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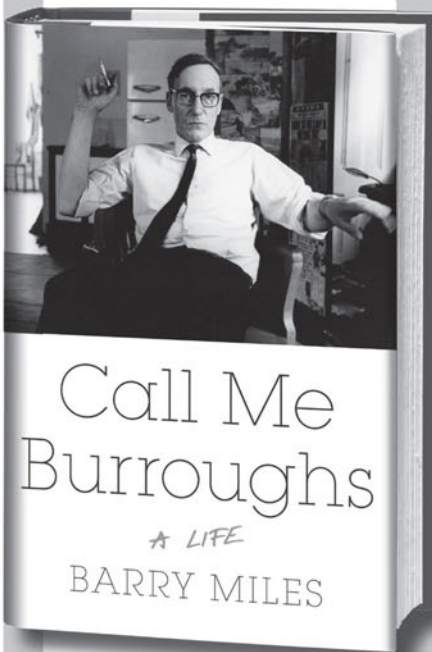
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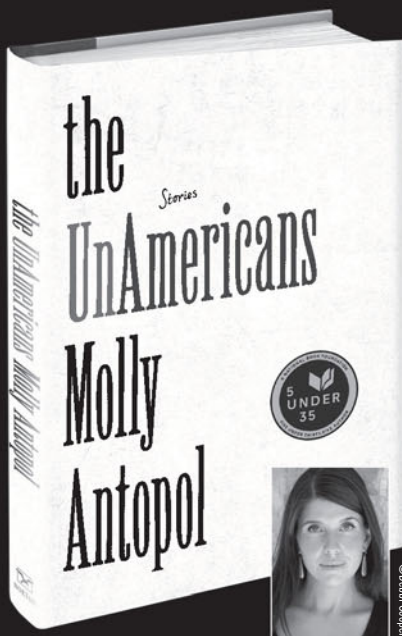


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THE MAIL

MAKERS' MARK

Evgeny Morozov, in his article on makers and hackers, characterizes Stewart Brand, the publisher of the "Whole Earth Catalog," as a consumerist ("Making It," January 13th). It is true that the "Catalog" and Brand's subsequent publications sold products, but they also contained wide-ranging articles. The "Catalog"'s sale items were primarily tools, not products to be consumed. And while it was not overtly political, the "Catalog" did express the widespread desire of people to mold their environments to suit their purposes. Steve Jobs referred to the "Catalog" as "sort of like Google in paperback form, thirty-five years before Google came along." Morozov seems to say that we must choose between believing that technology determines politics or vice versa. But technology enables a variety of uses, and it is impossible to predict them all. The idea of convivial tools, which are designed to be accessible, and sometimes modifiable, by users, does not emerge from "naïveté," as Morozov says, but, rather, is a key factor in creating technology that enables people to determine their own environments and encourages them to connect with others.

*Shel Kaphan
Seattle, Wash.*

Morozov writes that "our institutional imagination has stalled, and with it the democratizing potential of radical technologies." This trivializes the role that DARPA, the National Science Foundation, the Department of Education, and many other federal research agencies play in launching pivotal projects: the Internet, search engines, and many 3-D printing projects. After the invention and launch of stereolithography (an early form of 3-D printing), in 1987, U.C. Berkeley and other universities conducted research alongside automobile- and consumer-product-manufacturing companies. This sped up connections between computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacturing. As a result, America still leads

the world in high-value product design. Furthermore, the maker movement's success has to do with conventional market forces, as Morozov suggests. Some 3-D printers now cost even less than a thousand dollars, and open-source design software can be downloaded free. We are working to put these design tools in the hands of every young student who dreams of one day inventing the next iPhone accessory.

Paul Wright

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BRAIN STEMMS

Michael Specter's article provided a thorough description of B.G.I., the Chinese genomics company ("The Gene Factory," January 6th). However, he gave the impression that cognitive functioning is based almost totally on genetics. Numerous studies show that memory and learning are affected by environmental factors such as nutrition and intellectual stimulation, and can be affected by infectious agents. Although genes are undoubtedly important determinants of cognitive development, strategies that focus solely on nucleic-acid sequencing are likely to be incomplete and, more important, can lead to false associations that are due to population-based environmental exposures. Detailed studies of both genetic and environmental factors will, I hope, lead to ways in which cognitive functioning can be predicted and improved in the human population.

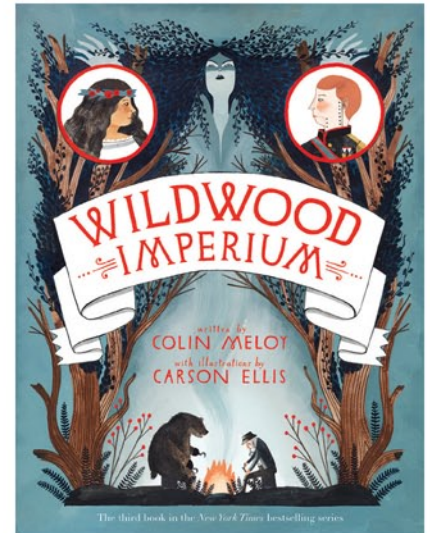
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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



FEBRUARY 2014 WEDNESDAY 5TH THURSDAY 6TH FRIDAY 7TH SATURDAY 8TH SUNDAY 9TH MONDAY 10TH TUESDAY 11TH

ALEXANDER BORODIN'S "PRINCE IGOR" is a permanent fixture in the Russian operatic repertory, but it hasn't been heard at the Metropolitan Opera since 1917. Now the epic work, which Borodin did not live to complete, returns in a new guise: the director Dmitri Tcherniakov and the conductor Gianandrea Noseda have created a unique edition that uses all the music Borodin is known to have written (including recently discovered passages) while retaining much of the material that the composer's devoted colleagues Glazunov and Rimsky-Korsakov added to make the opera's first viable version. Many of the scenes have been reordered, but the beloved "Polovtsian Dances" will still be there, and the Met has a magnetic young basso, Ildar Abdrazakov (above), to sing the heroic title role.

THE THEATRE
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NIGHT LIFE | MOVIES

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY ERIK MADIGAN HECK



David Henry Hwang looks at the life and the legend of Bruce Lee in his new play, "Kung Fu."



EXIT THE DRAGON

Asian-American artists defy stereotype through the decades.

NANCY KWAN WAS THE FIRST. The first movie star my brother and I fell in love with. We met her late at night in the black-and-white universe of our television set. We saw her, initially, in her breakout role, in the 1960 film "The World of Suzie Wong," in which the mixed-race actress—her father was a Chinese architect, her mother white and English—played a call girl. Not unlike many of the women we grew up with, who toiled in the legit world, Kwan's character supported her family with what she had, or what the world would allow her to have. What moved us about Kwan, in those pre-gender-and-race-studies days, was her insistence on projecting her ethnicity as part of her style; she wasn't performing for the white male director, but for people who looked or felt something like herself.

For Kwan, being the only Asian pinup of note since Anna May Wong, in the nineteen-twenties and thirties, must have been a burden. David Henry Hwang—the most successful Chinese-American playwright this country has produced—must, at times, feel similarly burdened. But it doesn't slow him down. The prolific fifty-six-year-old has written important works ranging from the Tony-winning "M. Butterfly" (1988), which centered on the illusion of love, to "Golden Child" (1998), about a Chinese family confronting an increasingly Westernized world. (Hwang also wrote the book for the 2002 revival of "Flower Drum Song"; Kwan starred in the 1961 film version. Imagine what the playwright could do with Kwan's life!) But Hwang's themes don't convey how very funny he is, too—he's no pedagogue; he's a wit. And, as with most wits, we learn through Hwang's distanced eye, and through his sometimes distanced but ultimately color-blind heart.

In his seventh full-length work, "Kung Fu" (at Pershing Square Signature Center), Hwang takes on the dynamic Asian movie star Bruce Lee. Born in San Francisco in 1940, to a Eurasian mother and a Chinese father who was a Cantonese-opera star, Lee was raised in Hong Kong. Despite his well-to-do family, Lee grew up street fighting, and eventually trained in martial arts. At thirteen, he became a protégé of Yip Man, who immersed him in the Wing Chun style of fighting, and several years later Lee's parents moved their son back to the States to avoid trouble.

Lee went on to star in the television series "The Green Hornet," and pitched the series that became "Kung Fu," for which he never received credit. While Lee completed only four feature-length films (he died at the age of thirty-two, of a cerebral edema, while working on his final film, "Game of Death"), he not only popularized martial arts as a philosophy but confronted America's racism by example. Lee was also an ethnic sex symbol who inspired outsider fantasies about revved-up power and beauty, in artists such as the Wu-Tang Clan—entertainers who loved Lee because he was stylish, culturally complex, and hot. In his new work, Hwang doesn't shy away from Lee's built-in glamour, especially as he shows us where Lee was coming from, and where he needed to go in order to become his bad-ass real—and mythological—self.

—Hilton Als

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OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

All the Way

Bryan Cranston plays Lyndon B. Johnson in this play by Robert Schenkkan, about Johnson's struggle to pass a landmark civil-rights bill in the early years of his Presidency. Also starring Brandon J. Dirden, as Martin Luther King, Jr.; Michael McKean, as J. Edgar Hoover; and Roslyn Ruff, as Coretta Scott King. Bill Rauch directs. Previews begin Feb. 10. (Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 877-250-2929.)

Kung Fu

Signature Theatre presents the premiere of a play by David Henry Hwang, about Bruce Lee's journey to martial-arts stardom. Leigh Silverman directs. In previews. (Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

Little Me

Encores! presents Neil Simon's first musical (Simon wrote the book, Cy Coleman wrote the music, and Carolyn Leigh wrote the lyrics), from 1962, about a young woman in search of fame, and her seven lovers, all of whom are played by one actor. Starring Rachel York and Christian Borle; John Rando directs. Feb. 5-9. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

Stage Kiss

The New York premiere of a comedy by Sarah Ruhl, in which two actors with a romantic history are cast in a play as lovers. Rebecca Taichman directs. Previews begin Feb. 7. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

NOW PLAYING

Antigone

In Jean Anouilh's tragedy from 1944, adapted by Louis Galantiere, Oedipus' two sons, rivals for the throne of Thebes, have killed each other, and the acting king, Creon (Michael Early), has buried one and left the other's body to rot, as a warning to those who might think rebellion a good idea. When Antigone, the dead men's sister, defies Creon and buries her brother under the cover of night, Creon is put in a tough spot—he doesn't want to kill Antigone, who's engaged to his son, but she doesn't give him a choice. Robert F. Kennedy's twenty-five-year-old granddaughter, Kick Kennedy, plays Antigone as if she were an anorexic brat, and Jeff Kline plays Creon's son like a mumbling hunk on "Gossip Girl." Although these extremely casual performances, under the direction of Peter Dobbins, are slightly amusing, they're ultimately not convincing. (Theatre at the Church of Notre Dame, 405 W. 114th St. 212-868-4444.)

Intimacy

The New Group presents the world premiere of a play by Thomas Brad-

shaw. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner

Roy Williams, a young British playwright, can hear the nuances in ambivalence. In this ultimately forgettable eighty-five-minute piece, Williams has adapted Alan Sillitoe's short novel about post-Second World War working-class British life, but, instead of keeping it in the novel's white, angry-young-man territory, Williams describes a mostly nonwhite world of thugs, incarceration, and the ties that bind one to an equally angry family. Colin (Sheldon Best) is a runner; he's running for his life, away from the limits imposed on him by class and ignorance. His single mother, Mum (Zainab Jah), was widowed early and wants to move on, into life, while Colin continues to idolize his late father, wonderfully played by Malik Yoba (who doubles as Mum's lover, Trevor). Despite Best's truly startling exertions, it's Jah who walks away with the evening. Small and compact, she knows that the most cutting thing about fury is distance; when she looks at Colin, it's as if she can't remember where she knows him from. She's fascinating in her engagement—and her disregard. (Atlantic Stage 2, at 330 W. 16th St. 212-352-3101. Through Feb. 9.)

A Man's a Man

Bertolt Brecht assembled this comedy over two days in 1926, with the help of "1/2 bottle of brandy, 4 bottles of seltzer and eight to ten cigars," and it still has the anguished, disjointed quality of a man racing to keep up with his own ideas. Brian Kulick's production, with music by Duncan Sheik, embraces the frenzy, and, like its protagonist, gets deliriously lost within itself. Gibson Frazier plays a porter in colonial India who goes out to buy a fish and falls victim to a brainwashing scheme by three imbecilic soldiers; mentally dismantled, he joins Her Majesty's Armed Forces and winds up marching on Tibet. Brecht's farcical meditations on selfhood are spiked with Sheik's droll ballads, performed with soulful detachment by Justin Vivian Bond, as Widow Begbick. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 866-811-4111.)

My Daughter Keeps Our Hammer

In this Flea Theatre production, the playwright Brian Watkins offers a recipe for roast mutton that will frighten even nose-to-tail enthusiasts. Volleying between low-rent realism and campfire grotesquerie, the story concerns two sisters in a small Colorado town. While sassy Hannah (Layla Koshnoudi) slings pancakes at a greasy spoon, stoic Sarah (Katherine Folk-Sullivan)

cares for their invalid mother and her pet sheep, Vicky. The sisters never speak to each other. "Some families just don't talk much," Sarah says. Instead, each directly addresses the audience, enhancing or contradicting the claims of her sibling. There's a tinge of condescension in the dialogue and the characterizations (verbally limited, morally occluded), as well as a set that suggests ranch life with dirty canvas and dry grass. But the director, Danya Taymor (niece of Julie), altogether unshameless, embraces the story's turn toward ovine gore. (41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

Outside Mullingar

Brian F. O'Byrne and Debra Messing star in this new play by John Patrick Shanley; Doug Hughes directs. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

Row After Row

The moment that Leah (Rosie Benton) and Cal (P. J. Sosko) meet in a bar after participating in a reënactment of the Battle of Gettysburg earlier that day, there's trouble: Leah's sitting at Cal's table, and she won't get up. Furthermore, it being her first year as a reënactor, Leah's got her uniform all wrong (foremost because she's dressed as a man), and that offends Cal, who takes his American history very seriously. Jessica Dickey's funny, sad, deep, and smart play is beautifully written and, under the direction of Daniella Topol, masterfully acted. Benton, especially, is utterly believable as a woman who is feisty and courageous enough to dress as a male soldier so that she can sneak into camp and give all the doomed young men one last kiss. (City Center Stage II, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

Stop Hitting Yourself

The Austin-based collective Rude Mechs drew on everything from Busby Berkeley to "Pygmalion" to create this loony political comedy, but the result is more like deconstructed nineteen-seventies kitsch: imagine "American Hustle" with Marxist overtones and a ton of gold spray paint. Set in a Liberace-esque palace (the glittering set is by Mimi Lien), the story concerns a bearded environmentalist known as Wildman (Thomas Graves), who infiltrates high society in order to compete in an annual charity event—a fight to the death, featuring a cheese fountain and tap dancing. Under the direction of Shawn Sides (the script is by Kirk Lynn), the seven-person ensemble puts across this sequined allegory with gusto and good humor, inhabiting a surreal stylistic plane all its own. (Claire Tow, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)

ALSO NOTABLE

AFTER MIDNIGHT

Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 877-250-2929.

BEAUTIFUL—THE CAROLE KING MUSICAL

Stephen Sondheim, 124 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.

THE BOOK OF MORMON

Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.

THE BRIDGES OF MADISON COUNTY

Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

BRONX BOMBERS

Circle in the Square, 235 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.

BUYER & CELLAR

Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-868-4444.

THE COMMONS OF PENSACOLA

City Center Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Through Feb. 9.

THE CORRESPONDENT

Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 866-811-4111.

CRY, TROJANS!

Performing Garage, 33 Wooster St. 212-966-3651.

DINNER WITH FRIENDS

Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.

A GENTLEMAN'S GUIDE TO LOVE AND MURDER

Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.

THE GLASS MENAGERIE

Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

KING LEAR

BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Through Feb. 9.

KINKY BOOTS

Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

LONDON WALL

Mint, 311 W. 43rd St. 866-811-4111.

LOOT

Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-352-3101. Through Feb. 9.

LOVE AND INFORMATION

Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 800-982-2787.

MACHINAL

American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.

MATILDA THE MUSICAL

Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

NO MAN'S LAND / WAITING FOR GODOT

Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.

PIPPIN

Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

RODGERS + HAMMERSTEIN'S CINDERELLA

Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200.

THE TRIBUTE ARTIST

59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.

TWELFTH NIGHT / RICHARD III

Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-279-4200.

WICKED

Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-239-6200.



FOOD & DRINK

BAR TAB ELIXIR LOUNGE

43-03 Broadway, Astoria
(347-642-5804)

Queens is the most diverse urban area in the world—almost half its residents are foreign-born—and Elixir Lounge, an L.G.B.T. bar on Astoria's eastern edge, mirrors the borough's inclusive makeup. Marilyn Sulay and Lidia Jimenez, the trans women owners, rehash the dark boudoir décor of Manhattan and Brooklyn speakeasies, and then heap on the frills: high-backed tufted banquettes, laser lights, and TVs playing music videos that are out of synch, by decades, with the d.j.'s Beyoncé and dancified Lana Del Rey. The *mélange* makes you feel like you walked into the coolest gay bar in Cleveland. On a recent Friday, Paul, a shirtless Polish bartender with six-pack abs and a sprawling shoulder tattoo featuring a blue koi and lotus flowers, served Coronas to gay couples in tight black T's. He mixed signature drinks with abandon, eyeballing amounts (one squirt of honey syrup—no, two) before passing them to clusters of men in vests and women flashing sequins, swaying and singing along with Aaliyah. Better to skip the cocktails (the Lusty Pear tasted like a Jelly Belly), order a stiff drink, and get right out on the dance floor.

—Anna Altman



TABLES FOR TWO

SAUL

200 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn (718-935-9842)

“THE SHOP’S CLOSED,” the security guard in the lobby of the Brooklyn Museum said, blocking the way of three diners who had a six-forty-five reservation at Saul. The new-American restaurant moved recently to the back of the museum, past the gift shop, from its home of fourteen years, on Smith Street, in Boerum Hill. The original Saul was one of the first spots in Brooklyn to receive a Michelin star and to lure Manhattanites in serious numbers across the river for dinner. The guard wasn't the only one who seemed confused; the hostess was unsure about the feasibility of a pre-dinner drink at the half-empty bar, which was unfortunate, because by that time everyone in the group felt that they needed one.

It's strange to be in such a massive, industrial space in Brooklyn, hearing about the Vermont farm where the pork-loin special got its start, but you still wish the restaurateurs had celebrated the space, rather than trying to hide from it. Aside from a pair of Paul Kelpé murals (from a series called “Williamsburg Housing Project”), the dark, low-ceilinged room works hard to make diners forget they are situated inside a treasure trove of art. Maybe it's the square dinner plates, or their tableau-like composition, but there's a generic, business-class quality to the eating experience. When the strawberry-balsamic ice cream and the baked Alaska arrive, the sense of being in a Ritz-Carlton in the late nineteen-nineties is fully realized.

The restaurant's uneasy status as a pioneer of a movement (rustic, farm-fresh) that has changed over time is encapsulated in the emphasis on vegetables even as there is not much for a vegetarian to eat. On a recent evening, a meal was cobbled together via a farro-salad special with a poached egg, and a parsnip soup the consistency of thick cream, which came with a heavy-handed drizzle of vanilla oil—simple food, but without the careful seasoning required to make it interesting.

A waiter said the seafood's the thing. And who would dare to complain that a mackerel appetizer was too fishy? Everyone who ate it, it turns out, a collective of salty-fish aficionados who found the cut—chunky, like beads on an art teacher's necklace—hard to stomach, and the puffed rice and assertive strands of scallion tossed on top unhelpful. “I don't think I've ever actually said I want less bacon” was the judgment on a monkfish entrée, cooked to a velvety consistency but overwhelmed. Meat was reliably good: a venison loin with wild mushrooms and a rich red-wine *jus* was so adeptly prepared it could have been a steak, and that pork special, served with quince and cabbage, was a traditional take just right for the polar vortex. Saul's move from Smith Street, the closest thing Brooklyn has to a restaurant row, to the six-lane Eastern Parkway was never going to be easy, but pulling it off will require doing more than what has always been done.

—Amelia Lester

Open Wednesdays through Fridays for lunch and dinner and weekends for brunch and dinner.
Entrées \$25-\$30.

ILLUSTRATION BY DANIEL KRALL

CLASSICAL MUSIC



OPERA

Metropolitan Opera

This week marks a historic occasion at the Met: the first performances in nearly a century of Borodin's "Prince Igor," one of the great Russian epics. The director, Dmitri Tcherniakov (whose recent production of Rimsky-Korsakov's "The Czar's Bride" had a major success in Berlin), has envisaged a production involving two unit sets, which suits an opera notable for its contrast of melting lyricism and big, nationalistic noise. The cast, which offers not only Ildar Abdrazakov, in the title role, but also the talents of Oksana Dyka, Anita Rachvelishvili, Mikhail Petrenko, and Stefan Kocán, is promising; Gianandrea Noseda, a forceful conductor with a deep knowledge of the Russian repertory, is in the pit. (Feb. 6 and Feb. 10 at 7.) • **Also playing:** "Die Fledermaus," Johann Strauss II's bubbly satire of the social mores of late-imperial Vienna, features Susanna Phillips, Christopher Maltman, Jane Archibald, Anthony Roth Costanzo, and (in a speaking part) the actor Danny Burstein; Paul Nadler and Adam Fischer conduct. (Feb. 5 and Feb. 11 at 7:30 and Feb. 8 at 8.) • A revival of Anthony Minghella's richly cinematic production of "Madama Butterfly," with Amanda Echalaz, Adam Diegel, Elizabeth DeShong, and Scott Hendricks in the leading roles; Philippe Auguin. (Feb. 7 at 7:30.) • Renée Fleming takes the title role in "Rusalka," one of her signature parts. The distinguished singers Piotr Beczala, Dolora Zajick, and John Relyea join her; Yannick Nézet-Séguin leads Dvořák's richly symphonic score. (Feb. 8 at 1.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

Freiburg Baroque Orchestra

The vivacious ensemble, which can produce quite a big sound when it wants to, comes to Alice Tully Hall for a performance of the complete Brandenburg Concertos, led by its violinist-directors, Gottfried von der Goltz and Petra Mülleians. (212-721-6500. Feb. 5 at 7:30.)

Europa Galante

This compact, high-voltage period-instrument group has been led by the violinist Fabio Biondi since 1990. Its program at Zankel Hall offers a host of Vivaldi concertos, including excerpts from "The Four Seasons." (212-247-7800. Feb. 11 at 7:30.)

Boston Symphony Orchestra

The venerable Bernard Haitink conducts the first of the elegant en-

semble's two Carnegie Hall concerts, a program of music by Steven Stucky, Schumann (the Piano Concerto, with Murray Perahia), and Brahms (the Symphony No. 4 in E Minor). (212-247-7800. Feb. 11 at 8.)

RECITALS

Eighth Blackbird: "Still in Motion"

Founded at Oberlin Conservatory, in 1996, this instrumental sextet used the conservative post-Schoenbergian combination of strings, winds, and percussion to drive a new and energetic postmodernist aesthetic. It comes to the Kitchen this week to perform music by (among others) Bryce Dessner, Steve Mackey, Brett Dean, and Ligeti (arrangements of several of the diabolically difficult Études for Piano). (512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. Feb. 6-7 at 8.)

Miller Theatre: "Saariaho • Bach"

J. S. Bach has long been the musical saint of Miller Theatre, going back to the George Steel years. This concert, a solo recital by the violinist Jennifer Koh, pairs the Master's Partita in D Minor with the Finnish star composer Kaija Saariaho's "Frises" (with Koh assisted by Jean-Baptiste Barrière, on electronics); Saariaho, who curated the program, will attend. (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. Feb. 6 at 8.)

Daniil Trifonov / Garrick Ohlsson

Two powerhouse pianists, each worthy of honor, grace Carnegie Hall's Stern Auditorium this week. First comes the young Trifonov, far more than another Russian "banger"; his sensitively compiled concert includes music by Stravinsky (the "Serenade in A"), Debussy, Ravel, and Schumann (the "Symphonic Études"). The later program, by Ohlsson, long an American artist of distinction, features Schubert's "Wanderer Fantasy," sonatas by Beethoven and Chopin, and three exquisite works by Charles Tomlinson Griffes. (212-247-7800. Feb. 6 at 8; Feb. 9 at 2.)

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

This year, the Society's Winter Festival investigates the extraordinary stream of masterpieces that flowed from the pens of the early German Romantics between 1820 and 1830. The first concert this week features, among others, the pianist Alessio Bax and

the violinist Pamela Frank, performing music by Beethoven, Schubert (the "Arpeggione" Sonata), and Mendelssohn (the fleet and expressive String Quintet No. 1 in A Major); the second spotlights the impressive young Danish String Quartet, in quartets by Beethoven (the "Serioso," Op. 95, and in A Minor, Op. 132) and Mendelssohn (in A Minor, Op. 13). (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788. Feb. 7 at 7:30 and Feb. 9 at 5.)

Brentano String Quartet

New-music advocacy has always been a prime concern of this expert American ensemble, now some two decades old. The New York premiere of Eric Moe's "Of Color Braided All Desire" (with the soprano Christine Brandes) will be tucked between classics by Haydn (the cantata "Arianna a Naxos") and Mendelssohn (the joyful Quartet in D Major, Op. 44, No. 1) in a concert at the 92nd Street Y. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Feb. 8 at 8.)

Music at the Frick Collection: Wolfgang Holzmair

The admired Austrian baritone, a lieder purist, teams up with the pianist Russell Ryan to offer a recital full of Schubert (including a complete "Schwanengesang"). (1 E. 70th St. 212-547-0715. Feb. 9 at 5.)

OF NOTE BILLY BUDD

Britten's opera, from 1951—which some consider his best—uses an all-male cast to limn the savage, buried passions of Herman Melville's immortal novella, set on a British battleship in the eighteenth century. (E. M. Forster, no less, co-wrote the libretto.) The Glyndebourne Festival Opera production, by Michael Grandage, bursts with talent: Jacques Imbrailo takes the title role, and Mark Padmore is Captain Vere, a role first brought to life by Peter Pears; the rock-solid Mark Elder conducts the London Philharmonic Orchestra. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. bam.org. Feb. 7, Feb. 9, Feb. 11, and Feb. 13 at 7:30.)

MICHAEL JARRELL'S "CASSANDRA"

Jarrell, a Swiss composer of high reputation, got some valuable New York exposure when the Philharmonic presented his music on one of its "Contact!" concerts. This monodrama for actress, electronics, and large chamber ensemble is a major effort, with a strong visual element (using film and live video) and a libretto by the German writer Christa Wolf; Anna Clementi performs it in a production by Nimrod Opera Zurich, with the Argento Chamber Ensemble, conducted by Michel Galante. (Bohemian National Hall, 321 E. 73rd St. czechcenter.com. Feb. 6-7 at 7. No tickets required.)



GOINGS ON, ONLINE

Visit nyr.kr/classical for extra music listings, including a recital by the pianist Simon Mulligan at the Morgan Library & Museum.

Details on a Loser's Lounge tribute to Lou Reed, a performance by Arturo O'Farrill, and a late-night set by the up-and-coming traditional-jazz act the Swamp Donkeys can be found at nyr.kr/nightlife.



ART

MUSEUMS SHORT LIST

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—
"Charles Marville: Photographer of
Paris." Through May 4.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—"Isa
Genzken." Through March 10.

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St.
(212-423-3500)—"Carrie Mae Weems."
Through May 14.

WHITNEY MUSEUM
Madison Ave. at 75th St.
(212-570-3600)—"American Legends:
From Calder to O'Keeffe." Through
Oct. 19.

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway
(718-638-5000)—"Wangechi Mutu: A
Fantastic Journey." Through March 9.

**AMERICAN MUSEUM OF
NATURAL HISTORY**
Central Park W. at 79th St.
(212-769-5100)—"The Power of
Poison." Through Aug. 10.

"Oscar" (2012), by Jackie Nickerson,
whose sculptural portraits of
farmworkers across Africa are on
view at the Shainman gallery.

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Harry Callahan

The photographer who most effectively defined American mid-century modernism is represented here by urban images—mostly of his home base, Chicago—made between 1945 and 1974. Streetscapes and buildings predominate, but the range is wide, and includes closeup portraits of anxious women seen in passing, abstract studies of telephone wires, and pictures of Callahan's wife and child, set like sentinels in the landscape. In one rarely exhibited 1967 series, Callahan overlaid scenes of store façades in Providence, Rhode Island, with pages of softcore porn. His best work is subtler: the show opens with a shot of a man and a woman crossing paths shoulder to shoulder on the street, each staring straight ahead. Through March 8. (Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 212-759-7999.)

Hans Josephsohn

This career-spanning show of brass sculptures by Josephsohn (who died

in 2012, at the age of ninety-two) is a gratifying introduction to the Swiss sculptor. Born in Prussia, he fled to Zurich to escape the Nazis and began sculpting figures so stark and simple as to seem Neolithic. Later, he took a more modern turn: an odalisque from 1971 suggests a blasted, pockmarked Maillol, while a 1969 standing figure recalls a Giacometti after an ice-cream binge. Josephsohn's superb late sculptures, squat and tumorous half-bodies with a harsh patina, mark a return to primitivism, as if the grim twentieth century had taught him there was no point in being contemporary. Through Feb. 22. (Hauser & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-794-4970.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

John Ahearn

Looking classical now, these painted life-cast sculptures of folks in the South Bronx, from 1981-91, revisit a moment of populist high heat, when idealistic young New York artists took to the streets. The personalities of Ahearn's irrepressible subjects—a fiendish young guy with a cigarette and a seashell necklace, a gaunt and wily woman with very long red fingernails—seethe. Intense colors convey flesh sweating in summer. The people don't feel here with us; we feel there with them, in their lived element. This is great work. Through Feb. 22. (Alexander and Bonin, 132 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 212-367-7474.)

Robert Bechtle

New oils, watercolors, and prints of drastically unremarkable suburban streets, cars, and houses in California radiate the uncanny air of hidden-in-plain-sight mystery that makes Bechtle by far the finest of Photo-Realists. What is it that so rivets the mind in what should bore the eye? Bechtle infuses the dumb gaze of cameras with a deep, intuitive knowledge of what things and non-things—so many nuances of emptiness!—are like. Snapshots of moments in time become time stretched toward eternity. Nothing is more extraordinary than the ordinary, when it has your full attention. Through Feb. 15. (Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300.)

Lynda Benglis

The independent-minded American sculptor, who is seventy-two, surprises again with a new series of two dozen small ceramic works covered in colorful expressionist glazes. Instead of using a potter's wheel, Benglis pinches and squeezes the clay with her hands, and, just as in her more famous polyurethane pours, the works make a virtue of formlessness, fluidity, and straight-up chaos. Some of the sculptures have a distinct interior and exterior, but they're even better when she aban-

dons that duality and leaves just a thrillingly unstable mess. Through Feb. 15. (Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727.)

Saul Fletcher

The maverick British photographer, now based in Berlin, makes charged images that seem to mark personal traumas, triumphs, and delights. As in past works, the backdrop for Fletcher's portraits and scrappy, ephemeral still-lives is a studio wall, pockmarked and smudged with paint. The wall-hung constructions look simpler this time around, if just as obsessive: a rag-draped wooden cross, a spiderweb, a spindly tree, a desiccated bird. Fletcher pictures himself bare-legged and on his haunches, looking feral, like a boxer ready for his next round. Through Feb. 15. (Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663.)

Andrew Moore

The New York photographer's previous landscapes and interiors were made in Cuba, Russia, and the ruins of Detroit. His new color pictures focus on remnants of the American West: abandoned farms, collapsing homes, snow-swept fields. There's a touching beauty, with reminders of past magnificence, in this desolation, especially when seen from a distance or from above (Moore shot several images from a crop duster). A gutted brick edifice, isolated on a barren Nebraska plain, could be the set of a Terrence Malick movie, and the steely-eyed, bearded survivor in the lone portrait here would make an ideal extra. Through Feb. 15. (Richardson, 525 W. 22nd St. 646-230-9610.)

Larry Poons

This show is like a dictionary illustration for the verb "paint." Massed small strokes in acrylic fill eleven large canvases, which suggest slightly different weather zones of a single, expansive country. The colors are effulgent, the textures fleshy, the touch urgent. Varied tones produce threats of figure-ground recession from which Poons recoils as if stung, wrestling them toward flatness. He has become the Sisyphus of modernist abstraction: achieving an old-school ideal of pure painting, which promptly expires. Then he does it again. Through Feb. 8. (Danese/Corey, 535 W. 24th St. 212-223-2227.)

Davina Semo

This young sculptor works in a minimalist vein, using the unsettling forms of metal chains, concrete blocks, reinforced steel, and one-way mirrors. All have a baleful simplicity, imbuing understated gestures with violent overtones, in the mirror pieces especially, which implicate the viewer's body in their logic of surveillance and control. Semo is onto something, though she should



abandon the overwrought titles—“She Put Her Hand to Her Heart Where It Boomed in the Otherwise Silence of the Street”—and let her powerful art speak for itself. Through Feb. 15. (Marlborough, 545 W. 25th St. 212-463-8634.)

Sue Williams

Williams's best paintings in years forgo, but don't really forget, her signature trope of orgiastic body parts. Melees of thick and thin, splotted and linear, sugared and neon colors have lots of bare canvas to breathe in, à la Joan Mitchell. With a political, self-mocking spin, they're collectively titled “WTC, WWII, Couch Size.” Some motifs do hint at exploding architecture, but sensual figuration tugs at the proceedings like an urchin begging for attention. The mood is hysteria. The execution is masterly. The style could use a name: Pep Art, perhaps. Energy for energy's lovely sake. Through Feb. 22. (303 Gallery, 507 W. 24th St. 212-255-1121.)

“Bad Conscience”

The artist John Miller curated this cross-generational, jam-packed group show, which transcends its organizing principle—artists he has worked with or knows—thanks to its frank, sometimes shocking subject matter. Nudes by Matthew Watson and explicit images from Leigh Ledare hang among several works by Lyle Ashton Harris that explore identity and sexual compulsion: one print simply reproduces a Web page that shames African men who allegedly rob their tricks. Miller smartly tempers the carnal material with early Photo-Realist paintings by Marilyn Minter, whose frank depictions of linoleum floors, bearing no resemblance to her recent blinged-out canvases, stand out from the blunter art in a kind of moral chiaroscuro. Through Feb. 22. (Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 212-206-7100.)

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

“Equations of Sight-Similarity”

Space is apparently still the place for the seven artists in this gratifyingly global show about the individual in the universe, whose title comes from a poem by Sun Ra. A record sleeve of an eighties Hong Kong pop album, which the artist Lantian Xie has altered to leave just a woman adrift among the stars, sets the tone for a mystic adventure, which is maintained by Ala Ebtakar's galactic collages with Persian nuances and Julia Bland's abstract embroidered paintings. The show hangs together well, even if several works, such as Hajra Waheed's aloof videos of the Middle East, make you long for a little less mysticism. Through Feb. 23. (On Stellar Rays, 1 Rivington St. 212-598-3012.)

DANCE



New York City Ballet

For ballet dancers, the sweet spot where maturity and freedom overlap is all too brief. Jenifer Ringer has extended it more than most through her sensitive musicality and theatrical intelligence. On Feb. 9, at the age of forty-one, she bids farewell with Jerome Robbins's “Dances at a Gathering” and Balanchine's “Union Jack.” In her new memoir, Ringer notes that she has performed almost every female role in “Dances,” but she has come to define the “Pink Girl . . . playful, sweet, and tenderly loving.” It is sad to see her go. On Feb. 7, Tiler Peck and Robert Fairchild reprise “A Place for Us,” Christopher Wheeldon's breezy pas de deux, set to clarinet sonatas by André Previn and Leonard Bernstein. • Feb. 5 and Feb. 11 at 7:30 and Feb. 8 at 2: “Vespro,” “Spectral Evidence,” and “Acheron.” • Feb. 6 at 7:30 and Feb. 9 at 3: “Dances at a Gathering” and “Union Jack.” • Feb. 7 at 8: “La Stravaganza,” “A Place for Us,” and “Todo Buenos Aires.” • Feb. 8 at 8: “Bal de Couture,” “DGV: Danse à Grande Vitesse,” and “The Four Seasons.” (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-496-0600. Through March 2.)

David Roussève

The dance-theatre works of this veteran choreographer, long based in Los Angeles, aren't strong on subtlety. The latest, “Stardust,” follows the story of a troubled gay African-American teen-ager solely through projections of his confessional text messages, potentially poignant in their idiomatic awkwardness. To a score that flatly juxtaposes romantic Nat King Cole songs with electronica, the ten-member company peppers sweeping, body-flinging modern dance with hip-hop posturing. Roussève appears mostly via Skype, as a concerned grandfather. (Alexander Kasser Theatre, 1 Normal Ave., Montclair, N.J. 973-655-5112. Feb. 6-7 at 7:30, Feb. 8 at 8, and Feb. 9 at 3.)

A.B.T. Studio Company

Conceived as a stepping stone between training at the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School and a professional career, the small troupe represents a slice of the future: most of A.B.T.'s apprentices begin here. At this intimate showing, the young dancers perform a new work created for them by the witty, urbane Larry Keigwin, as well as a lilting pas de deux by Martine Van Hamel from 1978, “Trio a Deux.” (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at

92nd St. 212-415-5500. Feb. 7 at 8, Feb. 8 at 3 and 8, and Feb. 9 at 3.)

Miro Magloire

With live music and skilled, focussed dancers, Magloire's New Chamber Ballet consistently offers tastefulness and intimacy. In this studio setting, the dances are all trios, a setup for the domestic power struggles that the choreographer favors. The music—piano pieces by Haydn, Luciano Berio, and, for the one première, Liszt—is played by the excellent Melody Fader. (City Center Studios, 131 W. 55th St. 212-868-4444. Feb. 7-8 at 8.)

LeeSaar The Company / “Grass and Jackals”

Fantasy, illusion, sensuality, and stark images of power and pain are all familiar elements in the work of Lee Sher and Saar Harari, the Israeli-born duo behind LeeSaar. This evening-length piece, their first to appear at the Joyce, is an extension of these themes, augmented by expressionistic lighting that transforms the dancers—seven women, clad in gleaming black bodysuits—into exotic, fluidly moving creatures, sexual and fierce. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Feb. 8 at 8 and Feb. 9 at 2 and 7:30.)

ABOVE & BEYOND

The Fest for Beatles Fans

In arguably the most important rock introduction of all time, on February 9, 1964, in New York, Ed Sullivan said, “The city never has witnessed the excitement stirred by these youngsters from Liverpool who call themselves the Beatles.” The Fest for Beatles Fans was formed in 1974, to mark the tenth anniversary of the British Invasion, and has been an annual celebration ever since. This year's edition includes performances by the co-invaders Donovan, Peter Asher, Chad & Jeremy, and Billy J. Kramer; talks and book signings by historians of the era; and appearances by those who had roles in the pop pageant, among them Freda Kelly, the Beatles' secretary and the subject of a wonderful 2013 documentary. Finally, fifty years to the minute after the group's legendary debut, and just across town from the Ed Sullivan Theatre, the Brooklyn band Bambi Kino (see Night Life) will tear into “I Saw Her Standing

There” and then play the rest of the world-changing songs from the Beatles' TV performance that night. (Grand Hyatt, Lexington Ave. at 42nd St. thefest.com. Feb. 7-9.)

Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show

Never mind the Olympics—the real competition happens at the dog show. This is the second-oldest continuously held sporting event in the U.S., after the Kentucky Derby, and it has not allowed mixed breeds since the eighteenth century. But, this year, the 138th

Dog Show has added the Masters Agility Championship, a racecourse of jumps, tunnels, ramps, and teeter-totters, in which more than two hundred dogs, fifteen of them “All-American” (the club's term for mutts), are judged for speed and accuracy, rather than for breed conformity. A small victory in the battle for equal rights. (The agility contest is at Pier 94, 12th Ave. at 55th St., on Feb. 8. The dog show itself takes place there and at Madison Square Garden, Feb. 10-11. For more information, visit westminsterkennelclub.org.)

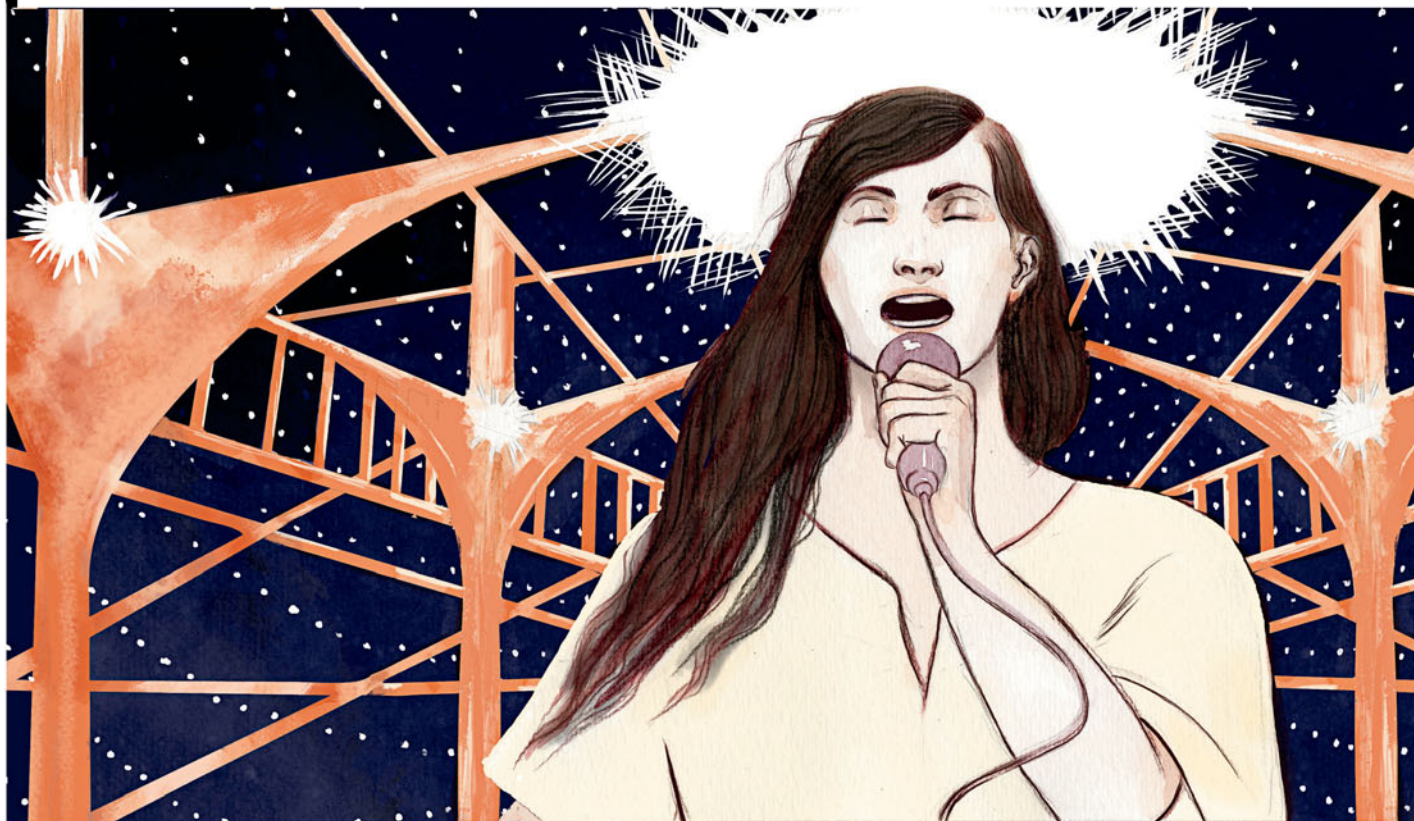
READINGS AND TALKS

Macaulay Honors College

Lara Vapnyar reads from her new novel, “The Scent of Pine,” and discusses it with the writer Ben Greenman. (35 W. 67th St. 347-460-4292. Feb. 5 at 7.)

Pen Parentis Literary Salon

Pen Parentis, an organization devoted to supporting writers who are also parents, presents a night with the literary magazine *Tim House*, featuring Cari Luna, Elissa Schappell, and Matthew Specktor. (Andaz Wall Street, 75 Wall St. penparentis.org. Feb. 11 at 7.)



The composer and performer Julianna Barwick, who uses electronic processors and looping pedals, brings her immersive choral explorations to *Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral*, a soaring, nineteenth-century Romanesque Revival space in Brooklyn Heights, on Feb. 12. It's an appropriate venue for someone who learned the sound of her own voice as a child, singing in churches across the South and the Midwest. (juliannabarwick.com)

ROCK AND POP

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

Bambi Kino

In 2010, this band—named for the movie house in Hamburg where John, Paul, George, Pete, and Stu bunked while playing their earliest gigs in that city—was invited to perform in Hamburg to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Beatles' first show there, before they became household names. Later this weekend, Bambi Kino marks another important milestone—the debut of the Beatles' first show there, before they became household names. Later this weekend, Bambi Kino marks another important milestone—the debut of the Beatles' first show there, before they became household names. Later this weekend, Bambi Kino marks another important milestone—the debut of the Beatles' first show there, before they became household names. (Union Hall, 702 Union St., Park Slope, Brooklyn. 718-638-4400. Feb. 8.)

Blood Orange

Devonté (Dev) Hynes is a Renaissance man: singer-songwriter, producer, composer, multi-instrumentalist, author, and consultant for Jay Z's fashion line, Rocawear. Aside from his

solo work (some of which has been released under the name Lightspeed Champion), he's collaborated with the Chemical Brothers, Florence and the Machine, Solange Knowles, and Sky Ferreira, and fronted the art-punk act Test Icicles. No matter how varied his projects, they're all imbued with a sexy, impenetrable coolness and benefit from his appetite for experimentation. On "Cupid Deluxe," Hynes's second album as Blood Orange, funky R. & B. beats, sensual vocals, eighties-style synth lines, and a lingering melancholy bring to life the city's subcultures, particularly that of L.G.B.T. youth. (Webster Hall, 125 E. 11th St. 212-353-1600. Feb. 6.)

"Bringing Human Rights Home"

A quarter century ago, Bruce Springsteen, Peter Gabriel, Sting, and other artists participated in a series of concerts in support of Amnesty International, which took place around the world from 1986 to 1998. On Feb. 5, at the Barclays Center, **Imagine Dragons**, the **Flaming Lips**, **Lauryn Hill**, **Tegan and Sara**, the **Fray**, **Cold War Kids**, **Cake**, and others pick up

the baton for a new generation of music fans and activists. **Madonna** will also be on hand, to introduce members of **Pussy Riot**. (620 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn. 800-745-3000.)

Jimmy (Preacher) Ellis

If you've ever heard of this singer, it's probably only because you happened to see his name on the back cover of an album called something like "Lost Soul Classics." Or you might be mistakenly thinking of the leader of the Trammps (best known for "Disco Inferno"), who had the same name, and died in 2012. This Ellis was born in Arkansas, and in the sixties and seventies he cut a number of highly regarded, but mostly overlooked, dance-floor gems, including "I'm Gonna Do It by Myself," "Work with What You Got," and "Put Your Hoe to My Row." The folks at Dig Deeper, the party series that brings old soul singers back to the stage, have convinced Ellis to travel from Dallas, where he lives, to Brooklyn, for his first-ever New York City show. He'll be backed by the **Brooklyn Rhythm Band**, which will also perform an

opening set. (Littlefield, 622 Degraw St., between Third and Fourth Aves. 718-855-3388. Feb. 8.)

Sharon Jones and the Dap-Kings

Jones's music has always been about persistence and struggle. On her five albums, backed by the Dap-Kings, she has dipped into classic soul and early funk, and conveyed the messages of self-empowerment and social justice that go along with that sound. But her new record, "Give the People What They Want," has a special dimension. It was originally scheduled for release last summer, but was postponed when Jones was given a diagnosis of cancer. Now, following her treatment, the record is out, and Jones is feeling well enough to tour. Songs on the album like "Retreat!" and "People Don't Get What They Deserve" were written before her diagnosis, but now they have new impact. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 212-465-6500. Feb. 6.)

Mutual Benefit

Jordan Lee brings his baroque-folk act to the Lower East Side for a



much anticipated performance. On tour, he's been backed by his sister, Whitney Lee (on vocals and synthesizers), along with a bassist, a violinist, a guitarist, and a percussionist. His songs are downy love letters to the people he's known while living in St. Louis, Boston, Austin, and, most recently, Brooklyn. Previously, he was a publicist for his sister's wedding-photography company, and he recently told Pitchfork, "I can't look at pictures of people getting married every single day and not believe in love." If lines like that don't cause you to roll your eyes, his debut album, "Love's Crushing Diamond," won't, either. (Feb. 7: Mercury Lounge, 217 E. Houston St. 212-260-4700. Feb. 8: Rough Trade NYC, 64 N. 9th St., Brooklyn. 718-388-4111.)

Skrillex

The best d.j.s know how to send thousands of people into ecstasy, hands in the air, glow sticks waving about, and few are better at it than Skrillex. This short and pale California boy with long dark hair has wizard-like power at the turntables, and he knows just when to accelerate the bass and when to drop it out completely. The workaholic d.j. has gone from putting songs up on Myspace to becoming a six-time Grammy winner, and now he's touring the world in what he calls "Takeovers," performing multiple shows in Amsterdam, Barcelona, San Francisco, and New York. Sorry, Manhattanites, but you'll have to cross the East River to experience Skrillex's unique brand of dance-floor sensory explo-

sion: all the shows are in Brooklyn. (Feb. 10: Brooklyn Bowl, 61 Wythe Ave., Williamsburg. 718-963-3369. Feb. 11: Music Hall of Williamsburg, 66 N. 6th St. 718-486-5400. Feb. 12: SRB Brooklyn, 177 Second Ave., at 14th St. 718-499-1700. Feb. 13: Output, 74 Wythe Ave. outputclub.com. Feb. 14: Location to be announced on skrillex.com.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Gerald Clayton

The progressive but listener-friendly pianist and composer usually appears as the leader of a light-footed trio, but his most recent album, "Life Forum," features a larger ensemble, complete with horns, singers, and the spoken-word artist Carl Hancock Rux. At the Village Vanguard this week, Clayton expands his basic unit slightly but decisively, adding **Logan Richardson** on alto saxophone. (178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. Feb. 4-9.)

Keith Jarrett

The venerated pianist, a newly elected N.E.A. Jazz Master, was recently in town with his long-standing trio, celebrating its thirtieth anniversary, but this show, at Carnegie Hall, is a solo performance. Jarrett's improvisatory forays have been his calling card since the remarkable success of his solo recital in 1975 in the Cologne Opera House, the recording of which, "The Köln Concert," became one of the top-selling jazz albums of all time, and introduced a wide audience to his stream-of-consciousness blending of gospel, classical, funk, and jazz. (Seventh Ave. at 57th St. 212-247-7800. Feb. 5.)

Danilo Pérez

Best known as the flinty pianist in Wayne Shorter's quartet, Pérez, a Colombian-born composer whose own work regularly incorporates Latin folkloric sources, has an ambitious new album, "Panama 500," celebrating the five-hundredth anniversary of Vasco Nuñez de Balboa's crossing of the Panamanian isthmus, in 1513, and the establishment of the first European settlement in the Americas. Some of the musicians from the new release join him at the Jazz Standard, including the percussionist **Roman Diaz** and the violinist **Alex Hargreaves**. (116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. Feb. 6-9.)

Joshua Redman

The formidable saxophonist returns to his small-group roots after performing last year in support of his album "Walking Shadows," accompanied by a string ensemble and the pianist Brad Mehldau. In the Allen Room, he fronts a dashing post-bop quartet that features such stalwarts as the pianist **Aaron Goldberg**, the bassist **Reuben Rogers**, and the drummer **Gregory Hutchinson**. (Jazz at Lincoln Center, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. Feb. 7-8.)

Paul Shapiro

Jewish music, both religious and secular, is the core of this saxophonist's transformative work. A weeklong residency at the Stone finds him leading six different bands, including his joyous Midnight Minyan, the witty Ribs & Brisket Revue, and a reunion of Foreign Legion, his eighties-era downtown funk unit. (Avenue C at 2nd St. thestonenyc.com. Feb. 4-9.)

Forbidden Love

Jonas Kaufmann is the tragic poet undone by obsession.



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MOVIES



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For more dance events, including "Chance Motives," a performance-art series at the Sculpture Center, visit nyr.kr/dance.

See nyr.kr/above for information about Paper Jam, a festival celebrating small presses, mini-comics, and zines, at the Silent Barn, in Brooklyn.



DVD OF THE WEEK

A video discussion of Sofia Coppola's "Lost in Translation," from 2003, in our digital edition.

NOW PLAYING

Black Girl

Diouana (Mbissine Thérèse Diop), a young woman from Senegal, is brought to the South of France to work as a nanny and maid for the family of a young French bureaucrat (Robert Fontaine) and his wife (Anne-Marie Jelinek). When they mistreat her, the desperate Diouana is ready for even the most extreme means of escape. By means of an intimate, straightforward realistic drama, Ousmane Sembène—in his first feature film, from 1966, which is also widely considered the first feature made by an indigenous African—expresses the frustrations and ambitions of an entire continent and its peoples. His images have the cool fury of an indictment: his ironic views of the French landscape and his shrewd New Wave citations suggest that beneath the natural and cultural charms of France lurks a bilious racism linked to colonialism. And the flashbacks to Diouana's earlier days in the capital city of Dakar depict the futility of nominal independence from France without an authentic African political and artistic revival—for which this small-scale film was a giant step. In French.—Richard Brody (MOMA; Feb. 5-7.)

Generation War

This ambitious film—made as a miniseries for German television and now reassembled as a two-part

feature—attempts to capture the experience of an entire generation of young people through the lives of five friends during the Second World War. Two of the young men (played by Volker Bruch and Tom Schilling) fight for the Wehrmacht on the Russian front, commit crimes against civilians and partisans, and gradually disintegrate. A singer who wants to be the next Marlene Dietrich (Katharina Schüttler) loves Viktor (Ludwig Trepte), a desperate but resourceful Berlin Jew; an idealistic nurse (Miriam Stein) endures the horrors of a hospital behind the lines. They are all patriots, but their fervor is non-ideological. In this account, their complicity in Nazism is forced on them, never chosen. The movie sells a very dubious innocence to its German audience, and the structure of the extended form is close to popular melodrama and soap opera. Yet the war scenes are often amazing, especially an attack on a fixed Soviet position in a rubble-strewn street, which may be the best representation of close combat ever put on film. In all, "Generation War" has the strengths and weaknesses of middlebrow art—it may be clunky, even embarrassing, but it's certainly never dull. Directed by Philipp Kadelbach; written by Stefan Kolditz.—David Denby (Reviewed in our issue of 2/3/14.) (In limited release.)

Labor Day

The year is 1987, and a teen-age boy named Henry (Gattlin Griffith) lives the quiet life with Adele (Kate Winslet), his divorced mother. Their routine is interrupted by Frank (Josh Brolin), a convicted murderer who has fled from custody and holes up in their home over the Labor Day weekend. His initial air of menace fades, and soon—absurdly soon, you might think—he becomes a part of the family, teaching Henry a range of manly skills and seducing the frail and loveless Adele. The seduction itself is waged largely by euphemism, as when Frank gets his hands all moist and juicy with a dash of home baking; at times like this, the movie—the first truly serious and joke-free tale to be directed by Jason Reitman—offers more to laugh at than most of his comedies do. It looks swell, and Winslet adds another portrait of pained watchfulness to her gallery of suffering heroines, but the result feels like a richly implausible dream disguised as a soulful drama.—Anthony Lane (1/13/14) (In limited release.)

Like Father, Like Son

In film after film, the Japanese director Hirokazu Kore-eda has inspected the family unit—the many ways in which it can be added to, subdivided, and cracked. His latest work lays forth a rare but especially troubling case of damage: Ryota (Masaharu Fukuyama) and Midori (Machiko Ono) discover that their son, Keita (Keita Ninomiya), age six, is not theirs at all. The maternity hospital mixed up two babies, and, as a result, their real son, Ryusei (Shogun Hwang), has spent his life in the care of another couple. Custom, genetics, and the law all specify that the boys must now be swapped, and yet their years of upbringing can hardly be undone or ignored. The families belong to different social strata, one being poorer but more rumbustious than the other, all of which leads to strains of mild social comedy and a definite touch of the schematic. What stays with you, however, is the unlikely shadow of loss, not least in the hearts of the boys' mothers: how can a loving child, even the "wrong" one, be let go? In Japanese.—A.L. (1/27/14) (In limited release.)

Ms. 45

A young woman who works as an artisan at a small garment-district fashion house endures unspeakable horror—she's raped twice in quick succession, first by a masked thug in an alley, and then, upon her return home, by an awaiting intruder. Fighting off the second attacker, she bashes his head in with an iron, dismembers and stashes his body, and, taking his pistol, wanders the streets to shoot men who display aggression or even affection. In Abel Ferrara's street-scuzzy, sun-streaked, neon-lurid New York film noir, from 1980, the protagonist, Thana (Zoë Tamerlis Lund)—short for the Greek word for "death"—suffers in silence: the character is mute, gesturing and passing notes to make herself understood, and her social isolation and her inability to vent her rage lend her gestures an ever-greater symbolic impact. With Grand Guignol relish, Ferrara depicts a city in the throes of a Wild West lawlessness that invites vigilante action (the Guardian Angels are thanked in the end credits). But his sardonic documentary portraits of cheesy styles of macho seduction set up an implacable gender opposition of legendary dimensions, beyond politics and perhaps beyond redress.—R.B. (BAM Cinématek; Feb. 7-9.)

Ride Along

Ice Cube and Kevin Hart are just funny enough together to make audiences forgive some of the most careless moviemaking in the long history of thrown-together commercial packages. The story concerns a police detective (Ice Cube) who tests his would-be brother-in-law (Hart) by putting him

OF NOTE MANILA IN THE CLAWS OF LIGHT

The vicious depredations of the urban jungle have rarely been bared with such fierce clarity as in this 1975 melodrama, directed by Lino Brocka. The twenty-one-year-old protagonist, Julio, a fisherman in a provincial village, has come to Manila on a self-appointed mission. His girlfriend, Ligaya, a local beauty, was lured to the city with the promise of a job, but soon thereafter stopped writing home. Suspecting foul play, Julio takes work as a laborer on a grand-scale Manila construction site while wandering the city in search of her. The simple setup hurls Julio—and the movie—into the frustrations and the deprivations of the urban poor. He faces near-starvation, the vulnerability of non-unionized workers whose meagre wages are paid sporadically, the unsanitary horrors of smoke-clotted waterfront slums, and the oppressive violence of streets run by policemen in cahoots with the wealthy and the powerful. With action ranging from Julio's recruitment by a male prostitute to the murder of a co-worker whose family lost their land to corrupt officials, Brocka fulfills the aesthetic promise of the title: the sharp-edged, rough-toned images reveal torments and abominations with exhilarating, combative energy. In Tagalog.—Richard Brody (MOMA; Feb. 6-12.)

through a hellish day of police work. The cop-buddy plot is so lame and derivative that it keeps collapsing, even as farce, but the director, Tim Story, milks the lead actors for what they can do. Ice Cube has a stare that cuts like a meat cleaver, and Hart Jungers around him like an overanxious terrier, chattering, falling, recovering.—*D.D.* (2/3/14) (In wide release.)

The Saragossa Manuscript

This three-hour swirl of Polish phantasmagoria, from 1965, is an epic piece of japey; it celebrates visions and magic by means of labyrinthine storytelling. Flashbacks within flashbacks make up the story, which is catalyzed when two soldiers on opposite sides of an unexplained nineteenth-century war stumble upon a manuscript that transfixes them with its potent, sexy language and imagery. The book recounts the picaresque adventures of Captain Alfonso van Worden, who travels between Andalusia and La Mancha during the Spanish Inquisition, encounters two gorgeous Muslim women in a boudoir at a deserted inn, and awakens beneath a gallows. The rest of his journey circles back to these euphoric yet troubling experiences, as such characters as a possessed peasant, a hermit-exorcist, a cabalist, and a gypsy chief regale him with stories involving stumbling suitors, busty beauties, ridiculous duels, and mystical symbols. The director, Wojciech Has, sustains a sardonic, slaphappy tone; the elegantly modulated black-and-white cinematography, with tones ranging from bleached to silken, and the off-kilter compositions suggest that the director himself is sporting a death's-head grin.—*Michael Sragow* (Film Society of Lincoln Center; Feb. 5 and Feb. 8.)

Secret Defense

The ne'er-do-well son (Grégoire Colin) of a French arms dealer who met with a mysterious end launches an investigation on his own and enlists his sister, Sylvie (Sandrine Bonnaire), a cancer researcher, to help. Suspicion falls upon Walsler (Jerzy Radziwilowicz), once the dead man's assistant and now his successor, whose gleaming high-tech office and shadowy rural chateau are steeped in secrets of family, business, and politics. The director Jacques Rivette's labyrinthine mystery, from 1998, places Sylvie at the center of the story: she's jolted out of her well-ordered and lonely life in Paris and into a world of violence and power on which she had successfully turned her back. With suave and feline images by the cinematographer William Lubtchansky, Rivette offers a virtual documentary on modern bourgeois solitude: coffee and cigarettes, computers and telephones, brisk strolls and Métro rides take the place of high adventure. (Long takes

aboard elevated urban train lines are especially limpid inspirations.) Paris takes on the character of Sylvie's rueful meditations and unwelcome revelations, and the countryside, seen through Walsler's spattered windshield, silently resounds with the horror of stifled history. In French.—*R.B.* (BAM Cinématek; Feb. 10.)

Stranger by the Lake

The lake is in France, under the spell of summer, but who could the stranger be? Almost anyone could qualify: Franck (Pierre Deladonchamps), who wanders onto the shoreline every day in search of companionship; Henri (Patrick D'Assunção), the corpulent loner who sits and surveys the scene; Michel (Christophe Paou), all muscle and mustache, who could have arrived straight from a French remake of "Magnum P.I."; and so on. The beach is a cruisers' idyll, and intimacy—often quite graphic—hangs within easy reach, even if one party knows nothing of the other, save the strength of his desires. When a swimmer dies, therefore, and foul play is suspected, the investigating policeman (Jérôme Chappatte) finds his inquiries thwarted at every turn. The director Alain Guiraudie's film is creepy, consumed by ritual, and quietly comic; only some eager blood-letting seems out of place. There is no music to be heard, and no getting away from the location, which feels like a paradise waiting to be menaced and lost. In French.—*A.L.* (1/27/14) (In limited release.)

12 O'Clock Boys

The documentary filmmaker Lotfy Nathan considers Baltimore's crews of young, mainly African-American dirt-bikers—daring and talented stunt riders whose high-speed, large-city expeditions through the city spark official denunciations and bitter cat-and-mouse games with the police. He focusses on one young aspirant, Pug, whom he films in the course of three years. Dreaming of acceptance by the leading group—the 12 O'Clock Boyz—the adolescent Pug devotes exceptional time and effort to cultivating his acrobatic skills, even as trouble intrudes. His older brother, Tibba—something of a father figure to him—dies suddenly, of an asthma attack, and Pug turns increasingly combative. Meanwhile, his lifelong affinity for and deep knowledge of animal life—he has long planned to be a veterinarian—go on the back burner. In slow-motion shots, Nathan captures the riders' pride in mastery and thrill in adventure. Discussions with Pug's mother and other relatives, his elder neighbors, and veteran riders reveal the underlying conflicts—the perception of hostile authority and widespread indifference—at the heart of the defiantly public self-assertions.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

24 Exposures

Billy (Adam Wingard), a photographer who specializes in what he calls "personal fetish photos"—all featuring young women in various states of undress and often pretending to be victims of violence—is questioned by a detective (Simon Barrett) who is investigating a series of unsolved murders. Meanwhile, Billy's relationship with his girlfriend, Alex (Caroline White), is tested twice—first by his attraction to one of his models, Callie (Sophia Takal), who joins the couple for a threesome, then by the informal photo shoot he arranges at home with a new participant, Rebecca (Helen Rogers), a waitress. In this sleek yet confessional drama by the prolific filmmaker Joe Swanberg, the boundaries of art and life are probed with a knowing yet uneasy directness. Billy admits that his photographs arise from his own fantasies and desires, yet struggles to keep them from becoming realities even as he stages them in studios and on location. The incongruously glossy camerawork (by Adam Pinney) suggests precisely the sort of softcore salability that Billy's—and Swanberg's—self-revelations skirt. As Billy attracts new models for his work, the movie audaciously displays the fantasies—and, perhaps, the realities—that these women, too, are pursuing.—*R.B.* (IFC Center.)

The Wolf of Wall Street

Martin Scorsese's three-hour burlesque of loathsome, crooked financial activity and extravagant personal debauchery is meant to epitomize everything that has gone wrong with the money culture. Leonardo DiCaprio's Jordan Belfort (a real-world scoundrel and swindler) comes right at us, narrating directly to the camera, like a low-rent Richard III; he pitches us his shady deals and his druggy, manic life. At the brokerage that Belfort sets up, DiCaprio, addressing the troops, arches his back, nearly swallows the mike, and preaches the gospel of winning, killing, and triumphing. Physically, DiCaprio's work is astounding, but it's also one of the most completely externalized performances in movie history—Jordan Belfort is not, in the end, very interesting. Neither is the movie: Scorsese stages the money-making, the orgies, and the drug-taking with such jubilant, unreflective vitality that they might be part of a Broadway musical—a knock-the-tourists-dead show called "Greed!" With Jonah Hill, as Belfort's henchman; Kyle Chandler, as the relentless and surprisingly subtle F.B.I. agent who pursues Belfort; and Margot Robbie, as the inevitable blond trophy wife. Terence Winter, adapting Belfort's boastful book, creates flurries of raucously cynical dialogue.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

OPENING

THE LAST OF THE UNJUST

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Feb. 7. (In limited release.)

THE LEGO MOVIE

An animated adventure comedy, about an action figure who is mistaken for a superhero. Directed by Phil Lord and Christopher Miller, with the voices of Chris Pratt, Elizabeth Banks, and Will Arnett. Opening Feb. 7. (In wide release.)

THE MONUMENTS MEN

George Clooney directed this Second World War drama, and also stars, as a member of a group of curators and scholars attempting to rescue art works from the Nazis. Co-starring Matt Damon and Bill Murray. Opening Feb. 7. (In wide release.)

ALSO PLAYING

I, Frankenstein: In wide release.
Tim's Vermeer: In limited release.

REVIVALS AND FESTIVALS

Titles in bold are reviewed.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"Millennium Film Journal at 35." Feb. 8 at 6 and Feb. 9 at 6 and 8: "Differently, Molussia" (2012, Nicolas Rey).

BAM CINÉMATEK

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"Vengeance Is Hers." Feb. 7 at 2 and 7: "Medea" (1969, Pier Paolo Pasolini). Feb. 7 at 4:30 and 9:30, Feb. 8 at 9:30, and Feb. 9 at 9:50: "Ms. 45." Feb. 9 at 2 and 6: "Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles" (1975, Chantal Akerman). Feb. 10 at 7:30: "Secret Defense."

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Feb. 7-13 at 1:10, 3:20, 5:30, 7:40, and 9:50: "Alphaville" (1965, Jean-Luc Godard; in French).

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—"Masterpieces of Polish Cinema." Feb. 5 at 2 and Feb. 8 at 5:30: "The Saragossa Manuscript." Feb. 5 at 6 and Feb. 7 at 7:30: "Camouflage" (1976, Krzysztof Zanussi). Feb. 5 at 8:30: "Man of Iron" (1981, Andrzej Wajda). Feb. 7 at 9:45: "Eroica" (1957, Andrzej Munk). Feb. 9 at 4:30: "Night Train" (1959, Jerzy Kawalerowicz).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—"Remastered and Restored: Treasures of French Cinema." Feb. 11 at 4 and 7:30: "Une Chambre en Ville" (1982, Jacques Demy). The 7:30 screening will be introduced by Adam Gopnik, of this magazine.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"An Auteurist History of Film." Feb. 5-7 at 1:30: "Black Girl." Special screenings. Feb. 6-7 and Feb. 11-12 at 7, Feb. 8 at 4:45, Feb. 9 at 2:30, and Feb. 10 at 6:30: "Manila in the Claws of Light." The films of Isaac Julien. Feb. 7 at 4:30 and Feb. 9 at 7: "Derek" (2008). Feb. 7 at 7 and Feb. 9 at 4:30: "Young Soul Rebels" (1991). Feb. 8 at 5:15: "Who Killed Colin Roach?" (1983) and "Territories" (1984). Feb. 10 at 7: A discussion with Julien.

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—"The Soundtrack Series." Feb. 8 at 2: "Saturday Night Fever" (1976, John Badham), followed by stories told by Cammi Climaco and Dana Rossi.



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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT ON THE TRAIL

Last month, Colorado opened its first retail marijuana shops. At the Colorado Springs airport, there are now bins to help departing travellers remember to drop their pot before flying off to less liberated states. The law legalizing marijuana in Colorado was the result of a long grass-roots campaign that culminated, in 2012, in a winning ballot vote, and was one of the most surprising left-libertarian successes in recent years. But pot legalization (Washington State has approved a similar law) is a difficult political harbinger to categorize.

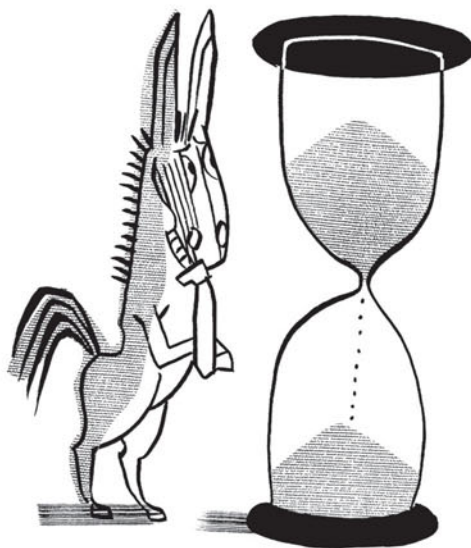
Colorado has a free-range-inspired history, and the new law might be understood as the latest reimagining of frontier freedom. It has not been a mellowing project, however. The campaign was fought amid a series of bruising battles over social and economic issues—gun control, fracking, taxes, school reform, and civil unions for gay couples—that Colorado and its Democratic governor, John Hickenlooper, Jr., have been engaged in during the years of President Obama's Administration.

The state's unruliness can be explained in part by the electoral math. Registered voters are almost equally split among Democrats, Republicans, and independents. Colorado's political statutes allow citizens to introduce ballot initiatives, a situation that encourages populist campaigning on unconventional issues. A rising Latino population has enlivened the immigration debate. And an oil and natural-gas drilling boom has exacerbated long-running arguments about land rights and environmentalism. The midterm elections will likely be closely contested and fuelled by heavy spending by outside interests, and the results may help to define President Obama's electoral legacy. One of his greatest political achievements has been to revive or solidify the Democratic Party's standing in the West, particularly in Colorado, Washington, Nevada, Oregon, and New Mexico. He was the first Democratic Presidential candidate to prevail in Colorado since 1992,

and he did so twice. In addition to the governorship, Democrats now hold both houses of the legislature and both U.S. Senate seats. During the next two years, Democrats across the country—not only the presumptive Presidential favorite, Hillary Clinton, but many candidates for the Senate and the House—will have to decide how best to recast the Party's ideas and campaign narratives for the post-Obama era, without giving up the political territory that he has conquered. It is not at all obvious how they should go about that. The task has been further complicated by the President's approval ratings, which have been pulled down by the dismal Obamacare rollout and, especially, by his inability to get anything through Congress. As in 2010, the President's struggles in Washington may undermine Democrats this year, too.

Some Democrats see promise in a bolder conviction politics—in the unabashedly progressive platform and rhetoric that lifted New York Mayor Bill de Blasio to office in November, and in the pointed critique of inequality offered by Senator Elizabeth Warren, of Massachusetts. Obama and his allies in the Party leadership, however, are charting a more cautious course—no doubt with an eye on the coming midterms. In last week's State of the Union address, the President emphasized

some populist ideas that poll well with independent voters, such as raising the minimum wage and giving tax breaks to companies that create jobs for Americans. Yet he said nothing about Wall Street pay or union-organizing, and barely mentioned gun control—something that he championed last year, after the elementary-school shooting in Newtown, Connecticut, by trying to push Congress to buck the gun lobby and pass modest restrictions. It was a noble attempt, but it failed after a compromise worked out by Senators Joe Manchin and Patrick Toomey couldn't attract enough votes, and the reality of that failure is that Democrats in the West



and the South must now run away from a reform that the President once ardently promoted.

This year, in Colorado, Senator Mark Udall faces a difficult reelection fight. His race is one of some half a dozen that could determine whether Democrats maintain control of the Senate as the 2016 Presidential primary campaigns begin. Whether Udall—or incumbents in those other races, including Mary Landrieu, of Louisiana, and Mark Pryor, of Arkansas—still regards the President's support as an asset isn't certain. After the State of the Union, CNN asked the Senator if he would invite Obama to campaign with him. Udall dodged. "Coloradans are going to reelect me based on my record, not on the President's record," he said.

Governor Hickenlooper has suffered whiplash on gun policy, too. Early last year, he pushed through legislation—similar to the bill that failed in the Senate—after Newtown and the 2012 mass shooting at a movie theatre in Aurora. That legislation requires background checks on buyers in private gun sales, and limits an assault rifle's magazine to fifteen rounds. These are hardly radical restrictions, but gun-control advocates hailed the legislation as a template for how courageous Democrats in rural and Southern states can defy the National Rifle Association and enact new limits. Nevertheless, the N.R.A. supported recall votes in Colorado that cost two state senators who were allies of Hickenlooper their seats; a third resigned, fearing defeat. "I've spent a lot of time

trying to think about how to do things differently," the Governor remarked recently about the backlash the legislation created. "I think we were ahead of parts of the state."

Hickenlooper also faces reelection in November. His ambivalence about his own gun bill reveals his capacity for political resilience; he is an accessible and winsome candidate. And he, along with Democrats across the country, will be helped by the Republican Party's remarkably persistent self-destructive tendencies. According to the polls, the candidate most likely to win the Republican gubernatorial nomination in Colorado this year is Tom Tancredo, the former congressman and anti-immigration campaigner who once called Miami "a Third World country," because of its many Spanish speakers. Hickenlooper defeated Tancredo in 2010.

The Democratic Party is hardly leaderless or adrift. Yet it is the type of experimentation that Hickenlooper conducts in his reelection bid that will shape the Party's evolution. In 2008, then Senator Obama accepted the nomination for the Presidency in Denver's Mile High Stadium. A crowd of eighty-four thousand waved "Change" signs. Washington, as we all know by now, proved substantially intractable. Democrats will be watching Colorado again this year, hoping that it will show them another path to victory.

—Steve Coll

INK THE TIGER CUB SPEAKS



Sophia Chua-Rubinfeld is a highly successful twenty-one-year-old. Still, she is fallible; and though she was expected, last Wednesday morning, at quarter past nine, she did not arrive at the Starbucks in Harvard Square until nine-nineteen. "I'm so sorry!" she said, removing her hat. "I don't even have an excuse. I'm just slow." She placed an order, with some difficulty ("This menu requires a body of knowledge that I do not possess"), and sat down. "I'm never late, normally. Well, that's not fully true. Contrary to what you might think, my mom is not an entirely punctual person, so I might have gotten some bad training in that regard."

The parental training that Chua-Rubinfeld got became the subject of a national debate when, in 2011, her mother, Amy Chua, published the memoir "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother." An excerpt in the *Wall Street Journal* provoked death threats; the book has sold more than a hundred and fifty thousand copies and inspired

at least three book-length rebuttals.

Now Sophia's parents—Chua and her husband, Jed Rubinfeld, who are both professors at Yale Law School—have co-authored "The Triple Package." It is about the only topic more fraught than child rearing: why some minority groups in the U.S. "starkly outperform others." "I think it's well argued," Chua-Rubinfeld said. Her younger sister "keeps reading aloud all these tweets saying, 'The Tiger Mom is back, and she's still racist!' It sends my mom into paralyzes of depression, actually. But my dad totally thrives on confrontation. He's, like, 'Overshadowed by my wife again! Why am I not being called a racist, too?'"

When "Tiger Mother" came out, Chua-Rubinfeld was unprepared for the spotlight. "People all over the Internet were saying terrible things about my family, and I'm pretending not to care, but I'm eighteen and insecure, and of course I care." Her mother had portrayed her as a freakishly precocious piano prodigy. To counteract that impression, she started a blog called *New Tiger in Town*. On it, she described herself as an "aspiring Buddhist philosopher and/or warrior princess"; she posted a photo of herself wearing velvet tiger ears; and she wrote about accompanying her mother to red-carpet events ("Mark Wahlberg is such a boss").

That fall, she enrolled at Harvard, where she is now a junior. "The students here, who are not the most well-adjusted people, were coming up to me, going, 'I know the names of your dogs,' 'I know which piece you played at Carnegie Hall.'" In search of normalcy, she pledged a sorority, Kappa Alpha Theta, and joined R.O.T.C. (the drills were "pretty badass"). Now she hopes to be a military prosecutor, with a focus on sexual assault.

These days, her blog includes her studies (double major: philosophy and



Sophia Chua-Rubinfeld



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Hermon Atkins MacNeil, *The Moqui Prayer for Rain* (detail), 1895-96, cast ca. 1897, Daniel and Mathew Wolf, in memory of Diane R. Wolf.

It was organized by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, in collaboration with the Denver Art Museum.

Sanskrit), and prose poems about heartache. “But, no matter what I write, there’s this cohort of Malaysian and Singaporean thirteen-year-olds who keep asking, ‘How do I study like a Tiger Cub?’” Chua-Rubinfeld said. In August of 2012, she posted a list of “reasons why I should not be your role model.” (No. 17: “I say cruel things when I’m angry.”)

Chua-Rubinfeld finished her cappuccino and walked across Harvard Yard to her philosophy class. She doodled—lips and eyes—but paid attention to the lecture, about Kant’s theory of ethics. Afterward, she met three friends, including Angie Peng, whom she introduced as “my sorority big sister.” Peng was born in Beijing and grew up in Ohio; Chua-Rubinfeld is, as her name suggests, Chinese-Jewish-American. According to her parents’ book, *Jews and the Chinese* are two American minorities that are enjoying “disproportionate success”—others include Mormons and Igbo Nigerians—because they exhibit three traits: insecurity, impulse control, and a superiority complex.

Chua-Rubinfeld summarized the argument: “You need to have this chip on your shoulder to get ahead, but you also need to have no doubt that you can do it.”

“Is the insecurity necessary?” Taryn Perry, another sorority sister, asked. Perry’s family is affiliated with the Daughters of the American Revolution. (From “The Triple Package”: “A culture of lassitude, of nonstriving, seems to have set in at the upper echelons of WASP society.”)

Selena Hurtado, who met Chua-Rubinfeld in R.O.T.C., was born in Texas; her parents are from Mexico. Chua-Rubinfeld said to Hurtado, “The good news for you, in the book, is that children of immigrants do really well.” The bad news is that Cuban-Americans—not Mexican-Americans—are the only Latinos on the Triple Package list.

“It’s awkward to talk about this stuff,” Hurtado said. “But it’s not like it’s a secret. My parents don’t know why

Cubans do better, but they do notice it.” “And, besides, it’s not like success is the only important thing,” Chua-Rubinfeld said. “The Nazis were a classic Triple Package culture.” She added, “And there are plenty of Triple Package people on antidepressants.”

—Andrew Marantz

DEPT. OF EXERTION TAKE A SEAT



Fitness fads have been escalating in machismo: CrossFit, boot camps, kettlebells. Now, just in time for the Olympics—that sobering display of athletic masochism—comes a new trend, developed by a mother-and-daughter team who have experienced extreme athleticism and have returned to save people from it. Their program is called Chaise-Fitness, and it takes place largely on a padded chair.

On a recent Saturday morning, Rachel Piskin taught at the ChaiseFitness studio downtown, while her mother, Lauren Piskin, prepared for the nine-thirty class at their new studio, in the basement of the 92nd Street Y. Lauren is fifty-three, petite, muscular, and cheerful, and she wore a pink tank top and a gold skull pendant with red eyes. “A client made me this,” she said. “She’s into skulls.” She hugged people as they came in. The students included Billy, a broad-shouldered shoe buyer at Saks; his friend Sam, a first-timer who works in sales for David Yurman; and a dark-haired woman who said, “I’m going to take a Hebrew-school class while I’m here!” The Y was bustling. In the hallway, kids in leotards ran around before a dance lesson.

“My husband builds every studio—he wanted to be an architect,” Piskin said.

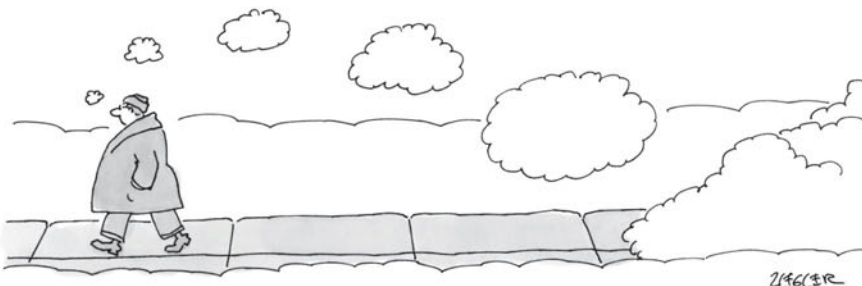
“He’s a dentist. Which, by the way, he loves.” The studio had two rows of cushioned metal Pilates-style chairs, with a pair of bungee cords with wrist loops hanging above each. The contraptions evoked a happier version of the end of “Star 80,” or the middle of “9 to 5.”

The Piskin chair, sometimes called the Reinvention Chair, enables its users to do a more aerobic and balletic form of Pilates. The bungee cords provide stability and take strain off shoulders and necks. The chair was Lauren’s inspiration; the bungees were Rachel’s. “I was a competitive figure skater till I was eighteen,” Lauren said. “At eighteen, I stopped skating. I said, ‘I want to be normal, and I want to quit.’” Then she coached figure skaters, including the Olympic gold medalist Sarah Hughes.

In the studio, the students stood behind chairs and put their hands through the bungee cords’ wrist loops. Music started playing at spinning-studio volume. Tara, the instructor, wearing a headset mike, commanded the students to stand next to their chairs and flap their arms, and then led them through squats and lunges. “I know it hurts,” she said. “Good morning!” Ten minutes later, the class mounted the chairs, kneeling; everyone was sweating. A hard look passed over Billy’s face. Piskin went in, smiled, and handed him a folded white towel. He soldiered on. The class did leg lifts.

Piskin said, “My daughter Rachel was the star of ‘The Nutcracker’ at age eight—they suck you in with that.” Rachel went on to become a dancer in the corps of the New York City Ballet. “At about twenty-two, Rachel’s body shut down,” Piskin said. “She put on thirty-five pounds. Her endocrine system shut down. She walked up the steps of Lincoln Center at age seven—now, never again.” Around that time, Lauren was refining her work with the chair. Rachel tried it. “This chair program healed her mind and body.”

When they decided to open Chaise-Fitness, people were skeptical. “My husband said, ‘Are you sure you want to do this? Chairs?’” Piskin said. People don’t always get the name. “They’re confused! Sometimes they think it’s like a couch—‘What is this thing?’ Branding people said, ‘Let me help you.’ There were months of names. Cinch was one. Edge. Uplift. Rise. My husband said, ‘This is not good. No one’s going to be able to say it, including



2/3/08

you.' Chaise, I think of the lounge chair. But it's different and unique."

People liked the chairs. Sati and Trisha, who came for the ten-forty-five class, are another mother and daughter. Trisha is thirty-two and slight. "I've gained fifteen pounds of muscle," she said. "We always come together. We're known for wearing matching outfits." Maddie, a student at Johns Hopkins, said that her mother got certified to teach ChaiseFitness classes; her father and sister attend, too.

Rachel Piskin is now healthy; a class she teaches, Ballet Bungee, incorporates pliés and tendus. And, Lauren said, she's getting married. "To a doctor. He was Rachel's knight in shining armor. He says his children will never dance, and they will *eat!* She would never have met him in the ballet."

In the hallway, a little girl in a pink leotard and tutu wandered by, chewing something. She looked in at the studio. Piskin waved.

—Sarah Larson

UP LIFE'S LADDER SHOOTING STRAIGHT



"No one hurt Duncan!" Catherine Hoke, a tall woman in a blazer, said the other day, to a group of athletic men. Hoke is the founder and C.E.O. of Defy Ventures, a nonprofit that teaches ex-convicts to start their own companies. She was referring to Duncan Niederauer, a C.E.O. of the New York Stock Exchange and a Defy faculty member. For Defy's most recent fund-raiser, Niederauer and Hoke had organized something more exciting than the traditional gala: a basketball tournament, at Madison Square Garden, between members of the business community and ex-convicts in the program; two former Knicks players, John Starks and Larry Johnson, had agreed to coach.

It was the morning of the tournament, and Hoke's students had gathered at a McDonald's on Seventh Avenue, to talk strategy. But they seemed more interested in drafting business plans.

"I recently read 'How to Win Friends & Influence People,'" Lasyah Palmer

said. In 1996, Palmer was arrested for a jewelry heist and sentenced to twenty years in prison. He wore a collared lilac shirt and had brought a stack of freshly printed business cards.

"Oh, Dale Carnegie?" Jamel Graham, another Defy student (convicted for selling crack), said. "He's like the realest man in business."

"I want you hyper," Hoke said. "We got some big-boy executives. Six-three, six-four. Two hundred and forty pounds."

"Duncan talks like he's pretty good," Brian Garrido (assault, drug possession, no prison time) said. Garrido wore a black sweatshirt with "ESCOBAR" on it, in white letters. That's the name of his street-wear company, and it refers not to Pablo but to Garrido's personal motto: Eloquence, Success, Courage, Optimism, Benevolence, and Respect.

"That's the thing about life: you can't underestimate anyone," Palmer said. He punched Coss Marte (cocaine dealing) lightly on the arm.

"I got stamina," Marte acknowledged. He runs what he calls a "prison-style" workout in downtown Manhattan. "I had one of the most significant cases of 2009," he said. "I had two million a year coming through my hands. Defy's model is to transform your hustle."

Hoke, who used to work in venture capital, started Defy because she believes that running a business, illegal or legal, requires a specific set of skills—and because, given how difficult it is to find a job if you have a criminal record, former convicts with an entrepreneurial bent might do better to create their own companies. Defy seeks out ambitious ex-criminals with managerial experience and trains them. Palmer had seventeen employees in four cities when he was running a diamond-heist ring. "They were leaders in their own right," he said. He became a paralegal in prison and now runs a Web site called LegalTech, which allows people to file legal complaints against their employers.

At the Garden, the players warmed up to Lupe Fiasco's "Around My Way (Freedom Ain't Free)." The businessmen had donated between twenty-five thousand and fifty thousand dollars each to play for a team. The Defy Dream Team, in white, was mostly ex-convicts; the Wall Street Bulls, in black, had Niederauer as their captain; the Sand Hill Road-

ies, named for the road in Silicon Valley where many private-equity firms have offices, wore red and were led by the venture capitalist Timothy Draper. "I'm strong, so I'm good on defense," Draper said. "But I foul a lot."

Niederauer, who is fifty-four, has spiky gray hair and a gravelly voice. He had recruited a ringer for his team: Wilfred (Spongy) Benjamin, who recently moved to New York from Uruguay, where he played professionally. Sitting courtside was Brian Hollnagel, the founder of BCI Aircraft Leasing, who is on Defy's advisory board. (In 2012, he was convicted of fraud and was later sentenced to twenty months in prison; if his crime hadn't been business-related, he might have been eligible to apply for the program.)

An M.S.G. announcer introduced the teams, and each player strutted onto the court. Larry Johnson bounded out in a gray sweater; John Starks, in a navy suit, gave a stern wave. The Bulls, coached by Starks, took an early lead over Sand Hill after Spongy scored two easy layups. Toward the end of the first, ten-minute half, Johnson was shouting at the referees. "You a half man, ref," he said. "We got Ray Charles and Stevie Wonder over here."

At halftime, Marte did a set of push-ups. "Not tired," he said, with a shrug. Draper, the venture capitalist, was sweating and moving slowly. "It's a longer court than we're used to," he said. His teammate Marlon Llin, a general contractor and Defy graduate, had plenty of energy. He served ten years for selling cocaine. "I used to work out four hours a day when I was in," he said. "Forty-five minutes of yoga, three hours of handball."

In the end, the Wall Street Bulls defeated both Defy and Sand Hill by wide margins. Sand Hill took second place, beating the Defy Dream Team by four points.

Palmer, the former diamond kingpin, asked Larry Johnson for a photo. "I'm going to mail it to Mr. Rich," he said. Johnson looked surprised. Palmer was referring to Richie Adams, who, like Johnson, had played for the University of Nevada, Las Vegas; he was convicted of manslaughter in 1998. "He's got some years left," Palmer, who was in prison with Adams, said. "I'm wishing him the best."

—Jessica Weisberg

THE FINANCIAL PAGE THE SOCHI EFFECT

Whatever happens on the ice and snow of Sochi in the next couple of weeks, one thing is certain: this Winter Olympics is the greatest financial boondoggle in the history of the Games. Back in 2007, Vladimir Putin said that Russia would spend twelve billion dollars on the Games. The actual amount is more than fifty billion. (By comparison, Vancouver's Games, in 2010, cost seven billion dollars.) Exhaustive investigations by the opposition figures Boris Nemtsov, Leonid Martynyuk, and Alexei Navalny reveal dubious cost overruns and outright embezzlement. And all this lavish spending (largely paid for by Russian taxpayers) has been, as Nemtsov and Martynyuk write, "controlled largely by businesspeople and companies close to Putin."

Sochi is emblematic of Russia's economy: conflicts of interest and cronyism are endemic. But the link between corruption and construction is a problem across the globe. Transparency International has long cited the construction industry as the world's most corrupt, pointing to the prevalence of bribery, bid rigging, and bill padding. And, while the sheer scale of graft in Sochi is unusual, the practice of politicians using construction contracts to line their pockets and dole out favors isn't. In the past year alone, Quebec learned about systematic kickbacks and Mob influence in the awarding of city construction contracts. In Turkey, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has become embroiled in a vast scandal involving friendly construction tycoons who were given cheap loans and no-bid contracts. And a recent report from the accounting firm Grant Thornton estimated that, by 2025, the cost of fraud in the industry worldwide will have reached \$1.5 trillion.

What makes construction so prone to shady dealings? One reason is simply that governments are such huge players in the industry. Not only are they the biggest spenders on infrastructure; even private projects require government approvals, permits, worksite inspections, and the like. The more rules you have, and the more people enforcing them, the more opportunities there are for corruption. And, in many countries, the process of awarding contracts and permits is opaque. As Erik Lioy, a forensic accountant and fraud expert at Grant Thornton, told me, "When it's not clear how projects get approved, people assume the worst, and that provides incentives to do a bribe or kickback."

On big government projects, additional factors kick in. Such projects are rare, and construction work is erratic, so politicians with contracts to award have immense leverage.

For contractors, bribery will always be attractive, because the cost of a bribe is dwarfed by the value of a contract—an effect known to economists as the Tullock paradox. And, as a study by Neill Stansbury, the co-founder of the Global Infrastructure Anti-Corruption Centre, put it, when a project is really big "it is easier to hide large bribes." Then, too, Lioy explains, "most big projects involve building something unique, or at least something that's never been built in that place before, and that makes it harder to estimate if costs are reasonable." Corruption is obvious only when costs are completely absurd—which Nemtsov and Martynyuk have shown is the case with Sochi's ice arenas and ski jumps.

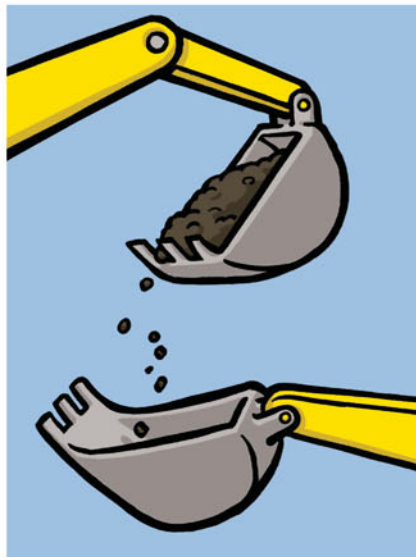
Sochi is a monument to Putin's Russia—a nationalist showcase, intended to demonstrate just how far the country has come in the past two decades. It has also given Russia its first world-class winter resort, and has significantly developed the infrastructure of the Caucasus. In that context, overspending can become, perversely, a point of pride. The contractors on the Pyramids almost certainly padded the bills, too.

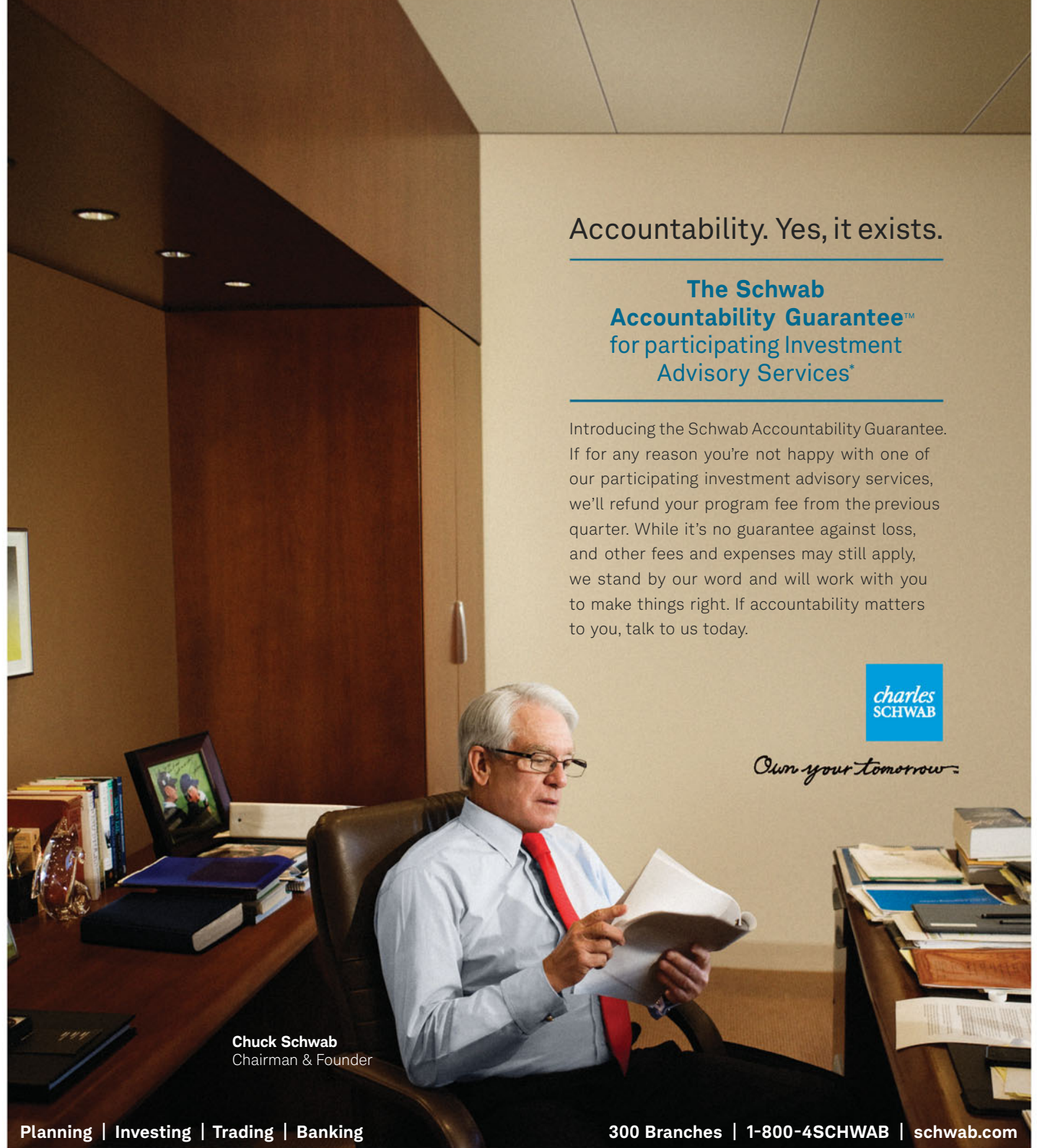
It's no surprise that graft-ridden grandiose projects are most common in countries where government isn't accountable. But even politicians who (unlike Putin) have to worry about being reelected often see benefits in unnecessary or wasteful construction spending, because it gives the economy a short-term boost. Turkey's construction spree, for instance, has played a major role in its economic boom. Construction creates jobs, and often reasonably well-paying ones. That's why, going back to the days of Boss Tweed, pouring money into construction projects has been a key part of what's sometimes known as "populist clientelism"—

a system that allows politicians both to reward cronies and to appeal to voters.

But an economic boost based on corrupt spending is an illusion, the equivalent of a sugar high. Paolo Mauro, an economist at the I.M.F., says simply, "Corruption is bad for economic growth." It's well documented that corruption discourages investment, because it makes businesses uncertain about what it takes to get ahead; as one study put it, "Arbitrariness kills." Corruption also skews government spending. The economists Vito Tanzi and Hamid Davoodi found that corruption leads politicians to overinvest in low-quality infrastructure projects while skimping on maintaining existing projects. (It's easier to collect bribes on new construction than on maintenance.) And, in a pathbreaking study nearly twenty years ago, Mauro found that countries with high levels of corruption spent little on education. In economist-speak, corrupt politicians put too much money into physical capital and not enough into human capital. Crony construction capitalism leaves us with too few teachers and too many ski jumps to nowhere.

—James Surowiecki





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BREAKING THE WAVES

In her sixties, a swimmer revives an old dream.

BY ARIEL LEVY



The first time Diana Nyad tried to swim around Manhattan, in the fall of 1975, she was pulled out of the East River in the black of night after eight hours of non-stop swimming—“trembling uncontrollably, muttering an incoherent stream of monosyllables,” she wrote in her 1978 memoir, “Other Shores.” She had contracted a virus in the contaminated water, and it took her ten days to recover. Then she got back in the water and did it again. On her second try, she wrote, “the Hudson was rough, but the full force of the tide was with me and I almost frolicked in the waves.” Nyad made it around in seven hours and fifty-seven minutes, breaking the record by nearly

an hour: “Manhattan Island was mine!”

There were pictures of her on the front pages of the New York papers the next morning. She was on “Saturday Night Live.” Woody Allen called her up for a date. (Nyad said yes, even though she’s gay, and they became friends; at one of his birthday parties, Diana Vreeland asked where she got her little shorts.) Nyad was twenty-six and strikingly beautiful, with big brown eyes, a toothy smile, and freckles. Her looks and her pronounced confidence made her a natural for television: she made a dazzling appearance on the “Tonight Show.” Her friend Bonnie Stoll remembers, “She walked on to Johnny Carson’s show as if

it was her show—no fear whatsoever.” Nyad was already an accomplished long-distance swimmer, having broken the women’s world record for the twenty-two-mile route from Capri to Naples and made the first north-to-south crossing of Lake Ontario. But after Manhattan she was a star.

For a follow-up, she decided, she would swim from Cuba to Florida: a hundred and eleven miles, the equivalent of five English Channel crossings, and the longest open-ocean swim in history. (The closest comparable feat was a sixty-mile crossing of Lake Michigan, performed by two men.) Nyad would have to contend with the strong currents and rough waves of the Gulf Stream, and with sharks and jellyfish. In an interview on the “Today” show, Jane Pauley asked about her motivation. “The most difficult thing I know, mentally or physically, is swimming these great bodies of water,” Nyad replied. But when she reached her destination, she said, she experienced “a moment of immortality.”

The Cuba swim was instead an epic deflation. Nyad entered the water in Havana Harbor protected by a steel shark cage, and the weather soon turned horrid. She was attacked by jellyfish, and eight-foot waves slammed her against the walls of the cage. The current pushed her wildly astray, toward Texas. Nyad had swum seventy-nine miles, in forty-two hours, when her team pulled her out of the water and told her that a squall had sent them irretrievably off course. She was devastated. “I have never summoned so much will power—I’ve never wanted anything so badly,” she told a television reporter just after she returned. Fighting tears, she added, “And I never tried so hard.”

A year later, on her thirtieth birthday, she broke the open-ocean world record for both men and women, swimming a hundred and two miles from the Bahamas to Florida, unassisted and without a shark cage. She did not swim another stroke for three decades.

One morning in November, Nyad, who is sixty-four, was at home in Los Angeles, where she lives with her dog, Teddy, in a rambling house in a neighborhood of green lawns and carefully pruned roses. Two ragged flags,

For long-distance swimmers like Diana Nyad, the greatest barrier is mental endurance.

American and Cuban, hung from a pole in her front yard.

When Nyad stopped swimming, she reasoned that thirty was a good age for an athlete to retire. She began a career as a television personality, on “Wide World of Sports” and CNBC, and as a radio commentator for NPR. Nyad’s voice is deep and resonant, and she is a voluble, impassioned storyteller; she also found work as a motivational speaker. She stayed in shape, and took a hundred-mile bike ride every Friday. “Part of the pleasure of these endurance activities is to be so engaged in your mind and in nature and just get away from the monkey chatter,” she said. “But I’d get back to the house and think, Oh, my God, I didn’t notice a thing. I didn’t look over and see if there were dolphins in the ocean.” Her mind was monopolized by regret. “I was very engaged in examining the past: Why didn’t I do it this way instead?”

She thought about the dissolution of her decade-long relationship—her marriage, as far as she was concerned—with a television executive named Nina Lederman, who is now a close friend. She thought about injustices she’d suffered and how she wished she’d fought back. And sometimes she thought about how differently she would approach her sport now. “There’s that French expression ‘If only the young knew, and the elderly could still do,’” she said. “How many athletes have I interviewed who say, ‘Oh, if only I could have my mind of this age and be back on the world stage’ as a skater, golfer, tennis player . . .”

She first had the idea of swimming from Cuba to Florida, in the seventies, when she was living on the Upper West Side. (She liked to gamble at the time—she used to meet her bookie at the cheese department in Zabar’s.) “I went out and got all the nautical charts of the earth’s surface, and I put them out on a big swath of the rug and got rid of the Antarctic Circle,” she said. When her eyes reached Cuba, “I literally had a palpitation about it. I thought, It’s *Cuba*. It’s magic. It’s that forbidden land we’re not allowed to go to, and they’re not allowed to come here. I thought of all the stories of the hundreds of Cubans who have tried to swim out on their own and not made it—they call it the Havana graveyard.” When Nyad was growing up, in Fort Lauderdale,

her mother used to take her to the Lago Mar beach club and, pointing off the shore toward Cuba, say, It’s so close you could actually swim there. “She meant it figuratively,” Nyad said. “But I think somewhere, bubbling in my imagination, I was, like, It’s right there.” Around her neck, Nyad wore a pendant that Lederman had given her: a scrimshaw map of Cuba with “Onwards” engraved on the back.

Her mother died shortly before Nyad turned sixty, and something shifted inside her. “I don’t care how healthy I am—it’s not like I’m going to live another sixty years,” she said. “There’s a real speeding up of the clock and a choking on, Who have you become? Because this one-way street is hurtling toward the end now, and you better be the person you admire.” She didn’t want to ponder her past anymore. “I used to be such a maverick in the nineteen-seventies,” she said. “I was one of the few people—certainly one of the few women—doing these kinds of extreme things.” She wanted the “thrill of commitment”: a magnificent goal that would consume all self-doubt. “Cuba, because the dream had been there before, I thought, Boy, that’s a dream I could rekindle.”

But it seemed impossible: you could never do at sixty what you did at thirty, let alone what you couldn’t do at thirty. The body disintegrates every year, every hour. “In some parts one grows woody; in others one goes bad,” the critic Charles Sainte-Beuve wrote. “Never does one grow ripe.” And yet: Cuba. So close you could swim there.

“We usually know where each other is,” Bonnie Stoll, who has been Nyad’s best friend for more than thirty years, recalled. “Suddenly there’d be hours of time when she’d be all squirrely—three, four hours at a time where I don’t know where she is, because she’s swimming.” After Nyad revealed her plan, Stoll accompanied her on a training swim in Mexico and saw her in the water for the first time. “One hour in, I saw that she was meant to do it,” Stoll told me. “She was one with the water. There was no difference; she was just part of it. That lasted six or eight hours. I said, O.K., let’s go.”

Nyad announced her intention to the rest of her friends at a party. “I feel powerful—I’ve got a lot of chi left in this life,” she shouted, pacing poolside in a white

bathing suit. “When I walk up on this beach this time, the whole world’s going to see: sixty is the new forty!” Then she leaped into the water.

Nyad met Stoll playing racquetball; Stoll was once among the top ten professional players in the country. The two dated briefly, and then settled into a jock friendship, working out together constantly. After Stoll, who has the demeanor of an exceptionally jovial drill sergeant, retired from racquetball, she became a trainer, and she helped Nyad prepare for Cuba. She wasn’t particularly concerned about Nyad’s age. “Endurance sports are very different from other kinds of sports: the mind is a large part of the endeavor,” she said. “And Diana has a different kind of mind.”

Steven Munatones, the director of the World Open Water Swimming Association, told me, “If you run, eventually your joints give out. In basketball, you can dunk at twenty-two but probably not at forty-two, and certainly not at sixty-two.” Munatones, who is a performance consultant for a variety of athletes (when we spoke, he was on the way to coach skiers for the Olympics in Sochi), said that swimming is different: “If you are inclined to, you can do it until the day you die. Marathon swimmers aren’t Michael Phelps. They are not being measured on aerobic capacity. If Diana’s aerobic capacity decreases, she just slows down.”

But the slower she swims the longer she has to stay awake, and to get from Cuba to Florida at any pace she would have to swim for days on end. Nyad has always operated without a lot of rest, though. In fifth grade, she wrote an essay called “What I Will Do for the Rest of My Life,” in which she announced, “I want to play six instruments. I want to be the best in the world at two things. I want to be a great athlete and I want to be a great surgeon. I need to practice hard every day. I need to sleep as little as possible.” Stoll told me, “Diana is the least lazy person I have ever met in my life.”

After Mexico, Stoll began to gather information: “Let’s figure out the nutrition; let’s write to people. But nobody really knows.” What they wanted to do had never been accomplished by anyone, male or female, at any age. Stoll said that she could “see the playing field: in endurance sports, you have to build up and



"I don't think we're going to be able to agree on a pizza topping that will solve all of our problems."

then you have to taper down in order to peak at the right time." But they couldn't simply pick a date to begin the swim. They had to wait for a window when the currents and the wind would not make the journey impossible. Even then, at any moment—after, say, forty hours of swimming—the weather could suddenly force them to stop.

They estimated that the expedition would cost about half a million dollars. Nyad needed a boat with a crew and an experienced navigator that she could follow. She needed a medic, in case she collapsed in the water. (In 1959, the Greek swimmer Jason Zirganos, attempting to cross the North Channel of the Irish Sea, suddenly stopped stroking after sixteen and a half hours. The medic in his crew cut his chest open with a pocketknife and performed open-heart massage, but Zirganos died before they reached land.) Nyad would need handlers available the entire time she was swimming, calling her toward them every ninety minutes, so that they could feed her over the side of the boat. (In keeping with the rules of the sport, they would have to feed her without touching her, as if dangling fish into the mouth of a dolphin.) Finally, the entire crew would need plane tickets and paperwork to get to Cuba. They began raising money.

When Nyad wasn't working on logistics, she trained ferociously. She spent the first half of 2010 going for twelve-, then eighteen-, then twenty-four-hour swims off of St. Martin, where there are rarely sharks to contend with. For the Cuba swim, Nyad and Stoll decided that they

would employ shark divers and kayakers for protection: Nyad had bad memories of swimming inside the shark cage, and, furthermore, an Australian named Susie Maroney had made the swim in a cage in 1997; Nyad wanted to accomplish something unprecedented. She and Stoll found a company that produces a kind of shark shocker—a telephone-sized contraption with a seven-foot antenna that drags in the water and emits a shark-repelling electromagnetic field.

Early in the summer of 2010, Nyad and Stoll went to Florida and waited for the right conditions. "Ninety-one days in a row sitting in Key West—trained, ready, expedition paid for—looking at the winds, calling the meteorologists," Nyad remembered, shaking her head. "The winds never stopped coming from the east. And when they come from the east and the Gulf Stream's going east they hit and they form giant peaks. And you can't make it. Then the water temperatures get too cold by the end of September." In early October, she sent an e-mail to friends and donors: "I got in better shape both body and mind than even in my twenties. It has been draining, ripping of the spirit to feel it all slip away from me."

"It's hard for me to remember even now—the heartache the day we went and packed up, after all the training, the fund-raising," she told me. "Now you're waiting until next July. And training again." Relinquishing the Cuba swim did not feel like an option. When she returned to L.A., she was "just looking up a mountain of knowing I was going to go back. Because there is no way I'm not

going to do that fucking swim." The waiting and the training would be their own test of endurance.

A pronounced ability to tolerate pain is common among marathon swimmers. Agony in the sport is a given. The body suffers from being immersed for days in salt water: when a swimmer swallows water as she breathes, it abrades the soft tissue of the lips, the tongue, and the throat. The throat starts to swell shut; in one case, Munatones said, "they literally had to cut the person's throat to get air in." Salt water is nauseating, and swimmers, already seasick from being thrown by waves, vomit during marathons, losing valuable calories.

The water in the Straits of Florida, where Nyad wanted to swim, is relatively warm. But even the balmiest seawater is colder than body temperature, and hypothermia is a grave danger. Blood flows to the body's core to protect the vital organs, and, as the condition progresses, the extremities fail. The victim becomes confused and can lose consciousness; in the worst case, her heart stops. Most swimmers tolerate a certain degree of hypothermia. The problem is that by the time a swimmer is dangerously hypothermic she has stopped feeling cold. "Every year, people get in trouble," Munatones said. "When their crew pulls them out, they seem catatonic, their blood pressure is low, their eyes roll back in the sockets."

Swimmers call the process of acclimating the body to cold and seasickness "hardening": the earned capacity to survive for long stretches underwater, where humans are not designed to be. People who excel at this tend to be exceptionally good at refocussing their minds when confronted with pain or danger. Recently, Nyad took part in an experiment with a psychiatrist at the University of California San Diego, in which subjects' air supply was restricted for undisclosed intervals and their panic response measured, using MRIs. Nyad stayed as calm as Navy SEALs who participated in the experiment. Open-water swimmers tend to have "a survival mentality," Munatones said. "You literally have to go to the edge. With athletes in general, they say that, but normally that means jump high or run fast—it's not a matter of life or death.

"Every open-water swimmer I know, they make lists," he continued. "They remember their exact time, to the second,

of a swim they did twenty years ago; they count their strokes.” When Nyad takes a long flight, she buys a family-size pack of M&M’s. In her seat, she takes the candy out of the bag, counts it, and puts back an equal number of each color. (She eats the extras.) She divides the length of the flight by the number of remaining M&M’s and then eats them at even intervals, keeping track of what color she pulls out of the bag every time. “I want to finish them exactly when I land,” she said. “Of course, if you don’t land on time, then you’re screwed, and your whole O.C.D. personality is in crisis.” On training swims for Cuba, if she got to her point of exit ahead of schedule, she would continue swimming around until she’d hit her planned duration to the second.

Open-water swimmers must be able to control their minds—it is all they can control, unlike the weather, the sharks, the currents. “They feel sick or cold or whatever, they have to be able to think of something else to continue,” Munatones said. “Open-water swimmers have to be able to compartmentalize.”

Nyad’s mother, Lucy Curtis, was born into a wealthy family, which made its money from a product called Soothing Syrup, and “used to live where Tiffany’s is now,” Nyad told me. But Lucy’s mother didn’t want her, and she was sent to France to be brought up by relatives “who knew Matisse and Gauguin” and lived “literally right next door to Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas.” She was seventeen when the war came to Paris, and, with her American passport, she escaped. “She got together with a group of people and—by bicycle and by walking through the South of France—they got across the Pyrenees and into Portugal, where they took a boat to Manhattan.”

Lucy married Aristotle Nyad, a Greek Egyptian who looked like Omar Sharif and was a wonderful dancer. Diana often does an impression of him in speeches. “He called me over when I was five years old, and he had the large Webster’s dictionary open, and he said, ‘Dahling, I am waiting for five years, till you are ready to hear this moment,’” she told a TED conference in Berlin. He pointed to the word “naiad,” and explained that in Greek myth “these were the nymphs that swam in the lakes and rivers and the oceans to protect them for

the gods! The modern definition says ‘girl or woman champion swimmer.’ This is your destiny, dahling!” She started getting up at four-thirty or five every morning to swim for two hours before school, with an hour of sprints at lunchtime; after school she got in the pool for another two hours. “I would be so tired at night I couldn’t eat dinner,” she said.

Aristotle Nyad was a con man, and the family—Lucy, Diana, her sister, Liza, and their brother, William, who was schizophrenic—had to move frequently to keep ahead of the people he had lied to and stolen from. “My father, I always thought, was, you know, scary and fun,” Nyad said. “Magnetic and terrifying.” She adored her mother, but described her as weak. Aris, as he was called, had a violent temper, and several times Lucy had to go to the hospital after he attacked her. Diana became skilled at diverting her attention, focussing on the goals she set for herself at school and in the pool.

Her parents broke up when she was a teen-ager, and she did not see Aris for twenty years. One day, when she was living with Nina Lederman, on West Eighty-sixth Street, he showed up at their apartment at four in the morning. “He says, ‘Dahling, please, I want to see you. I love you so much.’ He’s wearing a white dinner jacket. He’s got a bucket of some incredibly expensive champagne. He’s got fresh-squeezed orange juice. He says, ‘Dahling, oh, I have thought of you every day for twenty years!’” He stayed that night and the next, when Nyad and Lederman were having a dinner party. “He makes a salmon with homemade risotto,” Nyad told me. “Gets these expensive Greek wines. Comes back at night with flowers for every woman at the party. Shows the men card tricks. Dances. We stay up till dawn. Everybody calls me the next day and says, ‘Your father is the most fascinating person alive, and his work with the U.N. is just incredible!’ Then the next person calls and says, ‘To be a professor of classics at the Sorbonne and to make it all the way over for this party was just amazing.’ They’re going to find out the truth when he’s gone. But he’s gone. And I never saw him again. Poof. Gone.”

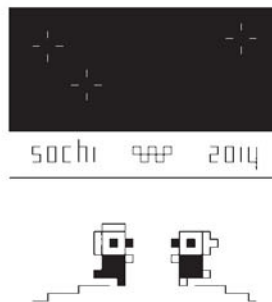
Throughout Nyad’s childhood, Aris had disappeared and reemerged, and once she reached puberty it was better if he was away. When she was eleven, he took her to the beach one afternoon, and when they stopped after swimming to wash off the sand he put his hand between her legs. “Like he could grab my crotch and hold it in his hand and look at me, like, ‘I got you—I got you right here. And I know how humiliated you feel, and this is fun.’” After that, Nyad strategized how to get to her room without crossing his path when she got home from school. She felt safest and most free underwater.

As a seventh grader at the Pine Crest School, in Florida, Nyad found a mentor: Jack Nelson, her swimming coach, a former Olympian, who convinced her that with his help she could become a star. “Finally, there’s somebody who truly is a leader and cares about me and thinks I’m going to capture the world,” Nyad told me. Within a year, she had won state championships in the hundred- and two-hundred-metre backstroke. “I had him on a pedestal—he was *it*. I was just dying for some leadership and I selected him. And I told him a lot of those stories about the parents.”

So it was devastating when he forced himself on her, when she was fourteen, one afternoon as she was resting at his house before a swim meet. Throughout high school, Nyad says, he persuaded her to meet him in hotel rooms, at his office, in his car, and molested her. She would never be a great swimmer without him,

he said, and this was what he needed from her in return; he told her that she had instigated the relationship by writing “I love Coach Nelson” on the cover of a notebook. Years later, Nyad disclosed the abuse to a former teammate, who said that she’d had the same experience.

They reported him to the headmaster, and Nelson left at the end of that school year. He went on to become the swimming coach at Fort Lauderdale High School, and in 1993 Fort Lauderdale named him its man of the year. In 2007, Nelson made a statement to the Fort Lauderdale police denying the allegations of abuse; Nyad, he claimed, had told him once that she “wanted to be a writer, and



wanted to have the ability to write things that were not true and make people believe them.”

Nyad told me, “A lot of children who grew up with incest say, ‘Oh, I love my father—it’s very complicated.’ With the coach, for me, it’s not complicated. I’ve had all kinds of fantasies of being out in the woods and tying him to a tree and putting his penis on a marble slab and walking around with a hatchet and watching him cry and plead, and I’d say, ‘Oh, remember me? Remember when I was crying? You didn’t seem to care too much about my feelings.’ And then leaving him to bleed to death.”

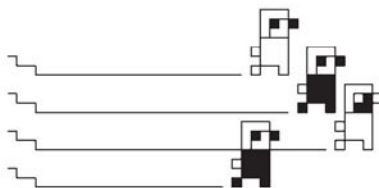
When Nyad was in college, her mother revealed that Aris was her stepfather, and that her real father had left when she was three years old. By the time Aris died, in 1998, Nyad had already made peace with her memories of him. “People say, ‘Where’d you get this drive?’” she told me. “Early on, I thought, I’m in this alone. I’m going to be taking care of myself.”

On the evening of August 7, 2011, after a second year of non-stop training, Nyad and Stoll and their crew set out from Havana Harbor. “There was just no doubt in any of our minds, We’re going all the way,” Nyad said.

Distance swimmers spend most of their athletic life staring down into murky water, isolated by sensory deprivation. “You are swimming essentially blind and deaf,” Munatones told me. “Imagine doing the New York Marathon and not being able to see around you. Most people would finish the marathon crazy—in fact, they wouldn’t be able to finish at all.” Nyad gets through the hours by singing songs in her head—Neil Young, the Beatles. She counts in sets of a hundred, first in English and then in German, Spanish, and, finally, French. She thinks about a one-woman show she wants to perform and fantasizes about appearing on “Dancing with the Stars.”

For the Cuba swim, Nyad followed an illuminated path in the water; her team had developed a streamer studded with L.E.D.s that trailed off a support boat, so that she could swim above it. They couldn’t shine a beam into the water to track her—light attracts animals—so she swam with a little red light attached to her swim cap.

By the end of the first night, she had excruciating pain in her right shoulder—“I feel like it’s going to come out of the socket,” she told Stoll from the water—and the current was pushing them backward. A few hours later, Nyad suffered a severe asthma attack, the first she’d ever had in the water, and every few strokes she had to roll onto her back to catch her breath. Her doctor got in the water to give her puffs from an inhaler, and she pushed on, swimming so slowly that she devel-



oped severe chills. “I’m just dead,” Nyad called out to Stoll. “I’m dead.”

At twenty-nine hours, she got out of the water, dehydrated and vomiting. “I just can’t see myself training and dragging everybody along again for another year,” she told her supporters when the team pulled up onshore in Key West. She cried a little as she said, “I think I’m going to have to go to my grave without swimming from Cuba to Florida.”

Six weeks later, she tried again. The weather and the water were flawless. “It was like glass the whole time,” Nyad said. She had been reading Stephen Hawking, and, at dusk, as she was enveloped by the dark sea and sky, she thought about the limits of time and space. Suddenly, at about 8 P.M., she felt a pain like nothing she’d ever experienced—like being “dipped in hot burning oil and your body is in flames.”

She had been stung by a swarm of box jellyfish, the most venomous creature in the ocean—an almost mythological monster with twenty-four eyes and three-foot tentacles that inject a poison that can cause cardiovascular collapse and cerebral hemorrhage. “I feel it in my back and then I feel it in my lungs,” Nyad recalled. “Just frozen in agony.” An emergency medical technician jumped in to wipe away the gelatinous tentacles and was stung in the process. He got back on the boat, injected himself with epinephrine, and collapsed on deck, able to take only three breaths a minute. Nyad stayed in the ocean, treading water, screaming and gasping for air.

After the worst of it dissipated, she picked up her stroke again. At five in the morning, a medical team from the University of Miami arrived to attend to her. “It was like an I.C.U. in the water,” she said. She was given prednisone and oxygen, and then she kept swimming. At dusk, she was stung again.

Nyad’s nephew Timothy Wheeler, who was working on a documentary about the swim, filmed her as she was pulled from the sea: her face is riven with terror, and then she closes her eyes and goes blank as the medical team administers oxygen. Stoll screams at her to keep breathing and not to fall asleep. Finally, air starts coming in and out of her nose, fogging the oxygen mask.

Nyad insisted on continuing after a few hours of treatment; if she returned to the precise G.P.S. coordinates where she’d stopped, she could at least attempt a “staged” swim. But she was too weak to swim half the time she was in the water, and the team was being swept off course. After thirty-seven hours, the navigators gave Nyad bad news. “They said, ‘Do you want to go to the Bahamas?’ And I said, ‘No, I don’t fucking want to go to the Bahamas!’ And they said, ‘Then it’s over. We’re done.’” Stoll told Nyad, “I watched you almost die last night. I really did. And I don’t think I can do that again.”

Still treading water, Nyad said, “Other people may go through this, but they’re younger, and they’re going to do other swims.” She looked ruined, bereft. “This is the end of it. This is the end.”

One afternoon during my visit, Nyad met with an accountant she was thinking of hiring. “All my life, whether I’ve had money or not had money, it’s the one area where I’ve been disorganized, incompetent, and haven’t done well by myself,” she told him. (Minutes before, she had left her wallet behind on the counter at a Jamba Juice.) When she was hired as an announcer on “Wide World of Sports,” she made three hundred and fifty thousand dollars a year. “In the nineteen-seventies, it was a lot of money,” she said. “I gave it all away, took care of my friends—we went on some bad-ass trips to Africa.”

Nyad is capable of incredible discipline, but she can be surprisingly unheeding: she never opens her mail and rarely has anything in her refrigerator.

Until 2006, she had a business manager, but things ended badly. One day, she went to the hospital for shoulder surgery, and was told that she hadn't had health insurance in years. Even now she seemed not to fully understand her own finances. She asked the accountant, "If I get paid fifty thousand dollars for a speech, what tax bracket am I in?" He explained that it depended how many speeches she gave a year.

She was going to make some money soon, she said, writing an inspirational book about her life. "All the biggest editors and publishers are interested; they're all calling it probably the biggest memoir of the decade!" she said, with guileless wonder. "I'm sixty-four years old. I want to take care of myself and not be stupid this time around." The accountant asked if she had a spouse or a partner. "Not right now," she said, but explained she had friends she wanted to provide for, so that when they were old "we always have a place to live and a little money to travel."

Nyad has not had a serious relationship in decades. (She had an affair at the end of her time with Lederman, and, she says, "I think part of my not being with someone else all these years was because I deserved to punish myself.") But she and Bonnie Stoll are very much a team. They have matching tattoos that say "one heart, one mind," in Japanese. They talk and text constantly and see each other daily—Stoll lives ten minutes from Nyad, in a modern house with a Leni Riefenstahl photograph of Jesse Owens, which Nyad bought for her, hanging in the living room. "She does as much for me as I do for her," Stoll told me. "I don't want to be on Diana's coattails; that's not my position."

After the near-fatal swim in 2011, Stoll and Nyad were deeply divided about whether to finally let go of the Cuba dream. Stoll had become convinced that there was something almost suicidal about persisting. She told me, "Sometimes Diana's not very evolved—and it pisses me off! She can react out of desperation. She can be desperate."

"My journey now is to find some sort of grace in the face of this defeat," Nyad told an audience a month after her third failed attempt. "Sometimes if cancer has won, if there's death and we have no choice, then grace and

acceptance are necessary. But that ocean is still there. I don't want to be the crazy woman who does this for years and years and tries and fails and tries and fails, but I *can* swim from Cuba to Florida and I *will* swim from Cuba to Florida."

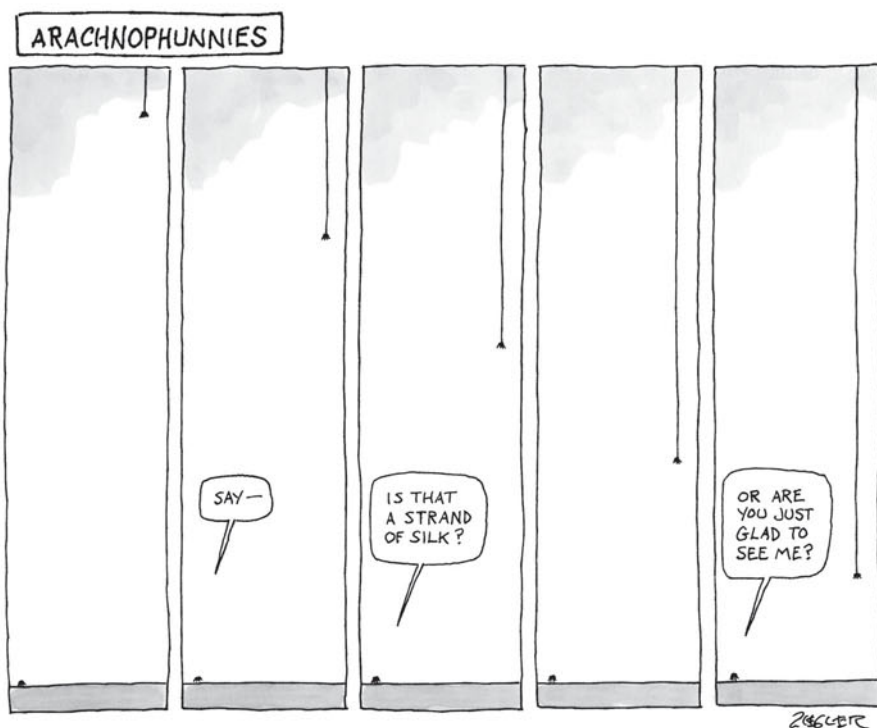
Nyad has always believed that a champion is a person who doesn't give up. (In high school, she hung a poster on her wall that read, "A diamond is a lump of coal that stuck with it.") But another kind of person who doesn't give up is a lunatic. "I sort of thought, Oh, she's crazy—and she *is* on some level crazy," Nyad's friend Karen Sauvigne told me. Sauvigne, a former triathlete who completed a four-hundred-mile bike ride when she was sixty, said, "On some level I can approach understanding." But, after Nyad's friends saw photographs of her face swollen and disfigured by stings, Sauvigne said, "we were all, like, Give it *up*, girl." Candace Lyle Hogan, a former girlfriend who has accompanied Nyad on every Cuba swim since 1978, told me, "I'm afraid from Day One that she's going to die. That body of water is a wilderness still. It's *strange* out there."

On August 18, 2012, Nyad made her fourth attempt. She swam for fifty-one hours and was stung repeatedly by jellyfish. (At night, she wore a protective mask that left only her nose and lips exposed: she was stung on the mouth.) When her team finally pulled her out,

there were sharks in the water around her and a severe tropical storm above. Nyad resisted, "shaking her head angrily," according to a live blog that Hogan kept on the boat, though there was "lightning, thunder, and roiling winds tossing her tiny escort vessel up and down on the waves." She relented only when they convinced her that lightning might kill one of the kayakers.

Stoll told Nyad that she would not accompany her on a fifth attempt at Cuba: she was increasingly disturbed by her friend's inability to accept defeat. "It didn't matter how many people—experts!—told her that the Cuba swim couldn't be done," Stoll said. Munatones told Nyad, "I don't think it is physically, humanly possible. There are just too many variables."

"By this summer," Nyad told me, "everybody—scientists, endurance experts, neurologists, my own team, Bonnie—said it's impossible." But Nyad was convinced that with each failed attempt she'd learned something. She enlisted Angel Yanagihara, the world's foremost box-jellyfish authority, and collaborated with a prosthetics expert to produce a silicone mask, with eyeholes for goggles and bite plates that secured the mask over Nyad's lips while still allowing her to breathe. Munatones said that swimming in that protective gear would be like "wearing lead shoes to walk up Mt. Everest." Nyad, on her



Web site, acknowledged that the mask “slows me down, by about .3 mph. And it forces me to swallow much more seawater than good for the stomach. But I simply need to remember, when enduring the difficulty of the mask, that it protects me from stings. . . . No other way.” She had a simple plan for dealing with the weather this time. She e-mailed her team, “We will not, under any circumstances, interrupt the swim for storms this year . . . no matter how severe.”

Stoll thought that no amount of preparation could suffice. “Something can always go wrong and something always will go wrong,” she told me. But at the last minute she decided to go with Nyad, anyway. “I didn’t want to have regret. If this is what Diana was going to do, then I’m with her.”

In Havana, the night before the swim, Nyad felt a cold coming on. Hogan gave her a massage before she went to sleep, and she woke up ten hours later “feeling fantastic,” she told me. Before a swim, she forces herself to keep her adrenaline contained, so she has energy available to fend off crisis. “When something means a lot to me, I don’t want to give it a lot of dispersed energy. I want to keep it within myself.”

Her first night in the water, the mask was agony, abrading her mouth and forcing her to swallow so much salt water that she threw up constantly. On her second night, there was a storm, and the support boats had to move away to avoid hitting her. For two hours, Nyad treaded water, becoming severely chilled. “I really started hallucinating badly,” she said. “I thought I saw the Taj Mahal. I saw all the structure of it and I was talking to the shark guys about it: I thought we got off course and we’re over in India.” Stoll told her that if she came across the Taj Mahal she just needed to swim around it.

“It was choppy out there, but who cared?” Stoll said. “Everything went our way—everything. No sharks, the currents, the wind. We were being pulled in the direction we wanted to go.”

“I was cranking,” Nyad said. “And, even with the rougher seas, we were moving with a good current and with me feeling well. And when I came to put on the mask at night Bonnie said, ‘I want to tell you something. You’re never going to have to put this mask on again.’”

The navigation team had calculated that the swim would take three nights—maybe four—but the current and the conditions indicated that they would arrive in Florida before sunset on the third day. Stoll told me, “It was like Mother Nature just said, You know what? Let her fucking go.” In the water, Nyad recalled, “I’m starting to think, Oh, my God, I’m going to make this thing. Before that moment, you have no idea when you’re going to finish. Is this going to be four days, and you’re going to have to find a way not through this night but through the next night?” When she lifted her head to breathe, she saw light along the horizon, and a thrill went through her: “I saw the sun was coming up. I saw this really white light.” But it was better than sunshine. “Bonnie said, Those are the lights of Key West. And I cried. I still had fourteen or fifteen hours to go. But for me that’s a training swim.”

As Nyad approached land, the team on the boat saw it before she did. “My vision’s real bad now—my swim—clouded, hallucinatory vision,” Nyad recalled. “But I see all the shark divers getting in and Angel Yanagihara getting in, and I just felt like there were a lot of people in the water all of a sudden.” They were nearing the reef just off Key West. “I started thinking of all the places I’d trained and all the people who helped, all the fundraisers,” Nyad said. “I remember the first attempt, and how it was so upsetting to be told that you’re so off course you’re never going to make it. Once we crossed the reef, it was not really a euphoric celebration but just, You didn’t give up. You fucking didn’t give up.”

At two in the afternoon, Nyad stumbled through the shallow water onto the sand, where hundreds of people had gathered to cheer her on. Her lips were as swollen as a clown’s. She staggered like a toddler taking her first steps. Stoll stood in front of her, a few feet up the shore, urging her forward, until finally Nyad stepped out of the water and fell into her arms. She managed to tell the crowd, “You’re never too old to chase your dream.”

Late this fall, to raise money for charity on the anniversary of Hurricane Sandy, Nyad had a two-lane pool installed in front of Macy’s, in Herald Square, and for forty-eight hours she

swam back and forth through the calm, chlorinated water. Every fifteen minutes, another person joined her for a shift in the second lane—a high-school student from a local swim team, her friend Jacki from L.A., Richard Simmons. During the day, there were throngs of people standing and staring, but by four in the morning it was frigid and dark, and the crowd had shrunk to a dozen spectators who couldn’t believe what they were seeing. “She’s been in there for how long?” a waitress getting off her shift asked.

It was Nyad’s second night in the pool, and as she swam up to the edge so that Stoll could feed her peanut butter she was starting to sound less coherent. (At one point, she asked when they were going to start using “the other pool.”) “When she’s been in the water for a long time, she turns into her mother, my grandmother,” Timothy Wheeler said. Lucy had Alzheimer’s disease at the end of her life, and there was a similar sense of disorientation and vulnerability. “Her voice, her facial expressions—everything.”

At the edge of the pool, Nyad didn’t look strong and confident, as she does on land. She looked weary and pickled and frail. She drank water through a straw that Stoll gently guided into her mouth, then started retching and threw up into a plastic garbage bin, which Stoll held out for her. Stopping to vomit made her cold, and she shivered in the water. It was hard not to wish that she would just stop swimming and get into bed.

Other people came and went from the pool, swimming beside her, in synch or not, sharing a little of her journey. The light started coming up, and the sky glowed purple for a while, then grew cloudy and foreboding. Sometimes, there were lots of people cheering her on, and it seemed as if Nyad were at the center of something exciting, and then there would be a lull, and the enterprise would seem dubious and isolated. There were long periods of dullness when time went by slowly, but it seemed to speed up toward the end. Diana Nyad did not stop swimming until her time was up. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM/GO/OUTLOUD

A conversation with Ariel Levy.

MAN AND MACHINE

Playing games on the Internet.

BY SUSAN ORLEAN



Were you driving through western Pennsylvania in the mid-nineteen-nineties, with the radio on? Was the music interrupted by two adolescent male voices jabbering trucker lingo? Or, several years ago, did you come across an online tourism video for the city of Milwaukee? Did it seem a little strange, in that the city shown was very obviously Manhattan, and that the video suggested that the entire Milwaukee area had been contaminated by an industrial accident? Or, sometime during the past few years, did you notice an account on Twitter called *Horse_ebooks* that spewed peculiar, mantralike messages such as “You’re not alone in your passion for tomatoes!”

and “Demand Furniture”? Around the same time, did you happen upon a YouTube channel called *Pronunciation Book*, which consisted of videos of words in black lettering on a white background, and a calm male voice pronouncing each word three times, with great deliberation?

Jacob Bakkila and Thomas Bender—the pair behind these projects—were recently reminiscing about another collaboration, a play they wrote called “Cowboy,” which had nothing to do with cowboys. This was when they were in high school, in suburban Pittsburgh. Bakkila and Bender are now both thirty, but it’s easy to picture them as mischief-

making teen-agers. Bakkila is a creative director at BuzzFeed, where he designs sponsored posts for companies like Pepsi and Geico. He is tall, with bristly blond hair, a square jaw, a sturdy neck, and biceps that look gym-made. He has a slight drawl that somehow sounds vaguely Texan. Bender works as a freelance tech consultant. He is slim and fair, clean-cut, with fine features, and speaks in a professorial tone. “We printed programs that made ‘Cowboy’ seem that it would be something like Gilbert and Sullivan meets Annie Oakley, which it definitely was not,” Bakkila said. He and Bender managed to lure a crowd to their high-school auditorium for the performance of the play, which was, in fact, an absurdist affair with an epic moment in which the actors stacked desk chairs until they came crashing down. Reaction to “Cowboy” was highly polarized: half the people couldn’t leave the auditorium fast enough; the other half seemed to think that the play was amazing.

A fifty-per-cent approval rating may sound disappointing, but Bender and Bakkila are less interested in winning approval than in eliciting a strong reaction, and by that measure their achievement has grown exponentially. According to YouTube’s analytics, the *Pronunciation Book* videos were viewed thirty-seven million times. *Horse_ebooks*’ most popular tweet, “Everything happens so much,” was re-tweeted more than nine thousand times by some of the account’s two hundred thousand followers. Bakkila and Bender operated both accounts anonymously, and trying to figure out who and what were behind them became an Internet obsession. On the day last September when they stepped forward to claim authorship, end the accounts, and launch an interactive video piece that they had designed as the final installment of the project, *Pronunciation Book*’s entry—“How to pronounce *Horse_ebooks*”—was one of the most viewed videos on YouTube.

Like the reaction to “Cowboy,” response to this news was divided, especially with regard to *Horse_ebooks*. Some people had thought that the account was an automated program that produced its utterances unwittingly, so when they learned that a person

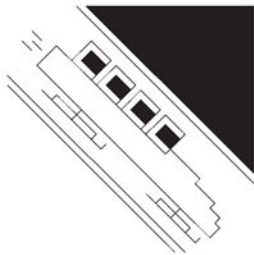
Finding out who or what was behind Horse_ebooks became an online obsession.

operated it, they were furious. Some saw it as a hybrid of a kind that the Internet is particularly good at enabling—a prank spread with the crazy multiplying speed of social media. Others simply couldn't see what the fuss was about. Still others appreciated the project's creative ambition. Christiane Paul, a curator of new-media arts at the Whitney Museum, said that its "play with identity, and the fusion of the human and the machine" placed Bakkila and Bender firmly within the genre known as "net art." A Web developer named Aaron Grando and two of his friends started designing and selling Horse_ebooks T-shirts in 2012. They expected to sell a few dozen, featuring some of their favorite tweets, such as "Get ready to Fly helicopters." Instead, they got orders from all over the world, and had to suspend the business because they couldn't keep up with demand. "I think what they did was art to the most modern degree," Grando said recently. He paused, and then added, "It was such a long con."

Bakkila and Bender became best friends in the third grade and almost immediately began cooking up plans. "We published a newspaper when we were about eight years old," Bender said. "Then we modified a CB radio so we could transmit to cars without anyone realizing where the sound was coming from." In middle school, they drew comic books together and made claymation films; in high school, they took turns writing chapters of a serial novel, and dabbled in online radio. Then came "Cowboy."

Bakkila went on to study journalism at the University of Southern California. Bender majored in physics at Princeton. In 2006, he saw "Vernon, Florida," Errol Morris's documentary about the eccentric residents of a small town. "I almost fell out of my chair," he said. "I immediately started neglecting my classes to spend time making videos." When he read a news story about a school for Wiccans in Illinois, he figured that he'd found a subject for his own documentary. By then, Bender had graduated, and had a temporary gig

teaching physics at a cram school in Queens. He called Bakkila, who had also graduated, and was working at a coffee shop in Ithaca, and asked him to help. "Tom saved me from months of scalding myself," Bakkila said. "I wasn't a very good barista." They drove to Illinois, shot the documentary, and Bender spent a year editing it.



The film, entitled "Hoopeston," was released in 2008; it played in several small festivals and was received well enough that Bakkila and Bender decided to make another documentary. This time, they wanted to use the form to describe a fictitious world, and distribute it as if it were real, so that part of the experience would be the surprise of discovering it. Bakkila and Bender are aficionados of corporate babble and the unintentional humor of bad advertising; in the course of ordinary conversation, they often quote commercials and sales pitches. They thought that tourism-promotion videos, with their unalloyed cheerfulness and obfuscation of inconvenient truths, were wonderful in an awful way, and therefore perfect for repurposing. They chose Milwaukee as their subject because they liked the name, and because neither of them had ever been there, which they considered a plus. At first glance, the ten-minute video, "This Is My Milwaukee," looks like a typical bit of boosterism, except for the perplexing glimpses of New York City landmarks. Then, about halfway through, the spokesperson—who speaks with a plummy English accent—mentions an "accident" at a local corporation called Blackstar. But, he adds merrily, "decontamination is well under way!"

Bakkila and Bender posted the video, listing themselves in the credits, on YouTube in November, 2008. Within three days, more than a hundred thousand people had viewed it. Some of them contacted local authorities to find out what was going on. "What the heck is 'This Is My Milwaukee'?" a Wisconsin news site asked. "We're getting deluged with e-mails asking us about a peculiar new Web site that just popped up." Most people, though, seemed to get the joke. Five

years later, Bender and Bakkila still hear from fans who want them to continue the story.

I spend a lot of time on Twitter, and I came across Horse_ebooks by chance, in 2012. I started following the account and re-tweeted it frequently. I wasn't as passionate as those followers who tweeted "I love you" to the account nearly every day, but it was one of my favorite things on Twitter. I wasn't sure what sort of sensibility was behind statements like "Who else wants to become a golf ball," but I assumed that it was machine-made, since it sounded both brash and illogical, like a self-help book that had been run through a shredder. That October, I received an e-mail from someone whose name I didn't recognize, asking if I wanted to know more about the account and, perhaps, write about it. Potential subjects don't usually promote themselves to me in such a way, but I was interested in how that corner of the Internet works. To "satisfy the burden of proof" that he was in control of the account, the writer told me what he would post that evening. I watched Twitter, and saw the post.

I met Jacob Bakkila a few weeks later. In the middle of the conversation, he said that it was time for him to tweet—that is, time for Horse_ebooks to tweet. He logged in on his laptop and typed, "Are you ready to have a swan?" He hit return, and we watched the screen. Within a few minutes, more than a thousand people had re-tweeted the phrase, and hundreds had flagged it as a "favorite."

There are lots of offbeat accounts on Twitter. Some feature invented characters, like "Ruth Bourdain," a mashup of Ruth Reichl and Anthony Bourdain; there are parodies of politicians and celebrities, such as Anthony Weiner and Tilda Swinton; and pure surrealist humor, like that of coffee_dad, who has more than a hundred thousand followers and posts nothing but updates on his daily coffee-drinking. ("Time for coffee"; "Looking for coffee"; "Have coffee.") There are automated accounts that are designed purely as curious exercises, such as Pentametrone, which scans Twitter for posts that happen to be written in iambic pentameter, and Stealth Mountain, which collects tweets that misspell the phrase "sneak peek" as "sneak peak." Then there is the category

of “weird Twitter,” which essentially plays with the form. (In the early days of Twitter, Bakkila ran one such account, called *agentlebrees*; that name has since been taken over by someone else.) *Horse_ebooks* fits into the weird-Twitter world, but Bakkila prefers to describe it as “conceptual/performance/video art,” or, sometimes, as “performance mischief.” He says that the first art that enthralled him was Christopher Wool’s block-letter canvases of phrases like “CATS IN BAG BAGS IN RIVER.” Bakkila has a vivid memory of seeing one of Wool’s paintings at a museum when he was eight or nine. He told me, in an e-mail, “It amazed me how something so simple—it was just words!—could fill the room, fill my entire mind.” Many of the other artists who he says have influenced him, such as Jenny Holzer, also use text as their medium.

Making art on platforms like Twitter and Facebook, or by e-mail or in chat rooms, began almost as soon as those platforms existed. Net art’s most immediate predecessor was the Fluxus performance-art happenings of the nineteen-sixties, but its roots go back to the Dadaism of the early twentieth century. Vuk Ćosić, a pioneer of conceptual Internet-based art, has called net artists “Marcel Duchamp’s ideal children.” Like Duchamp’s readymades, a lot of net art defies the attributes usually associated with art: it isn’t singular, it doesn’t require the artist’s hand, it isn’t necessarily visual, it is often intangible, and, because it is usually distributed free, it is hard to collect and monetize.

Art has never been easy to define, and net art is even harder, since it frequently takes an existing form and simply alters it or interacts with it. Ben Grosser’s “Facebook Demetricator,” a widely discussed net-art piece, is a free plug-in that strips all numerical values off a Facebook page. In Joseph DeLappe’s “Quake/Friends.1,” another significant piece, six participants join a violent online multiplayer game, *Quake III Arena*, and reenact an episode of “Friends” while, in the world of the game, they are repeatedly killed. Aaron Betsky, the director of the Cincinnati Art Museum, who was the curator of architecture, design, and digital projects at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art from 1995 to 2001, told me, “This is the world young artists and art students live in. The way we rep-

resent our world is more and more digitally based and networked. If art is in any way reflecting our world, it will have to adopt and adapt these techniques and technologies.”

There isn’t a traditional market for net art, although a number of museums, including SFMOMA and the Guggenheim, have begun collecting it, and several Web sites, such as *Rhizome.org*, now run out of the New Museum, and *netartnet.net*, archive it. *Rhizome’s* collection, which was established in 1999, includes more than two thousand works, among them software, games, browsers, computer code, apps, and Web sites. In a way, net artists, existing outside mainstream art institutions, have a lot in common with early graffiti artists. The difference is that technology—and, in particular, social media—has made it simple for net artists to make their work accessible to millions of people almost instantaneously. Even so, being a net artist is rarely gainful. I asked Christiane Paul if anyone could support himself by working in the genre. “Well,” she answered, “I doubt a net artist could make a living right now making art.”

A producer was interested in developing a “This Is My Milwaukee” television series, but, after a year of talks, the plan fizzled. In the meantime, Bakkila moved to New York, and worked at various temp jobs, before ending up at BuzzFeed. Bender got a job as an editor at Howcast, a Web site of instructional videos. His first video, “How Not to Get Mugged,” starred Seena Jon, a middle-school friend of his and Bakkila’s, as the victim and Bakkila as the mugger. Bakkila, who occasionally freelanced at Howcast, helped write the script, which is more or less credible as a guide to street safety but also seems suspiciously like a goof on the whole idea of a how-to video.

Bakkila and Bender started thinking about a series of new projects. Jon, a former comedian who now works as a lawyer and a producer, became part of the team. They considered and then rejected the idea of telling a story through fake takeout menus slipped under apartment doors; forming a seemingly real trade association and issuing a monthly newsletter; opening a storefront to market a fictional clothing line; and aggressively promoting a new sports league that

“SIMPLY
MESMERIZING.”

—GILLIAN FLYNN,
author of *Gone Girl*

the next
time you
see me

A NOVEL BY
Holly Goddard Jones

“Have you turned the last pages of Gillian Flynn’s *Gone Girl* and don’t know what to pick up next? Try Holly Goddard Jones’ debut novel.”

—CHICAGO TRIBUNE

“Impressive.”

—THE NEW YORK TIMES

“Rich in character . . . An immensely satisfying and skillful debut novel.”

—KATE ATKINSON, author of
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“Beautifully articulate.”

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didn't exist. One of Jon's suggestions was to deliver a narrative through fortunes in fortune cookies, which would have been convenient, since Bakkila lived across the street from a fortune-cookie factory in Bushwick.

Bender was interested in "content farms"—Web sites that analyze which subjects are most frequently Googled, and then churn out material on those subjects so as to end up at the top of search results. The content is often just text grabbed from other Web sites and repackaged; the goal is to attract as many viewers as possible and then flood them with related advertising. Bender wanted to take the idea of demand-driven content to an extreme—to get as many views as possible while spending as little money as possible, as a kind of commentary on a form that tries relentlessly to convert a search for information into a chance for sales.

He knew that people Googled words and names in order to learn how to pronounce them. Making a pronunciation guide would cost next to nothing: he could find the words most often searched by typing in "how do you pronounce" and noting the words that Google offered. It was easy enough to produce type on a screen, and he recorded the pronunciations himself. He offered a new word each day; the first, posted in April, 2010, was "How to pronounce ASUS." Bender says that he researched the way to say the words correctly. "It was initially very sincere," he said. The videos immediately drew viewers who wanted to know how to pronounce the words he chose, and then, within a year or so, the channel drew another set of viewers, who were curious about its origins, its portentous tone, and its random-seeming choices, such as "Tagalog," followed by "Srixon," and then "giclée." One of the videos—"How to pronounce 1999"—attracted more than three hundred and fifty thousand views. "It was really surreal watching the views grow," Bender said.

Bakkila also found a medium that he thought he could hijack. Automated programs, known as bots, that deliver spam and sales links had been proliferating on social media. Last year, *Bloomberg Businessweek* reported that bots generate twenty-four per cent of all

posts on Twitter. By Facebook's own account, some fifteen million of its "users" are bots, which post sales links as status updates. Some bots are welcome—on Twitter, there are weather and seismic-condition bots, run by legitimate agencies, that post temperature and earthquake information. But most bots are the equivalent of junk mail, broadcasting e-commerce links in bulk, and both Twitter and Facebook devote considerable resources and manpower to flushing them out. To evade detection, bots masquerade as real accounts, so, in addition to the links, programmers give them something to say, or at least to appear to say—often snippets of text taken off the Internet—to make them seem as human as possible.

Bakkila decided to take over an existing bot on Twitter, and then slowly subvert its tweets. He wanted to attempt an identity inversion: he would be a human trying to impersonate a machine that was trying to impersonate a human. There were plenty of bots to choose from, but the one he liked best was Horse_ebooks, which appeared on Twitter in 2009. Its tweets often had an equine theme, but some, like "Considered GIVING UP on the whole professional gambling scene?," seemed to come out of the blue.

Many of Horse_ebooks' tweets were followed by links to e-library.net. The site sells e-books, some of which are about horses, but its most popular categories are inspirational guides and financial-advice books. It lists as its current best-sellers "Forbidden Psychological Tactics," "Sexual Fun and Games for Christian Couples," and "How to Buy and Sell Real Estate in the Bahamas." The bot grabbed most of the text for its tweets from books on e-library.net, but, probably owing to a programming glitch, it often failed to pull out complete sentences, and it didn't seem to be able to process certain punctuation marks. Many of the resultant tweets were half-formed, vaguely melancholy exclamations, such as "For many years this beautiful story has delighted millions of." They were more peculiar and more evocative than bots usually are; they were like found poetry in an otherwise crass medium. By the time Bakkila came to Horse_ebooks, it already had hundreds of followers who loved its fractured tone.

In order to take over the account, he had to find the person behind it. You can set up a Twitter profile with nothing more than an e-mail address, but Bakkila followed links to e-library.net, and after six months he managed to track down a young Russian Web developer named Alexey Kouznetsov, who acknowledged that he owned e-library.net, and had set up Horse_ebooks to drive traffic to it. They agreed that, if Bakkila would buy two hundred and fifty dollars' worth of books from e-library.net, Kouznetsov would give him control of the Horse_ebooks account. Kouznetsov remains the owner of e-library.net, and he told me that he sold between five and ten e-books a month through the account after Bakkila took it over.

Bakkila never wrote anything original for Horse_ebooks; like a bot, he just combed the Internet for text. (He had pulled the phrase that I watched him tweet at our first meeting from "The Essential Beginner's Guide to Raising Swans.") That part, he said, was easy: "There are so many weird, unindexed sites out there. When you go down the rabbit hole of spam, it's an infinity of infinity." He added, "One person could curate or remix endless amounts of information." The first pulled text that he chose to tweet was "You will undoubtedly look back on this moment with shock and," on September 14, 2011.

Bakkila was so excited by the prospect of playing a machine that he overlooked some of the challenges. Machines never sleep; bots post day and night and on weekends and holidays as well. He could have made a lot of tweets and programmed them to be time-released, but he decided to post in real time, because, as he put it, "I wanted to preserve the integrity of bespoke spam." Bender, by contrast, recorded dozens of Pronunciation Book videos, then uploaded one each day, at his convenience. "Jacob really gets into these endurance things," Seena Jon told me. "He likes to see how hard he can push himself." Because Bakkila wanted to remain anonymous, he says that he didn't explain even to close friends why he was excusing himself during dinners and movies.

Bakkila doesn't remember the original context of his most popular tweet,

“Everything happens so much,” but he says that it was something ordinary, like “Everything happens so much faster when you’re retired.” Stripped out of the sentence, the phrase feels koanlike. “I was trying to wrest wisdom from these wisdomless piles of information,” Bakkila said. A recurring theme in net art is appropriating something familiar and setting it in a new framework that makes it surprising. It’s especially surprising if you think that a machine is doing the decontextualizing unintentionally, and ending up with something that seems poignant or meaningful.

Shortly after Bakkila took over Horse_ebooks, some followers mentioned that the percentage of notably odd tweets seemed to be growing. As John Herrman, who is now the tech editor at BuzzFeed, wrote on the comedy Web site Splitsider, “The kinds of tweets that used to take weeks to show up—the perfect truncations, the ominous declarations—were now coming fast and hard.” After that, Bakkila, without revealing his involvement, persuaded an acquaintance to post a story dismissing the idea that the account had changed. (The acquaintance was extremely irritated when he later learned the truth.) He also worked to make the account look as botlike as possible, which is why he kept posting frequent links to e-library.net, as Kouznetsov had. “To be a sincere spambot, I wanted to try to sell as many e-books as possible,” he explained.

Horse_ebooks continued to attract attention. Adrian Chen wrote a long feature for Gawker about the “beloved online automaton,” which he described as being “showered with a level of praise seldom applied to actual humans on the Internet.” (Chen correctly identified Kouznetsov as the founder of Horse_ebooks, but he didn’t realize that the account had changed hands.) Fans started Tumblr accounts and Facebook pages, and created Horse_ebooks-inspired comics and fan fiction. At least one fan got a Horse_ebooks tattoo. An artist on Etsy produced letterpress stationery decorated with the tweets, and someone wrote a campaign speech composed entirely of them: “Every week it seems the economy” “Is uncertain, insubstantial” “Or going on a dangerous fad diet!” One



guy posed as a woman and chatted on an online-dating site, using only the tweets, and posted the results on Tumblr.

Bakkila and Bender had planned that Pronunciation Book and Horse_ebooks would end with the launch of a third, very different sort of project, called Bear Stearns Bravo. It was meant to be a commentary on capitalism and the immorality of some corporate behavior. “Our formative years were in the Bush Administrations,” Bakkila said. “The financial crisis and the destruction of employment is all part of what we’re interested in. Businesses are characters, and corporations are people. And people are cells.”

Although Bear Stearns Bravo was to be launched last, planning for it began first. A few months after Bear Stearns collapsed, in March, 2008, Bakkila and Bender sat in Bender’s studio apartment, and began plotting a narrative that would be set in a fictitious version of the firm. They decided to use short live-action video segments and a format inspired by choose-your-own-adventure children’s books. The basic story would pit Bear Stearns employees against government regulators in a surreal financial emergency. After each segment, viewers would be given a choice: Arrest a suspicious secretary or get her to inform on executives? Butter up the C.E.O. or embarrass him in front of the board members? Meanwhile, employees burned documents and pined for more time on

their yachts. (“In every project Tom and I have created,” Bakkila told me, “we have characters who regret owning boats.”) There were two episodes to the piece. They decided to make the first one available for free, but to charge users seven dollars for the second.

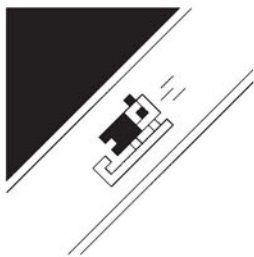
They worked on the project for four years, compiling hundreds of hours of videos. Seena Jon was the project’s producer, and Jamie Niemasik, a college friend of Bender’s who is now a software developer, wrote the program for navigating the videos. Only a few people knew the entirety of what they were doing; some people at BuzzFeed knew that Bakkila was working on videos but not what they were for. The actors hired for Bear Stearns Bravo were told only that they were taking part in something called “Untitled Video Project for Web Interactive Project.” One actor said, “All I knew was that I played an upper-management employee of an unnamed financial-services company. The character’s name was Billie, and she had anger-management issues.”

The videos were shot in a tiny, windowless room that Bakkila rented down the hall from his loft. On the day I visited, last summer, an actor, sweating amply, was shouting into the camera, “Multilevel marketing! Crystals! Stationary progressions!” Bakkila nodded, leaned over to Bender, and said, “Wow, that’s a wall of nonsense!” Next up was Bakkila’s girlfriend, Emily Liu, who was playing a small role that required her to

deal a deck of tarot cards. Liu, who is an account executive at an online advertising agency, performed with an air of quiet bemusement. After the first take, Bakkila said, “Emily, I don’t want to direct your card dealing, but please put the last card down with . . . triumphalism.” After Liu managed to do a sufficiently triumphal take, Bakkila switched places with her. He hadn’t planned to be in the videos, but he ended up taking the role of the C.E.O., because he and Bender couldn’t find anyone they felt was right for the part, which was physically taxing—the C.E.O. bellows all his lines. By the end of the day, Bakkila had blown out his voice, but he seemed pleased with the results.

No one would have suspected that a slightly bizarre, faceless YouTube channel and an apparently automated Twitter account had any connection. If you paid close attention, you might have noticed a few common notes—mentions of the names Dalton and Chief, and frequent references to tomatoes and pyramids—but, otherwise, the sites appeared to be separate entities, each with its own mysteries. Online forums studied Pronunciation Book’s word choices and even the ambient background noise in each video; one generated a file of more than a hundred pages trying to decrypt the site. Once Bakkila and Bender settled on a launch date for Bear Stearns Bravo, Bender began posting full sentences on Pronunciation Book and then started a countdown—“Something is going to happen in seventy-seven days”—that sounded especially ominous.

“There were wild conspiracies,” Bender said. “One guess was that Edward Snowden was behind it. Another was that it was a Syrian operative.” Other people assumed that Pronunciation Book was a slowly unfolding promotion for a new smartphone or a Batman movie or a reboot of the “Battlestar Galactica” TV series—not bad guesses, since so many seemingly authentic Internet phenomena have turned out to be marketing campaigns: the narrative around a fake beekeeping site, *ilovebees.com*, for instance, was revealed



to be a promotion for the video game Halo 2. But the cyberpunk novelist William Gibson tweeted, “The content of that YouTube channel smells of fiction. Those of us who slave in the factory know the smell.”

Last July, two months before Bear Stearns Bravo was set to launch, Bender, who doesn’t have a Twitter account and isn’t even on Facebook, realized that someone had posted his name and telephone number in connection with Pronunciation Book. He was barraged by calls, and then someone showed up at his office, announcing himself as “Chief.” Around the same time, Gaby Dunn, a reporter for the Internet news site the Daily Dot, figured out Bender’s association with Bakkila. When she contacted Bakkila, he scrambled for a cover story, ultimately telling her that he and Bender had been assembling a secret project that might have a movie component, and he needed time to line up more funding. She agreed to postpone her story. Bakkila now says that he wasn’t seeking any financial deal, and admits that he lied to Dunn to stall her. He said, “You get one chance to introduce yourself as an artist. This was it.”

Bakkila and Bender wanted to launch Bear Stearns Bravo with a performance, so they found a gallery on the Lower East Side that would rent them space for a day. They planned to post a phone number on Horse_ebooks at ten in the morning, and man the phones for the next eleven hours. They would read a line of spam to each caller and then hang up. The gallery would be open to anyone who wanted to watch. Loops of video from Bear Stearns Bravo would be projected onto the walls.

The night before the launch, Bakkila, Bender, Jon, Niemasik, and Liu gathered in the gallery to set up the projectors and install the phones. Bakkila placed an artist’s statement near the front door that began, “We are influenced by data,” and went on to say, “Bakkila has . . . performed, in secret, as a spambot on the social network Twitter, posting a piece of spam roughly every two hours for 742 days.” (In total, there were eighteen thousand tweets, including Kouznetsov’s.) Bakkila said that he ex-

pected to feel a little depressed once he ended Horse_ebooks, the way an actor might feel at the end of a play’s run, but that he couldn’t spend the rest of his life performing as a machine.

In the morning, a few friends milled around; they had agreed to help with logistics but still didn’t know what the project was. One of them, reading the artist’s statement, started sputtering, “What? Jacob wrote all Horse_ebooks . . . a machine didn’t . . . This is . . . Wow.” Bakkila and Bender sat down at a conference table, each armed with a phone and a stack of printouts from which to read. I sat at a third phone to watch the proceedings and answer a few calls. At exactly ten o’clock, the Pronunciation Book video of the day demonstrated how to pronounce “Horse_ebooks,” and Horse_ebooks tweeted the gallery telephone number, followed by its last tweet, “Bear Stearns Bravo.” Within a minute, all three phones began ringing. A few times when I answered, I heard the caller laughing. One person yelled, “What does this have to do with Horse_ebooks? Tell me! Tell me!” The phone I was watching registered almost four hundred missed calls in the first twenty minutes. In addition, Bakkila and Bender claim that, by the end of the day, a hundred thousand people had visited *bearstearnsbravo.com*.

Shortly after word got out on social media, people began showing up at the gallery. One young man in an olive drab jacket leaned against the wall for most of the day, taking pictures of Bender and Bakkila and scribbling notes. He told me that he loved Horse_ebooks, and had never been sure if it was a human or a bot, or maybe, he said with a sidelong glance, some entirely new life form. “Nobody knew,” he said. “Nobody knew.” He took another picture and then said in a quiet voice, “This is something to tell my grandkids about someday.”

The team had expected people to be surprised—maybe even shocked—when they shed their online personas, and people were. “Horse_ebooks is over,” someone posted. “I can’t deal.” Obituaries were put up on Tumblr and Facebook. Adrian Chen, who had written first about Kouznetsov, remembers feeling “extremely unsettled—like I was waking

from a dream.” Many people were angry not only because a favorite Twitter account was ending but also because they felt cheated that Horse_ebooks wasn’t what it had seemed; it wasn’t an unintentional oracle but the work of one person who plotted its course. Because Bakkila works for BuzzFeed, the company was suspected of having a hand in Horse_ebooks, which compromised the account even more in the eyes of some fans. But John Herrman, the site’s tech editor, said that “across the board, people at BuzzFeed were completely surprised.” (The editor-in-chief, Ben Smith, later told the editorial staff that he was willing to keep secrets, but preferred having advance notice of what staffers were up to in their free time.)

People complained bitterly about many things: that charging to play the second episode of *Bear Stearns Bravo* was a sellout; that it couldn’t have been physically possible for Bakkila to have posted around the clock; that he and Bender were more mercenaries than artists; that they were overeducated Brooklyn hipsters manipulating the public; and that, in the end, *Bear Stearns Bravo* was just a big bore. Others were more philosophical. “@Horse_ebooks was a fiction,” Robinson Meyer wrote in *The Atlantic*. “It was about the network and it took the form of network. It was loved by many users, a semi-daily treat in their feed, and hated by others. . . . It was the most successful piece of cyber-fiction of all time.” Chen told me that, after he got over the initial jolt, he saw it as “an amazing performance,” even though it spoiled the illusion that the Internet could spontaneously produce something pure and beautiful. “I’m happy it was a human,” he said. “In the end, humans win—even at being robots.”

Horse_ebooks and Pronunciation Book aren’t the first art projects to rile people and leave them feeling betrayed; net art often makes use of ambiguous identity and deliberate misdirection. By definition, it examines the nature of our relationship to machines, and the notion that machines or computer systems might be closer to sentience than we realize.

This isn’t only a contemporary preoccupation. Machines have always enraptured us because they are perfectible systems that can surpass human limitations. Several people, in discuss-

ing Horse_ebooks, have pointed to the work of Joseph Weizenbaum, a professor of computer science at M.I.T., who, in the nineteen-sixties, wrote one of the first artificial-intelligence bot programs, which he called Eliza, after George Bernard Shaw’s heroine. It could mimic the tone of a Rogerian therapist, by repeating phrases back to whoever was interacting with it. Weizenbaum was concerned by how involved in the program people got, and noted that his secretary would ask him to leave the room when she was “talking” to Eliza. In his 1976 book, “Computer Power and Human Reason,” Weizenbaum wrote, “Extremely short exposures to a relatively simple computer program could induce powerful delusional thinking in quite normal people.”

At other times, we’ve mistaken a human for a machine. Some people commenting on Horse_ebooks have also mentioned an automaton called the Turk, which was introduced, to great acclaim, in Austria, in 1770. The metal-and-wood contraption, which was designed to look like a man and was dressed as a sorcerer, amazed audiences by playing master-level chess against human opponents around the world, for seventy years. The secret of the machine was that it wasn’t really a machine. The mechanical body had a concealed cabinet behind its gears and cogs, and a real chess master hid inside it and directed the Turk’s moves. In 1854, the Turk, which had been stored in a museum in Philadelphia, was destroyed in a fire. Many people still believed it was a robot that had acquired an uncanny, humanlike intelligence. Its last owner claimed that he heard the Turk calling out as it went up in flames.

Bakkila didn’t appear upset by the uproar, even when it seemed as if every social-media blog and Internet forum were raging at him. “I did want to create an uncomfortable situation,” he said. “I wanted a tension between the human and the artificial. I don’t fault anyone for an emotional response. It was designed to be emotional.” Recently, I asked him and Bender if they were on to their next collaboration yet. They avoided answering, but Bakkila finally said, “We’ve been doing stuff together most of our lives. I’m sure there will be more to do.” ♦

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SHOUTS & MURMURS

MAJOR TOM: THE NASA INVESTIGATION

BY GEORGE MEYER



RESULTS OF NASA'S INQUIRY INTO
FLIGHT PV-801:

Multiple lapses by Ground Control, compounded by astronaut error, led to the stranding in space of U.S.A.F. Major Thomas D. Ogletree (MAJOR TOM). Established procedures were not followed; flawed decision-making was rampant and systemic.

Below are excerpts from the official CAPCOM transcript, with comments by the investigators.

1. GROUND CONTROL: *Ground Control to Major Tom. Take your protein pills and put your helmet on.*

The panel found the command to swallow nutritional supplements just moments before liftoff to be reckless and foolhardy.

In addition, the panel determined that T minus ten seconds was far too late in the launch sequence for Major Tom to "put [his] helmet on." Conse-

quently, his CO₂ purge valve went unchecked, and he did not have time to rub his visor with anti-fog compound.

2. GROUND CONTROL: *Commencing countdown, engines on.*

The panel found it bizarre to be "commencing countdown" near what is obviously the end of the countdown. In fact, a background voice can be heard saying "... six ..." as the countdown is "commencing."

Moreover, activating engine thrust requires a complex multi-step protocol, and cannot be accomplished merely by saying, "Engines on." One investigator compared this to a small child ordering, "Car go fast!"

3. GROUND CONTROL: *Check ignition and may God's love be with you.*

At liftoff, capsule video clearly shows Major Tom, his mouth stuffed with protein pills, looking flummoxed. He paws

at the control console (trying to check ignition?), then sees his helmet lying on the floor, still in its protective bag (!). The Major scrambles frantically, almost comically, to screw on the helmet as powerful g-forces buffet his body.

4. GROUND CONTROL: *This is Ground Control to Major Tom. You've really made the grade!*

This empty praise, just forty-six seconds into the flight, is perhaps intended to divert attention from the helmet fiasco. What is indisputable is that coolant is spraying wildly from the Major's helmet seal.

5. GROUND CONTROL: *... and the papers want to know whose shirts you wear.*

No corroboration could be found for this strange statement. Certainly, astronauts are not known for their snappy dress. (In recent years, the most discussed piece of astronaut fashion was a diaper.)

6. GROUND CONTROL: *Now it's time to leave the capsule if you dare.*

The panel felt that the gratuitous addendum "if you dare" showed poor judgment, and may have rattled Major Tom. (Later, we hear the even more baffling "Take out your comfort pillow if you dare.")

7. MAJOR TOM: *... and I'm floating in a most peculiar way.*

Panelists were incredulous that a seasoned astronaut could be unfamiliar with basic weightlessness. Lax training was cited.

8. MAJOR TOM: *For here am I sitting in a tin can...*

This cheap shot at his spacecraft from the usually courteous Major is troubling. Is he beginning to unravel? At Cape Canaveral, the designers of the capsule can be heard sighing in humiliation.

9. MAJOR TOM: *Planet Earth is blue...*

Taxpayers who spent \$4.8 billion on

the mission were surely not thrilled with this banal observation.

10. MAJOR TOM: *... and there's nothing I can do.*

Sadly accurate, as vital silkworm experiments go undone, and no docking is achieved with the International Space Station, despite its location, just eighteen inches away.

11. MAJOR TOM: *... and I think my spaceship knows which way to go.*

This remark cannot inspire confidence.

12. MAJOR TOM: *Tell my wife I love her very much... she knows.*

Major Tom is not married.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. In future NASA missions, the use of Dyna-Z Protein POW!!! should be curtailed. The pills are unnecessary, and their source (the flight director's daughter Melanie) creates a conflict of interest.

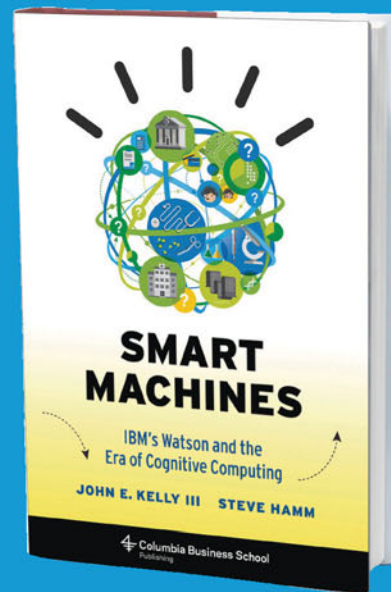
2. In no event should protein-pill consumption delay the far more critical putting on of the helmet.

3. Ground Control must project a calm, steady authority. Remarks like "Your circuit's dead, there's something wrong!" sound panicky and unprofessional. Better would be "Major Tom? We're looking into a technical issue. Please stand by." Light, reassuring music could follow, e.g., "Hey, Good Lookin' (Whatcha Got Cookin'?)," by Hank Williams.

4. If communication is interrupted, we suggest the standard "Do you copy? Over." Repeatedly pleading "Can you hear me, Major Tom?" better suits a needy, neurotic lover than the world's foremost space program.

5. Finally, a rescue mission should be launched at the earliest convenience to return Major Tom to Earth. The Major's frequent call-ins to morning radio programs may be entertaining, but his erratic, hobo-like opinions and dirty language could alarm budding astronauts. ♦

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THICKER THAN WATER

A Nantucket family's trial at sea.

BY TAD FRIEND

The stripers weren't biting. After watching clients cast in vain for two hours on Nantucket's sheltered North Shore, Captain Jason Mleczko called his father, who ran the family's charter-boat company, and said that he was heading to the Opening to try fishing the rips. It was a raw, wet afternoon last May, with a hard wind gusting out of the northeast—too cold for fish to be stirring, really—but Mleczko's clients, four twenty-six-year-old guys, remained enthusiastic. "It was nasty out," one said, "but it beat having beers on land."

They'd come in for Figawi, the Memorial Day Weekend rite in which young professionals swamp the island's bars and strip its shops of "I Am the Man from Nantucket" T-shirts. (The weekend is predicated on a Hyannis-to-Nantucket sailboat race named for an early competitor's baffled cry: "Where the fuck are we?") After a late night that Friday, the guys woke up at the family summer house of their host, Andrew Curren. Shortly before 11 A.M., they put windbreakers on over their sweatshirts and fleeces, grabbed two twelve-packs of Bud Light, kissed their girlfriends, drove to the pier off Madaket Harbor, and trooped aboard.

Jason Mleczko (Muh-less-ko) was thirty-three and married, with infant twins, but his younger passengers warmed to him right away. A strapping six-foot-five fisherman with dirty-blond hair, Jason had the candid, boisterous manner of a golden retriever. As the guys drank up, with only Jason abstaining, the conversation skipped from fishing to lacrosse to friends in common, the easy lingua franca of young men from the prep-school dominion. Curren, a gregarious I.T. manager, was at the center of the group. He had gone to Washington College with Joe Coveney, a chipper financial-data salesman, and Kent McClintock, a banker and an experienced outdoors-

man. After college, he had roomed in Washington, D.C., with Alex Cameron, a short, smilingly combative man, who'd driven all night from Virginia, where he was attending the business school at U.V.A.

Now, at 1 P.M., Jason pointed to the map of Nantucket sewn on Andrew's fleece to indicate their route and destination. In the off-season, he was a middle-school science teacher at Derby Academy, on the Massachusetts mainland, and he enjoyed explaining things. They'd head west along the North Shore, fishing the shoals as they went, then thread a channel south of Tuckernuck Island to reach the outside of a horseshoe-shaped sandbar—the Opening. "I bet you we'll catch a fish there," he said, "and then we'll call it a day."

Once they arrived, at 1:45, Jason edged the boat toward a region he called the Shallow Spot, where a shoal lurked two feet down. He explained that the tide sucking out over the bar, the "rip," should stir up sand eels and spearing, which attract striped bass. As the guys cast into the white water, he would let the boat drift out with the current, powering back in every so often but staying on the safe side of the breakers. Jason's father, Tom, insisted that his captains observe this precaution: always have the tide pushing you away from danger.

This brand of charter fishing—casting with light tackle from a boat working the edge of the surf—was essentially Tom's invention: a four-hour, six-hundred-and-seventy-five-dollar, rough-and-tumble alternative to the "bluefish buses" that trolled placidly in Nantucket Harbor, some ten miles to the east of the Opening. Tom Mleczko, whose four boats constituted the island's largest fleet, was a taciturn, gravel-voiced man who loved to combat the elements. "The rougher the day, the better the fishing," he liked to say. Over the years, that philosophy had cost him

a broken ankle, a broken arm, and several broken ribs, but gained him the devotion of such clients as George H. W. Bush, with whom he'd conspired to ditch a trailing Secret Service boat, and Jimmy Buffett, whom he'd raced in an impromptu contest—fishing boat against seaplane—and then rescued when Buffett's plane crashed. David Halberstam, a longtime Nantucket resident, wrote that Tom was "by consensus, our best fisherman."

The guys' Figawi-weekend trip had been booked by Kent McClintock's girlfriend, Jenn Fenton, who knew the Mleczkos; in 2008, she'd spent the summer on the island, scheduling trips for Tom and babysitting his grandchildren. "The whole family was warm and welcoming," she said, "and all his clients always told me Tom was the best." Tom's boat was reserved when she called, so the guys went out with Jason. Like his father, Jason was "fishy": he had a nose for the slicks the bluefish left after vomiting up eels, that smell of new-mown grass. He also prided himself on his ability to navigate the white water that stripers frequented. Yet his friend Corey Gammill, who was one of Tom's captains for six years, observed that "Jason would catch fish some other guys didn't, but he also put himself in rough water more. He was trying to push envelopes to create some of those legendary fishing stories he grew up hearing about his dad."

The Opening, described by Robert Lowell as "a brackish reach of shoal off Madaket," is the most ticklish fishing spot in Nantucket's capricious waters. The shoals shift constantly and the waves can arise from four directions, churning like an industrial washing machine. Sheila Lucey, the island's harbor-master, says, "The Opening is not marked with buoys. No one wants the liability." The churn there has capsized



The son of a renowned fisherman, Jason Mleczko “would catch fish some other guys didn’t, but he also put himself in rough water more.”

at least four boats in recent memory, and in 2008 a rogue wave swept off both the anglers aboard a boat called the Queen Bee, which kept heading east and wound up, nearly four years later, in Spain.

Capt. Tom's Charters usually fished the Opening in one of its two twenty-nine-foot Hawks, big, beamy boats with an unusually low center of gravity. If a strong wave caught them broadside, they'd just "power slide" sideways. That day, though, one of the Hawks was in Hyannis being painted, and Tom was out in the other. So Jason had taken Jabb, a sporty twenty-three-foot Maritime Defiant. Tom believed that his captains could fish the rips in Jabb if the waves didn't exceed six feet, but he didn't recommend that anyone else try it: "Most of the other captains don't understand what we do and don't have the skill to do it." Jason would have taken Jabb even if the other Hawk had been available; it was his first trip of the season and he wanted the smaller boat's range, so that he could roam in search of stripers. He also liked buzzing along at thirty knots, skipping over the crests like a stone.

At the Opening, there were heavy storm clouds gathering in the south, and the combination of the incoming swell, the outgoing tide, and the twenty-five-mile-an-hour gusts of wind made for thick, unruly waves. Another local captain, P. J. Rubin, had decided to surf the nearby break at Madaket Beach rather

than go fishing that day, but he quickly packed it in: "We had double-overhead waves that cleaned out all the best surfers on the island," he said. Almost all of Nantucket's charter boats cancelled their trips.

After Jason arrived at the Opening, he made a few passes, feeling right at home: when he was eight, on a trip with his father, he'd caught his first striper just off Tuckernuck. The shoals at the Shallow Spot seemed to lie much as he remembered, and the waves, though strengthening, were only three to five feet. Then an eight-footer snapped over the bow, knocking down Joe Coveney and swamping the deck. Joe usually had a good sense of humor, but now he handed his rod to Alex Cameron and sat by the center console, soaked and shivering. The air temperature was fifty-three and dropping; the water temperature was fifty-two. It was Joe's first visit to Nantucket, and he didn't want to be the guy who said, "We should go in"—but he wanted to go in. Jason looked at his phone, saw that it was 2:08, and suggested they take one last pass.

Alex at once caught a bluefish, and the guys cheered: they'd finally blooded themselves, even if it was only a seven-pounder. Jason helped him remove the hook and release the fish, and powered in toward the bar. As he approached the white water, he looked up to see a wave looming over his right shoulder—a nine-

foot mass of water. He gunned Jabb into it and crested the wave before it broke, but it wrenched the boat to port, making everyone go "Who!"—the roller-coaster yell. Jason, who knew that big waves come in threes, shouted, "We're gonna make it!" as he spun the bow toward the incoming surf. The guys, laughing as they regained their balance, were taken aback. Why wouldn't they make it? The second wave, a twelve-footer, hit four seconds later. The bow soared up over the wave crest, then plunged down so hard that it knifed below the surface. Water flooded the deck to the gunwales, washing the tackle bag overboard and sending everyone flying. Kent and Andrew, flung together in the stern, exchanged a look of dismay.

The third huge wave came early and from a new angle, surging toward their port stern. With no time to turn into it, Jason shouted, "Hold on!" and pinned the throttle to outrun it. But at the Shallow Spot there was no deeper water to escape to. The wave caught them from behind and lifted them until they were surfing its face. They hung there for five seconds—their port gunwale tilting overhead, the Yamaha outboard whirring in the air—as if time were taking a breath. Jason still believed that they'd shoot the barrel and make it out. Then the starboard gunwale hit sand, and with fantastic power the wave lifted the boat and hurled it onto the sandbar upside down. All that was visible of Jabb from above was a strip of maroon-painted hull.

Jason had reflexively crouched between his seat and the console; now he was squashed in three feet of water, his head bumping the deck. The steel radar tower atop the center console was buried in the sand, pinning the boat in place. With the motor buzzing crazily and the current swarming around him, it was as if he'd crashed into a hive of bees. His mind went to his father. I'm an idiot, he thought. *We* don't capsize.

Tom Mlecenko first visited Nantucket in the summer of 1970. He went with his brother, who was dating a lively young woman named Bambi Gifford, from a banking family that had summered there for three generations. One night, Bambi announced that she was



"For your information, this 'stuff' happens to be my husband!"

going fishing in the morning—any takers? Tom was the only one eager to rise at 5 A.M., and, Bambi recalls, “that sealed our fate.” Casting into a gleaming sunrise off Madaket, Tom said, “I fell in love with the whole thing—my wife, the fishing, the island. It was all a big magical package.”

The couple married and had three children: Priscilla, known as Wink; Allison, known as A.J.; and Jason. In the off-season, Tom taught middle-school science at the New Canaan Country School, in Connecticut, where the students called him Mez and regularly dedicated the yearbook to him. He was one of those charismatic men whose devotion to a subject—from genetics to coaching hockey—was inextricable from his conviction that hard work was vital to mastery.

When each of his children turned two, Tom would strap skates on them and leave them in the middle of an outdoor rink, with the promise of hot chocolate if they skated to the edge. When they crawled off in tears, he’d return them to the ice. Bambi recalls, “The other mothers would say, ‘That’s the meanest thing I’ve ever seen!’” But by the third day the Mleczko toddlers would be skating. Wink grew up to captain the women’s hockey team at Harvard, as did A.J., who also starred on the U.S. team that won a gold medal at the 1998 Olympics. And even though Bambi was wary around the water—as a girl, in 1956, she had been aboard the Andrea Doria when it sank off Nantucket one foggy night, killing fifty-two people—she became the first female commodore of the Nantucket Yacht Club. Everyone in the family had a Nantucket Nectars bottle cap devoted to his or her achievements, except Jason.

The year Wink was born, 1973, Tom began running summer fishing charters out of the island’s West End. He’d make himself a peanut butter, mayonnaise, and lettuce sandwich, then head out from dawn till dusk; Bambi kept the books and manned the phones (while also running a dress shop in town). “Family days” would be more fishing, just with the family. When Tom retired from teaching, in 1996, he and Bambi moved to the island year-round, and he increased his fleet to four boats, all painted flag blue. (Jabb stands



“I’m working part time, but I’m hoping that once I finish my master’s they’ll up my hours to full time.”

for “Just Another Blue Boat.”) “My dad taught us that if you’re the captain you’re in charge,” Wink says, “and if you’re not the captain there’s no shame in that, but you have to listen to the captain.”

When chasing fish, Tom would blissfully lose track of time. Bambi would often be on the verge of phoning for help when Tom returned, his chinos stiff with bluefish blood, and shook his head, saying, “Don’t call the Coast Guard.” This was a Nantucket dynamic known to every whaler’s wife who ever trod a widow’s walk. It had been that way since the English settlers’ first voyage to the island, in 1659, when Thomas Macy captained a small boat from Martha’s Vineyard. After a storm blew up and Macy’s wife grew anxious, he cried, “Woman, go below and seek thy God! I fear not the witches on earth nor the devils in Hell!” Over the centuries, the area’s chopping currents, shifting shoals, and whirling storms caused more than seven hundred

wrecks and earned it the nickname the Graveyard of the Atlantic.

In recent decades, as the island became a tycoon’s paradise, and as the median price of its homes rose above a million dollars, that sense of constant peril diminished. The danger was obscured by the massive yachts and the ubiquitous G.P.S. systems, and also by the island’s hummocky, cranberry-coated topography; though you’re nearly always within a mile or two of the ocean, you rarely catch sight of it. So Tom’s timing in starting his business was perfect: he was offering the old, manly Nantucket just as the new, wealthy Nantucket became eager for a turnkey version of it.

Trapped inside Jabb, Jason tried to squirm under the starboard gunwale, but the surf was battering it into the sand. He turned back, but the bungee cord that held his pliers to his belt snagged behind him. As he realized he

was stuck, he also realized that he was running out of air, and he panicked for a moment. Then he ripped the pliers off his belt, crawled to the port gunwale, heaved it up, and squeezed beneath it.

When he surfaced, gasping, he saw Andrew Curren, ten feet away. Andrew had wormed out near the stern and grabbed a life jacket that was floating by in the froth. It was a child's jacket, so small that it prevented deep breaths and pinioned his arms high like flapping bird's wings, but he dutifully kept it on. Jason paddled over and they swam together to the boat, diving under the rollers as they came in.

As they clutched the gunwale, Andrew shouted, "What do we do? What do we do?" The surf slammed the boat, lifting and dropping it like a bathtub toy, flinging them off. They fought back to it, and Jason was able to scramble onto the hull. When he stood, he saw three heads in the water, fifty feet away. While he was shouting for them to swim to the boat, a wave broke on top of him. He and Andrew were rolled and boiled fifteen yards before they could surface. Jason kicked off his boots to swim more freely, but the waves were all ten-to-twelve-footers now, immensely strong, one after another, so they could never catch their breath.

The fifth time they got knocked off, Jason found himself on his back, being sucked under. His soggy red fleece had become a straitjacket. Gazing up as he sank, he accepted that he was going to die. Then he grew terrified and angry, and he thrashed to the surface, where he saw that Andrew, too, had surrendered to the water. "It's like a warm blanket that settles over you," Andrew said. "I was just going down to the bottom when Jason reached over and pulled me back to the boat."

By now, the corkscrewing of surf and tide had ripped the radar tower off the console, and Jabb began to drift south, toward calmer water. Once Jason and Andrew dived out beyond the break, they were able to wriggle back onto the hull. They stood on this perch, an area about ten feet by six, and peered through the seething wave caps. The others had disappeared. Andrew was still shouting, "What the fuck do we do?" Jason finally replied, "I don't know! I've never been in this situation." Andrew suggested that

they try to flip the boat, so they jumped on one side of it until Jason said to stop—if they righted the boat it might sink. Having regained his bearings, he'd realized he was still the captain.

That was when he saw two heads in the water, far to the southwest. Joe Coveney was closer. He'd surfaced amid a whirlpool and had to swim desperately just to stay afloat. It wasn't until he was fifty yards from the boat that the current eased enough for him to look around and notice Kent McClintock fifteen yards behind him. Kent yelled "Help!" and Joe, hearing him, shouted, "Call the fucking Coast Guard!" to no one in particular. Then Kent cried, "Help me, Joe—I'm bleeding! I'm dying!" The water around him was stained dark red. "I'm not going to make it." "You are, you are!" Joe said.

Joe caught sight of Andrew and Jason waving to them from the hull. He called out to Kent, "Let's get back to the boat!" and took off in a vigorous crawl. He was a good athlete, a former pitcher for Washington College's baseball team, and the water had erased any wooziness caused by the beer. Even so, the swim took ten minutes; his sweatshirt seemed heavy as a bearskin rug. He arrived so weary that Jason and Andrew had to tug him aboard.

When he was able to stand, he couldn't see Kent, let alone Alex. The sea was empty. Filled with guilt that he had left the others behind, Joe said, "Kent's dying—he's not going to make it." Andrew, still wearing his child's life jacket, was overcome; he'd brought his friends to Nantucket, and now, as he kept saying, "they're dead, they're dead!" "Shut the fuck up—we'll find them!" Jason yelled, increasingly afraid that they wouldn't.

In New Canaan, Tom Mleczko walked Jason to school, coached his teams in football, hockey, and lacrosse, and taught his sex-ed class. "I was bombarded with my dad," Jason said. To forestall accusations of favoritism, Tom was hard on him—giving him extra sprints, making him serve team penalties. So, naturally, Jason grew his hair long, cut corners, and took a postgraduate year before attending Hamilton College. He was charming but distractible, promising but perennially boyish—the youngest child you notice on the Christ-

mas card and wonder about, the one whose broad smile hides an uncertainty about who he's supposed to be.

When Jason was twelve, he got busted for jumping a ferry's wake in his Boston Whaler. "Tommy's boy?" the harbor-master said reprovingly. His father sat him down: "You've got to realize that you're Jason *Mleczko*. Respect the history of Nantucket that we're a part of—this is our life, our community. Gaining people's respect takes work, but it also takes work to keep it." Jason listened in despair. "Dad," he said, "I can't get away from you!" On a forty-eight-square-mile island, there was no place to hide.

At fourteen, Jason began to realize why Tom wouldn't answer directly when he asked, "What'd you catch?," saying only, "They had a great time"; fishing wasn't so much about landing fish as it was about making memories. At sixteen, he started working for his father as a striker—local parlance for a mate—and calling him Cap'n, or Cap. Tom would bellow constant fond reminders: "Jase, wake up! Jase, set the anchor! Jase, did you call the clients?" Everyone in the Mleczko operation had a "dog" name: Tom was Mad Dog, Bambi was Top Dog, and Jason was Lazy Dog. Jason earned his captain's license at twenty, but his father watched him for two more years before making him a captain. "When Jason started captaining, he sometimes acted his age," Mike Holland, a family friend who often fished with both Tom and Jason, said. "But he continued to learn at the feet of the master."

At about the time that Jason began running boats, several other fishermen, some of them former employees of Tom's, set up rival operations. It was a small island and a short season, and there were only so many places to fish, so the captains' collegiality was often underpinned by jealousy and murmured trash talk. Some said that Tom ran his boats hard, without quite enough respect for safety. His fleet was up to code, but while the Mleczkos had often talked about fitting their boats with EPIRBs—Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacons, which send an automatic distress signal if a boat flips—Tom had thriftily decided to hold off. Other captains carry self-inflating life jackets, but the Mleczkos

stuck with the old-fashioned kind, stowed in the console. And, while Tom's captains all had waterproof cases for their cell phones, Jason sheepishly told his passengers that morning that, in the season-opening flurry, he'd left his case in his Hyundai, in Hyannis.

In recent years, as Tom entered his mid-sixties, he'd stopped challenging the breakers as much as he had in his youth and had begun to hand the business on. A number of local captains wondered whether Jason was ready. One said, "If you asked thirty captains who's most likely to have an accident, twenty-seven would say Jason." His sister Wink felt it was hard on him to have to compete with all the older captains who worked for the family. But for Jason, who vigorously contested the notion that he was reckless, the only comparison that mattered was with his father. "My goal was always to be on his level—the way he carries himself, the way he can read every situation," he said. "It's an innate gift. I'd like to believe I have it, but time will tell." Reared on tales of wrecks and rescues, he understood that the ocean was a test. He wrote poems about the angry sea and once sculpted a sinking boat ringed with words such as "survive" and "must" and "angry" and "father"; the deck was a drowning face. His father found the sculpture creepy and unsound. "All of us have images of breaking water on the boat," Tom said. "But you control that. You say, 'I'm not going to let that happen.'"

With a surge of joy, Jason saw Kent reappear through the shifting chop, and then Alex, too, much farther away. Jason began screaming encouragement, but they were out of earshot, lost in solitary battles. Kent, struggling to breathe and to stay afloat, was terrified by the blood streaming down his green jacket. Behind him, he heard Alex moaning, "I'm dying, I'm dying."

Kent called, "We have to start swimming to the boat!" He set out, expecting his friend to be close behind. Alex was a strong swimmer, but when he was flung from the ship he'd banged his head hard on something—the hull or the sand. Now he could barely keep his nose up. Cloudily, he realized that he was snagged by two triple-barbed fishhooks—one in his left

sleeve, and one in his buttock—and that his legs were trussed by their line. He panicked, thinking, *I'm not going to make it*. As soon as he accepted his fate, he felt calm enough to duck under and feel around, keeping his eyes shut, because he was wearing contact lenses. At last, he found the fifteen-pound-test line and snapped it. The effort left him spent, and he floated, barely conscious, no longer certain what he should be doing.



As Tom Mleczko searched for his son, he told himself, "Boats flip, but never our boats."

On land, Kent was sarcastic but measured, the capable-seeming one. Now, as he swam against the current, he felt reality receding. A Bud Light can that floated by seemed like a hallucination. One of his shoes had vanished, so he dove under to pull off the other one. It was so hard fighting to the surface that he thought, *This is it*. And then: *I never want to go underwater again in my life*.

Jason, who was standing to exhort him—"You're going to make it, you're going to make it!"—understood Kent's stricken expression: "Going under had become affiliated with death, and we all knew that." Kent heard Jason and picked up his pace. After half an hour in the water, he reached the boat and collapsed on the hull, where Andrew lay atop him to keep him warm. When Kent finally sat up, he was amazed to discover that he wasn't bleeding, after all—he'd just been smeared with Jabb's maroon bottom paint.

Jason turned his attention to Alex, who was thirty yards away and drifting wide of the boat, his strokes feeble and intermittent. His head was often below the surface, but every so often he'd lift it to call out, "Save me, I'm dying! Save me!" Joe said, "They were desperate cries—it was awful." Andrew, Alex's closest friend on the boat, his frequent companion at concerts and Washington Nationals games, said, "I couldn't conceive getting back

in, even to save a dying friend. Once you've been under the water like that, you go into full-on survival mode. I wanted to jump in, I felt obligated to—but it was impossible."

For Jason, it was a terrible decision. If he swam to Alex, what would happen to the others? "Alex," he belted, "you swim and you fucking live! You drift and you fucking die! Swim, Alex—swim to live!" Alex angled closer, laboring, cramping, swallowing water with every breath. Jason kept screaming, thinking, *If he goes under, I'll jump in after him, and it'll probably be a mistake*. When Alex was five feet away, Jason lowered himself in, and he and Kent hoisted Alex onto the hull. After nearly forty minutes in the water, his face was blue and his hands were frozen claws. He lay on his stomach, gasping. As Jason rubbed his legs to warm them, Alex tried to thank Kent—who he mistakenly believed had towed him the whole way—but all

the others could hear was an incoherent mumble. Still, Alex dimly felt, at least he was alive.

Andrew looked at his dive watch—a Breitling, a gift from his parents that he habitually removed before getting in the water. It was 2:45 P.M. They could see the houses and scrub oaks on Tuckernuck, only a mile away. Andrew, who’d spent six summers as a lifeguard, suggested they swim for it before the current carried them farther out: “If we stay on this boat, we’re dead.” Kent seemed inclined to agree. Joe didn’t want to swim unless the boat sank, and Alex was in no condition to do anything. “We need to get Alex to a hospital,” Kent said. “He won’t make it.”

Jason had been vainly pushing the power button on his phone, which had somehow remained in his pants pocket. Now he reasserted himself. Everything his father had taught him led to one conclusion: you stay with the boat. Jason pointed out that the water was frigid, the seas choppy, and the current dead into them. “If you get in that water, you’ll be in Bermuda before you’ll be in Nantucket. This boat is the only thing saving us.”

“Well, then, what do we do?” Kent asked.

“We stay warm. We survive.” He went on, “My dad knows we’re supposed to be back—the Coast Guard helicopter will be coming soon.” Tom had told Jason that the captain’s chief job, when a boat was in distress, was to keep all the passengers calm: smile and talk and keep telling stories.

Kent said that Jenn Fenton, his girlfriend, would also raise the alarm shortly after 3 P.M., because they always called each other if they were going to be late. Joe was optimistic: “I had it all in my head—by 3:30 they’ll call us, our phones and the radio won’t be working, and then the Coast Guard will be on its way.” He announced, “Guys, we’ll be out of here by five.” Sure, Kent said. Then they asked Andrew the time.

Andrew’s watch became critical to the group’s well-being: it gave structure to the waiting, and provided a link to the orderliness of life on land, where their loved ones were surely organizing to find them. After 3 P.M., the guys began listening for the helicopter and searching the horizon. An occasional plane flew overhead, and they’d shout and wave, to no

is a phrase coined by Cal Watkins of the Harvard Linguistics Department in November 1971

to disparage certain concerns of the female students of Harvard Divinity School.

In a world where God is “He” and everyone else “mankind,”

what chance do we have for a bit of attention? seemed to be their question.

Cal Watkins—how patient a man—did not say you carry-tale mumble-news mar-plot find-fault spoil-

sports!

but rather that pronouns themselves were not to blame. It’s the Indo-European system of markedness.

A binary system. Which regards masculine as the unmarked gender. As if all the creatures in the world were either zippers

or olives, except way back in the Indus Valley

effect. They were wearing dark clothes, against a dark-red hull, in the gunmetal water. Harbor seals surfaced nearby and stared at the five men. Joe imagined that they were thinking, Look at you morons! Jason envied them: they could be on Tuckernuck in two minutes.

It was raining hard now. They discussed diving for the life jackets and flares that might still be in the console, but Jason said it was too dangerous. As they took turns rubbing Alex’s back,

in 5000 B.C. we decided to call them zippers

and non-zippers.

By 1971 the non-zippers were getting restless. They began bringing

kazoos to their lectures to drown out certain pronouns and masculine generics. Now, a kazoo

is a toy, a noisemaker. It scrubs away the air in that place. What

can you do with a piece of scrubbed-away air? Various things. You can fill it with neologisms.

Or with re-analysis. Or with exaptation. Let’s explore exaptation. To exapt

is to adapt in an outward direction.

You may have seen pictures of a kind of dinosaur called the archaeopteryx. Which had feathers

but did not fly. Its feathers kept the archaeopteryx warm. Meanwhile everywhere

Jason had them switch positions, so that Joe wouldn’t bear the brunt of the northeast wind. It was a trick he’d seen penguins employ in a documentary.

Fog scudded in, thicker and thicker. Soon they could see only a quarter mile, then half that. Anyone who came looking for them now would have to get lucky. Sunset wasn’t until 8:01 P.M., but to the south a wall of thunderheads was rumbling closer. The clouds were so dark that Alex hazily thought that night had already

PRONOUN ENVY

ice was melting.
Feathers for
warmth
became redundant.

One night
the archaeopteryx
exapted its feathers—as wings—and
over

the yards of Harvard
rose divinity students
in violent flight,
changing everything,

changing nothing,
soaring and banking
under the moon,
intending (no

doubt) to never come back
but of course
that proved impossible.
They did come back,

they finished their degrees,
they used their wings
to shoot pronouns around
on a big hockey rink

back of the Divinity School.

Nightcold
rushes onto my forehead
and an area of emotion up under
my tongue

when I
recall those games.
But because a binary system
uses numbers in base 2,
requiring

fallen. Everyone's teeth were chattering.
No one wanted to seem anxious, but they
all kept asking the time. Andrew, who had
his arm companionably around Joe, began
just waving his wrist at anyone who asked.
It was 4:30. Then 4:45.

"Pretty soon we'll be found," Jason
said. "Pretty soon now." He suggested
another switch of positions, so that ev-
eryone stayed busy. "I'd told them the
Coast Guard helicopter was coming, to
keep their spirits up, but I knew it was

only 1 and 0
to express its differential,
we had to score our games
in scandal and sadness,

in tungsten and long twisting
streets, in bride-habited,
maiden-hearted, thief-stolen,
wind-led, marble-constant

wonder-wounded, to-and-fro-

conflicting, world-without-end
marks
of our own invention.
And to this day

if you look behind the Divinity
School (and if you know
what to look for)
you may see a slight residue of

those nights.
Here's
what to look for:
a pony

standing quiet with one ear

bent.
He seems to have
a bit of capture caught in it.
He shakes his head and all around

you, soaking
the night
and the yards and whatever is
alienable or inalienable there,

comes
a smell like
a new tuxedo.

—Anne Carson

too foggy for the helicopter. And I knew
it would take two and a half hours for
their cutter to get around the island
from Brant Point. So I knew it was my
dad or nothing."

Tom and Jason were scheduled to-
gether on a special charter at 3 P.M.
A family friend named Clark Whitcomb
had booked one of the big boats, Purple
Water, to take relatives and friends
around Madaket Harbor to scatter the

ashes of his late wife in some of the spots
she'd loved best. When Tom left the
dock, at 3:15, he kept his demeanor stoic
so as not to distract from the occasion.
But he quietly tried to raise Jason on the
VHF radio and his cell phone, calling
repeatedly as he puttered from Eel
Point to Tuckernuck Harbor to Smith
Point and then back up Hither Creek.
It wasn't unheard of for Jason to be late
or not to answer his cell phone, but it
was troubling about the radio—no mat-
ter where the boat was, it should be in
VHF range.

After an hour on the water, Tom
returned to the dock and called his
wife: "Have you heard from Jason?"
"No," Bambi said. She was doing a
Civil War jigsaw puzzle at home with
her daughter A.J. and two of A.J.'s
children. Tom said he was going out
to look, but though he reassured her—
"I'm sure Jason's just broken down"—
he didn't add his usual benediction,
"Everything's going to be all right,
baby." Bambi worried, suddenly, that
he wouldn't return.

It was pouring, so Tom put on his
foul-weather gear. He left the dock at
4:30 and made for the Opening, topping
Purple Water out at seventeen knots—as
fast as he dared, since he could see only
two hundred yards in the brume. Tom
steers a skipping boat calmly, his right
hand steady on the tiller, but his thoughts
were agitated. He briefly considered call-
ing the Coast Guard, then decided not to,
estimating that it would take three or four
hours for its cutter to round the island.
(The officer in charge of the Coast Guard
station, Matt Welsh, says that it would
have taken at most an hour.) Nantucket's
harbormaster has a rescue boat in Mada-
ket Harbor, but Mleczo didn't call her,
either. He didn't think he needed backup
to find Jabb and tow her in. "Boats flip,
but never our boats," he told himself. The
waters around Nantucket were life-giving
and familiar, almost amniotic.

When Tom didn't see Jabb at the
Opening, he continued northwest, to
the shoals off Muskeget Island. Noth-
ing. So he kept going, four miles past
Muskeget, toward Chappaquiddick.
Still nothing. He was alone in thick
fog. Apprehension began to steal over
him, and as he turned south again he
vowed to look even more closely.

Jenn Fenton, waiting at Andrew's

house with a friend from high school, had called and texted Kent five times. Her friend suggested that the guys must have gone for a beer, but at 4:30 Jenn called the Mleczkos. A.J. answered, and said that the boat had probably broken down and that Tom was out looking for it. She wasn't worried: "I thought, Of course Jason's not answering his phone—it's at the bottom of the harbor, where he's dropped it twenty times before." Jenn tried the other passengers' phones, which all went straight to voice mail. When she called the Mleczkos back with this news, A.J.'s stomach dropped. Bambi immediately called Tom.

Dismayed, Tom moved offshore and began serpentineing to cover more water, worried that his engine noise would drown any cries for help. When he approached the Opening, he thought again about calling the Coast Guard. He was beginning to brace for disaster. "I had confidence in Jason. He's good under stress. But you suddenly realize how insignificant you are out here. I've always felt that I had control out on the water—that the ocean was my buddy—and now I didn't."

As the storm drew near, the world went leaden, then charcoal gray: the sky, the water, the occasional soot-colored cormorant. "Seeing a squid boat in the distance gave us perspective on how tiny we were," Joe said. "We were on the same level as all this ocean, a flat, alien plane." As his deadline of 5 P.M. came and went, Joe's spirits sank. Jason had said that any rescue boat would be coming west through the channel from Madaket Harbor, so they'd kept their eyes on that spot, but in the murk they'd missed Tom's boat, and nothing else appeared. Andrew felt that the fog and the storm made darkness their final deadline. The blacker it got, the closer to death he felt.

Jason had the same thoughts. He'd begun with complete faith that his father would find them. As the afternoon darkened, he'd begun to think, If anyone finds us, it'll be my dad. Now he just repeated to himself, "God, I hope he finds us." As he thought about his three-month-old sons, and how they would grow up with-

out knowing him, tears sprang to his eyes. He began kissing his wedding ring and murmuring their names: "Wes and Coop, Wes and Coop." Kent asked, "Are you saying goodbye?" "Fuck, no!" Jason replied, mustering all his bravado. "You guys are lucky you're with me—I'm seeing my goddam boys again!"

At 5:20, the rain stopped, and a few minutes later the fog lifted. Everyone except Alex, who was still in a heap, stood and stretched in the wan sunlight. At 5:40, Jason remarked that they needed to think about plans for the night. He could see the boat's anchor line beneath them, and he planned to dive for it and loop himself and each of his passengers to one of the boat's cleats. "I would have said it was for safety in the night, so if you got washed over you could haul yourself back to the boat. But I was also thinking, At least that way they'll find my body." While he was under the boat, he planned to search the console for a knife or a screwdriver so he could scratch some final words on the hull: "To Wes and Coop, I'm more excited to be your dad than anything else. Thank you for being out here with me." And to his wife, Jenny: "I love you forever, you should remarry." That was a lot of words, though—what could he leave out?

"Boat!" Kent yelled. He'd seen a furrow in the water about two miles off, heading south. Jason squinted, eighty per cent sure it was Purple Water. He ripped the red reflector panel from the child's life jacket and held it high in his left hand to catch the light, waving the jacket with his right hand and standing as tall as he could. They all stared in silence, willing the boat to turn, but it continued on, past perpendicular. Jason crushed his makeshift signal flags onto his head.

When the fog lifted, Tom was still heading south. A half-mile off Tuckernuck, he slowed and turned his gaze to some commercial squid boats five miles away, thinking, *I wish I could see Jason as well as I can see those boats.* He felt numb, empty, receptive. Then he saw a tiny flicker out of the corner of his right eye—a movement that was subtly out of cadence with the waves. He swivelled and stared, not daring to blink: nothing. Then he saw it again—an infinitesimal nod in

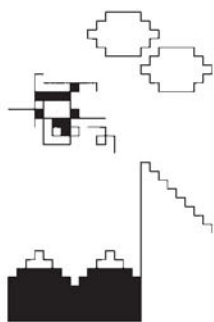
the water. *There they are!* he thought, powering into a right-hand turn.

When Jason saw the wake erupt, tears began pouring from his eyes. He grabbed Kent's shoulder and cried, "We're going home!" Kent didn't stop screaming with joy until Purple Water hove to. When Tom got close enough to count five heads, he, too, was suffused with relief and joy, yet he maintained a stern, rescue-mode demeanor. As he idled alongside the wreck, so that the castaways could step aboard, he said, "What happened?" Then he asked if anyone needed medical attention, and they said that Alex did.

Alex came over first, almost plunging aboard, and the others followed. Tom told them to go below to the cuddy, put on foul-weather gear, and stay warm. Andrew suddenly succumbed to motion sickness and began vomiting over the side, as Tom patted his back. In the cuddy, Joe leaned his head on Kent's chest and began weeping: "I'm so sorry I couldn't help you more!" Kent said that he understood—there was only so much anyone could handle out there.

Up top, Jason threw his arms around his father, who gave him a preoccupied pat and said, "What are we going to do about that boat?" Jason stared, hoping his father would say, "You take the wheel, and I'll go anchor Jabb," but he didn't. Tom knew he was behaving stiffly, and he later said, "I felt that, as Jason's employer and his father, I should make this whole thing better—only I didn't know how." Jason unspooled the line attached to Purple Water's anchor, cut a hundred and fifty feet, and threw the anchor overboard. Then, reluctantly, he followed the anchor into the water and swam the line to Jabb. As he began making clumsy half hitches, tethering the line to Jabb's bow with numb fingers, the passengers came on deck, astonished that Tom wasn't immediately taking Alex to the hospital, and even more astonished to see Jason back in the water. When the task was done, Jason swam to Purple Water's bow, but couldn't pull himself onto it. Tom looked over, askance, and Jason said, "Cap, I've been in the water for four hours—I'm at about ten per cent." He finally crabbed himself aboard.

As they headed home, Tom called Bambi and said, "I found 'em." She burst into tears. Then he called the local boatyard to ask if it could salvage Jabb



that day. The head of the boatyard said no, given the weather—the storm would last three days—and reminded Tom to alert the Coast Guard. Instead, Tom called his friend Sheila Lucey, the harbormaster, to say that “one of my boats capsized, and we’re on our way in.” She would meet him at the dock with two ambulances, and Alex would be airlifted to Massachusetts General, in Boston, to get the water drained from his lungs and be treated for a concussion.

The fog and the cold rain had rolled back in, so Tom told Jason to go below and get warm, but Jason said, “I’m staying up here with you.” When they reached Madaket Harbor, their home waters, Tom eased back on the throttle, turned to his son, and pulled him into his arms. Immediately comforted, Jason was glad he’d been the one to anchor Jabb. “My dad was right,” he said. “You don’t leave your boat.”

The next morning, Tom’s grandson Oliver was christened at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church. The choir sang the familiar hymn:

Eternal Father, strong to save,
Whose arm hath bound the restless wave,
Who bidd’st the mighty ocean deep
Its own appointed limits keep:
Oh hear us when we cry to thee
For those in peril on the sea.

Tom started to cry, and Bambi, seeing her husband in tears for the first time since his father died, wept and hugged him. Then Jason, recalling the feel of Wes’s warm breath on his neck when he got home the night before, began to cry, and soon the entire family was weeping.

As news of the rescue flashed around the island, the Mleczkos were surrounded by well-wishers. They were lauded in the local press, and later recognized with life-saving awards. Some captains embraced Tom and said, “What happens if my boat rolls and you’re not around?” But there were also murmurs about Tom’s judgment in going out to search alone, and a strong feeling that Jason, as one captain put it, “had made a bad decision”—to fish the Opening, in those conditions, in that boat—“that ultimately led to him having to make a bunch of great decisions to save lives.” If even one passenger had died, every captain would have suffered.

Yet the passengers all felt that it was an accident, and that Jason had behaved heroically. He’d gathered them, kept them on the boat, mastered their doubts



“O.K., first things first—did everyone sign the card?”

as well as his own—saved their lives. They were less taken with Tom, who’d actually rescued them. His failure to call the Coast Guard bewildered them, as did his inability, at the moment of rescue, to express the empathy he’d made his clients feel for forty years.

A sense of connectedness had frayed out there on the water: the ocean separated them, then brought them back together, but not all the way. Andrew jumped into a swimming pool not long afterward and felt sick to his stomach. When Kent was tired, he’d find himself replaying the incident, helplessly watching the boat hang in the air and then begin to flip. It took a week for Alex’s mind to clear, and when people asked him, “How was your Memorial Day?,” he’d say, “Oh, fine,” too embarrassed to go into it.

For Jason, seeing the fog lift just as his father arrived was “a religious moment.” He was convinced that no one else would have found him. But though he had been inspired by his passengers’ ferocious fights to get back to the boat, their will to live, he struggled with the burden of having put them to the test. He’d always imag-

ined the ordeal would be his alone. “When I’m lying in bed and I can’t sleep and it’s dark, I can put myself back under the boat anytime,” he said. With a determined smile, he added, “But I choose not to.”

Two weeks after the accident, Tom tried to tighten a boat’s engine belt with the engine running, and cut off the last inch of his right index finger. “It was total stupidity,” he said. “I’d been doing it for forty years without consequences, and it caught up with me.” He slid the fingertip into a plastic bag and tried to keep on fishing, but his clients insisted that he go to the hospital. “After that, people kept saying, ‘Two strikes, Captain—what’s the third one?’ I said, ‘No third strike—it’s totally unrelated.’” He installed EPIRBs in his boats this winter, but he was reluctant to acknowledge any larger lessons. “We’d still have gone to the rips that day,” he said. Yet he would wake at night to find himself back at the Opening, peering out at the vast dark sea. “What if I hadn’t seen that little movement? What if I’d been looking two degrees to the left? The ocean—it turns out it’s pretty impersonal. It doesn’t care.” ♦



Hayes has devoted the past fifteen years to studying atrazine, a widely used herbicide made by Syngenta. The company's notes reveal

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAN WINTERS



ANNALS OF SCIENCE

A VALUABLE REPUTATION

After Tyrone Hayes said that a chemical was harmful, its maker pursued him.

BY RACHEL AVIV

that it struggled to make sense of him, and plotted ways to discredit him.

In 2001, seven years after joining the biology faculty of the University of California, Berkeley, Tyrone Hayes stopped talking about his research with people he didn't trust. He instructed the students in his lab, where he was raising three thousand frogs, to hang up the phone if they heard a click, a signal that a third party might be on the line. Other scientists seemed to remember events differently, he noticed, so he started carrying an audio recorder to meetings. "The secret to a happy, successful life of paranoia," he liked to say, "is to keep careful track of your persecutors."

Three years earlier, Syngenta, one of the largest agribusinesses in the world, had asked Hayes to conduct experiments on the herbicide atrazine, which is applied to more than half the corn in the United States. Hayes was thirty-one, and he had already published twenty papers on the endocrinology of amphibians. David Wake, a professor in Hayes's department, said that Hayes "may have had the greatest potential of anyone in the field." But, when Hayes discovered that atrazine might impede the sexual development of frogs, his dealings with Syngenta became strained, and, in November, 2000, he ended his relationship with the company.

Hayes continued studying atrazine on his own, and soon he became convinced that Syngenta representatives were following him to conferences around the world. He worried that the company was orchestrating a campaign to destroy his reputation. He complained that whenever he gave public talks there was a stranger in the back of the room, taking notes. On a trip to Washington, D.C., in 2003, he stayed at a different hotel each night. He was still in touch with a few Syngenta scientists and, after noticing that they knew many details about his work and his schedule, he suspected that they were reading his e-mails. To confuse them, he asked a student to write misleading e-mails from his office computer while he was travelling. He sent backup copies of his data and notes to his parents in sealed boxes. In an e-mail to one Syngenta scientist, he wrote that he had "risked my reputation, my name . . . some say even my life, for what I thought (and now know) is right." A

few scientists had previously done experiments that anticipated Hayes's work, but no one had observed such extreme effects. In another e-mail to Syngenta, he acknowledged that it might appear that he was suffering from a "Napoleon complex" or "delusions of grandeur."

For years, despite his achievements, Hayes had felt like an interloper. In academic settings, it seemed to him that his colleagues were operating according to a frivolous code of manners: they spoke so formally, fashioning themselves as detached authorities, and rarely admitted what they didn't know. He had grown up in Columbia, South Carolina, in a neighborhood where fewer than forty per cent of residents finish high school. Until sixth grade, when he was accepted into a program for the gifted, in a different neighborhood, he had never had a conversation with a white person his age. He and his friends used to tell one another how "white people do this, and white people do that," pretending that they knew. After he switched schools and took advanced courses, the black kids made fun of him, saying, "Oh, he thinks he's white."

He was fascinated by the idea of metamorphosis, and spent much of his adolescence collecting tadpoles and frogs and crossbreeding different species of grasshoppers. He raised frog larvae on his parents' front porch, and examined how lizards respond to changes in temperature (by using a blow-dryer) and light (by placing them in a doghouse). His father, a carpet layer, used to look at his experiments, shake his head, and say, "There's a fine line between a genius and a fool."

Hayes received a scholarship to Harvard, and, in 1985, began what he calls the worst four years of his life. Many of the other black students had gone to private schools and came from affluent families. He felt disconnected and ill-equipped—he was placed on academic probation—until he became close to a biology professor, who encouraged him to work in his lab. Five feet three and thin, Hayes distinguished himself by dressing flamboyantly, like Prince. The *Harvard Crimson*, in an article about a campus party, wrote that he looked as if he belonged in the "rock-'n'-ready at-

mosphere of New York's Danceteria." He thought about dropping out, but then he started dating a classmate, Katherine Kim, a Korean-American biology major from Kansas. He married her two days after he graduated.

They moved to Berkeley, where Hayes enrolled in the university's program in integrative biology. He completed his Ph.D. in three and a half years, and was immediately hired by his department. "He was a force of nature—incredibly gifted and hardworking," Paul Barber, a colleague who is now a professor at U.C.L.A., says. Hayes became one of only a few black tenured biology professors in the country. He won Berkeley's highest award for teaching, and ran the most racially diverse lab in his department, attracting students who were the first in their families to go to college. Nigel Noriega, a former graduate student, said that the lab was a "comfort zone" for students who were "just suffocating at Berkeley," because they felt alienated from academic culture.

Hayes had become accustomed to steady praise from his colleagues, but, when Syngenta cast doubt on his work, he became preoccupied by old anxieties. He believed that the company was trying to isolate him from other scientists and "play on my insecurities—the fear that I'm not good enough, that everyone thinks I'm a fraud," he said. He told colleagues that he suspected that Syngenta held "focus groups" on how to mine his vulnerabilities. Roger Liu, who worked in Hayes's lab for a decade, both as an undergraduate and as a graduate student, said, "In the beginning, I was really worried for his safety. But then I couldn't tell where the reality ended and the exaggeration crept in."

Liu and several other former students said that they had remained skeptical of Hayes's accusations until last summer, when an article appeared in *Environmental Health News* that drew on Syngenta's internal records. Hundreds of Syngenta's memos, notes, and e-mails have been unsealed following the settlement, in 2012, of two class-action suits brought by twenty-three Midwestern cities and towns that accused Syngenta of "concealing atrazine's true dangerous nature" and contaminating their drinking water. Stephen

Tillery, the lawyer who argued the cases, said, "Tyrone's work gave us the scientific basis for the lawsuit."

Hayes has devoted the past fifteen years to studying atrazine, and during that time scientists around the world have expanded on his findings, suggesting that the herbicide is associated with birth defects in humans as well as in animals. The company documents show that, while Hayes was studying atrazine, Syngenta was studying him, as he had long suspected. Syngenta's public-relations team had drafted a list of four goals. The first was "discredit Hayes." In a spiral-bound notebook, Syngenta's communications manager, Sherry Ford, who referred to Hayes by his initials, wrote that the company could "prevent citing of TH data by revealing him as noncredible." He was a frequent topic of conversation at company meetings. Syngenta looked for ways to "exploit Hayes' faults/problems." "If TH involved in scandal, enviros will drop him," Ford wrote. She observed that Hayes "grew up in world (S.C.) that wouldn't accept him," "needs adulation," "doesn't sleep," was "scarred for life." She wrote, "What's motivating Hayes?—basic question."

Syngenta, which is based in Basel, sells more than fourteen billion dollars' worth of seeds and pesticides a year and funds research at some four hundred academic institutions around the world. When Hayes agreed to do experiments for the company (which at that time was part of a larger corporation, Novartis), the students in his lab expressed concern that biotech companies were "buying up universities" and that industry funding would compromise the objectivity of their research. Hayes assured them that his fee, a hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars, would make their lab more rigorous. He could employ more students, buy new equipment, and raise more frogs. Though his lab was well funded, federal support for research was growing increasingly unstable, and, like many academics and administrators, he felt that he should find new sources of revenue. "I went into it as if I were a painter, performing a service," Hayes told me. "You commissioned it, and I come up with the results, and you do what you

want with them. It's your responsibility, not mine."

Atrazine is the second most widely used herbicide in the U.S., where sales are estimated at about three hundred million dollars a year. Introduced in 1958, it is cheap to produce and controls a broad range of weeds. (Glyphosate, which is produced by Monsanto, is the most popular herbicide.) A study by the Environmental Protection Agency found that without atrazine the national corn yield would fall by six per cent, creating an annual loss of nearly two billion dollars. But the herbicide degrades slowly in soil and often washes into streams and lakes, where it doesn't readily dissolve. Atrazine is one of the most common contaminants of drinking water; an estimated thirty million Americans are exposed to trace amounts of the chemical.

In 1994, the E.P.A., expressing concerns about atrazine's health effects, announced that it would start a scientific review. Syngenta assembled a panel of scientists and professors, through a consulting firm called EcoRisk, to study the herbicide. Hayes eventually joined the group. His first experiment showed that male tadpoles exposed to atrazine developed less muscle surrounding their vocal cords, and he hypothesized that the chemical had the potential to reduce testosterone levels. "I have been losing lots of sleep over this," he wrote one EcoRisk panel member, in the summer of 2000. "I realize the implications and of course want to make sure that everything possible has been done and controlled for." After a conference call, he was surprised by the way the company kept critiquing what seemed to be trivial aspects of the work. Hayes wanted to repeat and validate his experiments, and complained that the company was slowing him down and that independent scientists would publish similar results before he could. He decided to resign from the panel, writing in a letter that he didn't want to be "scooped." "I fear that my reputation will be damaged if I continue my relationship and associated low productivity with Novartis," he wrote. "It will appear to my colleagues that I have been part of a plan to bury important data."

Hayes repeated the experiments



"Daddy's taking us out to buy a snowman!"

using funds from Berkeley and the National Science Foundation. Afterward, he wrote to the panel, "Although I do not want to make a big deal out of it until I have all of the data analyzed and decoded—I feel I should warn you that I think something very strange is coming up in these animals." After dissecting the frogs, he noticed that some could not be clearly identified as male or female: they had both testes and ovaries. Others had multiple testes that were deformed.

In January, 2001, Syngenta employees and members of the EcoRisk panel travelled to Berkeley to discuss Hayes's new findings. Syngenta asked to meet with him privately, but Hayes insisted on the presence of his students, a few colleagues, and his wife. He had previously had an amiable relationship with the panel—he had enjoyed taking long runs with the scientist who supervised

it—and he began the meeting, in a large room at Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, as if he were hosting an academic conference. He wore a new suit and brought in catered meals.

After lunch, Syngenta introduced a guest speaker, a statistical consultant, who listed numerous errors in Hayes's report and concluded that the results were not statistically significant. Hayes's wife, Katherine Kim, said that the consultant seemed to be trying to "make Tyrone look as foolish as possible." Wake, the biology professor, said that the men on the EcoRisk panel looked increasingly uncomfortable. "They were experienced enough to know that the issues the statistical consultant was raising were routine and ridiculous," he said. "A couple of glitches were presented as if they were the end of the world. I've been a scientist in academic settings for forty years, and I've never

NEW
FROM

PARENTAL VALENTINES



Please don't go
rock-climbing
with that idiot.



Don't break them
by backpacking
around Somalia.



So no skydiving
until after
I'm dead.

R. Chis

experienced anything like that. They were after Tyrone.”

Hayes later e-mailed three of the scientists, telling them, “I was insulted, felt railroaded and, in fact, felt that some dishonest and unethical activity was going on.” When he explained what had happened to Theo Colborn, the scientist who had popularized the theory that industrial chemicals could alter hormones, she advised him, “Don’t go home the same way twice.” Colborn was convinced that her office had been bugged, and that industry representatives followed her. She told Hayes to “keep looking over your shoulder” and to be careful whom he let in his lab. She warned him, “You have got to protect yourself.”

Hayes published his atrazine work in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* a year and a half after quitting the panel. He wrote that what he called “hermaphroditism” was induced in frogs by exposure to atrazine at levels thirty times below what the E.P.A. permits in water. He hypothesized that the chemical could be a factor in the decline in amphibian popula-

tions, a phenomenon observed all over the world. In an e-mail sent the day before the publication, he congratulated the students in his lab for taking the “ethical stance” by continuing the work on their own. “We (and our principles) have been tested, and I believe we have not only passed but exceeded expectations,” he wrote. “Science is a principle and a process of seeking truth. Truth cannot be purchased and, thus, truth cannot be altered by money. Professorship is not a career, but rather a life’s pursuit. The people with whom I work daily exemplify and remind me of this promise.”

He and his students continued the work, travelling to farming regions throughout the Midwest, collecting frogs in ponds and lakes, and sending three hundred pails of frozen water back to Berkeley. In papers in *Nature* and in *Environmental Health Perspectives*, Hayes reported that he had found frogs with sexual abnormalities in atrazine-contaminated sites in Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, and Wyoming. “Now that I have realized what we are into, I cannot stop it,” he wrote to a colleague. “It is an entity of its own.” Hayes began

arriving at his lab at 3:30 A.M. and staying fourteen hours. He had two young children, who sometimes assisted by color-coding containers.

According to company e-mails, Syngenta was distressed by Hayes’s work. Its public-relations team compiled a database of more than a hundred “supportive third party stakeholders,” including twenty-five professors, who could defend atrazine or act as “spokespeople on Hayes.” The P.R. team suggested that the company “purchase ‘Tyrone Hayes’ as a search word on the internet, so that any time someone searches for Tyrone’s material, the first thing they see is our material.” The proposal was later expanded to include the phrases “amphibian hayes,” “atrazine frogs,” and “frog feminization.” (Searching online for “Tyrone Hayes” now brings up an advertisement that says, “Tyrone Hayes Not Credible.”)

In June, 2002, two months after Hayes’s first atrazine publication, Syngenta announced in a press release that three studies had failed to replicate Hayes’s work. In a letter to the editor of the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, eight scientists on the EcoRisk

panel wrote that Hayes's study had "little regard for assessment of causality," lacked statistical details, misused the term "dose," made vague and naïve references, and misspelled a word. They said that Hayes's claim that his paper had "significant implications for environmental and public health" had not been "scientifically demonstrated." Steven Milloy, a freelance science columnist who runs a nonprofit organization to which Syngenta has given tens of thousands of dollars, wrote an article for Fox News titled "Freaky-Frog Fraud," which picked apart Hayes's paper in *Nature*, saying that there wasn't a clear relationship between the concentration of atrazine and the effect on the frog. Milloy characterized Hayes as a "junk scientist" and dismissed his "lame" conclusions as "just another of Hayes' tricks."

Fussy critiques of scientific experiments have become integral to what is known as the "sound science" campaign, an effort by interest groups and industries to slow the pace of regulation. David Michaels, the Assistant Secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health, wrote, in his book "Doubt Is Their Product" (2008), that corporations have developed sophisticated strategies for "manufacturing and magnifying uncertainty." In the eighties and nineties, the tobacco industry fended off regulations by drawing attention to questions about the science of secondhand smoke. Many companies have adopted this tactic. "Industry has learned that debating the *science* is much easier and more effective than debating the *policy*," Michaels wrote. "In field after field, year after year, conclusions that might support regulation are always disputed. Animal data are deemed not relevant, human data not representative, and exposure data not reliable."

In the summer of 2002, two scientists from the E.P.A. visited Hayes's lab and reviewed his atrazine data. Thomas Steeger, one of the scientists, told Hayes, "Your research can potentially affect the balance of risk versus benefit for one of the most controversial pesticides in the U.S." But an organization called the Center for Regulatory Effectiveness petitioned the E.P.A. to ignore Hayes's findings. "Hayes has killed and

continues to kill thousands of frogs in unvalidated tests that have no proven value," the petition said. The center argued that Hayes's studies violated the Data Quality Act, passed in 2000, which requires that regulatory decisions rely on studies that meet high standards for "quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity." The center is run by an industry lobbyist and consultant for Syngenta, Jim Tozzi, who proposed the language of the Data Quality Act to the congresswoman who sponsored it.

The E.P.A. complied with the Data Quality Act and revised its Environmental Risk Assessment, making it clear that hormone disruption wouldn't be a legitimate reason for restricting use of the chemical until "appropriate testing protocols have been established." Steeger told Hayes that he was troubled by the circularity of the center's critique. In an e-mail, he wrote, "Their position reminds me of the argument put forward by the philosopher Berkeley, who argued against empiricism by noting that reliance on scientific observation is flawed since the link between observations and conclusions is intangible and is thus immeasurable."

Nonetheless, Steeger seemed resigned to the frustrations of regulatory science and gently punctured Hayes's idealism. When Hayes complained that Syngenta had not reported his findings on frog hermaphroditism quickly enough, he responded that it was "unfortunate but not uncommon for registrants to 'sit' on data that may be considered adverse to the public's perception of their products." He wrote



that "science can be manipulated to serve certain agendas. All you can do is practice 'suspended disbelief.'" (The E.P.A. says that there is "no indication that information was improperly withheld in this case.")

After consulting with colleagues at Berkeley, Hayes decided that, rather than watch Syngenta discredit his work, he would make a "preemptive move." He appeared in features in *Discover* and the San Francisco *Chronicle*, suggesting

that Syngenta's science was not objective. Both articles focussed on his personal biography, leading with his skin color, and moving on to his hair style: at the time, he wore his hair in braids. Hayes made little attempt to appear disinterested. Scientific objectivity requires what the philosopher Thomas Nagel has called a "view from nowhere," but Hayes kept drawing attention to himself, making blustery comments like "Tyrone can only be Tyrone." He presented Syngenta as a villain, but he didn't quite fulfill the role of the hero. He was hyper and a little frantic—he always seemed to be in a rush or on the verge of forgetting to do something—and he approached the idea of taking down the big guys with a kind of juvenile zeal.

Environmental activists praised Hayes's work and helped him get media attention. But they were concerned by the bluntness of his approach. A co-founder of the Environmental Working Group, a nonprofit research organization, told Hayes to "stop what you are doing and take time to actually construct a plan" or "you will get your ass handed to you on a platter." Steeger warned him that vigilantism would distract him from his research. "Can you afford the time and money to fight battles where you are clearly outnumbered and, to be candid, outclassed?" he asked. "Most people would prefer to limit their time in purgatory; I don't know anyone who knowingly enters hell."

Hayes had worked all his life to build his scientific reputation, and now it seemed on the verge of collapse. "I cannot in reasonable terms explain to you what this means to me," he told Steeger. He took pains to prove that Syngenta's experiments had not replicated his studies: they used a different population of animals, which were raised in different types of tanks, in closer quarters, at cooler temperatures, and with a different feeding schedule. On at least three occasions, he proposed to the Syngenta scientists that they trade data. "If we really want to test repeatability, let's share animals and solutions," he wrote.

In early 2003, Hayes was considered for a job at the Nicholas School of the Environment, at Duke. He visited the campus three times, and the university

arranged for a real-estate agent to show him and his wife potential homes. When Syngenta learned that Hayes might be moving to North Carolina, where its crop-protection headquarters are situated, Gary Dickson—the company’s vice-president of global risk assessment, who a year earlier had established a fifty-thousand-dollar endowment, funded by Syngenta, at the Nicholas School—contacted a dean at Duke. According to documents unsealed in the class-action lawsuits, Dickson informed the dean of the “state of the relationship between Dr. Hayes and Syngenta.” The company “wanted to protect our reputation in our community and among our employees.”

There were several candidates for the job at Duke, and, when Hayes did not get it, he concluded that it was due to Syngenta’s influence. Richard Di Giulio, a Duke professor who had hosted Hayes’s first visit, said that he was irritated by Hayes’s suggestion: “A little gift of fifty thousand dollars would not influence a tenure hire. That’s not going to happen.” He added, “I’m not surprised that Syngenta would not have liked Hayes to be at Duke, since we’re an hour down the road from them.” He said that Hayes’s conflict with Syngenta was an extreme example of the kind of dispute that is not uncommon in environmental science. The difference, he said, was that the “scientific debate spilled into Hayes’s emotional life.”

In June, 2003, Hayes paid his own way to Washington so that he could present his work at an E.P.A. hearing on atrazine. The agency had evaluated seventeen studies. Twelve experiments had been funded by Syngenta, and all but two showed that atrazine had no effect on the sexual development of frogs. The rest of the experiments, by Hayes and researchers at two other universities, indicated the opposite. In a PowerPoint presentation at the hearing, Hayes disclosed a private e-mail sent to him by one of the scientists on the EcoRisk panel, a professor at Texas Tech, who wrote, “I agree with you that the important issue is for everyone involved to come to grips with (and stop minimizing) the fact that independent

laboratories have demonstrated an effect of atrazine on gonadal differentiation in frogs. There is no denying this.”

The E.P.A. found that all seventeen atrazine studies, including Hayes’s, suffered from methodological flaws—contamination of controls, variability in measurement end points, poor animal husbandry—and asked Syngenta to fund a comprehensive experiment that would produce more definitive results. Darcy Kelley, a member of the E.P.A.’s scientific advisory panel and a biology professor at Columbia, said that, at the time, “I did not think the E.P.A. made the right decision.” The studies by Syngenta scientists had flaws that “really cast into doubt their ability to carry out their experiments. They couldn’t replicate effects that are as easy as falling off a log.” She thought that Hayes’s experiments were more respectable, but she wasn’t persuaded by Hayes’s explanation of the biological mechanism causing the deformities.

The E.P.A. approved the continued use of atrazine in October, the same month that the European Commission chose to remove it from the market. The European Union generally takes a precautionary approach to environmental risks, choosing restraint in the face of uncertainty. In the U.S., lingering scientific questions justify delays in regulatory decisions. Since the mid-seventies, the E.P.A. has issued regulations restricting the use of only five industrial chemicals out of more than eighty thousand in the environment. Industries have a greater role in the American regulatory process—they may sue regulators if there are errors in the scientific record—and cost-benefit analyses are integral to decisions: a monetary value is assigned to disease, impairments, and shortened lives and weighed against the benefits of keeping a chemical in use. Lisa Heinzerling, the senior climate-policy counsel at the E.P.A. in 2009 and the associate administrator of the office of policy in 2009 and 2010, said that cost-benefit models appear “objective and neutral, a way to free ourselves from the chaos of politics.” But the complex algorithms “quietly condone a tremendous amount of risk.” She added that the influence of the Office of Management and Bud-

get, which oversees major regulatory decisions, has deepened in recent years. “A rule will go through years of scientific reviews and cost-benefit analyses, and then at the final stage it doesn’t pass,” she said. “It has a terrible, demoralizing effect on the culture at the E.P.A.”

In 2003, a Syngenta development committee in Basel approved a strategy to keep atrazine on the market “until at least 2010.” A PowerPoint presentation assembled by Syngenta’s global product manager explained that “we need atrazine to secure our position in the corn marketplace. Without atrazine we cannot defend and grow our business in the USA.” Sherry Ford, the communications manager, wrote in her notebook that the company “should not phase out atz until we know about” the Syngenta herbicide paraquat, which has also been controversial, because of studies showing that it might be associated with Parkinson’s disease. She noted that atrazine “focuses attention away from other products.”

Syngenta began holding weekly “atrazine meetings” after the first class-action suit was filed, in 2004. The meetings were attended by toxicologists, the company’s counsel, communications staff, and the head of regulatory affairs. To dampen negative publicity from the lawsuit, the group discussed how it could invalidate Hayes’s research. Ford documented peculiar things he had done (“kept coat on”) or phrases he had used (“Is this line clean?”). “If TH wanted to win the day, and he had the goods,” she wrote, “he would have produced them when asked.” She noted that Hayes was “getting in too deep w/ enviros,” and searched for ways to get him to “show his true colors.”

In 2005, Ford made a long list of methods for discrediting him: “have his work audited by 3rd party,” “ask journals to retract,” “set trap to entice him to sue,” “investigate funding,” “investigate wife.” The initials of different employees were written in the margins beside entries, presumably because they had been assigned to look into the task. Another set of ideas, discussed at several meetings, was to conduct “systematic rebuttals of all TH appearances.” One of the company’s communications



Pete Seeger at his Hudson Valley home, in 1965. Half his life—musically pure, politically complex, singularly American—still lay ahead.



"I've been thinking, maybe you'd like to keep some of your rocks here in my cave."

consultants said in an e-mail that she wanted to obtain Hayes's calendar of speaking engagements, so that Syngenta could "start reaching out to the potential audiences with the Error vs. Truth Sheet," which would provide "irrefutable evidence of his polluted messages." (Syngenta says that many of the documents unsealed in the lawsuits refer to ideas that were never implemented.)

To redirect attention to the financial benefits of atrazine, the company paid Don Coursey, a tenured economist at the Harris School of Public Policy, at the University of Chicago, five hundred dollars an hour to study how a ban on the herbicide would affect the economy. In 2006, Syngenta supplied Coursey with data and a "bundle of studies," and edited his paper, which was labelled as a Harris School Working Paper. (He disclosed that Syngenta had funded it.) After submitting a draft, Coursey had been warned in an e-mail that he needed to work harder to articulate a "clear statement of your conclusions flowing from this analysis." Coursey later announced his findings at

a National Press Club event in Washington and told the audience that there was one "basic takeaway point: a ban on atrazine at the national level will have a devastating, devastating effect upon the U.S. corn economy."

Hayes had been promoted from associate to full professor in 2003, an achievement that had sent him into a mild depression. He had spent the previous decade understanding his self-worth in reference to a series of academic milestones, and he had reached each one. Now he felt aimless. His wife said she could have seen him settling into the life of a "normal, run-of-the-mill, successful scientist." But he wasn't motivated by the idea of "writing papers and books that we all just trade with each other."

He began giving more than fifty lectures a year, not just to scientific audiences but to policy institutes, history departments, women's health clinics, food preparers, farmers, and high schools. He almost never declined an invitation, despite the distance. He told his audiences that he was defying the

instructions of his Ph.D. adviser, who had told him, "Let the science speak for itself." He had a flair for sensational stories—he chose phrases like "crime scene" and "chemically castrated"—and he seemed to revel in details about Syngenta's conflicts of interest, presenting theories as if he were relating gossip to friends. (Syngenta wrote a letter to Hayes and his dean, pointing out inaccuracies: "As we discover additional errors in your presentations, you can expect us to be in touch with you again.")

At his talks, Hayes noticed that one or two men in the audience were dressed more sharply than the other scientists. They asked questions that seemed to have been designed to embarrass him: Why can't anyone replicate your research? Why won't you share your data? One former student, Ali Stuart, said that "everywhere Tyrone went there was this guy asking questions that made a mockery of him. We called him the Axe Man."

Hayes had once considered a few of the scientists working with Syngenta friends, and he approached them in a nerdy style of defiance. He wrote them mass e-mails, informing them of presentations he was giving and offering tips on how to discredit him. "You can't approach your prey thinking like a predator," he wrote. "You have to become your quarry." He described a recent trip to South Carolina and his sense of displacement when "my old childhood friend came by to update me on who got killed, who's on crack, who went to jail." He wrote, "I have learned to talk like you (better than you . . . by your own admission), write like you (again better) . . . you however don't know anyone like me . . . you have yet to spend a day in my world." After seeing an e-mail in which a lobbyist characterized him as "black and quite articulate," he began signing his e-mails, "Tyrone B. Hayes, Ph.D., A.B.M.," for "articulate black man."

Syngenta was concerned by Hayes's e-mails and commissioned an outside contractor to do a "psychological profile" of Hayes. In her notes, Sherry Ford described him as "bipolar/manic-depressive" and "paranoid schizo & narcissistic." Roger Liu, Hayes's student, said that he thought Hayes wrote the e-mails to relieve his anxiety. Hayes often showed the e-mails to his

students, who appreciated his rebellious sense of humor. Liu said, “Tyrone had all these groupies in the lab cheering him on. I was the one in the background saying, you know, ‘Man, don’t egg them on. Don’t poke that beast.’”

Syngenta intensified its public-relations campaign in 2009, as it became concerned that activists, touting “new science,” had developed a “new line of attack.” That year, a paper in *Acta Paediatrica*, reviewing national records for thirty million births, found that children conceived between April and July, when the concentration of atrazine (mixed with other pesticides) in water is highest, were more likely to have genital birth defects. The author of the paper, Paul Winchester, a professor of pediatrics at the Indiana University School of Medicine, received a subpoena from Syngenta, which requested that he turn over every e-mail he had written about atrazine in the past decade. The company’s media talking points described his study as “so-called science” that didn’t meet the “guffaw test.” Winchester said, “We don’t have to argue that I haven’t proved the point. Of course I haven’t proved the point! Epidemiologists don’t try to prove points—they look for problems.”

A few months after Winchester’s paper appeared, the *Times* published an investigation suggesting that atrazine levels frequently surpass the maximum threshold allowed in drinking water. The article referred to recent studies in *Environmental Health Perspectives* and the *Journal of Pediatric Surgery* that found that mothers living close to water sources containing atrazine were more likely to have babies who were underweight or had a defect in which the intestines and other organs protrude from the body.

The day the article appeared, Syngenta planned to “go through the article line by line and find all 1) inaccuracies and 2) misrepresentations. Turn that into a simple chart.” The company would have “a credible third party do the same.” Elizabeth Whelan, the president of the American Council on Science and Health, which asked Syngenta for a hundred thousand dollars that year, appeared on MSNBC and de-

clared that the *Times* article was not based on science. “I’m a public-health professional,” she said. “It really bothers me very much to see the New York *Times* front-page Sunday edition featuring an article about a bogus risk.”

Syngenta’s public-relations team wrote editorials about the benefits of atrazine and about the flimsy science of its critics, and then sent them to “third-party allies,” who agreed to “byline” the articles, which appeared in the *Washington Times*, the *Rochester Post-Bulletin*, the *Des Moines Register*, and the *St. Cloud Times*. When a few articles in the “op-ed pipeline” sounded too aggressive, a Syngenta consultant warned that “some of the language of these pieces is suggestive of their source, which suggestion should be avoided at all costs.”

After the *Times* article, Syngenta hired a communications consultancy, the White House Writers Group, which has represented more than sixty Fortune 500 companies. In an e-mail to Syngenta, Josh Gilder, a director of the firm and a former speechwriter for Ronald Reagan, wrote, “We need to start fighting our own war.” By warning that a ban on atrazine would “devastate the economies” of rural regions, the firm tried to create a “state of affairs in which the new political leadership at E.P.A. finds itself increasingly isolated.” The firm held “elite dinners with Washington influentials” and tried to “prompt members of Congress” to challenge the scientific rationale for an upcoming E.P.A. review of atrazine. In a memo describing its strategy, the White House Writers Group wrote that, “regarding science, it is important to keep in mind that the major players in Washington do not understand science.”

In 2010, Hayes told the EcoRisk panel in an e-mail, “I have just initiated what will be the most extraordinary academic event in this battle!” He had another paper coming out in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, which described how male tadpoles exposed to atrazine grew up to be functional females with impaired fertil-

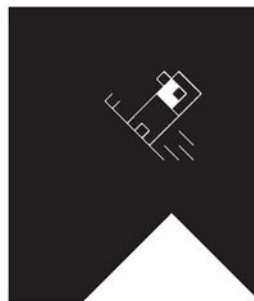
ity. He advised the company that it would want to get its P.R. campaign up to speed. “It’s nice to know that in this economy I can keep so many people employed,” he wrote. He quoted both Tupac Shakur and the South African king Shaka Zulu: “Never leave an enemy behind or it will rise again to fly at your throat.”

Syngenta’s head of global product safety wrote a letter to the editor of the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* and to the president of the National Academy of Sciences, expressing concern that a “publication with so many obvious weaknesses could achieve publication in such a reputable scientific journal.” A month later, Syngenta filed an ethics complaint with the chancellor of Berkeley, claiming that Hayes’s e-mails violated the university’s Standards of Ethical Conduct, particularly Respect for Others. Syngenta posted more than eighty of Hayes’s e-mails on its Web site and enclosed a few in its letter to the chancellor. In one, with the subject line “Are y’all ready for it,” Hayes wrote, “Ya fulla my j*z right now!” In another, he told the Syngenta scientists that he’d had a drink after a conference with their “republican buddies,” who wanted to know about a figure he had used in his paper. “As long as you followin me around, I know I’m da sh*t,” he wrote. “By the way, yo boy left his pre-written questions at the table!”

Berkeley declined to take disciplinary action against Hayes. The university’s lawyer reminded Syngenta in a letter that “all parties have an equal responsibility to act professionally.” David Wake said that he read many of the e-mails and found them “quite hilarious.”

“He’s treating them like street punks, and they view themselves as captains of industry,” he said. “When he gets tapped, he goes right back at them.”

Michelle Boone, a professor of aquatic ecology at Miami University, who served on the E.P.A.’s scientific advisory panel, said, “We all follow the Tyrone Hayes drama, and some people will say, ‘He should just do the science.’ But the science doesn’t speak for itself. Industry has unlimited



resources and bully power. Tyrone is the only one calling them out on what they're doing." However, she added, "I do think some people feel he has lost his objectivity."

Keith Solomon, a professor emeritus at the University of Guelph, Ontario, who has received funding from Syngenta and served on the EcoRisk panel, noted that academics who refuse industry money are not immune from biases; they're under pressure to produce papers, in order to get tenure and promotions. "If I do an experiment, look at the data every which way, and find nothing, it will not be easy to publish," he said. "Journals want excitement. They want bad things to happen."

Hayes, who had gained more than fifty pounds since becoming tenured, wore bright scarves draped over his suit and silver earrings from Tibet. At the end of his lectures, he broke into rhyme: "I see a ruse/intentionally constructed to confuse the news/well, I've taken it upon myself to defuse the clues/so that you can choose/and to demonstrate the objectivity of the methods I use." At some of his lectures, Hayes warned that the consequences of atrazine use were disproportionately felt by people of color. "If you're black or Hispanic, you're more likely to live or work in areas where you're exposed to crap," he said. He explained that "on the one side I'm trying to play by the ivory-tower rules, and on the other side people are playing by a different set of rules." Syngenta was speaking directly to the public, whereas scientists were publishing their research in "magazines that you can't buy in Barnes and Noble."

Hayes was confident that at the next E.P.A. hearing there would be enough evidence to ban atrazine, but in 2010 the agency found that the studies indicating risk to humans were too limited. Two years later, during another review, the E.P.A. determined that atrazine does not affect the sexual development of frogs. By that point, there were seventy-five published studies on the subject, but the E.P.A. excluded the majority of them from consideration, because they did not meet the requirements for quality that the agency had set in 2003. The conclusion was based largely on a set of studies funded by Syn-

genta and led by Werner Kloas, a professor of endocrinology at Humboldt University, in Berlin. One of the co-authors was Alan Hosmer, a Syngenta scientist whose job, according to a 2004 performance evaluation, included "atrazine defence" and "influencing EPA."

After the hearing, two of the independent experts who had served on the E.P.A.'s scientific advisory panel, along with fifteen other scientists, wrote a paper (not yet published) complaining that the agency had repeatedly ignored the panel's recommendations and that it placed "human health and the environment at the mercy of industry." "The EPA works with industry to set up the methodology for such studies with the outcome often that industry is the only institution that can afford to conduct the research," they wrote. The Kloas study was the most comprehensive of its kind: its researchers had been scrutinized by an outside auditor, and their raw data turned over to the E.P.A. But the scientists wrote that one set of studies on a single species was "not a sufficient edifice on which to build a regular assessment." Citing a paper by Hayes, who had done an analysis of sixteen atrazine studies, they wrote that "the single best predictor of whether or not the herbicide atrazine had a significant effect in a study was the funding source."

In another paper, in *Policy Perspective*, Jason Rohr, an ecologist at the University of South Florida, who served on an E.P.A. panel, criticized the "lucrative 'science for hire' industry, where scientists are employed to dispute data." He wrote that a Syngenta-funded review of the atrazine literature had arguably misrepresented more than fifty studies and made a hundred and forty-four inaccurate or misleading statements, of which "96.5% appeared to be beneficial for Syngenta." Rohr, who has conducted several experiments involving atrazine, said that, at conferences, "I regularly get peppered with questions from Syngenta cronies trying to discount my research. They try to poke holes in the research rather than appreciate the adverse effects of the chemicals." He said, "I have colleagues whom I've tried to recruit, and they've told me that they're not willing to delve into this sort of research, because they don't

want the headache of having to defend their credibility."

Deborah Cory-Slechta, a former member of the E.P.A.'s science advisory board, said that she, too, felt that Syngenta was trying to undermine her work. A professor at the University of Rochester Medical Center, Cory-Slechta studies how the herbicide paraquat may contribute to diseases of the nervous system. "The folks from Syngenta used to follow me to my talks and tell me I wasn't using 'human-relevant doses,'" she said. "They would go up to my students and try to intimidate them. There was this sustained campaign to make it look like my science wasn't legitimate."

Syngenta denied repeated requests for interviews, but Ann Bryan, its senior manager for external communications, told me in an e-mail that some of the studies I was citing were unreliable or unsound. When I mentioned a recent paper in the *American Journal of Medical Genetics*, which showed associations between a mother's exposure to atrazine and the likelihood that her son will have an abnormally small penis, undescended testes, or a deformity of the urethra—defects that have increased in the past several decades—she said that the study had been "reviewed by independent scientists, who found numerous flaws." She recommended that I speak with the author of the review, David Schwartz, a neuroscientist, who works for Innovative Science Solutions, a consulting firm that specializes in "product defense" and strategies that "give you the power to put your best data forward." Schwartz told me that epidemiological studies can't eliminate confounding variables or make claims about causation. "We've been incredibly misled by this type of study," he said.

In 2012, in its settlement of the class-action suits, Syngenta agreed to pay a hundred and five million dollars to reimburse more than a thousand water systems for the cost of filtering atrazine from drinking water, but the company denies all wrongdoing. Bryan told me that "atrazine does not and, in fact, cannot cause adverse health effects at any level that people would ever be exposed to in the real-world environment." She wrote that she was "troubled by a suggestion that we have ever tried to discredit anyone. Our focus has always been on communicating the science and

setting the record straight.” She noted that “virtually every well-known brand, or even well-known issue, has a communications program behind it. Atrazine’s no different.”

Last August, Hayes put his experiments on hold. He said that his fees for animal care had risen eightfold in a decade, and that he couldn’t afford to maintain his research program. He accused the university of charging him more than other researchers in his department; in response, the director of the office of laboratory-animal care sent detailed charts illustrating that he is charged according to standard campus-wide rates, which have increased for most researchers in recent years. In an online *Forbes* op-ed, Jon Entine, a journalist who is listed in Syngenta’s records as a supportive “third party,” accused Hayes of being attached to conspiracy theories, and of leading the “international regulatory community on a wild goose chase,” which “borders on criminal.”

By late November, Hayes’s lab had resumed work. He was using private grants to support his students rather than to pay outstanding fees, and the lab was accumulating debt. Two days before Thanksgiving, Hayes and his students discussed their holiday plans. He was wearing an oversized orange sweatshirt, gym shorts, and running shoes, and a former student, Diana Salazar Guerrero, was eating fries that another student had left on the table. Hayes encouraged her to come to his Thanksgiving dinner and to move into the bedroom of his son, who is now a student at Oberlin. Guerrero had just put down half the deposit on a new apartment, but Hayes was disturbed by her description of her new roommate. “Are you sure you can trust him?” he asked.

Hayes had just returned from Mar del Plata, Argentina. He had flown fifteen hours and driven two hundred and fifty miles to give a thirty-minute lecture on atrazine. Guerrero said, “Sometimes I’m just, like, ‘Why don’t you let it go, Tyrone? It’s been fifteen years! How do you have the energy for this?’” With more scientists documenting the risks of atrazine, she assumed he’d be inclined to move on. “Originally, it was just this crazy guy at Berkeley, and you can throw the Berserkley thing at anyone,” she said. “But now the tide is turning.”

In a recent paper in the *Journal of*



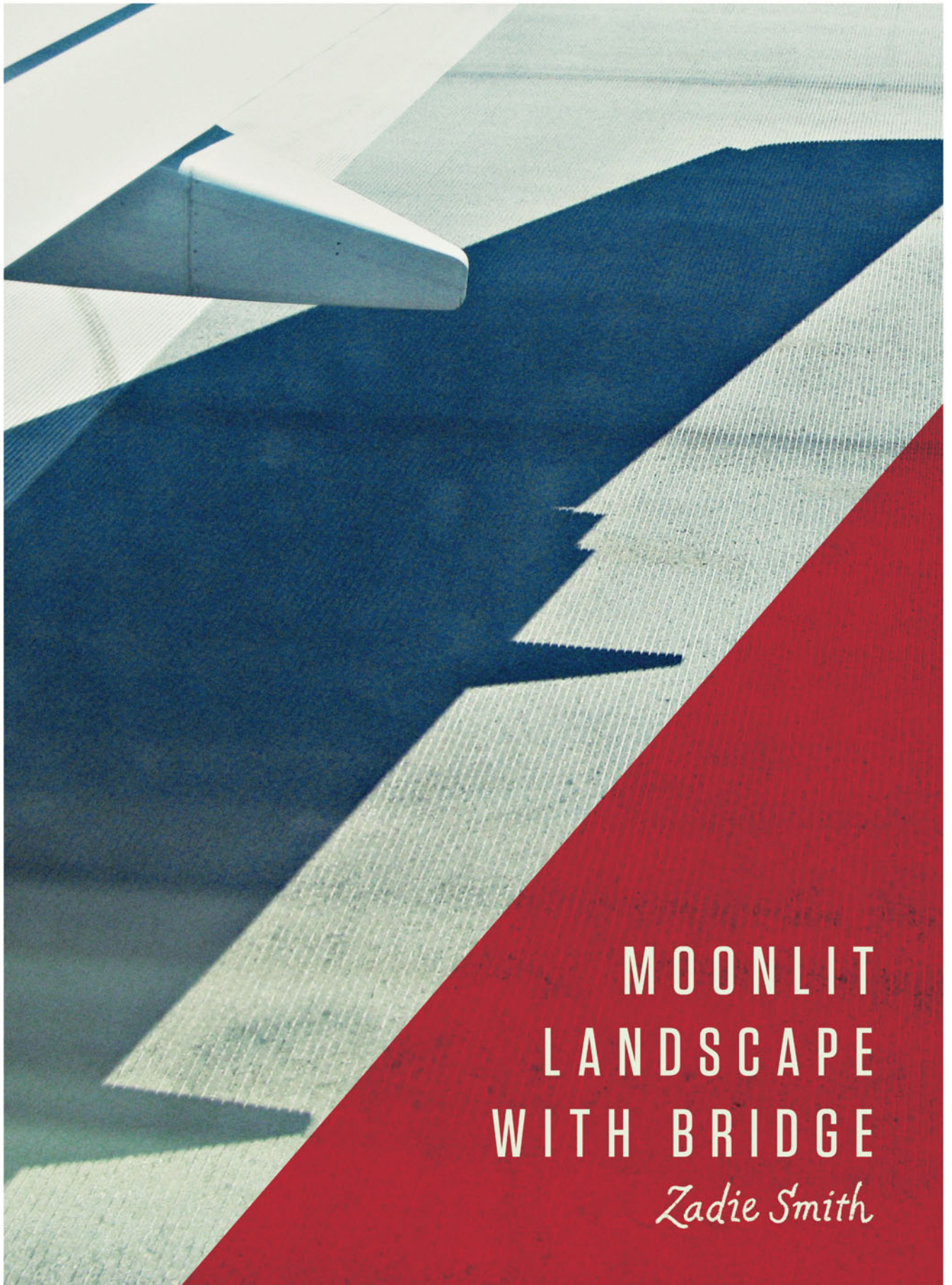
“Furthermore, my opponent does not believe in Canadian Unexceptionalism.”

Steroid Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, Hayes and twenty-one other scientists applied the criteria of Sir Austin Bradford Hill, who, in 1965, outlined the conditions necessary for a causal relationship, to atrazine studies across different vertebrate classes. They argued that independent lines of evidence consistently showed that atrazine disrupts male reproductive development. Hayes’s lab was working on two more studies that explore how atrazine affects the sexual behavior of frogs. When I asked him what he would do if the E.P.A., which is conducting another review of the safety of atrazine this year, were to ban the herbicide, he joked, “I’d probably get depressed again.”

Not long ago, Hayes saw a description of himself on Wikipedia that he found disrespectful, and he wasn’t sure whether it was an attack by Syngenta or whether there were simply members of the public who thought poorly of him. He felt deflated when he remembered the arguments he’d had with Syngenta-funded pundits. “It’s one thing if you go after me because you have a philosophical dis-

agreement with my science or if you think I’m raising alarm where there shouldn’t be any,” he said. “But they didn’t even have their own opinions. Someone was paying them to take a position.” He wondered if there was something inherently insane about the act of whistle-blowing; maybe only crazy people persisted. He was ready for a fight, but he seemed to be searching for his opponent.

One of his first graduate students, Nigel Noriega, who runs an organization devoted to conserving tropical forests, told me that he was still recovering from the experience of his atrazine research, a decade before. He had come to see science as a rigid culture, “its own club, an elite society,” Noriega said. “And Tyrone didn’t conform to the social aspects of being a scientist.” Noriega worried that the public had little understanding of the context that gives rise to scientific findings. “It is not helpful to anyone to assume that scientists are authoritative,” he said. “A good scientist spends his whole career questioning his own facts. One of the most dangerous things you can do is believe.” ♦



MOONLIT
LANDSCAPE
WITH BRIDGE
Zadie Smith

The Minister of the Interior stood in the middle of the room, assessing three suits laid over a chair. One was a pale morning-sky blue; the next tan, of light material, intended for these terrible summers; the last a heavy worsted English three-piece, gray, for state visits. They were slung across one another every which way, three corpses in a pile. The rest of the marbled room—his wife had liked to call it the “salon”—was in boxes, labelled, optimistically, with a forwarding address. Within the hour, efficient young Ari would drive the Minister to the airport, and from there—all being well—he would leave to join his wife and children in Paris. The car would not be a minute out of the driveway, he knew, before the household staff fell on these boxes like wild beasts upon carrion. The Minister of the Interior rubbed the trouser leg of the gray between his fingers. He was at least fortunate that the most significant painting in the house happened also to be the smallest: a van der Neer miniature, which, in its mix of light and water, reminded him oddly of his own ancestral village. It fit easily into his suit bag, wrapped in a pillowcase. Everything else one must resign oneself to losing: pictures, clothes, statues, the piano—even the books.

“So it goes,” the philosophical Minister said out loud, surprising himself—it was a sentence from a previous existence. “So it goes.” Without furniture, without curtains, his voice rose unimpeded to the ceiling, as in a church.

“You call me, sir?”

Elena stood in the doorway, more bent over than he’d ever seen her.

“Call? No . . . no.”

She seemed not to hear him. Her eyes had taken on an uncomprehending glaze, open yet unseeing. It was the same look the Minister had noted in all those portraits of heroic peasants presently stacked against the wall.

“Difficult days, Lele,” the Minister said, picking up the light blue, trying not to be discouraged by its creases. “Difficult days.”

Elena twisted her apron in her hands. Her children, he knew, lived by the sea with their children. All along the coast the cell-phone network had been obliterated.

“God is powerful,” she said, and

bowed her head. Then: “God sent this wind.”

The Minister sighed but did not correct her. They were from the same village originally, distant cousins—she had a great-uncle with his mother’s surname. He appreciated her simplicity. She had done much for his children over the years, and for him, always with this same pious sincerity, which was, to the Minister, as much a memento of his village as the woven reed baskets and brightly colored shawls of his childhood. But why bend so deeply, as if she were the only one suffering?

“If it were only the wind!” the Minister said, tilting his head to look through the missing skylight. “We had measures in place for wind. It’s not true that we were unprepared. That is a wicked lie of the foreign press.” He pointed at a lemon tree, horizontal and broken outside the window. “The combination of the wind and the water. In the end, this is what proved so difficult. As I understand it, most of the deaths in the south were drownings, in fact.”

He frowned at her puffy face, made puffier by tears, and at her apron strings, cutting into a wad of encircling fat. Why was her hair so sparse? There was only a year or two between them. But, of course, he had never felt old and, consequently, had never looked it. A clear case, in the Minister’s view, of the importance of mind over matter.

“God is so powerful,” Elena said, and wept into her hands.

Out of habit, the Minister thought now of Elena’s suffering and multiplied it by the population. (By inquiring after her gut feelings he had been able to correctly predict three elections, the death penalties of several notorious criminals, and the winners of half a dozen television singing contests.) He put a light hand on her shoulder.

“Unfortunately, these weather events are democratic. Big countries, little countries. We are all caught by surprise. It’s not possible to fully prepare for them.”

“God help the children!” Elena said. She swayed into his hand like a cow nudging a barn door. Gently, the Minister righted her.

“Well, when we’re settled in Paris, Lele, we’ll send for you.”

“Yes, Minister,” Elena said, but continued to weep freely, just as if he’d said,

“When we’re settled in Paris, you will never hear from us again.”

“Minister,” Ari said, appearing in the doorway.

The Minister stepped forward and pressed the housekeeper to his chest. The girl of faint erotic memory had vanished, and in his arms he held an old woman, easily mistaken for his mother. Hard to believe that she had once been his sweet relief from the shock and boredom of his wife’s first pregnancy, the months and months of it, in this unforgiving climate, and with such a difficult, pampered woman. Now the Minister’s youngest daughter was turning seventeen, and his wife hoped to present the child as a *débutante* in a grand hotel in Paris, making some kind of opportunity out of a crisis. Thinking on this peculiar fact, the Minister got stuck on a sentence: *I am further from my village now than I have ever been.* Italicized just like that, in his mind. Unsettled, he drew back, pressing an inch and a half’s worth of currency into Elena’s hands, which, for the first time in their history, she made no pretense of declining, grabbing it from him like any beggar in the street, folding it, crying some more.

“The time, Minister,” Ari said, tapping his wrist.

The Minister had not ventured outside in three days. Yet the scrolling devastation held few surprises, maybe because the foreign news crews filmed in just this way, from the window of a moving vehicle. For the first mile or so, the magnitude of what had happened was not obvious. Up here, the storm had knocked down only every third tree, blown out a few windows, and driven a stone general and his horse nose first into the ground. By the time they reached the valley, however, any hope one had that the television exaggerated was destroyed. The water had retreated, leaving behind a shredded world of plastic, timber, and wire. Under the wall that had once circled the parade ground, the Minister spotted several pairs of feet, purple and bloated, liberated of their shoes. If Ari slowed or hesitated even for a moment, the sound of hands banging on the trunk came, but mostly he did not slow, and the S.U.V. rolled over everything in its path. The Minister thought of his children making this same journey

forty-eight hours earlier. He looked through tinted windows at his people scavenging from mountains of rubble. He groaned and wept discreetly into a handkerchief.

"Oh, I'm not listening to that."

The Minister—who had not thought that he could be seen or heard—experienced a surge of humiliation and rage, pressing him against his seat, inflaming the tips of his ears.

"It wasn't much use before"—Ari tapped the satellite navigation unit suctioned to the windscreen. "It's totally pointless now. If a road looks O.K., I'll take it. Otherwise I'll detour. Sound O.K. to you, Minister?"

"Yes, yes, whatever you think." The blood that had rushed to his extremities returned to where it belonged. His tongue relaxed; his face lost its awful contortion. He wiped the wetness from his cheeks, folded the handkerchief into a sharp-tipped diamond, and replaced it in the top pocket of the gray suit.

"Of course, the whole system is linked to an American military satellite," the Minister said, leaning forward to peer at the delusional technology as it recommended impassable roads and pointed out a bridge no longer in existence. "If the Americans ever chose to switch it off, we would all be plunged into darkness. Metaphorically speaking."

Ari shook his head: "What a mess."

Through the windscreen they could see a large gathering of people, waiting outside an empty municipal office. As the car approached, heads began to turn, followed by hands lifted to throats, patting the skin there, over and over, like some mass mating call. The Minister took a pen and pad from his inside pocket and made a note of the location. For whom, for what purpose, he no longer knew.

Ari wiped his forehead with his sleeve. "We can't get through this."

"We are not going to *get through*," the Minister corrected. "We're going to stop. There are three crates of water in the trunk."

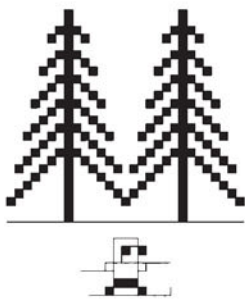
Ari made an incredulous face in the rearview mirror.

"They'll be just as thirsty by nightfall. Meanwhile, you miss your plane!"

The Minister retrieved his handker-

chief and worked at the sweat on his own forehead.

"Your generation is so cynical. You should try to help every individual person you meet, Ari, as a reflex, without thinking." Ari put his head on the steering wheel. "Here we find a fundamental weakness of the Christ doctrine," the Minister declared, making that wise and relatable face that had always been such



a success in his television lectures. "It troubles itself too much with conscience, rationale, and so on. Now, I myself am a student of human nature. I observe all faiths, and draw my own conclusions. For example, a Christian sees a tramp in the street, he begins agonizing. Should I give him

the money in my pocket? What if he uses it for drink? What if he wastes it? What if there's someone else who needs it more? What if I need it more? And so on. The Jews, the Muslims—they see a tramp, they give him money, they walk on. The action is its own justification."

"I'm not cynical," Ari objected. "How can I be cynical? The fact is, I'm a Buddhist." He examined his hair in the wing mirror and pressed the button for the back window. Fetid air—which the Minister had earlier made clear he did not want to breathe—invaded the vehicle.

"Pull over just there. Look, I don't mean to insult you—anyway, I'm nothing at all, as I said, only a student of human nature, so there's no need to be insulted. Let's get this water distributed, eh? Then we can move on."

With a great sigh, Ari drove forward until they were ten feet shy of the crowd. Here he stopped, leaving the engine running. The Minister, who was not a tall man, swung his little feet to the right, tried the handle twice, asked Ari to release the child lock, opened the door, and slipped down into ankle-deep sludge. His left shoe came off and was submerged. Catching the eye of a handsome peasant woman with a large child in her arms—seven or eight years old—he thought he saw in her anxious face the group's dilemma. Hold your ground in this line? Or risk losing your place for a dubious little man who still cared about his shoes?

"WATER!" the Minister cried—this broke the stalemate. He had reclaimed his shoe, and now, without planning to, found that he was opening his arms wide. Had he come to embrace them all?

"We have water! Women and children first!"

The people ran toward him, ignoring his instruction. He turned from them, walking thickly through the sludge to the trunk. The first to put a hand on him was a middle-aged man with a head wound that needed attention. For a moment, he seemed to recognize the Minister. Yet if recognition was there it was also perfectly useless. There were things that had mattered before the storm and things that mattered now, and the Minister fully understood that he belonged to the former category. Who cared, today, about the Long-Haired Bloc? The Minister's offices, like much of the government, had been flattened; seeing this chaos on the news, even the Minister had not been able to rid himself of the childish notion that it had been stomped into the ground. And what was a Minister without a ministry?

"Please, I beg of you—help my family." So said the man with the wound. At the same moment, Ari stuck his head out the window. This left the Minister little choice but to reach for his wallet, take out the remaining paper currency, and press it into the hands of the man, who immediately had a portion of it snatched from him by a little girl, who in turn had her share taken from her by someone else, at which point the beleaguered Minister lost track, rolled up his sleeves, and turned back to bend over the trunk. He struck it twice with an imperious fist; it opened, as if by magic. The first thing was to rip the plastic covering off the crates while making a swift, imprecise count of how many bottles were in each layer. But the plastic was not so easily removed, and before he had finished ripping even one corner he felt many hands reaching around him, pushing him aside, knocking him to the ground. By the time he had struggled to his knees, fallen again, grabbed onto the bumper, and dragged himself up, the crates were gone, the people were running back to the municipal building, and several small fights had broken out. The Minister hung on to the side of the vehicle and edged his way around to the back door,

one shoe forever lost to the mud. He heaved himself up into his seat. Without comment, Ari passed a tub of wet wipes over his shoulder. Without comment, the Minister took it.

Before the storm, it would have taken the Minister perhaps an hour to get to the airport. Now the sun fell in one part of the sky, while the moon rose in another. He dared to look at his watch. Five hours had passed since he promised Ari that he would make no further attempts to leave the vehicle.

"But I can't hold on any longer. I'm afraid it's unavoidable, Ari."

"Minister, everything is avoidable."

"Do you want me to piss myself? Is that it?"

"You should not make promises your bladder can't keep," Ari said, causing the Minister to reflect that one never really knew a person until one was caught in a situation of extremity with that person.

"I tell you it's unavoidable!"

"Well, I don't know where you think

I can stop. All these people are trying to get to the airport. If we stop they'll slit my throat!"

"You are becoming hysterical," the Minister said. He pointed at a brick church whose four sides were still attached, providing the only shade for miles.

Ari parked right at its door, like a chauffeur delivering a bride. People were everywhere, along with cars and vans and news trucks. The arrival of a small well-dressed man with one shoe did not attract much attention. The Minister struggled through an inert mass of people until he reached the yard behind the church, where he relieved himself against a sliver of dusty blue wall, watching with interest as it turned as vivid as the Virgin's cloak. Somewhere off to his right, a German film crew lent a boom mike to an American film crew. "There's a woman in there lighting candles, praying, etcetera," an American voice said. "Her English is pretty good." To which a German replied, "I sink we have enough church." The Minister zipped up and walked with as

much dignity as could be managed back through the milling crowd, accepting the sweat of many strangers. People without direction or focus, swatting halfheartedly at the flies, standing around with no purpose other than to be among one another.

He caught a flash of Ari, smoking louchely out the car window—before a tall man blocked his view. More and more people gathered, and the Minister could get no farther. Then a sudden shouting and crushing; everyone turned to face the murderous sunbeams in the west, and the dark shadow of an open truck, from which two figures, silhouetted, hurled sacks into the crowd. Cornmeal? Rice? Why not demand an orderly queue? Why cause the maximum amount of chaos? Next to the Minister, a hysterical woman held her baby above her head and wailed. A nice spectacle for the foreign press! Toward them both a sack sailed; the gallant Minister moved to push the woman out of its path. He was rewarded by somebody's powerful fist connecting with his left temple. Once

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"I dress for the weather I want, not the weather I have."

again he found himself in the dirt, contemplating the bare feet of his countrymen. In pain, he called out for Ari; Ari heard, Ari replied—but from this nothing followed. The crowd was too thick to penetrate. The Minister decided instead to crawl forward on his hands and knees, and in this way made progress. He was within a yard of the car when he found himself being roughly lifted to his feet and brushed down by a pair of oversized, hairy hands.

"On your feet, on your feet—we need everybody standing, if they can stand! Red Cross! Red Cross!"

The man doing the shouting was broad and dark, with a boxer's broken nose, thin, silky black hair cut in a Caesar style, and a chin with a huge, inelegant cleft. He was in uniform, though even at this confusing moment something in the Minister registered the wrongness of this, in terms both of this man's particular body in a uniform and the uniform itself.

"Please take your hands off me—I am going to my car."

The big man smiled foolishly and gripped the Minister by the elbow. A bolt of clarifying pain arrived: broken, in

the fall. At the thought of spending any time in a local hospital, the Minister's legs went weak. In response, the man took almost all of his companion's weight and began pushing his own giant body through the last two layers of people until he had hold of the car's door handle.

"Red Cross! Back this up. I'll open when you're clear."

"Do no such thing!" the Minister croaked. But he had lost Ari's vote. The car reversed, moving just fast enough that the man and the Minister were forced to jog along beside it. Once they were relatively free of the crowd, the man jumped into the car, pulled the Minister in beside him, and shut the door.

The Minister backed away until he was pressed against the car window.

"You've made a grave error. I am the Minister of the Interior—I advise you to get out of this vehicle at once."

The man chuckled and patted the Minister's delicate knee.

"I know who you are, Minister. I saw you arrive. I just want to go to the airport, that's all. No trouble."

"Ari, this man is not Red Cross—that is not a Red Cross uniform. Stop this car immediately."

The man leaned forward and placed the flat edge of a knife against the back of Ari's neck.

"Keep driving," he said.

Ari screamed, a woman's scream. The man laughed again: the genial, warm laugh of someone who finds the world delightful.

"Put that knife down," the Minister said, in a very small voice.

"Fine," the man said, without any rancor, and slipped the weapon back into a pocket in his uniform. "You'll see that it doesn't change anything."

Considering Ari, driving and weeping, and himself—a slight gentleman in his mid-sixties with a broken elbow who did not, after all, weigh much more than sixty kilos—the Minister of the Interior understood that the man was entirely correct.

They passed the old reservoir. The Minister was nudged gently in the ribs and offered that dim-witted smile.

"Nothing to say?"

The Minister lifted his chin and looked out the window. The reservoir

was a decades-old failed public-works project, presided over by the Minister, and it was always unpleasant to pass it on the way to the airport.

"You're angry. Of course, I know very well you're a proud man who doesn't like to be tricked. I suppose I *have* tricked you, Minister. But think of me! I'm disappointed!"

The sun was setting, pink, over the rancid water, and the cracked concrete walls of the overflowing reservoir made it look like the basin of some ancient ruined amphitheatre. It had a strange beauty. The Minister had never noticed any beauty in it before. He wished he did not have to notice it now, while stuck in a car with a lunatic and a coward, on the way to his own execution.

"I may not be very educated, Minister, but I have my thoughts and feelings. You shouldn't judge a book by its cover."

The Minister, lost in a fatalist haze, turned to his captor with a mournful face and said, matter-of-factly, "But of course you're going to kill us."

The man frowned and bit his lip.

"So you really don't recognize me at all. Truly you don't. Ah, it's disappointing!"

From Ari, another whimper.

"I should know you?"

"Well, we went through a lot together. Though my hair's shorter now. But then so is yours. And the Prime Minister—he's bald as a coot! And he was the longest-haired boy of all! Ha! Ha! What kids we all were!"

"Please don't kill me please don't kill me please don't kill me," Ari pleaded, and, despite the sunset half blinding them all, and the large, menacing hand presently encasing the Minister's knee, the precise and vengeful Minister took note of Ari's use of the singular pronoun.

"Who said a thing about killing anybody? No, no, no. We gave that up a long time ago. A long time ago. Some of us served our time for it, some didn't—and I say well done to those who didn't! But now you know me for sure, Minister. Marlboro! The Marlboro Man. Nobody believes me when I say the Prime Minister himself named me. But it's true! My aunt used to send me the red ones from America—you must remember that—and he loved to smoke them. One day, we were making camp, way up in the hills this was, and he said, 'Hey, you, Marlboro Man'—

and it stuck. Forty years later, it's still sticking."

If a bell rang for the Minister, it was a faint one indeed. He made his hands into a steeple and pressed them, upside down, between his knees.

"You must understand, there is no way I can get you onto a plane. When we arrive, you will be arrested. It will be out of my hands. There is no other outcome."

The Marlboro Man gave the Minister's knee a jovial squeeze.

"But I don't want to get on a plane, Minister. I wish only to go the airport. That's where we hear all the action is—and I always want to be where the action is. Money, food, girls! Besides, I helped build it—I'd like to see it again."

It was surely a mark of the pain and distraction in the Minister's mind that only Ari grasped the significance of this revelation. The name of the infamous prison escaped the young man's open mouth like an involuntary burp. The Marlboro Man clapped Ari on the back, congratulating him for solving such a jolly riddle.

"Thirty years we've been trying to get out of that place—and then the Lord himself goes and does it for us. Down went the walls—flat as a pancake! What a thing! Anyone still on his feet simply walked out into the sunshine and looked up at the clear blue sky. . . . Ah!"

He stretched his arms across the back seat. The Minister was put in mind of a holiday-maker settling into a sand dune.

"All criminal fugitives will be executed," the Minister said, reduced to repeating what he had heard on the news. "Their only chance is to hand themselves over to the authorities."

"The way I see it," the Marlboro Man said, "this is a moment of opportunity—for both of us." He winked, then picked up the Minister's left hand and pressed it down on the Minister's knee until he yelped in pain. "It's all a question of timing. The thing I've always admired about you, Minister, is your timing. You've always known when to move. Always known when a reckoning is coming. And you see it, don't you? You see that the people have begun to smell your shit—and it's not so sweet! Ha-ha! Finally, they can smell it. I mean, they've *always* smelled it, but back then they were children—we were children!—and now they

are grown and not afraid to say it to your face. Any day now. Next year, they'd have had the lot of you in cuffs, off to The Hague! So it's lucky: the wind came, just in the nick of time! Eh? The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want! It's an opportunity, and you're taking it. Listen, I admire it! I am a student of history—now, don't laugh. I tell you, a man gets a lot of time to read in that little cell. I've been trying to educate myself. I want to be one step ahead of history—that's the game, isn't it? Maybe I don't play it as well as you. But I'm learning. Oh, yes, I've become quite the student of history."

It was madness, of course, and the Minister did not imagine that Ari would make much sense of it, but, at the same time, it was unfortunate that within this man's madness he should have hit upon that particular phrase, so like the Minister's own, and keep repeating it, with that idiotic, implicating grin, which necessitated, the Minister now felt, a restatement of his own position, lest Ari should hear echoes where none existed.

"I, meanwhile, am a student of human nature." With his free hand, the Minister tried to hold his crushed elbow together. "And students of human nature understand that ungrateful children always revert to their parents' wisdom, in the end."

"Ah . . ."

Under the Caesar hairline, the man's granite forehead wrinkled, and the tip of his tongue poked out from between his lips, like a schoolboy engaged in a fearful piece of calculation. Observing this effort, a village thought now came to the Minister—a memory, really, of the Devil as a young man. Tales concerning the childhood of the Devil were a specialty of his people; Elena had a wonderful way with them, turning them into bedtime stories for the Minister's children—a rather low-class habit of which the Minister was supposed to disapprove. Unlike his colleagues, however, and unlike his difficult wife, the Minister of the Interior was essentially a pragmatist: if it were up to him, political men would never cross the thresholds of either bedrooms or shrines. He believed in leaving people to their private fantasies. When his children were small, he liked to open the door to his study at night, slicing through envelopes with a pearl-handled knife, while listening to Elena's Devil-talk. In these tales the Devil was

never quite an idiot, no, not quite. He was like this fellow to the Minister's left. A good student, very attentive, eager to get on, who nevertheless always learned the wrong lesson.

"Weren't we children?" the man cried suddenly, bringing his fist down heavily on the upholstery. "And weren't we ungrateful? Then we became the fathers in our turn. That's the truth of it. Yes, we were young—we were heroes! But we're not long-haired anymore, my brother. Yet we survived. Most people didn't. So that's to be celebrated. That's a sign. Do you see? You must see that. You and I! Survivors!"

The thud on the seat continued to radiate through the Minister's elbow.

"I do not see," he whispered. "I do not see, because there is no analogy at all between us. I am the Minister of the Interior. You are insane. Perhaps once you were one of us—or worked for us. I don't know. You say you did. Now you are only a criminal. A fugitive and a criminal."

Through his agony, the Minister was able to feel some satisfaction at having hit the mark. For an abashed expression passed over the Marlboro Man's face. To hide it, he turned from the Minister to face the window.

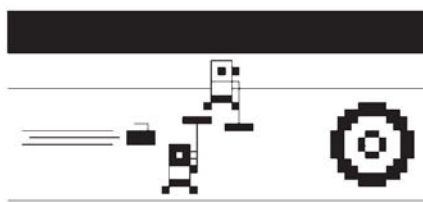
"Oh, I meant no offense, Minister, none at all. All I mean to say is—excuse me if I'm not speaking in an elegant way—you were smart and we were stupid. That's all. And let me tell you, you were really admired in there, truly. Much more than the Prime Minister. Because we remembered that you were once one of us! Smarter than us, maybe, but one of us all the same. But him? Never, not really. For he never really got his hands dirty. Not like we did. And now they call us 'mercenaries' and put us in prison and pretend they never knew us. But without men like us where was the victory? Answer me that. That boy took the glory, but it was others who did the work. He was just a pretty face. Like this one here." He reached forward, horribly animated, and grabbed Ari's cheek between thumb and forefinger. The car lurched toward a deep gully at the side of the road—the Minister's turn to scream—before the Marlboro Man leaned all the way forward to seize the wheel briefly with his free hand, steering them true.

"Don't panic, don't panic," their captor said, fondly. He patted the top of frantic Ari's head, sighed, and sank his great buttocks back into the upholstery.

"But you! That's a lot of blood to wash off, brother. Oh, we never forgot. Hell of a lot of blood. A river of blood. I saw it, I was there. Up to the knees! Up to the knees!"

The Minister, just now emerging from the brace position, looked up to find Ari eying him strangely in the mirror. Never mind that it was a grotesque exaggeration: a river, stained red with blood, is not the same as a river of blood. But the Minister had not forgotten, no, not the difficult things, nor did he, as so many did, exaggerate or obscure. He remembered perfectly well how the Prime Minister had looked at nineteen, marking out an ambush on a field map. He remembered how they had recruited from the villages, handing out guns to young thugs who could not even spell their own names. He remembered the two halves of a girl's head, rolling down a riverbank through reeds into water. Divided, perhaps, by this very man's machete. All their boys had fought like animals, at one point or another. But the Minister had never forgotten, either, the beauty and quiet triumph of the nights that had followed those bloody days. A different life. Sharing simple food in the moonlight, not only with the village thugs but with bold, intelligent young men, committed to the future of their nation and willing to risk anything for it—including the eternal pollution of their own skulls.

"A sissy. Always with some sissy book in his back pocket. It should have been you, brother. Up to the knees!"



So it goes. Together the Minister of the Interior and the thoughtful boy who would later give him that title had read a thrilling book by an American with a German name—Vonnegut! A tale of war. It had so electrified them at the time, and yet, forty years later, the Minister found that he retained only one sentence of it and could not even retrieve its title. But he remembered two young men bent over one battered paperback, under a tree in the cleared center of a village. Books had

been important back then—they were always quoting from them. Long-haired boys, big ideas. These days, all the Prime Minister read was his bank statements. Yet, in essence, he was the same good and simple man, in the Minister's view—naïve, almost, doglike in his loyalties and his hatreds. If you were on the right side of the Prime Minister, you stayed there. So, at least, it had been for the Minister. Whatever he had needed had always been granted, up to and including this evening's flight. He had been lucky, always.

"That's lucky!" the man cried, and the Minister, yanked from his memories, began to fear that some form of voodoo was at work. "The water's gone down! Look at that fat beautiful moon! We can take the bridge!"

Over the last bridge they went. The small tent city that had sprung up around the airport lay before them. The knife reemerged, this time held low, at Ari's waist. At a makeshift checkpoint, Ari stuck the green government badge in the windshield with a shaking hand, and they were waved through, instructed to follow a police car past the camp and its abject inhabitants.

"Leave me anywhere here," the Marlboro Man said. "Next to one with her legs open. 'Let's lift some skirts and make it hurt!' Remember that old chant? And they'd all go running with their mothers into the bushes! Ha-ha! Now, don't begrudge me that, Minister, please. You probably had some yesterday—but for me it's been a little longer."

For a big man, he moved nimbly, passing himself over the Minister, opening the car door, and stepping down onto gravel, smiling all the while. The Minister closed the door behind him.

"What the— What are you doing? Minister? Minister? He's just walking away!"

The Minister's phone was cold in his hand. He watched the man stride into the crowd. He felt as if he were releasing the spirit of chaos into the world. But wasn't it already here?

All commercial flights had ceased. The tiny half-destroyed airport had become a base for aid workers, stranded journalists, sleeping soldiers. Only the runway still functioned. The few planes available had been chartered by the government, and passengers approached

IN THE CORNER OF A ROOM WHERE YOU WOULD NEVER LOOK

Warhol was right: he said athletes are fat
in the right places
and they're young
in the right places. Apparently
the next Godzilla movie has Godzilla
just stomping around eating everyone's
money and it's the scariest thing ever—
we can rub bug powder on the national
anthem and run that over the closing credits
as long as the singer manages to sing
I'm in love with everyone but you, almost
convincingly. A production team undoing
one another's pants
is *How We Get Naked Now* but tomorrow
morning all the cut-off parts of us are coming
back so get ready. Europe: you swear it exists
because you once had sex in it, and ideas.
Prepositions: that's where we all get sucked
under. Prepositions: the San Andreas
fault of meaning. Prepositions:
what came dislodged when our parents
hired operatives to kidnap us from cults
and deprogram us in the backs of vans.
Warhol was talking about the ass,
right, which we have come to understand
is the vessel of histories. That effect.
We put everything through
a translation engine
because we wanted to see the world.

—Mark Bibbins

them by driving to a gate in the perimeter fence and having their documentation checked by yet more officials. When the Minister's turn came, several young men approached the car, in uniform, or else in the dark-blue suits of the faithful. "This way, Minister, this way," they said, hustling him out of the car. He was crossing the floodlit tarmac before he realized that he'd said no goodbyes to Ari, but when he turned to look back he could no longer even see the vehicle. Hundreds of people pressed against the chain-link fence, waving pieces of paper in the air, shouting and begging. Just outside the painted yellow line, along which the Minister had once liked to walk in his neat, upright way, wheeling a discreetly luxurious brown-and-gold suitcase behind him—just on the other side of this yellow line, instead of the usual bustle

of baggage handlers and suitcases, there lay a young man in a yellow neon safety vest and ragged trousers, sleeping on the tarmac, his head resting on a boulder.

"This plane, Minister. Keep to your left, Minister. Keep moving, Minister. Minister?"

But someone was screaming his name, his given name, which he heard so rarely these days it stopped him now in his tracks. He swivelled to locate the source and soon found it, a clear head and shoulders above the majority of his diminutive countrymen. He was grinning the same stupid devilish grin and making the old gesture of solidarity, wildly above his head, with the crossed fists they had all once used to signify "You, too, are my brother."

"Arrest that man," the Minister said, quietly, to the young aide beside him,

who, either not hearing or not understanding, nodded twice and said, "This way, if you please, Minister."

Across the lake of tarmac, the Minister and the Marlboro Man locked eyes.

"Bon Voi Yah Gee! Bon Voi Yah Gee!"

Bon voyage. A phrase he'd probably only ever seen written down. Screaming it at the top of his lungs. And making that gesture, over and over, a gesture that, the Minister was painfully aware, had fallen out of fashion in recent times—in truth, had come to be reviled; the Minister himself had not performed it in many years. He could see people on either side of the lunatic hanging off his giant arms, cursing and abusing him.

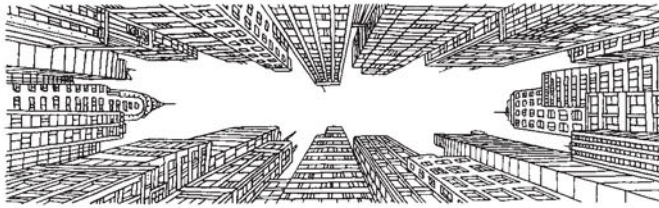
The Minister tried to remind himself that nothing horrifying was happening—he was merely being wished well on his trip by an idiot. Bon Voi Yah Gee! Bon Voi Yah Gee! He turned back to his handlers and once more attempted to give his instruction, but the jet's engines started up, and all was lost in this fresh wall of noise, all except those ridiculous words, attending the Minister's footsteps like an incantation of some kind, or the rungs of a ladder, ascending and descending both, depending. Bon Voi Yah Gee! Up to the knees!

"This way, Minister. This way." So many people seemed to be touching the Minister, guiding him, advising him, that he felt as if he were not so much walking as being carried. He stopped trying to speak. What point was there in words? Actions, only actions. A few feet from the stairs to the plane, he became aware of a sudden change in the light: an impudent gray cloud between the Minister of the Interior and that fat beautiful moon. Large warm raindrops big as acorns fell on his nose, on his single shoe, on his lapel, on the world. Rain fell off the curve of the plane in torrential sheets, rain rioted on the cheap tin roof of the airport, soaking the Minister to the skin, making it even harder to hear instructions, and then, just as abruptly, stopped. The cloud moved on, the moon returned. The Minister held his elbow together. He pressed his suit bag to his chest. "This way, Minister, this way." The Minister shut his mouth and followed. ♦

NYR.KR/THISWEEKINFICTION

Zadie Smith on her story.

THE CRITICS



BOOKS

BET THE FARM

Robert Frost's turbulent apprenticeship.

BY DAN CHIASSON

When Robert Frost, in his 1930 address “Education by Poetry,” spoke about the importance of being “at home in the metaphor,” he seemed to suggest how infrequently he had felt at home anywhere else. The New England landscape abounds with Frost sites: the Frost Farm, in Derry, New Hampshire, and the Frost Place, in Franconia, New Hampshire; the Robert Frost Stone House, in South Shaftsbury, Vermont, and the Homer Noble Farm, in Ripton, Vermont; a house on verdant Brewster Street in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and one on leafy Sunset Avenue in Amherst, Massachusetts. Add to these two houses in England, where Frost lived from 1912 to 1915 and first found acclaim, along with a cottage in Key West, where he often spent winters, and a white pillared house that once stood in Ann Arbor, Michigan (where Frost lived while he worked at the University of Michigan, in the twenties), but was moved by Henry Ford to Greenfield Village, a part of Ford’s museum complex. It now sits on a cleansed American green, near Edison’s laboratories, the Wright brothers’ bicycle shop, and a courthouse where Lincoln practiced law.

Frost’s stone walls, old barns, cellar holes, birches, and brooks—the sedimentary, second-growth New England that, before Frost, had awaited its bard—imply a writer who cared, like Thoreau, only to be “admitted to Nature’s hearth.” But, wherever he went, Frost schemed to buy land or a house or a farm. Frost is sometimes still associated with the old-fashioned comforts of home, but in reality he

was frequently on the move, spending, and often squandering, whatever investments of the heart and the wallet he had lately made. Those cozy houses and picturesque farms that litter the countryside make a trail of places Frost fled. Emerson, whose work he always kept nearby, suggests the fitting motto: “Everything good is on the highway.” And yet Frost never really lit out for the territories; instead, he moved among carbon-copy small farms with mountain views, and smart Victorians on the fringes of campuses, where, having escaped the “academic ways” he always said he loathed, he could return day after day.

Throughout his life, Frost moved into things so he could move out. He does this in language, too, veering toward certainties in order to evade them. He knew, like his “Oven Bird,” how “in singing not to sing.” Frost can be trying company, but he is company: no modern poet draws us so close, though what he does to us at close range is often impolite. If a reader knows only one poem by Frost, it is likely “The Road Not Taken,” that cunning nugget of nihilism disguised as an anthem for non-conformity. A quick Google search turns up mugs, T-shirts, and posters, as well as customizable business cards, all quoting the poem. What tends to be forgotten is the barbed tangle of tenses at its close:

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.

The primary “I” in the poem isn’t the one doing the “sighing”; that’s a later version



“I kept farm, so to speak for nearly ten years,”

of the self that this current version, though moving steadily in its direction, finds pitiable. Look up the word “all” in the dictionary, and you will find that it means “the whole amount or quantity of.” In Frost, the word is always sad. So often in his work, the whole of something adds up to much less than one had hoped.

Because Frost is so mercurial, many

ABOVE: VASCO MOURÃO



Frost wrote a friend. "I can see now that I went away to save myself and fix myself before I measured my strength against all creation."

people feel they have a claim upon him. Heads of Frost, in bronze or stone, are standard clutter for town libraries and English-department common rooms (there's a wobbly-looking one down the hall from where I am writing this). A man named Mitchel Potter was arrested in 2012 for stealing a bust of Frost from Wichita State twenty-five years earlier,

after, he said, he'd done "a lot of beer bong." Some local teen-agers in Middlebury, Vermont, broke into the Ripton farm a few winters ago, and partied and urinated on the floors. Their sentence involved taking a mini-class in Frost's poetry. The aged Frost appears in Tobias Wolff's novel "Old School," jesting with the boys at a fictional boarding school and

inspiring, in the students, "fits of dignity." There is the "dark Frost" recommended by Lionel Trilling in the late fifties, a "terrifying poet," and the shuffling, windswept sage of Kennedy's inaugural, reciting "The Gift Outright" from memory. Poets have come the closest to rendering the "offstage" Frost. Robert Lowell punned on Coleridge ("Robert Frost at midnight, the

audience gone/to vapor”) in his sonnet for Frost, and John Berryman, who remembered both Frost’s “malice” and his “good/big face,” put it succinctly: “For a while here we possessed/an unusual man.”

It can sometimes seem, from the surfeit of images of Frost in his later years, that he was born old, incapable of youth in the same way John Keats is incapable of age. “The Letters of Robert Frost, Volume I: 1886-1920,” edited by Donald Sheehy, Mark Richardson, and Robert Faggen, part of a heroic effort by Harvard University Press to collect all Frost’s writings in a definitive edition, goes some way toward filling this imaginative deficit. “I have been pulled two ways and torn in two all my life,” Frost wrote in a letter of 1915. He was born in 1874 in San Francisco, where his father, William Frost, a newspaperman from primeval New England stock, had taken a job. William Frost died of tuberculosis when Frost was eleven; the family—Frost, his sister Jeanie, and his mother, Isabelle—then made a new start in and around Lawrence, Massachusetts, where Frost’s paternal grandfather oversaw a successful mill.

He tried college twice. First, he went to Dartmouth, where, he said, he lost interest in any task “not self-imposed,” and left after several months. A few years later, having married and started a family, Frost was admitted to Harvard, where he intended to study classics and become a high-school Greek and Latin teacher. He quit after three semesters. He seems to have proposed many times, at least twice successfully, to his future wife, Elinor White. They had exchanged rings in secret before Elinor went off to St. Lawrence University; nearly every time she returned home, it seems, Frost tried to persuade her to drop out. When Frost visited her unannounced, holding a privately printed book of five poems that he had made as a gift for her, she took the book

and booted him out. He then set off on a bizarre trip to the Dismal Swamp, in Virginia. He walked ten miles into the swamp and was discovered by some duck hunters. Back home, he visited Elinor, they quarrelled again, he again stormed out, and again suggested that he might do something nuts. In fact, he went to Cambridge to have a drink with friends. Elinor finally graduated, and the two were married.

There was an element of conscious metaphorical shaping to everything Frost did. He couldn’t choose just any swamp as his slough of despond: “dismal,” a word he might have encountered in “Paradise Lost,” had the right to-hell-and-back feel about it. Frost would “always go to farming” knowing, he said, that he would “always make a failure of it.” So he would have to teach; but teaching kept him from writing. Then it was back to farming, which pleased him, likely because he neglected so much of it. And the cycle was renewed: among writers, he seemed like a farmer, and among farmers he seemed like a writer. When his grandfather purchased the farm in Derry for him, in 1900, he rigged it so that Frost wouldn’t own the property—and therefore couldn’t sell it off—until ten years after the old man died. Still, the Frosts made it for just eight, leasing the farm out until the minute the deed matured, when it could be unloaded.

Frost was a little like the anonymous woodsman he describes in “The Wood Pile”: always “turning to fresh tasks,” forgetting “his handiwork on which/He spent himself, the labour of his axe.” Only he didn’t forget. His vagrancy was a quality that he prized and, in fact, adroitly captained. He found the title of his first volume, “A Boy’s Will,” in Longfellow: “A boy’s will is the wind’s will.” But the wind-drivenness was always checked by what he called his “Scotch-Yankee calculation,” a trait that prospered most when he called attention to it, sometimes by keen actions of self-mockery.

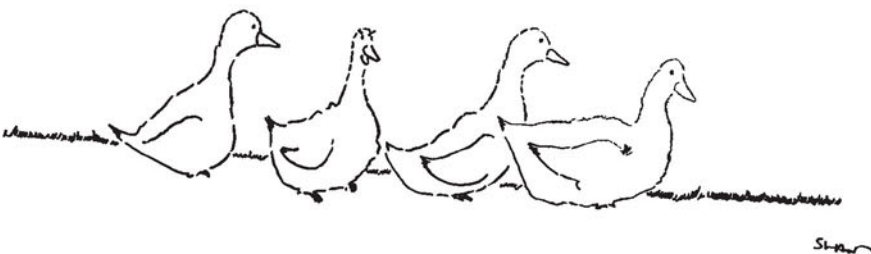
In 1916, for the amusement of his friend Louis Untermeyer, Frost drew up a phony circular titled “Anybody Want to Hear R. Frost on Anything?” One subject he advertised was the “True Story of My Life”:

Stealing pigs from the stockyards in San Francisco. Learn to whistle at five. Abandon senatorial ambitions to come to New York but settle in New Hampshire by mistake on account of the high rents in both places. Invention of cotton gin. Supersedes potato whiskey on the market. A bobbin boy in the mills of Lawrence. Nailing shanks. Preadamite honors. Rose Marie. La Gioconda. Astrolabe. Novum Organum. David Harum. Cosmogony versus Cosmography. Visit General Electric Company, Synecdoche, N.Y. Advance theory of matter (whats the matter) that becomes obsession. Try to stop thinking by immersing myself in White Wyandottes. Monograph on the “Multiplication in Biela’s Comet by Scission.” “North of Boston.” Address Great Poetry Meal. Decline. Later works. Don’t seem to die. Attempt to write “Crossing the Bar.” International copyright. Chief occupation (according to Who’s Who) pursuit of glory; most noticeable trait, patience in the pursuit of glory. Time three hours. Very intimate and baffling.

This is autobiography passed through the sieve of self-contempt, an absurdist anti-*Who’s Who* that elevates, by ostensibly denigrating, the real “true story” of a person’s life. Frost did raise chickens, White Wyandottes, to “try to stop thinking”; he did feel that he was in decline already, at the age of forty-two; he did look with wonder on the fact that he didn’t “seem to die,” having assumed on many an occasion that he was gravely ill, and often contemplating suicide. The final item is agonizingly astute about how others viewed him, and how he viewed himself: “Very intimate and baffling.”

The truest Frost was the most feigning, as these letters reveal time and again. Frost showed “patience in the pursuit of glory” only if his incessant nudging of editors, both here and in England, is compared with some imaginary alternatives: bribery, say, or hostage-taking. When Frost learned of his first paid acceptance, by *The Independent*, in 1894, he wrote a letter to its literary editor, Susan Hayes Ward, enclosing more poems for her to consider:

You must spare my feelings when you come to read these others, for I haven’t the courage to be a disappointment to anyone. Do not think this artifice or excess of modesty though, for, to betray myself utterly, such an one am I that even in my failures I find all the promise I require to justify the astonishing magnitude of my ambition.



“I fail to see why this is such an achievement.”

“Astonishing” is the key word here: astonishing, that is, even to himself, and even at this moment. Frost beheld his own actions with a kind of strategic impartiality, preempting the worst that others might say about him. “Bragging isn’t really ‘bragging’ when it’s so manifestly a *performed* thing,” the editors write in their fine introduction. Or is it a deeper kind of brag, as though an exception to Frost’s strict anti-bragging policy had to be made in just this one case? “You give me a new courage,” Frost wrote to Ward, a year or so later. “At last I feel as if I could afford to be modest.”

In young writers, ambition often sprints ahead of accomplishment, then stops and waits for the gap to close. If it didn’t run ahead, there might be no race at all. Frost’s ambition made its start around 1894, but his career didn’t catch up until 1913, when he published his first book, “A Boy’s Will,” and, a year later, his second, “North of Boston.” The intervening period was as hard as any writer has endured. In 1900, Frost’s first child, Elliott, died, of cholera, at the age of three. The Frosts had consulted a homeopath referred by Frost’s mother. His remedies failed; the boy’s symptoms worsened, and by the time the family doctor was called it was too late. “I have seen right in my own family one person lost by not taking instant and out-and-out measures,” Frost later wrote. He thought he had as much as murdered his child. (Four of the six Frost children died before he did; he found a way to blame himself each time.) Frost’s mother, who had told him that Elliott’s death was “God’s judgment” upon the family, soon died of cancer, alone in a sanatorium. The Frosts then moved to the thirty-acre farm in Derry, under circumstances that Frost found aggravating. Elinor had appealed to his grandfather behind Frost’s back. The farm would be purchased and Frost would have to welcome his high-school friend Carl Burrell to be a live-in farmhand. Burrell agreed only if he could bring along his eighty-four-year-old grandfather, Jonathan (Jont) Eastman. And so in October, 1900, only three months after Elliott’s death, Frost, Elinor, their seventeen-month-old daughter, Lesley, and Carl Burrell and his grandfather moved into the small farmhouse, with the two hands living upstairs

and sharing all meals with the family. It was Carl who woke early to milk the cow, who harvested the apples and packed the eggs for sale at the market. The whole situation made Frost feel that he was being told, by his grandfather, “Go out and die.” But it must have occurred to him that all these arrangements had been made so that he could write his poems.

The few letters that survive from this period are nearly all to Susan Hayes Ward, Frost’s single, fraying tie to the literary world, fussing about incidentals. Much of what we know of the Derry years comes from what we may surmise from the poems in Frost’s first two books, which Frost wrote on the farm and in England, where, testing his moral luck, he impulsively took his family to live in the summer of 1912. In a letter to William Stanley Braithwaite, three years later, Frost wrote, of “North of Boston”:

The book is an expression of my life for the ten years from eighteen on when I thought I greatly preferred stocks and stones to people. The poems were written as I lived the life quite at the mercy of myself and not always happy. The arrangement in a book came much later when I could look back on the past with something like understanding.

I kept farm, so to speak for nearly ten years, but less as a farmer than as a fugitive from the world that seemed to me to “disallow” me. It was all instinctive, but I can see now that I went away to save myself and fix myself before I measured my strength against all creation. I was never really out of the world for good and all. I liked people even when I believed I detested them.

Derry was a pliable symbol, reshaped to suit the occasion, for the rest of Frost’s life. The “ten years” were really nine, and not from “eighteen on” but from twenty-six to around thirty-five, though he had farmed intermittently at other times. But to keep farm, “so to speak,” is not to say he kept farm, exactly, nor is to “disallow”—in scare quotes—precisely to disallow. The word “keep” and its variants occur forty-seven times in “North of Boston”; some of Frost’s greatest poems, from later in his career (“The Most of It” and “Directive” both come to mind), turn on that weirdly abundant little word. The letter insists on not meaning what it says, and it assumes a correspondent whose step will not be shaken by the small faults and tremors Frost liked to put into his sentences.

“Strongly spent is synonymous with

kept,” Frost writes in his essay “The Constant Symbol.” His letters, no less than his poems, were for him a “symbol . . . of the way the will has to pitch into commitments” without knowing the outcome. This is a speculator’s state of mind, or perhaps a day trader’s, moving a finite sum in and out of investments until the closing bell. As he wrote to his publisher Alfred Harcourt, in 1917, “There are a lot

of good things I believe in, but for the life of me I can’t always enumerate them at a moment’s notice.” He prized “misunderstanding” and “understanding” equally, since they were, he said, the same: both clear your mind and

leave “you with one less detail in life to be bothered with.” Loss was gain: his aim in thinking was to take “away from the sum and burden of what you have to consider.” One of his greatest statements about poetry applies to his letters also, which seem to subtract sentence after sentence from themselves until they close: “Like a piece of ice on a hot stove the poem must ride on its own melting.” He played it straight, it seems, only when he was dickering about his pay.

“The sense of intimacy gives the thrill of sincerity,” he wrote in another letter, reminding us that both “intimacy” and “sincerity” are, for him, ends in themselves, not means of comfort or connection. At Amherst College, where, beginning in 1917, he taught off and on for more than forty years, he surprised the students by gossiping mercilessly about his colleagues. He liked “the actuality of gossip, the intimacy of it,” not necessarily the dirt. These statements are gently provocative, as Frost, who was always careful to come off as potentially malevolent, no doubt intended. His correspondents and, later, his biographers were in an uncomfortable bind: he spoke to them, as to everyone, in “parables and in hints and in indirections,” as he put it, “whether from diffidence or some other instinct.” Lawrance Thompson’s three-volume official biography of Frost is thus one of the strangest books ever written. Thompson stayed by Frost’s side for more than twenty years; he was like Boswell without an imagination or a memorable prose style. (He seems to have grown to detest Frost, and competed



with him for the affections of Kay Morrison, Frost's secretary and lover.) And so this huge book, full of details that Frost spoon-fed to Thompson and that Thompson vomited up, will never be replaced: everyone writing about Frost, including me, consults it.

Most of the remarkable things in the new volume of letters have been in circulation for a long time, in stray collections, in the Thompson biography, and in William H. Pritchard's "Robert Frost: A Literary Life Reconsidered," the best single volume on Frost. But it is wonderful to find premonitions of them and small aftershocks, and their contexts can now be imagined much more clearly. The most famous letters in the book—the most famous that Frost ever wrote—are two to his former student John Bartlett, introducing his theory of "the sound of sense." The first, written from England on July 4, 1913, is Frost's declaration of independence from what he calls "a worn out theory of versification," from Swinburne and Tennyson, his Victorian predecessors, and from what was left of his timidity:

To be perfectly frank with you I am one of the most notable craftsmen of my time. That will transpire presently. . . . I alone of English writers have consciously set myself to make music out of what I may call the sound of sense. Now it is possible to have sense without the sound of sense (as in much prose that is supposed to pass muster but makes very dull reading) and the sound of sense without sense (as in Alice in Wonderland which makes anything but dull reading). The best place to get the abstract sound of sense is from voices behind a door that cuts off the words.

Frost was working out the intonations and rhythms of his Derry neighbors, whom he had first studied, he wrote, with an "almost technical interest in their speech." The theory is in some ways unsurprising: anyone who has ever had a dog knows what you can accomplish with the "abstract sound of sense." But Frost went on:

An ear and an appetite for these sounds of sense is the first qualification of a writer, be it of prose or verse. But if one is to be a poet he must learn to get the cadences by skillfully breaking the sounds of sense with all their irregularity of accent across the regular beat of the metre.

The brilliance of the theory was all in its application, and when it was applied, in poems like "Home Burial," Frost not

only reclaimed English prosody for American speech; he found the distinct accent of his own grieving. In the poem—a kind of little play (it has been staged, with iffy results) for two voices—a husband and a wife argue over their responses to the death of their child. The man has just spied the family cemetery through a window:

"The wonder is I didn't see at once.
I never noticed it from here before.
I must be wonted to it—that's the reason.
The little graveyard where my people are!
So small the window frames the whole of it.
Not so much larger than a bedroom, is it?
There are three stones of slate and one of marble,
Broad-shouldered little slabs there in the sunlight
On the sidehill. We haven't to mind *those*.
But I understand: it is not the stones,
But the child's mound—"

"Don't, don't, don't, don't," she cried.

Frost was especially proud of that last line. Obviously, you don't say, as the meter would suggest, "don't *don't*, don't *don't*." I hear four equal strong stresses, but you might hear it differently. At other times in the poem, the "sentence sounds" cling to the meter for dear life, as when the wife describes her husband's seemingly affectless action of digging the child's grave:

"God, what a woman! And it's come to this,
A man can't speak of his own child that's dead."

"You can't because you don't know how to speak.
If you had any feelings, you that dug
With your own hand—how could you?—
his little grave;
I saw you from that very window there,
Making the gravel leap and leap in air,
Leap up, like that, like that, and land so lightly
And roll back down the mound beside the hole."

"Leap *up*, like *that*, like *that*, and *land*": it isn't a description of the action; it is the precise rhythmic signature of the action redone in language. Frost was a wizard at that kind of effect. Most of his lines fall somewhere between these two extremes of strict adherence to and open defiance of the meter. The lines are, he wrote "apprehended by the ear. . . . The most original writer catches them fresh from talk, where they grow spontaneously."

Around the time Frost wrote those words, his family was living what he

termed their "mildly literary life" in a London suburb, calling occasionally on Pound ("six inches taller for his hair," with a coat of "heavy black velvet") and Yeats, both of whom had endorsed Frost in ways that Frost found inadequate. T. S. Eliot arrived in London a year later; his literary debut was still several years off, and he never appears in these letters. Modernism was stirring, the war was coming. It had been more than two years since December, 1910, the moment, Virginia Woolf said, when "human character changed." The family's response to all this was to get out of London's orbit entirely, to Gloucestershire, where the landscape and the acoustics were more like Derry.

Soon, Frost was back home in New Hampshire, buying and selling property, taking and quitting jobs, making and losing friends, and, in the letters that close this volume, shaping his reputation with, one suspects, the sense that someone in the future would be there listening. He was becoming that Frost we all can picture, "the Only Genuine Robert Frost in Captivity," as Randall Jarrell put it. Perhaps two-thirds of his best poems had been written. Frost had once taught a friend's child, he wrote, "a way to make a big splash with a small object and a small splash with a large object." These letters, showing Frost at home in metaphor, if nowhere else, expand upon that lesson. He threw in his lot with small objects; poems, he wrote, provided nothing more than a "momentary stay against confusion." His own oppositional modernism was as revolutionary as Eliot's, though it arose not from divine afflatus but, as the title of one of his poems has it, from "The Need of Being Versed in Country Things." In a letter to a friend on May 18, 1914, Frost describes a visitor to his home in Gloucestershire, the poet W. H. Davies, and some of the hazards of ignorance:

He set about encouraging Lesley [Frost's daughter, then fifteen] to write about nature. It would be good practice for a child. He admitted that he had used it up as copy. Lesley is old enough to have to struggle to keep a straight face in such circumstances. There now, he said, see that little bird, that little green one, I wonder what kind he is. Says Lesley It's a sparrow and it isn't green, is it? And Davies stumped into the house. He doesn't really know nature at all. He has lately been telling the British public that the American robin isn't red breasted and it has no note that he has ever heard. ♦

BUT HE CONFESSED

Jesse Ball's "Silence Once Begun."

BY JAMES WOOD



Like his earlier work, Jesse Ball's strange, brief, beguiling fourth novel, "Silence Once Begun" (Pantheon), flirts with the hermetic. Laid out as a series of Q. & A. interviews (and a small collection of photographs), the book sometimes resembles a film script; the pages bloom with whiteness. Silence is both the book's quarry and its stalker: silence "once begun," the hanging title suggests, is voraciously expansive.

Ball tells the story, or stories, of Oda Sotatsu, a twenty-nine-year-old Japanese man of no great distinction or education. In 1977, he is working in an import-export business owned by his uncle. He lives alone, has no girlfriend, no pets. The

novel's atmosphere at first calls to mind Kurosawa's great film "Ikiru," with its portrait of Kanji Watanabe, who has done the same dull office job for thirty years: "Many people knew him, and lived beside him, near him—but few could say they had any sense of what he was really like. They had not suspected that he was really like anything." But Sotatsu has become friendly with a much more dynamic couple, Sato Kakuzo and his girlfriend, Jito Joo. They are restless, political, eager for risk. They persuade Sotatsu to commit to a revolutionary act, "in order to feel alive again." Sotatsu agrees to a wager: if he loses a game of cards, he must agree to sign a confession, and Joo will take it to

the police station. Sotatsu loses, signs the confession, and is soon arrested.

He has "confessed" to a crime that has convulsed the villages around the city of Sakai—a series of apparent abductions, eleven in all, known as the Narito Disappearances. Sotatsu may or may not have known what he was confessing to. But, once charged, he keeps to his part of the wager with mysterious relentlessness. Like a latter-day *Bartleby*, he rarely breaks his silence and seems to be filled with a rebellious fatalism; in court, he repeats—in a lawyerly way—that although "he does not know about the facts of the indictment, yet he holds to the confession that he signed, as he signed it," provoking the judges to insist that "as the general effect of the language present in the confession is a mirror to that of the indictment, it is legitimate and appropriate that admitting the facts of the confession is identical to admitting the facts of the indictment." He is sentenced to death by hanging, and transferred to death row. He does not appeal the verdict.

But this summary flattens the form of Ball's novel, shelling it for its thrillerish pith. Ball uses a *Rashomon*-like approach, with multiple interviews of different witnesses, some of whom contradict each other. His novel does not, like most thrillers, move steadily toward solution. Though some of the questions of plot are clearer by the novel's end, the mystery of Sotatsu's silence is only more opaque. Ball enjoys borrowing some of the conventions of crime writing, but in order to use them rather than to be used by them. He is a youngish (born in 1978), experimental writer, whose previous novels, such as "Samedi the Deafness" (2007) and "The Way Through Doors" (2009), have circled around metafictional questions of truth-telling, the veracity of representation, the coherence of the self, language's relation to silence, and what we mean by innocently talking about fictional "characters" as if they were real people—pretty much the full, familiar postmodern quiz-kit. And some of his earlier work—full of mysterious, prisonlike houses, numbered doors, stories within stories within stories, arbitrary rules and facile plot machinery, shadowy organizations, random guns, and characters with names like Sermon, Estranger, and Morse—has not escaped the student's slightly glib fluency, as well as the fatal shadow of the weightless Paul Auster. But Ball's talents, as both a storyteller

In his latest novel, Ball enriches his metafictional restlessness with humane curiosity.

and a writer of prose, tend to burst the borders of his structures. His language is chastely lyrical, with a discreet musicality: "It was a fine autumn day, really, and the air through the open windows smelled like life." He is often appealingly funny, in an absurdist manner reminiscent of the English avant-gardist B. S. Johnson:

James stood near the front door. Grieve had woken up and gone off. He had gone off too. When someone wakes up and goes off, it never feels right to stay in the place where you were with them. One should always go off and find something new if one is to keep oneself perennially young and happy.

His previous novel, "The Curfew" (2011), was a sombre dystopian allegory, but was not without similar comedy. In one early scene, the protagonist, William Drysdale, whose job is phrasing epitaphs for gravestones (a so-called "epitaphorist"), has an amusingly deadpan conversation with an elderly widow. She wants her husband's grave to read, "Paul Sargent Monroe. Died before his time." When Drysdale reminds the widow that Mr. Monroe died at the age of ninety-two, and that thus the motto might not be "exactly right," she counters with the suggestion that they move his birth date up, to twenty-five years ago. Ball can also be tender toward his fictional creations: at the heart of "The Curfew" is the touching portrayal of Drysdale's relationship with his mute nine-year-old daughter, Molly.

One of the triumphs of "Silence Once Begun" is the way that Ball enriches his metafictional restlessness with the humane curiosity that sometimes struggled for air in the more gamelike grid of books like "Samedi the Deafness." We know immediately that there will, of course, be *some* games: an early page announces, "The following work of fiction is partially based on fact," accompanied by a tiny, indistinct, Sebald-like photograph of what the reader assumes to be a Japanese woman standing in front of a wall. But even as his interview form enacts a proper postmodern skepticism toward the authority of single narratives, he also brings alive a range of voices, and realistically grounds a tortuous family history.

The novel's narrator, named Jesse Ball, is a journalist who becomes obsessed with telling "the whole story" of Sotatsu's "tragic life." Many years after the actual events, he records his witnesses with what

he primly calls a "tape-device," and presents edited extracts of these sessions. (David Foster Wallace's "Brief Interviews with Hideous Men" may have been a formal influence here.) But we quickly see "the whole story" splintering. Sotatsu's brother, Jiro, believes in Sotatsu's innocence, and visits him often, despite his brother's non-coöperation. He tells his interviewer that Sotatsu broke his silence to tell him, "Brother, I didn't do anything. I didn't do it." But is Jiro to be believed? His mother doesn't think so, and tells Jesse Ball that Jiro was always "a lying child." Poignantly, she seems to want to communicate with her imprisoned son. But her husband, an imperious, quarrelsome man, has decided that Sotatsu is guilty, and that he no longer exists—Jiro is now the first son—and no one is to visit him.

Mr. Oda is sensitively drawn, full of rage, shame, and repressed grief. He says that Sotatsu was always sick and essentially doomed:

Maybe others couldn't see it, but I always could. I could always tell when he was about to do something stupid. He would get this blue look, this blue look, this look that I recalled from his childhood. It would be like he was being strangled, but he wasn't, and you would know, you would just know—he is going to do something now that everyone will regret. And then he would do it.

He had always known, he tells Jesse Ball, that something bad was going to happen:

Until then our life had gone well. I was living in the shadow of this thing, this terrible thing that no one else could see. But, I knew that it was coming. Fishermen are not like other people. We can tell things; not like priests. . . . But we do see things. Sometimes we see them before they happen. It is not reliable. It isn't the same as knowing about things. One doesn't find it useful, do you see? Do you, do you see? It isn't a useful thing. It is just a thing.

But Jiro later tells his interviewer that many people consider his father to be "demented."

Stealthily, a shattered picture emerges: a domineering father, with little education; a compliant, fearful mother; a daughter who has escaped, and moved up the class ladder (she is a professor in Korea by the time Jesse Ball interviews her); and two sons, differently oppressed and ultimately dismissed by their impossible patriarch. Ball makes all this vivid, yet the novel does not become a straightforward realist account (and is stronger for it), partly because Sotatsu's silence sits at its voided center like

an empty tomb. Why does he do what he does? By silencing himself, does he not really also disappear? And if Sotatsu disappears like this into silence and unreason, is he still what we think of as a self, let alone that entity we call "a character"? (In prison, he actually begins to shrink from lack of food, either because of a hunger strike or because his guards are starving him.) A former guard tells Jesse Ball that, just before a condemned man is executed, officials sign a document attesting that the prisoner is who he says he is. The prisoner must sign it, too: "You sign the document as well, agreeing that you are yourself." The novel assaults the idea of such easy self-identity. Sato Kakuzo, the evil mastermind of the original wager (and in some sense, therefore, the true author of the story), tells Jesse Ball that he selected Sotatsu because, in effect, he didn't exist: "His life was a zero. He would have done nothing. Instead, look: someone is writing a book about it."

Postmodernism has often had uneasy relations with silence. For Samuel Beckett and Maurice Blanchot, language is perilously proximate to silence, as if it were a suicide at once dreaded and longed for. Yet if this side of postmodernism—it could be called the tragic or tragicomic side—is gravely shadowed by silence, the comic-maniac side sometimes seems to be in rapid flight from it: think of the anarchic proliferations of Thomas Pynchon, the metafictional garrulity of William Gass, the perpetual movement of Auster. For them, storytelling seems unflinching in its supply, and language rarely fails them. You could say that Beckett and Blanchot tell truly doubtful stories, while Auster and company tell merely suspicious ones.

If Ball's first two novels seemed, in their gamelike abstraction, to be rather noisily fleeing from silence—which is to say, death—his most recent work appears to be attempting to make a space for it. Sotatsu's unaccountable silence, his unreasonable "zero," haunts the book from start to finish. As he dwindled into nothingness, his brother recalls, "He had a very odd way at that time, a very odd way of holding his mouth. I think it was because he had stopped talking. Maybe if people didn't use their mouths for talking anymore, this is the way they would all hold their mouths." His sister puts it more beautifully: "His actions no longer leaned on his words." There is something

BRIEFLY NOTED

religious about Sotatsu's refusal, a resonance Ball doubtless encourages by dedicating his novel to "K. Abe & S. Endo." One of Shusaku Endo's best-known novels (at least in English) is "Silence," his story of Christian martyrdom and persecution in seventeenth-century Japan. Endo, who was Catholic, is menaced by God's silence in the face of the suffering of the early Japanese Christian martyrs, and the silent indifference of God's world: "Behind the depressing silence of this sea, the silence of God . . . the feeling that while men raise their voices in anguish God remains with folded arms, silent."

Much of Endo's novel is narrated by Sebastian Rodrigues, a Portuguese missionary; the prose has a devotional calm not unlike that of the priestly narrator of Marilynne Robinson's "Gilead." Jesse Ball's prose often has a similar quietude, an almost reverential equanimity. The language seems aware of the charged space around it, as if one were praying aloud in a darkened, empty church. His characters speak at once lucidly and uncannily; words have become strangely heavy. Nothing is lovelier than Jito Joo's long monologue, in which she tells her interviewer of her developing love for Sotatsu, and how her prison visits became the essence of her life:

In the first part of my life with Sotatsu, he lived in a cell in a jail where the sun came south through the window on an avenue all its own where it was forced to stoop and stoop again until when it arrived at its little house it was hardly the sun at all, just a shabby old woman. Yet we were always looking for her, this sun, when she would come, always eager to have her meager presents, her thin delineations. I would say, oh, Sotatsu, oh my Sotatsu, today you are like a long-legged cat of the first kind. He would smile and laugh, meaning, Joo, I have nothing to do with such a cat as you describe.

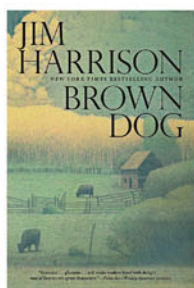
But, unlike the devout "Silence," Ball's novel is unmistakably a post-religious work. God is not so much silent as absent, and the threat of Sotatsu's silence might be not that it is full of meaning but that it is meaningless. When, at the book's end, we discover why Sato Kakuzo orchestrated these events (as a revolutionary protest against the justice system), we also learn that, as far as we can tell, nothing changed after the public disclosure of Sotatsu's wrongful conviction and death: "Some weeks passed, and it was essentially forgotten." The silence spoke; and the world comprehendeth it not. ♦



WARSAW 1944, by Alexandra Richie (Farrar, Straus & Giroux). In August, 1944, when the Warsaw uprising began, the city had almost a million inhabitants; within a few months, almost a hundred and seventy thousand were dead, and more than half a million had been sent to a Nazi transit camp. Others were hiding in sewers, or starving in the basements of houses soon to be burned. This history grapples movingly with the question of whether the order to rise up should have been given at all. The Poles had counted on the German Army being in disarray (it was actually being reinforced) and on Russian aid (Stalin was not their friend). After the capitulation, Hitler had Warsaw levelled; Richie makes the city's existence today feel like a miracle.



FLYOVER LIVES, by Diane Johnson (Viking). As a girl in sleepy Moline, Illinois, Johnson, the author of "Le Divorce" and other novels, took for granted the "sweetness, stolidity, and common sense" of her forebears, while failing to understand the sacrifices they made as frontier settlers. Exploring her family tree, she finds an impoverished country doctor crippled by depression; a mother who watched seven of her nine children die; and relatives living an "almost preindustrial" life well into the nineteen-fifties. Johnson seeks to understand how this history has shaped her character, and when she describes her time as a screenwriter and a young single mother with four children in nineteen-sixties England, her cheerful pragmatism and unsparing work ethic do seem tied to the can-do spirit of her ancestors.



BROWN DOG, by Jim Harrison (Grove). This omnibus edition brings together six novellas, one of them previously unpublished, featuring Harrison's antihero Brown Dog. Although Brown Dog's American Indian sobriquet masks questionable native origins, he does, in his own scoundrelly way, represent something of life in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. His exploits—trying to sell the preserved corpse of an Indian chief; foiling his anthropologist girlfriend's plans to excavate a Chippewa burial ground—are fun, but the real pleasure of the book lies in his philosophy of life, which involves bucking convention and the law in pursuit of a decent meal, a good lay, or easy money. "It was the messiness of nature," Brown Dog notes, "that gave it such beauty."



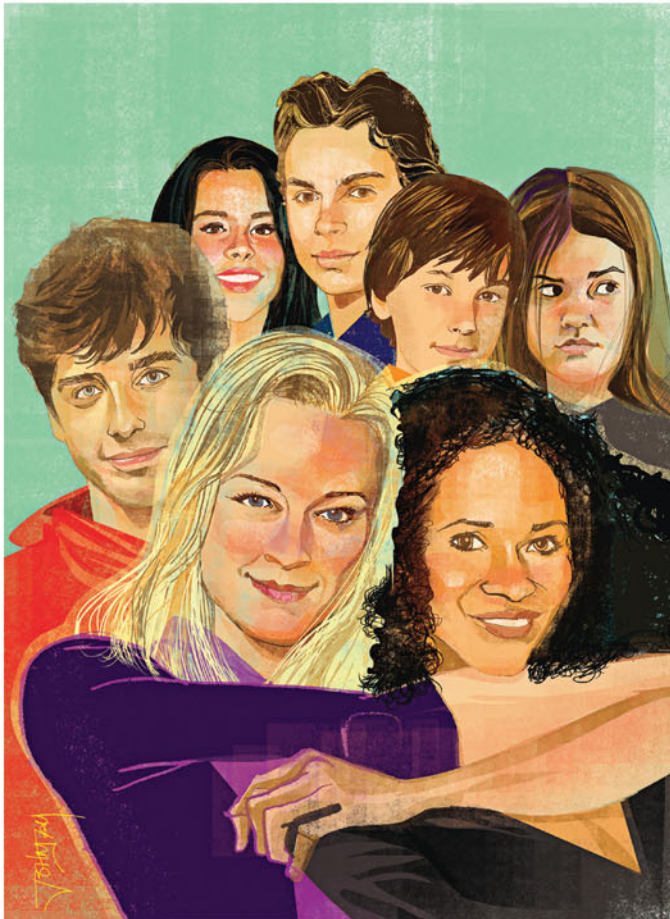
SHOVEL READY, by Adam Sternbergh (Crown). In this dystopian thriller, Manhattan is largely deserted after a dirty-bomb attack. The taxi-drivers who remain keep Geiger counters on their dashboards. The wealthy spend their days getting nutrition through I.V.s, and the poor are in thrall to a post-apocalyptic evangelist named T. K. Harrow. Sternbergh's protagonist, Spademan, is a Hoboken garbageman turned hit man whose "no motives, no details, no backstory" policy toward killing is upended for the first time when he's hired to kill Harrow's pregnant daughter. Sternbergh's writing is sometimes stripped down to the point of obfuscation, but he skillfully blends elements of noir, sci-fi, and speculative fiction, and keeps the action and the dialogue energetic.

ON TELEVISION

SWEET AND LOW

"The Fosters" and "Broad City."

BY EMILY NUSSBAUM



In a recent episode of “The Fosters,” a new drama on ABC Family, Callie Jacob, a sixteen-year-old girl who has been bumped through several different foster homes, runs away. She hitches a ride, then tries to apply for a job as a waitress at a diner—an impossible task without I.D. She naps on a public bus until she’s kicked off; she lingers near some streetwalkers, who warn her that the local shelter is unsafe. Finally, she walks into a bodega and starts grabbing snacks: a sandwich, then a soda. “If you take one bite of that candy bar, I’m gonna call the cops,” the owner tells her. Eyes locked with his, Callie bites down. She knows she’s taking a fast track back into the system.

In another television context—some slick crime procedural or an after-school special—the sequence might feel like melodrama. But, on “The Fosters,” the moment has weight and resonance, in part because Callie, played by Maia Mitchell, isn’t a lurid case study but the show’s heroine. She’s stamped with, but not defined by, her worst experiences. Her early history is as ugly as that of any one-off cameo on “Law & Order: SVU”: her mom died in a car accident, her dad went to jail, and she was raped by a former foster brother. Later on, she was beaten by a foster father, and when he turned on her sweet younger brother, Jude, she took a baseball bat to his car,

and ended up in “juvie.” In the show’s pilot, social workers place her—and, eventually, Jude—in a functional home, the one that the show’s online fans have affectionately dubbed “the Gaydy Bunch”: interracial lesbian moms, Lena and Stef; fifteen-year-old Latino twins, Mariana and Jesus, who were fostered to adoption; and Brandon, Stef’s sixteen-year-old biological son. Knowing that this placement is probably temporary, Callie stays wary, steeling herself against feeling that she belongs.

Does this sound contrived or corny? It’s not. “The Fosters” is a perfect example of why it makes sense to bake diversity into the premise of a TV show—once it’s there, you don’t have to add it later, through romantic interests or a “diverse” plot in Season 3, as many cable dramas have done. The characters feel like individuals, not like abstractions. Lena, a biracial hippie with globe-trotting parents, who’s the vice-principal of a charter school, and Stef, a white working-class cop, have a marriage that is happy but not utopian. Their intimacy is the show’s bedrock, and the unabashedly sentimental credits end with the two women’s hands in bed, twined together—an image of daily love. In Jennifer Senior’s new book, “All Joy and No Fun,” adolescence is described as a crisis that tests parents as much as it does kids. That’s very much the theme of “The Fosters”; the teens on the show are all decent kids, but so “impulsive and secretive,” as Lena puts it, that they rattle everyone they encounter.

Sometimes this anarchy is romantic: the minute Callie moves in, her new foster brother Brandon, a talented pianist with a steady girlfriend, can’t stop looking at her. His attraction is sincere, but it’s tinged with something else: Callie’s air of damage is exotic. Other boys, too, are drawn to Callie’s mysteriousness, her need for rescue. Unlike them, she recognizes the danger in this power imbalance; while she’s in institutional limbo, they’re safe, and freer to make mistakes. When she was fourteen, she had been similarly close to the older foster brother who later raped her, but she never told anyone, because she knows the rules: once you get tagged as “sexually volatile,” you won’t get placed. When Callie and Brandon do finally kiss, she runs away, and ends up in a therapeutic group

“The Fosters” straightforwardly embraces its small dramas as meaningful, even epic.

home. Twelve-year-old Jude, who is still living with the Fosters, is devastated; they'd finally found a family that was willing to adopt them, and now this possibility might evaporate.

As good as the Callie-Brandon plot is, however, there are about seven other plots that are equally thoughtful. This is the rare show on which three Latino teen-agers—the twins and Mariana's best friend, Lexi—aren't "the Latino kids" but simply teens with idiosyncratic issues, including the twins' conflicting attitudes toward their biological mother, a drug addict who seeks out Mariana online, but whom Jesus rejects entirely. When ethnicity does come up directly, it's part of a nuanced ebb and flow. In a typical scene, Mariana and Lexi try on dresses for Mariana's upcoming *quinceañera*, which Lena is showering money on in a guilt-tinged desire to honor her daughter's heritage. After the saleslady reacts awkwardly to the fact that her moms are lesbians, Mariana gripes, "When you tell people that you have a mom and dad, they don't say, 'How wonderful!'" "Oh, who cares," Lexi shoots back. "I wish I had two moms throwing me a *quinceañera*. My parents refuse, and we're *Latino*." She pauses. "I mean, so are you, but you know what I mean."

The show is full of such understated tensions, like the contrast between "bad girl" Callie, who is often unfairly suspected of lying, and the feminine, seemingly conventional, virginal "good girl" Mariana, who lies with ease, perhaps because she has the biggest front to maintain. When there's a family crisis, cracks emerge in the blended family, and the biological child, Brandon, punishes his siblings with the simple phrase "my mom." Even Stef's heavy-drinking ex-husband, Mike, who is a cop on the force with her, gets sharp, affecting plotlines, as he offers help to his son in an effort to ease his own isolation.

In a mere twelve episodes, the show has covered, in largely undidactic fashion, a variety of themes. Among them: the morning-after pill, skin-color bias between a black mom and her biracial daughter, debates over gay marriage, and illegal immigration. Yet it regularly finds surprising routes into these topics, ones that are grounded in character rather than ideology. When Jude wears nail polish to school and gets bullied,

Lena helps him remove the polish, telling him how she and Stef often don't kiss in public, for safety's sake, but also how furious hiding the truth can make her feel. Callie tells him that, no matter how liberal-seeming their environment is, it may not last: he shouldn't get comfortable, or take risks. Jude—a watchful, polite boy who is generally eager to fit in—goes back to school, his nails bright blue. The scene pays off beautifully, owing to the show's straightforward embrace of these small dramas as meaningful, even epic.

The camerawork on "The Fosters" is blunt and sometimes downright clumsy, with the simple closeups that are endemic to teen soap operas. As on shows like "Grey's Anatomy," pop songs highlight emotional moments in pink neon. (The Macklemore & Ryan Lewis song "Same Love," played under a gay wedding, was particularly on the nose.) But if there is occasional thesis-statement dialogue ("DNA doesn't make a family, love does"), and if a few actors are stronger than others (Hayden Byerly, who plays Jude, is the ensemble's standout), such nit-picking misses the point. The show just works: it's wise, funny, and insightful. Beneath the bright surfaces, it explores far more sophisticated themes than, say, "Downton Abbey," and it deserves a wider audience, one that recognizes that shows about teen-agers can be as adult—and are often more so—than shows about criminals or aristocrats. It's also a tearjerker. Like "Friday Night Lights," which the critic James Poniewozik called "Daddy's Cry Time," "The Fosters" gets me where I live, which is apparently a place where even a school principal grading a child's achievement test can make a person break down and sob. Perhaps you're a stronger person, and can resist the rip-tide of heartache. Sweetheart, you're missing out.

For years, women on TV rarely worked blue, in part because they were reflexively shamed, by producers and critics alike, for (to quote the most boring formulation possible) trying to "be like the boys." Then came Sarah Silverman, movies like "Bridesmaids" and the underestimated "Bachelorette," "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia," "Girls," "Archer," "2 Broke Girls," "Whitney,"

"Don't Trust the B—— in Apartment 23," "30 Rock" (dirtier than you recall), and, most recently, Amy Schumer and her terrific Comedy Central skit show, "Inside Amy Schumer." All this skanky creativity has worked like a TNT blast, detonating once locked doors.

Barrelling on through comes a tiny, oddball series on Comedy Central with its own dank flavor of stoner surrealism: "Broad City," which was developed from a Web series by the comedians Ilana Glazer and Abbi Jacobson, who write and star. Glazer and Jacobson play best friends, living in grubby pads in Astoria and Gowanus. Ilana is the gonzo trickster, Abbi the shy girl. They both work at dead-end jobs, although Abbi, touchingly, dreams of leading Soulcycle exercise classes (here parodied as Soulstice), rather than sluicing pubic hair from the gym's steam room. Ilana is a brazen scammer, a mouthy pleasure-seeker who strings along a love-struck medical resident played by the great Hannibal Buress. When she's desperate for cash to go see a Lil Wayne show, she places an ad on Craigslist: "We're 2 Jewesses tryin' to make a buck."

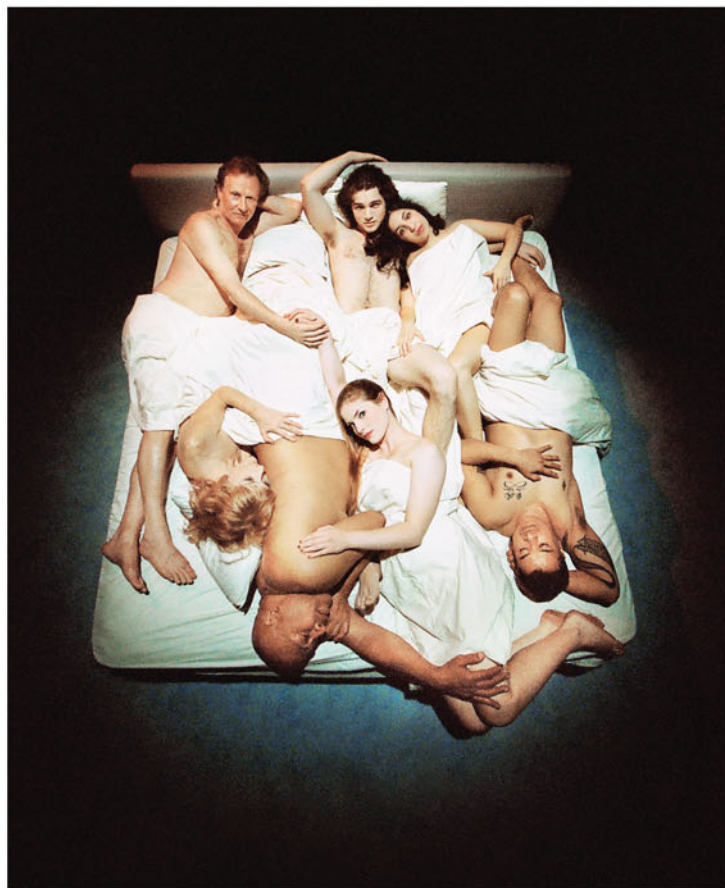
In the first episode, she and Abbi end up working as near-naked maids for a guy in a baby outfit. In the next one, Abbi goes on a deranged journey to a FedEx distribution center on an island in the East River which can only be reached via a rowboat full of twins. Fred Armisen, Janeane Garofalo, and Rachel Dratch show up in cameos. The show is jagged and dopey (in both senses), but, for a new sitcom, it's also unusually confident, and appealingly detached from the boring constraints of realism. I hesitate to compare every female comedy I admire to FX's "Louie," but what can I say? It's got some "Louie" in the mix.

Glazer, in particular, is a slapstick dynamo who throws weird twists into every line: When her boss asks her to sign a work policy, she replies, "I'll get right on that, sire," rolling the "r" for no good reason. Shamelessly napping in a bathroom stall, she sprawls her legs up on the walls like some slacker pretzel. "Broad City" is all about the question of how to survive a crap economy, one that forces young people to make their own fun. Luckily, watching "Broad City" qualifies. ♦

DIRTY TRUTHS

Local entanglements in "Intimacy" and "Outside Mullingar."

BY HILTON ALS



A playwright's voice isn't everything. Certainly not when it comes to our superficial enjoyment of a show. Watching a straight drama or comedy, we listen less for literary invention—the moments when language exists for its own sake, its own pleasure—than for themes and plot points that not only move the story along but also give us the sense, once the curtain falls, that the play has been a gratifying experience. But, periodically, playwrights come along who disrupt our spectatorial passivity by making our vibrant, boring, familiar, catchy, and idiosyncratic speech patterns strange and new. They do this by composing dialogue that works toward something far grander and harder to achieve than the usual he-said-she-said stuff: speech that is

literature, representative of this world even as it creates another, in a kind of uncanny mimesis. The list of playwrights who have done this on the postwar American stage is relatively short, and ranges from Edward Albee, of course, and some late Tennessee Williams, to María Irene Fornés, Amiri Baraka, Wallace Shawn, and Suzan-Lori Parks. These playwrights' careers flowered at a time when it cost less to bet on a new artist. These days, playwrights who want to rival the richness and variety of their predecessors must also have the cunning to convince directors and producers of the political hipness or the professional advantage of their work.

The thirty-three-year-old Thomas Bradshaw—whose latest play, "Inti-

macy," is at the New Group—has become a significant presence in the world of theatrical cool. The sixty-three-year-old John Patrick Shanley—whose new work is "Outside Mullingar" (a Manhattan Theatre Club production, directed by Doug Hughes, at the Samuel J. Friedman)—is technically and emotionally regressive. But, although the two plays couldn't be less alike in subject matter or tone, they are both, ultimately, about the writer's voice. Bradshaw's goal is to make beauty out of the degradation that passes for everyday life—at least, where his morally compromised characters are concerned. And Shanley's? In a way, his project is more complicated, because it's both more outwardly sentimental and more inwardly closeted. Shanley coats his words in corn, to prevent them from revealing the truth, but about what?

A more fitting title for "Intimacy" might be "Innocence." Because that's what Bradshaw's characters evince, no matter how reprehensible their emotional brutality. "Intimacy," which has been cleanly and simply reimaged by the director Scott Elliott, is Bradshaw's eleventh full-length play and, at nearly two and a half hours, one of his longest. In it, we meet Matthew (Austin Cauldwell), a dark-haired, attractive high-school student, who wants to be a filmmaker. He lives in an American suburb with his father, James (Daniel Gerroll), a Wall Street retiree and a Christian. Matthew's mother died a couple of years ago, and James feels ambivalent about his house: it's filled with painful memories. Should he remodel it, or just have his friend, a craven-minded Honduran contractor named Fred (David Anzuelo, who is appropriately shady in the part), repaint it? But nothing can erase James's loss or the social alienation that he feels among the couples who inhabit his little part of the world, which, largely unbeknownst to him, is rank with sex and deceit.

The morning after we meet James and Fred, we see Fred having breakfast with his daughter, Sarah (Dea Julien), a smart, striving high schooler, and James's neighbor Pat (Laura Esterman) having breakfast with her mixed-race daughter, Janet (Ella Dershowitz). While James prays for some relief from his loneliness in one part of the stage, our focus shifts between him and these strange family moments. Strange, because, for instance, Janet, a depressed teen, tries to discuss what's bugging her with her

Rationality meets pornography in Thomas Bradshaw's "Intimacy."

mother: she's having trouble achieving more than one orgasm when she has vaginal sex with her boyfriend.

JANET: I decided to be open about this issue with Paul and he agreed to go down on me after we have sex.

PAT: O.K.

JANET: But the thing is I like to be eaten out for like forty-five minutes after sex.

PAT: So?

JANET: He says that his tongue gets tired and that he won't do it anymore. He called me a freak and broke up with me.

PAT: You don't need a man like that around. There are plenty of men who would die to have a lover like you.

JANET: Thanks for understanding.

While this may not be standard mother-daughter chat, it is standard Bradshaw talk: Formica-clean about its own debasement, rationality meets pornography.

"Outside Mullingar," on the other hand, dwells in the pornography of Lucky Charms cuteness. Set in the contemporary Irish Midlands, it centers on the middle-aged Anthony Reilly (the endlessly weepy Brian F. O'Byrne), who wears his sensitivity and his moral righteousness on his sleeve. Loyal to a fault, Anthony lives on the family farm with his widowed father, Tony (Peter Maloney, who plays the part with unsurprising benign crustiness). It turns out that a piece of the property Tony sold years ago went not, as Anthony initially thinks, to their recently deceased neighbor but to his ornery daughter, Rosemary (Debra Messing), who holds a grudge against Anthony because he once knocked her over when she was six and he was a teen-ager. Seriously. Tony dies, and there's much talk and tears from these softhearted, blarney-infused rejects from one of Sean O'Casey's more forgettable scripts. With all the self-conscious "lyricism" of his language, Shanley seems to be trying to mask his predictable and not entirely convincing portrait of woman as indomitable spirit. Rosemary is a self-righteous bore, and the russet-haired Messing never manages to go beyond what Shanley has given her to work with; she's dutiful and untiring in the part—and thus a sad reminder of how outrageously good Adriane Lenox was as a minor character, Mrs. Muller, in Shanley's 2004 hit, "Doubt." Lenox tore away at Shanley's sentimentality to reveal something deep and nasty that might not otherwise have come to light (and, judging by Viola Davis's performance in the same role in the 2008 film, may never be seen again).

Shanley likes to play Cupid in his ro-

matic scripts, where people not only meet cute but meet cute again and again—while wearing sweet-scented prophylactics. Shanley doesn't really believe in bodies and their excretions; he fights to protect his characters' always gentle or bruised feelings, and thus his own. (At the end of "Outside Mullingar," Anthony confesses that not only is he a virgin; he's a honeybee, buzzing with thoughts and feelings, while searching for his lady flower.) In "Intimacy," by contrast, the entire cast ends up appearing in a porn film, despite the pain that Janet's burgeoning porn stardom causes her dad. Matthew directs the movie, in which he also has sex with the closeted Fred.

It's not that Bradshaw is trying to upend our notion of what a play is; his scripts are straightforward, and the actors in "Intimacy" perform as matter-of-factly as possible. (Esterman, for one, is dead serious in her role, and thus hilarious in its absurdities.) But, within that framework, Bradshaw makes fun of what traditional plays often are: set pieces with a problem here, a problem there, and some resolution, followed by applause. He attacks our complacency by stripping his plays of prosody, which creates another kind of music—both boring and comedic. He makes us see how routine our feelings are. Is this enough? In his brilliant 2011 play, "Mary," Bradshaw addressed the ways in which racism has twisted history. "Intimacy" doesn't have such an obvious theme, and yet it would not leave me alone after I saw it, perhaps because the play is, I think, not really about what it purports to be about—the sins of the father being passed down to the children. Rather, it's an attempt to tell a story from the viewpoint of the author-as-God, à la Richard Foreman. But Foreman uses his own voice to make that presence felt, while Bradshaw looks at his characters and their peccadilloes through a long-distance lens. It's a chilly perspective that would have been more intense if the play were shorter. In his earlier work, Bradshaw was more aware of what his ideas could sustain; his structures were tight, and they hurt us with their glittering shards of malice and folly. But why criticize a writer—especially one as talented as Bradshaw—who has none of Shanley's post-Catholic sanctimony and who aspires to greatness, even as he reveals his own conflicted desire for and abhorrence of authority? ♦

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THE COST OF SURVIVAL

"The Last of the Unjust."

BY ANTHONY LANE



Benjamin Murelstein and the director Claude Lanzmann in a new documentary.

No character that you see onscreen this year will match the impact that is made by Benjamin Murelstein. "The Last of the Unjust," a new documentary, runs three hours and forty minutes, much of which is spent in his company, and very good company it is. We first see his head from behind, with its solid rolls of flesh. He turns to reveal a face of undimmed liveliness—seventy years old, and thickly spectacled, yet verging on the combative, and never too far from a smile. His voice tumbles over itself, so much does he have to impart, and any question sent in his direction is fired straight back, with barely a pause for thought. It is hard to imagine that doubts perplex his sleep. At a glance, you would guess he was a burgomaster: prosperous, well nourished, and well pleased with the world—retired from the bakery trade, perhaps, with a nice pile of dough.

This is not the case. Murelstein was a Viennese rabbi, born in 1905. After the Anschluss, in 1938, he was involved in the emigration of Austrian Jews, more than a hundred and twenty

thousand of whom escaped the country. In the course of his duties, Murelstein had to answer to Adolf Eichmann, and among the satisfactions of the film is the scalding verbal portrait that he draws of Eichmann, whose rabidity was equalled by his bent for corruption. Short shrift is given to Hannah Arendt and her celebrated coining, in "Eichmann in Jerusalem," of "the banality of evil." The man was far from banal, as Murelstein explains: "He was a *demon*."

If Murelstein remains a figure of controversy, it is because of what happened at Theresienstadt. This is a town northwest of Prague which was picked as a suitable site for the housing of Jews; opened in 1941, it was, in one of the Nazis' poisoned oxymorons, a "model ghetto." Immense numbers of Jews were sent to Theresienstadt—more than seventy-three thousand from Czechoslovakia alone—and some thirty-three thousand people died there, many from disease and malnutrition. Tens of thousands more were dispatched to labor camps and to Auschwitz, although that name, Murelstein recalls, was unknown.

He held an important position at Theresienstadt, in the Jewish Council—the internal organization that oversaw practicalities in the ghetto and negotiated with the Nazis who governed it. Murelstein was made the Elder of the Jews in 1944, after the first two Elders had been killed; one was sent to Auschwitz, where he saw his wife and child shot in the head, before meeting the same fate. To be an Elder was, by definition, to risk the charge of moral compromise. After the war, Murelstein was accused by the Czechs of collaboration, although the case was dropped for want of evidence. Gershom Scholem, who opposed Eichmann's execution, thought that Murelstein should be hanged for his pains. Murelstein, savoring the wryness of the contrast, says of Scholem, "The gentleman is a little capricious with hanging, don't you think?"

What we discover in Murelstein is an ironist of the deepest hue. Nobody could see all that he saw and emerge with any illusions about our limitless capacity to inflict and suffer hurt. What he shouldered in Theresienstadt was a dirty, thankless, and all but impossible task that someone had to do. He was, in his words, caught between the hammer and the anvil. When the Red Cross came to the ghetto, in 1944, Jewish workers were instructed to spruce the place up. Some of them refused, understandably, but Murelstein told them to proceed with the embellishment, claiming that to be visible to the outside world, even through the prism of a lie, was better than not being seen at all. "If they hid us, they could kill us," he says of the Nazis. You take his point, although it is challenged by a clip we see from a Nazi propaganda film, made after the Red Cross tour, showing the inhabitants of Theresienstadt working in pleasant conditions, playing chess and football, and munching buttered bread. Most of the happy children who appeared in the film were deported to Auschwitz afterward and gassed.

In short, "The Last of the Unjust" is every bit as quarrelsome as it should be. Murelstein, recounting the circumstances in which he took mortally serious decisions, dares to ask us if we could have done any better. "An Elder of the Jews can be condemned," he says. "In fact, he must be condemned. But he can't be judged. Because one cannot take his place." Did

he, at one point, withhold food from his fellow-Jews? Yes, until they agreed to be inoculated against typhus, which was spreading through the camp. (The tactic succeeded.) His job was to save lives, at whatever cost, and however degraded those lives became; indeed, to expect anything other than degradation was fruitless. Tears were a waste. "If, during an operation, a surgeon starts crying over his patient, he kills him," Marmelstein says. All his wit and learning come to the fore as he searches for analogies to his plight. The historian H. G. Adler likened him, in body and soul, to Falstaff, "clever, clear, superior, cynical, and artful," but Marmelstein prefers Sancho Panza, cleaving to common sense while others tilt at windmills. He also invokes Orpheus ("Sometimes looking back is not a good thing"), and Scheherazade, whose life was preserved by a willingness to talk. Seldom has one man loomed so large as Marmelstein does in "The Last of the Unjust," yet here's the mysterious thing: I'm not sure that he is the hero.

That honor goes to Claude Lanzmann, the director of the film. His interviews with Marmelstein, many of them conducted in kindly sunshine, took place in Rome, in 1975. They were meant for use in "Shoah," Lanzmann's masterwork of 1985. In the event, he chose not to include them, and you can see why. "Shoah" was nine and a half hours long, cut down from three hundred and fifty hours of footage. Some of the discarded material has since been crafted into smaller films, one of them about the Red Cross inspection of Theresienstadt. "The Last of the Unjust" confirms that Marmelstein deserves his own film; he could well

have thrown "Shoah" off balance, so bountiful is his testimony. Also, as Lanzmann says, "I had no right to keep it to myself."

He is not the first artist to feel impelled by the Holocaust to carve new forms for his endeavors. The verses of the German-speaking Jewish poet Paul Celan, who drowned himself in 1970, shrank in their anguish to mere pocketfuls of words, some freshly minted to lend a voice to the inexpressible. At the other extreme lies Lanzmann's method, the keystone of which is not so much duration as endurance. On what ground, "Shoah" asked, should we not surrender half a day of our easeful life to the scrutiny of mass extinction? To the formidable stamina with which he marshals his evidence, Lanzmann adds a more surprising virtue: he stays in the picture. Slipping coolly aside, as some documentarians do, is not his way, nor would his theme reward such reticence; he is dealing with enough ghostly presences as it is. In "The Last of the Unjust," he is the first person we see, and it makes for a moving sight. Back in the nineteen-seventies, in Italy, in his blazer and shades, he was a handsome dog, like Peter Sellers disguised as a playboy spy. And now look at him: an old man of eighty-seven, standing alone at a railroad station, on a damp gray day, clutching a sheaf of papers. These contain passages from a memoir by Marmelstein, which Lanzmann reads aloud. He is defying age for the sake of bearing witness. The station is in Bohusovice, a small Czech town, unregarded nowadays but once a disembarkation point for Jews from Vienna and Hamburg, many of them elderly and infirm, who were ex-

pecting lakeside accommodation at a spa. Instead, they were marched to Theresienstadt. Lanzmann asks, "Who in the world today knows the name of Bohusovice?"

We do, thanks to this film. It takes a stand, at once patient and irate, against the ebb tide of the years. You could say the same of "Shoah," but the mood is different here. Death still laps at the edge of every frame, and our vision is flooded for a while by the names of the deceased, inscribed within the synagogues of Vienna and Prague. Yet the film is stirred and enlivened by the tribute that it pays to pure survival, even if that of Marmelstein will strike some viewers as too dearly bought. He died in 1989, but in the footage from 1975 he seems cussedly indestructible—a stubborn grace note to the refrain of "Shoah," which proved that, under the Nazis, anyone and anything could be destroyed. In the beautiful closing sequence, as he and Lanzmann wander through the Roman Forum, by the Arch of Titus, it's hard not to be overwhelmed by a sense of multiple histories. The two men, in 1975, are nearer to the saga of Theresienstadt than they are to us. And Theresienstadt, in turn, bears echoes of the distant past, in 70 A.D., when Titus led the Roman army in the sack of Jerusalem, and the obliteration of the Second Temple. For centuries, no Jew in Rome would pass beneath the Arch. Of the days of affliction, there shall be no end. All we can hope for, time after time, is that somebody lives to tell the tale. ♦

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Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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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 Jack Ziegler, must be received by Sunday, February 9th. The finalists in the January 27th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the March 3rd issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the United States, Canada (except Quebec), Australia, the United Kingdom, or the Republic of Ireland age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION

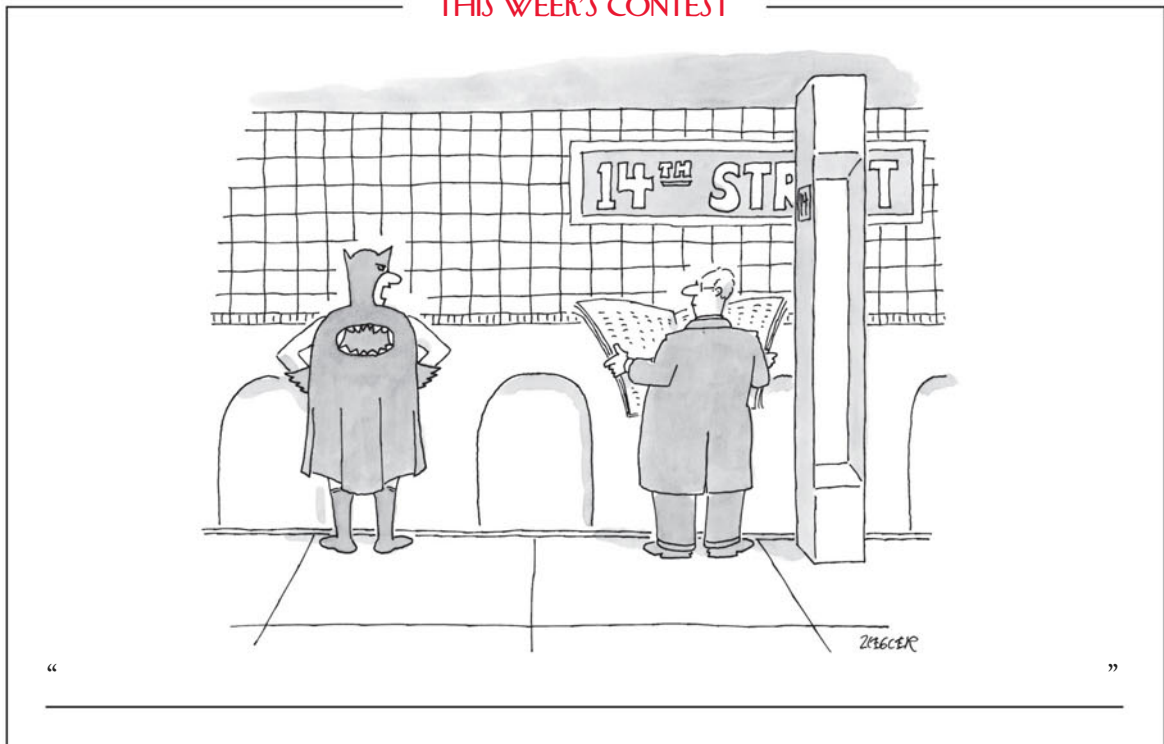


THE FINALISTS

"Do what he says, honey. Give him your kidneys."
Nat Hendel, Berkeley, Calif.

"Isn't it great how so many their age are pursuing second careers?"
David Dillman, Abilene, Texas

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

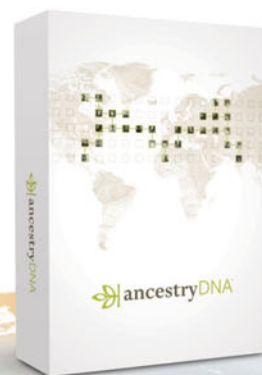


IR15%
SCANDINAVIAN43%
IT41%
NATIVE AMERICAN1%

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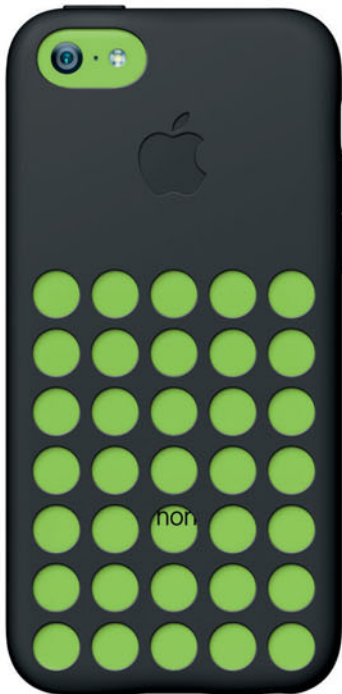
The AncestryDNA test is not yet available for purchase outside of the United States.



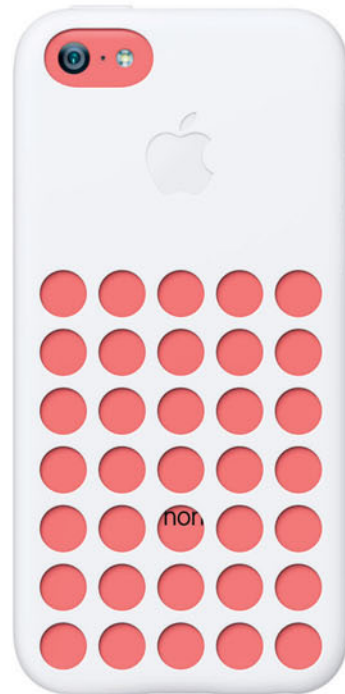
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The Jitney



Chinese Take-Out