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# THE NEW YORKER



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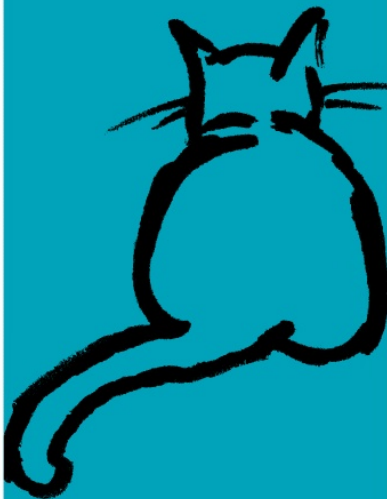
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At last, an owner's manual worthy of its subject: "The Big New Yorker Book of Cats," featuring cartoons, cover art, poetry, essays, and yarns from contributors such as **MARGARET ATWOOD, T.C. BOYLE, ROALD DAHL, HARUKI MURAKAMI, SUSAN ORLEAN, JOHN UPDIKE,** and more—with a foreword by **ANTHONY LANE.**

## THE BIG NEW YORKER BOOK OF CATS



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# THE NEW YORKER

MARCH 10, 2014

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**DRAWINGS** Benjamin Schwartz, Edward Steed, Emily Flake, John O'Brien, P. C. Vey, Barbara Smaller, Danny Shanahan, Paul Noth, Robert Mankoff, William Haefeli **SPOTS** Philippe Petit-Roulet

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# GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN APP



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<p><b>BLOGS</b>  <i>John Cassidy and Amy Davidson on politics and economics.</i></p>	<p><b>COMMENT</b>                      Daily news analysis by <i>Jeffrey Toobin</i> and others.</p>	<p><b>FICTION</b>  <i>Yiyun Li</i> reads her new story.</p>	<p><b>FILM</b>  <i>Richard Brody</i> on his DVD of the Week, "Bellissima," from 1951.</p>
<p><b>HUMOR</b>                      Comedy and satire on Daily Shouts and the Borowitz Report.</p>	<p><b>PODCASTS</b>  <i>Tim Wu</i> talks to <i>Nicholas Thompson</i> and <i>Alan Burdick</i> about technology and evolution. Plus, the Political Scene, hosted by <i>Dorothy Wickenden</i>.</p>		<p><b>POETRY</b>  <i>Jane Hirshfield</i> and <i>Gary J. Whitehead</i> read their new poems.</p>
<p><b>ARCHIVE</b>                      Our complete collection of issues, back to 1925.</p>	<p><b>CARTOONS</b>                      A Daily Cartoon drawn by <i>Barbara Smaller</i>.</p>	<p><b>SLIDE SHOW</b>                      Scenes from Nicaragua, where a new canal may be built.</p>	<p><b>INFOGRAPHIC</b>                      Possible routes for the Nicaragua canal.</p>

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# THE MAIL

## TOXIC REGULATION

Rachel Aviv's reporting on Syngenta's campaign to discredit a scientist who warned of the dangers of the herbicide atrazine shows only a tiny facet of a regulatory problem that should concern every American ("A Valuable Reputation," February 10th). Americans assume that chemicals are tested before being released into the marketplace, but, even when testing is required, companies exploit scientific uncertainty to delay and prevent regulation. Of the more than sixteen thousand pesticides registered under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act, as many as sixty-five per cent were first approved for market by conditional registration, which means they may lack essential test data on human-health and environmental impacts. Americans may be shocked to learn that the regulation of toxic substances is even weaker. The E.P.A. has required the testing for human-health effects of between just two and three hundred chemicals. Since the Toxic Substances Control Act was passed forty years ago, the E.P.A. has issued regulations to control only five existing chemicals determined to present an unreasonable risk. Syngenta's efforts to smear individual scientists seems like overkill, since the law already protects the company from science.

*Andrea Gelfuso Goetz*

*Adjunct Professor, University of Denver  
Lakewood, Colo.*

## SUBSTANDARD PRACTITIONER

Eyal Press, in his article on the rogue abortion provider Steven Brigham, reveals one of the chief reasons that Brigham is able to maintain his dangerous and unscrupulous practice: the secretive, stigmatized atmosphere that opponents of abortion rights have created ("A Botched Operation," February 3rd). Through legislative assaults on access to reproductive-health services, and harassment, intimidation, and acts of violence, politicians and protesters bent on ending legal abortion in the

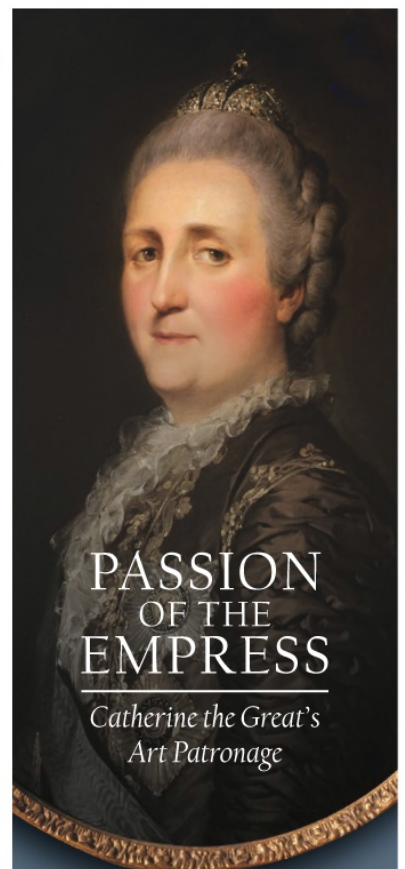
U.S. have forced caring, respected, and experienced reproductive-health-care providers to close. They have tried to shame women who make the very personal decision to end a pregnancy. As an activist who has worked in abortion care for thirteen years and as the head of an organization whose members have repeatedly sounded the alarm about Brigham, I find it bitterly ironic that so many opponents of abortion claim to be acting in the interest of protecting women's health. Insuring the availability of high-quality care for women seeking to end a pregnancy is the way to protect them, not leaving them with nowhere to turn but to people like Brigham.

*Dallas Schubert, Board Chair  
Abortion Care Network  
Cleveland, Ohio*

Throughout his career, Brigham has come under fire from state licensing boards, health departments, and the abortion-provider community. His case is not representative of the high standard of care offered by abortion providers in the U.S. If anything, his story demonstrates how important it is for women to have access to safe, legal, and affordable abortion care. State regulations have made it more difficult for women to obtain safe abortions. Regulations such as requiring providers to have hospital admitting privileges do nothing to improve patient safety, nor do they stop bad actors like Brigham. Instead, they make it more difficult for legitimate providers to remain open, and create opportunities for substandard providers to prey on vulnerable women.

*Vicki Saporta, President  
Beverly Winikoff, Board Chair  
National Abortion Federation  
Washington, D.C.*

*Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to [themail@newyorker.com](mailto: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.*



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# redeployment

## phil klay

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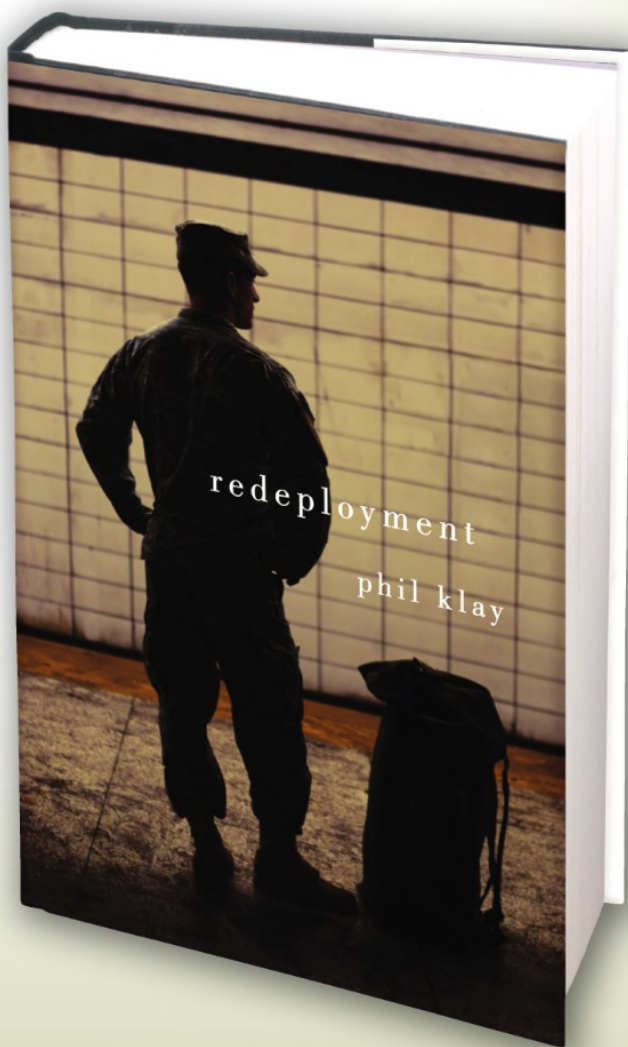
—BEN FOUNTAIN, author of *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk*

“A stunning, upsetting, urgently necessary book about the impact of the Iraq War on both soldiers and civilians.”

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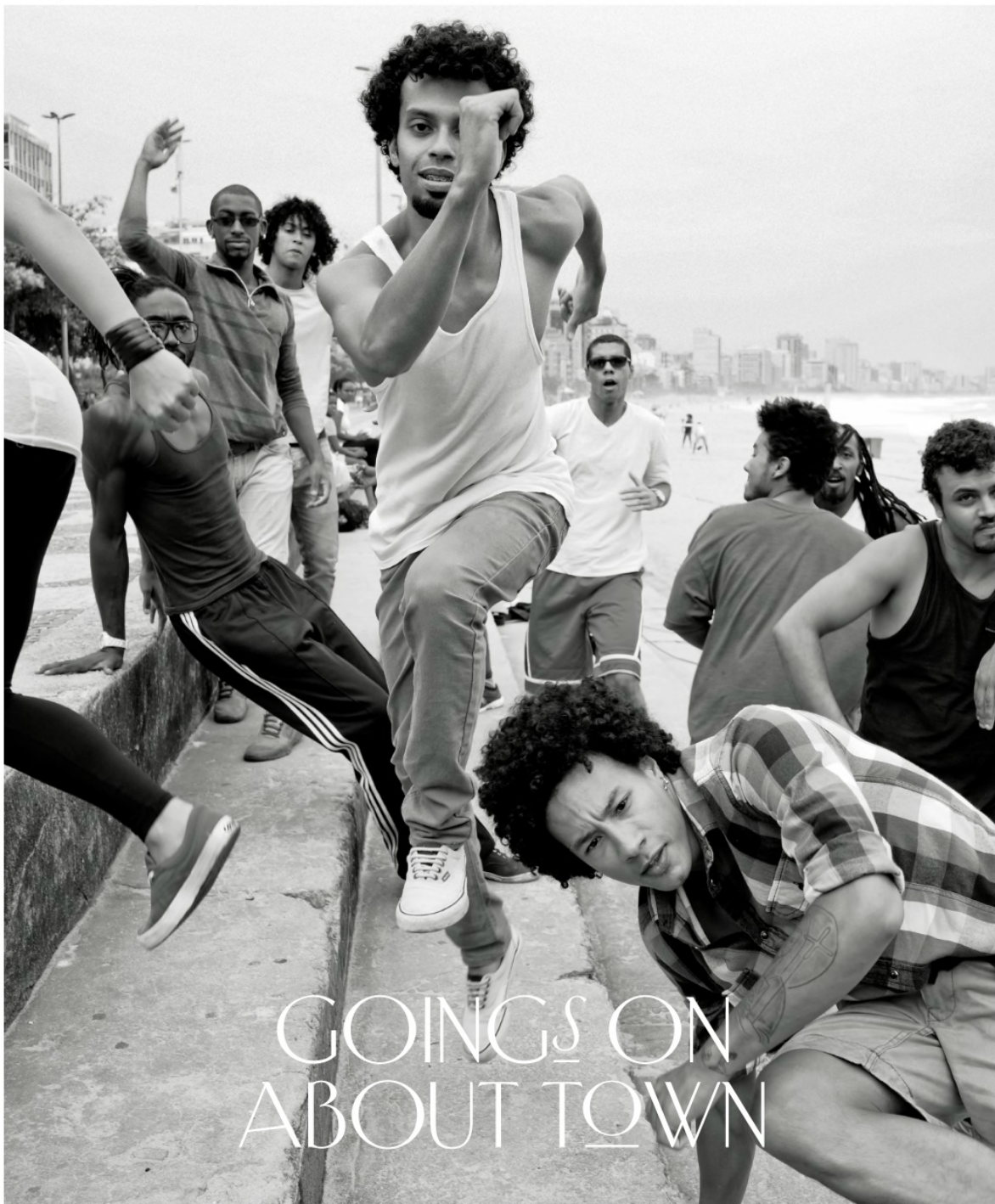
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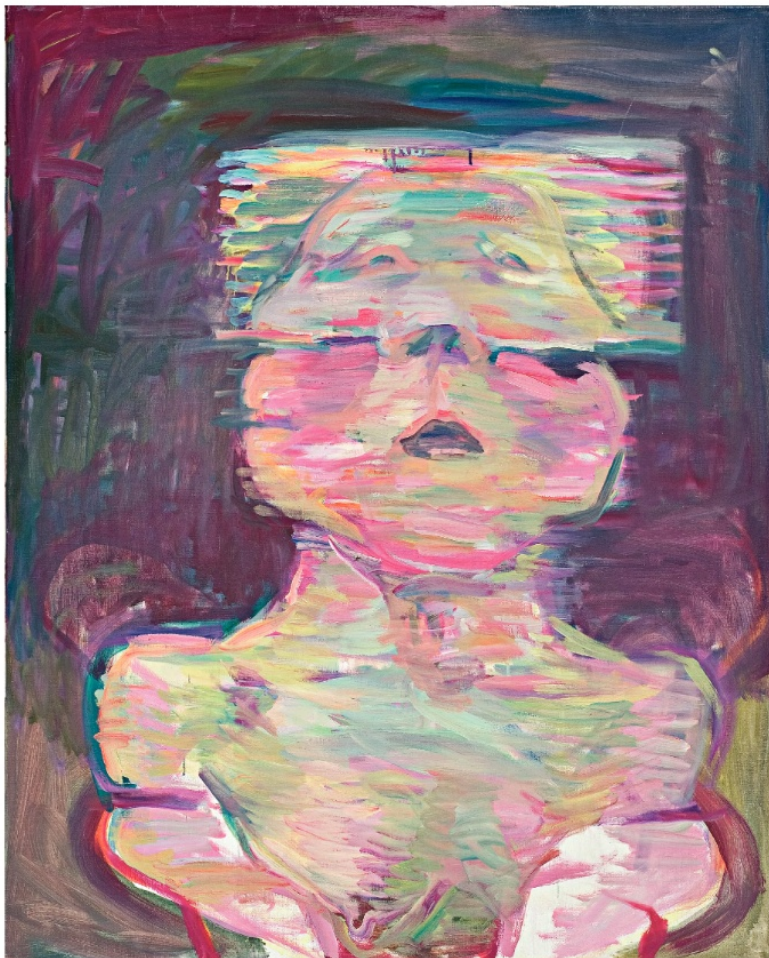
# GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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

**IN THE RUN-UP** to the World Cup in Brazil, this summer, the Joyce Theatre presents its inaugural festival of Brazilian dance, both traditional and contemporary. Capoeira, the Afro-Brazilian martial-arts form in which bare-chested dancers flip end over end, is represented this time by the veteran troupe DanceBrazil. The country's vibrant tango and samba scenes infuse the work of Focus Cia de Dança. Pictured here is Companhia Urbana de Dança, which finds poetry in the dancers' upbringing in the favelas of Rio.

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

PHOTOGRAPH BY MOISES SAMAN



## HER

*The radically prescient self-portraits of Maria Lassnig, at MOMA PS1.*

MARIA LASSNIG is “the perfect artist for the age of the selfie,” says Peter Eleey, who has curated a survey of the Austrian painter’s self-portraits. The idea is counterintuitive: the ninety-four-year-old artist never relies on photography, unlike many contemporary figurative painters. She uses her imagination and what she calls “body awareness,” a unique approach to Expressionism that she hit on in 1948. Simply described, she paints from the inside out, taking cues from her body’s sensations. If Lassnig doesn’t feel her ears as she’s working, they stay out of the picture. The same goes for her hair. She

seems to be aware of seeing and breathing; her faces tend to have eyes, mouths, and noses. The results can suggest an Alice Neel portrait of an extraterrestrial.

For all their startling interiority, Lassnig’s figures also convey the sense of being seen. Take “You or Me” (2005), in which she presents herself with a gun in each hand, one pointed at her temple and the other aimed straight at the viewer. Eleey says that Lassnig’s paintings pinpoint “the problem between how we perform ourselves versus the way that we feel” that’s endemic to social media. And Lassnig’s oeuvre is prescient in other ways,

“Transparent Self-Portrait” (1987), by Maria Lassnig. The Austrian painter is having her first New York museum show, at the age of ninety-four.

too, incorporating cyborg-like imagery. In one work from 1987, a transparent screen floats in front of a face: Google Glass avant la lettre.

While she’s not actually uploading selfies, Lassnig has gained more followers in recent years—in 2008, London’s Serpentine Gallery organized a critically acclaimed retrospective, and last summer she was awarded the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement at the Venice Biennale. Her influence is evident in New York in the paintings of Charline von Heyl, Dana Schutz, and Amy Sillman.

The heightened appreciation comes after decades of a career largely limited to Central Europe. Lassnig was born in the rural Austrian state of Carinthia in 1919, and displayed a knack for drawing as a young girl. As she wrote in a whimsical autobiographical poem from 1992: “God didn’t make me a beauty, let’s face it, but He gave me the gift with a pencil to trace it; like a latter-day Dürer or some other big cheese, all I portrayed proved easy to please.” She attended the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna during the Second World War, when the Nazis had banned Expressionists like Max Beckmann and Oskar Kokoschka for being “degenerate” and only sanctioned realist painting. (The earliest work in the show is a deft, academic self-portrait that her teachers compared favorably to Rembrandt.) Lassnig has written that she developed her body-awareness technique to “go beyond skill, beyond the security of the real, into uncharted territory.”

Lassnig still paints in her Vienna studio, but she no longer travels, and she won’t see her show in New York. She lived in the city for more than a decade, beginning in 1968, during the heyday of minimalism, when figurative artists were personae non gratae. She experimented with filmmaking and continued to paint—in obscurity, but never alone. Maria was always there, watching.

—Andrea K. Scott

## MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

### Guggenheim Museum

**"Italian Futurism, 1909-1944: Reconstructing the Universe"**  
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 this show makes a powerful case for second thoughts. The curator, Vivian Greene, arrays some superb paintings and sculptures, as well as graphic and architectural invention. 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. Through Sept. 1.

## GALLERIES—UPTOWN

### Herbert Matter

This excellent survey of works by the mid-century photographer and graphic designer, who was Swiss-born and based in New York, focusses on abstraction, collage, and experimental approaches to printing. Whether he was photographing a sailboat's rigging, a Calder sculpture, or a woman's stocking, Matter could always find an unexpected angle. Many of the abstract images here were made without a camera, by drawing with light—sharp, quick strokes tumble like straws against a black background—or by capturing splashes of darkroom chemicals on photosensitive paper. Through March 22. (Gitterman, 41 E. 57th St. 212-734-0868.)

## GALLERIES—CHELSEA

### David Altmejd

In a dazzling twist on thinking inside the box, the Canadian-born artist installs a teeming dreamscape of a sculpture in a vitrine bigger than some New York apartments. The transformative powers of art and of sex—to create and to destroy—are among the work's subjects. As always with Altmejd, monsters abound. So does fruit. (Not familiar with the American melon head? Google it.) Industrious demons sit at a transparent table, manipulating pieces of clay. Man-size suited figures with hawklike heads evoke Syrian gods of creation; loosened trousers suggest that the gods have been cruising. Disembodied werewolf forms float in midair, studded with crystals like lesions. Dark goings on are leavened by slapstick: note the pineapples, baring their teeth. Through March 8. (Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000.)

### David Golde

In the past, Golde's simple, luminous photographs have sometimes seemed

to be about wonder itself. His new series was inspired by Michael Faraday's and Humphry Davy's nineteenth-century experiments with electricity. Golde re-created some of them using household items (razor blades, water glasses, pencils) and devised new projects too, photographing the sparking, sizzling, and burning. The show also includes some scorched drawings made by using graphite as a conduit for electrical currents on paper, but it's the photographs that best convey Golde's antic mad-scientist vision. Through March 8. (Milo, 245 Tenth Ave., at 24th St. 212-414-0370.)

### Julije Knifer

The Croatian artist, who co-founded the avant-garde Gorgona Group and died in 2004, spent forty years painting nothing but black-and-white rectilinear abstractions. Thick black lines meander across the canvases, sometimes nearly obliterating their white backgrounds with forceful fat strips. Although they're individually elegant, in a dated, Op kind of way, the paintings work best collectively, as a lifelong exploration of difference in repetition. The mini-retrospective includes a vitrine filled with documentation of sixties-era performances, in Zagreb, which whets the appetite for a separate show on the subject. Through March 15. (Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400.)

### Michael Majerus

This three-space show memorializes the inventive Luxembourg painter, who died in a plane crash in 2002, at the age of thirty-five. Majerus expanded on precedents set by Sigmar Polke and Martin Kippenberger with ultra-Pop imagery from then-emerging digital mediums, including video games. (Super Mario capers in the corner of one handsome monochrome.) Savoring head-on collisions of cool and hot styles, Majerus also boldly cribbed motifs from Warhol's collaborations with Basquiat. He infused his often architecturally scaled formats with Apollonian design and Dionysian color. He was well launched on the track of a millennial Baroque, fit to be shared, elbow to elbow, by connoisseurs and skateboarders alike. Through April 19. (Marks, 502, 522, and 526 W. 22nd St. 212-243-0200.)

### Fred McDarrah

As the first (and, for many years, the only) staff photographer at the *Village Voice*, McDarrah didn't just cover the downtown scene, he helped to define it. Among the hundred and thirty vintage prints are images of Jack Kerouac reading in a Lower East Side loft, in 1959; Bob Dylan saluting in Sheridan Square, in 1965; and exhilarated protesters outside the Stonewall Inn on the night of June 29, 1969.

In a period energized by artists and activists—subjects here include Jerry Rubin, Susan Sontag, Bobby Kennedy, LeRoi Jones, and Candy Darling—McDarrah seems not to have missed a single demonstration, happening, or house party. Through March 8. (Kasher, 521 W. 23rd St. 212-966-3978.)

### "Re-View: Onnasch Collection"

Curated by Paul Schimmel, late of the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art and now a partner in Hauser & Wirth, this dumbfounding showcase of postwar art (owned by a German dealer) opens with Barnett Newman, Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland, and two of the greatest paintings Clyfford Still ever made—and the quality never lets up. The greatest-hits narrative embraces a few welcome outliers: Christo, John Wesley, and especially Edward Kienholz, whose disquieting Vietnam-era assemblages include grimy rubber dolls arrayed like a mushroom cloud. Nothing's for sale in this flag-planting exercise—why would a big-box gallery traffic in anything as vulgar as money? Through April 12. (Hauser & Wirth, 511 W. 18th St. 212-790-3900.)

## GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

### Robert Janitz

A German cosmopolite who has lived in France and America makes confident abstract paintings with just a few speedy, broad-brushed strokes of liquid, palely tinted wax on monochrome grounds. The wealth of happy accidents in the streaky and puddled medium, with strong ground colors peeking through, feels as generous as its cause is patent. Janitz also creates towering faux potted plants with rough-cut, shiny, crumpled steel strips for leaves. All his works appeal with dandyish airs of instinctive elegance and passionate nonchalance. Through March 23. (Team, 83 Grand St. 212-279-9219.)

## OF NOTE NEW MUSEUM "PAWEL ALTHAMER: THE NEIGHBORS"

The exhibition exalts the shamanistic, multitasking Polish sculptor, whose devotion to themes of humble humanity effectively upends Arte Povera: call the spirit *Povertà Artistica*. There are spectral gray portrait figures made of stiffened cloth strips, with life masks; models of sweetly woebegone landscapes and interiors; video animations redolent of childhood yearnings; and videos from the artist's nature-loving travels and philosophical effusions. The museum's fourth floor is an arena of free-for-all graffiti, with materials to add more provided. In one video, Althamer is injected, by a doctor, with "truth serum" and questioned about religion. He talks to God, he confesses. Does he see or only imagine God? He murmurs, "There's no difference." (Althamer has arranged free admission for visitors who donate a man's coat to the museum, on behalf of the Bowery Mission.) Through April 20.

## MUSEUMS SHORT LIST

### METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

"The Passions of Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux." Opens March 10.

### MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

"Gauguin: Metamorphoses." Opens March 8.

### MOMA PS1

"Maria Lassnig." Opens March 9.

### GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

"Carrie Mae Weems." Through May 14.

### WHITNEY MUSEUM

2014 Whitney Biennial. Opens March 7.

### BROOKLYN MUSEUM

"Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties." Opens March 7.

### AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

"The Power of Poison." Through Aug. 10.

### FRICK COLLECTION

"Renaissance and Baroque Bronzes from the Hill Collection." Through June 15.

### JAPAN SOCIETY

"Points of Departure: Treasures of Japan from the Brooklyn Museum." Opens March 7.

### STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM

"The Shadows Took Shape." Through March 9.

## GALLERIES SHORT LIST

### UPTOWN

#### Martin Kippenberger

Skarstedt  
20 E. 79th St. 212-737-2060.  
Through April 26.

#### Harvey Quaytman

McKee  
745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-688-5951. Through March 22.

### DOWNTOWN

#### Joanne Greenbaum

Uffner  
170 Suffolk St. 212-274-0064.  
Opens March 8.

#### Laurie Simmons

Salon 94 Bowery  
243 Bowery, at Stanton St. 212-979-0001. Opens March 7.



# FOOD & DRINK

## BAR TAB BEAST OF BOURBON

710 Myrtle Ave., Brooklyn  
(347-789-9901)

On a barren stretch in Bed-Stuy there is a cement building, industrial and ambiguous enough to suggest a meat-processing facility or an auto chop shop. But it houses the cavernous bar Beast of Bourbon, where, on a recent night, the Jersey-based blues musician Ken (Stringbean) Sorenson, a former riverboat captain, performed James Cotton's "Boogie Thing" next to a poster of Iggy Pop, whom he resembles. Patrons ate BBQ-by-the-pound off brown-paper-lined trays or huddled around the horseshoe-shaped bar, trying to decipher the Oxford English Dictionary-size print on the drink menus. There are more than forty beers on tap and two hundred-plus whiskeys, ryes, and bourbons—from Catdaddy corn whiskey, which tastes like bubblegum cough syrup, to James E. Pepper 1776 fifteen-year-old bourbon, reminiscent of oak and toasted caramel. In a smaller, divey barroom nestled within—where eight dollars can get you forty ounces of Miller High Life in a brown paper bag—a tattooed couple queued up for the pool table, which was being run by middle-aged birthday partiers. "It's just a nice eclectic Brooklyn group," said Sureshan Pather, the owner, a Brit who ran an aquarium-supply store in Manhattan for twenty years. In chalk, on a wall by the pool table, someone had scrawled a testimonial: "I found friends" [sic].

—Emma Allen



## TABLES FOR TWO

# FORAGERS CITY TABLE

300 W. 22nd St. (212-243-8888)

IT SEEMS STRANGE TO SAY that the best thing at a place that specializes in juice cleanses is the porchetta, but Foragers Market and Table encapsulates the contradictory nature of the New York diet, serving quality food that feels "healthy," and is often local and organic, but with none of that dull avocado-based asceticism. The Table, a sit-down restaurant, is an offshoot of the Market, a gourmet grocer, which opened first in Dumbo and in 2012 expanded to Chelsea. In addition to the three-day juice cleanse and the panoply of expensive condiments (sixteen-dollar peanut butter, fourteen-dollar Sriracha), Foragers sells vegetables, herbs, and eggs from a dedicated farm in Canaan, New York.

A list of other regional suppliers is on the back of the menu, but the Foragers farm salad will tell you everything you need to know: it doesn't rely on a gimmicky or heavy dressing but, rather, on a barely discernable sherry vinaigrette, so the greens still crunch, and the sunflower sprouts remain springy. It makes a strong case for eating locally, supported by the devilled Foragers Farm eggs, the deliciousness of which depends not on paprika or truffle oil or bacon bits but on the eggs themselves, which give a clean bite and a grassy taste, like they were plucked from a particularly clever chicken this morning. (The farm delivers to the restaurant twice a week, so they might have been.)

Smart choices abound: a lamb Bolognese is prepared with trumpet pasta, and its nubbinnes provides maximum nooks and crannies for the rich tomato sauce. The brown beech mushrooms in the same dish are almost exactly the same dimensions as the trumpets, so it's a good pasta to eat if you're on a date and don't want to deal with the perilous fork twirls—or seasonal incongruity—of the spaghetti pomodoro. There's a pleasing uniformity in the king-crab appetizer, too, a salad of colorful slivers (crab, snow peas, tarragon), which is driven by mayonnaise but not monopolized by it. The porchetta—heritage pork loin and belly roti—comes as a glistening spiral, the skin bubbly and golden, the fat intertwined, and impossible to separate out, which is how it should be.

The crowd is mostly young people, and old people paying for young people. There's enough kale and quinoa to give you the option of being virtuous, and a reasonably priced three-course prix-fixe with desserts that are highlights, not afterthoughts. A maple pot de crème is accompanied by an outstanding brittle to crumble in, and there's also an assertive coffee ice cream that tastes like a frozen Americano and is mellowed out with salty chunks of brownie. For those city-dwellers who live in apartments without kitchen counter space, it's the highest compliment to say that you would like to eat at a particular restaurant every Tuesday night. Foragers Table is such a place.

—Amelia Lester

Open Tuesdays through Saturdays for dinner and weekends for brunch. Entrées \$22-\$26. Prix fixe \$38.



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Additional funding is provided by the MoMA Annual Exhibition Fund.

This exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

Paul Gauguin. *Mata mua (In Olden Times)* (detail), 1892. Oil on canvas. Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, Madrid. Image credit: © Colección Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza/Scala/Art Resource, N.Y.

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# NIGHT LIFE



### ROCK AND POP

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

#### Broken Bells

At first, the idea of the Shins front man, James Mercer, and the producer extraordinaire Brian Burton, a.k.a. Danger Mouse, collaborating may have seemed like a novelty, but it's now apparent that their side project has staying power. The two bring out the best in each other, combining Mercer's pensive, punchy pop with elements of rock, hip-hop, and electronica. Inspired by late-night conversations about mortality and the passage of time, the act's latest album, "After the Disco," is a modern take on seventies and eighties synth-pop that delivers danceable beats and catchy choruses amid looming melancholia. (Webster Hall, 125 E. 11th St. 212-353-1600. March 7.)

#### Habib Koité

The Malian guitarist and singer, who was born into a griot family and educated at the National Institute of the Arts, in Bamako, links the traditions of the past with contemporary blues and pop. He's carved out a successful career, appealing to world-music fans and jam-band aficionados in equal measure with his group Bamada, but he rounded up a new set of musicians for his latest album, "Soô" ("Home"), including Toumani Diabaté and Bassekou Kouyate. Koité also switched up instruments, replacing the drum kit with hand drums, and taking up the banjo himself. (City Winery, 155 Varick St. 212-608-0555. March 6.)

#### Lonnie Lester

A soul-singing stalwart of the Indiana music scene, Lester grew up in Gary, the home town of Michael Jackson, and before the Jackson 5 signed to Motown he gave them a guest spot on one of his gigs in Chicago. Lester's early work, such as "You Can't Go," "Ain't That a Shame," "So This Is Love," and a handful of other 45s from the mid-sixties, is highly sought after by northern-soul, funk, and other dance-floor-obsessed record collectors. Lester has stayed very active in and around Indianapolis, but he's never performed in New York City. The folks behind the Dig Deeper party series, which specializes in bringing unheralded soul singers to town, has persuaded him to appear at Littlefield, where he'll revisit those early favorites, backed by the Brooklyn Rhythm Band. (622 Degraw St., between Third and Fourth Aves., Brooklyn. 718-855-3388. March 8.)

#### Bob Mould

The force behind the seminal eighties band Hüsker Dü, which delivered music that was equal parts melody, speed, and aggression and which paved the way for alternative rock music during the following decade, Mould was immortalized by his bandmate Grant Hart, in Michael Azerrad's book "Our Band Could Be Your Life: Scenes from the American Indie Underground," as being so volatile that he "could stink up an entire room with his bad vibes." Since that band broke up, Mould has gone on to have a solo career, to lead the band

Sugar, and to work for professional wrestling, among other activities. These gigs at City Winery celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the release of Mould's debut solo album, "Workbook," and they'll showcase his less aggressive side. (155 Varick St. 212-608-0555. March 7-8.)

#### Kyary Pamyu Pamyu

The Japanese fashion model-turned-vocalist Kiriko Takemura, who performs under this name, is the Harajuku equivalent of Lady Gaga, with a sicker sense of humor. Her music, candy-lacquered electro-pop with a sadistic grin, is so adorable that it borders on the freakish, but that hasn't stopped her from becoming one of the most popular artists in Japan. Last year, J. J. Abrams selected her to sing the theme for the Japanese release of his most recent "Star Trek" film. (Best Buy Theatre, Broadway at 44th St. 800-745-3000. March 8.)

### JAZZ AND STANDARDS

#### Barry Harris

The eighty-four-year-old pianist came up in his native Detroit, playing with outstanding local talent and backing such visiting stars as Charlie Parker and Miles Davis when he was barely out of his teens. He's retained all the lessons he learned on those early bandstands and further refined his exceptionally elegant playing. Harris and his trio approach bebop as the high art that it is; he is a national treasure. (Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. March 4-9.)

#### Donald Harrison, Billy Cobham, Ron Carter Trio

Those who remember Cobham as the tsunami-swirling super-drummer of the Mahavishnu Orchestra will be surprised at how sensitive and swinging he becomes when working in tandem with the master bassist Carter and the New Orleans-based alto saxophonist Harrison. As heard on Harrison's album "This Is Jazz," recorded live at this club in 2011, the trio exalts in the freedom that its spare configuration provides. (Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St. 212-475-8592. March 4-9.)

#### Billy Hart Quartet

This sparkling foursome, bringing together the veteran drummer and three younger players (the pianist **Ethan Iverson**, of the Bad Plus; the bassist **Ben Street**; and the accomplished saxophonist **Mark Turner**), celebrates the release of a new album, "One Is the Other," which shows that the group is achieving its potential. The band's original compositions are intriguing, and their take on Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Some Enchanted Evening" is a thing of true beauty. (Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. 212-581-3080. March 4-8.)

#### Shirley Jones

Although Jones may be best known as the authoritative but sweetly hip mother on the early-seventies pop-kitsch series "The Partridge Family," she had spent the previous two decades as a respected, award-winning fixture on Broadway and in Hollywood. She's focussing on songs from that era in her debut at the Café Carlyle. (Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. 212-744-1600. March 4-15.)

# DANCE



## Brian Sanders **JUNK / "Patio Plastico Plus"**

Following in the footsteps of his mentor, the choreographer Moses Pendleton, this former member of MOMIX creates suites of surreal vignettes filled with whimsy and made possible by his dancers' acrobatic skill. Each segment has a theme and a set of tools: in one, dancers crawl under garbage pails and enact a trash-can ballet; in another, a tutu-clad ballerina hovers just above the floor, defying gravity. Yet another tableau vivant is inspired by the Surrealist paintings of Dorothea Tanning. A medley of music—bossa nova, rock, opera—sets the mood. (Michael Schimmel Center for the Arts, Pace University, 3 Spruce St. 866-811-4111. March 6-8 at 7:30.)

## Faye Driscoll

Driscoll's formally sophisticated dances tend to resemble childish sessions of make-believe that keep getting out of hand. Her exaggerated orchestrations of

awkward human interactions are funny and discomfiting, though perhaps not always in the way she means them to be. The stated goal of "Thank You for Coming," her ambitious new series of works, is no less than a new vision of society. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's Church In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. March 6-8 and March 11 at 8. Through March 15.)

## Flamenco Festival

The yearly event kicks off with a gala at City Center, offering a taste of flamenco's many flavors, including performances by the veteran Antonio Canales and three relative newcomers. Canales is a consummate showman; at fifty-three, his panache is undiminished. Carlos Rodríguez, formerly of the Nuevo Ballet Español, mixes flamenco with ballet. The real eye-openers are Jesús Carmona and Karime Amaya. Carmona is a young hot shot with a flair for witty, fast-paced footwork. Amaya, the grand-niece of the firebrand Carmen Amaya, has inherited her rela-

tive's attack and intensity. In addition, there are two performances by Eva Yerbabuena and her company; both explore themes of isolation and solitude. "Ay!" is a solo in which Yerbabuena is accompanied by musicians, including the violinist Vladimir Dmitrienco. "Lluvia" is a more elaborate but no less moody ensemble work influenced by modern dance and dance theatre. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Gala: March 6-7 at 8. "Ay!": March 8 at 8. "Lluvia": March 9 at 7.)

## Netta Yerushalmy

For her contribution to the 92nd Street Y's Harkness Dance Festival, Yerushalmy presents a work-in-progress flatly titled "New Work." The three dancers in it are also new: they're making their professional debuts. Using an abstract vocal score by Judith Berkson, Yerushalmy has taken segments of sculpted choreography and formal structures, cut them up, and rearranged them in collage. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. March 7-8 at 8 and March 9 at 3.)

## Brazil Festival / Focus Cia de Dança

Of the four companies participating in the Joyce Theatre's festival, this one could be seen as the most like a contemporary troupe from anywhere.

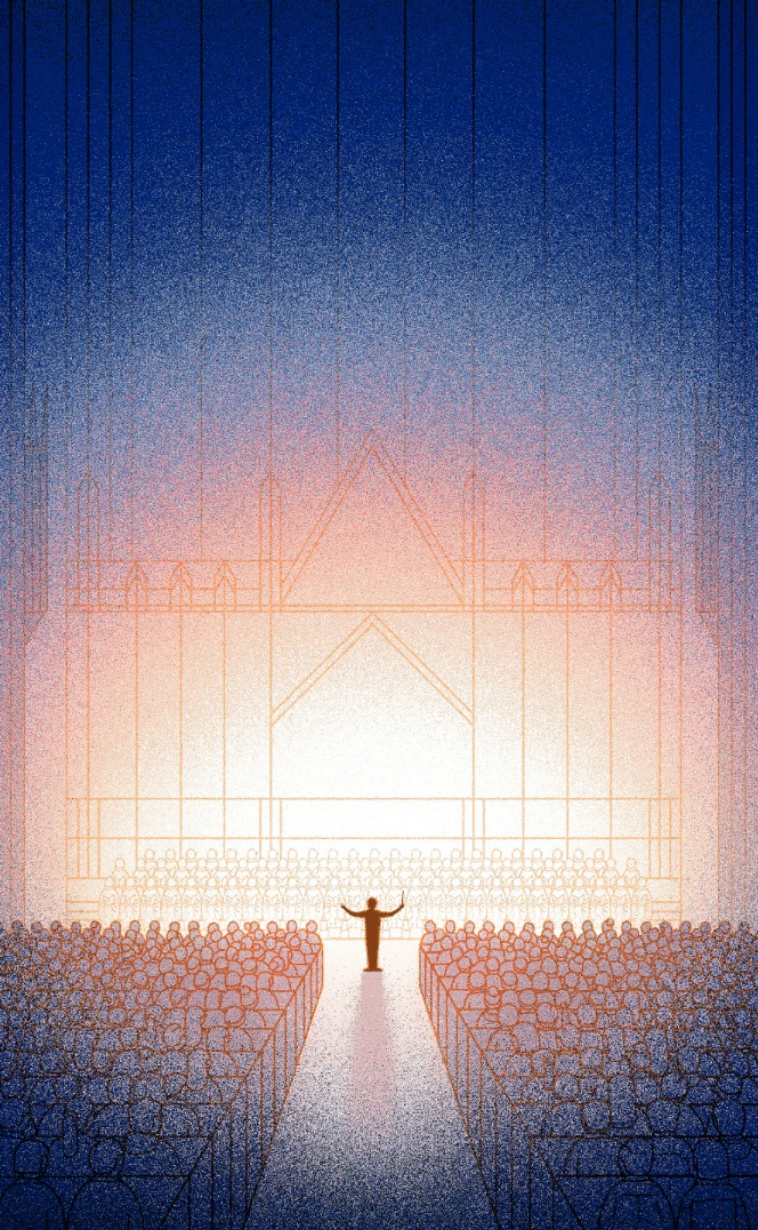
Yet its piece "The Songs You Danced for Me" is deeply Brazilian in a peculiar way, set to recordings by the Brazilian star Roberto Carlos that mimic American pop styles of the sixties and seventies. Dancers engage in games of musical chairs and steamy duets in which couples lock lips. Even members of the audience get caressed. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. March 8 at 8, March 9 at 2 and 7:30, and March 10 at 7:30.)

## "Works & Process" / Martha Graham Dance Company

In preparation for its City Center season, the company presents an evening of excerpts and discussion with Nacho Duato. The prominent Spanish-born choreographer introduces his new work, "Depak Ine," set to atmospheric music by Arsenije Jovanovic and John Talabot. Afterward, he discusses his peripatetic career, which has taken him from the directorship of Compañía Nacional de Danza to the Mikhailovsky, in St. Petersburg, to the Staatsballett Berlin in less than three years. The dancers also perform excerpts from "Rust," Duato's recent all-male quintet. Inspired in part by photographs of prisoners at Guantánamo, it is a meditation on cruelty and physical torment. (Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3587. March 9-10 at 7:30.)

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# CLASSICAL MUSIC



same joyous energy of last year's Stravinsky Festival. "Lamentatio" (March 9–April 13) is centered on six Sunday early-evening concerts. They will feature not only Novus and the Trinity Choir but also guest appearances by the recently formed chamber collective Decoda and by the ancient Choir of Merton College, Oxford. The repertoire begins with early-Renaissance masterworks by Dufay and Ockeghem, stretches through twentieth-century landmarks by Messiaen and Ginastera, and continues into the present with music by Philip Glass and the admired British choral composer Gabriel Jackson (the North American première of "Passio"). The abundant lunchtime series offers, among other attractions, Bach cantatas sung by the Choir and the Trinity Baroque Orchestra. (The Choir will head up to Alice Tully Hall, on March 17, to join the Juilliard 415 ensemble in Bach's St. Matthew Passion.)

It's an unusual move for a church to underwrite a Baroque orchestra and a new-music ensemble; many affluent religious institutions maintain performances of liturgical music, and occasional concerts, at a very high level, but don't seek to turn themselves into mini Lincoln Centers. Trinity is a parish of renowned wealth, but its vicar, the Reverend Canon Anne Mallonee, insists that ultimately "everything flows from the altar," and that Wachner's program "is part of an integrated ministry of outreach efforts that extend through music, education, housing placement, and food relief. We hired him not only because of his entrepreneurship but because he has Anglicanism in his blood." (Julian's wife, Emily Wachner, is a priest on the church's staff.)

"My pitch to the church," says Wachner, who was hired in 2010, "was to bring the liturgical music and the concert performances into one vision." The results have been impressive, as last December's performances of "Messiah"—which ended with a victory-lap presentation at Tully—proved. Wachner's vibrant crew includes such expert and versatile musicians as the violinist Owen Dalby, who not only leads Novus but plays in the Baroque Orchestra as well. It was a quick "Messiah" but a thrilling one, with every phrase from the players and vocalists charged with conviction and formed with care. The Reverend Mallonee's desire to "bring people nearer to God" through the beauty of great music is noble, and perhaps a bit naïve. But even for those of little faith, it is reaping a bountiful harvest. ([trinitywallstreet.org](http://trinitywallstreet.org))

—Russell Platt

## HOLY TRINITY

*A mini Lincoln Center for classical music downtown.*

**IN THE EVENING**, even a well-lit cathedral space will take on a touch of gloom, with the awareness of the day's demise enforcing a certain intimacy among the congregants. The dozens who arrived on a night last April to hear a concert in Trinity Wall Street's Stravinsky Festival were probably skeptical: were the Master's late-period sacred works, seldom heard and composed according to a demanding and idiosyncratic twelve-tone technique, really that good? "Threni," a setting of texts from the Lamentations of Jeremiah, had suffered a disastrous Paris première in 1958. But Julian Wachner, Trinity's Director of Music and the Arts, brought out the tortured beauty of the piece, leading the unflappable musicians of the Trinity Choir and of Novus N.Y., the church's in-house contemporary ensemble, with palpable enthusiasm. Doubts dispersed like wafts of incense.

Trinity's upcoming Lenten festival of sacred works also takes the Lamentations as its theme, though it will surely be brought off with the

## OPERA

### Metropolitan Opera

The baritone sound and noble stage presence of the superstar tenor Jonas Kaufmann, 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 Bizic, as Albert, make fine Met debuts, 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. (March 7 and March 11 at 7:30.) • **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. (March 5 at 7:30 and March 8 at noon.) • Thomas Hampson, a singer of regal dignity, returns to the house to take the title role in Berg's "Wozzeck"—an unusual fit, perhaps, given the baritone's natural authority and the desperate alienation of the character in this, the most elemental of expressionist music dramas. James Levine has long made a specialty of this work's complex and savage beauty; his Marie is Deborah Voigt, making a comeback in what is, for her, a complete departure from divadom. (March 6 and March 10 at 7:30.) • If you miss this, the final performance of Dmitri Tcherniakov's production of "Prince Igor," you may have to wait another ninety-seven years for the Met to take it up again. Borodin's meltingly beautiful music is sung by a superb cast that includes Ildar Abdrazakov (in the title role), Oksana Dyka, Mikhail Petrenko, Anita Rachvelishvili, Sergey Semishkur, and Stefan Kocán; the orchestra and chorus (especially in the magical "Polovtsian Dances") do excellent work under the firm hand of Gianandrea Noseda. (March 8 at 7:30.) • Vittorio Grigolo, a musician whose career (and artistic persona) are still in the flush of youth, will offer a solo recital on the Met stage, an honor given previously to such masters of the tenor's art as Luciano Pavarotti and Jonas Kaufmann. His rather Pavarotti-like program—songs and arias by Bellini, Donizetti, Tosti, and so on—will be accompanied at the keyboard by Vincent Scalerà. (March 9 at 4.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

## ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

### Orchestra of St. Luke's

Beyond the elaborate arrangements of Carnegie Hall's Vienna festival, home-town ensembles continue the perpetual embrace of the city's golden repertory. The versatile and enduring orchestra teams up with an old friend—the lauded British period-instrument expert Roger Norrington—to offer a performance of Beethoven's extraordinary "Missa Solemnis," with the vocal soloists Susan Gritton, Julie Boulianne, Michael Shade, and Nathan Berg, assisted by the Oratorio Society of New York. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. March 6 at 8.)

### Ensemble LPR

(Le) Poisson Rouge's occasional orchestra, led by André de Ridder, offers a concert featuring not only works by the alt-classical stars Jonny Greenwood (the Suite from "There Will Be Blood") and Bryce Dessner (a première) but the kind of twentieth-century classic that used to be a big-orchestra staple: Bartók's magisterial Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta. (158 Bleecker St. lprnyc.com. March 7 at 8.)

## RECITALS

### Matthias Goerne and Christoph Eschenbach: "Die Schöne Müllerin"

The baritone and the pianist, two of the superlative musicians of our time, bring their insights (and stamina) to Schubert's searching exploration of doomed young love. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. March 5 at 8.)

### String Orchestra of Brooklyn

Music by talented young Gothamites is one of the main concentrations of this community-oriented collective, which in this concert will include such superb musicians as the cellist Ashley Bathgate, the Mivos Quartet, and the vocalist Mellissa Hughes; freshly minted works by Christopher Cerrone, Ted Hearne, and Scott Wollschleger are on offer. (Church of St. Ann and the Holy Trinity, 157 Montague St. March 6 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

### Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

High romanticism abounds in this week's concert, anchored by the cellist David Finckel, one of the Society's artistic directors: he's joined by the violinist Arnaud Sussmann, among others, for a program of music by Dvořák (the dulcet Terzetto in C Major), Schumann (the Piano Trio No. 2 in F Major), and Dohnányi (the very Brahmsian Piano Quintet in C Minor, Op. 1). (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788. March 7 at 7:30.)

### Bargemusic

After a little spa treatment—carpentry, refurbishing—the coffee barge that

houses New York's floating chamber-music series has returned to service. One of several attractions this week is the Horzowski Trio, a young piano trio of flawless technique and energetic appeal; music by Haydn, John Tower ("For Daniel"), and Tchaikovsky (the sweeping Trio in A Minor) is on the program. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. March 8 at 7. For tickets and full schedule, see bargemusic.org.)

### Murray Perahia

For thousands of baby boomers, a concert by this veteran pianist, conservative in content and in style, is a cultural touchstone. He returns to Avery Fisher Hall to perform works by Bach, Beethoven, Schumann ("Papillons"), and much Chopin (including the Scherzo No. 2 in B-Flat Minor). (212-721-6500. March 9 at 3.)

### Benjamin Hochman

The 92nd Street Y co-presents a recital at SubCulture by this inquisitive and insistent young artist, a winner of the 2011 Avery Fisher Career Grant; his program includes modern classics by Berio, Knussen ("Variations"), and Rzewski ("The People United Will Never Be Defeated!"), along with a new work by the Israeli-American composer Tamar Muskal. (45 Bleecker St. subculturenewyork.com. March 10 at 7:30.)

### Evgeny Kissin

A regular at Carnegie Hall, the firebrand Russian pianist makes a coincidental nod to the venue's Vienna festival by performing Schubert's Sonata in D Major, D. 850; the rest of the program is all-Scriabin (the Sonata No. 2 and a clutch of études). (212-247-7800. March 10 at 8.)

## OF NOTE

### NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC: "SWEENEY TODD"

The Philharmonic's relationship with Stephen Sondheim has been long and loving. Returning from their Asian tour, Alan Gilbert and his players tear into the Master's "musical thriller" of sharp dealings in old London. Sweeney and his nefarious companion, Mrs. Lovett, are portrayed by two great stars, Bryn Terfel and (in her Philharmonic debut) Emma Thompson; they're joined by a supporting cast that includes Jay Armstrong Johnson and Erin Mackey, in a staged production directed by Lonny Price. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. March 5 at 7, March 6 at 7:30, March 7 at 8, and March 8 at 2 and 8.)

### "VIENNA: CITY OF DREAMS": TALEA ENSEMBLE

New music has a place in Carnegie Hall's Vienna fest. The intrepid New York ensemble—expanded to chamber-orchestra size—steps up to the challenge of giving the U.S. premières of works by three of Vienna's current leading lights: Olga Neuwirth ("Un Posto Nell'Acqua"), Bernhard Gander ("Take Nine for Twelve"), and Pierluigi Billone. (Bohemian National Hall, 321 E. 73rd St. March 7 at 8. To reserve free tickets, which are required, call 212-319-5300. For a full listing of concerts, panel discussions, and other festival events, see carnegiehall.org.)



## GOINGS ON, ONLINE

For more events around town, visit our Web site, where there are capsule reviews of "American Hustle," "12 Years a Slave," and "The Act of Killing," and previews of the multimedia artist Rashaad Newsome's dance performance at the Drawing Center and the Chieftains' concert at Town Hall.



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# THE THEATRE



a really nice guy. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

## My Mother Has 4 Noses

What's charming about the pop singer Jonatha Brooke's monologue about her beloved, declining, added mother is her upbeat performance. Brooke, under the direction of Jeremy B. Cohen, spends ninety minutes talking about things related to the cancer that spread across her mother's face, finding the humor in her prosthetic nose, and it's sometimes very funny. But Brooke's rosy disposition while describing the gruesome details of her mother's last two years is also what diminishes the power of the play—she never really allows the audience to feel the depth of her pain. Brooke takes occasional breaks to sing about her mom, and, being a seasoned musician with a beautiful voice, she rocks it. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010.)

## Ode to Joy

"I do not understand why people make art that upsets other people," Mala (Roxanna Hope) says, considering a painting by Adele (Kathryn Erbe). Adele's work, we are told, is jarring, dark, and a little gross. So is this complicated play by Craig Lucas (who also directs), which follows Adele's struggles with love and addiction, toggling between her romance with Mala and her long-term relationship with Bill (Arliss Howard), a heart surgeon. Adele is the kind of emotional vandal who is good at art (if that) and bad at life; her first date with Bill ends with blood and broken glass. Lucas's wordplay-rich script doesn't want to be loved—and Erbe's characterization borders on shrill—but it offers disquieting shards of wisdom. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 866-811-4111.)

## Since Africa

What happens to a Lost Boy once he's found? This Red Fern Theatre play concerns Ater (Matthew Murumba), a young Sudanese refugee adjusting to a new life in Chicago. Can openness flummox him, fast food nauseates him, and the neighbor's dog gives him nightmares. Aided by Murumba's earnest performance, the play captures the pathos of Ater's situation even as it too often exploits his naiveté. (Ater on feminism: "Women have value in Dinka culture. A bride will bring a family many cows.") But rather than center on Ater, Mia McCullough's script cedes the stage to Diane (Jennifer Dorr White), the socialite who volunteers to help Ater, and her less compelling troubles. Nancy Robillard's slipshod direction doesn't steady the play, and little could redeem the awkward scene changes featuring the Nameless One, a white-clad figure who flits past the furniture like a pan-African Tinkerbell. (Theatre at the 14th Street Y, 344 E. 14th St. 866-811-4111. Through March 9.)

## ALSO NOTABLE

### AFTER MIDNIGHT

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New Amsterdam

### ALL THE WAY

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### CHARACTER MAN

Urban Stages

### THE CORRESPONDENT

Rattlestick

### DINNER WITH FRIENDS

Laura Pels

### A DOLL'S HOUSE

BAM's Harvey Theatre  
(Reviewed in this issue.)

### A GENTLEMAN'S GUIDE TO LOVE AND MURDER

Walter Kerr

### HAND TO GOD

Lucille Lortel

### THE HAPPIEST SONG PLAYS LAST

Second Stage

### LOVE AND INFORMATION

Minetta Lane Theatre

### MATILDA THE MUSICAL

Shubert

### MEASURE FOR MEASURE

New Victory

### LES MISÉRABLES

Imperial

### MOTHERS AND SONS

Golden

### NO EXIT

Pearl

### THE OPEN HOUSE

Pershing Square Signature Center

### ROCKY

Winter Garden

### SATCHMO AT THE WALDORF

Westside

### STAGE KISS

Playwrights Horizons

## OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

### Bullets Over Broadway

A musical adaptation of Woody Allen and Douglas McGrath's screenplay of the 1994 film, with a book by Allen. Starring Marin Mazzie, Brooks Ashmanskas, Zach Braff, Karen Ziemba, and Vincent Pastore. Susan Stroman directs and choreographs. Previews begin March 11. (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

### If/Then

A new musical by Tom Kitt (music) and Brian Yorkey (book and lyrics) imagines different life paths for an urban planner (Idina Menzel) moving back to New York. Also starring Anthony Rapp and LaChanze; Michael Greif directs. In previews. (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 800-745-3000.)

### A Raisin in the Sun

Denzel Washington and LaTanya Richardson Jackson star in the Lorraine Hansberry play, directed by Kenny Leon. Also starring Sophie Okonedo, Anika Noni Rose, David Cromer, and Stephen McKinley Henderson. Previews begin March 8. (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

### Tales from Red Vienna

Nina Arianda and Kathleen Chalfant star in this new drama by David Grimm, about a widow who turns to prostitution after the First World War. Kate Whoriskey directs the Manhattan Theatre Club production. In previews. (City Center Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

## NOW PLAYING

### Gidion's Knot

In Johnna Adams's beautifully written drama, an educated and open-minded single mother (Karen Leiner), whose eleven-year-old son has just killed himself, is stonewalled by the boy's defensive fifth-grade teacher (Dara O'Brien) when the mom comes to school asking about what happened to her son that day. Under the direction of Austin Pendleton, Leiner delivers a magnificent, multilayered performance: she is at once furious, frustrated, incredulous, heartbroken, brutal, and kind. O'Brien's performance, too, is well embodied, though less nuanced—she becomes what we all should fear, a teacher who's dead inside. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Through March 9.)

### Kung Fu

Cole Horibe has a body like a Swiss Army knife: fast, sharp, and compact.

He's well cast as Bruce Lee, who turned martial arts into a cinematic art form and died at the peak of his fame, in 1973. He brings a live-wire energy to David Henry Hwang's uneven stage portrait; his Lee is punchy, kinetic, and cocksure, even when Hollywood resists the idea of an Asian star. Hwang avoids the hackneyed ups and downs of most bio-plays, setting offhand scenes in Lee's martial-arts classes, or on a car ride during a location-scouting trip in India. But the narrative gets choppy, and Leigh Silverman's production includes the kind of hammy overacting usually reserved for musical comedy, here with kung-fu interludes instead of songs. (Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

### London Wall

Writing this 1931 play, set in a law office, the playwright John Van Druten ("Bell, Book and Candle") was prescient in his examination of the workplace as an evolving social construct, which provides a kind of family but is also fraught with the dangers of economic and sexual exploitation. In the first act, the skills of the writer, the director (Davis McCallum), and the company of nine combine to create a bustling, intimate world that is at once heightened and believable. If the plot plays out a little too neatly, the characters' interaction keeps us thoroughly engaged. Standouts in the exemplary cast include Julia Coffey as a super-sharp secretary with an Eve Arden edge, Stephen Plunkett as a predatory young lawyer, Laurie Kennedy as a dotty client, and Jonathan Hogan as the head of the firm, a gentle beacon of professionalism, morality, and humanity. (Mint, 311 W. 43rd St. 866-811-4111.)

### Middle of the Night

In 1953, Paddy Chayefsky, one of the most prolific writers in the golden age of live television, created "Marty," featuring an iconic regular-guy protagonist. The next year, he wrote another teleplay featuring a true mensch, which was adapted for Broadway in 1956 and is revived here for the first time since then, by Keen Company, under the direction of Jonathan Silverstein. Jonathan Hadary plays Jerry, a middle-aged garment-district manufacturer, who, in the depths of a rough New York City winter, unexpectedly finds himself in a warming affair with Betty (Nicole Lowrance), a young employee also suffering from doubt and loneliness. Hadary is superb, acing the underrated task of finding depth and nuance in



Sandrine Kiberlain and Isabelle Huppert in Serge Bozon's stylized police comedy "Tip Top."



## FRENCH EVOLUTION

*A rising generation at "Rendez-Vous with French Cinema."*

**NEW FRENCH MOVIES** will occupy three of New York's leading repertory houses—BAM Cinémathèque, Film Society of Lincoln Center, and IFC Center—March 6-16, in the annual "Rendez-Vous with French Cinema" series. It's co-produced by Unifrance Films, France's quasi-governmental agency for the international promotion of the country's films, which is why the series showcases not only the cream of French cinema but also overtly commercial work. Though this balance was off in the past, this year's edition offers a well-chosen set of movies by a rising generation of French directors whose work notably fuses documentary-based authenticity with blatant theatrical artifice.

Serge Bozon—whose previous feature, "La France," is a musical set on First World War battlefields—returns with "**Tip Top**," a contemporary police procedural that's also a screwball sex comedy. It stars Isabelle Huppert as Esther Lafarge, an internal-affairs officer who is dispatched to a provincial suburb to investigate the murder of a local informant.

Under Bozon's precise direction, Huppert's virtuosic actorly control becomes part of the story; Esther has a punctilious attention to "protocol" and a sex life that, with its own distinctive rules, has landed her under a cloud of departmental suspicion. Bozon sets the action at the most conflict-riddled crossroads of French politics: the country's transformation into a self-consciously multicultural society. The investigation into the murder of the informant—a former Algerian policeman who fled Islamist violence in his home country—reveals deep-rooted relations between France and

Algeria that transcend the colonial heritage. In Bozon's view, the integration, in France, of Christians and Muslims is no mere dream but an inescapable and unexceptional fact.

Politics of a more familiar sort are the setting for Justine Triet's first feature, "**Age of Panic**," which takes place on May 6, 2012—the day that François Hollande was elected President of France—and early the next morning. The protagonist, Laetitia (Laetitia Dosch), is a TV journalist whose on-the-street reporting from the Left Bank rally where the Socialist Hollande's supporters await the results is disrupted by child-care trouble. When Laetitia's estranged husband, Vincent (Vincent Macaigne), pushes into her apartment to see their young daughters, she orders the babysitter, Marc (Marc-Antoine Vaugois), to bring the girls to the rally for safekeeping. Triet's film is a tour de force of intertwining documentary and fiction—and public and private life. She filmed the core of the action during the actual May 6 rally, with the actors taking part in it; the spontaneous warmth of a late-night reunion in Laetitia's apartment seems to arise from the promise of political change.

The shambling Vincent Macaigne also stars in Guillaume Brac's first full-length film, "**Tonnerre**," which takes place in a rural village of that name, where the director's grandparents lived. Macaigne plays Maxime, a Parisian singer-songwriter who heads to his father's house for a few months' break from city life. He begins an affair with a young journalist (Solène Rigot) at a local paper; when she leaves him, the gentle romance veers into film-noir territory. Brac builds the story from lyrical interstitial moments, many of which bring the actors together with actual residents of the village. With his intimate sense of place, Brac suffuses the film with the fragrance of its late-autumn foliage, while also coaxing wise and gentle humor from the veteran comic actor Bernard Menez, who, as Maxime's father, plays a key dramatic scene with a leaf-blower strapped to his back.

—Richard Brody

**OPENING****BETHLEHEM**

Reviewed in Now Playing. Opening March 7. (In limited release.)

**THE GRAND BUDAPEST HOTEL**

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

**PARTICLE FEVER**

A documentary, directed by Mark Levinson and David Kaplan, about physicists' search for the Higgs boson. Opening March 5. (Film Forum.)

**REVIVALS AND FESTIVALS**

*Titles in bold are reviewed.*

**BAM CINÉMATEK**

"Rendez-Vous with French Cinema." March 8 at 3: "Age of Panic" (2013, Justine Triet). • March 9 at 4:30: "Grand Central" (2013, Rebecca Zlotowski). • March 9 at 7:30: "Love Battles" (2013, Jacques Doillon).

**FILM FORUM**

The films of Alfred Hitchcock. March 7 at 1:15, 3:30, 7:50, and 10: "Notorious" (1946). • March 7 at 6: "Waltzes from Vienna" (1934). • March 8 at 1, 3:15, 7:50, and 10: "Dial M for Murder," in 3D (1954). • March 8 at 5:30: "Under Capricorn."

**FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER**

"Rendez-Vous with French Cinema." March 7 at 6:30 and March 10 at 1: "Age of Panic" (2013, Justine Triet). • March 10 at 6:30: "Love Battles" (2013, Jacques Doillon). • March 12 at 4 and March 14 at 6:30: "Tonnerre" (2013, Guillaume Brac). • March 14 at 1 and 9: "Tip Top" (2013, Serge Bozon).

**IFC CENTER**

"Rendez-Vous with French Cinema." March 8 at 4:45: "Grand Central" (2013, Rebecca Zlotowski). • March 9 at 1: "Miss and the Doctors" (2013, Axelle Ropert). • March 9 at 5:30: "Age of Panic" (2013, Justine Triet). • March 11 at 8: "Love Battles" (2013, Jacques Doillon). • March 13 at 7: "Tonnerre" (2013, Guillaume Brac). • March 13 at 9:30: "Tip Top" (2013, Serge Bozon).

**MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**

"Vienna Unveiled." March 5 at 4: "Maskerade" (1934, Willi Forst). • March 7 and March 11 at 7: "Schwitzkasten" (1978, John Cook). • March 9 at 2: "The Wedding March." • March 9 at 5: "The Marriage Circle."

**MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE**

"Hotels on Film." March 8 at 5: "The Silence." • March 8 at 7: "Lost in Translation" (2003, Sofia Coppola) and "Life Without Zoë" (1989, Francis Ford Coppola). • March 9 at 2: "Grand Hotel." • March 9 at 4:30: "Beware of a Holy Whore" (1971, Rainer Werner Fassbinder). • March 9 at 7: "The Shining" (1980, Stanley Kubrick).

**NOW PLAYING****Bethlehem**

Yet another intimate-scale spy drama set amid the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This one concerns Razi (Tshahi Halevi), a young and hip-looking Israeli secret-service officer who has recruited a Bethlehem teenager, Sanfur (Shadi Mar'i), as an informant. When the planning of a suicide bombing in Jerusalem that left thirty dead is traced to Sanfur's brother, Ibrahim (Hisham Suliman), Razi is ordered to coax Sanfur to lure Ibrahim out of hiding and into a meeting that will mean death for both brothers. But Razi—who influences Sanfur under the guise of a quasi-paternal affection—has misgivings about his orders. The Israeli director Yuval Adler, who co-wrote the script with the Palestinian journalist Ali Wakad, gives Palestinians the bulk of the attention. Internecine struggles among the various Palestinian factions and parties—and the deadly cloak-and-dagger games woven deep into domestic life in the occupied territories—are revealed in fascinating and harrowing detail. Meanwhile, Israeli officials appear as apolitical technocrats whose efficiency is threatened, above all, by their irrepressible warmth and humanistic sentiments. The suspense plot is effective yet familiar; the direction is brisk, even hasty, and impersonal. In Arabic and Hebrew.—*Richard Brody* (In limited release.)

**Grand Hotel**

From her first line, "I have never been so tired in my life," Greta Garbo sets the movie in vibration with her extraordinary sensual presence. She plays a *première danseuse* whose career is fading—a weary, disillusioned woman briefly reconciled to life by a passion for a shady nobleman: John Barrymore. Garbo was only twenty-six when she played this role (Barrymore was fifty), but the fatigue, the despair, seem genuine. Most of the players give impossibly bad performances—they chew up the camera. But if you want to see what screen glamour used to be, and what, originally, "stars" were, this is perhaps the best example of all time. As a secretary working in the hotel, there is a startlingly sexy minx named Joan Crawford; her scenes with Lionel Barrymore (in one of his rare likable performances: he's a dying man spending his life savings on a last fling) show a real rapport. The fifth star is Wallace Beery, as a brutal, crooked tycoon; he overacts mightily and charmlessly. Directed by Edmund Goulding. Released in 1932.—*Pauline Kael* (Museum of the Moving Image; March 9.)

**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, and 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. Directed by Arnaud Desplechin.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 2/17 & 24/14.) (In limited release.)

**The LEGO Movie**

As a rule, movies about toys need to be approached with extreme caution; some of them have been bad enough to count as health hazards. This one is the exception. Phil Lord and Christopher Miller, who made "Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs," have delivered another essay in controlled madness, bombarding you with far more candy-colored detail than you can process—though, by some miracle, not too much to stomach. In short, pop culture eats itself. Everything you see, until the closing scenes, is Lego: people, landscapes, and products. Even fiery bolts of laser beam are orange plastic rods. You could try to resist or lament this marketing frenzy, but the movie is way, way ahead of you, landing joke after joke about the shiny pretensions of the Lego world. Our hero is a construction worker who stumbles on a magic brick that will reveal some higher truth, though the film takes ruthless comic pains to knock down the pomposity that usually attends—and spoils—the genre. ("Transformers," we're looking at you.) With the voices of Chris Pratt, Will Ferrell, Elizabeth Banks, and, in a spoof of his divine status, Morgan Freeman.—*Anthony Lane* (3/3/14) (In wide release.)

**The Lunchbox**

This gentle romantic drama, by the Indian director Ritesh Batra, packs twenty minutes of action into its hour-and-three-quarters running time. The story involves Ila (Nimrat Kaur), a neglected young housewife and mother in Mumbai, who begins an epistolary affair with Saajan (Irrfan Khan), a widowed elder accountant, when a messenger mistakenly delivers to him the lunches that she has lovingly prepared for her husband. Saajan, on the verge of retirement, is saddled with the training of his eager successor, Ahmed Shaikh (Nawazuddin Siddiqui), who, in turn, tries to coax the grieving, life-worn

introvert out of his shell. Batra's poised, observational direction gets much mileage from his actors' soulful gazes, shading the sentimental mist with unspoken misery. Yet his loving attention to local customs—starting in Ila's kitchen, including the very lunch-delivery network on which the story runs, involving Saajan's white-collar workplace, and extending to the particulars of public transportation that bind the city together—serves mainly as an ornamental backdrop for a slight, undeveloped anecdote. In Hindi and English.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

**The Marriage Circle**

For his second American film, from 1923, Ernst Lubitsch turned a drawing-room farce into bittersweet chamber music—which, aptly, plays out in Vienna. The story begins with Professor Josef Stock (Adolphe Menjou) watching his wife, Mizzi (Marie Prevost), storm out of their elegant apartment; he then hires a detective in the hope of finding grounds for divorce. She takes an interest in the psychiatrist Dr. Franz Braun (Monte Blue), the husband of her best friend, Charlotte (Florence Vidor), who is, in turn, pursued by Braun's medical partner (Creighton Hale). Lubitsch's pointed visual double-entendres bear the shivery eroticism of Freudian suggestions. His appearance-obsessed characters hide their emotional turmoil behind ingratiating masks, but his greatest visual trope is the evocation—by means of silent images—of a world of sound. The suggestion of a ringing telephone, a tap on a windowpane, a voice in the dark, and a woman weeping behind closed doors may startle the viewer even as they spur characters to motion or freeze them with apprehension. Only a few notes separate these blithe romantic machinations from film noir. Silent.—*R.B.* (MOMA; March 9.)

**The Monuments Men**

An all-star dud about a group of connoisseurs—architects, art historians, curators—who attempt to 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.—*D.D.* (2/17 & 24/14) (In wide release.)

## Non-Stop

Liam Neeson, as an alcoholic air marshal who must defend a packed flight against a terrorist, is even grimmer and angrier than he was in "Unknown," his previous collaboration with the Spanish-born director Jaime Collet-Serra. Essentially, you've seen this bomb-on-a-plane movie before, but Neeson, who brings enormous conviction to these late-career action roles, moves his big body through confined spaces (virtually the entire movie takes place in the airplane) with so much power that you expect him to rip out the seats. With Julianne Moore.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

## Omar

Omar (Adam Bakri) is a young Palestinian living in the West Bank, under trying conditions. In order to merely visit his friends Tarek (Iyad Hoorani) and Amjad (Samer Bisharat), not to mention the beautiful Nadia (Leem Lubany), with whom he is flirtatiously in love, he must scale the concrete security barrier that cuts through his community. A plan is hatched to attack Israeli soldiers; Omar is apprehended, tortured, turned, and sent back among his comrades. From here on, up to the final moments, the movie is snared in secrets and divided loyalties, and the point of the action sequences—in which Omar hustles and leaps through local houses and alleys, chased by the law—is not just to thrill but to

offer a burst of release, away from the tangles and traps of fate. The director, Hany Abu-Assad, is Palestinian, and there is no doubt where his political sympathies lie; yet his finest coup, in a fraught film, is to grant dramatic space and substance to the enemy—an Israeli intelligence agent who becomes Omar's handler, and who is played by Waleed Zuaiter with fierce purpose plus a dangerous touch of playfulness. In Arabic and Hebrew.—*A.L.* (3/3/14) (In limited release.)

## The Silence

This 1963 drama by Ingmar Bergman begins with one of the director's signature sequences: a boy (Jörgen Lindström) riding with two women in a compartment of a train breaks free and beholds, with frozen wonder, an ominous transport of tanks on the opposite track. One of the women, Anna (Gunnel Lindblom), is his mother; the other, Ester (Ingrid Thulin), is her sister, whose coughing jags cause the group to leave the train in a strange city and stay in a desolate, palatial hotel while she tries to recuperate. In a country where none of them speak the language (one invented by Bergman), the women endure the monotonous isolation by contriving hothouse passions, playing erotic games, and unleashing pent-up resentments, all of which take place in the presence of the blankly bewildered boy. Bergman unfolds

grand themes—childhood and its mute sensibility, adulthood and its unhealed emotional wounds—in highly inflected images, which have an anguished intensity unseen since the age of silent films. In Swedish.—*R.B.* (Museum of the Moving Image; March 8.)

## Under Capricorn

Alfred Hitchcock's sumptuous Technicolor romantic melodrama, from 1949—set in the young colony of Sydney, Australia, in 1831—is giddily atypical in its style even as it explores lurid new byways of Hitchcock's familiar obsessions. The intrigue begins when Charles Adare (Michael Wilding), a suave Irish ne'er-do-well, disembarks there and is befriended by the rough-hewn but wealthy Sam Flusky (Joseph Cotten), a self-made "emancipist," or freed convict. Sam's wife, Henrietta (Ingrid Bergman), is a classic Victorian-era madwoman who remains in seclusion and under the thumb of a tyrannical—and nubile—housemaid (Margaret Leighton) with designs on Sam. But Henrietta is also Charles's cousin and childhood friend, and he makes her rehabilitation—and their emotional bond—his priority. Crucial aspects of "Rebecca," "Suspicion," and "Shadow of a Doubt" are bound together by a darting, swooping camera that Hitchcock seems to have borrowed from Max Ophüls, but the theme of erotic degradation and dependency

is entirely his own. Suavely and suspensefully, Hitchcock draws the crucial line between lust and love, and, in a brilliant scene of mirrors and darkness, evokes the ultimate danger—the loss of self—that sexual passion entails.—*R.B.* (Film Forum; March 8.)

## The Wedding March

In this extravagant, wickedly ironic 1928 melodrama, Erich von Stroheim's directorial genius radiates from his self-typecast performance. He plays Prince Nikolaus von Wildeliebe-Rauffenburg, the hedonistic scion of a fading noble family whose parents want to marry him off to a homely corn-plaster heiress (Zasu Pitts). The prince is game for the mercenary match until he falls hard for Mitzi (Fay Wray), a willowy working-class beauty. The scene of their encounter—at a pompous royal procession, where he is perched atop a high horse and the maiden is packed among street-level gawkers—is an elaborate masterpiece of erotically charged montage. The coolly disciplined pacing unfolds layers and nuances of the intricate social codes of prewar imperial Vienna with a novelistic fullness: Stroheim's plethora of angles, shifting points of view, and profusion of details of décor, dress, and gesture bring to the screen a kaleidoscopic frenzy of conflicting passions. Silent.—*R.B.* (MOMA; March 9.)

# ABOVE & BEYOND

## Charles Ives's Studio

As a nation, we seem reluctant to preserve the homes of great composers. (Copland House, near Peekskill, is a notable exception.) But composers' studios, the quirkily individual spaces where they wrote their works and left indelible traces of their personalities, are having better luck. The contents of Leonard Bernstein's Fairfield studio were recently relocated to the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University, and now another Connecticut shrine, the studio of America's first great composer, Charles Ives, is being reconstructed in a room at the American Academy of Arts and Letters, on Audubon Terrace. In their proper places are Ives's hat, his piano, a set of double doors covered with press clippings, and an especially iconic object, the cornet played by his beloved father. (Broadway between 155th and 156th Sts. The room will be open to the public March 6-April 12 and May 22-June 15. No tickets required. artsandletters.org.)

## AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

**Sotheby's** combats the mid-season doldrums with a sale of twentieth-century design on March 6 (offering lots of Tiffany and Ruhlmann lamps, and a desk by Mattia Bonetti that appears to be made out of silvery toothpaste), followed by one of its "Contemporary Curated" auctions on March 7—a jazzed-up selection of mid-priced contemporary art, selected by a panel of "tastemakers" that includes the gallerist and socialite Maria Baibakova and the technology entrepreneur Trevor Traina. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) • Returning for its sixteenth edition, the sprawling mega-fair known as **The Armory Show** (March 6-9) sets up shop on Piers 92 and 94, where more than two hundred international galleries will vie for buyers' attention. (Twelfth Ave. at W. 55th St. 212-645-6440.) • Designed to attract younger buyers, **Christie's** latest "First Open" sale (March 6) comprises a reasonably priced mix of contemporary paintings, sculpture, and photographs (with a

few higher-priced items thrown in to add lustre). Ambitious collectors may be drawn to a group of Basquiat sketches and a touching chiaroscuro portrait by Eric Fischl, "Question-

able Pleasure #1," which depicts a young woman getting dressed, her face concealed by her sun-bleached hair. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)

## READINGS AND TALKS

### "NYPL Books at Noon"

The New York Public Library inaugurates a new weekly series in Astor Hall (the soaring space just inside the main entry), featuring a writer in conversation with a member of the library's staff. P. J. O'Rourke, the author of "Parliament of Whores," is up first, discussing his latest book, "The Baby Boom." (Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. 917-275-6975. March 5 at noon.)

### "One-on-One"

The literacy-and-writing nonprofit 826NYC celebrates its tenth anniversary with a "Chat Spectacular," featuring conversations between leading artists, including Ken Burns and Kurt Andersen; John Oliver and Ahmir (Questlove) Thompson; and Masha Gessen and Anand Giridharadas. With music by Robyn Hitchcock. Sarah Vowell and Eugene Mirman are the hosts. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 826nyc.org. March 5 at 7:30.)

### "E. E. Cummings & Edna St. Vincent Millay: Twentieth-Century Stars"

The poet Billy Collins, the actress Blair Brown, and the Millay biographer Nancy Milford join Susan Cheever for a night celebrating her new biography, "E. E. Cummings: A Life." (Bruno Walter Auditorium, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Lincoln Center. No tickets necessary. poetrysociety.org. March 6 at 6.)

A NEW THRILLER FROM THE AUTHOR OF **THE EXPATS**

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*Powerful people would kill for it.*

*The CIA will eliminate anyone who touches it.*

*The author would die for it.*

**She controls it . . . but only until they find her.**

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## THE TALK OF THE TOWN

### COMMENT

#### THE X FACTOR

If the Presidential election were held today, Hillary Clinton would deliver her acceptance speech sometime before midnight tonight. Last week, a *Times*/CBS News poll found that a whopping eighty-two per cent of Democrats picked Clinton over both Joe Biden and Elizabeth Warren. Last month, a Quinnipiac poll reported that registered voters in Ohio chose Clinton over six possible Republican candidates: Jeb Bush, Marco Rubio, Rand Paul, Ted Cruz, and John Kasich. “If the election were tomorrow,” John McCain said, “Hillary Clinton would most likely be the President.”

But the election isn't being held today or tomorrow or even next year, and Clinton isn't even officially a candidate. Nor are any of the people she's been squared off against, which is why mock elections are mostly meaningless. A CNN/*USA Today*/Gallup poll conducted in February of 2006—as far in advance of Election Day 2008 as the current polls are of Election Day 2016—reported Clinton's defeating six possible Democratic primary contenders, including John Kerry, Al Gore, John Edwards, and Biden. Barack Obama wasn't even in the field.

The apotheosis of Hillary Clinton is not inevitable. She is an accomplished diplomat, a seasoned campaigner, and a formidable fund-raiser. But she strikes many voters as disingenuous and perhaps unethical, concerns that will probably be aired again as some thirty thousand pages of documents from the Clinton presidential library are beginning to be made public—more than a year after legal restrictions on the release of Presidential records expired. (“Hillary should own the women's media,” a 1995 memo reads.)

Still, for the moment, Clinton's chances of winning the White House are better than any female candidate's have ever been, including her own. No office-seeker wants to run as a “female candidate.” But, just as Obama could hardly avoid running as a black man, Clinton doesn't have much

choice, except to steer clear of the topic, which, while tempting, would be a mistake. Obama's March, 2008, speech on race, placing his campaign within the “long march” of civil rights, helped him gain the nomination. Three months afterward, in her concession speech, Clinton said that, from that moment on, it would be “unremarkable to think that a woman can be the President.” That wasn't quite true, nor was it an especially good speech. For all her advocacy of women's rights around the world, Clinton doesn't seem any likelier, lately, to speak stirringly about the long march from Seneca Falls.

American women have fought for political equality against damnable objections. “It is difficult, of course, in contemplating the possibility of a female President of the United States, to disregard the physiological difficulties which stand in the way of such an Executive,” a New York newspaper remarked in 1872, when Victoria Woodhull became the first woman to run for the office. These difficulties included a “periodical functional incapacity for public business” (menstruation) and, should the President be married, “the pleasures and responsibilities incident” to women (pregnancy and nursing), unless she were to “have criminal recourse” to certain “expedients now too fashionable” (contraception and abortion).

Woodhull spent Election Day in prison, on trumped-up charges, and after Susan B. Anthony went to the polls to cast a ballot—on the theory that women had been enfranchised by the Fourteenth and the Fifteenth Amendments—she was arrested. Only after seven decades of suffrage marches, petitions, speeches, prison terms, and hunger strikes did women finally gain the right to vote. In the years following the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, in 1920, women began to enter elected office, but, long shut out of schools and jobs, most lacked the experience that was understood to qualify candidates.

In 1935, the year George Gallup



founded his company, a lawyer named Lillian D. Rock founded the League for a Woman President, with the goal of getting a woman elected by 1940. "During the next decade," F.D.R.'s secretary Louis Howe predicted, "not only the possibility but the advisability of electing a woman as President of the United States will become a very seriously argued question." It was seriously argued, but the only women to run in the nineteen-thirties and forties were Betty Boop, against Mr. Nobody; Gracie Allen, for the Surprise Party; Wonder Woman, "1000 years in the future"; and Olive Oyl, who promised, if elected, to "get a man for every gal."

In 1937, Gallup's pollsters began asking a question they have asked, in one form or another, ever since: "Would you vote for a woman for president?" The numbers have risen steadily: thirty-three per cent said yes in 1937, ninety-five per cent in 2012. But the question requires respondents to self-report on the kind of thing, like church attendance, that they tend to overstate. In 2005, Gallup asked a different question: Do you think most of your neighbors would vote for a woman for President? Thirty-four per cent said no.

Women don't make better politicians than men, or worse. They don't constitute a party or even an interest group. They ought to serve in equal numbers for the simple reason that one-half of the people ought not to be ruled by the other half. But in politics, as in much else, there exists what the political scientists Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox call an ambition gap: men are far more willing to run for office. Across all levels of

government, women have never held more than a quarter of elected offices, despite the efforts of organizations like Emily's List and the Susan B. Anthony List—the latter founded in 1992, the year that Bill Clinton said, of himself and his wife, "Buy one, get one free!" Between 2001 and 2011, the percentage of women interested in running for office actually dropped. One reason is that, in those Sarah-and-Hillary years, it became impossible to deny that female politicians face outrageously personal attacks little different from the sort of thing that was said in, oh, 1872. Recently, Democrats have raised a great deal of money in the wake of Republican attacks—for instance, after a conservative commentator called the Texas gubernatorial candidate Wendy Davis "Abortion Barbie." This climate makes it all the more remarkable that a record-breaking hundred and eighty-four women ran for Congress in 2012. A record number, eighty-nine, won.

Premature polls strengthen some of the most anti-democratic forces in American politics. In a year in which there happens to be a sizable cohort of women who could either run for President or test the waters, it would be too bad if the legacy of George Gallup held them back when, instead, the legacy of Lillian Rock might urge them on. In 2006, Gallup pollsters asked, "Do you think Hillary Clinton has already decided whether or not she will run for President in 2008?" More than two-thirds said yes. Most people think that she has already decided to run this time around, too. A better question is: who else will?

—Jill Lepore

## THE BOARDS PONY UP



Backstage at New York City Ballet on a recent afternoon, a Shetland pony waited to audition for the role of a donkey. The pony—short and broad, with pinto coloring that included a suggestion of eyeliner—was harnessed to a small open cart partly filled with plastic apples.

For more than thirty years, a donkey named Giorgio appeared in every New York City production of George Balanchine's "Union Jack." The ballet, on British themes, calls for two girls to be carried onto the stage in a cart, pulled by a donkey and led by a boy. The girls leap off and join a dance to the tune of "There Is a Tavern in the Town." The donkey waits; the girls climb back into the cart and ride off, and, a moment later, the stage is full of sailors. Giorgio, who lived in stables on West Forty-eighth Street, alongside other animals available for film and theatrical performances, last

performed in "Union Jack" in 2012.

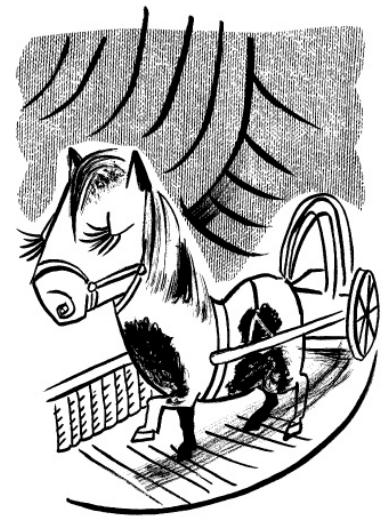
"We didn't know exactly how old Giorgio was, but we did know that he originated the ballet, in 1976," Marquerte Mehler, the company's production stage manager, said. She was waiting in the wings for Peter Martins, N.Y.C.B.'s chief ballet master, who would evaluate the pony. "Giorgio was very calm and relaxed, but slow," she said. "We sort of knew that it was the last time. A lot of people took pictures."

Giorgio died last May. And Mehler, explaining, "I am somehow responsible for arranging the donkeys," called Giorgio's stable to ask if there was another animal that could take his place. In January, a few hours before the season's first performance, Diego, a donkey, arrived for a dress rehearsal. "It didn't work out," Mehler said. "Diego entered O.K., but he would not leave the stage."

Martins—sixty-seven years old and lean, wearing a zip-up black sweater—now appeared at Mehler's side, and took up the story of this recent disappointment. "He went like this," Martins said, and, miming stubbornness, he bent at the waist, pushed against the edge of a desk, and held the position. "There were four

people pulling him," Martins recalled. Diego's two-minute appearance stretched to fifteen. His handlers eventually decided that the donkey would be able to leave the stage only by walking backward. "So he did a Michael Jackson," Martins said. "He moonwalked off the stage." To demonstrate, Martins moonwalked.

"I mean, I had to fire the goddam donkey. We couldn't take a chance.



Spanky

Because there's a whole dance happening"—he snapped his fingers—"right afterward, the whole stage filled with dancers, and you couldn't have a donkey standing there in the middle of it."

Diego returned to his stable. For that evening's performance, Martins gave the part of the donkey to Henry Clark, the nine-year-old boy whose job was to lead the donkey onto the stage.

"I said, 'Henry, let's see your biceps. Can you lift the cart?' He said, 'Sure, man.'"

Martins recalled that, in 1976, when he danced in the première of "Union Jack," his son, Nilas, led out the donkey.

"My son, who is now . . ."

"Forty-seven," Mehler said.

"Forty-seven. He was the original donkey boy. Balanchine said to me, 'I need a little boy who can take out the donkey, stand, do nothing while they dance, and then, at the right moment, walk off. Do you think he can do it?' I said, 'Fine.' My son was petrified. I have pictures. He's now forty-seven, and Giorgio is dead."

After Diego's failure, the stables, which had no other donkeys, sent Mehler head shots of two ponies, called Spanky and Hot-Diggity. Mehler and Martins chose Spanky, for being smaller and rounder.

And now Martins had the opportunity to watch Spanky onstage. A pianist played. Jenifer Ringer and Andrew Veyette, principal dancers, danced a music-hall kind of dance. Spanky was led on, with the girls; and then, at the right time, he was led off.

"Exactly right!" Martins said afterward. "Spanky's in. Everything's beautiful at the ballet. He got the part."

He added, "Truthfully, I would have been happy with Henry alone—the little boy—bringing the sisters on. And then we don't have to go through the goddamn nonsense."

"On the other hand," Mehler said.

"On the other hand, this was Balanchine's wish," Martins said. "So I thought, How can I make that decision? He wanted a donkey." He paused. "He got a horse."

When, three days later, Spanky appeared for the first time in front of a ballet audience, he stopped in the middle of the stage just long enough to let his passengers alight, and to perform an act as-

sociated with donkeys and ponies equally. He left the stage in a hurry; there was an unscheduled curtain drop, a public announcement—"Ladies and gentlemen, please let us take a minute to clean up our act"—and Hot-Diggity waited for a phone call.

—Ian Parker

## SECOND ACT DEPT. FIXER-UPPER



Sharon and Lawrence Tarantino bought their first and only house in 1988, in Millstone, just north of Princeton, New Jersey. It came with a leaky roof but a famous name attached to the blueprints—Frank Lloyd Wright—and the Tarantinos, who own an architectural studio, were smitten. They lined the living room with buckets until the roof got fixed, and imagined living there forever. "It's hard for me to talk about this," Lawrence said last month. He was giving a tour of the house, which he was now in the process of dismantling. If all went as planned, the house would soon be loaded onto three tractor-trailers and driven through Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and on to St. Louis, where it would head south, through the Ozarks, toward its new home: Bentonville, Arkansas. The Tarantinos would not be going with it, however, and Lawrence's voice cracked when he mentioned the recently removed dining-room table. "There's no crying in architecture," Sharon said, scolding her husband. "That's what we say."

The Tarantinos, now in their sixties, had little desire to move, let alone move their entire house, but nature had forced their hand. The house sits a hundred yards from the Millstone River, which offered a bucolic view when Wright designed the building, in 1954, but had since become a menace. "Hurricane Floyd was a little below that shelf," Lawrence said, pointing to a ledge six feet above the kitchen floor. "Irene was above the shelf." In their back yard, the Tarantinos had marked the level of each flood on several trees with red spray paint, like parents tracking the height of their children.

Fearing what the next storm might bring, the Tarantinos started looking for a buyer willing to move the house to safer ground. A modernist housing development in the Hamptons showed interest, as did an Italian architect, who considered moving the house to a town north of Florence where Wright had once fled with his mistress. Eventually, Sharon learned that Alice Walton, the Walmart heiress, who had recently opened Crystal Bridges, an art museum in Bentonville, had grown up in a house designed by Fay Jones, a Wright acolyte. Walton came to New Jersey for a tour and, in January, agreed to buy the house and make it a permanent exhibit on the museum's grounds.

By early February, the Tarantinos' living room was filled with the dispersed contents of several toolboxes, multiple sawhorses, and a roll of protective plastic wrap the size of a hay bale. The first-floor bathroom no longer had a door; instead, a sign near the doorway read, "No lookie, occupato."

The house was to be taken apart and put back together with the assistance of a booklet the Tarantinos were writing, which showed where each piece should be placed, as if the house were a Lego set. Sharon was dressed in her profession's uniform—rimless glasses, head-to-toe black. Lawrence wore jeans and work boots, having embraced the role of lead dismantler. "The first stage is the skin of the interior," he said, pointing to the Philippine-mahogany boards with which Wright had covered the walls. To remove the boards, he had fitted a saw with a thin blade to slice the nails attaching them to the wall; some required a crowbar. "If you pry too much, it could crack," he said, pointing to a board that had split in one corner. "It's very tedious work."

Next on the punch list: scaffolding to remove the high ceiling, which is lined with twenty-foot beams, and a temporary staircase large enough so that the bathtub could be conveyed downstairs. A concrete tower at the house's center would not be making the trip, but that meant finding a company in Arkansas capable of reproducing Wright's preferred blend of concrete. "The windows are going to be the most difficult," Lawrence said, of the ten-by-four-foot panes facing the river. One corner, consisting of three pieces put together in a zigzag

pattern, had proved especially vexing. "There's some kind of hard epoxy in there," Lawrence said. "We don't know how we're going to do that yet."

The trucks were to arrive in a matter of weeks, and, as inspiration in the face of such hurdles, the Tarantinos had hung a black-and-white photograph of the architect just off the living room. "He's watching over us," Sharon said. They had started to find consolation for the loss of their home in their role as preservationists. "We meet here every morning," Lawrence said. "We have our cappuccino, and then he tells us what to do next."

—Reeves Wiedeman

## DEPT. OF HOOPLA A WOMAN'S TALE



It is seventy-two miles as the crow flies from Lackawaxen, Pennsylvania (six hundred and forty-two residences), to the Diamond Horseshoe night club, on Forty-sixth Street, beneath the Paramount Hotel (five hundred and ninety-seven rooms). The other day, the filmmaker So Yong Kim, who lives in Lackawaxen, rode the train in, by way of Bard College, where she teaches, to attend a party

hosted by Miu Miu, Prada's little-sister label. Kim was to be the guest of honor.

Billy Rose, the showman and lyricist ("It's Only a Paper Moon"), opened the Diamond Horseshoe in 1938. Shortly thereafter, the *Times* called the club "the most zestful, gorgeous and lovable pleasure palace in town." Clark Gable, Gary Cooper, and Orson Welles were patrons; Gene Kelly contributed choreography for six-foot-plus chorus girls, who were billed as the Long-Stemmed American Beauties. The club closed in 1951; three years ago, the developer Aby Rosen bought the Paramount, and, since December, the Diamond Horseshoe has been the site of "Queen of the Night," an immersive dinner-theatre experience, with one-on-one knife-throwing demonstrations, suckling pigs on spits, and arty overhead acrobatics.

A few hours before the Miu Miu party began, Kim, a diminutive woman of forty-five, sat wedged into one of the club's velvet-upholstered booths. She had made "Spark and Light," an eleven-minute short film that was to premiere at the party, for the Miu Miu Women's Tales film series—"distinctive female filmmakers with different intellectual backgrounds explore the feminine love affair with Miu Miu," according to the brand's Web site.

"Lackawaxen has a tiny post office next to an A.T.M. machine and Two River Junction, which acts as the rifle and fishing-gear depot," Kim said. She was

wearing a flannel shirt, a striped sweater, jeans, scuffed boots, and a wool cap over her cropped hair. "We live in a cabin on this little plot of land, on the river," she said of herself, her husband, and their two daughters. "But there's a great Montessori school. It has chickens and sheep and a weaving class. If you want to get over your addiction to shopping, come over!"

Kim said that Miu Miu had approached her because the label wanted an Asian director for the seventh Women's Tale. Kim was born in Busan, South Korea, and moved to the U.S. when she was twelve. "They sent me pictures of the collection, and there are all these prints of cats and fish and birds that just felt like fairy-tale magic," Kim said. "They reminded me of old Japanese ink blocks." Did she make off with any free clothing? "No, because it's really beautiful and precious," she said. "Sometimes, I run out of the house with food all over me, so I try to just keep it clean." If she were to get any swag, she said, "I would probably hang it on the wall."

Behind her, a man practiced juggling white rings while balancing a red umbrella on his face. Another man, with a topknot, checked on trapezes that descended from the ceiling for acrobatic displays.

Kim is known for intimate, atmospheric films. The *Times* critic A. O. Scott included her in a piece on "Neo-Neo Realism"; of her 2008 film, "Treeless Mountain," about two Korean sisters left in the care of an alcoholic aunt, he noted "the accessibility of the story, the vividness of the emotions." In "For Ellen" (2012), Paul Dano plays a heavy-metal dude fighting for custody of his daughter.

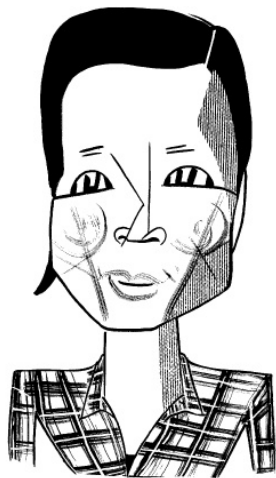
At around nine, guests began to arrive, making their way down a curved marble staircase, past a chandelier that appeared to have crash-landed, pausing to pose with a stuffed jaguar draped in jewels, then on to a bar that looked like a mad scientist's laboratory. Without introduction, the lights dimmed, and "Spark and Light" played: A young woman's car breaks down. The woman, played by Riley Keough, Elvis Presley's granddaughter, falls asleep waiting for a tow, and dreams that she has sought shelter in a strange house, full of warmth and Miu Miu chinoiserie-inspired patterns. There her mother, who in the real world is ailing, is well again. "I always



*"And that's when he realized he wasn't on the partner track at all!"*

think that if you're driving a car on an icy road then you're going to get stuck somewhere," Kim said.

"Too many twists," complained one partygoer, when the lights went back on. Waiters bearing cherry-marmalade foie-gras gougères were increasingly log-jammed by celebrities—Sarah Paulson, Zosia Mamet, Anna Kendrick, Hailee Steinfeld. One waitress counselled a col-



So Yong Kim

league, "I just say, 'Excuse me, or I am going to spill this on your coat.'"

Kim, dressed in Miu Miu—a long black coat with a jewelled collar over a black belted dress—and looking very clean, camped out in a booth with Paul Dano, on whose lap the actress Zoe Kazan was perched. A man snapped photographs of the singer Solange Knowles ("Oh, my God, I love her so much it hurts," he said), then spotted Kim and gasped. "That's the director! We've got to get a picture with her." Lackawaxen seemed like a dream.

—Emma Allen

## YO-HO-HO A PIRATE'S LIFE



Barry Clifford, the only person known to have recovered pirate treasure dating from the so-called golden age of piracy, around the turn of the eighteenth century, recently exhib-

ited a small selection on the second floor of the Explorers Club, on East Seventieth Street. "That's a syringe," he said, indicating a bratwurst-size pewter cylinder, which someone had guessed might be a bosun's whistle. "It was filled with tincture of mercury and was used to treat syphilis. Those are shoe buckles. Pieces of eight. A blunderbuss, still loaded. Cannonball. Broken porcelain. Pirates threw Ming vases overboard. My wife saw pieces in the water and said, 'Look at all the pretty blue-and-white clamshells!'"

Clifford found his first pirate ship, the *Whydah*, off Cape Cod, in 1984. It went down in a storm in 1717, and just eight of the hundred and eighty men aboard survived. (Two were defended in court by Cotton Mather, and were acquitted. The six others were hanged.) Clifford's main ongoing recovery effort is on and near Île Sainte-Marie, a slender island off the east coast of Madagascar. "We found Captain Kidd's ship *Adventure Galley* here," he said, pointing to a spot on a (modern, photocopied) map. "And we found the *Great Mahomet* right about here." At the site of the *Whydah*, a member of Clifford's crew uncovered a shoe, a stocking, and a leg bone, which Clifford, using primary sources, eventually identified as having belonged to the pirate John King, who at the time of his death was nine or ten years old. (The key piece of evidence was the shoe, roughly a size 6.) On another dive, Clifford disturbed a layer of silt above part of a wreck and was overwhelmed, through his face mask, by the smell of three-century-old pirate pee.

The event at the Explorers Club was a party to celebrate "Black Sails," a television series about pirates, on the Starz cable network. Clifford had just watched the first four episodes, twice, and he pronounced them not only dramatically compelling but also faithful to history. Minor exceptions included the condition of almost everyone's teeth. Jonathan Steinberg, a co-creator of the show, was standing near the bar. He said, "Pirates are a genre that everyone thinks is trodden-over and cliché, but, once you start reading the history and understanding what that world was like, you realize there's never been a story about those people as people who wake

up in the morning and have to do a job." Piracy, as a theme, also resonates in an interesting way with a TV genre that really has been trodden over: the Old West. "The rules for cowboys and pirates are identical," Steinberg continued, "because they're both on the edge of a civilization that can't police them. It's all the same stuff, except the pirates have ships." They also have sex, a narrative engine that hasn't always been available to television producers. (Imagine "Gunsmoke" with a naked Miss Kitty.)

At dinner, someone asked Clifford whether he kept pirate stuff just lying around his house, and he produced a three-hundred-and-twenty-year-old silver coin—a piece of eight—and passed it around the table. Hannah New, who plays Eleanor Guthrie, a beautiful and intermittently fully clothed fence for plundered cargo, asked the person sitting next to her to take a picture of her biting the coin, so that she could show her sister, a jeweller. Zach McGowan, who plays the pirate Charles Vane and was sitting directly across from New, rolled the coin over and under his fingers, a trick he'd taught himself for the show. His hair was pirate length, and he was wearing an earring and a belt with a skull buckle. "I've switched from whiskey to rum," he said.

After dessert and coffee, Richard Wiese, a former president of the Explorers Club, and also the youngest person ever to hold that position, who climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro when he was only a little older than John King was when he died, led an ascent to the club's trophy room, on the fifth floor. The room contains an elephant skull with two double tusks, the skin of a lion shot by Teddy Roosevelt, and a stuffed whale penis, among other treasures. Various guests asked to be photographed next to various treasures—mainly, the whale penis—and after that the party began to disperse. Down in the lobby, near the coat-check room, were several "Black Sails" press kits, which contained screeners of the first four episodes. The DVDs included repeated reminders of "a concern to all in our industry," and requested that viewers not sell or copy the recordings, and "return or destroy" each disk after viewing it. The concern? Piracy.

—David Owen

LETTER FROM CAIRO

## REVOLUTION ON TRIAL

*The strange world of the Muslim Brotherhood court cases.*

BY PETER HESSLER



*Former President Morsi stands trial in a featureless courtroom on the edge of the desert.*

The last two Presidents of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak and Mohamed Morsi, have both been tried on criminal charges, one after the other, in a converted lecture hall at the Cairo Police Academy. The academy is in the far eastern suburbs of the capital, near the summit of a long hill that rises from the Nile Valley into the desert. Beyond this area, the landscape is desolate—nothing but sand and rubble for seventy miles until the Suez Canal. The isolation is the reason that the trials have been held here. Ever since the Tahrir Square movement began, on January 25, 2011, Egypt has suffered from waves of instability, and the authorities fear that a trial involving a former President might become the target of protests or terrorist attacks. The Police Academy is well secured, with a high brick-and-concrete wall topped by metal spikes, razor wire, and towers with armed guards. Even if somebody were to breach this barrier, he'd still have to travel another half mile across the sprawling campus in order to

reach the building that hosts the trials.

The auditorium was converted for the Mubarak case. After the initial protests at Tahrir, Mubarak was forced to resign, in February of 2011, and later that summer he was put on trial for crimes that ranged from corruption to inciting violence. He was sentenced to life in prison, but his lawyers appealed, and the case is ongoing. In 2013, after Morsi was removed from office by the military, and charged with his own set of crimes, he was naturally tried in the same venue. But, after more than two years of Presidential trials, the courtroom lacks any marker of its new function or status. The judge and other officials sit at a long desk, and behind them a wood-paneled wall rises more than twenty feet high. This space is blank: no sign, no inscription, no national seal. There isn't an Egyptian flag anywhere in the room. Two crude metal cages have been installed in part of the auditorium, to hold the accused during hearings. The only words in the front of the room con-

sist of an engraving on the judge's desk: "Justice is the Foundation of Governing."

For a visitor who arrives in this featureless courtroom, having travelled to the edge of the desert, there's a strong impression of frontier justice. The court appears makeshift; the actors seem to improvise. There are no nameplates for the judge and other officials, and the various legal teams are not seated in defined areas. Most security personnel are not in uniform, and many of them chain-smoke. The auditorium's floor slopes steeply, which means that much of the audience and the accused look down on the judge. Nobody is allowed to bring a camera, an audio recorder, or a cell phone into the courtroom, and foreign journalists can't be accompanied by translators. Family members of the accused have been barred from attending. Ostensibly, these restrictions are for reasons of security, but they also serve to limit the material that gets out. All digital recordings are made and controlled by the state, which thus far has released only a few selected clips from Morsi's appearances.

In January, while the court was between sessions, Egypt celebrated the third anniversary of Tahrir. By now, it's hard to define the original event—whether it was a revolution or a coup, whether it's dead or alive. Egypt's new constitution, which was approved by more than ninety-eight per cent of voters in a referendum earlier this year, includes a preamble that describes the movement as the "January 25-June 30 Revolution." The second date refers to the nationwide protests against Morsi that were organized last year by a group that called itself Tamarrod—"Rebellion"—and which persuaded the military to step in. Since then, the security forces have engaged in an increasingly vicious crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood, the organization of which Morsi had been a leader, and a series of terrorist attacks have targeted police and military officers. Along the way, there's a sense that history is being revised. "I'm seeing a trend to eliminate the idea of January 25th," Hussein Gohar, one of the leaders of the Egyptian Social Democratic Party, told me recently. "Maybe in another hundred years people will read that there was a conspiracy to take power or divide Egypt, and then the military sorted it out. January 25th will cease to be the revolution, and

June 30th will become it. Unless there's a third wave."

If a third wave is to rise, its leaders will have to be very brave. Field Marshal Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, the Minister of Defense, who forced Morsi from office, is expected to become the next President. Since the coup, he has developed the image of a populist, drawing on the tradition of Gamal Abdel Nasser and other military leaders. In recent months, a number of activists who played a major role in the events of 2011 have been imprisoned. The only two political parties that managed to lead the country in the past decade have been banned. Of the ten or so candidates who were prominent in the early stages of Egypt's first democratic Presidential election, in the spring of 2012, three are now in prison, one is in exile, and another is dead. Not one is President. Since the beginning of the Arab Spring, Egypt has held seven national votes, but the country still does not have a single official at any level who was democratically elected.

The last Egyptian voted into office was Morsi, and after the coup he was not seen in public for four months. He was held at an undisclosed location, and then, in the first week of November, he reappeared in the makeshift courtroom at the Police Academy. Dressed in a dark suit without a tie—he had refused to wear the traditional all-white prison garb—he stood in one of the metal cages and shouted angrily at the judge. "This court, with all due respect to the members, does not have jurisdiction over the President of the Republic!" he yelled. "This coup is a crime and treason!" In the audience, a number of Egyptian journalists shouted back, "Death penalty! Death penalty!" Angry arguments broke out between groups of lawyers; at one point, a woman took off her shoe and tried to attack somebody from Morsi's legal team. The judge didn't have a gavel, and every time the chaos erupted he pounded the desk with the flat of his hand, like a substitute teacher on a bad day. After a couple of hours, he adjourned the session.

By the time of Morsi's second appearance, in the last week of January, a layer of soundproof glass had been added to the cages. Along with the former President, twenty-one other men were scheduled to be tried, most of them leaders of the

Brotherhood. When I walked into the courtroom, a security official was explaining the remodelling to a group of Egyptian journalists.

"There's a metal screen, and then there's glass," the official said, tapping the glass through one of the screens. "Then there are more metal bars behind that."

"How many layers of glass?"

"One only."

The journalists scribbled in their notebooks. Soon they stood up to watch while the twenty-one accused men, chanting political slogans, entered the larger of the two cages. The glass was effective—all we could hear was a muffled roar. The men turned and sat with their backs to the court, and they saluted with four fingers, the gesture that has come to represent Rabaa, the site of the sit-in where, last August, hundreds of Morsi supporters were massacred by security forces. In court, a few journalists responded by holding up two fingers in a victory symbol. Directly in front of me, a reporter with a shaved head stood with his pinkie and forefinger upraised, like a metalhead making the sign of the Devil. The rumble behind the glass grew louder, until a plainclothes security official—more than fifty had been posted around the room—came over and told the reporter to stop antagonizing the men.

"These are terrorists!" the reporter said. "I'm not afraid of terrorists!"

I was sitting next to the cage, and after a while Mohamed el-Beltagy, one of the accused, began gesturing to me through the bars. He had been the secretary of the Brotherhood's political party, and he was famous for fiery speeches. At times, he had been accused of inciting violence, and last July, after the coup, he made a notorious remark on camera about a recent series of terrorist attacks in the Sinai Peninsula. "We don't control everything on the ground, but what's happening in Sinai, as a response to this military coup, will stop the second Sisi announces that he has stepped back from this coup," Beltagy said. Many Egyptians believed that this statement meant that the Brotherhood was sponsoring terrorism, although there has been no evidence of this and the group has repeatedly condemned such acts. Nevertheless, in December the government officially designated the Brotherhood as a terrorist organization.

Over the years, I had seen Beltagy at a

number of events and, at the end of 2011, I interviewed him in his office. That was during the transition period after Tahrir, when the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, or SCAF, was running the country, and Beltagy was campaigning for a seat in the first post-revolution parliament. There were already signs of tension with the military, and I asked Beltagy if he believed that the authorities would allow the parliament to function if the Brotherhood won a majority. "Any attempt to turn the parliament into a façade—it's unacceptable," he said, and he emphasized that the military wouldn't fight on this point. "They can't go into conflict with the people," he said. "When there's pressure, they will respect it."

In the short term, Beltagy was right—he won the seat, the Brotherhood gained a majority in parliament, and Morsi took the Presidency. But the military was only one of many institutions that had long mistrusted the Brotherhood. The first parliament was soon dissolved by a court order, and then, in November of 2012, Morsi issued a Presidential decree that temporarily granted him powers beyond the reach of any court. He claimed that this was to prevent the judiciary from interfering in the drafting of a new constitution, but it also inspired protesters to hold a sit-in outside the Presidential Palace. The next day, the protesters were attacked by a well-organized group of Morsi supporters, who quickly cleared the site. As the evening continued, an escalating series of counterattacks left eleven people dead and more than seven hundred injured, with casualties sustained on both sides. Among the dead was El-Husseini Abu Deif, a thirty-three-year-old journalist, who had been shot at close range while filming the fight. Abu Deif had been a constant presence during Tahrir, and he was known to be critical of the Brotherhood; a number of his colleagues believed that he had been the victim of a targeted killing. It was one of many incidents that turned the private media strongly against the Brotherhood. At Morsi's first court appearance, some reporters carried pictures of Abu Deif, and civil lawyers representing the Journalists' Syndicate formally requested that Morsi be sentenced to death by hanging.

The atmosphere in the Police Academy courtroom also reflected long-standing tensions between the Brotherhood

and the judiciary. After Morsi's Presidential decree, in 2012, more than thirty Egyptian courts, including the nation's highest judicial body, went on strike. In response, Morsi rushed to hold a referendum on a new constitution, which included an amendment that would have forced the retirement of more than half the judges on the Supreme Constitutional Court. This clash with the judiciary continued to the end of his Presidency, and, since then, the violence had further hardened everybody involved. Beltagy's seventeen-year-old daughter, Asmaa, was killed at Rabaa. Like so many tragic events of the post-Tahrir period, Asmaa el-Beltagy's death has been the subject of conspiracy theories, although it has the distinction of being captured on video. There's a clip on YouTube: a young woman stands at the edge of a crowd, listening to a sheikh preach a sermon. The scene is calm; no shots are being fired, and nobody is running. And then the girl drops as suddenly as if she had lost all control of her legs. She was shot in the chest, apparently by a sniper; no bystanders were injured. There was speculation that Asmaa was targeted in revenge for her father's words and actions, including the role he allegedly played in organizing the attack at the Palace.

Asmaa el-Beltagy died on an operating table at a Rabaa field clinic, and there's a video of that, too. Even at the end, the pretty young woman is modestly covered in a red-patterned hijab, her face is pale, and she murmurs, "Ye Allah!" in a faint voice. Her eyes look calm. That YouTube clip has been viewed more than five hundred thousand times. No one has been charged with the crime.

In the courtroom, Beltagy caught my eye from inside the cage, and began to make a series of exaggerated gestures. We had met only once, so I was sure that he didn't recognize me, but he must have focussed on my face because there were no other foreigners nearby. He drew a hand across his mouth to show that he had been silenced. Then he patted his back and turned away from the judge—*boycott*. Clenched fists, crossed arms—*military*. Thumbs down, hands atop the shoulders—*oppression*. He repeated the gestures, smiling broadly. In an awful way, there was something clownish about the figure: dressed all in white, locked in a

soundproof cage, smiling and miming as if he were playing some twisted game of charades.

After a while, he jotted something on a piece of paper and held it up. A security officer quickly stepped over to block the view. In front of me, the Egyptian reporter with a shaved head took out a piece of paper and wrote two big capital letters, in English: "C C"—shorthand for Sisi. The reporter grinned at Beltagy and held the paper above his head, like a kid taunting a monkey at the zoo.

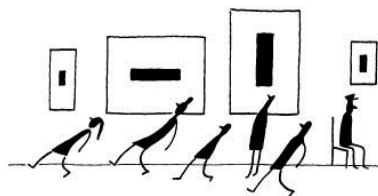
Just before eleven o'clock, Morsi appeared. This time, he had been forced to wear white, and he was escorted into the smaller cage, where he stood alone. Until now, the judge had not switched on the microphone that connected to the cages. He pushed a button on his desk, and for the first time we heard the voices of the accused men. They chanted:

Down, down with military rule!  
Down, down—

The judge hit the button again, and the room went quiet.

For the rest of the session, that was the pattern: the judge opened the mike, the men shouted, and almost immediately they were cut off. The first time Morsi was asked a question, he called out that he was the legitimate President of Egypt. "Who are you, man?" Morsi yelled.

"I am the president of Egypt's Criminal Courts," the judge said. His name was Shaaban al-Shamy, and he was a heavy-set, tough-looking man who seemed to



enjoy his power over the courtroom. After Beltagy refused to respond to a court request, the judge peered into the cage and said, "I can see you—why aren't you answering?" When a member of Morsi's defense team asked an aggressive question, the judge suggested in a deadpan voice that he might toss the lawyer into the cage.

Morsi and most of the others faced multiple charges, and today's hearing concerned a prison break that had occurred

during the first week of the revolution. The Tahrir protests had initially been against police brutality—January 25th is National Police Day—and, as the movement quickly gained momentum, the Mubarak regime arrested Morsi and other Brotherhood leaders on trumped-up charges. It was an old strategy: the government hoped to make the Brotherhood a scapegoat for the unrest. But this time it turned out to be an enormous miscalculation. In the beginning, the Brothers had not officially joined the Tahrir movement, a reluctance that later was held against them by other activists. But the arrest of the Brotherhood's leadership helped galvanize the group, and all members were instructed to join the Tahrir demonstration on January 28th. Their presence and discipline proved to be critical in the chaotic days that followed.

During that period, security forces often attacked demonstrators, and police stations and prisons became targets for angry mobs. Morsi and other Brotherhood leaders were held at the Wadi el-Natroun Prison, which is about sixty miles north of Cairo, on the desert highway that leads to Alexandria. On the evening of the twenty-eighth, men with automatic weapons and heavy construction machinery breached the prison walls and freed the inmates—more than eleven thousand. Casualties were low, because most of the officers had abandoned their posts. After Morsi escaped, he made an excited call by satellite phone to an Al Jazeera news channel, to explain that he and the other Brotherhood leaders were leaving because the jail had become dangerous. "I speak to the whole world!" he said. "We did not escape. If there is an Egyptian official who would like to contact us, we are here."

Morsi never made another public statement about the event. Hassan Karim, one of Beltagy's lawyers, told me that the prison break had been organized by relatives and friends of common criminals inside. In any case, Morsi's escape wasn't particularly unusual in the context of the revolution: many political prisoners, ranging from former parliamentarians to Salafi Islamists, were set free during the unrest. And Morsi had spent all of two days in Wadi el-Natroun.

But last June, while the Tamarrod campaign was building, stories about the prison break started to emerge. On

June 23rd, a week before the anti-Morsi demonstrations, a court in Ismailia ordered an investigation into the charge that some Brotherhood members had conspired with Hamas and Hezbollah to storm Wadi el-Natroun. The court didn't mention Morsi, but that week, when I visited the Tamarod headquarters near Tahrir Square, I noticed that somebody had decorated a wall with a picture of Morsi behind sketched-in bars. An inscription read, "Wanted: Escaped from Prison." At the time, it struck me as strange—there were many reasons for people to be unhappy with the President, but I had never heard anybody complain about the prison break.

Even now, there are other charges that seem more plausible. Morsi and Brotherhood leaders have been accused of inciting violence during the Palace protests, where some of the evidence was collected by respected lawyers and human-rights activists who began working on the case as events unfolded. Ragia Omran, a coordinator for the Front to Defend Egypt's Protesters, and a recent recipient of the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award, has filed one case on behalf of some of the forty-nine citizens who were wrongfully detained and interrogated, and, in many instances, tortured. She told me that there is strong evidence that some Brotherhood members directed the detentions and interrogations.

But the case regarding the prison break seems absurd. In court, the trial began with an official reading a twenty-three-minute statement that claimed that eight hundred members of Hamas and Hezbollah helped coordinate the attack on the prison, after entering Egypt illegally. In addition to Morsi and the other Egyptians, more than seventy Palestinians were being tried in absentia, and all of them had been charged with "carrying out a plot to bring down the Egyptian state and its institutions." (They were also accused of stealing chickens from the prison storehouse.) Hamas and Hezbollah have issued statements strongly denying the foreigners' involvement. One of the accused, Hassan Salama, has been in an Israeli prison since 1996. Another Palestinian, Shady El-Sanea, had been dead for more than two years by the time he allegedly helped organize the prison break—he was killed on the first day of the Gaza War, in 2008. But such abuse of history seems



*"I should warn you, I'm expecting a call."*

almost the point. The case undermines the narrative of Tahrir as a home-grown movement, and links the Brotherhood to foreign agents. In effect, the state is trying to do what it failed to do three years ago: to pin the chaos of the revolution on the Brotherhood.

Near the end of the court session, Beltagy began shouting and pounding on the cage, and the judge pressed the button. "We want to talk!" Beltagy said loudly. "We have demands! We are deprived here! This is political revenge!" He continued, "So if there were eight hundred Hamas and Hezbollah members who crossed the border and came from Sinai to Cairo, and caused all of this to happen, then was it a revolution or was it a military occupation?"

The prosecution's lawyer said calmly, "By responding to the allegations, Beltagy is acknowledging the case." The judge hit the button—silence—and a number of journalists applauded. But now Beltagy was enraged. He ran to the front of the cage and climbed up the metal bars, to get closer to the microphone that was set into the ceiling. The cage rattled; Beltagy was yelling to have the mike turned on. Finally the judge pressed the button.

"From January 25th to January 30th, was that a revolution or a military occupation?" Beltagy shouted.

"I don't talk about politics," the judge said.

"This isn't politics!"

They went back and forth a few times,

until the judge hit the button once more. There was laughter in the audience when he made a gesture like a man brushing away a fly.

On January 25th, the third anniversary of Tahrir, I went to the Mustafa Mahmoud Mosque, in the Cairo neighborhood of Mohandiseen. Since 2011, the square in front of the mosque has been a popular starting point for marches that continue across the Nile to Tahrir. But this also means that security forces have established a more or less permanent presence near the mosque. When I arrived, police officers with weapons had been stationed all around the square, and more than a dozen armored personnel carriers had been parked at key intersections. Soldiers in desert camouflage sat atop the A.P.C. turrets, rifles in hand, watching protesters arrive.

By one o'clock, a few hundred people had gathered in the square, and they began to chant. But they were splintered into different groups. One pro-Morsi faction shouted, "Down with military rule!" and "The people want to overthrow the regime!" Nearby, members of the activist groups April 6 and the Revolutionary Socialists began to chant against the military and the Brotherhood—"The revolution continues!" was one of their calls. Others stood silent on the peripheries. I struck up a conversation with a pair of young bystanders; one was a computer

programmer named Hisham, who lived nearby. He and his friend had come to watch the protest. “I’m not going to participate,” Hisham told me. “But I’m sympathetic.”

He told me that he had voted for Morsi. “I regret it,” he said. “He was a bad President. But he shouldn’t have been removed that way.” He continued, “Morsi is finished—I want something different. But not this military rule.”

I asked what the alternatives might be, but, before he could answer, shooting broke out. Later, some Cairo newspapers reported that Brotherhood supporters had antagonized soldiers by flashing the Rabaa symbol. One paper claimed that a protester fired the first shot, but I saw no weapons in the crowd. They had been chanting for all of ten minutes. And there was no warning—the troops didn’t advance their positions, and nobody got on a loudspeaker and called for the square to be cleared. There wasn’t even an initial volley. The gunfire came in a cascade; most of it was bird shot, but there was also the roar of Kalashnikovs and the heavy percussion of assault rifles launching tear-gas canisters. People began screaming, and Hisham shouted, “Run!”

The security forces seemed to be aiming above our heads. I was running with the crowd, away from the square, and I looked to my left and saw a soldier on an A.P.C. firing his weapon into the sky. This is usually the pattern at protests that end in gunfire, but in a number of instances security forces have lowered their weapons and killed people. I was running on a bad foot—I had injured a ligament a few weeks before—and I slowed to a walk once I thought we were out of range. But then I heard bird shot ripping through the leaves of a tree overhead, so I started running again. I turned down the first side street where troops weren’t stationed. A protester staggered down the middle of the road, bleeding from the head—he must have been hit by bird shot. Some locals stood near the entrance of a building, and I asked them if I could sit down.

“Get out of here!” one man said angrily. “Why do you Brotherhood people come here and cause trouble?”

I told him that I was a journalist and that my foot was injured, but the man pushed me in the chest. “Get out!” he said.

The others didn’t look happy—tradi-

## MY LIFE WAS THE SIZE OF MY LIFE

My life was the size of my life.  
Its rooms were room-sized,  
its soul was the size of a soul.  
In its background, mitochondria hummed,  
above it sun, clouds, snow,  
the transit of stars and planets.  
It rode elevators, bullet trains,  
various airplanes, a donkey.  
It wore socks, shirts, its own ears and nose.  
It ate, it slept, it opened  
and closed its hands, its windows.  
Others, I know, had lives larger.  
Others, I know, had lives shorter.  
The depth of lives, too, is different.  
There were times my life and I made jokes together.  
There were times we made bread.  
Once, I grew moody and distant.  
I told my life I would like some time,  
I would like to try seeing others.  
In a week, my empty suitcase and I returned.  
I was hungry, then, and my life,  
my life, too, was hungry, we could not keep  
our hands off our clothes on our tongues from

—Jane Hirshfield

tionally, Egyptians don’t respond this way to a foreigner who is alone and hurt. But nobody said anything as I limped away. In the past year, there have been a number of shootings in Mohandiseen, including fatalities, and locals were clearly traumatized. It’s a modern, middle-class neighborhood—the name means “engineers”—and violence feels shocking in such a place. But the worst fighting in Cairo tends to occur in relatively affluent areas. All of Egypt’s political disturbances, from Tahrir to Tamarrod to the current round, have been led by members of the intelligentsia and the middle class, which is common in any revolution. The Brotherhood’s leadership is dominated by engineers, doctors, and scientists, while many young liberal activists come from elite families. The military is a staunchly middle-class institution. One of the great ironies of today’s Cairo is that the best way to avoid political violence is to go to the *ashwa’iyet*—the slums. Residents there enjoy talking about politics, like most Egyptians these days, but after three years of instability they are rarely very inspired or active. The slums are also poorly

policed, which, in the post-coup climate, is perversely reassuring. The most dangerous thing you can do in Egypt these days is stand around a police station. Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, the Sinai-based group that has claimed responsibility for the biggest recent terrorist attacks, has repeatedly issued warnings to citizens to stay away from police stations and military sites. The day before the anniversary of Tahrir, the group detonated a car bomb that destroyed the façade of the police directorate in eastern Cairo. The attack had been scheduled for six-thirty on a weekend morning, apparently to reduce civilian casualties. (Four people died, and dozens were injured.) The explosion was so powerful that it rattled the windows of my apartment, more than three miles away.

After the protest in Mohandiseen, I limped down the street until I met a friendly banker and a retired military engineer who let me sit next to their building. The banker brought me a chair and a glass of water, and I sat and waited for the shooting to die down. Both men spoke good English; the engineer had

spent some time in Fort Worth. It was the kind of conversation that I often had with educated Cairenes, except that today we were interrupted periodically by volleys of gunfire. The police were pursuing protesters down the side streets, arresting them under a new law that prohibits demonstrations without prior approval.

The conversation turned to China, where I used to live. I mentioned that, in spite of the heavy-handed things that the Communists did, at least they had responded to the Tiananmen Square massacre by training security officials in the use of nonviolent methods to disperse the thousands of demonstrations that occur every year. “Nothing has changed here,” the banker said, looking disgusted. If anything, it had got worse—I had never attended a protest that was set upon so quickly and so violently. Later, when I contacted Hisham, I learned that his companion had fallen and broken his foot while trying to flee, and they had seen several people who had been shot. There were dozens of arrests and at least one death. And yet Mohandiseen barely made the news. Across Egypt, more than sixty people died in political violence on January 25th, and by now it was hard to claim that this anniversary commemorated the beginning of a real revolution. It still felt like Police Day.

The general mood among Cairenes who were active in Tahrir is that this is the lowest point since the start of the Arab Spring. But most still believe that the revolution is ongoing, and they take heart from the fact that, if nothing else, vast numbers of Egyptians have become politically aware and engaged. And this is true—people all over the country discuss politics with an openness that wasn’t possible under Mubarak, and they have gained confidence from the experience of removing two unpopular leaders through mass protests. But the longer I live in Egypt the warier I am of this surge into political life. Observers tend to focus on inspiring examples: the young activist who wants freedom, the uneducated slum dweller who joins a march in the name of social justice. The truth is that these elements can’t be separated from other trends that are less encouraging. The climate that creates politicized activists also creates a politicized judiciary, a politicized police force, and a politicized military. It

means that a religious organization like the Brotherhood attempts to seize control of the country. It means that the Pope of the Coptic Church and the Grand Imam of the Al Azhar Mosque stand onstage with Sisi when he announces the removal of an elected President. It means that supposedly impartial journalists shout “Death penalty!” at a man in a cage.

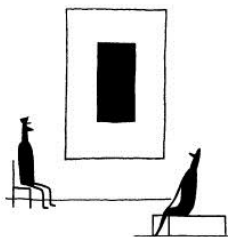
In the late nineteen-sixties, Samuel P. Huntington, the American political scientist, who wrote “Political Order in Changing Societies,” characterized such a situation as “praetorian”—a fundamentally unstable state in which “participation in politics has outrun the institutionalization of politics.” When a weak state lacks established political parties and other institutions that handle the give-and-take of governance, the result is a series of clumsy maneuvers by ill-prepared players. In Huntington’s view, there’s no essential difference between students taking to the streets, a court cancelling a parliament, and a military staging a coup. (“Each social force attempts to secure its objectives through the resources and tactics in which it is strongest.”) In this regard, Egypt’s challenge is especially great, because two of the most powerful forces, the military and the Islamists, have always been suspicious of formal politics and parties. The same is true of many activists. In June of last year, when Tamarrod was preparing its protest, organizers were adamant that they had no interest in traditional politics. “There should be no parties,” Karim el-Masry, a twenty-seven-year-old lawyer who was one of the Tamarrod leaders, told me the week before the protest. “We’re just Egyptians. We don’t want to divide the country.”

At times, the act of following Egyptian politics seems almost cruel—it’s like watching a lightning-fast sport played very badly, with every mistake reviewed in excruciating slow motion. When I sat in the Police Academy courtroom, and looked into the cage, I recognized men and remembered conversations that made me wince. There was Hazem Farouk Mansour—in 2011, when he was running for parliament, I mentioned to him that some people distrusted the Brotherhood. “You are right to think like that,” he told me. “We have been underground for

eighty years. When I speak to you now and I am under the light, then you can know me well.” Now he was sitting in the cage near Sobhi Saleh, who had been having his shoes shined in the members’ lounge of the Egyptian parliament when I last talked with him. That was mid-March of 2012, when the Brotherhood still claimed that it wouldn’t field a Presidential candidate, in order to demonstrate a willingness to share power. I had asked Saleh if the Brothers might change their minds. “Never,” he said. “Never. We will not nominate somebody.” Eight days later, when I posed the same question to Rashad El-Bayoumi, one of the members of the Brotherhood’s Guidance Bureau, the message had shifted. “We said that we may be obligated, or that things can push us to run for the Presidency,” Bayoumi told me. Later that week, the Brothers officially entered the race, and in May I attended a Morsi rally in Ismailia. A Salafi preacher named Safwat Hegazy warmed up the crowd. “As for the fears that the Brothers want to take over the government—” Hegazy said, pausing for effect. “Yes, we do want everything! We want the parliament! We want the President! We want the cabinet and the ministries!” He shouted, “The majority should have power! The minority opinions are not allowed to argue!” Now this scourge of minority rights was locked in the sound-proof cage, along with Bayoumi and all the rest.

There are signs of hubris with Sisi, too. After the coup, even Egyptian liberals tended to be supportive, in part because they believed that Sisi had no plan to seek the top office. But something changed toward the end of last year. Since Morsi’s removal, it’s been easier to track such trends on the street, because both the private and the state media have sounded essentially the same notes, which are then

echoed by the public. At the beginning of winter, I started having a wide range of conversations in which people mentioned the same fact: that President Dwight D. Eisenhower had formerly been a general, so there was a precedent for a military leader’s being elected to the top office in a democracy. Usually, I said something to the effect that the



American analogy wasn't perfect—for one thing, Ike hadn't tossed Harry S. into a cage—but the talk shows seemed to be pushing this idea.

I suspected that Sisi hadn't originally planned to become President, just as I suspected that the Brotherhood hadn't originally planned to field a candidate. But when a country suffers a lack of political authority, the vacuum at the top sucks in anybody who draws close. And leaders feed off the crowd as much as they direct it. During Morsi's year in office, as he made dangerous enemies of key institutions, he periodically called on supporters to demonstrate in the streets, as if this would give him the legitimacy to continue. For months, Sisi has been gauging the public mood in similar ways. "If I nominate myself, there must be a popular demand," he said, in early January. It was made clear to the Egyptian people that, if they turned out in high numbers and voted for the new constitution, they were encouraging Sisi to run.

Many seem to think that this dynamic is democratic. When the Brotherhood was in office, its members talked obsessively about "the ballot box," using their electoral success to justify any action. After the Army removed Morsi, it released footage and estimated numbers of Tamarrod protesters, to show that it was following the people's will. But leaders are also tempted to tap into the worst instincts of the mob. The decision to clear Rabaa probably had much to do with public pressure—the six-week-long sit-in was held in a middle-class area whose residents had been furious about the disruption. Afterward, these people, many of whom had witnessed the terrible bloodshed firsthand, tended to be the biggest apologists for the massacre.

In such a climate, it's hard for fledgling political organizations to mature. Eight months after the Tamarrod protests, when I again talked to Karim el-Masry, he spoke vaguely about the group's plans to eventually form a political party. "We emerged from the street," he said. "We emerged from the people. Wherever they go, we are part of them." I asked for details about the party's future goals and principles, but he said that the direction had to come from the grass roots. "Whatever the people choose, whatever they want, we will do," he said.

For leaders who try to harness the en-

ergy on the streets, the task is all but impossible, because of the volatility of public opinion. Last spring, support for the Brotherhood vanished so quickly that many of its leaders didn't seem to realize what was happening. Although Sisi is by far the most popular figure in the country, I already sense a slight dip in enthusiasm. The country's economic problems are severe and getting worse; last week, the Prime Minister and his cabinet resigned, partly in response to a series of strikes by government workers. At this point, Sisi's value lies entirely in his popularity—he's not a general who won a war, or a politician who succeeded in a previous office. It's remarkable how little is known about the man. He has yet to announce his candidacy, and he has given no details about policy plans or economic ideas. Politically speaking, he remains as featureless as the desert outside the capital. He has arrived atop the crowds, and the crowds will determine whether he stays. "Here people really have a role," Ahmed Ragab, a young investigative reporter at *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, one of the country's most influential private newspapers, told me. "Even the leaders fear the people, so the leaders have to feed that fear."

Ragab believed that the charges against Morsi and other Brotherhood leaders were so ridiculous, in part, to give the state some flexibility. He explained that in the future, if the political winds change and the authorities decide to reconcile with the Brotherhood, the cases can easily be thrown out of court. In the meantime, though, the public mood is crucial. "You know what toppled Morsi—it wasn't just the Army," Ragab said. "It was also the people. Sisi knows very well that if he becomes President tomorrow, and the people come out in the streets again, there will be another coup, from another part of the Army." But he didn't mention the other possibility—that, when a President is backed by both the military and the police, a widespread protest could end like Rabaa rather than like Tahrir.

**I**n the Police Academy courtroom, the soundproofing of the cages quickly became a focal point for the defense team. During Morsi's third appearance in court, his lead lawyer withdrew the defense team in protest, cutting the session short. At the next hearing, another defense lawyer

stood up and requested that the trial be delayed until his legal team and its clients were able to learn sign language, so they could communicate. (The judge rolled his eyes—request denied.)

On the second day of the trial, there had been a break for midday prayer, and I walked over to the front of the cage that faced the gallery. I talked with Beltagy's lawyer, who told me that the soundproofing was both illegal and unprecedented. I mentioned this to an Egyptian television journalist, who shook her head. "There is nothing in the law that says they can't do this," she told me, in perfect English. "And this is not the first time that glass has been put in a cage like this. They've done it in Turkey." (Not yet, it turned out—though later that same week another soundproof cage was used in a court in Azerbaijan.)

During the break, a man in a blue worker's uniform came over and studied the cage. He stood out among the crowd of suits and ties and black legal robes—he was short, bald, and middle-aged, and his company name was stitched onto an oval patch on his breast. "You can see how they installed this, between the wires," he told me, touching the glass. "And, up there, they joined it." I asked him if he was there to fix it.

"Of course not," he said. "I'm the air-conditioner repairman."

I asked what was wrong with the air-conditioning.

"Oh, there's no problem!" he said, looking surprised. "It's not even on."

This made sense—it was the last week in January. So why was he here? The court had banned cameras, voice recorders, and cell phones; the relatives of the accused weren't allowed to attend; very few members of the foreign press had shown up. And yet the midwinter air-conditioner repairman was mingling with Egyptian journalists and Islamist lawyers. I figured I might as well get his opinion on the soundproof cage.

"I don't think it's right," he said. "They should be able to speak, right?"

When the trial resumed, he took a seat in front of me. He sat there for the next two hours, listening intently. I never figured out why he had come, but I liked having him there in the journalists' section. I had a feeling that, where Egypt was going, it needed all the good judgment it could get. ♦

# ALEC BALDWIN'S PRESCHOOL REPORT CARD

BY PAUL RUDNICK

## STUDENT EVALUATION

From Miss Kelli Schoopheimer  
Massapequa Elementary School

### Hygiene

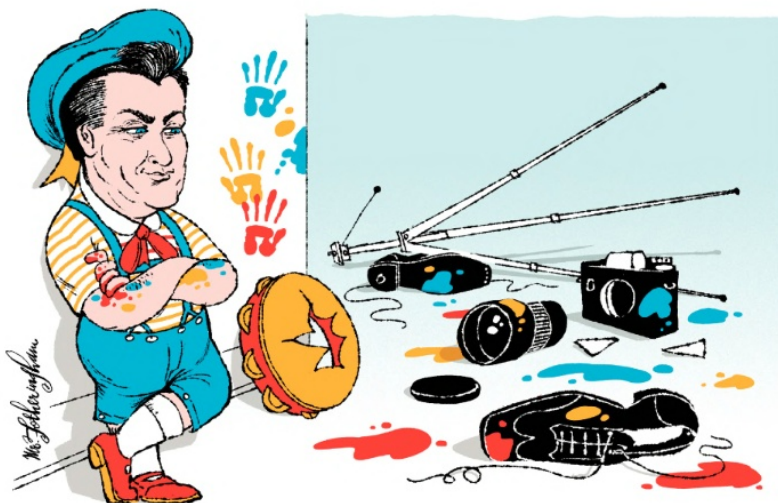
As Alec's teacher, I can report that Alec pays careful attention to his personal cleanliness and grooming, especially regarding his hair, which he has repeatedly asked me to touch. For October's show-and-tell, Alec brought in what he referred

who's gonna end up living in a trailer with his fat wife and their eight fat kids."

After I spoke with Alec about his response, he apologized to Jimmy and added, "Jimmy, I bet someday you're gonna have a totally hot wife, and I'm gonna be all over that."

### Study Habits

Alec was one of my very first students to learn the entire alphabet, although he



to as his "steely blue eyes." He stood in front of the entire class in silence for three minutes, and then asked, in his already surprisingly deep and raspy voice, "Am I turning you on?" All the other children, including the boys, raised their hands. After another long pause, Alec smiled and said, "I thought so."

### Playing Habits

Alec is a generous and caring playmate, although during one game of tag, at recess, he claimed that Jimmy Peterson had not, in fact, tagged him, and Alec asked me to call in both a police officer and an attorney. "Jimmy was nowhere near me," Alec insisted, "and he knows it. Jimmy is a fucking little candy-ass liar

said that "only right-wing morons" would ever need all the letters. He has recently begun reading the *Times* Op-Ed page aloud to his classmates, during which he occasionally rolls his eyes, snorts, and mutters, "Man, this is such a pantload of liberal whining. Just like you, Amanda, when you keep saying, 'I love my Raggedy Ann doll, because she has curly red hair and freckles, just like me.' Yeah, and you better start dating each other, because that's where it's going."

When I asked Alec to choose his words more carefully, he insisted that he admired both Amanda and her Raggedy Ann doll for their honest relationship, and added, "I hope they go for it. And I'd be open to a three-way."

## Making Friends

Alec is a popular and charismatic child, and in January he ran for class president, and gave a campaign speech in which he called for less nap time, ten additional buckets of Legos, and more raisins in the class's morning Dixie cups of Raisin Bran. In his speech, he asked, "What is this with only five fucking raisins and all that goddam bran? Where are we, North Korea? Sorry, Su-Chin. What? You're not Korean? I'm sorry, we should talk about that. But no wonder you can't add."

Alec lost the election by one vote, to Su-Chin. Alec then announced that the election had been rigged and that he'd decided to go into acting instead, and just last month he played the title role in our class play, "The Happy Little Bunny." But Alec decided that the original script was too lightweight, so he rewrote it, using the title "The Little Bunny Who Struggled with Impulse Control and in June Is So Fucking Out of Here."

## Special Gifts

In addition to acting and politics, Alec has demonstrated a knack for finger painting, playing the tambourine, and kickboxing. Sadly, he sometimes combines these aptitudes. When the school photographer arrived to take our annual class picture, Alec threw paint on him, broke a tambourine over his head, and kicked him in the groin, claiming that the photographer had invaded his personal space and had also shot him from the wrong side. "I told him to come in from the right," Alec explained, "because that's my hero side, and not from the left, which makes me look like a goddam five-year-old."

When I reminded him that he was, in fact, a five-year-old, Alec pointed to some early silver strands in his thick, dark hair. "You see these?" he asked me. "Do you know how I got these? From no raisins, a photographer who doesn't respect me, and the fact that you won't go out with me. Sure, I'm five and you're, what, thirty? But I've seen your little punk-ass assistant-vice-principal fiancé, and he's never gonna make principal and you know it. Come on, Kelli. A bitch needs a Baldwin."

While Alec was rude, disgusting, and completely inappropriate, and I considered recommending him for suspension or even expulsion, could I really say that he was wrong? ♦

## HIT MAKER

*Can boxing be made to look believable on Broadway?*

BY JOAN ACOCELLA



In the upstairs lobby of the Winter Garden Theatre, a few Fridays ago, two men were beating each other up. Or not exactly. They were rehearsing the fight that comes at the end of “Rocky,” a musical that is scheduled to open on March 13th. The show was inspired by Sylvester Stallone’s 1976 movie, “Rocky,” which tells of Rocky Balboa, a going-nowhere semi-pro boxer who lives next to an El in North Philadelphia and makes his living as a collector for a loan shark. By a fluke, Rocky is challenged to an exhibition fight with the world heavyweight champion, Apollo Creed, also known as the Master of Disaster. Written by and starring Stallone,

“Rocky” was nominated for ten Oscars and won three, including Best Picture. The scene at the end of his training, in which he runs up the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art and dances a triumphal little jig at the top, has become a sort of cultural icon. (The city’s commerce director said that Stallone had done more for Philadelphia than anyone since Benjamin Franklin.) “Rocky” went on to have five sequels. The movies have earned more than a billion dollars at the box office.

It is no surprise, then, that “Rocky” has once again been reborn, this time as a musical. It has a book by Stallone and Thomas Meehan, direction by Alex

Timbers (“Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson,” “Peter and the Starcatcher”), music by Stephen Flaherty, lyrics by Lynn Ahrens, and choreography by Steven Hoggett and by Kelly Devine. The two men assaulting each other in the Winter Garden lobby were Terence Archie, a large, splendidly built man, who plays Apollo, and Andy Karl (“Wicked,” “Jersey Boys”)—who is smaller than Archie, as is appropriate to the story, but also a fine specimen—as Rocky.

As they went at each other, Patrick McCollum, the associate fight choreographer, hovered on the sidelines, calling out counts: one through eight, over and over. Standing next to McCollum, and issuing instructions, corrections, and compliments, was Hoggett, a forty-two-year-old Englishman who has big ears and bright eyes—he looks like an alert animal—and dresses like a stage-hand. Though he is listed in the program as a choreographer, he is actually a “movement director,” and he is the person who designed the fight. Movement directors have probably been at work in the theatre since Periclean Athens. In any case, they now have a name, and they are there to make movement more expressive, suggestive, symbolic.

In the fight that Hoggett created for “Rocky,” Karl looks down much of the time—an expression of Rocky’s underdog position. Archie, as Apollo, has his face up, to the light. He is vainglorious, sure that he will knock Rocky out. He’ll soon discover otherwise. So the characters’ bearing, as much as their more pronounced actions—and their words—creates the drama. To make that happen, the director, the actor, and the movement director (if there is one) collaborate. Asked if this doesn’t represent a poaching on the director’s prerogatives, Hoggett says that things aren’t that way anymore. The process is more fluid. “I don’t think I know any directors, of my generation, who still work in that old style, where it’s all blocked, and this actor goes there and that one walks past the samovar.”

In “Rocky,” Hoggett had an additional task. He had to design a fight that, to people not involved in the profession, would look more or less like the real thing. And unlike filmed boxing, where the cameras can do a lot for you, his fight had to look real from right,

*The movement director Steven Hoggett with the stars of the musical “Rocky.”*

left, and center: everywhere the audience would be. Therefore the men did have to hit each other, but without hurting each other. This is possible, Hoggett says, because boxing is concentrated, enclosed: "It's not like a field-hockey game, where the ball can fly in from anywhere and hit you. Boxing's just you and one other person." So you can control what happens. "Mike Tyson would go for this part of your nose," Hoggett said, touching the tip of his nose. "What he wants is to drive this part of your nose bone into your brain." To do that, a boxer has to use the element of surprise.

Accordingly, Hoggett eliminated surprise, by designing every move of the sixteen-minute fight and getting the boxer-actors to memorize the entire scenario. That way, they knew at all times what was coming, and could mount an effective defense. "On counts seven and eight in Round 1," Hoggett said to Andy Karl, during the rehearsal, "you need to prepare these ribs here, because this is where you'll get two hooks to the left rib, and then you're going to return with a hook." And Karl could immediately call up in his mind what happens on counts seven and eight of Round 1. This is not too different from dance, and Hoggett says so: "Boxing is a duet." (Or, he corrects himself, a trio. He thinks that many referees move so interestingly, and also so expertly, that they are part of the dance.) But, in the matter of counting, dance is easier, because the counts are being sounded out to the cast by the music. In "Rocky," the actors have to have it all in their heads.

Are the men *never* injured? Andy Karl answered reluctantly that he once got a black eye, but that was at the start of rehearsals. Plus, the gloves weren't sewn quite right. Terence Archie said that he has had no injuries in these New York rehearsals, which makes sense, because he had played Apollo in Hamburg, where the show opened. According to Patrick McCollum, the problem isn't really injuries: "Getting hit in this fight is like getting hit by a Nerf football. That doesn't sound so bad, but if it goes on, without stopping, for sixteen minutes, it can be pretty bad."

While Apollo and Rocky are punching each other, they have to continue acting. Prior to the fight, Hoggett says,

"you've had an hour and forty minutes of watching a character, Rocky. Now, when he steps into the ring, we need to follow that character through to the end." He added, "So I've got to pick up every storytelling device we've used—song, staging, text, acting, the whole thing—and make sure Andy takes those elements and moves them forward rather than just treating the episode as a boxing event. It's actually a character arc, for him and for Apollo."

Hoggett believes that the only medium in which he's truly happy is physical narrative: "I don't really have a skill set to make work based on just an aesthetic. And technique is something that I can see, but I wouldn't know how to put any two purely technical moves together. I always want a story."

Hoggett was born in 1971 in Huddersfield, a grim industrial town, as he describes it, in West Yorkshire. His father started as a carpenter and ended at a desk job. Hoggett went to Swansea University, in Wales, where, hoping to become a journalist, he studied English literature. One night, a friend had an extra ticket to a production of Tony Harrison's "Medea: Sexwar," by Volcano, a physical-theatre company that was popular in Britain at that time.

"Physical theatre" is a term that is hard to define, because it covers a wide span. "Is there any kind of theatre that isn't physical?" Hoggett asks. "Unless you're in a Beckett play, the chances are you'll move." But, at various times, Western playwrights and directors have taken a special interest in movement—heavily designed, forceful movement—as a carrier of meaning on a par with, or even more important than, the script. The last few decades of the twentieth century were such a period. In America, one might point to the Living Theatre, but even that uninhibited collective did not consistently use the aggression, even the violence—one character beating up on another—that, to many, is a basic ingredient of physical theatre. A purer instance would be the German choreographer Pina Bausch, who got her dancers to throw one another into walls and spit at one another.

An even better example would be the group of British companies, including

Volcano, DV8, and others, which actually called themselves physical theatre. According to Scott Graham, a schoolmate of Hoggett's who worked with him for many years, the sort of fury that these companies dealt in fit into the culture-clash politics of the nineteen-eighties and nineties. I saw DV8 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 1988. Watching the dancers hurl themselves at one another and trip and punch one another (their name is a pun), I myself felt bruised.

Volcano was the same way, Hoggett says: "It was incredible just watching that explosive energy that they generated, for maybe an hour and ten minutes. I felt quite frightened by it. I'd been to the theatre maybe four times before this, to see something with school, like a 'Romeo and Juliet,' and there might be a sword fight. But these guys were tearing into each other. I remember a woman being kicked all the way around the stage." The Volcano actors did not replace the play's text with movement, Hoggett says. They kept the script, but "they forced it to surrender." Hoggett decided that this was what he wanted to do in life. So did a number of his friends.

In his last year of university, Hoggett worked at a fruit-and-vegetable stall, and in a bingo hall: "It was all women, all over sixty-five, all smokers." After he graduated, he joined Volcano for a year, while waiting for his friends to finish university. Then, in 1994, he, Graham, and another physical-theatre devotee, Vicki Middleton, founded a company that they eventually called Frantic Assembly. They started with four performers: Graham, Hoggett, and two women, also from Swansea. They got a telephone, and installed it in Hoggett's room. Middleton booked the tours.

On video, Frantic Assembly's way of moving sometimes looks harmless. But even when it's not aggressive it is often manipulative. One person's hand slips under another person's, and raises it. The second person doesn't have much say in the matter. In other pieces, the action is thundering. The participants launch themselves through the air, one by one, onto a small bed, or they jump on top of one another, or back one another into walls while brandishing knives. They began with straight

drama: in 1994, they produced John Osborne's "Look Back in Anger." But they didn't like the stage directions, so, rather than obey them, they came out and read them sarcastically to the audience. (Osborne died soon afterward, Hoggett notes dryly.) In "The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theatre," which Hoggett and Graham published in 2009, they reminisce tenderly about sets that collapsed in the middle of performances, falling on the actors' feet. They also recall "experiments with dried flowers and petroleum in a flammable dressing room." They were young. "We took our clothes off a lot in the first few years," Hoggett says.

The Arts Council of Wales paid Frantic Assembly's way, barely. "If one of us bought a book, everybody read it," Hoggett says. "If one of us bought an album, everybody listened to it. Somebody bought the *Guardian* every day. One of us used to buy dessert. We were with each other all the time, in a van or a rehearsal room or a theatre. There were usually only six or so of us, but it was a real community." They held workshops; they taught school groups; they put on full-scale productions, and toured them widely. In time, they moved to London.

Twelve years after the company's founding, the National Theatre of Scotland hired Hoggett, on a freelance basis, to construct the movement and serve as an associate director for a show called "Black Watch" (2006), which dealt with eight members of a Scottish regiment sent to the Iraq War. The show uses shifting time planes and other modernist maneuvers, but it is unswervingly about those eight soldiers, not about the ontology of theatre or whatever. They talk about how they miss the food back home—lemon chicken, cheese on toast. They are frightened, they weep, they come under fire. (The BBC filmed "Black Watch," and it is a thrill to watch.) Hoggett, who won an Olivier Award for "Black Watch," in 2009, says that the play was his breakthrough work and also, by association, Frantic Assembly's. But if, at that time, the company's status rose, that was probably not just because of Hoggett's work and Frantic Assembly's but also because of what had been the troupe's inching toward character and story, which audiences like.

Around that time, Frantic Assembly produced shows for the national theatres of Scotland, Wales, and England. "We were part of the establishment now," Hoggett says. "We worked for institutions that were good and strong." At the same time, they were making their own product. "We were part of the ecology of theatre," he said. "Could anything be more healthy?" Accordingly, he felt he could leave the company, and in 2012 he did.

Since then, most of Hoggett's time has been spent in mainstream commercial theatre in New York. Among the productions for which he has served as movement director (or choreographer, as he is sometimes listed) are "Peter and the Starcatcher" and "Once," both in 2011—shows that received a slew of Tony nominations, plus other awards. Last year, he worked on "What's It All About?," "The Glass Menagerie," and the Metropolitan Opera's "Rigoletto."

Hoggett had always wanted to work in New York. "I remember my first day, walking to work. I was here!," he says. Furthermore, his partner lived in New York. Hoggett goes back to England several times a year. "I still have an apartment there, and my mum is there. I find myself missing both." But then he returns to New York. He thinks that Americans are more receptive to movement instruction. In England, he says, dramatic training is, above all, training in *language*; that's what actors and directors think theatre is. People who go in for movement-heavy drama are not the ones who will be chosen to play Hamlet, or who will choose to. Hoggett adds, "And then, in the States, there is a sense of lateral careers. You can be in 'Chicago,' and then in a huge TV series, and still be taken seriously in classical theatre. I think that in the U.K. we've got a sense of the actor that's close to the Russian idea of an actor—something incredibly refined. And so we produce these blazingly brilliant performers, but they wouldn't be in 'Chicago' for love nor money." The situation is changing, but not fast.

"Once," which is still playing on Broadway, gives a fully developed sense of Hoggett's idea of what movement directing is, and how it is tied to character and narrative. The show is de-

rived from an endearing 2006 Irish movie of the same title. In Dublin, boy meets girl; they write some songs together (they are both amateur musicians); they part. The conclusion is prefigured in a number of scenes, but there is a moment in which these two (whom the program calls the Girl and the Guy) more or less directly confess their love, and their knowledge that it will come to nothing. They don't embrace. They don't even join hands. "That energy of holding two hands—it's a dead moment," Hoggett says. It means that the show is going to end. "Either all is well or all is sad. 'We're going to hold hands like this in profile to the audience. You've got five minutes left.'" Instead, in "Once," the boy simply leans forward, and the girl leans forward, and they touch foreheads. That, and the songs that came out of their heads, is all they're ever going to have of each other.

"Once" also shows how Hoggett uses his actors to help him construct movement. He dislikes big, splashy numbers where the actors, under the spell of love, or Oklahoma, break into song and dance, and he has had no training in dance, but he does use it, secretly. In "Once," the Girl and the Guy go to a bank to ask for a loan in order to make a demo tape. The situation is archetypal: art is being played off against commerce. Hoggett accepts this; indeed, he underlines it. The Guy, to convince the loan manager, plays him a song. In rehearsals, Hoggett, to enlarge the meaning of this—the hope, the innocence—asked the people playing the bank clerks to show him, in movement, what they thought clerks did all day. "Each sat at his desk—that was his intimate space—and I said, What do your hands do?" The actors did some mime: they rubber-stamped, they filed, they had migraines. Then came the second half. "I asked them, if your hands could dream in that space, where would they go? And what I got were all these little squid-like motions—hands dreaming." He took those two strings of gestures and used them to fashion a semi-abstract movement sequence, the first half staccato, the second wiggly and floaty. It didn't exactly look like drudgery vs. escape, but it felt that way. Hoggett tells me that, before teaching the actors

such phrases, he never tells them they are about to do a dance. They would freeze on the spot. They think they can't dance.

"Once," which had its New York première at New York Theatre Workshop, a two-hundred-seat house in the East Village, moved to Broadway in 2012, and received eleven Tony nominations, more than any other production that season. Hoggett was nominated for best choreography.

The revival of Tennessee Williams's "The Glass Menagerie" was even more acclaimed, and in terms of what Hoggett has said is his real *métier*, physical narrative, it may be his greatest achievement to date. Laura, the shy, crippled daughter of the family, suppresses, with a wrenching effort, her shyness in order to entertain Jim, a supposed "gentleman caller"; her mother, Amanda, insists. Eventually, however, Laura discovers that, far from being a suitor, Jim is engaged to another girl. The revelation is crushing to her, and more crushing to Amanda—a former Southern belle, or so she tells us—who soon appears and finds out the truth. In this production, Laura turned to Amanda, and pressed against the front of her body. "She falls into her mother," Hoggett said. "She wants to be absorbed by her mother." Like the lovers in "Once," Laura and Amanda didn't embrace. The loss is so shocking and rings a bell for so many years to come that to hold each other would be too neat and easy. Hoggett told me that the moment was one of those collaborative actions that he had spoken of earlier. He and the director, John Tiffany, with Cherry Jones, who performed the role of Amanda, and Celia Keenan-Bolger, who was a masterly Laura, had decided together: no hug.

In the rehearsal period, Hoggett likes to give actors exercises in which they have to make up a scene—a scene not in the play—about their relationship with another central character. To Celia Keenan-Bolger, he said, "I want you to take Amanda to a place in the house and physically mend her." Keenan-Bolger told me, "Initially, I had no idea what he was talking about. I led Cherry to the edge of the stage. Then I looked her in the eyes to try to

communicate that she didn't need to worry about me, and ran away. From that, Steven said, 'Why don't you push her a little further and don't look in her eyes. Just walk away.'" Keenan-Bolger may not have known, at the beginning, what Hoggett meant by "mending," but Jones did: Amanda was not going to be mended. Jones said to me that while Laura is entertaining Jim, Amanda is downstairs, in the kitchen, drumming her fingers on the counter: One Mississippi, two Mississippi. "She thinks how nice it will be," Jones said. "The man will take care of Laura and of her. They will have a little room for her next to the kitchen."

This will not come to pass, and Laura, by pushing Amanda to the edge of the stage and then leaving her there—on the edge, incidentally, of a sinister moat of black liquid, like the River Styx, which encircles the stage (brilliant set design by Bob Crowley)—has already said that to herself. Indeed, she has said it to Amanda as well, so that Jones, when she comes out at the end of the scene, will have more material to work on. Amanda will never have a nice little room next to the kitchen. From now on, all will be toil and anxiety.

Movement direction is a new trend, or a newly revived one. Lots of shows have it and, like "The Glass Menagerie," are greatly enriched by it. I spoke to Hoggett about where this could lead: to plays that were dancelike, and dance shows that were playlike. The prospect didn't bother him. He clearly loves fluidity. Collaborators decide things together. Movement penetrates text. Abstraction grows out of representation. A song may surface briefly, like a fish out of the sea, and then plunge down again.

In our time, this is a nontraditional and notably un-narcissistic position—which doesn't necessarily mean that it's good. For example, movement can be overstressed, and intrusive. This is the case with "What's It All About?," a plotless medley of Burt Bacharach songs—performed by a vaguely unified group of singers in street clothes—for which Hoggett was the director as well as the movement director. Perhaps the prob-

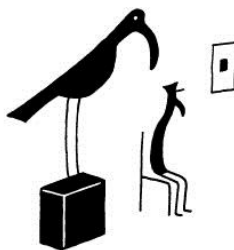
lem with the show was just Bacharach's anodyne songs, but its plotlessness must also have been a difficulty for Hoggett. As he has said, he wants a story. Without incident or character, the performers, while singing perfectly well, spent the rest of the time dithering around and looking at one another with intense but unspecified meaning. In this show, it seemed, Hoggett was conducting an

experiment: Could movement that was neither abstract nor narrative combine with music to make an interesting night at the theatre? No, or not yet, or not for him. But in the other shows that he has worked on recently in New York, all of them

narrative, his enlargement of the meaning, or even just of the stage picture, via movement is bold.

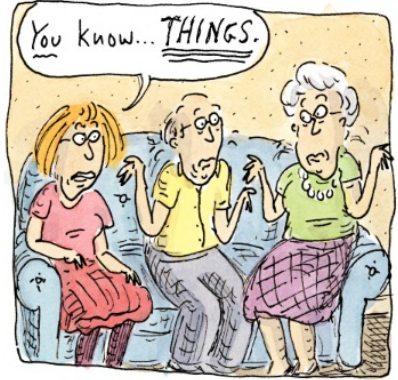
The first preview of "Rocky" was a fraught event. For one thing, it was delayed a night. (There were "issues with Con Edison," I was told.) Then came a monumental snowstorm. I thought that when the curtain finally rose the cast would be looking at a half-full house. Instead, the theatre was jammed, but there were still plenty of problems. There were difficulties with getting the set—a complicated business—to move, Hoggett said. Most important, he felt that the fight wasn't right: "It's not beat-perfect. It still hasn't found its feet. It's not valiant enough." Such anguish is the rule, not the exception, among the makers of a show during previews.

Nobody but the makers seemed to mind, however. When the show was over, the audience gave it a clamorous ovation. Then Stallone came out on the stage, and the noise got louder. He said that he never imagined his little movie would turn out to be such a big thing. He told us that he was a homeboy, born nine blocks from the theatre, in Hell's Kitchen. (His father began as a hairdresser; his mother was, at various times, an astrologer and a women's-wrestling promoter.) Perhaps with a note of apology for setting his blockbuster in Philadelphia, he said to the audience, "Yo, New York, I love you." The noise got even louder. ♦



# CAN'T WE TALK ABOUT SOMETHING MORE PLEASANT?

My parents and I never discussed **DEATH...**



I was quite aware that my parents had had tough lives—way, way tougher than mine.

You don't know what trouble is!



I had heard the stories my whole life—about how their parents had come over from Russia at the turn of the century with **NOTHING**...



...about how my maternal grandfather had been an engineer in Russia, but how, between his inability to speak English and his being Jewish, he wound up barely being able to support five kids and his wife working as a presser in the garment district;

and how bitter and angry he was; and how my grandmother washed clothes for other people;



and how even sadder my father's family was. His mother was one of nine children.



Not only was she the only girl but she was also the only one of her siblings to survive the Russian cholera epidemic.



Then, in a forest, her father had his throat cut "from ear to ear" by "bandits."



I don't know what happened to her mother. But she came to New York, married my paternal grandfather, and had just one child, my father, by Cesarean section, in 1912...

... a horrible ordeal that involved, according to my mother, "opening her up from her neck to her you-know-what."



Between their one-bad-thing-after-another lives and the Depression, World War II, and the Holocaust, in which they both lost family —

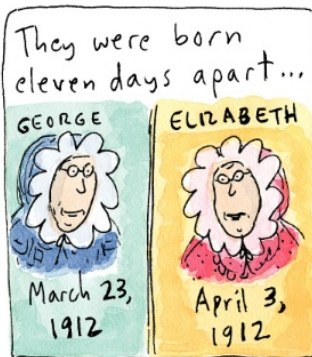
it was amazing that they weren't crazier than they were.



Who could blame them for not wanting to talk about death?

Let's discuss a more pleasant subject.





I visited them for the first time in years at their apartment in Brooklyn, where I grew up. What I noticed first was the level of

# GRIME

WHAT IS GRIME?

It's not ordinary dust, or a greasy stovetop that hasn't been cleaned in a week or two. It's more of a coating - something that happens when people haven't cleaned in a really long time.



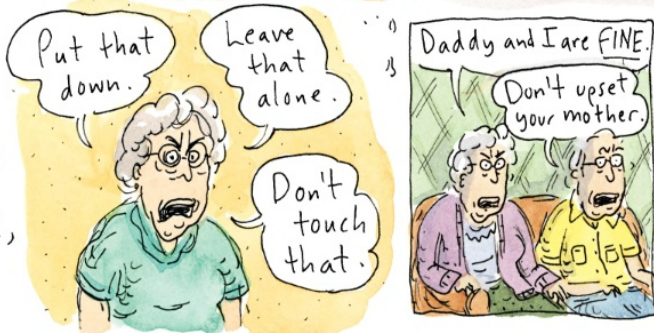
It was clear that she had stopped worrying about that.

## BUT WHAT DO YOU DO?

If you pick up a sponge and start cleaning...



... it will not necessarily be perceived as helpful. The person you're trying to help might even feel insulted, or embarrassed.



I wasn't great as a caretaker, and they weren't great at being taken care of.

By 2002, they were 90. It was hard not to notice that every time I came to see them the grime had grown thicker...



The piles of newspapers, magazines, and junk mail had grown larger...



... and they themselves had grown frailer.



I could see that they were slowly leaving the sphere of TV-commercial old age...

• SPRY!  
• TOTALLY INDEPENDENT!  
• JUST LIKE A NORMAL ADULT, BUT WITH SILVER HAIR!



...and moving into the part of old age that was scarier, harder to talk about, and not a part of this culture.



Extend human life span to 140!!!

# SOMETHING WAS COMING DOWN THE PIKE.

It's no accident that most consumer ads are pitched to people in their 20s and 30s.



For one thing, they are less likely to have gone through the transformative process of cleaning out their deceased parents' stuff.



Once you go through that, you can never look at YOUR stuff in the same way.



You start to look at your stuff a little... POSTMORTEMISTICALLY.



If you've lived more than two decades as a consumer, you probably have quite the accumulation, even if you're not a hoarder. SIGH.

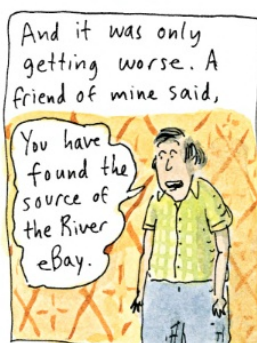


An ergonomic garlic press and throw pillows and those stupid sunflower dessert plates and seven travel alarm clocks and eight nail clippers and a colander and a flat iron and three old laptops and barbells and a set of FUCKING BOCCIE BALLS, and patio furniture and an autoharp, for God's sake, and your old flute from high school and a zillion books and towels and sheets and a wok you never used...

My parents weren't hoarders, quite. Nevertheless, no one could deny that the Depression had had an effect on their shopping habits:



Besides their aversion to talking about "unpleasant topics," they also had trust issues.



But anytime I mentioned "assisted living" the reaction was extremely negative.



Somehow, they were able to see through the euphemisms.



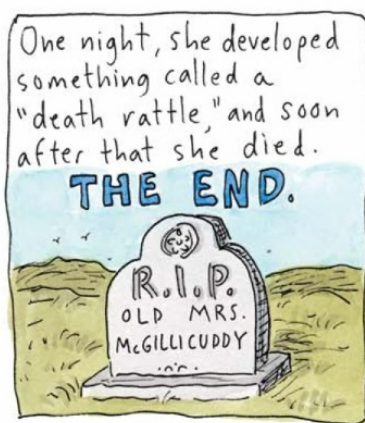
Finally, I got them to move to a "Place."



# A TYPICAL AFTERNOON AT THE PLACE



Here's what I used to think happened at "the end":



What I was starting to understand was that the middle panel was sometimes a lot more painful, humiliating, long-lasting, complicated, and hideously expensive.



He entered hospice, which my mother didn't particularly approve of, either.

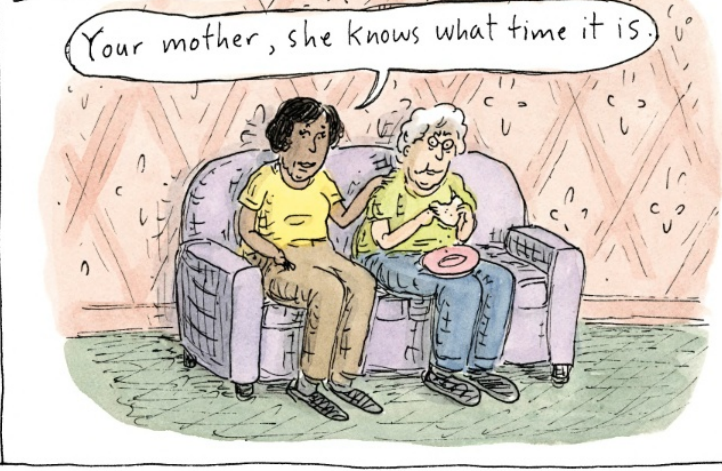


Shortly after my father died, my mother began a long, slow decline. The Place suggested that I get around-the-clock care, so I hired two nurses. Each would do a twelve-hour shift. My money worries increased. Besides the monthly rent at The Place and the two nurses, there was her medication, and there were all these supplies she needed: bed pads, Depends, extra pads to wear inside the Depends, latex gloves for the nurses, Ensure, baby wipes...

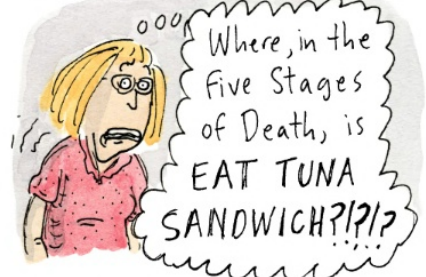


A couple of weeks into the around-the-clock care, hospice, etc., I went to see my mother at The Place, filled with dread and fearing the worst.

Instead, she was sitting on the couch with one of the private nurses, a middle-aged woman from Jamaica named Goodie. She was fully dressed. She was wearing shoes. She was eating a tuna sandwich.



I knew her retreat from the abyss should have filled me with joy, or at least relief. However, what I felt when I saw her was closer to:



I had sort of adjusted to the idea that she was dying, and this was THROWING ME OFF.

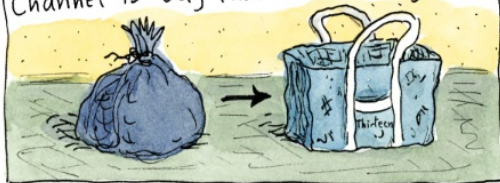


On the floor of my closet, along with shoes, old photo albums, wrapping paper, a sewing machine, a shelf of old sleep T-shirts, an iron, a carton of my kids' art work, and some other miscellaneous stuff, are two special boxes.

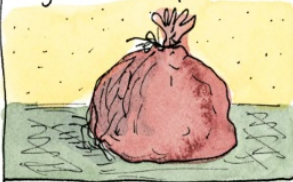
One holds my father's remains. The other box holds my mother's.



My father's box is inside a navy-blue velvet drawstring bag, which I placed inside the ancient Channel 13 bag that he took everywhere.



My mother's box is inside a maroon velvet drawstring bag. It is "en plein air."



Until I figure out a better place for them, they're staying in my closet.



R. Chert

# THE COMANDANTE'S CANAL

*Will a grand national project enrich Nicaragua, or only its leader?*

BY JON LEE ANDERSON

Last June 15th, Daniel Ortega, the President of Nicaragua, held a ceremony in Managua to announce his newest and most audacious plan to help the country's poor: a transoceanic canal, stretching from the Atlantic Coast to the Pacific, a few hundred miles north of the Panama Canal. "This is a project," he promised, "that will bring well-being, prosperity, and happiness to the Nicaraguan people." The last time Ortega attracted the world's attention, it was as Ronald Reagan's great adversary in the Contra war of the eighties: a fighter "against the domination of the capitalists of our country, in collusion with the U.S. government—i.e., imperialism." In those days, Salman Rushdie described him as looking like "a bookworm who has done a body-building course." Now his face has thickened and roughened, and his hair is thinner. His politics have changed, too. A former Marxist, he presides over an economy in which nearly anything goes. But he keeps up his anti-imperialist credentials, with fiery rhetoric about "los yanquis" and "la revolución" and "el pueblo." Last summer, when the National Security Agency whistle-blower Edward Snowden was pondering his options during an extended stay at the Moscow airport, Nicaragua's government offered him asylum.

For a dedicated practitioner of political influence, Ortega has little appetite for making speeches; his wife, Rosario Murillo, usually speaks on his behalf, in public and in a daily media address she gives. But the magnitude of the plan called for a grand gesture. Ortega's canal would be the largest civil-engineering and construction project in the world. To lead it, and to bring in money and expertise, he had recruited an obscure Chinese tycoon named Wang Jing, and two days before the ceremony, the National Assembly had approved a concession that put a large swath of the country at Wang's disposal as a building site. Yet for

months, as rumors about the canal spread through Nicaragua, Wang had not appeared in public. And so Ortega was obligated to prove that the man anointed the country's savior was not, as his critics put it, "a phantom."

At the ceremony, Murillo—a former poet whose oratorical style combines the ecclesiastical and the stream-of-consciousness—opened the proceedings. "A very good afternoon, dear Nicaraguan families, who follow us on the television channels, on the radio, on all the means of communication, on this historic day for Nicaragua," she said. "A day of prophecies coming true, a day in which dreams are being fulfilled, a day in which the doors to the future are opening with rights, with justice, with liberty, dignity, and fraternity." She went on like this for some time. Finally, she handed the microphone to her husband, whom she called Comandante Daniel.

Ortega wore his usual suède jacket over a collarless white shirt. In the manner of a boxing referee declaring the winner of a fight, he held up the hand of a round-faced Chinese man in a black suit and a blue tie. "I want to welcome a brother born in that great nation the People's Republic of China," he said, in a flat, braying voice. "Here is our brother Wang Jing. Here is the phantom, in flesh and blood!" Ortega reminded the audience that the Americans had once planned a canal in Nicaragua, but had built it in Panama instead. Now it was Nicaragua's chance to see its dreams fulfilled. The country was very poor, he said, and "with poverty and economic dependency there can be no sovereignty." The canal would allow Nicaragua to finally achieve "total and definitive independence." Behind the two men was a wall emblazoned with the logo of Wang Jing's new firm, H.K.N.D.—the Hong Kong Nicaragua Canal Development Investment Company.

Nicaragua's political opposition has



*Emblems of Daniel Ortega's rule abound in*



Managua. At a parade ground, a likeness of his hero, Augusto Sandino, stands with Trees of Life and a Circle of Life, designed by his wife.

loudly objected to the prospective canal. The novelist Sergio Ramírez, who served as Ortega's Vice-President for six years before breaking with him, told me that he thought it was all a *cuento chino*—a “Chinese story,” local slang for a lie. But he was concerned enough to draft a manifesto, claiming that the canal violated the country's sovereignty. Signed by dozens of prominent Nicaraguans, the manifesto pointed out that the concession, approved without consulting the public, granted Wang sweeping rights over any lands he chose, even those owned by private citizens. Ramírez suspected Ortega of using the canal to keep himself in office and also, possibly, to enrich himself. “Ortega wants to make it appear that his tenure in power is indispensable in order to consummate this long-term project,” he said. “But this is a white elephant. It is not known when its construction will begin, much less when it will end, or what kind of business deals or financial manipulations may be hiding behind the curtain.”

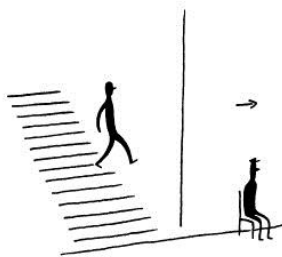
At the press conference, and in other appearances, Wang has emphasized his concern for Nicaragua's sovereignty, its environment, and its people. “We move forward with complete confidence—throughout ancient and modern history, at the start of each new era, a new milestone, like a butterfly that breaks out of its cocoon,” he said. “The world will change through us; we shall bring more happiness, freedom, and joy to the planet.” Wang, who is forty-one, had no record of accomplishing anything on the scale of a canal; indeed, he seemed to have little public record of any kind. But he was confident that he would be able to raise money in China and elsewhere, and that he would “make every investor smile broadly.” The canal would be completed in five years, he promised, and for the Nicaraguan people it would change everything, bringing tens of thousands of jobs. Unable to restrain himself, he noted that the Nicaraguans had dreamed of a canal “for hundreds of years, and suddenly a Chinese guy shows up and has a plan.”

The lure of a canal began long before the modern state of Nicaragua was born. As the conquistadors plundered the New World, they ferried gold to the Atlantic Coast across the narrow Isth-

mus of Panama—an arduous crossing, by foot and by mule. Hernán Cortés wrote to Emperor Carlos V, “Whoever possesses the passage between the two oceans can consider himself the owner of the world.” In 1581, the Spaniards explored a possible route in Nicaragua, where the San Juan River flowed to the Atlantic from a huge inland lake, separated from the Pacific by just twelve miles of land. Half a century later, an engineer named Diego de Mercado made a survey. Noting a difference of a hundred and thirty-eight feet in the sea level of the Pacific and the Atlantic Coasts, he determined that the project was technically impractical.

But by the time Nicaragua gained independence from Spain, in 1821, the new technologies of the industrial revolution had made the engineering seem possible. Since then, Nicaragua's leaders have granted at least seven “exclusive concessions” to foreign entrepreneurs. Simón Bolívar proposed a canal financed by Latin-American capital, seeing it as a step toward his dream of a United States of Latin America. Louis Napoleon Bonaparte proclaimed, “Nicaragua can become, better than Constantinople, the necessary route of the great commerce of the world.”

In the California gold rush of 1849, tens of thousands of fortune-seekers from Europe and the East found that their only way to the Pacific Coast was a



dangerous, months-long voyage around Cape Horn, and a number of hastily assembled transport syndicates began vying to shorten the trip. Two such groups, backed by a U.S. government subsidy, were given sole rights to the route across Panama, carrying passengers, by steamship and canoe, between New York Harbor and San Francisco in five weeks. Cornelius Vanderbilt, the American steamship and railroad tycoon, developed a route across the Nicaraguan isth-

mus. Within two years, he was boasting of transporting two thousand passengers a month from New York to San Francisco in twenty-five days, managing the water passages by steamer and the land crossing by stagecoach.

Vanderbilt had initially wanted to build a canal, and had dredged a shortcut from the Atlantic Coast to the San Juan River. Soon, the United States took up the idea of a canal, and Congress began trying to decide whether to build it in Panama or Nicaragua. In 1901, the Nicaraguan government gave the U.S. government exclusive rights to build a canal there. But before the issue went to a vote the chief of the powerful pro-Panama lobby mailed each U.S. senator a one-centavo Nicaraguan postage stamp, featuring an image of Lake Managua, luridly illuminated by an exploding volcano. Panama, which had no volcanoes in the canal zone, won by a margin of eight votes.

For Nicaragua, though, the final blow didn't come until 1914, after the Panama Canal was completed. That August, the country's President, General Emiliano Chamorro, signed a pact with Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan, which granted the United States the exclusive right, in perpetuity, to build a Nicaraguan canal. The deal, which paid three million dollars, effectively prevented Nicaragua from competing with the Panama Canal, and inspired the creation of a bitter epithet: *vendepatria*, which means “seller of the fatherland.”

Augusto César Sandino—modern Nicaragua's greatest hero—also dreamed of a canal, an exclusively Latin-American project that would help free the region from outside influence. From 1927 to 1933, Sandino waged a guerrilla campaign against the invading U.S. Marines. After they retreated, he agreed to peace talks; as one condition, he demanded that the Bryan-Chamorro treaty be nullified. The attempt failed, and soon afterward Sandino was murdered, betrayed by the National Guard commander General Anastasio Somoza García. Within two years, Somoza García had seized power, becoming the first of three Somozas to dominate Nicaragua.

As a child, Ortega idolized Sandino, and he has spent a career invoking Sandino's legacy as he promises to remake

the country. On Tiscapa, a hill that looms over Managua, he erected a black steel silhouette of Sandino, in the spot where Somoza once had a fortress home and an underground jail for political prisoners. The statue is visible for miles. On a recent visit, I walked around its base, past a small tank once owned by Somoza, a large artillery piece, and a series of cannons.

As a teen-ager, Ortega joined the Sandinista National Liberation Front, or F.S.L.N., a guerrilla force named in Sandino's honor. In 1967, at twenty-two, he attempted to rob a bank, in order to raise funds for the cause. He was captured, and spent the next seven years in prison. (He wrote a poem about his time there, called "I Never Saw Managua When Miniskirts Were in Fashion.") Ortega lacked a natural leader's charisma, but he was wily and determined. After he was released, as part of a prisoner exchange, he took charge of the F.S.L.N., and after the guerrillas overthrew Somoza, in 1979, he became the head of the new revolutionary junta.

Once in power, the Sandinistas adopted radical Marxist policies, and aligned themselves with Cuba and the Soviet Union. In the countryside, conservative peasants and Somoza loyalists began a resistance movement, which coalesced into an army known as the Contras. Nicaragua slid toward civil war. In 1983, on the fourth anniversary of the Sandinistas' "revolutionary triumph," I watched Ortega give a speech in Managua. Punching a fist in the air, he barked out warnings that the people had to prepare to fight a "new invasion" by the U.S. Marines.

Ortega wasn't being paranoid. Reagan had been doing everything he could to undermine the Sandinistas, from funding and arming the Contras to hiring mercenaries to fly them weapons; that same year, the C.I.A. was caught mining Nicaragua's harbors. The Contras were brutal enough to beat or stab prisoners to death after making them dig their own graves; one field commander told me that he used fourteen-year-old boys as executioners, because they were "too young to have a conscience." But Reagan saw the Contras as "freedom fighters," who would help save the continent from Communism. In one memorable speech, he appealed



*"Every guy out there is either married, gay, or a human suit zipped around a column of ants."*

to the American people for humanitarian aid, and raised the threat of losing the Panama Canal. "Using Nicaragua as a base, the Soviets and Cubans can become the dominant power in the crucial corridor between North and South America," he said. From there, he warned, they could "threaten the Panama Canal, interdict our vital Caribbean sea lanes, and, ultimately, move against Mexico."

In 1984, Ortega was elected President, and the U.S. Congress finally banned covert aid to the Contras. Reagan was undeterred. He ordered a withering trade embargo against Nicaragua, and senior White House officials began a clandestine effort to finance the Contras. When the plot was discovered, in November, 1986, it dominated the American news for months, playing out as a tragicomic farce. In simplest form, the scheme was to evade the congressional ban by selling missiles to Ayatollah Khomeini's regime, in Iran, and passing along the proceeds to the Contras. The operation, devised in large part by a former Marine colonel named Oliver North, was not without lapses in trade-craft. At one point, North's secretary, Fawn Hall, transposed two digits in the number of a Swiss bank account, and a large contribution to the Contras, sent by the Sultan of Brunei, was mistakenly

delivered to a Swiss businessman. On a secret trip to Tehran, the former national-security adviser Robert McFarlane carried gifts for Khomeini: a Bible and, to symbolize the reopening of relations, a cake in the shape of a key.

Meanwhile, the war in Nicaragua destroyed the economy and cost tens of thousands of lives. By 1990, Ortega had agreed to peace talks and new elections, but Nicaraguans were fed up: they elected Violeta Chamorro, the widow of an anti-Somoza newspaper editor whose killing, in 1978, had galvanized the Sandinista guerrilla movement. In Ortega's final two months in office, he pushed through an enormous redistribution of Nicaragua's wealth. Peasants were given tiny plots of land, while Ortega and his confederates appropriated vast swaths of real estate and millions of dollars from the state's accounts. When Chamorro took over, the central bank had only \$3.2 million left. Even the spotlights from the state television network had been looted. The country was so thoroughly hollowed out that the episode has become known as *la piñata*.

There is an old Spanish adage that Ortega's critics invoke to describe his pursuit of power: *hierba mala nunca muere*, or "weeds never die." Ortega ran for reelection in 1996 and 2001, and lost

both times. But he became the head of the opposition in the National Assembly, and, promising to “govern from below,” he cut deals with former enemies. After he lost the 1996 election, to the businessman Arnoldo Alemán, Ortega made a non-aggression pact with him, and used the alliance to reduce the threshold for electoral victory to thirty-five per cent of the vote. The change proved crucial: in the elections of 2006, Ortega beat Alemán, with only thirty-eight per cent of the vote. After Alemán left the Presidency, he was convicted of corruption. The Supreme Court, under Ortega’s influence, threw out the conviction.

As Ortega plotted a return to power, he cultivated the right wing, especially the Catholic Church. In 2006, he backed legislation that led to an extraordinarily strict abortion ban. These days, Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo, an old opponent from the Reagan years, appears alongside Ortega and Murillo in public, blessing whatever they do. A former official in Ortega’s administration said, “The conservative peasants who thirty years ago may well have shouted ‘Long live Rea-

gan’ may today shout ‘Viva Ortega.’”

Although Ortega’s party was widely accused of fraud in municipal elections in 2008, he secured a firm majority in the Assembly. Like most former dictatorships in the region, Nicaragua places strict limits on successive Presidential terms, but in 2009 Ortega successfully lobbied the Supreme Court to declare the pertinent articles of the constitution invalid. Two years later, he stood for reelection and won.

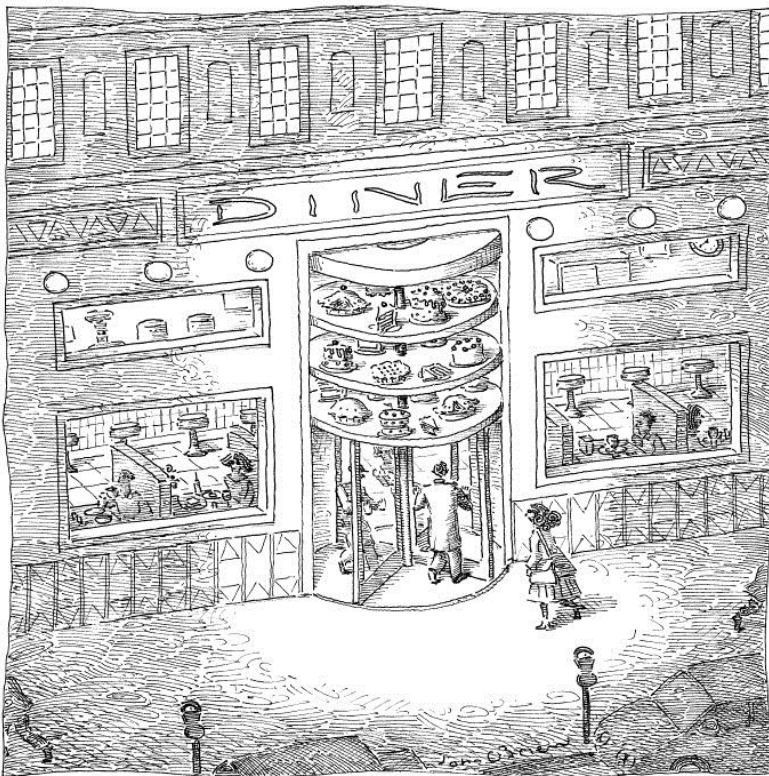
Early in his Presidency, Ortega signed up with the Venezuelan leader Hugo Chávez’s regional economic bloc. In exchange, the bloc has given him half a billion dollars’ worth of oil subsidies annually. His critics, who describe the subsidy as a personal slush fund, say that the money is crucial to his political survival. “The strength of this regime lies in the country’s poverty,” Arturo Cruz, Ortega’s former Ambassador to the U.S., explained. A Johns Hopkins-educated political scientist, Cruz speaks of Ortega with grudging admiration. “Ortega is the last caudillo standing. He is a father figure for the campesinos—he can resolve their needs. He has been clever about knowing how to distribute the

scarcities with more abundance than other politicians.” The expectations of the poor are modest, he said. “It can be resolved for many people with a few pieces of roofing tin and a handful of nails. The voter thinks, Now I won’t get wet. And when it rains he thinks of Ortega.”

Ortega, in his second consecutive five-year term, governs under the uniquely ecumenical slogan “Cristiana, Socialista, y Solidaria.” It is emblazoned on government billboards in the First Lady’s official color scheme: fuchsia, blue, yellow, and purple. Ortega’s chicanery sometimes elicits disapproval abroad, but, since the end of the Cold War, Nicaragua has been on a geostrategic par with Burkina Faso; in other words, it doesn’t matter much. There have been brief moments when it returned to international prominence. In 1998, Hurricane Mitch devastated the country, killing three thousand people. That same year, Zoilamérica Narvaez, Ortega’s thirty-year-old stepdaughter, accused him publicly of having sexually abused her since she was eleven. Ortega, then the opposition leader, ignored the charges and, with Murillo’s help, succeeded in vilifying his stepdaughter as a neurotic liar.

Ortega was damaged by the scandal, and, over the years, most of his original Sandinista comrades have abandoned him, put off by his crass behavior and his changing principles. But he has always managed to find new allies, make new arrangements. Today, whatever opposition remains is too fractious to be very effective. Sergio Ramírez, Ortega’s former Vice-President, told me, “Ortega outsmarted us all.”

The Nicaraguan government hasn’t talked much to its citizens about the canal, and, when it has, the messages have often relied on the language of faith. Just before the canal concession was approved, Murillo described the project in her daily address: “This will represent the true application of Christianity, of Socialism, of Solidarity, in that we will live well—secure, healthy, beautiful, clean, beyond poverty of any kind.” This suggests a radical transformation. About the size of Alabama, Nicaragua is the largest nation in Central America, and, with nearly half its six



million people living below the poverty line, it is poorer than any country in the Western Hemisphere except Haiti. Between the Pacific Coast and the Atlantic Coast, much of the landscape is a jungle wilderness, bisected by rivers and swamps. In the countryside, oxcarts remain a common form of transport, and one out of two people lives on less than a dollar a day.

In December, driving with a Nicaraguan companion along a dirt road in the backcountry, I stopped to offer a lift to an elderly woman, whose burnished skin suggested indigenous blood. She was wearing a long traditional dress, and she was moving slowly, with the help of a walking stick. When I asked if she wanted a ride, she thanked me, and said, "Some alms would be better, son." I dug into my pocket for a hundred-cordoba note, worth about four American dollars. She looked at it bemusedly, and asked, "What is it?" Shocked, my companion tried to explain what paper money was. She looked quizzical, and kept on walking.

In Managua, the streets are littered with a bewildering array of signs and billboards; everything imaginable is for sale. Tucked between the Dunkin' Donuts franchises and the gas stations are "auto-hotels"—El Casanova, El Secreto del Amor—where businessmen take their secretaries for lunchtime trysts. There are huge electrical pylons everywhere, but no crosswalks, and so pedestrians scamper like deer across intersections. At the traffic lights, children run between the cars to form human pyramids, to clown for donations from motorists, or simply to beg.

Little evidence remains of the idealistic Sandinista revolution, apart from ubiquitous billboards emblazoned with Ortega's smiling face. Sometimes he is pictured standing next to Murillo. A thin woman with long frizzy red hair, she is usually festooned with necklaces and a ring on every finger, and clad in her characteristic colors, which she says give off "good vibrations." In a traffic circle on Avenida Bolívar, the city's main boulevard, stands an enormous plastic sculpture of Hugo Chávez's face; it rests upon a multicolored symbol known as a Circle of Life, apparently adapted from a Mayan hieroglyph. The face is rendered in Homer Simpson

yellow. Looming around it are five huge, stylized metal trees, painted bright yellow and studded with thousands of light bulbs in Murillo's official hues. Like the yellow Chávez, the Trees of Life, as everyone calls them, were devised by Murillo. The National Assembly building and the trees in the surrounding parks are strung with more lights, and at night the entire area glows like a Disney fairyland.

Throughout November, in preparation for the annual festival known as La Gritería—a celebration of the Virgin Mary's Immaculate Conception—teams of government workers erected elaborately decorated plywood chapels along Avenida Bolívar. All were painted with the holiday's traditional refrain—"What causes such happiness? Mary's conception!"—and with images of Mary in beatific guises. The Ministry of Telecommunications had surrounded her with satellites; the Ministry of Defense depicted her floating next to an airplane. Halfway down the avenue, one little chapel featured a painted tableau of Mary in a coterie of angels. They shimmered together in a blue sky in front of a smoking volcano, below the prayer "Virgin Mary: Bless the Interoceanic Great Canal!"

One scorching-hot afternoon in December, several hundred people gathered at the Hugo Chávez traffic circle, protected from the sun by hats and parasols. Some carried Nicaraguan flags; others displayed handwritten signs ("Ortega Dictador!") to the passing traffic. A few days earlier, Ortega had presented the National Assembly with a sweeping package of constitutional reforms. The proposed alterations, which became known as "the big bundle," would enshrine the terms of the canal concession in the constitution. They would also allow Ortega to be reelected indefinitely, and to name active-duty Army officers as judges. Nicaragua's political opposition was in a state of near-hysteria. At the protest, vendors sold white Styrofoam hats with the word "No" spelled out in red letters.

The crowd, shouting slogans, walked to the side street that led to the National Assembly, where the parliamentarians had convened to discuss the reforms. A cordon of police formed a barrier there,

and a woman struggled with a police-woman, who knocked her down. More police and demonstrators entered the fracas, shouting and punching, until the protesters surged forward and the police line crumbled. There were shots in the air, and the din of vuvuzelas, as the crowd ran toward the gates of the Assembly building, where more police had formed a phalanx. Several tough-looking protesters—former Contra fighters, apparently—fired handmade bazookas over the heads of the police, causing loud explosions, followed by cheers. A young man and woman spray-painted the wall of the Assembly building: "What is the Assembly? A bunch of pigs!" and "Ortega Vendepatria!"

A couple of days later, I met with Dora María Téllez to discuss the reform proposal. One of Nicaragua's most distinctive modern political figures, Téllez was a young medical student when, in 1978, she helped the Sandinistas take fifteen hundred hostages in the National Assembly, to be exchanged for imprisoned comrades. After serving as minister of health in the Sandinista government, Téllez broke with Ortega in the nineteen-nineties, forming the Sandinista Renovation Movement, which attracted other disenchanting loyalists but effected little change.

Téllez wore a man's plaid shirt and jeans, her white hair cut short. She told me that the bill represented a formalization of Ortega's control of most of the state's institutions: the Army, investments, the courts. "Ortega's logic is the logic of total power," Téllez said. "If he does some deals with the private sector, it's a temporary thing. His logic is 'If I can have a bank, why should you have it?'" Ortega's children—he has seven with Murillo—own or direct a number of key media companies and advertising firms. Murillo is in charge of government communications. "You have to understand: this functions like a dictatorship," Téllez said. "With a little more elegance, maybe, but a dictatorship nonetheless."

The canal concession, ratified in three days without any public consultation, had caused virtually no protests. "People here in Nicaragua don't really react to things on paper," Téllez said. "They react when things start happening. Here it will happen when the expropriation of land begins." She

pulled out a binder that contained the constitutional reforms, and showed me where, in the clause concerning the state's respect for indigenous "property rights" in the Atlantic Coast region, the word "property" had vanished.

It was easy to spot which parts of the reform bill came from Ortega. "All the parts concerning the military and extending term limits, the parts dealing with power—those are his," she explained. But Murillo had had a hand in it, too, Téllez said. She leafed through her binder to a section about the environment and pointed to the words "Mother Earth." "Rosario's bits are easy to spot," she said, laughing. "If it reads like someone smoked a big green joint, that's hers."

The reforms overturned a constitutional structure against foreign soldiers being garrisoned in Nicaragua, Téllez pointed out. "The Chinese must be throwing themselves a party right now," she said. "Since the concession doesn't specify geographical limits, it effectively gives them the whole country to do what they want. What do they have to pay in taxes? Nothing. What control does Nicaragua have? None." Within the canal zone, the Chinese "will have the commercial interest and absolute control." But, as Wang's partner, Téllez said, Ortega could begin making profits in property speculation even before construction began. "The only reason Daniel Ortega would have signed the canal concession is if he is the real owner of the project. Because stupid he is not."

On December 10th, the bill passed the Assembly by a vote of sixty-four to twenty-six, and it was ratified on January 28th. Within hours, the veteran commentator Sofia Montenegro tweeted, "The canal law is now 'legal,' giving sovereignty to foreigners and allowing expropriation." Under pressure, the Assembly had altered some of the proposed language, but the intent seemed unchanged. Although the word "property" was restored to the clause about indigenous rights, Wang retained the right to build the canal wherever he chose. Ortega had been forced to give up on naming Army officers to the judiciary, but he won the right to place them in the executive branch. Téllez was dismayed.

"Power is like Viagra: nobody buys it not to use it," she said. "If they have proposed to put military men into the executive, it means that they plan to do it."

Manuel Coronel Kautz, the president of the Nicaraguan Canal Commission, received me graciously one morning in his office. Situated in a walled compound, the office had official trappings, but, except for Kautz and a secretary, it appeared deserted. Dominating one long wall was a map of Nicaragua with a bold blue line that traced the traditionally proposed canal route up the San Juan River, along the Costa Rican border. Kautz, a lean man of eighty-one with piercing blue eyes, hastened to clarify

that the San Juan route was one of six routes under consideration by Wang. The government of Costa Rica was fervently opposed to it, he said ruefully, so it seemed unlikely.

Kautz shared the national wistfulness about a canal. In 1970, after the ignominious Bryan-Chamorro treaty was nullified, some Americans had explored the possibility of making a canal with atomic bombs, but, Kautz noted wryly, "eventually, they were advised that it was not a good idea to proceed." A decade later, a Brazilian company issued a proposal, but, "with Nicaragua in the midst of the Contra war and in a confrontation with the U.S., it was not the right time."

Several of Ortega's predecessors had promoted such a project, with little success. Ortega's coup was finding a sponsor. In planning the canal, he wanted to be faithful to Sandino's vision, Kautz said. "We had the idea of proposing it to those countries with an ideological affinity with Nicaragua. That included Brazil, which transports a lot of iron ore to China, not through the Panama Canal but around the Horn. The first country we went to was China." Although Nicaragua does not have formal diplomatic relations with China, he said, "we had a relationship with the Communist Party, and Daniel Ortega had cultivated good relations there."

Ortega and Wang apparently made contact in 2012, when several Nicaraguan officials visited China, accompanied by Ortega's son Laureano—an operatic tenor who also advises ProNica-

ragua, an agency charged by the government with promoting overseas investment. They went as private citizens, but, according to a Nicaraguan source with close ties to the government, they were invited to a meeting with four men they understood to be a high-level delegation from the Communist Party. One of them asked to speak privately with Laureano. "That man was Wang Jing," the source said. Laureano did not return for nearly two hours. Later, when friends asked him about the meeting, he said only that he had been given a message to deliver to his father.

The next fall, Wang travelled to Nicaragua to see Ortega, and a series of meetings followed. Kautz said, "Wang Jing impressed us as a young revolutionary who could take control of this kind of project. He made an excellent impression on both the President and myself. He is young and clean." Wang registered his canal-development firm in Beijing and a holding company in the Cayman Islands. In September, a Memorandum of Understanding for a canal concession was signed in Managua, and a few days later Ortega announced the deal, saying, "The People's China is a source of inspiration, of development, of growth for humanity." Kautz said that Wang "relatively quickly" produced contracts for feasibility studies with four major international firms: the U.S. lobbying firms McLarty and McKinsey Associates; the U.K. sustainability experts Environmental Resources Management; and, for the technical work, the China Railway Construction Corporation.

The agreement with Wang was part of a broader commercial relationship. As the canal was announced, Laureano revealed that Wang would bid in an upcoming government auction for a contract to build a telecommunications network; a month later, the government announced that Wang had won. Wang promised to begin work by 2014, and an office building near the National Assembly was painted and spruced up for his use. During my visit, it sat empty, and there has been little apparent activity on the contract.

The Assembly released the details of the canal concession in the government gazette, but only after it had been ratified. Benjamin Lanzas, the head of the Nicaraguan Chamber of Construction, is in favor of the canal, but he told me that he



was baffled by the air of secrecy. “The government has overwhelming support for the canal from the Nicaraguan people, and from the private sector, too,” he said. “If something’s good, why hide it?” Many of the canal’s opponents saw the agreement as inexplicably generous. Wang’s concession allows for the construction of two ports, a railroad, an oil pipeline, and roads; it also includes a number of free-trade zones. Under the agreement, H.K.N.D. owns the canal at the outset, and the Nicaraguans reclaim a one-per-cent stake each year. They would need half a century to gain control of the canal that runs through their land. In the meantime, Wang is permitted to sell his rights to whomever he chooses: another company or another country.

Other than some language stating that H.K.N.D. should “procure” up to ten million dollars a year for Nicaragua’s treasury, the agreement promises little financial compensation. For this reason, and because of the opaque negotiations, many Nicaraguans assume that Ortega has a private financial arrangement with Wang. Some of his political opponents say that it might also be a matter of job security. Antonio Lacayo, a prominent businessman and a former senior government official, believes that Chávez’s death sent Ortega looking for a new benefactor. “Daniel can see the disaster that is coming in Venezuela,” he explained. “So he looks around. It’s not a long list: there’s Russia, China, Iran. With Iran, there was nothing to get. From Russia, he got some buses and some reconnaissance planes. So Daniel decides to attract China to Nicaragua—to ‘defend’ it from the U.S., and to contribute economically. How does he do it? By offering the Chinese a hundred-year concession to do whatever they want.” Lacayo said he had heard through mutual friends that Ortega privately dislikes the Chinese. “He thinks the Chinese are too capitalistic,” he said. “He’d have preferred the Russians.” But, he noted, “the point is, Daniel needs a friend.”

Within Nicaragua, Ortega’s strongest support comes from his old enemies in the private sector. In the nineteen-eighties, the influential Superior Council on Private Enterprise—known by its Spanish-language acronym, COSEP—fiercely opposed the Ortega

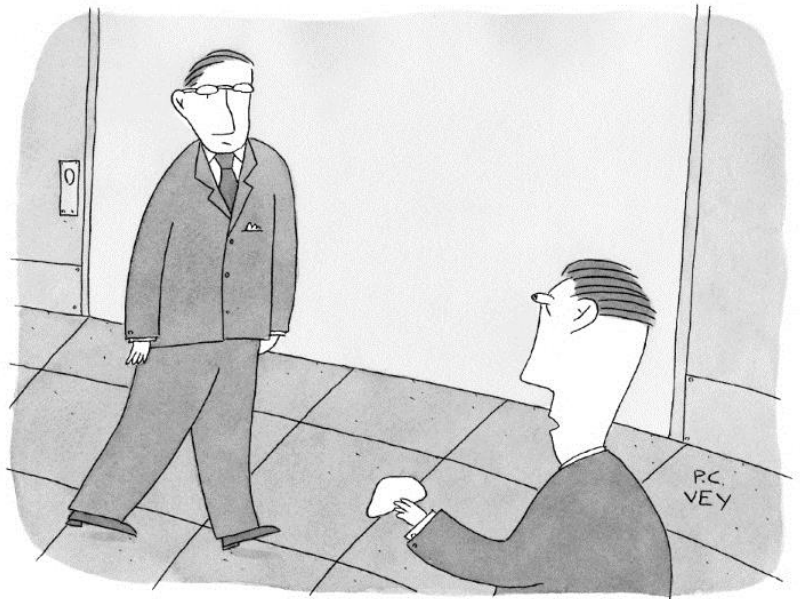
regime; its vice-president was killed in a confrontation with Sandinista security forces. The current COSEP president, José Adán Aguerri, an intense man in his fifties, told me that the business community had largely supported Nicaragua’s past three Presidents in opposition to Daniel Ortega. But, once Ortega was back in, working with him was a matter of survival. “This government controls, legitimately or not, everything,” he said. “We have to guarantee our security and our future.” As Aguerri explained it, COSEP had made peace with Ortega, and that had brought great benefits. “Here is the reality today: there is not a single law that the Sandinista government has passed that has not been consulted on first with us in the private sector. This government is ranked No. 8 in the world in terms of its non-intervention in the private sector. Venezuela is 148.”

At the ceremony in June, Wang had invited a delegation of Nicaraguans to China, saying that he was eager to host businessmen. Aguerri went along. “We wanted to see that it wasn’t all just a bluff,” he said. “And we wanted to see whether the project had room for anyone more than the government and the Ortega family.” The trip, in October, included twenty-two Nicaraguan businessmen, officials, and politicians. Accompanied by Laureano Ortega, the group travelled to

five cities, ending up in Hong Kong. Several people on the trip told me that they came back astonished at the sheer scale of development in China. Aguerri spoke excitedly of visiting the headquarters of the behemoth China Railway Construction Corporation, where the delegates found a team of technicians and engineers engaged in the Nicaragua project. “Months of work had clearly already taken place,” he said. “Someone is investing a lot in this.” The visitors had little doubt that Wang was supported by the Chinese state. Everywhere they went, Arturo Cruz recalled, mayors and regional Party chiefs turned out to receive them. Aguerri said, “Their message to us was ‘This canal is going ahead.’”

Aguerri was cautiously hopeful. “If there are no political and economic problems, God willing, we may have the opportunity to change the history of this country, and stop being the second-poorest country in Latin America,” he said. When I asked about Nicaragua’s sovereignty, he replied, with a scowl, “In a country where anyone can come and stomp all over us tomorrow, what’s sovereignty?”

One day, I went to Brito, a tiny fishing village situated where the Brito River meets the Pacific Coast: the same place where Vanderbilt’s passengers transferred from stagecoach to



*“I found your other shoulder pad.”*

steamship on the way to San Francisco. At the edge of a field, I found five Chinese men in gray coveralls, unpacking generators and long tubes from wooden crates covered with Chinese characters. They looked at me with studied disinterest, and carried on with what they were doing. Three Nicaraguan workers were helping them, and I asked in Spanish if they were there for the Gran Canal. "Yes," one of them, a tall young man, exclaimed, smiling brightly. "What are all these things you're unpacking?" I asked. None of them had any idea. They couldn't communicate with the Chinese, who spoke no Spanish. They had an interpreter, but he wasn't there, and he hadn't told them much anyway. "It's paid work," the young man said, as if that were all the explanation needed. The Chinese men stared and commented among themselves. One took my picture with his phone.

At the mangrove-clogged mouth of the Brito, an hour's walk away, I found a group of biologists counting the sea turtles that used a virgin stretch of beach to lay eggs. There were just a few, one assured me—not as many as they had thought. Won't there be even fewer if the canal goes through here? I asked. The scientists looked uncomfortable. I asked if they worked for the Gran Canal, and they nodded. One told me apologetically that they could not speak to me; they were working under a confidentiality oath.

Even in China, little has been revealed about the canal. Wang was nearly invisible before 2010, when he bought the telecom company Xinwei. In the few interviews he has given since obtaining the canal concession, he has been evasive. Talking to the A.P. at his Beijing offices last summer, he shrugged off his lack of a public profile. "Before anyone gets famous, little is known of him," he said. "My résumé? It is simple. Born in December, 1972, in Beijing and a Chinese citizen." Wang disclosed that he had studied traditional Chinese medicine, but refused to say at which university. He made his first fortune in gem and gold mines in Thailand and Cambodia, he said, but couldn't calculate his own worth.

People who have worked with Wang told me that he is intently focussed on

## MAKING LOVE IN THE KITCHEN

We do it with knives in hand,  
blue tongues licking the bottoms of pots,  
steam fogging the windows from hearts  
of artichokes being strained.

Hearts are made to be carved  
out, cooked soft, slathered with butter,  
fork-stabbed and lifted to another's  
open mouth. We say we are starved,

as though we were doing this alone,  
lonely as an onion in its skin,  
say we are starving when what we mean  
is that we want to postpone

the inevitable, which is inedible,  
however we dice  
it, and so we make—as it consumes us—  
this love we call a meal.

—Gary J. Whitehead

business and fascinated by war; his office is decorated with scale models of armaments, and with a large painting of Chinese military heroes. Arturo Cruz, who spent time with Wang on the trip to China, said, "There is an urban legend that his father was some top general who died, and then his mother married his best friend, who was also a general." Wang has denied this. But, Cruz notes, "he has the demeanor of someone who grew up in the barracks—at a very high level—and is used to giving orders. If he'd been born in the nineteenth century, he'd probably have been a rival to Cornelius Vanderbilt."

Wang claimed that Xinwei had lucrative contracts in a dozen countries, but financial journalists who dug into the company's performance came up with a decidedly mixed record—in some countries, as in Nicaragua, Xinwei was registered but not yet conducting business. The spotty record has increased doubts that Wang is capable of completing the canal project. When confronted, he spouts Chinese expressions like "I can pound my chest and guarantee it will succeed." He is more circumspect about his contacts with China's ruling elite. Last year, Xinwei's Web site posted photographs of Communist Party leaders

visiting its premises. In an interview with the *South China Morning Post*, Wang denied that such visits meant anything. "In Hong Kong, there is this thing called gossip," he said. "Xinwei is an ordinary company, run by ordinary people, and Wang Jing, too, is an ordinary person. I think the Chinese government wants to see Chinese companies step forward, create Chinese standards and Chinese intellectual-property rights—it gives us the right to speak out when we compete with Western countries. There is nothing else to it."

When I asked June Teufel Dreyer, an expert on China's international relationships at the University of Miami, about Wang's acquisition of the canal concession, she said, "Of course the Chinese government is behind it, though of course the official reply is that this is just a business deal." Evan Ellis, of the Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies, an authority on China's presence in Latin America, thought that the government's support could be provisional. "Wang Jing may be a cowboy, but connected, and kind of making things up as he goes along," he said. But, he pointed out, by some estimates Wang may have already spent as much as a hundred million dollars

on feasibility studies, which suggests that he expects major backing from Chinese financial institutions. If the canal proves not to be viable, the state can simply turn to another project. “The Chinese sometimes try things out at a small level, and if it doesn’t work they step back.”

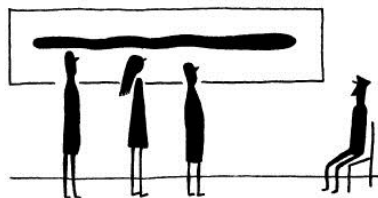
The construction of the Panama Canal was a ten-year ordeal, in which more than five thousand workers died from malaria, yellow fever, accidents, and the exhausting work of cutting through jungle and rock. The finished canal stretched about forty-seven miles, from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The engineers who built it took advantage of an existing river, which they dammed in order to create Gatun Lake, whose surface lies eighty-five feet above sea level. Two sets of locks facilitate the passage, but they also impose a limit; for decades, the shipping industry’s standard has been the Panamax ship, the largest one that could fit through the locks. A third set of locks, wider and deeper, has been under construction since 2007, and is to be completed in 2015, at an estimated cost of seven billion dollars.

In Nicaragua, the proposed canal will be at least three times as long, but it will also take advantage of several river courses, as well as the waters of Lake Nicaragua, which is some forty miles wide. As in Panama, the rivers have to be widened and deepened, and a series of locks created to float ships to the surface of Lake Nicaragua, a hundred and eight feet above sea level. There are considerable environmental concerns to overcome. Lake Nicaragua, which is Central America’s largest source of freshwater, isn’t deep enough for the biggest ships, and so it will have to be dredged; after it is joined to the ocean, there is the risk of salinization. Even disposing of the excavated dirt poses an enormous challenge. The cost of the construction is officially estimated at forty billion dollars.

In Panama, I found opinion sharply divided over the Nicaraguan canal. The former Panama Canal administrator Alberto Alemán Zubieta told me that several years ago a group of Nicaraguans asked him whether it was feasible to have two canals in the same neighborhood. “I said I didn’t think it

made sense—I was being diplomatic,” he said. “It’s a dream, and there’s nothing wrong with having a dream. But one day you have to wake up and look at the cold, hard numbers.” By his analysis, the construction of a Nicaraguan canal would cost at least a hundred billion dollars. In the meantime, Panama could increase its capacity by building a fourth set of locks. That would cost perhaps ten billion dollars, far less than the Nicaraguan canal, and it could be done more quickly. “I just don’t see it,” he said. “It’s a humongous project, to be used for what, by whom?” As for the notion that Nicaragua’s canal was motivated by geostrategic concerns, he scoffed: “Nowadays, you don’t need a canal for a geostrategic infrastructure. Nowadays, it’s drones. What does a canal do for you?”

Wang has pointed out that ninety per cent of the world’s commerce travels by ship, and that global trade is expected to increase several hundred per cent in the coming decades. He says that he is looking to build a canal with a capacity for the “ships of tomorrow.” Carlos Urriola, an executive vice-president with Carrix, an international port-management firm, concurred. When I asked about the need for a Nicaraguan canal, he talked about ships’ capacity, measured in T.E.U.s, or twenty-foot containers. “At the end of the seventies, when the container ships were fifteen hundred T.E.U.s and went to forty-two hundred, we said it would never go higher. Now we are at eighteen



thousand.” The largest ships—those bigger than fourteen thousand T.E.U.s—can’t fit through the Panama Canal, and “the ships will keep getting bigger, as history shows us.” He said that the Nicaraguan canal would be viable even if Panama built a fourth set of locks. “It’s not only containers. Shipping cargo today is also grain, coal, liquefied natural gas, soy, oil. So I would say, sure, there is business in a Nicaraguan canal.”

Urriola wasn’t concerned by the

technical challenges: “The engineering is feasible—it can be done.” The China Railroad Construction Corporation, which Wang contracted, has overseen most of China’s rail projects, and was involved in building the gargantuan Three Gorges Dam, on the Yangtze River. Urriola doubted that the canal would be finished on schedule, but, he said, “it’s definitely a call of attention to Panama that it should finish its expansion and possibly begin a fourth set of locks, because we may stop having the monopoly in the region.” The money wasn’t a concern, he argued; China’s infrastructure projects can run wildly over budget. In any case, the Chinese, like Ortega, might not believe that cost-effectiveness was the most important criterion. “This is a project of *envergadura*,” he said—a term that he translated, with a smile, as a “hard-dick project.”

A few years ago, U.S. Department of Defense contractors began speaking anxiously about the String of Pearls, a term that they had devised to warn of China’s strategic maritime expansion throughout South Asia. Since 2003, Chinese firms have also bought stakes in ports from Piraeus to Antwerp, and invested heavily in major infrastructure projects—ports, railways, roads—in Sudan, Kenya, Malaysia, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. These projects usually link up with regional investments. Gwadar, a port that China is expanding in Pakistan, will attach to the Chinese-built Karakoram Highway, which extends to southwestern China. A newly planned port at Bagamoyo, in Tanzania, will be connected by a Chinese-built railway to Zambia, where China has significant copper-mining interests.

In Latin America, too, China has an exponentially growing presence, with trade increasing from about twelve billion dollars in 2000 to two hundred and fifty billion in 2012. It is a major purchaser of Venezuelan oil and gas, of Peruvian minerals, and of Brazilian iron ore. But it has few ports in the region, and Wang’s project would represent a major foothold. In Managua, Benjamin Lanzas, the head of the Chamber of Construction, who went on the China trip, told me, “The canal is their way of telling the world, ‘We’ve arrived.’” He



*"I do, too, notice the little things, and most of them irritate me."*

pointed to a map on his office wall. "Could this be the bridge China wants to use to come and conquer the Americas? This worries us a little. If the U.S. becomes ill, we'll suffer, too."

For two centuries, U.S. policy in the region has been guided by the Monroe Doctrine, which justified military intervention whenever America felt that its security was at risk. In November, John Kerry told a gathering at the Organization of American States, "The era of the Monroe Doctrine is over." Instead, the U.S. hoped to foster a partnership based upon shared "values and interests." Kerry's pronouncement seemed intended as a palliative in an increasingly confrontational region. Half a dozen Latin-American countries are governed by left-wing nationalists, and the governments of Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia have vociferously challenged U.S. policies.

If the American government is concerned about a Chinese megaproject in Nicaragua, it has been careful not to let on. In November, Roberta Jacobson, the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, told an audience in Beijing that China's growing commercial involvement in Latin America was "an extraordinarily positive thing for the region and for us."

In Bogotá, a senior government

official expressed dismay at America's inactivity: "We have conveyed our disquiet about the Chinese presence in the Caribbean, but the Americans have not paid us any mind." In a meeting with Vice-President Joseph Biden in December, 2012, the official brought up the canal, and Biden replied that he had "no instructions to talk about the subject." (The Vice-President's office denies this.) The official added, "We don't understand, frankly. Maybe they are waiting for commercial opportunities." He believed that the U.S. was being deliberately circumspect. "But one cannot believe that they don't find the idea of a Chinese canal so near to the United States uncomfortable."

In November, when Biden toured Panama's canal expansion, he refrained from any public mention of a competing canal. As long as the canal is officially a private project, there is little benefit in provoking a public fight with China—especially when construction has not yet begun. And perhaps the legacy of the Monroe Doctrine is enough to keep the canal from being built if the U.S. is not included.

Daniel Ortega's younger brother, Humberto, a former defense minister, told me that America's cooperation would be essential. "Daniel's clear

about that, and the Chinese know that, too—they're not stupid," he said. "If this goes ahead, it will have to be with an American-Chinese agreement. For the Chinese, the canal will be a playing card with which to talk to the gringos and to gain an advantage somewhere else. But the gringos will have to be the gatekeepers. If not, there will be no canal."

One day, I drove down the shore of Lake Nicaragua to the town of Morrito, which is on one of the proposed routes for the canal. Morrito was a tiny, quiet place. In the church, some teen-age girls preparing for a *quinceañera*—the traditional party for girls turning fifteen—were filling the space with pink balloons. A concrete pier jutted into the lake, and a few boys dove and swam at the end. On the horizon were two large blue volcanoes—including the towering Momotombo, whose image, smoldering on the postage stamp, had cost Nicaragua the canal a hundred years earlier.

The mayor, Griselda Medina, a woman in her forties, met me at her home. She eyed me suspiciously, and wrote everything I said in a notebook on her lap before she replied. About the canal, she said, "God only knows if it will pass through here. I would be delighted." I said that I had found very little information forthcoming from the government, and she narrowed her eyes. She said that she and other mayors had been summoned by the President, and he had spoken to them about the canal—"in general terms," she said. "In this government, there is no secrecy. Everything is spoken of, and I believe that whatever is done will be fair." When I asked about the possibility that land would be expropriated, she looked at me sourly. "There will always be someone who comes along who wants to twist the truth."

Few people I talked with in Nicaragua seemed sure that the canal would be completed, but everyone hoped that it would help the economy: even if only a railroad or a port was built, it was better than nothing. Manuel Kautz, the president of the Nicaraguan Canal Commission, told me, "For a period of six to ten years, there will be a lot of work in Nicaragua, and that will leave a lot of know-how in the

country.” But China often brings its own citizens to work on foreign ventures. “The Chinese say there will be jobs for six hundred to seven hundred thousand people,” Kautz said. “Let’s see how many of those can be for Nicaraguans.”

Aguerri, speaking for the private sector, said, “We just need to make sure we have a seat on the horse and don’t fall off.” Everyone seemed to understand that there was little use in standing up to Ortega. He had the business community, the Army, and the Church on his side; whatever benefit the project created would probably go to his friends. Even his old enemies had become ardent supporters.

One of his most celebrated adversaries was the guerrilla leader Eden Pastora. In American media coverage of the Contra war, Pastora, who fought under the name Comandante Zero, emerged as a kind of real-life action figure. On NBC in 1983, Tom Brokaw described him as “a romantic and mysterious man who fought with the Sandinistas to take control of that country, and now fights against the Sandinistas.” A former ally of Ortega’s, he was distressed by the authoritarian leanings of the junta and fled to the jungle to join the Contras, supported by cash and weapons from the C.I.A. In April, 1984, I joined him during an attack on the small town of San Juan del Norte, at the Atlantic Coast entrance to the San Juan River. In days of bloody fighting, several dozen Sandinistas were killed, as were a number of Pastora’s closest lieutenants. A few weeks later, a Sandinista agent planted a bomb in television-camera equipment at a press conference at Pastora’s base. The explosion missed Pastora but killed seven other people, including three journalists.

A few years before my recent visit, Pastora had made his peace with Ortega, and had been put in charge of dredging operations along the San Juan River. He met me in his office, which was decorated with souvenirs of the old days: Kalashnikovs, pistols, framed photographs of himself with Fidel Castro. Almost seventy-seven, he looked fit, though his hair had turned white. He told me that, whatever he did on the San Juan, the canal likely wouldn’t go through there. “The *ticos*”—as Nicaraguans call their neighbors in Costa Rica—“lost an opportunity to partici-

pate in the canal, because they don’t want to reach an agreement with us,” he said. He added, “The Gran Canal is an old dream of the Nicaraguans, but none of the previous Presidents had Daniel Ortega’s *hormones*. Strength and political ability are needed to carry out the job. The opposition didn’t want to believe it, and they even talked about *el chino*—Wang Jing—as if he were a phantom. But now they know it’s true.” Pastora, who had met Wang, said, “He’s a man who knows what he’s doing.”

When I asked about the concession, he said, “The opposition calls it a surrendering of national sovereignty, but investors need security for their investment. And not a single foreign soldier is coming to Nicaragua! What really bothers them is the prestige that this signifies for Daniel Ortega. Keep in mind: this will change the economy of the world. The natural resources won’t have to go around Cape Horn anymore, but come straight through here to China, on megaships!” Pastora went on, “There will be two-hundred-ton trucks doing earthmoving and specialized drivers earning a thousand dollars a day! The *ticos* are just concerned that we’re going to be the richest people in Central America.” He cackled. “There are going to be railroads, refineries, satellites, hydroelectric plants, airports, and over thirty-seven social projects—all of it achieved in an atmosphere of freedom and democracy, without even so much as a tear-gas canister fired, without persecuting anybody. In five years, Managua will be a canal city, the most beautiful of Central America.” Carried away by his vision, he shouted, “Viva Daniel Ortega!”

The Nicaragua that Pastora occupies—Ortega’s Nicaragua—seems bizarrely marooned in the post-Cold War era. No true democracy has been fostered, but the old ideologies persist only as expedient rhetoric. Past allegiances, even mortal rivalries, mean nothing; the only important things seem to be power and profit. Victor Tirado López, one of the original Sandinista commanders, met me one afternoon at the guesthouse he runs in an upscale neighborhood of Managua. “Of the Sandinista revolution, there is nothing left—just projects that were unfinished,” he said. “If

it hadn’t been for us, there wouldn’t be this new epoch, this new country. But the ideology—the Marxism and all that—that’s history; it’s over.”

In other words, nothing that had been fought for so fiercely matters anymore. Pastora made his peace with Ortega for trying to murder him, and Ortega forgave his betrayal. Without any obstacles or any oversight, the country’s private sector is happy, just as it was under Somoza. Whether or not the canal is built, Ortega has sustained himself in office, and will perhaps make a great deal of money besides. Wang Jing got the country’s telecommunications contract and a chance to present himself as a major international developer. The only losers are the poor. Thirty-five years after the revolution that had supposedly liberated the country from an unscrupulous dictator, the majority are still destitute and semi-literate, and will likely vote for anyone who offers any improvement in their lives.

In a small Managua slum called Quilombo, a collection of shacks built into a muddy riverbank where a neighborhood threw its trash, I spoke to a couple of young mothers. One of them, Kenia Lucia, lived there with her three young children and worked as a cleaner in a hospital, earning the equivalent of about a hundred and forty dollars a month. Her boyfriend was an itinerant bricklayer. Kenia Lucia’s neighbor, Angelica, had five children. Four of them lived with her mother, whom she paid a little money to look after them. Angelica’s husband was a vender of flavored ices, but he was home at the moment, working in the dirt at the side of their shanty; he paused to wave and smile. They were digging a latrine, Angelica explained. They had been there three months, because, like Kenia Lucia, they had nowhere else to live.

“What about the Gran Canal?” I asked. Kenia Lucia looked nonplussed. I reminded her that President Ortega had said that the project would provide many jobs for Nicaraguans. She smiled politely, and said yes, she remembered: “That’s what they say.” I might as well have asked about a manned mission to Mars. “Let’s see if it brings some help,” Angelica said. She waved at the mud, the trash, and the half-dug latrine. “It’s hard to raise children in these circumstances.” ♦



*A Sheltered Woman*

YIYUN LI

The new mother, groggy from a nap, sat at the table as though she did not grasp why she had been summoned. Perhaps she never would, Auntie Mei thought. On the placemat sat a bowl of soybean-and-pig's-foot soup that Auntie Mei had cooked, as she had for many new mothers before this one. *Many*, however, was not exact. In her interviews with potential employers, Auntie Mei always gave the precise number of families she had worked for: a hundred and twenty-six when she interviewed with her current employer, a hundred and thirty-one babies altogether. The families' contact information, the dates she had worked for them, their babies' names and birthdays—these she had recorded in a palm-size notebook, which had twice fallen apart and been taped back together. Years ago, Auntie Mei had bought it at a garage sale in Moline, Illinois. She had liked the picture of flowers on the cover, purple and yellow, unmelted snow surrounding the chaste petals. She had liked the price of the notebook, too: five cents. When she handed a dime to the child with the cash box on his lap, she asked if there was another notebook she could buy, so that he would not have to give her any change; the boy looked perplexed and said no. It was greed that had made her ask, but when the memory came back—it often did when she took the notebook out of her suitcase for another interview—Auntie Mei would laugh at herself: why on earth had she wanted two notebooks, when there's not enough life to fill one?

The mother sat still, not touching the spoon, until teardrops fell into the steaming soup.

"Now, now," Auntie Mei said. She was pushing herself and the baby in a new rocking chair—back and forth, back and forth, the squeaking less noticeable than yesterday. I wonder who's enjoying the rocking more, she said to herself: the chair, whose job is to rock until it breaks apart, or you, whose life is being rocked away? And which one of you will meet your demise first? Auntie Mei had long ago accepted that she had, despite her best intentions, become one of those people who talk to themselves when the world is not listening. At least she took care not to let the words slip out.

"I don't like this soup," said the mother, who surely had a Chinese name but had asked Auntie Mei to call her Chanel. Auntie Mei, however, called every mother Baby's Ma, and every infant Baby. It was simple that way, one set of clients easily replaced by the next.

"It's not for you to like," Auntie Mei said. The soup had simmered all morning and had thickened to a milky white. She would never have touched it herself, but it was the best recipe for breast-feeding mothers. "You eat it for Baby."

"Why do I have to eat for him?" Chanel said. She was skinny, though it had been only five days since the delivery.

"Why, indeed," Auntie Mei said, laughing. "Where else do you think your milk comes from?"

"I'm not a cow."

I would rather you were a cow, Auntie Mei thought. But she merely threatened gently that there was always the option of formula. Auntie Mei wouldn't mind that, but most people hired her for her expertise in taking care of newborns and breast-feeding mothers.

The young woman started to sob. Really, Auntie Mei thought, she had never seen anyone so unfit to be a mother as this little creature.

"I think I have postpartum depression," Chanel said when her tears had stopped.

Some fancy term the young woman had picked up.

"My great-grandmother hanged herself when my grandfather was three days old. People said she'd fallen under the spell of some passing ghost, but this is what I think." Using her iPhone as a mirror, Chanel checked her face and pressed her puffy eyelids with a finger. "She had postpartum depression."

Auntie Mei stopped rocking and snuggled the infant closer. At once his head started bumping against her bosom. "Don't speak nonsense," she said sternly.

"I'm only explaining what postpartum depression is."

"Your problem is that you're not eating. Nobody would be happy if they were in your shoes."

"Nobody," Chanel said glumly, "could possibly be in my shoes. Do you know what I dreamed last night?"

"No."

"Take a guess."

"In our village, we say it's bad luck to guess someone else's dreams," Auntie Mei said. Only ghosts entered and left people's minds freely.

"I dreamed that I flushed Baby down the toilet."

"Oh. I wouldn't have guessed that even if I'd tried."

"That's the problem. Nobody knows how I feel," Chanel said, and started to weep again.

Auntie Mei sniffed under the child's blanket, paying no heed to the fresh tears. "Baby needs a diaper change," she announced, knowing that, given some time, Chanel would acquiesce: a mother is a mother, even if she speaks of flushing her child down the drain.

Auntie Mei had worked as a live-in nanny for newborns and their mothers for eleven years. As a rule, she moved out of the family's house the day a baby turned a month old, unless—though this rarely happened—she was between jobs, which was never more than a few days. Many families would have been glad to pay her extra for another week, or another month; some even offered a longer term, but Auntie Mei always declined: she worked as a first-month nanny, whose duties, toward both the mother and the infant, were different from those of a regular nanny. Once in a while, she was approached by previous employers to care for their second child. The thought of facing a child who had once been an infant in her arms led to lost sleep; she agreed only when there was no other option, and she treated the older children as though they were empty air.

Between bouts of sobbing, Chanel said she did not understand why her husband couldn't take a few days off. The previous day he had left for Shenzhen on a business trip. "What right does he have to leave me alone with his son?"

Alone? Auntie Mei squinted at Baby's eyebrows, knitted so tight that the skin in between took on a tinge of yellow. Your pa is working hard so your ma can stay home and call me nobody. The Year of the Snake, an inauspicious one to give birth in, had been slow for



## COLD WAR STORIES

Auntie Mei; otherwise, she would've had better options. She had not liked the couple when she met them; unlike most expectant parents, they had both looked distracted, and asked few questions before offering her the position. They were about to entrust their baby to a stranger, Auntie Mei had wanted to remind them, but neither seemed worried. Perhaps they had gathered enough references? Auntie Mei did have a reputation as a gold-medal nanny. Her employers were the lucky ones, to have had a good education in China and, later, America, and to have become professionals in the Bay Area: lawyers, doctors, V.C.s, engineers—no matter, they still needed an experienced Chinese nanny for their American-born babies. Many families lined her up months before their babies were born.

Baby, cleaned and swaddled, seemed satisfied, so Auntie Mei left him on the changing table and looked out the window, enjoying, as she always did, a view that did not belong to her. Between an azalea bush and a slate path, there was a man-made pond, which hosted an assortment of goldfish and lily pads. Before he left, the husband had asked Auntie Mei to feed the fish and refill the

pond. Eighteen hundred gallons a year, he had informed her, calculating the expense. She would have refused the additional responsibilities if not for his readiness to pay her an extra twenty dollars each day.

A statue of an egret, balanced on one leg, stood in the water, its neck curved into a question mark. Auntie Mei thought about the man who had made the sculpture. Of course, it could have been a woman, but Auntie Mei refused to accept that possibility. She liked to believe that it was men who made beautiful and useless things like the egret. Let him be a lonely man, beyond the reach of any fiendish woman.

Baby started to wiggle. Don't you stir before your ma finishes her soup, Auntie Mei warned in a whisper, though in vain. The egret, startled, took off with an unhurried elegance, its single squawk stunning Auntie Mei and then making her laugh. For sure, you're getting old and forgetful: there was no such statue yesterday. Auntie Mei picked up Baby and went into the yard. There were fewer goldfish now, but at least some had escaped the egret's raid. All the same, she would have to tell Chanel about the loss. You think you have a

problem with postpartum depression? Think of the goldfish, living one day in a paradise pond and the next day going to Heaven in the stomach of a passing egret.

Auntie Mei believed in strict routines for every baby and mother in her charge. For the first week, she fed the mother six meals a day, with three snacks in between; from the second week on, it was four meals and two snacks. The baby was to be nursed every two hours during the day, and every three or four hours at night. She let the parents decide whether the crib was kept in their bedroom or in the nursery, but she would not allow it in her bedroom. No, this was not for her convenience, she explained to them; there was simply no reason for a baby to be close to someone who was there for only a month.

"But it's impossible to eat so much. People are different," Chanel said the next day. Less weepy at the moment, she was curled up on the sofa, a pair of heating pads on her chest: Auntie Mei had not been impressed with the young woman's milk production.

You can be as different as you want after I leave, Auntie Mei thought as she bathed Baby; your son can grow into a lopsided squash and I won't care a bit. But no mother or baby could deviate just yet. The reason people hired a first-month nanny, Auntie Mei told Chanel, was to make sure that things went correctly, not differently.

"But did you follow this schedule when you had your children? I bet you didn't."

"As a matter of fact, I didn't, only because I didn't have children."

"Not even one?"

"You didn't specify a nanny who had her own children."

"But why would you . . . why did you choose this line of work?"

Why indeed. "Sometimes a job chooses you," Auntie Mei said. Ha, who knew she could be so profound?

"But you must love children, then?"

Oh, no, no, not this one or that one; not any of them. "Does a bricklayer love his bricks?" Auntie Mei asked. "Does the dishwasher repairman love the dishwashers?" That morning, a man had come to look at Chanel's

malfunctioning dishwasher. It had taken him only twenty minutes of poking, but the bill was a hundred dollars, as much as a whole day's wages for Auntie Mei.

"Auntie, that's not a good argument."

"My job doesn't require me to argue well. If I could argue, I'd have become a lawyer, like your husband, no?"

Chanel made a mirthless laughing sound. Despite her self-diagnosed depression, she seemed to enjoy talking with Auntie Mei more than most mothers, who talked to her about their babies and their breast-feeding but otherwise had little interest in her.

Auntie Mei put Baby on the sofa next to Chanel, who was unwilling to make room. "Now, let's look into this milk situation," Auntie Mei said, rubbing her hands until they were warm before removing the heating pads. Chanel cried out in pain.

"I haven't even touched you."

Look at your eyes, Auntie Mei wanted to say. Not even a good plumber could fix such a leak.

"I don't want to nurse this thing anymore," Chanel said.

This thing? "He's your son."

"His father's, too. Why can't he be here to help?"

"Men don't make milk."

Chanel laughed, despite her tears. "No. The only thing they make is money."

"You're lucky to have found one who makes money. Not all of them do, you know."

Chanel dried her eyes carefully with the inside of her pajama sleeve. "Auntie, are you married?"

"Once," Auntie Mei said.

"What happened? Did you divorce him?"

"He died," Auntie Mei said. She had, every day of her marriage, wished that her husband would stop being part of her life, though not in so absolute a manner. Now, years later, she still felt responsible for his death, as though it were she, and not a group of teen-agers, who had accosted him that night. Why didn't you just let them take the money? Sometimes Auntie Mei scolded him when she tired of talking to herself. Thirty-five dollars for a life, three months short of fifty-two.

"Was he much older than you?"

"Older, yes, but not too old."

"My husband is twenty-eight years older than I am," Chanel said. "I bet you didn't guess that."

"No, I didn't."

"Is it that I look old or that he looks young?"

"You look like a good match."

"Still, he'll probably die before me, right? Women live longer than men, and he's had a head start."

So you, too, are eager to be freed. Let me tell you, it's bad enough when a wish like that doesn't come true, but, if it ever does, that's when you know that living is a most disappointing business: the world is not a bright place to start with, but a senseless wish granted senselessly makes it much dimmer. "Don't speak nonsense," Auntie Mei said.

"I'm only stating the truth. How did your husband die? Was it a heart attack?"

"You could say that," Auntie Mei said, and before Chanel could ask more questions Auntie Mei grabbed one of her erring breasts. Chanel gasped and then screamed. Auntie Mei did not let go until she'd given the breast a forceful massage. When she reached for the other breast, Chanel screamed louder but did not change her position, for fear of crushing Baby, perhaps.

Afterward, Auntie Mei brought a warm towel. "Go," Chanel said. "I don't want you here anymore."

"But who'll take care of you?"

"I don't need anyone to take care of me." Chanel stood up and belted her robe.

"And Baby?"

"Bad luck for him."

Chanel walked to the staircase, her back defiantly rigid. Auntie Mei picked up Baby, his weight as insignificant as the emotions—sadness, anger, or dismay—that she should feel on his behalf. Rather, Auntie Mei was in awe of the young woman. That is how, Auntie Mei said to herself, a mother orphan a child.

**B**aby, six days old that day, was weaned from his mother's breast. Auntie Mei was now the sole person to provide him with food and care—and this she did not want to admit even to

"I wish  
I could tell  
everyone  
who thinks  
we're ruined,  
Look closer...  
and you'll  
see something  
extraordinary,  
mystifying,  
something  
real and true."

—ZELDA  
SAYRE  
FITZGERALD



herself—love. Chanel stayed in her bedroom and watched Chinese television dramas all afternoon. Once in a while, she came downstairs for water, and spoke to Auntie Mei as though the old woman and the infant were poor relations: there was the inconvenience of having them to stay, and yet there was relief that they did not have to be entertained.

The dishwasher repairman returned in the evening. He reminded Auntie Mei that his name was Paul. As though she were so old that she could forget it in a day, she thought. Earlier, she had told him about the thieving egret, and he had promised to come back and fix the problem.

"You're sure the bird won't be killed," Auntie Mei said as she watched Paul rig some wires above the pond.

"Try it yourself," Paul said, flipping the battery switch.

Auntie Mei placed her palm on the crisscrossed wires. "I feel nothing."

"Good. If you felt something, I'd be putting your life at risk. Then you could sue me."

"But how does it work?"

"Let's hope the egret is more sensitive than you are," Paul said. "Call me if it doesn't work. I won't charge you again."

Auntie Mei felt doubtful, but her questioning silence did not stop him from admiring his own invention. Nothing, he said, is too difficult for a thinking man. When he put away his tools he lingered on, and she could see that there was no reason for him to hurry home. He had grown up in Vietnam, he told Auntie Mei, and had come to America thirty-seven years ago. He was widowed, with three grown children, and none of them had given him a grandchild, or the hope of one. His two sisters, both living in New York and both younger, had beaten him at becoming grandparents.

The same old story: they all had to come from somewhere, and they all accumulated people along the way. Auntie Mei could see the unfolding of Paul's life: he'd work his days away till he was too old to be useful, then his children would deposit him in a facil-

ity and visit on his birthday and on holidays. Auntie Mei, herself an untethered woman, felt superior to him. She raised Baby's tiny fist as Paul was leaving. "Say bye-bye to Grandpa Paul."

Auntie Mei turned and looked up at the house. Chanel was leaning on the windowsill of her second-floor bedroom. "Is he going to electrocute the egret?" she called down.

"He said it would only zap the bird. To teach it a lesson."

"You know what I hate about people? They like to say, 'That will teach you a lesson.' But what's the point of a lesson? There's no makeup exam when you fail something in life."

It was October, and the evening air from the Bay had a chill to it. Auntie Mei had nothing to say except to warn Chanel not to catch a cold.

"Who cares?"

"Maybe your parents do."

Chanel made a dismissive noise.

"Or your husband."

"Ha. He just e-mailed and told me he had to stay for another ten days," Chanel said. "You know what I think he's doing right now? Sleeping with a woman, or more than one."

Auntie Mei did not reply. It was her policy not to disparage an employer behind his back. But when she entered the house Chanel was already in the living room. "I think you should know he's not the kind of person you thought he was."

"I don't think he's any kind of person at all," Auntie Mei said.

"You never say a bad word about him," Chanel said.

Not a good word, either.

"He had a wife and two children before."

You think a man, any man, would remain a bachelor until he meets you? Auntie Mei put the slip of paper with Paul's number in her pocket.

"Did that man leave you his number?" Chanel said. "Is he courting you?"

"Him? Half of him, if not more, is already in the coffin."

"Men chase after women until the last moment," Chanel said. "Auntie, don't fall for him. No man is to be trusted."

Auntie Mei sighed. "If Baby's Pa is not coming home, who's going to shop for groceries?"

The man of the house postponed his return; Chanel refused to have anything to do with Baby. Against her rules, Auntie Mei moved his crib into her bedroom; against her rules, too, she took on the responsibility of grocery shopping.

"Do you suppose people will think we're the grandparents of this baby?" Paul asked after inching the car into a tight spot between two S.U.V.s.

Could it be that he had agreed to drive and help with shopping for a reason other than the money Auntie Mei had promised him? "Nobody," she said, handing a list to Paul, "will think anything. Baby and I will wait here in the car."

"You're not coming in?"

"He's a brand-new baby. You think I would bring him into a store with a bunch of refrigerators?"

"You should've left him home, then."

With whom? Auntie Mei worried that, had she left Baby home, he would be gone from the world when she returned, though this fear she would not share with Paul. She explained that Baby's Ma suffered from postpartum depression and was in no shape to take care of him.

"You should've just given me the shopping list," Paul said.

What if you ran off with the money without delivering the groceries? she thought, though it was unfair of her. There were men she knew she could trust, including, even, her dead husband.

On the drive back, Paul asked if the egret had returned. She hadn't noticed, Auntie Mei replied. She wondered if she would have an opportunity to see the bird be taught its lesson: she had only twenty-two days left. Twenty-two days, and then the next family would pluck her out of here, egret or no egret. Auntie Mei turned to look at Baby, who was asleep in the car seat. "What will become of you then?" she said.

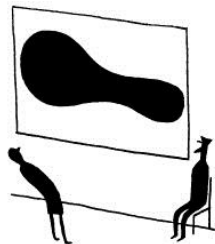
"Me?" Paul asked.

"Not you. Baby."

"Why do you worry? He'll have a good life. Better than mine. Better than yours, for sure."

"You don't know my life to say that," Auntie Mei said.

"I can imagine. You should find



someone. This is not a good life for you, going from one house to another and never settling down."

"What's wrong with that? I don't pay rent. I don't have to buy my own food."

"What's the point of making money if you don't spend it?" Paul said. "I'm at least saving money for my future grandchildren."

"What I do with my money," Auntie Mei said, "is none of your business. Now, please pay attention to the road."

Paul, chastened into a rare silence, drove on, the slowest car on the freeway. Perhaps he'd meant well, but there were plenty of well-meaning men, and she was one of those women who made such men suffer. If Paul wanted to hear stories, she could tell him one or two, and spare him any hope of winning her affection. But where would she start? With the man she had married without any intention of loving and had wished into an early grave, or with the father she had not met because her mother had made his absolute absence a condition of her birth? Or perhaps she should start with her grandmother, who vanished from her own daughter's crib side one day, only to show up twenty-five years later when her husband was dying from a wasting illness. The disappearance would have made sense had Auntie Mei's grandfather been a villain, but he had been a kind man, and had raised his daughter alone, clinging to the hope that his wife, having left without a word, would return.

Auntie Mei's grandmother had not gone far: all those years, she had stayed in the same village, living with another man, hiding in his attic during the day, sneaking out of the house in the middle of the night for a change of air. Nobody was able to understand why she had not gone on hiding until after her husband's death. She explained that it was her wifely duty to see her husband off properly.

Auntie Mei's mother, newly married and with a prospering business as a seamstress, was said to have accepted one parent's return and the other's death with equanimity, but the next year, pregnant with her first and only child, she made her husband leave by threatening to drink a bottle of DDT.

Auntie Mei had been raised by two mythic women. The villagers had shunned

the two women, but they had welcomed the girl as one of them. Behind closed doors, they had told her about her grandfather and her father, and in their eyes she had seen their fearful disapproval of her elders: her pale-skinned grandmother, unused to daylight after years of darkness, had carried on her nocturnal habits, cooking and knitting for her daughter and granddaughter in the middle of the night; her mother, eating barely enough, had slowly starved herself to death, yet she never tired of watching, with an unblinking intensity, her daughter eat.

Auntie Mei had not thought of leaving home until the two women died, her mother first, and then her grandmother. They had been sheltered from worldly reproach by their peculiarities when alive; in death, they took with them their habitat, and left nothing to anchor Auntie Mei. A marriage offer, arranged by the distant cousin of a man in Queens, New York, had been accepted without hesitation: in a new country, her grandmother and her mother would cease to be legendary. Auntie Mei had not told her husband about them; he would not have been interested, in any case—silly good man, wanting only a hardworking woman to share a solid life. Auntie Mei turned to look at Paul. Perhaps he was not so different from her husband, her father, her grandfather, or even the man her grandmother had lived with for years but never returned to after the death of Auntie Mei's grandfather: ordinary happiness, uncomplicated by the women in their lives, was their due.

"You think, by any chance, you'll be free tomorrow afternoon?" Paul asked when he'd parked the car in front of Chanel's house.

"I work all day, as you know."

"You could bring Baby, like you did today."

"To where?"

Paul said that there was this man who played chess every Sunday afternoon at East-West Plaza Park. Paul wanted to take a walk with Auntie Mei and Baby nearby.

Auntie Mei laughed. "Why, so he'll get distracted and lose the game?"

"I want him to think I've done better than him."

Better how? With a borrowed lady

"In the spirit of  
**THE PARIS WIFE.**"

—SARA GRUEN

"ARRESTING."

—ELLE

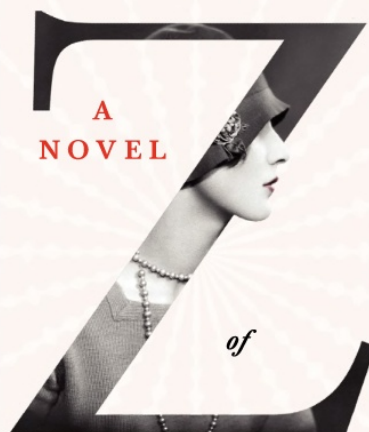
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friend pushing a borrowed grandson in a stroller? “Who is he?”

“Nobody important. I haven’t talked to him for twenty-seven years.”

He couldn’t even lie well. “And you still think he’d fall for your trick?”

“I know him.”

Auntie Mei wondered if knowing someone—a friend, an enemy—was like never letting that person out of one’s sight. Being known, then, must not be far from being imprisoned by someone else’s thought. In that sense, her grandmother and her mother had been fortunate: no one could claim to have known them, not even Auntie Mei. When she was younger, she had seen no point in understanding them, as she had been told they were beyond apprehension. After their deaths, they had become abstract. Not knowing them, Auntie Mei, too, had the good fortune of not wanting to know anyone who came after: her husband; her co-workers at various Chinese restaurants during her yearlong migration from New York to San Francisco; the babies and the mothers she took care of, who had become only recorded names in her notebook. “I’d say let it go,” Auntie

Mei told Paul. “What kind of grudge is worthy of twenty-seven years?”

Paul sighed. “If I tell you the story, you’ll understand.”

“Please,” Auntie Mei said. “Don’t tell me any story.”

From the second-floor landing, Chanel watched Paul put the groceries in the refrigerator and Auntie Mei warm up a bottle of formula. Only after he’d left did Chanel call down to ask how their date had gone. Auntie Mei held Baby in the rocking chair; the joy of watching him eat was enough of a compensation for his mother’s being a nuisance.

Chanel came downstairs and sat on the sofa. “I saw you pull up. You stayed in the car for a long time,” she said. “I didn’t know an old man could be so romantic.”

Auntie Mei thought of taking Baby into her bedroom, but this was not her house, and she knew that Chanel, in a mood to talk, would follow her. When Auntie Mei remained quiet, Chanel said that her husband had called earlier, and she had told him that his son had gone out to witness a couple carry on a *sunset affair*.

You should walk out right this minute, Auntie Mei said to herself, but her body settled into the rhythm of the rocking chair, back and forth, back and forth.

“Are you angry, Auntie?”

“What did your husband say?”

“He was upset, of course, and I told him that’s what he gets for not coming home.”

What’s stopping you from leaving? Auntie Mei asked herself. You want to believe you’re staying for Baby, don’t you?

“You should be happy for me that he’s upset,” Chanel said. “Or at least happy for Baby, no?”

I’m happy that, like everyone else, you’ll all become the past soon.

“Why are you so quiet, Auntie? I’m sorry I’m such a pain, but I don’t have a friend here, and you’ve been nice to me. Would you please take care of me and Baby?”

“You’re paying me,” Auntie Mei said. “So of course I’ll take care of you.”

“Will you be able to stay on after this month?” Chanel asked. “I’ll pay double.”

“I don’t work as a regular nanny.”

“But what would we do without you, Auntie?”

Don’t let this young woman’s sweet voice deceive you, Auntie Mei warned herself: you’re not irreplaceable—not for her, not for Baby, not for anyone. Still, Auntie Mei fancied for a moment that she could watch Baby grow—a few months, a year, two years. “When is Baby’s Pa coming home?”

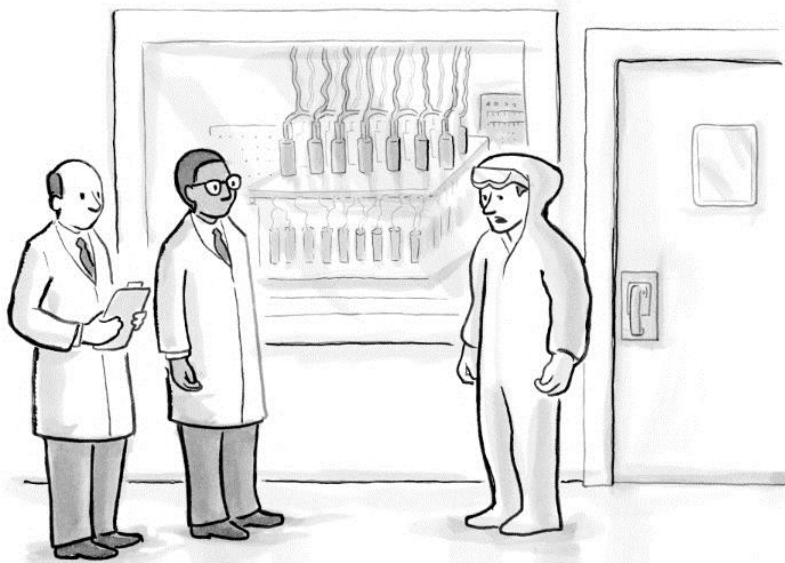
“He’ll come home when he comes.”

Auntie Mei cleaned Baby’s face with the corner of a towel.

“I know what you’re thinking—that I didn’t choose the right man. Do you want to know how I came to marry someone so old and irresponsible?”

“I don’t, as a matter of fact.”

All the same, they told Auntie Mei stories, not heeding her protests. The man who played chess every Sunday afternoon came from the same village as Paul’s wife, and had long ago been pointed out to him by her as a potentially better husband. Perhaps she had said it only once, out of an impulse to sting Paul, or perhaps she had tormented him for years with her approval



PAUL  
NOTH

“Well, your quantum computer is broken in every way possible simultaneously.”

of a former suitor. Paul did not say, and Auntie Mei did not ask. Instead, he had measured his career against the man's: Paul had become a real professional; the man had stayed a laborer.

An enemy could be as eternally close as a friend; a feud could make two men brothers for life. Fortunate are those for whom everyone can be turned into a stranger, Auntie Mei thought, but this wisdom she did not share with Paul. He had wanted her only to listen, and she had obliged him.

Chanel, giving more details, and making Auntie blush at times, was a better storyteller. She had slept with an older married man to punish her father, who had himself pursued a young woman, in this case one of Chanel's college classmates. The pregnancy was meant to punish her father, too, but also the man, who, like her father, had cheated on his wife. "He didn't know who I was at first. I made up a story so that he thought I was one of those girls he could sleep with and then pay off," Chanel had said. "But then he realized he had no choice but to marry me. My father has enough connections to destroy his business."

Had she not thought how this would make her mother feel? Auntie Mei asked. Why should she? Chanel replied. A woman who could not keep the heart of her man was not a good model for a daughter.

Auntie Mei did not understand their logic: Chanel's depraved; Paul's unbending. What a world you've been born into, Auntie Mei said to Baby now. It was past midnight, the lamp in her bedroom turned off. The night-light of swimming ocean animals on the crib streaked Baby's face blue and orange. There must have been a time when her mother had sat with her by candlelight, or else her grandmother might have been there in the darkness. What kind of future had they wished for her? She had been brought up in two worlds: the world of her grandmother and her mother, and that of everyone else; each world had sheltered her from the other, and to lose one was to be turned, against her wish, into a permanent resident of the other.

Auntie Mei came from a line of women who could not understand themselves, and in not knowing themselves

they had derailed their men and orphaned their children. At least Auntie Mei had had the sense not to have a child, though sometimes, during a sleepless night like this one, she entertained the thought of slipping away with a baby she could love. The world was vast; there had to be a place for a woman to raise a child as she wished.

The babies—a hundred and thirty-one of them, and their parents, trusting yet vigilant—had protected Auntie Mei from herself. But who was going to protect her now? Not this baby, who was as defenseless as the others, yet she must protect him. From whom, though: his parents, who had no place for him in their hearts, or Auntie Mei, who had begun to imagine his life beyond the one month allocated to her?

See, this is what you get for sitting up and muddling your head. Soon you'll become a tiresome oldster like Paul, or a lonely woman like Chanel, telling stories to any available ear. You can go on talking and thinking about your mother and your grandmother and all those women before them, but the problem is, you don't know them. If knowing someone makes that person stay with you forever, not knowing someone does the same trick: death does not take the dead away; it only makes them grow more deeply into you.

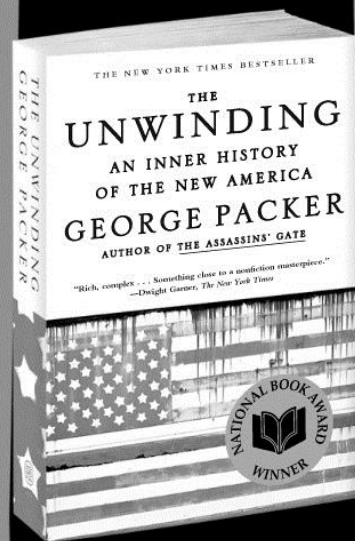
No one would be able to stop her if she picked up Baby and walked out the door. She could turn herself into her grandmother, for whom sleep had become optional in the end; she could turn herself into her mother, too, eating little because it was Baby who needed nourishment. She could become a fugitive from this world that had kept her for too long, but this urge, coming as it often did in waves, no longer frightened her, as it had years ago. She was getting older, more forgetful, yet she was also closer to comprehending the danger of being herself. She had, unlike her mother and her grandmother, talked herself into being a woman with an ordinary fate. When she moved on to the next place, she would leave no mystery or damage behind; no one in this world would be disturbed by having known her. ♦

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Yiyun Li on "A Sheltered Woman."

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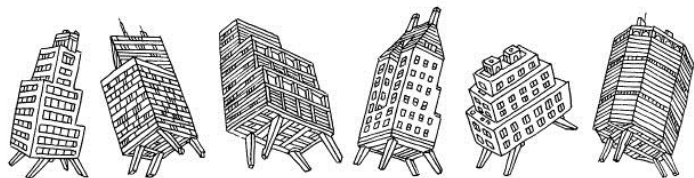
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# THE CRITICS



THE THEATRE

## THE MARRYING KIND

*A new production of "A Doll's House."*

BY HILTON ALS

Money is the more binding of the corsets that the female characters have to deal with in Henrik Ibsen's 1879 play, "A Doll's House" (currently in revival at BAM's Harvey Theatre). Perhaps "binding" is not the word, since it's a lack of cash—and the power that goes along with having money—that determines so much in this very great play, a drama rife with emotional debts, secrets, recriminations, and sexual poverty. Taking intimacy as its basic theme—What determines love? Is it ever free of social convention, and, if so, what does "free" love look like?—Ibsen's fifteenth script and third masterpiece ("Peer Gynt" and "Pillars of Society" had come out in 1867 and 1877, respectively, when Ibsen was middle-aged) is not difficult to follow, but it is difficult to take. The piece is a profound act of empathy about the hard work of coupling, but the only real love it shows is for Nora Helmer (Hattie Morahan), Ibsen's multi-layered, optimistic, and beautifully obdurate protagonist.

One senses that his love for Nora was among the more pure he had known; Ibsen's considerable ego does not inform Nora so much as support her. There's a familial feel to Ibsen's regard for the existentially troubled young woman, which is odd, given how little regard he expressed toward his own family. Born into a clan centered on the drama of male power and collapse, Ibsen was forever shamed by his father's drinking and his inability to make a successful go of it in business. His artistically inclined mother was emotionally withdrawn. To save himself and his im-

mense gifts, Ibsen turned his back on his family as quickly as he could; he learned of his father's death some time after the fact. Although it has been reported that "A Doll's House" was inspired by a friend's marriage—the wife took out a loan to give her ill husband a restorative holiday, as Nora does in Ibsen's nearly three-hour drama—that seems like surface noise next to the play's titanic imaginative force.

Actually, part of what makes the story feel so desperate and urgent in our hearts—we never want it to end—is that it so resembles life's rhythms, with its various elisions and polite misdeeds and yearnings, and yet it's better than reality, since "A Doll's House" cannot be explained away, or treated merely as a distant object; once it enters our consciousness, it sweeps us up in its emotional irresolution. It is a knowing work but an innocent one. And when the piece is done well, as it is here, in the director Carrie Cracknell's continually energetic, excellently cast production, we feel as though we're watching a story told by a director who has the eye and the sensibility of an unusually intense and observant child—one who knows that convention is a bogeyman we are reluctant to cast off, because we dread freedom, a largely uninhabited landscape.

Ibsen starts off by telling us something about who Nora is—or, rather, the conditions she lives under. It's Christmastime in Norway, and the Helmer household is filled with excitement. A sweet-tempered maid, Helene (Mabel Clements), scurries about the Helmers' tidy house; she opens

the front door, and our fair-haired heroine enters Ian MacNeil's ingenious set, which sometimes revolves, like a dancer in a music box, as the actors move from room to room, trailed by Stuart Earl's lovely score. Nora is carrying a number of packages; they're gifts for her three children. As she sets her packages down and takes off her coat, Helene tells her that her husband, Torvald (Dominic Rowan), is in his study. After years of struggle, he's about to be made the manager of a local bank. Things are on the upswing in the Helmer household, but something's wrong.

Before Nora can alert Torvald or the children to her presence, she devours a chocolate that she's secreted away. But why is her pleasure a secret? Torvald enters, and you can't help choking when he calls Nora a "swallow"; she's a bird in a cage. He chastises her for her extravagance; in money matters, she's like her father, a profligate fellow, now dead. Torvald says that, just because he's doing better financially than he was last Christmas, that's no reason to overspend. Nora laughs—she laughs a lot when the truth strikes too close or too brutally—and she keeps rushing into or flirtatiously pulling herself away from Torvald's strong, stiff arms as he talks. She's about to request something, and to do so she must appear smaller, more "feminine," and thus an object to be protected, not criticized.

Torvald asks Nora what she would like for Christmas, and eventually she hits on money. The audience laughs, even though we don't know why, exactly. We're only about fifteen minutes in, but Morahan, largely through her exquisite voice and carriage (she sounds like a contralto and is as physically precise as a tango dancer), has already projected Nora's emotional reality—her hunger—and her act: the wife as little girl. But we know there is more to her. Nora's constantly acting, even within her acting. Torvald's crack about her father's profligacy, and her asking for more money, feel erotic, somehow; by having the money Nora wants, Torvald is saying not only that he's a better man than her father but that he's a better provider, the manlier man. Yet Nora is involved in an act of onanism that's even more powerful to her. She's living a double life, and the secrets she's been keeping to herself—about her marriage, and the money she has borrowed—convey her



*Hattie Morahan as Nora Helmer, Henrik Ibsen's multilayered, optimistic, and beautifully obdurate protagonist.*

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greater reality, her more interesting truth.

Still, she wants to share her secretive-ness with someone. She's soon given the female audience she craves. (Ibsen barely mentions Nora's having a mother.) Kristine Linde (Caroline Martin), a former classmate, comes to call. They haven't seen each other in years. (Old friends, like old memories, are always popping up in Ibsen's middle-to-late plays. Those surprise guests don't so much change the atmosphere of a given work as deepen it, darken it.) Kristine explains that she's a widow, childless, and down on her luck. She wears her independence like some gray shawl and resembles those single women Elizabeth Hardwick once described as wandering about "in their dreadful freedom like old oxen left behind, totally unprovided for." While they're chatting, Kristine remembers how, back in school, Nora was such a spend-thrift. In any case, Kristine is looking for work; perhaps Torvald can help her? As delivered by Martin, the spendthrift observation is as much a criticism as it is a kind of wistful envy: isn't Nora frightened of the future, of losing what Kristine no longer has? Moving out of the sitting room and into the bedroom, Nora and Kristine are also regressing, returning to their girlhood world of confidences.

Sitting on her bed, Nora tells Kristine that, some time ago, Torvald got sick; she took him to Italy to recover. But to pay for the trip she borrowed money from a petty bureaucrat named Nils Krogstad (Nick Fletcher). Kristine had rejected a marriage proposal from Krogstad years earlier, because he was cash poor, yet she still has feelings for him. Krogstad, in turn, may be interested in Nora. (By making the loan, he hopes to keep Nora tethered to him; it's an affair, but of the wrong kind.) The only way she could get the loan was to fake her father's signature. She's been paying the note back, but it takes all her ingenuity—all her scrimping and saving on Torvald's rather fixed budget—to make the payments; she doesn't want Torvald to know any of it. It would bring shame on him, first, and then on the family, yet now Krogstad has shown up at the house. "You've never admitted anything to Torvald?" Kristine asks. "How could I?" Nora replies. "He would be so embarrassed. He would be humiliated." (In Simon Stephens's translation, we miss some of the knottiness of Ibsen's hard-oak

language—his characters are mysterious and declarative—but that doesn't detract from the work's strength.)

Morahan and Martin play this scene exceptionally well; they keep opening their characters' interior drawers and rifling through their undergarments and hidden thoughts. (They may live loveless lives, but they will find the love in them, even if it's filthy lucre, which their minds—and the actors—elevate to a kind of pornographic status.) "Will you ever tell him, do you think?" Kristine continues, and Nora says:

Oh maybe one day. When I'm old. And tired and haggard. When I'm not quite as beautiful as I am now. I'm being serious. When he's stopped enjoying watching me dance for him. And dressing for him. When he no longer cares about my little performances for him.

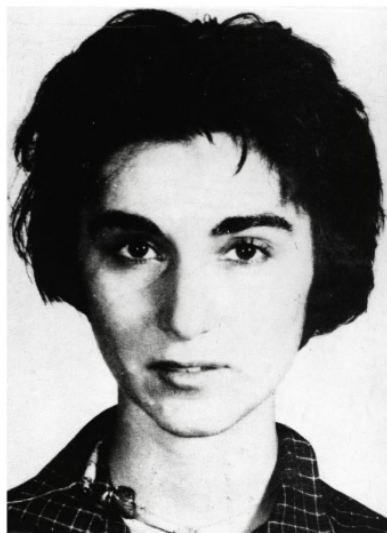
The sexuality in the piece is never overplayed. And I think that Cracknell is right to drag it out of Ibsen's text, to tease it, but not to exploit it, largely because the female characters are unaware of it themselves, except when they're playing at sexuality, at being the kind of woman a man might need. (The sexual charge in this production reminded me of Jane Fonda's stellar interpretation of the role in Joseph Losey's 1973 film version. Fonda's Nora was coquettish, too, and the only moments of calm she had were in the safe company of other women.)

When it's revealed that Krogstad is the bitter holder of the incriminating note, and that Torvald will be his boss, this news doesn't quiet her debtor, as Nora hopes, but, rather, exacerbates the situation, despite Kristine's best efforts to soothe Krogstad with her steady, uncomplaining love. After Torvald finally learns of Nora's subterfuge, she closes the door on their life together. But were Nora's best efforts to love and take care of her husband actually an act of subterfuge, or the desperate act of a loving wife, willing to add one more humiliation to her list of humiliations, because she could take it, and was supposed to take it, since, after all, she's a woman? Before Nora leaves, she tells Torvald that he's a stranger to her, and she can't live in a house with a stranger. But that's not true. Torvald was Nora's self, or that part of herself which was once ravenous for the security that comes from being a citizen of a limited, calculable world. ♦

## A CALL FOR HELP

*What the Kitty Genovese story really means.*

BY NICHOLAS LEMANN



*A. M. Rosenthal (far right) believed that apathetic bystanders, not just Winston Moseley, were to blame for Genovese's death.*

Plucking a few events out of the vastness of the world and declaring them to be the news of the day is a mysterious and complicated project. Sometimes what's news is inarguable—the outbreak of war, a head-of-state transition, natural calamity—but very often it falls into the category of the resonant incident. It isn't a turn in the course of history, but it strikes editors as illustrative of something important. Take crime. If crimes don't involve anyone powerful or well known, they generally aren't considered news. But a few such crimes do become news, big news, and hold the public's imagination in a tight, enduring grip.

An excellent example is the murder of Kitty Genovese, a twenty-eight-year-old bar manager, by Winston Moseley, a twenty-nine-year-old computer punch-card operator, just after three in the morning on Friday, March 13, 1964, in Kew Gardens, Queens. The fact that this crime, one of six hundred and thirty-six murders in New York City that year, be-

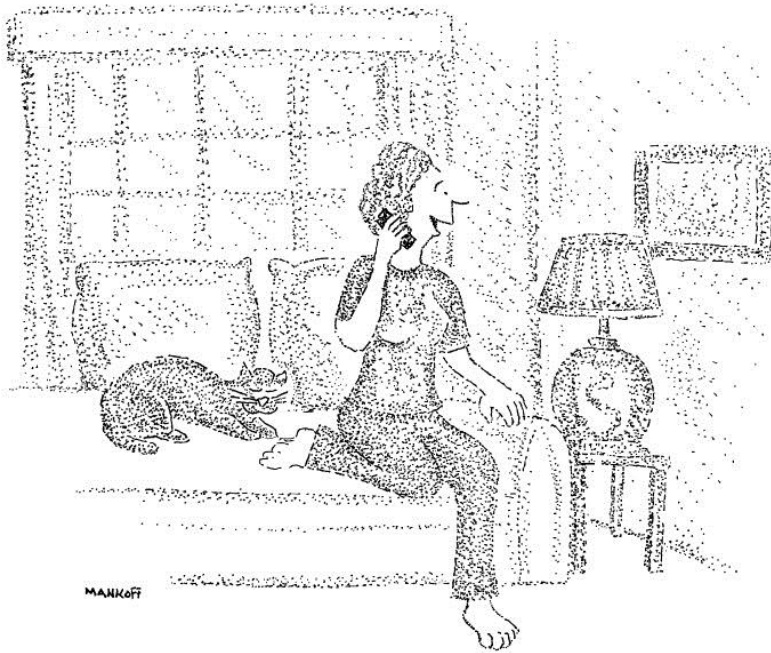
came an American obsession—condemned by mayors and Presidents, puzzled over by academics and theologians, studied in freshman psychology courses, re-created in dozens of research experiments, even used four decades later to justify the Iraq war—can be attributed to the influence of one man, A. M. Rosenthal, of the *New York Times*.

In 1964, Rosenthal was forty-one years old and relatively new on the job as the newspaper's metropolitan editor, an important step in his ascent to a seventeen-year reign over the *Times*' newsroom. Ten days after Genovese was killed, he went downtown to have lunch with New York City's police commissioner, Michael Murphy. Murphy spent most of the lunch talking about how worried he was that the civil-rights movement, which was at its peak, would set off racial violence in New York, but toward the end Rosenthal asked him about a curious case, then being covered in the tabloids, in which two men had confessed to the

same murder. He learned that one of the competing confessors, Winston Moseley, had definitely murdered a woman in Kew Gardens, Kitty Genovese. That killing had been reported at the time, including in a four-paragraph squib buried deep within the *Times*, but Murphy said that what had struck him about it was not the crime itself but the behavior of thirty-eight eyewitnesses. Over a grisly half hour of stabbing and screaming, Murphy said, none of them had called the police. Rosenthal assigned a reporter named Martin Gansberg to pursue the story from that angle. On March 27th, the *Times* ran a front-page story under a four-column headline:

37 WHO SAW MURDER DIDN'T  
CALL THE POLICE  
Apathy at Stabbing of Queens Woman  
Shocks Inspector

The following day, the *Times* ran a reaction story in which a procession of experts offered explanations of what had happened, or said that it



*"We loved Tuscany. The cell reception was fantastic and the Wi-Fi was to die for."*

was inexplicable. From then on, the story—as they wouldn't have said in 1964—went viral.

It's evidence of a kind of editorial genius that Rosenthal, by playing the story in the way that he did, was able to get such a reaction. The tabloids had treated it simply as a sensational tale of urban violence. The *Times* made sure that its apathetic-witness angle would land by prominently displaying the story on its front page. The murder now stood for a profoundly disturbing sociological trend. The key line in Gansberg's story came from one of the witnesses (none of whom were named), who said, "I didn't want to get involved."

Some of the fascination that racialized, sexualized violence attracts surely rubbed off on the story—it became clear from photographs and from other outlets that Genovese was white and attractive and that Moseley, a repeat rapist, was black—but the gist of the piece lent itself perfectly to Sunday sermons about a malaise encompassing all of us. It was a way of processing anxieties about the anonymity of urban life, about the

breakdown of the restrictive but reassuring social conventions of the fifties, and, less directly, about racial unrest, the Kennedy assassination, and even the Holocaust, which was only beginning to be widely discussed, and which seemed to represent on a grand scale the phenomenon that one expert on the Genovese case calls Bad Samaritanism.

The *Times*' version of the Genovese story represents a version of reality that was molded to conform to a theory. The March 27th story began "For more than half an hour 38 respectable, law-abiding citizens in Queens watched a killer stalk and stab a woman in three separate attacks in Kew Gardens. . . . Not one person telephoned the police during the assault; one witness called after the woman was dead." Later that year, Rosenthal published a very short instant book, the only book he ever wrote on his own, called "Thirty-eight Witnesses: The Kitty Genovese Case," which used portentous, outraged language to enshrine the apathy narrative. (He urged readers "to recognize that the bell tolls even on each man's individual island, to recognize that every man must fear the witness in

himself who whispers to close the window.") By the eighties, a widely used college psychology textbook drew this scenario from the *Times* account: "What is interesting about this event is that no fewer than 38 of her neighbors came to their windows at 3:00 AM in response to her screams of terror—and remained at their windows in fascination for the 30 minutes it took her assailant to complete his grisly deed, during which time he returned for three separate attacks."

It's now clear that this version of events is wrong, thanks to a number of Genovese revisionists who have emerged over the years. They include Jim Rasenberger, a journalist who has written a couple of influential articles about the case, notably one in the *Times*, in 2004; and Rachel Manning, Mark Levine, and Alan Collins, the authors of a 2007 article in *American Psychologist* (which quotes from, and debunks, the textbook rendering). The essential facts are these. Winston Moseley had been out in his car, looking for a victim, when he came across Genovese driving home from work. He followed her. She parked at the Kew Gardens train station, adjacent to her apartment. Moseley parked, too, and attacked her with a hunting knife. She screamed, and a man named Robert Mozer opened his window and shouted, "Leave that girl alone!" Moseley ran away. Genovese, wounded but not mortally, staggered to the back of her apartment building and went inside a vestibule. Moseley returned, found her, and attacked again, stabbing her and assaulting her sexually. He fled again before she died.

The *Times* story was inaccurate in a number of significant ways. There were two attacks, not three. Only a handful of people saw the first clearly and only one saw the second, because it took place indoors, within the vestibule. The reason there were two attacks was that Robert Mozer, far from being a "silent witness," yelled at Moseley when he heard Genovese's screams and drove him away. Two people called the police. When the ambulance arrived at the scene—precisely because neighbors had called for help—Genovese, still alive, lay in the arms of a neighbor named Sophia Farrar, who had courageously left her apartment to go to the crime scene, even though she had no way of knowing that the murderer had fled.

The one indisputable villain in the

Genovese case, other than Moseley, was Joseph Fink, who worked in the apartment building across the street from where Genovese lived. He saw the first attack, did nothing, and, after Moseley had fled, took a nap in the basement, rather than going outside to help Genovese. A more ambiguous figure was Karl Ross, a friend and neighbor of Genovese's, who was drunk that night. He heard the first attack and did nothing. The second attack occurred in the vestibule outside his apartment door. He opened the door a crack, saw Moseley plunging a knife into Genovese, and closed the door, terrified. He made a couple of phone calls, the first to a friend on Long Island, who advised him to do nothing, the second to a neighbor in the building, who told him to come over. Ross crawled out of his window, across the roof, and into a neighbor's apartment, and eventually called the police. It may or may not be relevant that Ross was thought to be gay, at a time when gay New Yorkers had a lot to fear, both from attackers on the street and from the police. Three months before the murder, Rosenthal had assigned a five-thousand-word story that ran on the *Times*' front page under the headline "GROWTH OF OVERT HOMOSEXUALITY IN CITY PROVOKES WIDE CONCERN." The fact that Kitty Genovese herself was gay evidently escaped his notice.

Winston Moseley certainly led a highly compartmentalized life. He was steadily employed, a married man with two children, and he owned a single-family house in South Ozone Park, Queens. He also routinely broke into people's houses and stole television sets, which is what led to his apprehension for Genovese's murder, five days later. Somebody who saw him leaving a house with a TV called the police, and in the course of being questioned Moseley confessed to a number of gruesomely sexualized murders of young women, including Genovese's; another murder he had committed; and one that he hadn't committed. (The last created the double-confession story that Rosenthal had asked the police commissioner about.) At Moseley's trial, a few months later, because of the pervasiveness of the apathy narrative, the prosecution decided not to call Joseph Fink or Karl Ross as witnesses, even though they

could have offered the most direct accounts of the murder. Still, Moseley had confessed to the murder; the trial was about whether he should be found not guilty by reason of insanity. The jury convicted him. Today, at seventy-nine, Moseley is the longest-serving inmate in the New York prison system.

Aside from the guilty reflections it inspired, the Genovese case had some tangible consequences. It helped in the push to establish 911 as an easy-to-remember national police emergency number; in 1964, the most reliable way to call the police in New York was to use the specific telephone number of each precinct, and caller response wasn't always a high priority. Two psychologists, Bibb Latané and John Darley, created a new realm of research into what came to be called the bystander effect, the main finding of which is that your likelihood of intervening in a Genovese-like incident increases if you believe that there are very few other bystanders. The effect has stood up through repeated experiments. In 1977, Winston Moseley, engaged in a periodic attempt to be granted parole, had the chutzpah to argue in a *Times* Op-Ed piece that his misdeed had wound up making the world a better place: "The crime was tragic, but it did serve society, urging it as it did to come to the aid of its members in distress or danger."

The fiftieth anniversary of the Genovese murder has generated two full-length books about the case: "Kitty Genovese: The Murder, the Bystanders, the Crime That Changed America," by Kevin Cook (Norton), and "Kitty Genovese: A True Account of a Public Murder and Its Private Consequences," by Catherine Pelonero (Skyhorse). Both authors have interviewed everyone there is to interview and reviewed the public records about the case, but so much attention has preceded their efforts that they wind up working from nearly identical sets of facts, and it sometimes feels as if they were straining to stretch their accounts to book length. Both have decided to write in the true-crime style, which entails occasionally telling us what people may have thought or felt, or present-

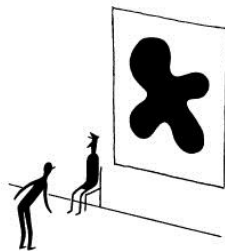
ing as quoted dialogue unrecorded private scenes from long ago—an unfortunate decision, given how much the story turns on the trustworthiness of journalism.

Cook is the more adept storyteller of the two. His peppy, knowing style calls to mind pop-culture products from the time of the murder, like the magazine *Argosy* or the television crime drama "Naked City." And he is firmly, and persuasively, in the revisionist camp. He says that Moseley's prosecutors concluded that there were only five or six witnesses who could plausibly testify at the trial. Pelonero is an anti-revisionist, who presents herself as a defender of the sullied reputation of Martin Gansberg, the *Times* reporter on the story, and as someone who insists that the unpleasant truth about Genovese's neighbors' behavior not be dodged. Her count of true witnesses, gleaned from police records, is thirty-three. (According to Cook, the prosecutors who interviewed potential witnesses found that most didn't grasp what had been going on.) "Historical revisionism of the Kitty Genovese story was underway, and the beautiful twilight of falsehood did indeed enhance it into something far less blinding than the burning glare of the truth," Pelonero writes, with more passion than clear meaning.

The Kitty Genovese who emerges from these books was an appealingly independent woman who had grown up in a large middle-class Italian-American Catholic family in Brooklyn but decided

not to follow when everyone else left the city for New Canaan, Connecticut. A brief marriage in her teens was annulled; she was once arrested for being a minor participant in a bookmaking operation (the most familiar photograph of her is a mug shot); and, for a year before her murder, she had been in a happy relationship with a woman named Mary Ann Zielonko, who shared her apartment in Kew Gardens and who also worked in a bar in Queens.

Winston Moseley is a truly chilling character, because of his ability to be utterly calm and functional most of the time, even when describing to officials



the horrifically violent acts he had performed on female strangers. In 1968, he jammed a tin can into his rectum so tightly that he had to be sent to a hospital. He escaped and, rather than melting into the landscape, quickly committed two more rapes. After he was caught and returned to Attica, he became a model prisoner again.

The third main character in the drama is Abe Rosenthal. He appears only intermittently in the two books about the case, but no matter; he told his own story. In 1999, he wrote a new introduction for a paperback edition of his "Thirty-eight Witnesses," timed to the thirty-fifth anniversary of the murder; and in 2008 Melville House republished the package, with an introduction by Samuel Freedman, as part of a series called Classic Journalism.

Back in 1927, in "The Rise of American Civilization," Charles and Mary Beard wrote about how the New York *World*, in its heyday under Joseph Pulitzer, became America's first mass-circulation newspaper: "It exploited to

the utmost limit the tragedy and comedy of contemporary life, in all its component elements of sex, society, crime, perversion, love, romance, and emotion generally." Although the *Times* was always far more respectable than the *World*, that passage comports with Rosenthal's description of how he approached the Genovese story: "News is not philosophy or theology but what certain human beings, reporters and editors, know will have meaning and interest to other human beings, readers." He describes processing the police commissioner's remark about the thirty-eight silent witnesses as "vicarious shock . . . the realization that what you are seeing or hearing will startle a reader."

It was obviously disingenuous for Rosenthal to suggest that he had no personal reaction to the Genovese murder—that he was merely making a clinical professional judgment about what would engage readers. His book, like most of his writing, is wildly emotional. The idea of the silent witnesses touched him in some deep, primal way: "there is

in the tale of Catherine Genovese a revelation about the human condition so appalling to contemplate that only good can come from forcing oneself to confront the truth." What's more, "there must be some connection between the story of the witnesses silent in the face of greater crimes—the degradation of a race, children starving." Rosenthal's convictions about the crime were so powerful that he was impervious to the details of what actually happened. His summary of the case appropriated the high drama of the *Times* piece, asserting "the choking fact that thirty-eight of her neighbors had seen her stabbed or heard her cries, and that not one of them, during that hideous half-hour, had lifted the telephone in the safety of his own apartment to call the police and try to save her life." By 1999, it had become clear that the original story might have been overstated, but in his new introduction Rosenthal was even less restrained: "Neighbors heard her scream her last half hour away and did nothing, nothing at all, to give her succor or even cry alarm."

In 2004, at a fortieth-anniversary conference about the case that was held at Fordham, Rosenthal made an appearance, and announced from the lectern that his sister Bess had died many years earlier after an incident that, to his mind, had been Genovese-like. (Rosenthal, who grew up in the Bronx, had a spectacularly horrible childhood; his father and four of his five older sisters died young, and he was usually on crutches, because of a bone disease.) Bess had been walking home when a flasher exposed himself to her; terrified, she ran all the way home. Then she caught a bad cold, and never recovered. To Rosenthal, the incident and the fatal illness were one. "A sexual pervert jumped out of the bushes and exposed himself to her," Rosenthal said. "I still miss our darling Bess, and feel Bess was murdered by this criminal who took her life away, no less than the monster who killed Kitty Genovese."

That seemed to explain a lot about Rosenthal's handling of the Genovese story, though his own writing makes it clear that he was profoundly disturbed by just about every way in which New York was changing in the sixties. Kevin Cook treats Rosenthal's 2004 disclosure



"Larry and I invited you here tonight to take our focus off each other."

at Fordham as a Rosebud moment in his narrative, to be saved almost until the end for maximum effect. Pelonero, the defender of the original *Times* story, chooses not to mention it.

When it comes to assessing the media, it's hard to get riled about press-generated hysteria over insubstantial matters like Justin Bieber's legal troubles or Mayor de Blasio's car running stop signs (unless, perhaps, you're directly on the receiving end of it). Stories like that of the silent witnesses to Kitty Genovese's murder represent the real danger zone in journalism, because they blend the power of instinct—which is about whether something *feels* true, not about whether it is true—with the respectable sheen of social science. In his book, Rosenthal groused, "I did not feel, nor do I now, that the sociologists and psychiatrists who commented contributed anything substantial to anybody's understanding of what happened that night on Austin Street." But, if he hadn't assigned a second-day story consisting of quotes from such people, his version of the Genovese murder would not have taken the shape that it did. The experts transformed a crime into a crisis.

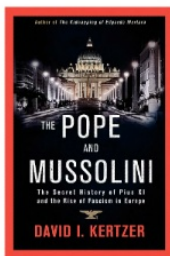
The manufacturing of the thirty-eight-witnesses myth had generally benign social effects. Yet there are many examples in which tendentious public renderings of violence have set off more, and worse, violence. (Many of the lynchings in the South during the Jim Crow era were undertaken to avenge a crime that the mob, confirmed in its rage by the local press, felt certain had taken place.) The real Kitty Genovese syndrome has to do with our susceptibility to narratives that echo our preconceptions and anxieties. So the lesson of the story isn't that journalists should trust their gut, the way Abe Rosenthal did. Better to use your head. ♦

#### BLOCK THAT METAPHOR!

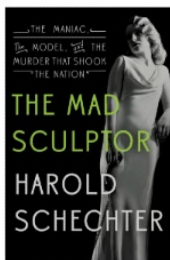
From "Degeneration," by Max Nordau (1892).

In England German romanticism was metamorphosed into pre-Raphaelitism, in France the latter engendered, with the last remains of its procreative strength, the abortions of symbolism and neo-Catholicism, and these Siamese twins contracted with Tolstoism a mountebank marriage such as might take place between the cripple of a fair and the wonder of a show-booth.

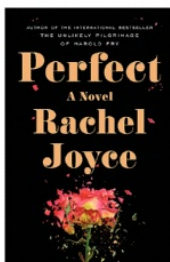
## BRIEFLY NOTED



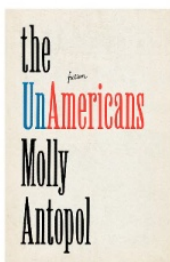
**THE POPE AND MUSSOLINI**, by David I. Kertzer (Random House). In 1929, the Vatican asked Mussolini to insure that his candidates in a coming plebiscite were "free from any tie with Freemasonry, with Judaism, and, in short, with any of the anticlerical parties." Mussolini made the changes, got a Vatican endorsement, and solidified his hold on power. Much more attention has been given to the Vatican's compromises and complicity with Hitler, but Kertzer tells a fascinating and tragic story of its self-interested support for Mussolini when he was vulnerable early on, and Pius XI's belated dismay at racial laws that engulfed even Jews who had been baptized as Catholics. When Pius XI died, in 1939, a speech critical of the laws was on his desk; his successor, Pius XII, quietly buried it.



**THE MAD SCULPTOR**, by Harold Schechter (New Harvest). This history revives a tabloid sensation of 1937, when a mother and daughter were found strangled in their Manhattan apartment. The fact that the daughter was a twenty-year-old nude model who left behind a "seemingly endless stream of boy-friends" made the case, as Schechter writes, a "perfect storm of prurience." The killer turned out to be a sculptor, taxidermist, and failed seminarian who had spent his adult life in and out of mental institutions. The book delves deeply into his biography—calling special attention to his odd ideas about visualization and time travel—but is most engaging when it sticks to the particulars, prurient or otherwise, of the crime and its investigation.



**PERFECT**, by Rachel Joyce (Random House). This novel follows two privileged British schoolboys in 1972 who believe that the leap year has led to two seconds' being added to the clock. One of them thinks that the seconds occur when his mother, driving to school on a misty morning, hits a girl on a bicycle. One strand of the plot concerns his and his friend's attempts to right the wrongs of the accident; the other follows a present-day middle-aged man—who seems to have some connection to the boys' childhood—struggling with obsessive-compulsive disorder. The first strand moves more briskly than the second, but the novel makes trenchant observations about class, power imbalances in friendships, and the difficulty of making good the missteps of the past.



**THE UNAMERICANS**, by Molly Antopol (Norton). The stories in this debut collection are set in Israel, the Soviet Union, and America, and their subjects are the dual shaping forces of history and family. A sixty-three-year-old Brooklyn man is uninterested in his Ukrainian Jewish heritage, while his daughter eagerly embraces it. McCarthyism splinters the career and the family of a mid-century Russian-born actor. Antopol is at her best when she's exploring the tension inherent in a young writer's telling of an older generation's stories. A woman asks her granddaughter, "Why don't you go out in the sun and enjoy yourself for once, rather than sitting inside, scratching at ugly things that have nothing to do with you?"

## LOST TIME

*"The Grand Budapest Hotel" and "The Wind Rises."*

BY DAVID DENBY

*Tony Revolori and Ralph Fiennes live the glory days of a great hotel.*

In Wes Anderson's new movie, "The Grand Budapest Hotel," the past becomes visible in stages, as if seen through the wrong end of a telescope that gets repeatedly extended. A middle-aged writer (Tom Wilkinson), appearing to us in 1985, recalls his youth spent idling in the Grand Budapest Hotel, a once luxurious resort in an obscure corner of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire. Looming over the fictional country of Zubrowka, the hotel—pink, and as fully tiered as a wedding cake—has been battered by war and, perhaps, by Communism. The movie jumps back to 1968, when the hotel was already forlorn. The writer, as a young man (Jude Law), dines with the hotel's owner, Mr. Moustafa (F. Murray Abraham), who remembers the Budapest's plump glory days between the wars, when he was a teen-age lobby boy called Zero (Tony Revolori). Outfitted in a purple uniform and cap, Zero learns the hotel trade from the redoubtable concierge, M. Gustave H., played by Ralph Fiennes as a man of intricate sexual taste—he's a homosexual and sleeps with jeweled elderly ladies staying at the hotel. Habits of deviousness gather under Gus-

tave's musky cologne and behind his handsome mustache. Gustave represents something that is dying even when the hotel is flourishing—an ideal, from the nineteenth century, of high-bourgeois travel and service. The animating emotion of "Grand Budapest" is nostalgia for nostalgia: the past, affectionately teased as a repository of antiquated styles, recedes into art. The film is, finally, not so much a recapture of lost time as a history of the way we have felt about lost time. Anderson and his cinematographer, Robert Yeoman, shot the various periods in different aspect ratios, as if to evoke earlier phases of filmmaking.

There is a plot of sorts: one of Gustave's elderly clients (Tilda Swinton) expires, and leaves the concierge a precious painting; jealous family members accuse Gustave of murder; he's imprisoned and escapes, remaining through it all mysteriously fond of Zero, a boy of no particular beauty or interest. But none of this matters. The plot is less a structural frame than a kind of golden wire on which Anderson hangs innumerable encounters, scampering chases, and an archly decorative style of commentary. The pace is

slowed slightly by Anderson's stuttered timing—a skipped beat, a moment of incomprehension—which gives the joking an air of deranged absent-mindedness. Many of Anderson's sequences consist of just a shot or two: someone walking across a hotel lobby, popping in and out of a room, skiing madly down a slope. The comic highlight of the movie is a series of single-shot appearances by Bill Murray, Bob Balaban, and other flavorful actors, who play arrogant Old World concierges (members of a secret society of concierges); they grip the telephone and demand, one after another, "Get me M. Martin at the Ritz Imperial. . . . Get me M. Ivan at . . ." Anderson edits his tiny cameos together in the rhymed units of a cinematic nonsense poem.

A sequence, by its nature, implies some sort of emotional continuity, but Anderson, gathering his one- and two-shot episodes into a skein, has never been a dramatic filmmaker—tension, rage, ego, lust interest him only as cinematic and actorly conventions that he can play with. His style is half facetious, half satirical, although we may not be sure what the movies are satires of: "The Royal Tenenbaums," a mock family saga, was so vague in meaning that one could enjoy it only by hanging on to Gene Hackman's obvious pleasure in playing the vicious Royal. "The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou" taunted a greedy deepwater documentary filmmaker. But how many in Anderson's audience had any idea who Jacques Cousteau was? Anderson's spoofs may have no particular referent, yet the air of calculated absurdity and knowing one-upmanship makes his work cool for some people. "The Darjeeling Limited" was ostensibly devoted to the conflicts among three brothers (Jason Schwartzman, Owen Wilson, and Adrien Brody), but most of it was so jokey that the fiction dissolved, revealing nothing more exciting than three would-be-hip actors horsing around Anderson's picturesque blue-and-yellow Indian train. "Moonrise Kingdom," a gravely charming adventure story about kids on the lam, offered a break in the smirking tone; Anderson released what appeared to be a strong current of tenderness.

A lot of the play in "Grand Budapest" is devoted to the formality of Mitteleuropa manners: the elaborate politesse; the haughty denunciations (Fiennes rips them off with devastating precision);

the European aristo names, here pushed into nuttiness (“Mme. Céline Villeneuve Desgoffe und Taxis”). The movie pays homage to more vigorous entertainments, like the Marx Brothers’ wild Ruritanian comedy, “Duck Soup,” and Lubitsch’s European-set farces for Paramount in the thirties. At his most derivative, Anderson throws in a variant of a famous scene in Hitchcock’s espionage thriller “The Lady Vanishes,” in which armed, uniformed Fascists gather outside a stopped train. “Budapest Hotel” takes off in a general way from the writings of Stefan Zweig, who committed suicide in 1942, believing that European culture had been destroyed by Nazism. But Anderson doesn’t appear to know what tone he’s trying for with his intimations of disaster. The thugs beat people up, but their leader, Edward Norton, wearing a tall military cap and waving his long fingers, seems to have stepped out of a comic opera.

In this kind of errant spoof, design provides most of the meaning. The hotel lobby, with its chandeliers and red carpets, its grand staircase, is an enormous decorated box; Anderson also favors closets, prison cells, cable cars, train compartments and their adjoining windows and doorways. His visual imagination tends toward coziness and enclosure. Tents and closets play a role in the earlier films, and in this movie the narrow winding streets of Old Europe, faintly misted, seem to bear some portent. But of what? They ominously lead nowhere, yet the images are merely pretty. Anderson boxes himself in, as a way, perhaps, of avoiding the coarse physical vitality that has been central to so many great movies. But knowingness and formalist whimsy should not, I think, be confused

with art—or at least not with major art. “The Grand Budapest Hotel” is no more than mildly funny. It produces murmuring titters rather than laughter—the sound of viewers affirming their own acumen in so reliably getting the joke.

Lovers of aeronautical folly may know that the Italian engineer and designer Giovanni Battista Caproni built, in 1921, a monstrous flying boat, the Caproni Ca.60, which had nine wings, stacked in threes, above a long fuselage and was intended to carry a hundred passengers across the ocean. The Ca.60 attained an altitude of sixty feet above Lake Maggiore and subsided into the water, never to rise again. Caproni and several of his more fanciful creations show up in Hayao Miyazaki’s masterly “The Wind Rises,” a kind of animated bio-pic of Jiro Horikoshi, Japan’s great airplane engineer of the nineteen-thirties. Caproni is both mentor and spiritual guide to Horikoshi, who works on military aircraft but also requires, as inspiration, Caproni’s romantic embrace of flight as sheer wonder and beauty.

Miyazaki, who says that this will be his last film, works in a subtly precise style that makes most American animation seem obvious, even bombastic. When he re-creates the 1923 Tokyo earthquake, he begins with an uncanny rumbling and a gently destructive rearrangement of the streets. In contrast to a Miyazaki classic like “Spirited Away,” with its dragons and ghosts, much of “The Wind Rises” feels intensely realistic. Using pastel colors and sharply outlined figures, Miyazaki produces as detailed a feeling of prewar Japan as conventionally photographed live-action movies do. He’s a social observer

with an attachment to revealing oddities. The prototype of a new airplane gets pulled onto a test field by lumbering oxen—the sign of a country moving uneasily from tradition to technological modernity. Much of the textural and aural particularity of this world touches him. He gives the sound of tobacco burning as someone takes a long drag on a cigarette the same emotional weight as, say, a view of the Japanese countryside from the air.

Miyazaki’s attitudes toward military aircraft and war are thoroughly ambivalent, which has got him into trouble with ideologues of one sort or another. In Japan, his expressed pacifism has led to criticism from nationalists. Yet his hero, Horoshiki, eventually built the Mitsubishi A6M, or Zero, the fighter-bomber that was used to subdue China and attack Pearl Harbor, and American nationalists, in turn, have criticized him here. His critics may not realize that an artist thrives on ambivalent feelings. It’s naïve to believe that the Zero could be used for anything but war, and it’s equally naïve to pretend that the creation of a new warplane could not be the exercise of a spiritual passion. Somehow I can’t bring myself to feel rage against the designer of the Douglas A-4 Skyhawk (Ed Heinemann), which was widely and destructively employed in Vietnam. Horikoshi says, in a wistful conversation with his muse, Caproni, “All I wanted to do was to make something beautiful.” What begins in aesthetic ambition, however, ends in slaughter. ♦

[NEWYORKER.COM/GO/FRONTROW](http://NEWYORKER.COM/GO/FRONTROW)

Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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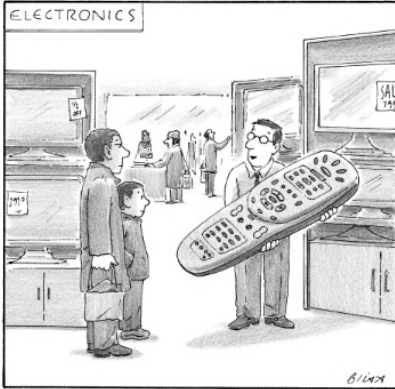
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## CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Tom Cheney, must be received by Sunday, March 9th. The finalists in the February 17th & 24th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the March 24th 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](http://newyorker.com/captioncontest).

### THE WINNING CAPTION



*"No, I'm sorry. You'll need a separate remote for your DVD."*  
Cindy Shirley, Oklahoma City, Okla.



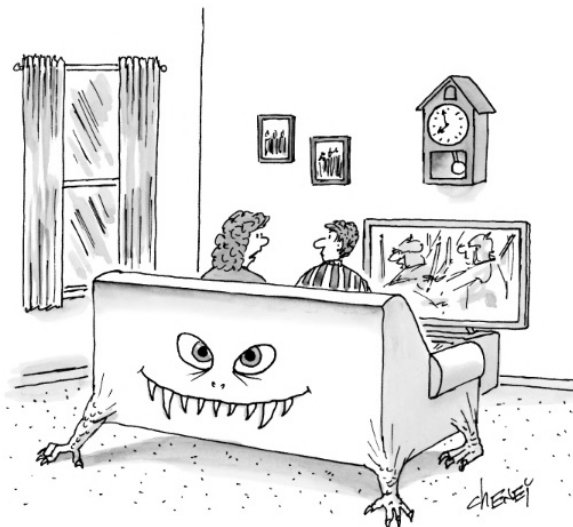
### THE FINALISTS

*"Not O.K., Cupid!"*  
Will Evans, Oakland, Calif.

*"I'm not feeling much love, but my arthritis is a lot better."*  
Rich Goldman, Franklin Square, N.Y.

*"And then I thought, Wow, my cat really is kind of sexy."*  
Sam Shackelford, Cumming, Ga.

### THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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