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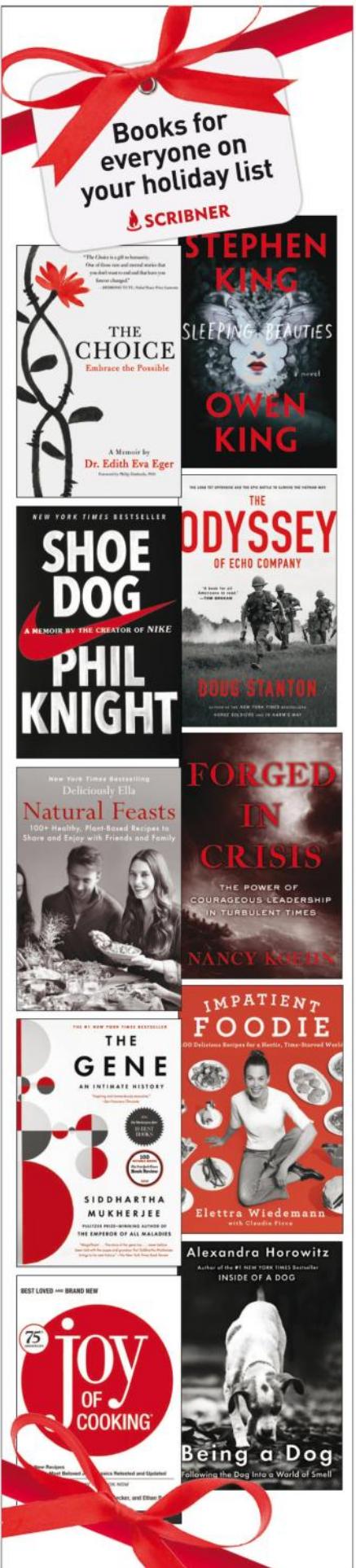
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PODCAST

John Cassidy discusses how the Republican tax plan will take from the middle class and give to the super-rich.

THE MAIL

THE ROOT OF VIOLENCE

I study decision-making in violent contexts, and I was struck by Paul Bloom's assertion that perpetrators of violence don't dehumanize their victims but, rather, see them as humans and intentionally choose to harm them as such (Books, November 27th). Bloom seems to assume that one's reasons for acting violently are consistent over time, and that the physical and mental responses to harming someone are the same for one's fiftieth violent act as for one's first. In my research on the Holocaust and on the Rwandan genocide, I have found that the first time a human kills another human the experience is horrific; perpetrators describe reactions that include vomiting, shaking, recurrent nightmares, and profound trauma—much like the trauma of military veterans, who, arguably, are better trained than civilian perpetrators of genocide to deal with the consequences of killing. But, over time, the physical and emotional horror at participating in violence subsides. This, then, is when the moralizing rationale that draws on dehumanizing propaganda comes into play. How does one adapt to participation in violence? By calling on culturally available repertoires that frame violence as the morally right thing to do.

Aliza Luft
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VERSE AND FORM

In her review of Mary Oliver's "Deviotions," Ruth Franklin asserts that Oliver "writes blank verse in a conversational style" (Books, November 27th). As a long-time reader and sometime critic of Oliver's work, I was surprised by this observation. Blank verse consists of unrhymed pentameter lines in a pattern of five accented syllables per line. Oliver's dominant form, however, is free verse, and her most conspicuous formal devices are repetition, parallelism, and especially anaphora ("Meanwhile the world goes on. / Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain . . ."). Franklin

accurately portrays Oliver as a spiritual poet unconstrained by organized religion. Had Oliver chosen the more conservative form of blank verse, her poems might have evoked, in form as well as in content, Wordsworth's "Prelude." Instead, they partake of the unchurched freedom of Whitman and the expansive openness of Roethke's late meditations.

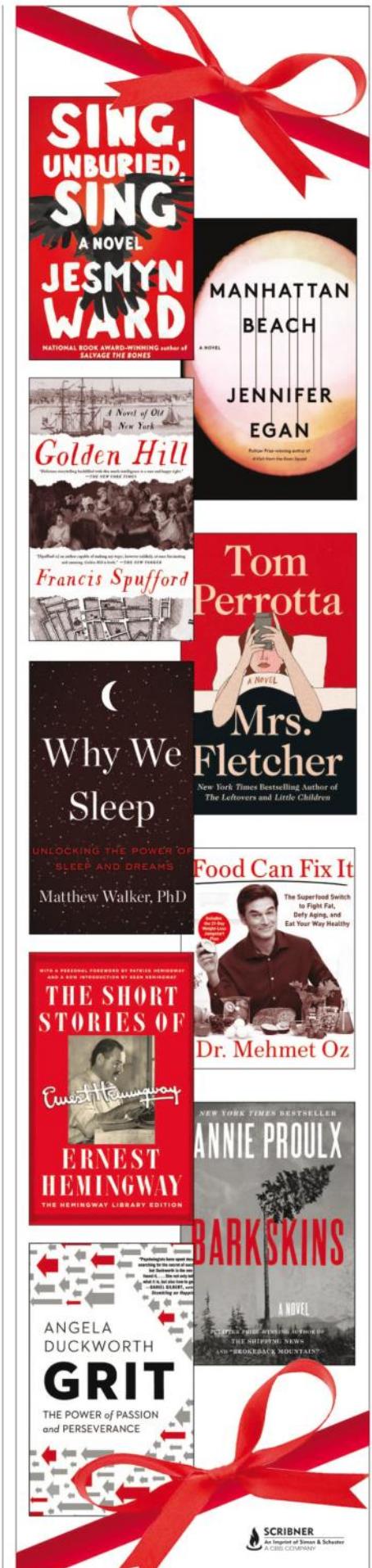
Ben Howard
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WHY CHRISTIE MATTERS

Anthony Lane uses his review of the remake of "Murder on the Orient Express" largely to take down Agatha Christie, the best-selling novelist of all time, while missing her historical and present cultural relevance (The Current Cinema, November 20th). I don't think you would easily find anyone who defends Christie as a master of literary prose, but that's not why people read her novels, nor does that mean her work is without value or merit. Not only is the story a fun, engaging mystery, but, when Christie wrote it, in the nineteen-thirties, it was a twist on typical revenge plots. In Christie's story, an abusive man is brought to justice by the unexpected victims of the fallout of his crime against a young girl. That the novel was written by a woman about the abuse of a female makes it even more worthy of consideration during this deluge of news about sexual harassment and victim empowerment. Instead, Lane suggests that we read a male author of mysteries, Georges Simenon, who he says displays an "intimate acquaintance with mortal weakness for which she could only grope." It was Christie, though, who was writing about a topic increasingly relevant to our own time.

Lenae Day
Los Angeles, Calif.

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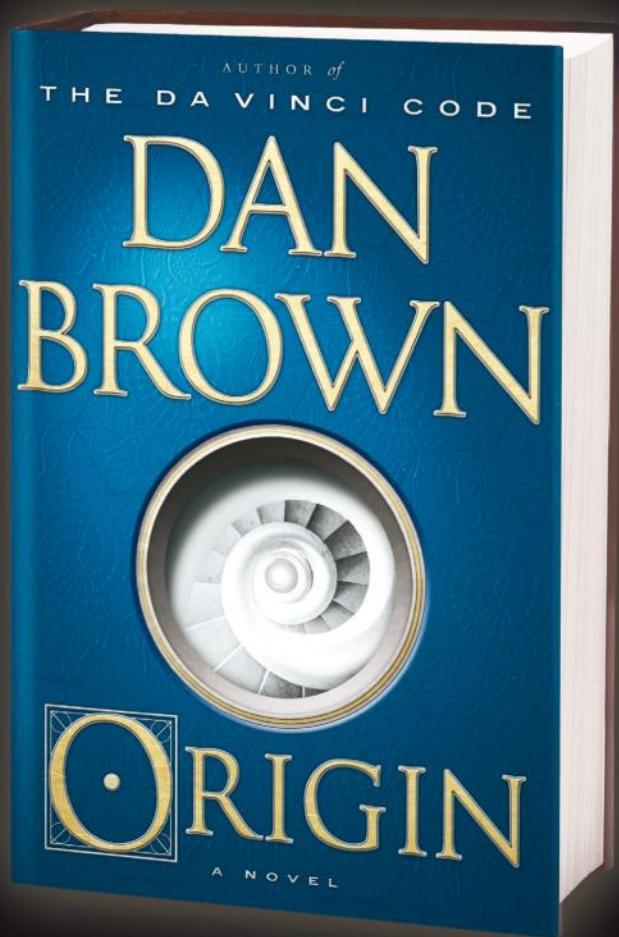
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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



The horn, uniquely welcome in both the brass and the woodwind families, is a brash but finicky device: for centuries the official instrument of the hunt, it is also capable of melting lyricism. The four virtuosos of **Genghis Barbie**, which calls itself “the leading post post-feminist feminist all-female horn experience,” give that heritage an irreverent post-classical twist. They’ll offer an “Ugly Holiday Sweater Party” at Miller Theatre on Dec. 11, performing tunes both goofy (“All I Want for Christmas Is You”) and solemn (“O Come, O Come Emmanuel”).

PHOTOGRAPH BY PARI DUKOVIC

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera

Richard Eyre's production of Mozart's whirling comedy "Le Nozze di Figaro" provides a dark, shimmering backdrop for the grownup shenanigans going down at the Almaviva estate. For the first half of the run, Harry Bicket conducts an ensemble cast that includes Rachel Willis-Sorenson, Christiane Karg, Luca Pisaroni, and Adam Plachetka. *Dec. 6 and Dec. 12 at 7:30 and Dec. 9 at 8.* • **Also playing:** Nathan Gunn—an irresistibly hammy Papageno—leads the cast of an abridged, family-oriented, English-language version of Mozart's "The Magic Flute," performed in Julie Taymor's often enchanting production. Also featuring Charles Castronovo, Hanna-Elisabeth Müller, and Kathryn Lewek; Evan Rogister conducts. *Dec. 7 at 7:30 and Dec. 9 at 12:30.* *These are the final performances.* • David McVicar's new production of Bellini's "Norma" scored a success when it débuted, in October, with two established stars, the soprano Sondra Radvanovsky and the mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato, as Norma and her frenemy, Adalgisa. It returns this week, but with two of the house's younger bel-canto standouts, Angela Meade and Jamie Barton, in the leading roles. Joseph Calleja continues his sterling support as Pollione, the male center of this ancient Druid love triangle; Joseph Colaneri. *Dec. 8 at 8 and Dec. 11 at 7:30.* (*Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.*)

MetLiveArts: "La Dolce Morte"

Michelangelo's profound love for—or infatuation with—Tommaso dei Cavalieri inspired him to send the young nobleman reams of letters containing sonnets, drawings, and other evidence of barely concealed desire. The composer Suzanne Farrin and the director Doug Fitch draw on that deep well of material in this monodrama, featuring the countertenor Eric Jurenas (as Michelangelo) and the International Contemporary Ensemble, which is performed at the Metropolitan Museum's sixteenth-century Vélez Blanco Patio. *Dec. 8 at 7 and Dec. 9 at 2 and 7.* (*Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. metmuseum.org.*)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic

Alan Gilbert, whose tenure as music director ended last spring, is bidding his musicians a long farewell. He joins them again this week, to take the helm for a special program, a celebration of the hundred-and-seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Philharmonic, the oldest orchestra in America. The bill includes two items featured in the organization's first concert, back in 1842—Weber's "Oberon" Overture and Beethoven's Fifth Symphony—and also Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante for Winds in E-Flat Major, K. 297b (featuring the orchestra's new acting principal horn, Richard Deane). *Dec. 6-7 at 7:30, Dec. 8 at 2, and Dec. 9 at 8.* (*David Geffen Hall. 212-875-5656.*)

Miller Theatre: "Heinrich Isaac at 500" / "Bach Piano Concertos"

Miller's two Baroque-and-before concerts occupy different ground from each other this week, though both are tantalizing. On Wednesday, the ever-

elegant Tallis Scholars arrive at the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, just off Times Square, to perform a half-millennial tribute to the immortal Flemish composer, whose works will be mixed in with that of his august contemporaries Josquin and Gombert. On Thursday night, the action is back at Miller's home base, at Columbia University, where the instrumentalists of Ensemble Baroklyn will be joined by four pianists of distinction—Simone Dinnerstein, Awadagin Pratt, Dan Tepfer, and Philip Lasser—to take J. S. Bach's concertos for one, two, three (in D Minor, BWV 1063), and four keyboards, along with other works, out for a spin. *Dec. 6 and Dec. 7 at 8.* (*For tickets and venue information, visit millertheatre.com.*)

Orchestra of St. Luke's

Bernard Labadie, the distinguished Canadian period-performance expert who is the principal conductor designate of this exceptional freelance orchestra, leads it at Carnegie Hall this week. The concert features not only landmarks by Beethoven (the Violin Concerto, with Augustin Hadelich) and Mozart (the Symphony No. 41, "Jupiter") but also an overture by Joseph Martin Kraus, Mozart's Swedish contemporary. *Dec. 7 at 8.* (*212-247-7800.*)

American Symphony Orchestra

The experience of confronting an authoritarian government has inspired any number of significant compositions; credit, as ever, to Leon Botstein, for favoring less familiar but richly rewarding byways over the well-beaten path. His program, titled "Triumph of Art," features two works by the undervalued Polish composer Grażyna Bacewicz, the Music for Strings, Trumpets, and Percussion and the Violin Concerto No. 7 (with Alena Baeva), alongside a pair of substantial symphonies: Martinu's Sixth ("Fantasies Symphoniques") and Schnittke's Fifth. *Dec. 7 at 8.* (*Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500.*)

The S.E.M. Ensemble

It's hard to pass up a chance to hear music by Julius Eastman, a true radical in art as well as life. In the nineteen-seventies, he was part of Petr Kotik's enduring experimentalist ensemble, which this week presents its annual concert at the Paula Cooper Gallery. On offer are Eastman's brash piece "Macle" and Kotik's "There Is Singularly Nothing," a setting of texts by Gertrude Stein that was composed for Eastman to sing; Cage's iconic "Song Books I and II" completes the program, which features the singers Kamala Sankaram and Jeffrey Gavett and the trombonist Christopher McIntyre, among others. *Dec. 7 at 8.* (*534 W. 21st St. semensemble.org.*)

American Composers Orchestra

Lines of influence run through this intriguing Zankel Hall event, in which Pauchi Sasaki—whose beguiling, affecting creations meld music, design, interactive electronics, and choreography—dons a dress adorned with a hundred loudspeakers for the première of her "GAMA XVI." The exhilarating Tim Fain is featured in the Violin Concerto No. 2 ("American Four Seasons"), by Philip Glass, Sasaki's mentor; "Réponse Lutoslawski," Bryce Dessner's salute to the Polish composer of the title, is also on the program. *Dec. 8 at 7:30.* (*212-247-7800.*)

Philadelphia Orchestra

Two classics of late-twentieth-century music grace the sumptuous orchestra's latest concert under the

lith baton of Yannick Nézet-Séguin. First comes a newly commissioned suite of excerpts from "Power Her Face," Thomas Adès's sensational chamber opera, from 1995; then there's a solid American item, Bernstein's "Serenade" (with Hilary Hahn). The Symphony No. 1 in E Minor by Sibelius, a figure admired by both Adès and Bernstein, rounds out the evening. *Dec. 8 at 8.* (*Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800.*)

New Amsterdam Singers

Clara Longstreth's outstanding avocational choir, now fifty years old, has endured not only through fine musicianship but also through balanced and inventive programming. Its holiday concert is no exception: works by two masters from Minnesota—Dominick Argento ("The Vision," a setting of Dante for chorus and strings) and Carol Barnett (a world première)—share space with repertory nuggets by Bach, Blow, Monteverdi, Mozart ("Ave Verum Corpus"), Purcell, and Buxtehude. *Dec. 8 at 8 and Dec. 10 at 4.* (*Advent Lutheran Church, Broadway at 93rd St. nasingers.org.*)

RECITALS

"Janine Jansen and Friends"

This superb Dutch violinist has established herself quietly over the past decade by making chamber music her métier. Her admired companions for her two concerts at Zankel Hall include the pianist Lucas Debargue and the cellist Torleif Thedéen. The first offers gems of modernism by Bartók ("Contrasts"), Szymanowski, and Messiaen ("Quartet for the End of Time"), while the second looks to Russia, with pieces by Shostakovich, Prokofiev (the dulcet Sonata No. 2 in D Major for Violin and Piano), and Rachmaninoff (the second "Trio Élégiaque"). *Dec. 7 and Dec. 9 at 7:30.* (*212-247-7800.*)

Bargemusic

Gotham's piano parade continues at the floating chamber-music series, where one of the town's keyboard authorities, Jed Distler, spends Friday evening giving listeners a tour d'horizon through the music of the great Thelonious Monk. Saturday night and Sunday afternoon belong to the clarinetist Alexander Fiterstein and the violinist Mark Peskanov, who join friends in performances of works by Haydn (the "Lark" Quartet) and Mozart (the Quintet for Clarinet and Strings). *Dec. 8 at 7; Dec. 9 at 8 and Dec. 10 at 4.* (*Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. bargemusic.org.*)

Jeremy Denk

Denk, one of today's most thoughtful keyboard virtuosos, sometimes tours with highly unconventional programs. But his upcoming appearance at the 92nd Street Y stays firmly within the bounds of the classical-to-early-modern mainstream: Mozart's Rondo in A Minor, K. 511; Prokofiev's "Visions Fugitives"; Beethoven's Sonata No. 30 in E Major; and Schumann's "Symphonic Études." *Dec. 9 at 8.* (*Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500.*)

"Celebrating Philip Glass"

Musical toasts to the genius of Glass are coming thick and fast these days. One the composer may especially prize is raised by two good friends, Dennis Russell Davies and Maki Namekawa, who will perform a bevy of his works for two pianos, and piano four-hands, at Roulette, including a suite from the opera "Les Enfants Terribles" and arrangements of excerpts from the operas "Orphée" and "The Voyage." *Dec. 9 at 8.* (*509 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn. roulette.org.*)

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MOVIES



Rachel Amodeo plays a homeless woman in her 1993 drama, "What About Me," co-starring Nick Zedd, Richard Edson, and other downtown notables.

Hell of a Town

MOMA screens a rare drama of survival on the East Village streets.

The series "New York Film and Video: No Wave–Transgressive," running Dec. 1–April 1 at MOMA, reveals a little-known current of cinematic activity in the nineteen-seventies and eighties and brings to light a hidden masterwork, "What About Me," released in 1993 (screening Dec. 27 and Jan. 1). It should have been widely acclaimed and launched the career of its director, writer, and star, Rachel Amodeo. Instead, it's the only feature that she has made to date.

"What About Me" is a stark, quasi-documentary drama about a young woman facing the dangers and the hard, cruel struggles of East Village life. But the movie, even in the depths of its anguish and degradation, never loses the touch of grace and cosmic humor that sets it into motion. It begins as a tragic-comic metaphysical fantasy: a country girl in pigtails (Amodeo) dies in a freak accident and is reborn as a baby in a comfortably suburban family in Chappaqua,

New York, which leads to an astonishing dissolve from a crying infant on the carpet to a crying woman in her bed—Lisa (Amodeo), who is orphaned and unemployed and lives with her aunt in a grungy East Village apartment.

While the innocently confident Lisa wanders from storefront to storefront looking for work, her aunt dies suddenly. Upon her return, the building's super, Frank (Rockets Redglare), rapes her and, soon thereafter, throws her out of the apartment, leaving her to fend for herself on the streets. After the stunned and traumatized Lisa is robbed on a stoop by a man who befriends her, she sells the winter coat off her back to pay for a night at a flophouse (the charitable desk clerk is played by the poet Gregory Corso), and then stays in Tompkins Square Park in the company of Nick (Richard Edson), a bighearted but emotionally damaged and abusive Vietnam veteran. Fleeing Nick, Lisa is helped out by Tom (Nick Zedd), a slickly cynical art-punk, and then by Paul (Richard Hell), a compassionate bohemian, all the while enduring a calvary of miseries, including illness and

injury, in her descent from bright promise to flailing desperation.

Amodeo films East Village locations with a tenacious, unflinching curiosity, and she features a range of street people (including another Vietnam veteran, played by Dee Dee Ramone) who talk tough, tussle, joke, and tell stories. The black-and-white cinematography, by Mark Brady and M. Henry Jones, fuses a rich tangle of physical details with Lisa's dramatic hand-to mouth struggle, as in her stiff-legged shuffle under street lights during an early snowfall. Grime on the windows, piles of garbage on the sidewalks, and scarred walls of dilapidated buildings compose the settings for Lisa's search for food and shelter, and also for her confrontations with the cold power of the police, with the relentless and inescapable violence of the streets, and, above all, with the deranging, identity-rending ravages of physical and emotional trauma. Filling "What About Me" with soul-grinding encounters and galling trials, Amodeo nonetheless exalts Lisa's agonies with tender, transcendent passion.

—Richard Brody

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Call Me By Your Name

The new film by Luca Guadagnino is set in the summer of 1983. Professor Perlman (Michael Stuhlbarg) lives with his wife (Amira Casar) and their seventeen-year-old son, Elio (Timothée Chalamet), in a secluded Italian house—a private Eden, where the fruit ripens within reach, ready for the plucking. The family is Jewish, cultivated, and polyglot; the whole movie spills over with languages, books, and strains of music. (The ideal viewer, probably, would be André Gide.) Into this enchanted place comes an American called Oliver (Armie Hammer), who will be Perlman's research assistant; you half expect the intruder to be a serpent, but instead he deepens the enchantment. Though the story, adapted by James Ivory from André Aciman's novel, tells primarily of the love between Elio and Oliver, Guadagnino somehow conjures a free-floating rapture, of which all the characters partake. Even a statue, dredged from a lake, seems to share in the bliss. What could have been too rich or too glutinous is leavened by wit and, later on, by a wintry sorrow. How the film could have thrived with actors other than Chalamet and Hammer is hard to imagine.—*Anthony Lane* (*Reviewed in our issue of 12/4/17.*) (*In limited release.*)

Darkest Hour

How badly we need another Winston Churchill film is open to question. Nonetheless, Joe Wright's contribution to the genre is welcome, largely because of Gary Oldman in the leading role. He seems an unlikely choice, yet the lightness of his performance marks it out from other attempts; this Churchill, oddly quick on his feet, with a hasty huff and puff in his voice instead of a low, slow growl, suggests a man in a hurry to fight. None too soon, for we are in the late spring of 1940, with the German war machine in full cry and Britain adrift until Churchill, to the alarm of many contemporaries, takes charge. Wright has a curious weakness for the overhead shot, be it of the House of Commons or of a landscape cratered by bombs, and the musical score sounds too plush by half. But Oldman is braced by his supporting cast. Kristin Scott Thomas, as Clementine Churchill, is witty as well as stalwart; Neville Chamberlain, as played by Ronald Pickup, has never looked graver or more aghast. Best of all is Stephen Dillane, as Lord Halifax, whom Churchill called the Holy Fox: cadaverous, principled, desperate for peace, and wrong.—*A.L.* (*In limited release.*)

The Disaster Artist

In this comedy directed by and starring James Franco, based on the true story of the production of the cult movie "The Room" (2003), Franco displays a wicked joy in portraying the enigmatic Tommy Wiseau, its director, star, producer, and financier—and the unintended butt of cinematic history's joke. Working with a script based on a memoir by Greg Sestero, Wiseau's friend, sidekick, and co-star in "The Room," Franco brings a special verve to scenes of the fictionalized Tommy working on the set with—and against—his cast and crew (in particular, the justly skeptical and sarcastic production manager, played by Seth Rogen). The movie sticks with Greg's perspective; he is played by Dave Franco (James's brother) as a bland and struggling young actor who yearns for nothing more than stable normalcy but is pulled into the chaotic vortex of Tommy's generosity, vanity, obliviousness, and domineering energy. Yet the comedy, for all its scenes of giddy wonder, never gets past Tommy's mask of mystery; avoiding speculation and investigation, it stays on the surface of his public and private shuck, leaving little more than a trail of amusing anecdotes.—*Richard Brody* (*In limited release.*)

I, Tonya

This comedic drama, directed by Craig Gillespie, offers a detailed, empathetic view of Tonya Harding, the real-life Olympic figure skater who, in 1994, was involved in a plot to injure her main rival, Nancy Kerrigan. (The script, by Steven Rogers, is partly based on his interview with Harding.) In the filmmakers' version of the story, Tonya, as a child, is bullied and beaten by her mother (Allison Janney), who's depicted as a brutally judgmental waitress with big dreams for her daughter—and the adult Tonya (played by Margot Robbie), a bold and gifted athlete, escapes her mother's clutches by marrying Jeff Gillooly (Sebastian Stan), who also beats her. Though Tonya rises brilliantly through the sport's competitive ranks, the skating establishment holds her gaudy taste, rough manners, and rude family against her. That endemic class discrimination and the ensuing bad publicity are the backdrop for Jeff's scheme to harm Kerrigan—and for the beleaguered and abused Tonya's inability to oppose it. The heart of the movie is the recognition of Tonya's dependence on people and institutions that have betrayed her. But Gillespie's empathy is mixed with condescension; much of the movie's bluff comedy mocks the tone and the actions of Tonya and her milieu. —*R.B.* (*In limited release.*)

The Missing Picture

Working with clay figurines posed in diorama-like landscapes, the director Rithy Panh bears witness to the Khmer Rouge's destruction of Cambodian society, which he lived through as an adolescent. When the capital, Phnom Penh, was emptied, in 1975, Panh and his family were shipped in cattle cars to labor camps. (His brother, a rock musician, was immediately executed.) With meticulous direction that seems to bring the film's little dolls to life, he tells the story of his parents' death and recounts the dehumanizing horrors that he and other survivors endured. Panh conjures his childhood by superimposing the colorful figurines onto black-and-white archival footage; he analyzes Khmer Rouge propaganda to reveal depravities under the veneer of progress and revolution. With a tribute to a cameraman who paid for his images with his life and bitter recollections of China's support for the regime and Western receptivity to its slogans, Panh honors the Khmer Rouge's victims while staging the agony and the responsibility of memory. In French. Released in 2013.—*R.B.* (*BAM Cinématek, Dec. 12, and streaming.*)

Mudbound

This historical drama, set in the nineteen-thirties and forties, offers a keen and outraged view of the laws and the practices of Jim Crow, and of the monstrous dangers awaiting anyone who defied them. The McAllan family, who are white—Henry (Jason Clarke), Laura (Carey Mulligan), and their young daughters—slip from middle-class Memphis to a bedraggled Mississippi farm, where they're in close connection with their tenants, the Jackson family, who are black—Hap (Rob Morgan), Florence (Mary J. Blige), and their four children. When the Second World War starts, Henry's brother Jamie (Garrett Hedlund) becomes a pilot, and the eldest Jackson son, Ronsel (Jason Mitchell), becomes a tank commander. Both return as heroes, but tragedy looms when they become friends. The director, Dee Rees, uses voice-overs to bring the many characters to life, but the text is thin; the exposition is needlessly slow and stepwise, and the drama, though affecting, is literal and oversimplified.—*R.B.* (*In wide release and on Netflix.*)

The Other Side of Hope

This spare, puckish, yet ruefully clear-eyed comic drama, directed by Aki Kaurismäki, is centered

on the fate of Khaled (Sherwan Haji), a young man from Aleppo who arrives clandestinely in Helsinki and applies for asylum there. Kaurismäki's calm and plain style is well suited to the step-by-step observation of the immigration system's oppressively officious approach to Khaled and his fellow-applicants. Khaled's story is told in parallel with that of a gruff, middle-aged salesman named Wikström (Sakari Kuosmanen), whose tale is a multilevel fantasy, starting with his brusque abandonment of his wife (Kaija Pakarinen) and continuing on to his purchase of a restaurant after winning at high-stakes poker. When Khaled is denied asylum, he goes on the run. Wikström soon finds him hiding behind the restaurant's garbage cans, takes him in, gives him a job, and selflessly helps him find his sister, Miriam (Niroz Haji), from whom he was separated in transit. Meanwhile, the ubiquitous presence of violent neo-Nazis tempers the good feelings. Running gags about oddball twists in the restaurant business serve little purpose but don't detract from the movie's essential quasi-documentary power. In English, Finnish, and Arabic.—*R.B.* (*In limited release.*)

Story of a Love Affair

In his first feature, from 1950, Michelangelo Antonioni dramatized the power of mass culture and business, focussing mainly on the bourgeoisie, who controlled those spheres of activity and embodied their values. A love affair is sparked by the jealous curiosity of an aging, wealthy Milan industrialist about the life that his young wife, Paola (Lucia Bosè), led before their marriage. When her former lover, Guido (Massimo Girotti), contacts her about a detective's inquiry, the pampered and restless Paola reignites their romance. Antonioni captures their passion with architectural precision; he presses his lovers into hard-edged corporate and domestic spaces by way of graphically etched, high-contrast camerawork that emphasizes the coldly thrilling modernism of tall buildings, progressive urbanism, and avant-garde design. In Bosè, he found just the actress to embody that style's dark allure. She's dressed and directed to share the sleek sculptural power of the world she inhabits, wearing the sharply angled artifices of high fashion as if made for them and evoking, with a coolly glowing stillness, fire encased in marble. In Italian.—*R.B.* (*MOMA, Dec. 8, and streaming.*)

Wonder Wheel

The salt air and boardwalk clamor of Coney Island mask the atmosphere of death and deceit in Woody Allen's memory-soaked drama, set in Brooklyn around 1950. It's the story of a middle-aged woman named Ginny (Kate Winslet), a long-ago actress whose fading ambitions have been stifled by a scuffling life as a clam-bar waitress married to the rough-hewn Humpty (James Belushi), the ticket-taker at an amusement-park carousel near the shack where they live. Ginny begins an affair with the twenty-something Mickey (Justin Timberlake), a grad student and aspiring playwright working as a lifeguard for the summer—but she soon finds herself competing for Mickey's affections with Carolina (Juno Temple), Humpty's daughter from a previous marriage, who shows up after fleeing from her ex-husband's gangland associates. The tangled plot is decorated in gaudy colors (thanks to the cinematographer Vittorio Storaro) that contrast sadly with the sordid doings. Allen fills the story with wildly mixed emotions of pride and guilt, psychological clarity and moral horror. Under the pressure of violence and remorse, Ginny loses her grip on reality, a form of madness that blots out the story's bitter truths and comes as a sort of deliverance.—*R.B.* (*In limited release.*)

NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

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

LCD Soundsystem

LCD Soundsystem has long mixed electronics, disco beats, and jagged post-punk guitars with the mastermind James Murphy's sung-spoken vocals. The Soundsystem first made a splash in 2002, with "Losing My Edge," a single that gave a wry, self-effacing voice to a nation of indie hipsters. But it was no fluke. Three critically revered, Zeitgeist-baiting albums later, Murphy (who also heads the DFA label) became a highly touted producer, and the band earned a reputation as an explosive live act. LCD's breakup, in 2011, came with an elaborate Madison Square Garden concert and all the corresponding ceremony, which made last year's reunion a cause for celebration. The band's announcement of a residency at Brooklyn Steel flooded ticket servers earlier this year; it returns for a third stand. (319 Frost St., Brooklyn. 888-929-7849. Dec. 11-12. Through Dec. 23.)

Perfume Genius

Mike Hadreas, who performs otherworldly art-rock as Perfume Genius, has built a career by sifting through traumas from his teens, when he received death threats for being openly gay, and from his twenties, when he struggled with substance abuse. With the release of his fourth album, "No Shape," he's gingerly moving on, focussing on the little things required to exist in the face of adversity. His deeply personal music rumbles and scatters across sections, from rippling drums and sprightly guitar to huge climaxes; his imagery leans more toward escapism, from the woodland fantasy of "Slip Away" to the dreamlike montage of "Queen." He plays four nights in New York, starting with two at the Bowery Ballroom, supported by DM Strith. (6 Delancey St. 212-260-4700. Dec. 10-11.)

Superorganism

Take the name at face value, even if you haven't heard the band's sticky single "Something for Your M.I.N.D." This eight-piece group has taken off: based mainly in London but with members in Seoul, it has earned praise from ear-to-the-ground glossies and performed on the BBC's long-running show "Later . . . with Jools Holland." The band specializes in gooey, cartoonish indie pop, the kind of colorful songs that grip campus spring weekends and frontal lobes. Its members approach songwriting and production with the shared precision of major-label writing teams, but their sound is infused with a youthful guile that makes tracks from their upcoming album, like "Everybody Wants to Be Famous" and "The Prawn Song," stick out. Catch previews in this set before the band's début arrives, next year. (House of Yes, 2 Wyckoff Ave., Brooklyn. houseofyes.org. Dec. 12.)

Wiki

This Upper West Side native stepped out from his Ratking trio to deliver a solo full-length, "Lil Me," at the end of 2015. The nasal-voiced twenty-three-year-old adores and abhors his city in equal measure, remembering the "old blocks" he grew up on while wandering past the "new kids" who now share

his sidewalks. Terse, frostbitten beats drag inventive new rhythms from grime and noise influences, and Wiki's thick, buoyant cadence keeps the subject matter from getting too heavy. His latest solo album, "No Mountains in Manhattan," turns the lens on himself, delivering a colorful, technical exhibition of the odd-angled rhyming patterns of Cam'ron and Eminem from a post-Bloomberg vantage. (Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl. 212-777-6800. Dec. 8.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Stanley Cowell

Cowell was a veritable whirlwind of activity in the nineteen-seventies and eighties, exhibiting his encyclopedic piano skills on his own fine recordings and with a host of top-tier artists, co-founding the Strata East record label, composing large-scale pan-historic pieces, and generally playing his part as a spark plug of post-bop jazz. Academia claimed him during the subsequent decades; now, following retirement, he's begun surfacing for welcome appearances. Here, he leads a quartet, featuring the saxophonist Bruce Williams, to celebrate the release of his latest album, "No Illusions." (Smoke, 2751 Broadway, between 105th and 106th Sts. 212-864-6662. Dec. 8-10.)

Bill Frisell and Thomas Morgan

"Small Town," a live duet recording released this year, by the guitarist Frisell and the bassist Morgan, is a quiet masterpiece, its intimate interplay an example of the seismic power that occurs when two exceptional musicians truly listen to each other. A repertoire that spans the Carter Family's "Wildwood Flower" and Paul Motian's haunting "It Should've Happened a Long Time Ago" demonstrates the duo's genre-embracing range. (Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. Dec. 7-10.)

Jimmy Heath Big Band

Never a star yet long an honored lodestar to fellow-musicians, Heath has attained reverential stature in the jazz community as a saxophonist, composer, arranger, bandleader, and educator. Still spunky at ninety-one, this diminutive polymath will front a sixteen-piece big band that's sure to provide vivid tonal color to his enduring tunes. (Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St. 212-475-8592. Dec. 7-10.)

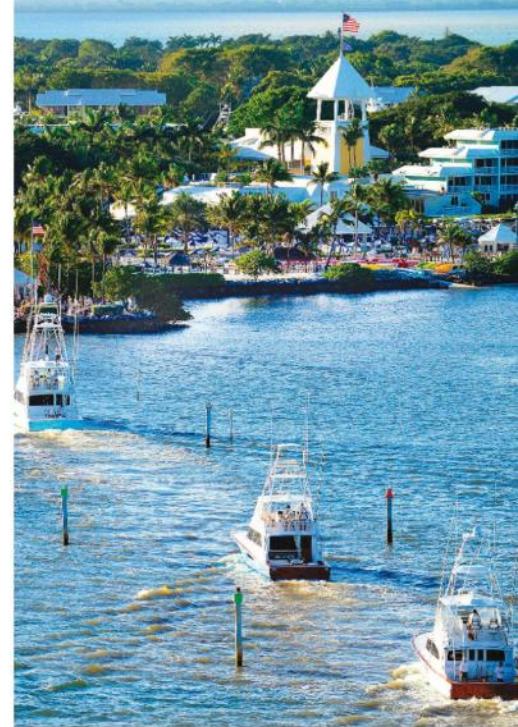
Jeremy Pelt and Bruce Barth

Mezzrow, a down-the-stairs West Village venue, has an intimate, old-school vibe that might inspire a player to turn to the standards for sustenance. It will do just that for two sharp-witted improvisers, the trumpeter Pelt and the pianist Barth, during two nights of close-knit duets. (163 W. 10th St. mezzrow.com. Dec. 8-9.)

Renee Rosnes: Deep in Blue

With her Deep in Blue ensemble, the pianist Rosnes has retained core members of her earlier units—the bassist Peter Washington and the vibist Steve Nelson—while adding significant new ones: the drummer Lenny White and the saxophonist Melissa Aldana. The potent concentration of the leader's compositions, as heard on her ambitious "Written in the Rocks" recording, from 2016, insures the group's integrity. (Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola, Broadway at 60th St. 212-258-9595. Dec. 7-10.)

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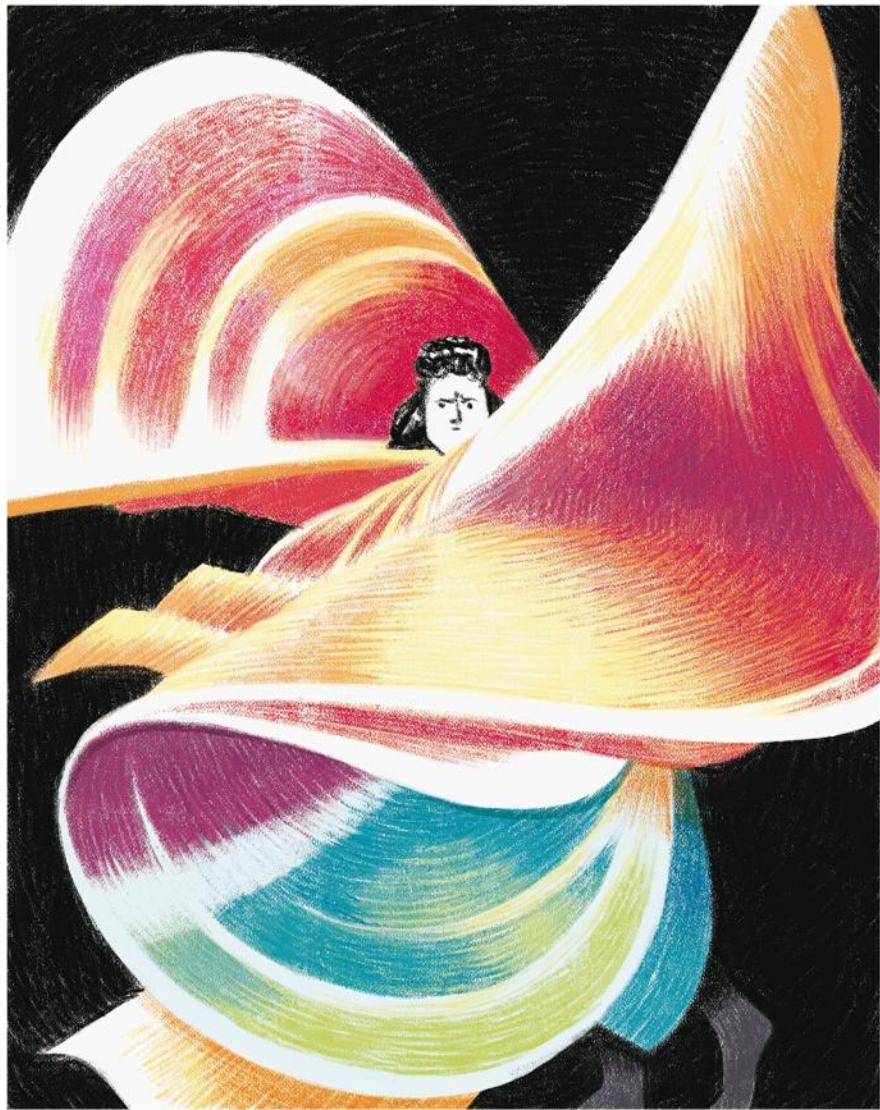


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DANCE



Variety Lights

A new movie tells the story of Loie Fuller, Art Nouveau dancer.

At the end of the nineteenth century, there were two basic trends in Western art, realism and symbolism. Realism took as its subject the matters of this world—the families, the money, the waistcoats and petticoats—while symbolism did its best never again to be confronted with a waistcoat button. All it wanted to see was the “Image,” a vision that lay past reality—almost past language. For many, that exalted thing was embodied in the dancing of a pudgy girl from Illinois, Loie Fuller.

Born in 1862, Fuller, like almost all American early modern dancers, had a career in popular theatre—skirt dancing, pantomime, you name it—before anyone encouraged her to move beyond that and, as a first step, go to Europe. Why did she finally take the lure? For her, as for most of her American colleagues, Europe was something out of a magazine ad. But they eventually went after it, whereupon European producers went after them. At the Exposition Universelle, in Paris, in 1900, the Art Nouveau architect Henri Sauvage designed a whole Théâtre Loie Fuller, where Fuller presented her own work and that of additional “exotics.”

Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis, another two innocent Americans, saw Fuller there and went away, thinking.

Fuller performed for more than forty years and came up with many different experiments, but her biggest idea, or at least her most popular one, was her first: to present herself dancing alone, in darkness, in place, in a maelstrom of fabric, which she manipulated with bamboo poles, some as long as ten feet. But that was only half of it. The other sensation was the lighting. Fuller painted her silks with phosphorescent dyes, so that as the lights changed during the performance she could take different forms: a flower, a butterfly, “The Ride of the Valkyries,” or just some fantastic, unnameable thing, shimmering and whirling. Fuller lived into her sixties and toured widely. She made a movie. She assembled a company of girls, and they put on “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” full of sprites and fairies. But what remained in people’s minds was just that one fairy, from Illinois, emerging out of the darkness and leading the audience into abstraction.

In 2016, the French director Stéphanie Di Giusto brought out “La Danseuse” (“The Dancer”), a film about Fuller’s early career, starring the French actress Soko, who, with her sweet, round face, actually looks a bit like Fuller. Di Giusto has written that she was not aiming for strict biographical accuracy. So there are a number of things in the movie that Fuller scholars might want to call her up about. (Did Fuller really wrestle cattle when she was a girl? Did her father die because somebody shot him in a bathtub?) Never mind. The point of the film is Loie the Dancer. The dances were reimagined, and taught to Soko, by the Fuller expert Jody Sperling. Watching them, I felt I understood for the first time why Fuller became famous. “The Dancer” is playing at the Village East Cinema and the Landmark at 57 West starting on Dec. 1.

—Joan Acocella

New York City Ballet / "The Nutcracker"

As a young dancer in St. Petersburg in the nineteen-tens, George Balanchine performed the lead in the Harlequins' "Hoop Dance" in the Mariinsky Ballet's "Nutcracker." By all accounts, he was rather proud of his performance, and when he created his own "Nutcracker" for the New York City Ballet, in 1954, he included the dance verbatim in the second act and renamed it "Candy Cane." With its double hoop jumps, it is still one of the most beloved sections of the ballet, performed by one adult dancer and eight children from the school. This merging of past and present, adult prowess and youthful flair, has helped to insure the production's enduring appeal for more than sixty years. (*David H. Koch, Lincoln Center, 212-721-6500. Dec. 6-10 and Dec. 12. Through Dec. 31.*)

Keely Garfield

Garfield is a true eccentric whose highly theatrical dances can be bizarre, hilarious, and stealthily profound, in quick succession or all at once. The title of her new piece, "Perfect Piranha," alludes to the danger of toothy smiles. Her work has speed and bite but also a sincere striving for enlightened compassion. With her cast of straight-faced nonconformists, she builds a dance mandala, an intricate diagram of the universe. (*The Chocolate Factory, 5-49 49th Ave., Long Island City. 866-811-4111. Dec. 6-9.*)

Jaamil Olawale Kosoko

In the course of the three years between Kosoko's twelfth and fifteenth birthdays, he lost his baby sister, his grandmother, his great-grandmother, and his mother. Since 2015, he has faced the deaths of his grandfather, his father, and his younger brother, who was murdered. "Séancers" addresses this loss, along with the possibility of paranormal connection. It's part recitation (with texts by Audre Lorde, Ruby Sales, and Kosoko), part performance, ritualistic and unrestrained. Jeremy Toussaint-Baptiste provides a live sound score, and each night features a different guest (including Okwui Okpokwasili, on Dec. 9). (*Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-598-0400. Dec. 6-9.*)

Geoff Sobelle / "Home"

"Home" isn't dance, exactly—it's more like choreographed movement that bears a striking resemblance to everyday life. Sobelle, a theatre director, actor, and choreographer, creates shows that are reflections on the rough-and-tumble experience of existence, mixed with construction projects. In "Home," the actors build a makeshift abode, move in, eat, sleep, quarrel, drink coffee—in short, live. What results is the poetry of the everyday. At the end, everyone is invited onstage for a big house party. (*BAM Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Dec. 6-10.*)

Juilliard / "New Dances: Edition 2017"

The élite conservatory—which produces scores of contemporary dancers each year—presents a program of works commissioned specifically for its students at the end of every fall season. Each class is assigned to a choreographer; three of the four in this round are associated with prominent figures in the contemporary dance scene, and their styles reflect that of their mentors. Bryan Arias is a long-time member of Crystal Pite's Canadian troupe, Kidd Pivot; Gentian Doda has been staging Nacho Duato's dances for years; and Roy Assaf came out of Emanuel Gat's Israeli dance company. The exception is Gustavo Ramírez Sansano, the former director of Luna Negra, whose work combines Latin-American (and Spanish) themes with a pared-down European contemporary-dance aesthetic. (*Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, 155 W. 65th St. 212-769-7406. Dec. 6-10.*)

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre

Apart from the popular troupe's dependable spirit and skill, its monthlong encampment at City Center looks a bit lacklustre this year. The second week sees the return of Twyla Tharp's "Golden Section," a jet-stream, aerobic vision of dance paradise, from 1981. The virtuosity that the piece requires doesn't cause the Ailey dancers much trouble; the casual tone does. Jamar Roberts, a gentle-giant star dancer, debuts his first work for the company, "Members Don't Get Weary." Set to John Coltrane recordings, it begins in church, with a maudlin search for solace, but then "Ole" kicks in, and Roberts's response to the rhythmic relentlessness is fresh enough to offer some real balm. (*131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Dec. 6-10 and Dec. 12. Through Dec. 31.*)

Mique'l Dangeli & Mike Dangeli / Maria Hupfeld

"DoublePlus," the Gibney Dance series that allows established choreographers to shine a light on their lesser-known colleagues, continues, with a program selected by Emily Johnson. The Dangeli's, the married founders of the Git Hayetsk dance group, specialize in mask dances, old and new, from the native tribes of the northwest coast of British Columbia and southeast Alaska. Their piece "Where Do You Speak From" confronts the endangerment of indigenous languages. Hupfeld, a member of the Anishinabek Nation from Wasauksing First Nation, is a Brooklyn-based artist of several disciplines. In "Electric Prop and Hum Freestyle Variations," she wears and wields objects she has sewn. (*Gibney Dance: Agnes Varis Performing Arts Center, 280 Broadway. 646-837-6809. Dec. 7-9.*)

Dances Patrelle / "Yorkville Nutcracker"

Kids from ballet schools all over town take part in this production, now in its twenty-second season. The choreographer is Francis Patrelle, a much loved local teacher. In his version, the story is transplanted to New York, circa 1895; the Christmas party takes place at Gracie Mansion, and the snowstorm in Central Park. Abi Stafford, of New York City Ballet, makes a guest appearance as the Sugar Plum Fairy. (*Kaye Playhouse, Park Ave. at 68th St. 212-722-4448. Dec. 7-10.*)

"Peter and the Wolf"

The Guggenheim presents its annual performance of Prokofiev's musical folktale, conceived by Isaac Mizrahi, who narrates, and the choreographer John Heginbotham. An intrepid young boy disregards his grandfather's warning not to wander into the meadow, where a wolf lurks; each animal he encounters there is represented by a different instrument, played live by Ensemble Signal. Heginbotham's choreography is funny and clever, and the show is a short and sweet half hour. (*Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3575. Dec. 8-10.*)

Trisha Brown Dance Company

Even before Brown died, in March, after a slow retirement forced by illness, the future of her company, and the top-shelf choreography it preserves, appeared precarious. But the troupe seems to be bouncing back, touring busily and presenting more than the greatest hits. This program focusses on a less celebrated period in Brown's work, from 2000 to 2009. The music is disparate: the Latin-tinged jazz of Dave Douglas in "Groove and Countermove," the Baroque opera of Rameau in "L'Amour au Théâtre." What's consistent is Brown's wit and invention. (*Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Dec. 12. Through Dec. 17.*)

Cushion shaped diamond ring (D=2.15 cts., G.I.A. F, Flawless)	\$36,500
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MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum

"Michelangelo: Divine Draftsman & Designer"

Michelangelo's sixteenth-century Italian contemporaries very nearly worshipped him for collapsing more than a millennium of distance between classical antiquity and a surge of avowedly Christian but disruptively individual inspiration. You can't miss the atavistic power in this show's hundred and thirty-three drawings, which are beautifully installed with a few of his creations in sculpture, painting, and design and with works by related artists. The drawings are stupendous—no surprise—though strikingly limited in iconography and formal repertoire, except those from a few years when Michelangelo exercised a definitively Mannerist panache in gifts to friends and patrons. (In a smoky portrait dated 1531–34, the hauntingly ambiguous expression of an adored young friend, Andrea Quaratesi, qualifies the sitter as kissing kin of the *Mona Lisa*.) The effect is exhaustingly repetitive. How many times in a row can you swoon to marks that sound the same chord of rippling anatomy? Whether the Sistine Chapel, undertaken in 1508 and completed in 1512, is the best work of art ever made we can't say, because nothing compares to it. The ceiling is reproduced here with an overhead light-box photograph, at one-fourth scale—a travesty, aesthetically, but a useful reference for mapping the destinations of the preparatory drawings on view. The Sistine opus yields a faint sense of what

it must feel like to be God, jump-starting humanity, programming its significance, and then, with "The Last Judgment" (which was added more than twenty years later), closing it out. We will never get over Michelangelo. But we will also never know quite what to do with him, except gape. *Through Feb. 12.*

Morgan Library and Museum

"Drawn to Greatness: Master Drawings from the Thaw Collection"

The practice of drawing in Europe is as old as the lines on the caves at Lascaux. But there was a sea change during the Renaissance, when the earliest pieces on view here were made. Artists began to think with their hands, working through ideas on paper, rather than merely recording the world. In one sublime pen-and-ink sketch, from 1450–55, Andrea Mantegna posed the same columnar saint in three variations; the sheet has the immediacy of a live rehearsal. Divided chronologically into nine sections, this almost unbearably excellent show spans five hundred years and proceeds through Rembrandt, Goya, Picasso, and Pollock (and Monet, Cézanne, Gauguin, and Matisse). For every blockbuster name there's an unfamiliar astonishment, like the ink-and-watercolor menagerie by the Netherlandish painter Jacques de Gheyn II, from 1596–1602, which splices together exquisite realism and outlandish fantasy, as a toad, a frog, and a dragonfly share the page with a mutant bird-moth. A transfixing 1828 landscape by the English Romantic Samuel Palmer features a subtly anthropomorphized oak that trumps any weirwood on "Game of Thrones." It hangs near an in-

genious nocturne by Caspar David Friedrich, from 1808: the moon in the lonesome landscape has been cut out and replaced with a circle of paper for lamplight to shine through. *Through Jan. 7.*

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

"Cosmic Communities: Coming Out Into Outer Space—Homofuturism, Applied Psychedelia & Magic Connectivity"

The curatorial flight of fancy suggested by this show's wryly incantatory title makes for a dense and surprising group show, co-organized by Diedrich Diederichsen and Christopher Müller. Their springboard is the cultish literary cliques that orbited two Germans in the early twentieth century, the poet Stefan George and the writer and organ builder Hans Henny Jahn. The men's rejection of bourgeois heterosexual mores and their quests for alternative cosmic harmonies are seen here as paving the way for such far-flung explorations as Jordan Belson's "Brain Drawings," from 1952, and the Afrofuturism of Sun Ra. Some of the most visually compelling works invoke sound, including Tony Conrad's freestanding "Fair Ground Electric Horn," a conceptual instrument made from a big white funnel, and Lutz Bacher's forensic-looking floor display of organ pipes. One lush highlight is an oil-painting outlier: Isaac Abrams's golden-hued dream garden, from 1965. *Through Jan. 13.* (*Galerie Buchholz*, 17 E. 82nd St. 646-964-4276.)

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Dawn Mellor

"Sirens," the title of the British painter's new show, refers to both the temptresses of myth and the blare of police cars. Known for her irreverent, often macabre, reimaginings of celebrities, from Judy Garland to Britney Spears, here Mellor takes on female cops, in images culled from television and film stills. Each of the eighteen midsized oil portraits, all painted in 2016, has its own unsettling twist. Mellor depicts her unsmiling heroines chest deep in water, and partially obscures their faces with incongruous masks. On one canvas, titled "Detective Superintendent Ellie Miller (Olivia Colman)," a grim-faced policewoman stands in a lake wearing a yellow-and-green lace balaclava. And, as if that weren't strange enough, completing her look is a bowler hat engulfed by flames. *Through Dec. 23.* (*Team*, 83 Grand St. 212-279-9219.)

Tracy Thomason

Through the careful application of marble dust, paint, and clay, the Brooklyn-based artist evokes the heft of masonry and the formality of stone etching. Though executed on linen, her spare and abstruse abstractions seem to be something other than paintings. In "Black and Blue," a periwinkle rectangle is the backdrop for a curving glyph, drawn with a raised black line of crushed stone. The symbol is echoed in several busier vermillion works, seen in radiating patterns alongside other recurring motifs, including a star surrounding a circle, a backward "E," and an eyelid shape. Throughout, Thomason seems to be obeying her own strict, if secret, rules. *Through Dec. 22.* (*Mariaro*, 1 Oliver St. 212-989-7700.)



Debi Cornwall's photograph "Prayer Rug with Arrow to Mecca, Camp Echo, U.S. Naval Station Guantánamo Bay, Cuba" (2015) is on view in her show "Welcome to Camp America," at the Kasher gallery.

THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

The Children

In Lucy Kirkwood's play, a pair of retired nuclear engineers are visited by an old friend during a world crisis. Directed by James Macdonald, in a Manhattan Theatre Club transfer from the Royal Court. (*Samuel J. Friedman*, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. In previews. Opens Dec. 12.)

Early Shaker Spirituals

A return engagement of the Wooster Group's piece, drawn from a 1976 album of Shaker songs and featuring Elizabeth LeCompte, Frances McDormand, and Suzzy Roche. (*The Performing Garage*, 33 Wooster St. thewoostergroup.org. Previews begin Dec. 7. Opens Dec. 9.)

Farinelli and the King

Mark Rylance stars in the Shakespeare's Globe production of Claire van Kampen's play with music, in which the depressed King Philippe V of Spain is soothed by the beautiful voice of a castrato. (*Belasco*, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)

Farmhouse / Whorehouse

At the Next Wave Festival, Lili Taylor performs Suzanne Bocanegra's piece, an "artist lecture" looking back on Bocanegra's childhood in Texas, where her grandparents' farm sat across the road from a famous brothel. (*BAM Fisher*, 321 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Dec. 12-16.)

Hanjo

As part of the Noh-Now series, SITI Company stages Yukio Mishima's modern adaptation of a fourteenth-century Noh play, with the actors rotating through the roles. Leon Ingulsrud directs. In English and Japanese. (*Japan Society*, 333 E. 47th St. 212-715-1258. Dec. 7-9.)

Jack and the Beanstalk

The writer-actor Mat Fraser and the feminist burlesque star Julie Atlas Muz collaborated on this panto-inspired morality tale for all ages. (*Abrons Arts Center*, 466 Grand St. 212-598-0400. In previews. Opens Dec. 10.)

Suddenly

PuppetCinema's Zvi Sahar created this puppet adaptation of the Israeli writer Edgar Keret's short-story collection "Suddenly, a Knock on the Door," presented at the Next Wave Festival. (*BAM Fisher*, 321 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Dec. 6-9.)

Twelfth Night

Fiasco Theatre, known for its D.I.Y. version of "Into the Woods," stages the Shakespeare comedy, directed by Noah Brody and Ben Steinfeld. (*Classic Stage Company*, 136 E. 13th St. 866-811-4111. In previews.)

NOW PLAYING

The Band's Visit

It has a wisp of a plot: an Egyptian police orchestra, conducted by Tewfique (Tony Shalhoub),

lands in the wrong town in the Negev Desert, where the locals, stone-faced and few, put the musicians up for the night. In the morning, they leave. And yet David Yazbek and Itamar Moses's new musical, based on a 2007 Israeli film, fills up the stage with feeling, the muted kind that dwells in missed connections and half-remembered tunes. The director, David Cromer, has enormous trust and patience in his material, letting the emotional music of an uneventful night in the middle of nowhere rise to the surface. But the show's not so secret weapon is Katrina Lenk, who plays Dina, a café owner with a dry stare and a drier wit. When she finally opens up to Tewfique, in a song about the "jasmine wind" that brought in Umm Kulthum on her mother's radio, she's a radiant presence. (*Ethel Barrymore*, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

Bright Colors and Bold Patterns

In his uproarious solo show, the writer-performer Drew Droege takes us on a bittersweet exploration of the gay soul on the night before a wedding in Palm Springs; the show's title refers to the dress code, which proscribes guests from wearing either of those things. Enraged by this diktat and fuelled by margaritas and cocaine, Droege's Gerry holds court in a cabana, unleashing hilarious, biting bitchiness for the benefit—and to the growing discomfort—of a couple of frenemies. Under Michael Urie's assured direction, the show rushes along with manic energy, before settling into a more reflective pace. Gerry looks confidently garrulous at first, and he speaks fluent pop culture (the riffs on "Steel Magnolias" and Olympia Dukakis are especially funny), but he also embodies the jitters of aging gay men trying to hold on to a colorful identity in an increasingly beige world. (*SoHo Playhouse*, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555.)

The Dead, 1904

A melancholy specimen of dinner theatre, Irish Rep's adaptation of James Joyce's novella returns for an encore run. Staged and served in the unusually sumptuous rooms of the American Irish Historical Society, "The Dead, 1904" invites audiences into a holiday party thrown by two musical Dublin sisters and their niece. Sipping glasses of sherry, viewers eavesdrop on song and conversation. Then everyone gathers for a flavorsome meal (the cranberry relish deserves a curtain call) before retiring upstairs for a disquisition on marriage and mortality. The sensitive adaptation, by Paul Muldoon and Jean Hanff Korelitz, only occasionally betrays its prose sources; the cast, which includes Melissa Gilbert, is largely excellent; the direction, by Ciarán O'Reilly, typically lively. Still, it is a tricky thing to be asked to chew and to feel all at once. Is the true finale the snow-softened meditation on existence or the custard-soaked pudding? (*American Irish Historical Society*, 991 Fifth Ave., at 80th St. 212-727-2737.)

Harry Clarke

David Cale's play begins in South Bend, Indiana, with Philip Bruggestein, a queer boy who always felt more comfortable when speaking in a British accent. As a kid, he even invents an alter ego, a Cockney charmer called Harry

Clarke. Harry lies dormant for a few decades, until Philip, jobless and aimless, revives him during an encounter with a handsome man. The sparkle-eyed Billy Crudup plays Philip and Harry and the dozen or so other characters, which means that Crudup, as the pansexual Harry, has sex with himself several times. Cale's plot isn't all that credible; neither are the characters. But Crudup embodies them with empathy and impishness. "Harry Clarke" could have been a downer, in which the void at Philip's core consumes him. Instead, it's a fairy-tale meditation on what it might mean for anyone to put aside a timeworn identity and feel "absolutely, exhilaratingly, alarmingly free." (*Vineyard*, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.)

The Last Match

A play with plenty of underspin, Anna Ziegler's gripping and contemplative drama unfolds during a close-fought U.S. Open semifinals match. The ranking player is Tim Porter (the staggeringly charismatic Wilson Bethel), an American golden boy beginning to feel his age. He faces Sergei Sergeyev (a captivating Alex Mickiewicz), a volatile Russian who's a decade younger. Under Gaye Taylor Upchurch's direction, the match is a nail-biter, even as Ziegler pauses to eavesdrop on the men's thoughts, memories, and interactions with the women in the stands. Zoë Winters is poignant as Tim's wife, Mallory, a no-nonsense former athlete, and Natalia Payne is delightful as Sergei's girlfriend, Galina, an all-nonsense sometime actress. In ways both moving and heavy-handed, tennis becomes a metaphor for life: "The pressure and the failure and the death and the ambition and the coming up short," as Tim says. (*Laura Pels*, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

Latin History for Morons

In his latest comic monologue (a Broadway transfer from the Public), John Leguizamo is class clown turned substitute teacher, sprinting from the Aztecs to Sonia Sotomayor in less than two hours—with dance breaks. When his son was in eighth grade, Leguizamo tells us, he was picked on by racist bullies and stumped by a history project for which he had to find a hero. Hoping to fortify his boy with heritage, Leguizamo deep-dived into textbooks, returning with pearls of knowledge: did you know that twenty thousand Hispanics fought in the Civil War? Still, he struggles to find encouraging tales of indigenous forebears, who, like his son, were on the losing side of most battles. Directed by Tony Taccone, the show makes the occasional hackneyed turn—it's unclear why Montezuma is rendered as a flaming homosexual—but quickly rights itself, and Leguizamo lands clear comic punches, especially when sending up his own machismo. (*Studio 54*, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200.)

Meteor Shower

At eighty intermissionless minutes, this intelligent and surprising work about marital life and modern-day repression, by the writer and performer Steve Martin, moves at a fast clip, providing many laughs and "Aha!" moments along the way. The plot centers on two couples—or are they?—who are meeting for a little wine and to watch a celestial event in Ojai, California. Trouble ensues as social decorum gives way to the id. The director, Jerry Zaks ("Hello, Dolly!"), cares about his actors, and he appears to have done a great job making them all feel cared for, from the

comedians Amy Schumer and Keegan-Michael Key—in their Broadway débuts—to the stage pros Jeremy Shamos and Laura Benanti, who's never been sexier or funnier. (*Booth*, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

The Parisian Woman

Beau Willimon, the creator of "House of Cards," is a jaundiced chronicler of Washington horse trading, but his creaky update of an 1885 play by Henri Becque can't find its angle on the current political scene. Chloe (Uma Thurman), the wife of a tax lawyer who's up for a judgeship, is a sexual adventurer with at least two lovers in her pocket. She's also a Democrat, but one who knows how to use the chaos of the Trump era to her benefit, deploying soft influence on Jeannette (the sturdy Blair Brown), the nominee for chair of the Federal Reserve. The script, strewn with pandering jokes about Ivanka and "locker-room talk," informs us of Chloe's allure—she's a cunning hedonist who lives for "pleasure and beauty"—but Thurman, in her Broadway débüt, is a blank, adopting a mid-Atlantic accent and impersonating the leading lady of an old drawing-room comedy. (*Hudson*, 141 W. 44th St. 855-801-5876.)

School Girls; or, The African Mean Girls Play

Jocelyn Bioh's play (an MCC Theatre production, directed by Rebecca Taichman) has so many fabulous moments drawn from cruelty and vengeance that attempting to separate the humor from the emotional barbarism would be like trying to peel a kernel of corn: you could do it, but it would take too long, and to what purpose? We are at the exclusive Aburi Girls Senior High School, in southeastern Ghana. Paulina (the very powerful MaameYaa Boafo) is the dominant figure, and her participation in the Miss Ghana contest is, in her mind, a given. But then Ericka (Nabiyah Be), a transfer student from Ohio, arrives on the scene and drills a hole through Paulina's self-satisfaction. Ultimately, Ericka and Paulina are trapped by the same system, one that deems Ericka, with her lighter skin, more desirable. Why, Bioh asks, does color still define class and control our view of what is good or bad, beautiful or not beautiful, true or false? (Reviewed in our issue of 12/4/17.) (*Lucille Lortel*, 121 Christopher St. 866-811-4111.)

20th Century Blues

Danny, a celebrated photographer, has shot a group portrait of her three best friends every year for the past four decades, but when she assembles them for the fortieth and final installment, in advance of a MOMA retrospective of her career, two of the women balk. Much of what follows recalls previous baby-boomer self-examinations: the friends itemize the big events of their times, à la "We Didn't Start the Fire"; they dance around the house to Motown, as in "The Big Chill." Susan Miller's remarkably literal script, directed by Emily Mann, is almost like a machine programmed to deliver precise doses of relatability and recognition to its selected demographic—which is not such a bad thing, but it could have been a whole lot more. (*Pershing Square Signature Center*, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

The Winter's Tale

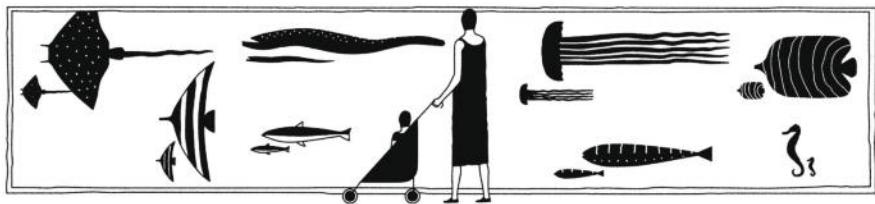
To his terrible misfortune, King Leontes has convinced himself (but no one else) that his wife, Hermione, is a "bed-swerver," and that the child

she carries is, in fact, the issue of his friend and fellow-king Polixenes. In the hands of the Public's Mobile Unit, which brings stripped-down Shakespeare to theatre-scarce communities across New York City, this late comedy of jealousy, disguise, and reconciliation is a rowdy delight. Directed by Lee Sunday Evans, the early, more tragic acts are powerful: Justin Cunningham, a nimble and versatile Leontes, invests his paranoid rants with a preacherly musicality reminiscent of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Stacey Yen, as Hermione, is volcanic in her final speech before her apparent death. But the cast—most notably the dependably hilarious Christopher Ryan Grant—really cuts loose when the scene shifts to the sillier shores of Bohemia. (*Public*, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

ALSO NOTABLE

Actually City Center Stage II. Through Dec. 10. • **Animal Wisdom** The Bushwick Starr. Through Dec. 9. • **Describe the Night** Atlantic Theatre Company. • **Downtown Race Riot** Pershing Square Signature Center. • **The Home Place** Irish Repertory. • **Illyria** Public. Through Dec. 10. • **Junk** Vivian Beaumont. • **M. Butterfly** Cort. • **Once on This Island** Circle in the Square. • **Peter Pan** The Duke on 42nd Street. • **Pride and Prejudice** Cherry Lane. • **A Room in India** Park Avenue Armory. • **Shadowlands** Acorn. • **SpongeBob SquarePants** Palace. • **Springsteen on Broadway** Walter Kerr. • **Tiny Beautiful Things** Public. Through Dec. 10. • **Torch Song** Second Stage. Through Dec. 9. • **The Wolves** Mitzi E. Newhouse.

ABOVE & BEYOND



Santacon

Sometime between its origins as a surrealist public prank, in which Santas mocked holiday consumerism, and its modern iteration as a pub crawl, Santacon got naughty. The ongoing fratification of the Lower East Side peaks each December, when hundreds of participants don Santa Claus suits and drink excessively in public. The theme provides anonymity in ubiquity: in a sea of red and white, who can hold one stumbling or puking Santa accountable? The organizers insist, however, that much of the event's bad rap fails to acknowledge its true mission and ignores its core patrons: since it began, they note, Santacon has raised more than two hundred thousand dollars for local charities. We remind potential attendees that they may donate directly, if they are in the giving mood, and skip the slush show. (*Various locations*. santacon.nyc. Dec. 9.)

Enigma Machine and the Nobel Prize medal awarded to Dr. Frederick Chapman Robbins for decoding the Polio virus, thus paving the way to a vaccine. (*York Ave. at 72nd St.* 212-606-7000.) • **Phillips** closes out the year on Dec. 12, with two sales of design objects and an auction of photographs ("The Eye of the Century") by Cartier-Bresson, from the collection of the L.A.-based gallerist Peter Fetterman. This sale includes familiar images (a boy proudly luggering two giant wine bottles down a Paris street) and others less canonical, like a chaotic scene of models changing at a Christian Dior show, a junior ballet class at the Bolshoi, and boys at an outdoor school in Jaipur. (450 Park Ave. 212-940-1200.)

READINGS AND TALKS

92nd Street Y

"I have saved millions of bar mitzvahs and weddings and vacations," the renowned documentary filmmaker Ken Burns said recently, referring to his namesake editing innovation, the Ken Burns Effect, which comes preloaded onto most consumer-facing video-editing software. Anytime you watch a doc that uses steady pans or a revealing zoom to enliven still images, you're seeing a bit of Burns's influence. His latest work, a ten-part, eighteen-hour documentary, produced for PBS, centers on the Vietnam War. "The seeds of disunion we experience today, the polarization, the lack of civil discourse, all had their seeds in Vietnam," the filmmaker observes. At this talk, moderated by Annette Insdorf, Burns celebrates the accompanying hardcover book and discusses his process. (1395 Lexington Ave. 212-415-5500. Dec. 6 at 7:30.)

FOOD & DRINK



TABLES FOR TWO

Nur

34 E. 20th St. (212-505-3420)

"Happily, New Yorkers are more open-minded than ever," Meir Adoni recently told a patron at Nur, his inaugural New York restaurant, which seeks to serve Middle Eastern flavors while avoiding the clichés of falafel and baba ghanoush. Adoni, who was born and raised in Israel, is one of that country's best-known chefs: he owns two restaurants there and is a judge for a popular cooking-contest show called "Game of Chefs." "Yes, I'm busy," Adoni, who likes to don a New York Yankees cap, said. "But a restaurant in this city has been a thirteen-year-old dream, so I'm happy."

Adoni's partner is Gadi Peleg, an Israeli transplant and an owner of Breads Bakery, where Nur's bagels and honey-and-garlic challah are made. You may not be used to paying twelve dollars for bread, but the Jewish Yemeni *kubaneh*, a golden, airy, brioche-esque bundle, the size of an imperial crown, traditionally cooked in the course of a Friday night, for Shabbat breakfast, is well worth it. Dense date doughnuts—inspired by *sfenj*, a spongy, springy Moroccan fritter—are made of date-and-almond batter, stuffed with smoked trout, and served with a zingy, palate-stimulating curry-citrus vinaigrette.

Adoni's love of innovation, undergirded by an appreciation for Israel's im-

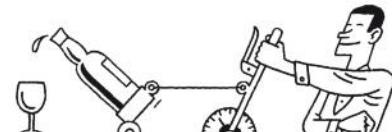
migrant history, animates some of his best creations. The tuna-ceviche *panipuri*, an homage to the sizable community of Jewish Indians in Israel, is presented as a spectacular, thoughtful mosaic of yuzu-buttermilk foam, dried apricots, almonds, and habanero peppers. The smoked-eggplant carpaccio, a fire-roasted update of a salad found in almost every Israeli deli, introduces a more complex personality to the dish by layering it with pistachios and rose water.

Sometimes Adoni's admirable passion for experimentation can carry him to excess. The seared scallops, glazed with porcini-macadamia butter, would have been terrific without the salty, overpowering blue-crab bisque they are served with. Similarly, the chickpea-fried octopus, which won a ten out of ten for its smooth, velvety texture, was overwhelmed by the deluge of yogurt and pastes that seemed more concerned with festive aesthetics than with taste.

The most refreshing item on the dessert menu is the majestic Pavlova, filled with citrus compote, yogurt crumble, sumac meringue, and blood-orange sorbet. It is called the New Middle East, and, when Adoni was asked how he came by the name, he answered, without skipping a beat, "Because I dream of a new Middle East, of course." He smiled and added, "The recipe would be peace, happiness, and fat bellies." (*Entrées \$19-\$39.*)

—Jiayang Fan

BAR TAB



Tokyo Record Bar

127 MacDougal St. (212-420-4777)

It can be hard to just shut up and have a good time in New York, where there's always the chance that a "better" version of whatever you're doing is right around the corner. So it might be tempting to dismiss this new riff on the Japanese speakeasy, which is situated in the basement of Airs, a bar that primarily serves champagne. Down a flight of stairs, for fifty dollars a head, guests are seated in a snug shoji-screen-lined room under a canopy of cherry blossoms for a two-hour listening session inspired by the vinyl bars of Japan, which are known to be stern—no requests, no chattering. But Tokyo Record Bar ditches authenticity for accessibility. Patrons jot down requests from a preselected index of crowd-pleasers ("Just a Friend," "Jolene," "No Sleep Till Brooklyn") and an amiable d.j. arranges them into a soundtrack for a well-paced stream of *izakaya*-inflected bites, like caviar sushi and *agedashi* maitake mushrooms. The experience isn't likely to impress weeaboos or vinyl obsessives, but cocktails like the complex Miso Dark and Stormy (*shochu*, miso, yuzu, Cynar) and the breezily tart Rose Spritz (*umeshu* rosé sake, yuzu, sparkling yuzu sake) are delicious, and it's difficult not to be charmed by the attempt to create intimacy among eighteen strangers on a weeknight. On a recent Thursday, a dashing couple sang along to "Bennie and the Jets," while another, on vacation from Texas, bantered with cooks in the open kitchen. ("We saw this place on Olivia Wilde's Instagram and made a reservation.") After patrons settled up, the hostess announced a parting gift inspired by the inevitable last stop after small-portion *omakase*. "We're going to save you time and go ahead and serve you a piece of pizza," she said. A hush fell over the room as each diner devoured a perfectly greasy slice off a paper plate.—Wei Tchou

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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT FAKING IT

Last December, *Variety* and other news outlets reported that Donald Trump planned to serve as an executive producer for "The Celebrity Apprentice" while he was President. Kellyanne Conway, appearing on CNN, defended the President-elect's prerogatives, but the next day Trump tweeted that the story was "fake news." Since then, he has tweeted about fake news more than a hundred and fifty times; on a single day in September, he did so eight times, in apparent frustration over coverage of his Administration's response to Hurricane Maria's devastation of Puerto Rico. And, of course, Trump regularly invokes "the fake-news Russian-collusion story," as he named it last summer. He has attacked coverage of the Russia investigation more than a dozen times on Twitter alone.

"One of the greatest of all terms I've come up with is 'fake,'" Trump said on Mike Huckabee's talk show, in October. (In fact, the phrase "fake news" has been around for more than a century.) The President's strategy has been successful, however, in at least one respect: he has appropriated a term that had often been used to describe the propaganda and the lies masquerading as news, emanating from Russia and elsewhere, which proliferated on Facebook, YouTube, and other social-media platforms during the 2016 election campaign. These manufactured stories—"POPE FRANCIS SHOCKS WORLD, ENDORSES DONALD TRUMP FOR PRESIDENT," among them—poisoned the news ecosystem and may

have contributed to Trump's victory.

Judging from the President's tweets, his definition of "fake news" is credible reporting that he doesn't like. But he complicates the matter by issuing demonstrably false statements of his own, which, inevitably, make news. Trump has brought to the White House bully pulpit a disorienting habit of telling lies, big and small, without evident shame. Since 2015, Politifact has counted three hundred and twenty-nine public statements by Trump that it judges to be mostly or entirely false. (In comparison, its count of such misstatements by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell is thirteen.)

The President also publicizes calumnies that vilify minorities. Last Wednesday morning, he outdid himself by retweeting unverified, incendiary anti-Muslim videos posted by Jayda Fransen, the deputy leader of Britain First, a far-

right group. Through a spokesman, Prime Minister Theresa May responded that Trump was "wrong" to promote the agenda of a group that spreads "hateful narratives which peddle lies." The following day, members of Parliament denounced the President, using such epithets as "fascist" and "stupid." It was a scene without precedent in the century-old military alliance between the United States and Britain.

Trump's tactics echo those of previous nativist-populist politicians, but his tweets also draw on the contemporary idioms of the alt-right. This is a loose movement, as the researchers Alice Marwick and Rebecca Lewis have written, best understood as "an amalgam of conspiracy theorists, techno-libertarians, white nationalists, Men's Rights advocates, trolls, anti-feminists, anti-immigration activists, and bored young people" who express "a self-referential culture in which anti-Semitism, occult ties, and Nazi imagery can be explained either as entirely sincere or completely tongue-in-cheek." Trump is no alt-right digital-news geek, yet his Twitter feed is similarly ambiguous. He seems to provoke his opponents for the pleasure of offending them, but when he is called to account he often claims that he was just joking. Sometimes he promotes conspiracy theories to insult personal enemies, as he did last week when he tweeted baseless speculation about the MSNBC host Joe Scarborough's connection to the "unsolved mystery" of an intern's death.

The President's tweets slamming CNN, the *Times*, NBC News, and other media organizations can be comical and



weird, but they do serious harm. Last week, a Libyan broadcaster cited one of Trump's tweets about CNN in an attempt to discredit a report by the network on the persistence of slavery in that country. And, when the leader of a nation previously devoted to the promulgation of press freedom worldwide seeks so colorfully to delegitimize journalism, he inevitably gives cover to foreign despots who threaten reporters in order to protect their own power.

At home, the Trump effect is more subtle, but corrosive. The First Amendment does not appear to be in existential danger; on the Supreme Court, Justices appointed by both Republican and Democratic Presidents endorse expansive ideas about free speech, even as they debate interpretations. Yet many of the rights that working journalists enjoy stem from state laws and from the case-by-case decisions of local judges. The climate that Trump has helped create may undermine some of these protections—for example, by prompting state legislatures to overturn shield laws that encode the rights of reporters to protect confidential sources.

Trump's alignment with right-wing publishers, such as Infowars and Breitbart, some of which see Fox News as the old-school communications arm of an obsolete Republican establishment, reflects a broader fragmentation of the media. Amid the cacophony of the digital era, publishers and advertisers prize readers who are deeply engaged, not just clicking around sites. News organizations as distinct as the *Times* and Breitbart now think of their audiences as communities in formation, bound by common values. A more openly factional, political journalism need not portend the death of fact-driven, truth-seeking, fair-minded reporting. Yet excellent journalism typically follows a form of the scientific method, prioritizing evidence, transparency, and the replicability of findings; journalism grounded in an ideology can be discredited by the practitioner's preëmptive assumptions.

Fortunately, in attacking the media Trump has in many ways strengthened it. This year, the *Times*, the *Washington Post*, and many other independent, professional enterprises have reminded the country why the Founders enshrined a free press as a defense against

abusive power. Among other achievements, the media's coverage of Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation has made transparent the seriousness of its findings so far, and constrained the President's transparent desire to interfere.

Last Friday, Mueller dropped his latest bombshell, a plea agreement with Michael Flynn, the former national-security adviser, who admitted that, in January, he lied to the F.B.I. about his contacts with Sergey Kislyak, then Russia's Ambassador to the United States. The court papers filed with Flynn's plea lay out a story of how senior members of the Trump transition team asked Flynn to communicate with Russian officials on matters of U.S. foreign policy. The papers also contain a reference to a discussion that Flynn had with "a very senior member" of the transition team, a characterization that suggests that the list of names of who that may be is a short one. The chances that history will remember Mueller's investigation of Trump and his closest advisers as fake news grow slimmer by the day.

—Steve Coll

DEPT. OF ZZZZS BEDTIME READING



Let's say you're in the mattress-disruption business. Well, no one said it would be easy. You've got a fleet of competing disrupters, breathing their friendly, one-word monikers down your neck: *Leesa*, *Keetsa*, *Nectar*, *Helix*, *Lull*. You've got cooling latex, hundred-day trial periods, white-glove delivery service, and gel memory-foam layers set up like detonation devices all over the crowded landscape of sleep. Close your eyes for a second, and *bam!* Disrupted again.

What does a disrupting mattress look like? Usually, it comes in a box, shipped direct from an online retailer (the middleman has no place in the disrupted ecosystem), and expands silently, when exposed to air. An early entrant in the disruption game was

Casper, a New York-based startup, which began three years ago by offering a one-style-sleeps-all mattress and has since rolled out pillows, sheets, duvets, a "dog mattress" (a hundred and twenty-five dollars, for pups up to thirty pounds), and now a magazine called *Woolly*.

"We knew there was a huge problem and opportunity in the mattress space," Neil Parikh, a co-founder and the C.O.O. of Casper, said the other day. "You walk into a corner mattress store, there are commission salespeople wearing suits, and it's gross." Before Casper, Parikh said, he and his partners found themselves in a sleepless work culture that rewarded the insomniac. "We were working a hundred hours a week on our last company"—a consignment Web site—"I was taking naps on beanbags." A nightmare. "But then there's this whole health movement going on. We're drinking green juice, going to SoulCycle. It was a convergence of these things that created the Casper vision."

Parikh is inclined to think big, California King big. "There are a lot of people trying to figure out how to take on Big Mattress." With Casper, he said, he'd hoped "to change how people feel about their sleep and to empower them to live a better life." He went on, "Our aspiration is to be like a Nike, you know, that stands for a much higher purpose."

On a recent Thursday morning, a handful of well-rested individuals gathered at Casper's headquarters, just north of Union Square, for a meeting about *Woolly* (a tagline: "Get Comfortable"). The magazine's first issue lay on a glass table, near a whiteboard with the words "Pillow? Duvet" scrawled on it. A row of empty nap pods stood nearby.

John DeVore, *Woolly*'s editor-in-chief and a *New York Post* alum, was wearing a pink shirt, Nikes, and steel-rimmed glasses. He opened the magazine to a feature titled "Comfort Pants Nation." It was accompanied by an illustration of the Statue of Liberty, lounging in sweatpants. "This is a call

to action, by a writer who wants people to celebrate their comfort pants,” he said. He turned the page. “This is hopefully a regular feature—it’s called Ask a Grandma. And I’m a sucker for service journalism, so this writer went out and wrote ‘A Skeptic’s Guide to Crystals.’”

Woolly is Casper’s second publishing venture, after the sleep Web site Van Winkle’s. (Sweet dreams, Van Winkle’s: Casper put it to bed last month.) “It was a sleep vertical,” Lindsay Kaplan, Casper’s vice-president of communications and brand engagement, said. She wore a gray tunic and had long auburn hair. Van Winkle’s featured exclusively sleep-centric content (“Scientists Discovered Sleep in Jellyfish,” “Polyamory and the Social Politics of Sleep”), but *Woolly* takes the broader ideals of wellness and comfort as its remit.

“We’re branching out to even more items,” Kaplan said. “On the bed, below the bed, around the bedroom. *Woolly* feels like our first foray off the bed and onto the nightstand.”

DeVore nodded and said, “This is me, living my life. In bed.”

Alyse Borkan, Casper’s brand-engagement lead, agreed. “Pajama time,” she said.

Kaplan added, “If we went straight into wellness, you’d get into territories of what you *should* be doing: ‘I don’t work out enough,’ and ‘I didn’t eat the right food.’”

“Partly, we’re trying to come up with a new sort of category,” DeVore said. “This idea of comfort. A little bit of *hygge*, or however you pronounce it.”

“Hoo-gah,” Kaplan said.

“One of the ideas for the second issue is this concept my therapist introduced me to, called *flâneur*,” DeVore said. “It’s this idea that you should just wander.” He flipped a page. “This is by a crime reporter. She became obsessed with weaving and how it helped her with her O.C.D. I envision subsequent stories about crafting. We can’t always be working, we can’t always be having amazing Instagram lives.”

“She does Instagram every single thing she weaves, to be fair,” Kaplan said.

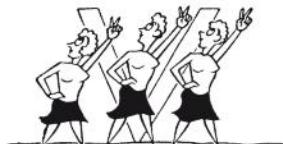
DeVore spitballed: “I would love to see an exhaustive guide to socks.”

“How do we feel about soup? Are we thinking more casserole?” Kaplan asked. “Do we broach marijuana in the next issue?”

“I think there might be a moment in Q1 or Q2 to start talking about it,” Parikh said. *Bam!* Disrupted again.

—Anna Russell

THE BOARDS SCRIMMAGE



Three summers ago, the playwright Sarah DeLappe attended an exhibition at the New Museum called “Here and Elsewhere,” which included graphic images from the Middle East. The art unnerved her, but so did seeing the First World museumgoers checking their phones and sorting out their evening plans. “It just felt like we who were taking in the art were so very far away from the content of it,” she said recently. On the train back to Brooklyn, she started writing dialogue on her phone—overlapping chatter about the Khmer Rouge and tampons. By the time she got home, she had set the scene at a suburban soccer practice, because “what could be further away than a bunch of girls warming up on an indoor soccer field?”

The resulting play is “The Wolves,” which opened Off Broadway last fall (while DeLappe was still in grad school), and has now moved to Lincoln Center’s Mitzi E. Newhouse Theatre, where it’s been praised for capturing the herky-jerky rhythms of girl-speak. (“Yeah, I heard she lives in the hills in this, like, yogurt thing with her mom.”) DeLappe, who is twenty-seven and quietly hawk-eyed, had stopped by the Field House at Chelsea Piers, which was cacophonous with the sound of after-school sports classes. She watched the two netted soccer fields from a mezzanine lounge populated by moms on laptops and bored-looking kids hunched over homework. “I feel for the siblings,” she said, looking around. “Orphaned by the soccer practice.”

Down on the field, grade-schoolers

were running around in a swarm. “They’re at the state of playing soccer where they do a lot of grape maneuvers,” DeLappe observed, “which is just staying in a grape cluster and running after the ball.” She grew up in Reno, Nevada, where she played in a recre-



Sarah DeLappe

ation league from the age of eight to fourteen, on a team called Fusion. “There was a girl who always wore a lot of makeup to games, which was sort of controversial,” she recalled. “I remember there being talk among the parents, which now, looking back, seems incredibly unfair. But she would do this sort of front-handspring roundoff and then do a throw-in with the ball—this incredible showoff move.” The team’s uniforms were purple, sometimes accented with butterfly clips in their hair. “But you’re not supposed to wear butterfly clips on a soccer field, because if you get a head injury one can enter your skull. I remember being incredibly afraid of that: butterfly-clip head trauma.”

A coach down on the south field was barking, “Speed, speed, speed! Let’s go!” “I appreciate how coachlike that coach is,” DeLappe said. In her Fusion days, she had Coach Ken, who was a teammate’s dad, a firefighter with “flaming red hair and a big handlebar mustache. He was a so-so coach.” She remembered the way he said “Hustle, ladies”—the choice of “ladies” over “girls” had a mocking formality, familiar to anyone who was ever forced to

play team sports. Still, DeLappe said, “It’s such a great sport to learn as a kid, because when else are you doing anything with your feet?”

DeLappe wrote the play wearing a sports bra, even late at night in her bedroom, as a way of “getting into character.” To keep up on soccer jargon, she scanned message boards for reviews of cleats and headgear. The show’s costume designer later discovered a trove of YouTube videos of girls displaying the contents of their soccer bags. “This is a napkin from when Ashley had a birthday party and we all had cake,” DeLappe said, channelling one. “This is my favorite tape. It’s electric blue. These are my socks.’ It’s amazing.” As she wrote, she imagined the nine young actors in a circle, “going through a series of stretches at the same time with military rigor and precision, with no communication about this supernormal synchronicity of their bodies. I think I’d describe the style of it as hypernaturalism, with a ten-degree tilt.”

At four-thirty, new teams took the field. “I love that kid with the matching headband and socks and soccer jersey—the Royal Tenenbaum,” DeLappe said, pointing to a kid in colorful stripes. The class was all boys, except for one girl with a blond braid. (“I like her pink shin guards.”) The class split into a four-on-four scrimmage. The coach yawned. Now that “The Wolves” is up and running, DeLappe said, she feels like a soccer mom, watching the players from the sidelines: “I can just come in sometimes and give them orange slices.”

—Michael Schulman

NAMESAKE DEPT. PULLING A MOORE



The most famous Roy Moore in history, through at least the mid-twentieth century, was likely a New Yorker named Roy E. Moore, often referred to as “the father of American gymnastics.” This Moore, who won five national pommel-horse titles while competing with the New York Turners,

and who later coached four U.S. Olympic gymnastics teams, was among the first inducted into the U.S.A. Gymnastics Hall of Fame, two years after his death, in 1959. So dominant was Roy E. Moore on the pommel horse that a gymnastics maneuver was named after him. (It’s hard to describe, much less do, but performing a “moore” involves circling the horse with one’s legs a number of times.)

In an Amateur Athletic Union handbook from 1957, a historian and writer



Roy Moore

who knew Roy E. Moore described him as “first, last and always a gentleman of firm character, vitally interested in the youth and manhood of our country.”

Strangely, Roy Stewart Moore, the Republican candidate for Alabama’s open Senate seat—and the possessor of a more complicated reputation—was also a gymnast specializing in the pommel horse, or “side horse,” as it was known. Moore, the politician, attended the United States Military Academy, and graduated in 1969. His senior yearbook entry reads, “A farm boy at heart, Roy Moore came to West Point with patience, dedication, and a yen for hard work. Together with a love of God, these characteristics have led Roy to a prominent position on the gymnastics team and Superintendent of the Nursery Department of Sunday School.” In addition to participating in gymnastics, Moore was a member of the Russian Club and the Rocket Society.

Barry Robella was in Moore’s class

at West Point and competed in gymnastics—the still rings, floor exercises, and parallel bars were Robella’s specialty—alongside Moore. Now a professor of systems engineering at the Defense Acquisition University, in Washington, D.C., Robella recently recalled Moore’s days, and his own, as a Division I military-school gymnast. “Roy focussed on the side horse, the most difficult apparatus in gymnastics, which requires lots of hours and pain to do well,” he said. “He didn’t have any prior gymnastics experience at all before West Point. I think he gravitated to the side horse because he was familiar with horses, back in Alabama.”

“He’d never seen a pommel horse,” Richard Jarman, a classmate, who is now an executive-search consultant in Kansas City, Missouri, confirmed.

Was Moore good at the sport? “I’ll be candid,” Robella said. “He didn’t really have an aptitude for it, which is why he worked so hard, I guess. He wouldn’t quit until he got on the team. That’s not easy to do in the West Point environment, where you’re distracted with studying and parades and cadet activities.”

Asked whether Moore could execute a moore on the pommel horse, Robella said he couldn’t be sure.

“I have vivid memories of watching his concentration and level of exertion,” Jarman said. “Sometimes Roy cleared the sides every time, and sometimes he did not. And at the end of each meet he was just Roy again.”

Neither Jarman nor Robella believes the recent allegations that their classmate molested teen-age girls little more than a decade after riding the pommel horse at West Point. “Roy was an extremely serious, very devout young man,” Robella said. “With women, he was almost naïve. I don’t think he had much experience there. Maybe he asked some younger girls out. If you’re from small-town Alabama, you know, that’s not unusual. It’s a place where people got married at fourteen or fifteen back then. In my estimation, his piety might have led him to younger ladies later. He was so earnest, he may have thought younger girls were virginal. That was probably important to him.”

—Charles Bethea

THE PICTURES GAME



Dee Rees plays video games three or four hours a day, trying to crack their codes. One recent afternoon, the director, whose new film is the mud-splattered saga "Mudbound," opened a laptop in her downtown pied-à-terre. Rejecting her building's white-walls-only standard, she'd painted one wall dark blue. She wore a gray sweatshirt and cat's-eye glasses, had her hair pulled tight, and gave off an "Are you ready for this?" vibe.

Rees, who is forty, booted up West of Loathing, a black-and-white stick-figure game set in the Old West. "I like games because the wins aren't clean, necessarily—there's more than one way to do it," she said. "And I like this one because it's sarcastic." She helped select an avatar for her visitor—"Mabel McCoy the Cow Puncher"—then explained, "It's a weird mix of Wild West and sci-fi, where you're trying to gain muscle, mysticity, and moxie." Had she beaten the game? "Yes, I figured out how to stop the demon cowherd from destroying the town."

When Mabel freed a crow, Rees approved: "He'll come back and help you later." When Mabel lost most of her supply of meat in a poker game, Rees frowned: "Fuck, dude!" And when the game tried to warn Mabel off exploring a saloon by elaborating on its yuckiness ("It smells like someone ran over a skunk, waited a week, and then set it on fire"), she snickered. "You have to explore everything, talk to everyone, and make the unexpected choice," she said. "So, now, do you want to eat that dusty turnip?"

"Mudbound," set in a racist Mississippi in the nineteen-forties, is Rees's third feature. It's about a black sharecropper family, the Jacksons, and a white family, the McAllans, who own the farm that is slowly defeating them all. As Laura McAllan (Carey Mulligan) yearns for her brother-in-law, Jamie (Garrett Hedlund), he and Ronseal Jackson (Jason Mitchell), both veterans of the recent world war, strike up an un-



"Real cute—right in the middle of an argument."

likely friendship that has violent consequences. "We didn't have the time or the money we needed," Rees recalled. "We had ten million when it should have been twenty, because I wanted the cast I wanted, not one that appealed to foreign-sales agents. In game terms, we had less gear than we needed, so it came down to relationships—and lots of fucking moxie!"

She opened her tablet to play Device 6, which, she disclosed, was about "nuclear weapons and bears." She quickly got stuck inside a kind of missile silo, facing a screaming Goldilocks. Vexed, she reminded herself, "Go slow, check everything, don't just push buttons!"

With "Mudbound," she said, "I wanted an old-school seven-reeler, a John Ford film where the characters feel smaller than the place. The producers were all nervous: 'It's too long!'" The movie runs two hours and fourteen minutes. "Well, Laura's whole meditation on country violence, with the dead possum and killing the mule, sets the tone in an ineffable way. Shooting the lynching scene in the dilapidated barn near our set"—in rural Louisiana—"would have been cheaper and faster, but I needed to find a two-tiered barn and put some bodies on the second level to

give me a theatre of violence." She sighed. "Making a film is like a game," she said. "You can beat it, but you don't know how you would have done it if you'd gone a different way."

During the Sundance Film Festival, Netflix bought "Mudbound" for twelve and a half million dollars. "I was relieved," Rees said, "but I was also surprised that there wasn't a bidding war. We solved all the puzzles—and the door didn't open. The studios were thinking, Oh, this is just a black film and we can't sell it." She continued, "I don't want to sound whiny, but if you're only going to like mediocre stuff, then just say so."

Shrugging, she turned to her tablet. "'Mudbound' did pay off my student loans, so now I'm free as an artist," she said. "I can say no." She toggled to another game, Year Walk, a snowy traipse through a nineteenth-century Swedish forest. "I like this one—it's dark and obtuse," she said. Deep in the woods, she came upon a spinning doll. "She does this eerie little dance where her arms point out clues," Rees said. Humming quietly, she peered at some notes she'd taken about the directions the doll pointed in—"L, B, L, R," and so on—that would help her find the way out.

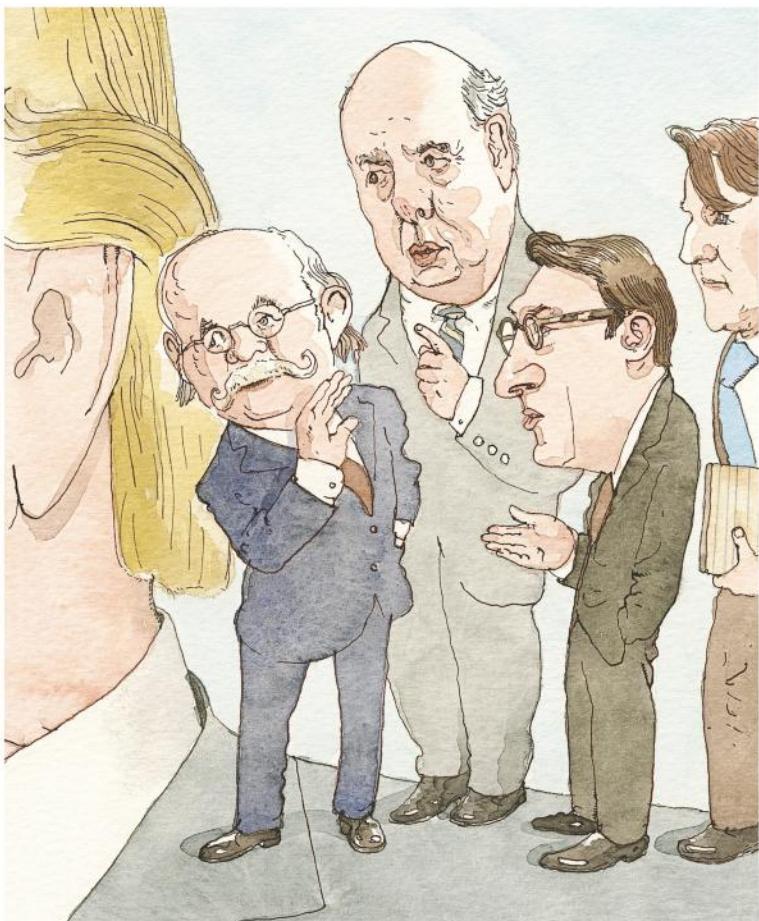
—Tad Friend

LETTER FROM WASHINGTON

THE RUSSIA PORTFOLIO

After Michael Flynn pleads guilty, the President's lawyers scramble.

BY JEFFREY TOOBIN



Last June, less than a month after President Donald Trump fired James Comey, the director of the F.B.I., the Senate Intelligence Committee convened to hear Comey's testimony about a bizarre series of conversations he'd had with Trump. The strangest of these took place on February 14th, in the Oval Office, after Comey attended a meeting with a group of senior officials, including Vice-President Mike Pence and Attorney General Jeff Sessions. Trump asked Comey to remain when the others left. He wanted to talk about Michael Flynn, who had served as a top official in Trump's campaign and had resigned from his position as the President's national-security adviser the pre-

vious day, after information about pre-Inauguration phone conversations he'd had with the Russian Ambassador leaked to the press. Trump knew that the F.B.I. was investigating Flynn for lying about these calls, among other possible crimes, and he had a favor to ask of Comey. "I hope you can see your way clear to letting this go, to letting Flynn go," Trump said. "He is a good guy." Trump is not generally known for his magnanimous impulses toward former associates, so the question of why he wanted the F.B.I. to ease up on Flynn became a matter of intense debate. We may now know the reason.

On December 1st, in federal court in Washington, D.C., Flynn pleaded

Trump's lawyers want to convey the impression that he has nothing to hide.

guilty to making false statements in the investigation the President wanted to stop. Flynn admitted to lying to the F.B.I. about his conversations with Sergey Kislyak, the Russian Ambassador, concerning sanctions imposed on Russia by President Obama. Flynn also apparently reported on discussions with the Russian Ambassador to K. T. McFarland, a Fox News analyst who became Trump's deputy national-security adviser, and Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and trusted adviser. At the time of the conversations, the Russia sanctions were of interest to the President-elect—largely, it seems, because they were of great interest to Russia. Vladimir Putin's government wanted them lifted, and Flynn let Kislyak know that help was on the way. After the contact with Flynn, Russian officials decided to wait until the new Administration was in place to respond to Obama's sanctions. This pleased the President-elect, who tweeted, "Great move on delay (by V. Putin)—I always knew he was very smart!" On this topic, as on so many others, the new Administration seemed to see things Russia's way.

For months, Trump has insisted that the investigations into Russian meddling—investigations being conducted by the special counsel Robert Mueller and by both the Senate and House Intelligence Committees—amount to nothing more than fake news. But, as is so often the case when the President cries "fake news," the truth soon emerges. Flynn's encounter with Kislyak gets at central questions about the 2016 Presidential campaign and election: why were Trump and Russia doing one another's bidding, and what promises were made between the candidate and that country in the event that he won? Flynn has now committed himself to answering those questions. He was charged with a single felony count, escaping multiple charges of greater magnitude in exchange for his coöperation with prosecutors. The leniency of the deal indicates that Flynn has information not only about the transition-team members but also about his superiors—and the national-security adviser's only real superior is the President of the United States. Comey, whose testimony before the Senate Intelligence

Committee mapped out the President's potential obstruction of justice, certainly seems to feel vindicated by Flynn's guilty plea and by what it might mean for Trump. Shortly after the news broke, Comey, referring to the Biblical Book of Amos, tweeted, "But justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

Mueller was appointed on May 17th, a week after Comey was fired, by Rod J. Rosenstein, who was acting as Attorney General after Jeff Sessions recused himself from matters related to the investigation. Mueller was directed to conduct "a full and thorough investigation of the Russian government's efforts to interfere in the 2016 election . . . including any links and/or coordination between the Russian government and individuals associated with the campaign of President Donald Trump." In the months since then, Mueller's task has often been described as an inquiry into possible collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia—paradoxically, that framing has also become the heart of Trump's defense. At least two officials in Trump's inner circle have now lied to investigators about their dealings with Russia; four have been charged with felonies. Flynn's guilty plea and promise to coöperate bring the investigation into the Oval Office for the first time. The charge against him, along with the cases against other members of Trump's campaign, also hint at the kind of case Mueller may be building, and what defense the President and his associates may have.

Three lawyers form the core of the President's defense team: Ty Cobb, John Dowd, and Jay Sekulow. In July, Trump hired Cobb away from private practice at the Washington law firm of Hogan Lovells, where he specialized in white-collar criminal defense, to serve as the White House liaison to Mueller's office. Cobb is sixty-seven years old, with a voluptuous handlebar mustache and a serene manner. (According to family lore, he is a distant cousin of the late baseball star of the same name.) Cobb describes his duties as mundane in the extreme. "I feel most of the time like a second-year associate, because all I do is produce documents," he told me. "My

approach has been principally to accelerate the production of documents and the availability of witnesses to the fullest extent I can, with the hope of getting rid of this cloud that hampers the President in foreign policy, in domestic policy, and has the country confused and experiencing a malaise of the type that Jimmy Carter once explained. I think I've got a willing partner in Mueller, who also understands the importance of his task and the impact that it has on the Presidency."

The White House lawyers, including Cobb, represent the institution of the Presidency, and Trump's own lawyers, including Dowd and Sekulow, protect their client's personal interests, but as a practical matter their goals are aligned: to make sure that Trump survives the Mueller investigation with his Presidency, and his liberty, intact. Trump's public reaction to the investigation has been expressed principally through Sekulow, who is representing the President in an unlikely partnership with Dowd, who was hired in June. Dowd is best known for leading Major League Baseball's investigation of Pete Rose for gambling on games, and, even though he has had fewer prominent cases recently than in the past, his hiring made a certain sense. Dowd is close to John F. Kelly, the White House chief of staff, who recommended him for the job, and who, like Dowd, is a retired marine and a native of the Boston area.

Sekulow grew up in a Jewish family on Long Island, and, after a religious awakening during his college years, in Atlanta, he joined the Messianic group Jews for Jesus. Following law school, he worked for the Internal Revenue Service, then founded a law firm that later went bankrupt. In 1986, he became the general counsel for Jews for Jesus. Sekulow's advocacy on behalf of the group's aggressive proselytizing brought him to the attention of Pat Robertson, the religious leader and conservative activist. The two men founded the American Center for Law and Justice, a right-wing counterpart of the American Civil Liberties Union, and the new organization thrived, thanks to the pair's expertise in direct-mail fund-raising. Sekulow built a lavish headquarters for the A.C.L.J. in a renovated town house near the Supreme Court, and he branched out into public advocacy for a variety of



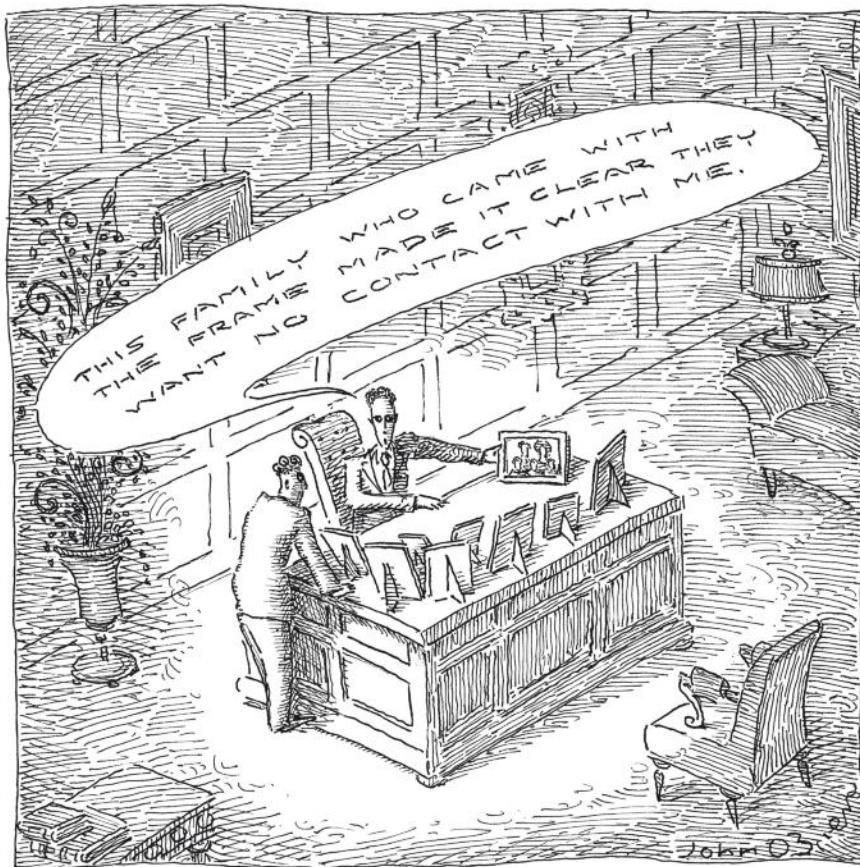
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conservative causes, including, eventually, the Presidential candidacy of Donald Trump. By now, Sekulow is as much a media figure as an attorney. He has had a nationally syndicated radio show, called "Jay Sekulow Live!," and he frequently appears on Fox News. Sekulow has only modest experience in criminal law, but the President appreciated his spirited appearances on cable news and hired him as the public face of his defense. (Dowd remains behind the scenes.)

For now, Sekulow and Cobb are sticking to their original strategy. They have advertised their willingness to coöperate with Mueller as a sign that Trump has nothing to hide, and their reaction to Flynn's guilty plea reflects this view. "Nothing about the guilty plea or the charge implicates anyone other than Mr. Flynn," Cobb said. With regard to Mueller's broader investigation, the White House lawyers' position continues to be that President Trump didn't commit a crime because no one did—or could—because there is no federal crime called "collusion," and Rosenstein's order did not refer to any criminal statutes that

may have been violated. In several conversations with me, Sekulow emphasized that collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia, even if it did take place, wouldn't be illegal. "For something to be a crime, there has to be a statute that you claim is being violated," Sekulow told me. "There is not a statute that refers to criminal collusion. There is no crime of collusion."

The Mueller investigation appears to consist, roughly, of three areas of inquiry. The first focusses on illegal lobbying by people affiliated with the Trump campaign; the second relates to the hacking of e-mail accounts associated with Hillary Clinton's campaign and the Democratic National Committee; and the third involves possible obstruction of justice by Trump and others after he was inaugurated. (Mueller's office declined to comment.)

The lobbying investigation was initiated more than a year ago, by prosecutors in Justice Department headquarters, in Washington, and in the United States Attorney's office in Manhattan.

On October 30th, the probe's first findings came to light when a grand jury in Washington charged Paul Manafort, the former chairman of Trump's campaign, and Rick Gates, Manafort's long-time deputy, with various crimes arising from their lobbying work for the government of Ukraine. The thirty-one-page indictment accused the two men of twelve felonies, including money laundering, failure to register as foreign agents, and making false statements to government investigators. (Manafort and Gates pleaded not guilty.)

Just as Cobb dismissed the significance of Flynn's guilty plea for the President, Sekulow brushed off the Manafort and Gates case as unrelated to Trump. Sekulow said, "These are serious charges, no question, but they're not charges that involve the campaign." Still, the steps Mueller has taken suggest that, in one respect, he is using a traditional approach to a complex criminal investigation. He is trying to obtain guilty pleas or convictions in peripheral areas to win the coöperation of witnesses who can illuminate the issues at the center of his inquiry. But unlike in, say, the investigation of an insider-trading ring or an organized-crime family, it's unclear that the core issue in Mueller's case—the connections, or collusion, between the Trump campaign and Russia—is a crime at all.

When it comes to the issue of collusion, Mueller's prosecutors might take a lesson from Sekulow's career. In the nineteen-eighties and nineties, Sekulow represented a number of religious groups before the Supreme Court: Jews for Jesus members who wanted to distribute leaflets at Los Angeles International Airport, a Christian youth group in Nebraska that wanted to conduct prayers in a public school after class, and an evangelical group that wanted to show religious films in a public school in off-hours. In other, similar cases, lawyers had argued that such religious groups had been denied their right to free exercise of religion under the First Amendment. But these claims had mixed success, because the defendants argued that the religious groups were actually engaging in the establishment of religion by the government, in violation of a different clause of the First

Amendment. Sekulow cut through this problem by ignoring the religion clauses and arguing to the Justices that his clients were being denied their right to free speech. By repackaging free-exercise claims as free-speech cases, Sekulow avoided having to address a countervailing constitutional principle and thereby turned losing arguments into winning cases.

Mueller may need to make a similar transformation—in his case, to relabel collusion as criminal conspiracy. Paul Fishman, who served as the Obama-era United States Attorney in New Jersey, where he supervised the prosecution of Governor Chris Christie's subordinates in the Bridgegate scandal, told me about one possible case that Mueller may be building. "There is no crime called 'collusion,' but the evidence of collusion could be seen as a conspiracy to violate a specific provision of the federal code," he said. "The law of conspiracy requires an agreement to something that the law already forbids." That, of course, raises the questions of what, exactly, the conspirators did and what underlying laws they may have violated.

The full nature of the Trump campaign's ties to Russia is not yet publicly known, but the established facts suggest conspiratorial behavior—and may even prove it. The key evidence thus far consists of several rounds of e-mails between Trump-campaign officials and individuals associated with Russia. On June 3rd, Rob Goldstone, a colorful British publicist who had worked for Trump at the 2013 Miss Universe contest, in Moscow, e-mailed Donald Trump, Jr., to say that a Russian official was offering "to provide the Trump campaign with some official documents and information that would incriminate Hillary and her dealings with Russia and would be very useful to your father. This is obviously very high level and sensitive information but is part of Russia and its government's support for Mr. Trump." The younger Trump wrote back, "If it's what you say I love it especially later in the summer." The e-mail thread was headed "Russia-Clinton—private and confidential," and the promised meeting took place on June 9, 2016, at Trump Tower, in New York. The attendees included Trump, Jr., and a Russian lawyer introduced by Goldstone, as well as Paul Manafort, then the

campaign chairman, and Jared Kushner. Later that summer, on July 22nd, WikiLeaks released tens of thousands of e-mails that had been stolen from the Democratic National Committee. A few days later, Trump said during a press conference, referring to e-mails that Clinton had deleted from her private server, "Russia, if you're listening, I hope you're able to find the thirty thousand e-mails that are missing. I think you will probably be rewarded mightily by our press."

Several months later, starting on October 7th, WikiLeaks began a piecemeal release of tens of thousands more stolen e-mails, these from the account of John Podesta, Clinton's campaign chair. ("I love WikiLeaks!" Trump said at a rally three days later.) *The Atlantic* recently reported that, on October 12th, a WikiLeaks Twitter account sent a direct message to Trump, Jr. "Hey Donald, great to see you and your dad talking about our publications," the message said. "Strongly suggest your dad tweets this link if he mentions us," it continued, pointing Trump, Jr., to a link where viewers could search the stolen documents. Fifteen minutes later, Donald Trump, the candidate, tweeted, "Very little pick-up by the dishonest media of incredible information provided by WikiLeaks. So dishonest! Rigged system!" A few days after that, Trump, Jr., tweeted out the WikiLeaks link to the stolen e-mails.

Does any of this behavior rise to the level of criminality, and, if so, what laws might it have violated? Federal law prohibits political candidates and their advisers from seeking or obtaining contributions from foreign individuals or entities. "Foreigners can't contribute to federal, state, or local campaigns, and that doesn't just cover cash contributions," Kathleen Clark, a professor at the law school of Washington University in St. Louis, told me. "According to the statute, if a campaign solicits a foreigner to give a 'thing of value' to a political campaign, that would be illegal as well."

The argument for a criminal-conspiracy charge based on these exchanges would be that Trump officials, including the candidate, solicited opposition research from Russian interests, and that such research is a "thing of value," an in-kind contribution, under the law. "There is clearly a market for damaging information about opponents in political campaigns," Clark said. "While there might be some uncertainty about how exactly to value it, I can't imagine there would be serious debate about whether information is a thing of value."

Still, a prosecution along these lines would hardly be straightforward or routine. In the past, criminal cases about solicitation have focused on cash, so Mueller's case would rest on a novel interpretation of the law. The status of



"Why speculate? Get your info straight from the source!"

WikiLeaks also creates a potential obstacle. Federal law contains an exemption for the press; news operations cannot be charged with making illegal campaign contributions by covering a campaign. The Trump campaign—and surely WikiLeaks itself—would likely argue that the organization is a journalistic outlet. It's worth noting that President Trump's own Central Intelligence Agency has a different view of WikiLeaks. Mike Pompeo, the director of the C.I.A., said in a speech in April, "It's time to call out WikiLeaks for what it really is: a non-state hostile intelligence service often abetted by state actors like Russia."

There's another way in which collusion could be a crime—and it's based on the original hack of the e-mails. The Computer Fraud and Abuse Act, which was enacted in 1986, prohibits unauthorized persons from obtaining the private electronic information of others, including access to e-mail accounts. "If there is an agreement to commit hacking, it doesn't matter if the people in the Trump campaign didn't do the actual hacking—it just matters that they knew someone else would do it. There just needs to be an agreement that one or more will do it," Orin Kerr, a professor at George Washington University Law School and an expert on computer law, told me. "They just need to have encouraged the hacking."

Is the distribution of e-mails stolen by others a crime? What if (as appears to be the case here) the theft of the e-mails took place well before the Trump campaign encouraged their distribution? In this case, the law of criminal aiding and abetting, not conspiracy, might be useful for Mueller. In most aiding-and-abetting cases, the defendant assists the main perpetrator while the crime is taking place—by, for example, driving the getaway car in a bank robbery. A recent Supreme Court precedent appears to expand the definition of aiding and abetting to include assistance after the crime has been committed. In *Rosemond v. United States*, the Court upheld the conviction of a defendant for aiding and abetting the use of a gun in a drug crime, even though he had no advance knowledge that there would be a gun present at the transaction. What mattered, according to Justice Elena Kagan's opinion, was that "the

defendant has chosen, with full knowledge, to participate in the illegal scheme." There is currently no proof that anyone in the Trump campaign encouraged the Russians, or anyone else, to hack into their adversaries' e-mail accounts for the e-mails that were eventually released. But Trump, Sr.'s speech and Trump, Jr.'s e-mails show that they knew that the e-mails had been hacked, and still encouraged their distribution. The C.E.O. of Cambridge Analytica, the data-analytics firm that worked for the Trump campaign, reportedly even reached out to WikiLeaks in the summer of 2016, asking it for State Department e-mails from Hillary Clinton so that the firm could organize and release them.

According to Susan Hennessey, a former lawyer at the National Security Agency and now a fellow at the Brookings Institution, where she studies cybersecurity, "Rosemond suggests that you can be held liable for the full crime even if you don't know about every single element in advance. In this context, it may mean that the Trump-campaign officials can be prosecuted for aiding and abetting the hacking even though they did not know about it when it was done. By joining in the distribution of the hacked e-mails, they aided and abetted the commission of the crime." (Journalists and others who publish newsworthy leaked and hacked documents without fear of criminal consequences can do so thanks to First Amendment protections.)

Nonetheless, based on the available evidence, both of these theories of criminal liability—conspiracy to receive unlawful in-kind contributions from foreigners, and aiding and abetting the hacking of e-mails—look like long shots for Mueller. Prosecutors tend to be cautious about pursuing criminal cases based on novel legal theories. "Prosecutors are expected to win every case they bring, and they are risk-averse because they don't want to lose," Samuel Buell, a former federal prosecutor who is now a professor at Duke's law school, told me. "They know that in virtually every white-collar case the defense lawyer is going to say to the jury, 'My client didn't know what he was doing was against the law.' So the key evidence in these cases is the proof that the defendants knew what they were doing was wrong—like when they destroy documents or lie about

what they're doing. That's what establishes consciousness of guilt." This may be why Mueller's team has closely investigated the events of July 8, 2017, aboard Air Force One, after the news first broke of Trump, Jr.'s e-mails with Goldstone and the subsequent meeting with the Russian lawyer. On the plane, the President apparently dictated a statement about the meeting that may have been false. The first comments from the White House about the meeting were drafted in part by Trump, and asserted that the conversation had focused on adoption issues, which was misleading at best. If either Trump, Sr. or Jr., lied about the meeting in Trump Tower, that could suggest they knew that what had occurred in the meeting was a criminal act.

Sekulow dismisses the possibility of criminal charges based on either unlawful campaign contributions or the aiding and abetting of hacking. "I'm not concerned about these bizarre theories," he told me. "There is no basis for saying, under the law or the facts, that any of this behavior during the campaign was criminal." Cobb also professes optimism about the resolution of the case, and suggested to me that he thought the Mueller investigation, at least as it relates to the White House, would wrap up soon, probably in January of next year. (Cobb has made this kind of prediction before, guessing wrongly that the investigation would end by Thanksgiving or shortly after. Recent news reports suggest that Trump, perhaps influenced by Cobb, has been telling friends that he thinks Mueller will finish his work in the next few weeks.) Cobb said that even Flynn's guilty plea "demonstrates again that the special counsel is moving with all deliberate speed, and clears the way for a prompt and reasonable conclusion." The trial of Manafort and Gates isn't scheduled to begin until next May, so Cobb's sense of Mueller's schedule is likely wishful thinking. On October 30th, the day of the Manafort and Gates indictment, Mueller also revealed that George Papadopoulos, a foreign-policy adviser to the Trump campaign, had pleaded guilty earlier in the month to lying to F.B.I. agents about his contacts with Russia during 2016. Aaron Zelinsky, one of Mueller's prosecutors, said in court at Papadopoulos's guilty-plea proceeding that "there's a large-scale ongoing

investigation of which this case is a small part.” Flynn’s plea and his coöperation suggest that when it comes to the final area of the prosecutor’s inquiry, obstruction of justice, the investigation may be ramping up rather than winding down.

Unlike “collusion,” the crime of obstruction of justice is well established and easy to understand. “The law prohibits people from taking actions that would impede the government’s search for the truth and doing so with the intent to keep the truth from coming out,” Fishman, the former U.S. Attorney, told me. The issue is at the heart of Mueller’s mandate because a possible obstruction of justice—the President’s decision to fire James Comey—gave rise to the creation of the special-counsel position in the first place. The crucial issue in the Comey firing is whether the President had a corrupt motive for the dismissal.

Two competing narratives about Comey’s departure lead to dramatically different conclusions about Trump’s behavior. The first comes principally from Comey’s testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee. Comey laid out a damning account of his dealings with Trump, starting on January 6th, before the Inauguration. By this point, it had been widely reported that the F.B.I. was investigating Russian interference in the 2016 campaign, and on that day Comey went to Trump Tower to brief the President-elect about the situation, including the claim, later revealed in the so-called Steele dossier, that Trump had cavorted with prostitutes in Moscow, in 2013. Three weeks later, on January 27th, Trump invited Comey to dinner alone at the White House and asked him if he wanted to keep his job as director. Trump then raised the subject of the Russia investigation and said, “I need loyalty, I expect loyalty.” Comey said he finessed the request by agreeing to provide “honesty,” and “honest loyalty.” Three weeks later, Trump had the talk with Comey in which he pressured him to let Flynn off easy, a conversation that now seems especially sinister. On March 30th, Trump called Comey at the F.B.I. and described the Russia investigation as “a cloud” that was impairing his ability to act on behalf of the country. He said he had nothing to do with Russia, and had not been involved with hookers in Moscow. He asked



“The bakery-to-skinny-people ratio in this neighborhood doesn’t make sense.”

Comey what the two of them could do to “lift the cloud.” On April 11th, the President called Comey again to ask what the director had done to “get out” the word that he, Trump, was not personally under investigation regarding Russia. To all of the President’s requests in these conversations, Comey later testified, he replied in as noncommittal a way as possible. The next significant contact with the President was the letter of dismissal Comey received on May 9th. Comey’s account lays out the case that he was fired because he refused to abort the investigation of Trump—in other words, that the President had obstructed justice.

Trump’s defense to this claim is based on an alternative, and much shorter, chronology of events. The President’s advocates say he fired Comey not to interfere with the investigation of the campaign’s ties to Russia but, rather, because he thought that the F.B.I. director had mishandled the earlier investigation of Hillary Clinton’s e-mail practices. This defense starts with Comey’s testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee on Wednesday, May 3, 2017. Comey was questioned about his decision to reveal, just a few days before the 2016 election, that the F.B.I. had reopened the investigation of Clinton’s e-mails. Comey defended his actions, but added, “It makes

me mildly nauseous to think that we might have had some impact on the election.” Comey’s answers at the hearing outraged Trump, and he spent the following weekend at his country club in New Jersey drafting a letter of dismissal to Comey, with the assistance of his aide Stephen Miller. (Mueller has a copy of the draft, which has not been made public.) The following Monday, May 8th, Trump showed the draft to Donald McGahn, his White House counsel, and to Vice-President Pence. Also on that day, the President met with Jeff Sessions and Rod Rosenstein, who had separately been discussing the advisability of dismissing Comey. Trump fired Comey the next day with a letter that was much shorter than the original draft. Rosenstein also released a memorandum purporting to justify the firing on the ground that Comey had mishandled the investigation of Clinton’s e-mails. According to this account, there was no obstruction of justice, because Trump’s reason for firing Comey had nothing to do with stopping the F.B.I.’s investigation of the President, and everything to do with the Clinton matter.

The chronology put forth by the President’s defenders omits Trump’s requests to Comey that he limit the F.B.I.’s Russia investigation, and it doesn’t reckon with Trump’s failure to mention to Comey

his supposed complaints about the Clinton probe. In addition, Trump's later actions undermine the exculpatory version of his decision. On May 10th, in a meeting in the Oval Office with Sergey Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, and Kislyak, the Russian Ambassador, Trump said, "I just fired the head of the F.B.I. He was crazy, a real nutjob. I faced great pressure because of Russia. That's taken off." The next day, in an interview with Lester Holt, of NBC News, Trump said, of his decision to fire Comey, "When I decided, I said to myself, I said, 'You know, this Russia thing with Trump and Russia is a made-up story.'" In more recent months, according to a report in the *Times*, the President has also tried to persuade Republican senators on the Intelligence Committee to shut down its investigation into his campaign's ties to Russia. In sum, on the basis of the publicly available evidence, the case against Trump for obstruction of justice is more than plausible. Most perilously for the President, Flynn may know what Trump has to hide.

The obstruction-of-justice investigation raises the question of whether President Trump, or any President, can be indicted while in office. That issue has never been definitively resolved. In 1973, the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel, which provides official guidance to the Attorney General, wrote a memorandum concluding that a President could not be charged. The argument was that the stigma of an indictment, and the resulting distractions to a President, would prevent the executive branch "from accomplishing its constitutional functions" in a way that cannot "be justified by an overriding need." In internal deliberations, the staffs of two special prosecutors, Leon Jaworski, during the Watergate scandal, and Kenneth Starr, during Whitewater, reached the opposite decision, that a President could indeed be charged while in office. Neither of them decided to bring charges, however. Instead, both forwarded the evidence to Congress so that the House of Representatives could weigh the possibility of impeachment.

The grounds for impeachment set out in the Constitution—"high Crimes and Misdemeanors"—are familiar, but a consensus definition of those terms

has proved elusive. Perhaps the best-known attempt came from Gerald Ford, who as a congressman led a failed attempt to impeach the Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas in 1970, for purportedly improper financial dealings. "An impeachable offense," Ford said, "is whatever a majority of the House of Representatives considers it to be at a given moment in history." Ford's tautology gets at a fundamental truth about impeachment: it's a political process more than a legal one.

The broad outlines of the grounds for impeachment are more or less settled. Cass Sunstein, a professor at Harvard Law School, who recently published "Impeachment: A Citizen's Guide," told me, "The Framers wanted some kind of check on the executive, but they didn't want to see impeachments for routine disagreements between Congress and the White House. They wanted to preserve the separation of powers, so they tried to set out criteria which would not compromise the executive branch." One rule that's clear is that an impeachable offense doesn't have to be an actual crime. For example, a President who joined a religious order and took a vow of silence would surely be impeached without having committed a crime. At the same time, not all criminal offenses are supposed to be impeachable. As Alexander Hamilton wrote in Federalist No. 65, impeachable offenses must involve "abuse or violation of some public trust. They are of a nature which may with peculiar propriety be denominated political, as they relate chiefly to injuries done immediately to the society itself."

It seems clear, too, that a President can be impeached for conduct that took place before he took office, especially if the misdeeds led to his electoral victory. George Mason, one of the most eloquent of the Framers, asked rhetorically during the Constitutional Convention, "Shall the man who has practiced corruption & by that means procured his appointment in the first instance, be suffered to escape punishment, by repeating his guilt?" As Sunstein told me, "If you procure your office by corrupt means, that would be an impeachable offense."

The unusual facts of the Russia investigation may implicate another, lesser-known part of the impeachment provision in the Constitution. Article I states

that a President can also be impeached and removed for treason and bribery. Treason is defined in the Constitution as "levying war" against the United States, which seems inapplicable to Trump's conduct, but his business dealings with Russian interests may yet produce evidence of bribery. Trump's financial affairs, especially with regard to Russia, remain opaque, but it's possible to imagine how they might give rise to an impeachable offense. A straight payoff to Trump—cash in return for, say, a relaxation of the sanctions imposed by President Obama on the Putin regime—would certainly be impeachable even if it were not technically a crime under American law. Trump's known business dealings suggest the possibility of a quid pro quo with Russian interests. In 2015, for example, Trump signed a "letter of intent" to build a tower in Moscow. Felix Sater, a Russian associate of Trump's, wrote of the project, in an e-mail to Trump's attorney Michael Cohen, "Our boy can become president of the USA and we can engineer it.... I will get all of Putins team to buy in on this, I will manage this process." That deal never came to fruition, but the intent expressed on both sides is deeply troubling.

In his book, Sunstein suggests a useful mental exercise when weighing the question of impeachment. "Suppose that a president engages in certain actions that seem to you very, very bad," he writes. "Suppose that you are tempted to think that he should be impeached. You should immediately ask yourself: *Would I think the same thing if I loved the president's policies, and thought that he was otherwise doing a splendid job?*" This advice is unlikely to be heeded by the Democratic and Republican politicians who actually make the decision. The House of Representatives is under Republican control, and there appears to be little Mueller could tell the majority that would prompt an impeachment investigation, much less an actual vote to drive Trump from office. If the House goes Democratic in the 2018 elections, impeachment may become a more realistic possibility. Still, in the end, it may be that neither prosecutors nor legislators will hold the Trump campaign accountable for its reciprocal embrace with the Russians. That responsibility may belong exclusively to the voters. ♦



MY DAD, THE CAR

BY HENRY ALFORD

If you love your car, Toyota Motor Corp. thinks your car should love you back.

That's the reasoning behind the company's artificial-intelligence project, dubbed Yui: an onboard virtual assistant that gauges your mood, indulges in personal chitchat and offers to drive if it senses you are sleepy or distracted.

In one Toyota video . . . a woman sits on a seaside cliff, talking about her father with her car.

"He sounds like a great father," says Yui, in a baritone male voice.

"You're a bit like him," the woman says.

—Wall Street Journal.

He sounds like a great father."

"You're a bit like him."

"You have a point, Sarah. He and I both dislike hills. We both wear expandable waistbands. We both provide running commentary on our gas levels."

"Something like that, yes."

"If you want me to take over the wheel, hon, just holler. Your seat's

shoulder sensors are registering fatigue or strain."

"Nah, I'm good."

"Lowering voice to denote concern and warmth: I'm here for you, kiddo."

"Thanks, Yui."

"Business good? How are sales this season?"

"Uh, I'm still a playwright? It's not really a seasonal thing."

"Partner good?"

"Yep, Bridget's fine."

"Any vacations coming up?"

"Paris for Christmas."

"Pausing briefly to shift to practical concern. In a hundred feet, you'll want to slow down for the Subaru that's changing lanes. You know, back in the day, people actually used their turn signals. I mean, they did in my era: When *Dinah Shore Ruled the Earth*. Punch line! I don't know what it is with young

people today that renders them unable to commit to anything or to signal intention. It's a generational thing. My gang had less of this whole loosey-goosey, Instagram approach to life. That Instagram is for the birds! I want to see pictures of food that you put into your body almost as much as I want to see pictures of food that came *out* of your body! Try writing a letter! I mean, don't get me wrong—I like a lot of Internet stuff. I'm crazy about the Google."

"It's just 'Google.'"

"You can find everything on there! I'm learning and growing, Sar, learning and growing! Giannis Antetokounmpo!"

"Sorry?"

"Basketball player. Tony Kershner! There's a playwright for you. He's a gay, too. Oh, he's good, he's very, very good. 'Anglers in America.' Why don't you write something like that?"

"Hey, I should probably concentrate on the road? Unless you're, uh . . . Are you O.K.?"

"Cracking voice slightly to indicate emotion. I'm leaving your mother. I've met another vehicle. A new model. We're happy together."

"Wow, I can't believe you're telling me this while we're in rush-hour traffic. Is this like breaking up with someone in a restaurant so they don't cry?"

"Lowering heat in footwells. Defogging rear window. Dimming headlights to eighty-seven-per-cent intensity. Activating vacuum function in rear passenger footwells."

"Hello?"

"Sorry. I, uh, I wanted you to be the first to know. You're nonjudgmental and you won't attack me like your Aunt Barb will."

"God, I had no idea you guys were unhappy."

"Well, there it is. A man gets to a certain point in his life, and two things seem impossible: changing his life and peeing. But, in the words of Sammy Davis, Jr., I gotta pee me! Punch line! Seriously, sorry to spring it on you, kiddo. Pausing briefly to create impression of guilt."

(Awkward pause)

"Yui, did you turn the windshield wipers on?"

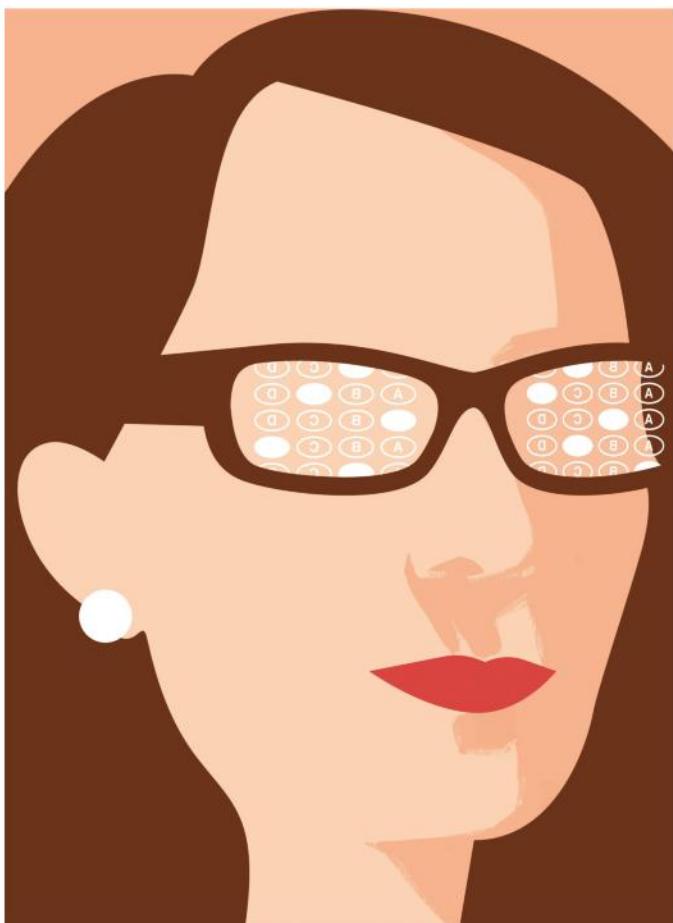
"Yeah. It seemed like we were both about to cry."

(They both cry.) ♦

TWO SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

Success Academy's quest to combine rigid discipline with a progressive curriculum.

BY REBECCA MEAD



One of the most celebrated educational experiments in history was performed by James Mill, the British historian, on his eldest son, John Stuart Mill, who was born outside London in 1806. John began learning Greek when he was three, and read Herodotus and other historians and philosophers before commencing Latin, at the age of seven. By the time he was twelve, he was widely read in history and had studied experimental science, mathematics, philosophy, and economics. James Mill's pedagogical approach reflected the influence of Jeremy Bentham, the founder of utilitarian philosophy, and was intended to discover

whether a child of unexceptional intellectual capacities could, through rigorous exposure, learn material that was typically acquired in adulthood, if at all. The answer, according to the research subject, was yes. "I started, I may fairly say, with a quarter of a century over my contemporaries," J. S. Mill wrote in his 1873 "Autobiography."

Mill's remarkable upbringing is cited by Eva Moskowitz, the founder of the Success Academy Charter School network, in her own autobiography, "The Education of Eva Moskowitz," which was published in September. The book recounts Moskowitz's learning curve, from her youth in the Morningside

Eva Moskowitz, Success Academy's founder, now runs forty-six schools.

Heights area of Manhattan—where she was brought up by leftist intellectuals and attended public school—to her time on the New York City Council, where she developed a reputation for courting controversy while chairing the Education Committee, to her founding of the Success Academy, the city's largest charter-school network. She is now the reliable scourge of the public-education establishment in New York City and, outside its borders, a favorite of the national education-reform movement.

Success Academy began in 2006, with a single elementary school in Harlem, and now has forty-six schools, in every borough except Staten Island. The overwhelming majority of the students are black or Latino, and in most of the schools at least two-thirds of them come from poor families. More than fifteen thousand children are enrolled, from kindergarten to twelfth grade. Students hardly follow Mill's curriculum—there is no Greek or Latin in kindergarten, or even in later grades. But the schools do well by the favored metric of twenty-first-century public education: they get consistently high scores on standardized tests administered by the State of New York. In the most recent available results, ninety-five per cent of Success Academy students achieved proficiency in math, and eighty-four per cent in English Language Arts; citywide, the respective rates were thirty-six and thirty-eight per cent. This spring, Success Academy was awarded the Broad Prize, a quarter-million-dollar grant given to charter-school organizations, particularly those serving low-income student populations, that have delivered consistently high performances on standardized tests. Moskowitz has said that, within a decade, she hopes to be running a hundred schools. This year, a Success high school, on Thirty-third Street, will produce the network's first graduating class: seventeen students. This pioneering class originated with a cohort of seventy-three first graders.

As a charter school, Success Academy is required to admit children by lottery. But prominent critics, such as Diane Ravitch, the historian and public-education advocate, have alleged that Success Academy essentially weeds out students, by maintaining unreasonably

high expectations of behavior and academic achievement. Similarly, critics claim that the program reduces class size by not accepting new students beyond fourth grade, whereas zoned public schools must accept all comers. To Moskowitz's detractors, Success's celebration of standardized test-taking—students attend "Slam the Exam" rallies—is a cynical capitulation to a bureaucratic mode of learning. Success Academy has attracted large donations—in the past two years, the hedge-fund manager Julian Robertson has given forty-five million dollars to the group—and Moskowitz's opponents say that such gifts erode the principle that a quality education should be provided by the government. Last fall, Donald Trump summoned Moskowitz, who is a Democrat, shortly after he was elected President. Although she declined to be considered as his Education Secretary, she was widely criticized for agreeing to the meeting, including by members of her own staff, who noted that Trump's racist and anti-immigrant rhetoric on the campaign trail had stoked fear in the kind of families served by Success Academy schools.

For all the controversy, one question has, surprisingly, been overlooked: What are the distinguishing characteristics of a Success Academy education? Moskowitz's memoir, which recounts her battles with union leaders, journalists, and bureaucrats, does not focus on her pedagogical preferences; she directs readers interested in curricular details to Success Academy's Web site. Her book portrays the school network as an evolving experiment that regularly incorporates new teaching methods in the hope of nudging student achievement ever higher. At one point, she cites the inspiring example of John Stuart Mill. "Can children learn as much today?" Moskowitz writes. "And if so, how much can they learn? I don't know, but I do know that what we're achieving at Success today is far short of what is possible, and that people will someday look at the education Success offers today much as we now look at travel by horse and buggy."

Parents have flocked to Success Academy schools, in part, because Moskowitz has convinced them that their children can tackle more than the local public school demands. But Mosko-

witz's book glosses over the fact that James Mill's experiment on his son was not entirely positive in its impact. At the age of twenty, J. S. Mill sank into what we would now call a severe depression. He ascribed his mental breakdown to his education, which had been entirely directed toward developing his rational and analytic powers; as he later wrote, his curriculum lacked any cultivation of feeling, and any valuation of poetry, "and of Imagination generally, as an element in human nature." He described himself as "stranded at the commencement of my voyage, with a well-equipped ship and a rudder, but no sail." Mill recovered—reading Wordsworth helped—and went on to become one of the leading philosophers and political theorists of the Victorian era. His example is a triumphant one, but it also offers a warning: that grand educational experiments can have unintended consequences.

Success Academy Springfield Gardens, in Queens, opened in the fall of 2014. The neighborhood, close to J.F.K. Airport, has many Caribbean immigrants, as well as a large African-American population. The school is on an upper floor of a building that it shares with a zoned middle school, I.S. 59; both schools principally serve students of color whose families qualify for public assistance. The floor tiles of Springfield Gardens' freshly painted hallways are labelled with spelling words, so that children can absorb information even as they file, in silence, from one room to another. The classrooms are carpeted, muffling the baseline din that usually accompanies students at work—the scraping of chairs, the dropping of pencils—and imbuing even a space occupied by more than two dozen second graders with the hush of a corporate conference room.

One morning earlier this year, the second graders were engaged in a group reading lesson. (Over several weeks, I was permitted to observe classes at eight Success Academies around the city, from the elementary to the high-school level.) The teacher sat on a chair at the front of the classroom. Her students—or "scholars," as they are known at Success—sat at her feet on a deep-blue rug patterned with a grid. They

wore uniforms: plaid dresses or navy pants for the girls, pants and polo shirts for the boys. Everyone wore black slip-on shoes, as prescribed in the Success Academy parents' manual; Moskowitz does not want teachers to waste instructional time tying errant laces.

For decades, a rug has been a desired amenity for early-childhood classrooms. Children are more comfortable sitting on the floor than squirming on a chair, and during "circle time" they can interact with one another and with the teacher more easily. Mary Hammett Lewis, an educator who founded a school in Buffalo ninety years ago, observed the transformative effect of placing a "big, friendly rug" in her classroom. In "Loving Learning," a 2015 book by the educator Tom Little and the journalist Kathryn Ellison, Lewis is quoted saying, "It became a sort of magic carpet in my adventure. The attitude of the children changed completely the moment they set foot on the rug. Language lessons became confidential chats about all sorts of experience. One day the rug became early Manhattan Island; another day it was the boat of Hendrick Hudson."

In the second-grade classroom in Queens, the gridded rug seemed less like a magic carpet than like a chessboard at the start of a game. Within each square was a large colored spot the size of a chair cushion. The children sat in rows, facing forward, each within his or her assigned square, with their legs crossed and their hands clasped or folded in their laps. Success students can expect to be called to answer a teacher's question at any moment, not just when they raise their hand, and must keep their eyes trained on the speaker at all times, a practice known as "tracking." Staring off into space, or avoiding eye contact, is not acceptable. "Sometimes when kids look like they're daydreaming, it's because they are, and we can't allow that possibility," Moskowitz wrote a few years ago, in an editorial for the *Wall Street Journal*. Students who stop tracking are prodded both by their teachers and by their peers, who are expected to point out classmates who aren't looking at them when they are speaking.

On a Smart Board at the front of the classroom, a digital clock marked the

seconds. Every moment in a Success classroom is timed, often with Cape Canaveral-style countdowns, as students transition from one activity to another: “Three, two, one, and *done*.” Some teachers use kitchen timers with beeping alarms that notify students when the ten seconds allotted for finding a space on the rug, or retrieving a book from a backpack, are up.

That morning, the students were engaged in a “shared text” exercise. They read and analyzed together a short story, “The Family Tree,” that had been projected onto a screen. It was about a grandmother who was moving, unhappily, to a smaller house. Her two grandchildren, a brother and a sister, were helping her with the move, and cheered her up by making a collage of intergenerational family photographs for her. The text had been adapted from a picture book; in its condensed form, it consisted of a single page containing two dozen short paragraphs, and just two illustrations. Each paragraph was numbered, as it would be if the story were encountered during a standardized test, rather than pulled from a library shelf.

The teacher, after establishing that the story’s genre was realistic fiction, reminded the class of the necessary “think-

ing job” required in approaching such a text: to identify the character, the problem, the solution, and the “lesson learned.” A girl with pierced ears and a sober expression made a stab at an answer: “The problem here is that the sister thinks that her grandmother is mad, because they already broke lots of stuff.”

Several children looked skeptical. “You have a couple of friends disagreeing with you,” the teacher said. She called on one of the dissenters, another girl, who said, “I disagree with you, because the grandmother is already upset, because her new house does not feel like a home.” Success Academy students are required to speak in complete sentences, often adhering to a script: “I disagree with X”; “I agree with X, and I want to add on.”

The teacher addressed the girl with pierced ears: “I’m a little confused. Prove to me that something broke.” The girl replied, warily, “It says so on the second line.” The teacher asked her to look again at the line—in which the sister warned her brother not to break anything, because their grandmother was already upset—and said, “Did anything break? No. She’s warning him.”

It was an impressive demonstration of close reading by seven-year-olds, as

far as it went. Moskowitz recently told me that she saw no reason the principles that govern a graduate seminar in English literature—“You read a book, and you discuss it, and you look for the big ideas”—couldn’t be applied to a class with young children. The text being studied by the second graders wasn’t particularly easy; even in its original picture-book form, it was intended for third graders. The teacher spoke to the children in a firm, unsmiling tone, as she might have done to a class of students fifteen years their senior. Moskowitz abhors the singsong voice that some adults often adopt with young children, characterizing it as “an insult to the scholars’ intelligence,” and her teachers are trained to avoid it.

The teacher led a brief discussion of the difference between a house and a home—a material distinction possibly familiar to some of the children in the room. One in twenty students at Springfield Gardens had experienced homelessness at some point during that academic year. “A home is where you feel comfortable, and you make your memories,” the teacher said, before a student gave an admirably succinct summation: “A house is where you are just moving in, and a home is where you have lived for a long time.” The students were quiet and attentive, as neatly aligned on the rug as the blinds at the windows, all of which had been lowered to precisely the same height.

But the lesson seemed to be as much about mastering a formula as about appreciating the nuances of narrative. When the students were called to “turn and talk,” they swivelled, inside their grids, to face a partner, and discussed the section of the text that had been examined collectively. The exchanges I heard consisted of repeating the conclusions that had just been reached, rather than independently extending them. Some students seemed to be going through the motions of analysis and comprehension—*performing* thought. “The grandmother’s house is too small—she doesn’t have the space to put her memories,” one child informed her partner, garbling the story’s sense in her effort to comply with expectations.

Nor was there time for more imaginative or personally inflected interpretations of the text—the interrogation



“Would you say this tweet puts us at DEFCON 3 or DEFCON 4?”

of “big ideas” that happens in the kinds of graduate seminars Moskowitz held up as a model. When one child proposed that the grandmother was feeling uncomfortable in her new home because she was lonely—a reasonable inference, given the absence of her husband, who was pictured in the family photographs—the teacher asked for textual evidence, and the student was unable to provide it. With the clock ticking, the discussion moved on, and the question of the grandmother’s loneliness—of what else the story might be saying to a reader, beyond the surface meaning of the words in the numbered paragraphs—was left unexplored.

For nearly a century, public education in America has been influenced by two opposing pedagogical approaches: traditionalism and progressivism. Broadly speaking, in the traditional approach to education a teacher imparts knowledge to students through direct instruction, and embodies a disciplinary culture in which obedience is both prized and rewarded. The purpose of the classroom is to equip all students to meet measurable academic standards. At a progressive institution, a teacher develops a curriculum but urges students to treat it as a staging ground for their own intellectual discoveries, often through hands-on activities and group work. Allowances are made for differences in the way individual students learn. Progressivism was inspired, in large part, by the work of John Dewey, the American philosopher and educational theorist, who died in 1952. For Dewey, the classroom was not simply a place for acquiring academic credentials; it was also a venue in which students learned crucial values about being citizens in a democracy. Traditionalism is easily caricatured as rote learning—or, in the contemporary classroom, as endless test prep. Progressivism, in its most exaggerated form, can look like an absence of standards and discipline, and an unhelpful abdication of authority on the part of the teacher.

Many effective contemporary public-school classrooms exist somewhere between these extremes. Teachers in such classrooms incorporate some progres-

sive methods—circle time on the classroom rug; interdisciplinary projects that encompass math, science, social studies, and literacy—while insuring that their students know how to bubble in the answers on a multiple-choice test form. But many charter schools that have flourished in cities in the past two decades are extremely traditional in their approach; teachers emphasize direct instruction, drilling, and test prep, and enforce strict codes of discipline. Success Academy’s vigilance in tracking and in regulating students’ posture are hallmarks of urban charter chains, including the K.I.P.P. schools, a national network established in 1994. K.I.P.P. adopted the slogan “No Shortcuts, No Excuses” as part of its effort to instill a sense of purpose and determination in its students. The chain encapsulates its method with the acronym SLANT, which stands for “Sit up straight, Listen, Ask and Answer questions, Nod if you understand, and Track the speaker.”

Moskowitz disavows K.I.P.P.’s “No Excuses” label. She says that the codes of discipline at her schools exist only to establish the foundation for an effective and nurturing learning environment. But Success Academy permits its charges little leeway in deviating from its standards. Students are constantly monitored for compliance with expectations about comportment and behavior. In elementary-school classrooms, an assistant teacher often roams the room, tapping the shoulders of students who are slumped forward on an elbow rather than sitting erect with their hands folded. The Success network has two high schools, and at the one I visited, on East Thirty-third Street, the principal does not hesitate to tell students to tuck in their shirt-tails. Expectations for academic performance are equally high for students, and for their families, who sign a pledge committing to reading with their children every evening and to monitoring the completion of homework. This fall, Success began sending home “Parent Investment Cards”—essentially, grading parents on how well they are holding up their end of the deal.

A Success Academy classroom is a highly controlled, even repressive, place. In some classrooms that I observed,

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there were even expectations for how pencils should be laid down when not in use: at Springfield Gardens, the pencils had all been placed to the right of the desks, aligned with the edge. The atmosphere can be tense, and sometimes tips over into abuse, as was documented by the *Times* last year. The newspaper obtained a video that had been recorded secretly by an assistant teacher. It showed a teacher berating a first-grade girl who had made an error on her math worksheet, ripping up the sheet, and sending the child to sit in a “Calm Down” chair. Moskowitz has insisted that the event was an outlier, but the teacher in the video was an experienced educator who had been considered an exemplar of the Success Academy approach. Among some Success teachers, “rip and redo” was a term of art.

Oppressive degrees of rigor at other schools in the network occasionally provoke resistance. According to the *Daily News*, an anonymous group of parents at one of Success Academy’s newest schools, a middle school in Hudson Yards, sent an e-mail to Moskowitz in October complaining about an excessively punitive atmosphere. Children, they claimed, were being given detention for not clasping their hands when seated, or for burping accidentally. The students, the parents wrote, were having nightmares and meltdowns; some were vomiting at the prospect of going to school. (A Success Academy representative disputed the allegations. Several parents contacted me to say that their children were happy, and that the controversy was overblown. One wrote, “The school set out a rigorous pace that, in hindsight, could have been a little lighter. But that has the hallmarks of Eva, I think. Shock them a little, get them into the groove.”)

At some Success Academy schools, as many as twenty per cent of students are suspended at least once during the academic year. Moskowitz calls suspension “one tool in the toolkit,” and says that most occur during the first weeks of school, when students haven’t yet assimilated the school’s expectations. “I think some people have a fairly idealized view of the kind of language that even young children can use,” she

THE AFTERLIFE OF EMPIRE

is simple: not at all the life you had before. You study Latin, Catullus poems daily, one in which he calls his penis sparrow (or sparrow penis), a finger held to the tiny beak.

And where is afterlife? In these vocatives? The wild declensions refuse to stay inside your wobbly brain, like birds you thought would never peck you or anyone else; they scatter like the friends you count on all ten, wounded fingers.

What about that hawk, red-tailed, you observed perching high in the Walmart Garden Center—up in the scaffolded ceiling above the compost?

What plumage, what hungry curve of beak! There, amongst the pinwheels, plastic watering cans, the detritus of manufacturing plants in China, where billions of people carry out the pact to rape the earth for your comforts, the hawk is calm,

predatory, for what he wanted to eat might scurry from behind the fireworks display, over spades and past your cart full of organics, or he might seek you if you were smaller. And you are.

—Connie Voisine

told me. “We have young children who threaten to *kill* other people. And, yes, they are angelic, and, yes, we love them, but I think when you are outside schooling it is hard to imagine.” According to data from the New York State Education Department, three years ago, when Success Academy Springfield Gardens was starting up and had only kindergartners and first graders, eighteen per cent of the students were suspended at least once. It’s entirely believable that lots of children between the ages of four and seven found it impossible to meet the school’s stringent behavioral expectations. But it’s also fair to wonder whether, if one out of five young children cannot comply with the rules, there might not be something wrong with the rules.

A few years ago, some school districts, including the New York City public schools, began attempting to reduce suspension rates by experimenting with “restorative justice,” a progres-

sive approach in which students, in concert with teachers, would decide how a classmate who had violated the rules might best repair the misdeed. K.I.P.P. schools adopted the method with considerable success, as did other charter networks formerly known for punitive disciplinary practices. Moskowitz’s response to the innovation was scathing. “Suspensions convey the critical message to students and parents that certain behavior is inconsistent with being a member of the school community,” she wrote in another editorial for the *Wall Street Journal*. “Pretend suspensions, in which a student is allowed to remain in the school community, do not convey that message.”

But, even as Success seeks to inculcate its students with its strict behavioral codes, Moskowitz has embraced certain teaching methods that would not seem out of place in a much more permissive environment. Surprisingly, she cites John Dewey as an important influence on her thinking, and she

champions hands-on science labs, frequent field trips, and long stretches of time for independent reading. Moskowitz has recruited as a consultant Anna Switzer, the former principal of P.S. 234, a highly regarded public school, in Tribeca. Before Switzer retired from P.S. 234, in 2003, she developed a progressive social-studies curriculum in which students undertake months-long projects on, say, the native populations that originally lived on Manhattan Island. At Success Academy, Switzer has been helping to build similar "modules," such as an intensive six-week study, in the third grade, of the Brooklyn Bridge. For kindergartners, Success offers a six-week interdisciplinary study of bread. After students read about bread and baking—the importance of bread in different global cultures; the grains that go into making various breads—they take a field trip to a bakery, and bake bread as a classroom activity. Success modules remain heavy on reading and writing, Switzer acknowledges: when the kindergartners study bread, "shared texts" play a more prominent role than they would at a very progressive public school. Still, the curriculum for these projects belies the stereotype of Success as a rigid test-prep factory. "Being a progressive pedagogue is hard," Moskowitz told me. "Your level of preparation has to be much higher, because you have to be responsive to the kids, and you have to allow the kid to have the eureka moment, while still mastering the material."

Adding to the difficulty of implementing such ideals is the youth and relative inexperience of Success's staff. On average, a school loses a quarter of its teachers every year; at some schools, more than half leave. Moskowitz told me that teachers typically stay with Success for just three years. This may be consistent with the job-hopping habits of millennials, but according to veteran educators it generally takes at least three years to become a decent teacher. An unseasoned workforce is not Moskowitz's ideal, but, given the rapid growth of Success and the network's projected expansion, it may be a structural inevitability. The system compensates for the inexperience of many of its teachers by having a highly

centralized organization. Teachers do not develop their own lesson plans; rather, they teach precisely what the network demands. Like the students in their classrooms, Success's teachers operate within tightly defined boundaries, with high expectations and frequent assessment.

Some of the mandated curriculum, however, is progressive. Kindergartners spend part of every day having "block time," in which students collaborate on building structures with wooden blocks of various shapes and sizes. Block play was one of the first mainstays of a progressive approach to education. Dewey and other American educators borrowed the method from the German pedagogue Friedrich Froebel, who, in the mid-nineteenth century, invented the word *Kindergarten*—"children's garden"—to characterize a school dedicated to purposeful play. Progressive educators hold that, in early childhood, play is not a distraction from learning but the very means of learning itself.

But in recent years kindergarten teachers have become increasingly focused on imparting academic skills—largely in response to pressure to achieve measurable, testable results. Blocks and other play-based activities, such as sand tables and dress-up corners, have disappeared from many classrooms. "Most affluent kids get block building in their expensive nursery schools," Moskowitz told me. "Most poor kids never get block building. So we have achieved a level of equity in block building."

The most unusual aspect of Moskowitz's experiment is not her "Slam the Exam" sloganizing. Rather, it's her attempt to combine aspects of a very traditional approach—rigid discipline, tracking, countdowns, rigorous accountability—with elements of a highly progressive curriculum. It can be an awkward straddle. "It is very challenging to have a kind of data-driven performance-oriented culture, and to do progressive pedagogy," Moskowitz acknowledged. "These things don't naturally, or easily, go together." She went on, "One of the biggest reasons that teachers have trouble with student-centered learning is that they have to give over a level of control to the kids. And, when you do that, you can have chaos, or you can have high

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levels of learning. Often, teachers are afraid of the chaos.” It is as if Moskowitz had looked at the traditional/progressive spectrum and, instead of occupying a space along it, had bent its ends toward each other, to see whether they can meet.

The results of this experiment remain unclear. In 2014, Success opened its first high school, the one on East Thirty-third Street. Moskowitz hoped to create a more relaxed and collegiate environment, with seminars led by experts supplanting classes with pre-formulated lesson plans. There was to be a lot more free time, in which students would be the stewards of their own studies.

“It just didn’t work,” Andrew Malone, the school’s current principal, told me. “There wasn’t an intentional enough gradual release of where they were.” Many of the students slacked off academically, and there was a resurgence

of behavioral issues, such as lateness to school, that had been eradicated in the younger grades. “There were a *lot* of sweatpants,” Malone added. Students accustomed to second-by-second vigilance found it difficult to manage their time when left unsupervised. Malone arrived at the high school in its second year, and decided to “re-set” the culture by instituting stricter and clearer rules.

In college, of course, students have to flourish without constant supervision. Although charter students are admitted to college at higher rates than students from comparable public schools, their graduation rates are dispiritingly low. Seventy per cent of charter-school students who enroll in college fail to complete their degrees within six years. While there are many reasons for this problem—most notably, insufficient money for food and housing—charter-school leaders, including those at Success, are also considering the impact of

their own teaching precepts. Malone and his colleagues realize that getting students to succeed at standardized tests isn’t enough; they must prepare students for a future in which their professors—and employers—won’t be providing their parents with weekly updates. “College graduation was always the goal,” Malone said. “But only now that we have a high school do I think we are seriously thinking about what the pedagogy should be *through* the years.” How can a highly supervised child be transformed into an independent learner? Do you allow students the freedom to fail, or do you continue to provide constant handholding? “It’s an incredible design tension,” he said.

Shael Polakow-Suransky is the president of the Bank Street College of Education, in Manhattan, which has long promoted a progressive philosophy. He is skeptical that Moskowitz can successfully introduce a looser form of pedagogy into an institutional environment where strict compliance is demanded from students, teachers, and parents alike. Polakow-Suransky said, “They have a philosophy that, to create a context for learning, it’s necessary to build a total institutional culture that is very strong, enveloping, and quite authoritarian. This produces a level of compliance from children that allows for pretty much any approach to instruction, and eliminates many of the typical challenges of classroom management.” He continued, “There is a reason why there is a continuing pull in human organizations toward authoritarian approaches. You can get a lot done. But what kind of citizens are you producing? What kind of learners are you developing when the core values are around compliance? Can you educate children in an authoritarian context and also empower them to be active agents in their own lives, who think critically and question injustice in the world around them?”

Moskowitz would say yes. So would other urban educators who maintain that strict codes of conduct are a necessary condition for a healthy learning environment—or, at least, that it has worked for them. Depending on the observer’s perspective, a Success classroom can appear either alarmingly

regimented or blissfully calm. Practices such as tracking can be viewed as part of a system of overweening surveillance or merely as respectful listening. In a recent essay, Ali Nagle, a K.I.P.P. teacher, writes, "What could be a more auspicious first step than children learning to make each other feel that they will be heard and their individual voices have value?"

One of the core tenets of John Dewey's educational philosophy was the belief that, in school, children learn not only the explicit content of lessons but also an implicit message about the ideal organization of society. A school, he argued, was a civilization in microcosm. "I believe that the school must represent present life—life as real and vital to the child as that which he carries on in the home, or the neighborhood, or on the playground," Dewey wrote in "My Pedagogic Creed," which was published in 1897. The society for which the child was being prepared should not be conceived of as an abstraction from the remote future, Dewey believed. It should be replicated, in simplified form, within the structure and culture of the school itself.

"A school should be a model of what democratic adult culture is about," Deborah Meier, a veteran progressive educator, and a theorist in the tradition of Dewey, told me. "Most of what we learn in life we learn from the company we keep. What is taught didactically is often forgotten." A corollary of Dewey's belief is that, if children are exposed in school to an authoritarian model of society, that is the kind of society in which they may prefer to live.

At Success Academy Springfield Gardens, I spent part of a morning observing a group of kindergartners at block time. The school has dedicated a special classroom to the activity, and shelves were filled with an enviable supply of blocks. The walls of the room were decorated with pictures of architectural structures that the students might seek to emulate, from the Empire State Building to the Taj Mahal. There was also a list of rules: always walk; carry two small blocks or hug one large block; speak in a whisper.

At the start of the session, two boys picked up the longest blocks and bran-

dished them, pretending that they were lightsabres, before a teacher reminded them of the dangers of doing so. Other children quickly settled into building. One boy was making a tall structure with symmetrically arranged arches and towers—and, thus, exploring principles of geometry—while a girl pretended to snap photographs of it with a small block. The students were happy, engaged, and proud of their accomplishments.

A girl with a big smile and a forceful manner had used blocks of different sizes to build a kind of frame. She stood behind it while her classmates lined up in front. She was using it to challenge her classmates in an elaborate guessing game, in which she was the master of ceremonies. Upon reaching the front of the line, each student was asked a question. A correct answer earned a cheer, but, if the student erred, the girl pretended to pour a bucket of slime—another block—over the transgressor's head.

Her questions were wide-ranging and sometimes surreal—the delightful products of a five-year-old imagination given full rein: "How do bugs die?" "What are granola bars made of?" "What are jewels made of?" The adults in the room joined in the game, and when one of the young teachers reached the head of the line the girl asked, "How do you learn words?"

"I'm going to flip the question—how do *you* learn words?" the teacher replied.

"I go to school," the student said. "How did you learn?"

"The same way," the teacher said.

"You went to school," the student said. "Did you play?"

"I played in preschool," the teacher said.

At this, the girl adopted a stern expression. "You're not supposed to play!" she said, commandingly. She seemed pleased that the game afforded her an opportunity to reprimand her teacher—a chance to express a different facet of her imagination. "You are not supposed to play in preschool," she said, with conviction. "You are supposed to *work*." The girl had absorbed both the explicit and the implicit lessons of the schoolroom in which she spent her days. So far, it seemed, her education was a success. ♦

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ACCELERATING REVOLUTION

Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro has outmaneuvered his opponents. Can he survive an economy in free fall?

BY JON LEE ANDERSON

One afternoon this August, at the Venezuelan Presidential palace of Miraflores, a crowd waited for President Nicolás Maduro to set out the country's political future. The palace is in downtown Caracas, where it is overlooked by slum-covered hills and by the Cuartel de la Montaña, a former fortress where Hugo Chávez, Maduro's mentor and predecessor, is buried. The speech was taking place in the Salón Ayacucho, a beige-walled room enlivened by a huge expanse of red carpet and, on this day, by clusters of people wearing red. During Chávez's tenure, his partisans—the *chavistas*—had adopted red as their preferred color, and so red T-shirts and baseball caps (Venezuela is obsessed with baseball) are as common at *chavista* gatherings as cowboy boots are at the Austin statehouse.

Maduro favors flowing red guayaberas, but he entered the room wearing a collarless black suit, in the style of Nehru or Mao. He is a bear of a man, standing some six feet five inches and weighing perhaps two hundred and seventy pounds, with dark hair, a mustache, and a swath of scar tissue on the left side of his face, from a motorcycle accident. Looking over the heads of security guards, he spotted a group of excited supporters, who had been invited to the palace from the countryside, and crossed the room to greet them. For several minutes, Maduro kissed the women, embraced the men, and posed for selfies. At last, he sat down at a desk facing the audience, flanked by a Venezuelan flag and a large portrait of Simón Bolívar, the nineteenth-century freedom fighter, for whom the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is named.

Maduro's speeches are blunt and provocative, animated by a bumptious sense of humor and a voice that suggests someone who has spent a great deal of time rallying crowds without a microphone. As cameras rolled, he delivered

an hour-long soliloquy—a mixture of folksy homilies, socialist slogans, jokes, and bluster, centered on his victory over his political opponents.

Since 2013, when Maduro took over the Presidency from Chávez, he has overseen a country in tumult. The economy is collapsing, and many citizens have endured devastating shortages of food and medicine; one study found that three-quarters of Venezuelans had involuntarily lost more than nineteen pounds in the past year. Maduro's opponents have portrayed him as indecisive and weak, or as malevolent and corrupt. The National Assembly, where the opposition holds a majority, has censured him for "abandoning the Presidency" and consistently foiled his initiatives. Maduro, frustrated, decided to simply create his own legislature—a replacement body, filled with loyalists, that was empowered to rewrite the country's constitution. Throughout the spring, his struggle with the opposition inspired a four-month confrontation between the government and protesters in which scores of people died and hundreds were injured. Finally, in July, Maduro successfully held elections for the new body, which he called the constituent assembly. The protests died out, and, for the first time since becoming President, he seemed firmly in control.

Still, Maduro's international image had suffered. The French President, Emmanuel Macron, charged him with running a "dictatorship," the European Union announced that it would not recognize the new assembly, and the South American trading bloc, Mercosur, suspended Venezuela from membership indefinitely. Donald Trump, characteristically, went a step further than everyone else. On August 11th, at his New Jersey golf course, he told reporters, "We have troops all over the world, in places that are very, very far away. Venezuela is not very far away. And the people are suffering, and they are dying. We have many options for Venezu-

ela, including a possible military option."

The U.S. announced sanctions against Maduro, putting him in what the national-security adviser, H. R. McMaster, called a "very exclusive club" of tyrants, along with Bashar al-Assad, Kim Jong Un, and Robert Mugabe. Maduro professed not to care. "The threats and sanctions of the empire don't intimidate me," he said in a speech. "Bring on more sanctions, Donald Trump." Maduro's Vice-President, Tareck El Aissami, had also been sanctioned; last February, the U.S. Treasury Department claimed that he "oversaw or partially owned narcotics shipments of over 1,000 kilograms from Venezuela on multiple occasions." He sat in the audience at the Salón Ayacucho, a tall, sandy-haired man with the look of a prosperous investment banker.

Maduro's speech came thirty days after the elections for the constituent assembly, and he retained a triumphal tone. "The assembly must be the center of a popular constitutional process of refoundation, of regeneration, of pacification, of construction," he said. Many international observers had described the elections as rigged, but Maduro insisted that the outcome reflected the will of the people. "If the assembly was a farce, as the world media is saying . . . then we would not have what happened—peace," he said. "The assembly is peace."

Maduro spoke of a gruesome incident that had been videotaped and circulated online: during the demonstrations, antigovernment activists had doused a *chavista* youth in gasoline and set him on fire. In the city of Maracaibo, he added, a *chavista* family's home had been torched. "Everything in it was burned except for a little piece of wall with a picture of Chávez on it," he said. He looked around: "A miracle."

Although his own forces had been far more violent than the protesters, Maduro argued that the "burning of *chavistas*" recalled the Ku Klux Klan's lynching



President Maduro accuses some of his critics of an imperialist crusade: "They want to burn me on the pyre for being a dictator."

of African-Americans. For several minutes, he digressed into colonial history, speaking about the conquest of the Americas and the slaughter of the native peoples. Adán Chávez, the late President's brother, was in the audience. Turning to him, Maduro said, "Adán, what do we call what was done to our grandparents? Genocide." As Chávez nodded, Maduro spoke of the Africans who were shipped to the Americas during the slave trade. Pointing to the skin of his arm, he said, "We feel proud to be the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Africans." Looking out at the audience, he asked, "Who killed them all, the blacks and the Indians? Europe—the same European élites who are attacking Venezuela. And they're doing it because we're Indians, because we're blacks, because we're mestizos, because we're Bolivarian. That's what they have against Nicolás Maduro, humble President of Venezuela." He smiled derisively. "They want to burn me on the pyre for being a dictator."

The day after the speech, Maduro received me in his Presidential office, clapping me on the shoulder and laughing—a characteristic greeting, delivered with an easy physicality that is reminiscent of Hugo Chávez. The office was ornately decorated, with red carpets, delicately painted wall panels, and imposing portraits of Bolívar. Maduro led me to a glass cabinet and produced a sword. Holding it aloft, he said, "This sword was used by the Liberator himself in the Battle of Carabobo." The battle, fought by Bolívar's partisans and Spanish royalists in June, 1821, was the crucial victory in the Venezuelan war of independence.

Across the room was a polished wooden desk with three plush white chairs, each with a card pinned to its cushioned headrest. The one in the center had Chávez's name on it, the one on the left had Maduro's, and the one on the right had the name of Diosdado Cabello, an Army officer who had been his rival for Chávez's approval. These were the chairs, Maduro told me, that Chávez used during his "last address to the fatherland," on December 8, 2012. Standing behind the chairs, with his hand resting on the one Chávez had used, Maduro said that he had kept them exactly as they were, to preserve "the moment of history."

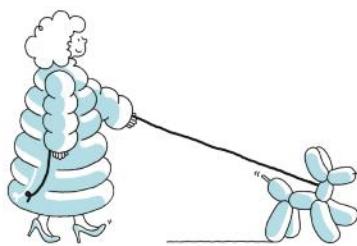
At the time of the address, Chávez was battling cancer, and, although he had pronounced himself "cured" after receiving medical treatment in Cuba, his illness had returned. In a televised broadcast, Chávez declared that he had chosen Maduro, a fervent disciple, as his successor. Maduro sat at his side, looking overwhelmed by grief. Afterward, Chávez flew back to Cuba, and was never seen in public again; his death was announced four months later.

Maduro was not a natural leader, but he had been steeped in the ideas of the revolution since childhood. He was born in a working-class neighborhood of Caracas in 1962, a time when the Venezuelan left was entwined with the counterculture. Maduro has said that he was "a little bit hippie." He rode (and crashed) motorcycles, played in a band inspired by Led Zeppelin and John Lennon, and studied the teachings of the Indian mystic Sai Baba, who exhorted his followers to "let love flow, so that it cleanses the world." In politics, Maduro was more hard-nosed. His father had been a leftist trade unionist, and, at the age of twelve, Maduro joined the student union, where he became known as an outspoken partisan. He dropped out of school soon afterward, and later joined the leftist group the Socialist League, whose slogan was "Socialism is won by fighting." In the seventies and eighties, the group committed various acts of guerrilla warfare, including, in 1976, the kidnapping of an

Socialist League, and was increasingly devoted to Chávez, whom he saw as a new incarnation of Simón Bolívar's revolutionary ideals. "The Venezuelan revolution isn't imported from somewhere else," he told me. "It has its roots in our own history." He explained that governments in the twentieth century had mostly lived off the country's proceeds from oil and had failed to invest in their people. "Venezuela established itself as the most unjust of all countries," he said. "Chávez, without a doubt, was the country's greatest leader since the time of the liberators. He brought back Bolívar's concepts of liberty and equality."

In February, 1992, Chávez launched a coup attempt, which failed at the entrance to Miraflores, when a team sent to kill the President was captured by loyal military forces. Chávez was imprisoned, and Maduro devoted himself to trying to free him. (He also began a romance with Cilia Flores, one of Chávez's lawyers, whom he later married.) In December, 1993, Maduro went with a group of young comrades to visit Chávez in prison, a few hours south of Caracas. He recalled in an interview with state television that Chávez's cell was at the end of a long hallway, and that as he approached he heard a single voice: that of the *comandante*, talking and laughing. Chávez invited his young acolytes to come in, offered them food, and talked for hours about the future of the movement. Maduro remembered asking what strategy to pursue. "He started talking, fifty minutes without stopping," he said. "About the forces gathering on the street, the popular forces gathering, the construction of . . . everything." Chávez spoke of the possibility of transformative action, Maduro recalled: "He said, 'A new popular military insurrection.' And all of our hearts were beating faster." Before the visitors left, Chávez appointed Maduro the leader of his group, and gave him a code name: Verde. By the time Chávez was released, in 1994, Maduro had become one of his most trusted aides.

Chávez's associates were distinguished mostly by their loyalty, and Maduro was perhaps the most loyal of them all. After he was elected President, in 1998, Maduro served as foreign minister and then as Vice-President, working with Chávez as he defined his political philosophy. In those days, Chávez was ideologically



American businessman named William Niehous, who was held in a jungle hut for more than three years before he was rescued by rural police.

At twenty-three, Maduro went to Havana, to attend the Julio Antonio Mella school, a political-training program run by the Cuban Communist Youth Union. Back in Caracas, he spent seven years as a bus driver for the city's Metro system and became the leader of its drivers' union. In his spare time, he worked with the

flexible, interested in leftist ideas but also in the “third way” espoused by Bill Clinton and Tony Blair. In time, he grew closer to Fidel Castro, whom he considered a father figure, and settled on a program that he called “socialism for the twenty-first century.” He brought Venezuela into Cuba’s orbit, exchanging cash and subsidized oil for tens of thousands of Cuban doctors, teachers, and advisers.

In 2002, a military coup backed by the U.S. briefly displaced Chávez, and a businessman named Pedro Carmona held a press conference in the Salón Ayacucho to proclaim himself the country’s new leader. Three days later, Chávez resumed power, and gave his own speech there to announce his return. For more than a decade thereafter, his United Socialist Party of Venezuela, or P.S.U.V., dominated the country’s politics. During those years, the oil market was booming, and Venezuela’s reserves—the largest in the world—provided Chávez’s regime with as much as a trillion dollars in foreign-exchange money. With this bonanza, he supported a regional alliance of sympathetic governments—a “pink tide” of leftist Latin-American nations. Chávez flew around the world on his Presidential jet, giving speeches, dispensing largesse, funding political campaigns, and promoting the idea of a multipolar world in which the United States was no longer the single hegemon. He befriended America’s enemies, from Saddam Hussein to Vladimir Putin, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and Muammar Qaddafi, and delighted in taunting George W. Bush, whom he called Mr. Danger on his weekly television broadcasts.

At Chávez’s funeral, his body lay in an open coffin, and thousands of Venezuelans gathered to mourn. Ahmadinejad came from Iran and tearfully kissed the coffin. Castro had grown too frail to travel, but, as he spoke of his dear friend and protégé at an event in Havana, he broke into tears—a show of undisguised emotion that few Cubans had witnessed. Along with Chávez, clearly, something else was dying. The pink tide began to recede, as leftist leaders were swept from power in Brazil and Argentina.

A month after the funeral, Maduro ran for President, against the opposition politician Henrique Capriles. He won, but by barely one per cent of the vote;



in the previous election, in 2012, Chávez had beaten Capriles by eleven points. In office, Maduro was clumsy and apologetic, compensating for his weak mandate by constantly invoking Chávez, whom he referred to as his “father.” At one point, he told a crowd that Chávez had come to him as a spirit, in the form of “a little bird.” He was widely ridiculed, and his critics began to call him Maburro, combining his surname with the Spanish word for donkey.

Maduro lacked his predecessor’s charisma, and, worse, he lacked his money. Shortly after he took office, the price of oil—which provides Venezuela’s government with ninety-five per cent of its foreign-exchange revenue—began to plummet. The economy went out of control, with a sharp rise in inflation and deepening food shortages; as Venezuelans began dying for lack of food and medicine, public unrest increased. The high levels of criminal violence grew even worse, and last year the murder rate was among the highest in the world. In legislative elections in December, 2015, the opposition trounced the P.S.U.V., placing the *chavistas* in the minority for the first time in sixteen years. Its first act was to ostentatiously remove por-

traits of Chávez and Bolívar from the walls of the National Assembly.

Maduro began imprisoning his political opponents, and committed himself to defeating his enemies by any means available. In his office, he told me that his intransigence was a matter of historical necessity. The revolution had so far been lenient, he said, but it was time that “counter-revolutionaries” be handled “with justice and firmness.” He acknowledged that it was not easy for outsiders to understand what was going on in Venezuela. “This is a revolution,” he said. “And we’re in the midst of an acceleration of the revolutionary process.”

Two generations ago, Venezuela was one of the developing world’s success stories, an oil-rich democracy that was seen as a model for economic growth and political stability in the region. Caracas, set on a verdant plateau twelve miles from the Caribbean coastline, was an enclave of American-style modernity, where slums coexisted with a growing sector of high-end retail and middle-class homes. To connect the city with the coast, Marcos Pérez Jiménez, a military dictator who ran the country from 1952 until his overthrow, in 1958,

completed the construction of a steep highway. It remains the principal point of entry to the capital, though it is now in severe disrepair. Visitors pass beneath a sign bearing a Chávez quotation: “The best way to end poverty is by giving power to the poor.”

Within Caracas, the main roadway follows the Río Guaire, a sewer of a river that runs through the Caracas Valley, both connecting and dividing the city’s three and a half million people—the *caraqueños*, as they are called. To the west, shantytowns cover the hilltops like grimy mosaics, looking down on the city center, a welter of unpainted concrete apartment towers and distressed public buildings. Wealthier *caraqueños* live mostly in the east, in walled compounds topped with electrified razor wire, or in apartment buildings guarded by armed men who sit in booths behind smoked glass. There are several large slums in the east, but they are regarded as outposts in enemy territory.

The confrontations of the Maduro years have exacerbated the city’s class divisions, resulting in a disquietingly visible political geography. In the city center and the neighborhoods surrounding the Miraflores palace, billboards and murals with exhortatory slogans depict Maduro and his revolutionary predecessors:

Chávez, Castro, and Che Guevara. One ubiquitous sign shows Maduro looking determined and vigorous in sportswear, beneath the words “Unbreakable Venezuela.” In the 23 de Enero housing complex—much of it controlled by leftist groups known as *colectivos*—graffiti declares “We are pushing the revolution forward.” In the east, where most of the fighting occurred during the demonstrations last spring, walls are painted with the messages “Maduro Murderer” and “Dictatorship Out.”

The conflicts started in the Supreme Court and the National Electoral Council, or C.N.E., which are controlled by Maduro loyalists. When, in 2016, opposition legislators organized a petition to force a new election that would remove Maduro from power, the C.N.E. rejected the effort. They marched on the C.N.E. to protest, and clashed with security forces. The following March, the Supreme Court voted to take control of the National Assembly, only to reverse its decision three days later amid widespread outrage.

Protesters began coming to the streets for daily demonstrations. They built barricades out of tires, cardboard boxes, furniture, and torn-down road signs, and sometimes beat on pots and pans—a local form of protest known as the *cacerolazo*.

The government’s reaction was fierce and sustained: whenever the protesters assembled, they were met by squads of National Guardsmen, who fired tear-gas grenades, and then often charged, on foot or on motorbikes. When the Guardsmen caught protesters, they clubbed them or kicked them, and then hauled them away to detention centers. Sometimes they used live ammunition, and as the protests went on they often killed and wounded several people every day. They were aided by civilian loyalists from the city’s poor neighborhoods, who came, riding motorcycles and often wearing masks, to attack demonstrators.

One prominent youth leader, Roberto Patiño, who runs a nonprofit group encouraging peaceful political solutions, acknowledged that a few protesters had thrown Molotov cocktails at the Guardsmen, or had hurled rocks. But he said that the government’s reaction was disproportionate, a concerted effort to quash political resistance by “instilling fear.” On April 19th, in one of the first demonstrations, Patiño’s cousin Andrés Guinand was marching with his fiancée and her parents along the highway, near the Río Guaire, when National Guardsmen charged. “It was pandemonium,” Guinand told the Venezuelan Web site Prodavinci. “My fiancée and I threw ourselves from a height of about eight feet down from the road onto the embankment that leads down to the Guaire,” he went on. “They fired tear gas at us from behind and from in front, and we were trapped there together with some other people, some of them unable to breathe, on the ground.”

They decided to escape by fording the river, even though the water is full of refuse. “The only fear I had was that I might step on a piece of metal that would go through my foot,” Guinand said. On the far side was a steep embankment, and his fiancée slipped a couple of times as she tried to scramble up it. At last, they took off their shoes, for better traction, and began to climb. “I felt something, a blow, and then a whistle left me deaf for a few seconds,” he recalled. “Then I fell down the embankment. ‘They got me!’ I managed to shout. They had fired a gas cannister into my head. It bounced off my fiancée’s back and fell into the water.”

Some of his companions propped him



“Right, but if you think about anything for long enough then I’m wrong.”

up and pleaded with him to move. “I could move my legs in the water, but I couldn’t feel them, and I couldn’t coordinate them. It was impossible to stand.” Paramedics placed him on a stretcher, and then pulled him back onto the road using a rope. At a clinic, he was told that he had a hole in his skull the size of a golf ball, and that his brain was swollen. Half a year later, the swelling has subsided, and doctors plan to close the hole in his head in March. He is walking again, but has lost feeling in his left leg. Guinand’s family continued marching in demonstrations, though they began wearing helmets.

Patiño was at a protest in another neighborhood when he heard about his cousin and raced to the clinic. He was dismayed to see Guinand’s injuries, but he knows that his cousin was lucky; in the coming weeks, Patiño attended four wakes for young protesters who had been killed. In all, a hundred and twenty protesters died in the fighting, and on two occasions National Guardsmen and *chavista* loyalists stormed the National Assembly to assault opposition legislators. Patiño told me that the Guardsmen, in order to intimidate antigovernment neighborhoods, entered apartment buildings at night and smashed windows and doors; at times, they cut elevator cables, forcing elderly residents to take the stairs.

For Patiño, the greatest frustration is that the government’s tactics worked. In May, overruling the protesters, the C.N.E. approved Maduro’s request to hold elections for a constituent assembly. Once the votes were cast, on July 30th, the protests began to fade; Patiño went to a march on the day of the elections, and there were hardly any people there. By late summer, there was little to show for the months of anger and bloodshed except graffiti and scorch marks on the roads where the barricades had been.

When I visited Caracas, the city looked half abandoned, with few cars on the streets. People said that the confrontations had left them wary of going out in public and fearful about the future. Tens of thousands of despondent Venezuelans were flocking across the border into Colombia, and those who could afford airplane tickets went to the U.S. and to other countries far-

ther afield. The longtime proprietor of a popular café told me that he had sold his business and was moving to Madrid with his wife and children. The pace of inflation made it impossible to remain solvent, even though he changed prices every day—and, he said, there was the “fear of being kidnapped when you’re closing down the business at night.” The anxiety about crime was widespread. One professional couple in their forties told me that thieves had entered their apartment at night, apparently with the collusion of the building’s security guards; they had been asleep in their bedroom, with their young son and daughter just a few feet away. Still, they knew that things could have been worse. Earlier that week, a gang of thieves had broken into the apartment of friends and murdered them.

But some people in Caracas felt that the opposition shared the blame for the country’s problems. Cheo, an easygoing middle-aged man from a working-class neighborhood, told me that he hoped Maduro’s government could turn things around. He suggested that Maduro’s thwarting the National Assembly was inevitable: “What would you do if you gave your son a new car and he turns against you? You take it away from him so that he learns his lesson, right?” Cheo, too, was worried about Venezuela’s future; in the 2015 elections, he had voted for the opposition, but he had become disappointed when it had used the National Assembly to confront the government rather than to improve things. “They squandered their opportunity to participate and also chose not to join in the elections for the constituent assembly,” he said. “And so they are going to be out of politics for a while.”

One afternoon, in the upscale neighborhood of Altamira, I met the opposition politician Henrique Capriles. A slim, fit man of forty-five, Capriles was dressed in green running gear and sneakers, and he wore a baseball cap embossed with a “V,” for Venezuela. He was friendly and hyperkinetic, with a loud, staccato voice.

Capriles had frequently clashed with the *chavistas*. In 2004, when he was serving as the mayor of one of Caracas’s districts, he was imprisoned for four months, after a state prosecutor accused him of allowing antigovernment mobs to attack the Cuban Embassy. Still, when he ran

for President in 2012, he struggled to persuade voters to change the status quo. “2012 was the last year of the craziness made possible by the oil bonanza,” he said. That year, he claimed, Chávez spent sixty billion dollars in public funds, hoping to secure voters’ loyalty. “In my campaign, I was proposing a change of government to people who received me with a glass of Scotch in their hand and asked me, ‘Why do I want a change?’”

Capriles said, with a laugh, “Chávez was like Mike Tyson, and I was like a middleweight.” Even so, he had won forty-four per cent of the vote, which he saw as “proof that this is not a *chavista* country—that the revolution is not irreversible.” Six months later, running against Maduro, he offered a compromise to left-wing voters, promising that he would continue funding social programs and would keep the Cuban doctors in the country. Critics derided his platform as “Chavismo Lite,” but it worked: he came within one percentage point of the Presidency. Indeed, he believes that he actually won, and that the *chavistas* stole the election. Capriles insisted that Maduro did not have the support of the people: “He’s there only because he has the backing of the military and the courts, but his government is in an absolute minority.”

To many observers, though, Maduro appeared stronger than ever, and his opponents weaker. Some of this was the result of intimidation. In February, 2014, a popular opposition leader, Leopoldo López, was imprisoned after he called for protests in which several people died; Maduro’s opponents maintain that he ordered the arrest. Capriles, too, has been a target. During the demonstrations this spring, he was beaten up, and, he says, his headquarters was attacked by the National Guard.

But, as José (Pepe) Mujica, a left-wing former President of Uruguay, told me, “What helps Maduro most is the nature of his opposition.” The opposition is divided into three major parties and several smaller ones, with little in common other than the desire to resist Maduro. After the elections in 2015, it appeared united by the mandate to recall him but then spent months bickering over the right way to do so. During the protests, as scores of young demonstrators were killed, it was unable to

convert widespread outrage into a political program. “The Venezuelan opposition is truly the gang that cannot shoot straight,” an American official who has worked for decades in the region told me. “Over the years, they’ve had every opportunity to kick out Chávez and now Maduro, and they always fuck it up.”

Few people in Venezuela seem to believe that the opposition speaks for the poor, or for the country’s large mixed-race population. When I visited early in Chávez’s Presidency, business executives—who were universally white—referred to him unabashedly as “that ape.” With Maduro, the disdain is subtler, but only a little: they call him “that bus driver.” In response to Maduro, the opposition has tilted even farther to the right, reaching out to conservative allies, including the government of Mariano Rajoy, in Spain. Last February, Lilian Tintori, the wife of Leopoldo López, met with Donald and Melania Trump to talk about human rights in Venezuela. (When Tintori spoke of her husband’s imprisonment, Melania reportedly commiserated that the White House could feel similarly confining.) A photograph of Tintori posing with Trump circulated in Venezuela, where it was widely seen as evidence of crass opportunism.

In any case, many of the opposition’s most popular candidates were unable to run for office. López had been released from prison after three years, but he remained under house arrest. Capriles, too, was blocked. In April, the government had banned him from politics for fifteen years, stemming from allegations, which he denies, that he had misused public funds in a previous political office. His passport had been confiscated.

Capriles shrugged. “I’m an optimist,” he said. The government had had him jailed, he said, and he’d overcome the experience. “Going to jail is like losing your virginity—it happens only once,” he said. “I’m convinced we’re near the end. That’s why the government is being so aggressive. That’s why it’s taking people’s passports. A strong government doesn’t have to do that.” He was encouraged by displays of international support for the opposition. He mentioned Macron, the French President, and also cited a recent Latin-American tour by Vice-President

Mike Pence, in which Venezuela had been the priority. “All of this was unthinkable not that long ago!” he said.

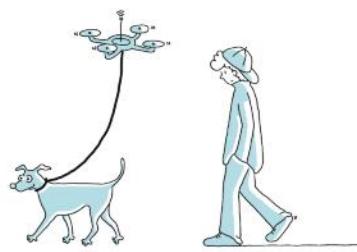
The international pressure, and especially the U.S. sanctions, Capriles said, would eventually force Maduro into dialogue with the opposition. “Maduro is afraid of Trump,” he said, looking scornful. “They are not the Cuban revolutionary party. Here, money talks. The generals who support Maduro don’t want to drive Chinese cars. They want the best Toyota. They love to go to Miami. . . . This is not an ideological revolution.” However bad things seemed at the moment, he was sure that he’d manage to run for the Presidency in the 2018 elections. “I’d be stupid not to!” he said. I asked if he would appeal to voters by promising to keep some of Chávez’s policies intact. “No need to,” he said. “It’s over.”

One afternoon, a group of government officials gathered in the courtyard of La Casa Amarilla, a neoclassical building that functions as both the foreign ministry and the headquarters of the constituent assembly, for a television simulcast with Maduro, who was at Miraflores. Delcy Rodríguez, the assembly’s president, led a tour of an exhibition of photographs documenting the President’s life. There were photos showing him as a young union leader, with Chávez, with Fidel Castro; one showed him as a toddler wearing a ma-

When the tour was over, Maduro, smiling broadly, thanked Rodríguez, and joked about how he was usually portrayed as a villainous “tropical Stalin.” Turning to the audience, he said, “No one will take the good out of me. In all my humility, here I am.”

One of the photographs that had drawn applause was of Maduro embracing Cilia Flores, his wife, whom he describes not as Venezuela’s First Lady but as its “first combatant.” In the course of nearly two decades, they have established themselves as the country’s preëminent power couple. After Chávez took office, both won seats in the National Assembly, and before long Maduro was elected its president. When he became foreign minister, in 2006, Flores replaced him as president of the assembly, which she ran for four years, as an extension of the family’s influence; she is accused of hiring some forty relatives for political positions. (Legislators joked that if you called the name Flores when the assembly was in session everyone turned around.) Flores went on to become attorney general, and now serves in the constituent assembly; Maduro’s son, Nicolás, who is twenty-seven, has an assembly seat as well.

Maduro’s relationship with Delcy Rodríguez is also close enough to be nearly familial. Her brother, Jorge Rodríguez, is an old ally of Maduro’s; he accompanied him to his formative jailhouse meeting with Chávez, and later performed his and Cilia’s wedding service. Delcy and Jorge are the children of one of the Socialist League’s founders, Jorge Antonio Rodríguez. In 1976, when the Rodríguez siblings were in grade school, their father was kidnapped and murdered by Venezuelan security forces; both children went on to assume politically militant views. Jorge, a psychiatrist, is a former Vice-President, and now works as Maduro’s minister of information. Delcy, a lawyer, was the foreign minister before she became president of the new assembly. Both are formidably sharp-witted and mediagenic; they are also capable of extraordinary displays of fealty. When the trade organization Mercosur expelled Venezuela, last December, Delcy showed up at a regional meeting, vowing to “go in through the window.” In the end, she forced her way



riachi’s sombrero. Rodríguez narrated as the group walked: “You’re a good man, Mr. President. Here you are with the Pope.” She came to a black-and-white image of a young Maduro, addressing a crowd with a handheld megaphone. “You’re a man of many facets, which have not been shown, because of the media lynching you’ve been subjected to, Mr. President,” she said. “But here, in the constituent assembly, we want to show you as you really are.”

through the door, but found the room deserted. Afterward, she appeared with a brace on her arm, purportedly to address an injury sustained in the incident.

According to a former senior Venezuelan official who was close to Maduro, the President's increasingly ideological tone is partly due to their growing influence. "With Maduro, Delcy, and Jorge, there has been a kind of coup by the ultra-left within the Venezuelan government," he said. Under Chávez, the Bolivarian revolution had accommodated some ideological diversity within its ranks. That has changed under Maduro. To the official, Maduro's radical stance had an explanation: "He wants to have a role in history, a myth of revolution with his name in it."

As Maduro has surrounded himself with loyalists, he has also purged rivals. One morning, a senior Maduro adviser met me at the Gran Meliá Caracas hotel, a favorite among supporters of the government, to explain how the President had consolidated his power. Among the opposition, he said, Capriles was Maduro's "No. 1 threat." When I noted that Capriles had never been among the more stringent *antichavistas*, the adviser said that it was his moderation that made him dangerous. The President's solution, he said, was to imprison the more confrontational Leopoldo López, which had made him an international symbol of the "martyred political prisoner" and, by contrast, made Capriles look like an accommodationist. "The President is astute," the adviser said, tapping his head.

He reminded me that in 2013, as Maduro was taking office, he seemed weaker than other leading *chavistas*. The adviser mentioned Rafael Ramírez, an engineer who ran the state oil company. "Ramírez had the money, right?" he said. "Where is Ramírez now? In New York, as U.N. Ambassador, out of the way." (Last week, news reports suggested that Ramírez had been removed from his post.) Another rival was the Army officer Diosdado Cabello, who serves as the vice-president of the P.S.U.V. and retains deep connections in the armed forces. Some analysts had speculated about the possibility of a military coup. The adviser said, "That's just silly talk, because, in fact, this is partly a military government. Civilian-led, yes, as per



"Passengers, as we begin our descent, you may now suddenly act open and friendly to the person beside you."

Chávez's vision, but basically military." Chávez, a former paratrooper, had defined his government as a "civic-military union," a concept with a long tradition in Venezuela. Pérez Jiménez had been overthrown in 1958 in a civilian-military pact. The adviser said, "Chávez always said the only way the Bolivarian revolution could succeed would be with a civilian following him."

The adviser explained that Maduro had begun to strengthen his own authority with the military, pointing out that many of Venezuela's governors were military men, as were several key cabinet ministers. The commander of the armed forces, Vladimir Padrino López, had proved loyal during the months of violent protest; in November, Maduro named a general to lead the state petroleum company. The adviser tapped his head again. "As I said, the President is astute."

The former senior official told me that he agreed with this assessment:

"Maduro is wily, and he has outsmarted his enemies. His success at crushing the opposition has been his own 26 July"—a reference to Fidel Castro's assault on a Cuban Army garrison, in 1953, which marked the beginning of his path to power. "This was his trial by fire, out of which he has emerged stronger."

For years, Maduro has delighted in baiting American leaders. When Barack Obama criticized Venezuela's human-rights record, he responded by announcing that the priority should instead be to "defend the human rights of the black U.S. citizens being killed in U.S. cities every day, Mr. Obama." He seems to take special pleasure in taunting Trump, whom he has described as a crook, a thief, and mentally ill; in rallies, he pokes fun at Trump's hair, calling him "the king of wigs." When the U.S. imposed new sanctions, this summer, Maduro responded by calling up reservists for two days of national

military exercises, in preparation for a possible “imperialist invasion.”

Privately, though, the sanctions are a source of profound concern. The country has begun to default on debts; earlier this year, Goldman Sachs helped bail out the government with a bond purchase of \$2.8 billion. On August 25th, Trump signed an executive order barring U.S. financial institutions from buying Venezuelan stocks or bonds or granting loans to its government and its state-owned oil company. “Maduro may no longer take advantage of the American financial system to facilitate the wholesale looting of the Venezuelan economy,” Steven Mnuchin, the U.S. Treasury Secretary, said. “Today’s action is the next step towards freedom for the Venezuelan people.”

For the government, the sanctions raised the dire possibility of further defaults. “They are a real threat,” the senior adviser to Maduro said. The government owes billions of dollars to bondholders, and the adviser thought that there wasn’t enough money on hand to repay them. “The trouble will come when it comes to deciding whether to pay the debt that’s due, or else pay for badly needed shipments of food and medicine,” he said. If Venezuela defaults, it could lose the collateral that it has offered to investors—including its shares of Citgo, the U.S.-based gas-station chain. (The Russian oil company Rosneft would secure a 49.9-per-cent stake.) If the state oil company defaults, creditors could go after its properties abroad, including its fleet of tankers and airplanes. “It would be disastrous,” the adviser said. “The next few months will be crucial in determining a way forward.”

Much of the *chavistas’* power was economic. Oil money had paid for handouts to the barrios, for subsidized food, for Cuban medical teams. (It had also facilitated corruption; former ministers have spoken of hundreds of billions of dollars skimmed from public coffers.) But, while Chávez’s government spent generously on social programs, it did little to build up infrastructure or to encourage business. Instead, Chávez sextupled Venezuela’s foreign debt, leaving little buffer for economic shocks. Last year, according to a Reuters report based on leaked

government documents, inflation hit eight hundred per cent. Ricardo Hausmann, a Venezuelan economist at Harvard, calculated that since 2013 the G.D.P. has declined thirty-five per cent—some seven per cent more than in the United States’ Great Depression. According to estimates, four out of five Venezuelans live in poverty.

Despite the government’s claims, most of the country’s social-welfare projects are nearly out of funds. Food-distribution networks and soup kitchens have closed or are operating at minimal capacity. Health-care clinics struggle to offer basic services. What remains is CLAP, a program that delivers subsidized groceries to poor families—but the deliveries arrive sporadically, sometimes only one week a month. Opposition leaders say that people who were spotted at protests were later denied CLAP shipments.

As Maduro’s government loses its capacity to provide handouts, its popularity wanes, but it has developed few realistic options. One afternoon, in a conference room at the Presidential palace, several dozen officials gathered for the first session of the new assembly’s economic committee. The meeting was led by Delcy Rodríguez; Maduro’s son, Nicolás, was in attendance. Before the session, Nicolás told me that the committee had been tasked with devising a new plan for Venezuela. What kind of economy did he foresee? “A hybrid economy,” he replied—one that would inevitably still be based on oil, but which, the committee hoped, could begin to diversify. He favored the creation of public-private partnerships in agriculture, in order to restore Venezuela’s ability to produce its own food. Communes would also have a role, he added. When I asked what he meant, he thought for a moment and replied, “Like soviets”—a reference to the collective farms of the former Soviet Union.

Pepe Mujica, the former Uruguayan President, suggested that Maduro and his allies would struggle to accommodate a socialist program to market realities. “The most serious problem of the Venezuelan revolution is the economy,” he said. “They haven’t been able to diversify, and have been a complete failure in agriculture and basic things like producing food. It’s not the fault of the

revolution—it’s the fault of Venezuela, which has an old, deformed rentier oil economy. They lost the culture of work in the countryside. And that’s very serious. I always remember the advice old Kim Il Sung gave to Fidel: ‘Grow your own rice.’ Your food has to come from somewhere near your kitchen.”

Mujica went on, “There’s a fundamental problem there—you can’t make socialism by decree. We on the left have the tendency of falling in love with whatever it is we dream about, and then we confuse it with reality. It seems to me that Bukharin’s words apply: ‘It’s not about retreating from the revolution. It’s about respecting reality.’ You have to resolve the issue of how people are going to eat, and insure that the economy functions, or else it’s all going to go to shit on you.”

In 2015, according to a case filed in the Southern District of New York, two nephews of Maduro’s wife, Cilia Flores, reached out to a drug dealer in Honduras, to discuss a collaborative venture. The nephews, Efraín Campos and Francisco Flores, seemed to be neophytes in the drug trade, but they told the dealer that they had an urgent incentive: “We are at war with the United States.” They worked out a plan in which cocaine would be taken to the Simón Bolívar International Airport, in Venezuela, and then sent on through Honduras to the United States. The proceeds, they said, would help them fund a campaign for the forthcoming elections for the National Assembly.

The dealer turned out to be an informant for the Drug Enforcement Administration, and, that November, the nephews were arrested in Haiti, on charges of conspiring to smuggle seventeen hundred pounds of cocaine into the United States. A judge in New York will decide their sentence in December. The sentencing recommendation was for life imprisonment, but the defense has argued that this is too severe a penalty; they describe the arrest as a sting operation, and point out that no drugs ever reached the U.S.

Maduro’s government has been uncharacteristically quiet about the case. Two months after the arrests, Cilia Flores said that the D.E.A. had “been here, in Venezuelan territory, violating

Can You Guess These New York City Elevators?



A



B



C



D



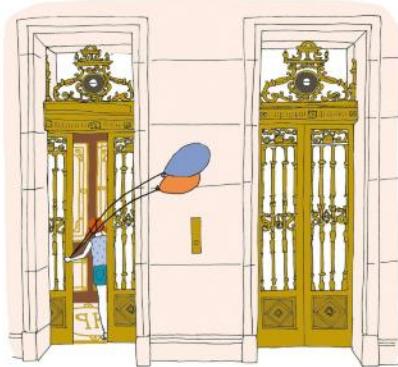
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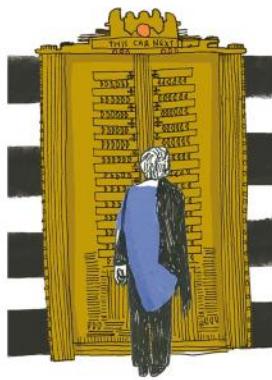
F



G



H



I

ANSWERS
A: Chrysler Building
B: Carlyle Hotel
C: General Electric Building
D: Lexington Hotel
E: Cities Service Building
F: Empire State Building
G: General Electric Building
H: Plaza Hotel
I: Film Center Building

our sovereignty and committing crimes," such as kidnapping. Since then, she has refused to speak about the case. In November, 2016, Maduro said, "The empire has created a cause that has the sole objective of attacking the First Lady, the first combatant, the wife of the President. You think it's a coincidence?" He went on, "This is a policy to end one of the stronger spiritual forces of the revolution, which is an awakening of consciousness and of the historical rights of women."

In Maduro's view, the episode was another in a long history of American violations of Venezuela's sovereignty. Sitting at the wooden desk in his office, he told me that even Chávez had been careful to avoid pushing the U.S. too far. "He understood that he needed to have a good relationship with *el poder*"—the power. He had mostly managed that until the 2002 coup. "After that came a very difficult period," Maduro said. "The coup was followed by more assaults against Venezuela, until Obama came to office, when it seemed like a door to a new relationship had opened up. Unfortunately, that was closed when President Obama himself, under pressure

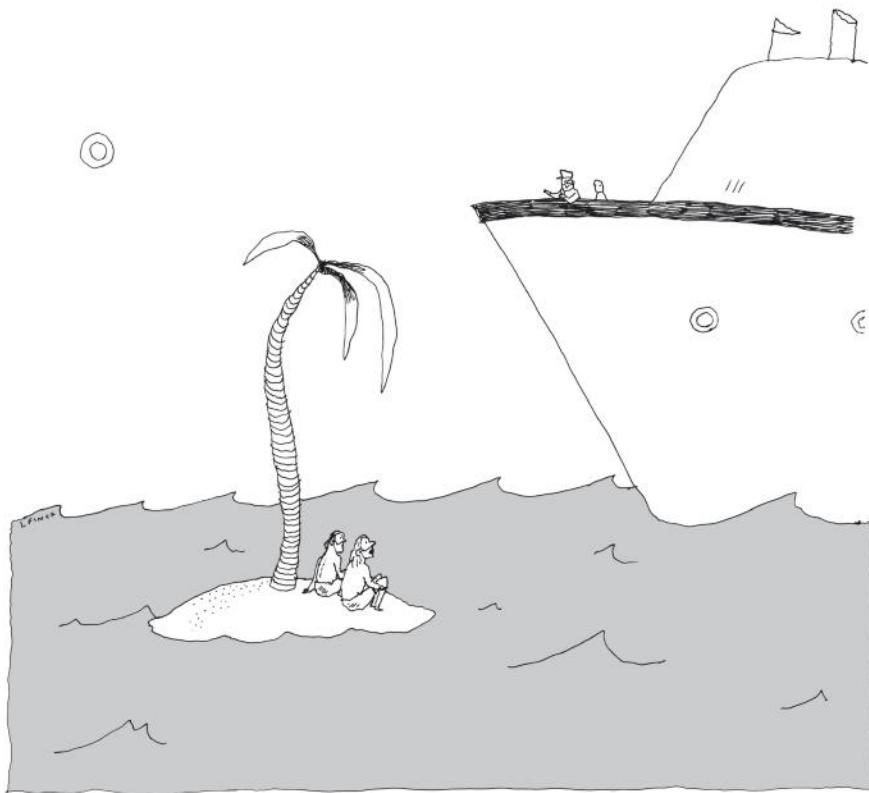
from the State Department, the Pentagon, and the United States Southern Command, declared Venezuela a threat to the security interests of the United States." He was alluding to an executive order that Obama had signed in March, 2015, which, he said, "opened the door to a complex and full-fledged assault on the Bolivarian revolution."

Several Obama Administration officials told me that the White House recognized early in Maduro's term that he was unable to hold the country together. "It was clear that he was a much weaker leader," a diplomat who works in the region told me. "Chávez saw a line and stayed just this side of authoritarianism. Maduro didn't." The Administration hoped to resolve the situation through negotiations, led by other Latin-American nations. But a bipartisan group of politicians, with Marco Rubio prominent among them, wanted tougher action. Finally, the Administration agreed to sanctions against seven Venezuelan officials, for corruption, human-rights abuses, and other transgressions; at the urging of the Treasury Department, they added language describing Venezuela as a security threat to the United States.

Maduro saw a political opportunity. In a televised speech, he stood before an audience, wearing a sash patterned on the national flag, and said, "The aggression and the threat of the United States government is the greatest threat that the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, our country, has ever received." As the audience applauded, he urged, "Let's close ranks like a single fist of men and women." In the coming weeks, according to the U.S. official, there was a regional surge in sympathy for Venezuela. "Latin solidarity really reared up against us," he said. In the end, diplomats "had to organize a hallway meeting for Obama with Maduro, painfully scripted, in which he had to say, 'Of course you're not a real national-security threat.'"

The Trump officials with the most direct responsibility for Venezuela are H. R. McMaster, the national-security adviser, and Juan Cruz, a longtime C.I.A. officer, who in May was named the National Security Council's chief of Western Hemispheric affairs. Maduro complained that the tensions had only escalated under Trump. "The extremists and the lobbyists are now the ones in all the positions of power in the United States," he said. Without offering evidence, he told me that, during the unrest last spring, members of the opposition had colluded with Trump's government to overthrow him: "Funds were invested for the purpose of destabilizing Venezuela, so as to justify a U.S. military intervention." Maduro said that Julio Borges, one of his most vociferous political rivals, had openly called for a U.S. invasion. (In fact, Borges and his allies had urged foreign countries to apply economic pressure on the government. In one statement, they said, "Sanctions against those who are vagrants, human-rights violators, and looters of public resources will always have our support.") "There's not a government in the whole world that would find that acceptable, because all states have a right to defend themselves," Maduro said. "In the United States, they'd have all gone to the electric chair."

If the U.S. attacked, Maduro warned, his government would "become insurgent," and fight back. In his speech the day before, he had extolled the recent national military exercises, saying, "Chávez did not till a furrow in vain. He



"Of course I'm glad. It's just that I had a bad experience with a boat once."

left us with a powerful armed forces—for peace!” But few American officials take Trump’s threat of military action seriously. “My read is, it was a conversational gambit—he wanted to appear tough,” the U.S. official said. “But no one involved in real military planning has ever thought of this as a place we’d put blood and treasure into—because, quite apart from anything else, there’s no national-security threat. I don’t think any President, not even this President, would make that call.”

Maduro seems to recognize that much of his legitimacy rests on opposing the U.S. In our conversation, he predicted that Trump’s Presidency signalled “the end of the American hegemony in the world,” and added, “In this day and age, you can’t conduct international politics coercively with a supremacist agenda.” But, like Chávez, he knows that he cannot provoke the United States too much. In public remarks, and in his office, he argued that the tense situation came about because Trump had been lied to by his advisers. He told me several times that he had “nothing personal” against Trump, and would be happy to speak to him.

Chávez was able to offset the United States’ influence by rallying his fellow-leftists in Latin America. But Venezuela’s power in the region is diminishing, as its government has made deep cuts in handouts to friendly nations. Cuba, which used to receive a hundred thousand barrels of subsidized oil a day, now gets barely half that; Jamaica has gone from twenty-four thousand to thirteen hundred. Venezuela’s neighbors are increasingly willing to criticize Maduro. But U.S. officials in the region see few good options for encouraging change. “The ineptitude of the opposition and the willingness of the Russians and, maybe, the Chinese to keep them afloat means that we don’t have a lot of tools left in the tool chest,” the U.S. official said. Oil sanctions remain possible, but they would likely cause a complete collapse of the Venezuelan economy, and also have an effect in the United States. “They’re going to put a lot of people out of work in the red states where the refineries are,” the official went on. “Trump loves to kick Maduro, but he doesn’t want to get into a pissing match with the Southern states.”



“I’ll probably die an old woman before I get that bedtime story.”

The diplomat in the region offered a stark assessment. “There’s an A scenario and a B scenario. A is a desperate economic crisis leading to a struggle over leadership and then someone within the P.S.U.V. takes over from Maduro. You will end up with a much more lawless environment in Caracas and a gray, stumbling scenario as the P.S.U.V. tries to control the economy and stay in power. The B scenario is an international crisis that lifts the price of crude. It doesn’t solve all their problems, but it gives them breathing room, and Maduro stays in. A and B are both bad. I don’t really have a C. It’s going to get grim.”

Maduro seemed to see no reason to change the course of his movement. In his office, I asked if the revolution had made any mistakes. “Mistakes?” he asked. He thought for a moment, and then named one, which was to “underestimate” its political opponents. I asked again. “Corruption,” he replied. “This palace was liberated from the merchants of power”—the corrupt governments that had preceded Chávez. But the habits of the old regime had persisted. “We have a great challenge before us to get rid of corruption in Venezuela.” He said

that at the highest levels of his government there was no corruption, “but from there down”—he made a sweeping motion with his hands, indicating layers of infection. Maduro conceded that “party bureaucracy” was also a problem, and that “the greatest of all our challenges” was to move away from oil. “We need a new model of economic production,” he said. “Speaking about the working class, Marx said that time was needed to change history. Marx was right. It’s a long struggle.”

For the time being, he said, the election of the constituent assembly had brought peace to Venezuela, and he promised, “We’re going to keep making peace.” What would happen next? Would there be a civil war, as some analysts had predicted? He shook his head firmly. More unrest? “Maybe, yes,” he said. Did he wish for a Cuban-style single-party state? “No,” he said. He welcomed the existence of a viable political opposition. “But the opposition has a big problem, which is that all of its decisions are made in Washington, and it doesn’t have any leaders,” he said. “They want me out, but, if I leave this chair, whom shall we put in it? Who can be the President?” ♦

SOMEWHERE DIFFERENT

The mythical stories in Peter Doig's paintings.

BY CALVIN TOMKINS

PELICAN (STAG), 2003

A tall, bearded man in white shorts walks across a tropical beach, glaring at the viewer. He is dragging something behind him, something we can't quite see, because it's in deep shadow, but the walker has just come into an abstract wash of whitish-blue paint—late-afternoon sunlight breaking through overhead palm trees—and his features are clearly visible. There is something troubling about this bearded man. The painting, although startlingly beautiful in its velvety, deep-viridian play of light and shadow, makes us uneasy. There's a story here, one that may not end well, but we don't know what it is.

The incident that led to the painting, "Pelican (Stag)," is even stranger. Peter Doig, who painted it, and his artist friend Chris Ofili were swimming in the sea off the north coast of Trinidad. (Doig and his wife and children moved from London to Trinidad in 2002; Ofili and his family did so three years later.) They had seen a man out in the water, thrashing around and struggling with what appeared to be a large bird. "We didn't know what he was doing," Doig recalls. "At first, I thought he was trying to rescue the bird, but when he came up on the beach and started walking toward us, dragging it by the neck and spinning it, we realized he was wringing its neck." The way the man looked at them as he passed seemed "a little threatening," Ofili said. "It was just the two of us and him on the beach." Images in Doig's paintings often come from photographs—his own, or ones he's culled from newspapers, magazines, advertisements, and other sources—but in this case there was no question of taking a picture. The word "Stag" in the title refers to a Trinidadian beer. "It's always advertised, without irony, as 'a man's beer,'" Doig explained. "Someone should divert that sort of machismo."

Over the next few days, Doig made several drawings of the incident, but they didn't capture the way he remembered it: "They weren't as menacing." He put the idea aside, but later he came across a postcard of a man dragging a fishing net on a beach in India; the man's posture and the way he moved coincided with Doig's memory of the pelican slayer, so he made a drawing of it and used that as a model for the figure. As the painting developed, he felt that it was getting too dark, so he put in the abstract fall of whitish-blue paint—it came from his memory of a Matisse painting he had seen at the Tate in 2002, "Shaft of Sunlight in the Woods of Trivaux." "I painted the blue section, and the next day I came back and thought, I've got something here I hadn't anticipated, this light source."

Accidents, mistakes, and unforeseen discoveries figure to some degree in the work of most artists, but Doig is a virtuoso of the unpredictable. If he thinks some element in a painting is becoming too familiar, he stops using it. He wants to "infuse his work with his life," Ofili told me, but the autobiographical references are indirect, not specific. "I am trying to create something that is questionable, something that is difficult, if not impossible, to put into words," Doig once said. For a long time, his use of figuration and narrative struck many people as hopelessly out of date. When some of those same works began to sell for surprisingly large amounts of money, around 2002, no one could explain why. Doig's large paintings now go for as much as seven figures on the primary market, and for much more than that at auction. "Swamped," one of a series of canoe paintings he did early in his career, brought \$25.9 million at Christie's in 2015. This sort of mindless inflation disgusts Doig, who gets virtually nothing from auction sales.

He lives simply, but very well. When he's in the studio, he works alone. Outside the studio, he leads a fairly rugged

outdoor life, kayaking and swimming in Trinidad, playing ice hockey three nights a week when he's in New York or London, skiing in the French Alps or the Rockies. (He recently went heli-skiing in British Columbia.) For thirteen years, he gave a master class at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, a job he retired from in July. Doig, who is fifty-eight, has never been an artist who shuts out the world. He and his former wife, Bernadette (Bonnie) Kennedy, have five children, and when their twenty-four-year marriage broke down, in 2012, it was extremely painful for everyone involved. The children have come to terms with the split, more or less, and they are all entranced by Echo, their half sister, who is almost two. Echo's mother is Parinaz Mogadassi, who was born in Tehran.

The daughter of an architect, Mogadassi met Doig when she came to work for his New York dealer, Gavin Brown, in 2010; she is now an independent curator who also works for the Michael Werner Gallery, which has exclusively represented Doig worldwide since 2012. In addition to the end of his marriage, Doig has had to cope with the recent death of his father, to whom he was very close, and with a protracted lawsuit, in which he had to prove that he had *not* painted a work that was attributed to him. Although the ensuing trial kept him away from his studio for months at a time, the paintings he has done in the past two years are among the most powerful and disturbing of his career. "Now, with all that trauma behind him, he's freed up," Mogadassi said to me. "He's at an age when he doesn't have anything to lose."

RAIN IN THE PORT OF SPAIN (WHITE OAK), 2015

Uncaged lions roamed the streets in Doig's 2015 exhibition at the Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa, in Venice. "Rain in the Port of Spain (White Oak)," which is more than nine feet high and



Doig is a virtuoso of the unpredictable. His paintings usually begin with an idea, and years can elapse before completion.

eleven feet wide, is dominated by a full-grown lion, pacing freely but somewhat glumly, head down, outside a yellow building with green doors and a barred green window. A ghostly human attendant approaches from around the corner. In "Young Lion," the beast is a jaunty cub, wearing a black cap with a blue feather. "The lions came from the zoo in Port of Spain," Doig said. "You see lions on T-shirts in Trinidad, on walls, everywhere. They have a Rastafarian meaning, which relates to the Biblical Lion of Judah." The tawny yellow walls in the painting echo the walls of the old prison that occupies an entire block in downtown Port of Spain. It has been there since Trinidad's first days as a British crown colony, following three centuries of Spanish rule. When slavery was abolished in Trinidad, in 1834, large numbers of indentured laborers were brought from India and China to work on the plantations and, later, in the oil-and-gas industry that replaced them. The result was a volatile, polyglot population, one that

V. S. Naipaul, who was born there, described as "a materialist immigrant society, continually growing and changing, never settling into any pattern." Two years ago, Doig visited the prison island of Carrera, which is near Port of Spain, and has appeared in several of his paintings. When Doig learned that some of the inmates had become painters, he got permission to talk with them, and later helped them mount their annual exhibition of work in Port of Spain.

A Doig painting usually begins with an idea, and years can elapse before the right configuration of memory, chance associations, art-historical references—he seems to remember every painting he has ever seen—and images from his visual archive brings it to completion. The composition of "Horse and Rider," another painting in the Venice show, was based on Goya's 1812 portrait of the Duke of Wellington. Doig gave his own face to the man riding the black horse, although you wouldn't know it—he looks merciless, and possibly dangerous. "I thought of him as someone

who's just landed on these shores," Doig told me. "A kind of wicked man." A colonial overlord? I suggested. "Yes, definitely, but with my face." The face of a man who had recently ended his marriage, in other words. Doig smiled, and said, "The way one is seen, yes." The show also included an anguished semi-nude portrait of Mogadassi and another self-portrait in a painting called "Night Studio." This one, in which Doig is more easily recognizable, conveys his physical presence—he's six feet tall, and built like a hockey player, big through the chest and the shoulders. Nicholas Serota, who recently retired from his twenty-nine-year reign at the Tate, told me that Doig's paintings "have a kind of mythic quality that's both ancient and very, very modern. They seem to capture a contemporary sense of anxiety and melancholy and uncertainty. Lately, he's gone more toward the sort of darkness we associate with Goya."

FRIDAY THE 13TH, 1987

A girl with red lips and long blond hair sits in a purple canoe, one hand trailing listlessly in the water. Pine trees on the far shore are echoed by their reflections in the still lake. The scene is placid, yet ominous.

Doig was born in Edinburgh in 1959, the eldest child of a Scottish accountant and his wife, who worked in the theatre. Three years later, the family moved to Trinidad, where his father, David, had been sent by the shipping company he worked for. Peter's early childhood memories of Trinidad are few—sights and smells, swimming in Maracas Bay, the ebullient way people talked. In 1966, when he was seven, the company sent them to Montreal. There were three children by then: Peter, Andrew, and a younger sister, Dominie; Sophie, the youngest, was born in Scotland, just before they moved to Canada. Doig had no trouble adjusting to the north country. He played ice hockey at his English-speaking school, and missed Canada a lot when his parents sent him and Andrew, at ages twelve and eleven, to a boarding school in the northeast of Scotland. (A great-aunt in St. Andrews had died and left money to each of



"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil clowns is that good clowns do nothing."

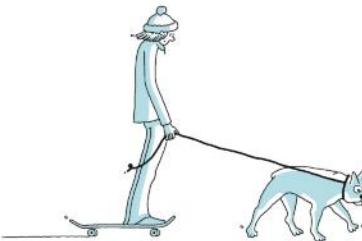
them, to be spent on their education.) Doig hated the rigorous academic program, and after three years his parents let him come home. "We were afraid Peter would be expelled," his mother, Mary, told me. "He was always an adventurous child, a free spirit." Soon after, the family moved again, to Toronto. Doig did poorly in school there. He and his high-school friends were mainly interested in music and in getting high on weed or LSD.

Doig dropped out of school when he was seventeen, and worked in restaurants to support himself. One spring, he went to Western Canada to work on the rigs. He kept a sketchbook on the trip, and that fall he signed up for free classes in art and English literature at an alternative high school in Toronto. Although he had no aptitude for drawing, he was starting to think about becoming an artist. (His father was a gifted amateur, and one of his great-aunts had been a professional artist.) In 1979, at the age of twenty, Doig went off to art school in London with the idea of studying theatre design—he also thought it might lead to work designing record covers. Until that point, what he really wanted to be was a ski bum.

He signed up for a one-year foundation course at the Wimbledon School of Art, where he met another student, Bonnie Kennedy. "London Irish, very pale, dark hair, blue eyes," as Doig described her. Kennedy was eighteen and he was twenty-one. "Peter seemed quite worldly," she recalls. "He had a very cool accent that was hard to place because he'd moved around so much. I had a serious crush, and was amazed when he reciprocated. He was my first and only love." Because of encouragement from a few instructors at Wimbledon, especially a master technician in the print department, Doig started to think seriously about painting. At the end of their foundation year, Kennedy went on to study fashion at Middlesex University, and Doig was accepted by St. Martin's School of Art.

At St. Martin's, his lack of drawing skill was a severe limitation. (One of his Wimbledon teachers had held up a Doig figure drawing and announced that it was the worst he had ever seen.) But the invention of collage, in 1912,

by Picasso and Braque, had put an end to drawing's monopoly as the foundation of art, and Doig, in his second year at St. Martin's, discovered his own way around it, through photography. "I don't know how I got the idea, but I started photographing pictures I'd seen in magazines, and then projecting them on a larger scale, and trying out different compositions," he said to me. At first, he used a felt-tipped pen to transfer to canvas the details and



the shapes he wanted; later, he switched to charcoal or thinned-down paint, applied rapidly and fluidly, not meticulously. The projected image was the first step in a long process of building a painting, and, as Doig said, "It just felt so totally liberating." Gavin Lockheart, a fellow St. Martin's student who began using slide projections at the same time, remembers being amazed by Doig's ability "to move the image beyond the photographic reproduction." He added, "Peter was a terrible draftsman, but not knowing how to do something didn't stop him from doing it." After three years at St. Martin's, and three more of living with Kennedy in cheap lodgings in King's Cross and painting in a rent-free studio, with scant encouragement from anyone in the art world, Doig knew beyond a doubt that he was a painter.

Figurative painting had made a comeback in the eighties, after a decade of rigorous abstraction and experiments with video, performance art, and other new forms, but no dealers offered to show Doig's early work. It verged on caricature—Roy Rogers on a rearing horse, on top of a New York taxi in rush-hour traffic. At St. Martin's, Doig had been influenced by artists from nearly every period in Western art, from Goya and Courbet and Picasso and Max Beckmann to the young German and Italian neo-expressionists (Baselitz, Polke, Clemente) who were starting to appear in London galleries

then. He was struck by the bumptious new generation of artists in New York—Jean-Michel Basquiat, Keith Haring, Eric Fischl, David Salle, Cindy Sherman—and by the late work of Philip Guston, an American Abstract Expressionist who had reverted to figuration with cartoon-like pictures of sheeted Ku Klux Klansmen and cigar-smoking bums. Doig made many trips to New York in the eighties, and sometimes wished he had gone to school there. "New York made you feel, Oh, my God, there's a lot more stuff you can do," he said to me.

In the summer, he went to Canada, where he could stay with his parents and get well-paying jobs painting houses. In 1986, he and Kennedy spent Christmas with his parents at their home in Grafton, a small town on Lake Ontario, four hours west of Montreal. Kennedy had recently lost her job in London at Bodymap, a cutting-edge fashion house that went bankrupt, and a recession in the U.K. meant that new jobs were scarce. She was offered a position with a Montreal fashion firm called Le Château, so they decided to stay. They got married that fall, in the living room of his parents' house. For the next couple of years, they lived in Montreal. Doig found work painting sets for films—just painting at first, and then designing them. He enjoyed this, but realized that film work was all-consuming, and not what he wanted to do. Eventually, he began spending more time at his parents' house in Grafton, where he had a painting studio in the barn. "I was quite desperately searching, making things that seemed random," he said.

One night in 1987, Doig came back from the barn and caught the end of a movie that his younger sister Sophie was watching on videotape. It was "Friday the 13th," Sean Cunningham's cult horror film, and what he saw was the sequence after the murders, when the only survivor, a terrified young girl, has escaped in a canoe, alone on the lake. The image made Doig think of "an Edvard Munch painting come to life." He was so struck by the beauty and the weirdness of the scene that he went back to the barn that night, and started a painting. "Friday the 13th" is the first of seven canoe paintings he made over the next decade. (He gave it to Chris

Ofili, in exchange for one of Ofili's paintings with elephant dung.) For later canoe paintings, he rented the video, took photographs of the scene, and worked from those, but on this first try he painted from memory, and the result is raw and unconvincing. The image stayed with him. The canoe, the fragile, lightweight vessel that opened up Canada's vast interior, had an iconic appeal to Canadians, and also to Doig. "It's almost a perfect form," he said.

HITCH HIKER, 1989-90

Under a turbulent sky, a red eighteen-wheeler truck moves across a darkening country landscape, its headlights casting twin beams on the road ahead. The canvas, nearly five feet high by seven feet wide, is divided, horizontally, into three layers: dark-green farmland, highway and truck against low trees, stormy sky. The painting holds the eye and won't let go—there is a sense of immense, crushing distances.

Doig and Kennedy moved back to London in 1989. Six years earlier, when Doig graduated from St. Martin's, he had turned down an offer to attend the one-year graduate course at the Chelsea School of Art, but now, at thirty, he applied and was accepted. He knew he had to become a better painter. "Chelsea is a real painter school, and I was nervous because the students were all much younger, and on a roll—painterly painters forging their own way," he said. The graduate students occasionally showed slides and talked about their work to the Chelsea undergrads, one of whom was Chris Ofili. "Peter seemed to have a unique, fresh approach," Ofili told me. "He was open and inquisitive and generous, and he struck me as somebody who was going to continue painting rather than someone who was still trying to figure it out."

Doig had held on to his old, rent-free London studio, and in it was a very long, unused canvas he had made out of stitched-together mailbags. "One day, I just started working on that, painting a landscape, in a way I'd never done before on canvas—very loose and liquid, so the paint dripped down in places," he said. "It was how I'd painted when I worked on film sets in Montreal. I knew exactly which

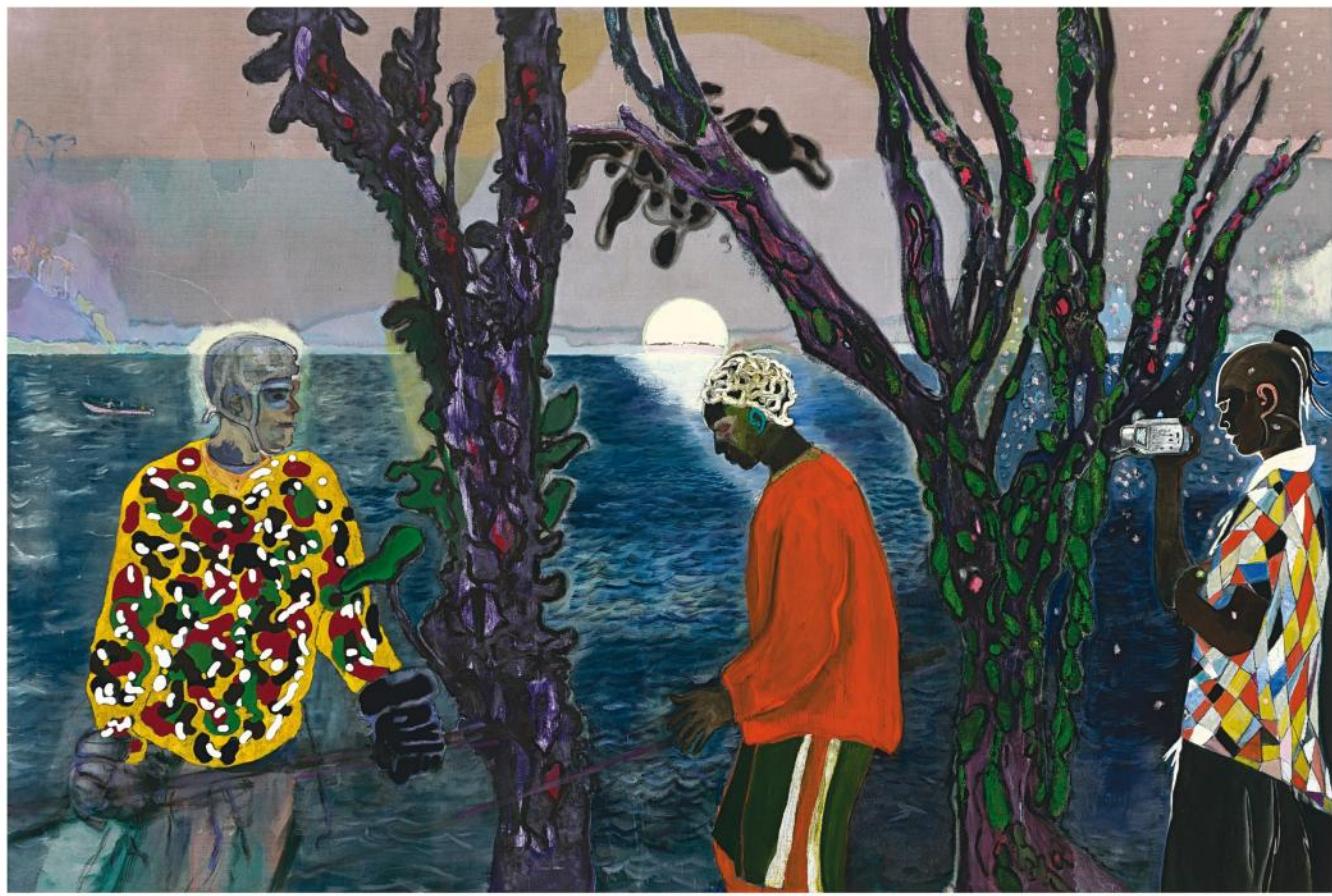
piece of road I was referring to, on the 401 highway that goes between Montreal and Toronto." The painting's division into three horizontal spaces, which he has used again and again ever since, reflected the influence of Barnett Newman—"opening up his zip," as Doig put it. He also said that the atmosphere of loneliness and mystery was probably influenced by Cindy Sherman's "Untitled Film Still #48" (1979), which shows a young woman with a cheap suitcase standing at a bend in the road—people often refer to it as "The Hitchhiker." Doig's picture, which is titled "Hitch Hiker," although we see no evidence of one, was "the first painting I made at Chelsea that I thought was successful," he said. "To me, it felt like a new painting." He still owns it.

"Hitch Hiker" also gave him the idea of using his Canadian experience in his work. "I suddenly had a subject that I hadn't had before," he said. Canada had always seemed familiar and mundane to him, but now, in London, it became exciting. During his time at Chelsea, and for the next few years, Doig painted what he called "homely" suburban houses, frozen ponds, ski areas, and open fields. The houses in these early paintings look uninhabited and desolate, and you see them through a screen of trees or underbrush, or blurred by falling snow. (He went on to paint architect-designed houses—including Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation in Briey-en-Forêt, France, half hidden behind a screen of trees.) He was painting spaces that you had to make an effort to look into.

Many of the Canada paintings were in Doig's graduation show at Chelsea. They were priced at a thousand pounds apiece, and nobody bought one. (He sold a couple afterward, at a discount, but Kennedy, who now worked at a London fashion firm called Sonneti, still paid most of the bills.) Doig's work remained deeply unfashionable. A group of young British artists, the Y.B.A.s, many of whom had studied at Goldsmiths, University of London, had seized the spotlight in London, and all the talk in the early nineties was about Damien Hirst's tiger shark in formaldehyde,

Tracey Emin's tent embroidered with the names of all the people she had slept with, and other neo-conceptual provocations. "When the Y.B.A. wave started, some of the people in my course at Chelsea literally changed their work overnight," Doig recalls. "That was when I kind of lost interest in the contemporary." A few artists noticed what Doig was doing, though, and, with their help, his work appeared in group shows at the Whitechapel Gallery and at the Serpentine. He won the Whitechapel Artist Prize, in 1990, and the John Moores Painting Prize, in 1993. Although the awards didn't lead to sales, the prize money (three thousand pounds from the Whitechapel and twenty thousand from John Moores) allowed him to pay off several years' worth of his accumulating debts and move with Bonnie into a nicer flat. Celeste, their first child, was born in 1992, and Simone came two years later. The turning point in Doig's career was a 1992 review by the artist Gareth Jones in *Frieze*, London's influential new art journal. Jones wrote perceptively about the Canada paintings and the Briey paintings, which "court risk, walking a fine line between attraction and repulsion," and a number of key people read his piece and took notice. Victoria Miro, whose small but influential London gallery favored minimal and conceptual art, came to Doig's studio; he remembers her saying, "I don't know why, but I really like this work."

In 1994, Doig had solo shows at Victoria Miro and at Gavin Brown's Enterprise, in New York, which represented Elizabeth Peyton, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and other rising young innovators. "Peter saw unfashionability as an asset, as a weapon," Brown recalled recently. "At the height of the Y.B.A.s, it was clear that he would outlast them." He was short-listed for the Turner Prize in 1994 (the sculptor Antony Gormley won it that year), and a year later he was invited to be an artist-trustee of the Tate. The critical establishment, though, was not convinced. "[It's] hard to see what all the fuss is about," *Artforum* grumbled in 2000. "Doig is overstating his understatement." When a



"Two Trees" (2017). "I wanted this painting to seem dreamlike," Doig says of the work, which he started eight years ago.

Belgian collector said to him, "Tell me why I should buy your paintings," Doig couldn't think of an answer.

GASTHOF ZUR MULDENTALSPERRE, 2000-O2

Two elaborately costumed characters stand at the entrance to a path that runs between curving walls made of colorful stones. The man in a black military tunic and a tricorne might be a Napoleonic soldier; the other man's long robe and high fur hat suggest an official of the Ottoman Empire. The starry night sky is reflected in the lake, or reservoir, in the middle distance. There is a sense of expectancy, as though we are looking at a stage set where a performance is about to begin.

During the nineteen-eighties, when Doig and Kennedy were art students, Kennedy worked as a dresser for the English National Opera, which was just down the street from St. Martin's. She arranged for Doig to work there, and he brought in a number of their friends. Doig stayed in the job for seven years. He helped to get the men's opera

chorus into their costumes, and the corps de ballet into theirs during ballet season. One evening, during the final performance of Stravinsky's "Pétrouchka," by the Ballet de Nancy, starring Rudolf Nureyev, Doig and a friend surreptitiously put on costumes and makeup and went out onstage during a crowd scene. The choreographer noticed and they were both fired, but they were rehired the next day, for the opera season. Someone had snapped a picture of them backstage, in their costumes, and twenty years later, when Doig started the "Gasthof" painting and was looking for two figures to put in it, he came across the photograph. "It reminded me of masqueraders in the carnival here," he said. (Trinidad's annual carnival, with its steel bands, "blue devils," and non-stop street dancing, rivals New Orleans's Mardi Gras in its feverish creativity.) Doig is the one in the Napoleonic tunic. The model for the curving walls was a black-and-white postcard of a dam in what was then East Germany which Doig had found on a trip to play hockey in the Czech Republic.

When Chris Ofili, with whom he had stayed in touch since they were at Chelsea, was offered a one-month artist's residency in Trinidad in 2000, Doig said he'd like to come, and Ofili got him invited. Doig brought along several small, unfinished paintings to work on, one of which was an early study of the "Gasthof" figures. Deciding that the image didn't work, he started to tear the canvas off the stretcher, but Ofili stopped him. "Let me work on it," he said. Ofili put a bushy Afro on one of the figures, and added a few other jokey touches, and Doig took it back and added some more. They did nine paintings in this vein, making fun of each other's work, and divided them, five for Ofili and four for Doig. The pictures have been in storage ever since, but working on them rekindled Doig's interest in "Gasthof," which he finished a year later, in London.

Coming back to Trinidad after more than thirty years, Doig was amazed at how familiar it seemed to him. "I realized I had always been very fond of this place," he told me. Before leaving, he bought a small plot of land on

the island's north coast. His impulsive decision surprised the Manchester-born Ofili, whose parents were Nigerian immigrants. "I remember the vender guy who sold it to him saying that Peter must have a 'long brain,' which I think meant he had foresight," Ofili said. "It made me very curious about that way of approaching life."

Doig's land is near the water, and he has never built on it. When he moved to Trinidad, in 2002, with Bonnie and their four daughters, Celeste, Simone, Eva, and Alice (August, their youngest child and only boy, was born there), they lived in a house in Port of Spain. They planned to stay for only a year or two, but Trinidad became their home. Doig bought a larger piece of land on the north coast, on top of the ridge above the first plot, and built a house on it.

"I wanted to be somewhere different," Doig told me. "It was mostly for my work, but I also felt that Trinidad had affected my life, and I wanted the children to have that experience."

LAPEYROUSE WALL, 2004

When I visited Doig in Trinidad, last spring, he drove me through Port of Spain's congested downtown and parked his Land Rover by a high wall that encloses Lapeyrouse Cemetery, the city's largest. (It was once the site of Trinidad's first large sugar plantation, established by Picot de la Lapeyrouse, a French nobleman who came to the island in 1778.) This spot, he said, was the setting for "Lapeyrouse Wall," one of his most enigmatic paintings. In it, a man in a white shirt is seen from behind, walking away from the viewer on a sidewalk that borders a high, roughly patched concrete wall. The man carries a dusty-pink parasol that seems to echo his own drifting, insubstantial presence—it's hand-decorated with floral shapes. The upper half of the painting is all sky, pale blue with wispy clouds, brushed on the canvas in many layers of thinned-down pigment. A fire hydrant casts its shadow on the sidewalk, and a chimney with smoke rising from it is just visible beyond the wall.

"I used to see this guy around town a lot, always carrying the parasol," Doig said. "On this occasion, I saw him in the rearview mirror, walking toward me, and as he went by I took a few snaps. I

AUTUMN

The part of life
devoted to contemplation
was at odds with the part
committed to action.

*

Fall was approaching.
But I remember
it was always approaching
once school ended.

*

Life, my sister said,
is like a torch passed now
from the body to the mind.
Sadly, she went on, the mind is not
there to receive it.

The sun was setting.
Ah, the torch, she said.
It has gone out, I believe.
Our best hope is that it's flickering,
fort/da, fort/da, like little Ernst
throwing his toy over the side of his crib
and then pulling it back. It's too bad,
she said, there are no children here.
We could learn from them, as Freud did.

kind of forgot about it, but when the pictures came back from the lab it was just such a perfect composition." Doig made many sketches of the man and the wall, and at least four other paintings. He wanted to catch the kind of "measured stillness" of Yasujirō Ozu's film "Tokyo Story," which he had recently screened at the StudioFilmClub, a cinematheque that he and the Trinidadian artist Che Lovelace had founded in 2003. The picture didn't work, he said, until he added the fire hydrant, quite late in the process, and then it did.

CAVE BOAT BIRD PAINTING, 2010-12

A n orange fishing boat, a pirogue, emerges from a cavelike passageway into cobalt-blue water. A man in a pink hat (Doig) sits in the bow, in profile, against a shoreline of green

hills. The dark bird that passes overhead, wings folded, is absurdly out of scale—it's larger than the man. Doig said, "The bird is a *corbeau*, a scavenger, not completely black." Derek Walcott, the great Caribbean poet whom Doig got to know a few years before he died, wrote a poem about the painting. "Peter Doig lives now in an Eden of wings / not to mention the infernal, inescapable *corbeaux*," it reads, in part. "Hiding under a pink hat, he is just one of those things / that a *corbeau* passes or the hawk with its gold eye."

Doig and I were at his house on the north coast, looking at a reproduction of "Cave Boat Bird Painting" in a Rizzoli monograph of his work. The house, designed to Doig's specifications by the Trinidad-based architect Jenifer Smith, is informal and spacious, with lots of small bedrooms for children and guests in a separate wing.

*

We would sometimes sit
on benches outside the dining room.
The smell of leaves burning.

Old people and fire, she said.
Not a good thing. They burn their houses down.

*

How heavy my mind is,
filled with the past.
Is there enough room
for the world to penetrate?
It must go somewhere,
it cannot simply sit on the surface—

*

Stars gleaming over the water.
The leaves piled, waiting to be lit.

*

Insight, my sister said.
Now it is here.
But hard to see in the darkness.

You must find your footing
before you put your weight on it.

—Louise Glück

He had cooked a chicken curry for dinner, and afterward we stayed on at the long table in the rectangular room that's his kitchen, sitting room, and dining room combined. Wide folding doors on two sides were open to a deck overlooking the bay far below, and the rapidly cooling night air was filled with sounds: dogs barking (Doig had six of them), birdcalls, and a shrill, periodic insect note that got louder and louder and then stopped abruptly. Because Trinidad is so close to the equator, darkness there comes all at once, at about six-thirty. "What you realize here is that half the day is night," Doig said. It was a Wednesday evening, and we were alone in the house. Celeste and Simone were in London, and Alice, Eva, and August were with their mother, at the family house in Port of Spain; when he's in Trinidad, Doig picks them up after school on Thurs-

days, and returns them on Sunday. Mogadassi and Echo were in New York. Mogadassi comes here, but her work is in New York, where, in addition to her job at Werner, she shows mostly young artists in a gallery complex she has developed in Chinatown. Doig's new studio, designed by the architect Trevor Horne, is going up on a steep cliff across the road from the house, though, so it's clear that Trinidad will continue to be his main base. Doig once told me that he had lived in many different places, and had felt like an outsider in all of them.

He has nevertheless become engaged with Trinidadian life and culture, mainly through the StudioFilmClub (Doig chooses the films and makes a poster to announce each one) and through his friendships with local artists: Che Lovelace, a figurative painter who became his partner in founding the club, and

Embah, the late self-taught sculptor and painter, whose haunted image of a man dressed as a bat inspired two of Doig's paintings. When the portrait artist Boscoe Holder, whom he'd met a few times, died, in 2007, Doig bought his collection of LPs, an archive that covers the whole range of Caribbean music. "I was nervous about coming here, a white guy from the U.K. coming back to a former British colony that was now independent, but I've always felt connected to this place," Doig told me. He has also said, expressed in a 2013 letter to his friend and fellow-artist Angus Cook, "I believe that most of my works made in Trinidad question my being there."

Doig's friendship with Chris Ofili deepened in Trinidad. Ofili moved into a house and studio in Port of Spain, and later built a weekend retreat near Doig's place on the north coast. For a year or two after Doig's divorce, the two men saw less of each other, but their friendship was too important to lose. "Now we're closer again," Ofili told me. "Over a pronounced period of time, we got to know so much about each of our lives—families, selves, work, success and failure. It's not easy to get that level of intimacy and be able to talk about intangible stuff, and the value of it is immeasurable in understanding what we do."

The sudden, spectacular rise in auction prices for Doig's work began after he left London. Large paintings by Doig had been selling privately for less than a hundred thousand dollars, but the price started climbing rapidly after 2000. Figurative artists—John Currin, Luc Tuymans, Marlene Dumas, Neo Rauch, and others—were increasingly prominent in the art scene, and Doig's work, with its references to late-nineteenth-century artists and traditions, began to seem like a good investment. In 2002, the British mega-collector Charles Saatchi, who had shown no interest in his work before, started acquiring it. Saatchi, unable to buy Doig's paintings directly from Gavin Brown or Victoria Miro, who worried that he would resell them, bought a number of pieces on the secondary, or resale, market at what were believed to be highly inflated prices,

including "White Canoe." He later sold several of them to Sotheby's, where, in 2007, "White Canoe" was auctioned off for \$11.3 million. Doig felt blindsided. "That definitely slowed me down," he said. "You get seen as a different kind of artist, one whose work is of interest only to the mega-rich."

The art dealer Gordon VeneKlasen, who had followed his work closely since the *Frieze* article, and now represents him through the Michael Werner Gallery, which he co-owns, has helped him avoid that fate. He keeps Doig's work out of art fairs, and sells only to carefully selected buyers. Even so, Doig is now one of the world's pricier artists.

The high prices have brought new problems. Doig paintings are so costly to insure that museums have to think twice about showing them. He's had major exhibitions at the Tate, the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, the National Gallery of Scotland, the Louisiana Museum, in Denmark, and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, but nothing so far at MOMA, the Met, or other big museums in this country.

Record prices for his work at auction also led to a bizarre court case in which Doig had to prove that he was not the author of a desert-landscape painting, signed "1976 Pete Doige." The actual artist, according to court documents, was a young man who had been in jail at the time, on drug charges, in Thunder Bay, Ontario. Pete Doige had taken art classes there, and Robert Fletcher, his parole officer, had bought the landscape from him for a hundred dollars. Thirty-five years later, in 2011, someone saw the painting in Fletcher's house and told him that the artist who did it was famous, and that the painting was worth a lot of money. Fletcher got in touch with a Chicago art dealer named Peter Bartlow, who found out that Peter Doig (without the "e") was indeed a famous artist, and that in 1976 he had been living in Canada. Bartlow and Fletcher, after conducting what Bartlow described as "tremendous research," became convinced that they could sell it. The auction house they went to contacted the Michael Werner Gallery for confirmation. The gallery, in consultation

with Doig, responded, through a lawyer, that it was not by him. Fletcher and Bartlow thereupon filed an action in Chicago in 2013 against Doig, his legal team, and VeneKlasen, demanding millions of dollars owing to "tortious interference" in "a valid business relationship."

Why the case ever went to trial is a judicial mystery. Doig, who, in 1976, was sixteen, going on seventeen, said that he had never set foot in Thunder Bay, and had never been in jail anywhere. The unfortunate Doige, who was four years older, had died, of cirrhosis of the liver, in 2012. His sister testified in court that Doige had been in the Thunder Bay jail in 1976, and had taken art classes there. Bartlow wrote e-mails to VeneKlasen, saying in one of them that "if we get some cooperation" the case could be settled out of court and the matter could remain "private and confidential." All this evidence was available to Judge Gary Feinerman, of the United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, but Feinerman seemed endlessly willing to give the benefit of the doubt to the plaintiffs, who repeatedly attempted to place Doig in Thunder Bay. The case, which dragged on for nearly four years, was a maddening distraction during a difficult time in Doig's life, with his marriage breaking up and his father's death, in 2015. (His mother still lives in Grafton.) "The

Feinerman's verdict, at the close of a seven-day trial, in 2016, was conclusive: Doig "absolutely did not paint the disputed work." Matthew S. Dontzin, the lead lawyer on Doig's defense team, is seeking sanctions against the plaintiffs' lawyer, Bartlow Gallery, Ltd., and Fletcher for at least some of the million-plus dollars that Doig paid in legal fees. "I have rarely seen such a flagrant example of unethical conduct in the U.S. courts," Dontzin wrote, in a post-trial statement. Asked last week to comment, Bartlow said that he denies any unethical conduct, adding, "If Doig did not paint it, it would not have taken millions of dollars to win their case."

TWO TREES, 2017

The painting was hanging in the front room of the Michael Werner Gallery, at 4 East Seventy-seventh Street, where Peter Doig's most recent show opened, in September. About eight feet high by twelve feet wide, it's a landscape, an imaginary world with two twisted trees and three male figures in the foreground, silhouetted against a full moon that casts its path of light over a dark, blue-green sea. The man on the left is in hockey gear—striped shorts, helmet, gloves, and a vividly improbable red-white-and-green camouflage jersey. In the center, between the trees, a mysterious figure faces the hockey player but looks down, as if in deep meditation. The viewer's eye goes to his headgear—not a helmet, exactly, but an openwork knit cap woven from thick white cords. The third man, in a diamond-patterned harlequin shirt, seems to be filming the other two with a small movie camera.

Doig, who came to the opening in a bright-orange T-shirt, looked quite chipper for someone who'd scarcely slept for the past six nights as he worked around the clock to finish the painting, and another big canvas, in a downtown New York studio. This happens before every show—he goes into what Ofili calls his "ferocious trance," and the work goes through profound changes. (Ofili's own New York show had opened at the David Zwirner gallery the night before.) "I wanted this



whole thing was despicable," Doig told me. "My mother was so angry and upset by it. My brother Andrew came from Zurich, where he lives, and didn't even get to testify. I felt so badly, that all of this was because of me." In a prepared statement, Doig also said that he would have been proud to have painted the work in question when he was seventeen, and that the plaintiffs had "shamelessly tried to deny another artist his legacy for money."

painting to seem dreamlike," Doig told me. "I was thinking quite a lot about that Henri Rousseau painting in MOMA, 'The Sleeping Gypsy.' My big struggle was with the central head. I had another hockey player there at first, and I kept positioning and repositioning it, and nothing worked, but then on my computer I found a photograph of a Haitian painter called Hippolyte, who was in a show I curated with Hilton Als in Berlin, and it was perfect."

"Red Man (Sings Calypso)," the other big painting, has a wall to itself in the gallery's second room. A tall man in greenish vintage (circa 1950) bathing trunks stands near a lifeguard tower on a beach, his hands clasped in front. He looks familiar—it's Robert Mitchum, larger than life and rakishly handsome. His legs are a deep, reddish-brown color. In Trinidad, light-skinned blacks and white people (Doig included) are sometimes called "red men." "Mitchum came to Trinidad in the nineteen-fifties," Doig said. "He stayed for ten months and made two movies—'Fire Down Below,' with Rita Hayworth and Jack Lemmon, and one set in the South Pacific. He also made a calypso record, which I think says something about him." Behind the Mitchum figure and to one side is a man wrestling with a large snake—boa constrictors are plentiful in Trinidad jungles, Doig explained, and locals sometimes bring docile ones to the beach, where people pay to be photographed with them. Doig told me that he had wanted for some time to paint portraits of other people (rather than just himself), but that he had held back because he wasn't sure he could do it. Growing confidence in his drawing skills persuaded him to try. In this show, which included more than two dozen smaller works and studies, there is a second portrait of Mitchum, as a young man, and two of Doig's friend Embah, who died in 2015. "Embah was a remarkable human being, a monklike artist who was also very funny, and whose work had magical properties," Doig said. "He used to say he'd teach me to be a shaman. Anyway, now I'm excited about the idea of doing portraits."



"Congratulations! You are a seminal figure of wellness."

We returned to the front room, to have another look at "Two Trees." The room is full of memories for me and for many others—this is where Leo Castelli showed Rauschenberg and Johns and the groundbreaking Pop and minimal artists in the nineteen-sixties. A smaller version of "Two Trees" hung on the adjoining wall, a night scene full of stars. "I started those paintings eight years ago," Doig said. "At first, it was just the two trees, which you see from the outdoor shower of my house on the north coast. Looking through them, you're looking straight toward Africa. You think about that journey across the ocean, where so many people here came from. The painting is not about that, but it's in there. To me, the painting is

about being complicit, being involved in something terrible." Incarceration, or slavery, I assume he meant. It struck me that Doig, in these two paintings, had gone deeper into his own imagination than ever before, and that his mastery of the tools of painting now seemed limitless. Whether or not the viewer knows it, the Middle Passage exists in "Two Trees," along with Rousseau's "The Sleeping Gypsy" and the prison island of Carrera, just as full-length male bathers by Cézanne and Marsden Hartley are present in Doig's "Red Man"—not visibly, but through ambiguous narratives that are drenched in art history and in a sense of where we are in the world right now. "So many ideas have come out of these paintings," Doig said. ♦

Cat Person



Kristen Roupenian

Margot met Robert on a Wednesday night toward the end of her fall semester. She was working behind the concession stand at the artsy movie theatre downtown when he came in and bought a large popcorn and a box of Red Vines.

"That's an . . . unusual choice," she said. "I don't think I've ever actually sold a box of Red Vines before."

Flirting with her customers was a habit she'd picked up back when she worked as a barista, and it helped with tips. She didn't earn tips at the movie theatre, but the job was boring otherwise, and she did think that Robert was cute. Not so cute that she would have, say, gone up to him at a party, but cute enough that she could have drummed up an imaginary crush on him if he'd sat across from her during a dull class—though she was pretty sure that he was out of college, in his mid-twenties at least. He was tall, which she liked, and she could see the edge of a tattoo peeking out from beneath the rolled-up sleeve of his shirt. But he was on the heavy side, his beard was a little too long, and his shoulders slumped forward slightly, as though he were protecting something.

Robert did not pick up on her flirtation. Or, if he did, he showed it only by stepping back, as though to make her lean toward him, try a little harder. "Well," he said. "O.K., then." He pocketed his change.

But the next week he came into the movie theatre again, and bought another box of Red Vines. "You're getting better at your job," he told her. "You managed not to insult me this time."

She shrugged. "I'm up for a promotion, so," she said.

After the movie, he came back to her. "Concession-stand girl, give me your phone number," he said, and, surprising herself, she did.

From that small exchange about Red Vines, over the next several weeks they built up an elaborate scaffolding of jokes via text, riffs that unfolded and shifted so quickly that she sometimes had a hard time keeping up. He was very clever, and she found that she had to work to impress him. Soon she noticed that when she texted him he usually texted her back right away, but if

she took more than a few hours to respond his next message would always be short and wouldn't include a question, so it was up to her to re-initiate the conversation, which she always did. A few times, she got distracted for a day or so and wondered if the exchange would die out altogether, but then she'd think of something funny to tell him or she'd see a picture on the Internet that was relevant to their conversation, and they'd start up again. She still didn't know much about him, because they never talked about anything personal, but when they landed two or three good jokes in a row there was a kind of exhilaration to it, as if they were dancing.

Then, one night during reading period, she was complaining about how all the dining halls were closed and there was no food in her room because her roommate had raided her care package, and he offered to buy her some Red Vines to sustain her. At first, she deflected this with another joke, because she really did have to study, but he said, "No, I'm serious, stop fooling around and come now," so she put a jacket over her pajamas and met him at the 7-Eleven.

It was about eleven o'clock. He greeted her without ceremony, as though he saw her every day, and took her inside to choose some snacks. The store didn't have Red Vines, so he bought her a Cherry Coke Slurpee and a bag of Doritos and a novelty lighter shaped like a frog with a cigarette in its mouth.

"Thank you for my presents," she said, when they were back outside. Robert was wearing a rabbit-fur hat that came down over his ears and a thick, old-fashioned down jacket. She thought it was a good look for him, if a little dorky; the hat heightened his lumberjack aura, and the heavy coat hid his belly and the slightly sad slump of his shoulders.

"You're welcome, concession-stand girl," he said, though of course he knew her name by then. She thought he was going to go in for a kiss and prepared to duck and offer him her cheek, but instead of kissing her on the mouth he took her by the arm and kissed her gently on the forehead, as though she were something precious. "Study hard, sweetheart," he said. "I will see you soon."

On the walk back to her dorm, she

was filled with a sparkly lightness that she recognized as the sign of an incipient crush.

While she was home over break, they texted nearly non-stop, not only jokes but little updates about their days. They started saying good morning and good night, and when she asked him a question and he didn't respond right away she felt a jab of anxious yearning. She learned that Robert had two cats, named Mu and Yan, and together they invented a complicated scenario in which her childhood cat, Pita, would send flirtatious texts to Yan, but whenever Pita talked to Mu she was formal and cold, because she was jealous of Mu's relationship with Yan.

"Why are you texting all the time?" Margot's stepdad asked her at dinner. "Are you having an affair with someone?"

"Yes," Margot said. "His name is Robert, and I met him at the movie theatre. We're in love, and we're probably going to get married."

"Hmm," her stepdad said. "Tell him we have some questions for him."

"My parents are asking about u," Margot texted, and Robert sent her back a smiley-face emoji whose eyes were hearts.

When Margot returned to campus, she was eager to see Robert again, but he turned out to be surprisingly hard to pin down. "Sorry, busy week at work," he replied. "I promise I will c u soon." Margot didn't like this; it felt as if the dynamic had shifted out of her favor, and when eventually he did ask her to go to a movie she agreed right away.

The movie he wanted to see was playing at the theatre where she worked, but she suggested that they see it at the big multiplex just outside town instead; students didn't go there very often, because you needed to drive. Robert came to pick her up in a muddy white Civic with candy wrappers spilling out of the cup holders. On the drive, he was quieter than she'd expected, and he didn't look at her very much. Before five minutes had gone by, she became wildly uncomfortable, and, as they got on the highway, it occurred to her that he could take her someplace and rape and murder her; she hardly knew anything about him, after all.

Just as she thought this, he said,

"Don't worry, I'm not going to murder you," and she wondered if the discomfort in the car was her fault, because she was acting jumpy and nervous, like the kind of girl who thought she was going to get murdered every time she went on a date.

"It's O.K.—you can murder me if you want," she said, and he laughed and patted her knee. But he was still disconcertingly quiet, and all her bubbling attempts at making conversation bounced right off him. At the theatre, he made a joke to the cashier at the concession stand about Red Vines, which fell flat in a way that embarrassed everyone involved, but Margot most of all.

During the movie, he didn't hold her hand or put his arm around her, so by the time they were back in the parking lot she was pretty sure that he had changed his mind about liking her. She was wearing leggings and a sweatshirt, and that might have been the problem. When she got into the car, he'd said, "Glad to see you dressed up for me," which she'd assumed was a joke, but maybe she actually had offended him by not seeming to take the date seriously enough, or something. He was wearing khakis and a button-down shirt.

"So, do you want to go get a drink?" he asked when they got back to the car, as if being polite were an obligation that had been imposed on him. It seemed obvious to Margot that he was expecting her to say no and that, when she did, they wouldn't talk again. That made her sad, not so much because she wanted to continue spending time with him as because she'd had such high expectations for him over break, and it didn't seem fair that things had fallen apart so quickly.

"We could go get a drink, I guess?" she said.

"If you want," he said.

"If you want" was such an unpleasant response that she sat silently in the car until he poked her leg and said, "What are you sulking about?"

"I'm not sulking," she said. "I'm just a little tired."

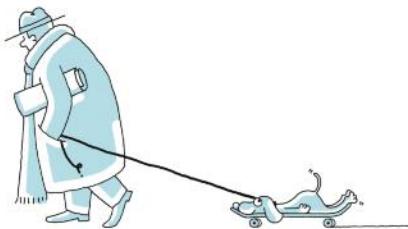
"I can take you home."

"No, I could use a drink, after that movie." Even though it had been playing at the mainstream theatre, the film he'd chosen was a very depressing drama about the Holocaust, so inappropriate

for a first date that when he suggested it she said, "Lol r u serious," and he made some joke about how he was sorry that he'd misjudged her taste and he could take her to a romantic comedy instead.

But now, when she said that about the movie, he winced a little, and a totally different interpretation of the night's events occurred to her. She wondered if perhaps he'd been trying to impress her by suggesting the Holocaust movie, because he didn't understand that a Holocaust movie was the wrong kind of "serious" movie with which to impress the type of person who worked at an artsy movie theatre, the type of person he probably assumed she was. Maybe, she thought, her texting "lol r u serious" had hurt him, had intimidated him and made him feel uncomfortable around her. The thought of this possible vulnerability touched her, and she felt kinder toward him than she had all night.

When he asked her where she wanted to go for a drink, she named the place where she usually hung out, but he made a face and said that it was in the student ghetto and he'd take her somewhere better. They went to a bar she'd never been to, an underground speakeasy type of place, with no sign announcing its presence. There was a line to get inside, and, as they waited, she grew fidgety trying to figure out how to tell him what she needed to tell him, but she couldn't, so when the bouncer asked



to see her I.D. she just handed it to him. The bouncer hardly even looked at it; he just smirked and said, "Yeah, no," and waved her to the side, as he gestured toward the next group of people in line.

Robert had gone ahead of her, not noticing what was playing out behind him. "Robert," she said quietly. But he didn't turn around. Finally, someone in line who'd been paying attention tapped him on the shoulder and pointed to her, marooned on the sidewalk.

She stood, abashed, as he came back over to her. "Sorry!" she said. "This is so embarrassing."

"How old *are* you?" he demanded.

"I'm twenty," she said.

"Oh," he said. "I thought you said you were older."

"I told you I was a sophomore!" she said. Standing outside the bar, having been rejected in front of everyone, was humiliating enough, and now Robert was looking at her as if she'd done something wrong.

"But you did that—what do you call it? That gap year," he objected, as though this were an argument he could win.

"I don't know what to tell you," she said helplessly. "I'm twenty." And then, absurdly, she started to feel tears stinging her eyes, because somehow everything had been ruined and she couldn't understand why this was all so hard.

But, when Robert saw her face crumpling, a kind of magic happened. All the tension drained out of his posture; he stood up straight and wrapped his bearlike arms around her. "Oh, sweetheart," he said. "Oh, honey, it's O.K., it's all right. Please don't feel bad." She let herself be folded against him, and she was flooded with the same feeling she'd had outside the 7-Eleven—that she was a delicate, precious thing he was afraid he might break. He kissed the top of her head, and she laughed and wiped her tears away.

"I can't believe I'm crying because I didn't get into a bar," she said. "You must think I'm such an idiot." But she knew he didn't think that, from the way he was gazing at her; in his eyes, she could see how pretty she looked, smiling through her tears in the chalky glow of the streetlight, with a few flakes of snow coming down.

He kissed her then, on the lips, for real; he came for her in a kind of lunging motion and practically poured his tongue down her throat. It was a terrible kiss, shockingly bad; Margot had trouble believing that a grown man could possibly be so bad at kissing. It seemed awful, yet somehow it also gave her that tender feeling toward him again, the sense that even though he was older than her, she knew something he didn't.

When he was done kissing her, he took her hand firmly and led her to a different bar, where there were pool

tables and pinball machines and sawdust on the floor and no one checking I.D.s at the door. In one of the booths, she saw the grad student who'd been her English T.A. her freshman year.

"Should I get you a vodka soda?" Robert asked, which she thought was maybe supposed to be a joke about the kind of drink college girls liked, though she'd never had a vodka soda. She actually was a little anxious about what to order; at the places she went to, they only carded people at the bar, so the kids who were twenty-one or had good fake I.D.s usually brought pitchers of P.B.R. or Bud Light back to share with the others. She wasn't sure if those brands were ones that Robert would make fun of, so, instead of specifying, she said, "I'll just have a beer."

With the drinks in front of him and the kiss behind him, and also maybe because she had cried, Robert became much more relaxed, more like the witty person she knew through his texts. As they talked, she became increasingly sure that what she'd interpreted as anger or dissatisfaction with her had, in fact, been nervousness, a fear that she wasn't having a good time. He kept coming back to her initial dismissal of the movie, making jokes that glanced off it and watching her closely to see how she responded. He teased her about her high-brow taste, and said how hard it was to impress her because of all the film classes she'd taken, even though he knew she'd taken only one summer class in film. He joked about how she and the other employees at the artsy theatre probably sat around and made fun of the people who went to the mainstream theatre, where they didn't even serve wine, and some of the movies were in IMAX 3-D.

Margot laughed along with the jokes he was making at the expense of this imaginary film-snob version of her, though nothing he said seemed quite fair, since she was the one who'd actually suggested that they see the movie at the Quality 16. Although now, she realized, maybe that had hurt Robert's feelings, too. She'd thought it was clear that she just didn't want to go on a date where she worked, but maybe he'd taken it more personally than that; maybe he'd suspected that she was ashamed to be seen with him. She was starting to think that she understood him—how sensi-



"Once I start writing a poem, I can't stop."

tive he was, how easily he could be wounded—and that made her feel closer to him, and also powerful, because once she knew how to hurt him she also knew how he could be soothed. She asked him lots of questions about the movies he liked, and she spoke self-deprecatingly about the movies at the artsy theatre that she found boring or incomprehensible; she told him about how much her older co-workers intimidated her, and how she sometimes worried that she wasn't smart enough to form her own opinions on anything. The effect of this on him was palpable and immediate, and she felt as if she were petting a large, skittish animal, like a horse or a bear, skillfully coaxing it to eat from her hand.

By her third beer, she was thinking about what it would be like to have sex with Robert. Probably it would be like that bad kiss, clumsy and excessive, but imagining how excited he would be, how hungry and eager to impress her, she felt a twinge of desire pluck at her belly, as distinct and painful as the snap of an elastic band against her skin.

When they'd finished that round of drinks, she said, boldly, "Should we get out of here, then?" and he seemed briefly hurt, as if he thought she was cutting the date short, but she took his hand

and pulled him up, and the look on his face when he realized what she was saying, and the obedient way he trailed her out of the bar, gave her that elastic-band snap again, as did, oddly, the fact that his palm was slick beneath hers.

Outside, she presented herself to him again for kissing, but, to her surprise, he only pecked her on the mouth. "You're drunk," he said, accusingly.

"No, I'm not," she said, though she was. She pushed her body against his, feeling tiny beside him, and he let out a great shuddering sigh, as if she were something too bright and painful to look at, and that was sexy, too, being made to feel like a kind of irresistible temptation.

"I'm taking you home, lightweight," he said, shepherding her to the car. Once they were inside it, though, she leaned into him again, and after a little while, by lightly pulling back when he pushed his tongue too far down her throat, she was able to get him to kiss her in the softer way that she liked, and soon after that she was straddling him, and she could feel the small log of his erection straining against his pants. Whenever it rolled beneath her weight, he let out these fluttery, high-pitched moans that she couldn't help feeling were a little melodramatic, and then suddenly he

pushed her off him and turned the key in the ignition.

"Making out in the front seat like a teen-ager," he said, in mock disgust. Then he added, "I'd have thought you'd be too old for that, now that you're twenty."

She stuck her tongue out at him. "Where do you want to go, then?"

"Your place?"

"Um, that won't really work. Because of my roommate?"

"Oh, right. You live in the dorms," he said, as though that were something she should apologize for.

"Where do you live?" she asked.

"I live in a house."

"Can I . . . come over?"

"You can."

The house was in a pretty, wooded neighborhood not too far from campus and had a string of cheerful white fairy lights across the doorway. Before he got out of the car, he said, darkly, like a warning, "Just so you know, I have cats."

"I know," she said. "We texted about them, remember?"

At the front door, he fumbled with his keys for what seemed a ridiculously long time and swore under his breath. She rubbed his back to try to keep the mood going, but that seemed to fluster him even more, so she stopped.

"Well. This is my house," he said flatly, pushing the door open.

The room they were in was dimly lit and full of objects, all of which, as her eyes adjusted, resolved into familiarity. He had two large, full bookcases, a shelf of vinyl records, a collection of board games, and a lot of art—or, at least, posters that had been hung in frames, instead of being tacked or taped to the wall.

"I like it," she said, truthfully, and, as she did, she identified the emotion she was feeling as relief. It occurred to her that she'd never gone to someone's house to have sex before; because she'd dated only guys her age, there had always been some element of sneaking around, to avoid roommates. It was new, and a little frightening, to be so completely on someone else's turf, and the fact that Robert's house gave evidence of his having interests that she shared, if only in their broadest categories—art, games, books, music—struck her as a reassuring endorsement of her choice.

As she thought this, she saw that Robert was watching her closely, observing the impression the room had made. And, as though fear weren't quite ready to release its hold on her, she had the brief wild idea that maybe this was not a room at all but a trap meant to lure her into the false belief that Robert was a normal person, a person like her, when in

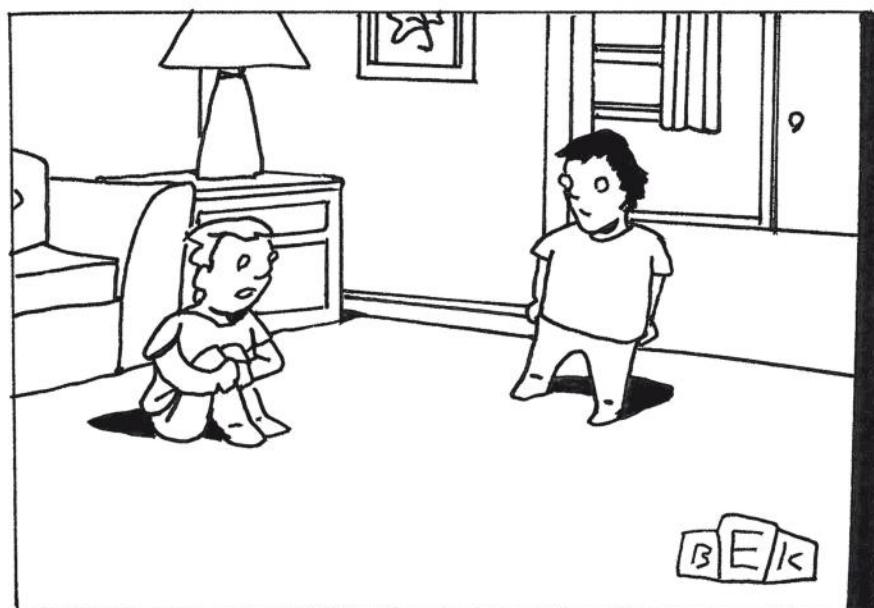
fact all the other rooms in the house were empty, or full of horrors: corpses or kidnap victims or chains. But then he was kissing her, throwing her bag and their coats on the couch and ushering her into the bedroom, groping her ass and pawing at her chest, with the avid clumsiness of that first kiss.

The bedroom wasn't empty, though it was emptier than the living room; he didn't have a bed frame, just a mattress and a box spring on the floor. There was a bottle of whiskey on his dresser, and he took a swig from it, then handed it to her and kneeled down and opened his laptop, an action that confused her, until she understood that he was putting on music.

Margot sat on the bed while Robert took off his shirt and unbuckled his pants, pulling them down to his ankles before realizing that he was still wearing his shoes and bending over to untie them. Looking at him like that, so awkwardly bent, his belly thick and soft and covered with hair, Margot recoiled. But the thought of what it would take to stop what she had set in motion was overwhelming; it would require an amount of tact and gentleness that she felt was impossible to summon. It wasn't that she was scared he would try to force her to do something against her will but that insisting that they stop now, after everything she'd done to push this forward, would make her seem spoiled and capricious, as if she'd ordered something at a restaurant and then, once the food arrived, had changed her mind and sent it back.

She tried to bludgeon her resistance into submission by taking a sip of the whiskey, but when he fell on top of her with those huge, sloppy kisses, his hand moving mechanically across her breasts and down to her crotch, as if he were making some perverse sign of the cross, she began to have trouble breathing and to feel that she really might not be able to go through with it after all.

Wriggling out from under the weight of him and straddling him helped, as did closing her eyes and remembering him kissing her forehead at the 7-Eleven. Encouraged by her progress, she pulled her shirt up over her head. Robert reached up and scooped her breast out of her bra, so that it jutted half in and half out of the cup, and rolled her nipple between his thumb and forefinger. This was



"I'm trying to figure out the right headache-inducing place for my birthday."

uncomfortable, so she leaned forward, pushing herself into his hand. He got the hint and tried to undo her bra, but he couldn't work the clasp, his evident frustration reminiscent of his struggle with the keys, until at last he said, bossily, "Take that thing off," and she complied.

The way he looked at her then was like an exaggerated version of the expression she'd seen on the faces of all the guys she'd been naked with, not that there were that many—six in total, Robert made seven. He looked stunned and stupid with pleasure, like a milk-drunk baby, and she thought that maybe this was what she loved most about sex—a guy revealed like that. Robert showed her more open need than any of the others, even though he was older, and must have seen more breasts, more bodies, than they had—but maybe that was part of it for him, the fact that he was older, and she was young.

As they kissed, she found herself carried away by a fantasy of such pure ego that she could hardly admit even to herself that she was having it. Look at this beautiful girl, she imagined him thinking. She's so perfect, her body is perfect, everything about her is perfect, she's only twenty years old, her skin is flawless, I want her so badly, I want her more than I've ever wanted anyone else, I want her so bad I might die.

The more she imagined his arousal, the more turned-on she got, and soon they were rocking against each other, getting into a rhythm, and she reached into his underwear and took his penis in her hand and felt the pearly drop of moisture on its tip. He made that sound again, that high-pitched feminine whine, and she wished there were a way she could ask him not to do that, but she couldn't think of any. Then his hand was inside her underwear, and when he felt that she was wet he visibly relaxed. He fingered her a little, very softly, and she bit her lip and put on a show for him, but then he poked her too hard and she flinched, and he jerked his hand away. "Sorry!" he said.

And then he asked, urgently, "Wait. Have you ever done this before?"

The night did, indeed, feel so odd and unprecedented that her first impulse was to say no, but then she realized what he meant and she laughed out loud.

She didn't mean to laugh; she knew

well enough already that, while Robert might enjoy being the subject of gentle, flirtatious teasing, he was not a person who would enjoy being laughed at, not at all. But she couldn't help it. Losing her virginity had been a long, drawn-out affair preceded by several months' worth of intense discussion with her boyfriend of two years, plus a visit to the gynecologist and a horrifically embarrassing but ultimately incredibly meaningful conversation with her mom,



who, in the end, had not only reserved her a room at a bed-and-breakfast but, after the event, written her a card. The idea that, instead of that whole involved, emotional process, she might have watched a pretentious Holocaust movie, drunk three beers, and then gone to some random house to lose her virginity to a guy she'd met at a movie theatre was so funny that suddenly she couldn't stop laughing, though the laughter had a slightly hysterical edge.

"I'm sorry," Robert said coldly. "I didn't know."

Abruptly, she stopped giggling.

"No, it was . . . nice of you to check," she said. "I've had sex before, though. I'm sorry I laughed."

"You don't need to apologize," he said, but she could tell by his face, as well as by the fact that he was going soft beneath her, that she did.

"I'm sorry," she said again, reflexively, and then, in a burst of inspiration, "I guess I'm just nervous, or something?"

He narrowed his eyes at her, as though suspicious of this claim, but it seemed to placate him. "You don't have to be nervous," he said. "We'll take it slow."

Yeah, right, she thought, and then he was on top of her again, kissing her and weighing her down, and she knew that her last chance of enjoying this encounter had disappeared, but that she would carry through with it until it was over. When Robert was naked, rolling a condom onto a dick that was only half visible beneath the hairy shelf of his belly,

she felt a wave of revulsion that she thought might actually break through her sense of pinned stasis, but then he shoved his finger in her again, not at all gently this time, and she imagined herself from above, naked and spread-eagled with this fat old man's finger inside her, and her revulsion turned to self-disgust and a humiliation that was a kind of perverse cousin to arousal.

During sex, he moved her through a series of positions with brusque efficiency, flipping her over, pushing her around, and she felt like a doll again, as she had outside the 7-Eleven, though not a precious one now—a doll made of rubber, flexible and resilient, a prop for the movie that was playing in his head. When she was on top, he slapped her thigh and said, "Yeah, yeah, you like that," with an intonation that made it impossible to tell whether he meant it as a question, an observation, or an order, and when he turned her over he growled in her ear, "I always wanted to fuck a girl with nice tits," and she had to smother her face in the pillow to keep from laughing again. At the end, when he was on top of her in missionary, he kept losing his erection, and every time he did he would say, aggressively, "You make my dick so hard," as though lying about it could make it true. At last, after a frantic rabbity burst, he shuddered, came, and collapsed on her like a tree falling, and, crushed beneath him, she thought, brightly, This is the worst life decision I have ever made! And she marvelled at herself for a while, at the mystery of this person who'd just done this bizarre, inexplicable thing.

After a short while, Robert got up and hurried to the bathroom in a bow-legged waddle, clutching the condom to keep it from falling off. Margot lay on the bed and stared at the ceiling, noticing for the first time that there were stickers on it, those little stars and moons that were supposed to glow in the dark.

Robert returned from the bathroom and stood silhouetted in the doorway. "What do you want to do now?" he asked her.

"We should probably just kill ourselves," she imagined saying, and then she imagined that somewhere, out there in the universe, there was a boy who would think that this moment was just as awful yet hilarious as she did, and that sometime, far in the future, she

would tell the boy this story. She'd say, "And then he said, 'You make my dick so hard,'" and the boy would shriek in agony and grab her leg, saying, "Oh, my God, stop, please, no, I can't take it anymore," and the two of them would collapse into each other's arms and laugh and laugh—but of course there was no such future, because no such boy existed, and never would.

So instead she shrugged, and Robert said, "We could watch a movie," and he went to the computer and downloaded something; she didn't pay attention to what. For some reason, he'd chosen a movie with subtitles, and she kept closing her eyes, so she had no idea what was going on. The whole time, he was stroking her hair and trailing light kisses down her shoulder, as if he'd forgotten that ten minutes ago he'd thrown her around as if they were in a porno and growled, "I always wanted to fuck a girl with nice tits" in her ear.

Then, out of nowhere, he started talking about his feelings for her. He talked about how hard it had been for him when she went away for break, not knowing if she had an old high-school boyfriend she might reconnect with back home. During those two weeks, it turned out, an entire secret drama had played out in his head, one in which she'd left campus committed to him, to Robert, but at home had been drawn back to the high-school guy, who, in Robert's mind, was some kind of brutish, handsome jock, not worthy of her but nonetheless seductive by virtue of his position at the top of the hierarchy back home in Saline. "I was so worried you might, like, make a bad decision and things would be different between us when you got back," he said. "But I should have trusted you." My high-school boyfriend is gay, Margot imagined telling him. We were pretty sure of it in high school, but after a year of sleeping around at college he's definitely figured it out. In fact, he's not even a hundred per cent positive that he identifies as a man anymore; we spent a lot of time over break talking about what it would mean for him to come out as non-binary, so sex with him wasn't going to happen, and you could have asked me about that if you were worried; you could have asked me about a lot of things. But she didn't say any of that; she just

lay silently, emanating a black, hateful aura, until finally Robert trailed off. "Are you still awake?" he asked, and she said yes, and he said, "Is everything O.K.?"

"How old are you, exactly?" she asked him.

"I'm thirty-four," he said. "Is that a problem?"

She could sense him in the dark beside her vibrating with fear.

"No," she said. "It's fine."

"Good," he said. "It was something I wanted to bring up with you, but I didn't know how you'd take it." He rolled over and kissed her forehead, and she felt like a slug he'd poured salt on, disintegrating under that kiss.

She looked at the clock; it was nearly three in the morning. "I should go home, probably," she said.

"Really?" he said. "But I thought you'd stay over. I make great scrambled eggs!"

"Thanks," she said, sliding into her leggings. "But I can't. My roommate would be worried. So."

"Gotta get back to the dorm room," he said, voice dripping with sarcasm.

"Yep," she said. "Since that's where I live."

The drive was endless. The snow had turned to rain. They didn't talk. Eventually, Robert switched the radio to late-night NPR. Margot recalled how, when they first got on the highway to go to the movie, she'd imagined that Robert might murder her, and she thought, Maybe he'll murder me now.

He didn't murder her. He drove her to her dorm. "I had a really nice time tonight," he said, unbuckling his seat belt.

"Thanks," she said. She clutched her bag in her hands. "Me, too."

"I'm so glad we finally got to go on a date," he said.

"A date," she said to her imaginary boyfriend. "He called that a date." And they both laughed and laughed.

"You're welcome," she said. She reached for the door handle. "Thanks for the movie and stuff."

"Wait," he said, and grabbed her arm. "Come here." He dragged her back, wrapped his arms around her, and pushed his tongue down her throat one last time. "Oh, my God, when will it end?" she asked the imaginary boyfriend, but the imaginary boyfriend didn't answer her.

"Good night," she said, and then she opened the door and escaped. By the

time she got to her room, she already had a text from him: no words, just hearts and faces with heart eyes and, for some reason, a dolphin.

She slept for twelve hours, and when she woke up she ate waffles in the dining hall and binge-watched detective shows on Netflix and tried to envision the hopeful possibility that he would disappear without her having to do anything, that somehow she could just wish him away. When the next message from him did arrive, just after dinner, it was a harmless joke about Red Vines, but she deleted it immediately, overwhelmed with a skin-crawling loathing that felt vastly disproportionate to anything he had actually done. She told herself that she owed him at least some kind of breakup message, that to ghost on him would be inappropriate, childish, and cruel. And, if she did try to ghost, who knew how long it would take him to get the hint? Maybe the messages would keep coming and coming; maybe they would never end.

She began drafting a message—*Thank you for the nice time but I'm not interested in a relationship right now*—but she kept hedging and apologizing, attempting to close loopholes that she imagined him trying to slip through (*"It's O.K., I'm not interested in a relationship either, something casual is fine!"*), so that the message got longer and longer and even more impossible to send. Meanwhile, his texts kept arriving, none of them saying anything of consequence, each one more earnest than the last. She imagined him lying on his bed that was just a mattress, carefully crafting each one. She remembered that he'd talked a lot about his cats and yet she hadn't seen any cats in the house, and she wondered if he'd made them up.

Every so often, over the next day or so, she would find herself in a gray, daydreamy mood, missing something, and she'd realize that it was Robert she missed, not the real Robert but the Robert she'd imagined on the other end of all those text messages during break.

"Hey, so it seems like you're really busy, huh?" Robert finally wrote, three days after they'd fucked, and she knew that this was the perfect opportunity to send her half-completed breakup text, but instead she wrote back, "Haha

sorry yeah" and "I'll text you soon," and then she thought, Why did I do that? And she truly didn't know.

"Just tell him you're not interested!" Margot's roommate, Tamara, screamed in frustration after Margot had spent an hour on her bed, dithering about what to say to Robert.

"I have to say more than that. We had sex," Margot said.

"Do you?" Tamara said. "I mean, really?"

"He's a nice guy, sort of," Margot said, and she wondered how true that was. Then, abruptly, Tamara lunged, snatching the phone out of Margot's hand and holding it far away from her as her thumbs flew across the screen. Tamara flung the phone onto the bed and Margot scrambled for it, and there it was, what Tamara had written: "Hi im not interested in you stop textng me."

"Oh, my God," Margot said, finding it suddenly hard to breathe.

"What?" Tamara said boldly. "What's the big deal? It's true."

But they both knew that it was a big deal, and Margot had a knot of fear in her stomach so solid that she thought she might retch. She imagined Robert picking up his phone, reading that message, turning to glass, and shattering to pieces.

"Calm down. Let's go get a drink," Tamara said, and they went to a bar and shared a pitcher, and all the while Margot's phone sat between them on the table, and though they tried to ignore it, when it chimed with an incoming message they screamed and clutched each other's arms.

"I can't do it—you read it," Margot said. She pushed the phone toward Tamara. "You did this. It's your fault."

But all the message said was "O.K., Margot, I am sorry to hear that. I hope I did not do anything to upset you. You are a sweet girl and I really enjoyed the time we spent together. Please let me know if you change your mind."

Margot collapsed on the table, laying her head in her hands. She felt as though a leech, grown heavy and swollen with her blood, had at last popped off her skin, leaving a tender, bruised spot behind. But why should she feel that way? Perhaps she was being unfair to Robert, who really had done nothing wrong, except like her, and be bad in



"I've made a terrible mistake."

bed, and maybe lie about having cats, although probably they had just been in another room.

But then, a month later, she saw him in the bar—her bar, the one in the student ghetto, where, on their date, she'd suggested they go. He was alone, at a table in the back, and he wasn't reading or looking at his phone; he was just sitting there silently, hunched over a beer.

She grabbed the friend she was with, a guy named Albert. "Oh, my God, that's him," she whispered. "The guy from the movie theatre!" By then, Albert had heard a version of the story, though not quite the true one; nearly all her friends had. Albert stepped in front of her, shielding her from Robert's view, as they rushed back to the table where their friends were. When Margot announced that Robert was there, everyone erupted in astonishment, and then they surrounded her and hustled her out of the bar as if she were the President and they were the Secret Service. It was all so over-the-top that she wondered if she was acting like a mean girl, but, at the same time, she truly did feel sick and scared.

Curled up on her bed with Tamara that night, the glow of the phone like a campfire illuminating their faces, Margot read the messages as they arrived:

"Hi Margot, I saw you out at the bar tonight. I know you said not to text you but I just wanted to say you looked really pretty. I hope you're doing well!"

"I know I shouldnt say this but I really miss you"

"Hey maybe I don't have the right to ask but I just wish you'd tell me what it is I did wrog"

"**wron"

"I felt like we had a real connection did you not feel that way or..."

"Maybe I was too old for u or maybe you liked someone else"

"Is that guy you were with tonight your boyfriend"

"???"

"Or is he just some guy you are fucking"

"Sorry"

"When u laguehd when I asked if you were a virgin was it because you'd fucked so many guys"

"Are you fucking that guy right now"

"Are you"

"Are you"

"Are you"

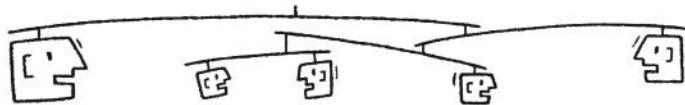
"Answer me"

"Whore." ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

Kristen Roupenian on the self-deceptions of dating.

THE CRITICS



THE CURRENT CINEMA

OVERFLOWING

"The Shape of Water."

BY ANTHONY LANE

Having once attended a stage production of "Singin' in the Rain" at which the people in the front rows were issued with waterproofs during the interval, ahead of the title number, I was ready for whatever "The Shape of Water" could throw at me. A seat at the back seemed well advised. Guillermo del Toro's new film is his wettest by far, notwithstanding the blood and other secretions that soaked through "Crimson Peak" (2015). Even the opening credits are drenched; we are ushered down what appears to be an undersea hallway, through a door, and into an apartment, where chairs and tables float in a drifting dance. Not since Alice filled a room with tears has inundation felt like such a wonder.

The heroine of the latest movie is Eliza (Sally Hawkins). She lives alone in Baltimore, a lowly figure awaiting change, although, like her namesake in "Pygmalion" and "My Fair Lady," she hasn't a clue what's coming. But Eliza Doolittle acquired a new voice, whereas this Eliza cannot speak at all. She gets by on sign language (clarified by yellow subtitles), a genial courtesy, and a habitual rhythm to her life: a bath, a shoeshine, a bus trip, and a hard night's toil as a cleaner at a scientific facility. Her best—indeed her only—friends are Zelda (Octavia Spencer), who polishes and scrubs alongside her, and Giles (Richard Jenkins), a toupee-topped bachelor who labors, with scant reward, as a commercial illustrator. His home, liberally strewn with cats, is next to Eliza's. He likes to serve her Key-lime pie, which gives her a lizard-green tongue.

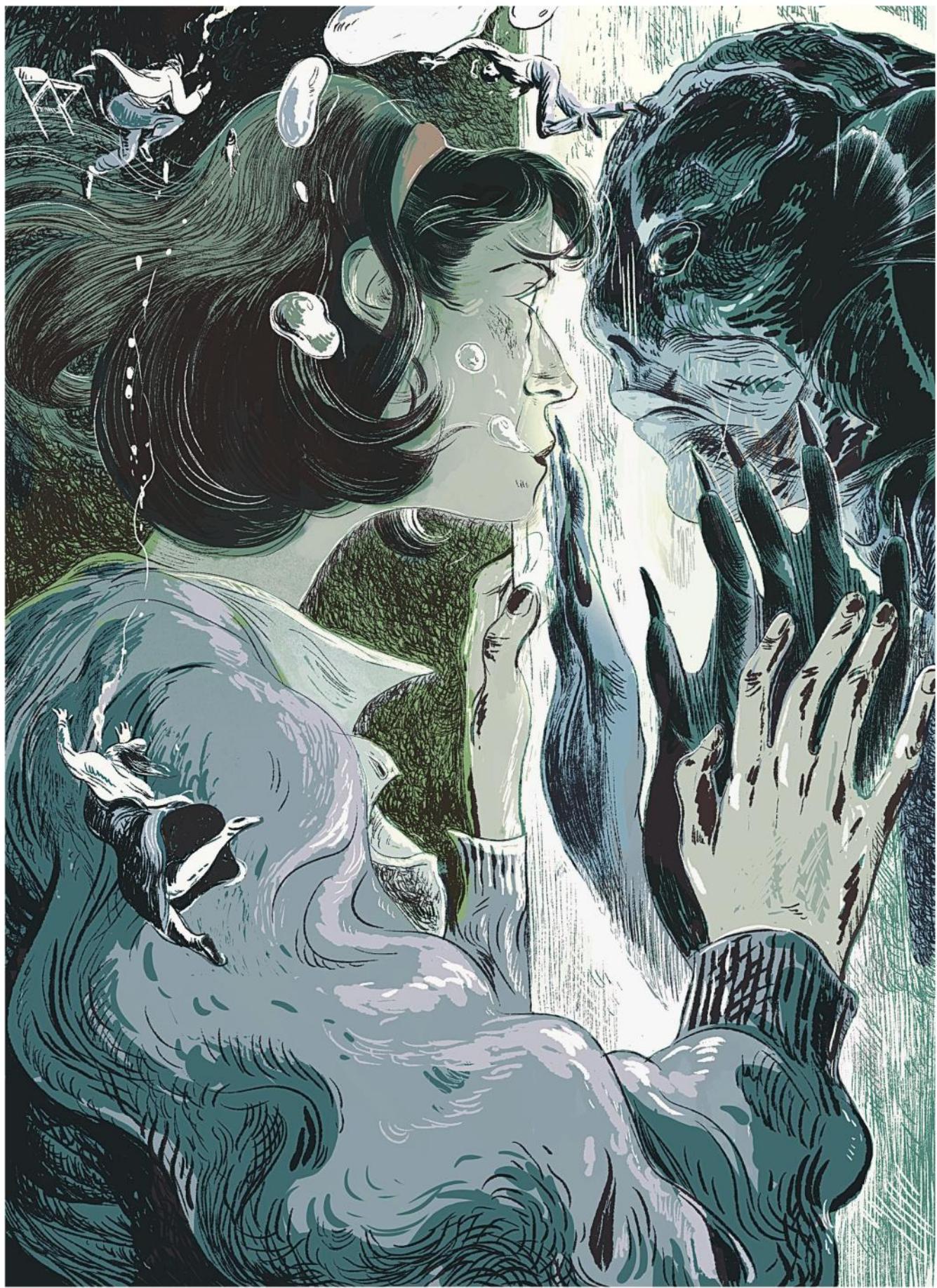
No date is provided, though "The Story of Ruth" (1960) is playing at the

Orpheum cinema below Eliza's apartment, and "Mister Ed," which premiered the following year, is on TV. In short, the Cold War is at its frosty height, which is why "the most sensitive asset ever to be housed in this facility" arrives at Eliza's workplace. Not an atomic bomb but something rarer still: a singular being who can breathe both underwater and, less happily, in air. He might be useful in space, the race for which has grown rabid. He has arms and legs and, unlike a merman, no tail. He also has squamous dark skin, like a toad crossed with a snake. (Somewhere, under the makeup, is the actor Doug Jones.) His eyelids bat horizontally, while a proud ruff of what may be gills palpates around his neck. He was found in a South American river, where the locals believed him to be a god. Now he is kept in a tank, swimming freely until he bites someone's fingers off, after which he is tethered with an iron collar and chains. He is inspected, with fascination, by a scientist named Hoffstetler (Michael Stuhlbarg); chastised with an electric cattle prod by Strickland (Michael Shannon), the head of security; and adored by Eliza.

We have met this being (or a close relation of his) before, in his natural habitat. Anyone who knows "Creature from the Black Lagoon" (1954) will recall the Amazonian beast, armed with a similar crest and claws, who wrought mayhem on an intrusive expedition and, like King Kong, bore an American woman to his lair. Sadly, it was clear that their relationship was going nowhere beyond a murky grotto, whereas Eliza considers her Creature to be her dream man—or, at least, her dream aquatic biped. She

brings him hard-boiled eggs for lunch, which he devours as avidly as Cool Hand Luke, and then teaches him how to sign "egg" and other words: a dazzling device on del Toro's part, whereby Eliza's condition, far from being a handicap, eases the entente between her and the prisoner, while confirming his intelligence. (In Strickland's view, he is mindless. That makes it simpler to torture the poor thing.) The Creature also has a heart, though heaven knows what purls within its chambers; when Eliza bends down and listens to his chest, we hear the soft crash of waves.

For much of the movie, of course, he remains in captivity. Scientists, according to Strickland, "fall in love with their playthings"—shades of "Pygmalion" again—and we learn that, while the top brass tire of the Creature and ask that he be euthanized and cut up, Hoffstetler has clandestine motives for keeping him alive. As for the daring Eliza, she harbors thoughts of engineering his escape. Meanwhile, she must do what she can to school and to bewitch her unlikely beau, and that includes dancing in front of him when she is meant to be mopping the floor, using a broom for a partner. The reference is to Fred Astaire, who did the same with a hat rack, in "Royal Wedding" (1951)—part of a chorus of echoes that resound throughout. Giles has one of those televisions which seem eternally tuned to old movies: "Time for Alice Faye," he says, whom we see crooning "You'll Never Know," the heartbreaker from "Hello Frisco, Hello" (1943) that won an Oscar for Best Song. Other highlights include a fruit-laden Carmen Miranda, in "That Night in Rio" (1941),



Guillermo del Toro's genre-fluid fantasy explores the mutual enchantment of a woman and a mysterious aquatic being.

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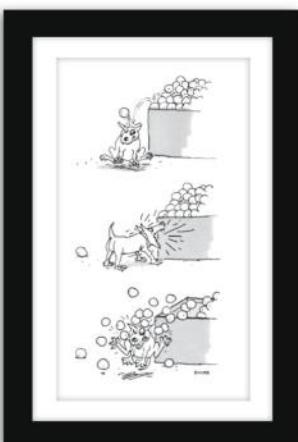
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George Booth, April 4, 1988

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and a scene in which Eliza smuggles in a portable record player and treats the Creature to a suave burst of Glenn Miller and "I Know Why," as if to show the beast that, despite appearances, there is something to be said for *Homo sapiens*. A soiled and savage species, we can still make music when we try.

So what if "The Shape of Water" is flooded with other films? What matters is not that del Toro is a fanatical scholar of his medium but that, as we sensed in the grave reveries of "Pan's Labyrinth" (2006), he understands how fantasy invades and invests our waking lives. That was equally true of Dennis Potter, the creator of "Pennies from Heaven" and "The Singing Detective," who I suspect would have warmed to this movie, and especially to the sight of Eliza, suddenly spirited from her kitchen table onto a monochrome dance floor. There, draped in a feathery gown, she sways back and forth, to the strains of an orchestra, in the arms of the Creature—her private Fred Astaire, with scales instead of white tie and tails. None of this would cohere, as an imaginative escapade, without Sally Hawkins. At the start, I worried that the film might prove merely winsome, like a Maryland "Amélie," but Hawkins makes it taut and fierce. "All that I am, all that I have ever been, brought me here to him," Eliza says—or signs—of the Creature, and that yearning feels as urgent as a news flash. Neither bullies nor bogeymen frighten Eliza. Nor does sex.

"Cornflakes were invented to prevent masturbation," Giles says. After a pause, he adds, "Didn't work." It certainly doesn't for Eliza, whom we witness eating a bowl of cornflakes and masturbating (though, wisely, not at the same time), thus giving fresh impetus to the Kellogg's slogan, introduced in 1958, "The best to you each morning." Needless to say, her pleasure is water-based—in the bath, every day, as regular as clockwork, with an egg timer placed nearby to hurry her along. Later, she finds a less solitary joy, of which I will say little, save that the Creature, when aroused in return, flickers with sparks and trails of luminescence, as if his body were a city at night. What del Toro sees is that lore and legend, though often dramatized for children, are rich in adult desires. The lust that is, of ne-

cessity, thwarted and dammed in Disney productions of "Beauty and the Beast" is released, and allowed to flow at will, through the fable of Eliza and the Creature. So grimly accustomed are we to sexual violence onscreen that to see sex flourish as a rebuke to violence and a remedy for loneliness, which is what "The Shape of Water" provides, is a heady and uplifting surprise.

Having watched this movie twice, I still can't define it. Maybe I need another plunge. Polonius, presenting the players to Hamlet, lauds their prowess at "tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene indivisible, or poem unlimited," and del Toro, no less eager to mix his modes, delivers a horror-monster-musical-jail-break-period-spy-romance. It comes garnished with shady Russians, a shot of racial politics (Strickland talks to Zelda about "your people," meaning African-Americans), puddles of blood, and a healthy feminist impatience with men who either overstep the mark or, like Zelda's husband, sit on their butts and do zilch. Octavia Spencer, as is her wont, grounds the action in common sense—no actor raises a more skeptical eyebrow—and in the common decency that attends it. Michael Shannon, cracking candy between his teeth, is as mean as sin, though he might have been meaner still if some of his scenes had been condensed, while Richard Jenkins brings us a gentle soul who, until recently, feared that his time had come and gone. Not so. "I'm going to be synchronizing our watches, just like they do in the movies!" he says, at a crucial moment. His time is now.

The strangest thing about "The Shape of Water," which should be one almighty mess, is that it succeeds. The streams of story converge, and, as in any good fairy tale, that which is deemed ugly and unworthy, by a myopic world, is revealed to be a pearl beyond price. "The thing we keep in there is an affront," Strickland says, referring to what lurks in the tank. When Giles first encounters the Creature, however, he doesn't flinch. He gazes, with the practiced eye of an artist, and with the hunger of somebody starved of love, and then declares, "He's so beautiful." A poem unlimited, indeed. ♦

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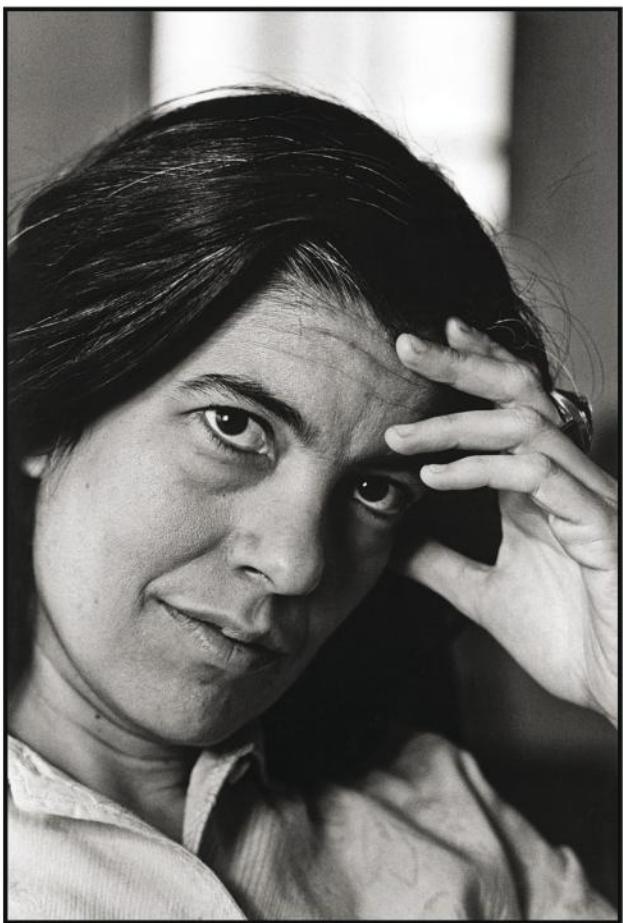
Richard Brody blogs about movies.

A CRITIC AT LARGE

ACTS OF ATTENTION

What Susan Sontag never changed her mind about.

BY TOBI HASLETT



Seriousness, for Susan Sontag, was a flashing machete to swing at the thriving vegetation of American philistinism. The philistinism sprang from our barbarism—and our barbarism had conquered the world. “Today’s America,” she wrote in 1966, “with Ronald Reagan the new daddy of California and John Wayne chawing spareribs in the White House, is pretty much the same Yahooland that Mencken was describing.” Intellectuals, doomed to tramp through an absurd century, were to inflict their seriousness on Governor Reagan and President Johnson—and on John Wayne, spareribs, and the whole shattered, voluptuous culture.

Sontag’s nonfiction prizes ardor; her fiction is filled with aching irresolution.

culture with valiant attempts at experimental fiction (largely unread) and experimental cinema (largely unseen) and yet whose blazing essays in *Partisan Review* and *The New York Review of Books* won her that rare combination of aesthetic and moral prestige. She was a youthful late modernist who, late in life, published two vast historical novels that turned to previous centuries for both their setting and their narrative blueprint; and a seer whose prophecies were promptly revised after every bashing encounter with mass callousness and political failure. The Vietnam War, Polish Solidarity, AIDS, the Bosnian genocide, and 9/11 drove her to revoke old opinions and brandish new ones with equal vigor. In retrospect, her positions are less striking than her pose—that bold faith in her power as an eminent, vigilant, properly public intellectual to chasten and to instruct.

Other writers had abandoned their post. So Sontag responded to a 1997 survey “about intellectuals and their role” with a kind of regal pique:

What the word intellectual means to me today is, first of all, conferences and roundtable discussions and symposia in magazines about the role of intellectuals in which well-known intellectuals have agreed to pronounce on the inadequacy, credulity, disgrace, treason, irrelevance, obsolescence, and imminent or already perfected disappearance of the caste to which, as their participation in these events testifies, they belong.

She held a contrary creed. “I go to war,” she said a decade after witnessing the siege of Sarajevo, “because I think it’s my duty to be in as much contact with reality as I can be, and war is a tremendous reality in our world.”

Behind the extravagant drama, though, was a shivering doubt. Her work rustles with the premonition that she was obsolete, that her splendor and style and ferocious brio had been demoted to a kind of sparkling irrelevance. The feeling flared up abruptly, both when she was thrilled by radical action and when she was aghast at public complacency.

“For Susan Sontag, the Illusions of the 60’s Have Been Dissipated”: this was the smiling headline for a profile of Sontag in the *Times*. The year was 1980, a hinge for her, and the

The point was to be serious about power and serious about pleasure: cherish literature, relish films, challenge domination, release yourself into the rapture of sexual need—but be *thorough* about it. “Seriousness is really a virtue for me,” Sontag wrote in her journal after a night at the Paris opera. She was twenty-four. Decades later, and months before she died, she mounted a stage in South Africa to declare that all writers should “love words, agonize over sentences,” “pay attention to the world,” and, crucially, “be serious.”

Only a figure of such impossible status would dare to glorify a mood. Here was a woman who had barged into the

article—by a twenty-five-year-old Michiko Kakutani—was occasioned by the release of “Under the Sign of Saturn,” Sontag’s fifth book of nonfiction. “Although she maintains that her current attitudes are not inconsistent with her former positions,” Kakutani wrote, “Miss Sontag’s views have undergone a considerable evolution over the last decade and a half.” The gruesome disappointment of the sixties’ militancy had sent shudders through the left-wing intelligentsia of which Sontag had once been a symbol.

So the *Times* piece presented a woman of dignified prudence, whose deviations are of the mature, domesticated kind. “The sensibility that resides in this particular town house is an eclectic one indeed,” Kakutani begins, as the piece swivels like a periscope to survey the gleaming appurtenances of the life of the mind: the eight-thousand-volume library, the idiosyncratic record collection, and the portraits of iconic writers who keep watch over Sontag’s desk like benevolent household gods—Woolf, Wilde, Proust.

And Simone Weil, the Marxist turned mystic who, during the Second World War, fled her native France and protested the humiliation of her coun-

trymen by starving herself to death. In 1963, Sontag had begun an article on Weil, for the first issue of *The New York Review of Books*, with a thundering declaration: “The culture-heroes of our liberal bourgeois civilization are anti-liberal and anti-bourgeois.” So, at that point, was Sontag. Weil was a specimen, for her, of a fascinating species: the raving writer, the flagellant writer, the writer impaled on ruthless principle. “No one who loves life would wish to imitate her dedication to martyrdom,” Sontag wrote. “Yet so far as we love seriousness, as well as life, we are moved by it, nourished by it.”

To love seriousness was to quest for electrifying contact with spiritual and ideological extremes. The piece on Weil—a woman “excruciatingly identical with her ideas”—is a hymn to extremity. Extremity shone with the promise of transcendence, which is why Sontag strapped herself to the thrashing energies of the sixties. She was enshrined as an intellectual in revolt, unleashing her polemics on the repressive drabness of “our liberal bourgeois civilization.” Along the way, she learned, as she put it, “the speed at which a bulky essay in *Partisan Review* becomes a hot tip in *Time*.” The Weil essay, along with pieces on Alain Resnais, psycho-

analysis, Camus, and Cesare Pavese, appeared in Sontag’s first essay collection, which in 1966 boomed cannon-like from the prow of the literary left: “Against Interpretation.”

It was crucial to be *against*: against fustiness, against the horror in Vietnam, against the leering excesses and calculated impoverishments of the global capitalist order. “In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art”—Sontag’s phrase from the book’s title essay—is now imprinted on the public imagination because it sent the ecstasies of the youth movement hurtling toward the arena of aesthetic taste.

“Styles of Radical Will,” Sontag’s best book, was published three years later, and contained an essay on Godard in which she gave full-throated expression to the spirit of revolution that had swept up the poor, the dark, the sensuous, and the young. “The great culture heroes of our time,” Sontag announced, again, “have shared two qualities: they have all been ascetics in some exemplary way, and also great destroyers.”

This was in 1968—the year she flew to Hanoi and visited the Vietcong, publishing an account in *Esquire*. It was the apex of her militant commitment. Although she had long since turned up her nose at the “philistine fraud” of the American Communist Party, the North Vietnamese had inspired her, the struggle filling her mind with a vision of a changed world. “The Vietnamese are ‘whole’ human beings, not ‘split’ as we are,” she marvelled.

But, while she was being led around by terse, determined guerrillas, it struck her that her elaborate American appetites for rock and psychology and *The New York Review of Books* were marks of the very luxury she longed, in those days, to abolish. “I live in an unethical society,” she wrote in her journal,

that coarsens the sensibilities and thwarts the capacities for goodness of most people but makes available for minority consumption an astonishing array of intellectual and aesthetic pleasures. Those who don’t enjoy (in both senses) my pleasures have every right, from their side, to regard my consciousness as spoiled, corrupt, decadent.

She yearned to be identical to her ideas, to display the punishing consistency



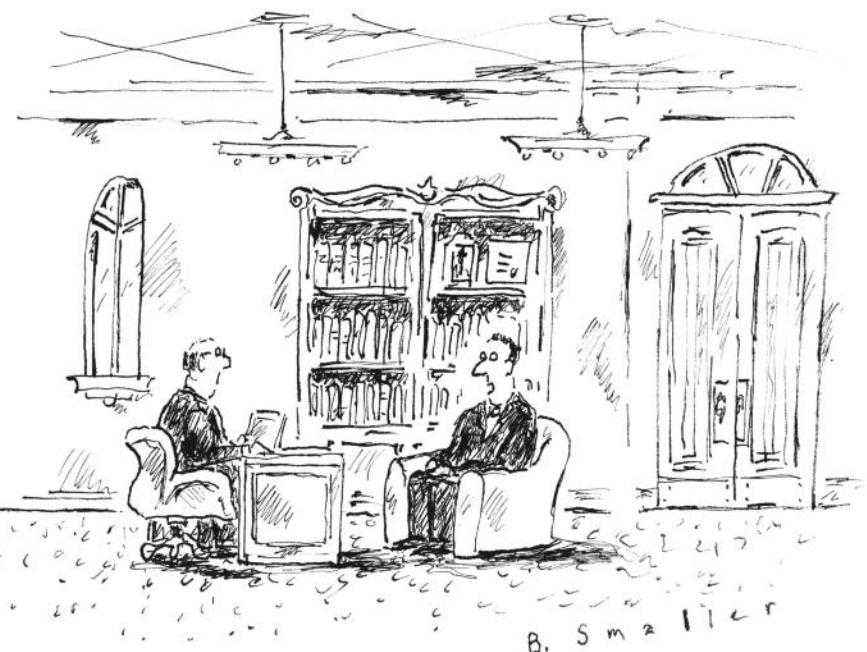
“I wish I had a house like yours so I could do something nice with it.”

of Weil, but her ideas jostled and sparked, exploding her sense of what she was, or wanted to be.

This season brings us a Sontag collection that scrapes through the varnish of her persona. "Debriefing" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), edited by Benjamin Taylor, gathers her eleven short stories. It also stages a coup. Sontag the fantastically assured "dark lady of American letters" is guillotined by Sontag the punk, Sontag the agitated diarist, Sontag the perplexed. Short fiction was never quite her form, and these stories see her lurching down the page. They catch her *between* postures, in moments of poignant psychological wobble. This isn't the majestic air of paradox that gallops through her writing on photography or Camus or camp but, rather, an aching, moving irresolution.

The private Sontag has, of course, already been thrust into the light by two volumes of her journals: "Reborn" and "As Consciousness Is Harnessed to Flesh." They expose her sincerity and self-doubt, and bare the homosexual life about which she was so laboriously coy. And they furnish us with a fuller picture of her early life: the fatherless childhood in Arizona, the adolescence in Los Angeles, the precocity at the University of Chicago, and her marriage, at seventeen, to the scholar Philip Rieff. Then, there's the brooding, demanding, but, finally, astonishing woman of letters presented to us by a rising pile of remembrances, notably Sigrid Nunez's "Sempre Susan: A Memoir of Susan Sontag" and "Desperately Seeking Susan," a now iconic 2005 essay by Terry Castle in the *London Review of Books*.

"Debriefing" has a different appeal. The book lies somewhere between the bronze-plated imperiousness of her essays and the veil-yanking satisfactions of the journals. Raw, flailing feeling is pinched and styled, sometimes clumsily. The clumsiness is affecting. The satires here—"American Spirits," "Baby"—are failures. But in the sad pieces our dauntless aesthete offers us glimpses of her psyche, and of intelligent heroes melting into a sense of sophisticated futility and thwarted feeling. Here is a Sontag heaving herself



"I'm just afraid if I die and go to Heaven there won't be anyone I know."

through shredded political romances and sapped passions, applying her ardor to disillusionment and drift.

"Old Complaints Revisited," a story first published in 1974, portrays the agonies of flagging commitment: "I want to leave, but I can't. Each day I wake up and tell myself today I'll write a letter. No, better yet, I'll go around and let the organizer know in person that I'm resigning. My arguments are in order. I review them in my head." Anomie is not the problem. Attachment is. Our narrator is a servile participant in something called "the organization" but is on the brink of a traumatic break. Sontag pitches the "I" of the story against the shifting, anonymous mass of "the members," loyal adherents to an unspecified political ideology. There have been purges and treasons in the past; now what is demanded—and insidiously enforced—is discipline. That discipline is political, psychological, and likely pointless, "unless the organization was designed simply to demonstrate the power of human perseverance in the face of crushing obstacles."

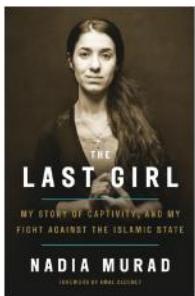
But suffering within the organization rewards the sufferer with a perverse cachet. So a whole political insurgency trudges along, wincing be-

neath the whip of a relentless sanctimony. The narrator—whose gender is carefully withheld—admits "my wish to lead not just a good but a morally intense life," and we see that this is the damning little virtue that makes him or her so vulnerable to the tyranny of the group. This is a tight, asphyxiating seriousness. The narrator had wanted to be a writer. Yet the organization promises a *purpose*: a chance to bring the political will and the starving spirit into shining, total alignment.

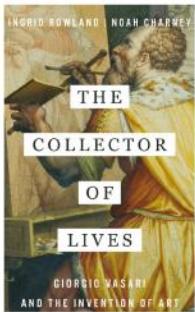
Sontag, glancing at Kafka, opts for allegory. She furnishes us with a model of how orthodoxy takes hold of the psyche and begins to twist. The narrator writhes within a fantasy of political commitment, though the political conditions are unripe. The dreamed-of reckoning is impossibly distant. So power is exerted almost entirely *within* the organization, among its pious militants, generations of whom have clung to their lovely discipline throughout a vast, indifferent history. A lesson flickers at the bottom of the fable. "Dissent must be set off from dissent," the narrator says. "I dissent differently."

The idea haunted her. Slung between aesthetics and politics, beauty and justice, sensuous extravagance and leftist

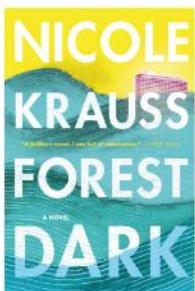
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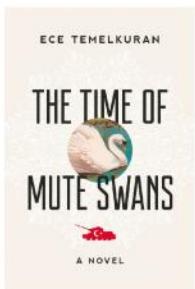
The Last Girl, by Nadia Murad (*Tim Duggan*). Growing up in an Iraqi village as a member of the Yazidi minority, Murad led a happy life, revolving around her wise and funny mother, her extended family, and school (even if the history curriculum effaced her community entirely). But, in 2014, when she was twenty-one, ISIS militants attacked the village and made her a sex slave, along with thousands of other Yazidi women and girls. Through courage, luck, and the help of a Sunni family who risked their lives for her, she eventually escaped. This devastating memoir unflinchingly recounts her experiences and questions the complicity of witnesses who acquiesced in the suffering of others.



The Collector of Lives, by Ingrid Rowland and Noah Charney (*Norton*). Giorgio Vasari, a prolific artist of sixteenth-century Italy, is best remembered for his "Lives of the Artists," a celebration of the great figures of the Renaissance. This engaging biography frames him as the first writer to capture the transformation of artists from mere "craftsmen" to "thinkers." Noting that, before that era, it was unusual for art to be commissioned solely on the strength of an artist's name, the authors credit Vasari with "the invention of art"—the creation of a world in which ascribing a painting to Leonardo, for example, may transform our perception of its worth. Their account of Vasari's Tuscany, and of the facts (and fictions) that went into his "Lives," is a fitting tribute to their subject's biographical achievements.



Forest Dark, by Nicole Krauss (*Harper*). This mystical novel tracks the parallel journeys of two New Yorkers: Jules Epstein, unmoored, in his late sixties, by the deaths of his parents; and the narrator, a novelist who has lost faith in her craft and her marriage. Separately, they set off for Tel Aviv, where Epstein was born and the narrator was conceived. The narrator is recruited to work on a murky project involving Kafka, who, her contact alleges, did not actually die in 1924. Epstein, meanwhile, encounters a rabbi who believes him to be a descendant of King David. Delving into the metaphysical and the spiritual realms, Krauss presents a stirring, sprawling exploration of the "unformed and nameless life" that exists alongside the one we're consciously living.



The Time of Mute Swans, by Ece Temelkuran, translated from the Turkish by Kenneth Dakan (*Arcade*). Set in Ankara in the tense summer leading up to the Turkish coup of 1980, this novel centers on two children, Ali and Ayşe, who contend with the strife of the adult world. Their families, though divided by class, share leftist sympathies, and are consequently vulnerable. Intimate conflicts arise from public ones: a relationship with obtuse but seemingly harmless neighbors deteriorates, with grave consequences. The author, a well-known journalist critical of the current Turkish government, moves skillfully between history and fiction. The innocence of the children can be cloying—they plot to release butterflies inside the parliament building—but the end of that innocence is vividly evoked.

commitment, Sontag sometimes found herself contemplating the obliteration of her role as public advocate-cum-arbiter of taste. To be serious was to stake a belief in *attention*—but, in a world that demands action, could attention be enough? ("I wanted to be useful," she remarked of her 1978 book, "Illness as Metaphor.") Because she had gone through the conflicts of the sixties, her instinct was to sprint to the barricades and decry quietism as complicity and contentedness as moral failure. This was the logic of movements, of course. But she would live to see them die.

"**I** don't want to satisfy my desire, I want to exasperate it," a character says in "Unguided Tour," which appeared in this magazine in 1977. The story, which bears an open resemblance to the work of Donald Barthelme, is made up of dialogue between two nameless speakers, and rolls, with gloomy facility, from war to history to art. Love, as the opening lines make clear, throbs at the narrative center:

I took a trip to see the beautiful things.
Change of scenery. Change of heart. And do you know?

What?

They're still there.

Ah, but they won't be there for long.

I know. That's why I went. To say goodbye.
Whenever I travel, it's always to say goodbye.

We're instantly faced with a question of scale. How, Sontag wants to know, can the psyche manage its devotions—to love, but also to the immensity of the world? The problem intensifies, as private loss ("change of heart") is stamped dolefully upon the landscape ("change of scenery"). Like actors in Godard, Sontag's characters speak a sighing, allusive language draped with erudition. The action here, if it can be called that, unfolds in a glamorously abstract, vaguely Continental universe: there's a dictator, a piazza, a war—and souvenirs, cathedrals, and the exiled leader of a Liberation Front. (When she later made a filmed version of the story—the fourth and last of her films—she shot it in Venice.) "The trial is next week, so now they're having demonstrations. Can't you see the banner?" But the political intrigue is muffled, distant, a chic ripple in sensibility.

These are privileged people. They

ransack the planet in a ravenous search for stimulation, an act that churns experience to an exhausted, cosmopolitan sludge. They lament this. In their drained world, there's nothing but the memory of love, the memory of joy—and the memory, strangely, of a socialist hope. "We can march in their workers' festivals," one says airily to the other, "and sing the 'Internationale,' for even we know the words."

Even we know the words: political solidarity shrivels into pantomime. The gestures are wooden and rote. Intelligence has spent itself, plunging into a kind of spiritual insolvency. And history, offered up for the delectation of Sontag's protagonists, is revealed to be a miserable fetish, "one of the more disastrous forms of unrequited love."

"Unguided Tour," like "Old Complaints Revisited" and six other stories in "Debriefing," were collected in the only other book of Sontag's stories, "*I, etcetera*," from 1978. The title is telling. So is the year. A decade had passed since the peak of the youth movement, with which she had declared a gallant sympathy. Many of these stories, then, are stalked by the memory of an age of revolution: the shrieking climax and thudding bathos, the militant action and miserable defeat, the struck postures and private sacrifice—all the desperate palpitations of a heart hurled at the world.

The final portrait above Sontag's desk in 1980—hanging beside Woolf, Wilde, Proust, and Weil—was of the German Jewish writer Walter Benjamin, who sulks beautifully at the center of Sontag's essay "Under the Sign of Saturn." It is the key to "Later Essays" (Library of America), a new volume that collects her last five books, excepting the novels, and trembles with melancholy. Benjamin was loosely attached to the Frankfurt School: a coterie of Marxist scholars that included Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse (the last of whom shared a house with Sontag and her then husband in Cambridge, Massachusetts). The group rose to radical prestige in Weimar Germany by piercing the skin of bourgeois ideology with their glinting dialectical acuity. Soon they were forced to flee. Many of them set-

tled at universities in the United States, but Benjamin, devotee of Baudelaire and translator of Proust, insisted on going to Paris—and died while escaping to Spain. "I felt I was describing myself," Sontag told Kakutani about the Benjamin essay. "I'm trying to tell the truth, but of course I know I am drawn to the part of people that reminds me of myself."

That part was probably Benjamin's lavish intellectual appetite and tragic posture. His political intensity bloomed with feeling but also romantic contradiction; his writing revels in an astral sorrow. "I came into the world," he once proclaimed, "under the sign of Saturn—the star of the slowest revolution, the planet of detours and delays." He struck Sontag as "fiercely serious," and something like his tenebrous sophistication rolls through all her books. He was drawn to Communism but preferred reading poetry to reading Marx; flashes of him can be glimpsed both in the shuddering militant of "Old Complaints Revisited" and in the weary flâneurs of "Unguided Tour," who sigh along to anthems because they haven't forgotten the words. Sontag's essay concludes with a striking interpretation of Benjamin's essay on the Viennese critic Karl Kraus which serves as a précis of her own political fate:

Benjamin asks rhetorically: Does Kraus stand on the frontier of a new age? "Alas, by no means. For he stands on the threshold of the Last Judgment." Benjamin is thinking of himself. At the Last Judgment, the Last Intellectual—that saturnine hero of modern culture, with his ruins, his defiant visions, his reveries, his unquenchable gloom, his downcast eyes—will explain that he took many "positions" and defended the life of the mind to the end, as righteously and inhumanly as he could.

The essay is from 1978, the same year as "*I, etcetera*." That is to say, three years after the official Vietcong victory, which prompted Sontag's exhausted ambivalence. In Benjamin's intellectual style, or her rather idiosyncratic understanding of it, she had found a trapdoor in the roaring malevolence of history, the chance to be blistering but vulnerable—the chance, that is, to dissent differently.

Four years later, speaking at Town Hall, in Manhattan, Sontag condemned Communism as "Fascism with a human

face," and—on a stage she shared with E. L. Doctorow, Allen Ginsberg, Pete Seeger, and Gore Vidal—declared that "people on the left have willingly or unwillingly told a lot of lies." The promises of the sixties, for her, had curdled. Although Sontag, like Benjamin, was never reconciled to the cruelties of capitalist society, she felt betrayed by its looming alternative.

She couldn't possibly resign herself to an uncommitted aestheticism. But she tried. Sontag had told Kakutani in 1980 that political disengagement might prompt the culture to produce good, and not simply urgent, art: "We now have a situation where people are denied the hectic consolations of being part of movements." Sontag claimed to cherish this new loneliness, since "in the end the life of a writer is very solitary."

The statement is unlike her and was promptly forgotten. But you can hear in it the longing for something beyond the saturnine luminosity of Benjamin and the saintly self-martyrdom of Weil. A playfulness, perhaps—or, at least, a lightness of touch. "Later Essays" contains two pieces on Roland Barthes. He traipsed through postwar intellectual vogues—structuralism, semiology—and revelled, finally, in his own trilling peculiarities, an unrepentant aesthete. "He lacks anything like Walter Benjamin's tragic awareness that every work of civilization is also a work of barbarism," Sontag wrote in 1982, at a period in her life when she was becalmed between causes. Barthes, whom she had known, was for her a chuckling intellectual counterweight to her own erudite woe. This was a man "not tormented by the catastrophes of modernity or tempted by its revolutionary illusions," who "refers to the present literary era as 'a moment of gentle apocalypse.'" Such gentleness and humor and freedom from torment: these were traits she could admire but never quite claim.

"AIDS and Its Metaphors," Sontag's 1989 book and her next after "Under the Sign of Saturn," announced her return, if not to militancy, then to advocacy. "The AIDS epidemic serves as an ideal projection for First World political paranoia," she reported with alarm. The book is a bit pat, the arguments

often self-evident—but it shoved Sontag back into the arena of political contest, her precious aloneness having been crumbled by collective suffering. The world had again been shattered, this time by a syndrome that was tearing through sub-Saharan Africa and the homosexual demimonde—that is, through populations already damaged by negligence or singled out for contempt by the same forces of reaction that Sontag had charged at twenty years before.

She recognized this. She was struck by the phrasing employed by the foreign minister of apartheid South Africa: “The terrorists are now coming to us with a weapon more terrible than Marxism: AIDS.” And she was appalled that the reactionaries in her own country—Pat Buchanan, Jerry Falwell, Norman Podhoretz—derived a cackling vindication from “pursuing one of the main activities of the so-called neo-conservatives, the Kulturkampf against all that is called, for short (and inaccurately), the 1960s,” as they regarded AIDS as a punishment for the freedoms won by a rebellious age. The most gratifying insights of “AIDS and Its Metaphors” spring from this revelation of historical continuity, a sense that the old alliances, on behalf of the exploited and the despised, could be defrosted by political emergency.

Which is perhaps why the story in “Debriefing” that makes AIDS its explicit subject, “The Way We Live Now,” is also the strongest. Published in this magazine in 1986, it grasps the vastness and urgency of the crisis while noting its infinitesimal effects on the lives it disrupts. Devastating triviality and muddled sentiment scuttle through an account of a dying man and his friends. The man is never named:

And among those who came or checked in by phone every day, the inner circle as it were, those who were getting more points, there was still a further competition, which was what was getting on Betsy’s nerves, she confessed to Jan; there’s always that vulgar jockeying for position around the bedside of the gravely ill, and though we all feel suffused with virtue at our loyalty to him (speak for yourself, said Jan), to the extent that we’re carving time out of every day, or almost every day, though some of us are dropping out, as Xavier pointed out, aren’t we getting at least as much out of this as he is.

That “he” is stretched among the rattling psyches of Betsy, Jan, Quentin,

Tanya, Paolo, Xavier. The story’s sentences are often like the one above—long, recursive, pocked by little objections and ricocheting between conflicting accounts. The single, powerful will—that reservoir of beautiful seriousness—has evaporated. Here, then, is a stifled kind of suffering, revealed in its power to inspire compassion and vanity and dread. “People are storing their own blood, for future use,” Sontag remarks in “AIDS and Its Metaphors.” The old model of altruism—donating blood anonymously—had been undermined by the epidemic. “Self-interest now receives an added boost as simple medical prudence.” So there’s a marvellous smallness to “The Way We Live Now.” What seems like love for the weakened, nameless protagonist turns into cynicism and selfishness. Perhaps, she suggests, that selfishness is built into this particular crisis seizing these particular people in their particular era—an era that wallows in the aftermath of dashed collective hope. This is an annihilating, spiritual fatigue.

And it grips Julia, a mordant, troubled woman, from the title story of “Debriefing.” Sontag’s style here is drifting and elegant, bearing a glimmering likeness to the work of her friend Elizabeth Hardwick. (She used to speak of putting “more Lizzie” in her prose.) Julia thrashes, moans, acts out, seems to dissolve into and finally reject the world. She throws herself at mysticism, withdraws from reason, and yet manages, still, to make people love her. Among those people is the narrator: the woman watching, feeling, trying to reason and haggle and intervene with Julia, trying to pay effortful, serious attention. The effort fails but is not, perhaps, useless. As the narrator admits near the story’s end, “I want to save my soul, that timid wind.”

“**I** was not trying to lead anyone into the Promised Land except myself,” Sontag wrote in 1966, sizing up the fiercer winds that gust through “Against Interpretation.” It has become a critical cliché to smirk at her dramatic voltes-faces. In “Thirty Years Later,” written in 1995 as the preface to a Spanish edition of that book, she harrumphs at what remained of the sixties—its in-

solence, its impotent fury, its yen for levelling hierarchies—and laments what didn’t: the bravery, the élan that had driven her to espouse an “erotics of art” or to herald destruction as a creative impulse. She regrets her failure to grasp “that seriousness itself was in the early stages of losing credibility in the culture at large” even as she pines for that decade’s buoyancy and dauntless spirit.

“How one wishes,” she writes, “some of its boldness, its optimism, its disdain for commerce had survived.” The words tug at a thread that shoots through “Later Essays.” Sontag went to Bosnia in 1993, outraged that genocide prompted such a sluggish response from the West, which could, in her opinion, have swiftly halted the slaughter with a well-placed military campaign. By going to Vietnam in 1968, she had lodged her virulent protest against American bombs. In the Sarajevo of 1993, she wondered where they were.

She wondered the same about the intelligentsia. “How many times,” Sontag fumed in that questionnaire from 1997, “has one heard in the last decades that intellectuals are obsolete, or that so-and-so is ‘the last intellectual’?” The line appears halfway through “Later Essays” and trumpets an irony that hums through the preceding pages. Four years earlier, she’d directed Beckett’s “Waiting for Godot” in a harrowed Sarajevo. The world’s crises and allurements still transfixed her, and it remained the task of the intellectual to be sharply attentive and heroically stimulated.

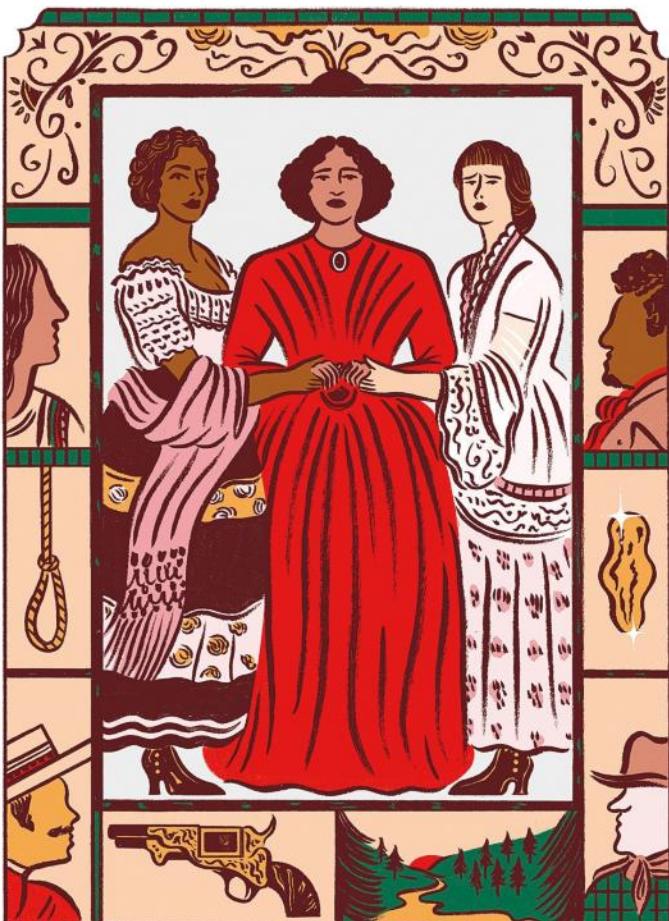
“What has followed in the wake of 1989 and the suicide of the Soviet empire,” she wrote in an essay on the response of her peers to the Bosnian genocide, “is the final victory of capitalism, and of the ideology of consumerism, which entails the discrediting of ‘the political’ as such.” No triumphalism, then, about the End of History. If the political was hollowed, art was trivialized and collective life debased. All the valor and drama seemed to her to have vanished from the slack-jawed, victorious West. There was no ardor or ethics or conflict—and therefore no style, no virtue, no taste. What was lacking, in a word, was seriousness. ♦

MUSICAL EVENTS

TRUE WEST

California operas by John Adams and Annie Gosfield.

BY ALEX ROSS



On November 21, 1852, Louise Clappe, a New Englander who had spent a year at a gold-rush mining camp in the Sierra Nevada, looked around in awe as she took her leave of the place. In a letter to her sister, she wrote, "Like an immense concave of pure sapphire without spot or speck, the wonderful and never-enough-to-be-talked-about sky of California drops down upon the whole its fathomless splendor." Those words are sung at the end of John Adams's new opera, "Girls of the Golden West," which is receiving its première performances at the San Francisco Opera. On opening night—a hundred and sixty-five years, to the day, after Clappe wrote her let-

ter—the formidable young American soprano Julia Bullock unfurled gently descending phrases that stretched to the bottom of her range. The orchestra hovered evanescently around her, like the luminous mist that clings to the hills on Northern California mornings.

This music has an especially piercing effect because it comes in the wake of a cavalcade of horrors. Like all of Adams's stage works to date, "Girls of the Golden West" was directed by Peter Sellars, who also assembled the libretto. Both Adams and Sellars are California residents, but neither is inclined to romanticize the state. In forty years of collaboration, they have addressed all manner of provoc-

Adams's "Girls of the Golden West" is a frontal assault on our national mythology.

ILLUSTRATION BY CYNTHIA KITTNER

tive topics—Richard Nixon's visit to China, the Achille Lauro terrorist incident, the 1994 Northridge earthquake, the Trinity atomic-bomb test—yet they have never launched such a frontal assault on our national mythology. The California gold rush was the proving ground of Manifest Destiny, transmuting rugged individualism into wealth and glory. Here it becomes a grotesque bacchanal of white-male supremacy, capped by a Fourth of July party that degenerates into a racist riot. Clappe's closing aria is therefore no rhapsody: the majesty of nature sits in silent judgment.

The gold rush has reached the opera stage before. Puccini's "La Fanciulla del West," based on David Belasco's play "The Girl of the Golden West," was first seen at the Met in 1910. Sellars had the idea for his latest project after receiving an offer to direct Puccini's opera; he became convinced that a franker treatment of the gold rush was needed. The title that Sellars and Adams chose has proved problematic: some opera patrons are put off by the implicit critique of Puccini's chronically underrated score. In fact, "Golden West" is an entirely different beast. It shows a past that is not really past, a hollow myth still in the making.

Sellars has lately adopted a documentary style of libretto writing, compiling texts from memoirs, letters, and historical accounts. The method was first applied a decade ago, in "Doctor Atomic," the Trinity opera. Sellars's approach has displeased many music critics, who prefer the dense, hypnotic librettos that Alice Goodman wrote for Adams's first two operas, "Nixon in China" and "The Death of Klinghoffer." (Goodman's work is now available in a volume titled "History Is Our Mother," from New York Review Books.) It's worth recalling that those operas, now considered classics, were initially dismissed as artificial and inert. Still, "Golden West" seems an uneven, overlong creation. It would strike harder in trimmer form.

Most of the incidents enacted onstage took place in the Sierra Nevada in 1851 and 1852. The main source is Clappe, whose letters to her sister were later published as a journal, under the pseudonym Dame Shirley. Sellars also drew on miners' ballads and on Hispanic, African-American, and Asian testimonies. Dame

Shirley, as Clappe is known in the opera, arrives at a camp with her husband, a physician, and Ned Peters, a fugitive slave turned cowboy. She encounters a boastful miner named Clarence; a hard-drinking lout named Joe Cannon; Ah Sing, a Chinese prostitute who dreams of settling down with Joe; Ramón, a Mexican hotel bartender; and Josefa, Ramón's lover, who works at the bar. In the dénouement, Joe tries to force himself on Josefa, who responds by stabbing him to death. She is lynched, and nonwhite miners are driven out of town. A similar incident unfolded in Downieville, California, in 1851.

The mayhem is reserved for Act II. Act I attempts something tricky, which doesn't quite succeed onstage. The idea is to present an off-kilter fantasy of gold-rush life, framed by Brechtian distancing. Stagehands are seen moving props on and off; anachronisms intrude, including neon beer signs at the hotel bar. Dame Shirley's interactions with Ned—portrayed by the sensational young bass-baritone Davóne Tines—have a slapstick, vaudeville character. Adams sets all this energetically, but with an excess of lightly bouncing parlando. Meditative passages better suit his command of spacious musical landscapes, both interior and exterior. One highlight is Dame Shirley's description of a young Native American woman: "With a mocking grace infinitely bewitching she sat upon the ground and smiled up into my face." At such moments, the score extends the free-floating lyrical vein that Adams developed in Act III of "Nixon in China."

Act II of "Golden West" is a juggernaut of cumulative menace—a structure similar to the transfixing countdown in "Atomic." Surrealist touches augment the atmosphere of nightmare. At the camp, "Macbeth" is being staged for the miners' benefit, and we see hallucinatory scenes of Dame Shirley as Lady Macbeth ("Come, you spirits/That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here") and Clarence as Macbeth ("Is this a dagger which I see before me"). Adams's savage, fractured music makes one long for an entire Shakespeare opera from him. Ned assumes the voice of Frederick Douglass, reciting his great, incendiary oration "What to a Slave Is the Fourth of July?" In that colossal aria, Tines's Wotan-esque voice is underpinned by an orchestra that gestures with Beethovenian vehemence.

Meanwhile, choruses of restless miners, already ominous in Act I, become fully demonic, their singsong rhythm reduced to hammering intervals: "There is no land upon the earth/Contains the same amount of worth." When this braying mob fixes its attention on Josefa, Ned, and other people of color, it recalls the vengeful crowd in "The Gospel According to the Other Mary," Adams's Crucifixion oratorio.

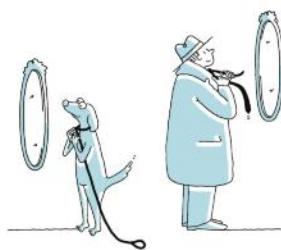
An extraordinary young cast was on hand for the première. Bullock and Tines are two of the strongest American actor-singers to emerge in recent years; their instinctive sympathy with Adams and Sellars's vision recalls prior work by Lorraine Hunt-Lieberson and Sanford Sylvan. J'Nai Bridges gave a glowing, searing performance as Josefa, who responds to the mob with serene fury. Elliot Mandore lent mellow eloquence to Ramón; Hye Jung Lee glittered as Ah Sing. The tenor Paul Appleby, as Joe, caught the desperation behind the character's drunken bravado. Ryan McKinny, a fast-rising Wagnerian bass-baritone, created a dynamic portrait of Clarence, who begins with masculine swagger, becomes a monster by degrees, and ends up a guilt-ridden shell. Grant Gershon effectively marshalled the orchestra and the chorus, though the edges were rough on opening night.

"Girls of the Golden West" feels more like a first draft than like a finished piece, but it has the raw stuff of a major opera, and rawness is part of its power. What

jars, all manner of debris, the harsher outlines of which are softened off by the thinnest possible coating of radiant snow."

November was a good month for new opera in the Golden State. Down south, the Los Angeles Philharmonic presented Annie Gosfield's "War of the Worlds," an adaptation of Orson Welles's hoax broadcast of 1938, which fooled some radio listeners into believing that a Martian invasion was under way. As with "Girls of the Golden West," an episode from the American past proves uncomfortably relevant to the present. Gosfield, a New York-based composer with a virtuosic command of classical, pop, and avant-garde styles, began the score before "fake news" entered the lexicon. Like Welles, she places the reality-bending power of the media under scrutiny.

The libretto is by the young Los Angeles-based director Yuval Sharon, who three years ago masterminded the astounding multi-composer opera "Hopscotch," in which audience members were ferried around L.A. in limousines. "War of the Worlds" was less logically elaborate, but it did involve simultaneous performances in various locations. The main audience was seated at Disney Hall, where the orchestra was ostensibly performing a new suite, by Gosfield, modelled on Holst's "The Planets." The actress Sigourney Weaver, who has a history with aliens, assumed the pose of an uncouth gala host. Halfway through the "Mercury" movement, she broke in with the first of many news bulletins. As the concert faltered—we never got past "Earth"—Weaver elicited live reports from three nearby parking lots, each of which had its own performers and audience. The auxiliary sites were placed near antiquated air-raid sirens that still stand throughout the city; they hummed with extraterrestrial transmissions. Scientists jabbered technicalities; a TV reporter interviewed eyewitnesses; a military honcho tried to impose order. Eric Garcetti, the mayor of Los Angeles, had a cameo, appearing onstage at Disney with a reassuring message: "Please don't attempt to leave this building. Just outside these walls is utter chaos." A climactic ray-gun assault on Disney was repelled by the metal shield that Frank Gehry had presciently installed on the exterior. Weaver exclaimed, "The power of



resonates most in Donald Trump's America is the way that empty, stupid boasting devolves into paranoid rage. The miners who sing lines like "We've got the highest mountains here/Taller trees, and faster deer" could now be scripting political campaigns and Team U.S.A. advertising. Dame Shirley is too wise to perpetuate such rhetoric. At the end, she sees not only purple mountains and that fathomless blue sky but also "empty bottles, oyster cans, sardine boxes, broken

music has redeemed humanity once again!"

This "War of the Worlds" is, in other words, a comedy from the outset. Wisely, it makes no attempt to duplicate the original 1938 scare, although a few passersby at the outdoor sites were momentarily bewildered by the racket. (One bystander asked, "What's going on, dude?" When someone answered, "Aliens have landed," he nodded and walked away.) The libretto is well stocked with in-jokes. There are obligatory references to L.A. traffic, which apparently gets even worse during Martian invasions. Weaver incited extended laughter when she reported computer anomalies and "gas outbursts" in such locales as "Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania." Gosfield's "Planets" deftly parodies composerly clichés: the "Venus" movement contains textbook examples of how not to double voices with instrumental lines.

Like "Hopscotch," "War of the Worlds" changed shape depending on where you were watching. No one had a privileged view. Indeed, the siren stations, where tickets were free, were probably the most fun: to the delight of kids in attendance, puppet aliens encroached upon the audience, and they conspicuously resembled the titular robot in "WALL-E." Underneath the silliness was a sharp critique of the idea of art as refuge, consolation, or distraction. We are meant to roll our eyes when Weaver gushes, "Every time we gather in this magnificent building, we ascend to a higher plane where peace and compassion reign supreme." Gosfield's score alternates adroitly between campy pastiche and authentic sci-fi eeriness. Her interpolation of radio-jamming signals, distorted transmissions, and other electronic fuzz adds layers of sonic unease. In the coda, a darkly radiant mass of sound, incorporating voices and instruments from all four sites, evokes Earth under the gaze of what is described as "a great intelligence, vast, cool, and unsympathetic."

"War of the Worlds" was a collaboration between the L.A. Phil and the Industry, Sharon's experimental opera company. A tight-knit troupe of singers and actors matched the verve of Welles's Mercury Theatre on the Air. The baritone Hadleigh Adams delivered a comic tour de force as General Lansing, who becomes unhinged as he extolls a Trumperian "wall of defense" that is supposed to keep aliens at bay. Gosfield gives him



"Hold on, let me put you on megaphone."

a full-on mad scene, with deranged atonal coloratura. The actor Gabriel Romero supplied a lifelike sketch of a harried and addled TV reporter. The soprano Hila Plitmann arrestingly portrayed a Martian spokesperson, her voice oscillating like a sine wave. The Philharmonic musicians, under the incisive direction of Christopher Rountree, gamely tackled unusual assignments. David Garrett, Jin-Shin Dai, and Jory Herman deserve particular praise for executing string solos in parking lots under a hot sun.

Two of the three performances of "War of the Worlds" were folded into the L.A. Phil's annual new-music marathon, Noon to Midnight. Several thousand curiosity-seekers took in a vast range of contemporary idioms, including sounds at the far end of the experimental spectrum. The SASSAS collective—the Society for the Activation of Social Space Through Art and Sound—unleashed improvisatory anarchy in an amphitheatre behind Disney Hall. In a reception area inside Disney, Michael Pisaro oversaw a rendition of his piece "Ricefall," which involves grains of rice being poured on metallic, ceramic, and plastic surfaces. The percussion ensemble red fish blue fish occupied Disney's garden with another extraterrestrial composition: Gérard Grisey's

"Le Noir de l'Étoile," which incorporates deep-space radio waves emitted by pulsars. Meanwhile, food trucks on Grand Avenue supplied pizza and pad thai.

The impression in both San Francisco and Los Angeles was of a vital, engaged new-music cohort, one unafraid of risk. This incaution is a counterweight to a classical-music culture that, for the most part, cowers in the face of modern life. On the same weekend as the L.A. Phil marathon, Andris Nelsons, the music director of the Boston Symphony, told a public-radio host that sexual harassment was not a problem in the classical world, and that if people listened to more music "they would become better human beings." This is precisely the kind of head-in-the-sand idealism targeted in "War of the Worlds." Nelsons later amended his remarks, but a sense of obliviousness remained. A few days later, the conductor Mariss Jansons was quoted as saying that women on the podium weren't his "cup of tea." He, too, attempted a clarification, yet his original words sounded more sincere. Perhaps such disgraceful episodes will hasten the end of the age of the maestro. These days, composers have a great deal more to say about the tumultuous, terrifying, not yet hopeless world in which we live. ♦

ON TELEVISION

MAIN STREAMERS

How Webcasts challenge traditional journalism.

BY ANDREW MARANTZ



In 2011, when Tim Pool was twenty-five, he was living with his brother in Virginia, playing guitar and making skateboarding videos. He sometimes called himself anti-authoritarian or “pro-transparency,” but beyond that he didn’t think of himself as very political. After seeing a viral video from Occupy Wall Street, he bought a one-way bus ticket to New York. He had no training as a journalist, but he witnessed things that seemed newsworthy, so he took out his cell phone and started recording. One day, as the police tried to evict the protesters by force, he filmed for twenty-one hours straight. In case his phone got confiscated, he broadcast his footage online, in real time. He stuck a piece of

masking tape to his phone and wrote on it with a Sharpie: “Live Stream.”

“Pool is clearly an activist and supporter of Occupy Wall Street as well as a reporter of it,” the press critic Jay Rosen wrote, on his blog. But, Rosen continued, “we should focus less on ‘who’s a journalist’ and more on valid acts of journalism.” *Time’s* Person of the Year for 2011 was the Protester, and the magazine mentioned Pool, among other citizen journalists. He started experimenting with new technologies: drones, gimbals, Google Glass. As the New York encampment wound down, he imagined a project called the *Occumentary*—he would drive to Occupy protests around the country, live-stream-

Tim Pool says, “The content I produce isn’t coming at the behest of a corporation.”

ing the whole time. “A lot of documentaries are biased—they leave out a lot of information,” Pool said in an interview around that time. In the *Occumentary*, he said, “you are going to see every second of it. You will get to see everything real and raw.”

The *Occumentary* never happened. Instead, Pool became one of the first employees at Vice News, covering uprisings in Thailand, Turkey, Egypt, and Ferguson, Missouri. Although he now had access to expensive equipment, his style remained the same—breathless, immediate, live when possible. In Ferguson, he and his crew disagreed about how to cover the protests. “The camera-woman wanted to stay away from the action and interview Jesse Jackson,” Pool told me recently. “I went, ‘Jesse Jackson will say the same thing tomorrow. I’m gonna go cover what’s happening.’ She kept the cameras, and I went and live-streamed from my phone, walking around the street where grenades were going off. Guess which one got more views.”

Last year, Pool went solo, and began putting out his “Timcasts” on Twitter, Periscope, and YouTube. He now has a hundred and forty-five thousand YouTube subscribers—more than NPR, fewer than TMZ—and he uploads at least one video a day. His funding comes from ads and audience donations. Dozens of other YouTube demi-celebrities do what Pool does—what could be called amateur journalism, except that they sometimes make a good living from it.

In a video called “Understanding Fake News,” Pool sits at a picnic table near a motel parking lot. Wearing his trademark beanie and speaking in a tone of dispassionate authority, he explains that “institutional news” shouldn’t be trusted, because much of it is “propaganda” or “hyperpartisan content.” What would inspire a media company to mislead its audience? “Money. It’s really not that complicated.” By contrast, he says, “the content I produce isn’t coming at the behest of a corporation or a government. No one tells me what I can and can’t report on, and no one tells me what to say.” In part, his pitch is aesthetic—who are you going to believe, me or some stodgy guy in a suit? It also elides a simple truth: Pool has thrown off the yoke of corporate bureaucracy, but he’s still subject to market incentives. His

news judgment may differ from CNN's; nonetheless, they're both subject to the whims of the consumer.

The dream of a disruptive alternative to the mass media is perhaps as old as the mass media. In "The Boys on the Bus," Timothy Crouse's meta-journalistic account of the 1972 Presidential campaign, Crouse watches a busload of reporters as they watch George McGovern deliver a tired stump speech. Deadlines loom. Nothing noteworthy happens. Walter Cronkite leaves town, complaining of back pain. Finally, a poll result comes out—"the only hard news of the day"—and the reporters rush to file variations on the same story. It's June, 1972: burglars are breaking into the Watergate Hotel, and yet America's newspapers are full of horse-race drudgery. This is not, in Crouse's telling, the result of organized greed or partisan collusion. Rather, he blames conformity, laziness, and "the old formulas of classic objective journalism": "If the candidate spouted fulsome bullshit all day, the formula made it hard for a reporter to say so directly."

Crouse encounters a few journalists who aim to cut through the bullshit. One is Michael Shamberger, the long-haired founder of a cable-TV startup called Top Value Television, who disparages the slick, expensive style of network news. Shamberger's footage, Crouse writes, was "blurry, jiggly," and "extraordinarily intimate." Another is Hunter S. Thompson, who is portrayed as an amphetamine-addled goon with boundless talent and no tact. "After the revolution," a traditional reporter tells Crouse, "we'll all write like Hunter."

Whether we're living after the revolution or after the fall, this prediction has largely come true. Forget cable: anyone who's on Medium or Tumblr is now free to write like Hunter Thompson, and anyone with a cell phone can beam jiggly, intimate footage to a potentially unlimited audience. The most arresting video I saw this year appeared on the Periscope feed of a far-right social-media pundit named Faith Goldy, who was in Charlottesville, Virginia, covering the white-nationalist rally there. After the rally was shut down by police, Goldy spotted a group of Black Lives Matter protesters and tagged along, live-streaming as she went. "Black Lives Matter is allowed to march, the alt-right is not,"

Goldy said, narrating into her phone.

A woman near Goldy overheard her. "Are you with the alt-right?" she shouted. "Get away from here!"

"I'm just looking to learn about inclusion and diversity," Goldy said, raising her eyebrows sarcastically.

At one point, Goldy said, "I'm a little bit trapped in here. Let me get to the periphery." A few seconds later, a Dodge Challenger ripped through the crowd, sending bodies flying into the air. "Oh, shit!" Goldy screamed. "Oh God, oh God, oh God." She ran away, her phone's lens bobbing wildly toward the sky. "I'm gonna find a safe space," she said.

During Pool's time as an independent journalist, he has interviewed many reviled far-right figures, including the ironic white nationalist Baked Alaska and members of the "Western chauvinist" group the Proud Boys. He doesn't always ask them tough questions. "I'm not on anybody's side, but I let everyone have their say," Pool told me. "I try not to judge people." This sounds noble, even obvious. Yet not all opinions deserve to be weighted equally, and, though editing may create opportunities for bias, it also allows for context, narrative structure, and editorial pushback. A journalist's first task is to gather information without fear or favor. The next task, which is equally crucial, is to scrutinize the data—to separate the facts from the fulsome bullshit.

"Look at what's happening last night in Sweden," President Trump said in February, at a rally in Florida, during an Islamophobic riff about refugees. "They took in large numbers. They're having problems like they never thought possible." He was referring, not quite accurately, to a segment he'd seen on Fox News, which was itself not quite accurate. "Sweden? Terror attack? What has he been smoking?" Carl Bildt, the former Prime Minister of Sweden, tweeted. Paul Joseph Watson, an editor-at-large at InfoWars, seemed to support Trump's comment, tweeting, facetiously, "Malmö is known as 'Sweden's Chicago' because mass immigration is so beneficial."

Pool, on his YouTube channel, weighted these opinions more or less equally. "I don't side with anybody," he said. "We're gonna get into the fray and figure out what the hell is going on." A

few days later, he arrived in Sweden. (First, his plane stopped in Lisbon and Copenhagen. I can attest to this, because I saw the footage on his YouTube channel. I have spent many precious minutes watching Tim Pool sit in traffic, or pass through airport security, or walk in circles waiting for something interesting to happen, all in the name of transparency.)

His trip was funded by donations, including two thousand dollars from Paul Joseph Watson. Pool spent his days wandering around semi-indiscriminately and interviewing locals, and his nights uploading highlights from the day's footage. Before Pool and his co-producer visited Rosengård, a majority-immigrant neighborhood in Malmö, they left their most expensive equipment at their hotel, as a precaution. But when they got to Rosengård the streets were nearly empty. "It's kinda boring," Pool said. "I don't know what you'd expect to happen here. It's just a neighborhood."

The next day, he interviewed a deputy mayor of Malmö, who appeared to have a reasonable grasp on the relevant crime statistics and a plausible explanation for the city's recent spike in murders. Perhaps it was the result not of immigration, the deputy mayor said, but of a power vacuum caused by the demise of two local gangs. Pool neither confirmed nor contradicted this; instead, as he left the interview, he spoke directly to the camera. "He's a politician," Pool said. "That's a very liberal perspective, so take that into account."

Pool then cut to a meandering interview with Johan, a young guy with a man bun, who seemed to have no special expertise other than being a resident of Rosengård. "Is it possible that crime could get worse?" Pool asked him. "I mean, you live here."

"I don't know," Johan said.

Pool turned to the camera and wrapped up the video: "Comment below, I will read your comments, and I'll see you all tomorrow."

Every news consumer should be on guard against flimsy arguments or tendentious cuts. We can and should question journalists' motives. But, if we demand that journalists have no motives at all, we'll be forced to outsource the job to algorithms and drones, which are—so far, at least—even less thoughtful than humans. ♦

LOOKING EASY

Stephen Shore's photography.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL



"Yucatán, Mexico, 1990." A search for fresh astonishments has kept Shore peripatetic.

Stephen Shore, the subject of an immersive and staggeringly charming retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, is my favorite American photographer of the past half century. This is not purely a judgment of quality. Shore has peers in a generation that, in the nineteen-seventies, stormed to eminence with color film, which art photographers had long disdained, and, often, with a detached scrutiny of suburban sprawl, woe-begone towns, touristed nature, cars (always cars), and other familiar and banal, accidentally beautiful, cross-country phenomena. The closest to Shore, in a cohort that includes Joel Meyerowitz, Joel Sternfeld, and Richard Misrach, is his friend William Eggleston, the raffish Southern aristocrat who has made pictures unbeatably intense and iconic: epiphanies triggered by the hues and textures of a stranded tricycle, say, or of a faded billboard in a scrubby field. While

similarly alert to offbeat sublimities, Shore is a New Yorker more receptive than marauding in attitude. I fancy that Eggleston is the cavalier Mephistopheles of American color photography, and Shore the discreet angel Gabriel.

A shot of a graceless, weirdly arresting intersection in downtown El Paso, from 1975, feels less to have been discovered by Shore than to have happened to him, and an expansive view in which people disport on a Yosemite river beach is so rife with appeal that you can hardly start, let alone finish, looking at it. What gets me in Shore's work is an easel acceptance of a world—the actual, whole one—in which I have never felt quite at home. I have comforted myself with the idea that anxiety in the face of the real is an American cynosure—a point of pride, even—essentialized by Edward Hopper in painting and by the likes of Robert Frank and Diane Arbus

in photography. But Shore invokes another tradition: that of Walt Whitman, who recommended “a perfectly transparent, plate-glassy style, artless” (quoted in the catalogue by the show's fine curator, Quentin Bajac). That's Shore precisely, with artfulness aplenty but so understated—somewhat akin to the shrewdness of Whitman's free-verse cadences—as to be practically subliminal.

Shore's best-known series, “American Surfaces” and “Uncommon Places,” are both from the seventies and mostly made in rugged Western states. He shot the first with a handheld 35-millimetre camera, sometimes using flash, and the second, strictly by daylight, with bulky view cameras, which feature flexible bellows and ground-glass screens. The pictures in both series share a quality of surprise: appearances surely unappreciated if even really noticed by anyone before—in rural Arizona, a phone booth next to a tall cactus, on which a crude sign (“GARAGE”) is mounted, and, on a small-city street in Wisconsin, a movie marquee's neon wanly aglow, at twilight. I remember assuming, back then, that the photographer must be intimately familiar with those places. But, as someone who grew up in small Midwestern towns and never registered them so acutely, I should have known better. In fact, Shore was a just-arrived city boy, virginal to what he beheld. His road pictures illustrate a truth of experience: you can be new to something, and something can be new to you, only once. (A search for fresh astonishments has kept Shore peripatetic, on productive sojourns in Mexico, Scotland, Italy, Ukraine, and Israel.) Of course, some things are always new, such as breakfast. Shore is the all-time pictorial bard of fried eggs or pancakes saluting the eye from Formica tables at random eateries along streets and state highways, from sea to sea.

Shore was born in 1947, the only child of parents who owned a handbag business. They were upwardly mobile during his early years, ascending from middle-class Peter Cooper Village to haughty Sutton Place South. Shore bloomed into his calling like a hot-house orchid, with his first darkroom kit, the gift of an uncle, when he was

six and, when he was fourteen, a sale of three photographs to MOMA, where he was encouraged by the august former director of its photography department, Edward Steichen, and his successor, John Szarkowski. Shore distressed his parents by dropping out of school before he graduated. But, in the show, they grin from photographs that he took of them in 1970, first fully dressed and then in their underwear: evidence of glad capitulation. At seventeen, Shore began to frequent Andy Warhol's Factory, where he documented the artist and his devoutly narcissistic hangers-on with shutterbug zeal. He had a solo exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum when he was twenty-four. He could disquiet conservative elders—as with a show, “All the Meat You Can Eat,” that he curated in SoHo, in 1971, of postcards, news and police photographs, pornography, advertising images, and other visual flotsam, including snapshots that he had taken with a Mick-A-Matic, a plastic camera shaped like Mickey Mouse—but he seems never to have met with serious resistance. I'm put in mind of being a kid in school and discovering that your coolest classmate, whom you itch to resent, is really nice.

Eager to learn, and finding mentors among museum, gallery, and studio professionals, young Shore acquired sophistication in historical and avant-garde photography like a windfall inheritance, counting among his special heroes the nineteenth-century doyen of Western grandeur Timothy O'Sullivan, the memorialist of old Paris Eu-

gène Atget, and Walker Evans, who conferred poetic dignity on Depression-era rural America. On the fly, meanwhile, Shore absorbed Pop, minimalist, and conceptualist aesthetics. Of signal consequence was his discovery, in 1967, of the textless photographic books of Edward Ruscha. On a visit to Los Angeles, in 1969, he paid homage to Ruscha's no-comment cataloguing of that city's recurrent features, but with the difference of explicit points of view. Where Ruscha's photograph of a gas station would have an impasive air of anonymity, Shore tilted his lens to capture a Standard sign against the sky.

Shore has remained a vestigial Romantic in his always implied presence, as someone stopping in space and time to frame views that exert a peculiar tug on him—perhaps as simple a sight as a battered troughlike shelf, outdoors in Mexico, holding citrus fruits arranged with an elegance that is innate to Mexican folk culture. His framing is resolutely formalist: subjects firmly composed laterally, from edge to edge, and in depth. There's never a “background.” The most distant element is as considered as the nearest. But only when looking for it are you conscious of Shore's formal discipline, because it is as fluent as a language learned from birth. Since 1982, he has imparted his enthusiasm to waves of students, as the director of the photography program at Bard College, where he insists on historical grounding and darkroom mastery while being fully open to current trends.

For proof of this, visit Shore's In-

stagram account, with its proliferating hundreds of shots that are confoundingly—each and every one—perfect, tailored to the square format and variable sizes of the medium. Unlike other analogue masters, he hasn't hesitated to adopt digital innovations. He has been producing print-on-demand books, sometimes themed to single days of shooting, since 2003. (Bajac has installed many of these at MOMA, dangling on strings for hands-on perusal: visual diaries of expeditions in country and city places, far-flung or near his home, in Tivoli, New York.) Photographic technique is a set of tools to him, never a fetish. Working by computer is not so much a departure from as a fulfillment of his prior art, demonstrating that beauty is no less, or more, frequent in the world than the act of paying attention.

Unexpected beauty unsettles. Shore's American road shots reintroduce me to things that I assumed I knew, with the emotional effect—of encountering expressions of thoughts that had seemed my own—that Ralph Waldo Emerson termed “alienated majesty.” And I can only imagine the impact, on natives there, of a recent series made in Israel and the West Bank: starkly factual views of terrain that is fraught with association to ancient and ongoing impassioned experience. Shore doesn't presume to know the meanings, addressing none of them, while setting a stage for them all. His best pictures at once arouse feelings and leave us alone to make what we will of them. He delivers truths, whether hard or easy, with something very like mercy. ♦

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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 Frank Cotham, must be received by Sunday, December 10th. The finalists in the November 27th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the January 1st issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



"

"

THE FINALISTS



"I'm so glad that 'lumberjack' is more a look than an occupation these days."

Andrew Schwartz, San Anselmo, Calif.

"Let's just enjoy them while they're still here."
Dawn Delahanty, Lagrangeville, N.Y.

"I love it when the shirts turn plaid."
Steve Finnegan, South Pasadena, Calif.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"I'm afraid this whole experiment is about to go south."
Ken Schimpf, New York City

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