julie's daughter and go watch the horses at the neighbor's house, and chat with him, and then wander back," he says. "If you love Orange City, those small, idyllic pleasures become what you live for." Because Julie moved back only after both her parents were dead, home did not feel idyllic to her in quite that way; but she realized that would have been so, sooner or later, in any case. Imagining that moving home could resolve your conflicts and fulfill your longings was as misguided as imagining that leaving would do the same thing. Home should not be idolized, she believed—only loved. ♦



*Riddle*

Thomas McGuane



I must have been renting a place on H Street in Livingston at the time, so that I could meet clients in town. (My home was several miles south, toward Gardiner.) I was an architect, and I had a model of Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater, which I'd built in school, on a library table in the front room. Most of my clients thought it was my design. The H Street house was on an elevated lot, facing the old sewing-machine shop. I never went in there, but I recall that they sold machines with a foreign name that were said to hem, darn, baste, and stitch—back when people did those things, instead of just throwing stuff away. Eventually, the place went out of business. I had only the ground floor of the house; the upstairs was occupied by a schoolteacher, who entered her apartment by way of a very unsafe-looking exterior staircase that undulated and squealed with her steps.

After drinking at the Wrangler until closing time one cold November night, I wandered around to Main Street, which was empty at that hour, except for a crippled old cowboy who was making his way toward the railroad yards. There weren't many of these fellows left, the ones whom horses had broken so often in accidents far from help, their hands still as hard as lariats. They kept their worn-out Stetsons so you wouldn't confuse them with railroaders. I had stopped to watch the old man, perhaps wondering how far he'd make it in his condition, when a young boy, an urchin, appeared from an alley and called out to him, "Jack! Hey, Jack!" and the old man turned toward the voice. I don't know if I can put my finger on it after all this time, but the excitement or joy, or whatever it was that these two experienced when they saw each other, has never left me. That's all I can say about it. It was late at night on an empty street. Any euphoria I may have accumulated at the bar was gone. The pair met up and spoke in an animated way, though I couldn't hear them from that distance. It doesn't matter. I moved on before they did, and the boy is probably middle-aged by now, the old cowboy surely dead. Somebody later told me that he

was born on the Cherokee Strip and had worked for Benny Binion. I'm not sure if that makes any sense.

We don't remember everything, but I'd love to know who's in charge of what we forget. If there's a system, it escapes me. I still remember that old cowboy and the boy's enchantment when I walk down Main, because heading home that night I was in a kind of trance that made me wonder later if I'd dreamed the rest of the evening. I had not, of course, but it had that quality, and it's hardly certain where dreams leave off.

My head was clear as I drove home, out Old 89 under the stars, though my ears were still ringing from various Doobie Brothers covers by locals who'd learned rock and roll at an Air Force base in Spain. The earliest houses in the valley were set close along the road for easy access in deep snow. Their lights were off at that hour, and I could just make out their shapes as I drove; up on the ridges, new homes glowed with yard lights and long driveways, their owners indifferent to weather. I turned on the radio, in case my post-Wrangler Bar attention wavered.

I lived alone in a two-story frame house built in 1905, with a still incorporated into the fireplace, in which the owner had made bottles of hooch to sell at country dances during Prohibition. Walking in the door by myself at three in the morning would make me long for someone to live with—anyone—but I'd soon be asleep, and in the morning I'd be glad to be alone again and would remind myself that I had to keep better hours if I was going to get any work done.

Just south of the cemetery, where the road starts down into the Suce Creek bottom, was a car upside down and two people, a man and a woman, standing beside it. The beams of my headlights carved a garish hole in the dark. I could see that the man was holding and trying to calm the agitated woman, who was pointing toward a vacancy of brush and prairie. I turned off the radio, so as to concentrate on, or try to understand, what I was seeing. I pulled up behind the overturned car without any sense that the

couple was looking to me for help. On the contrary, the man was waving harshly at me to turn off my lights. When I did, I could no longer see the two of them very well, and it was unclear whether they wanted me to stay or whether there was something private about the woman's anguished wails that I should respect. The glimpse I'd had of them with my headlights on had suggested that they were uninjured. I don't know why this encouraged my bafflement or diffidence, but I just sat in my car waiting to be asked.

I couldn't just sit there, but I really couldn't leave. I got out of the car, risking the parking lights, which didn't seem to offend the man as my headlights had. Now he beckoned me over, with the same kind of authoritarian gestures with which he had ordered my lights extinguished. When I reached him, he stared me straight in the face in a disquieting way. He was not big but seemed fit, with close-cropped hair and noticeably long sideburns. He shook his head to indicate either that this entire situation was a mess or that there was nothing to be done about the dramatic noises coming from the woman, a remarkably small person in a cotton dress that went all the way to the ground, who was still directing her cries toward the grass and underbrush. The man put his hand on my shoulder and moved me to a spot away from the noise.

"She's crying for her baby," he said in an oddly confiding tone, almost as though he were selling me the idea. When I asked if the child had been thrown from the car, he said, "There is no baby. She's crazy. Just play along." His gaze was very direct. "I think you can do that."

At this, the woman rushed over to us and stood just at the level of my chest so that the peculiar arrangement of her hair, piled atop her head with a comb thrust through it, drew my exhausted scrutiny.

"He don't believe me! Timmy was throwed from the back window. Out in the pickers."

The man was staring at her. She touched a finger to a button on my shirt. I thought it was a curious gesture



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for someone in her position. Her diction, too, was in contrast to the refinement of her face and the delicacy of her clothing. The man watched her as though he'd never heard her speak before.

"Will you look for him? *He* don't believe me, and I got no shoes on."

The man tilted his head and nodded, and I concurred that there was no harm in going along with this. It seemed entirely possible that there was a baby. As I set off, I wondered whom I believed.

I stumbled through the brush and weeds, my eyes not quite adjusted to the starry night. I thought something like a five-minute loop would demonstrate my willingness to help, but at the same time I listened for the sound of a child. I hadn't gone far before I stepped into a badger hole and fell; by the time I got the dirt out of my eyes and my mouth, I was annoyed. I thought of the old cowboy and the boy back on Main Street and how there was something important about them that I couldn't put my finger on. I was in no hurry as I stood up to pick the thistles out of my left palm.

It was thus that I observed my car drive away, two little red tail-lights, and this threw me into a strange reflective state, in which my dissolute night at the Wrangler and my ensuing exhaustion, the cowboy and the boy, the two crooks who had just stolen my car, my remote house and its unconquered air of vacancy, all seemed to have equal value—that is, no value. I have gone back to this idea since, because I feel it was a clue to my eventual burden, this set of random data points by which I simply moved across some screen before being faced with a connivance that I couldn't understand, though it seemed to belong to me. The flashing light on a remote radio tower across the valley looked almost like a beacon, and I recall thinking that I could head for that as easily as go back to the road, where I no longer had a car. Later, misusing these memories to impress some girl, I would try pitching the idea that this

descent into the abyss was hilarious, but I hardly laughed at the time.

When I got back to the road, scuffed up, fingernails packed with clay, I looked both ways as though I might be run over on this empty highway. I knew where I was, just at the rise toward Deep Creek, Pine Creek, Barney Creek, and so on; I could smell the irrigated hay fields on the night air. I was more than ten miles from my house, on a little-travelled road. The Absaroka Range made a sharp silhouette against the starlight.



A car approached from the north, a pair of lights wobbling on the uneven pavement. I stood at the edge of the road, arms at my sides. It pulled up beside me, and from within I heard a woman's anxious voice: "Are you all right! You're lucky to be alive!" I made an effort to sweep the dirt from my clothes before opening the passenger door; it gave me the moment I needed to understand this interesting development. Then I got in, flinging myself back against the seat. "Yes," I breathed. "Very lucky indeed, thank you. I just need to get home."

"Shall I call someone, the—someone?" She held up her phone. A pretty face, sharply focussed, very dark-brown eyes, shone in the thing's green light. I said I didn't think it was necessary. I supposed that my own phone was travelling somewhere in the night, in my car. I tried to make conversation as we drove on. "Is that Cassiopeia?" She didn't know; she was trying to watch the road. I remembered the groceries I'd had in the trunk of my car—some apples, orange juice, Lean Cuisine, two tins of Science Diet cat food, a fifth of George Dickel. I knew what was going to happen: it was three in the morning. We didn't even get upstairs. We fucked on the couch with the front door open. The cat was all over us. She started laughing and soon left. I carried my clothes upstairs, threw them on the floor, and went to bed.

Karen was her name. I don't know if she got mine or not. She was an

emergency-room doctor and smelled like surgical tape. She was tired from work and on her way home. I'm surprised she took the time with me. I believe I enjoyed the experience, but I really couldn't stop thinking about the old cowboy and his young friend. She did tell me that her job was grim and had taught her to "live it up." Maybe that explained it, if an explanation was required.

I woke up hungry, but it was almost midmorning. I had work to do! One of my skills was making models for other architects' projects. I was in far greater demand for these models than I was for my own designs. In fact, they pretty well ate my career. I was making one now for a glamorous house in Bridger Canyon. It looked like a spaceship, with rooms cantilevered over a spring-fed pond. I could just picture it below the gorgeous massif of the Bridger Range, a real piece of shit. Oh well, it was a living.

When I was this weary, I'd do various mindless things to get myself ready for the day, which necessarily demanded physical deftness. I was trying to drop two halves of a Lender's onion bagel into the slots of the toaster simultaneously, a tough hand-eye maneuver: I'd nail one and the other would flop out onto the counter. I was further distracted by the beauty of the morning, visible above the sink, a crowd of finches in the lilacs beside the kitchen window, through which came the most ambrosial air from the spruces surrounding the yard.

I didn't get a chance to eat the bagel until later in the day, when it was cold and hard: a knock on my front door turned out to be our big Sheriff Holm, bursting out of his olive uniform and smiling suspiciously at me as he offered his hand. He had a large, round Scandinavian head and a blunt nose. He didn't want a bagel, so I led him into the living room, where I offered him a straight-backed chair, a white oak Shaker knockoff I'd made myself, an extraordinarily uncomfortable thing that gave its occupant the feeling of enduring an inquisition while insuring the brevity of a visit. I knew

instinctively that this would be the right approach, given the startling appearance of the law. The chair made twerps out of most people, but the sheriff looked like he owned it. It may even have added to his authority. He got right to the point.

"Do you know where your car is?"

"I don't. It was stolen."

"And you never got around to reporting it?"

"I was with an emergency-room doctor, tending to other matters. Has it been found?"

"It's in Torrington, Wyoming, full of bullet holes."

This was a good time to say nothing.

"They've got the guy," he added.

"What about the girl?"

"In the hospital. She's not gonna make it. They robbed the Sinclair Station in town, rolled their car, and then got some help from you."

"Well, I wouldn't call it—"

"Really? Then why didn't you report it?"

"It was late."

"Pard, we answer the phone 24/7."

"I should have called. Of course, I should have. I should have picked up the phone and called."

"I could probably make a case here. I'm not going to, because I don't think it would fly. But it never needed to come to this. Maybe you should think about that. There wasn't nothing in the world wrong with that young woman. You ever see a pretty gal in a morgue? I don't recommend it."

He gave me time to absorb this, but at that moment my mind was elsewhere. "Who's that old cowboy walks around town in the middle of the night?"

It took the sheriff a moment to answer. "If he has a name, I wouldn't know it. Why do you ask?"

I still had my work to do. I was able to use a shard of broken mirror for the pond. I just couldn't figure out how far back I'd have to go to put together the pieces that wound up in Torrington. This was going to take a while. ♦

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Thomas McGuane on writing in free fall.

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THE THEATRE

## WASTED

*Acting and addiction in “People, Places & Things.”*

BY HILTON ALS

Dramas about addiction can be exciting to watch. And then dispiriting. Exciting because degradation is fascinating to follow from the relative safety and smugness of an “appropriate” life, and dispiriting because if all that sad mayhem can happen to this or that character what’s to keep it from happening to me or you?

Emma (Denise Gough), the protagonist in Duncan Macmillan’s *“People, Places & Things,”* a transfer from the National Theatre in London (at St. Ann’s Warehouse), suffers greatly, but she is also interested in how far and fast she can fall and still pull back before landing, permanently, in the gutter: she’s the star of her own tinsel tragedy. Like many junkies, Emma is a brutalizing sentimentalist chasing the dragon—a line of coke, a handful of tranquilizers, booze—while also chasing some idea of love, which involves regret as well. She would “only connect” if she could—or if that kind of connection held her interest for long enough.

Emma’s an actress, a sloppily confrontational, drug-addled mess in a business populated by handlers who applaud inflated self-regard. She likes to be watched—she demands it—but in her fucked-up state she demeans the honor of drawing the audience’s attention. Onstage, she jerks and twists her way through a scene about failed dreams and unrequited love. What play is this, though? Some of the lines are familiar. Ah, that sad, tall guy is Treplev, from Chekhov’s *“The Seagull,”* so Emma, in a long black dress, must be Nina, Treplev’s childhood friend and an aspiring actress, Nina, with her dreams and her hysteria. Emma keeps

saying, “I’m a seagull,” but the words come out strangely—garbled or ill-timed—as she lurches to and fro, nodding off and then trying not to nod, as the scene disintegrates and dance music is piped in and, leaving her costume behind, she goes off to a rave in a world far from Chekhov’s, a club populated by party people who don’t want the night to end, if it is, in fact, night.

The next day—or some other day, who can say—Emma sits, stoned while trying not to be, in the lobby of a rehab facility in London. She’s on the phone with someone—we don’t know whom at first. She’s asking the person to clean out her apartment and get rid of all the hidden pills and bottles. She says, in a rush between twitching and scratching, “Listen to me listen to me okay alright please this is important to me.... Listen please for a second because right now you’re being a complete cunt.” Who is she speaking to so disparagingly? “Look, obviously I called the wrong person. Obviously you’re unable to help me, you can’t give me half an hour to do something that could save my life.... Listen, Mum.” But Mum isn’t listening—perhaps she has listened and had her hopes dashed one time too many—and, given the acrimony in Emma’s voice as she struggles to form a sentence, one wonders if she has ever had anyone listen to her off-stage, or if her family and friends are finally revolting against her unbridled selfishness.

By seeking help, Emma puts us on her side: who doesn’t identify with the desire to be better, to be transformed, rehabilitated? We all need “work.” And

Emma needs to get through rehab if she’s ever going to be hired as an actress again. Indeed, the desire to act is never far from her heart or her way of being: she signs into rehab as “Nina,” a distressing and distressed character who both is and is not herself.

Emma hides behind her addictions, and she uses her sense of irony as a distancing scrim. When she is shown to her room by a rehab administrator named Foster (Alistair Cope, who, like the rest of the supporting cast, is excellent), she flips him off with snotty remarks: she is defiant, or acting defiant. Foster has seen it all before, and so has the Doctor (Barbara Marten, who plays several roles), but their patience and knowingness feel contrived to Emma. Not long after she starts to crash, she sees versions of herself climbing out of the bed and breaking through the wall, frantic for the familiar escapes of drugs, drink, and staunch make-believe. Emma is not pulled together because she’s never been pulled together, and her job has encouraged this splitting apart of the soul in order to become other people.

Throughout the almost two-and-a-half-hour play, Macmillan and the committed director, Jeremy Herrin, make the point that drugs both allow Emma to compartmentalize her various selves in her real life and encourage her not to have a real life at all. Group therapy is useless to Emma until she tells her life story—except that it’s not her life story. Another recovering addict, Mark (Nathaniel Martello-White), recognizes it as the plot of *“Hedda Gabler.”* Who is Emma without a script? A broken girl who was close to her brother, who died



*Through some extraordinary process, Denise Gough becomes Emma and not Emma at the same time.*



*"I remodelled, but I left it so that when danger threatens  
I can still take refuge in the redoubt."*

young—and she couldn't grieve with her parents, no way. Besides, if she stood up to the agony of her loss who would stand up for her? Macmillan has written a brilliant evocation of what happens to performers when they can't not perform, when they live lives in which the curtain never seems to come down, ever.

Emma's backstory—the dead-brother trope—is O.K., but it doesn't entirely explain who she is or why she uses. Macmillan likely knows that it doesn't quite work, because he doesn't stress or try to elucidate the point. Anyway, Gough's energy, her wild physicality and imagination, is what we want—it doesn't take long for her to become our drug—and the text is, in the end, simply the foundation that she needs to leap off as she races toward us. I'll never forget the look on Gough's face when, after Emma moves

back home to work on her recovery, her mother (Marten) hands her a box filled with all the pills, drug paraphernalia, and alcohol that Emma asked her to get rid of. Mum, cold and self-absorbed, says that she didn't know what to do with it; the last time she "tried to intervene" at Emma's request, she says, Emma broke her fingers. Emma has no memory of that violence. "Why do you think I don't play piano anymore?" Mum asks.

Is it true? Mum may be a self-dramatizing liar, too. At least Emma acts out her contempt and her loss. For Mum, those emotions are like a warm cardigan wrapped around her, enclosing her. These two women are locked in something awful and familiar: their apparent urge to compete with each other to please the ultimate director, Dad (the wonderful Kevin McMonagle, who also plays several roles). For

Emma, Mum's a trigger; she's one of the people, places, and things that her therapist warned might set her off. Emma returned home to escape the dangers of her independent life only to end up with the devil she knows.

When we last see Emma, she's at an audition, giving it her all—she appears to be sober—but after a casting person says "Thank you" we see other girls lining up behind the actress, waiting for their chance. It's a terrible moment, and it avoids being a cliché, thanks to Herrin's direction: he knew how easily the material could devolve into bathos if he wasn't careful. (As Emma left the stage and the next actress stepped up, I thought of the scene in the movie "Klute" in which Jane Fonda's character, Bree Daniels, goes to a casting call for a beauty commercial. The clients comment on the women as they walk past, asking to see their hands and faces and talking about them as though they weren't quite human.) For actresses like Emma—who are too old to be ingénues but not physically striking enough to be movie stars—the world is a limited place. When we go to the movies, we want to see not just the performance but also some version of the performer, and Emma knows that she is compelling enough to be a star only in her own mind—and not even there, at least not all the time. All she has going for her is her intelligence and her ability to dissemble.

Through some extraordinary process, the Irish-born Gough becomes Emma and not Emma at the same time; that is, she knows how to play Emma's lies without foregrounding them or trying to make us comfortable with Emma's psychology. Her performance is greater than the script, and the script is terrific, if conventional; it gives Gough a framework through which to express her genius. Gough has said that before she auditioned for the role she was going to give up on acting—on competing with other women for parts and being rejected. Playing Emma has given her the strength to push on in ways that Emma can't, and the struggle you see onstage draws on something bigger than a single play: anger at a show-business world that condones the brutality of male power, degrades women, and watches with delight as those women go on to degrade themselves. ♦

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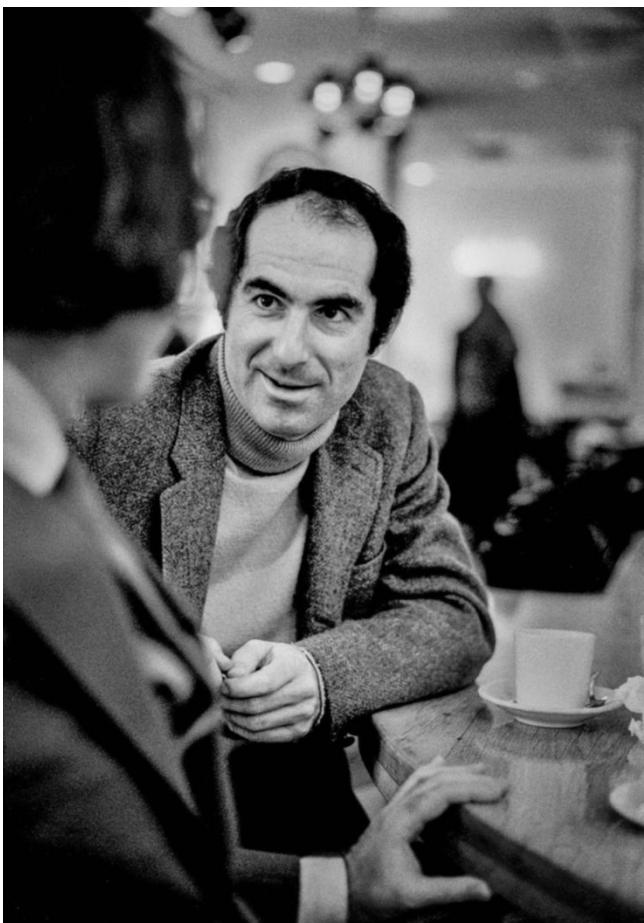
# texture



# THE PATRIOT

*The collected nonfiction of Philip Roth.*

BY ADAM GOPNIK



Philip Roth's new collection of nonfiction, mostly writing about writing and about other writers, is called, with Rothian bluntness, "Why Write?" (Library of America). It's the first nonfiction collection Roth has produced in many years, though some pieces in it have appeared in two previous volumes, "Reading Myself and Others" and "Shop Talk." Where John Updike, his competitive partner in a half-century literary marathon—in which each always had the other alongside, stride by stride, shedding books like perspiration—produced eight doorstop-size volumes of reviews, essays, *jeux d'esprit*, citations, and general ponderations, Roth ceased writing

regularly about writing sometime in the mid-seventies. Since then, there have been the slightly beleaguered interview when a new book came out, the carefully wrought "conversations" in support of writers he admired, particularly embattled Eastern European ones, and, after his "retirement" from writing, a few years ago, a series of valedictory addresses offered in a valedictorian's tone.

This turning away from topical nonfiction was not an inevitable development. If our enigmatic oracles—Thomas Pynchon, say, or Cormac McCarthy—weighed in too often on general literary and political topics, they would cease to be enigmatic, and oracular. But Roth,

from early on, was a natural essayist and even an editorialist, a man with a taste and a gift for argument, with much to say about the passing scene as it passed. (A 1960 *Commentary* piece, "Writing American Fiction," about a murder in Chicago and the impossibility of the writer's imagination matching American reality, is a classic of that magazine's high period.) He remains engaged, so much so that a mischievous essayist might accuse Roth of being an essayist manqué, looking for chances to interpolate essays in novels. In "Exit Ghost" (2007), for instance, there are embryonic ones on (among other topics) the surprising excellence of George Plimpton's prose and the micro-mechanics of cell-phone use on New York streets, and though both are supportable as pieces in a fictional work, they could easily be excised, enlarged, and made to stand on their own. The editorialist in Roth is part of his art even when he's writing straight fiction. Roth is a dramatic writer inasmuch as he typically begins with an inherently dramatic circumstance or situation: a writer pays a call on his hero, as in "The Ghostwriter," or is suffering from unbearable neck pain, as in "The Anatomy Lesson," or has become a woman's breast, as in "The Breast." But the succession of events is presented more as rumination and reverie—as irony overlaid on incident—than as "scenes," something that becomes apparent when they are made into sometimes painfully static movies.

The new collection divides neatly into three parts: the first, mostly from the sixties and the early seventies, is devoted to setting up shop as a writer—announcing themes, countering critics, with the author trying to defend himself from accusations, which dogged him after the publication of "Goodbye, Columbus" and then "Portnoy's Complaint," that he was callous or hostile to the Jews. Peace was eventually made—he actually got an honorary doctorate from the Jewish Theological Seminary—perhaps because the novels in the "American" trilogy ("American Pastoral," "I Married a Communist," and "The Human Stain") were such undeniably Jewish meditations on ethnicity and morality.

Like any writer worth paying attention to, Roth turns out to be the sum of his contradictions. There is the severity of purpose that he loved in the literary

*Roth wants to find a morally rigorous way to claim an American identity.*

culture of the fifties, one that had him coming to books “by way of a rather priestly literary education in which writing poems and novels was assumed to eclipse all else in what we called ‘moral seriousness.’” That’s the spirit that infuses the first third of “Why Write?,” and it is a state Roth has never really abandoned. (Even his announced retirement has the exigency of vocation: the Archbishop makes a point of his withdrawal, whereas most writers just drift away from attention.)

Yet peeking out mordantly from the start is Roth’s natural gift for comedy, which can’t help but rise to the surface even amid the seriousness. And Roth is a comedian, really, rather than a humorist or a satirist. The difference is that you can be humorous or satiric out of intelligent purpose, while a gift for comedy is, like a gift for melody, something you’re born with. Cracking up other kids as an adolescent is one of Roth’s core recurrent memories. In the opening essay in this book, the wonderful “Looking at Kafka,” he makes his fellow Hebrew-school mates sick with laughter by calling the magically-summoned-to-Newark Franz Kafka “Dr. Kishka.”

“Ungovernable” is Roth’s own adjective for comedy, and his readers may recall such long, ungovernable happy exercises in comic voice as the monologues of Alvin Pepler, the distraught ex-quizzeshow contestant in “Zuckerman Unbound,” or the impersonation of an intellectual pornographer, obviously based on the late Al Goldstein, in “The Anatomy Lesson.” Meanwhile, the sequence in which Portnoy visits his shiksa girlfriend’s house for Thanksgiving and meets her parents is an extended masterpiece of American standup:

“How do you do, Alex?” to which of course I reply “Thank you.” Whatever anybody says to me during my first twenty-four hours in Iowa, I answer “Thank you.” Even to inanimate objects. I walk into a chair, promptly I say to it, “Excuse me. Thank you.”

Roth’s vision is bleak as bleak can be; there are no moments of *Quiet Affirmation*. (Zuckerman’s father’s final whispered word to his son is apparently “Bastard!”) But, whereas in Samuel Beckett’s fiction—and Beckett’s name comes up more often in this book than one might expect—the comedy is as dark as the drama, in Roth the comedy lights up the

page even when what it illuminates is sordid or sad.

So, when Roth’s second act as a critic arrives, in the seventies and eighties, he becomes less inclined to argue with his detractors—the comedy has already done the arguing for him—and instead puts himself under a sort of self-imposed house arrest, sublimating his own critical opinions and complaints into interviews with writers he esteems. He not only relishes talking to these writers but in some ways identifies with and even envies their ironic detachment—the dignity of their inquiry, the seriousness with which they are allowed to pursue a literary vocation that in America always comes with cap and bells, with the only questions being how odd the cap you get to wear and how loud the bells ring. “When I was first in Czechoslovakia,” Roth wrote in an often quoted line, “it occurred to me that I work in a society where as a writer everything goes and nothing matters, while for the Czech writers I met in Prague, nothing goes and everything matters.”

**T**hen there comes a last third, gathered here for the first time, called “Explanations,” which is in many ways the most arresting and apropos part of the book. Roth’s great subject turns out to be, by his own account, patriotism—how to savor American history without sentimentalizing it, and how to claim an American identity without ceasing to inquire into how strangely identities are made.

Just as Updike’s œuvre, vast and varied, was built on the literary foundation of old, wry *New Yorker* humor, Benchley and White and Thurber, Roth’s default mode is a kind of earnest self-consciously American storytelling. As his work has evolved, and as he has a keener retrospective sense of his own accomplishment, he has become aware, he says, that much of what he’s struggled for is rooted not in the duly intoned roster of high modernism, Kafka and Beckett and Joyce, but in a certain vein of American realism, even regionalism—in a didactic democratic propaganda that was at large in the nineteen-forties. “The writers who expanded and shaped my sense of America were mainly small-town Midwesterners and Southerners,” he writes. He includes in this group Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, Erskine Caldwell,

and Theodore Dreiser. “Through my reading, the mythohistorical conception I had of my country in grade school—from 1938 to 1946—began to be divested of its grandiosity by its unraveling into the individual threads of American reality the wartime tapestry that paid moving homage to the country’s idealized self-image,” he says.

Reading them served to confirm what the gigantic enterprise of a brutal war against two formidable enemies had dramatized daily for almost four years to virtually every Jewish family ours knew and every Jewish friend I had: one’s American connection overrode everything, one’s American claim was beyond question. Everything had repositioned itself. There had been a great disturbance to the old rules. One was ready now as never before to stand up to intimidation and the remains of intolerance, and, instead of just bearing what one formerly put up with, one was equipped to set foot wherever one chose. The American adventure was one’s engulfing fate.

Roth sees that the immediate effects of this tradition were in many ways absurd: in eighth grade, he wrote, together with an unnamed girl student, a “one act play, a quasi-allegory with a strong admonitory bent” that “pitted a protagonist named Tolerance (virtuously performed by my coauthor) against an antagonist named Prejudice (sinisterly played by me),” climaxing in the defeated Prejudice stalking off “in bitter defeat shouting angrily at the top of his voice, in a sentence I’d stolen from somewhere, ‘This great experiment cannot last!’” He recognizes that Prejudice was the better role, and that some aspect of him was unleashed in his not being the nice boy onstage, but “it isn’t entirely far-fetched to suggest that the twelve-year-old who coauthored *Let Freedom Ring!* was father to the man who wrote *The Plot Against America*”—Roth’s 2004 novel, about a mythical United States in which the America Firster Charles Lindbergh wins the 1940 Presidential election.

His American trilogy, written in the late nineties, was already self-consciously patriotic, dense with details of an American community. Yet people tend to forget that so seemingly “disruptive” a book as “Portnoy’s Complaint” is formed from a tension between the narrator’s need to assert his sexual autonomy, to own his human desires without shame, and his enormous estimation of the integrated Jewish-Newark culture in which he grew up—represented, most touchingly, by a

Saturday softball team on which the narrator dreams of playing. His adolescent self hates the claustrophobia of his upbringing, but the narrating self has an ungrudging affection for its many communal virtues. Far from being a screed for sexual liberation, "Portnoy's Complaint" is a study in the ever-present pull between the tribal and the transgressive in modern life.

The desire to find a liberal way of imagining the particulars of American patriotism has become ever more urgent, especially in the light of Donald Trump's Presidency. It's one of the reasons that Richard Rorty's "Achieving Our Country" (1998) has, however improbably, become so significant, quite beyond its prophetic predictions of an approaching working-class nihilism. Rorty's project was to find a way in which you could credibly talk about love of country as a communal basis for reforming it, his point being that you can't have a reformist project that doesn't have an earlier idea of form within it. In the words of the old *Ladies' Home Journal*, you have to answer the question "Can this marriage be saved?" before you can save it. The current leftist critique, lit by the inevitable disillusion of the post-Obama period, is one of absolute original sin—the sins of the Constitutional Convention, with its "three-fifths compromise," reinforced by the evils of Reconstruction and Jim Crow and its sequelae. Rorty's point, in contrast, is the Obama-ish one that American history provides as much reason for hope as for despair, and the hope lies in a liberalism that crosses classes and identities to become credibly popular.

Roth's patriotic proposal invests not in the arc of history—which perhaps resembles too easily that eighth-grade pageant of Tolerance defeating Prejudice—but in a more fully realized sense of simple belonging. He proposes a patriotism of place and person rather than of class and cause. His patriotism recognizes how helplessly dependent we are on a network of associations and communal energy, of which we become fully aware only as it disappears. Not only can you go home again, Roth insists. You can *only* go home again. You get America right by remembering Newark as it really was.

Making the point that only by having a deep local sense of place can one

have a larger loyalty that contains within it the necessary contradictions and limits, he both narrows his allegiances to working-class Newark and makes Newark a miniature of America. Roth calls this, in a final summation, "the ruthless intimacy of fiction." He insists that "Newark was my sensory key to all the rest," and that "this passion for specificity, for the hypnotic materiality of the world one is in, is all but at the heart of the task to which every American novelist has been enjoined since Melville and his whale and Twain and his river: to discover the most arresting, evocative verbal depiction for every last American thing."

This task can be encyclopedic, as in Melville and Pynchon, or it can be microscopic, as Roth now views his own. The job is to be attached to a place as one is attached to a self: not looking past its flaws, but literally unable to imagine life without it. (It is an emotion that was already part of Roth's arsenal of feeling as early as his first book, "Goodbye, Columbus," in which he wrote, "I felt a deep knowledge of Newark, an attachment so rooted that it could not help but branch out into affection.")

Roth's notion about the particularity of productive patriotism is trailed by a history. As the Hungarian-American historian John Lukacs has observed, the nationalist has a grievance and an abstract category (it's one of the reasons that many of the more successful nationalists, including both Stalin and Hitler, don't actually have to come from the nations they lead), while the patriot has a well-furnished idea of home. Here, again, a compelling literary comparison is with Updike. Updike, like Roth, never stopped singing his version of America. Their patriotism was almost quaint in its simplicity of faith. The Second World War is for them above all an area of triumph and moral clarity. The differences between Updike and Roth are obvious: Wasp and Jew, poet and tummler. But both were poor boys from the East Coast, Shillington and Newark; both had the shared experience of restlessness and discontent, in retrospect a kind of unconscious bliss in a small city; both found their sensibilities revolutionized and overturned by the events of the sixties. This upheaval involved the sexual revolution that made their early fables of

forced choice—Must Harry marry Janice? Must Gabe take on the baby?—suddenly outmoded, and also the compound urban crises that made their small native towns unrecognizable. Both did what real writers ought to do—bear witness to the transformation rather than pretend it hasn't happened.

Indeed, patriotism and its discontents is the theme that both took on. In Updike, adultery is the most American of acts, being a form of pursuit of happiness available to otherwise constrained actors; in Roth, alienation from the Jewish tribe is the cost of the cosmopolitan education that Jewish values promote. The promise of acting irresponsibly in a responsible way—pursuing pleasure and autonomy without actually being an outlaw—drives both of their imaginations. The hipster idea that one might actually become an outlaw—take part in the blood ceremony of violence that can seem central to American experience—was beyond their more domestic-minded and bourgeois East Coast imaginations. ("To live outside the law, you must be honest" is one of the more fatuous untruths Bob Dylan ever uttered. To live outside the law, you must lie to everyone all the time about everything, and cut friends loose when today's lies demand it.)

No writer of the more recent generations will participate in this patriotic pageant quite so serenely. Not because they are "anti-American" or indifferent to America—just the opposite—but because younger writers take the world as a living principle within their work. They go places, without eventfulness. The crises that stir them tend to be imagined on planetary rather than patriotic terms, and are no worse for that. Though often placed—who now knows the American novel who does not Brooklyn know?—they seem less obsessed by one place, by the Newarks and Shillingtons of the world. Their Newarks and Shillingtons are more often the genre fiction on which they were raised—comic books and sci-fi and indie cinema—and to which they return again and again with the same mixture of nostalgia, longing, rancor, and mockery that the older novelists devoted to their home towns.

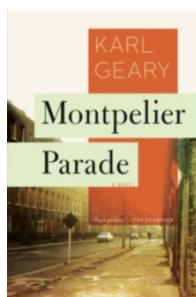
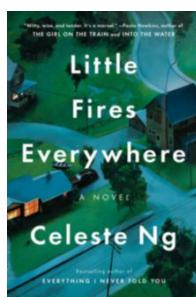
Toward the end of the book, Roth reflects on "The Plot Against America," explaining why imagining the counter-history of Lindbergh's triumph felt both

frightening and reassuringly distant. It didn't happen. Now it has, or something rather like it has. This time, the plot against America worked. Yet, while there is nothing Roth despises more than the cheap turn of "consolation"—the moments in a play or a book where everyone discovers love and feels better—the real arc of Roth's career, as he presents it here, has a tincture of hope. He moves from detachment toward attachment, albeit an attachment, like all real ones, more stormy than simple, and double rather than Manichaean, with Tolerance and Prejudice played by the same actor, often at the same time.

Among all his alter egos, Roth seems to have come to prefer neither Portnoy, his heightened comic archetype, nor Nathan Zuckerman, his reliable literary stand-in, but instead Mickey Sabbath, the tormented and ridiculous puppeteer of "Sabbath's Theater." For Sabbath—who, significantly, is perhaps the one Roth hero to have experienced the Second World War as a field of suffering rather than of triumph, having lost his beloved brother in battle—is the most desperately oscillating of his creations. "Such depths as Sabbath evinces lie in his polarities," Roth writes. "What's clinically denoted by the word 'bi-polarity' is something puny compared to what's brandished by Sabbath. Imagine, rather, a multitudinous intensity of polarities, polarities piled shamelessly upon polarities to comprise not a company of players, but this single existence, this theater of one."

The outward-moving correlation is apparent. Instead of seeing America as a virtuous pageant of Good and Bad, with Tolerance coming heroically out of the bullpen in the bottom of the ninth to strike out Prejudice, we are to see it as that theatre of overlaid opposites. Not an arc that bends, however slowly, but a series of contradictions that we experience most intensely in the close-up and near-at-hand observational theatre of literature.

This vision seems to suit our moment—with a negation now available for every previous affirmation and a loss for every gain—better even than Rorty's dream of the slow consolidation of a pious coalition of goodness. "A multitudinous intensity of polarities": it seems like a passably patriotic motto to inscribe on the current American coat of arms. ♦



## BRIEFLY NOTED

**Red Famine**, by Anne Applebaum (Doubleday). In the early nineteen-thirties, at least five million people died of hunger in the Soviet Union. Some eighty per cent of the deaths occurred in Ukraine, and Applebaum draws on new archival research to show that food scarcity was not simply a tragic consequence of misguided state planning but, rather, a state-orchestrated program "specifically targeted at Ukraine and Ukrainians." The Soviet leadership, driven by "paranoia about the counter-revolutionary potential of Ukraine," ordered the confiscation of food from homes and imposed severe restrictions on travel and trade, while also carrying out a purge of scholars, writers, artists, and others. The Holodomor, as the result came to be known, was a "political famine."

**Kierkegaard's Muse**, by Joakim Garff, translated from the Danish by Alastair Hannay (Princeton). Garff, the author of a masterly Kierkegaard biography, here narrates the mysterious love affair that shaped the writer's later life. Not much is known about Regine Olsen, who was engaged to Kierkegaard for a year before he broke it off and she married someone else. He often wrote of her in his journals, and left everything to her in his will. For more than a decade after their break, he scheduled his daily walks to coincide with hers, yet they spoke only once in that time. Working from previously unseen letters provided by Olsen's family, Garff fleshes out the sensitive, pragmatic Regine, illuminating her perspective on the affair and her influence on Kierkegaard's work.

**Little Fires Everywhere**, by Celeste Ng (Penguin). The little fires of the title refer primarily to tiny pyres that Izzy, the youngest of the four Richardson children, sets alight on the beds of her family members, causing the conflagration that opens this novel of suburban mores. But, before then, little fires are ignited within the Richardson children, when two new arrivals—Mia Warren, an artist, and her daughter—befriend them and widen their horizons. Mia challenges the community in many ways, and, during a trial resulting from her actions, Izzy's mother feels an urge for justice burst into flame like a "hot speck of fury that had been carefully banked within her."

**Montpelier Parade**, by Karl Geary (Catapult). Sonny Knolls, the protagonist of this accomplished début, is a working-class Dublin teen-ager—unhappy at school, friendless, and bored in his part-time job at a butcher shop—who steals bits of classmates' bicycles to build his own. His yearning to transcend the limits of his bleak life finds an outlet in Vera Hatton, an attractive but troubled Englishwoman who lives alone in a big house near the sea. "You were the hero in your dream of saving her, even with everything you didn't know about her," Geary writes. The novel is narrated entirely in the second person, a stylistic choice that produces moments of intense intimacy but also means that Vera remains as elusive for the reader as she ultimately is for Sonny.

# THE REDESIGN OF R. & B.

*Ty Dolla \$ign shows a new way.*

BY CARRIE BATTAN



Near the end of Ty Dolla \$ign's new album, "Beach House 3," the singer makes a startling declaration: "I think about you all the time." This would be standard fare for almost any radio-friendly chorus since the dawn of time, but for Ty Dolla \$ign it's a gesture of transformation. A few years ago, the singer—who once referred to women as "horses in a stable," among other derisive descriptions—would have dismissed a line like this with a low chuckle.

The rapid churn of musical appetites rarely affords artists the opportunity to evolve gradually. This is true in terms of sound, certainly, but especially in the emotional realm. The music business is fuelled by fresh blood and hard resets—breakdowns, high-

drama apology tours, and drastic makeovers. Fans, accustomed to constant novelty, no longer have the patience for artists to take unhurried new shapes. The rule is: reinvent yourself as often and as drastically as possible, or flame out.

If there is anyone who has successfully avoided these traps, it is Ty Dolla \$ign, the prolific R. & B. singer-songwriter. Born Tyrone Griffin, Jr., in South Central Los Angeles, Ty broke into the mainstream by 2013, with his "Beach House" and "Beach House 2" mixtapes. The mixtapes—particularly "Beach House 2"—have become modern classics, owing as much to the life style they advertise as to their lush, muted West Coast sound. Ty dispensed with

*Along with T-Pain, Ty helped create a movement for the hip-hop-minded singer.*

the cloying chivalry of commercial R. & B., and zeroed in on the routine of seducing women and rejecting them with the swift coldness of a kicking horse.

On one of Ty's songs from those tapes, "My Cabana," he sings about how many women—and how many varieties of them—he can fit in his beachside bungalow. On his breakout hit, "Paranoia," he wonders if the women in his orbit are plotting a conspiracy against him. "I see two of my bitches in the club," he sings. "And I know they know about each other." He presented himself as a hedonist, but one far too mellow to adopt the theatrical and manic depravity of artists like the Weeknd. The phrases and the narratives he uses are so filthy that they seem to smugly float, a challenge to his listeners: *Go ahead and try not to enjoy my vulgarity.*

This attitude put Ty at risk of becoming merely a punch line, but it was also resonant enough that it could have sustained his career. And yet, since he first achieved success, he has moved gently away from smut, while releasing some of the most essential R. & B. of the current moment. His major-label débüt, "Free TC," from 2015, functions in part as an ode to his incarcerated younger brother. The Ty of early "Beach House" days is still there—assuring us that he'll sleep with women but won't date them—but the album also offers a glimpse into a well of emotion. He brings the concerns of the club to church on "Guard Down," a light electro-gospel song in which he is both preacher and libertine, offering spiritual encouragement one moment and talking about 3 A.M. parties the next. His follow-up mixtape, "Campaign," from 2016, intersperses political matters, mostly in the form of criticisms of Donald Trump, with club-focussed songs about his sexual escapades. Of course, the only campaign he was running was the one to further his own career, but Ty had widened his purview beyond the realm of dead-eyed debauchery.

With "Beach House 3," Ty has arrived at a place of thorough and unexpected spiritual change. Although he maintains some of the loucheness of previous albums, women now occupy his mind more often than his bed, and he can be someone who experiences hurt rather than blindly inflicting it

upon his conquests. He yearns for human connection and monogamy, and he sings of swapping out liquor for water in the hope of preserving his soul and his liver. “Bet you ain’t know you was my baby/Even though you drive me crazy,” he sings, on “All the Time.” This kind of shift risks sounding hollow, but Ty Dolla \$ign is far too easygoing—and not nearly famous or cynical enough—to engage in the merely performative exercise of reputation reform. When he says that he’s “been stressing” and had to “leave them hos alone” to focus on his life, he sounds like he means it.

On many of his earlier projects, Ty sang through a haze of his own harmonies and a swirl of bass and minor-chord melodies—the sound of much mainstream hip-hop today. The new album has less of this density and darkness; it is more concerned with melody and weightlessness. Collaboration is Ty’s default mode, and, perhaps out of habit, he brings too many voices onto the slightly too-long “Beach House 3.” His solo songs point to his ability to prosper alone.

The son of a funk musician, Ty learned to play the bass guitar and keyboards as a child, and is an underrated songwriter. He scored his biggest hit as a writer on the 2014 Chris Brown track “Loyal,” which defined the sound of urban radio for much of a year: the lyrics cool and dismissive toward romantic interests, with an effortless low bounce and a featherlight synth topline. Along with the producer DJ Mustard and the Los Angeles gangster-rapper YG, Ty has helped modernize and popularize West Coast hip-hop, reorienting low-rider music to the present-day club. The high whine of DJ Mustard’s synthetic organ, not unlike the signature squeal of Dr. Dre’s beats, became a dance-floor dog whistle, signalling that Ty—or someone like him—was not far behind.

Just as Ty has transformed, so has the landscape around him. He began his career in the early aughts, when hip-hop and R. & B. had begun folding into each other. Rappers found that they could break new ground by blending sung melodies into their verses. This caused a panic among stalwart rap fans, who saw R. & B. as encroaching on a sacred art form. In fact, it was R. & B.

that was at risk of extinction. In the past five to ten years, hip-hop has seemingly swallowed R. & B. whole, taking select elements of the genre and discarding the rest. Conventional R. & B. stars have been pushed to the fringes by the unflagging cultural dominance of hip-hop.

But Ty had the good fortune—or perhaps the wherewithal—to climb the ranks of music using the ladder of hip-hop. He packaged his early projects as mixtapes, which were hosted on hip-hop Web sites in collaboration with hip-hop d.j.s. In 2014, he was named a member of *XXL*’s Freshman Class, an honor historically reserved for rappers. In a previous era, he might have become a full-blown R. & B. star, but today he’s made himself a crucial hip-hop accessory. He’s not a leading man but perhaps something more influential: a near-constant presence on urban radio. Last year, the Web site Stereogum listed forty-five of his guest verses from 2016 alone. He shows up on other artists’ hits like a vapor, materializing in the atmosphere of a song with heavy eyelids and a satisfied grin. A typical example is Fifth Harmony’s ubiquitous “Work from Home,” where Ty adds a velvety, calm counterweight to the song’s shrill essence. “Girl, go to work for me,” he sings, more backing instrument than added flair.

People often credit Kanye West and Drake with forging a path for the singing rapper. Along with T-Pain, Ty deserves just as much credit for creating a movement for the hip-hop-minded R. & B. singer. It is difficult otherwise to imagine the success of artists like Toronto’s PartyNextDoor, the nineties-referencing Kehlani, or the bruised egoist PnB Rock. They are all talented singers whose native language is hip-hop, and who have been able to find a niche in part because Ty made it. It would have been easy for Ty to fully submerge himself in the world of hip-hop, pumping out songs filled with understated, half-sung verses. But, on “Beach House 3,” he acts as an ambassador from the land of R. & B., coolly advocating for the art of singing. He allows his voice to soar above the range of what’s typical in his world, sometimes sounding as though he’s powerless in the face of the urge to sing. What better way to express his feelings? ♦

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DANCING

# THE WRECK OF HAPPINESS

*Mark Morris's new version of an ancient Middle Eastern fable.*

BY JOAN ACOCELLA



Mark Morris, as a teen-ager, in the seventies, did his longest and most serious dance training as a member of a Balkan folk-dance troupe, the Koleda Balkan Dance Ensemble, a semi-pro group of Seattle hippies and music geeks who got together on weekends, went to the woods, drank slivovitz, and danced till they dropped. When you see the sheer danciness of his work—the twirling, the leaping, the falling, the floor-smacking—Koleda, in large measure, is what you're seeing. In time, fired up by that experience, and by the ethnic richness of his native city, he absorbed many other tra-

ditions. Partly because of Morris, we no longer speak loosely of "folk dance." We call such dances by the name of the folk in question: Macedonian, Greek, Indonesian, flamenco.

Late last month, during Lincoln Center's White Light Festival, Morris's inspiration was Middle Eastern, and the piece was "Layla and Majnun," a new version of an Arabic tale, more than a thousand years old, that has been the subject of countless songs, poems, and, more recently, films, in Hindi, Turkish, Arabic, and Farsi. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the story was the basis of the first Azer-

*The dances in "Layla and Majnun" are accompanied by Azerbaijani musicians.*

baijani opera, which is still a sort of national anthem for that country. (It opens the season at the Azerbaijani State Opera and Ballet every year and is broadcast nationwide.) Morris uses an abridged version, a little less than an hour long, which was made recently by the singer Alim Qasimov and two collaborators. Qasimov, who sings in the show with his daughter Fargana Qasimova, is Azerbaijan's foremost star of *mugham*, the traditional, improvisational style in which the opera was written. "People at the airport in Baku push Yo-Yo Ma out of the way to get to him," Morris told Marina Harss, in the *Times*, and when Qasimov and Qasimova open their mouths and start producing the rich, nasal sound that is their musical native tongue—screamy, but without harshness, like a Russian tenor—you feel you would push a small building or two out of the way to sit at their feet.

"Layla and Majnun" is a tale of star-crossed lovers. Layla (the girl) and Majnun (the boy) fall in love as children, but when they come of age their parents will not allow them to marry, because Majnun's love seems to them so extreme, so crazy. It may seem that way to us as well, when we read the libretto printed in the program and find the young man saying such things as "My only wish is to perish in the world of love" and "I yearn to feel this sorrow as long as I live." Layla's parents send Majnun away and marry her off to a nice man, who, however, dies when Layla refuses to forfeit her chastity to him. Pretty soon, Layla dies, too. Majnun returns, finds her body, and expires alongside it. So complete is the wreck of earthly happiness that scholars over the years have interpreted the tale as a Sufi allegory of love for God rather than as a representation of any human passion.

Morris may have been thinking along these lines when he decided upon the most curious feature of his production: he parcelled out the leading roles to four sequential pairs of dancers. In Act I, "Love and Separation," the leads are Mica Bernas and Dallas McMurray, who are indeed the youngest-looking members of the troupe. In Act II, in which Layla and Majnun suffer the parents' refusal, the

lovers are Nicole Sabella and Domingo Estrada, Jr., she frenzied with grief, he nobly restrained. In Act III, “Sorrow and Despair,” all the male dancers in the show lie down, as if everyone in the world had died, and then the longest-legged woman in the troupe, Laurel Lynch, comes on and, bending over in sky-high arabesques, revives them one by one, as if raising the dead. In Act IV, “Layla’s Unwanted Wedding,” Lesley Garrison, with a mane of blond hair that she can swing wildly, plays the distraught bride, while Sam Black—always the most sincere-looking person on Morris’s stage—pursues her.

This subdividing is actually typical of Morris. In his “*L’Allegro, il Pensoso ed il Moderato*,” from 1988, practically everything came in pairs. There were even two moons in the sky. In his great “Dido and Aeneas” (1989), the heroine is divided into the queen, Dido, and her destroyer, the Sorceress. (The fact that this double role was originally played by a man, Morris, seemed to split it yet again.) In “Layla,” as in “Dido,” he divides the movement style, too. Some maneuvers are very elaborate. When Layla and Majnun are young, playing their love games, Layla uses her arms to make a kind of house for Majnun. He twirls in it, ecstatically, and then makes a house for *her* body, and she twirls in that. They do it again and again, until the phrase’s momentum carries them across the stage. Later, when the parents are separating the two lovers, the superb Estrada does a large, dramatic step—*dégué* front to *développé* arabesque back—over and over as he moves backward, away from his Layla, Sabella. Then Sabella does a series of spectacular ronds de jambe (big circles of the leg in the air, which look even bigger in her red gown) as she moves toward him. We just sit back and enjoy Morris showing us everything he can think of, everything he can do, to say how people feel.

Alongside these fancy steps are others so ordinary that you could almost miss them: the wonderful Aaron Loux jumping off a platform like a goat off a rock, or, more amazingly, the swift, blunt death of the lovers: just clunk, clunk, down they go. Sometimes Mor-

ris deploys a simplicity that is almost too much for me. I don’t love it when a Layla/Majnun pair is doing some marvellous, complicated thing and the other dancers, watching, gesture to one another as if to say, “Look at what Layla and Majnun are doing.” I see what they’re doing; I don’t need to be told. On the other hand, this “indicating” business is completely true to art history. You can find it on pre-Christian Sicilian vases.

Speaking of realism, the stage is awfully crowded. Imagine what’s up there. In the middle are the musicians—eight ensemble players, the stars Qasimov and Qasimova, and their two sidemen, playing Azerbaijani stringed instruments that I will not try to describe. Behind and to the right and left of them are sixteen dancers, arrayed on a structure of platforms. At the very back is a stage-wide canvas, an enlargement of a painting called “Love and Death,” by the British painter Howard Hodgkin, a friend of Morris’s, who died this year, at eighty-four. Even apart from its title, the painting is perfect for the show, a storm of green brushstrokes being swallowed by a storm of red. Morris’s longtime lighting designer, James Ingalls, reshades the painting repeatedly, as the plot thickens. All this is fabulous, but there isn’t enough room onstage for everything that is going on.

Nevertheless, this is the most ambitious and profound work that Morris has created in the past ten years or more. Sometimes it seems that there’s nothing he doesn’t know about the terms on which we live our lives. At the end of “Dido and Aeneas,” the dancers, one by one, slip through a slit in a map of the world that is the show’s backdrop—dying like their queen, more or less. At the end of “Layla and Majnun,” two dancers, Lauren Grant and Christina Sahaida, walk forward with lit lamps in their hands. Meeting downstage, they trade lamps. (“What does it matter which is which?” they are asking. “Layla or Majnun, woman or man?”) Then, in a coup de théâtre, they put their hands over the tops of the lamps. The flames shine and spread and struggle, and then, like the lovers, they are extinguished, and the theatre goes dark. ♦

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# ORPHEUS RESOUNDING

*John Eliot Gardiner presents Monteverdi's operas at Lincoln Center.*

BY ALEX ROSS



Gardiner, who launched his career with Monteverdi, likens him to Shakespeare.

Which music-theatre works of today will play to sold-out houses in the twenty-fifth century? Such is the challenge issued by Claudio Monteverdi, the former maestro di cappella at the Basilica di San Marco, in Venice, who, four hundred and fifty years after his birth, still has a knack for putting butts in seats. In October, the British conductor John Eliot Gardiner led vital performances of Monteverdi's three surviving operas—"Orfeo," "The Return of Ulysses," and "The Coronation of Poppea"—at Alice Tully Hall. Once again, this ancient music worked its wiles on posterity. We thrilled to the lustrous brass fanfares, swooned at the liquid lyric lines, laughed at the bawdy jokes, and grew tense at moments whose outcome was not in doubt. When Or-

pheus cast his fatal glance back at Eurydice, there was an audible gasp from the audience, even though no dramatic situation could be less suspenseful.

Gardiner has likened Monteverdi to Shakespeare—a comparison that has become routine. Both artists give fathomless depth to familiar tales; both maneuver adroitly between high and low. In a way, Monteverdi's feat is more remarkable, since opera had been invented only a decade before he first addressed the genre, with "Orfeo," in 1607. The breakthrough comes in the aria "Possente spirito"—the plea for mercy that Orpheus delivers to Charon, the ferryman of Hades. Orpheus' vocal lines are typical of the period, with florid ornamentation unfolding within narrow intervals.

But the music moves at an unusually deliberate, meditative pace. Pairs of instruments play spectral ascending and descending scales, with the second part sounding as an echo. The harp echoes itself. Monteverdi is relaxing his grip on the narrative and delving deep into his character's condition. This is the opportunity afforded by the evening-length structure of opera. The clock slows; the horizon widens; we go walking in the landscape of Orpheus' soul.

Monteverdi's resonance today is not just a matter of compositional mastery. His protagonists become expressive individuals, yet they inhabit a world where hierarchies are fixed and freedoms circumscribed. "Nothing delightful here below endures," Apollo tells Orpheus, advising him to give up on life and go to Heaven. In "Poppea," which is set at the court of Nero, the virtuous are punished and the wicked are rewarded. In Neronian America, such un-deceived realism seems more modern than the idealism of so many Romantic-era operas. "The Return of Ulysses" is the happiest of Monteverdi's stories, because its characters elude the grasp of fate. When Ulysses comes home to Penelope, he exits the nightmare of history.

Gardiner launched his career with Monteverdi. In 1964, while he was studying at Cambridge University, he organized a performance of Monteverdi's 1610 Vespers. From that event arose the Monteverdi Choir, which has been at the core of Gardiner's activities ever since. Recently, he has been known more for his Bach—above all, for his epic traversal of the complete cantatas and for his formidable book "Bach: Music in the Castle of Heaven." This year, he returned to his point of departure, touring Europe and America with "staged concert" versions of the Monteverdi operas. He had recorded "Orfeo" and "Poppea" but had never conducted "Ulysses." The stint at Tully, involving the Monteverdi Choir, the English Baroque Soloists, and nineteen solo singers, marked the end of a seven-month, sixteen-city journey.

At seventy-four, Gardiner is undiminished in energy. On this occasion, he served not only as conductor but also as co-director, alongside Elsa Cooke. The productions had no sets or props, but costumes, lighting, and stage movement gave sufficient life to the dramas. Singers

appeared on all sides of the orchestra and often in its midst. They also popped up in the hall's balconies and entered through the doors leading to the lobby. At times, as in Peter Sellars's dramatizations of the Bach Passions, the instrumentalists were drawn into the field of action. Gwyneth Wentink, the harpist, had two memorable moments. During "Possente spirto," Krystian Adam, as Orpheus, held his hand above Wentink's instrument, as if summoning music from it. And in "Ulysses," during the uproarious lament by the clownish Iro, Robert Burt, a veteran of the role, began frantically strumming the harp strings, prompting Wentink to bop him over the head with her score. Monteverdi's quicksilver changes of tone, from comic to tragic and back again, were handled with fluidity and grace. "Orfeo," in particular, was an organic, riveting piece of theatre.

Although Gardiner specializes in early music, he has also explored nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century repertory, from Beethoven to Stravinsky. His current approach to Monteverdi seems to reflect his wider experience. When, after Eurydice's death, the chorus sings "Ahi caso acerbo" ("Alas, fell chance"), the affect was almost Expressionistic, with sharp attacks and flaring crescendos. In "Ulysses," when the chorus comments on the gods' decision to forgive the long-suffering hero the tempo slowed to a majestic crawl, with eerie harmonies foregrounded. Elsewhere, Gardiner did not skimp on the kind of rollicking rhythms favored by early-music revivalists such as René Jacobs and Jordi Savall; the chorus augmented the wedding rites of Orpheus and Eurydice with syncopated handclaps and foot stomps. A phalanx of cornetti and sackbuts provided glints of courtly splendor. Before the start of "Orfeo," the brass players greeted the audience by blaring the work's famous Toccata from a balcony above the lobby—a touch reminiscent of the outdoor Wagner fanfares that resound at the Bayreuth Festival.

Among the singers, the big discovery was the young Italian bass Gianluca Buratto, whose huge, rich, finely focussed voice made rows of music professionals sit up and scrutinize their programs. As Charon in "Orfeo," Buratto unleashed stentorian, black-clad tones, suitable for the Commendatore in "Don Giovanni." (A video clip available online hints that

he is already hair-raising in that role.) He reaches down to low C, yet sings with plaintive beauty two octaves higher. His performance as the noble, doomed Seneca, in "Poppea," was the vocal pinnacle of the cycle. Buratto clearly has a major career before him, one that may soon take him to the Met. His energetic banging of a hand drum during the "Orfeo" prelude suggested that he could find side work as a percussionist.

The cast had few weak links, though I've heard several of the parts sung better over the years. Adam tackled the tenor roles of Orpheus and Telemachus with unflagging vigor, despite some fuzziness in the lower register. Furio Zanasi, as Ulysses, lacked penetrating power but showed immaculate style. Hana Blažková was refined and agile in the roles of Eurydice, Poppea, and Minerva; she also accompanied herself expertly on the harp when she took the role of La Musica in "Orfeo." Marianna Pizzolato brought plushness of tone to Penelope in "Ulysses" and Ottavia in "Poppea." The countertenor Kang-min Justin Kim gave a ferocious, gender-ambiguous edge to the decadent Nero. Anna Dennis made a sultry set piece out of Melanto's aria in "Ulysses."

At the end of "Poppea," and of the cycle, came the duet "Pur ti miro" ("I gaze at you")—the loveliest Monteverdi music that Monteverdi probably did not write. "Poppea" had its première in early 1643, during the Venice Carnival; the composer died that November. He may well have fallen ill while at work on the score, and turned to colleagues for help. In any case, scholars have detected the stylistic fingerprints of other composers in more than one passage of the opera. The late scholar-conductor Alan Curtis believed that "Pur ti miro" was the creation of either Francesco Sacrafi or Benedetto Ferrari, who, along with Francesco Cavalli, were younger stars of the fertile Venetian scene. Gardiner insists that the duet is entirely Monteverdi. Uncertainties about authorship remind us that the cult of the individual genius long postdates Monteverdi. Seventeenth-century Italy witnessed a grand fusion of musical traditions, élite and popular alike, which powers the genre of opera to this day. What we celebrate in these three magnificent works is not only the genius of a man but also the genius of a place, the genius of an era. ♦

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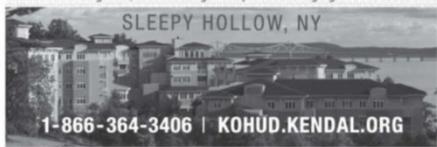
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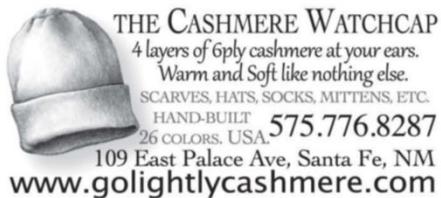
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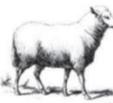
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# HUE AND CRY

*"Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri."*

BY ANTHONY LANE

As titles go, "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri" doesn't sound like a movie. It sounds like a photograph. There's a Walker Evans image, taken in 1936, called "Houses and Billboards in Atlanta," and I like to think that Evans would have turned his lens upon the Ebbing billboards, too. They stand in a misty meadow,

against a blood-red background: "RAPED WHILE DYING"; "AND STILL NO ARRESTS"; "HOW COME, CHIEF WILLOUGHBY?" The victim was Mildred's teen-age daughter, Angela (Kathryn Newton), who died less than a year earlier. Her body was set alight, and you can still see the scorched grass where she lay. The person whom Mildred holds



In Martin McDonagh's film, Frances McDormand is a mother seeking justice.

with an empty road running beside them and nothing else around. The advertisements that they once bore have peeled away, leaving only scraps and broken slogans ("of your life"), of the melancholy kind that Evans loved. The writer and director of the film, Martin McDonagh, is right to accord such prominence to the billboards; they get the movie going, and thereby display its wares—bereavement, rage, small-town venom, and the strange spoors that you find yourself tracking when you have to hunt down the truth.

The main hunter is Mildred Hayes (Frances McDormand), an Ebbing resident who runs a gift shop. She takes the step of renting the billboards and having three messages posted on them,

responsible—not for the crime but for failing to solve it—is Willoughby (Woody Harrelson), the local sheriff. On the basis of the billboards, we expect him to be a slimeball or a slacker, but no. As played by Harrelson at his homeliest, he's a decent man and an industrious cop, and, in this case, he's taken some necessary steps. DNA matches have been sought, but without success. That's not good enough for Mildred, whose idea of necessity goes a little further. "Pull blood from every man in the country," she says.

All our sympathies are with Mildred, and we prepare to join her in the fight for justice, but "Three Billboards" is not that kind of movie. No music soars in tune with her righteous quest. Mc-

Donagh's ear is cocked, instead, for the noise of human dissonance, and never is the clash more jarring than when Willoughby explains to Mildred that he's dying of cancer, and dying fast. His hope, evidently, is that she might rethink the billboards, or remove them. Mildred doesn't budge. "They wouldn't be so effective after you croak, right?" she says. I've seen the movie twice, and each time I've felt the people around me rear back at that line, with a nervous gasp, suddenly forced to adjust their view of this woman, and to wonder if they should curb, or even withdraw, their pity. Does the ache for revenge surpass more tender emotions, or has she stepped too far beyond the decencies of grief? If so, how far is too far?

These questions would scarcely plague us were it not for McDormand. Not since "Fargo" (1996) has she found a character of such fibre. She doesn't pitch it to us, still less try to make it palatable; she seems to *state* Mildred, presenting her as a given fact, like someone unrolling a map. If her demand for the blood of every guy in America is unreasonable, so what? A parent from whom a child has been torn may no longer feel the need to comply with the powers of reason that constrain society and insure its peace. Hence, not just the rarity of Mildred's smile but also the warring outfit—overalls and a spotted bandanna—that makes her look like a distant relation of Rambo and which she wears on most occasions, even at dinner with James (Peter Dinklage), a friend who's done her a favor. She will not rest. Hers is the battle of all mothers.

As commanding as McDormand is, the film does not lie in her sole possession. We meet her ex, Charlie (John Hawkes), a mean and wiry type, who's dating a much younger woman; they happen to be dining in the same restaurant as James and Mildred, and she approaches Charlie's table with a bottle of wine, bearing it as a gift yet swinging it like a club. Then, there is Angela's brother, Robbie (Lucas Hedges), truculent and spiky, who is more exasperated than stirred by his mother's campaigning wrath. The sight of Hedges cannot help but remind you of his fine performance as another youth in mourning, in last year's "Manchester by the Sea." He had more dramatic space in that movie, but its method was

very different; rather than plowing ahead in the pursuit of facts, it stayed put and scraped away at unhappiness, twitching with flashbacks as if they were bad dreams. "Three Billboards," in contrast, has only a single flashback, though it tells you utterly: a foolish family rumpus, with Mildred refusing to let Angela borrow the car and Angela saying, fine, she'll walk, and shouting, "I hope I get raped on the way." God help them all.

**W**hat is most surprising about McDonagh's film is how far it travels. Apart from a few scenes beside the billboards, or up at Mildred's house, which overlooks them, we don't stray much outside Ebbing. Nonetheless, there are inward journeys in progress—moral migrations that carry the characters, almost despite themselves, away from where they began. Take Red Welby (Caleb Landry Jones), the pallid creep in charge of the town's advertising agency, who is first seen at his desk, reading Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard to Find." Our last view of him shows him in pain, offering succor to a bandaged figure whose sufferings are, if anything, more acute than his. As for Dixon (Sam Rockwell), the in-house racist at the Ebbing Police Department, where to start? He's a bully, schooled in abuse by his gravel-voiced mother (Sandy Martin), and dumb to boot. "How's it all going in the nigger-torturing business, Dixon?" Mildred asks. He swiftly corrects her. "That's the person-of-color-torturing business these days," he replies.

In a remarkable sequence, apparently shot in one take, Dixon enters a build-

ing, barrels upstairs, grabs hold of Red, and tosses him out the window. Passing citizens gaze in stupefaction, and so do we, and it wasn't until the second viewing that I began to see what is fuelling Dixon's frenzy. Sure, he's got a grudge against Red, but there's more; a friend of Dixon's, the only person who spotted potential in him, has just died. In short, Dixon has joined the movie's lamentation gang, headed by Mildred, and this is his choleric way of coping. Eventually, even he sees the light—or, at any rate, squints at the thought of wrongs being rectified. The turning point comes when he is burned in a fire, although, unlike Angela, he survives. The film may feature a diatribe against the Catholic Church, issued by Mildred to a priest who deplores her billboards (she fears that "there ain't no God and the whole world's empty and it doesn't matter what we do to each other"), but McDonagh is not averse to purgatorial flames, from which a soul, chastened and purified, can emerge.

All this asks a lot of Sam Rockwell, but he thrives here as he has seldom done before—not even in "Moon" (2009), where he had the screen to himself. His usual persona is that of the frowning goofball, at once puerile and intense, and "Three Billboards" is the first film to explore that tricky compound. Look at Dixon, standing in the police station and listening to ABBA's "Chiquitita"—a sublimely ill-judged choice—on his headphones. When Mildred marches into the place and shouts, "Hey, fuckhead!" he immediately answers, "What?" It's difficult to imagine how Dixon could ever grow up, let alone grow wise, yet something in the fuckhead strives to

become other than what he was. A good man is hard to find, but not impossible.

Where "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri" falls short, though not wounding so, is inside Ebbing. You don't feel that you know it as well as you knew Manchester by the Sea, for instance. The action shifts between Mildred's home, Red's office, the bar, and so on, as if from one stage set to the next, and the hum of other lives, around the central crisis, stays fairly low. Luckily, that crisis is compelling. We stick with these flawed and quarrelsome people, like Mildred and Dixon, because they alone can lay the memory of Angela to rest, and also because, would you believe, they are kind of fun to watch.

McDonagh, who began as a playwright, made his name as a movie director with "In Bruges" (2008), which spat with nasty laughs. The comedy here is less militant, not straining to intimidate but arising from a more tolerant sense that most folks, most of the time, mess up. Their speech betrays a basic puzzlement; often, what they deliver are not lines so much as spurts of clueless yammering—"How come? What? What?" It seems only fitting, then, that pure chance, rather than sleuthing or spadework, should lead to a breakthrough in the murder investigation; as Willoughby says, you only get a break, long after a case has gone cold, when you hear someone bragging in a bar. So it is that Mildred, at last, gets out of town. She goes in hope, and in search of a promising lead, leaving those damned billboards behind. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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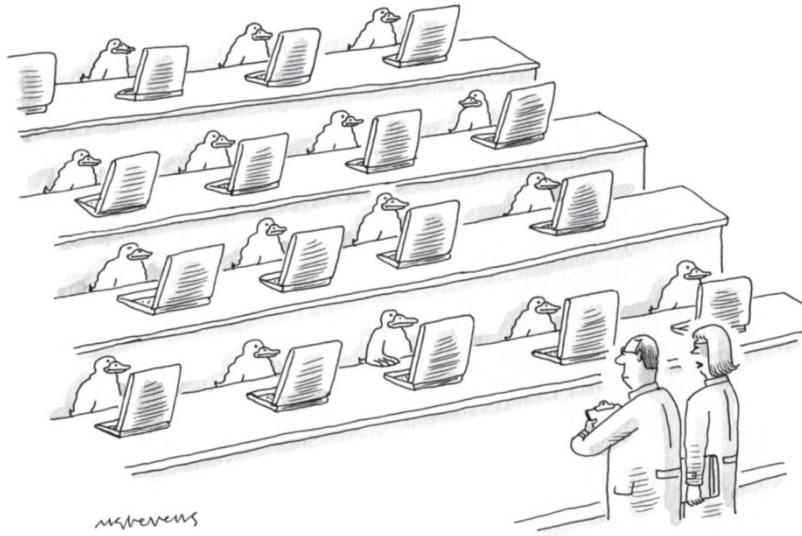
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## CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Mick Stevens, must be received by Sunday, November 12th. The finalists in the October 30th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the November 27th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit [contest.newyorker.com](http://contest.newyorker.com).

### THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



"

"

### THE FINALISTS

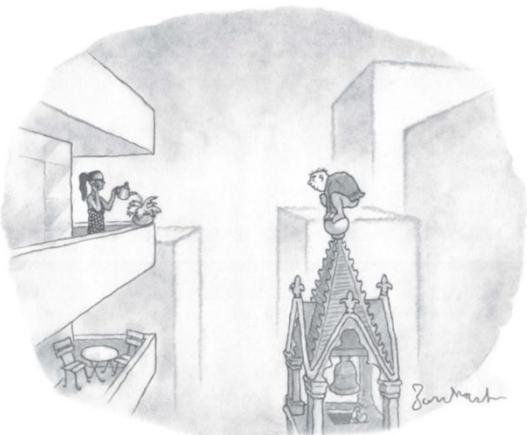


*"It will be worth even more when he's extinct."*  
Chip Rodgers, New York City

*"Let me guess—you didn't invent the wheel, either."*  
Joshua Eisenberg, Beaverton, Ore.

*"If it's a grocery list, we're in trouble."*  
Mark Fitzgerald, Doniphan, Neb.

### THE WINNING CAPTION



*"Like I would date a guy from Notre Dame."*  
John Glenn, Tyler, Texas

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