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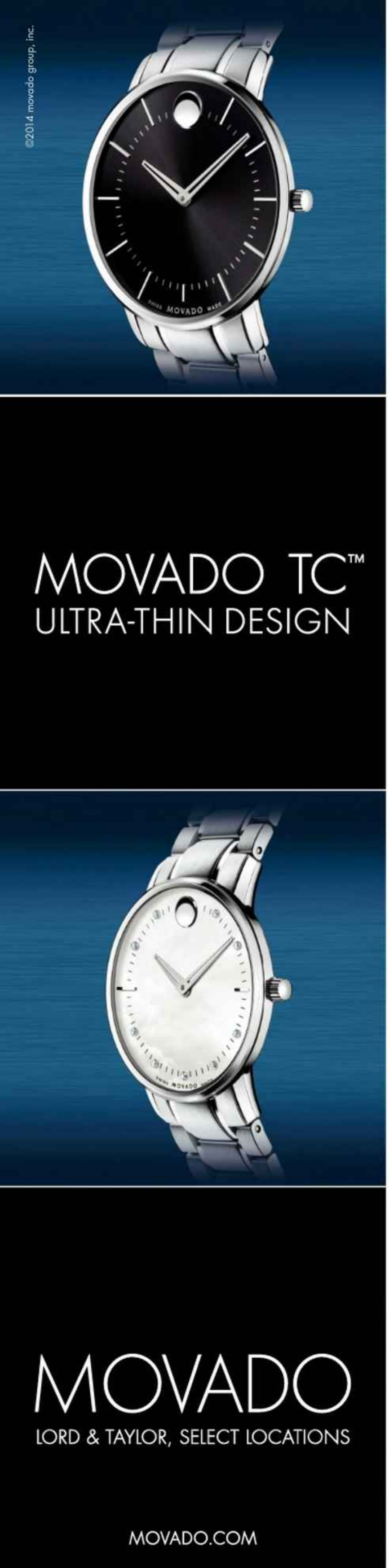

THE NEW YORKER

JUNE 2, 2014

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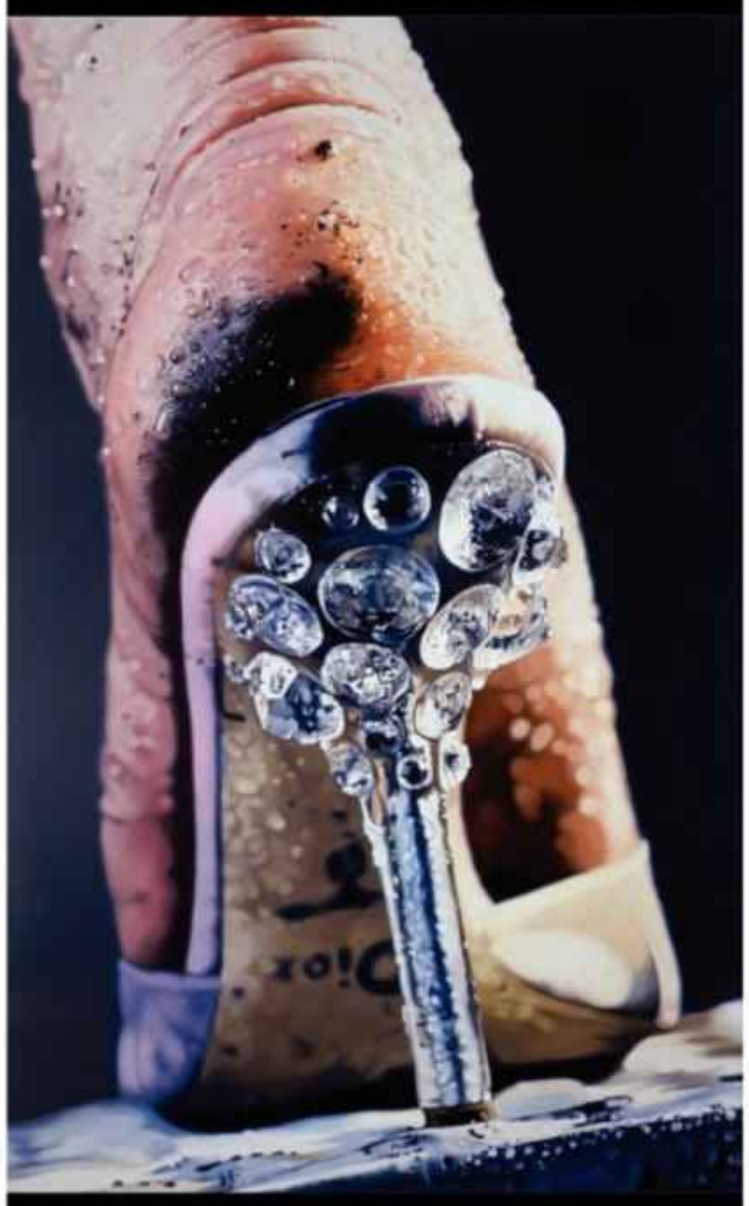

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THE MAIL

QUALITY EDUCATION

Dale Russakoff's report on the attempted rescue of the Newark school system contains echoes of the social-reform efforts of a century ago ("Schooled," May 19th). When Cory Booker, Newark's "rock-star mayor," called for top-down reform because an open political process could potentially be taken captive by opponents, he reminded me of the social reformer John Purroy Mitchel, the wondrous "Boy Mayor" of New York City, who took office in 1914. Convinced of his own pure motives, Mitchel felt himself to be uniquely capable of transforming the lives of the downtrodden, and so never bothered to consult the folks he was uplifting. Neither Mitchel nor Booker thought that serious participation could be a positive force in his grand plans, and both appeared to believe that the dilemmas of a democracy are best addressed through less, not more, democracy. Such beliefs rest on an ugly assumption: that only "the best and the brightest" are capable of exercising their own agency, while the rest of us can be written off according to age, race, income, and place of residence. Mitchel was driven from office after a single term. *The New Republic* wrote that people had "revolted against the consequences to themselves of government by capable and disinterested experts"—an undemocratic "autocracy of experts." The election of Ras Baraka as Newark's new mayor is yet another echo.

William Ayers
Chicago, Ill.

Russakoff's article focusses on the feelings of disenfranchisement experienced by Newark schools' stakeholders: students, families, and teachers. This focus on feelings is misplaced. The would-be reformers have failed to persuade the stakeholders because their proposed reforms are unproved. A study published last month in a journal of the American Educational Research Association casts doubt on the utility of using student test scores to evaluate teacher performance, a centerpiece of the reforms described in Russakoff's article. The study was funded in part by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which advocates precisely this type of teacher evaluation, but in comments about the findings one of the researchers was clear: "Value-added scores don't seem to be reflecting the quality and content of the work that teachers are doing in the classroom." The Newark school stakeholders are acting rationally by refusing to accept radical, disruptive, and dubious reforms.

John Hankey
Teacher, Los Angeles Unified School District
Los Angeles, Calif.

Many of the decisions made by the Newark School Superintendent, Cami Anderson, seem farsighted given the complexity of what she calls "sixteen-dimensional chess," the socio-economic-scholarly context within which school systems operate. As a lifelong educator, I know that effective schooling is complicated, especially in an environment poisoned by poverty, corruption, and in-fighting. Progress is possible if decision-makers heed a few basic principles: learning isn't a commodity; schools are not profit centers; and communities are entitled to a voice and to an accounting of resources. Ultimately, what matters most is what takes place between students and teachers. An authoritative 2007 study by McKinsey & Company concluded that most reform efforts, including restructuring and charter schools, have little or no systemic impact: "The quality of a school system rests on the quality of its teachers." Human capital is the capital that counts.

Jim Haas
Olathe, Kans.

•

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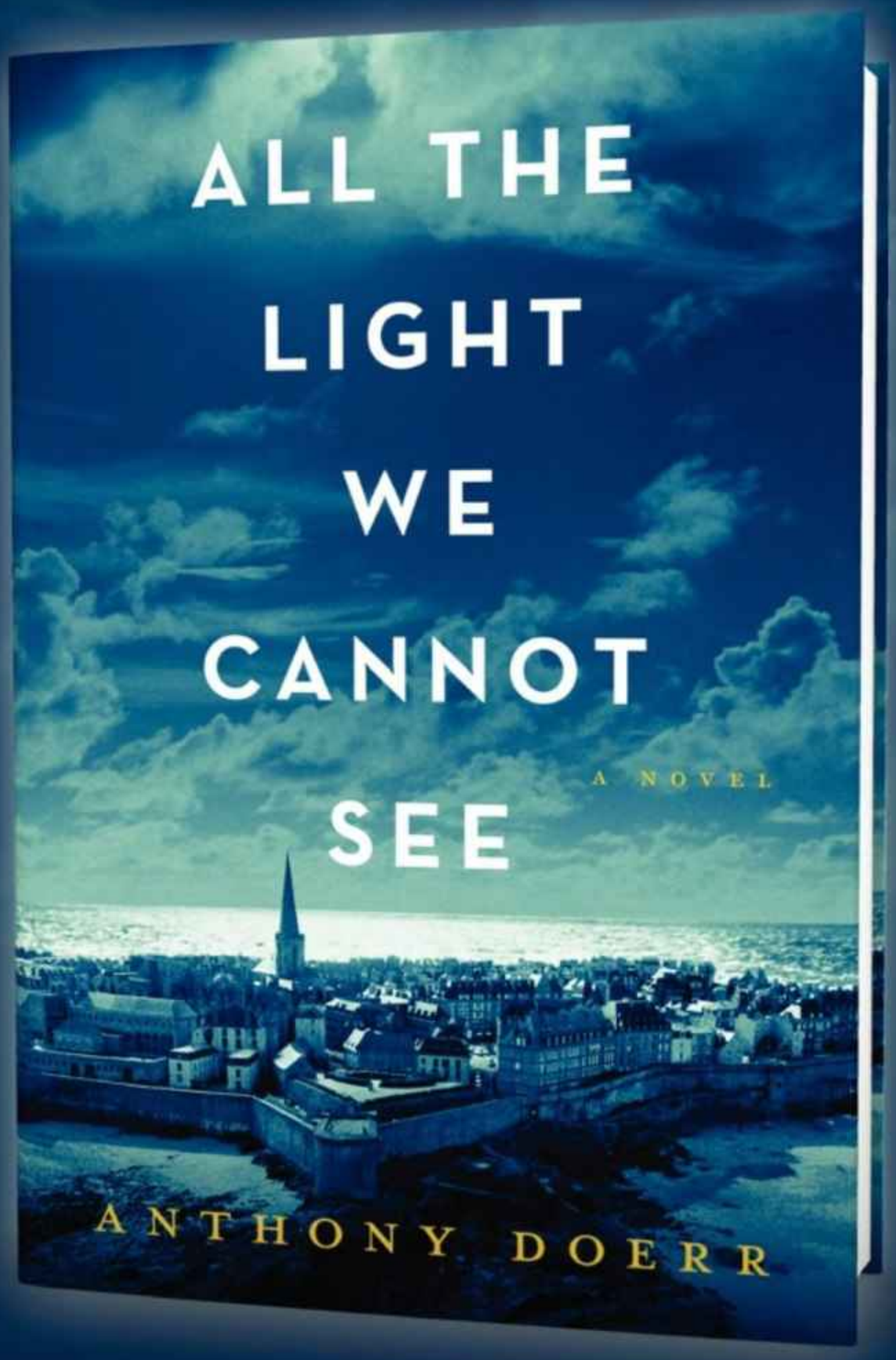

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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AT LEAST A HUNDRED and thirty-eight languages are spoken in Queens, and the Queens Museum reflects the borough's mosaic. It has organized shows on the diasporas of Cuba and South Asia, and it exhibited contemporary Chinese art before it was fashionable. On May 31, the museum hosts "Oye, Corona," a daylong festival in Corona Plaza that incudes a performance by New York's all-female mariachi band Flor de Toloache. (Like Queens, the group is pan-cultural: its nine members are Dominican, Mexican, Colombian, Cuban, Italian, German, Puerto Rican, Indian, and American.) The museum owes its populist vision, in part, to the community-minded Tom Finkelpearl, who was its director from 2002 until April, when Mayor de Blasio wisely chose him to become the city's new Commissioner of Cultural Affairs.

NIGHT LIFE
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Top: La Bayadère. Bottom: Xiomara Reyes in *Coppélia.*
Photos by Marty Sohl.

NIGHT LIFE

SummerStage presents "New Songs of Justice: An Evening Honoring Pete Seeger."

SUMMER PREVIEW

SUMMER IS HIGH SEASON for music festivals in New York City. SummerStage brings concerts to Central Park celebrating hip-hop, local Latin music, and Pete Seeger. Okayplayer—the online community that the Roots' drummer, Questlove, started in 1999 for fans—which has grown into a full-fledged media company, marks its fifteenth anniversary with five performances, starting with a show on June 15, in honor of twenty years of democracy in South Africa, featuring **Nathi (Black Coffee) Maphumulo** and **DJ Spoko,** and ending, on Aug. 16, with an appearance by Devonté Hynes's **Blood Orange.** Fania Records, the legendary label that was co-founded by the salsa innovator Johnny Pacheco, has partnered with SummerStage for a run of shows celebrating its fiftieth anniversary, including, on Aug. 24, a huge blowout with the **Fania All-Stars,** forty-one years to the day after the ensemble's historic appearance at Yankee Stadium. On July 21, Pete Seeger, who died earlier this year, will be honored with "New Songs of Justice," an evening of protest music performed by a wide-ranging roster of artists, including the punk group **Anti-Flag** (in an acoustic setting), the perpetual rebel **Steve Earle,** the hip-hop artist **Toni Blackman,** and the indie idol **Amanda Palmer** (also performing acoustic).

In forward-looking Brooklyn, June 12-19, the Northside Festival presents four hundred acts—including **Sharon Van Etten, Fuck Buttons,** the **War on Drugs, Beirut,** and **Chvrches**—along with panel discussions, workshops, and film screenings. Brazil, the country hosting this year's World Cup, remains in the spotlight after the soccer is over. Brasil Summerfest brings the vocalist **Bebel Gilberto** and the guitarist and singer **Vinicius Cantuária** to Prospect Park on July 18. The following night, in Central Park, the singer-songwriter **Lenine,** who is from Recife, teams up with the Dutch composer **Martin Fondse** and his orchestra for the U.S. première of their project "The Bridge." A week of Brazilian music at venues around town follows.

—John Donohue

ILLUSTRATION BY STANLEY CHOW

ROCK AND POP

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

A-Trak and Cam'ron

Cameron Ezike Giles, a.k.a. Cam'ron, is one of the most beloved figures in contemporary hip-hop. Throughout the past decade, his hardworking collective, the Diplomats (a.k.a. Dipset), released a flurry of mixtapes and albums capped by Cam'ron's jaded, Ping-Ponging flow. In 2003, he famously mocked Bill O'Reilly when he was a guest on his show; when the host became agitated, Cam'ron laughed at him, shouting, "You mad! You mad!," sparking an Internet meme that persists to this day. Five years ago, he stuck a thumb in the eye of the recession with his hit "I Hate My Job." Recently, when Cam'ron was asked to team with the Canadian d.j. A-Trak, he didn't know his work, but he agreed, hosting a series of recording sessions during which the pair created "Federal Reserves," a new EP featuring guests from the Dipset days. (Terminal 5, 610 W. 56th St. terminal5nyc.com. May 31.)

Bambi Kino

The punky-pop New York City band, specializing in set lists that the Beatles played in Hamburg in the early sixties while honing their stage chops, will lead a benefit for P.S. 154, a public school in Windsor Terrace. They'll be joined by their friends **Charles Bissell** and **Kevin Whelan,** of the spiky Jersey indie band the Wrens. Also performing: the **Big Bright,** featuring members of Ollabelle who are following their musical hearts back toward eighties Britpop. The original lineup of the Brooklyn quartet **Palomar** is getting back together, and **White Collar Crime,** the art-punkers led by the Soft Skull Press founder, Sander Hicks, will also be on hand. (The Bell House, 149 7th St., Brooklyn. 718-643-6510. May 30.)

Eels

Mark Oliver Everett, who is known as E and who records and performs under the name Eels, has known a difficult life, full of loss. He's been making darkly personal music since the early nineties, transferring his pain into both commercial success ("Novocaine for the Soul," off the début Eels album, "Beautiful Freak," from 1996, was a staple on MTV) and a long career. The eleventh Eels studio album, "The Cautionary Tales of Mark Oliver Everett," just came out, and it's a collection full of minor-key regret, in this case inspired by romantic troubles. (Apollo Theatre, 253 W. 125th St. 800-745-3000. June 1.)

Old 97's

For twenty years, this Texas band, led by the singer-songwriter Rhett Miller, has produced one of the most impressive bodies of work in literate contemporary music, informed as much by power pop and alt-rock as by new country. The band's latest record, "Most Messed Up," is among the rawest and most rollicking in its catalogue. A set of self-lacerating road-warrior tales, it lays bare the ups and downs of a two-decade ride with a nearly perfect mix of sharp humor and sad truth. (Webster Hall, 125 E. 11th St. boweryresents.com. June 3.)

Steve Wynn and the Miracle 3

In March, Wynn, the multitalented power-pop maestro, along with his wife, the drummer Linda Pitmon, and many others, took part in a moving tribute to Lou Reed, organized by Alejandro Escovedo, at South by Southwest. They return to Reed's influential catalogue, in the company of the guitarist Jason Victor and the bassist Dave DeCastro. Also on the bill is **Deniz Tek,** a founder of the Australian proto-punk collective Radio Birdman, legendary for delivering double-barrelled rock in the vein of Michigan's favorite sons the MC5 and the Stooges. (Tek is originally from Ann Arbor.) He's here with his latest group, Deniz Tek and the Badmen. With the **Nuclears,** progenitors of party-hardy rock. (Bowery Electric, 327 Bowery, between 2nd and 3rd Sts. 212-228-0228. May 29.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Blue Note Jazz Festival

A hundred and fifty artists, including Aretha Franklin, Bobby McFerrin, Questlove, Michael McDonald, Reggie Watts, Michael Bolton, and Sérgio Mendes, perform throughout the city June 1-30. Getting a jump on the festivities, **Joe Lovano** brings his **Village Rhythms Band** to the Blue Note May 27-June 1. This group harks back to a little-known episode in the saxophonist's musical life—in 1981, when Lovano was twenty-nine, he collaborated with the Afrobeat icon Fela Kuti during a visit to Nigeria. Lovano's septet includes **Abdou Mboup** on kora and percussion, **Liberty Ellman** on guitar, and **Judi Silvano** on vocals. (131 W. 3rd St. 212-475-8592. For more information about the festival, visit bluenotejazzfestival.com.)

BossaBrasil

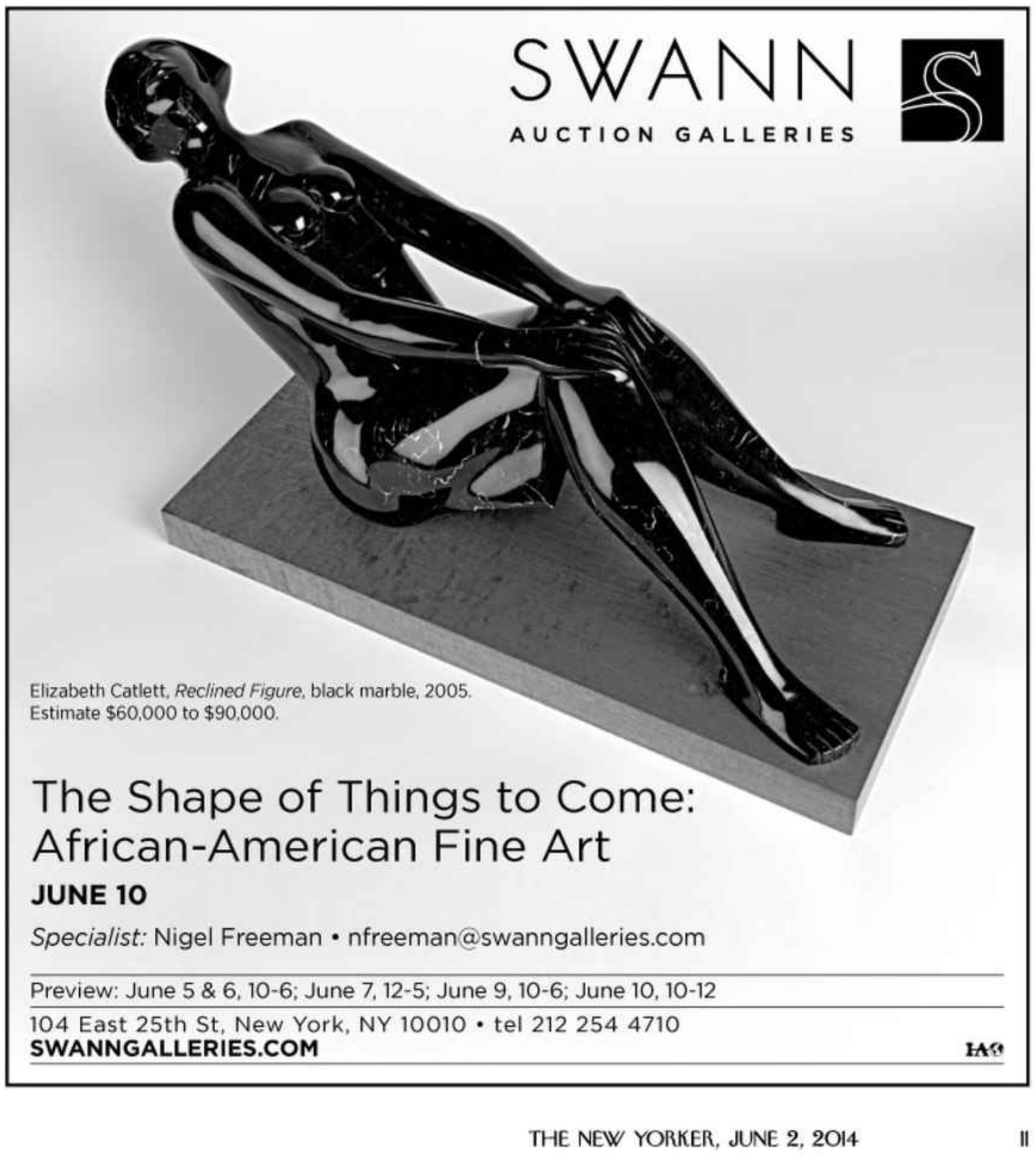
Antônio Carlos Jobim is the composer most closely associated with bossa nova, but other outstanding Brazilian songwriters and performers helped shape the genre. Joining forces here are two accomplished figures, **Marcos Valle,** the hand behind "Samba de Verão"—best known to U.S. listeners as "So Nice (Summer Samba)" as performed by Walter Wanderley and Astrud Gilberto—and **Roberto Menescal,** whose "O Barquinho" ("Little Boat") has become a jazz standard. Accompanied by a handpicked cadre of Brazilian musicians, the duo will perform signature tunes and touch on the work of the Master, Jobim. (Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. 212-581-3080. May 27-31.)

Theo Croker's DVRK Funk

Although Croker is the grandson of the beloved arch-traditionalist trumpeter Doc Cheatham, he couldn't be any less of a style-bound thinker. A trumpeter and singer, Croker blends contemporary R. & B. strains and swinging jazz with impunity in his DVRK Funk outfit, which is celebrating the release of Croker's new album, "AfroPhysicist." It's on **Dee Dee Bridgewater's** DDB Records label, and the irrepressible vocalist, who contributes a knockout version of the standard "Save Your Love for Me" on the release, is a special guest at these shows. (Jazz Standard, 111 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. May 27-28.)

Jeff (Tain) Watts

As anyone who savors the early albums of Wynton and Branford Marsalis can attest, Watts—the powerhouse drummer who stoked the rhythmic fires of both brothers' bands—has never been shy about making his presence known. Watts went on to become one of the most dependable percussionists of his day, eventually making the transition to bandleader. His trim quartet includes the pianist **David Budway** and the saxophonist **Troy Roberts.** (Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S. 212-255-4037. May 27-June 1.)



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CLASSICAL MUSIC

Weber's "Euryanthe," at Bard SummerScape, combines Romantic music and medieval fantasy.

SUMMER PREVIEW

SOMETIMES A HALF-FORGOTTEN OPERA SURVIVES on the edge of the repertory, either because it is just too beautiful to throw away or because its style summarizes the achievements of a particular national culture. Carl Maria von Weber's **"Euryanthe"** (1823), which Leon Botstein will conduct at Bard SummerScape (July 25-Aug. 3), is sterling on both counts. Weber was not the only early-Romantic composer to write a sung-through German opera, but it was his that spurred Schumann and Wagner to aim higher. This medieval romance is saddled with a creaky libretto, but musically it is full of treasures, hinted at in the popular overture. Ellie Dehn takes the demanding title role; Kevin Newbury, who won praise for his Bard production of another "problem opera," Strauss's "Die Liebe der Danae," in 2011, directs.

Anyone following today's headlines knows about the turbulent currents of Russian history. Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's **"The Tsar's Bride"** (1899), a piece beloved in its native land, is a rich fantasy of words and music spun from the legend of Ivan the Terrible's brief third marriage, to Marfa Sobakina, a commoner, who died just days after the wedding. Dmitri Tcherniakov's recent production in Berlin magnified the work's complexities; the Lincoln Center Festival's performances (July 12-13), conducted by the eminent Gennadi Rozhdestvensky, will be in concert form.

A brashly American tale of love and murder, Jack Beeson's irresistibly dramatic **"Lizzie Borden"** is a piece that gains strength not only from its famously lurid story (father, stepmother, angry daughter, axe) but also from its sharp clash of neo-Romantic and Expressionist styles. Admired since its première, in 1965, by New York City Opera, it will be mounted at Tanglewood (July 31) in collaboration with Boston Lyric Opera, with Heather Johnson in the title role so memorably created by Brenda Lewis at City Center—a high point of American opera's golden age.

—Russell Platt

ILLUSTRATION BY KRISTINA COLLANTES

OPERA

"NY Phil Biennial"

In the next two weeks, the New York Philharmonic presents a whirlwind of new music, and opera is a substantial part of it. The first of two works is **"The Raven,"** a monodrama for mezzo-soprano and twelve instruments—inspired by the poem by Edgar Allan Poe—by Toshio Hosokawa, a distinguished Japanese composer adroit at creating silken textures and suspended dramatic moods. Gotham Chamber Opera, conducted by Neal Goren, presents it at the Gerald W. Lynch Theatre; André Caplet's "Conte Fantastique: Le Masque de la Mort Rouge," another Poe-inspired piece, is the curtain-raiser. (John Jay College, Tenth Ave. at 59th St. 212-279-4200. May 28 at 7:30 and May 30-31 at 8.) • Although HK Gruber, the brilliantly perky Viennese provocateur, is best known for his orchestral "pan-demonium," "Frankenstein!!," he is also admired for **"Gloria: A Pig Tale,"** a madcap comic opera with ominous undertones that are unique to postwar Vienna. Alan Gilbert conducts the Juilliard School's superb Axiom ensemble in a production crafted by Doug Fitch and Giants Are Small (Gilbert's collaborators on the Philharmonic's presentation of Ligeti's "Le Grand Macabre" and other works), presented jointly with Juilliard and the Metropolitan Museum, where the performances will take place. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. metmuseum.org. May 29-30 at 7 and June 1 at 2.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

"NY Phil Biennial": New York Philharmonic

One of the most exciting events of the Philharmonic's all-embracing festival is an exuberant all-American program; both works are New York premières. In the first half, Julian Wachner conducts his outstanding Trinity Choir, along with the trusty Bang on a Can All-Stars, in the New York première of Julia Wolfe's "Anthracite Fields," a flinty, big-boned, and appealing piece that honors the generations of miners who toiled in the Pennsylvania coal fields. After intermission, the Philharmonic, conducted by Jayce Ogren, takes the stage, collaborating with Synergy Vocals, the actor and vocalist Rinde Eckert, and the Catch Electric Guitar Quartet in Steven Mackey's "Dreamhouse," a post-9/11 meditation on the American Dream that's almost Whitmanesque in its brashly heterogeneous congress of sounds. A "Play Date" with the composers and performers—and a cash bar—follows. (Avery Fisher Hall. May 30 at 8 and May 31 at 7. For tickets and a full schedule of concerts and other events, see nyphil.org.)

"NY Phil Biennial": Orchestra of St. Luke's

Pablo Heras-Casado, a captivating young Spanish conductor who is equally skilled at music old and new, leads the ensemble in two concerts under the Philharmonic's big tent that pay tribute to two of Europe's most admired composers. The first is centered on the great Pierre Boulez, represented by "Mémoriale" and "Une Page d'Éphéméride," in addition to pieces (all U.S. premières) by Heinz Holliger, Bruno Mantovani, Philippe Manoury, and Marc-André Dalbavie; the second, also rich in premières, is a toast to the British master George Benjamin, whose Octet and "Upon Silence" are joined on the program by works by Colin Matthews, Ryan Wigglesworth, and Helen Grime. (Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St. nyphil.org. May 31 at 2 and June 1 at 5.)

"The Arvo Pärt Project"

St. Vladimir's, an Eastern Orthodox seminary in Yonkers, is spearheading this celebration of the compelling Estonian composer, whose influence upon contemporary music and performance is vast. A concert at the Metropolitan Museum is already sold out; this one, at Carnegie Hall, features Tõnu Kaljuste conducting the famed Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir and the Tallinn Chamber Orchestra in such beloved works as "Fratres," "Cantus in Memoriam Benjamin Britten," and the Te Deum. (212-247-7800. May 31 at 8.)

Budapest Festival Orchestra

For Iván Fischer, an all-Dvořák program is an opportunity to rethink the Bohemian composer's music from the bottom up. The Symphony No. 8 in G Major and the Piano Concerto (with Garrick Ohlsson) anchor the first concert with Fischer's wonderful orchestra, while the Cello Concerto (with Daniel Müller-Schott) and the Symphony No. 9, "From the New World," are highlighted in the second; both feature selections from the composer's "Legends" and "Slavonic Dances," each originally written for piano four hands. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500. June 1 at 3 and June 2 at 8.)

RECITALS

Ensemble LPR

(Le) Poisson Rouge's contemporary-music ensemble, conducted by Christopher Rountree, brings a special guest to the downtown music club—the engaging young composer and pianist Timo Andres. He'll be out front in works by Mozart (the intimate Piano Concerto No. 12 in A Major) and Britten ("Young Apollo") on a program that also features recent music of his own and by Ted Hearne. (158 Bleecker St. lprnyc.com. May 28 at 7:30.)

Bargemusic

Music by the flamboyant neo-Romantic composer David Del Tredici dominates the first program of the weekend at the floating chamber-music series, with the winning young Voxare String Quartet performing the String Quartet No. 1, and the violinist Mark Peskanov, the cellist Michael Nicolas, and the pianist Steven Beck featured in the composer's appropriately titled "Grand Trio." (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. May 30 at 7. For tickets and full schedule, see bargemusic.org.)

Empire Viols: "Island Music"

In a week bursting with new music, the viol consort (with the harpsichordist Arthur Haas and a guest, the violinist Leah Gale Nelson) looks back, with music from the English Baroque, by Christopher Simpson and his more famous compatriot Matthew Locke. (Second Presbyterian Church, 6 W. 96th St. May 30 at 8. A donation is suggested.)

"NY Phil Biennial" at SubCulture

One of the festival's more interesting small events (co-presented with the 92nd Street Y) is an evening devoted to music by outstanding young American composers, each a première and each performed by a member of the Philharmonic; among the works are Paola Prestini's "Eight Takes" (for the cellist Sumire Kudo) and Eric Nathan's "So Above, So Below" (for the principal trombonist, Joseph Alessi). Marc Kaplan, the co-director of this invitingly low-key new venue (with a cash bar), hosts. (45 Bleecker St. 212-415-5500. June 3 at 7:30.)

SWANN
AUCTION GALLERIES

Guy C. Wiggins, *New York Skyline, from a Staten Island Ferry Boat* (detail), oil on canvas. Estimate $100,000 to $150,000.

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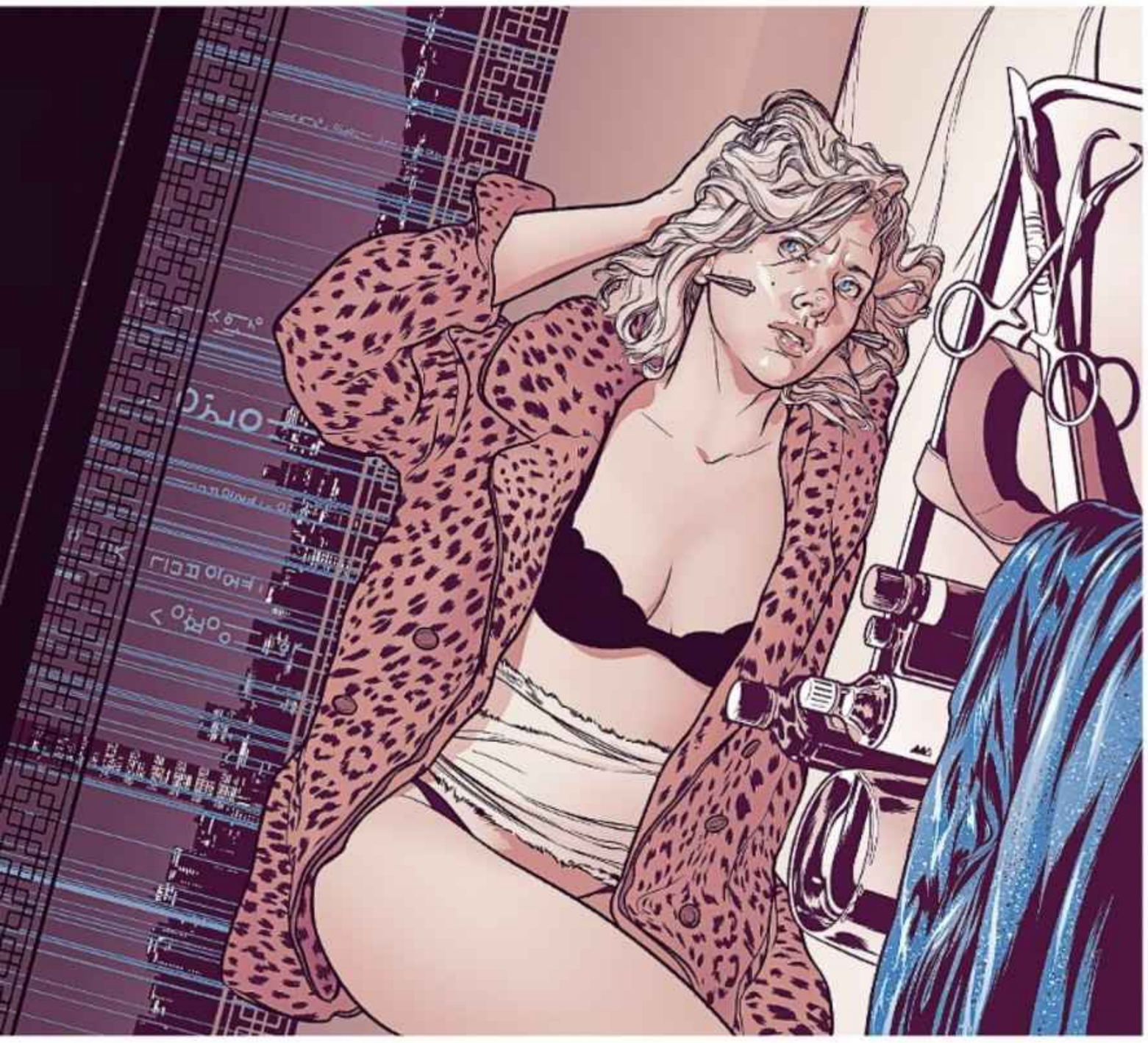
MOVIES



Scarlett Johansson plays a woman with unwanted superpowers in the futuristic thriller "Lucy."

SUMMER PREVIEW

SUMMER MOVIES ARE A SPECIAL breed. They're rarely unveiled at film festivals or given long-lead screenings, because their element of spectacle is its own news. Nobody knows anything—except for what's in the trailers. These are some of the ones that appear the most promising this season.

Clint Eastwood's musical **"Jersey Boys"** (June 20), based on the Broadway show about the mid-sixties pop group the Four Seasons and its lead singer, Frankie Valli, seems like an anomaly in his career. But the trailer, highlighting the conflict between the artists' private lives and their public image, as well as the way that history is raised to legend, places the project firmly at the heart of Eastwood's concerns as a director, and conveys the verve that Eastwood has always brought to stories that coincide with his own memories, such as "Changeling" and "Bird."

"Dawn of the Planet of the Apes" (July 11) looks like the Western of the season. The director, Matt Reeves, replays the drama of a people at peace in nature being menaced by marauding arrivistes who encroach on their homeland. He puts the sentient simians on horseback and lends them the hand gestures and pidgin English of Native Americans from myriad horse operas. Caesar (Andy Serkis), the leader of the apes, sets the tone with his ode to "Home, family, future"; when the apes are ordered to go, he asks the question of exiles the world over: "Where?"

In Luc Besson's **"Lucy"** (July 25), Scarlett Johansson portrays a woman who is trapped in a pharmacological scheme that also gives her superhuman physical and mental powers. Besson invests the kitschy setup with clever and catchy visual inventions, from spare upside-down shots and a closeup of her newly chameleon-like eyeball to the dazzlingly sped-up city in which she alone stands still. With such devices as a shimmering curtain of language and the hyper-accelerating force of a wave of the hand, "Lucy" looks like a gleeful catalogue of cinematic magic tricks.

—*Richard Brody*

NOW PLAYING

Blended

Two suburban single parents (Adam Sandler and Drew Barrymore) meet on a disastrous blind date and vow not to meet again, but their paths cross at a resort, where their children—his three girls, her two boys—bring them together. The corn of the setup is sweetened by the stars' easygoing chemistry. Sandler, a live-action Fred Flintstone with a wry garlic drawl, lends heart and humor to the secular Jewish Everyman, and Barrymore—earnest, febrile, breathless—hints at real pain beneath a perky veneer. But the details are an embarrassment: the resort is in South Africa, referred to almost always only as "Africa," and its black staff members engage in the sort of obsequious glad-handing, often involving song and dance, that harks back to grotesquely racist stereotypes, which pass unquestioned and seemingly unnoticed. (The many nonwhite patrons of the resort are just part of the décor.) For that matter, the plot, with Sandler playing sports dad to an athletically frustrated boy and Barrymore re-styling one of the motherless girls, rests on equally retrograde gender models. These blundering dogmas come off, doubtless unintentionally, as an incisive critique of the heart-catching sentiment of family life. Directed by Frank Coraci.—*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

Cold in July

Strictly for connoisseurs of violent genre pulp. In East Texas, in 1989, an ordinary guy with a mullet (Michael C. Hall) kills an intruder in his house, only to find himself caught up in a miasma of revenge, police corruption, Mafia-made snuff films, and vigilantism. The story, an adaptation by the director, Jim Mickle, and the co-writer, Nick Damici, of a cult novel by Joe R. Lansdale, isn't credible for a minute, but Mickle has an undeniable talent for sustained and terrifying scenes of stalking and violence. The blood flows plentifully. With Sam Shepard, now somewhat gaunt, as a hard-souled, taciturn ex-con, and Don Johnson, as an amiably fearless private eye; they are both excellent. The talented Vinessa Shaw, as the hero's wife, is badly underused. Shot in upstate New York.—*David Denby* (In limited release.)

Elena

This personal documentary by the Brazilian filmmaker Petra Costa unfolds a story of grief and thwarted promise with expressive urgency and thoughtful restraint. Its subject is the director's older sister, Elena Andrade, who, as a teen-ager in the family's home town of Belo Horizonte, exhibited prodigious talent as an actress and went to New York in pursuit of a movie career. She soon went home disappointed, but returned to Manhattan—with the seven-year-old Petra and their mother in tow—to study. There, she was engulfed by clinical depression, which drove her to self-destruction. Using archival footage of Elena in performance, home videos shot by Elena herself, and interviews with family members and others, Costa restores her sister to the world of art, to the scene of her love and torment. Their parents' backstory—fusing cultural and political ambition with the currents of history—brings the action to the present day; Costa's ritual of mourning, on both sides of the camera, fulfills the family's cinematic dreams with a self-dramatizing flair.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

Gebo and the Shadow

The centenarian Manoel de Oliveira directed this exquisite yet anguished spectacle, a grand piece of cinematic chamber music for a cast of mighty soloists. It's set in the late nineteenth century, in a cramped room off a desolate courtyard, where a

ILLUSTRATION BY MARTIN ANSIN

poor elderly couple, Gebo (Michael Lonsdale) and Doroteia (Claudia Cardinale), are haunted by the absence of their prodigal son, whose wife, Sofia (Leonor Silveira), they have taken in. Then the young man, João (Ricardo Trêpa), makes his defiant return. He's a jumpy Dostoyevskian rebel who boasts of his crimes and cruelly threatens to rend the family's threadbare bonds. The elder actors conjure stifled furies with their pensive stillness and chiselled diction, and Oliveira—aided by the cinematographer Renato Berta's evocation of gaslight—summons the lingering agonies of a vanished century, the hard world of Cézanne brought back to life.—*R.B.* (Anthology Film Archives.)

Godzilla

The beast is back. Contractually obliged to rise from the waves at irregular intervals, and with no visible improvement to either his temper or his complexion, he surfaces once more in Gareth Edwards's movie. The story ranges from 1999 to the present day, and from the Philippines to San Francisco, with enjoyably manic excursions to Japan, Hawaii, Las Vegas, and other centers of interest along the way. In case the monster gets lonely or bored, Edwards provides him with rival behemoths, one of whom even sports a pair of ponderous wings, like the world's most inelegant dragonfly. In terms of geopolitical fallout, the film gives off a weaker signal than Edwards's "Monsters" (2010), which was infinitely cheaper, more patient, and more febrile with anxiety. Still, as the skies darken, in the second half, the action acquires a grim grandeur, and Edwards seems happiest in the company of the inhuman, with all the little people brushed aside.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 5/26/14.) (In wide release.)

The Job

Ermanno Olmi's 1961 melodrama blends satire and romance, social critique and aching sympathy into an analytical panorama of urban life. Domenico (Sandro Panseri), the teen-age son of a working family from the outskirts of Milan, goes into town to apply for a job with a large corporation. On break from a daylong battery of "psychotechnical" tests, he meets Antonietta (Loredana Detto), a smoky-voiced, raven-haired beauty from his group of applicants. Olmi's intimate camera captures his performers' delicate range of inflections and glimmers of feeling as their inhibitions begin to curdle into weary bitterness. The contrast of Domenico's family life with modern corporate burdens—the trade-off of constraining tradition for isolating freedom, of dire poverty for deadening routine—rises to a tender lament for the human condition. The promise of lifetime employment comes off as a death sentence with a handshake. In Italian.—*R.B.* (MOMA; May 29.)

Korengal

Sebastian Junger has made a kind of addendum and sequel to "Restrepo," the 2010 documentary about an Army infantry platoon assigned to the Korengal Valley, in a remote and mountainous corner of Afghanistan, in 2007 and 2008. As in the earlier film, terror and boredom fill the men's days. Junger and his filmmaking partner, the late Tim Hetherington, go out on patrol with the soldiers, experiencing live fire again and again; they catch the fear and exhilaration of battle as well as the men's vagueness about what, exactly, they are doing in Afghanistan. As a record of the war, the two films are imperishable. A number of the soldiers, interviewed after their deployment is over, say that no relationship at home could equal the devotion that they felt to one another, and that they would gladly go back to Afghanistan for the adrenaline high of combat. The film was self-financed; Junger raised money for distribution on Kickstarter.—*D.D.* (In limited release.)

The Rendez-Vous of Déjà Vu

Antonin Peretjatko's first feature, from 2013, is a loopy and audacious comedy with a political setting. It centers on a group of young adults who, in the face of economic crisis, leave Paris for an impromptu beach trip. Two of them—Hector (Grégoire Tachnakian), a guard at the Louvre, and the unemployed Truquette (Vimala Pons), an amateur acrobat—are in love; when they get separated, a carnivalesque chase, led by a quack doctor (Vincent Macaigne), ensues. Peretjatko spins out a variety of comic inventions, including flashbacks and fantasies, perorations into the camera, and magic tricks, but the movie's original French title, which translates as "The Girl of July 14th," reflects the director's historical ambitions. The film starts with a breathtaking scene at an actual Bastille Day military parade, which Truquette, the acrobat, somehow infiltrates to peddle a left-wing magazine and French Revolution trinkets. With ricocheting references to France's tradition of violent uprisings, Peretjatko gleefully unleashes the brazen energy of youth—on both sides of the camera.—*R.B.* (French Institute Alliance Française; June 3.)

The Wind Will Carry Us

Abbas Kiarostami's quietly ecstatic comedy, from 1999, is set in a Kurdish mountainside village where Behzad (Behzad Dourani), a director from Tehran, arrives with his crew to film the unusual local funeral rite. Unfortunately for them, the moribund woman for whom the services are planned is in no rush to pass on, and Behzad is stuck there for weeks with little to do but talk with the villagers. Kiarostami films the encounters and the landscapes with a patient, painterly tenderness, but his modest methods conceal vast political goals. He nudges the Iranian regime's limits on expression as Hollywood directors tweaked the Hays Code—his realism packs symbols to express the forbidden. Kiarostami's main subject is sex, which he evokes in sly touches worthy of Lubitsch and Hawks, alluding to the official abuse of religion and the natural force of desire; when a cynical elderly married woman refers to her "night work," it becomes clear why the entire film takes place in daylight. The title alone, from a love lyric by the prerevolutionary poet Forugh Farrokhzad that Behzad recites, suggests the irrepressible beauty of playtime. In Farsi and Kurdish.—*R.B.* (IFC Center; May 30-June 3.)

Words and Pictures

Clive Owen, looking scruffy and wearing a terrible pair of glasses, is an alcoholic and self-destructive English teacher at an élite school. Juliette Binoche is a well-known painter, hampered by rheumatoid arthritis, who teaches art. They both make speeches—he, for the primacy of language; she, for the glory and truthfulness of painting. Their rivalry, which emerges in public as well as in classrooms, lifts their students out of the doldrums. This rather sententious romantic comedy might have sunk under its pretensions were it not for the stars. Owen is noisy and freewheeling (playing an American seems to have liberated him), and Binoche is tough as nails. The French star paints with a huge brush that's suspended from pulleys; her fervent strokes are the best thing in the movie. All the artwork shown is actually hers, and it's impressive. Gerald Di Pego wrote the fearfully overexplicit script. Fred Schepisi directed, with heavy emphasis on the obvious.—*D.D.* (In limited release.)

X-Men: Days of Future Past

The seventh film in this unkillable franchise combines apocalyptic doom, the usual advocacy for people who are "different," and a fair amount of wit. As Earth lies in ruins, Logan (Hugh Jackman) goes back to the Nixon era to prevent the evil professor Bolivar Trask (Peter Dinklage) from developing the superweapons that have destroyed almost all mutants and taken a lot of humans down with them. Logan encounters the younger selves of Professor X (James McAvoy), who needs a good talking-to; the inexorable Magneto (Michael Fassbender); and the hotheaded Mystique (Jennifer Lawrence, who looks awesome in blue). At one point, Lawrence takes over Richard Nixon's body, improving his appearance somewhat. There's much flaming annihilation, but the 3-D effects are mostly playful: people fly through enclosures and go deep into the frame; bullets drift slowly toward us. With Ellen Page, as Kitty, who has magic hands; the roguish Evan Peters, as Quicksilver; and the usual gang—Ian McKellen, Patrick Stewart, Nicholas Hoult, and Halle Berry. Directed by Bryan Singer.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

OPENING

ELENA
Reviewed in Now Playing. Opening May 30. (IFC Center.)

GEBO AND THE SHADOW
Reviewed in Now Playing. Opening May 28. (Anthology Film Archives.)

KORENGAL
Reviewed in Now Playing. Opening May 30. (In limited release.)

MALEFICENT
A live-action version of "Sleeping Beauty," starring Angelina Jolie and Elle Fanning. Directed by Robert Stromberg. Opening May 30. (In wide release.)

A MILLION WAYS TO DIE IN THE WEST
Seth MacFarlane directed and stars in this Western spoof, co-starring Charlize Theron and Liam Neeson. Opening May 30. (In wide release.)

NIGHT MOVES
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening May 30. (In limited release.)

REVIVALS AND FESTIVALS
Titles in bold are reviewed.

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
The films of Rainer Werner Fassbinder. June 1 at 1: "Martha" (1974). • June 1 at 8: "Effi Briest" (1974).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
In revival. June 3 at 4 and 7:30: **"The Rendez-Vous of Déjà Vu."**

IFC CENTER
In revival. Beginning May 30 (call for showtimes): **"The Wind Will Carry Us."**

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
"An Auteurist History of Film Reprise, Part 2." May 29 at 7:30: **"The Job" ("Il Posto").**

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
The films of Kenji Mizoguchi. May 31 at 5: "The Love of Sumako, the Actress" (1947). • May 31 at 7: "Miss Oyu" (1951). • June 1 at 2: "The Crucified Lovers" (1954). • June 1 at 4:30: "Victory of Women" (1946). • June 1 at 7: "My Love Has Been Burning" (1949).

EVERETT

DVD OF THE WEEK
A video discussion of Frank Tashlin's "The First Time," from 1952, in our digital edition.

Jeff Koons's polychromed aluminum sculpture "Split-Rocker (Orange/Red)" (1999).

SUMMER PREVIEW

WHEN THE WHITNEY MOVES to the foot of the High Line next year, it returns to its roots: in 1914, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney opened the first version of the museum just a few blocks away, in her studio in Greenwich Village. Her mission was to show living American artists, so it's fitting that the Whitney's last show on Madison Avenue surveys the career of **Jeff Koons,** one of the most famous artists alive. Like Andy Warhol, Koons is a native Pennsylvanian who moved to New York and shot to superstardom, straddling the worlds of fine art and pop culture. His objects have penetrated the palace interiors and formal gardens of Versailles, and they've floated overhead at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade. To those who argue that his reputation is overinflated, consider that inflation is often at the heart of his work. In 1979, Koons exhibited ready-made blown-up vinyl flowers, set against mirrored tiles; more recently, he's produced Brobdingnagian balloon animals, fabricated in seductively reflective stainless steel. (An orange version sold for more than fifty-eight million dollars at auction last year, a record for a living artist.) Examples of these works, and others across a wide range of mediums, take over Marcel Breuer's building, in a show organized by the impeccable Whitney curator Scott Rothkopf. Whether Koons is, as Stephen Colbert recently said on TV, "the world's most expensive balloon clown" or an American master will be hotly debated when the show opens, on June 27.

James Lee Byars—who was born in Detroit in 1932, studied Noh theatre and Shinto rituals in Japan, and died in Cairo in 1997—was an American mystery. MOMA PS1 sheds light on the elusive artist in "1/2 an Autobiography," beginning June 15. The Met has developed a mystery of its own: when the great street photographer **Garry Winogrand** died suddenly, in 1986, he left behind some two hundred thousand unprinted negatives. The museum includes posthumous prints in a Winogrand retrospective, opening June 27.

—Andrea K. Scott

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Jewish Museum

"Mel Bochner: Strong Language"

Fifty years ago, straight out of art school, Bochner, a pioneering Conceptualist, took a job as a security guard at the Jewish Museum—from which he was fired, for falling asleep. His return to the museum is hardly drowsy, but it isn't a full retrospective; without any of his measurement rooms, geometric experiments, or film works, this show skips over crucial decades of his career. But the focus on Bochner's use of language does help to connect such early experiments as "portraits" of his colleagues Sol LeWitt and Eva Hesse written on graph paper to his recent paintings of rows of synonyms—"SILENCE! COOL IT! PUT A SOCK IN IT! JUST SHUT THE FUCK UP!"—in eye-popping colors. Lately, the artist been experimenting with digital argots like "leet speak" and emoticons, but the best of his new paintings are Beckettian compositions in midnight blue, in which Expressionist backgrounds are overlaid with the words "BLAH, BLAH, BLAH." Through Sept. 21.

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Dawoud Bey

To commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the 1963 bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, which killed four young girls, the Chicago-based artist photographed black children in Alabama, who are the same age as the victims were. He also shows portraits of adults in their sixties, the age the girls would be if they'd lived. Formally posed, often in church pews, and seen here in pairs, Bey's sitters regard us with sombre expressions. But the artist is not heavy-handed; the soulful concern that grounds his pictures also buoys them. Through June 28. (Boone, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-752-2929.)

Lucien Smith

Take camouflage patterns à la Warhol, render them in stains of liquid paint à la Morris Louis, and you'll be too late. The twenty-five-year-old prodigy Smith has nailed that cool, neo-formalist recipe, with incisive and sumptuous results (and ballooning art-market rewards). He stencils shapes in rich browns, greens, and the occasional orange or black, within narrow borders of unpainted canvas. The jagged designs suggest turbulent motion but, checked by the borders, hold still, effectively becoming pictures of themselves. A style so polished piques from an artist so young. Now what? Through June 27. (Skarstedt, 20 E. 79th St. 212-737-2060.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Duane Michals

The octogenarian photographer, best known for his multipanel narratives about memory and desire, shows small black-and-white views of New York, made in the mid-nineteen-sixties. Working under the influence of Eugène Atget, Michals saw the city as a series of familiar tableaux: the laundromat, the grocery store, the shoeshine stand, the Italian street fair. Avenues and shops, shot early in the morning before the city awoke, look like movie sets before the actors arrive, or haunted sites in a ghost town. The work is restrained, and suffused with feeling for New York's once-upon-a-time quotidian pleasures. Through May 31. (DC Moore, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-247-2111.)

Ken Price

The late genius of ceramic art springs posthumous surprises. In two gallery spaces, massive, luminously painted bronzes, conceived in Price's last years, amplify his wonted poetry of globular

forms. Walk around them. They configure differently from each viewing angle, to dramatic, funny, and beautiful effect. A third space presents a series of little, and little-known, experimental works, called "Specimen Rocks," which Price made during a spell in Massachusetts, in the early eighties. The grenade-size ceramics combine planar and rough elements, and matte and metallic colors, in ways that transfix and delight. Through June 28. (Marks, 502, 522, and 526 W. 22nd St. 212-243-0200.)

Mika Rottenberg
Spare half an hour for the delirious video that anchors this strong show of sculptural installations, collectively titled "Bowls Balls Souls Holes." Images of the moon, a decrepit hotel, and melting Arctic ice pepper extended scenes of a tawdry bingo hall where the caller interrupts her duties, now and then, to drop colored clothespins down a hole, whence they migrate by way of cunning contraptions to the hands of an underground man who . . . but see for yourself. A synopsis can't convey the formal mastery and spiritual aplomb with which Rottenberg explores regions of a strangely urgent waking dream. Through June 14. (Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000.)

Sterling Ruby
Ruby assaults this impossibly huge gallery with the artistic equivalent of an armored division: colossal paintings, sculptures, and a mobile, each one-of-a-kind and specifically gross. There are images—cups and bowls, stuffed dolls, an industrial stove—but the emphasis is on materials: bronze, fabric, ceramic, cardboard, casts and drools of urethane, and, among many other things, a dangling bucket of aluminum baseball bats. The aggression achieves a Pyrrhic victory, rousing and wearying by turns and in roughly equal measure. Through July 25. (Hauser & Wirth, 511 W. 18th St. 212-790-3900.)

Julian Schnabel
There's a forlorn majesty, as of an exiled monarch, to this show of immense works on tarpaulin, burlap, sailcloth, and velvet. Schnabel made them outdoors, in 1989 and 1990, with slathers and spills of paint and the occasional crude inscription ("Ozymandias," for pompous instance). The look is prescient of art by Joe Bradley and other vigorously blowsy young painters of the moment. But the attitude thuds. It's that of an artist whose most distinctive content (except in his often superb movies) has always been self-admiration. Through May 31. (Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111.)

Hiroshi Sugimoto
The Japanese photographer's enormous black-and-white landscapes were made between 1976 and 2012 at natural-history museums. Their subjects are dioramas, displaying taxidermy animals and fake foliage against painted backdrops—dense layers of artifice, to which Sugimoto's photographs add yet another layer. Like so much of the artist's work, this series is conceptually brilliant, formally impressive, and ice cold. Which might be the point: we're so alienated from nature that even the dioramas staged to involve us in animal drama (warthog vs. ostrich, polar bear vs. seal) come off as empty, if elaborate, tableaux. Through June 28. (Pace, 510 W. 25th St. 212-255-4044.)

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Kerstin Brätsch
The German artist's nearly ten-foot-high works in colored inks on paper may have only technique to justify them. But what a technique! She adapts the antique means of book marbling—dropping and manipulating inks and solvents on a watery surface, then off-printing them on paper—to produce spectacular, infinitely complex phantasmagorias. Hints of bodily and spectral imagery swim in engulfing depths that suggest a radioactive coral sea. How far the work goes, as art, is questionable, but its pell-mell velocity is not. Through June 21. (Brown, 620 Greenwich St. 212-627-5258.)

MUSEUMS SHORT LIST

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
"Charles James: Beyond Fashion." Through Aug. 10.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
"Gauguin: Metamorphoses." Through June 8.

MOMA PS1
"Maria Lassnig." Through Sept. 7.

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

WHITNEY MUSEUM
"American Legends: From Calder to O'Keeffe." Through June 29.

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
"Ai Weiwei: According to What?" Through Aug. 10.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
"Pterosaurs: Flight in the Age of Dinosaurs." Through Jan. 4.

FRICK COLLECTION
"The Poetry of Parmigianino's 'Schiava Turca.'" Through July 20.

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
"In a World of Their Own: Coney Island Photographs by Aaron Rose." Through Aug. 3.

NEW MUSEUM
"Camille Henrot: The Restless Earth." Through June 29.

QUEENS MUSEUM
"13 Most Wanted Men: Andy Warhol and the 1964 World's Fair." Through Sept. 7.

ABOVE & BEYOND

World Science Festival
While arts festivals are typically darlings of high-culture institutions, science-related events usually end up sequestered in laboratories, universities, or children's museums. Seeking to elevate science on the cultural pedestal, Brian Greene, the renowned physicist and author, and his wife, Tracy Day, a former journalist and TV producer, co-founded this festival in 2008. The five-day citywide gathering showcases the world of science in unique ways. Alan Alda, a longtime supporter of the event, has written a play about Albert Einstein, "Dear Albert," which will be performed by Paul Rudd, Cynthia Nixon, and Francesca Faridany on opening night. At the same time, it engages with serious scientists—participants include Mary-Claire King, the geneticist who discovered the breast-cancer gene BRCA1; John Kovac, who may recently have found further proof of the big bang; and the cosmic-inflation theorists Andrei Linde, Alan Guth, and Paul Steinhardt. Attendees can stargaze from Brooklyn Bridge Park and from the deck of the Intrepid (where, also, beneath the Space Shuttle, "Gravity" will be screened), find out what their ancestors looked like, and discover the chemistry of ancient Scandinavian beer. The event culminates with an outdoor fair, in Washington Square Park, where the public can view a 3-D printer that will print astronaut supplies when in space, and interact with robots of all shapes and sizes. (worldsciencefestival.com. May 28-June 1.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Paintings and sculptures from all corners of South and Central America come to auction this week. For once, the sale at **Sotheby's** (May 28) is not led by a Botero composition of portly figures; instead, one of Matta's "Morphologie Pyschologique" paintings—Surrealist canvases covered in layers of biomorphic shapes—leads the way. The selection of Cuban art is particularly strong; it includes works by the *vanguardistas* Mario Carreño and Cundo Bermúdez (hidden away in a private collection for decades), as well as a tropical idyll by Tomás Sánchez. Then, after a mid-range sale of Impressionist and Russian art from the nineteenth century (May 30), the house offers an auction of books and manuscripts (June 3), featuring a trove of letters and books by Albert Camus from the collection of Patricia Blake, a young American college student wooed by the French author during his 1946 New York sojourn. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) • **Phillips** serves up another helping of Latin-American art (May 29), mostly of more recent vintage. The star lot is a sleek metal geometric sculpture ("Bicho Parafuso Sem Fin," from 1960) by the Brazilian Constructivist Lygia Clark, whose career is the subject of a current retrospective at MOMA. (450 Park Ave. 212-940-1200.) • At **Christie's** Latin-American auction on May 28, a Botero ("Man Going to Work") vies with a work by the early-twentieth-century Uruguayan modernist Joaquín Torres García ("Composition TSF") for the top spot. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)

READINGS AND TALKS

Tom Robbins
The author of "Even Cowgirls Get the Blues" reads from his new book, "Tibetan Peach Pie: A True Account of an Imaginative Life." (Powerhouse Arena, 37 Main St., Brooklyn. 718-666-3049. May 29 at 7.)

92nd Street Y
Edna O'Brien offers selections from her memoir, "Country Girl," and Edward St. Aubyn reads from his new novel, "Lost for Words." (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. May 29 at 8.)

McNally Jackson Books
Rivka Galchen reads from her new book, "American Innovations," a collection of short stories. She'll also discuss her work with Rebecca Curtis. (52 Prince St. 212-274-1160. May 29 at 7.)

DANCE

The River to River Festival celebrates Trisha Brown's relationship with New York City.

SUMMER PREVIEW

SINCE TRISHA BROWN'S ANNOUNCEMENT, early last year, that she would step down from the helm of her company, the troupe has been on an international tour. It is not a farewell but, rather, a celebration: Diane Madden and Carolyn Lucas, two longtime company members, will take the reins and continue presenting Brown's dances. This summer, on Governors Island, the **River to River Festival** honors Brown's relationship to New York City, presenting exhibitions, talks, and open rehearsals devoted to her role as one of the earliest practitioners of site-specific dance. Brown, whose works range from pure dance to pure concept, has asked her troupe to perform on roofs, on walls, and on rafts. In 2011, she created three final dances, including "I'm Going to Toss My Arms—If You Catch Them They're Yours," a loose-limbed, melancholy work, in which nine dancers shared the stage with nine industrial fans. On Governors Island, her company will adapt the piece for outdoor performances on the East River waterfront—a reminder that Brown's work endures and evolves.

The love triangle is perhaps the most universal plot device. Whatever window dressing an author might heap on top—iambic pentameter, swan feathers—the triangle demands that a choice be made, and, inevitably, that joy and sorrow will follow. At its core, Mark Morris's new dance-opera, **"Acis and Galatea,"** which premières Aug. 7-9 at the David H. Koch Theatre during the Mostly Mozart Festival, is a messy romance. Polyphemus, the monster, is smitten with Galatea, the nymph, but she loves Acis, the shepherd. "I rage, I melt, I burn," Polyphemus laments. Handel wrote the score in 1718, and Mozart fashioned an elaborate arrangement in 1788; Nicholas McGegan, Morris's collaborator, has said that Mozart transformed Handel's black-and-white movie into color. Isaac Mizrahi's spring-green costumes and Adrianne Lobel's rich, swirling mural backdrops amplify the vibrant mood.

—Katia Bachko

New York City Ballet
Created in 1976 for Natalia Makarova and Mikhail Baryshnikov, the pas de deux "Other Dances" seemed to capture the dancers' Slavic soul, their sense of humor, and, of course, their breezy virtuosity. These qualities are almost impossible to equal, and yet the ballet, with its nonchalance and sophistication, has never lost its charm. Recently, Tiler Peck has brought to it her playful musicality. The music—four Chopin mazurkas—is played by an onstage pianist. "Other Dances" is performed alongside Balanchine's "Concerto Barocco" and "Who Cares?," set to Bach and Gershwin, respectively, as well as Benjamin Millepied's "Neverwhere," from last year. This sleek concoction, performed to a shimmering score by Nico Muhly, is notable mainly for its glistening costumes by the Dutch designer Iris van Herpen, fashioned out of jet-black, scale-like plastic shards. • May 27-28 at 7:30, May 30 at 8, and June 1 at 3: "Concerto Barocco," "Other Dances," "Neverwhere," and "Who Cares?" • May 29 at 7:30 and May 31 at 2 and 8: "Walpurgisnacht Ballet," "Everywhere We Go," and "The Four Temperaments." • June 3 at 7:30: "A Midsummer Night's Dream." (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-496-0600. Through June 8.)

American Ballet Theatre
Spring at the Met is all about stories: dramatic, exotic, and sometimes comedic. Next week offers all three options. Marius Petipa's "La Bayadère," staged for the company by Natalia Makarova in 1974, is set in an imagined India, where a temple dancer competes with a beautiful maharaja's daughter for the affections of a handsome warrior. Disaster ensues. Look for the cast led by the Bolshoi ballerina Olga Smirnova or the one headlined by Viktoria Tereshkina, of the Mariinsky. In "Manon," based on Abbé Prévost's 1731 novel, the twentieth-century British choreographer Kenneth MacMillan traces the downward spiral of the ballet's young heroine, whose love for a student is no match for her appetite for riches. (The best cast is led here by Diana Vishneva and Marcelo Gomes.) The late-Romantic "Coppélia," by Arthur Saint-Léon, is about a strong-willed girl, whose swain is distracted by a beauteous, lifelike doll. The score, by Léo Delibes, is a delight. Catch it with Misty Copeland, in her New York début as Swanilda, and Herman Cornejo. See abt.org for casts. • May 27 and May 29 at 7:30 and May 28 at 2 and 7:30: "La Bayadère." • May 30 at 7:30 and May 31 at 2 and 8: "Coppélia." • June 2-3 at 7:30: "Manon." (Lincoln Center. 212-362-6000. Through July 5.)

John Jasperse
The goal of "Within Between" is to resist classification, and much of its intellectual excitement recalls the classic visual illusion in which one sees both rabbit and duck. Is what we're watching wit or formal beauty? The answer is both. Jonathan Bepler's score, played live, belches up fragments of Debussy, hard rock, and Valley Girl talk, but Jasperse's choreography, which tweaks ballet and makes a postmodern hoedown out of the stepping of black fraternities—flows smoothly. A terrific cast of four makes everything unambiguously dancey. (New York Live Arts, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. May 28-31 at 7:30.)

School of American Ballet
The school's workshop performances are a yearly highlight for dance lovers, who scour the ranks, divining who will be the next Suzanne Farrell or Edward Villella. This year, the young dancers take on Balanchine's "Serenade" and a section of his "Western Symphony," as well as excerpts from his one-act "Swan Lake" and "Coppélia." (Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, 155 W. 65th St. 212-769-7406. May 31 at 2 and 8 and June 3 at 8.)

ILLUSTRATION BY GRACIA LAM

FOOD & DRINK

TABLES FOR TWO

MARGAUX

5 W. 8th St. (212-321-0100)

THE RESTAURANT INSIDE THE NEW Marlton Hotel, on West Eighth Street, was inspired in part by "Tender Is the Night," but even Dick Diver might find it challenging to get a drink here. Before sitting down to eat, there's the lobby's bar to negotiate, inevitably packed, and dominated on a recent evening by British tourists laden with Century 21 shopping bags and by men using the word "iterate" who looked like UrbanDaddy subscribers. Eye contact with the bartender, let alone an elaborate mescal cocktail, was an impossible dream. What a relief it was, then, to enter the comparative calm of the dining room—where the walls glow Ladurée green, and the décor is like Wes Anderson's fantasy of a French bistro—heartened by the promise of a light, fresh, eastern-Mediterranean meal.

Let us set aside the pernicious creep of the phrase "complimentary water," the drink menus dispensed like Moses' tablets, and the denial of a perimeter booth in the empty room because they were "reserved for hotel guests." It's nice, if a little L.A., to begin a meal with crudités, but the green tahini sauce was hidden underneath a piece of lettuce, only to be discovered once most of the vegetables had been eaten. Continuing the healthful theme was a Farmer's Board of red-quinoa tabouli, spicy smashed sweet potato, avocado hummus, and beets with "grains of paradise," a peppery seed from West Africa. The sweet potato showed up again, later, with the best of the entrées—a roast chicken—and that's fine, because it was interesting and smoky, and somehow tasted like bacon. The chunky consistency of the avocado hummus made it inferior to guacamole, and the crispy buckwheat crackers were too fragile to dip into it, in any case. Other problems showed up before the mains: a heavy-handed approach to a citrus dressing on a fennel salad; a cauliflower custard with a striking resemblance to scrambled eggs; and a salad in which artichokes were cut into spiky, fibrous slivers, and were tough to eat.

A sea-urchin-adorned tagliatelle tasted appropriately funky, almost shoelacey, and Arctic char with peas and watercress was suitably verdant. Unusual decisions surrounded the burger, a staple of any hotel-restaurant menu. Why pickled jalapeños, especially with English Cheddar? The effect was disorienting, and the dimensions delicate. The best bet is that chicken, the skin blistered and blackened in the rotisserie, and a green harissa just the right grade of spicy. As for dessert, you might wonder why you have never eaten feta ice cream before, but that is before you try it: the feta was too salty, and the texture unpredictable, when it should have been nothing but smooth. It came with a rhubarb crostata, neon-colored, cold, like a leftover Danish from the breakfast service. Luckily, lingering is not encouraged—the table needed to be cleared for another party, so there was nothing left for the guests to do but pour the last dregs of rosé themselves, and leave.

—Amelia Lester

Open daily for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Entrées $14-$59.

JOHN BROWNJOHN

BAR TAB SEA WITCH

703 Fifth Ave., Brooklyn (347-227-7166)

This nautical South Slope bar isn't far from the famous gravestones and wild parrots of Green-Wood Cemetery; visiting both in one day makes for a pleasingly gothic surf-and-turf adventure. Sea Witch's façade resembles a boat's stern. At a window by the entrance, you can order food—oysters, fried clams, a veggie cutlet—and then wait for it at the bar, drinking craft beer, sitting on a barstool made of welded anchor chain, and listening to Thin Lizzy. "I wonder what it would involve to buy a real shrunken head these days," a man said, peering at a high shelf. There's plenty to stare at: a mermaid mural, the skeleton of a shark's jaw, and, mesmerizingly, live tropical fish, swimming in a glowing oval tank. Out back, there's a patio, with fishponds among the benches and flagstones. The music (Gang Starr, the New York Dolls, Van Halen) and the drinks (topnotch cocktails; twenty beers on tap, including Stone Arrogant Bastard and Brooklyn Sorachi Ace) are savory enough to keep you floating around for a while: past nine on a Sunday night, all the barstools were full, and two women danced a bit. "I make such a great Old-Fashioned that someone made me this bracelet," a bartender said, extending his arm. He deserved it.

–Sarah Larson

PHOTOGRAPH BY LANDON NORDEMAN

THE THEATRE

"Between Riverside and Crazy," by Stephen Adly Guirgis, at Atlantic Theatre Company.

SUMMER PREVIEW

THE NEW YORK-BORN, IRISH-EGYPTIAN playwright Stephen Adly Guirgis was an actor first. With his friends John Ortiz, Philip Seymour Hoffman, and John Gould Rubin, he was an early member of the Labyrinth Theatre Company, and he wrote his first play for the group in 1995. In works such as "Jesus Hopped the A Train" and "Our Lady of 121st Street," Guirgis drew on his experiences as a Catholic-school student in Harlem and a violence-prevention counsellor at institutions like Rikers to compose energetic, curse-ridden odes to the struggles of regular people in New York City that were also trenchant examinations of the relativity of faith and morals. In 2011, on Broadway, his wonderful play "The Motherf**ker with the Hat" brought out the tragic beauty in a crew of hilariously foulmouthed, love-starved addicts. This summer, Atlantic Theatre Company premières a new play by Guirgis, **"Between Riverside and Crazy"** (previews begin July 10), in which a widowed ex-cop and his paroled son tussle with the landlord over their rent-controlled apartment.

Kenneth Lonergan, another New York City-bred playwright, might be better known as a filmmaker. After he made the 2000 indie hit "You Can Count on Me," the lovely "Margaret" (in which Guirgis has a small role as a seen-it-all N.Y.P.D. detective) was a critical darling but a disappointment at the box office. This summer, Lonergan returns to his theatrical beginnings, with **"This Is Our Youth."** Mark Ruffalo and Josh Hamilton led the original cast Off Broadway, in 1996; the revival, about disaffected rich Manhattan kids in the early eighties, opens on Broadway, at the Cort (Aug. 18), starring Michael Cera, Kieran Culkin, and Tavi Gevinson.

At Second Stage, David Schwimmer directs Laura Eason's **"Sex with Strangers"** (July 8), starring Billy Magnussen and Anna Gunn ("Breaking Bad"). Magnussen, who was marvellously game as Sigourney Weaver's boy toy in "Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike," plays a sex blogger and memoirist; Gunn plays the reclusive novelist he idolizes.

—Shauna Lyon

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

As You Like It
New York Classical Theatre transposes the Shakespeare comedy to the nineteen-tens, for its fifteenth-anniversary production. The peripatetic show, on the grounds of Central Park, is free of charge. Opens May 29. (Meet at 103rd St. at Central Park W. 212-252-4531.)

Ayckbourn Ensemble
The centerpiece of "Brits Off Broadway" is this trio of comedies by Alan Ayckbourn, playing in repertory: "Arrivals and Departures," "Time of My Life," and "Farcicals: A Double Bill of Frivolous Comedies." Ayckbourn directs the Stephen Joseph Theatre productions. Previews begin May 29. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

Fly by Night: A New Musical
Playwrights Horizons presents the New York première of a musical by Kim Rosenstock, Will Connolly, and Michael Mitnick, set during the Northeast blackout of 1965, in which a sandwich-maker meets a pair of sisters. Carolyn Cantor directs. In previews. (416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

Holler If Ya Hear Me
Todd Kreidler wrote this new musical, based on the lyrics of Tupac Shakur, about life on the streets, directed by Kenny Leon. The cast includes Tonya Pinkins. Previews begin June 2. (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 877-250-2929.)

Just Jim Dale
The veteran Broadway performer Jim Dale wrote and performs this solo show, about his experiences in the theatre. Richard Maltby, Jr., directs. In previews. Opens June 3. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

The Killer
Michael Shannon stars in this 1959 parable play by Eugene Ionesco, translated by Michael Feingold, about a serial killer on the loose in an otherwise utopian city. Darko Tresnjak directs the Theatre for a New Audience production. In previews. Opens May 29. (Polonsky Shakespeare Center, 262 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. 866-811-4111.)

Macbeth
Rob Ashford and Kenneth Branagh's staging of the Shakespeare play stars Branagh as Macbeth and Alex Kingston as Lady Macbeth, in their New York stage débuts. Previews begin May 31. (Park Avenue Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. 212-933-5812.)

Our New Girl
Gaye Taylor Upchurch directs the U.S. première of a play by Nancy Harris, about a London woman with a problematic son who receives a mysterious visit from a professional nanny. Mary McCann stars. In previews. (Atlantic Stage 2, at 330 W. 16th St. 866-811-4111.)

The Village Bike
MCC presents this play by Penelope Skinner, starring Greta Gerwig, Jason Butler Harner, and Scott Shepherd, about a pregnant woman who takes her desires into her own hands when she buys a used bike. Sam Gold directs. In previews. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-352-3101.)

When We Were Young and Unafraid
Cherry Jones, Zoe Kazan, Cherise Boothe, Patch Darragh, and Morgan Saylor star in a new play by Sarah Treem, in which a woman running a women's shelter takes issue with the influence

ILLUSTRATION BY EDEL RODRIGUEZ

that one of the residents has over her teen-age daughter. Pam MacKinnon directs the Manhattan Theatre Club production. In previews. (City Center Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

The Who & the What

LCT3 presents a new play by Ayad Akhtar, in which a young woman clashes with her Muslim family over the book she has written about women and Islam. Kimberly Senior directs. Previews begin May 31. (Claire Tow, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)

NOW PLAYING

American Hero

In Bess Wohl's frazzled, friendly comedy for Second Stage Uptown, Jamie (Ari Graynor), Ted (Jerry O'Connell), and Sheri (Erin Wilhelmi) are the beleaguered employees of a foundering Tasty Torpedo sandwich franchise. (It's hard to make bank when your product promises intestinal wreckage.) Things go from flatbread to worse when the franchise owner (Daoud Heidami) disappears and the distributors stop delivering. To cover payroll, the sandwich artists go hoagie rogue, finding ingenious ways to keep the shop open. Wohl writes with a tart tongue and a sweet heart. There's a state-of-the-nation play lurking beneath the Caesar-cheese blend, but she typically cedes political critique to panini-driven comedy. Under Leigh Silverman's practiced direction, the actors mostly play according to type, though Graynor brings particular verve to Jamie, a woman of high heels and low morals. Her battle cry: "Let's make some motherfucking sandwiches." (McGinn/Cazale, 2162 Broadway, at 76th St. 212-246-4422.)

Early Shaker Spirituals

The director and performer Kate Valk's new piece, for the Wooster Group, is a charming, small work that's as much about what makes spectacle as it is an homage to anti-spectacle—America's Shaker society. The "text" is a recording of Shaker women singing various hymns; their voices are flat and unassuming. But, after a while, their faith and the faith of the performers fills you up. The actors—Frances McDormand, Suzzy Roche, and Elizabeth LeCompte are real standouts in the nine-member cast—use the record as a jumping-off point for their own singing, which, in turn, eventually leads to the whole ensemble's formal, controlled dancing, with lots of spinning. It's when the controlled and the uncontrollable meet that you see the enormous discipline that goes into being a Shaker—and into being a performer. (Performing Garage, 33 Wooster St. 212-966-3651.)

A Fable

In David Van Asselt's garish black comedy, directed by Daniel Talbott, an agent of the devil (Gordon Joseph Weiss) and an angel in a white bustier (Samantha Soule)—meeting on earth after aeons apart—decide, for fun, to battle over the soul of a young soldier (Hubert Point-Du Jour) whose two friends have just raped an innocent young woman, murdered her mother (Liza Fernandez), and blinded her father (Alok Tewari). As part of the deal, the angel gives the soldier a conscience, and makes him fall in love with the girl; then, when the soldier decides to search for the girl's father, who has gone astray, the agent of the devil makes himself the young man's guide. There's not a subtle moment in Van Asselt's play—not only are the characters cartoonish but the speeches about good and evil (and there are many in this two-and-a-half hour play) are sophomoric. Though this isn't a musical, there are a few very short songs, by Elizabeth Swados, some sweet, some ridiculous. Produced by Piece by Piece Productions and Rising Phoenix Rep, in association with the Rattlestick. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 866-811-4111.)

A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder

A musical entertainment with panache and precision, by Robert L. Freedman and Steven Lutvak. Set in Edwardian England, the story concerns one Monty Navarro (the suave Bryce Pinkham), who discovers that he is a disinherited member of the noble D'Ysquith family and eighth in line to be Earl of Highhurst. Blithely homicidal, he goes about dispatching the intervening D'Ysquiths, who are all played, with buffoonish alacrity, by the masterly Jefferson Mays. (His costume changes alone are Tony-worthy.) Like "The Mystery of Edwin Drood," the musical sets its arch humor to a tuneful score, served up elegantly in Darko Tresnjak's production. With winsome performances by Lisa O'Hare and Lauren Worsham, as Monty's rival love interests, and a plush fun-house set by Alexander Dodge. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

Hedwig and the Angry Inch

Hedwig (Neil Patrick Harris), a down-on-his-luck transgender rock musician, performs a concert that is the story of his culturally confused but ultimately triumphant life, punctuated by eleven vivid songs. (The music and lyrics are by Stephen Trask, and the one-of-a-kind book is by John Cameron Mitchell, who starred indelibly in the original show and in the 2001 movie.) A native of Communist East Berlin, the young Hedwig became the love object of an American soldier. In order to go to the U.S. as the soldier's wife, he agreed to a sex-change operation, which was botched. The marriage collapsed; love is now a stranger to his hungry heart, despite the affection that Yitzhak (the wonderful Lena Hall), his partner and backup singer, demonstrates. Under Michael Mayer's direction, Harris doesn't quite capture Hedwig's profound androgyny of the soul. His Hedwig is a physically disciplined gay man in a wig, who's afraid of tripping in his Elton John "Pinball Wizard" space boots. (Reviewed in our issue of 5/5/14.) (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

In the Park

Randy Sharp directs a new solo show by the story stylist Edgar Oliver. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Axis Theatre, 1 Sheridan Sq. 212-352-3101.)

A Raisin in the Sun

In Kenny Leon's revival of Lorraine Hansberry's 1959 play, Walter (Denzel Washington), a poor chauffeur, lives in a cramped, two-bedroom apartment on the South Side of Chicago, with his wife, Ruth (Sophie Okonedo), his ten-year-old son, Travis (Bryce Clyde Jenkins), his younger sister, Beneatha (gorgeously inhabited by Anika Noni Rose), and their widowed mother, Lena (LaTanya Richardson Jackson). The family anticipates Walter's father's life-insurance payout: ten thousand dollars that will help Walter open his own liquor store and make him feel, unequivocally, that he's the head of the household. After it arrives, Lena reveals that she has used some of the insurance money to buy the family a new home—in Clybourne Park, a white section of town. The stage revitalizes Washington. With his wide-legged, gunslinger stance, he helps cast the sanctimony out of the role. Watching Washington is like watching a great actor at the start of his career: free and joyous, in love with words. (4/14/14) (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

Too Much Sun

Leave that tube of sunscreen capped. Nicky Silver crams this play with birth, death, marriage, divorce, M&Ms, and several passages from Euripides, but little that dazzles or delights. The aging actress Audrey (Linda Lavin) walks away from a "Medea" dress rehearsal and into the guest room of her daughter Kitty's beach house. Domestic disasters ensue. Lavin—tart and imperious—made audiences purr as the monstrous mother in Silver's "The Lyons." Here she plays a declawed version, though whiny Kitty (Jennifer Westfeldt) still describes her parenting as "self-centered, childish, irresponsible, erratic." (At least Audrey, unlike Medea, stops short of homicidal.) At first the play promises the kind of barbed, provocative comedy that Silver ("Pterodactyls," "The Food Chain") patented, then it subsides into something much sudsier. Mark Brokaw directs the play as though he's spiked those M&Ms with amphetamines. But the contrived script drains the show of energy—solar or otherwise. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.)

ALSO NOTABLE

ACT ONE
Vivian Beaumont

AFTER MIDNIGHT
Brooks Atkinson

ALADDIN
New Amsterdam

ALL THE WAY
Neil Simon

ANNAPURNA
Acorn. Through June 1.

BEAUTIFUL—THE CAROLE KING MUSICAL
Stephen Sondheim

BULLETS OVER BROADWAY
St. James

BUYER & CELLAR
Barrow Street Theatre

CABARET
Studio 54

CASA VALENTINA
Samuel J. Friedman

THE CITY OF CONVERSATION
Mitzi E. Newhouse

THE CRIPPLE OF INISHMAAN
Cort

HEATHERS: THE MUSICAL
New World Stages

HERE LIES LOVE
Public

IF/THEN
Richard Rodgers

KINKY BOOTS
Hirschfeld

LADY DAY AT EMERSON'S BAR & GRILL
Circle in the Square

THE LION KING
Minskoff

MATILDA THE MUSICAL
Shubert

LES MISÉRABLES
Imperial

MOTHERS AND SONS
Golden

NEWSIES
Nederlander

OF MICE AND MEN
Longacre

ONCE
Jacobs

PIPPIN
Music Box

THE REALISTIC JONESES
Lyceum

ROCK OF AGES
Helen Hayes

ROCKY
Winter Garden

THE SONIC LIFE OF A GIANT TORTOISE
JACK

VIOLET
American Airlines Theatre

WICKED
Gershwin

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TOYOTA | Let's Go Places

THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

BUILDINGS AND BOOKS

The New York Public Library's announcement that it is abandoning its Central Library Plan has been praised as a good and sensible thing, and indeed it is. The C.L.P. would have sold off the Mid-Manhattan Library and the Science, Industry, and Business Library (called SIBL; five of its floors not open to the public have been sold already). The collections of those libraries would have been moved to the main research library, on Fifth Avenue, and elsewhere. That hundred-and-three-year-old edifice (now known as the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building), with the stone lions out front, would have been reconfigured: seven floors of its stacks taken out, a lending library added to what had been a research library only, more than a million books moved off-site, and a four-level atrium and other new elements put in, following a design by the architect Norman Foster.

Observers could be excused for finding the plan too complicated and strange to think about at first. The library's management and board of trustees developed the C.L.P. without the public's knowing much about it, but as the time for construction approached, and more public meetings were held, it became clear that the C.L.P. represented a major retrenchment. Anyone with experience in household austerity and the cost of modern real estate could get the picture. The main research building was like the elderly but still healthy parent; the Mid-Manhattan Library and SIBL were the grownup offspring. Pressed for cash, the family was selling the kids' apartments and moving the kids in with the parent. To make room, some of the parent's belongings would have to be put in storage in New Jersey. When the sacrifices that the C.L.P. would entail sank in, thanks in particular to reporting in *The Nation* and *n+1*, library users began to object loudly and persistently. The protests, the new mayor's lack of support, and the fact that the financial projections did not add up eventually undid the C.L.P.

The biggest problem was the money. The N.Y.P.L. receives only part of its funding from the city, in an amount that goes up or (more often) down from year to year. Most of the money is spread among the eighty-seven branch libraries throughout Manhattan, the Bronx, and Staten Island. (Brooklyn and Queens have their own systems.) In 2014, the city will contribute about fifty per cent of the over-all operating costs. To make up the difference, the N.Y.P.L. pursues funding from many sources, which also fluctuate unpredictably. The collection of the main research library has been compared to that of the Library of Congress and to that of Harvard's Widener Library. But the U.S. government underwrites the former, and the latter rests comfortably in the care of the richest university in the world. In contrast, the N.Y.P.L. is an on-the-jump freelancer, scrambling for dollars from one day to the next almost as energetically as the street performers out in front of the Fifth Avenue building.

In the case of the C.P.L., the money that did not add up was about three hundred million dollars. This was the amount that the sale of SIBL and Mid-Manhattan would have provided a portion of. (The city would have put in most of the rest.) The sum had been thought sufficient for carrying out the C.L.P., until an independent audit found it not to be. To get an idea of where this much money ranks against ongoing enterprises in midtown, it's useful to look at the fate of the Donnell Library, the currently out-of-commission branch on Fifty-third Street. In 2007, the sale of the Donnell brought the N.Y.P.L. a mere fifty-nine million dollars, and, four years later, a developer tore it down.

A new Donnell is projected to open late next year, in a smaller space, with fewer resources, on the lower level of a luxury high-rise that has been built at the site. The high-rise, a fifty-story hotel-and-residential tower, cost more than five hundred million dollars to erect; a penthouse apartment in it sells for sixty million. Several other tall buildings featuring apartments in that price range are going up in the same neighborhood. The city could

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

use the tax revenue, as our previous mayor liked to point out. But the Donnell's fate suggests the tread of the giant feet of big-bucks real-estate players on the public spaces of midtown—not a reassuring thought, considering the loss of public space that the C.L.P. would have involved.

Plus, the whole business makes three hundred million dollars seem a relatively puny sum. Very likely, fewer people than occupy the research library's main reading room on a busy afternoon will live in the luxury condos. The research library and Mid-Manhattan receive a total of about 3.7 million visits a year; if several billion can be spent on luxury housing for a few, surely a few billion can be devoted to a library for the eight and a half million people of New York City. That's easy enough to say—of course, it would be great if the library had two or three billion dollars. But nowadays there's an uncertainty about what libraries will be in the future. Will there even be libraries? Will they exist in cyberspace only? Will physical books be necessary? It's harder to raise money for something not clearly seen.

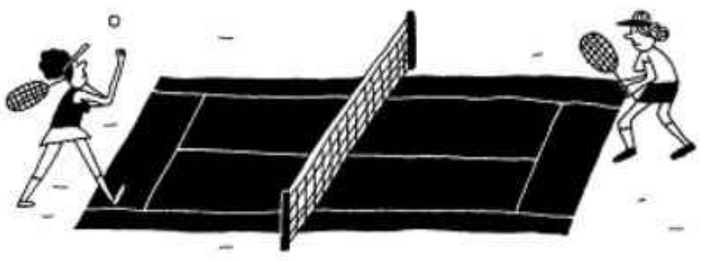
The controversy over the C.L.P. has sketched in a few answers. Physical, public space and physical books will continue to be vital to a library whose research collection, amassed over more than a century, is a cultural treasure. (Even people who focus mostly on their laptops seem to want the company of others, judging by how crowded the three midtown buildings in question usually are.) Given the importance of books, it follows that as many as possible should be on-site. Keeping them there, and moving back many that are off-site now, is a worthwhile goal. If the Schwarzman Building's stacks need major refitting in order to preserve the books better, ideally that should be done, even at the projected cost of tens of millions of dollars. The Mid-Manhattan Library has long been falling apart. It should be fixed up, as the N.Y.P.L. has recently promised to do. Many of the eighty-seven branch libraries also need extensive improvements and renovations—a need more urgent than others, if the money could be found.

The Schwarzman Building stands on the site that once held about half of the Croton Reservoir. Massive stones from the reservoir's walls make up part of the building's foundation. The reservoir stored much of the city's water, carried by an aqueduct system for many miles from upstate. New York City has created visionary civic projects in the past; its public library is chief among them. America now has the highest level of income inequality in the developed world, and New York's is among the worst in America. The public library has always been a great democratizer and creator of citizens, and a powerful force against inequality; it must not retrench, especially now.

—Ian Frazier

TIGER DAD

CHILD'S PLAY



Richard Williams, the world's most successful tennis dad (Venus, Serena), was in the penthouse of a midtown hotel earlier this month, answering questions from aspiring Richard Williamses. Richard, how did your daughters get mentally tough? "Same way they got human tough," he told one parent. "Running for their life! In the ghetto, no matter what color you are, you're gonna run for your life." When should I get my kid on the court? "I feel like I started too early—at four years, six months, and one day," he said. Better, he now thought, to let kids grow up; a more sensible age to start serious training, he said, would be six years old.

Before his daughters left for Paris this week to compete in the French Open, Williams, who wore a striped polo buttoned at the neck and Nike sneakers with the laces untied, was in town to give a talk to the Hudson Union Society about his new memoir, "Black and White: The Way I See It." He walks with a limp, the result of a childhood fight in which he was stabbed with a railroad spike, and sits with a hunch, the result of having recently turned seventy-two. "If I sit too long, I might fall," he said, opting to stand rather than perch on a stool at the front of the room. Much of "Black and White" deals with Richard Williams's life pre-Venus and Serena, especially his childhood, in Shreveport, Louisiana, a Ku Klux Klan stronghold, where, in addition to the railroad-spike incident, Williams said he was hit over the head with a baseball bat, a bottle, and a flashlight. Every attacker was white. "I had to do something, and what I wanted to do was kill people," Williams told the crowd. "I had a war against the white race. But how in the hell can you have a war at eight years old?"

He tried. In various altercations, Williams stabbed a man in the neck with an ice pick, hit another with a soup bone, and, dressed in a Klan member's hood, sneaked up on a white farmer, hit him with a stick, and ran off into the woods. Once, when several neighbors sicced their dogs on him, Williams pulled out a slingshot, which proved insufficient, so he grabbed a rifle and shot one of the dogs dead. He was arrested numerous times. "I decided I was gonna get the sheriff back," Williams said, of one arrest. "So I set his house on fire." The crowd gasped. "Yes, I did," he went on. "I surrounded his wonderful house with kerosene." After another booking, in Chicago, where he moved in the nineteen-sixties, Williams tracked down the arresting officer and told him, "Today, one of us will die." (No one did.)

Eventually, Williams moved to California, where he took tennis lessons from a man named Old Whiskey, whom he paid in pints of booze, and says he wrote a seventy-eight-page plan for turning two yet to be conceived daughters into tennis stars. Once they were born, he put up signs in the family's front yard to emphasize lessons about life ("Venus, You Must Take Control of Your Future") and tennis ("Serena, You Must Learn to Use More Top Spin on the Ball"). Boyfriends were not allowed, and, to discourage any impulse toward early motherhood, Richard would rip the heads off of any dolls Venus brought home.

During the talk, Lakeisha Graham, Williams's third wife, who is thirty-four, a year older than Venus, sat in the front row with Dylan, their twenty-two-month-old son. (Richard and Oracene Price, Venus and Serena's mother, divorced in 2002, following allegations of domestic violence, which Williams denied. Rumors of strife, which the sisters typically dismiss or ignore, have followed the family ever since.) "There is nothing

a human being cannot do if a human being believes in themselves," Williams said. He was talking about Venus's declaration, at twelve, that she would win Wimbledon five times—she has—but the thought reminded him of his most recent accomplishment, whom he grabbed from Graham. "At seventy years old, he was born," Williams said, picking up Dylan, who had been snoring. "Of course, I went and got a DNA test. I wanted to make sure he was mine."

Williams doesn't want Dylan playing tennis. "With the things I know now, Venus and Serena wouldn't have been there," he said. "Look at Donald Sterling. . . . What sport do you think he played? Not one! And he makes enough to pay every single player." Richard had wanted Serena and Venus to become millionaires; his goal for Dylan has three additional zeroes. "He'll never be a billionaire in tennis," he said.

What path to riches, then? "Gold," Williams said. Gold? "Gold!" he repeated. "Gold mines are easy to get." He has already done research on potential mine locations (Zimbabwe) and markets ("You can't get China enough gold"). He also wants Dylan to study "all types of commodities," in case he can't find a profitable mine. Resource extraction seems easier than building another backhand. "Just two big sales and he's set," Williams said. "Then he can play tennis for the rest of his life."

—Reeves Wiedeman

THE ARTISTIC LIFE

CHECKERED

Weaving backward, two docents in dark couture led Harmony Korine through the white labyrinth of offices and private exhibition areas at the Gagosian Gallery on Park Avenue. Korine's first big solo show, "Shooters," was about to open in the gallery's space, and he kept remarking that he'd just got off the plane from Nashville. His hazel eyes were wide, and he held his arms out with his fingers spread, like a small boy boarding an escalator.

He stopped before a jaunty red canvas and asked, "What's the title on that one?" He'd only recently, and hastily, titled his pieces. Virginia Coleman, in brown, said, "Chrissie?" Chrissie Erpf, in black, purred, "'The Zooter.'"

"Zooters are potheads," Korine explained.

He examined "Tornado Check," a large canvas covered with a checkerboard of tiny, woozy, red and white squares. "The paint's still wet on this one," he said. "I use whatever the Salvation Army leaves out—house paint and hairbrushes and steak knives and squeegees—and I might toss the canvas in the yard and stomp on it. There are three or four paintings underneath here—these weird dogs, a mushroom cloud, and a caveman. I started to feel bored with it and put it aside for a few years." The hovering women smiled understandingly. "Then, finally, I got into this whole checking madness, because I've long been interested in loops, mistakes, trancey repetition. It's like writing a novel with pages missing in all the right places."

Korine, a scruffy yet tidy child of the counterculture—the writer Jim Carroll cut his umbilical cord—still bears tattoos from his skateboard gang, but now that he's forty his beard is daubed with gray. He came to notice as the writer of the 1995 film "Kids," about feral tweens, but is best known as the writer-director of "Spring Breakers" (2012), a trancey, boobs-saturated meditation on feral college girls who head to Florida for fun and instead meet James Franco. All the while, though, he was painting. A year ago, when his studio grew overstuffed, he began inviting other artists to take a look, and soon Larry Gagosian was on the phone.

Korine halted in front of a disturbing image half smeared over with black paint. "'The Kotzur Gift,'" Erpf murmured. He said, "It's from a still from my film 'Trash Humpers' that creeped me out, of Brian Kotzur sitting on a toilet. That's actually my wife there"—he pointed to a figure in an ancient-Greek-crone mask. "Our daughter was just six months old, and when she saw her mother pull her face off she went crazy."

In the conference room, Korine drank coffee from a china cup that had materialized, along with four small bottles of Perrier, and moved tiny versions of his paintings around in a mockup of the gallery space. For reasons of color and balance, he decided not to include any of his early black "Loop" paintings, comprising row upon row of photocopied snapshots of his friends. "I'd dress them up in dime-store Jheri-curl wigs and tracksuits, and they'd run through the ominous alleyways around my neighborhood and break into abandoned houses and destroy things." The series smacked of the street culture in "Kids": "Back then, it was about oblivion seekers, people who wanted to get lost on rooftops and alleyways, to vanish. Now it's all video cameras and G.P.S. and self-documentation—'This is the new bedspread

Harmony Korine

I have'; 'This is the doughnut I ate two days ago'—and I don't understand it."

Of late, he said, after painting by day, "at night I'd write this script that I finished three days ago. It's tropical, with dreamy, poppy, moody, crunchy colors and kind of a liquid narrative. There's some real raw gangster stuff in it, and my wife doesn't like having me around when I'm taking that on myself, so I'd go to different hotel rooms. I'm sure everyone thought I was fucking whores, but I was just writing." He laughed. "After twenty years in film, I'm up to the Holiday Inn, a hundred and fifty dollars a night."

What do the paintings cost? "I actually have to talk to them about that," he said. "It should be reasonable shit, something regular people can afford." (The gallery priced Korine's work in the fifty-to-hundred-thousand-dollar range.)

On cue, the door opened and Larry Gagosian came in, very tan in a blue suit. "Hello, Harmony," he said crisply, beaming. Indicating an identically tan man

who led the party that followed him in, Gagosian continued, "He just bought your red-check painting!"

" 'Tornado Check,' " Erpf clarified, as the client's wife stood observing the tableau. Everyone laughed merrily.

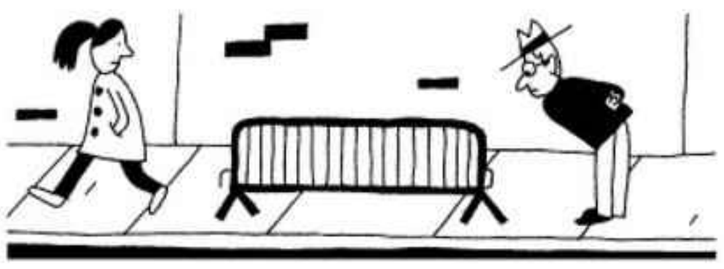
"Oh," Korine said. "Cool."

The client said, "I touched it and it was still wet"—he raised his palms, but the stigmata were no longer visible—"so Larry said I had to buy it!" Everyone laughed again.

After the dealer's party vanished, the artist shrugged. "Dude," he said, "I just live in Nashville."

—Tad Friend

STREETSCAPE
DO NOT CROSS



Here is a basic urban object: the crowd-control barricade, as seen at events all over America, especially in New York City. In Times Square on New Year's Eve, at the St. Patrick's Day Parade on Fifth Avenue, at the West Indian-American Day Parade on Eastern Parkway, a certain familiar type of waist-high metal barricade keeps the many on one side, the few on the other. Some of the interlocking units bear a small silver label that says, "Friedrichs Custom Mfg. Inc., 303 Butterworth St., New Orleans, LA 70121." On other units, the label says, "Jefferson, LA," instead of "New Orleans." Suspiciously, the Zip Code given for both municipalities is the same.

Art critics sometimes describe objects as being of such overwhelming beauty that it is impossible to look at them without a sharp intake of breath. With Friedrichs Mfg. Inc.'s barricades, the sharp intake of breath may not occur at first glance, or ever, but give these objects a few minutes of contemplation and a minor visitation of the sublime may occur. An informational folder put out by the company bears its motto, "America Stands Behind Us." The basic barricade unit advertised, Model No. F2-B, is eight feet seven inches long and three feet seven inches high. The frame is made of inch-and-a-half steel tube, and the "grille"—the vertical crosspieces that constitute the fence—is made of five-eighths-inch steel tube. Each unit has nineteen vertical crosspieces, set about five and a half inches apart. Some units feature bolt-on feet, and some have feet that are welded on. To form an unbroken line, the units fit together by means of rings at one end and hooked posts at the other. The City of New York has purchased more than twenty-five thousand of these barriers, whose undiscounted price is a hundred and twenty-five dollars each.

A vacationer in New Orleans who wanted to know more checked out the Friedrichs factory recently. It is not in downtown New Orleans. The vacationer followed the Jefferson Highway a long way out, via two buses and some walking. Butterworth Street lies close by the Mississippi River and almost underneath the Huey P. Long Bridge, a structure so vaulting and high that it seems to extend from one white, towering Gulf Coast cloud to the next. Low industrial buildings and idling semis and gray mud puddles in the shape of tire tacks compose the scene back on earth. The Friedrichs factory is made of corrugated metal painted white on the street side and not painted on the others. Dim and echoing, it opens its bay doors to the daylight. The vacationer walked in. Not unexpectedly, hundreds of barricades lay or leaned in piles on the factory floor. Nobody seemed to be about.

In a back office, the vacationer found the company's secretary, Barbara Milano, a woman with blond-gray hair and blue eyes. She wore a blue blouse with white embroidery, and glasses attached to a purple cord.

"Actually, we *are* in Jefferson," she admitted. "Although sometimes we do say we are in New Orleans. The Friedrichs company started back in the thirties, making furniture. Because of the crowd-control demand at Mardi Gras, it started also making barricades. We're one of the leading barricade companies in the country. We get some competition from barricades made in China but those barricades are not well made, and eventually police departments that buy them come back to us. You probably noticed that the labels on the barricades have a 1-800 phone number, too. Well, when people call that number it rings at this phone here. I get a lot of calls from people in New York City asking when we're going to come and pick up the barricades in front of their buildings. I tell them to call their local police station. We don't have anything to do with that.

"Right now, we've got eight people working here, including me," she went on. "Two guys do the welding and the other jobs are interchangeable: filing down the welds, bending the steel, making the little parts. We hire temps when it gets busy. Katrina did not flood us, but there was some flooding near here, in Kenner. I went up to New Iberia to stay with relatives—my background's Cajun, partly—and some of my neighbors patrolled the streets to stop any looting. We are twenty miles from New Orleans here. I hardly go

"I can't give you a raise, but I can give you this 'Also Participated' ribbon."

up to the city anymore—too dangerous, and too expensive. They fixed up the areas of New Orleans where the tourists go, but they have not replaced all the housing for ordinary people around here. I've got relatives staying with me now, and I know other families who are doing the same. These days, New Orleans does not buy many barricades from us; it still uses the ones it bought a while ago. The city just doesn't have enough money anymore to spend it on barricades."

—Ian Frazier

THE BOARDS
STUDENT TEACHER

Hamish Linklater, the actor, moved to Los Angeles in 2000, and, until recently, when he came back to New York he'd stay in the spare room of his mother's Upper West Side apartment with her two cats, whom he loathes. But, while preparing to appear as Benedick in the Shakespeare in the Park production of "Much Ado About Nothing" in June, he's upgraded to his girlfriend's place on the Lower East Side, which is cat-free. The other day, he was juggling errands: getting a drink with an old friend (their matching tattoos: a Picasso drawing of Don Quixote), and dropping in on his mother's third-year M.F.A. acting class. Kristin Linklater, a professor of Shakespearean acting at Columbia, was about to decamp to the Orkney Islands, and Hamish was being trotted out to serve as proof that Fortune's fickle wheel might be kind, post-showcase.

On the fifteenth floor of Riverside Church, Linklater—who is thirty-seven, lanky, toothy, with tousley curls—selected a seat next to his mother (white hair, polka-dotted socks), and slid into a slouch, arms crossed, black boots stuck straight in front of him. A tattooed "2" (Derek Jeter's number) peeked out from the sleeve of his T-shirt.

"Hello. This is what the future looks like," he said, ominously. The students laughed nervously.

A recent graduate started things off: "Did you plan that you were going to have this incredibly varied career?" A veteran of Shakespeare in the Park, Linklater has also had roles on "The Newsroom" and in the Miranda July movie "The Future," and will appear with Christopher Walken in the film "When I Live My Life Over Again," and in Woody Allen's upcoming "Magic in the Moonlight."

"Well, obviously, no," Linklater replied. "I was doing summer stock out in New Hampshire when I was in college, and a director introduced me to my first agent. I was at Amherst, and I called my mom and I was, like, 'Mom, do you think I should go back?' And Mom was, like, 'Save me the money, drop out now.'" More nervous laughter from the students, most of whom were paying upward of forty-five thousand dollars a year for their degrees.

Linklater decided to move to Manhattan with his girlfriend at the time. (Her name, Martha, was tattooed on his hip until Linklater had a daughter, seven years ago, and covered it up with a pink rose.) They lived on 207th Street. Linklater said, "And I went on every open call I could. And had, like, awful jobs"—filing death certificates, installing signs—"but the most important thing, starting out, is you want to throw yourself like al-dente noodles at every wall."

A student with gelled hair and ripped jeans raised his hand. "I have a question about desperation and Los Angeles," he said. "I felt those things when I lived there, but I do want to move back."

"I think the situation is the situation," Linklater said. "The pain that you're going to go through is just *great*—it's juicy, lovely. Don't stress yourself out about being worried, don't worry about being depressed, don't put a hat on a hat. The hat's there. It sucks. What's terrific about a crown of thorns is you've got blood coming down—oh, my gosh! It's a wonderful individual experience, which is going to make you a more individual, specific actor." No laughter.

"I'm wondering what the balance is for you, as a parent," a pregnant woman in camouflage pants said.

"It's really tricky," Linklater responded. "But kids become this totem for you, reminding you how wonderful the world is and how you should try to be wonderful in it, too." He looked uncomfortable. "Next question!"

The recent graduate asked, "What is success to you? Are you clocking every day as 'I'm happy today, thus I'm successful?' "

Linklater resumed his slouch and said, "I don't put a lot of stock in being happy, but I put a lot of stock in being engaged. And I think the more torturous my engagement with each day is the more fulfilled I'm going to feel." His mother rolled her eyes.

Linklater sat up and tried again. "Wait, no. I'll tell you what success looks like!" he said. "Success is when you get a call to go and meet Woody Allen." In the film, Linklater sings and plays the ukulele, neither of which he's very good at. "After the first take, Woody was, like, 'That's really how you sing?' " Linklater recalled. "And I said, 'Yeah, that was me trying.' And he was, like, 'Oh. I got two words for you: *agonizing death*.' " Linklater covered his face with his hands.

Hamish Linklater

When the class ended, he administered hugs and said he hoped that he hadn't been too depressing. Then he headed out to Grant's Tomb.

"Are there bodies in there?" he asked a Parks Department employee.

"Yes, there are, sir," the man said.

Linklater looked thoughtful. "And there's never, like, an odor issue?"

"It's too sealed to be a problem," the employee said. "Are you a mortician?"

"Obviously I'm not a mortician."

"Are you a doctor?"

"Obviously I'm not a doctor."

"Why are you not a doctor?"

"I had to drop out of school because I asked too many dumb questions."

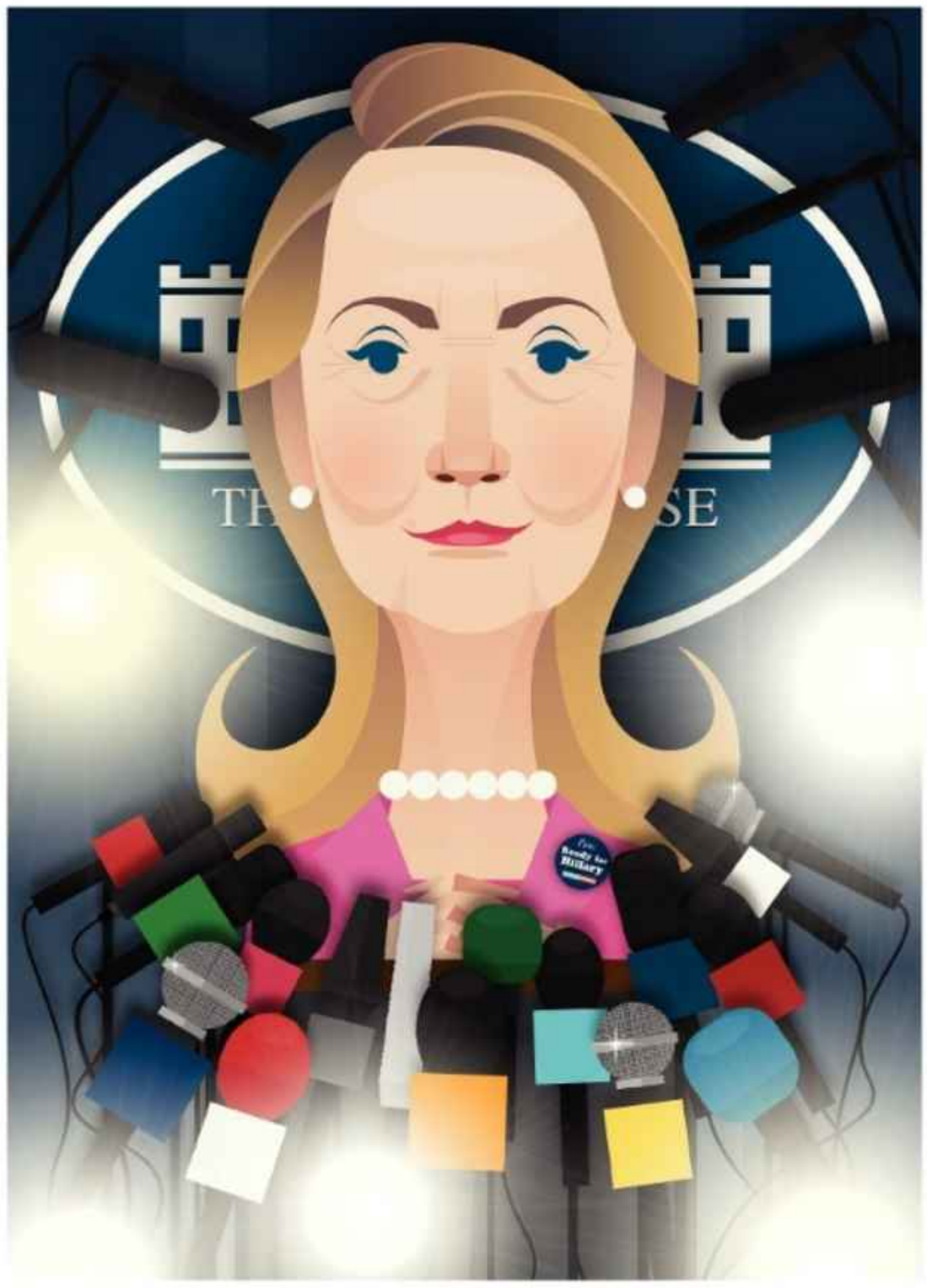
—Emma Allen

ANNALS OF COMMUNICATIONS

THE HILLARY SHOW

Can Hillary Clinton and the media learn to get along?

BY KEN AULETTA



Since stepping down as Secretary of State, fifteen months ago, Hillary Clinton has kept a calculated distance from the press and the public. She has been working on a memoir about her years at the State Department, "Hard Choices," to be published in early June; making occasional speeches, often for a fee said to exceed two hundred thousand dollars; and talking with close advisers about a possible second Presidential run. Despite the absence of a story, the media can't stop discussing her. The mainstream press recycles talking points concerning her hypothetical campaign while casting about desperately for something new: Will Chelsea's pregnancy and the prospect of becoming a grandmother mean that Clinton will be less likely to run? Would she support Marjorie Margolies, the Democrat vying to represent Pennsylvania's Thirteenth Congressional District, who also happens to be Chelsea's mother-in-law? (She did, but Margolies lost.) When the Washington *Post* asked eleven Democratic activists in Iowa which of four prominent Democrats they would invite to a dinner party, why did only one choose her?

Meanwhile, Clinton's old nemesis the "vast right-wing conspiracy" has begun declaring her not only politically but also clinically moribund. "Whispers are persisting, whispers," Rush Limbaugh said, in anything but a whisper, several months ago on his radio program. "There's a whisper campaign, folks, that Mrs. Clinton is sick, that she will not run for the Presidency because she is sick." The Drudge Report contributed a picture of a wan-looking Clinton above the caption "Is she sick?" The Daily Caller, a conservative Web site, added, "Whispers persist that Hillary won't run: Health may be worse than disclosed." A hard-right blogger, Robert Morrow, wrote that he was "ninety-five per cent sure" that "Hillary Clinton probably has brain cancer" and would not run in 2016. In mid-May, Karl Rove, who learned his trade under Donald Segretti, a dirty-tricks master in the Nixon camp, mentioned a fall Clinton took in December, 2012, which eventually led to a blood clot. He asked why she had emerged from the hospital after thirty days—it was actually just three—"wearing glasses that are only for people who have traumatic brain injury."

Then Monica Lewinsky reappeared. After ten years of silence, she described in *Vanity Fair* the indignities she has suffered since her sexual encounters with Bill Clinton, and her belief that Hillary Clinton unfairly maligned her at the time, calling her a "narcissistic loony-toon." Lynne Cheney, the wife of the former Vice-President, promptly appeared on Bill O'Reilly's program to speculate whether "this isn't an effort on the Clintons' part to get that story out of the way." She wondered if Hillary had somehow persuaded Lewinsky to tell her side of the escapade for the first time. Fox News commentators relished the thought. Eric Bolling said, "Now, the theory that I'm hearing is to provide sympathy for Hillary, just remind everyone that Bill Clinton was a jerk."

Like so many mad theories that have swirled around Clinton over the years, it was enough to fuel more speculation and to highlight her famously defensive relationship with the press. From her first days in Washington, she adopted a bunker mentality. (Friends and colleagues of Clinton's often told me that they needed clearance from her spokesman before they could talk to me.) But if she wants to be President she may have to find a new strategy for getting herself across the battlefield.

In the years since Clinton's Presidential campaign, in 2008, the media has become more polarized, less thoughtful, and faster paced. Conservatives seem to be of two minds about how best to take her on this time. Newt Gingrich said that he was

If Clinton decides to run for President, she'll need to adopt a more open approach.

ILLUSTRATION BY STANLEY CHOW

offended by Rove's remarks. Lindsey Graham, who has consistently criticized Clinton for what he sees as her negligence over security at the American consulate in Benghazi, Libya, and for the deadly attack there in 2012, announced that he had "no reason" to think that she "has a health problem that would disqualify her." In an interview on MSNBC, Nicolle Wallace, who worked with Rove on George W. Bush's 2004 reëlection campaign and then served as the White House communications director, said that Rove was "off the wall" and "had some of the facts wrong," although she noted that "this was a deliberate strategy on his part to raise her health as an issue . . . ahead of the next campaign."

I met with Matthew Continetti, the cofounder and editor of the online Washington Free Beacon, which presents itself as an enlightened addition to the right-wing press. Continetti, who is thirty-two, dresses like an older man, in sombre dark suits, plain shirts, modest ties, and frameless glasses. His first job after college was as an intern for William Kristol's neoconservative publication *The Weekly Standard*. He was subsequently hired, and he stayed for eight and a half years in all. In 2012, Continetti married Kristol's daughter, Anne; on their first date night as new parents they attended the annual dinner of the American Enterprise Institute. Kristol sits on the four-member board of the Center for American Freedom, a conservative group that funds the Free Beacon. (The center does not disclose the names of its donors.) Its chairman is Michael Goldfarb, who was an aide to Sarah Palin and has worked as a communications strategist for the Koch brothers.

Continetti's politics aren't always predictable. In an article in *The Weekly Standard*, he criticized as "nonsense" some of Glenn Beck's musings, such as his "Top Ten Bastards of All Time," on which Franklin Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson rank higher than Hitler and Pol Pot. "Not even the stupidest American liberal shares the morality of the totalitarian monsters whom Beck analogizes to American politics so flippantly," Continetti wrote. And he has defended the safety net provided by Social Security and Medicare. "It is wishful thinking that they could ever be junked," he told me in an e-mail. "The best response, then, is to stop fighting the New Deal and try to finance it in a way that does not bankrupt the country." In his first book, "The K Street Gang: The Rise and Fall of the Republican Machine," published in 2006, he criticized the undue influence of money on congressional Republicans. House Majority Whip Tom DeLay, he wrote, "relied on paid lobbyists to get bills passed, not the other way around." Three years later, he published "The Persecution of Sarah Palin: How the Elite Media Tried to Bring Down a Rising Star," which he describes in the introduction as "a book about how the feral beast hunted down its prey."

Continetti launched the Free Beacon, in February, 2012, as a nonprofit enterprise. Conservatives may be divided on some issues, but they remain united by indignation at having been marginalized by the mainstream media. For the Free Beacon's launch, Continetti wrote a manifesto, "Combat Journalism," in which he asserted that there weren't enough conservative journalists to "nullify or even sublimate the loud, constant, coherent progressive roar of: NBC, ABC, CBS, PBS, NPR, CNN, MSNBC, CNBC; the New York *Times*, the Washington *Post*, the Los Angeles *Times*, the *Financial Times*, and others; the left blogosphere, Hollywood, and practically every magazine editor in the country." The only option was to respond in kind: "Scrutinize the left's claims with the same adversarial techniques that the left uses to cover the right. Don't back down from confrontation. Stick to the facts and avoid the cul-de-sac of conspiracy theory."

The Free Beacon's headquarters are situated in an office building at the corner of Sixteenth and K Streets. On the day I visited, the staff was preparing pieces with headlines such as "WHITE HOUSE CONTINUES SECRET MEDIA WAR AGAINST ISRAEL," "EPA GAVE HUGE BONUS TO PORN ADDICTED EMPLOYEE," and "BOEHNER: WHEN WILL OBAMA ADMIN TELL THE TRUTH ON BENGHAZI, IRS, FAST & FURIOUS?" The Free Beacon has also broken news. In February, it published the diary notes and correspondence of Diane Blair, a close friend of Hillary Clinton who died in 2000, in which she recounted their personal conversations from the mid-nineteen-seventies until her death. Alana Goodman, a Free Beacon reporter, unearthed the material in the archives at the University of Arkansas. The Free Beacon published a story about some of Clinton's blunt private opinions, and posted a link to the diary entries. For example, she told Blair, in 1993, that the "press has big egos and no brains" and, in 1994, that she was "furious" at her husband for "ruining himself and the Presidency." Blair added, "She keeps trying to shape things up, knows what's wrong, but he can't fire people, exert discipline, punish leakers." Traffic to the Free Beacon briefly jumped.

Continetti emphasized that the Free Beacon's targets are not all Democrats. Last July, he published a story revealing that Jack Hunter, the social-media director for the Republican senator Rand Paul, was for many years a pro-secessionist talk-radio host known as the Southern Avenger. The report compelled Hunter to resign, and it embarrassed Paul. Beacon stories are fact-checked, so that "we don't make ourselves easy to dismiss," Continetti said. "Conservatives are held to a higher standard. What I worry about is getting the story right." He noted happily that his site had recently been slammed in the Washington *Post* by Dan Pfeiffer, a senior adviser to President Obama, and he dismissed a remark made by Andrea Mitchell, on NBC, that the Free Beacon is an "anti-Clinton Web site." To Continetti, the criticism was further evidence of what he sees as a vast left-wing conspiracy, a term popularized in 2005 by Byron York, then the White House correspondent for *National Review*, in a book by that title.

"I see the news agenda being set by the major networks and by people who often take their cues from the New York *Times*," Continetti said. "The treatment of Sarah Palin is when I first became aware of this. I think the treatment of Charles and David Koch in the media resembles that. You can see some of this going on with the G.W. Bridge and Chris Christie. The attention paid to what he knew, and when, over the closing of a lane on the bridge seems to me far disproportionate to the attention that was paid, up until a week ago, to who knew what, and when, with respect to the Benghazi talking points."

Continetti refers to his staff of media researchers as the "war room." I asked with whom he was at war. "We have a side," he said. "We have a conservative viewpoint. So we want to report on people who disagree with us, because they're reporting on us. You may as well even

the playing field as much as you can."

In Continetti's "Combat Journalism" essay, he provides a brief history of the rise of conservative journalism. He invokes Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew and their speechwriters, William Safire and Pat Buchanan; moves on to the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, and other "counter-establishment" outlets; and laments the appearance, after 2000, of "counter counter-establishment" groups, such as the Center for American Progress, and wealthy liberals like George Soros and Peter Lewis, who have funnelled millions into campaigns on behalf of Democrats. Like any origin story, it glosses over less convenient realities, such as the degree to which, for decades, wealthy conservatives have actively sought to shape press coverage, particularly of the Clintons.

STATE BIRD

Confession: I did not want to live here,
not among the goldenrod, wild onions,
or the dropseed, not waist high in the barrel-
aged brown corn water, not with the million-
dollar racehorses, or the tightly wound
round hay bales. Not even in the old tobacco
weigh station we live in, with its heavy metal
safe doors that frame our bricked bedroom
like the mouth of a strange beast yawning
to suck us in, each night, like air. I denied it,
this new land. But, love, I'll concede this:
whatever state you are, I'll be that state's bird,
the loud, obvious blur of song people point to
when they wonder where it is you've gone.

—Ada Limón

When Hillary Clinton arrived at the White House, in 1993, her guard was already up. As the governor's wife in Arkansas, she had retained her maiden name and pursued her own career, as a partner in a prominent law firm in Little Rock. When, in 1980, Bill Clinton was defeated in his gubernatorial-reëlection bid, the press cited Hillary's independence as a contributing factor. She was aware, too, of her husband's infidelities, as Carl Bernstein revealed in his 2007 biography, "A Woman in Charge." Diane Blair told him that in the nineteen-eighties Hillary knew that her husband had a wandering eye, and that after Chelsea was born she worried about raising her as a single parent. "Hillary never went into details—absolutely never," Blair said. "And I doubt she did with anyone."

Clinton's apprehensions that her private life would be exposed in the media were confirmed in January of 1992, during the Presidential campaign, when headlines announced that Bill Clinton had allegedly engaged in a twelve-year affair with Gennifer Flowers. In subsequent interviews, the Clintons presented a united front, having apparently agreed that the best strategy was to stick together and keep the media at bay. "I'm sitting here because I love him, and I respect him, and I honor what he's been through and what we've been through together," Hillary told "60 Minutes." "And you know, if that's not enough for people, then heck, don't vote for him." Around the same time, Bill Clinton, while campaigning in New Hampshire, asserted that Hillary would be a full partner in his Administration. Their slogan, he said, jokingly, should be "Buy one, get one free," but several critics wondered if she aspired to be "co-President." After Clinton was elected, he gave Hillary an office in the West Wing and a mandate to shape health-care reform. "She was the first professional woman to have an operational role" as First Lady, Kati Marton, the author of "Hidden Power: Presidential Marriages That Shaped Our Recent History," told me. "She treated the role as if it were a job. This was jarring to many."

Hillary Clinton became a lightning rod for criticism. In "Living History," her 2003 memoir, she wrote, "Innocent comments or jests erupt into controversies within seconds of being reported on the news wires. Rumors become the story *du jour*." But she also misplayed her hand. Her plan for universal health care failed to gain support in either the House or the Senate, despite Democratic majorities, and Democrats lost control of both chambers, in part because Republicans made "Hillarycare" a campaign issue during the midterm elections.

A minor industry of right-wing commentary sprang up, funded in part by Richard Mellon Scaife, an heir to the Mellon oil, banking, and aluminum fortune. Scaife's foundations were major funders of the *American Spectator*, edited by R. Emmett Tyrrell. The sole aim of the magazine's Arkansas Project was to dig up dirt on the Clintons. "These people were talking about impeaching Bill Clinton long before Monica Lewinsky," David Brock, who was then a reporter at the magazine, told me. "After the 1992 elections, parts of the right did not accept Clinton's election. Most of the early Clinton 'scandals' came from that."

In 1993, several members of the White House Travel Office were fired, largely because Hillary overreacted to suspicions of financial irregularities; this became Travelgate, and the *American Spectator* relentlessly pushed the story. A money-losing Clinton land deal in Arkansas grew from an embarrassing but not criminal conflict of interest into the Whitewater scandal. That July, Vincent Foster, the White House deputy counsel and a close friend and former law partner of Hillary's, committed suicide, and Scaife's Pittsburgh *Tribune-Review* poured resources into investigating whether he was murdered and the Clintons covered up the crime.

In January of 1994, in an article for the *American Spectator,* Brock quoted four Arkansas state troopers who described how they ferried Governor Clinton to and from assignations, lied to Hillary about his whereabouts, and solicited the phone numbers of women he found attractive. When the Clintons vigorously denied the story, it became known as Troopergate. Later that year, an independent prosecutor, Kenneth Starr, was assigned to inves-

tigate Whitewater. The investigation metastasized, and, in 1998, Starr discovered Monica Lewinsky, which led to the Republican effort to impeach Bill Clinton and remove him from office.

By then, Brock had renounced his story. "I later came to learn that a lot of the details were wrong," he said. In late 1997, when the troopers began giving depositions under oath, they did not confirm what they had told him. It was later revealed that they had received support from a fund set up by a conservative donor after the article was published. His book "The Real Anita Hill" (1993) purported to demolish the credibility of Hill, who testified before Congress that Clarence Thomas had sexually harassed her. Brock introduced the phrase "a little bit nutty and a little bit slutty." He now says, "I got sold a bill of goods. I was never the same after I realized that my book had facts that were not true."

Nevertheless, he next set out to write a critical book about Hillary Clinton, but "The Seduction of Hillary Rodham," published in 1996, was sufficiently nuanced that conservative journalists banned him from their circles. A scathing review appeared in the Washington *Times*, where Brock had once worked, under the headline "SAINTHOOD FROM A HILLARY CRITIC." Brock is gay and thought that his conservative colleagues had accepted him, but he now became the subject of media smears. In 1997, he wrote an article for *Esquire* in which he condemned the right-wing "thought police" and apologized for the role he had played in their company. In 2002, after he published "Blinded by the Right: The Conscience of an Ex-Conservative," Bill Clinton called him; Brock met Hillary the same year. Since then, he said, he has stayed in contact with them, but he declined to discuss the extent of their interactions.

Brock is a slightly dishevelled fifty-one; his tie is often askew and his graying hair uncombed. He completed his ideological transformation in 2004, with the founding of a nonprofit, Media Matters for America. Through its Web site, he told me, it "monitors and corrects conservative misinformation in the media." In 2010, he founded American Bridge, a PAC whose aim is to elect liberal Democrats and do opposition research on Republican candidates. It has also assumed an unofficial role as a pro-Hillary media watchdog. In March, in an address to the Clinton School of Public Service, at the University of Arkansas, where longtime Clinton loyalists served as his hosts, he extolled Clinton's "deep desire to affirm the good and virtuous in politics," and lamented that the "right-wing noise machine is far more sophisticated and far-reaching than in Matt Drudge's heyday." One cog in that machine, he said, is Continetti's Free Beacon, whose "sole goal" is "slandering its political opponents." When I asked Continetti what he thought of Brock, he replied, in an e-mail, "David Brock is a very successful fund-raiser, and I am impressed by the longevity of his career." In a subsequent note, he added, "Brock has an ideological flexibility that is rare even for Washington. It's served him remarkably well."

For many years during the Clinton era, Taylor Branch, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author, spent late nights at the White House interviewing Bill Clinton for a biography that eventually became "The Clinton Tapes: Wrestling History with the President." The three had met in 1972, during the McGovern campaign, and become friends. By Clinton's second term, Branch was struck by the Clintons' obsession with the press. For a time during the first term, the Clintons read only staff-assembled newspaper clips and stopped watching the evening news.

One night, Branch became so alarmed by the President's "dark mood" on the subject that he wrote a two-page letter addressed "Dear Bill." It began, "Please allow me to step beyond my role as your historical sounding board," and offered some advice: "Your biggest weakness is a tendency to lump 'the press' together with your political opponents." He pleaded with Clinton to instead deploy his charm on reporters; he could attack his opponents, but not the press. A few days later, he received a note in the mail, signed by Hillary: "Thanks for your words of encouragement during the past week."

But Hillary has never quite overcome her guardedness toward the political press. Cheryl Mills, who was the deputy White House counsel in Clinton's second term, became Hillary's chief of staff at the State Department and today is a central figure in the wide circle of friends and advisers known as Hillaryland. Mills said that many newcomers to the White House press environment were, like Hillary, sometimes baffled by the line of questioning. At a substantive press conference about childhood obesity, for example, reporters might ask: "Who's the expert you guys are quoting? Was he ever obese? Did he know that you were going to be talking about this? What's your relationship with him? Is he making any money off his book because you're talking about childhood obesity?"

In 2000, when Clinton ran for the Senate from New York, she tried a different tactic. She had only recently moved to the state, and critics portrayed her as a carpetbagger. She went on a "listening tour," to hear the concerns of voters. Although she rarely granted interviews to the national press, she got to know the group of local reporters assigned to follow her. "She was one hundred per cent focussed on New York," Philippe Reines, her longtime spokesman, says. "If you were a reporter for the Watertown *Daily Times*, you got her on the phone in a minute."

Reines has been her spokesman since 2002. He shielded Chelsea Clinton from the press during the 2008 Presidential campaign and worked for Hillary at the State Department. He oversees her communications strategy and works with nine personal staffers who are fiercely loyal to Hillary. He is also a partner at Beacon Global Strategies, one of Washington's revolving-door consulting firms. His preferred style is an open-necked shirt over a T-shirt; some days he shaves, some days he doesn't.

As a senator, Clinton earned the respect of her constituents, including conservative upstate and suburban voters, and also of her Senate colleagues. She passed bills providing for 9/11-related health care and veterans' health care; co-sponsored a measure with Lindsey Graham to expand benefits for members of the military; and served on the Armed Services Committee. Easily winning reëlection in 2006, she was anointed the front-runner for the 2008 Democratic Presidential nomination.

But her staff was deeply divided over how she should present herself to the media and the public. At the start, her chief strategist, Mark Penn, insisted on promoting her political attributes—experience, practicality, endorsements, name recognition, and the inevitability

of her candidacy. In the spring of 2008, Penn was replaced by Geoff Garin, the campaign's pollster. But Clinton was burdened by her vote, in 2002, granting President Bush permission to invade Iraq if diplomacy failed. And she seemed to say more about herself than about what she would do for people. Many Democrats came to believe she felt entitled to the nomination.

Clinton's advisers complained that the press was swooning over Obama. A study published in 2007 by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism seemed to bear them out: in the first months of campaigning, thirty-eight per cent of media stories about her were negative, and only twenty-seven per cent were positive. Only sixteen per cent of stories about Obama were negative, and nearly half were positive. Dana Perino, who was George W. Bush's press secretary at the time, remembers talking with Bush about Clinton: "President Bush thought in some ways that she was getting a raw deal from the press."

Residents of Hillaryland attribute some of the negative coverage to reflexive sexism. "Men won't vote for Hillary Clinton because she reminds them of their nagging wives," the Fox anchor Neil Cavuto told a television audience at one point, quoting a guest on his show. Gloria Steinem, a staunch supporter of Clinton, says journalists affix adjectives to female candidates—shrill, pushy, aggressive, ambitious, divisive, bossy—that they don't apply to males. Today in public forums, Clinton often criticizes the press's "gender-based characterization" of women.

But reporters on the 2008 campaign complained that Clinton was remote and came across as scripted and inauthentic. Reines bridles at the suggestion that Clinton or her handlers contributed to the problem. "Why, because she only spent ninety seconds with them when she brought them bagels to the back of the bus? And if she spent nine minutes the coverage would have been fair? That's apparently the takeaway: because she didn't spend enough time with them and their bagels, they couldn't be fair." He insisted that "she spent a tremendous amount of time with the press, formally, informally, off the record," and added that it's not easy "to pal around with hundreds of people."

On September 11, 2012, the U.S. consulate in Benghazi was attacked, and Chris Stevens, the U.S. Ambassador to Libya, and three other Americans were killed. Conservatives demanded to know why security was lax, and, when it began to appear that the attack might have been planned by terrorists, accused the Obama Administration of covering up that knowledge. "We're going to find a system failure before, during, and after the attacks," Lindsey Graham said on his Facebook page in May of 2013. "We're going to find people asleep at the switch when it comes to the State Department, including Hillary Clinton." Her memoir will offer her version of the story, but, regardless of what she says, if she runs in 2016 Benghazi will be the bloody shirt around which many of her critics rally.

Clinton's tenure at State was otherwise mostly free from controversy, and she maintained a cordial relationship with the press corps. Fifteen or so correspondents are assigned to the Secretary of State. "They travel with the Secretary, so there's a lot of schmooze time, a lot of off-the-record time," Steven Weisman, who was the chief diplomatic correspondent for the *Times* until 2006, told me. Often, he said, the State Department is referred to as "the Department of Nice," because "it's always trying to make peace." Mike McCurry, who was the State Department spokesman from 1993 to 1995, before moving over to the West Wing as press secretary, says, "The White House is a political beat, the State Department is a policy beat. The White House press starts from the premise: Is the President up or down today? Is this good politically or not good politically? There's far less interest in the substance of policy."

Reines derides the right-wing media for promoting the idea that Clinton was directly responsible for the deaths in Benghazi. "You can tell when something is just being pushed by everybody, using the same language. You can see it in the course of Benghazi." That's what he expects from Fox News and others. He has more contempt for the mainstream press corps, which is on what he views as a frantic quest for " 'gotcha' moments." He has told at least one reporter to "fuck off." He said to me in our first meeting, "There's no such thing as straight reporting anymore."

He blamed economics for the tendency of the press to latch on to stories and sensationalize them. "I don't think the imperative is ideological as much as it is commercial," he said. "It's about views—eyeballs, clicks." Part of his task is to maintain a kind of firewall, to keep the right-wing chatter, like the kind ignited by Karl Rove's remarks, from spreading. This is hard to do when Hillary is involved. "The Clintons are good for business," he said. "With Hillary more than anyone, there's a premium placed on the sensational, the colorful, the inane, and that often comes at the expense of accuracy."

If Clinton decides to run for President, she will need to take a more open approach to the press. "You have to engage with the media," David Axelrod, who was Obama's chief strategist, says. "There is a tendency among politicians to believe it is an adversarial press. And it is a maddening process. Obama used to roll his eyes: 'This is news?' Hillary has to let people in." Stephanie Cutter, who was Obama's deputy campaign manager in 2012 and John Kerry's communications director in 2004, says, "Coverage always improves if there's access to an individual. You've got to feed the beast." But, as Stuart Stevens, a Mitt Romney strategist in 2012, pointed out to me, befriending the press is not easy: "In a world where everyone has an iPhone, a candidate can't go to the back of the bus and have an off-the-record conversation." Like Clinton in 2008, Romney was distant and stiff. To reporters, Stevens said, his efforts to be casual came across as " 'trying to play us.' It was not, 'Look, this is a chance for us to get to know each other.' "

Taylor Branch remembers that when Hillary Clinton first contemplated running for the Senate she asked him for advice. "I told her that she has to think of the press as representatives of the people, even if she carried bad memories," he said. "And part of her strategy had to be to win them over." If Reines has a strategy for doing so this time around, it is not apparent. He has been described as "slightly paranoid" about the press. When I asked if that was a fair description, he said, "I'd

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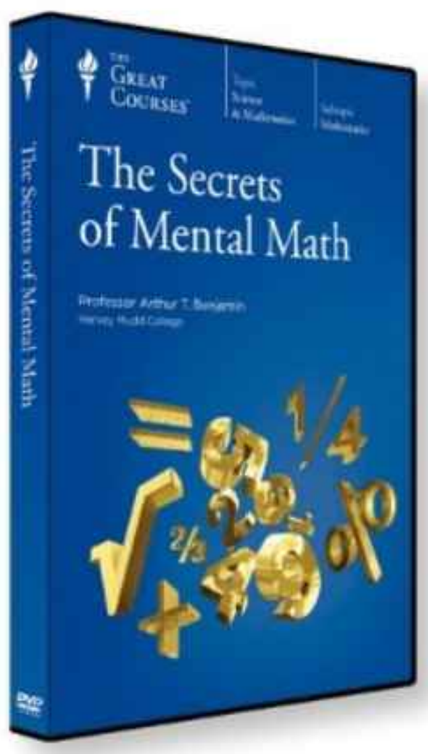

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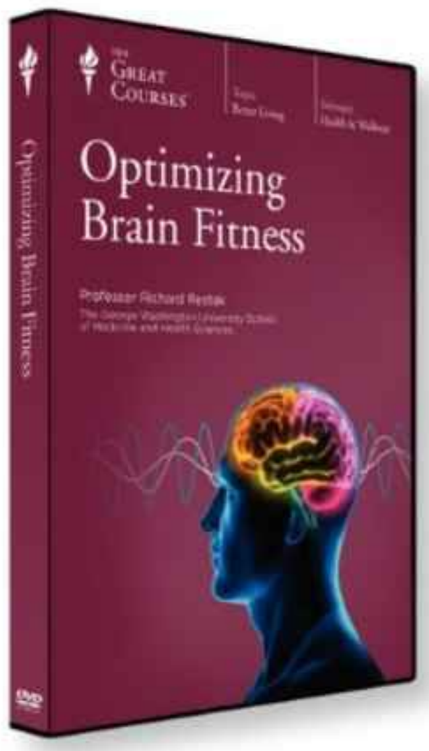

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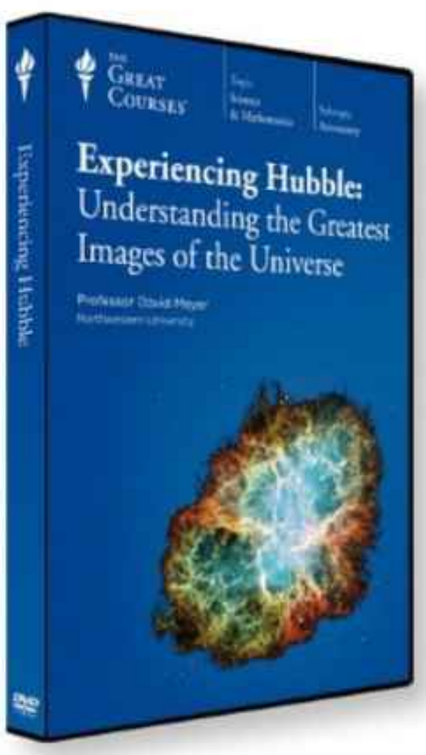

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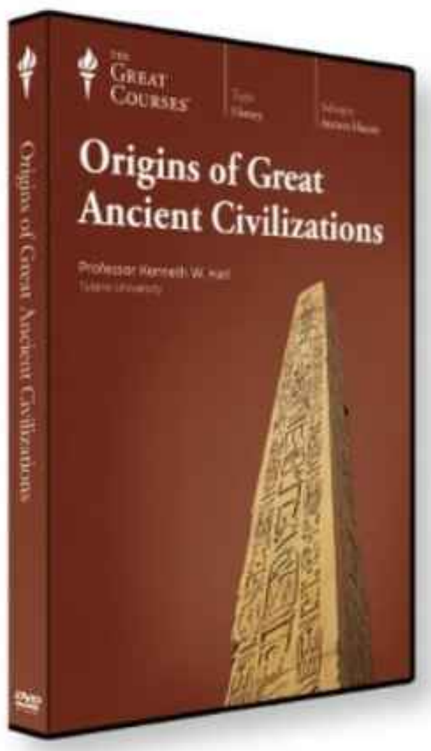

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rather be called paranoid than naïve. Or stupid."

Some of Clinton's allies are concerned. "I hope she will be more accessible, more relaxed," Lanny Davis, a Yale Law School friend who is a longtime Clinton adviser, said. "She will get burned by some, but this is worth the risk, because when she is being herself I know she is sincere and likable." Another longtime adviser to the Clintons said, "They're putting up the gates around her, being very protective. That's what she wants. But that's only successful when she's really on top. Can she and her people be more humble in dealing with the press? It's a really good question. I don't see how she can fundamentally change."

Regardless of Clinton's strategy, the media will continue to find outlandish things to say about her. Headlines on Robert Morrow's blog have proposed that "CHELSEA CLINTON IS THE BIOLOGICAL DAUGHTER OF WEBB HUBBELL AND NOT BILL CLINTON," that "HILLARY WAS HAVING SEX WITH BOTH WEBB HUBBELL & VINCE FOSTER, HER PARTNERS AT ROSE LAW FIRM," and that Foster did not actually shoot himself in a park but, instead, died mysteriously in the White House. Glenn Beck predicted recently that "Hillary Clinton will be having sex with a woman on the White House desk if it becomes popular." (He did not indicate how this might become popular.) In response, Brock told me, he has organized Correct the Record, a team of twenty staff members from American Bridge, to "answer conservative and Republican attacks on Democratic candidates in 2016. Most of that activity focusses on Hillary Clinton."

Some conservatives wonder if the rhetoric is self-defeating. In a 2001 article in *The Atlantic*, Byron York—now the chief political correspondent for the Washington *Examiner*, a Fox News contributor, and a keen critic of the Clintons—wrote that in the nineteen-nineties some commentators "became possessed by a self-destructive brand of opposition to Bill Clinton, and, in their desire to knock the President out of office, they ended up hurting themselves more than him." York was referring to the decline of the *American Spectator*, after Clinton's Justice Department opened an investigation into allegations of witness tampering. The broader cause suffered, too. After the impeachment proceedings against Bill Clinton, his popularity soared, Republicans lost seats in Congress, Newt Gingrich's sharp-edged "Republican revolution" faded, and George W. Bush won the 2000 Presidential race in part by promoting "compassionate conservatism." York worries that the conservative press could make the same mistake with Hillary Clinton. "If you go overboard, you tend to look into stories that don't have merit and pay too much attention to unimportant things," he told me. To dredge up the distant past "will only work in her favor."

Steve Schmidt, who served on George W. Bush's communications team when Bush ran for reëlection, in 2004, and was John McCain's chief strategist in 2008, shares the concern. "The average Limbaugh listener is rural and sixty-nine," he said. "The country is changing in a lot of ways, and what those people are fed is a steady diet of grievance and anger." Like other Republicans, he contends that the stream of Tea Party invective only alienates the G.O.P. from the growing population of Hispanic and Asian voters. "It's profoundly worrying," he said. "There's no question that the Clinton campaign, should there be one, will be more than adequately prepared to take advantage of the excesses and overreach of people on my side of the aisle."

William Kristol agrees: "The personal stuff became bigger in the nineteen-nineties because the policy stuff was relatively small. It was a more centrist country; the Democrats were more centrist, and the Republicans were probably more centrist. So everything became the personality drama. The 2016 race is going to be a very big policy election. There will be big choices to be made on foreign policy, Obamacare, the Supreme Court. These aren't personality-driven issues." Continetti said, "The Clintons have been quite resistant to scandal. The point of attack should be her record"—health care, spending, "how aggressive she was in protecting our embassies"—not personal matters. "The case to be made against Hillary Clinton is a policy case."

Hillary, like her husband, is respected among people who know her, even those who don't share her politics, for her intelligence and charm. Brock isn't the only former foe to have embraced her. Beginning in 1994, in a series of articles in Scaife's Pittsburgh *Tribune-Review* and Rupert Murdoch's New York *Post*, Chris Ruddy accused the White House, the doctors, and the coroner of covering up the details surrounding Vincent Foster's death. In 1997, he published a book along the same lines, "The Strange Death of Vincent Foster." Recently, Ruddy told me that he now keeps a picture of Bill Clinton on a wall of his office, in West Palm Beach. He said, "Do I think I got caught up in anti-Clinton hysteria? Sure. Was the stuff I did over-hyped? Sure."

In 1998, Ruddy founded News Max, a conservative Web site designed, he said, to "provide the other side of the story" to those "on the right or center right." (Recent headlines have included "SCIENTISTS REBUT WHITE HOUSE GLOBAL WARMING CLAIMS" and "ALL EYES ON HOUSE SPEAKER BOEHNER FOR IMMIGRATION REFORM.") He began to warm to Bill Clinton after the Bush Administration's invasion of Iraq, which he opposed, and because he found Clinton's post-Presidency philanthropic efforts commendable. In 2007, a *Times* reporter called him to ask what he thought of Clinton now.

"I said to the New York *Times* that my position had changed, and I had a higher opinion of his Presidency," Ruddy said. A few months later, an aide to Bill Clinton called Ruddy and invited him to have lunch with Clinton in his Harlem office. Scaife went along, and the lunch lasted three hours. "I started getting invitations to Clinton events in Florida," Ruddy said. He was invited to lunch several more times, and now considers Clinton a friend.

In 2008, Hillary Clinton, during her campaign for President, agreed to meet with Scaife and the staff of the Pittsburgh *Tribune-Review*. The paper endorsed her candidacy, noting that her willingness to talk to the staff "was courageous given our longstanding criticism of her. That is no small matter: Political courage is essential in a President. Clinton has demonstrated it; Obama has not. She has a real record. He doesn't."

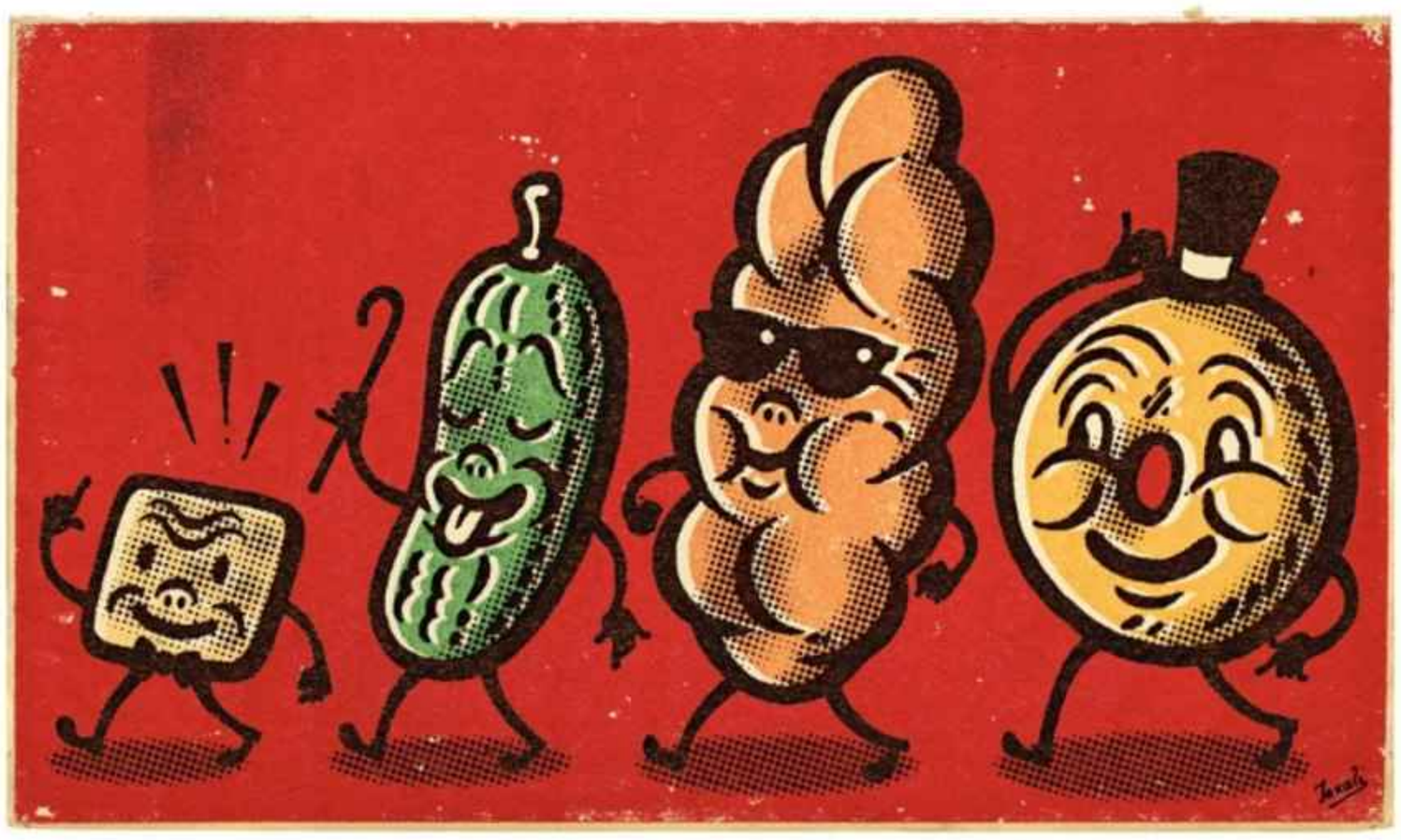
Ruddy told me that his first choice for President in 2016 would be Jeb Bush. "Jeb was a fantastic governor," he said of Bush's two terms in Florida. "He's not the party of no." Still, Ruddy isn't averse to the possibility of Hillary Clinton's candidacy. "I don't perceive her as an ideological person," he said. "I do think she would make a good President." ♦

SHOUTS & MURMURS

YUMMY

BY PAUL RUDNICK

The Manischewitz Company, which is known for many products, including matzo, gefilte fish, and wine, is planning "to promote 'kosher' as a quality-control designation, rather than simply a religious one," according to the *Times*. Yaakov Y. Horowitz, the company's chief rabbi, said, "There was always a good feeling in American culture about kosher." According to the *Times*, the company has "introduced advertisements that took a secular approach, with scant mention of religious themes."



Memo
From: Bain Capital, the new owners
To: Manischewitz marketing team

Guys, we are so excited about the possibility of extending our market share to consumers of every possible religious background. To encourage this strategy, we'd like to make both Judaism and our product line as up-to-the-minute and user-friendly as possible. A few thoughts:

1. Let's brainstorm an ad featuring a smiling blond family in bright pastels, at a country-club brunch, enjoying their matzo with mayonnaise and highballs. Maybe the clean-cut, golf-playing dad says, "Laura, this matzo is scrumptious! It's the new Melba toast!" To which his pert wife, in pearls and a smart tennis outfit, replies, "*L'chaim*, Ted!"

2. How about a spot where a red-headed colleen is skipping through a lush Irish glen. She's approached by a roguish leprechaun, who asks, "Would you like my pot o' gold?" The colleen replies, "No, but have you got any Manischewitz Whitefish and Pike?" The leprechaun winks and hands her a jar, quipping, "It's not just for Jews!"

3. We're also thinking about aiming for a trendy "Sex and the City" vibe. Let's zoom in on a tableful of chic young working women sharing cosmos and Manischewitz Tam Tam crackers. A handsome waiter stops by and says, "Tam Tams? Are any of you beautiful young ladies thinking about converting?" The sexy Samantha-type woman answers, "You bet we're thinking about converting—to delicious, dry, unleavened flavor!"

4. What if, on Christmas Eve, Santa visits a home where he finds a welcoming glass of milk, a plate of cookies, and . . . a dish of Manischewitz Creamy Horseradish with Dill? "At last, someone got it right!" says Santa, smiling, as he leaves an extra-generous stack of gifts.

5. Remember, mothers hold the purse strings. In heavy rotation on Lifetime, we'd show a soccer mom packing her kids' lunches, maybe in lunchboxes featuring images of Golda Meir and Chewbacca. Her twelve-year-old son peers skeptically into his lunchbox. "Really, Mom?" he asks. "A juice box and Manischewitz Mediterranean-Flavored Gefilte Fish?" "Just try it," his mom advises, and we cut to the boy at recess, where his buddies are begging him, "Yo, Ethan! Got gefilte?"

6. We should also start thinking about product placement in movies. Here's one pitch: Seth Rogen is a devout rabbinical student at a Brooklyn yeshiva, when a raucous hipster night club moves in next door. Seth, with his beard and his nerdy eyeglass frames, decides to pass himself off as a hipster and infiltrate the club. Before you know it, hipsters and Hasidim are partying together, with bottles of wine balanced on their heads—Manischewitz Extra-Heavy Malaga! And then Seth meets Scarlett Johansson, a sexy divorcée, whom he assumes is way out of his league, until he notices . . . she's wearing a wig! She's Orthodox, too! The movie ends with a wild, wonderful wedding, where Seth and Scarlett teach the hipsters a hot new dance—the Shimmel!

7. We definitely need a catchphrase, a "Where's the broth?," or "Holla for challah." Just off the top of our heads, a few notions:

—The Pope is celebrating Mass in St. Peter's Square. As he prays, an Orthodox kid hang-glides into view. The Pope turns to his flock and says, "That kid's got balls!" And the kid, holding up the product, tells everyone, "Yeah—Manischewitz Reduced-Sodium Gluten-Free Matzo Balls!"

—James Bond skydives out of a plane, into Times Square, where he takes on ten thugs. Cut to Paris, where he hurls a bad guy off the Eiffel Tower. Cut to London, where he rescues the Queen. Once she's safe, Her Majesty tells 007, "Yo, James, you're keepin' it real." "No, Ma'am," Bond replies, offering Her Highness some Manischewitz Homestyle Potato Latkes. "I'm keepin' it kosher." ♦

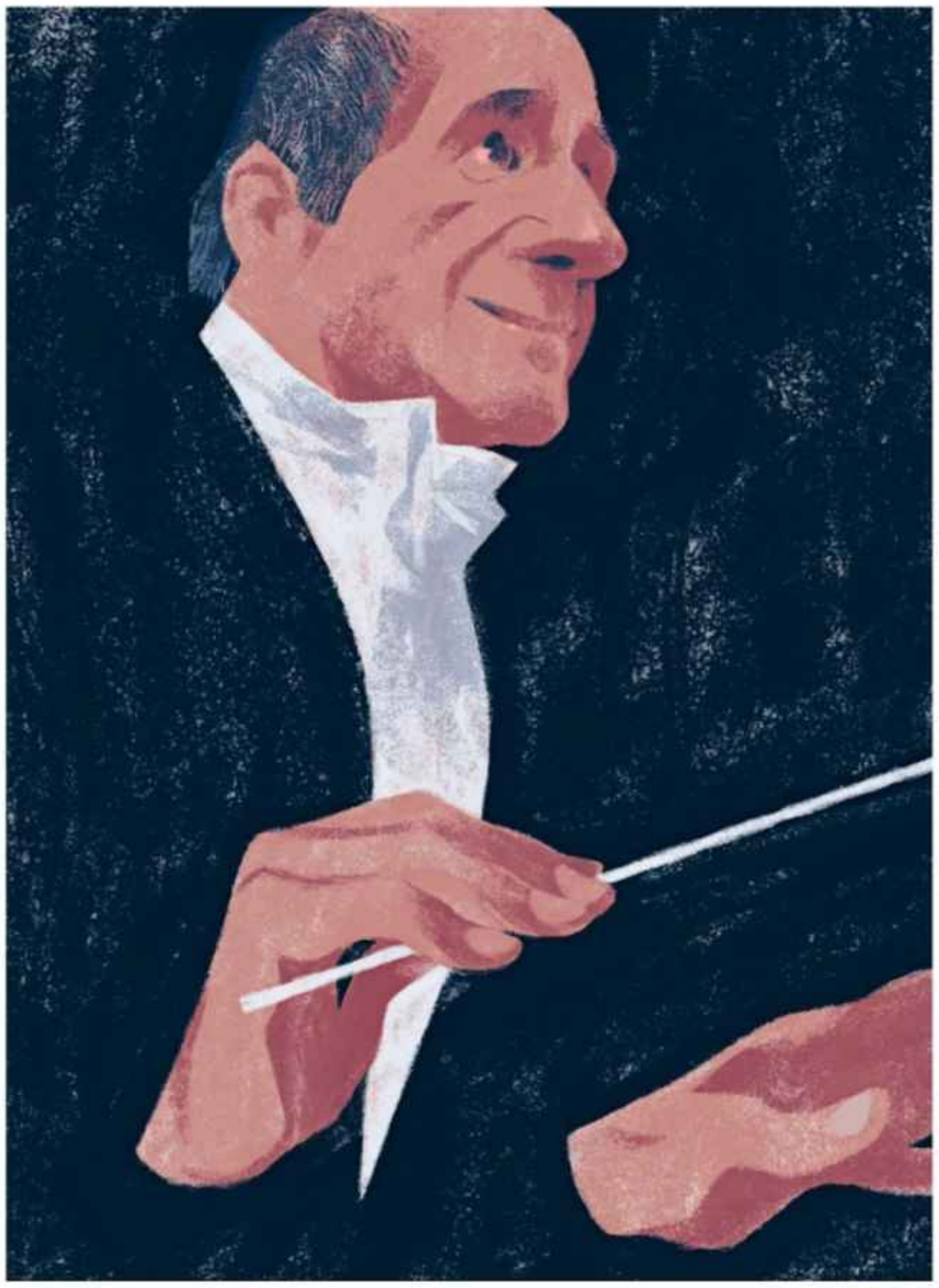
GARY TAXALI

LETTER FROM BUDAPEST

NOTES OF DISSENT

In Hungary, Iván Fischer is shaking up music and politics.

BY ALEX ROSS



Fischer's opera "The Red Heifer" is a biting satire about Hungarian anti-Semitism.

On an icy January night in Budapest, with the temperature descending through the teens, a group of young people huddled outside the Millenáris Teátrum, a performance space on the west side of the Danube. They were waiting to see a midnight concert by the Budapest Festival Orchestra, a thirty-year-old ensemble that has gained international renown not only for its grainy, potent music-making but also for its disruptive approach to the business of putting on concerts. Many curious things have happened at B.F.O. events. The arrangement of the orchestra often changes, with flutes showing up amid the violins, and vice versa. The program is not always announced in advance. On certain nights, the music is picked by an audience member, the chooser determined by a slip of paper drawn from a tuba. Players may start tangoing during Stravinsky's "Tango"; a live tree may appear onstage during Beethoven's "Pastorale" Symphony. The B.F.O.'s Midnight Music concerts, aimed at a youthful crowd, are full-on happenings, intended to strip away routine while leaving the music vibrantly intact.

The instigator of this methodical madness is the conductor, composer, opera director, and political gadfly Iván Fischer, who co-founded the B.F.O. in 1983. When I entered the Teátrum, Fischer was pacing around the space, making final preparations. The setup was like nothing I had ever seen. Arrayed among the players' music stands were dozens of beanbag chairs and foam seats, on which listeners would be invited to sit. (Alternatively, they could sit on bleachers, which had been set up along one side of the space.) The idea was to break down the barrier between orchestra and audience, placing the public in the thick of the action. Fischer was pulling the beanbags this way and that, his face preoccupied, as if he were playing a surreal form of chess.

"Perhaps you should sit here," he said to me, indicating a beanbag just behind the seats for two lead cellists. He speaks English with lyrical ease, his lightly accented voice skating up and down in pitch and lingering over words that he enjoys. "But, really, you can sit anywhere. You can lie under the piano, if you so want." I followed his original suggestion. "Very good!" he exclaimed, his eyebrows leaping upward. "You will be *embedded* with the cellos."

Fischer is a youthful sixty-three. Of medium height and barrel-chested, he is quick and alert in his movements; like many conductors, he communicates a great deal with his eyes, which dart and glitter. His hairline receded when he was fairly young, and, like many men who go bald early, he seems to age barely at all. Watching him, you sense a contradiction: he is a meticulous musician, dissecting scores with Old World rigor, yet he also has an anarchic disdain for decorum. Last summer, when he led his own production of "The Marriage of Figaro" at the Mostly Mozart Festival, he sat in front of the orchestra before the performance began and struck up a conversation with audience members in the front row.

This subversive streak goes hand in hand with an uncommon political outspokenness. At a time when illustrious conductors have aligned themselves with powerful regimes—Valery Gergiev is a prominent supporter of Vladimir Putin, and Gustavo Dudamel has failed to distance himself from Nicolás Maduro, Venezuela's President—Fischer is a vocal opponent of Fidesz, the Hungarian right-wing party that has been edging toward authoritarianism since it won a supermajority, in 2010. Fischer recently composed "The Red Heifer," a

ILLUSTRATION BY ANNETTE MARNET

bitingly satirical opera on the subject of Hungarian anti-Semitism, which has seen a resurgence in recent years.

The players began filing in with their instruments. Most are Hungarian, but a fair number are foreign-born. Unusually for an ensemble of international reputation, the B.F.O. has a freelance membership. Although the musicians lack the security of a union job, they have more independence and assert themselves accordingly. I noticed that some of them meddled with Fischer's scheme, nudging the beanbags away with their feet. The cellists with whom I was embedded were Kousay Mahdi, a native of Iraq, who came to study music in Hungary in 1985, when he was in his late teens; and Antoaneta Emanuilova, a thirty-four-year-old Bulgarian who grew up in Germany and studied at Juilliard. "Are you O.K.?" Emanuilova asked me as I sank into the beanbag. Hearing that I was from New York, she described a favorite jerk-chicken place off Eastern Parkway, in Brooklyn, where she lived when she was at Juilliard.

The program consisted of two works: Prokofiev's Third Piano Concerto, with the Georgian-born, Indiana-based virtuoso Alexander Toradze as the soloist, and the "Polovtsian Dances," from Borodin's "Prince Igor," with chorus. At the front of the stage, Toradze, an amiable bear of a man, was warming up at the piano, trying out jazzy chords. Fischer began making scat-singing noises into a microphone. He also gave instructions to the choral singers, who were to be seated in the audience. They were from the Czech Republic, and Fischer addressed them in German, which in Central Europe rivals English as a lingua franca. "*Nicht zusammen!*" he called out. "Not together!" By this he meant that the singers should spread out in the Teátrum.

Soon audience members, many of them in their teens and twenties, were sitting on the beanbags and in the bleachers. Around midnight, Fischer picked up his microphone and introduced the concert. "Tell us what is important about Prokofiev," he said to Toradze, in English. Toradze answered, "It is a very cosmopolitan piece. It has themes from all around the world." He highlighted the fact that the main theme of the second movement had a Jewish contour. I later asked Toradze whether he had intended any political message in the choice of the word "cosmopolitan"; he said that he hadn't. But it is worth noting that right-wing extremists in Hungary, who have made their presence felt in recent elections, have often attacked pan-European and cosmopolitan tendencies, sometimes with the implication that Jews, Romanies, and homosexuals, among other groups, lack true devotion to Hungary.

Acoustically, the Prokofiev left much to be desired: those of us on the beanbags had a hard time hearing the piano, while those seated at the front of the bleachers may have heard little else. Yet it was revelatory to listen from such a peculiar vantage: you could grasp how the cello parts fit into the whole, as simple figures contributed to a machinelike mass. And you could watch a major conductor as players saw him: cajoling, marking time, looking faintly annoyed at a balance issue, smiling at Prokofiev's quirkier touches, throwing himself viscerally into the fortissimos.

Fischer then introduced "Polovtsian Dances" with a discursive, ironic summary of the plot of "Prince Igor"; he kept laboriously over-pronouncing the name of the hero, Igor Svyatoslavich. This performance had a magical effect. Unlike most of the audience, I knew of the surprise in store—the Czechs began singing from their positions amid the audience, and eventually rose to their feet and swayed about—yet the sensation of the sound, woven around the ears, was still a pleasurable shock. The crowd was rapt; even though the concert ended at 1 A.M., dozens stayed to chat about what they'd heard.

"So many of our players are younger," Fischer told me, as concertgoers milled around him. "They love to play for people their age, and when they are with older people they may not feel so comfortable. So this concert is for them. The issue was to find an hour when young people are awake and others are asleep." Fischer's plan to elude the elderly didn't entirely succeed; a few feet away was the celebrated Hungarian-born operatic soprano Júlia Várady, who, at seventy-two, looked more alert than most around her. "I hope you will come to a normal concert, too?" Várady asked me, with a smile.

I tried my best, but none of the B.F.O. activities I attended—concerts at the Palace of Arts, recording sessions for Tchaikovsky's "Pathétique," a children's concert at which cups of cocoa were served—seemed altogether normal. Certainly, Fischer often conforms to the usual protocol, and he foresees no surprises for the B.F.O.'s upcoming appearances at Lincoln Center, on June 1st and 2nd, at which he will lead symphonies of Dvořák. "You know, I am not always twisted," he said, when I asked if any oddities were in store for New York. Yet a tension simmers in everything he does. In much of the West, classical concerts are placid, conservative affairs; the Budapest Festival Orchestra has become a site of independent, even radical, thought.

Fischer spent his childhood on the most splendid street in Budapest: Andrássy Avenue, a wide boulevard patterned on the Champs-Élysées. Its palaces and gardens recall Budapest's heyday as the co-capital of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and in the post-Communist era the city has regained much of its former glitter. One night, Fischer took me to see the apartment where he grew up; it is across the street from the Hungarian State Opera, a masterpiece of neo-Renaissance opulence. The apartment remains in his possession, although he does not live there, preferring to stay in a house in the northwest of the city. (He divides his time between Budapest and Berlin, where he is the music director of the Konzerthaus, and where his wife, the flutist Gabriella Pivon, and two sons live most of the time.)

While Fischer looked for a parking place near the apartment, he recounted some early musical memories. He and his older brother, Ádám, who is also a noted conductor, would look out the window at the opera house where Gustav Mahler and other luminaries had worked. Each night, they observed when crowds emerged after the final curtain, developing a precise knowledge of the duration, if not the content, of works in the repertory. Soon, they joined the children's chorus at the opera. "Our favorite opera was 'Boris Godunov,' " Fischer told me. "We had two scenes: first came the coronation of

Boris, and then, two whole hours later, the scene where we took the money from the fool. So we would go across the road, in our costumes; we would have dinner with our parents, still in our costumes; and then we would go back for our second scene."

The apartment is not large, consisting of three bedrooms and a living room, but with its lofty ceilings and ornate moldings it gives off a bourgeois aura. Fischer uses it for gatherings and occasional chamber-scale performances, and has hung family pictures in the hallway. In one photograph, his father, Sándor Fischer, is seen standing next to a complete edition of the works of Goethe. A composer, an arranger, a scholar, and a translator of opera librettos, Sándor liked to play his children passages from recordings by Furtwängler, Klemperer, and Toscanini, showing how their interpretations differed from one another and changed over time. The music publisher and writer Bálint András Varga, who worked with the elder Fischer at the Hungarian state radio station, remembers him as a "soft-spoken gentleman of the old school."

Sándor Fischer was descended from shtetl Jews. He had survived the Second World War by means of a melancholy subterfuge: non-Jewish family friends whose son had died young told the authorities that their child was still alive, and Sándor assumed his identity for the duration of the war. The false papers are now displayed on the wall of the Fischer family apartment. Most of the family survived the Holocaust, but Iván's maternal grandparents died in the concentration camps. "This is the only picture we have of my grandmother," he said, peering at a youngish woman of noble bearing.

In his youth, Fischer had no dreams of becoming a second Furtwängler. He played piano, violin, and cello; wrote some experimental compositions in the manner of John Cage; founded an avant-garde theatre company with friends; and broadly dabbled in the arts. But when he went to the Vienna Music Academy he found that conducting came naturally to him. He first fell under the sway of Hans Swarowsky, who preached an unsentimental, objectivist approach. Later, he worked with Nikolaus Harnoncourt, the early-music pioneer, whose style was more philosophical and exploratory. In 1976, Fischer won the Rupert Foundation competition, in London, which secured him guest-conducting gigs all over the world.

He had the right pedigree for a high-profile career. American orchestras, in particular, are accustomed to Hungarian accents: Fritz Reiner, George Szell, Georg Solti, Antal Doráti, and Eugene Ormandy, all Hungarian-born, played dominant roles in twentieth-century musical life, directing, among them, the orchestras of Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dallas, Detroit, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Washington, D.C. Self-assured, at times arrogant, Fischer obtained strong results. But he soon became dissatisfied. He often found himself in a strange hotel room, packing his bags to go on to the next date just when he felt he was establishing a rapport with the local ensemble. He began making notes about how things might be done differently.

"It took me a few years to figure out why I was so unhappy," he told me, over lunch at the Palace of Arts. "Everyone was congratulating me. My manager in London was quite contented. But I thought deeply, and came to the conclusion that the entire orchestra system was flawed. Especially in America, it is a very *boring,* very *bad* system. Everyone complains about governing boards and managements"—when we met, a fifteen-month lockout at the Minnesota Orchestra had just ended—"but I also blame the unions. They are too rigid in their attitudes. Let us imagine, say, a first-trumpet player who can no longer play well. The union should look after the musical interests of the entire orchestra. But, instead, they defend that one player to the end. I dislike also the audition system, which is based on playing certain famous excerpts from the repertory. The trouble is that some players give perfect renditions of the excerpts but turn out to be useless in the orchestra, while others do poorly in the audition but are fantastic in the orchestra. There should be more flexibility, more competition."

Fischer speaks from some experience: he has appeared with many leading American ensembles, and from 2008 until 2010 he served as the principal

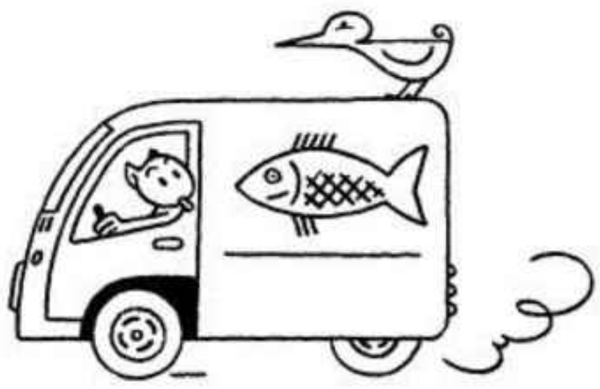
"And while you're waiting for your drinks can I get you something from the bar?"

conductor of the National Symphony, in Washington. Over time, his pessimism has only deepened. "Unfortunately, I think that all these orchestras will die out in twenty or thirty years," he said, sitting back and shaking his head. "They have become too big. Like dinosaurs, they must feed themselves all the time. And the real problem is that they are no longer organizations where real music-making happens. Instead, they exist to satisfy other needs. They satisfy a necessity for job security among the musicians; they satisfy a kind of career mania of soloists and conductors; and they satisfy the interests of a small margin of society that likes to go out and be seen at some kind of"—his face clouded over, as if contemplating a mystery—"unidentifiable social event."

Such scathing assessments of the orchestra business have been delivered at regular intervals over the decades. Fischer takes pride in not just criticizing the status quo but putting an alternative model into practice. "I knew the orchestra had to be smaller in profile—not a dinosaur but a tiger. Or some fast, small mammal. Doglike! And I imagined a different driving force for the organization. This would be the artistic fulfillment of the musicians. It is their passion that must be satisfied. But for that to work there would have to be a big change in structure. So: no union, no job security. They are free to pursue other work, and they come back refreshed." The resulting structure is atypical, but it appears stable, and a core group has been with the orchestra for years.

Fischer himself is away from Budapest for extended periods. He applies his unconventional programming ideas at the Konzerthaus, in Berlin, presenting marathon performances and surprise concerts. He also has a relationship with the Concertgebouw Orchestra, in Amsterdam, and with Dutch culture; Nora Fischer, one of his daughters from an earlier marriage, is a noted singer and music-theatre artist in the Netherlands. He has been mentioned as a possible successor to Mariss Jansons, who plans to relinquish the directorship of the Concertgebouw at the end of next season. But, for the most part, Fischer has been reducing his outside commitments. "I do what I call 'negative marketing,' " he told me. "I have no agency. Nobody can find me. It is liberating."

For all its utopian aspects, the Budapest Festival Orchestra is hardly a grassroots democracy. The organization is in thrall to Fischer's intelligence, wit, and charisma, not to mention his comprehensive musicality. At one rehearsal, he picked up a cello in order to demonstrate to me differences between Baroque and contemporary string-playing techniques, and played with a clean, communicative tone. Although he avoids ranting in the manner of his legendary Hungarian predecessors—Solti earned the nickname the Screaming Skull—Fischer is ceaselessly verbose in rehearsal, firing off commands, questions, jokes, vocalizations of instrumental parts, and digressive anecdotes, in various languages. "Winds, a little bit stronger pressure here!... *Shht, shht*—no noise!... *Dolce, piano*.... There shall be no rushing in the cellos.... Now some people are dragging—the train has already left the station."



Still, members of the B.F.O. have more of a voice than their counterparts in other high-level orchestras. Fischer brushes aside maestro mystique, insisting that everyone address him as Iván. He circulates among the players before and after rehearsals, heeding their comments. The programming of the Cocoa Concerts—the series for children—is generated by the musicians. A group with a yen for the Baroque pursues projects on the side. Even while rehearsing a canonical work such as Tchaikovsky's "Pathétique," players feel free to chime in.

The unusual conductor-musician dynamic was apparent during the recording sessions for the "Pathétique." When making a CD, Fischer works exclusively with C. Jared Sacks, the American-born, Netherlands-based proprietor of the Channel Classics label; together they have made more than twenty disks, covering such meat-and-potatoes repertory as Beethoven, Brahms, Bruckner, and Dvořák. Their recording of Mahler's Fourth Symphony, acutely characterful and expressive, is among the finest Mahler recordings ever made.

After two and a half days of recording, the orchestra had arrived at the finale of the "Pathétique," the great Adagio lamentoso. Fischer was favoring a restrained approach to the work, whose supercharged mood had helped generate the urban legend that Tchaikovsky committed suicide. (The composer died of cholera.) "The dosage of emotion is already very high," Fischer told me, riding the elevator down to a basement studio where he would listen to playbacks. "There is no need for an overdose." One effect caught my ear: in the bars leading up to the lushly lyrical second theme of the first movement, Fischer asked for a pristine, precisely tuned sound from the strings, with little vibrato. It acted as a cool frame for a hot image.

Fischer sat down with Sacks and his producer, Hein Dekker, to listen to the day's takes. Joining him in the studio were various members of the ensemble: Giovanni Guzzo, a guest concertmaster; Antoaneta Emanuilova, with whom I had sat at Midnight Music; and several principal wind and brass players. The musicians made noises of approval or dismay at different points, depending on how their section was sounding. In general, they tended to argue for the takes that showed the most technical polish. "Will the cellos stay like that?" one of them asked. "They're not in tune." The loudly weeping first chords of the Adagio seemed a little hazy—heavy vibrato made it hard to hear the harmony. "The tones should sound more clearly," Guzzo commented. Fischer replied, "I wouldn't mind an uglier, more dissonant sound. It should *hurt*."

Later in the day, the orchestra rerecorded the opening of the second movement. (In the editing phase, a new take can be seamlessly inserted into earlier versions.) During a conversation with Radu Hrib, a Romanian-born violinist, Fischer had become convinced that the principal theme should be phrased differently. The movement has a meter of five beats per bar—a lopsided beat that has the feeling of a drunken

waltz. Fischer had been conducting the opening phrase, in the cellos, as a steadily flowing pattern, smoothing over the discontinuity. But Hrib had proposed that the third beat be stressed a bit, so that you could hear each measure subdivided into units of two and three. Fischer tried it out, and liked the result.

"Bravo, Radu," he said to the violinist afterward. They hummed the phrase to each other. "It is like skiing over a bump," Hrib said. "You don't stop, but you feel a little something."

Around 2000, Fischer began to compose again. It was a risky decision, given the tendency for maestros to produce what is known as *Kapellmeistermusik*, or conductor's music: an adroit mashup of other people's ideas. Mahler himself was accused of perpetrating such pastiches, though posterity has delivered a different verdict. Fischer does not fear the label, admitting that his scores are saturated with echoes. Before the première of "The Red Heifer," last fall in Budapest, he announced, in a program note, "Please let me emphasize that I am not a modern composer—do not expect modern music. As a performer, my head is full of all types of music." He described himself as a montage artist, collecting fragments of the "mix in which we live, which attacks us from the radio, from the lift, from ringtones, from concert venues."

"The Red Heifer" addresses a shameful episode in Hungarian history—the Tiszaeszlár blood-libel affair of 1882, in which Jews in a rural village were accused of murdering a girl in a religious frenzy. An extended trial ended with acquittal, but the case intensified anti-Semitism in Hungary and foreshadowed the Dreyfus affair. Fischer fashioned the libretto himself, adapting a rueful narrative by the great early-twentieth-century novelist and journalist Gyula Krúdy. Fischer felt compelled to take on the material because in recent years right-wing extremists have attempted to reopen the Tiszaeszlár case: a memorial to the murdered girl has become a site of pilgrimage, and a member of Jobbik, Hungary's far-right-wing party, claimed in 2012 that the acquittal of the Jews of Tiszaeszlár had been a whitewash.

Fischer's rage at such hateful rhetoric is audible in the first bars of the score, whose biting attack recalls Kurt Weill's collaborations with Brecht. A pensive Bachian recitative gives way to rousing traditional Hungarian dances, as the villagers of Tiszaeszlár carouse at the Red Heifer Inn. Amid the crowd we see a Jewish boy, Móric Scharf, who longs to find his place among the fair-haired youth. That envy makes him vulnerable to manipulation: a rabble-rouser presures Móric into bearing false witness against his father and other Jews. Notably, Fischer here pulls his musical language toward the present: the persecutor plants his story in a gruesome cocktail-lounge blues, and Móric, in court, spits out his testimony in a terrifying triplet-rhythm rap, with Weill-like chords snapping behind him. The masterstroke is the introduction of vuvuzelas, or plastic trumpets, in the chorus. Vuvuzelas are a fixture at international soccer games, and a particular game comes to mind: a 2012 match between Israel and Hungary, at which Hungarian hooligans turned their backs during the playing of the Israeli national anthem.

Fischer does not register dissent solely through his scores. "The country is now in danger of sinking into a nationalistic dictatorship," he told the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, in 2011. "The world must not passively stand by if this fragile democracy finally breaks down."

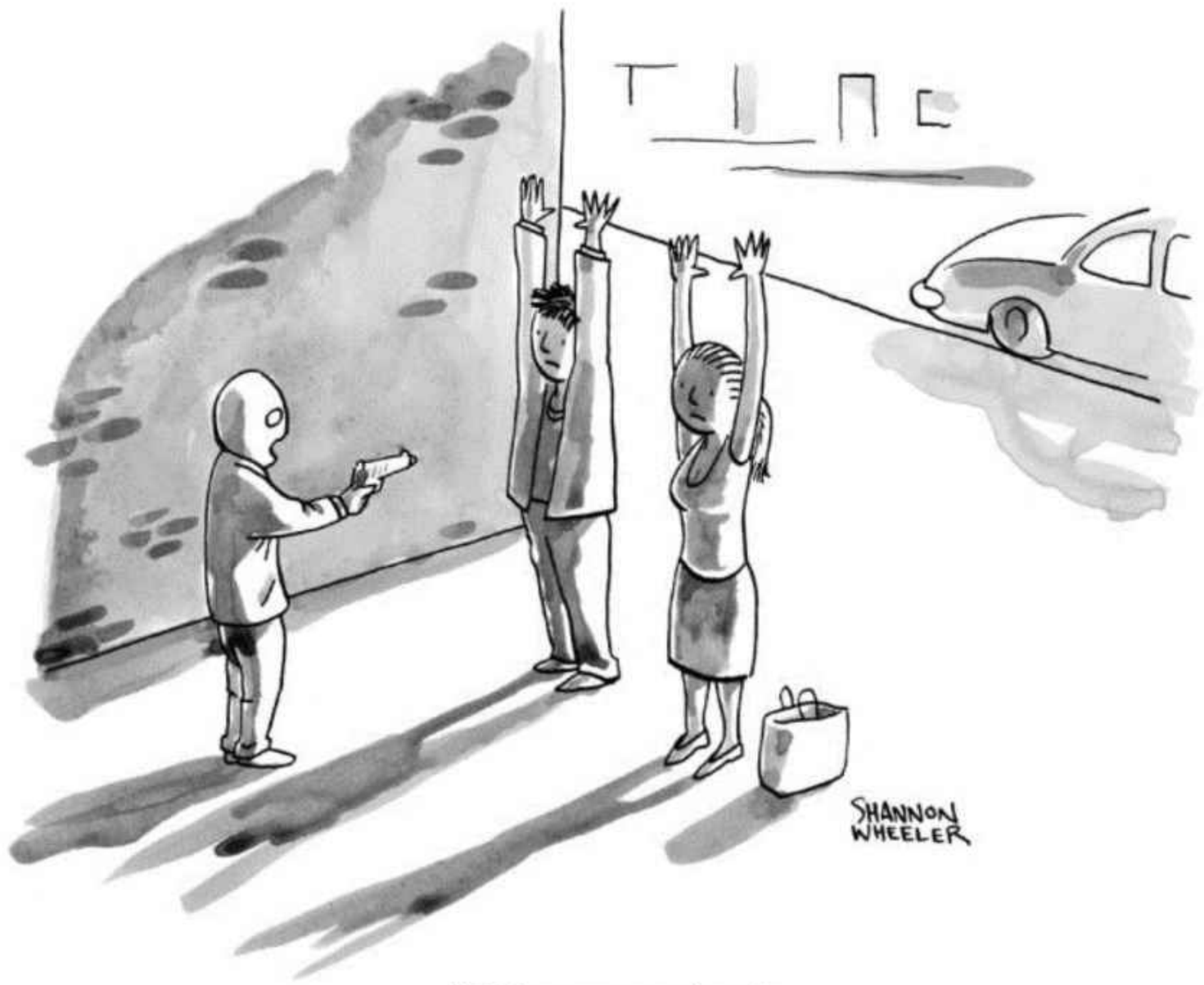
Not surprisingly, Hungary's right-wing press took a dim view of "The Red Heifer." A review in the conservative daily *Magyar Nemzet* emphasized the ironic, sarcastic tone of Fischer's work, concluding that, "instead of easing conflicts" in Hungarian society, the composer was "further provoking them." Likewise, Márton Gyöngyösi, the deputy parliamentary leader of Jobbik, told Lucy Ash, of the BBC, that the opera was "a sheer provocation." As Ash pointed out, that phrase might better be applied to Gyöngyösi's proposal, in a 2012 speech, that the government should "tally up people of Jewish ancestry," because they "pose a national-security risk."

Fischer is not the only classical musician who has criticized the rightward march of Hungarian politics. His brother, Ádám, who will lead a production of Wagner's "Ring" in Budapest in June, is no less forceful in his opinions, and the celebrated pianist András Schiff now refuses to set foot in his native country. Meanwhile, the pianist and conductor Zoltán Kocsis, with whom Fischer founded the B.F.O., has shown himself friendlier to the ruling Fidesz party. Not long after Fidesz won its supermajority, the government of Viktor Orbán, the party's leader, increased funding for the Hungarian National Philharmonic, where Kocsis is the music director, and cut funding for the B.F.O. Some thought that Fischer was being punished for his opinions.

Before the latest national election, which was held in April, Fischer had been hoping for a resurgence of a liberal coalition, and he had hosted a meeting of politically active intellectuals at his home. Fidesz's clear victory and Jobbik's strong showing—forty-five per cent and twenty-one per cent of the vote, respectively—mean that Fischer will face an uncertain environment for at least a while longer. "For now, the subsidy is good," Fischer told me, in a video conversation a few weeks ago. "We never need to cut a project because of a lack of money. But we can only decide the budget year-to-year." He continued, "Generally speaking, Hungary today is a completely brainwashed society. The last election was not a real campaign in the Western sense. In most villages and towns, you can see only the state television, which is a mouthpiece of the government. I should say that I do not consider Hungary a dictatorship. It is an authoritarian society where a certain amount of criticism is tolerated." He takes solace in the fact that Fidesz received fewer votes this year than in 2010. Eventually, he believes, there will be a democratic reawakening.

I asked Fischer whether he ever felt that his politics could endanger his career or the existence of the orchestra. "For me, there is no dilemma," he said, staring fixedly into the camera on his computer. "If I censored myself, I could not look at myself in the mirror. If it ever reached a point where they said, 'We will not support an orchestra which is the flagship of Hungarian culture around the world because their conductor made

critical remarks,' then it would become such a level of dictatorship that I wouldn't want to serve it anymore. So I will stay free, and they will decide how tolerant they are."



"Trigger warning."

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On my last night in Budapest, I watched a technical rehearsal for a future staging of "The Magic Flute." Although Fischer is best known for his symphonic work, he has long been passionate about opera. In the nineteen-eighties, he worked at the Kent Opera, an inventive English company that fell victim to funding cutbacks; he also led the Lyon Opera. In Budapest, he has put together striking presentations of "The Marriage of Figaro" and "Don Giovanni," both of which travelled to New York. Neither was a full production; the singers shared the stage with the orchestra, and no set was used. But through fluid lighting and movement Fischer conjured brightly swirling spectacles that showed greater vitality than recent Mozart productions at the Met. Inevitably, the orchestra and the conductor became characters in the drama. When, before "Figaro" began, Fischer chatted up spectators in the front row, he was already advancing the opera's theme: the dismantling of hierarchies in the name of politically tinged comedy.

Fischer relishes the role of opera director, which conductors rarely undertake. Naturally, he can articulate a rationale for this additional extracurricular pursuit. Many contemporary opera productions are schizoid affairs in which, on the one hand, the conductor enforces strict fidelity to the score, and, on the other, the director spins out wild scenarios that have little to do with the libretto. By assuming both roles, Fischer believes that he can restore a missing unity between music and action. There are personal reasons, too: he is reviving his youthful theatre mania, when he put on plays in friends' apartments, emulating the experimental director Jerzy Grotowski. When Fischer is dealing in orchestral matters, he exudes an adult wariness, even at his most mischievous moments; in the vicinity of opera he reverts to boyish enthusiasm.

For "The Magic Flute," Fischer pictured a staging that would spring forth from the pages of a children's book, with a series of drawings projected behind the singers and orchestra. His collaborator is Margit Balla, a Hungarian illustrator. "I want to have a 'Magic Flute' that is basically for children but not literally for children—it is for the inner child of everyone. There are so many layers to the opera, from the fairy-tale aspect to Mozart's concern with Freemasonry—the intellectual, logical dimension represented by Sarastro. I thought that we shouldn't try to choose; we can keep the childish simplicity. And with these children's-book images we can integrate the surtitles, so that the people stop noticing that they are there. We make out of the necessity a virtue."

Projected on a large screen over the stage were Balla's early sketches for her "Magic Flute" book: images of princes, damsels, mountains, and a dragon lying on its back with its tongue hanging out. Two musicians from the orchestra—Emese Gulyás, a violinist, and Dániel Tallián, a bassoonist—had volunteered to help out. They strolled around the screen with their instruments while Fischer and others, including his assistant, Rita Szabó, gauged how well the images could be seen. A problem surfaced: when the screen extended all the way to the floor, spotlights on the players made it difficult to see the images, and when the screen was raised it looked too much like background scenery, rather than a book from which the singers were materializing. The screen went up, the screen went down. Gulyás and Tallián tried out passages from "The Magic Flute" and other bits of their repertory. Positioned at the front of the stage was a silver-colored double-bass case. "This will be a mummy," Fischer explained, when I asked about it.

The question arose of where Fischer should be stationed during the opera. Should he stand inside the mummy case, hidden from the audience? Or should he sit in a chair on one side of the stage, as he had during his "Figaro"? There was a discussion in Hungarian, part of which Szabó translated for me. Balla proposed that if Fischer stayed inside the case it might create the wrong expectation in the audience. "They will be waiting the whole time for something to happen—for you to jump out," she said.

Fischer tilted his head to the side, eyes fixed on the prop, as if entertaining the notion of jumping out of the mummy case.

"No, I think I will use the chair," he said. With a laugh, he added, "It is better in the end to admit that I am the conductor." ♦

PHOTOGRAPH BY BRIGITTE LACOMBE

INHERITANCE

How Edward St. Aubyn made literature out of a poisoned legacy.

BY IAN PARKER

In 1991, as Edward St. Aubyn was about to publish "Never Mind"—the first of five highly autobiographical novels, in which extremes of familial cruelty and social snobbery are described with a tart precision that is not quite free of cruelty and snobbery—he went for a walk with his mother in the English countryside and told her that his father had repeatedly raped him as a young boy. Her response "wasn't totally satisfactory," St. Aubyn said, several weeks ago. "She said, 'Me, too'"—meaning that his father had raped her as well. "She was very, very keen to jump the queue and say how awful it was for her."

St. Aubyn was eating lunch in an almost empty restaurant a short walk from his home, in the Notting Hill area of London. The only other diners, a few tables away, were two of his friends: Lady Antonia Fraser, the writer, who is also the widow of Harold Pinter; and Tristram Powell, a filmmaker who is the son of Anthony Powell, the author of "A Dance to the Music of Time," a cycle of autobiographical novels centered on the English élite, to which St. Aubyn's work has been compared. When St. Aubyn had come in—a long cashmere coat over a gray jacket, and his right hand braced and bandaged after a skiing accident—they had asked him to join them for a glass of wine, and for fifteen minutes there had been good-natured talk about the Tony prospects of the recent Broadway production of Pinter's "Betrayal," and about a sad decline in the quality of literary feuds.

Then St. Aubyn had moved to his preferred corner, and recalled some of his life's most fraught experiences with steady irony, and in an unhurried accent of English privilege that—like the paintings that hang in his drawing room, and the tone of amused contempt that sometimes marks his prose—is part of his inheritance from a father who tortured him. Like his father, Roger, he is a member of White's, the oldest gentlemen's club in London.

St. Aubyn said that his mother, Lorna, a descendant of American industrialists, "was very keen to establish that she had no idea" about the sexual assaults, and "didn't even know such a thing existed." She "really was a person of good intentions, but if ever it was clear that good intentions were not enough . . ."

He narrowed his eyes. St. Aubyn's movements have a bomb-disposal delicacy. He'll brush the tips of two or three fingers against his lower lip for half a minute, or he'll tilt his head slightly backward, as if in response to a tiny surprise. He is fifty-four and the father of two, and has the air of someone who is puzzled, and rather impressed, to find that he is not dead.

The novels that draw on the St. Aubyn family disaster—the fiction and the life both involve a perfect house in the South of France, a brutal English snob, an American heiress with good intentions, and a son who becomes a suicidal junkie—were initially resisted, by some, for their upper-class milieu. But the books, which focus on a family named Melrose, are now widely admired for their forensic and comic variation on the theme of trauma and imperfect recovery. In Britain, the publishing marketplace has become so saturated with nonfiction reënactments of this theme that the genre is known, with brusque mockery, as the "misery memoir," and bookstores have "Painful Lives" sections filled with such titles as "Tell Me Why, Mummy" and "Please, Daddy, No." St. Aubyn is seen to have done something remarkable with his balance of wretchedness and wit. For someone who used to think that he had met every reader of his work, the literary recognition has been gratifying. In 2006, the fourth Melrose novel, "Mother's

St. Aubyn says of his father, "He had a small canvas, but he was as destructive as he could be. If he'd been given Cambodia, or China, I'm sure he would have done sterling work."

Milk," was nominated for a Booker Prize. Rachael Horovitz, a producer of "Moneyball," is working on a complete series of Melrose films for television, a project that she recently described as "a modern-day, albeit twisted" version of the miniseries adaptation of Evelyn Waugh's "Brideshead Revisited." St. Aubyn told me that Pinter, not long before his death, took him to lunch in a Notting Hill restaurant a few doors away and sternly praised his work. "He could be very ferocious," St. Aubyn recalled. "But when that was actually in the form of kindness it was very impressive."

He is entertaining, teasing company. We had several meetings, at a time of flooding in the south of England. One day, when a London paper's banner headline was "RED ALERT," I met him after having just crossed the Thames, and I said something about the river not looking as swollen as I had expected. He later e-mailed: "Someone with a wide variety of extreme-weather channels available to him in America is unlikely to be shaken until several herds of cattle and a large number of cars and houses have been lifted into the air, swirled about and dumped onto exploding power lines or into the corpse-strewn floodwaters of ruined cities." This is also how he speaks.

He recently finished a novel that, for the first time in more than a decade, does not involve Patrick Melrose, his psychologically fractured stand-in, or the awful senior Melroses. He also gave up his usual work habits—wrenching personal excavations, repeated revisions, and "the tyranny of the *artiste maudit* cliché"—in favor of a quick attempt at fun. The new novel, "Lost for Words," describes antics surrounding the awarding of a Booker-like literary prize. "I rather missed out on play," he told me. (He also missed out on the Booker.) "It's a bit late in the day, but why not start now? If not at five, then at fifty."

The irony in the title of St. Aubyn's third Melrose novel, "Some Hope," published in 1994, points both to a career-long interest in the idea of psychological deliverance and to a desire not to be mistaken for an artless writer. To read the novels is to watch a high intelligence outsmart cliché (or, to use a more Melrosian word, vulgarity), and so protect his protagonist's literary distinction. Similarly, St. Aubyn has been careful to protect his own life from the dull tarnish of remembrance-and-release; it would pain him if readers mistook a twenty-year literary project for a therapeutic one. "What he wanted was a very pure success," Oliver James, an old friend of St. Aubyn's, and a clinical psychologist, told me.

But the awkward fact is that writing saved St. Aubyn's life. Years of psychoanalysis, and the controlled fiction that followed, deferred the threat of suicide. St. Aubyn describes Patrick as an alter ego, though there are some differences. Patrick ends up with a day job—he's a barrister—which St. Aubyn, with a seeming shrug of privileged incomprehension, barely makes convincing. More important, Patrick has no experience of therapy, beyond a group meeting or two in rehab. Instead, he ruminates, and makes sour, studied jokes. The novels enact, and describe, therapeutic progress, but St. Aubyn, led by a literary taste for compression, and by the desire to create "vivid and intense and non-boring" fiction, left out much of the process that helped him survive to midlife.

James, who has known St. Aubyn since childhood, and who once saw him, as a teen-ager, teaching others how to inject heroin, has charted his friend's progress, and calls him an "extraordinarily emotionally intelligent person." But the stability that St. Aubyn has achieved isn't quite calm. The novels can feel like heavy fabric that has been pulled beautifully taut by sweating effort that's just out of frame, and there's some of that in St. Aubyn's wary charm: his equilibrium requires constant monitoring of experience and thought. He said that there are certain words that, in an instant, can raise his blood pressure from a hundred and five to two hundred. He paid almost obsessive attention to the plans we made, and was distressed by any threat to them. In conversation, he'd talk over any attempted interruption but hold the truncated question in his mind and answer it several minutes later. When I arrived, punctually, at his house, he answered the door, in coat and scarf, four or five seconds after I pressed the bell. It seemed important not to disappoint him. Thanks to his unfamiliarity with cell phones—he had just bought his first one—I heard, at the end of a voice-mail message to me, a snatch of peremptory conversation on another line, in which he complained about "one or two villains" who were "not contributing to my peace of mind." (When I mentioned this to him, he was relieved I could tell that I was not one of those being slighted.)

That voice-mail accusation could serve as a précis of the Melrose books, if one wanted to contrast the subtlety of Patrick's self-scrutiny with his tendency to measure others on a simpler, more severe scale—in which someone either is making things better for Patrick or is not. (Most are not.) Patrick is enormously empathic, but largely on his own behalf. Secondary characters can be knocked flat by satire and scorn.

St. Aubyn approached our conversations with good humor, but they were probably not helping his peace of mind. "I couldn't give a master class on relaxation," he said, as we left the restaurant. I'd asked about his skiing vacation, in the shadow of the Eiger, with his thirteen-year-old son. We walked back to his house, on a route that gave us a view of the gate over which Hugh Grant and Julia Roberts, in "Notting Hill," climb into a private communal garden. St. Aubyn's back garden has a door that leads into the same kind of treasured space. He lives in a neighborhood of handsome and expensive white early-Victorian terraces, although he's conscious of the fact that his four-story home is less grand than the five-story mansions nearby, owned by princes of finance.

His wistfulness about this is delivered for comic effect, but he has an air of displacement, or exile. St. Aubyn spent much of his childhood in France, on an eighty-acre property comprised of many buildings, along with woods and a vineyard. "My sense of home was lodged there, however disturbed a sense of home that was," he told me. He expected to inherit that land, but this didn't happen. His attachment to France remains strong, and when he needs to concentrate on writing he prefers to sit alone in a hotel by the Mediterranean. Watching St. Aubyn walk up the steps to his front door, wearing a long coat from another era, into a nine- or ten-million-dollar house of regret and economic retrenchment, I found it easy to imagine him in the company of one of his relatives, such as his Scottish grandfather, who spent much of the Second World War in Nassau with his friend the Duke of Windsor—the former King Edward VIII—and who drank himself to

death in Monte Carlo; or his great-uncle, Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich, a first cousin of Tsar Nicholas II, who helped to murder Rasputin, survived the revolution, and later worked as a champagne salesman in Paris. Or his father, a musically gifted sadist who died in New York. We went inside, and St. Aubyn called a technician about a scanner that he couldn't figure out how to work.

St. Aubyn had been invited to speak at Wolfson College, Oxford, as part of a program in biographical writing. Because of the floods, no trains were running, so the college sent a taxi. For the hour-long ride, St. Aubyn brought water, in the form of a glass bottle of Acqua Panna, and two glass tumblers. He was also carrying a set of his novels, filled with bookmarks. He is an unhappy and infrequent public speaker, although, in James's description, "he's the heart and soul of any dinner party—if he decides to be."

St. Aubyn had been asked by his host, Dame Hermione Lee, the biographer and academic, to sit for a Q. & A. with her, and to read from the Melrose series. The novels are short and condensed, and four of them describe action that occurs in a single day. In "Never Mind," the Melroses are in France and Patrick is five; the book depicts a dinner party and the first time that his father, David, sexually assaults him. In "Bad News," the second novel, Patrick is a heroin addict in his twenties, collecting David's ashes in New York. In "Some Hope," which was conceived as the final volume of a trilogy, he is thirty, and he attends a society party in the English countryside. St. Aubyn reprised the series with "Mother's Milk": Patrick is again in the family house in France, and is now the father of young sons. "At Last," published two years ago in the U.S., takes place over a few hours on the day of the funeral of Eleanor, Patrick's mother. St. Aubyn had marked a few pages from "At Last": Johnny Hall, a friend of Patrick's, is driving him to a post-funeral party, and Patrick thinks about his lifelong propensity "to flood difficult situations with words," noting that his conversational ease has masked a "core of inarticulacy." That phrase illuminates a key part of St. Aubyn's ambition: it connects self-understanding to high literary effort by echoing a line in T. S. Eliot's "East Coker" which describes writing as "a raid on the inarticulate." St. Aubyn treats that phrase as a kind of motto.

As the taxi neared Oxford, the sun shining, St. Aubyn asked me apologetically if he could prepare for the event by reading aloud. In the passage, Patrick recalls a scene from infancy involving his father:

> He could remember, when he was three years old, standing beside the swimming pool in France looking at the water with apprehensive longing, wishing he knew how to swim. Suddenly he felt himself being hoisted off the ground and thrown high in the air. With the slowness of horror, when the density of impressions registered by the panic-stricken mind makes time thicken, he used all the incredulity and alarm that rushed into his thrashing body to distance himself from the lethal liquid he had been warned so often not to fall into by accident, but soon enough he plunged down into the drowning pool, kicking and beating the thin water until at last he broke the surface and sucked in some air before he sank back down again. He fought for his life in a chaos of jerks and gulps, sometimes taking in air and sometimes water, until finally he managed to graze his fingers on the rough stone edge of the pool and he gave in to sobbing as quietly as possible, swallowing his despair, knowing that if he made too much noise his father would do something really violent and unkind.
>
> David sat in his dark glasses smoking a cigar, angled away from Patrick, a jaundiced cloud of pastis on the table in front of him.

St. Aubyn then reached a dark passage of self-analysis. Patrick recalls a beloved children's book in which a goat battles a wolf, replays a recent terrifying dream, and arrives at a new understanding of his mother's complicity in his father's cruelty: "The deeper truth that he had been a toy in the sadomasochistic relationship between his parents was not, until now, something he could bear to contemplate."

The chapter ends with Patrick and Johnny pulling up to the party. St. Aubyn kept his eyes on the page for a moment, and looked a little rattled. He then celebrated the fact that such a long reading would eat into the time during which he would be expected to answer questions.

We were a little early, so the car dropped us in the city center, and we went into a pub to drink tea. Then we walked, between buildings of glowing limestone, the mile or so to Wolfson.

Before St. Aubyn went to Oxford, to study English, in 1979, he had spent two years living in hotels in Paris and New York, shattered and paranoid, taking drugs and listening to voices in his head. He had started injecting cocaine and heroin at sixteen, while he was a student at Westminster School, in London. We had begun to talk about this the previous evening, in the American Bar of the Savoy

"We're watching your side of the room with growing fascination."

• • •

Hotel, where St. Aubyn had ordered a Manhattan, and the wait staff, apparently following a script, kept asking us if we were marking a special occasion. He recalled a hotel in New York where he stayed during his years of addiction: the George Washington, on the corner of Lexington Avenue and Twenty-third Street, "which was twenty-seven dollars a week, and a television was extra, and it had almost no visible picture at all." The wallpaper "looked like a bloodshot eyeball."

He was committed to heroin—whose effect is described, in "Bad News," as being "as soft and rich as the throat of a wood pigeon"—but he kept other drugs in the drawer by his bed. "In those days, you could go to a park in New York and buy any number of uppers and downers of various sorts, and acid," he said. (Nick Ayer, a friend and a former heroin addict, described St. Aubyn's intake of drugs and alcohol as "astounding.") "I used to open the drawer when I still had my eyes closed, and reach in, and I'd take three without knowing what they were. And then there was a sense of adventure. If they were three black bombers, I'd probably die of a heart attack; if they were three Quaaludes, I'd probably be a puddle on the floor. And, to kill the time until I found out what I'd taken, I would have a fix, and smoke a joint, and turn on the television, where you could dimly see the Road Runner through the snowstorm." He laughed. St. Aubyn prefers to tell a dark story lightly, avoiding what one of his characters calls the "obscure and fatuous slang" of a Narcotics Anonymous meeting. His tone also suggested a kind of respect for the young junkie's outlaw resolve—his willingness to toss himself into deep water.

"That was one thing that was going on," he continued. "The other was that, on the plastic table, with its cigarette burns, was 'The Magic Mountain,' Kafka, Beckett's trilogy of novels, Camus. Those were books that were influencing me then, as a very disturbed and heavily drug-addicted—but also very serious—seventeen-year-old, who kept flying and crashing. My psychological problems would overwhelm me at a certain point, and I would crash, but all along I felt—absurdly, with no evidence—that I was here to write, that I would either die or I would write." For several years, he wrote poetry on scraps of paper; he once read a long poem aloud to Oliver James, who considered it astonishingly good. St. Aubyn has lost all his poems. "Part of me still longs for the purity of poetry," he said. "Without any narrative, and wretched *settings*."

On his eighteenth birthday, St. Aubyn came into an inheritance from his maternal grandmother, Lela Emery, who had died when he was an infant. Lela was from a family whose vast fortune derived from Ohio real estate and pig fat. One of Lela's sisters married Dmitri Pavlovich, the Russian duke; Lela's older brother, Jack Emery, became a property magnate and a grand man of Cincinnati, building himself a house with twenty-one bathrooms. Lela married two Europeans with status but little money; the first was Alastair Mackintosh, an amusing and well-connected Scot, whose memoirs describe how, when Lela was in labor with St. Aubyn's mother, their friend Cole Porter was playing the piano in the next room. After a divorce, Lela married the Duc de Talleyrand, for whom she bought Edith Wharton's former home, Le Pavillon Colombe, near Paris. Lorna spent a part of her childhood there, and in 1957 she married Roger St. Aubyn, a handsome English doctor and a frustrated pianist with an aristocratic sensibility, even though his branch of the St. Aubyn family was not quite the landed, titled branch. The Duc de Talleyrand outlived Lorna's mother, and, according to St. Aubyn, broke a promise to pass on the bulk of the Emery fortune to his two stepdaughters. Lorna, deprived of much of her inheritance, later disinherited Edward.

The bequest from his grandmother made Edward rich. He wouldn't tell me the amount—which, "from her point of view, was loose change at the bottom of her handbag"—but it seems to have been several million dollars. He later learned that his parents had already drawn on Lela's gift to pay for his education, which allows him to say that "there was no point at which I was given anything by my parents—the whole thing came from this dead stranger."

With the infusion of money, St. Aubyn said, he "suddenly moved from the George Washington to the Pierre, as it were, and from the APEX ticket to the Concorde ticket." The Pierre is the main setting for "Bad News," in which Patrick nearly loses his mind while on heroin. (It's also where, in 1941, this magazine's Talk of the Town section conducted a skeptical interview with Alastair Mackintosh, "clipped of mustache and speech," who was acting as a high-end, name-dropping publicity mascot for a new night club in the hotel. He owned three hundred ties.)

"I had no expectation of living very long," St. Aubyn recalled. "I had no self-restraint of any sort, in any department, so of course I rushed through this money." He added, "It was a ludicrous settlement, because it was given to me with no strings attached. I only really got into the swing of it when I was about nineteen. People were trying to tell me that it would be better to preserve the capital. I had an income that was actually quite a lot, but I would run out, because I was living in the Pierre and having five thousand dollars of drugs a week. And so I tentatively picked up the phone and rang the people who had the money and said, 'Could you wire thirty thousand pounds to my bank account?' And they said, 'It'll be there tomorrow.' And I thought, Oh!"—he laughed—"I see! *That's* how it works. After that, I made that call every other week."

During this period, St. Aubyn had the sense to return to London, and to enroll for a few months in a college that pushed derailed young people through the Oxford and Cambridge entrance exams. His tutor was Penelope Fitzgerald, the novelist. A year later, her book "Offshore" won the Booker Prize. St. Aubyn, who is grateful for her teaching, had no idea that she was a writer (and, guided by a friend with a strong aversion, has still not read her books). St. Aubyn was a dyslexic child, and is still a slow reader. "I think that's affected my prose style," he said. "I became very interested in the sound of words, and the rhythm of sentences, because it took me so long to get to the end of them." Today, "if I can find an excuse not to read something, I'm very grateful." One evening, we attended a panel discussion about Fitzgerald, at which his friend Alan Hollinghurst, the novelist, spoke. Afterward, there was a lottery draw for a set of her novels; it was touching to see the rigid distress with which St. Aubyn faced the prospect of winning, and his joy when he did not.

The writer Francis Wyndham, who is a friend and a sometime travel companion of St. Aubyn's, and is eighty-nine, told me, "He's more a writer than a reader. I'm a reader—I don't mind if what I read isn't absolutely perfect." He thought that Joyce and Beckett might be the only two writers he had heard St. Aubyn praise wholeheartedly. St. Aubyn recognizes that he makes frequent reference, in his fiction and his conversation, to works that he studied in the final two years of secondary school, including "King Lear," "Four Quartets," and "The Portrait of a Lady."

After what St. Aubyn calls his "double gap year," he started at Oxford. He had already bought an apartment in London, and he now bought an Oxford flat, where he rarely slept and to which he never invited anyone. (He later bought a London house. "That's the only reason I'm not living under a bridge," he added, explaining that you couldn't simply exchange "a floor of your house" for drugs.)

He ate alone, in a suit, in Oxford's most expensive restaurants. He continued taking heroin, sometimes with his fellow-student Will Self, the future novelist, who, like a number of people acquainted with St. Aubyn, did not want to be interviewed for this article. "I was always running away from Oxford," St. Aubyn said. "I'd go into a tutorial to apologize for not having done my essay, with a taxi waiting outside to take me to Heathrow. I was always having overdoses and being revived in hospitals, adrenaline pumped in." He was protected from expulsion by some early flashes of literary talent, and by the kindness of the teaching staff. Toward the end of his three-year course, a generous but too hopeful professor suggested to him that, with effort, he could do very well on his final examinations. Not long before this conversation, St. Aubyn had stopped breathing in the back of an ambulance between his London apartment and Charing Cross Hospital, after an overdose. Feeling that he "had to confess," St. Aubyn said, "Well, there is a problem—I am a heroin addict." The professor was concerned. "He said, 'Do you have a television?' I said, 'No.' He said, 'Oh, do get one, they're very relaxing.'" St. Aubyn laughed. "The Oxford University recovery program. I bought a television and took it back to my Oxford flat, and watched a lot of daytime television." The university awarded him the lowest possible class of degree: a pass.

On our walk through Oxford, we passed Keble, his college, and he mentioned that, in 1982, during the vacation before final exams, he had attempted replacing heroin with whiskey and Valium. Waiting in a pharmacy to fill his Valium prescription, he met Nicola Shulman, the daughter of well-known journalists. Shulman became his partner until the end of the decade. She was having a sunnier experience at Oxford. The election of a Conservative government, in 1979, and the success of such period dramas as "Brideshead Revisited" had made it newly fashionable for students to participate in moneyed, black-tie frolics. (Hollinghurst's "The Line of Beauty" captures the moment.) Shulman's extended circle, which St. Aubyn joined, included Hugh Grant and Nigella Lawson, whose father was one of Margaret Thatcher's ministers. The previous summer, Lawson had been photographed dangling a croquet mallet out of a sedan chair carried, on poles, by four young men.

St. Aubyn could play the part. He was not quite an aristocrat; an English peer, when recently asked to identify St. Aubyn's place in the country's upper classes, paused for a long time and then said, "Well, he's upper-middle-class, isn't he?" But St. Aubyn said "huff" for "have," and "orf" for "off." Oliver James is sure that St. Aubyn has never worn a pair of jeans: "He always dressed like, and had the manners of, a toff." And St. Aubyn was attractive, thanks, in part, to his mixture of vulnerability and predatoriness. One observer described him as a "golden lamb" with "very beautiful soft skin and wonderful wavy hair."

St. Aubyn remained a drug addict, but he said that Shulman civilized him: "It was good to have some care." For the next few years, his heroin binges—injections spaced twenty minutes apart—were interrupted by more sociable patterns of drug-taking and swanning around, although, as Nick Ayer put it, "his more normal times would kill most people." St. Aubyn said that he ached to return to his former life, but "there was a beautiful girlfriend, there was a party to go to." (Shulman, who declined to be interviewed, became a well-regarded journalist and author, and is now married to a marquess—below a duke, above an earl.)

By the time that St. Aubyn and I reached Wolfson College, he had become agitated by the thought that we would arrive less than an hour before he

had to speak. He was greeted by a member of the college staff, who asked, chattily, if he was related to the Cornish St. Aubyns, whose ancestral seat is a castle atop a small rocky island. "Uh, yes, cousins," St. Aubyn said, in a way that discouraged this line of small talk.

Soon afterward, he was reading on a stage in a modern hall lined with pale wood. When he finished, Hermione Lee asked him how one writes about what can't be spoken, and St. Aubyn drew a distinction between inarticulacy and repression. "I think trauma, during the period of our lives we can remember, doesn't lead to repression," he said. "I never understood that theory. It leads to splitting and fragmentation. I never had any trouble remembering what were the most outstandingly violent and life-threatening events in my childhood. Why would you?"

When St. Aubyn overdosed in his London apartment, Oliver James called the ambulance and rode with him to Charing Cross Hospital; after an adrenaline shot brought St. Aubyn back to life, he shuffled off into the rain without his shoes, looking for more drugs. Today, James is well known in Britain for his broadcasting and his writing, including a book whose title bleeps Larkin: "They F*** You Up: How to Survive Family Life." He is several years older than St. Aubyn, and has at times been a surrogate big brother—and, to some extent, he's Johnny Hall, Patrick Melrose's kindest friend, although James, unlike Johnny, was never very interested in hard drugs. When James encountered Chilly Willy—a Lower East Side drug dealer who became a character, Chilly Willy, in "Bad News"—it was because St. Aubyn, in a double-breasted pin-striped suit, went directly to score after picking up James at J.F.K.

James met me in London. Within a few minutes, he said, "I have an odd relationship with Teddy, because he has never, ever been, in any way, cruel to me." He described going with St. Aubyn and Shulman to a weekend party held by "the Earl of somebody or other," at which the flirtation between St. Aubyn and a fellow-guest was painfully obvious. James also recalled how St. Aubyn sometimes reacted, at dinner parties, to a stranger's careless remark: "A not terribly bright girl might say, 'Ooh, that's fun,' and he would play with her use of language in a way that humiliated her." He added, "It was like a wolf savaging a sheep. It was absolutely terrifying, and difficult to interfere with." I later spoke with a woman who had had exactly this experience, in France: "I said something about a book I didn't really know. He made me feel very young, and very stupid."

James placed this behavior in a generational setting. "That's what Teddy's father used to do," he said. In the fifties, James's parents, both psychoanalysts, had a second home in Cornwall. David Astor, the owner of the *Observer* and a family friend, encouraged them to visit Arthur Koestler, who was staying nearby "with this person called Roger St. Aubyn." ("Such was the 'Dance to the Music of Time' nature of things," James said.) Roger, in his early fifties, a qualified but inactive doctor, had by this point divorced his first wife—Baroness Sophie von Puthon, an Austrian—and married St. Aubyn's mother. Alexandra, Edward's older sister, had just been born. "My mother described it as an incredible situation in which you had this sadistic, horrible man being vicious to his young heiress wife," James said. "She was looking after this baby, in this doomy, bleak Cornish place, with Arthur Koestler being intellectual and not particularly nice."

A friendship nevertheless developed between the James and the St. Aubyn families. Not long after Edward was born, in 1960, the St. Aubyns moved from England to a house in Provence, just inland from Toulon; a few years later, Lorna bought a nearby property, referred to by the family as Le Plan, which included a seventeenth-century convent, a chapel, a collection of seven houses on a hill, and a view of mountains. The St. Aubyns spent most of the year at Le Plan, but sometimes lent it to the Jameses, and one of Oliver's sisters stayed there one summer, as a babysitter. "Roger gave her the creeps," James recalled. "He was an intimidating presence, and this man, who wished he'd become a piano virtuoso, would sit there playing with incredible passion, keeping everyone awake." When James was in his early teens, and Edward was seven or eight, the two families stayed together at Le Plan, and the boys shared a room. "Every evening, Teddy would get the Encyclopædia Britannica before he went to sleep," James recalled. "I said, 'What on earth are you doing?' And he said, 'I have to read six or seven entries of the Encyclopædia Britannica every night, and my father is going to test me in the morning.'"

James now assumes that the behavior was enforced with "the ultimate deterrent" of a sexual act. "Teddy wasn't a wet—he wasn't someone you'd want to cross, even at that age," he recalled. "But Roger was really clever, and would have been able to find ways to humiliate him, make him feel terrible, such that it wasn't worth it—it was much better to just get on with learning the seven things."

Edward St. Aubyn has described two forms of snobbery. One is aspirational, driven by the illusion that access to power or privilege will make you more powerful or privileged; the other is the "snobbery of contempt," an assumption that those outside your tribe can be treated as if not fully human. Roger St. Aubyn, an old Etonian and a former lieutenant in the 4th Queen's Own Hussars, was the second type, and, in his son's description, his sadism was emboldened by a sense of social grandeur, and by the pleasure he took in ignoring convention. In "Never Mind," after David Melrose beats and rapes young Patrick one afternoon—and Patrick allows his mind to escape into the body of a lizard he sees on the wall—David wonders, facetiously, if "he had perhaps pushed his disdain for middle-class prudery a little too far."

Edward St. Aubyn said that his father's assaults on him began when he was three and a half and ended when he was eight. Nick Ayer knows a woman who was also abused by Roger, when she was a girl. In "At Last," when Patrick revisits aspects of his family's history of sexual violence—a history that St. Aubyn said I could regard largely as "straightforward reportage"—there are references to victims besides Patrick, and to a letter sent by one of them to his mother.

Recalling this period, St. Aubyn described the arrival of a new Spanish nanny. "She said, 'I'm your new nanny, and now it's time to have a bath. Go and get ready.' And I went into my bedroom, and I put on a suit and a tie and some shoes and socks, and went into the bathroom. And she said, 'What are you doing?' And I said, 'You're a complete stranger, I'm not taking my clothes off in front of you.' And I climbed into the bath, in my suit, and sunk under the water, and just stared at

her. So she left. But you can see why I'd do that."

In "At Last," Patrick is in his forties, and his father is long dead. Patrick recalls a story that David sometimes told to guests late at night; Roger St. Aubyn used to tell the same story. On a hunting trip in India between the wars, far from a hospital, a member of Melrose's party developed symptoms of rabies. The patient was trussed up in an improvised hammock. That evening, "it was challenging, even for

One of the guesthouses on the former St. Aubyn property in the South of France; Edward, at the age of three.

these hard men, to enjoy the sense of deep relaxation that follows a day of invigorating sport with this parcel of hydrophobic anguish dangling from a nearby tree. The row of lanterns down the dinner table, the quiet gleam of silver, the well-trained servants, the triumph of imposing civilization on the wild vastness of the Indian night, seemed to have been thrown into question. David could only just make out, against a background of screams, the splendid tale of Archie Montcrieff driving a pony and trap into the Viceroy's ballroom." In David's telling, he got up, shot the man in the head, and then rejoined his "dumbfounded" friends, saying, "Much the kindest thing to do." As Patrick explains in his icy narration, his father boasted that the men of the hunting party felt, by the end of the evening, that he "had done something exceptionally courageous": "David would almost smile as he described how he had brought everyone at the table round, and then in a fit of piety, he would sometimes finish by saying that although at the time he had not yet set eyes on a copy of *Gray's Anatomy,* he really thought of that pistol shot as the beginning of his 'love affair with medicine.'"

It's a fine passage: a tale of murder, an after-dinner story, and an Oedipal duel, in which the urbane disdain of Patrick is wielded against the urbane viciousness of his father. The anecdote also conveys Roger's charm, at least to certain men. Oliver James said of Roger, "He engaged with me. He took what I said seriously." Roger also taught him the secret of scrambled eggs, which is "an enormous amount of butter." (When asked to consider Roger St. Aubyn diagnostically, James referred to regressed pedophilia, and to what some psychologists call a Dark Triad personality: a mixture of psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and narcissism. St. Aubyn said that his father's sexual behavior was "more complex and polymorphous" than suggested by the character of David Melrose, and included adult homosexual affairs.)

Gully Wells, the editor and writer, spent her childhood summers in a house a few miles from Le Plan, with her American mother, Dee Wells, and her British stepfather, A. J. Ayer, the philosopher—both models for characters in "Never Mind"—as well as Nick Ayer, her half-brother. She remembers the nearby beach, filled with kids running around and women in bikinis, where Edward and Alexandra, known as Minky, were kept clothed and shaded by a nanny "dressed up like some mad nurse in the Crimean War." Wells is almost certain that her family was ignorant of Roger St. Aubyn's sexual violence, but he was clearly a bully. "One had the impression that Lorna was terrified of him," she said. And yet A. J. Ayer, who took camping and motoring trips with Roger St. Aubyn, had an attitude that Gully Wells summarized as "Roger? Splendid fellow!" Nick Ayer said, "My parents were vile to one another—all my friends' parents were vile to one another. So Lorna and Roger being vile to one another was no different."

Roger and Lorna divorced in 1968, when Edward was eight, and Roger moved to an airless modern house, not far away, that Gully Wells remembers as a bunker. Lorna welcomed Oliver James and his friends at Le Plan, and while there he would drop in on Roger. "Let's face it, Roger was pretty fun," he said. "He was very well read, and some of what you have"—in Edward—"is attributable to Roger." Like David Melrose, Roger instructed his son to "observe everything."

One evening in 1985, when Nick Ayer was a student at Bard, he visited his mother's Manhattan apartment. "There were Minky and Teddy, sitting in her living room, and they looked up and told me that Roger had died." He'd had a heart attack. "I had always loved Roger very much, and I said, 'I'm terribly—'" He

LEFT: COURTESY JANE LONGMAN

ANDY'S HAIKUS

Hey, why the long face,
Mr. Smooth Fox Terrier?
Dog jokes never die.

*

Stay down, crazy pooch!
Stop jumping all over me.
Enough love—O.K.?

*

Petal ears on top,
Triangles of attention,
Pick us up also.

*

Aloft and agog,
My old dads, depanniered,
Cancelled fox's plan.

Unacceptable,
4 A.M. nose in my ear.
Oh, well—c'mon under.

*

Prewash your plates
Is what I do around here:
Lift that door and die!

*

Circling your cushion,
Settled on your spot to nap:
Curvature ensues.

*

Black patches on white
Form an archipelago:
Terrierana.

—*Roger Angell*

wasn't allowed to finish. "They said, 'Look, we know how you feel, and it's not how we feel, so don't bother saying anything.' And that was the first inkling I had that there was some terrible darkness there."

Within months of Roger's death, Edward St. Aubyn had begun to write about him. He was twenty-five. He had started a few novels, and was contributing occasionally to *Tatler*, a magazine, then having its day, that allowed middle-class readers to eavesdrop on a version of smart, funny talk between toffs. He wrote best when confronting powerful men. His first published paragraph contains a snooty sketch of a cleaner who inconvenienced him, at Heathrow, on his way to a luxurious vacation in India. But when he later profiled William Waldegrave, a titled Conservative politician, he had expert control of the kind of ceremonial mockery that is valued in the House of Commons and at the Oxford Union. Waldegrave, he wrote, "gives the impression that it is lonely at the top before he has even reached the top. Some people just carry the top around with them; it is the medium in which they move and they only relax when they have a place that corresponds to it."

He lived with Nicola Shulman in the London house that he had bought, in an expensive and unbohemian part of Kensington. Oliver James remembers that "there was wallpaper that took about three years to make, and individual worms that had been hand-fed organic caviar in order to produce the silk." St. Aubyn's friends were grand, as they largely still are. (Mick Jagger attended the London party for "At Last.") Remembering this period, St. Aubyn murmured, "Adam Shand Kydd, who's now dead. Jasper Guinness, who's now dead . . ." He and Shulman spent time at Le Plan. In England, he was committed to high-society parties in a way that seems to have mixed novelistic detachment, sexual avidity ("He has always been a shagger," James said, affectionately), and an instinct to take possession of his class inheritance, perhaps in fortifying defiance of his father. He didn't retreat at all from the place where his father set him down. "It's one part of what he was coerced to do that he hasn't chosen to change—I suppose that's how I'd look upon it," Oliver James said, and he referred to Earl Spencer, Princess Diana's much married brother, whose older son is St. Aubyn's godson: "Charles Spencer's quite an interesting man, but you couldn't really say he's the nicest person."

"I thought about suicide constantly during those years," St. Aubyn said, one day at lunch. "It was like a heartbeat, from adolescence through to my late twenties: 'I want to live,' 'I want to die'; 'I want to live,' 'I want to die.'" We were in a semicircular booth in a restaurant on Portobello Road. Even before his skiing accident, he was injured. During a writing stint in a French hotel, a masseuse had, "like a Bruce Lee villain," jabbed him

violently in the shoulder. He asked for my understanding if he couldn't always manage to turn fully my way—although he sometimes found the fortitude to track the path of one or another slim woman as she took her seat in a nearby booth.

In the mid-eighties, St. Aubyn sometimes tried to break from heroin by renting a country house and declaring it drug-free. Under the terms of his treaty, relapses were burdensome, and required a long drive back to London; he had to finish consuming the drug before returning. While on the highway, still full of heroin, he kept himself awake by burning the back of his hand with a cigarette.

During one of these rentals, in Oxfordshire, he kept a fire burning day and night, read all of "In Search of Lost Time," and tried to write about bringing his father's ashes back from New York. (As Patrick observes, in "Bad News," it was "the first time he had been alone with his father for more than ten minutes without being buggered, hit, or insulted.") Then, on a drug break in London, St. Aubyn recalled, "I just thought, Actually, it's all too complicated, and I'm going to kill myself." He filled a syringe with a deadly amount of heroin but passed out before he had fully pressed the plunger. "It wasn't a cry for help or anything like that," he said, keeping his narrative clear of banality. "I was actually saved by the sincerity of my suicide attempt." He woke up a day and a half later, with the syringe still in his arm.

"At that point, I was completely sure that later that day, or the next day, I would try again and I would succeed," St. Aubyn said. "I thought, *Or* I could tell someone the truth. Nobody knew the most important facts about my life. So really my self was a false self, it was a working self for dealing with the world, and behind that wall was total chaos, just this sort of swirling blackness, and I just found it totally unbearable, second by second, being me. So I thought, I have to stop it or get some help."

He called Oliver James, and asked if James's father, the analyst—whose own psychoanalyst had been Anna Freud—would see him. "The next day, I went into psychoanalysis," St. Aubyn said. In the first session, he told Dr. James about the sexual abuse. St. Aubyn saw him five times a week for several years; under the conventions of analysis, he and Oliver cut off contact during that period.

In 1988, St. Aubyn took heroin for the last time. (He later gave up alcohol, for a long while, largely in response to a liver crisis; subsequently, he started drinking to excess. He now seems to drink in an amiably social way. "Self-destruction is obviously a defeat," he said. "But terrorized abstinence is also a defeat.") That year, he started a new novel, under an extreme contract with himself. "It was 'Either I write a novel which I finish and get published, and is authentic, or I'll kill myself,'" he said. The thought was not melodramatic, or hysterical, he explained. "It was just 'If I don't, there's nothing so far in my life that I'm not ashamed of, and horrified by. But if I wrote a decent novel, that would change the game.'" The contract, "written in blood," stayed in place for twenty years.

Even if St. Aubyn's memories of his earlier life, shaped by trauma, are not perfectly accurate, he seems to take care to transmit his memories accurately. But he was drawn to fiction, not memoir. He imagined a trilogy, whose third-person narrative would center on an alter ego but have access to the minds of others. "I wanted the freedom and the sublimatory power of writing a novel," he told me. "And I wanted to write in the tradition which had impressed me most." Nabokov's "Speak, Memory" was the only impressive memoir he could remember reading. "I don't know if you've tried reading Rousseau, but that's pretty unbearable," he said.

He wrote a first chapter: on a September morning in the South of France, an Englishman drowns ants with a garden hose, while his wife anticipates "the sticky, awkward cubes of ice" in her day's first cocktail. He then stopped for a year. "I thought, It's impossible, I can't tell this story." The abuse seemed unmentionable. In the eighties, "no one else was talking about it. And, for all I knew, it might not have happened since ancient Greece." St. Aubyn added, "It would be very different now." Patrick appears in the second chapter, carrying a toy sword, reflecting on the texture of squashed snails. The narrative that follows—a rape, then a dinner party—has the sprung control of a prosecutor's steady summing up. St. Aubyn's metaphors can be ornate, but his writing generally has a retaliatory steeliness; it seems to keep a promise to Patrick, who, awake at night, resolves that, one day, he'll "play football with the heads of his enemies." If the prose can read like a speech that he has become impatient to make, this seems to reflect a psychological truth. His mind had long been filled with imagined conversations in which he triumphed with "marvellous ripostes" and aphorisms. "I'm sure that I translate my thoughts into sentences more insistently, and associate them with words more readily, than a lot of people," he told me. "Even as a child, I used to sit around staring into space for ages, thinking—thinking in sentences.... Even if I'm walking down the street on my own, I'm narrating the experience. It has to be described before it convinces me that it has happened."

The writing remained painful. St. Aubyn and Shulman had married in 1987, but they separated before the end of the decade. A new girlfriend, Ana Corberó, a Spanish artist, encouraged him. "I lovingly bullied him," she recently said, though she disputed St. Aubyn's memory that she had taken his handwritten pages and typed them up in another room. Nick Ayer said that St. Aubyn "hated every minute of it. He'd wrap himself in towels, he was sweating so much." In the months before publication, in February, 1992, St. Aubyn placed a call each day to his publisher, with the aim of withdrawing the novel; he'd hang up when someone answered. "I thought I would be shunned, and that people would be disgusted," he said. "I projected my sense of shame onto everyone else. It was a great surprise that people were rather sympathetic."

At a moment when the emerging British fashion was for spikily vernacular Scottish and Irish writers—Roddy Doyle, James Kelman, Irvine Welsh—the response to St. Aubyn's elegant prose was muted. Alan Hollinghurst, like many readers, caught up with St. Aubyn's novels only a few years later. "I had been slightly put off them before," he told me, in an e-mail. "There was a lazy assumption in some quarters that, because they were written by an upper-class person about his own world, they must be trivial or snobbish or somehow irrelevant—such a person, it was thought, 'didn't need to write.' In fact, of course, Teddy needed to write more urgently than most."

Privately, people were kind and concerned, although one friend of his father's—a former secretary to Winston Churchill, and a war hero—never spoke

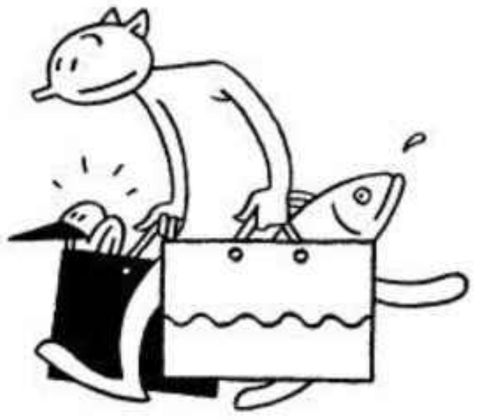
to St. Aubyn again. Sophie von Puthon, Roger's first wife, was sympathetic, but went on to say, "I still love your father, I'll always love him." In our conversations, St. Aubyn was understandably careful about speaking for Alexandra, his sister, but he recalled her supportive response: "If anyone ever asks me about my childhood, I'll just give them a copy of your book." Alexandra St. Aubyn, who has no analogue in the novels, declined to be interviewed; she lives in England, and is on friendly terms with her brother and his family. In Nick Ayer's description, "part of her was pleased that Teddy wrote the book, that the story could be told and that she didn't have to say anything. But it did make life difficult, because she'd then be questioned about it, and she's a very private soul."

Lorna St. Aubyn's pride in her son's bravery was "impeccable," Edward said. But, not long after publication, he received a letter from a Frenchwoman who had been one of his nannies, and who now worked at a publishing house in Paris. "She said, 'I've been haunted all my life. I've wanted to apologize to you. I used to hear you screaming down the corridor, day after day. I knew something was terribly wrong'"—but she didn't dare confront Roger. "I thought, Mm, so she was nineteen, and she *wasn't* my mother, and she wasn't there for the whole of my childhood, and she knew beyond any doubt that something absolutely appalling was happening. But my mother's story, when I told her, was 'How could I have known?' I now had some important counter-evidence."

Spanish editions collect the first three Melrose books as "El Padre," and the two others as "La Madre." Before devoting his full attention to his mother's story, he finished his trilogy. In "Some Hope," Patrick makes a disclosure: he tells Johnny that he was abused by his father. Later, they attend a party at which Princess Margaret, the vain and toxic guest of honor, tells stories "about 'the ordinary people in this country' in whom she had 'enormous faith' based on a combination of complete ignorance about their lives and complete confidence in their royalist sympathies." (When I asked St. Aubyn a question about the Queen, he said, in a barely audible voice, "I really enjoyed my meetings with her. Unlike her sister.")

In 1994, when "Some Hope" appeared, St. Aubyn gave his first interview. Asked if Patrick's experience of sexual abuse described his own, he said, "Yes. Why not say that?"

He told me, "This whole journey is toward the truth, or toward authenticity, agency, and freedom. How could it possibly help to plant a lie in the middle of it? On the other hand, by telling the truth, I've distorted the message." And a process of "turning something horrible into something that, I hope, is well made and beautiful" might be put into reverse.



"The truth for me is the truth in the books," he said. "And the truth in the facts is a derelict ruin."

Lorna St. Aubyn was the author of several books, including a memoir of her previous lives, one of which was lived alongside Christ. She also wrote a study of alternative therapies—in which she argued that doctors were worthless, and pharmaceutical drugs cause disease—and a manual, "Rituals for Everyday Living," published in 1994, that describes possible ceremonial responses to life transitions, including one to assist someone recollecting sexual abuse. It involves two chairs, four candles, a bowl of water, and a photograph of the abuser, to which one should address a soft chant: "It is healing that he needs, not hatred. Healing, not hatred. Acceptance, acceptance, acceptance." She goes on, "Try at this juncture simply to accept that what you have undergone has a meaning and purpose which you may one day understand."

Thanks to the Duc de Talleyrand, Lorna did not have a dynastic level of wealth. But there was money—her house in Kensington, where Edward spent his school years, was later owned by Dustin Hoffman—and a desire to do good with it. Edward recalled that, when he was a boy, Lorna supported such causes as Save the Children. Later, she embraced New Age ideas. By the time that Edward left Oxford, Le Plan was being used for residential courses in the mandala and in near-death experiences.

In the late eighties, Lorna told her son that she intended to give up ownership of Le Plan, and help turn it into a permanent New Age center. As Nick Ayer put it, St. Aubyn would be "disinherited for a bunch of loons—for her cat, almost." St. Aubyn was appalled; he spent much of his time in France, and wrote there, and felt that his sanity depended on access to the landscape. "I said, 'This is my home—go and do it somewhere else,'" he recalled. "And she said no, and I fought and fought and fought." It was a betrayal and an indignity: his own pursuit of self-knowledge would be thwarted by a New Age parody of that idea. And his mother couldn't see the irony in this plight, while he was built out of irony. (Patrick, referring back to the lizard on the wall, defines irony as "that deep-down need to mean two things at once, to be in two places at once, not to be there for the catastrophe of a fixed meaning.") St. Aubyn now regards her behavior as a reënactment of her own disinheritance: "She was sleepwalking her way through a repetition syndrome, while thinking she was going to raise the world's consciousness and inaugurate the Aquarian age, and there would never be any more war, or hatred, or challenging novels."

In the mid-nineties, Lorna offered to sell him Le Plan, and he recognized the sympathy in that act. He had then just sold his Kensington house, in order to acquire a larger place in Notting Hill. He never moved in, and instead sold it to pay for Le Plan; his mother, in association with an expert in Holotropic Breathwork and fire-walking, moved to Ireland to establish a shamanistic center. St. Aubyn knew that the cost of running Le Plan would make living there unsustainable, unless—against all indications—his mother decided to leave him some money rather than give it all to her cause. "You'll regret it," she said of his decision to take over the property. "But I didn't," St. Aubyn told me.

He knocked together two of the cottages to make a space that he considered a perfect "writing machine." In the mornings, he took his notebook to the Mediterranean, five miles away, and moved from café to café. Here, in the late nineties, he wrote two non-Melrose novels. "On the Edge" satirizes Californian New Age foolishness in a snail-squashing way, but allows a troubled Englishman to find a path to a bespoke form of

enlightenment, which includes Tantric sex. "A Clue to the Exit" is more striking, and resets Melrosian questions about consciousness and agency in a neurological context: a screenwriter tries to write a serious novel after being told that he'll die of liver disease within six months.

Early in the new century, St. Aubyn began working on a novel that he was slow to recognize as a continuation of the Melrose series. His protagonist was initially named Mark; St. Aubyn has described performing a global search-and-replace on his draft that introduced such typos as "super-Patricket." In what became "Mother's Milk," Patrick, now married, is beset by parental worry, and, at the beach, by drunken lust: "Oh, God, why was life so badly organized? Why couldn't he just hoist her onto a hot car bonnet and tear off that turquoise excuse for a bikini bottom? She wanted it, he wanted it. Well, anyway, he wanted it." In dispute with a rashly philanthropic and ailing mother, Patrick makes weary fun of her New Age comrades as well as his children's nanny and some British acquaintances vacationing in Saint-Tropez. This mockery is sometimes awkward: the novel doesn't quite vouch for Patrick's scorn, but the absurdity of his victims is a given. The Saint-Tropez household is out of Roald Dahl: a woman blathers to her personal chef in awful French while her fat and stupid son watches a cartoon and munches vacantly on cheese puffs. Such moments verge on the "snobbery of contempt." When asked about this, St. Aubyn said that he could hear a cruelty in the voice of the first three books but not in "Mother's Milk." "If I write about a three-year-old child, the fact that he hasn't read the Iliad isn't unkind, on my part," he said.

St. Aubyn was by then a father. In 1994, he had a daughter with Alexandra Marr, a girlfriend; they named her Eleanor, in oblique recognition of Lorna St. Aubyn, at a time when Edward was on relatively good terms with her. A few years later, after a tabloid interlude when Jerry Hall was accompanied to an event or two by an obscure novelist with a troubled history—"JERRY'S TEDDY BOY"—St. Aubyn had a son with his partner, Jane Longman, a painter who had posed several times for Lucian Freud, and whose mother was a bridesmaid at the Queen's wedding. She and St. Aubyn lived together at Le Plan. Later, in London, no longer a couple, they became near-neighbors and friendly co-parents who share vacations. They named their son Lucian.

Oliver James said that St. Aubyn, by his thirties, had lost much of his social acerbity, and was further declawed by fatherhood. (Years ago, St. Aubyn acknowledged that there was a period when he was a "monster of snobbery," but, when I asked about his former reputation for unkindness, he took the question to be about unrestrained infidelity, which he acknowledged, while rephrasing the idea as people "getting burnt" around him. He then placed his wit and generosity on the other side of the scale.) St. Aubyn described his children as "extraordinarily impressive human beings—they're funny and they're interested in education, and they're open-hearted." He said, "The art of bringing up my children has been checking the extent to which I'm projecting my own anxiety or paranoia onto them," adding, "I can be firm, but it takes a long time. I go through a thoroughly democratic process. The imperative tense is a long time coming."

When Lucian was seven, he came across a journalist who was waiting, in his mother's apartment, to interview his father. When the journalist asked for advice, Lucian said something slightly eerie: "Don't try to be clever. Just be clever." Nick Ayer, recalling a recent encounter with father and son, in the South of France, gave me a gently amused description of Lucian's rather formal attire, noting, "Maybe there are things from one's childhood we cannot escape. And dressing up like a real English gentleman on a beach is one of those things."

St. Aubyn's quiet, carpeted living room runs through the parlor floor of his house. At the back, there's a daybed, and other furniture that looks like it was held onto, rather than bought, and two handsome twentieth-century paintings: one depicting an alley, the other rooftops.

Talking there one afternoon, in front of a window that looks out over the communal garden, St. Aubyn described how, at eight, he resisted his father in a hotel bedroom, when they were on "some sort of faux expedition" together. There was, he said, a David-and-Goliath moment. "I thought, He'll probably kill me but I can't.... I'm going to stop him if I can." He imitated a small boy in a boxer's pose, and laughed. He recalled saying a single phrase: "I don't want to do that anymore." His father "collapsed," he said.

Around this time, his parents were divorcing. "That's probably part of what gave me the courage to do it," St. Aubyn said. After the breakup, St. Aubyn, now a "delinquent and illiterate" schoolboy in

"They buy one cup of coffee and then sit there for aeons."

"We're all together watching television, but we're not all watching television together."

London, was expected to interrupt his Provençal vacations with long visits to his father's house, whose only windows faced inward, into a courtyard choked with weeds. "It was fucking spooky," St. Aubyn said. "Poverty and dereliction, and self-neglect, and nobody ever visiting. My father was too depressed to speak, a lot of the time, and if he did he talked about suicide. In a way, he was showing me what I'd done to him, by refusing to continue to be abused. He was reproaching me, saying, 'Look what you've reduced me to—from being this master sadist I'm now this ruin.'"

St. Aubyn glanced at the paintings, on facing walls, which were by Loren MacIver, a New York painter who was married to a poet named Lloyd Frankenberg. They wore berets and lived on Perry Street. Roger St. Aubyn knew MacIver, who had stayed with the family in France. A few years after Frankenberg's death, in the mid-seventies, Roger heard that MacIver was suicidally unhappy; she had stopped painting and was drinking wine from gallon jugs. "And he said, 'I'm going to go to New York, and I'm going to get Loren to paint again,'" St. Aubyn recalled. "And he got out of bed, and shaved, and bought a ticket to New York. He had a project. And this is what was so interesting about him. He was the most destructive person I've ever met—he had a small canvas to work with, but he was as destructive as he could be. If he'd been given Cambodia, or China, I'm sure he would have done *sterling* work. But he was also a brilliant musician, and a man with a powerful mind, and someone who could make things, and could help people in the most extraordinary way. And he flew to New York, and he went in and he did his thing: the other side of him. She was a wreck. She said, 'O.K., I will paint if you play the piano.'" Roger hadn't played for years. His hands had begun to curl up from Dupuytren's contracture—his son now has the same problem—and he had rheumatism. "It was very painful for him to play, but he had this weird relationship with pain, you know," St. Aubyn said. "He'd play for six hours, and she would paint. And then Pierre Matisse gave her an exhibition." His father "resurrected her," he said. The painting of rooftops was in that exhibition.

At dusk, St. Aubyn closed the shutters and snapped down their metal bars. I asked him if he could show me a photograph of him as a boy; he said that he had none, although his sister had kept some.

In the Melrose series, St. Aubyn touches only occasionally on the period between Patrick's young childhood and his twenties. St. Aubyn has not described Patrick in class (or David Melrose on Perry Street). I asked St. Aubyn if he might ever write about his alter ego's student years—a stage in life that he once considered to have been over-mined by coming-of-age fiction. He acknowledged that, when he talked with me about his adolescence, he felt he was "giving away" material that he might later want to deploy. "There are things to be discovered," he said, adding that he was "certainly not going to write another Melrose book for ages."

This reply was surprisingly far from no, but it seemed wrong to react with excitement—for fear of seeming blasé about St. Aubyn's welfare (the towels, the sweat) or unappreciative of the non-Melrose work. But it was cheering. The Melrose books make a literary virtue of self-absorption—to the extent that one even accepts, as part of the shading of Patrick's portrait, the way in which his young children are depicted as weird satellite Patricks. St. Aubyn has written beautifully from the vantage point of self-preserving self-regard, and habits of mind that might be weaknesses in other fiction—a lack of leniency, a certain unresponsiveness toward the world beyond one's world—become strengths. St. Aubyn's most compelling books are "Never Mind" and "At Last," which have the least dialogue, and the most Roger.

When St. Aubyn is not focussed on Patrick's struggle, his characterizations can devolve into mimicry. (Americans start sentences with "Oh, gee," or "Say, Fred.") "Lost for Words" is, at times, entertaining about what St. Aubyn calls the "poison of comparison," symbolized by a corrupt literary prize, but his story—which started as a broader farce, and was reshaped after discussions with his agent and editors—can seem more disengaged than carefree. When we met, he drew my attention to an idea that one character has about art's ability "to arrest our attention in the midst of distraction," but he had forgotten that the phrase was not his but Saul Bellow's.

There's also a question of courtesy. The 2006 Booker Prize was won by Kiran Desai, the Indian novelist. St. Aubyn was, effectively, the runner-up: I was told that "Mother's Milk" lost, four votes to one, when the judges met just before the ceremonial dinner. Most novelists, drafting a Booker satire a few years later, would not have included, as St. Aubyn does, an Indian woman whose book of old recipes gets onto a literary prize's shortlist by mistake. One can detect in this a hint of his father's contempt for bourgeois niceties.

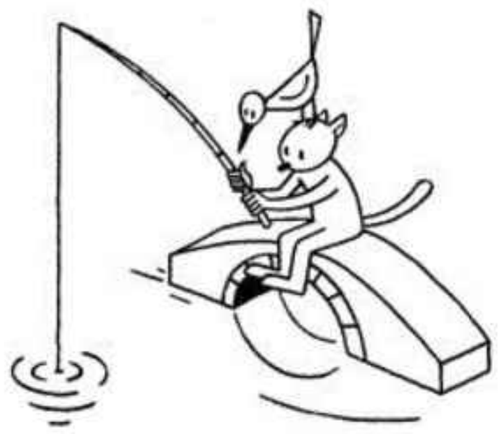
The year that he lost the Booker, St. Aubyn sold Le Plan to a "very nice and massively rich" French family that reminded him of characters in the Babar books. His mother had died, after a series of stokes, the previous year, between the delivery and the publication of a novel that described her physical and cognitive decline. She had no more money. St. Aubyn had by then given himself a few years to experience Le Plan through the eyes of his son. For Lucian, "it wasn't filled with these dark and complex meanings," he said. "He just thought it was completely fabulous, as indeed it was. You know, there were cherry trees and apricot trees with ladders leaning against them—you could climb up and have an apricot. And frogs, and a series of ponds, and goldfish, and water lilies: this little fiefdom, this hamlet, which took quite a long time for a small boy to walk around."

Alan Hollinghurst had visited Le Plan several times in previous years, and had written parts of "The Line of Beauty" there. Just before the property changed hands, he came to stay with St. Aubyn, and they went from building to building, deciding what should be added to a bonfire that burned for three weeks. As St. Aubyn recalled, "I'd be saying, 'Oh my God, I remember getting this suit!' There would be, of course, a story attached to everything. And I'd look at Alan, who'd say"—firm, low voice—"'Burn it.'" After a while, St. Aubyn skipped the anecdotes; Hollinghurst continued to say, "Burn it."

St. Aubyn moved back to London. He was living alone, in a house much smaller than the one he'd sold a few years earlier. "My study here is basically a big cupboard," he said. "It isn't quite the same as sitting under the plane trees." But there was a compensation: readers had finally caught up with St. Aubyn's project, and, as if settling an old debt, "Mother's Milk" became a best-seller in Britain. In America, St. Aubyn switched publishers, from Open City to Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

The novel that St. Aubyn then began, "At Last," registers his sense of accomplishment. Mourners gather for the funeral of Eleanor Melrose, whose American family is modelled closely on Lorna St. Aubyn's family. Someone says, "What is it now? Six generations with every single descendant, not just the eldest son, essentially idle." As Patrick also observes, the enormous wealth of Eleanor's family was never turned into political power or cultural monuments. Similarly, one can Google one's way across Lorna St. Aubyn's family tree and find little evidence of activity beyond astrology, horse-carriage driving, and an upmarket nail salon on West Broadway. If St. Aubyn's achievement is literary and psychiatric, it's also sociological: he got something done. In his living room, he described boyhood visits to see his grandfather, an alcoholic wreck, in the Jardins du Casino, in Monaco. "He'd be sitting in these beautiful suits which were only marred by the fact that he'd pissed himself," St. Aubyn said.

It took St. Aubyn five years to finish "At Last." In the novel, Patrick is separated from his wife, Mary, and their two children, and is living in a small apartment in London. It is a tightly structured story that wraps flashbacks inside flashbacks



and gives secondary characters new autonomy—a right to exist beyond the protagonist's peace of mind. Even Patrick seems ready to glimpse the humanity of fools. He reflects on a recent stay in rehab, and on the horror of his parents' marriage; he recalls his mother's account of his conception—in rape—and his new sense of how "she craved the extreme violence of David's presence" and "threw her son into the bargain." Near the end of the novel, at the party following his mother's funeral, Mary asks him if he'd like to eat supper with her and the children, and he declines. He flirts with a waitress with a long neck, and, at the start of the final chapter, he returns alone to his apartment, with her number in his pocket.

In 2009, in his closet-sized Notting Hill study, St. Aubyn had written his way to his present self—in its fundamentals, if not its details. The Melrose story had caught up with its author, who had no plan for an ending, and no archive of experience from which to draw. St. Aubyn was presented with the strange and extravagantly Romantic experience of deciding Patrick's fate and discovering his own, at the same time.

"The revelation was in the process of writing," he told me. "The liberation came from the revelation, which came from the writing. It was happening in real time."

Finishing a five-book series, St. Aubyn wanted equally to avoid an anticlimax and a miracle. As he wrote, he began to allow Patrick, sitting alone, to consider how the death of both parents could create a truce with his inheritance, if not quite the "acceptance, acceptance, acceptance" of Lorna St. Aubyn's ritual. When one of Eleanor's New Age friends calls Patrick, he shows her an unprecedented civility. Afterward, he opens himself up "to the feeling of utter helplessness and incoherence that he supposed he had spent his life trying to avoid," and finds that he is not dismembered by it. He thinks his way to a state that St. Aubyn has called "unconsoled": not consoled, but not inconsolable. Patrick phones Mary about supper.

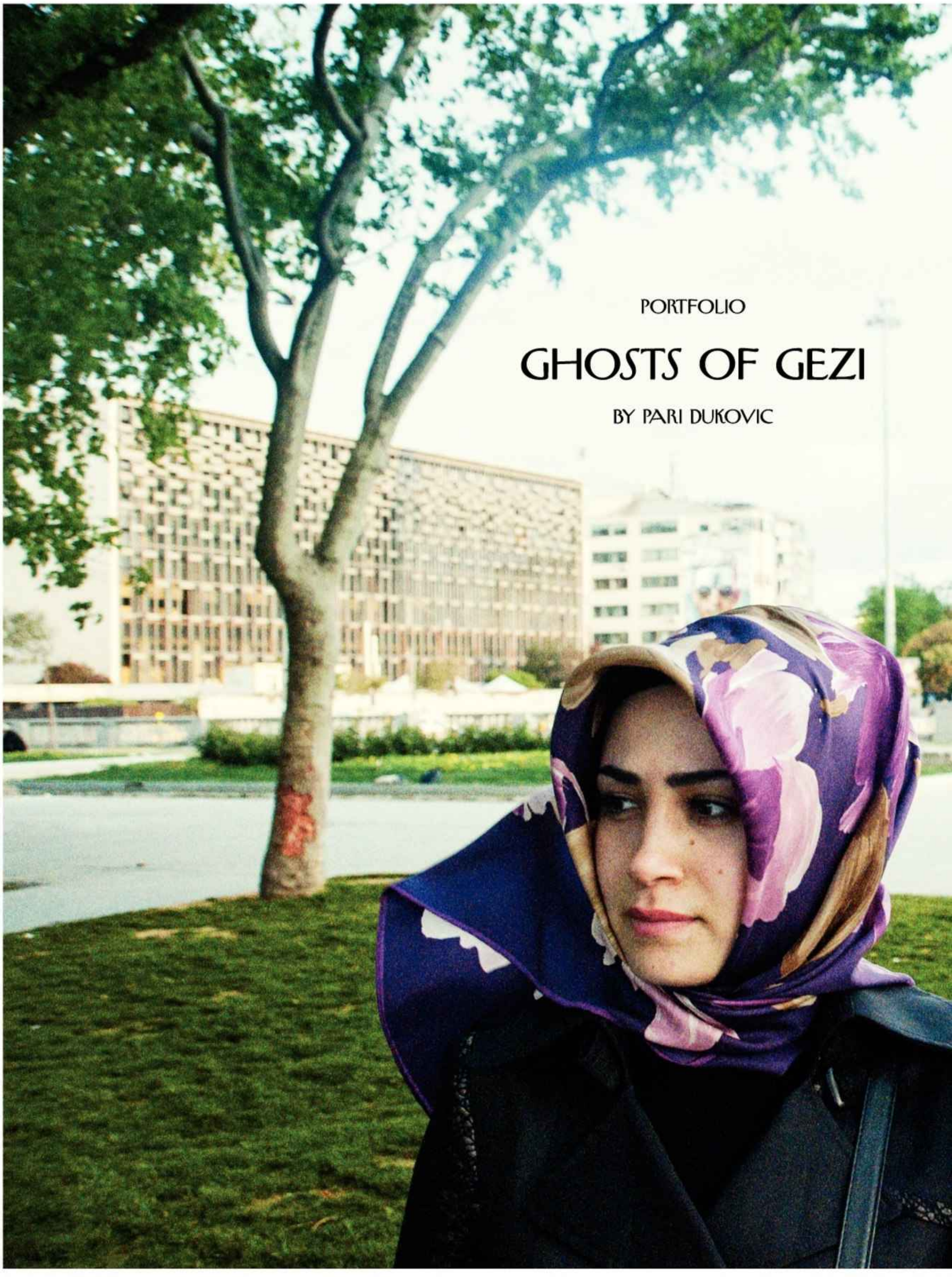
One could say: a sorrowful egomaniac deigns to eat with his children. Or one could say, as St. Aubyn put it, that the books trace Patrick Melrose's attempt to emerge "with dignity from an impossible assault on dignity." Certainly, it was a happier ending than St. Aubyn was expecting. "There were tears streaming down my cheeks," he said. "It was amazing to me."

Written words are fixed, he said; a state of mind is not. But, for St. Aubyn, the conclusion has not come to feel false or wishful. It was, for him, "the deepest moment of authenticity so far, which I can very easily betray by becoming distracted, by becoming caught up in some game." He continued, "But I know it's there, and, at my best, that's where I would be." ♦

PORTFOLIO

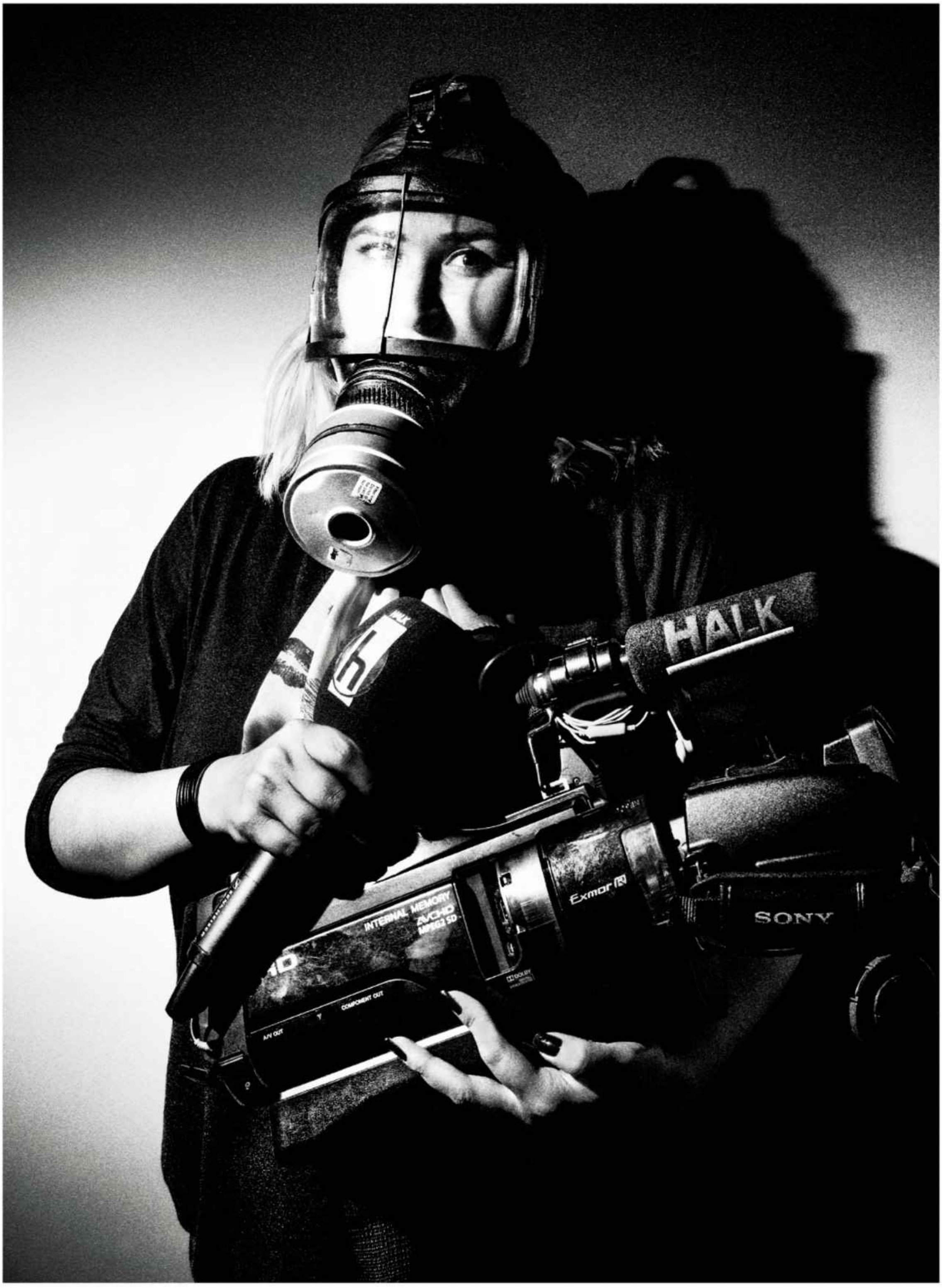
GHOSTS OF GEZI

BY PARI DUKOVIC



Hülya Şahin Alp and Fatma Şen were among the openly pious Muslims who protested in Istanbul's Gezi Park last year. The protests, which

began on May 28th to block a development project, grew into a fractious national expression of political discontent. Turkey remains divided.



Halk TV's Makbule Cengiz was one of the first Turkish television reporters in Gezi Park. Her network, affiliated with an opposition party, gained many viewers—and was fined by the state for "harming the physical, moral, and mental development of children."

There was the crassness of the idea: to build a kitschy shopping mall in a reconstituted Ottoman military barracks, in the middle of Istanbul's treasured Gezi Park. There was the whiff of cronyism in it, too. There was the obstinate micromanagement from the office of the Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who appeared unable to fathom that people might not want a kitschy shopping mall instead of a park. (His reaction to a national-heritage board that rejected the plan was typical: "I reject your rejection.") Then, there were those initial days when a handful of people tried to prevent earthmoving equipment from uprooting Gezi's sycamores. There was the courageous member of parliament who threw himself in front of the machines, and the tent city that sprang up to house protesters who refused to leave. Eventually, as might be expected, the police came, with pepper spray and fire and truncheons, beating and blasting people and burning down tents. As the protesters grew in number, to more than two million across the country, the police swarmed, shooting more than a hundred thousand cannisters of tear gas—at times directly at people, like bullets. Police roamed Istanbul in boxy white trucks armed with water cannons. They had little time for food or sleep, and in their exhaustion they argued over their tactics, which ultimately caused thousands of injuries and half a dozen deaths. Soon enough, the excessive force became a far more urgent object of protest. The atmosphere grew more intense, but there were moments of release: ballroom dancing in Taksim Square, communal feasts, fireworks, street theatre. An artist stood at attention for eight hours, and hundreds of people emulated him. Istanbul's governor announced to the protesters, "I wish I were among you," even as he was clearly assisting the police effort. Soccer fans built barricades from urban debris. Journalists were everywhere and nowhere. During the initial violence, CNN Türk aired a documentary about penguins—an act of self-censorship that further fuelled the demonstrations, as people believed their grievances and their hopes were being written out of existence. And for more than two weeks in May and June the country seemed to be engulfed in unrest.

A year later, the fight for Gezi still looms over Turkish politics. The public discontent has not ebbed. Neither have the autocratic state reflexes or the conviction of Erdoğan's supporters. Last winter, there was news of secret wiretap recordings—apparently of Erdoğan, his son, and members of his inner circle, all of them implicated in corruption. Homes were searched, and people were arrested. Erdoğan called the recordings a fabrication, and responded with a lecture: "Listening to my phone is forbidden." He launched a self-acknowledged "witch hunt," in which thousands of government employees were reassigned. He banned Twitter. He banned YouTube. He unbanned Twitter, under court order, then interfered with its service. There were more demonstrations. And in March the spectre of Gezi returned: a fifteen-year-old boy named Berkin Elvan, who had been shot in the head with a cannister of tear gas, died, after two hundred and sixty-nine days in a coma. His parents said that he was going out to buy bread the morning he was shot. Erdoğan, unmoved, insisted that he was a terrorist, "hurling steel marbles with the slingshot in his hand." On Mother's Day, Erdoğan added another detail, that the boy had explosives in his pocket: "Who would go to buy bread with a mask, a slingshot, and explosives?" At the funeral, people held loaves of bread in Elvan's memory. Some were arrested.

It wasn't so long ago that Erdoğan was a different kind of politician. In the nineteen-nineties, as mayor of Istanbul, he spoke of "unity and tolerance." He was a moderate Islamist—a minority position in a country whose leaders seek to impose majority rule, often absolutely. For decades, a secularist Old Guard in the tradition of Kemal Atatürk owned the winner-take-all arena of Turkish politics; the Army monitored and disciplined elected leaders, orchestrating coups when they strayed. Erdoğan understood what it meant to be on the blunt end of that kind of power. In 1999, after publicly quoting a line of poetry—"the mosques are our barracks / the domes our helmets / the minarets our bayonets / and the faithful our soldiers"—he was imprisoned for inciting "religious hatred." His jail time was brief, four months, but the sense of victimhood never dissipated. Before he was taken away, tens of thousands of protesters turned up at his Istanbul office, and he promised them, "We will have justice and human rights one day."

As Prime Minister, Erdoğan has transformed Turkey. He smashed the Army's corrupting role in politics. He initiated a peace process with the P.K.K., the Kurdish militant group that fought the state for decades. He advanced free expression, helped pass universal health care, and abolished the final vestiges of the death penalty. Then the Prime Minister's office began to transform Erdoğan. He became intolerant of dissent, and cultivated a climate of fear; Turkey now imprisons more journalists than any other country. He built patronage networks, enmeshing politics and business to augment his influence. And, just as Atatürk once banned the fez, he and his party, in small ways, have attempted to dictate private habits: limiting the sale of alcohol, urging women to have more children, expressing displeasure with public kissing. The Turkish constitution is a relic of an old junta; along with needed reforms, Erdoğan has advocated an "executive Presidency," an office that he no doubt wants to fill. If power in Turkey once served a brittle statist ideology, it now appears to serve a personal agenda: Erdoğan's rule. Feeding on his animosity during the Gezi protests, his followers begged for permission to "crush" the citizens encamped at the park. "Let us go!" they demanded at a rally, chanting, "Minority, do not be confused, do not test our patience."

The protests, in the truest sense, were about undoing the logic of majority domination. For many Turks, Erdoğan—with his street-tough manner, his white-hot temper, and his baroque political conspiracies (where all opponents are secretly plotting treason)—has extended that logic to the point of tragicomic caricature. Two weeks ago, when hundreds of miners perished near the town of Soma, Erdoğan rushed to the scene, and offered a bizarrely defensive lecture—as if the deaths were a personal affront. Protesters called him a murderer. They kicked his car. Erdoğan, in turn, called them immoral and impertinent. Policemen pinned a relative of one of the deceased to the ground, and a senior Erdoğan adviser ran over to kick him. Erdoğan was mobbed. "If you boo the country's Prime Minister, you get slapped," he warned. At a supermarket, his guards pushed people away, and, amid the chaos, Erdoğan lashed out and hit a man in the crowd.

—Raffi Khatchadourian

One icon of the protests was "the woman in red"—an academic who stood her ground while police a few feet away blasted her with pepper spray. Recently, a woman in a red dress twirled like a Sufi in Taksim Square, until police intervened.

Sami Elvan visits the grave of his son, who was shot in the head with a cannister of tear gas. Investigations into the death are moving slowly. On CNN Türk, he appealed to Erdoğan: "If he wants, he can find the murderer of my son in one hour."

ILLUSTRATION BY LESLIE HERMAN

For a long time they do nothing but hide and wait. Very little light creeps in under the pantry's double doors. Brooks examines the cans on the shelf level with his head: beans, corn, soup. This pantry does not belong to him—or to his sister Mary. They are in someone else's home. Mary has her eye pressed to the door crack.

"Do you have to breathe so loud?" she asks. "I'm trying to listen."

The pantry is small but not coffin-small, not so small that Brooks can't stretch his arms wide like a—well, like a what, exactly? Like a scarecrow on a pole. O.K., a scarecrow, sure, but where did that image come from? From the muck of the way back when, no doubt. "Your long-term memory seems to be hunky-dory," Dr. Groom has told Brooks more than once, jubilantly.

Sure enough, a student theatre production from almost thirty years ago bubbles up fresh, unbattered: the out-of-tune piano at the end of the stage, the hard crusts of chewing gum under the seats in the auditorium, the flattened cereal boxes cut into rectangles and painted to look like a road of yellow bricks. Fourteen years old, Brooks nearly landed the coveted Scarecrow role in "The Wizard of Oz," coveted because of the beautiful blond-haired fifteen-year-old playing Dorothy Gale, a girl who later, according to three Munchkins, gave it up to the Tin Man in the janitor's closet. It might have been Brooks she gave it up to if he hadn't screwed up in auditions and been cast instead as a member of the dreaded Lollipop Guild.

"If I only had a brain," Brooks sings.

"That's not funny," Mary says and looks over at him. "I really wish you wouldn't say things like that. It's upsetting."

Say things like what? Oh, the bit about the brain. Brooks gets it now, why he's thinking about the mindless scarecrow after all these years. Somewhere up in his head is the Old Brooks, that asshole, and he's poking fun at this moodier, slower version of himself. "If *you* only had a brain," Old Brooks is singing, a malicious smile on his chubbier face, his brown hair combed over neatly, not cropped short with scabby scars across the scalp.

"You might feel irrationally angry sometimes," Dr. Groom has said. If he's feeling agitated, Brooks is supposed to ask himself why, to interrogate his agitation, but, God, does he want to punch something right now, anything, the angel-hair-pasta boxes or the cracked-pepper crackers, the clementines or the canned chickpeas, so many chickpeas, a lifetime's supply of chickpeas. He could punch the peas into a mash and lick his knuckles clean. Brooks has lost all sense of how long they've been hiding in this pantry. He plops down onto a lumpy dog-food bag beside his sister.

"I don't hear them anymore," Mary says. "They might be upstairs. Maybe they're asleep."

Brooks nods, then lets his eyebrows scrunch. He can feel his sister studying him.

"Have you forgotten why we're in here?" Mary asks. "Have you forgotten about the dogs?"

The events of the afternoon have been disassembled and constellated in his memory: a turkey sandwich, his sister's Taurus, a small brass key from under a mat, a tiled kitchen floor, two snarling dogs. It's like standing inches away from a stippled drawing and being asked to name the subject. And the artist.

Mary gives him one of her pity smiles, where her upper lip mushrooms around her bottom lip, consumes it. She is a compact, muscular woman, still a girl really, with a body for the tennis court, not the sort of person you could knock over easily.

The dog-food pebbles crunch under his sharp butt bones when he shifts. He's lost weight, probably twenty pounds since the accident. Brooks doesn't remember anything from that night, but according to the police (via his mother) he was alone at the time, unloading groceries from the back of his car on the street in front of his town house. Someone smashed the left side of his head with a brick. A brick! The police found it in some bushes down the street, along with bits of Brooks's skull. The assailant took the car (which still hasn't been recovered and probably never will be) and his wallet. "A random act of violence," his mother called it. "A totally senseless thing." Unnecessary qualifiers, he sometimes wants to tell her, as the universe is inherently a random and senseless place.

"I need to go," he says.

"We can't."

"Go, as in pee."

"Right," Mary says. "Of course. I'm sorry. Let's just give it a few more minutes. Just to be safe. The last thing we need is to go out there and get bitten."

He squirms.

"Here," she says and offers him a third-full bottle of organic olive oil. "You can pee in this."

You can pee in this. Mary feels like one of the nurses. Brooks is staying with her for a month, while their mother is away, and that means she is responsible for his meals, for his entertainment, for getting him to all his appointments.

Yesterday they had to wait forty-five minutes for the doctor to return to the examining room. Brooks was a broken record while they waited: "Pencil box screen door pencil box screen door." Dr. Groom was to blame for this. One of his memory games. The doctor often began his checkups by listing a random series of words for Brooks to repeat later, on command, a test of his short-term memory. Before leaving, their mother had warned that Brooks might attempt to scribble the words on his hand when the doctor wasn't looking. Brooks, their mother had explained, wanted his independence back almost as much as they wanted to give it to him. But that wasn't possible yet. He still had what she called "little blips." He could be coherent and normal one minute and the next . . . well.

"Pencil box screen door pencil box . . ."

"You don't have to remember it anymore," she said. "The doctor already asked you, and you got it right. You already won that game."

That didn't stop him. He hammered each syllable hard, except for the last one, door, to which he added at least three extra breathy "o"s. He oooooohed it the way a ghost or a shaman might. Maybe he is a shaman. Who can say. What the doctors call hallucinations and delusions—maybe they are something else entirely. Mary read an article somewhere online explaining that people with brain injuries sometimes report unusual and even psychic side effects. There was a stroke victim who said he could read a book and be there—actually be *in the book*, tasting the food, smelling the air. A teen-ager in a car accident lost his sense of taste but said he could feel other people's emotions. It had something to do with unlocking previously unused parts of the brain.

Watching her brother clumsily tap his fingers on the shiny metal table, Mary

"Which one of us is me?"

• •

wondered if it was possible he was in communication with something larger than both of them: a cosmic force, the angels, Frank Sinatra, anything. She doubted it. Her poor brother could barely button his shirt. And as for those words, the skipping record, maybe he'd fallen into some sort of terrible neural-feedback loop. He seemed to be saying it involuntarily now.

She was ashamed by how much she wanted to slap her brother. Her whole life, Brooks had been the one looking after her—and so what right did she have to be irritated now? When things got rough with her boyfriend after college, it was Brooks who drove all the way down to Atlanta and helped her pack her things. It was Brooks who defended her to their mother when she quit her job with the real-estate company. It was Brooks who wrote her a check to buy the Pop-Yop, her soft-serve franchise.

She worried that it would never be that way between them again, that the balance had forever shifted, and then she felt selfish for worrying about such a thing. Brooks needed her. It was her turn.

"Your pants, Brooks," she said and handed him his khakis.

He stood there beside the exam table in white underwear and a wrinkled blue shirt, holding the khakis out in front of him like an unwanted gift. Mary was supposed to have ironed his shirt for him before they left the house that morning, and that she hadn't fulfilled this duty was obviously a source of some anxiety for her big brother. He could no longer tolerate creases—in clothes, in paper, in anything. Watching him step into his pant legs, she thought he might bring up that morning's ironing debacle again, but he tucked in the shirt and zipped his pants without comment.

His crease-intolerance was one of many changes that had come with the accident. A longtime smoker, he now said that smoke made him feel sick. He had a closet full of dark clothes that these days he deemed depressing. In fact, his new favorite article of clothing was a tight, bright-pink-and-purple sweater that Mary wouldn't let him wear outside the house, because it wasn't his but their mother's.

When, finally, Dr. Groom came back, Mary stayed seated in her little plastic chair, eying all the instruments, the cotton swabs and the tongue depressors in the glass jars, the inflatable cuff of the blood-pressure device. The bigger, more impressive machinery was somewhere else, in another building. The nurses had trouble keeping Brooks still in those machines. Apparently, he got antsy.

"Pencil box screen door," Brooks blurted, all trace of shaman gone from his voice.

"Very good, Mr. Yard," the doctor said and then leaned back against the table to explain the scans, how they were looking good, better than expected, given the nature of the accident and Brooks's age, which was forty-four. Of course, he said, it wasn't all about the scans. The scans wouldn't show any shearing or stretching, for instance. But Brooks was doing well, that was the bottom line. He wasn't slurring his words. His headaches were less frequent. Even his short-term memory was showing signs of improvement. A fuller recovery, the doctor said, might very well be possible.

Brooks is not sure how possible it will be to pee, cleanly, into a third-full bottle of organic extra-virgin olive oil, especially given the tiny circumference of its plastic top. The tip of his penis will not fit into that hole. The bottle is a little slippery. He pops off the black top that controls the outward flow of the oil and hands that to Mary. He turns away from her and unzips.

"I've got this can of Pirouette cookies ready if you run out of bottle," Mary says.

"I just need you to be quiet." He concentrates—or doesn't. What's required is the absence of concentration. That should be easy, shouldn't it? He's a pro at that now. He sees a yellow brick road. The urine comes in splashy spurts at first and then streams steadily. The bottle warms. The urine pools in a layer above the olive oil, all of it yellow. Thankfully, he doesn't need the cookie tin for overflow. Mary hands him the top when he asks for it and tells him job well done.

Bottle plugged, they decide to store it under the lowest shelf, out of sight for now. He plops back down onto the dog-food bags. If he had to, he could sleep like this. He checks his wristwatch with the shiny alligator-leather strap, a gift from a long-ago girlfriend. Which girlfriend, he couldn't say.

"We've been in here for an hour," Mary says. She stands and peers again through the crack in the double doors. "Maybe we should just go for it. I don't see the dogs."

Her left eye still at the crack, she crouches down for a new angle on the outside world, her small hands on either side of the white door for balance.

"Let me," Brooks says, rising. He grabs the brass knob near her left temple, and Mary slides away to let him pass. He emerges from the pantry. To his right, through another doorway, he can see a kitchen with a high white ceiling and recessed lights. To his left, a long unfamiliar hallway unfolds, hardwood floors with wide dark-red planks, at the end of which an imposing grandfather clock ticks.

"Not that way," Mary says when he starts down the hall.

He hears a distant clacking of nails, a jangling of collars. Never has such a tinkly sound seemed so ominous. Mary is behind

him now, tugging at his shirt, his arms, pulling him back into the sepulchre of the pantry. The dogs are approaching, their stampede echoing down the hallway. When his back collides with the food shelves, two fat cans drop and roll at his feet. Mary pulls the doors shut again. Seconds later, the dogs galunk into them. Their bulky, invisible weight shakes the flimsy wood so hard Brooks wonders if the hinges might pop. Mary holds the brass knobs tight, as if worried that the dogs are capable of turning knobs. The dogs growl. It's hard to think straight over that noise.

"I'm sorry," she says. "I shouldn't have let you go out there. That was dumb of me."

"What are they, exactly? What breed?"

"Rottweilers? Dobermans? I don't know what they are, but they're freaking huge. Biggest dogs I've ever seen. Genetically modified, maybe. Wynn would do that. Order a bunch of genetically modified military dogs. That would be so him. There are two of them, Baba and Bebe. Wait, let me try something. I think I just remembered it." The dogs are still clawing at the pantry doors. She sticks her lips to the crack and says, "Baba Beluga." The dogs don't stop their attack. "Bebe, Baba, Baba O'Riley. It's something like that."

"What is?"

"The safe command. Oh, Goosie, I'm sorry I got you into this."

Goosie. When was the last time she called him that? Back at his town house, in the drawer to the right of the stove (his mind still has *that* power at least, the power to conjure up images, to see things that aren't directly in front of him), he must have a hundred thank-you cards addressed to Goosie. Thank-yous for the loan, the money that helped her buy the soft-serve place that she had, until then, only managed. The golden egg, she called his loan. Him, the goosie.

"The safe command will make them docile," she says.

"Remind me again who Wynn is to you?" he asks.

"A friend," she says quickly. "He's out of town for a few days, and I agreed to feed his dogs and bring in the mail. He gave me the safe command before he left. I should have written it down."

"Could have just told me. I would have remembered."

She smiles.

"Let's just call someone for help," Brooks says.

"I would if I could. My cell is out in the car."

Brooks fishes around in his pockets.

"Yours is in the car, too," she says.

"Well, that's bad luck. What should we do now?"

"When they settle down again, we'll go together. There's a door in the kitchen. That's, what, like, thirty feet from here?"

Brooks isn't sure but nods. The dogs are no longer scrabbling at the doors but whining. They walk in circles, with clicking nails, outside. Mary reaches over Brooks's shoulder for a bag of pistachios. She rips open the plastic at the top and offers him some. "We missed breakfast," she says.

He doesn't want any nuts. He sits down on the dog food again, his head back against a shelf. His medication can make him groggy. He needs to rest his eyes.

He is halfway in a dream when Mary announces that it's time for another attempt to escape. The dream is about fishhooks. Well, not *about* fishhooks, but it involves them. He is looking for one in the bottom of a tackle box. Brooks hasn't gone fishing in more than a year, probably not since his last trip to Nicaragua. His company, which he started with a friend a decade ago, manufactures medical devices and has a factory outside Managua. The last time he was down there, Brooks took a few extra days and chartered a deep-sea-fishing boat out of San Juan del Sur. He caught a striped marlin, though it was the captain who did the hard work, setting up the rod, finding the right spot. All Brooks did was wait and take orders, reel when the captain yelled to reel. Going deep-sea fishing is, actually, kind of like how he lives now. Sure, he can fry a few eggs, but only if there is someone there to help him, to keep him on task, to clean up the mess when his hands fail him, to calm him down when he loses his temper, to reel him in.

"You have gunk on your face," Mary says and wipes it away with a wet thumb. "I think it's old soy sauce."

"Are you sure we should go for it again?" he asks. "How long will the owners be away? We could survive in here for days."

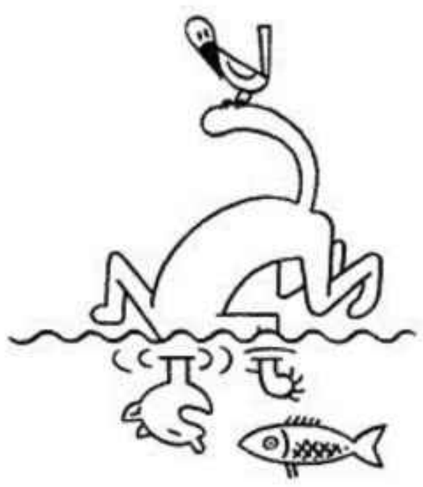
"No," she says. "I got us into this mess. I'll get us out."

Brooks knows this is the truth, that his sister is to blame, but he can't let go of the feeling that he should be masterminding the escape. After all, he's the big brother. He's always taken care of her. That's just how it is. His former self, the Old Brooks, up there somewhere, would know exactly what to do in this situation. Old Brooks sees a solution, surely, but he's keeping quiet about it. He's enjoying all this confusion. "Try not to think about who you were *before* the accident," Dr. Groom has said, "and concentrate instead on who you want to be now. Accept the new you." Sometimes Brooks wants to toss Dr. Groom out the window.

Mary opens the pantry doors. She doesn't see the dogs. If only she had poison. She imagines Wynn coming home and finding both dogs dead. She imagines him cradling their bodies and weeping. No, Wynn wouldn't weep. He'd probably just buy two more dogs, recycle the names, and move on with his life. Mary has never killed an animal as big as a dog. She veered her car in order to hit a squirrel once and regretted it for two days.

She makes it a few steps into the kitchen before realizing that Brooks has fallen behind. He has stopped at the fridge. Photos and appointment cards are stuck to the front of it with magnets. He's looking at a Polaroid, one she can see—of two children, a tiny girl and an older boy, on a seesaw. Across the bottom someone has written "What goes up . . ."

She waves at him to get his attention. At least forty feet of tiled floor separate them from the back door. She considers sprinting for it, but they haven't discussed that as the plan, and she doesn't want to surprise Brooks. She takes two steps, then two more. It's when she reaches the entrance to the living room that she sees them in there, twenty feet away, the dogs, heads low, tails stiff, coarse black fur mohawked up along their backs. Is it possible that the dogs have set an elaborate trap for them?



"What's wrong?" he asks, far too loud.

The dogs growl. Their heads drop even lower.

"Baa baa black sheep," Mary whispers. "Bibi Netanyahu." Maybe Wynn has changed the password. She hates him now more than ever. Her friends warned her about him. They'd heard strange things about him. Perverted things. According to

a guy who used to work with him, he cheated on his wife constantly. He'd been with a hundred women. Probably his dick was contaminated, they said. At least make him wear a condom, they said.

Brooks can't see the dogs, but he hears them now. His sister inches backward. He could probably make it to the pantry in time. But not Mary. He looks around the room for something that might help them. He sees the cordless phone on the wall behind him. Mary could call her friend for the safe command, and all this would be over.

"Top of the fridge," he whispers.

"What?" She sneaks a look over her right shoulder.

Brooks leans back for the phone as Mary lunges for the fridge. When he turns, she's trying to use the ice dispenser as a foothold. The freezer door swings open. She slams it shut and scrambles up onto the soapstone counter. From there she pulls herself up onto the fridge. Brooks is not far behind her. Phone in hand, he flings himself onto the counter, belly first. He feels like a spider with all its legs ripped out. He's having trouble getting up onto his knees. He reaches for a cabinet knob. One of the dogs locks onto his ankle, and he screams. He writhes, swinging the phone back and forth. When the phone connects with the dog's head, he loses his grip on it and it goes clattering to the floor. But he's free now. He's able to clamber up beside his sister.

The top of the fridge is covered in dust. They have to crouch to avoid hitting their heads on the ceiling.

"You're bleeding," Mary says, bending down to his ankle.

"Don't bother with it now." He looks down at the dogs, at their giant stinking faces. One dog is on the floor whimpering, and the other is pogoing up and down the front of the fridge, knocking loose all the photos and appointment cards. Its back paws come down on the phone and launch it sideways.

"I dropped it," Brooks says. "The phone. Sorry. We could have called your friend."

Mary is prodding at his ankle unscientifically. "Don't worry about it. That wouldn't have worked anyway."

"Why, he's out of the country or something?"

"Well—"

"He doesn't know we're here," Brooks says.

His sister looks at him as if she were the one with the dog bite.

The night Wynn first brought out his video camera they were in Myrtle Beach, at his family's vacation home. Mary listened to the waves through the open window as Wynn fiddled with a tape. Wynn with his blue eyes, the perfect gray streak in his long, windswept hair, the difficult marriage to his crazy pediatrician wife, who was hardly ever around. Then he told her to start playing with herself. Already she could anticipate the regret. Maybe that was part of the fun.

Did she enjoy making the video? A little bit, sure. For the newness of it. But not for the sex itself. It didn't even feel much like sex to her. It was like something else. She was a planet, way out in space, out of its orbit, and he was an unmanned spaceship, taking measurements of the atmosphere. She was not suitable for habitation. The pillowcases smelled like potato chips and sweat. She wondered if he'd even washed the sheets, if maybe this was one of the kids' bedrooms. He smacked her bottom, and she almost laughed. It wasn't risqué, it was silly.

She broke off the affair a few weeks later, when he proposed a new video, this one in his bathroom at home. His wife was at work and the kids were at school. He already had the camera out.

"Do you ever watch these later?" she asked.

"Not really," he said. "It's not about that. Making them is what's fun. It is fun, isn't it?"

She was in a white towel, examining the shower. There was blond hair trapped in the drain. His wife's, no doubt. One of the drawers under the sink was halfway open, and she could see cotton swabs and a box of tampons. She opened the medicine cabinet and found three different kinds of antidepressants.

"Not mine," he said. "Let's start with you in the shower. You ready?"

She slipped back into her underwear and told him it was over.

"I don't understand," he said.

"I want the tape," she said. "From the beach."

"I erased it. I always tape over them."

She left him half naked in the bathroom. Later, she wondered if she might have got the tape from him then if she'd only been a little more persistent. She thought about it constantly. At work, ringing people up, she lost track of the numbers. She spilled a box of rainbow sprinkles, and what should have been a ten-minute cleanup took her almost thirty.

"You've got to get that tape," her friends said. "What if he puts it online?"

Online! She started visiting pornography sites, just in case. There were so many categories of sex. She couldn't believe all the categories: Mature, POV, MILF, Amateur, Ex-Girlfriend. How might Wynn have categorized her?

She called him and demanded the tape.

"I already told you," he said. "It doesn't exist anymore."

"I'll call the cops."

"Listen, if I had it I'd give it to you, but I don't. You can't just call me like this. I'm at work."

She imagined a locked desk drawer in his home study, a hundred tapes, each with a label, her name on one of them, the date, the location, the positions, the noises made, all of it charted out and diagrammed.

This was her situation to fix. Wynn kept a key hidden under a rock on the back porch. She remembered that. All she had to do was wait for the right day, the right moment.

"And so you think he has the tape here," Brooks says. "Somewhere in this house? And that's why we broke in?"

She nods.

"You could have just told me," he says.

"You would have judged me."

"Sure, but only a little."

"Would you have gone along with it? If you'd known we were breaking into someone's house?"

"No, of course not," he says. "I would have waited in the car."

She smiles at him, and he is relieved to see that it's a real smile, without a trace of pity. "So where is Wynn now?" he asks. "How much time do we have?"

"A few hours, maybe. They drove up to Chapel Hill for the day. His son's looking at colleges." She knows this because Wynn shares so much of his life online. When she was with him he was hardly ever without his phone.

"If I had a sex tape, I don't think I'd keep it in the house for my wife to find."

"You don't know Wynn."

The dogs have stopped barking. They

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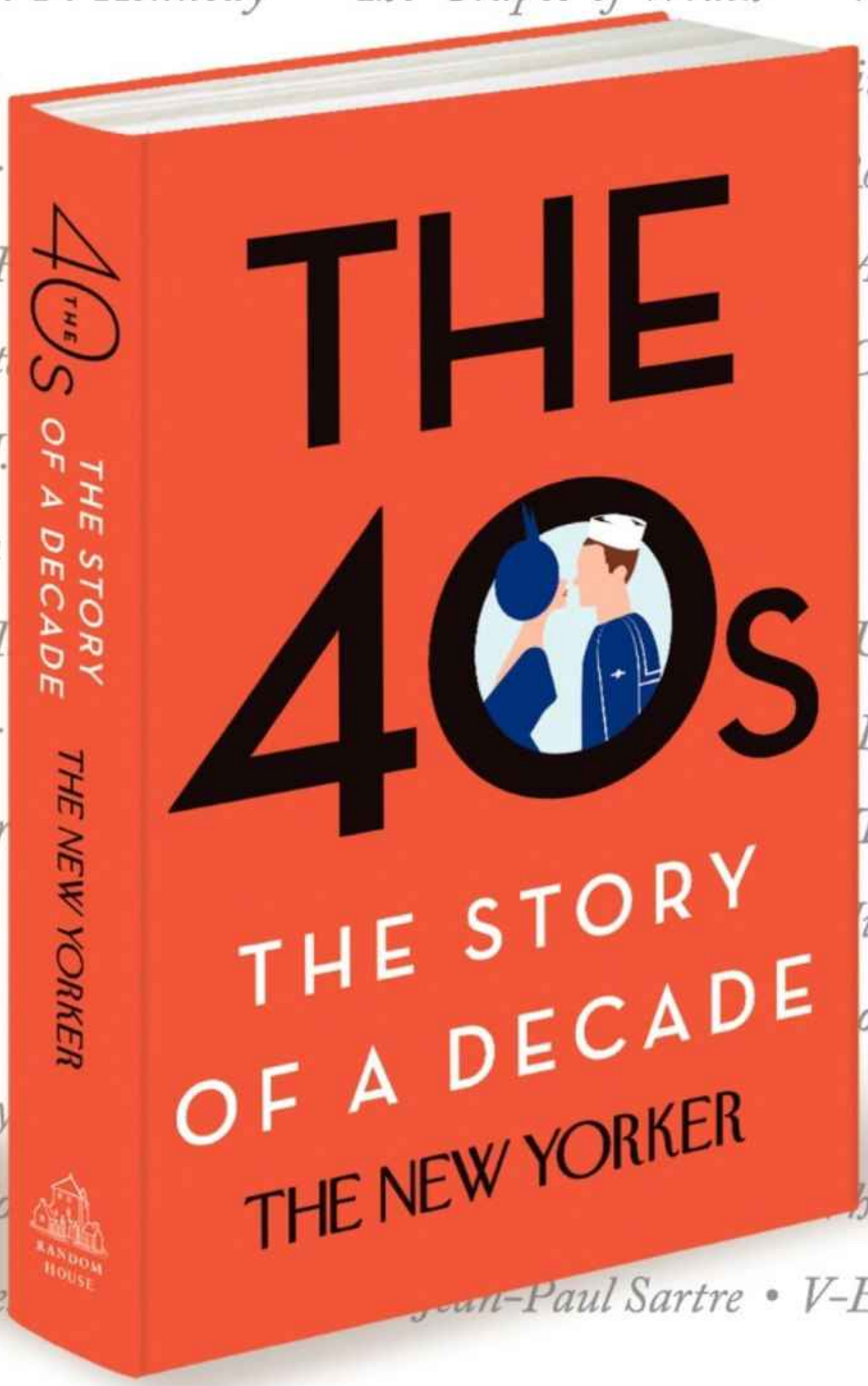

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A RANDOM HOUSE HARDCOVER AND eBOOK

sit patiently at the foot of the fridge. Brooks's ankle throbs. He doesn't know what to do next. If only he could curl up here and take a nap. But the dogs will never give up. They are trained to attack intruders, and that's exactly what he and Mary are. They're the intruders. He has broken into someone's home. He needs a brick. Where's his brick. Give him a brick.

Brooks jumps, not over the dogs and toward the door but to their left. He lands on both feet and sprints back down the hall. The dogs follow. He's the distraction, the bait. "Find it!" he yells back to Mary. He passes the pantry. Ahead of him is the grandfather clock. A blue Oriental rug shifts sideways as he turns left at the end of the hall. He runs up a wide staircase, hand on the rail, and at the top he sees that there are doors, three of them. They all look the same. It's like a terrible game show. He grabs the knob of the middle door, but his fingers won't grip right. "Some things will get better and others won't," Dr. Groom says, and Brooks will have to accept that.

But it's not his fingers, he realizes. The door is locked. He slings his shoulder into it with all his weight. Thankfully the lock is cheap and the door pops open.

Closing it behind him, he finds himself in a room with hot-pink walls decorated with gruesome movie posters. A stereo and a television barely fit on a small white desk beneath the window. In the dead, gray television screen, Brooks can see his warped reflection staring at him: his awful haircut, his skeletal face. Overhead, the ceiling fan spins. The bedspread moves.

Moves? A tiny wiggle at the corner of his vision. An almost imperceptible change in the arrangement of wrinkles in the blanket. Like a scene from a horror movie.

In the months after the accident, Brooks experienced what he now knows were mild hallucinations. At the hospital he became temporarily convinced that a family of goats had taken up residence under his bed. They had gray coats and black eyes, and at night they came out to lap water from the toilet. If Brooks called for help, the goats would scatter in all directions. Dr. Groom had explained that Brooks could no longer implicitly trust everything he saw and heard. What Brooks needed, he said, was a healthy dose of skepticism. If goats were ransacking his room, he was supposed to remember that it would be very tricky for a goat to get past the hospital's front desk and take the elevator to the third floor. If the coatrack asked him for a grilled cheese, Brooks needed to remind himself that coatracks did not typically require human food, especially grilled cheese. If a bedspread sprang to life . . .

He steps toward the bed. There are pillows piled at the head and foot. In the middle, under the bedspread, is a person-size lump. He watches it closely.

"Who's under there?" he asks.

The lump is very still.

"I'm trying to leave," he says. "So don't be afraid. All of this was a big mistake. Us being here, I mean. We know your dad. We got trapped. By your dogs."

The lump doesn't move.

"I'm Brooks. I'm not sure if you're actually under there. Maybe I'm talking to nothing. I can get a little confused. I haven't always been this way." He steps toward the desk. "I'm moving your desk so I can go out the window. Your dogs want to eat me. So I'm going out the window. Sorry." An apology to a ghost.

He slides the desk toward the closet, everything on it rattling. A water glass topples over and the liquid rolls. He grabs a sock off the floor and sops it up before it reaches a closed laptop covered in pink monkey stickers. "I spilled some water," he says, "and I had to use one of your socks. Sorry. Your laptop is fine, I think." He gets the window open and pops out the screen, which lands below in some holly bushes. He sticks one leg out and straddles the sill. It's a long way down, but not so far that he will necessarily break a bone. Still, this is probably going to hurt.

"Ba baboon," the lump says.

"I'm sorry?"

"Say that to the dogs and they won't attack you."

"So you're really under there?"

The lump doesn't answer.

"Thank you. That's very kind. I'm Brooks."

"Yeah, you said that already."

"Aren't you supposed to be off with your family or something?"

"I got out of it. Please go now."

"I hope you're not just in my head," he says and goes to the door. "Because that would mean 'ba baboon' is total nonsense, and I'm going to get bitten again." The lump doesn't answer. He's about to turn the knob but stops. "By the way, just in case this ever happens again—"

"God. Why haven't you left yet?"

"I will. I'm about to. But next time this happens you should really consider calling the police—or at least your parents."

The lump is quiet.

"Just an idea," Brooks adds.

The lump sits up fast, the bedspread transformed into a mountain. "Look, my mom, like, stole my cell, all right?" the lump says. "And the only phone up here is all the way in my parents' room, and it's not like I had a ton of options, you know? I told

you what to say, now go. Just get out of here."

Brooks isn't sure what to say. He considers apologizing again.

"Actually, I lied," the lump says. "I did call the police. They'll be here, like, any minute. You're going to jail."

"O.K.," Brooks says, hand on the door. "I'm going."

When Mary climbs down from the fridge, part of her just wants to leave and forget the tape. But she can't do that. Brooks could be hurt upstairs. He could lose his way. He could trap himself in the linen closet and, in the dark, lose himself entirely.

Until her brother's accident, Mary never gave much thought to the idea that personalities may be not only malleable but also divisible from the self. There has to be more to us than memories and quirks that can get smashed away so easily. This raises questions of accountability. What part of her is accountable for her decisions if all that stands between Mary being Mary and not someone else is a simple bump on the head?

Wandering down the hall in search of the tape, she finds a room with a computer on a mahogany desk and a leather chair on a clear plastic mat over the carpet. Wynn's camera is on the chair, and in a metal tray beside the computer she finds a stack of small gray tapes. She can't sort through them here. She'll just have to take them all with her. She dumps out a bag of tangled cables, connectors and startup disks and drops the tapes into the bag. Then she adds the camera, just in case.

The hallway is quiet. Brooks is upstairs somewhere—and the dogs? At the bottom of the stairwell, she hears their nails. "Get out, Brooks!" she yells, and runs back the way she came, down the hall, past the grandfather clock and the pantry, into the kitchen, all of it so familiar now. She goes out the back door and into the yard, the sunlight on her face, a stultifying whiteness. One day she will forget everything, and there will be nothing left of her except . . . This. Whatever This is. Total erasure, maybe.

She roams around the perimeter of the house, searching for any sign of Brooks up in the windows. She sees a popped-out screen in some bushes, but there's no sign of Brooks up above in the window. On the front porch, she leans into a narrow window beside the door with her hands cupped around her eyes. Through the thin white curtain she can barely make out a table in the foyer, a painting on the wall above that, and the base of the wide staircase. She rings the doorbell three times, hears it echo in the house. She is about to abandon the porch when through the window she sees feet, then knees, then a torso. Brooks is striding down the stairs as if he owned the place.

The dogs follow him, no longer vicious at all, their heavy dumb tongues lolling over sharp, crooked teeth. Her brother has

tamed the beasts. The dead bolt clicks open, and there he is, framed in the doorway, her big brother.

The dog bite isn't deep enough to warrant a trip to the emergency room. "No more stitches," he says. "Please." Back at Mary's, he takes a hot shower and lets the water trickle over his wound. Blood swirls around the drain. He towels off and wraps his ankle with gauze and then falls into a long nap on top of the covers. When he wakes up, it's dark out. He does his exercises at the foot of the bed, then heads downstairs. In the den, the blinds are drawn and the television screen casts a blue light across the furniture. On the floor, stacks of gray tapes surround a video camera tethered to the television by a long cord.

Brooks sits down cross-legged and brings the camera into his lap. He can hear Mary in the kitchen, rattling pots, preparing dinner. The tapes all look the same. He picks one off the top and pops it into the camera. When he pushes play, he keeps his finger on the button, just in case he's presented with something no brother wants to see.

Two lines squiggle across the screen, and then a patio appears, a concrete space bright with sunlight. The camera is bouncy in someone's hand. Two kids are on the ground, dyeing Easter eggs in red Dixie cups. The boy, maybe twelve years old, gives an egg to his younger sister. Holding it between two fingers, she dips it in the cup.

"Hey, I didn't know you were awake," Mary says, striding into the den in an apron. When she sees what he's watching, she sighs and sits down beside him on the floor. They stare up at the television together.

It's been years, Brooks thinks, since he last saw this tape, but it's all coming back to him now: their dye-stained fingertips, Easter eggs buried in the pine straw, the smell of the azalea bushes, his mother lounging in the yard with her Bible and *People* magazines.

"Seems like yesterday that was us," Mary says.

The little girl on the screen knocks over the cup and colored water spills all over her dress, the blue dye splashed up across her chest. She faces the camera bewildered, looking for help or reassurance, maybe, and begins to cry.

"We shouldn't be watching this," Mary says and grabs the camera from Brooks's lap. "It's wrong. Do you think I should try to return this stuff? I feel awful about it. I guess I could leave it all on the doorstep."

As she's saying this, a woman Brooks doesn't recognize rushes onto the screen with a handful of paper towels for the little girl's dress, and only then does he fully understand that this isn't their patio or their Easter or their mother. This isn't their childhood at all, and never was. "Stop clinging to the Old Brooks," Dr. Groom likes to say, "and guess what? You'll still be you."

He looks over at Mary, her finger poised on the stop button. But she doesn't press stop. She doesn't pull the cable from the camera or gather the tapes back into the crinkling bag, either. She is watching the boy, onscreen, as he holds up a perfect egg and then runs out of the frame. The little girl climbs onto her mother's lap and cries into her shoulder. The scene cuts: the kids are off searching for the eggs—in tree limbs, desk drawers, mulch beds, and, improbably, under a doormat. "Not there," Mary says aloud. "I mean, really." When the video ends, the room is dark, and they are quiet. Brooks waits a few seconds before sliding another tape across the floor to her. Mary's eyes dart up his arm to his face, her expression so serious that he wonders if she's really allowing herself to see him for the first time since the accident. He mushrooms out his upper lip, imitating her pity smile, and she rolls her eyes.

Then she loads the next tape. ♦

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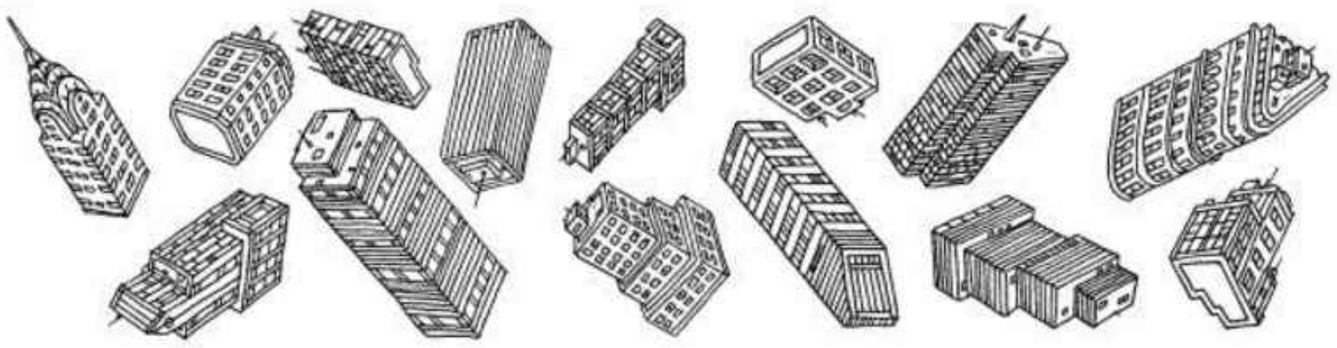
Thomas Pierce on "Ba Baboon."



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Tolkien's "Beowulf."

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

In the nineteen-twenties, there were probably few people better qualified to translate "Beowulf" than J. R. R. (John Ronald Reuel) Tolkien. He had learned Old English and started reading the poem at an early age. He loved "Beowulf" and would declaim passages of it to the private literary club that he had founded with his schoolmates. "Hwæt!" ("Lo!") he would begin. (He did the same, later, as a professor, at the beginning of Old English classes. Some of the students thought "Hwæt!" meant "Quiet!") He also loved stories, especially medieval ones, with lots of wayfaring and dragon-slaying—activities prominent in his books "The Hobbit" and "The Lord of the Rings." In 1920, he began teaching Old English at the University of Leeds. He needed money—by now he had a wife and children—and he supplemented his income by marking examination papers. Anyone could have told him that he should translate "Beowulf." How this would have advanced his reputation! Finally, he sat down and did it. He finished the translation in 1926, at the age of thirty-four. Then he put it in a drawer and never published it. Now, forty years after his death, his son Christopher has brought it out (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt). It is a thrill.

"Beowulf" was most likely written in Britain—by whom, we don't know—in around the eighth century. (That is Tolkien's date. Some scholars put it later.) The plot is simple and exalted. Beowulf is a prince of the Geats, a tribe living in what is now southern Sweden. He is peerlessly noble, brave, and strong. Each of his hands has a grip equal to that of thirty men. He is alone in the world; he was an orphan, and he never acquires a wife or children. Partly for that reason—because he has no one to behave toward in an intimate way—he has no real psychology. Unlike Anna Karenina or Huckleberry Finn, he is not a filter, a point of view, standing between us and his world.

This unself-consciousness gives that world a sparkling vividness. Here are Beowulf and his men, after a journey, sailing back to Geatland (this and all uncredited translations are by Tolkien):

> Forth sped the bark troubling the deep waters and forsook the land of the Danes. Then upon the mast was the raiment of the sea, the sail, with rope made fast. The watery timbers groaned. Nought did the wind upon the waves keep her from her course as she rode the billows. A traveller upon the sea she fared, fleeting on with foam about her throat over the waves, over the ocean-streams with wreathéd prow, until they might espy the Geatish cliffs and headlands that they knew. Urged by the airs up drove the bark. It rested upon the land.

The boat must have been enormous—it carries Beowulf and what seems to have been at least a dozen knights, plus their horses, their battle gear, and heaps of treasure. The timbers groan. Yet the boat fairly flies, gathering a necklace of sea foam. Then, suddenly, the men see the cliffs of their homeland and, mirroring their eagerness, the boat lands in five short words.

That passage is speed incarnate. Others, many others, are portraits of dark or light, such as the description of dinnertime at Hearot, the King of Denmark's mead hall:

> There was the sound of harp and the clear singing of the minstrel; there spake he that had knowledge to unfold from far-off days the first beginning of men, telling how the Almighty wrought the earth, a vale of bright loveliness that the waters encircle; how triumphant He set the radiance of the sun and moon as a light for the dwellers in the lands.

But outside the hall there lurks a monster, Grendel. Grendel hates music, and for twelve years he has been coming to Hearot after dark, to prey on the Danish knights. The poet describes one of Grendel's visits:

> The door at once sprang back, barred with forgéd iron, when claws he laid on it. He wrenched then wide, baleful with raging heart, the gaping entrance of the house; then swift on the bright-patterned floor the demon paced. In angry mood he went, and from his eyes stood forth most like to flame unholy light. He in the house espied there many a man asleep, a throng of kinsmen side by side, and band of youthful knights. Then his heart laughed.

He seized one sleeping man, "biting the bone-joints, drinking blood from veins, great gobbets gorging down. Quickly he took all of that lifeless thing to be his food, even feet and hands." How lovely, the bright-patterned floor. How appalling, Grendel's dinner.

"Beowulf" is the story of the hero's defeat of three successive monsters. The first is Grendel. The Geats are allies of the Danes, and Beowulf, who by then seems to be about thirty, decides to go to Denmark and rid it of this menace. It is hard to say what Grendel looks like. He is apparently about four times the size of a man. He has claws; he does not speak. But he also has human qualities. He has to enter Hearot by a door. When wounded, he bleeds, as Beowulf soon discovers. With his powerful hands, the hero grabs Grendel's wrist and tears off his arm and shoulder. His shoulder! He then hangs the whole business—shoulder, arm, hand—from the rafters. Imagine the Danish knights drinking their mead as half of Grendel's torso drips blood onto them. Grendel is the most real of the monsters. (It means something that he is the only one of the three who has a

ABOVE: VASCO MOURÃO

Tolkien finished his translation of the poem in 1926, at the age of thirty-four. Then he put it in a drawer and never published it.

ILLUSTRATION BY JEFFREY ALAN LOVE

"O.K., I'll talk."

• • •

name.) As Seamus Heaney, another "Beowulf" translator, has written, Grendel "comes alive in the reader's imagination as a kind of dog-breath in the dark." Almost with embarrassment, you pity him somewhat. (Tolkien describes how, after the fight with Beowulf, Grendel, "sick at heart," dragged himself home, "bleeding out his life.") He is also a bit childlike. It is no surprise that John Gardner, in his 1971 novel "Grendel," portrays the monster as a boy.

One reason Grendel seems childlike is that he has a mother. When her son comes home to die, Grendel's mother goes on a rampage. So Beowulf must suit up again. The mother lives in a chamber below a stinking swamp: "The water surged with gore, with blood yet hot." Beowulf dives right in, with his helmet on. His knights, afraid to join him, stand at the edge of the water. Grendel's mother is waiting for him—with helpers, a gang of sea monsters, which tear at him with their tusks, to soften him up. Finally, she takes over. Demon or not, she clearly loved her son, and she goes at Beowulf with a blinding fury. The hero finds that his famous—and previously invincible—sword, Hrunting, is of no use against her plated hide. It bounces off her. But he sees, close by, another sword, forged by giants, which no man can pick up—except him. He waves it through the air, piercing the monster's throat and breaking her neck bone. This is more horrid even than Beowulf's removal of Grendel's arm and shoulder, or, at least, it feels more painful. (It also shows a man killing a woman.) Before he leaves the den, Beowulf beheads Grendel's corpse, lying nearby. Normally, the poet says, it would have taken four men to pick up that head. But Beowulf carries it alone, to the surface, and hands it to his knights. When they get back to the mead hall, they tug it around by its hair, as a game.

Beowulf's third fight, which takes place back home, in Geatland, is with a dragon, who, unlike Grendel and his mother, is less a monster than a symbol. He is not sad or weird. Indeed, he is rather glamorous. He is fifty feet long and breathes fire. He has wings—he can fly—and he doesn't live in a nasty fen. He has a nice cave, where he guards a treasure that has been his for three hundred years, and which he feels strongly about. But now someone has come and stolen a jewelled cup. This enrages him, and he begins incinerating the Geatish countryside.

Many years have passed since Beowulf killed Grendel and his mother. He has become the King of the Geats and ruled them for fifty years. He is about eighty years old now, and tired. Still, to protect his people he must eliminate this menace. He sets out, but "heavy was his mood." Speaking to his knights, he reviews his great deeds. He bids them farewell. In what is probably the poem's most iconic image, he goes and sits on a promontory that juts out over the sea. (This says everything. Beowulf will soon be part of nature—the land, the sea.) As always, he insists on going into the contest alone. His knights, relieved, slink off into the forest. The dragon emerges from the cave, "blazing, gliding in loopéd curves." Beowulf brings his huge sword down on the monster's body, but, as with Grendel's mother, it doesn't make a dent. The dragon sinks his teeth into the hero's neck. His blood "welled forth in gushing streams."

Will he lose the fight? No. Not all his men ran into the forest. One young knight, Wiglaf, stayed and, unbeknownst to the King, followed him close behind. Seeing Beowulf wounded, Wiglaf rushes forth and stabs the dragon "a little lower down." As the poet is too polite to say, Wiglaf took better aim than Beowulf did, and thus weakened the dragon to the point where the old man could go in for the kill. Beowulf has not lost his touch: "he ripped up the serpent." That's the end of the dragon—the Geatish knights unceremoniously dump the body over a cliff—but it's also the end of Beowulf. Wiglaf unclasps the King's helmet, and bathes his wounds, to no avail. In the final lines of the poem, we see the knights, in tears, riding their horses in a circle around Beowulf's tomb. "Thus bemoaned the Geatish folk their master's

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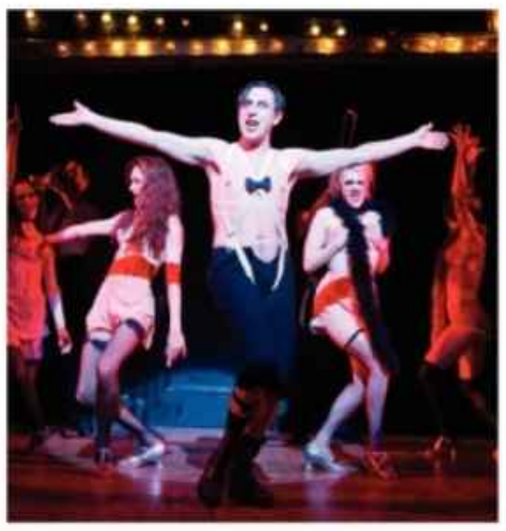

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fall, comrades of his hearth, crying that he was ever of the kings of earth of men most generous and to men most gracious, to his people most tender and for praise most eager."

Tolkien may have put away his translation of "Beowulf," but about a decade later he published a paper that many people regard as not just the finest essay on the poem but one of the finest essays on English literature. This is " 'Beowulf': The Monsters and the Critics." Tolkien preferred the monsters to the critics. In his view, the meaning of the poem had been ignored in favor of archeological and philological study. How much of "Beowulf" was fact, and how much fancy? What was its relationship to recent archeological finds?

Tolkien saw all this as an evasion of the poem's true subject: death, defeat, which come not only to Beowulf but to his kingdom, and every kingdom. Many critics, Tolkien says, consider "Beowulf" to be something of a mess, artistically—for example, in its mixing of pagan with Christian ideas. But the narrator of "Beowulf" repeatedly says that, like the minstrels who entertain the knights, he is telling a tale from the old days. "I have heard," he says. "I have learned." Tolkien claims that the events of the poem, insofar as they are real, occurred in about 500 A.D. But the poet was a man of the new days, when the British Isles were being converted to Christianity. It didn't happen overnight. And so, while he tells how God girded the earth with the seas, and hung the sun in the sky, he again and again reverts to pagan values. None of the people in the poem care anything about modesty, simplicity (they adore treasure, they count it up), or humility (they boast of their valorous deeds). And death is regarded as final. No one, including Beowulf, is said to be going on to a better place.

Another aspect of "Beowulf" that critics seeking a tidier poem deplore is the constant switching of time planes: the time-very-past, in which a noble tribe created the treasure that becomes the dragon's hoard; the times-less-past (there are several), in which we are told of the greatness and the downfall of legendary kings and heroes; the time-present, in which Beowulf kills the monsters; the time-future, when other peoples, hearing of Beowulf's death, will make bold to move against the Geats, and will conquer them, pressing them into slavery. Geatish maidens scream as they imagine it. They know that it will come to pass. This is like something out of "The Trojan Women."

As the time planes collide, spoilers proliferate. When Beowulf goes to meet the dragon, the poet tells us fully four times that the hero is going to die. As in Greek tragedy, the audience for the poem knew the ending. It knew the middle, too, which is a good thing, since the events of Beowulf's fifty-year reign are barely mentioned until the dragon appears. This bothered many early commentators. It did not bother Tolkien. The three fights were enough. Beowulf, Tolkien writes in his essay, was just a man:

> *And that for him and many is sufficient tragedy.* It is not an irritating accident that the tone of the poem is so high and its theme so low. It is the theme in its deadly seriousness that begets the dignity of tone: *lif is læne: eal scæceð leoht and lif somod* (life is transitory: light and life together hasten away). So deadly and ineluctable is the underlying thought, that those who in the circle of light, within the besieged hall, are absorbed in work or talk and do not look to the battlements, either do not regard it or recoil. Death comes to the feast.

According to Tolkien, "Beowulf" was not an epic or a heroic lay, which might need narrative thrust. It was just a poem—an elegy. Light and life hasten away.

Few people—indeed, few literary scholars—can read "Beowulf" in the original Old English. Most of them can barely refer to it. The characters in the Iliad and the Odyssey, poems that

"Don't forget your gunfighting helmet."

were written down more than a millennium before "Beowulf," are known even to people who haven't read their source. Achilles, Hector: in some parts of the world, babies are given these names. But people do not know the names of the characters in "Beowulf," and, if they did, they still wouldn't know how to pronounce them: Heoroweard, Ecgtheow, Daeghrefn. That is because Old English, as the standard language of the Anglo-Saxons, preceded the Norman invasion, in 1066, when the French, and their Latinate language, conquered England. Here are the lines, at the opening of "Beowulf," that Tolkien used to shout out to his literary club:

Hwæt wē Gār-Dena in geār-dagum
þēod-cyninga þrym gefrūnon,
hū ðā æþelingas ellen fremedon.

This sounds more like German than like English. If you don't know German, it doesn't sound like anything at all.

Old English did not become an object of academic study until the mid-nineteenth century, and by that time there was little chance of its being included, with Greek and Latin, as a requirement in university curricula. Also, little of the surviving Old English literature is artistically comparable to what Greece and Rome produced. In consequence, it was treated as a sidelong matter. In Tolkien's time, Oxford required that students specializing in English literature know the language well enough to be able to read, and translate from, the first half of "Beowulf." That is why Tolkien had a job: at Oxford, for decades, he taught the first half of "Beowulf."

Then, there were the conventions of Old English poetry. "Beowulf" does not rhyme at the ends of its lines, and it doesn't have a rhythm as regular as, say, Shakespeare's iambic pentameter. Instead, each line has a caesura, or a division in the middle, and the two halves of the line are linked by alliteration. (Look at the opening line that Tolkien recited to his literary club: "Hwæt wē Gār-Dena in geār-dagum.") The pattern of the consonants creates the stresses, and thereby the rhythm.

What is the modern translator to do with this? It is hard, in discussing Tolkien's translation, not to compare it with Seamus Heaney's famous 2000 version. Heaney was a poet by trade—indeed, a Nobel laureate in literature—and to him it would probably have been unthinkable to translate "Beowulf" as anything but verse. He also chose to obey the "Beowulf" poet's prosody: the caesura, the alliteration. As for tone, he says that the language of "Beowulf" reminded him of his family's native Gaelic: solemn, "big voiced." This magniloquence, it seems to me, is the leading edge, linguistically, of Heaney's poem. It is an Irish-sounding translation, and he wanted it that way.

To achieve all this, he had to make some compromises. Consider the lines where Tolkien shows us Grendel eating a knight. The monster seizes the man, "biting the bone-joints, drinking blood from veins, great gobbets gorging down. Quickly he took all of that lifeless thing to be his food, even feet and hands." In Heaney's translation, the monster, picking up the knight,

bit into his bone-lappings, bolted down
his blood
and gorged on him in lumps, leaving the
body
utterly lifeless, eaten up
hand and foot.

Here, for the sake of alliteration and rhythm, we lose, among other things, the great gobbets (what a phrase!), the idea of using a man as food, and, most unfortunately, the picture of Grendel eating the feet and hands. Heaney's "hand and foot" seems to mean just that Grendel went from the top of the man to the bottom. We don't have to imagine, as we do in Tolkien's translation, the monster crunching on the little bones and the cartilage—harder to swallow, no doubt, than the "great gobbets." We're forced to think about what it would be like to eat a man.

The same problems arise from line to line. Heaney, to his credit, took responsibility for this poem, and turned it into something that regular people would want to read, and enjoy. (Who knew that a translation of a poem more than a thousand years old, about people

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killing dragons, could reach the top of the *Times* best-seller list?) In the words of Andrew Motion, in the *Financial Times*, Heaney "made a masterpiece out of a masterpiece." I have no doubt that Heaney grieved over some of the choices he had to make, but by his rules he had to act as an artist, create a new poem. This is the sacrifice always made in a "free" translation. To help those who could read Old English, he reproduced the original on facing pages.

Tolkien, though he wrote poetry, did not consider himself primarily a poet, and his "Beowulf" is a prose translation. In the words of Christopher Tolkien, his father "determined to make a translation as close as he could to the exact meaning in detail of the Old English poem, far closer than could ever be attained by translation into 'alliterative verse,' but with some suggestion of the rhythm of the original." In fact, the alliteration is there throughout. Consequently, you can tap out the rhythm, with your foot, line by line. But Tolkien doesn't insist on any of this.

Such acts of faithfulness do not necessarily make his poem more accessible to the modern reader than Heaney's free translation. Especially because Tolkien reproduces the "Beowulf" poet's inversions ("Didst thou for Hrothgar king renowned in any wise amend his grief so widely noised?"), his translation is probably harder to read. But you get used to the inversions; you can understand the sentence even if you have to read it twice. And what is won by the archaism—or just by the willingness to sound strange, as in the "feet and hands"—is a rare immediacy.

Why did Tolkien never publish his "Beowulf"? It could be said that he didn't have the time. As he was finishing his translation, he got the appointment at Oxford and had to move his family. Such a disruption can put a writer off his feed. A few years later, he began "The Hobbit," which, with its three sequels, in "The Lord of the Rings," took up many of his remaining healthy years. It has also been argued, by Tolkien's very sympathetic biographer, Humphrey Carpenter, that he was too much of a perfectionist to let the poem go. Christopher Tolkien, in the introduction to "Beowulf," says that, in editing, the typescript he worked from—and this was a "clean" copy, a retyping from preceding marked-up copies—was full of changes, plus marginal notes as to other, possible changes. Christopher also supplies a commentary consisting of Tolkien's lectures on "Beowulf" and the notes he wrote to himself before and after the lectures. This material, which Christopher says he cut substantially, is longer than the poem: two hundred and seventeen pages, as opposed to ninety-three. So although Tolkien told his publisher in 1926 that he had finished the translation, he went on fiddling with it for a long time. When he published "The Hobbit," in 1937, a number of his colleagues said to him, "Now we know what you have been doing all these years!" But he wasn't just writing "The Hobbit." He hadn't stopped working on "Beowulf."

Was this really due primarily to perfectionism? "Beowulf" was by no means Tolkien's only translation from Old English, and he gave a number of them, such as "Pearl" and "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," the same treatment that he gave "Beowulf." Both "Pearl" and "Sir Gawain" were actually set in print, but Tolkien could not bring himself to write the introductions, and so the contracts lapsed. Nor should it be thought that Tolkien's problem was that he feared criticism from other scholars of Old English. "The Hobbit," too, though it was not an academic enterprise, was laid aside for years, until a representative of the publisher George Allen & Unwin went to Oxford to see Tolkien, borrowed the typescript, read it, and prevailed upon him to complete it.

Another possible explanation for Tolkien's putting "Beowulf" aside—a theory that has been advanced in the case of many unpublished manuscripts—is that the work was so important to him that if he finished it his life, or the life of his mind, would be over. I think this makes some sense. "Beowulf" was Tolkien's lodestar. Everything he did led up to or away from it. This idea suggests another. Tolkien was a serious philologist from the time he was a child. He and his cousin Mary had a private language, Nevbosh, and wrote limericks in it. One of their efforts went:

> Dar fys ma vel gom co palt "Hoc
> Pys go iskili far maino woc?
> Pro si go fys do roc de
> Do cat ym maino bocte
> De volt fact soc ma taimful gyroc!"

("There was an old man who said 'How/Can I possibly carry my cow?/For if I were to ask it/To get in my basket/It would make such a terrible row!' ") Later, he made up a private alphabet, and then another, to use in writing his diary.

As an adult, Tolkien could read many languages—and he made up more, including Elvish—but the number is not the point. Even in secondary school, Carpenter says, "Tolkien had started to look for the bones, the elements that were common to them all." Or, in the words of C. S. Lewis, his closest friend, for a time, in adulthood, he had been *inside* language. Perhaps he couldn't come back out. By this I don't mean that he couldn't talk to his wife or his postman, but that Old English, or at least that of "Beowulf," was where he was happiest. He knew how it worked, he loved its ways: how the words joined and separated, what came after what. Old English is where he spent most of the day, in his reading, writing, and teaching. He might have come to think that this language was better than our modern one. The sympathy may have gone even deeper. Like Beowulf, Tolkien was an orphan. (He was taken in by his grandparents.) He grew up in the West Midlands, and said that the "Beowulf" poet, too, was probably from there. He did not have difficulty living in a world of images and symbols. (He was a Catholic from childhood.) He liked golden treasure and coiled dragons. Perhaps, in the dark of night, he already knew what would happen: that he would never publish his beautiful "Beowulf," and that his intimacy with the poem, more beautiful, would remain between him and the poet—a secret love. ♦

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BOOKS

MOTHER TONGUE

Poetry and prose by Rachel Zucker.

BY DAN CHIASSON

Motherhood isn't war, madness, or addiction, but for a writer it can be an adverse condition, undermining the very work it inspires. The problem is time: writing and attending to children are contesting emergencies, each an existential threat to the other. The best contemporary poetry on motherhood understands the subject to be this temporal crisis. Sylvia Plath's "Ariel" is, among other things, a book about working at dawn, before "the child's cry / melts in the wall"; the wall between art and life, at that moment, melts as well. After centuries of sentimental poems about mothers and babies, Plath and others—Adrienne Rich, Alice Notley, Louise Glück—came to write poems that were tensed by the incipient threat of interruption. Glück's were often taut and epigrammatic, as though, her hands full, every impurity had been removed by long refinement in the mind. Rich's poems were "snapshots," as she put it, the extended intervals required for formal portraiture no longer in her grasp. Any minute, Rich's "buoyancy of . . . attention," bobbing like a helium balloon above the fray, might be "snatched" from its heights by competing demands.

Rachel Zucker is a mother of three and the author of several books of poems; her latest, "The Pedestrians," has just been published, along with a memoir, "MOTHERs." Her poems read like skin-of-your-teeth escapes from impending disaster. She learned her fleetness from Frank O'Hara, but O'Hara, one of the greatest poets of gratitude, was a little like Pac-Man: he moved forward only by ingesting the world. Zucker's speed is used for actions of flight and evasion. This is the opening of "mindful":

> jammed my airspace w/ a podcast &
> to-do list filled up inside I run & running
> then a snowstorm so no school I cried &
> said
> *Mayor Bloomberg should be scalded*
> *with hot*
> *cocoa* when someone said *Yay for snow!*
> I'm
> cutting it too close Erin if a blizzard
> makes me
> cry I used to long for snow for that quiet
> filling
> everything up *What are you talking*
> *about?* asks Erin
> *Seriously what are you talking about?*
> crammed
> in the toddler bed I say *If you want me to*
> *stay*
> *you need to lie still* the toddler tries why?
> must he?

There is a devotional poem hiding somewhere inside these calamities, an attempt at "mindfulness" undone by the mind's fullness. Calm cannot be willed or "jammed" into one's inner "airspace" by prayer, or even a soothing podcast: the competing voice of the to-do list drowns it out, or, as Zucker writes, fills her up inside. (The suggestion is that pregnancy doesn't end when the child is born; a mother's burdens just shift.) The podcast promises some minutes of rapture and possession; it stands no chance against the demands of the to-do list, whose mental fulfillment—formulaic and repeated, like a rosary—requires not just attention but reiteration. Somewhere Zucker remembers the prior self who longed for snow, now a terrified parent who must engineer a day for her children using cocoa and coercion.

"Mindful," like much of "The Pedestrians," is a series of adjustments to abrupt temporal shifts: the podcast cuts to the to-do list, which cuts to the school cancellation, and so on. The presence of an interlocutor, Erin (a name that, as every Erin I have known tells people, means "peace"), suggests that it's impossible to keep even these complaints about effaced interiority quiet and on the inside: what seemed like a silent shitstorm is in fact a litany of mounting injuries wailed into the phone or texted as they happen. What the poem seeks is timelessness, a condition it finds in miniature in "one nap moment of silence," although, as Zucker

Zucker's poems read like skin-of-your-teeth escapes from impending disaster.

ILLUSTRATION BY MONTSE BERNAL

concedes, "if that's what I wanted I should have made / other don't you think choices?" The book is always tallying the costs of trance, a calculation anyone who pays (a sitter, for example) for time (to write, to think, to exercise) and then squanders the time knows too well:

> I'd like to get
> naked into bed & feel if not hot then
> weightless I
> once was there was a sensory-deprivation
> tank
> Madison WI circa 1992 I paid money for
> that
> Perfectly body-temperatured silent pitch-
> dark tank
> to do what? play dead & not die? that
> was before
> e-mail before children before I knew
> anything
> just the deaths of a few loved ones which
> were
> poisoned nuts of swallowed grief but
> nothing of life

"I paid money . . . to do what?" The sensory-deprivation tank stands in for all the time in the past when one had nothing to do, nobody who needed care. Escape from one's senses was, then, a novelty. The dream is that those moments are in some bank, like a savings bond, waiting to mature. In "wish you were here you are," we learn that the closest a mother can come to that old freedom isn't timelessness but, rather, simultaneity, the pleasure in youth and innocence beheld:

> I am shattering fields of time around me
> & experiencing time differently from
> those I pass
> last night I saw my son's adult self &
> in the same moment toddler self this
> really
> happened he was playing "Wish You
> Were Here"
> by Pink Floyd on his electric guitar &
> feeling it
> he's 11 & in between 2 kinds of time

The eleven-year-old trying on adult remorse and "feeling it"—looking forward to looking back—and the mother, monitoring "the verge" of childhood and adolescence from her retrospective peak, meet in the song and in the poem that nearly shares its name.

The line "wish you were here you are" suggests that the proof we are "here"—in a place, in an emotion, in a relationship—is the remorse we feel that we aren't there, or fully there. This is not a new predicament, but it has taken new forms. The person who fears that she will run out of time also fears that she will spread herself too thin: these are clichés, but they suggest the ways the self has been drastically reconfigured in time and space in the past decade or so. Walt Whitman, the New York poet behind O'Hara, the New York poet behind Zucker, had read about mesmerism and seemed to believe in some kind of literal connection between widely distributed selves. His magnificent catalogues—those swimmers, firemen, contraltos, lunatics, and so on—work under the assumption that, where intimate knowledge of one another is concerned, "it avails not, neither time nor place." When I read the word "avails," in the Whitman, I can't help but think of the word "available," as it applies, for example, to cyberspace, an actual realm we can understand only in metaphorical terms. Whitman's "I Sing the Body Electric" is not a prototype for Skype, but the fact is that we live in practically undreamed circumstances where, as compensation for never really being able to be present where we are, we are easily and magically able to show up in places where we are not. In "i'm nobody you are too" (the title riffs on Dickinson's "I'm Nobody! Who are you? / Are you—Nobody—too?," replacing coy inquiry with blunt assertion), she writes:

> last week DA Powell
> via Skype told my undergrads he had
> no blueprint
> for a poem *It's language going through*
> *my body*
> *and the poem is what I hang on to* he said
> Whitman's line
> helped him *Reach into the gutter and*
> *create a horizon*
> *for the eye* he said *The end is also a*
> *doorway for what*
> *comes after*

Skype is only a visual medium catching up to a technology that poetry has always claimed it mastered—the conjuring of presences all the more real and striking for their being representations. Whitman, who was everywhere and nowhere, knew this conjuring well. "Missing me one place search another," he writes in the final lines of "Song of Myself"; "I stop some where waiting for you." Powell and Whitman, zipping across time and space as pure image and voice, suggest a gendered transcendence no woman with a family would attempt. Zucker's antiversion of it is bummed-out immanence: the realization, upon visiting an unnamed Paris-like city, for example, that "this city, so unlike her city, was exactly like her city and that everyone in her city was exactly like everyone in this city."

These lines are addressed to Alice Notley:

> I want to tell you that all the people who
> say
> they love me are siphoning me feeding off
> me
> not like they did when they were babies
> but
> eating away at me

And yet it has to feel that way sometimes, and these moments of exposure, of putting one's worst foot forward, are important to the book's strong effect of having been written, unlike most prior poetry about having kids, under the conditions it describes.

Zucker doesn't merely self-expose: her poems name names, and they attribute real actions and remarks, or what feel like them, to people who can't all have been consulted before they were conscripted into her book. Poets have always gossiped, especially poets of city life: Juvenal, Pope, Ginsberg. A city poet is a conduit for things said, actions observed, behaviors noted. Gossip, for a city poet, is really a form of passivity, part of a larger open-border policy toward whatever comes her way. If you want to know some things said and done by real or dreamed Jorie Grahams, Brenda Hillmans, or Stephen Burts—nothing scandalous, just chit-chat and occasional sententiae—you can find it all in this book, in her memoir, "MOTHERs," and in Zucker's previous volume, from 2009, "Museum of Accidents."

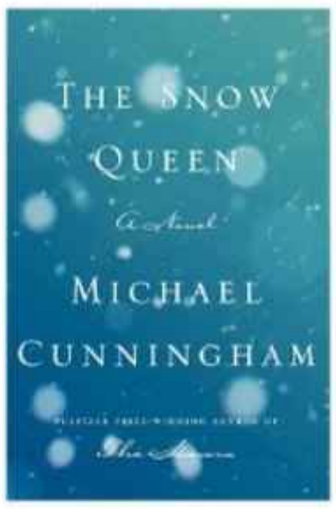
But gossip, since it provides a rich trace of human frailty, often matures into tribute. "MOTHERs" begins in the key of grieving (for a friend, and for a pregnancy that ended in miscarriage). Then it modulates into a reflection on memory and on Zucker's relationship with her own mother, the storyteller Diane Wolkstein, whose side of the story emerges in e-mails and iChat transcripts that Zucker has included, seemingly unedited. The book ends twice: with a touching letter from

Wolkstein, asking her daughter not to publish the memoir we have just read, and with an epilogue describing Wolkstein's sudden death, in 2013, in Taiwan, where she had gone to study Mandarin. The letters and e-mails and iChats, many of them from Taiwan, now seem like communications from the beyond; a tell-all has become, in real time, an elegy. The real names and unrelieved slights of the book suggest that we exist, all of us, in circumstances unique to us, nonreplicable, nontransferrable. Or they suggest the opposite: our lives, assigned to us arbitrarily and at random, are undifferentiated; we might as well be dead, since we will be, or not yet born, since, once upon a time, we weren't—or here, or in Paris, or in Taiwan, since any place is every place.

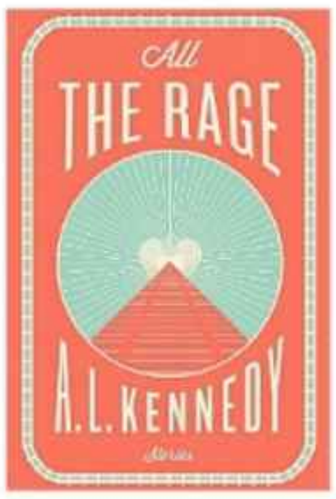
"The Pedestrians" opens with a series of prose poems unlike anything Zucker has done before: daydreams that turn irritatingly literal; escape fantasies written, since they failed, in the key of remorse; luxurious *pensées* all the more mysterious because they seem to have been given a bye from the passing of time. In one passage, she seems to step outside her life only to spy upon it, a little like Hawthorne's "Wakefield." She is in "a building not far from the apartment where she and the husband and their children lived and had lived for all of their children's lives." The space has three desks; "sometimes a husband and a wife sat at the other two desks, with their backs to her." It feels like a dream; in reality, it was probably some kind of shared office space in a cramped English or creative-writing department. The couple seem to have, as all couples do, "their own quirks and disappointments." Zucker's name-naming, carping, merciless, and gloriously human body of work thus far suggests that any full account of being an individual has to register how specimen-like and interchangeable our lives often seem:

> Sometimes she sat there thinking about what it meant to be alive in one physical location instead of another, at one moment of time instead of another, to be one kind of animal rather than another. Other times she would pull the pocket door over that kind of thinking and sit and listen to the muffled sound of that kind of thinking while she made a clicking noise on her keyboard. ♦

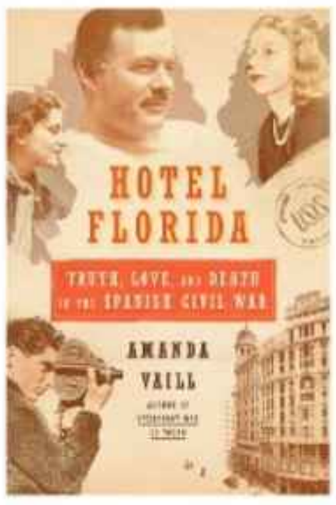
BRIEFLY NOTED



THE SNOW QUEEN, *by Michael Cunningham (Farrar, Straus & Giroux).* At the start of this novel, Barrett Meeks, a gifted underachiever in his late thirties, sees a "celestial manifestation" in the night sky over Central Park. The semi-religious experience inspires him to look hard at his life and to question his youthful assumptions about love. Meanwhile, his equally aimless older brother, Tyler, cares for his frail, cancer-ridden fiancée, for whom he struggles to compose a wedding song that is also an elegy. Tyler's lyrics are mawkish, however, and something of their spirit seems to pervade the novel. Set between George Bush's reëlection and the coming of Barack Obama, it charts that period's waves of despair and hope, but the characters too often come off as overeager and almost adolescent.



ALL THE RAGE, *by A. L. Kennedy (New Harvest).* This short-story collection begins with a woman trying to imagine her aging lover's earliest kiss and ends with a woman on a first date picturing what it would be like to grow old with the man she has just met. Kennedy is concerned with the fantasies that sustain and harm relationships; her characters are tormented by "the sting of possibility," though some do manage to find momentary satisfaction. The stories read as a kind of dialogue between writer and subject, cool narration cut through with first-person outbursts. The effect is one of sympathetic intimacy, as if Kennedy had pressed close enough to her characters to feel their breath hot against her ear.



HOTEL FLORIDA, *by Amanda Vaill (Farrar, Straus & Giroux).* In 1937, during the Spanish Civil War, Ernest Hemingway came to Madrid with his new lover, Martha Gellhorn. At the Hotel Florida, they encountered two other couples: the photojournalists Robert Capa and Gerda Taro; and Arturo Barea and Ilse Kulcsar, censors for the Popular Front's foreign-press office. This ambitious history uses the couples' romantic and artistic misadventures to unfold a larger canvas of war and ideology. As bullets fly and editors demand copy, Vaill's subjects struggle to balance their hatred of fascism with their desire to tell the truth. At times, the narrative overwhelms the individual characters, with the exception of Hemingway, who bursts from the page. As Gellhorn indelibly put it, "I think it was the only time in his life when he was not the most important thing there was."

WHAT WOULD LYNNE TILLMAN DO?, *by Lynne Tillman (Red Lemonade).* This witty compendium of essays and interviews is arranged alphabetically ("A is for Andy," "B is for the Bowleses") and its subjects are wide-ranging. Tillman writes of Barack Obama's media savvy, of hearing the Rolling Stones play in New York in 1965, of the pitfalls of defining New York's "downtown" arts scene. Writing about neologisms, she offers "Jellyrollreversal": "A gender reversal or role adaptation; primarily domestic. . . . Probably a combination of two terms, bon temps rouler (let the good times roll) and jelly roll." Taken together, the pieces express an abiding curiosity in the commitment to making art and a willingness to read carefully and think deeply about other artists' work.

THE THEATRE

CRUISING

Edgar Oliver's park stories.

BY HILTON ALS

I'm afraid it was the limited, prejudiced part of my nature that prevented me from acknowledging, before now, the writer and performer Edgar Oliver and his emotionally grand work. Although Oliver and I are both gay and share similar interests—he has been a ubiquitous presence on New York's downtown theatre scene for almost thirty years—I tended to dismiss his earlier performances as affected and self-conscious, camp that built on camp. But his current monologue, "In the Park" (respectfully directed by Randy Sharp, at the Axis), is so beautiful—so enthralling in its undisguised but never tedious self-absorption, in its command of the spoken word, and in its demand for love—that to remain unmoved by it, or to dismiss it as fairy folderol, begs the question: Why?

My list of grievances against Oliver as an artist was long. First, there was his voice, that stately and sonorous bass that made him sound like a mannered stage actor in an early talking picture, enunciating so carefully you just wanted the words to stop. Then there was his cultivated look—the russet-colored hair and the enormous flashing eyes that brought to mind that perverse fantasist Daddy Carroll, from Gus Van Sant's 1991 film, "My Own Private Idaho," or Cecil Beaton's portraits of the British aesthete Stephen Tennant, who spent much of the latter part of his life in bed, for no reason other than that he preferred it. I didn't want Oliver, with his precious affect and his Ronald Firbank airs, to matter in my seemingly tougher, more "real" gay world.

But soon after Oliver, dressed all in black, unceremoniously took the stage in the Axis's low-ceilinged performance space and looked out at the audience with a tender expression, my smugness began to shift. Oliver was so clearly used to being confronted with intolerance like mine, and yet he was able to keep moving bravely, expansively forward. Still, he confesses, at the start of his hour-long piece, "I am a hesitant man. It seems to me that I have spent my life half lost in some rapturous dream I dreamt as a child, from which I have never awakened. Perhaps I don't want to wake up. If I woke—I would find that I have failed to live." As he goes on, Oliver slowly makes his audience understand that theatre, once stripped of its standard smoke and mirrors, is a storytelling medium, wonderfully reducible to two or three essentials: actor and text and that unidentifiable something which visionaries such as Artaud call magic.

Oliver, who is fifty-seven, stands at the front of the stage and addresses the audience directly. After a while, the lights behind him, delicately designed by David Zeffren, dim and then come up again—and do so throughout the piece, whenever he pauses between anecdotes or thoughts. (Paul Carbonara's musical interludes punctuate the monologue as well.) There are no props, no lamppost or bench to help us visualize what Oliver describes: the days and occasional nights that he spends in Brooklyn's Prospect Park, which he loves, especially the areas that are largely unexplored by others. In the verdant, run-down spaces he seeks out, he finds a refuge where he can write the story that he's telling us now. (Oliver's bohemianism—that is, his ability to make do with little, and then make more—is entirely genuine.)

Oliver fills the stage with gestures: with one hand, he draws a chair or a patch of grass or a person, and the atmosphere that he creates with his astonishing sentences is an extension of his body—which is integral to the story of his isolation. As a boy growing up in Savannah, Georgia, Oliver would go to Maryland in the summers, to visit his grandmother, with his sister and his eccentric mother. (He never

Edgar Oliver's one-man show, "In the Park," is a love story about moments.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALICE O'MALLEY

mentions his father.) In Baltimore, Oliver was entranced by a statue in a fountain. He explains:

> At its center sprouts a thicket of bronze bulrushes. Amidst the bulrushes a naked boy of bronze laughs and dances on a turtle's back. He seems in the midst of leaping. . . . I loved this statue. The music of the fountain's waters was for me the music of the rain. I loved rain above all things. It was as though this naked dancing boy lived in a world of eternal rain. In Savannah, when it rained . . . I felt myself go wandering through in the rain—as though I were some other boy—some wild boy out there wandering.

Oliver identifies not with other people but with objects, like that fountain, like the water. Human beings are a danger. From a bridge in Prospect Park, he notices some "black boys on bicycles." He stands, "frozen with terror, thinking, They are going to kill me." He feels himself "so murderable there among the woods—on the black side of the park—so murderable by teen-aged black boys on bicycles. How could they resist murdering me?" With this, the piece takes an enormous leap into autobiographical brilliance. Oliver's panic about his difference from those boys is a way of being proud of it, too; imagining his imminent victimhood allows him to star in the drama of being, on a stage constructed by those living, flesh-and-blood boys. But Oliver doesn't, like Jean Genet, equate violence or degradation with eroticism. There's no real system to his revelations. As a performer, he is as vulnerable to his audience as we are to him. (The night I saw the show, the audience collectively held its breath when Oliver brought up those "black boys" and his terror of them. We didn't know where he was going with the story. Or, more specifically, we didn't want him to go to the predictable place. And he didn't. He even preëmpted our response by admitting, "It seems strange to me now that I could have been so convinced those boys were going to kill me. They were just teen-aged boys on bicycles playing in the park.")

As the evening continues, it becomes increasingly clear that "In the Park" is a love story about moments and sensations: Oliver rhapsodizes about rain and darkness and the sun and the soul music that he hears at a McDonald's where he sometimes goes to write. He ends his meditation with a scene of shared human emotion. One evening, as he is leaving the park, where he was "trying to write something about the end of summer—trying to write, well . . . this," a young black man asks, as he passes, "Were there many pretty boys?" The young man, who is called Durrance, then stops to make a suggestion: "Let's go somewhere and make love. Then I can get some money. You see—I say what I mean. And when I see something I like I say it." Oliver tells us, "I felt flattered—because he had said when he looked at me he saw something he liked. Also I felt deeply flustered and troubled by desire." Desire is an emotion that no artist can control—until it fades and its vapors become part of the story. Oliver doesn't gloss over his excitement at Durrance's proposition. He has felt invisible for much of his life, an invisibility that he relished: it freed him to feel more like an element—like the rain he loves, like the night that is his friend—than like a person, something he understands less than he understands statues. But now, in the park, he has been noticed, as a man.

At one point in his 2008 monologue "East 10th Street: Self-Portrait with Empty House," Oliver tells of his love for a boy named Jason. One night, they get drunk and quarrel. Then comes this extraordinary—and extraordinarily described—moment:

> Suddenly I jolted awake on the bed. It was broad daylight. . . . I looked around in a panic for Jason, and, thank God, there he was lying on the bed beside me, curled up with his back to me, sleeping. I had to talk to him. I reached over and took him by the shoulder to shake him, to wake him. But his shoulder came off in my hand. His entire arm came away. In horror, I dropped it. I grabbed at his back, but his whole back disintegrated at my touch. I began clawing for him—clawing at the bedclothes—but piece by piece Jason came apart in my hands—unravelled and disappeared into thin air until I was down to the bare mattress. . . . What I had thought was Jason was just a pile of bedclothes.

For gay men of Oliver's generation—gay men who survived AIDS—romanticism, and not sex, became the dominant mode: dreaming about a man wouldn't kill you. And yet there was still the need to connect physically; we are all bodies. Oliver is constantly clawing his way through absence to get to something that he doesn't immediately recognize: that satisfying moment when heartbeat meets heartbeat. He doesn't take Durrance up on his offer, but both men are changed by the conversation. Durrance kisses Oliver, then wanders off into the post-twilight rain, leaving Oliver, ever the artist, to give shape to this shared experience of love in another shadow world—the theatre. ♦

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THE CURRENT CINEMA

DISCONNECTED MAN

"Night Moves" and "The Double."

BY DAVID DENBY

In Kelly Reichardt's "Night Moves," Jesse Eisenberg plays a lonely and reticent man, Josh, who works on an organic farm and food co-operative in southern Oregon. Eisenberg has grown a tentative beard; his eyes are hooded and hostile; he hauls, loads, does unending physical labor without apparent pleasure. His scowling appearance and his withdrawn temperament are a bit of a shock: his usual persona, a bright urban boy whose mind races ahead of the world, had seemed too good to give up. But Eisenberg is thirty now, and, however self-deprecating in interviews, he's ambitious, launching himself in many directions: appearing in movies large and small, and writing provocative plays as well as humor pieces for *The New Yorker* and *McSweeney's*. In "Night Moves" and another new independent film, "The Double," he plays not grown men, exactly (it's still hard to imagine him as a businessman, a father, an adulterer), but young men in transition who are burdened by the need to seize an identity.

"Night Moves" is much the stronger of the two. Surly Josh is one of three eco-terrorists who plan to blow up a local hydroelectric dam. His fellow-conspirators are Dena (Dakota Fanning), a shrewd rich girl who works at a health spa, and Harmon (Peter Sarsgaard), a cynical ex-marine who has taken part in such capers before. Their ideas are rather simple and not that far from despair. They know that they can't stop the degradation of the environment and the overconsumption of power, yet they are outraged that the dam is providing electricity and water for luxuries like the myriad local golf courses. They want to make a statement, but they are motivated by sentiment, rather than ideology; they're not at all like the chattering students in Godard's "La Chinoise" (1967), who recite Communist texts and long to attack establishment culture by blowing up the Louvre. Godard knew that the students' means were idiotic, but he was on their side. His approach was both satiric and affectionate; Reichardt's tone, by contrast, is glumly objective.

Jesse Eisenberg plays a lonely eco-terrorist in Kelly Reichardt's new movie.

Her three characters want to live off the grid, keeping as small a carbon footprint as possible. But how can such virtuous types, who grow vegetables and hang wind chimes, turn to violent destruction? That's what Reichardt, who wrote the screenplay with Jon Raymond, hasn't worked out, and it's a hole in the movie. It must be said that Reichardt is not a fan of words in general. In her "Wendy and Lucy" (2008), Michelle Williams, playing a young woman drifting through the Northwest, gave a nearly silent but physically expressive performance. Reichardt supported her with long, elegantly composed tracking shots, and the film has a forlorn and haunting lyricism.

Watching "Night Moves," however, you long for Eisenberg to explain himself. He does deliver a brief rant about "killing all the salmon just so you can run your fucking iPod every second of your life" with great disgust, but Reichardt and Raymond never tell us why he doesn't just engage in nonviolent protest. Reichardt wants existential mystery: we're meant simply to accept the trio as outlaws, resentful, half-educated, nihilistic, and in way over their heads. What obsesses her is not why they launch the attack but how, and she realizes the many stages of it with first-rate narrative skill. The physical action in the movie is detailed, weighted, palpable. You watch with amazement and dread as the conspirators mix ammonium-nitrate fertilizer with fuel, load it into a boat, and steer the boat to the edge of the dam. The ambivalence grows as you gaze at the natural Oregonian magnificence that surrounds them (photographed with sombre beauty by Christopher Blauvelt): they are both protectors and violators of the environment, both righteous and criminal. What happens at the dam, filmed at night, with only shimmering light, is the most nerve-racking sequence in recent movies. Reichardt, despite the film's absences, has achieved an impressive control over the medium.

It's characteristic of Josh that when he walks into a forest he barely responds to its glory. He is a damaged person who comes to know himself only when it's too late. It's Eisenberg's first taciturn performance, and he suggests the hell experienced by a disconnected man by narrowing his eyes, stiffening his body, and holding himself in—even his silences are eloquent.

Eisenberg was born in Queens, but moved with his family to East Brunswick, New Jersey. His father was an academic; his mother entertained as a clown at children's parties. Eisenberg

ILLUSTRATION BY OWEN FREEMAN

started acting in school plays, then attended the Professional Performing Arts School, in Manhattan, and later studied anthropology at the New School. In his first great movie performance, in Noah Baumbach's "The Squid and the Whale" (2005), he played Walt Berkman, a teenage denizen of book-lined Park Slope, a poseur who mimicked the pompous literary opinions of his novelist father. Eisenberg demonstrated a startling originality, playing the lost adolescent in a light, glancing style, without the anguished emotionalism common to such roles. He was twenty-one, but he looked the character's age—sixteen—and not at all like a potential movie star. Pale and slender, unmuscled, he had rather close-set blue eyes, curly brown hair, a slightly pointed jaw, and twin peaks on his upper lip, which turned out to be a gift—the mouth made it easier for him to look cocky.

He also displayed an astonishing verbal speed and self-assurance, which allowed him, without breaking tempo, to emphasize key phrases and make his lines snap. And he did something canny: he didn't exaggerate or satirize Walt's pretensions; he played them straight, as a needy boy's desire for approval in an intellectual family. Anyone who has ever bluffed his way through a literary conversation would have recognized himself in that character. But Walt's quickness and his egotism—even his lies—suggested that he would learn to be a winner someday.

Eisenberg was the latest smart-boy Jewish movie actor to hit the mainstream, but he wasn't neurotic, like the young Dustin Hoffman; or self-deprecating, like the young Woody Allen; or bumptious, like Ben Stiller. He's openly demanding, a nerd hiding his fears behind aggression. Richard Dreyfuss did something similar, but Eisenberg is more nuanced. His indelible performance as Mark Zuckerberg, in "The Social Network," suggested that a new kind of personality had entered the world, a code-based brainiac who deals with life as if it were data. Racing through Aaron Sorkin's brilliant script, Eisenberg short-circuits or wrong-foots other people. Yet, on second viewing, you can see that for all his bullying speed, and the smirking put-downs, he ruffles the surface of Zuckerberg's confidence and reveals an easily wounded temperament underneath. Eisenberg is an economical actor, often relying on no more than a flutter of his eyelids, or a half smile, or a sweet glance that shades into contempt.

He is unafraid to play jerks, solipsists, narcissists. In his well-received second play, "The Revisionist," staged last year at the Cherry Lane Theatre, Vanessa Redgrave portrayed an elderly Polish Holocaust survivor, named Maria, and Eisenberg was her shallow American cousin, David, a blocked writer so trivially self-obsessed that he can't respond to the extraordinary secret she divulges to him. Eisenberg made Maria candid and soulful, and David a fool. He may have been offering an admission of the way his screen characters avoid deep connection. Some of Eisenberg's most effective humor pieces have been composed in the voice of resentful, isolated boys and young men, plagued by a monstrous mom or by endless love troubles. Even in commercial projects, he shunned easy company. In "Zombieland" (2009), Ruben Fleischer's bloody sendup of ghoul epics, he starts out as a tense boy who thinks that most people were zombies before they started eating flesh. As a sleight-of-hand hustler in "Now You See Me" (2013), he comes off as elusive, almost haughty.

In "The Double," based loosely on the early Dostoyevsky novella, Eisenberg embraces the spiritual condition of both nonexistence and ebullient egotism. The movie, written by Richard Ayoade and Avi Korine, and directed by Ayoade, is set in a sort of steampunk data center. It's a pseudo-expressionist folly, with vague howls on the soundtrack and characters walking down endless corridors. But it's worth seeing for Eisenberg, who plays Simon James, a self-effacing worker with a soft voice, an ingratiating smile, and a limp body no more powerful than a question mark. At the office, Simon suddenly finds himself facing a doppelgänger, James Simon (Eisenberg, again)—an exact physical replica, but a capable and charming opportunist who swings through rooms and aces Simon at work and in bed. Simon's weaknesses confront James's strengths, and Eisenberg, acting with himself, suggests that the egotistical James may be the inner self of the mousy Simon. The movie, bad as it is, will do as a demonstration of a talented man's freedom to choose different ways of being himself. ♦

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Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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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 Kaamran Hafeez, must be received by Sunday, June 1st. The finalists in the May 19th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the June 23rd issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the United States, Canada (except Quebec), Australia, the United Kingdom, or the Republic of Ireland age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION

"You know, Dad, this is not making 'the talk' any less awkward."
Daniel Kenitz, Hartford, Wis.

THE FINALISTS

"I liked you better before you molted."
Drew Mow, Arlington, Wash.

"Guess we missed the Rapture."
Randall Markworth, Dallas, Ore.

"Re-occupy Wall Street."
Alison Schmieder, New York City

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

" "

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Extra hardware shown.
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