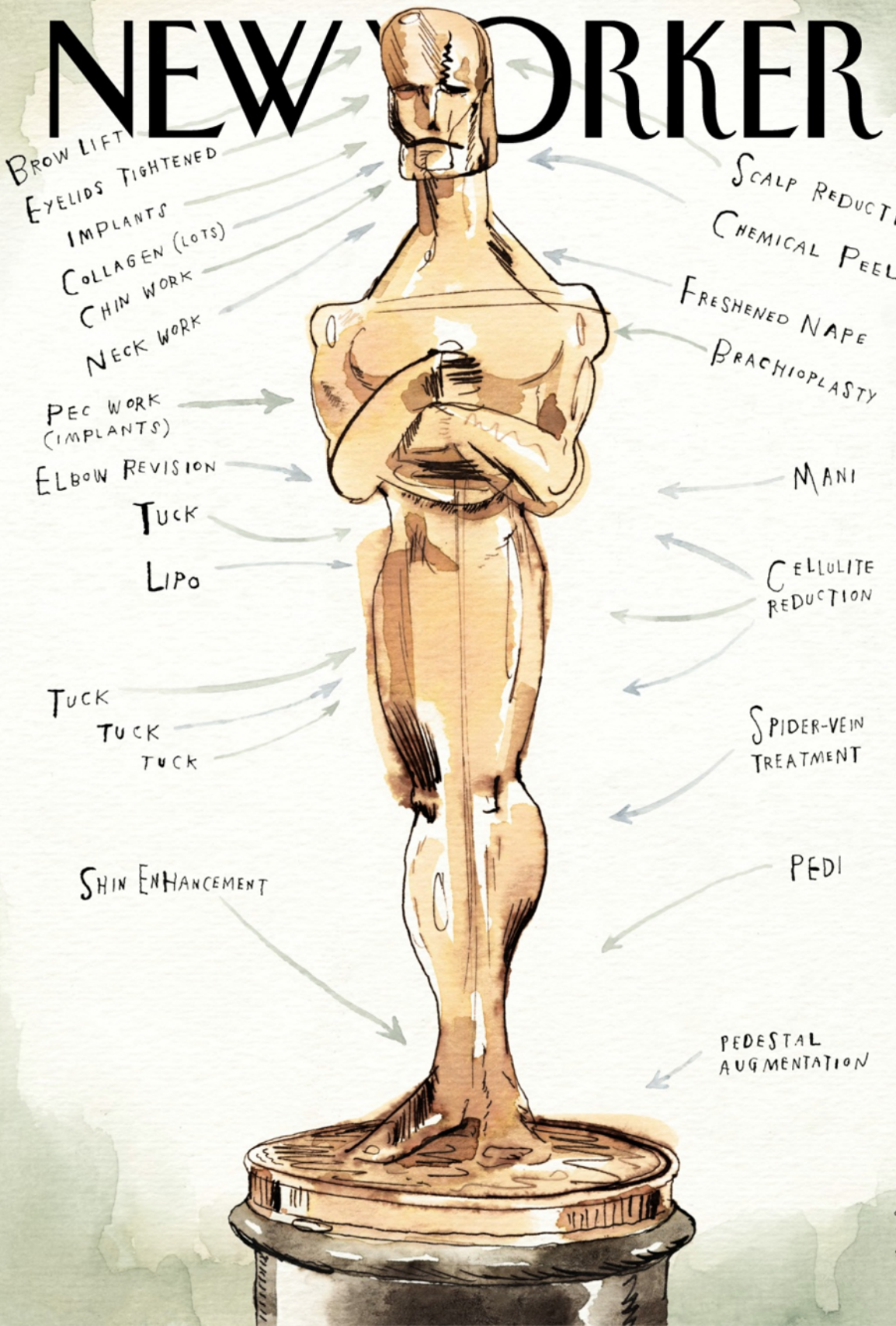
PRICE $6.99

THE NEW YORKER

MAR. 3, 2014



INTENTIONALLY DESIGNED

TO STOP TRAFFIC.

© 2014 General Motors. All rights reserved. Cadillac® ELR.

Cadillac

FIRST EVER

2014 ELR

COUPE

Regen On Demand™

Technologically advanced luxury interior

Customized charge settings

cadillac.com/ELR

THE NEW YORKER

MARCH 3, 2014

7 GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

23 THE TALK OF THE TOWN
Anthony Lane on the Academy Awards; Chris Christie's high-school politics; a Somali in Hollywood; Mavis Gallant's stories; James Surowiecki on social mobility.

DAVID REMNICK 30 PATRIOT GAMES
Vladimir Putin's bid for gold.

JENNY ALLEN 36 SPEAK, MEMORY

ELIZABETH KOLBERT 38 BIG SCORE
A mother's SAT panic.

RAFFI KHATCHADOURIAN 42 A STAR IN A BOTTLE
Can an experimental reactor save the planet?

FICTION

DENIS JOHNSON 60 "THE LARGESSE OF THE SEA MAIDEN"

THE CRITICS

BOOKS

PAUL MULDOON 70 *"E. E. Cummings: A Life."*

75 *Briefly Noted*

MUSICAL EVENTS

ALEX ROSS 76 *The Polish Renaissance.*

ON TELEVISION

EMILY NUSSBAUM 78 *"True Detective."*

THE ART WORLD

PETER SCHJELDAHL 80 *Futurism at the Guggenheim.*

POP MUSIC

SASHA FRERE-JONES 82 *Tinariwen's "Emmaar."*

THE CURRENT CINEMA

ANTHONY LANE 84 *"Omar," "The Lego Movie."*

POEMS

MARTHA SERPAS 48 *"The Best of Us"*

DON PATERSON 65 *"Wave"*

BARRY BLITT COVER
"Ready for His Closeup"

DRAWINGS Jack Ziegler, Danny Shanahan, Joe Dator, David Sipress, Frank Cotham, Roz Chast, Gahan Wilson, J. C. Duffy, Edward Steed, William Haefeli, Christopher Weyant, Barbara Smaller, Nick Downes, Paul Noth, Emily Flake SPOTS Yann Kebbi

Sold exclusively in Louis Vuitton stores and on louisvuitton.com 866·VUITTON

Download the Louis Vuitton pass app to reveal exclusive content.

LOUIS VUITTON

The *New York Times* bestseller and NPR Best Book of the Year
NOW IN PAPERBACK

"A fascinating, honest, and deeply touching story about a father and son, the price of family secrets, and the redemptive power of truth."
—CHICAGO TRIBUNE

AFTER VISITING FRIENDS
A SON'S STORY
MICHAEL HAINEY

"[A] powerfully affecting memoir."
—O, THE OPRAH MAGAZINE

"Memoir writing at its best. . . . Gut wrenching, riveting, and touching."
—SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

"One of my favorite books of the year. A fantastic read. This is a beautifully written book. It's heartbreaking."
—WILLIE GEIST, THE *TODAY* SHOW

ALSO AVAILABLE AS AN EBOOK
SCRIBNER AfterVisitingFriends.com

CONTRIBUTORS

RAFFI KHATCHADOURIAN (**"A STAR IN A BOTTLE," P. 42**) is a staff writer.

ANTHONY LANE (**COMMENT, P. 23; THE CURRENT CINEMA, P. 84**), the author of the essay collection "Nobody's Perfect," is a film critic for the magazine.

ELIZABETH KOLBERT (**"BIG SCORE," P. 38**), a staff writer, is the author of "The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History," which has just been published.

DEBORAH TREISMAN (**THE TALK OF THE TOWN, P. 27**) is the magazine's fiction editor.

JENNY ALLEN (**SHOUTS & MURMURS, P. 36**) wrote the one-person show "I Got Sick Then I Got Better," which she has performed across the country.

JAMES SUROWIECKI (**THE FINANCIAL PAGE, P. 28**) is the author of "The Wisdom of Crowds."

DENIS JOHNSON (**FICTION, P. 60**) received the 2007 National Book Award for fiction for "Tree of Smoke." His new novel, "The Laughing Monsters," is due out in the fall.

DON PATERSON (**POEM, P. 65**) is a Scottish poet and musician. "Rain," his most recent book of poetry, won a Forward Prize for Best Collection.

PAUL MULDOON (**BOOKS, P. 70**) has been the poetry editor of *The New Yorker* since 2007. He teaches at Princeton.

ALEX ROSS (**MUSICAL EVENTS, P. 76**), the magazine's music critic, has written two books, "The Rest Is Noise" and "Listen to This."

BARRY BLITT (**COVER**) is a regular contributor whose illustrations appear in several children's books, including "George Washington's Birthday: A Mostly True Tale" and "While You Were Napping," which will be published in September.

THE NEW YORKER DIGITAL

WWW.NEWYORKER.COM		DIGITAL EDITION	
THE OSCARS Reviews of the nominees and coverage of the awards.	**COMMENT** Daily news analysis by *George Packer* and others.	**VIDEO** *Raffi Khatchadourian* explains how a fusion reactor works.	**TELEVISION** *Emily Nussbaum* on HBO's "True Detective."
PAGE-TURNER *John Ashbery* and *Paul Muldoon* discuss a poem by Charles Simic.	**PODCASTS** *David Remnick* talks to *Sasha Weiss* about the Sochi Olympics. On the Political Scene, *Masha Lipman* and *Keith Gessen* discuss Ukraine's uprisings.		**POETRY** *Martha Serpas* reads her new poem.
ARCHIVE Our complete collection of issues, back to 1925.	**SLIDE SHOWS** Images of the protests in Kiev, and daily galleries, on Photo Booth.	**ART** Works from the Guggenheim's Italian Futurism show.	**BOOKS** Excerpts from E. E. Cummings's "Complete Poems: 1904-1962."

Subscribers: Get our digital edition for tablets and phones at no extra charge at the App Store or from Google Play.

THE MAIL

BLIGHT FLIGHT

I was part of and witness to the white flight in the nineteen-fifties and sixties that transferred the wealth of Detroit to Oakland County, which Paige Williams writes about in her article on the longtime county executive L. Brooks Patterson ("Drop Dead, Detroit!," January 27th). Every time Patterson bashes or ignores Detroit, he undermines his aim of making Oakland County "the epicenter of activity in the region," for what Detroiter in his or her right mind would choose to follow and support such an aspiration? Patterson's primary goal is to protect his county from Detroit's largely black, low-income populace, which he fears will cross Eight Mile Road and encroach upon the sprawl he loves. This fear is what has driven white flight since it began, sixty years ago, and it is what has got him reëlected. As long as it divides southeastern Michigan, Oakland County will be a prisoner of its own making, and the basis of its future will be white privilege.

Tony Moss
Philadelphia, Pa.

I am a corporate executive who recently relocated from Williamsburg, Brooklyn, to downtown Detroit, where I bought a house. Thirty-eight per cent of the city's population lives below the poverty line and, in my precinct, many of the homes are abandoned. There is racial tension and rampant crime. To Patterson's point, if I buy gas on my corner I keep one hand on the pump and one hand on my pistol. But the city is the best place for someone with nerve and cunning to seek a piece of the American dream. My four-thousand-square-foot house cost less than two years' rent in Brooklyn. Suited white guys speak about seizing opportunities, but few of them are willing to take the risks involved. They see photographs of black people and burned-out houses and say, "You're crazy if you go there!" There are exceptions. Warren Buffett has noted that Detroit is undervalued, and the Quicken founder, Dan Gilbert, has invested heavily in the city's downtown. The Whole Foods Market co-C.E.O. Walter Robb has said that the company's Detroit store, opened in June, 2013, is "exceeding our wildest expectations." I do value one piece of Patterson's advice, though: fencing off Detroit. I might enjoy living in a gated community, especially knowing that it keeps out the suburban riffraff.

Bryan Harris
Detroit, Mich.

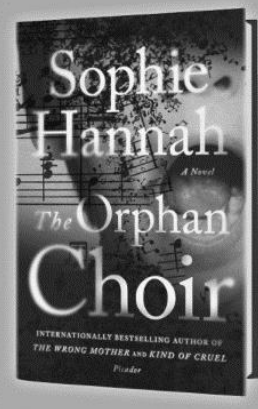
Patterson's reference to Detroit as an "Indian reservation, where we herd all the Indians into the city, build a fence around it, and then throw in the blankets and corn" is insulting and harmful, not only to the Native American community of Detroit but to all Detroiters and Michiganders. Native people have lived in Detroit and throughout Michigan for thousands of years. Many of us are professionals who live and work within Wayne, Washtenaw, Livingston, Macomb, and Oakland Counties, as well as on Michigan reservations, and maintain strong connections to our ancestral culture. Patterson's words only serve to compound the historical trauma suffered by Native Americans. Detroit—indeed, all of Michigan—is sacred Anishinaabe land. Detroit may be struggling economically, but it is rich in the cultural diversity of its people. It is this intrinsic partnership between the city and its suburbs that requires everyone in southeast Michigan to rise above hateful politics and unite for the common good of revitalizing our communities.

Joe Reilly
Ann Arbor, Mich.

•

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters and Web comments may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. We regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter or return letters.

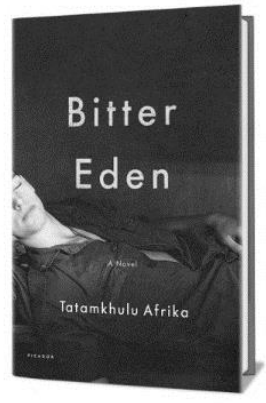
"PLENTY CREEPY."
—THE NEW YORK TIMES



"A riveting story in which suspense snowballs to a climax that is all the more dire for its everyday contemporary English setting. Absolutely haunting, in every sense of the word."
—BOOKLIST

PICADOR
www.picadorusa.com

"Such a powerful, melodic, urgent, and honest story of suffering, love, and survival I have never quite encountered before."
—ELIZABETH GILBERT



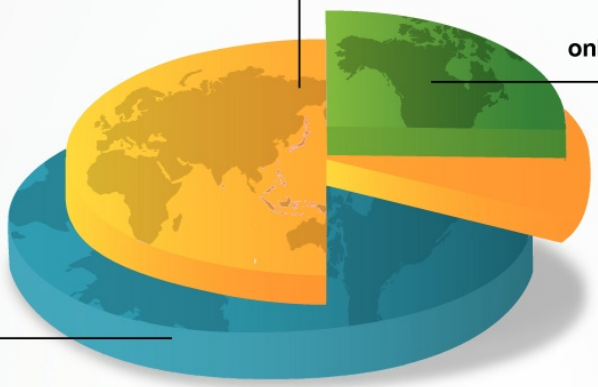
"What begins as an unforgettable account of prisoners of war ends as something surprising: a love story."
—KIRKUS REVIEWS (starred)

Is your portfolio TOO LOCAL for a GLOBAL ECONOMY?

100%
of the time, over the past 30 years, the top-performing equity market has been outside the U.S.[1]

80%
of global GDP comes from non-U.S. countries.[2]

only **26%**
of the world's publicly traded companies are based in the U.S.[3]



Diversify your portfolio with Fidelity international funds.

FDIVX
FIDELITY® DIVERSIFIED INTERNATIONAL FUND

FIGFX
FIDELITY® INTERNATIONAL GROWTH FUND

FIVFX
FIDELITY® INTERNATIONAL CAPITAL APPRECIATION FUND

Fidelity has more than 400 research professionals around the world bringing you smart investing ideas. Get our full perspective and fund details now.

Fidelity INVESTMENTS®

Fidelity.com/opportunity
800.FIDELITY

Before investing in any mutual fund, consider the investment objectives, risks, charges, and expenses. Contact Fidelity for a prospectus or, if available, a summary prospectus containing this information. Read it carefully.

Past performance is no guarantee of future results.

Stock markets are volatile and can decline significantly in response to adverse issuer, political, regulatory, market, or economic developments. Foreign securities are subject to interest rate, currency exchange rate, economic, and political risks, all of which are magnified in emerging markets.

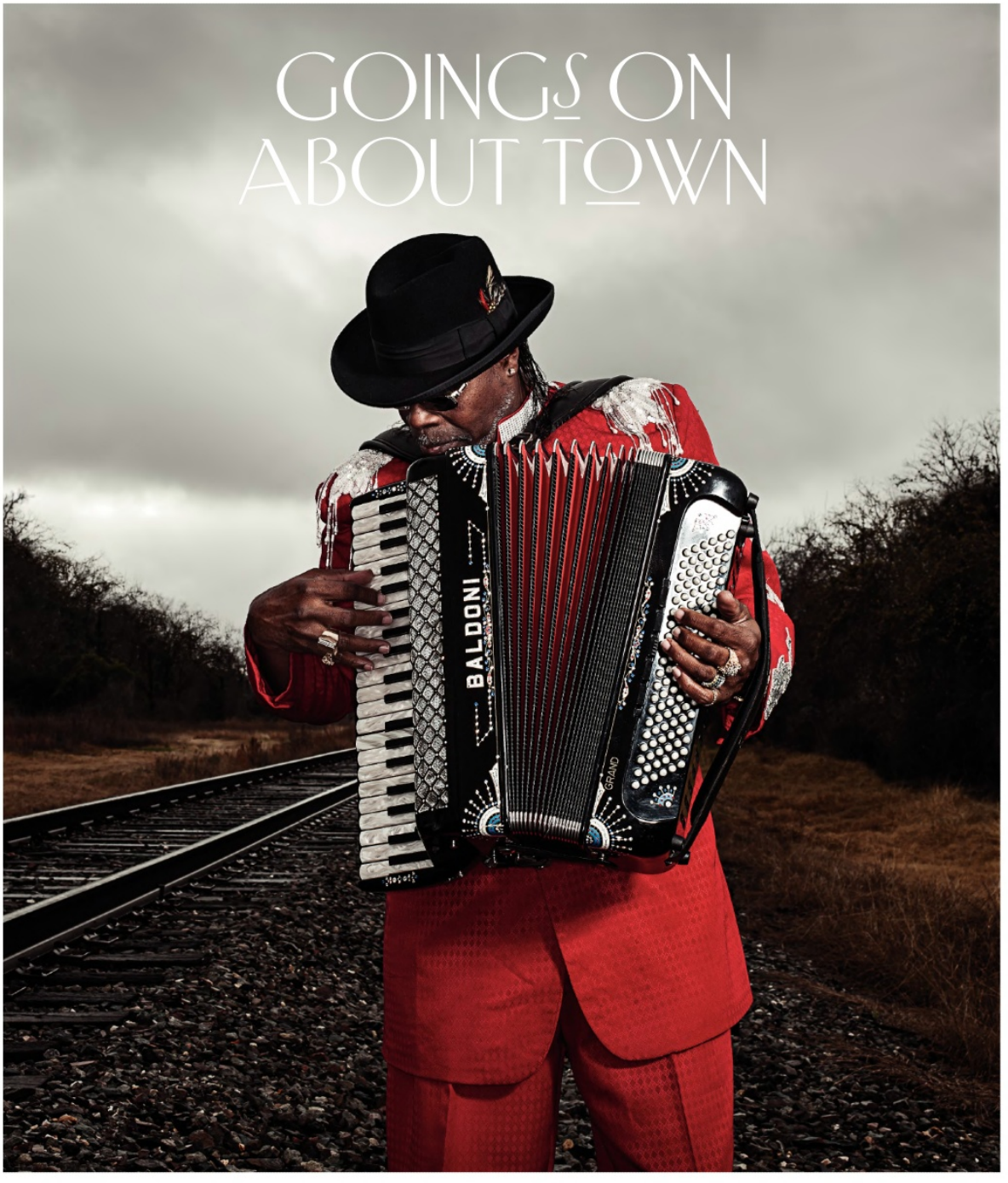
[1]Source: MSCI All Country benchmark returns 1983–2013.

[2]Source: Gross domestic product based on purchasing-power-parity (PPP) share of world total. IMF, Haver Analytics.

[3]Source: FactSet as of 11/30/2013. Data presented for the MSCI AC World Index, which represents 44 countries and contains 2,436 stocks. The index is not intended to represent the entire global universe of tradable securities.

Fidelity Brokerage Services LLC, Member NYSE, SIPC. © 2014 FMR LLC. All rights reserved. 675573.1.0

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



FEB./MAR. 2014 | WEDNESDAY 26TH · THURSDAY 27TH · FRIDAY 28TH · SATURDAY 1ST · SUNDAY 2ND · MONDAY 3RD · TUESDAY 4TH

IN THE RURAL PARISHES west of New Orleans, musicians keep dancers moving late into the night playing zydeco, an up-tempo style that evolved from music developed by Creoles in the area nearly a century ago. Performed by a band with an accordion, an electric guitar, and a frottoir (a percussion instrument resembling a wearable washboard), the music is hard-rocking and high-spirited. C. J. Chenier (pictured above) is the son of the legendary accordionist Clifton Chenier (1925-1987), who solidified the genre's name with his 1965 recording of the anthem "Zydeco Sont Pas Salé." On March 2, two days before Mardi Gras, he brings his Red Hot Louisiana Band to a "Let's Zydeco!" party at Connolly's, an Irish bar in midtown that will be hard to distinguish from a Louisiana roadhouse.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAN WINTERS

NIGHT LIFE
FOOD & DRINK | MOVIES
THE THEATRE | ART
CLASSICAL MUSIC | DANCE
ABOVE & BEYOND

NIGHT LIFE

It's last call for the Allman Brothers Band, and the xx take over the Park Avenue Armory.

SPRING PREVIEW

THE ALLMAN BROTHERS BAND is from the Deep South, but for decades the group has owned the Beacon Theatre, and has performed there more than two hundred and twenty times since 1989. The Allmans' connection to the city runs deep: their first gold record, "At Fillmore East," was recorded in 1971 at Bill Graham's legendary hall, where they took the stage so often they were known by some as his house band. The group, which is celebrating its forty-fifth anniversary, returns to town on March 7 for fourteen nights, and it is likely to be its last run here. Two key members, Warren Haynes and Derek Trucks, have declared that they are leaving, and the founding member Gregg Allman, who is sixty-six, has announced that the band will stop touring at the end of the year. Southern rock wouldn't exist as we know it without the Allman Brothers Band, but what makes them so great is that they defy easy categorization. Their songs draw on the best of American blues and jazz, as in their instrumental "In Memory of Elizabeth Reed," from their second album, "Idlewild South." Onstage, they've been known to stretch songs out into forty-minute jams. Of course, the band has broken up a few times in the past, shuffling its membership and returning with even more power than before. Don't risk missing out on their dual-guitar, polyrhythmic magic.

On the other end of the musical spectrum, the British act **the xx** is bringing its intimate electronica to the Park Avenue Armory March 19-29. The trio is presenting two to three shows a night for audiences of just forty people, who will join them under the soaring ceiling of the fifty-five-thousand-square-foot drill hall, a space that evokes an airplane hangar or the train sheds of Europe. Details about the shows are scant, but they are said to be modelled on the xx's similarly secretive gigs at the Manchester International Festival last year, where audience members sat inches away from the band.

—John Donohue

ROCK AND POP

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

Les Claypool's Duo de Twang
The California writer, singer, and power bassist Claypool has been shaking things up in the rock world—regularly, forcefully, and weirdly—since the début of his band Primus, in the mid-eighties, known as much for their costumes and dramatics as for their musical attack. Now Claypool and his collaborator Bryan Kehoe are performing as Duo de Twang, giving a twisted Americana reading to covers (including Alice in Chains' "Man in the Box," Johnny Horton's "Battle of New Orleans," and the Bee Gees' "Stayin' Alive") as well as originals. Carrying on the dramatic tradition, Claypool and Kehoe will be playing in the McKittrick Hotel's large performance space as patrons exit the Punchdrunk theatre company's five-story, multi-perspective, interactive version of "Macbeth," called "Sleep No More." (The Heath at the McKittrick Hotel, 542 W. 27th St. 212-564-1662. Feb. 26-27.)

"Let's Zydeco!"
Leroy Thomas, born in Lake Charles and raised in Elton, Louisiana, began his musical journey by taking up the drums, like his father, Leo. But the lure of the accordion was too strong, and now he leads his own group, the **Zydeco Roadrunners,** flashing a distinctive squeezebox with an American-flag design. They're in town Feb. 28. **C. J. Chenier** takes over on March 2. (Connolly's, 121 W. 45th St. letszydeco.com.)

Stephen Malkmus and the Jicks
Malkmus has now released more albums with the Jicks than with Pavement, the nineties-era indie-rock band that first brought him fame. The Jicks' latest collection, "Wig Out at Jagbags," is filled with the twisty wordplay and sterling melodies that have distinguished Malkmus's work for decades. On more than a few of its songs ("Chartjunk," "Rumble at the Rainbo"), Malkmus confronts the fact that rock music is trafficking in explicit nostalgia and that his audience is aging at the same rate that he is. And yet the old dog has some new tricks, as on the almost-R. & B. ballad "J Smoov" and the proggy album closer, "Surreal Teenagers." (Feb. 26, at the Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St. 212-533-2111; Feb. 27, at the Music Hall of Williamsburg, 66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. 718-486-5400.)

Public Service Broadcasting
J. Willgoose, Esq., and Wrigglesworth, who make up this intriguing English duo, comb through their country's vast film archives, hunting for fragments of public-information films to layer over their music. They are most comfortable performing propulsive suites of melodic krautrock, although the music often plays second fiddle to the surprisingly lyrical samples, many of which were culled from films produced in the nineteen-thirties. Onstage, the pair perform in front of a wall of vintage televisions showing footage from the original movies. (Mercury Lounge, 217 E. Houston St. 212-260-4700. March 1.)

St. Vincent
The singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Annie Clark, who records and performs as St. Vincent, created her first guitar out of cardboard and rubber bands when she was five years old. A quarter century later, she's one of the closest things the art-rock world has to a bona-fide shredder, though her catchy melodies, complex arrangements, and clever wordplay also make her stand out as a consummate pop artist. Her talents attracted the likes of David Byrne, and the two teamed up to make 2012's "Love This Giant," a horn-filled, grooved-out album. Now the Texas-raised chanteuse

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN MALTA

870 MADISON AVENUE NEW YORK

is back with her fourth, self-titled solo effort, one she engineered to be "a party record you could play at a funeral." (Terminal 5, 610 W. 56th St. 212-582-6600. Feb. 26.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Jack DeJohnette, Joe Lovano, Esperanza Spalding, Leo Genovese Quartet

If the drummer DeJohnette, the saxophonist Lovano, and the bassist Spalding need no introduction, the pianist of this coöperative quartet might. Genovese is an Argentine keyboardist who works with Spalding, and whose resourceful playing can be heard on her recent album "Radio Music Society." To sweeten an already tasty deal, the opening act will be the sensational singer **Cécile McLorin Salvant**. (Rose Theatre, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. Feb. 28-March 1.)

Roy Haynes and Ron Carter

It's always a pleasure to witness the eighty-eight-year-old drummer Haynes defy time with his propulsive, wholly idiosyncratic approach to his instrument. Carter, the dean of mainstream bass and a rhythm mate worthy of Haynes's legendary status, joins his Fountain of Youth band here. Haynes, the last of the great bebop-era drummers still playing, has backed major figures from Louis Armstrong and Lester Young to John Coltrane and Pat Metheny; the ubiquitous Carter has experience with practically everyone Haynes might have missed. And the two have crossed paths before, as in their classic hookups with Eric Dolphy in the early sixties. (Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St. 212-475-8592. Feb. 25-26.)

Maude Maggart

For her début at the Café Carlyle, the perennially charming singer presents "The Door Opened," a new show that touches on classics and rarities by the likes of Irving Berlin, Harry Warren, and Dorothy Fields. Maggart can also be heard performing with her sister, Fiona Apple, on a recently released Starbucks compilation, "Sweetheart." (Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. 212-744-1600. Feb. 25-March 1.)

Branford Marsalis

"Four MFs Playin' Tunes," the saxophonist's 2012 album, introduced a new face to his long-standing quartet: the drummer **Justin Faulkner,** who replaced the human tornado Jeff (Tain) Watts. Based on the album and subsequent live performances, the energy level of the band hasn't abated one bit, and the leader's keen historical awareness continues to color his stouthearted improvisations. On Monday, Marsalis will host a benefit for the recently deceased bassist Dwayne Burno, featuring surprise guests. (Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. Feb 28-March 3.)

FOOD & DRINK

TABLES FOR TWO

BETONY

41 W. 57th St. (212-465-2400)

"I GO TO THE HAMPTONS, but I don't *participate* in the Hamptons" is the sort of thing you're likely to overhear at Betony. On a recent evening, a septuagenarian who could have walked out of an Al Hirschfeld drawing expressed unadulterated rage at the mere suggestion that his party of two might not be seated at the table he desired, because it was meant for four. His companion, an ash blonde wearing white stockings, white cowboy boots, and a white fur vest, stared dully into space as he sputtered. If you live for people-watching, and for floor-length mink coats, and for lines like "I *don't* want to be on the family dole," you'll be in Heaven at Betony. If you disdain those things, you'll have no trouble tuning them out, thanks to the spectacular new-American food, distinctive cocktails, and impeccable service—that angry man was quickly soothed by a team of three.

Are you familiar with milk punch? By the end of a conversation with Eamon Rockey, Betony's almost scarily knowledgeable general manager, you'll know everything about it, including the fact that Benjamin Franklin had his own recipe. Betony's version doesn't look like much, and it doesn't look like milk, thanks to a complicated-sounding clarification process that renders it colorless. But it tastes like magic: smooth, sweet, and spicy—depending on a changing roster of seasonings, such as bergamot tea and Thai bird chili—topped off with your choice of spirit and served over a gigantic ice cube.

The executive chef, Bryce Shuman, who comes from Eleven Madison Park, looks like an insurance salesman but cooks like a maestro, extracting more flavor than seems possible from familiar ingredients. In one dish, foie gras gets whipped like butter and formed into bite-sized "bonbons," coated in chopped cashews and served with coarse salt and pepper. In another, foie gras is smoked, chilled, and sliced thin, then rolled into tubes, like decadent deli ham, and plated with toasted barley and caramelized kabocha squash. Roasted chicken breast is almost unrecognizable, filleted into an elegant rectangle of succulent white meat sealed with crackly golden skin and accompanied by a bowl of confited leg, puréed salsify, and fragrant Périgord truffles. Luscious poached lobster gets a rich bath in its own bisque and finds perfect partners in meaty chestnuts and delicate whole carrots.

Rockey could talk for hours about his Kola Flip—a frothy play on rum and coke, featuring cola he painstakingly makes from scratch—and suggests it as a dessert cocktail. For a cocktail dessert, try the butterscotch pudding, made with the hard stuff, of the Islay variety. Like all else at Betony, both will leave you in a happy stupor.

—Hannah Goldfield

Open Mondays through Saturdays for lunch and dinner. Entrées $28-$39.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BETH FLATLEY

DC
Cool
NATIONAL
Cherry Blossom
FESTIVAL
March 20 - April 13, 2014
3:17 pm
TIDAL BASIN
Escape to DC. Capture the blossoms.
Plan your getaway at WASHINGTON.ORG or 1-877-44BLOOM.

MOVIES

Donald Rumsfeld discusses his life in and around politics in Errol Morris's "The Unknown Known."

SPRING PREVIEW

THREE NEW DOCUMENTARIES bring history to life in original ways. In **"The Missing Picture"** (March 19), the Cambodian filmmaker Rithy Panh uses clay figurines in dioramalike landscapes to tell the story of the Khmer Rouge's reign of terror. In 1975, at the age of eleven, Panh was forced from Phnom Penh during the city's total evacuation and confined in a rural labor camp, where his parents and sisters died, events that he reconstructs in miniature. He uses archival footage to recall the metropolis that was reduced to a ghost town, and his close study of Khmer Rouge propaganda films reveals hidden traces of the regime's depravity.

The title character of **"Finding Vivian Maier"** (March 28) is a justly admired street photographer whose work was completely unknown at the time of her death, in 2009. John Maloof (who directed the documentary with Charlie Siskel) tells the story of his acquisition of a trove of her photos in 2007. Maier was so guarded that Maloof found no trace of her online prior to the publication of her obituary. The filmmakers reconstruct her obstinate artistic vocation—anchored by her longtime employment as a nanny—by tracking down many of her former wards and visiting the French village of her ancestry. Without shying away from her troubles, they offer a moving tribute to her art and its place in her strange life.

"The Unknown Known" (April 2), in which Errol Morris interviews Donald Rumsfeld about his career, is a double-edged work of political epistemology and dialectical jujitsu. The discussions, unsurprisingly, are centered on Rumsfeld's concerns as Secretary of Defense under President George W. Bush—in particular, the September 11th attacks and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Morris focusses on Rumsfeld's tens of thousands of memoranda and zeroes in on his obsession with terminology in order to peer into the information bubble within which vast decisions are made, and to reveal the character of the man himself.

—Richard Brody

NOW PLAYING

Gabrielle

This intriguingly opaque costume melodrama, based on a story by Joseph Conrad, starts with the discovery by a renowned Belle Époque businessman (Pascal Greggory) that something has gone wrong with his ten-year marriage to the enigmatic Gabrielle (Isabelle Huppert). The rest of the film concerns their attempt to renegotiate their union and to sell it to their social circle. The director, Patrice Chéreau, avoids psychology in favor of intimate pageantry: he establishes the hard, brilliant veneer of the couple's social identity before opening the door to their private, dishevelled vulnerability, and builds the film around the guilty pleasure of spying on public people in their queasy domesticity. The choreographed comings and goings of a phalanx of mobcapped chambermaids are less a matter of upstairs-downstairs than of inside-outside: what do they know, and whom are they likely to tell? The stars, whose tough-minded theatricality is second nature, convey the fear and the heartbreak behind the glossy artifice. In French. Released in 2005.—*Richard Brody* (Film Society of Lincoln Center; March 2.)

Jimmy P.: Psychotherapy of a Plains Indian

An intelligent, sympathetic, but rather wan movie about a nervy and brilliant French anthropologist and psychoanalyst, Georges Devereux (Mathieu Amalric), who analyzes a Blackfoot Indian, Jimmy Picard (Benicio Del Toro), in a military hospital in Kansas, soon after the Second World War. Physically, nothing is wrong with Jimmy, but he's plagued by headaches, sweats, mysterious pain; Devereux draws on his knowledge of Native American religions as he gets Jimmy to recount his dreams and recall his past. The movie is an open endorsement of classical analysis, and Jimmy is a perfect analytic patient: he remembers his dreams and responds to questions and suggestions; he's not glib or self-pitying. Yet he doesn't come off as a very interesting man—even his nightmares are tame. The director, Arnaud Desplechin, co-wrote the screenplay with Kent Jones and Julie Peyr. The movie is based on Devereux's 1951 memoir.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 2/17 & 24/14) (In limited release.)

The Last of the Unjust

A new documentary from Claude Lanzmann, the director of "Shoah." This film is considerably shorter—it runs three hours and forty minutes—and Lanzmann confines himself to a single figure. In 1944, Benjamin Murmelstein, a Viennese rabbi, became the third and last Elder of the Jewish Council, in the Theresienstadt ghetto. In that capacity, he was not just responsible for the lives and welfare of his fellow-Jews but also answerable to the Nazis who controlled the camp: an all but impossible task, which nobody would envy, but for which he was fiercely condemned, in some quarters, after the war. Throughout his interviews with Lanzmann, conducted in Rome in 1975, Murmelstein (who died in 1989) comes across as pugnacious, learned, and all but indestructible, fully alive to the grave ironies of his story. The film itself—not least in the aged figure of Lanzmann, still tireless in his tracing of monstrosities, lest they fade from historical view—becomes a startling double portrait of the will to endure. In German and French.—*Anthony Lane* (2/10/14) (In limited release.)

The Monuments Men

An all-star dud about a group of connoisseurs—architects, art historians, curators—who attempt to

ILLUSTRATION BY OWEN FREEMAN

What began as an idea of taking one aspirin a day became a standard that saves lives worldwide.

Brigham and Women's discovery that taking an aspirin a day prevents heart attacks has had a global impact. Today, we are pioneering the latest advances in heart valve surgery. And cells created here are regenerating new heart muscle, bringing new hope to millions who had none. Innovations here change the future of medicine, one patient at a time. It all starts here. **Download our white paper or watch our video on "Aspirin and Your Health" at BrighamAndWomens.org/aspirin.**

Life. Giving. Breakthroughs.

BWH BRIGHAM AND WOMEN'S HOSPITAL

A FOUNDING MEMBER OF PARTNERS HEALTHCARE

© Brigham and Women's Hospital

retrieve the classic works (the Ghent Altarpiece, Michelangelo's Madonna of Bruges, and thousands of other pieces) that the Nazis stole from museums and private collections. The movie feels like a cross between a jaunty "Ocean's Eleven"-style caper and a large-scale war film about misfits operating behind enemy lines, such as "The Dirty Dozen" or "Inglourious Basterds." But George Clooney, who wrote the screenplay with Grant Heslov, directed, and also stars, can't find the right tone. The picture runs back and forth between wheezy high-mindedness and self-deprecating comedy, and most of the encounters with Nazis and confrontations with other dangers fizzle out. With Bill Murray, John Goodman, Jean Dujardin, Bob Balaban, and Matt Damon, whose caddish behavior with Cate Blanchett's Paris Resistance operative is an insult to the animal spirits of art restorers everywhere.—*D.D.* (2/17 & 24/14) (In wide release.)

Mr. and Mrs. Smith

Alfred Hitchcock's sole screwball comedy, from 1941, reeks of erotic horror. The handsome and prosperous Smiths, David (Robert Montgomery) and Ann (Carole Lombard), lock themselves in a bedroom for three days to try to solve a squabble. The sex seems to have gone out of their three-year marriage, but, when David learns that a legal loophole has rendered their union null and void, he becomes aroused by the prospect of reseducing the newly coy and virginal Miss Ann. Instead, she puts him through the hell of another courtship. Latent erotic frenzy emerges in diabolical details—the phallic neck of a champagne bottle that David points at his prey, the childless Ann's new job at a department store's layette counter. Meanwhile, David spirals downward into degradation as Ann sparks his jealousy by dating his gallant, athletic law partner (Gene Raymond). All ends up artificially well, but the comedy foreshadows the sexual gamesmanship of "Vertigo" as well as the metaphysical terror of "The Wrong Man" and "North by Northwest," in which a person is expelled from his own life by a hiccup of fate.—*R.B.* (Film Forum; Feb. 26.)

La Ronde

Max Ophuls's bittersweet comic sketches of the daisy chain of sexual relations, based on a play by Arthur Schnitzler that symbolized the spread of syphilis, bring to light another, incurable malady: dissatisfaction. In Ophuls's stupendous opening scene, a balletic five-minute tracking shot, a master of ceremonies (Anton Walbrook) effortlessly guides the story across the fourth wall, exchanging his trenchcoat for top hat and tails as he flits from 1950 Paris to 1900 Vienna to set the stage for erotic dreams that are played out, gaily but joylessly, against a backdrop of graceful manners and gaudy amusements. The ten serial lovers—from the prostitute in search of tenderness (Simone Signoret) and the soldier seeking conquest (Serge Reggiani) to the young poet dreaming of fame (Jean-Louis Barrault) and the aging actress needing financial security (Isa Miranda)—all use sex in order to pursue their various aims, and what they all get is, mostly, sex. In French. Released in 1950.—*R.B.* (MOMA; March 2.)

Silver Bullets

Joe Swanberg's remarkably self-excoriating camera gazes on his own art and life. He plays Ethan, an independent filmmaker in crisis, whose girlfriend, Claire (Kate Lyn Sheil), is cast in a low-budget horror film by a more successful director (Ti West). In apparent revenge, Ethan casts her best friend (Amy Seimetz) as his girlfriend in his new movie. Swanberg's flagrantly expressive camera style virtually gashes the screen with intense contrasts, bright lights, and screaming colors. The action unfolds in long takes that simmer near the boiling point as the violence of the horror-film-within-a-film spills over into the characters' lives. Makeup and masks show the uneasy convergence of performance and persona, especially in an extraordinary scene of domestic dirty dancing, in which Sheil achieves a terrifying psychodramatic intensity. Bringing together the anguish of love and the demands of art, Swanberg seems to tear the skin off the filmmaking process to expose deep wounds. Released in 2011.—*R.B.* (Museum of the Moving Image; March 1.)

Two Lives

This bland, facile, but inescapably suspenseful cinematic page-turner of Cold War cloak-and-dagger mystery is loosely based on a real-life tabloid tale and a grim page of history. During the Second World War, children born to Norwegian women and soldiers of the German occupation were quickly removed to Germany—and some of those children who ended up on the East German side were later sent back to Norway as spies in adulthood. The movie, set just after German reunification in 1990, is centered on one such woman, Katrine Myrdal (Juliane Köhler), whose infiltration of Norway involves her in a settled family routine that's threatened by a well-meaning lawyer who's trying to bring her story to light. As her multiple identities come into conflict, flashbacks to the bad old days of Stasi machinations are reflected in paranoid latter-day counterplots. Though the direction is mechanical, the storytelling is hermetic, and the characters are undeveloped, the movie nonetheless offers piquant speculations on the rat holes of twentieth-century politics and the fate of its smoked-out rats. Directed by Georg Maas; co-starring Liv Ullmann. In Norwegian, German, and English.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

Two Men in Manhattan

A hidden-classic New York film noir by a filmmaker who can pronounce the term. The director, Jean-Pierre Melville, also stars as Moreau, a French journalist in the Rockefeller Center office of Agence France-Presse. When France's delegate to the United Nations goes missing, Moreau is assigned to track him down, and enlists a friend—the dissolute and cynical news photographer Delmas (Pierre Grasset)—to help in the nocturnal search. Following the injunction "Cherchez la femme," Moreau and Delmas trawl Off-Broadway dressing rooms, haunt a jazz recording studio, and visit a threadbare burlesque show in Ridgewood as they stumble into big trouble. Melville's cool, taut black-and-white images exalt, with an outsider's passion, the city's lights, the architecture, the bustling streetscapes, and the romantic desolation, but, as the plot turns sordid, he balances the atmospheric sleaze with an ultra-French infusion of national honor. Mere months after Charles de Gaulle's return to power and the founding of the country's Fifth Republic, Melville—himself a former Resistance fighter—turns a story of back-alley pleasures and lowball jackpots into a glorious myth about the making of a nation's glorious myths. Released in 1959. In French and English.—*R.B.* (French Institute Alliance Française; March 4.)

The Wind Rises

The melancholy sweetness of this animated historical drama—based on the true story of Jiro Horikoshi, a Japanese boy, born in 1903, who dreams of airplanes, becomes a leading aeronautical engineer for Mitsubishi, and gets caught up unwillingly in the buildup to the Second World War—owes much to the painterly virtuosity of the director Hayao Miyazaki's hand-drawn animation, whether it's applied to the tender intimacy of faces or to the horrific devastation of the earthquake of 1923. Jiro's progress from diligent student to supreme inventor—and the awakening of his sense of impending doom in the face of his unswerving devotion to industrial aesthetics—is a deep and subtle story, but it is undercut by a self-conscious strain of visual poetry that sacrifices astonishment to admiration and invention to cuteness. Miyazaki's studied whimsy hits plot points on the nose and seems likelier to inspire calculation than imagination; his retrospective politics also have a touch of dewy and filtered sentimentality. With the voices of Joseph Gordon-Levitt, John Krasinski, and Emily Blunt. In English.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

OPENING

NON-STOP
Liam Neeson stars in this action film, as an air marshal who tries to prevent a hijacking. Directed by Jaume Collet-Serra. Opening Feb. 28. (In wide release.)

TWO LIVES
Reviewed in Now Playing. Opening Feb. 28. (In limited release.)

REVIVALS AND FESTIVALS

Titles in bold are reviewed.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
"Motion(less) Pictures." March 1 at 7:45: "Letter to Jane" (1972, Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin).

BAM CINÉMATEK
In revival. Feb. 28-March 6 (call for showtimes): "Marketa Lazarová" (1967, František Vláčil; in Czech).

FILM FORUM
The films of Alfred Hitchcock. Feb. 26 at 1:15, 5:10, and 9: **"Mr. and Mrs. Smith."**

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
The films of Patrice Chéreau. March 2 at 3:20: **"Gabrielle."**

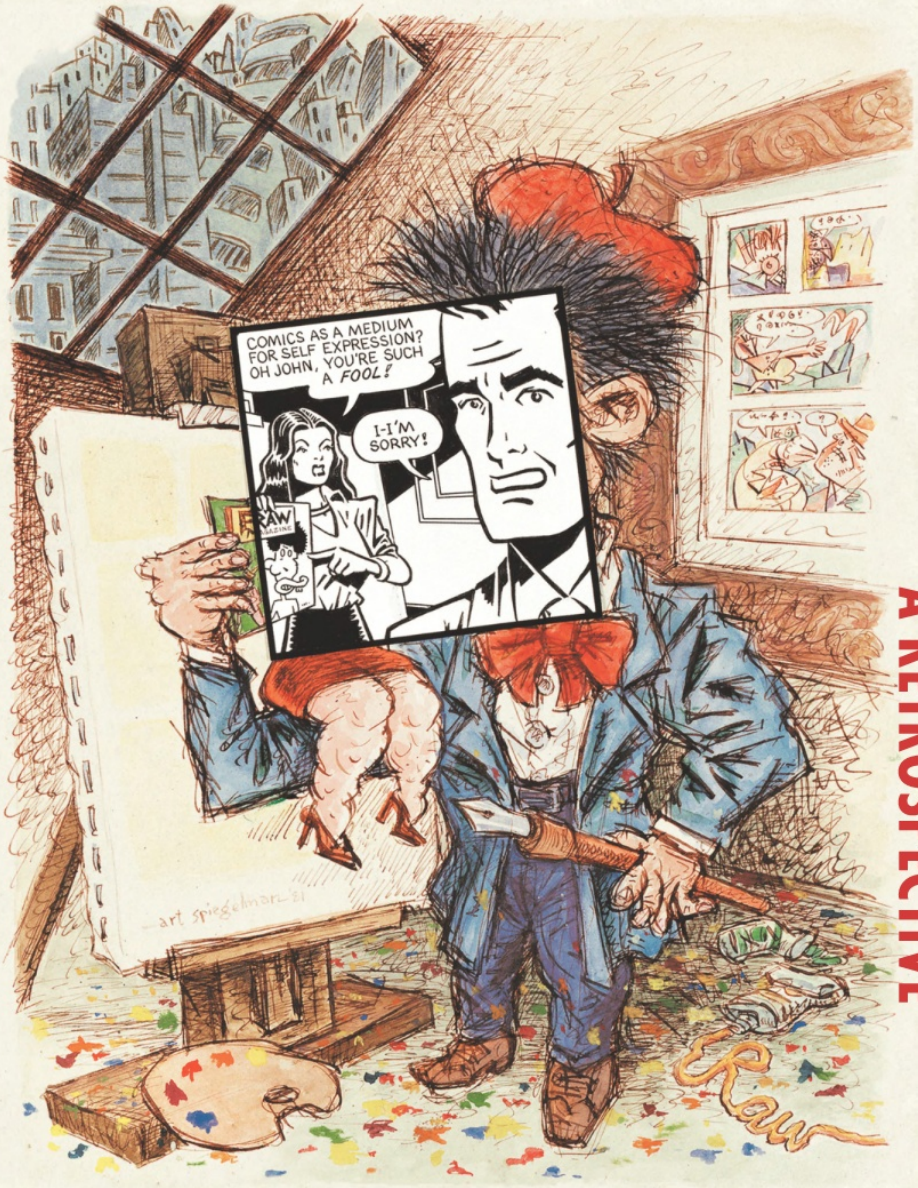
FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
"Remastered and Restored." March 4 at 4 and 7:30: **"Two Men in Manhattan."**

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
"An Auteurist History of Film." Feb. 26-28 at 1:30: "Echoes of Silence" (1965, Peter Emanuel Goldman). • "Vienna Unveiled." Feb. 27 at 7: "The City Without Jews" (1924, Hans Karl Breslauer; silent). • March 1 at 1:30: "Maskerade" (1934, Willi Forst). • March 2 at 2: **"La Ronde."**

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
"See It Big!" Feb. 28 at 7: "New York, New York" (1977, Martin Scorsese). • Films by Joe Swanberg. All screenings will be introduced by the director. March 1 at 2: "Hannah Takes the Stairs" (2007). • March 1 at 4:30: "Nights and Weekends" (2008, Swanberg and Greta Gerwig). • March 1 at 7: **"Silver Bullets."** • March 2 at 2: "Art History" (2011). • March 2 at 7: "All the Light in the Sky" (2012).

EVERETT

DVD OF THE WEEK
A video discussion of Raoul Walsh's "Me and My Gal," from 1932, in our digital edition.



ART SPIEGELMAN'S CO-MIX

A RETROSPECTIVE

Final Weeks!
On View Through March 23

See the feature documentary *The Art of Spiegelman*
Tuesday, March 4, 11:30 am
Free with Museum Admission

5th Ave at 92nd St
New York City
TheJewishMuseum.org

THE JEWISH MUSEUM

Leadership support is provided by Eugene and Emily Grant in memory of Evelyn G. Clyman, beloved sister. The exhibition is made possible, in part, with endowment support from the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation Exhibition Fund and the Alfred J. Grunebaum Memorial Fund. Generous support is also provided by Jean Schulz.

Art Spiegelman, cover art for *Print* magazine, May–June 1981. Copyright © 1981 by Art Spiegelman. Used by permission of the artist and The Wylie Agency LLC.

The Jewish Museum is under the auspices of The Jewish Theological Seminary.

THE THEATRE

Idina Menzel stars in the new musical "If/Then," along with Anthony Rapp and LaChanze.

SPRING PREVIEW

IDINA MENZEL HAS A SPARE but formidable track record. In 1996, she made her Broadway début in the Pulitzer Prize-winning musical "Rent." Her powerhouse voice insured that she held her own in a talented ensemble full of unique up-and-comers. Seven years later, she created the role of Elphaba, the misunderstood green girl fated to become the Wicked Witch of the West, in "Wicked," opposite Kristin Chenoweth's Glinda (no wallflower herself). Menzel left the show after two years (it's still going strong), and she has recently resurfaced in the tween-girl sweet spot, as the voice of Elsa in the film "Frozen." As the Disney animated movie (which is already in early development for Broadway) approaches a billion dollars in box-office sales, its soundtrack has been at the top of the Billboard 200 for seven weeks and counting, driven largely by Menzel's soaring ballad about taking control of your innate power, "Let It Go." This spring, Menzel takes on a seemingly quieter role, in **"If/Then,"** a new musical by Tom Kitt and Brian Yorkey, who wrote the complex 2009 breakout hit "Next to Normal." The story considers alternate versions of the life of an urban planner (Menzel) who returns to her native New York, based on choices and chance. Michael Greif directs. (Previews begin March 5, at the Richard Rodgers.)

Nina Arianda, another actress who chooses her roles with a savvy eye for show-stealing potential, stars in **"Tales from Red Vienna,"** by David Grimm, as a post-First World War widow who turns to prostitution. Kate Whoriskey directs (in previews, at City Center Stage I). Sam Gold directs Will Eno's new comedy, **"The Realistic Joneses,"** starring Toni Collette, Michael C. Hall, Tracy Letts, and Marisa Tomei, about two suburban couples whose lives become intertwined. (Previews begin March 13, at the Lyceum.) Anna D. Shapiro ("August: Osage County"), a director who knows how to plumb the depths of dysfunction, directs James Franco and Chris O'Dowd in John Steinbeck's **"Of Mice and Men."** (Previews begin March 19, at the Longacre.)

—Shauna Lyon

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Aladdin
The Disney film from 1992 has been adapted into a musical, with music by Alan Menken, lyrics by Howard Ashman, Tim Rice, and Chad Beguelin, and a book by Beguelin. Casey Nicholaw directs and choreographs. In previews. (New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 866-870-2717.)

Appropriate
Signature Theatre presents a play by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, in which a family returns to the plantation owned by its ancestors and discovers disturbing things about its past. In previews. (Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

Les Misérables
The 1987 musical, written by Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel Schönberg and based on Victor Hugo's 1862 novel, returns. The story, set in nineteenth-century France, follows the tortured paths of Jean Valjean, the ex-convict with a heart of gold, and his beloved Cosette. Directed by Laurence Connor and James Powell. Previews begin March 1. (Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

Satchmo at the Waldorf
In the New York première of a play by Terry Teachout, set backstage at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in 1971, John Douglas Thompson plays the great jazz musician Louis Armstrong, his manager Joe Glaser, and Miles Davis. Gordon Edelstein directs. In previews. Opens March 4. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.)

NOW PLAYING

The Correspondent
Ken Urban's show bounces from genre to genre like an errant Ping-Pong ball. What begins as a mordant drama careers from ghost story to love story to weepie to thriller. Philip (Thomas Jay Ryan), a bereaved husband, has found a novel way to reach his dead wife, Charlotte. He has hired the terminally ill Maribel (Heather Alicia Simms) to play errand girl in the afterlife. But letters from Charlotte arrive even before Maribel has shuffled off this mortal coil. Who has written them? The director, Stephen Brackett, might have eased off on the ominous design elements, but he gamely shoulders each new contrivance. So do Ryan and Simms, though they occasionally seem overwhelmed by Urban's tonal shifts. Still, they manage some poignant, truthful moments, as when Maribel agrees to accompany Philip to a work dinner. "This is crazy!" she exclaims. It is. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 866-811-4111.)

Dinner with Friends
Two married couples live in suburban Connecticut and vacation together in Martha's Vineyard. After twelve years of friendship, you'd think they knew each other. But then Beth (Heather Burns) reveals, over polenta cake, that Tom (Darren Pettie) is leaving her for a travel agent, leading Karen (Marin Hinkle) and Gabe (Jeremy Shamos)—food writers who finish each other's sentences—to question their own tidy version of contentment. Donald Margulies's play, which won the 2000 Pulitzer Prize, is a studied and square portrait of middle-aged ennui; it is less incisive about marital boredom than it is about the situational nature of friendship. The Roundabout's revival, ably directed by Pam MacKinnon, succeeds on

ILLUSTRATION BY JOSH COCHRAN

the strength of its cast, particularly the layered, nebbishy Shamos. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

Sotto Voce
A persistent young writer from Cuba (Andhy Mendez) and an elderly German recluse (Franca Sofia Barchiesi) who survived the Nazis fall in love over the telephone as they talk about her life back in Berlin, when she was a young woman in love with a man who disappeared—first on a ship full of Jews headed for Cuba and then into the death camps. The idea of strangers divided by decades falling in love over the phone has obvious potential, but in this play by Nilo Cruz, there's no chemistry between Mendez and Barchiesi. Mendez, under Cruz's direction, never really embodies his part, and Barchiesi fills in the gap by overacting. (Theatre for the New City, 155 First Ave., at 10th St. 212-868-4444.)

Til Divorce Do Us Part
What better way for a wife to get revenge on her Broadway-producer ex-husband than to write a bunch of biting lyrics about her divorce, turn them into a musical (with music by John Thomas Fischer), and mount it Off Broadway? Performed by the gifted singer-actresses Dana Wilson, Erin Maguire, and Gretchen Wylder, under the direction of Mark Waldrop, Ruthe Ponturo's irreverent ditties—with lyrics like "Oh, my nose is shiny / What's a girl to do / Let me get my compact out / And by the way fuck you"—are sometimes laugh-out-loud funny. A few songs that take us from heartbreak to murderous rage to joyful freedom, though, would have been plenty; ninety minutes of upbeat bad feelings can start to feel like grounds for divorce. (DR2, at 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

Transport
The good news about this new musical, with a book by Thomas Keneally—about four female convicts in the eighteen-thirties (Pearl Rhein, Jessica Grové, Emily Skeggs, and Terry Donnelly), on their way by ship from Ireland to Australia, where they'll serve their sentences as prostitutes—is that the music, written by Larry Kirwan, sometimes rocks. The bad news is that the show spends most of its time introducing the eight characters through song, leaving very little time for a plot to unfold. As a result, two couples fall in love, and two people die, and no one cares. Directed by Tony Walton. (Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

The Tribute Artist
When Jimmy's wealthy friend Adriana (Cynthia Harris) dies in her Manhattan townhome while they're hanging out together one night, Jimmy (Charles Busch), an aging female impersonator, hatches a plan to hide the death, pretend he's Adriana, sell the townhome, and become filthy rich. Unfortunately, the rightful heir to the place (Mary Bacon) shows up with her young transgendered son (Kiera Keeley) before the sale can be completed, and Jimmy has to step up his act. All of the actors in this Primary Stages production of Charles Busch's comedy (with the exception of Harris, who's unfortunately only present in the first scene) are going for maximum camp at maximum volume, but, under the direction of Carl Andress, neither the jokes nor the gags are funny enough to support this exhausting barrage. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

© 2014 ESTATE OF SIGMAR POLKE/ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK/VG BILD-KUNST, BONN

"Raster Drawing (Portrait of Lee Harvey Oswald)" (1963), by Sigmar Polke.

SPRING PREVIEW

THE GERMAN ARTIST SIGMAR POLKE, who died in 2010, has never had the name recognition of his peer Gerhard Richter, but a blockbuster at MOMA, opening on April 19, could change that. With more than three hundred figurative and abstract works, straddling painting, photography, printmaking, drawing, cinema, and sculpture, **"Alibis: Sigmar Polke, 1963-2010"** encapsulates, to the extent that it's possible, the quicksilver career of the reclusive titan, whose oeuvre was one long experiment. Arsenic, snail slime, and pulverized meteorites were just some of the materials Polke used on canvas, in addition to paint. But for all his forward thinking, Polke was steeped in history, lifting motifs from Goya and Hogarth, referencing the French Revolution, and revisiting Renaissance-era alchemical processes. While his images could be unnerving (notably, spectral paintings of concentration-camp watchtowers), Polke was often hilarious. In cahoots with Richter during the early sixties, the East German-born artist founded "capitalist realism," taking the piss out of Soviet socialist realism while spoofing American Pop. Warhol silk-screened "Triple Elvis"; Polke painted three mismatched socks. Polke's irreverence and relentless innovation made him a hero to generations of artists, as reflected in the show's catalogue, which includes contributions from the artists Paul Chan, Tacita Dean, and Jutta Koether.

During the third **"Frieze New York"** art fair, May 9-12, seven artists install special projects (and lend the commercial affair a nonprofit gloss). For those who like their art 24/7, the veteran Conceptualist Al Ruppersberg is running an on-site, two-room hotel. Who knows what to expect from the young gun Darren Bader? One recent show of his featured two goats. A more reverent atmosphere attends **"Lost Kingdoms of Early Southeast Asia,"** at the Met, opening April 14, an exhibition of Hindu and Buddhist sculptures made from stone and bronze during the second half of the first millennium, on loan from Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, and Myanmar.

—Andrea K. Scott

MUSEUMS SHORT LIST

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
"Ink Art: Past as Present in Contemporary China." Through April 6. • "William Kentridge: The Refusal of Time." Through May 11.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
"A World of Its Own: Photographic Practices in the Studio." Through Oct. 5.

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
"Italian Futurism, 1909-1944: Reconstructing the Universe." Through Sept. 1.

WHITNEY MUSEUM
"American Legends: From Calder to O'Keeffe." Through Oct. 19.

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
"Twice Militant: Lorraine Hansberry's Letters to *The Ladder*." Through March 16.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
"The Butterfly Conservatory." Through May 26.

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
"Visions and Nightmares: Four Centuries of Spanish Drawings." Through May 11.

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
"City as Canvas: New York City Graffiti Art from the Martin Wong Collection." Through Aug. 24.

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM
"Andres Zorn: Sweden's Master Painter." Opens Feb. 27.

NEW MUSEUM
"Pawel Althamer: The Neighbors." Through April 20.

QUEENS MUSEUM
"Peter Schumann: The Shatterer." Through March 30.

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
"The Shadows Took Shape." Through March 9.

FRONT ROW
Richard Brody discusses Film Forum's retrospective of the films of Alfred Hitchcock.

GOINGS ON, ONLINE
For details on a Johnny Cash Birthday Bash in Brooklyn and a celebration of the music of Dexter Gordon, at Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola, visit nyr.kr/nightlife.

Additional theatre openings, including Jean-Paul Sartre's "No Exit" at the Pearl and the New Victory's "Measure for Measure," at nyr.kr/theatre.

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Museum of Modern Art

"Frank Lloyd Wright and the City: Density vs. Dispersal"
This cogent and tightly installed exhibition looks at the contradictions of the American architect, who both loved and loathed urban environments. Wright spent decades refining his Broadacre City, an ideal suburb that afforded each car-driving family an acre of land—but he also envisioned such urban inventions as a mile-high skyscraper, chunky tower blocks for Chicago, and four pinwheel apartment buildings that came close to fruition on the grounds of St. Mark's Church in the East Village. Only a few of the projects here were ever realized. One, a headquarters for Johnson Wax, in Racine, Wisconsin, is captured not only in Wright's fastidious drawings but in a newsreel, extolling the high employee morale of the typing pool in the glass tower. Through June 1.

Metropolitan Museum

"The Flowering of Edo Period Painting"
The collection of Robert and Betsy Feinberg looks spectacular in the Met's Japanese galleries, but this is far more than a private-collection show: it's a trek through startlingly diverse painting styles, from the rise of the Tokugawa shogunate, at the start of the seventeenth century, to the Meiji Restoration, of 1868. The familiar pleasures of Chinese-influenced, black-and-white literati painting stand out markedly from the vibrant polychromes of the Rinpa school, such as a gold-washed silk scroll by Suzuki Kiitsu, in which a cannibalistic demon gazes at cherry blossoms while a servant washes his victims' blood-soaked clothes. The show closes with several demimonde masterpieces of the ukiyo-e ("pictures of the floating world") school; one features a high-class courtesan and her retinue strutting past a teahouse while lower-rent sex workers endure the ogling of the men outside their gilded cage. It's not a refined subject, but in its hovering forms you can just start to glimpse the hedonistic, thirty-five-million-strong metropolis that now throbs on Edo's ruins. Through Sept. 7.

International Center of Photography

"What Is a Photograph?"
As traditional, darkroom-derived photography becomes obsolete, the question this exhibition poses could not be more crucial. The curator Carol Squiers includes works from the seventies and eighties by Lucas Samaras, Sigmar Polke, and Floris Neusüss to sketch in some recent history of unconventional uses, but the show can only hint at the range of approaches. Although technical advances, including a wide array of digital manipulation, account for some of the splashier images here, many of the most alluring abstract pieces (by Marco Breuer, Adam Fuss, Liz Deschenes, Eileen Quinlan, and Alison Rossiter, among others) are the result of hands-on, cameraless techniques that are as old as photography itself. That there is no one answer to the title question is the exhibition's main strength. Through May 4.

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

"The New Beauty of Our Modern Life"
Beauty seems beside the point in this provocative group show organized by Kate Steciw, who includes one of her own digitally collaged color photographs in the mix. Alex Da Corte scatters faux lettuce leaves on his diamond-shaped tile flooring, setting a surreal tone picked up by Rachel de Joode in a series of sculptural, worm-shaped photographs that isolate the tracks of tears as Dali-esque melts. Other photographic images are embedded in vacuum-formed plastic, printed on transparent Plexiglas, or, in the case of Harm van den Dorpel's showstopper, stamped on strips of synthetic glass that have been bent into a skeletal, suspended globe. Through March 1. (Higher Pictures, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-249-6100.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

David Musgrave

The incisive British artist withholds as much as he offers in subtle drawings that at first appear to be Photo-Realist depictions of folded and torn paper, but turn out to portray invented and even impossible forms. Several incorporate a humanoid stick figure, as if some alien intelligence had crossed over into the land of still-life and left its residue. Three sculptures in the rear gallery compound the unsettling atmosphere: an acrylic skeleton with a swollen head, an aluminum mask with drooping edges, and a tiny, perhaps fetal bronze figure, abandoned on the floor. Through March 1. (Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100.)

Beverly Semmes

The artist's drawings are a lighthearted riposte to a post-feminist culture in which pole dancing is considered an act of female empowerment. Semmes, who is best known for her sculptures in fabric and clay (examples of each are on view), inherited a stash of porn magazines from a neighbor a decade ago and started to paint on the pages. Based on the evidence here, the game has some rules: eyes, hands, and feet can be seen, but that's about it. The coverup reads as both censorship and protection, especially in works where the redactions occur in short, swift, repetitive marks that suggest knitted stitches. The Dada collages of Hannah Hoch are an obvious precedent, but the works also recall the faked splotches of ectoplasm in early-twentieth-century spirit photography, as if Semmes were reuniting bodies and souls. Through March 15. (Inglett, 522 W. 24th St. 212-647-9111.)

"Carol Bove on the High Line"
The final, four-block stretch of the High Line remains overgrown, with sweeping views of the Hudson to the west and the rail yards below. Seven gnomic sculptures by the marvellous New York artist complement rather than compete with the experience. Two white powder-coated-steel coils unfurl like laconic Slinkys. Three angular constructions made of rusty I-beams evoke railroad ties. A knee-high concrete block topped with a delicate brass framework suggests the work of a modernist Lilliputian. A large bronze plinth with a jade-green patina gracing one edge is a collaboration between the artist and entropy—it's a watermark, evidence of damage sustained by the sculpture at the artist's studio during Hurricane Sandy. Admission is free, but reservations are required. Through May 31. (The High Line; enter at W. 34th St., west of Eleventh Ave. 212-500-6035.)

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Hassan Hajjaj

The London-based Moroccan photographer returned to Marrakesh for these vivacious, brightly colored images of veiled and djellaba-clad women on motor scooters, sporting logos and flaunting bare legs. Hajjaj's approach seems inspired by both Malick Sidibe's high-spirited studio portraiture and Bill Cunningham's hit-and-run snaps of contemporary street fashion. And, if that's not attention-getting enough, he frames his pictures in rows of consumer goods—cans of soft drinks, tinned tomato sauce, vials of colorful powdered pigments—giving the show a Pop-art punch. Through March 8. (Grahne, 157 Hudson St., at Laight St. 212-240-9442.)

Kazuko Miyamoto

Tokyo-born but fifty years a New Yorker, this post-minimalist sculptor—once an assistant to Sol LeWitt, whom she met during a fire drill in their building in SoHo—makes constructions of string, which are threaded methodically around networks of nails on the wall and in the floor. The example here, a circuit of hand-dyed cotton stretching nearly ten feet tall, recalls the Brazilian artist Lygia Pape's shafts of golden filaments, but Miyamoto's rougher art makes a virtue of the imperfections that arise despite its rigorous geometry. Nearly a dozen works on paper from the seventies exhibit the same algorithmic creativity and find space for personal invention in a discipline that would seem to offer very little breathing room. Through March 2. (Invisible Exports, 89 Eldridge St. 212-226-5447.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Mariss Jansons conducts the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra at Carnegie Hall in May.

SPRING PREVIEW

THERE'LL BE A LOT OF ACTIVITY in the orchestral world in the coming months, especially at the New York Philharmonic, where Alan Gilbert has launched what may be a visionary overture, the first **NY Phil Biennial** (May 28-June 7), a cavalcade of new music by composers young and old who hail from North America, Europe, and Asia. With the Met subsisting solely on revivals in April and May, the focus on contemporary opera will be doubly welcome. The schedule for the Biennial includes the U.S. première of Toshio Hosokawa's monodrama "The Raven" (after Poe), performed by Gotham Chamber Opera, and of HK Gruber's "Gloria—A Pig Tale," a co-presentation with the Juilliard School and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where the piece, a madcap comic opera with the ominous undertones unique to postwar Vienna, will be staged.

At Carnegie Hall, the **"Spring for Music"** festival, which brings in outstanding orchestras from the U.S. and Canada for a weeklong blowout, returns for its final run (May 5-10). Gilbert and the Philharmonic will take part, offering the New York première of Christopher Rouse's Requiem; also included are the symphonies of Seattle, Rochester, Winnipeg, Cincinnati, and Pittsburgh, performing such out-of-the-way fare as John Luther Adams's "Become Ocean," Howard Hanson's opera "Merry Mount" (premièred by the Met in 1934), and pieces by Varèse, R. Murray Schafer, and the African-Canadian late-Romantic composer R. Nathaniel Dett. Of all of Carnegie's orchestral riches this spring, however, the most tempting may well be the three concerts given by the elegant and commanding Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and its distinguished conductor, **Mariss Jansons** (May 16-18). They'll perform a seldom heard John Adams piece, "Slonimsky's Earbox," as well as repertory by, among others, Brahms, Berlioz, Beethoven (the Fourth Piano Concerto, with Mitsuko Uchida), Ligeti, and Shostakovich.

—Russell Platt

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera

Russian-American relations may be trending downward, but things are looking up at the Met, where the young director Dmitri Tcherniakov has radically but reverently updated Borodin's **"Prince Igor"**: by removing all of the extra music that Glazunov and Rimsky-Korsakov composed to make the unfinished piece into a more conventional type of opera and by reordering many of the remaining scenes, Tcherniakov brings Borodin's empathetic lyricism to the fore. The lead singers—including Ildar Abdrazakov, Oksana Dyka, Mikhail Petrenko, and the incandescent Anita Rachvelishvili—all do satisfying work; so do the orchestra and chorus, under the firm hand of Gianandrea Noseda—especially in the stirring "Polovtsian Dances," which have thankfully been left intact. (March 1 at noon and March 4 at 7.) • **Also playing:** The Met revives Jeremy Sams's 2011 staging of **"The Enchanted Island,"** a Baroque pasticcio that gave audiences the valuable opportunity to hear music by such giants as Rameau and Vivaldi (in addition to Handel, of course) resonating into the rafters of the Met's glorious auditorium. The cast, once again, is star-strewn, featuring, among others, Susan Graham, Danielle de Niese, David Daniels, Anthony Roth Costanzo, and Plácido Domingo (in the cameo role of Neptune); Patrick Summers. (Feb. 26 at 7:30 and March 1 at 8.) • When the superstar tenor Jonas Kaufmann was last featured in the French repertory here, it was in Des McAnuff's uninspired "Faust." But his baritonal sound and noble stage presence in the title role are ideal for Richard Eyre's new staging of **"Werther,"** which has a mellow, sostenuto quality appropriate for the most warmly lyrical of Massenet's operas. The French mezzo-soprano Sophie Koch, as Charlotte, and the Serbian bass-baritone David Bižić, as Albert, make respectable Met débuts, but the house favorite Lisette Oropesa lights up the stage as Sophie; Alain Altinoglu draws out the ebb and flow of the score with exquisite subtlety, and the orchestra seems grateful for his expertise. (Feb. 28 and March 3 at 7:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

Gotham Chamber Opera

This feisty group thrives not only on new repertory but on innovative collaborations. The Metropolitan Museum is its partner this time, presenting the company in a double bill on the theme of war: Monteverdi's furious **"Il Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda"** (staged in the Arms and Armor Court) and the world première of Lembit Beecher's **"I Have No Stories to Tell You"** (presented in the Medieval Sculpture Hall), which is scored for an ensemble similar to Monteverdi's. The singers include Beth Clayton, Craig Verm, and Abigail Fischer; Neal Goren conducts. (Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 212-570-3949. Feb. 26-27 at 7.)

"Vienna, City of Dreams"

In the heyday of Carl Schorske and the late Kirk Varnedoe—say, the late eighties—an all-Vienna festival at Carnegie Hall would have been cutting edge; now it's largely a way to attractively repackage music that everyone knows and loves. But the venue is importing more treasures than

ILLUSTRATION BY RICCARDO VECCHIO

can wisely be ignored, and there are a number of interesting detours to be taken—not least in the festival's panel discussions, which include a frank reëvaluation of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra's compromised behavior during the Nazi era. The initial week of the festival gives us a slate of concerts by the Philharmonic and the affiliated Vienna State Opera. The first of two operas-in-concert is Berg's **"Wozzeck,"** featuring Matthias Goerne and Evelyn Herlitzius, conducted by Franz Welser-Möst; the second is Strauss's **"Salome,"** with Gun-Brit Barkmin, Falk Struckmann, Gerhard A. Siegel, and Jane Henschel in the leading roles and Andris Nelsons on the podium. (212-247-7800. Feb. 28 and March 1 at 8. For a full listing of concerts, panels, and other festival events, see carnegiehall.org.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra

The opening concerts in Carnegie Hall's Vienna festival are offered by the matchless orchestra and one of its most frequent collaborators, the conductor Franz Welser-Möst. The first, featuring singers of the Vienna State Opera as well as the New York Choral Artists, offers not only Beethoven's beloved Ninth Symphony but, as a prelude, Schoenberg's late-Romantic choral plea for peace, "Friede auf Erden"; the second features symphonies by Mozart and Bruckner (No. 6 in A Major) as well as a work by the contemporary composer Johannes Maria Staud ("On Comparative Meteorology," inspired by the stories of Bruno Schulz). (212-247-7800. Feb. 25-26 at 8.)

Voices of Ascension: The B-Minor Mass

Viennese music is not the only big attraction in New York this week. Dennis Keene's superb choir carries on, offering the supreme masterwork of J. S. Bach, with orchestra, at the Church of the Ascension; the vocal soloists include Dominique Labelle, Silvie Jensen, and Dashon Burton. (Fifth Ave. at 10th St. 212-358-7060. Feb. 27 at 8.)

RECITALS

Axiom

The latest program from Jeffrey Milarsky's top-notch modern-repertory ensemble at Juilliard has a touch of Viennese flavor, too, with the Austrian composer Georg Friedrich Haas's "Monodie" (1998-99) taking its place among classic works by Oliver Knussen and David Lang ("Cheating, Lying, Stealing"). (Alice Tully Hall. Feb. 27 at 8. Free tickets are available at the Juilliard box office.)

Brentano String Quartet and Vijay Iyer

Iyer, an extremely talented composer and pianist who easily jumps the barrier between classical and jazz, collaborates with the eminent quartet in the New York première of his work "Time, Place, Action"; two Beethoven quartets (including the second "Razumovsky," in E Minor) complete the program. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. March 1 at 8.)

Leonidas Kavakos: The Beethoven Sonatas

This incisive violinist often does his most probing work far away from the glamour of orchestral concertos. With his longtime accompanist, Enrico Pace, he takes on a complete survey of Beethoven's violin sonatas in three concerts, part of Carnegie Hall's Viennese festival. (Zankel Hall. carnegiehall.org. March 2-4 at 7:30.)

DANCE

The lighting design of "New Work for the Desert" mimics the colors of the American Southwest.

SPRING PREVIEW

WHEN BETH GILL'S "ELECTRIC MIDWIFE" premièred, in June, 2011, only twelve viewers were allowed into each performance at the Chocolate Factory's industrial space. Onstage, six women, kept apart in two groups by tape on the floor, performed simple movements arranged in intricate patterns. Each dancer mirrored her counterpart in perfect symmetry; the pairs were so connected that they seemed to swallow in synch. The work won Gill a Bessie Award for best emerging choreographer. For her new piece, **"New Work for the Desert,"** which débuts at New York Live Arts on March 19, Gill draws inspiration from the landscapes of the American Southwest. To evoke those open, glowing skies, the lighting designer Thomas Dunn floods the intimate venue with vivid color. Four women and two men, including the appealing Kayvon Pourazar, suggest the vastness of space, through movement that is meditative, serene, and precise.

Even before Trisha Brown's troupe climbed the walls of the Whitney, in 1971, the museum has hosted dancers in the galleries. In recent years, though, performance art has moved to the center of the Whitney's Biennials, with the choreographer Sarah Michelson winning the prestigious Bucksbaum Award for her "Devotion Study #1" in 2012. This Biennial features several edgy young dance-makers, including Jacolby Satterwhite, who vogued during Jay Z's "Picasso Baby" performance at the Pace gallery, and the Los Angeles choreographer Taisha Paggett. The most exciting is Miguel Gutierrez, whose eclectic interests in poetry and music fuel his sprawling, emotional works. His dances are laden with eccentric props and costumes. For one piece, he wore an enormous Baroque-style wig; in another, the stage was strewn with old television sets like an abandoned RadioShack. In **"Age & Beauty,"** which runs April 23-May 4 at the museum, Gutierrez grapples with approaching middle age in his typically voracious manner.

—Katia Bachko

ILLUSTRATION BY JON HAN

New York City Ballet
The season closes with two strong mixed bills and a rarity. Some of the most striking works in the company's repertory are set to French music, a fact underlined by the "À la Française" program, which includes both the whirlwind "La Valse"—a Balanchine ballet set to Ravel, about a woman who waltzes with death—and Jerome Robbins's delicate Debussy reverie, "Afternoon of a Faun," which takes place in a dance studio. Both were made for Tanaquil LeClerq, a chic, urbane ballerina who became Balanchine's second wife, and is now the subject of an excellent new documentary. The bill also includes Liam Scarlett's first ballet for the company, "Acheron," a large ensemble work with undertones of eroticism and conflict between the sexes. Peter Martins's seldom performed "Todo Buenos Aires"—part of the "Contemporary Choreographers" program—is inspired by the razor-sharp steps of tango and set to music by Astor Piazzolla. For the final matinée, the company has chosen an all-Balanchine program featuring three masterworks. • Feb. 25 at 7:30: "La Stravaganza," "A Place for Us," and "Todo Buenos Aires." • Feb. 26 at 7:30 and March 1 at 2 and 8: "Acheron," "Afternoon of a Faun," "Walpurgisnacht Ballet," and "La Valse." • Feb. 27 at 7:30 and Feb. 28 at 8: "Bal de Couture," "DGV: Danse à Grande Vitesse," and "The Four Seasons." • March 2 at 3: "Concerto Barocco," "The Four Temperaments," and "Stravinsky Violin Concerto." (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-496-0600.)

Kimberly Bartosik / "You Are My Heat and Glare"
Bartosik's evening-length work is a rumination on intimacy in its various guises, which she explores through a series of duets, both danced and spoken. Inspired in part by the Canadian poet Anne Carson's "The Anthropology of Water," the piece offers a study in impenetrability, the mystery that surrounds each person's thoughts, and the strange ways in which our subjective experiences of life interconnect, sometimes with violence, sometimes with empathy and harmony. (New York Live Arts, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Feb. 26-March 1 at 7:30.)

Brazil Festival / Mimulus Companhia de Dança
When this Brazilian troupe, founded in 1992, made its American début, at Jacob's Pillow in 2007, its effortless and lightly humorous approach to social dance hit the kind of pleasure neurons that can make a company addictive. Yet Mimulus is only now making its New York début, kicking off the Joyce Theatre's three-week festival of Brazilian dance. "Dolores," set to songs from Pedro Almodóvar films, is absurd, sexy, and inventive, but why are the women dragged by their hair and used to sweep the floor? The strain of misogyny obstructs the fun. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Feb. 26 at 7:30, Feb. 27-28 at 8, and March 1 at 2 and 8.)

Casebolt and Smith
The Los Angeles duo of Liz Casebolt and Joel Smith bring their "O(h)" to the 92nd Street Y's Harkness Dance Festival. These two move and sing and make jokes with equal aplomb, targeting the pomposity and obscurity of modern dance. As a dance-theatre work that discusses its own making, "O(h)" already fits into the festival's explanatory format, but these performances promise to explain some of the explaining. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Feb. 28 and March 1 at 8 and March 2 at 3.)

"Sally"
Three choreographers who share a first name and a sense of adventure convene in this program. Sally Gross, who began her career in the nineteen-sixties, performs a solo and presents a duet and a trio, both of them recent and sparely formal. Sally Bowden, who came up in the seventies, dances a solo of shifting weight. Sally Silvers, a maverick since the eighties, shows some of her new Hitchcock project, featuring the ex-Cunningham dancers Dylan Crossman and Melissa Toogood. (University Settlement, 184 Eldridge St. 212-453-4532. Feb. 28 and March 1 at 8.)

Navaridas & Deutinger / Ferenc Fehér / Sheinfeld & Laor
The international acts débuting on this free triple bill are little known here. In "Your Majesties," the Austrian performer Alex Deutinger recites Barack Obama's Nobel Peace Prize speech while executing exaggeratedly casual and absurd gestures choreographed by Marta Navaridas. In "Stix 66," the Hungarian autodidact Ferenc Fehér looks like Nosferatu undergoing electroconvulsive therapy as he tries to embody nothingness. And in "Two Room Apartment" Niv Sheinfeld and Oren Laor, two Israeli dancers who are romantic partners offstage, use repetition to establish interpersonal boundaries before they violate them. (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101. Feb. 28 and March 1 at 8.)

"Brazil Festival" / Companhia Urbana de Dança
Sonia Destri's choreography, spare and cerebral, uses Brazilian hip-hop and other urban dance forms as its starting point, without reducing them to caricature. The seven young male dancers move with a raw grace; several come from the crime-ridden favelas of Rio de Janeiro. The pared-down, well-paced solos and ensemble sections that make up "ID:Identidades," from 2010, are notable as much for their rigor as for their energy and power. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. March 3-5 at 7:30 and March 6 at 8.)

ABOVE & BEYOND

"Ladies and Gentlemen . . . the Beatles!"
This year is the fiftieth anniversary of the Beatles' début on "The Ed Sullivan Show," and if you missed "The Night That Changed America: A Grammy Salute to the Beatles," the recent TV special, or "The Fest," an annual celebration in New York City of all things Fab Four, check out this multimedia exhibition at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, which is up through May 10. It focusses on the band's early years and its first tours in the U.S., and there are rare behind-the-scenes photos by Bob Bonis, who was the tour manager in America during that period, along with listening kiosks, handwritten set lists from their concerts, and guitars owned by George Harrison, Elvis Presley, and Buddy Holly. A number of public events are scheduled, including a live taping of WNYC's "Soundcheck" program on Feb. 27, with a debate about which band is better, the Beatles or the Rolling Stones. The actor Mike Myers and his brother, the writer and musician Paul Myers, are taking the side of the Beatles, and the comedian Ophira Eisenberg and Bill Janovitz, the front man of Buffalo Tom and a writer, are taking the side of the Stones. (40 Lincoln Center Plaza. 917-275-6975.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

With top bidders escaping the cold in places out of town, it's a mostly quiet week on the auctions circuit. **Christie's** holds its mid-season sale of American art (Feb. 26), with the lots spanning the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; it includes the usual pretty vistas (one of the prettiest, "Vermont Landscape," is by Milton Avery), sea views, and still-lifes. In addition, the house is holding a companion sale online (through March 4) of works by the African-American modernist Jacob Lawrence, among them the brightly colored, collagelike "Builders—Men on Ladders." (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) • As part of a general sale of fine photographs at **Swann** on Feb. 27, the photographer Bill Diodato, a mainstay of life-style and fashion magazines, is selling off a stash of photography books, including works by Man Ray, Moriyama, and Ruscha, as well as a copy of Alexey Brodovitch's famous—and extremely rare—1945 tome, "Ballet," with text by Edwin Denby. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)

READINGS AND TALKS

"Saving the Fulton Fish Market"
Robert LaValva, the founder of the New Amsterdam Market, which is located in the old Fulton Fish Market, in lower Manhattan, joins Paul Greenberg, the author of "Four Fish," and Mark Kurlansky, the author of "The Big Oyster," to discuss the market's history and their vision for the future of the site, which is threatened by development. (Jefferson Market Library, 425 Sixth Ave., at 10th St. newamsterdammarket.org. Feb. 26 at 6.)

"Selected Shorts"
An evening of stories about heroism and villainy, hosted by the designer Chip Kidd, with readings from "Batman and Robin Have an Altercation," by Stephen King, "The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay," by Michael Chabon, and other works. The readers include Aya Cash. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Feb. 26 at 7:30.)

American Museum of Natural History
Elizabeth Kolbert, a writer for this magazine and the author of "The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History," joins Michael Novacek, provost of science at the museum, to discuss the process of extinction and humanity's role in it. The science writer Flora Lichtman is the moderator. (Central Park W. at 79th St. 212-769-5100. Feb. 27 at 6:30.)

NEW FROM THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE DOVEKEEPERS*

ALICE HOFFMAN

The MUSEUM *of* EXTRAORDINARY THINGS

"A bewitching world of time and place. . .suffused with magical moments, a mysterious disappearance, and romance."
—*Family Circle*

"Arresting. . .rich with literary inspiration, history, and urban legend."
—GREGORY MAGUIRE, author of *Wicked* and *Out of Oz*

"Alice Hoffman understands and delivers the ordinary and the extraordinary."
—AMY BLOOM, author of *Away*

"Many novels these days are called 'stunning,' but this one truly is: part love story, part mystery, part history, and all beauty."
—JODI PICOULT, author of *The Storyteller* and *Lone Wolf*

Also available as an ebook and an audiobook

SimonandSchuster.com SCRIBNER

THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
BEST BETS

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences was formed, in 1927, with a brief "to raise the cultural, educational, and scientific standards" of film. That noble purpose was sustained until July 12, 2013, the release date for "Grown Ups 2," in which a frightened deer urinates on Adam Sandler's face. In the animal's defense, one could argue that it was merely taking movie criticism to a higher and more clarifying level. Nevertheless, "Grown Ups 2" will not feature when the Academy doles out its garlands, on March 2nd, even in Best Visual Effects.

What hope, then, for the standards of old? Could there still be cause for celebration? Well, like the nation, the Academy has its first African-American president; indeed, unlike the nation, it has its first female African-American president. Cheryl Boone Isaacs was elected in July, having proved her worth by masterminding the publicity campaigns that brought five Oscars to "Braveheart" and six to "Forrest Gump." She is clearly a miracle worker, although change at the top, as Barack Obama would be the first to warn her, doesn't logically lead to reformation below. Isaacs now heads an organization whose members, when polled by the Los Angeles *Times* two years ago, proved to be ninety-four per cent white and seventy-seven per cent male, with an average age of sixty-two, and artistic tastes to match. Remember the deliciously awkward stunt pulled by Chris Rock, when he hosted the Oscars, in 2005—taking a camera team to a Magic Johnson theatre in Crenshaw, Los Angeles, and asking patrons whether they had seen the nominees for Best Picture. Mostly, he drew a blank. Statistics show that, at this point, eighty-eight per cent of Academy members began to squirm.

If they look relieved these days, it's because the rivalry of 2013 has turned hot, and because heat draws the customers like an open fire. We now have nine good movies jostling for Best Picture; we have a cluster of major stars; and, in "12 Years a Slave," we have matters of historical weight being addressed not with an overcrowded slog (think of "Gandhi") but with intimate concentration. Happiest of all, we have a box-office that is worthy of the occasion. The takings for "Gravity" have slipped the surly bonds of Earth, while "American Hustle" and "The Wolf of Wall Street" have earned sums that even their avaricious heroes might have deigned to pocket. Who knows, if Martin Scorsese's film takes home a prize, its domestic receipts could yet sneak past those of "Grown Ups 2." Only another twenty million to go.

All this bodes well for March 2nd, not least if you're a television executive. Ideally, you want the folks watching your telecast to recognize the movies that are being fêted and the stars who are being mobbed. Bemused viewers are less likely to tune in, or stay tuned. Hence the ratings spike of 1998, when an audience of fifty-five million, fifteen million more than the year before, watched "Titanic" being raised to glory. A decade later, the numbers were down on the ocean floor, at thirty-two million. The Best Picture nominees that year were a distinctive crew: "Juno," "Michael Clayton," "There Will Be Blood," "Atonement," and—the winner—"No Country for Old Men." But their total global returns, though healthy enough, amounted to a third of the pile that "Titanic" had amassed. As for the weird and wonderful creatures ascending the stage to collect their statuettes—Tilda Swinton, Marion Cotillard, Javier Bardem—who *were* these people? Where was Captain Jack Sparrow? How about the big yellow thing from "Transformers"? Or Shrek?

Unease of this kind has prevailed

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

since 1953, the first year the Oscars were shown on TV—not just the new kid on the block, in the eyes of Hollywood, but a sign that the whole block was under threat. Bob Hope, the white-tied m.c. that evening, was on the defensive. "Television—that's where movies go when they die," he said, and the nervousness behind the gag has never subsided. If anything, it has deepened in recent years. You could argue, looking at the cast lists on HBO, that television is where movie stars go when their big-screen scripts start to die. Oscar night is anxiety central: TV needs the stars to light up the ratings, and the stars, for their part, use TV to stage what is, in essence, a communal bath of self-love. "Just a small group getting together for a pat on the back," in the words of Janet Gaynor, who won the first Oscar for Best Actress, in 1929. Since then, the pat has become a caress, and the caress has grown into the kind of activity that in "The Wolf of Wall Street" is reserved for yachts and jets.

And yet, against all odds, the show goes on. Not just that: it has got itself a new warmup act, nuttier and more unflagging than Hope, Rock, and Johnny Carson combined. The Oscars, it turns out, are made for life online. The crunching of numbers, the groundless soothsaying, the venting of inexhaustible spleen: such are the habits on which we digitally thrive, and in the Academy Awards we have found the perfect place to unleash them. Whether Leonardo DiCaprio or Matthew McConaughey, or neither of them, will be crowned Best Actor is a matter of such brazen unimportance that we have gone crazy trying to call it. Wins in smaller arenas, like the SAG and the W.G.A., are browsed over like steaming entrails on the altars of ancient Rome. We have been introduced to "Oscarologists," a previously unknown profession, and one Web site unveiled "exclusive charts that track how the Experts' Oscar predictions have changed over time." Not only are we looking forward to March 2nd; we are already looking forward to looking back in anger at the awards that confounded our hunches, at our loss of the office sweepstake, at the stop-start tears, the sagging jokes, and the normally rational women who choose, for one night only, to dress like exploded cupcakes.

All this is part of the fun. In fact, to decry it, even as we sit transfixed, is often more fun than the event itself, although the minds of true Oscar lovers will already be drifting elsewhere, to the sunlit uplands of 2015. Will it be "Gone Girl" or "Interstellar," or maybe Clint Eastwood's "Jersey Boys"? No one has seen these movies, because they are not yet finished, but so what? Opinions must be formed. Bets should be laid. The race is on.

—Anthony Lane

GLORY DAYS

REVENGE OF THE NERDS

A lot of people peak in high school. Until recently, it seemed that Governor Chris Christie was not one of them. But then came Bridgegate, the scandal that has sunk the Governor's reputation as a Republican star and refocussed the spotlight on his high-school glory days. Some background: At the center of Bridgegate sits David Wildstein, the Port Authority official who ordered the lane closings leading to the notorious George Washington Bridge traffic jam last September. Wildstein, a Christie appointee, went to Livingston High School at the same time as Christie; newspapers have described him as Christie's "high school friend." At a press conference, Christie nixed this idea, citing their differences in social status as teens. "We didn't travel in the same circles in high school," he said. "You know, I was the class president and athlete. I don't know what David was doing during that period of time." Later, when Wildstein turned on his former patron—his lawyer claimed that "evidence exists" tying Christie to the lane closings—Christie's office dredged up high school again, distributing a memo to friends and supporters that portrayed Wildstein as a loser. "As a sixteen year old kid, [Wildstein] sued over a local school board election," it said. "He was publicly accused by his high school social studies teacher of deceptive behavior." (Neither of these claims proved to be entirely accurate.)

Could it be that a proper understanding of Bridgegate depends on decoding the social dynamics of Livingston High School, circa 1979? It was, as Christie pointed out, a big place, with more than eighteen hundred students. Geography: hangout spots included "the circle" and the school parking lot (Chevy "conversion vans" were popular). Dress: "We wore Buffalo shoes and Huk-a-poo shirts," Jayme Ratner, Class of 1980, recalled. Valerie Valente, an upstate innkeeper and a former theatre geek, added, "Gloria Vanderbilt jeans, Sasson, Jordache." There were disco fans and "rockers." (The latter wore Yes, Genesis, and, of course, Springsteen T-shirts.) Prom theme: "Wonderful Tonight" (after the Eric Clapton song). Harlan Coben, a mystery writer, said, "I would say that a third of the class wore varsity jackets." Saturday nights: Valente recalled a club in West Orange called Creation, but most of the action was in people's basements. "There were probably three party houses in town," Stephen Slotnick, a salesman at Paper Mart, Inc., said, adding, "Mine was one of them." Afterward, people gathered at the Heritage Diner. Ratner said, "You'd drive through the parking lot to see whose car was there, or you'd go in" and have "a Coke and a corn muffin or fries with turkey gravy."

Christie was a catcher for the baseball team, which won the state championship. "We had carte blanche," Slotnick, who was his teammate, said. He was a perennial class president. Valente remembers him dressing up as the school's mascot, a lancer. Early political accomplishments included establishing a "free lunch" period at school and organizing a boycott of the Heritage Diner when it kicked out his friends. He looked different then than he does now. "Lanky," Slotnick said, describing the Governor's high-school physique. On the field, he said, "we used to call him Buttocks."

And what of Wildstein? On Facebook, there is a group dedicated to memories of Livingston High in the sixties and seventies. Amid reminiscences about fast-food joints ("White Castle rat burgers!"), discussion recently turned to Bridgegate. "I am opening up Pandora's box, but I would like to know if anyone here knew David Wildstein," the group's leader,

MUSICAL COMEDY IS BACK WITH A BANG!

Written by
WOODY ALLEN

Direction and Choreography by
SUSAN STROMAN

Based on the Screenplay of the Film BULLETS OVER BROADWAY by Woody Allen and Douglas McGrath

PREVIEWS BEGIN MARCH 11

Telecharge.com or 212.239.6200 ···· St. James Theatre, 246 West 44th Street

BULLETSOVERBROADWAY.COM @BulletsOverBway

Photo: Jason Bell

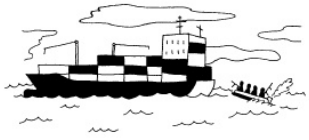
Michele Florio-Campisi, wrote. Here people's memories seemed to falter. "I don't remember him," someone wrote. Others offered vague recollections: "They lived on Shrewsbury Ave." Another wrote, "Chris had a personality. Wildstein was nondescript."

Among grads of Livingston High, at least, Christie is still Presidential material. Wildstein became the mayor of Livingston in 1987, and he was installed as an adviser to the school's Key Club. On Facebook, Ratner suggested that he assumed this role because he never got elected to the club as a teen-ager. "He's a wannabe," she wrote. Slotnick piled on, too: "He was the kind of kid who you would want to wedgie."

So if Wildstein was the nerd the Governor made him out to be, was Christie a bully? Buttocks, like the man he grew up to be, was used to getting his way. During his senior year, a star catcher transferred to Livingston High from a private school, taking Christie's starting place on the baseball team. The Washington *Post* quoted a teammate, Scott Parsons, who recalled Christie telling him that his family wanted to try to block the move. They were, he said, "considering consulting attorneys."

—Lizzie Widdicombe

THE PICTURES
CONTENDER



When war broke out in Somalia in 1991, Barkhad Abdi was six; overnight, Mogadishu changed from being a place where he was afraid to toss a rock, lest a passerby reprimand him, to one where killing and rape were normal. His mother evacuated the family, and they joined Abdi's father in Yemen, where he was teaching math. Several years later, they immigrated to the U.S., settling in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood of Minneapolis, home to many expatriate Somalis. Abdi entered high school, learned English from Biggie, played basketball, and eventually got a job driving a Lincoln town car for his brother's limousine company.

That's what he was doing when he saw an ad for an open casting call at the local community center: Somalis needed for "Captain Phillips," a film by Paul Greengrass, starring Tom Hanks, about the pirate attack on the cargo ship Maersk Alabama that took place in 2009. Abdi went. On a questionnaire that he was asked to fill out, he checked every "Yes" box, including the one next to "Can you swim?" He couldn't.

Abdi tried out with three other men he knew from his apartment complex. He played Abduwali Muse, the nervy leader; Faysal Ahmed, a muscly fellow Abdi calls "the big guy," was his ruthless second fiddle; Mahat M. Ali was the boat driver; and Barkhad (Little B) Abdirahman, the brother of one of Abdi's friends, was the kid pirate. After the audition, they were flown to Los Angeles and learned from Paul Greengrass, over lunch at Shutters on the Beach, in Santa Monica, that they'd been cast. Abdi said, "He was, like, 'All you guys in the movie! Now you have to be pirates. I'm not looking for actors.'" Abdi won a BAFTA for his performance, and was nominated for an Academy Award—a rare thing for a first-time actor. He may also be the only Hollywood star ever to have been arrested for possession of khat. (The charges were dismissed.) At the time of the film's release, he didn't even have an agent.

The other night, Abdi, who is five feet eleven and weighs a hundred and thirty pounds, was at the South Beverly Grill, in Beverly Hills. A black Lincoln town car like the one he used to drive was waiting for him. "Exact same color," he said. It was nine, and he was carefully carving up a hamburger, the only thing he'd eaten all day. Earlier, at a dinner for Oscar nominees at Spago, he had been too nervous to eat. At an Academy luncheon at the Beverly Wilshire, he'd been too busy meeting people: Alfonso Cuarón, the director of "Gravity"; Christian Bale.

Between bites, Abdi talked process. To empathize with his character, he said, "I would think about where I woke up and where he woke up at. You don't want to go back." He went on, "I thought, What would you be like if you was there and you had nothing, you know?" (The real Muse is serving a thirty-three-year sentence in a federal prison in Indiana; his accomplices were shot dead by Navy SEALS.) Also, Abdi said, "I watch a lot of movies." In spite of his family's relative good fortune, working on the film returned him to his childhood. "That was the last time I had seen a real AK," he said. As for the film's iconic line, "I'm the captain now," which Abdi delivers to Tom Hanks on the bridge of the ship, it was Abdi's improvisation. "That was a message to Tom that I'm the lead," Abdi said, revealing a set of very large teeth.

Abdi, who learned to swim, shoot, and steer a skiff, now finds himself in a predicament similar to Muse's at the time of the film's action: having improbably boarded the ship, he realizes that his grasp on power is tenuous, and he is still waiting for a payday. For his work on "Captain Phillips," a fifty-five-million-dollar film, Abdi earned sixty-five thousand dollars. That was more than two years ago. After filming, he went back to work for his brother, selling mobile phones at his shop in a Somali-run mall in Cedar-Riverside. He shook his head and smiled. "How I thought about it was, like, When the movie came out, reviews either gonna be good or bad. Either way, I cannot be working here." On the day of the première, he quit.

Barkhad Abdi

When Abdi is in Los Angeles to promote the film, he subsists on a per diem, good at the Beverly Hilton, where the studio likes to put him up. The town car is available only for official publicity events. His clothes are loaners. Recently, Abdi requested that he be allowed to stay at a commuter's hotel near LAX, to be closer to his friend, a Somali cabdriver from Minneapolis, who shuttles him around for free. After the Oscars, Abdi

plans to move to L.A. His roommate will be Faysal Ahmed, the big guy, who now has an agent, too.

—Dana Goodyear

POSTSCRIPT
MAVIS GALLANT

"I'm forced to say that it seems very unsatisfying to me, and simply no story at all, if the ending is to be left so far in the air," a *New Yorker* editor wrote in an internal memo about Mavis Gallant's 1961 story "Two Questions." (Between 1951 and 1995, Gallant, who died last week, at the age of ninety-one, published a hundred and sixteen stories in this magazine.) "Seems to me that *something* should be completed, or it's just a long sketch. . . . It's like life, and not—to me—like fiction." William Maxwell, Gallant's editor, replied, "The older I get the more grateful I am not to be told how everything comes out."

It's that quality—Gallant's "like-lifeness," her unresolved presentness—that makes her stories sit so solidly, almost badnaturedly, in memory. They have come to dinner, and, no matter how late the hour, you just can't show them to the door. You're haunted both by the moments of beauty and intelligence and by the scenes of devastating loneliness or disappointment. Haunted, too, by the details of her biography that informed so much of her experience, fictional and otherwise: being left at a boarding school at the age of four ("The only thing I remember," she said, "is my mother putting me on a chair and saying, 'I'll be back in ten minutes.' She just didn't come back"); not being told of her father's death until several years after the fact; deciding to give up a job as a journalist in Montreal and move to Europe alone, in her late twenties; her subsequent months of penniless hunger in Spain (while her literary agent pocketed her earnings); or her lacerating observations of the 1968 student uprisings in Paris, in which no one gets away unexamined.

There's an unapologetic tone to most of Gallant's stories, and also to the stories about her. She didn't apologize for wanting to write at a time when women, Canadian women, as Alice Munro has documented, were not expected to put themselves forward. She didn't apologize for leaving Canada—and leaving her homeland forever in a quandary about the extent to which it could claim her. She lived most of her life as a foreigner, in France, childless and husbandless. (An early marriage ended when she was twenty-five.) Had she lived another way, she wouldn't have been the writer that she was. But it's easy to underestimate how difficult these decisions may have been for her. In a 1960 diary, she recorded a conversation with a friend, who told her:

> "You want to put yourself in a box. . . . Is that the life you want? . . . Do you want every day to be just like the next? Now you are free. You haven't a man—that is, you haven't a man to betray you, to cheat you, and to take all your money. Install yourself in your new apartment, have all the adventure you like, but never allow any man to spend more than two evenings *consecutively* there." I kept saying, "But what is to become of me?" "Nothing. You are a writer. Why do you want to be anything else? . . . Why do you want to be anything but *Mavis*?" he asked.

Gallant was sometimes unforgiving, but also compassionate toward the characters she inhabited. I came to her as a reader years before I had any idea that I might one day know her. For a young woman, reading secondhand copies of the collections "From the Fifteenth District" and "Home Truths" was a revelation. Gallant's characters were so interior one had the sense that they were almost trapped inside their own minds, peering outward through two circles of light. The degree of self-knowledge was painful, the understanding of the moods and motivations of others astonishing, but the moments of real connection heartbreakingly rare. There was isolation, and then there was the acceptance of isolation.

Gallant was also, and ever, funny. Writing, she told *The Paris Review*, is "like a love affair: the beginning is the best part." In an early letter to Maxwell, she joked, "I have another [story] nearly ready, but it is about children, and I wonder if you haven't had enough of that from me. (1) Yes (2) No (3) Undecided (4) Never heard of Eisenhower." The one time I met Gallant in person, in 2006, she was hunched and crippled by osteoporosis, but she skewered two people I knew with such startling and sly precision that I was speechless for a moment, thinking I'd misunderstood. But Gallant's vision is not, generally, a satirical one; it isn't calculated for effect. She is simply honest. In early 2004, she wrote to me, "I don't believe any of us shed tears of nostalgia over 2003, which began with threats and ended with an earthquake. For 2004, I wish you not just une Bonne Année but une Année Meilleure—brighter and truthful." Truthful, it seems to me, is one of the best things that can be said about her writing. Truthful—and like life.

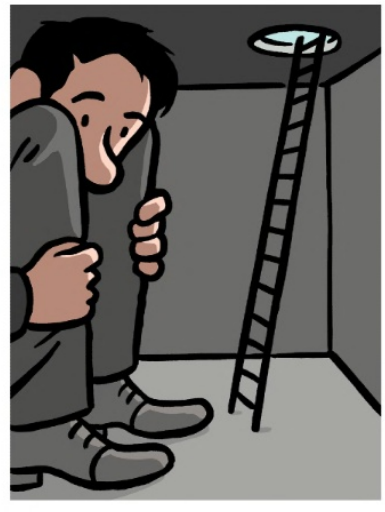
In 1957, Gallant recorded a dream in her diary: "This is a *comic* dream. I dream that people keep dying in my apartment and I keep shoving them in a trunk. I keep going about to friends saying plaintively, 'What is one supposed to do with a lot of cadavers?' " We all know what she did with those cadavers—the people she dreamed up, assessed, dissected, described, and, with a sometimes exacting eye, loved. Her particular science was both autopsy and resurrection.

—Deborah Treisman

THE FINANCIAL PAGE

THE MOBILITY MYTH

Since at least the days of Horatio Alger, a cornerstone of American thinking has been the hope of social mobility—the idea that, as Lawrence Samuel put it in a history of the American dream, anyone can, "through dedication and with a can-do spirit, climb the ladder of success." In recent years, though, plenty of Americans have come to believe that, as President Obama said in his State of the Union address, "upward mobility has stalled." So it was a surprise recently when a team of economists from Harvard and Berkeley released a comprehensive study showing that mobility in the U.S. hasn't fallen over the past twenty years at all. "Like many people, we thought mobility would have declined," Raj Chetty, one of the researchers on the project, told me. "But what we found was that kids born in the early nineteen-nineties had the same chances of climbing up the income ladder as kids born in the seventies." Even more striking, when the researchers looked at studies tracking economic mobility going back to the fifties, they concluded that it had remained relatively stable over the entire second half of the twentieth century.



That sounds like good news, but there's a catch: there wasn't that much mobility to begin with. According to Chetty, "Social mobility is low and has been for at least thirty or forty years." This is most obvious when you look at the prospects of the poor. Seventy per cent of people born into the bottom quintile of income distribution never make it into the middle class, and fewer than ten per cent get into the top quintile. Forty per cent are still poor as adults. What the political scientist Michael Harrington wrote back in 1962 is still true: most people who are poor are poor because "they made the mistake of being born to the wrong parents." The middle class isn't all that mobile, either: only twenty per cent of people born into the middle quintile ever make it into the top one. And although we think of U.S. society as archetypally open, mobility here is lower than in most European countries.

This wasn't always the case. As the economist Joseph P. Ferrie has shown, in the late nineteenth century U.S. society was far more mobile than Great Britain's—a child in the U.S. was much more likely to move into a higher-class profession than that of his father—and much more mobile than it became later. It was possible for Andrew Carnegie to start as a bobbin boy in a cotton factory at a dollar-twenty a week and end up one of the world's richest men. This legacy left a deep imprint on American culture. The sociologist Werner Sombart noted in 1906 that the average American worker felt he had a good chance of rising out of his class. That feeling has persisted: Americans are less concerned than Europeans about inequality and more confident that society is meritocratic. The problem is that, over time, the American dream has become increasingly untethered from American reality.

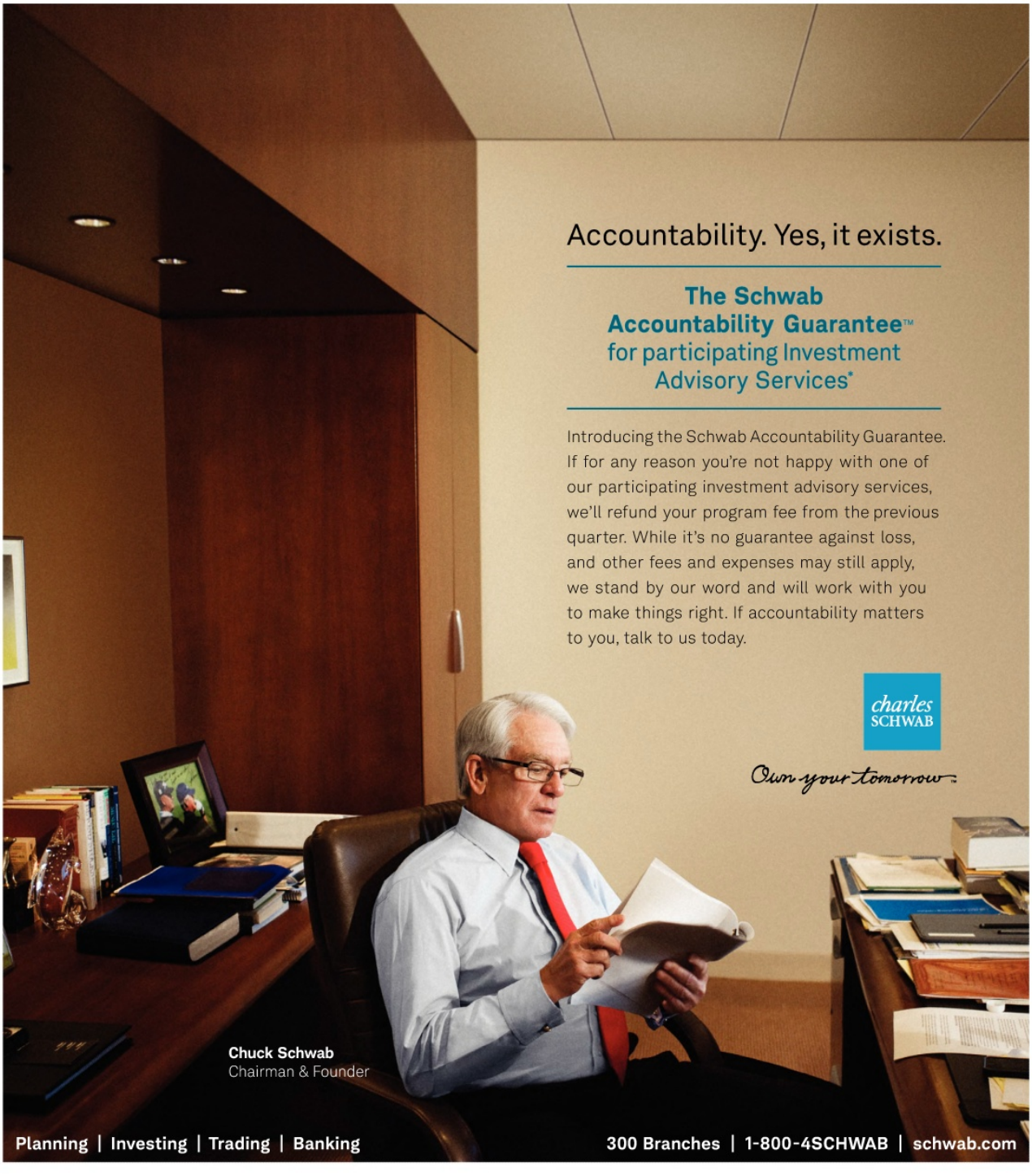
Both political parties say that they want to change this. And Chetty and his colleagues have shown in another study that some places in the U.S., like Salt Lake City and San Jose, have mobility rates as high as anywhere else in the developed world. There are also places in the U.S., like Mississippi, where mobility is lower than anywhere else in the developed world. So if you could figure out exactly what Salt Lake City is doing right, and apply that lesson elsewhere, you might be able to get people movin' on up again.

Increasing economic opportunity is a noble goal, and worth investing in. But we shouldn't delude ourselves into thinking that more social mobility will cure what ails the U.S. economy. For a start, even societies that are held to have "high" mobility aren't all *that* mobile. In San Jose, just thirteen per cent of people in the bottom quintile make it to the top. Sweden has one of the highest rates of social mobility in the world, but a 2012 study found that the top of the income spectrum is dominated by people whose parents were rich. A new book, "The Son Also Rises," by the economic historian Gregory Clark, suggests that dramatic social mobility has always been the exception rather than the rule. Clark examines a host of societies over the past seven hundred years and finds that the makeup of a given country's economic élite has remained surprisingly stable.

More important, in any capitalist society most people are bound to be part of the middle and working classes; public policy should focus on raising their standard of living, instead of raising their chances of getting rich. What made the U.S. economy so remarkable for most of the twentieth century was the fact that, even if working people never moved into a different class, over time they saw their standard of living rise sharply. Between the late nineteen-forties and the early nineteen-seventies, median household income in the U.S. doubled. That's what has really changed in the past forty years. The economy is growing more slowly than it did in the postwar era, and average workers' share of the pie has been shrinking. It's no surprise that people in Washington prefer to talk about mobility rather than about this basic reality. Raising living standards for ordinary workers is hard: you need to either get wages growing or talk about things that scare politicians, like "redistribution" and "taxes." But making it easier for some Americans to move up the economic ladder is no great triumph if most can barely hold on.

—James Surowiecki

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN



Brokerage Products: Not FDIC Insured • No Bank Guarantee • May Lose Value

*The guarantee applies to the following investment advisory services ("Participating Services") and associated program fees: (i) Schwab Private Client ("SPC"); (ii) Schwab Managed Portfolios ("SMP"); and (iii) Managed Account Connection ("Connection") for accounts that are managed by investment advisors affiliated with Charles Schwab & Co., Inc. ("Schwab") – Windhaven Investment Management, Inc., ThomasPartners, Inc., and Charles Schwab Investment Management, Inc.

The guarantee does not apply to (i) accounts managed by investment advisors that are not affiliated with Schwab; (ii) accounts managed by Schwab-affiliated advisors outside of the SPC, Connection and SMP programs; or (iii) any other product or service made available by Schwab or its affiliates. SPC, SMP and Connection are wrap fee programs sponsored by Schwab.

If at any time or for any reason you are not completely satisfied with a Participating Service, at your request Schwab will refund the associated program fee for the previous calendar quarter applicable to the Participating Service. The program fee is a percentage of the eligible assets in your Participating Service account(s). You will receive a credit to your Participating Service account(s) within approximately four weeks of your request. No other fees, commissions, charges, expenses, or market losses will be refunded. If Schwab is unable to address your concerns after consulting with you and refunding your program fee, Schwab will work with you to help meet your financial goals. Schwab reserves the right to change this guarantee in the future after providing notice. For additional information regarding associated program fees, please see the disclosure brochure for the Participating Service, available at the time you enroll or upon your request.

The Charles Schwab Corporation provides a full range of securities, brokerage, banking, money management and financial advisory services through its operating subsidiaries. Its broker-dealer subsidiary, Charles Schwab & Co., Inc. (member SIPC), offers investment services and products, including Schwab brokerage accounts. Its banking subsidiary, Charles Schwab Bank (member FDIC and an Equal Housing Lender), provides deposit and lending services and products.

©2014 The Charles Schwab Corporation. All rights reserved. (1113-7113) ADP77848-00

LETTER FROM *SOCHI*

PATRIOT GAMES

Vladimir Putin lives his Olympic dream.

BY DAVID REMNICK

A quarter century ago, as jubilant citizens took sledgehammers to the Berlin Wall, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, an officer in the Dresden station of the K.G.B., fed a raging furnace with the documentary evidence of Soviet espionage activities in East Germany. Putin was grateful for his Dresden posting. He had grown up in Leningrad, an uneven student with early dreams of serving the state. One of his grandfathers was a cook for Lenin and Stalin. His father was an undercover operative during the war. Putin's parents barely survived the Nazi siege; an older brother did not. After a rough upbringing, Putin had enjoyed a halcyon four years in Dresden. He had a pretty wife and two young daughters, and enough leisure to play Ping-Pong, fish in the rivers outside town, and drink beer in the city's pubs and breweries. He drank so much beer that he gained twenty-five pounds. Now the happy days were ending. The Wall had been breached, and Putin was shovelling top-secret files into the fire so quickly, he recalled in a book-length interview, that "the furnace burst." This was early in November, 1989. Later, angry Germans threatened to break into the K.G.B. compound. Putin's superiors called Moscow for reinforcements, but, he says, "Moscow was silent." The state was failing even its most resolute foot soldiers. Within a few months, Putin slipped back home to Leningrad and took a position as "vice-rector"—the residential spy—at the local university.

As the Soviet Union began to unravel, there was a pervasive mood of desperation in its most repressive offices. Occasionally, that desperation took on comic dimensions. One fall morning in 1990, when I was working as a Moscow correspondent, I was reading a stack of newspapers—a requirement of the job—and came across an article of tangy interest in *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. The headline read "MISS K.G.B."; below was a photograph of a woman in her twenties, named Katya Mayorova, provocatively adjusting the strap of her bulletproof vest. She had, it seemed, won a beauty contest at Lubyanka, the K.G.B. headquarters. This was new. I took a sip of coffee. The article described how Comrade Mayorova wore her vest with "exquisite softness, like a Pierre Cardin model." Beyond "mere beauty," her talents included the ability to deliver a karate kick "to her enemies' head." I called Lubyanka, which, by now, had a press

Putin's aim was to put on a display of renewed national confidence and modernity. "Russia is back," officials kept insisting.

PASCAL LE SEGRETAIN/GETTY

office, and asked if I might interview Katya Mayorova. The press officer was effusive: Why not? Bring a camera! On the appointed day, I went to Lubyanka, where Comrade Mayorova explained to me that the K.G.B.'s beauty contest, such as it was, took place in "private." She was wearing an angora sweater. She liked the Beatles. She worked as a secretary, but was certified in the handling of small arms. "They try to give us all-around skills," she said. Assured once more, if in an unexpected form, that the Soviet Union was in a state of mortal delirium, I thanked Katya and took my leave. A year later, the statue outside Lubyanka of Felix Dzerzhinsky, the founder of the Soviet secret police, dangled from a noose held by a crane. After a short while, "Iron Felix" toppled to the ground, where protesters hacked away at his metallic corpse, the better to bring home a jagged souvenir of the recent past.

Great powers seldom retreat forever. But, to the people who suffer their fall, the sense of diminishment is acute. For Russians, the end of the Soviet Union was not merely a new charter, a new flag, a new set of lyrics to an old anthem. There were plenty, in the cities, mainly, who rejoiced in the liberating sense of possibility—the open borders, the cultural ferment, the democratic potential—but for many millions of their compatriots, Putin among them, the collapse launched a decade of humiliation, marked by geopolitical, economic, and cultural disarray. In 1999, as Yeltsin handed the Presidency over to him, Putin said, "Russia is in the midst of one of the most difficult periods in its history. For the first time in the past two or three hundred years, it is facing a real threat of sliding into the second, and possibly even third, echelon of world states."

Putin's lament had nothing to do with any fealty to Communism. Even Leonid Brezhnev, who presided over the Party and the country from 1964 to 1982, began privately calling Leninist ideology *tryakhomudiya*—a term of derision that might best be translated as "crapola." What the regime and its supporters valued in its last years was not Marxism-Leninism but, rather, power, a sense of greatness that was slipping away. Huge oil reserves, and the vast arsenal of weapons that the oil helped pay for, had for years masked the hollowness of the entire enterprise. As early as 1975, Brezhnev worried that the country would not be able to make good on its promise to host the 1980 Summer Olympics, in Moscow. (The Soviet Union, decrying the pernicious "bourgeois individualism" of competitive sports, did not even take part in the Games until 1952.) "This event will cost colossal amounts of money," Brezhnev wrote to one of his successors, Konstantin Chernenko, in a document that has only lately come to light. "Some comrades have suggested to me that if we pay a small fine we could get out of this." In the event, more than sixty countries, led by the United States, boycotted the Moscow Games, in protest over the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

For Putin, however, the Olympics remained a marker of national prestige. In 1996, when he was a deputy mayor of St. Petersburg, he led an effort to secure the 2004 Summer Olympics for the city. The mission failed. St. Petersburg did not make the final ballot. The loss seems only to have deepened his resolve. When Putin became President, he set out to stabilize Russian authority, and he did so in the time-honored manner: seizing command of regional governorships; cracking down on political opposition; taking complete control of the legislature, the courts, and state television. But he also looked for ways to revive the national spirit. "The general state of society is one of dejection and pessimism," he said later. "We need to cheer up."

As part of this effort, Putin, working with some of the wealthiest magnates in the country, pursued the Olympics again. He focussed on the 2014 Winter Games, which were up for consideration at a meeting of the International Olympic Committee in Guatemala in 2007. The I.O.C., which has a history of financial receptivity and political amoralism, awarded the 2014 Games to Russia over South Korea by a narrow vote. The committee members could not have been persuaded by Sochi as such. The city, subtropical and until lately underdeveloped, was known as a place for convalescence during the Second World War and as a vacation spot for mid-level apparatchiks. Stalin kept a dacha compound there called Green Grove, and Putin now has a lavish spread in the area.

When I arrived in Sochi for the Games, I made my way along the new promenade by the Black Sea. While friends and family texted scenes of New York encrusted in snow and ice, Sochi was usually between fifty and sixty degrees during the day. This was turning the snow in the mountains to vichyssoise, but it was a delight near the sea.

One morning, I turned left out of my hotel gate and walked along the Black Sea promenade toward Abkhazia. I passed a stout Russian woman wearing an Olympic sweat suit, her hair dyed a shade of pumpkin. She was surrounded by skating pupils, sneaker-wearing girls between five and nine, who were practicing figure-skating turns and leaps that they would later try on ice. Still breathing hard from their exertions, they took a rest and talked about Yulia Lipnitskaya, the fifteen-year-old Russian who had helped her team win gold the night before. They set about trying to imitate the curve of Lipnitskaya's back, her triple Axels and Salchows; it was like watching the kids at a batting cage in the Bronx try to swing like Derek Jeter.

Farther on, past strolling visitors from Moscow and Novosibirsk ("It's so *warm* here!"), past exhausted construction workers taking long cigarette breaks on benches, I walked down a ramp to the rocky beach. At the shoreline, there were fishermen, dozens of them, standing at ten-yard intervals and casting long spinning rods into the metallic throb of the sea. There were ducks on the surface, a good sign for the fishermen.

"We'll have enough for dinner before lunch," one of them said.

Most smoked and cast their lines in silence. The occasional bubbles of conversation were about fishing—what was biting, how often, matters of territory, technique, and equipment. They seemed to pay the Games no mind. Nearby, a squat man with a southern accent—an accent like Mikhail Gorbachev's, in which the hard "g"s get overlaid with airy "h"s—let loose a harangue

about his neighbor's alleged encroachment. If he used any idiom beyond "Back the fuck off" and "Fuck your mother," I did not catch it.

I walked over to the last fisherman—and then there was the fence. Beyond was Abkhazia, a region considered "independent" by Russia and a breakaway province by Georgia; it has been a scene of post-Soviet battle and ethnic cleansing. And it is just one corner of a perilous region where Putin and the International Olympic Committee thought to situate the Winter Games. The Caucasus—the region that takes in the mountains adjoining Sochi, Georgia, North and South Ossetia, Ingushetia, Dagestan, Chechnya—has played a violent and romantic role in the Russian imagination for centuries, akin to that of the American Wild West. A region of countless languages and ethnicities, it was, for Pushkin, a place where "martial robbery occurs and the savage genius of inspiration is hiding in mute silence." It has been the scene of imperial conquest and rebellion, bandit raids and battle. Now it's where Islamic radicalism is at more or less permanent war with Putin's security forces and with local, pro-Moscow governments. And it's where Putin, at the cost of at least fifty billion dollars—colossal *otkaty*, or kickbacks, included—has built eleven new sporting venues, a Formula One track, forty-nine hotels, twenty-two tunnels, fifty-four bridges, a railroad to put the Acela to shame, a cathedral, a hospital. To do it, he enlisted thousands of migrant workers from Central Asia and displaced two thousand families. His enemies have not wished the project well. Doku Umarov, the most bloody-minded of the Islamist combatants and the self-proclaimed emir of the "Caucasus Emirate," declared that the Games were "satanic dancing on the bones of our ancestors, on the bones of the many, many Muslims killed" by Russia in the region; he vowed to "derail" them. But, as the Games progressed, Putin's "ring of steel"—tens of thousands of troops and police, along with drones and security cameras—proved sufficient. These were Putin's Games.

Sochi was a theatrical event before it was a sporting event. Putin's aim was to put on an international display of confidence and modernity. "The Games are his baby," Dmitry Chernyshenko, the head of the Sochi Olympic Organizing Committee, said. Sochi will be "a blueprint for the rest of the country to follow." Putin built a vast Olympic Park on swampy land—an echo of Peter the Great's building his grand westward-looking city on the swamps of the Neva River—precisely because of the daring it involved. "We need to understand and feel that we are capable of pulling off major large-scale projects," Putin said. Not since the Soviets laid out the twenty-six hundred miles of the Baikal-Amur railroad in Siberia and the Far East, more than a generation ago ("the construction project of the century," it was called), had a Kremlin leader proposed something of such scale.

Not everything went according to plan. The failure to complete all the hotels in the mountains, particularly the hotels where many journalists were meant to stay, created a P.R. debacle. Before there were any events to write about, the Twitter hashtag #SochiProblems and outlets like CNN drew bountiful reports of broken toilets, double toilets, no toilets at all, brown water, yellow water, lobbies with no floors, showers with no water. And there were the dogs. Western reporters were taken with sightings of "wild dogs" in the streets and, alternately, cruel purges of homeless hounds. The mockery reached the point of neo-Cold War Schadenfreude. Vladislav Tretiak, the three-time gold-medal hockey goalie of a generation ago, had to remind an interviewer that, at the 1980 Winter Olympics, in Lake Placid, New York, he and other Olympians were put up in a barracks-like building that was later used as a federal prison.

Such distractions were peripheral to Putin's grand vision. "Russia is back," officials kept insisting. Amid all the brutality and corruption of his regime, his historical mission has been to assert himself as the country's singular, irreplaceable leader and to reclaim Russia's globe-bestriding status. In Putin's eyes, Russia had allowed the West to humiliate it, by expanding NATO to its frontiers, by luring former Soviet republics—especially Ukraine—westward, by bombing Serbia and Kosovo, and, as the self-proclaimed power in a unipolar world, by dancing in the end zone at every opportunity. Sochi was meant to put a stop to all that. It wasn't about "slope style" snowboarding; it was about the televised revival of a demoralized country.

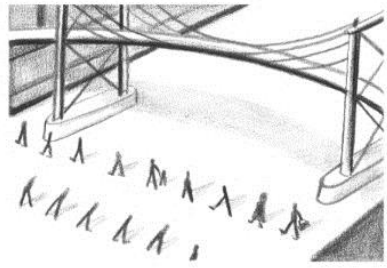
Putin presided with all his accustomed bravado. He is an autocrat who does not defy his cartoon; he draws it, stroke by broad stroke. He is the frenetic macho, who flies a fighter jet into Chechnya, rides a horse bare-chested, tranquillizes a Siberian tiger,

hang-glides with cranes, drives a Formula One car, rides with a motorcycle gang, skates with the Russian hockey team, skis the Caucasus, shoots a whale with a crossbow, and dives into the sea in search of archeological treasures. After years of gerontocrats and an incapacitated drunk, the man who rules Russia projects vitality. He divorces his wife and is said to have taken up with an elastic Olympian—a rhythmic gymnast!—named Alina Kabaeva, a woman so flexible she can lean backward and dribble a soccer ball with her head. His habits of mind are rooted in his K.G.B. history. His language is uncompromising and sometimes crude. Concerning the Chechen rebels, he has declared his intention to "corner the bandits in the shithouse and wipe them out." To his supporters, Putin is a modern *muzhik*, a real man.

Putin could not guarantee gold medals for Olympic athletes, but he could control the Olympic spectacle. The perfect embodiment of Putinism in Sochi was the opening ceremony. At the 2008 Olympics, in Beijing, the Chinese underlined the nation's dramatic emergence, its sense of itself as the great power of the twenty-first century, with a dazzling opening conceived and directed by the filmmaker Zhang Yimou. The two-part artistic program—"Brilliant Civilization," depicting the epochs of Chinese history, and "Glorious Era," which seemed to make a point about peaceful coexistence with the rest of the world—was a phantasmagoria of fireworks, L.E.D. displays, and thousands of performers moving in astonishing synchronicity.

The Chinese rehearsed their opening ceremony for almost a year. The Russians, in true Russian fashion, crashed their program. They had hoped to begin rehearsing in Fisht Olympic Stadium last August, but the stadium was not ready until December. The computer programmers, who were essential to the aerial spectaculars and the preposterously sophisticated gantry system that ran across the roof, had asked for six months of preparation; they got six weeks. George Tsypin, an émigré theatre and opera designer who worked on the Sochi production, knew just how many ways an ambitious theatrical production with countless moving parts could go wrong. His résumé includes "Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark."

One of the most curious of the performances came in the half hour before the opening ceremony began. The Russian pop duo t.A.T.u., now well past their sell-by date, sang their hit "Not Gonna Get Us." At the urging of their hype-happy manager, the duo used to kiss onstage, hinting broadly that they were lesbian lovers. Eventually, they were outed as straight. Considering all



the controversy surrounding Putin's anti-gay-propaganda law, their presence could be read as a message of sorts, though it was unclear what the message might have been. Stranger still was the sight of the Interior Ministry police choir singing Daft Punk's hit "Get Lucky." The Interior Ministry police are not a happy presence at a Moscow political demonstration—think Chicago police, circa August, 1968—and their headquarters, 38 Petrovka Street, is an ominously resonant address. This was Sochi's "Springtime for Stalin" moment: giddy tenors in the uniforms of notorious enforcers.

The official ceremony began with a projection of all the letters of the Cyrillic alphabet, each letter standing for something quintessentially Russian: "P for Pushkin," and so on. There was nothing quite so bold as "S for Solzhenitsyn" or "B for Babel": no hint of the Gulag. Still, many of the honored names—Chagall, Kandinsky, Nabokov, Stravinsky—were émigré avant-gardists who were, in their time, considered traitors to the Motherland.

The "parade of nations," a long procession of national teams, posed one question: Would any of the athletes make a show of solidarity with gays and lesbians—a raised fist, say, in a rainbow glove? Belle Brockhoff, an Australian snowboarder, talked plainly of being a lesbian and of her opposition to the Russian legislation, but she had already said that she wasn't going to do "anything crazy," like carry a rainbow flag into Fisht Stadium. No one dared.

Putin supervised the proceedings closely. He had put Konstantin Ernst, the producer who runs Channel One, the largest of the state-run television channels, in charge of the opening ceremony, and he attended several rehearsals. Ernst and Putin met regularly, examining models, discussing ideas and limits. According to a study of post-Soviet film and television by the historian Stephen M. Norris, Ernst has specialized in arousing a new Russian patriotism with film spectaculars that view the collapse of empires as tragedies and highlight the brighter moments of Soviet times. This Putinesque impulse, the search for a usable past, however fantastical, was at the center of Ernst's opening ceremony.

Eventually, Ernst and Tsypin trimmed back some of their ambitions. Valery Gergiev, the conductor and Putin's friend, was supposed to appear with a symphony orchestra inside a "chandelier" as large as a five-story building—a "kinetic sculpture." That didn't quite work for the opening, and the construction was put in a hangar. There was a plan to have everyone in the stadium hold up a picture of one of the twenty-some million Soviets who died in the Second World War, but the I.O.C. felt that that was too political, and the Russians agreed to drop it.

In a rehearsal I saw a few days before the opening, the biggest goof came when only two horses of an intended troika appeared. Early in the actual ceremony, five illuminated snowflakes were supposed to transform into the five Olympic rings. Only four managed the trick, providing Twitter with more Schadenfodder and presenting Konstantin Ernst's team with a split-second decision. Russian TV was called on to cut away from the sight of the failed Olympic ring and to a taped rehearsal when all five rings opened. "We had so many mishaps along the way—it's normal," Tsypin told me. "It takes months and months to fine-tune a system like that. We had six weeks. It's just a miracle that the show took place at all."

"Zen Buddhists have this idea that when you have a perfectly polished

sphere, you should leave a notch in it so you can understand just how perfectly it is polished," Ernst told the *Daily Telegraph* the next day. "In technical terms, the rings were the simplest thing in the whole show. They turned out to be our notch. . . . This is certainly bad, but it does not humiliate us."

Ernst and Tsypin's main event was a toboggan run through Russian history. An Olympic opening ceremony is to history what the Ice Capades are to "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire"—Gibbon on Ice!—but the stylized drama revealed something about the leadership's conception of the country and of itself. Bring on the snow fairies and the candy-colored onion domes. (You were expecting the purges?) "We were not showing a real country," Tsypin told me later. "We were showing a dream, an ideal." Imperial Russia was represented by a courtly ballet, "Natasha Rostova's First Ball," from "War and Peace," with stars of the Bolshoi and Mariinsky Ballets. It was the purest, most exquisite set piece of the night. The Revolution was represented by jagged avant-garde images—Malevich as a kind of aerial parade float—and by an enormous chugging agitprop train, spreading the word of the Bolsheviks. Industrialization looked like a halftime show at the Tostitos Fiesta Bowl, the postwar years like a Slavic production of "American Graffiti," complete with boxy cars and *stilyagi*, duck-tailed hipsters, cutting a rug. A dream, an ideal. The only leader mentioned explicitly was Peter the Great: no Lenin or Stalin, no Gorbachev or Yeltsin. It was a pop-cultural representation of a sentiment whose classic formulation was delivered by Count Alexander von Benckendorff, the head of the secret police under Nicholas I: "Russia's past is admirable; her present is more than magnificent; as to her future, it is beyond the grasp of the most daring imagination."

This is, effectively, Putin's historical credo, and it has prompted him to reverse certain advances of previous generations. Two pivotal moments in the postwar Soviet Union were Khrushchev's repudiation of Stalinism, in 1956, and a speech given by Gorbachev in 1987, which, ostensibly celebrating Leninist principles, took Khrushchev's opening up of the past many steps further. When Gorbachev sanctioned the publication of Solzhenitsyn's "The Gulag Archipelago," a Dantesque excursion into the vast network of Soviet prison camps, he undermined the lies upon which his own regime rested; the exposure of Soviet history spelled the end of Soviet history.

Throughout the Yeltsin years, in the nineteen-nineties, new textbooks appeared in Russian schools with chapters on the Soviet past that sometimes resembled Solzhenitsyn more than they did the approved texts of previous generations. Putin saw the new textbooks as a *kasha*, a muddle—a capitulation to Russia's detractors. At a televised meeting with history teachers, in 2007, Putin insisted that Russia had "nothing to be ashamed of," and that the pedagogical task was to make students "proud of their motherland." He allowed that Russia's past included "grim chapters," but whose did not? "No one must be allowed to impose the feeling of guilt on us."

The creation of an alternative past was integral to Putin's mission. The Kremlin-backed "A Modern History of Russia: 1945-2006: A Manual for History Teachers" urges a "balanced" view of Stalin. Stalin's repressions are taken note of, but are placed in the "context" of mobilization for war with Germany. The book regards the fall of the Soviet Union, in 1991, as a tragic error: "The Soviet Union was not a democracy, but it was an example for millions of people around the world of the best and fairest society." Gorbachev, ceding independence to Eastern and Central Europe, is dismissed as pathetically weak. The hero of modern Russian history in this narrative is, of course, Putin himself.

Just as Stalin approved, and wrote part of, the "Short Course" on the history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Putin commissioned guidelines for new Russian history and new textbooks. He has become an amateur scholar of world history. At a four-hour press conference in December, he said, "Can you tell me what is the big difference between Cromwell and Stalin? There is none. From the point of view of the liberal part of our political establishment, they're both bloody dictators. The former was actually a very cunning man who played a somewhat controversial part in the history of Britain. However, his monument is there. Nobody is tearing it down. . . . We have to treat every period of our history with care. It's best, of course, not to create any commotion, not to blow people's minds with some untimely actions that could divide society."

The promulgation of a "national idea"—a triumphalist, unifying vision of a usable past—has been a particular concern of Putin's since his return to the Presidency, in 2012. It is hardly a systematic vision. He quotes a miscellany of Russian philosophers and politicians—Ivan Ilyin, Nikolai Berdyaev, Pyotr Stolypin—who sit together in about as much accord as Hobbes, Locke, and Gramsci. Nor is it an ideology enforced in the way of the Stalin-era Soviet Union, with its institutions of indoctrination and control. Putinism is more eclectic and contradictory, although it inclines toward absolutism. As Nikolai Karamzin, the great Russian historian of two centuries ago, put it, "Autocracy has founded and resuscitated Russia. Any change in its political constitution has led in the past and must lead in the future to its perdition."

There are recurring strands in Putin's conservatism: a resentment of Western sermonizing and meddling in Russia and its sphere of political influence; a belief in the primacy of the state over the individual; a vision of Russian Orthodoxy as a quasi-official faith and as a locus of "traditional Russian values." Having crushed the protest movements of two years ago, Putin sought to consolidate his base, Russia's "silent majority," and keep its loyalty through the mind-numbing use of state-run television, which spreads his ideals of patriotism and state power. The arrest and show trials of the punk-rock protesters Pussy Riot and the enactment of the anti-gay-propaganda law were demonstrations of that effort. Although Russians are hardly puritanical—the rates of abortion and divorce are among the highest

in the world—Putin recognized that they are decidedly homophobic, and that he could use this to advantage. Gays and lesbians, as well as those immoralists who would support their decadent ways, are a convenient "other." Indeed, the Church leadership considers homosexuality a sign of the Apocalypse, a view that has been aired with some frequency on television.

Last December, in a speech to the Federal Assembly, Putin combined a realistic sense of Russia's reduced place in the world with an insistence on its elevated moral standing. "We do not claim to be any sort of superpower," he said, but added that the West accepts "without question the equality of good and evil" and endorses a brand of tolerance that is "neutered and barren." To follow the West blindly was a path to "a primitive state." Putin has said that it is his job to shield Russia from "the rather aggressive behavior of certain social groups," and from the "quasi-values" of the West, which are "very hard for our people to accept."

Like so many on the American and the European far right, Putin warns that the West has been rejecting the "Christian values that constitute the basis of Western civilization." An insidious cosmopolitanism lurks within the exponents of such decay. "They are denying moral principles and all traditional identities: national, cultural, religious and even sexual," he has said. "They are implementing policies that equate large families with same-sex partnerships, belief in God with the belief in Satan. The excesses of political correctness have reached the point where people are seriously talking about registering political parties whose aim is to promote pedophilia. . . . And people are aggressively trying to export this model all over the world. I am convinced that this opens a direct path to degradation and primitivism, resulting in a profound demographic and moral crisis." Such rhetoric—exquisitely rendered both on state television and on the English-language propaganda channel, RT—has earned Putin approbation not only from Russian religious conservatives but also from some American ones. In an article titled "Is Putin One of Us?" Pat Buchanan praised the Russian President's "moral clarity" and suggested that he could help lead a kind of global conservative bloc.

"Sometimes I feel like the only thing keeping us together is our fear of the children."

• •

In the run-up to the Olympics, Putin went to some lengths to sheathe the razor edge of his re-moralization agenda. He released some political prisoners. Some of the migrant workers who had been stiffed in Sochi got paid. And, once the Games got going, you could spend many hours concentrating on sports that most people revisit only every four years. I saw the American women, led by killer twins from North Dakota, crush some hapless Swiss in hockey so thoroughly that it seemed right to send a card. I watched curling, and found it almost as riveting as I had remembered it. I watched the "kiss and cries" at team figure skating. For a while, Sochi, which looks like Orlando-sur-Mer, seemed like an extravaganza anywhere: buttoned up, locked down, corporate, and best followed on television.

But, while the Olympics were airing across Russia, heretics who dared to question the canonical view of history wound up in trouble. When Dozhd (Rain), a small, independent TV station, put out a poll asking viewers whether the Soviet leadership should have surrendered Leningrad during the siege rather than suffer the loss of hundreds of thousands of people, the station lost its cable operators. When the satirist Viktor Shenderovich, writing on the Web site of the independent radio station Ekho Moskvy (Echo of Moscow), dared to compare the Sochi Olympics to the Berlin Olympics, in 1936, he was vilified, and, within a few days, a video of Shenderovich masturbating—a video that everyone understood to be the work of the Russian secret services—made its way onto state television.

Finally, in the second week of competition, women from Pussy Riot showed up in town to scrape at the Potemkin village's wet paint and plaster. About twenty miles from the Olympic Park, they came out onto the street in their fluorescent balaclavas and tried to perform a song called "Putin Will Teach You to Love the Motherland." Cossacks, once known in Russia for their taste for pogroms and now empowered as law enforcement, put a rough stop to the performance. They set upon the women with horsewhips. In a pure expression of Putinism, a Cossack smashed Pussy Riot's guitar. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM/GO/OUTLOUD
A conversation with David Remnick.

SHOUTS & MURMURS

SPEAK, MEMORY

BY JENNY ALLEN

You know what I'm tired of? People being so down on themselves for not remembering things. Doesn't it seem like everyone you know over a certain age is spending way too much time saying, "Dammit, I just saw that movie yesterday, and I can't remember what it's called. This is terrible." That's so negative. Quitcherbellyachin'! Celebrate what you do remember!

For example, I was in Duane Reade the other day, forgetting what I was there for, and, yes, getting bummed out about it. Then I remembered that I was there for some kind of hair product, only I couldn't remember what it was. Then I remembered that it was the stuff that comes in a bottle that you wash your hair with, but I couldn't remember what it's called, so I knew I wouldn't be able to ask any of the employees to help me find it. Just as I was about to throw myself a great big pity party there in the hair-care aisle, my eye caught a display of those fake tortoiseshell headbands. And my brain said, "Lynne Tryforos."

What the—?! I thought. And then I decided to turn things around—to just enjoy the moment, to take pleasure in the workings of my brain. I had a fun time right there in Duane Reade—it was like playing a game—trying to put together why this name had popped into my head. It came to me: Lynne Tryforos was the secretary and girlfriend of the Scarsdale Diet doctor, and the reason that Jean Harris, who was also his girlfriend and had preceded Lynne Tryforos, shot him. Jean Harris wore that same kind of headband!

I think it's so neat that my brain remembered that. Why did it, when the names of so many people I actually know, and sometimes my own phone number, are lost to me? Who can say? The brain is a mystery, a wonderful, labyrinth-like mystery.

I say let's put these random bits of information to use, to help us. For instance, when the conversation turns to Jean Harris and the Scarsdale Diet doctor, and somebody asks, "Why did she shoot him again?" and you pipe up, "Lynne Tryforos," people who have just met you will think you remember other things as well, lots of other things, when in fact you could not tell them what you had for breakfast. They'll think you're smart, which is great, since you never know these days when you'll be fired from your job and you might need one of these people to recommend you for a new job. They don't need to know that in fact, with your antique, outmoded "skill set," you would be lucky to find employment as a lunchroom lady.

Granted, it is not too often that the whole Scarsdale Diet-doctor thing comes up in conversation. You will just have to cleverly steer it in that direction, like so:

YOU: "Headmistress." Now that's a word you don't hear too much anymore.

OTHER PERSON: That is so true!

YOU: I think the last time I heard it was in reference to Jean Harris.

OTHER PERSON: Jean Harris. Was she the lady who shot the diet doctor?

YOU: Exactly. Because he was having an affair with his secretary, Lynne Tryforos.

OTHER PERSON: Get out of town! Good God, how do you remember that? You're amazing!

YOU: I don't know about that, but I do seem to be remembering more things as I get older. I feel sharper than ever, and totally up for new challenges. In fact, if you hear of any jobs, maybe you'd suggest me.

OTHER PERSON: That I will!

Also, once we stop thinking of these "meaningless" bits of information that come to us out of the blue as annoying and disconcerting, we can start having fun with them, folding them into our social discourse like frothy egg whites:

YOU: Don't you remember the strangest things sometimes?

OTHER PERSON: I'll say. The other day, I was thinking about my fifth-grade teacher, Hyla Jones, and how odd it was that I remembered her first name when I don't remember the first names of the many dozens of other teachers I had over

ISTVAN BANYAI

the years. I mean, Hyla is an unusual name, but really, I'm sure some of my other teachers had unusual names.

YOU: That's so fascinating! Speaking of elementary school, the other day I remembered the lunch box my friend Dana Cole had in the third grade. It was shaped like a school bus, and it had all the Disney characters waving out of the windows of the bus. Before I saw hers, I really liked my lunch box, which was plaid, but after I saw hers I just wanted hers.

OTHER PERSON: That's such a compelling story. Poignant, even.

YOU: You know what else I remember? Almost the entire cast of "Where the Boys Are": Dolores Hart; George Hamilton; Frank Gorshin—in a pair of funny glasses!—Jim Hutton; Connie Francis, who also sang the title song; Yvette Mimieux; Paula Prentiss; and Dick Benjamin.

OTHER PERSON: Outstanding! I forgot about Dolores Hart. I thought that was Mitzi Gaynor.

YOU: Mitzi Gaynor?!? No way! She was in "South Pacific."

OTHER PERSON: Of course! I remember all the words to "I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Outta My Hair."

YOU: Me, too!

OTHER PERSON: Let's sing it right now!

YOU: And let's do the same moves she did—let's act like we're in the shower, doing whaddyacallit to our hair.

OTHER PERSON: Shampooing it?

YOU: "Shampooing"! Yes! Oh, thank you!

OTHER PERSON: Say, do you ever find it sad that our memories are now made up of a few odd, insignificant bits stuck there like chewed-up gum to the underside of a classroom desk, and come to us unbidden and out of nowhere, but that if you try to remember something important, like how to do long division, you cannot?

YOU: Not at all! We should take pleasure in what comes to us while we are sitting there not remembering math. Like, Mike Nesmith's mother invented Liquid Paper. Once I ate spaghetti and meatballs at my friend Anne Dumke's house, and once I peed in the woods with my neighbor, Carl Walsh. Barbie's nerdy date in the Barbie board game was named Poindexter. Terry Southern's co-author on "Candy" was named Mason Hoffenberg. I could go on and on. ♦

SWANN
AUCTION GALLERIES

John Marin, *Brooklyn Bridge and Lower New York* (detail), etching and drypoint, 1913. Estimate $20,000 to $30,000.

19th & 20th Century Prints & Drawings

MARCH 6

Specialist: Todd Weyman • tweyman@swanngalleries.com

Preview: March 1, 12-5; March 3 to 5, 10-6

104 East 25th St, New York, NY 10010 • tel 212 254 4710

SWANNGALLERIES.COM

IAO

Advertisement

ON THE TOWN

BE THE FIRST TO HEAR ABOUT EVENTS, PROMOTIONS, AND SPECIAL OFFERS FROM OUR ADVERTISERS

WIN A TRIP TO LONDON

London is a city brought to life by its people and the unique and fascinating stories they have to tell.

Explore the best of the city and start your own London Story with a chance to win a five-night trip to London, including round-trip airfare, accommodations, and more.

For more information and to enter, go to visitlondon.com/stories.

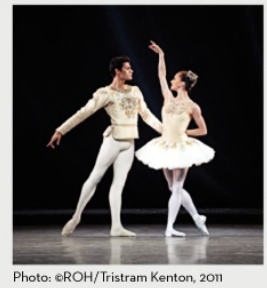


Photo: ©ROH/Tristram Kenton, 2011

THE LONDON™ STORY
VISITLONDON.COM

NO PURCHASE NECESSARY. Promotion begins October 1, 2013, at 10:00 GMT, and ends at 23:59 GMT on March 30, 2014 (when all entries must be received). Open to residents worldwide aged 18 years and over. Void where prohibited by local law. Employees of Promoters and their immediate families are not eligible. To enter and for complete rules, go to www.visitlondon.com/story. The approximate retail value of the prize ranges from $3996.80 low to $4982.40 high, depending on exact itinerary chosen by winner. Blackout dates apply. Promoters of this sweepstakes are London & Partners, 2 More London Riverside, London, UK SE1 2RR. Odds of winning depend on the number of entries received.

newyorkeronthetown.com • Follow us on Twitter: @NewYorkerPromo

Advertisement

BUSINESS INSIGHT

THE *NEW YORKER* PROMOTION DEPARTMENT PRESENTS FINDINGS AND FORESIGHT FROM OUR BUSINESS ADVERTISERS

SUCCESSFUL INVESTORS AREN'T JUST RIGHT.
THEY'RE RIGHT AT THE RIGHT TIME.

You never know when an opportunity might strike. With the TD Ameritrade Mobile app, you can monitor the market with synchronized watch lists and research investment ideas, wherever you are.

System response and account access may vary. All investments involve risk. TD Ameritrade, Inc., member FINRA/SIPC/NFA. TD Ameritrade is a trademark jointly owned by TD Ameritrade IP Company, Inc. and The Toronto-Dominion Bank.
© 2014 TD Ameritrade IP Company, Inc. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

TD Ameritrade

tdameritrade.com/600offer

newyorkeronthetown.com
Follow us on Twitter: @NewYorkerPromo

AMERICAN CHRONICLES

BIG SCORE

When Mom takes the SATs.

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT

Taking the SATs is not something to do lightly. Nevertheless, on a frigid Saturday morning not long ago, I found myself filing into a classroom with twenty sleep-deprived teen-agers. One of the girls was carrying two giant SAT review books studded with pink Post-its. I couldn't decide whether she'd brought them along to do some last-minute studying or to intimidate the competition. We'd been assigned to a chemistry classroom, and its walls were covered with placards offering a variety of emergency-evacuation instructions and motivational sayings.

"If you aim for nowhere, that's just where you'll go," one poster observed.

"Some days you're the pigeon," another, written in runny, guano-colored letters, said. "Some days you're the statue."

The proctor, who herself seemed oddly nervous, handed around the tests and the answer booklets. After issuing a series of warnings, which she read word for word from a script, she told us that we'd have twenty-five minutes to complete the first section of the exam—the essay question. The last time I took the SATs, there was no essay. Fortunately, though, I'd been warned about this development, along with many others, by Debbie Stier, the author of "The Perfect Score Project: Uncovering the Secrets of the SAT" (Harmony). At the age of forty-six, Stier decided to devote herself full time to

The SATs may determine a student's future, but what do they really measure?

ILLUSTRATION BY R. KIKUO JOHNSON

the test, with the goal of achieving the maximum possible score of 2400. My hopes were modest: I was looking to avoid humiliation. What this meant in numerical terms, I'd resolved to leave unspecified.

On this particular day, the essay question involved progress—does it require struggle and conflict? According to Stier, the key to scoring well on the essay is a clear thesis. "Declare, don't waffle," she counsels. Pick a position and then bang away at it, the way you might at a piñata, or a rabid dog.

I considered my options. I wanted to argue against the question's very premise; who can even really say what progress is? Then I realized that everyone else was already scribbling away, so I ditched that idea and went with the obvious: "No pain, no gain." I ended up writing on the Manhattan Project, despite my misgivings about whether the prospect of nuclear annihilation should count as an advance. When I got to the point of quoting Robert Oppenheimer's famous line "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds," I couldn't remember exactly how it went, and so, heeding Stier's advice—"Details count; factual accuracy doesn't"—I made something up.

Next there were some vocabulary questions, and then a math section. The girl with the review books was sitting directly behind me. We must have been given different tests, because, whenever I was trying to read, she was clicking away loudly on her calculator. By around the fifth section—grammar for me, more math for her—I was starting to flag. I felt increasingly at a disadvantage, and not just because the last time I reckoned the surface area of a cylinder my fellow test-takers had not yet been born. As the morning wore on, they seemed to be growing perkier, while I was suffering from caffeine deprivation. My sixth section was math, with free-response questions of a sort that also hadn't existed when I went to high school. One problem involved finding the coördinates of the point where two lines on a graph would intersect. Only one of the lines had been drawn, and I knew that to answer the question I needed to figure out the slope of the second. But I couldn't, and I had to leave the answer blank. Then I had to leave another answer blank. Soon I came to a reading section, with a long passage about writing and running by Haruki Murakami. Was this passage "analyzing an activity" or "challenging an assumption"? Both seemed valid. Was a phrase in a second reading passage "speculative" or "ironic" or "defensive"? Damned if I knew. By the time I got to the tenth section, I was zonked. That's when I made a dreaded bubbling error. I started to fill in my responses in the part of the answer booklet reserved for section nine. I went to erase the errant marks, but then I wasn't sure how many I needed to get rid of. In the confusion, I felt my chances of getting into the college of my choice slip away, which, considering the circumstances, says a lot about the power of the SATs.

Stier, a divorced mother of two who lives in Irvington, New York, decided to take up the SATs for the same reason we all do foolish things: out of love. Her oldest child, Ethan, a B student with modest athletic abilities (yet several minor concussions), was a sophomore in high school. Stier, in her words, was "beginning to feel frantic." Ethan would soon be applying to college, but what were his chances of getting into a good one?

"A possibility presented itself," she writes. "Ethan could study for the SAT, earn high scores, and get a scholarship at a decent school." There was just one hitch: Ethan wasn't interested in studying for the SAT. He preferred playing Halo. So Stier thought she would model the behavior she was hoping to inspire: "I thought maybe I could motivate Ethan to care about the SAT, just a little, if I climbed into the trenches myself." Initially, she intended to sample a different test-preparation method each month, but her "project" kept growing, or metastasizing, until she determined to take the SAT each of the seven times it was offered in the course of the calendar year. She'd try taking the exams at seven different schools, to see if desk size or classroom configuration had any impact on her results. "Not too far into it I got a teensy bit crazed," she writes.

Before embarking on her quest, Stier's only experience with the SAT was the sort that most students have, or at least had: she'd taken the exam just once, in 1982, when she was in high school. As almost anyone Stier's age will recall, SAT scores then came in two parts—verbal and math—with a maximum combined value of 1600. (The three-part test, with a top score of 2400, was introduced in 2005.) Stier had received a 410 on the verbal and a 480 on the math, scores she characterizes as "*very* bad." Still, she attended Bennington College and went on to a successful career as a book publicist. That Ethan might try to follow a similar trajectory is precisely what has her concerned.

"The land I would be sending my little tadpole into was a different place," she writes. No longer, she's concluded, can a kid from an affluent suburban community expect to waltz his or her way into a decent college, and from there back into an affluent suburban community: "The days when you could la-di-dah your way out of Bennington" and into "a guaranteed starter job in the industry—a job, not an internship—were gone."

Stier's worries about Ethan are quickly transferred to the exam he's not worrying about. She signs up for a Kaplan online course, which she ends up hating "every minute of." She buys a Barnes & Noble's worth of review books: "Dr. John Chung's SAT Math," "A-Plus Notes for Beginning Algebra," "The New Math SAT Game Plan," "Kaplan SAT 2400," "Kaplan SAT Strategies for Super Busy Students," "Kaplan SAT Strategies, Practice & Review," "Outsmarting the SAT," "The Ultimate Guide to SAT Grammar," "PWN the SAT: Math Guide," and the College Board's "Official SAT Study Guide," which is known as "The Blue Book." She Skypes with a tutor named Stacey in Seattle; undertakes a regimen called Cogmed, which is supposed to improve her memory; and meets with a tutor named Erica in New York City. Throughout it all, she frets.

"There was anxiety everywhere," she writes of the run-up to her first SAT of the year. "My anxiety level was soaring," she observes of the approach to the second. "I started to panic," she says, recalling the weeks leading up to the third.

Somewhere between the fourth SAT and the fifth, Stier's project very nearly collapses, along with her family life. It's summer, when no SATs are offered, and Stier decides this would be a good time for her and Ethan and Ethan's younger sister, Daisy, to work together on their math skills. She brings the kids to a local tutoring center so they can all take a diagnostic exam. Apparently, the two teen-agers have not been consulted about this plan, because they react with fury. Stier, in turn, is enraged by their behavior. Harsh words are

exchanged. That night, the kids decamp to their father's house. Some days later, they reappear, but bad feelings linger.

"Ironically," Stier observes, "it was now time for Ethan to begin studying for the SAT in earnest, and we were barely speaking." Bowed but not broken, she returns to the tutoring center alone. There she learns from Jennifer, the preternaturally patient woman who runs the place, that she has tested at a third-grade level. Stier requests extra practice sheets so she can quickly work her way up to high-school math. Instead, she gets bogged down on long division.

" 'How long till the polynomials?' I'd always ask Jennifer," she recalls. " 'Not for a *long* time,' Jennifer would say."

The SATs were administered for the first time on June 23, 1926. Intelligence testing was a new but rapidly expanding enterprise; during the First World War, the United States Army had given I.Q. tests to nearly two million soldiers to determine who was officer material. (Walter Lippmann dismissed these tests as "quackery in a field where quacks breed like rabbits.") The SAT's inventor, a Princeton professor named Carl Campbell Brigham, had worked on the Army's I.Q. test, and the civilian exam he came up with was a first cousin to the military's. It contained some questions on math and some on identifying shapes. Mostly, though, it focussed on vocabulary. Brigham intended the test to be administered to students who had already been admitted to college, for the purposes of guidance and counselling. Later, he argued that it was foolish to believe, as he once had, that the test measured "native intelligence." Rather, he wrote, scores were an index of a person's "schooling, family background, familiarity with English, and everything else."

By this point, though, the test had already been adopted for a new purpose. In 1933, James Bryant Conant, a chemist, became the president of Harvard. Conant, the product of a middle-class family, was dismayed by what he saw as the clubbiness of the school's student body and set out to attract fresh talent. In particular, he wanted to recruit bright young men from public schools in the Midwest, few of whom traditionally applied to Harvard. Conant's plan was to offer scholarships to ten such students each year. To select them, he decided to employ the SAT. As Nicholas Lemann observes in his book "The Big Test" (1999), this was one of those small decisions "from which great consequences later flow." Not long after Harvard started using the SAT, Princeton, Columbia, and Yale followed suit. More and more colleges adopted the test until, by the mid-nineteen-fifties, half a million kids a year were taking it.

In the early decades of the test, scores were revealed only to schools, not to students. This made it difficult to assess the claim made by the College Board, the exam's administrator, that studying for the SATs would serve no purpose. Still, a brash young high-school tutor named Stanley Kaplan concluded, based on the feedback he was getting from his pupils, that the claim was a crock. Kaplan began offering SAT prep classes out of his Brooklyn basement. Accusations that he was a fraud and a "snake oil salesman" failed to deter his clientele; the students just kept on coming. In the nineteen-seventies, Kaplan expanded his operations into cities like Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Miami; this is when the Federal Trade Commission decided to investigate *his* claims. The commission found that Kaplan was right: tutoring did boost scores, if not by as much as his testing service advertised. The College Board implicitly conceded the point in 1994, when it changed the meaning of the SAT's central "A"; instead of "aptitude" it came to stand for "assessment." Then the board took the even more radical step of erasing the meaning of the name altogether. Today, the letters "SAT" stand for nothing more (or less) than the SATs. As the Lord put it to Moses, "I am that I am."

"Get me everything on everybody."

The premise of Stier's "project" makes Kaplan look like a piker. Her high-school SAT scores put her below the national average among test-takers in 1982. Three decades later, she's proposing to loft herself into the upper reaches of the ninety-ninth percentile. (Stier can never quite figure out why there isn't a hundredth percentile.) Out of the more than one and a half million students who now take the SATs each year, fewer than five hundred will earn a "perfect" score. These are, Stier concedes, daunting statistics, and at one point she considers scaling back to "The Higher Score Project." But she rejects this idea after Daisy and Ethan accuse her of setting the bar too low.

Since Kaplan set up shop, test-prep tutoring has come out of the basement. It's now a billion-dollar industry whose primary product is heartache: college admission is, after all, a zero-sum game.

What might be called the Institute for Advanced Study of tutoring services is a Manhattan-based operation called Advantage Testing. Advantage's tutors hold Ph.D.s from Stanford, the University of

Pennsylvania, and Harvard, and its rates can run as high as seven hundred and ninety-five dollars for fifty minutes. (A friend of mine who has worked for Advantage told me the tutors there get paid according to an algorithm based, in part, on how many points their pupils' scores increase. My friend's own personal best was an eight-hundred-and-twenty-point jump.) During her yearlong quest, Stier is repeatedly advised to go to Advantage—"*Everyone* uses them," a real-estate mogul she knows tells her—but she balks at the price. Finally, with less than three weeks to go, she decides she's got to try it. "By that point, I would have considered refinancing my home," she writes. Advantage, however, will not assign her a tutor on such short notice. After considerable noodging, the president of the company, Arun Alagappan, agrees to meet with her. He tells her that the whole premise of her project—sampling a different method of test prep each month—is misguided; successful preparation requires a sustained approach. This critique only makes her that much more desperate to sample Advantage's method. At last, Alagappan relents, and Stier spends the last two weeks of her project camped out in Advantage's office. She comes to feel so at home there that when other students arrive for their sessions she buzzes them in.

What does all this "struggle and conflict" accomplish? The first scores Stier receives as an "adult tester" show that four years of college and twenty-plus in the publishing industry have considerably boosted her sentence-completion skills; before any prep, she scores a 610 on the writing section and a 680 on critical reading. At first, it seems that her math score—a 510—has also improved, but this turns out to be an artifact of the curve. Thanks to a generalized decline in scores, the College Board in 1995 "recentered" the exam. As a result, Stier's original 480 in math has been pushed up by thirty points, so officially her new number and her old one are equivalent.

In subsequent SATs, Stier continues to make progress. By her third exam, she's lifted her scores to a 700 on the writing section, a 690 in reading, and a 530 in math. Her scores keep on climbing until, on her fifth exam, she does reach perfection, or a least a third of it—an 800 on the writing section. On that test, she gets a 740 in reading and a 560 in math. This turns out to be Stier's peak. All of her scores drop in the sixth exam, and two of them drop again in the seventh. She ends the project on a note of frustration. She's spent an entire year bisecting angles and factoring quadratics; still, her final math score, 530, is, by her own account, mediocre. "Oooofff," she says of it.

The morning I took the SATs, none of the other test-takers paid much attention to me. Probably this was because they were preoccupied with the exam, but it may have been because adults are to teen-agers just too weird to bother about. The only person to comment on the oddity of the situation was one of the security guards posted by the bathrooms, who cheered me on. "You go, Mom!" he called out during one of the breaks.

As an adult, I found the test more difficult than I had as a teen and, at the same time, more disappointing. Many of the questions were tricky; some were genuinely hard. But, even at its most challenging, the exercise struck me as superficial. Critical thinking was never called for, let alone curiosity or imagination. Ironically—or was it defensively?—this was most apparent to me while I was blathering on about the Manhattan Project. A study by an instructor at M.I.T. has shown that success on the SAT essay is closely correlated with length: the more words pile up, the higher the score. When, at Advantage Testing, Stier is shown essays that have received top marks, she is horrified. They are, she writes, "terrible."

Whatever is at the center of the SAT—call it aptitude or assessment or assiduousness or ambition—the exam at this point represents an accident. It was conceived for one purpose, adapted for another, and somewhere along the line it acquired a hold on American life that nobody ever intended. It's not just high-school seniors who are in its thrall; colleges are, too. How do you know how good a school is? Well, by the SAT scores of the students it accepts. (A couple of years ago, the dean of admissions at Claremont McKenna College was forced to resign after it was revealed that he had inflated students' scores to boost the school's ranking.) As befits an exam named for itself, the SAT measures those skills—and really only those skills—necessary for the SATs. ♦

A REPORTER AT LARGE

A STAR IN A BOTTLE

An audacious plan to create a new energy source could save the planet from catastrophe. But time is running out.

BY RAFFI KHATCHADOURIAN

Years from now—maybe in a decade, maybe sooner—if all goes according to plan, the most complex machine ever built will be switched on in an Alpine forest in the South of France. The machine, called the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor, or ITER, will stand a hundred feet tall, and it will weigh twenty-three thousand tons—more than twice the weight of the Eiffel Tower. At its core, densely packed high-precision equipment will encase a cavernous vacuum chamber, in which a super-hot cloud of heavy hydrogen will rotate faster than the speed of sound, twisting like a strand of DNA as it circulates. The cloud will be scorched by electric current (a surge so forceful that it will make lightning seem like a tiny arc of static electricity), and bombarded by concentrated waves of radiation. Beams of uncharged particles—the energy in them so great it could vaporize a car in seconds—will pour into the chamber, adding tremendous heat. In this way, the circulating hydrogen will become ionized, and achieve temperatures exceeding two hundred million degrees Celsius—more than ten times as hot as the sun at its blazing core.

No natural phenomenon on Earth will be hotter. Like the sun, the cloud will go nuclear. The zooming hydrogen atoms, in a state of extreme kinetic excitement, will slam into one another, fusing to form a new element—helium—and with each atomic coupling explosive energy will be released: intense heat, gamma rays, X rays, a torrential flux of fast-moving neutrons propelled in every direction. There isn't a physical substance that could contain such a thing. Metals, plastics, ceramics, concrete, even pure diamond—all would be obliterated on contact, and so the machine will hold the superheated cloud in a "magnetic bottle," using the largest system of superconducting magnets in the world. Just feet from the reactor's core, the magnets will be cooled to two hundred and sixty-nine degrees below zero, nearly the temperature of deep space. Caught in the grip of their titanic forces, the artificial earthbound sun will be suspended, under tremendous pressure, in the pristine nothingness of ITER's vacuum interior.

For the machine's creators, this process—sparking and controlling a self-sustaining synthetic star—will be the culmination of decades of preparation, billions of dollars' worth of investment, and immeasurable ingenuity, misdirection, recalibration, infighting, heartache, and ridicule. Few engineering feats can compare, in scale, in technical complexity, in ambition or hubris. Even the ITER organization, a makeshift scientific United Nations, assembled eight years ago to construct the machine, is unprecedented. Thirty-five countries, representing more than half the world's population, are invested in the project, which is so complex to finance that it requires its own currency: the ITER Unit of Account.

No one knows ITER's true cost, which may be incalculable, but estimates have been rising steadily, and a conservative figure rests at twenty billion dollars—a sum that makes ITER the most expensive scientific instrument on Earth. But if it is truly possible to bottle up a star, and to do so economically, the technology could solve the world's energy problems for the next thirty million years, and help save the planet from environmental catastrophe. Hydrogen, a primordial element, is the most abundant atom in the universe, a potential fuel that poses little risk of scarcity. Eventually, physicists hope, commercial reactors modelled on ITER will be built, too—generating terawatts of power with no carbon, virtually no pollution, and scant radioactive waste. The reactor would run on no more than seawater and lithium. It would never melt down. It would realize a yearning, as old as the story of Prometheus, to bring the light of the heavens to Earth, and bend it to humanity's will. ITER, in Latin, means "the way."

The main road to the ITER construction site from Aix-en-Provence, where I had booked a room, is the A51 highway. The drive is about half an hour, winding north past farmland and the sun-glittered Durance River. Just about every form of energy is in evidence nearby, from hydroelectric dams to floating solar panels. Seams of lignite, a soft brownish coal, run beneath the soil in Provence, but the deposits have become too expensive to mine. Several miles from Aix, a large coal plant, with a chimney that climbs hundreds of feet into the sky, is being converted to burn biomass—leaves, branches, and agricultural debris. ITER is being built a mile or two from the wooded campus of the Commissariat à l'Énergie Atomique et aux Énergies Alternatives, a state-funded research organization, created in 1945 to advance nuclear power, and now also renewable energy. Evergreen oak and Aleppo pine cover the foothills; beneath them, the French government maintains its largest strategic oil reserve.

ITER's headquarters, a five-floor edifice, was erected two years ago. An undulating wave of gray concrete slats shade its floor-to-ceiling windows. Its interior is simple: whitewashed walls, polished-concrete floors. The building's southern façade overlooks a work site, more than a hundred acres of construction on the opposite side of a berm. By the time the reactor is turned on—the formal target date for its first experiment is 2020—the site will be home to a small city. Nearly forty buildings will surround the machine, from cooling towers to a cryogenics plant, which will produce liquid helium to cool the superconducting magnets. A skywalk extends from the second floor of the headquarters to the berm, where a capacious NASA-style control room will one day be built. For now, the bridge ends

Commercial reactors modelled on ITER could generate power with no carbon, virtually no pollution, and scant radioactive waste.

ILLUSTRATION BY JACOB ESCOBEDO

in a pile of ochre dirt, and the only way to the vast expanse of construction is via a circuitous drive.

When I arrived, on a late-summer morning, the air was dry and warm—filled with the aroma of pine, lavender, and wild thyme. Five hundred people work for ITER's central organization, but an unusual sense of quiet and vacancy permeated the place; this was August in France, and many workers had taken time off. The atmosphere seemed to be drawn from the imagination of J. G. Ballard: the modernist husk of a utopian project, half-finished, half-populated, isolated amid a primeval forest. A few people with clipboards stood beneath the sun to map out an expansion to the headquarters. To save money, an entire wing had been abandoned during the construction, and employees worked out of temporary annexes—their staircases and walls hollow, like stage sets—built several hundred yards away, with shuttle buses moving among the buildings. The busing has proved to be impractical, and so the wing will be constructed after all, though now at greater expense.

In a bare lobby, I wandered over to a model of the reactor core: a cylinder, dense with mechanical parts, rendered in brightly colored bits of machined plastic. ITER's design is based on an idea that Andrei Sakharov and another Russian physicist, Igor Tamm, sketched out in the nineteen-fifties. It is called a tokamak—old Soviet shorthand for a more precise and geometrical name, *toroidalnaya kamera s aksialnym magnitnym polem*, or "toroidal chamber with an axial magnetic field." Sakharov's rough sketch depicted a doughnut-shaped vacuum chamber, or torus, ringed with electromagnets, and that is how ITER's core will look, too, once it is completed.

In myriad ways, the project is a fragment of the Cold War stranded in the present day. Sakharov had predicted that a reactor based on his sketch would produce energy in only ten or fifteen years. Subsequent physicists who built and ran experimental tokamaks were equally optimistic, always predicting success in a decade or two or three. Yet, while other scientific challenges have been overcome—launching Yuri Gagarin into orbit; delivering a rover to Mars; sequencing the human genome; discovering the Higgs boson in CERN's Large Hadron Collider—controlled thermonuclear energy has remained elusive. The National Academy of Engineering regards the construction of a commercial thermonuclear reactor—the kind of device that would follow ITER—as one of the top engineering challenges of the twenty-first century. Some in the field believe that a working machine would be a monument to human achievement surpassing the pyramids of Giza.

ITER was first proposed in 1985, during a tense summit in Geneva between Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, who agreed to collaborate "in obtaining this source of energy, which is essentially inexhaustible, for the benefit for all mankind." Since then, the coöperation has expanded to include the European Union, China, Japan, South Korea, and India. In the ITER lexicon, each partner is a Domestic Agency. Unlike any previous scientific collaboration, no partner has full control, and there is no over-all central budget. Each country makes its primary contribution in the form of finished components, which the ITER organization will assemble in France. The arrangement could serve as a model for future collaborations—or as one to avoid. At the headquarters, there is a circular dais, where representatives from the Domestic Agencies come and sit, with flags and placards before them, like members of the U.N. Security Council. But there are limits to diplomacy in nuclear engineering. Big machines either work as they're supposed to or they don't. Compromise and politesse can be disastrous. Thousands of components—many of them huge machines in their own right—must be slotted beside one another, more or less perfectly, and there will be scant ability to correct imperfections after they are delivered. Ultimately, the project's success may rest on a simple question: Will everything fit together?

Stefano Chiocchio, ITER's head of design integration—its chief puzzle master—works in one of the temporary annexes near the headquarters. His BlackBerry typically contains an impossible schedule of overlapping appointments, forcing him to conduct meeting triage as he rushes around like a zigzagging atomic particle. Rather than take the shuttle among the buildings, he drives his car to save minutes. When he speaks, he often gets halfway through a sentence, stops, and says, "O.K."—ending his thought right there. Sometimes a friend will stop him mid-stride, and say, "Stefano," and smooth out his rumpled collar.

Chiocchio's engineers are, in a sense, the project's Praetorian Guard, as one ITER official told me. So far, the vast machine exists only as 1.8 terabytes of digital information, accessible on a secure computing cloud, and backed up every night to a bank of hard drives in Barcelona. The hard drives are secured, but the main threat to the files is the work itself—with alterations to the design coming simultaneously from the ITER headquarters, from the Domestic Agencies, and from subcontractors around the world. Ideally, the changes are added only with the Praetorian Guard's approval. Still, incompatibilities proliferate, with many lying in wait like insurgents. Chiocchio's team must hunt down entire taxonomies of conflicts—"nonconformities" and "clashes" and "deviations." On most days, it seems that there aren't enough hours to do it.

I was supposed to meet Chiocchio on the fifth floor of the main building, but when I arrived there was no receptionist, no security to speak of, no one I could find to ask where he was. I heard my footsteps echo down the long, sunlit corridors as I looked for him. In one conference room, I interrupted a meeting, and a few seconds later a short, smiling man in his fifties came rushing out. It was Chiocchio. His hair, virtually gone on top, graying and wavy on the sides, framed a tired face with rounded features. Greeting me warmly, he ushered me back into the room, and urged me to sit.

Two dozen engineers were seated around tables arranged in a horseshoe, and the mood was sombre. A sense of crisis has come to surround ITER like the concentric nebulae of a dying sun. The project has been falling behind schedule almost since it began—in 1993, it was thought that the machine could be ready by 2010—and there will certainly be further delays. Morale is through the floor, and one can expect cynicism, disagreements, black humor. "There is anxiety here that it is all going to implode," one physicist told me. Many engineers and physicists at ITER believe that the delays are self-inflicted, having little to do with engineering or physics and everything to do with the way that ITER is organized and managed. Key members

of the technical staff have left; others have taken "stress leave" to recuperate. Not long ago, the director-general, Osamu Motojima, a Japanese physicist, who has run the organization since 2010, ordered workmen to install at the headquarters' entrance a granite slab proclaiming ITER's presence. People call it a tombstone.

Chiocchio's engineers had assembled to discuss their most urgent problem: delays in constructing the enormous building that will house the tokamak. The holdup had its own history. ITER had ended up in Provence following years of geopolitical argument over its location. The fight narrowed until just two countries remained, France and Japan, and finally a compromise was struck: the site would be in France, but ITER's director-general would be Japanese. There are many reasons that building a project like ITER in France makes good sense; France is singularly reliant on nuclear power, and Europe has built some of the world's most well-regarded tokamaks. But the region is prone to earthquakes, and to winds so strong that they can cause a large building to sway several inches. So the machine, along with two structures housing critical equipment, will be built on a special foundation—a concrete slab, called the B2 slab—that will be supported by hundreds of anti-seismic plinths, in what ITER engineers call the Tokamak Seismic Isolation Pit. The slab must support three hundred and sixty thousand tons of equipment and infrastructure.

Early on, to maintain the schedule, construction was rushed forward, even though significant portions of the tokamak design were incomplete. It was like building the shell of a rocket before its engine is designed—or worse, because, as Chiocchio said, "one of the difficulties with this nuclear building is that after it is built, in many cases, you cannot drill a hole in it. Once a wall is finished, that's it. The building has a safety function, a confinement function, and one of the main requirements is that it has no cracks through which radioactivity can migrate and escape. We have to be sure that we have not missed anything—every pipe, every cable—because if we do miss something, and someone says, 'O.K., let's just bolt this to the wall'—well, no, we cannot do that." And yet ITER's tremendous scale and machine density make it virtually impossible to know where everything will go. Six thousand miles of cable will run through the machine, delivering electrical power to two hundred and fifty thousand terminal points. One heating system will send a million watts of microwave radiation through a window made of a large synthetic diamond. The system will require perfectly straight tubular guides to transport the waves; no other component can impede them.

"There's money in there that could be used for other purposes."

• •

To solve the riddle of building-before-machine, the engineers have been designing special portals throughout the structure. "Basically, what we have to do now is make sure we have predefined places, with steel plates embedded in the walls, where we can support all the systems that we have inside," Chiocchio explained. "We have to put in a lot of these embedment plates, more than eighty thousand, but each one costs a lot of money, and the European Domestic Agency, which is responsible for the building, is complaining that we are putting in too many." Complaints become arguments, arguments become delays, and delays with the building now threaten the whole project. "If the building is not finished, we will have components sitting along the road. A day of delay now starts costing, I don't know, probably close to a million euros."

In the conference room, the engineers studied a PowerPoint presentation titled "TKM Complex—B1 level status week 34 and actions week 35." A member of the design-integration team, Jean-Jacques Cordier, was leading the discussion. As the meeting ended, he noted that there was not enough time to vet the components that occupy the third floor: plans had to be gathered, specifications brought up to date, problems reconciled. "It is not reasonable," he said. "It means that we would need to process thousands of data points in three weeks." Chiocchio asked if things would speed up after early floors were finished, but there were simply too many details to work through before delivering drawings to the contractor. "We have no more float," Cordier said. "If we delay now, we will have a real delay. The only way to avoid a schedule loss is to increase our resources to cope with it."

That afternoon, Chiocchio joined me for lunch. He seemed exhausted. ITER, by the time it is finished, will contain ten million individual parts, but he had only twenty-eight people working for him. He later showed me a room near his office where three men sit at workstations every day to hunt down conflicts. Before each man, there was the huge ITER puzzle in miniature, filling up two computer screens. Up close, the design looked as though someone had taken the industrial landscape that runs alongside the New Jersey Turnpike and compressed

it into a cube the volume of a Holiday Inn. "We have to check everything, from clashes to interfaces—like here," one of the men said, pointing to a schematic where a support structure for the tokamak was not lining up with an embedment plate. To fix it, he would have to inform a team of designers two floors below. Usually, members of the Guard relay messages that others do not want to hear, he said, adding, "In fact, we are not well loved by everybody."

As Chiocchio saw it, many design conflicts arise because of the project's political underpinnings. Changes to one component often make others (built in other countries) more expensive, and the ensuing arguments are difficult to resolve. From the outset, each Domestic Agency vied to build the machine's state-of-the-art components, so that its industries could gain the know-how; as a result, the design and the manufacture of the most sophisticated parts have been split apart in ways that are politically expedient but are at odds with engineering prudence. A single manufacturer should build ITER's vacuum chamber, a high-precision device that must operate with perfect symmetry. Instead, it will be constructed in nine segments, two in Korea and the rest in Europe. The design calls for certain features to be welded, but the Europeans decided to use bolts, which are cheaper. The Praetorian Guard, with little more than the power of persuasion, must insure that the device is whole.

Common frames of reference are often hard to find, and Chiocchio was constantly working to prevent ITER from becoming a scientific Tower of Babel. He pushes scientists to use the same terminology (even, occasionally, the same language), and to use the same metric standard of measurement. It is the job of a scold, but he has been with ITER for two decades, and, like many people who build tokamaks, he came to the project with a sense of mission. Thermonuclear energy—or nuclear fusion, as it is also called—differs from fission, the type of atomic reactions harnessed by existing reactors, and its promise is vastly greater. An engineer who has devoted his career to the goal of a working reactor once told me, "Fusion has an interesting pathology to it—the allure of it is so immense." In the ITER headquarters, one can sense this: a psychological force that attenuates, or confines, pessimism like a magnetic field. I picked up on it one afternoon when a dispirited physicist brightened as he made the case, half joking, that the spaceship in "Star Trek" was powered by fusion.

Chiocchio has been touched by it, too. He had started his career in fission, his interest emerging out of dire predictions about peak oil. "There was this story of limited growth, how the planet would be affected by its lack of resources, and I thought nuclear energy would help solve this," he told me. "But, after a few years, I was, let's say, *impacted* by Chernobyl, which stopped nuclear activities worldwide. In Italy, the project that I was working on came slowly to an end—O.K., it wasn't stopped, but it was clear that there was no more political support for building new nuclear plants." He eventually found contract work with a European tokamak called the Joint European Torus, or JET, and later made his way to ITER. "Fusion looked like it would have a chance—a clean alternative to fission," he said. "But there is a difference: fission is a reality. Fusion is on its way toward reality."

II—THE STAR BUILDERS

The basic physics of thermonuclear energy is seductively simple. Fission produces energy by atomic fracture, fusion by tiny acts of atomic union. Every atom contains at least one proton, and all protons are positively charged, which means that they repel one another, like identical ends of a magnet. As protons are forced closer together, their electromagnetic opposition grows stronger. If electromagnetism were the only force in nature, the universe might exist only as single-proton hydrogen atoms keeping solitary company. But as protons get very near—no farther than 0.000000000000001 metres—another fundamental force, called the strong force, takes over. It is about a hundred times more powerful than electromagnetism, and it binds together everything inside the atomic nucleus.

Getting protons close enough to cross this barrier and to allow the strong force to bind them requires tremendous energy. Every atom in the universe is moving, and the hotter something is the greater its kinetic agitation. Thermonuclear temperatures—in the sun's core, fifteen million degrees—are high enough to cause protons to slam together so forcefully that they are united by the strong force. Hydrogen nuclei slam together and form helium. Helium nuclei slam together and form beryllium. The atoms take on more protons, and become heavier. But, strangely, with each coupling a tiny amount of mass is lost, too. In 1905, Einstein demonstrated, with his most famous equation, $E=mc^2$, that the missing mass is

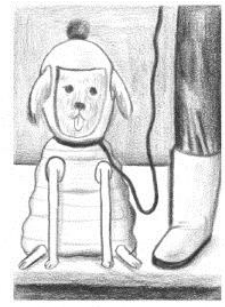
released in the form of energy as the nucleus is bound together. The quantity of energy is awesome—in some cases, a thousand times what is needed to get atoms to bind in the first place. Without it, stars would not burn, and space would remain forever cold.

The sun is, essentially, a four-hundred-quintillion-megawatt thermonuclear power plant, fuelled by billions of years' worth of hydrogen. Six hundred million tons of it is converted into energy every second. "If you go back, really far, you see the first caveman crawl out of his cave and be surprised every time the sun came up—that was the first time mankind encountered a fusion reactor," Ned Sauthoff, a physicist at Oak Ridge National Laboratory, in Tennessee, who serves as ITER's American project manager, told me. "It was ninety-three million miles away. But, of course, the caveman was impressed by the warmth and the light, and, being human, he said, 'How can I have one of those?' "

In this quest, humanity first dabbled with fire, a pale facsimile of the sun, and then with scientific fraud. In 1951, Argentina's President, Juan Perón, announced that, on the island of Huemul, his scientists had built the world's first thermonuclear reactor—something that neither the United States nor the Soviet Union, with their grand weapons programs, had sought to do. Crude fission reactors, yes: Enrico Fermi had created one in Chicago as early as 1942. But, at that time, fusion had only one real place in the American scientific imagination: the hydrogen bomb, still in secret development, not yet detonated.

The announcement was front-page news in the *Times*. Perón extolled the reactor, pronouncing it "transcendental." Instead of providing details, he introduced the project's chief designer, Ronald Richter, a scientist from Austrian-controlled Czechoslovakia who had worked under Werner Heisenberg. On Huemul, Richter had built a concrete bunker, nearly the shape of a cube, which housed a machine that he called a "thermotron." Few people had access to the device, and what little Richter described quickly raised doubts. Some physicists suspected that he was a swindler, or crazy—though an American intelligence assessment wondered if he was a "mad genius" who was "thinking in the year 1970." When public pressure grew for a demonstration, Richter began to act erratically. He made requests for gunpowder, to improve the efficacy of his machine. Eventually, military technicians went to visit Huemul, and returned announcing the "Richter discovery a colossal bluff."

The triumphant announcement, followed by scientific retreat and humiliation, set a pattern that would plague the field for decades. Still, Richter's thermotron did have an unexpected consequence: it prompted American physicists to consider what a genuine thermonuclear reactor might look like. The day the *Times* published the story, Lyman Spitzer, a thirty-six-year-old Princeton astrophysicist who had been recruited to work on the hydrogen bomb, rushed out to get a copy. Spitzer was among the thermotron's skeptics, but he was intrigued. With fusion reactions a million times more energetic than fire, two and a half pounds of the right hydrogen isotopes could produce as much energy as eighteen million pounds of coal.



Spitzer was on his way to Aspen for a ski trip, and as he went up the chairlifts, again and again, he turned the idea over in his head. As an astrophysicist, he was familiar with the punishing conditions that stars require to burn, and the lack of any physical material to contain them. At the super-high temperatures necessary for fusion, the hydrogen atoms would be unlike any of the common states of matter—solids, liquids, or gases—but would exist as ionized gas, or plasma, which would have unique electrical properties. Ninety-nine per cent of the visible universe is plasma. Spitzer knew that the ionized gas, with its free-floating charged particles, would respond to magnetic fields. Perhaps, he reasoned, a system of magnets could contain a thermonuclear cloud in a vacuum. The plasma would never have to touch a thing.

Spitzer was given time off from his bomb work to set up a secret thermonuclear-energy project in an old rabbit hutch at Princeton. He designed a tabletop device, which he called a stellarator, that looked like a pipe twisted into a figure eight. When the device was first turned on in the darkened hutch, an instantaneous purple glow appeared: the plasma, lasting a millisecond. Eventually, Spitzer was able to heat the ions to a million degrees. As he tinkered with his stellarator, government investment in thermonuclear energy began to increase, with budgets entering the millions, and competing scientists developed different magnetic bottles. There was the Perhapsatron, the "mirror" machine, the Fusor.

No matter the approach, the physicists reasoned that, as the plasma became denser, hotter, and longer-lasting, the conditions for fusion would eventually be met. But, because the point of the research was to build a commercial reactor, simply fusing atoms would not be enough. The plasma would have to produce at least as much energy as the physicists were pouring into it—an atomic breakeven—and then, beyond that, generate a net gain in energy. The ultimate goal, which the physicists called "ignition," is to excite the plasma to a state where it will heat itself like a star, requiring the barest effort to sustain and control.

The early machines performed terribly. They sucked up huge amounts of energy, only to run instantaneous plasmas. As the physicists quickly realized, they were working against physical conditions totally inhospitable to thermonuclear energy. In the sun's inner core, gravity is so crushing that light and heat from fusion can take more than a hundred thousand years to zigzag through the thick gas and reach Earth. With that kind of pressure impossible to replicate here, the scientists sought to compensate with extreme temperature. But the plasma had other ideas. Merely containing it long enough to heat was a challenge. One had only to look at the surface of the sun—a roiling sea of plasma instability—to see why. One scientist compared the effort to holding jelly in rubber bands.

In 1958, with progress largely stalled, the work was declassified and exchanged with academics, and even with the Soviets. The West learned of Sakharov's tokamak, conceived during a break in his bomb work. The tokamak had trouble with plasmas, too, but it was a remarkably elegant design. Spitzer had fashioned his vacuum chamber into a figure

eight to correct for an unavoidable imbalance in magnetic fields. Sakharov had designed a chamber that was compact, symmetrical, shaped like a doughnut—the torus. To correct for the same magnetic imbalance, he decided to drive a powerful current through the plasma, to keep it from drifting. The process would not only stabilize the swirling ionized gas but also heat it. Soon, tokamaks were achieving new milestones: denser, hotter plasmas. No device was more promising. If a self-sustaining star could be formed inside Sakharov's chamber, the heat could drive turbines that would provide near-limitless energy.

By the time Chiocchio joined ITER, in 1993, the field of fusion had travelled an uneven road of setbacks and accomplishments. Scientists were building bigger and bigger tokamaks, having calculated that as the chamber's volume increased so would its capacity to maintain a plasma that was stable and energetic enough to heat itself. The bigger the machines got, the more expensive they became, and more was expected of them. In Washington, their shortcomings were harshly judged—especially as the oil crises of the nineteen-seventies waned, and oil seemed plentiful. In the eighties, two chemists announced that they had produced "cold fusion": thermonuclear reactions, at room temperatures, in what looked like an ordinary test tube. The claims were quickly exposed as a fraud, adding a patina of credulousness to genuine research that was already struggling with credibility. And yet, by 1993, physicists were making a clear approach toward breakeven. They were hopeful that if they could build a big enough machine the barrier could be breached—decades of frustrating effort would finally yield energy.

In those early years, ITER had—for the only time in its history—a single visionary at its helm: a French physicist named Paul-Henri Rebut. Balding, with intense eyes darting behind large glasses, Rebut had designed JET, a widely praised machine with a vacuum chamber big enough to walk through. Some colleagues referred to him as a genius; he could attend to engineering obstacles with extreme focus, and was able to visualize simple solutions for intricate problems. At JET, Rebut wandered the halls of the design office at night—he thought more clearly while pacing—and sometimes he went from workstation to workstation, penning corrections or x-ing out whole ideas. "He could be brutal," Chiocchio recalled. "But he was very, very clever."

Once Rebut had agreed to take charge of ITER, he moved with characteristic boldness. For years, in various workshops, a conceptual design had been sketched out for a dual-purpose machine that was partly an experiment to prove fusion's feasibility and partly a prototype for a commercial reactor. Rebut tossed out the design and replaced it with his own: a gargantuan device, in effect a full prototype. In his mind, fusion was already feasible—and, as he had

THE BEST OF US

Give me your Greek myths
and I'll give you the Carmen

Kief Bridge—forgotten,
whatever it was called before—

where thirty years ago Trey
scaled the steel lift

still hot from the sun of the day,
with a spray can under his chin,

to inscribe the I-beam with the promise
of her memory and the imprimatur of his passion.

*

Or when Oris G. did his girlfriend on the front lawn
at lunch—I was speechless with admiration.

The football coach looked him right in the eye
and Oris looked right back, the coach hardly

able to draw his smile or keep from pounding Oris
on the back as if he were a safety

just trotting off the field with his first interception.
(What girl could I hold—even under the bleachers?)

*

Trey sat with his brother on the T-top
of their Trans Am, a big, wing-stretched

bird stamped in gold on the hood.
They drank the better of a twelve-pack

under the scrawl of a new constellation.
There was no moon, there was no call.

*

Mr. Kief went to early Mass
with his wife and four daughters,

auburn muses sliding into his car,
one hotter than the next, down to his baby girl,

whose breasts even the straight girls attended.
Did Carmen see the blazón first or did her father,

driving with his neck stretched as if
the crimson letters themselves were suitors

tearing up his sod and eating at his table?
Before the sun set, sandblasters were at work

clouding the message and blotting the sword.
Fathers themselves, they scrubbed

the rust patches and rivets almost to clouds, like those
around great mountain peaks, red rocks

and crags reaching through too-visible haze. "Trey"
watered down to foam by the gritty spray, "loves"

columned in faint streaks, but "Carmen" flaring
like the night it was born from Trey's nozzle.

All that Mr. Kief could not rid himself of:
how his baby became the protagonist,

how she acted through the actor, freeing
herself through photon bonding at the head

of this, our bayou infrastructure. Shame is such
a bastard, its fly-by-night parents,

cowardice and hubris—all that we know
better than God, all we hide from the grass

and the sky. *Her* name will be remembered,
not like a trophy or the blotted girl on the lawn

but like a woman who guards the pass
or a woman who starts a war.

—*Martha Serpas*

once explained, "There is a general tendency not to be harsh enough in this field and to go too slowly, not to make the necessary step large enough." He envisioned a vacuum vessel seventy-two feet in diameter. Its plasma would produce a gigawatt, or a billion watts, possibly more, and run for a thousand seconds. He saw no point in the massive global effort without chasing the ultimate goal: ignition.

At that time, ITER had no formal organization. "All of us were basically assigned to this international team from our own countries," Chiocchio recalled. Three offices were opened: one in Garching, Germany, where components inside the vacuum chamber were being worked on; another in Naka, Japan, which concentrated mostly on magnets; and a design center in San Diego, where Rebut was based. Chiocchio worked in Germany, but he sometimes flew to see Rebut. "I remember he had a chair with wheels, and was rolling among the workstations of the designers," he recalled. "Rebut himself was the integrator. We were sending them faxes every evening, and they were sending us responses by fax every morning. We were joking, this is design by 'strategic fax.' But the approach was not entirely entropic. It had an advantage. Instead of working eight hours a day, we were working sixteen."

The design was extremely elastic: features shifted continually in relation to other features that were also shifting. "The team was not so big, so we knew each other well," Chiocchio said. Working at the conceptual level—without worrying over fine details—they could grasp what colleagues in other divisions were doing. The plasma was constantly exerting new and unforeseen forces, which the ITER engineers struggled to measure and to incorporate into their designs. "The mentality of fission is that there is a systematic process—you define your loads, your criteria, and then you produce a design," Chiocchio told me. "At the beginning, at ITER, sometimes I would ask my boss, 'Can you tell me what the main requirements are for this component?' And he would say, 'What are you talking about? Try to find a solution.' It was a bit more of a, let's say, *creative* engineering environment."

Rebut himself did not bother documenting the requirements. This was information that he kept easily in his head. An American representative urged him to work in a more standardized way, but he refused. The design was growing in scale and cost, and Rebut's intuitive style and unwillingness to engage in basic diplomacy began to work against him. In 1994, the United States succeeded in having him removed. As it was not Rebut's way to leave subtly, he went to Congress, and argued that the ITER organization had insufficient legal authority, insufficient independent funding, and, perhaps worst of all, a leadership of incompetent bureaucrats. By focussing on consensus, he argued, the parties made decisions based on the lowest common denominator. The representatives

"Remember how we used to put nice little smiles on their faces?"

• •

assigned to the ITER Council were "more concerned with the work awarded to each home team than by the success of the engineering design activity." If things did not change, Rebut predicted, the machine would never succeed.

ITER was only an idea, a pile of schematics worked out in three countries by intercontinental fax, and yet the collaboration was already fraying. In the United States, the 1994 Republican revolution ushered into Congress lawmakers hostile to internationalism—especially in the case of a scientific project that offered no immediate utility. No one could doubt the vision in Rebut's design, but the price—ten billion dollars—was conspicuous for a field that had generated not one electron of net power. Even within the fusion community, there was growing skepticism. Fearing that the American contribution to ITER would soak up funding for domestic research, some scientists quietly lobbied against it. In 1996, two physicists from the University of Texas at Austin, William Dorland and Michael Kotschenreuther, joined with researchers at Princeton to run a computer model based on the ITER design; it suggested that the reactor had no chance of meeting its goals. The story made the *Times*. The people who were with the project embraced the news, Chiocchio told me: "The team reacted in the right way. It was not 'No, no, no'—it was really trying to understand, based on their analysis, how we should correct anything." But within political circles the *Times* story could not have been encouraging.

The ITER team reached out to James Sensenbrenner, the chair of the House Committee on Science, which oversaw the fusion-research budget. "Sensenbrenner visited Naka, to see the prototypes that we had built for the vacuum vessel and the magnets," Chiocchio said. "The people who organized the visit told me, 'Ah, we really managed to convince him that we are using the taxpayers' money well.'" Sensenbrenner returned to Washington and set out to insure that ITER would never be built. Congress cut funding for the project, and in 1999 the United States withdrew; the San Diego office was shut down, flights were cancelled, and American physicists were instructed not to participate. Chiocchio told me, "We thought it was the end of ITER."

The timing was painfully ironic: the justification for the project was only growing stronger. For decades, physicists had been working with a heavy hydrogen isotope called deuterium, which is abundant in seawater. Calculations had long indicated that a half-and-half mixture of deuterium and tritium—an even heavier hydrogen isotope—would produce the ideal conditions, but tritium is rare and radioactive; it would irradiate expensive machines that were not fully designed for it. In the nineties, two tokamaks experimented with it sparingly. One, at Princeton, achieved temperatures as high as five hundred million degrees, and in three years of experiments made huge advances. In Europe, scientists at JET, using only ten-per-cent tritium, produced more than a megawatt of fusion power. The trial fell short of breakeven, but the scientists estimated that, with the ideal tritium mixture, their plasma would have produced more energy than was put into it—for the first time, in theory, a net gain. Several years later, they set out to confirm their estimate, and succeeded in producing a sixteen-megawatt plasma, a record, though they still narrowly missed breakeven. As Chiocchio put it, "There was really this impression that we were very close to the target."

The history of physics is littered with unrealized grand experiments: old blueprints buried in file drawers, half-built machinery packed in crates, excavated earth filled with pooling rainwater—the

detritus of Big Science. As the frontier of human knowledge pushes forward, so, too, does the cost and the complexity of further exploration. Telescopes grow larger. Space is probed at greater depths. Atomic particles are smashed more forcefully. Many scientific questions now demand resources that no individual can marshal—no single university, no single company, and, increasingly, no single government. "But big science has the special problem that it can't easily be scaled down," the physicist Steven Weinberg recently observed in *The New York Review of Books*. "It does no good to build an accelerator tunnel that only goes halfway around the circle." And so such projects are often born out of vexed politics, then hampered by limited funding, and by a willingness to abandon them at any time. To some extent, the experiments that succeed are aided by a willful dose of unrealism—budgets imagined too lean, timetables too short, human behavior too nearly ideal. Crisis emerges when reality finally asserts itself.

In facing such a crisis, ITER was not alone. Many large machines have been commissioned, and then, as costs soared, cancelled midway. Last summer, at the Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory—a federally funded institution that grew out of Lyman Spitzer's rabbit hutch—I was shown the partially assembled segments of a device called the National Compact Stellarator Experiment. Each piece was an exquisite metallic artifact, made primarily of stainless steel, curving and twisting in ways that could not have been designed before the advent of supercomputers. The assembly requirements were so precise that building the thing in the way that the laboratory promised was impossible. The project—tens of millions of dollars over budget, and years behind schedule—was killed five years ago, though it was hard to tell, as the scientists spoke dreamily about seeing it assembled one day. In a way, the machine suffered a less painful fate than the Mirror Fusion Test Facility, at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, which was fully built before it was defunded, in 1986—without being used even once.

In the nineties, there was every reason to think that ITER had reached its end, too, with America's role in it so significant, and the mood in Washington so austere. But, as Weinberg told me, "It is hard to turn off international collaborations"—large-scale bureaucratic inertia can be its own saving grace. By the time the United States withdrew, another French physicist, Robert Aymar, was in charge, and he decided to reduce the astronomical cost by making a smaller machine. The redesign had to be conducted on a tight budget, with a small staff; begun in 1998, it was not completed until 2001. The new machine would be built for the ideal tritium mixture, but it would no longer strive to attain ignition. Instead, it would produce ten times the energy fired into the plasma, at half a gigawatt. Aymar put its value at five billion dollars, and the number—precisely (and conveniently) half of ITER's earlier cost—was soon cited as its price. But the estimate was intended only as a guide to divide work among the parties, and did not consider real-world manufacturing expenses, or the unusual way the work would ultimately be split up. The design was still far from complete, and just about everyone knew that the figure was a gross underestimate. "Of course, bureaucrats wanted to get ITER approved, and politicians were happy to turn a blind eye," an official told me. "If they would have said, 'Oh, instead of five billion this will be fifteen billion,' then probably nobody would have wanted to build it."

Urged by a consensus of American academics, the United States rejoined; an agreement formally binding the parties together was finally signed, and offices for the American Domestic Agency were opened at Oak Ridge. But the willful unrealism remained. The first two leaders of ITER had no background in plasma physics. The director-general, Kaname Ikeda, was a Japanese civil servant and a nuclear engineer. His chief deputy, Norbert Holtkamp, came from the world of high-energy particle accelerators. Holtkamp did what he could to shield the fledgling organization. "He once said, 'If you spend as much money as you can, after the first billion no one is going to stop us,' and so he spent and spent and spent," one former ITER engineer told me. "The design wasn't finished! But he just wanted to go already: move, move, move." (Holtkamp denies making the comment.) Science and politics fused. When European engineers who had invested decades of research on tokamak inner walls proposed building ITER's, a Chinese official stood and, deeply upset, argued vehemently that it was the height of arrogance to presume that China could not manufacture a wall. And so it was decided: China would make part of the wall.

Soon enough, reality again asserted itself: the schedule slipped, and costs rose. In 2010, Ikeda and Holtkamp were out, and Osamu Motojima was in. As a plasma physicist, as a fusioneer, Motojima understood what was at stake: if ITER fails, the quest for thermonuclear energy might be set back indefinitely. After taking the helm, he declared, "The dream is alive!" One afternoon, David Campbell, ITER's chief physicist, told me, "I can go across the hall and look at the construction site, and sometimes I have to tell myself, 'We're building ITER out there!' It took a long time to get this far. Even though there are frustrations with the system, even though the members are not happy because the cost has gone up and the schedule is longer than they want, everyone is committed to it."

III—INTO THE MACHINE

When I walked up to the Commissariat à l'Énergie Atomique, Chiocchio was standing at the front gate, shielding his eyes from the sun. He seemed taken aback by my presence, and then he smiled warmly and told me that there wasn't much time. It was 8 A.M., and we were trying to make an 8 A.M. meeting in a "virtual reality room" that ITER was renting from the C.E.A., in order to study the tokamak design in three dimensions. We still had to get credentialled, and then drive through the sprawling grounds.

A few minutes later, we parked at the back entrance of a concrete building, and I followed him through a steel door and into a massive hall. "This is the building for Tore Supra—the first European superconducting tokamak," he said. We walked past the machine, a twenty-five-year-old behemoth designed by Aymar. Tokamaks, as they are currently designed, work in pulses, and in 2003 Tore Supra set a record for the longest plasma pulse: six minutes. A few years later, a Japanese tokamak ran for five hours. These long pulses did not attempt to generate energy; rather, they attempted to show that a tokamak could one day produce a plasma that engineers call "steady state." ITER is being designed to run its highest-performing

plasmas for up to five hundred seconds; but a real reactor would need to work continuously—something that no one has figured out how to do.

We rushed through a dim lobby and then into a small room, where about fifteen engineers had convened. A blurry rendition of the ITER tokamak was projected on a large screen, and polarized goggles were being handed out so that the 3-D effect would be perceptible. I put on the goggles and looked at the cylindrical reactor core, its dense crush of parts, rendered in bright colors, seeming to float in a vast gray horizonless space. The projection had the tactility of an object. Chiocchio walked over to the window, and stood next to another engineer. "You better take your seat or you will lose it," he said. He pointed to an empty chair and laughed. "This is how it works: competition, O.K.—" There was no point in his sitting anyway. He could stay for only a few minutes before the next meeting.

A senior member of the Praetorian Guard was running the review: Jens Reich, a lanky German mechanical engineer with the intensity of an overworked Ph.D. candidate. Reich grew up near the Baltic Sea, and started his career in R.&D. for washing machines and other household appliances. When money for the research dried up, he applied for a job at the Max Planck Institute for Plasma Physics, which was hiring people to build a billion-dollar stellarator called Wendelstein 7-X. Right away, he sensed that he belonged to an important but easily misunderstood mission. "I have friends working on solar power," he told me. "What we are doing is not so obvious."

The purpose of Reich's review was primarily to evaluate changes that various Domestic Agencies were proposing for the magnets, beginning with one called the central solenoid, the most important American contribution to ITER. In grade school, children often make solenoids by wrapping wire around a nail and then attaching the wire to a battery: the current magnetizes the coil. ITER's solenoid will work in the same way, but it will weigh a thousand tons, and stand as a forty-foot column in the center of the vacuum chamber. Its coil will be more than twenty miles long, and it will be made with niobium-3-tin, an exotic material rarely used in large industrial projects. The metal was selected because it can generate extreme magnetic fields: two hundred and sixty thousand times greater than Earth's. Key to the original Soviet tokamak design, the solenoid will send huge pulses of electricity through the plasma, to heat and stabilize it.

David Everitt, the engineer at Oak Ridge in charge of the magnet's construction, told me to think of it as a giant sparkplug. "It will be a technological wonder," he said. "It has to do so many things. The current is not constant. It has a very high magnetic field—not the highest ever, but very high—and where the current in one module is opposite the one in the adjacent module there is a very large separating force."

When ITER engineers talk of a very large separating force, what they mean is a cataclysmic rupture. The solenoid will be built in six modules, stacked one atop another like poker chips. The benefit of this design is that the various modules can run magnetic fields, giving physicists the ability to mold the plasma in different ways. The drawback is that those fields also create tremendous opposing forces, which are inclined to blow the stack apart if they are not severely counterbalanced. The magnet's designers have calculated that the forces can reach sixty meganewtons, or twice the thrust that a NASA Space Shuttle requires for liftoff. The stack can compress just as powerfully. When structural engineers learned of the design, their reaction was: Holy mackerel! You want to do *what*?

Depending on whom you talk to, the history of the central solenoid epitomizes either ITER's flaws or its ability to overcome them. From the start, the magnet's technical requirements indicated that it would be extremely difficult to build. To prevent the solenoid from launching through the roof, a thousand and eighty screws must be fixed to the top and the bottom, to keep the stack in viselike compression. Moreover, niobium-3-tin is difficult to work with. It does not attain its superconducting properties until it is baked: cables made with strands of it must be coiled into a module, then heated for days in a custom-made furnace flooded with argon gas. The strands, each one less than a millimetre thick, are interwoven with copper. In the furnace, the metals bind into a fragile matrix that later cannot be flexed.

"The challenge for the central solenoid is that it has to ramp up every time you do a plasma shot, which is thousands of times during the lifetime of the machine—so you have to create a superconducting cable that can pulse tens of thousands of times without degrading, and that is very hard with niobium-3-tin," an engineer who worked on the magnet told me. "It is a brittle material. How is it not going to become dust? With each pulse, you are literally breaking it, microfracturing it. So what is the solution? Don't pulse so many times, or pulse with less energy. But you cannot do either. If you pulse with less energy, then you don't get the heating that you need, and if you pulse fewer times then the life of the machine is shorter. So you are pushing up against the limit of what the material can do."

The project's internecine politics made matters only worse. People at ITER use the term "conductor zoo" to refer to the menagerie of materials going into the magnets. The niobium-3-tin strand is produced by a dizzying array of subcontractors in six countries, in ways so disparate that their samples even look different. As Chiocchio explained, "You have suppliers from all over the world, and it is really a nightmare." Japan, which had worked on the prototype for the solenoid, wanted a hand in developing its cables, so it campaigned to supply its own materials to the zoo. In 2010, two Japanese companies sent samples to a test facility in Switzerland. The results were spectacularly poor. The solenoid is designed to run sixty thousand pulses in ITER's lifetime, but the Japanese cable was degrading after six thousand. Engineers began to worry: "Is this going to be a fatal flaw for ITER?"

Officials at Oak Ridge, concerned that the schedule was at risk, contacted an ITER supplier in New Jersey, Oxford Superconducting Technology, which was producing niobium-3-tin strand for other large magnets in the machine. They requested a sample that could work for the

solenoid, and in 2012, after it performed well in tests, they urged the Japanese to purchase the material from Oxford. "In the structure of ITER, it was very hard to convince the Japanese that was something they wanted to do: spend a lot of money in the U.S. on conductors," a former Oak Ridge official told me. The Japanese refused, and the threat of delay grew. The engineers—attempting to maintain the spirit of collaboration—tried twisting the Japanese cable more tightly, in the hope that it would perform better. New samples were sent to Switzerland, and, after more than two years of discussion and trials, the Japanese product finally worked. "There was a whole lot of relief around the world," the former official said. Some engineers were proud of the teamwork, but the problem need not have existed, and the issue remains sensitive. When *Science* published a news item about the success, Motojima wrote to say that it was unfair to imply that the Japanese manufacturers had ever failed. "This is not correct," he insisted.

The effects of the delay are still evident on the ground. Officials at Oak Ridge had subcontracted the construction of the solenoid to General Atomics, a family-owned company in San Diego, with a portfolio that ranges from nuclear batteries to algae-based animal feed. After winning the contract, in 2011, General Atomics constructed a sixty-thousand-square-foot workspace, in a large building overlooking the dry arroyos of Sycamore Canyon. (The building belongs to a corporate affiliate that makes Predator drones, though that part is "secure.") Before I flew to France, the solenoid project's chief engineer gave me a tour of the vast, mostly empty space. He talked about the problem of how to move the extremely heavy modules among workstations. In addition to a thirty-five-ton crane, he had purchased a large pallet that glides on a cushion of compressed air. A company called Airfloat makes them for various industries; an airplane fuselage or a locomotive built on an Airfloat pallet can slide like a shopping cart.

"That magnet is so heavy that we had to spend time super-duper reinforcing the floor," a spokesperson for the company said. Nearly a million dollars' worth of concrete had been poured, mostly to a depth of eighteen inches—capable of bearing two hundred tons, the combined weight of a module and the equipment needed to work on it. As the concrete set, it was precisely levelled: a tilt of more than an eighth of an inch spanning ten feet was unacceptable. Too great an incline would disturb the air beneath the pallet, allowing millions of dollars' worth of superconducting cable to drift out of control. The floor looked like a shelf of polished glass; as we crossed it, I asked the chief engineer if he was ever tempted to put on skates and race across. He grinned, and said, "We've had all kinds of crazy ideas, about having a criterium in here—a bunch of us have bikes—or a roller-hockey tournament."

A hundred feet away, two young people were working in what seemed like an Arctic encampment atop the shelf. They were wearing white Tyvek bodysuits, and were dipping the superconducting cable into epoxy, trying to figure out another problem: coils of the material seemed to be shrinking after they were vacuum-sealed. We walked over to a massive slinky: empty cable jacketing from Japan that had arrived in a plywood box stamped "Fragile." The slinky contained half a mile of metal. This is how all the cable will come. The engineer shook his head at the scale.

General Atomics had wanted to make several changes to the solenoid's design, and, with the ITER team convened in the C.E.A.'s virtual-reality room, Jens Reich begin to review them. Above the virtual tokamak, there was a command: "Navigate—fly." The session's pilot—a technician holding a joystick—stepped forward, and navigated the team through the cyberscape. We swooped toward ITER's base, then into the vacuum chamber. The computer could not handle the entire ITER schematic in 3-D, so on Reich's command the renderings for most of the machine were subtracted, leaving only the solenoid.

Working though a checklist from General Atomics, Reich guided the pilot to various locations. Some features—pipes and cables—were shielded in casings, so the pilot used a tool to cut through the shielding, as if it were an object. Reich asked the pilot to bisect the solenoid, and the team studied its cross-section. To manufacture the magnet, General Atomics wanted to alter its

geometry, and when the pilot measured the modules it was clear that they had slightly widened. Reich made a note: if the available gaps in the design were too small, the consequences would be severe. A bit later, he noticed two pipes that went nowhere. "How about those?" he said. "What is that?" No one knew. "There is an intermediate piece missing," he said, and noted it. On the whole, though, Reich was pleased. The design was nearly final, and he was already considering the magnet's complex installation.

In May, the Japanese are scheduled to begin delivering the conductor to General Atomics, which is scheduled to complete all six modules by 2018. The company will ship the finished pieces to the Port of Galveston, with each module—fourteen feet in diameter—delivered on trucks propelled by as many as thirty axles, to support their weight. The journey will likely be made after midnight, because the trucks will need to occupy two highway lanes. In Galveston, the modules will be loaded onto a ship that will travel to Fos-sur-Mer, near Marseilles. From there, they will be hauled along a specially fortified road to the tokamak's assembly hall, and stacked and compressed and wired and tested. The height of the hall is dictated by the height of the solenoid. Once the stack is built, it will be attached at its top to a crownlike jig. Suspended from the ceiling, a sliding crane—with four hooks hanging off steel cables—will lift the jig, and with it the solenoid, hanging vertically. Every variable will be precisely accounted for: the amount the cables will stretch while bearing the immense weight; the crane's momentum as it moves; the degree to which the magnet will sway; even the weather—the wind hitting the building, and how the force of it might affect the crane's journey. Slowly, the solenoid—all one thousand tons of it—will be carried to the tokamak and lowered into the center of the vacuum chamber. If it is just millimetres too wide, it will not fit in the tight cylindrical space designed for it. There is no room for error.

IV—THE RED BUTTON

What will happen when ITER is turned on? This much is certain: a synthetic star, as it takes shape inside an earthbound device, is a cryptic marvel. The only way to observe it is from the remove of a control room: the magnetic fields are invisible, the plasma makes no sound. But visit a working tokamak—in South Korea or Switzerland or India—and ask what would happen if you stood beside the machine, while it is on, and threw a kitchen magnet into the air. Answer: The magnet would zoom toward the core and blast a hole in the machine. What if the plasma suddenly dissipates? Answer: Gargantuan forces are likely to surge, perhaps even lifting the device, as runaway electron beams tear wildly into the machine. In the control room, it might appear that not much is happening, but you will be surrounded by a science of extremity.

"We were definitely here before them."

What will happen when ITER is turned on? The answer, as with all experiments, is something of a mystery, since no one has yet produced a plasma that is hot and dense and durable enough to heat itself. Will such a thing be more difficult to contain, or will it possess an unforeseen equilibrium?

While ITER is running, the machine's central brain, a computer system called CODAC, will monitor a hundred and twenty thousand streams of information—among them the plasma's temperature, fluctuations in electromagnetic activity, and the forces that the reactions exert on the machine. Until then, physicists around the world are working with supercomputers to help predict how the atomic particles will behave. Since the first Soviet tokamaks, the plasma's volatile magnetic storms and turbulence are far better understood—one physicist described them to me as swirls within swirls within swirls—but they remain a perplexing scientific frontier. Physicists have developed an entire nomenclature for the instabilities: sawteeth, drift, tearing, sausage, interchange, counterstreaming, helical kink, bump-in-tail. They can seem, at times, like the scientists in Stanislaw Lem's "Solaris," peering into the "plasmatic eddies" of a sentient ocean, whose behavior is beyond understanding.

In the nineteen-eighties, tokamak performance had hit a ceiling because turbulence at the edge of plasmas was impossible to control: electromagnetic eddies carried energy outward from the superhot core in diffuse and unpredictable ways, abrading the tiles on the tokamak walls, sucking impurities into the plasma and cooling it. These instabilities seemed insurmountable until researchers in Germany stumbled upon a discovery: under the right heating conditions, the plasma contained itself by forming a steep, clean pedestal at its perimeter, with its inner temperature and density ballooning. At first, the effect was doubted. There was no theory to explain

it, and plasmas had rarely offered gifts, only obstacles. But the pedestal was real, and it was christened H-Mode. It is now ubiquitous in tokamaks, though physicists still have only a general idea how it works, and maintaining it is hard: when the pressure behind the pedestal is too great, the plasma erupts into flares that must be quelled.

It is unclear whether ITER will have enough power to achieve H-Mode. The relevant heating systems on the largest existing tokamak are the size of five shipping containers; ITER's will be three times larger, and will have to work in an unproved way, just as pliers the size of a skyscraper cannot be opened by hand. Even if the systems work, there might not be enough of them. Current extrapolations offer only a hazy guide to what ITER will require for the pedestal, with the range of uncertainty—what physicists call the error bar—remaining frustratingly large. Joe Snipes, a physicist at ITER's headquarters, told me, "We tried and tried and tried—and when I say 'we' I mean the entire fusion community, experts from around the world working on different machines—we tried to reduce the error bar, but we really couldn't do it; the H-Mode depends on so many different factors that we don't understand." Some engineers wonder if the relevant heating systems—hardware, costing a billion dollars, first developed for Reagan's Star Wars Defense Initiative—have outlived their usefulness in tokamaks. Others believe that everything must be tried, because ITER ultimately remains an experiment: mapping the way is its purpose.

Snipes's job will be to run the plasma. Not long ago, in the headquarters, he gave a lecture for engineers titled "Operational Limits on ITER." Most of what he had to say involved the uncertainties of plasma behavior, but he reminded his colleagues that some limits might be imposed simply by the way ITER is built. While the Praetorian Guard was worrying over the gaps among components, trying to insure that there will be enough space to assemble the machine, the physicists were worrying over them, too. Neutrons are expected to pour out of ITER's plasma like a tsunami. Because these particles have no charge, they will escape the grip of ITER's magnets, advancing through any space that they can find, pushing into, or even through, obstructions—solid matter will not always stop them.

Early on, physicists understood that, as more gaps were introduced into the design, more neutrons would penetrate the machine, heating whatever absorbed them. To study the plasma's effects on the structure, they purchased a million C.P.U. hours on MareNostrum, a supercomputer in Barcelona that is housed in a pristine glass box in the dimly lit nave of a nineteenth-century chapel. ITER's magnets will be encased in a cryostat and continuously cooled with liquid helium. If they get warmer than negative two hundred and sixty-seven degrees, they will "go normal," and lose the quality that makes them superconducting. At that point, the enormous electrical current running through them will look for an alternate outlet, like a dammed river. If all eighteen toroidal-field magnets were to experience this phenomenon at once, forty-one billion joules of energy would seek a new place to go. One scientist compared the outcome to two 747 airplanes simultaneously crashing into the machine.

Complex calculations are required to predict how many neutrons will hit the magnets, but gaps are being introduced faster than the analysis can be done. "The physicist responsible for this is constantly upgrading his models," Snipes told me. "Every little gap causes him tremendous headaches. Now, it probably won't be a problem—we will lower the plasma performance before we get to that dangerous state—but it will limit how high we can go." In other words, even if ITER is able to produce record thermonuclear reactions, the machine may not be able to cope with them—an immensely frustrating prospect. Since the days of Dorland and Kotschenreuther, there have been far more encouraging computer models; one predicts that ITER could theoretically reach ignition. But, if the gaps proceed apace, even the project's fundamental goals may be compromised.

"This is what happens when you are driven by a schedule that is not realistic, or when you are asked to build a machine with too few people, or too little money—so something has to give," a scientist affiliated with the project said. "Whenever the director-general celebrates a milestone, he doesn't acknowledge the shortcuts that have been taken to get to that milestone." ITER is continually being reshaped to meet the demands of lower cost. The tokamak once had two exhaust components, called diverters. Now it has one. "And that is risky," the scientist added. "That's like building only one Space Shuttle, and expecting it to run for thirty years. If something happens to that one diverter, it could take five years to make another, so that might be the end of the project." The compromises are a source of constant arguments, many of which go unresolved or are resolved cynically, people say, because Motojima fosters a culture antithetical to open science, because technical needs give right of way to diplomatic sensitivities, because ITER's organizational structure is being modelled on that of a Japanese corporation—heavy on administration and intensely concerned with projecting an image of progress. "This project is supposed to be about hope, but fear runs rampant within it," the scientist said. "Efforts are made on many levels to hide the problems, in part because people believe the situation can't be remedied, and in part because some of the decision-makers will be dead by the time the big red button is pushed."

By summertime, the working atmosphere within the largest scientific collaboration in history was growing increasingly anxious. "ITER has always been a bit of a hectic place to work, eh?" Chiocchio had told me, but the frustrations were clearly mounting. In the previous year, ITER had met barely half its goals. The latest target date for turning on the machine—2020—was again slipping. Officials were now quietly talking about 2023 or 2024. What if the schedule continued to slide? Engineers operate in a world of strictly measured loads and heat fluxes, but political forces are impervious to precise measurement. Still, the ultimate repercussions were obvious: there would come a point, eventually, when frustrated politicians decided that ITER was simply not worth the increasing expense of delay.

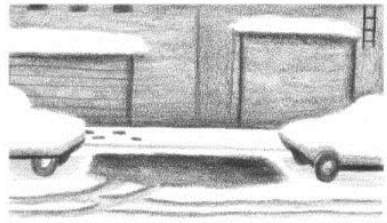
In June, the ITER Council gathered in Tokyo, and it was evident that the organization was grappling with its own inner turbulence. At one point, the council member from Korea picked up his papers and stormed out. Ned Sauthoff, the U.S. project manager, bluntly made it known that he thought the project's

nuclear-safety culture was lacking. America's involvement was growing more tenuous. The Department of Energy had cut funding for a tokamak at M.I.T. to help pay for ITER, and the decision had familiar implications; members of Congress were invited to view the inert machine, and they returned to the Hill expressing outrage. ("ITER is going to eat our whole domestic program.") Official estimates of the U.S. contribution had doubled, to a billion dollars, and then rose again, to $2.4 billion, merely to get to "first plasma"—essentially, just turning on the machine. Before summer's end, Dianne Feinstein, the chairwoman of the Senate subcommittee that handles appropriations for energy development, announced that she would discontinue all funding for ITER until the Department of Energy provided a detailed assessment of the total American financial commitment. The request was both logical and impossible to answer accurately; even people at ITER did not know. The department was reluctant to provide a number, and Sauthoff told me, "We are in unknown territory."

Motojima, meanwhile, was struggling to make the organization simpler and more centralized, but his efforts were trapped in a Catch-22: the Domestic Agencies wouldn't turn over more control to ITER's headquarters without greater trust in its effectiveness, but the organization could never be more effective without greater central authority. Something clearly had to change. When I met Motojima, he had just returned from Siberia—to visit an ITER contributor in Novosibirsk—and he seemed tired. He had his own theory about the sinking morale: it was partly caused by the incessant work, but it also had a psychological component, in that people could not witness the physical manifestations of their work. Most ITER employees cannot see the construction site from their windows, or components built off-site. In time, large pieces would arrive. Progress would be measurable. Attitudes would shift. From his office, on the fifth floor, construction on the vast tokamak work site was always visible.

Still, Motojima was weathering fierce criticism. It had been decided in Tokyo that, once and for all, the schedule had to be made realistic. A council member told me, "Outsiders look in and say, 'This is rotten.' They say, 'Oh, the project of fusion itself is misguided,' that this is an impossible dream. No, no, no! The leadership at ITER is what is rotten. We have to converge on a solution, a possible way out of this mess. If we don't, then we will have trouble—I think a total shakeup of the whole project, the leadership, maybe something else. I mean, any partner country can leave, but that is not very useful, because the project is executable. All the member states are not getting together as one team, with one goal. We have to rectify this."

The shakeup was unavoidable. In October, a confidential management assessment determined that the project was "in a malaise and could drift out of control." It made eleven stark recommendations, among them that Motojima be replaced as quickly as possible. The ITER Council convened an emergency session. The stakes were particularly high for the American delegation, which still needed to placate Congress. The Department of Energy had offered Feinstein a new estimate of the U.S. contribution—ranging from four billion dollars to $6.5 billion—and she had agreed to fund ITER (and the M.I.T. machine), but not without conditions. Twenty per cent of the money would be withheld until the eleven recommendations were meaningfully followed. In essence, she was saying that ITER had to turn itself around, or the U.S. role might again be in jeopardy.



As people involved in ITER began to wonder who would succeed Motojima—one suggested Condoleezza Rice—he hastened to make changes. He summarily fired his head of magnets, an outspoken but respected veteran of twenty-six years, and merged the Praetorian Guard's work with that of other divisions. "I am no longer the head of design integration," Chiocchio told me, but, no matter how many times he tried to explain his new place in the bureaucracy, it was hard for me to grasp. He had gained a few responsibilities, and lost others. "Basically," he told me, "I keep doing exactly the same work."

V—THE APOLLO GAMBIT

When Chiocchio joined ITER, concerns about energy were largely economic. Climate change has made them a matter of survival. It is virtually an article of faith among some fusioneers that creating miniature stars on Earth is a non-optional part of humanity's future—a view that mirrors arguments put forth by a growing number of environmentalists who once decried nuclear power. The belief rests on a simple premise: burning fossil fuels is a paramount ecological ill, but no existing form of renewable energy can replace it. David MacKay, a physicist at Cambridge University, once posed the question of what would need to happen for the United Kingdom to entirely stop using fossil fuels. He arrived at this instructive hypothetical: even if the country cut energy consumption by half, it would still require a wind farm the size of Wales, along with fifty new nuclear-fission plants, and photovoltaic cells with twice the surface area of Greater London—but situated in a far-off desert, with the electricity somehow delivered to British consumers.

On a warm afternoon, Chiocchio stopped by the office of Guenter Janeschitz—"ITER's Schwarzenegger," an engineer had told me. Tall, blond, and Austrian, Janeschitz was a senior adviser in the director-general's office, but his role was broader and vaguer than that—as Chiocchio put it, "If you look at the organization, it's not clear where he is." Often, during a crisis, Janeschitz is there. Chiocchio had known him since the nineteen-nineties. "Once, I went to my wife, and I said, 'My life in fusion will be very brief, because I am always arguing with Guenter,'" he recalled. "But then one day he came to me, and he said, 'I like you. You do not say yes to me, and I need people like you.' This made me respect him: he has very strong opinions, but he also really listens to people."

Sitting at his computer, Janeschitz made his case for fusion: "In the next several decades, we have to replace oil, and in the next century we have to replace natural gas—and these two, taken together,

represent sixty per cent of the total energy use of every country today. This is a huge amount of energy. To replace it would require many nuclear power stations, or coal-powered stations. Now, coal will be available for a long time, so coal is an option. China is building a coal-powered station almost every week—and that is just coal. But China also has an oil-usage growth of nine or ten per cent per year. This is an exponential curve. This is not sustainable. So we will see, at one point, an increase in the price of oil. When you have a barrel going for two hundred dollars or three hundred dollars, it will be felt throughout the world economies."

Janeschitz pointed to a pie chart of Germany's energy consumption. "You see the renewables are at twelve per cent," he said. "But most of this comes from biomass. Wind and solar make up only two per cent, and they are already built up quite a lot. So maybe we can go up to fifteen per cent, maybe even twenty. But that is it. And the fluctuation in energy for many renewables means that you need a lot of storage. If you have too much, where do you put it? And if you have too little—in Germany, with all this wind energy, they still have gas-powered stations that switch on if the wind is not blowing. Then you have to transfer the energy to where it is needed. In Germany, the wind blows in the North Sea, but much of the industry is in the south. So they have to build electric lines through the country. They are building them now, and the cost is a lot." I later looked it up: the cost is more than three billion euros.

"Fusion should come in at the price of wind," Janeschitz continued. "Some of our colleagues dream of fusion coming in at today's competitive energy prices, but that means that they have to produce science-fiction physics on science-fiction machines. If you are realistic, fusion will not be cheap. But, considering that oil prices will be higher than they are today, then it will be O.K. Coal might be cheap, but because of climate change it will be a big problem. Some people propose sequestering the CO_2 from coal deep into the earth, but, I mean, do you want to live over land with high-pressure CO_2 underneath it? And the energy and expense to capture and transport that CO_2 to a suitable site, and then to press it down—my God, you would have pipelines across the country. And, in two or three centuries, you wouldn't have enough sites to do it. It is like renewables: the problem is scale. Oh, I can harness the wind. I can harness solar. Yes, but now talk about numbers, which most politicians forget. Talk about gigawatts. Talk about terawatts—then things become interesting. This is thousands of nuclear power stations. This is millions of windmills—of course, while the wind is blowing. And, if it doesn't blow, what do you do?"

"Russ is the sort of person who never wants to be alone with his thoughts."

• •

Critiques of nuclear fission often focus on the waste, but scientists like Janeschitz worry about the supply, too. It is estimated that, with the current reactor technology, the world's supply of uranium will be consumed in about a century. What then? There are designs for more efficient fission reactors, and for "breeder" reactors, which spawn their own fuel, but they will require billions of dollars in investment, and their widespread use might abet the proliferation of fissile material. Will the public accept this? Janeschitz seemed to think no. Robert Iotti, the chairman of the ITER Council and an executive in the nuclear-power industry for decades, concurred: "I think ITER is an absolute necessity for the world—otherwise I wouldn't put up with the frustrations."

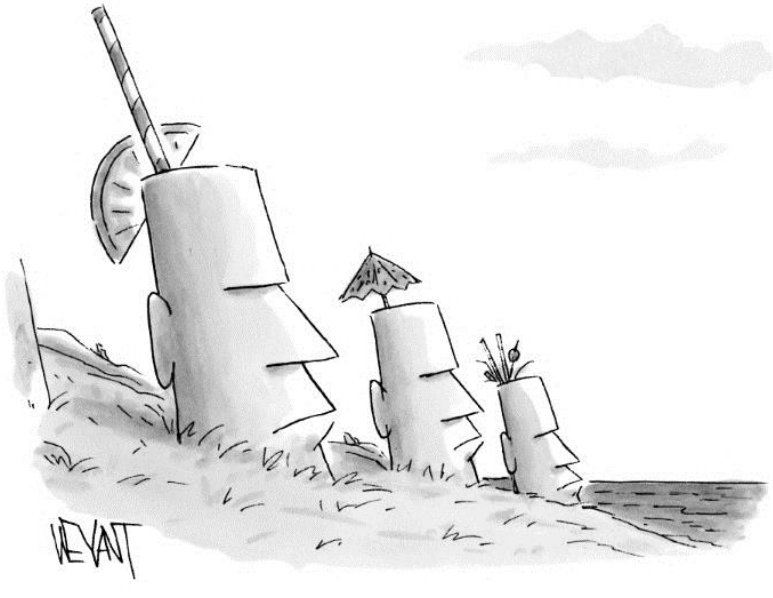
Janeschitz envisions a future in which thousands of commercial thermonuclear reactors will one day operate, with plasmas burning within: points of astral light across the globe. "In my opinion, you need very big fusion power to make it viable—two- or three-gigawatt power stations," he told me. He believes that political will and imagination are the crucial factors in determining when this vision becomes reality. This belief, expressed in this way, is common among his peers, who often use "political will" as a synonym for money. South Korea has a lot of political will. At the moment, China is building a fusion-research facility, in Huainan, that resembles a small metropolis, with an Epcot-like orb at its center, and it is even designing a reactor prototype. As one ITER official joked, "We make a modification to ITER on a Friday, and by Monday they have

added it to the design of their machine."

In the United States, political will has long been governed by a form of Washingtonian special relativity: depending on whether you are inside or outside the fusion community, the view differs dramatically. Typically, outsiders cannot comprehend how the massive expenditures never manage to yield energy. Typically, insiders cannot comprehend how little is being invested in a project that presents such immense technical obstacles and also such potential. A graph commonly passed around among the insiders—an enduring scrap of twentieth-century budgetary ephemera—depicts the 1976 federal plan to build a working thermonuclear reactor. The graph tracks various scenarios for attaining fusion energy. The "maximum" effort, the most expensive up front, with initial spending as high as nine billion dollars a year, was projected to yield a reactor by 1990. The "moderate" effort, with spending never exceeding four billion dollars in a year, would take fifteen more years. The fusion community might be easy to criticize for its many unmet milestones, but for decades the United States has never come close to even the moderate effort. In 1977, when the American fusion budget was at its peak, government investment in the research, adjusted for inflation, was seven hundred million dollars; by 1991, this had fallen by more than half. It is now half a billion, not appreciably more than the Korean budget. A Department of Energy official who was involved in the decision to shut down M.I.T.'s machine told me that American researchers should prepare to work on foreign technology.

After one of our talks, Janeschitz shared a rough sketch that he had worked on for an "ultra-fast track" to a commercial fusion reactor—an Apollo program-like commitment. "The Apollo program was a similar challenge," he said. "But it had unlimited money, and a central team that controlled the money." The United States spent more than a hundred billion (in today's dollars) on NASA missions in the fourteen years after Sputnik launched—almost eight billion per year. In Janeschitz's back-of-the-envelope calculations, the ultra-fast track, over a similar time frame, would cost thirty billion. The need is, without question, more pressing than it was for Apollo. By mid-century, the atmosphere will likely contain five hundred parts per million of CO_2, and by 2100 its effect on the oceans alone will be devastating: a near-total ecological collapse.

But even if ITER meets its objectives—even if it surpasses them, and achieves ignition—the work ahead is humbling. Assuming that the physics of tokamaks is perfected, and fusioneers can hold a synthetic star indefinitely in a magnetic bottle, someone will still have to solve the tricky problem of how to protect all the machinery that surrounds that bottle. The plasma in a commercial reactor will be a cloud of atom-size H-bombs detonating unceasingly. The tritium fuel is radioactive, but it will not be a source of radioactive waste—it will be transformed into helium. The machine itself will become the waste. Under constant neutron bombardment, nearly all of the tokamak's crucial parts will become "activated." Their radioactivity will be low, and will last only about a hundred years—a time frame that scientists tend to believe is manageable—but the structural impact of the neutrons will be awesome.



Janeschitz's ultra-fast track includes huge spending on research and development in materials science. Some would go toward developing metals resistant to activation, and some toward more immediate structural problems. Neutrons that drive into the wall of the steel vacuum chamber will cause gaseous bubbles to cavitate within it, diminishing the integrity of the chamber. In a commercial reactor, the neutrons, like a billiard break, would rearrange the entire molecular structure of key components. "Imagine a substance where every atom is displaced every two weeks," a scientist involved in the research told me. "The material completely remakes itself!"

A few years ago, in an academic paper, three materials scientists wondered if fusion's demands represented the single greatest challenge of their discipline. The lead author, Brian Wirth, who is affiliated with Oak Ridge, told me that his colleagues had documented a strange phenomenon on tokamak tiles made out of tungsten, an extremely dense metal. Tiles facing the plasma were degrading, even when the conditions were not especially severe: exposure to low-temperature plasmas was causing what scientists call "fuzz" to emerge on them. "The best way to describe it is the steel wool that you use to clean your pots, except that the steel wool is nanometre dimensions," he told me. "The tungsten has lost all its strength, and you can literally wipe off layers of this fuzz with your thumb. There is not a unified model for understanding why it forms, and whether we can control it."

I asked Wirth if the materials inside a commercial thermonuclear reactor had to be more resilient than the shielding for the International Space Station. "The simple answer is: if you told me that physicists could create a steady-state plasma device, I do not have the materials today to build that," he said. "There are certainly harsh radiation conditions in space, but

the particle flux—the rate of particles hitting the Space Station—is about twelve to fifteen orders of magnitude less than the rate that they are going to hit the first wall in a prototype reactor."

There is, at the moment, very little political will to resolve this problem. But Wirth believes that "a billion-dollar-class machine"—a device that would be as complex as some of the world's largest particle accelerators—is needed to bombard different substances with neutrons in order to develop commercially relevant materials for fusion.

The magnitude of these challenges, combined with many others, has caused some early proponents of tokamaks to question whether the design itself is intrinsically flawed. In the seventies, Robert Hirsch directed the federal government's fusion program, and helped garner funding for some of the largest tokamaks ever built. But he has come to believe that there is no way a public utility will want to manage a device so complex and precarious, even if it can produce energy. For too long, he says, fusion has been in the hands of academics and government researchers who have neglected the practicality of their devices, focussing only on the physics within them.

Janeschitz told me, "When Benz invented the car, I am sure many people were saying, 'I will just take my horse—it is a lot simpler.' The truth is, most of the large tokamaks have been working for decades, and none have been retired for technical problems." Moreover, the design of a commercial reactor would inevitably be a lot simpler than ITER, because it would not need to retain the flexibility of an experiment. With an Apollo-like commitment, Janeschitz told me, fusion's remaining problems could be worked out within a lifetime. But the funding would need to come in significant amounts, and mostly at once, not dribbled over decades. As he sketched out his vision, he alluded to an aphorism by an early Soviet tokamak pioneer, a quote that practically echoes among the halls of ITER's headquarters: "Fusion will be ready when society needs it."

Before I left France, I joined Janeschitz and Chiocchio, along with several other members of the Praetorian Guard, for a tour of the ITER construction site. It was noontime, and the sun was bright and warm. The group might have been burdened by complex physics and by even more complex politics, but this was still a beautiful afternoon in Provence. We headed down a dirt road through the trees, passing cables and transformers that would direct power from the French national grid into ITER. A dozen yellow earthmoving vehicles—dump trucks, backhoes, dozers—were lined up in a neat row. In the distance, cranes spanned upward, their L-shaped silhouettes still against the open sky. For a project that was desperate to make up time, the site was oddly quiescent.

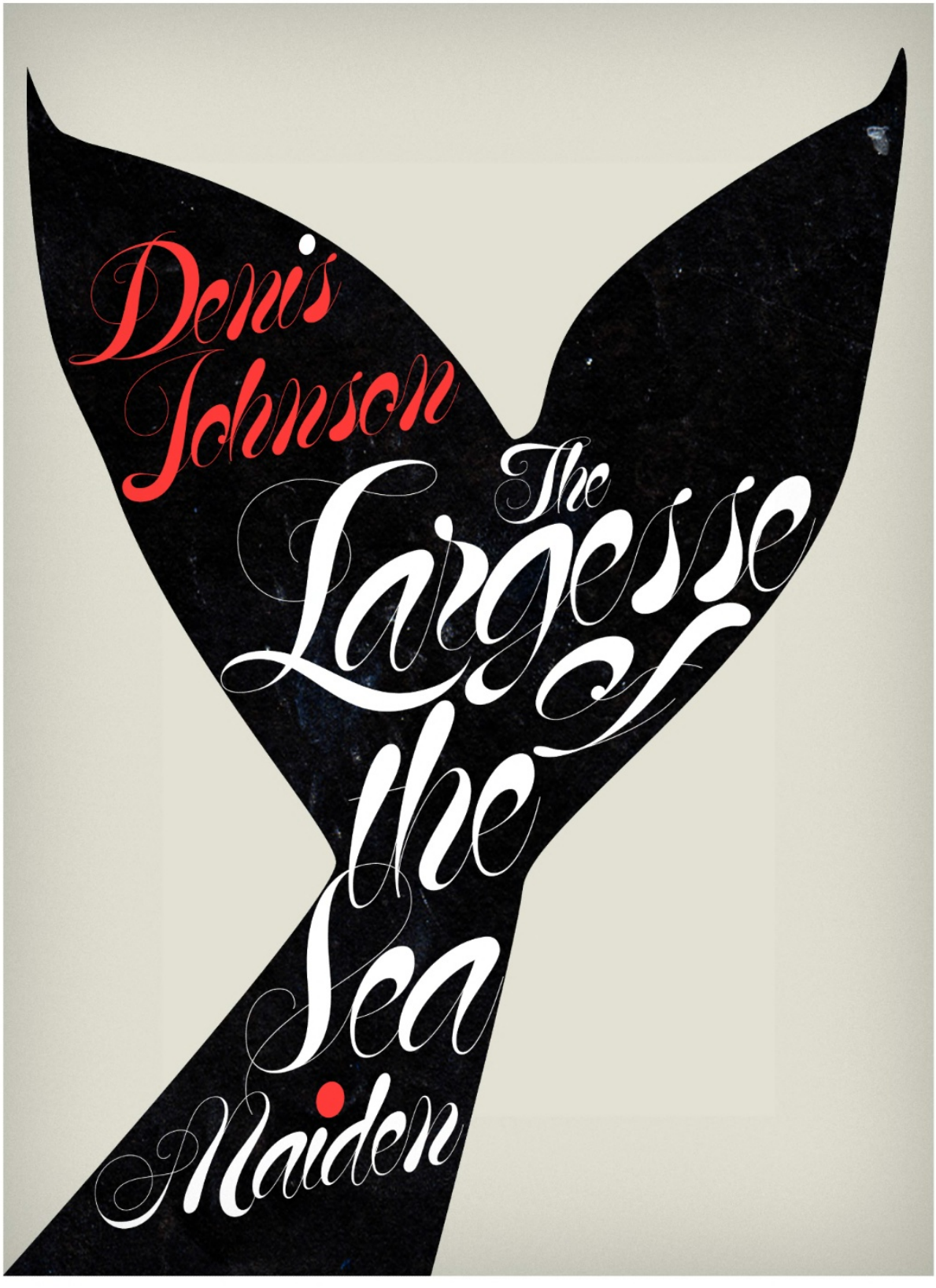
"They are on lunch break," Janeschitz said dryly.

We passed an empty building as long as five Olympic pools. ITER's poloidal field magnets, too large to move any great distance, will be made there. We passed a mockup station for the vast concrete slab that will eventually support the reactor. Construction on the slab had stalled, because of another conflict: to save money, the European Domestic Agency had insisted that it be half as thick as the design had specified—a change that the French regulator decided was unsafe. To resolve the impasse, ITER's engineers designed a new structure to distribute the machine's weight more widely. Chiocchio then had to find space for it. "It took six months," he said. "The machine was already designed—every component was already designed. You couldn't change anything." Janeschitz shook his head, and said, "Of course, then you find there are complaints, because of cost and late changes."

To get to the tokamak construction pit, we descended a metallic staircase until our feet hit earth, fifty-five feet below. The pit was so wide that it took some mental adjustment to appreciate its depth. We were in a canyon. The dirt at the bottom—sunbaked and cracked—had been rolled flat, and piles of equipment were stored across the expanse. Towering over the space where the B2 slab was being built were smooth retaining walls buttressing the pit. You could see the concrete plinths—four hundred and ninety-three of them—each a small monolith, topped with anti-seismic bearings. In an earthquake, the bearings will allow the slab to sway from side to side.

Even considering all the project's difficulties, it was hard not to feel the majesty of what was being attempted. At the center of the base mat, miles of rebar were bent into an elegant spiderweb spanning nearly two hundred feet. One day, all of those lines would be buried in concrete, and the tokamak would stand at the center, where the webbing was densest. After pausing at the edge, taking in the expanse, everyone suddenly set out across a row of wooden planks toward the inner radius of the spiderweb, where the tokamak core will be supported: ground zero. It's hard to know why we were all going out there; the center offered no better view of the huge slab than standing off to the side. There was, perhaps, the human impulse to be right there, where something notable will happen. Fusion, the most plentiful energy source in the universe, has never produced energy on Earth. Nature had shielded the planet from the punishing conditions it requires with a great buffer: millions of miles of empty space. What the physicists and the engineers in the South of France were attempting to do was to traverse that boundary. Thirty-five countries were trying somehow to cross it together. On some level, the arrangement would necessarily be a messy one.

That evening, at a café near the work site, I had a drink with an ITER physicist, who was despondent, fearing that the machine would never work. Why he was staying with the project he couldn't say. But a few weeks later, after thinking about it, he told me that his mood had lifted. He had come to see his role in both small and sublime terms—akin to a stonemason toiling for years on the York Minster cathedral (begun 1220, finished 1472) without witnessing the work being completed. "I now expect to devote my full professional career before seeing a decent plasma in ITER," he said. "This does not bug me. There have been many scientists before me, working for this same goal, who will not see this. Martin Luther King had a dream fifty years ago. He did not live long enough to see that dream realized. But, thanks to him, we have made wonderful strides in helping his dream be fulfilled. The scientists working on ITER have a dream that could be as powerful as Martin Luther King's—not for human equality but for energy independence. We won't see this dream realized. But each day I go to work I have a hidden smile knowing that I am helping us get one day closer to our ITER dream." ♦


Denis Johnson
The Largesse of the Sea Maiden

SILENCES

After dinner, nobody went home right away. I think we'd enjoyed the meal so much we hoped Elaine would serve us the whole thing all over again. These were people we've gotten to know a little from Elaine's volunteer work—nobody from my work, nobody from the ad agency. We sat around in the living room describing the loudest sounds we'd ever heard. One said it was his wife's voice when she told him she didn't love him anymore and wanted a divorce. Another recalled the pounding of his heart when he suffered a coronary. Tia Jones had become a grandmother at the age of thirty-seven and hoped never again to hear anything so loud as her granddaughter crying in her sixteen-year-old daughter's arms. Her husband, Ralph, said it hurt his ears whenever his brother opened his mouth in public, because his brother had Tourette's syndrome and erupted with remarks like "I masturbate! Your penis smells good!" in front of perfect strangers on a bus or during a movie, or even in church.

Young Chris Case reversed the direction and introduced the topic of silences. He said the most silent thing he'd ever heard was the land mine taking off his right leg outside Kabul, Afghanistan.

As for other silences, nobody contributed. In fact, there came a silence now. Some of us hadn't realized that Chris had lost a leg. He limped, but only slightly. I hadn't even known he'd fought in Afghanistan. "A land mine?" I said.

"Yes, sir. A land mine."

"Can we see it?" Deirdre said.

"No, ma'am," Chris said. "I don't carry land mines around on my person."

"No! I mean your leg."

"It was blown off."

"I mean the part that's still there!"

"I'll show you," he said, "if you kiss it."

Shocked laughter. We started talking about the most ridiculous things we'd ever kissed. Nothing of interest. We'd all kissed only people, and only in the usual places. "All right, then," Chris told Deirdre. "Here's your chance for the conversation's most unique entry."

"No, I don't want to kiss your leg!"

Although none of us showed it, I think we all felt a little irritated with Deirdre. We all wanted to see.

Morton Sands was there, too, that night, and for the most part he'd managed to keep quiet. Now he said, "Jesus Christ, Deirdre."

"Oh, well. O.K.," she said.

Chris pulled up his right pant leg, bunching the cuff about halfway up his thigh, and detached his prosthesis, a device of chromium bars and plastic belts strapped to his knee, which was intact and swivelled upward horribly to present the puckered end of his leg. Deirdre got down on her bare knees before him, and he hitched forward in his seat—the couch; Ralph Jones was sitting beside him—to move the scarred stump within two inches of Deirdre's face. Now she started to cry. Now we were all embarrassed, a little ashamed.

For nearly a minute, we waited.

Then Ralph Jones said, "Chris, I remember when I saw you fight two guys at once outside the Aces Tavern. No kidding," Jones told the rest of us. "He went outside with these two guys and beat the crap out of both of them."

"I guess I could've given them a break," Chris said. "They were both pretty drunk."

"Chris, you sure kicked some ass that night."

In the pocket of my shirt I had a wonderful Cuban cigar. I wanted to step outside with it. The dinner had been one of our best, and I wanted to top off the experience with a satisfying smoke. But you want to see how this sort of thing turns out. How often will you witness a woman kissing an amputation? Jones, however, had ruined everything by talking. He'd broken the spell. Chris worked the prosthesis back into place and tightened the straps and rearranged his pant leg. Deirdre stood up and wiped her eyes and smoothed her skirt and took her seat, and that was that. The outcome of all this was that Chris and Deirdre, about six months later, down at the courthouse, in the presence of very nearly the same group of friends, were married by a magistrate. Yes, they're husband and wife. You and I know what goes on.

ACCOMPLICES

Another silence comes to mind. A couple of years ago, Elaine and I had dinner at the home of Miller Thomas, formerly the head of my agency in Manhattan. Right—he and his wife, Francesca, ended up out here, too, but considerably later than Elaine and I—once my boss, now a San Diego retiree. We finished two bottles of wine with dinner, maybe three bottles. After dinner, we had brandy. Before dinner, we had cocktails. We didn't know one another particularly well, and maybe we used the liquor to rush past that fact. After the brandy, I started drinking Scotch, and Miller drank bourbon, and, although the weather was warm enough that the central air-conditioner was running, he pronounced it a cold night and lit a fire in his fireplace. It took only a squirt of fluid and the pop of a match to get an armload of sticks crackling and blazing, and then he laid on a couple of large chunks that he said were good, seasoned oak. "The capitalist at his forge," Francesca said.

At one point we were standing in the light of the flames, I and Miller Thomas, seeing how many books each man could balance on his out-flung arms, Elaine and Francesca loading them onto our hands in a test of equilibrium that both of us failed repeatedly. It became a test of strength. I don't know who won. We called for more and more books, and our women piled them on until most of Miller's library lay around us on the floor. He had a small Marsden Hartley canvas mounted above the mantel, a crazy, mostly blue landscape done in oil, and I said that perhaps that wasn't the place for a painting like this one, so near the smoke and heat, such an expensive painting. And the painting was masterful, too, from what I could see of it by dim lamps and firelight, amid books scattered all over the floor. . . . Miller took offense. He said he'd paid for this masterpiece, he owned it, he could put it where it suited him. He moved very near the flames and took down the painting and turned to us, holding it before him, and declared that he could even, if he wanted, throw it in the fire and leave it there. "Is it art? Sure. But listen," he said, "art doesn't own it. My name ain't Art." He held the canvas flat like a tray, landscape up, and tempted the flames with it, thrusting it in and out. . . . And the strange thing is that I'd heard a nearly identical story about Miller Thomas and his beloved

Hartley landscape some years before, about an evening very similar to this one, the drinks and wine and brandy and more drinks, the rowdy conversation, the scattering of books, and, finally, Miller thrusting this painting toward the flames and calling it his own property, and threatening to burn it. On that previous night, his guests had talked him down from the heights, and he'd hung the painting back in its place, but on our night—why?—none of us found a way to object as he added his property to the fuel and turned his back and walked away. A black spot appeared on the canvas and spread out in a sort of smoking puddle that gave rise to tiny flames. Miller sat in a chair across the living room, by the flickering window, and observed from that distance with a drink in his hand. Not a word, not a move, from any of us. The wooden frame popped marvellously in the silence while the great painting cooked away, first black and twisted, soon gray and fluttering, and then the fire had it all.

ADMAN

This morning I was assailed by such sadness at the velocity of life—the distance I've travelled from my own youth, the persistence of the old regrets, the new regrets, the ability of failure to freshen itself in novel forms—that I almost crashed the car. Getting out at the place where I do the job I don't feel I'm very good at, I grabbed my briefcase too roughly and dumped half of its contents in my lap and half in the parking lot, and while gathering it all up I left my keys on the seat and locked the car manually—an old man's habit—and trapped them in the Rav. In the office, I asked Shylene to call a locksmith and then to get me an appointment with my back man.

In the upper right quadrant of my back I have a nerve that once in a while gets pinched. The T4 nerve. These nerves aren't frail little ink lines; they're cords, in fact, as thick as your pinkie finger. This one gets caught between tense muscles, and for days, even weeks, there's not much to be done but take aspirin and get massages and visit the chiropractor. Down my right arm I feel a tingling, a numbness, sometimes a dull, sort of muffled torment, or else a shapeless, confusing pain.

It's a signal: it happens when I'm anxious about something.

To my surprise, Shylene knew all about this something. Apparently, she finds time to be Googling her bosses, and she'd learned of an award I was about to receive in, of all places, New York—for an animated television commercial. The award goes to my old New York team, but I was the only one of us attending the ceremony, possibly the only one interested, so many years down the line. This little gesture of acknowledgment put the finishing touches on a depressing picture. The people on my team had gone on to other teams, fancier agencies, higher accomplishments. All I'd done in better than two decades was tread forward until I reached the limit of certain assumptions, and stepped off. Meanwhile, Shylene was oohing, gushing, like a proud nurse who expects you to marvel at all the horrible procedures the hospital has in store for you. I said to her, "Thanks, thanks."

When I entered the reception area, and throughout this transaction, Shylene was wearing a flashy sequinned carnival mask. I didn't ask why.

Our office environment is part of the New Wave. The whole agency works under one gigantic big top, like a circus—not crowded, quite congenial, all of it surrounding a spacious break-time area, with pinball machines and a basketball hoop, and every Friday during the summer months we have a happy hour with free beer from a keg.

In New York, I made commercials. In San Diego, I write and design glossy brochures, mostly for a group of Western resorts where golf is played and horses take you along bridle paths. Don't get me wrong—California's full of beautiful spots; it's a pleasure to bring them to the attention of people who might enjoy them. Just, please, not with a badly pinched nerve.

When I can't stand it, I take the day off and visit the big art museum in Balboa Park. Today, after the locksmith got me back into my car, I drove to the museum and sat in on part of a lecture in one of its side rooms, a woman outsider artist raving, "Art is man and man is art!" I listened for five minutes, and what little of it she managed to make comprehensible didn't even merit being called shallow. Just the same, her paintings were slyly designed, intricately patterned, and coherent. I wandered from wall to wall, taking some of it in, not much. But looking at art for an hour or so always changes the way I see things afterward—this day, for instance, a group of mentally handicapped adults on a tour of the place, with their twisted, hovering hands and cocked heads, moving among the works like cheap cinema zombies, but good zombies, zombies with minds and souls and things to keep them interested. And outside, where they normally have a lot of large metal sculptures—the grounds were being dug up and reconstructed—a dragline shovel nosing the rubble monstrously, and a woman and a child watching, motionless, the little boy standing on a bench with his smile and sideways eyes and his mother beside him, holding his hand, both so still, like a photograph of American ruin.

Next, I had a session with a chiropractor dressed up as an elf.

It seemed the entire staff at the medical complex near my house were costumed for Halloween, and while I waited out front in the car for my appointment, the earliest one I could get that day, I saw a Swiss milkmaid coming back from lunch, then a witch with a green face, then a sunburst-orange superhero. Then I had the session with the chiropractor in his tights and drooping cap.

As for me? My usual guise. The masquerade continues.

FAREWELL

Elaine got a wall phone for the kitchen, a sleek blue one that wears its receiver like a hat, with a caller-I.D. readout on its face just below the keypad. While I eyeballed this instrument, having just come in from my visit with the chiropractor, a brisk, modest tone

began, and the tiny screen showed ten digits I didn't recognize. My inclination was to scorn it, like any other unknown. But this was the first call, the inaugural message.

As soon as I touched the receiver I wondered if I'd regret this, if I was holding a mistake in my hand, if I was pulling this mistake to my head and saying "Hello" to it.

The caller was my first wife, Virginia, or Ginny, as I always called her. We were married long ago, in our early twenties, and put a stop to it after three crazy years. Since then, we hadn't spoken, we'd had no reason to, but now we had one. Ginny was dying.

Her voice came faintly. She told me the doctors had closed the book on her, she'd ordered her affairs, the good people from hospice were in attendance.

Before she ended this earthly transit, as she called it, Ginny wanted to shed any kind of bitterness against certain people, certain men, especially me. She said how much she'd been hurt, and how badly she wanted to forgive me, but she didn't know whether she could or not—she hoped she could—and I assured her, from the abyss of a broken heart, that I hoped so, too, that I hated my infidelities and my lies about the money, and the way I'd kept my boredom secret, and my secrets in general, and Ginny and I talked, after forty years of silence, about the many other ways I'd stolen her right to the truth.

In the middle of this, I began wondering, most uncomfortably, in fact with a dizzy, sweating anxiety, if I'd made a mistake—if this wasn't my first wife, Ginny, no, but rather my second wife, Jennifer, often called Jenny. Because of the weakness of her voice and my own humming shock at the news, also the situation around her as she tried to speak to me on this very important occasion—folks coming and going, and the sounds of a respirator, I supposed—now, fifteen minutes into this call, I couldn't remember if she'd actually said her name when I picked up the phone and I suddenly didn't know which set of crimes I was regretting, wasn't sure if this dying farewell clobbering me to my knees in true repentance beside the kitchen table was Virginia's, or Jennifer's.

"This is hard," I said. "Can I put the phone down a minute?" I heard her say O.K.

The house felt empty. "Elaine?" I called. Nothing. I wiped my face with a dishrag and took off my blazer and hung it on a chair and called out Elaine's name one more time and then picked up the receiver again. There was nobody there.

Somewhere inside it, the phone had preserved the caller's number, of course, Ginny's number or Jenny's, but I didn't look for it. We'd had our talk, and Ginny or Jenny, whichever, had recognized herself in my frank apologies, and she'd been satisfied—because, after all, both sets of crimes had been the same.

I was tired. What a day. I called Elaine on her cell phone. We agreed she might as well stay at the Budget Inn on the East Side. She volunteered out there, teaching adults to read, and once in a while she got caught late and stayed over. Good. I could lock all three locks on the door and call it a day. I didn't mention the previous call. I turned in early.

I dreamed of a wild landscape—elephants, dinosaurs, bat caves, strange natives, and so on.

I woke, couldn't go back to sleep, put on a long terry-cloth robe over my p.j.'s and slipped into my loafers and went walking. People in bathrobes stroll around here at all hours, but not often, I think, without a pet on a leash. Ours is a good neighborhood—a Catholic church and a Mormon one, and a posh town-house development with much open green space, and, on our side of the street, some pretty nice smaller homes.

I wonder if you're like me, if you collect and squirrel away in your soul certain odd moments when the Mystery winks at you, when you walk in your bathrobe and tasselled loafers, for instance, well out of your neighborhood and among a lot of closed shops, and you approach your very faint reflection in a window with words above it. The sign said "Sky and Celery." Closer, it read "Ski and Cyclery."

I headed home.

WIDOW

I was having lunch one day with my friend Tom Ellis, a journalist—just catching up. He said that he was writing a two-act drama based on interviews he'd taped while gathering material for an article on the death penalty, two interviews in particular.

First, he'd spent an afternoon with a death-row inmate in Virginia, the murderer William Donald Mason, a name not at all famous here in California, and I don't know why I remember it. Mason was scheduled to die the next day, twelve years after killing a guard he'd taken hostage during a bank robbery.

Other than his last meal, of steak,

"I've decided to work from home today."

green beans, and a baked potato, which would be served to him the following noon, Mason knew of no future outcomes to worry about and seemed relaxed and content. Ellis quizzed him about his life before his arrest, his routine there at the prison, his views on the death penalty—Mason was against it—and his opinion as to an afterlife—Mason was for it.

The prisoner talked with admiration about his wife, whom he'd met and married some years after landing on death row. She was the cousin of a fellow-inmate. She waited tables in a sports bar—great tips. She liked reading, and she'd introduced her murderer husband to the works of Charles Dickens and Mark Twain and Ernest Hemingway. She was studying for a Realtor's license.

Mason had already said goodbye to his wife. The couple had agreed to get it all out of the way a full week ahead of the execution, to spend several happy hours together and part company well out of the shadow of Mason's last day.

Ellis said that he'd felt a fierce, unexpected kinship with this man so close to the end, because, as Mason himself pointed out, this was the last time he'd be introduced to a stranger, except for the people who would arrange him on the gurney the next day and set him up for his injection. Tom Ellis was the last new person he'd meet, in other words, who wasn't about to kill him. And, in fact, everything proceeded according to the schedule and, about eighteen hours after Ellis talked with him, William Mason was dead.

A week later, Ellis interviewed the new widow, Mrs. Mason, and learned that much of what she'd told her husband was false.

Ellis located her in Norfolk, working not in any kind of sports bar but, instead, in a basement sex emporium near the waterfront, in a one-on-one peepshow. In order to talk to her, Ellis had to pay twenty dollars and descend a narrow stairway, lit with purple bulbs, and sit in a chair before a curtained window. He was shocked when the curtain vanished upward to reveal the woman already completely nude, sitting on a stool in a padded booth. Then it was her turn to be shocked, when Ellis introduced himself as a man who'd shared an hour or two of her husband's last full day on earth. Together, they spoke of the prisoner's wishes and dreams, his happiest memories and his childhood grief, the kinds of things a man shares only with his wife. Her face, though severe, was pretty, and she displayed her parts to Tom unself-consciously, yet without the protection of anonymity. She wept, she laughed, she shouted, she whispered all of this into a telephone handset that she held to her head, while her free hand gestured in the air or touched the glass between them.

As for having told so many lies to the man she'd married—that was one of the things she laughed about. She seemed to assume that anybody else would have done the same. In addition to her bogus employment and her imaginary studies in real estate, she'd endowed herself with a religious soul and joined a nonexistent church. Thanks to all her fabrications, William Donald Mason had died a proud and happy husband.

And, just as he'd been surprised by his sudden intimacy with the condemned killer, my friend felt very close to the widow, because they were talking to each other about life and death while she displayed her nakedness before him, sitting on the stool with her red spike-heeled pumps planted wide apart on the floor. I asked him if they'd ended up making love, and he said no, but he'd wanted to, he certainly had, and he was convinced that the naked widow had felt the same, though you weren't allowed to touch the girls in those places, and this dialogue, in fact both of them—the death-row interview and the interview with the naked widow—had taken place through glass partitions made to withstand any kind of passionate assault.

At the time, the idea of telling her what he wanted had seemed terrible. Now he regretted his shyness. In the play, as he described it for me, the second act would end differently.

Before long, we wandered into a discussion of the difference between repentance and regret. You repent the things you've done, and regret the chances you let get away. Then, as sometimes happens in a San Diego café—more often than you'd think—we were interrupted by a beautiful young woman selling roses.

ORPHAN

The lunch with Tom Ellis took place a couple of years ago. I don't suppose he ever wrote the play; it was just a notion he was telling me about. It came to mind today because this afternoon I attended the memorial service of an artist friend of mine, a painter named Tony Fido, who once told me about a similar experience.

Tony found a cell phone on the ground near his home in National City, just south of here. He told me about this the last time I saw him, a couple of months before he disappeared, or went out of communication. First he went out of communication, then he was deceased. But when he told me this story there was no hint of any of that.

Tony noticed the cell phone lying under an oleander bush as he walked around his neighborhood. He picked it up and continued his stroll, and before long felt it vibrating in his pocket. When he answered, he found himself talking to the wife of the owner—the owner's widow, actually, who explained that she'd been calling the number every thirty minutes or so since her husband's death, not twenty-four hours before.

Her husband had been killed the previous afternoon in an accident at the intersection where Tony had found the cell phone. An old woman in a Cadillac had run him down. At the moment of impact, the device had been torn from his hand.

The police said that they hadn't noticed any phone around the scene. It hadn't been among the belongings she'd collected at the morgue. "I knew he lost it right there," she told Tony, "because he was talking to me at the very second when it happened."

Tony offered to get in his car and deliver the phone to her personally, and she gave him her address in Lemon Grove, nine miles distant. When he got there he discovered that the woman was only twenty-two and quite attractive, and that she and her husband had been going through a divorce.

At this point in the telling, I think I knew where his story was headed.

WAVE

For months I'd moved across the open water
like a wheel under its skin, a frictionless
and by then almost wholly abstract matter
with nothing in my head beyond the bliss
of my own breaking: how the long foreshore
would hear my full confession, and I'd drain
into the shale till I was filtered pure.
There was no way to tell on that bare plain
but I felt my power run down with the miles
and by the time I saw the scattered sails,
the painted front and children on the pier
I was no more than a fold in her blue gown
and knew I was already in the clear.
I hit the beach and swept away the town.

—Don Paterson

"She came after me. I told her, 'You're either from Heaven or from Hell.' It turned out she was from Hell."

Whenever he talked, Tony kept his hands moving—grabbing and rearranging small things on the tabletop—while his head rocked from side to side and back and forth. Sometimes he referred to a "force of rhythm" in his paintings. He often spoke of "motion" in the work.

I didn't know much about Tony's background. He was in his late forties but seemed younger. I met him at the Balboa Park museum, where he appeared at my shoulder while I looked at an Edward Hopper painting of a Cape Cod gas station. He offered his critique, which was lengthy, meticulous, and scathing—and which was focussed on technique, only on technique—and spoke of his contempt for all painters, and finished by saying, "I wish Picasso was alive. I'd challenge him—he could do one of mine and I could do one of his."

"You're a painter yourself."

"A better painter than this guy," he said of Edward Hopper.

"Well, whose work would you say is any good?"

"The only painter I admire is God. He's my biggest influence."

We began having coffee together two or three times a month, always, I have to admit, at Tony's initiation. Usually I drove to his lively, dishevelled Hispanic neighborhood to see him, there in National City. I like primitive art, and I like folktales, so I enjoyed visiting his rambling old home, where he lived surrounded by his paintings, like an orphan king in a cluttered castle.

The house had been in his family since 1939. For a while, it was a boarding house—a dozen bedrooms, each with its own sink. "Damn place has a jinx or whammy: First, Spiro—Spiro watched it till he died. Mom watched it till she died. My sister watched it till she died. Now I'll be here till I die," he said, hosting me shirtless, his hairy torso dabbed all over with paint. Talking so fast I could rarely follow, he did seem deranged. But blessed, decidedly so, with a self-deprecating and self-orienting humor that the genuinely mad seem to have misplaced. What to make of somebody like that? "Richards in the Washington *Post*," he once said, "compared me to Melville." I have no idea who Richards was. Or who Spiro was.

Tony never tired of his voluble explanations, his self-exegesis—the works almost coded, as if to fool or distract the unworthy. They weren't the child drawings of your usual schizophrenic outsider artist, but efforts a little more skillful, on the order of tattoo art, oil on canvases around four by six feet in size, crowded with images but highly organized, all on Biblical themes, mostly dire and apocalyptic, and all with the titles printed neatly right on them. One of his works, for instance—three panels depicting the end of the world and the advent of Heaven—was called "Mystery Babylon Mother of Harlots Revelation 17:1-7."

This period when I was seeing a bit of Tony Fido coincided with an era in the world of my unconscious, an era when I was troubled by the dreams I had at night. They were long and epic, detailed and violent and colorful. They were exhausting. I couldn't account for them. The only medication I took was something to bring down my blood pressure, and it wasn't new. I made sure I didn't take food just before going to bed. I avoided sleeping on my back, steered clear of disturbing novels and TV shows. For a month, maybe six weeks, I dreaded sleep. Once, I dreamed of Tony—I defended him against an angry mob, keeping the seething throng at bay with a butcher knife. Often, I woke up short of breath, shaking, my heartbeat rattling my ribs, and I cured my nerves with a solitary walk, no matter the hour. And once—maybe the night I dreamed about Tony, I don't remember—I went walking and had the kind of moment or visitation I treasure, when the flow of life twists and untwists, all in a blink—think of a taut ribbon flashing: I heard a young man's voice in the parking lot of the Mormon church in the dark night telling someone, "I didn't bark. That wasn't me. I didn't bark."

I never found out how things turned out between Tony and the freshly widowed twenty-two-year-old. I'm pretty sure it went no further, and there was no second encounter, certainly no ongoing affair—because he more than once complained, "I can't find a woman, none. I'm under some kind of a damn spell." He believed in spells and whammies and such, in angels and mermaids, omens, sorcery, wind-borne voices, in messages and patterns. All through his house were scattered twigs and feathers possessing a mysterious significance, rocks that had spoken to him, stumps of driftwood whose faces he recognized. And, in any direction, his canvases, like windows opening onto lightning and smoke, ranks of crimson demons and flying angels, gravestones on fire, and scrolls, chalices, torches, swords.

Last week, a woman named Rebecca Stamos, somebody I'd never heard of, called me to say that our mutual friend Tony Fido was no more. He'd killed himself. As she put it, "He took his life."

For two seconds, the phrase meant

nothing to me. "Took it," I said. . . . Then, "Oh, my goodness."

"Yes, I'm afraid he committed suicide."

"I don't want to know how. Don't tell me how." Honestly, I can't imagine why I said that.

MEMORIAL

A week ago Friday—nine days ago—the eccentric religious painter Tony Fido stopped his car on Interstate 8, about sixty miles east of San Diego, on a bridge above a deep, deep ravine, and climbed over the railing and stepped into the air. He mailed a letter beforehand to Rebecca Stamos, not to explain himself but only to say goodbye and pass along the phone numbers of some friends.

Sunday I attended Tony's memorial service, for which Rebecca Stamos had reserved the band room of the middle school where she teaches. We sat in a circle, with cups and saucers on our laps, in a tiny grove of music stands, and volunteered, one by one, our memories of Tony Fido. There were only five of us: our hostess, Rebecca, plain and stout, in a sleeveless blouse and a skirt that reached down to her white tennis shoes; myself in the raiment of my order, the blue blazer, khaki chinos, tasselled loafers; two middle-aged women of the sort to own a couple of small obnoxious dogs—they called Tony "Anthony"; a chubby young man in a green jumpsuit—some kind of mechanic—sweating. Tony's neighbors? Family? None.

Only the pair of ladies who'd arrived together actually knew each other. None of the rest of us had ever met before. These were friendships, or acquaintances, that Tony had kept one by one. He'd met us all in the same way—he'd materialized beside us at an art museum, an outdoor market, a doctor's waiting room, and he'd begun to talk. I was the only one of us even aware he devoted all his time to painting canvases. The others thought he owned some kind of business—plumbing or exterminating or looking after private swimming pools. One believed he came from Greece; others assumed Mexico, but I'm sure his family was Armenian, long established in San Diego County. Rather than memorializing him, we found ourselves asking, "Who the hell was this guy?"

Rebecca had this much about him: while he was still in his teens, Tony's mother had killed herself. "He mentioned it more than once," Rebecca said. "It was always on his mind." To the rest of us this came as new information.

Of course, it troubled us to learn that his mother had taken her own life, too. Had she jumped? Tony hadn't told, and Rebecca hadn't asked.

With little to offer about Tony in the way of biography, I shared some remarks of his that had stuck in my thoughts. "I couldn't get into ritzy art schools," he told me once. "Best thing that ever happened to me. It's dangerous to be taught art." And he said, "On my twenty-sixth birthday, I quit signing my work. Anybody who can paint like that, have at it, and take the credit." He got a kick out of showing me a passage in his hefty black Bible—first book of Samuel, Chapter 6?—where the idolatry of the Philistines earns them a plague of hemorrhoids. "Don't tell me God doesn't have a sense of humor."

And another of his insights, one he shared with me several times: "We live in a catastrophic universe—not a universe of gradualism."

That one had always gone right past me. Now it sounded ominous, prophetic. Had I missed a message? A warning?

The man in the green jumpsuit, the garage mechanic, reported that Tony had plunged from our nation's highest concrete-beam bridge down into Pine Valley Creek, a flight of four hundred and forty feet. The span, completed in 1974 and named the Nello Irwin Greer Memorial Bridge, was the first in the United States to be built using, according to the mechanic, "the cast-in-place segmental balanced cantilever method." I wrote it down on a memo pad. I can't recall the mechanic's name. His breast-tag said "Ted," but he introduced himself as someone else.

Anne and her friend, whose name also slipped past me—the pair of women—cornered me afterward. They seemed to think I should be the one to take final possession of a three-ring binder full of recipes that Tony had loaned them—the collected recipes of Tony's mother. I determined I would give it to Elaine. She's a wonderful cook, but not as a regular thing, because nobody likes to cook for two. Too much work and too many leftovers. I told them she'd be glad to get the book.

"Permission to speak in rhyming couplets, sir."

The binder was too big for any of my pockets. I thought of asking for a bag, but I failed to ask. I didn't know what to do with it but carry it home in my hands and deliver it to my wife.

Elaine was sitting at the kitchen table, before her a cup of black coffee and half a sandwich on a plate.

I set the notebook on the table next to her snack. She stared at it. "Oh," she said. "From your painter." She sat me down beside her and we went through the notebook page by page, side by side.

Elaine: she's petite, lithe, quite smart; short gray hair, no makeup. A good companion. At any moment—the very next second—she could be dead.

I want to depict this book carefully, so imagine holding it in your hands, a three-ring binder of bright-red plastic weighing about the same as a full dinner plate, and now setting it in front of you on the table. When you open it, you find a pink title page, "Recipes. Caesarina Fido," covering a two-inch thickness of white college-ruled three-hole paper, the first inch or so the usual—casseroles and pies and salad dressings, every aspect of breakfast, lunch, and supper, all written in blue ballpoint. Halfway through, Tony's mother introduces ink of other colors, mostly green, red, and purple, but also pink, and a yellow that's hard to make out; and, as these colors come along, her penmanship enters a kind of havoc, the letters swell and shrink, several pages big and loopy, leaning to the right, and then, for the next many pages, leaning to the left, then back the other way; and here, where these wars and changes begin, and for better than a hundred pages, all the way to the end, the recipes are only for cocktails. Every kind of cocktail.

Earlier that afternoon, as Anne handed the binder over to me at Tony's memorial, she made a curious remark. "Anthony spoke very highly of you. He said you were his best friend." I thought it was a joke, but Anne meant this seriously.

Tony's best friend? I was confused. I'm still confused. I hardly knew him.

CASANOVA

When I returned to New York City to pick up my prize at the American Advertisers Awards, I'm not sure I expected to enjoy myself. But on the second day, killing time before the ceremony, walking north through midtown in my dark ceremonial suit and trench coat, skirting the Park, strolling south again, feeling the pulse and listening to the traffic noise rising among high buildings, I had a homecoming. The day was sunny, fine for walking, brisk, and getting brisker—and, in fact, as I cut a diagonal through a little plaza somewhere above Fortieth Street, the last autumn leaves were swept up from the pavement and thrown around my head, and a sudden misty quality in the atmosphere above seemed to solidify into a ceiling both dark and luminous, and the passersby hunched into their collars, and, two minutes later, the gusts settled into a wind, not hard but steady and cold, and my hands dove into my coat pockets. A bit of rain speckled the pavement. Random snowflakes spiralled in the air. All around me, people seemed to be evacuating the scene, while across the square a vender shouted that he was closing his cart and you could have his wares for practically nothing, and for no reason I could have named I bought two of his rat dogs with everything and a cup of doubtful coffee and then learned the reason—they were wonderful. I nearly ate the napkin. New York!

Once, I lived here. Went to Columbia University, studying history first, then broadcast journalism. Worked for a couple of pointless years at the *Post*, and then for thirteen tough but prosperous years at Castle and Forbes on Fifty-fourth, just off Madison Avenue. And then took my insomnia, my afternoon headaches, my doubts, and my antacid tablets to San Diego and lost them in the Pacific Ocean. New York and I didn't quite fit. I knew it the whole time. Some of my Columbia classmates came from faraway places like Iowa and Nevada, as I had come a shorter way from New Hampshire, and after graduation they'd been absorbed into Manhattan and had lived there ever since. I didn't last. I always say, "It was never my town."

Today it was all mine. Today I was its proprietor. With my overcoat wide open and the wind in my hair, I walked around and for an hour or so presided over the bits of litter in the air—so much less than thirty years ago!—and the citizens bent against the weather, and the light inside the restaurants, and the people at small tables looking at one another's faces and talking. The white flakes began to stick. By the time I entered Trump Tower, I'd had a long, hard, wet walk. I repaired myself in the rest room and found the right floor. At the ceremony, my table was near the front—round, clothed in burgundy, and surrounded by eight of us, the other seven much younger than I, a lively bunch, fun and full of wisecracks. And they seemed impressed to be sitting with me, and made sure I sat where I could see. All that was the good part.

Halfway through dessert, the nerve in my back began to act up, and by the time I heard my name and started toward the podium my right shoulder blade felt as if it were pressed against a hissing old New York steam-heat radiator. At the head of the vast room, I held the medallion in my hand—that's what it was, rather than a trophy; an inscribed medallion three inches in diameter, good for a paperweight—and thanked a list of names I'd memorized, omitted any other remarks, and got back to my table just as another pain seized me, this one in the region of my bowels, and now I repented my curbside lunch, my delicious New York hot dogs, especially the second one, and, without sitting down or even making an excuse, I let this bout of indigestion carry me out of the room and down the halls to the men's lavatory, where I hardly had time to fumble the medallion into my lapel pocket and get my jacket on the hook.

I'd sat down with my intestines in flames, first my body bearing this insult, and then my soul insulted, too, when someone came in and chose the stall next to mine. Our public toilets are just that—too public; the walls don't reach the floor. This other man and I could see each other's feet. Or, at any rate, our black shoes, and the cuffs of our dark trousers.

After a minute, his hand laid on the floor between us, there at the border between his space and mine, a square of

toilet paper with an obscene proposition written on it, in words large and plain enough that I could read them whether I wanted to or not. In pain, I laughed. Not out loud.

I heard a small sigh from the next stall.

By hunching down into my own embrace and staring hard at my feet, I tried to make myself go away. I didn't acknowledge his overture, and he didn't leave. He must have taken it that I had him under consideration. As long as I stayed, he had reason to hope. And I couldn't leave yet. My bowels churned and smoldered. Renegade signals from my spinal nerve hammered my shoulder and the full length of my right arm, down to the marrow.

The awards ceremony seemed to have ended. The men's room came to life—the door whooshing open, the run of voices coming in. Throats and faucets and footfalls. The spin of the paper-towel dispenser.

Somewhere in here, a hand descended to the note on the floor, fingers touched it, raised it away. Soon after that the man, the toilet Casanova, was no longer beside me.

I stayed as I was, for how long I couldn't say. There were echoes. Silence. The urinals flushing themselves.

I raised myself upright, pulled my clothing together, made my way to the sinks.

One other man remained in the place. He stood at the sink beside mine as our faucets ran. I washed my hands. He washed his hands.

He was tall, with a distinctive head—wispy colorless hair like a baby's, and a skeletal face with thick red lips. I'd have known him anywhere.

"Carl Zane!"

He smiled in a small way. "Wrong. I'm Marshall Zane. I'm Carl's son."

"Sure, of course—he would have aged, too!" This encounter had me going in circles. I'd finished washing my hands, and now I started washing them again. I forgot to introduce myself. "You look just like your dad," I said. "Only twenty-five years ago. Are you here for the awards night?"

He nodded. "I'm with the Sextant Group."

"You followed in his footsteps."

"I did. I even worked for Castle and Forbes for a couple of years."

"How do you like that? And how's Carl doing? Is he here tonight?"

"He passed away three years ago. Went to sleep one night and never woke up."

"Oh. Oh, no." I had a moment—I have them sometimes—when the surroundings seemed bereft of any facts, and not even the smallest physical gesture felt possible. After the moment had passed, I said, "I'm sorry to hear that. He was a nice guy."

"At least it was painless," the son of Carl Zane said. "And, as far as anyone knows, he went to bed happy that night."

We were talking to each other's reflection in the broad mirror. I made sure I didn't look elsewhere—at his trousers, his shoes. But, for this occasion, we men, every one of us, had dressed in dark trousers and black shoes.

"Well . . . enjoy your evening," the young man said.

I thanked him and said good night, and, as he tossed a wadded paper towel at the receptacle and disappeared out the door, I'm afraid I added, "Tell your father I said hello."

MERMAID

As I trudged up Fifth Avenue after this miserable interlude, I carried my shoulder like a bushel-bag of burning kindling and could hardly stay upright the three blocks to my hotel. It was really snowing now, and it was Saturday night, the sidewalk was crowded, people came at me, forcing themselves against the weather, their shoulders hunched, their coats pinched shut, flakes battering their faces, and though the faces were dark I felt I saw into their eyes.

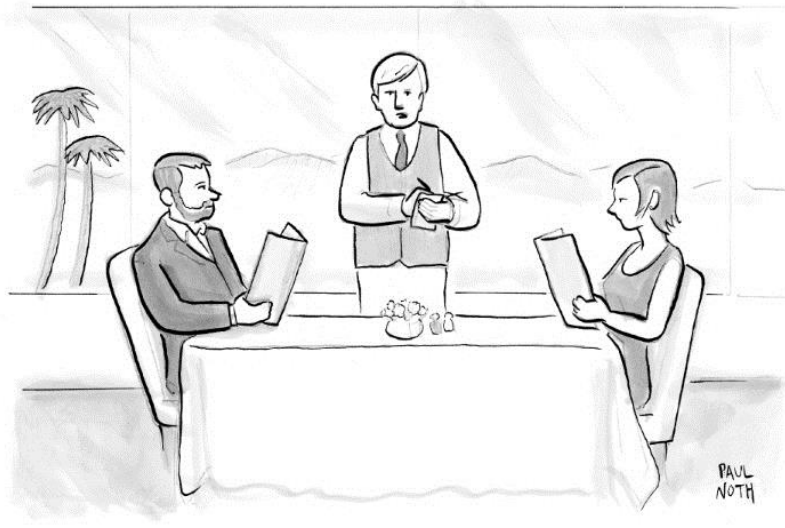
I came awake in the unfamiliar room I didn't know how much later, and, if this makes sense, it wasn't the pain in my shoulder that woke me but its departure. The episode had passed. I lay bathed in relief.

Beyond my window, a thick layer of snow covered the ledge. I became aware of a hush of anticipation, a tremendous surrounding absence. I got out of bed, dressed in my clothes, and went out to look at the city.

It was, I think, around 1 A.M. Snow six inches deep had fallen. Park Avenue looked smooth and soft—not one vehicle had disturbed its surface. The city was almost completely stopped, its very few sounds muffled yet perfectly distinct from one another: a rumbling snowplow somewhere, a car's horn, a man on another street shouting several faint syllables. I tried counting up the years since I'd seen snow. Eleven or twelve—Denver, and it had been exactly the same, exactly like this. One lone taxi glided up Park Avenue through the virgin white, and I hailed it and asked the driver to find any restaurant open for business. I looked out the back window at the brilliant silences falling from the street lamps, and at our fresh black tracks disappearing into the infinite—the only proof of Park Avenue; I'm not sure how the cabbie kept to the road. He took me to a small diner off Union Square, where I had a wonderful breakfast among a handful of miscellaneous wanderers like myself, New Yorkers with their large, historic faces, every one of whom, delivered here without an explanation, seemed invaluable. I paid and left and set out walking back toward midtown. I'd bought a pair of weatherproof dress shoes just before leaving San Diego, and I was glad. I looked for places where I was the first to walk and kicked at the powdery snow. A piano playing a Latin tune drew me through a doorway into an atmosphere of sadness: a dim tavern, a stale smell, the piano's weary melody, and a single customer, an ample, attractive woman with abundant blond hair. She wore an evening gown. A light shawl covered her shoulders. She seemed poised and self-possessed, though it was possible, also, that she was weeping.

I let the door close behind me. The bartender, a small old black man, raised his eyebrows, and I said, "Scotch rocks, Red Label." Talking, I felt discourteous. The piano played in the gloom of the farthest corner. I recognized the melody as a Mexican traditional called "Maria Elena." I couldn't see the musician at all. In front of the piano a big tenor saxophone rested upright on a stand. With no one around to play it, it seemed like just another of the personalities here: the invisible pianist, the disenchanted old bartender, the big glamorous blonde, the shipwrecked, solitary saxophone. And the man who'd walked here through the snow . . . And as soon as the name of the song popped into my head I thought I

heard a voice say, "Her name is Maria Elena." The scene had a moonlit, black-and-white quality. Ten feet away, at her table, the blond woman waited, her shoulders back, her face raised. She lifted one hand and beckoned me with her fingers. She was weeping. The lines of her tears sparkled on her cheeks. "I am a prisoner here," she said. I took the chair across from her and watched her cry. I sat upright, one hand on the table's surface and the other around my drink. I felt the ecstasy of a dancer, but I kept still.



"The starred menu items are available for celebrities only."

• •

WHIT

My name would mean nothing to you, but there's a very good chance you're familiar with my work. Among the many TV ads I wrote and directed, you'll remember one in particular.

In this animated thirty-second spot, you see a brown bear chasing a gray rabbit. They come one after the other over a hill toward the view—the rabbit is cornered, he's crying, the bear comes to him—the rabbit reaches into his waistcoat pocket and pulls out a dollar bill and gives it to the bear. The bear looks at this gift, sits down, stares into space. The music stops, there's no sound, nothing is said, and, right there, the little narrative ends, on a note of complete uncertainty. It's an advertisement for a banking chain. It sounds ridiculous, I know, but that's only if you haven't seen it. If you've seen it, the way it was rendered, then you know that it was a very unusual advertisement. Because it referred, really, to nothing at all, and yet it was actually very moving.

Advertisements don't try to get you to fork over your dough by tugging irrelevantly at your heartstrings, not as a rule. But this one broke the rules, and it worked. It brought the bank many new customers. And it excited a lot of commentary and won several awards—every award I ever won, in fact, I won for that ad. It ran in both halves of the twenty-second Super Bowl, and people still remember it.

You don't get awards personally. They go to the team. To the agency. But your name attaches to the project as a matter of workplace lore—"Whit did that one." (And that would be me, Bill Whitman.) "Yes, the one with the rabbit and the bear was Whit's."

Credit goes first of all to the banking firm who let this strange message go out to potential customers, who sought to start a relationship with a gesture so cryptic. It was better than cryptic—mysterious, untranslatable. I think it pointed to orderly financial exchange as the basis of harmony. Money tames the beast. Money is peace. Money is civilization. The end of the story is money.

I won't mention the name of the bank. If you don't remember the name, then it wasn't such a good ad after all.

If you watched any prime-time television in the nineteen-eighties, you've almost certainly seen several other ads I wrote or directed or both. I crawled out of my twenties leaving behind a couple of short, unhappy marriages, and then I found Elaine. Twenty-five years last June, and two daughters. Have I loved my wife? We've gotten along. We've never felt like congratulating ourselves.

I'm just shy of sixty-three. Elaine's fifty-two but seems older. Not in her looks but in her attitude of complacency. She lacks fire. Seems interested mainly in our two girls. She keeps in close contact with them. They're both grown. They're harmless citizens. They aren't beautiful or clever.

Before the girls started grade school, we left New York and headed West in stages, a year in Denver (too much winter), another in Phoenix (too hot), and finally San Diego. San Diego. What a wonderful city. It's a bit more crowded each year, but still. Completely wonderful. Never regretted coming here, not for an instant. And financially it all worked out. If we'd stayed in New York I'd have made a lot more money, but we'd have needed a lot more, too.

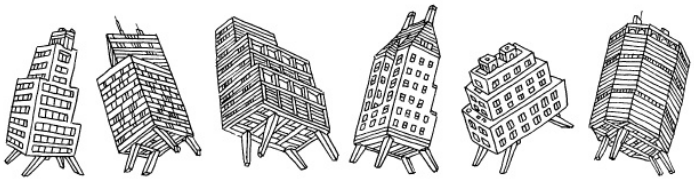
Last night Elaine and I lay in bed watching TV, and I asked her what she remembered. Not much. Less than I. We have a very small TV that sits on a dresser across the room. Keeping it going provides an excuse for lying awake in bed.

I note that I've lived longer in the past, now, than I can expect to live in the future. I have more to remember than I have to look forward to. Memory fades, not much of the past stays, and I wouldn't mind forgetting a lot more of it.

Once in a while, I lie there as the television runs, and I read something wild and ancient from one of several collections of folktales I own. Apples that summon sea maidens, eggs that fulfill any wish, and pears that make people grow long noses that fall off again. Then sometimes I get up and don my robe and go out into our quiet neighborhood looking for a magic thread, a magic sword, a magic horse. ♦

NYR.KR/THISWEEKINFICTION
Denis Johnson on his story.

THE CRITICS



BOOKS

CAPITAL CASE

The poetry of E. E. Cummings.

BY PAUL MULDOON

The title that E. E. Cummings gave his Charles Eliot Norton Lectures, delivered at Harvard in 1952 and 1953, was predictably provocative: "i: six nonlectures." To start with, there was the eschewal of capitalization, a feature that, combined with the near-absence of punctuation, most poetry readers would take to be defining of his style:

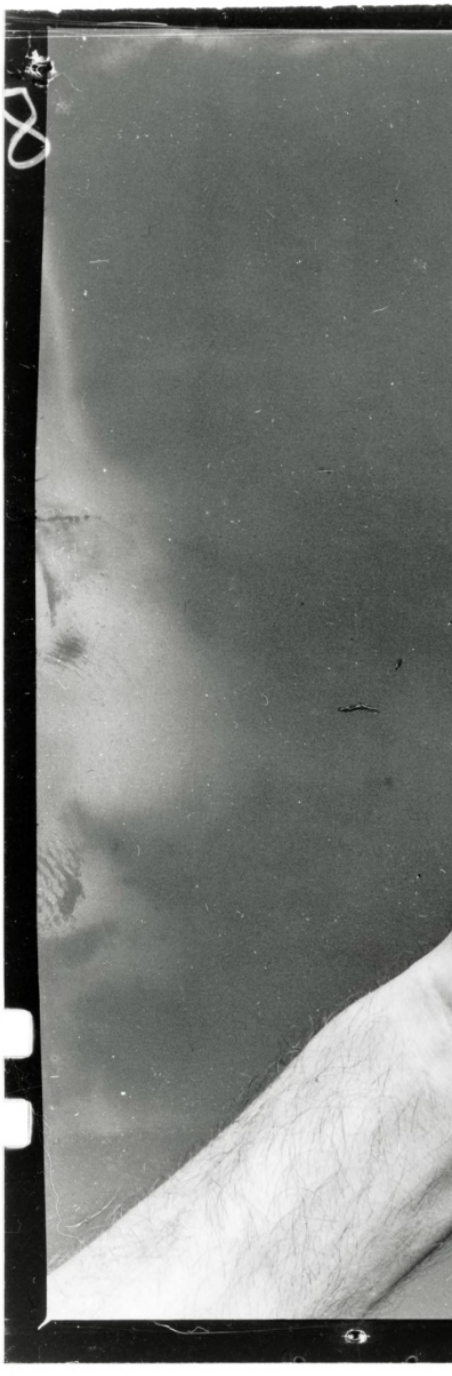
Buffalo Bill 's
defunct
who used to
ride a watersmooth-silver
stallion
and break onetwothreefourfive pigeons-
justlikethat
Jesus
he was a handsome man
and what i want to know is
how do you like your blueeyed boy
Mister Death

What do all these typographical high jinks signify? Perhaps the disregard for punctuation allows the reader a more active role in the process of reading, providing the opportunity to entertain multiple interpretations. The conceit may even play, in an egalitarian spirit, on the idea of capitalization in the economic sense, as if there might be a relationship between upper and lower cases and upper and lower classes. It also happens that Cummings's first collection, "Tulips & Chimneys," in which the Buffalo Bill poem appears, was published in 1922, the year of Joyce's "Ulysses" and Eliot's "The Waste Land." Cummings had been reading both writers for years, and their influence on his work is plain to see. From Joyce, he had learned how to present a verbal equivalent of the mind's wanderings between past and present, and so a fleeting triumph over linear time. From Eliot, who had written that "the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality," he learned to distrust the hierarchical in every aspect of life, beginning with his own being. In his poetry, "I" becomes "i."

As it turns out, Eliot's "extinction of personality" and Joyce's "stream of consciousness" have a common source in William James—who happens to have lived on the same street in Cambridge on which Edward Estlin Cummings was born, in 1894. According to his "nonlecture one," his father, who taught sociology at Harvard, had been introduced to his mother by none other than James himself. The modernist ideas about personality and the consciousness that were so important to Cummings were expressed partly in James's "Principles of Psychology" (1890) and, more succinctly, in his 1892 essay "The Stream of Consciousness," where he muses on the substantive and transitive states of mind:

> When we take a general view of the wonderful stream of our consciousness, what strikes us first is the different pace of its parts. Like a bird's life, it seems to be an alternation of flights and perchings. The rhythm of language expresses this, where every thought is expressed in a sentence, and every sentence closed by a period.

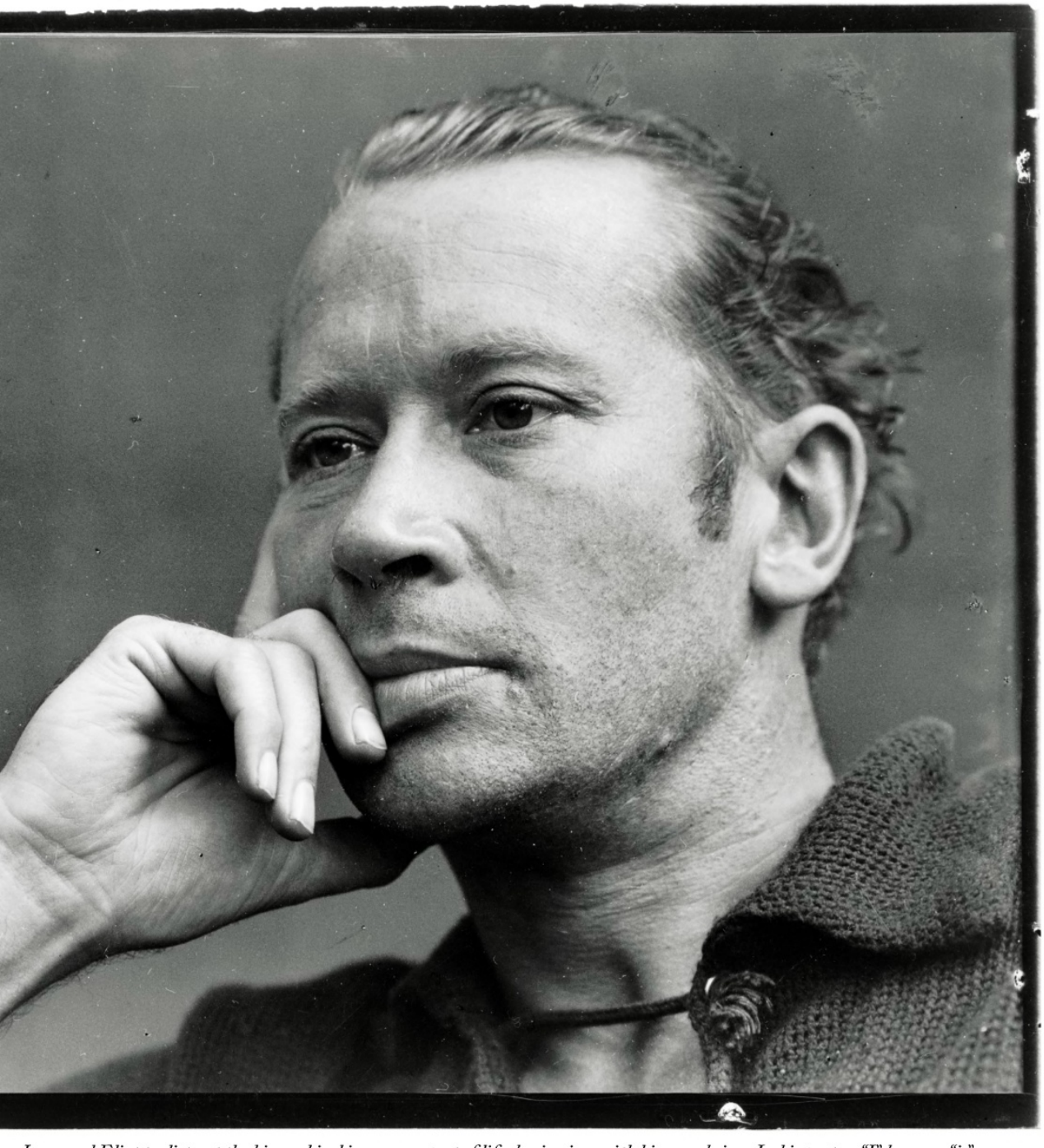
This could serve admirably as an account of Cummings's poem about Buffalo Bill Cody, right down to the description of the "pigeons."



Cummings learned from high modernists like

Later, James expanded on a second idea that's central to Cummings: the distinction between the empirical self, or "me," and the pure ego, or "I," complete with capitalization. The etymological root of the word "capitalization" is the Latin *caput*, "head." No wonder the focus in the poem is on Buffalo Bill's head, both in his being a "blueeyed boy" (which is less a

ABOVE: VASCO MOURÃO



Joyce and Eliot to distrust the hierarchical in every aspect of life, beginning with his own being. In his poetry, "I" becomes "i."

physical description than a suggestion that he's special to Mister Death) and a "handsome man." Given the syntactical nonspecificity, we may read the "handsome man" as being not Buffalo Bill but "Jesus," the word "Jesus" itself less a pious ejaculation than a musing upon the long-haired, bearded, notoriously self-involved Jesus look-alike.

Buffalo Bill became Mister Death's favorite on January 10, 1917. The following day, Cummings, who was then working in the fulfillment office of the New York publishing division of P. F. Collier, read an obituary in the New York *Sun*. According to Richard Kennedy, in his 1980 biography of the poet, Cummings was inspired, and started jotting phrases. On one sheet of Collier stationery, he wrote of a Buffalo Bill

> who used to ride a white horse and shoot
> pidgeons
> with his long hair like reindeer moss on
> the old stone of his face.

On another, he wrote, "Buffalo Bill is dead," with the word "defunct" hovering nearby. The word "defunct" is a telling

CENTER FOR CREATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY, ARIZONA

PHOTOGRAPH BY EDWARD WESTON

choice for a former student at the Cambridge Latin School, given the word's roots in the idea of having "ceased to function," a precise description of the end of Buffalo Bill's career as a showman. The truncation of "is" to " 's" is also revelatory, since the typographical space between the end of "Bill" and the "s" suggests the abrupt discontinuation of Cody's life.

Cummings seems never to have doubted his poetic gifts; he wrote prolifically from the age of six on, his mother saving every scrap for the future archive that she was sure would be required. His first efforts, dating from his years as a student at Cambridge Latin, are reproduced in "Complete Poems: 1904-1962" (Liveright), a newly revised, corrected, and expanded edition of his work, edited by George James Firmage. One would rarely complain that a 1,102-page book is not long enough, but this edition lacks an introduction and notes that would help contextualize the poems. Susan Cheever's new biography, "E. E. Cummings: A Life" (Pantheon), might hold out the promise of such contextualization, but readers may be better served by earlier efforts.

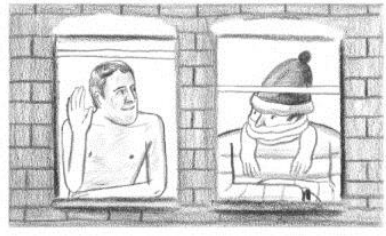
All his biographers agree that when he went to Harvard, in 1911, Cummings was at least as interested in visual art as in poetry, and later considered pursuing a career as a painter. (He continued to paint throughout his life.) At his Harvard graduation, he delivered a speech on "The New Art," in which he spoke enthusiastically of Marcel Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase," Gertrude Stein's poetry ("Her art is the logic of literary sound painting carried to its extreme"), and Arnold Schoenberg's music, with its "bristling forests contorted by irresistible winds."

Those metaphorical "bristling forests" became all too real for Cummings when, the day after the United States declared war against Germany in April, 1917, he volunteered for service on the battlefields of France with the Norton-Harjes American Ambulance Corps. During an interlude in Paris, he saw Stravinsky's early work, and the première of the ballet "Parade," which featured a libretto by Jean Cocteau, music by Erik Satie, choreography by Sergei Diaghilev, and sets and costumes by Pablo Picasso. The program notes, by Guillaume Apollinaire, described the ballet as "a kind of surrealism"—the first time the word had been applied to an artistic project. The following year, Apollinaire published "Calligrammes," a collection of visual or concrete poems, which the author described as "an idealization of free-verse poetry and a typographical precision at a time when typography is reaching a brilliant end to its career, at the dawn of the new means of reproduction that are the cinema and the phonograph." Cummings took inspiration from Apollinaire's example, while ignoring his suggestion that typography was nearing the end of its career.

Cummings also found time to consort with the city's prostitutes. This was a poet whose work was distinguished as much by its erotic candor and intensity ("there is between my big legs a crisp city") as by its formal experiments. When, in later years, college girls swooned at his readings, they were responding to more than just zany typography.

Cummings's career in the ambulance service was cut short, because he was suspected of being less than enthusiastic about the French or, at least, insufficiently antagonistic toward the Germans. As Richard Norton, the head of the Ambulance Corps, wrote to Cummings's parents in October of 1917:

> EDWARD E. CUMMINGS HAS BEEN PUT IN A CONCENTRATION CAMP AS A RESULT OF LETTERS HE HAD WRITTEN STOP AM TAKING UP THE MATTER THROUGH THE EMBASSY TO SEE WHAT CAN BE DONE.



Cummings was released only after three months' internment in the prison of La Ferté-Macé, an experience that provided the backdrop to his autobiographical prose work "The Enormous Room" (1922). He describes finding himself back in Paris:

> The streets. *Les rues de Paris*. I walked past Notre Dame. I bought tobacco. Jews are peddling things with American trade-marks on them, because in a day or two it's Christmas I suppose. Jesus it is cold. Dirty snow. Huddling people. *La guerre*. Always *la guerre*.

The phrase "Jesus it is cold" sends this reader back to "Buffalo Bill," the seemingly casual nature of the "Jesus" at odds with Cummings's deep-seated belief in, and connection with, a decidedly capitalized Christian God, one in whose service his father now worked as a Unitarian minister:

> i thank You God for most this amazing
> day:for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
> and a blue true dream of sky;and for
> everything
> which is natural which is infinite which is
> yes

Back in the United States, Cummings worried his father with his indifference to paying work; his career at P. F. Collier lasted only two months. But he began to make his name, first with "Tulips & Chimneys," and then, in 1926, with "is 5." The latter contains one of his best-known poems, "she being Brand," which has fun with the lavish consumer culture of the nineteen-twenties:

> she being Brand
>
> -new;and you
> know consequently a
> little stiff i was
> careful of her and(having
>
> thoroughly oiled the universal
> joint tested my gas felt of
> her radiator made sure her springs were
> O.
>
> K.)

"Think twice before you think," Cummings counselled in "nonlecture four," but he might usefully have put a little more thought into the seventh line, above, given that the words "felt of" make no sense, however one cuts them. As the poem proceeds, it develops what is essentially an Elizabethan conceit on the relationship between motoring and lovemaking. There are more and more verbal pileups ("Bothatonce"; "allofher"), and a double entendre on a slang reading of Cummings's own name:

> again slo-wly;bare,ly nudg. ing(my
>
> lev-er Right-
> oh and her gears being in
> A 1 shape passed
> from low through
> second-in-to-high like
> greasedlightning)just as we turned the
> corner of Divinity
>
> avenue i touched the accelerator and give
>
> her the juice, good

The poem shows Cummings's strengths and weaknesses. There's the powerfully playful mimesis of the verse turning a corner "as we turned the corner" and the witty choice of "Divinity," the street in Cambridge on which his father had taken his degree in theology. A few of the pileups ("Bothatonce") are amusing; most ("allofher"; "slowwly;bare,ly nudg") are rather tiresome. Little is gained by isolating the "wly" or "nudg" components from "slowly" and "nudging," and "greasedlightning" hardly belongs in the poem at all. The upshot of this is that the reader begins to do more work than might be decently expected, perhaps going so far as to rewrite "Public," in "by the Public Gardens," as "Pub(l)ic," for example, and enjoying the opportunity for a schoolkid snigger that Cummings himself seems to have missed.

Still, the erotic strand is one of the most attractive aspects of Cummings's work, and one to which he returned throughout his life. In the spring of 1918, he began an affair with Elaine Orr, who was married to his Harvard friend Scofield Thayer, a rich litterateur. The following year, Cummings fathered a child with her, Nancy. After he married Elaine, in March of 1924, Nancy legally became his daughter, but she was never told of it. Later that year, Elaine announced that she had fallen in love with someone else, an Irish banker, and wanted a divorce; she moved with their daughter to France. Cummings soon took up with a sometime artist's model named Anne Barton; he found her "common, even vulgar," but also noted that "if Annie came into a room, every man's prick hit the ceiling." Then, in 1926, his father was killed in a car accident. The episode is recounted with an eerie detachment in the "nonlectures":

> My father and mother were coming up from Cambridge to New Hampshire, one day, in their newly purchased automobile—an aircooled Franklin, with an ash frame. As they neared the Ossippees, snow fell. My mother was driving; and, left to her self, would never have paused for such a trifle as snow. But as the snow increased, my father made her stop while he got out and wiped the windshield. Then he got in; and she drove on. Some minutes later, a locomotive cut the car in half, killing my father instantly. When two brakemen jumped from the halted train, they saw a woman standing—dazed but erect—beside a mangled machine; with blood "spouting" (as the older said to me) out of her head. One of her hands (the younger added) kept feeling her dress, as if trying to discover why it was wet.

Susan Cheever's description of the scene relies, quite understandably, on Cummings's: "The steam-belching engine loomed above the Franklin and then cut it in half. Edward Cummings was killed instantly. Rebecca Cummings was miraculously thrown clear." Cheever does not, however, give us any insight into what this tragedy might have meant for Cummings. It's left to us to see the connection between a motorcar and death suddenly supersede the classic connection between a motorcar and sex in "she being Brand."

Around this time, a new gravity entered Cummings's poetry, as in the famous elegy for his father:

> my father moved through dooms of love
> through sames of am through haves of
> give,
> singing each morning out of each night
> my father moved through depths of
> height

Although there are moments in this opening verse that sound like discounted Dylan Thomas, Cummings anchors his linguistic exuberance in an everyday usage:

> his anger was as right as rain
> his pity was as green as grain

The traditional *aabb* rhyme scheme of the poem underscores a side of Cummings that is much more conventional than his typographical experiments would suggest. Despite his bon mot in "nonlecture four" that "great men burn bridges before they come to them," many of Cummings's most effective poems are sonnets, or, anyway, sonnet-like, implying that he's less iconoclastic than has often been supposed—including by himself. Certainly, the core of his belief system was much more staid than his explosions of font. The poems gravitate toward the time-honored themes set down by Yeats: "sex and the dead." With regard to form, my sense is that there's been very little new in the field of the visual pun or typographical jeu d'esprit since 1759, the year of the

"I'm telling you, Manhattan is over."

• •

publication of "The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman," in which Laurence Sterne marked the death of one character with a black page and mimicked the twirling of a stick by another with a squiggle. Indeed, one may come to feel that Cummings's visual effects are largely an affectation. Edmund Wilson, with singular vehemence, considered them an indication of his "immaturity as an artist," and found the poems "ugly" and "hideous on the page."

As his second marriage was failing, in 1932, Cummings fell in love with the fashion model Marion Morehouse, with whom he established a relationship that lasted the three decades that remained of his life. He maintained a residence at 4 Patchin Place, in Greenwich Village, from 1924 until his death; summers came to be spent at his home in New Hampshire. Not that he was any kind of homebody. He spent much of those decades living the life of a celebrity poet, giving talks, taking up an honorary academic post, and travelling the world. A visit to the Soviet Union, which he described in the verse travelogue "Eimi" (1933), started a drift to the political right. By the nineteen-fifties, he had a certain sympathy for McCarthyism and was inclined to blame Eleanor Roosevelt and the "gruesome gang of dogooders" she sponsored for the Soviet Union's status as a world power. He was also canny enough, given the circles he travelled in, to keep these views to himself.

By the time the Norton Lectures were delivered, Cummings had no problem drawing a crowd. Susan Cheever, in a chapter titled "Odysseus Returns to Cambridge," reports on the mood at Harvard:

> The poet and editor Harvey Shapiro remembers that the audience was annoyingly packed with dewy Radcliffe girls . . . who seemed to worship E. E. Cummings for no good reason, or no good reason that Shapiro could discern. These were the same girls who, when Shapiro was living across the mews from Cummings on Patchin Place in the Village, would show up at all hours to recite Cummings poems under his windows and leave scrawny bunches of wildflowers.

A number of questions come to mind. Was it "annoying" to Harvey Shapiro (who thought that Cummings's work was "for kids") that the venue was "packed" or that it was "packed with Radcliffe girls"? Was it because those girls were "dewy"? Were they all "dewy"? What does "dewy" mean, anyhow? Did Harvey Shapiro take the opportunity to discern a "good reason" from the Radcliffe girls? Were these in fact "the same girls" who showed up on Patchin Place or were they merely similar girls? Did any of their bouquets go beyond "scrawny"? Were any tending toward the condition of sumptuousness?

Many passages of Cheever's biography combine condescension and knowingness; others are sloppy, and soppy. There's just one scene in which the book somehow takes off, partly because of Susan Cheever's keen awareness of father-daughter dynamics. It's the scene in which Nancy Thayer, now twenty-nine, who's been sitting for a portrait by Cummings on Patchin Place, takes the opportunity to bring up the subject of her family while Marion Morehouse is out of the room:

> Nancy asked about Thayer, referring to him as her father, and Cummings looked at her strangely. After a short silence, Nancy blurted out her fears that she was falling in love with him.
>
> Suddenly the third-floor room was as still as a church. The pigeons cooed, traffic rumbled by far away, to the west the afternoon light was fading, the room smelled of wood and paints. Cummings required absolute silence for his work. Now the quiet seemed to require a revelation. For the four years of their casual friendship, Cummings had known the truth about Nancy and she had been kept in the dark. Why hadn't he told her before this awful moment? Now, he asked Nancy: "Didn't anyone ever tell you that I was your father?"

Cummings's biographer Richard Kennedy interviewed Nancy, and gives her account of how the conversation continued. "You cannot mean it," she said, after a long pause, and Cummings replied, "You don't have to choose between us." Marion returned then, and was aware that an exchange of some significance had occurred. Cummings told her, "We know who we are."

Cheever's broad strokes are somehow appropriate, though, in her descriptions of exactly who Cummings turns out to be—a man of whom Robert Frost's "I never dared to be radical when young / For fear it would make me conservative when old" seems particularly apposite. She does not overlook the crudity of which Cummings proved to be so capable, once including the words "cunted" and "kike" in a single verse. Although Cummings denied anti-Jewish intent—insisting that his point was that a "kike" was not a Jew but what "the machineworld of corrupted American materialism" creates of one, by the same process that converts an "Irishman into a 'mick' "—she concludes that Cummings's anti-Semitic language "is criminal and repulsive," having quoted Harvey Shapiro as saying, bluntly, that Cummings "was nothing but an anti-Semite."

Given her ambivalence toward her subject, it makes sense that she describes his death twice, the first time in her self-regarding preface:

> The way he died, in 1962, at Joy Farm, the Cummings family place in Silver Lake, New Hampshire, was another one of my father's often-told stories. Marion had called him in to dinner as day faded and the glorious sky lit up with the fires of sunset. "I'll be there in a moment," Cummings said. "I'm just going to sharpen the axe." A few minutes later, he crumpled to the ground, felled by a cerebral hemorrhage. He was sixty-seven. That, my father let us all know, was the way to die—still manly and useful, still beloved, still strong. " 'how do you like your blueeyed boy / Mister Death,' " my father growled, his eyes wet with tears.

It's with a sense of relief, therefore, that one may remind oneself that Cummings, like Ez Po and Possum, was *something* more than an anti-Semite. To return to the best of his poems is to return to a buoyancy and boisterousness, of course, but also to an odd bountifulness:

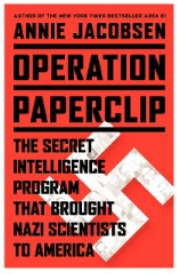
> (i who have died am alive again today,
> and this is the sun's birthday;this is the birth
> day of life and of love and wings:and of the gay
> great happening illimitably earth)

That sense of joy in creation found answering chords in his love lyrics, as well:

> (i do not know what it is about you that closes
> and opens;only something in me understands
> the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses)
> nobody,not even the rain, has such small hands

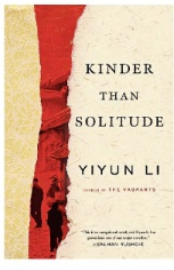
The phrase "nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands" encapsulates such a profound sense of wonder and wistfulness that one remembers why, at the time he went to sharpen the axe in 1962, Cummings was second only to that other axe-grinder, Robert Frost, as the most widely read poet in the United States. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

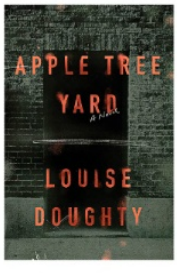


OPERATION PAPERCLIP, *by Annie Jacobsen (Little, Brown).* This darkly picaresque account details the covert operation that brought Nazi scientists to work in the U.S. As the Third Reich collapsed, the Allied powers, in awe of its "wonder weapons," scrambled to employ these scientists, even though they may have murdered or worked to death tens of thousands of people—whether on V-2 rocket assembly lines, in tubs of freezing water, or while testing experimental vaccines. Some scientists retired to a resort in the Bavarian Alps and sunbathed until the Allies arrived. Jacobsen persuasively argues that the mindset of the former Nazi scientists who ended up working for the American government may have exacerbated Cold War paranoia.

EROTIC EXCHANGES, *by Nina Kushner (Cornell).* This history brings to life *les dames entretenues*—women who dazzled and scandalized eighteenth-century Paris as mistresses of powerful men. Kushner traces the pathways to élite prostitution: many mistresses began as actresses and singers; others were sold into the demimonde by their parents. She finds that mistresses were held to have a stabilizing influence on men's romantic whims, and they enjoyed some of the benefits of married women. Contracts guaranteed their pay, and they were often the primary breadwinners for their own families. Some mistresses found lifetime partners in their patrons, and some achieved financial independence, but many were discarded by their late twenties and began a life of streetwalking. Kushner avoids over-contemporizing her subject, affording her women agency but not more than they actually had.



KINDER THAN SOLITUDE, *by Yiyun Li (Random House).* In this novel, which spans the two decades following the Tiananmen Square crackdown of 1989, a fifteen-year-old orphan named Ruyu arrives as a guest at the comparatively privileged home of Shaoai, a fiery-spirited student protester. Ruyu's steely reticence and otherworldly faith immediately set her apart from her cosseted Beijing-bred peers, attracting her classmates but infuriating Shaoai. When one character is poisoned, no suspects are arrested, but every member of the victim's circle is implicated. Li turns an intricately plotted mystery into something more profound, one that queries the meaning of crime and punishment in the moral murk of contemporary China.



APPLE TREE YARD, *by Louise Doughty (Sarah Crichton Books).* Yvonne Carmichael is an eminent geneticist in London, with two children and a husband who is a successful academic. Haunted by the memory of infidelity on the part of her husband, and worn out by years of sacrifices for her family, she falls into a risky affair with a man whom she meets while testifying before a government committee, and whom she believes to be a spy. But her lover's secret is even more ominous, and when the novel opens they are both on trial for murder. Doughty writes with consummate pacing and psychological acuity, bringing fresh force to a common regret of adulterous lovers: "We discovered that safety and security are commodities you can sell in return for excitement, but you can never buy them back."

Advertisement

ON THE TOWN

BE THE FIRST TO HEAR ABOUT EVENTS, PROMOTIONS, AND SPECIAL OFFERS FROM OUR ADVERTISERS

SKETCH WITH A SENSE OF DREAD

The terrifying new original series "**Penny Dreadful**" premières on Sunday, May 11th, as **Showtime** reimagines literature's most iconic and nightmarish characters.

Do you dare set your nightmares to paper? In partnership with **The Sketchbook Project**, Showtime invites you to submit your original work of art. Selections will be featured in print and online.

Visit **sketchbookproject.com/dreadful** to sign up for this free art project and to receive official materials* and instructions.

**Quantities are limited; first come, first served.*

SHOWTIME

newyorkeronthetown.com
Follow us on Twitter: @NewYorkerPromo

MUSICAL EVENTS

DROWNED SOUNDS

Paweł Szymański's opera "Qudsja Zaher," in Warsaw.

BY ALEX ROSS

The devastation visited on Warsaw during the Second World War also wiped out a fair amount of music. Witold Lutosławski and Andrzej Panufnik, two young Polish composers who had played together as a piano duo in cafés during the German occupation, saw most of their scores destroyed. The loss was, in a way, liberating: Lutosławski and Panufnik carried on with increasing audacity, testing the aesthetic limits that fell into place after the Communist takeover. Panufnik defected to Britain, in 1954; Lutosławski remained, becoming the pilot figure in a remarkable surge of musical activity that has been named the Polish Renaissance. A superficial liberalization of Polish culture in the post-Stalin era allowed for the importation of avant-garde ideas. Visitors to the Warsaw Autumn festival, which began unfolding in 1956, were surprised to hear bruising dissonances and roiling textures in works by Lutosławski and his younger colleagues Krzysztof Penderecki and Henryk Górecki, among others. The Polish avant-garde tended to be less studied, less process-driven, than its Western counterpart; it had a kind of psychedelic extravagance, which came to the fore most spectacularly in Penderecki's "Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima," a sustained screaming of strings that was first heard at Warsaw Autumn in 1961.

Szymański continues the Polish musical renaissance that began under Communism.

Of the leaders of the Polish Renaissance, only Lutosławski, whose centenary was celebrated around the world last year, entirely fulfilled his promise. Joining sonic spectacle to structures of tensile strength, he proved to be one of the century's supreme musical architects. I have never understood why his Third Symphony, of 1983, isn't heard as often as Beethoven's: it packs the same heroic wallop. Penderecki, now eighty, remains industrious, but since the mid-seventies he has gravitated toward a formulaic neo-Romantic style. Górecki had an astonishing success when, in the early nineties, the Nonesuch label's recording of his austere, meditative Third Symphony sold more than a million copies. Subsequently, his output slowed, as if the phenomenon had unsettled him. He died in 2010, leaving behind an unfinished Fourth Symphony, which will have its première in London, in April, in a version completed by his son, Mikolaj. Framed by harsh chords and bass-drum thuds, the score may disappoint fans of the mesmeric Third, but it looks to be a potent farewell.

Although composers of younger generations have yet to match the international renown of the postwar trio, the Polish scene remains frenetically diverse. I recently spent a weekend in Warsaw, attending a performance of Paweł Szymański's opera "Qudsja Zaher," at the Polish National Opera, and an all-Polish program by the Sinfonia Iuventus. I also picked up stacks of CDs and videos, many of them supported by such state-linked institutions as the Polish Music Information Centre, the Adam Mickiewicz Institute, and Warsaw Autumn. The music ranges from Mahlerian opulence to laptop-generated anarchy, but at all points on the spectrum there remains a joy in the properties of sound. It's as if a primal scene were being repeated: young composers find a piano in a ruined space and see what glorious noise they can make upon it.

Szymański, who will soon turn sixty, is an unclassifiable loner. When he took his bows after "Qudsja Zaher," he had the look of a grizzled biker. Yet he is a composer of a severe and inward cast, schooled in old arts of counterpoint. An EMI disk of his piano music features a seven-movement Baroque suite that not only sounds like Bach but could be mistaken

PHOTOGRAPH BY KRZYSZTOF BIELINSKI/TEATR WIELKI/POLISH NATIONAL OPERA

ILLUSTRATION BY KRZYSZTOF DOMARADZKI

for Bach—the latter being rather more difficult to accomplish than the former. Such pastiche is atypical; more often, Szymański distorts his historical echoes within a modern frame, as fixed pitches melt away into glissando textures or ominous silences intrude. At times, he recalls the melancholic collage style that was common among late-twentieth-century Eastern European and Soviet composers, notably Alfred Schnittke. But there is little sense of nostalgia or loss in Szymański's layered manipulations of the past. Rather, it's as if a sensitive extraterrestrial had received transmissions of a classical-radio broadcast and composed new works according to an unknown logic.

Szymański completed "Qudsja Zaher" in 2005, setting a libretto by the filmmaker Maciej J. Drygas, but the opera reached the stage only last year, after several previous attempts fell through. A cryptic mythological narrative, it tells of an Afghan woman who throws herself from a derelict refugee ship and finds herself at the threshold of the underworld. The Ferryman demands payment for passage to the land of the dead; Qudsja, short on money, remains in limbo, drowned souls chanting around her. Her predicament is solved by the unexplained entrance of an Icelandic schoolteacher and a class of fifty boys. As they chant stories from history and legend, it emerges that Qudsja is the reincarnation of Astrid, a suffering woman who passed this way a thousand years ago. The Ferryman lets her through. At the end comes another scene of sinking, with searchlights scanning the depths; the cycle is beginning anew.

The score contains a few neo-Baroque passages, but for the most part it avoids historical references, as befits the netherworld setting. There are high, dissonant wind chords, like the shredding of steel; descending string glissandos, suggestive of bodies and wreckage drifting downward; low, muffled prepared-piano notes, like pinging sonar. The chorus of the drowned speaks and sings in a multilingual haze; the Icelandic boys chant archaic raps; Qudsja, a soprano role, alternates between spare, searching arioso lines and stifled screams. Most of the time, these elements are isolated from one another, but at climactic moments voices and orchestra gather into an overpowering, electronically enhanced mass. In all, the work creates an authentic ritual strangeness.

The production, by the Lithuanian director Eimuntas Nekrošius, with sets by Marius Nekrošius, spoke its own symbolic language, not always easily decoded. I never grasped the import of a flapping birdlike contraption that kept popping up in the background. Yet Nekrošius's oceanic forms achieved a dark beauty, in keeping with Szymański's score; especially haunting was the image of propellers hanging down from above, signifying the Ferryman's vessel. Katarzyna Trylnik was pure-toned and affecting in the title role; Wojciech Michniewski conducted incisively. Afterward, inching across an iced-over Piłsudski Square, I felt that I hadn't quite left the world of the opera.

The Sinfonia Iuventus concert, which took place on the premises of Polish Radio, with Marzena Diakun conducting, offered a glimpse of the youngest Polish generation, in the form of Ignacy Zalewski, who is twenty-three. His Symphonic Variations are a riot of inventive orchestration in search of structural coherence—not surprising, or discouraging, in a still developing composer. Panufnik's 1961 Piano Concerto, with Piotr Sałajczyk at the keyboard, provided a contrasting lesson in compositional discipline, with a whizz-bang ending to boot. Panufnik's centenary arrives this year; he deserves an audience outside Poland and Britain, the only countries where he is regularly performed.

As for the dozens of younger figures I encountered on CD, I'll single out Agata Zubel, a thirty-six-year-old composer-vocalist of multiple and formidable gifts. Her own works are experimental in method and visceral in impact: "Not I," a 2010 setting of Beckett, veers between guttural spluttering and otherworldly song, her voice multiplying into an electronic mob. On a recital disk called "Poems," Zubel delivers smoky accounts of vocal pieces by Copland, Scriabin, Berg, and Szymański. And, on "El Derwid," Zubel joins the cellist Andrzej Bauer and the electronic musician Cezary Duchnowski in paying unconventional homage to Lutosławski: they transform slinky pop songs that he wrote in the fifties, under the pseudonym Derwid, into an avant-pop tour de force, with Zubel's live-wire voice at the center. After six decades, the Polish Renaissance rumbles on. ♦

DESIGNATHARVARD

"An unparalleled opportunity to explore the world of design."

Architecture
Landscape Architecture
Urban Planning
Urban Design

THE CAREER DISCOVERY PROGRAM

JUNE 9 - JULY 18, 2014

Harvard University Graduate School of Design
gsd.harvard.edu/careerdiscovery
617-495-5453

IMPORTANT AMERICAN PAINTINGS

Request your hardbound catalogue
144 pages, 50 color plates
ALL WORKS OFFERED FOR SALE

QUESTROYAL FINE ART, LLC
903 Park Ave. (at 79th St.) 3A&B, New York, NY 10075
(212) 744-3586 gallery@questroyalfineart.com
www.questroyalfineart.com

ON TELEVISION

COOL STORY, BRO

The shallow deep talk of "True Detective."

BY EMILY NUSSBAUM

Judged purely on style, HBO's "True Detective" is a great show. Every week, it offers up shiver-inducing cable intoxicants, from an over-the-top action sequence so liquid it rivals a Scorsese flick to piquant scenes of rural degradation, filmed on location in Louisiana, a setting that has become a bit of an HBO specialty. ("Treme" and "True Blood" are also set there.)

Like many critics, I was initially charmed by the show's anthology structure (eight episodes and out; next season a fresh story) and its witty chronology, which chops and dices a serial-killer investigation, using two time lines. In the nineteen-nineties, two detectives, Marty Hart and Rust Cohle (Woody Harrelson and Matthew McConaughey), hunt down a fetishistic murderer, the sort of artsy bastard who tattoos his female victims, then accessorizes them with antlers and scatters cultish tchotchkes at the crime scene. In the contemporary time line, these ex-partners are questioned by two other cops, who suspect that the murders have begun again. If you share my weakness for shows that shuffle time or have tense interrogations—like the late, great "Homicide" or the better seasons of "Damages"—you might be interested to see these methods combined. The modern interviews become a voice-over, which is layered over flashbacks, and the contrast between words and images reveals that our narrators have been cherry-picking details and, at crucial junctures, flat-out lying. So far, so complex.

On the other hand, you might take a close look at the show's opening credits, which suggest a simpler tale: one about heroic male outlines and closeups of female asses. The more episodes that go by, the more I'm starting to suspect that those asses tell the real story.

This aspect of "True Detective" (which is written by Nic Pizzolatto and directed by Cary Fukunaga) will be gratingly familiar to anyone who has ever watched a new cable drama get acclaimed as "a dark masterpiece": the slack-jawed teen prostitutes; the strippers gyrating in the background of police work; the flashes of nudity from the designated put-upon wifey character; and much more nudity from the occasional cameo hussy, like Marty's mistress, whose rack bounces merrily through Episode 2. Don't get me wrong: I love a nice bouncy rack. And if a show has something smart to say about sex, bring it on. But, after years of watching "Boardwalk Empire," "Ray Donovan," "House of Lies," and so on, I've turned prickly, and tired of trying to be, in the novelist Gillian Flynn's useful phrase, the Cool Girl: a good sport when something smells like macho nonsense. And, frankly, "True Detective" reeks of the stuff. The series, for all its good looks and its movie-star charisma, isn't just using dorm-room deep talk as a come-on: it has fallen for its own sales pitch.

To state the obvious: while the male detectives of "True Detective" are avenging women and children, and bro-bonding over "crazy pussy," every live woman they meet is paper-thin. Wives and sluts and daughters—none with any interior life. Instead of an ensemble, "True Detective" has just two characters, the family-man adulterer Marty, who seems like a real and flawed person (and a reasonably interesting asshole, in Harrelson's strong performance), and Rust, who is a macho fantasy straight out of Carlos Castaneda. A sinewy weirdo with a tragic past, Rust delivers arias of philosophy, a mash-up of Nietzsche, Lovecraft, and the nihilist horror writer Thomas Ligotti. At first, this buddy pairing seems like a funky dialectic: when Rust rants, Marty rolls his eyes. But, six episodes in, I've come to suspect that the show is dead serious

Though the show has movie-star charisma, it reeks of macho nonsense.

ILLUSTRATION BY VICTOR MELAMED

about this dude. Rust is a heretic with a heart of gold. He's *our* fetish object—the cop who keeps digging when everyone ignores the truth, the action hero who rescues children in the midst of violent chaos, the outsider with painful secrets and harsh truths and nice arms. McConaughey gives an exciting performance (in Grantland, Andy Greenwald aptly called him "a rubber band wrapped tight around a razor blade"), but his rap is premium baloney. And everyone around these cops, male or female, is a dark-drama cliché, from the coked-up dealers and the sinister preachers to that curvy corpse in her antlers. "True Detective" has some tangy dialogue ("You are the Michael Jordan of being a son of a bitch") and it can whip up an ominous atmosphere, rippling with hints of psychedelia, but these strengths finally dissipate, because it's so solipsistically focussed on the phony duet.

Meanwhile, Marty's wife, Maggie—played by Michelle Monaghan, she is the only prominent female character on the show—is an utter nothing-burger, all fuming prettiness with zero insides. Stand her next to any other betrayed wife on television—Mellie, on "Scandal"; or Alicia, on "The Good Wife"; or Cersei, on "Game of Thrones"; or even Claire, on "House of Cards"—and Maggie's an outline, too. Last week, Maggie finally got her own episode, in which she is interrogated by the cops. She lies to them, with noir composure, as the visuals reveal a predictable twist: Maggie had revenge sex with Rust. That sex is filmed as gasp-worthy, though it lasts thirty seconds. We see Monaghan's butt, plus the thrusting cheeks of McConaughey. Yet the betrayal has no weight, since the love triangle is missing a side. An earlier sex scene is even more absurd, and features still another slice of strange: a lusty, anal-sex-offering, sext-happy ex-hooker. She seduces Marty with her own philosophical sweet nothings ("There is nothing wrong with the way he made us"), and, since she's a gorgeous unknown, we get to see her ride Harrelson like a bronco, as ceramic angels and devil dolls look on from the dresser.

I'm certain that, if you're a fan of the series, this analysis irritates you. It's no fun to be a killjoy, particularly when people are yelling "Best show ever"; it's the kind of debate that tends to turn both sides into scolds, each accusing the other of being prudes or suckers. A few months ago, a similar debate erupted about Martin Scorsese's "The Wolf of Wall Street," a film that inspired its advocates to rage that those who didn't "get it" just needed to get laid. There were more nuanced arguments out there, though: in the *Times*, A. O. Scott argued that, while the film did a fine job sending up the corruption of the grifter Jordan Belfort, there was little distinction, visually, between Belfort's misogyny and the film's own display. Cool girl that I am, I didn't entirely agree: like "True Detective," "Wolf" unfolds in flashback, through voice-over, but its outrageous images bend and ripple with Belfort's mania. With the exception of a few shots—like one of a stewardess, whose assault is treated as a joke in a way that made me twitch—the nudity, however nasty, makes sense.

On "True Detective," however, we're not watching the distorted testimony of an addict, punctured by flashes of accidental self-revelation. The scenes we see are supposed to be what really happened. And when a mystery show is about disposable female bodies, and the women in it are eye candy, it's a drag. Whatever the length of the show's much admired tracking shot (six minutes, uncut!), it feels less hardboiled than softheaded. Which might be O.K. if "True Detective" were dumb fun, but, good God, it's not: it's got so much gravitas it could run for President.

It's possible that my crankiness derives from having watched so many recent, better crime series, telling similar stories, in far more original ways. Most notable were Jane Campion's soaring "Top of the Lake," on Sundance, and Allan Cubitt's nightmare-inducing BBC series "The Fall." In "Top of the Lake," Campion jolts the viewer with actual taboo nudity: she films the saggy bodies of middle-aged women, members of a feminist encampment. Then she stitches this subplot, in which she satirizes the cult of self-help victimhood, onto a small-town mystery about sex crimes against teen-age girls, who are filmed with comparative discretion. A moody, pastoral twist on the rape-and-murder genre, Campion's mini-series torqued viewer expectations, exploring provocative themes about the way that communities agree to treat these crimes as if they were bad dreams. "True Detective"'s hinted-at mystery seems strikingly similar. The difference is that, while "Top of the Lake" is about survivors, "True Detective" is about witnesses. The acts themselves are mere symbols of the universe's unspeakable horror.

"The Fall" (which is available on Netflix) has even more conventional nudity than "True Detective." It, too, tells a story about a team of detectives hunting for a rapist-murderer obsessed with symbolism. It features pervy stalker shots, along with sick-making imagery of female corpses, in bondage, photographed as keepsakes. Some critics called the show "misogynistic torture porn": by turning viewers on, they point out, it takes a rapist's-eye view. But this imagery has a sharp purpose. The show reveals the murderer immediately, forcing us to see the world through his eyes. Then, episode by episode, it tears that identification apart. Just like Rust Cohle, "The Fall"'s rapist has an elaborate pseudo-intellectual lingo, full of Nietzsche quotes and talk of primal impulses. But an icy female cop, played by Gillian Anderson, sees through him—and, in the finale, she shreds his pretensions with one smart speech. Anderson aside, "The Fall" overflows with complex female characters, and not merely the killer's victims but their families, the murderer's wife, his daughter, and his mistress. Beautiful as "The Fall" looks, it's harder to watch than "True Detective," because there is a soul inside each body we ogle. When women suffer, their pain isn't purely decorative.

"True Detective" isn't over, of course: like any mystery, it can't be fully judged before the finale—it might yet complete that mystical time loop Rust keeps ranting about. There are hints of the supernatural, with endless references to the "Yellow King" and the "Lost City of Carcosa": maybe the show will reveal that it was Cthulhu all along, in the library, with the candlestick. But for now I'm an unbeliever. Bring me some unpretentious pulp, like Cinemax's "Banshee," or an intelligent thriller, like FX's "The Americans," which is beginning its second season later this month, and actually does have fresh things to say about sex, sin, and the existential slipperiness of human identity. Or, to quote Nietzsche: "Is life not a hundred times too short for us—to bore ourselves?" ♦

THE ART WORLD

PARTY LINES

Futurism and Italian Fascism.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

Gino Severini's "Armored Train in Action" (1915). Futurism sought to "glorify war."

COURTESY MOMA/ARS, NY/ADAGP, PARIS/SCALA/ART RESOURCE, NY

"Italian Futurism, 1909-1944: Reconstructing the Universe," at the Guggenheim, is a spectacular survey of what has long been the most neglected canonical movement in modern art—because it is also the most embarrassing. An avant-garde so clownish, in its grandiose posturing, and so sinister, in its political embrace of Italian Fascism, has been easy to shrug off, but the show makes a powerful case for second thoughts. It arrays some superb paintings and sculptures, the best of them by Umberto Boccioni, whose death in the First World War, at the age of thirty-three, deprived the movement of its one great artist. And marvels of graphic and architectural invention reward a stroll up the Guggenheim's ramp, through an eventful installation by the curator Vivien Greene. Yet even the most original Futurist art—such as Boccioni's gorgeous and explosive painting "The City Rises" (1910-11) and his dazzling sculpture of a body in motion—feels a bit unequal to the presumptions of the movement's ringmaster, the poet and master propagandist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. The show begins in 1909, the year of the publication of Marinetti's first Futurist Manifesto; it ends in 1944, the year of his death, of heart failure, after service with the Axis forces on the Eastern Front. (He was at work on a poem celebrating an élite Italian Army unit.) Futurism was Marinetti's creation. Both its glories and its miseries come home to him.

A cosmopolitan prodigy, Marinetti was born in Alexandria in 1876, and was educated at the Sorbonne and the University of Genoa, where he took a degree in law. He wrote most of his poetry in French. His father, a lawyer employed by the Ottoman administration in Egypt, staked him to a fortune. Like many a restless youth of his generation, he thrilled to new currents in the arts and philosophy, from Wagner, Nietzsche, and Bergson to the French apostle of revolutionary violence Georges Sorel. Marinetti streamlined a mélange of radical ideas into an aestheticized politics of upheaval for upheaval's sake, with a strutting emphasis on heroic virility. He declared an intention "to destroy museums, libraries, academies of every sort," and wrote, "We intend to glorify war—the only hygiene of the world—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gestures of anarchists, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and contempt for woman."

Marinetti gathered zealous adherents in Italy—where late-blooming modernization had brought an alertness to the wider world as well as an upsurge of nationalism—and organized public events calculated to scandalize. In 1910, he fluttered leaflets from the Campanile in Saint Mark's Square in Venice, calling for the city's canals to be filled with the rubble of its palaces and for its return to military and economic dominance of the Adriatic. It wasn't clear, at first, whether his ideological thrust veered to the left or to the right. He idealized the proletariat, and in 1921 the Italian Communist theorist and activist Antonio Gramsci praised the Futurists as revolutionaries of culture. But reactionary tendencies emerged, not least in matters of art. Futurism hewed to traditional formats of painting and sculpture and only fitfully ventured into photography and film. It couldn't match the aesthetic innovations of Cubism or, a few years later, the conceptual genius of Dada, or the dynamic mergers of art and design in Russian Constructivism, or the experimental discipline of the Bauhaus. It remained closest in spirit to the emotional heat, in laggard forms, of German Expressionism. But nobody could beat the Futurists for issuing manifestos.

Between 1910 and 1914, Marinetti paid calls on avant-garde circles in Paris, London, Berlin, Moscow, and St. Pe-

tersburg, intending to evangelize but, instead, antagonizing almost everyone. He received the closest thing to a positive response in London, where the Vorticist movement was launched by the writer and artist Wyndham Lewis, abetted by Ezra Pound; it became Futurist, as well as proto-Fascist, in all but name. Paris was amused. Guillaume Apollinaire vacillated on Futurism but developed forms of poetry akin to Marinetti's "words-in-freedom," as the Italian called his typographically varied and spatially scattered aggregations of onomatopoeic sense and catchy nonsense. Parisian Cubism stunned Marinetti's initial cadre of Italian artists—Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, and Gino Severini—who promptly vulgarized the new syntax of fractured representation in narrative tableaux of speed and destruction: zooming cars, swooping airplanes, and siren songs of riot and war.

The guns of August, 1914, elated Marinetti. He dedicated his movement to promoting Italy's entrance into the mayhem, on the excuse of annexing contested territory from Austria. The fatal move was made in 1915, with largely disastrous results that did not sober Marinetti. (The glamour of modern weapons, he wrote, "makes the spectacle of torn, dying human flesh almost negligible.") When chaotic postwar conditions climaxed with Mussolini's March on Rome, in 1922, Marinetti seems to have expected Futurism to become the official culture of the new regime—a misapprehension like that of the contemporaneous Russian avant-garde, which identified itself with the Bolshevik Revolution. Unlike Stalin, Mussolini condoned some pluralism in the arts, although pressure from Hitler, in 1938, led to a purge of Jewish artists, which Marinetti did nothing to oppose. He had long displayed a readiness to compromise his temperamental anarchism, having proclaimed, in 1915, "The word Italy must dominate over the word Liberty."

After Futurism's initial heyday, its visual art lost focus, becoming an eclectic mix of modernistic styles. But the movement spun off lively developments in theatre, music, dance, design, advertising, fashion, and even toys. Manifestos trumpeted each departure. The painter and composer Luigi Russolo hoisted the flag in music, promising "orchestrations of the crashing down of metal shop shutters, the slamming of doors, the bustle and shuffling of crowds," and so on through an inventory of up-to-date dins. A fascinating discovery for me, in the show, is the multimedia virtuosity of Fortunato Depero, a Futurist recruit who introduced a repertoire of robotic forms and figures. He made terrific puppets, for performances and for children's play, and theatre sets. Among his other feats as a commercial artist, he created the classic Campari Soda bottle. From 1928 to 1930, Depero lived in New York, mounting Futurist shows and producing stylish illustrations and covers for magazines, including this one.

The show concludes with a game attempt to dilute the record of the Futurists' misogyny, which Marinetti never tired of promulgating. In 1911, he denounced "horrible and staid Love that encumbers the march of man and prevents him from transcending his own humanity." But he seems to have been surprised, and mellowed, by his feelings for the writer and painter Benedetta Cappa, whom he married in 1923. The couple collaborated on a style they called Tactilism, for its appeal to the sense of touch. Her warmly colored semi-abstractions and aerial-view landscapes led, in 1933-34, to a commission for murals for a post office in Palermo. The big paintings, on view at the Guggenheim, are notably sensual variants of the technology-celebrating mode that became an international staple of public art during the Depression.

An essay by the Italian scholar Claudia Salaris in the show's substantial catalogue is titled "The Invention of the Programmatic Avant-Garde," which neatly expresses the historical importance of Futurism while suggesting its artistic limitations. Salaris notes Futurism's resemblance to "a political party, with a charismatic leader, a central directorate, and cells in the field—a first in the art world." Marinetti's gang provided a template for insurrectionary culture, especially anticipating the militant Surrealism of André Breton, whose political drive ran him into a tortured allegiance to Communism. Wanting to create art and wanting to change the world may excite the same cocktail of stimulants in the brains of the susceptibly young and disaffected. Futurism demands credit for exploiting that effect to the fullest extent ever. You can feel it at the Guggenheim, like ghost sensations in a severed limb. ♦

What a Beautiful World...

More than 100 spacious, natural acres for a retirement community where stewardship of the environment is prized by all.

KENDAL® at Oberlin
Together, transforming the experience of aging.®

1-800-548-9469 • kao.kendal.org

PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL

MAYO CLINIC

Depression
Addiction
Pain

507-266-5100
M–F 8am–5pm CDT

mayoclinic.org/psychiatry-psychology

DALLAS PRIDGEN JEWELRY
ONE AT A TIME... BY HAND

Some Bunny Necklace
Sterling Silver $78
14k Gold $799

1 inch tall with 18" chain

Unconditionally Guaranteed

1-800-477-1856 www.dallaspridgenjewelry.com

HELP FOR ADDICTION

Dawn Farm offers affordable treatment for drug and alcohol addiction on a working farm. Accredited, internationally known, a unique program with compassionate care and hope.

www.dawnfarm.org • 734.669.3800

Ohana Family Camp in Vermont

Swim
Sail
Kayak
Canoe

Archery
Tennis
Hiking
Biking

Ohanacamp.org • (802) 333-3460

Warm and Soft Perfection:
THE CASHMERE WATCHCAP

HATS · MITTENS · LEGWARMERS
FOOTSIES · BERETS · SCARVES · ETC

MADE IN TAOS, NM 575.776.8287
www.golightlycashmere.com

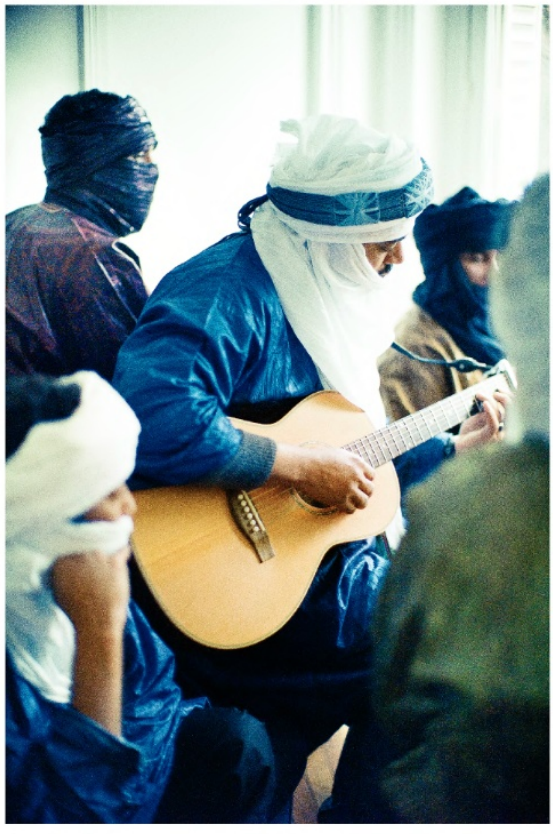
Judiaca
Classic, contemporary
Jim Cohen Metals
info@jimcohenmetals 505.474.5240

POP MUSIC

SAHARA BLUES

Tinariwen's desert sound.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES



Using the same tools you'd find at Guitar Center, the band sounds deeply unfamiliar.

The music of Tinariwen, a Tuareg band whose members live in the Sahara Desert region that spreads across parts of Mali, Algeria, and Libya, is often compared to American blues. The band's sound is rooted in electric and acoustic guitar, anchored by electric bass and some local percussion. The songs are in standard tuning, often lowered a half step and then played with a capo, making the strings slightly more taut and some fingerings easier. The yearning in the music and the sonorities of the strings resonate in ways that Americans are familiar with. It is less bright in tone and more dirgelike than the guitar patterns of masters to the south, like Diblo Dibala, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Tinariwen's new album, "Emmaar," is its best-engineered yet; previously the members have recorded outside—where they prefer to sleep—which worked better than you'd imagine. Properly captured, the sound in this record reveals two opposing pulls: you hear the pervasive sadness at its core, and the strength that the band can conjure when they play live. Their music swells to something almost as cathartic as loud rock music while being entirely unlike it.

I recently spoke with Eyadou Ag Leche, the band's bassist, in New York. Most of the group's lyrics are in Tamashek, a variety of the Tuareg language, but Ag Leche also speaks French. In addition to bass, he also plays guitar, adding percussion and singing as needed, which is typical of all the group's members. Although he had some traditional sandals in his hotel room, he wore a black leather jacket and matching black leather Converse high-tops. (He pointed to the sandals and, smiling, said, "*Trop froid maintenant.*") The term he used to describe Tinariwen's music was "*assouf*," which our translator rendered as "nostalgia." Something seemed off with this word, and after several minutes of wrangling we arrived at the Portuguese "*saudade*," and Ag Leche lit up. He described meeting a Portuguese musician and having roughly the same conversation. Ag Leche described the feeling as being "between happiness and sadness," and it is the sound of having endured something acutely unpleasant, leaving the musician to bask in the complex joy of having survived, even though further hardships lie ahead. Or it can be as simple as being heartbroken, recovering, and knowing there is likely more heartbreak to come.

The heartbreak of Tinariwen has to do with staying on the road and missing their wives and children at home, where they are not necessarily safe. The Tuareg are a semi-nomadic people looking for a land, and the members of Tinariwen are easily their best-known ambassadors outside Africa. Ibrahim Ag Alhabib founded the band, in the early nineteen-eighties, with three other Tuareg, when they were in exile from Mali and living in Libya. Some founding members of the group have since died or dropped out, and other Tuareg have joined.

Deciphering the Tuareg's role in the region's current wars is not easy. Subjects of oppression, they were themselves longtime slave traders (and, by some accounts, a form of slavery still exists in some Tuareg communities). Their struggle to receive recognition from the government of Mali has led to several insurgencies, and the recent introduction of Islamist sects into the region has further complicated the situation. Last year, a member of Tinariwen, Abdallah Ag Lamida (known as Intidao), was kidnapped by Islamists in northern Mali. He was held for around ten days before escaping—the other

PHOTOGRAPH BY IOULEX

guys in the band picked him up. As several journalists who have reported from the area said, the Tuareg have been "used" by both the Islamists and local governments. Though Tinariwen's lyrics are more poetic than specifically political, the group is working to "spread the message," as Ag Leche put it. While Tinariwen is popular in indie circles, it remains to be seen if that message is clear enough to convince those outside Africa to agitate on their behalf.

"Emmaar" is thicker and deeper in sound than its predecessor, "Tassili," a largely acoustic affair that, like the new album, was released on the American label Anti-. "Emmaar" is the first Tinariwen release to be recorded in America, at a large house in Joshua Tree, in the California desert. Previously, Ag Leche said, "We were playing at home with our own bad-quality amps with batteries that were low, and the sound quality was not good."

Although the album was produced by Patrick Votan, Tinariwen's manager, the band took an active part in the direction of the recording. The New York guitarist Matt Sweeney, who played on the album, described the proceedings. "They would do a track and then they'd all come in and listen to it," he said. "They'd all be kind of yelling notes about what should come up. It's very, very involved—all of them."

Tinariwen's music doesn't really bloom to full intensity until the band plays live and the moans become hollers and the room shakes with hand claps and singing. In this, too, Tinariwen is like the blues, but the music's relationship to anything beyond the desert is easy to overstate. In fact, using roughly the same tools as anybody might find in a Guitar Center, Tinariwen sounds unlike anything American. Ag Alhabib takes many of the lead vocals, singing in a craggy baritone, and occasionally ceding the front spot to Ag Leche or two other band members. The vocals typically become group sing-alongs, so the concept of "lead singer" is almost irrelevant.

A song like "Imidiwan Ahi Sigdim" is roughly typical of the *assouf* style. A slow, loping figure is set up on one or two guitars. A bass guitar and a hand drum fill in beneath the guitars, but there are rarely any breaks that focus on anything but guitar. Because this isn't a genre that places a premium on individual improvisations or solos, the few ornamental moments of guitar are brief. The urge in Tinariwen songs is always to regroup, and the music builds largely by the volume of the hand claps and how hard the guitar strings are plucked. Ag Alhabib sets up a line, and then the group repeats it. The lyrics, in Tamashek, speak in an open-ended fashion about exile, without naming any names, and sound more like scripture than like a protest song: "Friends, companions, hear my truth and my conviction. These banishments that befall us bring no joy, neither to my heart nor to that of the youth. You suffer the bitterness of that oppression, which annihilated the old folk on whom you counted and tortures the soul of the heart that knows no hatred."

The line about "old folk" could be seen as literal—Ag Alhabib's father was shot in front of him. And, though in Mali the band has been invited to perform at the Presidential palace, English-speaking audiences will be hard-pressed to know exactly how to identify with Tinariwen. The Tuareg have fought on several sides of the battle, usually for whoever seemed most likely to advance their cause. It is impossible to know if Tinariwen's members know any hatred; their songs tend to the mournful more than the vengeful.

When discussing the band's constant touring, Ag Leche noted that he felt that older musicians like Robert Plant and Carlos Santana have taken to Tinariwen's music more readily than younger listeners. He said that in the sixties and seventies "people were feeling more the same feeling," and that Tinariwen "must be part of that time, of that kind of period." Though Ag Alhabib had access to some Bob Dylan cassettes, the group's sound developed with very little influence beyond the music of the region. In the nineties, the band began to tour widely and found common cause with other music. In 2004, Ag Leche heard Jimi Hendrix for the first time. When he told me this, he broke into a huge smile and began to rock back and forth, as if praying. When I suggested that a collaboration between Hendrix and Tinariwen would make the best band of all, he nodded vigorously. ♦

Extraordinary summers for high school students
Summerfuel
SUMMERFUEL.COM
US / UK / SPAIN / FRANCE / ITALY

McLean Gunderson
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL AFFILIATE
BPD is a disorder, not a destiny.
Treatment for women with BPD at U.S. News' #1 Psychiatric Hospital
855.707.0520 mcleanhospital.org/gunnyr

Blazer Sale
Blazers for ladies and gentlemen
15 colors. All sizes.
Were $195, Now $165
Hunter and Coggins
Asheville, NC 1-800-343-9396
hunterandcoggins.com

A unique alternative to reading glasses.
NEARSIGHTS MONOCLES
www.nearsights.com
(877) 667 - 6494

Joyful Summers for Over 100 Years

The Aloha Girls' Camps of Vermont
www.Alohafoundation.org

JacksonCenter
FOR CREATIVE WRITING AT HOLLINS
www.hollins.edu/jacksoncenter

THE CURRENT CINEMA

FOLLOWING ORDERS

"Omar" and "The Lego Movie."

BY ANTHONY LANE

The Israeli submission for Best Foreign Language Film, ahead of this year's Academy Awards, was "Bethlehem," a thriller about a young Palestinian man, with links to terrorist activities, who is secretly controlled by an Israeli handler. The Palestinian offering was "Omar," a thriller about a young Palestinian man, with links to terrorist activities, who is secretly controlled by an Israeli handler. Who said the two sides in the conflict have no common ground? If you can share a plot with your neighbor, who knows what might yet bloom?

Eyad Hourani, Adam Bakri, and Leem Lubany in a film by Hany Abu-Assad.

In the event, only "Omar" was picked as a nominee. It stars Adam Bakri as the Omar of the title: a baker by trade, and a good-looking guy, as shown by a glowering closeup at the start. But he pales beside his beloved, a student named Nadia (Leem Lubany), whose dark eyes, in a film full of interrogation, ask the most searching questions of all. She and Omar live on the West Bank, kept apart from each other by the separation barrier that slices through their neighborhood. To them, as to most Palestinians, it is a twenty-six-foot-tall insult, and Omar's first deed is to scale the concrete bluff. To the Israelis who built it, however, it is a vital aid to security, designed to block incursions by those who wish them ill.

Omar, it turns out, is one of the wishers. That smolder we saw in the closeup was not so much romantic suspense, with Nadia in mind, as the slow burn of political frustration. So it is that, one evening, he steals a car and drives two comrades—Nadia's brother Tarek (Eyad Hourani) and Amjad (Samer Bisharat), the smiling runt of the trio—to a vantage point, from which Amjad shoots and kills an Israeli soldier. By any measure, it's a mad act, achieving nothing and provoking a vengeance that proves to be swift and brutal, but also spider-like in the subtlety of its means. Consider the tremendous back-to-back scenes in an Israeli jail. First, Omar, who has been pulled in as a suspect, and tortured to no effect, sits over trays of food with an older inmate, a donnish type with spectacles, a salty beard, and a crocheted taqiyah on his head, who warns him, in Arabic, of talking too much and predicts that, if the authorities break you, they will force you to collaborate in their schemes. "I will never confess," Omar says. "Good, good," the man replies. Second, Omar is led by guards to a shadowy room. In comes an Israeli in shirtsleeves, bare-headed, minus the spectacles, but with the beard intact. Guess who. Mild of manner, he produces a tape recorder, replays Omar's words from the meal ("I will never confess"), and says, "That's a confession." Checkmate.

In short, the game's afoot. And it *is* a game—a murderous one, set in motion by deep national urges of pride, anxiety, and self-determination, but a game nonetheless. Back and forth we go, across the wall, with each party dicing for advantage. Omar is turned by the Israelis (or so they believe), and set free in his own community, under orders to "bring us what we need to catch the killer." Omar, for his part, decides to double-cross his tormentors and attack them, not realizing that they are infinitely wise to such maneuvers. And so on, with the ground forever shifting under our feet, and with everything—friendships, weaponry, sexual fidelity—up for grabs. The twists continue coiling to the final frame.

This is a Palestinian film, directed by Hany Abu-Assad, and you are in no doubt as to where his sympathies lie, or who will wind up on the losing team. What else can you hope for, the movie asks, among a people under perpetual siege? Given that attitude, it would not be surprising if "Omar" made you feel morally bullied, and yet, as with Abu-Assad's previous work "Paradise Now" (2005), which dramatized the even more inflammatory topic of suicide bombers, that is not the legacy it leaves. For one thing, you hardly have time to get backed into a corner: "Omar" lasts ninety-eight minutes. Much of the story scampers along, as does its limber hero, who, more than once, has to negotiate the roofs and the alleyways of his home town with the law at his heels, as if in training for a local reboot of the Jason Bourne franchise. But the quieter sections, too, seem curt and peeled-back (one spell of maltreatment, in prison, is implied by nothing more than the scrape of a heavy lamp against the floor), and there is a rueful economy to

ILLUSTRATION BY JASHAR AWAN

the way in which the director tracks the passing of time: as Omar runs into trouble, his face keeps acquiring fresh cuts and bruises, and you wait for them to fade.

Most of the actors are novices, and though they struggle now and then with hokey dialogue, they acquit themselves with a wiry conviction, constantly glancing around for any threats. The villain is another matter. Abu-Assad's film may be emotionally rooted in the Palestinian cause, but he has the mettle, and the sense of balance, to yield the most fertile dramatic territory to the opposite camp. Rami, the Israeli intelligence agent who deploys Omar, is brought to life by the forbidding Waleed Zuaiter. Born in Sacramento, raised in Kuwait, and schooled at George Washington University, Zuaiter is a regular on the New York stage. (In George Packer's "Betrayed," based on an article written for this magazine, he played an Iraqi translator.) Now, as Rami, Zuaiter is compact, steady, and impossible to outsmart—affable, too, although, as with any spymaster, you can't be sure if yet another front is being erected. At one point, he chats with his wife and his mother on a cell phone, in Hebrew, sounding henpecked: a timely comic belittling, you assume. But then you notice that Omar, too, is watching him, and you wonder if the comedy might not be camouflage, intended to humanize the older man, humor the younger one, and thus break down his guard. Maybe it's not Rami's wife on the line at all, but another agent. And the lesson is, trust nothing—not your eyes, your ears, or your instincts. Whether you should trust your God, in these holy lands, is up to you.

Brick by brick, the success of "The Lego Movie" mounts up. Two hundred million dollars and counting, after a couple of weeks, is a decent start, although, at first blush, it may be hard to explain. All the main characters are Lego people, which means that their physical mobility is pretty much confined to marching straight ahead and bending stiffly at the waist, like Robert Mitchum in "The Winds of War." They show even less range in their expressions, switching from a bewildered grimace to a shiny grin with nothing in between, like Ali MacGraw in "The Winds of War." So where's the appeal?

Well, our hero is Emmet (voiced by Chris Pratt), a construction worker who could not be more contented. He toils in a gleaming world, watching the TV programs he is told to watch, and drinking his appointed coffee; imagine if the Chaplin of "Modern Times" had loved his assembly line. As it was, he craved escape, whereas Emmet has to learn that his soul is being crushed before he can summon the need to do something about it. As you would expect, this entails a journey, wisdom culled from an elderly sage (Morgan Freeman), the snares of the evil Lord Business (Will Ferrell), and a piece of non-Legoid plastic with mysterious powers. To sum up, "Blah blah blah, proper name, place name, backstory." Such is the narrative, as outlined by Wyldstyle (Elizabeth Banks), a new friend of Emmet's, and it marks the moment at which "The Lego Movie," directed by Phil Lord and Christopher Miller, shifts from a bubblegum blast to a rich, self-conscious joke at the expense of our universal suckerdom. It is not a film about toys. It is a film about the willingness of people, as both moviegoers and consumers, to be toyed with. After all, "to call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions."

That is Karl Marx, whom I would cheerfully have taken as a date to this movie, not least for the thrill of seeing him in chunky 3-D glasses. How cool would they look with his beard? He would, I think, have applauded the precept that is issued here—namely, that we should toss away the instructions in our Lego kits and cobble together whatever takes our fancy. (One mistake: the film proposes that dads are obsessed with cleaving to Lego rules, while their sons yearn to tip everything into a pile and get messy. In my experience, it's precisely the other way around.) Pursued to its logical extreme, such revolutionary advice would mean never buying any new Lego but endlessly recycling our old stuff: an excellent workout for the imagination, and a nightmare for the marketing wonks at the company. Needless to say, in the wake of a very funny film, the last laugh will be theirs. Go to your Lego store, or to the Web site, and you'll find the "Creative Ambush" package, including a biplane that's also a Wild West saloon and a "flying kebab stand" that fires "tasty kebab flick missiles"—just the kind of loosey-goosey, left-field inventions that parents everywhere, inspired by "The Lego Movie," would like their kids to devise. The kit retails for $39.99. It comes with instructions. ♦

THE NEW YORKER IS A REGISTERED TRADEMARK OF ADVANCE MAGAZINE PUBLISHERS INC. COPYRIGHT ©2014 CONDÉ NAST. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

VOLUME XC, NO. 2, March 3, 2014. THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028792X) is published weekly (except for five combined issues: February 17 & 24, June 9 & 16, July 7 & 14, August 11 & 18, and December 22 & 29) by Condé Nast, which is a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: The Condé Nast Building, 4 Times Square, New York, NY 10036. Elizabeth Hughes, vice-president and publisher; Beth Lusko, associate publisher advertising; James Guilfoyle, director of finance and business operations; Lynn Oberlander, general counsel. Condé Nast: S. I. Newhouse, Jr., chairman; Charles H. Townsend, chief executive officer; Robert A. Sauerberg, Jr., president; John W. Bellando, chief operating officer & chief financial officer; Jill Bright, chief administrative officer. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 40644503. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. 123242885-RT0001. Canada Post: return undeliverable Canadian addresses to P.O. Box 874, Station Main, Markham, ON L3P 8L4.

POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO THE NEW YORKER, P.O. Box 37684, Boone, IA 50037 0684. FOR SUBSCRIPTIONS, ADDRESS CHANGES, ADJUSTMENTS, OR BACK ISSUE INQUIRIES: Please write to The New Yorker, P.O. Box 37684, Boone, IA 50037 0684, call (800) 825-2510, or e-mail subscriptions@newyorker.com. Please give both new and old addresses as printed on most recent label. Subscribers: If the Post Office alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within one year. If during your subscription term or up to one year after the magazine becomes undeliverable, you are ever dissatisfied with your subscription, let us know. You will receive a full refund on all unmailed issues. First copy of new subscription will be mailed within four weeks after receipt of order. For advertising inquiries, please call Beth Lusko at (212) 286-4454. For submission guidelines, please refer to our Web site, www.newyorker.com. Address all editorial, business, and production correspondence to The New Yorker, 4 Times Square, New York, NY 10036. For cover reprints, please call (800) 897-8666, or e-mail covers@cartoonbank.com. For permissions and reprint requests, please call (212) 630-5656 or fax requests to (212) 630-5883. No part of this periodical may be reproduced without the consent of The New Yorker. The New Yorker's name and logo, and the various titles and headings herein, are trademarks of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. Visit us online at www.newyorker.com. To subscribe to other Condé Nast magazines, visit www.condenet.com. Occasionally, we make our subscriber list available to carefully screened companies that offer products and services that we believe would interest our readers. If you do not want to receive these offers and/or information, please advise us at P.O. Box 37684, Boone, IA 50037 0684 or call (800) 825-2510.

THE NEW YORKER IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RETURN OR LOSS OF, OR FOR DAMAGE OR ANY OTHER INJURY TO, UNSOLICITED MANUSCRIPTS, UNSOLICITED ART WORK (INCLUDING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO, DRAWINGS, PHOTOGRAPHS, AND TRANSPARENCIES), OR ANY OTHER UNSOLICITED MATERIALS. THOSE SUBMITTING MANUSCRIPTS, PHOTOGRAPHS, ART WORK, OR OTHER MATERIALS FOR CONSIDERATION SHOULD NOT SEND ORIGINALS, UNLESS SPECIFICALLY REQUESTED TO DO SO BY THE NEW YORKER IN WRITING.

PLEASE RECYCLE THIS MAGAZINE

CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Corey Pandolph, must be received by Sunday, March 2nd. The finalists in the February 10th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the March 17th 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

"This is what we get for walking down a dark alley before 5 P.M."
Andrew Seward, Frederick, Md.

THE FINALISTS

"She got it in the divorce."
Richard Wolf, Westminster, Md.

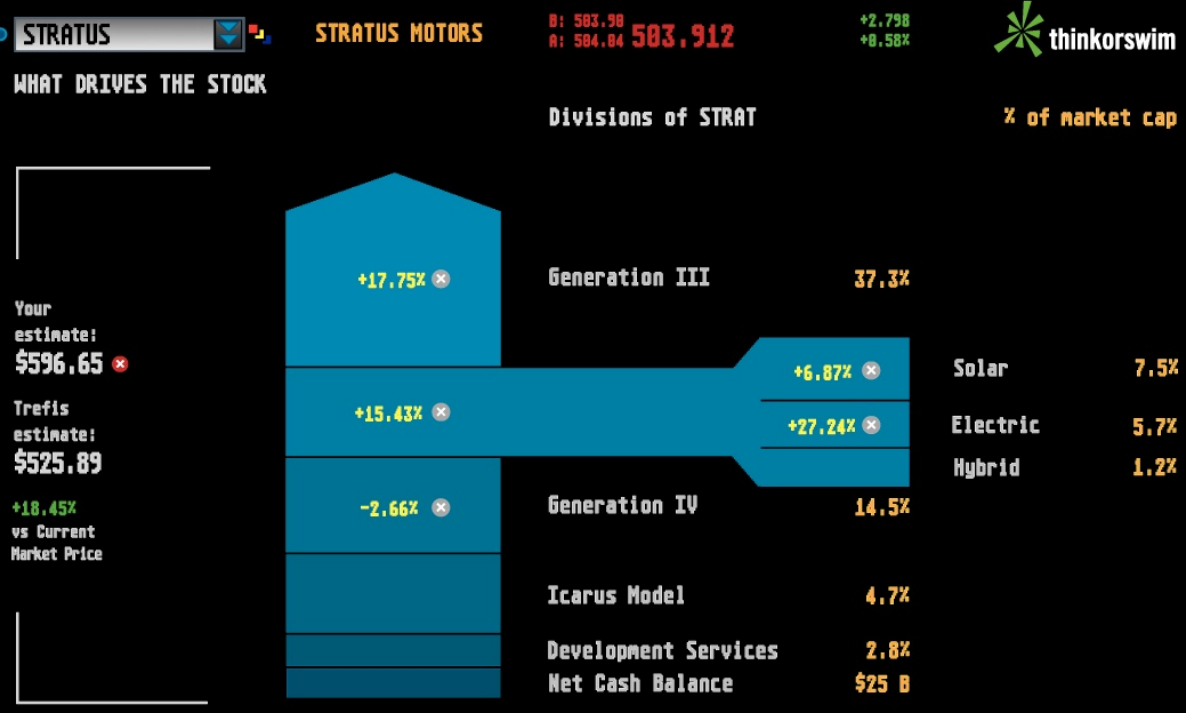
"Robin totalled the Batmobile—again!"
Anníbal Sodero, Fayetteville, Ariz.

"Well, this is just great. The Joker is probably halfway to Brooklyn on the L by now."
Bruce Niedt, Cherry Hill, N.J.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

“ ”

TAKE A COMPANY FOR A SPIN BEFORE YOU INVEST.



Introducing Company Profile.

A research tool that lets you take a company and experiment with different hypothetical scenarios, such as a new breakthrough product or a manufacturing mess, and how they might affect its stock price. Imagine a company's future with the future of trading.

Open an account and trade commission-free for 60 days.
tdameritrade.com/thinkorswim

TD Ameritrade

Information/estimates provided by Insight Guru, a separate and unaffiliated firm. Stock prices are impacted by numerous factors and estimates of prices in the future are not guaranteed.

Market volatility, volume and system availability may delay account access and trade executions. Offer valid through 4/30/14. Minimum funding (within 60 days) of $2,000 required (up to 500 commission-free Internet-equity, ETF or options trades). Contract, exercise and assignment fees still apply. See Web site for details and other restrictions/conditions. TD Ameritrade reserves the right to restrict or revoke this offer at any time. This is not an offer or solicitation in any jurisdiction where we are not authorized to do business. TD Ameritrade, Inc., member FINRA/SIPC/NFA. TD Ameritrade is a trademark jointly owned by TD Ameritrade IP Company, Inc. and The Toronto-Dominion Bank. © 2014 TD Ameritrade IP Company, Inc. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

Red Carpet

Buttered Popcorn

Previews

Closing Credits

iPhone 5c | at&t

Cases sold separately. ©2014 Apple Inc. All rights reserved. 1-800-MY-APPLE or www.apple.com.