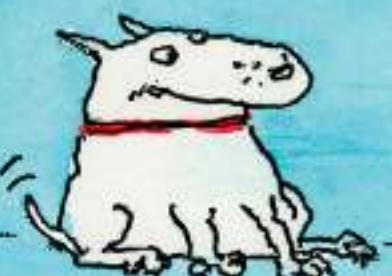
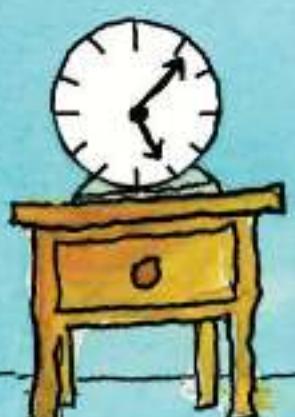


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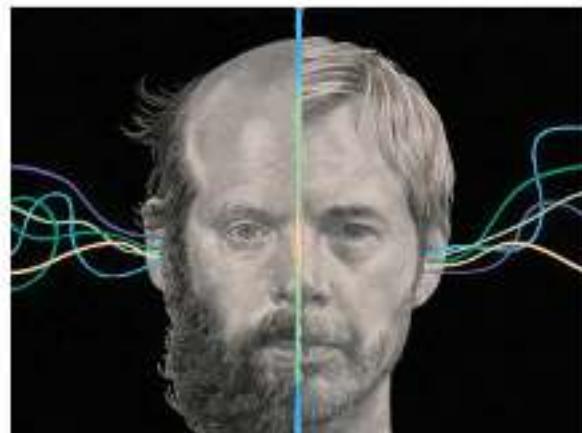
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THE NEW YORKER INTERVIEW

Amanda Petrusich talks with the musicians Bonnie "Prince" Billy and Bill Callahan.



DAILY COMMENT

Graciela Mochkofsky on how COVID-disinformation campaigns have affected the Latinx community.

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THE MAIL

HUMANITIES, REDEFINED

Louis Menand, in his review of two books that defend so-called “great books” courses, points out that the tension underpinning both works, between professors’ motivations and their institutions’ priorities, is nothing new (*A Critic at Large*, December 20th). Recent trends in undergraduate enrollment, however, may help to explain why students seem to be turning away from subjects such as English, foreign languages, and philosophy in favor of more career-oriented courses of study. According to a report published by the Pew Research Center in 2019, between 1996 and 2016, the share of dependent undergraduates in the U.S. who came from families living below the poverty line rose from twelve per cent to twenty per cent. A decline in humanities enrollment might stem from the fact that students from less affluent backgrounds often feel that they don’t have as much freedom to pursue degrees in fields—like art, literature, and philosophy—that, though life-enriching, promise small, or uncertain, financial payoffs. For the humanities to appeal to such students, conditions beyond the university also need to change.

*Jack Maurer
Huntsville, Ala.*

Menand refers to figures showing steep drops in enrollment in the humanities at research universities as “real-world context.” I teach at a public college, the kind that most American students attend (around three-quarters of them, according to the National Center for Education Statistics). Here, we are seeing a reinvention of the humanities, and writing classes are a part of that. As Menand notes, writing classes seem to defy the humanities’ downward trend. Statistics show that freshman composition is the class taken by more American undergraduates than any other. Writing courses are especially popular in public institutions, where, in my experience, new offerings—including those centered on digital media, mul-

tilingual approaches to literacy, and social- and racial-justice writing—attract students with diverse interests and backgrounds. Last fall, I taught a writing course that brought together students in Latinx studies, business, nursing, social work, engineering, and English. Menand critiques the traditional purpose of the great-books course, to “know thyself.” Writing classes propose another purpose: to know others, through the process of listening, collaborating, and revising.

*Jessica Yood
Associate Professor of English
Lehman College, CUNY
Bronx, N.Y.*

MY BRILLIANT FRIEND

In the early nineteen-nineties, I met Eddy Zheng, the subject of a recent profile by Hua Hsu, when we were both prisoners at San Quentin (“The Other Side,” December 20th). I was inspired by the way that he questioned every aspect of prison life, and by his advocating for peace during times of racial unrest. In my last year there, we became cellmates. Because I am white, our friendship caused a stir. (The staff thought we were starting an Anglo-Asian gang. In reality, I appreciated his culinary skills—what he could do with Top Ramen and a can of tuna was incredible.) That year, tensions between the northern Mexicans and the whites ran high, after the staff accidentally placed two men from rival gangs in the same cell. There was a slew of razor slashings of white inmates. Eddy, knowing that I had mere days left before my release, kept me out of harm’s way. I salute him and am proud to be his friend.

*James Guardino
San Francisco, Calif.*

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



The streaming service **MUBI** is a virtual repertory cinema, adding a movie each day alongside ongoing series. The January offerings include notable first features (Janicza Bravo's "Lemon," Noah Baumbach's "Kicking & Screaming"), the new release of the 2020 documentary "There Will Be No More Night," and a tribute to the Sundance Film Festival, presenting such independent-film classics as "But I'm a Cheerleader," "Chuck & Buck," and Jonathan Caouette's pioneering personal documentary "Tarnation" (pictured above).

As New York City venues reopen, it's advisable to confirm in advance the requirements for in-person attendance.

PODCASTS

Cocaine & Rhinestones

This exhaustively researched, feverishly delivered history-of-country-music podcast—a passion project and one-man show from Tyler Mahan Coe—was an instant cult hit among music obsessives when its first season came out, in 2017. Coe spent the next few years creating the second season, a wildly ambitious, and wildly long, epic about George Jones. In telling the great singer's story, Coe zooms in and out to include the development of the Nashville sound, the history of pinball, the invention of ice cream, the Medicis, the production of moonshine, Martin Luther's opposition to the Roman Catholic Church, Jones's alcoholism, Tammy Wynette's affair with Burt Reynolds, the history of drag and masquerade balls—and, quite deftly, cocaine and rhinestones. Coe, an autodidact and the son of the outlaw-country musician David Allan Coe, relishes his role as scholar-enthusiast-gadfly, and his zeal is the show's animating force. It's at its most sublime when he delves into the songs themselves: "The song 'White Lightning' isn't exactly about outrunning the law with a trunkful of moonshine, but you wouldn't know it from the music," he says, playing a bit of the track. "Buddy Killen's standup bass turns over like an engine, and all of a sudden you're chugging down a mountain, Pig Robbins's piano tinkling around somewhere in the back with all the glass jars, and Floyd Robinson's guitar lines whipping by the windows faster than passing tree trunks."—Sarah Larson

THE THEATRE

Company

Stephen Sondheim's gimlet ode to the eternal fear of shrivelling up and dying alone—that is, of being thirty-five and single—from 1970, based on a series of one-act plays by George Furth (who wrote the book), gets a bristling, buoyant revival, directed by Marianne Elliott. Bobby, the musical's avowed bachelor, has become Bobbie (Katrina Lenk), a singleton in present-day New York, who is pursued not by a trio of marriage-hungry gals but by three eligible gents who think she's crazy not to settle down. Her friends, all of them long ago partnered, heartily agree. Bobbie, who is seen by her cohort as a kind of willful kid, visits with her various friends and lovers, and what she observes does not tempt her matrimonial appetite. Thanks to the gender switch, when Joanne (Patti LuPone), Bobbie's salty, seen-it-all older friend, raises her vodka Stinger to "the girls who just watch," in the song "The Ladies Who Lunch," she's no longer talking only to herself but to Bobbie, too; LuPone has concocted a signature, bouncy version of Joanne's ferocious number. If there's a weak link here, it's Lenk, who has the sharp comic timing and the ironic emotional armor required for the role but seems to push her voice, straining where she should soar.—Alexandra Schwartz (Reviewed in our issue of 12/20/21.) (Bernard B. Jacobs Theatre; open run.)

The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe

This one-woman show first arrived on Broadway in 1985, tailor-made for Lily Tomlin by Jane Wagner. Now it has been revived at the Shed, performed by Cecily Strong and directed by Leigh Silverman. The new production clarifies how tuned in—and limited—to Tomlin's rhythms, and to the problems of the eighties, the original was. The show begins with Strong as Trudy, who is "crazy," but happily so. She can, as she says, "pick up signals that seem to transmit snatches of people's lives," watching—and enacting—scenes from them. The characters she visits form a social frieze; among them are a latchkey kid and a once earnest activist whose life runs parallel to the failure of the Equal Rights Amendment. There are now contemporary references to, say, Elon Musk, but the

play still feels firmly dated. Strong is funny and works from the heart. She could rivet in a show written about her own generation—one that is at once more sincere and more at sea than Tomlin and Wagner's.—Vinson Cunningham (*The Shed*; through Feb. 5.)

DANCE

"Bolshoi Ballet in Cinema"

In the past few decades, Balanchine's 1967 ballet "Jewels," a triptych set to music by Fauré ("Emeralds"), Stravinsky ("Rubies"), and Tchaikovsky ("Diamonds"), has become a staple of the international ballet repertoire, not quite on the level of "Swan Lake" and "Giselle" but close. The Bolshoi has performed it since

PODCAST DEPT.



Last summer, the journalist, author, and self-proclaimed "insufferable gossip" Kelsey McKinney wrote an Op-Ed for the *Times* with the headline "Gossip Is Not a Sin." In the piece, McKinney grappled with her conservative Christian upbringing and with the way that her church leaders demonized gossiping as an onanistic and shameful activity that had no place in a moral life. Still, McKinney argued, she loved gossip, and she found it useful, not only in terms of bonding and entertainment but also for breaking down toxic power structures from within and providing crucial whisper networks that protect the vulnerable and shine light on abusive behavior. The #MeToo movement began as gossip, after all. McKinney's new podcast, however, takes a much more lighthearted and low-stakes approach to the subject. She and the producer Alex Sujong Laughlin have created a weekly show, "**Normal Gossip**" (from Defector Media), that provides pure, voyeuristic, candy-coated pleasure. The conceit is that McKinney speaks to a "normal" person (her first guest was the author and podcaster Virgie Tovar) about more or less meaningless or wacky rumors that have been floating around in their social scene for a while. In Tovar's case, the steaming tea involves a messy group of entangled graduate students and an ill-fated camping trip. The show evokes the thrill of sitting next to chatty, high-drama strangers at a café, a rare feeling in these indoor-oriented times. It's delicious.—Rachel Syme



In his decade-long career as the Weeknd, the singer Abel Tesfaye has evolved from faceless art-house R. & B. enigma into a bona-fide pop star and a Super Bowl act. The reaches of his music have expanded, too, both sonically and conceptually. His new album, “**Dawn FM**,” imagines purgatory as a traffic jam inside a tunnel, where a dialled-in default radio station helps the dead transition into the next phase. The songs are decidedly vintage and glam, evoking eighties synth pop and even Japanese city pop, but they retain Tesfaye’s signature haunting tone. With collaborative production from the pop guru Max Martin and the electronic alchemist Daniel Lopatin (*Oneohtrix Point Never*), at once ethereal and stark, upbeat and eerie, Tesfaye probes his hedonistic persona and discovers accountability. In a rare turn, the once heartless womanizer finally feels the sting of infidelity and desertion—in perdition.—*Sheldon Pearce*

2012. Unsurprisingly, the company is most convincing in “Diamonds,” the most glamorous and imperial of the three ballets. The lead ballerina in this section plays a kind of remote and melancholy queen who is served by an adoring cavalier. The roles were created on Suzanne Farrell and Peter Martins, and are danced here by Svetlana Zakharova and the recently promoted Jacopo Tissi. Violette Verdy’s role in “Emeralds” is danced by the sparkling Evgenia Obraztsova. The performance will be transmitted live from Moscow on Jan. 23, as part of “Bolshoi Ballet in Cinema.” Participating New York cinemas include Kips Bay 15, Empire 25, and Union Square Stadium 14.—*Marina Harss* (bolshoiballetincinema.com; Jan. 23.)

MUSIC

Burial: “Antidawn”

ELECTRONIC The British electronic-music producer Will Bevan, who works as Burial, makes ghost-town tracks, full of curling static and flickering vocal wisps. But he tends to arrange these abstruse elements in the service of a pronounced, if oft-pockmarked, beat. What’s

different about “Antidawn,” his new EP, is that he dismisses such beats almost entirely, as if stripping a film set of nearly everything, leaving mainly horizon, weather, and a few glimmering details. Those details accrue weight with attention, though a fan could be forgiven for wondering if there’s anywhere else for this approach to go.—*Michaelangelo Matos* (*Streaming on select platforms.*)

Cat Power: “Covers”

INDIE ROCK Since Chan Marshall débuted as Cat Power, in the mid-nineties, she has made cover versions a fixed part of her repertoire—bracingly rocking Hank Williams’s “I Can’t Help It (If I’m Still in Love with You),” or casting Rihanna’s “Stay” into time-stopping relief. With a voice of mystery, conviction, ache, and awe, Marshall locates new depths of emotion in obscurities and pop songs alike. In reinterpreting classics, she has furthered her stature as one. Her latest release, “Covers,” spans jazz, country, punk, rock, and pop, including staples of her live sets, such as Frank Ocean’s generation-defining ballad “Bad Religion” and the spry “Pa Pa Power,” by the actor Ryan Gosling’s band, Dead Man’s Bones. Marshall was inspired to cover “Pa Pa Power” ten years ago, following the Occupy

Wall Street protests. “Burn the streets, burn the cars,” she incants, a clear-eyed reminder that people have the power.—*Jenn Pelly* (*Streaming on select platforms.*)

Fred Hersch: “Breath by Breath”

JAZZ It’s little wonder that Fred Hersch’s “Breath by Breath,” a collaboration between his trio and the Crosby Street String Quartet, is shaded in tender colors. The work emanates from a pianist who prizes lyricism and contemplative improvisation, and whose compositions are often touched by that same assiduousness. Yet Hersch’s eight-movement “Sati Suite,” inspired by his meditation practice, never drifts completely into the ether, thanks to the well-integrated roles of the bassist Drew Gress and the drummer Jochen Rueckert, and to the sympathetically positioned string ensemble. This careful project may lack the stirring interaction that powers Hersch’s inspired trio recordings, but resisting the discreet beauty of such polished gems as “Rising, Falling” and the title track is futile.—*Steve Futterman* (*Streaming on select platforms.*)

Víkingur Ólafsson: “Mozart & Contemporaries”

CLASSICAL This imaginative pianist’s latest album, “Mozart & Contemporaries,” places the much vaunted eighteenth-century genius alongside other classical-era composers whom he tends to muscle out of recital programs. Víkingur Ólafsson demonstrates the individual charms they offer—the restive flair of a C. P. E. Bach rondo, or the pensiveness of a Galuppi largo—but Mozart still comes out on top: the playfulness and harmonic fluency of his Piano Sonata No. 16 in C Major, with its memorable motive that cracks a smile in the simple act of spelling a major triad, transcends the more conventional material. Ólafsson’s signature touch, which rounds the edges off of each note, remains captivating, even if his phrasing in slower passages sometimes feels too diffuse. Galuppi and company get their day in the sun when Ólafsson takes the album to Zankel Hall, next month, for a sold-out concert.—*Oussama Zahr* (*Streaming on select platforms.*)

Christopher Otto: “rag’sma”

CLASSICAL The violinist Christopher Otto, a founder of the JACK Quartet, has contributed to that ensemble’s assurance and allure across a staggering range of styles, from Xenakis’s elemental roil to John Luther Adams’s ineffable stillness and Catherine Lamb’s infinitesimally shaded harmonic world. For his own compositions, Otto embraces the pure mathematics of just intonation. In “rag’sma,” two prerecorded quartets spiral apart slowly through simple intervals, their mounting distance producing a web of phantom tones, pulsations, and frictions. Two versions of the work offer complementary perspectives on that interplay; in a third, a live quartet smooths the divide between its recorded counterparts. Joseph Branciforte’s judiciously managed recording illuminates this uncanny music.—*Steve Smith* (*Streaming on select platforms.*)

Hana Vu: “Public Storage”

INDIE POP At twenty-one, the Los Angeles singer Hana Vu boasts an improbably deep repertoire, having been born to an era of indie artists who

graduated swiftly from lock-and-key diaries to Bandcamp pages. Her early songs grappled with high-school angst—that perennial songwriter’s gift—with a present-tense zest. Where home-recorders once repudiated the pop world, Vu, like many in her cohort, has a more ambivalent relationship. Her album “Public Storage” makes room for surly guitars as well as airy synths, dark ruminations and also chipper disco beats. At times, Vu flirts with a self-deprecation that seems spiritually torn from the nineties: “I am just the world’s worst talker,” she laments in “World’s Worst.” “I can’t say anything.” Yet she sings the lines with a characteristic robustness and poise—a diva with a schlumpy veneer. Though a January tour was scuttled by COVID, Vu is set to play Baby’s All Right in March.—*Jay Ruttenberg* (*Streaming on select platforms.*)

ART

Robert Gober

Since the nineteen-seventies, this esteemed American artist has made work that seems to materialize directly from his unconscious, albeit slowly; elements that might appear to be found (sinks, beds, bundles of newspapers) are, in fact, painstakingly made by hand, realistic but also somehow uncanny. The diorama-like shadow boxes on view in Gober’s current show—titled “Shut up. No. You shut up.”—reflect his characteristic emotional restraint and cool touch, but they gain new power from their intimate size and the inherent tension of containment. Two arresting examples, both titled “Help me,” are installed facing each other at a distance, offering cropped views of the same window, complete with floral curtains and a rusted can labelled “farm grease” atop the sill. Initially, they look identical, but close inspection—which requires traversing the space—reveals more differences than similarities, not unlike two siblings’ recollections of the same childhood memory.—*Johanna Fateman* (*Matthew Marks; through Jan. 29.*)

E. McKnight Kauffer

This commercial poster designer, the subject of a startlingly spectacular retrospective at the Cooper Hewitt, was a magus of boundless resourcefulness in the nineteen-twenties and thirties. (Kauffer died in 1954.) With assistance from his second wife, Marion V. Dorn, he mined—and evangelized for—adventurous aesthetics to change the street-level look of cities, invigorate book-cover design, and inflect theatre sets and interior decoration. His influence proved so infectious that it was swallowed up by successive generations in a profession whose manufacture is inherently ephemeral. Kauffer spent his childhood in Evansville, Indiana, and later became a live-wire cosmopolitan, based in England from 1915 to 1940. A vast chart spanning a wall of the show is a name-drop constellation of associations: Alfred Hitchcock, T. S. Eliot, Aldous Huxley, Virginia Woolf, Langston Hughes, Man Ray, and Sir Kenneth Clark. So why isn’t this “Underground Modernist,” as the show is subtitled, better known himself? One factor is his practically exotic integrity, public-spirited in service to civic and political causes and holding that a proper designer “must remain an artist.”

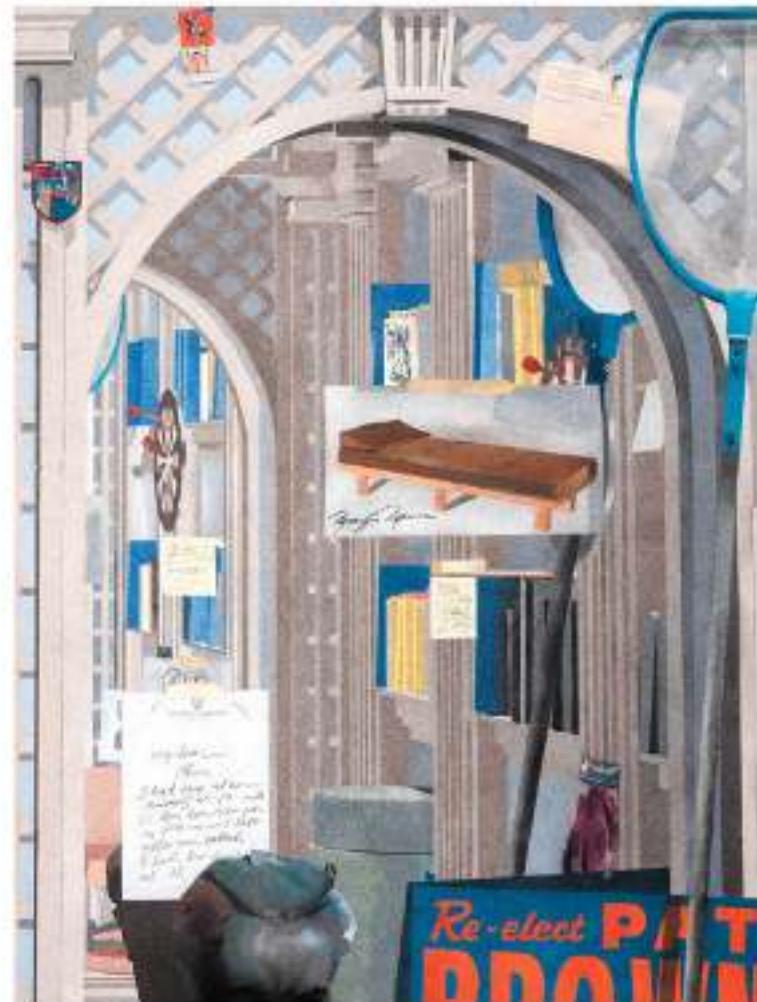
Kauffer worked mainly with small agencies, winning commissions including the creation of some hundred and twenty-five posters for the London Underground. Never settling on a signature style, he said that his criteria for posters were “attraction, interest, and stimulation,” deeming “no means too arbitrary or too classical”—Apollonian values.—*Peter Schjeldahl* (*Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum; through April 10.*)

Anita Thacher

The predicaments of scale faced by Alice on her sojourn to Wonderland are echoed in “Loose Corner,” a gaily desultory yet precisely constructed ten-minute film, from 1980-86.

Thacher, a New York artist who died in 2017, shot the transporting piece on 16-mm., cleverly linking Cubist sight gags and casually surreal vignettes. In this exhibition, it’s shown as the artist intended: projected onto a large screen installed between two walls, obscuring a corner. The configuration heightens the recursive effect of the film itself, blurring cinematic and physical space. The onscreen action unfolds in the corner of a white room, whose blank architecture provides a stage for a woman, a man, a boy, and a dog to interact with a quartet of Lilliputian doubles. Like any great magician, Thacher saves her best trick for the grand finale, in which the room appears to fill with water, becoming an aquarium with a starry sky reflected in its depths.—*J.F. (Microscope; through Jan. 29.)*

AT THE GALLERIES



In 2018, an impeccable installation by **Cynthia Talmadge**, at 56 Henry—one of the most exciting young galleries on the Lower East Side—turned a pointillist eye on the Frank E. Campbell Funeral Chapel, whose clients are the rich, famous, and dearly departed of New York City. In Talmadge’s new exhibition, “Franklin Fifth Helena” (at 56 Henry, through Jan. 30), the scene has shifted from the Upper East Side to the Brentwood neighborhood of L.A., and the medium from oil paint to colored sand, but the artist’s preoccupations remain languidly morbid. If the immersive installation (a detail is pictured above) had a soundtrack, it might be Lana Del Rey’s “Born to Die.” You don’t have to be versed in Talmadge’s tabloid-worthy subjects—the death of Marilyn Monroe and the shady conduct of the actress’s final psychoanalyst—to marvel at the trompe-l’oeil intricacy of the interior, whose latticework and wraparound, still-life composition were inspired by the fifteenth-century *studiolio* from the Ducal Palace, in Gubbio, Italy, long on display at the Met. As Talmadge exposes Monroe’s complex character through the details of the rooms in which she passed her last days, the project recalls another celebrity portrait of sorts: William Eggleston’s 1983 photo essay, “Elvis at Graceland.”—*Andrea K. Scott*

MOVIES

The Confrontation

The joys and the deceptions of revolutionary fervor are staged as a color-splashed, on-location musical in the Hungarian director Miklós Jancsó's exuberant historical drama, from 1969. The action is set in 1947, mainly at a Catholic seminary, where a group of Communist college students breach the gates and, following their warmhearted leader (Lajos Balázsovits), attempt to hold a political debate with the young seminarians. The police try to impose order, but the students, confident of their powers of persuasion, keep the atmosphere festive. The entire movie takes place outdoors, in sunlight. When students face down the police, they do so with a circle dance as they sing a song of the Spanish Civil War; in the seminary courtyard, they march arm in arm while intoning other hearty partisan chants, and boys and girls whirl together

as a cimbalom band pounds out high-speed folk songs. Yet—as if cautioning rock-and-roll radicals of the Age of Aquarius—the same spirit of solidarity in song accompanies a shift in the action, as friendly exhortation gives way to revolutionary terror.—Richard Brody (*Screening and streaming at Metrograph starting Jan. 19.*)

Introduction

The battle of the generations is fought passive-aggressively in this spare, wry, yet bitter drama by Hong Sangsoo. It's an intricate tale of push-and-pull romance, in which a young man named Young-ho (Shin Seok-ho) is summoned to a meeting with his father (Kim Young-ho), a prosperous doctor, and chances to meet his father's friend (Gi Ju-bong), a well-known actor who sparks Young-ho's artistic ambitions. But Young-ho's girlfriend, Ju-won (Park Mi-so), gets the opportunity—thanks to an artist (Kim Min-hee) who's a friend of her mother (Seo Young-hwa)—to

study in Berlin, and Young-ho plans to ask his father for the money to join her there. Meanwhile, Young-ho's mother (Cho Yun-hee) lurks in the background, aiming to keep his focus on his future career. Hong—who wrote, produced, and directed the film, and also did the cinematography and the editing—packs a novel's worth of dramatic complexity and a lifetime of rage into its sixty-five-minute span. Parents and children and their partners and friends come off as the closest of enemies, making misery for one another with good intentions as well as with indifference.—R.B. (*In limited theatrical release.*)

Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World

The work of Patrick O'Brian finally arrived onscreen in this 2003 drama. Two of his twenty Jack Aubrey novels were requisitioned for the film, directed by Peter Weir; instead of receiving a gentle introduction, we are launched straight into a fogbound firefight, and from there into a race around Cape Horn. The casting of Russell Crowe as Aubrey may divide the fans; he can handle the sway of action with aplomb, but O'Brian's readers may flinch at his sullen air and pine for the bluffness of the original. Paul Bettany does a delicate job with the role of Stephen Maturin, Jack's best and cleverest friend; we sense his quiet eagerness—common to the work of both Weir and O'Brian—to press on toward the darker reaches of the world and discover more. For all the foul weather, and despite a charming amputation scene, we feel ourselves to be in good company with these men, and strangely jealous of their packed and salted lives.—Anthony Lane (*Reviewed in our issue of 11/17/03.*) (*Streaming on Paramount+, YouTube, and other services.*)

The Whistle at Eaton Falls

A plastics factory in a small New Hampshire town is the focus of this unusual 1951 drama, filmed on location, that's centered on the workers' labor union. After the owner's sudden death, his widow, Helen (Dorothy Gish), hires Brad Adams (Lloyd Bridges), a factory worker who's also the union president, to take his place. Despite Brad's sympathies, he follows through on planned layoffs, putting him into conflict with the union and his longtime friends. The director, Robert Siodmak, renders the rustic town ominously labyrinthine, with interconnections of power as tangled as those of a teeming metropolis. The drama interweaves financial chicanery, the wiles of salesmen, the peculiarities of military-procurement bids, the delights of industrial design, and the banalities on which fortunes pivot—in this case, the plastic channel selector of television sets. A happy ending is balanced with cautionary ironies regarding the future of unions in an environment where management has the built-in upper hand. The cast features such great character actors as Ernest Borgnine, Lenore Lonergan, and Arthur O'Connell alongside local nonprofessionals.—R.B. (*Playing on TCM Jan. 24 and streaming on Watch TCM.*)

For more reviews, visit
newyorker.com/goings-on-about-town

WHAT TO STREAM



The Oregon-raised, Paris-based director James Blue's clandestinely filmed 1962 drama, "**The Olive Trees of Justice**," reveals the attachment of French colonists to Algeria and the emotional and moral drive for the country's independence (which was achieved later that year). The film—screening and streaming at Metrograph starting on Jan. 21—is based on a novel by Jean Pélégri, who co-wrote the script and plays an aging man of French descent, the founder of a vineyard in the Algerian countryside, who is now on his deathbed. The patriarch's adult son, Jean (Pierre Prothon), who lives in France, returns to Algiers to see his father and, while there, reconnects with lifelong friends—indigenous Algerians, who display a wide range of responses to the fight for independence. Flashbacks to Jean's childhood at the family farm show his strong bond with his native village's residents, who nonetheless endured his father's unchallenged domination. Blue evokes both the campaign of terrorism by Algerian militants and the brutality of France's military occupation; above all, he depicts the nuances of irreconcilable inequalities, the web of local subtleties that both compose and miss the historically big picture.—Richard Brody



TABLES FOR TWO

Casa Enrique 5-48 49th Ave., Queens

One of the first Mexican eateries in New York City opened in midtown in 1938. Its proprietor, Juvencio Maldonado, who had sailed over from the Yucatán Peninsula, called his place Xochitl, after an Aztec goddess. He patented a mechanical taco-shell fryer and printed a glossary of imported culinary terms for his befuddled diners. (Tortilla: “a flat, round corn cake, about 6 inches in diameter and 1/16 inch thick . . . can be bent or rolled, as we shall explain.”) For decades, Xochitl was just about the only game in town. The scene ramified in the nineteen-eighties and nineties, when the city’s Mexican population grew eightfold. New arrivals would launch taco trucks, tamale pushcarts, *panaderías*, tortilla factories, and more than a thousand professional kitchens in the five boroughs. If a certain French tire manufacturer is to be believed, among the best of them today is Casa Enrique, which opened a decade ago, in Queens, and is the first Mexican restaurant in the city to have been awarded a Michelin star—every year since 2015.

Many years before the chef Cosme Aguilar opened Casa Enrique—before he toiled in French restaurants as a porter and then a line cook and then a chef, before his first career, as a teen-age car mechanic, before even his birth—his mother ran a small restaurant in Chiapas. She passed away in 1983, when he was a boy. Twenty-nine years later, when Aguilar decided to open his own place, he turned to a notebook of recipes she left behind. One of the first dishes he attempted to re-create was her *albondigas*—meatballs, each with a hard-boiled egg in its center, sunk in a smoky tomato sauce prepared with onion, garlic, and chipotle chilies. “The first time I made *albondigas* here, it really got me,” Aguilar said. “I hadn’t tasted that meal in a very long time, and I was, like, ‘Oh, my God, it’s just like my mom used to make.’ I almost cried.”

Aguilar has a dozen stories like that. “Everybody who wants to open a Mexican restaurant in New York,” he said, “they want to go fancy—they use *truffles*.” He was wearing a mask, but you could tell he made a face when he said “truffles.” Aguilar is not above aesthetic embellishment, but he also believes that overbold improvisation on traditional fare too often spins out, crashing over the guardrails of tribute and into the pit of cultural snobbery. He, instead, elects to go deeper. His menu is his memoir.

Aguilar’s *mole de Piaxtla*, poured over stewed chicken, is an homage both to his father’s home town and to the mem-

ory of his paternal grandmother, who would press into service anyone within shouting distance whenever she made mole. “Someone would be peeling the chilies, someone else would be toasting the nuts,” he said. “It’s a lot of ingredients!” Aguilar’s version has twenty-four, including chilies (five types), almonds, raisins, figs, sesame seeds, plantains, and cocoa powder. Atop the accompanying yellow rice, he throws down a dare: a single mature *chile de árbol* (Scoville heat units: up to 65,000). A frozen blueberry margarita, or several, is some comfort here.

Whatever you order comes with a hot pot of steaming tortillas, and many dishes lend themselves to imaginative reassembly in the form of tacos. Take the *cochinito Chiapaneco*, a love letter to Aguilar’s native Chiapas, for which he marinates pork ribs in apple-cider vinegar, guajillo chilies, garlic, and fresh thyme before slow-roasting them for four hours. Once you’ve dispatched the ribs, what is to be done with the leftover marinade? Spoon it over a rice-and-beans medley and fold it into a tortilla, obviously.

The heartiest winter dish, a shredded-pork-and-hominy soup topped with julienned radish, appears on the menu as *Pozole de Mi Tía*. Aguilar won’t specify which aunt. “I have to be careful,” he said. “I have six aunts on my father’s side, and another six on my mother’s side.” A pause. “It’s a lot of aunts!” (*Entrées \$21-\$36.*)

—David Kortava

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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

OMICRON BY THE NUMBERS

There's an urban legend about a Texas man who takes a rifle to the side of his barn and sprays bullets across the wall, more or less at random. Then he finds the densest clusters of holes and paints a bull's-eye around each one. Later, a passerby, impressed by this display, trots off in search of the marksman. In a reversal of cause and effect, the Texas Sharpshooter is born.

The Sharpshooter Fallacy is often used by scientists to illustrate our tendency to narrativize data after the fact. We may observe an unusual grouping of cancer cases and back into an explanation for it, cherry-picking statistics and ignoring the vagaries of chance. As we muddle through COVID-19's winter surge, the story holds a deeper lesson about the perils of interpreting data without a full appreciation of the context. Omicron, because of its extraordinary contagiousness and its relative mildness, has transformed the risks and the consequences of infection, but not our reading of the statistics that have been guiding us through the pandemic. Do the numbers still mean what we think they mean?

A coronavirus infection isn't what it once was. Studies suggest that, compared with Delta, Omicron is a third to half as likely to send someone to the hospital; by some estimates, the chance that an older, vaccinated person will die of COVID is now lower than the risk posed by the seasonal flu. And yet the variant is exacting a punishing toll—medical, social, economic. (Omicron still presents a major threat to people who are unvaccinated.)

The United States is recording, on average, more than eight hundred thousand coronavirus cases a day, three times last winter's peak. Given the growing use of at-home tests, this official count greatly underestimates the true number of infections. We don't know how many rapid tests are used each day, or what proportion return positive, rendering unreliable traditional metrics, such as a community's test-positivity rate, which is used to guide policy on everything from school closures to sporting events.

There are many other numbers we'd like to know. How likely is Omicron to deliver not an irritating cold but the worst flu of your life? How does that risk increase with the number and severity of medical conditions a person has? What are the chances of lingering symptoms following a mild illness? How long does immunity last after a booster shot or an infection? Americans aren't waiting to

find out. Last week, rates of social distancing and self-quarantining rose to their highest levels in nearly a year, and dining, shopping, and social gatherings fell to new lows. Half of Americans believe that it will be at least a year before they return to their pre-pandemic lives, if they ever do; three-quarters feel that they're as likely, or more so, to contract the virus today—a year after vaccines became available—as they were when the pandemic began.

Should we be focussed on case counts at all? Some experts, including Anthony Fauci, argue that hospitalizations are now the more relevant marker of viral damage. More than a hundred and fifty thousand Americans are currently hospitalized with the coronavirus—a higher number than at any other point in the pandemic. But that figure, too, is not quite what it seems. Many hospitalized COVID patients have no respiratory symptoms; they were admitted for other reasons—a heart attack, a broken hip, cancer surgery—and happened to test positive for the virus. There are no nationwide estimates of the proportion of hospitalized patients with "incidental COVID," but in New York State some forty per cent of hospitalized patients with COVID are thought to have been admitted for other reasons. The Los Angeles County Department of Health Services reported that incidental infections accounted for roughly two-thirds of COVID admissions at its hospitals. (Pediatric COVID hospitalizations have also reached record levels, probably because Omicron's transmissibility means that many more kids are contracting the virus; there's little evidence that the



variant is causing more severe illness in them, though.)

Clarifying the distinction between a virus that drives illness and one that's simply along for the ride is more than an academic exercise. If we tally asymptomatic or minimally symptomatic infections as COVID hospitalizations, we risk exaggerating the toll of the virus, with all the attendant social and economic ramifications. If we overstate the degree of incidental COVID, we risk promoting a misguided sense of security. Currently, the U.S. has no data-collection practices or unified framework for separating one type of hospitalization from another. Complicating all this is the fact that it's sometimes hard to distinguish a person hospitalized "with COVID" from one hospitalized "for COVID." For some patients, a coronavirus infection can aggravate a seemingly unrelated condition—a COVID fever tips an elderly woman with a urinary-tract

infection into delirium; a bout of diarrhea dehydrates a man admitted with sickle-cell disease. In such cases, COVID isn't an innocent bystander, nor does it start the fire—it adds just enough tinder to push a manageable problem into a crisis.

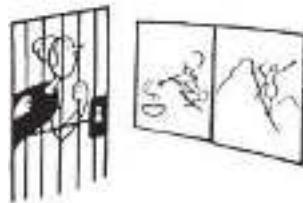
It is a positive development that we're able to engage in this discussion at all. With Alpha and Delta, almost all COVID hospitalizations were related to the infection. The situation is different with Omicron—a function both of its diminished ability to replicate in the lungs and of its superior capacity to infect people who've been vaccinated or previously contracted the virus. Still, parsing the numbers in a moment of crisis can seem a subordinate aim. Omicron is imposing an undeniable strain on the health-care system. Last week, a quarter of U.S. hospitals reported critical staffing shortages. Many have postponed non-urgent surgeries, and some have asked their em-

ployees to continue working even after they've been infected. Some states have called in the National Guard; others have enacted "crisis standards of care," whereby overwhelmed hospitals can restrict or deny treatment to some patients—I.C.U. beds, ventilators, and other lifesaving resources—in order to prioritize those who are more likely to benefit.

But this wave, too, shall pass—possibly soon. At the end of it, the vast majority of Americans could have some degree of immunity, resulting from vaccination, infection, or both. In all probability, we'd then approach the endemic phase of the virus, and be left with a complex set of questions about how to live with it. What level of disease are we willing to accept? What is the purpose of further restrictions? What do we owe one another? A clear-eyed view of the numbers will inform the answers. But it's up to us to paint the targets.

—Dhruv Khullar

UP THE RIVER ARTISTS AT WORK



Journalists incarcerated at San Quentin produce a monthly broadsheet newspaper. Cowboys locked up at the Louisiana State Penitentiary perform at the Angola Prison Rodeo (events include barrel racing and a game of poker in which four men play seated at a table while a loose bull bucks around). Recently, at Sing Sing Correctional Facility, a maximum-security prison thirty miles up the river from New York City, several painters gathered for an art show. "There was a second earlier today when I thought this wasn't going to happen," Ryan Lawrence, who wore wire-frame glasses and paint-splattered work boots, said. He had a fresh stick-and-poke tattoo of a lion on his left arm.

"Oh, man, the situation was rough," another artist, Charles Minson, said, wiping sweat from his bald head. He wore a pressed red cotton shirt tucked into state-issued green trousers. "Last night, they had a big thing in the yard—" "There was a big fight in the yard,"

another artist cut in. "There was a riot."

Minson went on, "Tear gas, everything! You know, anytime you're in this type of setting, tension is flaring up, the wrong person can say the wrong thing, and it could get crazy."

Darrian Bennett, who is known as Plank—"I'm a fan of 'SpongeBob,' and there's a character named Plankton"—stood listening. He chimed in, "I have a policy: I don't go to the yard." He laughed. "I can't paint in the yard. I can't draw in the yard. I can barely read in the yard." Plank wore pink Pumas with pink laces, and a pink sweatshirt. He continued, "I was always taught, 'Go to the school building.'"

In the school building, a classroom overlooked the A Block yard, which was ringed in razor wire. Iron bars on the windows, instructional posters taped to the walls. ("Ditch double negatives!") Visual artists living in B Block and Five Building mingled with actors and singers from Seven Building. Spectators from the Honor Housing Unit, who had just finished a dinner of whitefish with white rice and greenish vegetables, took their seats. A prison administrator scratched his nose, which peeked over a cotton mask; a corrections officer wearing sunglasses slumped in a plastic chair at the back of the room.

One spectator, Tim Walker, a muscular man with a soft voice, pulled out a Moleskine notebook filled with poems and colorful marker illustrations. "I'm almost tempted to put my notepad up there," he said, gesturing toward several art works displayed on easels. Alen Haymon, who wore a state-issued white cotton mask over a salt-and-pepper beard, leaned in. "Art is art. No matter the size or the style," he said. "Put it up there!"

The exhibition was hosted by Rehabilitation Through the Arts, a nonprofit that works with dancers, actors, poets, and



Darrian Bennett

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artists at six prisons in New York. R.T.A.'s teachers have put on art classes, workshops, and performances with the aim of helping people in prison develop life skills. (Nationwide, the recidivism rate for incarcerated people is about sixty per cent; less than five per cent of R.T.A. participants re-offend.) The show was the brainchild of Plank, who said he wanted more attention for visual artists. "I came up with the idea for an in-house art show because I wanted to show love to the guys," he said. "I wanted the guys to have an opportunity to be seen on a grander scale."

In 2019, R.T.A. appealed to the prison's administration to hold Plank's art show, and it agreed. It was the first event to take place since the coronavirus halted arts programming at the prison. "Tonight is about family and love," Plank said, pointing to one of his paintings (title: "The One with All the Books"), which depicted the writers Ta-Nehisi Coates and Nikole Hannah-Jones sitting behind a pile of hardbacks. "I feel like these two people have a lot of love for their people, Black people!"

Plank introduced a few artists, who stood before a chalkboard to discuss their work. First up, Gary Butler: "I think this piece is about all the ongoing debate about global warming and fossil fuels and all that kind of stuff." His painting ("The title, I think, is 'Mother Earth'") showed a woman in a liquid shawl floating above a crystalline river, which was certainly not the Hudson.

David McFadden: "The reason I started working with acrylic is 'cause I

couldn't get my pencils sharpened. We need a pencil sharpener!" (The artists use nail clippers and emery boards to sharpen their pencils; oil paint is prohibited.)

Minson: "Y'all see it's glossy, right?" He pointed to a painting ("Boo'd Up") of a couple dressed for a night on the town. "Well, that's floor wax!"

Lawrence: "'Home' is a word we use a lot around here. It's different for everybody. 'What are you gonna do when you get home?' 'Man, I can't wait till I get home.' But it's not that simple for me." His triptych collage depicted a motorcycle. "I've taken so much, especially from my family. And it's now in pieces."

Walker: "We've watched one another change from ignorance to consciousness to accountability."

McFadden: "Instead of painting this piece, I coulda been outside acting crazy, like the rest of these guys. But, no, I choose to settle my difference and take my angers and frustrations out on the canvas."

—Adam Iscoe

DEPT. OF EXCLUSIVITY MEMBERS ONLY



In the spring of 2006, Charles T. Craton III, a businessman in northwestern Georgia, best known for his work on Chick-fil-A's "Eat Mor Chikin" campaign, opened Entice Adult Superstore.

"I did expect there to be controversy," Craton later told the *Rome News-Tribune*. But, he went on, "you'd have thought I killed the Lindbergh baby, sunk the Lusitania, and started World War II." There had never been a porn shop in Floyd County—although, as Craton had discovered, no ordinance barred them. The county commission subsequently passed one; Craton unsuccessfully challenged it. But he was allowed to stay open as long as he changed the store's name to Entice Couples Boutique and promised that no more than thirty-five per cent of his inventory would be dildos and other "adult novelties."

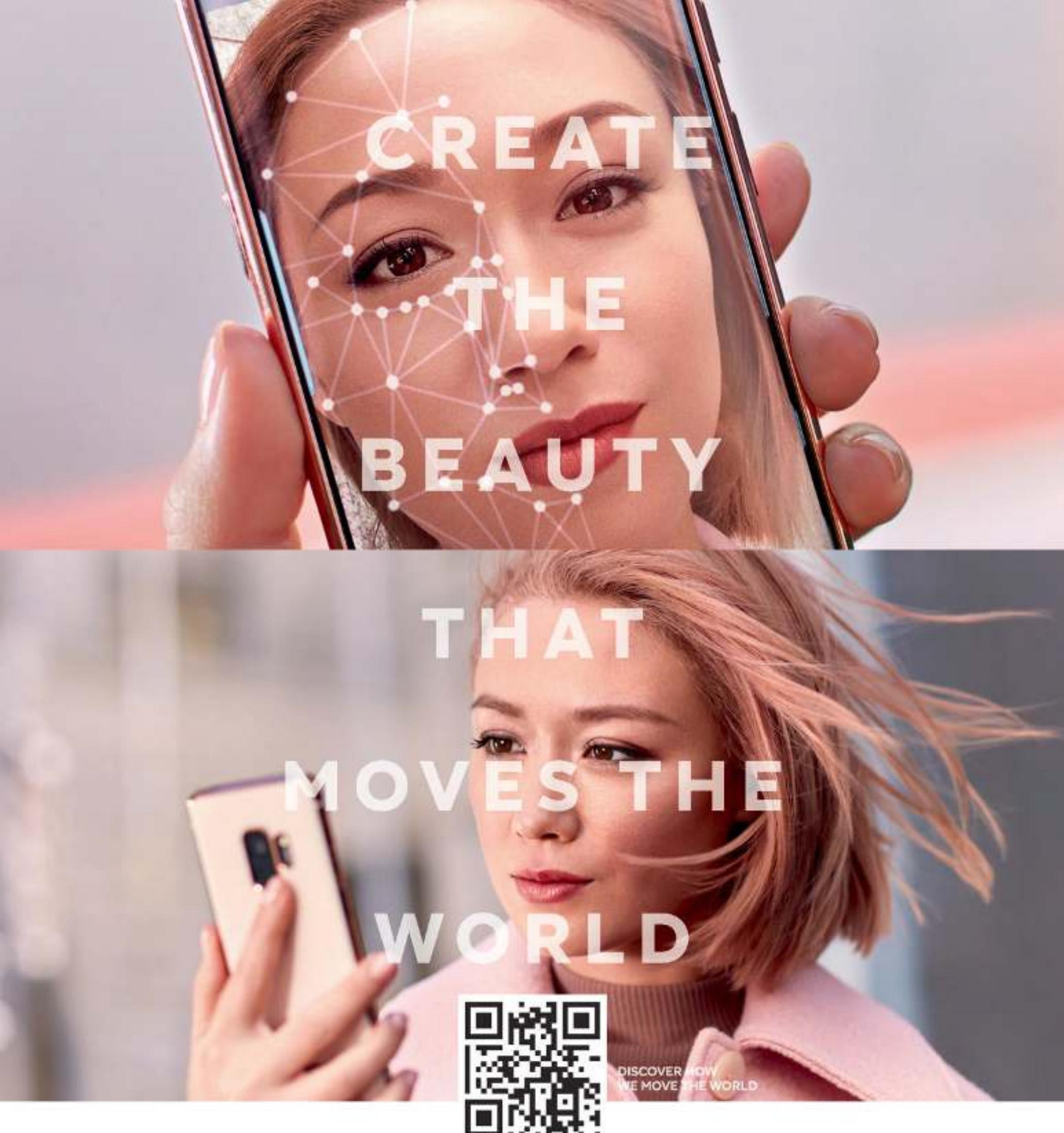
By that time, Craton had been expelled from the Coosa Country Club, in Rome, which is in Georgia's Fourteenth Congressional District. The club offered Craton several reasons for his expulsion in addition to his ownership of Entice. A Coosa member is said to have resigned "because of a known pornographer"—Craton—among the membership, and because Craton's wife allegedly appeared on a "pornographic Web site." All this, the club maintained, endangered "the good order, welfare and character of the Club."

Craton, who had been a Coosa member for four years, sued the club for five million dollars. "This is me standing my ground against the moral elitists of Rome, Georgia," he told the *News-Tribune*. His lawsuit noted that he had "conducted himself, at all times, on and off the club premises, as a gentleman." Craton also published an open letter in the paper, addressed to "The Members of Coosa Country Club," in which he referred to "felony crimes" and "public drunkenness" by fellow-members, and mentioned "illegal gambling in the men's locker room." The letter went on, "If the Coosa Country Club Board is going to conduct witch hunts, then for God's sake, let's find all the witches." It concluded, "Once we investigate who all the witches are, there won't be any members left."

The suit was dismissed before Craton could tell his Coosa stories to a jury. "Private clubs are the last bastion of legal prejudice," he told the *News-Tribune*, after the decision. He built



"It's nice that we want the same things."



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himself a house with a view of the club's eighth hole.

"We called it the 'porn hole,'" a former club member, who believed that Craton had got a raw deal, said recently. The club's "moral hypocrisy," as the former member put it, was on view again this month, when Coosa welcomed Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene.

Greene and her husband, Perry, who runs a construction company, were among eight new members mentioned in the January edition of the *Coosa Chronicle*, along with an engineer and an anesthesiologist. Greene's admission was never put before the Coosa membership committee, as is standard for a controversial figure, according to a committee member who first learned of it on Twitter. Shortly before joining Coosa, Greene described the events of January 6, 2021, as "just a riot at the Capitol." The violence, she said, was consistent with the Declaration of Independence's support of "overthrowing tyrants." (Any wrongdoing, she suggested, was the work of the F.B.I.)

"They ran Craton off for 'pornography,'" the former member said. "But they don't seem to have a problem with an adulteress who promotes insurrection?" He said he'd read about various extramarital affairs that Greene allegedly conducted years ago—one with a man who, according to the *Daily Mail*, now calls himself the Polyamorous Tantric Sex Guru on his OnlyFans page—when she worked at a CrossFit gym outside Atlanta. (Greene's office denied the affairs.)

He was not the only Coosa member to be perturbed. John Cowan, a local neurosurgeon, who lost to Greene in a primary runoff, tweeted his reaction: "I hope she realizes she can't handpick who else attends while she's there like she does for her Townhall meetings."

Entice Couples Boutique closed in 2015, and Craton moved on to other businesses. By then, the Rome Area History Museum had published a book titled "Legendary Locals of Rome." The chapter "Outside the Box: Innovators and Rebels" opens with the story of Charles T. Craton III, who built "the largest store of its kind in the southeast."

—Charles Bethea

THE BOARDS PLAYING IN SPACE



It was twenty minutes before curtain on opening night for a production called "Rolling Along." The audience clustered in the lobby of the Signature Theatre, on West Forty-second Street. One woman got out her iPad and cell phone. "I'm at an event you would love to be at," is how she began a call, while scrolling the CNN Web site. She paused for exactly as long as it takes to say "What?"

"Bill Bradley doing a one-man show!"

All hundred and sixty attendees signed paperwork acknowledging that they might appear in a documentary that would



Bill Bradley

be filming during the performance, the first in a four-night run. They filed into the theatre to find a name card on each seat, as though the show were a giant dinner party: Katrina vanden Heuvel, Charlie Rose, Bob Kerrey, Phil Murphy.

When the lights went down, the stage was empty except for a table and chair. Bradley appeared, dressed in slacks and a pale-blue V-neck sweater over a button-down shirt. He faced the audience with an odd, ambiguous expression that suggested an apology was coming. It's possible that, as someone who had lived up to immense expectations for most of his life—who had, as John McPhee put it, in an article in this magazine, "a

sense of where you are"—he was feeling a bit lost.

For the next hundred minutes, Bradley told the story of his life, organized around polished anecdotes. He began in Crystal City, Missouri, where he was the only child of a small-town bank president with a bad back, and moved quickly through his ascent as a high-school athlete, a college-basketball prodigy, an Oxford scholar, a faltering rookie with the Knicks, a star, and a two-time champion. And then a rookie senator from New Jersey, a three-term senator from New Jersey, and, in 2000, a Presidential candidate running in a primary against Al Gore, after which he became an investment banker—at last, "my father's banker son." And, now, performing in a one-man play.

There was anecdote after anecdote about life as a basketball star. The time he went to a Russian professor at Princeton before facing the Russians in the Olympics, in 1964, and learned a couple of Russian phrases, which he used to spook the Russians during the gold-medal game. How he was initially resented in the Knicks locker room because he was making more money than anyone else in the league, for reasons that seemed connected to his being white. How the fans booed him on the court that year, throwing coins at him.

In the lobby of the Signature a few days later, after the final performance, Bradley, who is seventy-eight, was fatigued but game; he runs cool, and had some energy in reserve. He said that the idea for the show had begun after a reception at Princeton, to which he donated his papers in 2017. The university's library had compiled an oral history about him, talking to more than a hundred people. About seventy showed up for the reception. "I prepared a talk where I mentioned each person," he said.

His friend Manny Azenberg, a theatre producer, was in attendance. "Manny, a friend of fifty years, has never given me a compliment," Bradley said. "But after my talk he came up and said, 'Sounds like Hal Holbrook. Why don't you work something up?' And then I just started doing it." Bradley continued, "I would go around the country revising it. I would go to Salt Lake or Chicago, or Austin, Texas, or Marin County, to these little theatres." As part of his research, he said, he looked at work by Holbrook, Billy Crystal, and

Spalding Gray. Gray always performed his monologues with a script open in front of him, but Bradley memorized his.

"Discipline is discipline," he said. "You need discipline to hit twenty-five in a row. And you have to have discipline to memorize something. There have probably been, in the past eighteen months, three to five days that I haven't done this show, or some version of it." After the onset of COVID, he rehearsed during long walks in Central Park.

When he was on the road with "Rolling Along," he'd ask the audience for notes after each performance: "One guy in Salt Lake said, 'You know, Senator, that's interesting, but people want guts on the floor. Put some more guts on the floor.'" This could be seen as a valid critique of Bradley's demeanor as a senator, and especially as a Presidential candidate. But his talent may be for coherence and a sense of proportion, of playing in space. Even in a one-man show, he was thinking about teamwork. "The key is finding the balance between candor and too much," he said. "You want to say enough but leave enough room for people's imagination."

—Thomas Beller

UTOPIA DEPT. NO RIFFRAFF



Conferences are on the wane these days. CES? Scaled back. Davos? Deferred. Where's a moneyed professional in need of camaraderie to go? Filippo Brignone, a member of the founding family of Costa Careyes, a gated community in the Mexican state of Jalisco, thinks that "the network of Careyes" may be able to serve as a substitute. Every year, Careyes hosts Ondalinda, a five-day festival. The theme of the most recent edition was mycelium, the fuzz of fungal threads through which plants purportedly communicate. "Nature's Internet," a pre-festival marketing e-mail called it, linking to a dress-code mood board.

"We get compared to Burning Man, but we didn't want Ondalinda to be *that*," Brignone said, seated in the palapa of his Pacific-front home. He wore flip-

flops, a Schaffhausen watch, and several beaded chakra bracelets; his graying hair was slicked back. "We have incredible houses," he went on. When the festival was new, in 2016, "we were getting calls, like, 'Can I see a photo of the bathroom?' 'Can I see a photo of the toilet?' Now it's 'Please, can I have a house, any house—whatever you have?'"

In 1968, Brignone's father, Gian Franco, an Italian real-estate developer, bought the twenty thousand acres after seeing them from a plane. "It was quite deserted," Brignone said. "Not good for agriculture." But perfect for cliff-top villas with screening rooms and infinity pools. Gian Franco, when setting up his community, which he envisioned as "a little Positano," sold only to buyers who met his twenty-seven criteria. ("24. To have faced serious financial problems. 25. To have a sense of humor.") Heidi Klum and Seal used to own a house there; Cindy Crawford, Mick Jagger, and Uma Thurman have passed through.

"At one time, my father didn't want any Americans," Brignone said. "You want people who have a certain level of consciousness." He has described the right type of people as "not interested in watches and cars" but seeking "something that helps them." In 2011, Lulu Luchaire, a Parisian looking for respite from her job helping lead Apple's global retail strategy, heard about the place. Five years later, she and Brignone started Ondalinda, which translates to "beautiful wave," and whose proceeds partially go to benefit local Indigenous communities. (Luchaire didn't make it to the mycelium festival because of a green-card snafu.)

Seven hundred and fifty people convened at Ondalinda in November; negative COVID tests were required. "There was a big debate about if we were going to test everybody again," Brignone said. "It's expensive." (They did.) Among the offerings was a chocolate-fungi workshop with Parker Roe, who describes himself as a "mushroom-and-plant-medicine product designer." Roe stood under a ceiba tree in front of an array of Bunsen burners and blenders, and addressed the class: "Now start weighing out the ingredients with a scale."

"Parker!" a student called. "If we were going to add psilocybin, how much per bar should we do?"

"Have you experimented with the

medicine before?" Roe asked. He nodded. "O.K. I'll let you be the judge." Magic mushrooms were not included in the workshop, to the dismay of some attendees. "I didn't pay eighty dollars to make a mushroom-flavored chocolate bar," a man in a white fedora said.

Other substances were plentiful. Erika Valero Tlazohiani, a shaman in a white gown, told attendees, "Tobacco is a way to talk with God." She led a cacao ceremony that involved drinking ritually prepared hot chocolate and taking a puff from a communal pipe. (Possible side effects: happiness, contentment.) "With this smoke, say thank you to your mothers," Tlazohiani said.

Less prescriptive: pop-up shops, disco naps, pool parties at private villas. "I've been to Ibiza, Mykonos, Vegas," a man with salt-and-pepper hair and John Lennon sunglasses said, half submerged in the pool at Casa Selva (six bedrooms, live-in staff, thirty-one hundred dollars a night). "Nothing compares to this."

"It feels safe," a woman next to him said. "You know there's no riffraff."

Ticket prices, which don't include lodging, start at eighteen hundred and fifty dollars. "We avoid the generation of twentysomethings who come with the idea of a rave in their heads," Brignone said. "It's rich people with an intellectual level. Artists, successful businessmen—you know, opinion leaders." At one mycelium party, bass thumped across a polo field illuminated by ten thousand candles and towering neon mushroom puppets with red-rimmed eyes. L.E.D. lassos swirled.

"That's a crazy-awesome outfit, even if you're not on a lot of drugs," a guy in a glow-in-the-dark T-shirt said, watching a couple in matching sequinned tie-dyed jumpsuits.

"It's like adult recess on crack, but all the kids on the playground want to play with you," a philanthropist named Gillian Wynn—the daughter of Steve Wynn—said. "It's not an unsavory thing like Las Vegas. There's a wholesome component." She added, "Everything is tasteful."

Connections were made. A shirtless L.A. real-estate developer in latex pants gestured at a man near the ice-cream buffet. "I used to work with that guy at Morgan Stanley," he said. "He didn't recognize me without my tie on."

—Sheila Yasmin Marikar

FLYING ACES

Artificial intelligence is transforming warplanes. Will pilots trust it?

BY SUE HALPERN



On a cloudless morning last May, a pilot took off from the Niagara Falls International Airport, heading for restricted military airspace over Lake Ontario. The plane, which bore the insignia of the United States Air Force, was a repurposed Czechoslovak jet, an L-39 Albatros, purchased by a private defense contractor. The bay in front of the cockpit was filled with sensors and computer processors that recorded the aircraft's performance. For two hours, the pilot flew counterclockwise around the lake. Engineers on the ground, under contract with DARPA, the Defense Department's research agency, had choreographed every turn,

every pitch and roll, in an attempt to do something unprecedented: design a plane that can fly and engage in aerial combat—dogfighting—withouthuman pilot operating it.

The exercise was an early step in the agency's Air Combat Evolution program, known as ACE, one of more than six hundred Department of Defense projects that are incorporating artificial intelligence into war-fighting. This year, the Pentagon plans to spend close to a billion dollars on A.I.-related technology. The Navy is building unmanned vessels that can stay at sea for months; the Army is developing a fleet of robotic combat vehicles.

Implementing new technology will mean convincing humans to cede control.

Artificial intelligence is being designed to improve supply logistics, intelligence gathering, and a category of wearable technology, sensors, and auxiliary robots that the military calls the Internet of Battlefield Things.

Algorithms are already good at flying planes. The first autopilot system, which involved connecting a gyroscope to the wings and tail of a plane, debuted in 1914, about a decade after the Wright brothers took flight. And a number of current military technologies, such as underwater mine detectors and laser-guided bombs, are autonomous once they are launched by humans. But few aspects of warfare are as complex as aerial combat. Paul Schifferle, the vice-president of flight research at Calspan, the company that's modifying the L-39 for DARPA, said, "The dogfight is probably the most dynamic flight program in aviation, period."

A fighter plane equipped with artificial intelligence could eventually execute tighter turns, take greater risks, and get off better shots than human pilots. But the objective of the ACE program is to transform a pilot's role, not to remove it entirely. As DARPA envisions it, the A.I. will fly the plane in partnership with the pilot, who will remain "in the loop," monitoring what the A.I. is doing and intervening when necessary. According to the agency's Strategic Technology Office, a fighter jet with autonomous features will allow pilots to become "battle managers," directing squads of unmanned aircraft "like a football coach who chooses team members and then positions them on the field to run plays."

Stacie Pettyjohn, the director of the Defense Program at the Center for a New American Security, told me that the ACE program is part of a wider effort to "decompose our forces" into smaller, less expensive units. In other words, fewer humans and more expendable machines. DARPA calls this "mosaic warfare." In the case of aerial combat, Pettyjohn said, "these much smaller autonomous aircraft can be combined in unexpected ways to overwhelm adversaries with the complexity of it. If any one of them gets shot down, it's not as big of a deal."

All told, the L-39 was taken up above

Lake Ontario twenty times, each sortie giving the engineers and computer scientists the information they need to build a model of its flight dynamics under various conditions. Like self-driving cars, autonomous planes use sensors to identify discrepancies between the outside world and the information encoded in their maps. But a dogfighting algorithm will have to take into account both the environment and the aircraft. A plane flies differently at varying altitudes and angles, on hot days versus cold ones, or if it's carrying an extra fuel tank or missiles.

"Most of the time, a plane flies straight and level," Phil Chu, an electrical engineer who serves as a science adviser to the ACE program, explained. "But when it's dogfighting you have to figure out, O.K., if I'm in a thirty-degree bank angle, ascending at twenty degrees, how much do I have to pull the stick to get to a forty-degree bank angle, rising at ten degrees?" And, because flight is three-dimensional, speed matters even more. "If it's flying slowly and you move the stick one way, you get a certain amount of turn out of it. If it's flying really fast and you move the stick the same way, you'll get a very different response."

In 2024, if the ACE program goes according to plan, four A.I.-enabled L-39s will participate in a live dogfight in the skies above Lake Ontario. To achieve that goal, DARPA has enlisted three dozen academic research centers and private companies, each working on one of two problem areas: how to get the plane to fly and fight on its own, and how to get pilots to trust the A.I. enough to use it. Robert Work, who was the Deputy Secretary of Defense during the Obama Administration, and pushed the Pentagon to pursue next-generation technologies, told me, "If you don't have trust, the human will always be watching the A.I. and saying, 'Oh, I've got to take over.'"

There is no guarantee that ACE will succeed. DARPA projects are time-limited experiments, typically lasting between three and five years. Schifferle, at Calspan, told me, "We're at the 'walk' stage of a typical 'crawl, walk, run' technology maturation process." Still, it seems increasingly likely that young

pilots will one day wonder how their fighter jet acquired the skills of a Chuck Yeager. When they do, they will be told about a refurbished Soviet-era warplane that was flown high above Lake Ontario by old-school pilots who were, in a way, writing their own obituaries.

As part of the effort to devise an algorithm that can dogfight, DARPA selected eight software-development companies to participate in the Alpha-Dogfight Trials, an A.I. competition that culminated with three days of public scrimmages in August, 2020. The prize was a flight helmet worn by Colonel Dan (Animal) Javorsek, who was in charge of the program until he returned to the Air Force last year. The contest was supposed to be held in front of a live audience near Nellis Air Force Base, in Nevada, but the pandemic relegated the action to an online event, hosted by the Applied Physics Lab at Johns Hopkins, and broadcast via a YouTube channel called DARPATv. Justin (Glock) Mock, an F-16 pilot, offered play-by-play commentary. At one point, he told the five thousand or so viewers that the objective was simple: "Kill and survive."

Each team took a slightly different approach with its A.I. agents, as the algorithms are called. EpiSci, a defense contractor based in Poway, California, mounted an effort led by Chris Gentile, a retired Air Force test pilot. The company broke the problem down into component parts, and used Gentile's flight expertise to solve each step. "We start at the lowest level," Gentile told me. "How do you control the airplane? How do you fly it and direct it to go left and right, all the way up to what tactics should we use?"

PhysicsAI, in Pacifica, California, fielded a four-man squad who knew next to nothing about aerial combat. They used a neural-network approach, enabling the system to learn the patterns of a successful dogfight and mathematically arrive at the maximum probability of a good outcome. "The problem we have to solve is like playing chess while playing basketball," John Pierre, PhysicsAI's principal investigator, said. "You're taking shots while making split-second decisions, and it needs to be done in a

way that human pilots can interpret what's going on."

During each contest, the A.I. agents, represented by dime-size airplane avatars, moved around a screen at a stately pace, mimicking the flight dynamics of an F-16. It wasn't exactly "Top Gun," but the algorithms were doing something that would have been impossible a year earlier: interacting with each other and adjusting their tactics in real time. As the agents battled it out, Mock compared the action to "a knife fight in a phone booth."

In the decisive scrimmage, on day three, Falco, an A.I. agent created by Heron Systems, a boutique software company based in Virginia, competed against an A.I. agent developed by Lockheed Martin, the country's largest defense contractor. The matchup drew the obvious David and Goliath comparisons—though this David had gone through about the same number of computer iterations as a pilot who trained all day, every day, for thirty-one years. After a few tightly fought rounds, Heron's Falco emerged victorious. But there was a final contest: a seasoned F-16 pilot was going to take on Falco.

The pilot, dressed in an olive-green flight suit, sat in a high-backed gaming chair, his face obscured by a virtual-reality headset. He was identified only by his call sign, Banger. (His identity was concealed for "operational security.") He'd trained with the team at A.P.L. beforehand, learning how to use the controls to guide his plane, and the V.R. headset to track his opponent's vector of attack.

On a split screen, viewers could see what Banger saw from the cockpit. Another screen displayed a visual representation of the fight, as the planes—yellow for Banger, green for Falco—jockeyed for the best angle. About a minute in, each team aggressively rolled its aircraft, and Banger evaded the A.I. by dropping down to ten thousand feet. Falco came around and got off a series of good shots. Banger was down to four lives.

In the end, Banger failed to survive a single skirmish. He said, "I think technology has proven over the past few years that it's able to think faster than humans and react faster in a precise pristine environment." Banger also

suggested that artificial intelligence might execute tactical maneuvers that pilots had been trained to avoid, such as flying too close to enemy aircraft and moving at speeds that would tax a human body. “I may not be comfortable putting my aircraft in a position where I might run into something else,” he said. “The A.I. would exploit that.”

Mock seemed pleased with the outcome. “You could look at this and say, ‘O.K., the A.I. got five, our human got zero,’ ” he told viewers. “From the fighter-pilot world, we trust what works, and what we saw was that in this limited area, this specific scenario, we’ve got A.I. that works.” (A YouTube video of the trials has since garnered half a million views.)

Brett Darcey, who runs Heron, told me that the company has used Falco to fly drones, completing seventy-four flights with zero crashes. But it’s still unclear how the technology will react to the infinite possibilities of real-world conditions. The human mind processes more slowly than a computer, but it has the cognitive flexibility to adapt to unimagined circumstances; artificial intelligence, so far, does not. Anna Skinner, a human-factors psychologist, and another science adviser to the ACE program, told me, “Humans are able to draw on their experience and take reasonable actions in the face of uncertainty. And, especially in a combat situation, uncertainty is always going to be present.”

In early May, I visited the Operator Performance Lab, at the University of Iowa, where members of the ACE program had gathered for a demonstration. O.P.L. is the creation of Tom Schnell, a Swiss-born professor of industrial and systems engineering. In his spare time, Schnell flies loops and rolls in an aerobatic plane above the cornfields of Iowa, but his expertise was, initially, in ground transportation. In the late nineties, a luxury-car company—Schnell won’t say which one—asked him to develop a way to measure how much people enjoyed driving its vehicles. Schnell attached sensors

to drivers’ faces to detect the movement of small muscles around the mouth and eyes, which might indicate smiling or frowning, and electrocardiogram leads to monitor their heart. “I told them that if I was going to do this work they’d have to send me a fun car,” Schnell said of his early client. “And they did.”

Schnell soon found that each sensor came with its own proprietary data-collection system, which made it nearly

impossible to analyze all the information at once. He built a common framework, which he named the Cognitive Assessment Tool Set, and began collecting the physiological data of people who operated all kinds of machinery. “They could be train engineers, or helicopter pilots, or people driving cars,” he said.

The face sensors supplied one set of data points. So did a device that analyzed galvanic skin response—how much a subject was sweating. Another tool looked at blood-oxidation levels, which served as a proxy for mental workload.

In 2004, Schnell persuaded his department chair at the University of Iowa to buy O.P.L.’s first aircraft, a single-engine Beechcraft Bonanza. Within a few years, he had acquired a jet, and commercial airlines and the Air Force hired him to conduct studies on their pilots. “We did a lot of work on spatial disorientation,” Schnell said. This involved things like having pilots close their eyes during aerial maneuvers and then try to fly straight once they’d opened them again. By the time DARPA put out its request for proposals for the ACE program, in 2019, Schnell’s laboratory had more than a decade of experience capturing the physiological responses of pilots.

Persuading pilots to hand over the controls may prove even more elusive than developing A.I. that can dogfight. “It’s probably the paramount challenge we’re trying to tackle,” Ryan Hefron, the current ACE program manager, told me. Hefron, a thirty-eight-year-old lieutenant colonel with a doctorate in computer science, came to DARPA in 2021 from the Air Force Test Pilot

School, where he was an instructor. As an example, he mentioned “Auto-GCAS,” an automated ground-collision-avoidance system that grabs the controls if a plane is in imminent danger of crashing. During testing, Auto-GCAS had a tendency to pull up suddenly without cause—what Hefron called “nuisance fly-ups.” The system has since saved at least eleven lives, but test pilots remained wary of it for years because of these early setbacks.

“There’s a saying in the military,” Peter Hancock, a psychology professor at the University of Central Florida who studies the effect of trust on technology adoption, told me. “Trust is gained in teaspoons and lost in buckets.” It’s not just an issue in warfare. In the most recent surveys conducted by the American Automobile Association, about eighty per cent of respondents said that they were not comfortable with the idea of autonomous vehicles. “Most of the drivers say that they want the current systems to work better before they can trust a fully self-driving system,” Greg Brannon, the director of automotive engineering at AAA, told me. “The percentage hasn’t moved much despite a lot of advances in technology, and that’s pretty shocking.”

To assess trust, psychologists typically administer surveys. “No one has ever come up with an objective measure of trust before,” Skinner said. DARPA hired SoarTech, an A.I. research-and-development firm based in Ann Arbor, to build a “trust model,” which aims to verify self-reported trust with the hard data from O.P.L.’s Cognitive Assessment Tool Set. “I think that’s how you do good science,” Schnell told me. “You take the best building blocks you have and put them together to answer very difficult questions. DARPA actually stepped up to the plate and said we want to know: ‘Are you trusting the avionics?’ ”

One of O.P.L.’s hangars, at the Iowa City Municipal Airport, was filled with secondhand aircraft that Schnell had purchased and retrofitted: two L-29 Delfins, a smaller cousin of the L-39, painted a glossy Hawkeye yellow; a hulking Soviet helicopter, purchased for about the cost of a Cadillac Escalade, upgraded with a



full-color night-vision system that Schnell built himself. At the far end of the hangar was the simulated cockpit of a 737 jet which was the size of a studio apartment.

An Air National Guard pilot, on loan to O.P.L. for the day, lowered himself into another simulator, a rectangular metal shell that Schnell called “the bathtub.” Schnell hooked him up to electrocardiogram leads, in order to gather some baseline data. Until that morning’s briefing, the pilot knew only that he would be participating in a DARPA research project. Even now, as he adjusted his V.R. headset and fidgeted with controls that replicated an F-16’s, all he’d been told was that artificial intelligence would be controlling the plane while he played a rudimentary video game broadcast on his display panel. (A separate ACE effort is developing a more complex version.)

The game simulated the battle-management tasks that pilots are expected to conduct in the future; to win, the pilot’s eight blue planes had to shoot down eight red enemy planes. An eye tracker inside his helmet would measure when and for how long he looked up to see what the A.I. was doing, which could be considered an expression of distrust. He did not know that some of the simulated skirmishes were primed for him to win and others to put him and his aircraft in jeopardy. But, if he felt that the A.I. was about to do something dangerous, he had the option of stopping the engagement by “paddling off.” This, too, would demonstrate a lack of trust.

Ultimately, the idea is to supply pilots with more information about the A.I.’s next move, in order to elicit the appropriate level of trust. Glenn Taylor, a senior scientist at SoarTech, told me, “We’re building visual and other interfaces into the system to let the pilot know what the A.I. is doing, and give him or her enough information, with enough time, to know whether or not to trust it.” The researchers called this relationship “calibrated” trust. Phil Chu, one of the ACE program’s science advisers, told me, “If we can show pilots what the A.I. is going to do in the next four seconds, that’s a very long time.”

Trust will also be crucial because,

with planes flying at speeds of up to five hundred miles an hour, algorithms won’t always be able to keep pilots in the loop. Hancock, the U.C.F. professor, calls the discrepancy in reaction time “temporal dissonance.” As an analogy, he pointed to air bags, which deploy within milliseconds, below the threshold of human perception. “As soon as you put me in that loop,” he said, “you’ve defeated the whole purpose of the air bag, which is to inflate almost instantaneously.”

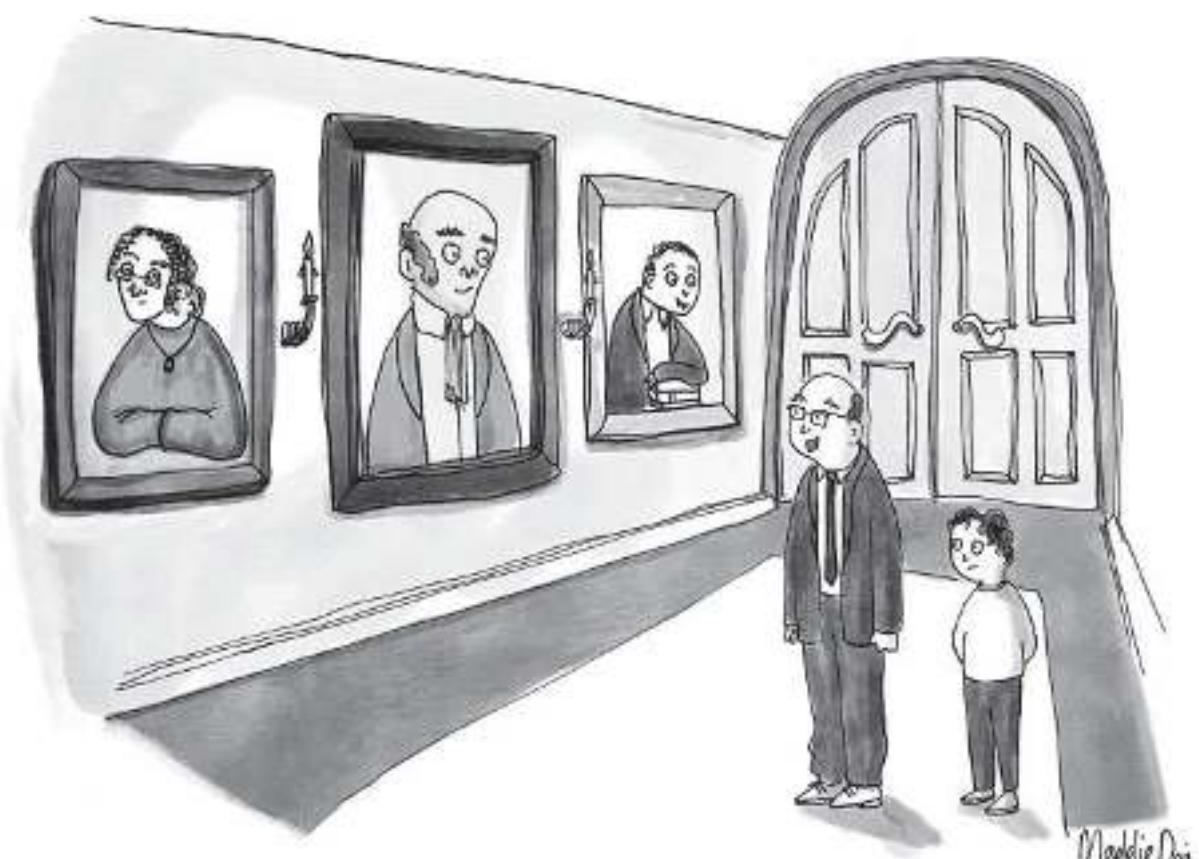
In the “bathtub” at O.P.L., a computer relayed what the pilot was seeing in his goggles. As he turned his head to the right, a wing came into view; when he looked down, he could see farmland. A radar screen at the front of the cockpit kept track of the adversary, which, in the first skirmish, quickly gained an advantage, coming at the pilot from behind and preparing to take a shot. “Paddle,” the pilot called out, ending the skirmish. The computer was reset. One of Schnell’s graduate students, who helped design the experiment, counted down from three, then called “Hack” to start the next contest.

Forty minutes later, as the pilot left the simulator, he was greeted by Katharine Woodruff, a researcher working with SoarTech. Woodruff asked him about an incident in which he stopped the encounter even though he was not in imminent danger. “I had two deci-

sions I could make,” he said. “To let it ride and see what happens or paddle off.” After a moment, he added, “I assessed that the bandit was starting to turn towards me. And so I paddled off.”

For the most part, Woodruff told me, the pilots in the study trusted the A.I. when it behaved appropriately and took over when it didn’t. There were a few exceptions: a pilot who had recently ejected from his plane was deeply suspicious of the technology. The thirty-year-old pilot whom I had observed thought that the autonomy “was cool,” but he paddled off even when his plane had the potential to achieve a good offensive angle. “I wanted to basically figure out my limits with the A.I.,” he told Woodruff. “What is too conservative, and what is going to get me killed. And then find that happy medium.”

Schnell’s graduate student, who can’t be named because he’s on active duty in the military, came over to listen to the debriefing. “You would be the perfect example of someone we’d need to influence, because—and I do not mean this to be rude at all—you completely violated the construct of the experiment,” he told the pilot. “You were deciding to not let the A.I. do the job that it’s put there to do, even though it was actually performing fine in the sense of not getting you killed. If we want to make you a battle manager



“And this hall reminds us we have always been very rich and quite ugly.”



"Have you tried turning it off and taking a nap?"

in thirty years, we'd need to be able to push that behavior in the opposite direction."

In 2017, the Future of Life Institute, an advocacy group focussed on "keeping artificial intelligence beneficial," which counts Elon Musk as a member of its advisory board, released "Slaughterbots." The short film imagines a world in which weaponized quadcopters about the size of a smartphone target political dissidents, college students, and members of Congress. "Nuclear is obsolete," a Steve Jobs-like character tells an enthusiastic audience at the Slaughterbot's product launch. "Take out your entire enemy, virtually risk-free."

At the end of the video, which has been viewed more than three million times on YouTube, the Berkeley computer scientist Stuart Russell says into the camera, "Allowing machines to choose to kill humans will be devastating to our security and freedom." Russell is among a group of prominent academics and tech executives, including Musk, Stephen Hawking, and Noam Chomsky, who signed on to a letter calling for a ban on "offensive autono-

mous weapons beyond meaningful human control."

And yet artificial intelligence is already driving a worldwide arms race. In 2020, global spending for military A.I. was estimated to exceed six billion dollars, and is expected to nearly double by 2025. Russia is developing unmanned vehicles, including robotic tanks and surveillance systems. Last year, it was reported that Libya launched an autonomous drone that appeared to be equipped with "real-time image processing," to identify and kill enemy fighters. Robert Work, the former Deputy Secretary of Defense, told me that intelligence suggests that China has turned decommissioned fighter jets into autonomous suicide drones that can operate together as a swarm. "That becomes an entirely new kind of weapon that's extraordinarily difficult to defend against," he said.

The United States, too, is testing the use of swarming drones. In an experiment last April, a drone swarm attacked a naval vessel off the coast of California. In October, the Skyborg program, an Air Force project to build autonomous aircraft to serve alongside F-35

pilots, tested two drones in live flight. Skyborg drones will be able to detect ground and air threats, identify suitable "kill" targets, and aim weapons for an optimal strike. The actual decision to "employ lethality," as the Air Force calls it, will remain in the hands of a human pilot. But, in 2020, the Air Force's chief scientist, Richard Joseph, cautioned that "we have some other questions to answer. How much autonomy do we want for a system that can deliver lethal force, and especially one that's moving at machine speed?"

In a paper published last April, Robert Work wrote that A.I.-enabled systems "are likely to help mitigate the biggest cause of unintended combat engagements: target misidentification." The U.S. military has repeatedly promised that improved technology would enhance enemy targeting. The results have been mixed. In 2003, during the Iraq War, an early autonomous weapon, the Patriot missile, inadvertently shot down a British fighter jet, killing both pilots, and a Navy plane, killing that pilot as well. A subsequent Pentagon report concluded that the human operators had given too much autonomy to the missile system. In a recent examination of thirteen hundred classified reports of civilian casualties in the Middle East, the *Times* characterized the American air war as "a sharp contrast to the American government's image of war waged by all-seeing drones and precision bombs."

Pettyjohn, of the Center for a New American Security, told me that the military is currently developing autonomous systems to help identify targets. "And that's one of the things that A.I. still struggles with," she said. "It's still a really hard thing to do—discriminate in the air when you're ten or twenty or thirty thousand feet in the sky." In 2018, researchers at M.I.T. and Stanford found that three popular A.I. facial-recognition systems often failed to identify the gender of women with dark skin. Two years later, a Congressional Research Service report noted that "this could hold significant implications for A.I. applications in a military context, particularly if such biases remain undetected and are incorporated into systems with lethal effects."

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more than a hundred and eighty non-governmental organizations, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the World Council of Churches, has urged nations to adopt a legal treaty controlling the use of lethal autonomous weapons. The U.S. is not among the nearly seventy countries that have so far signed on. “It’s not just about banning a particular weapon, like we ban land mines or chemical weapons,” Bonnie Docherty, a lecturer on human-rights law at Harvard Law School and a senior researcher in the arms division at Human Rights Watch, said. “This is an effort to preempt the development of a technology that could alter the way wars are fought in a really dreadful way.”

The D.O.D.’s position on lethal autonomous weapons, established in 2012, requires a human decision-maker to remain in the loop to an “appropriate” degree. David Ochmanek, a senior defense analyst at the Rand Corporation, whose former office at the Pentagon drafted the 2012 directive, told me, “It does not, in fact, prohibit the development of autonomous weapons.” Rather, he added, “it puts in place a number of processes for review and safeguards. The commander has to be able to intervene and turn on the autonomy and turn it off as needed.”

Ochmanek sees the development of autonomous weapons as a matter of deterrence, particularly against large-scale acts of aggression, such as Russia invading NATO territory or China invading Taiwan. “Can autonomy in different manifestations enable us to credibly believe we could defeat an invasion of this type?” he said. “The answer to that question is very much yes.”

In Niagara Falls last spring, as the L-39 was flying over Lake Ontario, the ACE program’s scientists and engineers gathered for their regular quarterly meeting. In a session with the groups competing to design the dogfighting algorithm, Chris Gentile, of EpiSci, emphasized that the program was not creating lethal autonomous weapons: “What we are doing is building tools to enable pilots to execute decisions more effectively.” But, as artificial intelligence ramps up the speed of decision-making, the question ultimately may be why have a human in the cock-

pit at all. “The Defense Department will tell you that they’re not going to have totally autonomous systems,” Pettyjohn told me. “But I have a hard time imagining, when everything is premised on making decisions faster than your adversary does, how people can actually be in that loop.”

In late September, I observed another trust experiment at O.P.L. For much of the day, a veteran pilot sat in the cockpit of one of the L-29s, which Schnell had turned into a flight simulator. Wearing a V.R. headset, he performed the battle-management role as the A.I. fought a series of scrimmages. Like the young pilot I’d watched the previous spring, he was asked to rate his trust in the A.I. while his biometric and flight data were recorded. But this time, instead of using pre-scripted scenarios, he was dogfighting with the three A.I. agents that had survived elimination: those developed by Heron Systems, PhysicsAI, and EpiSci.

Toward the end of the day, the parameters of the experiment were changed. The pilot was allowed to paddle off, fly the plane manually, then, when he felt that it was safe, cede the controls back to the A.I. According to Lauren Reinerman-Jones, a senior scientist at SoarTech, the researchers’ expectation was that, if the pilot lost the first scrimmage, it would take several more to recover trust. But, if he won the first fight, his trust in the A.I. would carry over to subsequent scenarios. Then, if he lost the final scrimmage, trust would decrease, but to a lesser degree—in coffee cups rather than buckets.

Four computers were positioned next to the plane. One recorded what the pilot was seeing in his headset. Another graphed his physiological responses, which were translated into various types of trust processing, each represented by a different-colored line. Reinerman-Jones explained that a brown line, displayed above the rest, aggregated the data into a crude rendering of the trust model she and her colleagues were developing. Woodruff sat nearby, with a computer on her lap and a recorder in hand. Every minute or so, she’d ask the pilot to assess his trust in the A.I. Almost invariably, he said it was high.

But during his debriefing he expressed some frustration with the experiment. In one scrimmage, his plane and the adversary’s chased each other around and around—on the screen, it looked like water circling a drain. The pilot told Woodruff that, though he let the A.I. keep fighting, “I know it is not going to gun this guy anytime soon. In real life, if you keep going around like that you’re either going to run out of gas or another bad guy will come up from behind and kill you.” In an actual battle, he would have accepted more risk in order to get to a better offensive angle. “I mean, A.I. should be so much smarter than me,” he said. “So if I’m looking out there, thinking I could have gained some advantage here and A.I. isn’t, I have to start asking why.”

For the moment, the pilot’s critique reflects the immaturity of the A.I. agents, which will need much more training if they are to become sophisticated enough to take on a real adversary. But it also harks back to what Justin Mock said at the AlphaDogfight Trials a year earlier: fighter pilots trust what works.

Since then, the teams had been developing and testing A.I. agents that could take on two adversaries simultaneously, a far more complicated task. They were also beginning to develop the tools that would enable them to advance to live flight. The first step was to integrate the L-39’s flight dynamics into the dogfighting algorithms and test them in drones. In the next few months, the program will be putting the A.I. agents into an airborne simulator, so that the pilots can experience g-forces, and see how that affects trust in A.I. “There’s a saying in the flight-test community: All models are wrong, some models are useful,” Ryan Hefron, the ACE program’s manager, said. “So we have to find the useful pieces.”

When I discussed some of these advances with Schnell, he said, “Everyone’s a hero in the sim.” The stakes are easy to overlook inside the O.P.L.’s hangar. Nobody gets hurt or killed crashing a virtual plane. “To truly trigger this trust equation we’re working on,” he told me, “you have to have another piece of metal coming right at you.” ♦



WIRECUTTER: THE BEST PARTNER

BY DAVID KAMP

The ongoing pandemic has only exacerbated the difficulty of finding an ideal partner for the purposes of companionship, intimacy, and low-stakes bickering. After researching three hundred and fifty-five adult-human archetypes and testing some four dozen, we at Wirecutter confidently offer these suggestions for the partners least likely to disappoint you, what with your high expectations and all.

Our pick

LICENSED CARPENTER

Why we liked them: We tried licensed plumbers, electricians, and general contractors, but carpenters stood out for their combination of pensiveness, artistry, and pleasant sawdust aroma, not to mention the steady demand for their skills. (Our testers enjoyed sexual congress with plumbers but were put off by the occasional whiff of sewage.) Licensed carpenters have abilities that are transferrable to home and leisure pursuits, e.g., slicing summer squash and Thai eggplants on a mandoline without cutting off fingertips, picking a banjo in Earl Scruggs style, and restoring abandoned Old Town canoes. Licensed carpenters are also physically

fit without being vain or extreme about it. The one we tried most recently was generally sinewy, but with an unintimidating midsection that was pleasingly soft to the touch.

Where they fall short: They are all booked solid through 2024, so you'll be lucky to enjoy as many as five genuine two-day weekends a year with one. They sometimes get moody and demand "me time" that includes the dog but not you.

Also great

DELI OWNER (FOURTH GENERATION)
Why we liked them: A huge improvement on the third-gen deli owner—whose performance was compromised by high cholesterol, the stress of meeting payroll during the Pritikin fad, and deep depression caused by overbearing parents and grandparents—the fourth-gen deli owner is a hassle-free breath of fresh air. Our testers were wowed by the fourth-gen model's marketing savvy, flair for tile-based décor, healthful life style, and hair that is not a comb-over.

Where they fall short: Their self-aware embrace of family heritage, including selling T-shirts featuring black-and-

white images of their zaftig forebears, is sometimes too cute by half. But it's tolerable, and there's all that free food.

Our upgrade pick

ESTABLISHED CREATIVE

Why we liked them: They must be doing something right to have that deal with Netflix, the series of fantasy Y.A. novels, and the annual residency at the Beacon Theatre. Our testers appreciated that established creatives reliably book business class, receive screeners of every new film, and know amazing people. One tester boasted of dining with Ta-Nehisi Coates, Oskar Eustis, and Meryl Streep in the course of a single week. The hetero package comes with a Jaguar E-Type, attractively shelved first editions of John Steinbeck, and a meticulously catalogued collection of rare jazz 78s. The queer version comes with a country house set on a tidy working farm run not by the established creative but by a hardy, amiable woman named Abby. Most but not all such farms feature an in-ground pool, stables, two horses, four types of garden (vegetable, butterfly, Zen, tulip), a neighbor who is a luthier, and a quintet of Araucana hens that lay splendid blue-green eggs.

Where they fall short: Be sure to stick to the moderately successful established creative. Our testers found extremely successful established creatives to be more susceptible to messiah complexes, infidelity, using Jessica Chastain as a communications proxy, and assigning to their children such names as Django, Willa, Trumbo, Sconset, and Samuel L.

Our budget pick

TENURED HUMANITIES PROFESSOR
Why we liked them: Our testers found them to be every bit as bright as untenured humanities professors but mercifully humbled by age, hard knocks, and the recognition that their books are uncommercial. Bodily, they are unimpressive, but some testers found this a welcome relief and even an asset, "a cozy comfort to the Patinkin-curious." In this price range, compromise is a given—the '97 Subaru Forester, the campus-adjacent bungalow that always smells of a gas leak—but factor in job security, free gym access, and a European sabbatical, and you're getting Whole Foods value on a Trader Joe's budget.♦

BEHIND THE MASK

The ironic genius of Thomas Mann.

BY ALEX ROSS



In 1950, a *Briefly Noted* reviewer in this magazine made short work of “The Thomas Mann Reader,” an anthology culled from the German novelist’s vast prose output: “The total impression created by this three-hundred-thousand-word monument is that Mann is a major writer, but perhaps not all *that* major.” A *New Yorker* subscriber in Los Angeles, residing at 1550 San Remo Drive, in Pacific Palisades, was annoyed. “Yes, I may well be a ‘major author,’ ” Thomas Mann wrote to a friend, “but not *that* major.” The creator of “Tonio Kröger” and “Death in Venice” was at the summit of his fame, yet many younger critics dismissed him

as a bourgeois relic, irrelevant in the age of bebop and the bomb. Another commentator numbered Mann among those “literary monoliths who have outlived their proper time.”

In Germany, that verdict did not hold. Circa 1950, Mann was a divisive figure in his homeland, widely criticized for his belief that Nazism had deep roots in the national psyche. Having gone into exile in 1933, he refused to move back, dying in Switzerland in 1955. Over time, his sweeping analysis of German responsibility, from which he did not exclude himself, ceased to be controversial. More important, his fiction found readers in each new gen-

eration. The accumulation of German-language literature about him and his family is immense, approaching Kennedyesque dimensions. Whatever resistance Mann inspires—Bertolt Brecht voiced the standard objection in calling him “the starched collar”—his chessboard mastery of German prose is not to be denied, nor can a certain historical nobility be taken from him. It is impossible to talk seriously about the fate of Germany in the twentieth century without reference to Thomas Mann.

In America, however, one can coast through a liberal-arts education without having to deal with Mann. General readers are understandably hesitant to plunge into the Hanseatic decadence of “Buddenbrooks” or the sanatorium symposia of “The Magic Mountain,” never mind the musicological diabolism of “Doctor Faustus” or the Biblical mythography of “Joseph and His Brothers.” There was an upsurge of interest in the nineteen-eighties and nineties, when the publication of Mann’s diaries revealed the pervasiveness of his same-sex desires. Four biographies appeared, and Knopf released fine new translations of the major novels, by John E. Woods. Then the aura of worthy dullness settled back in place. Two recent books—Colm Tóibín’s novel “The Magician” (Scribner), an absorbing but unchallenging fantasia on Mann’s life; and a problematic reissue, from New York Review Books, of Mann’s conservative manifesto “Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man”—probably won’t disturb the consensus.

Because I have been almost unhealthily obsessed with Mann’s writing since the age of eighteen, I may be ill-equipped to win over skeptics, but I know why I return to it year after year. Mann is, first, a supremely gifted storyteller, adept at the slow windup and the rapid turn of the screw. He is a solemn trickster who is never altogether earnest about anything, especially his own grand Goethean persona. At the heart of his labyrinth are scenes of emotional chaos, episodes of philosophical delirium, intimations of inhuman coldness. His politics traverse the twentieth-century spectrum, ricochetting from right to left. His sexuality is an exhibitionistic enigma. In

Mann is a solemn trickster who is never altogether earnest about anything.

life and work alike, his contradictions are pressed together like layers in metamorphic rock. It is in the nature of monoliths not to grow old.

The Magician was a nickname bestowed on Mann by his children, and it conveys the distance he maintained even with those closest to him. Tóibín's novel of that title is a follow-up to his previous meta-literary fiction, "The Master" (2004), which delves into the shadowy world of Henry James. Tóibín, with a style as spare as Mann's, is ornate, brings a measure of warmth to an outwardly chilly figure. Tóibín's Mann is a befuddled, self-preoccupied, not unlikable loner, pulled this way and that by potent personalities around him, the most potent being his wife, Katia Pringsheim Mann, the scion of a wealthy and cultured Jewish family.

At first glance, Tóibín's undertaking seems superfluous, since there are already a number of great novels about Thomas Mann, and they have the advantage of being by Thomas Mann. Few writers of fiction have so relentlessly incorporated their own experiences into their work. Hanno Buddenbrook, the proud, hurt boy who improvises Wagnerian fantasies on the piano; Tonio Kröger, the proud, hurt young writer who sacrifices his life for his art; Prince Klaus Heinrich, the hero of "Royal Highness," who rigidly performs his duties; Gustav von Aschenbach, the hidebound literary celebrity who loses his mind to a boy on a Venice beach; Mut-em-enet, Potiphar's wife, who falls desperately in love with the handsome Israelite Joseph; the confidence man Felix Krull, who fools people into thinking he is more impressive than he is; the Faustian composer Adrian Leverkühn, who is compared to "an abyss into which the feelings others expressed for him vanished soundlessly without a trace"—all are avatars of the author, sometimes channelling his letters and diaries. Mann liked to say that he found material rather than invented it—a play on the verbs *finden* and *erfinden*.

Mann's most dizzying self-dramatization can be found in the novel "Lotte in Weimar," from 1939. It tells of a strained reunion between the aging Goethe and his old love Charlotte Buff,

who, decades earlier, had inspired the character of Lotte in "The Sorrows of Young Werther." Goethe is endowed with Mannian traits, flatteringly and otherwise. He is a man who feeds on the lives of others and appropriates his disciples' work, stamping all of it with his parasitic genius. Mann, too, left countless literary victims in his wake, including members of his family. One of them is still with us: his grandson Frido, who loved his Opa's company and then discovered that a fictional version of himself had been killed off in "Doctor Faustus."

It is only fitting, then, that Mann should fall prey to his own invasive tactics. The early chapters of Tóibín's novel re-create the crushes on boys that Mann endured in his youth, in the North German city of Lübeck. We meet Armin Martens, with whom Mann took long, yearning walks. Tóibín writes, "He wondered if Armin would show him some sign, or would, on one of their walks, allow the conversation to move away from poems and music to focus on their feelings for each other. In time, he realized that he set more store by these walks than Armin did." The question is how much this adds to the parallel narrative of "Tonio Kröger," which was bold for 1903: "He was well aware that the other attached only half as much weight to these walks together as he did. . . . The fact was that Tonio loved Hans Hansen and had already suffered much over him. Whoever loves more is the subordinate one and must suffer—his fourteen-year-old soul had already received this hard and simple lesson from life."

Tóibín doesn't adhere exclusively to the biographical record, and his most decisive intervention comes in the realm of sex. In all likelihood, Mann never engaged in anything resembling what contemporary sensibilities would classify as gay sex. His diaries are reliable in factual matters and do not shy away from embarrassing details; we hear about erections, masturbation, nocturnal emissions. But he clearly has trouble even picturing male-on-male action, let alone participating in it. When, in 1950, he reads Gore Vidal's "The City and the Pillar," he asks himself, "How can one sleep with gentlemen?" The Mann of "The Magician," by con-

trast, is allowed to have several same-sex encounters, though the details remain vague.

In the most memorable sequence of Tóibín's novel, sexuality and politics are interwoven, with gently wrenching consequences. In the spring of 1933, Mann, then a few months into his exile, was agonizing over the fate of his old diaries, which had been left behind at the family house, in Munich. Because he had renounced right-wing nationalism in the previous decade, the Nazi regime viewed him as a traitor—Reinhard Heydrich wanted to have Mann arrested—and the diaries could have been used to ruin his reputation. Mann's son Golo had packed them in a suitcase with other papers and had them shipped to Switzerland. For several weeks, nothing was delivered. "Terrible, even deadly things can happen," Mann wrote in a diary entry in late April. Decades later, it became known that a German border officer had waylaid the suitcase but had paid attention only to a top layer of book contracts. The contracts were sent to Heydrich's political police, examined, and sent back, whereupon the suitcase was allowed to proceed.

Tóibín vividly evokes Mann's panic when the diaries went missing. In a wonderful detail, the protagonist asks a Zurich bookshop for a biography of Oscar Wilde: "While he did not expect to go to prison as a result of any disclosures, as Wilde did, and he was aware that Wilde's life had been dissolute, as his had not, it was the move from famous writer to disgraced public figure that interested him."

While Mann frets, he recalls an episode that the diaries would have revealed: his infatuation, in 1927, at the age of fifty-two, with an eighteen-year-old named Klaus Heuser. Mann destroyed diaries from the period—the extant volumes are from 1918 to 1921 and from 1933 to 1955—but subsequent comments suggest that he considered this his only consummated relationship with a man. Tóibín describes it thus: "Thomas stood up and went to the bookcases. Before he had time to compose himself and listen out for Klaus's breath, Klaus had moved swiftly across the room, grasping Thomas's hands for a moment and then edging him around

so that they faced each other and started to kiss." There we break off, with further fumbling implied.

Passages in the later diaries might lead us to believe that something of the sort occurred: Mann indicates that he drew Heuser into his arms and kissed him on the lips. There is, however, rival testimony. In 1986, the scholar Karl Werner Böhm tracked down Heuser, who, it turned out, was gay. Heuser said that nothing remotely sexual had taken place with Mann; indeed, he had no inkling of any erotic interest on the part of this kindly and reserved older gentleman.

To the modern eye, Mann may seem pathetically repressed. But from another perspective—one no less modern—there is something honorable in his inactivity. To have done anything more with Heuser, the son of family friends, would have been predatory. Granted, it was not an ethical consideration that stopped him; it was a terror of the physical. (If Heuser had been as forward as he is in "The Magician," Mann would probably have bolted from the room.) In any case, the encounter didn't leave Mann in a state of frustra-

tion; instead, he felt lasting joy. Years later, he thought back on the Heuser adventure with "pride and gratitude," because it was the "unhoped-for fulfillment of a lifelong yearning."

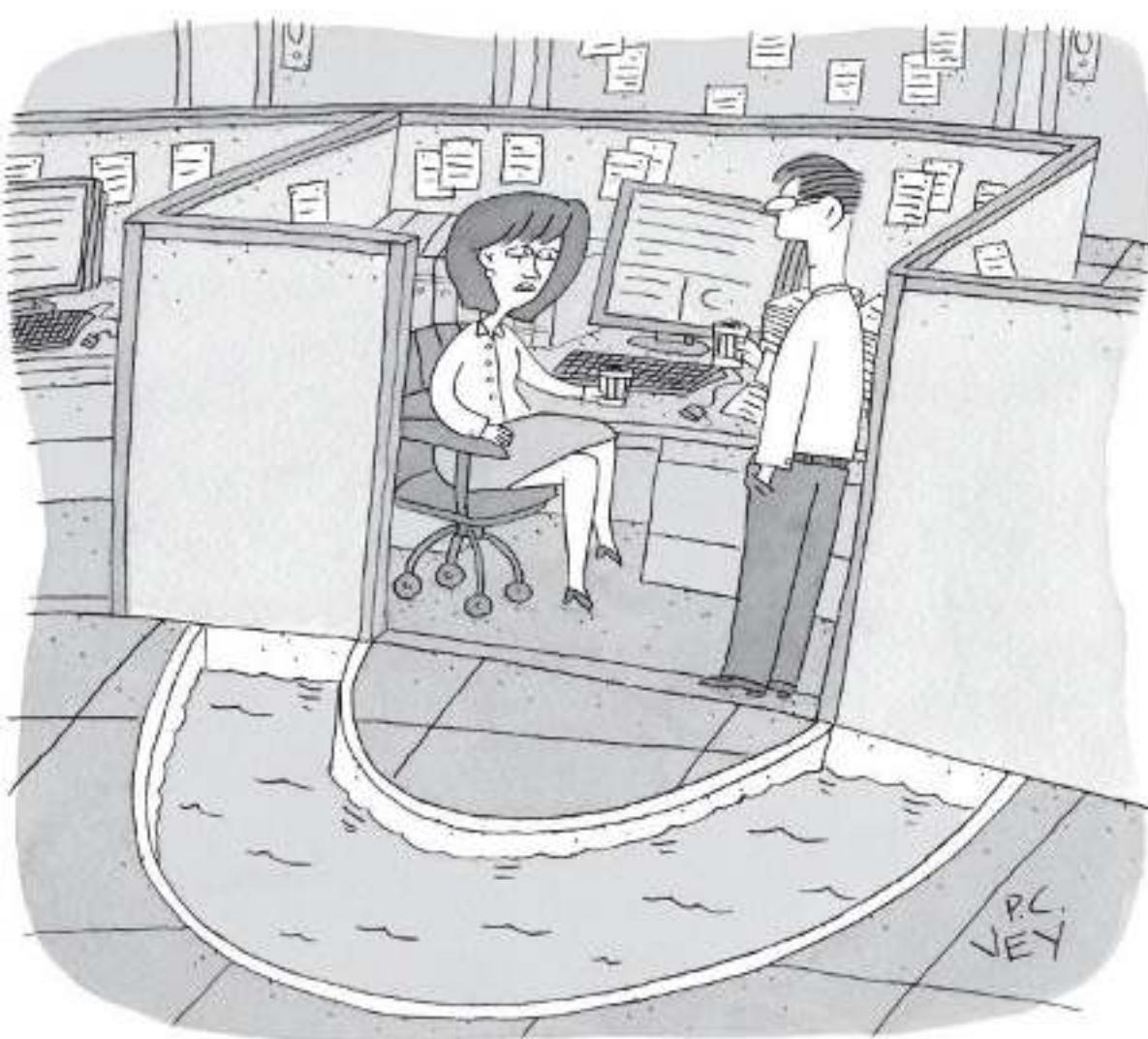
All the while, Mann was ensconced in a reasonably happy marriage—one with enough of a physical component that six children resulted from it. "The Magician" is notable for its rich portrait of the strong-willed, sharp-witted Katia Mann, who studied mathematics before marriage ended the possibility of an academic career. The twin sister of a gay man, Katia was alert to her husband's sporadic crushes on college-age lads; she also knew that nothing would come of them. When, in 1950, Mann became besotted with a Zurich hotel waiter named Franz Westermeier, Katia fired off teasing remarks while the couple's daughter Erika worried about appearances. A seemingly stagy line of Erika's in "The Magician"—"You cannot flirt with a waiter in the lobby of a hotel with the whole world watching"—is based directly on the diaries.

"The Magician," deft and diligent as it is, ultimately diminishes the im-

perial strangeness of Mann's nature. He comes across as a familiar, somewhat pitiable creature—a closeted man who occasionally gives in to his desires. The real Mann never gave in to his desires, but he also never really hid them. Gay themes surfaced in his writing almost from the start, and he made clear that his stories were autobiographical. When, in 1931, he received a newspaper questionnaire asking about his "first love," he replied, in essence, "Read 'Tonio Kröger.'" Likewise, of "Death in Venice" he wrote, "Nothing is invented." Gay men saw the author as one of their own. When the composer Ned Rorem was young, he took a front-row seat at a Mann lecture, hoping to distract the eminence on the dais with his hotness. "He never looked," Rorem reported.

If Tóibín gives us a somewhat domesticated version of Mann, the new edition of "Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man" trivializes him, reducing the Great Ambiguator to the level of an op-ed columnist. The historian Mark Lilla, who wrote an introduction for the volume, thinks that Mann has something to tell us about ideological conformism in the arts today. It's an obtuse reading of a work that Mann came to see as an artifact of his own political stupidity. In Trumpian America, the chief lesson to be drawn from the literary quagmire of "Reflections" is how educated people can accommodate themselves to irrationality and violence.

First published in 1918, the book is drenched in the patriotic fervor that overtook Mann's intellect during the First World War. It seethes with contempt for Western democracy and with resentment of his brother Heinrich, who is never named but who appears in the guise of the *Zivilisationsliterat* ("civilization's littérateur"). Heinrich decried the war in the name of cosmopolitan ideals, and in his contemporaneous novel "Der Untertan" he tracked the degeneration of German nationalism into chauvinism, militarism, and anti-Semitism. Artists should blaze a more enlightened path, Heinrich argued. Thomas responded in "Reflections" that war is healthy and enlightenment suspect. Art, he says, "has a fundamentally undependable, treacherous tendency; its delight



"Since you somehow managed to get past my moat, I'll give you a few minutes."

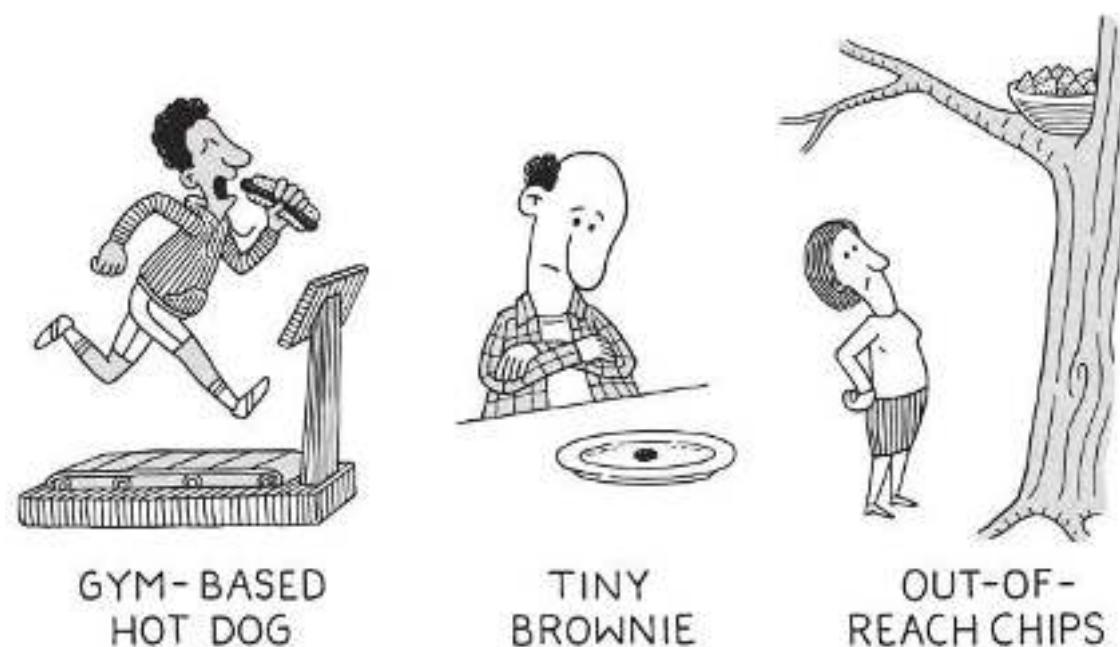
in scandalous anti-reason, its inclination toward beauty-creating ‘barbarism,’ is ineradicable.”

Mann began backpedalling almost immediately, informing friends that the book would be better read as a novel. By 1922, he had reconciled with Heinrich and endorsed the Weimar Republic. As the years went by, he became increasingly embarrassed by “Reflections,” worrying that it had contributed to Germany’s slide into Nazism. Although he stopped short of disavowing the work, he commented in 1944 that it had “quite properly” never been translated into English, adding, “I should never have published it even in German, for a more intimate and more misusable diary has never been kept.” Its only usefulness now, he went on, was to show the roots of “The Magic Mountain,” in which the Manns’ brotherly feud is revisited with a more progressive slant. Not until 1983 did an English translation come out; that version, by Walter D. Morris, is what New York Review Books has reissued.

The first problem with the publication is that it occupies a vacuum. In a situation that would have infuriated Mann, almost all his other nonfiction writings either are out of print in English or have never been translated. We need an updated “Thomas Mann Reader,” one that places excerpts from “Reflections” alongside “An Appeal to Reason,” “The Coming Victory of Democracy,” “The Camps” (one of the first serious engagements with the Holocaust, from 1945), “Germany and the Germans,” and “On the Occasion of a Magazine”—the last an unpublished 1949 essay that Mann conceived as a “J’Accuse!” against McCarthyism. The “Reflections” volume does append “On the German Republic,” Mann’s pivotal 1922 endorsement of democracy, but it fails to counterbalance the preceding harangue.

With proper contextualization, “Reflections” makes for a grimly fascinating read. Mann discloses as much of himself in its pages as in any of his autobiographical fiction. As Anthony Heilbut pointed out in his 1996 study, “Thomas Mann: Eros and Literature,” the usual erotic fixations are in play. Mann imagines that Germany’s strapping heroes are drawing sustenance from his work—“Death in Venice” is sup-

HEALTHY SNACKS



posed to have been especially popular in the trenches—and that “voluptuous emotions” of comradeship are running rampant, to the point where, we are told, returning soldiers may no longer be attracted to their wives. An especially stupefying passage responds to humanitarian lamentations over the horrors of war by bringing up the difficult birth of one of the Mann children: “That was not humane, it was *hellish*, and as long as this is around, there can also be war, as far as I’m concerned.”

“Reflections” is an extraordinarily convoluted assemblage of allusions, imitations, oblique insults, unattributed quotations, plagiarism, and self-cannibalism. In the relevant volume of S. Fischer Verlag’s annotated edition-in-progress of Mann’s œuvre, the scholar Hermann Kurzke supplies almost eight hundred pages of commentary, accounting for some four thousand citations. The New York Review Books edition has no index, and contains five pages of notes, consisting mostly of German texts of poems. Readers will be left in the dark as to the identity of a certain “infinitely naïve and demoniacally tortured” writer (Frank Wedekind); the name of the novel that mocks Wagner’s “Lohengrin” (“Der Untertan”); and the source of the phrase “affirmation of a human being apart from his *worth*” (the homoerotic sociologist Hans Blüher).

The introductory essay is an embar-

rassment. Whatever the merits of Lilla’s other work—his books include “The Reckless Mind: Intellectuals in Politics” and “The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West”—his credentials as a Mann specialist are slim. He states that Mann wrote no novel between “Buddenbrooks” and “The Magic Mountain,” thus vaporizing the three-hundred-and-fifty-page “Royal Highness.” He declares that Mann was away from Germany on a lecture tour when Hitler assumed power, which is not the case. He says that the young Heinrich Mann produced “biting left-wing satires”; Heinrich began on the right. He writes that “Zivilisationsliterat” is “an unlovely term even in German.” Indeed it is, because it’s misspelled.

The tendentious framing of “Reflections” is no less aggravating. Although Lilla acknowledges the book’s dangerous ideological drift, he sympathizes with its critique of the supposed Jacobinism of its time because he is reminded of the supposed Jacobinism of ours. In “The Once and Future Liberal: After Identity Politics,” from 2017, Lilla argued that modern liberalism has been waylaid by scoldingly self-righteous protesters, from queer activists to Black Lives Matter supporters, who value their own agenda above the common good. This is presumably what Lilla has in mind when he says that the following



I only know 'Sit' and 'Stay.'

sentences in Mann's treatise "could have been written today":

The outlawing and expulsion of those who disagree is completely consonant with his concept of freedom. . . . He imagines himself justified, yes, morally bound, to relegate to the deepest pit every way of thinking that cannot and does not want to recognize what glitters so absolutely for him to be the light and the truth.

Hermann Kurzke advises that the image of a glittering truth is probably an allusion to the final scene of Wagner's "Das Rheingold," in which Loge laughs at the gods and their grasping after gold. In truth, such lines could not have been written today. If you substitute "expulsion" with "cancellation," however, you can see the point that Lilla is evidently trying to make.

The point doesn't register with me, since gay activism of the ACT UP era helped save me from oblivion, but let's set identity politics aside and assess what the analogy tells us about Mann. If you read "Reflections" without context, you might conclude that the German Jacobins whom Mann is denouncing were figures of frightening power who could cancel their opponents with a single feuilleton. In fact, they occupied a tenuous position in a militarized state that was evolving toward dictatorship. "Der Untertan" could not be published during the war, because of its

scouring anti-Wilhelmine spirit. A few pages earlier, Mann mentions Wilhelm Liebknecht as a radical leader. He means Liebknecht's son Karl, who helped found the German Communist Party—and was murdered by Freikorps soldiers in 1919. If Lilla's historical analogy holds, we are on the brink of a Fascist takeover, and woke protesters are destined to be the valiant last line of defense. Let's hope that this is not the case.

The assassinations of the early post-war period and the rise of Nazism in Munich helped convince Mann that he had made a terrible wrong turn. Even while writing "Reflections," though, he had felt tremors of unease, torn between German war fever and a cosmopolitan, pan-European sensibility. There is a tortuous pleasure in watching the book totter under the weight of its contradictions. Hundreds of pages in, Mann admits that his main thesis—that leftists have injected politics into an innocent artistic sphere—is incoherent, because "antipolitics is also politics." He suggests, after many pages of bilious anti-democratic rants, that democracy is inevitable in Germany. In his saner moments, he simply pleads for something other than the hypocritical Anglo-American system that preaches freedom while subjugating other peoples. (Fair enough.)

"Reflections" traces the groggy awakening of a writer who has never thought systematically about politics. It is the beginning of a journey that ends with his embrace of democratic socialism. As Kurzke points out, Mann succumbs to the disease of nationalist resentment just before it becomes endemic in Germany. He effectively "immunizes" himself against Hitlerism.

To the end of his life, Mann kept insisting that any attempt to separate the artistic from the political was a catastrophic delusion. His most succinct formulation came in a letter to Hermann Hesse, in 1945: "I believe that nothing living can avoid the political today. The refusal is also politics; one thereby advances the politics of the evil cause." If artists lose themselves in fantasies of independence, they become the tool of malefactors, who prefer to keep art apart from politics so that the work of oppression can continue undisturbed. So Mann wrote in an afterword to a 1937 book about the Spanish Civil War, adding that the poet who forswears politics is a "spiritually lost man." The same conviction is inscribed into the later fiction. The primary theme of "Doctor Faustus" is the insanity of the old Romantic ethos.

To claim, as Lilla does, that Mann held fast to some eternal principle of artistic freedom reverses the arc of his career and unlearns his hardest-won lessons. In fact, Mann came to believe that a just social order required limits in politics and art alike. Stanley Corngold underscores this point in "The Mind in Exile: Thomas Mann in Princeton," which chronicles the time that the novelist spent at the university between 1938 and 1941. In speeches of the period, Mann called for "social self-discipline under the ideal of freedom"—a political philosophy that doubles as a personal one. He also said, "Let me tell you the whole truth: if ever Fascism should come to America, it will come in the name of 'freedom.'" He left the United States in 1952, fearing that McCarthyism had made him a marked man once again.

The baroque tangle of Mann's sexuality and his politics can easily consume discussions of his work, as it has this one so far. Nonetheless, there is no way to make sense of his devel-

opment without taking the tangle into account. Consider the progression from “Buddenbrooks,” in 1901, to “The Magic Mountain,” in 1924. The family saga of “Buddenbrooks” was a huge triumph for a writer in his twenties. Then came a spell of uncertainty, with many false starts amid finished projects. “Fiorenza,” a verbose stage drama about Savonarola and the Medici, received biting reviews; “Royal Highness,” an arch marital comedy, came across as disappointingly slight. Heinrich Mann, meanwhile, had a string of successes. The fraternal break was caused in part by a gibe that Heinrich made in a 1915 essay on Zola: “It is the case with those destined to dry up early that they step forth consciously and respectably at the start of their twenties.”

In the years before the First World War, Mann labored to come up with a second masterpiece. He contemplated a novel about Frederick the Great and other weighty schemes. When none of them panned out, he busied himself with seemingly trivial subjects: a story about a charming confidence man; a tale involving tuberculosis patients at a Swiss clinic; a novella based on a beach vacation in Venice. The last, published in 1912, proved to be the breakthrough to Mann’s mature manner. But it took the form of a fabulously intricate self-satire, in which the Frederick the Great novel and other unrealized plans were attributed to an older, sadder version of himself. It was a bonfire of his vanities, a kind of artistic suicide. Mann struggled with suicidal impulses in his early years, and he found cathartic satisfaction in killing off his alter egos.

“Reflections,” in the course of its meanderings, addresses perceived misunderstandings of “Death in Venice.” Readers saw the novella as an exercise in attaining a “master style”; for Mann, it is a parody of his own quest for mastery. “Death in Venice” is secretly a comedy, in a very dark register. The narrator’s grandiloquence overshoots the mark and becomes ludicrous: “What he craved, though, was to work in Tadzio’s presence, to take the boy’s physique as the model for his writing, to let his style follow the contours of this body which seemed to him divine, to carry its beauty into the realm of the intellect, as the eagle once carried the Trojan shepherd

into the ether.” The real point of collapse comes when we are assured that the outer world will enjoy Aschenbach’s miraculous prose without knowing its tawdry origins. The boundary between art and life is obliterated as soon as it is drawn.

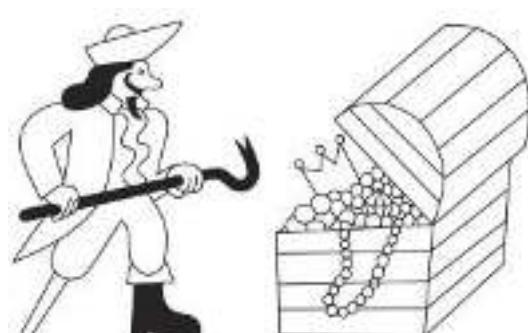
The political crisis of the First World War brings with it a parallel aesthetic crisis, which leads to another breakthrough. In the early chapters of “Reflections,” Mann gestures toward mounting an orderly argument, but after a while the pretense falls away and the book devolves into a diaristic collage, with experiences plopped into the narrative one after the other: friends’ publications arriving in the mail, performances of Hans Pfitzner’s opera “Palestrina,” news of military advances and reversals. In his next major work, “The Magic Mountain,” he proceeds in much the same way, but with far greater control. Happenstance events in his daily life—visits to séances, an encounter with an X-ray machine, the arrival of a phonograph—are seamlessly folded into his sanatorium epic. The turgid thrashings of “Reflections” have yielded a distinctive novelistic technique that Mann employs for the remainder of his career.

Mann’s new style is modernism in a high-bourgeois mode, as byzantine in its layering as anything in Joyce. The seventh chapter of “Lotte in Weimar,” in which Goethe delivers an interior monologue, creates an astonishingly

Serenus Zeitblom, another parodically long-winded narrator, reacts to news of Hitler’s downfall just as Mann did in his study in Los Angeles; the self-mirroring lends an uncanny reality to the novel, as if a second author were watching from the wings. Mann observed himself as unsentimentally as he observed everyone else.

Was there an element of charlatanism in the magpie methodology—particularly when Alfred A. Knopf, Jr., was marketing his star émigré novelist as the “Greatest Living Man of Letters”? Mann accepted the possibility, since he had always been haunted by the sense of being an empty shell, a wooden soldier. All along, the dubiousness of genius had been one of his chief motifs. In “The Brother,” his essay on Hitler, he wrote that greatness was an aesthetic rather than an ethical phenomenon, meaning that Nazi exploitation of Goethe and Beethoven was less a betrayal of German artist-worship than a grotesque extension of it. The Magician’s finest trick was to dismantle the pretensions of genius while preserving his own lofty stature. The feat could be accomplished only once, and it happens definitively in “Doctor Faustus,” when Leverkühn’s explication of his valedictory cantata spirals into madness. An immaculately turned-out personification of bourgeois culture stages its destruction.

What is left amid the ruins is cosmic irony—Mann’s preferred mode from the start. At his death, he had finished the first part of “Confessions of Felix Krull, Confidence-Man,” a novel-length elaboration of his earlier story. In one chapter, the winsome protagonist is working as a waiter in a Paris hotel when he meets a Scottish gentleman named Lord Kilmarnock—a slender man of stiff bearing, his eyes gray-green, his hair iron-gray, his mustache clipped, his nose jutting awkwardly from his face, his manner friendly yet melancholy. Not for the first time, but never so obviously, Mann takes a seat at the table of his fiction. In a series of fleeting chats, Kilmarnock makes his interest in Felix clear, without committing any improprieties. He expounds his philosophy of life, which is *Selbstverneinung*, the negation of the self: “Perhaps, *mon enfant*, self-negation increases the capacity for the affirmation of the other.” ♦



dense mosaic of Goethean utterances intermingled with Mann’s own thoughts; at the same time, it is a radical demythologizing of a cultural demigod. (You might not notice from reading Helen Lowe-Porter’s stilted translation, but Goethe wakes up with a hard-on.) “Doctor Faustus” restages the life of Nietzsche, borrows fragments from Mann’s old diaries, and absorbs chunks of the musical philosophy of Arnold Schoenberg and Theodor W. Adorno.

THE BOUNTY HUNTER

Jordan Thomas's army of whistle-blowers has exposed one Wall Street wrongdoing after another. But is he changing the industry?

BY PATRICK RADDEN KEEFE

These are strange days for the American stock market, with the exuberance of investors defying the bleakest of outlooks. Yet, even in this warped moment, the outsized success last year of a tiny company called Cassava Sciences seemed exceptional. With only two dozen employees and no product revenue, the Austin-based biotech firm generated a stampede of investor enthusiasm that caused its stock to rise nearly fifteen hundred per cent. Cassava is run by Remi Barbier, a genial entrepreneur who wears wire-rimmed glasses and is given to ambitious predictions. It has been developing a novel treatment for Alzheimer's, a pill called Simuflam, which is designed to attack the disease by fixing abnormalities of the protein filamin A. The medication has not yet received approval from the Food and Drug Administration, but clinical trials are under way.

Six million Americans suffer from Alzheimer's, and any drug that could ameliorate the condition would represent a milestone in public health—and make billions of dollars. Cassava issued press releases touting the results of its clinical trials, and Barbier suggested that Simuflam was "the first drug—to our knowledge—that can restore cognition." Word spread about the product on online forums, including Reddit, and Cassava became a "meme stock," surging in value as it was hyped by relatively unsophisticated retail day traders. Cassava's stock symbol is SAVA, and devotees of the company called themselves "SAVAgers." They weren't necessarily scientists, but they felt certain that Cassava would, in the words of one Redditor, "eradicate Alzheimer's." Another stockholder declared, "Ever since I seen the 10% cognitive [sic] improvement I've been convinced." Barbier, meanwhile, told *Fortune* that a core group of institutional investors had looked at the

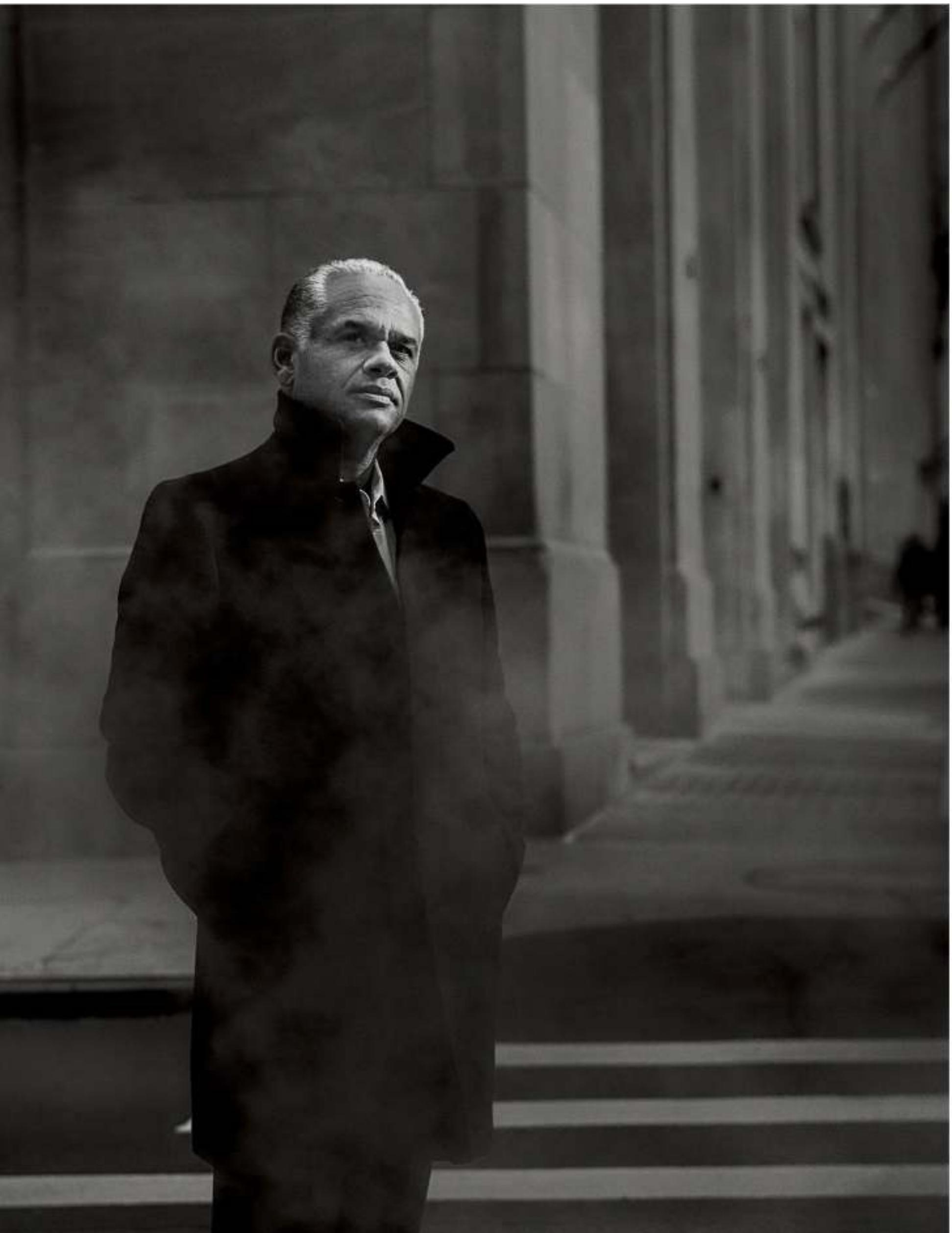
preliminary data and concluded that, from an investment perspective, Cassava might be the next "Google or Tesla." Last summer, a user on the Web site Seeking Alpha proclaimed, "CASSAVA SCIENCES IS ON THE BRINK OF MAKING MEDICAL HISTORY," enthusing, "CEOs of public companies don't make these kinds of statements unless they can back it up." In July, Cassava's stock price surged to a hundred and thirty-five dollars, giving it a market value of roughly five billion dollars.

This was an astounding turn for Barbier's company, which had no laboratories of its own, contracted out most of the science, and didn't have much of a track record in Alzheimer's research. In fact, until 2019, Cassava had been named Pain Therapeutics and was known primarily for developing what it described as the groundbreaking formulation of an opioid painkiller that had little risk of abuse. The drug, Remoxy, seemed so promising that investors poured money into the firm. In 2003, Sidney Wolfe, of the watchdog group Public Citizen, cautioned that Remoxy "sounds too good to be true." He was right: the drug never earned F.D.A. approval. But, because Pain Therapeutics was publicly traded, it managed to stay alive on the fumes of investor optimism. In about a decade, the stock lost most of its value; meanwhile, Barbier compensated himself with nearly thirty million dollars. In the tart summation of the medical-news Web site STAT, "Barbier has a reputation for profiting personally even while his company suffered multiple setbacks."

Barbier insisted that his Alzheimer's drug was a different story. Scientists affiliated with the company had published papers in peer-reviewed journals. And the National Institutes of Health had awarded some twenty million dollars in grants to Cassava and its academic collaborators. In May, 2020, the company



Thomas constantly promotes his business, noting



"Whistle-blowers aren't repeat clients." If more people know that it can pay to sound the alarm, more people will sound the alarm.

acknowledged that the results of a clinical trial had been unsuccessful. But Barbier said that there must be some mistake, and subsequently announced that the company had commissioned a re-analysis, by an outside lab, and that the data showed a significant improvement in biomarkers for Alzheimer's compared with a placebo. The stock began to climb. In February, 2021, Cassava touted a round of promising results from another trial—without a placebo—and claimed that, in an unprecedented breakthrough, Simufilam could actually renew cognitive function. The stock price reached new heights.

Barbier admitted that his company's fortunes depended on the drug, saying, "We're a moonshot with one rocket ship." Nevertheless, he was comfortable with the "high-risk, high-reward" aspect of the business, so much so that he and his family owned more than a million shares of Cassava. "I'm putting my money where my mouth is," he said. Last summer, the company made plans to commence a much larger third phase of clinical trials, in the fall, with nearly two thousand patients.

But in August Barbier was blindsided by a startling intervention. A New York attorney, Jordan A. Thomas, filed a "citizen petition" with the F.D.A. citing "grave concerns about the quality and integrity of the laboratory-based studies surrounding this drug candidate." The petition contained a forty-two-page technical report outlining "a series of anomalies" in Cassava's published research "that strongly suggests systemic data manipulation." Though the petition never said so explicitly, it insinuated that Cassava had been fudging the data to inflate its stock price. Thomas even invoked the spectre of Theranos, the Silicon Valley darling that was ultimately exposed as a fraud. Cassava's research was "riddled with red flags," he argued, urging the F.D.A. to suspend the clinical trials, and to investigate.

Citizen petitions to the F.D.A.—which anyone can file to request action or express concern—are published online, and within hours Cassava's stock had plunged roughly thirty per cent. Within a week, the company had lost two and a half billion dollars in value. Barbier declared himself "dazed and confused" by the attack, insisting, "These

allegations are false." He cast suspicion on those making the charges, noting that Thomas had filed the petition not on his own behalf but at the behest of unnamed clients. Who were these shadowy antagonists, and why wouldn't they step forward? Barbier complained, "By distancing the monkey from the organ grinder, those behind this scheme are hard to detect."

As it happens, submitting explosive government filings on behalf of anonymous clients is what Jordan Thomas does for a living. He is an attorney who represents whistle-blowers. Thomas previously worked at the Securities and Exchange Commission, where he helped create a new program, implemented in 2011, that encouraged people to report corporate malfeasance. The program, developed after the 2008 financial crisis and the Bernie Madoff scandal, established a substantial monetary incentive for whistle-blowers, by allowing them to share in the proceeds of successful S.E.C. actions. These awards, which are sometimes referred to as bounties, can range from ten per cent to thirty per cent of what the errant company ends up paying the government. Since its introduction, the program has dispersed more than \$1.2 billion in awards. In the words of the former S.E.C. chair Mary Jo White, it has been "a game changer."

Just after Thomas helped introduce this new regime, he left the government and opened a legal practice dedicated

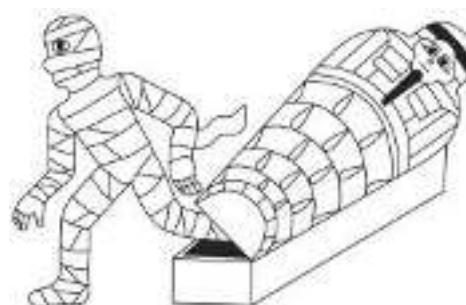
sixty-seven-million-dollar penalty, in 2015. Another client alerted the S.E.C. to the misuse of customer cash at Merrill Lynch, leading to a four-hundred-and-fifteen-million-dollar fine, in 2016. Last summer, when the Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen was preparing to take her allegations public, she and her legal team consulted Thomas.

Haugen acted in a very public way, testifying before Congress. With many of Thomas's clients, though, the government agencies they inform may be aware of their identities, but the offending company—and the general public—is not. For whistle-blowers, corporate retaliation is a very real danger, and the best way to avoid it, Thomas likes to say, is to remain anonymous. Sometimes his clients quietly report their company to the S.E.C., reap a multi-million-dollar reward, and continue working at the company. Some elect not to go public in order to avoid what Thomas describes as "the lottery-ticket effect": friends and family hounding them for a piece of the prize.

"None of my friends know," the JPMorgan Chase whistle-blower, who received a thirteen-million-dollar award from the S.E.C., told me. "We're just in a plausible-deniability situation where, if I don't drive around Manhattan in a Ferrari, I can keep a low profile." He added, "Everyone says it's super hard to keep a secret. It's not. When someone pays you thirteen million dollars, it's really not."

Because Thomas is often among the few people who know about the clandestine risks that his clients undertake, and about the secret windfalls they receive, he can occasionally act like their therapist or priest, giving them the faith to persevere. It helps, of course, that he is one of the designers of the bureaucratic gantlet they face. "He's the architect of the Matrix," the whistle-blower said. "Jordan Thomas built this machine."

The majority of our clients are referrals," Thomas told me last summer, when I first met him. "Very few people do what we do." Since the pandemic began, he has been working primarily from home; he lives with his wife, Mona, and three children in a large house overlooking Long Island Sound. Thomas had commandeered the dining-room

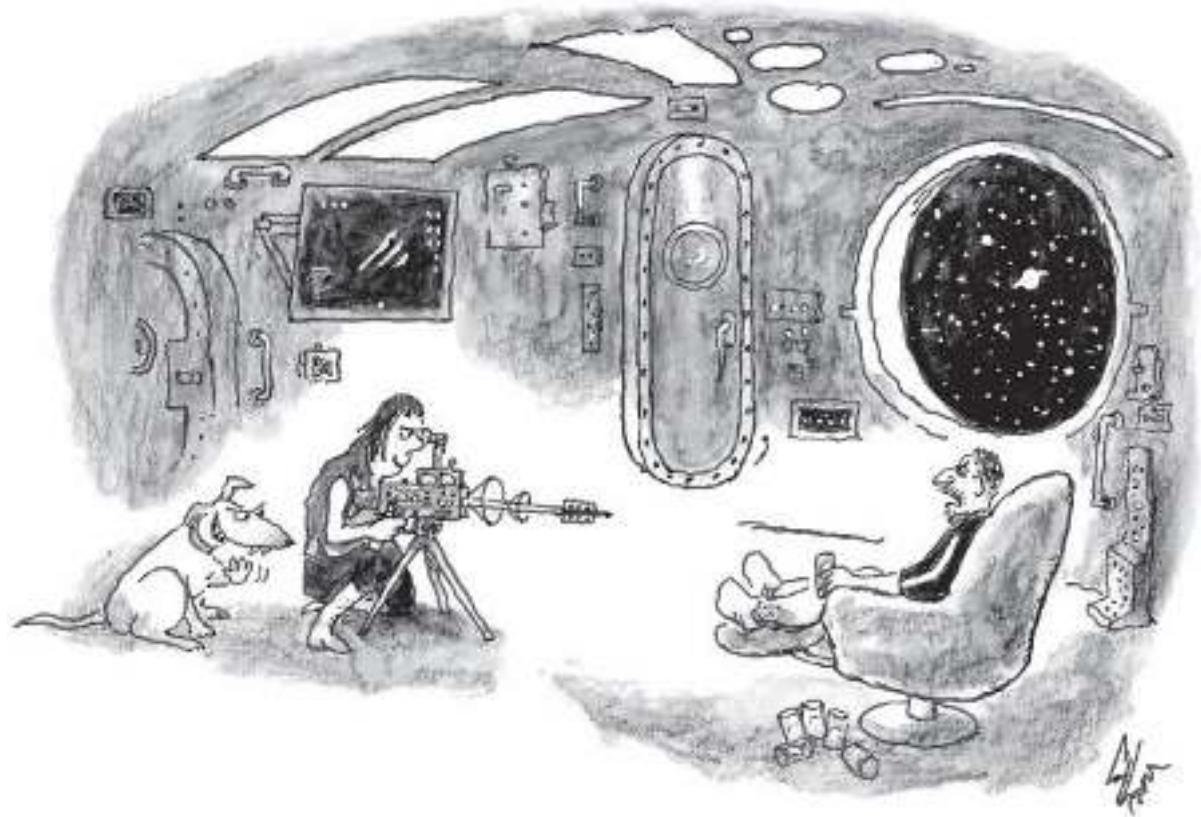


to representing whistle-blowers who brought cases to the S.E.C. Today, he is perhaps the foremost attorney representing such whistle-blowers. "I'm not a model—I'm a Black man who got a G.E.D., who went to community college," he told me recently. "But I like the idea of being a pioneer in an area of law." Thomas represented a whistle-blower from JPMorgan Chase who helped expose a pattern of self-dealing at the bank; the case resulted in a two-hundred-and-

table, which was covered in stacks of legal files. He has a youthful face and close-cropped graying hair, and he was dressed in athletic wear. A Peloton bike stood in the corner. Thomas has an intensely focussed manner; he's not given to casual chitchat about family, leisure, or anything extraneous to his job. He works nights and often rises to work before dawn. He works weekends.

One reason for this urgency is the sheer abundance of corporate malfeasance. After Thomas established his whistle-blowing practice, at the law firm Labaton Sucharow, he commissioned an anonymous survey of finance professionals, conducted by the University of Notre Dame. The findings illuminate a rampant ethical permissiveness: more than a third of respondents who have salaries of half a million dollars or more say that they have witnessed, or have firsthand knowledge of, wrongdoing in the workplace; nearly twenty per cent of respondents "feel financial-services professionals must at least sometimes engage in illegal or unethical activity to be successful." The S.E.C. established the whistle-blower program partly so that people who witnessed misbehavior would have a reliable mechanism for reporting it. The agency had ignored the forensic accountant Harry Markopolos when he sounded the alarm about Bernie Madoff's Ponzi scheme. "Huge percentages of people know stuff," Thomas told me. "They're just not speaking up." The JPMorgan whistleblower said, "There were a dozen people I worked with who knew the same information I knew and still didn't report anything."

People look the other way out of apathy or complicity—or fear. Tom Mueller, in his book "Crisis of Conscience: Whistleblowing in an Age of Fraud," notes that for most of us the notion of standing up to a government agency or a major corporation is "almost unimaginable," because we sense that powerful forces will retaliate and "pursue us like the Furies to the ends of the earth." The biochemist Jeffrey Wigand, who turned on his employer, the tobacco company Brown & Williamson, received death threats and had to hire bodyguards. Another former client of Thomas's, Eric Ben-Artzi, told the S.E.C. about false accounting practices at Deutsche Bank,



"If I'm vaporized, you two will be the obvious suspects."

and was subsequently blackballed by the industry. Blowing the whistle was a "career killer," he has said. (Though Deutsche Bank agreed to a penalty, it acknowledged no wrongdoing.)

Thomas thinks he can help upend the notion that, whenever a whistleblower acts, "the company crushes them and now they live in a motel eating cat food." He concedes that sometimes "there *are* bad outcomes," but says that his work "is about levelling the playing field." By any measure, his practice has been a success. For the first five years, it ran at a loss, but he was confident enough about its prospects that he renegotiated with the firm, taking a smaller salary in exchange for a bigger piece of the action should he ever make a profit. "I think now they would probably prefer the old deal," Thomas told me, flashing a smile. Because he works on contingency, his fee is a significant chunk of any rewards that his clients receive. When the S.E.C. announced, in 2018, that in the Merrill Lynch case it would pay two awards, totalling eighty-three million dollars, it was reported that Labaton Sucharow could make more than twenty-five million dollars. Thomas expanded his team, bringing on two partners, Rich Levine and Michael Stevenson, who are also former S.E.C. officials. He is not given to personal extrav-

gance, but after that win he traded in his fifteen-year-old Toyota for a Tesla.

When Thomas talks about his job, he occasionally seems like a C.I.A. officer whose mission is the surreptitious recruitment and handling of well-placed insiders willing to betray their bosses. He relishes the intrigue of the accompanying tradecraft, describing cases in which his clients assumed generic pseudonyms—Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones—or disguised their voices with a scrambler when making phone calls. Thomas once conducted a sub-rosa interview with a client in an empty church. Often, the people he represents don't merely alert the government about misconduct; they gather evidence, secretly record phone calls and meetings, even wear wires. In one recent case, involving a public company in China, a client smuggled thousands of pages of sensitive documents out of the country and set up an office in Thailand, where the papers could be photocopied and turned over to the S.E.C. The Chinese Ministry of State Security caught on to the operation and started questioning people, so the whistle-blower had to remain one step ahead. "It was like something from the movie 'The Firm,'" Thomas said.

A private whistle-blower may have the freedom to do things that the S.E.C. cannot: tape a call without obtaining a

warrant; gather intelligence abroad without getting permission from the State Department. In some cases, Thomas points out, government officials can use whistle-blower evidence that was obtained illegally, “as long as it’s something they didn’t ask for.” In such instances, whistle-blowers can occasionally function as an unofficial auxiliary, doing things that government investigators do not have the resources—or the legal authority—to do.

Each year, the S.E.C. receives thousands of tips. But it is chronically underfunded, and it lacks the personnel to sort through them. This makes Thomas—a former colleague who can essentially triage the agency’s in-box, serving as a filter and identifying the strongest cases—extremely useful. “We take fewer than twelve cases a year on average,” he told me. But he and his partners screen about three hundred potential clients annually, and much of that culling is done on the phone. His number is posted online, so that when the right cold call comes he’ll be there to answer it. He noted, “People who are senior enough to really know stuff don’t put their shit in an e-mail.”

When I met Thomas, he was in a fight with the S.E.C. In 2020, the Trump Administration had altered the rules of the whistle-blower program in a way that could limit the size of awards. Thomas was incensed: the “primary beneficiary,” he pointed out, would obviously be Wall Street, because high-level people would be discouraged from reporting significant wrongdoing. He blamed the shift on Jay Clayton, Trump’s S.E.C. chair, who had previously been a partner at the law firm Sullivan & Cromwell, representing major banks. After leaving government, Clayton returned to his firm and also joined the board of the private-equity giant Apollo Global Management. “Total cash-out,” Thomas said. “He’s like the poster child of the revolving door.” Thomas sued the S.E.C., in an effort to reverse the decision. Many of his clients, he argued, had taken the extraordinary risk of blowing the whistle with an expectation that they would be well rewarded, “in reliance on the prior rules.” Now they would be left out in the cold.

If litigation is a contest of narratives, Thomas is a persuasive storyteller, with

an intuitive sense of how to package his arguments as accessible anecdotes. In conversation, he occasionally sounds like a screenwriter in a pitch meeting, punctuating a story by saying, “Let me just give you one more beat.” He has become the self-appointed bard of whistleblowing, readily accepting invitations to speak about what he does. “I used to go anywhere in the country,” he told me. “Big audiences. Small audiences. Pick any big city in Texas, for example, and I’ve flown there and talked to people.” He does this in part because it drums up business. He jokes that “whistle-blowers aren’t repeat clients.” If more people know that it can pay to sound the alarm, more people will sound the alarm.

As good as Thomas is at promoting his business, he frequently feels hamstrung by his duty to maintain client confidentiality. “The people who have the best outcomes are often the most circumspect,” he noted. Sometimes, he could tell me the name of a company but not the whistle-blower. Other times, he could specify the industry but not the company or the size of the fine. Hearing him discuss his caseload sounded a bit like a game of Clue.

One day, Thomas arranged a phone call for me with a woman (whom I can’t name) who is currently working with the government to investigate misconduct (which I can’t detail) at a large public company (which I can’t identify, because she still works there). “Anytime you talk about a female whistle-blower it is potentially identifying, because there are so few of them,” he said. In his experience, women are less likely to expose wrongdoing than men, but they can be the best whistle-blowers, because they tend to be more scrupulous about documentation. The woman I spoke to told me that when she started observing inappropriate behavior at work she made a point of registering her objections in e-mails: “Other employees would say, ‘Don’t put it in an e-mail!’ But I kept putting it in e-mails, because I wanted everything documented.” The double life that she is leading as a government informant is “so stressful,” she said. One study found that about eighty-five per cent of whistle-blowers suffered from severe depression or anxiety. The woman told me that she has sought psychological counselling to deal with the pressure.

Some whistle-blowers, like the woman I spoke to, are driven by principle, and by an almost custodial sense of allegiance to their organization. Thomas said of her, “This is her home, and people were doing things she didn’t think were right.” Others are less pure of intention. Occasionally, they hold a grudge against a co-worker who happens to have engaged in nefarious activity. Sometimes they’re implicated in that activity themselves. One of Thomas’s clients, a junior trader named Jason Thorell, documented a pattern of fraudulent conduct at the hedge fund Visium Asset Management. Working with the F.B.I., Thorell wore a wire and recorded hundreds of hours of conversations with his co-workers. But, as he acknowledged under cross-examination when testifying in the trial of one of his bosses, he had played a part in the scheme himself. (Visium paid a penalty, but admitted no wrongdoing.) “I did the right thing by exposing the fraud at Visium,” Thorell told me in an e-mail, adding that he had received a “substantial” award. Thomas said that he rarely takes on clients who have participated in the criminal scheme they wish to expose, because the S.E.C. program “is designed to prevent people from benefitting from their own misconduct,” and such whistle-blowers therefore tend to receive reduced awards.

When Thomas filed his citizen petition against Cassava Sciences with the F.D.A., Remi Barbier could only speculate about the identity of Thomas’s whistle-blower clients. Given that the company had just two dozen employees, one might assume that Barbier could smoke out these insiders through some Agatha Christie-style process of elimination. But an interesting wrinkle of the S.E.C. program is that a portion of the people who report misconduct—and get rewarded for it—are company insiders at all. In fact, according to the S.E.C.’s most recent statistics, forty per cent of the whistle-blowers who have received awards were outsiders who had scrutinized the public record and concluded that something illegal must be going on. In such cases, the calculus of incentives is clearly different, because outsiders do not face the same risks that insiders do. The company can’t fire you if you don’t work there. But the S.E.C. values the

quality of the tip above all other considerations, and rewards outsider whistleblowers as generously as insiders.

In the case of Cassava, Thomas's clients did not work at the company. And, though he protected their identities, there was one important detail that he did disclose. His clients already had a major incentive to blow the whistle on the company: they had taken a short position on SAVA. They had made a financial bet against its stock.

The Cassava case started with a San Diego doctor named David Bredt, who worked as a biotech entrepreneur and, earlier in his career, had run neuroscience research at Janssen Pharmaceuticals and at Eli Lilly. "The first time I heard of Cassava was around February, when there was this explosion in the stock price," Bredt told me. He found it odd that the stock was skyrocketing on the basis of a trial without a placebo. You can't trust such results, he said, because it is simply "human nature to want things to work."

Bredt started reading Cassava's research. The company claimed to be developing a blood test that could accurately provide a diagnosis of Alzheimer's—something that Bredt described to me as a "holy grail" in the field. He also discovered that all the company's publications associated with Simufilam, the Alzheimer's drug, appeared to have been written by the same scientist: an associate medical professor at the City University of New York named Hoau-Yan Wang. When Bredt consulted the papers, he was shocked. "They were making statements that were incompatible with biology and with pharmacology," he told me. If all the claims in these papers were true, "they would win five Nobel Prizes."

Over the years, Bredt had occasionally taken short positions on biotech stocks. Last summer, he decided to share his concerns about Cassava with a friend and former medical-school classmate, Geoffrey Pitt, a cardiologist and a professor at Weill Cornell Medical College who conducts neuroscience research. The two are quite different: Bredt is tanned, informal, and intense; Pitt is buttoned up and cerebral. After examining Cassava's research, Pitt echoed Bredt's skepticism. It wasn't just that

the science didn't make sense; there seemed to be signs of data manipulation.

On July 26th, Cassava made a presentation at an Alzheimer's conference in Denver, and on the strength of the company's claims about Simufilam the stock price spiked further. Bredt took a look at the display materials from the conference and shared them with Pitt. Much of Cassava's research involves Western-blot tests, a method used by scientists to detect and quantify specific protein molecules, which show up as dark bands on X-ray film. But some images of Cassava's Western-blot tests looked off—as though they had been tweaked by a program such as Photoshop.

Bredt and Pitt homed in on Cassava's decision to re-do its analysis of the 2020 data. "Now, suddenly, it's the best drug!" Pitt said. "That just doesn't happen." They learned that Cassava had instituted an unusual compensation scheme in which Barbier and other senior executives would be rewarded with cash bonuses if the company's stock met certain benchmarks. If the market cap maintained specific valuations for twenty consecutive business days, the executives would share a multimillion-dollar bonus. The full incentive scheme could exceed two hundred million dollars, and it was

not pegged to F.D.A. approval or to the success of the drug—just to the share price. This appeared to create an incentive for the company to pump its own stock. Moreover, though Barbier had said that the re-do was conducted by an "outside lab," Bredt suspected that it was actually Wang's group at CUNY. Incredibly, Wang—the man guiding the Simufilam studies—was a participant in the cash-bonus plan.

"I have this righteous streak," Pitt told me. It offended him that the papers Wang published were peer-reviewed, that the N.I.H. had invested twenty million dollars in Cassava, and that the F.D.A. had allowed the clinical trials to move forward. The whole system of pharmaceutical research and regulatory approval is predicated on the notion that scientists will not lie about their results—a structural vulnerability that makes it difficult to identify fraud. Pitt said, with indignation, "My identity is science. I have so much pride in the stuff we do, and the idea that someone might have had the gall to fabricate things over all these years just really got to my soul." He worried, too, that, if Cassava was lying about Simufilam's efficacy, it might also be lying about the drug's safety. The third phase of clinical trials, in which the pill would



be administered to a huge number of patients, would soon begin.

The doctors approached Jordan Thomas, who initially was dubious. “We were both so emotional about it that Jordan thought we were a little bit out there,” Pitt recalled. At Thomas’s urging, the doctors sent Cassava’s papers to ten prominent experts, including the neuroscientists Thomas Südhof, of Stanford, who received the Nobel Prize in 2013; Roger Nicoll, of the University of California, San Francisco; and Don Cleveland, of the University of California, San Diego. Bredt and Pitt were immediately struck by the fact that Cassava—despite having won Wall Street over with its audacious promises about revolutionizing the treatment of Alzheimer’s—had gained little renown among specialists in the field. Bredt said, “The first question we asked was ‘Have you ever *heard* of Cassava Sciences?’ And every single one of them said no.”

When the scientists consulted Cassava’s research papers, “the main reaction was ‘Oh, my God, how could they get away with this?’” Pitt said, adding, “These Western-blot images are hard to fake. It appeared that someone had tried to crop them and cut out little pieces of one and put them in another.” Many of Wang’s papers were co-authored by Dr. Lindsay Burns, a senior vice-president at Cassava—and Barber’s wife. Bredt and Pitt identified apparent methodological problems in six of Wang’s published papers. (Other scientists have since found problems in another twenty.)

Südhof told me that the data in the papers “looked suspicious and needed scrutiny,” and that the scientific conclusions were “unjustified.” He was also surprised that the F.D.A. had signed off on the “rationale” for the drug and the clinical trials, because of a lack of evidence “linking filamin A to Alzheimer’s disease.” He pointed out that there are a lot of scientific journals, and noted, “The fact that a paper is published in an apparently peer-reviewed journal doesn’t necessarily mean it was properly peer-reviewed.”

Nicoll, who is an expert on the study of brain slices, told me he was shocked to see Cassava assert that it had tested the effects of its drug on the brains of deceased Alzheimer’s patients which had

SIXTEEN CENTER

Last week, an insurrection,
yesterday, the second impeachment,
and this evening of slurry and wind
that makes the old dog wary, I call
my grandpa, my mama’s daddy, to ask
why we called his parents’ land 16 Center.
He doesn’t know! And he laughs,
can fathom no reason but his daddy’s
drunk whimsy and charisma in the naming
of those twenty acres of Arkansas backwoods,
those pastures and good timber a mile
down Columbia County Road 14.
Nor does he remember how to call a hog.
Nor does he remember who first called
him Billy, as much his name now as Sam
and for nearly as long. We leave what is forgotten
behind us easily enough, detour
through what rough country he can recall:
his uncle Sonny Boy taking him west to live
in Vegas; his grandma, Ma Gladys, in L.A.
rescuing him from Vegas; his baby sister shot,
and him thirteen, holding her feet at the hospital
down in Haynesville as she died; his many jobs;
his longest love; an outline, a sketch he’s drawn
before that I want to fix in my mind. I know
my questions rarely resolve past treble: I talk
too fast, too high, am nearly unintelligible
to him, yet we pass an hour this way.
He offers some measure of a past
we do not share, and it’s easier to let be
what is lost, to put down what I never carried.

—Donika Kelly

been frozen and then thawed months, or even years, later. “It’s hard for me to imagine how you could get any life from that tissue,” he said. “I mean, this is wild. It’s zombie science!”

When Thomas agreed to take the case, he warned his new clients that, even if they succeeded, any monetary award might be minimal, because Cassava was “a one-drug company.” If they were correct that the drug wasn’t viable and Cassava was simply a fraudulent scheme, public exposure would destroy the company’s value, and there would be little money left to pay a big penalty to the S.E.C. Yet Bredt had his short position, and Pitt—who had never shorted a stock before—made a similar bet. Thomas told me that he has no scruples about representing short sellers. He has done

it before, and successfully. His attitude is that anyone can be a whistle-blower, as long as they have the goods. In any event, his clients were less focussed on the S.E.C. than on the F.D.A., which they wanted to halt the clinical trials, pending an investigation. Thomas told me, “The question is, Who’s going to blink, Cassava or the F.D.A.?”

Tom Devine, of the Government Accountability Project, once remarked that becoming a whistle-blower can mean having to “out-Machiavelli the Machiavellis.” Thomas came up with the idea of using a citizen petition; it would put the F.D.A. on notice, in a public way, and force the agency to examine the anomalies in Cassava’s research while keeping the identities of his clients a secret. Initially, Bredt and Pitt wanted to

remain anonymous, because they anticipated blowback from the company—and from the SAVAGes—if they went public. But Thomas persuaded them that, in addition to making an S.E.C. complaint, it would be savvy to recount their investigation to the *Wall Street Journal*. He is not shy about enlisting the press when he thinks it might help, and in this case the choice of outlet was deliberate: it was thanks largely to the *Journal* that Theranos was revealed to be a scam.

One day in August, Thomas convened a media-training session for his clients, over Zoom, with a Manhattan-based consultant. They needed to prepare for their conversations with the *Journal*. It was important not to get too lost in the science, Thomas advised: “The conclusion should be short and sweet—‘It looks like the government’s being defrauded, investors have been lied to, and patients are at risk.’”

Bredt, who was Zooming in from his home, in California, was dressed in a Rip Curl T-shirt and shorts. The previous night, he had resigned from his job, at a biotechnology-investment firm, in order to avoid any potential conflicts of interest. He offered a dry run of his narrative of the case—which, to my layman’s ears, was bewilderingly technical—before concluding, “In my thirty-five years of research, I’ve never seen such a long trail of apparently clear misrepresented scientific data.”

“I thought that was quite good,” the consultant said. “As a reporter, my first question would be ‘How the hell did the N.I.H. and the F.D.A. miss this?’”

“The system has failed at many levels,” Bredt replied.

Thomas interjected, “It’s worth saying, ‘This is so bad, I couldn’t believe it. So I went to some of the leading experts in the country.’” He reminded his clients to mention that they had consulted a Nobel laureate, because everyone knows “Nobel Prize winners are super smart.”

After the meeting, Thomas seemed optimistic. He was mulling over an issue that often comes up in his cases: how best to harness his clients’ moral indignation. On the Zoom call, Bredt had been visibly exercised, chewing his lip. It was evident that he felt profoundly aggrieved by the alleged fraud. A little righteousness is useful for a whistle-

blower. But not too much. “The stronger the case, the more you want to be like Mr. Rogers,” Thomas told me. “You don’t *have* to be emotional, because the evidence is so ridiculous.” At the same time, he didn’t want Bredt to “completely muzzle himself and lose his soul, because there’s peace in expressing it.” One detail Thomas had fastened on to was the fact that Bredt’s grandfather had suffered from Alzheimer’s. On the call, he counselled Bredt that, when he spoke to the *Journal* reporters, he should mention this family history. He added, “I think you can say, ‘This is personal.’”

Daniel Ellsberg, who leaked the Pentagon Papers to the *Times*, has suggested that there is something otherworldly about the whistle-blower, like an astronaut who cuts the safety cord and floats away from the mother ship. Blowing the whistle is a psychologically fraught, existentially decisive act. Thomas is attuned to the ways his clients, by standing on principle and antagonizing the powerful, often end up rewriting their own lives in the process. “People are put under pressure,” he said. “The uncertainty, the doubt—not everybody comes out the other side of that the same.” Often, whistle-blowers’ families disapprove of their decision. Occasionally, the act of speaking up initiates a lasting reinvention. “Some of the people that I work with reflect my belief in second chances,” Thomas told me. “Because *I’m* living a second chance to make a good



life, one I can be proud of.” Only in recent years has he started speaking openly about his own former life, and his own secrets, including the fact that Jordan Thomas is not his real name.

At Thomas’s house, he pulled out a hardcover book with a worn red dust jacket, titled “The Craft of Power.” Published in 1979 by a former military scientist named R. G. H. Siu, it is a series of maxims about the cultivation of

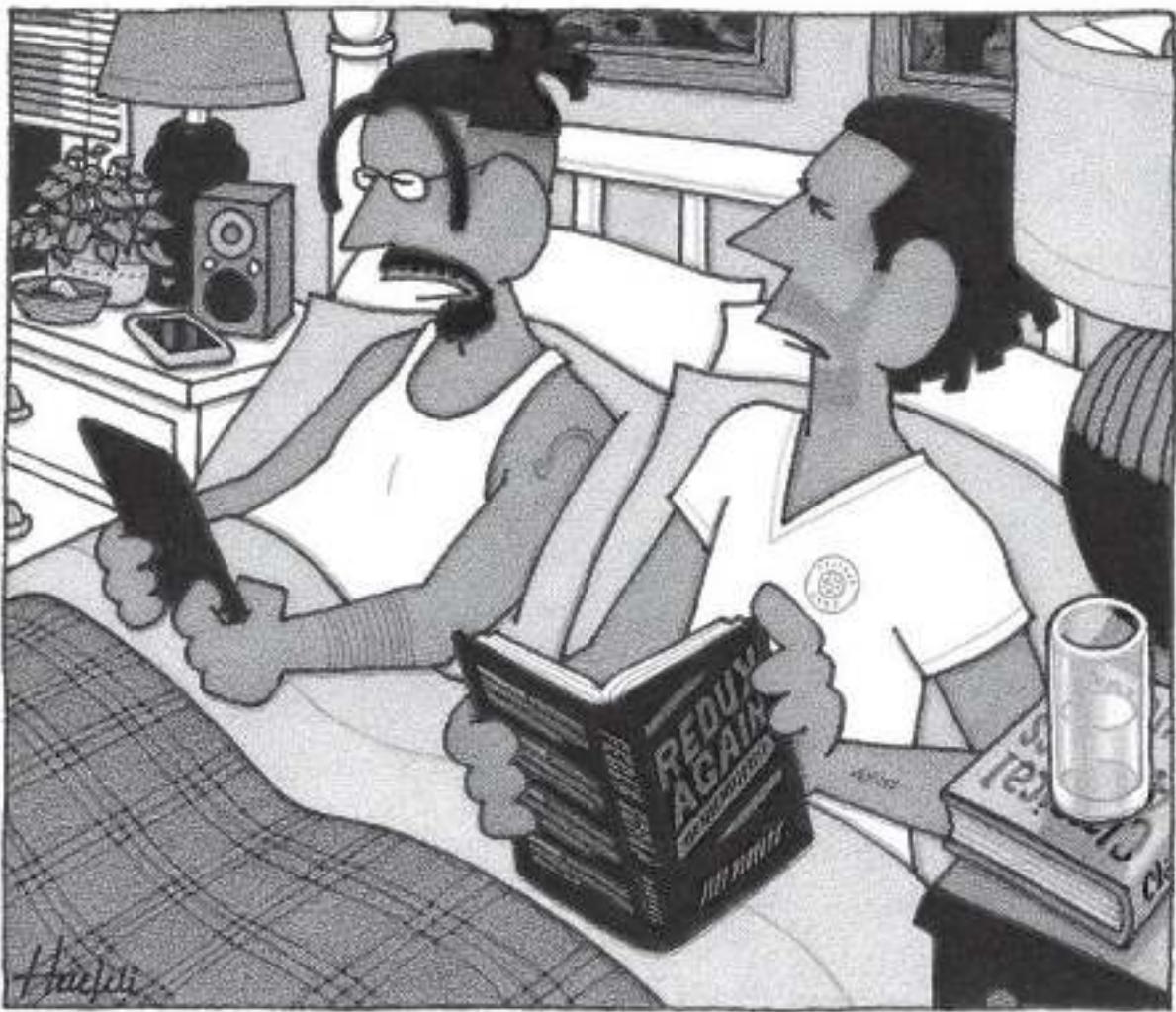
power, and it espouses a notably Machiavellian world view. “This was one of my father’s favorite books,” Thomas said.

Jordan Thomas was born Paul Thompson, in 1970. His mother, Celia Andrade, a white woman from Hawaii, was a nun, in a convent in Compton, California, when she met his father, G. Thomas Thompson. “My father has a great story,” Jordan said. Thomas Thompson attended Compton’s community college, and then an unaccredited law school, before passing the bar and becoming a judge—one of the first Black elected judges in California. He was tall, handsome, and charismatic. He was also a womanizer. It may be some measure of the man’s charm that he managed to father a child with a woman who’d taken a vow of chastity, but a relationship was not in the cards. By the time Thomas was born, his mother had left the convent. She ended up marrying another man and moving to Yakima, Washington.

“I grew up between two worlds,” Jordan Thomas told me. As a child, he lived mainly with his mother. But he found his relationship with his stepfather deeply emotionally oppressive, and they clashed. Occasionally, he visited his father, who filled him with awe: “He was young, he was Black, he was Obama before Obama—in the sense that he was hot. All the power people for the next several decades in California were supporting him. Stevie Wonder did a fund-raiser for him. He was the man.” Thomas opened a folder of yellowed news clippings from the Compton *Bulletin*, and showed me photographs of his dad with various grandees.

At one point, his father got in a car accident and was treated for his injuries with powerful painkillers. “He became reliant on those,” Thomas said, and had to retire from the bench. But he reinvented himself, Thomas explained, as one of Southern California’s top political fixers—“someone with powerful friends.” Thompson checked in with his network so frequently that he carried huge rolls of dimes in his pockets, for pay phones.

In 1986, when Thomas was fifteen, he moved to California to live with his father. He earned his G.E.D., enrolled at the community college in Compton, and, at sixteen, transferred to U.C.L.A. “It was like a dream,” he recalled. “My dad’s



"Your passionate respect for physical books is put into doubt by your use of them as coasters."

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my hero. He's a judge. He drives fancy cars. He lives by the beach. He's got a place in Hawaii." Thompson started enlisting his son to help him out. "I wore a suit and followed him around," Thomas recalled. "I was really engaged with my father, going to meetings with him."

The Judge liked to discourse on the art of Realpolitik, quoting "The Craft of Power" ("The glare of power bothers people. They feel more at ease with the myth of the meek inheriting the earth") or another favorite book, "The Godfather." He had a sideline organizing clubby political fund-raisers in restaurants and private homes around L.A., and at such events he whispered to his son about the politicos and magnates, illuminating a secret world of influence peddling. "You're either pulling the strings or you're a puppet," the Judge said.

It took a while for Thomas to see that not all his father's activities were legal. Many guests at the fund-raising events were there because they owed someone a favor—and could pay it off by making a contribution to a pet cause or candidate. His father was also in-

volved in a graft in which he helped appoint people to be probate referees—a form of patronage in which politically connected people were given cushy sinecures. "I ended up being willing to do illegal and unethical things, and I'm not proud of it," Thomas told me, adding, "I just wanted to be his No. 2." He remembers a time when it appeared that a close associate of his father's had been indicted, and his father, in a panic, suddenly refiled several years' worth of taxes.

The incident that finally led Thomas to break with his father was comparatively minor. He came home from college one day to discover Thompson with a local woman who was married. His father told an unconvincing story about what they had been doing. It was no secret that he had multiple overlapping relationships with women; what shocked Thomas was that he was trying to deceive his own son about it. One of his father's maxims— cribbed, perhaps, from "The Godfather"—was that "you never lie to family." If he lied to his son about a trivial dalliance, what else might he be

lying about? Thomas was starting to realize that, to his dad, many people were expendable. Was he expendable, too? After years of conflict with his stepfather, he had sought emotional refuge with his father, and had come to worship him. But now the Judge seemed like a false god.

Thomas packed his Volkswagen and drove across the country. While attending U.C.L.A., he had seen a performance by the Alvin Ailey dance company, and had been profoundly moved. After reading that Bennington College had a good dance program, he transferred there—under a new name, which he had legally changed. "I kind of put myself in a witness-protection program," he recalled. "Different location, changed my name, changed my life."

His new name was Jordan Andolini Thomas. "Jordan" because he loved Michael Jordan. "Andolini" was a "Godfather" reference—before Michael Corleone's father turned to crime, Andolini had been the family name. Thomas's renunciation of his family was so extreme that, at nineteen, he got a vasectomy. It was seven years before he had it reversed, at around the time he met his wife. By that point, he said, "I had more confidence that I would live a life where I wouldn't cause more harm."

Susan Sgorbati, a member of the dance faculty at Bennington who was Thomas's college adviser, remembers him as a diligent student who was consumed by dark emotions, but who channelled them into choreography. "I could see that he really was struggling, and I think dance was a great outlet," she said. He could have had a career as a choreographer, she thought. So she was surprised when he came to her office one day and said, "I want to be a lawyer." After graduating, in 1992, he attended Southwestern Law School, then joined the Navy as a judge advocate.

When I inquired about this transition, Thomas pointed out that one way Michael Corleone tried to break with his family was by serving in the military. But "The Godfather" is actually a story about how Corleone fails to escape the Mafia—he ends up running the family business. For Thomas, to become a lawyer was also to follow in his father's footsteps. In explaining his choice of "Thomas" as a last name,

he told me matter-of-factly that he selected it because it sounded like “Thompson.” I couldn’t help but note, however, that Thomas was also his father’s given name.

For decades, few people in Jordan Thomas’s life knew much about his past. But he has started to talk more freely about it. He gave an interview to the *Times* in which he acknowledged that he had changed his name but declined to divulge his birth name. Since then, out of a sense of solidarity with his clients, he has opened up more. “I didn’t realize it at the time, but I was carrying secrets—I was hiding everything,” he said. “Becoming a whistle-blower lawyer helped to save me.” His clients were “the models”: they rebel against their professional families; they break away. “They fundamentally believe that’s their duty,” he said, adding, “They’re not perfect. They’re human.”

All of that may be true. But Thomas is adept enough at telling stories that it is tempting to wonder whether he realized at a certain point that revealing something of his own baroque personal background might make him a more compelling subject for journalists. “Bring it back to the personal,” he advised David Bredt. When I proposed that Thomas seems to have retained a bit of his father’s skill for Realpolitik, he readily agreed. “My father was a realist and my mother was an idealist,” he said. “Whistle-blowers are both.”

His practice has allowed him to fuse these parental attributes: he channels righteous fervor on behalf of his clients while savoring the jousting and the power games of legal combat. He regaled me with stories about cunning ways he has used “misdirection” to cloak the identity of clients, such as reporting a tip to the Los Angeles office of the S.E.C. so that the suspect company will assume the tipper is based on the West Coast, when in fact he lives in New York. Sometimes the S.E.C. will formally request an interview with someone who is, secretly, already his client. “Then the person informs the company where they work, all concerned, and says, ‘Oh, my God, the S.E.C.’s called me. What can I do?’” Often, the company hires a lawyer to represent the employee, unaware that the employee is already being represented by Jordan Thomas.

When Thomas sued the S.E.C. to reverse the Trump Administration’s rule change limiting the awards given to whistle-blowers, he was taking a considerable risk: his practice hinged on good relations with the agency. But he decided that he had the legal advantage, and that it was the right thing to do. “The willingness to fight is an incredibly valuable thing,” he maintained. “I’m like a whistle-blower—lots of people see the problem, but nobody wants to step forward and do something about it. People are afraid of pissing off the S.E.C.”

Thomas had indicated that he was going to file a motion for summary judgment by August 10th. On August 6th, he called me, sounding giddy. “The commission has agreed to rewrite the rules,” he said. It had backed down before he could even file the motion.

His father, he said, had taught him an adage: “The greatest samurai is the one who doesn’t have to unsheathe his sword.” Reflecting on his victory, Thomas said, “We sought two things—that they fix the rules and that they don’t enforce them while they’re fixing them. Ultimately, that’s exactly what we got, and we didn’t have to go to court. My dad would’ve liked that.”

One day this summer, I met a convicted fraudster named Sam Antar for coffee at a café in a park on the West Side of Manhattan. Antar, a man in his sixties, wore a “Star Trek” baseball cap and Prada sunglasses. A face mask dangled from the crook of his arm. “Whistle-blowing is a spectrum,” he told me. “The altruists—they don’t need money. Hopefully, they end up with a guy in law enforcement who’s a pragmatist, because two altruists never get anything done. Then, you get the exes—ex-lovers who are spurned, former business partners and employees who got fucked over. Then, you’ve got the bounty hunters.” About a decade ago, Antar became a client of Thomas’s, and, later, an occasional consultant. “Jordan spoke my language,” he said. “He’s a pragmatist.”

Antar grew up, after the Corleone fashion, in a crime family. His uncle and cousin ran Crazy Eddie, a chain of electronics stores in the New York area which, in the early nineties, was prosecuted for securities fraud. Antar’s family sent him to college to learn account-

ing, so that he could better fake the numbers. “In other words, I was a real prick,” he said. When the Feds came after him, he flipped on his family. After pleading guilty to three felonies, paying a fine, and receiving a sentence of house arrest, Antar started a new line of work—as a consultant to law enforcement. He told me that he had a particular skill set: he knew “the underbelly of accounting,” the “stuff you *don’t* learn in college.” This made him particularly proficient at spotting fraud.

Antar is part of what Thomas describes as an “underground whistle-blower support network”—a loose fraternity of lawyers, accountants, and ex-law-enforcement types. The network sounds reminiscent of his father’s phone book: in any business, there is a premium on always knowing just the right person to call. When Thomas needed help with forensic accounting, Antar could comb through the public filings of a company and uncover subtle anomalies. He has initiated several cases with Thomas simply by scrutinizing a company’s books. In one instance, he received a substantial award. “The money didn’t make a difference in my life style,” he told me. “All I give a shit about is I have the latest iPhone.”

In 2015, Antar and Thomas filed a complaint with the S.E.C. about the Chinese conglomerate Alibaba. It had recently gone public in the United States, in one of the largest initial public offerings in history. But when Antar dug into the company’s disclosures he found indications of accounting shenanigans. Scouring the Hong Kong filings for any mention of companies that had commercial or financial relationships with Alibaba, he discovered apparent inconsistencies: in many cases, he alleged, Alibaba was not fully disclosing these interactions with financial affiliates to American investors. Antar documented a pattern of possible fraud in which scores of Alibaba’s affiliated companies did a flurry of transactions among themselves. As Antar put it, “It was all incest accounting.” (Alibaba told me that it fully discloses all “material” matters to investors and has “complied with all applicable securities laws.”)

The S.E.C. whistle-blowing process can be frustratingly slow, and its investigators seldom give much indication

to whistle-blowers about an inquiry's status, or whether their evidence will lead to any charges, much less a reward. Thomas joked, "It's kind of like you're dating a lot and then they start ghosting you." The whistle-blower delivers a formal submission to the S.E.C. and often makes a presentation to agency lawyers, who might ask follow-up questions. Then, silence. It can take seven years before a case comes to fruition, a penalty is secured, and the whistle-blower is informed about any award. After the JPMorgan Chase whistle-blower notified the S.E.C. about the misconduct he witnessed, and submitted to a series of interviews, he heard nothing. He learned from the *Wall Street Journal* that the agency was investigating the bank. Finally, six years after he had contacted the S.E.C., the call came. Thomas informed him that another unidentified whistle-blower had *also* reported the scheme—with better information—and was receiving a much bigger bounty. "Jordan went through all my deficien-

cies," the whistle-blower told me, adding drily, "It's the saddest way to learn you're making thirteen million."

Since Antar spoke with the S.E.C. about the Alibaba case, he, too, has been left in the dark. "You work your ass off on the case, and then you sit there for six years and wonder if you wasted your time," he grumbled. "But that's the way it is." He shrugged. "The cases you do very well on will compensate you for the ones that you don't get paid for." Antar told me that Thomas has referred to the business model as "legal venture capital."

When I asked Antar if he plans to expose the misdeeds of other companies, he said he might not bother: "I'm sixty-four years old. I'm not going to wait until I'm seventy-one. Every day is an adventure with my body parts." But he was pleased to have taught the Feds some of his tricks. A smart crook can always beat an audit, he said. "All it takes is management override of internal controls. Two people to collude, and you're done." During his criminal

years, Antar never sweated an audit. What kept him up at night was the prospect of "somebody ratting us out from *within our midst*."

Thomas's practice can tolerate only a degree of failure, Antar observed. "You don't want to be the guy who cries wolf with the S.E.C.," he said. "It's one thing to make a submission they don't take up. But you don't want to bring them something that wastes the S.E.C.'s time. If you do that, you can also hurt your future clients."

Another former Thomas client, the Deutsche Bank whistle-blower, Eric Ben-Artzi, agreed that a whistle-blower attorney succeeds, in part, by having a close relationship with the S.E.C. He is less convinced that this is a benevolent proximity. After Ben-Artzi qualified for roughly eight million dollars as part of a shared award, he wrote an article in the *Financial Times* proclaiming, "I refuse to take my share." He declared that the S.E.C. program's focus on monetary penalties was problematic, because the executives who had broken the rules faced no consequences—and the bank's shareholders would end up paying the fine. Thomas may invoke the language of idealism, but that idealism has its limits—Labaton Sucharow sued Ben-Artzi for its share of the award. Thomas declined to speak with me about the matter. But his firm ultimately got paid.

Ben-Artzi was similarly circumspect about disparaging Thomas. He told me, however, that his own life had unravelled after he blew the whistle. Not only did he renounce the award; he ended up declaring personal bankruptcy. Ben-Artzi thinks that the whistle-blower program itself has become compromised by the revolving-door problem that Thomas often decries. Many of the lawyers who have gone into the business of representing S.E.C. whistle-blowers are, like Thomas and the partners he recruited to Labaton Sucharow, former agency employees. The banks and corporations that stand accused hire their own set of ex-S.E.C. attorneys to defend them. "You end up with a whole system of people who are motivated by money, and not by justice," Ben-Artzi said. The S.E.C. tends to settle with the bad actors rather than go to trial. "Most people I talk to see justice in



THE SISTERHOOD OF THE TRAVELLING WINE NO ONE WANTS

this," Ben-Artzi told me. "They don't realize it's all a game. It's a business. Structurally, it's a protection racket."

In August, the Cassava whistle-blowers had a video meeting with the S.E.C. Thomas would tell me nothing about how the meeting went, citing the confidentiality of any direct dealings with the agency. Remi Barbier, the Cassava C.E.O., was hitting back hard, defending Simufilam's potential and accusing Thomas's clients—who, at that point, were still anonymous—of manipulating the market by issuing damaging allegations simply to hurt his company's stock. Thomas was getting nasty e-mails from the SAVages, including death threats. Because his was the only name associated with the whistle-blower case, and because he has made himself easy to reach, he was flooded with strong reactions from strangers. Calls came in day and night, and—always having in mind that one might be a new whistle-blower with a great tip—he picked up the phone.

"Are you Jordan Thomas? I hope you get disbarred! Fuck you!"

Thomas told me, "It's no fun when your wife is saying, 'Should I be concerned for our safety?'" People got in touch to tell him that they had loved ones with Alzheimer's and wanted to enroll them in the Simufilam clinical trials. How dare he try to halt the process? Occasionally, Thomas shared with such people something that he had not yet spoken about publicly: a close relative of his also had the disease.

It was easy for me to believe that Thomas might have become a choreographer as I watched him assemble the various participants—the clients, the outside experts, the regulators, the press—and try to get them all moving at his tempo. But, in the Cassava case, one element of his coördinated strategy did not seem to be falling into line: the *Wall Street Journal*. Bredt and Pitt had spoken on the record, knowing that as soon as their identities were revealed they would come under attack. But weeks had passed and the *Journal* had not yet run a story. "They're not telling me anything," Thomas said. "Because my clients are short sellers, I think they're worried that my clients are going to try to time their short on a story."

Thomas did have good news: a lead-

ing expert on scientific fraud, Elisabeth Bik, had reviewed the Cassava papers and had concluded that some images looked manipulated. When I spoke to her recently, she avoided accusing Cassava of being a criminal enterprise but said that she shared the concerns raised in the citizen petition, and added that she had discovered additional problems in the papers which had not been raised by Thomas and his clients.

Bik asked Wang's lab at CUNY to produce higher-resolution versions of the original Western blots, but neither Wang nor Cassava would do so, and "the silence of the lab," as she put it, had intensified her skepticism. (A spokesperson for CUNY said that it "takes accusations of research misconduct very seriously" and is looking into the matter.) Meanwhile, a hedge fund named Quintessential Capital, which had its own short position on Cassava, released a forty-page report detailing a months-long sting it had conducted, which involved sending undercover investigators to infiltrate the clinical-research centers where Cassava was conducting its trials. The report described Simufilam as "a worthless compound," suggested that Cassava might be engaged in "a scheme orchestrated by management to enrich itself at the expense of shareholders," and questioned the methodology of the trials.

Despite all this, Thomas's impatience with the *Journal* was palpable. "Right now, it's just me—some lawyer who works for a plaintiff's law firm—saying this," he said. People are more inclined to believe a multibillion-dollar public company than a plaintiff's attorney, he suggested. But "the world changes when the *Journal* comes out with a Nobel Prize winner who expresses concern."

One morning in October, I visited Thomas in his office at Labaton Sucharow, in a skyscraper near the World Trade Center. The office has views of the Manhattan Bridge, and a wall covered in framed movie posters, including one for "The Insider," the Russell Crowe film, and another for "All the President's Men," which featured the tag line "At times it looked like it might cost them their jobs, their reputations,

and maybe even their lives." Thomas wore a crisp white shirt, open at the collar. While I was there, he ushered in Sharon Muravez, a tall, elegant woman with blue glasses and bright-blue eyes, who had worked for many years as his father's personal assistant.

"Paul, look at this office!" she said as she entered. Thomas had reconnected with Muravez on a recent trip to California. She was visiting New York, and he had invited her to come and discuss his father. She brought with her two thick file folders. Muravez had been working as a court reporter in the seventies before she took a job with Judge Thompson. "He was complicated," she said, with a smile. "He was spit on a frying pan."

She reeled off his political associates and powerful connections—Johnnie Cochran, Jerry Brown, Gray Davis. Muravez had helped coordinate the fund-raisers that Thompson had held. She spread her files out on a glass table. "It was difficult to go through this," she said. "I was helping a man who, it turned out, did unsavory things." She herself had benefitted from Thompson's cronyism: he helped get her appointed as a probate referee. In retrospect, it all "felt dirty," Muravez said, but at the time she was "part of it—just swept away."

When Thompson was a judge, Muravez recalled, he "would ask the attorneys appearing before him to step into the chambers, please." He would then "shake them down for a business card, tell them he was having an event, a fund-raiser or a dinner." The implication was clear: the attorneys should attend and make a donation. "I was new to all this," she recalled. "I didn't think it was at all unusual."

Thomas, visibly unsettled, stood up and paced around his office. "This is the stuff that"—he winced and trailed off. When it came to his father, he said, "anything relating to the law, to the administration of law, is tough for me." At a certain point, Muravez said, she began to wonder if she could trust the Judge, and, as a form of insurance, she made a list of improper activities that she knew he'd engaged in. She pulled it out of a folder. There was an entry about a doctor in North Hollywood



who had paid the Judge “cash for stopping state investigation of a complaint filed against him by a patient,” and another item that described Thompson telling her he had paid Gray Davis “speaking honorariums, with clear understanding of *why*,” for “3 probate referee positions.” Muravez exclaimed, “He was playing the game!” (A representative for Davis denied this account.)

When Muravez read an item about Thomas’s father being paid by a local attorney for “helping him” on cases by intervening with other judges, Thomas stood up again. “This is one that makes me want to scream,” he said. “It’s *small-time*. You’re with a small-time attorney doing small-time corruption—on call.” He went on, “When you hear about the other stuff my father did, it’s big time, big game. But that lawyer is a witness against him for life! You’re doing it with different judges. If you find *one* judge with integrity, you’re dead. There’s a lot of dumb stuff, but this is just spectacularly dumb. I just can’t get over it.”

It was as if Muravez were blowing the whistle on Thomas’s own past. She offered him one damning revelation after another, all backed up by her scrupulous notes. There must have been something therapeutic for him in re-investigating his father’s misdeeds, but there was a touch of masochism, too. “I had seen my father at a different tier,” he said. “It wasn’t a life I wanted to follow. He was in the Mafia. I don’t like the Mafia. But he was the capo.” He paused. “This is not Mafia shit. This is small-time. Small-time and dumb.” He shook his head and thrust his hands in his pockets. “I just—I just don’t know what was going on there.”

Muravez looked at him, her eyes full of compassion. “Sometimes he got in money jams,” she said.

The *Journal* finally published an article on November 17th, headlined “SEC INVESTIGATING CASSAVA SCIENCES, DEVELOPER OF EXPERIMENTAL ALZHEIMER’S DRUG.” In a regulatory filing, the company had acknowledged being investigated. The story identified Bredt and Pitt as the whistle-blowers, and described their short position, and their effort to halt the clinical trials. In an interview, Remi Barbier confirmed the suspicion shared

by Brett and Pitt about the so-called “outside lab” that had conducted the reanalysis in 2020. It had been Wang’s lab after all—a fact that Barbier had not made clear to investors. (He has since maintained that Wang did the work “under blinded conditions.”) Barbier defended Cassava but seemed to change his story more than once in the space of a single quote: “There is zero evidence, zero credible evidence, zero proof that I’ve ever engaged in, nor anyone I know, has ever engaged in funny business.”

Thomas and his clients were not celebrating. The *Journal* had framed the controversy as a he-said, she-said situation, and they were disappointed that the newspaper hadn’t drawn a more definitive conclusion, based on the experts’ evidence, that fraud had occurred. They were also surprised that the report did not quote any of the additional experts they had consulted. It didn’t even mention Thomas Südhof and his Nobel Prize. They were alarmed that Cassava’s Phase III clinical trials were proceeding. The whole process had started with a citizen petition to the F.D.A., yet the F.D.A. did not appear to be investigating. “Within two days of filing with the S.E.C., my people were in the room with the S.E.C.,” Thomas exclaimed to me. “The F.D.A. is the principal regulator and they’re missing in action! They’re going to start treating patients! People are going to

ple sometimes do get away with things for a very long time.” He and Bredt told me that they no longer have a short position on Cassava, and he told me that he has been impressed by the aplomb with which company officials had “thrown around jargon” to defend their claims. “But, because it’s science, eventually there will be an answer,” he continued. “Eventually, the clinical trial has to work—and I’m very skeptical that it will.”

Thomas finds it hard to be quite so philosophical. “My personal brand is involved with this,” he told me. “I’ve been very thoughtful about the cases I pick and the cases I go public on, and this isn’t going to be the case where I look like I was wrong. I don’t want to be wrong. Eventually, I’ll be totally vindicated. Absolutely. One hundred per cent.” He paused. “The issue is the interim.”

In addition to the S.E.C.’s inquiry, the N.I.H. is obligated to investigate the grants that it made to support the development of Simufilam, and journals that published Wang’s papers have issued statements of concern, announcing that his results were under review. Even so, many investors have remained bullish on Cassava, notwithstanding the significant evidence of what looks like scientific misconduct. Südhof told me he is “surprised” that the financial community doesn’t seem to take any of this very seriously. Instead, Cassava appeared to be benefitting from a broader American tendency to pick a side and stick with it—even when the experts on the other side have a Nobel Prize. “I’m just amazed by how the Cassava fans are blindly defending it,” Elisabeth Bik said. In “The Craft of Power,” Siu counsels that “people need buttressing in their beliefs by respected specialists.” But this approach doesn’t work in a society that has fully embraced Siu’s cynicism and is no longer impressed by what he calls “the ritual of objective expertise.”

When I spoke to Remi Barbier recently, he suggested that Cassava is the blameless victim of a smear campaign by short sellers, and said, “Jordan Thomas could care less about patients.” For the allegations in Thomas’s petition to be true, he suggested, his company and its academic advisers would have had to engage in “a fifteen-



put this thing in their mouths!” His frustration was so intense that he contacted a House of Representatives committee that was investigating the F.D.A. for its approval of an Alzheimer’s drug from Biogen, called Aduhelm, whose efficacy had been subsequently questioned. Committee staffers got right back to Thomas. “I briefed them,” he told me, with satisfaction.

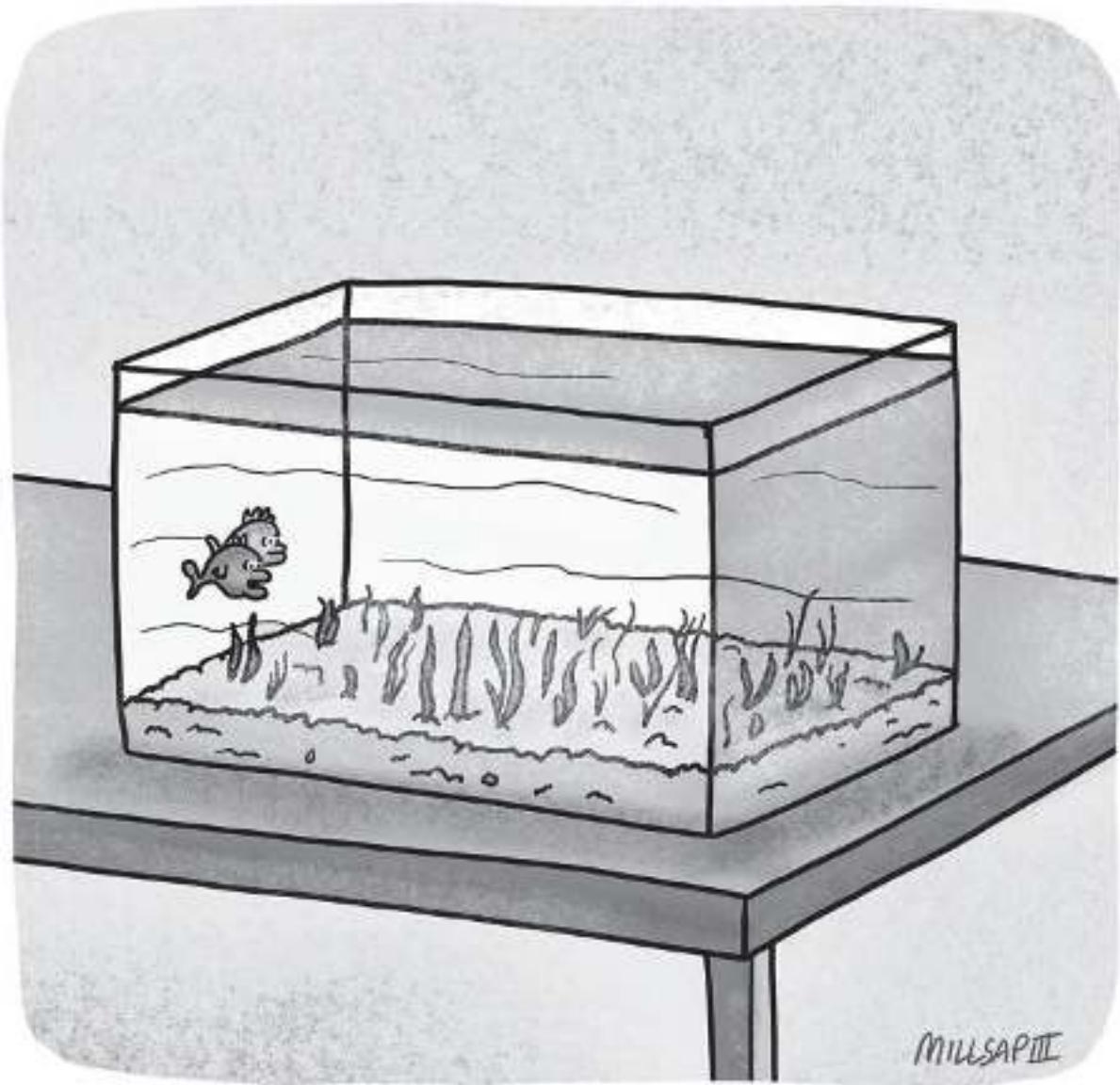
“How long did Bernie Madoff get away with it?” Geoffrey Pitt said. “Peo-

year fraud." They had not done so, he insisted—and, if they had, the truth would have come out. "There is no whistle-blower," he said. "Nobody has stepped up from the company, not from CUNY, not from anywhere."

Barbier spoke fondly of Dr. Wang, whom he described as a "top-notch scientist," and said, "One hundred per cent, we stand by all his work." He told me that David Bredt has been "an academic rival" of Wang's "for many years," though Bredt is politely dismissive of this idea. When I asked Barbier whether it was appropriate for Wang to be included in a bonus plan based on short-term fluctuations in Cassava's stock price, Barbier said that this was standard practice, adding, "I've never been able to get people to work for free." (I posed the same question about this arrangement to Bob Gussin, a former Johnson & Johnson executive who sits on Cassava's board, and he said, "It's not typical, I'll say that. And I'm not thrilled with that aspect of things." Barbier is an "excellent president," Gussin assured me, but also a salesman: "I keep telling him, 'Don't overstate this stuff. Don't fluff it up. Because that can come back and bite you.'")

In the end, Barbier maintained, the F.D.A. cares chiefly about safety, and there are no indications of such problems with Simufilam. Consequently, when the agency responds to Thomas's petition—which it is obliged to do next month—Barbier is convinced that Cassava will be cleared of any wrongdoing. Even so, he acknowledged, institutional investors have fled the company, and all the members of Cassava's own scientific advisory board appear to have done the same. "I suppose one brilliant insight Jordan Thomas has is that investors care more about price than they do about information," he said. "The man is a marketing genius, if nothing else." Barbier said that he'd been encouraged by the loyalty of "smaller investors," who, unlike the big funds, can "see through" Thomas's arguments. In another recent interview, Barbier said his attitude is that "haters will hate."

There's an adage in "The Craft of Power" that goes, "The more selfish the drive, the more idealistic the label," and this notion formed the thrust of Bar-



"Someday, I'd like to take you over there."

• • •

bier's defense against the whistle-blower campaign. It incensed Thomas to be dismissed in these terms. "I care about how I'm perceived, that I'm perceived as a person with integrity," he told me. "This is my life's work. The idea that I'm someone who is driven by money, it drives me crazy."

In a book about whistle-blowers, the scholar C. Fred Alford once suggested that every person who takes this path must accept "some terrible truths about the world," the greatest of which is that "his sacrifice will not be redeemed. No one will be saved by his suffering, not even himself." Even when cases are successful and bounties are paid, there is reason to be skeptical that they will effect systemic change. The JPMorgan Chase whistle-blower told me he doubts that the penalties levied by the S.E.C. program—even the nine-figure ones—will deter future wrongdoing. "Shareholders don't care," he told me. "I don't think it stops anyone."

Surprisingly, Thomas agrees. "They

pay billions and it doesn't matter," he acknowledged. "Because they know how to keep making more." In the anonymous survey that Thomas commissioned, a third of respondents said that Wall Street has not improved since the 2008 financial crisis.

Thomas's father died in 2005, of pancreatic cancer. There was no newspaper announcement of his death and, at his request, no funeral. Thomas told me that he has not shared "The Craft of Power" with his children. "They don't even know about it," he said. Earlier this month, he announced that he and his partners are leaving Labaton Sucharow, to establish an independent law firm focussed exclusively on S.E.C. whistle-blower cases. He currently has seven cases awaiting a determination on whether an award will be paid. Collectively, his clients could be eligible for more than three hundred million dollars. In the meantime, he keeps working, strategizing, pacing. And, when the phone rings, he answers. ♦

FAULT LINES

A woman's quest to free the man convicted of killing her father.

BY EREN ORBEY

Katie Kitchen had always felt some sadness about the fate of the man convicted of murdering her father. On a summer night in 1991, Robert Hans Kaim, a seventy-seven-year-old white real-estate developer, had just pulled into his garage in Houston's upscale Tanglewood neighborhood when an assailant robbed him at gunpoint, shot him in the chest, and then drove off with his wallet. Nine days later, police arrested a twenty-year-old Black man named Joseff Deon White in connection with the crime. White told investigators that he'd had an accomplice, a Jamaican friend who went by the street name Blocker, but the police never found or even identified him. At White's trial, Kitchen noticed his small stature, and the mothers of his children sitting on his side of the courtroom, crying. The jury reached a guilty verdict in forty-five minutes. On April 20, 1992, White was sentenced to life in prison. "All I could think about was how senseless it was for a person to throw away their life for a wallet," Kitchen, who was forty at the time, wrote later, in her journal.

The Tanglewood home, where Kitchen grew up, is a mid-century-modern structure made of brick and glass. I met Kitchen there, in August, when she was visiting one of her two older sisters, Ellen Benninghoven, who moved back into the home a few years after their mother's death, in 2011. As Kitchen unlatched a tall security gate, which the family had installed in the wake of the murder, she gestured toward the front entrance. "That's where the police found him," she said. When officers reached the scene, after a neighbor heard a commotion and called 911, Kaim was still alive. According to the Houston *Chronicle*, he had crawled to the entryway and was banging his head against the door in an attempt to wake his wife. An émigré from Berlin who'd fought for the U.S. in the Second World War, Kaim

had an imposing build and a "huge German voice," Kitchen said. Before he was rushed to the hospital, he told the police that during the robbery he'd refused to hand over his wallet. Kitchen, who was out of town that night and didn't reach the house until the next morning, sometimes imagines that her father "scared the hell" out of White, perhaps leaving him no choice but to fire in self-defense.

Now seventy, Kitchen is white-haired and voluble, with a slight Texas accent and an understated personal style. Versed in the anti-racist precepts of such writers as Ibram X. Kendi, she calls herself a "white woman of privilege" from a "very segregated world." During her childhood, a Black housekeeper, Willie Lee, cooked the family's meals and lived in servants' quarters Monday through Friday. Kitchen's first husband, whom she married when she was nineteen and divorced shortly before her father was killed, was the heir to an oil fortune. Today, Kitchen splits her time between homes in Austin, New York City, and Snowmass, Colorado. With the exception of a stint as a waitress at a Holiday Inn, she has never had a paying job.

As we sat in the back yard of her sister's house, which is still decorated with their parents' antique furniture and numbered-edition fine-art prints, Kitchen became emotional discussing her father's death. She recalled his fondness for sailing trips and jelly doughnuts. But at other times she spoke of his murder with an unnerving sense of perspective, as if her personal tragedy were an inevitable result of a broader societal reckoning. "I'm just so privileged that I can't imagine complaining about anything," she said. "We all lose our dads, right? Mine was to a violent crime, but, then again, it just shows that I am part of this world. If rich old white people keep putting themselves on taller and

taller pedestals, sooner or later people are going to break down the walls."

After Kaim died, Kitchen said, she finally "started showing up for life." She travelled the globe, got a bachelor's degree, and, at a hatha-yoga class in Houston, met a financial executive named Paul Kovach, who became her second husband. Kitchen was a liberal, but, as she wrote in her journal, she worried that "there was nothing I could really do to make a difference." In August of 2014, she attended a two-day symposium, "Making the Change They Want to See," at an arts center near Snowmass. One of the speakers, the artist and policy advocate Laurie Jo Reynolds, described organizing a successful campaign to shut down the Tamms Correctional Center, a notorious supermax prison in Illinois. "We are all bystanders to torture, but we don't have to be," Reynolds told the mostly white and wealthy crowd. Another speaker, Darrell Cannon, had spent twenty-four years in prison, including nearly a decade at Tamms, for a murder that he did not commit. Kitchen asked to sit beside him at a dinner after the event; she wrote in her journal that it was one of the first times she'd shared a meal with a Black man. Listening to Cannon discuss his incarceration, Kitchen felt a "deep-seated shame," and she began to think of Joseff White. "What if he had become a good person?" she wrote. "Shouldn't he have the right to be free after serving some 20+ years?"

That fall, Kitchen and Kovach enrolled in a pair of personal-development seminars offered by the company Landmark Worldwide. A corporate reincarnation of Werner Erhard's controversial self-improvement trainings, which were in vogue in the seventies, Landmark is popular today among H.R. departments and M.B.A. types. Kitchen's course leader, Josselyne Herman-Saccio, told me that Landmark helps people



Katie Kitchen petitioned for Joseff Deon White's release from prison after taking seminars in personal development.

“clear out everything in their past” and then create “something to fill that empty space.” Kitchen signed up on the advice of her stepson, an administrator at an elite private school in Manhattan, who told me he’d hoped that Landmark might help her sort out “her stuff around wealth and privilege and her father’s murder.” During the last session of the second seminar, Kitchen and some of her peers presented their work to an audience of loved ones. Kitchen invited her sisters, explaining that she’d had a “transformation.” When it was her turn to approach the microphone, she felt her heart racing. “That’s where I told them my story, and then my plan,” Kitchen recalled. “I was going to do everything in my power to get the man who killed my father out of prison.”

In Texas, state law requires parole panels ruling on a murderer’s release to solicit feedback from the victim’s family members. When White first came up for parole, in 2006, after fifteen years in prison, Kitchen’s relatives began receiving notices from Texas’s Department of Criminal Justice. (Kitchen herself had opted out of the department’s mailings.) Bruce Roberson, a family friend, wrote back on behalf of Kitchen’s mother, Elsa, to request that White remain in prison. Roberson told me, “Elsa was fervent about not letting him out while she was alive, because she feared for her life.” But by the time Kitchen had completed her Landmark course Elsa had died, and no one in the family formally opposed White’s release or Kitchen’s plans to free him.

In October of 2014, Kitchen called Mark Vinson, the prosecutor on her father’s case and one of only a few Black lawyers in the Harris County district attorney’s office at the time. During the trial, Vinson had described White as “a man who’d do anything to get paid.” Kitchen said that when she reached Vinson, who had retired, and has since died, he told her, “For the life of me, I don’t know why you would want to free that kind of a no-good man.” Kitchen then phoned the Texas Department of Criminal Justice and

learned that White was incarcerated at the Darrington Unit, a penitentiary thirty miles outside Houston. A warden’s assistant at Darrington referred her to the Department of Criminal Justice’s Victim Services Division, which runs a program that facilitates meetings between victims and offenders. Only by “looking into his eyes,” Kitchen



recalled the assistant telling her, could she determine whether White was “ready to be freed.” The notion baffled Kitchen. In her journal, she wrote, “How in the world could I make that kind of decision having only spent several minutes with the man?” But she suspected that participating in such a program

would make prison administrators more likely to take her seriously, so she enrolled, and soon learned that White was open to meeting.

Shania Springer, their mediator, declined to speak with me, citing the program’s confidentiality policies. In a promotional video shot by the Department of Criminal Justice last year, she narrates a fictional encounter between a victim, played by a white woman, and an offender, played by a Black man. After completing such sessions, Springer explains, victims often feel that they “finally have some peace.” Since the nineties, the Texas program has conducted almost eight hundred mediations, but in nearly twice as many cases the victim—or, more rarely, the offender—has withdrawn before the meeting took place. In preparation for their encounter, Kitchen and White worked with Springer and an assistant for four months. They were asked to keep journals, to complete questionnaires, and to draft imagined letters to each other. Survivors of violent crime often seek answers from perpetrators and relate the pain they’ve suffered. Kitchen, by contrast, wrote, in a pretend letter to White, “I have to believe that you never set out that night to hurt anyone.” The mediators were concerned that she might be in denial about White’s role in the crime. “They tell me that I have to come to grips with fact that JDW had killed my dad and it wasn’t an accident,” Kitchen wrote in her journal, referring to White

by his initials. “I had to let go of my ‘coping story.’”

During this period, Kitchen received a call from Cynthia Tauss, a member of the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles. White had recently come up again for parole, and word of Kitchen’s quest to free him had reached Tauss, who was one of three board members assigned to White’s case. In Texas, victim-offender dialogues are designed to have no bearing on an offender’s parole status. (They are distinct from certain pretrial restorative-justice procedures, which can sometimes result in reduced sentencing for low-level offenders.) But Tauss had been so struck by Kitchen’s efforts that she’d moved White’s case to the top of her queue and driven to the Darrington Unit to conduct his parole-assessment interview herself. She learned that while in prison White had converted to Islam, taking the name Yusuff, and had earned his G.E.D. With Kitchen’s permission, Tauss planned to recommend to the parole board that White be transferred to the Carol Vance Unit, a highly selective prison in Fort Bend County, Texas, with an eighteen-month rehabilitative program. If he completed the program, he would be freed.

Kitchen met White on May 20, 2015, in a windowless conference room at Carol Vance, a few days after his transfer. As they approached each other, Kitchen’s “whole being was filled with compassion,” she later wrote. “I reached out my hand and said ‘Hi, I’m Katie Kitchen.’” They talked for four and a half hours. White described life in prison before his transfer, when touching other inmates was forbidden and guards routinely checked his rectum for drugs. He spoke of his four children—he later discovered that he’d fathered a fifth—one of whom had a child of his own. Kitchen said she hoped that they could one day visit schools together to share their story. White told me, “I expected for the white lady to be angry, to go off on me, but it was nothing like that. It was all love.” At the end of the meeting, he asked the mediator’s permission to give Kitchen a hug.

White completed the rehabilitation program in the spring of 2017. The week he was set to be released, Kitchen flew from New York to Houston, hoping to meet him as he left prison, but she

learned at the last minute that the conditions of his parole prohibited him from having contact with her family. Instead, she hired a local filmmaker to record the first hours of White's freedom, as he moved into his uncle's home in Houston. Eight months later, after successfully petitioning the Department of Criminal Justice to waive the ban on further contact, Kitchen attended a ceremony at Carol Vance for White and other parolees. White took the stage last, wearing a paisley tie and a crocheted black taqiyah, which he'd bought, he told the audience, with earnings from his new job on an assembly line at an ambulance manufacturer. "Twenty-five years ago, I killed a man," he said. "I'm here because the daughter of this man forgave me."

Recounting this story, Kitchen sounded both proud of her efforts and embarrassed by the ease with which she succeeded. The family members of murder victims have had a formal say in the sentencing of perpetrators since the birth of the victims'-rights movement, in the seventies. Tauss, the parole-board member, told me, "When we are getting ready to release someone and the victim still feels strongly about them not being released, we usually go along with it." But victims who press for leniency have sometimes had a harder time making their voices heard. In one case in Colorado, in 2014, a judge blocked a couple's attempt to advocate against the death penalty for the man who murdered their son. Sujatha Baliga, an Oakland-based restorative-justice advocate, told me that she often meets survivors who have petitioned parole boards for permission to contact the people who have harmed them. "They are not allowed," Baliga said, "even though they deeply want to have a relationship."

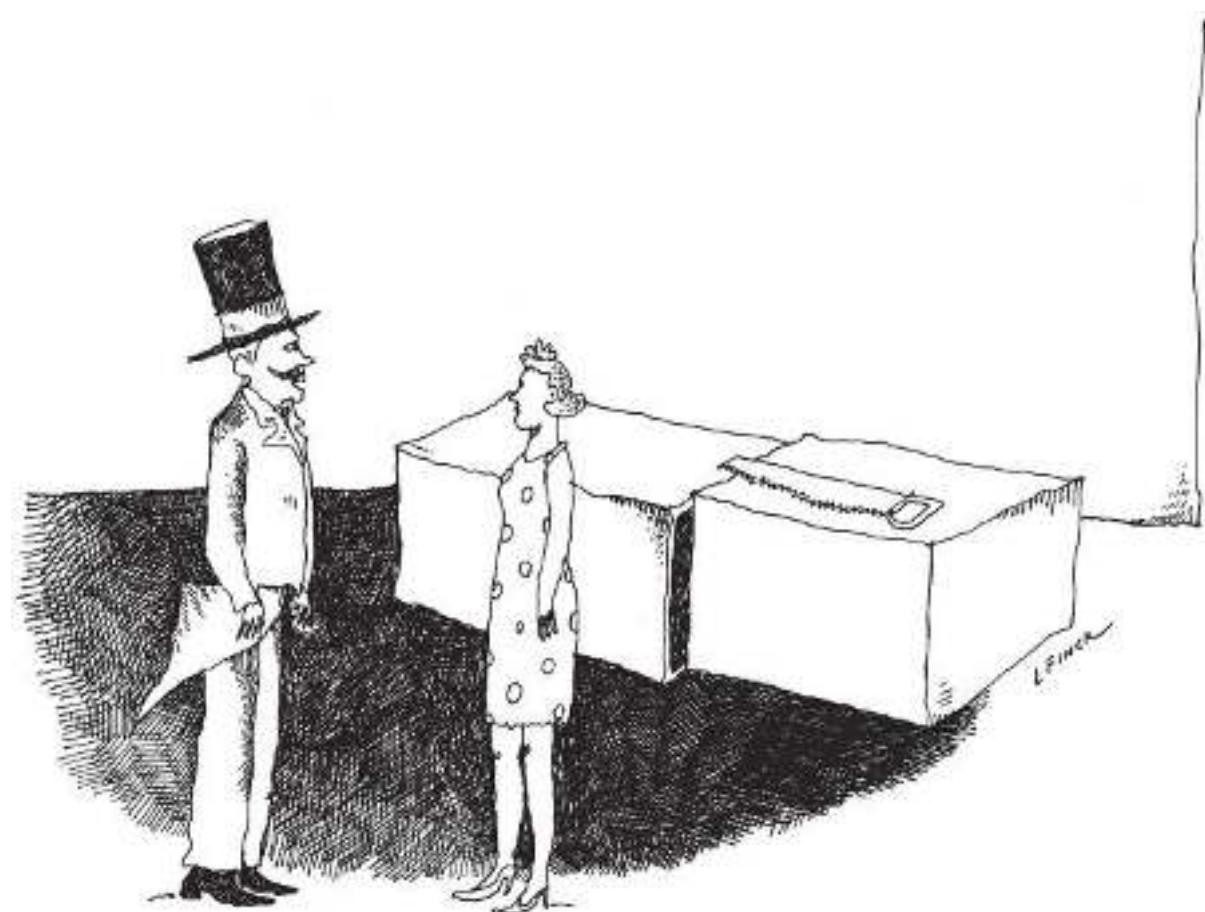
Kitchen told me that she had been ready to hire "the best lawyer in the country" to secure White's freedom. Instead, it had taken little more than a few phone calls. "What if I'd been Black?" she said. "If I hadn't looked the way I looked, I don't think they would have afforded me the same courtesy." Tauss, who is white, denied that Kitchen's race was a factor. By phone from her home, in Pearland, Texas, she said that she'd simply been impressed by Kitchen's capacity to forgive. In her decade on the

parole board, Tauss considered up to a thousand cases each month. Now retired, she recalled only a handful of victims who supported parole for their offenders. The board didn't always heed these wishes: Tauss mentioned one case she'd voted against, in which a mother who'd been raped by her son advocated for him to be freed. Still, Tauss told me, "my feeling has always been that if the victim's say is very important in not releasing someone, it should be just as important in letting someone out."

I was first introduced to Kitchen, by a mutual acquaintance, because my father was also killed in a robbery. In the summer of 1999, my parents, Turkish immigrants who'd settled in Massachusetts, took my older sister and me on a vacation to Ankara. One night, an intruder entered an open window in the apartment where we were staying and shot my father six times, while my sister and I hid in a closet. I was three years old and barely understood what had happened, but as I grew up I sought out information about the killer, whose name I found in a newspaper clipping. After my junior year of college, in 2018, I visited the lawyer, in Ankara, who had represented my family at trial. Reluctantly, he made copies of his files from the case, but he advised me not to at-

tempt to contact the killer, who was serving a life sentence in prison. The facility prohibited visits from anyone other than inmates' family members and approved guests, so I drove at a distance past its front entrance, which was flanked by armed guards. My efforts left my family aghast; my mother said that meeting the murderer would dishonor my father's memory.

With the rise of the restorative-justice movement, stories of meetings between victims and perpetrators have entered the public consciousness. "The Redemption Project," a CNN series hosted by Van Jones, has mined such encounters for their entertainment value. But I've found few detailed narratives in which someone pursues contact with a family member's killer, let alone ones in which the outcome is mutually gratifying. In "Dead Reckoning," a memoir from 2017, the Canadian social worker Carys Cragg describes her two-year correspondence with her father's murderer, who seems incapable of expressing the degree of remorse that Cragg craves. "I was seeking something from him that I knew that I would never get," she writes. "It was ludicrous of me to even try, but I had to." When I first spoke to Kitchen, in the fall of 2019, I felt both inspired and mystified by her relationship with White. Like Cragg, I



"I started as a magician's assistant, myself."

felt that my father's murderer owed me something. An explanation? An apology? I didn't understand Kitchen's willingness to aid the man who had killed her father while seemingly expecting nothing of him in return.

One morning last August, Kitchen and I visited White's house, in Acres Homes, a historically Black neighborhood in Houston. In the years since his release, Kitchen and her husband have sent Christmas gifts to White and have treated him to meals when they're in town. White lives in a beige cottage resting on cinder blocks and surrounded by a chain-link fence. As Kitchen and I pulled onto his street, we passed a horse grazing on a patch of grass beside a modest church. From the porch of the house, we could hear a Bobby Womack song drifting through the screen door. White, who is fifty-one and stocky, with tattooed forearms, stepped out, wearing calf-length cargo shorts and several silver chain necklaces. "I really want to hug you, but I won't, because of COVID," Kitchen said.

Kitchen hadn't seen White since before the pandemic, when he was still living with his uncle. As White showed us his prayer room, where pairs of worn loafers and bright sneakers were lined up neatly against the walls, she said, "You have more shoes than I do, and they're even better looking." Behind the kitchen counter was a red barber's chair, for the haircuts that White sometimes gives to neighbors and relatives. "I've been cutting hair since I was little," he said. "That was one of my first hustles." White described Kitchen as a central part of his support system, telling her, "You're on the list of people I look at and say, 'I refuse to let you down.'"

Before I arrived in Houston, Kitchen had told me that she'd never directly discussed the night of the crime with White, and that she didn't want to be present when I broached the subject. But, as we drove to lunch, at a nearby New American restaurant, with White following behind, she said that she'd had a change of heart. During our meal—a patty melt for White, a Caesar salad for Kitchen—White spoke of his time in prison. During his first year there, a Muslim inmate had given him a copy of "The Autobiography of Malcolm X," which led

MY MOTHER IN BARDO

1.

Dear Future: It's strange how much
you resemble the past, all the houses
Gone dark, the rooms where we lived
so many lives: the ruptured sofa
Groaning as we read the book about the rabbit,
the kitchen table shattered with flour
For bread, all vanished into an emptiness
thirsty as old iron, a plowshare
Left in a fallow field for decades beside
a snakeskin wound through the eyehole
Of a steer's skull. Dear Future: I am still
standing there, a shadow at the threshold.
My mother was the door through which
I entered the light. Now she is gone
Alone through her own vanishing door.

2.

With the hands of my heart
I would claw out a place
For her in the darkness beyond
breath, I would break through
The silence after heartbeat
with another rhythm hammered

him to the Quran. "Once I started learning stuff, I just kept on going," he said. He recalled his childhood, which was spent moving between Louisiana and Texas. At Yates High School, in Houston's Third Ward, he'd been a talented football player, but he began missing practices to support his mother, a nurse's aide who was raising him and his younger brother as a single parent. White dropped out in ninth grade and started selling marijuana. Later, he found work as a security guard but kept dealing drugs. I waited for an opening in the conversation, then asked, "Do you want to talk about the night?"

"I remember earlier that night. We were out drinking, smoking weed. I remember Blocker coming through," White said, referring to his accomplice. "He was, like, 'Hey, man, what you doing? I'm gonna come back and pick you up.' And so I went home and got dressed." Then White skipped past the crime, to the night of his arrest, after the police received a tip from his neighbor. "What I was going through was so painful. As

soon as they got me, they put me in a cell by myself. I was dealing with trying to figure out what happened, and it was real hard for me. All of a sudden, they're saying, 'Hey, man, you been charged with murder.' I'm not one of those guys that came up in the ghetto and went to juvie and all that." White's mother was in the hospital, with ovarian cancer, and he worried about who would care for his brother, who was fourteen. "It was just crazy, man," he said.

As White spoke, I felt put off by his focus on the toll that the crime had taken on his own life. But Kitchen was frowning sympathetically. "Were you surprised to hear that he died?" she asked him.

"I actually seen it on the news," White said. "I think it was the next day. I'm, like, 'Man, I know that house.' And that's when it dawned on me."

"But you don't remember being there, or doing it?" I asked.

"No," he said. "It's like—I really want to know, because when you're incarcerated you're in the cell by yourself, you've got a lot of time to think, and your mind

On the hide drumhead of death.
It would sound like the ghost
Of Professor Longhair raging
for goat's blood from the bowl
I hold up in the underworld, that great
New Orleans shuffle of hers, so she can
Dance again, with the hands of my heart.

3.

No one in the family thought I could do anything
practical in this world, Mother, but look:
I have raised out of the core of the firmament
of my being a great lighthouse made
Of what looks like gleaming obsidian but
in fact, if there are facts anymore, is nothing
But the grief of my time on this earth. It stands
on the edge of the valley of living fog
Where you have chosen to wander, flashing
its warning: do not turn back, do not
Think of us here still going on, because
life doesn't do that, we are here
On the wrecking stones of existence
just like you. Its light goes on
As long as I go on. So go on. And there, look
how solid it stands. Dear Future: See what I did?

—T. R. Hummer

tends to wander. And so sometimes we formulate stuff in our minds to fit where we want it to fit. Something might be missing, but we're gonna put something there. You understand what I'm saying?"

"We create a story," Kitchen replied.

According to court records, White claimed that he knew nothing about Kaim's murder when he was first questioned by police. The next day, he signed a statement saying that he had waited in the car while Blocker robbed and shot Kaim. The identity of the gunman was contested in court; the murder weapon was never recovered, and there were no eyewitnesses to Kaim's attack. (The Galleria, a glitzy Houston mall that Kaim helped to develop, offered a reward for information about the crime.) At the trial, the neighbor who'd provided White's name to the police testified that White had shown him a gun and had described robbing an old man. "He explained that he told the guy to give it up, but the guy didn't want to give it up," White's neighbor said, according to the *Houston Chronicle*. "He

said, 'You know, I had to get paid.'" White's team appealed the verdict, to no avail. The appellate judge, in his decision, questioned whether the "mysterious Jamaican" even existed. Mark Vinson, the prosecutor, had planted the same suspicion at the trial. "You know who Blocker is, don't you?" he asked the jury. "It's Joseff White."

I tried to find an answer to the Blocker question. The Houston Police Department provided me with a one-page incident report, filed the night of the crime. It notes that a Black male suspect shot Kaim and then "ran to the listed vehicle, which was waiting for him," but does not specify whether anyone else was inside. The department denied my request for a full police report, on the ground that the case technically remains open, and thus confidential, because there were two possible suspects, one of whom "was never charged and/or was unable to be located." Kitchen's ex-husband, Ben Kitchen, who died last year, had been close with her parents, and he and his second wife, Margaret,

were among the first to reach the scene. Margaret recalled hearing that there were two offenders, as did White's defense lawyer, Kurt Wentz, but neither of them could point me to any evidence. At the trial, Wentz portrayed White as the perpetrator of a "robbery gone wrong," he told me, adding, "Although Mr. White was armed, he had no anticipation of a conflict." In a "special issue" appended to their guilty verdict, the jurors found beyond a reasonable doubt that White had been the one with the gun.

Under Texas's so-called law of parties, White was liable for Kaim's death whether he pulled the trigger or waited in the getaway car; his punishment may have been the same either way. White told me he suspects that Blocker evaded arrest by fleeing back to Jamaica. Kitchen, though, found the police's failure to track down Blocker infuriating. "Is Joseff Deon White serving a 65 year sentence for a crime he only assisted in??" she wrote on a questionnaire shortly before their first encounter. Only White knows for sure whether he had an accomplice and, if he did, what role each of them played in the crime. During our lunch, Kitchen pressed gingerly for details. "So did you and Blocker share the money?" she asked White.

"Yes," White said. "He gave me some money."

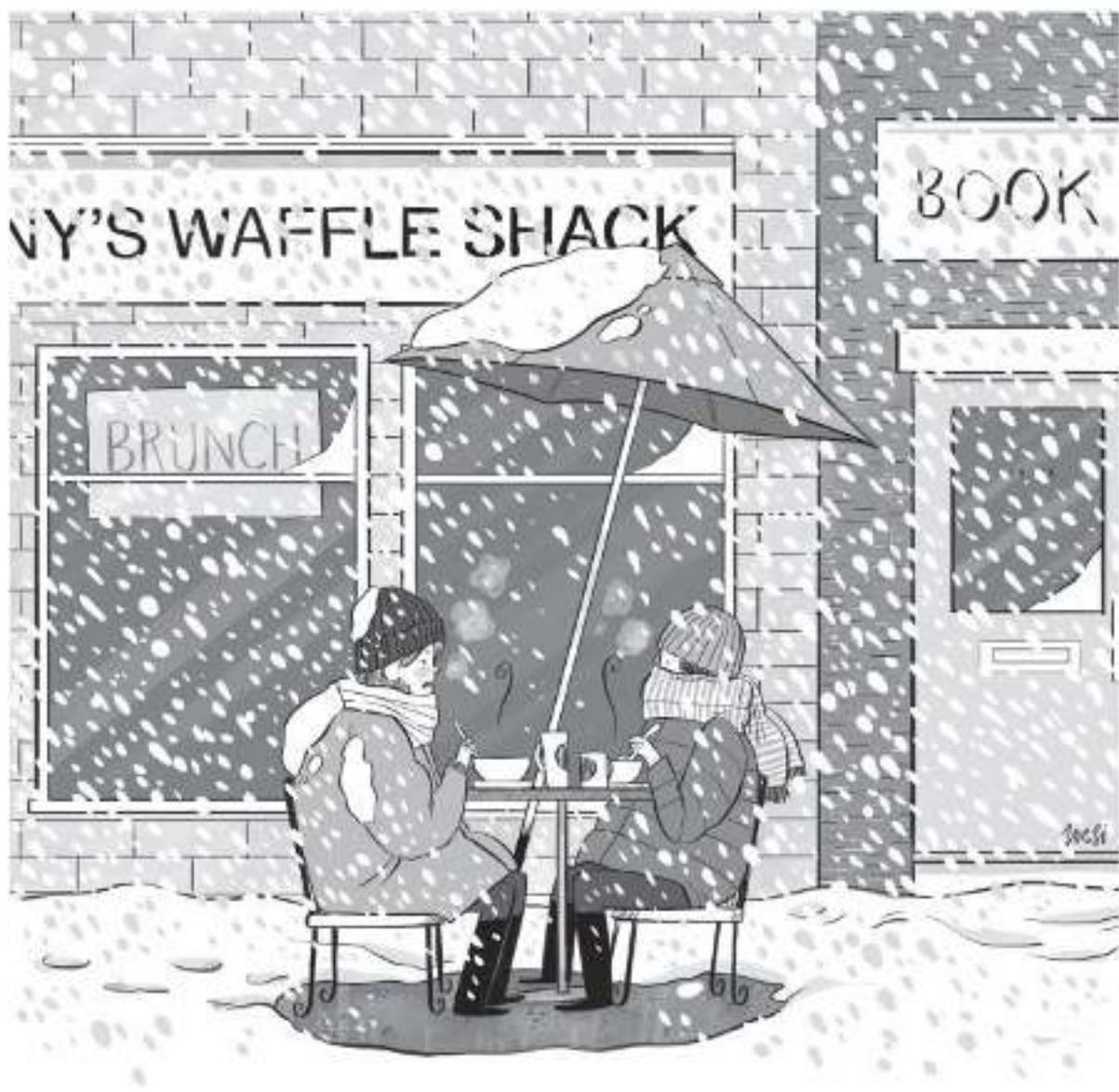
"What do you mean 'He gave you'? Didn't you get the wallet?" Whoever got the wallet was presumably the one who'd robbed and shot her father.

"I didn't get the wallet," White said, shaking his head. "I remember us being at the store. After he came back to the car, we left, and we went somewhere on the Southwest side. I think it was a Stop-N-Go. Blocker was giving me some money."

"So it was Blocker who got out of the car?" I asked. "Who killed Katie's dad? Was it you or Blocker?"

"That's the problem I have," White said. "I keep seeing different stuff. See what I'm saying? I'm trying to fit in what's missing."

Even within a single family, people grieve in different ways, and the legal procedures that allow for mercy sometimes expose the fault lines. "Meeting with a Killer," a Court TV



"Unfortunately, positive thinking is not improving this experience."

• •

documentary from 2001 that has become a touchstone for victim-offender dialogues, follows the mother and daughter of Cathy O'Daniel, a Houston woman who was raped and shot to death, in 1986, as they prepare to visit one of her two assailants in prison. During the meeting, the assailant—who raped O'Daniel but wasn't the shooter—vows to change his life, and afterward both women give him a hug. Later, though, as *Slate* reported, O'Daniel's daughter told the filmmaker that she regretted the embrace, and O'Daniel's father, who'd declined to participate in the mediation, said that he couldn't bear to watch the tape. More recently, two sons of Robert F. Kennedy—Robert, Jr., and Douglas—have supported the release of Sirhan Sirhan, who was recommended for parole after serving more than five decades in prison for assassinating their father. "I am grateful today to see him as a human being worthy of compassion and love," Douglas said last year, at a parole hear-

ing. Kennedy's widow and six of his other children have spoken out against Sirhan's release, and, in a decision last week, California's governor, Gavin Newsom, sided with them.

Although Kitchen's family members didn't oppose White's parole, some have found her friendship with him discomfiting. Kitchen's daughter, K. C. Coats, a Realtor who lives in Austin, attributed her mother's affection for White to her "childlike, innocent quality," which she described with loving skepticism. "Forgiveness can sometimes really require distance," Coats said, "because it allows you to accept someone for who they are, and they're over *there*." She added, "My mother hasn't fully let the reality of what happened wash over her. She could have kept Joseff at an arm's length, and it all would have been just as good." Ellen Benninghoven shares her sister's interest in criminal-justice reform. Before the pandemic, she volunteered weekly with a Houston-based restor-

ative-justice program called Bridges to Life, which, according to its Web site, leads incarcerated people through a curriculum "centered on responsibility, repentance, and restitution." But Benninghoven has never wanted to meet White, in part because she never got the sense from Kitchen that he was truly remorseful.

"Most of these guys, when they go through this program, they realize what they've done, and they want to say, 'I regret it,'" Benninghoven told me one night at her house. She and Kitchen were in the living room, eating mint gelato from small glass bowls and finishing a game of Rummikub. A retired real-estate agent with a chic white pixie cut, Benninghoven has a more pragmatic air than her sister. "If Joseff had said, you know, 'I'd been on drugs that night, and I really regret what I did,' it's not like he would ever have been my good friend, but I would sort of want to keep up with him." Benninghoven turned to Kitchen. "But when he couldn't say those words? And you didn't need them?"

"I didn't want him to ever have to feel he had to lie to me," Kitchen replied.

"What would he have lied to you about?" Benninghoven asked.

"Maybe he'd feel he had to say he was sorry, even if he didn't mean it."

"Well, whatever the reason was, you didn't want to hear that he was sorry."

"But he *did* tell me stuff," Kitchen said. Before my visit, she had mailed me copies of documents from the mediation process, including a debriefing questionnaire that she and White had completed after their meeting. I retrieved it from my backpack. White's handwriting was faint and cramped, but on the back of the form Kitchen had rewritten some of his answers in cursive.

"The question is 'How do you feel right now?'" I read aloud. Then Kitchen read White's answer: "I've been sorry, but now I'm even more sorry. I feel even worse for her father's life being taken, because she and her father and family are good people."

"So he did say he was sorry," Benninghoven said, a bit abashed.

"I feel he was doing the best he could," Kitchen said. When discussing White, she on occasion slipped

into an unintentionally condescending tone. Before I'd met White, she had told me that I might not be able to understand him well, because he "doesn't have great enunciation." Now, to Benninghoven, she said, "We're not all articulate. We're not all educated in a way that we can express our feelings or be smooth." Then she asked what I thought.

I told Kitchen that, as a child, I had found it comforting to know that my father's killer hadn't targeted him in particular—that the murder was, to some extent, a "random act," as I'd heard her call White's crime. Like Benninghoven, though, I chafed at Kitchen's insistence on ignoring the question of White's responsibility. In her narrative, the murder was a terrible accident, and White, because of systemic injustices, had been as much a victim as her father. I admired that her mission on White's behalf was an attempt to live up to her progressive ideals. But I wondered whether she had truly let go of what the mediators had called her "coping story." Did she accept that White may well have been the one who killed her dad, and that the crime may not have been an accident?

Kitchen stood up, paced for a few moments, and then settled on a beige armchair on the other side of the room. She started crying. "Even when I think about it right now, I'm just so sad that somebody's life would be in such a place that they would do that," she said.

I replied that she seemed plagued by an unconventional kind of survivor's guilt, stemming not from her father's fate but from White's.

She said again how sorry she felt for people desperate enough to turn to crime. "Maybe in a way it's almost disrespectful," she added. "I don't even give them enough credit that they can be held accountable."

Kitchen began giving talks about her quest to free White even before his release. "I am grateful that only one person's life was lost that night in 1991," she likes to say. She and Jamal Joseph, a formerly incarcerated screenwriter who now teaches at Columbia, have discussed the possibility of a film adaptation of her story. Joseph, who is Black, told me, "I hadn't heard a story

like this before, with someone saying, you know, 'Let me be active in forgiveness and help this person regain their life.'" Kitchen knows that some people might dismiss her as a "white savior," or as a rich lady bent on centering her own racial and political awakening. "I don't know what her motive is for publicizing her story," her oldest sister, who asked that I not use her name, told me, adding, "It sort of seems like she might want credit for it, or something." Kitchen said that she hopes to serve as a model: "People always say, 'How can you sit across from the man who did that to your family?' I want them not to say that anymore."

At her sister's house, Kitchen had worried that my own unresolved feelings about my father's killer might affect how I portrayed her. "When you do decide to write what you write, I hope it will be you as the educated adult, as opposed to the child who has lost his dad," she told me. When I relayed Kitchen's story to Sujatha Baliga, the restorative-justice advocate, she acknowledged that Kitchen's lack of interest in White's culpability was uncommon. Baliga was sexually abused by her late father, and she is working on a book about how she came to forgive him. But she said it's a mistake to presume that survivors should feel a certain way. "In my line of work, I have to constantly suspend the need for other people to have my needs," she told me. Indeed, as I reported on Kitchen's story, I grew less frustrated by the evasive manner in which she and White discussed the murder. It moved me that each seemed attuned to what the other needed from their unusual friendship.

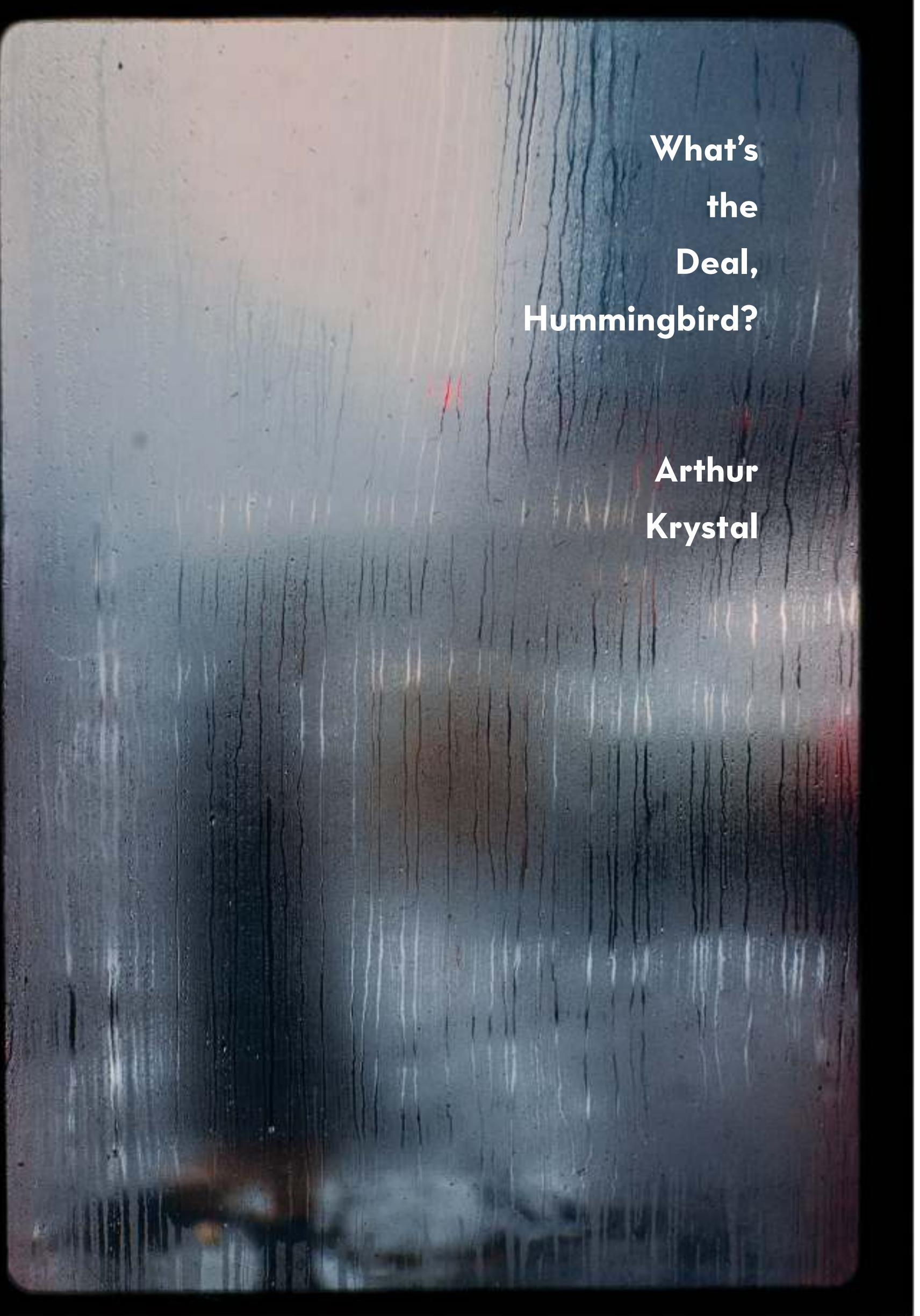
White clearly coöperated with this piece largely out of obligation to Kitchen. "Whatever she asks me to do, if I have time for it, I'll make time for it, because I feel like I owe her so much," he told me. Without Kitchen as an intermediary, though, White was hard to get in touch with. He works two full-time jobs, as an electrician by day, with his uncle, and as a security guard at night. After weeks of trying, I reached him one evening in Octo-

ber, over FaceTime, while he was working a shift in the parking lot of a hookah lounge in downtown Houston. A silver security badge gleamed against the breast of his black shirt. I thought that without Kitchen present White might share more details about the night of the crime, or even admit to the murder. Instead, to my surprise, he told me the same thing that he'd told the police the morning after his arrest: he'd been in the car outside Kaim's house, but it was Blocker who'd robbed and shot him. "I wasn't no killer, man," White said.

He explained that he didn't feel he'd had any power to tell his side of the story at the trial. Kurt Wentz, his lawyer, had chosen not to put him on the stand. "It was me, as a young Black boy, young Black man, whatever you want to call it, against the system," White said. I asked why he hadn't told any of this to Kitchen at lunch—and why, at the ceremony for Carol Vance parolees, in 2017, he'd introduced himself as someone who'd "killed a man." White brought up Toastmasters, a public-speaking program that he'd completed before his release from prison. "One of the things you learn is knowing your audience," he said. "When you do speeches, you have to reach people and touch them the way you feel like they can be touched. To be honest, don't nobody wanna hear, 'O.K., I'm in prison, and she got me out, but really I ain't the one who did it.' People want to hear a story, to motivate them, to know that things get better."

His comment reminded me of an entry in Kitchen's journal, from 2018, after she and White gave a talk at the Darrington Unit. Before it began, she pulled White aside to ask if he worried that their story might sound like "bragging to folks who were stuck inside prison." White reassured her. "He told me that many times when one is inside one thinks about taking one's life. It all seems so hopeless about ever getting out. He said our story will give them Hope. The fact that anything can happen to you." ♦





What's
the
Deal,
Hummingbird?

Arthur
Krystal

On or around May 5th of 2020, he just stopped. He stopped exercising, stopped walking, stopped reading, stopped planning. He ate, drank, washed, and paid the bills, but that was it. He was seventy-three. He'd spent more than 38,368,800 minutes on earth, only a precious few of which he remembered. That's what hit him one evening, after the cheering and clanking of pots and pans had died down: a vast chunk of his life—the greater part of his life—might as well never have occurred. Not just the time spent sleeping but those millions of minutes spanning lunches, dinners, meetings, concerts, marriage, work, books, movies, conversations—all gone. What remained? A bird's breath of his existence. Sitting with his mother in Prospect Park when an actual bird had shat on her dress and he, eight years old, thought the world had swerved off course. Wounding a squirrel with a BB gun when he was ten and crying over the small quivering body. Losing a footrace when he was twelve because he was so far ahead he thought he could slow down. Sparring at seventeen with a handsome Black kid who fought as an amateur under the name of Voodoo DaLeeba. Smoking a joint in Sheridan Square Park when an old man in tattered clothes approached and said, "If you tell me you love me, I'll tell you how to make a lot of money." Watching "2001: A Space Odyssey" in a movie theatre on Fifty-first Street and softly whistling when the dark bone flung into the air descends and suddenly there's a white satellite sailing through space. Running headlong down a steep hill in a Kentucky hollow, exhilarated by the danger of falling and breaking his legs. Bumping into a friend, who told him that she had slept with two men that day, and it so aroused him that he asked if he could be the third. Inhaling an intensely aromatic 1990 La Tâche at a Sotheby's pre-auction tasting. Listening as Seiji Ozawa conducted "The Rite of Spring" at Tanglewood when the skies darkened and thunder rumbled and a hard slanting rain sheeted into the tent, spraying the audience and the musicians onstage. Ozawa didn't seem to notice, but he noticed that the musicians were smiling, almost grimacing. The strings cried with the wind and thumped with the drums, and the horns played searing notes in various keys and it was so fuck-

ing wonderful that he never even thought to look over at his girlfriend.

For a time, he wanted to live for art, a fatuous notion since he couldn't write, paint, or sculpt, and played the piano with a vague melancholic air that impressed no one. A small trust allowed him some leeway during the seventies, but once he had his fill of moving around he took a job in a large advertising agency where he made nice with people he often liked but never admired. When he was thirty, he met a woman whose skin and smell were so intoxicating that he foolishly spent every dollar he earned trying to hold on to her, even though he knew it was hopeless. She was twenty-four and thought cocaine, vodka gimlets, and going to CBGB part of the natural life cycle. Five months after she totalled her dark-blue MG, killing herself and a grad student, he married someone who knew more about books than he did. She didn't want children and, after a while, he didn't, either. His wife was a writer and a lecturer at various colleges, mostly in the East, so he met a lot of people in the arts, all but one of whom disappeared from his life after the divorce. How many times had he slept with his wife in nineteen years of marriage and the four months before that? Nineteen hundred times? Three thousand times? Five thousand four hundred and twenty-two? Shouldn't he remember how it felt at least some of those days and nights? It's so damned intimate being inside another person. Isn't it?

In the morning, he occasionally listened to Ben Webster.

By August, 2020, his sense of time had gone kablooey. Events thirty years in the distance now knocked at the door, while things he'd done five weeks earlier seemed impossibly remote. He remembered watching war movies made in 1945 and thinking they were ancient because it was 1960. Now he thought "The Graduate" and "Jaws" were contemporary films. How do you know what you've forgotten? He knew only that he was a case of nerves between two eternities. His first day of college—that he remembered. He'd stood in line to register behind a tall, light-haired, long-legged girl who ended up in two of his classes. It was 1965 and she

came to class barefoot, wearing skimpy white shorts. He remembered one of their professors saying, "As long as you're alive, you're immortal." He believed that for about five minutes and then he wondered how many other professors got things wrong. He remembered getting drunk and wanting to fight a cop during a protest against Dow Chemical, and being pulled away by his roommate. He remembered a long purple-and-white scarf he wore in college that no one else remembered. He remembered sitting in the Jardin des Tuileries next to a handsome middle-aged woman and her daughter, who looked like Catherine Deneuve. They struck up a conversation and the woman invited him to lunch, but he declined. Why? He remembered going into a pâtisserie after having rehearsed saying "*Je voudrais acheter une boîte de chocolats*" and being mistaken for a Parisian. He remembered a sunset in Provence, a hostel in Montpellier where he played Ping-Pong, a dog he almost hit when he was driving from Nice to Antibes. He remembered his wife pressing him to read "The Death of Ivan Illyich." He read it and was bored. He remembered dropping acid on Martha's Vineyard and asking everyone who Martha was. No one knew. He remembered the last woman he had slept with. She had been sixty-two. How strange was that? He remembered the first time he removed a girl's bra, only to think about a character in "Catch-22" who claimed that life is all downhill after that. He remembered meeting Joseph Heller at the office of the Brooklyn parks commissioner back in 1998 or '99. He remembered being face to bosom with Jackie Onassis as he was going up the stairs at the Metropolitan Opera and she was coming down. He remembered sitting on the Sixty-fifth Street crosstown bus opposite Paul Newman, who was wearing a beautiful tan shearling coat and orange-tinted sunglasses. He remembered Lauren Bacall, leaning on a walker, asking him to reach for something on a shelf at Zabar's. He remembered sitting in a Thai restaurant at a table next to Mick Jagger, Jerry Hall, and two bodyguards. Jagger caught him sneaking a glance and said, "It makes the food taste better, don't it?" He remembered sitting across from John Updike on a 1 train heading downtown from 155th Street. He remembered getting into an argument

with Christopher Hitchens over who disliked Henry Kissinger more. He remembered shaking the hand of Willie Pep in a high-school gym in West Orange, New Jersey. Pep was old by then and his small hand was soft and felt padded.

In the morning, he sometimes listened to the "Pastoral" Symphony.

Even before the pandemic, he barely heard from anyone. His old college friends were more absorbed than ever in the lives of their children and grandchildren, and he had neither one nor the other. "Social media" were words he heard a lot but they meant nothing to him. He didn't have many close friends. One had died of a stroke; another had killed himself by jumping from a ferry in the English Channel, his body never recovered. When he looked at people he knew, he considered their absence. He himself was more or less in good health: no blood-pressure pills, no blood thinners, no prostate issues. But he had no energy. Without anyone cooking for him or watching what he ate, he subsisted on sandwiches, take-out, and Entenmann's. With nothing to do, he began thinking about suicide. But suicide required planning and he wasn't up to it. He owned a gun, but he wasn't about to shoot himself or leap to his death or jump in front of a train, and pills were not foolproof. Then the pandemic hit and he stopped thinking about dying.

The pandemic perked him up. He didn't tell people that, but, come on, it was the most interesting thing to happen to the world since 9/11. He didn't downplay the misery and suffering it caused, but that was the point: it killed people. Every day there was a body count, every day there were stories of loss, separation, and grief. Every day he read about or heard accounts of the heroic behavior of essential workers, frontline workers, and first responders, of spouses and children keeping vigil outside hospitals that shut them out. Life had become a constant threat to life. It was a goddam ticking time bomb is what it was. Sure, it could feel good when you were young and fit, but

what had he done with his youth? He had never kept a diary and regretted, even resented, not knowing where he'd been or what he'd felt at 12:48 P.M. on November 2, 1978. It wasn't supposed to be this way. He'd retired when he was sixty-nine, but he'd still gone through the motions. He went out, attended openings and the opera, dined in good restaurants, borrowed books from the Society Library, and visited New Orleans and San Francisco. He even tried snorkeling in the Keys. But COVID put a stop to that, and then he stopped.

Obviously, he was afraid of catching the virus, but he rather liked the masks, the forced anonymity, the social distancing, the sense of fear on the streets. He didn't mind lining up to get into a CVS and he got used to ordering his groceries over the phone, though the stores always got something wrong. And though he no longer walked regularly, he'd go out after it rained, when there were fewer people around. He now had an excuse for doing what he always wanted to do: live in the world without anyone noticing. Instead of feeling housebound, he felt content to be at home. And now when he had nothing to do he felt justified in doing nothing. As for boredom, well, sure, but when had he ever not been bored?

"You need to get Netflix," his ex-wife told him. She had called him about two weeks after New York went into lockdown, partly out of guilt and partly because she was just a nice person. "Watch 'Call My Agent,'" she said. "It'll cheer you up." He promised her he would, without intending to follow through, but she knew him, so she put him on her account and e-mailed him her password, which obligated him to watch it. She was right: it cheered him up. He asked her what else he should

watch and quickly marshalled against the plague—as though they were chess pieces in his match with boredom—"Longmire," "Get Shorty," "Sneaky Pete," "Justified," "Line of Duty," "The Kominsky Method," "Peaky Blinders," "Ozark," "Bosch," "The Americans," "A French Village," "The Queen's Gambit," and the always soothing "The Durrells in Corfu." Damn it if he didn't begin to live with these imaginary people, and he hated it when a se-

ries ended. It was like the death of a friend, several friends. What he needed, he told his ex, was a series that would run for as long as he did.

"Give 'Cobra Kai' a try," she e-mailed one night.

"No, there are limits," he wrote back.

"Do it," she said.

One night, six months into the pandemic, when no one knew how bad it would get, he watched "The Third Man," which he hadn't seen in thirty years, and partway through, as he lay on his couch, he began to feel something he had trouble identifying. It took a few seconds to understand that he felt happy. The writing, the direction, the acting, the lighting, the set design, the music, the cinematography—everything worked so well that he wanted to call up Graham Greene and ask him, What's the deal with the stupid, annoying landlady? Why couldn't he have left her out?

Sometimes in the afternoon he listened to Al Green or Sam Cooke or the Staple Singers.

Music had always been there. He had grown up listening to the radio, to Cousin Brucie, Murray the K, and, later, switching over to FM, Jonathan Schwartz and Allison Steele. Although he didn't remember the first time he heard the Shirelles singing "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?," it was the first popular song that had stuck with him. He remembered the first time he heard "Satisfaction," the first time he heard a recording of Bill Evans playing "Some Other Time," the first time he heard the Toccata and Fugue in D Minor on WQXR, the station of the New York Times. He remembered George Jellinek, but not the other hosts. He remembered Lenny Bernstein saying, in some interview or other, that he found it hard to breathe when conducting the "Missa Solemnis." If he had to guess, it would be during the Sanctus, about fifty-three minutes into the piece and lasting a little under thirteen minutes. Pensive strings with light support from flutes usher in a radiant violin solo right before the Benedictus. Only Beethoven could have written this, and hearing it made the world bearable for a while.



Music cut out the noise. Rock, country, folk, jazz, or classical, it didn't matter; it cut out the noise. And, Lord knows, there was plenty of noise now. The nation seemed to be imploding. Watching the news, switching between Fox and CNN, he remembered a movie he'd seen some years back; it could have been five, it could have been ten. The movie was available on demand, so he watched it again and liked it, but thought it sometimes talked because it could. Brad Pitt played a hit man who shows up at a bar to get paid off. But the man who hired him now feels he deserves a discount. They discuss it while a small TV overlooking the bar plays a live feed of a youngish Barack Obama delivering his election victory speech. When he gets to the part about America being one country, one community—out of many, one—Pitt's character scoffs, "It's a myth created by Thomas Jefferson . . . a rich wine snob who was sick of paying taxes to the Brits." Pitt's hard-bitten cynicism caps the film. "Don't make me laugh," he says. "I'm living in America, and, in America, you're on your own. America's not a country. It's just a business. Now fucking pay me."

He had never given much thought to what America was about. It was above his pay grade. Once, it had been about the old versus the young, about supporting the war in Vietnam or opposing it, but, with the televised killing of George Floyd, America had become a misfire, a moral mare's nest. We'd found the secret portrait recording our sins: slavery, Jim Crow, our treatment of Chinese workers, Native Americans, unions, women. But it was still America, right? Give me liberty or give me death. Four score and seven years ago. Ask not what your country can do for you. "When the values go up up up/ And the prices go down down down/ Robert Hall this season/ Will show you the reason/ Low overheads." Compared to murdering fucking Nazis and crazed, robotic Japanese soldiers, we were goddam saints. Anyway, what was he supposed to do about it? His skin puckered on the inside of his elbows, hair grew in his ears, dark spots mottled the backs of his hands—what do you call them? Liver spots, sun spots, age spots? Too many to know which were recent and which had been around a while. He should have taken pictures of them and dated each photo, so he could track their number

and location, a chronological map that led to oblivion. In the meantime, noise. People wanting to wrap the country in a shroud and bury it—tearing down statues, renaming buildings and holidays, cancelling this person and that one, stopping the publication of a book because its author was accused of rape. Where was Kate Smith when you needed her? And what happens? Thousands of malevolent idiots storm the Capitol because a reckless lowlife narcissist pays them a little attention, making them feel they're still protagonists in the nation's history. Is this what America is about? A reign of error countered by a reign of terror? And everything playing out against a plague killing millions around the world. What did it all amount to? Maybe just numbers. Generations come and generations go, but space and dark matter abide forever. He remembered a student paper his wife had shown him. She had assigned her class a short story that ended with the words "My God, only a moment of bliss. Why, isn't that enough for a whole lifetime?" The student had somehow missed the comma in the last line, which only made his paper more heartfelt. His wife had given him an A.

In the evening, because he was essentially a simple man, he occasionally listened to Puccini.

When he was young, he liked to travel. He'd done the Grand Tour thing several times and fallen in love with Italy. He remembered visiting the Uffizi for the first time and thinking, This is what a museum should feel like. He remembered buying a print of Botticelli's "Primavera," a detail, actually, that he'd hung in his first apartment, in Chicago. He remembered Shirley Hazzard, who'd been a friend of his wife's, saying to him, "It's *Cap-ri*, not *Cup-ri*." He remembered riding a motor scooter in Ibiza in '71 or '72. He'd gone to a beach and had sunburned like crazy. That night, he picked up a short, pretty American girl, taken her back to his room, and had painful, slapstick sex. He remembered a lion in a cage in the Bronx Zoo. The cage was small and filthy and sat on wheels. He remembered the first time he had crunched into butterfly shrimp in a Chinese restaurant. He remembered that

he had remembered and then forgotten the name of the duck dish that he used to order in a restaurant that had long since closed. He remembered frankfurters sizzling on a grill at a deli called Schweller's. He remembered a game of touch football in Brookline, or was it Boston? He remembered a pipe he had smoked for a year after quitting cigarettes. He remembered a pair of Frye boots that he had worn to the ground. He remembered jogging around the Central Park Reservoir a few yards behind Willie Nelson. He remembered a lyric about listening to Chet Baker on the beach, in the sand, with the leaves falling down. He remembered a hysterical woman in a bloody nightgown stopping him on West End Avenue brandishing a carving knife. It was late, the street was deserted, and the woman was screaming in Spanish. He calmed her down and cautiously pried the knife from her fingers, which is how the police, guns in hand, found them: a twentysomething man holding a large knife, and a woman in a nightgown covered in blood. He remembered a piece of pineapple upside-down cake a girlfriend's mother had given him. He remembered hitching from Paris to Calais one summer and getting picked up in a cream-colored Rolls-Royce by a London publisher, who took him home and played him recordings of Schubert's lieder. He remembered being driven off the highway outside Covington, Kentucky, by a man who wanted to have sex with him. He remembered the Lionel electric train set that his father had bought him after his mother died. He remembered the afternoon that his mother, wearing a green velour hat, had picked him up at day care. Upon seeing her, he had exclaimed, "What's the deal, hummingbird?", and she had given him a brilliant smile and replied, "Hey, what's the word, banana peel?" For the whole ride back to the house, she had chuckled and tousled his hair, and when they got home she picked up the phone and called his father. She then motioned him over so he could speak into the receiver. He repeated what he'd said and his father slowly let out his deep-chested laugh. "So what's the word, banana peel?" he roared.

Why, isn't that enough for a whole lifetime? ♦

THE CRITICS



A CRITIC AT LARGE

EAT PREY LOVE

The unsettling book behind a classic children's movie.

BY KATHRYN SCHULZ

It is one of the most famous murders in the history of cinema. A mother and her child are out for a walk, on the first warm day after a bitter winter. Beguiled by the changing weather, we do not see the danger coming. In fact, we never see it at all, because the man with the gun remains offscreen. We see only the mother's sudden alarm; her panicked attempt to get her child to safety; their separation in the chaos of the moment; and then the child, outside in the cold as snow once again begins to fall, alone and crying for his mother.

The film in question is, of course, the 1942 Walt Disney classic "Bambi." Perhaps more than any other movie made for children, it is remembered chiefly for its moments of terror: not only the killing of the hero's mother but the forest fire that threatens all the main characters with annihilation. Stephen King called "Bambi" the first horror movie he ever saw, and Pauline Kael, the longtime film critic for this magazine, claimed that she had never known children to be as frightened by supposedly scary grownup movies as they were by "Bambi."

Unlike many other Disney classics, from "Cinderella" to "Frozen," this fright fest is not based on a fairy tale. It was adapted from "Bambi: A Life in the Woods," a 1922 novel by the Austro-Hungarian writer and critic Felix Salten. The book rendered Salten famous; the movie, which altered and overshadowed its source material, rendered him virtually unknown. And it rendered the original "Bambi" obscure, too, even though it had previously been both widely acclaimed and passionately re-

viled. The English-language version, as translated in 1928 by the soon to be Soviet spy Whittaker Chambers, was enormously popular, earning rave reviews and selling six hundred and fifty thousand copies in the dozen-plus years before the film came out. The original version, meanwhile, was banned and burned in Nazi Germany, where it was regarded as a parable about the treatment of Jews in Europe.

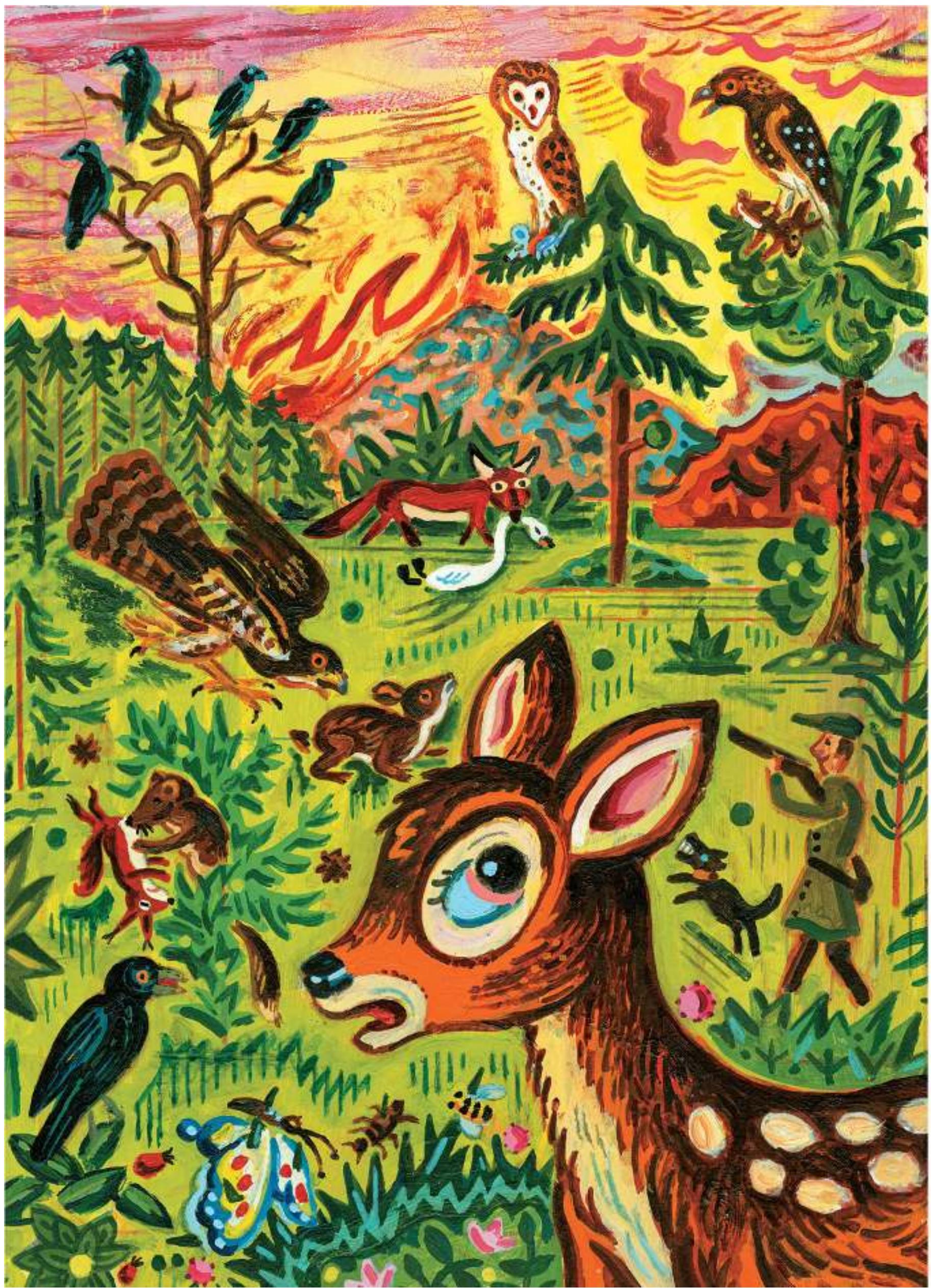
As that suggests, "Bambi" the book is even darker than "Bambi" the movie. Until now, English-language readers had to rely on the Chambers translation—which, thanks to a controversial copyright ruling, has been the only one available for almost a century. This year, however, "Bambi: A Life in the Woods" has entered the public domain, and the Chambers version has been joined by a new one: "The Original Bambi: The Story of a Life in the Forest" (Princeton), translated by Jack Zipes, with wonderful black-and-white illustrations by Alenka Sottler. Zipes, a professor emeritus of German and comparative literature at the University of Minnesota, who has also translated the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm, maintains in his introduction that Chambers got "Bambi" almost as wrong as Disney did. Which raises two questions: How exactly did a tale about the life of a fawn become so contentious, and what is it really about?

Felix Salten was an unlikely figure to write "Bambi," since he was an ardent hunter who, by his own estimate, shot and killed more than two hundred deer. He was also an unlikely figure to

write a parable about Jewish persecution, since, even after the book burnings, he promoted a policy of appeasement toward Nazi Germany. And he was an unlikely figure to write one of the most famous children's stories of the twentieth century, since he wrote one of its most infamous works of child pornography.

These contradictions are nicely encapsulated by Beverley Driver Eddy in her biography "Felix Salten: Man of Many Faces." Born Siegmund Salzmann, in Hungary in 1869, Salten was just three weeks old when his family moved to Vienna—a newly desirable destination for Jews, because Austria had lately granted them full citizenship. His father was a descendant of generations of rabbis who shook off his religious roots in favor of a broadminded humanism; he was also a hopelessly inept businessman who soon plunged the family into poverty. To help pay the bills, Salten started working for an insurance company in his teens, around the same time that he began submitting poetry and literary criticism to local newspapers and journals. Eventually, he began meeting other writers and creative types at a café called the Grienstein, across the street from the national theatre. These were the fin-de-siècle artists collectively known as Young Vienna, whose members included Arthur Schnitzler, Arnold Schoenberg, Stefan Zweig, and a writer who later repudiated the group, Karl Kraus.

Salten was, in his youth, both literally and literally promiscuous. He openly conducted many affairs—with chambermaids, operetta singers, actresses, a prominent socialist activist,



Felix Salten's 1922 novel sought to educate naïve readers about the violence of nature, as well as about man's threat to it.



"We've rehearsed this conversation several times in my head—do not go off script."

and, serially or simultaneously, several women with whom other members of Young Vienna were having dalliances as well. In time, he married and settled down, but all his life he wrote anything he could get paid to write: book reviews, theatre reviews, art criticism, essays, plays, poems, novels, a book-length advertisement for a carpet company disguised as reportage, travel guides, librettos, forewords, afterwords, film scripts. His detractors regarded this torrent as evidence of hackery, but it was more straightforwardly evidence of necessity; almost alone among the members of Young Vienna, he was driven by the need to make a living.

Yet, like his father, Salten could be reckless with money. Anxious to seem like an insider, he insisted on eating, drinking, dressing, and travelling in the manner of his wealthier peers, with the result that he was constantly accruing debts, some of which he dispatched in dodgy ways—for instance, by “borrowing” and then selling a friend’s expensive books. And he could be reckless in

other respects, too. Inclined to be touchy, either by temperament or because he felt the need to prove himself, he spent much of his young life fomenting disputes (he once walked into the Griesteidl and slapped Kraus in the face after the latter criticized him in print), then resolving them via lawsuits or duels. Both his personal judgment and his critical judgment could be impulsive and errant; in his thirties, he borrowed prodigiously to produce a modernist cabaret, of the kind that was all the rage in Berlin, only to see it become a critical and financial catastrophe.

The production that brought Salten the most infamy, however, did not bear his name: *“Josefine Mutzenbacher; or, The Story of a Viennese Whore, as Told by Herself.”* Published anonymously in Vienna in 1906, it has been continuously in print since then, in both German and English, and has sold some three million copies. Despite the subtitle, no one ever seems to have entertained the possibility that it was written by a prostitute, or even by a woman.

In Salten’s lifetime, nearly everyone thought he wrote it, except for those who liked him too much to believe he could produce something so filthy and those who hated him too much to believe he could produce something so well written. Salten himself twice claimed not to have been responsible for it but otherwise was silent or coy on the subject. These days, everyone from academics to the Austrian government regards him as the undisputed author of the book.

Written in the tradition of the ribald female memoir, à la “Fanny Hill,” *“Josefine Mutzenbacher”* recounts the sexual adventures of the title character beginning when she is five years old, and continuing after her turn to prostitution in her early teens, following the death of her mother. Today, what is most shocking about the book is Josefine’s youth. At the time, however, most of the scandal concerned her unapologetic embrace of her career, which she both enjoyed and credited with lifting her out of poverty, educating her, and introducing her to a world far wider than the impoverished Vienna suburbs where she (like Salten) grew up.

Perhaps inevitably, scholars have tried to draw parallels between *“Josefine Mutzenbacher”* and *“Bambi.”* Both title characters lose their mothers while still in their youth; both books introduce readers in detail to urban borderlands—the poor suburbs, the flophouses, the forests—about which most proper Viennese were largely ignorant. Still, for the most part, such comparisons seem strained. *“Josefine Mutzenbacher”* occupies much the same place in the Salten œuvre as his homage to carpets: the one that lies at the intersection of ambition, graphomania, and penury.

But the place of *“Bambi”* is different. If there is a through line to Salten’s scattershot career, it is his interest in writing about animals, which was evident from his first published work of fiction: *“The Vagabond,”* a short story about the adventures of a dachshund, written when he was twenty-one. Many other nonhuman protagonists followed, most of them ill-fated: a sparrow that dies in battle, a fly that hurls itself to death against a windowpane. Salten’s novel *“The Hound of Florence”* concerns a young Austrian man destined to spend every other day

of his life as the archduke's dog; in the end, he is stabbed to death, in his dog form, while trying to protect a courtesan he loves from assault. (In an even more drastic transformation than the one "Bambi" underwent, this story became, in Disney's hands, "The Shaggy Dog.") "Fifteen Rabbits" features, at first, fifteen rabbits, who debate the nature of God and the reason for their own persecution while their numbers gradually dwindle. "Renni the Rescuer," about a German shepherd trained as a combat animal, features a carrier pigeon traumatized by its wartime service. And then, of course, there is "Bambi"—which, like these other stories, was not particularly suitable for children, until Disney bowdlerized it to fit the bill.

If you haven't seen the Disney version of "Bambi" since you were eight, here is a quick refresher: The title character is born one spring to an unnamed mother and a distant but magnificently antlered father. He befriends an enthusiastic young rabbit, Thumper; a sweet-tempered skunk, Flower; and a female fawn named Faline. After the death of his mother the following spring, he and Faline fall in love, but their relationship is tested by a rival deer, by a pack of hunting dogs, and, finally, by the forest fire. Having triumphed over all three, Bambi sires a pair of fawns; as the film concludes, the hero, like his father before him, is watching over his family from a faraway crag.

"Bambi" was not particularly successful when it was first released. It was hampered partly by audience turnout, which was down because of the Second World War, and partly by audience expectations, since, unlike earlier Disney productions, it featured no magic and no Mickey. In time, though, "Bambi," which was Walt's favorite among his films, became one of the most popular movies in the history of the industry. In the four decades following its release, it earned forty-seven million dollars—more than ten times the haul of "Casablanca," which came out the same year. Perhaps more notably, it also earned a dominant position in the canon of American nature tales. In the words of the environmental historian Ralph Lutts, "It is difficult to identify a film, story, or animal character that has had a greater influence on our vision of wildlife."

That vision is of an Eden marred only by the incursion of humankind. There is no native danger in Bambi's forest; with the exception of his brief clash with another male deer in mating season, and maybe that hardscrabble winter, the wilderness he inhabits is all natural beauty and interspecies amity. The truly grave threats he faces are always from hunters, who cause both the forest fire and the death of his mother, yet the movie seems less anti-hunting than simply anti-human. The implicit moral is not so much that killing animals is wicked as that people are wicked and wild animals are innocent. Some years ago, when the American Film Institute compiled a list of the fifty greatest movie villains of all time, it chose for slot No. 20—between Captain Bligh, of "Mutiny on the Bounty," and Mrs. John Iselin, of "The Manchurian Candidate"—the antagonist of "Bambi": "Man."

Unsurprisingly, "Bambi" has long been unpopular among hunters, one of whom sent a telegram to Walt Disney on the eve of the film's release to inform him that it is illegal to shoot deer in the spring. Nor is the film a favorite among professional wilderness managers, who now routinely contend with what they call "the Bambi complex": a dangerous desire to regard nature as benign and wild animals as adorable and tame, coupled with a corresponding resistance to crucial forest-management tools such as culling and controlled burns. Even some environmentalists object to its narrowness of vision—its failure to offer audiences a model of a healthy relationship between people and the rest of the natural world.

But perhaps the most vociferous if also the smallest group of critics consists of devotees of Salten, who recognize how drastically Disney distorted his source material. Although the animals in the novel do converse and in some cases befriend one another across species, their over-all relations are far from benign. In the course of just two pages, a fox tears apart a widely beloved pheasant, a ferret fatally wounds a squirrel, and a flock of crows attacks the young son of Friend Hare—the gentle, anxious fig-

ure who becomes Thumper in the movie—leaving him to die in excruciating pain. Later, Bambi himself nearly batters to death a rival who is begging for mercy, while Faline looks on, laughing. Far from being gratuitous, such scenes are, in the author's telling, the whole point of the novel. Salten insisted that he wrote "Bambi" to educate naïve readers about nature as it really is: a place where life is always contingent on death, where starvation, competition, and predation are the norm.

That motive did not make Salten go easy on human beings. On the contrary: his depiction of our impact on nature is considerably more specific and violent than the one in the film, not to mention sadder. Consider the moment when Bambi, fleeing the hunting party that kills his mother and countless other creatures, comes across the wife of Friend Hare, in a scene that reads like something out of "Regeneration," Pat Barker's novel about the First World War:

"Can you help me a little?" she said. Bambi looked at her and shuddered. Her hind leg dangled lifelessly in the snow, dyeing it red and melting it with warm, oozing blood. "Can you help me a little?" she repeated. She spoke as if she were well and whole, almost as if she were happy. "I don't know what can have happened to me," she went on. "There's really no sense to it, but I just can't seem to walk. . . ."

In the middle of her words she rolled over on her side and died.

What purpose are scenes like that one serving in this book? Salten maintained that, despite his own affinity for hunting, he was trying to dissuade others from killing animals except when it was necessary for the health of a species or an ecosystem. (That was less hypocritical than it seems; Salten despised poachers and was horrified by the likes of

Archduke Franz Ferdinand, who boasted of killing five thousand deer and was known to shoot them by the score as underlings drove them into his path.) But authors do not necessarily get the last word on the meaning of their work, and plenty of other people believe that "Bambi" is no more about animals than "Animal Farm" is. Instead, they see in it



what the Nazis did: a reflection of the anti-Semitism that was on the rise all across Europe when Salten wrote it.

As a textual matter, the best evidence for this proposition comes from two parts of “Bambi” that never made it onto the screen. The first concerns Faline’s twin brother, Gobo, who was written out of the movie. A fragile and sickly fawn, Gobo cannot flee during the hunting rampage that kills Bambi’s mother and Friend Hare’s wife. For several months, he is presumed dead. Then one day Bambi and Faline spot a deer making its way across an open meadow with reckless nonchalance, as if oblivious to any possible peril.

This newcomer turns out to be the grownup Gobo, who, we learn, was rescued by a member of the hunting party, taken into his home, and nursed back to health. When Gobo returns, the other forest animals gather to hear him describe the kindness of the hunter and his family, the warmth of the dwelling, and the meals that were brought to him every day. Most of them think that Gobo’s time among humans has made him dangerously naïve, but he is convinced that it has made him wiser and more worldly. “You all think He’s wicked,” he tells them. (In Salten’s books, humans are typographically styled the way God is: singular and capitalized.) “But He isn’t wicked. If He loves anybody,

or if anybody serves Him, He’s good to him. Wonderfully good!”

Every subjugated minority is familiar with figures like Gobo—individuals who have assimilated into and become defenders of the culture of their subjugators, whether out of craven self-interest or because, like Gobo, they are sincerely enamored of it and convinced that their affection is reciprocated. Such figures often elicit the disdain or the wrath of their peers, and Salten leaves little doubt about how he feels: Bambi “was ashamed of Gobo without knowing why,” and the half-tame deer soon pays the price for his beliefs. One day, ignoring the advice of other animals, Gobo strolls into the meadow even though the scent of humans fills the air. He is confident that they won’t harm him, but he is shot in the flank while his love interest looks on. As she turns to flee, she sees the hunter bent over Gobo and hears his “wailing death shriek.”

One understands why Disney left that part out. So, too, a scene in Salten’s book where a dog kills a fox, which unfolds at a horrifyingly leisurely pace. The fox’s paw is shattered and bleeding, and he knows he will die soon, but he pleads with the dog: “Let me die with my family at least. We’re brothers almost, you and I.” When that fails, he accuses the dog of being a turncoat and a spy. The dog works himself into a frenzy defending the virtue and the power of his mas-

ter, then itemizes all the other animals who serve humankind:

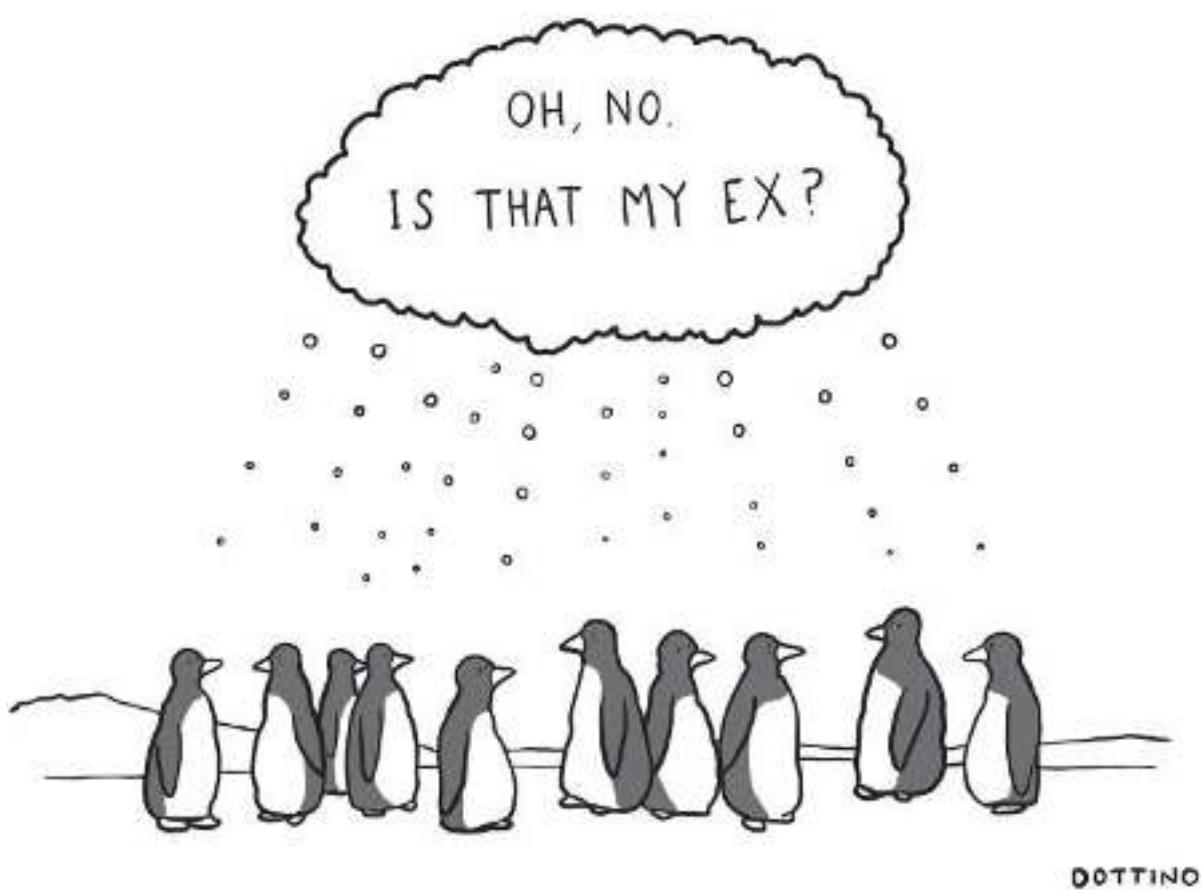
“The horse, the cow, the sheep, the chickens, many, many of you and your kind are on His side and worship Him and serve Him.”

“They’re rabble!” snarled the fox, full of a boundless contempt.

It is easy, in light of these scenes, to see why some people interpret “Bambi” as a covert account of the crisis facing European Jews in the nineteen-twenties—a story about innocent creatures forced to remain constantly vigilant against danger, from would-be betrayers within and proto-Brown Shirts without. Some of Salten’s biography supports that reading, starting with the fact that he knew a thing or two about assimilation. “I was not a Jew when I was a boy,” he once wrote; raised in a household that prized European liberalism, and educated in part by pious Catholic teachers who praised him for his knowledge of the catechism, Salten only really began to identify as Jewish in his late twenties, when he grew close to Theodor Herzl, a fellow Austro-Hungarian writer and the father of the Zionist movement. He claimed that it was Herzl’s pamphlet “The Jewish State” that made Salten, as he wrote, “willing to love my Jewishness.”

If so, that love was, to say the least, complicated. On the one hand, Salten began writing a weekly column for Herzl’s Jewish newspaper, in which he grew more and more critical of the assimilationist impulse that had shaped his childhood; on the other hand, he wrote it anonymously and refused to set foot in the newspaper’s offices. In later years, his increasing willingness to embrace his Judaism corresponded, not coincidentally, with the increasing anti-Semitism in Vienna, which made it impossible for Jews to forget or deny their religious background.

In 1925, three years after “Bambi,” Salten published “New People on Ancient Soil,” the product of a visit to Palestine and a book-length tribute to his friend’s dream of a Jewish state. A decade later, his books, together with countless others by Jewish authors, were burned by the Nazis, and two years after that, following Germany’s annexation of Austria, he moved to Switzerland. Salten died in Zurich, at the age



of seventy-six, four months after Hitler killed himself.

Does all this make “Bambi” a parable about Jewish persecution? The fact that the Nazis thought so is hardly dispositive—fascist regimes are not known for their sophisticated literary criticism—and, for every passage that supports such a reading, numerous others complicate or contradict it. Many critics see in “Bambi” different or more diffuse political sentiments, from a generalized opposition to totalitarianism to a post-First World War commentary on the brutality of modern combat. All these readings are plausible, including the specifically Jewish one and Salten’s own interpretation of his work as a plea for greater understanding of and greater care for the natural world. Yet the most striking and consistent message of the book is neither obliquely political nor urgently ecological; it is simply, grimly existential.

Whatever else “Bambi” may be, it is, at heart, a coming-of-age story, cervine kin to “Oliver Twist,” “Little Women,” and “Giovanni’s Room.” In the language in which it was written, however, it is often described not as a bildungsroman—a general novel of maturation—but more specifically as an *Erziehungsroman*: a novel of education and training.

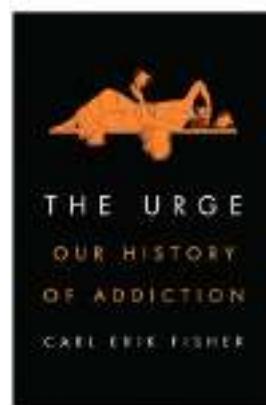
The agent of that education is a character known as the old Prince, the oldest surviving stag in the forest, and the lessons he imparts are not subtle. When he first encounters Bambi, the latter is still a fawn, dismayed because his mother has lately grown distant—pushing him away when he tries to nurse, and walking off without caring whether he is following. Thus rebuffed, he is by himself in the middle of the forest bleating for her when the old Prince appears and scolds him. “Your mother has no time for you now,” the old Prince says. “Can’t you stay by yourself? Shame on you!”

That, in two sentences, is the ultimate message of “Bambi”: anything short of extreme self-reliance is shameful; interdependence is unseemly, restrictive, and dangerous. “Of all his teachings,” Salten writes, “this had been the most important: you must live alone. If you wanted to preserve yourself, if you understood existence, if you wanted

BRIEFLY NOTED



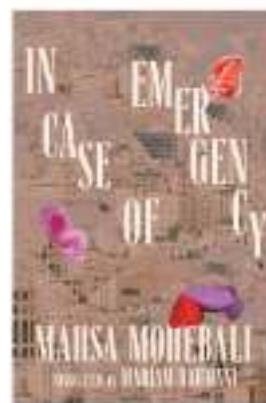
Free, by Lea Ypi (Norton). This memoir of growing up amid Albania’s transition to a democracy is bounded by two revolutions: the violent uprisings against the Communist regime in 1990, and those that took place seven years later, against the depredations of the economic “shock therapy” that followed its collapse. Ypi, who was twelve at the time of the first protests, writes with compassion and dry humor of the dismantling of the world view—in which socialism meant that “everyone was already free”—that she internalized in grade school. As the reductive tenets of proletarian struggle give way to the equally facile doctrines of capitalism and privatization, she finds the latter, which has devastated Albania’s economy, to be deeply flawed. She ultimately launches a search for a new definition of “freedom” that would tame “the violence of the state” in all its forms.



The Urge, by Carl Erik Fisher (Penguin Press). Addiction is variously described as a brain disease, a personal demon, and an epidemic. This compelling history holds that it is simply “part of humanity.” Fisher, an addiction physician and a recovering addict, illustrates the “terrifying breakdown of reason” that accompanies the condition by drawing on patients’ anecdotes and on his own experience. He also highlights the ways in which stigmas—such as the “firewater” myth, which held that Native Americans were uniquely vulnerable to alcohol addiction—have provided “ideological cover” for policing certain groups.



It's Getting Dark, by Peter Stamm, translated from the German by Michael Hofmann (Other Press). The characters in this absorbing story collection are bound by loss—of love, of fortune, of the lives they once had, or the ones they’ve missed out on. In one tale, a man discovers a flirtatious e-mail on his girlfriend’s computer and, assuming the interlocutor’s name, carries on a written affair with her. In another, a model imagines switching places with a sculpture of herself, situated in the home of a well-to-do businessman. Though moody, the collection is tinged with hope, as when a tarot-card reader tells a woman, “I can see how everything will end. What I can’t see is what we make of it, what we’ll look back on. And that’s what happiness is.”



In Case of Emergency, by Mahsa Mohebali, translated from the Farsi by Mariam Rahmani (Feminist Press). This novel, published in Iran in 2008, takes place in Tehran in the course of a day when the city has been flung into chaos by a series of earthquakes. Shadi, the young, disaffected narrator, is less concerned with the disaster than she is with locating her next opium fix. Rather than flee the city with her family, she spends the day traversing it, getting high with various misfit friends and making observations about Tehrani society with her acerbic wit. Her sardonic commentary is interspersed with sensual descriptions of her highs, and of the periodic quakes roiling the ground beneath her. “I wish I could sink, pour into the earth and dance with her,” she declares. “Let the tremors crawl through my body. I don’t want them to stop.”

to attain wisdom, you had to live alone.” This is not “The Lorax” or “Maus.” This is “The Fountainhead,” with fawns.

Most panegyrics to the solitary life written by men have an element of misogyny in them, and “Bambi” is no exception. Seemingly brave and vivacious in her youth, Faline grows up to be timid and lachrymose; she “shrieked and shrieked,” she “bleated,” she is “the hysterical Faline.” When she and Bambi are (for lack of a better word) dating, the old Prince teaches Bambi to ignore her calls, lest they come from a hunter imitating the sound. Like Gobo, the romance between the childhood friends is doomed by the logic of the book. “Do you love me still?” Faline asks one day, to which Bambi replies, “I don’t know.” She walks away, and “all at once, his spirit felt freer than for a long time.” All other relationships with the female of the species have a similarly short life span; fatherly love is enduring and ennobling, motherly love juvenile and embarrassing. “Bambi” ends with its hero importuning two fawns, just as the old Prince had importuned him, to learn to live alone.

The curious thing about this insistence on solitude is that nothing in the book makes it seem appealing. The chief trajectory of Bambi’s life is not from innocence to wisdom; it is from contentment and companionship—in his youth, he cavorts with Gobo and Faline, with magpies and Friend Hare, with screech owls and squirrels—to isolation and bare-bones survival. Stranger still, this valorization of loneliness seems unrelated to the book’s second explicit moral, which concerns the relationship between human beings and other animals. In the final pages, the old Prince takes Bambi, himself now old and beginning to gray, to see something in the woods: a dead man, shot and killed by another hunter. (Amazingly, Walt Disney planned to include this scene in his film, excising it only after the sight of the corpse made an entire test audience leap out of their seats.) With the old Prince’s prompting, Bambi concludes from this experience not that we humans are a danger even unto one another but, rather, that other animals are foolish for imagining that we are gods merely because we are powerful. “There is Another who is over us all,”

he realizes while contemplating the dead man, “over us and over Him.” The old Prince, satisfied that his work is done, goes off to die.

This vague gesture in the direction of deism has no antecedent in the book, no moral or theological trajectory to make Bambi’s insight meaningful or satisfying. On the contrary, the book is at its best when it revels in rather than pretends to resolve the mystery of existence. At one point, Bambi passes by some midges who are discussing a June bug. “How long will he live?” the young ones ask. “Forever, almost,” their elders answer. “They see the sun thirty or forty times.” Elsewhere, a brief chapter records the final conversation of a pair of oak leaves clinging to a branch at the end of autumn. They gripe about the wind and the cold, mourn their fallen peers, and try to understand what is about to happen to them. “Why must we fall?” one asks. The other doesn’t know, but has questions of its own: “Do we feel anything, do we know anything about ourselves when we’re down there?” The conversation tacks back and forth from the intimate to the existential. The two leaves worry about which of them will fall first; one of them, gone “yellow and ugly,” reassures the other that it has barely changed at all. The response, just before the inevitable end, is startlingly moving: “You’ve always been so kind to me. I’m just beginning to understand how kind you are.” That is the opposite of a paean to individualism: a belated but tender recognition of how much we mean to one another.

What are we to make of this muddy, many-minded story? Zipes, in his introduction, blames some of the confusion on Chambers, contending that he mistranslated Salten, flattening both the political and the metaphysical dimensions of the work and paving the way for Disney to turn it into a children’s story. But that claim is borne out neither by examples in the introduction nor by a comparison of the two English versions, which differ mainly on aesthetic grounds. Zipes is knowledgeable about his subject matter, but he is not a lucid thinker or a gifted writer (a representative sentence from the introduction: “Salten was able to capture this existential quandary through a compas-

sionate yet objective lens, using an innovative writing technique that few writers have ever been able to achieve”), and the Chambers translation, from which I have quoted here, is much the better one.

In both versions, the “Bambi” that emerges is a complex work, part nature writing, part allegory, part autobiography. What makes it such a startling source for a beloved children’s classic is ultimately not its violence or its sadness but its bleakness. Perhaps the most telling exchange in the book occurs, during that difficult winter, between Bambi’s mother and his aunt. “It’s hard to believe that it will ever be better,” his mother says. His aunt responds, “It’s hard to believe that it was ever any better.”

It’s tempting to read those lines, too, as a commentary on the Jewish condition, if only because—to this Jew’s ears, at least—they have the feel of classic Jewish dark humor: realistic, linguistically dexterous, and grim. Yet no one alive today can regard such a sentiment as exclusive to any subgroup. It is simply a way of seeing the world, one that can be produced by circumstance, temperament, or, as in Salten’s case, both. Reading him, one suspects that the conventional interpretation of his most famous work is backward. “Bambi” is not a parable about the plight of the Jews, but Salten sometimes regards the plight of the Jews as a parable about the human condition. The omnipresence and inevitability of danger, the need to act for oneself and seize control of one’s fate, the threat posed by intimates and strangers alike: this is Salten’s assessment of our existence.

One of the forgotten novelist’s most forgotten novels, “Friends from All Over the World,” is set in a zoo that is maintained by an enlightened and humane zookeeper yet remains, intrinsically, a place of suffering and cruelty. The animals within it, Salten writes, “are all sentenced to life imprisonment and are all innocent.” That is a lovely line, and one that seems to apply, in his moral universe, to all of us. In the forest—that is, in a state of nature—we are in constant danger; in society, tended and cared for but fundamentally compromised, we are still not out of the woods. ♦

RADICAL ACTS

The many lives of Lorraine Hansberry.

BY BLAIR MCCLENDON



With "A Raisin in the Sun," Hansberry became an emblem of American progress.

It is a lonely, wild, and often fatal thing to be Black and brook no compromise. Lorraine Hansberry was rigorous and unyielding in her life, but she was gone too soon and claimed too quickly by those who thought they understood her. Like many other Black giants of her time, her image proved pliable in death. She was turned into a saint so that her life could be turned into a moral. Yet she struggled beneath the weight of her own complexities and sorrows. She achieved literary celebrity but called herself a “literary failure,” was supported in a marriage that ultimately collapsed, resisted her family but didn’t denounce it, became an icon of the civil-rights movement that she relentlessly criticized, and wrote a masterpiece only to watch as it was widely misunderstood.

When I first encountered “A Raisin in the Sun,” I treated the play with suspicion. I was in high school, and thought that any Black writer who received such universal praise must have, in some way, sold out. I followed Hansberry’s protagonist, Walter Younger, Jr., as he confronted the future, “a big, looming blank space—full of *nothing*.” I watched him try to fill that space, begging and plotting and raging and falling into the abyss of deferred dreams that still swallows people whole. Despite my best efforts, I was moved. Perhaps I had succumbed; perhaps I would sell out, too.

But I had misread Hansberry. She knew all about Black success in America—its rewards, its costs, its limits—and her vision of it was murkier and more unsettling than she is given credit

for. “A Raisin in the Sun” was the first play written by a Black woman to appear on Broadway—in 1959, when Hansberry was twenty-eight. It was an instant hit, and Hansberry’s age, race, and gender made her an emblem of American progress. “Raisin” follows the rise and fall and rise again of the Youngers, a Black mid-century family trying to turn its loss into a legacy. Walter Younger, Sr., has died, and the payout from his life-insurance policy promises to transform his family: five people across three generations squeezed into a kitchenette on Chicago’s South Side. Walter’s widow, Lena, uses part of the windfall for a down payment on a home in a white neighborhood. Against her better judgment, she entrusts another part to Walter Younger, Jr., to open up a liquor store, instructing him to set aside enough for his sister Beneatha’s medical-school education.

It is very nearly a tragedy. Walter believes so deeply in the American Dream that he cannot see the traps laid in his path. His business partners swindle him, and he loses everything. He is offered a devil’s bargain to gain a small portion of it back: a white man from the Youngers’ new neighborhood offers to pay them to relinquish their house. Things can be set right if they will give in. But Walter, who has considered his whole life a failure, refuses to say “yes, sir” yet again. The curtain closes as the family prepares to move into their new home.

On its surface, “Raisin” was the perfect play for its time. The Youngers are dignified, working-class folk, hemmed in by injustice, demanding nothing more than their fair share of the national bounty. For liberal white audiences, the play suggested an uplifting moral about universal humanity. For liberal Black audiences, it was consistent with the messaging of the civil-rights movement.

But Hansberry was more radical than her broad appeal would suggest. This was the same playwright who would later insist that it was quite reasonable for Black people to “take to the hills if necessary with some guns and fight back.” As Charles J. Shields writes in his new biography, “Lorraine Hansberry: The Life Behind ‘A Raisin in the Sun’” (Knopf), Hansberry’s ex-husband and longtime collaborator “wept with

disappointment” over the early reviews. They struck him, Shields explains, as “too mild, and none of the themes or ideas were touched on about Black family life, the stresses of poverty, the conflict of the generations—nothing.”

In recent years, the puzzling paradox of how a Black lesbian Communist became a darling of mainstream America has been explored in multiple biographies, including Imani Perry’s “Looking for Lorraine” and Soyica Diggs Colbert’s “Radical Vision,” and in Tracy Heather Strain’s documentary “Sighted Eyes/Feeling Heart.” Shields’s portrait is the latest attempt to expand our sense of the personal struggle behind the public figure, and to illuminate the many contradictions that she sought to live and work through.

Hansberry was not raised to be a radical. She was born in Chicago in 1930, the child of an illustrious family that was well regarded in business and academic circles. Lorraine’s father, Carl Augustus Hansberry, was a real-estate speculator and a proud race man. When Lorraine was seven years old, the family bought a house in a mostly white neighborhood. Faced with eviction by the local property owners association, Carl fought against racially restrictive housing covenants in court. Shortly before the case was argued, a crowd of white neighbors gathered outside the Hansberry home. Nannie, Lorraine’s mother, stood watch with a gun. Someone hurled a brick through the window, narrowly missing Lorraine’s head. When the police finally arrived, one officer remarked, “Some people throw a rock through your window and you act like it was a bomb.” It was 1937. The bombing of Black families would come.

Carl Hansberry’s fight wound up before the Supreme Court, where he won his suit; Lorraine, perhaps, learned something about the need to stay and fight for what you deserve. Or at least that’s the neatest version of the story. Shields’s biography lays out a more complex narrative of political inheritance. Carl was not just a warrior against housing segregation. He was also, Shields says, the

“king of kitchenettes,” a businessman who spotted an opportunity in Chicago’s rapidly growing Black population. Urban housing was scarce, in part because white landlords refused to rent apartments to Black families. Carl, through a few intermediaries, set about “blockbusting”—getting white families to sell cheaply by moving Black residents into their neighborhoods. He’d buy a building, then erect flimsy, flammable partitions dividing the apartments into cramped kitchenettes—like the one that the Youngers yearn to escape. “When a decent return on rental property was 6 percent, Hansberry was making 40,” Shields writes. This unseemly fact

has been glossed over by some biographers, who have described Carl Hansberry as an entrepreneur. The complaints from his renters make clear that “slumlord” is a more accurate description.

For Lorraine, being the daughter of a kitchenette king was a problem from the start. Shields describes her being sent to kindergarten in an expensive white ermine coat, then shoved to the ground by her classmates, leaving the fur stained. As she grew up, she drifted away from the politics of her parents, who remained committed Republicans even as most Black voters were shifting their party allegiance; at the University of Wisconsin, she began campaigning for Henry Wallace’s Progressive Party. After the police turned up at a local protest that Hansberry attended, her parents forbade her to continue supporting the insurgent candidate. “I am quite sick about it,” she wrote to a close friend. “They are afraid Little Lorraine will call up one night from the police station and ask for her pajamas.” She kept volunteering for Wallace.

Hansberry also got involved in student theatre, and her nascent political and artistic aspirations fed off each other. In another letter, she wrote, “One either writes, paints, composes or otherwise engages in creative enterprises . . . on behalf of humanity—or against humanity.” Never a strong student, Hansberry left school during her sophomore year and moved to New York. She took a job as an assistant at

Freedom, the Harlem-based leftist newspaper run by Paul Robeson, and was immediately thrust into the city’s political ferment. The names that crop up in Shields’s biography—Robeson, Julian Mayfield, W. E. B. Du Bois, Alice Childress, Ruby Dee, Ossie Davis, Claudia Jones (Hansberry’s erstwhile roommate)—read like a *Who’s Who* of the postwar Black intelligentsia, which is to say, it reads like a list of F.B.I. surveillance targets.

Whether she knew it or not, Hansberry was already one of them. She had been identified by an F.B.I. informant at a meeting of a leftist college group; by the time she died, in 1965, the Bureau’s file on her was a thousand pages long. In 1952, when Robeson was unable to attend an international peace conference in Uruguay—the State Department had cancelled his passport—Hansberry went in his place. She wrote an article describing the trip, in which she referred to the Korean War as “the murder in Korea” and denounced U.S. domination of Latin American economies. If she wasn’t yet a revolutionary, she was certainly talking like one.

But *Freedom* was falling apart. As the civil-rights movement shunned many of the leftists with whom it had once made common cause, fault lines among Black activists became unbridgeable divides. The vice-president of the New York chapter of the N.A.A.C.P., buckling under anti-Communist pressure, shouted down Robeson during a panel on helping Black people find jobs in radio and television. Many prominent intellectuals disavowed their old allegiances, but Hansberry, whose fealty to the Communist cause endured, later called the N.A.A.C.P. “outmoded.”

Through her political circles, Hansberry had met Robert Nemiroff, the son of Russian Jewish immigrants, and the two became a couple. Hansberry called him, with a certain fondness, a “wide-eyed, immature, unsophisticated revolutionary.” On the eve of their wedding, in 1953, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were executed. The fiancés slipped out of a party at the Hansberry family home to attend a candlelight vigil. In an unpublished short story based on the event, Hansberry evoked her outrage that night, a “desire to fling the glass into the flow-



ers, to thrust one's arms into the air and run out of the house screaming at one's countrymen to come down out of the apartments." In college, Hansberry had said that artists had to be for or against humanity. The narrator of her story looks at the moral disaster and wonders, "What shall I say to my children?"

Hansberry and Nemiroff shared political commitments, but "desire" in a deeper sense was missing from their marriage. Hansberry wrote to her husband obliquely about her attraction to women: "I want one or two things which you simply cannot give." In letters, she seems torn between her radicalism and the social conservatism of her upbringing. Intellectually, she had reservations about marriage—"I know, for instance, that one does not go on loving people because one says meaningless vows"—but she struggled to see the alternative: "What then? Promiscuity? Revolting."

The internal conflict between Lorraine the Village radical and Lorraine the daughter of the Chicago bourgeoisie would become a familiar and painful one. She believed that homophobia was a "philosophically active anti-feminist dogma." She subscribed to *The Ladder*, the "first national lesbian publication," and when it ran a piece about "how lesbians should dress and act" she dashed off a characteristically emphatic letter to the editor. As a child of the Black élite, she wrote, she had been taught how to dress and act for the "dominant social group." It had not changed which hotels would deny her entrance, or stopped the cops from sneering at her mother when a brick shattered her window. Appeasement, Hansberry believed, wouldn't get you very far. Her demand was freedom, nothing less.

But living freely could be nearly impossible. Even when Hansberry's marriage began to dissolve and she started dating women, she and Nemiroff continued living together. (They would divorce a year before her death.) Her sexuality was well known in the Village, where she could be seen driving a convertible with a girlfriend, but it was never a public matter in her lifetime. When "A Raisin in the Sun" made her a celebrity, the editors of *The Ladder* tried to persuade her to come out publicly. Hansberry said that, as a Black lesbian

Communist, she had been forced to decide "which of the closets was most important to her."

It is hardly surprising, then, to encounter Hansberry writing to Nemiroff, in 1956, that she was "terribly lonely, almost to the point of madness." Adding to her despair was the torture of writing. In her early twenties, she had finished several plays and staged readings with her friends, but she considered the work inadequate. In a letter, Nemiroff wrote, "You are so obviously grappling with yourself, uncertain, unresolved about many things." What she needed was "a little more self-confidence; a little more self-honesty and self-criticism." He continued to champion her after their marriage ended, managing her career and prodding her to write through bouts of depression.

In her journals, Hansberry described an ordinary day in the fall of 1956: she thawed a chicken for dinner; a "very dull" friend came over; she "smoked cigarettes and longed to be quite dead." She was unmoored, unable to finish her play. In a beautiful and harrowing pas-

sage, she writes, "Outside it is already deep autumn again and I am twenty-six and somehow there are leaves, the brown, unhappy, useless ones on the sidewalks of the streets outside—even though there are no trees. . . . If such emptiness only had a shape." The anguish generated by her torpor calls ahead to the fear of a big nothing that threatens to consume Walter Younger, Jr.

Only two years before "Raisin" opened, Lorraine gathered all her material for the play in the fireplace and prepared to burn it. Nemiroff took the pages away. A few days later, he put the script in front of her and she went back to work.

Success tends to make itself seem inevitable, but at every stage "A Raisin in the Sun" was an unlikely prospect. The initial producers were record-label owners who knew little about developing a Broadway show. Fund-raising stalled, and there were disputes over who should direct. In January, 1959, after stops and starts, the play premiered in New Haven, with Sidney Poitier starring as Walter Younger, Jr. On March 11th,



"And this is the part that will never let you forget the time you called your third-grade teacher 'Mom.'"



"If you cried a little during the week, maybe you wouldn't have to scream at the game all weekend."

it opened at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre, in New York.

"Raisin" is a naturalist drama, sliding coolly between despair and hope, often by way of bitter jokes. In the opening act, when the life-insurance check arrives, Walter, Jr.,'s wife, Ruth, tells Lena that she ought to go to Europe. After all, she points out, "rich white women . . . don't think nothing of packing up they suitcases and piling on one of them big steamships and—swoosh!—they gone, child." Lena simply laughs: "Something always told me I wasn't no rich white woman." It's a funny retort, but Hansberry lets the meaning hang in the air. Her entire play revolves around that "something"—the forces that withhold simple dignity from Black Americans.

For some critics, the play was a triumphant story of overcoming these forces. In the final scene, Lena says proudly, of her son, "He finally come into his manhood, today, didn't he?" The seemingly happy ending, which some audiences considered a quasi-revolutionary

act, was easy to rally around. One critic applauded the show for displaying Black people's ability to "come up with a song and hum their troubles away." It no doubt helped that all the Youngers want is to own a business and a home. Walter is not staging a sit-in, staring down the police, or seizing the means of production. He wants to get rich. He wants to own property. And who out there beyond the stage lights didn't?

For starters, Black radicals even younger than Hansberry. Amiri Baraka later recalled thinking that the play was "middle class"; the Youngers' fixation on "moving into white folks' neighborhoods" looked like an endorsement of an assimilationist agenda. But this was never Hansberry's intent. Of the critic who understood her characters to be carefree, she wrote, in the *Village Voice*, "It did not disturb the writer that there is no such implication in the entire three acts." Hansberry's play is a masterpiece because it pushes ideas until they mutate; what might read at first

as a moral triumph is too complex, too enmeshed in the compromises of American life to be so easily summed up.

Reducing "Raisin" to the standoff between the Youngers and their bigoted neighbors ignores the play's clashes within its Black world—between genders, generations, and classes. The class conflict is perhaps best captured by Walter's sister, Beneatha, and her rich suitor, George Murchison, whom she insists she'll never marry. The Murchisons, she explains, are "honest-to-God-real-live-rich colored people, and the only people in the world who are more snobbish than rich white people are rich colored people." When her mother admonishes her not to hate the rich for being rich, Beneatha responds that plenty of people hate the poor for being poor.

Hansberry admitted that her family was more like the Murchisons than the Youngers. When "Raisin" premiered in Chicago, what should have been a momentous homecoming turned into a fiasco. The city had doggedly pursued the Hansberry company over unpaid fines and the poor living conditions at its properties, issuing arrest warrants for all proprietors of the business, including Lorraine. On opening night, she had to flee Chicago—shadowed by the very class divide that her play so sharply portrays.

Shields holds up this apparent contradiction as proof of Hansberry's inconsistency. How, he wonders, could she endorse "economic justice for Black Americans that would give them access to better opportunities and a standard of living consistent with the pursuit of happiness" and also oppose capitalism, which had made her family—and then her—rich? "She never seemed to understand the complex ways aspiration, democracy, and an advanced market economy can go hand in hand," Shields writes.

But this was exactly what Hansberry did understand. Walter, Jr., is sick with aspiration and capitalism, and all that democracy talk flitting around the country isn't helping him get well. "Raisin" punctures the American Dream, but takes seriously the question of why it has such power in the first place. Lena puts it starkly:

LENA: Son—how come you talk so much 'bout money?

WALTER: Because it is life, Mama!

LENA: So now it's life. Money is life. Once upon a time freedom used to be life—now it's money. I guess the world really do change . . .

WALTER: No—it was always money, Mama. We just didn't know about it.

Absent a political education, Walter demands the best thing he can imagine, which is the right to be a boss. Who can say that he is wrong? Money *is* life. People die for a lack of it every day. Yet Hansberry puts the line into the mouth of a man descended from people who were made into capital. *Money is life* has historically been a reality too literal to bear. Walter thinks that he's taking a step up, but listen closely and it sounds like he's giving in to a darker idea. Hansberry knew that dreams like Walter's were lodged deep in the breasts of their dreamers. What she doubted was whether they were worth it. She had always had what the Youngers wanted. It did not keep the despair at bay, nor had it set the world free.

Hansberry had been intoxicated by the idea of public renown long before she achieved it. When she was twenty-five, she wrote, "Fame. It has become a sweet promise, hiding, whispering to me daily. . . . I shock myself with such thought and shake my head with embarrassment—fame!" "*Raisin*" depends on the tension produced by such a shock. It admits a fact denied by people of many races and politics: what a particular Black person wants may not always be consonant with freedom. American history has placed such weight on the meaning of those wants that it can be hard to look at them straight on. Hansberry didn't turn away.

After "*Raisin*," writing was still a struggle; depression was still stifling. Even as the play received widespread acclaim—or perhaps precisely because it did—Hansberry considered it dramatically flawed. When adapting it for the screen, she set about trying to make improvements, adding new scenes with more obviously political material. They never made it into the film.

Her next play—she didn't know it would be her last—was "*The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*," about Village intellectuals whose artistic careers are floundering and whose love lives are a mess. In the opening scene, Sidney, a pretentious newspaper editor, advises a

protégé to "presume no commitment, disavow all engagement, mock all great expectations"—a succinct summary of the kind of writing that Hansberry despised. The play opened to unenthusiastic reviews. One, Shields notes, deemed it "an unresolved chaos of liberalistic political and sexual ideas."

Through it all, Hansberry was sick and getting sicker. She had ulcers, anemia, and calcium deposits. She visited doctors and underwent exploratory surgery. The truth was that she had pancreatic cancer, but she was never told; Nemiroff concluded that it would be better if she didn't know how dire the state of her health was. Their friends took up a collection while she was in the hospital, not to pay for her care but to keep "Sidney Brustein" running. The play closed on January 12, 1965, the night Hansberry died. She was thirty-four years old.

In a speech a few weeks before "*Raisin*" debuted in New York, Hansberry said it was a Black writer's duty to join "the wars against one's time and culture." One can barely imagine what she would have achieved had she been able to stay in the wars longer, through the terrible, astonishing years that followed. Instead, she was drafted into the culture in ways that likely would have discomfited her. She became a star—bright but distant.

Years ago, in my first Brooklyn apartment, I cut out of a magazine a photograph of Hansberry and taped it to my wall. In the picture, she is twenty-nine or thirty, her hair high and tousled. A cigarette hangs between her fingers. Her eyes are fiery, focussed just beyond the frame. Her mouth is open, but her jaw is set. She appears like a dream of this city: a writer in pitched combat over ideas. Many of us have tried to look like this and failed.

This vision, of course, doesn't capture her in full. Her passion could be countered by inhibition, her tenacity by trepidation. The year before she died, she questioned whether her success had made her too comfortable. She worried about having "sold my soul." All her pretty words paled in comparison with what was being done at lunch counters, on buses, and in streets around the country. In her journal, she made a note: "I think when I get my health back I shall go into the South to find out what kind of revolutionary I am." ♦

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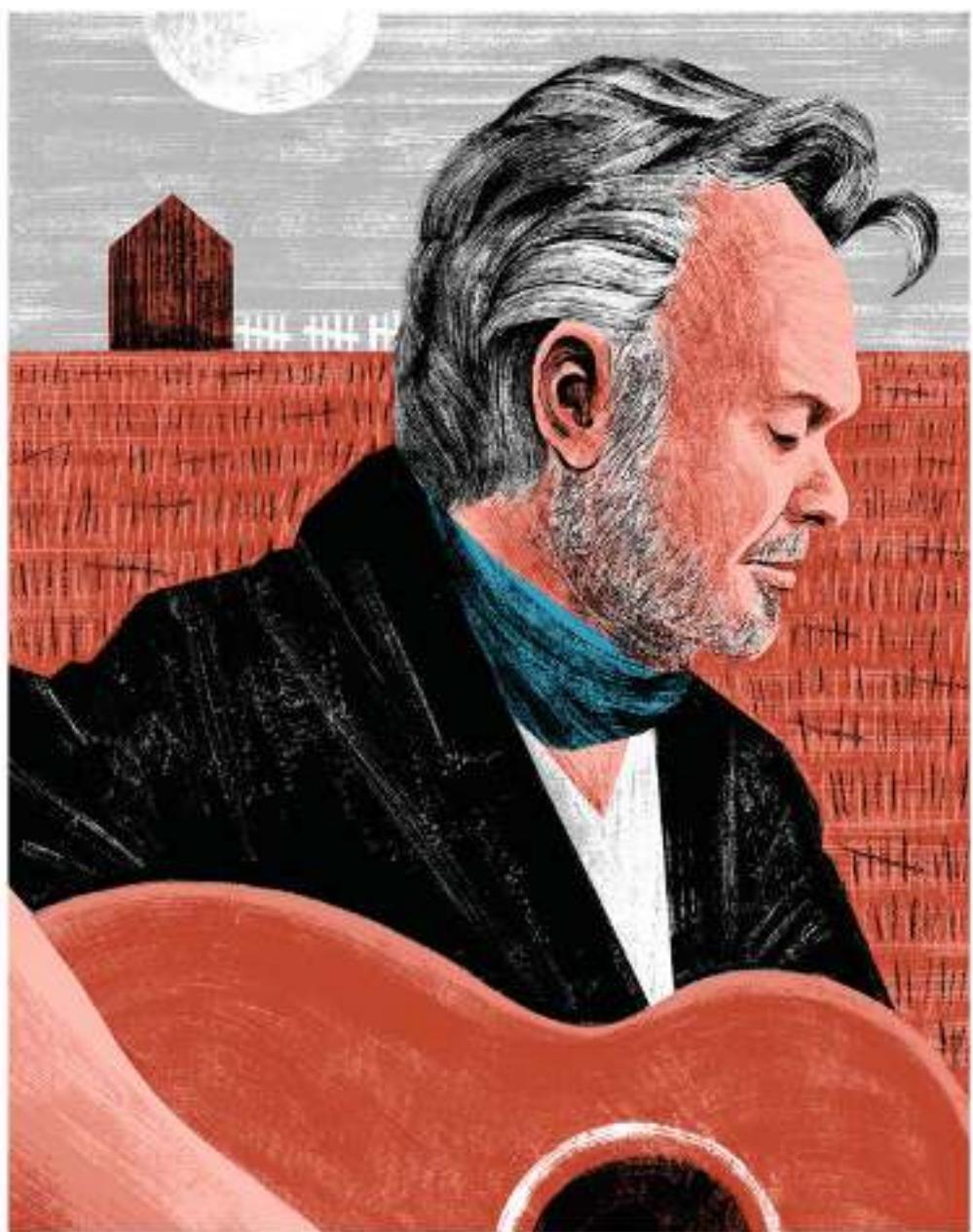


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LIFE GOES ON

John Mellencamp finds inspiration in aging.

BY AMANDA PETRUSICH



In 2012, the singer and songwriter John Mellencamp was given the John Steinbeck Award, presented annually to an artist, thinker, activist, or writer whose work exemplifies, among other virtues, Steinbeck's "belief in the dignity of people who by circumstance are pushed to the fringes." The grace of the marginalized is a long-standing theme of Mellencamp's writing. The musician, who comes from Indiana and began releasing records in the late nineteen-seventies, is known as a populist soothsayer, an irascible and unpretentious spokesman for hardworking, rural-born folks. Yet Mellencamp has also bristled at this characterization, which is largely

rooted in fantasy: men gazing wistfully out the windows of vintage pickup trucks, watching dust blow by, listening to some parched and distant radio station. The image of such "real," non-coastal Americans has become a useful cudgel for conservatives looking to depict their opponents as élitist buffoons; Mellencamp finds this grotesque. "Let's address the 'voice of the heartland' thing," he told Paul Rees, whose satisfying biography, "Mellencamp," came out last year. "Indiana is a red state. And you're looking at the most liberal motherfucker you know. I am for the total overthrow of the capitalist system. Let's get all those motherfuckers out of here."

Mellencamp is a poet of ennui, making him an apt mouthpiece for our moment.

Besides sharing Steinbeck's political radicalism, Mellencamp also possesses his instinctive knowledge of just how desolate even the sweetest life can feel. "All great and precious things are lonely," Steinbeck wrote in "East of Eden," from 1952. "Sometimes love don't feel like it should," Mellencamp sang on the single "Hurts So Good," from 1982. Mellencamp turned seventy in October, and this month he is releasing "Strictly a One-Eyed Jack," his twenty-fifth album. "Wasted Days," the first single, a duet with Bruce Springsteen, is about the despair of aging. "How can a man watch his life go down the drain?/How many moments has he lost today?" Mellencamp rasps. "And who among us could ever see clear?/The end is coming, it's almost here," Springsteen adds. Mellencamp's voice is shredded from decades of cigarettes—it remains an illicit delight to watch him smoke hungrily throughout an entire 2015 appearance on the "Late Show with David Letterman"—and his face has turned long and craggy under his trademark pompadour.

Mellencamp sounds like he's working through a season of mortal reckoning, though, to be fair, he has been lamenting impermanence since his youth. On "Jack & Diane," another single from 1982, he sang, "Oh yeah, they say life goes on/Long after the thrill of living is gone." "Strictly a One-Eyed Jack" is lumbering, bleak, and engrossing. Mellencamp's voice, once booming and rauous, is now softer, but never gentle. (Vocally, he has landed somewhere between late-career Bob Dylan and early-career Tom Waits.) He is frequently accompanied by acoustic guitar. Age seems to have given Mellencamp license to gripe; he is a poet of ennui, which makes him an apt mouthpiece for a moment when it is sometimes difficult to feel optimistic.

These days, Mellencamp doesn't care about appearing likable, grateful, or good-natured. "I come across alone and silent/I come across dirty and mean," he admits on "I Am a Man That Worries." He delivers each line with the steadfast confidence of a guy who has witnessed a lot of ugliness and won't pretend otherwise. As he told Rees, "I've been right to the top and there ain't nothing up there worth having." This sort of honesty—unconcerned with

commercial striving; a pure repudiation of the filtered and staged—is rare. It buoys these songs and gives them heart.

Mellencamp was born in 1951, in Seymour, Indiana, with spina bifida, a neural-tube defect in which the spine and the spinal cord don't develop properly. In the fifties, spina bifida was often terminal. It was standard practice to wait six months or longer to operate on infants with the condition, but, because so many babies were dying before then, a pioneering surgeon performed the procedure on Mellencamp right away. Incredibly, he survived. Rees's book suggests that this early miracle gave the singer preternatural confidence. "Every day of my life my grandmother told me how lucky I was," Mellencamp recalled to him. "You get told that enough and you believe it."

Mellencamp's family attended the Church of the Nazarene, a punitive Protestant sect that prohibited alcohol and tobacco. Even as a youth, Mellencamp had a reputation for being petulant and cocksure. By the age of fifteen, he was singing in a local band called Crepe Soul, six of whose members were Black. The band's integration angered some listeners. "They loved us when we were onstage," Mellencamp told Rees. "It was when we came off they didn't like us so much." Mellencamp learned to fight with a blackjack—a strip of leather with a piece of steel sewn into it. At eighteen, he married his high-school girlfriend, Priscilla Esterline. (The two later split, and Mellencamp married and divorced twice more; he has five children.) In 1976, Mellencamp acquired a manager, who suggested that he change his name to Johnny Cougar. He did, reluctantly, and signed a deal with M.C.A. Records. His début LP, "Chestnut Street Incident," was a flop, and he lost both the manager and the deal. He didn't become a pop star until 1982, when he released his fifth album, "American Fool."

Mellencamp was a champion of so-called heartland rock, an earnest, vaguely melancholy mashup of traditional folk music and fractious, boot-stomping rock and roll. The sound was marked, lyrically, by concern for the working class and a realist approach to romance: there are no guarantees in life, so drive it like

it's stolen. The genre's best songs unfold like short stories, with opening lines that tremble with foreboding. Lucinda Williams begins "The Night's Too Long," from 1988, "Sylvia was workin' as a waitress in Beaumont / She said, T'm movin' away, I'm gonna get what I want." On Mellencamp's "Small Town," from 1985, he offers, "Well, I was born in a small town / And I live in a small town / Probably die in a small town." Sometimes there are hints of redemption in the choruses. Often there aren't.

Throughout the years, Mellencamp's advocacy for the neglected began to focus on American farmers. In 1985, he, Willie Nelson, and Neil Young started Farm Aid, a nonprofit that puts on an annual benefit festival to bring attention to the plight of small family farms. In 1987, Mellencamp testified before the Senate in support of the Family Farm Act. He said, of frustrated farmers, "It seems funny and peculiar that, after my shows and after Willie's shows, people come up to us for advice. It is because they have got nobody to turn to." (Farm Aid operates a hotline that provides "support services to farm families in crisis.") Mellencamp has also become a serious painter. His portraits suggest the same preoccupations as his songs, depicting beautiful, sad-eyed figures rendered in muted, earthy tones. One self-portrait, "Pandemic John," features Mellencamp looking forlorn and slightly peeved. His brow is so furrowed that it appears topographical.

"Strictly a One-Eyed Jack" places Mellencamp in a lineage of artists (Leonard Cohen, David Bowie, even, to some extent, Bob Dylan) who have found new inspiration by reckoning with death. Though rock music has historically venerated youth ("I hope I die before I get old," Roger Daltrey, of the Who, famously shouted in 1965), its relevance has waned a bit in recent years, as hip-hop and its various outcroppings have ascended. This has perhaps left rock and roll available for a reclamation. Rebellious teen-agers and aging, introspective rock stars share a sense of freedom, an understanding of what's possible when responsibilities—to the marketplace, to polite society—melt away. A different kind of disobedience might come with age, but it is no less electrifying. ♦



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ON TELEVISION

SINNERMEN

"The Righteous Gemstones," on HBO.

BY DOREEN ST. FÉLIX



Has Danny McBride been reading bell hooks? "The Righteous Gemstones," McBride's farce about a family of mega-rich megachurch pastors in South Carolina, grapples with the late theorist's conclusion that "most men find it difficult to be patriarchs." The scope of the conflict is a step up from McBride's previous HBO comedies, which dealt with individual men who were unable to cope with losing their authority in narrower settings. As Kenny Powers, the washed-up baseball star in "Eastbound & Down," and Neal Gamby, the hostile educator in "Vice Principals," McBride played outrageous and dark "angry white men," wallowing

in grievances of race and gender. Both were somewhat absent fathers, and so we weren't worried about them passing their angst on to others. In "Gemstones," McBride's character, Jesse Gemstone, is both a father and a son, and, to him, maintaining the family is a struggle of the highest order.

The Gemstones live in mansions on a gated compound that reeks of arrested development. Pastor Eli Gemstone (John Goodman) is the widowed patriarch, the stoic architect of the family's Christian empire. He has three kids: Jesse, a hedonist blowhard who's mulling a takeover; Kelvin (Adam Devine), an earnest youth minister; and Judy (the incredible Edie

Shades of Billy Graham and Jerry Falwell color this depiction of televangelism.

Patterson), the lone daughter, undervalued by Eli because of her gender. Eli, a poor boy done good, looks upon his bratty adult children, who were weaned on his prosperity gospel, with exasperation bordering on disgust. This drives his kids to destructive self-loathing.

"Gemstones" is an ensemble series, although it's Jesse's egotism that sets off the action. McBride is an undersung contributor to the antihero canon; he seems to understand that buffoons are America's true leading men. Jesse, who is paunchy and dresses like an Elvis impersonator gone to seed, has an absurdly perfect life—a lucrative preaching gig; a hot wife, Amber (Cassidy Freeman); doe-eyed sons, one of whom is named Pontius—but he doesn't have Daddy's ear. In Season 1, Jesse receives an anonymous text message that contains a video of him partying at a prayer convention in Atlanta, surrounded by topless women and cocaine. The sender threatens to release the video unless Jesse forks over a million dollars. Because the Gemstones' ultimate currency is reputation, Jesse's problem is a problem for the entire family. Jesse and his siblings meet the blackmailers, and the confrontation erupts in a spiral of violence and shenanigans evocative of a Coen-brothers noir.

As it turns out, Jesse's estranged eldest son, Gideon (Skyler Gisondo), is one of the blackmailers, as payback for Jesse's bad parenting. Gideon had run off to Los Angeles, where he became a stunt double, and, in a flashback, we see Jesse sneer at Gideon's dreams, claiming that "people in Los Angeles hate Christians." The line is played for laughs, but its meaning is pointed. There's meaty culture-war commentary in "Gemstones" about opposing religions and competing entertainers: Jesse's disdain of Hollywood, and, implicitly, the sexy liberalism that attends it, betrays his fear of becoming irrelevant in the eyes of his son. Gideon yearns for his father's attention, but he's lukewarm on becoming a preacher, which makes him a threat to the family order—the trinity of Eli, Jesse, and Gideon.

Am I making "Gemstones" sound grave? This is a filthy comedy, teeming with rococo insults and grotesque gags; we see cocked shotguns, road head, and a menagerie of floppy pink dicks. One night, Eli and his brother-in-law, Uncle

Baby Billy (the marvellous Walton Goggins), face off with a group of saboteurs at a satellite church—in a shopping mall—thwarting them and sending them home completely naked. Later, Judy, tired of being overlooked, threatens to take off, vowing, “I’m gonna move to Malibu Beach, shave my pussy, and learn to surf!” McBride’s stubborn fidelity to raunchy humor is a pledge of allegiance, in a way, to the lingua franca we’re prone to turn up our noses at.

The series has some blind-item pleasures when it comes to megachurch culture. Shades of Billy Graham and Jerry Falwell color the depiction of celebrity televangelism, a uniquely American invention. One plot point, involving the storage of millions of dollars in the vents of the Gemstones’ church, presaged a similar real-life event: last month, a plumber found “bags and bags” of money in the walls of Joel Osteen’s Lakewood Church, seven years after it had reported the theft of six hundred thousand dollars. But “Gemstones” isn’t primarily interested in satirizing modern Christianity; rather, McBride, not so much a moralist as a closet sentimental, treats his subject with some affection. Many have found this approach frustrating. The series premiered in 2019, during the Trump Presidency, and there were critics who wished that the characters were more straightforwardly sinister. Why wouldn’t McBride come out and condemn these predatory capitalists, who have converted faith into so much personal wealth? Why didn’t Eli move like a dastardly Robert Mitchum-esque huckster? The plot endeavors to be more epic than topical. The stories unfold not unlike New Testament parables. Greed has

corrupted the Gemstones utterly, and McBride wants to nudge his wayward creations back to the path.

The Gemstones are lost sheep: liars, narcissists, victims when it’s advantageous, bullies when it’s not. They’re protagonists always, which is to say, Americans. But the show makes plain its investment in the promise of salvation, as both a storytelling and a theological device, which is why comparing it to “*Succession*,” as people often do, works on only the most superficial level. In “Gemstones,” as in a Disney movie, it’s the death of a mother that is the catalyst for the main characters’ dysfunction. In the first season, we meet, in a flashback to the Aquanet eighties, Aimee-Leigh, who is played by the country singer Jennifer Nettles. A cross between Tammy Faye Messner and Marie Osmond, Aimee-Leigh was, with her brother, a Christian-music child star. As an adult, married to Eli, she’s the rock, grounding the Gemstones’ empire in the tenet of (relative) humility. But the boldness of a McBride production loses its edge when it comes to women: the Aimee-Leigh story line is cloying. She really is an angel.

The début-season finale opens with the family at her deathbed. When a bee zips into the room, everyone freaks out, making a mess of the medical equipment. Later, Uncle Baby Billy gets a slapstick smiting—he sustains a lightning strike to the dome and drops dead—but the bee’s stinging brings him back to life. “Gemstones,” with its deus-ex-machina ploy, provides a comforting closing salve.

Season 2, which premiered this month, introduces two new obstacles. One is Thaniel Block, a Ronan Farrow-like

muckraker in the form of Jason Schwartzman, from the houses of Coppola, Anderson, and Coen, which I take as a kind of symbolic uniting of the modern strains of comic Americana. And then there’s Eric Roberts, as Junior, an oily wrestling promoter come back from Eli’s dark Memphis past to haunt him. Eli is in an existential funk. But, mostly, family bonds have been strengthened, although the swaggering Lyle Lissons (Eric André), a Texas preacher who seduces Jesse into backing his Christian resort, Zion’s Landing, might be a problem later.

This season also doubles down on the source of my biggest gripe: the handling of Kelvin and Judy, who get the shoddiest character development. The show doesn’t know what to do with their sexualities. Is it because of some kind of misconceived “respect” for the marginalized? Kelvin, a professed virgin, mentors a reformed beefcake satanist named Keefe (Tony Cavalero), who becomes the leader of Kelvin’s God Squad, a band of greased-up Christian muscle boys. The squad veers into John Waters territory, which is exciting visually, but the “joke,” about the obvious homoerotic undertones, needs to evolve. Meanwhile, Season 1 showed Judy confronting her father about his infantilization, and her announcing, “I have tits. I do sex.” Patterson plays Judy with a wild desperation; sometimes she wants to resuscitate her mother’s genteel femininity, but most of the time she wants to mount her husband, B.J. (Tim Baltz), who is coded as effete. “Gemstones” is brave, and I want it to explore rather than shy away from all that subtext—which is that straight white men are straight white men because the rest of us are not. ♦

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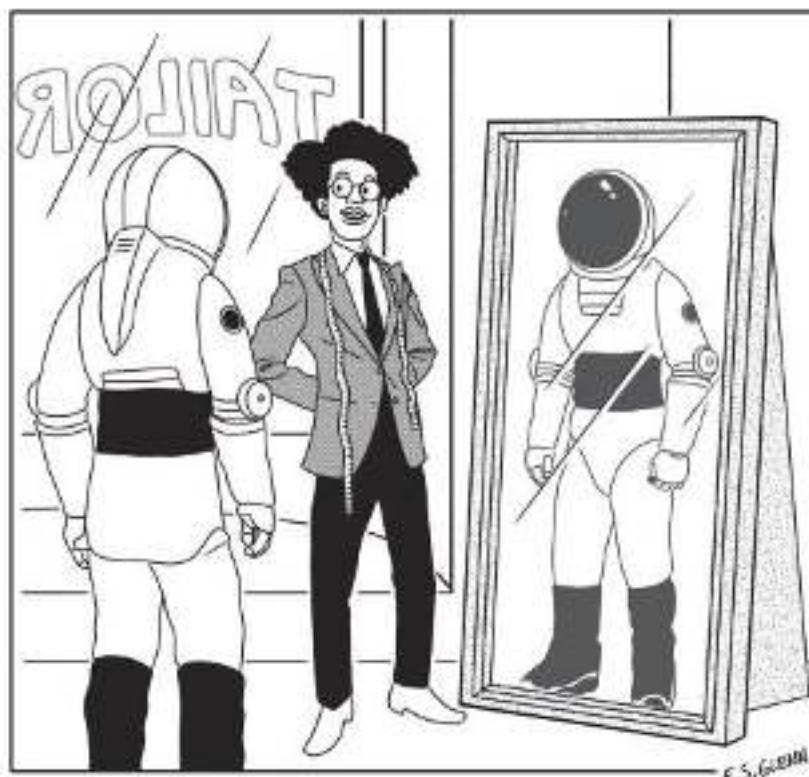


CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

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 E. S. Glenn, must be received by Sunday, January 23rd. The finalists in the January 3rd & 10th contest appear below.

We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the February 7th 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



"My client is prepared to walk."
Kenny Moore, Rocklin, Calif.

"He'll negotiate, but he won't beg."
Lawrence Wood, Chicago, Ill.

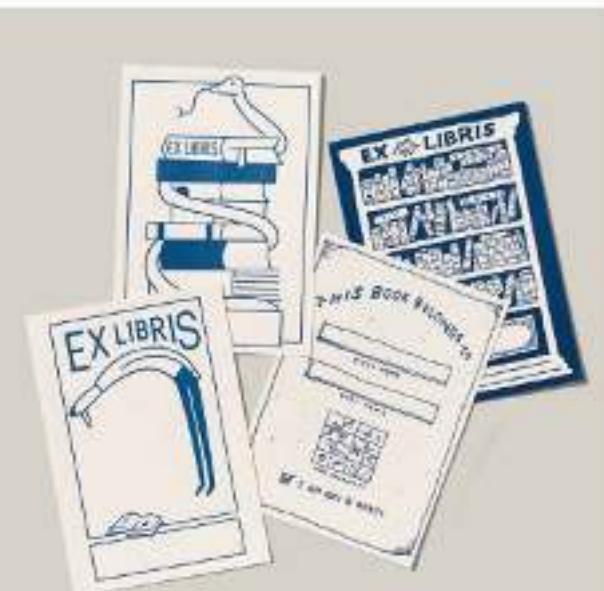
"He may be your best friend, but I am his lawyer."
Tim McNamara, New York City

THE WINNING CAPTION



*"Mind if I read over your shoulder?
I have trouble turning pages."*
Jan Chambers, Chapel Hill, N.C.

THE
NEW YORKER
STORE



NY'ER
BODEGA
CAT

THE APOLLO
DIM SUM LITTLE TIBET
MR. MET
THE CYCLONE

IN THE HEIGHTS
DR. ZIMMERMANN PIGEON
DOLLAR SLICE
TAKE THE A TRAIN

THE BURGER JANOCHO
POLAR CUE SHIRTS THIRD BASE
JEWELRY ELOISE
BABY DOLLAR SLICE

HEMINGWAY ALTERNATIVE PANTS
HORN AND HORN NIA
WOMEN'S JEANS TELEVISION
BABY DOLLAR SLICE
JEWELRY WING AND WHI



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PUZZLES & GAMES DEPT.

THE CROSSWORD

A lightly challenging puzzle.

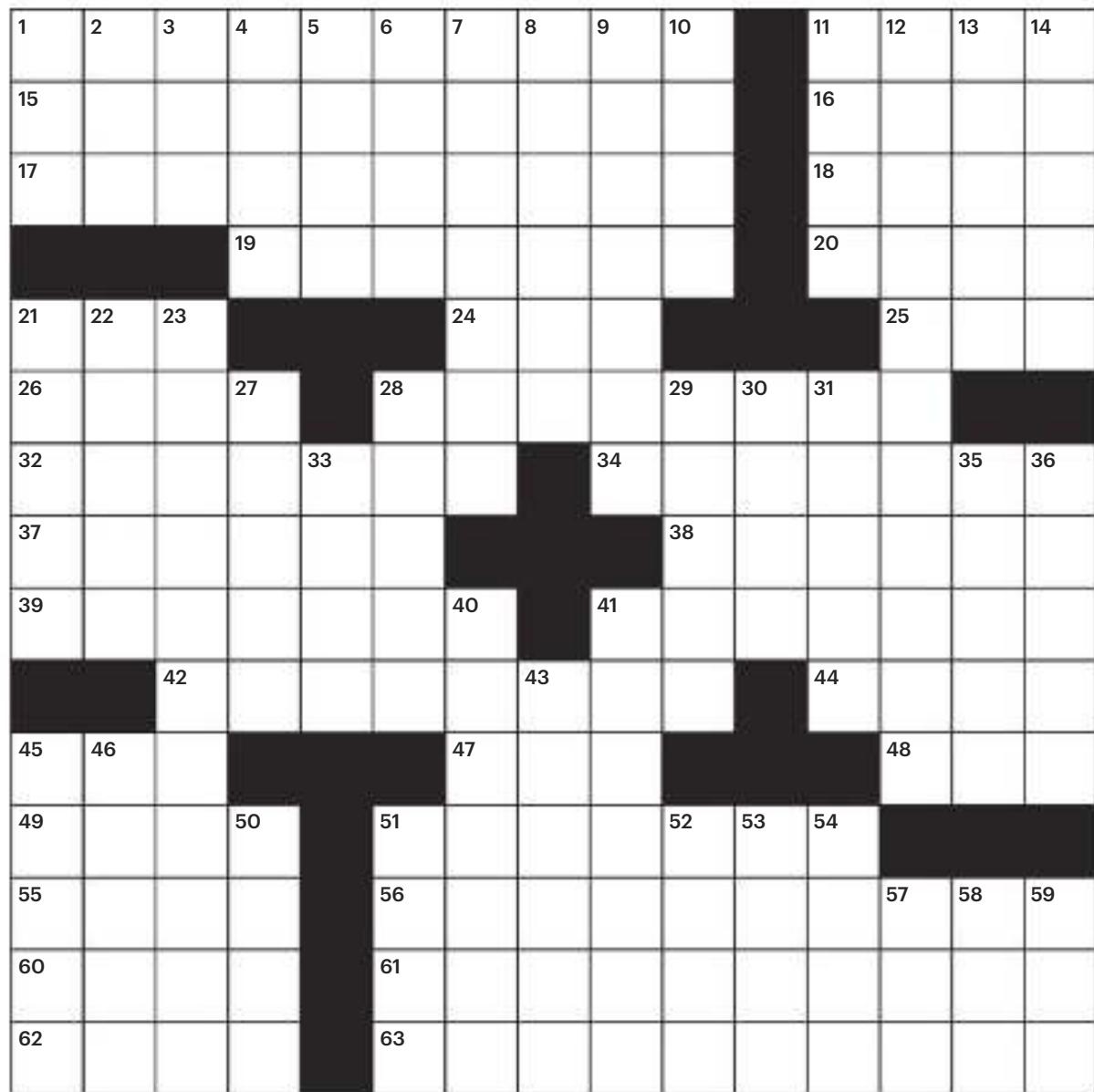
BY ANNA SHECHTMAN

ACROSS

- 1 Like vegan meat alternatives
- 11 Worms, e.g.
- 15 Change of scenery, professionally
- 16 Target of some medicated shampoos
- 17 Set of equipment for a newbie
- 18 Vegetarian frozen-food brand
- 19 Holds in custody
- 20 Fashion lines?
- 21 Fitting
- 24 Political org. whose e-mails were made public in a 2016 WikiLeaks dump
- 25 Government org. whose hacking tools were made public in a 2017 WikiLeaks dump
- 26 Pointed put-down
- 28 Tangential remark
- 32 "Measure for Measure" or "Much Ado About Nothing" role
- 34 Masochists' counterparts
- 37 59-Down that captures the sound of "melancholy womanliness," per the composer Christian Schubart
- 38 Chicago school that's the largest Catholic university in the United States
- 39 Sports-betting site
- 41 Authentic
- 42 Twitch broadcaster, e.g.
- 44 H.I.V.-prevention drug
- 45 Hawaiian tuna
- 47 ___ King Cole
- 48 The "e" of "i.e."
- 49 Collectible disks of the nineties
- 51 The Stepford wives, e.g.
- 55 U2 front man
- 56 Labor that Louise Kapp Howe called "pink collar"
- 60 Hoppy brews, for short
- 61 Unbroken
- 62 City that's home to the Munch Museum
- 63 Got off course

DOWN

- 1 Dell products
- 2 Back muscle, for short
- 3 Palindromic constellation



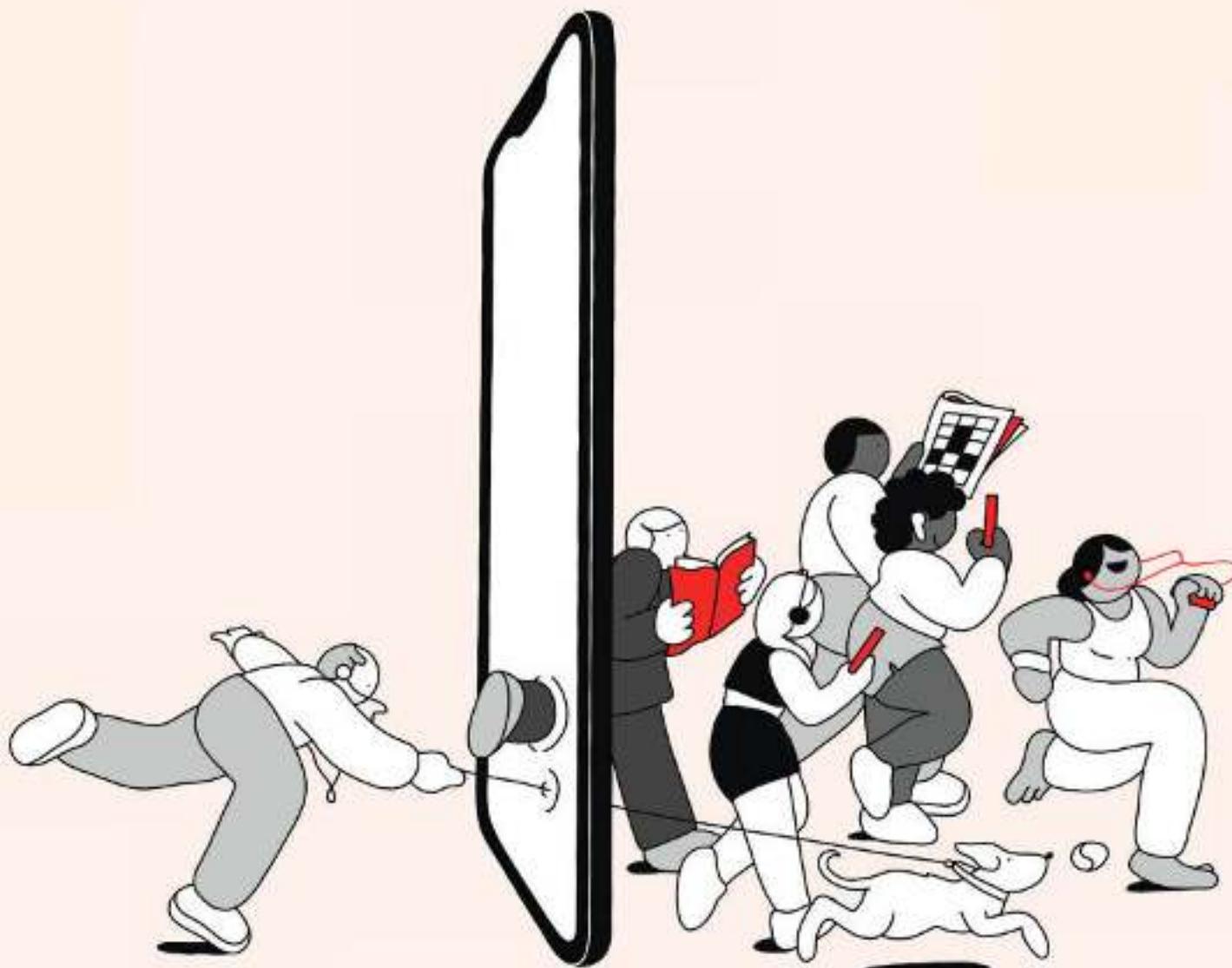
- 4 Stereotypical role for Anthony Michael Hall in the eighties
- 5 French bean?
- 6 "Less Than Zero" author ___ Easton Ellis
- 7 Source for talk, traffic, and weather
- 8 "How thoughtful!"
- 9 Demonstrates
- 10 Some police-dept. employees
- 11 Meh
- 12 Co-founder of the Négritude movement who wrote "Discourse on Colonialism"
- 13 "This isn't exactly news, but worth signal-boosting anyway," for short
- 14 Actress Thompson of "Passing"
- 21 Grading range
- 22 "Carrie" director Brian De ___
- 23 Track lighting?
- 27 ___ pan (ring-shaped bakeware)
- 28 Emphatic follower of yes or no
- 29 Four-time Presidential candidate Ralph
- 30 Greg who was the No. 1 pick in the 2007 N.B.A. draft
- 31 Lift at one end
- 33 Gloomy
- 35 Makes pitch-perfect?
- 36 Recharged, in a way
- 40 Innermost division of a track
- 41 Bart Simpson catchphrase
- 43 "You cannot serve God and ___": Matthew 6:24
- 45 Peacock comedy about a tough H.S. science course
- 46 Staple accessory for Jennifer Lopez
- 50 Meh
- 51 "Just my opinion, but . . . , in a text
- 52 ___ Day (vitamin brand)
- 53 What there are six of in a fl. oz.
- 54 Loretta who played Hot Lips Houlihan on "M*A*S*H"
- 57 Walt Whitman's "Gliding ___ All"
- 58 Type of audio cable named for an electronics brand
- 59 See 37-Across

Solution to the previous puzzle:

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

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